

SATURDAY SEPTEMBER 2 TEN CENTS

ALL-STORY WEEKLY



Breath of the Dragon

by A. H. Fitch

A Remarkable
Romance of the
Yellow Empire

MODEST STEIN

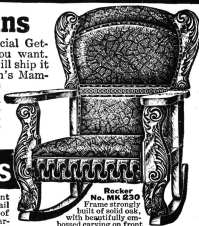
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ALL-STORY WEEKLY

VOL. LXII

NUMBER 1



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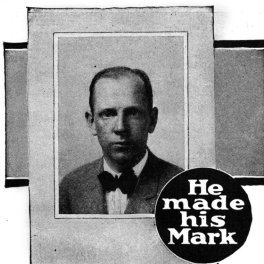
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ALL-STORY WEEKLY

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Breath of the Dragon

by A. H. Fitch

AS in all good stories, the urge to read this fascinating tale of China as it is, lies in the story itself and needs no editorial assistance. We simply point the way. We would just like to add, however, that it is absolutely certain, when you have followed this most alluring piece of fiction to the very last word, you will know a great deal more about China than you did when you began. The color is as true as it is wonderful and amazing.—THE EDITOR.

CHAPTER I.

THE BEGGAR WOMAN.

BETTY DANFORD, daughter of the newly appointed American minister to China, had been in Peking a week.

Her father had preceded her to the capital, leaving her to follow more leisurely with friends, Mr. and Mrs. Day, who, having intended to visit the Legation, would return home by way of Japan.

Betty had never enjoyed herself so continuously in all her life; dances every night, garden parties, and picnics to picturesque Buddhist temples beyond the city; in fact, foreign society in Peking

had fêted the presiding lady of the American Legation every hour of the day and most of the hours of the night.

When Betty had appeared on her father's arm in Lady Caton's drawing-room on the first evening of her arrival, the doyen of the diplomatic corps had been heard to declare solemnly that her entry took his breath away.

Many of the women of the "foreign legion" were pretty; the wife of the minister from Spain was beautiful, but Princess Pontioff, wife of the Russian ambassador, had said to her neighbor:

"Though our Spanish friend grows handsomer every day, the little lady of the American Legation has a prettiness I like better."

And the fair Russian had gazed with frank admiration at Betty.

There were others who agreed with Princess Pontioff, among them the German chargé d'affaires, and Captain Bertram of the British Legation.

But before the end of that first evening Princess Pontioff, who was a keen and, for the nonce, sympathetic observer of human nature, declared that Miss Danford and the captain were dancing into an international romance. Perhaps they were.

But it happened that precisely at the moment when the princess made the remark, Betty was asking Captain Bertram if he knew a certain John Follingsbee. The Englishman's reply had left Betty with a vague and annoyed impression that Follingsbee was not a man other men cared to claim acquaintance with. As a matter of truth, this was so.

In China, when a man who is neither a missionary nor an explorer goes about among the coolie classes dressed like one of them, and caps these proceedings with periodical disappearances—total eclipse of identity so to speak—he is regarded with unsavory suspicion and has no one to blame for the fact but himself.

Betty had met Follingsbee on three memorable occasions. An element of intense excitement had characterized two of these occasions.

Their first encounter had been on a house-boat on the Pei-ho when Betty was traveling to Peking. She and the Days had seen a tall Chinese pursued by soldiers, and afterward, when a stalwart young American sought refuge on their boat, they had recognized in him the same man the soldiers had been chasing.

Mr. Day, in the excitement of that occasion, had sustained an injury to his arm which necessitated, at least in the opinion of his anxious wife, an immediate return to Tientsin, and Betty had been left to continue her journey to Peking in the company of a missionary and his wife, fortuitously discovered by Follingsbee.

If Betty had known what was before her, she would probably have returned to Tientsin with her friends and waited there till her father could come for her. But she didn't know, nor did any one else, unless it might be her bland-looking, English-speaking *amah*.

The missionaries had unexpectedly been compelled to delay their departure for a day in order to appear before the district magistrate in behalf of two of their converts who were falsely accused of being members of the "Young China Club," the purposes of which were the promulgation of progressive ideas obnoxious to the imperial government.

These clubs had been organized by the brilliant young Chinese reformer Een-Sha, whose recent capture in Tientsin and condemnation to death by the slicing process had caused the utmost consternation among his followers.

Betty had been sleeping when the missionary and his wife left to attend the magistrate's court, and when she awakened from her slumbers the boat was well on its way up the river. Her English-speaking *amah* had told her with a soft smile that the missionaries had sent word that they would be unable to accompany her to Peking, as their presence for the next five days was necessary at the trial of their converts.

Betty had believed her.

But queer things began to happen after that.

Midway to Peking her *amah* suddenly deserted her, substituting a handsome young girl of Betty's own age who did not understand a word of English and who possessed a certain indefinable air which did not accord with her humble, retired attitude.

Betty was now entirely alone. She had felt oppressed, even afraid as she gazed on the sordid, little mud villages squatted on the muddy banks and over the flat plains, stretching off interminably, punctuated with countless graves. But the new *amah*, touching her gently on the arm, had looked at her with an

expression so kindly and reassuring that Betty had felt her confidence returning and a sympathetic understanding had sprung up between them.

Finally they had reached Tung-Chow, where canal-boats were substituted for the commodious river house-boats.

And then, at last—Peking!

Before Betty there had loomed simply a dark mass, a somber expanse of unbroken masonry; a wide stretch of desolate, sandy road followed the length of the imprisoning wall that encircled the capital. As the boat drew nearer the city Betty had watched eagerly for the sight of the familiar figure of her father—for the approach of a sedan-chair. But neither the chair nor her father had been there to meet her.

Filled with dismay, Betty had turned to consult, as best she could, her *amah*. But the *amah* had disappeared as completely as if the muddy waters of the Grand Canal had closed over her.

For a few minutes, doubting the reality of the young woman's disappearance, Betty had continued vainly to search for her. Then a sudden fear came over her, not allayed by the sight of the silent boat-coolies squatting on the deck smoking and staring curiously at her. Not knowing what to do, Betty had hastened ashore alone and entered the great gates of the city—just as a beggar woman with dust-covered, disheveled hair and horrid rags hobbled quickly past her.

Betty never knew exactly what happened after that, except that she found herself leaning half fainting against a stone archway, shrinking in disgust from a large crowd that had gathered about her attracted by the curious spectacle of a foreign girl alone and on foot in the streets of Peking.

From this precarious predicament she had been rescued by a tall Chinese who had forced his way through the jeering rabble to her side and, in unmistakable American, had quietly reassured her and carried her in safety to his cart.

The man was Follingsbee.

And so Betty had met him for the second time. She had been too happy in the consciousness of his protecting nearness to wonder at his presence in Peking. In answer to his astonished inquiries she had related her experiences since they had last met, and Follingsbee had listened at first with speechless indignation as she told him of the desertion of her English-speaking *amah*. Then he had sworn violently under his breath, and only became suddenly, alertly silent again when she described her second *amah* and her strange disappearance before the gates of Peking.

"Did you see no one—that is to say, no woman—enter the gates?" he had finally asked.

"Only a horrid beggar woman in dirty rags," she had replied.

Whereupon Follingsbee had become markedly interested in the beggar, had plied her with so many questions regarding her appearance and the direction she had taken after entering the city, that Betty had been not a little amazed at his singular inquisitiveness.

After he had delivered her over to an extremely anxious parent, Betty had seen Follingsbee again, but only for a few short moments. He did not attend the dinners or dances to which, indeed, he wasn't always asked, nor did he join in the other gaieties which had absorbed Betty for one glorious week. Without quite knowing why, Betty had sometimes found herself strangely annoyed by his absence from these festivities.

One morning, after a ball, in spite of the fatigue incident upon long hours of dancing, she rose early, prepared for a ride.

Legation Street was never crowded, but that morning it was deserted except for a beggar crouching close to the wall. Betty threw her a few copper cash, and the beggar, brushing her unkempt, matted hair from her face with a quick, sly gesture, gazed after the American girl while Betty passed on, wondering why a dirty Pekingese beggar should suggest

to her a resemblance to some one she knew.

However, she forgot the incident as she entered the crowded, evil-smelling streets of the Chinese city and reached the great gates in the outer wall.

The life she was to lead in Peking would be a steady whirl of gaieties, and, since she had scored what a budding *débutante* considers distinct success, her dances would be divided and subdivided and her partners many. Yet, in spite of Betty's sigh of content, she was conscious of having missed the presence of Follingsbee.

That morning she met him again. This time he was not in Chinese costume. He sat his horse with the careless, indolent grace of the western American.

"You should not ride alone," he said after their greeting, and to her protestations that she was not alone since the *mafoo* accompanied her, who, moreover, was her father's most trusted servant, he only repeated his warning rather more earnestly than before.

After that he talked of Betty's life in Peking, and Betty described with all the enthusiasm of her young years the gaieties which engulfed her, then stopped suddenly in her account of the previous night's ball to ask Follingsbee why he absented himself from all legation festivities. He replied that even if he were invited to attend them—which he assured her was quite infrequently the case—he would scarcely find leisure to do so.

"You see," he said, smiling down at her, "I am not a society man," and he added rather lamely, "I came over here to—er—study Chinese life and languages, and I am interested in native types of all kinds—even beggar types," this last with a queer smile.

But the word beggar brought to Betty's mind the woman she had seen that morning crouching close to the wall in Legation Street, and who had so strangely reminded her of some one she knew. So she told Follingsbee about her and, even as she told him, he turned and di-

rected their ponies Pekingward at racing speed, suddenly pleading an important engagement which he claimed to have forgotten.

She did not like being disposed of in so abrupt a fashion, and they traversed the crowded Chinese city in silence.

Entering the Tartar city, Follingsbee appeared to be unconscious of the presence of his companion, and when they reached Legation Street, Betty was biting her lips in chagrin at being ignored.

In an alley close to the Russian Legation, from where the gates of the American Legation could be seen, squatted a beggar, her clap bowl beside her. When Betty saw her she broke her self-imposed silence.

"There she is again!" she cried impulsively, turning toward the alley.

But Follingsbee, curiously enough, would not allow her to go near the woman, declaring suddenly that the beggar was sure to have smallpox.

Betty objected to his peremptory attitude. But her objections were quietly overruled, and she found herself riding rapidly and resentfully toward the American Legation alone, leaving Follingsbee experiencing a new sensation which he only half understood.

He watched her slender figure, the well poised head, the dainty boot just visible beneath her riding habit, disappear through the gates, then turning swiftly, he entered the alley.

At the same time, from the opposite side of the alley, appeared half a score of Chinese soldiers, loud, blustering bannermen. Follingsbee spurred his horse toward the beggar, and, leaning quickly from his saddle, said in a low voice:

"Hong-Kong."

"Tientsin," she whispered.

Follingsbee spoke again hurriedly, and threw some cash at her feet.

In drawing the money from his pocket his handkerchief fell, and the beggar, whining her thanks in shrill tones, picked up the coppers and hastily thrust into her bosom the "something" which lay

concealed in the cambric folds of the handkerchief. Then she hobbled off, trying to avoid the soldiers who, as they approached, flung out unsavory jests about beggars in general and women beggars in particular.

The handkerchief lay where it had fallen.

Follingsbee appeared to suddenly notice it. Wheeling his horse so that the animal formed not only a barrier between the woman and the soldiers, but also effectively obstructed the least advance in the narrow alley, he leaned with slow deliberation from his saddle, picked up his property, and without shaking out the dust and the dirt thrust it back into his pocket.

In the handkerchief lay a crumpled piece of paper.

The soldiers muttered curses at the foreign devil's impudence in blocking their path, but the young man affected not to hear or understand.

The beggar had disappeared.

Follingsbee passed the American Legion without stopping, and riding rapidly to his own quarters, emerged an hour later dressed like a cartman.

CHAPTER II.

NIECE OF THE LADY YIN.

"SEE if the cart is waiting!"

A-lu-te rose from the *k'ang*, slipped off the simple cotton gown she was wearing and, with the assistance of the old *amah*, began her toilette. Before long she stood arrayed as a Manchu lady of high quality, even to the long, silver nail-shields on the third and fourth fingers of her little hands.

One would have had difficulty in recognizing her now as the young and pretty *amah* who had disappeared so mysteriously from Betty Danford's side at the gates of Peking, and certainly one would never have taken her to be the old beggar woman to whom Follingsbee had spoken that morning.

A well-filled purse had been the result of that short conversation between her and Follingsbee, and the beautiful embroidered gown and shoes and handsome ornaments and nail-shields had been the result of the money.

The old *amah* opened the door of the house and fearfully peered out.

In an alley a short distance away stood a mule cart. The driver's head was bobbing in sleep as he sat on the shafts of the clumsy vehicle. And not even his most intimate friend would have suspected the driver of being—Follingsbee. Except for his presence the alley was deserted.

"It is there," said the *amah*, who began to sob as she had been doing intermittently ever since the beautiful Manchu girl had returned and discarded the disguise of the beggar woman. A-lu-te threw her arms around the old woman's neck.

"Courage, *amah*! The cousin of Fen-Sha has just come from Pao-chou. He knows all about the family. The girl, Wang-ti, has been dead two years. Her mother and the Lady Yin have not been on speaking terms these five years or more. She knows nothing about her niece. Have no fear."

"But when you leave there to go to—"

"Be silent!" said A-lu-te, peremptorily, and pushed the *amah* gently from her. "See, I go forth unafraid! As the winds and the clouds of heaven are ever shifting, so the misery and happiness of man change from morning to evening. Because I am unhappy now is not a sign that I shall not be joyful before another moon."

"*Ai*—perhaps—if you live that long," murmured the woman. "O my flower, I am filled with forebodings. Did I not hear the cock crow at the hour of the ox? And yesterday I dropped against the oil-can, upsetting it; and my left eye twitched three times in the hour of the snake! No good can come from such things. Misfortune is hovering near. I tremble with fear for you!"

But A-lu-te made no response to the frightened woman's wailings.

Cautiously and swiftly she slipped from the house and entered the waiting cart. The driver, suddenly wide-awake, whipped up his mule and the cart rattled off.

Behind the gauze curtains A-lu-te gave directions in a low voice. The driver nodded without replying.

High in the air circled white doves—mid-sky houris, the Chinese call them—shedding as they flew soft eolian notes from the whistles fastened to their tail feathers. A-lu-te loved their music. It recalled certain happy hours spent in a pleasant garden with one she loved. She drew aside the curtains to look up.

A shaven-headed *bonze*, collecting pieces of printed paper in the street lest the sacred name of Buddha be defiled, saw her. He gaped at the lovely face so suddenly exposed to him, and made a coarse remark.

The girl dropped the curtain hastily and sank back on the floor of the cart. And the driver managed, while flicking his mule with his long whip, to include the bald pate of the *bonze*. The man of Buddha screamed out imprecations. The cart rattled on.

It turned into a crowded thoroughfare, turned again, and in a few minutes stopped before a gate in a high stone wall. The driver sprang from his seat, knocked vigorously on the wooden panel. A *tingi* (gate-keeper) in official head-dress opened the gate.

A-lu-te spoke from the interior of the cart.

"I am the niece of the Lady Yin. The driver is mute. Give me entrance and have my presence announced."

The *tingi* flung the gate wide and sounded a gong. A tall eunuch appeared. To him A-lu-te addressed herself in the same imperious manner.

"Announce to the Lady Yin that her niece, the daughter of Lord Cheng-shi, has arrived, and begs to be admitted to her presence."

The beauty and haughty bearing of the Manchu girl impressed the eunuch, and a few minutes later A-lu-te, trembling within but presenting a haughty exterior, stood in the presence of the wife of one of the most prominent Manchu officials in the capital. She advanced into the reception-room a few steps, then curtsied, her left knee touching the floor.

"How is it that my brother-in-law did not advise me of your approaching arrival?" demanded the Lady Yin sharply, probably annoyed at being interrupted while performing her toilette. "I am told you arrived unattended—in a cart. Is that the way my brother-in-law sends his daughter about the country?"

"My aunt," replied A-lu-te, "I set out for Pao-chou with a large escort and bearing letters to you and my Lord Yin from my father. On the road we were attacked by robbers, and though the servants fought valiantly, they were overpowered and killed. The worthless presents my father charged me to present with his respectful salutations were stolen and the contents of my box rifled. The robbers intended to hold me for a ransom, but I escaped by the cunning of my *amah*, who quickly changed herself into my clothes and passed herself off for me, while I, under cover of the darkness, fled, and through the kindness of a carter, made my way to Peking."

The Lady Yin and the maids that were about her listened with profound interest to A-lu-te's narrative.

"Yes," said Lady Yin, "I have always heard that robbers were as plentiful as watermelon seeds on that road. Why did my sister wish you to visit me? It was not for love of me, that is certain, for it has been six years now since she has condescended to write or to send me any message. She has been foolish to remain angry so long because my husband has superseded hers in office. As if my husband were accountable that his talents are superior to those of your father, and have, therefore, received deserved recognition from the empress dowager."

"I have not come to visit you, my aunt," returned A-lu-te quietly. "I have come to present myself, with the other Manchu maidens, for inspection at the imperial household office."

The Lady Yin dropped the ornament she had selected from those on the tray the servant was holding before her. She looked annoyed as well as surprised at A-lu-te's statement.

"Why, that is in two days. How can you get ready? Your clothes are not suitable. You cannot present yourself in that dress, although I confess it does not look travel-stained."

"My father, desiring that I should appear as well as the daughters of the Manchu families who live in Peking, ordered a dress to be made ready for me when I arrived. I called for it on my way here, and brought it with me."

"It was well that you bethought yourself of that," remarked Lady Yin, gratified to discover that she would not have to disburse money for her niece's clothes. "Is your name on the list?"

"Yes, it has been on the list since my fifth year."

"That is true—I forgot. I will see to it that you have a chair and outriders to accompany you to the palace. Glad am I that I have borne no daughters to be registered in the government book. I am sorry for you if you are selected; life in the palace under old Buddha* is no sinecure. Moreover to be shut up behind stone walls for the rest of one's years and never see one's family again, to be little more than a slave, is not my idea of happiness."

Tears came into A-lu-te's expressive eyes.

"Nor mine," she murmured, and her sad mien moved the heart of Lady Yin to sympathy.

"Well, well, don't be downcast, my dear. One can never tell what may happen. You are pretty; perhaps the emperor will take a fancy to you, and then, who knows? You may bear him a son."

A-lu-te, clenching her little hands tightly, showed nothing of the black despair with which this suggestion filled her heart.

"I hope," continued Lady Yin, "that if you are selected to be the *fei* or the *pin* (grades of imperial concubines) and the acquired influence it incurs, you will not forget that I have received you kindly, in spite of my sister's undutiful behavior toward me."

"I'll not forget," said A-lu-te in a low voice. And through the paint and powder which covered her lovely face, she wore a weary look.

"Sit down," said Lady Yin. "In a little while we will eat. Then I shall make my visits and you can sleep. You look tired."

Later, the other women of Lady Yin's household were each presented to A-lu-te in turn, and the Lady Yin recounted with a certain pride the adventures the girl had had upon the road; her fortunate escape from robbers, and the reason of her coming to Peking.

A-lu-te sat beside the voluble lady's chair, pensive and silent. And when the women had returned to their own apartment she was invited to eat. After the meal was over, servants brought basins of water and towels and a box of paint and brushes. Lady Yin washed her hands, touched up the rouge on her lips which had been partially rubbed off, and applied more powder to her face.

Then, followed by a long procession of menials, carrying her toilet articles, her pipe, tobacco, and additional clothes, she passed into the court and entered her chair.

The house servants promptly took their places in carts; *mafoos* mounted their ponies, and the cortège slowly left the compound.

Lady Yin had gone to make her rounds of visits. She had much to tell her friends concerning the arrival of her niece and the adventures she had encountered on the road from Pao-chou to Peking.

*The name commonly bestowed upon the empress dowager.

In the bedroom assigned to her, A-lu-te sat alone. She was weeping.

CHAPTER III.

THE PLIGHT OF FEN-SHA.

PEKING was taking its after-tiffin nap when Follingsbee, once more in the dress of his countrymen, entered the American legation.

He had a particular reason for wishing to see Betty again, and finding her alone on the bamboo-shaded veranda outside the drawing-room windows, he did not wait to be announced.

"I have come to apologize," he said rather abruptly. "I was abominably rude this morning. Will you forgive me, and be friends again?"

He held out his hand and she laid her own little white one ever so lightly in his.

"I should like to be friends again," she replied simply, and though her manner was entirely gracious, Follingsbee felt a subtle change. She seemed indefinitely different. Seating himself on a wicker-chair beside her, there followed a short and awkward silence. Betty was looking toward the flower garden; Follingsbee was looking at Betty.

"The *mafoo* told me he saw the beggar quite distinctly; he said she did not have the smallpox."

Betty was not looking at Follingsbee as she spoke. Her eyes were still fastened on the flower garden. And Follingsbee came out of his reverie with an abruptness which resembled a jolt. But he said nothing.

Betty turned her eyes upon him, gravely questioning.

"Did she have the smallpox, Mr. Follingsbee?" she asked.

A confused sound that seemed to be an affirmative, changed into a negative, and ended in a cough, expired in Follingsbee's throat.

"I beg pardon," Betty said politely. "What did you say?"

"I said no," he replied with decision.

Betty sat rigid in her chair for a moment. Then, relaxing again she leaned back and appeared to be thinking it over.

Follingsbee awaited her verdict. Suddenly a swift spasm of surprise swept the girl's face, as if a thought that had suddenly appeared to her, came in the nature of a shock.

"You—you know her? Was it—was it *you* she was waiting for?"

Follingsbee met the question full in the face and nodded.

"Why—why?" Betty faltered.

Follingsbee's smile was slow and somewhat uncertain.

"I—I am afraid I cannot tell you that," he said quietly, glancing down at the girl's nervously excited fingers that were gripping his sleeves. "It is quite a long story, and if I told you, it would be equivalent to telling Mr. Danford and—well, something might turn up which would make it desirable, on his own account, that he have no knowledge of this matter."

Betty looked at him questioningly. Mysteries are always annoying things, even in China where they abound. And this particular mystery which surrounded Follingsbee made an astonishing difference to Betty. She would not have been half so interested if it had been a matter concerning Captain Bertram, of the British Legation.

"But—but if I promise not to tell my father? Can't you trust me to keep my word?"

The faintest of smiles quivered an instant on Follingsbee's face. Betty saw it and flushed a little.

"Why—why did you laugh at me?" she asked. "Do you think because I am a woman I cannot keep a secret? That is not fair of you. I can be as silent as—as—well, as the sphinx, for instance, who, you may remember, is a woman, too! Now, please, Mr. Follingsbee, tell me—who was that beggar woman? Remember, I forgave you for being rude to me this morning."

Follingsbee studied Betty's eager face.

"You remember your young *amah* who deserted you so mysteriously when you reached Peking?" he asked in a low voice, and his eyes said the rest.

Betty gasped.

"You—you mean that the beggar woman was my lost *amah*?"

Follingsbee nodded, and watched the girl's wide-eyed surprise with some amusement. Then, becoming rather tight-lipped and serious again, he said quietly:

"If I tell you, will you remember what you promised—that you won't tell Mr. Danford?"

Betty nodded.

"I sha'n't tell him," she said simply, and settling herself in her chair and folding her hands in her lap, she fastened her eyes upon Follingsbee's face and prepared to listen.

"A-lu-te—" he began.

"A-lu-te! What a pretty name! Where did you first meet her?"

Her curiosity was outstripping her patience.

"This morning."

"This morning? But how—" She saw a gleam of humor in Follingsbee's eyes and said quickly:

"I won't interrupt again, Truly. Please go on."

"All right," Follingsbee smiled. "I will tell you the story from the very beginning.

"Among my classmates at college was a young Chinese chap, round-faced, good natured, and jolly. He was an excellent student and a general favorite. His name was Fen-Sha."

Fen-Sha! Betty had heard that name before somewhere, and in a moment recalled the case of the two young Chinese for whom the missionary had been detained to intercede when he, the missionary, should have accompanied her on her way to Peking. The young Chinamen in question had been accused of organizing "Young China Clubs" at the instigation of this Fen-Sha.

"They called him 'Curly,'" Follingsbee went on, ignoring the surprise on

Betty's face, "for no reason that I ever discovered, except that his hair was as straight as an Indian's or a Chinese. He was an ardent patriot; to a few of his intimate friends—I was among the number—he used to confide his ambition to organize in his country a reform party, its object being to replace all conservative ministers and viceroys adhering to their century-old traditions with men imbued with Western ideas, who would be prepared to urge the adoption of reform measures, and change China from her present state of a helpless giant, possessing neither strength nor power, to her former proud position—that of a wise parent of the Oriental family of nations, the leader of the yellow race.

"I doubt if any of us took these patriotic outbursts very seriously. They occurred but seldom, and if we thought of them at all, it was to regard them as the chimerical dreams of an enthusiast. We were far more interested in Fen-Sha, the man, than in Fen-Sha, the would-be reformer of Chinese customs older than Christendom.

"But from the day he persuaded me to let him teach me Chinese I ceased to be indifferent. I have, I suppose, a facility for learning languages. At any rate, when he left college I could speak Chinese fairly fluently. It is a fact that when a man acquires a new language, he acquires with it a keener comprehension, a more vivid interest in the people who speak that language which no amount of reading or traveling without such knowledge can give him.

"After we graduated, Fen-Sha returned to China. For a time his friends lost track of him, but I began to hear of him as an indefatigable organizer of reform clubs in various parts of the country. He traveled up and down the Yellow River; he went all over the south, and north as far as the Great Wall. His name became a household word among thousands of his country people. In his work he was encouraged and assisted financially by Duke Tsing, who not only shared his progres-

sive views, but to whose generosity he owed his college education in America. Fen-Sha was betrothed to the adopted daughter of his benefactor—"

"A-lu-te!" murmured Betty, tense with excitement.

"Yes, A-lu-te. Three days before their marriage was to be solemnized Fen-Sha was arrested near Tientsin, charged with conspiracy against the imperial government. He was thrown into prison, tried, and condemned to death. In two weeks his execution—slow death by the slicing process—will take place. His reform clubs are closed by the authorities, and the members threatened with death or banishment if they attempt to reorganize. Duke Tsing was arrested, but because of his high official position, the empress dowager graciously permitted him to hang himself. His family were banished, and A-lu-te was warned that if she put foot again on her native land, she would be sold as a slave to the highest bidder."

Betty listened in wide-eyed, silent horror as this terrible narrative was unfolded. Her own happy world seemed suddenly to have given way to a monstrous universe filled with awful torment, with injustice that left the heart sick.

"It is horrible! Horrible!" she cried, her voice breaking into a sob. "Oh, why did she return and expose herself to such a hideous fate?"

"To save Fen-Sha, her betrothed. I have very little hope that she will succeed. Even if her identity is not discovered and she escapes being sold into slavery, her plans for his release are so hazardous, it is well-nigh impossible that she can carry them to a successful issue. But her courage is magnificent."

"What are these plans?" inquired Betty, holding her breath in suspense.

"Do not ask me; I have told you all I can."

Suddenly a fearsome thought came to Betty.

"Do they—the plans—include your cooperation?"

"To a certain extent," he replied care-

lessly, and added—"that is one of the reasons I do not want your father to be informed concerning this matter. I am an American, and—well, that fact might be an embarrassment to him."

"Will you be in danger at any time?"

A note of keen anxiety rang in her fresh, young voice.

"None whatever," lied Follingsbee calmly.

Quite unconsciously, Betty gave a sigh of relief. Then she said:

"Did you help her to come to Peking as my *amah*?"

"Good Lord, no!" he exclaimed, horrified. "Do not think it for a moment. The plan was arranged and carried out by one of Fen-Sha's Chinese friends in Tientsin. I was not told of it, or I should have promptly interfered. If A-lu-te had been discovered on board your boat, I hate to think what might have been the consequences to you. When I arrived in Tientsin I received a letter from Fen-Sha's friend, saying that A-lu-te would be in the capital after a certain date, and disguised as a beggar. He said she would require financial aid, and asked me to obtain it for her. As he knew I had never seen the young woman, and would not be able to recognize her in her disguise if I had, he told me how to identify her. Every day for a week I have been roaming the streets, accosting beggar women, in the hope of finding her. It was the irony of fate that when I was on Legation Street, she was elsewhere. It was a game of hide and seek, which both of us were doing our utmost to end without success, until I met you this morning and you put me on her track."

"Oh, I am glad that I was of some help to her, after all!" Betty cried impulsively, and made Follingsbee laugh outright by offering him all the money she had, declaring quite seriously that she would get her father to buy all her curios for her.

"You are a young lady of infinite resources," Follingsbee said, still smiling. "But you must keep your money. A-lu-te is provided with funds—and—and now

I must be off. You are sure you have forgiven me for my rudeness this morning?"

"Quite sure."

And Follingsbee was satisfied, for the nonce, at least.

On the following day he went again to the legation, and on the next and the next—always after tiffin, when the minister was taking his *siesta*. Follingsbee did not choose this hour for the purpose of avoiding Betty's father, but because he was assured of being, at that time of day, Betty's only caller.

The result of these visits was that she learned more about his friend Fen-Sha; of the young reformer's work, of his passionate devotion to his country, his vehement desire to help his people, his faith in their better destiny, and his brave and single-handed efforts toward this end. In addition to which Follingsbee told her some interesting facts about himself; experiences of his own, any one of which repeated abroad would have made him the most talked-of man in China; experiences which every young fellow with a taste for adventure would have given his eye-teeth to have lived through, and which would have excited the envy and admiration of others too old to be easily stirred.

Betty listened enthralled, marveling at the simple manner in which he told these marvelous tales.

And then it chanced that Follingsbee was invited to the Prince and Princess Pontioff's ball, which took place on the evening of the third day. When the prince had questioned the princess about the wisdom of inviting Follingsbee, she had merely said with that air of finality of which she was perfect mistress:

"It is my wish. He is the most interesting man in Peking. Moreover, the Great Mogul of the Imperial Maritime Customs, before whom all the heads of legations—including yours, *monsieur*—kotoed reverently, has had him at tiffin. I know, because I met him there."

And that settled it.

Follingsbee attended the ball. He danced with Betty, and annoyed Captain Bertram of the British Legation. Then he went home with a song in his heart.

On the desk in his room he found a box, and inside, a paper. On the paper was written, "Wan-Shou-Shan." It was the name of the empress dowager's summer palace. The box had been brought, said his boy, by an old woman some hours since.

"So," said Follingsbee to himself, "Al-te has gone into the dragon's maw. It is two to one I won't succeed in getting her out again, but I shall have to make the venture when she sends for me. It is a black outlook for her, for Fen-Sha, and"—he shrugged his shoulders—"for me."

Then, lighting his pipe, he fell to thinking of Betty and the dances she had given him. But after a little while he knocked the ashes from his pipe and, sighing as one who may no longer dream pleasant dreams, he unlocked a trunk in which lay a varied and strange assortment of Chinese clothes.

After a careful inspection he selected a set of garments, placed it on top of the others, locked the trunk again, and went to bed.

CHAPTER IV.

ENEMY AND FRIEND.

OUT on the great Pichili plain between Peking and the western hills a green chair was being carried. The chair-bearers had fallen into a swift, steady pace, resembling somewhat the trot of the little north China ponies.

The wind was blowing. The sun shone through a strange, yellow mist which was like a constantly shifting, transparent curtain. The air was laden with fine particles of golden sand. The bearers breathed heavily; eyes, ears, and nostrils were caked with sand. The ponies of the escort hung their heads low in vain efforts to escape the sting of the flinty shower.

Inside the chair A-lu-te sat with curtains drawn tight. The chair swayed, rising and falling with every step of the bearers.

Two hours had passed and the motion had not ceased or varied, not even when the men in the cart had taken the place of those carrying the chair. The transfer was made swiftly, skilfully, and silently. A-lu-te did not move, though her limbs were numb from their cramped position.

She sat like a statue, except that now and again she clasped and unclasped her small, slender hands, and her lips moved as if in prayer.

Suddenly the bearers halted. There was loud talking and shouting of orders. Above the general hubbub arose the shrill voices of women exchanging comments, asking questions. A-lu-te drew the curtains aside and looked out.

She saw fifteen other chairs, their occupants all young Manchu girls like herself and as handsomely gowned. Surrounding the chairs were soldiers, officers, and bearers. Some one stepped up to A-lu-te and asked her to descend, and she found herself before the large gates of the summer palace.

A small gate to the right of the large one was thrown open. Palace eunuchs appeared and invited the young women to enter. They passed into a court beyond which was another more beautiful than any A-lu-te had ever seen.

There were exquisite flowers in profusion and small, pink-flowering mimosa-trees, from the branches of which hung gilt cages holding canary birds singing sweetly. In the center of the court was a marble basin filled with fragrant lotus-blossoms; water from carved marble fountains sparkled in the sunlight.

A-lu-te had scarcely time to take in the beauty of the scene when they were conducted to a large pavilion. Here tea was served to them, and little cakes. The Manchu maidens tittered and talked among themselves, giving no heed to A-lu-te, who sat apart as if not one of them.

Many of these youthful candidates for the imperial harem were pretty, or would have been except for their vacant expressions. When they had drunk their tea, they moved about the hall, showing off to one another their handsome gowns, the ornaments in their smooth hair, their daintily embroidered shoes. Or they sat on the stiff-backed ebony chairs, chatting, and now and again breaking into little screams of laughter.

They were thoughtless, capricious, puerile, and grossly ignorant. Others, the less-pretty ones, huddled together, frightened, sad-eyed, thinking of the life that would be theirs within the palace walls; their liberty gone, their souls embittered, their days ruled by eunuchs, and, except in name, not even concubines, if the old Buddha so willed. For them the sun would set over a life withered from the start, the flower of their youth never having bloomed.

More than two hours passed and still no one came to summon them before the empress dowager. The pretty ones yawned, or examined the furnishings.

On the walls hung long, white silk panels on which were painted golden characters. Flowery scrolls, they were called. They were suspended in pairs; the inscriptions were contrasts, antitheses, the lights and shades of the poets' thoughts, the painter's fancy.

Before one of these ornamental scrolls stood a small, plump girl. She had a round baby face, and eyes full of caprice and cunning. Upon the scroll she was examining was written:

"The bright sun rises over the eastern mountains. A new glory reawakens the earth to the impulse of spring. The pink peach flowers open their beauties to the light, and the heart of youth to love."

"I wish I knew what is written there," she said.

A tall girl, with cheeks thickly daubed with almond paste and crimson paint, tossed her head scornfully.

"What! you have not learned to read? How ignorant you are!"

"No more than you," retorted the pretty, plump one quickly.

The others laughed. The tall girl replied haughtily:

"You are in error; I read with ease."

"What says the flowery scroll?" challenged the pretty one.

The tall girl struck an affected attitude, studied the panel a moment in silence, and in a singsong voice said glibly:

"Our primary duty is to make our family illustrious and bring glory to our race."

Her companions were impressed. She had vindicated to their complete satisfaction her pretensions to read.

A-lu-te smiled disdainfully.

The door opened; a tall, magnificently clad eunuch entered. He wore the red button and peacock feather, insignias of exalted rank, never before accorded a eunuch.

A-lu-te thought she had seldom seen so ugly a man. His eyes gleamed like live coals in his sunken orbits. His jaw was lean and heavy; his lower lip protruded. The expression of his face was a curious blending of the servility of a slave and the cold cruelty of a despot. His manners were as polished as the handsome jade buckle which held his belt together.

The eunuch was Li Lien Ying, known throughout the Middle Kingdom as P'i Hsiao Li, or Cobbler's Wax Li, the powerful chamberlain before whom even royal princes and famous statesmen forgot to be haughty.

He bowed ceremoniously to the young Manchu girls, and addressed to each some comment attesting his knowledge of her father's rank in the capital or province, or something of her family history. They, in turn, showed him a marked deference. Perhaps because A-lu-te was afraid of him and resented the slight shudder which passed over her slender figure, she drew herself very straight and returned his gaze haughtily.

Li gave her another look of penetrating keenness, which she bore without flinching, though her heart throbbed painfully.

He did not speak to her. His manner had suddenly changed; he was no longer the suave courtier, but the influential confidant and adviser of the empress dowager, the man whose caprice or hatred all at court except his royal mistress had learned to fear.

He bowed again to the young women, turned, and left the room. Soon palace eunuchs appeared. The names of ten of the young women were read aloud. They were then conducted to the imperial pavilion, where her majesty the empress dowager herself would inspect them.

The five girls whose names were not read were invited to return to their homes. They were presented with bolts of silk and boxes of sweetmeats, which servants carried before them to their chairs. Cobbler's Wax Li had passed judgment upon them. They were not worthy of being presented to the empress dowager for selection for the emperor's harem.

Among the rejected was A-lu-te.

Her four slighted companions rose hastily to leave the summer palace. Their first feeling of humiliation was quickly forgotten in a pleasant realization that they had escaped the slavery of life behind the palace walls. No one noticed that A-lu-te remained behind in the empty pavilion.

She had not prepared herself for the possibility of not being admitted to the empress dowager's presence. Her precautions had been too carefully taken, her plans too well laid, that Li should have divined her identity; and, fully aware of the comeliness of her person, she had not deemed it in the least probable that the chief eunuch would pass adversely upon her physical merits.

What, then, had induced him to reject her? Had she succeeded so far in her perilous undertaking only to be balked at the very doors of the palace?

An hour passed as she sat in the empty hall thinking deeply. Then she rose and stepped out into the court. At the same moment the chief eunuch, followed by his

personal attendants, entered the court from the opposite direction. When he saw A-lu-te, his face grew dark as if the shadow of a thunder-cloud had fallen athwart it. He turned to one of his menials, the same who had escorted the rejected Manchu maidens from the palace enclosure.

"How is this, dog?" he exclaimed in an angry voice. "Why did you fail to assist the honorable lady to her chair at the outer gate?"

The trembling servant replied that he thought she had been with those whom he had seen depart.

"Fifty blows of the big bamboo," ordered Li.

Instantly the fellow was seized and thrown down, his back bared, and the blows administered. His ashen face was prone on the ground; except for the quivering of his flesh, he lay as one dead.

With a sneer undisguised beneath his suavity, Li turned to A-lu-te:

"Through the negligence of my servant, I am rewarded; to me falls the honor of escorting you to your chair."

"It is unnecessary; I am not seeking my chair," replied A-lu-te calmly.

Li looked at her, and as he looked his anger grew.

"The gate lies yonder," he said harshly. "Go."

"I have been summoned to appear before her sacred majesty, the empress dowager. Do you presume to interfere with her commands? Stand aside and let me pass."

The face of the chief eunuch became purple. Never since the death of An Te-hai, the former powerful favorite of Tzu Hsi, had royal prince or statesman dared speak to him in this manner.

"Woman," his voice was a low snarl, "know that without my consent no one may enter the precinct. Make haste and begone."

He seized her arm.

A-lu-te, with a quick movement, wrenched herself from his grasp and before either Li or his attendants realized,

or could prevent her, she had flown past them into the adjoining court and on into the next and next. Finally as her breath was failing, and the pursuing, shouting eunuchs were close upon her, she came to a large, quadrangular garden filled with beautiful flowering shrubs and rare exotic plants in great cloisonné pots.

At the farther end of this garden she saw a magnificent building, covered with wonderful carving. On the wide veranda of the building hung innumerable lanterns of buffalo horn, shaded with red silk. Attached to every lantern was a red silk tassel from the end of which was suspended a handsome jade ornament. On the doors of this palace, in great red characters, blazed the word "Shou" (Long Life).

The shrill, staccato voices of the eunuchs broke into a yell of triumph, for A-lu-te was almost in the grasp of her pursuers. The doors of the palace were thrown open and a woman appeared upon the threshold.

She was below the average in height. Her figure was slender and perfectly proportioned; her manner of holding herself was at once graceful and imperious. Her dark, flashing eyes were veiled by long lashes. Although she was not beautiful, her whole personality had something in it striking and fascinating.

She was dressed in a gown of sea-green silk embroidered with white water-lilies. In her black, glossy hair gleamed a lily made of white jade and coral; the delicate petals swayed with every motion of her head. A magnificent pearl necklace hung down to her waist. Her slender wrists were adorned with pearl bracelets of rare beauty; on the third and fourth fingers were long, gold nail-shields incrusting with pearls. Her shapely feet were encased in green silk shoes embroidered to match her gown and ornamented with tassels of pearl. She appeared to be a woman of thirty-five; as a matter of fact she was over fifty.

Such was Tzu Hsi, the great Empress

Dowager of China. Behind her, straining forward the better to see, stood a group of gaily gowned ladies. They were insipid-looking dolls with red and white daubed cheeks, penciled eyebrows, and brilliant, carmine patches on their lips.

A-lu-te flung herself on the ground and kow-towed. From under her long lashes Tzu Hsi looked at her in amazement. The court ladies gasped. It was in truth a strange spectacle, this which confronted them—a beautiful and richly dressed young Manchu woman, a stranger to them all, forcing her way into the sacred presence, pursued by shouting, angry palace eunuchs and by the great chamberlain himself.

"What means this uproar?" demanded Tzu Hsi.

The chief eunuch pointed angrily to A-lu-te prostrate on the ground.

"She came with the other candidates to present herself for the imperial women's palace, but was dismissed with the customary gifts. An hour later she was discovered roaming through the courts seeking, no doubt, in her deep guile and ignorance of his absence, to encounter the emperor."

Tzu Hsi frowned. This was indeed an offense past pardoning.

The ten maidens, belonging to the beauty and fashion of the Manchu aristocracy, who had passed before her critical eye that morning, were already lodged in a special part of the palace to be instructed in court manners and etiquette. Later they would again appear before her, and according to the knowledge obtained of their dispositions and characters, she would retain them at the summer palace in her own service, or send them to the Yellow City to be wives—if he so desired—of their sovereign, the young emperor, Kwang-Hsi.

For a maiden to try and show herself to the emperor before the empress dowager had passed upon her and assigned her to her place, was an unheard-of procedure.

"What is your name? Speak girl!" she commanded, addressing A-lu-te.

"Wangti," came the soft answer. "Your handmaiden is the daughter of your servant Lord Ko Lin Ch'in-in Pao-Chou and niece of your servant Lord Yin in Peking."

A-lu-te had a low, sweet voice, pleasant to the ear, her enunciation was clear, her intonation excellent. The Empress Dowager laid stress on such matters.

"Your conduct is extraordinary. What have you to say concerning it?"

"Yonder palace menial—he with the gross and ugly face who just spoke—esayed to prevent your handmaiden from presenting herself before your majesty's august presence in obedience to her imperial decree."

All stood aghast at the intrepidity of this speech. The chief eunuch gnashed his teeth in rage. He waited with ill-concealed impatience to inflict the punishment he was convinced would be ordered administered upon this audacious creature.

But the great Old Buddha—as Tzu Hsi was called by the eunuchs—was a woman of impulse. She was kind, gentle, gracious, and affable when no passion excited her. Also the present situation appealed to her sense of humor, of which she possessed an abundant and varied store.

"What think you of your portrait, Li? Gross and ugly! You had best mend your life and so cure the first defect. As for the second, pray to the gods to tell you a remedy. I know of none myself."

She laughed again.

"Get up, girl, and let me have a look at you," she said.

A-lu-te rose and stood with downcast eyes before her.

"H-m," said the empress dowager, "your face at least cannot be called ugly."

She chuckled and threw a malicious glance at her discomfited chamberlain. Li dug his nails deep into the palms of

his hands. He inwardly swore to be avenged not only upon the girl but upon all her family to her most distant relation.

"Would you like to remain with me?" asked the empress dowager, tipping up A-lu-te's chin and smiling into her eyes. She had a charm, when she chose to exert it, which was irresistible.

"Yes," replied A-lu-te, clasping her hands together. Her eagerness was not assumed. Tzu Hsi was pleased. She patted the girl's cheek.

"We will see how you behave yourself. You must not give us any more of your portraits, however, or I fancy you will get into trouble—with the court painters." She laughed again; then turned and entered the imperial pavilion.

"Come," she called over her shoulder.

A-lu-te hastened to obey. She had no desire to be left alone with the chief eunuch. She seemed to read in his small, glittering eyes, as he looked at her, something fiendlike.

The court ladies whispered to one another in low, excited voices, as they gently pushed her through the heavy, blue satin portières into the throne room.

A-lu-te had a confused impression of walls, made of beautiful, carved open woodwork, lined with blue satin; of teak-wood screens inlaid with lapis-lazuli; of wonderful cloisonné vases; of pyramids of sweet-smelling fruits and bowls of perfumed "Buddha's hands"; of rare orchids in priceless jardinières, and everywhere flowers in profusion.

Tzu Hsi resumed her interrupted painting—the branch of a plum-tree in bloom.

"Can you read?" she asked.

"Yes."

Tzu Hsi nodded with satisfaction. Few of the Manchu ladies at her court could either read or write.

"Have you studied 'The Five Ching' and 'The Four Shū'?"

"Your handmaiden has read them."

"I will see how well you remember

what you have read. I will recite and you will finish what I begin."

There were few pastimes which the empress dowager, whose memory was prodigious, enjoyed more than quoting from the classics and from her favorite authors. She often entertained herself in this manner with Wang, a scholarly eunuch in the palace.

"Do you know 'The Doctrine of the Mean'?" she asked.

"Yes," replied A-lu-te.

Tzu Hsi determined to put this assumption of knowledge to a severe test. If the girl had lied to her, or even bragged unduly, she would turn her over to Li, to be punished and ejected from the palace.

Tzu Hsi had a supreme contempt for those who affected a knowledge they did not possess.

In an exquisitely modulated voice, sweet and musical as the sound of a lute, she began to recite, gracefully gesticulating with her hand.

"The heaven now before us is only this bright, shining spot; but when viewed in its inexhaustible extent, the sun, moon, stars, and constellations of the zodiac are suspended in it, and all things are overspread by it."

She paused.

"The earth before us is but a handful of soil," quoted A-lu-te in her fresh young voice, "but when regarded in its breadth and thickness, it sustains mountains like the Hwâ and the Yo, without feeling their weight, and contains the rivers and seas without their leaking away."

Tzu Hsi smiled, well pleased, and continued:

"The mountain now before us appears only a stone, but when contemplated in all the vastness of its size, we see how the grass and trees are produced on it, and birds and beasts dwell on it, and precious things which men treasure up are found on it."

She paused again. Without hesitation, A-lu-te carried on the quotation:

"The water now before us appears but a ladleful; yet, extending our view to its unfathomable depths, the largest tortoises, iguanos, iguanodons, dragons, fishes, and turtles are produced in them, articles of value and sources of wealth abound in them."

"Good! Good!" cried the empress dowager. "You have read and remembered well." She now recited a long poem from the "Book of Odes."

"You know that?" she asked when she had concluded the poem.

"Yes, it is from the Odes of Ts'in," replied A-lu-te.

"Ah! We shall get along famously together," declared Tzu Hsi. "You have some wit and knowledge in your head, which is more than I can say for most of the ladies here," and she waved her delicate little hand disdainfully toward the doll-like group standing near.

"Have you knowledge of history?" she continued her catechism.

"A little," said A-lu-te.

"It is a splendid study for men. History is not much use to a woman unless she is an empress. Now, I have derived benefit from the study of dynasties and the separate reigns of the emperors. I know them all perfectly. The Tang dynasty is one of the most interesting. Tao-tung had a fine mind; we are indebted to him for the preservation of the classics and for the wonderful system of literary examination which has made my country the most learned in the world and my statesmen the most enlightened. And the Empress Wu, what a great woman we have there! What can you tell me of her?"

"She was a *fei* in the palace of the Emperor Kau-tung. She strangled her first-born and accused the Empress Wang-shi of the deed, then persuaded the emperor to condemn Wang-shi to death and make her his empress instead."

The old Buddha waved her hand.

"Yes, yes; but those are minor details—unimportant incidences in a great career. She extended the empire; she for-

mulated excellent laws for the benefit of the people, whose miseries she ever sought to alleviate; she made—"

Tzu Hsi stopped abruptly and stared with an expression of anger, surprise, and disgust at the paint-brush she had momentarily laid down while recounting the excellent qualities of the Empress Wu. A fly had alighted on the ivory handle of the brush. Consternation was depicted on the faces of her attendants as their eyes followed her gaze.

"That," said the empress dowager in slow, accusing accents, addressing the frightened eunuch at the door, whose duty it was to keep flies from entering the apartment where her majesty was, "that is the second one this week."

Turning to A-lu-te, she said:

"You see how badly I am served. All my servants, and all the court ladies, too, know how I abhor those flies, yet no one tries to keep the creatures away from me, and do not even prevent them from actually alighting on articles I am using!

"Destroy that brush!" she commanded the eunuch. "I am sorry to lose it; it was a good one. Tell the beater to give you twenty blows with the big bamboo. I sha'n't paint any more to-day; I am no longer in the mood. That is always the way—no sooner do I find time for a little quiet recreation than I am tormented beyond endurance. The wife of a seventh-grade mandarin is better served than I am. Where is Cha?"

A small white Pekingese dog was brought in. He bounded toward his mistress, his long, curly tail wagging ecstatically.

"Cha is the only one who really wants to please me all the time."

She stroked the little fellow's soft, silky hair and tossed him a sweetmeat, which he caught dexterously in the air. Like his royal mistress, he was devoted to sweets. He sat now on his fluffy tail and waved his forepaws; his small red tongue lolled out expectantly. She tossed him a second sugar dainty and patted him again.

"That is enough; take him away," she ordered.

Cha was carried out, feebly protesting.

A eunuch brought a tray containing a cake of perfumed soap, a towel, and a bowl of hot water. He knelt before Tzu Hsi, while she carefully washed the hand which had caressed the dog.

"Do you sing?" she asked A-lu-te.

"Yes."

"Then come with me; I will rest and perhaps sleep if your music is soothing. Most of my people here have voices like cats."

The empress dowager's nerves had been jarred. She felt irritable in consequence. Under ordinary circumstances these imperial speeches, accompanied as they were by imperial favor, would have engendered among the court ladies a feeling of bitter antagonism toward the favored one and a desire for swift revenge.

But not so now. They knew that A-lu-te had gained the enmity of the most influential person at court, namely, the chief eunuch. His revenge might be slow in coming, but that it would be terrible was certain. Had they not been witness to the proof of this many times? They were quite willing to leave everything to him and wait.

The empress dowager ordered A-lu-te to take the Yueh-Kin, the "full-moon guitar," an instrument of four strings, and follow her into her bedroom. The other ladies were commanded to remain without.

In the bedroom the air was heavy with perfumes.

Near a window stood two long sandalwood tables covered with toilet articles, combs, almond paste, pink powder, lotions made of honey and jasmine, and scented soap of various kinds. Beautifully embroidered white silk curtains hung from the carved sandalwood frame over the bed. On the yellow brocade mattresses were soft sheets of pink, blue, green, mauve, and violet silk; pillows of the same shade, richly embroidered, completed this riot of color which in delicacy

and loveliness resembled a variegated flower-garden.

When the dainty form of Tzu Hsi was stretched on this gay bed and her head was pillowed on her favorite cushion of tea-leaves, she might have been taken for a fairy reclining on a fragrant bouquet.

"Sing," she said to A-lu-te, and closed her eyes.

The girl struck the strings of the guitar with her nail, and in a soft, plaintive voice, pitched in the falsetto key, sang the Bridal Song from the "Shi King":

"Ho, graceful little peach-tree,
Brightly thy blossoms bloom!
Go, maiden, to thy husband,
Adorn his hall, his room."

A-lu-te sang verse after verse while the empress dowager watched her from under half-closed eyelids.

She felt irresistibly attracted toward her, and determined to keep her in the palace. She had no intention of permitting her to enter the emperor's harem. This was not because the girl was pretty—among the imperial concubines were many quite as good to look upon as she—but because her attractive personality was combined with fearlessness and quick intelligence.

Such characteristics were dangerous ones to place near the emperor. Moreover, if the girl bore him a son, her own days of absolute power would be imperiled. Had she not risen to be autocrat of all China because she herself had wit, beauty, and had attained motherhood? It would be supreme folly to risk a repetition of such a thing in the palace.

She had selected the first and second wives of the young emperor and all his concubines with the utmost care for this very reason. Many of these women were beautiful, all were insipid, and the emperor, like herself, could only tolerate, never like, stupid people.

To be sure, the young empress—her niece—had a certain keen intelligence, but was, nevertheless, harmless. She was

not attractive; her teeth were black, her skin sallow, her figure bad, and her admiration and fear of her royal aunt all that could be desired.

Kuang Hsu detested this wife of his. He had evinced his dislike the first day of their marriage by throwing his shoe at her. Tzu Hsi had carefully fostered the estrangement, till now only a thinly veiled enmity existed between the two, an enmity most useful to her own purpose.

While these thoughts flashed through the imperial lady's mind, A-lu-te finished her song.

Tzu Hsi pretended to sleep.

A-lu-te stood quite still, gazing long and thoughtfully upon the charming face.

The dark eyes which gave to the royal countenance that look of vivacious intelligence were hidden under long, black lashes; the soft olive of the complexion was free from paint or cosmetics; about the rather large mouth lurked a smile, sweet and appealing as that of a child; in the small, firm chin alone lay a suggestion of that iron will which brooked no opposition and which had helped to make Tzu Hsi the greatest woman in the history of China.

As A-lu-te looked, she wondered if it could be true that this gracious little lady was the same who had commanded her adopted father to commit suicide, and who had condemned Fen-Sha, her playmate, friend, and betrothed, to the lingering death, to the dreadful slicing process.

Tzu Hsi suddenly opened her eyes wide. A-lu-te started guiltily.

"Well? What do you think of me?" The silver voice rang with an amused challenge.

"Your handmaiden thinks that your majesty and Kuan Yin" (the goddess of mercy) "must be sisters, so great is their resemblance to each other," returned A-lu-te.

Now, one of the favorite diversions of the empress dowager was taking part in elaborate court pageants attired as Kuan Yin, to whom she loved above all things to be compared.

A-lu-te's quick reply was therefore a particularly happy one, and greatly pleased the empress dowager.

"Wangti," she said softly, "come here—nearer—so." A-lu-te sank on her knees by the bed. Tzu Hsi touched the bowed head lightly, tenderly. "I do not know why it is, but I feel as if I had always known you, always loved you—and I want you always to try to please me, so that I need never have cause to be angry with you. Please promise me this, will you?"

"Yes," said A-lu-te in a low voice.

"Call one of the eunuchs in attendance in the outer room," commanded the empress dowager; and when he appeared she issued a few rapid orders. The eunuch kow-towed and hastened from the royal bedroom.

Turning to A-lu-te again, Tzu Hsi said: "You can go now and rest till I send for you. I have assigned the eunuch S'ang to be your servant. He will show you your room. One of the court ladies, Chou-Chao, has the same house with you; you need not be polite to her."

When A-lu-te left the room the court ladies in attendance crowded around her. The eyes of some expressed ill-will, others merely vapid curiosity. A-lu-te was plied with questions to which she answered:

"I am commanded to seek my room; I cannot stay to talk," she said, and followed the eunuch who was to conduct her to her pavilion.

A-lu-te had successfully installed herself in the summer palace. Would she succeed as well in the next step of her perilous plan? This was the question she asked herself as she followed her guide.

CHAPTER V.

S'ANG.

THE pavilion in which A-lu-te found herself was a charming little building overlooking terraces resplendent with flowers. With its gaily painted pillars, its bright tiled roof and orna-

mental eaves and general look of an exquisite oriental tent solidified, the pavilion resembled, except in size, most of the dwellings in the summer palace.

In A-lu-te's room the windows commanded a marvelous view of hills, temples, and lake. Rose-silk awnings shed a soft, subdued light in the interior; rose-silk hangings showed through the interstices of the screenlike walls, and rose-silk cushions covered the ebony chairs and *k'ang*.

A fresh, sweet fragrance from the flower-filled courts permeated the air. It was a retreat to rest in, to dream pleasant dreams. But A-lu-te was indifferent to its charm. She dropped into a chair, a sense of unreality upon her. She thought of her journey to Peking as maid to the care-free, happy foreign girl; of her arrival in the capital; her beggar's disguise; her old *amali's* joy at seeing her again; her search for Fen-Sha's friend; her visit to the house of Lady Yin, and finally her presence in Wan-Shou-Shan. All this appeared to her a fantasmagoria.

She asked herself whether it was true that she was in the summer palace; that she had really passed the scrutiny of the formidable chief eunuch, and successfully ingratiated herself with the empress dowager? How would it all end? Would she succeed in saving Fen-Sha, or would she not only lose her own life but hasten the execution of his terrible death sentence?

These reflections clashed in her head till her brain grew weary and her heart grew chill and heavy. But her indomitable courage and confidence—the two strong pinions of her soul—soon bore her up again from the depth of despondency.

She now recalled every word and look the empress dowager had given her. They indicated something more than mere transitory liking for the young stranger who had forced her way into the royal presence, something more than passing pleasure in her personality and her intelligence.

A-lu-te was sure of this, for she herself

had experienced a strange sense of attraction, even of sympathy, for the great empress, and this in spite of the causes she had to hate and abhor her.

As these thoughts passed in rapid succession through A-lu-te's mind she was subconsciously aware of the recurrent sound of a hard, rasping cough. The cough now became a paroxysm, lasting several minutes.

A-lu-te arose, entering the middle hall, and followed the direction from which came this painful sound. It led her into a small, unattractive room. A thin little figure, gaily clad, lay on the *k'ang*.

A-lu-te first thought she was in the presence of some child, till, drawing nearer, she saw that the small, sickly face belonged to a young woman.

She remembered suddenly that the empress dowager had said "One of the court ladies—Chou-Chao—shares the house with you. You need not be polite to her."

"Are you the Lady Chou-Chao?" she asked.

The young woman, unaware of A-lu-te's entrance until she spoke, rose hastily from the *k'ang* and curtsied.

"Yes," she said in a frightened voice. "Am I late? Has Lao Fo Yeh" (the great old Buddha) "sent you for me?"

"No; I heard you coughing. You look sick. Can I help you?"

An expression of surprise, almost incredulity, swept over the thin face of Chou-Chao.

"You heard me coughing and came to help me? How curious!"

"Why is it strange that I should wish to help you?" asked A-lu-te.

"Why?" answered the other, staring hard at her visitor. "Because it is not customary here to help any one."

Her voice was not bitter. She was merely imparting information to one inquiring for it.

A-lu-te shivered a little and was silent.

"When did you come?" inquired Chou-Chao.

"This morning."

"Is your room in this house?"

"Yes; on the other side of the hall."

"The large room with the rose curtains? It is pretty in there. Sometimes I stop to look in when I pass the door."

"The next time you must come inside and sit down."

Again Chou-Chao appeared surprised. She turned to a small lacquer cabinet, opened a drawer, and took from it some red and white paint which she proceeded to apply in an artistic manner to her forehead, cheeks, and lips.

With a charred stick she blackened her eyebrows to resemble a crescent moon. When her task was completed she resembled a mocking death's head, grotesquely painted.

"I must go now. It is my turn to sit to-day," she said.

"To sit! What do you mean?" inquired A-lu-te curiously.

"When Lao Fo Yeh takes her nap some of the court ladies watch in her room."

"Then you need not hurry. Her majesty has already had her nap," said A-lu-te.

This announcement threw Chou-Chao into the greatest consternation.

"She has had her nap!" she cried, wringing her hands. "Yet it is a full hour before her usual time! Oh, what shall I do? What shall I do?"

"If, as you say, it is a full hour before her usual time, why are you so frightened? It is not your fault that you were not on time."

"What difference does that make? I shall be punished just the same. I only came back to rest a little while—I was so tired and my cough bothered me. And now I am late!" She looked terrified.

A-lu-te did not attempt to disguise the scorn she felt for such pusillanimity.

"Don't be so frightened. One would suppose you were going to receive a beating—like any slave girl or eunuch."

Chou-Chao ceased wringing her hands. Her expression changed abruptly from pronounced fear to quiet amusement.

A-lu-te felt a return of that little shiver which had come to her before in this room.

"It is plain to be seen that you are a newcomer here."

With these words Chou-Chao hurried from the pavilion.

A certain faintness came to A-lu-te, as one overpowered with sudden weariness. In the middle hall she saw that the eunuch S'ang had returned.

"Will you have tea?" he asked.

She shook her head and entered her room. A few minutes later S'ang appeared with a tray upon which was a bowl of tea, also some bread stuffed with mincemeat.

"Eat; it is time," he said, and placed the tray before her.

"Eat," repeated the eunuch.

Mechanically A-lu-te drank the tea, but left the bread untasted.

She pushed the tray from her.

"Remove it," she ordered.

She sank on the *k'ang* and closed her eyes.

Her interview with Chou-Chao had unaccountably left her with less hope, less courage. She had but a week in which to save Fen-Sha; until now she had not faltered in her daring plan; she had surmounted the worst difficulties by the very audacity with which she had encountered them; she had faced, it may be, the worst dangers awaiting her, and yet a few words dropped from the mouth of a sickly woman had sapped her courage, left her unnerved, frightened, without knowing why. She gritted her teeth and moaned aloud.

S'ang heard her.

"Are you in pain?" he asked, coming in.

"Yes. My head is hurting me."

The eunuch disappeared and returned again with two mulberry leaves steeped in vinegar; he laid them on her temples.

"It will cure the pain," he said.

She heard him later in the middle hall, reading or reciting in a low voice. The monotonous sound had a quieting effect

on her. She fell into a half doze, during which she was vaguely conscious of trying to hear what he was saying.

From this uneasy sleep she soon awakened to be tormented again with the knowledge of Fen-Sha's fate. She tried to picture what life would be without him, haunted as she would be with the remembrance of his terrible death. The blood mounted into her cheeks, she pressed her hands over her eyes as if to shut out the picture, then another came to her, a picture of herself, living out long, dreary years behind the palace walls, the slave of a capricious old woman and perhaps—she clinched her teeth again—of a dissolute young man.

"Never that, never that," she whispered hoarsely.

She buried her head in her outstretched arms and fell to weeping bitterly.

S'ang's voice roused her.

"You are unhappy," he said. "I know nothing of your sorrows, but I know the means wherewith you can dispel them like clouds before the wind."

A-lu-te turned toward him with eager, questioning gaze.

Silently the eunuch held out a small book.

"Oh, that!" said A-lu-te contemptuously; "I have tried it—it is worthless."

She thought he had a copy of the imperial almanac, which is published yearly under the authority of the astronomical board, and contains lists of the lucky and unlucky days.

"Read," said S'ang, still holding out the book.

Her eyes rested carelessly on the cover. She read aloud, "The Gospel of St. John."

"It is not the almanac then. What is this St. John?" she asked.

"He was the loved disciple of our Lord," replied the eunuch.

"Of Sakya-muni Buddha? I do not know him," she said indifferently.

"Nay, nay, not of Buddha; but of the Lord Jesus Christ."

"Ah, now I recall hearing that name; he is the idol worshiped by the foreigners."

"He is not an idol. He is our Lord," returned S'ang.

A-lu-te leaned forward and regarded the eunuch intently.

"S'ang," she said in a low voice, "are you a worshiper of this God of the foreigners?"

"Yes, lady," he replied simply.

"And you dare admit it! You dare offer prayers to the strange God, here, in the very palace of the empress dowager? Profound would be your sleep to-night if I were to tell her!"

"You will not tell her," he replied quietly.

"Why not?"

"Because you are different from those who are here and you do not hate the foreigners." A sudden fear of him came over A-lu-te. Did this eunuch know more of her than the others?

"What cause have you for thinking I do not hate them?" she asked, trying to keep the fear from her voice.

"You call them foreigners and not devils and barbarians."

"You are right, I do not hate them. I have indeed cause to be grateful to them." In her relief she admitted more than she had intended.

But S'ang noticed the admission only to reply, "And I," with such fervor, A-lu-te was moved to ask what benefits he had received from the foreigners.

"They taught me to know and love the Lord Jesus Christ."

"Oh, that!" said the girl, shrugging her shoulders.

"I was unhappy even as you are," continued the eunuch, "I was as one groping in a black pit, without hope, without a morrow. Disgust and weariness were my companions throughout the day and lay down with me when I sought my bed at night. Then I was led from the blackness of the pit into the bright sunlight, into the pure air; joy came to me and peace. These, too, can

be yours, if you will learn to know, to believe in the Lord Jesus."

"Your God is powerless to help me," said A-lu-te gloomily, and added: "Leave me now; I have need of rest."

He turned to go when she called sharply to him. He came back, standing quietly before her.

"This God of yours, does He help those who ask it of Him?"

"Yes, if they believe in Him."

"Do you believe?"

"As truly as that I am now alive, standing in this room in your presence"; he spoke the words slowly with deep solemnity.

"Have you ever wanted anything so much you would give your life to obtain it?" she asked.

"Yes."

"Well, and have you asked your God to give it to you?"

"Yes, I ask Him every morning when I wake and every night before I sleep."

"Then it appears this God of yours won't help you after all, since you must needs ask Him day after day and night after night; your God is no better, no more merciful, no more powerful than any other god, than Buddha for instance, before whom I have prostrated myself so many times in prayer I have fainted from fatigue, and all without avail."

She spoke bitterly.

"I have faith that my prayers will be answered. I am content to wait."

The eunuch gazed out of the window on the temple-crowned hills in the distance. His lips moved, though no sound fell from them.

"You are praying," said A-lu-te, watching him curiously. "What are you asking this God of the foreigners?"

For a moment the eunuch looked troubled and hesitated.

"I cannot tell you," he said.

"You mean, you will not," returned A-lu-te haughtily. "Stop and consider. Do I not already hold your life in the palm of my hand? I have only to tell Lao Fo Yeh that you pray to the foreign

God and you know well what will happen. Now listen to me. I am in great trouble. I will prostrate myself before this foreign God and pray to Him, if you can convince me that He is powerful enough to help me."

"I will try to convince you."

"But how can I know that you are not deceiving me if later you come to me declaring your petition has been granted, since you refuse to tell me what that petition is?"

The eunuch looked earnestly at A-lu-te, then, as if possessed of a sudden resolve, said:

"My petitions are for the emperor. My prayers are that he may be taught the true faith, the Christian faith."

"What!" exclaimed A-lu-te, surprised for a moment into forgetting her troubles. "You pray for a thing like that! What foolishness to waste breath in such prayers! Moreover who would have the presumption to try to induce the Lord of Ten Thousand Years to forswear the religion of his ancestors?"

"I," replied the eunuch. His eyes flashed with a strange light; on his pale, thin face was depicted an ecstasy of hope.

A-lu-te looked at him in amazement.

"You!"

"Yes, even I."

"But you are not of his household. You can never approach him, much less can you seek permission to address him," she reminded him.

"God will help me. He will find a way." He spoke with the conviction of perfect faith.

"Yes—when the Yellow River runs dry. You are aiming at the impossible," said A-lu-te with an accent of impatience.

It seemed to her that the eunuch's prayers and belief were not only useless but essentially paltry; that they did not deserve time for speculation or discussion.

"To those who have faith nothing is impossible," replied S'ang. He pointed

out of the window to a stone wall surrounding the court. "Do you see that tender green plant which has forced a passage through the thick wall yonder? And the other one which has made its way, while still a feeble, small shoot, to this side and has grown so large and strong it has split great stones apart? Have not those little plants achieved the impossible? And why should not I?"

"Or I!" murmured A-lu-te to herself, then fell to studying S'ang's face. What had taken place in the mind and heart of this eunuch to make him so different from others of his despised breed?

As if in answer to her unspoken thought, S'ang said:

"Do you desire that I speak to you of myself?"

"I am listening," replied A-lu-te.

CHAPTER VI.

THE EUNUCH'S STORY.

"I WAS born in the province of Pichili," began the eunuch, "in the village of Makian, two hundred *lis* north of Peking. My father was a rich man. He owned camels by the score; these, laden with tea and merchandise, journeyed periodically beyond the Great Wall in charge of his servants.

"The cargo was sold at large profits, and on its return the caravan carried coal from Mongolia to be disposed of in the Peking market. The business flourished and yearly grew more lucrative. My father had two wives, but my mother was the legitimate consort. She died the third year after my birth.

"I was six when my father took to his house another woman. She came from the south and belonged to one of the nine classes of professional women of evil renown. She was a dancer. Her beauty was great, she was, in fact, the eye of the peacock. It was said of her she could dance her way into any man's heart, and that none were so rich but that she could spend what they had and make them poor.

"What truth there was in these reports which came to my childish ears, I know not, I only know that from the day she entered my father's abode, peace fled out of the door. You know the proverb: 'One key makes no noise, but two keys create a jingle.' The women quarreled; there was jealousy and backbiting, and the house became a pandemonium, so that in the village there was a saying, 'as noisy as the house of Tang.'

"The new concubine was a violent-tempered woman; she often caused my father to eat bitterness—a bitterness like that of aloë-juice—yet her influence over him was great, and when she bore him a son, it became supreme.

"One year—I was fifteen at the time—a sickness common in the north beyond the wall struck the camels, and one after another they died. That same year a great drought visited the land, and our crops were killed. Disaster after disaster fell upon us, till a time came when we were no longer the rich family of the village, but the poorest. One day my aunt—the concubine of the south—saw me eat a millet cake she had laid aside for her own son. She complained of me to my father, and represented to him that I was an idle, worthless fellow, a mere tortoise-egg, that I would never amount to much, and that the best thing which could happen to me and to the family was to sell me to Huang-ti.

"On hearing her speak in this manner, I was terribly frightened, for I felt convinced she would succeed in persuading my father to do as she wished. Huang-ti lived in a neighboring village, and did a thriving business supplying rich mandarins, dukes, and princes of the blood in Peking with eunuchs.

"I implored my father not to sell me to this man, for I did not want to become a eunuch, and he not being a hard-hearted parent was disposed to yield to my entreaties. But my aunt, who possessed a volubility of tongue truly alarming, reproached him with loud cries and lamentations for not considering the welfare of

the other members of his family, and leaving them to suffer in poverty, when by selling me to Huang-ti, he not only provided me with a career which might bring me eventually into the Yellow City and so to large emoluments, if I had wit enough to procure them, but also enable me to return to my father the benefits he had already bestowed upon me.

"My father, weary of contending with her, and it may be, seeing sense and reason in her demand, yielded. I wept bitterly, but my father was obdurate. He told me to remember the great lesson taught in the Trimetrical Classic, which imposes absolute obedience upon the child to his parent.

"And so I left the family."

After a moment's silence, the eunuch continued:

"Huang-ti entered me in the service of a Manchu prince. I was in the household five years, and became the confidential adviser, even instigator of every kind of wild escapade, to the seventeen-year-old son of the prince. One day the princess, desiring to make a pilgrimage to a Buddhist monastery, commanded me to precede her in charge of the scrolls, the silk embroidered hangings, the mirrors and rich cloisonné vases which were to be used to decorate the bare guests' house the priests assign to visitors.

"Now, I had assisted the young prince in an intrigue with the wife of a petty shopkeeper. She bore him a girl-child, and he, not caring to be bothered with the little one, had her passed under the bridge" (drowned). "I was present when this was done, and heard the frightened wail of the infant as she was dropped into the well, and saw the small arms stretched feebly up for help, as the water swallowed her. I had seen and shared in much wickedness, of which this act was not the worst, for such drowning of girl infants is not contrary to established usage, as you know.

"But the memory of this deed stayed by me night and day; the cry haunted

me, the baby's arms pursued me, and I finally determined to consult a wise man to rid me of the obsession.

"Now, in passing through the village of Yang-lin, on my way to the monastery, I heard of a geomancer, residing there, one very learned in his craft. I stopped to see him, but he had been called away by a wealthy tax-gatherer to a distant village. As I sat before his closed house, very dejected, I noticed across the street, over the door of a miserable hut, a sign which read: 'Pu-lun, little assistant to Jesus.' Not knowing what it meant, and being curious, I knocked at this door. A benevolent-looking old man appeared in answer to my summons.

"Are you Pu-lun?" I inquired.

"He replied that he was indeed the man.

"Then," continued I, not knowing what else to say at the moment, 'you are the little assistant of Jesus.'

"With a joyous expression he said: 'You have spoken truth. Come in. Come in.'

"I followed him into a room which, though small and meanly furnished, was clean.

"Do you, too, love Jesus?' he asked.

"Old man," I said, 'what are you talking about? I never saw or heard of this Jesus. How, then, should I love him? Is he your master? And what is his trade?'

"He is my Master, and His trade is teaching love.'

"Ho-ho," said I, laughing, 'that is a pretty name for the business you follow. In the city we call it—'

"Wait," commanded the old man, holding up his hand, 'wait till you hear what I have to say. The love which the Master enjoins upon us is love for all mankind, the love which teaches kindness, purity, forgiveness, which returns good for evil. He who loves like this, becomes a child of God, his sins are forgiven him; he finds peace in life and eternal joy in life after death.'

"I thought to myself that this kind of

teaching was worth looking into; that although it seemed impractical, it might rid me of my obsession. I asked Pu-lun to become my instructor. He consented with eagerness and I agreed to return at a certain hour every week to receive his lessons. This I did, until the time came when the prince, in accordance with the law which compels rich nobles to supply the imperial palace periodically with one eunuch, sent me here. My visits to Pu-lun ceased, but the joy and the wonder of that which he taught me will abide with me through life."

The eunuch's narrative had made a profound impression upon A-lu-te.

"What did this Pu-lun teach you?" she asked.

In earnest, simple words S'ang told her the story of Christ as he himself had received it from the lips of Pu-lun.

"So this is the religion of the foreigner!" exclaimed A-lu-te when the eunuch ceased speaking. "It is preposterous! Is that a good father who sends his dutiful son to be murdered by wicked people in order that they and others as wicked should be saved? Is that justice? Is that kindness?"

"It is love—the highest, the most wonderful that can be conceived," said S'ang.

"Well, it is a strange love," retorted A-lu-te. "As for the teachings, they do not differ greatly from the teachings of Buddha. Does he not tell us not to do evil and not to seek after riches? Truly the moral precepts of the God of the foreigners and of Buddha are the same.

"They are as like as day is to night," replied the eunuch. "The religion of our Lord Jesus Christ is the religion of Hope; the religion of Buddha is the religion of Despair. Buddha holds the soul of no account; he says: 'Eschew evil and in time you will cease to exist, you will be lost in the all-embracing Quietus, you will enter Nirvana—your spirit will sink into nothingness.' Our Master teaches us, not only to eschew what is evil, but to do that which is good. He promises those who believe in Him, who follow His precepts,

inexhaustible happiness and life everlasting. Listen to what He says."

S'ang opened the book which he still held in his hand, and in a low voice began to read. As A-lu-te listened she told herself that S'ang was right, that there was something wonderful in the promises the words contained, in the hope they inspired in an aching human heart. When he read: "Ask and ye shall receive," she repeated the sentence over and over to herself, nor did she listen any more to S'ang's voice.

Suddenly vague shouts reached them from the distance. The shouts came nearer and nearer; they were the cries of eunuchs announcing to all the palace world that "The Great Buddha wakes up, the Great Buddha wakes up."

S'ang slipped the book up his sleeve as a eunuch rushed into the room, calling:

"Imperial decree says that Lady Wang-ti is to come before the presence."

Reluctantly A-lu-te made haste to follow him to the pavilion of the empress dowager. She wanted to pray to the unknown God who had said:

"Ask and ye shall receive."

CHAPTER VII.

A-LU-TE PRAYS.

A-LU-TE found the empress dowager attired for a walk.

Instead of the stiltlike Manchu shoes she wore on ceremonial occasions and in the palace, she had on a dainty pair of low-heeled slippers. The heavy Gu-un Dzan had been discarded and her dark hair was coiled high in a simple knot, ornamented with a single rose, in place of the jewels she had worn that morning. Her blue silk dress was short, not to impede her walking. In her hand she carried a white, wandlike stick. She was accompanied by all the court ladies, among them the Lady Chou-Chao. A-lu-te threw a hasty glance in her direction, and noted that Chou-Chao was smiling with timid contentment.

The Empress Dowager called out gaily:

"I am going for a long walk, and I shall eat in a peony thicket on top of a hill where the view is beautiful. I am very happy to-day, and I want every one around me to be happy, too."

The procession started, the Empress Dowager leading, the court ladies following. After them came twenty eunuchs and six *amahs*, bearing boxes containing dresses, wraps, shoes, perfumes, water-pipes, handkerchiefs, looking-glasses of various sizes, yellow paper, and red ink. Any one of these articles Tzu Hsi might require during the next hour or two.

One servant was detached from the procession. He walked a few steps behind and to one side of his royal mistress, holding in outstretched hands a yellow satin stool for her to rest upon when tired. The procession was closed by the bearer of a large, yellow bag filled with bamboo sticks which was always carried wherever her majesty went, so that punishment could be promptly administered to delinquent servants.

The empress dowager ordered A-lu-te to walk beside her. When the procession was forming, Chou-Chao had whispered hurriedly into A-lu-te's ear:

"I was only a little late, she was sleeping and no one noticed me; they were talking about you."

Tzu Hsi had keen eyes and quick ears.

"What did that woman say to you a moment since?" she demanded.

They were following the fine-wrought white marble balustrading which stretched along the borders of the lake.

"She said she had forgotten to bring a wrap and asked if S'ang would fetch her one."

"She need not take such excellent care of her health. Stupid people are not scarce in this world," remarked Tzu Hsi caustically. The next minute her mood changed. She plucked a flower and held it caressingly to her cheek. "The heart of summer lies in it," she said, "how gladsome it is, how sweet!

Since the days of my youth—which, alas, passed swiftly as an arrow's flight—my greatest solace has been the contemplation of nature. I have commanded to be engraved on six thicknesses of imperial silk, these words of mine: 'Study the beauties of nature—it is the road which leads to inward freedom and serenity.'"

She stood still; her dark eyes glowing with tender light rested alternately on the silver-sheen of the lake, on the distant winding streams, the peony-covered terraced hillside nestling in the shadow of the rugged western hills where the yellow, upturned temple-roofs gleamed in the sunlight.

Suddenly she threw a backward glance at the procession of court ladies and servants and broke into a gay laugh.

"See, how silly they look! They are wondering why I am standing here staring into space. That is the way with them; they care nothing for a beautiful view and cannot comprehend any one who does. Even Li here, who is not without real brains, sees in nature only ground that is high or low, wet or dry, water that is smooth or rough, deep or shallow, skies that are bright or overcast, trees that are green or not according to the season, and plants with or without flowers. Well, you can't teach sheep to climb trees, or make poets of men who have no ink in their stomachs. Am I right, Li?"

The chief eunuch, who had approached the instant he heard his name mentioned, replied:

"I should be lying like a Nanking bird-hawker if I said no; yet I am not destitute of poetic imagination."

"Poetic imagination! You! Prove it! Prove it!"

"In a cup of wine I admire the blush of the young peach. Can a poet do more except to rhyme what I put in prose? And perhaps to drink so deep of the blush that it leaves sooner the cup to glow triumphantly at the end of his nose?" retorted Li, with a broad smile.

Tzu Hsi laughed. This servant possessed the art of diverting her. It was one of the reasons of his great influence over her. He was intelligent, witty, and when in her presence invariably amiable.

His manner towards A-lu-te had completely changed; he treated her with polite deference, showing no sign of the fierce passion for revenge which gnawed at his heart. The character of the chief eunuch was an intricate web, in the midst of which his mind sat like a hideous and venomous spider. He had three passions, greed, revenge, power. He had one virtue, loyalty to his imperial mistress.

Tzu Hsi resumed her walk. She had a quick, light step and those who followed had much ado to keep pace with her. Finally they arrived at that part of the lake where Tzu Hsi had elected to take the imperial boats. Two of these boats resembled magnificent pagodas floating on the water.

The chief eunuch assisted her majesty to embark. A-lu-te was told to follow, while the court ladies entered the second boat. The imperial float was attached by yellow ropes to three large rowboats manned by seventy-two rowers, who stood to their oars as they plied them in unison.

Tzu Hsi seated herself on a yellow-cushioned chair and invited A-lu-te to occupy the red cushion at her feet. The day was singularly beautiful; the lake smooth and crystal clear, except where here and there thick clusters of lotus-flowers rested on the water like small, pink islands. As the little fleet receded from the marble-terraced banks, two eunuchs, standing in the bow of the empress dowager's boat, began to sing. Their voices, musical, clear, and sweet, mingled with the soft sound of the water stirred by the oars of the rowers.

Presently the empress dowager raised her hand.

"Stop," she commanded, "your song makes me sad. I am growing old and cannot afford to indulge in that feeling.

In the afternoon of life one should beware lest one forgets how to laugh and be happy. Let a story be read."

She had scarcely given the order when she turned to A-lu-te.

"Wang-ti, you shall tell me a story, but let it not be sad."

"Your handmaiden will relate a tale from Liao Chai Chih, if your illustrious majesty permits," replied A-lu-te, and receiving permission she began:

"An old woman past seventy lived in Chao Ch'eng. She was a widow and had one son who was her sole support. One day he went into the forest to chop wood and was eaten by a tiger. The old woman prepared to commit suicide, for how could she live with no one to bring her food or to care for her? However, in thinking the matter over, she determined to go to the magistrate instead. Weeping and lamenting she told him her sad plight and begged him to have the tiger arrested.

"'Ha-ha!' laughed the magistrate, 'who ever heard of bringing a tiger to the Yamen!' The old woman continued her lamentations and hopping up and down before the magistrate, besought him to do as she asked."

A-lu-te imitated the shrill cries and lamentations of the old woman and jumped up and down in so ludicrous a manner that the empress dowager was highly entertained.

"The magistrate, disliking so much noise and clamor, and in order to be rid of her, pretended to accede to her request. But the old woman sank on her knees and refused to move until the warrant of arrest was issued. Finally the warrant was duly drawn up and the magistrate asked his police officers which one would serve it.

"Among the lictors was a certain Li-hêng. He had spent the previous night carousing in a tavern and his head was heavy and his mind not clear. The others knowing this pushed him forward and he was made to consent. Now when Li recovered from the effects of his ca-

rousal and discovered what he had promised, he was horrified. But he quickly consoled himself with the thought that the magistrate would not compel him to serve such a silly summons.

"After two days the magistrate, who had again been plagued by the old woman, sent for him, had him flogged for his dilatoriness and ordered him to go forth immediately and serve the summons.

"With fearful heart and trembling greatly, Li went into the forest to seek the tiger. But he did not find him. He then went to the temple of a local divinity whose shrine lay to the east of the city. He knelt before the image and prayed for help. As he rose to leave the temple a tiger entered the door. Li-hêng was terribly frightened; he expected to be eaten. But the beast remained motionless, his head bowed to the ground. Seeing him so quiet, Li gathered courage and said:

"'Did you kill the old woman's son?'"

"The creature raised his head and roared admission of his guilt."

Here A-lu-te tried to imitate a tiger's roar, and succeeded in making a sound not unlike an angry kitten, which caused the empress dowager to laugh consummately.

A-lu-te continued her narrative.

"'As you have admitted your guilt,' said Li-hêng, 'I must place the chain around your neck and take you to the office of the magistrate.' This he proceeded to do. The magistrate, being informed of his arrival, sent for the old woman. Then he questioned the tiger: 'Did you kill the son of this old woman?' he asked. The animal bowed his head.

"'Murder is a capital offense,' said the magistrate, 'and in your case an unusually heinous one, for this old woman was entirely dependent on her son. But I will let you go free on condition that you support her for the remainder of her natural life.' Again the tiger bowed his head humbly. The chains were removed, and he trotted off.

"The old woman, however, was very indignant because he was not put to

death; 'great folks may set the town in a blaze; common folks mustn't even light a lantern,' she muttered angrily as she hobbled off. But the next morning she found a dead deer lying before the door of her cottage. She sold the hide and venison, and supplied her needs with the money she obtained.

"Every morning the tiger brought venison to the cottage, and frequently other choice food. The old woman waxed rich, for the tiger supported her better than her son had been able to do. He often came and lay under the eaves of the cottage, and the old woman would pat and caress him, for she had become fond of the beast. When she finally died, the tiger came to the cottage door, pushed it open with his paw, and how-owed forth his grief. He appeared again at the grave, leaping in among the mourners, and roared like thunder."

A-lu-te illustrated the roaring with much vigor. The empress dowager shook with laughter: "Excellent, excellent!" she cried. "I have heard the late emperor's sleeve-dog make quite as fierce a noise! What became of Sir Tiger?"

"Having thus loudly proclaimed his sorrow at the old woman's death, he walked away weeping and was never seen again. The people of Chao-Ch'eng, however, erected a shrine outside the west gate to commemorate his devotion."

The empress dowager was in the best of humors when she left the pagoda boat to be carried in her chair to the summit of the peony-hill, which commanded a lovely view of the palace grounds and the surrounding country.

In a rustice summer-house she sipped tea from a white jade cup on a golden saucer presented by a kneeling eunuch, while a second eunuch held a gold tray containing blossoms of honeysuckle and orange flowers, with which she loved to flavor her tea. By royal command A-lu-te was given of this special brew. The court ladies remained outside the summer-house, where their own eunuchs prepared tea for them of a quality less fine.

"Wang-ti," said the empress dowager, "I find pleasure in your company; you are merry and are not stupid. I will see whether the day you came to the palace is not a most auspicious one. Have the book read," she said, turning to Li, "and bring the answer immediately."

With an inscrutable look upon his face, the chief eunuch went to do her bidding. No sooner had he gone than A-lu-te—buoyed by a hope rendered overconfident because of the favorable impression she had made, and because the "Great Old Buddha" did, in sooth, look that day like the "Benign Mother" her people affectionately called her—determined to try to obtain by frank and open-hearted appeal that which she had thought only to obtain by stratagem and fraud.

She threw herself suddenly at the feet of the empress dowager and knocked her head repeatedly on the ground.

"Tut, tut, girl! You needn't break your head thanking me for the tea. Get up."

"Grant, Old Ancestor, the prayer of your handmaiden," said A-lu-te, her voice quivering with fear of failure and hope of success.

She was risking all at one stroke. If she failed, Fen-Sha's fate was irrevocably sealed. That she was imminently endangering her own life she knew well, but to this she had become accustomed. Had she not risked her life many times over from the moment she set foot in the summer palace, and even earlier in Peking, where she posed as the niece—dead these two years or more—of the Lady Yin?

"What is it you want?" asked the empress dowager with a smile; a charming smile of great sweetness. "Is it a new gown for the summer more handsome than any at court save mine? Or jewels? For, in sooth, you seem to have none. Shall it be pearl earrings, or a bracelet of green jade from Khoten? Speak; perhaps it will pleasure me to grant your prayer."

A-lu-te clasped her hands in supplication.

"It is not gowns or jewels your slave desires; it is—" Her voice faltered an instant; then she went bravely on: "It is the life of one who, innocent of crime, is doomed to die."

Tzu Hsi frowned.

At this moment the chief eunuch entered, silent-footed, unobserved. When he saw A-lu-te on the ground in the attitude of one kow-towing, not in deference or gratitude, but as one beseeching, he stopped to listen. A look of intense satisfaction came into his face as he heard her low-spoken words. He was a clever man, and an exceedingly cunning one. The reason of the astounding temerity the girl displayed that morning when she defied his authority to eject her from the palace was clear to him now. She hoped to save the life of some one dear to her.

Who was it? Not her father, for Li knew well that the brother-in-law of Lord Yin was not threatened with danger from the wrath of the throne, nor yet any of his family. Had the girl a lover? Yes! That was it! What audacity to present herself as eligible to enter the harem of the Solitary One! She herself had now given him the rope with which to hang her. Well, he would use it, and quickly, and the knot around her throat he would tie exceeding tight.

Softly approaching the empress dowager, he whispered in her ear:

"It appears, Old Buddha, that now we have the true reason why this young lady so ardently desired to grace the court with her presence."

The frown on Tzu Hsi's face deepened. She did not reply to the eunuch, but his words made the impression he desired on her mind. Her anger grew against this girl whose apparent happiness and gaiety had ozonized the stale atmosphere of her court.

Was it true that this lovely young creature had sought to remain in the palace for reasons other than the honor and joy of being near the Presence? Tzu Hsi's vanity was wounded. Her voice was harsh when she spoke again:

"What nonsense is this? What have you to do with the decrees of my law courts? If one of my subjects is condemned to die, be assured of the fact that he deserves his fate, and that it ill becomes an ignorant girl like you to question the justice or plead the cause of such a one. Moreover, I know that I allow no one other than officials, or those summoned by me for the purpose, to broach questions of state or law."

Too late A-lu-te realized her mistake. It seemed to her that a grave had opened at her feet, a grave of her own digging, into which she had plunged Fen-Sha, and into which she herself was falling. Again the empress dowager spoke. Her voice was, if possible, more imperious, more harsh than before.

"Who is this man for whose life you have the presumption to plead?"

There are some natures who from an overpowering consciousness that their opponent is more powerful, stronger than they, become crushed, spiritless, frightened. A-lu-te's nature was not one of these. Love made her strong. Her mind worked with lightning rapidity. Only quick thought, ready wit, could save her now.

"Old ancestor, it is not a man your slave pleads for—it is her dog."

The empress dowager stared a moment in blank amazement—then broke into a silvery peal of laughter.

"Your dog!" she cried. "Well, and why must your dog die? Has he snapped at the official legs of one of my magistrates? Is that it?"

"No, your majesty. It is that he is far from his mistress, your handmaiden, and will die sorrowing for her."

"That is not the habit of animals, whether man or dog," replied Tzu Hsi emphatically. "In the palace I permit only my own special breed of dogs. I will give you Cha's brother; his hair is not as long and silky as Cha's, but for all that he is a handsome creature."

A-lu-te drew a long breath. For the moment, at least, the danger was past.

She kow-towed again, this time to express gratitude for the gift she was to receive. Then she rose staggering to her feet. Her escape had been narrow; the strain of it left her weak.

She was conscious that the chief eunuch was watching her closely. She felt instinctively that he at least had not been deceived by her answer. A breeze had sprung up. The blossoms on the mimosa trees moved gently to and fro like dainty pink birds swaying on the branches. Far below, silvery ripples ruffled the smooth surface of the lake, the lotos flowers nodded their fragrant little heads.

"How beautiful it is," sighed the empress dowager. "I have often wondered which hour in the twenty-four nature is her loveliest. I have watched her in all of them; in the early morning, at mid-day, in the long, dreamy afternoons, in the evenings, and in the wonderful hours of the starry night; and never, never can I decide when her beauty is supreme."

Suddenly she remembered the commission she had given the chief eunuch.

"What says the book?" she asked.

"What your slave read is best said to your majesty's ear alone," he replied significantly.

She turned to A-lu-te.

"You can join the other ladies. Tell them to note the beauties of nature and cease discussing their clothes or tea-house gossip brought by the eunuchs of the palace."

A-lu-te withdrew. Her heart was heavy with foreboding. She feared the chief eunuch at that moment more than she had feared the empress dowager's frown.

When she had gone, Tzu Hsi said sharply:

"Out with it—what said the book?"

"Old Buddha, the news is bad. The seventh of this moon—which is the day she came to the palace—trouble begins for you."

Clever woman though she was, Tzu Hsi was grossly superstitious. Belief in omens, in prophecies, was deep-rooted in her character, and played an incredibly

important part in forming her opinions, in regulating the actions of her public and private life.

She was in fact as grossly superstitious as the most ignorant coolie in the empire, in spite of her undoubted intelligence, her profound acquaintance with Chinese classics and histories. She seldom questioned the integrity of signs and omens, and she habitually consulted her book not only for lucky days, but for propitious hours in the day.

The chief eunuch's report both amazed and troubled her. She rose abruptly.

"My chair," she commanded.

This time A-lu-te was not invited into the royal barge. The girl's anxiety and fear increased. What had the chief eunuch told the empress dowager? Perhaps he had discovered her identity!

But she did not entertain the thought long, for she was well aware that the Great Old Buddha's rage would have fallen upon her immediately. The court ladies, quick to note the slightest change in the royal countenance, thought they saw A-lu-te's star rapidly descending. They moved away from her, gathering in small groups to whisper and titter, while she sat apart a prey to anxious thoughts and conjectures.

She was not entirely alone, however. Lady Chou-Chao remained beside her. When they landed, A-lu-te hoped ardently that she would be summoned to approach the empress dowager again, to entertain her with song and story or lively conversation.

But no summons came, and she was allowed to follow unnoticed in the rear of the procession. Later in the day she

accompanied the court to the theater and remained long hours, scarcely seeing or hearing the eunuch actors who were performing one of the numerous plays which the empress dowager amused herself writing in leisure hours.

That evening when she returned to her room she found a small fluffy black-and-white object curled up on a chair. It was Cha's brother, the gift of the empress dowager. The little creature stuck out its soft, moist tongue and gently licked her hand.

A-lu-te felt comforted, for she could not but think that had the empress dowager been angry the dog would not have been sent to her. She felt tired, yet had no thought of sleep. She sank on her knees and, bowing her head to the floor, began to pray.

"O you, you nameless One, you God of the foreigners, help me, A-lu-te; for Buddha hears me not. With bent body, with lowered eyes, humbly, humbly I bring my prayers to you. I will burn incense and candles in your temples at this very hour, every month of every year I live, if you listen to me now. Save Fen-Sha, condemned to die the lingering death. O you God of the foreigners, I kow-tow to you. I promise sacrifices to you, wine, cakes, aye, even sheep and bullock, reverently I promise. Save Fen-Sha, save Fen-Sha, save Fen-Sha!"

The night was far spent, and still A-lu-te offered up her frenzied prayers, bowing to the ground unceasingly, calling on the God of the foreigner.

An hour before dawn she crept exhausted to her *k'ang*.

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.

COMPLETE NEXT WEEK THE FIGHTING LASH

BY CHARLES B. STILSON

Story of a Strange Weapon and the Strange Man Who Wielded It.

The Dame and Pythias



by

Frank R. Adams

IT was a slack morning in the store, and hot besides. Customers were few and indolent. The season was conducive to confidences.

"Do you believe much in fortune tellers?" Fannie Herman asked of her counter-mate in the ladies' silk hosiery section.

"Well," Mabel carefully inserted a blond pencil into her knot of black hair before replying, "I don't know that I'm in a position to say, dearie. I've had a lot of nice things predicted for me," she offered with a mouselike smile, "but I'm too young yet to tell whether they're going to come true or not."

"I just asked to sort of get your point of view before telling you what happened to me," Fannie explained amiably, patting her pompadour, her collar, and her hips in the order named to assure herself that she was looking her trim best.

"I guess I told you once about a couple of fellows I've been going with for the past year, ain't I? Nice boys, both of them are, and when they wash the graphite and grease off their hands and faces after the whistle blows over at the automobile factory, they'd pass for white men anywhere. One is named Nick Hopper, he's the oldest, and the other is

Hardy Nelson, as nice a Swedish boy as ever came over from the old country up in Minnesota. They're both good mechanics and they get good pay there at the factory.

"The only objection I ever had to Nick and Hardy was that they stuck so close together. Those lads were as strong for each other as if they had been brought up on the same bottle of liquid glue. They certainly were good company for themselves. One package of tobacco was enough for both of 'em because they were never out of sight of each other. That certainly is grand when it comes to whacking up living expenses and devising ways and means of deceiving the landlady, but it ain't such a much if you carry it to extremes like mixing it in your love affairs.

"Unfortunately, them two lads didn't fall in love with a brace of twins like they should, but instead they both picked on me. You can imagine how much fun that was. Just sitting in the parlor with two gentlemen friends or going to band concerts and movies with the same does moderately well for the time being, but in order to get real intimate with anybody of the opposite sex a girl has got to let him hold her hand

in the dark occasionally and fight with him about whether or not she is going to kiss him good night.

"Things went on like that for nearly a year, and I was seriously considering the idea of adopting a cat and being an old maid when they came to me together and said they wanted to marry me.

"Which one?" I asked sort of surprised because I had given up hope.

"Whichever one you want," replied Nick. "There ain't any other way to settle it. We've tried to but can't. I've been urging Hardy to do it for the last six months but he insists on me having you, so we can't get anywhere."

"Nick will make the best husband for you, Fannie," Hardy urged. "He works faster than I do and makes more money."

"But I don't save it the way Hardy does," Nick pointed out. "He's got a roll in the bank."

"Half of it's yours when you need it, Nick," his pal said, putting his hand on his shoulder.

"Can you beat it? Those two lads stood there hurling bouquets at each other until their arms gave out. It was just like that movie we saw last week, you remember, don't you, Mabel, the one where the guys wore mostly sheets instead of clothes, and one of 'em was going to die for the other."

"I got you," Mabel responded immediately to the description. "It was just grand. The name of it was 'The Dame and Pythias,' I think."

"That's it," agreed Fannie. "Nick and Hardy was just like them guys in the picture except they were all dressed, complete."

"When they put it to me that way I didn't know what to do. You know how it is when you've only got a dollar to spare from lunch money and Jordan's is advertising a perfectly elegant near-German-silver mesh-bag for ninety-eight cents and The Fair is having a run the same day on ninety-nine-cent envelope chemises with almost hand-made lace in-

section. A girl don't know where to put her money.

"I told Nick and Hardy I'd have to think it over. I made one condition though. I said they'd have to cut out the team play."

"I don't care how you arrange it," I said as kindly as I could, because I saw that the idea was hard for them to understand, "but I've got to get used to looking at you one at a time if you really mean business."

"They stood for it and we arranged how Nick was to call Monday, Wednesday, and Friday evenings and Hardy on the other evenings except Sunday which was to be a mass meeting as usual of all the parties concerned."

"It looked as if things was going to be a lot livelier—there was more chance for a heart interest, as the book reviewer says. I figured that in a week's time I could have those boys just as friendly with each other as the Kaiser and King George."

"I wasn't entirely wrong about the heart interest part anyway. After a few rehearsals I got Nick so he knew what to do with my hand when I left it accidental in his lap. Hardy was more trouble. The average Swedish lad seems to have an idea that the way to win a girl is to wear her out by talking about the weather. He was a bum performer but I knew from something in his eye that he would be a whirlwind if he ever got started. So I nursed him along, and finally one night I nearly scared him to death by letting him kiss me good night when all he meant to do was help me off with my coat."

"But what do you think that poor fish did? He went and apologized to Nick about it. I nearly cried when I heard that. How do I know? I'll tell you. I went to the window to look at him once more when he left the house. Will you believe me he hadn't no more than got out the door when somebody meets him under the lamp post? It was Nick, and he'd been waiting to walk

home with Hardy. Hardy wouldn't go with him until he had explained what a pup he'd been by kissing his friend's best girl. Thank Heaven some men ain't so particular. Otherwise what would we do for magazine stories?

"I was near discouraged. All my smooth work didn't amount to much if they were going to get out extras about it. You can't put over a plot very successful if they keep a spotlight on you all the time. Occasionally you have to pull a little rough stuff. The quickness of the hand deceives the eye all right most of the time, but it ain't considered good form to make the magician take off his coat and show where the extra ace of spades is attached to the rubber band in his sleeve. Even Houdini couldn't do some of his best stuff if he had to work in sight of the audience when he slips them handcuffs off.

"We been going to White City a good deal this summer. They got a swell band out there this season, and the dance floor in the pavilion is something elegant. Hardy ain't so light on his feet as a steam tractor, but Nick can dance a good deal better than Pavlowa, and I've seen 'em both.

"I think there is something in Hardy's religion that makes it a sin to dance, although the way he does it it ain't so much a sin as it is a crime, which ought to be punishable by fine and imprisonment. Nick, though, hasn't got any impediment in his feet whatever, and when I was fox-trotting with him I could almost forget the places where I'd been stepped on by the world's champion Scandinavian horse-shoer.

"But Hardy had his good points. As I said before, an expert could tell that all he needed was bringing out, and besides it wasn't possible entirely to forget that bank-roll that he had put away in the First National. In some ways cash comes in a lot handier after marriage than the ability to waltz with both hands tied behind you.

"So I didn't decide right away. As

a matter of fact I was enjoying it more than the boys. They got a little haggard, both of 'em, and had a worried look around the eyes.

"'Can't you decide?' asked Nick on Monday or Wednesday evening, I forget which—anyway it was his night to be with me.

"'No, I can't,' I admitted regretful. We were at White City, and the band was playing that new piece of Irving Berlin's just as loud as they could. It was as romantic as anything, with the splash of the water in the 'Shoot the Chutes,' and all the electric lights turned on full horse power.

"'Let's ask Rajah Bong about it,' he suggested, desperate.

"'Gee,' I answered kind of took back. 'Do you know how much the Rajah charges?'

"'Yes.' Nick gulped a little. 'Five dollars for a complete reading, but for two bucks he'll give you an answer to one question.' Which was lucky for Nick because he never had five dollars all at once in his life—anyway not an hour after he was paid off and had settled with the guys he had borrowed off of during the week.

"Rajah Bong is about the most elite attraction at White City this season. If you've been out there you've probably been past his place. There ain't any ballyhoo spieler outside, and the sign above the door ain't printed in letters over a foot high. Everything is dignified. He don't have to advertise because everybody knows about him anyway. All he has to do is just touch your hand and he can tell you who you're going to marry, how many children you'll have, and whether or not some rich relative is going to die and leave you money.

"I guess any girl is sort of crazy about getting some dope on the future from somebody that's on the inside. I fell for the Rajah Bong idea right off the reel. He charged so much for information it seemed like he must be a friend of somebody pretty high up.

"So I agreed to leave it up to the Rajah and become engaged to whichever of 'em he said. I might just as well. If I was going to anyway there was no harm in finding out and saving a lot of worry making up my mind.

"We went over to Rajah's concession. There was just an even dozen waiting to see him, and a colored man in a red kimona gave us a number and told us to wait, something like in a barber shop.

"The place was all fixed up like a window-trimmer having delirium tremens, lots of turkey red hangings from the upholstery department of the five-and-ten-cent store, and sword bayonets from the Spanish War fixed on the walls in pairs, crossed. Black curtains with tinsel moons and stars sewed on 'em hung across an inner door, and over it was some printing in Russian or Yiddish or some Bohunk language. I've found out since that it's a quotation from the Old Testament and means, 'Watch your step and have your money ready.'

"Rajah Bong was certainly tending strictly to business that evening. It wasn't over half an hour before he got to me and there was a dozen people ahead. Even at two dollars a throw he was making enough every hour to buy a set of tires for an automobile. And some of the patients was loosening up for five-dollar treatments. You could tell that by the way they went into a corner and dug down into the holeproof vault when the colored gent asked 'em to contribute.

"Nick had two dollars right in his hand when it got to me. It was all in silver, and we'd both kicked in on it because he didn't have enough. The colored person took it away from him and threw it in a bag he was carrying as if it was too much trouble to count it.

"'Write yo' question here,' the colored man said, giving me a pad of paper and a pencil stub. 'The Rajah has to have something that you have touched in his hand before he can answer.'

"'What shall I write?' I asked Nick.

"'Ask him who you're going to marry,' Nick answered. 'That's all we want to know.'

"So I wrote that on the paper, and the darky took it careless and went behind the curtain. It was only a minute before he was back and said: 'Rajah Bong will receive yo'.' He said it just like that, grand, like in a book.

"I had to leave Nick outside and go in alone.

"Inside there was only a little room, but it was certainly fixed up swell. Everything was black, with skulls on it in white. There was a couple of regular skulls, too, on the table that had electric lights in 'em for eyes. A brass dish had a little fire in it that made a funny-smelling kind of smoke, like that Japanese nonsense you burn to attract the mosquitoes when you sit out on the front steps in the evening.

"The Rajah Bong had a skull in his hand, and was sitting sidewise looking at it sorrowful-like, as if he was saying, 'Alas, poor Horlick!' Neither of 'em looked at me when I come in, but in a minute a little smoke oozed out of the skull's eyes. I recognized the smell of Pirates' Delight cigarettes in a minute. I suppose smoking 'em was what killed him. They say that after inhaling ten, you have to send for the pulmotor.

"The rajah was a little man, but he looked terrible dignified and solemn in a black Mother Hubbard, with spangles on it and a hassock, or something Oriental anyway, wound around his head.

"'Abacadabra,' he said in a deep, sorrowful voice.

"'No,' I corrected him. 'The name is Fannie Herman.'

"'I know that,' he said, weary. 'Nothing is concealed from Rajah Bong. I know everything.'

"Wasn't it wonderful, his knowing my name? And I had never set eyes on him before in all my life.

"'I know,' he went on in the same tone of voice, 'that you belong to the frail

sect called woman, created to be the despair of man. And you are going to marry a young man with dark hair and eye-brows, dressed in a suit of dark-blue clothes and a pair of yellow shoes.'

"He couldn't have described Nick better if he had seen him. He even knew the kind of clothes he had on.

"Well, that settled it. I went out and told Nick what the Rajah Bong had said. I hated the idea of losing Hardy for good, especially when I remembered how careless Nick was with his pay, but the thought of the way Nick could dance sort of evened things up.

"I suppose we're engaged then,' I said after I had got tired waiting for him to mention it.

"Uh-huh,' he admitted, just as cheerful as if somebody had poisoned his dog.

"It ain't a funeral, you know,' I reminded him. 'The minister ain't going to say, "Ashes to ashes and dust to dust," when he hitches us.'

"It ain't that,' said Nick. 'I was thinking of Hardy. This is going to break him all up when he hears about it.'

"Do you think he's so crazy about me that he can't stand it?' I asked, a little worried myself. I didn't want to drive anybody to a carbolic-acid cocktail. 'Don't you suppose he can get along without me?'

"I was thinking how lonesome he's going to be when I'm gone,' Nick was as mournful as a bride kissing her mother good-by. 'I guess we'll have to have Hardy come and live with us,' he said.

"Nothing like it. Play something else, that piece is out of your range. After we're married you're going to be allowed to invite Hardy over for dinner once a month, if he'll promise not to cry on the parlor rug. Play that both ways for me.'

"Nick was sort of set back, but he saw that I meant it, and said no more about it.

"Anyhow,' he decided as he left me at the door after taking me home that night, 'let me break it to him. Maybe he won't take it so hard if I tell him.'

"I agreed to that. There wasn't any particular reason why I wanted to gloat over the poor Swede's misery.

"But I wasn't quite prepared for what happened the next night when Hardy Nelson showed up, grinning all over his map, and said he was going to take me out to White City.

"I looked at him, doubtful.

"Where's Nick?' I asked.

"I don't know,' Hardy answered. 'This ain't his evening to call.'

"I saw what had happened. Nick had lost his nerve, and hadn't been able to spring the bad news on his tow-headed friend. What could I do? Nothing. I had promised my fiancé I wouldn't tell. So I trotted along with Hardy out to White City as if nothing had happened.

"Nick has a great scheme,' he tells me on the way out. 'I'm going to take you to the Rajah Bong and let him settle which one of us you're going to marry. Is that all right with you?'

"I saw it all. It was clever of Nick, wasn't it? Instead of telling Hardy himself, the fortune-teller would do it for him, and, of course, Hardy wouldn't take it so hard coming sort of direct from fate that way. The scheme was so pretty that I fell for it right away. It would cost Hardy a couple of bucks that he didn't really need to spend, but then he had money to burn, if you counted that bank-roll which I wasn't so much interested in helping him save any more.

"So we went to Rajah Bong's place as soon as we hit the park. It was early, and there was nobody waiting in the outside room. So they maced Hardy for a couple of iron men right away, and I wrote my question on the paper and went into the cell where they kept the rajah.

"He was still looking at his bone-head friend, and, without glancing at me, he said solemnly, '*Abacadabra*.'

"This time I didn't argue about it. He reached out and took my hand.

"You want to know something about marriage,' he said, all mysterious, but still looking at Horlick and talking as if he

was a long ways off. 'I see before you a beautiful youth with light hair and blue eyes, who takes your hand and leads you to the altar.'

"Then, still holding my hand, he turned toward me for the first time. I saw a sort of puzzled look come into his eyes, as if he thought he had seen me somewhere before, but couldn't remember where.

"'Beautiful girl,' he said, 'your soul and mine have met before. They speak to each other. What does it mean?'

"I didn't tell him, because probably he knew, anyway, and was just asking questions to let me think I was in on it.

"Besides I had a lot of things that was worrying me more at that moment. Where did I stand? How did it come that fate picked out two different husbands on two evenings one right after the other? This second night he had described Hardy Nelson just as if he was a brother. There was no mistaking it. And Hardy was out in the other room where the rajah couldn't possibly see him.

"It was too much for me. I went out and told Hardy what the rajah had said, and we agreed to be engaged. I didn't know what else to do.

"But he asked me not to tell Nick, and said that he would spring the news himself. This suited me down to the ground, because I didn't know how I was going to explain to either lad what had happened. After they had scrapped it out among themselves, they could come to me with the decision."

"How did the boys settle it?" asked Mabel eagerly.

"They didn't," Fannie drawled tantalizingly. "Each one is afraid to tell the other for fear it will break him all up. Neither of 'em can sleep nights for worrying so about how the other one is going to take it."

"Ain't that awful," Mabel sympathized. "Who is this lad trying to attract your attention?"

Fannie looked carelessly toward the other end of the counter where stood a

bashful young man of heavy-weight build, who was covered with crimson blushes at finding himself in the proximity of so much feminine hosiery.

"It's Hardy," Fannie murmured in amazement. "What can he be doing here during shop hours?"

She moved toward him nevertheless, and Mabel, curious, edged down as close as possible without appearing to be listening deliberately.

"What's the matter, Hardy?" Fannie inquired of the agitated youth. "Are you starting on a honeymoon all by yourself? What's the idea?"

"I've left the shop," he said, "and I've come to tell you that our engagement is off. The foreman said he'd have to lay one of us off for the slack season, and I went to him afterward so Nick wouldn't know and told him I'd be the one to quit. I just couldn't tell Nick I was going to take you away from him, so you'll have to marry him. I'm going away off somewhere, but I hope you'll both be happy."

Without giving her a chance to make any protest he turned and fled precipitately, while Fannie, barred from pursuit by store rules, could only murmur feebly:

"Can you beat that?"

She was still muttering to herself when another man approached from the other aisle.

"Nick!" she exclaimed.

"Yeh," he admitted gloomily. "I been waiting for Hardy to clear out so I could speak to you alone."

"What is it?"

"Listen, sis, I can't do it. The marriage thing, I mean. Hardy is crazy about you, and I couldn't bear to take you away from him. He's known there was something up for a long time, and it's been worrying him. He ain't said anything, but I've seen him getting thinner every day. Why, that boy has dropped from two hundred and seventeen pounds down to two hundred and twelve in the last three weeks.

"If he was to hear for sure that you

and me was going to get hitched, it would put him down and out. So I'm going to call off our engagement. I think too much of Hardy. He can have you. I'm going to find him and tell him now. I just quit my job at the shop so he'll be making enough to get married on. I can get along somehow until I get something else. Good-by, Fannie. I'll come and see you sometime after you're married."

He, too, breathless from his impassioned speech, rushed off in the direction taken by his comrade, leaving Fannie, who probably held the world's record by being jilted twice in ten minutes, rearranging her hair and touching her neck-band and smoothing her skirt over her hips to assure herself that at least externally she was still the same girl.

"Ain't that dreadful?" sympathized Mabel, disclosing amazingly intimate knowledge of the conversation that had just taken place. "They were both awful handsome boys, too. What are you going to do? You could sue 'em for breach of promise."

"I won't bother about 'em," said

Fannie nonchalantly. "I don't think I'll even tell my husband about it."

"Your husband? What do you mean—husband?"

"I am the Rajaherine Bong," Fannie announced with a careless gesture. "We was married last evening. His real name is Clarence Weinberg, and he is making too much money to be a bachelor. As soon as my week is out here, I'm going to take the colored man's place collecting the coin for fortunes from the simps in the ante-room."

Mabel regarded her with ill-concealed envy.

"Gee, don't you have all the luck? But the rajah made a dreadful mistake, didn't he, when he told you first that your husband would have dark hair and then the next night said he would be a blond. That was an awful blunder, wasn't it?"

"No. The Rajah Bong never makes mistakes. He knows everything. What he meant was that his own hair is dark now, but it's only dyed, and is coming in yellow at the roots."



SONNET TO A SWAT

BY GEORGE ALLAN ENGLAND

WHEN in the early dawning, still and gray,
 Thou court'st coy slumber that doth restive flee,
 And after endless wooing, painfully
 Induce th' unwilling Morpheus to stay—
 Hark! Zzzzzzz! List now the tiny minstrel's lay!
 Zooning about thine ear, he fatefully
 Doth seek to lance thee, wheresoe'er it be,
 With tiny falchion eager for the fray.

Motionless, bating breath, thou dost hold back
 The premature and ineffective blow;
 Till the gray minstrel, swiftly bending low,
 Lights on thy brow and sinks his drill. Then, *WHACK!*

Secure from harm, thou sink'st to dreamy bliss—
 What joy in life can half compare with this?

The Step-Livelies

by Henry Payson Dowst

Author of "The Girl and the Game," "The Girl on the Jury," etc.

CHAPTER I.

"BROKE!"

AT exactly six o'clock, post meridian, on May 27, 1915, Jonas Jones slammed down the top of his big desk with an angry crash.

"There," he said, aggressively wagging his grizzled head, "I guess that's settled!"

He got up and went to a convenient wash-stand concealed behind a mirrored door at the side of the room. Here he busied himself, stooping, and irritably splashing the water in the basin.

"I warned you, Burly, six months ago, that the time wasn't far off when you'd reach your limit." He bent over and splashed cold water vigorously in his face and eyes. "Damn that office-boy—where's a towel?" He pawed blindly in space.

"Here, father," said young Burleson Jones. He stepped quickly across the room from the window out of which he had been moodily staring during the last half hour. Now he got a fresh towel from some shelf above the elder man's head and placed it in the groping fingers.

"Thanks. It's not because I haven't got plenty; it's because you're ruining yourself and weakening your character—oh, what's the use? We've been over all the ground time and again. What I say

now is final; not a cent more. You get out and rustle a while. Live at home if you want to; that's more than most boys get. And don't think I'm doing this because I'm sore. I'm doing it for your own good."

"Hurts you more than it does me, I suppose," suggested the son, with a dubious grin.

Jonas grunted through the towel.

"Well, maybe I wouldn't go so far as that. I wouldn't really say that I was in any acute agony—only the pain you give me by being such a—a—"

"I get you, father. You don't need to say it. And you won't even give me a job on the System?"

"Old man's pet," snorted Jonas. "Not on your life!"

"But they wouldn't know I was *your* son."

"Wouldn't they? Huh! They'd know it in three days, from one end of the line to the other. No, sir, you get out and rustle. Get a job."

"Something like a waiter in a restaurant—or, say, driving a taxicab? That's about the only thing I know how to do."

"Not so bad, not so bad," approved Jonas, laboring with his detachable cuffs. "When I first came here I got a job driving—"

"Yes, I know."

"Well, boy, a little repetition don't hurt."

Young Burleson Jones sighed and picked up his hat. His father took an aged, flat-topped derby off a peg in the closet and dusted it carefully. It was a hat that had become a landmark in the Street, for Jonas wore it summer and winter. Burleson lighted a cigarette. They passed out together and stood waiting for the elevator. Jonas eyed the cigarette vindictively.

"Give me one of those damn things," he demanded.

He lighted it awkwardly, treating it like a cigar, and when they reached the street spat it away in disgust.

"Don't see anything in smoking a piece of rag like that. Where you going now, Burly?"

"Up to see Grace, I guess."

Jonas Jones grinned cheerfully at his son.

"What are you going to do, try to make her a workingman's bride? Come on, I'll— John, take me home; and then Mr. Burleson wants to go to Mrs. Colchester's."

The two entered the limousine.

"What do you want to rub it in for?" asked Burleson, irritated.

Half an hour later Jenkins, whom Burly Jones persisted in ridiculing as Mrs. Bryant Colchester's "moving-picture butler," admitted that young man to the great Colchester drawing-room, and consented punctiliously to call Miss Grace.

"I don't see," Burly began pugnaciously, when, all smiles and dimples, she came to greet him, "why I always have to wait here in this sarcoph—"

"Burly!" protested Grace.

"Well, why is it?"

"Mother's orders. She's very strict with Jenkins. Would you rather come up in my sitting-room? It is cosier, of course. But it looks so untidy—"

"Fiddlesticks!"

"Why, Burly, aren't you cross!"

Once in Miss Grace's snug sitting-room,

the caller advanced upon the fireplace, where he kicked a half-burned log until it blazed up pleasantly. Then he threw himself into a comfortable chair.

"Smoke if you want to," suggested Grace.

"Thanks. I've never smoked in this room yet; I'd rather not."

"Burly dear," the girl asked, sitting on a spindly-looking chair, which she drew quite near him, "what's the trouble?"

"Two things, and they don't go together worth a cent. I'm in love, and I'm broke."

He rolled his head against the back of his chair and looked at Miss Colchester soberly; and Miss Colchester blushed. She was adorable when she blushed. She was adorable anyhow.

An unusual type was Grace Colchester, a blonde with the deep brown eyes of a brunette. A girl like Grace cannot be described in cold type; she can only be suggested. Then you can close your eyes and imagine some conceit of your own that will visualize her—something all dimples, and pink and whites and golds, radiating a charm made up of equal parts physical perfection, absolute well-being, and unaffected good-will.

Of course Grace was the child and product of luxury. Luxury fitted her like a garment, and you couldn't imagine her without it, any more than you could imagine a trout-brook without banks and overhanging trees.

Grace pointedly ignored Burly's first condition.

"Broke?" she echoed. "How can that be? You never—"

"No, I never was, before. But friend father has turned off the spigot."

"How mean!"

"Well, I don't know exactly as to that, either. He's been a pretty good sport with me. He has reasons. I'm really not much of a credit to him now, am I?"

"Why, yes, I thought you were—er—one of the most ornamental young gentlemen in our fair city."

"Gracie, please cut the comedy. This

is serious. I want some good, sound, practical advice."

"Ha-ha!" giggled Miss Colchester. "In fact, ha-ha twice. Excuse me, I really have to laugh. Good, sound, practical advice. Well, let's see. Go get a job. How's that?"

"That's what father said. What kind of a job, pray?"

"Oh-e-oh, I don't know," she considered. "You really don't know much about anything, do you, Burly?"

"I'm not a civil engineer, or a journeyman plumber, or an expert accountant—"

"I have it," cried Grace; "be a chauffeur. You know all about steering wheels and differentials and stethoscopes and the other parts of a car, and you're certainly a splendid driver."

"Would you like to be a chauffeur's wife?" suddenly demanded Burly.

"What are you talking about?" Grace blushed again, presumably from indignation.

"You," said Burly; then, as an apparent afterthought, "and me, of course."

"I'm afraid you'll have to be running along, Burly," said Grace, rising.

She went and rested a pink elbow on the mantel above the fireplace and kicked idly at one of the andirons. Then, carelessly, she looked at herself in the mirror over the mantel, discovered an important strand of hair that needed adjusting, and to all intents and purposes forgot that Burleson Jones existed.

Burly arose.

"I'm sorry, Grace," he said ruefully. "I'm afraid I've made rather a mess of—things—my life. I went to father for a thousand, to pay a rather—er—pressing bill—"

"You've been playing poker again, Burly."

"And he said *no*, just like that; and to prove he meant it, stopped my allowance. Then, coming up-town in the car, he kidded me about you."

"Burleson Jones, what right had you—had he, or any man, to mention my name?"

"Oh, father didn't mean any harm. He likes you. He only asked me if I was going to make you 'a workingman's bride.'"

Burly smiled, a little maliciously, with the natural impulse to vent his irritation on some one.

"Really, Burleson, I must ask you not to detain me any longer," insisted Grace icily. "I have to dress for mother's dinner."

"Is your mother giving a dinner to-night? Who's coming?"

"It's not in the least your business; but, since you allow your curiosity to get the better of your manners, the Morris Pawsons are coming, and Reggie Van Ambrose—"

"Ouch!" exclaimed Burly.

"And Mr. and Mrs. Crather, and last, but by no means least—"

Grace paused, and looked at Burleson out of the corner of one eye.

"Well," he demanded impatiently, "who?"

"Mr. Harrison Grady."

"Gee! Roo! Sa-lem! That's a choice collection. Wouldn't that tickle father? And I said he liked you!"

"Why, what do you mean?"

"Pawson and Crather are in a pool that's been trying to beat father out of control of the System; he's had an awful fight, and they've tried every crooked stunt known to finance, I guess. By George, Grace, this looks to me like some of that man Grady's work. He's one of their brokers, and—"

"Do you think it good taste to speak in that way about my mother's guests, Burleson Jones? My goodness, since when have you been appointed social arbiter for this part of New York? Harrison Grady is a splendid fellow, and—"

"How long have you known this Van Ambrose *atom*?" suddenly cried Burly.

"You can't cross-question me any longer," snapped Grace indignantly. "And I won't allow you to vilify mother's friends and mine. So, if you please, and in deference to the amount

of time I simply must have to dress for dinner, here's your hat, Mr. Jones, what's your hurry!"

"Good night, Gracie dear," said Burleson sweetly. "So you don't want to be a workingman's bride."

"Not to-night, thank you. *Scat!*"

Following this effectual, if not very sentimental leave-taking, Burleson Jones dropped into his club. He was really in a mighty uncomfortable and embarrassing situation. He felt small and mean and caddish, especially in view of his outburst at the mention of Mr. Harrison Grady.

Harrison Grady was a newcomer, comparatively, in the circles where Burleson Jones now frequently encountered him. He had good looks, and ease of manner, a certain gallantry of bearing which went beautifully with the ladies, and a fine, sincere, hearty way among men. In the Street he was beginning to be known as having developed some valuable connections. True, the dealings of the Pawson-Crather crowd were viewed a little questioningly; but no one denied their growing, if sinister influence, and Harrison Grady seemed to be just now very much in their good graces.

Gradually Grady had insinuated himself here and there, turning up at some surprisingly smart affairs, tucking his knees under an occasional dinner-table of more than ordinary exclusiveness. A good many people frankly liked him; and the worst Burleson Jones had heard said of him, as yet, was that he was "pretty smooth."

Burleson was not in the least sorry, however, for the manner in which he had spoken of Reginald Van Ambrose.

You couldn't account for Van Ambrose at all. He came to New York occasionally, some people said from Albany, others thought from Buffalo. Nobody was quite sure. His manners were unexceptionable; he ate with his fork, didn't get out of step, smiled at about the right moment, nodded, said "How interesting!" in a slim, lackadaisical voice, and made no particular impression.

On his visits to New York Harrison Grady became his sponsor, put him up at a club, and obtained for him invitations to dinners or dances, where he was always unobtrusive, rather silent, and—Burleson Jones observed—exceedingly alert. In spite of his almost effeminately deprecatory manner, Jones couldn't help noticing that he possessed a pair of eyes as beady as a ferret's.

At the club to-night almost the first persons Burly ran across were Grady and Van Ambrose.

"Hello, Burly," was Grady's greeting. Burleson wished himself in a position to resent the man's easy familiarity. "You know Van Ambrose, don't you? Mr. Jones, Mr. Van Ambrose."

"I believe we've met," said Burleson. "Glad to renew the acquaintance. Will you pardon me just a moment, Mr. Van Ambrose, if I speak a word with Mr. Grady?"

Van Ambrose politely concurring, Burly led the other man into a corner of the lounge.

"Grady," he said, feeling the color rise in his face, "I'm awfully sorry, but—something has happened, and I can't—can't pay you that thousand to-night, as I promised."

"Why, my dear fellow," Grady reassured him genially, "that's all right. I understand. Of course, I'm sorry myself, because I'd rather relied on it; but I daresay I can do without it, even at some inconvenience to myself. Dear me, though, it's going to be very embarrassing—well, never mind, old chap. Don't trouble—"

The man stopped, looked off into vacancy, and whistled a thin strain absently, as if pondering some problem. The effect of this polite regret was cleverly calculated to put Burly Jones in wrong. If Grady had snarled or bullied, Jones, in his state of mind at that moment, would have cheerfully recommended Grady to a warmer climate; but this suave, martyrlike assurance that it was all right, even at the expense of Grady's own

embarrassment, drove Burly to desperation. He didn't like Grady; he wished he had never allowed himself to play cards with him. But if the fellow was really trying to be decent—

"You see," he began lamely, "I tried to—tried—"

"I'll tell you," suddenly broke in Grady. "I'll tell you the name of a chap who would fix you up. Rum sort of a devil, of course. I've never done business with him; he'd charge you a bit stiff, no doubt, for the accommodation, but he's a pretty safe bet. If you really want to help me out of a deuce of a hole, you can, you know."

"Here's the bounder's name. And listen, old man, if you don't mind, after you've seen him just put the oof in an envelope and leave it here at the desk for me. How's that? Good. Hope you'll excuse us; we're just starting for Mrs. Colchester's—dinner, you know. Charming people, what? Miss Grace is delightful, don't you think? Decidedly. 'Night, old man."

He thrust a penciled slip into Burly's hands and took himself off with Van Ambrose to a waiting taxicab.

Burly looked at the slip. It read:

"Thaddeus Q. Skanks, attorney, No. 782 Franklin Street. Telephone, Franklin 080."

Burly looked thoughtfully at the slip.

"Skanks," he murmured. "Skanks. Devil of a name—doesn't sound good to me. Funny Grady should carry all that in his head. After seven o'clock, too. Wonder if the old shyster would be in now—Grady seems to know. Funny; guess I'll try the phone."

Burly went into the telephone-room and gave the operator the Skanks number.

"Line's busy, Mr. Jones," the boy reported.

"So he is in," thought Burly.

But he didn't know that the reason the attorney's line was busy was that Mr. Harrison Grady, in a drug-store telephone booth, was saying to Mr. Thaddeus Skanks something like this:

"Hello, Skanks? Grady speaking. Got a good one for you to-day; yes, fat and juicy. You'll hear from him any minute. Now, Skanksy, you old snide, I want you to trim him up good and plenty. He's a rare one; and, Skanksy, while you're about it, give him one good wallop for me. 'At a boy! Sure; name's Jones. See you in a couple of days and settle up. Good night."

CHAPTER II.

BURLY GRABS A JOB.

A KNOCK came upon the office door of Thaddeus Q. Skanks. To be sure, it was after business hours; but the ordinary limits of the commercial day meant nothing to Skanks. In fact, most of his affairs were conducted when honest men's doors were locked.

Skanks was a lawyer, a dingy, unbrushed little man with dandruff on his collar and the lust of other people's wealth in his eye. This eye, of which the mate had by some mischance long ago lost its luster and its usefulness, was small, watery blue, and rimmed with lids constantly irritated by peering through a bad light into affairs that would bear no stronger illumination. The eye looked forth furtively from a leathery face, beardless, and wrinkled with much pondering upon dubious matters.

This man handled, with tricky adroitness, the legal business of those most frequently in need of his services, underworld unfortunates, forced willy-nilly to pay substantially and in advance.

Skanks was like any other beast you can think of which lurks and strikes from ambush. He always skulked. In his practise he won cases "at the bench" rather than "at the bar," which means that he "knew" the judges and valued the whispered word more than the most impassioned flights of oratory.

Of him a client said:

"That guy is so sneaky he wouldn't even go man-fashion at a piece of pie in

a restaurant. He'd hide his knife and fork in his hip-pocket and creep up on that helpless pie, easy and soft, and then—*pounce!*"

So, for many years, this advocate had been known in the underworld as "Panther" Skanks. And such was the engaging personality encountered by Burly Jones upon opening the Skanksian door.

The lawyer looked up and observed his visitor, a large, wholesome young man with an outdoor face, good-natured brown eyes, and a square jaw.

"Well, sir," he whined in a voice seemingly compounded of grievance and influenza, "what can I do for you?"

"I'm Mr. Jones," said Burly, "whom Mr. Grady telephoned you about."

Now, Burly did not actually know that Grady had telephoned Skanks; but on his way down-town in the subway he had been thinking hard. He was nobody's fool. He disliked and distrusted Grady in spite of the latter's conciliatory attitude.

"Jones?" queried the lawyer.

"I know it's an uncommon name," said Burly, "but in some circles, and with suitable attachments, it gets by. Jones is right, Mr. Skanks, though it may seem odd to you. And as I said, I'm the Mr. Jones your friend Grady said he'd send."

"Mr. Grady?"

"Yes, Harrison Grady. Why the coy reserve, Mr. Skanks? I'm here to be skinned; why waste time? I'm prompt, you see. How long ago was it you heard from Grady? Half an hour?"

"About," answered Skanks. "He didn't state the nature of your business with me, however."

The man fumbled nervously among the littered papers on his cramped little desk. The single eye hardly ever met Burly's look.

"Money," announced Mr. Jones.

"What money?"

"A loan. You lend money, don't you?"

"Very seldom, Mr. Jones, very sel-

dom. I hardly see why Mr. Grady should send you to me. He knows I've very little money on hand, especially at this time of night."

"Oh, he knows that, does he? Then why did he send me to you?"

"I have occasionally accommodated him—that is, some of his friends. But—"

"Let's not waste time," cut in Burleson. "I've got to have a thousand dollars to-night. Grady knew you could fix me up; said so. He'd hardly send me down here on a wild-goose chase."

"I haven't got a thousand dollars—in the office." Skanks looked up obliquely, then back again at the confusion of documents."

"Good," said Burly. "If you haven't, all right. I'll try somewhere else. I'll be going along—"

"But," went on the lawyer, "it's just possible that I might get it for you, if you're not too impatient. It might cost you quite a lot, though."

"How much?" snapped Burly.

"Easy, easy," whined Skanks. "Sit down, Mr. Jones, and we will talk this thing over. Now, what security would you be prepared to offer?"

"Hadh't thought of any. My credit is pretty good, I suppose."

"It wouldn't be possible, Mr. Jones," went on Skanks, "for you to raise a thousand dollars on such short notice without some satisfactory security. It wouldn't be business."

"But I could go to any shop in town and buy twice that amount of merchandise, and no questions would be asked."

"It happens to be my business to ask questions, Mr. Jones. Why doesn't your father let you have this money?"

Burly opened his mouth to speak, and closed it again.

"You don't have to answer if you don't wish to," Skanks assured him.

"But, of course, you would get it from him if you could. You can't, so you come to me. And you need it very badly."

"Like the devil!"

"Exactly; and so, probably, you will have to pay like the devil for it, and give security, too."

"How much would I have to pay, then?"

"I should say, roughly speaking, that under the circumstances, in order to get a thousand dollars, you would have to agree to pay back two, and give some assurance that the payment would be made punctually."

"Ouch!" remarked Burly. "That's high finance with a vengeance."

"With a vengeance," the lawyer repeated, and smiled for the first time.

"The vengeance seems to be the principal part of the transaction," observed Burly. "One thousand dollars per vengeance? And this security? What would—"

"That is not so difficult as you suppose, perhaps," said Skanks. "A check might do, dated ahead, say one month."

"I see," admitted Burly.

"For two thousand dollars; and bearing a suitable—er—signature."

"For instance?"

"Why—er—your father's would do nicely."

"But you know I wouldn't be here if I could get my father's name on a check for a thousand."

The lawyer said nothing, but continued to fiddle with the scattered papers.

Burly fidgeted.

"That's absurd," he blurted. "Of all the damn-fool propositions! I might have saved my time—it's so valuable!"

"Sorry, Mr. Jones," whined Skanks. "But you couldn't expect me to risk my—my friend's money without proper security. Now, a check signed by—that is—bearing your father's name, and dated June 22, would probably be ample—"

He got just that far before the significance of what he was saying dawned upon Burleson Jones.

"Why, what the devil," cried the latter, "are you talking about? You—you—"

He seemed to choke almost. Then he reached for his hat.

"All the dirty names that a fellow could call you," he said quietly, "have doubtless been applied long ago. I could not think of any fresh ones; there would be no entertainment for you in hearing me curse you out because it would lack novelty."

"I think I'd better tell your friend and client, Mr. Harrison Grady, to come down here and borrow that thousand himself. *I wonder whose name you'd ask him to forge in order to get it?*"

Burly went out quickly, slamming the door behind him.

Skanks's office was in an old building, two flights up, and there was no elevator. If there had been, it would not have been running at eight in the evening. Burly Jones clattered hastily down the badly lighted stairs, and when he reached the street he stood a minute and breathed deeply of the night air. Then he trotted briskly off in search of a subway station.

Burly left the subway at Grand Central and returned to his club, where he had something to eat. It was now about nine o'clock. He wondered if it wouldn't be a good idea to call up the house and talk to his father about the dinner at Colchester's.

To Grace he had defended Jonas, but just now he was feeling rather resentful. Burly knew little about the pinch of poverty, and to find himself reduced to a few small bank-notes, with no prospects of any accretion to their number or size, was a sensation for which he had scant relish.

He decided neither to call up his father nor to go home. He was uneasy, distraught. Something was in the air, something depressing. This Burly laid at the door of his financial difficulty.

He got his hat and walked out into Forty-Fourth Street. Burly's club was but a few steps from Fifth Avenue. Toward that discreetly advertised thoroughfare he now strolled aimlessly, a prey to his anxieties. Just as he turned the corner his depression gave place to a ripple of curiosity.

Across the avenue, upon the curb, a little crowd had collected about a taxicab, and Burly observed an altercation in progress between a traffic officer and a chauffeur.

"I'm tellin' ye, ye nearly run into that other cair, me bye, and it's in no condition ye are to be dhrivin'. So I'll be afther runnin' ye in, d'ye mind."

"But, offsher," protested the chauffeur, "'s all wrong, I shay. I'm very careful driver, abshlutely. Lemme tell you some-'n', offsher; I got medalsh for careful op'rashion of taxicabsh all over th' worl', I have. B'shides, got very important 'ngagemensh ten-thirty, number shix fif seven Fifty-Seventh Shtreet. Very 'important; mushn't mish it, shee?"

"Will you be quiet now, Bill?" adjured the officer. "I got enough of your lip. You tell your troubles to the lieutenant, me man."

At this moment, with rattle and clang, a patrol-wagon slid alongside the curb, the inebriate was bundled in, and the wagon made off again. Whereupon, the knot of people, the excitement over, dispersed.

"Mike," called a well-modulated voice from the curb.

The traffic officer, back at his post by the little semaphore, looked up.

"Is it you, Mr. Jones? An' how are you to-night?"

Burly stepped off the curb and advanced.

"Mike, what are you going to do with that cab?"

"Sure, it 'll stay there till the cab company sinds a man to bring it back to the gayridge."

"I've nothing to do; why don't I take it back?"

"And phwy don't you, thin? Because I'll not leave you, that's why."

"But, Mike, you know I'm competent—"

"Gwan wid ye. Don't dare to lay a hand on that buggy, mind, while I'm look-in'. Of course if it was took from behind me back I'd never know who done it.

'Tis a fine night, Mr. Jones, wid stars, is it not? Sure, spring has— Now, where did that divvle go to, I dunno?"

He gazed steadfastly westward, with an emphasized interest in a big changing sign over on Broadway. The roaring of an engine and grinding of gears seemed to have no significance for him. Presently he looked around; the taxi had disappeared.

"Saints be!" he chuckled. "'Tis gone. Now probably the company's after sendin' for it."

Ten minutes later Burly Jones steered the cab into the big service station of the Central Auto Transit Company.

"Here's your old stuffed tiger," he said. "Your driver's in some lockup, full of liquor and language. Where's Eaton?"

"In the office."

Eaton, night manager of the company, looked up as Burly approached his desk.

"'Lo, Jonesy," he said. "Want to hire a touring-car? Got a nice one. Fine night for one of those joy-rides—"

"Shut up, Eaton," retorted Burly. "I brought back that cab from Forty-Fourth Street and the avenue. Happened to be handy when they pinched your man—"

"Dirty bum," grunted Eaton. "Was he very tight?"

"He was," Burly assured him. "He was tighter than that."

"They telephoned me about it from the police station. I was going to send our first available man. We're short-handed to-night. Much obliged, Jonesy."

"Welcome. Say, Eaton, give me a job?"

"Sure; only keep sober and—now, look here, young fellow, what are you up to? Some devilment?"

"Not a bit. I'm broke. Have to have a job, and driving a car's the only thing I know. Why don't you give me this chap's place—for a while, anyhow. I'll begin to-night."

"Go to it, boy. But, say, mind if I put an item about it in the papers? 'Son of Railway Magnate Jones Drives C. A.

T. Co. Cab.' Great ad. The girls would play the cabs like a lottery, trying to draw the millionaire chauffeur."

"Don't talk rot, you damn fool! Give me a badge and a coat and a cap, will you? I've got an important engagement up at Fifty-Seventh Street. I wouldn't miss the date your drunken driver made for that cab *on your life!*"

CHAPTER III.

BRYANT 6666?

OF all the matrons of Burly Jones's acquaintance, Mrs. Bryant Colchester, Grace Colchester's mother, was by far the most significant. Reputedly one of the richest widows in the city, she added to the distinction of her wealth the attractions of invulnerable social position and personal fascination.

Having hardly crossed the borders of middle age, she was strikingly beautiful. People said that, had it not been for a reserve of manner which amounted almost to coldness, she would have had many suitors.

Men found her charming, but distant, unapproachable. Unlike her daughter Grace, she was dark, inclined to sumptuousness of figure, a trifle stately.

"Mother's such a peach," said Grace. "I don't see how anybody can resist her. I think she's perfectly fascinating!"

There was a side to Mrs. Colchester's character which, to a degree, explained to the few who were aware of its existence her aloofness, or, if you like, her somewhat studied coldness.

She was shrewd in a business way. If she had started in life poor, she would have ended well-to-do, for she possessed to a degree unusual for her sex the business instinct. The great fortunes left to her daughter and to herself by Bryant Colchester she had managed with excellent judgment.

Grace Colchester did not have a very good time at her mother's dinner. Although she had defended the guests

against Burleson Jones's somewhat irritable criticism, he would have been pleased indeed had he been aware that Grace's opinion of both Harrison Grady and the Van Ambrose "Atom" (of Albany or Buffalo or Battle Creek) coincided with his own.

She surveyed the stodgy Mr. Pawson, across the table from her, with hardly concealed contempt. He weighed two hundred and breathed heavily while he ate. Mr. Crather, too, though a sad little man, was diligent in his business.

"He makes me think of a soldier," thought Grace, "on a European battlefield, trying to 'dig himself in.'"

Then there were Mrs. Pawson and Mrs. Crather; they were simply "among those present." One scarcely noticed them; but what one could not escape was the profusion of gems, mostly diamonds, with which they were decorated. Each wore enough to make a respectable showing in a Fifth Avenue jeweler's window.

Grace glanced at Harrison Grady, sitting at her right at the round, flower-banked table. Grady was, superficially at least, a pleasing figure, and certainly shone in contrast with any of the other three men present.

He was the hale and hearty type of full-blooded young Irishman, a trifle florid, clean-cut, blue-eyed, genial. When he spoke or laughed he showed fascinatingly white teeth beneath a crisp little military mustache. He looked cared-for, but not overvaleted. Always he was the polished gentleman, never at a loss, apt in conversation, dry, suave, gallant. His voice, deeply pitched, was well modulated, resonant, distinct. He said things with expression, affecting that little trick of the English whose inflection often tells as much as words.

But to Grace the dinner was an unutterable bore. Something—often called intuition, but perhaps more accurately designated as common sense—made her distrust and dislike Grady, despite his manners.

Van Ambrose, the Atom, she could not

endure. Mr. Pawson and Mr. Crather were vulgar and their wives dull. Grace dutifully made the best of an uncomfortable and, seemingly, a needless situation, and prayed for fortitude to live through the ordeal.

At last, when Miss Colchester began to think her nerves would prove unequal to further strain, her mother arose.

"Perhaps," the hostess said smoothly, "the gentlemen would like to smoke in the room Mr. Colchester used to call his office. Mr. Grady, you know the way, I will send in the coffee—"

"But you're going to join us, ain't you, Mrs. Colchester?" asked the corpulent Pawson in a voice which, if intended to be polite, sounded more like a demand.

"Oh, of course," replied his hostess. "I haven't forgotten that there are—some things to talk over. I'll be with you presently."

This significant exchange affected Grace Colchester like a stimulant. So, after all, there was to be a business meeting. It wasn't like her mother—and yet, on second thought, it might not be so unlike her. Mrs. Colchester was a very independent woman.

Why Pawson and Crather, though? What was it Burly Jones had said about them, earlier that same evening? They were in some sort of pool to do something or other to his father? Very likely this meeting had something to do with that.

Therefore, when Mrs. Colchester excused herself and disappeared, Grace knew she had joined Pawson, Crather, and Grady, and that the business meeting was in progress. She spent an uncomfortable time with the uninteresting and overfed Mesdames Pawson and Crather and the equally uninspiring Van Ambrose.

The clock had struck ten when, after what seemed an interminable wait, Grace heard the door of her father's old "office" open, and her mother, with the three men, came along the hall.

There followed fifteen minutes of po-

lite conversation, the burden of which was that Mrs. Colchester regretted very much that she had been obliged to absent herself for so long, but she was sure they would understand the reason.

Of the subject of the meeting, Grace gathered next to nothing definite, except when Pawson took his wheezy leave, he exploded in what was meant for a confidential tone, to her mother.

"So a hundred 'n' twelve's the very lowest you'll take? Well, we'll see, Mrs. Colchester, we'll see. I'm goin' to telephone you by midnight, maybe before. Good night, ma'am, a very pleasant evenin'."

Along with the Pawsons and Crathers, Harrison Grady and his friend, the Atom, took their polite departure. Grady bent over Miss Grace's hand with something approaching tenderness.

"Ah, Miss Grace," he breathed, "if I could only have had more of this evening with you. How different it would have been; and, I fancy, it might even have been a bit more interesting for you, eh?"

"You flatter yourself, Mr. Grady," returned Miss Colchester, but with a reassuring trace of irony in her tone. "Perhaps if you were to extend your call, now that business matters are settled, why—er—I'm simply burning with curiosity. That *would* be interesting. I should make you tell me everything."

"My dear young lady," he rejoined, "matters of great moment, great moment; and, no less, of great secrecy."

"Mother is a good business man," she said. "You will not find her stupid."

"Indeed, no," Grady agreed. "Be sure she can take very good care of herself. May I call again, soon, Miss Grace? And—Mrs. Colchester, a delightful evening; I trust, also, a profitable one for you, dear lady. Good night to you, a very good night."

The big doors closed behind the departing guests.

"Mother," cried Grace, "it's none of my business, but what possessed you to have that crowd here to-night?"

"Grace," replied her mother, with a note in her voice which she intended for kindness, but which to Grace seemed condescension, "I'm in a very peculiar position. Fortunately, or unfortunately, I find myself with a taste for this kind of thing. Of course, a widow who has money is proverbially the victim of all sorts of unscrupulous people. It pleases me, I don't know why, to meet the schemers and analyze their plans and to prove to my own satisfaction that I am a match for them. This dinner to-night was brought about by Mr. Grady. He seems to me genuinely straightforward and honest; and I'm sure, too, he is most friendly to—us.

"The facts," she went on, "are these, dear. We are very large holders of a certain railroad stock which has become lately what financial people call a 'speculative' stock. I don't like that; because, half of all the money I handle is yours. So I have been a good deal worried, feeling that perhaps it would be well if I got rid of it and bought in its place something more stable. I mentioned the matter to Mr. Grady, who has been very nice about it. He told me the people in Wall Street who would be most interested would be Mr. Pawson and Mr. Crather. So that explains our little dinner. It wasn't a social affair at all."

"Mother! That's just what made me—curious; and, I must confess, a little surprised. It hardly seems in good taste to—mix business affairs with—well, to have such things brought into one's home. And as for Harrison Grady, I think he's odious. I wouldn't trust him out of my sight."

"Grace! I'm surprised to hear you speak so about any one. Some day, I dare say, you'll think differently."

"What's the name of the stock?" asked Grace innocently.

"I don't know that it matters, Grace," said her mother, a little loftily. "Why burden you, child, with details that would hardly mean anything to you?"

"Oh," said Grace; then, a little stiffly. "Forgive my curiosity, mother. I guess I'll go to my downy. How about you?"

"Not just yet, dear."

Grace went thoughtfully to her room, where she immediately made ready for bed. Then, at an impulse, she put on a negligée, and inspected all the doors, peered into the hall, made sure her maid had gone and—picking up her own gold and enamel telephone, called softly:

"Hello? Operator? Give me Bryant 6666, please."

CHAPTER IV.

OVERHEARD.

MR. HARRISON GRADY and Mr. Reginald Van Ambrose descended the steps of the Colchester residence in company with the Pawsons and Crathers. Two big limousines stood at the curb, and the younger men hovered about with polite if puttering solicitude, while Pawson established Mrs. Crather and his own wife in one of them.

"Now, Charlie," he said to his chauffeur, "you take Mrs. Crather home first, then Mrs. Pawson. After that, you stick around the garage. I may need you any time; be ready to jump when I telephone. Don't get caught nappin', now, Charlie; I may not want you, but if I do it 'll be bad and quick. Good night, Mrs. Crather. Now, Crather, you and I'll round up those fellows. Your man knows where to go? All right."

Pawson then turned to Grady.

"Young man, you've got your orders; twelve o'clock, sharp—or a little before that, at my house. Then we'll see what next; maybe nothing, maybe a whole lot. Be on hand. Now, Crather, let her go; and *step lively!*"

The great cars swerved toward the middle of the street and presently their tail-lights swung the corner and disappeared into Fifth Avenue.

"Those rich guys give me a pain," remarked the Atom.

"No doubt," commented Grady. "Get a move on, Teddo. We've got business."

Just ahead of the recent location of the limousines stood a taxi.

"Sure it's the one?" queried Van Ambrose.

"Yes; X0372, that's the number."

Grady had dropped his easy manner of speech. The two came rapidly up to the taxi and entered it.

"That you, Joe?" demanded Grady.

The chauffeur nodded and grunted an indistinct affirmative. He was muffled in the turned-up collar of his coat; his cap was well down over his face.

"What's that? Say, Joe, you aren't drunk again, are you?"

The man shook his head vigorously and muttered:

"No, course not."

"I didn't know," returned Grady, reassured. "I was afraid you might be back on the stuff again; if you were, it would be one damn sad night for you. Come now, beat it to the club. Go like hell; we're not taking any summer vacation, my boy."

The car swung rapidly out of Fifty-Seventh Street and raced off down the avenue.

"Now, Teddo," began Grady, "how did you get along? Can you put it over?"

"Sure we can, if Joe's all right. But gee! I'd rather crack Pawson's or Crather's. Did you see the rocks on those two dames? Holy Patrick!"

"Never mind those two to-night," warned Grady. "Maybe I'll have a chance to let you in on 'em later. Say, I wonder what Skanksy did to young Jones."

"You had your nerve to send that guy to Skanks; I think Jones is a fly one."

"Trust Panther," said Grady. "He's trimmed lots of better ones than Burly Jones. I've sent him five boobs already this spring."

"Jones is no boob; what's your rake-off?"

"That's between Skanksy and me. No doubt you'd like to be in on it; but, Teddo, that isn't your lay. You aren't built for that game. Your work's too coarse."

"I guess I've been mingling in pretty successfully lately," protested the Atom.

"As long as I keep you under my eye, coach you, and you don't load up with booze and then talk, you do all right, Teddo. You've got a good chance. You must have cleaned up seven or eight thou' so far—Mrs. Grandly's necklace, and the Atwater ruby—"

"Aw, shut up, Harry," cried Van Ambrose. "You make me nervous. How long is the grift going to pan out? How soon do I lay off this Raffles game and make my little get-away? And if I should let my foot slip, can Skanksy turn a trick, or do I go up for a stretch? I tell you, Harry, those questions are making me lose sleep. It's a case of heads you win, tails I lose, unless I clean up and beat it before long. I'm nervous."

"You're a damn fool," retorted Grady. "You don't want to quit just when the going is getting easy. Maybe to-night will turn you in something good—anyway, you can't lose."

"Not unless we get pinched; but these swell cribs get my goat, Harry. They have too many modern improvements, and about a million servants."

"You need a drink, boy," said Grady. "Here's the club. Come in and I'll see if our friend Jonesy left me that money; if he didn't I'll have his hide. And, by the same token, if he did, Skanksy 'll have it. So I've got that bird, going and coming."

Grady, standing on the curb, turned to the chauffeur.

"Joe, Teddo's losing his goat. He's been sizing up the Colchester premises, but he saw a couple of car-loads of ice on two of the dinner guests, and the glare has made him nervous."

"I wish he had your nerve, Joe, minus your appetite for booze. Now, this may

be a hard night for all of us. Mind you keep straight; and be back here in an hour, sure. Get me?"

"U-huh," grunted the driver.

The electric light in front of the club threw a strong shadow, and this, combined with a turtlelike drawing-in of his chin and the concealment afforded by his visor, afforded a fortuitous protection. Burly felt a strong impulse to lean over and startle Grady by the abrupt disclosure of his identity, but withstood it, and with another grunt of assent, moved away from that perilous vicinity.

Grady turned and trotted up the steps into the club. He found Van Ambrose sunk as far as he could get into the depths of a big leather chair. In the Atom's attitude there was despondency and a brooding dread.

"Buck up, Teddo," said Grady cheerfully, "the worst is yet to come."

"That's no joke," agreed Van Ambrose.

"Say, for Mike's sake, man, get onto yourself. This is no time to get weak-kneed. Where's your nerve?"

"Something tells me we're in bad."

"Damn you, Teddo," cried Grady in a rush of impatience, "you make me sick. Do you think I'm going to let you welsh at this stage of the game? Not by a long shot. Think of what it means to me, and to you, too. I've worked too hard to pull this thing off to let a little difficulty discourage me. This is the grand play of my life; it means, if I win, I quit card playing and all that small-time stuff. I've made a start, I'm getting in right, and I've given you chances—you and Joe."

"Now, have a drink and pull yourself together. You're going to play this game out with me whether you like it or not. I play the tune and you dance, d' you get me, you little two-by-four shrimp? If you crawfish, it 'll be good night for you, no matter what happens to me. Skanks 'll attend to that, my boy. Now then, Mr. Teddo the tailor,

alias Reggie Van Ambrose, once for all, do you stick, or do you weaken?"

"I stick," said the Atom. "I—I never said I wouldn't, Harry, you know that; now did I?"

"You came damn close to it, Teddo. Now let's go and see what's doing at the desk."

"No, Mr. Grady," the clerk gave information for inquiry, "Mr. Jones hasn't left anything for you. But there was a telephone call a short time ago; in your box, Mr. Grady, yes, sir."

Grady took the white notification slip from his letter box. The number given was not a familiar one.

"Wait for me in the lounge, Teddo," he said, and hurried off to the telephone-room. Returning shortly, he made his beady-eyed intimate jump with alarm when he said:

"That call was from the police station."

"The—devil you say."

"Joe Kenney's locked up."

"No! You wouldn't think—"

"Good Lord, Teddo, don't be such a fool. You act like a woodchuck—if you had a hole in the ground you'd crawl into it."

"I'd do just that little thing," groaned the Atom.

"They pulled Joe for operating an automobile while drunk. I wonder what I said to that driver, now. I made some kind of fool talk, thinking it was Joe. Oh, well, he wouldn't know—"

"Wouldn't you have thought Joe 'd stay sober, Harry, this night of all nights? Gee; things don't look good to me!"

"Teddo, you never know what a booze-fighter will do. I always hated to trust Joe, just on that account."

"What are you going to do?"

"I've called a taxi. We'll go around to the station house and see. Probably we'll have to get hold of Skanks."

"I'm not crazy about that police-station stuff," began Teddo.

"Oh, shut up. You needn't go in; sit outside in the cab if you like."

"Cab waiting, Mr. Grady," called the doorman.

Burly Jones, when Grady, unconscious of his conversational blunders, entered the Babylon Club, drove off in a considerably puzzled frame of mind. Some of Grady's phrases stuck in his head. "Teddo"—who was Teddo? "Sizing up the Colchester premises"—"losing his goat"—"ice"—Burly knew that in some circles diamonds were called ice. Dinner guests with ice. That must refer to the guests where Grady and Van Ambrose had been. Who, then, was this Teddo who had been made nervous? Who, but Reginald Van Ambrose?

Joe; now, who was Joe? Plainly enough, he was the drunken driver.

"Of the three, Joe's the only one who's where he belongs," thought Burlyson.

Then, prompted by what seemed inspiration, he laid a new course, and after some twistings and turnings came to a halt before the East Thirty-Seventh Street police station.

"Did you have a drunk brought here to-night around nine o'clock?" he asked the lieutenant, "charged with operating an automobile while intoxicated?"

"We did not; where was he picked up?"

"Forty-Fourth and Fifth Avenue."

"He wouldn't be brought here; they'd have taken him to the East Fifty-First Street station."

Burly renewed his inquiry at the station thus indicated.

"Such a man was brought here; he's in a cell, sleepin' it off. Name's Joe Kenney? Was you a friend of his, now?"

"I heard he was in trouble," answered Burly evasively. "I was wondering whether—whether he would be looked after, or—"

"He will," the lieutenant assured him. "He began to sober up immediate when we put him in a cell, and says would we please call up the Babylon Club and leave word for Mr.—let's see—Brady—

no, Grady, Harrison Grady, that Joe Kenney was in trouble and would he please come soon and do what he could for him? It's not ten minutes since this same Mr. Grady called up and said he'd be right over. He's due here any min—"

"Thanks," cried Burly hastily, "that's all I wanted to know."

He bolted for his taxi, spun the engine, and had hardly got under way when another car rolled up in front of the police station. Burly saw Grady and the Atom inside, but they were too intent upon their own errand to notice him.

Just as he pulled away from the curb he glanced over his shoulder and observed a stooping, rather furtive figure seemingly about to enter the police station. Where had he seen—yes, it was Panther Skanks.

About this time it occurred to Burly Jones that perhaps, after all, the more generous thing for him to do was to drop a hint to his father concerning the Colchester dinner. Jonas had always been pretty decent to him, and was certainly not to be blamed for a degree of impatience regarding his son's shiftlessness. Burly felt very definitely a sense that some of the events of the evening gravely concerned the elder Jones. He drew up near a drug store and called for his home telephone number.

After a two-minute wait, the operator informed him the line was out of order.

"Out of order?" he repeated. "Oh, fire next door? Wires down, eh? Very well, thank you."

His nickel came rattling into the "return" pocket. He decided to go in person and tell his father what he had learned, and swung his car back into Fifth Avenue, heading up-town. On the way up he would cut over through Fifty-Seventh Street, past the Colchesters'.

That phrase of Grady's, "sizing up the Colchester premises," kept running through his head. Besides, he loved Grace so much it gave him a wistful sort of pleasure merely to gaze up at the severely aristocratic façade of her dwell-

ing; and he might, besides, see a light in her window on the third floor.

It was now about eleven o'clock. The avenue was pretty well crowded with vehicles at so busy a time in the long, New York evening. Burly turned into Fifty-Seventh Street and scooted hummily along, not too fast, on account of the possibility of that light—

Somebody was signaling from the sidewalk. He checked the car, moved in close to the curb, and leaned over to catch his instructions from the lips of his would-be fare. It was a woman, young, blond, pretty, well cloaked in some garment of a dark material, her hair protected by a scarf which seemed to have been put on hastily.

"Yes, lady," he said, averting his face and drawing his chin into his chauffeur's collar, at the same time pulling down the peak of his cap. The lady drew open the cab door.

"You may take me to—" She gave him a very familiar address. "And please, please go as fast as you can. I'm in a dreadful hurry."

"Yessum," muttered Burly. In a kind of daze he let his clutch engage, too jerkily, for the car started with a series of spasmodic, bucking impulses. He reduced his gas, steadied his engine, then stepped firmly upon the foot-throttle and the car shot forward along the shining asphalt.

CHAPTER V.

FIFTY-FIFTY.

MR. JONAS JONES sat in his upstairs study, working. Jones's business affairs were his chief interest, and no hour was too late to give them his attention. He frequently worked until far into the night, and at just this time, with his fight against Pawson and Crather on his hands, he found it necessary to put in extra time.

So he doggedly bent his powerful mind upon his problem.

Jonas was a railroad man as well as a financier, and he kept a practical eye upon the operation of the big Greystone System. His great fortune included many other interests, but the System was his pet. He heartily wished that Burleson might go into the business of owning and operating the System, but that young man had as yet shown little ambition to become a transportation magnate.

If in any conduct or achievement of Burleson's the elder man could perceive a sign of real stability, particularly under the stressful circumstances which he hoped his mandate had imposed, he secretly intended to modify what he had said, especially about putting Burleson at work in some more or less responsible position in the System organization.

But now his problem was to save the System itself, and his entire fortune as well; for he knew that should the Pawson-Crather fight be lost, it would dislodge the keystone and let the whole structure come crumbling about his ears. And after the next forenoon the issue would be decided. The stockholders' meeting was fixed for ten o'clock in the morning; the old board would be retained, if Jones had his way; if he lost, new and antagonistic directors and officers would step in. That was what Pawson, Crather, and their associates wanted.

There came a discreet knock, and, at Jonas's assent, his butler, Whimson, entered.

"There's a young lady down-stairs—"

"A young lady? To see me?"

"She says so, sir, and she says it's important. It is Miss Grace Colchester, sir."

"No! Why, Whimson, haven't you made a mistake?"

"No, sir; she distinctly said as 'ow she wanted to see Mr. Jonas Jones; and when I told her you might not want to be disturbed, she said something about it's being likely, sir, you'd be much more disturbed, sir, if you didn't see her."

"Oh, well, of course, if it's that way, Whimson, show her up. But— Oh,

Whimson! How about my lunch? I'm hungry."

"I think it's almost ready, sir."

"Bring enough for two, will you?"

"Yes, sir."

Jonas pushed back a pile of papers upon which he had been working, arose, and selected a chair from among the odd assortment of furniture in the room.

This study of Jonas's was in the top of his big house. In its equipment it had nothing in common with that of the rest of the establishment. This was Jonas Jones's very own room, where nobody else entered except with his express permission. The chairs were relics of less prosperous days. The pictures were old-fashioned, valueless except to Jonas.

All the furniture was what you would unhesitatingly call "junk." There was no uniformity in wood or fashion. Some shelves of plain, unpainted boards held a disorderly assortment of dingy-looking books—bound copies of census and crop reports, a few law books, documents, and rulings pertinent to railroads, reports of Interstate Commerce Commission hearings and proceedings, and a lot of translations of French novels and detective stories.

Chaos seemed to reign in that room. Nothing was in order, and if Jonas had caught any one trying to set things to rights, murder would have been done.

"I can put my hand on anything I want," he would say.

Whimson was privileged to bear messages to his door, and to bring him a simple lunch at between eleven and twelve. When its proprietor went out, the room was locked and the key went into his pocket. A small safe in one corner held such valuables as he wished especially to safeguard. Every chair held its burden of papers and documents.

The magnate, having selected a seat for his visitor, swept from it at one gesture its lapful of miscellany. Then he dusted it carefully with his pocket-handkerchief.

Footsteps sounded outside.

"This way, miss," directed Whimson.

Miss Colchester entered a little hesitantly.

"Why, Grace," began Jonas, advancing to meet her, "this is—"

"An unexpected pleasure, Mr. Jones? I guess it is; and a pretty unusual thing to do. So I suppose you're dreadfully shocked."

"Oh, I don't know," replied Jonas smilingly. "Maybe I don't shock so easy. Sit down, child." He pushed forward the carefully made-ready chair. "Now what's on your mind?"

"What a nice—er—quaint room," observed Grace.

"I never thought much about that," he rejoined. "It suits me first rate; I'm out of everybody's way here, and they're out of mine."

"I came here to tell you something," began Grace.

"Or ask something; now which was it? Nothing about that Burly of mine, I suppose?"

"My goodness! What could I possibly have to ask you about Burly?"

"How do I know till you've asked it?"

Jonas Jones's eyes twinkled with good-natured shrewdness.

"Well, I'm not going to ask it," Grace assured him. "It's a much more important matter."

"Now how could that be, my dear?"

"Please stop trying to tease me, Mr. Jones. You're wasting time and—money, perhaps."

"Never," said Jonas. "I'm not given to doing, either. Fire ahead, little girl."

"How much stock have mother and I got in the Greystone System?"

"I thought you wanted to tell me something, not ask questions."

"Well, then, Mr. and Mrs. Pawson and Mr. and Mrs. Crather dined at our house to-night."

"You get out!" exclaimed Jonas.

"It's the truth, Mr. Jones. And besides, there were Mr. Harrison Grady—"

"Huh?"

"And Mr. Reggie Van Ambrose."

"Don't know him."

"Probably not. He's from Albany, or Toledo, or Pittsfield, or somewhere."

"Were you at dinner with this—er—choice collection of—celebrities?"

"Of course."

"What did they talk about, my dear?"

"The weather, and the wine, and the fillet, and the symptoms of appendicitis."

"That's all?"

"Substantially. How much stock do we own, Mr. Jones?"

"Are you of age, Grace? You're only about twenty, are you? Your mother is your legal guardian and in charge of your affairs. How do I know she'd want me to give you this information? I wonder if she knows you came here—of course not. It's pretty mysterious, child. There's only one thing that would explain it partially; your interest in Burly, plus some idle curiosity. Haven't you seen Burly to-night?"

"No. This visit has nothing to do with Burleson."

"Huh! Why do you want this information? Trying to find out how much Burly and you'll have to live on when you're married, if he doesn't work?"

"Mr. Jones, do you want me to be very, very much offended? I've never had anybody say such outrageous things to me."

"Have a sandwich, my dear," said Jonas, Whimson entering with a tray at this moment. "There's some marmalade, too, and tea enough for the United States army—two cups. You pour it, Grace. Now, let's have this thing plain. You come here and ask a very pertinent—I might say impertinent—question; in the same breath you tell me that my dear friends Pawson and Crather, to say nothing of that scoundrel Grady—"

"Scoundrel, Mr. Jones, at my mother's table?"

"Just as much so there as in a Bowery saloon. I know that young man, my dear. The whole thing disturbs me."

"I thought it would; I hoped it would, in fact."

"But why?"

"Because—well, I wanted to do you a favor, if I could, without being disloyal to mother. You're Burly's father, and he said you liked me—"

"I do, my child, I do. And when you tell me what you have about Pawson and Crather—"

Jones looked at this blond and fluffy creature with a new admiration. There was something intensely dramatic in this visit of a frivolous little trick like Grace to a grizzled old man of business at such an hour. What a wife she'd make for Burly—clever as hell!

"Your mother controls," he suddenly said, "about fifteen thousand five hundred shares of Greystone common; of course, part of that is yours. Your father believed in my work and in me, and bought at a time when his money was a life-saver and the stock a marvelous investment. At its present quotation—"

"What is its present quotation, Mr. Jones?"

"Closed to-day at ninety-six. It has been much higher, but the Pawson-Crather crowd has hammered and hammered it, spreading all sorts of rumors—Why, your mother said to me only last week—"

"My mother?"

"Yes; came to see me about this very thing. She's heard all sorts of reports—ugly things, mismanagement, stock-jobbing, poor earnings, worn-out equipment—she wanted to know what to do about her stock. I reassured her, quite persuaded her, I thought, that she had been misled. All the things she heard were absolutely untrue. But this crew of pirates have made an awful fight to oust me; if they do, it will make me look like thirty cents, besides breaking my heart. I have all along hoped that Burly—"

"But about mother?" put in Grace.

"She was pretty skittish; wanted me to buy her out. I said I would, at the market. She said she couldn't think of selling at the market; that she had always considered the stock worth at least one hundred and ten—which it was a month

or two ago. I said I wouldn't give it; advised her to hang on. I said I'd give her a hundred and six, though, but that was the very highest."

"Would you buy our stock now, Mr. Jones?"

"Yes, at 106."

"I'm sorry," said Grace, rising. "All your explanation has been so clear; and the supper was nice, too. I am practically certain mother won't sell for that price."

"Well, then," cried Jonas, jumping up and laying a detaining hand on Grace's arm, "what will she sell for?"

"Suppose I tell her you offer a hundred and fifteen?"

"Oh, my child, that's over a third of a million above the market!"

"Wouldn't it be worth it to save your road?"

"Why, if I actually had to give that much—"

"Then why don't you?"

"Are you sure your mother won't sell cheaper?"

"I'm absolutely certain you can't get our stock for a penny less."

"Then I understand your mother demands 115 from me, because she can get that much elsewhere—that is, she thinks she can get it from, say, Pawson, Crather, and their crowd?"

"Please, Mr. Jones, don't be led astray by what I say. Be your own judge of what you should do. I tell you Grady and those two odious men had a conference with mother. I couldn't swear to the subject of their discussion. It may have been the price of silk dress goods in Afghanistan. When the guests were making ready to leave I heard Mr. Pawson make a somewhat indistinct remark to mother, naming a price.

"Afterward I tried to find out more, but mother said I was too young to understand such things. But if I wasn't mistaken, you can get the stock for 114. I sha'n't tell you another thing, because I've got to show some decent loyalty—and, then, suppose it all turns out wrong?

I'm ignorant, of course, just as she says—I have no business interfering—only I was so disturbed—and Burly said—"

"There, there, Gracie; there, there," soothed Jonas, for his pretty guest was weeping. "I'll pay 115—"

"Oh, *will you?*" cried Grace, and ceased her lamentations with almost suspicious suddenness. Then, quickly recalling her lacrimose mood, she sobbed: "Woo-would you poo-put it in—in wri-i-ting, M-Mr. J-Jones?"

"You bet," agreed the millionaire. "Press that button for Whimson, will you?"

He wrote rapidly, then read the result of his labor. Grace listened, her head cocked on one side like that of a pert and inquisitive sparrow.

"Is that a real legal paper?" she asked innocently. "I'm sure it sounds all right, but I know so little about such things. Would it be all right to put in, after 'from Mrs. Helena Colchester,' 'or her representative'?"

"Oh, very well," assented Jones, but he looked at the girl shrewdly. She was so demure, so altogether fluffy.

"Here, Whimson, witness my signature. There, child, run along home; I think I'd best have Barnard take you in the limousine."

"Oh, no; I have a taxicab waiting. I'll be home in six minutes, and I'll wake mother up, and we'll—no, we can't. That's why I came, anyway."

"Can't what?"

"Use the telephone; your line is out of order. Well, I promise to get word to you somehow. Let's see, I've got the agreement and the blank proxy, haven't I? Good night, dear Mr. Jones. Thanks so much."

Whimson showed the young lady to her waiting equipage. When that dignitary had shut the cab door and the engine was purring smoothly over the shining asphalt, she leaned forward and, thrusting her face through the open front window, said whimsically:

"Burly dear, I can't see why you don't

get along better with your father. He's awfully nice."

The chauffeur, his incognito thus violated, nearly ditched the machine.

"Good Heavens, Grace, I thought I'd fooled you! You nearly startled me out of my boots."

"Did you think your disguise was so perfect? Heavens, no! You ought to try to look more intelligent; then even your best friends might not be able to recognize you."

"Huh! I guess a mere child that goes skyhooting around all alone in a taxicab at midnight hasn't so much on me for intelligence. What did you want to see father for?"

"Oh, a little matter of business—let's see; about a million eight hundred and sixty thousand dollars, I believe. Our profit, thirty-one thousand dollars."

"What do you mean, *our* profit?"

"Yours and mine, Burly dear. You get half, because you told me something this afternoon—you know, about Pawson and Crather and Harrison Grady."

"But I don't understand, Grace. And you're not going to give me any fifteen thousand dollars just because I'm broke—"

"Mercy, Burly, aren't you sensitive? Don't tell me you're a *tipless* taxi-driver; because, you know, there isn't any such thing."

CHAPTER VI.

TO THE RESCUE.

"GRACE," said Burly seriously, "you've got a lot of things to explain. Does your mother know you're out?"

"Heaven prevent!"

"You didn't go to our house to see me."

"No. Earlier in the evening I wanted to see you, and I tried your club and then the house. But the telephone at your house is out of commission. Then I thought it all over, and it seemed best

to go right to your father. So I went out and hailed you—"

"Did you know it was I?"

"No. I only found that out when I saw you crank the car just now in front of your own home."

"Have you any money to pay my charges?"

"Mercy! I forgot my pocketbook. Oh, well, when I get home—"

"That's queer talk from one who deals so flippantly in millions. And how about the pin-money you picked up on the side—that thirty-one thousand that you propose to divide with me? A very small part of that will take care of my modest taxi fare."

"Oh, that is our profit."

"On what?"

"On the stock I sold your father."

At this, Burly jammed down his clutch pedal and drew up slowly by the curb. Grace was sitting on one of the little extra folding seats, so that she could readily talk through the window in Burly's ear.

"Now," said the latter, "we'll just stay here and converse for a few minutes until I get all this frenzied finance unfrenzied. Please explain."

In a few sentences Grace made the situation clear to the young man.

"So," she concluded, "I went to your father and got him to offer mother one hundred and fifteen."

"Great guns!"

"And if she accepts, she's to sign a proxy for him to vote her stock at tomorrow's meeting; and she can accept, with the privilege of holding her stock if, at the end of a month from the stockholders' meeting, she wants to change her mind."

"But why didn't you get him to offer 113? That's a point higher than her price?"

"Two dollars a share on fifteen thousand five hundred shares is thirty-one thousand dollars. That's our profit. We'll have to pay her 113."

"Grace Colchester, you mean to say you went and *trimmed* my poor, old, in-

nocent dad out of thirty-one thousand dollars and want *me* to share the loot? Nothing doing, my child; nothing doing a-tall."

"What time is it, Burly?"

"Eleven forty."

"Home, James; home, James!" cried Grace. "We've got to wake mother and put this up to her. Your father said Pawson and Crather wouldn't buy the stock, but they would get her to give them a proxy. Hurry!"

"Suppose she's already promised?"

"Then she'll have to change her mind and back out of the agreement."

"And if they refuse to release her?"

"Oh, Burly, you don't think they'd refuse a lady a little thing like that? Well, she'd just have to insist, that's all."

"Gracie, you're certainly a husky business man. Here we are, lady. Anything else to-night? Try one of our one-dollar Broadway sight-seeing trips? Entire white light district, hotels, theaters, roof-gardens, cafés, Chinatown, all for the small sum of—"

"Burly, you'll have to come in with me. Mother may have to be reasoned with. And then you've got to take the proxy back to your father."

They were admitted by Jenkins, the movie butler, who had been trained not to register surprise at any contingency.

"Has mother retired, Jenkins?"

"Yes, Miss Grace."

"Very well, Jenkins; you'd better go to bed now. Burly, you wait here in the sarcoph—drawing-room. I'll go up and speak to her. She can't have been in bed long."

Burly waited. The chimes of the great hall clock announced midnight. Then Grace came running down the stairs, white-faced and breathless.

"Burly, Burly, what—what do you—think? I—I can't find—mother!"

"The—then—why, why—she—she's probably out somewhere."

"You display extraordinary intelligence, Mr. Sherlock Jones. But *where*?"

"Kidnaped!"

"Nonsense! That's absurd."

"She may be right back."

"She may; but she may be out some time, and your father is waiting."

"Doesn't it strike you as odd that she left no word for you?"

"Decidedly. She will probably telephone, or else come right back."

"Call up the garage and see if your car is out."

Grace returned from the telephone presently and said she had got hold of the Colchester chauffeur, who reported both cars under cover, and no calls all the evening."

"I've an idea," hazarded Burly. "I don't think it's so far-fetched, either. She's at Pawson's."

"How could that be?"

"You said Pawson agreed to call her up before midnight. He probably did; he said—let's see, what do you think he would say? That he and Crather and their crowd would accept your mother's offer. Then—let's see—he probably told her that important papers must be signed, and she'd better come to his house."

"But she wouldn't go; she'd tell him to come here."

"You'd think so. But Pawson would have arguments. He'd say there were other people there whom she'd have to meet; and a stenographer; and a lot of legal truck to be gone over that he didn't want to lug all the way here. Therefore, Mr. Pawson would very obligingly send his limousine for Mrs. Colchester, and send her back the same way when the business was concluded."

"Of course, her not leaving word for you is queer; but ladies like your mother, Grace, sometimes move in mysterious ways their wonders to perform, and if there didn't happen to be any servants in sight, and she thought she'd be back very soon— Gee! Grace, suppose she had gone to your room to tell you? Scan-dell, scan-dell, my chee-ild!"

"Then what are we going to do?"

"Telephone Pawson's. Get your mother on the wire and tip her off not to sell,

as you've got a better offer; and not to sign any proxy or she'll be ruined; give her one bigga-da-scare, see?"

Miss Colchester looked sadly at Mr. Burleson Jones.

"Burly," she said, "there are times when I don't wonder your father has despaired of you. Aren't you a kid!"

"I'm not lonesome, Gracie dear. Hustle now, there's no time for idle gossip."

At the telephone, Gracie's side of the conversation ran like this:

"Stuyvesant 529— Hello—Mr. Pawson's house? May I speak with Mr. Pawson?—yes—hello— Is this Mr. Pawson? This is Miss Grace Colchester; is my mother there? Well, she's not at home. I thought she might have gone to your house—in fact, I *know* she did—yes, she certainly did—I must speak to her at once—oh, has she—thank you—hello, is that you, mother? Oh, I just knew you'd be there; Burly said so—no, please, please don't be annoyed, this is very important—yes, I know I was very abrupt, but I had to be—

"Listen, mother dear, don't do anything about the Greystone stock—yes, I knew you went there about it—well, you mustn't sell it, or sign anything, or give any proxy—I can't tell you now, but please come right home and I'll explain everything—careful, mother—I have a better offer—never mind how I knew—well, it's Mr. Jonas Jones, and he'll give you 113. But you must sign a proxy for him to vote your stock to-morrow—forgive me, mother, but please, please, we'll be terrible losers if you deal with that horrid Pawson crowd—he lied to me, too, about your being there—I told him I *knew* you were—and you'll come right home? I'll be here— Please hurry; good-by."

"What did she say, what did she say?" excitedly demanded Burly when Grace returned, flushed but triumphant, to the drawing-room.

"It's all right. She's coming home. And what do you think? That atrocious old Pawson actually said she wasn't there.

I beat him at his own game; told him I actually knew she was. So he asked her to come to the telephone. I'm—what is it—a four-blusher, or something—whatever it is."

"You're a bold, bad bluff, you Grace," said Burly sternly. "But all seriousness aside, dear; do you feel as if your mother will get home safely?"

"Why—why not, Burly?"

"No reason at all—only, those fellows are pretty unscrupulous and they have resources. They've got to get that proxy, or keep your mother away from the meeting, or they'll be ruined. Do you suppose they'll let her slip through their fingers so easily? Remember, they have Grady, and Grady has Van Ambrose and Kenney—that's a fine trio. Kenney is a taxi-driver, ostensibly. I have his taxi now; that's how I found out about him. If I thought your mother was in actual danger—"

"Burly!" Grace's face paled a little. Heretofore she had maintained her accustomed flippancy; now she grew poignantly serious.

"I guess," said taxi-driver Jones, "I'd better do something. This has been one busy evening, so far. From now on it's going to be still busier; I've got to *step lively!*"

He was drawing on his gloves. Contrary to refined drawing-room procedure, he pulled his chauffeur's cap firmly upon his head.

"Are you going to Pawson's?"

"Right."

"I'm going, too."

"Not much. This is going to be serious business; no place for a girl."

"Burly, you're crazy. My own mother is threatened—and anyhow, I want to be with you, so I'll be safe. Besides, some day I think I may become a—a—working-man's bride, after all."

"Permit me," said Burly abruptly, "to sign them papers." He kissed her quite unopposed. "Now come on; let's hustle."

In less than two minutes they were

speeding toward Pawson's, Grace hidden in the shadows of the taxi interior.

CHAPTER VII.

UNDERSTANDING EACH OTHER.

IT would have made the astute Jonas Jones a little proud of his son Burleson had he known how shrewdly that young man guessed the facts concerning Mrs. Bryant Colchester's visit to the Pawson residence.

There were gathered to greet her besides the master of the house, Mr. Crather, Mr. Grady, a secretary, and a couple of nondescript gentlemen, members of the Pawson-Crather crowd, who seemed to have been assigned hardly more than thinking parts, despite what may have been their interest in the proceedings.

Mrs. Colchester demurred at first when Pawson assured her by telephone that her presence in his home was desired. But when he said that the gentlemen most concerned had about decided to accept her offer of stock at 112, and wished to conclude the transaction at once, she allowed her cupidity to get the better of her sense of—let us say convenience, rather than fitness.

The conventions were amply covered in two ways: first, Mr. Pawson's assurance that Mrs. Pawson would be present, and, second, the quite exclusively commercial aspect of the gathering.

So, when the Pawson limousine drew up in front of the Colchester house, Mrs. Colchester was ready to enter it. There were no servants in sight—why bother? She would be back very shortly, anyway.

In Mrs. Bryant Colchester there ran, somewhere beneath the solid bedrock of her practical nature, a tiny spring of daring. Here was an adventure, mild enough, no doubt, but still softly titillating with some feathery promise of the unknown. It pleased her, too, to break a lance with these lords of business, in the confidence of her own prowess.

The Pawson-Crather crowd were bunco-

men of Big Business, living by their wits. Just now they were opulent, swollen by the gases of great adventure. To-morrow, punctured by a sliver from the wand of fate, their Zeppelin might explode and come tumbling; whereupon Mesdames Pawson and Crather would keep their hands soft by applications of dish-water, *ad lib.* and then some, three times daily, after meals (if any).

But, needless to say, if the puncture were delayed, the Pawson dirigible would soar yet higher, and, thus soaring, its buccaneer crew would drop bombs upon the coasts of traffic.

"Grady, you've done well," said Pawson, in the few minutes preceding Mrs. Colchester's arrival. "The scare worked all right. I think we've got her."

"That 'inside information' did it, about the 'passed dividend.'" Grady allowed himself some measure of complacency. "Dividends are Mrs. Colchester's middle name, plus personal vanity."

"Trust Grady not to overlook that part," said Pawson slyly, turning himself out a stiff drink of Scotch. "I never was no ladies' man, but I can see there's times when it pays fine. Mostly it's expensive, but Grady makes the soft stuff an asset. I guess we've settled how to handle this lady, eh? And say, Grady"—here Pawson whispered in a breathy aside—"if worse comes to worst, you've got those friends of yours in line?"

"Ready at the drop of a hat," Grady assured him.

A few moments later Mr. Pawson greeted his aristocratic guest, opening the door for her with fine unction.

"Where is Mrs. Pawson?" asked Mrs. Colchester. She had been promised the presence of the lady of the house, otherwise her sense of the conventions would have prevented her coming.

"She'll be right down," Pawson informed her. He led the way to a large library, where she coolly acknowledged the acquaintance of the gentlemen present.

"Now, Mrs. Colchester," began Pawson, without waste of time, "if we can

get right down to business—I have here a proxy, made out in my favor, empowering me to vote your fifteen thousand five-hun—”

At this moment the telephone rang, and Pawson checked, with a frown of annoyance.

“For you, Mr. Pawson,” said his secretary.

Pawson moved irritably to the telephone and snarled.

“Hello? Yes—who?—No, she ain’t. Well, I don’t know anything about that—that’s all right, she isn’t here—oh, you do—she did?—well, I—all right, she’s just come in—one moment—”

He put down the receiver.

“I’m sorry to say it’s for you, Mrs. Colchester. I had a suspicion you’d not let anybody know you was here. It’s your daughter; you must have told her you was coming.”

“And why not, Mr. Pawson?”

Mrs. Colchester took up the receiver. Constrained, evidently, by the presence of so many, she was very guarded. Yet, as the onlookers watched her keenly, they observed a subtle change in her expression. Finally, she hung up the receiver and turned to Mr. Pawson.

“Why did you tell my daughter an untruth?” she demanded.

“Oh, now, Mrs. Colchester, didn’t I understand from you after dinner to-night that this transaction was to be regarded by you as strictly confidential ’til it was all buttoned up? Didn’t I? How’d I know you’d *want* me to tell the child that you was here? She said you’d told her you was comin’, though, so I put you on the wire.”

Mrs. Colchester inwardly gasped. Grace had told that to Pawson? She felt very sure the girl would never do a thing like that unprompted, or without impelling reason.

“I think, Mr. Pawson,” she announced, “that perhaps—we’d better postpone this transaction for a while. Would you mind sending me home?”

A storm of protest burst. Pawson was

furious, but tried to maintain some degree of moderation.

“It ain’t right,” he declared. “It ain’t business. You made us an offer, bonny fired and in good faith, and we was prepared to talk business”—Pawson scrupulously refrained from saying just how his crowd had concluded to “put one over” by means of an untenable agreement—and here you go, for no reason at all, kicking over the traces—”

“That is entirely uncalled for, Mr. Pawson,” said Mrs. Colchester in a voice that stung like icy needles.

“But you’ve put us in an awful hole; you can’t back out now,” said Crather.

“Nothing has been concluded; I have bound myself to nothing. I do not say that I shall not complete the arrangement. I say only that I shall do nothing further to-night. Perhaps in a few days I shall be ready to take the matter up again. In the meanwhile I will consult—”

“But the stockholders’ meeting in the morning; it’s important—it’s life or death to us, Mrs. Colchester,” whined Crather, while Pawson, too enraged to trust speech, glowered venomously at the lady.

“Mrs. Colchester,” began Harrison Grady, with more of conciliation in his voice and manner than either Pawson or Crather was capable of showing, “let us not be hasty. Give us half an hour—yes, even fifteen minutes to talk this thing over.”

“I don’t care to discuss it any further to-night, Mr. Grady,” she returned. “I thank you for all you have done, all your courtesies, but—”

She felt a sudden dislike for this suave young Irishman, whose flatteries and polished, delicately gauged attentions had hitherto proved so effectual with her.

Now she loathed the whole sordid company. Being a business woman was not all smooth sailing, and, strangely, she felt cornered, as if by a pack of hungry wolves, from whom escape seemed a dubious prospect.

“Step this way, into the drawing-room, please, Mrs. Colchester,” said Harrison

Grady with fine courtesy. "Mr. Pawson will call his car for you."

He led the way, and Mrs. Colchester bade the company an arctic good night. Grady left her in the drawing-room, where Mrs. Pawson presently appeared to keep her company. She mentally thanked Grady for summoning even so uninteresting a companion; for while she had nothing in common with Mrs. Pawson, that lady's banalities would serve perhaps to calm her now highly wrought mood.

Grady, returning to the room where the Pawson-Crather board of strategy still sat, looked a question.

Pawson brusquely dismissed his secretary.

"Now, then," he snapped, "what's the next step?"

"I guess it's up to me," replied Grady, with a wry smile. "I thought I'd done pretty nearly all that was necessary when I arranged the dinner. I hoped we'd be able to get by without the strong-arm work."

"Look here, Grady," interrupted Pawson, "don't use those words. You know our agreement—I don't want to know what you propose to do. It ain't none of my affair. If that woman shows up at the stockholders' meeting in the morning, and votes her stock against us, or gives old Square-Top Jones her proxy, we're goners. Otherwise, we're certain to win. Out goes Jonesy and we do things in the market. Bing! The stock'll go down like a burnt-out rocket; and we've margined millions of it on short sales.

"Now, let's not go into no harrowin' details. You take the risk and leave me and my associates out of it. If we win, you get one hundred thousand dollars cold cash; and not only that, if you've been wise I've no doubt you've sold a lot of the stock short, so you stand to clean up handsome. You've got to step lively; but I ain't party to what you do, and I don't *recommend* anything rough. I'm just tellin' you where you get off; that's all."

"I get you, Mr. Pawson," assented

Grady. "But I'd just like to have you make that agreement in writing—in-formally, you know. No details may be mentioned—just make me a memorandum to the effect that the hundred thousand will be paid in the event that the Pawson-Crather crowd get control of the Grey-stone System."

"Not much," fumed Pawson. "Ain't my word good?"

Grady looked the older man very coolly in the eye, and his glance was so icily piercing that Pawson fidgeted.

"If you force me to say so," said Grady, "your word is much better when written, signed, and endorsed by Mr. Crather."

Pawson turned an angry purple.

"I'm a man of my word," he said. "I won't sign a damn thing."

"Yet you wish me to risk Sing Sing. No, thank you."

"Not a hint of a memorandum do I sign," stormed Pawson. "Would you, Crather?"

Crather shook his head sadly.

"Very well, gentlemen," agreed Grady, with every semblance of cheerful resignation. "There's nothing compulsory about it. I'm a poor man myself; I've hardly anything at stake. You men who are short thousands of Greystone shares, in spite of your temporary pool to swing the stockholders' meeting, are the ones to consider whether it is best to drop this thing—it's your own business."

"Oh, come now, Grady—"

"I'm not coming, I'm going. I wonder how Mrs. Colchester would like my company as far as her own door. Perhaps she'd be interested in some of the details—and then, maybe our friend Square-Top Jones would prick up his ears at just a hint of—"

"Great Scott, Grady, are you plumb crazy?" howled Pawson. He turned a sickly, nondescript shade of green.

"Oh, no, hardly that," returned Grady.

He was the fine impersonation of insolence. Pawson and Crather both knew him to be quite capable of doing what

he hinted. Pawson thought of the millions at stake—and wilted.

"Here, damn you!" he exploded; and seizing a pen he wrote a hasty scrawl, signed it, and passed it to Crather. That financier attached his signature, shaking his head sadly.

"Now," said Grady, "the rest of you gentlemen, please."

The actors who had hitherto borne but a thinking part in this engaging drama now fidgeted, but a compelling glance from Pawson decided them.

Grady grinned, took the memorandum, scanned it casually, and thrust it in his pocket.

"Thanks," he said. "That's quite satisfactory. Now, if I'm to accomplish this thing, I'll have to bid you good night."

"Go to it, my boy," said Pawson. His good-nature had returned in a degree. There was something about Grady's brisk decision of manner that inspired a certain confidence. "Go to it, Grady, and—"

But Grady was gone.

Less than ten minutes later Grady was seated in the back room of a Sixth Avenue saloon, in conference with three persons—Joe Kenney, the Atom, and that astute attorney Thaddeus Skanks.

"Now, Joe," observed Grady, "you've pretty well sobered off, I should say."

"I'm sober enough," grunted Kenney sourly.

"Keep so from now until six in the morning, and after that you can drink as much as you like, and I'll promise you'll have the price to pay for the most expensive jag your money ever bought."

"Cut the kidding, Harry," said Kenney. "My nerves is all frazzled. Give us the lay quick, and let's get busy. But if I don't have one drink pretty soon I croak, see?"

"You can have two, Joe. One now and one when you get up-town. I'm going to give Teddo a little bottle of whisky for you, and you can sink it in your system just before you go into the Colchester—"

"Good God!" cried Joe. "Is that the crib we're to crack? I hoped—"

"You've got another hope this trip, Joe. Teddo's been up there to-night sizing up the premises. He knows what to do and how to do it. If you fellows get away with this job, you'll never lose another night's sleep. Got your kit?"

"Yep."

"All right. Now this is the dope."

The quartet drew their heads close together, and Grady gave directions in swift but well-muffled tones. The three heads nodded. After a five minutes' colloquy Grady straightened up.

"Now, Skanksy, you understand the whole game? I want you to have it all in your head, even though you aren't going up there. You're the boy with the alibi, and I want it to be copper-riveted and lawyer-proof."

"And you lads remember one thing—not too rough. There's no need of that. Be sure and clean up all the stuff you can get; it'll be worth a lot. And remember, it'll all be yours. I don't want any of it. You and Skanks can settle that between you."

"Work quick and get the stuff before the lady gets home—and then, remember, all that's necessary is that she—well, doesn't feel like leaving her bed for a day or two. Got your needle, Teddo?"

Mr. Reginald Van Ambrose nodded.

"Very good; now boys, beat it. Good luck! And remember, if you do get pinched, keep your mouths shut, sing out for Skanksy, and we'll take care of you."

"Well, Harry," remarked Kenney, with an unpleasant leer, thrusting his rubicund nose close to the more delicately chiseled organ of Mr. Harrison Grady, "here's hopin' Panther's as good as you say he is, with his alibis and his pull with the officers and judges and all; but a stretch don't look good to me, and rather than do too long a bit I'd blow the whole game, just like a mice. We takes the risk, and you gets most of the coin; so be damn sure we're looked after, see?"

Grady looked unconcernedly at the al-

coholic and threatening face of his underworld subordinate.

"Beat it, Joe," he rejoined. "What do you take me for—a country school-teacher? All you've got to do is make good."

"Come on, Teddo," muttered Joe; and the two melted out through the side door into the night.

Left alone with Skanks, Grady showed some curiosity concerning previous events of the evening, notably the visit of Burleson Jones to the Skanksian lair.

"You'd better look out for that young man," warned the lawyer. "He's no fool. You made a mistake when you sent him down to me. You ought to have known you couldn't expect me to do anything with him."

"I'm sorry you couldn't trim him up," complained Grady resentfully. "You had good luck with the others."

"Yes; but he isn't like the others, Grady. He's not so easy. You better look out, or he'll get that goat of yours."

"You should worry," rejoined Grady. "Anyhow, after to-night I won't concern myself with that kind of thing. If our play goes through I'll be a rich man to-morrow evening."

"How much does that gang of Wall-Streeters pay you for this deal?" Panther eyed his client with a sly cunning in his single eye.

"Fifty thousand."

"Too cheap," grunted Skanks.

"Oh, I don't know," returned Grady easily. "Those yeggs 'll get plenty up at the house; they don't get any of mine."

"How about me?" demanded the lawyer.

"Oh, I'll take care of you."

"Pretty airy, aren't you, Mr. Grady? Well, Harry, my boy, you can bet you will take care of me. I'm sick of this living off the small fry. It's a piker game, I tell you. I'm going to make you a proposition.

"I came up and got Joe out of jail for you to-night—had to dig up real money to do it. I pretty near know how

to handle yeggs like him and Teddo. Likewise, Mr. Harrison Grady, you ain't so clever but I can come pretty close to handling you, too.

"So, if you're getting fifty thousand for your little deal to-night, I should say a fifty-fifty split between you and me would be fair."

"The hell it will!"

"The hell it *won't*!"

"But look at all the work I've done and the risk I'm running. Why should I split it two ways with you?"

"Because I say so. I've been trailing along with you for some time now, Grady, and I've just about come to the place where I can make you skip rope. I'm a useful guy to you, young man; you'd better make up your mind I don't work for nothing. So I guess we'll shake hands and call it a go, eh?"

"Well, Skanksy, if I give you twenty-five of my fifty, will you keep those yeggs off my neck? They may make an awful holler, especially if they don't get much stuff up at Colchester's."

The lawyer grinned a slimy grin.

"Those birds? Sure! I'll throw a scare into 'em that 'll keep 'em quiet until doomsday. Or I'll railroad 'em. Which do you want?"

Grady pondered, remembering Joe's parting threat.

"Oh, we'll see how this thing comes out," he said. "No need to decide to-night—not as long as you and I understand each other."

"You bet we do," remarked Panther Skanks; and his leathery face cracked in a leer meant to be pleasantly appreciative of the humor of the situation. "You bet we understand each other."

But Harrison Grady, walking briskly toward his club to await a telephone message from Kenney and Teddo that the job had been pulled off, chuckled. For the difference between half of fifty thousand and half of what he had been actually promised by Pawson was the tidy sum of twenty-five thousand dollars.

"I wonder," he mused, "if Panther

could fix it to send those birds over the road without getting me in Dutch?"

CHAPTER VIII.

PURSUIT.

CHAUFFEUR BURLESON JONES swung out of Fifty-Seventh Street into Sixth Avenue and headed down-town. It was a considerable drive to the Pawsons', who lived in one of those fine old homes in West Twelfth Street.

Burly thrust his rattly old cab in and out among the evening traffic and made time as rapidly as possible. Grace Colchester, well veiled, huddled in the shadows and, as the cab bounced over the crossings and roughnesses of the avenue, wished for the luxurious springs of her mother's limousine.

Suddenly she felt the taxi slacken speed and, leaning a little forward, observed her driver gazing intently at a figure just turning into the door of a saloon. Burly looked back at Grace, then jerked a thumb toward the barroom.

"Did you see that man?" he asked.

"Was it anybody?"

"It was, if my eyes are as good as they ought to be. It was, indeed, somebody; it was Harrison Grady."

"No!"

"Yes, I say. Didn't he look familiar to you?"

"What is he doing there?"

"That's what I'm going to find out." Burly pulled up by the curve. "Do you mind if I leave you just two or three min—"

"But mother—how about mother?"

"I'll have to take a chance. I've just got to see what Grady's doing in there. It'll take only a minute. I've a notion your mother's on her way home by this time, anyhow—"

"Go on, Burly; hurry then; I'll wait."

Burly sprang down and made his way back half a block to the saloon. He entered boldly, since, if Grady were here, he could hardly hope to avoid him. But

Grady was not in the bar. There was no customer in sight. Burly walked leisurely over to the free lunch, helped himself to a cracker, and ordered a gingerale. Into his manner he threw a rough good-fellowship.

"Nice night, ain't it?" he observed. "Business pretty good?"

"Rotten," said the bartender.

Chauffeur Jones finished his drink and walked to the rear of the bar, where a little passage, with swinging doors at each end, led into the back room. The door at the barward end of the passage swung shut behind him, its ground glass admitting a dim glow. The door opening into the back room had no glass; a streak of light revealed its outlines.

Burly paused in that shadowy cupboard of a place and listened. There were voices to be heard, muffled and indistinct. He put out a hand and gently moved the swinging door. A trifle was enough, and he found it possible to peer through.

Harrison Grady sat in deep conference with the Atom, Thaddeus Skanks, and—yes, it was Joe Kenney, the drunken chauffeur. He appeared sober enough now, though an empty whisky glass indicated that he had been recently served.

"Devilment," thought Burly. That phrase, "sizing up the Colchester premises," came back to him.

He withdrew from the passageway and walked once more the length of the bar, picking up a cracker as he passed the free lunch. Once on the sidewalk he quickened his steps.

"Now for Pawson's," he said, and sent the car racing down the asphalt.

"For goodness' sake, Burly, don't jounce me so," complained Grace. "Was it Harrison Grady in that saloon?"

"It certainly was Harrison Grady in that saloon," replied Burly. "I can't help jouncing you; I'm in a hurry. Hang on tight and try not to bite your tongue."

"A tactful way of telling me to hold it, I suppose," grumbled Grace, clutching the cushions.

The cab turned into West Twelfth Street. Burly slowed down and drew up at the side of the street, some distance in the rear of a limousine.

"That's Pawson's," said Burly, turning to Grace. "And that's his car. The chauffeur is changing a tire. So I guess your mother hasn't started home yet after all."

"Burly, don't you suppose we might get there ahead of her?"

"We undoubtedly could, if I'd consent to let that limousine out of my sight."

"Well, I'd like to be home when she comes. I'd rather she didn't look for me and find I was out. Of course I'll tell her later, but—"

"There she comes now," announced Burly.

Mrs. Colchester descended the Pawson front steps, and the Pawson chauffeur, appearing to have finished changing his tire, let down his jack, strapped the replaced tire and rim in the lugs, and in a leisurely fashion prepared for departure.

"I guess they're going to send her home safe," said Grace, to whom the sight of her mother still alive and able to walk was sufficiently reassuring.

"I guess so," Chauffeur Jones agreed. "I'm going to make sure, though."

The Pawson car presently started off, and headed up Fifth Avenue. Burly kept at a respectful distance, within plain sight, so that should the big car swing into any side street he would not miss it. But it kept on along Fifth Avenue until well above Forty-Second Street.

Just as the limousine passed Forty-Ninth Street there came a loud explosion. The Pawson car paused, swerved in toward the sidewalk, and slowed down.

"He has a blow-out," said Burly.

"Now can't you take me right home?" asked Grace. "It will require some time to change tires, and you'll be able to get me to the house and then come back here again."

"We might stop and take your mother aboard."

"No, no; I don't want to let her know

yet that I've been out. Perhaps—perhaps I won't have to let her know at all. Maybe I can make her think you put through that agreement with your father for me."

"Grace, Grace, if you ever adopt a business career, let business beware! You're one of our best little subterfugers. No, you won't tell your mother I put up any job like that on my poor old father—not with my consent."

"Well, take me home, anyhow."

"I guess it will be safe enough," consented Burly. As they passed the stalled limousine they could see Mrs. Colchester's anxiously impatient face peering through the glass at the Pawson chauffeur.

As they went up the steps Grace said:

"Burly dear, now that I'm to be a working man's bride, and when I've made it so plain how helpful I'm trying to be in keeping the wolf from the door, don't you think it would be nicer of you to come back and help me persuade mother to give up that proxy for your poor old father?"

"'Poor old father' is right," chuckled Burly. "Heaven pity him; he's no match for you, and I don't suppose I am, either. Yes, Grace, I'll come back. But just how far I'll go to help you trim father I'd rather not commit myself. Got your latch-key?"

They were now at the top of the steps, and entered the vestibule. Burly would have turned and gone back to his taxi—but something prompted him to step into the hall with Grace, as the big inside door swung to her pressure. Just what that impulse was it would be hard to tell—perhaps he intended to kiss Grace there in the big, gloomy hall. Perhaps some instinct prompted him to make sure of her safe entrance—

"Burly," she whispered suddenly, and in so startled a way that he felt a creepy sensation at the roots of his hair. "Burly!"

"For the love of Mike," he whispered, "what are you trying to do? Scare me to death?"

"I've a feeling that some one is in this house."

"I wonder," rejoined Burly—"I wonder what put that into your head. Of course that's nonsense—"

Then across his mind floated those four huddled faces around a small table in the back room of a Sixth Avenue saloon. Burly suddenly forgot all about Grace's mother in a wave of anxiety for the girl herself. Suppose there were somebody in the house?

"I'll just go to the head of the stairs with you, dear," he said. "I suppose the proprieties—"

"Bother the proprieties," whispered Grace and, reaching out, took the working man's hand in a strong and magnetic grip.

Burly thrilled to the touch of her. Together they mounted the stairs in the dark, and, upon the thickly padded treads, as quietly as ghosts.

Grace reached a wall-switch at the head of the stairs, and light flooded the hall. Reassured by the illumination and by the comforting presence of Burly, she looked about confidently.

"How silly I was," she said.

Together they spied about, poking into this shadowy doorway—that dark corner.

"Of course it's all nonsense—"

And just then something happened. The lights went out. Grace gave a little, startled scream, and Burly held out his hands to her in the dark.

There was a swift rush of human bodies, quick, guttural breathing, a whiff of an alcoholic exhalation, and then Grace screamed in real terror. Burly's hand found Grace's body and he drew her to him and got her between him and the wall. Somehow, he felt that she was the object of attack.

He struck out blindly into the dark, and his fist crashed into something that gave under the blow, whereupon Burly decided that he had punched some person's face. A grotesque idea flitted through his brain that it might, by some

accident, be that motion-picture butler whom he had smitten.

Grace screamed again, and steps pattered in the rear of the house. The voice of the watchman came in startled tones:

"Now, who's that and what's wanted?" It was plain that the watchman was rattled; as he might well have been upon suddenly awakening from a peaceful sleep.

Burly pawed about in the dark, hoping to hit something again, or catch hold of some one's clothing. He got his hand on a rough sleeve, which was torn away.

"Beat it, Joe," grunted a voice. "We're in wrong."

The ray of the watchman's flash-light stabbed the darkness, and Burly saw two figures tearing down the stairs. In a breath he was after them.

"Burly, Burly!" cried Grace. "Don't leave me!" And with a mad impulse of fear plunged after him.

Again came the watchman's search-light glimmer, and then somebody turned the switch, and the hall was once more lighted. At the foot of the stairs, and making for the front door, Burly saw Reginald Van Ambrose, *alias* Teddo the Tailor, *alias* the Atom, and Joe Kenney, ex-taxi driver. The latter had a big bundle under his arm, of irregular shape and bulk. Teddo the Tailor turned and pointed a revolver up the stairs.

"Get back there!" he screamed. "Back, or I plug the lot of you."

Kenney and his bundle oozed out at the front door. Burly and Grace collapsed suddenly on the stairs, Burly trying his best to shield the girl. Old Harvey, the watchman, came lumbering after them, stumbled, and pitched forward, half sliding, half rolling until he stopped with a sickening jolt against Grace's back.

The Atom turned and followed Kenney.

Burly sprang after him, with Grace at his heels, while poor old Harvey continued his bumping descent to the foot of the stairs. Grace followed Burly blindly, in a frenzy of terror, having the confused sense of imminent dissolution. She wanted to be with Burly when her time came.

Kenney and Teddo, on the sidewalk, ran full tilt toward Fifth Avenue, alert for the best available means of escape.

A closed car cleared the corner and swung toward the curb. Joe Kenney darted into the street, hopped on the running-board, and dealt the chauffeur a stunning blow, presumably with a black-jack. The chauffeur collapsed, and Kenney toppled him to the asphalt. Burly remarked afterward on the neatness of this maneuver.

"Inside, Teddo; inside!" yelled Kenney.

The Atom swung open the limousine door. Burly, close upon him, tried to pull him back to the street, but Teddo kicked out violently. Burly Jones, under the impact of Teddo's foot, rolled into the street.

Joe Kenney, in the seat of the dethroned driver, fed his engine a flood of power, and the great car went sailing off to the westward.

Burly, picking himself up, made a dash for his taxi. It stood with engine idling, and he had it under way in so short a time that he was close behind the limousine when it turned down Sixth Avenue. He sensed the presence of some one beside him. It was Grace.

"You'll be in danger!" he cried. "You should have stayed at home."

"I couldn't, I couldn't!" she wailed. "In that dreadful house? Full of burglars and goodness knows what else? Never!"

"Did you see all that happened?"

"Yes; and that limousine—it's Pawson's, and—"

"Your mother's inside it with Reggie Van Ambrose."

Traffic, comparatively light on Sixth Avenue at this hour, offered little to impede the chase. The limousine dashed unchecked under the Elevated. Burly's wheezy cab was a poor match for the powerful car, but he gave it all the gas it would stand, and managed for some time to keep the Pawson tail-light in sight, though it glowed more dimly every minute.

There wasn't a policeman within a thousand blocks, it seemed. Pursued and pursuer tore along, block after block, until suddenly the tail-light disappeared. Some other vehicle had intervened, and before Burly could uncover his objective, it had turned into a cross street. He kept on until he reached a point at which he judged the red light had vanished, but could see no sign of it.

"Murder!" he observed. "We've lost em."

CHAPTER IX.

GRADY ACCEPTS AN INVITATION.

HARRISON GRADY, at the Babylon Club, awaited with increasing uneasiness the expected telephone-call from Kenny and Teddo. He passed an exceedingly uncomfortable hour playing billiards with a casual acquaintance.

"Say, Grady," observed his opponent, "you're playing a rotten game to-night. What's the matter? You usually beat me hands down. You're missing the easy ones."

"Telephone-call for Mr. Grady," said a boy. Grady looked at his watch. It was nearly one-thirty.

"About time," he muttered, dropped his cue, and with a hasty "Excuse me," raced for the booth on the lounge-floor of the club. Receiver in hand, he called sharply:

"Hello; this you, Joe? What—"

"I beg pardon," came a voice, feminine and modulated. "Is this Mr. Grady?"

"What's that?" stammered Grady.

"Yes—this is Mr. Grady—I beg your pardon, I thought—"

"This is Miss Grace Colchester."

"The devil!" Sheer panic startled the expletive from Grady's lips. "Oh, oh, I—I— Please forgive me, Miss Colchester—I was speaking to—a—to a bystander." He tried to carry the situation off with a laugh. "I'm delighted to hear from you. Isn't it rather late?"

"Please, Mr. Grady, could you come to our house at once?"

"To your house? Why—er—yes, if—"

"It's mother—we wish to see you—"

Grady managed to suppress audible evidence of his chagrin.

"Your mother? Oh, of course—do you—may I ask what it is about, Miss Grace?"

"I can't tell you exactly—that is, not over the telephone. It's about the Pawson matter. Will you come at once? I think it's very important."

"Yes, Miss Grace; I'll be there right away. Yes, just as soon as I can get a taxicab. Good-by."

Grady's face was chalky; his heart made frenzied efforts to climb out through his throat. He steadied himself against the side of the booth and tried to think.

Then he told the doorman to call a taxi, and in the interim went into the bar where he swallowed a stiff whisky. He was terribly puzzled, filled with a clutching fear, yet impelled, in spite of himself, to accept Grace Colchester's summons. Oddly, at the same time, he fought back an impulse to run away, to escape, to drop the whole awful business.

"No, by Heaven," he muttered; "I'll see it through. I'll take the chance. I can't drop it now."

All the way to Fifty-Seventh Street he fought back that tugging urge which would force him to cry out and bid his driver go on and on and on, as far from New York as wheels and gasoline could take him.

At last he found himself standing in the Colchester hall, shaking hands limply with Grace, and muttering some flat banality of greeting. She led him into the big drawing-room.

If the frightened soul of him had permitted, he would have seen that the girl was charmingly clothed in some sort of loose and voluminous, lacy garment; that she wore small, heelless slippers; that her lovely, shining hair was hanging in thick braids. She was warm, dewy eyed, like one lately awakened. Certainly she gave

no hint of her recent adventurous wanderings. Also, she was palpitant with an appealing anxiety.

"Mr. Grady," she said tremulously, "I'm in great trouble. I thought of you because—well, because you have been so much interested—mother has spoken so pleasantly of you—and now—oh, Mr. Grady, she's gone!" Grace began to cry.

"Gone!" repeated Grady in astonishment. "I don't understand—"

"It's dreadful; she was here a little while ago, I know, because I found this in the office; and there were signs of violence—"

"Oh, no, Miss Grace; it's unbelievable."

Grady held out his hand for the slip of paper which Grace offered him, and examined it with the most extraordinary sensations of amazement. For it was nothing more or less than a printed form, setting forth that the undersigned delegated to Morris Pawson, whose name had been filled in at the proper place, all voting rights, *et cetera*, in certain holdings of Greystone stock. And this astonishing document was signed—

"Helena Urquhart Colc—"

Grady stared at the uncompleted signature in stunned incomprehension.

"When did your mother do this?" he asked excitedly.

"I don't know exactly. But she must have done it after she returned from Mr. Pawson's."

"From Pawson's?"

"Yes; she went there shortly before midnight, and returned directly. She said she had some work to do in the office; so I went to bed. I didn't go to sleep for a long time, and then, thinking of something I wanted to ask her about, I came down-stairs and looked for her. Mr. Grady, please come with me."

She led the way to the rear of the ground floor, and admitted her visitor to a small room with which he was already familiar. It was now in confusion. Chairs had been tipped over, papers were scattered about.

"Did you call the police? And where are the servants?"

"No. I didn't call any one. Mother is so peculiar—I didn't know—she's terribly afraid of notoriety—I wanted advice—from some one of discretion. I couldn't really convince myself that the house had been broken into; it's very well guarded. Our watchman is thoroughly trustworthy."

Grady was still staring at the half-signed proxy in his hand.

"Shall I ring up the police?" asked Grace in tearful helplessness.

"Not yet, I should say. Of course, this uncompleted signature looks as if your mother had been interrupted in the act of signing the document; or it may mean that she fully signed another, and that this one she found in some way unsatisfactory before she finished writing her name."

"Oh, but what shall I do, what shall I do?"

Grady looked at Grace wonderingly. Away down deep in his mind arose a suspicion. What was this clever girl up to? Could it be that she was adroit enough to—No; her shoulders were shaking with sobs.

"It's all on account of this Pawson matter," she cried. "Mother's been so upset. I don't like Mr. Pawson—I knew she went there, and I called her up and begged her to come home. She seemed determined to put through some sort—of—of—is *deal* the word? When she got home she said she was sorry she had not completed it. Please, Mr. Grady, help me find her. You are so close to Mr. Pawson and his friends. Oh, I'd be willing for her to—*to make any arrangement with him—with Mr. Pawson—if I only knew she was safe—if she were just here with me, in her own house.*"

"Why didn't you call up Pawson's? She may have gone there."

"I did, I did; and they didn't answer their telephone."

"Funny, very funny," said Grady. But he didn't suggest trying again. He

stood for a long minute, evidently considering what was best to be done.

"In spite of appearances, Miss Grace," he said smoothly, "I think you have really overestimated the seriousness of the situation. Are there any signs of burglary—has anything been taken?"

"Not a thing," said Grace.

"My dear young lady," said Grady, who had by this time recovered his poise, "I will do everything possible to assist you. I wouldn't be alarmed, if I were you. I wish you would trust me to do what is necessary—I will go to Mr. Pawson's, as you say they don't answer their telephone; and I will call you up just as soon as I find out anything."

"Let me suggest that you summon a servant, have a cup of cocoa, and try not to worry. Say nothing about this. Please believe me fully at your service. I am quite certain you really have no cause for anxiety. Your mother evidently came here and made a search for certain papers she wanted, and in her haste may have caused some confusion; see, it's easy enough to set things to rights quickly."

Grady picked up the overturned chairs, gathered together the scattered papers, and, surely enough, the room looked as if nothing had disturbed its orderly arrangement.

"Now, Miss Grace, if I may use your telephone just a moment," said Grady. He picked up the instrument and gave a number sharply.

"Hello; this is Grady talking. I want to see you at once; yes. I'll be there in a few minutes."

"Friend of mine," explained Grady. "Very clever detective whom I sometimes consult in—er—emergencies. This is the point, Miss Grace: Your mother is a very reserved and cautious woman. She has good reasons for everything she does. We have no right to interfere with her, even if she chooses to do something unusual. At this moment she is, doubtless, engaged in matters which she considers urgent, and we have no real reason to suspect anything wrong."

"However, I think it is wise, without consulting the police, to have some one interested in the situation in whose discretion we may have confidence. I do it for my own protection. This man is my friend, and if, as I am sure will be the case, your mother arrives at home shortly, nothing will ever be said. Understand?"

Grace signified her absolute confidence in Grady's judgment, crying softly meanwhile, and thanking him through her tears. In another minute he was gone, leaving the girl with a sad little smile of gratitude on her tremulous lips. She would be terribly anxious until she heard from him—

The front door slammed behind the retreating figure.

"Oh, Burly!" cried Grace. "Quick!"

Burleson Jones appeared promptly from an adjoining room.

"Did you hear all that?" asked Grace.

"You bet I did, and there isn't a minute to waste. You certainly can act, Gracie girl; holy Moses! What a star the drama has lost! Did you catch that telephone number?"

"o8o Franklin!"

"Right; know whose number it is?"

"How should I?"

"It's that shyster lawyer's—I told you about him. One of the gang. Now I've got to beat it round to Fifty-Fifth and get the car; and it's ho! for Franklin Street. Keep up your courage, Gracie, old girl. I'll let you know what I learn. Don't be frightened. Good-by, dear. I'll have to step lively."

CHAPTER X.

CRATTY'S.

HARRISON GRADY left his taxi outside the dingy building in Franklin Street and mounted the pitch-black stairway to the third floor. At the end of the corridor a tenuous filament of light marked the space between the door and threshold of Panther Skanks's office.

"They gummed it, by God!" cried Grady when the leathery-faced attorney admitted him.

"I was trying to get some sleep when you called up," grumbled Skanks. "Damn this business, anyhow. I'm afraid the risk's too great. We'll all be in a mess; that's what I think."

A shabby couch by the wall, with a soiled and rumpled quilt, showed where he had sought his uneasy and interrupted repose.

"They gummed the game," repeated Grady. "Look!"

He extended the proxy, bearing the all but completed signature.

"Well?" queried Skanks irritably.

"It means those fatheads went up there, broke in, and blundered onto Mrs. Colchester in her office in the very act of signing the one paper of all others we've been trying to get."

"It wouldn't be any good without a witness."

"Hell! That's not the point. It just shows she had made up her mind, doesn't it? We'd have heard from her sure early in the morning, and then that witness thing could have been taken care of. How do you know she wouldn't have had one of her own servants witness that signature?"

"Anyhow, if those fools had been two seconds later the signature would have been complete and we could have fixed the witness part all right. The point is, I've got this damn, useless, almost-but-not-quite thing, and they've kidnaped the woman."

"Well, I know it."

"You know it? How?"

"They've got her over at Billy Cratty's, on Eighth Street. They telephoned me; said they'd tried to get you at your club and you'd left. Fine fellow, you are, not to be within call. They phoned me, and I told them not to worry yet a while; I'd very likely hear from you. I was right."

"Sure; I thought you'd know where to put your finger on them."

"Yes; and this kidnaping is a damn mysterious thing. Your story don't dovetail with theirs; some one's lying. They say they didn't kidnap her; she was wished on them."

"Go on, Skanks; her own daughter told me; called me up, asked me to go to the house, begged me to find her mother, and showed me the very room where Teddo and Joe had grabbed the dame, tipped over chairs and things, and rushed her out. It's the coarsest work I ever heard of, and strictly against orders. I'll have their hides for it, by Heaven! If we don't all go to jail for this mess, I'm a liar."

"We'd better go over to Cratty's," suggested Skanks.

"You bet," agreed Grady vehemently. "What time is it? Nearly half past two. This is some slippery situation; the only thing I can do is make a grandstand play—big rescue act, see? I'm afraid I'll never get away with it, but it's the only thing. Desperate disease, desperate medicine. Come on."

Somehow it was one of Grady's faculties to inspire with some degree of confidence those with whom he dealt. It was a valuable part of his equipment for the dubious profession of crook. Through the dark hall and down the murky stairway the one-eyed little jackal of the law followed his leader, almost obediently. At the curb Panther gave the taxi driver a street and number.

"And make time," he urged. "Hit 'er up, boy; step lively!"

Now a thing had happened during Grady's visit in the Skanksian office which entirely escaped that malefactor's notice. This is not to be wondered at, since the pale light of the street lamps picked out with inadequate distinctness the lineaments of the taxi driver.

Hardly had Grady disappeared up the black and cavernous stairway when a second taxicab slid up behind the one which had brought Grady down-town.

"Oscar," said the driver of the second car, "you've got to swap cabs with me."

"Oh, hello, Mr. Jones," said Oscar. "Since when you been driving for the C. A. T. Co.?"

"No time to explain, my boy. Good thing you happen to know me. Now you get into my car and chase yourself."

"You're not getting me into trouble, are you, Mr. Jones?"

"No, Oscar, I give you my word. I'll square you with Eaton in the morning, if anything is said. Come, now, wiggle! Go buy yourself a feed when you get off duty."

Burly pushed a five-dollar-bill into the pseudo-reluctant hand of his fellow-employee.

"Beat it, beat it!" he urged.

In another thirty seconds he had the satisfaction of seeing the last of his erstwhile vehicle. He had not long to wait, for Grady and the lawyer presently appeared.

The address given was in a dubious neighborhood, and proved to be that of a saloon displaying the name "W. Cratty" in sumptuous gold letters over the door. Grady and Skanks alighted.

"Wait here," said Grady shortly. Then he and the lawyer went to the door designated "Ladies' Entrance," and were presently admitted.

Burly Jones promptly climbed down from his driver's seat and instituted a scouting expedition. He soon located an alley, half a block from the saloon, and in it stood—the Pawson limousine.

"Now for the doity woiik," he muttered, feelingly; and approached the ladies' entrance of W. Cratty's select resort. "I wonder how desperate those fellows are; maybe I'm taking an awful chance. Well, here goes nothing."

He knocked sharply on the glass. Presently the lock rattled and the door gave a couple of inches.

"Whaddyawant?" demanded a coarse voice.

"I'm Mr. Skanks's shofer. I want a little touch o' liquor, that's what I want."

"Why the hell didn't youse come in when he did, then?"

"He don't buy me no drinks," said Burly. "He's the original hard-boiled egg. I buys me own booze, see? Besides, that duck wouldn't ride wit' me if he knew I'd touch it. He'd complain to me boss and have me fired. Gee! A guy has got to have a little somethin', doin' this all night stuff."

"Right you are, bo," admitted the guardian of the portal, who proved to be a waiter. "Come on in and wet your t'roat. An' while you're buyin', remember they's others got a t'oist, same as y'self."

"Sure," said Burly. "Go 's far 's you like, feller."

The room into which he had been admitted was an ordinary "back room," not crowded. A few forlorn-looking *bon-vivants* sat drinking at the sloppy tables. Burly ordered a rye, and when no one was looking, emptied it into the cuspidor. He paid for it and for a glass of beer for the waiter. Then he got up and moved toward the street, stepping into the small entrance hall from which the door opened to the sidewalk.

But Burly did not use this exit; instead he softly pulled open a door which formed the third side of the little vestibule and disclosed what he had hoped for—a stairway. Without that justly celebrated hesitation with which angels are supposed to approach the resorts of the silly, Burleson ascended the stairs seeking such adventures as might befall.

The stairway was narrow, and its confining walls covered with greasy, tattered wall-paper. At the top a hallway ran toward the shadowy rear of the building. Burly walked the length of this corridor, treading softly, listening. Unrewarded, he turned, moved toward the front of the house, and mounted a second flight. On the third floor the hallway duplicated the one beneath it, save that it smelled less rancidly of stale food, liquor, and tobacco.

The young man walked slowly rearward—then, suddenly stopped. From behind a door came the sound of voices.

Burly hugged close to the door frame and strained every nerve in his attempt to gain some tangible idea of the conversation. He distinguished the peremptory tones of Grady and Skanks's asthmatic whine; then the thready notes of Reggie Van Ambrose filtered out to him. There was a fourth and unfamiliar voice, too, doubtless that of Joe Kenney.

"Nice rats' nest," thought Burly.

He caught only fragmentary phrases, occasional words. But as he listened it seemed as if there was some disagreement, some recrimination. The speakers became less guarded. Burly distinguished, plainer than anything else, the oaths and epithets with which the colloquy was punctuated.

A shorthand reporter, putting down the coherent sounds as he could catch them, would have made a record something like this:

"Fatheads—damn—get rid of—yourself in this—how the hell did we—inside with the dame—hell of a mess—expect me to get you out of—very risky bus—damn blundering fools—pretty coarse—back home without raising the devil—proxy half signed—I'll go in and interview—she's locked—cursed young Jones—my goat—never meant to kidnap—next room—all up the river—"

This much Burly gathered; that Grady was finding fault with the two yeggmen for bungling their job; that the gang was in a position from which only Grady's adroitness could by any possibility effect an escape; that Mrs. Colchester was held a prisoner in the next room; that Grady proposed to interview her; and that the serious problem confronting the gang was to get rid of the lady, presumably by returning her unharmed to her own home.

Over this ground the quartet wrangled again and again, and it was by their constant repetition that Burly, in a long ten minutes, could piece together any logical idea of the situation.

Convinced that by further eavesdropping he only increased his danger with-

out adding to his information, Burly moved along to the next door. No sound came from within. He knocked gently, once, twice, a third time. It seemed as if he heard the swish of feminine apparel. Bending over, he placed his mouth close to the keyhole and said, distinctly but very softly:

"Mrs. Colchester!"

Then he waited a few seconds, after which interval he repeated the call.

"Mrs. Colchester!"

Then he listened, and heard, through the keyhole:

"Who is it?"

"It's Burly Jones."

"Thank God. Can you get me out?"

"Listen, Mrs. Colchester. If you will be patient I think you will soon be taken home. Don't worry; they don't intend to harm you. I haven't any time to spare. They may catch me here. They're wrangling in there—can't you hear them?"

"No; there is a little passageway with two doors between these rooms."

"Listen, Mrs. Colchester. I am going to ask you to do a heroic thing. You are perfectly safe. But your release may be a matter of hours. I'm going to throw my fountain-pen through the transom, if I can open it; then I'll push a proxy blank under the door. Will you sign it, in father's favor?"

"Yes, Burly, I will. I've got to trust some one. This is a terrible position."

"Quick, then."

Burly put a foot on the knob, drew himself up and gave the sash of the transom a vigorous push. It yielded a crack, and he dropped the pen into the room. Presently the white slip came sliding under the door, bearing the signature of Helena Urquhart Colchester.

"Good," shrilled Burly, through the keyhole. "Now I'm going; but be sure you will come to no harm."

He hardly waited for Mrs. Colchester's quavering farewell, but was off down the corridor, risking not another minute in that perilous vicinity.

The room in which Joe Kenney and Teddo the Tailor had locked Mrs. Bryant Colchester was small, and dingy, and ill-ventilated. Mrs. Colchester, high bred, fastidious, scrupulous, suffered a thousand nightmares.

Burly's keyhole message, charged with hope for the future, could hardly mitigate the odious discomfort of the present. The imprisoned lady sat on a wooden chair and waited an agony of years. She was scarcely reassured by the young man's promise of speedy deliverance, and almost wished she had asked him to call the police. Still, if she could escape the publicity which must inevitably follow any participation by the police, she would gladly endure such discomfort as might be necessary.

A key rattled in the lock and Grady suddenly appeared from the next room. He was haggard, disheveled and—yes, he looked as if he had been fighting.

"Ah, Mrs. Colchester, thank God, thank God you are safe!" he cried, with so convincing a note of solicitude in his voice that Mrs. Colchester's belief in his good will remained unshaken. "What a terrible experience! I've been through the most horrible things to get to you. Grace called me and asked me to find you—I couldn't imagine you were in such danger. I'm nearly torn in pieces; I suppose I've been nearer death to-night than I ever was before or ever shall be again. I had to do it without any help from the police—I knew you'd wish that, if possible."

Mrs. Colchester began to cry, with relief, with gratitude, with self-pity.

"Oh, Mr. Grady," she sobbed, "how can I ever thank you?"

"You don't need to thank me, dear Mrs. Colchester. One doesn't wish to be thanked for such a thing. Now we must leave here as soon as we can. My private detective is down-stairs, keeping watch, and we can get out all right."

"I'm certainly ready," breathed Mrs. Colchester. She felt quite ill from fatigue, anxiety, and, most of all, reaction.

Grady gallantly offered his arm, and together they passed out of that ill-omened place. At the street door a small, shabby, and leather-faced citizen touched his cap politely to Grady.

"You've done splendid work to-night, Gibson," said Grady, rather pompously. "I suppose you're going to stay around here a while to see if you get any clue to those fellows."

"I guess I'd better," agreed the leather-faced man. Mrs. Colchester observed that he had only one eye.

Grady assisted his rescued companion into the taxicab, gave the driver the Colchester street and number, and Chauffeur Burleson Jones speedily got under way.

"That," said Grady, referring to the leather-faced man, "is one of the cleverest private detectives in New York, Mrs. Colchester. But for his assistance I doubt if I could have located you."

But just as the cab pulled away from the curb, Private Detective "Gibson," catching sight of the chauffeur's face in a slant of light from a street lamp, started violently, peered after the now rapidly moving vehicle, and exclaimed:

"Well, I'll be damned!"

Then he disappeared through the ladies' entrance of Billy Cratty's.

CHAPTER XI.

THE ROUND-UP.

"MOTHER, mother dear!" cried Grace Colchester, clasping the rescued lady to her bosom, "where have you been?"

"My child," cried Mrs. Colchester, "I wish I never need tell you; it's been dreadful, dreadful. I'm lucky to be alive, my dear, and I feel as if I owe my life to Mr. Grady. Oh, Grace dear, you'll never thank him enough."

"Yes," said Grace, in an oddly cool little voice, "I asked Mr. Grady for help. I thought he'd know exactly where to find you."

Grady, startled at this curious speech, looked at Grace. The girl returned his stare with a smile, somewhat enigmatic.

"I'm sure Mr. Grady was glad to—do what he could," she said. "He's not the—er—sort one can thank for—doing the chivalrous thing."

Grady was puzzled. He decided to take this last remark as a compliment.

"Thank you, Miss Grace," he said humbly. "I appreciate that."

"Come into the office, Mr. Grady," invited Mrs. Colchester. "Grace, dear, I think you'd better call some one and have a cup of coffee and some sandwiches made. Oh, Mr. Grady, what an extraordinary night! It must be nearly four o'clock."

"Oh, that's not so late," cried Grady with affected lightness. "Think of it, lots of people are dancing at the cabarets now. I suppose this is really the shank of the evening."

They passed on into the office, Grace lingering in the hall. When they were out of sight, Grace opened the front door and admitted Chauffeur Jones.

"Great work, dear!!" whispered Grace.

"Oh, I don't know," doubted Burly. "Grady would have brought her home anyhow. They had her in a place way down on Eighth Street, and were afraid to keep her there. She still thinks Grady's her best friend; hasn't the least suspicion of his connection with those burglars. Now, Gracie, let me at a telephone, quick—one where I can put in a few calls without being overheard."

In the office, Mrs. Bryant Colchester sat, half-exhausted, in a big leather chair, while Harrison Grady, near by, talked soothingly for the benefit of her overwrought nerves.

"A very narrow escape, very narrow," he was saying. "I call that the boldest attempt at abduction I've ever heard of."

"Yes," said Mrs. Colchester wearily.

"There are several odd features about it," went on Grady. He laid before his

hostess a somewhat crumpled bit of paper. It was the proxy with the incomplete signature.

"Your daughter gave me this," he said. "Would you mind telling me where you really were when you started to sign this document? Miss Grace believes you signed it after your return from Mr. Pawson's, and that you were interrupted by the housebreakers."

Mrs. Colchester studied the paper in a dazed way. She turned it over and over, as one examines something that is quite unfamiliar.

"Perhaps," said Grady, smiling, "as it is so nearly completed, and as you evidently intended to carry out your agreement with Mr. Pawson when you filled out and attached the greater part of your name to this form, you might as well finish the signature; and I'll witness it. Then I'll take the matter of the agreement up with Mr. Pawson again, at once, before morning—"

Mrs. Colchester was staring at the speaker with a kind of blank incomprehension.

"I'm sure you'll be glad to trust me," went on Grady, "after all that has happened."

"I—don't understand—you," said Mrs. Colchester. In her eyes suddenly gleamed that old, hard light which denoted her sense of commercial verities. More than that, it denoted suspicion, even rising anger. "I think you—er—don't know what you're asking, Mr. Grady. I never signed this, even partially. And I wasn't abducted, either. I happened to be in Mr. Pawson's limousine when those two thieves appropriated it. I wonder if you—you really did go through so much to rescue me? I should have thought the thieves would have found me something of a white elephant—something they would be glad to get rid of."

Mrs. Colchester's tones were as icy as the Arctic wind.

"Oh, Mrs. Colchester, how can you say that?" cried Grady, his voice full of the sense of injury.

"That writing," went on the lady, "is not mine. It is my daughter's."

At this moment Grace entered.

"Oh, that?" she asked lightly. "Of course."

She looked across the room at Grady, and her gaze was full of malice and not entirely without a trace of triumphant amusement.

"Good God!" cried Grady, springing up. "You've—you've been—"

"Fooling you, Mr. Grady, fooling you. Haven't we, Burly?"

She raised her voice with the last query, and Chauffeur Jones stepped into the room.

"Hello, Grady," he said coolly. "Jig's up, old man."

With a snarl, Grady sprang for the door.

In an instant Burly Jones was upon him.

"No, you don't," cried Burly. "You stay right here in our—ugh—our midst. Stop that, you devil, or I'll—here, no gouging. Look out, man, your arm 'll break—"

Mrs. Colchester screamed and fell back. Grace ran forward and would have lent her lover the best aid at her command.

"No, no, Grace," panted Burly. "I can—can handle him all—all right. Look out; better get your mother—no, you don't, my boy. I'm onto that little trick. Well, if you really must have it—ugh!"

Mrs. Colchester screamed again, wildly, and Grace shuddered, huddling back against the door frame, but unwilling to leave the room. She watched the struggle with a dreadful fascination.

"Want another, Grady? I've got a—better one than that—old Fitz—Fitzsimmons taught me one—I—I—hate to hit in a clinch, but—there, down—we—go. Got enough? I bet!"

He had brought his man to the floor with a crash, his face pressed into the rug; then, with a cruelly twisting grip, brought the vanquished man's hands behind him and pinioned them securely,

meanwhile sitting astride the prostrate body.

"Good God, Jones, don't!" cried Grady. "I can't stand that; you're killing me!"

"Got a gun?"

"No; I swear I'm not armed."

"And you won't fight any more, or try to escape?"

"I promise—I promise. For God's sake, Jones, please—"

"All right, then, get up," remarked his conqueror.

Grady, released, scrambled to his feet and stood back against the wall, shorn of every manly grace and attribute. He was pitiable, abject, emptied of all his airs and bombast like a collapsed lay figure.

"What's this?" asked Grace, stooping. She picked up a little sheaf of papers, which she placed in Burly's hand.

"Yours?" asked Burly of Grady.

Grady nodded.

"I'll run through 'em."

"Do you call that a gentlemanly thing to do?" demanded Grady with a show of spirit.

"No," said Burly; "it wouldn't be if I were dealing with any part of a gentleman. Hello, what's this?"

The papers were mostly letters, to which Burly paid little attention. But one was a slip, folded once, bearing an agreement by Morris Pawson and others to reimburse Mr. Harrison Grady to the extent of one hundred thousand dollars—

"Well, well!" cried Burly jubilantly. "This explains it all. Here, Grady, you can have your stuff, all but this. Now, folks, let's go take a little taxi-ride."

"Oh, no," objected Mrs. Colchester.

"Where to?" asked Grace.

"Spoken like a true sport," observed Burly. "To me pay-rental abode, good people. How'd you like that, Grady?"

Grady only scowled.

"I want you to meet my father," went on Burleson Jones. "He's a fine fellow; he'll be delighted to know you, Grady. There's so much you can tell him."

"I won't tell him a thing," said Grady sullenly.

"Tut, tut, and two pshaws! Don't put on airs. Mrs. Colchester, you will please lead the way, with Grace. I'll just come along with our friend here. He needs company."

The two ladies, Mrs. Colchester under protest, entered the taxi. Grady obediently mounted the seat beside Burly.

"Now, Grady, no fooling," warned Burly. "You can't get away. Try to make a bolt and I'll catch you sure. I did the hundred in ten and two-fifths in college, and moreover when I do catch you I'll injure you for life."

There was a grimness in the young man's tone which convinced Grady of the hopelessness of escape. He sat in despondent silence until the Jones residence was reached.

Burly let the party in with his night-key, turned on numerous lights, and began ringing bells. The privileged Whimson appeared with surprising promptness, though with a puzzled vagueness in his face indicating a half-awakened state.

"Whimson," directed Burly, "call father, please." He led the way to the vast drawing-room on the second floor.

"Ladies and—Mr. Grady, be seated. Mr. J. Square-Top Jones, my honored parent, will shortly be amid our 'mongst. I will promise you some good old-fashioned meller-drama, served in the jacket. Perhaps I should offer you some refreshment."

Mrs. Colchester and her daughter declined; but in Grady's eye Burly detected a pathetic appeal.

"Whimson," said the young man, "some Scotch—or shall it be something else? Oh, brandy? A little soda, too? Very well. Whimson, for Mr. Grady a brandy and soda, and for me one tall glass of water."

He spoke with exaggerated politeness. Grace giggled nervously; Mrs. Colchester, haggard from fatigue, sighed and closed her tired, smarting eyes. Such a night!

"Well, well," cried Jonas, entering the

room five minutes later; "quite a little party, quite a nice little party. Mrs. Colchester, how are you? I'm glad to see you. And Grace—goodness me, you've taken quite a shine to our humble abode."

"Mr. Grady, my father," put in Burly. "Father, shake hands with a rising financier; that is, if you're not particular."

"Burly!" cried Grace. "How ungenerous!"

"I'm sorry," said Burly. "Beg pardon, Grady. Very rude of me, eh?"

Grady arose and bowed stiffly to Jonas Jones, but did not extend his hand. The older man had made a step forward, but checked himself. An embarrassing silence followed, till Jonas said:

"I'll shake hands with you, Grady. Why not? An honest handshake never hurt any one, eh?"

"Now," said Burly, "how much do you wish to tell my father, Grady, and how much do you want me to tell him?"

"I seem to be in your hands," said Grady, with a wry smile. "You can't expect me to commit myself. I suppose I'll have to take my medicine."

"All right," agreed Burly cheerfully. "Let's begin at the ending. Exhibit A."

He laid before his father Mrs. Colchester's proxy, made out in Jonas Jones's favor.

"Well, well, Mrs. Colchester," cried Jonas. "That's mighty fine, mighty fine. I'm relieved. Miss Grace, I suppose I can thank you for that?"

"Thank Burly," said Grace, dimpling.

"Thank Mrs. Colchester," advised Burly. "She's been through one strenuous night; Grace and I've been—er—merely having fun, haven't we, Grace? Now, Exhibit B."

He gave his father the half-forged proxy, product of his own and Grace's combined ingenuity.

"You might have that framed," Burly observed dryly. "It's the only one in captivity. It looks like a narrow escape—but it isn't. Still, it has tender associations."

Jonas examined the proxy with its in-

complete signature, his face wrinkling in a perplexed frown.

"You young folks move too fast for me," he said.

"We step lively," agreed his son. "Now, if you please, father, let me bring to your distinguished attention Exhibit C, wherein lies the means whereby we decipher—"

"Great Scott!" cried Jonas, scrutinizing the memorandum given Grady by Pawson, Crather, and associates. "Mr. Grady, I understand; you tried to forge Mrs. Col—"

"No, he didn't," snapped Burly. "Grace produced that little triumph of penmanship. Mr. Grady is the blameless youth, squire of ladies in distress, and hero of the gallery gods. He it was who, at risk of life and limb, rescued Mrs. Colchester from the clutches of two murderous villains—two, count 'em."

"For God's sake, don't!" cried Grady. "This is awful. Let me say a word or two, will you, Jones?"

"Go as far as you like," consented Burly graciously.

"Mr. Jones," began Grady, plucking up courage, "I have been employed as a broker by Mr. Pawson and his associates. That memorandum was given me to indicate their willingness to reward me for work in their behalf—perfectly legitimate effort, to induce Mrs. Colchester to pool her interests with theirs. At somewhere around one-thirty this morning two thieves broke into Mrs. Colchester's house and stole a quantity of valuables; also, in some way, they appropriated a limousine belonging to Mr. Pawson and carried Mrs. Colchester away in it.

"Miss Grace telephoned to my club and asked my assistance. I immediately employed a private detective and located the thieves, though I failed to recover the plunder. I think it will be restored, however. But I certainly did succeed in extricating Mrs. Colchester from a very serious if not absolutely dangerous situation.

"That forged proxy was, I presume,

intended as a sort of decoy. Miss Grace and your son admit they tried to fool me, and to an extent they did so, by concerted misstatements. I have not yet been able to understand just where to draw the line between their deceit and the real facts. But it is clear that Miss Grace made an appeal to my chivalry to which I was prompt to respond—"

"Ha-ha!" It was Burly Jones who thus crudely and rudely broke in upon Grady's glib explanation. "Don't make me laugh, Grady. It's too serious. Let's quit fooling and get down to 'real facts,' as you call them.

"Father, Pawson and his crowd employed Grady to induce Mrs. Colchester to play in their yard, by any means necessary. He tried mild measures first. Then, failing in that, thanks to Grace's cleverness, he sent a couple of hired thugs up to Mrs. Colchester's house.

"They stole a lot of stuff, but slipped up in the main object of their visit, which I believe was to drug or otherwise disable Mrs. Colchester to prevent her participation in the affairs of the Greystone System, and enable Pawson and his crowd to dominate your stockholders' meeting.

"Unfortunately, or fortunately, Mrs. Colchester actually fell into their hands. It was more than they bargained for, because you can't kidnap a woman of Mrs. Colchester's importance and get away with it.

"Now, I had the good luck to discover Grady's connection with this scheme. I'm a professional taxi-driver, and believe me, I've done a rushing business this night. Never mind details now, but Grace and I planned a little scheme to trap our friend Grady, and as a result I was able to track him, locate the burglars and the prisoner, and see just how our hero, Mr. H. Galahad Grady, pulled off his now justly celebrated rescue act. Grady, you're a slick one; but that hundred-thousand-dollar bait got your goat!"

"Look here," cried Grady, "your story sounds all right; but you can't prove a

thing. You haven't a bit of criminal evidence against me—"

"Wait a moment," said Burly, and left the room.

Grady fell to arguing in his own defense, but Jonas Jones turned a stony face and a deaf ear. Grace and her mother maintained a silence, alert on Grace's part but somewhat apathetic upon that of the wearied Mrs. Colchester.

"I was calling up my friends at headquarters," explained Burly, reappearing. "I am informed that Messrs. Joseph Kenney, the burglar taxi-driver, and Reginald Van Ambrose, alias Teddo the Tailor, alias the Fifth Avenue Atom, are now in durance vile; that the police have all the stolen valuables; and that, unfortunately, the Hon. T. Panther Skanks, attorney and counselor at law, has not yet been located.

"Presumably Kenney and his pal can be induced, by the well-known and effectual methods of police science, to tell what they know, in order to make their stay up the river as brief as possible. I understand they are eagerly awaiting their friend Grady, who is expected shortly to join them, or at least to occupy a commodious apartment within call."

Grady started to his feet and moved toward the door.

"There's a large, unsympathetic policeman just outside that portière," remarked Burly; and Grady collapsed.

"Now," went on Burly, "I hate to monopolize the conversation, but I'll just add that Morris Pawson and his friend Crather will be here soon, in the expectation of driving a sharp bargain with their opponent, affectionately known in Wall Street at Square-Top Jones."

"Burleson, my son," remarked his father, "if you could monopolize a more expensive commodity as well as you control conversation, you'd have us old Wall Streeters begging for pennies. Between you and Grace, you've pretty nearly spoiled my night's rest, too."

At this moment the ubiquitous Whimson announced the arrival of Messrs. Pawson and Crather.

"Show 'em up, Whimson," directed his employer.

The faces of the two new arrivals upon perceiving the make-up of the company assembled in their opponent's drawing-room would have made a movie director froth with jealousy. They registered in rapid succession the emotions of surprise, chagrin, and anger, in all their variations.

"What—what the dev—what does this mean, Jones?" demanded Pawson roughly.

"Lord, Pawson, I'm not the master of ceremonies. Ask the boy; he'll tell you."

"What's Grady doing here?" demanded Pawson.

"Waiting to go to jail," suddenly snapped Burly. "Want to go with him?"

"What d'you mean?"

"You employed him in criminal activities—"

"Damn lie!" roared Pawson. "Ain't it a lie, Crather?"

"Yes," confirmed Crather sadly, "it certainly is."

"We've got it in writing," observed Burly. "Incidentally, Mr. Pawson, I can tell you where you can find the limousine used to-night by your select employees to abduct Mrs. Colchester—"

"The hell—"

"I don't like your language, Mr. Pawson," warned Burly. "Now I'll turn you over to father; he's got something to say to you."

"How would you like to go to jail with Grady?" asked Jonas in the pleasant tone of solicitude he might have used in inviting them for a yachting cruise. "We've got a policeman handy, Burly says, who'd be proud to arrest a couple of distinguished financiers like you."

"Say, Jones," cried Pawson, turning an unwholesome shade of green, "you haven't got anything on us. I distinctly warned this man Grady against anything rough; my agreement with him is strictly legit—"

"See these names?" demanded Jones. "Every man who signed this memoran-

dum will be in jail to-morrow night, unless they happen to be where the police can't find 'em; and I judge that would be quite a considerable distance from New York City.

"Come; this is as good a time to start as any; I suppose you'd like to warn the other two, and go home and pack up your tooth-brushes and shaving things. Good morning, gentlemen!"

Pawson and Crather looked futilely from one face to another, and each fastened upon the unfortunate Grady a look which indicated that he alone was responsible for the entire collapse of their plans.

"Broke again," remarked Pawson hoarsely. "Broke again, ain't we, Crather?"

"Broke again, Morris," echoed the sad Mr. Crather; and together the two men made a slinking exit.

"Now, folks," went on Jonas Jones, "I'm sorry to seem inhospitable, but I'd honestly feel more comfortable if Mr. Grady—"

He stopped, and Harrison Grady arose.

"Good-by, Grady," said Jonas. "You seem to be the goat. There's a lot more of you in Wall Street. Maybe I'll give Burly a job rounding 'em up. I can't really say I'm very sorry for you, young man. You have brains, and you've mis-used 'em; good material gone to waste. Step along now; it's too bad to keep that policeman waiting."

Half an hour later Mr. Jonas Jones entertained at breakfast his son Burly, his son's *fiancée*, Miss Grace Colchester, and that young lady's weary but now philosophic mother.

"Good gracious!" suddenly exclaimed Grace. "Burly dear, did you ever pay poor Mr. Grady his thousand dollars?"

"Goodness, no! How careless of me!"

"What's that?" demanded Jonas.

"Poker," said Burly. "Guess that's what started the whole business."

"He'll need it," said Grace.

"When he gets out?" queried Burly.

"Oh, well," twinkled Grace, looking slyly across the table at her father-in-law-to-be, "we can pay it out of our profits and still have thirty thousand or so left."

"And square Eaton for the difference between my pay and the use of his taxicabs all night," suggested Burly.

"What are you young ones raving about?" asked Jonas.

Grace jumped up and ran around to the old gentleman's side.

"It was a mean trick," she cooed, "but Burly and I made a little something on that transaction in Greystone—you know; you pay us 115—but mother 'll sell to Burly and me for 113."

"You little hyena!" scolded Jonas. "You mean to say you trimmed me? Honestly, child, I half suspected you were putting something over. We'll have to take you into the railroad business."

"We?"

"Burly and I. Transportation seems

to be his long suit. It isn't such a big jump from taxi-driving to, say, train conductor, eh?"

"Well, just so I'm still to be a working man's bride," pouted Grace. "The idea is such a nice, novel one."

"You can bet the wife of any man employed by the Greystone is a working man's bride, my dear. And that goes, from the engine-wipers up."

"Father Jones," suddenly cried Grace, "my conscience bothers me. If I let you have our stock—mother's and mine—for 113, will you give us the thousand? Never mind the thirty. And will you really give Burly a good job—well, something like vice-president or general manager of the Greystone System? You know he's got the ability—"

"Whimson," said Jonas, "give me another cup of coffee. Grace dear, look at your poor mother—actually fallen asleep in her chair. Wonder what time it is? Great Scott, it's exactly six o'clock!"

(The end.)



THE GARDEN OF BOOKS

BY MARGARET G. HAYS

THERE'S no sunshine in my garden,
 Just a dim and hallowed peace;
 There are aisles and groves of history
 Where my soul finds full release;
 There are hedges thick, of science,
 Sparkling founts of poesy,
 Wondrous blooms of love and romance,
 Thickets dark, of mystery.
 Oft I linger in my garden
 With the bright minds of all ages,
 The immortals—Burns and Chaucer,
 Sophocles, and modern sages.
 Am I lonely? No, no—never!
 They wait for me—day or night—
 For my spirit knows the password
 To a garden of delight.



The Man in the Mirror

by Lillian B. Hunt

A "DIFFERENT" STORY

IN the twinkling of an eye he shot past me.

The reception-hall was shaded, but the massive gilt mirror at the far end, scintillating under twin clusters of light, caught his image and held it for an instant.

A clean-cut fellow he was, an artist in appearance, slender and agile—a young man with a face at once fascinating and repellent. The features showed the ravages of dissipation, of poverty, and unfulfilled ambition. The cheeks were hollow and of a bluish pallor; the eyes wildly startled, like those of the hunted deer.

Under the rembrandt, banded with black, hung straight, wet wisps of hair whose tawny glint harmonized well with the stains of modeling clay on hands and sculptor's apron. But what startled me most in that brief glimpse of him was a great wound in the center of his forehead, seared and livid, like the brand of a murderer.

For a quarter hour at least I had been pacing the open conservatory in the right wing of the reception-hall which, in the

form of a broad balcony, overlooks the boxwood shrubbery and terrace-gardens. The heavy fragrance of blossoms with the drowsy damp of the river air had gone to my head like a drug.

I felt unsteady, uncertain. The studio garments I wore actually burdened my brain and clogged my steps, for I seemed to be searching, searching everywhere—for what? Well, I hardly knew. For some time my memory had played the knave with me. It was simply that nature had turned *Shylock* and was exacting from the prodigal even more than her rightful pound.

There were times of late when, without warning, my head would spin and seethe, and my body quiver in a frenzy. Such attacks invariably left my nerves in shreds, and made the dread of the future unspeakably terrifying. To-night I seemed both unnerved and fearful. The perfumed air of the balcony oppressed me, the shrubbery below haunted me.

Thus, in striding up and down, I felt that something extraordinary had happened. The very atmosphere in its heavi-

ness breathed mystery. I peered over the trim lawns set with flower-beds and cone-cut bays, and back again at the dense wall of shrubbery barely distinguishable in the wan starlight.

I stared inside the reception-hall, shadowed save for the clusters of light over the mirror at the far end, and, staring, I stumbled; something crackled and shivered under my feet.

Perhaps you know the shock of stumbling when the nerves are keyed to a certain tension. Perhaps you have heard that sharp, crunching sound that tingles through your tense body like a sword-thrust, and leaves you weak and trembling!

Well, I found myself tottering in a mass of broken porcelain, and, looking down, noticed hundreds of fragments scattered about the tiled pavement. At first I was puzzled, and yet I should have known.

With no feeling other than sadness, I bent and gathered a few of the fragments in my shaking hands. They startled me with a fiendish suggestion. Even as I handled them, they flashed in my eyes wicked as witch-fires, they darted serpents' fangs at me and glowed a vivid scarlet. I flung them over the balustrade in a quick revulsion of feeling, and they fell, sparkling and clinking, on the concrete path below.

At that very instant there came to me the muffled sound of voices and the slow tramp of feet. I counted five silhouettes in the group, and the foremost carried a large-sized pocket flash-light which revolved persistently at every step.

Naturally I was curious to learn their errand, and in my eagerness groped my way over heaps of broken plants, earth, and pottery to a long gap in the floral ranks where I could lean over the balustrade with ease.

The men paused directly beneath me and, as I had surmised, pounced headlong on the brilliant bits of porcelain, jabbering and gesticulating like true natives of the jungle. Of course, I laughed aloud—it was so absurd, so contemptible,

their clawing over those atoms in their puny efforts at deduction. And as I laughed the glare of the electric lantern shot upward—full in my face.

The smile froze on my lips. I was blinded, alarmed, too; but what of that? I merely dropped to my knees and huddled there in the darkness.

This incident happened directly before I saw the strange man in the mirror—I rushed quickly back into the house just in time to see him pass. He startled me, too, because he was so close to me, not more than an arm's length away.

I sprang back from him in momentary fright—and suddenly he was gone. There wasn't the faintest trace of him anywhere; yet his image was still clear and distinct in my mind—the wild, protruding eyes, the haggard face, the scarlet mark on the forehead.

For ten minutes, perhaps, I moved about that portion of the hall where he had been, watching and listening for another sign of his presence. Then, impelled by the wariness of his footfall and the weird terror in his face, I began to explore the adjoining parlors and library.

But he had vanished.

Certainly, then, he was the criminal! Why did I think so? I didn't know. All that concerned me was that a suspicious young man lurked beneath my brother's roof.

I leaned against the newel-post and considered. It still lacked two hours of midnight, and Harmon had hosts of friends whom I had never met and who would be likely to drop in after dinner for a round of cards or billiards. Yet, I felt this visitor was no ordinary one, and decided to lose no time in rallying the servants and running him down.

I whirled around toward the nearest push-bell, but before I could place a finger upon it there came to my ears the noise of loud thumping and the prolonged buzzing of an electric bell. By intent listening I concluded that the well-spring of sound was the main front door which opened upon the verandas. Evi-

dently, then, my visitors of the terrace had decided to go further into the heart of things.

I stood quiet for a moment. I hardly knew where to go or what to do. If the refugee was to be caught in my brother's house, should not the glory of the capture be mine? I had found him first; to me belonged the praise and the reward.

However, as I shifted from one foot to the other in nervous uncertainty, I was again amazed. In the midst of the ringing and rapping the parlor portières swayed violently, and the man of the mirror stood before me. He was ghastly, and when he saw me he shivered and raised his hand to hide the scar on his forehead.

"What is it?" I shrilled at him. "What have you done?"

He said nothing; his dry lips moved, but made no sound. I was quick to see the mockery of his attitude, and I reached for him in a fury. But hardly had my fist swung out than he vanished as before, even as a specter might have dissolved in air.

All I remember is that I crashed into a great gilt frame, and that the mirror went swaying and straining like a thing bewitched. When I regained my footing there was nothing for me to see save the portières still swinging in his wake.

This time I did not even try to follow him. My one impulse was to compose myself and tidy my person before opening the door. I rushed into the coat-room, tore off my outer garments, and threw them on the floor. Then, quietly and with a dignity befitting my Vaughan ancestors, I opened the door, which by this time was well-nigh parted from its hinges.

"'Diana' is not here!" I explained hastily to the five men without. "She is gone! A strange man with a strange scar stole her. I tried to catch him, but failed. He is still here. Search every room! Guard every door!"

After that my memory is a blank. But it seems I must have remained in the

reception-room to await developments. On a leather couch I huddled, sick and very weak. My brain was throbbing, and my fingers plucked the cushions in a semidelirium.

Finally I heard the tramp of returning feet, and felt a strong hand on my shoulder. Raising my head, I instantly encountered the searching eyes of Detective Robesart, a man of high standing in the profession. I bowed socially, and while doing so, recognized in his four associates the servants of the house, including Dombey, the chauffeur.

"Have you found him?" I questioned feverishly.

"Not yet," answered Robesart. "At least, no one answering his description. Were you alone when you saw him?"

I nodded. Robesart fastened his magnetic gaze upon me, examining me from head to heel. He was a short man and stout, with eyes like ebony pin-points and a jaw of grim power. He was a man to be feared, and I feared him.

Quietly he swung about and stepped outside on the veranda, the four attendants and myself in close file behind him. Once there, he paused abruptly and turned to me.

"Go first, Mr. Vaughan," he said.

I asked no questions, but in a dim way understood his request. I took the flashlight from his hand and walked a straight course to the shrubbery. Then, as the servants crowded breathlessly about me, my courage failed, and I slipped behind, hoping they might be the first to make the discovery.

But they carried me with them, every step, and forced me to level my light full at the piteous object. I shrieked at the bare glimpse of it, and tried to beat my way back through the shrubbery. Failing in this, I stood quietly aside and looked at it, timidly at first, then boldly, then sorrowfully.

It was the white marble torso of Harmon's masterpiece — "Diana in Flight," valued at a hundred thousand — the "Diana" I had always worshipped and

coveted, had tried for years to imitate in my humble attic workshop. It was crushed to atoms.

Robesart knelt for examination. And as I dropped beside him and placed my hand on a portion of the fair young head, so piteously mutilated, a sudden, sharp grief convulsed me, and I moaned and wept uncontrollably.

Who—oh, who could have done this damnable act?

But Robesart cut short my ravings. With kindly patience and stern practicability, he drew my attention to the exquisite hands twined with the roots and foliage of rare plants, the crumbled hair, and the enfolding studio-curtain of sea-green velvet glittering with flecks of rain-bow porcelain.

Beyond all question, she had been thrown from a height—from the balcony—after first being stolen from the drawing-room!

Again I screamed, and lurched forward. Two of the servants lifted me to a standing position and stood on either side for support.

"How did this happen?" Robesart asked abruptly. "Tell us, Mr. Vaughan."

Thus suddenly addressed, I must have swooned. The shock had completely wrecked my nerves. My tongue was stiff; my head seemed to pound with a sledge-hammer's precision.

"I do not know," I heard myself saying in an unfamiliar voice. "This is the first I have seen her since my brother Harmon left for New York at four o'clock."

"How, then, did you know of her destruction and the place?" Robesart continued.

His eyes were gleaming at me with an intensity that roused my fury. I felt in his glance and in the tone of his blunt questioning all the shafts and spear-points of accusation.

I glanced at him with stubborn defiance, but said nothing.

"When you opened the door to us, a half-hour ago, you stated that 'Diana'

was gone,' and you brought us here where she lies," the detective explained patiently. "Therefore, the natural question to ask you is, how did you learn of all this?"

"I surmised it!" I replied, cautioned by the brutal menace in his tone. "I didn't *know* positively!"

Robesart turned to Lunston, the butler.

"When did you last see this statue in its accustomed place, Lunston?"

"Directly after tea, sir!" was the answer. "I was carrying the silver tray, sir, and I saw she had been moved to the conservatory."

"Was there any one else in the house beside the servants?"

"No one, sir!"

"Certainly no enemy, no suspicious stranger?"

Lunston denied such a possibility.

"But there *was* a strange man!" I shouted, enraged. "I know there was, for I saw him. I met him face to face—I talked with him. If these hirelings here had tended their duties and taken charge of the house instead of crying 'Thief!' and racing away four strong, they might have caught him easily."

"I assure you, Mr. Vaughan," Robesart declared earnestly, "if any human being besides yourself was inside the house when these men left it, he has not yet escaped. Every door, every window from roof to cellar was locked, and locked on the inside—excepting the front door which has been constantly guarded; every door, every window is still locked on the inside according to last investigation. The chef, Pierre, had the presence of mind to order all this done before giving the alarm—"

"Perhaps you'd care to hear their version of the affair, Mr. Vaughan," he continued. "According to their joint testimony, the four servants were gathered in the kitchen at dusk previous to the serving of dinner. While there they were terrified by a series of crashes that came from the open conservatory where they had last seen you at work on a small clay model of the 'Diana.'"

"Pierre and Lunston ventured immediately into the reception-hall. The front door stood wide open, and as they passed they heard a heavy thud outside as of a mass of stone falling from a height. Together they examined the conservatory. There was no sign of human presence, though they had every reason to believe you were hiding there."

"They lie!" I screamed, but the detective raised his hand imperatively and I held my breath.

"They found the conservatory much disturbed. Plants had been knocked down and trampled upon; jardinières and flower-pots lay crushed among heaps of black earth. There had been a struggle, a fight to a finish, but the principals were missing. 'Diana' was gone from her pedestal; even the velvet draperies of her niche were gone. They searched every room and as they went along closed every door and window.

"Lunston hastened to the telephone and Dombey to the garage that he might run out the car and pick up the first policeman he met. The car, however, had gone wrong. It could not be started till a quarter-hour later when, with the greatest possible despatch, they brought me here. And," he added, rising, "here I stay till I find my man."

"He *was* in the house!" I exclaimed in shrill treble. "I saw him, studio-togs and all!"

Robesart stared at my blanched face.

"You're not well, Mr. Vaughan!" he said with sudden concern.

Immediately the terrific pains in my forehead returned. They were carrying her in from the terrace—reverently as though she were human dead, and I shrieked like a maniac and tore the air with clawlike fingers.

However, they grappled with me and poured a stimulant down my throat, and in time the agony passed. I recognized Robesart beside me.

"The man in the mirror!" I cried.

"Have you found him?"

He shook his head thoughtfully.

"No person, strange or otherwise, has been in the house, save ourselves," he replied. "The place has been thoroughly searched. However, I wish you to describe the fellow in detail. You say he wore studio-clothes?"

"Yes, yes," I replied in eager haste, and then I frankly met his gaze and told him all I remembered. During the recital Robesart stood motionless, staring at me till I was fully conscious of the great, silent question in his piercing gaze.

"But there *was* no mysterious vandal!" he blurted out. "There was no strange man in the whole affair from start to finish! He is merely a creature of your imagination."

"What?" I roared, leaping to my feet, snarling with anger. "Do you mean—?"

"Candidly now, Mr. Vaughan, *why* did you steal and destroy the famous 'Diana'?" Robesart asked forcefully.

"Destroy the 'Diana'!" I howled. "How dare you—?"

"Your forehead—the brand on your forehead!" he cried dramatically. "Your victim was marble, but she put the murderer's mark upon you that all men may see and beware!"

I clapped my hand to my head, be wildered, fearful. A wound! A great wound where the flesh had been broken! I could actually feel it. The pain of it was almost intolerable—how odd that I had not noticed it before. Small wonder that Robesart suspected me—

Again I lost consciousness and for a long time lay like one dead. At last Robesart roused me.

"Mr. Vaughan," he said with great solemnity, "while you were sleeping I phoned your brother and physician in New York. Dr. Rossmore has known your family for generations and your own personal history from the day of your birth, and I may add that neither are surprised at to-night's affair!"

"You mean," I raved, "that they have been expecting this thing of *me*?"

"They have imagined such an outcome!"

"What would be my motive?"

"Jealousy." His lips were rigid. "You have failed in your chosen art—failed miserably. What more natural than you should be jealous of your brother Harmon's success, and resenting his most valuable work—"

"Just so!" I exclaimed, shifting easily into the thread of the argument. "Why shouldn't Harmon divide with me? He has fame and money and I'm a—a nobody!"

"That's exactly the motive!" was the quiet answer. "Are you ready to make your confession?"

"I have no confession!" I told him fiercely. "I deny the charge. I know you believe me insane—you believe my story of the real criminal in the mirror a fabrication. Of course the strange mark on my head is damning evidence, but—"

Robesart smiled whimsically. My teeth began chattering and my shoulders shook.

"Lunston," he called to one of the men, "Go to the coat-closet and bring Mr. Vaughan's wraps!"

I grasped his sleeve and he turned toward me expectantly.

"You must find that man in the mirror!" I chattered. "There *is* a man and you must be convinced of it! You must insist upon his being found!"

The detective nodded earnestly. As the servant stepped forward with my belongings, Robesart took the long, full, sculptor's apron in his hand.

"This is yours, Mr. Vaughan?"

"It is mine!" I answered, ramming my arms in the sleeves.

"And this?" He held a brown rembrandt in his hand which I recognized at once by the shabby black velvet stretched around its band.

"Yes, mine!" I exclaimed.

I put on the cap and apron, not that I felt the need of them, but because I firmly believed I could convince him of my innocence and make him my friend for life—if only we might find the man—

Suddenly a subtle change swept over his stern face and manner.

"I have news for you, Vaughan," his great voice boomed. "Our investigation is now ended! We have found the criminal—the man of the mirror! Come inside! We need you for identification!"

I tried to cry out my relief, my joy. But I couldn't.

"Come inside with us," Robesart whispered. "Show us the man in the mirror!"

I could only babble incoherent words of delight. But even before I reached the threshold the wound on my forehead seethed and agonies unspeakable crashed through my brain.

The columns of the veranda spun about me and I clung to both men for support. But through it all I was conscious only that my innocence and veracity were proved at last beyond all question, and that I was about to see my brother's enemy again face to face.

"Your story is a plausible one, after all!" Robesart was saying in a cool, monotonous tone as we stumbled into the vestibule.

The electrolier had been turned out, the reception-hall was shaded save for the twin clusters of light twinkling over the great gilt mirror at the far end. As Robesart walked beside me, his face showed a perceptible triumph, his eyes glittered suspiciously.

We traversed the hallway in silence, and then I paused directly in front of the mirror, and my heart ceased its beat.

I simply stared straight ahead, and there he stood—the vandal—the same haunted face, the same bulging eyes, heavy cap, black band, tawny hair, and apron with its stains of modeling clay, the brand in the center of the forehead.

"Yes, yes, it's he!" I screamed. "It's he! It's he!"

The torments of the inferno fairly ridled me. I threw out my arms and sprang forward to throttle him. Before the men could interfere, I had crashed into the mirror, reeled, and fallen with the unwieldy mass of it upon me.

And then—at last—I knew—it was I—I— But I can say no more.

The Courtship Superlative

by C. MacLean Savage

Author of "The Scarlet Samurai," "The Quest of the Wolf," "The Mastodon-Milk Man," etc.

A TALE OF OUR GRANDCHILDREN-TO-BE

CHAPTER I.

IN THE CITY.

IT was at the corner of Forty-Second Street and Broadway, Fifth Stage, or, to be exact, between Fourth and Fifth, for they met on the crowded escalator that led from Base Street, used exclusively for south-bound motor trucks, and the one above, for similar vehicles going north.

Duane Warren was jostled by Christopher Perry, who was just ahead, for the latter had missed his step, being a bit near-sighted, on the revolving rubber and slipped back in consequence. Warren was going to make a remark about "chalking up an error," when the little man in front turned around with a polite "Beg pard'n." At that each recognized the other as a former acquaintance at college.

Two more opposite types would be hard to find among that mass of men and women that came upward toward the sunlight on the roaring escalator.

Warren noticed that Perry still affected the clothes and a hat of the vintage of 1950. Then, too, the stiff linen collar the little man always wore gave the taller man the impression of a still picture of his grandfather, taken in the bygone days when those abominations were used for

other than identification purposes, and New York and Philadelphia were yet separate cities.

Yet, to tell the truth, Christopher Perry gave but the impression of oldishness—he was just turned twenty-eight. It was either the horn-rimmed goggles, the old-fashioned sack suit of black, the partly bald head, or perhaps a combination of all three, that conveyed it. Looking closely, his blue eyes were bright behind the glasses, the bulging forehead unwrinkled, and the full-lipped mouth, set in a pale face, firm and determined.

In direct contrast Duane Warren was tall, handsome, and tanned (a rare sight), stamping him as an outdoor man and an athlete. His one-piece suit of purple pongee set off the lines of his splendid figure, while a violet-hued cap of like material was set back on his head which, in spite of his twenty-nine years, was still covered with a mass of curly, blond hair.

Third Stage was reached, where south-bound pleasure autos went by in a steady stream, coming in and out of sunlight and shadow, bearing gaily-dressed men and women, pennons flying, brass, nickel, and steel alternately glistening and dull. For the sunlight came in great squares rounded at the corners, banded in shadow of the bridges above.

Again under the shadow of one of these cross-streets the two men rounded the mighty steel pillars and made for yet another escalator.

"Going Top?" queried Warren pleasantly as they stepped aboard the moving incline.

"Yes indeed, and further," answered Perry, making conversation, for he was deep in thought.

"Plane ride, eh?"

"Oh, no, fifty-story monorail, west-bound."

"Going to Philly?"

"That way a bit."

"Bound thereabouts myself—mind company?"

"Not yours."

Forty-Second Street and Broadway still, but Second Stage, where the north-bound autos and cycles flew by, the light brighter, for it was high noon. Not long would the sun shine so brilliantly in this abyss, for the seventy-story buildings, on either side of the street, with the quadruple line of swiftly-flying monorails, one above the other, cut off enough clear daylight as it was. Soon the cars, with their cigar-shaped bodies of aluminum, would be the only thing to show, by their glitter, that the orb of day was unchanged.

At length, Top Street was reached, where pedestrians alone were allowed.

East and west, north and south, it was the same. From the Battery to the Bronx, walls with their urns and the four streets below, crossed by the bridges that on the streets ran north and south, and east and west on the avenues, every fifty feet.

Top Street, of course, was crowded. Chorus girls flaunted by in their exaggerated costumes, "Ancient Greek" here (sandals, flowing robes, and gilt-ribbon-banded hair); "Assyrian" there (modified and modernized scarlets, cerises, oranges, pinks, and mauves), and everywhere, the "Theme gowns," modeled in color, form, and general effect after the peacock, the dove, the parrot, the robin, and so on. It was a variegated mass of flashing color, setting off the pert beauty

of the wearers, or heightening a fashionable expression of affected innocence.

And the men!

One-piece suits on those of good physique, tight, like Warren's, to the figure, of silk, linen, madras and piqué, in bottle green, plum color, steel gray, navy and Prussian blue, russet, and golden brown.

Some of the older men still clung to old-fashioned sack. Now and then a dandy aped the Greek of the women, ancient Roman, Empire, and what-not. Lawyers bustled about in cap and gown, their names and addresses embroidered in red letters on their backs—their own walking advertisements. Bewigged actors, in plaids and checks, stood about, chatting together, or ogling the women as they passed. Burly policemen twirled their electrically charged, paralyzing sticks, the terror of violent drunkards and unyielding prisoners.

Against the buildings the horns of the newspaper machines sent out their nasal, mechanical cries:

"Put a cent in the slot and get the l-a-a-test! Full game special! Morning game special! Chelseas win! Newarks lose! Broad Streets beat Bronxies! Extra! Full morning game! Box score! Put a penny in the slot and get the l-a-a-test!"

From the four streets below came the throbbing, buzzing, honking din of the motors, mingling with the raucous call of the phonographs. Far above sounded the whistle, click, and whir of the monorails that shot along on their cables, stretched on networks of steel from towering building to towering building. A city of height, massiveness, color, magnificence, and clamor. A city of teeming, ever-hurrying life. A city of fifty million souls!

"Ought to interest you," said Perry, jerking his thumb in the direction of the baseball-spitting machine, "or aren't you playing any more?"

"Betcha life," answered Warren; "pitchin' for Harlem now. Worked day

before yesterday, so the old man let me have the day off. May work to-night against Edgewater, though. I'm going in here."

"Are they really playing baseball at night now?" asked Chris dreamily. "I heard—"

"Where have you been, bo?" asked the ball-player pityingly. "Been playing ball every night for two seasons. Three games a day now, right here in the City League; ten, three-thirty, and eight. Come up some night—great sight with all those lights. I said I was going in here."

In the long, marble-flagged, marble-ceilinged arcade that stretched elevators on one side, stores with show-windows on the other, from street to street in an electric-lighted and busy vista, the two had stopped before a show-window that bore the legend:

EFFANVEE COMPANY FILMERS

All Sizes from 100 Feet Up.

Myriacolors Especially.

"That's funny," replied Perry sheepishly. "I was going to ask if you'd mind waiting for me. I'm bound for the same place."

"Let's make it together, then," said Warren.

They did. Inside, large, well-lighted room, counters, uniformed girls, clicking typewriters that worked, not by hand, but by dictation through a tube, the hanging blue globes that made the light, and much bustle.

"My film, please," said Perry to the girl who waited on him.

"Name?" snapped her blondeship, and hearing it, turned to Warren with a red-lipped pout and coo:

"And your name, please?"

He told her, off-handedly.

"Mr. Duane Warren of the Harlems?" She tittered and blushed. "I'll get *yours* quick!"

Such was fame! Hero-worship still thrived. Beauty and vigor had not fallen from their pedestals. No, indeed, the lapse of years, the change of conditions, had not changed femininity, suffragettes and eugenics notwithstanding.

The girl returned soon with two black-paper-wrapped packages, slammed one at Perry, and with another giggle and blush, handed the other to Warren.

The ball-player was the first to draw out his computing-name pencil, and wrote name and amount. There could be no mistake in either, for that pencil, furnished by the Signature Banks, wrote nothing but that one name in that one way. It was also balanced by the bank for the amount the writer was responsible for. He couldn't make the figures "\$500.00" with but a hundred in the bank. He could write no more when the amount was exhausted.

The extension of credit had become so common and universal that the carrying of money was confined only to the poor or the vulgar. This same credit system was also responsible for the pencil, one of the most delicately wonderful inventions of the age.

Perry had followed suit shyly, for his pencil had but little left to write, and the two went out and along the arcade, where the horns above the elevators gave the destinations of the ascending and descending cages.

"Going down! Going down! Going down!" rumbled one horn in a cracked bass. "Bronx, Yonkers, Os'ning Subway!" "Up—up—up!" piped another. "Top Monorail Express! City Hall, Philly! Change for Balto, Wash, Pitts, Chi, Cin, and points S. and W.! Last car up!"

"Palisades Ball Park!" squeaked the next. "Hud Riv local, Hack, Leonia, Pater, Edgewater game—going up!"

"Not this one for me now," said Warren, passing this last. "Oh, I hear it," and he walked briskly to an elevator, whose horn, in a rising-falling, rising-falling, sing-song voice called out:

"Jersey, Newark Marsh stops, Newark, West Newark, and Camden. Going up!"

Warren turned as he stepped into the cube of steel network that formed the car; but Perry was still beside him. The same way yet, evidently. Perry looked from the circular bundle he carried to the similar one in the hand of his acquaintance. Could it be possible that they were going to the exact, same place—even on the same errand? Was there to be (he hoped not) a triple proposition?

As the uniformed starter pressed the button that closed the gates and turned the crank that shot the elevator and its load of humans upward, Duane Warren was asking himself the same question, only he called it by its slang name: "a where-we-get-off."

CHAPTER II.

SUITORS THREE.

ON the fiftieth floor, where the two alighted, the scene was similar to the arcade below, except that the ceiling was low, and instead of stores opposite the elevators, there were numerous offices. Once more the phonographs; this time one above each door, shrieked, squeaked, babbled, and drawled as the two men walked along the hall toward the platform, a tiresome din, to wit:

"Brazil-Argentine bonds! Only safe investment! Six per cent bonds! Buy them! buy them! buy them!" only to be lost in the cooings of a mellow, female voice: "Mme. Bordeaux Beauty Parlors! Superfluous hair positively removed! Freckles eradicated, cloudy complexions cleared! Money refunded if—"

That was next drowned by a male voice with a chuckle in it and a quaint Scotch burr that chortled the virtues of—

"Bradbury's to-measure, one-piece suits are the best, boys—the verra, verra best! Buy Bradbury's, boys, buy Bradbury's, boys, buy Bradbury's, boys! Ye-e-ah-ha! ha! ha! Ha! Buy Bradbury's and be happy!"

It was a "Mac Angus Record," they recognized, a Scot whose chuckle was his fortune. He was a man earning five dollars for every word he uttered, whose office was crowded with applicants who wanted him to "talk" their ads. No one with a good, an odd, or a quaint voice need starve nowadays, for "ad talking" had become a lucrative business. The office without its phonograph above the door did little or nothing. Why bother to read signs when you couldn't help but listen?

The railed, concave platform was but slightly crowded, as the aluminum car, with a whirr, a rattle, and a click, slid on its cable and came to a stop. Three doors opened, one in the center and one toward either end.

"Have your plugs ready!" bawled a phonograph. Our two had; or Warren fetched up two, to be correct, as they entered by way of the clinking turnstiles (regulated and synchronized one with the other so that no more than the car's quota of one hundred and fifty people, or twenty-three thousand pounds, could get aboard); the plugs bought from bank or company being deposited in a slot there for the purpose.

Inside the car was but half full, mostly with "standees" who clung to swinging, porcelain handles on a bar. This made Perry swear inwardly as he groped for plugs. Warren had paid his fare—it was up to him to buy seats.

He selected the two slots, there in the concave wall by the concave windows. He put in the coins, and kerplunk! kerplunk! down from the sides, one behind the other, flopped two curve-bottomed seats hung on a folding, telescopic support of steel. Both sat down—to stay seated until they got out. There was no giving your seat to a lady nowadays, for once you left it, back it would go with a zip, and you must stand up—or be prolific with your plugs.

The car slid along on its rail or cable (for it was sometimes one, sometimes the other, and sometimes both, the two wheels

overhead, one behind the other, fitting automatically on either) with a very slight swaying motion.

Looking down, one saw the sheer drop of the sides of the building in an awful, sickening abyss. At the bottom, there were still the bridges and the four streets below, with their cross streets.

Like water-beetles appeared the faintly seen motor trucks at the bottom of the man-made gulch; like ants the moving mass of humans on the top street, the hum of it all mingling with the buzzing of the motor and the whirring wheels overhead.

Eighth, Ninth, and Tenth Avenue stations were passed, and then, under a gigantic—nay, colossal framework of steel in the shape of an inverted "U," the car, swinging a bit more now, flashed across the Hudson.

Smokeless, the boats (like toy boats they looked from the height) plied swiftly in and out of mighty steel quays, and, "bone in their teeth" and white-waked, went swiftly hither and thither on the water, now golden-glinting in the midday sun.

As far above as the ships were far below, now black against the sun, now reflecting yellow, silken, shimmering, and dazzling white, dirigible balloon, monoplane, biplane, and patrol kite, rose and fell, drifted, sailed and soared.

There was a lurch of the car as the power was shut off and it took the downward cable at breakneck speed. Solid rock loomed ahead—it looked as if the terrific slide would end in the smashing of the car like an eggshell. The rock towered—engulfing blackness—a click, and the car, lighted by invisible electric globes, rumbled and roared through the tunneled Palisades.

A moment or two and they were in sunlight again; but in a somewhat changed scene. The car was no longer above the buildings. On a succession of "U"-shaped arrangements it lay below, now, riding on the single rail.

At Jersey City Station the superim-

posed five streets had disappeared. Instead, one mighty avenue, divided into six roadways, two each for motorcyclists, pedestrians, and motorists, bound east and west, a line of beautiful poplars dividing each, stretched in a seemingly never-ending vista between magnificent, temple-like buildings, the homes of the wealthy.

Once Warren pointed out a distant affair that resembled a huge pudding-mold of glass which glistened in the sunlight. This, he explained, was the summer and winter, day and night home of the Jersey City baseball team, an enormous stadium, glass-enclosed, capable of seating forty thousand people.

"I was knocked out of the box there last Friday," he said as they whirled on their way. At the call, "Newark Marsh first stop," they alighted and walked across a spacious viaduct.

The name of "Marsh" was still used only to distinguish it from Newark proper, where mostly manufacturing was done and the few thousand Italians lived after the exclusion act. Very few people remained who remembered when it *was* a mighty waste of swamp and morass, criss-crossed with obsolete road-beds, where old-fashioned steam locomotives puffed and coughed nasty, black smoke.

It was now the site of four great general hotels—the Egyptian, the Babylonian, the Persian, and the Greek, named not for these extinct peoples (the last being lost in the Balkan Empire amalgamation), but for their architecture.

General Hotel Greek, white marble, columned, corniced, statue and fountain surrounded, stood to the left. General Hotel Egyptian, dull gray granite and gold, massive-stoned, pyramid-crowned, with two colossal sphinxes flanking the main entrance, loomed at the right.

"Going to the 'Gyp'?" queried Warren queerly, hoping so and yet not. Perry grinned, nervously fingered his bundle, and nodded.

"Come on, then," said the ball-player, walking faster. "Maybe we're even going to the same 'partment."

Both had thought so all along.

From beneath the steel causeway came an incessant soprano babble. Incessant and voluminous; and no wonder, for ten thousand children ran wild in the big hotel's play place, under the eyes of registered infant nurse, tutor athletic-hygienic, and assistant mother.

In the Hall Rameses, Perry and Warren found their fears not unfounded. Of the burly and bedizened negro, with his yellow and black striped head-dress and costume in keeping with the imitation barbarism of the decorations of gilded scarab, enameled Ibis, and mummy-pillars of brightly hued plaster, both had asked (or Warren had, to be seconded by Perry) for Miss Cherry Desbrosses.

The negro pressed one of the innumerable buttons on the round desk of imitation stone, in the middle of which he sat, his legs hidden one wondered where, and immediately there was a scratching on a tiny glass square that lit up in front of him.

"Names, gentlemen?" asked his gorgeously arrayed dorkyship.

He was told.

He next brought forth an arrangement that looked like a tiny kettle-drum with a light behind it. Warren looked into it and then turned his profile; Perry did likewise. More scratching on the glass, and then politely from the Nubian:

"Miss Desbrosses expects you. Four elevators to your right, fourteenth floor." Another button pressed, and a green light showed above a panel along the hall. "That's your car, gentlemen."

Reaching a panel, a Nile scene in imitation mosaic, it slid back and disclosed the car. Inside, Warren pressed the button marked fourteen, the panel automatically shut, and the car went noiselessly and swiftly upward. No chance of suing for accident or injury when one ran the car oneself.

At the fourteenth floor the door opened again on a long corridor, richly carpeted. Here another negro awaited them. He held in his hand two small squares of

black tin. These were instantaneous tin-types, which he scrutinized carefully, looking from them to the two men. Satisfied, he bowed, pressed a button close at hand, and another green light showed some twenty feet down the hall. Toward this the two men walked.

The door was opened by Miss Desbrosses herself.

"Fancy you two coming together!" she said pleasantly. "I was so surprised when both your pictures were shot up in the same tube. Come in, Mr. Warren—come in, Mr.—or is it Professor Perry?"

"Not quite," stammered Chris, as he followed his hostess and the broad back of Warren along the short hall.

The room they entered was square and spacious. Windowless, too, it was, yet there was a round opening in the center of the ceiling where an exhaust-fan whirled. At the four corners hung globes of liquid, bluish light.

The walls were paneled with old rose wall-cloth to match the girl's Greek robes of the same color. Perry remembered his last visit. Then she had worn a clinging peacock theme against a background of greenish-blue paneling. Warren was just now recalling her goldfish theme, sea-green paneled. The number of colors on your revolving, changeable panels depended on your rent. A turned crank did the trick. New panels of eight colors could be hired at the office.

Between the panels, on the white enameled walls of aluminum, hung pictures and a something embossed on ivory in an ebony frame. Three white doors, a settee, several chairs, a piano, and some coconut mats on the hardwood floor (the rage since the South Sea Islands had become society's winter resort) completed the furnishings.

On the settee was another man. He rose as the hostess and the two others entered. He was tall and well formed. He was dressed in white knee breeches, stockings, and vest, short-fronted and long-tailed coat of blue, with blue and white striped, flaring lapels, somewhat

after the "Incroyables" of the Directoire. His scant hair was dark, his complexion sallow. Black eyes burned in deep hollows. A hooked nose and straight mouth gave him a sort of eaglelike expression.

"Gentlemen," said the girl, "allow me to acquaint you with Mr. Benson Leonard, chemist and inventor. Mr. Leonard; Mr. Christopher Perry, germologist, microbologist, and bacillologist. Mr. Duane Warren, Mr. Leonard, pitcher for the Harlem baseball team."

The three men bowed (hand-shaking had long since been abolished as unsanitary). They were an odd group, the girl in her flowing, ancient Greek robes, Leonard in his eighteenth-century splendor, Perry in his twentieth-century plainness, and Warren in the comfortable, sensible, and yet not unbecoming one-piece suit of to-day.

Four decades of clothing were represented in an age of cosmopolitanism of dress. Odd as the difference seemed, it was common enough in the city.

As for the girl herself, one couldn't hit upon a better word in describing her than statuesque. Her clear complexion that needed no artifice of powder or cosmetic, bright eyes, and red lips showed plainly a clean bill of health. A perfect animal, an intelligent woman, she would prove an ideal eugenic wife. It was a wonder that there was but a triple proposition on hand—one would expect a gathering of at least six at an event as important as this.

"You're warm, Mr. Warren," she cooed. "Oh, no trouble at all!" as he protested. "This will fix the room in a minute." She crossed over to a porcelain urn on a tripod, deftly lifted the cover, letting out a noiseless, invisible stream of liquid air, slightly and delicately perfumed.

"Anything new in your line?" asked Leonard of Perry, with a lift of his left eyebrow. An expression typical of the man, it gave him a sinister look that offended many.

"Indeed yes," answered Chris bright-

ly. "Professor Zeider, my father-professor, has hit on a counter-germ for cancer. It looks to me as though that dread disease would soon become as obsolete as tuberculosis. You see, the hypothesis of the mucous—"

"Oh, I understood you hadn't obtained your degree yet!"

Thus Leonard cut in cynically on the young scientist's enthusiastic babble. Perry's eyes narrowed behind his goggles at the intentional taunt. The chemist's dark eyes flashed back a deep defiance.

CHAPTER III.

HEARTS EUGENIC.

"SHALL it be luncheon first?" came in Cherry's voice, for she had quickly seen the impending quarrel. "I'm afraid it must be, for my brother White is in the projecting room, looking at a film of the Battle of San Francisco Bay. Poor boy—history is his *bête noir*! I don't really blame him, especially as he's studying that hateful Europo-Germanic war. The table button is behind you, Mr. Warren. Would you mind pressing it four times? Thank you!"

Out it came, slowly from the wall, an oblong, legless table of aluminum, to which the three men brought up their chairs. Meanwhile, from an opening between the panels in the wall on the other side of the room, Cherry brought forth cover-dishes from the thermos compartment. Other hidden places produced knives, forks, plates, and so forth; all of the light metal. The girl chatted pleasantly with her guests as she set the table deftly. On an occasion such as this, no matter what her wealth or station might be, it was the duty of the maid sought to wait upon her suitors.

The meal was a light one, of meat patties (mostly hippopotamus since the exorbitant and almost prohibitive price of beef), flavored with lobster extract, a cunningly devised sauce of the food chemists that tasted almost exactly like that

now extinct crustacean. There was also a delicious nut paste, a salad highly spiced, and other tasty dainties.

Indeed, taste in food had become the cardinal necessity, since the race was slowly losing the sense through the use of those idiotic compressed foods once so common in the middle of the twentieth century.

Lemons, cinnamon, Cayenne pepper, cloves, bay-leaf, thyme, and even the once despised garlic were used as freely as that ridiculous concoction known as bread was eaten by our misguided ancestors. The latter half of the nineteenth century predicted that we would carry our meals in our vest pockets. We did—to our sorrow, for to be born tasteless was now as common as blindness had once been. One could take food that way—yet where, in view of the result, was the advantage?

After the meal (the soiled dishes sent clattering down in an electrically run dumb-waiter and the table slid back) the company adjourned to the projecting room. Since the motion picture had become one of the principal forms of home amusement and instruction (to the detriment of reading), no family at all well-to-do was without one.

This was a square compartment, furnished only with chairs, a liquid-air cooler, and the aluminum screen at one end, the door of admittance and the operating box at the other.

"We'll try yours first, Mr. Leonard," said Cherry, placing the chemist's film in the box. "You see, you're the oldest." A click—complete darkness—another—a whirring—and light danced on the screen; then, in brilliant blue letters:

BENSON BETHUNE LEONARD,

A space of darkness, then a sub-title:

SWIMMING THE WYCOFF RAPIDS.

The scene shown after that was a lake or river, with a background of wooded shore. Leonard, in a bathing suit, was

seen to approach the water, walk to the end of a springboard, and dive in.

As he swam with various fancy strokes that were good to look upon, the panorama moved with him, until bubbling, swirling rapids came into view. The attempt was thrilling as the man struggled with the turbulent water—now he disappeared—to come up again—to be tensed close to the camera, and yet again but a bobbing speck of black in the center of a whirlpool that lashed into a white foam.

Slowly the rapids were conquered, and he emerged, dripping and tired, on the opposite bank.

The applauding audience saw him at tennis, fencing, shooting, and then the theme changed, and he was seen in white apron and cap, surrounded by his assistants and the globes, retorts, stills, and furnaces of his laboratory.

At close range the others saw the rapid manufacture of a substance closely resembling coral. A small bit of this was broken off and put into a thick glass jar. Following this a live rabbit, kicking and squirming, was held up, then put into the jar with the substance. The receptacle, with both animal and chemical seen inside, was covered and hermetically sealed. Duly attested by prominent men, the time was shown, close-range, as eleven in the morning of the 18th of June.

Again the same scene was shown with everything as before, the time attested as the same, the date, June 21st, three days later. The jar was opened—the rabbit was still alive!

Other tests of carbo-absorbo-leonard were equally wondrous. Cherry applauded freely; the chemist raised that eyebrow and smiled grimly as the lights were turned on. His film had made good!

Next was shown the moving-pictorial prowess of Mr. Duane Jay Warren. His was done in myriacolor, the better to show off his handsome face and splendid physique in the white uniform and orange-striped socks against the bright green of the diamond.

Of course, his ability at the playing of the national game formed the burden of the film. He struck out mighty hitters, fielded bunts and got his man at first, hit safely himself, stole bases in scenes from actual games. The picture was subtly and marvelously retouched so that Warren seemed ever in the foreground, in a wonderful, halolike light.

One series of pictures brought applause from all present. It was a view of the pitcher, the mound, and the home plate, taken from above. As the ball left the player's hand, the film was run slowly, showing the actual course of the ball. It was most uncanny to watch the white sphere go straight, then, approaching the plate, "break" in and out, up and down. Mr. Warren's "control" was enviably perfect.

"I say, Mr. Warren," remarked Cherry jocularly as the room was re-lighted, "it wouldn't do for me to let any of the opposing teams see that last picture. It might go hard with you when they faced you next time on the diamond."

"Surest thing you know," answered Duane, his eyes sparkling at the interested expression on the girl's face. Leonard clutched his lower lip and frowned. There was an idea there if Warren were successful.

Darkness once more, the whirring and flickering and the screened story of Christopher Pine Perry. Very little of the little man was shown. They saw him in his tiny laboratory of concrete, with his tubes, his cultures, and his microscope. He dipped here and there, then spread some invisible substance on a glass slide. Sub-titles with long and strange Greek names (Latin had been discarded as too Italian since the exclusion act and the President Vincent outrage) told that such-and-such bacilli would be shown.

They were, most wondrously, by microscopic-motion-photography. Cancer germs raised myriad families before their eyes. Zeidergerms, the discovery of

Perry's father-professor, grew monstrously by the second. Then the Zeidergerms attacked the cancer germs and there was a battle royal. Ninety-eight hundred Ziedergerms fell in the slaughter (according to the sub-title), but friend cancer germs were utterly annihilated.

The trouble now was, Perry explained glibly, that the victorious Zeidergerms, tasting flesh, turned cannibal. "Get rid of that," said he, enthusiastically, "and Professor Zeider would rank with the immortals."

Other battles were shown, other bacillic families were raised. Germ and microbe life came and went. Altogether, Cherry voted it a tremendously interesting picture. Chris hoped so, for it had cost him a pretty penny—more than he could really afford.

What were the odds if he won the hand of Cherry Desbrosses? There would be both inspiration and help of a financial kind. Then, too, she was nearly ideal—ninety-five per cent perfect. Didn't the framed eugenic certificate, embossed on ivory in the ebony frame, prove it?

Outside once more, the three men were introduced to White Desbrosses, a handsome boy of fourteen, in sleeveless jersey, short khaki trousers hanging to above the knee, woolen socks, and leather sandals, after the manner of the time, his arms and legs browned and bare. A Boy Scout plainly; a branch of Uncle Sam's service that had done splendid work in the War of the Four Nations.

Perry walked to the certificate on the wall and squinted close to it (although he had read it dozens of times) to make sure of that ninety-five per cent. Thus it ran:

EUGENIC BOARD

Matrimonial Efficiency Branch

Under the Laws of the UNITED STATES TERRITORIES and REPUBLICS of AMERICA (Mexico, Honduras, Costa Rica, San Salvador, Guatemala, Panama, and Colombia) and

by Congressional Arrangement with the Independent Republic of CANADA.

	PER CENT PERFECT
Physical fitness	100
Mental fitness	94
Maternal possibilities	96

Mental Accomplishments

Piano	95
Cello	89

LANGUAGES.

Greek	93
French	93
English	99

Physical Accomplishments

Tennis, golf, basketball, handball, swimming, fencing, boxing, motor- ing—Average	96
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Total grand average.....95

Young Desbrosses had gone, and there was a pause. Leonard was leaning against the piano, admiring, evidently, his tiny foot and the curve of his calf. Perry, conscious that he had approached impolitely by gazing too long at the certificate, flopped awkwardly into a chair. Warren wriggled and blushed on a low, stool-like chair, his bulk looking ridiculously. He was plainly wishing the "darn thing over."

Majestically Cherry Desbrosses walked to the center of the room. If she was embarrassed, she didn't show it. Most girls were on the occasion, although some (of the ninety-six, ninety-seven, and ninety-eight per cent class) had done it so often they became used to it.

She was indeed radiant, the soft, blue light shining on her graceful, flowing robes. The background of white and old rose framed her artistically. In a soft, mellow voice she began in the usual form:

"Gentlemen, you have all done me the honor of asking me for my hand in marriage. I regret my father is not here to second me; but his Mississippi hippo ranch keeps him away—there is some trouble with floods, I believe. Nevertheless, I'll try to answer you alone.

"According to custom, I must accept one, refuse all, or set a time. I will do the latter and make a proviso, with a recalling clause in six months.

"I have read your certificates and see that you have all passed the Eugenic Board, how highly rated doesn't matter so long as you have passed, you being males. Socially, you are equal: a chemist, a microbiologist, and a ball-player.

"I find you all worthy. Your names all prove that you are natives, the sons and grandsons of native New Yorkers. Taking you separately, there is an equality and yet a difference.

"Rating you myself (and I have taken some pains in the matter, finding you all equally serious), I come to this conclusion on a one-hundred per cent basis. Mr. Leonard I would call fifty-fifty; equally divided physically and mentally. Mr. Warren I would designate as seventy-five per cent physical and twenty-five mental. On the other hand, Mr. Perry is surely twenty-five per cent physical and seventy-five per cent mental. An immediate choice would be difficult, since my affection and regard for each of you is equal.

"Listen, then, to my plan. I bind myself to all of you for one year, promising to entertain no other suitors. You may each call on a certain day, once a month, or write, in that interval, what you have done.

"Now, my dear suitors three, the one who in this year shall have done something more remarkable, more ultrascientific, or more humorous than he has ever done before, and to my best judgment the best in either of these three provisos, to him I will give my hand and my fortune, to be his wife, his helpmate, and the mother of his children."

The three suitors dolefully accepted these conditions and left the house.

How different from the moonlight-egged proposal by the man in the days of our forefathers! How different from the acceptance of the girl, carried away by a maudlin, silken speech or a sylvan

scene. How different — and how much better!

CHAPTER IV.

ENTER A PROFESSOR.

THE scene was that little laboratory of concrete that we have seen on the screen. We behold it with its rows and rows and rows of tubes on narrow shelves, labeled and cotton-corked. There is the long, narrow table also tube-filled; the microscopes, the blue, liquid light and two men, aproned, masked, gloved, and muffled in white.

One man is tall and much bent. Could we see his face we would find it white-bearded and scarred, one cut of bygone warfare having taken toll of the left eye. The other blazed fierily over a wrinkled old nose. Such was once Major but now Professor Johann Zeider. The other, shorter man, was Christopher Perry.

It was a hot July night; but neither heat or cold ever penetrated into that subterranean den, for even the Commercial Subway might occasionally be heard rumbling overhead. Poor, indeed, were the folks who dwelt or worked as deep in the earth as this.

The old man had picked up a tube of germ-culture and was holding it to the light. Suddenly the old hands trembled, the tube came crashing to the floor.

"Donnerwetter!" he rumbled behind the gauze; then, turning to Perry, he gave vent to a frightened: "Go oudt—go oudt, Christopher, it is deadly here—go quickly, I say!"

"But I can't leave you alone with them," came Chris's muffled answer, "I ought to help."

"You will help by being in the way!" said the old man in an assumed angry tone; "I should know better what to do as you, and you are too young to risk it." Then, as the young man still hesitated: "Go oudt—*schnell*—I command it you!"

There was nothing to do after that

but go. Zeider was his father-professor with authority as great as his own father. At that, he was the only father he remembered. To be commanded was to obey. Reluctantly he opened the steel door, then another of antiseptic wood, and a third of steel, into a hall and up a winding stone staircase.

Three flights up he opened another door and entered the tiny room where he slept, with its narrow, iron bed, bureau, washstand, chair, and other necessities. The exhaust fan overhead whirled but slowly.

He divested himself of his wrappings, apron, and the rest of his laboratory clothing and hung them in a closet; came out, brushed his scant hair, adjusted his tie, switched off his light, and went out again, to climb three more flights of stone stairs. As he made the ascent, there came down crescendo, the babble of voices, topped now and then by a shrill laugh or the nasal note of a music-playing phonograph, drowned, as the rumble of a passing train of the Passenger Subway was heard through the solid stone walls. Next a hall filled with to-and-fro-going humans and out the doorway into the fresh air.

The space was a gigantic courtyard, the inside dimensions of an entire city block. On all sides rose sheer the single tenement building, a square block itself. From the fourth story of the square, in a wide ring, hung the arc-lamps, twenty feet from the walls. Another ring shone at the eighth story, forty feet inside, sixty at the twelfth, eighty at the sixteenth, and so on, so that the entire space was flickeringly blue lighted from top to bottom, with almost the brightness of day.

Thus the city fathers fought the dark corners of crime and vice with brilliant light. There would be no dark deeds where there was no darkness.

The space was partly flagged and partly earth-covered. A sporadic fountain played in the center, surrounded by chattering children of every age. Three

drinking-fountains, wherein one must thrust the face, enclosed this in a triangle.

Before every one of the myriad windows of the building was a sort of cage of fine steel wire, the outcome of the old-fashioned fire-escape. The one that was not populated with men, women, and children was the exception. The courtyard, too, was crowded with couples, groups, and knots of six and seven. Some sat on the stone benches, some strolled, and still others stood, leaned, and what-not.

And the sound of it!

The guffaw, the good-natured jibe, laughter, deep, high-pitched and shrill. The voice raised in argument, sullen in protest, and harsh in anger. The squeaking of the phonographs, the whine of the accordion, the breathe-in-breathe-out of the harmonica. The babble and hysterical laughter of the children, the wail of the baby in arms; the mother's cooing lullaby. Altogether, the sounds all humanity makes on the ground, up, up, and up in one seething vortex enclosed by the walls of stone in the flickering light.

"Why so early, Chris?" called a thin, girlish voice at sight of the young scientist. She was seated on a curving stone bench, her chin resting on her hands. Her dress was a simple frock of blue calico, a poor fit on a trim, little figure. Her face was a perfect oval, the complexion pale and wan. Her eyes were uncommonly large; blue as the *Kaiserblumen* of her fatherland. Her flaxen hair, parted in the middle, hung in long plaits over her shoulders.

"Your grandpop chased me, Gretchen," he answered, sitting beside her. "Some doggone germs loose and he feared for me. Oh, no danger, little girl," he added at the frightened expression on her face, "he knows how—fumigate 'em out in no time—don't you worry!"

"Ach so!" she cried petulantly. "Why must he waste his time with horrible things in tubes and spend his pen-

sion money on all sorts of dreck? From this country and from his he gets just enough to live on. He lost my father and my two uncles in the great war. He did noble—he is rewarded. Why can't he pass his days in peace in the country instead of living deep in the earth like a mole and making nonsense in bottles?"

"Gretchen, Gretchen!" answered Chris reprovingly, "you shouldn't say such things about your grandfather! He's a great man—a great scientist. If these experiments are a success, he'll be famous all over the world."

"If, though, *mein Freund*—always 'if'! So it has been for all the five years you have been with us and I, a little girl, can remember five years before!"

Thus she countered; not petulantly, but half-sadly. She was a daughter of a land of thrift. She was practical and matter-of-fact, hiding a soul as romantic as a maid of bygone days. Even the slight admonition of the man beside her cut her to the quick.

"But think of the fame, Gretchen," said he dreamily. "With fame will come wealth and position. Is it not worth while to work for humanity even though no one appreciates it? It is bound to come—fame!"

He clasped his hands over his knees, gazing straight ahead into a rose-colored vista of renown.

"Fame for you, perhaps," she replied sadly sweet, instinctively reading his thoughts. "To you it will come—*Grossvater* says so often. Then you will leave us and go to the *schöne Dame* you will win by it. The other two you will beat I know." A world of confidence in this last; then a change and a struggle the man did not see. "Tell me about her."

He told as best he could for the hundredth time. Outside of his bacteriology this was his best subject, this description of the charms of Cherry. She turned him on it often, not, as may be guessed, because she wanted to hear *it*; but because she wanted to hear *him*. No

greater test of a woman's heart could there be than this.

"She is so wonderful as that?" she asked when he was through.

His answer—with a sigh: "Ninety-five per cent!"

Another sigh from her that had worlds of meaning in it: "And I am but seventy-eight!"

But the meaning of the sigh he read not at all. It was but brotherly affection when he patted her hand.

The next morning in the laboratory found Professor Zeider a changed man. It was true that the room was safe now (the pungent odor of the disinfectant testified to that), yet there was a peculiarity about the old man's manner—his unusual silence was foreboding.

Days came and went, and the condition did not change—indeed, it grew slowly and steadily worse. He muttered and mumbled to himself something about "got me at last" and "*schlecht*—to kill their creator!" The time came, when, from a capability of working ten and twelve hours a day, he could hardly stand the strain of two.

In time that ceased altogether, and he never left his bed. Chris and Gretchen got their heads together—there would be no chance for him in their subterranean home. He protested; but they prevailed, and he was sent away to try the ocean air and the excellent treatment of Far Rockaway Hospital.

Troublous times were at hand now. Chris sent his monthly letter addressed to Hall Rameses No. 14, Egyptian General, Newark Marsh, to a certain lady, describing prospects he did not have and pleasure he did not feel. He visited the old man daily in the gigantic hospital facing the sea, in this now a very city of hospitals that foolish men had once used for a pleasure resort.

One day the old man held long to the hand of his foster-son and pupil.

"The time is at hand, my boy," he said faintly. "I have requests to make

of you. You shall get it a phonograph and records and bring them here—I have words to say that will help you in the work to be done. You will be my successor, my boy—a worthy one. Yes, yes—I have written to the degree committee—your examination comes soon.

"Neffter mindt the poverty now—it will soon be that you will be great and claim your betrothed—although—although I had hoped for other things—that you would be my son by other ties. Neffter mindt—the draft is made out—Gretchen shall have the pension and shall give you what you need—all else I leave to you—it is written in the will—Dr. Perry soon, my boy—the phonograph—I shouldt make many records to guide you—I shouldt do it to-day."

Three days later, after almost continual dictation there in the little white room with its window facing the blue sea, the old man, no longer the professor, for at the last moment he had raised his feeble hand in the military salute, made the Great Exit.

Gretchen and Chris, their hearts heavy, stood side by side at the cremation service (burial was prohibited by law) as the old man, wrapped (a great honor) in both the red, white, and black and the Stars and Stripes, went slowly down on the elevator, to the tune of a sonorous and majestic military march.

The work went on. Chris, fired by thoughts of his degree, inspired by the picture in his mind of the beautiful woman who had partly pledged herself to him, worked zealously, early and late. Beside him, another woman thought of him as he thought of another—for Gretchen, knowing no other occupation and glad to at least be near him, was learning fast and became quite a help. The professor was there, too.

In spirit? Surely, if spirits haunt the scenes of their former lives, there, watching the young man he had adopted and the work that he loved, there would he be. He was there otherwise, for his

cracked old voice, with its quaint accent, squeaked from the horn of the phonograph the work to be done, with formula, thesis, and instruction bacteriological.

One day, as Chris sat on the bench after his meager lunch for a breathing space, wiping his goggles on his apron and deep in thought, Gretchen, busy with the phonograph, ruminated thus:

"If these things in these tubes can kill people, Chris, what is the use of making them? If they killed people what ought to be killed, it would be all right, *aber* they don't. My *Grossvater* made some and raised some and spent his money on them. Then they killed him. Maybe they kill you, Chris—maybe they kill me—we must *niemals* be so careful. Maybe we should sell them to prisons and armies what want to kill people."

He appeared not to hear her; then slowly the words sank in. His jaws dropped—the goggles slipped from his nerveless fingers and slid to the floor. He stared into space like a man seeing a spirit.

"Chris! Chris!" screamed the girl. In her fright at his face she ran to him, and before she knew what she was doing had sunk on her knees before him, her arms about his neck. She begged, she pleaded—he must go—must give all this up. Something had happened; he was ill; he would die like her grandfather. That she could not bear. He must—he *must* go!

Gently yet firmly he released her twined fingers. He stood up, bringing her with him, still holding her hands, yet keeping her off from him.

"My dear girl," he said half angrily, "please, *please* go away from me—you've given me—a splendid idea!"

Sleepless nights and feverish days soon attested that Gretchen had, although she didn't like the reward of being neglected and spoken sharply to. No matter how early she came to the laboratory, she would find him there ahead of her; no matter how late she stayed with him, he'd

dismiss her at last. Sometimes she waited in the courtyard until the gibes of the vulgar sent her to bed at three and four in the morning. Something was wrong with "her Chris"; the "nasty" bugs had done something to him.

Something was wrong with him—yet how different from what she imagined! The speech, unremembered by her, like a dropped seed forgotten, grew and grew in his brain. She figured not the idea, but, womanlike, the neglect of her. He, as manlike, figured her not at all. The idea grew and grew until it stretched in a marvelous vista before him. The possibilities? There were no end to them!

Why hadn't he thought of it before? (Since Adam put the blame on the woman, man still took the credit.) These Zeidergerms! Inveterate cannibals, they ate everything—they were failures! Yet the old professor had not labored in vain—oh, no, quite the contrary! He had not—neither had he died in vain. Poor man—he had sought to eliminate cancer! Wonderful—inconceivable thought—he had found a way to eliminate warfare! He had brought about universal peace!

Gretchen had more and more to contend with. There were mongrel dogs in the laboratory that must be fed; there were mongrel dogs that sickened and died. After a few days the laboratory was deserted; for Chris, dressed in his best and armed with a satchel, would be "gone for the day."

Where? she wondered.

He gave no thought to Gretchen's questionings. Convinced now that he was on the right track, he took the passenger subway down to the financial district. This part of the city was utterly strange to him. He found a sameness and yet a difference about it that puzzled him.

There were the superimposed five streets, the colossal buildings, and the monorails; but the people were so different! The colors of Broadway were supplanted by duller ones. Boys rushed by with curious hieroglyphics on dull gray, white, tan, and yellow. He didn't

know that they were employed, in the order named, by brokers, bankers, money-lenders, and lawyers. The hieroglyphics were the code-signs of their employers.

The women, too, were similarly garbed, the colored article of clothing in the form of a loose cape and cowl that they need but wear during business hours. Some, here and there, both men and women, wore a band of bright green on the left arm, over the hood and cowl of plum color, slate gray, bottle green, and dark brown.

Chris knew not the color-code that said plainly to all who knew, "book-keeper," "secretary," "dictator," "computing pencil clerk," or "telephone-phonograph operator." The bright-green band signified "unemployed and in search of work."

Men in one-piece suits or the sacks and frock coats of bygone days made queer signs to one another as they passed, as though they were deaf and dumb. He thought this the case at first; but when they called after one another such (to him) gibberish as "Bull—small on the rising"; to be answered by, "On the hun'th-eighth par'b'lo' sell I think," he wondered if he had somehow been wafted to another country.

In one of the gigantic buildings that he entered at random he was completely baffled by the hundreds of horns above the elevators.

"Investors twentieth to thirtieth this way," yelled one. "Mining forty-fifth right wing only!" barked another. "Brokers cotton last six top—going up!" squeaked a third. And with every opening gate the surging crowd swerved him this way and that, like the uncertain cork in the sea of humanity that he felt himself.

At last, in sheer despair, he jumped on a car, the horn of which trebled: "All kinds of promoters—tenth to fifteenth left wing—up! up! up!" Surely a promoter was the thing he wanted.

But on the tenth floor he found himself in another maze of long hall and grinding

phonographs. There were babbled calls for "Patents! Patents! Patents! Buy or sell, quick work and big comish!" thrilled cries for patents on every side of him. No, this must be the wrong floor; he had no patent to buy or sell.

He walked back toward the elevator, thinking to take the escalator, which must needs be near, to the floor above. Passing the gate where the cages shot up and down, he walked beyond and along the hall in the opposite direction. The horns spoke of "inventions" now instead of the call for patents.

One, particularly, caught his ear. There were three notes on a gong and then: "Mr. Franklin Norris, financier and promoter. Bring me your inventions—gong—gong—gong!" That was all; but it was enough for Chris. He went inside.

In vain did the clerk try to find out what he wanted. He had an invention; he must see Mr. Norris personally. He waited an hour. People flitted in and out of partitioned offices. At last Mr. Norris would see him.

He found the promoter an oldish man, bald, and side-whiskered, seated before a great square desk, with numerous telephones and buttons thereon. At a certain thing Chris said, Mr. Norris reached for a button. Perry forestalled him by begging to be heard out. He had heard of such things—crank chairs they called them. An electric current held you helpless until the attendants came to help you to the street.

"I'm not a crank, Mr. Norris," Chris was saying. "Do I look it? I can prove every word I say. Here"—he opened the satchel and brought forth a tiny glass tube—"this is distemper. If you have a dog you want to get rid of, just break this near him. I could have brought a dog with me; but then you'd think he had it already. Try it on one yourself—or a cat will do.

"The possibilities, as I said, sir, are unlimited. Why bother to shoot an enemy with a bullet, when, by shooting, one can kill but one at a time? With a dozen

or so of these capsules, filled with typhoid, tetanus, or whatever germs you will, you can kill by the score; yes, by the thousand.

"An army can be annihilated by a company. Why bother to kill at all? With malaria, grip, incipient pellagra, or even appendicitis, the enemy can be disabled. All one needs is the cartridge and the gun—ordinary gunpowder will do."

Mr. Norris listened attentively—nay, he showed keen interest. Nothing could be done that day—to-morrow at this time would suffice and he would have talked the matter over with his partners meantime. He would, he said, take the distemper.

The next day Chris was given almost immediate admittance. There were two other men with Mr. Norris, introduced as Clark and Worth. They scrutinized Perry carefully.

Norris was the spokesman.

"Mr. Perry," said he, "my sister's cat, a somewhat ancient beast, died this morning of distemper. It was a most rapid and virulent case. I put the capsule on the floor last night and stepped on it as pussy rubbed against my legs. Her demise resulted.

"There is no doubt in my mind but what that capsule was genuine. I am also sufficiently carried away by your sincerity to believe that you can put up other germs. As for the gun and the cartridge, that is a simple matter. Here, then, is the difficulty:

"Outside of prisons we would have a hard time finding subjects. Were we to use this thing wantonly, we might be liable for murder. No one is willingly going to lay himself open to disease, much less seek it out.

"As for suicides, we can't advertise for people contemplating it. So there you are. We could lay the matter before the government for you and draw up a contract for future use. I doubt, though, if they would do anything, with only dogs and cats as subjects."

"How about this?" answered Chris,

drawing a newspaper from his pocket. "There are subjects enough there."

The article, flaringly head-lined, ran thus:

MEXICAN SITUATION ALARMING I

Ten Thousand Rebels Destroy Property and Burn Villages!

YAQUIS AT THE BOTTOM OF IT.

Troops Ordered Mobilized Immediately.

Mr. Clark whistled, Mr. Worth's eyes popped as they read on.

"I never thought of that," said Mr. Norris.

"I think," drawled Clark, "that one or all of us ought to go to Washington and see the President; that is"—and here he beamed on Chris most benignly—"if Mr. Perry sees fit to let us handle the matter for him."

Chris saw, and they drew up a preliminary contract. Then he left the office, to find, when he got home, a message from the College of Bacteriology to call there for his examinations.

This kept him busy for a week. He must submit to thought wave tests where his brain force was measured (a sensitive plate on his head while, in a glass-covered machine, grim old men watched the needle run up and down, registering the cell power); his aura examined in a pitch-black room next, and he was ready for the actual examination.

A little nervous he was when he entered the large, white room alone with its row of tubes along the walls with the rubber pipe attached to each for the hearing of the questions. He walked to tube No. 1, put the attachment to his ears, and listened to the questions. He answered as best he could at each tube, taking his time about it, as was his privilege. He could give as many answers as he liked and as long an answer as he wished. It was his record until he pushed the button over the tube that closed the receiving.

Three days this took him—three days of terrific mental strain. There was no way of “cramming,” for once the hearing apparatus was taken down the three questions must be answered, right or wrong. There was no listening at tube No. 1 and going home to study, to answer correctly on the morrow. There was no knowing, when tube No. 1 was finished, what tube No. 2 would ask. It was say his say or call “no answer.”

The button once pressed, there was no taking the matter up again. No button pressed, the door didn't open. One could stay the night (there was a couch in the room) or call for food, and it would come up via the dumb-waiter. But leave a tube button unpressed or a hearing apparatus unreplaced, one could not. As for bringing a list of answers, how could he before he knew what he would be asked? Then, too, he must wear the simple suit they gave him at each visit while his own stayed in the locker down-stairs.

He found it worth it, though, for on entering the office to find Mr. Norris he was entitled to be called Dr. Perry. That gentleman, bursting into the room, never thought to congratulate him. Instead, he rushed at Chris with beaming face.

“My dear boy!” he chuckled delightedly, “I've just come back from Washington!”

CHAPTER V.

“SOMETHING HUMOROUS.”

DUANE WARREN (called both Du and Ane by baseball writers, fans, and team mates) was in that frame of mind that was known as “stumped,” the former slang word, like many others, having worked itself into the language. He went even farther than that, describing his condition as “stumped all around.”

In the first place, that noble and yet (to him) somewhat ambiguous speech of Cherry's began to prey a bit on his mind. To do something “more remarkable” or

“ultrascientific” was, as he expressed it, like “stealing second with the bases full,” or “bunting a home run into the grand stand.” It couldn't be done.

A loophole of hope still remained to him, namely, the “something humorous.” He thought of all sorts of things, such as getting into the papers by running the bases the wrong way or throwing an egg at the batter instead of a ball. But as fast as these ideas came he discarded them. They wouldn't do, and he knew it. When a first-class, much-sought-after, ninety-five-per-cent girl like Cherry Desbrosses said “something humorous,” she must surely mean something “big,” not the “silly-ass, nut stuff” he was doping out!

He racked his brains, sat up nights and, worst of all, took to drinking a bit to give him inspiration. The something humorous came not—no, in spite of rackings, sittings, and drinking, it came not at all! Instead, something went.

Up to this mid-July time his record had been splendid—fourteen wins to six defeats. From the time of the triple proposition it began to fall off. His old-time control was lacking; he lost the “old hop to the fast one”; his “floater” was mauled to every corner of the lot. Eight defeats in a row changed him from an idol to an object of jeers. The terrible, sickening (he hated and feared it) “Take him out!” sounded often in the stands, now further to rattle him. He was, in the opinion of the baseball writers, “on the toboggan.”

He braced a bit in mid-August and lost but two more games than he won. He worried terribly when the writers called him an “in-and-outer.” It looked bad. Finally, when the All New York team was made up in the fall, Mr. Duane Warren looked vainly for his name. The Harlems, in second place in the City League, contributed a first baseman and a utility infielder, but no pitcher.

Baseball had become a big thing these days, to the dwarfing of theatricals and other forms of amusement. The large

cities had long since outgrown from one to two teams each. Half the time at home and half on the road no longer satisfied the appetites of many millions of fans.

So it was that each city had a league of its own, of from six to ten teams. These played it out in the summer. In the fall each city made up a team of twenty-five of the best men its league had produced, and the championship of the country was fought for in heated, lighted, and glass-covered stadiums throughout the winter.

Way back in the early nineteen hundreds much annual excitement was wrought up over a so-called "World's Series"—a dinky affair between the leaders of the two great leagues. There was now one that *was* a World's Series; for there were Australia, Brazil-Argentina, Germany, and Japan-China to bet on in the elimination games, and the big, real World's Series came off in the spring. Then there *was* excitement.

But to return to Duane Warren. His chances for a money-making winter at baseball were over. Of course, unless his team released him, he was credited with half salary. Besides, he was a sensible boy and had invested securely. Seven computing-name pencils of a thousand each in the safe-deposit vault testified to that. Financially, he had no cause to worry.

And now, the strain of the season over, the quest of the "something humorous" came back with redoubled force. He went everywhere and thought of everything. At last, in utter despair, he spent a loafing afternoon in the magnificent Bronx Zoological Gardens. Here, of all places, watching a cage of mighty gorillas, the "something humorous" came like a flash.

From that moment on he got busy.

First he became rigorously a student, spending days and days in the educational moving-picture libraries and taking to his own projecting room, as well, films that he ran over and over, some of which were:

"The Future of Central Africa."

"Up the Congo in a Motor-Boat."

"My Trip through Gorilla Land."

"The Congo and its Jungles."

Of course, he ran simultaneously in his phonograph the lectures that accompanied these travelogues, besides many others in the same vein. Then his career as a student came to a sudden stop.

He went to the bank, drew out two of his computing-name pencils and became quite a purchaser. Two weeks later a list of what he had bought read thus:

1 collapsible aluminum motor-boat.

1 sixty horse - power gasoline - electric engine.

1 portable corrugated iron house.

4 guaranteed paralyzing sticks.

4 repeating rifles.

4 automatic revolvers.

1 crate "Big League" baseballs.

1 box gloves (all kinds, fielder's, catcher's, *et cetera*).

$\frac{1}{2}$ dozen masks.

1 crate bats.

$\frac{1}{2}$ dozen chest protectors.

$\frac{1}{2}$ dozen shin guards.

Of course, there were necessities such as blankets, folding frame and canvas beds, pots, pans, bowls, and cups of aluminum, compressed food tablets of beef, all-vegetable and milk, thermo bottles, a fireless cooker; in short, all that went to make up a modern, first-class camp.

He selected for his companions a "rookie" by the name of Quinn, a red-headed, freckle-faced lad of nineteen. An embryo catcher he was and showed promise, his only present fault being a tendency to throw to center field to catch a man going down to second.

The other was one Samuel Bleeker, aged sixty and known to a passing generation of fans as "Slippery-Elm Sam, King of Southpaw Spitters." Said Sam, now rather adipose, was king of nothing at all but a badly paying haberdashery in Flatbush that he was glad enough to sell out to accept Warren's liberal terms. What he didn't know about baseball from a whipsaw steal to the squeeze play wasn't in the book.

Duane bid good-by to Cherry; but what he had in mind he kept to himself. He gave his destination as Africa and said, with a sly wink, that he had something "up his sleeve" that, if it worked, would prove "a knockout." The tiny tear he didn't notice for she turned away her lovely head to hide it. Buoyant, confident, and unafraid, he left her.

So that is why next morning, the older and the younger man beside him, he boarded the gigantic, funnelless, half electric and half oil-burning liner Blue Ridge, bound for the Azores.

The mighty ship, with her seven superimposed decks, left the city with toot and roar from the Erie Basin docks, a city in herself. She slid past the old Statue of Liberty, and going on down the busy bay, dwarfed, in passing her, the old and once so highly thought of Imperator that was moored close to Coney Island. They used the ancient steamship for a sort of floating museum, for there, the public might gaze at live horses, lobsters alive in tanks, cigars made by hand and other obsolete things that a past century had known.

Soon, silhouetted against the setting sun, the gigantic equestrian indian statue (another symbol of that which had vanished) with massive hand to massive forehead, seemed to watch them out to sea.

The first day out Red Quinn had the balancing lever put on in his compartment (a ball-bearing contrivance that made the square room move in opposition with each lurch of the ship) and thus avoided the seasickness he dreaded. But Sam and Duane, being better sailors, used the caged-in diamond often to keep in practise, both even participating in several friendly games.

Every morning came the newspaper via wireless. There were the usual concerts, cabaret performances, and moving-picture and talking-picture plays. They ate three meals a day, played cards and so on, the trip being otherwise uneventful.

At the Azores, at Port du Manuel, now

one of Europe's favorite winter resorts, where the wealthy recuperated from social strenuities, they transferred to a Cape Verde and West Coast steamer. This carried them to Monrovia, which, since the hippopotamus trade, had become quite a thriving and modern-looking city. Sam was for stopping there, for the heat was beginning to "get" him. Warren, reminding him of the terms of his contract, took ship for the port of Bomba.

Here, they found, was like stepping back into another century. Progress, in her march, had somehow avoided central Africa. True, there were several hotels, but they were of the ramshackle order. Wooden quays rotted in the sun, native huts of mud dotted the landscape, while the narrow, winding streets were filled with a polyglot stream of blacks, Portuguese and French traders, naked and dirty children, with here and there a burnoused Arab or a bearded and gabardined Jew.

Yellow, sluggish, and wide, the mighty Congo stretched away into desolate wastes of animal-haunted forest and fever-exhaling jungle.

"Well, Ane," said Sam, mopping his glistening brow as he sat at a dirty table in the parlor of the dirtier inn, "you sure have toted us guys to the jumpin'-off place. Gee, what's here outside o' niggers, fleas, gnats, mud, and heat—forte principally on the heat! Believe me, bo, managin' a Class Z bush league is paradise compared with this. Where do we go from here—Hades?"

"Whew!" echoed Red Quinn for the thousandth time, "it sure is hot-like, there ain't no gettin' away from that. I caught a game in Mexico City in July wunst; but that was liquid air storage compared with this part of the well-known globe!"

"Boys," remarked Duane as he lifted one white duck-clad leg, with the tan puttees and shoes, over the other, "tomorrow, I'm glad to say, we move. We'll have to get some of these niggers to help

us put the motor-boat together and pile our things in."

"Move—where?" asked Sam in a trembling voice.

"Up the river," answered Warren.

"Where to?"

"Search me, Sam—until we find something humorous."

Long and queer were the glances Red and Sam exchanged. The look said "The heat's got him—let's go home—he's crazy."

But they didn't speak their minds. Sam had "broke in" the young man, while Red looked up to him, both as an idol and a model to pattern himself after. Too bad! Such a nice boy! Well, that's what a bad season would do to a man with his heart and soul in the game. It sure was awful!

Yet when the fixing and fitting out of the boat came on the morrow, they were both "on the job" and determined to see the thing through if it "croaked" them.

So, at half past four on the morning of the following day the tidy craft, thirty feet long with a beam of ten, everything aboard, poked her nose into the brownish-yellow water of the Congo and, without a word of farewell, chugged her way up-stream.

In the heat of the day they moved toward shore and under a rigged-up square of canvas they slept (or tried to) while the sun blazed down on the yellowish-greenness of river and jungle. To use the words of Sam, it was a part of the world that might better have been "wiped off the map."

Sometimes they passed a small sailing vessel, the first two of the men had ever seen, coming down-stream, bearing ivory, coconuts, and mahogany. Sometimes it would be a native canoe, made from a dug-out log and paddled lazily by three or four shiny blacks.

At night, close to the shore, staring, green eyes might be seen or thundering roars heard, telling them graphically that a lion had come down to drink, while yet

again the rhino crashed and splashed through the brake, his two horns an odd silhouette against the red of a rising moon.

Surely it was a country God and man had both shunned and forgotten and here went the three, deeper and deeper into the jungle in quest of—(save the mark!) "something humorous." Was the knight of old outdone? In firmness of purpose, daring, and fearlessness, side by side with sheer ridiculousness, he was equaled by Duane Warren.

One dismal evening, as they chugged along the now narrowing stream, flanked right and left by overhanging trees and murky, mist-exhaling swamp, Red lay prone on his face in the bow, his arm outstretched, the hand dangling limp over the water. Suddenly out of the stream two ugly jaws shot up.

There was a snap—Red, howling affrighted, drew back his hand—and just in time. One of his fingers had been laid open almost to the bone. The blood trickled down palm and wrist.

"Here, let me bind that up for you," called Warren, fetching a roll of lint. Red, too frightened to realize what had happened, submitted. Warren, at the task, kept jollyng the rookie, making sundry remarks about "a first class catcher" looking out for his fingers, adding: "You might be sent for any day to fill in," and so on.

"Great Cæsar!" cried Sam from the wheel at the stern. "Do you know this water's chuck full o' crockydiles, Ane? You oughta see—get down you ugly brute! Look out!"

At the shrill cry of alarm Warren turned just in time to see the long, vicious snout poke itself up over the low free-board.

Crack! crack! crack!

Warren's automatic spit fire, and the crocodile with a lurch and a splash went back into the water, churning it into a white foam that gradually grew to crimson as the reptile lashed and twisted in his death throes.

The matter was not so soon to be ended. The crocodiles, attracted by the swirl and tasting the blood of their fellow, crowded about the boat. They swam beside, before, and behind it in slimy eddy; every now and then a hideous snout raised. Wide, gaping jaws snapped, tails swished dangerously near.

"Mind the wheel, Red!" shouted Warren. "Get a 'matic, Sam, and let's pump these fellows full o' lead!"

Soon the primeval forest reverberated with the crack, crack, crack of the revolvers, the shots sounding doubly loud over the water. That water now seemed a boiling mass as the bullets took effect.

Still the swarms crowded as the reptiles showed fight—still the bullets sped. Darkness grew—the situation was more grave than Warren would admit.

Crack! crack! crack! crack!

Splash! swish! splash!

The snouts and snapping jaws seemed, faintly seen now, to come from everywhere. What was to be done?

A scream!

"Help! They've got me!" came Red's voice. "Help!"

"Hold hard!" shouted Duane. "Hold for your life!"

Swiftly he dived under the canvas and brought out a long, cylindrical object; then as quickly as he could without overturning the boat, he crawled to the stern.

The crocodile, half out of the water, had Quinn's doubled elbow just in the end of his jaws. The man held tight to the wheel for dear life. To shoot in the half-darkness would have been risky. A swerve of the boat (it was rocking violently enough as the ugly brute wagged his snout from side to side in an effort to drag the man overboard) and the bullet might have gone through the thin metal bottom.

"Hold steady—I've got him!"

Warren thrust the paralyzing stick against the crocodile's nostril, pressed the button, and the stored-up galvanic current swiftly passing through him, made the beast relax his hold and slide back

helpless into the water. Red, affected both by the reaction of his perilous position and the communicated current, flopped, a nerveless heap, into the bottom of the boat.

"Here, Sam," called Warren, "take this stick, keep the button pressed and hold it in the water. All right—now take the electric hand-lamp and get into the bow.

"That's right—shine 'er straight ahead. Now look out, Mr. Crocodiles, or I'll run some of you down. There's one consolation about this dump, there's no motor-cycle or motor-boat cops or even speed laws to bother me. Whoopee—out of my way—I'm after a record!"

He held the wheel with one hand and with the other yanked back the lever that sent the motor-boat cutting through the yellow river. Her stern deep, bow out; the water flying right and left in a V-shaped fan, away she went.

CHAPTER VI.

"ULTRASCIENTIFIC."

MR. BENSON BETHUNÉ LEONARD was conceited enough to think that Cherry Desbrosses's remarks were directed at him. Who of her three suitors, he asked himself, was more capable of doing something remarkable, humorous, or ultrascientific? The latter condition, he figured, fitted him particularly. If she had said solely scientific, she might have meant Perry as well; but by adding the "ultra"—well, anything ultra, to use his expression, "hit him where he lived."

Why, then, hadn't she chosen him before the others if it was him she preferred? Humph! *He* knew women! She was too kind-hearted for that; wanted to "let them down easy," so to speak.

Why not? Warren was a young pitcher on a baseball team. Fancy anything humorous, remarkable, or ultrascientific coming from him! A refusal might upset him at a time like this. He

evidently thought his looks (oh, yes, Mr. Leonard had noticed them) would carry the field. Looks—as if a girl of Cherry's mental caliber would stoop to the purely physical!

Perry? Pooh! A penniless student that he honored by conceding him even scientific. Then he thought he had noticed a slur in Cherry's voice when she had referred to Chris as twenty-five per cent physical. Twenty-five was worse than seventy-five on a ratio, surely!

Now, as for himself—she had called him “fifty-fifty.” Could anyone be nearer perfection than that? Balanced—that was the word—perfectly balanced. A well-balanced man and a perfect woman. That was the law of the improvement of the race. There was no getting away from that!

Meanwhile Mr. Leonard was on his way down-town in a car of the Sixth Avenue and South Ferry Monorail Company (the ferry end of it but a name) that whirled between the buildings, high, high above where once had rumbled and roared to drive one to deafness an antiquated elevated railroad.

Reaching the Battery (now a mighty curve of white marble steps leading down to the water, with groves of trees, a peristyle, Greek façade, statues, and fountains for the pleasure of the poor at night and clerks in the noon hour), he descended at the kiosk and took the elevator to the Staten Island Passenger Tube. In three minutes time he was whisked under the bay to Stapleton. A city had once been proud of a ferry that took twenty-five minutes to go to the same place.

Staten Island was now almost entirely a residential section. From the Bay Ridge shore it looked like one of those towering wedding-cakes of times by-gone, white, corniced, and spired, one layer smaller than the other, each topping each. In truth, nothing more aptly described it. Sixty-story buildings, marble-faced, ran around the entire edge. Above, on the natural ridge, ran a simi-

lar one in a smaller circle, a still smaller one ran above, and at the top the smallest.

Directly in the center a thin, high, and octagonal tower rose, the home both of the General Wireless station and the naval observatory with the telescope that saw twenty-five miles out to sea.

Altogether it was a city of towering buildings, with gardens, pretty canals, and the curving monorails, express and local, running in circles between circles. Looking down from a plane, it gave one the impression of a mammoth bull's-eye target.

The buildings facing the bay were the most desired and the most expensive. Each waterfront building had its own marble quay that stretched out into the water. Here the bay was alive with motor-boat, motor-yacht, and electric-launch, canoe, rowboat, and shell.

In the most favorably placed, central, and conveniently located building on the shore dwelt Mr. Benson Leonard. His apartment was on the forty-eighth floor. His laboratory and work-room occupied six rooms on the thirtieth. His own motor-boat was moored to the quay, close to a square marble house which he also rented and used for certain marine experiments.

To the negro porter, clerk, or elevator starter, Mr. Leonard was a “perfect gem'man.” The barroom voted him a “good sport,” the quay a “fine fellow.” At No. 60 West Shore Semicircle, Staten Island, no one, in fact, was better liked or known.

This day he arrived at his bachelor quarters at about three o'clock. Crossing the sitting-room of gray with its changeable paneling, leather chairs, tiger and bearskin rugs, and appropriate furnishings of deer and buffalo heads, fencing foils, boxing gloves and the like, he opened a door and entered the dressing-room adjoining. He was looking for a one-piece waterproof suit; for the water, seen from the monorail on his way hither, attracted.

There was no need to look very hard for what he sought. On the wall was a blue frame of felt with white lettering that could be changed or removed at will. He ran his finger down the alphabetized list of his goods—waistcoats, wallets, watch fobs—here it was—waterproof.

Beside each word was a round hole wherein a peg fitted. Said peg hung from a fine silver chain. Peg in hole—a button pressed and whir-r-r-rup! a panel in the wall slid up and there, on a hanger, was waterproof, hat, goggles, and slip-over shoes of rubber.

A moment later and he was descending in the elevator. Two, and he had met a friend on the quay. Three, and he was at the wheel of his motor-boat and shooting over the water at breakneck speed.

He returned at five-thirty. Delcambre, his Louisiana mulatto valet, was waiting for him. He undressed, put on his bathrobe, and the valet, having gone into the hall and rung for the elevator marked "Gentleman's Bath," Mr. Leonard descended therein.

Twenty minutes were spent in the hot room, where, in company with several scantily clad fellow lodgers, he listened to the latest news from the horn of the General Phonograph Service. Next a lukewarm shower, a rub-down by two muscular Swedes, and he was ready for plunge in the marble pool, sixty feet by twenty, where he swam, floated, and sported about in the clear and crystal artesian water. A dry towel rub-down, a shave in the magnificently appointed tonsorial parlor adjoining the pool, his bathrobe on again, and he ascended the elevator to his rooms.

"I say, Del," he said as the valet helped him into his soft, white dress-shirt of raw silk, "what's the color for to-night's dinner? I forget what I had engraved on the cards I had sent out."

"Blue, sir," answered the mulatto respectfully. "I took the liberty of laying out the Copenhagen dress-suit with the navy tie, waistcoat, and socks."

"Think that's better than the turquoise?"

"Yes, I do sir, if I may say so. Besides, there's young Mr. Elm; he always wears a turquoise suit. Remember, sir, when you had the yellow and orange dinner he didn't come?"

"No, poor Elm hasn't but two dress-suits to his name, I think. That green one always looked to me like one of those confounded reversibles. The Copenhagen let it be then. You'll attend to the panels?"

"Yes, sir!"

"And the waiters—what did you get?"

"Four Nubians, sir, and costumed them in blue-and-white bloomers and turbans that I hired at the costume room down stairs."

"Good! The dinner I'll leave to you."

"Yes, sir!"

"And the entertainment afterwards. I hate those Hippodrome melodramas and musical comedies that are so much the rage for people who are so deuced silly as to still want to see a spectacle in the flesh. Vulgar, I call it, and I'm something of an arbiter, Del. I'd rather have it right here. No stupid symphony coming out of an arc-light, either, mind you!"

"I understand, sir. The films are already in the projecting room. I got some new records from the Parisian Library for the phonograph as well, sir. I'm sure you'll like them."

"I hope so, Del. If this thing is a success, there's an extra ten-spot in it for you."

"Thank you, sir."

If the consensus of opinion of Mr. Arch Spruce, General Hotel architect (he was the fat one with the Prussian blue dress-suit); Mr. Broad Race, ad talker, the tall one whose suit of azure, cuffed and striped with indigo, hung so loosely on his slim figure); Mr. Boyles-ton Tremont, hippo breeder (he of the electric blue suit that became so well his tanned face and close-cropped white

hair), and young Greenwich Elm (who wore the turquoise, as Delcambre had predicted), was any criterion, both dinner and entertainment *were* a great success.

Mr. Leonard, of course, was called upon for a speech. He described Cherry and they drank her health. He was one of a favored three suitors; but it was a "cinch" who'd win. He'd bet any man present (hear! hear!) anything from a dollar to a thousand that he'd be the lucky man. ("Hope you are! You deserve to win! Here's to the lucky girl!") When a Leonard wanted anything he got it, no matter what the cost.

The Myriacolor pictures seen afterward in the projecting room, were declared "piquant" and "Frenchy." They would hardly be seen in a Sunday-school, and yet were not offensive—together. They were "breezy" and "confoundedly clever."

As for the phonograph records, even Leonard thought Delcambre had outdone himself in his selection of them. There were little French ditties by Exillia, the chanteuse, and dialect stories *par excellence* by Maguire, undoubtedly the greatest *raconteur* of his day.

Fat Mr. Spruce laughed until the tears rolled down his cheeks. Mr. Race slapped his lean thigh as he guffawed, aided and abetted, no doubt, by some sparkling burgundy of the vintage of nineteen-eighty, while Mr. Tremont's senile chuckle and Elm's youthful chorle sounded often.

They were going. The Nubians were clearing away. Leonard, there in the hall, held back young Elm as the young man started for the elevator.

"Gre'ch," he said suavely as a "Good night, old sport!" came, diminuendo and a little thickly from the descending three, "I want to ask you something—something rather serious. Want to make a little extra coin?"

Mr. Greenwich Elm said he did—said it positively.

"Listen here, then," resumed Leon-

ard, lowering his voice a bit. "That diving-bell is ready. I want some one to go down in it. Some one I can trust. I've tried my C-A-L" (the trade name of the carbo-absorbo-leonard) "on every animal under the sun that I can get hold of. It's worked—you know that.

"The diving-bell is in the quay laboratory. I've fitted it up with everything—telephone, button-signal, and all that. Nothing could happen to you. I just want to see how long a man can stay under if his carbonic acid gas is absorbed as fast as he breathes it out. Will you risk it?"

Mr. Elm would.

"All right—it's one now. I'll ring you up at four-thirty. You will find me below in the quay laboratory at five. There won't be many about then. That all right?"

It was.

True to his word, at five sharp young Elm, looking a bit sleepy, was there at the end of the quay.

Things, meanwhile, had happened. A traveling crane had been run on its track to the proper spot. Leonard's three other assistants, with the aid of a couple of darkies, had brought out from the laboratory a round ball of aluminum, the circumference of which was about twelve feet. This was attached to the crane, the electricity was turned on, and the ball was first swung out and over, then dropped into the water. It sank about three-quarters of its bulk, then rode nicely.

There was a running to and fro after that. Wires were attached to the globe and connected with the laboratory. By the aid of the motor-boat the globe was towed out some twenty feet from the quay. Two glass-covered plates were then put in the motor-boat. When Elm arrived everything was in readiness.

"All right," said Leonard to him, "go ahead in. You'll find everything comfortable. There's a telephone inside that we've just connected. I'll keep in touch with you all the time. If you should get

weak suddenly or anything like that, you'll find a white lever that you can pull down. It's attached to a compressed-air torpedo that 'll shoot you up in a jiffy. Good luck—we'll fill 'er on this end."

Elm bowed and climbed down into the motor-boat. He came alongside the floating globe, reached out and opening the trap, he entered the square. His body half-way down, the two plates of the C-A-L were handed to him. He took them inside, shortly appearing again.

"Let 'er go!" he shouted, and pulled the trap down after him.

The gray of the dawn just showed above the buildings on the Bay Ridge shore as the globe, at first slowly, then with a rush accompanied by a hiccoughing pumping from somewhere, sank out of sight, leaving a widening ring of gray water behind.

The gray light grew and grew. A crimson slit of sky showed to the eastward. Already the motor-tugs began to dot the water. Inside the square building, among all sorts of bottles, tanks, wheels, and machinery, at a long table, sat Leonard, his ear to the telephone, the transmitter close to his thin lips.

"Hello!" he called softly. "All right, Gre'ch?"

"All right. First batch of C-A-L discoloring a little," came Elm's voice over the wire.

"Open up your second when she gets dark brown. How do you feel?"

"All right!" answered the voice cheerfully.

The crimson slit grew to a bank of pink sky. An incoming liner blurred it out for a minute. The tugs were thick, now, towing barges and canal boats. The city was stirring. More and more often the monorails whirled and clicked. There was a hum of awakening life.

In the square building again at the phone:

"Hello, Gre'ch. How do you feel now?"

Over the wire:

8 A-S

"All right. First batch N. G. Using the other."

"Sure you're all right?"

"Yep! Feel fine!"

From pink to orange, from orange to golden, and the sun had topped the Bay Ridge buildings. The harbor was crowded with its daily quota of all sorts of craft. Insistent was the hum of the monorails.

At the phone once more:

"Hello, Gre'ch! How are you?"

Over the wire:

"Getting—a little—dizzy. Second—batch—tanning up."

"Want to come up?"

"Wait a minute—I'll—tell you."

A minute—two—five—ten—twenty.

"Let me up!" faintly over the wire.

A lever pulled, and the hiccoughing pumping again. The motor-boat chugged out toward the slowly appearing globe. Up—up—up it came. The boat was alongside. The trap was swiftly opened by one of the men and the air rushed into the square opening with a sucking sound.

"All right, Elm?" called one of the men.

A pause—a deep sigh, then Elm's voice:

"All right—be up in a minute."

Leonard, standing on the edge of the quay, looked at his watch. It was ten-fifteen. At that rate, Elm had been under water without air for four hours and fifty minutes!

In the thirtieth-story laboratory, a room of concrete with its hundreds of shelves, long, slablike tables, cranks, wheels, innumerable buttons, and the big tank sunk in the floor, Leonard listened intently as Elm spoke:

"It seems to me, Ben, that if I'd had a couple of tanks of oxygen I could have stayed down another couple of hours. There was no trouble at all except that the air kept thinning. As I breathed out, of course, the C-A-L soaked up the carbonic acid gas. At that rate, with no

air coming in, it was only a question of time before I'd be in a vacuum.

"Now, a tank full of air turned loose when the first was all gone and a fellow could, with enough C-A-L, repeat the process over and over. You might even stay down for a day."

"Why a day, Gre'ch?" answered Leonard with a lift of his left eyebrow. "If one could invent a machine for absorbing and compressing air and keeping it in tanks, a man, or any number of men, could stay under water for a week. So, with electricity as a motive power, the submarine problem would be solved. There would be no chance for a repetition of the Holland-type horror of fifty years ago."

"But could any such machine—"

"I think it could, Gre'ch—I think it could. In fact, I have an idea for—" Leonard broke off short. "I'll name-

pencil you an extra fifty, Gre'ch. Go to bed if you want to—you must need some sleep. Tell Craig to ring up the Pulmotor Assistance Company and have them send me one of their very best men. I think I'll go to work on this thing right away."

Up came that eyebrow and Benson Leonard, his chin on his fist, was deep in thought. So young Greenwich Elm left him.

A machine for compressing enough air to keep men under water for a week—it wasn't so hard. With the absorbing of the carbonic acid gas by the C-A-L the result was half accomplished.

The submarine problem solved—the navies of the world rendered useless—could there be anything more "ultra-scientific" than that?

The way to Cherry Desbrosses lay clear!

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 SUBSTITUTE

BY FAITH BALDWIN

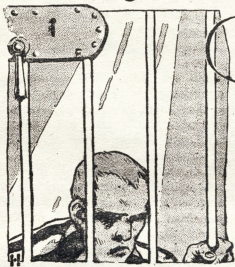
WHERE once I prayed, I may no longer kneel,
Dim are the temple and the vacant shrine,
And, crushed beneath a careless, brutal heel,
The cup that guarded Memory's crystal wine.

The Worship-Love I knew is long since sped,
The broken bubble of a shattered dream,
And Hope's white rose lies on the altar, dead,
Gray ash the incense; cold the taper's gleam.

Let me now play at merry Make-Believe,
With heart-door locked, and dance with Life, the Jade,
To laugh with lips that quite forget to grieve,
And eyes that watch the ceaseless Masquerade.

Love's blithe half-sister seeks me, tender-wise,
To kiss her roughish mouth must be my task,
She comes to me, in Friendship's sober guise,
With eyes that mock, 'neath her black-velvet mask!

Officially Sprung



by

H. A. Sturtzel

BEHIND the last grated door on the right, in the rear corridor, Tullis, No. 110, paced the length of his cell—back and forth, back and forth through the patch of sunlight.

It was nearing the last quarter of the forenoon—between ten and eleven—that flood-time of highest vitality, when captive animals and caged men feel most keenly their extremities a-crawl with life.

Tullis was a big man, but he moved with a curious padding lightness, for all the weight of him. The knees bent a trifle and the shoulders stooped—not the labor-stoop, but the furtive sag of the slumborn. There was a noticeable lack of motion to those shoulders.

A man walks with a lurch, a swing, or a slight bob to the shoulders. One looks for it. But here there was no movement above the hips. The fact lent a strange sense of alertness to the impression. The movements were those of an animal.

It was November. Canned sunlight filtered in through the iron grating outside

the high window, through the bars and dirty glass of the window itself—thinned until it fell aslant the stone floor like a light coating of sulphur-dust.

The cell was a death-cell, a "solitary" in prison terms, for Tullis, on one of his nervous nights, had killed a man, and was to die on Saturday morning, the 12th of November—just three days off.

Seven ordinary paces was the length of that cell, the seventh always bringing Tullis's foot hard up against the stones at either end. Or else it was five long, quick ones that Tullis took when he was cramped and needed shaking out, as on this morning. That left enough play at each end for him to swing his bulky shoulders around freely as he pivoted on the ball of his foot at each turning.

Sometimes for a change he would turn at the far end of the cell, take the three long paces across the width, then seven down the other side to the door, and so on around the edges, completing an oblong circuit. That made twenty paces in

all for a complete round, eighteen when he cut the corners, or twenty-two when he circled back on himself, making a figure eight by crossing the nicked flagstone in the center of the cell twice.

All of which seems like so much dawdle when set down in black and white, but to Tullis it was not dawdle. To him it had represented the key to his balance, if not to his sanity, during the past six months—this and the counting of the stones in the cell wall, in rows, up, down, across, and around. It gave him something to grip with his mind. There was nothing else. There was no means of communicating with other prisoners through bars. The walls were of flagstone, all but the door.

There was the sound of a step in the echoing corridor—the captain. Tullis knew by the peculiar scuff of one heel on the flags. His pacing ceased. A voice called out:

"Give us the time, will yu, pard?"

It came from one of the cells. It was a low voice, a typical prison voice, curiously husky from long disuse and stonedamp, and a bit of a whine in it that courted a turn-down or a kick. This had to do with the unescapable incubus of self-pity that rides men who are locked in cells.

Tullis placed an ear close to the barred square in the center of his door, and caught the answer:

"Ten-thirty."

He renewed his pacing. The footsteps came nearer and stopped. A key rattled in a door, an order was growled, then the door clanged open and shut and the footsteps of two instead of one retreated down the corridor. Tullis cursed.

There was to be another "masked lineup" in a few minutes. There had been two of them so far. Soon they would come for him and he would march down the corridor ahead of the captain and two armed guards, around the turn to the left where a metal door would be unbarred and unchained, then down four steps and into the general room.

More armed guards would be waiting there, also a file of detectives, all masked, and Bivins, the new prison psychologist, would come in with the warden and give a lecture on the prisoners. Another livestock exhibit.

And what was the use of it? Over half that line-up were "lifers" and "bump-offs." They would not be on the city books again.

Tullis continued his pacing.

Tullis was Rube Tullis, who had been the "Whang" in his cub days, but was now the "South Paw Pouter"—yeggman, gangman, "gun," stall, and "cahoot," from Lower Mercer Street on the East End water-front.

All of which was depicted in full in the cryptic epithet "Pouter" to any who ever frequented that region of fantastic nick-names from Fat Harry's Place on North Tremont Street, to "Tony the Blacksmith's" and the Blooston's, the last and murkiest cavities in the East End crime-belt.

Here in this jungle-patch of slum, men and women had fought and loved, betrayed and killed each other for generations to earn their respective "handles," the names which would blast them, or brand them with fame ever afterward, according to the adroitness and daring of their crimes.

Everything was in the names. For instance, the "Whang" stood for a "moll-buzzer," which is a dealer in paramours, while the "South Paw Pouter" referred to a characteristic bulge under Tullis's coat, a bulge where a gun had been slung in a left-handed holster—a gun that itched and was uneasy.

It was just this uneasiness of the gun in the left-handed holster that had put Rube Tullis where he was.

For a long time past Tullis had had to pay a "tax" to operate in a certain fat district, and that tax had gone to none other than the night captain of that precinct, a man named Blaine, who, as Tullis knew, was doing more to foster crime on

the East Side than any ten crooks in the city.

The captain had been too foxy to meet his dupes in person, and had employed a trusty ward-man, an ex-pugilist, as his collector. One night Tullis had met this ward-man in an appointed "dive" to settle up for another month's "pickings." The go-between, inflated over his recent easy money, had topped his extortions with a threat. Tullis's gun had barked once, and the town was rid of one of the worst of her bleached little Frankensteins.

But the town wanted Tullis just the same, and the police had to deliver the goods, for Rube didn't get a chance to run that time. Getting wind of this, chief among those in at the capture was none other than Captain Blaine himself, full of praise for the meddling patrolman who had made the "bottle."

Thereafter the affair had quieted down on the surface, but underneath it all things had gone on working, sinister and effective undercurrents that were unknown even to Tullis himself. For instance, though the crime was committed on the very edge of the city-front, Tullis had been "sloughed-in" at the Head Office, several miles into the heart of the city.

He had not been in jail more than an hour when he was arraigned before the commissioner of police. Here a relay of questions had been put to him, questions that filled the allotted procedure-time but got nowhere. And strangely enough, one of those who led him out had been Captain Blaine.

One of Blaine's hands had gripped Tullis's sleeve, the other had grasped his hand, and when it was removed a moist pellet remained.

Back in his cell Tullis had picked the pellet apart, found it was a scrap of paper, and read this:

Sit tight. You'll have to go to the pen, but we'll spring you. Eat this.

No signature.

Then Tullis knew that the commis-

sioner, too, had had a hand in that little system of Blaine and his ward-man. He remembered now how the commissioner's questions had hardly borne on the case at all. The whole examination had been a stall in order that Blaine might get the pellet to him. They would do anything to shut him up.

A week later he had been removed to the penitentiary. All that was six months ago.

And so, although the Blind Lady's scales had been buncoed against him, and Rube Tullis was to die "before sunrise on the 12th of November," there was probably no one in the State less worried over the matter than he himself.

Tullis had no intention of being "bumped-off." He had friends in the "high places." Also Tullis could talk. And if he were allowed to talk, there would be many a one in the "high places" and some on the city force that would set up a squeal, and a few of them might don the stripes, even as he.

Purposely during his twenty-odd years of crime in the city, Tullis had assiduously "cultivated" certain acquaintances with "pull," in anticipation of just such a pinch as this. That was business.

For instance, there was the Head Office Commissioner and his fox Blaine. These two were the most important—the nearest to the wires.

There was Darrow, the ferret-faced little criminal attorney, who was now bucking the courts.

There were two jewel-brokers who knew what had become of many a "rock" of Tullis's passing.

There was Mallory, a plain-clothes "dick," whom Tullis had freed one night from a certain "gun-joint," for reasons.

There were various "fly" politicians on the East Side who owed Tullis a good turn and who were itching to balance things with him.

And there was Abe Solow, "fence" and impromptu costumer, who would be working every politico-crook in the city

from the day he heard of Tullis's capture, for Tullis's fall meant his fall.

And so for months these mysterious forces under the surface of things had been reaching up out of "dives" and "hop-joints" of the underworld, reaching and tightening about the bloated throttles of officials, politicians, and citizens, with an influence the power of which cannot be conceived by one who has not been himself on the inside of the political ward-game.

Men close to death are prone to unload their inmost secrets. Rube Tullis *had* to be "sprung." Legal means had failed. "Official" means were now to be switched on to the situation.

As Tullis paced and thought, other footsteps had been passing along the corridor. One after another he heard the cell doors open and close. He knew that one armed guard was now stationed at his end of the hall, that another was at the turn in the corridor, while two more came and went, escorting each man to the line-up.

It was twenty minutes before the key rattled in Tullis's door. The cross-bar slid back, and the captain stepped in. At the grunted order, Tullis arose from his cot in the blue gloom and came forward. The movement would have been unnerving to one not accustomed to the sight. It was like the sudden stirring of ringed coils in a dark covert—man's psychic reaction to the stripes.

Past the guard and out into the corridor he slouched. That slouch had become as involuntary as second nature. It had nothing to do with bravado or any sense of wrong. Again, it was the stripes.

In the general room he took his place in the uneasy, shuffling line. It was the old Byrne's system, dating back to the seventies, being renewed. There were over forty of them, filched from the shadiest denizens of the East Side.

Almost to a man they knew each other, yet there was not a lift of an eye in recognition; for a man who knew a man who

was probably due to be "bumped-off" might be "sweat-boxed" to tighten the noose about that other man's neck.

They toed a chalked line.

Across the room were the detectives, on hand for the criminology lecture—all masked. Tullis probed three of the "silks." There was "Camera-Eyed" Fraser, who never forgot a crook's face, once he got a square look at it; and little Wilkinson, who could "take-off" a woman better than anything the stage could show; and Sands, the fetish of the Bowery, whose great bulk no manner of disguise could conceal.

Between the barred windows at the end of the room stood two armed guards; by the door stood another; out in the hallway was a third. There was no voice while they waited.

Cavanaugh, the warden, now entered, followed by the little psychologist. Bivins took the floor and delivered a short, crisp talk on the aims of modern criminology. Byrne's masked line-up had never before been attempted in a penitentiary, but at this particular time records at headquarters showed that nearly half the undesirables of the city were in custody. Those at the top had thought it an opportune time to make an example for the East Side to remember.

Bivins was a brain—a small, ferretlike man with sharp, shifty features of the paleness that goes with hair that is fiery even to pinkness. Somehow there was too much light in those blue eyes; they were too glary, like those of a bird of prey. During the preceding two lectures, Tullis, who knew predatory men, had felt those eyes weighing him as an investment.

Bivins drew up a wheeled blackboard and produced a list.

"I have here the names of six men—homicides, due for the chair," he began. "They should prove rather interesting. We'll endeavor to map out the similarities of head, features, build, and habits of these fellows. Also we'll get at the working of their brains a bit."

Somehow Tullis felt that he was one of the six. Two men were called forward, picked for a striking similarity of head. Side by side they were exhibited, the strong light from two of the windows playing upon their faces. Their type of head was charted on the blackboard. Suddenly Bivins broke out into a scathing record of their past, leaving no intimate phase unrevealed. The two were "caliocephs," said the little psychologist; their perversion due to sexual precocity.

"Very well," he said jerkily. "Take your places." Then the birdlike eye darted down the line, rested on Tullis, and the white, upraised finger flicked twice. Tullis lunged forward.

With an ejaculation, Bivins ran a hand over the short-cropped head.

"Gentlemen, we have here exactly the opposite type from the first two—the bovine as related to the feline in the human. This is the purely physical, animal type of the younger races. The stamp of the bull is plainly in the bulge of the forehead, the full, wide eyes. The fellow is angry at these proceedings. Note the dark blood mounting the neck and face—almost purple.

"Most recent *alias* in the books is the 'South Paw Pouter.' Left-handed and right-brained. Over half your vicious types are. Some of 'em are ambidextrous. It's because neither lobe of the brain is as yet differentiated. Of course you know the right brain controls the left side of the body and the left brain the right side. You and I have our left brain fitted for cerebration. These fellows do their thinking with the right brain mostly—big men with a child's brain. That's your key to perversion, you plain-clothes men."

Shooting quick, snappy sentences, Bivins had been running his hand over the cranial bumps on Tullis's head. The hand now slid down to the back of the neck. Something slipped under the striped collar, and Bivins had turned again to the assembly.

Tullis's eyes never changed.

Four other short talks followed, then

one by one the prisoners were marched back to their cells. It was an hour later that Tullis extracted from under his shirt a thin quill of paper. Sitting on his cot with his hands apparently hanging listlessly over his knees, he read this:

Prison psychology gag phoneyed-up at Headquarters for you. Your picnic. It's the only way to get you out of the cell at right time. Little spieler, a shyster; best imported defense from St. Louis. He'll have you spotted by time you get this. Be on lookout for next kernel. Spring you Thursday night. Make way with this.

No signature.

Tullis's face never changed. Noiselessly he jerked the note in two, chewed each piece to a pulp, and swallowed it. Then he lay down.

Thursday night. It was now Wednesday morning. Tullis grinned.

So the psychology stuff was a game—a game to throw a scare into the East Side as advertised, but underneath a game to "spring" him. Some fox, the commissioner. Clever little cuss, Bivins. And God, how he could lay a man open, showing the wheels in his dome. What a crook he would have made.

Then Tullis took an hour's nap.

Thursday came.

All that morning Tullis waited, but no "kernel," no "high-ball." It was not until nearly noon that the line-up was called. The talks that morning were brief and not on homicides. Only a handful of the force was on hand. Tullis was not called up. No "kernel" from the little "shyster."

Twelve o'clock and back to the cell again.

At one the new guard came on. All depended upon this man or the one who relieved him at six. It would be a ticklish job. There are methods for eyes and ears in prison corridors that even guards do not suspect—eyes watching through bars for something on which to build a last plea. Tullis watched.

The hours dragged by. He began

counting them. Those who rattle off prolonged and unhealthy climaxes for the city-sick, on the galloping moments of the condemned, see these things from the parlor instead of the racks of men.

Suppertime came unmarked. At six-thirty Tullis was standing by the bars when the footsteps of the night relief were heard coming from the front entrance. The guard going off duty brushed past his door on the way down the corridor. Suddenly he whirled, struck viciously through the bars, planting a blow on the side of Tullis's head.

"Say, get back from th' bars w'en I go past, will ye?" he snarled. "Tryin' t' spring somethin', but that gag's too old!"

The impact of the blow and the resulting scuffle of feet could be heard the length of the corridor. Tullis reeled, and had gathered himself on an instant for a lunge of that left of his that would have crippled the guard's arm, when he stopped. He licked his lips, and his left arm fell to his side.

"Hell with you," he growled softly, carrying out the scene for any eye or ear that might have been trained in that direction.

For at that instant Tullis had sensed something which had fallen noiselessly from the hand that had just withdrawn from the bars and now lay in the shadows at the back of his cell.

The face of the guard remained pressed close to the bars.

"Keep yer mug where it belongs after this," rumbled the face with a curse, then the up-corridor eye winked once, a mirthless wink, baleful in its wisdom, and was gone.

While the two guards exchanged the time of day down the hall, Tullis found the crumpled missile. It was wrapped in a piece of dirty waste, so as to look exactly like a bit of cordage from the "trusty's" mop. An hour later he saw his chance and read:

To-night. Special talk called by shyder for crowd of big bugs at nine. Commish, pen in-

spector, fly-polls, college prexies, and a crowd of Parkhursts coming. None of the force. Not a gun in the crowd. At noon to-day every gun in the pen was faked with blank bullets made by a firm that's all right. Only you and five others in line-up to-night. When talk is on make your jump for the shyder. Bulldog Colt inside his coat, with sap. Don't use it unless you have to. Go through crowd, out door, and turn to left through office. Big blond screw at door is safe. Guns on wall all faked. Find rope and hook at middle of east wall. Coat on other side. Go to Abe Solow.

That was all. Tullis ate the note and took to his cot to wait.

Then, one upon another, came trooping a hell of thoughts. It was all so smooth and soft, to read it. But God, what a risk to run, all on their word for it. He didn't even know who was the writer of those notes. Probably Bivins, and what could he expect from a "mouthpiece"?

"Guns all faked—go through crowd."

What if it were a put-up game to put the damper on him? Egg him on to make a bolt for it and be riddled full of holes like a mad dog in an army camp! He knew the commissioner and his kind like books. Still, they had played straight with the "kernels." But if they were clever enough to "frame up" the thing on the level, they could make it work the other way, too.

"God, the dirty—"

He was trembling all over. Sweat stood out on his temples. There was a padded footfall in the corridor and a chuckle. Tullis jerked upright, trying to erase the lines of rage, but not quickly enough.

"Aha. So it's gettin' you, is it? I been a-watchin' you lately. Been holdin' yourself too stiff the last few weeks."

The grinning face of the new guard was pressed close to the bars. The sudden palsy lest the man had deduced the truth passed, and Tullis mopped his brow.

"God," he muttered hoarsely. "It ain't me nerve, it's the nights! I seen a line-man fumble into the 'hot-stuff' once. Every night I sees him in me sleep, a-smokin' up there on the pole. I'm leary about droppin' off now."

"Heh, heh, heh. It always gets 'em that way the last forty-eight hours. The rope or a bullet's somethin' a feller can understand, but this here juice—"

Still chuckling, the guard passed on, his footsteps dying away down the corridor. Tullis sneered. Then he arose and began pacing. Yes, he would try it. The thing might be on the level. He was in good condition for all the six months. His lips writhed back from his teeth. He would make that jump for the little "shyster," and if he went out, the other would go, too—if he had to "strong-arm" him. But Rube Tullis would never go out by the "juice" route. Better the bullets. That was a man's death anyhow.

Already some subtle wave of uneasiness was going through cells and corridors—that occult sixth sense that warns circus performers and men behind bars when something is about to happen. Probably the night shift had brought it—some feeling they had contacted in passing through the outer office, the one place where such things are known beforehand.

The pacing continued.

The prison gong had sounded nine through the yellow-lighted corridors some twenty minutes before, when Tullis was marched down the echoing hall, around the turn to the left, through the grated metal door and into the general room. There, only one door remained between him and the outer dark, and the guard there was "fixed," so the note said. Tullis was the last in. The other five were already on the chalked line. The strong light made him squint.

Up at the head of the room he saw the "starched-fronts" already assembled. Not one among them but what Tullis knew, personally or through others. There in the end seat was the broad, mercantile front of the Boss of Ward One, beside him three smaller "fly polls" of Tullis's acquaintance, bloated and big-jowled. There was the bald head of the "pen" inspector who had come on each of the six months Tullis had been in,

and there was the commissioner at the other end of the row.

Behind these loomed the "white-brows" from the colleges, pale and austere, and still farther back the inevitable Parkhurst delegation, nearly a dozen of them, frock-coated, and some of them with queer little mutton-chop whiskers, that seemed to be the badge of the anti-vice crowd.

Quite a layout in his honor. Well, they would get an eyeful to peddle to the rice-and-cereal circles before the show was over. Fat chance of a gun in that crowd—or a nerve—unless—the commissioner—

The murmuring of the assembly ceased. Bivins had risen. Cavanaugh, the warden, and Tullis's guard of the afternoon, having despatched their duty took places against the opposite wall. At the end was a guard, by the door another guard. It was like a dress parade.

Tullis sized them up while Bivins was getting away. Counting speaker and audience out, there were only the two guards and Cavanaugh. Tullis's guard was "right." The guard at the far end of the room he could blow over one-handed. He took in the guard by the door—a played out "pug" by the looks. Maybe he was right, too. A fighter out of the game is easily bought. The outlook was good there.

But Cavanaugh the warden was a different proposition. Over two hundred pounds of brawn and nerve. But there would be the Colt—and the other five would be into things by that time.

Bivins was warming up to his opening talk. It was a most polished and professional performance, to all appearances the pith of years of study on criminology. Just then Tullis could have worshipped that diamond keenness of brain. And the nerve of it—calling in the highbrows and bearding them at their own game.

Reporters were becoming febrile, trying to catch his every word.

Tullis was second to be called forward. The same talk as on the preceding days.

Stolidly Tullis submitted, and watched. The crowd loomed before him as in a blur, its center the commissioner. He studied Bivins's coat. It was unbuttoned, so there was no bulge, but one side was weighted.

Bivins had now come to the personal part—the remarks about the “animal man.” Now was the time. Feigning sudden rage, Tullis sprang. He clapped the little shyster to his breast, partly as a protection, one hand diving to the inner pocket. It was there—a small, blunt-nosed Colt—an automatic—and around it a leather “thong-sap” was wound, loaded with shot.

Tullis was partial to “thong-saps.” There had been a certain hard winter on which he had learned to wield one with the unerring effect of a sand-bag. One glancing blow and the little psychologist lay crumpled up on the floor!

With the same movement Tullis whirled to meet the day guard coming like a catapult across the room. The “sap” flipped again in Tullis's left and found the side of the guard's head with a dull thud. Two metallic clicks were audible—the “doctored” rifles of the guards—then curses. No shot from the crowd. The commissioner was playing straight.

Tullis's rush had not slackened—straight over the figure of the day-guard that had sunk to the floor, straight at the man by the door. Now from behind came shouts, the scraping of chairs and Cavanaugh's voice bellowing orders, breaking the frozen silence that had first settled over the room. Like animals when one has leaped on the trainer, the other five had clutched the situation and sprang at Cavanaugh and the remaining guard.

There was no time to lose. The door-guard had pulled his trigger once more, then clubbed his gun and struck. It's descent had been parried by the butt of the blunt-nosed Colt; then the “Pouter” had the barrel in both hands. They clenched. It was only a moment. Tullis had seen that the door was not barred. Suddenly he released his grip, the guard

staggered and the Colt came down on the middle of his forehead. The fellow's head flew back and found the floor with a crack just as the door burst open. It was the hall-guard.

Straight at Tullis he leapt. There was time for no more fighting. The Colt barked this time from the Pouter's hip, and the figure of the new guard was left crumpled on the floor beside the other, with a bright red blotch on the white face that grew and spread like magic under the merciless glare of the arc-light.

Tullis had gone—slid out the door, closing it upon a room that shook with sounds as from an inferno. Big “Buck” Cavanaugh was putting up a terrible fight, and the other guard had come to his aid. The getaway was covered.

By the time shouts and running footsteps told that the prison had been aroused, Tullis' soft-footed rush had carried him into the office. The big guard at the outer door whirled about in pure terror at the hell that looked out of that face limned above stripes. It was the blonde “screw” mentioned in the “kernel,” and he made no sound now but a stifled gasp, for he loved life better than Rube Tullis.

“How about it? Do I crawl yer hump?” hissed Tullis, never stopping that padded lunge.

No answer. Once more the “sap” came down just gaged to deal nonentity. In a trice the blue coat and cap were ripped off and on himself.

Next moment he was in the outer dark. Just a thin sickle of a moon; good!

Bending low, he ran, hugging the masonry. His left was closed over the automatic in a grip like love. He came to the corner of the wall he had been following—the end of the cell-houses that stretched out into the quadrangle. There, a hundred feet ahead, loomed a great, gray barrier—the wall. No sentry in sight. But a moment, and he had flitted across the open stretch and was crouching in the shadows at the base. No one had seen.

It was sheer twenty-five feet of solid masonry, that barrier, topped by a row of spikes and broken glass, except for a narrow walk along which a guard passed every ten minutes with a rifle loaded for action.

At last!

He had been groping along the base and had stumbled over that which his fumbling hands had missed—the rope—a long coil of it, thin and strong, and on one end a hook—a clamped hook muffled in cloth. In a moment he had coiled it like a lariat, stepped back from the wall, and cast. High up over the top the hook flew. It grated on the stonework as he pulled on the rope—then held fast to the iron spikes above.

Now a sudden hubbub broke forth behind him. The door through which he had bolted burst open—Bivin's audience scurried like rats into the night. Within, as the door swung to, the sounds of the struggle still echoed.

Tullis had swung clear of the ground now for the overhand climb. The rope was so small he could get no palm grip. His full weight was on his fingers. Ten feet up his hands were bleeding and the pull on his arm sockets was terrible.

Up—up—up. He braced his feet against the masonry to ease the strain. Half way up the sweat was blinding him, though the fall chill was in the air. The tendons of his fingers were hardening to steel. He could not open them.

He was climbing now with his hands alone—a hand's breadth at a time. It was an agony of will to unclench one set of fingers and put them above the other. His breath scorched his lungs like a living flame, and his heart seemed pounding against his throat with a rending double-action that was beyond all control, when at last his groping hand encountered—the hook. Then he was lying across the wall like a broken thing, heaving, the jagged glass gashing his abdomen.

But it was only a moment. In that moment he had seen a dark road below, and beyond an embankment that dropped

down into the west side freight yards. A low laugh came from him then—the old laugh of Mercer Street, for none knew better than he that in that jungle of "dead freight" a man's trail ended where it began.

He turned the hook, dropped the rope over the other side, and let himself down. Half way, and the rope slid through his paralyzed hands, burning the flesh like fire. He rolled out in the weeds at the bottom and lay there for a moment listening. Faintly from the quadrangle came the sounds of excited voices, but without, all was silent.

He had found the bundle with the long coat in it now. A black hat was with it. In a moment it was the guard's coat and cap that were wrapped up, and a figure in a long coat and a black hat pulled low over the face, slipped across the road, dropped down the embankment and was swallowed up in the blackness of the freight yards.

That was ten o'clock.

Just two hours later that same cloaked figure was flitting furtively along a mean side street in the West End's "Little Moscow," a good three miles from the prison wall. A certain black alley-way received it; a moment later a rickety stairway that sprawled against the rear end of an old wooden rookery, creaked under cautious footsteps, and a knock sounded on the door above.

Then the door flung a crack of light into the dark, and the face that peered through the crack was that of the very crime-monger of the city—Abe Solow, "fence" for the East and West Side, sixty years old, dirty, white-bearded, son of an anarchist, father of two pickpockets.

"Open up—wide open!" snapped Tullis, giving the panel a kick.

The Colt trained through the pocket of the long coat, swept the lamplit interior. Then he stepped inside. The key clicked in the lock behind him.

Neither spoke a word. Tullis strode into the next room, searched it, found nothing, and sat down. The old Jew

shuffled after him and pointed to the soiled bed. A shoddy second-hand suit with a cheap stripe was laid out, beside it a black hat and a shirt.

Solow went to the small, round stove, threw fresh wood on the fire and sat down, his back hunched up like an old satyr's. An enumeration of the escapes this old reprobate had aided would probably have filled a volume. At last Tullis arose.

He stripped. The lid came off the stove and the striped pants dropped into the flames. His underwear followed. The Jew, seeing, brought out another suit, and socks. Slipping into the trousers, Tullis's hand came out of one pocket with a roll of bills. He counted them without changing expression. Fifty dollars. Folded with the money was this note:

This is the last donation. We're through. It's cost us \$9,000 already. Clear the town as quick as God 'll let you. From to-night on there 'll be a price on you, dead or alive. Ship over the Pond. If they nab you again there won't be a second chance.

That was all. Fifty dollars and a hand-me-down suit to call it quits with him, and he could have sent half of them to the Island. But they knew he would never have the nerve to buck the force again.

Tullis sat down on the bed.

"This here uniform from your joint down-stairs?" he asked.

The Jew nodded.

"Well, we'll just amble down an' pick out a frock with lines to it. I'm aspendin' the winter at Palm Beach. I'll be needin' a full worsted layout. I'm leavin' me cravanette with yu fer 'hock,' see?"

"Ach, Moses—" began Solow.

"Dry up, now," said the Pouter. "We ain't arguin' none to-night. Now in half an hour I'm hittin' the main drags through the town, but it won't be in no striped come-back like this. You're goin' down-stairs with me now, or I takes the lamp an' does it myself."

Cursing in Yiddish, Solow obeyed. Passing a cracked mirror on the wall,

Tullis got the first look at himself in six months. His mouth dropped. Deep lines and the gray prison pallor were there. It would brand him anywhere in daylight. He would need a little tan make-up.

The figure in a cap and rubber soles that padded out of the alley-way a half hour later was that of a workman, tanned by years in the open. With the roll-neck of his jersey pulled well up over his chin he walked down one of the well-lighted side streets, neither crossing nor halting for anything. His course was in the direction of the Union Yards.

A bit later a coughing switch engine dropped him well beyond the city-limits. At 2.10 A.M. the night flyer, westbound for Chicago, took Rube Tullis on a North-town Junction, not as a passenger in one of the brilliantly lighted cars, but as one of three phantoms that leaped onto her blinds as she gathered momentum in her two-hour dash to Philadelphia.

Tullis had nothing to do with those other two shadows. The road "high-ball" was exchanged as the three huddled together in the dark, back of the swaying tender, then Tullis mounted the tops and flitted lightly over the car-roofs at a stooping run. By the time the Limited straightened herself out of the last maze of switches and settled into her hurtling speed, Tullis was splatted flat on the top of the diner, the last car from the end, one arm hooked around the ice-rod.

He had held down the tops of many a train, but never the Eighteen-Hour Limited. By the time the open country was reached he was breathing through the neck of the jersey. The visor of the cap was pulled low for a cinder shade. Road grime imbedded itself into his very pores. The tail of his coat whipped like a lash, and he had to press his face close to the ventilators to breathe.

She slowed down for nothing. At times he gasped like a man slipping under water. The shriek of the whistle, loosed fourteen cars ahead, swept down upon him, rending his eardrums as if he were lying over its mouth. Protesting automatic switches

rushed past like clanging excited voices out of the dark ahead.

But even this didn't hold Tullis's thoughts as he clung there. This was merely the thing that was giving him back his "front." With every lurching mile he felt his nerve rising—the eternal egotism of the criminal over his own feats. He had "strong-armed" the force for ten years, and to wind up he had put a crimp in the Blind Lady and stepped out of the chair. And New York couldn't get him.

At the end of an hour there was a one minute stop at a watering station. Tullis held his place. Up ahead, however, he saw the other two had jumped for it and were coming back along the cars. Probably a live town.

One of them made him out as they passed beneath, and there was a hail.

"Say, bo, don't you know this line? Big division point up ahead—lousy with 'fly-cops.' Better make a drop for it now."

Tullis started. Already the train was in motion again. He made a run to the end of the car. He was stiff and cramped, and by the time he got his grip to slide down the folding blind the Limited had gained half her speed. It was no use. To jump now meant a broken neck. He pulled himself up with a curse, and regained his old position on the throbbing top.

Tullis knew division points from many a dirty experience of the past—knew them as very nests for the railroad's deputies. Just now he feared these more than any city police. A side-walk "bull" was a "slough-foot," but the road knew how to hire their "strong-arms"—wise nerves from the big city-fronts. Also they knew the lay of the yards. He had to blunder.

A week in the city hock for beating the Trunk Lines. The meaning of this flashed over him as he recalled that his picture would probably be all over the country by to-morrow. His hand went to the cold chunk of steel in his pocket for assurance.

It was another half hour before the brakes shrieked again. This was no tank town; there was a great halo against the night sky. Tullis was down between blinds by the time the bell clanged at the yard-limits. A moment later he risked a jump, catapulted twenty feet and brought up against an iron switch post. He rolled over, struggled to rise, but fell back with a groan, just as a dark figure bore down upon him. The town was Pembroke.

Big John Saunders, night yard-master at Pembroke, was huge, hairy, and predatory—by very nature a hunter of men. To the "little men of the tops" and to every cronic "vag" that ever hit the road westward from the "bright lights" in the spring, he was known as the toughest proposition in yard-bulls east of Chicago.

"Hellbender" John was the road cogno, known the width of the States, provoking a curse wherever it was spoken. Over two hundred pounds of brawn and sinew Saunders had been known to crack the skull of a rambler who "got dirty" with him, with one blow of his fist.

It was none other than Saunders himself who pounced upon Tullis as he sank down at the foot of the switch post. Now whatever his five years of night ferreting had given him, it had taught him to know men. As the thin shaft of his bulls-eye found the twisted features of Rube Tullis, Saunders started, and the descending "sap" fell with doubled force, dealing unconsciousness. For at that instant Saunders had seen the prison-cropped head, from which the cap had fallen.

Two things Saunders knew. This was no "vag." Chronic bums were not in the habit of dropping from the tops of the Eighteen-Hour Limited on cold November nights. It took a nerve or a trailed man to hold that down. Also men do not have their heads shaven in November.

In a trice, Saunders, with the limp figure in his arms, pushed open the door of an empty section house, dumped his burden onto a bunk, and lit a lantern. Then he searched. The sap and the

Colt's automatic brought forth a grunt of surprise. Then from an inner pocket he drew the fifty. That was enough.

Saunders was no fool. A man does not buck a November wind on top of a flyer with fifty dollars in his clothes without reason. Ticket agents were often keen on remembering faces. Saunders pocketed these trophies, locked the door and sat down to wait.

There was a scheme forming in the mind of John Saunders. Incidentally, he had not confined himself to mere vag-hunting during his five years in the yards. He had found through experience that the majority of the men who beat the roads were crooked and that very often it paid not to turn a man over to the city authorities—at least, not until he had made his own investigations. This of to-night looked like a haul, and "Hellbender" John was not one to let a good thing get by.

A whistle sounded from up the tracks, a heavy out-going freight just dragging its lumbering length out of the tangle of shuntage. Sanders arose and stepped to the door. It was his business to watch that freight out, coup or no coup.

As the key rattled in the lock, Tullis on the bunk, opened his eyes a trifle and took in the interior without moving his head. Already a stealthy hand had ascertained that his pockets were gutted. The door swung open. Tullis's muscles gathered and he launched himself, just as Saunders whirled.

A board in the bunk had creaked.

Locked together the two men fell through the open door into the dark and the rain outside. Tullis was uppermost,

but he felt himself breaking. Right there he knew how a stone cell can sap a man.

Inexorably, the great broad back of John Saunders was rising under him, lifting his entire weight. Tullis felt the other's tremble as his last ounce of reserve was called into play. The yard-master gained his feet. His two hands gripped Tullis's arm from in front. Then he doubled up like a released spring. The body of the Pouter shot over his shoulder like a sack of grain. It was the "flying mare." Only Saunder's bulk could have sprung that.

Tullis came down on all fours in a puddle of water. There was a blinding, tearing flash that was like an explosion. A sheet of blue-green flame danced over the surface of the puddle and over the body of the electrocuted Tullis, who lay like a broken reed, one leg over the third-rail.

The concussion had staggered the yard-master, six feet away.

The blue-green flame danced no more now. A thin wisp of smoke rose from the figure that had been Rube Tullis and eddied on the faint night wind.

On Saturday morning, just twenty-six hours later, the body they laid out on a morgue slab, a block from the head-office station in New York, was broken, crumpled, and staring-eyed, just as it would have been had it been carried out of the death-chamber of the penitentiary.

The law nor yet the city had been able to get Rube Tullis, nor had he gone out in the chair, but the lightning had found him and the outcome was the same.

Even the time was the same, early in the morning on the 12th of November.

THE SPECTER

BY MABEL J. BOURQUIN

WHAT matter if beyond the utmost pole
 Man hides his guilt and deems him safe from fear?
 Like sudden trumpet breaking on his soul
 A fearful shadow whispers, "*I am here!*"

The Reckless Age

by Octavus Roy Cohen and J. U. Giesy

Authors of "Nothing But the Truth," etc.

SYNOPSIS OF PRECEDING CHAPTERS

SHIELA McLEOD, daughter of a wealthy leading citizen and the spoiled and petted darling of the younger set, reads in the paper the announcement of the engagement of Dorothy Carrigan, her best friend, to Edgar Trevor, an old school-day chum whom Shiela herself loves (secretly) and had always expected to marry, though actually they had never been anything but good friends. Incensed and shocked, on the impulse of the moment, she writes him a most indiscreet note which she sends by messenger to his apartment. Realizing almost at once what she has done she tries to get it back, and, failing, recklessly rushes off to recover it herself. She manages to slip into his rooms and gets the note, but before she can leave a party of men begin a card game in the room opposite, leaving the door open. Trapped, she remains in the room, finally falling asleep. Trevor in the mean time is at a bachelor dinner in honor of his engagement; there it is also arranged that he shall run for mayor on one ticket while his best friend, Renwick Langdon (who secretly loves Shiela), runs on the other, thus assuring a clean administration whichever wins. Returning to his rooms, at three o'clock in the morning, Trevor is shocked and amazed to find Shiela. He endeavors to smuggle her out, but is seen by the man across the hall, a gambler and gentleman adventurer, named Harvey Kennedy. He gets her home, however, and returns intending to see Kennedy and find out how much he has seen and if he has recognized Shiela.

CHAPTER VI.

THE SWORD OF DAMOCLES.

FOR Trevor, the fifteen minutes which sufficed to take him back to the Avalon were about the worst he had ever spent with himself. He walked with bent head, shoulders somewhat sunk forward. It is odd how disgrace, or even its threat, can put the droop into the carriage of one never before assailed by popular outcry—bend a head always carried upright heretofore.

Up to this night Edgar Trevor had always been rather a popular idol—the most popular man in Edgewater, as he was sometimes called. Of good family—old stock—than which nothing is more

potent for recognized standing in the better society of the South; handsome in a dashing way, a modernized replica, as it seemed, of some of those old forbears of his who hung still in paint in the halls of his family home back "up country"; supplied with sufficient means to maintain all his obligations, and possessed of a mind of scintillant brilliance, he had long been accustomed to take, as a matter of course, the position conceded to him in the city.

His career as city attorney, marked as it had been by some really clever work, had lifted him to an even higher pinnacle of popular attention. This morning, as he struck savagely out on his return to the apartments, he saw the whole fabric of

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his position threatened with horribly swift collapse.

As he had said to Shiela, he fully intended to put her suggestion of a call on Kennedy into effect. But the thing spelled humiliation to a man of his type. Of a rather quixotic attitude toward women and girls, always preserving that almost romantic pose toward the sex upon which masculine chivalry is founded, it little suited him to approach even the gentlemanly gambler on this matter which must inevitably involve the character of the girl he had just left in a discussion, even though there was no mention of names.

The sincerity of his feelings were proven fully by his determination that there should be none of that—that if he found Shiela had been recognized by Kennedy in that brief instant of open doors, he would end the entire discussion and take such steps to protect her as he might.

Of course, she had been madly foolish—but had certainly meant no wrong. He had known her so long, ever since they both were children. He knew her for a tomboy girl, a harum-scarum sort of a maiden, and now a hotly impulsive woman; and he knew her for a pure woman, also—perhaps the more daring in her impulse, because she scarcely ever thought of the wrong things of life.

It was going to be mightily unpleasant to face Kennedy and meet his more common, less polished, but more experienced unbelief in a girl like that, and seek to convince it. Still—it appeared the only course at present. If only he had taken the step at once, the instant Kennedy slammed his door. The worst of it all was to go to him now, would be so much more apt to assume the appearance of trying to beg off—the offering of a thought-out explanation after a time had elapsed.

He muttered a curse under his breath as he mounted the steps and entered the Avalon lobby. He was charging straight at the stairs head down, when the voice

of the telephone-boy fell on his ears. "Mistah Trevoh, sah!"

He paused and whirled.

"Fo' de Lawd!" explained the negro. "I done brought dem haidache powdahs a long time ago, sah, an' toted dem up ter your room. I knocked an' knocked, an' nobody done answered. Den Mistah Kennedy done opened his door an' said as how you-all went out wid a lady. I reckon he's been drinkin' wid dem cayrd-players of his'n. How's you-all's haid? I got dem powdahs here." He produced the box and handed it over. "Shall I run you up?"

Trevor nodded and pocketed the box of powders, produced a coin, and flipped it to the darcy. "Thanks, yes. I did go out for a walk. What's that about a lady?" Despite his efforts to appear nonchalant and indifferent, his own voice sounded flat in his ears.

"I dunno. He jes' said you done went out wid one. He acted sort o' funny. 'Peared to me lak he was listenin', de way he done got his door open so quick." Sam started the car up the shaft.

Inwardly Trevor writhed at this fresh turn, due to Kennedy's common nature. But with the ability of his legal training, he kept his face calm. "You didn't see any lady come in here to-night, did you, Sam?"

"In here?" the boy grinned. "Lawd, no!"

"Then where did Kennedy get that stuff?"

"I dunno. I reckon he was dreamin'." Sam shook his head.

"You saw me come in—brought me up?" Trevor continued to rivet his impression on the negro's mind.

"Yassuh."

"I didn't have any woman with me, did I?"

"No, sah." Sam was growing serious, too.

"You didn't take one up and let her into my rooms, did you, while I was gone?"

The boy's eyes started. "My Gawd,

Mistah Trevoh, sah, no! I done tuk up a note, but dat's all. I drapped it through th' slot."

Trevor nodded. "Yes, yes. I know. That was all right."

"Dere was a lady done called up about—"

"Yes, yes. You told her I was at the club. She—reached me."

"Yassuh." Sam nodded and stopped on Trevor's floor.

Trevor stepped out, and because he knew the boy would probably watch him, he went swiftly to his own door, opened it, and entered his own apartment without another word. He heard the slam of the shaft gate, as he closed himself in, and the purr of the down-dropping cage.

"Common," he sneered. "Dirt common. Mentioning a thing like that to a nigger servant. Bah!" His lips curled in contempt of the man across the hall, the man upon whose mercy he must cast his own and Shiela's reputation. What could he expect from a person of that type if already he was making gossip out of the affair?"

Passing through the den, he made his way into the bedroom, intent on gaining his bath and freshening up a bit his haggard appearance before interviewing the man who, no matter what his individual character, was in a position to compel his appeal.

And passing the bed, he noted what, during the tense time of his finding of Shiela, he had overlooked—a bit of torn and crumpled paper upon the counterpane.

Instinctively he put out a hand and caught it up, straightening out its wrinkles, before secondary consideration cried that it was to regain and destroy the very thing of which this was a part that the girl had made her mad venture—that as such it should be inviolate from his eyes—that while she lay on the bed in restless slumber, it must have fallen from the open neck of her dress, and so remained behind when she rose.

That thought came later, and only after

he had caught the first part of those words the fragment contained: "Oh, my dear one, she cannot love you as I do—as I have loved you for years."

Trevor's hand closed on the fragment, crushing it shut, hiding the rest of that pitiful confession. The blood flooded his face, receded, and left him shaken, staring before him at nothing.

So this was the secret of Shiela's madness. She had heard of his engagement to Dorothy, and at once, hurt, wounded, she had written to him, telling him—God knew what, but certainly of her love. Her love! She loved him! Poor little Shiela!

He sat down on the edge of the bed where he had sat beside her. No wonder she had dared all to get back that fatal note of impulsive outcry from a hurt heart. He could understand it all now so much better. Any anger or resentment he may have felt up to this time left his own mind, and left behind nothing so much as pity. What else could a man feel toward one who had loved and lost—himself?

Surely he could not blame her, either for her love or the first backfire of knowing it was unrequited, which had inspired her note. And then, pride rousing, she had taken a desperate measure to regain the missive and save herself from the shame which must follow its reaching his hands. And he had offered her marriage—but such a marriage!

His sympathy grew swiftly. Poor little Shiela—poor hurt, little woman heart! He pressed his lips together and crushed the scrap of her torn note in his hand. Now, more than ever, it was plain that he must shield her—save her—this girl chum of his young manhood, who had done what she had because of her feeling for him. There could be no question now as to his going to Kennedy and asking the gambler to help him save the woman. Surely the man must have some rudiments of chivalry in him if one could reach it. At least it was his, Trevor's, duty to try.

He got off the bed, went in and doused his face and neck with the coldest water he could gain from the tap, shaved himself quickly, put on fresh linen and a business suit, and was ready for the interview before him. Regaining the hallway, he crossed it directly, and setting his lips into a line of determination, put up a hand and rapped sharply on Kennedy's door.

No answer. He rapped again. Doubtless the man was asleep after his session at cards. For the third time he hammered away and then attacked the bell.

"Get out! Go to the devil!" The words drifted to him muffled.

"Kennedy—Kennedy—I want to see you!" he called with lips close to the jamb of the door.

"Hello! Who is it?"

"Trevor."

"Oh!" shortly. "Well—wait a bit."

There followed a pause, while Trevor leaned against the wall of the hallway; then came shuffling footsteps from within the apartment, the rattle of the knob, and the door was swung inward, to reveal the tousled blond head of Kennedy surmounting a figure clad in pink and white striped pajamas. He was a young fellow of not bad appearance and a pair of cold, gray eyes, which fixed on the attorney. "What do you want at this hour of the morning?" he said.

"To see you." The black eyes of the lawyer met the gray of the gambler and held.

"Come in," the latter invited, holding back the door.

Trevor entered. Kennedy closed the door and locked it with a thumb bolt, waving his early caller before him to a den of similar proportions to Trevor's. "Sit down."

Trevor took a chair. Without circumlocution, he came at once to the point. "I wanted to see you about this morning—earlier this morning," he said.

Kennedy flopped into a chair of his own, took a cigar from the partly filled box still on the table with a jumble of

bottles, ashes, and stubs, and struck a match. "Oh, I'm wise to that. I was looking for you, but not so darned early," he remarked between puffs. His eyes fixed firmly on the other man. "You must have been making a night of it yourself, old man, but you might have let me get my beauty sleep at least." He tossed away the match and lay back in the depths of the chair. "Well—shoot."

"You saw—" Trevor began.

"Not more than I had to. I shut the door. I deemed that I chose an inopportune time to open in the first place."

"You did—in the *first* place." Trevor seized the opening presented. "If you'd left it closed earlier in the evening, I wouldn't be here asking you to help me protect the good name of an innocent woman."

The somewhat thin lips of the blond man twitched the least bit in the world. "Yes? How's that?"

Trevor flushed to his own disgust before that ghost of a smile. "She—she came up here during the evening on an errand," he went forward quickly; "found my door unlatched—it sometimes fails to catch—and stepped inside. A moment later, when she started to go, you had opened your door, and she found she could not leave without being seen by yourself and your companions. Quite naturally she waited."

"Oh, quite." Kennedy's lids contracted slightly. "Trevor, are you asking me to believe that stuff?"

"It happens to be the truth."

"That an *innocent* woman came to your rooms, in *this* apartment building, and went into them last evening?"

"Yes."

"You want me to believe that?" Kennedy's smile broadened. "Trevor—we're men—not boys."

"Oh, I know how it looked." Once more Edgar Trevor flushed.

Kennedy nodded. "Yes, I guess so. You shut the door in a hurry. By the way, rumor has you slated in the race for mayor."

Once more the two eyed one another like antagonists in some deadly duel, seeking to ferret out the adversary's intention. Kennedy's smile came back again, cold and thin, about his cigar.

Trevor spoke. "Never mind rumor, Kennedy, in this. I didn't come to you to speak of rumor, or to save myself altogether, nor to ask you to close your lips over anything you saw or think, for myself alone. I came here to give you the word of a man, his word of honor, that no matter how things appeared to you—no matter what interpretation the world at large must place upon what occurred under your eyes to-night, there was nothing wrong about it. That girl was and is as innocent of all wrong, either in thought or action, as you and I would like to believe any woman of our own blood.

"She's clean, man, clean; and I'm appealing to you not as my friend—for I know you as an enemy, rather, not from a political standpoint, or for any other personal reason. I'm coming to you as one man to another, and asking you, as a man, to protect the good name of a good girl who did a foolish action and found herself trapped because your door was set open and prevented her leaving unseen. I can prove my own absence during the greater time she was there. I—"

"Your room was lighted when I opened my door," Kennedy interrupted.

"And at that time I was at the Senece Club," said Trevor.

Kennedy nodded. "One of the fellows heard your door close later, but we saw no one go in or come out."

Trevor put a question sharply. "Did you keep your door open till you broke up?"

"Yes. That was just before three."

"I know that. I met your guests. They rang for the cage as I came up. Renwick Langdon came to the Avalon with me, and I urged him to come up for a smoke. He will verify that. Also your friends will bear me out that I asked Sam

why my door was open and my rooms lighted."

Trevor paused, feeling he had gained an advantage.

Kennedy seemed to think so, too. He frowned slightly, appeared to consider, and spoke again abruptly:

"Who was the girl? As it happens, Trevor, although not in your set, I hear a lot of gossip. I wouldn't hesitate to bet I know more about the private lives of your local aristocracy than most of their intimates do. Who was this girl? Tell me her name, and let me judge for myself. Without going into my own methods of life, I'm not the man to willingly or knowingly throw mud on a clean woman's skirts—no!—nor to push one who's been down and is trying to get back, either. Who was the girl?"

"You didn't recognize her, then?" Trevor queried, and realized instantly his blunder.

Kennedy laughed outright. "And you a lawyer, reputedly clever, old chap. Was it to learn that you routed me out of bed?"

"No!" Trevor got up and faced him squarely. "No, it wasn't. That was an exclamation, rather than a thought out question, Mr. Kennedy, I think. Neither she nor I knew whether you did or not; but we did know that *if* you did, the only course left us was to marry. As it happens, I am engaged to another girl."

"Yes, I know," said Kennedy, still smiling. "That was another thing which made the whole business seem rather raw—especially to-night."

"Oh, I know how it appeared to *your* mind," Trevor flared in disgust at the turn things had taken. "I'm trying to show you that appearances are sometimes misleading."

"So are professions and poses," said Kennedy with a chuckle despite an added tinge of color in his cheeks and beneath his steady eyes. "Trevor, you're a pretty high flier, from all I know about you, which is little, but enough to please me—since I care nothing about it at all. At

the same time it appears that while up to now you have been either clever or pretty decent, you to-night find it necessary to get down to the level of my common, every-day sort of dirt, and look life in the face as you find it.

"Grant that my code isn't yours, at the same time we are both just men under the surface veneer. I don't believe I'd be any more ready to injure an innocent girl than the next one. Therefore, I'm going to overlook your hot-headed fling, and ask you again to tell me that girl's name."

"I can't," Trevor set his jaw. "That would be the act of a cad."

"Or a wise man—good finesse," said Kennedy lightly. "Still—I suppose that's your code, *noblesse oblige*—protect the woman—the woman—regardless of other conditions, convenience, or common sense. Well, that's where the common man and the man of caste differ, Trevor; but—damned if I don't believe you. I'm a gambler, you know, and a gambler has to be able to size up the other fellow."

"Speaking just as a man and as men go, I'd call you a sneaking liar; but sizing you up, as I'd size up a man I intended to trim of his wad, I think you're telling the truth. And because of that I'm going to give you my word to forget all about what I saw this morning. If I'm right, it's just what I should do, and if I'm wrong—why, I guess it doesn't much matter—so—I'm going to take a chance."

"Kennedy!" Trevor put out a hand. "Kennedy—I— Hang it, man. I ask your pardon. We're both men, and we both want to save the woman—I fancy with you, too, it's *noblesse oblige*, no matter what you say. But Sam said you told him I went out with a woman, and it made me a bit hot under the collar. I thought—"

Kennedy laughed. "That I was an awful rotter, eh? Well, may be I was; but just then I supposed if you had that skirt there, Sam must have winked at her coming in. There is a difference between us though, Trevor. Now, if I'd made a crack at a man like you did a minute ago,

I'd have let it ride no matter how the turn went. It takes your gentlemen born to learn how to apologize. Don't be too satisfied with my promise of silence, however. I wasn't the only one who saw you. Buck Frieder was right behind, me and—"

"Buck Frieder!" cried Trevor, and paused aghast.

"Yes," Kennedy nodded. "He didn't recognize the girl either, though, I can assure you of that, for we talked the matter over. Lord, Trevor, why didn't you come in then—right away—and face the thing up, if it's as you say?"

"I thought only of getting her home," said Trevor, sick to the soul as he realized all Kennedy had put into words.

Buck Frieder was one of the strongest McSwayne henchmen, one of his most rabid adherents. Small chance that he would neglect the weapon fate had thrown in his way for use in the coming campaign. No matter what Kennedy did or did not do, Frieder would talk. The hope which had leaped at Kennedy's words, sank and died. He gave him the glance of one utterly discouraged.

"That settles it, I guess. I couldn't go to him—and it wouldn't do any good if I could. That girl's white as the virgin, and they'll paint her black as hell."

"Is she? Look here!" Kennedy spoke sharply.

Trevor lifted his head and met the scrutiny turned upon him. His shoulders straightened and went back. "Before God, she is."

Kennedy got up and began to unbutton the frogs of his jacket. "Sit down, then, and wait," he directed. "I'll go to Frieder myself. I'm—I'm taking your word."

"I told you the truth."

Kennedy jerked on a shirt and trousers, thrust his feet into low shoes, added a collar and tie. "Stick around," he said, and went out of the door.

Trevor waited, the victim of conflicting emotions. He had to admit that this gambler had surprised him. After all, the class to which he himself belonged had no monopoly of the virtues. One was apt to

turn up streaks of sterling worth in the most unexpected places. Humanity was an odd mixture—a jumble of good and bad.

No one could doubt that Kennedy was acting from purely unselfish motives; that he was deliberately refusing, with his eyes wide open, to use a potential weapon, if by so doing he was apt to injure any other than the one against whom it was directed. That was the act of a gentleman at heart. Would he be able to induce Frieder to follow his altruistic lead in the matter?

Shiela had been nearer the truth in her intuition that this liver by wits would give sympathetic understanding than had he. How was he succeeding with Buck Frieder? Ah, he was here.

The door opened and Kennedy came in. Trevor turned on him a glance of silent interrogation.

Kennedy answered at once. "I went down and had it out with Buck. He says I'm a fool, as possibly I am, from his standpoint at least. However, I put it to him on a personal basis, and he's agreed not to spill, unless—"

"Unless what?" prompted Trevor, as his companion paused.

"Unless he came to consider it his duty to talk, was the way he put it, I think."

"And that means?"

Kennedy shoved back some bottles and threw a leg over the corner of the table, half standing half sitting. "Unless you get into the race for mayor, as it looks to me."

Once more the two men eyed each other. "It looks that way to me, too," said Trevor after a bit. "Well, Kennedy, all I can say is that you've acted awfully decent, and that somewhere in this town there's a pure little girl who would go down on her knees to thank you, if she dared. A half-hour ago you laughed at my apology and ignored my hand. Will you accept both now?"

Kennedy put down his leg and stood on both feet. For a moment he let his gaze remain on Trevor's outstretched

palm, then lifted it to his face. This time his laugh was without any touch of malice. "Yes, damn you, I will," he exclaimed, and clasped the other's hand.

Trevor went back to his rooms. At least in so far as Shiela was concerned he had won. He crossed to the phone, asked for the Central Exchange, and demanded Shiela's private number. When she answered he explained what had happened, taking care to veil his remarks for her personal understanding. "So far as the girl is concerned, she is safe," he told her at the end.

"And the man," she said quickly; "what of him and his public position—his political aspirations?"

He crushed back all selfish fear in so far as he could, and strove to lighten his answer. "He hasn't been asked to run for anything yet. He may not be."

For a time long enough to cause Trevor to fancy she might have left the phone, Shiela made no response whatever; then once more he heard her, very faintly: "Ed—Ed, are you there? Oh, Ed, God bless you."

There followed the sound of a sob. Yes, she was safe, but over the man's head Frieder's veiled threat hung like a sword of Damocles.

CHAPTER VII.

THE MORNING AFTER.

SHIELA McLEOD crept back from the phone to stretch herself again on her bed. It was eight o'clock and a golden day without. She could hear her younger brother whistling somewhere below about the yard of their home. And then he was answered by the cry of a playmate. She caught his shouted reply: "Hi there, Bob! Come on over!"

Her face quivered. Frank was young—a boy—a man child. And she—she lay here a woman—more of a woman than ever before in all her life. What was it Trevor had said last night—that she was at the "reckless age." Ah! To go back to

yesterday with its free, fearless hours, and take with her some of the knowledge which had come to her in the watches of the night.

They had brought, indeed, a change to Shiela. Her taper limbs ached as she stretched them out on the bed, and her head, too, ached dully—felt full, as though crammed beyond its proper capacity for holding. Yet greater than any physical pain was the ache in her heart, the throbbing horror of what she had done. What she had just heard over the wire in Ed's lowered tones served little to afford her any lasting relief.

He had said she was safe. She was safe—because two men had mutually agreed to protect her, and a third had given a qualified assent. And they hadn't recognized her, so even if they later did talk, she probably still would be safe. She could see that. And beyond it, throwing it into insignificance on this golden day of September, loomed the menace to Trevor and the woman he loved.

Ed had plainly evaded when she asked about his position over the phone. That meant that for him the situation was in no way improved. Frieder had said he would remain silent unless it became his duty to speak. She had heard her father talk politics often enough to realize that meant a direct threat against Trevor. If he stayed out of the mayoralty race, well and good. If he went into it, then Frieder would talk. Like Kennedy and her father, he was a supporter of Jim McSwayne.

Lying there on the bed, she pressed her lips together and knotted her tired little brows, and clenched her hands, in which icy coldness had given place now to a reactionary hotness, and tried to think.

Her own impulsive action had brought all this to pass. She admitted it freely now. If she had kept cool—given the announcement of Ed's engagement even a brief consideration before writing the note—none of it would have happened. She would have remembered her maidenly

pride and have acted in a far different manner.

And since she had been the cause of the trouble, somehow, she must find a way to undo what was past, and prevent the menace of the future. It was characteristic of the change which had occurred in her during the last twelve hours that she did not grasp on the first plan which presented, but lay firm-lipped, with lids half closed, her clenched hands at her sides, while she turned and examined in detail each conception of a way which waked in her tortured brain.

Only one thing she did not examine or abandon, or question. She must save Ed Trevor from the results of her own foolhardy course of the night before. That was the basal theme on which all her future actions must be erected until the end was gained. And it all came down to that in the end. Come what would or might, she could not permit his good name, his reputation, held unsmirched through all his young manhood, to be blackened through her.

Plainly he had not told Kennedy who she was—had not acted on her suggestion. He was a chivalric gentleman in such things. Nor would he do it. If the thing was divulged, it would come about through other channels, of which, so far as she knew, she herself was the only possible one.

She had to admit that she admired his stand immensely. It was a bit wonderful to imagine that even though he were publicly accused of a moral transgression with some woman, and could free himself, perhaps, by naming the person and defying proof, or carrying the war into the opposite political camp by involving her in the scandal, he would refuse, and face the issue alone.

Yet she knew that was what he would do. And because of that, she was safe—but found small pleasure in her safety.

Of course, Trevor could refuse the nomination when asked by Gottfried to make the race. That way would lie safety for them both. But she put that impatiently

aside. It wouldn't do. It would seem to the man who had promised silence a tacit admission of guilt, and it would rob Trevor of the very fruits for which he had worked since he had been city attorney. It was horribly unjust that he could be so robbed through no fault of his own.

Over and over she turned the thing in her brain. An hour passed, two hours. A rap sounded on her door. The voice of her brother Frank came through to her ears. "Say, Shiela, are you sick?"

"No—I—was just resting," she called back.

"Mom wanted to know. She's keeping some breakfast hot for your lazy highness. Comin' down?"

"In a minute," Shiela told him.

"Heard the news?" he questioned, scratching on a panel while he waited.

"No." Shiela's tone was brittle. "Frank, quit that scratching."

"Ed Trevor's going to run for mayor—maybe. It's in the paper."

"All right. Tell mother I'll be down right away," said his sister.

She heard him patter down the hall and sat up, swinging her feet to the floor. Trevor was mentioned as a candidate in the morning papers. She wondered whether as a possible or an actual head for Gottfried's ticket. If the latter then most surely Buck Frieder would speak, and attempt to blacken the opposition man in favor of McSwayne's nominee.

She sprang up, tore off her kimono, and began to dress with quick haste. Her little red mouth was a straight line, and her eyes clouded as she donned her attire. Suddenly she straightened up to the full stature of her lithe little figure, and stamped a high-arched foot on the floor.

"It sha'n't be," said Shiela. "They sha'n't do it. Ed's too nice a boy. He said I'd reached the reckless age. Maybe I have. They'd better look out." She opened her door and went down the stairs.

And she found a copy of the *Herald* as

she went in to breakfast, and spread it out while waiting to be served. She found some comfort in the fact that Trevor was mentioned as a possibility only. At least that would give her a respite—time in which to think out a way of meeting the situation.

Her mother came and sat down beside the table. "You got in pretty late last night, Shiela," she half stated, half questioned. She was a woman who rarely made a direct statement. The majority of her remarks ended always in a rising inflection.

Shiela nodded. "U-mm," she made answer. "We were talking about Ed Trevor."

She felt that her mother eyed her quickly. "His announcement was a great surprise, wasn't it?" she said, and paused, waiting.

Shiela broke a piece of toast. "Oh, he's showed a lot of interest in Dorothy," she replied with implied indifference in her tones.

"I—I can't understand it," her mother stammered. "Ed, and Dorothy Carrigan." She left it up in the air.

"Oh, Dorothy's a nice girl," said Shiela, surprised to find she could say it without any particular effort. Last night it had driven her to a temporary frenzy. Why now did it cause her scarcely a flutter of a heart beat to discuss it?

"Ed's certainly keeping himself before the public," her mother resumed in a tone of relief, satisfied in seeming at least that her child had taken small hurt from Trevor's action. "They say he's going to be run for mayor on Gottfried's ticket. Your father was speaking about it this morning. He says if Ed runs, Jim McSwayne will ask Ren Langdon to run for us."

Shiela put down her cup abruptly without getting it to her lips.

"Ren Langdon!" she cried. "Why, Mom, he's Ed's bosom friend. He wouldn't run against Ed?"

"Your father says so." Mrs. McLeod seemed to consider her answer final.

Something contracted sharply in Shiela's breast. Ren Langdon to make the race against Ed Trevor. The possibilities involved in that were too awful to contemplate. She had heard Langdon speak of Frieder as one of his friends—and Frieder knew all about last night. If Langdon ran, there was simply no chance at all of Buck's remaining silent. And no matter what he said, Ed would not explain. His reputation would be ruined, his social position gone, his political aspirations blasted at the very start.

Something like a sudden demoralization seized her. She picked up her cup and drained it in thirsty gulps to cover her emotion, pushed back her breakfast scarcely tasted, spoke confusedly of a headache, and left the room.

Ren Langdon to run against Trevor. The thought seemed to blot out all else as she fled back to her room and shut herself in. If that happened—if it happened. She wondered if Ed knew; whether knowing he would consent to take such chances or even to run against his friend.

She caught her breath. There was a way. The two men were a byword in the town in their friendship. Ed could refuse to run on those grounds and so save the situation. Full of the idea, she ran to her phone and called his office. She learned that he was in court, and was not expected back till some time in the afternoon.

But she might get Langdon. She rang up the engineering plant where he held the assistant manager's position. His voice came back to her after a bit. "Ren, this is Shiela," she announced with the freedom of long acquaintance.

"Oh, hello Shiela! What can I do for you?"

"Tell me something," she replied promptly. "They tell me Mac's going to run you against Ed, for mayor. How can you two boys oppose each other?"

Langdon chuckled. "By mutual consent," he informed her. "Ed and I

talked it all over last evening on the way from the club. It does look funny, but we agreed not to let it hurt our friendship. This town needs a clean mayor, and we agreed to make it a clean race, without any mud slinging or personal assaults either physical or moral. It ought to make a pretty scrap, don't you think?"

"Then—you're going to run?" asked Shiela with a sinking heart, even while she felt a wild desire to give way to a sort of hysterical laughter. A clean race—a clean man—a clean campaign—for a clean mayor—no mud throwing! So that was the program? Good God, if Langdon knew the irony of what he was saying!

"Of course. We shook hands on it in the Avalon lobby," came the man's voice.

"Maybe—Ed's—changed his mind?" she stammered.

"No chance," Langdon averred. "When Ed makes up his mind, he's a regular coon dog to keep his grip on the notion. By the way, Shiela, can I come up to-night?"

"Up here? Why, you're always welcome." That was true, too. Next to Trevor she had always liked his handsome, tawny chum.

"I—I want to see you about something very special," he said with a noticeable hesitation.

The girl's pulses surged. What was it? Had he heard? Did he know? She became aware that she was holding the receiver and staring into the mouth-piece.

"About eight, Ren," she forced herself to answer. "Good-by." If he did know, it was better to face it at once and have it over.

But the thing gave her a huge unrest as she hung up and rose. Suddenly she wanted to get out in the sunshine—go somewhere—do something to get away from herself. She put on a street suit quickly and took up her hat. She was possessed of a little electric motor which

stood in its own little stall in the garage at the back of the house.

She ran down-stairs, told her mother she thought a drive might help her headache, and made her way to the rear. Five minutes later she glided down the drive to the street and turned toward the center of town. Down there she would see things—people—possibly find the sort of diversion she craved.

So, driving, it came to her mind that she had promised Dorothy only the day before to meet her this morning at Cannon's—Edgewater's largest department-store—for one of those feminine shopping expeditions, in which girls delight. Only yesterday. Could it be possible that not more than twenty-four hours had passed since she talked to Dorothy over the wire? It might have been a year to judge by the difference in her feelings. How much life could crowd into a little space at times.

She glanced at her watch. She was half an hour late for their appointment, but—of a sudden she resolved to go to Cannon's and see if Dorothy were still waiting. Sometime she would have to meet her, and face the issue of her engagement squarely, and it might as well be now. She increased her speed, and presently leaving her car by the curb, entered the somewhat ornate doors of the store.

CHAPTER VIII.

A PROMISE—QUALIFIED.

SHIELA found Dorothy in the white goods department, forced a smile to her lips, and advanced with extended hand. "And you never told me one word yesterday when we were talking," she exclaimed quickly. "You sly minx! Dot! You look awfully happy." While the saleswoman watched she kissed her blushing friend.

"I am," Dorothy declared in her calmly poised manner. Shiela fancied that already there was something differ-

ent about her—that she was more womanly, less the girl, as Trevor's promised bride.

"And you will be. When is the wedding?"

"We haven't set the date," said Dorothy, her eyes shining. "And you, Shiela—why don't you say 'Yes' to Ren Langdon? We could have a double wedding."

Shiela pouted. "Ren Langdon! Fudge. He never asked me. Why should he?"

"Because he loves you, honey."

They had drawn a little ways back from the counter and listening ears. Shiela glanced into the pink and white exaltation of Dorothy Carrigan's face. "Dot," she said quickly, "I've heard that newly engaged young women and brides were given to day dreams. I reckon this is one of yours."

Dorothy shook her head, still smiling. "He's told me, Shiela. He worships the print of your feet."

Shiela McLeod found her heart violently throbbing, but tossed her head. "He's kept it well concealed then," she said lightly. "Are you through here? I don't feel like shopping. I didn't get up till ten and I feel awfully stuffy. Come on over to Connelly's and we'll have a bite of luncheon. I didn't eat breakfast and still I got here late. What's the use of your buying things now? You'll have to be getting your trousseau before long."

Dorothy gave her another smile. "Send those things up, please," she addressed a clerk, and turned down the aisle with her chum. The two girls crossed the street and entered one of the better cafés where they found a table and took seats.

"I suppose you've heard the gossip about Ed this morning?" Dorothy began.

For one moment Shiela's heart contracted; with something like sickening dread, then Dorothy's quiet happiness and her own common sense came to her

relief. "About the mayoralty race?" she returned.

"Yes."

Shiela nodded. "Oh, yes, he told me." She regretted the form of her answer the next moment as Dorothy's blue eyes widened. It was a bit cattish, and she knew it, but—Dorothy seemed to have stepped into her new rôle so surely—there was an actual note of possession in the way she spoke Trevor's name.

"Ed told you?" Dorothy queried. "When?"

"Last night—over the phone."

"He was at the Sence Club last night." Dorothy eyed her.

Shiela nodded. "Yes. I rang up to congratulate him on his engagement. He mentioned the mayoralty matter also."

"And Ren will run against him," Dorothy said.

Shiela smiled slightly. "It is to be a clean race between them, and the best man will win." She couldn't help that either. Dorothy was so awfully sure.

"Meaning Ed?" she said now, flushing.

Shiela shrugged. "Maybe, Dot, maybe. The people must give the final decision."

"Ed's position as city attorney should help him there," Dorothy responded. "He told me this morning that Ren and he had agreed last night that there should be no personalities used in the fight. Not that it would matter to Ed. His reputation is not one to be assailed in that way. If they want a clean man for mayor, they couldn't get a better. Ren, too, of course."

"I suppose I ought to say thank you for that last, since you think him my Romeo," Shiela retorted.

Once more as when speaking to Langdon she felt herself assailed by a desire to break forth into hysterical laughter. Why was it that she felt that impulse toward ribald merriment without humor when the agreement between Trevor and Langdon was mentioned? She knew that both men *were* of good principle

and deportment—that it would be hard to find two better men for the place than they.

Yet the irony of the thing which stood back and threatened one of them since last night, gripped her and shook her with a desire to scream out that it would *not* be a clean race, *could* not be a clean race—that even though blameless, one of these men would emerge from it blackened, ruined, a social outcast in this Southern city with its old-fashioned code of morals for the élite of the social world.

She lifted her kerchief and pressed it over her lips while she fought back that urge to the cachinnation of fiends.

And after that she let Dorothy chatter, while she herself toyed with her luncheon and wished that sufficient time had elapsed to give color to her escape. In the end she pushed back her plate and signed the waiter for her check. Dorothy, it appeared to her inquiry, was going back to the store to complete her shopping.

Shiela expressed her intention of going for a further drive before returning home. She accompanied Miss Carrigan to the entrance of Cannon's, bade her an affectionate good-by, at least in seeming, and turned back to her little car.

One purpose now filled her mind. This race between the men chums must not start, let alone be allowed to continue. Trevor must make the excuse that he would not run against Langdon. Rightly maintained, such a pose would not injure him in any way save, perhaps, to make people call him sentimental.

In view of what would certainly follow the other course, it seemed the wise one to her. She decided to go to his office and talk it over, unless, perhaps, he, too, had arrived at the same conclusion. It would be a sacrifice, but at the same time it would be a salvation.

Yet her heart well nigh failed her as she stopped before the building which held his office. It was an awful thing to ask him to forswear his career for a

reason in which she herself was the prime cause. She set her rounded jaw into a harder line as she mounted to Trevor's floor and paused before the ground-glass panel of his door.

And then she was inside, asking a stenographer for Ed, and he had heard her voice, and opened the door of his private office and asked her to come in.

Once there, however, his manner grew severe. "I hardly expected this," he began the instant the door was closed. "Do you think it prudent?" He paused suddenly embarrassed. The thought that this beautiful woman loved him rose to arrest his tongue.

As for Shiela, she opened her big eyes wide. "And why not? I've been here before, goodness knows—many a time. Will it do any good for me to play ostrich and hide my head in the sand?"

Trevor jerked a hand in an upward gesture. "Well?"

Shiela laughed. "Like a chess game, isn't it, Ed. You play the same opening every time. Last night you said 'Well?'; to-day you say 'Well?' again."

He frowned slightly. "Is this about last night, Shiela?"

"Partly. It's because of last night at least. Ed, you mustn't make this mayoralty race."

"Mustn't?" Trevor smiled.

"Mustn't," the girl repeated, meeting his glance squarely. "And I'm not talking for my own selfish interest either. If it were only that, I wouldn't be here—not after the hours I have passed since you left me, and the things I have thought. I'm safe, thanks to you and the chivalry of your actions; but this is about you, Ed, and—and Dorothy."

"She loves you, Ed—really. I've seen her—we had luncheon together. She's happy—planning to be happier, Ed—you have made her a woman—just as last night made me one, too. The difference is, she's a happy woman, and I—am not—because I realize so fully what I have done. That's why I've come to tell you you mustn't make the race. If you do,

and Ren Langdon runs against you, Buck Frieder will talk. He's Langdon's friend. That will mean a stain on your reputation, the loss of the election most likely, and heartache for Dorothy at least. Wouldn't it be better to keep out and—"

"Have everybody ask why?" Trevor cut in quickly.

"You could refuse to run against Ren."

The lawyer smiled. "Shiela, you're clever. I could—except that Ren and I have settled that, and I understand Ren's been telling people about it all morning. If I refused on those grounds now—it would hardly convince."

"Then you're going to run?" The question came a trifle breathless.

"I scarcely know what to do," said Trevor. "If they ask me, I can hardly refuse unless I give a plausible reason. It looks like I'd have to take my chances."

"You haven't any. I attended to that," said Shiela in bitter self-accusation. "Oh, Ed, I wish I'd died before last night."

Sudden sympathy followed her words in Trevor's breast. Again he thought of the crumpled scrap he had found on the bed in his rooms. In a way he had wounded her—or so it seemed to him at the instant. He had driven her to her present position by his engagement to another. And despite that she was showing a noble nature in thinking of himself and Dorothy and their welfare.

"There, there, it will all come out somehow," he told her. "Anyway, Shiela, you mustn't worry yourself sick about it, little woman. Forget it and let me fight it out."

She set her red mouth firmly. "I can't!" fiercely. "Buck will deem it his *duty* to talk if you run, unless he is stopped—so I guess—I guess I'll have to stop him."

"What?" Trevor leaned suddenly forward. "You—stop him—Shiela. What do you mean?"

"That"—she threw up her head quickly—"I'll *tell* him. I don't think he'll want to pose as the man who threw mud

on my name. I'll go see him and tell him the *truth*. I'm not going to see you attacked because I was a fool."

Trevor reached her quickly and seized her by the shoulders. "You'll not," he almost hissed. "You'll not do anything like that, Shiela McLeod, and you'll give me your promise not to before you leave this room. After last night and the escape you at least had from recognition, I've a few rights in the matter, and I'm not going to let you run any such mad course as that."

"Buck Frieder's no man to understand such a story—or believe it. He's a shrewd business man—a clever politician—but he isn't a gentleman as we understand the term. You're not going to put yourself in his power. Promise me you won't."

She stared back with defiant eyes.

Trevor tightened his grip on her flesh. "Promise."

"Then what am I to do?"

"Nothing. Promise."

"Ed—you're hurting. I've got to do something."

"Promise."

"You think because I'm a woman I can't do anything, I suppose."

"You can promise, and then you can go home and not bother any more about this business at all."

"I promise," said Shiela, and paused. Trevor released her.

"That I won't do anything unless—" She retreated toward the door into the outer office.

"Unless what?" Trevor whirled toward her.

"I consider it my duty, *a la* Buck Frieder." She flashed through the door and was gone.

Trevor sat and stared at the closed door. Her visit had at least served to bring him face to face with the situation, which all day he had refused serious consideration. He remained in his chair for an hour after she left him, sunk in troubled thought.

That night Renwick Langdon kept his appointment with Shiela. Very gently,

and very strongly, he urged her to be his wife. She refused for two reasons: One that she had never considered him in any light save that of a friend, so sure had she been of Trevor. The other was, that while the situation she had herself created remained unsettled, she could not consider the love he offered, without telling him all about it, and she shrank from doing that.

And yet, after he had taken his leave and gone down under the elms in the moonlight, tall, strong, fair-haired as some young viking, she climbed up to her room and laid herself down with the light of the moon in her chamber. A long time she lay there, recalling his words, the note of his voice—his confession of a love considered hopeless since he thought she loved another.

And when she slept, a little smile had formed itself on the rosy bow of her mouth. She was thinking of how Langdon's thick, tawny hair curled above his forehead, of how strong his face looked in the half light of the veranda where they had talked together, of the deep, full tones of his voice.

CHAPTER IX.

TREVOR DECIDES.

A WEEK passed, eight days, nine days. Trevor, immersed in work, which he now welcomed as almost a relief, waited developments in the political situation, and spent restless nights turning his predicament over and over in his mind.

So far, he had been unable to reach any definite decision. But a change was coming over him while he waited. For the first time he faced a really crucial situation, and, like many before him to whom life has been kind, he began to experience a dull resentment of the trick fortune had finally played him.

He spent less time at his club, more at his office, took his meals at unusual places, and generally deported himself like a bear with a bee-sting, avoiding rather than seeking his fellows.

Uncertain as to just what new form Shiela's half-expressed purposes in the matter might take, anxious to avoid any further discussion with a girl whose secret he possessed without her knowledge, whom he could not approach as a lover, and to whom yet he could not show the stern front possible under a condition of ignorance on his part, he kept out of her way.

To Dorothy and Dorothy alone he crept time after time with a sore heart, a sense of ephemeral happiness in her presence—a fear that at any time the Damoclean sword might fall and destroy the harmony between them. She noticed it as a matter of course. At first he evaded explanation and then pleaded the press of work, which certainly existed.

Her hand fell softly caressing across his hair. "And the campaign coming, too," she made sympathetic comment. "You mustn't work too hard, dear. You'll need all your force in this fight."

In his heart Trevor knew even better than she how much force and reserve powers of fighting ability he might possibly need.

"They haven't asked me to run yet," he said to her.

In fact, he had to confess now that he dreaded the thing which once had appealed—hoped that Gottfried might, after all, not offer him the once desired head of his ticket.

"But they will?" Dorothy's eyes held all the supreme confidence of the woman truly in love. "And then Mr. and Mrs. Mayor will take a trip and you'll get a good, long rest."

He pressed her to him in a silent answer. In his soul a voice cried out that he wanted the rest now—to take her and run away from all the infernal tangle—just they two—and be happy.

Such evenings spent with the girl of his heart left him more deeply perturbed than ever, yet he went back again and again, to leave more than ever torn between alternative courses. If he withdrew, how explain to associates, friends, his fiancée?

Since the agreement between himself and Langdon had become known, that once fairly plausible excuse no longer existed. Then what—why?

On the night of the ninth day he left earlier than usual—the thing was getting beyond his control. His whole nature clamored to tell the sweetheart in his arms the whole desperate muddle and ask her help to decide. He longed to lay it before her, as when a boy he had taken his childish troubles to his mother.

Chivalry—the duty he owed to that other woman, who had given him her heart even though unasked, sealed his lips and chained his tongue. He left Dorothy and the haven of her sweetness and rushed back to his rooms in a mood akin to desperation.

And while he sat there glowering from a window, blown first this way, then that, by conflicting impulse, his fate was being decided, all unbeknown to himself.

In some Southern cities there is a totally different political atmosphere to that which pertains in other sections of the nation. To begin with, the inhabitants are all—or mainly—Democrats. There is but one national ticket. Despite that fact, they manage to get all the excitement of two or more parties by means of factional divisions, based on divergent local opinions in the main.

Such conditions satisfy the primitive man love of conflict, without infringing the sacred opinion of any on national matters. And as in different parties in other States, so in a town like Edgewater, each faction has its acknowledged leader, its fairly well-built-up machine.

"Be sure you're strong enough to knock out the other fellow and then hit him hard—and first." That was the motto openly expressed of John Gottfried, one of Edgewater's bosses—the man who would race Trevor in the near-approaching campaign.

Another saying of Boss Gottfried was: "When you can't do it one way—there's apt to be another." He had proved both sayings true in the past.

He was a big man, mentally and physically, his one vice a craving for power which he attempted to wield through the game of politics. In his private business as one of the city's merchants he was honest to a degree. Nor did he make any attempt to deny the quasi-legitimate means he employed in handling his political cohorts. He was honestly dishonest, when it came to the "game" as he called it.

Some of that stolid defiance of conventions showed in such epigrammatic utterances as he made at times, and the iron hand of control which he held over his men. But he was honestly the friend of Trevor, admiring the unswerving integrity of the younger man immensely and in outspoken fashion, as was his way.

McSwayne, his political rival, opposition leader, general contractor in his other life, had been cast in a similar mold, save that, unlike Gottfried, he was more subtle and less gruff. Commenting on Gottfried's dictum anent hitting hard and first, McSwayne had been known to remark that it was a good way, but a better was to "Let the other fellow hit as hard as he liked, and then not be there when the blow landed."

The actual size of the matter was that in their innermost hearts each man admired the other and took a keen delight in their constant warfare. They had come to a place where, like a player of chess, they actually regarded politics as their own "game," and made their moves with the same consideration and calculation and the same openness. In the South, as a matter of fact, political fighting, while no less bitter, is, in the main, more open, more clean—save in the occasional instances of rabid personal affairs.

So in Edgewater, Gottfried and McSwayne played a sort of political chess game, with the city for their board, and its hundred and odd thousand men and women as their pieces. And they watched each other with a caution which sought to foresee each the other's move.

While Trevor fought out his undecided

battle with himself, Gottfried and his advisory council were deciding their own immediate moves. Gottfried, heavy, stolid, puffing on a cigar as big as himself, vest open over his paunch, his florid face a bit flushed, summed up the situation in the offices of his hardware establishment where the council was held.

"When you can't do a t'ing one way—try annoder. It don't make no difference do I win or McSwayne, dis town has to have a clean administration. I would radder give it to dem myselluf as to have Mac do it. Ve know he will run Ren Langdon, and he is going to pe a hardt man to beat. Budt ve got vun what will beadt him. Dat's Trevor. Already has the *Express* and de *Heraldt* mentioned his name for de place. Vy not ask him and haf it settled? Gene's had plendy, and anyway de people won't gif him any more."

Gene Collins, thrice mayor, admirable henchman, excellent puppet, who automatically exhibited Gottfried's will upon demand, grinned as he gave assent.

"Sure, John! They've got my number pretty near right by now. Mac's big card is going to be a 'clean administration,' and he's sure picked a good man to carry that stuff right up to election. I've had enough, too, to tell the truth. I'm dragging down more brickbats than bouquets the last six months."

"But say!" Tommy Wilson ("Kid Wilson"), erstwhile bantam-weight prize-fighter, and present king of the Seventh Ward, opened his mouth. "How far does that clean stuff go? If you get this Trevor guy in—an' I ain't sayin' but what he's the clear goods in a lot of ways—where will it land us when it's done? How far does it go, Gott—on the level?"

Gottfried turned his eyes on the little fighter.

"Id goes all der vays, Tommy," he said.

"Honest?"

Gottfried nodded.

"Den kiss me good-by." Wilson shook his head in disapproval.

"Id would go likewise the same distance ven Langdon vas elected, Tommy," Gottfried said. "Dis town vants Reform mit a capital R. De question is not do they gedt id, but who gifs it to dem, me or Mac. I should rather it vould be me, Tommy, and so maybe"—he closed a blue eye slowly—"vould you and your friends—no?"

"Gawd!" said Tommy. "I guess I grab your drift now, John. It's better to ride than walk. Yep—there'll be better days."

"It will be hardt enough to stay riding," Gottfried rumbled. "Dis Langdon will be strong with the laboring classes. But I think with Trevor's pull mit de society people and what ve can count on always among our own people, we can beadt him all right."

Tommy banged a corner of the desk. "He'll get de Sev'nt' all right, or I wades in blood."

"And we've six wards sewed up the same as ever," Collins opined.

"And Ed's strong in the First himselluf. Dey made him city attorney," Gottfried added.

Tommy chuckled. "An' dat's eight outer fifteen. Good day, Mr. Mayor."

Gottfried swept his eyes about the office, searching the faces of one or two others who had taken small part in the conversation. He read approval. He began chewing quickly, as was his way, on the butt of his cigar.

"Den you, Gene, and you, Tommy, and me, to-morrow ve will go and tell Trevor we want him. So I guess dat's all." He began to chuckle thickly. "He iss even engagdt to Carrigan's daughter, and Carrigan iss vun of Mac's men—budt iss he?—now already I t'ink Mac iss beaten. Ledt us go home."

As a result, the morning of the 15th of September saw Gottfried's committee with Boss John at their head, demanding admittance to the presence of Edgewater's city attorney.

For one brain-swirling moment after they were announced Trevor fought to

maintain his poise, and greatly to his own surprise, and despite his still unformed decision, he emerged from the first knowledge that his fate was upon him calm and more evenly balanced than he had been for days.

He rose and stood while Gottfried, bulky, massive, puffing on what might have been the cigar of last evening, advanced from the outer office with Gene Collins, dark, thin-faced, shifty of eye, and Wilson, small, quick, with the glance of a hawk striking, trailing in his rear. He put out his hand with a quiet dignity of manner, greeted his callers, and gestured them to chairs. Then he resumed his own.

Gottfried came down to the point without preface. "No need to beadt aboutt the bush with you, Ed. I guess you know what we've come for. You got to be mayor."

Trevor's face twitched. It had come at last—the moment he had dreamed of—felt afraid of. It faced him now in the persons of these men of his own faction. He forced a slight smile to his lips.

"Why have I 'got to,' John?" he inquired.

Gottfried clamped his cigar in a corner of his mouth.

"Because Ren Langdon's headin' Jim's ticket, and you're the only man in town what can beadt him."

"You think I can?"

"Sure. If I didn't, I wouldn't ask you to run, Ed. I ain't handin' Mac nud-dings ven I know it."

"What makes you so sure?" Trevor temporized further.

Tommy Wilson cut in. "'Cause you kin come clean, Mr. Trevor. Dis burg's gone bug-house over clean administrations. They won't be happy till they think they've got it, an' after the rep you've made as attorney they'd fall for you in a bunch.

"W'en you can look up a guy's record clean through an' not find nuthin' on him, dat's half de battle wid de reform gang. Dey don't ask what's a man done, but

has he done anything he hadn't oughter. Dat's dem. Dere ain't another man in dis town w'at's got a better dope sheet on past performances dan you have, an' dat ain't no 'bull.' It goes."

Trevor nodded. His lids contracted slightly, however, at Tommy's words. If only they knew—what might happen. He turned again to Gottfried. "And if I run and win; what then?"

"Up to you," said John with a chuckle. "Reform all you vant to; though just so we understand each other; don't offer to do it if you vants der Gottfried support on der nexdt election. Dat's no threat, Ed. It's just playin' der game open mit you."

"I know you vell enough to know you vill do as you please. Budt—if you should t'ink aboutt Congress—dat would be different also—my machine could help you a lot on dat roadt."

The mayoralty—Congress. The ladder of fame. It appealed to the ambition locked in Trevor's breast. Dorothy in the capital of the nation queening it in her regal, blond beauty. The dream passed and showed another picture—defeat, disgrace.

He nodded slowly. "I appreciate your frankness, Gottfried, but I'm afraid I can't make this race."

Tommy Wilson leaped to his feet.

"Not make it?" he yelled. "Why, Gawd, Mr. Trevor, yuh got to!"

"Sorry, Tommy. I've very good reasons." Trevor met the little man's staring gaze.

"Come clean. What's eatin' yuh?" Wilson demanded.

Gottfried, though puzzled, was calmer.

"Yes, Ed; what are dey?" he questioned. "Don't you vant to be mayor?"

"Frankly, John, I'd like it."

"Then vat is it? Is it because Langdon is running? I heardt you boys had fixed that up."

"It isn't that." Trevor shook his head.

Collins smiled thinly. "Your reason's private?" he queried.

"Yes." Trevor's answer was spoken shortly.

Gottfried rubbed his hands. "Dose is no good," he declared. "As a clean administration candidate you should not let private matters stand in de vay of your duty to the city." He winked a heavy lid.

"Dat's de stuff!" howled Tommy Wilson, and at once became almost pathetically pleading. "Aw, come on, Mr. Trevor, be a sport. I'll wrap up me ward an' hand her over to youse right now. Gott's six will go for you solid, an' you can swing de First mob yourself. You got it all sewed up already. Come on."

"Tommy's right, Ed," Gottfried resumed. "We only need a fair break to win. Mac thinks he's got our crowd licked with Langdon. We don't only need you, we got to haf you. It iss your duty."

Two pictures swam before Trevor's mental eye—Dorothy and the face of Shiela.

"I—I can't do it, Gottfried," he said thickly. "I'd like to—but—"

"But what?" sneered Collins. "This is a hell of a way to throw down your own people. If you had this bunch of reasons, why didn't you tip us off ten days ago when your name was first mentioned? I know Dot Carrigan's dad is one of Mac's gang, but I didn't suppose—"

"Drop that!" Trevor's voice snapped sharply. "Miss Carrigan has nothing whatever to do with the reasons I spoke of. At the same time, they are, in my estimation, sufficient to justify my actions."

"If they concerned me alone, do you suppose I would hesitate to take off the gloves and get into this fight? If you do, you don't know me. But they don't. There are other parties interested in this thing—vitally interested in it. For that very reason I can't go into details sufficiently far to make my position plain. There's a good excuse"—he suddenly swept his arms wide in the grip of his own emotions—"and I wish to God there wasn't! But there is."

Gottfried removed the cigar from his mouth and inspected its chewed-up end as though for inspiration. After a moment he sighed.

"Ed," he observed quite calmly, "dis is my last throw. If you go back on me, der oldt man is beaden. I know from vat you say dat dere is somedings you iss afraid may crop up in dis campaign, and I aindt going to ask you to say vun more wordt, only dis. You know vat it is, I don't.

"I know dat vid you ve vin and Edgewater geds der best administration she efer had. Dot's vort some leedle risk, I reckon. Vidout you ve is licked already. You can put me oudt of business or nodt, as you like. Now dat's all. I'm going away and led you t'ink. Phone me aboutt t'ree o'clock—only Ed—for Got's sake, ven you phone say 'yes.'"

He jammed his cigar back in his face, signaled his two henchmen, and stalked heavily from the room.

Trevor watched his departure without a word, and, when he had vanished, sighed. Well, he had decided—given up the opportunity he had worked for—let his great chance go by. Gottfried, no matter how he might take it now on the surface, would never forgive him. Politically, at least in Edgewater, he was dead. Unless by three o'clock—

Unless. Now that he had decided, he realized fully how much he had wanted to accept—to make the race—to win—and win—and win—to mount the ladder of success, and see pride and love and faith grow in Dorothy's face. What would she think of his refusal? How could he explain—how expect her to accept any half-way explanation he could make?

A perspiration broke out on his forehead, now he was alone. This way lay suspicion at least, if not open disgrace. A dozen, a hundred persons would question him directly—thousands would question themselves. Could he evade all the direct interrogations and save his face or

satisfy the unasked questions in the minds of the others?

The decision given, he saw it in the light they would view it. They would question at first, and then answer for themselves and smile wisely and nod. They would say he was covering something—and they would put a name on the something, each to suit himself.

He clenched his hands. At the best they would deem him skulking some issue he feared to face. That would be the kindest interpretation he could hope for. And how would, could that affect the happiness of the girl he loved? A skulker! A fine character and name to offer a dainty woman for life! A fine thing to feel! Yes, feel! Because within himself was something which revolted at this passive defeat, this yielding to the threat of the future without a struggle.

He bowed his head in his hands and dug his fingers into his heavy black hair, and thought, thought, thought around an endless circle.

The telephone rang. He answered. And that began it. Gottfried, whatever else he was, was a politician, a general, a leader. Once out of Trevor's hearing, he drew Collins and Wilson to him and gave them some hurried counsel. They darted away in opposite directions.

As a result of their going, the phone bell in Trevor's office began an almost ceaseless ringing, save for those intervals during which he responded to its summons and listened to a steady string of congratulations, applause, predictions of his coming election, urgings to make a strong fight and rely on the united support of his friends—voices begging him for this or that reform so soon as elected—other voices telling him it was his duty to get in and clean up the city, and—how did Gottfried work it?—at the last, toward two-thirty, Dorothy's own sweet tones saying:

"Ed—Ed dear, is it so that they've sent a committee to offer you the place on Gottfried's ticket? Oh, Ed, are you going to run?"

Something broke in Ed Trevor's brain. His jaw came up and set firmly. His eyes fired and flashed.

"All true, dear," he said softly. "They were here this morning. I'm to give them their answer at three o'clock."

"Ed—" softly.

"Yes?"

"Well, what are you going to answer?"

"Yes!" Trevor ground it out slowly between clenched teeth.

"Sweetheart—come to me this evening, will you?"

"Yes dear," he said the word for the third time, waited until he heard her hang up slowly, and leaned back, staring at the phone. And now let all the fiends of perdition howl, the die *was* cast. He was going to make the fight. He was going to face the issue squarely; regardless of all else, he was going to enter this race and bank on what the public knew of his cleanness to offset any slanderous attack Buck Frieder might make.

Surely it ought to take more than one man's unsupported word to blast the labor of years. Anyway, he would chance it, and if the worst came he would face it then, and not before in anticipation. In his own heart he was innocent of wrong. He would not skulk and cringe any more. He squared his shoulders, put out a hand, and took up the phone. And then quite calmly, and without the least hesitation, he called Gottfried's number and sat waiting.

The *Evening Express* that night carried a double-column head which proclaimed to the city in thirty-six-point type the candidacy of Edgar F. Trevor for mayor. The *Ledger* also had the item, though it overtopped it with the name of Renwick M. Langdon, their own faction's man for the place.

Shiela McLeod read both announcements with a sickening depression—a feeling of direful foreboding which seemed swiftly to engulf her, constricting her heart in her breast. Her hammering pulses seemed beating out in her brain

the dull, heavy accusation: "You have sent this man to his doom." After all, she was young.

CHAPTER X.

THE SWORD TREMBLES.

SHIELA knew of Langdon's candidacy beforehand—that is the unofficial announcement. The thing had, of course, been a foregone conclusion ever since the first mention of his name. But the *Ledger's* black type which put Renwick's name at the head of the McSwayne ticket even as the *Express* heralded Trevor's acceptance, was already to her old news.

Not only had she seen considerable of Langdon, who refused to consider her refusal of his suit as final, but Nancy McSwayne was giving a huge reception and dance the very evening of the day when Trevor's name was announced. It was to be a sort of social ratification of Langdon's preferment in the coming campaign.

Now with the black type of the *Express* proclaiming Trevor's final decision to defy any possible danger which might exist as a result of the night at his rooms, staring her in the face, she found herself regarding the function to which she had looked forward with pleasant anticipation, as an ordeal instead.

Let the lights shine and the music play, let men and women laugh and dance and revel to their hearts' content. Her own heart would not be in it—could not be in it, now that Trevor had decided as he had. Every moment would be but a form of torture, in which she would say to herself, how long will it last—when will the storm break, and blast the reputation of this man, because of me.

Could she support it? The temptation to avoid it, to send word that she was not well, to remain at home in her room assailed her for the moment. It would be so much easier to do that—to sit there alone in the dark where there was no need to maintain an appearance.

She put it away with a sigh. She remembered Langdon was to take her, had asked her to go as his lady, and had flushed with pleasure when she had accepted. A little smile touched her lips.

"Poor Ren," she whispered to herself and the dusk of her room. "He's a nice boy—oh, such a nice boy—why can't he love a girl who can love him—be worthy of him. Oh, dear, why can't I make anything but trouble—give anything but pain?"

She put on the lights and began to dress with fingers which trembled and fumbled in a sort of clumsy numbness. They felt cold to the flesh of her throat and shoulders when she touched it in fastening her gown.

Langdon waiting for her below stairs knew nothing of that, however. To him she was altogether lovely—the lady of his desire as she came down the stairs a picture in soft lemon silk and laces, with a huge late red rose in her hair. Very lovely; very piquant and fetching and Spanish she looked to him as he went forward and took her hand.

Like Trevor perhaps he too dreamed a dream in which Shiela McLeod held the place at his side, and looked on him with pride. Youth is of such things, dreams of love, of accomplishment, of deeds for the dear one, of laying the fruits of our effort at a pair of little feet. And something of that looked out of Renwick Langdon's Southern gentleman's eyes and brought a tint to Shiela's cheek to vie with the hue of the roses.

"You little beauty," he said softly, still holding her hand.

Fire flashes fire quickly when one has reached the reckless age. Her red lips challenged with a smile. "Do you want that hand, Ren Langdon?"

And he answered: "Yes—always," with a meaning she could not mistake.

"Ren!" she chided, while her heart leaped none the less.

"Shiela, dear," he responded.

They looked on one another. Shiela shook her head. "You mustn't, Ren."

"Mustn't what? Tell the truth? You are dear to me. You know it."

Play time was past. This was serious. The color ebbed from Shiela's blush. "Come," she prompted. "I was clumsy to-night about dressing. It won't do to have the guest of honor late."

The house of McSwayne, two storied, wide porticoed, built on old lines of modern materials and construction by Jim McSwayne himself, always one of Edgewater's show places, was never more so than this night when it blazed with light, and rang with music and laughter.

Big Jim stood with his wife and Nancy to welcome the incoming guests. His face wore a grin as he recognized the gathering of his political clan to ratify his judgment and swear fealty to the man he intended to make mayor, thereby scoring a victory over the redoubtable Gottfried and forcing himself once more into party control.

Politics makes strange bedfellows, it is said. One might have been aware of the fact this night. Of course, out of regard to Nancy and her mother and the diplomacy of politics even, there were the usual society members selected without much regard to factional affiliation.

But beside them one could have noted here and there men palpably not so comfortable in the present situation as they would have been elsewhere; the men who wore their regalia of fashion not as to the manner born, but with reddened faces and evident discomfort, or bolder in their station, forebore to wear it at all.

These were Jim McSwayne's lieutenants of the line, men who harkened to his voice, and did his bidding, who would fight shoulder to shoulder in support of Langdon throughout the campaign.

The advent of Langdon was the signal for a sudden cohesion of these soldiers of political warfare about the newly announced head of the ticket. Shiela coming down from the dressing-room found her cavalier the center of a three-ply deep cluster of mankind and herself hedged off from his attention.

Over the heads of the men about him she could see his face, slightly flushed, boyishly handsome and enthusiastic as he accepted the plaudits and good natured chaff of what Big Jim called the "gang."

Momentarily at leisure she swept her eyes about the handsome parlors. She had heard that out of courtesy to Dorothy, Trevor was to be invited. She wondered if he were here—in the enemy's camp as the thought came into her mind. And then she saw him enter with Dorothy on his arm.

A little sharp pang assailed her. They were a striking couple what with Trevor's dark strength and Dorothy's almost wheaten blondness. She could not but admire the girl's poise. She began to wonder if after all she had been right in thinking her less well suited to pose as Trevor's mate in a public life, than herself—if perhaps her own petite beauty would in reality serve as well as a foil for the man's virile presence.

Langdon apparently saw Ed about the same time as herself. Breaking the circle about him, he bore directly down on Trevor and the slender blonde by his side, as they turned away from their hosts.

Dorothy extended both hands toward him as he advanced with exquisite camaraderie and tact. Shiela slipping forward now, heard her first greeting: "So this is the man my future husband has to beat in the coming election?"

Langdon laughed with high, good humor. "Behold the man. From what I know of practical politics he ought to find it easy."

"Faint heart you know, Ren," Dorothy countered.

"Oh," said Langdon, "this is not official. Keep it dark. Did Gottfried know I was doubtful, he'd give me an awful time, and make Ed help. If he started anything like that I'd just have to get up and take the First Ward away from their prince."

Shiela pushed forward and greeted Dorothy and Trevor. The four made a group which rapidly attracted both at-

tention and comment. Dorothy noted the glances cast their way and laughed.

"It seems to interest the multitude to behold the hated rivals in amicable communion," she observed, smiling. "Shiela, what do you think of these two chums flying at each other and lambasting one another from the rostrum and through the public press?"

"A masculine way of showing friendship," Shiela said, shrugging her bare, round shoulders. "I shall try to take a philosophic view and be content that one of my friends at least will be mayor—"

"And the other married," cut in Geoff Miller who had just spied the four and hurried up.

"Thanks Geoff," said Langdon. "I thought you were for Trevor—this is a visible gain for me already."

Geoff shook his head. "Thou dost not take my meaning, me lud," he retorted. "Marriage I was suggesting for thy consolation—a ladye fayre to bind thy political wounds. I have heard gossip, rumor. Thou shall come home on thy shield to thy Shiel—"

"Geoff!" Shiela McLeod flushed crimson, while Dorothy caught and pressed her close to her side. "Just for that you don't get a single dance."

"I'll take two then," Miller decided, wholly unabashed, "and thank ye kindly fair maid. To return to our muttuns, they've called Ed and Ren, Damon, and Pythias for years. What I want to know now is which is Damie and which one Pyth—which one has to work for the other—which one is slated to die. So young, so strong, me honor but 'tis sad."

The receiving line had broken up. Nancy's little sister Noriene was passing dancing programs. Dorothy hurried away to remove her light wraps. Langdon took a program for Shiela, wrote himself down for the first and last and two in the middle. Geoff seized the card and made good his threat of two, before rushing off to seek others. Shiela glanced at the two handsome men between whom she stood. "Which is Damon and

which Pythias?" she said with almost a catch in her voice.

"The public will settle that, Miss Shiela," returned Jim McSwayne, who had come up behind Langdon. He gave Trevor a grip of greeting and laid his hand on Langdon's arm.

"It's fine for you two boys to stand here openly talking," he said; "good campaign stuff may be and all that, but you're the lion of the evening, my boy, and you've got to circulate a little—if you could you oughter roar now and then, too. Miss Shiela, you'll have to excuse him till they start dancing. This isn't all fun this evening. Some of it's practical politics."

Shiela nodded to Ren in understanding. He turned away with McSwayne and left her with Trevor. She lifted her eyes to his face. "You're going to do it—really—run?"

He bowed and replied for her ears alone: "Yes."

"Are you mad, Ed? Are you as mad as I was?" That was a breathless whisper.

"I'm not mad at all," he told her. "I couldn't refuse without causing too much demand for explanation, too much conjecture. I was caught on the horns of a dilemma. Besides I hardly think under the already well-known agreement that Ren and I are to fight clean, that Buck will start anything at all. Even if he tried it, Ren wouldn't have it. He's not that sort of a man." He put out his hand toward her card. "Shiela, aren't you going to offer me a dance?"

She handed the program to him without a word, and watched while he scrawled his name. Once she knew how gladly she would have watched him do it. To-night it gave her no pleasure at all. He was so wholly another's—so openly Dorothy's lover—so utterly lost to her forever.

And some way despite his confidence, his brilliance, the high color on his handsome face, he seemed to her, one already an outcast, driven forth with the sins—

of another upon him, like the scapegoat of olden time. And those sins were her sins. She was to blame. The eyes she held on his face were tragic, and he sensed it.

"Don't worry so, little friend," he said gently under cover of giving back her card. "I know Ren and he knows me. He wouldn't hear of anything underhanded in a thousand years."

"Then tell him—the whole thing—tell him now—at the start," she panted. "If he knows now he can stop it. Ed—"

"I couldn't do that," he interrupted. "You—well maybe you don't understand, but I couldn't."

"Because it was, I—that night?" she asked.

"Yes, because it was you."

"But I ask you to do it—tell you to do it. I—"

"What are you two plotting?" Dorothy's soft tones cut in. "Ed, dear, there's the music."

The first bars of the first dance were stealing through the room. Trevor gave his sweetheart his arm. Langdon came hurrying up. The four moved toward the dance-floor, where already a few couples were beginning to sway in time to the catching rhythm.

Shiela saw Ed circle Dorothy with his arm and catch the step. Then Langdon had whirled her, too, out on the well-waxed surface. She was a very quiet little partner, however, as they swayed across the floor.

"Aren't you feeling well?" Langdon queried when she made no effort at conversation.

"I was thinking," she made answer.

"Ren, this campaign will be fought out on clean lines, won't it?"

Langdon chuckled. "Clean as a hound's tooth, Shiela. Ed and I are too good friends to start throwing mud, politics or not."

"It would be awful though if somebody else did—if anything happened to end your friendship," said the girl in his arms.

She felt his grip tighten about her body. "They'd better try it," he rapped out sharply. "That would be one fine way to make me chuck the whole game."

Shiela felt her pulses leaping. It was splendid, perfectly splendid, the way those two boys stood by each other. She felt herself warm toward the stalwart fellow who led her so easily through the dance.

Chuck the game; it was beyond belief, and yet somehow she felt he would do it—that he had meant every word he had said. Some of the chill foreboding left her and gave place to a feeling of hope. Surely neither Buck nor any one else would speak if Ren took a stand like that.

The dance ended, and once more Mc-Swayne was waiting to snatch Langdon away for some purpose of his own. Shiela, sitting where they left her, became conscious of some one pausing before her, and looked up to meet Buck Frieder's smile.

"You are alone, Miss McLeod; will wonders never cease?" he made his opening.

"This is Mr. Langdon's busy night," she returned.

Frieder sat down without permission. He extended his hand for her card. "I'm not much of a dancer, Miss Shiela, but if you'll bear with me, I shall be delighted."

Hardly knowing what she was doing, she let him have it, and watched him write his name, took the card back again in listless fashion, and suddenly stiffened with a purpose. "Just what do you think of the coming election?" she asked.

"Langdon will win." Frieder's tone brooked no denial.

"Mr. Trevor is popular," she parried.

Buck nodded. "Is—yes. But popularity, Miss Shiela, like fortune, is a fickle jade. It has been known to suffer a change."

No need for the girl to simulate a sudden, wide-eyed pallor or a quick intake of breath as she questioned: "Why—what do you mean?"

Her companion smiled somewhat grimly. "I mean that Langdon is going to

win this election. Big Jim and myself and some others intend to see that he does."

The call of the new dance was heaven-sent release. In a moment Geoff Miller would certainly come to claim her. Shiela gripped her dress in a hand which crushed its silken fabric and waited. Big Jim and this man, and some others, intended to see that Ren was elected. What did he mean; what was going on that neither she nor Langdon knew of? That was Geoff coming now to the rescue. She nodded to Frieder, rose, and waited for Miller to reach her side.

He found her as had Trevor, unlike herself; volubly witty one moment, the next as constrainedly silent, distraught. The fact was that to Shiela the evening was becoming more and more of an ordeal, through which a hundred verbal and mental barbs pierced into her spirit, and set her aquiver with seething emotions, which she was compelled to suppress beneath the surface as far as she possibly might.

She found herself physically hot and cold by turns, even as her dancing mates found her mentally moved to the verge of hysterical outbursts of speech or frozen to an icy silence of straining nerves.

Yet she waited for her dance with Trevor as a goal to be reached. Then once more she would have speech with him under cover of the music and the motion, and tell him what Frieder had said, warn him of the covert meaning.

She found his number next, with a sigh of relief, a prayer for strength in her heart, and surrendered herself to the clasp of his arm with but one thought—to speak convincingly and fast.

He gave her the chance himself. "You've got to get a grip on yourself, little woman," he said softly, half-way around the first circuit of the floor. "You can't go on this way, Shiela. It's exciting comment. People are saying you are not like yourself; asking what is the matter with Shiela McLeod."

"And you can't go on either," she panted against his shoulder. "Ed—you've

got to stop now—withdraw—somehow. You'll have to get sick—have a nervous breakdown—anything that will offer an excuse for you to drop out of the race."

"That's nonsense," he said quickly. "It wouldn't pass muster."

"It's not nonsense," she parried. "Ed—I've been talking to Frieder. He—he came over and made me give him a dance, and we talked. He—he said that you would never be elected; that Jim and himself and—and others intended to see to that."

Trevor smiled. "Of course they do. They'd be a poor lot of politicians if they didn't intend to force Ren in, if they can. Little girl, you're getting morbid."

She caught his coat with the hand she rested on his arm. "No, Ed," she faltered. "I'm not morbid. That isn't what Buck meant. I—I don't know how I know it, but I do. I—I feel it. He meant something else. He said your popularity might fail. Ed—he—he meant about that night. He—he means to—to talk."

"I don't think so," Trevor persisted. "Ren's too good a sport to permit it. Did you see how he met Dorothy and me this evening? That would rather spike Buck's guns, I should think. He must realize after to-night that we two boys are going to fight on local issues only, and let one another alone."

She had failed. Sick at heart, she realized that nothing she could say or do now would turn this man's feet back from the abyss of slander and traduction toward which he was heading.

Suddenly it seemed to her she could go no farther, as though the floor beneath her feet was falling away from beneath them. Trevor found her clinging desperately to him, her lips gone from scarlet to pink, her olive skin waxen, the lids of her dark eyes atremble.

"Shiela!" he cried to her softly.

"I'm—I'm sick, Ed—faint. Take me—take me among the flowers, and see if you can't get me—a drink—or something."

Without more words, he rather more carried than guided her out of the press of dancers and toward a door giving into a sort of tropical bower of ferns and palms, opening off one side of the room. Just at present it was deserted, so far as one could observe. Between dances it would be full of gay, colored life, but it now offered a variety of retreat.

At the door Shiela spoke to him again: "Let me go in alone, Ed. Go get me a drink—or an ice. I'm—I'm burning up—on fire."

"You'll be all right?" he questioned.

"Yes—only—Ed, hurry back."

She saw him depart swiftly on his errand, turned, and went slowly, with an actual drag in her usual light-footed step toward a *casuse* set in front of a rock-work grotto filled with ferns and small vines and topped by palms.

She sank into the seat and closed her eyes briefly over her whirling senses, only to tauten once more into a strained attention, with every nerve aquiver. Some one had spoken from the other side of the artificial mound of rock and earth beside which she sat.

"And who was the woman?" It was the voice of a man, but one she did not recognize.

"I don't know. The light was rotten, and she was back of Trevor." She knew that voice; had heard it last less than an hour before when Buck Frieder had forced his presence upon her.

"And you expect to pull that sort of stuff without knowing her name?" the first speaker continued.

"We won't need her name," Frieder protested. "Lord, man, Trevor can't deny it. Kennedy saw her, too, and though he's promised not to talk and got me to agree unless I thought it my duty, once it is out, he'll back us up. Trevor's sharp enough to see that. He won't deny it, and then the public will demand the woman's name and Ed won't give it. If he doesn't, his silence will be taken as sure proof of guilt. We'll have him in a cleft stick. Then we'll scotch him."

"Ren Langdon won't stand for it, I reckon," his companion resumed. "You know his agreement with Trevor is that his fight's to be clean."

So that was it. Even in her tense horror, Shiela felt her heart expand briefly. First, Langdon's opponent had given Ren's attitude as an argument for his own safety, and now these two supporters of the McSwayne man were saying the same thing.

He was a man—a man—this blond giant of the tawny hair and the blue eyes. And he was known by men as a man. One might be proud of the friendship of such as he—might do much to merit his love. She clenched her hands and sat on with straining ears, the white flesh of her bared bosom rising and falling in slow, deep, silent respirations.

"No, Ren won't stand for it," Buck admitted. "That's why I'm putting you wise. We may have to act without him. Anyway, we can't let a man like Trevor get in—a man who holds girls in his rooms at night. Nice reform candidate that."

"Rot," said the other. "Go slow on that. There may be a perfectly sound explanation."

"Explanation? Of a girl in your rooms at 3 A.M.? There's just about one, to my mind—and to the minds of most others."

"Trevor's not that sort."

"Any man's that sort—with a girl and a chance, if you listen to me."

"Well, what's your idea, then?"

Shiela's attitude became still more tense. Forewarned is always forearmed, and only with a knowledge of the enemy's plans could she hope to make others to circumvent them. Not that she had the faintest idea of what was to be done, but—surely, surely there was a way out of this terrible *impasse*!

Buck cleared his throat. "Now, listen," he began, and went on in so low a tone that Shiela could not catch the words at all, strain her ears as she might.

A figure came through the doorway. It was Trevor, bearing a brimming glass of iced punch in his hand. Shiela straightened. In a flash she saw a way to at least add caution to these plotters behind her. "Oh, Mr. Trevor," she called loud enough, yet not too loudly. "What are you doing here?" She forced herself to her feet just as Ed reached her side, and without explanation she caught the glass from his hands and dropped it, untasted, among the clustering ferns.

Trevor stared at her as at one bereft of her senses. "Shiela!" he made uncertain protest.

Without an answer she laid her finger on her lips. Her head nodded slightly toward the grotto. There was a movement beyond it; and then Buck Frieder, and another man in ordinary sack suit and soft collar, emerged and passed toward the ballroom door.

Frieder swept man and girl as he passed, and ducked his head briefly to Trevor. One would have said his eyes searched the young attorney's face in interrogation.

Shiela shivered. "They were sitting there talking—plotting," she half explained to Trevor. "Ed—they—they mean to talk, I tell you. You must tell Ren Langdon all about it, and get him to make Buck stop."

Trevor set his lips firmly. "I am not the man to mention your name, or that of any good woman, in such a connection," he said slowly.

A sense of absolute defeat, a realization of the futility of her efforts, swept over Shiela in overwhelming flood. She opened her lips as if to protest Trevor's remark, and closed them again without uttering a sound.

When she did speak, her accents were flat, hopeless, lifeless: "Ed, take me out and get me a taxi. Don't bother Ren. He's got to stay here. But I want to go home. If I don't—I'll go to pieces. Please, Ed—please!"

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.

LABOR DAY

BY WILL THOMAS WITHROW

(*In Anticipation.*)

MY snow-white uniform and jaunty cap,
Spotless and neatly pressed, are laid away;
They'll fit my manly form with style and snap
While proudly I parade on Labor Day.

The fellows at the shop selected me
To wear a bright, new sword and lead the line,
Because they wanted all the folks to see,
First in command, a martial form like mine.

Straight down the center of the wide, main street,
Which cheering thousands line on either side,
I shall direct ten thousand marching feet,
The while my manly bosom swells with pride.

(*In Retrospect.*)

My snow-white uniform and jaunty cap,
Spotless and neatly pressed, and laid away,
Are still unused, but I have hopes, mayhap,
That I may wear them on *next* Labor Day.

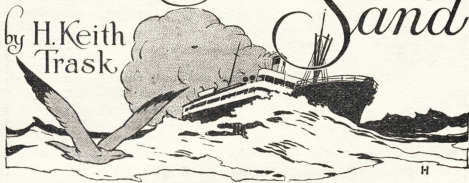
I did *not* lead the Labor Day parade;
I marched in a parade led by my wife!
My sword and uniform, they made *some* show—
Did they? They did *not*! Not on your sweet life!

I cleaned the house; I beat four dozen rugs;
I manicured the lawn and patched the roof;
I blacked ten stoves and filled my hands with slugs
Of rusty iron—I have the scars for proof.

Thus did I "celebrate" on Labor Day;
And when at last the end—and night—had come,
My wife remarked how "nice" it was for me
To spend a *quiet* day with her at home!

The Grain of Sand

by H. Keith Trask



CAPTAIN MIKE ROONEY, master of the Consolidated Fruit Company's steamship *Presidente*, rested his elbows on the bridge rail, regarding his chief mate with a humorous eye.

"Look at that, now," he chuckled, "teachin' them squarehead deckhands to clean as much paint with five swipes of the sponge as they formerly did with thirteen—efficiency, he calls it!"

John Norton, the general manager of the company, nodded approval.

"That youngster should go far, Captain Mike—I like to see that spirit."

"Ye-es," returned the skipper, scratching his chin thoughtfully; "but, it can be overdone, John. I've only had that lad this trip, but I can see one thing—he's not human. He's a machine, with a bilge pump in place of a heart. He's for Carl Graham, first, last, and in the mid-watch. Not but what he's a smart mate," the captain added. "You should see his boat drill!"

Captain Rooney glanced sideways across the bridge to where his chief engineer was standing with his back against the wheel-house, talking to the manager's daughter.

"Look at Sam Bowen, now. This

ship costs less for coal and repairs than any other in the line, but Sam's human—I love him like me own son."

"True, Mike," Norton returned. "But then, Bowen's efficient without knowing it."

"Always exceptin' in love," the captain grinned. "He falls down there—Graham never would. He'll court with his head, not his heart."

The subject of their conversation was standing in the forward well deck of the *Presidente*, superintending the scrubbing of the paint on the after end of the forecastle. He was a sufficiently good-looking youngster, but, to the close observer, there was a hard look about his mouth and a cold, steely glint in his gray-blue eyes that betrayed the nature of the man.

When, at eighteen, Carl Graham graduated from the Schoolship *St. Marys*, he entered the employ of the Consolidated Fruit Company as a quartermaster on one of their ships. Thereafter, as fast as the United States steamboat inspection rules would permit, he went up for his examinations, and, at twenty-five, he had his master's papers and had been appointed chief mate of the *Presidente*.

Carl's consuming ambition was the

achievement of material success. Very early in life, he had formulated a course which he had determined to follow unvaryingly, and that course had for its objective a far wider scope of activity than would be possible to him as master of a vessel, no matter how large. No consideration should be permitted to deflect him from that course and no means overlooked to attain his end.

In his schoolship days, Carl had somehow happened upon one of the earlier works on efficiency and, thereafter, read them all. The theory and practise of one exponent in particular attracted him. This gentleman, who was a contractor, had been able to prove that a man could lay more bricks in a day with less exertion if a careful study was made of the number of movements requisite to put each brick in its proper place, and the layer was then instructed how to work in such a manner as to use the minimum number of motions only.

This principle had struck Carl as entirely practicable, and he had yearned for an opportunity to apply it. The opportunity came with his appointment to the Presidente. Such matters of ship husbandry as the cleaning of paint are entirely within the control of the chief mate, and Carl had taken strong hold at once, to the disgust of the boatswain.

Alice Norton turned to the chief engineer. Sam Bowen had no business on the bridge, but he was generally to be found somewhere in the immediate neighborhood of Miss Norton when she was aboard the ship. The girl asked:

"Why don't you try some of that efficiency on your engine-room, Sam?"

Bowen laughed.

"That's where it grows, Alice!"

"Small thanks to you!" she retorted.

"I don't believe you've been in the engine-room once since we left port."

"That shows how efficient I am," Sam countered, his handsome face beaming as he looked down on her. "Besides, you're wrong. I go down every morning and give 'em my blessing."

The mate, standing on the forehatch, swung around and hailed the bridge.

"Hold the watch on us, please, Captain Rooney!" Then he blew a shrill call upon his whistle and sang out: "Man overboard!"

Instantly, all was bustle upon deck. Captain Rooney strode to the engine-room telegraph and shoved the handle to "stop!" The deckhands dropped their sponges, swarmed up the ladders to the shelter deck, raced aft, and tumbled into the quarter-boat, swung out, ready for lowering. From his place in the stern sheets, Graham dropped his arm and the boat sank swiftly to the water.

Norton put away his watch with a satisfied nod.

"Two minutes—very snappy work!" he commented to the captain. Then he added: "A promising young officer. I must watch him."

Carl received the manager's commendation with outward modesty. He was assured that his little gallery play had fixed him in Norton's mind as an entity instead of a name on the marine department's payroll. He also perceived that Miss Norton was impressed; and this impression was a part of Carl's general scheme, for he had made up his mind that he must marry a woman who could help him.

If he loved her, so much the better, but that was not an essential. Alice, plainly, would help him. It never entered his calculations that the lady might not see things in the same light. Such a doubt would be contrary to all the principles of efficiency. But then, Carl had never had time to study woman, either in the abstract or the concrete.

The Presidente docked at Brooklyn the following afternoon, and the Nortons departed for home. Before she left the ship, Alice found Sam Bowen.

"Why don't you come to see me once in a while, Sam?" she questioned with a flashing smile. "I don't think you treat an old schoolmate very well!"

Whereat, Sam blushed and stammered

and said that he'd try to get around. The next evening, while the chief was sitting in the chart-room with Mrs. Rooney and the captain, the skipper having slipped down to see how things were going under Graham's charge, the mate poked his head in at the doorway. When he saw him, Bowen's eyes rounded with wonder, for Graham was dressed in immaculate evening clothes; a thing never before seen aboard the Presidente.

"I have put Mr. Olsen in charge and I am going ashore now, sir, unless you want me," Graham announced in his clear-cut, incisive speech.

The captain's eyes twinkled.

"Go ahead, Mr. Graham—I hope you'll tell the girl all about them efficiency dodges. John Norton is a kind of crank on them things, and she always does what John wants."

The mate bowed to Mrs. Rooney and departed.

"Is Graham going to the Norton's?" Bowen asked the captain.

"He is—and you better watch yourself or he'll run away with the girl under your nose!" the skipper responded.

"Oh!" said Sam thoughtfully. Without further speech he walked away and, thereafter, spent an hour staring at a small snap-shot that hung above his desk.

Alice Norton and he had gone to public school together in Brooklyn. That was before Mrs. Norton died and while John Norton was still a shipmaster in the company's employ, instead of its general manager. There had never been any girl in Sam Bowen's life except Alice Norton, and there never would be; but Sam had very little imagination.

At twenty-seven, he was chief engineer, and his conception of success had, so far, carried him only to a gradual increase in the size of the boats upon which he would serve and the same gradual increase in the size of his pay-check. Serious thoughts of matrimony had been far in the future. It came suddenly to Sam that, perhaps, herein he differed from Carl Graham.

The very next evening he called at the Nortons' and was well received by Alice, who was rather a terrifying figure to him, dressed as she was for a dance. She mentioned that Graham had called upon her, and that he was a very interesting man; also that his ambition was most acceptable to her father. Then it was time for her to go to the dance, and she went, accompanied by a youth whom Sam could have turned up and spanked with his left hand otherwise engaged. Sam returned to the ship; again very thoughtful.

Time went on and the Presidente made her trips regularly between Bella Cruz and New York. Whenever he was in port, Carl Graham spent much time with Alice. He seemed to be making satisfactory headway; and Norton was most hospitable. But one matter troubled him. On two occasions Alice was unable to accept his invitations because of a previous engagement with Sam Bowen. Carl began to see that Bowen must be considered an alien grain of sand in the bearings of the efficiency machine. And, as such, should be removed.

Sam seemed to get nowhere. As has been said, he lacked imagination, and that finer perception of the feminine viewpoint that sometimes goes with imagination. He liked to be with Alice, but he was unhappy when he was with her; and still more unhappy when he was not.

Then John Norton announced that he was going to Bella Cruz again. Whereupon, Alice decreed that she should go, too; and that they would travel aboard the Presidente.

It happened that, on the afternoon of the second day out, Alice found herself alone. There were no other passengers, her father was yarning with Captain Rooney, Carl Graham was on watch, and Sam Bowen down in the engine-room. Something about the machinery was balky and he had been there all day.

Alice tired of reading and took a walk around the ship. She dropped into the

galley and had a chat with the chef, then wandered on, along the port side of the main deck. The door of Sam's room stood open and all Sam's earthly possessions were exposed to the world.

Alice hesitated, glanced cautiously around, then stepped inside. She read the titles of the scanty store of books upon the shelf, uncomprehendingly fingered a steam-engine indicator lying on the desk, then saw the little snap-shot, hung against the bulkhead.

A quick, tender smile lit her face and she turned and hurried to her own room. Presently she was back on the port side of the main deck. Sam was still absent. Alice went inside once more, drew a large cabinet photograph from under her polo coat and put it in a prominent position on the desk. Then she ran swiftly forward and joined her father and Captain Rooney, taking a somewhat excited part in the conversation.

When he came off watch, Graham repaired to the chief engineer's room to mention a leaky steam-pipe on the after winch. He found Bowen, with the grime of the engine-room still upon him, just laying a cabinet photograph upon the desk. Sam blushed furiously through the grime when the mate entered. Graham mentioned his errand briefly, with tight shut lips through which his speech snapped—then departed, morally certain that the chief had been kissing that photograph. That grain of sand in the bearings was beginning to be serious.

All the next day the Presidente bucked into a southeasterly gale that rapidly increased to hurricane strength. When darkness fell, she was barely able to hold her own with her engines running full speed ahead. She had shipped a sea that had torn two boats bodily from the chocks and wrenched away the engine-room skylights, flooding the lower regions with tons of water. The upper deck staterooms were impossible of occupancy, because they were entered from outside, and it was a very dangerous procedure to attempt to pass along

the deck; so Alice and her father were transferred, for the time, to inner rooms opening off the main saloon on the port side.

When Alice went to bed Captain Rooney had the ship head to sea, and, being light, she was laboring terrifically, so much so that Alice had difficulty in reaching her room at all. She had long since been forbidden to poke her nose outside the house, and she had spent a miserable evening in company with the purser, who was fat, fifty, and addicted to a nap after dinner, gale or no gale. She had not seen Sam for thirty-six hours.

Some time during the night Alice was awakened by noises that were not of the hurricane. There was much shouting in the saloon, a shuffling of feet, and snapped orders. Somebody pounded on her door, yelling:

"Fire!"

And in that weather!

Alice was a sailor's daughter, and she was partially dressed and outside her door before her eyes were wide open. Her father was awaiting her. Together, they emerged from the alley, now full of pungent, choking smoke, and saw a terrifying spectacle.

The engine-room well—that pierced through all the decks to the shelter deck, furnishing light and air to the engine-room—was a steel casing, sheathed on the saloon side with a patent, decorative material that the Presidente's builders had guaranteed non-inflammable. Their guarantee was, however, worthless, for now it was blazing fiercely, fanned by the draft that came through the saloon doors, opened to admit hose lines.

The heat was intense; so intense that, in places where the sheathing had fallen away, the steel beneath was warped and gaping, so that the flames drew inward and up through the broken engine-room skylight as through a chimney. Also, the fire had already attacked the state-room partitions on the starboard side.

Men with axes reeled on the heaving

deck, striving desperately to cut away the burning material. Other men, with their feet braced wide apart, held the hose lines and directed the streams against the fire. The water, striking the steel of the engine-room well, still further warped the red-hot plates and cascaded through the openings in showers of steam.

Carl Graham, cool and active, was directing the seemingly hopeless fight. His clear voice dominated the tumult and his quick eye instantly saw the most minute point of vantage from which to attack the enemy. He caught sight of Alice and her father and turned to them.

"Please go aft as far as possible," he begged. "We can beat this, but I don't want to have to worry about you!"

Alice shook her head, but Graham had already turned back to his duty. He was certainly resourceful and brave, but—

At that instant Sam Bowen touched Graham on the arm and said something about the forward donkey pump.

"Yes, start it!" Graham directed crisply. "We need all the water we can get! Be careful how you go forward," he added, "we've had two men swept overside already!" Then he turned to give directions to the axmen.

Bowen stood staring at the engine-room casing. He seemed not to have seen Alice or her father. A stream struck the steel and the water poured through an opening, boiling hot. Sam muttered something and raced away; but not forward, Alice noticed.

Presently Smith, the second engineer, reported to Graham that he had the forward donkey pump going and another two lines of hose available.

It was a long and stubborn fight, but they won it at last. All hands not actually needed in the working of the ship, even Alice, turned to—it was put the fire out or die. No small boat could have been launched or, if launched, could have lived in that raging sea. Never once, through all the fight, did

Alice see Sam Bowen again, and she wondered; but decided that he must be standing by the pump.

When the last ember had been stamped or drowned out, the cook went to the galley and made hot coffee for all hands. The gale was moderating fast and the rising sun almost breaking through the flying scuds.

Graham brought coffee to Alice and her father and received their praises. While they were drinking the coffee, Sam Bowen came up. He was covered with black, but his face showed dirty white in places and his cheeks were oddly puffy.

Alice turned to him with a delighted welcome. Carl Graham heard the gladness in her voice and his face clouded, and the steely glitter in his eyes became very pronounced.

"I noticed that you sent the second to the forward donkey pump, Sam," he remarked in a meaning tone. "You did quite right not to take a chance on going overboard." He addressed Alice. "We wouldn't want to lose the chief, would we, Miss Alice?"

The girl turned to Bowen, her face suddenly hard.

"Did you send the second to the pump?"

"Certainly," Sam said in a surprised manner.

"Where were you?" Alice persisted.

"Oh, Sam was all right—he was in the engine-room!" Graham interposed. Then he laughed nastily.

"Were you in the engine-room?" Alice's voice was cold.

Blank amazement and incredulity spread over Sam's face at the tone of the question. He stared at Alice. Something he read in her expression made him turn quickly and walk away without reply. Alice followed and tapped him on the shoulder. He winced, as though her touch hurt him.

"Sam," said the girl piteously, "oh, Sam, I didn't think you were a coward!"

The chief engineer made no attempt to

defend himself, nor did he look around, but walked slowly out of the wrecked saloon, his shoulders bent.

Norton flashed his daughter a puzzled glance; then bent frowning brows on the mate. He favored Graham with a prolonged scrutiny, made a sound that was a cross between a laugh and a snort, and stalked away to his own room. Carl Graham permitted the set line of his lips to relax. The grain of sand had been removed.

Alice did not see Sam Bowen again before the *Presidente* docked at Bella Cruz. Once or twice she strolled past his room on the main deck, impelled by she did not know what; but the door was always tight shut and the blind drawn across the window. Once she saw a steward disappear through the door carrying a tray of food. Her face hardened. It must be true, then, Sam was ashamed to appear. The dining saloon had escaped the fire, and Sam had always taken his meals with them, but now he could not face them.

Unwelcome news awaited Norton on the pier at Bella Cruz. The local manager told him that the country was full of fever and that it would be unsafe to leave the town. As the repair shop of the company's railroad would be busy with the *Presidente's* wrecked interior, he and Alice went to the hotel, and Norton immediately plunged into business with his representative.

On the morning following their arrival, Alice strolled down to the quay with her father and, while he was in the offices, she went and sat at the edge of the pier, looking out over the bay. She was immediately surrounded by a crowd of ragged, native urchins, who chattered to her in incomprehensible Spanish.

"They want you to throw coppers over for them to dive after," Graham elucidated, joining her. "Watch!" He walked to the corner of the pier at the stern of the *Presidente* and threw a handful of pennies overboard.

At once the water was full of plunging, struggling youngsters, plain to be seen in

the clear depths. Alice laughed heartily and emptied her purse of small coin to keep the circus going. In the midst of the fun she glanced up at the ship and saw Sam Bowen leaning over the taffrail.

Sam called something down to them, of which she caught only the word "propeller." The ship's water-ballast tanks had been emptied and she floated so high out of the water that nearly half of the propeller was exposed. The boys were diving within ten feet of it.

"Mr. Bowen is warning us of something," she told Graham.

"Oh, he's just telling us to keep them clear of the screw," the mate returned. "I suppose they are going to turn the engines over to test them. Let's give the boys a real scramble. Watch them go for this half-dollar!" He held the coin between thumb and forefinger, so that all the eager little copper-colored faces might focus upon it; then tossed it overboard.

Simultaneously, the boys dove. Two of the more active of them reached right under the coin. Their motion made the half-dollar slant sideways, as a stone skips along the surface. It zigzagged downward, approaching ever nearer to the ship's rudder, and came to rest on the skag, or bottom support of the rudder, immediately under the propeller.

One of the youngsters saw it and made a quick stroke forward. He rose directly under the skag and clutched the prize, then tried to come to the surface.

Alice gasped and Graham said something that sounded very like an oath. The boy's wisp of cotton trousers had become entangled in the bottom rudder pintle and he was unable to tear loose. He struggled frantically, and air bubbles, rising to the surface, showed that he had lost his head and would drown shortly. His companions had fled from the water terror-stricken.

Bowen was leaning far over the taffrail, calling to Graham. The mate, white-faced, fingered the top button of his jacket irresolutely, as though he were minded to

tear it off and go in for the boy; he thought better of it and blew the call for his boat-crew. Alice was bent over the edge of the pier, wringing her hands and calling upon Graham to do something.

There came a mighty splash in the water, and Bowen struck downward, straight for the youngster. All the girl's faculties were centered on the man who had now reached the boy and was tearing at his trousers; but, in the back of her mind, she was aware that Graham had run aboard the ship and was getting a boat overboard as efficiently as he did everything.

Now, Bowen, in his efforts to release the youngster, had thrown a leg over the skag, right under the propeller blade. Alice screamed—a frantic scream that brought her father and all the office force out of the building. The propeller was beginning to turn. Slowly, inexorably, the blade came down; and Bowen, with his leg over the skag, did not heed. Once let that blade, with a clearance of barely four inches, cross the skag and nothing could save the chief's leg, probably his life. Down, down came the blade—six inches—four inches.

"Oh!" Alice went limp.

With a savage jerk Bowen had torn the cloth at last, and he and the boy shot to the surface as the propeller began to turn in earnest. The backwash sent them clear; and Graham and his boat-crew were in time to pull them in and land them on the pier.

Both were unconscious. The company doctor set two clerks to work to revive the youngster, and turned his attention to Bowen. Alice, drawn by an irresistible impulse, came close as the doctor opened the thin cotton shirt that was the only covering on the upper part of Bowen's body. He glanced at the chief's chest, then tore the shirt clear off his shoulders.

"No wonder he fainted!" he ejaculated. "The man's body is a mass of burns!"

With sudden understanding, Alice saw the raw flesh where Sam had scraped the

blisters in his struggle under water. As the world reeled about her, she staggered to her father and held to his arm.

"I wondered how long you'd let that four-flusher bluff you!" her parent remarked, with a grim smile. "Sam Bowen stuck to his engines while boiling water and firebrands dropped on him for three hours. He wouldn't ask his men to stand the gaff. He kept the ship head to wind and saved our lives!"

"Oh don't, dad!" Alice wailed. Then she looked for Carl Graham, who was walking hurriedly toward the quarter boat.

When Sam Bowen opened his eyes, somebody was sitting beside him—somebody who whispered his name when she saw that he was conscious. The same somebody bent very close to him and, in plain view of all Bella Cruz, assembled on the pier, pressed her lips to his.

"Sam," somebody whispered, "daddy has decided that he must go back to New York on the Libertad when she touches here this afternoon. I'll have to go, too—unless"—here somebody hid her face in his wet hair, so that he could not see it, although he very much wished to—"unless—of course—you've never asked me, Sam, but, I think—I think—Captain Rooney would marry us—then I could stay behind and look after those burns, Sam, dear."

Subsequently, the Consolidated Company had a new ship come out. The assignment of officers to her caused a shake-up and a vacancy for a new captain. Sam Bowen, marine superintendent of the line, took his problem to the general manager.

"Here are two chief officers who entered the service on the same day, and each man's record is clear. Who gets the Presidente when Rooney takes the Dictator?"

"Give her to Tom Carter," Norton directed, with a smile. "Carl Graham is such a darned efficient paint scrubber that it'd be a shame to make a skipper of him!"

Two's Two

by J. Storer Clouston

SYNOPSIS OF PRECEDING CHAPTERS

SIR WYVERNE WARRINGTON BROWNE, M. P., dabbling in chemistry, evolves a capsule that divides him into two living personalities—Archibald Fitz-Wyverne and Samuel Harris—his giddy and ascetic personalities respectively. In the first afternoon Archie changes the baronet's politics, makes appointments with two young ladies for the same hour that evening, and spends the appointed hour in the company of Joyce Demayne, the baronet's secretary. He tells Joyce the baronet is crazy about her. Samuel, on the other hand, writes serious sociological treatises, and sternly informs the baronet's mother that Joyce Demayne is a menace to her son's well-being. Attempting to reunite into the single body of the baronet again, the problem is solved by shaking hands. But the baronet finds himself confronted with the consequences of Archie's escapades—committed in his name!

CHAPTER X.

THE TWO CANVAS BAGS.

ONE of the pleasantest features of Sutherbury Park was the avenue of limes; not the main avenue from the London road, but a long and narrow glade between two rows of ancient trees, leading to a postern in the boundary wall.

Down this, on a placid, sunshiny afternoon, Miss Joyce Demayne strolled very thoughtfully, her eyes on the ground, the charms of the day and place unheeded. When she happened to look up she saw, between the trees ahead, Major Peckenhams. He, too, was walking extremely slowly for a man of his brisk habits.

Like all women of sound instincts, Miss Demayne approved of military gentlemen; especially when they looked the part as satisfactorily as the major. And like all good judges of women, the major highly approved of Joyce Demayne; in fact, he had even gone the length of adding up his salary, pension, and private means and subtracting from the total the hypothetical cost of a lady and (say) two children.

The remainder, he perceived at once, was quite inadequate to support a gentleman as a gentleman ought to be supported, but the calculation showed the exceptional nature of his approval. He had made it only about eight times before in his whole life.

Yet, though she looked particularly engaging this morning in a short walking skirt and the most becoming soft felt hat, he never quickened his stride, and his manner when they met was abstracted. So, likewise, was hers, and, in fact, after saying "Good-morning," they stood for a moment in silence. She was the first to speak.

"I presume Sir Wyverne has told you he is going abroad?" she asked.

From his sudden look at her, she seemed to have touched the very topic on his own mind.

"Oh, then he has told you?"

"But evidently not any one else. Even his mother is not to be informed till after he has gone."

"I knew he was keeping it pretty dark."

"It seems to me a little strange," she said tentatively.

This story began in the *All-Story Weekly* for August 26.

He looked at her very intently for a moment.

"Miss Demayne"—his tone was earnest—"I am going to ask you something. It's a question of great interest to us both. Excuse me for one moment."

The words and the voice sent a strange suspicion shooting through her mind. She had never looked upon the major as that kind of admirer, but then men were men.

His next procedure, however, raised an even graver suspicion. Darting from her side, he passed between two of the trees and carefully peered round. Then he crossed the glade and did the same on the other side. She remembered having been proposed to several times before and though the gentlemen had always sought solitude first, they had never taken such extraordinary precautions. Yet the major seemed the last man to have a nervous breakdown.

"Have you seen any strange men about the place?" he asked in a low voice as he came close to her again.

She looked a little startled.

"No," she said, "not since I met Mr. Archie Fitz-Wyverne."

"Have you seen him again?"

She shook her head.

"Or any other stranger?"

"Not about the house or park. Do you suspect there are any?"

He nodded, and to himself he said:

"Where the devil does he keep the fellows?"

"But surely you don't think they are likely to be behind the trees!" she exclaimed.

"Upon my word, I haven't the foggiest notion what to think," he said gravely. "The thing is getting on my nerves. There are certain people somewhere, and not knowing where, I'm beginning to look for them everywhere."

"Is Mr. Fitz-Wyverne one of them?" she demanded. He became evasive.

"Certain people *were* here, and I've made quiet inquiries and worked out the railway time-tables, and I can't account

for things unless they are here all the time!"

He fell silent for a few moments and then in an even more confidential voice, he continued:

"You have some influence with Wyverne, Miss Demayne."

"Oh, very little!" she protested hastily, her color rising just perceptibly.

"Well, anyhow you *can* have if you like, and if you will use it for his own good, I'll tell you what I wish you'd persuade him to do—to tell the truth!"

"About what?"

"Just get it into his head that if he trusts people at all, he oughtn't to tell them whopping lies. Do it in your own tactful way. Give it the feminine touch—the high-souled, beautiful influence of woman and—er—all that, but make him stop fibbing!"

She had never before known Major Peckenharn rise to such heights of eloquence, and was naturally impressed. At the same time, her commission struck her as a trifle vague.

"I can hardly believe he is deliberately untruthful—" she began.

"Put it like that! Put it like that!" cried the major. "That's the way to influence us—appeal to our higher nature!"

"But won't you even tell me what untruth he has told?" she pleaded.

"Murder will out," he answered darkly. "And so probably will this."

With this cryptic forecast, he raised his hat and turned away. Then he turned back.

"By the way," he added, "remember I'm always at your service while Wyverne is away. Come and tell me at once if anything seems at all queer. I'm afraid I won't have much time to come up to the house. I have two men coming to-night to stay with me."

"Your brothers?" she asked hopefully.

The major had three brothers in the army and two in the navy—all very gallant gentlemen.

"No," he said hastily, "no such luck. Quite different fellows. Good-by."

She thought his manner seemed stranger than ever as he made this last speech.

She got back to the house in time for tea. Sir Wyverne, as usual, was there, and as usual was politeness itself to the old lady. He and his secretary barely exchanged a word.

Shortly before dinner he sent for her to come to the study. She happened to be passing through the hall when she got the message and so it was that she appeared a little sooner than she was probably expected.

"Oh!" exclaimed the baronet hurriedly "I—er—just one moment!"

In each hand he held a plump little canvas bag, and as he spoke he turned away from her, put them on his desk and closed the top. She distinctly heard a metallic clink as he set them down.

There had been a marked constraint in their bearing toward one another for the past two days—ever since the visit of Archibald—and this incident seemed on his part to increase it.

"I only just wanted to tell you," he said, "that I am leaving for Paris to-night."

"To-night!"

"Yes—important business—a sudden call. I'm leaving rather quietly. Please give this note to my mother in the morning. It's to—er—explain things."

She took the note and there was a moment of silence. It might have been the psychological moment for a tactful homily on truthfulness, as she realized afterward; but at the time it was the last thing she thought of.

"Well, good-by," he said, as if he thought he ought to get it over with, and they shook hands.

She had reached the door when he spoke again.

"I should be greatly obliged if you would regard this—er—incident as confidential," he suggested. "It sounds mysterious, but—do you mind?"

His smile was always charming, but to-

night the thing that struck her about it was its reminiscent suggestion of somebody else. For an instant she was puzzled, and then she remembered, it was Archibald Fitz-Wyverne!

"Do you mean my coming to the study?"

"Yes—the whole thing. Just tell my mother I left the note out for her. You see I shall probably walk to the station and carry what I need in a handbag, and—" He broke off and then added: "By the way, I think, on the whole, you *had* better say I saw you and that I told you this. Good-by again."

At this point the idea of the homily did strike Miss Demayne rather forcibly, but it was clearly not the most tactful moment.

Early hours was one of Lady Warrington-Browne's leading principles and by half past ten Joyce was in her room, and silence had fallen on the house. She was in no mood for sleep, and for a long time sat in a wicker chair before the fire thinking and wondering. The picture that persistently rose before her mind was of an opulent and respected baronet leaving his house on foot in the dead of night, equipped with a handbag for a visit to Paris.

The clock on her mantelpiece struck softly. She looked up and saw that it was half past eleven, and then it occurred to her that the only night train for London, or for anywhere else, passed through Sutherbury Station—stopping if notice were given—at 11.40. So he must have left the house some time ago.

She sat thinking till twelve o'clock roused her again. He must be thundering through the night toward Paddington by now! She decided it was time to go to bed.

But still she felt restless, and after gazing absently at the dying fire, and then a little less absently at the mirror, she opened the window and gazed into the night. Dimly she could pick out one dark, towering evergreen after another

till her eye fell on one which was not quite dark. There was a little spot of radiance on it, just bright enough to show it to be a yew.

She held her breath and followed the line of light across the lawn till she traced it to a window on the first floor. It was hard to be quite certain in the dark, but she was morally sure it was the window of Sir Wyverne's study. And then suddenly the light vanished.

"He has not gone after all!"

CHAPTER XI.

THE MIDNIGHT VISITOR.

BY 11 P.M. the peaceful town of Sutherbury prepared for rest. The nightly promenade of youths and maidens ebbed till the old stones of the High Street were left almost bare.

An economical person with a mysteriously efficient pole went round and turned out every other lamp, and gradually the last lingerers took the hint until, down the darkened street, the footfalls of the few passers-by began to ring out like a postman's raps.

And then, more gradually, one bright blind after another became a mere piece of the darkness.

In the oldest and narrowest part of the High Street, near the foot, a light still shone brightly in the glass over Major Peckenham's door, and in a chink between the curtains, the blind of his ground-floor window glowed.

Just before twelve o'clock the door opened and the major himself appeared on the step, a spectacle calculated to delight the provincial eye. How many other people in Sutherbury dressed regularly for dinner was uncertain; some said one and some said two. Certainly, no one else wore a frogged smoking coat with red silk lapels, or smoked quite such a good cigar.

Yet in spite of these advantages, the major seemed far from happy. He frowned into the darkness, up the street

and down the street, and for five minutes more he frowned as he stood there intently listening.

Midnight clanged on the town-hall clock.

Then he closed his door and returned to his smoking-room fire and a glass of whisky and soda that stood on an oaken stool beside it. On the table was a tray with siphons, two glasses, and a decanter. Evidently his guests had not arrived; but evidently he still expected them.

"Can they be coming by train?" he asked himself. "If the 11.40 is late there's just a chance. Confound them!"

The night-train was never much late, and by 12.15 it was clear that no railway was bringing them.

"D—n them!" muttered the major.

By half past twelve the High Street of Sutherbury was desolate enough for a highway robbery. Not a footfall had broken the silence for twenty minutes, and, except Major Peckenham's, every house was dark.

And then a step rang out.

It was a deliberate and dogmatic step, and as its owner passed one of the surviving lamps his appearance answered exactly to the step. He seemed also of a cautious and discreet nature, for his felt hat was turned down to shade his face, and as he drew near the lower end of the street he paused and listened warily. He carried a small leather suit-case.

When he reached the major's door he stopped, listened again, and then rattled the knocker.

The major's red lapels and white-shirt front appeared in the doorway.

"Is that you at last?" he demanded.

"The answer to the first part of your question is in the affirmative," replied the visitor with some asperity. "The last part I consider an unwarranted aspersion! I have arrived at the hour which I considered most advisable. You can shut the door."

The major was still standing by the open door looking into the darkness of High Street.

"Isn't the other fellow coming?" he asked.

"The answer to that is in the negative," replied his visitor, marching into the smoking-room and throwing his suitcase on the sofa with an assurance that made his host's toes tingle.

"What has happened to him?"

"He left the house some time ago, but I take no interest in his movements, and would prefer not to discuss such an unsavory subject."

"Left the house?" repeated the major. "Do you mean Sutherbury Park?"

"Naturally," snapped his guest. "You are not an idiot, are you, Maurice?"

The major started as though he had been shot. In fact, he had been shot at least twice in his career with much less apparent effect.

"I beg your pardon?" he gasped.

"Are you deaf?" queried his guest tartly. "I spoke exceedingly distinct."

"My name, Mr. Harris, is Major Peckenham," replied the major with extraordinary exactness.

Mr. Harris looked at him critically and then at the tumbler on the oak stool.

"You are evidently drunk," he replied.

"My name is Samuel and yours is Maurice, and you are perfectly aware of those facts. Kindly get me a glass of milk and a biscuit."

Major Peckenham was usually very hospitable, but there were limits.

"My servants, unfortunately, have gone to bed," he replied stiffly.

"Do you imagine I pay you five hundred pounds a year in order to obtain that information?" said Samuel sternly.

"Get me what I asked you for."

The major choked. Evidently this pestilential person was absolutely in Wyverne's confidence. Evidently, also, it had been arranged he should act this detestable farce. The most elementary discretion forbade offense being taken.

In silence he stalked out of the room, and in silence returned with a jug of milk and a box of biscuits. Samuel filled a tumbler and munched a Bath Oliver. Ex-

cept for the munching, which was rather loud, there was silence for a few minutes. Gradually the major calmed down.

"Best plan is to humor the brute" he said to himself philosophically.

Aloud he inquired:

"Then you've no idea what mischief your friend is up to?"

"He is not my friend," replied Samuel.

"And since you are going to act as my agent, I may as well warn you that inaccuracy is one of my pet aversions."

The major took a deep breath and clenched his hands very tightly. By these means he was able to answer with outward calm:

"I mean Fitz Archibald, or whatever he calls himself."

"He calls himself Archibald," corrected Samuel. "And as I said before, I neither know nor care where he went or what he proposes to do. We have arranged to keep one another supplied with our addresses, so that I shall probably learn where he is in a day or two. But, having driven the necessity for this elementary precaution into his idiotic head, I was only too thankful to be relieved of his society."

Again there was a pause while Samuel munched another Bath Oliver.

"Tell me when you would like to go to bed," said the major.

"May I inquire precisely why I should inform you?" demanded his guest through a mouthful of biscuit, which muffled without mellowing his voice.

All the reply the major was capable of making on the spur of the moment was:

"It—it is usually done, I believe."

"I never heard a more unintelligent answer," replied Samuel. "When I am ready for bed I shall go."

He finished his biscuit in silence and then bent his searching gaze upon the tray.

"Do you indulge in alcoholic refreshment every night?" he inquired.

"Usually."

"Usually?" repeated Samuel with an accurate man's scorn. "On an average

per week, how often do you omit to poison yourself?"

"Never," said the major.

"In that case you will soon become quite unfit to transact business for *me*," said Samuel. "Have you tried any of the recognized drink cures?"

"No."

"I shall give you one. A half-fuddled agent is unendurable."

"Look here—" began the major, and then checked himself. His position was extraordinarily delicate.

"Look where?" demanded Samuel.

Major Peckenharn sprang up.

"Personally, I am going to bed," he said. "I had better show you your room."

"I know every room in this house as well as you. I took it for you. I presume I have got the bedroom opposite yours?"

The major gasped. Certainly this fellow was extraordinarily well informed.

"Yes," he said.

Samuel rose, also, and picked up his suit-case.

"Good night," said he. "We breakfast at seven."

"Nine," corrected his host.

"Seven," repeated the guest firmly.

"I have come here to work, not to lie in bed."

"My servants only get up at seven."

"They will have to get up at five. I shall tell them so. Their room is the top back, I believe?"

He started for the door.

"You don't propose to tell them now!" exclaimed his host.

"I do."

The major decided he must risk something.

"You will do nothing of the kind," he replied, planting himself in the doorway in front of his guest.

His shoulders were broad, and his eye clearly meant business. Samuel looked at him dourly, but he reflected that he, also, might be placed in an awkward situation.

"I put this outburst down to intemperance," he said in a chilly voice. "See that it doesn't happen again, Maurice. Inform your servants of my wishes."

He and his bag went up-stairs, and the major heaved a sigh of relief.

"Rid of him for a few hours, anyhow!"

And then he thought of the morrow, and his face again fell.

CHAPTER XII.

THE FIRST LETTER.

"PLEASE, your ladyship," announced Horrocks, "Sir Wyverne hasn't slept in the 'ouse!"

The two ladies were sitting at breakfast when this bomb was thrown. Joyce flushed, and the searching gaze of the dowager did nothing to lower her color.

"Then he must have gone, after all!" she exclaimed.

"Gone where?" his mother demanded.

"To Paris."

"When?"

"Last night."

"By motor-car?"

"No; he walked to the station."

"But his luggage?"

"He carried it in his hand."

For a moment Lady Warrington-Browne stared at her in silence. Then in a very dry voice she remarked:

"Ah! He confided in you this time."

"He asked me to tell you—" began Joyce.

"And why didn't you?"

"I thought I saw a light in the study window after the last train had gone."

"What an extraordinary reason for withholding this information from his mother!"

Joyce rose.

"He left a note for you," she said hurriedly. "I'll get it."

"I should hope so!"

Joyce returned with the note, and in silence Lady Warrington-Browne read it through.

"He says nothing about walking to the station at midnight with his luggage in his hand," she observed.

"Perhaps he decided on that later," suggested Joyce.

"I was not with him later," replied the dowager icily, "but you apparently were. Did he give no explanation of his extraordinary step?"

"I never asked him for any."

"Ah, no doubt inquiry would be unnecessary."

This ambiguous remark was spoken calmly, but the dowager's eye gleamed. Joyce said nothing else till breakfast was over, and then hurried to her room.

Opening the window, she put out her head and looked along the long garden front at the windows and then at the illuminated yew. Then she went into the garden and examined them from there. She admitted she might conceivably have made a mistake; she admitted she had been culpable to jump to a conclusion on such evidence alone; and yet she remained morally sure that that light had burned in Sir Wyverne's study and then been extinguished after the night train had gone.

In the course of the morning she walked into Sutherland to do some shopping, and there, for the first time, she heard rumors of Mr. Fitz Wyverne's exploits, and the scandal that was rapidly gathering like a snowball round his kinsman's name. The nervousness of Major Peckenhams began to seem, after all, not so very extraordinary.

From the High Street her errands took her to the station, where she expected a parcel by train, and there a greeting from the station-master suddenly suggested an inquiry.

Beginning diplomatically with a few questions about trains to London in general, she arrived at the night express.

"Is it often stopped by signal?" she asked.

"Once or twice a week, miss, as a general rule," said the station-master. "It was stopped last night, for instance."

"Oh!" said Joyce carelessly. "By Sir Wyverne, I suppose?"

"Sir Wyverne!" exclaimed the station-master. "He didn't go by train last night surely, did he?"

"He has gone away for a few days," said she evasively. "It just occurred to me it might be he."

The casual habits of the family at the park seemed to surprise the station-master.

"It seems a bit odd, miss, you shouldn't know," he remarked.

Joyce felt it was time she moved on, but she could not resist putting one question more.

"Who did stop the train last night?" she inquired.

"A young gentleman. Remarkable affable young gentleman he was, too, miss—quite one of the nuts, as they call 'em nowadays."

"Nobody from Sutherland?"

"Oh, no; I never saw him before; that I'm positive certain of."

"Well, good morning," said Joyce.

As she walked back to the house, she wondered very hard indeed. She had the strongest suspicions who the young gentleman was, but what was one to think about the whole episode? The major's state of mind seemed perfectly normal now.

She met the dowager again at lunch, she met her at tea, she met her at dinner, and she sat with her for an hour in the drawing-room afterward, and as far as she could remember the old lady addressed only six remarks to her. But the vigilance of her hostile eye was never relaxed. Joyce was reminded of the stories of prisoners in solitary cells and eyes that watched them through peep-holes night and day.

After certain of Archibald's disclosures, she could not pretend to herself that the old lady's attitude was an unfathomable mystery. But this made the situation no more comfortable.

When she came to review the position over her bedroom fire at night, she saw only one ground for satisfaction, which

was that she had clearly been right about the light in the study and the conclusion she drew from it.

That Sir Wyverne had not gone away, but was concealed, for some mysterious reason, either in the house or in the neighborhood, she felt positive.

In the morning she arrived first in the dining-room, and her theories received a new and violent shock. On the table, beside her place, lay a letter in the baronet's handwriting, marked "Private," and with the London postmark exceptionally legible.

She took it to the window, and with an eye on the door all the while, read this unexpected communication:

Hotel Chic,
Piccadilly,
London, W.

DEAR MISS DEMAYNE:

Here I am in London, after all! An important communication from one of the most important party bugs has changed my plans, and if ever I needed my invaluable secretary, I need her now! Come up by the five-twelve train and meet me here. It's *most* important. Bring the usual note-books and pencils and things, also your smartest evening frock. My mission is social as well as political. Be *sure* you don't fail me!

The bug in question insists that my worthy mother is not to be told. I give you my authority to order the car when you want it, and come away quietly. I shall probably require you for two or three nights. We shall have a strenuous time, but a politician must do his duty.

Yours sincerely,
WYVERNE WARRINGTON-BROWNE.

She had no more than time to read the letter and slip it into her pocket before the dowager appeared, and a silent meal, under a freezing eye, began.

Walking thoughtfully in the park after breakfast, she reread her employer's commands.

They were very explicit, and there was no doubt about the handwriting, but there were disturbing features. Never before had she known the baronet refer to his political advisers or any one else, as "bugs." Never had she known him so lavish of points of exclamation. "My

worthy mother"—"my invaluable secretary"—the underlined "most" and "sure"—"note-books and pencils and things"—all these were most unusual features in a letter from Sir Wyverne Warrington-Browne.

The secrecy enjoined was also remarkable. Furthermore, there was the extraordinary problem of how he had reached London, a conundrum on which the letter threw no light at all.

Nevertheless, she was paid her wages by Sir Wyverne; it was his to command and hers merely to obey. His mother's subsequent comments might very possibly be adverse, judging by her peculiar conduct lately, but Joyce had a high spirit, and she considered that the old lady had enjoyed, in the course of a long life, at least as much deference as she deserved.

She resolved to do her duty by her employer—even down to the detail of her smartest frock.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE SECOND LETTER.

THE Hotel Chic is Piccadilly's brightest beauty spot.

Before it arrived, a mere building defaced the choicest site in that historic street. A magic wand was waved by four or five gifted brunette gentlemen, and lo! a structure stood there instead.

This structure was vast without and gorgeous within. The charges were fabulous, the food was dazzling and tasted quite pleasant, and the staff consisted of the entire reserve battalion of the 556th Bavarian Regiment, gorgeously appareled and rapidly becoming too plump for their old uniforms.

To this choice resort potentates and notabilities of all nations and degrees of splendor thronged perpetually. There was no place in Europe where it was harder for beauty, diamonds, coronets, or even crowns, to create a new sensation, yet the feat was achieved in five minutes by a young man who arrived with one

handbag and a pair of rather too bright yellow boots.

"I say!" he cried in a ringing, cheerful voice the moment he stepped into the hall. "I want to see the manager!"

"If you inquire at the office, sir—" began the charmingly polite official in plum color and gold.

"I shall interview him here," announced the youth. "Inform him that Mr. Fitz-Wyverne has arrived."

He threw himself down in a chair, and while awaiting the manager, returned the gaze of the dozen or so potentates who happened to be in the hall, with a smiling and confident eye. They tried to look as though they were quite accustomed to seeing Mr. Fitz-Wyverne, but without any success. The sensation had obviously begun.

When the manager appeared—a thing he did, as a rule, only when the more majestic royalties arrived—the young man addressed him from his chair with a mixture of authority and humor that increased the sensation at every word.

"Get me a motor-car," he commanded. "The best in London. I shall probably want it for a week. See that the chauffeur is dark and rather stout. I wish his beauty to be a marked contrast to my own. It should be upholstered in green for choice. Have it round at the door in quarter of an hour."

Nothing was ever known to baffle the manager.

"Very good, sir," he replied smoothly, and a glance toward the office set a brilliant satellite to work on a telephone. The car was evidently on order.

"I also want two bedrooms, a sitting-room, and a bathroom—the best you have. The second bedroom is for a lady. Her hair is dark and her complexion pale; see that the flowers are appropriate."

"The flowers?" asked the manager.

"Order half a flower-bed-full—the best, of course. Place a small diamond trinket upon her dressing-table."

"Have you got the trinket, sir?" inquired the manager.

"No; I thought I could trust you to supply the bare necessities of a lady's bedroom."

"Certainly, you can trust me, sir," said the manager, with a slight smile at the grotesque idea of the Hotel Chic proving unable to deal with this elementary problem.

"Now," said the distinguished guest, rising, "I wish to visit my suite of apartments and get my boots calmed."

"Calmed, sir?" inquired the manager apologetically.

"Did you ever see such a violent shade of old gold?" the young man asked, with a condescending yet infectious smile. "I want them chastened by your leading artist."

Mr. Fitz-Wyverne vanished in the elevator, and the notabilities in the hall breathed more freely. They felt that they had become somebodies again.

In quarter of an hour exactly, a green upholstered car stood at the door, with a stout, dark expert at the wheel, and two minutes later the brilliant young stranger reappeared from the elevator.

His boots were now of the chastest shade of brown and gleamed like jewels. Meanwhile notabilities had mysteriously drifted into the hall till there was a considerable gathering to enjoy the spectacle of his departure. At the glass revolving door he turned and made them the most gracious and smiling bow conceivable. It was so irresistible that one crown prince, three grand dukes, five peers, and seven millionaires bowed simultaneously to the courteous apparition.

"What a good beginning!" said Archibald to himself as he whirled away in his car.

Sensations that morning were not confined to the Hotel Chic. A world-famous firm of tailors enjoyed another, when a remarkably good-looking young gentleman walked in, and, inquiring for the most responsible person in the establishment, secured the services of this functionary and gave his orders.

"I want an evening suit and an over-

coat by seven o'clock to-night, a tail coat and striped trousers by ten o'clock to-morrow morning, and a suit of tweeds by to-morrow night."

"Unfortunately, sir, this is not a ready-made establishment," replied the responsible person, blandly but a little coldly.

"I suspected it!" smiled the handsome stranger. "In fact, I want these things made by *you* to fit *me*. Now just kindly add up the prices and tell me the total. Don't bother me with the separate items."

The responsible person procured a sheet of paper and made a brief calculation.

"Fifty-four pounds, ten shillings," he announced, without visible emotion of any kind.

The young man plunged one hand into one trousers-pocket and brought it out full of sovereigns. He plunged the other hand into the other trousers-pocket with the same glittering result. He went through all his pockets and not one disappointed him. Then he arranged the sovereigns in rows on the table. Twelve rolls of tweed had to be removed before they were finally marshaled. All this time he made no remark, and in silence the entire staff and two customers watched the proceedings.

"Seventy-six pounds," he announced at last. "They are yours if I have those clothes at the times I mentioned."

"I shall see what can be done, sir," said the responsible person blandly and warmly.

The same businesslike methods produced several other sensations in the same select shopping region, and Archibald's luncheon of real turtle soup, grapes, and liqueur brandy (at fifteen shillings a glass) consumed in an easy chair which he had specially brought into the dining-room, was also a decided success, especially when he was seen to drop a couple of sovereigns into the finger-bowl before leaving the table.

"No one has been disappointed in me yet," said Archibald to himself with excusable satisfaction.

And for the next twenty-four hours

no one who watched or assisted the career of Archibald was for one moment disappointed.

Soon after six o'clock on the second afternoon of his triumphal progress, the green upholstered car swept into Paddington Station, and the unqualified success strolled down the arrival platform of the Sutherland train.

Ten minutes later he was eagerly scanning each first-class carriage as they slid more and more slowly past him. But it was not from one of these that a very smart and charming-looking young lady descended.

"Good Heavens!" he cried, with deep contrition. "Do you mean to say you actually came third-class! I'm awfully sorry I didn't tell you—"

Miss Demayne's astonished eyes pulled him up "just on the dashed brink," as he said to himself.

"*You?*" she cried, and there seemed to be more disquiet than pleasure in her voice.

Archibald recalled the somewhat peculiar circumstances of his origin, and began again more cautiously.

"I ought to explain that my cousin has suddenly been called down to the country and has asked me to look after you while he is away. By the way, I've got a note to you from him."

She took the note and read:

DEAR MISS DEMAYNE:

Exceedingly sorry these sportsmen at the Whip's office are sending me down to York. Shall be back as soon as I possibly can. Meanwhile, I leave you in Archie's hands. He is one of the steadyest, and you can safely trust him to do the honors of the Hotel Chic in my unavoidable absence.

Hoping you will have a cheery little holiday till I return.

Yours sincerely,

WYVERNE WARRINGTON-BROWNE.

It was undoubtedly a kind note—in fact, it might even be called a thoughtful note, yet it left the same sensation of discomfort in Joyce's heart.

Sir Wyverne's novel method of begin-

ning his sentences without verb or pronoun; the allusion to the "sportsmen"; the devil-may-care atmosphere of the whole letter, distressed her. She began to hope very anxiously that no mental trouble was affecting the baronet.

On the other hand, its commands were quite explicit, and there was nothing actually unnatural in the circumstances it disclosed.

"Very well," she agreed. "Have you secured a cab?"

"Cab!" cried Archie. "Just wait till you see it!"

She saw the green upholstered car and the stout, dark chauffeur, and she was evidently impressed.

"Oh, you've brought your own car!" she said.

"Wyverne and I are splitting it," said Archie airily as he handed her in.

He saw at once that he had made a mistake in disclaiming the sole ownership, and resolved that he would give the baronet no more credit than he could help for anything else.

As a matter of fact, Joyce was wondering rather seriously why a man with three cars of his own should slip up to London with a suit-case and there split a new car with this light-hearted youth. It seemed superfluous.

She was very silent as they purred back to the hotel, but Archibald found himself enjoying the view of her profile so much that he was quite content to feast his eyes in comparative silence. That is to say, he stopped talking at least three or four times for nearly a minute on end.

The arrival of the lady whose voluptuous tastes demanded a bedroom full of flowers to match her complexion, and diamond trinkets on her dressing-table, naturally caused extreme interest at the Hotel Chic, and the wink with which Archibald found himself instinctively replying to the looks of curiosity, greatly enhanced the effect of her entry.

In fact, had the gay youth but known it, the manager was seriously wondering

whether even the reputation of the Hotel Chic could stand the shock. Fortunately, before he could quite make up his mind, the handsome couple were safely in the elevator.

"What beautiful flowers!" cried Joyce. "Do they put them in every room here?"

"I shall see that they put them in any room which has the luck to have you in it!" said Archibald.

As a plum-colored attendant was at that moment engaged in unstrapping her trunk within a few feet of them, Joyce bit her lip and made no answer. Archibald thought that the act of biting her lip was positively divine—as Joyce did it.

"Whose is this?" she exclaimed as she approached the dressing-table.

"Yours," said Archibald, preparing to fasten the trinket to her dress.

She started back and glanced at the attendant.

"The lady wishes you to leave the room," commanded Archibald with a princely gesture.

"Not till you have finished, please!" said Joyce hastily.

But Archibald winked again, and the man discreetly took the hint.

"Who is this from?" she demanded.

"Me," said Archibald proudly.

"Please take it back."

Even the irrepressible Archibald was chilled.

"You mean you don't want it?"

"No, thank you."

Archibald stepped to the window, opened it, and sent the trinket flying into space.

"That's the end of it," said he with a little break in his voice. "It won't trouble you any more, Joyce."

"But—but weren't they diamonds?" she cried aghast.

"Only small ones."

Joyce looked at him with very mixed emotions in her eyes.

"You foolish boy!" she cried. "Run down and recover it at once before any one else picks it up!"

The kindness in her voice converted him on the instant into the smiling Archibald again.

"Then will you be getting ready to come out to dinner?"

"I suppose I must dine somewhere," she smiled, "and apparently Sir Wyverne wants me to dine with you."

"Confound Wyverne!" said Archibald to himself as he went to his room. "Why need she lug him in?"

CHAPTER XIV.

A LITTLE DINNER.

No longer Charles afraid is
When he meets the naughty ladies!

THE band was playing that deservedly popular melody, the champagne was bubbling in Archibald's glass and in *her* glass, and the candle-shades were pink. In fact, Archibald and Joyce were seeing life as life ought to be seen when life is life, so he assured her, and Joyce sipped her champagne and smiled.

At first she was a little quiet, Archibald thought; but, no doubt, it was only the traces of Girton before they evaporated under his genial influence—which they now seemed to be doing. Her host's habit of singing audibly snatches of all the airs he knew, and then calling the waiter at the end of the piece and sending him to the bandmaster with his congratulations and half a sovereign, attracted universal attention to their table; and to begin with this seemed to beget reserve rather than satisfaction. However, like the traces of Girton, it was now happily succumbing to the Archie-cure.

The effect upon Archibald of her dark eyes with a smile in them, looking into his, and her voice with a laugh in it, answering kindly, was so intoxicating that even the band was forgotten; and in the midst of one of his favorite tunes he lowered his voice and murmured excitedly:

"Joyce! You know I love you. Do you love me?"

She neither blushed nor started, but simply continued to smile.

"Won't it do if I reverence you?" she asked.

"But, Joyce, I am serious."

She shook her head.

"No, Archie," she said, "you are very hospitable and nice and kind, but you are certainly not serious."

"I'm not serious in the bad sense," admitted Archibald. "But in the highest and best sense I am very serious."

"Wait till the band stops," she suggested, "and it will pass off quite naturally."

"You don't know what's really in me!" he protested.

"Oh, yes, I do. I have seen you drink three glasses of it, and I am making every allowance."

"If you don't approve of me," persisted Archibald with scornful emphasis on the contemptible word, "why do you call me Archie?"

"I quite approve of you occasionally, and I call you Archie in honor of your birthday."

"My birthday!" exclaimed Archibald.

"You are just fifteen, aren't you?"

Archibald was the soul of good nature, but he began to feel annoyed.

"Joyce," he said with some severity, "I really thought better of you. I never dreamed you were one of those girls who admire solid, leaden, clammy, indigestible, boring virtues."

"Would you admire this duckling," she inquired, "if it only consisted of gravy?"

"Then I am a mere splash of gravy!"

"Splash is a very appropriate word, Archie—not too serious and just exactly what you do."

Archibald tried a very tender line.

"Joyce dear," he said in a low voice, "I am quite serious enough to think of marrying. Don't you believe that?"

"Oh, yes," she answered, "and when you are grown up I expect some girl will marry you very quickly and easily—probably even before you mean to propose."

"You think I could be easily caught, do you!"

"If I wanted to marry you," said Joyce confidently, "I should simply order the cake, send out the invitations, and then give you three glasses of champagne."

Archibald looked at her very hard, and a question began to form in his eyes.

"Well, what is it?" she laughed. "Are you wondering whether I've ordered the cake?"

"I was wondering," he said, "whether you really don't consider me a great improvement on Wyverne."

Joyce stopped laughing abruptly, and she in turn looked hard at him—though only for an instant.

"An improvement on Sir Wyverne! What an extraordinary question!"

"Tell me honestly."

She began to smile again.

"If I thought you were serious—" she began.

"I am!" Archibald assured her.

She shook her head.

"You can't be, Archie, so there's no use trying. You will find it a great strain and be very dull while it lasts, and only feel disappointed when it's over."

"Dash it," Archie exploded. "I feel jolly well inclined to tell you the whole truth about me. I can tell you I would open your eyes! Only I'm afraid you wouldn't believe me."

"Probably not!" she agreed.

"About me and Wyverne!" he added, nodding his fair head at her.

She seemed more interested.

"Well?" she asked.

"Look here," said Archie, "this is perfectly sickening! Whenever I mention Wyverne you turn serious, and you simply laugh at me!"

"Archie," said Joyce kindly, "you really mustn't mistake your vocation. You are intended to cheer people up and amuse them and make them forget the serious side of life altogether. If you are quite sure that you can stand another glass of champagne, I don't mind your

having one. Or you might have some chocolates instead. It is impossible to feel depressed while one is eating chocolates."

Archibald was silent for a moment.

Then he proposed lustily: "All right; we'll make a night of it!"

They did.

When dinner was over they went to a box at the Empire for an hour, and then to a box at the Palace for an hour, and they wound up with an extremely pleasant supper.

"And now," said Archibald when they arrived at last at their private sitting-room, "let's put out the lights and tell stories over the fire."

"That's a very happy idea, Archie," Joyce admitted, "but unfortunately I'm not nearly robust enough to make any more of a night of it than we've done. Good night!"

He protested, but in vain. The vision vanished and Archibald was left disconsolate.

"Dash it!" he said to himself. "That isn't going to be the last word! I'm not going to be cut out by a rotten edition of my own self. If she cares twopence for Wyverne, she ought to care a fiver for me! I'll make her, too!"

The discovery that she had left her opera cloak behind gave him a moment of reminiscent ecstasy. Then he brought out a very handsome despatch-case—one of his recent purchases—and with a deliberate smile unlocked it.

CHAPTER XV.

THE THIRD LETTER.

THE delicious habit of sitting in front of a bedroom fire gradually making up one's mind it is time to begin undressing, is one of the greatest luxuries of a thoroughly civilized life. The training of Joyce's somewhat austere youth decidedly discouraged the custom, but Sutherbury Park had been demoralizing, and the Hotel Chic was fatal.

She sat in a puzzled, smiling mood for quite a long time, and it was when she roused herself that she first missed her opera cloak.

The hour was very late, and she presumed Archibald would have gone to bed, since he seemed the last person to muse in silence and his own society, so she went quietly back to the sitting-room and very gently opened the door.

And then she stood on the threshold spellbound.

The lights were still on, and there, with his back to her, sat Archibald writing. Beside him on the table was a little canvas bag, exactly like the fat little bags which clinked when Sir Wyverne set them down; only this bag was collapsed and evidently nearly empty.

Archibald apparently meant to replenish it, for he was just finishing the writing of a check. Even as her eyes fell on him, he raised the book to tear out the check and she saw the handwriting quite distinctly.

With a horrified face she came into the room and closed the door behind her. Archibald turned with a start, and for a moment they looked at one another. To her bewilderment there was no sign of guilt on his face; but merely a quick look of surprise and then a gay smile of welcome.

"Hullo!" he cried cheerfully.

"Let me see that check!" she demanded.

"This check?" he asked in surprise, and then his face suddenly changed, as though at last he realized what he had been caught at.

"Forging a check!" she cried. "Oh, Archie!"

It was a check for a hundred pounds on Sir Wyverne's account, made payable to Archibald Fitz-Wyverne, and signed by Wyverne Warrington-Browne; and the ink of the signature was still wet.

"It does almost look like it," he admitted.

"Is that all you have to say!"

Archibald made a great mental effort.

"What do people say in books?" he said, gazing thoughtfully at the ceiling. "I remember! 'Oh, my God!' No, by the way, that's what *you* ought to say. Ah, I have it! 'Spare my innocent babes their father's shame!'"

"Did you mean to use this check?" Joyce asked quietly.

"I do mean to."

"Not this one," she answered, picking it up and throwing it in the fire. "Now give me the check-book."

"But, hang it!" protested Archibald. "Look at this bag! It's almost empty, and I very soon won't have a shilling in the world unless I cash a check!"

"Give me the check-book," repeated Joyce.

"I say, Joyce—" he began.

She went to the bell.

"Very well, if you won't give it me, I'm very sorry, but I'll have to tell the manager."

"Upon my word, this is deuced high-handed," said Archibald; "especially after you've been eating my chocolates!"

"I am in Sir Wyverne's employment," replied Joyce, "and I find his check-book in the possession of somebody else who is using it to forge Sir Wyverne's name and draw on his account. Do you really think I am going to leave it with you? Come, give it to me."

"But if I do I'll be absolutely bust! I can't pay for these rooms or anything!"

"That's an idea which *might* have struck you sooner. And in any case I really can't help it."

"Joyce dear, don't you care for me enough to wish to see me remain in affluent circumstances?" he asked in a beseeching voice. "Even the most platonic friend ought to have that feeling!"

"Have you no sense of shame?" she demanded impatiently.

"I have nothing to be ashamed of," Archie assured her. "In fact it's really Wyverne who ought to feel ashamed. He gave me this wretched little bag of money, quite misunderstanding my hab-

its, and then his better nature added the check-book when it realized how absurdly stingy he had been."

"Do you mean to tell me he *knows* you have this check-book?"

"Certainly."

"And allows you to use it?"

"Of course."

His face was so open and his voice so calm and assured that for an instant she doubted what to think. Then her eye fell on something else lying on the table. She took a quick step forward.

"This is a letter to me from Sir Wyverne!" she exclaimed, picking it up and starting to read it.

"I say; one moment!" said Archibald. "That letter will only complicate the situation. Don't trouble to read it, Joyce."

But she had already troubled. It ran:

DEAR MISS DEMAYNE:

Have just been entrusted with a most delicate mission to His Royal Highness the Prince of Monaco. It is very confidential, so I need only say now that it's in connection with the naval defenses of his empire. Have just looked in at Hotel Chic, but found you had gone to bed, so I leave everything in Archibald's hands. Tomorrow morning he will escort you to join me at Monte Carlo (where, as perhaps you know, the prince lives).

Glad to hear you had a pleasant little dinner with A. I assure you he is one of the best.

Yours in haste,

WYVERNE WARRINGTON-BROWNE.

For a moment Joyce stared at this curious letter in extreme bewilderment. And then the truth flashed upon her.

"You forged this, too!" she cried.

"Don't say 'forged,' please," pleaded Archibald. "It's a horrid word. I wrote it, if that's what you mean."

More and more light began to break on her.

"And the other two letters—oh, I know the whole truth about you now, without your troubling to tell me! I presume you *wrote* those also?" she demanded, with a scornful emphasis that made the word even more unpleasant than "forged."

"Look here," said Archibald plain-

tively, "you put me in a deuce of a hole. If I say I did, you'll get shirtier than ever; and if I say I didn't, there's not an outside chance of your believing me. I'm ready to lie with any if there's even a sporting chance of it's coming off, but what's the use when you know I write exactly the same hand as Wyverne. This is my notion of a tragedy, if you ask me."

"It's my notion of a very dishonorable swindle," said Joyce.

"What beastly words you use!" complained Archie. "It almost seems as if you were deliberately trying to annoy me."

"I am trying to make you realize what you have done. You admit yourself that Sir Wyverne gave you that bag full of money; and I know he did, because I saw it in his hand. And in return for his kindness—oh, can't you really see what a mean, contemptible—"

"Don't!" interrupted Archibald. "You'll make me cry if your voice begins to quiver like that. And you said yourself that seriousness doesn't suit me. I assure you, on my word of honor, Joyce, that when you next see Wyverne and ask him, he will tell you that I had full permission to write those notes and take these rooms, and make any use of his check-book I liked."

"And imitate his handwriting?" she challenged.

"I can't *help* that! It's our family hand. It takes me all my time to fake another signature. I assure you it was quite a problem how I was going to make my endorsement look natural. In fact, if I keep out of the hands of the police, even without your giving me away, I'll deserve a jolly lot more credit than you seem to realize. Let me tell you that, Joyce!"

"If Sir Wyverne ever attempts to justify your conduct," said Joyce with deep conviction, "I shall think a very, very great deal less of him than I've thought before."

"Now, there you are!" cried Archi-

bald gloomily. "You are going to put Wyverne in a hole next.

"Oh, woman! In our hours of dinner
You positively seem a winner;
But when—"

"This well-known and happily selected quotation was interrupted remorselessly.

"Give me that check-book!" she demanded.

"But look here—"

At that point she took it out of his hand and turned for the door.

"Joyce!" he cried in tender accents, springing up and following her.

The door opened and then was shut in his face.

"Lost my best girl!" said Archibald bitterly. "And financial ruin stares me in the face! And all because of the ridiculous value people set on quite the wrong qualities."

He examined the collapsed canvas bag.

"After all, one can do a lot of busting on tick," he reflected more cheerfully. "And what is one blooming girl that one should feel gloomy about losing her? Besides, I've no doubt she'll take a more humorous view of things in the morning. Joyce is a ripper!"

But in the morning Joyce had gone—by an early train, the disconsolate Mr. Fitz-Wyverne was informed.

CHAPTER XVI.

BLACKMAIL.

"I MUST cure myself of even thinking about her," said Archibald to himself. "Unrequited love is a mug's game."

Inspired by this excellent sentiment, he took immediate steps to retrieve his financial position, very justly considering that to be the foundation of a young man's career. He emptied the remaining sovereigns into his trousers-pocket.

"Now that leaves the bag ready for a fresh start," he concluded eagerly. "Which is what most good sportsmen have to do now and then."

With the empty bag in his new overcoat-pocket he set forth in his green-upholstered car and visited in turn four of the shops where he stood highest in favor. At each of these he changed five shillings into coppers, till the bag was considerably stouter than it had been when it began its career. It contained, in fact, two hundred and forty pennies.

On his return to the Hotel Chic he carried it unostentatiously up to his room and there inscribed very neatly and legibly on the canvas—"£500."

"Allowing for the difference in size between a brown and a thick 'un, that ought to work out about right," he said to himself complacently.

He then very carefully and thoroughly tied and sealed the mouth of the bag, and finally descended in the lift, displaying it much more ostentatiously this time.

"I want to see the manager," he announced at the office with an important air.

The clerk eyed the bag, noted the legend—which happened to be so held that he could read it very easily—and deferentially conducted Mr. Fitz-Wyverne to the manager's room.

"I say, baron, old bird," began Archibald genially, "I want you to do me a favor."

He had become extremely intimate with the manager by this time, styling him "baron" because, as he explained, he looked like one. The manager with equal cordiality expressed his pleasure in having the opportunity of doing Mr. Fitz-Wyverne a service.

"I want you to take charge of this for me," said Archibald, sliding the canvas bag onto the table very carefully. "The fact being, baron, I'm one of those fellows who can't be bothered with keeping accounts, so I pay ready money always; and if I happen to see a picture or a motor car or a diamond tiara, or anything else, and take a fancy to it, I must have the dibs handy. I'll probably want to blow this little lot in the next day or two, but till I do I wish you'd keep it for me."

To so reasonable a request made with so princely an air, there was, of course, only one answer. The manager took the bag and gave a receipt which Archibald was a little disappointed to observe only acknowledged the deposit of a sealed canvas bag "marked on the outside '£500.'"

"I'd have had him beautifully if he'd only committed himself to saying the bag actually did hold five hundred pounds," he reflected. "However, I've undoubtedly inspired the proper confidence. Now for a crowded hour of glorious life! What a jolly thing it is to feel financially sound again."

Had he seen the manager gently but firmly pinching the bag all over, and observed his extremely thoughtful look at the end of this process, Archibald would probably have felt that he might have inspired even more confidence if he had invested in four hundred and eighty half-pennies.

It did occur to him to look for the diamond trinket as an extra financial precaution, but the trouble of discovering in what direction Joyce's bedroom window looked, and after that making even further inquiries, struck him as excessive, especially for a man with a receipt in his pocket for a bag marked "£500."

Besides, he had the kindest heart imaginable, and the idea of disappointing the fortunate finder by a churlish claim was really not to be thought of. So he lunched very pleasantly for the modest sum of two pounds and decided on a stroll in Piccadilly.

It was then that for the first time he realized certain disadvantages in his position. For a young man of his social instincts, pleasant companionship was quite essential. A solitary sportsman struck him as a mere contradiction in terms. Accordingly, when he observed two fashionably dressed gentlemen approaching him, and recognized them at once as friends of Sir Wyverne's youth, he stopped instinctively and gave them the cheeriest hail.

"Hello, hello, old nutlets!" he cried. "Whither away?"

To describe the gentlemen (a political peer and a lieutenant-colonel in the brigade of guards) as surprised would do considerably less than justice to their emotions.

"I am afraid, sir, you have the advantage over us," said the peer politely but not warmly.

"By gad, so I have!" said Archibald, beginning to realize the situation. "Well, the fact is I'm a cousin of Sir Wyverne Warrington-Browne, and I've heard all about you both so often I thought I'd just pass the time of day, and so forth and so on."

"As you have now passed it, sir," replied the lieutenant-colonel severely, "I should recommend you to move on before you get into trouble."

"And if I hear of you accosting any more of Sir Wyverne's or anybody else's friends, I shall inform the proper authorities," added the peer.

"I was merely going to show you the way," replied Archibald quite calmly.

The peer's political habits made him incautiously inquire:

"The way where, sir, may I ask?"

"To the Zoological Gardens," advised Archibald, "where you will find your cages awaiting you. Good morning."

"Scored off them badly!" he said to himself as he strolled on. "At the same time, this kind of thing is rather a jar. I must choose my next bird a little more carefully."

He had just reached the corner of Hamilton Place when he exclaimed aloud:

"Got him!"

A gentleman who was waiting on the curb for the string of buses to pass turned round at the exclamation. He was a broad-backed, sleek-haired, immaculately attired man, with a heavy, blue chin and a curiously furtive look in his eye as it fell on the stranger who had spoken his thoughts aloud.

"Mr. Muldevon, I believe?" queried Archibald, bowing politely.

Mr. Muldevon nodded curtly, still with that watchful, shifty look in his eyes.

"Allow me to introduce myself as Archibald Fitz-Wyverne—a cousin of Sir Wyverne Warrington-Browne."

At the mention of this name, Mr. Muldevon turned a shade less florid. His voice, too, seemed a little unsteady as he asked:

"And what do you want with me?"

"A private word. Shall we cross the street?"

For an instant Mr. Muldevon hesitated, but Archibald had begun to lead the way across Piccadilly with such instant decision that he followed automatically at his shoulder. Without pausing, Archie passed through the small gate into Green Park, and there, under the shade of the trees, he turned and looked straight into the wary eyes.

"You once acted as stock-broker for Sir Wyverne, I believe?" he began with the gravest air at his command.

"And supposing I did?" questioned Mr. Muldevon.

"My cousin was devilish good-natured over that affair."

"What affair?" demanded Mr. Muldevon, whose blue-chinned face had become a mask.

"That two thousand pounds, old chap."

Mr. Muldevon's face became very intelligent, but none the less sinister.

"Sir Wyverne gave me his word he would tell nobody! We were old friends; he made allowances."

"He has told *me*," persisted Archibald. "And it would be deuced unpleasant if I passed it on, wouldn't it?"

For a moment Mr. Muldevon looked at him in silence. Then, with an unpleasant air of accepting the inevitable, he said briefly:

"Name your price. What do you want?"

"To dance!" cried Archie, with sparkling eyes.

"To make me dance, I presume you mean?" said Mr. Muldevon grimly.

"Well, you can dance, too, if you like; but look here, old bird, the position is this.

"I'm rather at a loose end—most of my friends out of town, and so forth and so on—and I'm simply busting with beans. I didn't know exactly what I was going to get out of you when I tackled you—whether to make you dine with me or take you out to play golf somewhere, or what. And then I had one of the inspirations of my life. A dance—that was the thing? Can you manage it all right?"

His most intimate friends had probably never seen exactly the same expression on Mr. Muldevon's face before.

"And after that?" he demanded.

"I don't quite follow."

"What else do you want?"

"Well," mused Archibald, "if I still find myself at a loose end I might get a day's golf out of you. I've got a ripping car; I'd take you anywhere you like to go. But the dance is the thing at present."

"You are talking seriously? Remember this shock to my nerves is no joke for me," declared Mr. Muldevon, with a marked relaxation of the strain apparent in his voice.

"Poor old chap! I'm really awful sorry," murmured Archibald with the most charming contrition. "It was deuced ungentelemanly of me, but if you only knew how dull I felt strolling along Piccadilly by my lonely self, you'd make allowances. Of course, I'm talking seriously. Now, what about this dance?"

So open and engaging was Archibald's face, and so sympathetic his voice, that the wary look vanished entirely from Mr. Muldevon's eyes, and, instead of the curt and sinister person of two minutes before, he suddenly revealed himself as an almost excessively rollicking blade.

"Spoken like a sportsman!" he cried. "Make allowances? Of course I will! Damn it, old man, the pleasure of making your acquaintance was well worth the shock to my nervous system! As for a

dance, by gad! I'm taking my two girls out to a hop on Friday night—that's the day after to-morrow. How'll it suit you to come and join our party?"

"I was sure you were the man I wanted!" Archibald exploded rapturously. "I've got a kind of instinct for knowing a good man when I see him!"

Mr. Muldevon assured him he had precisely the same instinct, and had known Archie instantly as one of the best, and they parted on almost affectionate terms.

"I wonder whether it's more luck or good guidance?" thought Archibald as he walked happily back again. "Anyhow, I'm undoubtedly a great success."

As for Mr. Muldevon, his rollicking mood passed as swiftly as it had appeared, and he fell exceedingly thoughtful.

"Well, we'll see," he said to himself finally.

CHAPTER XVII.

AN OLD FRIEND.

USING happily on his exceptional luck, Archibald forgot to turn back into Piccadilly, and presently discovered himself still in the Green Park, shut off by the railings from the traffic and life of the street.

There was not far to go before he came to another gate, but even this brief divorce from the enticing world beyond the bars struck him as an admirable instance of the melancholy way in which some fellows wasted their time. The habits of the late Sir Wyverne were a particularly sad example.

"To think of the fellow—practically *me*—mugging up scientific books and political pamphlets alone in his study!" he said to himself. "What a handicap Samuel was!"

Just before he arrived at the gate he perceived another sad instance—a man still on the right side of middle-age who seemed to prefer sitting alone on a bench to strolling gaily through the crowd.

As Archibald's compassionate eye sur-

veyed this figure, it noted, however, certain extenuating circumstances. The solitary's overcoat was sadly frayed at the cuff; one boot showed a loose flap where the upper ought to have joined the sole; his felt hat was of at least three shades of green; in short, he was not quite suitably dressed for a promenade in Piccadilly. Still, sitting alone in the Green Park required a lot of explanation.

Suddenly the solitary's face seemed familiar. "It's poor old Jack Swinby!"

To pass an old acquaintance simply never occurred to Archibald. He would have hailed him at once, only his two recent adventures made him cautious.

"Fellows' nerves don't seem as strong as they used to be," he reflected.

So he seated himself on the bench beside the shabby solitary and began in a breezy, conversational way, calculated to calm the most sensitive nerves:

"Jolly day, isn't it? I say don't you find it a bit quiet here? Some fellows like it, I suppose, but it always seems to me rather a pity to waste one's fragrance on the desert air, *et cetera*."

The solitary looked at him dully. He had pleasant, blue eyes a little bloodshot; his chin was covered with a stubble of fair bristles; his air was apathetic; when he spoke his voice was monotonous but unmistakably that of a gentleman.

"I don't know that I'd call myself very fragrant," he suggested.

"That will come all right," said Archibald encouragingly. "Give yourself a chance—that's all that's wanted."

"A chance!" exclaimed the other, with a note in his voice which touched Archibald exceedingly.

"You don't remember me, I suppose," he queried. "But I know you quite well. You're Jack Swinby."

The solitary was roused this time. He sat up sharply and there was suspicion in his eyes now.

"Who are you?" he demanded.

"A fellow you've met often—when you used to go to Warrington-Browne's rooms."

"That's an obvious lie," declared Swinby bluntly. "It's twelve years at least since I last saw Warrington-Browne. You must have been an infant then."

"Oh, Lord!" said Archibald. "These complications are really the deuce! Well, anyhow, my name's Archie Fitz-Wyverne, and you're going to dine with me to-night, and that's the fact of the matter, old bird."

"To dine with you to-night!" repeated Swinby with a laugh that was more melancholy than his apathy had been. "I don't know how you got hold of my name, but have you the least idea of my distinguished career?"

"Rather!" said Archie. "You were in the 35th Hussars, then you chucked the service and weren't very lucky and so on and so forth, and now I suppose—not to beat about the bush—you've landed on your uppers; as many another good sportsman has done."

"Good sportsman!" repeated Swinby sardonically. "It was the blank army who chucked me, and the blank police have made my acquaintance since, and you'd better keep your invitations for people who can accept them."

He turned away as he spoke, and then turned back and threw another curious glance on Archibald.

"Who the devil are you?" he asked.

"That's neither here nor there," said Archie, jumping up. "You just wait here and I'll be back in half an hour."

"You'll probably still find me here if you call again at two in the morning," said Swinby with his uncomfortable laugh.

"Good Lord! Haven't you any rooms, Jack?"

"Jack!" echoed Swinby with a gust of laughter. "I have a room, Archie, my old pal, in a highly fashionable part of the town, but it has a landlord and he has been making some uncivil inquiries about rent for the last month or two. My room isn't very healthy at present in consequence."

"Pay him a couple of quid on account," suggested Archibald, holding out his hand. "It's a loan, old bird; take 'em."

"A loan?" said Swinby, taking the sovereigns with a hasty movement that almost suggested he was afraid they would suddenly vanish. "And when do you expect me to pay you back, friend of my youth?"

"Oh, I never let people pay me back under a year—that's to say a year per pound—two years in your case. It's the interest I think of. Well, I'll be back presently. Be good!"

The fashionable apparition sped up the path to the gate and vanished in the crowd of Piccadilly, leaving an extremely perplexed waif on the bench.

In about half an hour the brilliant youth returned, this time carrying a small suit-case.

"Excuse my taking a liberty, Jack," said he, "but the fact is, there's a fellow I'm going to introduce you to who's one of the best, but a bit of a snob, and I thought I'd better fit you up first with a few *et ceteras*."

As he spoke he opened his bag and took out of it a hat, an overcoat and a pair of boots.

"I had to have a shot at the sizes," he explained, "but they'll probably see you through the next hour or so. Stick your old things into the bag."

Mr. Swinby stared at him hard.

"You don't look exactly the Salvation Army type," he said, "but I'm damned if I can make out what you're driving at otherwise."

He began to take off his boots while Archibald lit a cigarette and seated himself beside him.

"What strikes me is," said he, "that people are extraordinarily easy surprised. For the last three days I've been noticing it. Of course, I naturally want to produce a good impression; it costs no more—or at least only a fiver here and there, and it's a deuced sound form of philanthropy I always think. At the same

time, I really don't see any good and sufficient reason for the wild flutter that seems to agitate the spectators whenever I appear. If I wasn't of a hopeful disposition I'd begin to fear that good men were getting scarce."

Mr. Swinby's stare became more comprehending.

"Cracked!" he said to himself. "But it's not for me to complain."

In a new hat, overcoat, and pair of boots, and with a gleam of hope once more in his blue eyes, he looked a very different gentleman from the waif of ten minutes ago.

"Now," cried Archibald. "Come on! My car's waiting for us."

He led the way into Piccadilly, his old friend following with the gleam in his eye still brighter. When he found himself in the green-upholstered car and they started eastwards there appeared on his face for the first time the dawn of a smile.

"If I might venture to make a suggestion," said he, "this person you are going to be so kind as to introduce me to—"

"My tailor!" confided Archibald.

He perceived that he had caused another flutter of surprise.

"Your tailor!" gasped Swinby.

"My dear old bird, absolutely the first thing you need is a suit of evening clothes! That goes without saying."

He was distressed to notice how lugubrious his old friend's face became.

"Evening clothes!" said he, and made a melancholy attempt at a laugh. "I *had* been thinking of a bit of supper."

"Supper!" exclaimed Archibald. "My dear Jack, it isn't lunch time yet!"

"I was beginning with the last meal I didn't eat," explained Swinby.

Archibald looked thoughtful.

"This is a bit of a dilemma," said he. "Even if we get you measured at once, it's making my tailor work pretty hard to have your evening clothes ready for a dance to-morrow night."

"A *dance*?" said Swinby, in a low, and it seemed an awed, voice.

"However," continued Archie cheerily, "it's clearly a case where an extra fiver is well spent. We'll have a hasty snack at the Chic and see what the tailor chap will do if I tell him to name his own figure. Hi, Jehu! Back to the Chic!"

The stout, dark expert (who answered very amicably to 'Jehu' for much the same consideration as inspired the tailors) touched his peaked cap, and Mr. Swinby's face began to clear again. He only ventured one more word of protest.

"About to-morrow night," he began. "The fact is, I've been a little out of the way of going to dances—"

"You'll get into your stride again in two minutes, old bird! Hullo, here we are! Hop out! By the way, fizz is still your drink, I suppose?"

Mr. Swinby hopped out and approached the revolving glass door of the Hotel Chic with the air of a somnambulist.

CHAPTER XVIII.

CAPTAIN SWINBY.

"CAPTAIN SWINBY is going to have my other bedroom," Archibald announced at the office. "He's just back from the Antarctic, and so he's a bit short of luggage and so on, but one of the most distinguished."

"That makes it all right," he explained to his old friend. "Captains are always popular, and no one expects to see nuts landing from the Antarctic. Now for a few oysters and a bottle of fizz."

"Lend me a clean collar," whispered the newly commissioned captain. "I'll have to lunch in my overcoat in any case, but they probably draw the line here at overcoats with their collars turned up."

They went up to Archibald's suite, and there, the celerity with which his guest changed his collar and declared himself ready for luncheon, met with his cordial approval.

"The sooner we get to the tailor's the better," he contended.

"Yes," agreed his guest, "— and to lunch."

A five course luncheon with two helpings of everything and the better part of a bottle of champagne produced the most gratifying transformation in Captain Swinby of Antarctic fame.

"You're a blank mystery, old chap," he chuckled, "but the kind of mystery I like!"

"If you like other people they always like you," explained Archibald.

The Antarctic adventurer looked at him curiously.

"That's your opinion, is it?"

"My plain and unvarnished."

"If you keep it for the next five years you'll be a phenomenon!"

"I'm a phenomenon already," said Archibald.

Thanks to Captain Swinby's Antarctic record (as narrated by Archibald to his tailors, the staff of the Chic, and any others he thought would be benefited by the information) certain peculiarities in his appearance were readily overlooked, and, by the time their afternoon's shopping was finished and he was shaved and arrayed in a suit of ready-made tweeds, his old friend began to detect a reminiscence of the once dashing hussar.

"I say," he declared, as they faced each other over a table in the gayest grill-room in London, "you're a new man again! And now there's nothing to prevent your remaining so, is there, Jack?"

"Well," admitted the captain, "I've had one or two weaknesses to contend with hitherto, I don't mind confessing."

"You've probably grown out of them," ventured Archie with great assurance. "In fact, in my experience that's the worst of weaknesses. They tend to fade away."

"Perhaps I'll find that has happened to mine," said the captain optimistically.

"Sure to, old bird. Regrets for lost bad habits is all you're likely to suffer from now."

"You're the most encouraging fellow I've ever met!" declared Captain Swinby.

"I've given up trying to puzzle my brains as to *who* you are, but that's *what* you are!"

"I'm awful pleased to be appreciated, Jack," said Archibald warmly. "Speaking of my unanimous and unqualified success, I quite forgot to mention that I've just lost my best girl, and it's really most consoling to hear your kind words, *et cetera*. What shall we do now — a music hall?"

The evening was very happily spent, and by the time he had supped, slept, and breakfasted in uninterrupted luxury, the distinguished Captain Swinby began to exhibit a degree of confidence worthy of his record.

"By Jove, I do believe my luck has actually turned!" said he. "I think I deserve it, too, for I've waited for a devilish long time."

"Luck's generally a matter of habit," observed Archibald. "In fact, once it begins the difficulty is how to stop it. You'll probably meet the maiden of your dreams to-night, and her oofy old uncle will die to-morrow, and there you'll be, old bird!"

"Then you're really going to take me to this dance?" asked the captain, looking a trifle less confident.

"Rather! That was my very first thought when I saw you on that bench: How Jack would enjoy a dance!"

"It was the last thought in my own head," admitted his friend. "Still, I dare say my ballroom manners will come back to me once I get there."

"Once a gentleman, always a gentleman," Archibald assured him. "That's the one bad habit which seems incurable."

CHAPTER XIX.

THE BALL.

ARCHIBALD'S gracious intention of picking up Mr. Muldevon and his daughters at their house had been communicated to them by telegram. Archibald believed in telegrams; they

saved time, and time was money, he said—and shortly after nine o'clock the green-upholstered car arrived.

Inside it were two such fashionable-looking gentlemen that the Misses Muldevon agreed at once that their father had selected their escorts with admirable judgment. And at least one of these gentlemen was apparently equally satisfied.

"Lucky as usual!" exclaimed Archibald enthusiastically.

"Who is?" inquired Miss Julia.

"Me," said Archibald; "and you can guess why if you like."

Mr. Muldevon changed the conversation at this point, rather tactlessly, Archibald thought. Still, he was sure he had made a good beginning.

As the gay party entered the ballroom, all on the best of terms already, Mr. Muldevon and his elder daughter fell a little behind the others, and the jovial stockbroker's expression became, for the moment, a trifle less hilarious.

"Julia," he whispered, "I wish you could manage to find out something more about this young fellow, Fitz-Wyverne. Pump him a bit when you get the chance."

Julia, who was both a beautiful and a discreet daughter, nodded significantly.

Meanwhile, fortune's favorite had already thrown his arm round the waist of Evangeline—a sophisticated débutante with a remarkable eye for what she termed toniness and nuttiness—and off they went to a rousing waltz.

The sensation they caused was exceedingly gratifying. The vanished Sir Wyverne's dancing days had fallen in a period of athletic waltzing, which was doubtless the reason why his lucky half whirled through the more sedately revolving crowd like a runaway gyroscope. With his coat-tails flying and his face radiant with joy, talking very loudly and cheerfully all the time, he spun round the room with prodigious velocity, while above the strains of the band arose intermittently the sound of a crashing bump and a genial cry of:

"Sorry, old bird! My fault!"

Evangeline thought that she had never had so exciting an experience before, but she afterward confided to her most intimate friend that it was actually eclipsed by her subsequent experience in a very dark and remote sitting-out place.

In fact, up till nearly the hour of midnight, Archibald's career was a succession of sensations for society and experiences for his partners. As for his own feelings, they were blissful even beyond his expectations, and as he had expected a good deal, no better testimonial could be imagined.

His only disappointment was his third waltz with Julia, such a pretty girl and so sympathetic up to that point. In the course of the first two waltzes he had grown possibly even more intimate with her than with any of the other charming girls, and had almost made up his mind to become temporarily engaged, but now she actually insisted on sitting in a corner which, though out of ear-shot, was in full view of the superfluous public.

"I want to talk sensibly this time," she said.

"My dear Julia," protested Archibald—he called all of his enslavers by their Christian names—"the only time for talking sensibly is before breakfast on an extra rainy morning. Otherwise, no healthy man is ever sensible enough to talk about it."

"Girls are different, though," declared Julia. "When they become friends with a man they like to know something about him."

"Well, I'll tell you all there is to know about me in two minutes. If you split the difference between forty-five years and five days you get a kind of average for my age. Add one and subtract the previous figure and you get the number of my ideas, which simply consist of peaceful happiness; and as to how I made my pile, it was really done by another fellow who made it by getting born of the proper parents and then went bust under secret and sensational circumstances."

"Went bust!" exclaimed Julia.

"Yes, and I'm one of the bits. So, what ho, for a quiet corner! The rest of my confessions are confidential."

"I must speak to dad for a moment first," said Julia. "Wait for me here."

"Gone to ask him whether it's safe to say 'yes,' on the strength of those revelations!" muttered Archibald to himself sagaciously. "This is a little too business-like for me. I think I'll get engaged to some one else instead."

When he received his daughter's report of her conversation with Fitz-Wyverne, Mr. Muldevon seemed still unsatisfied.

"I might have a few words myself with Swinby," said he. "He seems a decent sort of chap."

When the next dance began he watched the various couples enter the ballroom, but there was no sign of the Antarctic explorer among them. He wandered through the sitting-out retreats, but there was no Captain Swinby there, either.

Then he tried the supper-room, and there at last he discovered the explorer very fortunately placed for a little conversation. He was, in fact, sitting quite alone in a corner of the room with a bottle of champagne on the table before him, apparently deep in meditation.

"Hullo, Swinby!" cried Mr. Muldevon jovially. "On your own, eh?"

Captain Swinby rose rather carefully and deliberately, he noticed, and made him a solemn bow. Then in a slow, measured voice he said:

"Sir, the champagne is our host's. Help yourself."

And with that he sat down again somewhat suddenly.

It occurred at once to Mr. Muldevon that the opportunity was even more promising than he had ventured to hope. He sat down and filled his own glass.

"Here's to ourselves!" he said, raising it.

"Sir," replied Captain Swinby, with the same measured utterance, "I am drinking this bottle to my friend Archie Fitz-Wyverne. It is the least I can do

for him—the very least, Mr.—your name escapes me, but no matter. As I was saying, one bottle is the very least. In fact, one is not enough. This is the second."

"He is an old friend, I presume?" inquired Mr. Mulvedon with an apparent careless air.

"His age," replied the captain profoundly, "is immy—immy—immyterial. You observe the word, sir? I chose it very, very, very carefully."

"I mean, you have known him a long time?" explained Mr. Muldevon.

Captain Swinby became gravely confidential.

"My friend Archie assures me, sir, he has known *me* a long time; but I 'sure him I was un'voidably detained from being present at his birth, which must have happened just when he says he met me."

The captain smiled pleasantly, drained his glass very slowly, and carefully refilled it; and, having recovered from the strain of the operation, smiled pleasantly again.

"Then you don't know much about his past career, eh?"

"I know where he came from," said Captain Swinby, "and as you seem intelligent sort of genelman, I don't mind telling you."

"Yes?" Mr. Muldevon spoke with an eagerness he hardly tried to dissemble.

Captain Swinby looked at him fixedly.

"You seem extr'ordinarily in'rested in my friend Archie," he observed.

"I've taken a fancy to him, like yourself, Swinby."

The captain held out his hand and solemnly shook Mr. Mulvedon's.

"In that case I hes'tate no longer. Mind you, I don't know 'xactly the name of the place, but"—he lowered his voice impressively—"it's where they keep the mad angels!"

"The what!" exclaimed Mr. Muldevon.

"Mad angels. That's my friend Archie exactly—mad angel."

Mr. Muldevon retired to ruminate on this information and, to judge from his expression, it seemed as though he were not yet entirely relieved of anxiety.

Left again to his meditations, Captain Swinby gravely emptied his glass, inspected the bottle minutely—even holding it upside down over the carpet—and then rose with a sigh and took a couple of steps toward the door, to the vast interest of a group of waiters who stood watching his proceedings with technical eyes.

"I told you so!" said one of these experts, as the gentleman turned back again with a sorrowful air. "'E knows 'e can't do it!"

Dropping into his chair again and burying his face in his hands, the distinguished explorer murmured:

"This is absolutely won'erful!"

It was a dance or two later that Archibald, glowing with triumph and moist with his exertions, burst like a ray of glory into the supper-room.

"A glass of fizz from the tap!" he cried. "My throat's dry as a judge with proposing."

And then his eyes fell on his friend.

"Bring a bottle to this table!" he commanded, and threw himself into a chair opposite the explorer.

"What's happened to you, Jack?" he asked. "I haven't bumped into you for the last six dances."

His friend looked at him steadily and sadly.

"Archie, my dear, dear ol' friend," he replied, "the most won'erful and astonishing pher—phenom-non has happened. I am drunk."

"Good bird!" said Archibald. "It's a wonderful happy feeling, isn't it?"

The captain shook his head in a mournful way.

"My weakness," he sighed, "my dear ol' weakness! It hasn't faded, Archie. It has returned abs'lutely full of beans."

"Well," said Archibald, "that's a jolly healthy sign, let me tell you."

"You are mos' encouraging—mos' encouraging, Archie. At the same time, I'm

a man of the worl', and there are prejudices against gentlemen getting drunk. I have disgraced you, Archie!"

"Nonsense!" protested Archibald. "Nobody 'll notice."

Captain Swinby shook his head still more mournfully.

"The kontras', Archie, the kontras' between you so beastly sober and me so bew—so bewtifully drunk, is too won'erfully striking, Archie."

"That's easily cured," said Archie, draining his glass and filling it again, "I'll get drunk, too."

His old friend held out his hand with an ecstatic smile.

"Jus' what I was going to sugges'!" he exclaimed. "You have the insting of a sportsman and a gentleman, Archie! And that being so, I see abs'lutely no reason why I shouldn't get a li'l' bit drunker."

Throwing himself into his work with his usual ardor, Archibald was able to announce in about three minutes: "I'm quite drunk enough now, old bird!"

"And I am distingly drunker," replied Captain Swinby.

"Then let's go home," suggested Archibald. "It's no good trying to dance on these revolving floors."

"Dance!" exclaimed the captain feelingly. "I can't even walk on the beas'ly things."

"Waiter!" cried Archibald, and a sympathetic expert was instantly at his elbow. "Help this gentleman to walk quite steadily and soberly into my car."

Captain Swinby reached the car after a progress through the mansion which succeeded in eclipsing all the other sensations of the evening.

Not the least impressed of the spectators was Mr. Muldevon, whose kindness in assisting their progress was rewarded by a very eloquent speech of thanks on the door-step, finishing with this surprising disclosure:

"My dear, dear ol' frien'," said Archibald, who made the speech unassisted, the captain being by this time asleep in

the car, "in conclusion let me explain myself. Your lovely daughter wants to know who I am. Tell, her, John—I don't know your Christian name, so I must just call you John—tell her, John, with my love, I'm a partner in a baronetcy, so if she wants to get engaged to me—well, there you are! Go' bless you!"

Looking much less enlightened than one would expect after such a particularly frank statement, Mr. Muldevon returned thoughtfully to the ballroom, where he was heard to express the opinion very emphatically and with unmistakable feeling that he had never been so d—d in his life.

Meanwhile, in the green-upholstered car, Archibald, with equal emotion, was lamenting his incautious candor.

"Given myself away! Told old John all about my dreadful secret. No one will ask me to any more dances when they know I'm only that blighter Wyverne. A tragedy, old bird, just a horrid tragedy!"

Discovering at last that the old bird was still fast asleep, he spent the next few minutes in gently rousing him, and by the time he was awake they had drawn up before the portals of the Chic.

With the assistance of Jehu, the captain was extricated and the two gentlemen were left on the pavement of Piccadilly to face the problem of an effective entrance.

Under ordinary circumstances the steps were not numerous, steep, or unsteady, nor did the revolving door present at all an impossible obstacle; but Captain Swinby's circumstances were not ordinary. Even Archibald's were a little unusual; and to add to the drama, as it was only just after midnight and the streets not yet empty, a small crowd was already collecting.

Fortunately, Archibald was always inspired by a crowd, and this time his inspiration took one of its most lofty flights.

"I say, old bird," he said confidentially, so that the crowd should not overhear—though as he happened inadvertently to shout his secret it was actually rewarded by a round of applause—"let's pretend we're polar bears and come in growling! That'll amuse 'em extraordinarily! They'll never dream for one single instant you're drunk—just trying to be funny. Come on!"

"Mos' encouraging—mos' encouraging, Archie!" agreed the captain.

Accordingly, on their hands and knees, the two polar bears slowly ascended the steps, and, with the assistance of many willing spectators, the glass door began to revolve. When it had revolved exactly half-way round, the grand-ducal party which happened to be in the hall were startled to catch a glimpse of what appeared to be a dark-colored quadruped entangled in the door, though so vigorously did the assistants make it revolve that at the first attempt Archibald was whirled completely round onto the steps again.

The captain, being a heavier weight, had more luck and made a very successful entrance, his growls being distinctly audible on the second floor.

Archibald's second attempt resulted in an equally spectacular effect, and the picturesque flight of the grand-ducal party as the two monsters roared their way to the elevator left absolutely nothing to be desired.

"'Gratulations! Sim'ly ever and ever and ever and ever so many 'gratulations, old fellow!" said the captain enthusiastically as the bears arose at last in the privacy of their room. (Archibald had considered it wiser the captain should remain a quadruped in the lift.)

"Wasn't it a neat idea?" questioned Archibald. "And won't the old manager laugh to-morrow! I say, I strongly advise you to pretend you're a rat and sleep on the floor!"

Which he did.

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.

Heart to Heart Talks



By the Editor



A SHORT time ago I talked of the psychological difference between the rapier and the modern automatic—of the snakelike devilry in the former compared with the sudden decisiveness that belched from the deadly little mouth of the latter. And since Johnstone McCulley's splendid story, "Captain Fly-By-Night," has called forth so many enthusiastic expressions of approval, I feel most happily situated this week, in being supremely confident that, in announcing

THE FIGHTING LASH

BY CHARLES B. STILSON

Author of "Polaris—of the Snows," "Minos of Sardanes," etc.

I am giving you something you will read at one sitting, no matter how long it takes or how much sleep you lose in the process.

It will appear complete in our next issue, and will bring to your eager attention a weapon that has a fascination all its own—a weapon as curious as it is effective in strewing disaster wherever the whine of it is heard. France and America in the middle of the seventeenth century is the setting; and from the glamorous mysteries of Mazarin's Paris to the old Peter Stuyvesant's Pear Tree and the councils of the red man's long house, you will be led with a rapidity of action that stamps this wonderful story as a masterpiece among novelettes—the concentrated essence of a Dumas novel, in one-sixth the length. And in these days of great speed in all things, time is everything.

But it is quite long enough to keep you sitting up late to finish it, because when you once get started on "THE FIGHTING LASH," "tomorrow" will be another day, and sleep won't matter much.

Next week, then, meet *Le Marcou—The Tom Cat*.

You will find the cultivation of his acquaintance as thrilling as it will be unusual.

✻ ✻ ✻
"SOFT HARVEST HANDS," by William Slavens McNutt, is a sparkling story of the stage, very highly charged with humor and rich in a very real human interest. It details the fate that overtook that remarkable ham-actor-manager, *Pilkington Van Handerberry*, when he went up against a simple Oklahoma farmer and his Iowa sweetheart. As *Miss Courlaine*, the character woman (who tells the story) remarks: "He is so crooked that he has to go wide around corners for fear of running into himself." But even against an accomplished "man of the world" of this sort, innocence may hold its own—and maybe a little more—with the aid of Chance and a clever woman—especially the

latter. If you don't believe it, read this story and see; even if it doesn't convince you, it will give you more hearty laughs than you've had in many weeks.

✻ ✻ ✻
"THE DARK SEA-HORSE," by Charley Wood, thrusts the three old Stapleton "salts," whom you have already encountered with pleasure, into a real race, in which *Captain Wagg* successfully brings down upon his head the copious store of profanity which *Captains Swiggles* and *Stubbler* always have at their command. Most of what they think of *Wagg* at the end of the race doesn't get into print,

but the reason for their sputtering wrath is very much all there, accompanied by large gobs of excitement and suspense and chortling joy.

That reason is the story, which is as funny and as clever a thing as the trio of skippers have ever been mixed up in. Which means *much*—and then some.



"THE SURE THING," by Ben Ames Williams, is as amusing and human a little tale of the Sport of Kings as you'd wish to read, and it goes to prove—well, several things. In fact, if you happen to be interested in racing, it will give you some pointers that are worth real money; and if you aren't, it will give you some other pointers that are also worth real money. So, there you are!

Mr. Williams is comparatively a new writer with us (do you remember his delightful "Glissez, M'sieu' Kellee, Glissez!" in the July 1 number?) But, as you will decide for yourselves before very long, he is an important addition to the ALL-STORY's staff of contributors.



"PROFESSOR PUNJAB," by James Fredrick Topping, is another story of the delightful *Mrs. McJimsey*, who used to trip one of the lightest fantastic toes in the "perfesh," and now conducts a select theatrical boarding-house for ungrateful and unappreciative chorus-girls from the Bashful Maids' Musical Comedy Company and its ilk.

The first time you met the lady was in "The Jonah Man," published July 8. That contained probably more of the superstitions that afflict stage folk than any other story of its size ever published. And in "Professor Punjab" you will find some interesting and enlightening features of stage hypnotism.



AN INSPIRATION

TO THE EDITOR:

I have been reading your magazine ever since I can remember, when it was printed once a month, and I must say you have the most interesting stories, all under the same cover, of any book on the market. They are so big and strong, and inspire one to do big things and live clean. Some people fail to get right back of a story, and see it as well as read it. That is why there are some letters I have run across objecting to some certain author or other. There are good points in all of your stories; if one would only read them over the second time, they would see them, and get good out of them. For me, give me the ALL-STORY every week. We fuss at home seeing who gets it first. Even my three-year-old girl tries to read. At any rate, she feels the goodness coming right to her, even

though she doesn't understand. It's instinct. She sits and holds it on her lap and talks to it.

Don't give Mr. England any vacation this year, for we need him right along.

Hunt up a good auto-racing story soon. I should like to meet again your wonderful "Face Value."

A. L. L. R.

Bar Harbor, Maine.

THE BEST EVER

TO THE EDITOR:

Enclosed find four dollars, for which please send me the ALL-STORY WEEKLY for one year, beginning with July 22, as I have been unable to get that number here, and I don't want to miss a number.

I have been a subscriber for a good while, and have been buying at the news-stands for five or six years, and I want to say that the ALL-STORY is the best magazine I have ever read. The worst stories I ever saw in it are "The Adopted Father" and "Face Value." About all the other stories fine.

Edgar Rice Burroughs and Zane Grey are my favorite authors.

Well, so-long for this time.

L. O. MORRIS.

R. F. D. No. 3.

Stuttgart, Arkansas.

\$1.00—THREE MONTHS OF JOY

TO THE EDITOR:

Have been a reader of your superb magazine for the last five years, and have never been able to "kick," 'cause you sure do "put it over."

And now a little hint to Hulbert Footner. He has certainly strayed from the gilded path of glory. Please, please blindfold him and lead him back to "The Sealed Valley" and "The Huntress" for some more good stories of that type, if it is only to keep him away from the city with its impossible romance of "The Fugitive Sleuth."

Would certainly enjoy a great deal more of these spell-binders—Franklin, Rath, Carewe-Carvel, Burroughs, and England.

Am sending herewith postal M. O. for one dollar for three months of joy, to commence with the issue of August 5th.

G. WURTMANN, JR.

Ditmars Avenue, East Elmhurst,
Long Island, New York.

FROM THE CRESCENT CITY

TO THE EDITOR:

The ALL-STORY was the first magazine I ever read, and, wishing a long life to the ALL-STORY, it will be the last.

To give a list of the "best" stories would

take pages, and I hardly think I would be allowed all that space in the Heart to Heart Talks. In a word, they are all good, with very few exceptions, one of which exceptions I regret to say is "Letters from a Beau Brummell of the Ring."

The *Tarzan* stories were the *crème de la crème* of all stories, past, present, and they will have to be very hard pressed in the future to lose the title of the best story ever printed in any magazine, bar none.

I think that the South will unite with me in saying that E. K. Means's stories are the best stories of southern negro dialect ever printed, and are as true to life as life itself.

I have never as yet read the written praise of New Orleans for the ALL-STORY in the Heart to Heart Talks, but New Orleans reads a goodly number of ALL-STORIES, and actions speak louder than words. T. C. C.

New Orleans, Louisiana.

KEPT 'EM GUESSING

TO THE EDITOR:

I started the ALL-STORY when "His Unknown Wife" was the front-page attraction, and must say it is the finest plot and best-handled story I ever read in any magazine (and I've read a few), "The Iron Rider" coming next. "The Brass Check" isn't finished. Can't England get his pipe going again and give us the rest of it?

"Box 901" was O. K., and must say that "Face Value" kept us guessing on the outcome.

Take it as a whole, I think the ALL-STORY is the best magazine published, and would not know how to spend Sunday without it.

Thanking you and your excellent staff writers for many hours of entertainment, I am,

F. T. N.

717 Cable Street,
Van Wert, Ohio.

"FISHHEAD"

NOTE: On January 11, 1913, we published in the *Cavalier* a story by Irvin S. Cobb called "Fishhead." We didn't call it a "different" story, because at that time we had not inaugurated our "different department," but that it was different is proved by the fact that, after a lapse of more than three and a half years, we are still getting letters about it. We published a most enthusiastic one from S. Haggood Parks, Jr., of Winchendon, Massachusetts, last week, and now from far across the Pacific comes the following:

TO THE EDITOR:

I have just finished your magazine for April 15, and as I wanted to thank you for the wonderful story by P. P. Sheehan, "The Million

Passing Tales," and "Fishhead," which were two of the best stories I have had the pleasure of reading for many months, I take this chance to do so.

As I am out here in the Pacific Ocean, five thousand five hundred miles and more from civilization, it takes a long time to get your magazine, but when it does come, we men have a great time to see who shall get it first.

I have read your first instalment of "This Woman to This Man," and wish it were all here. Also "Do" is a fine hint for thousands of men who have no grit or forwardness.

I am waiting for another different story.

Yours very respectfully,

HOWARD R. STANLEY.

Guam, Mariana Islands.

RATHER MISS A DAY'S MEALS

TO THE EDITOR:

Enclosed herewith please find ten cents, for which kindly send me the ALL-STORY of May 27, 1916. I buy my ALL-STORY every week from my news-dealer, but somebody carried off my copy after the dealer put it aside. I can't possibly afford to lose a single issue of the ALL-STORY; would a lot rather miss a day's meals. The short stories are all fine, but gee, Zane Grey, England, and Burroughs, they are simply grand. Please hustle along the copy for May 27 so I can catch up again with "Mr. South of Somewhere." Should also like to have a sequel to "The Brass Check."

Yours respectfully,

T. E. HULBERG.

Crosby, North Dakota.

FOUND IN EVERY CORNER OF THE GLOBE

TO THE EDITOR:

Have intended for some time to communicate to you my appreciation of your splendid efforts to make the ALL-STORY WEEKLY the best on the market.

I have watched with consuming interest the rapid progress of this magazine for six years, and the change wrought in that time is certainly worthy of commendation.

It is my opinion (and I believe many readers concur in the same opinion) that the ALL-STORY is the best magazine ever offered to the public. It was my only companion for eighteen months in the Markarof (government) Prison at Vladivostok, Russia, when I was convicted by the Court of High Tribunal for attempted sedition in writing a manuscript on exile life in Siberia. So you cannot imagine the feeling I entertain for ALL-STORY.

I might say that I have found ALL-STORY in nearly every corner of the globe, from Hudson's

Bay to the Falkland Islands, and from little old New York to 203 Metre Hill at Port Arthur, the only place that I have not been able to obtain it being in the South Georgia Islands, South Arctic Sea, which islands are not inhabited.

Mrs. H. E. Small, of Wrenshall, Minnesota, in the June 17 issue, cracks the ice relative to the artists, so I will jump in the swim, too. I say, let the cover illustrate the feature story.

With regards to the family (I mean the Heart to Heart Talks family), I beg of you, believe me to be

A sincere ALL-STORY admirer,

ALBRO A. ADAMS,

Electrical Engineer.

Care of Russell's Hotel,
Batangas, Batangas,
Philippine Islands.

A FAITHFUL READER

TO THE EDITOR:

Kindly send me a copy of the *All-Story Cavalier Weekly* for August 1, 1914, for which I enclose twelve cents in stamps.

You may wonder at the tardiness of the request, so I will explain. During the summer, 1914, I was so unfortunate as to be beyond the reach of your magazine. On my return I went directly to college, with the result that I did not have the opportunity to read the numbers I missed. This summer I was looking over some of the old numbers, for we keep them all to reread and enjoy again, and commenced "The Quitter." When I looked for the last instalment, it was missing, hence the order.

In the town in which we live the ALL-STORY does not reach us until Thursday afternoon, so we often have to drive the four miles just to get it, but we never let the day pass without it. Every Thursday there is a family gathering while, first one, then another, reads aloud. Those of us who do not like to read a serial instalment by instalment wait until all the instalments have been published, and read the story in its entirety.

Give us some more *Tarzan* stories. "The Trail of the Otter Pelts" and "Polaris—of the Snows" are also among the masterpieces we have greatly enjoyed. "Blue Water," beginning in the issue of July 22, gives great promise, and we await the next issue impatiently.

Very sincerely,

BERTRAM Y. KINZEY.

Hyattsville, Maryland.

A BOOST FROM THE "ROSE CITY"

TO THE EDITOR:

I have been reading the ALL-STORY since it was merged with the *Cavalier*, and I enjoyed

the *Cavalier* a good while before that. I read every one of the stories that I can find time to read. I haven't any favorite writers, because I hardly ever look to see who the author is. The best story that I ever saw in the *Cavalier* was "The Cradle of the Deep." The next best, "Two Women or One."

When we are going to get a sequel to "The Brass Check." If it doesn't come pretty soon, I am going to write England's neck (in my mind).

I have never seen a letter from this section of the United States, so I thought I would write and tell you and all the readers that the Rose City is on the map and boosting for the ALL-STORY. Give us another like "The Cradle of the Deep." I remain your well-wisher,

DAN LA BOYTEAUX.

134 South Fifth Street,
New Castle, Indiana.

NOTE: "The Cradle of the Deep," by Jacob Fisher, was published in the *Cavalier* August 17 to September 7, 1912 (inclusive). "Two Women or One," by E. J. Rath, in the *Cavalier*, September 14 to October 5, 1912.

HAS NEVER MISSED AN ISSUE

TO THE EDITOR:

Began to read the ALL-STORY in February, 1905 (its first issue, I believe). Have not missed an issue since. That I will not miss an issue as long as I live may be taken as a basis of my opinion of your magazine.

In the Heart to Heart Talks I note what the readers offer in praise of the different authors (all well merited). But to you, Mr. Editor, I send my bouquet. For it is your judgment that gets the good things to us, and so, more success to you. I am with you strong. You have never disappointed me in the past.

Very truly,

H. G. BENDER.

Eustis, Florida.

CONFLICTING OPINIONS FROM OHIO

TO THE EDITOR:

About two years ago I was down with sickness, and everybody knows how slow time goes when you're sick. Then a friend brought me a copy of the ALL-STORY (then *Cavalier*) which made time fly. I got so interested that I still get it, and I'm glad to say I like all the stories, including the Heart to Heart Talks. The letters are very interesting, but, unless I missed it, there never has been any from Canton, Ohio. But don't think there aren't any fans here, because there are lots of them. If you don't get your ALL-STORY Thursdays or Fridays, you might as well make up your mind to do without; they go like hot cakes, and I'd rather miss Sunday

dinner than the ALL-STORY. All the stories are good, but please put in a Tickfall story by E. K. Means every week, can't you? Don't ever stop printing the ALL-STORY.

MISS E. M. BOELT.

1831 South Market,
Canton, Ohio.

TO THE EDITOR:

I am a reader of the ALL-STORY, and have been for years. The ALL-STORY and *Cavalier* were my favorites before they were combined.

Have just finished reading "The Dreamer in the Cupola," by Frank Blighon. It was great. I think a sequel, showing what was done with the "Great Ideal" and what *Elijah Stebbens* and *Charles Marvel* did with their days after it was tested in so remarkable a manner, would be a good story.

I like all the stories so far, and enjoy the Heart to Heart Talks almost as much as any of the stories.

"Down with the kickers." Some people are too hard to please, any way you take them.

My favorite authors are Blighon, England, Burroughs, Grey, Condon, Abdullah, and some others.

I don't care much for E. K. Means's Tickfall stories, but read them to see why so many like them.

I don't remember seeing a letter in the "Talks" from this wide-awake city.

Yours,

377 West North Street, H. K. GLENN.
Akron, Ohio.

"WHO KNOWS?" PLEASES

TO THE EDITOR:

Seeing the names Ethel and A. James Dorrance on your recent attractive cover, I bought the magazine. I like their stories, they are so human. Noticing also your Heart to Heart Letterettes, thinks I, if I like "Who Knows?" I'll send in a line when I finish. But their climax in Part I is so very good, I am writing now, instead of waiting, to give my little word of appreciation to them for the story and to you for the publishing.

Very sincerely,

CAROLYN TAYLOR.

Alexandria, Virginia.

"SEVEN NOTES FROM ALL THE WORLD"

TO THE EDITOR:

Enclosed find one dollar; please renew my subscription for your splendid ALL-STORY for three months. Some time ago I wrote you a letter. You published it in Heart Talks, and I

have received seven letters as a result—from Carterville, Missouri; Woolum, Arkansas; Brockton, Massachusetts; Seattle, Washington; Racine, Wisconsin; Mystic, Connecticut, and Fullerton, California, loud in their praise of the ALL-STORY. What an immense circulation it must have, and what dear, good people read it. I was delighted, I assure you. All honor and glory to the best magazine of to-day.

Yours truly,

217 Diamond Street, LAURA D. LUFKIN.
Redondo Beach, California.

BEST ON THE MARKET

TO THE EDITOR:

I have been a reader of the ALL-STORY WEEKLY for the past three years, and find that it is the best magazine on the market, and I can hardly wait each week for it to come.

Please give us some more like "The Son of Tarzan," "The Brass Check," and "The Border Legion," which I have found are the best. Also more of E. K. Means's, which are fine; as I have lived in the South, I know something about the negroes and their ways. I enjoy the Heart to Heart Talks very much. Give us another like "The Dreamer in the Cupola." Have just finished it, and it was fine.

C. J. PETERS.

Box No. 167,
Ironwood, Michigan.

TWO "TARZAN" ENTHUSIASTS

TO THE EDITOR:

I have been reading your magazine for a long time, and I couldn't do without it. It is a fine magazine; in fact, the best on the market. I think so, anyway, and I know lots others who think the same. Keep up your good work, and give us more like "This Woman to This Man," "The Iron Rider," and, best of all, the *Tarzan* tales. Wishing you all the luck in the world,

I remain,

Sacramento, California.

A. J. V.

TO THE EDITOR:

Please tell me through your ALL-STORY where I can purchase a copy of it containing "The Beasts of Tarzan." If there is such a story written, it must be by Edgar Rice Burroughs. I have read "Tarzan of the Apes" and "The Return of Tarzan." I would like to procure all stories of "Tarzan of the Apes." I think it was the greatest story I ever read.

With best wishes for the ALL-STORY.

H. D. JOHNSON.

R. F. D. Box No. 30,
Reagan, Texas.

NOTE: "The Beasts of Tarzan," by Edgar Rice Burroughs, was published in the *All-Story*

Cavalier, May 16 to June 13, 1914. It is out of print, but may be had in book form from the publishers, A. C. McClurg & Co., Chicago, Illinois. "The Son of Tarzan," *ALL-STORY WEEKLY*, December 4, 1915, to January 8, 1916—six numbers—we can supply on receipt of sixty cents.

IT'S A GOOD HABIT

TO THE EDITOR:

Please find enclosed one dollar for another three months' subscription to the *ALL-STORY WEEKLY*. I find the *ALL-STORY WEEKLY* habit one I cannot break. The *ALL-STORY WEEKLY* to-day is first class, and is so nice and clean my seven-year-old boy reads it each week and enjoys it.

Yours truly,

MRS. FRED M. STAPLES.

R. F. D. No. 3,
Woodfords, Maine.

"MAGNIFEROUS" STORIES

TO THE EDITOR:

I have been a reader of *ALL-STORY* for the last four years, and now at the age of eighteen I find I cannot procure a better or cleaner magazine.

I wish to tell you truly that the stories you publish are magnificent—a word of my own vocabulary, which expresses my feeling of anything good, clean, and interesting.

I like Western stories, but I adore stories of India and the deserts.

In closing let me give, not a faint hurrah, but a loud war whoop, for the editor of the best magazine published.

Truly

MISS NETTIE CULLETON.

Irwin Estate,
Sewickley, Pennsylvania.

LETTERETTES

Enclosed find one dollar to pay my subscription for three months to *ALL-STORY*.

I have been reading *ALL-STORY* for three years, and would not miss receiving it for anything.

I was raised in the South, and, needless to say, the first thing I look for is the E. K. Means story. All of your writers are good; some a little better than others, but none worse.

D. W. Cox.

Indianapolis, Indiana.

Enclosed please find twenty cents, for which send me the *ALL-STORY* for July 8, 1916. I certainly agree with W. T. Weber, of Brooklyn,

about *O'Toole*. Maybe it's because I'm Irish, too. I certainly like your magazine. I started taking it just as it was changed from a monthly to a weekly.

PAT FLANAGAN.

Ellis, South Dakota.

Enclosed please find ten cents in cash, for which send me the *ALL-STORY* containing the fifth part of "The Return of the Mucker."—the July 15 number.

I am a constant reader of your *ALL-STORY*, and think it has the best stories of any magazine on the market.

Yours truly,

THOMAS HOURAHAN.

1115 Boston Road, Bronx.

E. P. Hodge's letter concerning the chuckles in "When the Devil Was Sick" made a hit with me. Buy every number from our local druggist. There is enough variety, we believe, in the stories to suit any taste.

M. E. KIMBALL.

Rifle, Colorado.

I have been a constant reader of the *ALL-STORY* for the past four years, and, believe me, it is some magazine.

Give us sequels to "Black Butterflies," "The Brass Check," and "Those Who Walk in Darkness."

"The Promise" was grand, as were "Plain Betty Dean," "The Lone Star Ranger," "The Border Legion," and "Clavering the Incredible."

NORMA BAINBRIDGE.

Box No. 76,

El Dorado, Arkansas.

I have read your magazine for quite a while, and think it is fine. Would like to read some more stories like "The Sea Demons" and "The Mucker." All your writers are good, and you have such good verses.

MRS. ELSIE FYE.

Perris, Riverside County,
California.

Enclosed check one dollar. Please extend my subscription three months from August 12.

Am very anxious for the sequel to "The Brass Check."

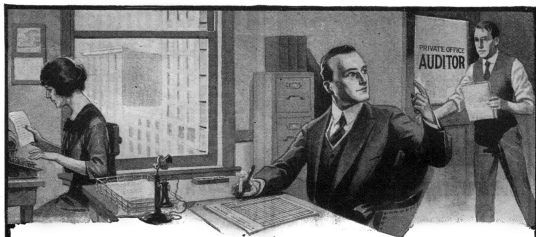
"Face Value" and "The Fugitive Sleuth" were both good. But I believe "Face Value" should have a sequel. How about it?

Give us plenty of continued stories. They can't be beat.

BERT L. CROWE.

Box No. 14,

Stanton, Kentucky.



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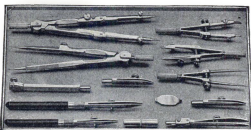
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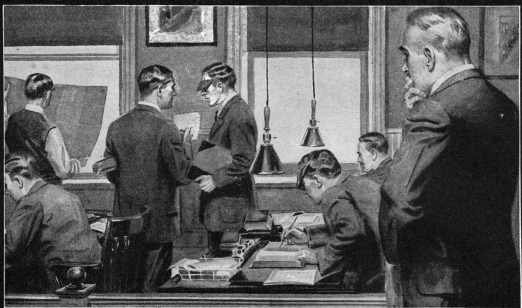
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"The Short Cut" is a murder mystery, but it involves neither police nor detectives. There is also another of the "Roxey Malone" series, entitled "The Headless Horse." "The Taboo and King Candy" is a pleasing little Hawaiian story and one all will like.

In the Sept. 16th All-Story

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