

SATURDAY

JANUARY 6

TEN CENTS

ALL-STORY WEEKLY



Beginning

The Scarlet Ghost

Perley Poore Sheehan's

*Powerful Sequel to "Those Who Walk
in Darkness"*

New York and District Attorney **Edward Swann**

are among the contributors to the
January issue of

Munsey's Magazine

MR. BAKER'S graphically descriptive article, entitled "Our New Air Service," is destined to create a large amount of interest, and the manner in which the "Confidence Man" works, as described by Mr. SWANN, is an article which is not only informative, but amazingly interesting to every man, whether young or of mature years.

There are two other special articles, including "The Stage," by Matthew White, Jr.; three serial stories; five short stories, and one complete novelette, entitled "No Experience Required," by FRANK R. ADAMS.

These, and seven poems, make up 192 pages of the most readable magazine published to-day at anything like its price.

Munsey's Magazine is only 10 cents a copy, and contains more interesting reading matter than any of the other popular magazines, some of which sell for more than double its price.

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The Frank A. Munsey Company

8 West Fortieth Street, New York



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in 48 to 72 Hours

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Trying to quit the tobacco habit unaided is a losing fight against heavy odds, and means a serious shock to your nervous system. So don't try it! Make the tobacco habit quit you. It will quit you if you will just take Tobacco Redeemer according to directions.

It doesn't make a particle of difference whether you've been a user of tobacco for a single month or for 50 years, or how much you use, or in what form you use it. Whether you smoke cigars, cigarettes, pipe, chew plug or fine cut or use snuff Tobacco Redeemer will positively remove all craving for tobacco in any form in from 48 to 72 hours. Your tobacco craving will begin to decrease after the very first dose—there's no long waiting for results.

Tobacco Redeemer contains no habit-forming drugs of any kind and is the most marvelously quick, absolutely scientific and thoroughly reliable remedy for the tobacco habit.

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Let Us Send You Convincing Proof

If you're a slave of the tobacco habit and want to find a sure, quick way of quitting "for keeps" you owe it to yourself and to your family to mail the coupon below or send your name and address on a postal and receive our free booklet on the deadly effect of tobacco on the human system, and positive proof that Tobacco Redeemer will quickly free you from the habit.

Newell Pharmacal Company
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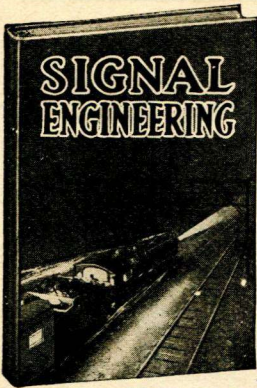
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Please send, without obligating me in any way, your free booklet regarding the tobacco habit and proof that Tobacco Redeemer will positively free me from the tobacco habit.

Name

Street and No.

Town State



Free Book on Signal Engineering

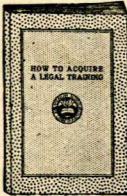
THERE are thousands of miles of railroad that must be equipped with block signal systems. To superintend these installations and to maintain the systems now in use thousands of men are necessary. *Golden opportunities are offered.* Every ambitious man in America should write for the free book on Signal Engineering. It will be sent to you prepaid—without obligations.

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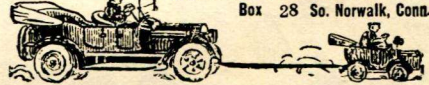
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Mailing Cards vs. Classified Advertising

It would cost more than \$11,500 to send a post-card to the more-than-a-million homes in which "The Munsey Magazines" are read every month. Advertisers who want to cover the same ground for \$17.42 are using this short cut:

	Line Rate	
MUNSEY'S MAGAZINE -	\$2.00	Special combination rate \$4.49 per line Less 3 per cent cash discount
RAILROAD MAN'S MAGAZINE -	.80	
THE ARGOSY -	1.30	
ALL-STORY WEEKLY -	.60	
	\$4.70	

Minimum space accepted, four lines. Ten per cent discount for six consecutive insertions. 3% for cash.

WRITE FOR THIS BOOKLET

"A New Force in Business," that gives full particulars about the effectiveness of Classified Advertising in "The Munsey Magazines."

The Frank A. Munsey Company
8 West Fortieth Street, New York

ALL-STORY WEEKLY

VOL. LXVI

NUMBER 3



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THE FRANK A. MUNSEY COMPANY, 8 WEST FORTIETH STREET, NEW YORK, and TEMPLE HOUSE, TEMPLE AVENUE, E. C., LONDON

FRANK A. MUNSEY, President

RICHARD H. TITHERINGTON, Secretary

CHRISTOPHER H. POPE, Treasurer

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

ISSUED WEEKLY. COPYRIGHT, 1917, BY THE FRANK A. MUNSEY COMPANY



Classified Advertising

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

"A New Force In Business" is a booklet that tells how to advertise successfully in the Classified Department of the Munsey Magazines. Mailed anywhere on request.

Classified Advertising Rates In The Munsey Magazines

	LINE RATE	
Munsey's Magazine	\$2.00	Special combination line rate
The Argosy	1.30	
Railroad Man's Magazine	.80	\$4.49
All-Story Weekly	.60	less 3 per cent cash discount.
	\$4.70	

Feb. 3rd. All-Story Weekly Forms Close Jan. 13th.

AGENTS & SALESMEN WANTED

NATIONALLY KNOWN FIRM WANTS A FEW MORE LIVE WIRE SALESMEN for its Advertising Thermometers Department. Whole or Part Time—Commission basis only. Build up a big business in your locality; repeat orders the rule. Write today giving experience and references. Sales Mgr., Taylor Brothers Company, Rochester, N. Y.

300% PROFIT. MEN AND WOMEN. Marvelous New Sanitary Coffee Strainer. Does not drip, always in place. Light article, sells on sight—10 cents. Sample 5 cents. 20th Century Mfg. Co., 105 W. Monroe Street, Chicago, Ill.

AGENTS NOT EARNING \$900 YEARLY SHOULD LET US SHOW THEM how to make much more. We train the inexperienced. Write today. Novelty Cutlery Co., 109 Bar Street, Canton, Ohio.

YOUNG MAN, WOULD YOU ACCEPT A TAILORMADE SUIT just for showing it to your friends? Then write Banner Tailoring Co., Dept. 467, Chicago, and get beautiful samples, styles and a wonderful offer.

FREE SAMPLE—NOSPLASH WATER STRAINERS SELL THEMSELVES. No talking—experience unnecessary. Daily profits \$5 upwards. Send 2c (mailing cost). F. U. R. Union Filter Co., New York.

WE WILL PAY YOU \$75.00 PER MONTH TO TRAVEL, collect names, advertise and distribute samples. Expenses advanced. Write today. Stanton Company, 201 Pope Building, Chicago.

1916'S SENSATION! 11 PIECE TOILET ARTICLE SET selling like blazes at \$1, with \$1 carving set free! Whirlwind stunt! Newcome made \$18 one day! Write A. Pierce Company, 906 Lake Street, Chicago.

Armstrong Earned \$67.50 First Day selling our new business necessity. Retail \$5.00 to \$30.00. Agents profit 150%. Buyer satisfied or money back. No competition. Exclusive territory. Free Sample. Sayors Co., 421 Wainwright, St. Louis, Mo.

\$5 TO \$10 A DAY. 175% Profit, Selling Fix-Ur Corn Remedy. Greatest wonder in chemistry; removes a corn or callous in 2 to 3 minutes. 25c seller. Sample Free. Jas. H. McDermott Co., 160 N. Fifth Avenue, Chicago, Ill.

AGENTS MAKE MORE MONEY.—A Linro Agent invests \$10 and handles Coffee, Flavorings, Spices, Perfumes, Soaps and 135 other Products, all sold on Money-Back Guarantee. Big Profits. Congenial, steady work. Get my Free Catalog and Money-Making Particulars. H. N. Marple, Pres., 2 Linro Bldg., St. Louis, Mo.

AGENTS WANTED—Agents Make 500 Per Cent Profit selling our Auto Monograms and Initials, Window Sign Letters, Changeable Signs, and Show Cards. 1000 Varieties, Enormous Demand. Sullivan Co., 1122 Van Buren Street, Chicago, Ill.

\$50 A WEEK UP. ALL THE FREE CLOTHES YOU WANT TO WEAR simply to advertise us. Write today for self-measuring blanks, style chart, big book of samples, etc. Send no money. A postal card brings all. We pay expressage on everything. American Woolen Mills Co., Dept. 101, Chicago.

Chicago Manufacturer Wants Salesmen To Introduce New Auto Specialty to Jobbers, Dealers and Owners. Practical; Seasonable, just out. Good repeater. Will make elegant side line. Necessary. Sanitary Wire-Door-Mat Co., 1753 Van Buren, Chicago.

DO YOU WANT AGENTS AND SALESMEN TO SELL YOUR MERCHANDISE? Men and women who are educated in personal salesmanship and know the house-to-house, office, store canvassing proposition. These advertisers are getting them year in and year out, and there are thousands more for you among the 5,000,000 readers of The Munsey Magazines. We have prepared a book entitled "A New Force In Business" that goes into the details of the subject. This book we shall gladly send to any one on request. The Frank A. Munsey Company, 8 West Fortieth Street, New York City.

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TYPEWRITER PRICES SMASHED. "Spot Cash" Gaerte will save you money. Rebuilt L. C. Smiths, Oliviers, Remingtons, Underwoods, Royals, etc. Your choice of 500 machines at \$10 to \$15. Guaranteed for 3 years. Send today for descriptive circular. Dearborn Typewriter Co., Dept. 7-T, Chicago, Ill.

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JAPANESE NOVELTIES—WE SHIP 50 ASSORTED Latest Japanese Novelties and Toys, postpaid, upon receipt of \$1.25. Something new for Trade and Gift Shops. Fast Sellers. If not satisfied, money refunded. Dealers and Jobbers write for Catalog and Terms. Matsumoto-Do, Tokyo, Japan.

HELP WANTED

TRAINED ADVERTISING MEN DEMAND AND GET \$2000 to \$10,000 yearly. I have trained hundreds and can train you; greater openings daily. Art Prospectus free, giving advice of noted authorities. George H. Powell, 71 Temple Court, New York.

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DO YOU WANT A SURE JOB WITH BIG PAY, easy hours and rapid advance? Write for my big Free book, DW 1053, which tells you how you can get a good Government position. Earl Hopkins, Washington, D. C.

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PATENTS—WRITE FOR HOW TO OBTAIN A PATENT, list of Patent Buyers, and Inventions Wanted. \$1,000,000 in prizes offered for inventions. Send sketch for free opinion as to patentability. Our Four Books sent free upon request. Patents advertised Free. We assist inventors to sell their inventions. Victor J. Evans Co., Patent Attys., 762 Ninth, Washington, D. C.

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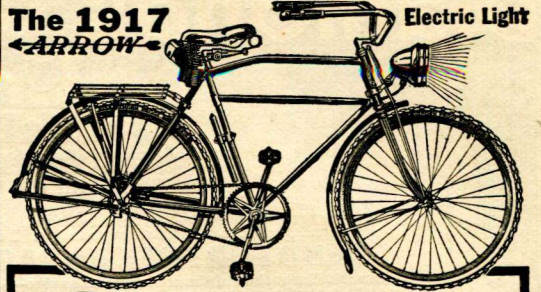
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Chicago, Ill.

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Fort Wayne Correspondence School
 Dept. 1081 Fort Wayne, Indiana

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ARGOSY

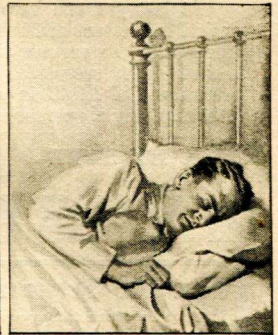
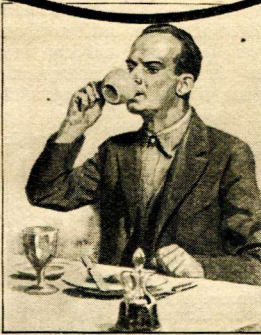
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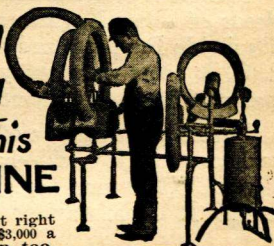
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ALL-STORY WEEKLY

VOL. LXVI

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SATURDAY, JANUARY 6, 1917



The Scarlet Ghost

by Perley Poore Sheehan

Author of "We Are French!" "The Million Passing Tales," "Abu, the Dawn-Maker," etc.

(Sequel to "Those Who Walk in Darkness.")

INTRODUCTION

WHEN Garfield drove mules on the tow-path, when Lincoln split rails, when old Bill Hicks, the local millionaire, was still making people laugh with that patent churn that was to make him rich—don't you love to hear about such things? Don't you just pick up your ears when some fellow begins, "I knew him when—"? Well, this is something like that. It's all about a young friend of yours who grew up, became a full-sized human being, and was selected for high honors.

You remember a story of ours called "Those Who Walk In Darkness." It was one of our "different" stories. We published it in the ALL-STORY WEEKLY for June 10, 1916. It told how there was a certain old woman named Mrs. Moss, who ran a lodging-house in that part of New York known as "the old Tenderloin," and how among Mrs. Moss's tenants there was a haunted young girl, who "walked in the darkness of necessity"; and a future sandwich king, who "walked in the darkness of choice"; and then a country boy—a boy to remind you of a young Lincoln—who, none the less, "walked in the darkness of ignorance."

The girl was Viola Swan. The future sandwich king was Alec Breen. The boy like Lincoln was Rufus Underwood.

Well, Rufus, who owned a farm up in Chenango County, near the village of Rising Sun (which was also the home town of Alec Breen), had come down to New York on a visit to Alec. At that time Alec was frying eggs and cutting sandwiches in an all-night lunch-wagon. Alec dearly loved this job, and wanted to see Rufus get a similar start. So they were living together at Mrs. Moss's place—great expectations, all that sort of thing.

But when Rufus Underwood saw Viola Swan he forgot all else. He thought that she was not only the most beautiful, but also the sweetest and purest girl he had ever seen. He showed this, too, in the way he looked at her. And that set her dreaming, for she also was from the country; had not been "walking in darkness" for so very long.

Then Rufus fell sick, and Viola nursed him—pawned her clothes. Rufus and Viola were beginning to see a light. Rufus saw the light altogether when he asked Viola to marry him, and she sobbed out the truth to him. But Rufus, instead of killing her as she had half expected, married her anyway—under her real name of Alice Linn—and carried her off to his home in the country.

All this to the snickering plaudits of Mrs. Moss and Alec Breen, who couldn't understand it at all. You see, they were still in the "darkness of choice," while Rufus and his Alice had emerged into the light.

How did it all turn out? We're getting to that.

Letters came in from all over the world about that story. People loved it. They had laughed over it. They had cried over it. There was one man particularly who said that he had never read anything with a more exquisite delight.

This man happened to be one who was in touch with all the great fiction of his day. He was, in fact, the head of a great publishing house. Said he:

"It's beautiful! It's great! It's too good to lose! It ought to make a wonderful book—a book I'd be proud to publish. But it's too short. The story isn't all told. Tell *all* of it—and we'll thus add another great novel to our list." Those may not have been his exact words, but in effect they were.

So Mr. Sheehan, who himself loved this story no less than a mother loves her child, once more took up the story of Rufus Underwood and Alice, his wife, who had been Viola Swan, of the old Tenderloin; also of Alec Breen and Mrs. Moss; told of the singing romance and black tragedy that came into their lives, until—until—

But that is the story of "The Scarlet Ghost," which we begin here as a serial—the only serial we have ever published that grew from a novelette. Read it, and you will judge for yourselves whether or not those predictions are warranted—that when this novel of Mr. Sheehan's is published by the George H. Doran Company a little later on it will be greeted as a masterpiece, for poetry, for fire, for drama, and—this above all—for stark and vibrant humanity!—THE EDITOR.

CHAPTER I.

FROM ANOTHER WORLD.

IT was still a little too early in the season, but Jessie Schofield was out in the fields looking for wild strawberries.

Jessie was seventeen and tall for her age. It was like her to have sought an opportunity like this to get off by herself. For she was a dreamer—more of a dreamer even than most girls of her age.

There was a dream, now, in her heavy-lidded eyes; hazel eyes they were, but with pupils so large that they appeared to be almost black at times. Her hair

was yellow, with reddish-brown depths. And her naturally fair skin was exquisitely tanned, as if both by the open air and her own abundant health; for it had a golden tint, and under this there was a glint of carmine.

This warmth of color, as well as the general cast of her rather heavy-featured face, gave more than a hint of a nature predominantly physical rather than spiritual. It was physically, rather than spiritually, that she was beautiful and good to look at.

Her movements were lazy, but there was a sort of tireless vigor and grace about them. She strode through the up-

land pasture quite regardless of the clinging dew.

She wore an old blue calico dress, black stockings, an old pair of low black shoes—an outfit which no amount of dew could greatly injure. On her head was a blue sunbonnet, loosely tied, and she had let this slip back until her face and the little, fine-stranded curls that stuck to the whiteness of her temples, were exposed.

She paused there in the high pasture. The shiny tin pail she carried contained but a handful of berries as yet, but it was an indifferent glance she cast about her. It was evident that her thoughts were elsewhere.

Gazing for a long time over into the valley of the Unadilla, she could see the roofs of a number of houses there—the village of Rising Sun; but with a barely perceptible shrug of her tender shoulders she continued her stroll.

She found a place where the berries were thick, and continued to pick them until she was tired. Then, seated in the fragrant, drying grass, she permitted herself to dream again—a mysterious, almost mystical, young priestess of the Nature cult.

There was every promise of a warm and slumberous day. The sun was well up, the sky absolutely pure, and there was no suggestion of a breeze. Most of the birds were still by this time. Now and then, very faintly, there came the “gee” and “haw” of a farmer working his team back there somewhere in the direction of the village. But the silence was almost perfect.

The reeling speck of a turkey-buzzard up aloft appeared to be almost the only living thing astir besides herself.

But suddenly Jessie sprang to her feet.

There, only a few inches from where she had been sitting, she could see a gliding length of snake.

The snake was harmless, she well knew. None the less it filled her with that suggestion of panic fear which

snakes invariably inspire in most people. Even when it was gone the sunlit pasture was no longer a pleasant place to loiter in.

Reflecting for possibly a minute, some instinct bade her to get into closer contact with human habitation. But she wasn't willing to forego the pleasure of being alone, however.

To return to the prosaic atmosphere of her grandmother's house, with its monotonous round of small tasks and smaller talk, was more distasteful to her than even the possible society of other snakes. She had an inspiration.

Just beyond the woods, over there, was Rufus Underwood's place. Rufus was a distant relation of hers. Almost every one in this part of Chenango County was more or less related to every one else. And Rufus had gone to New York. This latter fact was but another point in favor of going over to Rufus's house.

For it was of New York she dreamed. Even the vague connection thus established between the deserted farm and her dream-city would, therefore, give her some added illusion of realization. She had never been to New York, but the lure of the city was stronger upon her than ever. She felt as if she knew it—almost as if it were her own.

Not only had Rufus Underwood gone there; but so had Alec Breen, whom she also knew.

Alec had been there a year now, and to this person and that—chiefly by means of illustrated post-cards—Alec had sent back glowing reports. It was Alec who was responsible for Rufus's departure—to the Promised Land, where no one had to work very hard for a living, where there was no milking to do, where no one got up early, where a million lights made night brighter than day, where no one was ever lonely.

Not only this, but Jessie had a fund of information unsuspected of her kith and kin.

Up in the attic of her grandmother's house she had discovered a certain book

which she had since treasured with the utmost secrecy. It was called, "Metropolitan Life Unveiled, or Mysteries and Miseries of America's Great Cities."

The introductory chapter of this book was headed, "The Great Maelstrom of Vice." Jessie knew the first sentence of this book by heart. It read:

"First in the category of America's cities stands New York; first in size, first in wealth, and *first in all the abominations which curse humanity!*"

There were various subheads — "The Dangers to which Beautiful Women Are Exposed"; "Forbidden Dalliances, which Modesty Refuses to Describe."

There were five hundred pages in the book, copiously illustrated with woodcuts. Jessie had read all the text not once, but many times, had lingered over the pictures until they were photographed in her brain. When she went to the city it would be as one forewarned. So she told herself. And she would see for herself all these things — even those "forbidden dalliances, which modesty refused to describe."

The hint of peril merely increased the fascination.

She went through the silent and darkling woods with the abstracted air of one who is perfectly at home in such surroundings. As a matter of fact, she had haunted these woods like a nymph almost ever since she could remember, and, coming out into the old wood-road beyond, followed this to the crooked rail-fence that enclosed the orchard, and scrambled over the fence as nimbly as a boy. It was with the gait of a boy — loose-jointed, high-breasted, shoulders back — that she swung down over the rounded hill.

About the farm there hung that heavy silence which always seems more oppressive in a place where the familiar and expected sounds are missing. No dog barked, no hens cackled, no horse whinnied, no cattle lowed. The very bees appeared to be spellbound, their droning muted.

Any deserted house is a proper temple for dreams, especially if this be the house of a deserted farm, far from neighbors; still more if the owner of it happens to be one of those who have gone over the horizon into the mysterious world outside.

Jessie felt this. When she was but half-way through the orchard her dreams were possessing her again, utterly. Rufus had gone. So also would she go, one of these days.

She came to the fence separating the orchard from what was called the "door-yard," then stopped short. Suppressing an exclamation which had formed itself on her parted lips, her breath and her pulse quickened in a way which had nothing to do with her supple descent of the hill.

The house had a back porch — long, shadowy, low-eaved. In the shadow of this porch some one lay as if asleep — or dead!

Jessie had made sure of a number of details before she undertook her next move.

The person who lay there like that was a girl, apparently but a little older than herself; and not dead — if even asleep — for she had moved with languid comfort. Moreover, the door from the house to the porch was open, thus hinting that the stranger had a right to be where she was; that she possibly belonged, in some way as yet undefined, to Rufus Underwood himself.

There was a further hint of this in the girl's garb. For, even while she was still on the far side of the fence, Jessie could see that the stranger was, to a large extent, undressed.

Was it possible that Rufus had returned from New York? Was it possible that here was some one he had brought with him?

The suppositions brought to Jessie's mind a gust of eagerness. Softly, she climbed over the fence, advanced for a closer view.

She felt as a scientist might feel when

he comes upon a specimen from some other world.

CHAPTER II.

THE TRAIL OF THE SERPENT.

THE strange girl was sound asleep. Jessie soon became sure of this, also that the house was otherwise deserted. It gave her an opportunity to study the specimen with absorbed and minute attention, and she proceeded to do so with a sort of passionate comprehension.

Her first survey had been sufficient to confirm her initial supposition that this was no mere country girl, but one indeed from the city. And there was only one city which could produce a girl like this—New York!

The stranger had taken off her hat and much of her clothing, and had let down her hair. Her arms and shoulders, her feet and her ankles, were bare. She lay curled up on the worn, weather-cleaned floor of the porch like a tender young mermaid left in a grotto by the receding tide.

Jessie was sure that she had never seen any one so beautiful.

She was colorful, warm, and moist. Her hair was darker than Jessie's own. It was fine and luxuriant and not very long. Her pink lips were parted over small white teeth. There was a childish flush on her cheeks close up under the sweeping lashes. The small hands were a revelation to the country girl. She had never seen such nails, pink, burnished until they glistened like mother-of-pearl.

The clothing which the girl wore, and that which she had laid aside, exerted as great a fascination over Jessie as the stranger did herself.

There was a brassière, embroidered, with a thin pink ribbon through it, which seemed to be the very quintessence of feminine luxury; a green silk petticoat but partly concealed other linen no less Sybaritically fine.

It recalled a phrase of that book of hers—"Beauty in lustrous garniture."

A pair of gray half-shoes, somewhat worn, but fine, and shapely from the owner's feet, lay in the grass-grown path below the porch. A little farther along, on the porch itself, lay her gray silk stockings, so sheer and shriveled that they might have been two crumpled bits of veil.

There was a greater semblance of order about the little green-lined jacket and green-hemmed skirt she had laid aside at the back of the porch; but inadequately hidden under these, as if hastily, by an afterthought, were her ridiculously small and dislocated corsets. They were even such corsets as Jessie had never seen—pink, supple, slight.

Nodding on the heads of the tall grass out near the old-fashioned well, where there recently must have been some great ablutions, to judge by the amount of water splashed about, there was a fragile little silk waist and a small handkerchief.

Jessie, getting bolder and bolder, and also increasingly fascinated, drew closer yet. After all, Rufus Underwood was a relative. This was Rufus's place. She had a right to be there.

At last she was almost within touch of the girl who slept. Stealthily, she sat down on the edge of the porch to continue her inspection. As she did so, her senses were assailed by a new delight.

The atmosphere surrounding the sleeper was filled with a most delicious perfume. It was extremely delicate, and so faint as to be scarcely perceptible even here. And yet there was that about it that stirred Jessie profoundly, far more than the smell of syringas, even—a scent of which she was passionately fond. This perfume was one such as she had never imagined; and yet, she seemed to recognize it.

It was a perfume that quickened every longing in her heart, brought up fragments of every dream she had ever entertained concerning New York.

Presently the sleeper stirred. She was

like a child, with her head pillowed on her slender arms; but she was like a child disturbed by evil or exciting dreams. Her small hands tightened convulsively. She murmured something that was almost articulate. Still, her sleep continued profound for the time being. Her movements did not awaken her even when she lay momentarily on her back, then turned to her side again, unconsciously seeking a more comfortable position.

As she thus moved, once more there billowed up from her scant garments a faint gust of perfume. A leisurely butterfly, black and yellow, must have been attracted by the fragrance just as Jessie had been, for it hovered over the sleeping girl's face. Jessie thrust out her hand to drive the butterfly away.

As she did so the stranger opened her eyes.

Her eyes were dark. They were startled—possibly by some dream-figment, rather than what they saw now; for it was clear that the girl saw nothing very distinctly for an interval. Then she uttered a little gasp, sat up.

The two girls were face to face.

She who had slept made an impulsive movement as if to cover her bare shoulders, and recognized the futility of this for the moment at least. Her startled eyes swept the near landscape, saw no one else there than the girl in front of her, then looked at Jessie again—this time with a dawning smile.

Jessie also, frightened at first, now was recovering herself.

"Don't let me worry you," she said. "I'm the only one here, I guess. My name is Jessie Schofield. Rufus Underwood is a relation of mine."

"Rufus!" the sleeping beauty gasped prettily. "I was waiting for him. I was afraid to stay in the house all alone. It was so still! I came out here. I didn't expect to see any one else." All this was by way of apology and explanation. "So you are a relative—Jessie!—Jessie Schofield! I am so glad to know you, Jessie!"

She hesitated a moment, as if doubtful

as to what course she should pursue. Jessie wasn't helping her any—not yet, being too overcome by wonder at hearing the apparition speak. But then the strange girl laughed. Impulsively she put her hands on Jessie's shoulders, drew Jessie toward her, kissed her lightly on the lips.

Jessie was ravished.

"I know some one else in New York," she said, as if by way of establishing some claim to distinction.

"Do you?"

"He knows Rufus, too. His name is Alec Breen—Alexander Breen."

"Oh, are you a friend of his? We all lived in the same house. It was through him that we got acquainted. I am very deeply indebted to him. Almost, you might say, it was thanks to him that—I am here."

Jessie was trying to fathom the mystery.

"Did you come here with Rufus?" she asked.

"Yes."

"I didn't even know that Rufus was coming home. I thought he was still in New York. I thought he was going to stay there. Where has he gone to?"

"He went—he said it was to his Uncle Joel's—to tell them that we had arrived, to get some things to eat. Nobody expected us. We got in early this morning."

All the time that the strange girl was saying this there was a suggestion about her of important information withheld. She was nervous, excited. Her dark eyes flashed out into the shimmering distances, came back to Jessie Schofield, with a smile, with an appeal, which merely served to increase Jessie's delight and bewilderment.

"Are you Rufus's friend?" Jessie asked.

She was still trying to plumb that mystery. Her question was one of encouragement.

The other looked at her, startled, as if the truth which she was about to reveal was as great a cause for astonish-

ment to herself as it could possibly be to any one else. She whispered her response:

"I'm Rufus's wife!"

Jessie greeted the announcement with a little cry of joyful amazement.

"You!"

"Are you sorry?"

"I think it's wonderful," cried Jessie. "I think you're wonderful. Oh, what's your name?"

"Viola—"

The name had slipped from the pink lips of little Mrs. Rufus Underwood before she had time to think. And before she had a chance to correct herself the girl in front of her had seized upon the name.

"Viola! I love that! Oh, I love you! Let me call you Viola!"

She put out her hands in turn, drew Rufus's wife to her, kissed her rapturously.

"No, no! That isn't what I meant," said young Mrs. Underwood, hastily, with an undercurrent of desperate haste. "I am Alice, sweetheart. Call me Alice."

Jessie was absorbed, inquisitive.

"Why not Viola?" she pleaded. "Oh, you look like Viola to me, not Alice. Viola—that just describes what you looked like to me when you were lying there asleep. You were so beautiful. You were so like what I always thought a New York lady must be. Your clothes are so beautiful, and your hands, and your hair, and the perfume you use is so lovely! You're Viola!"

Young Mrs. Underwood trembled slightly. That startled look which was forever coming and going in her large, dark eyes had returned again, remained there as Jessie spoke. The name was having upon her almost the same effect as the sight of the blacksnake had upon Jessie back there in the upland pasture.

And she knew it, now—that while she slept, here on the porch of her husband's house, in this place of refuge which was to become her home, so far from New York, from Mrs. Moss's lodging-house,

so far from the old Tenderloin, in her dreams she had ceased to be Mrs. Rufus Underwood, or the Alice Linn of her girlhood. No, she had become once more the Viola Swan from which she had hoped to flee. And that was the reason why the name had come to her lips in response to this girl's question.

"Call me Alice, dear," she pleaded softly, with a frightened smile. "You will, won't you?"

"Yes."

"And never refer to Viola again. I don't like the name. That must have been why it sprang up when you asked me what my name was. I guess I just wasn't thinking."

CHAPTER III.

CONCERNING NEW YORK.

VAGUELY it may have occurred to Jessie Schofield that Alice's disliking for the name of Viola was strange and insufficiently explained, but this was merely an added touch of mystery where all was mysterious.

And Rufus's wife awake was even more mysterious and fascinating than she had been when she slept.

Jessie sat there and looked at Alice, tried to fit her into the New York of her book, "Mysteries and Miseries of America's Great Cities." Both girls were intuitional. Each recognized how different was the character of the other. Yet the bond of friendship between them had been instinctive, was immediately strong.

Uncle Joel's place was more than a mile away. So Jessie told Alice. They had time to talk.

Refreshed by the cold water of the well and by her nap, brief though it had been, young Mrs. Underwood was dressing herself, coiling up her hair, in view of the possibility that Rufus should not return alone. And all the time that she was doing this, Jessie watched her out of her hazel eyes, their pupils dilated more widely than ever.

"Didn't you love it down in New York?" Jessie asked.

"No! I'll love it here."

"What did you do down there?"

"Suffered, mostly—until Rufus came along."

"Were you ever tempted?"

"What do you mean?"

"I mean, were you ever almost swept into the 'Maelstrom of Vice'?" The girl whispered the question.

"Jessie dear!"

"It must be wonderful to be tempted! They say that all young girls are who go to New York. I want to go there, some day. Do you suppose that I—I'll be tempted?"

"Let's don't talk about such things," little Mrs. Underwood proposed hastily. "Do you think that Rufus's people will be glad to see me? Will they be glad that he married me? We were just married last night. We started for Rising Sun right after the ceremony. It took us all night."

Jessie impulsively seized Alice's hand and kissed it.

"They'll be glad he married you when they see you," she declared. "Oh, now that I've seen you I don't know how I ever lived here without you! Why did you suffer in New York?"

Jessie pressed Alice's fingers to her lips again as an encouragement to confidence. She whispered her next question, also, ingratiatingly: "I suppose you often ran across 'The Gay Lotharios of the Four Hundred'?"

The sun was slowly mounting higher. The sky was of a transcendent purity. Now there was just enough movement in the air to bring in with it to the shadow of the porch the breath of clover and wild roses, of flowering locusts and honeysuckle. But, for the second time—or the third, or the fourth—since opening her eyes, the girl who had been Viola Swan felt her vision obscured, her other senses yield to a haunting illusion.

The fair prospect of woods and fields, untenanted except by bees and butter-

flies, went out; and, in place of it, there again was the squalid street in the old Tenderloin where Mrs. Moss had her lair, where she herself had sought refuge like a hunted thing.

The smell of the flowers was gone. It was the mingled reek of gasoline and chop suey, of garbage and cheap perfumes, which once again momentarily sickened her.

She started to speak, paused, clutched the fingers that were caressing her own.

Through her mind there glimpsed the thought that here at her side, in the guise of Jessie Schofield, was really the Alice Linn who had been herself a little more than a year ago; the Alice Linn who was getting ready to leave just such surroundings as these for the big city; her head filled with the doubts and surmises and expectations of this other girl.

A mental step, and she saw herself in New York, friendless and bewildered; saw herself turning to the old woman who managed the house where she had taken a flat; saw herself beguiled, tricked, disillusioned, committed to the road that led down over the nameless abyss; felt her feet once more slipping, faster and faster, until she clung, when it was almost too late, to Rufus Underwood and found him steadfast.

There was more than a suspicion of moisture in Mrs. Underwood's eyes, but she smiled and tossed up her head.

"What an odd girl you are to talk about such things," she said with mild reproval. "Tell me all about yourself and your family. Rufus has hardly had the time yet to tell me about anything."

"Oh, the family!" exclaimed Jessie, with a shade of lazy contempt. "You'll have plenty of time to find out all about them. They'll do enough talking about themselves and their aches, and their ancestors, and everything, as soon as you give them a chance." Then she whispered enticingly: "Passion must be a wonderful thing!"

"What makes you think so?" queried Alice, startled.

"Oh, I've read a lot," Jessie volunteered; "Swinburne, Charlotte Brontë, Mrs. Browning."

"You'll think me very ignorant, Jessie, dear; but I've never read anything by these people you mention."

"To read of things—that was my only chance," Jessie reflected aloud with unconcealed regret. "I probably shouldn't read, either, if I could live in a place like New York—live romance at first hand instead of being forced to get it all out of books."

Alice Underwood stole a swift glance at the girl at her side. Jessie, unconscious that she had said anything to stir her new friend's most poignant memories—a nightmare barely lulled—was merely affectionate, was speaking with the growing abandonment of one long denied the audience of a kindred spirit.

"New York is full of girls who would give anything to live in a place like this," said Alice; "to change places with you, Jessie."

"They'd want to change back again before very long," Jessie sighed with conviction. "The boys are nothing but yokels, the grown-ups are—respectable. Respectability! How I loathe respectability! They seem to have absolutely no conception of the hunger of a young girl's soul, or of the cosmic urge, or anything."

She met Mrs. Underwood's eyes, let herself go in a little transport of enthusiasm and affection only slightly shaded by bashfulness.

"Oh, I just know that we're going to be friends," she exclaimed breathlessly; "that you'll tell me all about your life there, your adventures!"

"Adventures—what adventures?"

"I don't know; but you must have had them! I just feel as if you must have had adventures, you're so—so romantic!"

"I'm not romantic, Jessie. Besides, I think that what you call romance is often merely—sadness, tragedy!"

"There's nothing so utterly tragic as a lack of romance," Jessie retorted, then

smiled engagingly. "Just to see those darling corsets of yours was quite enough to turn my head. You won't mind if I say so—will you—may I call you Alice? I'll call you that other name in my heart—but I found those corsets of yours positively thrilling—like something unrespectable, something almost immoral!"

She laughed, and gazed out over the shimmering surface of the earth. Mrs. Underwood also gazed away. Once more their eyes met, held, questioning, friendly, yet not quite at poise.

"I want to show you a book I have," said Jessie, "and you'll tell me how much of it is true."

"What sort of a book?"

"One that describes New York—and other great cities." An extra flush mounted under the gold of her complexion. "It isn't a book I'd care to show to every one."

"Will you do me a favor, dear?" Alice asked.

"Anything!"

"Go and see if Rufus is coming."

Left alone, the former Viola Swan sat wide-eyed for a space where Jessie Schofield had left her. Presently, as a feeling of uneasiness in her breast increased, she got up and turned to the house. But the prospect of the empty, brooding rooms held her where she was. Quite unexpectedly, she began to sob.

She checked herself by a desperate effort.

She was trying to think, trying to get a grip on this new life in which she found herself. Was it possible that that old "Terror by Night" was going to haunt her here, even as it had back there in the fetid atmosphere of the old Tenderloin?

She recalled her recent dream—the dream in which she had ceased to be Alice Underwood, had become once again the Viola Swan of Mrs. Moss's lodging-house. She recalled the undisguised intuitions of Jessie Schofield, as unerring as they were unconscious.

There was a shudder in her heart.

She forced a smile. She quickly turned and looked out over the blues and yellows of the sun-warmed grass. She saw the youth who had married her—Rufus Underwood!

Like a young pioneer he looked—a trifle gaunt, but fair, upstanding, powerful. Over his shoulder was a sack of provisions which he was bringing back with him from his Uncle Joel's. And this was to be the beginning of their honeymoon.

She fluttered her hand in welcome.

CHAPTER IV.

KITH AND KIN.

"DIDN'T your family hate to lose you?"

"I have no family," Alice answered, with a soft, quick glance about her.

It was Rufus's grandmother, Aunt Allie Beeman, who asked the question. She was flat-chested, dignified, almost seventy, a nugget of human kindness with a grim exterior. But it was Uncle Joel who sprang the proper response to that remark of Alice that she had no family.

"You've got one now," he exploded.

Uncle Joel almost always exploded his remarks, which is a common enough trait among men who are chiefly silent.

Uncle Joel was close to sixty. There was a certain largeness about all his movements. From profound abstraction he could break into a dazzling, personal smile. From apparent vacuity he would drop his head forward in his hands with the sigh of an overburdened thinker.

There were four or five others present: Aunt Mary Kennedy, Joel's wife; Andy Jones, a sort of distant cousin to them all, who sometimes worked with Uncle Joel and sometimes with Rufus; Cole Beeman, another uncle to Rufus, and Cole's wife, who had driven over from their place near Bainbridge.

The reception was taking place in the

Kennedy parlor, which was every whit as prim and respectable and free from any taint of worldliness, as was Aunt Allie's self. In this respectable room young Mrs. Rufus Underwood sat very straight in her straight-back chair, looking about her with her large dark eyes, very serious, a little frightened, eager to smile, yet eager to appear grim and respectable, too.

These people were not strangers to her. They might have been the neighbors of her childhood, and this very parlor the parlor of almost any house in Clear Spring, back in Maryland.

Yet she was an exotic.

Her clothes were different. She wore them differently. About her there was an air of mystery—disquieting to the womenfolk, alluring to the men—which was as native to her as the color of her hair.

"Well, weren't your friends surprised when you told them that you were going to marry Rufus?" Aunt Allie pursued gently.

"I had no friends—except Rufus," Alice answered.

She cast her eyes down at Rufus. He was seated on a hassock at her feet, partly owing to the fact that there were not enough parlor chairs to go round, partly just to be near her.

"You were living all alone—in New York?" Aunt Allie queried.

"That's the way everybody lives in New York," Rufus asserted loudly. "You never saw such a place. Nobody has relations there. Nobody has friends, you might rightly say. Why, grandma, if some one dropped in on you for supper in New York, unless they got a regular invitation two or three days in advance, you'd think they were crazy."

Andy Jones spoke up. He had been sitting there all evening devouring Alice with his eyes and trying to conceal the fact. He was thirty and a bachelor. Now and then he preened his yellow mustache. He had been to New York once on an excursion.

"Sure, that's the way it is in New York," he said seriously. "It's only natural. Food's a good deal finer there than it is here."

He was playing to put himself on the side of the New Yorkers. The strange Mrs. Underwood rewarded him with a shy and flitting smile. Andy preened his mustache.

"It must be very hard—and dangerous—for a young girl," said Aunt Allie with mild sorrow.

"How'd you and Rufus come to meet?" Cole Beeman asked heartily.

It was Rufus who answered.

"She nursed me while I was sick—saved my life."

"Yes, but who introduced you?"

"Alec Breen," Rufus asserted.

"Oh, so you knowed Alec, did you?" Cole went on, with whole-souled good nature. "Well, Alec's family never amounted to anything; but I guess he's all right—a little pert, a little flip! Know him long?"

"I can't rightly say that I know Mr. Breen at all," Alice began modestly.

"They were just living in the same house; that's all," Rufus hastened to explain. "You know! They had the same landlady. The landlady was a great friend of Alec's. Her name was Mrs. Moss."

Little Mrs. Underwood winced and hid it as best she could by adjusting her modest but fascinating hat.

"Alec always was a great hand at scraping up friends," Cole Beeman asserted cheerfully.

The assertion brought a loud and unexpected guffaw from Mr. Andy Jones. He checked it promptly, stroked his yellow mustache with a bland and reminiscent smile.

Rufus clung to a subject which he felt to be safe.

"Alec's running a lunch-wagon, down there in New York. He's a slick customer, all right. Says he's going to be a sandwich-king some day. Reckon he's right, too. You ought to see him when

he gets a lead quarter or a nickel with a hole in it—"

But the others present were not to have their interest diverted from Rufus's wife.

"What church did you belong to, child?" Aunt Allie inquired.

"I—I—was baptized a Presbyterian," answered the little Mrs. Rufus.

"Did you have a good minister?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"Did you bring a letter to the congregation here?"

Rufus broke in hurriedly.

"Shucks, grandma! We didn't have time for all those things."

But the family was waiting for Alice to answer.

"I—didn't get to church very often—in New York," she replied, with something of the haunted in her voice.

Uncle Joel exploded again. He dropped his head forward in his hands, then threw himself back.

"That don't matter," he shouted. "Mary," he demanded, "how about some of that coconut cake you baked to-day?" He flashed one of his brilliant and unexpected smiles on Rufus's wife. "We're all Baptists here," he elucidated, "but that don't mean that we're any better than anybody else."

He got up and stretched himself.

"Yea, Lord," he said, "we're all of us poor, miserable sinners."

He checked words and gestures abruptly, smiled again at Alice, then trundled off to help his wife in the business of hospitality.

Rufus and Alice walked home. They had refused the invitation to spend the night at Uncle Joel's. They had declined Andy Jones's offer to drive them over in one of Uncle Joel's buggies. Rufus had sensed Alice's wishes in this, and Rufus was as one possessing authority, especially now that he was married, and Uncle Joel had helped a lot by supporting them in their wish to be alone.

Both of them were silent for a long time. They were passing through a pri-

vate lane connecting the two farms. Most of the time they were out under the open sky, and the sky was lit by a million more stars than are ever visible in New York.

But at times the lane dipped through hollows where great willow-trees arched overhead, and the damp, cool darkness was fragrant with mint. In such a place, where not even the stars could see, Rufus stopped and pressed the girl up close to him.

"They all like you; they think you're wonderful," he whispered.

"Oh, Rufus!" she breathed.

There may have been something of uncertainty, something of fear, in her voice.

But that was all that was said.

CHAPTER V.

DOMINION.

THE home to which Rufus had brought his bride was as good as any country girl might have wished for—thirty-two acres, rich and well drained.

For almost a century it had been held by the Underwoods and their kin—farmers to a man, who had conserved the fertility of their land as a family of bankers would conserve a financial patrimony.

The house, as already intimated, was likewise old; but it was comfortable—two stories, of ample dimensions, adapted to human occupancy by slow years of accumulated adjustment and selection. Houses evolve, like any other physical container of life. That's what this had done until it had become a home fit for any one.

There was stable room for three horses and as many cows, room for uncounted chickens and ducks, turkeys, guinea-fowl, pigeons. It would have surprised any one to see how rapidly the place they had found deserted became a sort of live-stock metropolis.

For the most part this was Alice's work.

Day and night, consciously or subconsciously, the girl, who had been Viola Swan, was confronted by a definite problem.

It was this:

Could a girl who had escaped, as had she, from the morass ever be clean again, ever become as other women, ever earn the right to stand up, without fear and without reproach, before herself, her neighbors, and her God?

She didn't try to answer this question immediately, but instead kept her mind away from it as much as she could. She was sickened by the vague terrors which surrounded it. All she could do was to hope.

Instinctively she saw that her only foundation for hope was in service—love and work. It was through such service—to Rufus, when he lay sick and alone in Mrs. Moss's house—that she had dragged herself from the morass of the old Tenderloin in the first place. A continuation of it now would, perhaps, furnish the answer to that problem of hers.

She started out to do for every living thing what she did for Rufus. Only now she was making a conscious effort to make things and people love her. Perhaps, like that, she could make every one and everything regard her as Rufus regarded her.

Rufus owned a rough old hound named Duke—inclined to be sullen and suspicious in his attitude toward strangers. But, if Duke had been human and Alice his mother, Duke's attachment couldn't have been stronger than it was after the first hour of their acquaintance.

He would look up into Alice's face with his sage, brown eyes, alert for her slightest sign, batting the floor with his heavy tail.

"He doesn't care," whispered Alice to herself, "if I was Viola Swan—before I became myself again."

There was a black gelding called Jake,

which had been frightened out of his wits when very young by a playful farm-hand with a coat over his head. Jake had never been worth his oats since then, although he had grown superbly in bone and beauty. It seemed a pity to kill such a fine animal. Pity was about all that had saved him. It was as if he forever feared to see every other human creature, who approached him suddenly, go headless and begin flapping his arms—as the farm-hand had done.

But Alice cured Jake just as she had cured the delirious Rufus.

She and Rufus were standing near the barnyard one evening shortly after the stock had been brought back from Uncle Joel's. She had just heard about Jake. She and Rufus had watched him—beauty and feebleness of intellect do so often go hand in hand—as he mooned about the stable-yard. Then, suddenly, Alice turned and flashed another quivering glance at Jake. She stepped over to the fence, and Jake, forgetful of that fright of his, put out his sensitive muzzle until she could touch it.

Only just then Rufus also started forward; and Jake, with a squeal and a snort, reeled and bolted.

But, none the less, that was the beginning of Jake's redemption. The time came, not so long afterward, when he sported his headstall like a badge of honor; then, when he fairly loved to use his supple strength to snake a wagon over the pleasant dirt roads by day or night.

"Rufus," said Uncle Joel meditatively, as he watched Alice moving about the stable-yard one morning with both Jake and Duke following her about, step for step, "the critters do seem to take after that wife of yours." He hesitated and then reflected. "And they say that critters do show God's own judgment in that respect."

Rufus, at work greasing the axles of a farm-wagon, slipped one of the heavy wheels back into place and gave it a spin.

"She's that way with all sorts of crit-

ters," he said seriously. "I never saw a girl like her. I guess the good Lord must 've broke the mold when he run her off."

He also looked at Alice.

The strange part about it—to Rufus, and to Uncle Joel, perhaps—was that she didn't look like a farmer's wife. There was a fragility and a grace about her, especially when she was seen from a distance, more especially still when she was thus surrounded by the heavy strength of a farmyard.

She wore a short, full skirt of figured cotton and a short-sleeved sailor-blouse that was open at the throat. Her luxuriant hair was free, except for a comb on either side. It brushed out soft and thick no lower than her shoulders. She wore black stockings and solid, low shoes, and as she pulled her skirt aside to cross a ditch, her slender and shapely nether limbs were momentarily visible quite up to the knees. Then she disappeared into the shadows of the barn.

"She's that way with all sorts of critters," said Rufus, trying to recollect where he had left off.

Uncle Joel had little eyes, brilliant and kind, pale blue. His complexion was ruddy. His eyes were still fixed on the stable-door through which Alice had disappeared.

"I dare say," he murmured.

"It's right," said Rufus, going on with his work. "She's got a covey of quail that feeds every morning along with her Rhode Island Reds. She can walk among them just like she can among her chickens. And haven't you noticed how thick the birds have been here of late all around the house?"

"I have that," said Uncle Joel, with the air of one who doesn't speak his whole mind.

"Bluebirds and robins," Rufus went on. "Say, she just naturally feeds the old mother-birds right on the nest! She's even got a woodcock settin' where she can go right up and put her hand onto it."

"Yes, and other kinds of birds,"

drawled Uncle Joel as he displaced himself from the rail where he had been sitting. It was almost as if he had made some allusion to himself.

Perhaps he alluded to other men.

A good many of them had got the habit of dropping over to Rufus's place every time they could, whether there was any special occasion for it or not.

There was a lot of work to do about the place, and they were only too glad to help Rufus do it; help him jack up the wagon when he greased the axles, help him hold the board when he had nails to drive, help him grind his tools. But all the time every one of them had an eye out for a sight of Rufus's wife.

They were perfectly respectful about it. If there was any one quality more than another in those glances of theirs it was a touch of awe.

She was different from the girls most of them were used to. There was something back of those dark eyes of hers that made them speculate, and dream a little, and yearn somewhat, perhaps; and stir their thoughts when they were alone again.

There were other elements of this fascination; the odds and ends of the pitiful little trousseau she had brought with her from New York—souvenirs of the life that was—the moving fragrances of crafty perfumes—the pink silk sweater—transparent stockings—a lilac kimono; but, most of all, the delicate face, the lithe and tender shape, the bold yet modest friendliness.

Rufus must have been aware of this lure his wife had for other men. But his heart was tranquil.

It was—until one night.

CHAPTER VI.

A PAIR OF HAMES.

IT was one of those nights in midsummer when the country itself seems to be under some sort of a thrall—when the air is not too hot, but very soft; with

just enough breeze to drift along the smell of clover; cloudy and dark, with a little quaver of heat-lightning now and then, and the fireflies looking for something they've lost in the underbrush; when everything else is in a swoon, or hushed and expectant.

The roses had come out lush and thick all about the Underwood cottage; so had the yellow honeysuckle which covered all of the front fence. There were a couple of acres of red clover which had been cut that day just to the south of the house, and that was the direction the breeze came from. The clover was safe. It was cloudy, but it wasn't going to rain. Uncle Joel had said so. And not once in twenty years had Uncle Joel ever been mistaken.

The great stillness, so heavily fragrant, so much more heavily freighted yet with mystery, enveloped Rufus and his bride, held them in the same embrace as it might have held Adam and Eve before the angel appeared with the flaming sword.

They lay at an open window looking out into the night.

"What are you thinking about?" Rufus whispered.

There was a long pause.

"Many things," Alice answered softly. "My thoughts are like those fireflies out there—just little points of light moving around, then going out, in the midst of all that darkness. There's so much that we don't know, can never know."

"Except that it will be broad daylight to-morrow morning," said Rufus with a touch of symbolism.

"What were you thinking about?" asked Alice, after an interval.

"About the great things that lie ahead of us," Rufus answered. "My thoughts are like the heat-lightning over there. Look! When it shimmers it makes the clouds look like the rocky coast-line along an empty sea. That's our country. We're lying on the prow of a ship that's headed in that direction. We're to discover it, make it known to the rest of the world."

It was a night of magic. The tepid perfume billowed in upon them.

Then Duke barked.

For those who could understand, Duke spoke a language which needed no words to make it clear. His present bark meant that some one was coming who had a right to come.

Minutes later they heard the familiar voice of Andy Jones. Andy had become one of the most frequent visitors of all.

"Hey there, Rufel!"

Rufus answered him.

"Hello there, Andy; what can I do for you?"

"Didn't suspect you folks went to bed so early er I wouldn't have bothered you," said Andy. "Say, Rufe, can you loan me a pair of hames?"

"Sure," said Rufus; "take anything you want."

"Had some hauling to do," Andy explained, "and thought I'd get an early start. Where'll I find them, Rufe?"

"Hanging on the rack on the right-hand side as you go in the barn," Rufus answered. "Want a lantern?"

Andy had come around until he was right under the window where they were, but it was so dark they couldn't see him. He made some jocular remark about having eyes like a cat. He trudged away. They knew that he would be back to thank them and bid them good night.

By and by they could hear him fussing about in the barn, could hear him swearing softly to himself.

"Dog-gone it," Rufus mumbled; "I guess I'll have to light the lantern for him. Dog-gone it!"

"Sh! Don't swear," said Mrs. Rufus playfully. "I'll go."

Rufus had worked hard from break of day. Into his fibers had crept the first delicious lethargy of rest. He surrendered himself to it. Alice leaned over him—just half reality and half luxurious dream—and as her lips met his he felt the delicate caress of her hair and her sheer and fragrant nightgown. Then she was gone.

The sensation of this little leave-taking was a lasting one so far as Rufus was concerned. For him it seemed all a part of the languorous night, of the new universe which enveloped him.

But by and by the night underwent a subtle change.

A solitary cricket, which sounded as if it were right there in the room, started up its music. A beetle droned in from the darkness and began to knock around in its quest for a way out. Suddenly, Rufus sat up.

He listened. He heard nothing. It seemed to him that Alice had been gone a very long time. That last kiss of hers and the contact of her garment were there to plague him with a vague, undefinable uneasiness.

He got out of bed, went over to a window from which he could look out in the direction of the barn.

There was a light in the barn. For a while it was steady. Then it was moving about. Then it was steady again. Not to himself would he have admitted it, but into the bottom of his heart, like the seep of an impurity into a well, there filtered a little poison which was very much like rage. He couldn't understand why it should take such a lot of time to find a pair of hames.

Rufus had never consciously been jealous in his life. His native poise and courage, and his unspoiled faith in human nature, had kept jealousy as an evil thing away from him.

But this night was like no other night that he could remember. The feeling that was paramount in him now was neither anger nor jealousy so much as it was the stifling desire to have Alice there with him again. He didn't want her to be away from him. That was all.

The barn-door became a center of animation.

Duke came out; then Andy Jones, jangling the hames over one arm; then Alice, holding the lantern high.

At the sight of Alice, Rufus went rigid. It was almost as if he were seeing her

for the first time. It was almost as if he were looking at her once again across that poisonous courtyard in the old Tenderloin.

She was wearing her lilac kimono, but it was loosely held and was fluttering open. Now, as then, her loose hair was an aureole about her head; there wasn't a curve in all her pliant length that wasn't revealed at times. She had put her bare feet into a pair of yellow slippers. At every step the ivory whiteness of her skin gleamed out—from her ankles, from her round and delicate throat, her uplifted arm.

Then, as by a gradual process, Rufus became aware that all this was likewise a spectacle for some one else.

Andy Jones was there. He walked a little back of her, a little to one side. He was all but treading on her—unconscious of his own feet, unconscious of the ground under them, unconscious of everything in the universe except this vision which filled his ogling eyes and in which he was steeping his soul. For the first time in his life, perhaps, Andy was looking at Beauty incarnate, exquisitely fashioned, perfectly clean. He was translated; like a man who has drunk deep of a heady brew.

It was just a fleeting impression.

Rufus, there at his window, controlled himself. It took something of a wrench, he couldn't have told why.

"Well," he cried, "did you get the hames?"

Andy Jones came miserably back to earth. He dropped from the zone of light. He throatily assured Rufus that he had found the hames all right. He said, "Good night, Mrs. Underwood, and much obliged," and he sang out his good night to Rufus. Then he was gone, plainly a victim of embarrassment, if not of a greater trouble.

It was different with Alice. She paused. She held the lantern a little higher still. She looked up toward Rufus with a smile.

"Oh, Rufus," she cried, "you should

have seen the doves! They fluttered all about us in the light."

CHAPTER VII.

MIDSUMMER MADNESS.

"YOU mustn't show yourself like that," said Rufus softly, with a quivering intensity, as he met Alice on the lower floor.

Her smile and her remark about the doves disarmed him. There was no rage in him at all.

She read his meaning. Her face went scarlet.

"Oh, Rufus!"

She looked down at herself.

"That's all right," said Rufus gently.

But there was a rigor in his arms and hands as he took the lantern. He raised the chimney—Alice watching him—and blew out the flame. The extinguished wick sent out an acrid whiff. This and even the heat of the lantern made them glad to get away.

With no other word they groped their way back to the upper floor and into the scented spaciousness of the room they had elected for their own. In the center of the room Alice stood stock still.

"It was only Andy," she gasped.

Rufus also stood still for a moment. He was trying to organize his thought, formulate it into speech—as much for his own relief, perhaps, as for the girl's enlightenment.

"I know, I know," he said slowly, soothingly. Then, as the words rushed up: "But, Alice, you're mine! *Mine!*"

Rufus slept. His breathing, profound and regular yet indistinct, was like some movement of the earth. It was almost as if the earth itself slept, here in the dark and tepid and luxurious night.

But Rufus's wife lay wide awake, open-eyed.

She had lain awake like this on other nights—many of them—back there in the furnished apartment of Mrs. Moss's es-

tablishment. She recalled these nights now, detail after detail. It seemed to her that there had been no change.

She was Viola Swan.

She could see it now—all her thoughts and hopes about it being otherwise were mere delusions.

Jessie Schofield was right. Jessie had been right from the very first moment, had seen her as she was, had recognized the truth. Jessie had never faltered in her perceptions since then.

She recalled the way that the girl was perpetually clinging about her; her unceasing interest in the garments which had been part of the equipment for the battle of life as fought in the old Tenderloin—the little pink corsets, the silk stockings, the cheap but pretty finery of machine-embroidered cottons, that inefacable taint of synthetic perfumes.

"Didn't men ever tell you you were beautiful?"

"Did any one ever follow you home?"

"What do you do to become a siren?"

"What is a 'Palace of Sin'?"

Why should Jessie keep on asking her questions like these, every time that they were alone together, if she didn't suspect, didn't know?

But Jessie had merely developed a little more highly the same intuition that brought the men to flocking about the place. That also she could see now in the clairvoyance of the night. It made her shudder. Yet, at the same time it made her marvel—with a thrill which was odd and not wholly unpleasant.

She hadn't understood. She had nourished some sort of an idea that they were there to see Rufus, that they were merely interested in his welfare, interested in her on his account.

With a mental gasp she recognized how absurd this was.

It was she herself who was the lure.

This night had brought its revelation. She saw again the doting, hungry eyes of Andy Jones; his gaping mouth; his Adam's-apple as he swallowed; his awkward and trembling hands. She heard

in memory his stifled efforts to laugh; felt the heat and magnetism of his not too ungainly body as he moved about her out there in the barn. And it seemed to her now that she had unwittingly enjoyed it all.

It was this that sent the thrill and trepidation from her heart out to brain and arms and legs.

She had been Viola Swan and had not suspected it. She saw that she had been nothing else all along, that what she had been this night for Andy Jones she had been ever since her arrival in Rising Sun for other men as well.

Was she anything else for Rufus even? A little while ago he had crushed her to him.

She heard the echo of his voice:

"Mine! *Mine!*"

It was not precisely dismay which came to little Mrs. Underwood as she lay there rigidly still with her eyes open to the darkness. There was bafflement. But there was also some anger, a feeling that was almost joy, sinister and fierce, in the sense of power which Viola Swan could exert in a community like this.

But the idea, taking this shape, merely served to recall again the pitiful hopes and expectations with which she had sought to drug herself during the first weeks of her nightmarish existence in Mrs. Moss's place.

"I'm not Viola Swan," she whispered. "I'm Alice Linn. I'm Mrs. Rufus Underwood. Oh, Lord, Lord! Tell me that I am."

She stole quietly out of the bed and crept over to the open window. Kneeling there, she raised her face to the slowly billowing fragrance. A rooster crowed. As if this were the signal for which they had waited, a million crickets struck into the music of their kind, lulling, strongly cadenced. Then a whippoorwill began to sing there in the shadows of the honeysuckle right under the window.

She knew the bird, loved it. The song of it—insistent, quick, cheerful, familiar,

coming to her at just that particular moment—soothed her, encouraged her.

The morning ripened, sweet and breathless. Rufus had been gone a couple of hours to get in his clover. Everything was very still.

It may have been a quality of the heavy and fragrant atmosphere, of the silence, and also of the comparative coolness and duskiness of the interior of the house, but as Rufus's wife moved here and there about her occupations, with the memory of last night's experiences still strong upon her, the specter of Viola Swan had no terrors for her at all.

The house was like a cave. She was the primitive woman. All men were primitive men.

She heard the beating of Duke's heavy tail on the boards of the back porch. There came a soft footfall, a clank of steel. Some one cleared his throat. It was Andy Jones coming back with the borrowed hames.

Alice paused where she was. For a moment she held her breath. What she asked herself was this:

Was it true that Andy looked upon her not as Mrs. Rufus Underwood but as Viola Swan?

It was a wicked thought, subtle, alluring.

"Hello, Andy!" she cried, a little short of breath as a result of her thought. "Is that you? Come right in."

Andy stepped into sight, peering, a prey to doubt. From her very first glance at him she knew that there was no mistake now in the way that Rufus had instinctively translated the events of the preceding evening. As plainly as if they had been recorded there on a photographic plate, there were visible in Andy's countenance the visions with which he had regaled his eyes while here before, his hope of seeing them again.

"I—I thought I'd run in with the hames," he said lamely, with his eyes on the girl who was still Viola Swan and couldn't help it.

He saw the small head framed with its black billow of hair; the strong but delicate face, with its expanding nostrils, its red and smiling mouth; and, dominating all this, a pair of eyes that were lustrous, deep, inscrutable.

All this in a place like a secret cave, safe from the glare and publicity of the summer morning.

CHAPTER VIII.

A CROCK OF CREAM.

"WON'T you sit down a while?" she asked.

It was odd. She sensed the danger, and yet, somehow, she couldn't quite bring herself to forego it.

"Why," Andy faltered; "I wasn't in any particular rush."

He cast his eyes about him as if looking for a place to deposit the hames, or a place to sit down—as if he weren't quite sure which.

"I'll take them," she said as she approached him with her hand out.

She was wearing one of those blouses of hers, clean and sheer, with the throat open, with brief, wide sleeves which revealed the slender yet strong and shapely whiteness of her upper arms.

What followed came without any immediate warning. The warnings in nature are apt to be slow and cumulative, easy to disregard.

There was a clank of steel as the hames fell to the floor. Andy had let them fall, like something forgotten.

For a moment his two hands were out, tense, yet inspired with all the gentleness in the world. His ordinarily innocuous eyes were blazing, but the flame in them was a plea for compassion. His usually insignificant face had become the mask of a great tragedian.

So it seemed to Viola Swan.

His movements appeared to her to have been slow. As a matter of fact, they must have been swift. There was no perceptible interval between the time

that he had caught her bare arms in the grip of his implacable hands, then held her imprisoned, helpless, against his breast.

"Andy," she whispered tempestuously. "Don't! What do you mean?"

"I love you," he faltered.

There was no faltering of his hands and arms though. They were as rigid as steel.

"Since when?" she panted.

"I don't know," he responded miserably. "I guess it was always." He took thought. He was trying to be honest. "I guess it was since last night."

"Let me go!"

"I want you. I couldn't sleep all night. I guess I'm going crazy."

It was almost a sob. It was certainly a supplication. There was a vibration of conscience in it almost as pronounced as that of passion. Andy wasn't merely wearing the mask of tragedy. He was tragedy itself.

"This is dangerous," she warned.

Like any woman under such circumstances, she was doing the thinking for both of them. She was able to think, as the first excitement ebbed quickly away from her.

It would never do to struggle. That would merely render the poor, daft creature furious, drive him on to desperation. It wouldn't do to cry out. The very worst that might happen to any of them, or to all of them, would follow if she apprised Rufus of what was going on.

"Andy," she whispered gently.

She put up her hand and stroked his face. It was like that she had first managed to slip the headstall onto the fear-maddened young horse she had tamed.

"Let me go," she whispered, more softly still.

She was watching with every nerve of her body for a relaxing of the tense arms that locked her shoulders. But her eyes brought her the first news of her victory. She saw the fire go dim in Andy's own eyes, the strained lines of his face soften

somewhat. She caressed his cheek with her finger-tips. His arms suddenly fell away from her. She was free.

Andy stood right where he was, even after she had picked up the fallen hames and moved away from him. He was like a man who has absorbed too much liquor or who suffers from an obsession.

"I didn't mean to do it," he suddenly blurted. "I didn't mean to do it."

"I know you didn't," she answered.

She was amazingly calm. It was amazing to herself. Her thoughts were clear. About this man who stood in front of her, she was thinking scarcely at all. It was about herself she thought. She surveyed the night; reviewed her mental processes immediately preceding this outbreak.

A voice inside her brain—yet like the voice of some one who recognized her and called to her from a distance—was hailing her over and over again as Viola Swan.

"Viola Swan! Oh, Viola Swan!"

She tried to deafen her mental hearing to it. The voice persisted all the same.

"What shall I do?" asked Andy.

"You'd better go," she suggested gently. She felt sorry for him.

"You'll never forgive me," he declared, lost.

"I'll forgive you, and do forgive you," she said, holding out her hand. "We'll both forget about it, never think about it again."

Andy gazed at her hand this time with a species of wonderment, as if it were the first hand he had ever seen in all his life. His action now was as unexpected as it had been before.

With a gasping, inarticulate exclamation, he took her hand in both his own. Before she could stop him he had shambled down to his knees. He pressed her hand to his face. He wept over it and held it against his convulsive lips.

There's no telling how long this second scene of their little drama might have lasted—nor how it might have ended; but just then there came the repeated

honk of an automobile-horn, followed by the crescendo creep and purr of the machine itself. It was enough to galvanize even Andy Jones out of his trance, to bring Mrs. Underwood herself to the open door with a rush.

Up the private roadway from the public pike an extremely large and powerful yellow touring-car was making its way with a single occupant.

The car swept up to the side of the house with the speed of a locomotive.

The driver got down.

He was a man of thirty, perhaps. He had that peculiar arrogance which goes with certain persons who ride powerful machines or fine horses—the look which seems to say:

"I made this machine—or created this horse—all by myself."

He was down from the machine and had turned completely to the door before he saw the lady of the house. The sight of the girl standing there in the door obviously gave him a decided shock, as pleasant as it was severe. He could scarcely be blamed for that. Excitement had made her eyes more brilliant than ever, heightened the contrast of the pallors and pinks of her complexion, parted her red lips, quickened her breathing.

The driver of the yellow car pulled off his thin silk cap. He had only a glance for the growling hound. His eyes came back to the vision in the door.

"Does he bite?" he asked with easy familiarity.

Alice cast down her eyes. She spoke a few soft words to Duke which brought the hound, still grumbling, but obedient, curling to her feet. She looked up again, with one of those startled looks of hers, slightly abashed.

The stranger was still smiling at her.

"Could you favor me with some water?" he asked. "Not for myself," he added, with a chuckle as if to imply a joke. "It's for my machine, you know."

"Certainly," Alice answered, unsmi-

ling, glad to escape the direct fire of his gaze.

The stranger insisted on helping her to draw a bucket of water from the well. His hand touched hers. He looked at her obliquely, when he wasn't looking at her openly, always with an undisguised admiration and a lurking familiarity.

While they were still at the well Andy Jones took his departure. He passed them almost slinkingly, disappearing in the direction of the barn. Alice and the stranger were alone. The stranger seemed to be quite as fully aware of this as Alice herself. She could see that he was distraught as he went about what he had to do, so she went into the house, out of sight.

She heard him turn his machine around, taking his time about it. There followed a period of silence. Then Duke growled again. The stranger called to her. He had approached as close as he dared to the kitchen door.

"I say, could I have a glass of milk?"

Alice recognized the request for what it was—a mere excuse for delay, a ruse to see her again. But she also recognized the truth that it was the Viola Swan part of her that was aware of this. It wasn't Alice Linn—it wasn't Mrs. Rufus Underwood—who understood men like that. Meekly, she seized a clean glass from the cupboard shelf and hastened out.

There was a sort of detached cellar or spring-house around at one side of the kitchen.

"I'll get you some," she said hastily, as she passed the stranger, scarcely daring to glance at him.

She was aware that he was following her, but she gave no hint of what was in her heart, and throwing open the spring-house door, entered. The stranger was just back of her.

"Wait," she murmured; "I sha'n't be but a moment."

But the stranger appeared to be in the grip of a rising enthusiasm.

"A spring-house!" he exclaimed jovial-

ly. "And, oh, see the crock of cream! Let me drink from it. Do!"

He had followed her into the place.

Alice turned slightly, at a loss as to what either to do or to say. The stress of her recent scene with Andy Jones was still sore within her. She had an impression of the stranger leaning toward her, and she was increasingly nervous.

Suddenly, she was aware that he was whispering to her, and what he said came as a sort of confirmation of her own innermost thoughts. That was the harrowing part of it.

"What are you doing in a place like this?" he asked. "You don't belong on a farm."

"What do you mean?" she faltered. "I don't understand."

But she understood all right. It wasn't to Mrs. Rufus Underwood that this man spoke. It was to Viola Swan. Everything declared the truth, blared it at her through psychic megaphones—his accent, his quickened breath, his furtive eyes, his sagging lower lip. So men had looked at Viola Swan before. So they would always look.

A wave of misery submerged her, brief but violent. She bore up under it and figuratively sought to catch her breath again. This was a nightmare. She wouldn't give way to it. She was Alice Linn—Mrs. Rufus Underwood. But no, the man kept on speaking to Viola Swan.

"Don't understand!" he ejaculated with a broken laugh. "No, I suppose not! I suppose you never look at yourself in the mirror. You're no girl for a place like this. You're wasting yourself out here. New York's the place for you. Broadway would come across with anything it's got for a little girl like you. I'm merely giving you a friendly tip."

His last sentence may have been inspired by some hint of caution. The girl had picked up the crock of cream, seemed to be undecided what to do with it, which way to turn, what to say.

"Don't!" she said finally, but with an

air of weakness; then hurried on, as if speaking to herself: "My husband—"

"Husband!"

There was a definite sneer in the way he pronounced the word. It must have been the sight of Andy Jones sneaking off that was still in his mind. He put out his hand to touch her shoulder.

Before he could touch her she turned. Even then, possibly, she had no idea as to what she was going to do; but, at the sight of that leering face, it was as if she were confronted in the flesh by all that horrified and sickened her, all that was bent on perpetuating the thralldom from which she was seeking to escape. Her fingers tightened convulsively on the crock. The crock became a weapon of defense. She struck at her nightmare with it, struck at the face which leered—and had always leered—at Viola Swan.

The cream splashed. She heard the stranger's bleat of surprise and rage and pain.

But these were sensations which came to her vaguely. The one sharp sensation which came to her was the thrill of fearful joy with which she felt the heavy earthenware vessel take contact with the stranger's flesh.

At last, at last!

She had her nightmare where she could punish it, hammer it, smash it, kill it perhaps. Her rage ran through all her veins like a red hot venom.

She struck again, then again.

The first blow must have blinded the stranger somewhat. He was floundering about, incoherent both as to voice and movement. There was cream all over him. Through this there appeared a flash of crimson which spread and spread.

It all transpired in a whirlwind of passion which required but a dozen seconds.

Then the stranger had found his way to the open air. Before he could escape altogether, however, the girl who was fighting not a man but an army of specters, hurled the crock against the side of his head, sent him reeling out

into the open air. He staggered there for a moment or two longer—groping and blinded, making futile efforts to wipe the cream and blood from his face.

He saw his automobile standing over there conveniently headed for the open road, the road of escape from something which even yet he could not by any possibility understand. He fled.

Left alone on the scene of her battle Alice Underwood stood there for a space as if she herself had been badly wounded. She was paralyzed, with a paralysis that stopped her breathing, numbed her thought. It was only gradually that her breathing came back to her—in dry convulsive sobs.

Would it always be like this?

She shrank down where she was and covered her face with her hands.

CHAPTER IX.

HAIRCLOTH AND GHOSTS.

JESSIE SCHOFIELD'S grandmother was about the most respectable person in Rising Sun, where every one was respectable.

Jenvey was her name—Mrs. Alma Jenvey. She was considered well-to-do, and lived in an extremely neat and rather pretentious frame house in the outskirts of the village. There was a well-kept lawn, trim beds of geraniums, petunias, and phlox; a number of fruit-trees in the yard, and these had their trunks neatly whitewashed.

Every afternoon at three o'clock, weather permitting, Mrs. Jenvey appeared on her front porch, slender, tranquil, dressed in sober silk—long sleeves and high neck relieved by a ruche or a bit of lace—and composed herself to her knitting or embroidery.

She was never long alone at such times. Generally some other lady dropped in—although there weren't so many of them in Rising Sun who considered themselves Mrs. Jenvey's social equals. Sometimes it was the pastor.

This particular afternoon it was Joel Kennedy, Rufus Underwood's uncle.

Uncle Joel drove up behind his favorite roadster, a big-boned, smooth-coated sorrel, young but gentle. He took his time about hitching his horse, as was his wont, gave an extra jerk at the strap to see that all was solid, came slowly up the path, with a glance for the grass and flowers, but none for Mrs. Jenvey herself until he was mounting the steps.

Mrs. Jenvey, who wasn't much more than fifty and must have been pretty in her day, had watched his arrival with a certain nervousness. She delivered herself of a quick little flutter to rearrange the draperies of her brown silk dress. As her caller came up onto the porch she delivered herself of another little flutter to denote surprise.

"Why, Joel Kennedy!"

Uncle Joel lowered himself into a rocking-chair with a sigh before he answered.

"Hello, Alma!"

"I declare, you're such a stranger I hardly recognized you," Mrs. Jenvey went on reprovingly. "How is Mary, and Aunt Allie, and everybody?"

"They're well," Uncle Joel exploded, with his eyes on the floor of the porch.

Mrs. Jenvey shot him a quick glance of her malicious black eyes and smirked.

"I haven't seen anything of Rufus, either, since his return from New York. Jessie told me first about his coming, about his having brought a wife back with him. Everybody seems to be agreed that she's a pretty little thing."

Uncle Joel didn't answer. Mrs. Jenvey decided to prod him a bit. She meditated her attack as she slowly rocked and made a pretense of going on with her embroidery.

"That must have been quite an exciting time they had over there the other day," she mused.

With one of his convulsive movements Uncle Joel now threw himself back in the chair and stared at the ceiling. He remained that way, motionless, thoughtful.

"As to that," he said, "I could tell you better if I knew what you was talkin' about."

Mrs. Jenvey giggled.

"You're the same old tease that you always were, Joel. If you don't know what I'm talking about I guess that you're the only one in this part of Chenango County who doesn't. They say that Rufus's wife just gave that fellow a laying out."

"Oh, you mean that!" exploded Uncle Joel, collapsing into a normal position.

"They say that fellow just left a stream of cream and blood behind him right on into Bainbridge—cream getting less and the blood getting thicker. They say that Dr. Murdock had to take six stitches in his scalp. I can't say that I blame the poor little thing. At the same time—" this was the prod she had been leading up to—"I'm sorry that Rufus married one of these chicks who encourage bad men."

Uncle Joel neither moved nor spoke for a dozen seconds. Then he slowly turned. But it wasn't at Mrs. Jenvey he looked even then. It was at the chair on which reposed Mrs. Jenvey's work-basket. Manifestly it was a parlor-chair. It was ancient and stiff, upholstered in black hair-cloth. Uncle Joel looked at this chair as if that had been the subject of their conversation. He droned through his nose.

"What makes you think she encouraged him?" he asked.

"A man must have some encouragement," said Mrs. Jenvey, "however depraved."

"I suppose so," Uncle Joel roared wearily. "And I suppose you ladies here in Risin' Sun have to have some victim for to feed your gossip on."

He put a period to this explosion with a twinkling smile.

"Nobody could ever accuse me of gossiping," retorted Mrs. Jenvey complacently, with a dash of vinegar, however. "I'm merely telling you, Joel, the things I hear; and I'm not telling you

the half of them either. It ain't gossip to say that there must be some reason why all the men of Rising Sun have taken to running out to Rufus Underwood's place every chance they get. What are you staring at that chair for?"

Joel Kennedy didn't answer her question. He raised his chin, squinted out into space.

"You're right," he said; "there generally is a reason when men go galavantin' around some woman. The reason generally is, it's because they're a passel of fools."

"Or the woman giving them encouragement," Mrs. Jenvey supplemented.

"You're wrong there, Alma," Uncle Joel asserted loudly as he began to rock himself with violence. "Laws! If encouragement was what fetched the men around, more'n one lone gal'd make herself the center of a camp-meetin'."

"You don't seem to have a very high opinion of us ladies of Rising Sun," said Mrs. Jenvey loftily from the heights of her respectability.

Joel Kennedy stopped rocking as abruptly as he had begun. One would have thought that he had just discovered an aeroplane, or a new kind of bird, over there beyond the tops of the maple-trees which lined the road. It was several seconds before he spoke. There was an accent of gentle reverence in his voice.

"The ladies! Why, Alma, if I was the Lord I'd just give each and every one of them a golden crown—as I reckon He will do, all in good time. You see, I can't forget that they was all gals once—tender little things, sort of gropin' around, like blind puppies, without any teeth, thinkin' that there wasn't much else in the world but love and frolic. Should we hold it up against them if some of them get tromped on, or get a little scalded, or swallow somethin' that wasn't good for their insides? Eh—God bless me!"

Uncle Joel once more slowly turned and looked at the hair-cloth chair—keenly, with a certain disapproval.

"Joel," Mrs. Jenvey asked, "what ails you anyway?"

"Me?"

Joel gave a little start, as one might who is suddenly awakened from a brown-study.

"I asked you once before why you look at that chair like that. I declare, you make me nervous. Any one would think, seeing you, that you were looking at a ghost."

Uncle Joel met Mrs. Jenvey's eyes squarely now. His voice was slow and steady.

"Well, now, you've just about struck it," he said. "You know, I can't see that there chair without sort of remembering how Leslie Shaine slipped off of it one evenin' when we were both courtin' you. Do you remember?"

It was Mrs. Jenvey's turn to rock. She rocked slowly, with her attention suddenly riveted on her fancy work. There was a frozen look in her face. Joel Kennedy watched her.

"Poor Leslie's been dead nigh onto thirty years," she murmured at last with forced complacency.

"Remember it just like it was yesterday," said Uncle Joel, almost stealthily. "Coroner's jury brought in a verdict of accidental shootin'." He relaxed. "Handsome boy with his blue eyes and curly hair!" He stretched his legs, took a quick glance at the sky. "Don't look as if we were goin' to get that rain," he speculated.

He got up. Mrs. Jenvey had an involuntary movement of relief. She addressed him hastily.

"Ask Mary to come in and see me one of these days."

"Oh, by the way," said Uncle Joel; "Mary was just back from visitin' Rufus's wife, when I was leavin' to drive in. She says that Rufus's wife's been a trifle lonely—especially since Jessie stopped comin' out. Jessie and Alice—that's Rufus's wife—were sort of fond of each other. I thought I might drive Jessie out there and let her visit for a

few days. I am headed past Rufus's place now."

Mrs. Jenvey's mouth was prim. She cast a quick glance at Joel Kennedy. He was gazing curiously at the hair-cloth chair again. Mrs. Jenvey's eyes came back to her work. She jabbed a couple of stitches into her work.

It was on her lips to defend herself for having forbidden Jessie to frequent the strange Mrs. Underwood's society. She had no blood relationship with the Underwood clan. But Joel Kennedy had just strangely touched upon a certain episode of her youth. She was disquieted.

"I guess you can take Jessie along," she said; "so far as I am concerned."

CHAPTER X.

AS BETWEEN NEIGHBORS.

"JESSIE'S got her grandmother to let her stay with us right along," said Rufus as he squatted on his heels and reached for a straw.

Both Rufus and Uncle Joel had driven their folks in for the Sunday evening service, but neither of them had entered the place of worship. The summer night was thickening about them. The Gothic windows of the little wooden church were open. From these poured a faint shimmer of yellow light and a rustle of subdued activity.

Uncle Joel turned a feed-box onto its side, seated himself, gazed at the nearest window of the church.

"I reckon that 'll suit Alice," he said. "How does she appear to be feelin'?"

Rufus meditated before he answered:

"Fine! Fine!"

From the lamp-lit windows there came the plaintive, scrawny bleat of a small organ. Like a line drawn through grass-grown water this accumulated a gradual weight of trailing voices—women's voices, principally—as the congregation essayed the opening hymn.

"Is that Andy Jones singing tenor?" asked Rufus.

"Yes," Uncle Joel answered. "I can see him from here—standin' there beside Alice and Jessie. Rufus, Alice sure has had a lot of influence on Andy. You know the sort of fellow he was before she come here—sort of wild—good-natured, you know—but harum-scarum."

Rufus didn't answer except to chew meditatively on his straw. But there gradually appeared a rapt expression on his face as, more and more, another voice than that of Andy Jones detached itself from the chorus—a woman's voice—a warm and true but uncultivated soprano—his wife's!

"Some folks around Rising Sun seemed to be sort of scared of her at first," Rufus said with amused contempt.

The organ was bleating its interlude.

"Folks are like live stock," Uncle Joel answered slowly. "They got to get used to you before they'll come up and eat out of your hand—however good you be."

The music, fortified, swung heavily into the second verse.

"Some of the folks in there right now are no better than they ought to be," Rufus opined with a note of challenge. "There's Jessie's grandmother. Just because she married old Curtis Jenvey she puts on airs. Why, dog-gone it! I can remember the way she treated Jessie's mother—her own flesh and blood—for getting into trouble."

"Like live stock," Uncle Joel ruminated softly as the hymn ended, and a comparative silence ensued; "and I reckon, Rufus, that Alice will end up by tamin' the folks of Risin' Sun just about like she's tamed the critters on the farm—includin' Andy Jones."

"And including a lot of others," Rufus replied with slow tranquillity. "There never were so many folks coming around to the old place—leastwise, not so far back as I can remember—especially men folks. You wouldn't find any of them trying—trying to get gay like that chap from the city. Uncle Joel—I say it right here by the church! If I'd caught that fellow I'd have killed him dead."

"She seems to have taken care of herself all right as it was," said Uncle Joel cautiously.

"She smashed him," Rufus agreed; "but it broke her all up. She was crying her heart out when I found her. I'd just come in to fill my water-jug. If I'd 'a' got there a minute sooner I'd 'a' been there in time to catch him myself. Then the folks of Rising Sun would have had something to talk about."

"I guess they ain't doin' so much talkin'," Uncle Joel consoled.

"Not in your hearing, nor mine," Rufus answered; "but they're talking, all right. I can tell. So can she. Anyway, Sally Weaver hears enough."

"Sally's workin' for you steady now?"

"Steady's her old man will let her. He makes her come home every now and then to cook and wash for that new wife of his."

"Just like live stock," Uncle Joel commented again. "And, at that, I guess that the Weavers are just about as good as the next ones. Rufe, a certain lady in this here community got me to subscribe for a book for her once. That was a good many years ago, and I was young myself. So was she. The name of that book was 'Metropolitan Life Unveiled, or the Mysteries and Miseries of America's Great Cities.'

"It wasn't no fit book for young folks—nor old ones either, I guess. It told some pretty tall stories as to what goes on in places like New York and Chicago and San Francisco. But—bless me! Do you know I've often thought since that there ain't any great difference in human nature after all? Every one of those stories could be matched by things that have happened right here in Risin' Sun—things just as bad, or worse."

Inside the church the preacher was getting into his stride. His voice rose to declamatory thunder:

"Cast the first stone, you that are sinless! That's it! That's what it says, and that's what it means. Look into your own hearts. See what you were thinking

about—last night—or the night before. An'en, if your thoughts were pure—an'en, if you can say: 'Behold, I am whiter 'n snow!'—"

There was a slight smile on Rufus's face, but, even there in the gloaming, it looked as if his face had gone a trifle whiter, was a bit set.

"Give it to 'em," said Uncle Joel. "That's the sort of stuff they need."

"I shouldn't be surprised but what the preacher's been hearing things himself," said Rufus. "Anyway, he's been out to our house to dinner a couple of times."

The preacher after his thunderous outburst had let his voice fall to a hoarse whisper, all but inaudible to those who listened outside. Then, suddenly, he broke out again louder than ever:

"Oh, yes! 'She gave me of the tree, and I did eat.'"

Again the voice subsided.

"He knows what he's talkin' about," said Uncle Joel. "And no one can say that he don't practise what he preaches. His wife—I remember her well—one of the prettiest girls she was that ever came out of Two Mile—ran away with one of these drummer-chaps when they'd only been married a couple of months. And, later, he took her back. She didn't live long after her baby was born."

"Baby still living?"

"Nobody knows. He grew up—handsome as a sunflower, got into trouble, skipped out." Uncle Joel combed his beard. "That's why Jessie Schofield has used her grandmother's maiden name instead of her father's. Mrs. Jenvey was a Schofield."

"Is that—"

"Yep; folks have sort of forgot about it, never mention it any more—although they did then a lot. The preacher—bless his good old soul—is Jessie's grandfather, although she don't know it—and maybe he don't either. But it's sort of touchin', when I see him and Alma Jenvey settin' together on that spick and span front porch of hers. I'm just sort of tellin' you these things, Rufe—"

"I understand," breathed Rufus. Then: "What's that?"

Both turned and gazed in the direction of the door of the church, whence there had come the signs of disturbance—a jostling of shapes, a subdued outburst of speech—which had attracted Rufus's attention.

"Looks like a shindy," said Uncle Joel.

There was always a group of half-grown boys and young men about the door of the church on Sunday night—waiting for the services to end, expectant of the girls inside.

Rufus, nimbler than Uncle Joel, had run forward to see what the trouble was. But the crowd was already moving off into the darkness before he could come up to the scene of the trouble. Only one remained of all who had been there, an anemic little boy with a large head and a precocious face. His name was Timmy Athens.

"What was the trouble, Timmy?" Rufus whispered.

Timmy looked fleetingly wretched, delicate and tactful beyond his years.

"They were talkin' about your wife," he answered. Then he fled.

CHAPTER XI.

WITH HORN AND HOOF.

IT was as if Rufus himself had received a blow, and it gave him pause. But it didn't stagger him. The pause was only long enough for him to tell himself that this was his concern. He started off in the direction the crowd had taken.

He didn't have to go very far.

A hundred yards or less from the church was the schoolhouse, surrounded by its yard.

The crowd swung around into the yard so that the little brick building was between them and the church. The place was dark—blue darkness in the open spaces, black darkness in the shadows; but it was light enough to fight in, especially for the native-born.

There lingered in Rufus's heart still some hope that what Timmy Athens had said was not true. He knew that he was hoping against certainty, but he wouldn't give in. He was almost up to the crowd. He heard enough to tell him who the heroes were. One of them was Jeff Beeman—Cole Beeman's oldest boy—who had been among the recent visitors at Rufus's place. The other was a young farm-hand from Two Mile—Ben Clode, by name—who for many moons had been camping on the trail of Sally Weaver.

Notwithstanding this collateral evidence to the truth of what Timmy Athens had intimated, Rufus clung to his hope.

Instead of following the crowd any further, therefore, he ran about the schoolhouse in the opposite direction, came up under the shadow of it where he could see and hear unseen.

It was Jeff's voice that first arose above the murmur of the crowd. Jeff was twenty, big for his age and powerful. Ben Clode was twenty-five or twenty-six, thin, wiry, tough. The two men were facing each other, three or four feet apart. They had both already thrown aside their coats, were in the preliminary stage of battle—like two young bulls pawing up the turf.

"I said," Jeff was saying, "that if you mentioned her name I'd smash your head into jelly."

"They's a reason fer you to fight, I guess," whined Ben with nasal wickedness, "but you ain't the only one."

Neither of the two had their hands up in the ordinary attitude of boxers. Their arms were only slightly forward. Both were crouched. At the conclusion of Ben's remark Jeff sidestepped slightly, tried to grasp his antagonist, floundered a pair of blows at him.

"You think that every one's like Sally Weaver," Jeff blurted.

"Darn you," cried Ben, "I'll make you eat them words. And I'll make you say it's true—what she said—about you and Mrs.—"

They had gripped each other. For a

moment or two, there was a swirling strain as they struggled for a fall. This was no affair of Queensbury rules. There were no rules. Swiftly they broke their clinch, flailed overhand blows at each other. Ben was the more agile of the two, more experienced. He ducked, thrust his head into Jeff Beeman's midriff, while Jeff pounded his back. But Ben was kicking with his knees.

Such speech as came from them now was brief, incoherent. It was such speech as might have come from any fighting males—the whine, the grunt, the bellow.

Rufus Underwood, standing in the blackness of the schoolhouse, still hesitated—battered as much as the combatants were, but by hands invisible. There was no longer a chance to hope. His Alice was the cause of this battle—she who, unconscious of it all, was worshiping back there in the little church, her face raised, her heart elevated, her soul soaring up on the wings of aspiration.

He could have wept.

All this was in but an instant or so of time—while the human bulls pitted against each other brute strength and brute sagacity, primitive ferocity and tension.

But the real nature of the battle wasn't lost on Rufus. Perhaps he saw it more clearly than any one else there. To them it was an ordinary struggle, the motive of which was no extraordinary one. The female of the species in one way or another generally inspired the occasional battles between the unmarried youth of the community. For the other spectators there this was merely a relative fighting for the good name of a girl who had been brought into his family-clan by marriage.

It was all different for Rufus.

Like a vision it revealed itself to him—two males fighting over a female.

The thought made him sick, but it was there.

He remembered how young Jeff Beeman had sat on the back porch of his house only yesterday and watched Alice come and go. In memory he saw the

saturnine Ben Clode hanging about the kitchen door after nightfall. For Ben, Sally Weaver, the hired girl, had become but a pretense. It was upon the mistress of the house Ben had cast the eyes of his longing.

From the crowd there came a complex, savage guttural of exultation as the grunting and straining champions went to earth with a soft thud and a recrudescence of articulate speech.

From Ben: "Say 'enough,' you dirty dog!"

From Jeff: "Let loose, er I'll chaw your gizzard out!"

"From the crowd: "Bust him, Ben! Go it, Jeff! He's bleedin'! Stand back; give 'em room!"

Rufus took a step forward, short of breath. All the strength of a Goliath was in his frame. He lacked the impulse to use it. Mentally, he toppled. He lifted his face. There sprang from his heart the old, old cry of man—to the Invisible—for help and guidance.

"Stay where you are," came the answer in a voice inaudible save to the responsive ears of his soul. "'Canst thou bind the sweet influences of Pleiades, or loose the bands of Orion? Canst thou draw out leviathan with a hook?"

There swept over him a gust of faith.

A strange time and place for communication with his Maker; but generally strange, perhaps, are the circumstances of a man's nearest approaches to seership. The lightning flashes down in time of storm.

Rufus turned back.

As he did so he heard a muffled whine from the thick of the pack over there. It was Ben Clode's voice, and Ben was crying like a little boy.

"I said 'enough' once," he blubbered.

"Say it again," young Jeff Beeman commanded.

By village law—so Rufus reflected with a flare of thanksgiving—the honor of little Mrs. Underwood was safe.

Rufus rejoined Uncle Joel at the side of the church. The older man had waited

for him there. He looked up at Rufus with an expression that meant he had already heard about the cause of the battle—from little Timmy Athens, perhaps.

"It won't do no hurt, Rufus," he said reflectively.

"Jeff gave that Ben Clode a licking," said Rufus. "If he hadn't done it, I would 've."

For a long time neither of them spoke again. The yellow light—like the voice of the preacher—struggled through the Gothic windows of the wooden church; both light and voice to be swallowed up, symbolically, one might have said, by the vast, inexplicable, mysterious night.

The closing hymn was sung. The preacher spoke the benediction. There was a movement inside the church as the congregation prepared to leave.

"Yea, Lord," murmured Uncle Joel; "just like live stock, but live stock who do take thought of Thee now and then!"

CHAPTER XII.

THE RED ECLIPSE.

MRS. UNDERWOOD, wondering what her young friend, Jessie Schofield, was about, ran up the stairs of the old farmhouse to the second floor. There were two or three levels to the second story—a step up here, two steps up there. There was a small upper hall at the head of the stairs, perennially dark and cool, from which the doors opened into the various rooms.

She paused there. The door of her own room was open. Through it she could see Mrs. Jenvey's granddaughter.

Mrs. Underwood gave a little gasp.

It was as if there in the cool twilight of the upper hall she had been confronted by a ghost. But this ghost was a ghost of flesh and blood. It was the ghost of Viola Swan.

Jessie had evidently unearthed the grass-woven suit-case which was all the baggage brought with her by Rufus Underwood's bride on her flight from New

York. In it at the time were the remnants of that wardrobe with which she had outfitted herself in the old Tenderloin.

There were a pair of French-heeled shoes—scarcely worn because they had never been comfortable. There were worn silk stockings of various shades. The gray and the black stockings were all right for wear in Rising Sun, but not the pinks and the purples.

These the bride had kept hidden in the grass-woven suit-case. Hidden there also had been a filmy red dressing-sack, among other things; and a little old make-up box, which had been presented to her by Mrs. Moss, who had probably salvaged it from the wreckage left by some former tenant.

Perhaps Mrs. Underwood would have been unable herself to tell just why she had kept these things.

It might have been just the perversity which makes most people cling to something or other which they would be better off without.

There was another reason why she may have clung to these relics of her avatar as Viola Swan. It was sentimental.

Viola Swan had a fairly large wardrobe when she first became acquainted with Rufus Underwood. A good deal of this wardrobe had been bought at the instigation and under the guidance of the crafty Mrs. Moss herself.

"A girl's got to respect herself! You got to spend money to make money in this town!"

But during the slow days—and nights—that Rufus lay sick, the volunteer nurse had made trip after trip to the pawn-shop.

Mrs. Underwood remembered it all as she stood there, transfixed and tremulous. She had never been able to carry much to the pawn-shop for fear that Mrs. Moss would see her. It took many trips before there was enough money to pay the extra physician. And each trip had been a species of glorification—a sort of purification by sacrifice!

Jessie had decked herself out in a fashion unique—the high-heeled shoes, red silk stockings, a nondescript garment of frills and lace—fluffy and clean, but from the devil's own lingerie shop; and then that spectacular, gorgeous dressing-sack—scarlet, as scarlet as Sin!

The day that Alice Linn, of Clear Spring, Maryland, bought that dressing-sack—she remembered it now—Alice Linn went into eclipse behind Viola Swan.

Jessie, thus equipped in what, after a manner of speaking, was the uniform of Viola Swan, had brought out the make-up box.

There was a rather large mirror in the room—part of an old-fashioned dresser. Before this Jessie was trying to make herself more beautiful than nature intended.

She had evidently already spent quite a little time on her tawny hair. It was combed out until the usually clinging tresses of it were floating free, strand by strand. Over her right ear was an exaggerated knot of scarlet ribbon.

She covered her face freely with powder, found a red lip-stick and proceeded to color up not only her lips but her cheeks. Then she drew back and smiled at herself.

The original Viola Swan, standing out there on the landing, was unable to move, unable to make up her mind what to do—to sneak back the way she had come or to go on in. She would have gone away and left Jessie to amuse herself. But she was held enthralled.

It was a dreadful thrall. To her it seemed dreadful—made up of a thousand shreds of remembered revolts, violences, despairs, fears, hopes, illusions, and disillusion. She would have gone in, only she was afraid that if she did so there would spring from her breast some revelation of the things that were clamoring there to be heard.

All she could do for the moment was to stand there and watch.

Jessie, finally deciding that she had not as yet solved the entire problem of fem-

inine beauty, now proceeded to pencil her eyes and eyebrows—slowly and carefully; with, one would have sworn, some natural instinct to the use of such devices.

Her yellowish hair and hazel eyes made the result all the more striking by the time that her eyebrows were blackened. She lengthened the line of her eyes. In a flutter of delight she added a beauty-spot, high up on the angle of her left cheek—where no courtesan of old Versailles could have placed it better.

The ghost was perfect.

As Alice Underwood stood there and watched—breathing hard, lips parted, one hand on her breast and the other clinging to the slender old banister-rail of the stairs—she was again overswept by the haunting sensation that Viola Swan would never disappear whatever she might do.

Back there in New York—baffled, desperate, knowing not which way to turn, finally misled by old Mrs. Moss—she had called into existence this other personality of hers. It was to have been her Aladdin's jinnee of the lamp. She had called the jinnee Viola Swan. She had sought to dismiss it—had labored to dismiss it. Since coming to Rising Sun she had consecrated her life to getting rid of it.

Was it all to be of no use?

The very first day when Jessie Schofield spoke to her she had heard the whisper of the jinnee's voice.

The men of Rising Sun knew of its presence and were lured by it. Why otherwise should they flock around the place, to stare in secret, think thoughts that Andy Jones alone of all the number had been weak enough to express?

It wasn't Alice Linn, the wife of Rufus Underwood, who troubled their peace, quickened their cravings. It was Viola Swan who did that.

The man whose blood she had shed out there on the sill of the spring-house had not made his advances to the woman of the farm. It was to Viola Swan—the former tenant of Mrs. Moss's furnished apartment, the little lost siren of the old

Tenderloin—she who had brought the historic taint along with her in spite of the wedding ceremony in City Hall; in spite of the pure air and hard work of this valley of remote Chenango County; in spite of all her thoughts and aspirations while she was alone, while she dreamed awake at her husband's side, or while she listened to the preacher in the little wooden church.

The sight of the red dressing-sack momentarily shut out everything else in her range of vision and absorbed all her senses.

It became as a flag; not only a flag, but the flag of an empire she had deserted. She had hated and dreaded this empire while she was marching in its ranks. But now, with a sense of wonder and guilty longing, she knew that she was homesick for it.

No sooner had she admitted this fact than she sought to repress it, drive it from her.

It was Viola Swan—her other self—asking her to return, to make her live again, to undertake the old campaign for riches, power, material joy. The red flag beckoned. It whispered to her:

"Viola! Viola!"

Her perceptions snapped back to normal.

It was Jessie Schofield who had whispered her name. Jessie had seen her through the open door, had danced toward her in an access of delight

CHAPTER XIII.

AS TO "MYSTERIES AND MISERIES."

"WHAT have you been doing?" Alice asked, at a loss for anything better to say.

"How do I look?" Jessie asked in turn.

She had seized Alice by the hand, dragged her into the room, slammed the door, released her in order to strut and pose and execute a few extemporaneous dance-steps.

"Terrible," Alice answered impulsively. She was unable, though, to suppress the smile.

It was Mrs. Rufus Underwood who spoke the word. It was Viola Swan who smiled. Rufus Underwood's wife was panting to express warning and condemnation. Viola Swan was equally eager to express something entirely different—to enter into the game, make sagacious suggestions, bespeak enthusiasm, recall past experiences.

"Let me fix you up," Jessie proposed.

"No! No!"

"You'd be so beautiful!"

"Jessie! Take off those things. Wash your face."

"No wonder Rufus fell in love with you," Jessie cried, looking at herself in the mirror. "You're beautiful, anyway; but, fixed up like this—oh, I can just see you! It must be wonderful to be a siren—have every one raving about you!"

Alice sank into a chair, stared at the girl and let her talk.

"My grandmother uses powder," Jessie went on, "but she's never let me use any of it. I used to put some on when I was by myself, just to try the effect. But she never had any of this glorious rouge, and I never would have believed I could be so striking with my eyes darkened."

"You've put on too much," Viola Swan spoke up.

Alice Underwood, seated in her chair, heard the voice and scarcely recognized it as her own.

"Wouldn't I make a killing, if some of the boys of Rising Sun could see me like this?" Jessie pursued. "But what's the use? There isn't one of them worth going after. There isn't even a statesman or an old millionaire—except Judge Aspinwall, over in Bainbridge—and they say he's blind. New York's the place, or Chicago! That's what the author of 'Mysteries and Miseries' says. You ought to read what he says about 'beautiful and ambitious denizens of the demi-monde!'"

Jessie flung herself down on the floor at little Mrs. Underwood's side, flung her arms over the other's knees, looked up into her face.

The girl who had been Viola Swan caressed Jessie's floating hair and flashed her dark eyes out of the open window as if she had seen something out there to startle her. She was going to say something, but checked herself. Her eyes came back to the girl looking up at her.

Jessie smiled.

"When you look like that—as you did just now," said Jessie softly and hurriedly, "you seem to think—oh! such unutterable things. I'm sure that you do, Viola, dear. Don't you remember how, that first day when I asked you what your name was, you told me that it was Viola?"

Jessie put up her hand, drew the other's head coaxingly within kissing distance.

"I know that you told me not to call you by that name," she hurried on; "but you don't mind—do you, just this once? You're not mad at me, are you? because I found these old things. Oh—listen, Viola! I was perfectly sure that there was some delicious mystery connected with you from the very first moment that I set eyes on you. Tell me about it! Go on! Don't tell me that it isn't so."

"No mystery," Alice Underwood struggled into speech. "But misery, yes!"

"The two so often go together!"

Jessie spoke spontaneously, as girls will—out of the accumulated knowledge garnered from books.

Alice Underwood smiled. Again she gave a quick glance away into the distance, but she was less haunted than she had been. It was as if her mere mention of the name of misery had been sufficient to break something of the spell of Viola Swan. It was back upon her again—the memory of the misery which had been Viola Swan's portion during that brief career of hers in New York.

"There is no mystery, Jessie," she asserted again with an impulsive earnest-

ness which was little sister to a sob. "The things you're thinking about are misery—misery! Misery! Do you understand?"

"Tell me about them," Jessie pleaded with quickened breath. "I should love to know."

"There's nothing that I can tell you that every one doesn't know," Alice Underwood replied. "I lived in New York. I was poor. I learned enough to know that good people there are the same as good people here—or anywhere; the bad the same as the bad. You're speaking about sin. And I tell you that where there's sin there is misery—whether it's New York or Rising Sun. Jessie, take off those wretched things; wash off that powder and paint. Come on! I'll help you."

But Jessie didn't move. She was clinging, insistent.

"They were yours," she urged. "If you don't want them let me have them. I might want to use them some day just as you did."

"Don't say such things! What do you mean?"

"You did use them. You've always got the same sort of perfume about you. I love it. I love you. Tell me! Were you an actress in New York? Or, did you—"

There was a delicacy about the shading off of Jessie Schofield's voice which matched the pleading affection in her wide-pupiled eyes. After all the two girls were nearly of the same age. It was as if Jessie, having seen the fleeting incarnation of Viola Swan, was exerting everything she had of will and persuasion to call that incarnation back.

Alice Underwood resisted the effort with a tiny shudder.

In her heart she was repeating over and over to herself the formula:

"I am not Viola Swan. I am Alice Linn. I am the wife of Rufus Underwood. I am as my mother was before me. As my mother did I also shall live, decent and respected."

What she said out loud—not very loud—was:

"There was another girl in New York—a girl I was very sorry for—who owned these things. Her name was Viola. She lived in the same house with me."

"Tell me about her."

"She came from the country—tried to find work—couldn't find any. She suffered a lot."

"And had adventures," Jessie suggested avidly.

"I suppose that you would call them that," Alice went on reluctantly. "She wasn't bad. She didn't want to be bad. She did her best to do what was right. I know she did. I know all that she went through. I know what it cost her. I know her terrors and revulsions. I know how she lay awake at night—and sometimes in the day when she tried to sleep; and how she wanted to scream at times, and how she had to fight against the thought of suicide—how she couldn't see any other way out of the—the—"

She had been speaking more and more rapidly with a steadily mounting emotion. Suddenly, her voice faltered, her emotion got the better of her. She dropped her face forward until it rested in the crimson bow and free tresses with which Jessie Schofield had sought to make herself beautiful.

Jessie, taken by surprise, anxious to console, yet at a loss to understand, felt her head anointed by a tear.

Then before either of them could speak again they heard through the outer stillness the repeated honking of a very powerful motor-horn.

That recent experience of Alice Underwood's with the driver of the yellow car was still too fresh in the minds of both of them for the present sound to be ignored. It filled them both with consternation and sent them rushing to the window.

But it wasn't the big yellow car of evil memory this time. Alice, her tears gone, had an exclamation of relief.

There was a car coming up the Under-

wood roadway from the public pike, but it was much smaller than that other car. And it was red—a blur of crimson that smote the eye like a red hot cinder, and stuck in it as a cinder would. The little car was bouncing along with a great show of speed.

Almost before they knew it, there it was at the dooryard gate. The driver slowed up and removed his goggles.

Then both girls cried out together. They had recognized him.

The driver of the red car was Alexander Breen.

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 Whale Buster

by Ben Ames Williams



IT was upon the quarter-deck of his own stout old ship, the Annie Howsley, as she lay idle against the wharves at New Bedford, that Captain Howsley told me this story; and it is here set down, as near as may be, in his own words. For is not Captain Howsley a large man, and robust? And has he not smitten—aye, and slain—Leviathan in the waters? Who am I, then, to edit his copy? If you have quarrel with what is here set down, your quarrel is with the captain—and you are at full liberty, for all of me, to pursue it. You will find him with no trouble in the world, for all in New Bedford know him. As for myself, I am content to take it as it comes from the saturnine slit of a mouth above his rasping old whiskers, and I should advise you to do the same.

Expect no jumble of nautical phraseology in what follows, for the captain knew me for a lubber who never saw deep water save from the shore, and with such a listener, he can, when he chooses, talk as straightforwardly as you or I.

Next to Hong-Kong (said Captain Howsley) you will likely find more different kinds of folk aboard a whaler than anywhere else in the world. There 'll be a backbone of Yankee stock, and there 'll apt as not be three-four Cape Verders—harpooners and such like—and the rest may be anything from a Kanaka to an English dook.

But this p'ticular cruise, we was more that way than most. I shipped as third mate—though 'twere on a mighty long lay, account of me being still a younker

—but when time came to fly the Blue Peter and throw the try works overboard, I was first officer. A whale's flukes did for the second mate, and James Mace, first mate, died of a complaint of the digestion. I always counted it as coming from eating whale's steaks, and never could stomach them from that day. It was an ignominious demise for a man that might have been snatched into a watery eternity by a whale; and Jem felt it so, and did be wishful, come t' the end, to take out his boat and trust to suthin' happening; but the Old Man would not hear to that. So James turned up his boots in his bunk; and, we being handy by, he was buried on a stretch of beach on the Solander grounds, and had a dry berth after all.

But as I was telling; we sailed with a hodge podge, and when we'd gone half round the world and put in at the Sandwich Islands for water and potatoes, the Old Man shipped two or three spare men there. Then we ran down to the Friendly Islands, and stopped at Tongataboo, and there this man came out to us in a canoe, with natives paddling him in state like a king of the islands. He came over the rail and asked the Old Man to sign him on.

"Have ye any acquaintance with the ways o' the sea and o' ships?" the Old Man asked. Mannis, his name was—Thomas Mannis, Scotch Presbyterian, and a most unrighteous man with language when he was roused.

"Too much," says this man. "Too much acquaintance. But I'd rather empty myself into the wide, wide ocean than stay on there—" And he waved an unfriendly hand at the Friendly Islands.

"How come ye there?" the Old Man asked.

"It's a long story," says this youth; "I'll tell you as we go along."

"I do be needing a man for Mister Mace's boat," said the Old Man, half to himself. And at that this stranger stepped to the rail and waved to the natives that had paddled him out.

"Ye may go, men," he called grandly to them. "I'm leaving you."

We had ample time thereafter to hear the young man's story. He was a prey to his own loquacity; and the true distinction between a man before the mast and a ship's officer was never fully clear to him. Such matters are not always emphasized aboard a whaler so vigorously as might be; for it is not easy to keep your dignity throughout a three-year cruise. The Old Man heard his story first, and the rest of us as chance came; for it happened that for some days after leaving Tongataboo we sighted no fish, barring two that we saw tied up to the Virgin, out of Nantucket.

I set the man to work oiling the bottom of my boat, one day, and stood by to see he did a proper job. His story as he told it then was this:

He was a cowboy—a cow-puncher, he called himself. He had come from Wyoming—or Montana, maybe—and at a gathering of his kind, had won a championship in what he called bronco-busting. He said this was the same thing as riding horses. With this championship had come to him a belt.

He fumbled inside his shirt when he told me this, and produced the belt itself. It was little enough to look at—just a strip of leather, with a ribbon of gaudy colors spliced into slits in it. But it was clear from his manner of handling the thing that he prized it. He said as much.

"I'll tell you what," he told me, "I'd sooner lose my silver-mounted Mex saddle than this belt," he says. "If I had a saddle," he says.

Along with belt and championship had come a hundred-dollar purse; and 'twas that had gallied him. He'd never put a fist to that much money before; and he upped anchor for Frisco to spend it. The first night he was there he had the misfortune to go to sleep in the wrong place, and so he woke up seasick.

"And barring the month I was on that island where you got me," he says, "I haven't had the full use of a meal since."

It was true the man was amazingly subject to seasickness. And what with that, and what with the handling given him by a bucko mate on the schooner on which he had been shanghaied, he had an unhappy few months till his chance came at Tongataboo and he slipped overboard and ashore. The schooner sent a boat-load of men to hunt him all one day, but he hid till they were gone, and there he had been, living from all he said, on the strength of his smile and his quick tongue.

I have said the man's stomach was not made for the sea. That is true. Most men can get accustomed to wrestling with the heave of deep water under your keel; and though on the early days of the v'y'ge you may in a squall see the whole watch hanging over the rail to loo'ard, they get their legs in a day or so, and no more trouble.

But this man—Red Simpson, he called himself, and half of that name at least he deserved, for his thatch was the color of a whale's spout when your lance has loosed the life in him—this man was different. They tell me a horse is an unsteady craft to ride, and he, by his own tale, had ridden many and various horses, so that his legs looked as though they might have been molded over an oil cask when they were soft, but he could not get used to the deck's not staying still for him to step on. Anything above a whisper of wind meant that his last meal was so much good victuals gone wrong.

Every man has his own cure for seasickness, and every man on the ship had a try at curing Red Simpson. But Pitchpole Dawson, the chief officer's harpooner, had more perseverance than the rest. It was him that tried the blubber cure, persuading Simpson to swallow a lump of blubber with a bit of yarn bent to it. When Simpson was himself again, he swore the cure was worse than the disease, and would try nothing more that Pitchpole suggested.

The affair should have been a warning to Simpson to beware of Dawson's advice. But no. Pitchpole set himself to

initiate Simpson into the ways of whales, and he worked hard at it, running afoul of Simpson's ready tongue right along. I overheard them one day when Simpson was scraping the spanker boom under Pitchpole's eye.

"When you come whaling," Pitchpole was declaring, "you come to drag gold-mines out o' the deep with a thread. Thousands and thousands of dollars in good oil and sparm, and maybe a hunk of 'gris that's worth its weight in gold and more."

Simpson was not impressed. "A bunkie of a friend of mine ashore," he says, "he found a prospect that showed good color and sold it outright for a hundred thousand. You'll not beat that with your fishing."

"Aye," Pitchpole agreed. "But gold-hunting ashore is a woman's game—none of the stuff that puts hair on your chest. Aye, there's no game that beats whaling for a man's game."

"If it's excitement you're wanting," says Simpson, "I know a little white-eyed pinto that I can recommend. And I desire to state, my friend, that bronco-busting is no lady's game."

"Just riding hosses?" Pitchpole asked, and he laughed in a provoking and suggestive fashion.

"Why, listen," says Simpson, getting red as his hair with enthusiasm. "Listen, till I tell you how I won this belt, friend." And he reaches inside his shirt and loosens that belt and pulls it out. "See that," he brags. "Lemme tell you there's not a cow-puncher in Wyoming wouldn't give his eyes for that. But lemme tell you—"

"I come to sea to get shet of hosses," says Pitchpole. "I was bred on a farm, and I've driv hosses all my life. They're a dull pack."

With that, Simpson was all rightly het up, and he let go all fluking. "Lemme tell you," he said. "In the tournament at Cheyenne, where I rode for this belt, there was one little black horse. Just a little horse it was; and it looked all rusty

like a circuit rider's old frock coat. The first man to top this little horse, he got careless, and the little horse just hashed him all up in the barb wire at the end of the corral. He won't never even walk again—much less ride. And there was a leg broke, and two collar-bones, and the man that fought it out with me for the belt would ha' been killed if he hadn't pulled leather."

I looked to see what Pitchpole would say to that, and I saw in his eye that he had thought of something. He started to say it, and then he saw me listening, and he swallowed his word. I did not guess what it was in his mind, and the Old Man himself could not have blamed me. For it was not a thought that would have come to another man than Pitchpole. He was red-headed, like Simpson, and such men are 'unaccountable. Had I been older and wiser, it may be that when Abner Marden came to me from the fo'c's'le with words in his mouth, I would have lent him a more attentive ear. But Abner was a timorous young man, and I, being young, feared to be set down for as timorous as he.

"Mister Howsley," he said, in a confidential tone and with a watchful fear in his eye, "there's a thing you should know."

This was days later. We were slopping on a dead swell in a dead calm, and half a mile from the ship Chief Officer Mace was out in his boat with Pitchpole Dawson in the bow and Red Simpson next to him, teaching the new hand the way of his oar, and how to let the whale-line run clear when the iron went home, so that his arm should not rip from its socket, or he himself dive after the whale.

Abner's eye turned toward this boat, and I told him lustily:

"Speak up, Abner. No need to whisper. We're honest here."

Abner jerked a thumb toward the mate's boat. "I cal'lated you might just tip the word to Mr. Mace, sir."

"What word am I to tip to him?" I demanded. "Out with it, man."

"It's Dawson, sir," he tells me. "Dawson and the new man. Pitchpole, sir, is a telling that Simpson things for no good." And with that he let go all and I got the yarn.

A harpooner, you will understand, is neither fish nor fowl. He is neither officer nor man. He bunks and eats in the cabin, but he has no official status. A harpooner is apt to be an unaccountable man, and his irons are properly his sweet-hearts. Most harpooners are Islanders of one sort or another. Pitchpole was an exception, and a notable one. He got his name from the fact that at pitchpoling, the most difficult sort of a job in whaling, he was expert beyond belief.

When you are fast to a whale, your effort is to pull alongside and prod your lance into him till you find his life. But times, a whale will not sound when stricken, but will flee—and when you are towed behind a fast-swimming whale, you might better try to pull alongside one of these new oil-burning destroyers at thirty knots. Any extra pull will draw the iron and your whale is loose. In such cases the officer in the boat will take his lance and heave it at the flying whale, javelin-fashion, pulling it back to him after each cast, till a dart finds the whale's life and the spout turns red. Then you drop back and watch the flurry and the thing is done.

Dawson was a master hand at that; wherefore Jem Mace, 'stead of changing ends to lance the whale himself, was like as not, come a good chance, to tell Dawson to try his luck; and any sort of luck meant a dry killing and an easy time all around.

But that comes later; and it's only so's you may understand. Just now, Abner was telling how Pitchpole come on Red Simpson and a little knot of men in their watch on deck, and listened a spell to Simpson's yarns about his horses, and then broke in:

"Simpson man, you make a power of bother about this hoss-riding of yours."

"And why wouldn't I?" says Simpson.

"Ain't I the chempeen bronco-buster of the woolly West. You've see my belt. Ain't I got a right to talk?"

"I reckon," says Pitchpole, slow, "that you never saw a whale rode."

Simpson, with the men looking from him to Pitchpole, was took all aback; and Pitchpole goes on: "They haint told you, eh, that you have to ride your first whale in his flurry before you're a regular whale-man?"

Red's jaw dropped, and the men looked at each other and chewed on their tobacco and said nothing, while Pitchpole went on with his wild talk. Abner Marden, whispering low and fast because the mate's boat was coming in and he had no wish for Pitchpole to hear what he said, told me how the man had expounded his jest to Red Simpson; how Simpson was told that when they came alongside the whale for the lancing, he was to board the monster and grip the line where it was fast to the iron, and so hold on through the flurry.

"He told him," Abner groaned, "that a whale only swims once or twice in a circle, and then just dies—that all he will get is a wetting. But the man Simpson will be killed, Mister Howsley," says Abner.

"He'll not," I told Abner, "him having brains to refrain from the attempt."

Abner shook his head. Pitchpole, he said, had derided the man, taunting him with his horse-riding, till Simpson was brought to the point of an oath that "No fish as ever was could unseat him." Abner said the new hand would surely try to do the trick.

I considered, briefly; and having no wish to be the subject of mirth for treating with seriousness so extravagant a jest, I decided to hold my tongue. So I but laughed:

"If Red Simpson can board a whale in his flurry, he can ride him. It's no more apt than that he should board an albatross on the wing." And with that, the mate's boat approaching the ship, I turned to look that way, when down from

the masthead floated the hail we had not heard in days, the hail that was to bring matters about our heads too quick for my interference, even if I'd been so inclined.

"Ah-h-h-h-h blo-o-o-ows!" hailed the masthead man. "Thar she blo-o-ows! Thar she white waters." And as the Old Man bounded up from the cabin and into the mizzen rigging—"Off th' port bow, sir."

In the whip of a flying sheet every soul was on deck, and the boats' crews at their places and ready. Jem Mace and his crew were off the port bow, and he backed water and swung around, so that when the Old Man from half way up the rigging caught through his glass the far, faint glint of the whale's white breath across the glassy swells and waved the boats away, the mate had a long start on the rest of us.

As the senior officer, he had precedence in any case; but I was always wishful to get an iron fast, and I humped my men along best I knew how. The second-mate's boat was abreast of me, and we made a pretty race of it at first. But lacking wind, our sails were no manner of good, and with a straightaway row of eight-ten miles ahead of us, our pace soon slowed down to reason. We'd made three or four miles, and I could catch sight of a spout now and then ahead of us, when from the mate's boat came Jem Mace's hail:

"Thar she goes."

I caught a flicker o' flukes as the whale went down, and made it out for a fine, lone bull, heading due for us. So we went ahead till we figured to be near him when he should come up again, then laid on our oars waiting for Old Blubber to finish his last supper down below us somewhere and come up to the irons.

You can most generally figure pretty close on a whale. Let him alone and he'll come up, regular, for his breath of air, and go down again. He'll make about the same number of spouts every time he comes up, and he'll stay down about the same length of time while he's down. This

period under water runs from forty-five minutes to twice that. Likewise a whale under water usually moves straight ahead on the line he took when he went down; and when he's feeding that way he travels about two miles an hour. So it's straight-off mathematics to work out where he'll come up, and be there or thereabouts a waiting for him.

A whale-boat 'll ride most any weather, but it's an unsteady vessel and hard on weak stomachs. The three boats of us slopped around on the dead swells for an hour, and once I see Red Simpson, in the mate's boat, getting rid of his feelings over the side. Just the wobble and glide of it had upset him. It was midafternoon, and a hot sun, and the water had that coppery, slimy, slick look it gets in a calm. If 'twa'n't for the wind it gets the ocean would be a stinking pool of a place.

The long waits for a whale to come up was always hardest on my nerves, p'ticularly when I was younger. I'd always get to wondering where he'd rise, and who'd get fast, and whether he'd fight or go easy, and whether we'd have stove boats and stove heads or a dead whale and no bother. Whales are uncertain. I've seen them lie and take the lance and go out with no more than a ripple of flukes—more p'ticularly cows with calves under their fins. Once in a while an old bull will do the same.

Then again he'll whirl around and smash boats with his flukes or splinter them between his jaws, and leave every man of you swimming midst the wreckage—or worse off. I wondered now what would happen when this fellow finished his supper; and I thought of Red Simpson and wondered if—once he saw the bigness of the whale—he'd stick to his promise and mount the beast. And about that time the mate's boat shot away from us, and we saw the big fellow's spouts a quarter of a mile away.

He waited for us, spouting slow and regular as a clock ticks. Half asleep, he was, and lying so low in the water that

the slow swells broke clear over him, his shiny black back from head to hump showing in between. He lay right awash as we made for him. Jem Mace was no hand to take chances with a long cast, and as I came up on the far side of the whale from him, I saw his boat was right on top of the big fellow. They fair rubbed sides, the boat and the whale, before Jem shouted to Pitchpole Dawson:

"Peak oars now, and—let him have it!"

Dawson dropped his oar in a whiff, whirled, set his knee in the rest, grabbed the iron from its rack, and with all the heaving power of arms and back and thigh, drove it down and home into that low-rolling carcass.

Jem sheered the boat off as the slack line went overboard, and for a space there was a hush upon the waters while we waited for the whale to run. I was coming up by then, hopeful of getting home an iron for good measure. Jem had started forward in his boat to change places with Pitchpole; but when the whale still lay there like he hadn't felt the barb, Jem yelled:

"Take the lance, Dawson. Stick him."

And with that he turned back again and grabbed the steering oar and twisted the boat onto the whale. Pitchpole grabbed up a lance where it lay ready to his hand, and drove it home and drew it out and thrust again. Then Jem swung them clear of the whale; and across a rod of open water, Pitchpole let fly the third time, and the razor-edged probe socked home into the whale like a spear.

And that try found the life, the great blood reservoir of the beast. Before, he had wallowed dully in the wash of the swell, but not now. A minute later I was glad we were clear of him.

For as the lance pierced him the monster rose up out of the deep with the water roaring under the flailing of his fins and flukes. Up he came like a tremendous cask suddenly released; and

he came up, rolling over and over side-wise toward the mate's boat, spurred into blind endeavor to be rid of the dreadful torment that had found him out.

Jem had no chance to dodge. You can avoid a whale that comes head on—sometimes. But you can't get out of the way of a sixty foot steam-roller that comes a mile a minute at you. It made a fearful mess. When Pitchpole had sent home the iron, he had cast loose the slack line; and the water between the whale and the boat must have been full of the tangle of it.

When the whale, rolling like an avalanche, smote the boat, it caught Jem and Dawson standing, the others in their seats; and it crunched them down out of sight, while the whale went over the boat like a typhoon.

As he rolled over them the whale sank, and a second later he came up with a dart like a train surging out of Hoosac Tunnel, and he came up running. His first fright was fury now; while his spout, like pure blood, streaked back along the length of him in a crimson river.

And it was when he came up like that, the water swirling back along his sides, that I saw the man on his back. Just forward of the hump, he was, and just back of the harpoon shaft, clinging to the line, right astraddle of the whale and all sprawl across his back.

I said no word, but I prayed a prayer for the fool soul of Red Simpson, who had swallowed the yarns of Pitchpole Dawson and had mounted the whale in his flurry to prove he was what he would never be—a whaleman. But I had time for no more than a whisper of a prayer; for the second mate's boat was coming up on the other side to pick up the men in the water, and I swung my boat that way to help.

But the whale thought different. He had started away in a big circle against the sun, the great head of him lifted out of the water, and blood and froth whipping in behind and smothering from

sight the man clinging to the harpoon there. Then, as I started to cut across his wake, he made a quick whirl and came back straight at me.

I knew he could not see me, me being straight ahead of him, and his eyes being set, as you might say, on opposite sides of the house and not facing the front at all. The blunt bows of him were like a battering ram fifteen foot across; and his mouth was gaping wide with the long lower jaw, with its double row of curved teeth, hanging all but straight down, ready to crunch home on anything that came handy. Seeing that mighty thing coming I trembled, but at the last moment safely swept my craft out of his path and to one side as he plowed past.

His wash all but swamped us; and it might as well have finished the job. For as he passed, from his wicked little eye, he saw us; and he gave a flirt of his great bulk, and his flukes swung up beneath us and rapped the bottom of our boat so that boat and all went into the air. We were knocked clear of the water and over and over, every man flying forty ways.

Even at the minute his flukes hit us I caught a glimpse of the red head of Red Simpson, half-smothered in the swirl of waters across the whale's back. But I had no time for more than the glimpse. The whale did not bother with us after that. There was no need. I swam to my boat and found the whale's blow had opened up the bottom of it like a wicker basket. The men got the oars across the boat and tied down to the thwarts, and there we sat in the water to our necks, gripping the oars for dear life and waiting for help.

I recollect that Hiram Tolley says to Abner Marden: "Why didn't you pay your washwoman, Ab?" The old notion among whalemens is that stove boats mean laundry work owed for by some one in the boats. But joking didn't hit my notion at the minute; and I snapped:

"Stow that, Tolley. There's Simpson

fast to that whale's back and maybe dead by now."

The men whirled to see, and the boat settled and cut off all our wind for a minute before we drifted to the surface again. "Set still, now," I bawled at them. And they did; but we all watched that whale, catching a glimpse now and then of that man still hanging there. The whale was swimming half on his side, like they're apt to do in the flurry; but Simpson seemed to manage to keep uppermost.

"He'll be drowned," I says to myself. "And you're to blame for it."

The second mate's boat had picked up Jem Mace and his men. They must have been a quarter of a mile from us, and no chance of their taking us aboard with the load they had. But I looked around for the ship, and I saw good news. She'd caught a breeze and was coming right down wind to us. That meant less bother when the whale was dead.

For the whale was dying, though slow. It couldn't have been more than a matter of seconds since Pitchpole Dawson pitchpoled home the lance that did the trick; and it couldn't have been many minutes to the end. But thinking of that man riding the whale made it seem as long as a whole cruise.

You might have thought the whale knew the champion bronco buster of Wyoming was aboard him. It looked like he set out to give a real performance. I've seen one of these Wild West shows since then, and I know more about broncos than when I first heard Red Simpson talk about them. But I wish to state this whale made a bronco look right feeble. He had all their tricks and some few of his own; and when he tried theirs, he improved on them by just the difference between a half a ton or so of horse and a hundred tons or so of whale. He'd swim in a racing circle for a minute, then go zig-zagging around, shaking the great head of him like he'd shake it off—like a trout fighting the line—then

he'd fairly gallop through the water in a smother and turmoil of spray and blood and froth. And every little while we'd catch one glimpse of that rag of humanity a sticking to him.

"He couldn't hold on through all that," I says. "He must be caught in the line."

But anyway, there he was. Once in so often, you come across a whale that dies extra hard. This was one of them; and the worst came at the end.

Our stove boat was like a grand stand seat to see it all. And the whale hung close to us. I could see him weakening; and all of a sudden he whirled and come our way, and without thinking I yelled:

"Starn all. Oh, starn all!"

A lot of good that did, with us under water to our noses. If he'd kept coming, he'd have splintered us like a rock splinters glass.

For a minute it looked like he'd do just that. Head out he came, and hell for leather. And then, when he was five-six rods away, I saw him settle in the water and I knew what was coming.

The next minute he was gone under, out of sight; and the minute after that, uplifting himself to the sky as though for mercy in the agony of giving up his life, with one tremendous, final stroke of his great flukes he flung his whole, gigantic bulk clear of the sea.

I saw him arching, as it seemed, almost above our heads; and for a space that was like eternity the stupendous mass of him hung suspended there. Then down he fell and struck the surging swell with a cracking, battering uproar and an impact that sent over us a wave which bore us down and down till I thought we would never see sun again. When I had kicked free of the boat and gasped and clawed and fought my way to the air, and breathed, there was the whale's great carcass, lifeless now, surging slowly past under the momentum of his last, terrific effort to shake off the irons that drained his life away.

The wrecked boat and my men drifted

to the surface; and then, within arm's length, came floating by that section of the whale where his hump lies. The leviathan had turned on his side, so that his hump was toward me; and just above it I saw the man's figure stretched limp as old clothes.

I saw, the same moment, that a noose in the line a foot from the harpoon had caught his arm and held him there. One whip of my knife freed him; and we dragged him across our knees in the wreck of our boat. My profane relief to hold even his lifeless body safe again was surging from my lips when, as I turned the body face uppermost to give the breath of life a chance, I saw—

The man who had ridden the whale in its flurry was not the cowboy—but Pitchpole Dawson, his tormentor.

Once explained, the thing was simple. When the whale rolled over the mate's boat Red Simpson forgot any thought he may have had of trying the outrageous feat to which Pitchpole had incited him. But by a strange and ironic circumstance, a noose in the loose line floating in the water, caught Pitchpole's arm at the elbow and tightened there.

Through that tremendous flurry he had struggled to free himself, till his merciful senses left him. Instinct kept the breath in his body during those periods when he was totally immersed. His stout jacket's sleeve saved his arm from anything worse than a tremendous strain and chafing. The tough fiber of the man asserted itself; and by the time the ship came up and we had hoisted him to the deck, he was able to stand erect, though wearily.

Red Simpson, however, during those minutes when from the second mate's boat he had watched the whale's manner of dying, had fully comprehended the strenuous nature of the joke Pitchpole had planned for him. I could not blame the man when, as he came face to face with Pitchpole on the deck, he evened things. For from within his water-soaked garments he produced that treasured belt, emblem of his hard won championship, and pressed it into Pitchpole's shaky hands.

"Take it, pal," said Red Simpson, all too heartily. "Take it. You've earned it. I'll take a chance at bronco-busting; but as a whale-buster, I take off my hat to you."



MY SONGSTRESS

BY GEORGIA M. McNALLY

DID you borrow the skylark's magical throat,
 When you sung the soul of me into your song?
 Did you fasten a sunbeam into the note
 That sped like a shaft of flame along
 The chords of my being, and trembling hung
 Like an unshed tear or a song unsung?

Else how did you dream I was waiting for you
 To thrill me and lift me up to the heights,
 Out of the depths of the infinite dark
 Into a dream world of beauty and lights?
 The lilt of the thrush is in your heart true—
No one could free my soul but you!

Pearls of Passage

by M.T.L. Addis

WE take pleasure in introducing to you M. T. L. Addis, a new and promising writer. This fascinating story is of an American girl in the Paris of Just-Before-the-War, and the startling adventures that were hers because of a bit of highly justifiable rebelliousness.—THE EDITOR.

CHAPTER I.

MISS ADVENTRESS.

IT was a beautiful night in early June. The fragrant darkness of a summer night had fallen upon the city of Paris; however, on the boulevards it was almost as light as day, and a constant crowd of people passed in and out of the cafés, or sat at small tables outside. At a little table in front of a café upon the Boulevard Clichy, Montmartre, a well-groomed young man sat and indolently sipped a cup of coffee while watching the rather boisterous crowd—mostly foreigners—who were endeavoring to get at the “true inwardness” of Paris as exemplified by the Rat Mort, the Bal Tabarin, and kindred establishments, at the mention of which a true Parisian will often remark, with a shrug, that they are maintained solely to gratify the expectations of American and English visitors.

The solitary observer at the little table must suddenly have noticed something of unusual interest, for he hurriedly beckoned to the waiter, paid his bill, and joined the passing throng. The slight

delay thus caused now made it necessary for him to hurry, and he threaded a passage through the leisurely crowd of pleasure-seekers, with an occasional murmured apology, until he was directly behind a young girl with copper-colored hair.

Certainly her appearance, unattended, was sufficiently bizarre in that locality, and especially at such an hour of the evening. She was dressed very quietly in black, but with the *chic* which is the gift of Frenchwomen and Americans alike. She had not, however, that mysterious and provocative *allure*—that atmosphere of intrigue—which seems to be the distinctive heritage of the Frenchwoman.

She was distinctly out of place in her present surroundings, and those few who noticed that she was alone gave her a momentary glance of surprise. But most of the units of that gay crowd were far too engrossed in their companions and the evening's enjoyment to waste any time upon others.

The girl, unconscious of any espionage, threaded her way through the crowd, glancing occasionally at the doors of

various establishments, where were stationed men whose office it was to enumerate loudly the attractions to be found inside.

She darted into one of these places, which we will call the Café des Brigands, and was immediately followed by her unobserved attendant, who had involuntarily given a low exclamation as she entered. A bowing waiter ushered her to a table at which a girl was already seated, and, with an involuntary glance behind her, the newcomer sank into the seat indicated and turned her face toward the stage.

Meanwhile the young man who had followed her had obtained a seat at a near-by table, where also sat a very décolleté lady.

It is unnecessary to describe the stage performance in detail. However, it may be said that it partook of the nature of an optical illusion. A member of the audience was invited to take a vacant chair upon the empty stage, and the humor of the thing consisted in the fact that, by an arrangement of mirrors, a lady in incomplete costume appeared to come upon the stage, seat herself by the novice from the audience, and make overtures to him, of which he was entirely ignorant, and the more he gazed about him, plainly wondering when the entertainment was to begin (what time the incompletely robed lady was rendering her costume still more incomplete), the more the audience roared with laughter, to his great astonishment.

At this point the young girl who had entered alone rose hurriedly and made for the door. Her departure was by no means unnoticed, for she was immediately followed by two gentlemen—the first a black-bearded individual, and the other our first acquaintance. The trio reached the pavement almost at the same moment, and the black-bearded individual was just murmuring facetious and rather personal compliments in the ear of the young lady, whose arm he was endeavoring to take, when a courteous voice interrupted him with:

"Pardon, *monsieur*, but I'm escorting this lady."

With a rain of equally courteous excuses and bows—directed, however, wholly at the gentleman—the black-bearded one removed himself, and the victor, to give color to his statement, offered the lady his arm, which she took in a species of stupor.

In silence they walked until they reached the Rue d'Amsterdam. Then the young man addressed his companion for the first time.

"Do you speak French?" was his first question, delivered in English.

The young lady stole a glance at his severe countenance, and replied, also in English: "Not very well."

"Ah! Then, if you will tell me your address I will call a taxi and have you driven there."

She stopped suddenly.

"But I can't go back yet!" she announced; "I—I'm not expected back until eleven-thirty."

"But you can't walk about the streets for two hours!" he protested.

"I could go to the Y. W. C. A.," she mused; "that is where I was supposed to go, and—"

Her escort laughed.

"Why are you laughing?" she demanded, with an evident disposition to be offended.

"Because," he answered, "it is a far cry from the Café des Brigands to the Y. W. C. A., and I'm sure you would be bored there! If you must kill time until eleven-thirty I would suggest that you come to some quiet restaurant where you will not be recognized, and dine with me—for I also have to kill time! I'm afraid I cannot offer you the attractions of the Café des—"

"How could I tell what it would be like?" she interrupted. "Please don't mention it to me again!"

"It was rather fortunate that I followed you in," he said seriously. "Probably you would have come to no harm, but you laid yourself open to annoyance.

That man was not to blame! What on earth made you go there, and is there nobody to look after you and prevent your doing such things?"

"Why did you follow me in?" she questioned.

"Well, I noticed you, and I saw that you—had no business here at this time of night, and perhaps it is scarcely more prudent for you to be in the company of a man you have never seen before, and who—but you're certainly as safe with me as you would be in the Café—"

"Don't!" she cried again. "I am so dull here! I work all day, and I thought there would be no harm if I just went out and explored a little by myself!"

"But—a thousand thunders!—couldn't you have chosen another locality? Why, my dear child—"

"You forget yourself!" she exclaimed.

"Well, then, my respected miss—my venerated companion—"

The girl laughed.

"Perhaps it *was* an error in judgment," she admitted. "There is a *soirée* at the Y. W. C. A. this evening, and I was invited to it. Madame, at my pension, said I ought not to go alone in a taxi even from door to door; but of course, being an American, she does not expect me to behave with any propriety, so I started—only I told the cocher to drive me to the Rue St. Lazare, and I walked from there. I've got a map here!"

"A most potent protection! How long have you been in Paris?"

"Two months."

"Two months! And you know no better than this! But all's well that ends well, so will you come somewhere with me and dine? In for a penny, in for a pound! You may as well be hung for a sheep as a lamb. And there's no use spoiling the ship for a ha'p'orth of tar! If I knew any more proverbs to the same effect, I'd quote them!"

The girl gave him an appraising glance. Somewhat subdued by her late adventure, the spirit of mischief still survived in her blue eyes. She laughed lightly.

"Yes, I'll come," she said recklessly. "Didn't I come out for adventure? I am very grateful to you. Won't you tell me your name?"

A slight shade of embarrassment seemed to change his expression.

"My name is Fraser," he told her. "Where would you like to dine? It had better be a quiet place, in case some one sees you and tells your fellow *pensionnaires* that you are not at the Y. W. C. A. Here's a taxi!"

"No one I know is likely to be dining out," she declared; and he suggested the Café Voisin. Soon they were established at a table in that restaurant, and were surreptitiously examining each other with the interest of new acquaintances.

"My name is Templeton—Enid Templeton," volunteered the girl.

A waiter handed each of them a menu at this moment, and conversation was cut short.

Mr. Fraser helped his guest to translate such of the menu as she could not understand, and they ordered a dinner, with the help of the waiter. Enid selected *escargots en huile*, among other items (which, being interpreted, is "snails in oil"), rather to Fraser's consternation.

"But do you like them?" he asked her aside.

"How can I tell until I try?" she returned, in the same tone. "But it would be absurd to come to Paris without eating snails."

"Another manifestation of your passion for local color! Here they come."

The waiter returned with a metal plate in which were small circular depressions, each containing a snail. Enid involuntarily recoiled from them, but the waiter demonstrated the correct manner of seizing the shell with an implement for that purpose, while extracting the snail with another implement.

A few minutes later, correctly interpreting Enid's expression, the attendant removed the snails, and Fraser inquired:

"Did they come up to your expectations?"

"Beyond them," she replied with a slight shudder. "I'd rather not talk about them."

"Certainly not," he agreed. "That makes two subjects that are taboo."

The remainder of the dinner proved excellent, and while Enid was enjoying a peach she looked up suddenly to find her host regarding her with an odd expression.

"I was just thinking," he explained with a half-smile, "that few people would guess, from our appearance, that you had been visiting the Café des Brigands alone, or that I am a fugitive from the law!"

Enid's eyes opened widely.

"That is not true!" she exclaimed. "You are joking!"

"No, it is true—unhappily! Oh, I give you my word of honor that I have neither stolen anything nor murdered any one, but there it is. I shouldn't have mentioned it, however, if I were not reasonably certain that I have eluded the sleuths."

He leaned back and smiled.

"Didn't you come out for adventure?" he inquired. "I was sure you would enjoy the joke."

"A doubtful joke!" she murmured, still uncertain whether or not to believe him.

"Only if they get me," he pointed out. "Don't be alarmed, Miss Templeton. I shall not involve you in my sad fate—but really, it would be no more than you deserve if you should be arrested in company with me—for—for uttering counterfeit notes, or something of that kind!"

She looked up, startled, but did not speak.

"That is not my specialty," he assured her with a smile. "And now, if you are to reach home by eleven-thirty, we had better start." And he nodded to the waiter.

A few minutes later they were driving down the Avenue de l'Opera. It was not the shortest way to the Rue la Boetie, where Enid's *pension* was situated; but

Fraser had explained that he wished to buy a box of chocolates for her, in order that she might have a souvenir of her visit to the Café des Brigands in company with a fugitive from the law.

Having purchased this, they returned to the taxi, giving the *cocher* instructions to go to the Rue la Boetie.

A silence had fallen upon Enid since Fraser's declaration—which she still half-doubted—that he was flying from the law, for she began to realize that her movements that evening might well have involved her in a most unpleasant predicament; and as the taxi sped along little was said on either side. Suddenly Fraser spoke.

"I am leaving Paris to-night," he said. "And after saying so much I owe you an explanation. After I am out of the wood, may I write to you?"

He did not wait for her answer, for the taxi had stopped, and he assisted her to alight. He took careful note of the street number as they approached the heavy door by which the courtyard was entered, while the taxi waited at the curb. Fraser paused, with the bell of the *concierge's* bell in his hand.

"What did I do with your chocolates?" he said, as he hurriedly felt in the pockets of his overcoat. "Ah, here they are! But what an idiot I am! I must have rung the bell!"

Indeed, as he spoke, the door, manipulated from the *concierge's* lodge, swung slowly open.

"Do go, Mr. Fraser!" hurriedly exclaimed Enid, taking the package. "If the *concierge* should ever mention that I came home with a gentleman I don't know *what* would happen!"

Fraser withdrew, laughing, and reentered the taxi, and immediately Enid stepped into the courtyard, turning for a last glance at the vehicle, which, however, had already turned a corner out of sight.

She shut the door precipitately as a second taxi raced by, dreading that it might contain some acquaintance who had seen her arrival.

Her shoes made a terrible noise on the flagstones as she crossed to the staircase which led to *madame's* flat; and her voice, as she called out her name to the *concierge*, sounded shrill and night-owlish to her own fancy.

She made her way as quietly as she could up the brightly polished and slippery oak stairs to the third floor, noiselessly inserted her key in the outer door of the flat, and reached her room, deciding to try if one of the souvenir chocolates would not banish a feeling of depression which was already stealing over her.

But when she had lighted her oil-lamp in the rather depressing little room, with its polished floor and odorous fur rug, she found that she was destined to at least one disappointment that night; for, stripped of its paper wrapping, the package proved to be a highly ornamented cigarette-box.

With a disgusted exclamation Enid broke the gummed paper which secured the lid. But the box was utterly destitute of either chocolates or cigarettes. Instead, it contained some cotton-wool and about a handful of unstrung pearls.

Fatigue and sleepiness forgotten, Enid stared at the pearls for a moment. She started toward the door, but recollected that by that time Mr. Fraser must be far away.

Then she began to review what he had said in the jesting manner which seemed habitual with him—that he was a fugitive from the law; that she deserved a severe lesson for her imprudence. And yet Fraser had seemed very much of a gentleman, and she could not believe that he wished to implicate her by leaving these jewels with her.

He must have felt sure of having eluded pursuit, and that she would not be suspected of having them in her possession. The visit to the bonbon-shop must, then, have been part of the plot to get them into her keeping.

But the action had an element of cowardliness in it that Enid was very un-

willing to attribute to her new acquaintance, and she refused to consider it for the present. It was much more likely that the box of pearls had been handed to her in error, and if so Mr. Fraser would certainly claim it as soon as he discovered the mistake.

With the resiliency of youth and health she determined to dismiss the matter from her mind until the morning. But first she looked round for a hiding-place for the pearls, realizing that they must be of considerable value. She finally put them under her pillow, and, almost too tired to undress, was soon asleep.

Morning came, and with it the familiar appearance of Marie, the *bonne*, at Enid's bedside, with chocolate served in one of the enormous cups used for that purpose in France. By this means Mme. Durand broke gently to her *pensionnaires* the tidings that it was time to get up.

Usually this libation brought Enid no more inspiring thought than the one that she must dress and be at the office which she shared with Miss Macfarlane by nine o'clock, where she would remain, with an interval for *déjeuner*, until five in the evening.

But to-day she awoke to the consciousness of her responsibility for a certain box, which she hastened to make certain still remained under her pillow; and she utterly failed to respond as usual to the lively French girl's flow of colloquial French, with which she delighted to plumb Enid's ignorance of the language.

Oblivious of Marie's crestfallen departure, Enid sipped her chocolate and pondered upon the selection of a more permanent place for the pearls.

Her imprudence of the previous evening had been a semiconscious revolt against several months' unutterable boredom. Her brother, Robert Templeton, had recently perfected a device which was of great importance in aerodynamics, and he had brought her to Europe for a tour which was to combine business and pleasure. But no sooner had they settled in a private hotel in Russell Square—that

Mecca of middle-class Americans in London—than he was hurriedly called to Petrograd in connection with his invention.

Enid was left to await his return in Russell Square, and while there she had become acquainted with Miss Macfarlane, a Scotchwoman of middle age, who had for many years kept a translation and copying bureau in Paris.

Enid's own education had included a course of typewriting and stenography, and Miss Macfarlane's suggestion that she should accompany her when she returned to Paris was eagerly seized upon by Enid, who, bereft of Miss Macfarlane's kind interest, foresaw a very dreary sojourn in Russell Square until her brother should return from Petrograd.

Miss Macfarlane had assured her that her very small knowledge of French would be an inconsiderable drawback, in view of her large number of American and English clients, and since she herself spoke French fluently.

This latter assertion was perfectly true, and it is not given to many persons to achieve the extraordinary vowel sounds which resulted from the grafting of French upon Miss Macfarlane's Glasgow Scotch.

Consequently, at the present time Enid was staying in a *pension* quite as dull as the Russell Square boarding-house had been, there not being sufficient room for her in the small room at the back of the office which constituted Miss Macfarlane's domicile.

Miss Macfarlane was one of the kindest women in the world—the least censorious and the least inquisitive—but this morning, after considering the affair from every view-point, Enid decided that it was impossible to avail herself of that lady's advice in regard to the box of pearls, because in order to do so the whole story of her visit to the Café des Brigands and her subsequent acceptance of an invitation to dinner by a perfect stranger must of necessity be revealed. But it was manifestly impossible to carry the pearls

continually about with her, or to leave them in her room when she was absent from it.

What could she do with them?

It suddenly occurred to Enid that one of Miss Macfarlane's customers had spoken of a deposit-vault which he rented at the offices of the American Express Company.

Enid was kept adequately supplied with funds by her brother, in addition to her earnings, and she supposed that she could meet the cost of such an arrangement, whatever it might be. She determined to at least inquire.

Accordingly she wrapped up the box of pearls in paper and tied it into a very ordinary package, and, taking a taxi, was soon in the Rue Scribe.

Fifteen minutes later she emerged from the office of the American Express Company with a mind considerably relieved.

For her absence from the *soirée* of the previous evening she knew she would not have to account to Miss Macfarlane, for she had made her preparations for her adventure in advance and had only given a conditional promise to attend.

To Miss Macfarlane, working quietly as usual, Enid seemed greatly preoccupied, and often, upon being addressed, she started violently. The Scotchwoman noticed, too, that whenever the door opened Enid seemed to suffer apprehension.

The reason for this was that it had now occurred to Enid that if Mr. Fraser had really given her the box of pearls in mistake he would naturally go to her address—unless he had started on his journey before discovering his error—and, being informed by Mme. Durand that she could be found at the Rue Caumartin, would proceed there; and then at his first words Miss Macfarlane, who, as she constantly reminded the girl, stood *in loco parentis* to her, and who knew that she had no acquaintances beside herself and her fellow *pensionnaires* in Paris, would at once insist upon being fully informed.

Taken by surprise, Mr. Fraser would

be certain to utter something damaging, and then Miss Macfarlane would write to Robert, who would remove her from Paris. Worst of all, he would never trust her again after such an exposure.

But nothing happened that day, nor on many days following, and Enid regained all her outward placidity, although Mr. Fraser's continued silence could not but confirm the idea that he had been perfectly aware of the contents of the package, which placed him in a very unfavorable light.

Once or twice, with a furtive sense of criminality, she visited her safe-deposit vault, and, unwrapping the box, reassured herself that the pearls were undisturbed. She gave herself up to wonderment as to their history, and Mr. Fraser's connection with them, and she often speculated upon the probability of their being claimed by some one, should she die suddenly and the safe-deposit receipt be found among her papers, and the alternative of their remaining the object of dark conjectures to her friends.

CHAPTER II.

A VISITOR.

ALMOST a month had passed, and one evening, as Enid was returning from the office, Marie met her with the tidings that a gentleman awaited her in the salon.

"A gentleman?" repeated Enid, with an unpleasant palpitation of the heart, and thankful that Miss Macfarlane was not an inmate of the pension.

"But yes, *mademoiselle*, a gentleman!" repeated Marie interestedly.

A gentleman, short, rather stout, and exuberantly bearded—the very antithesis of Mr. Fraser—rose from a chair as she entered and bowed profoundly.

"Miss Templeton?" he inquired with a strong French accent.

"I am Miss Templeton," answered Enid, indicating a chair and seating herself.

"My name is Benoit," he commenced, handing her a card upon which that name was engraved.

"M. Benoit," murmured Enid, trying to assure herself that the misgiving she had felt from the first moment was without foundation.

"*Mademoiselle* is acquainted with a Mr. Vernon?" began M. Benoit.

"No, I know no one of that name," said Enid, a load lifted from her mind.

"It is possible that you know the gentleman under another name?"

M. Benoit suddenly produced a photograph and presented it to Enid. She glanced quickly and fearfully at it, and then exclaimed, thankfully:

"Oh, no!"

"*Monsieur* wore a mustache at the time this photograph was taken, as *mademoiselle* sees," explained M. Benoit. "Doubtless *mademoiselle* will recognize him better clean-shaven," and he produced a second photograph.

The second photograph was a snapshot showing several passengers alighting from a train, and needed but a glance for Enid to identify one of them, whose face had been turned directly toward the camera, as Mr. Fraser. A small cross had been drawn in ink above this figure.

If M. Benoit were a physiognomist he must have seen that Enid recognized the marked figure, but he inquired, while restoring the two photographs to his pocket-book:

"*Mademoiselle* recognizes that face?"

She answered his question with another, astonished at her own courage.

"May I ask the reason of these questions?"

"But certainly, *mademoiselle*. I am from the prefecture of police." And M. Benoit slightly showed a badge upon his waistcoat.

Enid's heart beat so violently at this announcement—although she had half expected it—that she felt it must be audible to M. Benoit. She was silent.

"*Mademoiselle* recognizes that face?" M. Benoit repeated suavely.

"Yes, *monsieur*," admitted Enid.

Monsieur took a small note-book from his pocket and consulted it.

"I think you dined with him at the Café Voisin upon the sixth of last month?" he continued.

"I do not recollect the exact date," faltered Enid mendaciously.

"You were seen by two persons," suggested M. Benoit. "Was your acquaintance with *monsieur* of long standing?"

Enid blushed hotly. This was the question she had dreaded.

"*Mademoiselle* need not be alarmed," said M. Benoit soothingly, "these questions are necessary as a matter of form, but they will not implicate *mademoiselle*. Besides, we know that *monsieur* wore a mustache as late as the third of last month, and his aspect, thus, was not familiar to *mademoiselle*. Therefore"—and he smiled—"it is reasonable to conclude that *mademoiselle* was unacquainted with *monsieur* until after he shaved, which was on the fifth, when this picture was taken, for he left Paris on the sixth."

M. Benoit looked mildly at Enid, as she sat with her hands tightly clasped.

"I can even tell *mademoiselle*," he went on, "where she made the acquaintance of *monsieur*. It was at the Café des Brigands, was it not?"

Enid started up, and he made a deprecatory gesture.

"Pardon, *mademoiselle*, I do not tell you this to cause you embarrassment—*mademoiselle* has a right to do what she pleases—but merely to show you that it is useless to try to hide anything from me."

Foremost among Enid's very unpleasant sensations was the conviction of being in a net from which she could never hope to escape—a net composed of her own unbelievably imprudent actions. M. Benoit's knowledge of these actions did not, however, surprise Enid. She had lived long enough in Paris to know of the wonderful "dossier" system by which the French police keep track of every individual.

This information, while not used unnecessarily, always exists, and is obtainable when required. It was Enid's misfortune to have stumbled upon such an occasion.

Not the least of her troubles, though a transient one, was the knowledge of what must be this Frenchman's opinion of her. No girlish indiscretion could possibly explain her actions to him. There would be, in his code, but one explanation. A Frenchman was totally incapable of appreciating that spirit, similar to that which prompts small boys to play truant from school, which had influenced her on that memorable evening.

Still, even while she writhed under M. Benoit's observant eye, she was upheld by the knowledge that, after all, she had really done nothing unpardonable, in spite of appearances.

M. Benoit frowned slightly. To him, as Enid well realized, she was simply a girl who was ashamed to have her illicit love-affairs dragged into the light of day, and who might thus hamper him in arriving at results. It was no part of his plan to embarrass her, and if he could have elicited the necessary information without touching upon her affairs, he would have done so, for he was simply concerned with that which he was commissioned to do. He may possibly have thought, also, that a lady so reckless might well have done with embarrassment.

"*Mademoiselle* crossed from New York about three months since, did she not?" he resumed.

"Yes, with my brother," answered Enid.

"Ah, yes, with your brother," repeated M. Benoit apologetically, waving a plump hand, "that is not my business, *mademoiselle*."

Enid realized, with horror, that he did not believe in the relationship.

"My brother has gone to Petrograd on business," she said tremulously, keeping back her tears with difficulty.

"But, *mademoiselle*," said M. Benoit

indulgently, "that does not concern me. That gentleman—*mademoiselle's* brother—did not come to France at all. He went to Ostend from London, and thence to Russia, and my business is not with him. *Mademoiselle* herself came to Paris with another lady, is it not so?"

"Yes," murmured the almost weeping girl.

M. Benoit stirred uneasily in his chair.

"*Mademoiselle* need not distress herself," he murmured. "To return to M. Vernon. He was seen to hand to *mademoiselle* a small package."

It had come. Enid gathered her faculties together.

"It is true," she answered, bracing herself.

"And the contents of that package? *Mademoiselle* does not care to answer? I can tell her. It contained pearls to the value of five hundred thousand francs."

"Well, *monsieur*?"

Enid's cool tone apparently surprised M. Benoit. He shrugged his shoulders after a brief but earnest scrutiny of her face.

"Well, *mademoiselle*, I am empowered to get possession of these pearls, and if *mademoiselle* will hand them to me, I can answer for it that she will not be molested in any way, or even asked any questions. There will even be—" he hesitated, as if choosing his words carefully—"a considerable compensation offered to *mademoiselle*."

"But—but—" Enid was slowly feeling her way to an argument, having partially recovered from what she considered was the worst blow that could fall upon her.

"May I ask why you claim them?" she asked at last.

"Because their rightful owner has deputed me to do so," he answered at once.

"But how can I be sure of that?" inquired Enid, rather surprised at her own temerity, and wondering in a detached way how she dared argue with the representative of the law.

"Truly, *mademoiselle*," replied M. Benoit, in a manner that indicated that his patience was at an end, "it is not profitable to discuss this further. Either you will hand the jewels to me, or—"

"You will arrest me?"

M. Benoit seemed troubled.

"*Mademoiselle*," he said after a momentary hesitation, "I have no authority to arrest you—at present—but I can assure you that it will be far better for all of us if you will hand over those pearls, and I will see that they reach the right person. I will give you a receipt for them, and *mademoiselle* will remember that a compensation was offered."

Enid hesitated, and shook her head impatiently, dismissing the question of compensation with a gesture which made M. Benoit shrug his shoulders again. A receipt would not be at all likely to console Mr. Fraser for the loss of the pearls, supposing he had the shadow of a right to them. Also, did M. Benoit *really* come from the police?

This last question caused her to say:

"*Monsieur*, I will tell you what I will do, if you like. I will go to the prefect of police with you, and I will tell you in his presence where the pearls are."

"But that would result in publicity, which my client is most anxious to avoid," objected M. Benoit instantly, "and you yourself, *mademoiselle*, can it be that you desire to attract so much attention?"

"Why should your client fear publicity?" she inquired, with a calmness which astonished herself. "We will leave myself out of the question."

"Excuse me, *mademoiselle*," replied M. Benoit, suave as ever. "I do not think I employed the word 'fear.' I spoke of my client's wish to have this distressing matter settled quietly, which is explained by his lofty position."

Somehow the information that the client of M. Benoit did not desire any publicity—although this assertion seemed rather incongruous with the affair being in the hands of the police—weakened his

case in Enid's eyes, while it relieved her from any fear that her own misdeeds would yet be made public property. While she was saddened by the thought that she had been made the scapegoat of such an affair by a man whom she had instinctively trusted, yet her feeling of responsibility was enough to make her decide to keep the pearls until perfectly sure she ought to give them up, and this assurance, owing to his client's delicacy, M. Benoit seemed at the moment unable to give.

"M. Benoit," said Enid suddenly, "I do not understand why you did not force Mr. Vernon—if that is his name—to give up the pearls when you knew he had them. Instead of making photographs of him, I should think your client would have been better pleased if you had concentrated upon the pearls. Besides, why have you left this matter so long after his departure?"

"There are many matters of law, doubtless, that are not clear to *mademoiselle*," said M. Benoit, polite as ever, yet somehow giving Enid an impression of great wrath; though, much to his credit, he passed over her impertinent reference to the photographs as if it had never been uttered. "Are you fully decided not to give up the jewels?"

"I will keep them for the present," she answered, her new-found courage almost deserting her.

"Very well, *mademoiselle*, I have done my best. *Mademoiselle* is mistaken in retaining possession of these jewels. One day she will acknowledge it."

With this enigmatical observation M. Benoit bowed himself out, leaving Enid to construct an explanation for his visit, which she knew would be eagerly anticipated at the *table d'hôte*; for rarely, indeed, was the *pension* (advertised by *madame* upon her cards as "*Pension pour dames*") profaned by the presence of a man.

Deciding that she would explain him as a client who had urgent work for her, and who—adopting M. Benoit's phrase—

desired to avoid publicity, she went to her room to dress for dinner.

Next day Miss Macfarlane noticed in Enid a return of that unaccountable nervousness which had aroused her anxiety a few weeks previous, and she almost determined to find out exactly how her protégée spent the hours after she left the office. But she was not acquainted with Mme. Durand, and the situation required diplomacy.

On Enid's return to the pension she encountered Mme. Durand, who remarked to her:

"Ah, if *mademoiselle* had only told me her trunk needed a new lock, I could have recommended to her a little locksmith who would have charged her but a moiety of the amount she has doubtless paid."

"But my trunk needed no lock!" exclaimed Enid in astonishment. "He must have mistaken the number."

"*Mademoiselle* doubtless forgets! The locksmith came this morning, and said he had been ordered to renovate the trunk of Mlle. Temple-tonne! Ah, it was easy to see he was no skilled workman, sending Marie for first this thing and then for that, as if the girl had nothing to do but wait upon him!"

"But, *madame*, wait a moment!" Enid, struck by a sudden suspicion, hurried into her room and examined the trunk. It was true that the lock had been taken off, but the same one had been replaced, and not very skilfully, the leather showing the marks of sharp tools and general carelessness.

She raised the lid. Everything was in confusion, as if desperately hurried hands had ransacked it. She opened the doors of her wardrobe, the contents of which she found to be in the same state, and turned to *madame*, who had followed her, and whose stream of ejaculations continued to flow. It was plain that the locksmith had made good use of his time while Marie was absent upon his various errands.

"A thief!" exclaimed *madame* in a

high key. "But, *mademoiselle*, it is incredible! *Mon dieu!* Such a thing has never happened to my pension before! Never, *never* do I allow any one to remain alone in the rooms of my *pensionnaires!* I told Marie—the good-for-nothing!—to stay here while the man worked, but *voyns!* It was 'Fetch me this!' and 'Fetch me that!' and—"

"It does not matter, *madame*," interrupted Enid, who had made a rapid survey and found nothing missing. In fact, she had not expected to do so. It was clear that some one, probably M. Benoit, abandoning for a time his policy of avoiding publicity, or some person sent by him, had expected to find the jewels there. "Do not distress yourself, *madame!* The man was a thief, no doubt, but Marie must have always have returned in time to prevent his taking anything."

"Nothing is taken? That is good, *mademoiselle!* But it is incredible, all the same. The man inquired for Mlle. Temple-tonne! I will inquire of the *concierge*—"

And *madame* hurried off, voicing her amazement and consternation until out of hearing.

Her departure was a relief to Enid. She wanted to rearrange her ideas a little, in the face of this open attack. Her good sense told her that the French police would not employ any subterfuge if they wished to search the apartments of a suspected person, and she regretted that she had not examined more closely the badge which M. Benoit had so impressively indicated.

But in any case Mr. Fraser could not be whitewashed. He had put her in a frightful position.

She tried to look at the mysterious affair from all possible angles, and evolved the following theories.

First: Mr. Fraser—whatever his name might be—had stolen the pearls, had found himself pursued, and had handed them over to her, leaving her to deal with the pursuers. But why should he give them to her in plain sight of any one who

might be interested enough to conceal himself in any of the convenient nooks near Mme. Durand's pension, or simply to follow in a taxicab? Also, why, if Mr. Fraser had stolen the stones, did not the persons who had followed him take the pearls from him when they were known to be in his possession?

Second: A band of robbers—of which Mr. Fraser was a member—had stolen the stones; he had endeavored to escape with the whole booty, and, thinking himself in danger, had left them with her until the peril should be over, feeling sure that she had not been seen with him, and would therefore not be questioned. But the same questions applied equally in this as in the above theory.

Third: Mr. Fraser had assured her that he had neither robbed, murdered, nor uttered counterfeit notes. Therefore he might really have a right to the pearls. But why should he be flying the law if not on account of the pearls?

Fourth: Mr. Fraser might have given her the box of pearls entirely in mistake for the box of chocolates. But why was he carrying five hundred thousand francs' worth of pearls in his pocket, and why had he not returned for the pearls when he found out his mistake?

Then there were many loose threads which did not fit in with any of these theories. Several times Enid almost decided to go to the prefect of police, deliver the pearls to him, and tell him exactly how she became possessed of them. She was always brought up short by the recollection that the story of her meeting with Fraser must be told again, no matter how well-known it might be by her auditor.

Besides, the pearls were perfectly safe where they were, and since M. Benoit's visit, Enid had been careful not to give a clue to their whereabouts by again visiting the American Express Company.

Mme. Durand reappeared to submit her report of her interview with the *concierge*. The locksmith, it appeared, had entered as any one else might, asked for

Miss Templeton, and had been duly directed to the Durand flat. Cross-examined, he had looked just like other locksmiths.

Enid assured her it was of no consequence, but the matter was prominent for several days as a matter for *table d'hôte* conversation at the *pension*.

Miss Macfarlane continued to theorize upon Enid's manner, just as Enid herself was occupied by theories upon her own situation. Her preoccupation prevented her from noticing the Scotchwoman's shrewd scrutiny, but Enid was so unused to concealment that she could not fail to show traces of her distress, and Miss Macfarlane, summing up her behavior of the past few weeks, almost decided to hint to Robert Templeton, by mail, that his sister showed symptoms of homesickness for the unequaled climate of California.

CHAPTER III.

AT THE GRAND HOTEL.

NO letter came from Mr. Fraser, and Enid wondered continually how long she would be left in possession of five hundred thousand francs' worth of jewels. Meanwhile, letters from her brother informed her that his business was nearly completed and his return near. Their arrangement had been that as soon as he should be at liberty they should carry out their original plan of leisurely visiting as many of the interesting places in Europe as they could afford.

She had thought of mentioning to Mr. Fraser the possibility of her leaving before he could write her, but the fear of seeming too eager to hear from him had kept her from doing so. But now Robert had written her that it might be necessary for them to return at once to the United States, and defer their tour until later.

Enid, on her way to the Grand Hotel one afternoon—called by a customer who wished to have some very private papers copied—felt sad at the thought of her im-

pending departure from Paris. Her brother would not consent to her remaining there indefinitely without him, and on her return to Los Angeles she would go back to her uneventful routine of keeping house for him in a charming but confining apartment.

In the elevator at the Grand Hotel, while being borne to the fourth floor, she enviously wondered what it would feel like to be a guest at this popular hotel. If those jewels were her own, how quickly she would convert them—

The elevator stopped, and a moment later she stood in the antechamber of a private suite. A man servant had carefully closed the door behind her, and now opened for her the door of another room, furnished as a sitting-room. A gentleman rose from a writing-table as she entered, and she exclaimed:

"Mr. Fraser!"

The gentleman smiled.

"Allow me to introduce myself as Sir Arthur Lloyd," he said, with great urbanity of manner. "Fraser is—or was—my name, but I have recently taken the name of Lloyd in order to fulfil a condition by which I inherit an estate. The gentleman whom you know as Fraser has no right whatever to the name; his own name is Vernon—unless that is also an alias, which is quite likely, from what I know of his character! But won't you sit down?"

Enid had started as she heard the name Vernon, which had been so often upon the lips of M. Benoit. She had already seen that although extraordinarily like Mr. Fraser (as she continued to call him in her mind), there was little resemblance in the actual features of the two men. That is to say, between them there was a strong superficial resemblance, which would almost disappear on acquaintance—and Enid remembered the face of Fraser with surprising correctness.

"I thought perhaps it would suit you better to secure an interview in this way than to call upon you," continued her host, "though I regret having caused you

a journey." And with the utmost politeness he handed her a chair.

It was not hard to guess why Sir Arthur Lloyd had arranged this interview, and again Enid was agitated by the question of what she ought to do when he asked—as he undoubtedly would ask—for the pearls. However, she need certainly not be afraid that anything could happen to her in the Grand Hotel—that most commonplace and matter-of-fact of hostelryes.

"Perhaps you know why I have sought this interview?" pursued Sir Arthur, looking intently at his silent guest.

"I suppose it is on account of the jewels which M. Benoit asked me to give up to him," she replied, taking the bull by the horns.

"Yes," he admitted, "and though you very naturally hesitated to deliver them to him, I think that you will have no objection to restore them to me, when I enlighten you a little as to Mr. Vernon's possession of them." He paused. "It is not very much to his credit, but I suppose the temptation was very great, and, thanks to my own indiscretion, I had left the way perfectly clear for him.

"But all this is unintelligible to you, Miss Templeton, is it not? I will tell you, first of all, that my parents, who were remotely connected with a wealthy English family, went to California when I was a child, and died in very poor circumstances. I was helped after their death, and got a fair education. I spent some years in France, engineering, and then I went to Mexico three years ago, where I got acquainted with your friend, Mr. Vernon—or 'Fraser,' as he does me the honor of calling himself. Both belonging to English families, we became friendly.

"One day I discovered through an advertisement that through a succession of deaths I had succeeded to a title and large estates in England, with the condition attached of taking the name of Lloyd as my own, or adding it to my own name of Fraser. I communicated with the law-

yers who were advertising for me, and intended to come to England, but I fell ill, and your friend, to whom I had imprudently told all this, seized the opportunity to go in my place and represent himself as the heir.

"He resembles me to a certain extent, and the lawyers were misled by this resemblance to the family and by his being in possession of so much information, and were actually induced to let him get hold of some of the property, including the pearls which I understand you now have.

"As soon as I could travel I came to England, wondering what had become of Vernon. I soon found what had happened. He had already decamped—naturally, he knew he could not keep up the deception when I appeared—and all he wanted was the pearls. I got upon his track, although a little too late, and I have had enormous difficulty in proving my identity to those fools of English lawyers.

"Now, the rest of the things I don't care about, but I do want those pearls!"

Enid hesitated. This tale fitted in only too well with the facts as she knew them, and yet she felt she needed time to think the matter over. Sir Arthur misunderstood her hesitation, and said eagerly:

"I don't expect you to give them up for nothing, of course. You understand that you could not sell them—they are well known—but if you will restore them I will gladly make it worth your while! Men in my position don't care to have a scandal the moment they step into an estate like this, and that is why I make this informal offer."

His eagerness was, however, defeating its object. Discrepancies and inconsistencies, which she could scarcely tabulate, disturbed as she was, still suggested themselves to Enid. The thought took shape in her mind that if this tale were genuine, there could be no need of so much maneuvering. Suddenly she said:

"But it seems to me that the search which was made in my room might very well have resulted in a scandal!"

Sir Arthur started violently, and the paper-weight he had been nervously handling rolled from the writing-table to the ground.

"What?" he exclaimed incredulously. "A search of your rooms was made?"

"Yes, certainly. Did you not know it—did not M. Benoit order it to be done?" Enid was a little shaken by his evident surprise, which, if not genuine, was excellently acted.

"I? Certainly not! What sort of search? By police?"

He spoke with unfeigned anxiety.

"No—I don't think so. By a man who said he came to repair my trunk. He ransacked my room."

"And the pearls?" he asked quickly.

"Oh, they are safe?"

"But where are they?"

"They are quite safe!" she repeated coolly.

Sir Arthur ran his hand impatiently through his hair, and there was a short silence.

"Well, Miss Templeton," he resumed, "I can assure you that this is the first I have heard of it. It was certainly a most foolish and most dangerous proceeding! I can only surmise that some private detective agency employed by Benoit—but why did I not think of it before! Miss Templeton, has Vernon ever tried to get the pearls back from you?"

Enid stared at him in surprise. At last she said:

"No. If he had asked me for them I should have given them up, for I believed them to be his property."

Sir Arthur looked at her dubiously.

"I thought—" he explained—"it struck me that he had perhaps endeavored to get possession of them, and that perhaps you had not been able to agree upon a compensation—and so—"

She stared up indignantly.

"This is altogether too much!" she cried, and turned toward the door.

The manservant, who had stood impassively at the door during this conversation—evidently obeying previous in-

structions—quietly locked it. Enid turned to Sir Arthur, not yet frightened, but bewildered and angry.

"Unlock that door, please!" she said in a low tone.

"Excuse me," said Sir Arthur shortly, "I went to considerable trouble to bring you here in an unobtrusive manner, and I shall detain you until I obtain the information I want!"

He was either becoming too angry to continue—or had deliberately abandoned—the courtesy with which he had at first addressed her, and this circumstance strengthened her in her decision to hold her ground.

"You have no right to detain me," she answered with considerable spirit, "and above all, no right to insult me!"

Sir Arthur had come nearer to her, and he appeared for the first time to notice her beauty. His eyes roved over her with an expression which alarmed her more than a threat would have done, and he smiled disagreeably as he noticed how she shrank under his gaze.

"These heroics are entirely wasted on me," he observed. "Sit down, Miss Templeton!"

"I will stand!" she said frigidly.

"But you oblige me to stand in that case," he said mockingly, "and I always like to be comfortable. Now listen, Miss Templeton, and be sensible. I have treated you with all possible respect, and you need not put on tragedy airs because I mention monetary transactions between you and Vernon. I don't want to know anything about those transactions, but—oh, the devil! I know he quarreled with some Frenchman about you, outside the Café des Brigands, and that you dined alone with him afterward, and so—we're not children, you know, and there is no necessity to put on all these airs with me!"

The girl sank into her chair, her face crimson. Her eyes filled with burning tears and she bit her under lip fiercely.

"Candidly, don't you think Vernon's behavior has been caddish in the ex-

treme?" he pursued. "He is not much good, I admit, but there is something positively ghoulish in making love to such a pretty girl, to make her an innocent accomplice in a jewel robbery! For I do you the justice to believe that you *were* innocent to that extent. Come, be reasonable! You will never see him again. He understands very well that the game is up! Now, what do you want for them, my dear?"

He was again standing by her chair, and could see how she leaned away from him.

"Don't be afraid!" he smiled, "it will be with me as with him—business first!"

Enid made a strong attempt to recover herself. Had not this man some measure of justice in his opinion of her? The extent of her folly seemed ever widening. It had caused this man to throw off entirely the mask of politeness he had at first assumed, and to speak to her as he would have spoken to the lowest of her sex.

Still her decision to support the man she had known as Fraser grew stronger—not because she believed him blameless, but because of her innate gratitude to him for having treated her from the first, in spite of appearances, as if he believed her to be worthy of respect. She could not—probably never should—understand why he had involved her in this affair, but she felt that she owed him something.

Sir Arthur was speaking again.

"You want a little time to think it over? Ah, well, dine with me, either up here or down-stairs, where, I'll swear, you won't see another woman as pretty as yourself!"

"I couldn't do that," she said desperately, although some idea began to occur to her that down-stairs, among the other diners, she might get a chance to escape.

"Are you afraid some one will tell the lady at the typewriting office?" he asked, laughing. "You were not so particular the night you dined with Vernon—and the Grand Hotel is quite as respectable as the Café des Brigands!"

Enid had been glancing about her, and decided that there was no possible escape for her without Sir Arthur's permission. Finally she said:

"I will dine down-stairs, if we can find a quiet place."

"That's very sensible. Only don't try to get away, because I want to settle this matter at once, and if you do, I shall be forced to make it unpleasant for you. Do you know how?"

She did not reply.

"I should merely have you stopped and say that I met you on the boulevard and invited you here, and that you had tried to rob me! That would not be pleasant for you, Miss Demurity? Of course you would disprove it, but there would be a spectacular scene!"

"You would dislike the publicity as much as myself," she retorted with white lips.

He looked at her, rather disconcerted.

"You are right, in a way," he said glibly. "No man in my position wants to figure in such a scandal as that would be! You are a wise little lady! All the same, you mustn't rely too much on my modesty, for I assure you I intend to get my property back. Dine here with me, and then I will drive home with you and get the jewels! If this doesn't suit you, I shall simply keep you with me until you are reasonable. Of course, I realize that I can't keep you here indefinitely—the good lady at the Rue Caumartin would come after you, and there would be complications. But there are ways and means—as my man there can assure you!"

"Come to the prefecture of police," said Enid suddenly, "and I will do exactly what he advises. You ought to find no fault with that."

He shrugged his shoulders and smiled.

"It is too late, and you know it. We will go in the morning, if you like, but you understand that I should not let you out of my sight to-night. And that reminds me—Masters, telephone to this number, and tell them that Miss Templeton won't return to the office, but will go straight

home. That gives me plenty of time!" he added, turning to Enid, who heard, with horror, the impassive servant telephoning Miss Macfarlane as directed.

She made up her mind, however, to consent to dine up-stairs, and, when the waiters came, she would raise the alarm, and in spite of a possible scandal, would at all events be relieved of this man's presence. She forced herself to laugh lightly.

"No, I shall not run away," she lied, "but I have changed my mind. I will dine up here!"

Somewhat suspicious of her change of front, Sir Arthur signified his approval of her decision. Instead, however, of telephoning his dinner order, he called his servant, who came, emotionless as a statue, and without even a glance at Enid. He listened in silence to his master's orders, which included several wines.

When the man had left the apartment, Enid restlessly walked to one of the mirrors, and began arranging her hair, regardless of Sir Arthur's mocking assurance that it looked charming. Her reason for this movement was that an electric light switch was thus between her and the door, and while she had no means of knowing whether it controlled all the lights—as the room was already lit up when she first arrived—she was planning upon an attempt at flight by its means.

Soon a soft footfall was heard in the corridor and the door opened. With one bound, Enid reached the switch. The room became perfectly dark, and, after colliding with the bewildered servant at the door and upsetting his tray, she found herself in the dimly lighted corridor. She did not turn her head to see the two in pursuit, but dashed madly along, stifling her hysteria.

A chink of light at the side of a door caught her eyes—she dashed at it, it yielded, and she slammed the door and bolted it. She had chanced upon a service-room—fortunately empty, except for the towels, sheets, et cetera, arranged on shelves. She sank down inside the door,

almost helpless, but collected herself by sheer strength of will, for there was no time to be lost.

With eyes darting from side to side like those of a cornered animal, Enid found another door. She dragged herself toward it. The key was in it, and she softly turned it, and opening the door, found herself—after a cautious glance on each side of her—upon an almost dark service staircase.

Straightening her dress with trembling fingers she descended the stairs for what seemed to her a never-ending period until she found herself upon the lowest floor. There she explained to a puzzled employee that she had lost her way. He directed her to an exit, which she reached without accident.

A moment later she was safely inside a taxi, bound for the Rue la Boetie.

CHAPTER IV.

FRASER AT LAST.

"**D**RINK this, *mademoiselle!* It is a *tisane* of camomile, which I have made myself. After you have taken it you will sleep, and in the morning you will no longer have cold."

Mme. Durand, stout and good-humored, stood at Enid's bedside with a generous glassful of some decoction, the odor of which filled her with the most doleful anticipations. She tasted it, and found that the odor was to the flavor as the light of a match is to that of an arc lamp. She glanced from the glass in her hand to *madame*, who beamed upon her and nodded.

"Drink it all, *mademoiselle!*" she urged.

"You are very amiable, *madame,*" murmured Enid, "and if I may leave it on the table until it is cooler, I am sure it will do me good."

"But it must be drunk hot as the tongue can bear," protested *madame*, and a few moments later she tiptoed out of the room, carrying the empty glass.

Enid had reached the pension in a condition of collapse which could only be plausibly explained by illness, and *madame* insisted upon her immediate retirement to bed, and had guaranteed to restore her to health in twelve hours on the condition that she followed her instructions implicitly.

As the door closed behind her, Enid shuddered again, and then smiled. The *tisane*, she supposed, must be added to the already long list of punishments for her escapade.

But it doubtless possessed all the virtues *madame* had ascribed to it, for in a short time Enid was asleep, and so soundly that she did not hear a whispered conversation outside her door, nor was she aware that the door opened shortly afterward to admit Miss Macfarlane.

Sir Arthur had erred on the side of overprudence when he instructed his servant to telephone Miss Macfarlane, for the message had the effect of at once intensifying certain qualms which that lady had had as to the propriety of such an attractive girl as Enid being sent to any client who was not absolutely above suspicion. It had often happened that Enid had undertaken such duties, but she had invariably returned to the Rue Caumartin for the purpose of making a report, before going to her pension.

As soon as Miss Macfarlane could close her office, she did so, and (doubtless repeating to herself that she was *in loco parentis*) had hurried over to the Grand Hotel, meaning to meet Enid if she had not already left. There, upon making inquiries, she was informed that the gentleman in suite No. 517 had only rented it for that day, and had already left, and that the young lady who had called to see him that afternoon had, after losing her way upon a service staircase in some incomprehensible fashion, called a taxi and driven away.

Miss Macfarlane, greatly disturbed, and showering abuse on herself, was then driven to the Rue la Boetie, where she was immensely relieved to hear that Enid

had returned. *Madame* described her discovery of *mademoiselle's* illness, her consumption of the *tisane*, and her subsequent gratifying slumber. The *concierge* had also testified that *mademoiselle* could scarcely mount the stairs, and that she had come home in a taxi.

Noiselessly Miss Macfarlane entered Enid's room, and, continuing her self-reproaches, prepared to wait until Enid should awaken. Soon she was startled by the girl's voice.

"I would sooner believe him than you!" she exclaimed vehemently. But the sound of her own voice awakened her, and she sat up, half dazed in the dim lamplight, and peered across the room.

"Who is that?" she asked in a low voice, full of dread.

Miss Macfarlane went over to the bed.

"It's only I," she said cheerily. "I got anxious about you, and came here to see what was the matter. Why didn't you come back, child? Your taxi could have gone there in a few minutes, and saved my worrying myself to death about you."

"I didn't think of it," faintly answered Enid, "and I felt so ill!"

Miss Macfarlane frowned. Enid's manner, in conjunction with what she had heard at the Grand Hotel, made her sure that she was concealing something from her.

"I blamed myself for letting you go there alone," she said. "I thought, afterward, perhaps some one had been rude to you."

Enid did not answer. Hardly herself as yet, she felt that any admission of the truth must lead to further discoveries.

"Was there much work to do?" pursued Miss Macfarlane.

Enid started.

"Yes—no! He decided not to have it done," she faltered.

"But he paid in advance for the afternoon!" exclaimed Miss Macfarlane. "I told him it was not necessary, but he persisted."

And she looked at Enid searchingly,

who, overcome by this discrepancy, made no reply.

"I called at the Grand Hotel," continued Miss Macfarlane, "and he has already given up his suite. It is very strange!"

Enid remained silent, and Miss Macfarlane, observing the set expression of her pretty mouth, rose and patted her hand clumsily.

"I won't stay now," she said, "but if you don't turn up to-morrow, I'll come to see you again. Go to sleep if you can."

But, as the door closed behind her, Enid silently resolved that the morning should find her at the office as usual, because a chance conversation between Mme. Durand and Miss Macfarlane might reveal the fact of M. Benoit's visit, and should *madame* mention that Enid had represented him as a client, Miss Macfarlane would certainly (*in loco parentis!*) insist upon getting to the bottom of so incomprehensible an occurrence.

She did not ignore the probability of Sir Arthur Lloyd's entrapping her into a second interview, for it was not likely that he would relax his efforts to recover the pearls. She was now convinced that he had as little right to the pearls as Fraser himself. The most puzzling feature of the whole affair was Fraser's continued silence.

But one thing was certain: Miss Macfarlane's threatened visit must be averted.

Indeed, as it was, Miss Macfarlane was far from satisfied, and as she journeyed back to the Rue Caumartin, she reflected that she had done well, a week ago, to write Robert Templeton that the air of Paris did not suit Enid, and that the sooner he finished his business in Petrograd and removed her from that fascinating city, the better it would be for her health.

"A telegram for *mademoiselle!*" cried the *concierge*, as Enid, at the usual time next morning, passed the *concierge's* lodge. Disregarding *madame's* remonstrances, and entreaties that she would

stay in bed at least until noon, she had risen at her usual hour, and was now starting for the office.

She took the telegram with the conviction that it was from Robert, announcing his immediate arrival, but when she opened it her expression changed. It ran:

Have urgent need of box entrusted to your care. Please despatch by messenger to Hotel Athenée.

FRASER.

Enid thrust the message into her handbag, and stepped out into the Rue la Boetie. Mechanically she motioned to a taxi driver, with the intention of being conveyed to the American Express Company. When they were fairly started, she reread the message with an odd feeling of disappointment mingled with relief. The laconic nature of the message somehow wounded her, but, as she looked at the words, "entrusted to your care" they suddenly assumed a new significance.

The box had not been "entrusted" to her care. It had certainly been left with her, but the word entrusted was obviously misused.

No one in possession of the facts would be likely to use that word in connection with the box of pearls. But neither M. Benoit nor Sir Arthur Lloyd were in complete possession of the facts; they had both assumed Enid's acceptance of the trust, and nothing she had said had undeceived them, and the telegram undoubtedly emanated from one of them.

Enid directed the driver to stop at the nearest telegraph office, and sent off the following telegram:

Will only relinquish box to prefect of police or Fraser in person.

If the message were genuine, her reply was only a wise precaution; if it were spurious, it was doubly a wise precaution, and with her heart considerably lighter, Enid repaired to the office.

"What! Up already?" exclaimed Miss Macfarlane, gazing at her rather pale face.

"I was tired of that stuffy little room," explained Enid, as she hung up her hat,

"and we were to have *boudins* and Brussels sprouts for lunch—I could smell the Brussels sprouts cooking—and I prefer the smell of typewriter ribbon! I enjoy our lunches in your little room so much better, too!"

"I'm afraid we shall not have it in my little room to-day," said Miss Macfarlane dryly, as she watched Enid, "because we are invited to the Grand Hotel."

"The Grand Hotel!" exclaimed Enid, her face coloring. "By—by whom?"

"I'm afraid you didn't enjoy your visit to the Grand Hotel," Miss Macfarlane said quietly. "Why won't you tell me all about it?"

"There's nothing to tell," stammered Enid, "except that I felt unwell. But who has invited us?"

"Well, I have news for you—the best of news," said Miss Macfarlane. "Your brother arrived in Paris this morning."

"Robert?" exclaimed Enid uneasily. "But why didn't he let me know?"

"Can't say, I'm sure," returned Miss Macfarlane gruffly, "but he came in a great hurry—said he had to go to the War Office, and would be back to take us to the Grand Hotel for lunch."

"Oh."

Enid turned to her work, disturbed by this news. One thing she was certain of—her position was by no means improved, and would not be until Robert and she were started upon their homeward journey—and yet the box of pearls ought to be given up to some responsible person before she left Paris. But to whom?

Again Enid began to regret that she had not taken her troubles and the pearls to the prefect of police. Judge her how he would, at least she would not have to hear his opinion of her delivered every hour of every day.

As for Miss Macfarlane, she not unnaturally thought that Enid was involved in some compromising *affaire du coeur*, and while she could not exactly reconcile this with what she knew of the girl's character, yet she knew enough of the world to believe that anything was possible—even

the impossible—which is a mistake that very worldly-wise people sometimes make.

At twelve o'clock Robert arrived. He was a tall young man who seldom smiled, and who took life rather seriously. His aspect was more than usually solemn this morning, and had Miss Macfarlane not already ascertained that he had left Petrograd before her letter had had time to arrive, she would have feared that her hints had been too disquieting.

Robert had, indeed, received news of a disquieting nature, but it was of international rather than of domestic importance, and his present anxieties were directed toward the successful conclusion of his business in Paris and the immediate securing of steamship accommodation to America for his sister and himself.

They elected to take luncheon in the winter-garden at the Grand Hotel, and Enid, who at first had almost been afraid to look around, gradually forgot her troubles in her interest in the scene. The subdued sound of silver and china in contact blended with the confused murmur of voices and the discreetly hushed band, and this, and the slowly moving figures of visitors arriving and departing, or seated at tables, all seen indistinctly among the palms, created an atmosphere of unreality for Enid.

She had, at the moment, a sense of gliding, as in a dream, amongst dangers which, for the moment, had no power to affect her.

This was only the second time that she had been entertained at any public restaurant while in Paris, and she could not help contrasting this occasion with that at the Café Voisin, which, curiously, did not seem nearly so far removed from her as the troubling event of only yesterday at this very hotel.

She was aroused suddenly from a dreamy analysis of all this by Robert's voice.

"I shall know to-night if we can get them," he was saying, "and if so, you'll have to pack at once."

"Pack?" she repeated, staring at him.

"Yes—pack," he reiterated. "The Marraine leaves to-morrow, and we'll have to pack to-night if I can get the tickets."

"I'll help her pack, Mr. Templeton," interposed Miss Macfarlane, who, relieved from her responsibility now that Robert had arrived, had almost forgotten to observe Enid.

"I can pack in an hour—no one need help me," protested Enid; "but I didn't quite understand! You mean that we have to leave Paris to-morrow?"

"If I can get the tickets we may have to start to-night. What's the matter with you, Enid? Haven't you been listening?"

"Nothing," she murmured in reply, "but all this is surprising."

Her absence of mind was partly accounted for by the necessity with which she was suddenly confronted of getting the pearls from the American Express Company that afternoon. The raid upon her room Enid had supposed, since her interview with Sir Arthur Lloyd, to be a little *faux pas* of M. Benoit's. It had served the purpose of proving, however, that the pearls were not in her room, and if Sir Arthur Lloyd was the sender of the telegram of the morning, it was probable that either he or some one deputed by him was watching her movements, and she knew that some finesse was necessary to obtain them without suspicions being raised. Also, she had Robert to evade.

As she mechanically replied to her brother's questions as to dessert, she began to plan for the removal of the pearls.

"If you will put me into a taxi, Robert," she said, "I will go to the *pension* and get my things together now, and then you can call for me—or I can meet you somewhere—for dinner—and Miss Macfarlane, too," she added, turning to that lady.

"But why pack until I am sure I can get the tickets?" objected Robert.

Enid laughed. "I am much too excited to work," she said, "and I have a feeling that you will get the tickets. At the worst, I can unpack! That is much better than being rushed."

She carried her point, and it was arranged that Robert should call for her at the *pension* at five, after which they would dine with Miss Macfarlane. Their further movements would be determined by Robert's success or inability to procure the tickets.

With a sigh of relief Enid at last found herself in a taxi. The offices of the American Express Company are almost at the door of the Grand Hotel, but Enid was forced to allow her taxi to reach the Boulevard Malesherbes before she directed the driver to turn back by a different route.

As she entered the office she glanced round, but as far as she could discover she was not followed. She asked in a distinct voice for information regarding the transatlantic sailings for the coming week, and then, seeing that no one stood near, stated her errand.

The box containing the pearls was of a size easily slipped into the pocket of the wrap she wore, and she emerged from the office apparently absorbed in the steamship circulars with which she had been supplied, and reached her taxi without molestation. However, she did not breathe freely until she had reached her *pension*. Having locked the door of her room, she opened the box and gazed once more at the pearls. To whom did they really belong, and what would be their ultimate fate?

She spent the remainder of the afternoon packing, in case the tickets should be obtainable; for above all things she dreaded a prolonged visit from either Robert or Miss Macfarlane, and had determined not to keep them waiting a moment when they should call for her. At any moment another telegram or a letter might arrive for her, the contents of which she would be most unwilling to show to either of them, and she could not give directions to *madame* or the *conciierge* to deliver any message to her privately without arousing their curiosity, which might become vocal at the wrong moment.

When every conceivable preparation had been made for the journey, Enid stood

at her window and looked down into the courtyard, into which she had so often gazed with feelings of the most profound boredom—wondering, indeed, how she could support another day of the unutterable monotony which had been her portion in Paris. It had been in one of those moods that her memorable excursion to Montmartre had been planned.

She had from her window a good view of the *concierge's* lodge, and after a few moments she saw the postman enter the courtyard, and after a rapid conversation with the *concierge*, depart, having left some letters with her.

Enid had often run down to ask if there was any mail for her, and she did so now, without any special interest in what the mail might contain, for all her expectations were centered in a possible telegram.

But the *concierge*, on her inquiry, peered into her dark little arrangement of pigeon-holes, and produced a letter, which she handed to Enid. The writing upon the envelope was in an unknown hand, and Enid instinctively sought the shelter of the staircase before opening it.

The first sentence convinced her that her suspicion of the authorship of the telegram received earlier in the day was correct.

The letter ran:

DEAR MISS TEMPLETON:

You have perhaps wondered why, after anxiously asking for your permission to write you "when out of the wood," I have not done so until now. I cannot assume any interest on your part in letters from me, but I must explain my silence for my own sake. An hour or two after leaving you, something happened which convinced me that I had been seen when with you, and I restrained my impulse to write you frequently, so that if you should be questioned in any way about me, you could truthfully say that you knew nothing of my movements since seeing me.

The thought that I had unconsciously exposed you to the chance of such unpleasantness has weighed upon my mind more than anything else since I saw you, and I shall not feel easy until I hear that nothing of the sort happened, although the very nature of the occurrence to which I allude makes it very likely that you would have been bothered.

All my affairs are now settled, and I hope to soon have an opportunity to explain to you my mysterious—and, I fear, melodramatic—actions and utterances (both spoken and written).

I shall be at the Hotel Ritz about as soon as you get this, and I shall anxiously await a line from you, telling me where and when I may see you. Will you address your letter to me in care of Sir Arthur Lloyd at the Ritz Hotel?

Very sincerely yours,

A. FRASER.

But she had no time to wonder over this letter—and especially its last paragraph—or to feel surprised that no mention whatever had been made of the pearls, for at that moment she heard footsteps in the courtyard, and, looking out from the doorway, saw Robert. She hurriedly slipped the letter inside her blouse and went to meet him.

"It's all right!" he called, as he caught sight of her, "but we shall have to leave for Havre to-night! Are you ready?"

"Yes, quite," she replied, as he followed her up the stairs. The events of the day had succeeded each other so rapidly that Enid had not altogether recovered from the feeling that she was in the middle of a nightmare, and that everything was to be accepted without question or surprise.

However, the one thing that seemed real to her was that Fraser—was that really his name, and what did "A" stand for?—was to be at the Hotel Ritz shortly, in care—wonder of wonders!—of Sir Arthur Lloyd, and that by that time she would be on the *Marraine*, bound for New York.

CHAPTER V.

HOMEWARD BOUND.

IN a few minutes she found herself introducing her brother to Mme. Durand, who, alternately smiling with gratification in acknowledgment of the introduction, and sighing in despair at the approaching departure of one of her favorite *pensionnaires*, still retained sufficient presence of mind to make out her bill.

A taxi was called, and Enid's baggage brought down into the courtyard, where she still had to face an affecting farewell with the *concierge* and her husband.

"Miss Macfarlane is to dine with us," Robert told her, when they were really started, "and we will call at the office for her. Where do you want to go, Enid?"

"To the Ritz," she answered at once; "I'd like to say, when we get home, that we dined once at the Ritz."

"It's too bad," replied Robert, reminded of their frustrated plans for a tour, "that you've not been about more, but it can't be helped. Why do you want to go to the Ritz? There are others just as expensive, and the sky's the limit as far as this dinner is concerned, for I don't mind telling you, Enid, I've been rather lucky with my invention."

"I'm so glad!" she exclaimed heartily. "I have a fancy for the Ritz, Robert, if you don't object."

And she began inwardly to ask herself if the habits of deceit and evasion which had been the result of her innocently meant escapade could ever be shaken off, supposing that she was ever relieved of the responsibility of the box of pearls (now secured with several safety-pins in the pocket of her coat).

They found Miss Macfarlane awaiting them, and, quite excited by the prospect of visiting for the second time that day one of Paris's most famous hotels, she jumped into the taxi as blithely as a girl. Her talkativeness helped to cover Enid's silence, for she was wondering how she could manage, under Miss Macfarlane's chaperonage, to write a note and confide it to a clerk, even if she should succeed in getting rid of Robert.

But, confused as she was by Fraser's omission of any mention of the pearls, the difficulty of reconciling his letter with his actions, the introduction of Sir Arthur Lloyd's name, and the uncertainty of having any opportunity to write at all, she had not decided what to say.

But when they had reached the Ritz

and had been ushered to a table, and when the two ladies had seated themselves with a preliminary glance around which assured them that several other people in traveling dress were dining there, the first person upon whom Enid's eyes rested was Fraser himself.

He sat alone at a table some distance away, and was gazing at her with an expression which she could not fail to recognize as one of extreme pleasure. Afraid of being remarked, she turned her eyes away instantly, but her manner changed quickly to a sparkling gaiety that surprised her companions.

But this gaiety was not of long duration. After all, what did this appearance of Fraser portend? It was not particularly strange that he should look pleased, knowing as he did that she had in her possession jewels amounting to five hundred thousand francs, which no doubt, as soon as he could see his way to do so, he would reclaim, and which she would have no option but to render to him.

And yet a strange elation persisted, and in spite of all the reason she had to think ill of Fraser (if that, indeed, were his name), she could not help feeling that that straightforward gaze of his did not accord very well with the crookedness of his ways.

Venturing to steal another glance at him, she observed that he was busily writing, while a waiter stood by his table. For a moment she feared that he would attempt to communicate with her, but, without a glance in her direction, he folded the paper upon which he had been writing and handed it to the waiter with some instructions. The waiter approached the door, and Fraser looked again at Enid, who hastily averted her eyes.

The dinner was excellent, had they had more time to enjoy it, but soon Robert began to look at his watch and compare it with the clock in the dining-room. When dessert was served he declared they must not delay any longer, and Miss Macfarlane reluctantly agreed with him. The waiter sprang to help Enid with her

wrap, which she had obstinately refused to allow him to hang up, and they rose.

Enid had conceived the daring idea of passing by Fraser's table and dropping the box of pearls into his lap, but this scheme was suddenly frustrated by the discovery that he had already left the room.

Listening to Robert's injunctions to hurry and Miss Macfarlane's admonitions to write her, she looked instinctively for Fraser as they left the hotel and entered the waiting taxi, but failed to see anything of him.

She returned Miss Macfarlane's farewells mechanically as they dropped her at the Rue Caumartin, and then Robert gave directions to drive to the station. Several times she dozed and awoke with a start before they got onto the train, and always one hand clutched the box of pearls.

They were unable to secure sleepers, and, by turns awake and asleep, her head jolted between the padded head-rests of the compartment of the corridor train by which they traveled, Enid awoke at last to the consciousness that they were nearing Havre.

Robert looked at her with some symptoms of commiseration.

"You'll be all right once we're on the boat," he assured her.

"But why all this hurry?" she asked, with the first show of fretfulness he had seen, thoroughly accounted for by the night they had passed.

"Because," he said in a low tone, "it won't be long before war is declared between some of the great powers, and Europe is a good place to get you away from just now!"

She sat up, thoroughly awake now.

"War? But it's impossible!"

"Hush! Don't say anything, but just remember what I've told you."

Enid sank back again into her place, oblivious of her mangled hat and disheveled hair; but as the train neared its destination she went, at Robert's suggestion, to repair the ravages of that hor-

rible night. Afterward she was glad she had done so.

At eight o'clock in the morning Robert guided Enid's weary steps across a gangplank from the dock to the deck of La Marraine, and as she reached it, a hand was put out to steady her, and, looking up, she again met the eyes of Fraser.

In another moment Robert had hustled her to her stateroom.

"I have met a very decent fellow in the smoking-room," said Robert to his sister the next day. "You'd have seen him at dinner last night if you'd been well enough to come in. He's got a most romantic history altogether; and while he was in Mexico, some time ago, he saw his name in a list of missing heirs in an English paper. He wrote to the lawyers, but just before he was to start for England he got sick, and a fellow he had been friendly with stole a march on him and went in his place, to pass himself off as the heir; and as no one had seen the heir since he was a child, it was not hard to do this, especially as he had all the details at his finger-ends.

"When the real heir recovered and went to England—knowing nothing of all this—he received the pleasant information that the other one had taken the family pearls to be reset. Of course, it was his intention to make quietly off with the pearls while the genuine heir was proving his identity.

The lawyers were hard to convince that they had made a mistake, so he agreed to go to California and produce persons who could absolutely swear to his identity. But first he got on the track of the fake gentleman and did a little burglarizing. This fake gentleman must have had plenty of pluck, for he actually got the police after him—to say nothing of private detectives—and he had to resort to all kinds of subterfuges to get away from England. But he was robbed of the pearls while leaving Paris—"

"Robbed of the pearls?" exclaimed Enid, enlightenment and joy struggling in

her mind. "How very interesting!" she added, recollecting herself.

"Yes, isn't it? Well, he went on to California and got his proofs, and now it's all settled and he is in possession of his estates and all that."

"What is his name?" inquired Enid, although she knew already what the answer would be. "And did he tell you all this himself?"

"His name is Sir Arthur Lloyd. I read most of this in the New York *Herald*, but I didn't think much about it until I heard his name last night. Then I asked him about it, and he admitted that he was the hero, but says he has been sufficiently advertised. Look, there he is now! No, no! Not that squat fellow—the tall one in the light overcoat. He's coming over. I'll introduce him!"

And a moment afterward, with a most brotherly disregard of whether or not it would be agreeable to his sister, he had cavalierly made the introduction, and, later, left the new acquaintance to talk to Enid while he went to have a talk with one of the wireless operators who had just come off duty.

The *bona-fide* Sir Arthur Lloyd smiled meditatively at his retreating back, then turned to look at Enid.

"Perhaps you would like to hear details of the chase first?" he said in his well-remembered manner. "I had gathered at the Ritz that you were on the eve of departure, so I wrote a check during dinner and had it cashed there—luckily I am known there—and was prepared to follow you anywhere. I pursued you in a taxi, and got upon your train without the slightest idea that it was the boat train, and I came on board just before you, and here I am! One thing troubled me!"

He waited in vain for her to question him.

"I see I shall have to tell you," he said. "Well, I feared that Mr. Templeton was your husband, and I made it my first task to ascertain whether he was or not."

There was such a long silence after this that Enid felt obliged to make some remark.

"I received your letter the evening we started, but I had no chance to answer it," she said.

"Only that evening? Then that wretched hotel boy at Marseilles must have forgotten to mail it! I wore out the patience of the Ritz clerks asking for letters for A. Fraser. I thought you might not have written 'Sir Arthur Lloyd' on the envelope, and that it might have been mislaid."

He was silent a moment, while Enid was employed in surreptitiously feeling inside a black satin embroidery bag to assure herself that a certain unpretentious cigarette-box was still there.

"I wanted to be the first to tell you of my change of name," her companion continued, "but I had no idea until I got back to Paris that I was being gibbeted in the papers. I have a great deal to tell you. I hardly know where to begin."

"Perhaps I know as much—or more—about the affair than you do," suggested Enid, and she laughed delightedly as Sir Arthur inquired in a puzzled tone:

"You mean all that nonsense in the paper?"

"Oh, no! I will tell you all about it, but not now! First you must answer me one question."

"Anything you like to ask me—if you will answer one of mine first!"

"And what is that?" asked Enid, looking away.

"Perhaps I ought to wait, but I am afraid that if I do some one else may—may—do you know that I have thought about you every moment since I first saw you? You really owe me some amends for occupying my mind so that I allowed myself to be robbed! Will you marry me, Enid?"

"Very likely; but now answer my question. What was it that you were robbed of the night you left Paris?"

"Why, those unfortunate pearls, of course! But what does it matter now,

especially after what you have just said? But I'll tell you some day how I stole my own pearls and was nearly caught by the police. I got away to Paris, and hung round until I was sure I had given them the slip, and then, you know, my meeting with you caused me to relax my vigilance somewhat. I was attacked on the train—by some one privately employed by Vernon, I suppose—and the pearls taken. I had them in a little box in my coat-pocket, and had scarcely taken my hand off them! But what still puzzles me is that my things were searched while I was traveling from New York to San Francisco. Surely they had got all they could possibly expect the first time!"

Enid had spoken truly when she said that she knew more about the affair than

its principal actor. She now understood why M. Benoit had delayed so long before approaching her; and in her happiness at finding every cause for resentment against her companion removed, she even paid M. Benoit's unsuccessful client the tribute of a little admiration for his courage when threatened by the imminent return of the owner of the pearls.

However, the pearls were worth a little daring.

She looked up at Sir Arthur Lloyd, and her blue eyes shone with mischief and a deeper feeling.

"I think I can explain the second attempt," she said. "You see, they only got a box of chocolates the first time!"

And she extracted from her bag, and handed to him, the box of pearls.

(The end.)

U U U U

THE DRINKER'S LAMENT

BY LYON MEARSON

HE started off the night with whisky straight,
 Four dry Martini cocktails followed then,
 And as it seemed his thirst did not abate
 He sank Manhattan cocktails, up to ten;
 Some lobster salad, and a golden buck,
 And extra dry champagne to wash it down
 Were next upon the bill, and then a duck,
 Which last he tried with Rhenish wine to drown,

A sloe ginn fizz with grenadine was next,
 He followed with absinth, mint, and beer;
 And then he paused, with honest doubt perplexed,
 He knew not what to drink, his head felt queer;
 He recognized from this the time had come
 To go to bed; he munched an olive, and
 He got upon his feet, which now were numb
 And scarcely could obey his brain's command.

He woke next morning with a splitting head.

"My innards are all wrong," he groaned and sighed.
 And twisting feverishly in his bed—

"That olive knocked me out, I guess!" he cried.

Nuala O'Malley

by H. Bedford-Jones

Author of "Malay Gold," "The Ghost Hill," "John Solomon, Supercargo," etc.

SYNOPSIS OF PRECEDING CHAPTERS

THE scene is laid in Ireland during Cromwell's time, when the whole country was in arms for or against the various parties. Brian Buidh, or Brian of the Yellow Hair, himself The O'Neill, comes home from Spain, where he had been brought up to fight for his country. After a mysterious warning from the Black Woman, an old hag, he wins forty men from O'Donnell More, the Black Master, by a trick, and wins the friendship of Turlough Wolf and Cathbarr of the Ax. His intention is to gather a storm of men and hold an independent place near Galway. He forms an alliance with Nuala O'Malley, known as the Bird Daughter because of her carrier pigeons, for the purpose of recovering her castle, Bertragh, which O'Donnell had won years before from her parents by black treachery.

CHAPTER VIII.

HOW BRIAN WAS NETTED.

THE Dark Master sat in his dark hall, brooding.

It was a bad morning, for there was a sweep of wind and black cloud mingled with snow bearing out of the north; and since the great hall, with its huge fireplace, was the warmest part of the castle, as many of the men as could do so had drifted thither, but without making any undue disturbance over it.

For that matter, they might have passed unseen, since the hall was black as night save for a single cresset above the fireplace. Here sat the Dark Master, a little oaken table before him on which his breakfast had rested, and at his side crouched a long, lean wolfhound that nuzzled him unheeded. On the other side the table sat the old *seanachie*, who was blind, and who fingered the strings of his

harp with odd twangings and mutterings, but without coherence, for O'Donnell had bade him keep silence.

"Go and see what the weather is," commanded the Dark Master. A man rose and ran outside, while other men came in with wood. Their master motioned them away, although the fire had sunk down into embers.

"A gale from the north, which is turning to the eastward, with snow, master."

"Remain outside, and bring me word what changes hap, and of all that you see or hear. Waste no time about it."

The Dark Master drew his cloak about his humped shoulders, and in the flickering dim light from overhead his face stood out in all its ghastly pallor, accentuated by the dead black hair and mustache. But his eyes were burning strangely, and when they saw it the men drew back, and more than one sought the outer chill in preference to staying.

This story began in the All-Story Weekly for December 30.

Now O'Donnell Dubh stared into the embers and muttered below his breath, while, as if in response, a little flickering whirlwind of gray ash rose up and fell back again, so that it blew over the embers and deadened them. The muscles of the Dark Master's face contracted until his teeth flashed out in a silent snarl.

"I could have slain, and I did not," he whispered as if to himself. "But there is still time, and I will not be a fool again!"

The watching men shivered, for it seemed that the wind scurried down the wide chimney and again blew up the gray ash until the embers glowed through a white coating. But the wind wrought more than this, for it brought down from the gray clouds a whispering murmur that drifted through the hall, and in that murmur were mingled the sounds of beating hoofs and ringing steel and shrieking men.

"Are watchers posted over the hills and the paths and the Galway roads?" spoke out the Dark Master as he gazed into the ashes.

"They are watching, master," answered a deep voice from the darkness.

Suddenly the wolfhound raised its head and stared into the ashes also, as if it saw something there that no man saw, for the bristles lifted on its neck, and it whined a little. O'Donnell dropped his hand to the thin muzzle, and the dog was quiet again. But after that the men stared at the fireplace with frightened eyes.

"There is still time, though one has escaped me," said the Dark Master, looking up suddenly at his sightless harper, who seemed to fall atrembling beneath the look. "The one who has escaped matters not, for his bane comes not at my hands. It is the other whom I shall slay—Brian Buidh of the hard eyes. Then the Bird Daughter. But it seems to me that one stands in my path of whom I do not know."

He brooded over the ashes as his head sank between his shoulders like a turtle's head. Then once again the wind swooped down on the castle, and whistled down the chimney, and filled the great hall with

a thin noise like the death-rattle of men. The cresset wavered and fell to smoking overhead.

The Dark Master reached his hand across the table and caught the hand of the blind harper and spread it out on the oak. A little shudder shook the old man, and as if against his will he spread out his other hand likewise, his two hands lying between those of the Dark Master. Then there fell a terrible and awestruck silence on the hall.

The stillness was perfect, and continued for a long while. Slowly occurred a weird and strange thing, for, although no blast whimpered down the chimney, the ashes fell away from the embers, which began to glow more redly and set out the forms of the Dark Master and the blind harper in a ruddy light. Suddenly a man pointed to the feet of the Dark Master, and would have cried out but that another man struck him back.

For the ashes had drifted out from the fireplace, flake after flake, and were settling about the feet of the Dark Master beneath the table. They rose slowly into a little gray pile; then one of the men shrieked in horror at the sight, and the Dark Master threw out his head.

"Slay him," he said quietly and drew in his head once more, staring at the table.

There was a thudding blow and a groan, then the stillness of death. The ashes were quiet; the fire glowed ruddily. After a little there came a soft whirl of soot down the chimney, blackening the embers. The soot rose and fell, rose and fell, again and again; it was as if an eddying draft of wind were trying to raise it. Finally it was lifted, but it only whirled about and about over the embers, like a shape drawn together by some uncanny force.

The Dark Master raised his head as a clash of steel and the voice of the watcher came from the outer doorway.

"Master, the blast thickens with black fog!"

"Remain on watch," said O'Donnell, and his head fell.

But through the hall men's hands went out to one another in the darkness. For storm-driven fog was not a thing that many men had seen even on the west coast, and when it did happen men said that a warlock was at work. There was not far to seek for the warlock in this case, muttered the O'Donnells.

Now the Dark Master looked into the fireplace and that whirling figure of soot raised itself anew and began its unearthly dance over the embers. After no long time men saw that the pile of gray ashes under the table was lifting also, lifting and whirling as though the wind spun it; but there was no wind.

"There is a man to be blinded," said the Dark Master. "Let him be blinded with fog and snow, and the men with him, and let the wind come out of the east and drive him to this place."

Slowly, so slowly that no man could afterward say where there was beginning or end, the whirling figure of soot dissipated; and little by little the dancing stream of gray ashes drifted back into the fireplace; then it also dissipated, seeming to pass up the chimney, so that the embers glowed red and naked.

"*Seanachie*," said the Dark Master in a terribly piercing voice, "who is this standing in my way, standing between me and Brian of the hard eyes?"

The blind harper began to tremble, but again came the clash and the watcher's voice from the doorway.

"Master, there is snow mingled with the fog, and the wind is shifting to the eastward."

"Light the beacon and remain on watch," said the Dark Master. But at the watcher's word new terror seized on the men in the hall.

"*Seanachie*, who stands in my way? Speak!"

The beard of the blind harper quivered and rose as if the wind lifted it, but men felt no wind through the hall. Then the old man began to writhe in his chair, and twisted to take his hands from the table, but he could not, although only he alone

held them there. Suddenly his mouth opened, and a voice that was not his voice made answer:

"Master, two people stand in your way."

"Describe them," said the Dark Master, and those near by saw that sweat was running down his face, despite the coldness of the hall. After a moment's silence the old harper spoke again; he had lost his eyes twenty years since, yet he spoke of seeing.

"Master, I see two people but dimly. One is a man, huge of stature and standing like Laeg the hero, the friend of the hero Cuculain, leaning upon an ax—"

"That is Cathbarr of the Ax," broke in the Dark Master. "His bane comes not at my hands. Who is the other?"

Again the old harper seemed to struggle, and his voice came more faintly:

"I cannot see, master. I think it is a woman—"

"That is the Bird Daughter," quoth the Dark Master.

"Nay, it is an old woman, but she blinds me—"

And the harper fell silent, writhing, until horror gripped those who looked on. O'Donnell leaned forward, his head sticking straight out and his eyes blazing.

"What do you see, *seanachie*? Speak!"

"I see men," and the old harper's voice rose in a great shriek. "A storm of men and of hoofs, and red snow on the ground, and fire over the snow, and the man of the ax laughing terribly. And I see other men riding hard; men with long hair and the flag of England in their midst—and Cuculain smites them—Cuculain of the yellow hair—the Royal Hound of Ulster smites them and scatters them—"

"*Liar!*"

With the hoarse word the Dark Master leaned forward and smote the blind harper with his fist, so that the old man slid from his chair senseless. Upon that the Dark Master swung around with his teeth bared and his head drawn in like the head of a snake about to strike.

"Lights!" he roared. "Lights! Bear the *seanachie* to his chamber, and send men to ring in the harbor and build beacons on the headlands. Hasten, you dogs, or I'll strip the flesh from you with whips!"

Under his voice and his flaming eyes the hall sprang into life, while the men carried out the blind harper and one of their own number who had been stricken with madness at what he had seen. Then the hall blazed up with cressets, logs were flung on the fire, and parties of men set out to build beacons and guard the bay as the Dark Master had given command. And when word was spread abroad among the others of what had chanced in the hall that morning, Red Murrough, the Dark Master's lieutenant, swore a great oath.

"If that Cuculain of whom the *seanachie* spoke be not the man Brian Buidh, then may I go down to hell alive!"

And the men, who feared Red Murrough's heavy hand and hated him, muttered that he would be like to travel that same road whether living or dead, in which there was some truth.

While these things took place in the hall at Bertragh—and they were told later to Brian by many who had seen them and heard them, all telling the same tale—Brian and his sailing galley was making hard weather of it. Six of the O'Malleys had been sent with him to manage the galley, for he was no seaman and had placed himself in their hands; and after rounding into Kilkieran Bay from the castle harbor and reaching out across the mouth of the bay toward Carna, intending to reach Cathbarr's tower direct, the blast came down on them, and even the O'Malleys looked stern.

Stern yet they looked when Brian cried that Golam Head was veiling in fog behind them, and with that the wind swerved almost in a moment and swept down out of the east, bearing fog and snow with it. Nor was this all, for the shift of wind bore against the seas and

swept down currents and whirlpools out of the bay, and after the snow and black fog shrieked down upon them, the seamen straightway fell to praying.

"Get up and bail!" shouted Brian, kicking them to their feet, for the seas were sweeping over the counter. The helmsman groaned and bade him desist, and almost at the same instant their mast crashed over the bow, breaking the back of one seaman, and the galley broached to.

With that the O'Malleys ceased praying and fell to work with a will, getting out the sweeps and bailing. The mingling of snow, shrieking wind, and black fog had been too much for their superstitious natures, but made no impression on Brian, for the simple reason that he did not see why fog and wind should not come together. After he understood their fears better he shamed them into savage energy by his laughter, and since the broken-backed man had gone overboard, took his sweep and set his muscles to work.

They made shift to keep the craft before the wind, but presently Brian found that half the men's fear sprang from the fact that the fog and snow blinded them, shutting out the land, and that the shifting wind had completely bewildered them. When he asked for their compass, their leader grunted:

"No need have we for a compass on this boat, Brian Buidh, save when warlocks turn the fog and wind upon us. I warrant that were it not for the fog, we would be safe in port ere now. As it is, the Virgin alone knows where we are or whither going."

"This is some of the Dark Master's wizardry," growled out another. "Before we hung those men of his last night, they said that the winds would bear word of it to the dark one, *cead mile mollaigh* on him!"

"Add another thousand curses for me," ordered Brian, "but keep to the bailing, or I'll give you a taste of my foot! And no more talk of warlocks."

The five men fell silent, and indeed

they needed all their breath, for the struggle was a desperate one. Instead of lessening, the fog only increased with time, and even Brian began to perceive the marvel in it as swirl after swirl of darkness swept over them. Yet, since the wind was from the east, he reasoned, it would naturally blow out the fog from the bogs and low lands. But this explanation was received in dour silence by the men, so he said no more.

There was no doubt that Cathbarr had reached home safely, since the night had been fair enough for the winter season. An hour passed, and then another, still without a lessening of the eery storm; and the nerve of the seamen was beginning to give way under the strain, when the helmsman let out a wild yell:

"A light ahead! A beacon!"

The rowers twisted about with shouts of joy, and Brian perceived a faint, ruddy light against the sky. Also, the fog began to lessen somewhat; and upon making out that the beacon undoubtedly came from a high tower or crag, the shout passed around that they had headed back to Gorumna with the shifting wind.

This heartened them all greatly, the more so since the gale drove them straight onward toward the beacon. The fog closed down again, but the ruddy glare pierced through it; and of a sudden there was no more fog about them—only a blinding thick snow which made all things grotesque. Then two more beacons were made out, lower than the first, and the men yelled joyously that fires had been lighted on either side the harbor to guide them in. And so they had been, but otherwise than the men thought.

Half frozen with the cold, they drove on through the snow and spray until at length they swept in between the guiding fires and scanned the shores for landing. Then the snow ceased, though the hurricane howled down behind them with redoubled fury; and as they floated in against a low, rocky shore, silence of wild consternation fell on them all. For they had come to Bertragh Castle, and fifty

feet away a score of men were waiting, while others were running down with torches.

Even in that moment of terrible dismay, Brian noted their muskets, and how the lighted matches flared like fireflies in the wind.

"Trapped!" groaned one of the men, and they would have rowed out again into the teeth of the storm had not Brian stayed them.

"No use, comrades. They have muskets, and there are cannon up above. Row in, and if we must die, then let us die like men and not cowards."

Seeing no help for it, the men growled assent, and they drifted slowly in, all standing ready with drawn swords, while Brian's Spanish blade flared in the prow. Then in the midst of the gathered men he saw a dark figure with hunched shoulders, sword in hand. As he turned to the seamen behind him, there was a glitter in his blue eyes colder than the icy blast behind them.

"There is the Dark Master, comrades! Let him be first to fall."

They drove up on the shore, and Brian leaped out, with the men behind him. Still the group above stood silent until the voice of O'Donnell sheared through the gale. "Fire, and drop Yellow Brian first."

So there was to be no word of quarter! As the thought shot like fire through Brian's mind, he leaped forward with a shout. A ragged stream of musketry broke out from the men gathered on the higher rocks, and he heard the bullets whistle. He paid no heed to the seamen who followed him, however. His eyes were fixed on the Dark Master's figure, and with only one thought in his mind he plunged ahead.

More and more muskets spattered out; a bullet splashed against his jack, and another; something caught his steel cap and tore it away, and a hot stab shot through his neck. But the group of men was only a dozen paces from him now, and a wild yell broke from his lips as he saw O'Donnell step forward to meet him.

Then only did he remember Turrough's speech on the day of that first meeting with the Dark Master—"The master of all men at craft and the match of most men at weapons"—and he knew that, despite the hunched shoulders, this O'Donnell must be no mean fighter. But the next instant he was gazing into the evil eyes, and their blades had crossed.

Flaming with his anger, Brian forced the attack savagely; then a sharp thrust against his jack showed him that O'Donnell was armed with a rapier, and he fell to the point with some caution. With the first moment of play, he knew that he faced a master of fence; yet almost upon the thought his blade ripped into the Dark Master's arm.

Involuntarily he drew back, but O'Donnell caught the falling sword in his left hand and lunged forward viciously. Just as the blades met again, Brian saw a match go to a musket barely six paces away. He whirled aside, but too late, for the musket roared out, and a drift of stars poured into his brain. Then he fell.

Like a flash the Dark Master leaped at the man who had fired and spitted him through the throat; the others drew back in swift terror, for O'Donnell was frothing at the mouth, and his face was the face of a madman. With a bitter laugh he turned and rolled Brian over with his foot. The five seamen had gone down under the bullets.

"He is only stunned," said Red Murrough. "Shall I finish it?"

"If you want to die with him, yes. Carry him in, and we will nail him up to the gates to-morrow."

And the clouds fell asunder, and the stars came out, cold and beautiful.

CHAPTER IX.

THE NAILING OF BRIAN.

BRIAN woke in darkness, with pain tearing at his head and heaviness upon his hands and feet. When he tried to put his hand to his head, that

heaviness was explained; for he could not, and thick iron struck dull against stone.

He lay there, and thought leaped into his brain, and he felt very bitter of spirit, but chiefly for those men who had come with him, and because he had failed before the Dark Master's hand.

It was cold, bitterly cold, and thin snow lay around him, so that he knew that he was in some tower or prison that faced to the east. It was from that direction that the snow had driven, as he had sore cause to know, and he wondered if the Dark Master had had any hand in that driving. But this he was not to know for many days.

It was the cold which had awakened him from his unconsciousness, he guessed. By dint of shifting his position somewhat, he managed to get his back against a wall, and so got his hands to his head. In such fashion he made out that his hair was matted and frozen with blood, and his neck also, where a bullet had plowed through the muscles on the right side. His head-wound was no more than a jagged tear which had split half his scalp, but had not hurt the bone, as he found after some feeling. Then he dropped his hands again, for the chains that bound him to the wall were very heavy. It must be night, for light would come where snow had come, and there was no light.

Now, having found that he was not like to die, at least from his wounds, he set about stretching to lie down again, and found some straw on the floor. He drew it up with his feet and gathered it about him; it was dank and smelled vilely, but at the least it gave his frozen body some warmth, so that he fell asleep after a time.

When he wakened again, it was to find men around him and a narrow strip of cold sunlight coming through a high slit in the wall of his prison. From the sound of breakers that seemed to roar from below him, he conjectured that he was in a sea-facing tower of the castle, in which he was right.

The men, who were led by Red Mur-

rough, gave him bread and meat and wine, but they offered no word and would answer no questions. So he ate and drank, and felt life and strength creeping back into his bones. He concluded that it must be the day after his arrival.

Now Red Murrough beckoned to the hoary old seneschal, whose red-rimmed eyes glittered evilly. The old man shook his keys and stooped over Brian, unlocking the hasp which bound him to the wall-ring. The oppressive silence of these men struck a chill through Brian, but he came to his feet readily enough as Murrough jerked his shoulder.

He followed out into a corridor, and the men closed around him, going with him down-stairs and along other passageways. Brian wondered as to his fate and what manner of death he was going to die; yet it seemed to him that death was an impossible and far-off thing where he was concerned.

He expected no less than death from the Dark Master, but at the same time it was very hard to believe that he was going to that fate. He was by no means afraid to die, but he felt that he would like to see the Bird Daughter once more. Also, he had always thought of fate as coming to him suddenly and swiftly in battle or foray; and to be deliberately done to death in cold blood by hanging or otherwise was not as he would have wished.

"At least," he thought without any great comfort, "Cathbarr and Turlough will avenge me on the Dark Master—though I had liefer be living when that was done!"

In one of the larger and lower corridors they came on two men bearing a body, sewed for burial. Murrough stopped his party and growled out something.

"It is the *seanachie*," answered one of the bearers. "Since the Dark Master struck him yester-morn he has not spoken, and he died last night."

Upon this Red Murrough crossed himself, as did the rest, muttered into his tangle of red beard, and motioned Brian forward.

This wider passage gave through a doorway upon the great hall. There was no dais, but the Dark Master was seated before the huge fireplace, his wolf-hound crouched down at his side. The hall was pierced near the roof with openings, and lower down with loopholes, so that when the sun shone outside it was bright enough.

Red Murrough led Brian forward, the clank of the heavy chain-links echoing hollowly through the place, but O'Donnell Dubh did not look up until the two men stood a scant four paces from him. Then his head came out from between his rounded shoulders and his eyes spat fire at Brian.

"A poor ending to proud talk, Brian Buidh!"

Brian tried to smile, but with ill success, for he was chilled to the bone and there was blood on his face.

"I am not yet dead, O'Donnell."

"You will be soon enough," the Dark Master chuckled, and the hall thrilled with evil laughter. In the eyes of all Brian had proven himself the weaker man and therefore deserved his fate. "What of this O'Malley journey of yours, eh?"

Brian made no answer, save that his strong lips clamped shut, and his blue eyes narrowed a little. O'Donnell laughed and began to stroke his wolf-hound.

"I have many messengers and many servants, Yellow Brian, and there is little my enemies do which is not told me. Even now men are riding hard and fast to trap Cathbarr of the Ax and your following."

At that Brian laughed, remembering Turlough Wolf and his cunning.

"I think this trapping will prove a hard matter, Dark Master."

"That is as it may be. Now, Brian Buidh, death is hard upon you, and neither an easy nor a swift one. Before you die there are two things which I would know from your lips."

Brian looked at him, but without

speaking. The Dark Master had thrust out his head, his hand still lingering on the wolfhound's neck, and his pallid face, drooping mustache, and high brow were very evil to gaze upon. Brian, eying that thin-nostriled, cruel nose, and the undershot jaw of the man, read no mercy there.

"First, who *are* you, Brian Buidh? Are you an O'Neill, as that ring of yours would testify, or are you an O'Malley come down from the western isles?"

At that Brian laughed out harshly. "Ask those servants of which you boast, Dark Master. Poor they must be if they cannot tell you even the names of your enemies!"

"Well answered!" grinned the other, and chuckled again to himself as though the reply had indeed pleased him hugely. "I would that you served me, Brian of the hard eyes; I suppose that you are some left-hand scion of the Tyr-owens by some woman overseas, and the O'Neill bastards were ever as strong in arm as the true sons. Yet you might have made pact with me, whereas now your head shall sit on my gates, after your bones are broken and you have been nailed to a door."

"Fools talk over-much of killing, but wise men smite first and talk after," Brian said contemptuously. He saw that the Dark Master was somewhat in doubt over slaying him, since if he were indeed an O'Neill there might be bitter vengeance looked for, or if he belonged to any other of the great families.

"Quite true," countered the Dark Master mockingly, and with much relish. "Therein you were a fool, not to slay when first we met, instead of making pacts. Who will repay me my two-score men, Brian of the hollow cheeks?"

"The Bird Daughter, perhaps," smiled Brian, "since two days ago she hung ten of those men I took in my ambushade."

This stung O'Donnell, and his men with him. One low, deep growl swirled down the hall, and the Dark Master

snarled as his lips bared back from his teeth. Brian laughed out again, standing very tall and straight, and his chains clanked a little and stilled the murmur. He saw that O'Donnell wore his own Spanish blade, and the sight angered him.

"There is another thing I would know," said the Dark Master slowly. "Tell me this thing, Brian Buidh, and I will turn you out of my gates a free man."

Brian looked keenly at him and saw that the promise was given in earnest. He wondered what the thing might be, and was not long in learning.

"You came hither from Gorumna Castle," went on O'Donnell, fixing him with his black flaming eyes. "Tell me what force of men is in that place, Brian of the hard eyes, and for this service you shall be set free."

"Now I know that you are a fool, O'Donnell Dubh," and Brian's voice rang out merrily. "I have heard many tales of your wizardry and your servants and your watchers, but when an unknown man comes to you, his name is hidden from you; and all your black art cannot so much as tell you the number of your enemies! Now slay me and have done, for you have wasted much breath this day, and so have I, and it goes ill in my mind to waste speech on fools."

"You refuse then?" O'Donnell peered up at him, but Brian set his face hard and made no reply. With a little sigh the Dark Master leaned back in his chair and motioned to Red Murrough to come forward.

"Strip him," he said evenly, and at the word a great howl rang out from all the watching men, like the howl of wolves when they scent blood in the air.

Murrough in turn signed to two of his men. These came forward and stripped off what clothes had been left to Brian, so that he stood naked before them. In that moment he was minded to spring on the Dark Master and crush him with his chains, but he saw that Red Mur-

rough held a flint-lock pistolet cocked, and knew it would be useless. Also, if he had to die, he was minded to do it like a man and not to shame the blood of Tyr-owen, either by seeking death or by shrinking at its face.

Now there passed a murmur through the hall, and even the Dark Master's evil features glowed a little; for Brian's body was very fair and slim and white, yet these judges of men saw that he was like a thing of steel, and that beneath the satin skin his body was all rippling sinew. Red Murrough drew out a hasp, brought his chained hands together, and caught the chain close to his wrists, so that his hands were bound close.

"Now," said the Dark Master, settling back and stroking his wolfhound as if he were watching some curious spectacle, "do with him as we did with Con O'More last Candlemas. But let us work slowly, for there is no haste, and we must break his will. In the end we will nail him to the door, and finish by breaking all his bones. It will be very interesting, eh?"

A fierce howl and clash of steel answered him from the men. At another sign from Red Murrough, Brian felt himself jerked to the floor suddenly, and his hands were drawn up over his head. His wrist-chains were fastened to an iron ring set in the floor, and his ankles to another, and he stared up at the ceiling-rafters of the hall, watching the motes drift past overhead in the reaching sunbeams. It all seemed very unreal to him.

"First that long hair of his," said the Dark Master quietly.

Murrough went to the fire and returned with a blazing stick. Brian's gold-red hair had flung back from his head, along the floor, and presently he felt it burning, until his head was scorched and his brain began to roast and there was the smell of burnt hair rising from him. Then Murrough's rough hand brushed over his torn scalp, quelling the fire, but it did not quell the agony that wrenched Brian.

"Paint him," ordered O'Donnell.

Again Murrough went to the fireplace, and returned with a long white-hot iron which had lain among the embers. This he touched to Brian's right shoulder, so that the stench of scorched flesh sizzled up in a thin stream, and followed the iron down across the white breast and thigh, until it stopped at the knee, and there was a swath of red and blackened flesh down Brian's body. Yet he had not moved or flinched.

Then Murrough touched the iron to his left shoulder and drew it very slowly down his left side. One of the watching men went sick with the smell and went out vomiting. A second swath of red and black rose on the white flesh, and beneath it all Brian felt his senses swirling. Try as he would he could not repress one long shudder, at which a wild yell of delight shrilled up—and then he fainted.

"Take him away," said the Dark Master, smiling a little, as he leaned forward and saw that Brian had indeed swooned with the pain. "To-morrow we will paint his back with the whip."

So they loosened him from the iron rings, and four men lifted him and carried him out. As they passed across the courtyard another came by with a pail of sea-water, which they flung over him; the salt entered into his wounds, washing away the blackness from his scalp, and slowly the life came back to him after he had been chained again in his tower-room and left alone.

He was sorry for this, because he thought that he had died under the iron. He found a pitcher of water beside him, and after drinking a little he spent the rest in washing out the salt from his flesh, though every motion was terrible in its torture. So great was the pain that gasping sobs shook him, though he stared up dry-eyed at the stones, and a great desire for death came upon him.

"Slay me, oh God!" he groaned, shuddering again in his anguish. "Slay me, for I am helpless and cannot slay myself!"

As if in answer, there came a soft laugh

from somewhere overhead, and the voice of the Dark Master.

"There is no God in Bertragh Castle save O'Donnell, Brian Buidh!"

The blasphemy shocked him into his senses, which had wandered. Now he knew that from some hidden place the Dark Master was watching him and listening for his ravings, and upon that Brian sternly caught his lips together and said no more, though he prayed hard within himself. A cloak had been laid near-by him, and when he had covered himself somewhat against the cold, though with great pain in the doing, he lay quiet.

The cold crept into him and for a space he was seized with chills that sent new thrills of pain through his burned body, for he could not repress them. After a time he relapsed slowly into numbed unconsciousness, waking from time to time, and so the hours dragged away until the night came.

Then men brought him more food and wine and straw, and he managed to sleep a bit during the darkness, in utmost misery. But after the day had come, and more wine had stirred his blood redly, Murrough fetched him to his feet and bade him follow. Brian did it, though walking was agony, for his pride was stronger even than his torture.

He was halted in the courtyard, found the Dark Master and his men gathered there, and knew that more torture was to come upon him. After a single scornful glance the Dark Master ordered him triced up to a post, which was done. Brian saw a man standing by with a long whip, but gained a brief respite as the drawbridge was lowered to admit a messenger mounted on a shaggy hill-pony. O'Donnell bade him make haste with his errand.

"The word has come, master, that five hundred of Lord Burke's pikemen are on the road from Galway and will be close by within a day or so."

"And what of Cathbarr of the Ax?" queried the Dark Master. Brian's heart

caught at the words, then his head fell again at the response.

"They have scattered in the mountains, it is said, master."

"Murrough, have men sent to meet these royalists with food and wines, and if they are bound hither we will entreat them softly and send them home again empty. Now let us enjoy Brian Buidh a while—though he has stood up but poorly. It is in my mind that we will nail him up to-morrow."

With that Brian felt the whip stroking across his naked back. His muscles corded and heaved up in horrible contraction, but no sound broke from him; again and again the hide whip licked about him until he felt the warm blood running down his legs, and then with merciful suddenness all things went black, and he hung limp against the post.

"Take him back," ordered the Dark Master in disgust. "Why, that boy we cut up the other side of Clifden had more strength than this fool!"

"His strength went out of him with his hair," grinned Red Murrough, and they carried Brian to his prison.

The Dark Master had spoken truly, however. Brian's strength lay not so much in brute muscles, though he had enough of them, as in his nervous energy; and the slow horror of his burning hair and of that iron which had twice raked the length of his body had come close to destroying his whole nervous system. Other men might have endured the same thing and laughed the next day, but Brian was high-strung and tense, and while his will was still strong, his physical endurance was shattered.

With the next morning, this fact had become quite evident to the general disgust of all within Bertragh Castle. The Dark Master himself visited the cell, and upon finding that Brian was lost in a half stupor and muttering words in Spanish which no one understood, he angrily ordered that he be revived and finished with that afternoon.

Red Murrough set about the task with savage determination. By dint of sea water externally and mingled wine and uisquebagh internally he had Brian wakened to a semblance of himself before midday. Then food, oil, and bandages about his wounds, and in another hour Brian was feeling like a new man.

He was under no misapprehension as to the cause of this kindness, but cared little. So keenly had he suffered that he was glad to reach the end, and he walked out behind Red Murrough that afternoon with a ghastly face, but with firm mouth and firmer stride, though he was very weak and half-drunk with the liquors he had swallowed.

His fetters were unlocked and he was led to the doorway of the great hall, with the Dark Master and his men watching eagerly. Red Murrough, with an evil grin, pressed his back to the door and held up his left arm against the heavy wood. Brian was half-conscious of another man who bore a heavy mallet and spikes, and whose breath came foul on his face as he pressed something cold against the extended left hand.

Then Brian saw the mallet swing back, heard a sickening crunch, and with a terrible pain shooting to his soul, fell asleep.

CHAPTER X.

IN BERTRAGH CASTLE.

NOW, of what befell after that nail had been driven through his hand, Brian learned afterward; though at the time he was unconscious and seemed like to remain so. Hardly had he sagged forward limply when two men came riding up to the gates demanding instant admittance. One of these was of the Dark Master's band, the other was a certain Colonel James Vere, of the garrison which held Galway for the king.

O'Donnell, who suddenly found himself with greater things on hand than the nailing of a prisoner, ordered Brian left where he lay for the present, and had

the drawbridge lowered in all haste. Colonel Vere, who had late been in rebellion against his gracious majesty, was now joined with Ormond's men against the common enemy, and was in command of that force of five hundred pikemen which had been marching to the west.

Knowing this, the Dark Master made ready to set his house in order, since it was known that Vere's men were only a few hours away. Hardly had the garrison gone to their posts, leaving Brian in the center of a little group about the hall doorway, when Colonel Vere rode in and was received in as stately fashion as possible by the Dark Master. It was not for nothing that O'Donnell had trimmed his sails to the blast, since he was on very good terms with all in Galway.

"Welcome," he exclaimed with a low bow as Vere swung down from his saddle. "Your men received the provision I sent off yesterday?"

"Aye, and thankful we were!" cried the other cheerily, for he was a red-faced man of forty, a Munsterman and half-English, and loved his bottle. "Hearing certain news from one of your men I made bold to ride ahead in all haste, O'Donnell."

"News?" repeated the Dark Master softly. "And of what nature, Colonel Vere?"

"Why, of one Brian Buidh, or Yellow Brian." At this the Dark Master began to finger the Spanish blade he had taken from Brian, and for a second Vere was very near to death, had he known it.

"What of him, Colonel Vere?"

"Why, the rogue had the impudence to come down on a convoy of powder and stores, last week, going from the Archbishop at Ennis to Malbay, for our use. Not only this, but a hundred of our rascally Scots deserted to him, he slipped past us at Galway, and I was in hopes you could give me word of him when I hit over this way. You're something of a ravager yourself, sink me if you aren't!"

and he dug the Dark Master jovially in the ribs.

"Yes," murmured O'Donnell thoughtfully, "so they say, Colonel Vere. But only when Parliament men come past, you understand. So you heard that this Yellow Brian was here?"

"Aye, and that you were doing him to death," coolly responded Vere, and his eyes flickered to the white form on the stones. "Zounds! What's this?"

"Yellow Brian," responded the Dark Master dryly. "What do you want with him?"

"Eh? Why, I'll take him back to Galway and hang him! I've a dozen of the Scots he was fool enough to let loose, and when my men come up they'll identify him readily enough."

"Unless he's dead," chuckled O'Donnell. "Well, if you want him you may have him and welcome. So now come in and sample some prime sack I took from the O'Malleys last year."

"With all the honors," responded Vere gallantly, and as they strode past Brian the Dark Master hastily directed that he be washed and tended and brought back to his right mind as soon as might be.

This order, and the conversation preceding it, gave Red Murrough some cause for thought. So it was that when Brian awakened once more in his cell, as evening was falling, he found the fetters on him indeed, but Red Murrough had bound up his wounds, dressed his sundered hand-bones, and was sitting watching him reflectively. It had occurred to the Dark Master's lieutenant that there might be something made out of this man, who seemed wanted in several places at once.

Therefore it was that while Brian made an excellent meal for a man swathed from crown to knees in bandages, Red Murrough poured into his ear the tale of what had chanced in the courtyard, and why it was that he was not at this moment nailed to the castle door. Brian collected his energy with some effort.

"Well, what of it?" he asked weakly.

"Just this, Yellow Brian," and Murrough stroked his matted red beard easily. "O'Donnell will make a good thing out of handing you over to the royalists, who mean to hang you in style, it seems. Now, it is in my mind that it might advantage you somewhat if you were not moved thence for a few days—indeed, you might even escape, for I think you are not without friends."

"Eh?" Brian stared up at him wonderingly. "What does it matter to you?"

"Nothing, whether you live or die. But you are in my care, and if I report that you are in too bad shape to be moved—which you are not—then this Colonel Vere will camp outside our castle until you are handed over to him. You will gain a few days in which to get your wits back, and the rest is in your hands."

"I had not thought you loved me so much," and despite his agony Brian forced out a bitter laugh.

"Not I! Faith, I had liefer see you nailed—but a service may be paid for."

"I have no money," Brian closed his eyes wearily.

"No, but you have friends," and Murrough leaned forward. "Promise me a clerkly writing to the Bird Daughter's men, or to your own men, ordering that I be paid ten English pounds, and it is done."

"With pleasure," smiled Brian wryly. "Also, if I escape, I will spare your life one day, Red Murrough."

"Good. Then play your part." And Murrough departed well pleased with his acumen.

And indeed, the man carried out his bargain more than faithfully. One visit assured the Dark Master that this broken, burned, cloth-swathed man was helpless to harm him further, and after that he gave Brian little thought.

As Murrough had reckoned Brian's swoop on the convoy had given him some notoriety, and more than once Brian

himself remembered Cathbarr's dark presage after he had let the ten Scots go free to Ennis; Colonel Vere was anxious to carry him back to Galway for an example to other freebooters, and he was quite content to bide at Bertragh Castle until his prisoner could travel.

For that matter the other officers of his command were quite as content as he himself, since all were men from the south-country who loved good wines, and the Dark Master had better store of these than the empty royalist commissariat.

As for the Dark Master, Murrough reported to Brian that he also was well content. Cromwell was sweeping like an avenging flame from Kilkenny to Mallow and Ormond was helpless before him; both king's men and Irish Confederacy men were pouring out of the South in despair, but the two had finally joined forces and the final stand would take place in the West. In fact, it seemed that things were dark for Parliament, despite Cromwell's activity, and the Dark Master was only one of many such who counted strongly on the rumors that the new king, Charles II, was on his way to Ireland with aid from France.

And indeed he was at that time; but Charles, then and later, was more apt at starting a thing than at finishing it.

Red Murrough lost no time in getting his "clerkly writing," luckily for himself. On the morning after his agreement he brought Brian a quill, and blood for lack of ink, and sheepskin. Brian wrote the order for ten pounds, promising to honor it himself if he escaped.

This, however, did not seem likely, and even Murrough frankly stated that it was impossible. But Brian was tended well, and his perfect health was a strong asset. His head had been little more than scorched, and the scalp-wound stayed clean; after the first day there came a festering in his broken hand, but Murrough washed it out with vinegar which ate out the wound and cleansed it, after which he bound it firmly in wooden splints and it promised well.

More than once Brian laughed grimly at the care he was getting, to the simple end that he should hang over Galway gates as a warning to the City of the Tribes and to all who entered the ancient Connacian town. For in that day Galway was a second Venice, and its commerce made rich plundering for the O'Malley's both of Gorumna and of Erris in the North, though the war had somewhat dimmed the glory of the fourteen great merchant families.

Brian wondered often what had become of Cathbarr and his two hundred men, and Murrough could give him little satisfaction. It was known that the force had slipped away from Cathbarr's tower and had vanished; Brian guessed that Turlough had either led them north, or else into the western mountains where the O'Flahertys held savage rule. However, it was certain that neither the Dark Master nor the royalists had scattered them as yet.

So Brian lay in his tower four days and might have lain there four-score more by dint of Red Murrough's lies, had it not been that on the fourth evening Colonel Vere managed to stay unexpectedly sober. Being thus sober, it occurred to him that he had best make sure he had the right man by the heels. So he ordered his ten Scots troopers in from the camp outside the walls, and the Dark Master sent for Brian to be identified.

"I'll have you carried down," said Red Murrough on coming for him. "Play the part, *ma boucal*, and when these royalists get into their cups again they'll forget all that is in their heads. Here's a cup of wine before ye go, and another for myself. *Slainte!*"

"*Slainte*," repeated Brian, and went forth to play his part.

When the four men, with Red Murrough at their head, carried him down into the great hall, Brian found it no little changed. Tables were set along the walls, each of them being some ten feet in length by two wide, of massive

oak, and in the center was another at which sat O'Donnell, Colonel Vere, and one or two other officers. Besides these there were a score more of the royalist officers mingled with the Dark Master's men, and it seemed that there would be few sober men in that hall by midnight, from the appearance of things. Only the ten Scots stood calm and dour before the fireplace.

After that first quick glance around, Brian lay with his head back and his eyes closed, careful not to excite O'Donnell's suspicion that he was stronger than he seemed. He was set down in front of the ten Scots, and there was an eager craning forward of men to look at him, for his name was better known than himself.

"Zounds!" swore Vere thickly. "The man has a strong and clean-cut face, O'Donnell! Strike me dead if he does not look like that painting of O'Neill, the Tyrone Earl, that hangs in the castle at Dublin! Though for that matter there is little enough of his face to be seen. You must have borne hardly on him with your cursed tortures."

"I fancy he is an O'Neill bastard," returned the Dark Master lightly. Brian felt the red creep into his face, but he knew that he was helpless in his chains, and he lay quiet. "Is he your man, Vere?"

"How the devil should I know?" Vere turned to the troopers and spoke in English. "Well, boys, is this the fellow we're after? Speak up now!"

"It's no' sae easy tae ken," returned one cautiously. "Yon man has the look o' Brian Buidh, aye."

"Devil take you!" cried Vere irritably. "Do you mean to say yes or no? Speak out, one of you!"

"Weel, Colonel," answered another cannily, "Jock here has the right of it. I wouldna swear tae the pawky carl, but I'd ken the een o' him full weel. An I had a peep in his een, sir. I'm thinkin' I'd ken their de'il's look. Eh, lads?"

Since it seemed agreed that they would

know Brian better by his hard blue eyes than by what they could see of his face, the exasperated Vere commanded that he be made open them if he were unconscious.

"Run your hand down his body, Murrough," ordered the Dark Master cynically.

Red Murrough leaned over Brian, and the latter opened his eyes without waiting for the rough command to be obeyed. Instantly the Scots broke into a chorus of recognition as Brian's gaze fell on them. Vere looked at him with an admiring laugh.

"Sink me, but the man has eyes! Well, so much the better for the ladies, eh? Now that this is over, give the lad a rouse and send him back to his cell."

He waved the Scots to begone, and rose cup in hand. Smiling evilly, the Dark Master joined him in the toast to Brian, and a yell of delight broke from the crowd as they caught the jest and joined in. O'Donnell was just motioning Murrough to have Brian taken away, when there came a sudden interruption, as a man hastened up the hall. It was one of Vere's pikemen.

"There is a party of four horsemen just outside our camp, colonel. One of them bade us get safe-conduct for him from O'Donnell Dubh, upon his honor."

"Eh?" the Dark Master snarled suddenly. "What was his name, fool?"

"Cathbarr of the Ax, lord."

A thrill shot through Brian, and he tried feebly to sit up. The Dark Master flashed him a glance. The hall had fallen silent.

"His business?"

"He bears word from one called the Bird Daughter, he said."

While the royalists stared, wondering what all this boded, O'Donnell bit his lips in thought. Finally he nodded.

"Let the man enter, and tell him that he has my honor for his safe-conduct."

Vere nodded, and the pikeman departed. Instantly the hall broke into uproar, but leaving the table, the Dark Master

crossed swiftly to Brian, and bent over him.

"Either swear to keep silence, or I have you gagged."

"I promise," mumbled Brian as if he were very weak. The Dark Master ordered him carried behind one of the tables close by, and a cloak flung over him. When it had been done, Brian found that he could see without being seen, which was the intent of O'Donnell.

Meanwhile the Dark Master was telling Vere and the other officers of Cathbarr, it seemed, and Vere hastily collected his wine-stricken senses.

"Nuala O'Malley, eh?" he exclaimed when the Dark Master had finished. "She is the one who has held Gorumna Castle and would make no treaty with us, though she has more than once sent us powder, I understand."

"I will talk with you later concerning her," returned O'Donnell. "She is allied with Parliament, they say, and it might be well for all of us if ships were sent against her place from Galway, and she were reduced."

Brian saw that things were going badly. The Dark Master seemed to be playing his cards well, and was doubtless thinking of throwing off the cloak and openly allying himself with the royalist cause. In this way he could secure help against Gorumna in the shape of Galway ships and men, and it was like to go hard with the Bird Daughter in such case.

However, Vere had no power to treat of such things, as Brian well knew. Also, Nuala had told him herself that her ships had not preyed on the commerce of Galway's merchants, but only on certain foreign caracks which free-traded along the coast. Therefore the Galwegians were not apt to make a troublesome enemy in haste, even if she were proved to be in alliance with Cromwell.

None the less, the Dark Master was plainly thinking of making an effort in this direction, and Brian knew that the Bird Daughter was in no shape to carry things with a high hand in Galway town.

He saw Vere and the Dark Master talking earnestly together across the table, but could not hear their words—and it was well, indeed, for him that he could not. As he was to find shortly, O'Donnell's quick brain had already grasped at what lay behind Cathbarr's coming, or something of it, and he had formed the devilish scheme on the instant—that scheme which was to result in many things then undreamed of.

"If I had followed Turlough's rede, there when I first met this devil," thought Brian bitterly, "I had slain him upon the road, and that would have been an end of it. Well, I think that I shall heed Turlough Wolf next time—if there is a next time."

Brian looked out from his shelter with troubled eyes, for there was something in the wind of which he had no inkling. He saw Vere break into a sudden coarse laugh, and a great light of evil triumph shot across O'Donnell's face. Then the Dark Master gained his feet, gathered his cloak about his hunched shoulders, and sent Murrrough to stand guard over Brian with a pistol and to shoot if he spoke out.

"Surely he cannot be going back on his word, passed before so many men?" thought Brian bitterly. "No, that would shame him before all Galway, and he is proud in his way. But what the devil can be forward?"

To that he obtained no answer. The Dark Master shoved his table back toward the fireplace, and placed his chair in front of it beside that of Colonel Vere. It seemed to Brian that the stage was being set for some grim scene, and a great fear seized on him lest harm was in truth meant toward Cathbarr.

No doubt the giant had been in communication with the Bird Daughter, and it had been ascertained that the galley had come to grief at Bertragh Castle. A sudden thrill of hope darted through Brian. Was it possible that Cathbarr had led down his men and placed them in readiness to attack? Yet such a thing would have been madness—to set a scant

two hundred against Vere's pikemen and the Dark Master's force combined!

But Brian knew that Turlough Wolf was at large, and Turlough's brain was more cunning than most.

If he could only get free, he thought, he might still be able to do something. He could ride, though it would mean bitter pain, and his sword-arm was still good—but he had got no farther than this when there came a tramping of feet, and in the doorway appeared Cathbarr, his mighty ax in hand, with the O'Donnells around him as jackals surround a lion.

CHAPTER XI.

THE BAITING OF CATHBARR.

THE bearded giant still wore the long mail-shirt that reached to his knees, and he paused at the doorway with his eyes roving about the hall. Well did Brian know whom he sought, but it was vain, for Cathbarr could not see him where he lay.

Then Brian saw that the ax had been changed, and wondered at it. One of the long, back-curving blades had been rubbed down with files, so that it was very tapering and thin like an ordinary ax-blade, while the other was still the blunt, heavy thing it had always been. Brian read the cunning of Turlough Wolf in that handiwork, and in fact the great ax was thus rendered tenfold more deadly.

The Dark Master waited quietly until Cathbarr began a slow advance up the hall, all eyes fixed on him in no little wonder. Then O'Donnell raised a hand, stopping him.

"Let us have your message, Cathbarr."

The giant halted and dropped the ax-head, leaning on the haft of the weapon. He took his time about replying, however, and his eyes still roved about the hall ceaselessly and uneasily. Then of a sudden he gave over the search, and gazed straight at the Dark Master with a swift word:

"Have you slain him?"

"Slain who, Cathbarr?" queried O'Donnell, with a thin smile.

"*Duar na Criosd!*" bellowed Cathbarr with sudden fury. "Who but my friend Brian?"

"Oh!" The Dark Master laughed and eased back in his chair. "No, he's still alive, Cathbarr? Is your message from the Bird Daughter in his regard?"

"Yes." Cathbarr fought for self-control, the breast of his mail shirt rising and falling, his bloodshot eyes beginning to circle about the place once more in a helpless and angry wonder.

"O'Donnell Dubh," he went on at last, "Nuala O'Malley sends you this word. Give Brian Buidh over to her, and she will pay you what ransom you demand."

"What alliance is there between Brian and her?" asked O'Donnell softly.

"Brian has given her service, and I have," Cathbarr flung up his head. "Our men lie in Gorumna Castle, there are ships coming from Erris and the isles, and if Brian be slain we shall bear on this hold and give no quarter. We have four hundred men now, and five ships are coming from the North."

The Dark Master gazed quietly at the giant, Vere taking no part in the talk. But Brian, watching also, saw that which brought a mocking smile to O'Donnell's pallid face. Cathbarr had no fear of any man, and lies did not come easily to his lips; when he spoke of the force lying in Gorumna, and of help from Erris, his face gave him away. Brian saw Turlough behind that tale, but Cathbarr was no man to carry it off with success.

"Well," laughed the Dark Master, "none the less shall Brian be slain. Carry back that word to Nuala O'Malley."

Cathbarr's mighty chest heaved like a barrel near to bursting. Brian was minded to break his promise, but Murrough's pistol was at his head, and he could but lie quietly and watch. The giant's face flushed somewhat.

"I have not finished," said he. "My

business for the Bird Daughter is done in truth, but now I have to speak a word of my own."

"Let us hear it," returned O'Donnell.

"It is this." Cathbarr drew himself up. "I am more your enemy than is Brian. Let him go, O'Donnell Dubh, and take me in his place, for I love him."

A sudden amazed silence fell on every man there, and but for Murrough's warning hand Brian would have sat up. O'Donnell's jaw fell for an instant, then his head drew in between his shoulders, he put a hand to Vere's arm, and whispered something. The royalist nodded, a grin on his coarse face, and the Dark Master settled back easily. Cathbarr still stood waiting, the ax held out before him, and a glory in his wide eyes.

"I would sooner hold you than Brian," and O'Donnell spoke softly. "If you will to take his place and die in his stead, Cathbarr, then loose that ax of yours."

Brian saw that Cathbarr was lost indeed, for the Dark Master was not likely to give over his pact with the royalists so easily. Cathbarr heaved up his ax with a great laugh, like a child; he brought it down on the stones, but if he had meant to break it the effort was vain. The huge weapon clanged down and bounded high out of his two hands, so that men drew back in awe; but the ax whirled twice in the cresset-light, then fell and slithered over the flagging beneath a table, and no man touched it.

"Take me," said Cathbarr simply.

"Nay," answered the Dark Master calmly, though his eyes flamed, "kneel down."

Cathbarr stood breathing heavily for an instant, then slowly obeyed. Brian saw that his curly beard was beginning to stand out from his face, but no word came from him as he went to his knees.

"Now," went on the Dark Master, "pray me for Brian's life, mighty one."

The giant struggled with himself, for humiliation came hard to him. Then his voice fell curiously low, terrible in its self-restraint.

"I pray you for the life of Yellow Brian, O'Donnell."

Brian forced himself up, thinking to cry out a warning before it was too late; but Murrough's hand closed over his mouth and forced him back relentlessly.

"Bring ropes," said the Dark Master, and ordered Cathbarr to his feet.

Men hastened out, and returned with a length of rope, binding the giant's arms behind his back, from elbow to wrist. Then the Dark Master laughed harshly, but Vere leaned toward him, his face troubled.

"Do not carry this thing farther, O'Donnell," said the royalist hoarsely. "This man is a fool, but he has a great heart. Let be."

For answer the Dark Master whirled on him with such fury in his snarl that Vere drew back hastily, and no more words passed between them at that time. O'Donnell rose and walked down the hall toward Cathbarr, in his hand a little switch that he used upon that wolfhound of his.

"Now," he said softly, yet his voice pierced hard through the dead stillness, "in token that your humility in this affair is without guile, Cathbarr of the Ax, bow your head to me."

The giant obeyed, closing his eyes. The Dark Master lifted his hand and cut him twice across the head with his switch, while Brian gasped in amazement and looked for Cathbarr to strike out with his foot. But although the giant shuddered, he made no move, and the Dark Master strode back to his seat with a laugh. Then Cathbarr raised his face, and Brian saw that it was terribly convulsed.

"Do with me as you wish," he said, still in that low voice. "But now let Brian be freed in my presence."

The Dark Master flung back his head in a laugh, and when the men saw his jest, a great howl of derision rang up to the rafters. Only Vere's officers looked on with black faces, for it was plain that this affair was none of their liking. A

look of simple wonder came into Cathbarr's wide-set eyes.

"Why do you not loose him?" he asked quietly.

"Fetch the man out, Murrough," ordered the Dark Master. "Shoot him if he speaks."

Now, whether through some shred of mercy—for he knew well that Brian would cry out—or for some other reason, Murrough leaned down swiftly to Brian's ear.

"Careful," he whispered as he motioned his men forward. "Play the part, and mind that this thing is not yet finished."

The warning came in good time, and cooled Brian's raging impulse. He was lifted from behind the table, his chains clanking, and laid upon it; Cathbarr gave a great start and bellowed out one furious word:

"Dead!"

"Nay," smiled the Dark Master. "His eyes are open, and he is but weak with his wounds, Cathbarr. Now say—would you sooner that we cut off that right hand of his, or blinded him? One of these things I shall do before I loose him, for I said only that I would take your life for his."

Brian saw that the Dark Master was only playing with the giant, for well he knew that Vere wanted to take him back to Galway whole and sound. But Cathbarr knew nothing of this, and as the whole terrible trickery flashed over his simple mind he lifted a face that was dark with blood and passion.

"Do not play with me!" he cried out, his voice deep and angry. "Loose him!"

Then O'Donnell leaned back in his chair, laughing with his men, and waved a careless hand toward Vere.

"He is not mine," he grinned. "I have given him to the royalists, for hanging at Galway. You, however, are now mine to slay."

Whether the Dark Master indeed meant to break his plighted faith, Brian never knew. Cathbarr took a single step

forward, his curly beard writhing and standing out, and his whole face so terrible to look on that all laughter was stricken dead in the hall.

"You lied to me!" he cried hoarsely. "You lied to me!"

O'Donnell laughed.

"Aye, Cathbarr. Your master goes back to Galway to be hung—he is out of my hands, but you are in them. However, since I have passed my word on your safe-conduct, I think that I may hold to it."

But the giant had not heard him. Throwing back his head, he gave one deep groan of anguish, and his shoulders began to move very slowly as his chest heaved up. All the while his eyes were fixed on the Dark Master, while the whole hall watched him in awe; not even Brian or O'Donnell himself guessed what that slow movement of Cathbarr's body boded.

"Best put chains upon him, Murrough," said the Dark Master, his teeth shining under his drooping mustache.

Vere cried out in sudden wonder.

"Fore Gad! Look!"

Then indeed the Dark Master looked, and sprang to his feet, and one great shout of alarm and fear shrilled up from those watching. For as Cathbarr stood there, the veins had suddenly come out on his face and neck, and with a dull sound the ropes had broken on his arms, and he was free.

Murrough rushed forward, and his pistol spat fire. Cathbarr, with his eyes still on the Dark Master, put out a hand and Murrough went whirling away with a dull groan. Then the giant rushed.

O'Donnell did not stay for that meeting, but slipped away like a shadow into his surging men, yelling at them to fire. There were few muskets in the hall, however, and an instant later Cathbarr had reached the table where Vere still sat astounded. He brought down a fist on the royalist's steel cap, and Vere coughed horribly and fell out of his chair with his skull crushed.

Now a musket roared out, and another.

But Cathbarr caught up the oaken table and faced around on the men who were surging forward at him; lifting the ten-foot table as though it were paper, he bellowed something and rushed at them, casting the table in a great heave. It fell squarely on the front rank, and then indeed fear came upon the hall. For Cathbarr's foot had struck against his ax, and he rose with it in his hand.

There was a din of screams and shouts, for half the men were struggling to get out of the hall and the rest were rushing to get at Cathbarr. Another musket crashed, and in the smoke Brian saw the giant stagger, recover, and go bellowing into the crowd.

Brian struggled from the table, groaned with pain, and then stood watching. He could walk, but his weakness and the chains on his wrists and ankles hindered him from being of any advantage to Cathbarr, though he lifted his voice in a shout of encouragement.

Cathbarr heard the shout, and roared out with delight. A musket-ball had cut across his forehead, and with the blood dripping from his beard he looked more like a demon than a man. The huge ax flashed in the smoky light, and before it men groaned and shrieked and gave back; it cleaved steel and flesh, or smashed helms and heads together, and the Dark Master had slipped from the place, so that his men had no leader.

Over the roar of fear-mad men, over the storm of shrieks and shouts, over the dust and smoke, rose the mighty bellow of Cathbarr and the thudding blows of his ax. The royalist officers were fighting around the doorway, while O'Donnell's men were trying to make head against the giant, but he swept through them like a whirlwind, awing them more by his ferocious aspect and his mad rage than by the half-seen effect of his terrific strength.

Little by little they eddied out from the door. Men lay all about, tables were overturned, and through the crowd swirled the terrible ax, leaving a path of

dead in its wake. Brian staggered to the motionless form of Colonel Vere, and reaching down drew a pistol from the dead man's belt. His strength was flooding back to him, and in spite of the agony caused by every movement, he clanked slowly down toward the door. At sight of his chained and bandage-swathed figure a wild shriek welled up, and when he laughed and fired into the midst of them all opposition ceased.

Cathbarr still sought the Dark Master, raging back and forth, smiting and smiting with never a pause in the flail-like sweep of his long arms. He saw Brian standing there, and emitted a wild bellow of joy, but never ceased from his smiting. Out through the door poured a stream of maddened figures, for blind panic had come on every man there, and Cathbarr's was not the only weapon that drew blood as the men fought for exit.

Brian laughed again, for now he knew that he would die in no long time, but it would not be under the torturers. Cathbarr cleared the hall, sent the last man flying out with an arm lopped from him, and swung to the huge doors after kicking two or three bodies from his way. When the beam had dropped into place and they were alone with the dead and dying, he turned to Brian and flung out his arms.

"Careful!" exclaimed Brian, seizing his hand. "None of your bear-hugs, old friend," and he swiftly told of his tortures. Tears ran down the giant's blood-strewn face as he listened, and with the tenderness of a woman he picked up Brian and carried him back to a table, setting him on it.

"First for these chains, brother," he cried, going back for his ax. "We may yet win out against these devils."

"Small chance," smiled Brian grimly. "I cannot swing a blade, and we cannot hold this hall for long. Besides, you have some wounds."

Cathbarr roared out a laugh, exuberantly as a boy, and carefully spread Brian's legs open on the table.

"Hold quiet!" he cautioned, and swung up the ax. Down it flashed, the thinner blade sheared through the chain an inch from Brian's ankle and split the oak beneath, and Cathbarr drew back for a second blow.

Four times he struck, and the blows smote off the chains from each wrist and ankle, although the locked rings still remained. But Brian was free, and when he gained his feet he found the exercise had somewhat loosened his muscles, and he picked up a sword.

"We can at least die fighting, Cathbarr," he said, and looked into the giant's eyes. "And, brother, I thank you."

"Nonsense!" blurted out Cathbarr, wiping the blood from his eyes and grinning through his beard. "Turlough Wolf has our men hidden around this royalist camp, and the Bird Daughter has a boat outside the castle. We cannot get through the royalists, but there is a chance that we can get to the shore. Besides, she has ships and men coming from her kinsmen in the North. Now, how shall we get away?"

Brian shook his head. "I can hardly walk, Cathbarr, to say nothing of swimming or fighting. There is a rear door out of the hall, yonder, but no use trying it."

"Perchance I have still some strength," grinned Cathbarr, picking up his ax. "Let us have a look at that rear door, before they come at us with muskets."

CHAPTER XII.

HOW THE DARK MASTER WAS RUINED.

THE fear that had come upon the O'Donnells was so great that not until pikemen entered the castle from the camp could the Dark Master get men at the doors of the hall. And this proved the salvation of Brian and Cathbarr, for when they left the hall by the rear door and slipped through the corridors, they came out upon the rear or seaward battlements of the castle.

These they found denuded of men, while from the courtyard and front of the keep were rising shouts and batterings, whereat Cathbarr chuckled.

"They are all drawn around to the front, brother. Now, how to get down from here?"

Brian looked around in the starlight, but saw that there was no gate or other opening in the walls. He began to lose hope again; once the Dark Master had burst into the great hall he would scatter men over the whole castle, and their shift would be short. At this point the walls were some thirty feet high, and pointing out to the sea stood four of the bastards, with balls piled beside them.

"Now if we had a rope," he said, "the matter would not be hard. Is that boat near the shore?"

"Not so far that I cannot make them hear," grinned Cathbarr, opening his mouth to shout, but Brian stopped him.

"Be careful—do you want to draw down the O'Donnells likewise? Now, cut the ropes from these cannon, and if we have time we shall yet get down safe."

Cathbarr rushed off in delight, and began hewing at the recoil-ropes which bound the bastards and their carriages to their places. Brian followed him, seizing the ropes and trying to knot the strands hastily and with no little pain to himself; but now the hope of escape began to thrill through him, and for the first time since sighting the Dark Master's stronghold he began to think that he might yet get away. However, he could do little knotting with one hand, and not until Cathbarr impatiently took over the task was it finished. At the same instant a great burst of yells rose over the castle.

"Hasten!" cried Brian, as the other began fastening the line to a cannon. "I can use one hand—"

"Save your strength," grunted Cathbarr, lifting him after swinging the loop of his ax around his neck. "Catch me about the neck with your good arm, and trust me for the rest, brother."

Brian did as he was ordered, since there

was no time for lowering him down. The giant scrambled over the edge, gripping the twisting rope, and Brian tightened his lips to keep down his groans, for the agony was cruel to him. He was forced against the body of Cathbarr, and swirl after swirl of pain went over him at each touch on his burns.

The giant grunted once or twice, for he had many slight wounds also, but with the rope gripped in hands and feet, he lowered away steadily. At length they reached the ground, and the scattered rocks along the shore were but a few yards away.

Cathbarr sent his bull-like voice roaring out at the stars, while Brian clung weakly to him and searched the waters. He could see nothing, but suddenly there drifted in a faint shout, and Cathbarr bellowed once more.

"Swim for it," said Brian, as torches began to move along the walls above. "If those cannon are not loaded, we're safe."

Cathbarr nodded, and caught up the body of Brian tenderly enough in one arm, as he splashed out. The icy water shocked Brian's brain awake and drove the pain out of him momentarily, and before Cathbarr was waist-deep he heard a hail and saw the dark shape of a galley approaching.

Muskets flashed out from the walls, and their bullets whistled overhead, but five minutes later Brian was on the galley, Cathbarr was clambering over the side, and the light boat was being rowed out again.

Brian thought his senses were slipping away when he found Nuala O'Malley herself holding his head as he lay in the stern, while men flung cloaks around him; but warm tears dripped on his face, and she patted his arm soothingly.

"Lie quiet," she said, but Brian would not, for already his brain was leaping ahead, and he knew that there was work to be done.

"Tell me," he asked eagerly, "are my men camped around the royalists? Is

help indeed coming to you from the North?"

"Yes," she replied, trying to quiet him. "A pigeon came in from Erris to-day, with word that two ships with men were on the way to help me. When I returned from the South and found that the plague had been at Gorumna, I sent off asking for help, and now it is coming."

"Then send word to Turlough!" cried Brian eagerly. "Tell him to throw my men on the royalist camp *to-night* and drive the pikemen into the castle! Colonel Vere is dead, and there is such confusion that all will think we have more than two hundred men. If we can leaguer them there until your ships come, we may win all at a blow!"

Nuala found instantly that there was meat in the plan, and as they were rowing out to meet one of her caracks, promised to send in the galley with word to Turlough when they got aboard the larger ship.

This they were no great while in doing. Brian knew nothing of it, for upon the Bird Daughter's word he had dropped away into a faint once more. With this Nuala O'Malley was quite content, so that when Brian wakened he was greatly refreshed and found himself lying bandaged on a bunk with the sunlight coming through a stern-port beside him, and the Bird Daughter watching him with food and drink ready.

"Take of this first," she smiled; "then we will talk."

Brian obeyed, being very thirsty and ravenously hungered. He had little pain except when he tried to move, and so he ate as he lay, propped up with folded garments, and watched the Bird Daughter. She refused to speak until he had eaten the meat and cakes she had fetched, but when he smiled and asked for a razor her grave face rippled with frank laughter, and her deep violet eyes danced as they looked into his.

"I am sorry I have none," she said mockingly. "So you must wait till we

come to port again. Just at present we are off Slyne Head and bearing northward."

"What!" Brian stared at her. "Are you in jest?"

It appeared that she was not, for she was sailing north to meet those ships of her kinsmen, and to hasten them back with her. Meantime Cathbarr had been sent ashore to meet Turlough and hold the Dark Master and his royalists in check. Nuala had sent fifty of her men to join Turlough, left twenty to hold her castle, and had ten with her upon the carack. It seemed likely that Turlough and Cathbarr could hold the Dark Master penned up for a few days at least, even with fewer men; if they could not, said Nuala shortly, they had best sit at spinning-wheels for the rest of their lives.

"You are a wonderful girl!" said Brian, and fell asleep again.

He remembered little of that voyage, for they met two caracks crowded with men off Innishark that afternoon, found they were the expected O'Malleys from the North, and turned back with them at once. Brian wakened again that same evening, but Nuala refused to let him go on deck until the following morning, when they sighted Bertraghboy Bay. Then Brian discarded most of his bandages, dressed, and, with his left arm in a sling, joined the Bird Daughter on the quarterdeck. He found that his burns were well on toward healing, for he could walk slowly without great pain, and had every confidence that he could sit a horse if need be.

Sailing past Bertragh Castle, the three ships went on up the bay and cast anchor. It was not hard to see that Turlough and Cathbarr had done their work well, for in passing the castle they had made out that the royalist pikemen had been driven inside, and there was some musketry to be heard at times. No sooner had the anchor-cables roared out, indeed, than a band of men came riding toward the shore, and Nuala sent off a boat for them. She had known nothing of Cathbarr's

deeds at the castle until Brian had told her of them, and on seeing that the giant was among those coming off, she smiled at Brian.

"Now you shall see how a girl can conquer a giant, Yellow Brian!"

Brian laughed and waved a hand to Turlough, who was beside Cathbarr in the boat. As the men came over the rail, Nuala quietly pushed him aside and faced the giant, sharply bidding him kneel. Cathbarr had been all for rushing forward to Brian, and obeyed with an ill grace, when Nuala quickly leaned forward and kissed him on the brow.

"That is for bravery and faith," she said. "Truly, I would that you served me!"

Poor Cathbarr grew redder than the Bird Daughter's cloak. He started to his feet, gazed around sheepishly, found all men laughing at him—and did the best thing he could have done, which was to go to his knees again and put Nuala's hand to his lips.

"While my master serves you, I serve you," he blurted out, and this answer must have pleased Nuala mightily, for she flushed, laughed, and bade all down into the cabin.

Brian greeted Turlough with no little joy, but beyond assurances that all went well, gained no knowledge of what had happened. Nuala had sent for the O'Malley chieftains, and proposed to hold a conference at once.

The O'Malleys arrived from the other ships in a scant five minutes—dark, silent men who spoke little, but spoke to the point. Art Bocagh, or the Lamé, had had one leg hamstrung in his youth, but Brian took him for a dangerous man in battle; while his cousin Shaun the Little was a very short man with tremendous shoulders.

Nuala took her seat at the head of the stern-cabin table, and the position of affairs was gone over carefully.

It seemed that no sooner had Turlough learned from Cathbarr of what had taken place in the castle, and that Brian was

safe on shipboard, than he drove his men down pell-mell on the camp, just before dawn. Any other man would have been exhausted by the events of that night, but Cathbarr had led them in the assault. The result had been that, with hardly any resistance, they had slain some four-score of the pikemen, and would have captured or slain them all had it not been for the Dark Master's cannon which drove them back.

The better part of the royalist officers had fallen, either then or under the ax of Cathbarr in the hall of the castle. In fact, after learning that he had slain some nineteen persons on that occasion, Cathbarr had taken no few airs upon himself. Vanity was to him as natural as to a child, and Brian hugely enjoyed watching the giant strut. However, what remained of Vere's five hundred pikemen were in the castle, joined to the Dark Master's men; and Turlough's advice was that since there must be some seven hundred mouths to feed, the safest plan was to bide close and force the fight to come to them, rather than to take it to O'Donnell.

"There is reason against that, Turlough Wolf," said Brian quickly. "The Dark Master has men on the hills, and if news is borne to Galway of what has happened, we are like to have a larger army on our heels than we can cope with."

"I have attended to O'Donnell's watchers," said Turlough grimly. "When Cathbarr bore word of the pact from Gorumna Castle, I sent out horsemen and we swept the hills bare of men. O'Donnell has no more than are in the castle, and a score of our own men are on the roads, watching for any ill."

"How many men have we in all?" spoke up Lame Art O'Malley. "In our ships there are sixty men we can spare for land battle."

"That gives us three hundred in all," replied Turlough to Nuala's questioning glance. "If we take a strong position we should sweep most of O'Donnell's men away at the first charge."

"There you are wrong," said Brian, shaking his head. "Those pikemen are bad foes for cavalry, and our two hundred horsemen would shatter on them if they stood firm."

"Not if we choose our ground," said the Bird Daughter, her eyes flashing. "Nay, *I* am master here, my friends! Now this is my rede. We shall not waste men by attacking the castle, unless forced to it by an army from Galway. Instead, we will wait until the Dark Master is driven out by hunger; then we will fall on him and destroy him utterly."

"Yellow Brian, you have some knowledge of war, and you shall take this matter in charge. Cathbarr, do you command fifty horse, with the men from our ships here, and keep the Dark Master in play. With the remainder, we shall wait in whatever spot Brian shall choose, and before many days are sped I think that Bertragh will be mine again."

The Bird Daughter had her way, since none could find much against her plan; and that afternoon Brian went ashore with her and the O'Malleys, leaving the three ships at anchor under a small guard. Turlough had made camp a short mile from the castle, on a little hill among the farms; both Nuala and the O'Malley men were somewhat surprised at finding the O'Donnell women and children safe and untouched in their own steads.

"I saw to that," laughed Turlough, slanting his crafty eyes at Brian. "I had but to threaten them in Brian's name, and the men only were slain."

"I think that you are a hard master," laughed Nuala, but Brian smiled and pointed to his men, who were pouring out to meet him with shouts of joy.

"All men do not rule by fear alone, Bird Daughter," he said quietly. She gave him a quick glance. "I found these men ruffraff of the wars, and while they have no such love for me as Cathbarr here, I think they had liefer follow me than any other leader."

After that Nuala said little concerning Brian's discipline.

That night Nuala and Brian took up headquarters at one of the larger farms, and while Cathbarr went before the castle to keep the Dark Master in check and allow none to leave the place, they called in a number of those men O'Donnell had loaned to Brian, and questioned them about the provisioning of the castle.

From these they found that there was good store of all things for the usual garrison, but with seven hundred men to feed the Dark Master would be forced out speedily. So with the dawn Brian and Turlough rode forth to select a battleground, and while Brian was very sore and riding caused him great pain at first, he soon found himself in better shape.

Turlough picked a hollow in the road a mile farther from the castle, flanked on either hand by woods and hillsides where men might lie hidden. Brian found it good, and that afternoon a part of their horsemen were shifted thither in readiness

For the next three days there was little done. Twice the Dark Master attempted sallies with what few horsemen he had left, but on each occasion Cathbarr's horse smote his men and drove them back. To be sure, O'Donnell thundered with his bastards, but the guns only burned up good powder, for Brian would allow no assault made.

By Turlough's advice, however, they brought about the Dark Master's fall through certain prisoners made in the two sallies.

These captives were led through the depleted central camp, though they knew nothing of that picked place farther back. Having been allowed to see what men Brian had here, Turlough slyly drove Cathbarr into parading his vanity before them; and in all innocence the giant told how he could put the Dark Master's men to flight single-handed, and of his anxiety lest the O'Donnells should fear to fight in the open. What was more, Brian affected to be utterly shattered by his wounds, and with that the prisoners were sent back with a message offering quarter to all

within the castle save the Dark Master himself.

Early the next morning a horseman came riding fast from Cathbarr with word that the garrison was stirring. Without delay, Brian donned a mail-shirt, bound his useless left arm to his side, and mounted. The Bird Daughter insisted on accompanying him, and stilled his dismayed protests by asserting her feudal superiority; in the end she had her way.

Leaving her kinsmen and a hundred more men to dispute O'Donnell's passage and give back slowly before him with Cathbarr, she and Brian rode to their men among the trees on the hillsides over the hollow in the road. Here they had a hundred and fifty men, composed of the Scots troopers and the pick of the others, and Nuala took one side of the road while Brian took the other. Then, being well hidden, they waited.

Brian was savagely determined to slay the Dark Master that day, and came near to doing it. Presently a man galloped up to say that O'Donnell and six hundred men were on the road, having left the rest to hold the castle. A little later Cathbarr's retreating force came in sight, and after them marched O'Donnell. He had deployed his muskets in front and rear, and rode in the midst of his pikemen, whose banner of England blew out bravely in the morning wind.

At the edge of the dip in the road Cathbarr led his men in full flight down the hollow and up the farther rise, where he halted as if to dispute the Dark Master further. There were barely a dozen mounted men with O'Donnell, and he made no pursuit, but marched steadily along with his muskets pecking at Cathbarr's men. When he had come between the wooded hillsides, however, Cathbarr came charging down the road; the pikemen settled their pikes three deep to receive him, and with that Brian led out his men among the trees and swooped down with an ax swinging in his right hand.

Alive to his danger, the Dark Master

tried to receive his charge, but at that instant Nuala's men burst down on the other flank. Brian headed his men, and at sight of him a yell of dismay went up from the O'Donnells. A moment later the pikemen's array was broken and the fight disintegrated into a wild affray wherein the horsemen had much the better of it.

Brian tried to cut his way to the Dark Master, but when O'Donnell saw the pikemen shattered he knew that the day was lost. He gathered his dozen horsemen and went at Cathbarr viciously; Brian saw the two meet, saw O'Donnell's blade slip under the ax and Cathbarr go from the saddle, then the Dark Master had broken through the ring and was riding hard for the North.

Brian wheeled his horse instantly, found the Bird Daughter at his side, and

with a score of men behind them they rode out of the battle in pursuit. It proved useless, however, for the Dark Master had the better horseflesh; after half an hour he was gaining rapidly, and with a bitter groan Brian drew rein at last.

"No use, Nuala," he said. "I must wait until my strength has come back to me, for I have done too much and can go no farther."

The girl reined in beside him, and her hand went out to his, and he found himself gazing deep into her eyes.

"For what you have done, Brian," she said simply, "thanks. Now let us ride back, for I think there is work before us, and we shall see the Dark Master soon enough."

"I am not minded to wait his coming," quoth Yellow Brian darkly, and they returned.

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.



SONG OF THE WATER FALL

BY CHART PITT

FOR a thousand years I have served the race,
Grinding its golden grist.

For ages they built their market-place
Within sight of my flying mist.

Though master-servant, a king was I
Until in one fell hour

They conjured the steam from pond and stream,
And robbed me of my power.

The water-wheels rotted, and I was alone,
Save when some one came to see

The mist-wraiths rise from my foaming face,
Like ghosts of the used-to-be.

Now I know once more the song of the wheels—
Monsters grinding by night and day—

For they send my power o'er copper-wires,
A thousand miles away!



Pete and Repeat

by
William Dudley Pelley

WITH a wild eye and his general personality askew, lumber-cook Siphon Jim invaded the little Utah restaurant.

The hour was noon. Therefore the man he sought was discovered calmly defiling himself with food at a corner table.

"Shiverin' Babes-in-the-Wood!" cried the angular old cook. "Have you seen the new Camp C manager who's to take Shootin' Carew's place in the timber?"

"I have," declared the doc, combination physician and cashier for the lumber camp one hundred and seventy-five miles northward in the Wasatch Mountains. "In fact, Si," he concluded, "he's come because I got him the job!"

"Are you ravin' crazy?" demanded Siphon, "or just fair-to-middlin' insane? That kid ain't twenty-two if he's a day. He don't weigh a hundred and twenty-five pounds!"

"I am aware o' those facts," said the doctor.

Siphon sank weakly upon an opposite chair. Removing his Jim-Crow hat, he ran bony fingers into his fearful and wonderful hair—like a farmer feeling in a haymow for tramps.

"And Shootin' Carew was fifty years

old, weighed two hundred pounds, and was as safe to bamboozle as a machine-gun primed with bad whisky!"

"I admit it."

"For all o' which, Shootin' Carew occasionally had to plug a man dead to show him the error o' his ways. Now, with this same bunch o' rough-necks, fugitives, and other scum o' civilization to handle, you've brought on a beardless boy to direct 'em!"

"It's plain," returned the doctor, "you do not know Peter O'Bruce."

"He was pointed out to me when he just got off the Salt Lake City train. All I got to say is, Bad Bunk McKnott will take one-and-three-quarters looks at him, snort, pick him up by the scruff o' his neck and shake him till every numeral with which the hairs o' his head are all numbered are piled in a heap on the ground! Bunk's licked every man ever sent here by the company, exceptin' Shootin' Carew. That's because Shootin' Carew was a shade worse'n he. There'll be anarchy in the tracts when we get back to camp!"

The doctor was aggravatingly quiet. "No, Si," said he, "you're saturated with misunderstandin'."

"You mean to sit there, Doc Apsey,

absorbin' me with your unobstructed orbs o' sight and claim this pin-feathered kid is goin' to maintain law in the tracts—that anything in human shape, twenty-two years and one-twenty-five pounds is capable o' constructin' a straight and narrow path in the tracts and keepin' it in repair without the German standin' army and two New York policemen?"

"I do, Si. If you'll control that blot on nature recognized as your face, I'll anoint you with information about this Peter O'Bruce.

"To begin with, he's just got out o' a university. He's been learnin' everything useful to existence in a lumber camp exceptin' a swamper ain't a chap that digs swamps or a scaler has nothin' to do with measures and weights. He's up here to try practical lumbering. Although there's a college education hamperin' him, I've bet President Telcolm he'll have Camp C kind, gentle, and fit for a lady to drive in a week. I base my contention, Si, on the previous history o' the kid himself!"

Doc Apsey lit a pepsinary cigar. He gazed out into the sun-baked streets of the little Utah town. They were sprinkled with lumberjacks from the north-eastern mountains awaiting the arrival of a new boss to fill the vacancy of one whose hard fists had been suddenly transferred elsewhere.

"Pete O'Bruce, Si," said the camp doctor, "is the legitimate progeny o' several generations o' O'Bruces whose bid for immortality has been to gaze on the wine when it was red.

"Gettin' into this universe in the usual manner, immediately he began makin' things interestin'. When a kid-fight was in progress he was never the one who held coats. As he grew up, he was characteristically untactful in the use o' school-kids, Chinamen, and neighborhood peace. Lovin' friends predicted he would end his days on the gallows. Lovin' enemies omitted the predictin', bein' sure o' it anyhow. Speakin' in simile, metaphor and brevity, young Pete O'Bruce was a live wire, a consignment o' dynamite, and

an automatic spark, all in a juicy nose, busted garter, and pucker-string blouse."

"But look at the men he's got to handle," Siphon argued. "They're a bunch o' gorillas, run amuck. What chance would he have in a fight with Bunk?"

"He'd run around Bunk and give him three punches while Bunk was spittin' on his palms. That's what he did to his step-father. That's why I got such faith in him."

"What did he do to his stepfather?"

"Waloped the tar out o' him before he was fifteen years old—the boy, I mean! Got indignant one morning at his father's business—which was gettin' drunk and mismanagin' his laundry business. The business was Pete's mother. Pete knotted up a little thumb-nail fist and pasted the old man so that for a minute the world took a handspring. There was immense pandemonium which lasted for the better part o' a day. The boy may have rushed in where angels fear to tread, but he didn't abandon himself to the business o' expectin' an angel to come along then and rescue him. It was the old man who yelled for an angel, and for want o' one he used the next best thing, which was a box-car startin' West at midnight. And he sat on the jarring, thunderin' floor, says he: 'Damned if I live in the same town with that sixty-pound chunk o' freckled wild-cat! There ain't no lickin' him. He won't lick!'

"That's the little cuss, Si, you see step-pin' off the train an hour ago. He wanted college trainin', and the same fightin' persistence got it. A month ago he was honorably discharged and wrote to me for a job. He's twenty-two and growed a bit since the scrap with his stepfather. But believe me, Si, his bowels for fight has never forsook him. There's to be some fun in the timber, Si, and don't bet your money on weight!"

The doctor might have said more. His narrative was cut short, however, by a wild whoop outside.

Into the room careened a dissipated,

dissolute Hercules, the status of his alcoholic social ratio inferring he might attempt to blow the foam off lemon pie. Bunk McKnott never hid the light of his badness under a bushel.

"I want," said he, "*food!*"

Siphon Jim moved over. No one ever fought with the lean, kindly, grizzled old camp cook.

"Bunk," said he, "ain't you takin' a bit too much?"

"You bet!" bellowed McKnott. "Loaded to meet th' new boss, I am. Aimin' to give him royal recepshun—me! Goin' to show him who I am—Cornelius McKnott; give him demonstrashun that when I'm havin' little time o' drinks—goin' to be let alone—me! You woman! Bring food!"

McKnott tried to turn over one of the plates. The proper way to turn over a plate in a Utah restaurant is slide a knife under its edge and pry it from the oil-cloth. Bunk pulled up the whole cloth and sent the contents of the table to the floor.

"Food! Food! Food!" he roared. "I'm Bad Bunk McKnott, Camp Seven, Ottumwa Lumber Company! Bad man, I am! I want *food!*"

To quiet him, Si essayed conversation. The widowed proprietress set out dishes with scared, disgusted face.

"Seen the new boss, Bunk? Guess we'll be gettin' under way on the mules in a little while now. He's round the place, gatherin' up the men."

"He don't gather me up!" announced McKnott. "I'm a free man, I am! This is a free country, this is! I go back to the mountains when I'm damned good and ready, I do! Me, Bunk McKnott go back when I get good and ready. I ain't ready to-day, I ain't! Bad man, I am—and I want everybody to know it! Say, Si, did they get a bigger man than Carew? Have I got to lick a bigger man than Carew?"

"Yaas," drawled Dr. Apsey from across the room. "Guess you have, Bunk."

"Huh?" The bleary features of the fighting-drunken fighter leered across to ascertain the speaker's identity.

"Oh, it's you, Doc Apsey. Waal, you're a good feller, doc! I won't touch you! You sewed up my hand once where Shootin' Carew winged me with a bullet. Only man that ever licked me—Shootin' Carew!"

Siphon Jim's features registered perplexity again. He ran his fingers into his hair and felt for more tramps.

"I'm thinkin', doc," said he, "that if your peppery infant aims to control a camp o' jacks like Bunk McKnott, he's goin' to have his mettle tested right here in Provo!"

At twenty minutes past one the screen-door of the Metropolitan Café creaked open to admit three men. One was pock-faced Terry Henderson, who looked after supplies. The second was young Johnson Quay, company bookkeeper. The third was a thin, undersized, deadly young man whose mouth was a tight hard line.

"Any Camp C men in here?" the last demanded.

Siphon gave a perceptible start. Doc Apsey laid a restraining hand on his arm.

"Yar!" roared McKnott. "But I ain't goin' back, I ain't, until I get ready. I know who you are. You're one o' the brats the new boss has sent to round the men up. But I'm a bad man, I am. Name's McKnott. Ain't goin' back till I get damned good and ready. Tell the new boss that!"

"All right. Then you'll walk. The company's mules are goin' in a bunch. Get me?"

The big man lifted a dish and smashed it in eighty pieces on the floor. The widow crept behind the three company men.

"Take him out!" she whimpered softly. "Why do you let these lumber men come down into Provo and do all this damage?"

"The previous boss, ma'am, quit unexpectedly," replied the deadly capable

youngster. "As soon as his iron fist was lifted, the men naturally scooted for a taste of civilization. But we'll be quit of the place in another half hour. I'm the new boss, and I'm rounding them up to move."

"*You!*" Bunk roared. "You the new boss! Haw! Haw! Haw! Where's your diapers, Willie? Does the company furnish free safety-pins to go with you? *You* the new boss! Why, you milk-faced little scut—you couldn't boss a wooden Noah's Ark, you couldn't!"

The corners of the young man's mouth came down in hard shadows of muscle. He was young. It was a safe wager, however, there was hair on his chest.

"Are you going back with this outfit, or are you walking?" demanded O'Bruce.

"Me walkin'? Well, I guess I ain't walkin'! Bunk McKnott, I am! Baddest man in the timber. Me have a mule? Who says I can't? Go on, now. You're sure foolin'!"

The fighter staggered across, grabbed the youngster's ears and began to push in his nose with the huge ball of a dirty thumb.

He was sent crashing among the dishes with the hardest and quickest smash in the face he had ever received in his life!

The blow that rocked his huge head sobered him in an instant. The roar from his lungs seemed to mix up the cruets on the counter.

"Want to fight, do you? Hit me, will you? Want to show off who's to be boss, do you?"

"Come out in the street," ordered O'Bruce. "There'll be too much wreckage in here that the lady can't afford!"

Henderson grasped O'Bruce's arm.

"Go easy, kid," he advised. "Don't fight with this guy. He's a bad egg! No one's licked him yet but Shootin' Carew. That was because Shootin' Carew would take the nerve out o' the opposition by simply standin' before 'em. Kid him along. Make a friend o' him, not an enemy."

"Enemy—hell!" snapped O'Bruce.

"But he's twice your sizen!"

"Is he?" asked the lad dryly.

Saying nothing more he led the way to the street. At the cry of "Fight!" a hundred men came from two hundred directions.

McKnott made a show of rolling back his sleeves. It was plain that laying out a new boss was a matter of ceremony.

The crowd squared off and made a shouting, whistling ring about the two. The Ottumwa men had seen the thing before. With O'Bruce it had come a trifle earlier than usual.

The new boss, however, did not even trouble himself to remove his hat.

Without preliminaries he walked up to the other's elaborate preparations.

From the top step of the Metropolitan Café, Siphon Jim startled himself by a hoarse shout of exaltation.

With a blow like the butt end of a steel billet, O'Bruce had split open the big man's left eye!

"You little devil! You little devil!" swore the big man. "Lemme at you! Just lemme at you!"

The crowd went insane with admiration. Cheers, roars, cat-calls, and whistles sounded on the droning afternoon air.

"Stand still and fight! Stand still and fight!" swore the big man. "You dassent stand still!"

The crowd whistled and cheered the more. Their moral support for the little chap worked on him worse than the blinded eye.

Like a great grizzly bear the bad man clawed about the human enclosure. Grapple and swing for the boy as he would, yet each time he swung his weight and lunged, the lad was not there. As he turned on each recoil, another and still another concentrated billet of steel got in the way of his chin and rocked his head groggily.

It was twenty minutes to two when Dr. Apsey turned with an oath to Siphon beside him.

For the first time the boy had been tardy! A fearful swing of the brawny fist had connected with his temple.

O'Bruce crumpled on the sun-baked mud and lay very, very still!

With the roar of an infuriated brute, McKnott was upon him. Once! twice! three times! his big boot stove at the prostrate figure. Livid prints of hobnails came on the boy's nude shoulder after three sickening thuds.

A mammoth billow of anger surged over the mob. Though the sins of many of the Wasatch timber men are as scarlet, yet they dearly love fair play.

"Foul! Foul!" they shouted. "Kill him! Lynch him! He hit the little feller when he was down!"

Pandemonium was unleashed! Man and prostrate boy became the vortex of a chaotic swirl of swarthy humanity.

From it McKnott tore himself loose. He whipped out a gun.

"Keep off!" he charged, "or I'll fill the place with corpses!"

Dr. Apsey and Siphon lifted the gamey youngster tenderly and carried him into the rough pine dining-hall. The widow brought a dipper of water and used her apron for a sponge.

The crowd, ugly and cursing, jammed the place. They were interested in knowing how badly the bantam was injured. They could get McKnott later.

The boy resuscitated quickly. Opening loggy eyes he sat up weakly on the table. The first he saw was Siphon.

"You see!" said Siphon.

"What?"

"He knocked you out."

The boy replied with a grunt. "Where is he?" he demanded.

"Lit out, twenty feet at a light," explained the doc, "to save the misanderstandin' o' a lynchin'."

"The sneak!"

"Waal," sawed Siphon, "outin this country it ain't exactly soothin' to be suddenly took with that species o' suspended animation!"

"I don't mean the lynching! I mean,

why didn't he wait till I came round?" said O'Bruce.

"What for?"

"To finish up!"

"Finish up!" gasped Siphon. "By the look o' you, sonny, I should pretty much estimate you was finished up already."

"That," declared O'Bruce with another ugly grunt, "remains to be seen."

"Where you goin'?"

"After him!"

"Gee-rusalem!" exclaimed Siphon.

In a rear room of the American Saloon, the temporary victor swathed cold water on his battered eye.

While thus engaged, the face of the big man paled. Then his alarm shifted to curiosity as reconnoitering from a side window to ascertain the cause of the sullen roar at the other end of the street, he saw in the van of the mob the figure of the boy he had knocked unconscious.

"Waal," demanded the uneasy man as the crowd came up, "come over to apologize?"

The new boss came over, but not to apologize. Speaking not a word, he hammered a quick cut at the big man's nose that stove it into his face.

"What the devil!" bellowed McKnott. "Didn't I knock you out once? Have you come back for more?"

Two minutes later Siphon Jim climbed on a grocery box to get a better view of the terrific hostilities.

"Gee-rusalem!" he cried again.

"It is my opinion," said Doc Apsey at his side, "that the chap who don't know when he's licked—ain't!"

Sheriff Godfrey, official exponent of Provo law and order, returned to his office toward sun-down. He found there a bruised and battered individual who had drawn down all the cheap window-shades to hide his Alsatia. This bruised and battered individual sat painfully in a dark corner with an enormous bandanna at his mouth.

"Say," demanded the battered one, "I want perlice protection!"

"Sufferin' cats!" exclaimed the sheriff, "I should say you did!"

"A kid did this!" declared the bloody one. "Look at me! I'm a mess!"

"Man," replied the astounded officer, "your perception is marvelous. You're more than a mess! You're *wreckage*!"

"I belong to Ottumwa Camp C. Got in argument with the new boss about goin' back. I licked him! Yes, sir—licked him brown! But every time I knock him cold, he don't know enough to stay down! He's up and at me again! He's searchin' the place for me right now. I want perlice protection!"

"Who are you?"

"Name's McKnott."

"Yaas," drawled the horse-faced sheriff, "your name's McKnott. But you've changed it lately and now it's mud!" The officer employed a chair adequately for the purposes for which it was manufactured. "I believe," he concluded, "you're the same McKnott that come down from the timber two years ago and shot up this town."

"I might o' got drunk," confessed McKnott, "and been suddenly took with hilarity. But you don't get my point! Four times I've knocked him cold since noon. It don't do a bit o' good. In half an hour he's good as ever—only deadlier. If I kill him I'll be roped up for murder. But what's the use o' scrappin' with a feller that don't know when he's licked?"

"It is positively," agreed the sheriff, "a waste o' time!"

"But what am I goin' to do?"

"If I was you, I'd grin and bear it!"

"Grin? I can't grin! That kid's plugged a monkey-wrench in my grinnin' machinery. Can't you see it? Look at my left eye!"

"I'm a lookin'," said the sheriff. "It's a bear!"

Then the sheriff's mood changed. With righteous wrath distorting his heavy bronzed features, he arose, wormed his fingers dynamically into the scruff of

Bunk's neck and raised the lumberman out of his chair. Something happened to the seat of Bunk's trousers that not alone looked like Sheriff Godfrey's boot, but felt like it, also.

"Get out o' this office, you swine!" he roared. "I've been watchin' this scrap. I know you! You're the feller that's been comin' down here from the timber periodically, maltreatin' the census and declarin' yourself a bad man generally. You cussed so loud that the whole county believed you. Now you've met a chap that ain't skeered o' you and he's dealin' you a dose o' your own paregoric. Get out and take it! I wish him joy! But mark this, you scum! If this young bantam turns up with his life suddenly missin', you'll be the first one strung up with no questions permitted or answered! Get me? Now take a walk!"

The sheriff was interrupted by a concourse of citizens who had apparently surrounded his office. The door was jerked violently open. A slender, wiry, khaki-clad figure stood in the aperture.

"You're licked! You're licked!" howled the big man at sight of him. "Four times you're licked—and you don't know it!"

"Somebody's been stuffin' you," declared the diminutive O'Bruee. "I've just begun to fight!"

Saying which he started forward and the bad man reeled to the opposite wall with his seventh smash in the nose.

In the rear room of the American Bar again, the professional bad man sat with three others. The clock on the wall drew near seven.

"I can't go through life with that baby-battleship houndin' me!" he declared. "I'll bet my gun he'll wake me in the middle o' the night to arise and scrap! And fellers. I'm about used up! There's only one way out. If the crowd won't let me finish him after puttin' him to sleep every time, somethin's natcherly got to happen to that crowd to divert their attention so I can! He's over to

that restaurant now, restin' up! In half an hour he'll be lookin' for me again. Now, then, there's man-sized fun for you to tag on the outskirts o' that crowd till the two o' us get scrappin' good. Then start shootin' up the town. Do it good and old-fashioned! Pepper everything! Start in with dogs and end up with angels! While the attention o' the mob is investigatin' your presentiments, I'll paste him so hard he won't never wake up till Bryan gets the Presidency! It's the only solution! It's got to be did!"

The wildly beautiful summer evening deepened. A mountain sunset, like a wound of scarlet, bled across the western sky. The titanic peaks of the far-flung Wasatches were weird and mystic in their ethereal benediction on the afterglow.

The little Utah town was sizzling with the excitement of the Herculean contest. For many a day after it would hum when the scrappy little boss had loaded what men he could on the long train of mules and taken them off and upward into the timber, to remain till the fall.

In his temporary quarters at the Metropolitan Café the new boss of the Wasatches sipped a man-strong cup of coffee with lips distorted and swollen. A rag was bound round his temples. His shirt was in ribbons. One side of his face showed hastily swabbed smears of blood, and his nose was a frightful thing. But his queer green eyes were alight, and his jaws were terrific.

At another table Doc Apsey leaned over and whispered to Siphon.

"Get your gun handy, Si. There's trouble brewin' in this town to-night. Even a bag like Bunk has got his friends."

Siphon Jim had his gun to hand. It was a beautiful pearl-handled six-shooter which had figured in more than one Wasatch Mountain fracas.

The lad at length finished his meal, swashed his face and arms in as cold water as the place afforded. Then he pried through the ring of admirers and the body-guard streamed into the street.

There were no electric lights in Provo at the time. The shacks were lighted with kerosene lamps which sent a fantastic shaft of lemon light from each window into the witching darkness.

Straight to the American Bar, where scouts had reported McKnott was hiding, the new czar of the tracts bent his way. And when he reached the place, Doc Apsey and Siphon slipped off into the darkness.

"Ain't got enough yet, hey?" leered McKnott, striding boldly out at the summons.

There was a momentary pause. All that could be heard for the instant was the coughing of the little locomotive that was making up the night freight for the run to Salt Lake City. Not a man in the crowd but felt this would be the final encounter. They did not wish to lose a word.

Battling in the light of the high-riding sun was one thing. Fighting in the starlit evening was another.

But without a word the deadly little challenger waded in.

For three minutes had they been battling when far to the left of the street came the sharp crack of a revolver followed by a fusillade of a dozen others.

Men reached for their guns and waited for the lights to begin crashing out. The crowd's attention was distracted. Like a great restless sea it suddenly shifted, and when the short, quick pad of a bullet snipped against soft wood, with a great hoarse roar, it melted.

Yet in the light of the dingy saloon door the man and the boy paid no attention. Wheezing, swearing, clinching, punching, they fought grimly with death and destruction striking with deceiving "pits" around them.

The crowd forgot them. They were too interested at the moment in learning the identity of the Huns who were not alone at the gates, but well inside, and doing their best to reduce the place to funeral crape.

The town was suddenly given over to a

reign of terror. In five minutes it had reverted to the savage and the primitive. Women threw up windows, shrieked hysterically, clutched crying children to them.

From his roost on top of the one-story print-shop, Doc Apsey clutched Siphon's arm.

"Don't shoot, Si!" he yelled, "it's McKnott, and he's runnin' like hell! It's a plot o' McKnott's to distract our attention while he finishes Pete. But by the gum-shoe gods—it's Pete as has finished him! Look at him go! Where's he headed for?—whose pullin' out his tail-feathers? It's O'Bruce! He's after him!"

The shooting ceased as suddenly as it had commenced. Siphon and the doc dropped down from the roof. The key to the situation had been the silhouetted fighters. With the chief actors disappearing the cry was to hound after them.

They passed down the Main Street, running almost blindly in the dark.

There was no doubt in their minds as to the victor. McKnott was running away while there was breath left in him to run anywhere. It wasn't the little fellow's blows he shrank from. It was his eternally keeping at it—his inability to realize when he was whipped. The big man had lost his nerve. Far in advance of the dark, surging mob he was sprinting as he had never sprinted in his life before. Twenty feet behind him came the silent, deadly figure of the lithe youngster who would have no trouble holding in check the lumber-jacks on the Wasatches hereafter!

Into a dark alley McKnott turned, sighting his way by one eye, instinct, and a pair of bulbous ears. Over a rubbish heap he stumbled, over a log-pile, across railroad tracks, down the ties, on he staggered, not knowing especially where he was headed, but expecting every instant to feel the swift, sharp jab in his rear that would telegraph his numbed brain he had been shot.

The cries of the oncoming mob deafened all sounds of the vicinity through which he was fleeing.

Then straight ahead of him he saw suddenly two great red eyes ten feet from the ground and five feet apart!

With a sob of relief he exerted his tortured system to greater effort.

Two sharp whistles pierced above the noise of the roaring crowd at his heels. It came from the locomotive far up forward. The night freight was gathering speed for Salt Lake City!

With head reeling, McKnott put forth every atom of energy in his exhausted cosmos. He overtook the caboose, from whose rear he had seen the lights. The door of the next-to-last car stood open. He clutched at the partition with his bare hands and with a miraculous escape from a horrible death beneath the wheels, drew himself with the last vestige of main strength into the empty box-car and fell senseless upon the floor.

Siphon Jim's long legs had carried him far ahead of the crowd that had been stopped by the obstructions of the railroad yards. He arrived just in time to catch a staggering form as he fell against it in the darkness.

"Kid," said Siphon, as he knelt beside the boy and eased his head upon the ties, "there's many a prophet without honor in his own country who can move over into the next State and get sized up wrong. But you can always tell a coward because he attacks those smaller than himself. Welcome to the Wasatch Mountains, sonny. They're all yours, and the support o' the men that goes with 'em!"

But the only reply from the little five-foot victor was a lugubrious grunt.

It was not half so lugubrious, however, as the language being used at the moment by the man in the box-car who sat up in the rolling, thundering conveyance, rubbed his throbbing head and said:

"Damned if I live in the same place with that freckled wild-cat! There ain't no lickin' him! He won't lick!"

As McKnott was the second man to reach that conclusion, the idea was undoubtedly plausible!

Greywold

by Elisabeth Sutton

SYNOPSIS OF PRECEDING CHAPTERS

MISS CARTER, a middle-aged governess and companion, goes to Greywold, the queer and mysterious home of John Campbell, whose wife is insane, and who has a daughter named Carmen who is never allowed to leave the place. Then arrives Jim Kidd, a one-eyed man, who seems to take charge of everything without a murmur from Campbell, who is palpably afraid of him. Kidd wrings the neck of a parakeet belonging to Mrs. Campbell because the bird cries "Dead fingers" when it looks at Kidd. Miss Carter sees the butler, who seems to be a Chinaman one day and a Jap the next, try to kill Campbell with a cut-glass bowl; but Campbell won't believe her when she tells him about it.

Kidd, after an altercation with Campbell one night, is found dead in his room. He has been strangled and stabbed, and both Campbell and his daughter accept responsibility for the murder. Miss Carter has a few exhibits of her own that she thinks will help to clear up the mystery.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE BOX FROM THE ORIENT.

IN spite of Carmen's startling declaration that she was the murderess of Jim Kidd, the agency detective stuck to his conclusion concerning the tragedy—that Mr. Campbell was guilty.

He considered that Carmen's attitude was induced by the fact that she believed her father to be the slayer of Jim Kidd, and was striving to ward off suspicion from him by directing it to herself.

I heartily shared with him his decision. That was what I had been thinking right along. It explained the bit of her kimono in the dead man's hand satisfactorily.

She, supposing her father to be guilty of the crime, had torn off a piece of her own gown and put it in the slain man's hand, hoping thereby to start a trail toward herself, and so save him.

This was also the object she had in view when she disavowed the knife at the coroner's inquest, knowing, as she must

have, that every member of the household at Greywold would easily identify it by reason of its unique handle, and because it had lain for so many years upon a table in the library. Therefore, it would be a surprising thing if a daughter of the house were not familiar with it, and highly suspicious for her to deny ever having seen it.

Corder's theory of the murder greatly impressed Liggett, who was slowly abandoning his idea that Mrs. Campbell had anything to do with it.

I have no doubt that he would have arrested the owner of Greywold at once but for his extreme fear of taking the wrong person into custody, and thus bringing upon himself fresh criticism from the inhabitants of Boisville, who, rightly or wrongly, credited him with being a complete fizzle as an expert in criminology.

So, in spite of Mr. Campbell's confession and request that he be arrested at once, nothing was done about it that day.

This story began in the *All-Story Weekly* for December 23.

As for Peter Gilbert, I am sure he still clung to the theory he had formulated from the beginning—that Carmen was guilty. The outside detective's opinion regarding the tragedy in no wise changed his decision. Peter Gilbert's mind, once made up, was pretty hard to change.

I wanted to talk to the detectives; to tell them that they were all mistaken; that they were hitting the wrong trail; that this murder wasn't so easy or so commonplace that the arrest of Mr. Campbell or Carmen would solve it.

I wanted to tell them about the shriveled dead fingers I held in my possession; dead fingers that, I was sure, were the key to the whole tragedy.

I wanted to call their attention to the butler, whose hands at one time were slim, delicate, aristocratic-looking, and then again fat and plebeian; and whose face and expression had so disquieted and puzzled me, for I was not sure at times if it were the face of a Japanese or of a Chinaman.

I wanted to draw their attention to the queer blanket of mystery enfolding Greywold; of the madwoman with a string of almost priceless emeralds around her neck, and a pet bird that cried "Dead fingers! Dead fingers!"—the parrot that Jim Kidd had wrung the neck of when it shrieked its weird chant in his hearing; of the fierce Russian wolfhounds that were loosed in the grounds every night, and of the pale-eyed gate-keeper at the lodge that I had caught watching me when I was telephoning to the police.

I was quite ready to tell them all that I knew and all that I thought.

Then Peter Gilbert looked at me, and I caught that look.

It was expressive of supercilious disdain, of impatient resentment of my intrusion upon their important discussion. I turned upon my heel and walked out of the library. They could solve it themselves. But I didn't believe that any of them was upon the right track, nor seemingly in any immediate way of getting upon it either.

Corder, being the outsider, would undoubtedly dominate the situation, and in the end Mr. Campbell, his suspect, would be arrested.

That evening Mr. Campbell sought me out. He informed me that he wanted to talk to me about Carmen, and, of course, anything relating to the girl whom I dearly loved was interesting to me.

He had in his hand a small box of a kind of wood that I was not familiar with, but which was very beautiful; a box that from the strange, intangibly sweet odor clinging to it—the unmistakable odor of the East—I judged to have come from China or Japan.

This box he placed in my hands with the injunction:

"Miss Carter, I am giving you charge of this. I want you to guard it carefully, and in the event of something happening to me"—he stopped for a second, and to me, who was watching his face, it seemed that a very queer expression suddenly slid into it—"say my sudden death or imprisonment—then you have my permission, really my command, to open it and examine the contents. In it, with other things, you will find a legal paper giving you the guardianship of Carmen, and another that is my will, in which you are named executor.

"As for the other contents, more especially the little book, I leave it entirely to your good judgment whether you destroy it, and never let Carmen know or decide that she should be told. If—if"—and again that peculiar expression stole over Mr. Campbell's face—"what I look for doesn't happen, then, Miss Carter, I expect you to hand me back this box, unopened, whenever I shall demand it."

I consented, of course, to take care of it, promising to guard it carefully, and to return it whenever it should be demanded of me, and to open it only in the event of Mr. Campbell's death or imprisonment.

And then I urged him to get away from Greywold.

"You are suspected, Mr. Campbell," I

warned him, "and of course your confession that you are the murderer of Jim Kidd must necessarily eventually lead to your arrest. Why don't you get away, if not for your own, then for Carmen's sake?"

But Mr. Campbell shook his head.

"It would be quite useless to make the attempt. I can't get away now, Miss Carter. But I am satisfied. We can't escape from Fate, you know. When she is ready to lay her finger upon a man, hide as he will, she will touch him. I wish they would arrest me. I can assure you, Miss Carter, the sooner they do, the better it will be for me."

Then I looked Mr. Campbell straight in the eye, and I told him.

"You didn't kill Jim Kidd, Mr. Campbell. In the beginning possibly you thought that you had stabbed him to death, but you didn't, you know. He was already dead when you crept to his room that night, with the knife from the library table in your hand. You knew the truth when you saw the cord knotted around his neck, the cord that had strangled him before your knife reached his heart. And Carmen is not guilty, either.

"She knew that Jim Kidd was a guest in this house whether you wished it or not; that you were forced to bow to his will in all things; that for some reason or other you stood in fear of him. When he was murdered, it came upon her with a great horror that you were the one who had committed the deed. She began to work immediately to ward off suspicion from you and to direct it against herself. To my mind, this accounts absolutely for all of her actions in the affair. Then, to save her from herself, you accused yourself of the murder.

"You are the only one, Mr. Campbell, who can throw a light upon Jim Kidd's death. Why don't you do it? Why don't you tell the truth? Why do you lie, and say that you are the murderer when you are not? Get away from Greywold if you won't tell, and let the detectives solve it if they can. Corder believes you guilty.

You will surely be arrested before another day has passed. Why don't you get away?"

Mr. Campbell sat down suddenly. He was trembling violently, and his face a livid gray.

"You are right—you are right, Miss Carter. I am not guilty of the murder. Neither is Carmen. But I can't tell—I can't tell anything. I don't want Carmen to know. I'd rather die than have her know. It is all written in the box that I have given into your keeping. I shall trust your good judgment to dictate to you what to do with it. And I can tell you, Miss Carter"—and here the man leaned toward me and spoke very low and impressively—"that *they* will get me, just as they got Jim Kidd, if I am not arrested and taken away."

"*They?* Who are 'they'?" I questioned.

Mr. Campbell shook his head and would have nothing further to say.

And so I left him, sitting there, lost in dejected thought, to judge from his appearance, and went to my room to put the box carefully away.

I looked at it long and longingly before placing it in the bottom of my trunk, where I had decided it would be most successfully concealed.

Pandora has proven that it is hazardous to trust a woman with a closed box, but evidently I have none of the lady's blood in my veins; for after putting the box away, I actually forgot all about it.

I wasn't very successful in sleeping that night, awakening every little while to lie there for hours, it seemed to me, reviewing the tragedy that had taken place in Greywold, to which my troubled mind reverted instantly that I unclosed my eyes.

And "they" annoyed and worried me. What did Mr. Campbell mean by it? Somehow there seemed to be something menacing and foreboding about the word.

I resolved that I would see Corder the very first thing in the morning. He was a reasonable man, with evidently some degree of respect for a woman's intelli-

gence. I was quite sure that he even considered it within the possibilities that a woman might be able to throw a clearing light upon a murder mystery.

Yes, I would talk it over with Corder. He might even be persuaded to change his mind about Mr. Campbell being the murderer of Jim Kidd after I had told him a few things.

CHAPTER XV.

THE MISSING HAND.

I WAS up early the next morning, but not earlier than the keeper of the Russian wolfhounds, who was looking for me, to report that every one of the dogs had been killed the night before, evidently by eating poisoned meat.

Notwithstanding that the animals were more or less of a nuisance around Greywold, that we all feared them, and that I had a narrow escape from them, the news was startling to me.

I ran to one of the windows opening on the grounds and looked out. Here and there lay one of the dead dogs already beginning to look grotesquely swollen from the gases of putrefaction.

The keeper knew absolutely nothing. He was so amazed by the singular accident that he was unable to advance any explanation concerning it.

He had loosed the hounds the night before, as was customary. In the morning, when he went to leash them, he found all of them dead. Meat with a white powder sprinkled upon it, chunks of which, partly eaten, were scattered around the grounds, pointed to the fate they had met.

Evidently the killing had been deliberate. Some one wanted to do away with the savage wolfhounds that roamed the grounds nightly. But who? And for what purpose?

I directed the keeper to see Mr. Campbell just as soon as possible and inform him of the affair. He would not have to wait long, for the owner of Greywold was an early riser, and it had been my obser-

vation that trouble such as had descended upon this fated household was not conducive to people lingering in their beds.

Mr. Campbell, however, did not put in an early appearance that morning. We had all been up for many hours, and still he did not come down-stairs.

I waited for some time. Then I sent the keeper of the hounds up-stairs to look for him. He came back in a few minutes with a frightened white face and trembling. There was something wrong in the room where he had found Mr. Campbell. He did not stop to investigate, but Mr. Campbell was lying in a queer way across the bed. He didn't like his looks, and he begged that I go up there at once.

I did not tarry to ask questions, but hurried up-stairs. I went straight to the room, the door of which was partly open.

He was right. Something was wrong in Mr. Campbell's room—so wrong that I hastily summoned the chief of police and his two detectives.

In a short time the three men were standing beside me in the room Mr. Campbell had occupied the night before, looking down at his dead body lying across the bed!

The owner of Greywold was slain in exactly the same manner that Jim Kidd had been slain—by a cord twisted to strangling tightness around his neck, and with a peculiar knot in it, a knot used only by natives of the East.

I called attention to this cord.

"You see, gentlemen," I pointed out to them triumphantly, "Mr. Campbell proves to you absolutely that he was not guilty of Jim Kidd's death by being murdered as his guest was. As for Miss Campbell—well, I hardly think any one of you will consider her guilty of this."

I never saw two more dazed-looking men than Peter Gilbert and the agency detective, especially the latter, who now beheld the one clue that he had held from the beginning swept away.

As for the chief of police, he looked rather eager. After all, might not Mrs. Campbell be the right suspect? Still he

was puzzled, too, for he had been keeping a pretty close guard on that lady, and he was quite unable to account for her having gotten away long enough from his watchful eye to have accomplished this.

I left them there, viewing the body, while I went off to find Carmen, and impart to her just as gently and as tactfully as I could the terrible fact that her father had been murdered.

I expected a heartrending scene, uncontrollable grief.

Instead, Carmen, while of course profoundly shocked and grief-stricken, was calmer about the tragedy than I supposed she would be, evidently getting some degree of comfort from the reflection that, after all, her father was not the murderer that she had supposed him to be.

She wept bitterly for a long time, and then confessed to me that it was because she had thought her father guilty of the murder of Jim Kidd that she had sought to direct suspicion against herself, and finally had accused herself of it.

The morning of the night of the murder she had risen early, leaving me in a profound sleep. In passing the door of the room Jim Kidd had occupied that night, which was wide open, she glanced in, not knowing whose room it was. She noticed the body lying across the bed, and there was something about it that brought her flying into the room.

Then she discovered that it was the corpse of Jim Kidd, and he had been done to death by a cord twisted about his neck. The knife-wound in his chest she had not noticed.

She had instantly thought of her father, and his quarrel the evening before with his unwelcome guest, and, believing him guilty of the crime, she had torn off a piece of her kimono and thrust it into the dead man's hand, hoping thereby to involve herself and thus save her father. This avowal surprised me not in the least. I had known all along what the piece of her kimono in the stiff hand of Jim Kidd meant.

After a while I left the girl and joined

the detectives again, where they still stood in Mr. Campbell's room, excitedly discussing this latest tragedy that had taken place in Greywold.

A sheet had been thrown over the dead body upon the bed, thus covering up the harrowing sight. They were all agreed upon one thing, and that, that this last, like the former murder, was an inside job. The lock of Mr. Campbell's room had been broken, as also had been the lock of Jim Kidd's door when he was murdered, while all the doors and the windows of the house, that had been carefully locked the night before by a servant whose duty this was, had not been tampered with in any way; for they were found in the morning exactly as they had been left the night before.

Presumably when Mr. Campbell retired he locked his room door as was his custom. It had been forced by the one who had murdered him.

This person must have been within the house and in a position to watch and mark the room the owner of Greywold retired to for the night, thus knowing where to go to perform his terrible deed.

The detectives finally determined to put through the third degree practically every one in the place, hoping thereby to get at some clue, no matter how faint, that might give them a basis to work upon.

As for the chief of police, I do not believe that he thought this procedure would bring out anything of especial importance.

His theory from the beginning that Mrs. Campbell had done Jim Kidd to death looked pretty good to him, and he believed her guilty of this deed also. Her diseased mental condition furnished the explanation. He could not quite account for her having eluded him and gotten into her husband's room the night before, but insane persons were notorious for their cunning and resourcefulness.

So all the doors leading from Greywold were carefully locked, and the chief of police telephoned into headquarters ordering policemen to watch the one railroad station in Boisville with instructions to

report and follow up promptly any stranger leaving town, guards also being placed upon all roads running through the village.

I submitted to the detectives the name of every servant in Greywold, and one by one they were called into the library where the men sat, and put through as complete a grilling as was possible, through the medium of an interpreter.

A rather singular thing to me was the fact that they were not making more of the killing of the Russian wolf-hounds. This occurrence seemed to me to be fairly bristling with significance, but apparently no one considered it of any vital importance, although I had taken care to report it at once.

However, I was only a woman, with no experience of criminology. Trained investigators of crime knew what to consider and what not to bother about.

Although every one in Greywold underwent the keenest scrutiny at the hands of the detectives, nothing was elicited. They found themselves as far off as ever from a working clue. Even the man at the gate had been sent for and questioned.

I was particularly interested in him. I don't know whether it was his pale, peculiar eyes that attracted and held my attention, but I know I was keenly alive to him. However, he turned out as hopeless as any of the others as a possible recipient of police attention.

The detectives were nonplused. Here they were, right in Greywold, and a murder similar to the one they were at work on had taken place underneath their very noses.

And the worst of it all was that they hadn't even the slightest clue to work upon, with the possible exception of the chief of police, who was more convinced than ever of Mrs. Campbell's guilt.

I left them discussing the fruitlessness of their examination of the servants, and went up-stairs to the room where the dead man lay all alone.

Gruesome it was certainly, this mystery

of two murdered in exactly the same manner by a cord tied in a peculiar way about their necks; still to me there was a certain amount of terrible fascination in it all.

Knowing the place and its peculiar atmosphere as I did, it was not surprising to me that these mystifying tragedies had brought matters to a climax.

I did not disturb the sheet that covered the stiff, cold body; I could not bear to look at the dead man's face. Somehow it seemed to me a reproach that he should have died by a strangler's hand, with so many of us, including a chief of police and two detectives, right at hand.

And he must have had some premonition, some warning, some knowledge of his coming end. It came to me forcibly now what he had said to me about "they" getting him.

"They will get me, just as they got Jim Kidd, if I am not arrested and taken away."

I turned to go out of the room, and just as I did so I caught sight of something lying on the floor that caused me to stand stock-still in startled amazement.

It was another one of the withered brown fingers!

I picked it up; then I went to my own room, where I placed it with the other dead fingers that no one but I apparently knew about.

I would show them to the detectives later, but I had no intention of hurrying in the matter. I did not notice that any one of them was falling over himself to get my advice about the murders. When I told them and showed them the fingers they would probably disagree with my judgment about them anyway and consider them of no importance.

Restless, I left my room and was going down the hall, when that morbid curiosity that exists in the living toward the dead impelled me to look into the dead man's room as I passed it.

Some one was there! And as I looked this person started to come out. It was the gatekeeper at Greywold!

Never had the man's pale eyes looked so peculiarly colorless, and even in the dim light that pervaded the hallway his hair was flamingly, aggressively red. Then there was that in his appearance and in his manner as he came toward me that caused me instinctively to stand still and brace myself as if to get ready for an attack.

And then, as he came toward me, I suddenly saw, with one of the queerest feelings of shock that ever assailed me, that the man had only half of his left hand!

The fingers were all gone, just the stump remaining!

As often as I had seen the gatekeeper I had never noticed this deformity. Always it was his oyster-colored eyes and red, vividly red, hair that had impressed me. As he neared me I knew not what to expect; a blow—perhaps that he would spring at me. But when he was just within reach of me he turned upon his heel and walked rapidly away.

I breathed deeply two or three times. Then I peered into the murdered man's room. The place had been ransacked. Drawers had been pulled out, their contents strewn over the floor, everywhere was the evidence of a desperate search.

What did the gatekeeper hunt for in the dead man's room? He was certainly taking big chances with a chief of police and two detectives in the house, and it made me smile to think that he had been able to accomplish it despite the sleuths of the law.

When I got down-stairs I discovered that the man had been permitted to leave the house and go down to his lodge at the gates. I had nothing to say, however.

CHAPTER XVI.

ON THE RIGHT TRAIL.

THE next day Jack Rourke appeared upon the scene. It seems that Rourke, a reporter fresh from college, working upon a big New York

daily and assigned to write up a sensational murder case, was lucky enough to stumble upon the key to the solution of a most complicated crime, thus securing a big scoop for his paper and bounding into fame himself at the same time.

The tragedies at Greywold, one of them actually taking place while detectives and a chief of police were upon the spot probing the other, had interested New York, and the press was making the most of it, giving it considerable space and big head-lines daily.

Rourke was sent out to Greywold in the hope that he would be fortunate once more and happen upon the clue that would lead to the unraveling of the two mysterious crimes that had taken place there.

I met Mr. Rourke soon after he arrived, and was most favorably impressed by him.

He was a well-built chap, with a nice, dark face, the pleasantest smile conceivable, and a pair of handsome, shrewd brown eyes.

I confess that beauty, whether in art, in nature, or in a human being, always is impressive to me, so that the young reporter for this reason secured immediately my interest and my good will.

Also, after discussing the murders with him, I came to the conclusion that he was clever and facile-minded enough to be, perhaps, the very one to solve the mystery of them.

At any rate, I was willing to back him against any of the other men carrying on the investigation.

He talked with me at great length, while I cheerfully and willingly did all within my power to enlighten him as to conditions existing in Greywold prior to the tragedies, so that after I was finished he really had a very good line on things.

Only I did not tell him about the brown, withered fingers I had in my room up-stairs, nor did I mention my encounter with the gatekeeper, who evidently had been searching the dead Mr. Campbell's room, and whose fingers were all missing

from one of his hands. Later on I would do so, but not just now.

Then the thing happened that put Jack Rourke out, at least for a time, of the inquiry into the Greywold mystery. Jack met Carmen!

It was a clear case of complete infatuation upon both sides just as soon as they spoke to each other. After that I don't believe the young man cared if he ever saw a newspaper again, and judging from the indifference he was displaying toward them the murders evidently occupied very little space in his mind, that was filled, to the outcrowding of everything else, with Carmen.

He neglected his paper so shamefully that I expected another man at any moment to appear at Greywold to relieve him, and he no longer sought me out to ask all sorts of shrewd questions concerning the tragedies.

He was to be seen from morning until night, all around the house, talking to Carmen—always to Carmen. It puzzled me to know what these two, who had never seen each other before, who were unaware of each other's existence a few days ago, found to talk about; but evidently they had discovered a subject that, judging from the rapt expression upon their faces, and their eyes fixed upon each other, they found the most interesting and most fascinating in all the world!

The chief of police and the two detectives who were still pursuing their inquiry, and who came out daily to Greywold, paid no attention to the young man whatever, apparently no longer considering him a rival worth fearing.

But at last Carmen awakened from her infatuation to realize with a terrible horror the awful fate that had overtaken the father she loved. Whereupon, with a woman's sweet unreason, she demanded of Jack Rourke that he find the murderer and consider everything off until he did so.

The young man came to me in despair. He had wasted valuable time, he had lost interest in the case, and now here was

Carmen asking him to elucidate the mystery.

He begged me to help him. Perhaps I could suggest something. It might be that I had heard something from the detectives?

"It may be too late now," I told him, "but if I were you I'd go down at once to the gatekeeper's lodge and investigate."

"You know something?" he questioned eagerly.

"It's what I should have done the very first thing; gone down to the gatekeeper's lodge, if I had been in charge of things."

He asked me many questions, but I would only insist:

"Go down to the gatekeeper's lodge."

Without any more information than this from me he acted upon my suggestion and started immediately for the lodge, I going with him as far as the front door, and wishing him good luck in the enterprise.

I wore a tiny watch, set in a small bracelet around my wrist, which I glanced at, noting the time that Jack Rourke departed.

Then I went up-stairs to my own room to attend to some small matters that needed my attention.

As I passed the library I caught sight of the chief of police and his two detectives with their heads together, evidently trying to evolve a clue from their inner consciousness, for judging from the progress they were making, that was the only way they were likely to get hold of one.

I could imagine how crestfallen they would be when Jack Rourke would be the one to solve the tantalizing mystery of Greywold, which in my estimation he was upon the point of doing.

The young newspaper reporter was alert. He knew exactly what I meant when I said: "Go down to the gatekeeper's lodge."

He would understand that I had reason to suspect the gatekeeper, and he would make the most of my tip to him.

I sat down and thought about the gate-

keeper. I could distinctly remember what a sinister impression the man had made upon me the very first day I arrived in Greywold, looking after me as I drove on to the house, a malignant smile twisting his features, his rampant hair reducing surrounding colors to insignificance by contrast, and his pale eyes that I could not see, watching me like those of some furtive animal.

Mr. Campbell and Jim Kidd had had him on occasions at their drinking parties, so that he undoubtedly was familiar with their habits, as well as with the house.

I recalled vividly how he had stared at me through the window, with those terrible eyes of his—eyes that only a sea-ghost should have—when I was telephoning to police headquarters the news of Jim Kidd's death; and later how I had caught him searching the murdered Mr. Campbell's room, and my startling discovery then that all the fingers from one of his hands were missing!

I held in my keeping three withered brown fingers that had appeared simultaneously with the tragedies at Greywold. Certainly there was some connection between these fingers and the murders, as there must be a link between them and the mutilated hand.

Were they the gatekeeper's fingers?

Also at that moment flashed through my mind the memory of Mrs. Campbell's feathered pet and its cry of "Dead fingers! Dead fingers!"

What did the bird mean by it, and why had it so disturbed Jim Kidd that he wrung its neck when it said it?

Afterward the dead fingers began to appear, on the dinner table the night that Jim Kidd was murdered, beside his body, as also in the room of the dead Mr. Campbell. Strange, mysterious fingers, what did they mean; where had they come from; why had they appeared?

I felt startled that I had never thought of the bird and its strange cry before this, not even when I had found the fingers.

It was all very puzzling, but I was con-

fident that when I produced the fingers and told their history there would be no trouble in establishing the guilt of the man at the gate. But what connection was there between Mrs. Campbell's pet bird who cried "Dead fingers! Dead fingers!" and the man with the red hair and pale eyes. I certainly hadn't the slightest idea.

I had been in my room for some time when, happening to glance at the watch on my wrist, I realized that several hours had elapsed since the young reporter had gone down to the gatekeeper's lodge to investigate.

Feeling sure that he must have returned by this time, and eager to hear what he had to report, I hurried downstairs. Jack Rourke had not come back yet. Evidently he had found something of interest down at the lodge. I waited for another hour, and then I began to grow uneasy.

What was detaining him for such a length of time?

After a while I sent one of the servants down to find out. The man returned shortly, running and breathless, with the news that Rourke was down at the lodge with his head smashed in, dead, my messenger thought. I was responsible for sending the young man down there! The thought almost overwhelmed me.

I flew to the chief of police and detectives frantically, telling them what had happened. With one accord we started for the lodge, every one of us running at full speed.

Jack Rourke was lying just within the front door, stretched out in a pool of blood, with something that looked like a baseball bat lying beside him.

I turned away from the still figure lying upon the floor in horror, and fled into another room.

"I sent him down here, I sent him down here; Carmen will never forgive me," I moaned in agony.

I stood there listening to the noises in the next room. They were so filled with terrible meaning to my nervous ears that

I could have screamed aloud. Just as I had reached the point that I felt I could no longer endure it, a sound reached me that caused me to rush into the next room.

It was a moan, or rather a long-drawn sigh, and when I entered they were helping the reporter to his feet. They led him over to a chair where he sat looking very dazed, but to my intense joy, not as if he had been seriously wounded.

After a time he recovered somewhat, and then the chief of police and the two detectives began plying him eagerly with questions, all of which I could see Rourke was politely but firmly avoiding.

He soon got to his feet, declaring that he was all right. Then he left the lodge, all of us following him, and protesting against his moving around until a physician had been summoned and examined him. He paid no attention whatever to us. He refused to talk beyond making the bare statement that he had been attacked in the lodge by whom he would not state.

He made straight for the stables. A few minutes later he came tearing past us on one of the carriage horses, bare-back. He rode like a Cossack or a cowboy, as if he were part of the animal. Just as he passed me, he leaned down from the horse as if he were about to pick up something from the ground, and whispered in my ear.

"A Chinaman!"

Then he dashed on, and out through the gates of Greywold that were wide open.

CHAPTER XVII.

A GLIMPSE INTO HIDDEN THINGS.●

THE chief of police and the two detectives regarded me rebukingly, for being the recipient of a secret that they were not permitted to share. However, this attitude upon their part disturbed me not in the least, for I had a premonition that the mysteries of Grey-

wold were about to be elucidated, and moreover that Jack Rourke was to be the one to solve them.

I went up-stairs to my own room as soon as I reached the house.

I knew that the men were eager to discuss Rourke with me, but I was determined they should worm nothing from me. When the young man got back he could tell them what he wanted them to know.

Carmen came into my room after awhile. I said nothing to her, preferring that she be surprised with the news I was sure Rourke would bring back to Greywold. The girl did not stay long.

When alone, I fell to reviewing the murders that daily were growing more exciting and more complicated. I wondered what would be the answer to the enigma, and if Jack Rourke even now, while I sat there thinking about it, were actually in the process of unraveling it.

He had whispered in my ear as he dashed by me:

"A Chinaman."

He had not said "The gatekeeper," but "A Chinaman."

Memories quickened in my brain. I thought of Mrs. Hudson's warning before her precipitate departure—"Look out for the Jap—the Jap in the dining-room"—then of my increased interest in, and closer observation of Saiki because of this admonition, followed by the bewildering discovery that his hands no longer were slender, fine, aristocratic hands I had taken such particular notice of, but coarse, fat, and plebeian.

I recalled also my astonishment and how puzzled I was when upon lifting my eyes to his face, after the shock his changed hands had given me, to find myself assailed by a doubt as to whether he was the same man we had had in the dining-room all along, and a Japanese, or a stranger and a Chinaman.

I thought of my watch of him after this, and the singular scene I had witnessed in the dining-room when, unaware that he was observed, he bent such a ma-

lignant look upon Mr. Campbell; of his obvious attempt to crush in that gentleman's skull with a heavy cut-glass bowl; of my report to Mr. Campbell of what I had seen, and my suspicion that a Chinaman had taken the place of our Japanese, and of Mr. Campbell's refusal to even entertain the notion that the man could be a Chinaman.

This additional mystery, in a house of mysteries, was forgotten until the murder of Jim Kidd, strangled after an Eastern fashion, and the phenomenon of the butler once more possessing slender, long hands.

I had not been encouraged to talk, and so I had said nothing.

And now here was Rourke crying into my ear:

"A Chinaman."

It all seemed logical enough. I wondered I had not insisted upon making more of it. I might have known that sudden transformation in hands meant something grave and important. But still there was Bryson, the gatekeeper, with his suspicious actions, and all the fingers missing from one of his hands.

What did it mean?

Suddenly it dawned upon me that perhaps I myself held the key to the whole thing in the box Mr. Campbell had placed in my keeping before his death, and that I, unworthy descendant of Eve, and impudent rebuker of Pandora, had left unopened and unexamined from that day.

I flew to my trunk, fishing out from the very bottom of it, the oddly carved box of some strange foreign wood, with the persistent spicy odor of the East permeating it, so that I felt should I close my eyes I might catch the patter, patter of poor little mutilated feet, or the silvery tinkle of the geisha girl's *samisen*, and might open them to the purple splendor of the wistaria, or the grace and beauty of the cherry-blossom dance.

I pulled up a chair before a table, upon which I placed the box. After a protracted hunt for the key which I had hid-

den in such a safe place that I had promptly lost all recollection of it, I sat down, and proceeded slowly to unlock it.

Somehow, now, when perhaps the mystery was about to be unfolded to me, I felt a certain delicacy about intruding upon it, or was it that I wanted Jack Rourke to be the one to unravel the snarl?

I pulled up the lid.

A blaze of shimmering, dazzling light met my eyes.

I was looking down at precious stones that I am sure would have filled easily a quart measure, all kinds of beautiful stones, blazing diamonds, velvety green emeralds, sapphires, blue as cornflowers, rubies red as crystallized blood, and one stone there was that surpassed them all.

It was an opal, oval in shape, and about the size of a quarter, the most beautiful gem I had ever seen; all fire, all color; a well of molten flame shot through with exquisite peacock blues, shimmering yellow and lovely pinks; flashes of gold, of lavender, of sapphire and ruby glowed through a sea of fire. In its exquisite heart it held a thousand beautiful sunsets, a thousand rainbows, the beauty and hues of a thousand gems. I gazed at it in awe, dazed by its peerless beauty.

For some time I sat there, staring as if fascinated at this perfect gem, forgetting the other stones, forgetting everything else in my rapt contemplation of it.

After a while I reluctantly laid it aside and proceeded to examine the contents of the box.

The only thing in it, besides the precious stones and a few legal papers, was a little book bound in cheap imitation leather, that evidently, judging from its appearance, had been water soaked and subjected to careless treatment. I opened it.

It was a diary in Mr. Campbell's handwriting, the diary of a sea journey made many years ago. The ink was faded with time, so washed out that in many places the entries were no longer legible,

but even hastily glancing through it told me that I had stumbled upon something very important.

I got up and locked my door, then I settled down and proceeded to read.

It was apparent that at one time the book had been much thicker, but many pages were missing from it, so that at times came whole gaps in the narration that was very annoying. Still there was enough of it to give an interesting story, a story that had some bearing upon the murder mysteries of Greywold.

I still have that little red book in my possession, and it holds an everlasting fascination for me so that I never grow tired reading the tragic little story that is inscribed in it in faded ink.

But reread it as often as I will I always experience something of a shock at the light the account spreads upon the character of John Campbell. Only that I knew it was his handwriting I shouldn't have believed it possible that the man could ever have had such a chapter in his life.

As for Jim Kidd!

Well, everything about him seemed just as it should be, and did not surprise me in the least. I never showed the little book to Carmen. There are some things in life, things even that touch us, that it were better we should never know.

CHAPTER XVIII.

ON THE REINA CELESTE.

THE little book was in the form of a sea diary, and from the entries at the beginning that I skimmed over rather hastily, I was so eager to get at the contents, I gained that at one time Jim Kidd and John Campbell had sailed as first and second mates on the schooner *Reina Celeste* putting out from *Bahía* with a cargo of cotton and sugar for a port in Japan.

The skipper, a Spaniard named Cavallo, had taken his seventeen-year-

old daughter Gregorita on the voyage, and John Campbell, the second mate, was in love with her.

It was evident that Gregorita's father frowned upon John Campbell's aspirations in his daughter's direction and that the latter smarted under this attitude upon the part of the skipper. Also it was plain that Campbell went on liking the girl, anyway, and that she returned his affection.

Then came many missing pages, and writing so water blurred as to be scarcely legible, and after that the following riveted my attention:

8th Day Out.

A calm day, with a hot sun, a smooth sea and the *Reina Celeste* slipping along with hardly a breeze stirring her sails.

Jim Kidd told me something interesting to-day. He says that Hop Sing, the Chinese pirate, has a treasure island in the *Jula Sea* where he caches all his loot. Kidd claims he has it direct from a Chinaman he once befriended, who had sailed with the pirate. He gave Kidd a map with the island charted on it, also he told him where the treasure was hidden.

It seems that with the treasure there is a wonderful opal called the *Burning of Troy*, it has such fire. It alone is worth a fortune, for not only is it the most beautiful and most valuable opal in existence, but it is said to bring rare good luck to the one owning it. Kidd says he's going to show me the map the Chinaman gave him, and he made me promise on my oath I wouldn't have a word to say to any one about it.

Think of a fortune like that lying on a lonely island, in the sea, just waiting for some one to come along and pick it up. And that opal he talks about, that he calls the *Burning of Troy*, must be a wonder. That alone would stake a man for a lifetime. I wish it was mine. I guess, then, the skipper might think I was good enough to aspire to Gregorita's hand.

Of course, any one who has ever sailed Eastern seas has heard of Hop Sing. They say he has hauled the biggest treasure of any pirate afloat. If Kidd's story is true, and most of the old Chinaman's loot is hidden on that deserted island, it certainly would be a find, and worth taking big risks to get at.

I wonder why Kidd has confided all this to me, also I am wondering what his game is? Kidd isn't the kind of a man to be telling you something for nothing. Although we have shipped first and second mates on the *Reina Celeste*, so far we have had very little to do

with one another. It puzzles me, this confidence. I can't quite make it out. I wish he hadn't told me anything about it, for since then my head has been filled with Chinese pirates, and treasure islands in the Jula Sea.

If I could only get hold of that opal, the Burning of Troy, maybe I could get Gregorita then. Kidd's a queer fellow. To think he has had scarcely a word to say to me since the voyage began, and now all of a sudden he up and tells me all about Hop Sing's island.

More pages missing, then—

12th Day Out.

An East wind freshening fast, and a heavy sea piling up with the *Reina Celeste* plunging and pitching, and every little while burying her nose in the wash.

Well, I know why Jim Kidd has confided in me. He has come right out with it and I am astonished at the boldness of the man. He wants nothing more or less than to get hold of a vessel and work her to Hop Sing's island. He even had the audacity to hint that if he could get enough of the crew of the *Reina Celeste*—but I would listen to no more from him, even if he is my superior officer.

It is mutiny that he is thinking and talking, he the first mate of the *Reina Celeste*, and by right I should report him to the skipper and have him clapped into irons. God knows I have no love for the skipper. He is a bullying brute, but nothing must happen on the *Reina Celeste* for Gregorita's sake. I don't see how in the world a man like Cavallo has as sweet and lovely a girl as Gregorita for a daughter.

14th Day Out.

The wind E. by N. E. with a sea that keeps the decks awash, and the *Reina Celeste* jumping and pitching plenty. Kidd is determined to get a vessel to work to that island in the Jula Sea, and he has given me to understand that he is considering the *Reina Celeste*. With enough of the crew standing by him, he says he can easily navigate her. He reckons he can count on five right off.

I should think he could count on the whole gang, for a worst set of ruffians and cut throats I have never seen shipped before the mast. I don't believe there's a man of them that would hesitate to knife you for a dollar.

These are the five Kidd is sure he can count on, and I guess he has sized them up about right. Montes, the Brazilian. He sailed with Kidd in the south Indian Ocean years ago. Tony, the cross-eyed Greek with the face of an angel and the heart of a devil, if I am not very much mistaken. Davy Arthur, the tall, lank Englishman who has a grouch against the skipper, no one knows for what; Gustav, the ship's

carpenter; and Chino Charlie, the Heaven's know what breed from the Malay Archipelago, who seems to like Cavallo no better than Davy Arthur does.

Kidd showed me the map again to-day with the island charted on it. It is a volcanic upheaval of rocks in the sea, and vessels give it a wide berth.

I've been hearing of that old Chinese pirate for some time. He must have quite a treasure piled up. Imagine getting hold of it. That Burning of Troy must be a wonderful stone. It would make a man's fortune.

16th Day Out.

A dead calm with the *Reina Celeste* lazing along as if she was in the Doldrums. I'm thinking Kidd's plan over. He swears he will divide up everything with me, and also will let me have the Burning of Troy if it is found. I am in for it. A man doesn't run across a chance like this but once in a lifetime.

It is my luck. I'd be a fool to let it slide. The skipper isn't helping matters the way he's going on. He is drinking and is in one continuous bad temper. He started this day off by knocking down Sammy Spigel—the cabin boy with the bright red hair—with a marlin-spike and like to split his head open because the boy fumbled at taking in a sail. Kidd looked after Sammy and bandaged him up, and it's easy known on which side the boy will be when the time comes.

The only thing that worries me is Gregorita. When hell breaks loose on the *Reina Celeste* the skipper is going to get his, and that's going to be hard on the girl. However, no matter what happens, I'll look out for her.

17th Day Out.

Light winds are not speeding us on our way. The barometer is high and steady. The skipper drinks steadily, and is a brute to every one. Kidd says he would like to sound the big Scotchman Muir. He's a husky fellow, and he knows the business of the sea.

18th Day Out.

The barometer is tumbling fast, the wind has veered around S. W. and the sky is heavily overcast, with a sea running mountain high. Kidd sounded the Scotchman to-day, but he will have nothing to do with the affair. Kidd is sorry now he had anything to say to the man, for he is afraid that he will betray the whole thing to the skipper.

The skipper has been at Spigel the cabin boy again, this time with a blow of his fist knocking out two of his front teeth and then when the lad protested he rushed at him and with one blow of the hatchet he was swinging around he cut off all the fingers from one of Spigel's

hands. Kidd talked with the boy this afternoon and he is ready for anything now.

Kidd has been making quite a collection of weapons that he hides in the fo'c's'le. Hatchets, carving knives, razors, marlinspikes, anything that is likely to come in handy when the time comes, he says.

19th Day Out.

Something queer has happened. I had just come up to relieve Kidd, the officer on deck, when there was an alarm sounded that there was no one at the wheel. Muir, the big Scotchman, had been stationed there, and sure enough when we investigated he was missing.

Cavallo came out of his cabin, half drunk as usual and took charge of the situation. He swung around, but because of the wind and the heavy sea running we did not spend much time in a search for the missing man, but went on leaving him to whatever fate had overtaken him in that lonely and tossing sea.

The men are all talking about Muir's disappearance. Some of them say it is suicide, others hint at murder, still others believe that supernatural agency had to do with taking the big Scotchman off.

Kidd hasn't said a word to me about the affair, but I could bet my head that he knows more about Muir's disappearance than any one else. I wouldn't like to be in Kidd's way. He can look at you with that one eye of his in a way to make you shiver.

I have had a clear understanding with him that things are to be done quietly, no matter what way he does it, also that I am to have a clean half of the treasure and the Burning of Troy, for keeping still. Kidd has been saying little to me of late, but from the taking off of Muir I think the time is near.

After this there were many pages missing, then came this in a hurried, nervous scrawl that bore little resemblance to John Campbell's writing.

20th Day Out.

It has come.

The helmsman, Tony the cross-eyed Greek, stuck a knife in the skipper's back as he leaned over the taffrail this morning. I was standing near but made no stir. The skipper was not killed, only wounded and he seemed to instantly realize that it was mutiny, also that I was in it since I was making no stir.

He suddenly began running toward me picking up a marlinspike from the deck as he came. I stood my ground, and when he reached me I had to battle for my life. He was a more powerful man than I at any time, but now seemed to have the strength of ten devils.

Fighting for my life I managed to wrest the marlinspike away from him, and then I hit him with all my strength on the head once, twice—

The diary had abruptly ended. I closed the book and stared down thoughtfully at the cheap water sodden leather cover overwhelmed with thoughts.

Then suddenly the telephone in the hall below rang so violently, so clamorously that I hastily jumped to my feet, and putting the little book back into the box, I hurried out into the hall and downstairs. Before I reached the telephone the chief of police and his two detectives were there. The chief was answering the call. I heard him say.

"Yes, Rourke—in Boisville—a Chinaman and the gatekeeper you say? You want me to come and make the arrest—you think that necessary?"

I spoke right up from where I stood on the stairs, I was so excited.

"If it is a Chinaman I advise you to go, chief, by all means."

The chief took down the receiver from his ear and stared at me.

Then whether it was something in the expression of my face, or the urgency of the appeal at the other end of the wire, I do not know.

At any rate, when he answered the telephone again, he told Rourke:

"All right, Rourke. I'll be there as soon as I can come in the machine."

While the chief and his detectives were getting ready to leave I went up-stairs to Carmen to tell her what had taken place that afternoon and to prepare her for the return of Jack Rourke, for I was sure that he would soon be back at Greywold and with some startling news.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE ELUSIVE TRUTH.

WE did not have to wait long for Jack Rourke's return. In less than an hour he was back at Greywold again. I could scarcely wait for the recital of his adventures, and Carmen

was no less eager than I for him to begin, feeling as she did, that at last the tangle of mystery enveloping her father's death was about to be smoothed out.

But before Rourke could begin I asked him eagerly.

"You got a Chinaman, didn't you?"

"Yes, I got a Chinaman," he assented, "but the Chinaman almost got me first." He put one hand caressingly and gingerly to the bandages swathing his head.

Carmen's little gasp of alarm was audible, whereupon the young man glanced at her gratefully for it.

"And he looks just like our Japanese butler, doesn't he?"

Rourke stared at me thoughtfully before answering. Then he said slowly:

"Well, since you mention it, there is a resemblance between this Chinaman and Saiki. But just why do you ask, Miss Carter?"

"Never mind," I told him. "You'll know later on. But I do think, young man, that you are in a fair way of solving the murder mysteries of Greywold by the arrest of that Chinaman. I thought it was the gatekeeper, but I guess a Chinaman is the right one."

"I sincerely hope so," Rourke returned fervidly, and cast a long, long look in Carmen's direction.

"But tell us all about it, tell us what happened," Carmen begged impatiently.

We all sat down in the library where we had been standing, and Rourke recounted to us how, upon my suggestion, he had gone down to the gatekeeper's lodge where the red haired man received him courteously, and invited him into the office.

After stating his business, Rourke had just settled down to asking questions relative to the murders at Greywold, when suddenly he was assailed by a strong feeling of impending danger. He turned quickly to behold a Chinaman stealing upon him from the rear, a Chinaman with an uplifted club in his hand, and unmistakable murderous expression distorting his features.

"As soon as I saw him," said Rourke, "I knew that trouble was coming my way, and coming fast. I tried to duck, and draw the revolver I carried in my pocket, but before I could do either the man was upon me, and the club had descended crashing upon my head. I think he thought I was killed, otherwise he surely would have finished the work he so savagely began.

"I recovered consciousness, as you know, Miss Carter, with the chief of police and his two detectives working over me, and the Chinaman and the gatekeeper gone.

"As soon as I pulled myself together I realized that it was of vital importance that this Chinaman who had assailed me, as well as the gatekeeper, be caught and held.

"I had a hunch that here at last something important had been struck in the Greywold case. I would have nothing to say to the chief and his detectives, however, for I was determined to have the honor of capturing the men myself, and then turning them over to the police.

"On the horse I rode clear to Boisville, feeling sure that I would run across the men I sought somewhere on the road.

"I was destined to disappointment, however. I caught up with no Chinaman and red-haired man, and although I made inquiries, no one had seen these two conspicuous-looking pedestrians.

"When I reached Boisville I put the horse up at a livery stable, and hired an automobile. Then I persuaded two policemen to get into it with me, after I had explained to them that without doubt I was hot upon the track of the man or men responsible for the tragedies at Greywold, and exhibited to them my smashed head.

"The wound seemed to be convincing, so we all got into the machine with a chauffeur and put off at top speed, determined to scour every road in the vicinity of Boisville until we had captured our quarry. We sped up one road, down another; ran miles along every highway

in the neighborhood, without, however, coming upon our men.

"The policemen were beginning to cast glances that were far from making me feel comfortable and wholly at my ease, and I could read in their severe faces that shortly I was to be brought to task for bringing stern officers of the law upon a wild-goose chase.

"Just about this time we turned into a little-frequented road running south of Boisville. We had run along it about three miles, when suddenly, to my great joy and relief, ahead I spied the two men we were after. They did not see us until we were upon them, and then put up a vicious fight before we overwhelmed them and bundled them into the automobile.

"We took them back to Boisville, and from there I telephoned to Greywold, to the chief of police. The men are to be held, the Chinaman for his assault upon me, Bryson as a witness.

"And now," ended Rourke, rising from his chair and pacing up and down the room, "begins the important task of digging up sufficient evidence to connect this Chinaman with the murders, and hold him."

"I think that it can be done," I told him.

At that moment Carmen left the room, one of the servants calling her. Rourke looked after her as if he had an inclination to follow, but I, leaning toward him, whispered:

"Stay, I wish to talk with you about this Chinaman."

Rourke sat down promptly.

"Do you know that Chinaman looks good to me," he said.

"To me also," I told him.

Then asking him to excuse me for a minute, while I went for something that I wanted to show him, I left him in the library and flew up-stairs to my room, where I secured the carved wood box Mr. Campbell had consigned to my keeping. When I rejoined Rourke down-stairs I took the little, sodden, cheaply bound diary from it and handed it to him.

"I shall let you read it, but no one else, not even to get your evidence against the Chinaman—for Carmen's sake," I told him.

Rourke nodded his head gravely, and took the book I handed to him.

"I understand—for Carmen's sake," he answered.

"Read it," I urged him.

The young man opened the book and began to read eagerly, without stopping. When he had reached the last sentence he looked at me with excited eyes.

"It was a Chinaman, of course—if that treasure was ever reached."

"The treasure was reached," I informed him, then opening the box I displayed before his astonished gaze the beautiful precious stones it held. Also I picked up the magnificent opal.

"It must be the Burning of Troy," I said. "There couldn't be two such opals in the world."

"Kidd and Campbell reached the island in the Julia Sea, seized the Chinese pirate's treasure, and got away with it. But Hop Sing trailed them—trailed them the length of the world, and at last got them both," cried Rourke, in his excitement seizing me by the arm and by way of emphasizing his remarks squeezing it, until I was sure it must be black and blue.

"Please remember," I reminded him, "that this story was written, and the events recorded in it, took place a long time ago. At that time Mr. Campbell and Jim Kidd were comparatively young men, and the Chinese pirate was an old man. Many years have gone by since then."

"That's so, that's so," mused Rourke, letting go my arm to my great relief, and beginning to pace up and down the room. Suddenly he stopped in front of me. "Then some one else took up the trail in Hop Sing's stead—another Chinaman," he said.

"It looks like it," I agreed. "Mr. Campbell and Jim Kidd, it is evident, feared something, somebody. Perhaps they were aware that this vengeance was abroad—"

"John Campbell was not only a murderer, but a murderer, if the diary is true," commented Rourke.

"A murderer in self-defense, and of his wife's father," I answered. "The Gregorita mentioned in the diary, Cavallo's daughter, is poor, mad Mrs. Campbell. I have often heard Mr. Campbell address her as Gregorita. He was compelled to murder her father. If his wife knew of this tragedy, I do not believe that Campbell's adored daughter Carmen did. Moreover, he did not want her to know, and I think that Kidd used this knowledge he possessed to hold it over Campbell's head, a threat and a menace.

"This might be the explanation of the relations existing between Campbell and Kidd. It caused the owner of Greywold to at last resolve to murder his troublesome guest. But a murderer had gotten ahead of Mr. Campbell, the murderer that he himself was to fall a victim to later on."

"Of course, Sammy Spigel, the cabin boy with the bright red hair, is Bryson the gatekeeper," I interrupted. "And by the way you have noticed anything about Bryson's hands?"

"All the fingers of one hand are off. I've forgotten if it is the left or right hand. I noticed it when I first saw him."

At this juncture I took from the folds of my handkerchief where I had them wrapped the three dead, dried fingers I had been so carefully keeping.

I held them out to Rourke, and as I did so I related their story.

"The dead fingers mean something," I said. "Mrs. Campbell had a gaily colored bird that on occasions cried 'Dead fingers! Dead fingers!' and Jim Kidd wrung its neck when it said it in his hearing. Also, is it a mere coincidence that all the fingers of one of Bryson's hands happen to be missing?"

"There must be some connection between the gatekeeper's missing fingers, and these—"

Rourke got no farther, for at that moment the telephone bell rang. Rourke

rushed out to answer it. In a minute I heard him saying eagerly:

"Yes, yes," then in tones of utter disgust and despair, "Good Lord!"

Straightway he was hurriedly preparing to leave the house. To me who had come out into the hall, he told:

"What do you think, Miss Carter? The Chinaman has gotten away!"

I was stupefied by the news for an instant. Then I gasped:

"How did it happen?"

"Don't know. I'm off to see," cried Rourke, dashing out of the house.

"Well, that settles the Greywold mysteries. They will never be solved now," I cried, as I hurried over to a window to catch a fleeting glimpse of the young newspaper man running madly down the driveway.

I wondered vaguely if he were going to get the carriage, or intended to run all the way to Boisville.

CHAPTER XX.

"BRYSON" TELLS A TALE.

HOWEVER, I had not taken into consideration Bryson, the gatekeeper, when I decided that the murder mysteries of Greywold would never be solved.

As soon as he heard of the Chinaman's "getaway," he told the whole story to the police, urged to it undoubtedly by the instinct of self-preservation.

He began with the sailing of the *Reina Celeste* from Bahia, and his recital tallied exactly with the dairy in John Campbell's writing that I held in my possession.

From where the diary stopped with the killing of Cavallo, the skipper, by Campbell, Bryson went on to tell how Jim Kidd had at once taken charge of the vessel, the entire crew submitting to him without protest, and sailed her into the *Jula Sea*.

They found and ran in as closely as they dared to Hop Sing's island, and

Kidd and Campbell, taking Spigel—or Bryson, as he was afterward known—with them, put off in the ship's dingey from the Reina Celeste for the island, upon which, after much difficulty, they found a landing place.

Without any trouble they succeeded in locating the pirate's treasure hoard, a wonderful collection of gold, jewels, and the coins of many nations.

They selected a boat load of it, bringing it back to the Reina Celeste, then returned for more.

They had loaded up the dingey, and were about to shove off from the island, when a huge Chinaman, followed by a boy, charged upon them from behind a big rock upon the beach, where they had been concealed and apparently watching the men at work.

The Chinaman was armed with a short sword, that he brandished around wildly, at the same time screeching in a high pitched voice that was blood curdling.

The men fled to the boat, and shoved off in frenzied haste, but the Chinaman followed them into the sea, the boy meanwhile standing on the beach watching the scene.

The men in the dingey bent to their oars, but the boat was heavily laden with the treasure, and the big Chinaman—who was Hop Sing—half waded, half swam, after them, finally managing to grasp the boat, almost capsizing it.

Kidd, who was in the stern, got a slash of the sword across the face that cut his cheek open, and dazed him a while from the blood and pain.

Campbell, dropping his oars, went for the frenzied Oriental. After a fierce struggle he wrested the sword from him, and then, with one stroke of it, he all but severed the fingers of the hand that still clung octopuslike to the boat.

Hop Sing's clutch was at once loosened, and with one terrifying howl, he held up the hand, with the fingers dangling from it by a shred of flesh in the most sickening way.

This gave the men in the boat a chance,

and they got away, and safely back to the Reina Celeste.

Once aboard her they set sail hurriedly and had soon left Hop Sing and his island far in their wake.

The crew were each given a handsome share of the loot, the rest of it being divided between Campbell and Kidd, the former receiving, in addition to his portion, the invaluable opal known as the Burning of Troy.

The Reina Celeste headed straight for a group of islands in the southern Pacific, wind and weather favoring them all the way.

She made an obscure port that saw few sails, and here the crew was discharged, and Mr. Campbell married Gregorita, the skipper's daughter, who had been on the voyage that was so fateful to her father.

Bryson was positive that Gregorita was unaware of who was responsible for the death of her father, and also he was certain that no one had ever discussed the distressing affair with the girl.

After the crew had been paid off and dispersed, Kidd and Campbell determined to abandon the Reina Celeste and get away. They secured passage on a tramp steamer leaving the islands for Europe, taking Bryson along with them.

In a sleepy little town in Portugal they settled down, making trips to big cities from time to time, where Bryson supposed that they converted their treasure into cash by degrees and invested it. Here in this quiet village, remote from the traveled highways of the world, the two men hoped to bury the memory of the Reina Celeste and Hop Sing's island and live in security.

But one morning they came down to breakfast to find a finger—a dried dead finger—lying upon the table. They knew what it meant, and the knowledge filled them with terror. It was one of the Chinese pirate's fingers that John Campbell had all but severed from his hand, and it meant that Hop Sing had taken up their trail.

They fled in haste from the Portuguese

town and Europe, and then began a life of wandering over the world, going from place to place, never staying very long anywhere.

Finally after many years of this kind of existence, they located in a town in India, where they considered they might now be safe from pursuit, for if Hop Sing were living, he must be by this time a very old man.

But after they had been settled here but a short time again did the mysterious finger appear!

This time while a terrific storm raged outside, and Kidd, Campbell, and his wife were together in a dimly lighted room, listening in awe to the raging elements, something suddenly fell at Mr. Campbell's feet.

He stooped and picked it up, and they turned on the lights to see what it was. It was a black, withered finger!

Mrs. Campbell, who knew why they fled from place to place, and who had been nervous and worried about it for many years, saw the finger, and was rendered so terrified by it that her mind gave way, and from that night she was a mad woman, taking no interest in any one or anything but a gorgeous little parakeet her husband had caught on Hop Sing's island and given to her. This bird she taught to cry "Dead fingers! Dead fingers!"

They fled from India to the South Seas, and here Campbell formed the sudden resolution of getting away from Kidd. He felt that Kidd, with his one eye and scarred face, would ever make it easy for the Chinaman to pick up their trail.

He confided to Bryson his decision, offering to give him the opal, the Burning of Troy, if he would desert Kidd and stick to him.

Bryson stated that the opal had the greatest fascination for him; that he would willingly make any sacrifice, go anywhere in order to get it, and so he decided to cast in his lot with Campbell.

So one day they skipped away from Kidd, Campbell of course taking his wife

and daughter with him, sailing for the United States on a steamer that was leaving port.

Upon his arrival in the States, Campbell purchased Greywold, where they settled down once more, Bryson being made gatekeeper so that he could guard the place well.

But soon Bryson had a grievance against Campbell. He did not get the opal that was promised to him, and from indications it looked as if Campbell had no intention of giving it up, either.

Besides this, Bryson had an added grievance in that he considered Campbell should have done better by him than designating him to the post of gatekeeper at Greywold, he that had been selected of the ship's crew to go to Hop Sing's island in search of the treasure.

He had received of the loot only an equal share with the other mutineers of the *Reina Celeste*, although he felt that he had done much more than they to earn it.

Brooding over this and the failure of Campbell to keep his promise about the opal, Bryson in revenge determined to locate Jim Kidd and acquaint him with the whereabouts of Campbell. So one day he wrote to the one-eyed man, care of a London firm of bankers with whom he knew Kidd had business transactions.

This letter reached Kidd, and a month later in a cab from Boisville he appeared at the gates of Greywold.

Bryson was aware that the coming and stay of Kidd in Greywold was a source of much worry and annoyance to John Campbell, not only for the reason that he feared he would bring once more upon them the visitor whose gruesome visiting card was a dead finger, but also for the reason that he, Kidd, knew that Campbell had been a mutineer, that his wealth had its source in a Chinese pirate's loot, and that to obtain its treasure he was responsible for the death of his wife's father—things that Bryson knew John Campbell did not want his daughter, now grown to womanhood, to know.

Then one day came another visitor to Greywold, this time a Chinaman! Of course it wasn't Hop Sing. Hop Sing would have been much older than this man.

He spoke good English and asked to be permitted to go up to the big house to see Mr. Campbell.

Seemingly he was familiar with the place, for he was aware that there was a Japanese butler there, and that Mrs. Hudson had been the housekeeper. And here Bryson explained that the Celestial looked so much like Saiki, the Japanese butler, that the resemblance amazed him.

The astonishing thing, however, was that Bryson allowed the Chinaman to go up to the house, knowing that he ought never to have done so; but he declared he was so overwhelmed, so frightened by the man's appearance at Greywold, that he feared to offer any resistance to him.

So the Chinaman went up to the house, and just as Bryson had determined to communicate with Campbell or Kidd about the visitor, he came down again and left Greywold; that is, according to Bryson's sworn statement of what he thought the Chinaman did.

The night of Kidd's murder Bryson told how astonished he was to behold Saiki outside the gates of Greywold, waiting to be admitted. Bryson declared he had not let the butler out, and had no idea he was away from Greywold; but there he was, and Bryson let him in, being unable to extract anything from him because of his limited knowledge of English.

Then early the next morning the Chinaman, who according to Bryson he thought had left Greywold, appeared at the lodge and demanded to be taken in and concealed. Bryson vowed that he feared for his life should he refuse the request. It was because of this fear that he failed to communicate with the detectives up at the house who were investigating Kidd's death, and inform them that a suspicious Chinaman was hiding in his place.

Bryson's explanation of this was that his terror had shattered his judgment, and also he was terribly frightened, for now he was sure that the man was an emissary of Hop Sing, the Chinese pirate.

So Bryson allowed the Chinaman to stay at the lodge, and made no effort to denounce him to the police, and the "heathen" went into concealment during the day but wandered around the grounds at night. The gatekeeper couldn't imagine how he escaped the Russian wolf-hounds, but supposed it was he that poisoned them at last.

Then came Mr. Campbell's murder, and Bryson said that he was so frightened, fearing that he would be suspected of being an accomplice of the man he harbored against his will, that he dreaded more than ever saying anything about his presence in the lodge.

He protested solemnly that he had no idea that his guest would make an attack upon the young newspaper man when he came down to the lodge to ask some questions about the murders.

After the attack, believing that Rourke had been slain, Bryson, overcome by the gravity of his perilous situation, convinced that his innocence under the circumstances could never be established, in utter despair cast in his lot with the Chinaman and fled with him from Greywold.

This was Bryson's statement, and I felt it my duty to turn over to the police the little red volume Mr. Campbell had placed in my keeping. It would corroborate, at least in part, Bryson's story, and while I had little use for the man, and disliked, for Carmen's sake, showing this diary her father had written, still I considered it my duty to do so.

Bryson was held for a time, and the grand jury failing to indict him, he was discharged. The chief of police of Boisville at any rate had "saved his face," for he had had the murderer of Greywold in custody, and it was up to the sheriff that the Chinaman had escaped.

Before leaving Boisville, Bryson came out to Greywold to see me. I think he

appreciated my turning Campbell's diary over to the police. He said he had come especially to see me and to tell me:

"No one will ever have any peace, nor long escape with their lives, that has that opal, the Burning of Troy, in their possession. I know what I'm talking about, Miss Carter. If John Campbell's daughter wants to keep out of trouble she'd better get rid of it. I wouldn't have it, not if some one got down on their knees and offered it to me on a velvet cushion. Do you remember the day you caught me in Mr. Campbell's room, Miss Carter?"

I nodded, recalling the incident vividly.

"Well, that's what I was looking for—the opal. Not for myself but for the Chinaman. He wouldn't budge from Greywold until he had it, and I thought I'd get it for him and get rid of him. The Chinaman wanted that opal badly, and he hasn't got it yet. Who knows, maybe he'll come back for it. And that would be bad, bad."

I assured Bryson that I was thankful for his tip, that I would do what I could about it, and then he left, and I never saw him again.

But I often thought of his queer, flaming red hair and his odd, pale eyes.

CHAPTER XXI.

TO ITS RIGHTFUL OWNER.

LITTLE remains to be told. After a while Jack and Carmen were married, and Carmen looked lovely as a bride, as I was always sure she would.

I retained my old position in Greywold. And then I fell to thinking of what Bryson had said to me about the Burning of Troy. Especially was I reminded of it when the man who now presided at the gates in Bryson's place reported that a mysterious Chinaman was hanging around Greywold.

I went at once to Carmen and her husband, and I begged them to get rid of the opal.

"Opals are notoriously unlucky, anyway," I reminded them. "Look at the Hapsburgs and others who bothered with them. Besides this, perhaps it was the opal that the Chinaman who committed the murders at Greywold was after, and he may never rest satisfied until he gets it, and in getting it who may say what will happen? Why not let him have it and be done with it?"

"But how?" demanded Jack and Carmen in one breath.

I told them.

"I will gladly undertake the task of delivering the gem into the hands of whoever the Chinaman is who wants it. I'll be delighted to do it. I always reveled in adventure anyway, and this will be a rare opportunity of indulging my craving that way. But apart from this I hear the East calling. It always does call, you know, to those who have once come under its spell, and when it calls one cannot resist it, one must heed it. Please let me go."

Jack and Carmen demurred, of course, and declared they wouldn't hear of such a thing, but I begged so hard and so persistently that at last they gave way to me, and so one day, with a generous letter of credit in my hand-bag, and the opal, the Burning of Troy, in a little chamois bag attached to a gold chain around my neck, I set out from Greywold to go to the other side of the world.

After an interesting voyage I reached Hong-Kong. From there I decided to go to Canton, where I intended to establish myself and get into communication with the man who wanted the Burning of Troy. I hadn't the slightest idea just how I was going to accomplish this, but I relied upon that mysterious means of communication peculiar to Oriental countries, whereby news is disseminated in the most marvelous and most startling manner.

I took the steamer up to Canton one evening. There were few passengers aboard, therefore I was not a little astonished as well as annoyed to find that I shared a stateroom with another woman.

My companion was a Miss Patricia Parsley, a missionary to the Chinese, who had spent years of her life in a remote village, where there wasn't a white person within miles; so when she traveled, the male portion of the race rendered her nervous and timid. That was why I had her in my stateroom.

The few men aboard rendered it absolutely imperative that she have a companion to shield her in an emergency. Not that Patricia Parsley had anything to fear from masculine attention forced upon her. Far from it.

She was a husky, raw-boned lady of uncertain years and uncertain features, with a complexion that years of a tropical climate had baked the color of a newly made brick. And if it wasn't enough to have a complexion like that, Patricia wore a dress of the most vivid Canton pink linen, that made her a sight for men to flee from, not to pursue.

I retired to my stateroom early.

Patricia Parsley was already in her berth, or rather in my berth, the lower one, and asleep. For an instant I felt inclined to rout her, but finally thought better of it and climbed into the upper berth, a process I detested because of a certain lack of limb length.

It was somewhere near midnight when I was awakened by the stoppage of the engine. I sat upright in my berth, alert and wide-eyed in an instant. Next I realized that the steamer had stopped!

That meant something had happened, something was wrong. I slipped down from my berth more quickly than I climbed up into it, and turning on the lights started to dress hurriedly. Meanwhile I awakened Patricia Parsley, telling her that the steamer had stopped, and, as a precaution, she better get up and dress at once. Whereupon Miss Parsley most inopportunistly went off into violent hysterics.

While I was striving to quiet her down and at the same time get into my clothing, there came a knock at the stateroom door. I expected, of course, to receive a

warning of danger when I opened it, but the Chinese boy who stood there said:

"Miss Carter is wanted."

Wondering who wanted me, and for what, at this unreasonable hour, I left Patricia to her hysterics and followed the boy, who led me to the captain's room and, after pushing open the door for me, vanished.

The room was flooded with light, and I beheld a Chinaman standing in the center of it, a Chinman in native dress of silk, magnificently embroidered, and who looked so much like Saiki, the butler I had left in Greywold, that for an instant I thought that it was Saiki!

"Saiki!" I cried in astonishment.

The Chinaman smiled and offered me a chair. Then, in excellent English, he told me:

"No, not Saiki, Miss Carter; but I was fortunate enough to resemble him close enough to replace him for a time in Greywold. You see, my mother was a Japanese. I may have some of that race's physical characteristics—"

"Then you are—" I gasped.

"The Chinaman who escaped from the police at Boisville. I believe that you have something for me, Miss Carter."

I put my hand up to my neck and unfastened the gold chain I wore around it. Then opening the little chamois bag, I took from it the opal and handed it to the man. I was glad it had reached the one who wanted it at last.

"How did you know—about it—and where to find me?" I asked.

The Chinaman smiled a most inscrutable smile and began fanning himself slowly with a beautiful fan.

"We of the Orient know many things. Some things are very easy for us that are hard for you of the West."

He looked at the opal lying in the palm of his hand.

"I'm grateful to you, Miss Carter. And you were a wise woman to persuade that girl at Greywold to part with this stone."

"Who are you?" I demanded boldly.

He answered me gravely.

"Hop Sing, who has passed these many years to his ancestors, was my father. This opal, that my father prized beyond all he had, now belongs to me. Again do I thank you, Miss Carter. You have come far to place it in the hands of its owner."

"May I ask some questions?" I begged.

His face immediately became sphinx-like, but he answered politely:

"Of course."

"Why did you hate Mr. Campbell so much? Jim Kidd was the ringleader in the raid on your father's treasure."

"I know. But I, who was a boy then, and on the island with my father where he stored his wealth, beheld this man Campbell cut my father's fingers from his hand, and then, when he was thus disabled, make away with the treasure that had taken him a lifetime to accumulate, including that which he prized above all, and which was said to bring with it good fortune—the Burning of Troy."

"Then why was Jim Kidd killed first?" I asked next.

"That was a mistake on my part," the Oriental answered calmly. "I intended that it should be Campbell."

"How did you manage to deceive us and take the butler's place?" I next inquired. "Did Mrs. Hudson—"

But at this point the Chinaman suddenly wearied of my questioning, for he clapped his hands, and the Chinese boy who had escorted me to this strange interview appeared at the doorway.

The man gave the boy an order in Chinese, and, although I did not understand that language, I was pretty sure he said:

"Show this woman back to her stateroom."

Then he bent almost to the floor, and I, bowing to him, followed the boy out of the room and back to my stateroom, to which he led me.

I noticed that many figures seemed to be lurking in dark shadows on the deck. I ascribed this to the curiosity of the crew.

Patricia Parsley, recovered from her hysterics and fully clothed in her pink Canton linen, with her pugree on her head and her umbrella in her hand, stood in the middle of the stateroom awaiting developments. Her face was not so aggressively red as usual, and her voice quavered as she inquired:

"Are we going down?"

"Foolish woman, take off your things and go to bed. The steamer is all right," I responded.

Instantly that Miss Parsley's fear vanished a certain amount of waspish wrath took its place.

"Well, of all things, to have people calling for you in the middle of the night! I don't know what the world and women are coming to anyway!" She took off her clothing and tumbled into her berth, or I should say *my* berth, and after a few indignant snorts I think she was asleep. When I felt the steamer move again I climbed up into the upper berth and followed her example.

The next morning we had docked, and as Patricia Parsley and I dressed to get off the steamer, she began asking me questions about the night before. I was soon aware that, timid as Patricia was, she had already been out on deck gathering up news.

And it seems the whole ship was talking about the pirates who boarded us the night before, the chief of them wanting only to see a Miss Carter who was aboard, the whole gang afterward leaving the steamer quietly, touching nothing.

"And what on earth, may I ask, could a Chinese pirate want with you?" Patricia begged of me.

Then, as I would vouchsafe no information, the missionary lady evidently made up her mind that I was the sort of a person she would do well to avoid. So she got her things together in a hurry and got out of the stateroom, conveying to me quite unmistakably that she wished nothing further to do with me.

The last I saw of her she was going down the gangplank, her pink Canton

linen dress making a blotch on the landscape, her pugree, with a green veil wound around it, pushed down upon her head, and a faded old green umbrella clutched firmly in one hand, as if Patricia Parsley symbolized by this grasp the firmer one she had upon her morals.

I was the cynosure of all eyes as I walked down the gangplank—I, whom a Chinese pirate had found it so important to interview that he had stopped and boarded a steamer to do it.

I rather expected that the whole thing would be made a subject of inquiry by the government, for I learned that there was a big price upon the head of Hop Sing's son, who was being more successful in the family profession than his father!

However, I was not bothered in any way, and after wiring from Canton to Carmen and Jack that I had placed the opal, I left that town, and then spent some months poking around in out of the way places in the East.

Finally a homesickness for Greywold came to me, and I decided to sail for San Francisco.

When I reached Greywold I found there awaiting me, besides Carmen's and Jack's rapturous welcome, quite a bulky package addressed to me.

It had been left at the gates of Greywold by a Chinaman.

When I opened it I found an amazing collection of unset precious stones, exquisite Chinese silks and embroideries, and lovely fans. Every year a similar package came to me, left always at the gates of Greywold by some mysterious messenger.

Then one year the package did not come; nor ever again.

The murderer of Greywold—Hop Sing's son—had probably parted with his highly priced head to the public executioner in far-off China.

At any rate, in Greywold, he was never heard of again.

(The end.)



Old Home Week

by John D. Swain

THE man on the blind baggage stepped to the ground where the first local took the siding on the single track half a mile this side of Denport.

Despite the years which had worked their will with him, the incredible changes

which had been wrought in mind and body since his boyish hand had waved a farewell to the little group of neighbors from the rear platform of his moving coach, he could not bring himself to alight at Denport depot, where half the population, headed by a fussy committee wear-

ing silk-ribboned badges with "Welcome Home" in gilt lettering, would be on hand to greet the first grist of returning prodigals.

Besides, dawn was breaking; the waves creaming over the sand-flats at flood tide, and the gulls raucously breakfasting on the little shoreward-swept fishes, were already visible as well as audible. The blind baggage was no longer a safe berth.

Filling his lungs with the crisp, salty air, he skirted the zone of cranberry bogs beside the track, and strode up the gentle slope of the forty-acre lot leading to his grandfather's house.

It was, he presumed, still erect in its apple orchard, since houses of its period disintegrate slowly; but it had been abandoned to the industry of the paper-making wasp and the domestic activities of the deer mouse. It was to have been his own, with its hundred-odd acres, and its view of distant ocean, across whose blue disc the nearest land, as his grandsire used to tell him, was Old Spain.

Long since it had been taken over by the town for unpaid taxes, the accumulated interest on which had outgrown the market value of the homestead, until some city man should realize its possibilities and buy it in, restore with cunning fidelity the sweet, strong lines of the old gambrel-roofed house, and with the perfect art which lies in the concealment of plumbing, render it not only beautiful but livable.

Capen presently saw the enormous chimney dominating the pink apple-blossoms which concealed the building as in a gigantic bouquet; and just as the faint toot of the local sounded its arrival, he passed through the broken fence and fought his way up the path lined with conch shells, and strongly defended by the barbed-wire entanglements of June rose-bushes and massed lilacs.

The great paneled door, when he won to it, was whole, but the wet, salt air had eaten through its hand-wrought hinges, and it sprawled full length in the entry. Most of the glass in the many-paned win-

dows was broken, but the thick bulls-eyes in the grill over the doorway were not so much as cracked.

Inside was much ruin. Floors sagged, and in some places had collapsed utterly. Paneled walls were cracked, and of the squares of landscape paper which had been the chief glory of the sitting-room, only a few weather-stained rags were left. There was no furniture save a few broken pieces not worth removing. Capen wondered what had become of the lordly high-boy, the two low-boys, the thousand-legged table, the old Liverpool china, and the steel engraving of "Washington's Farewell Address."

It was, however, the mighty fireplace in the kitchen which called loudest to him from the past. In its black cavern still hung the crane with its rings and hooks; but gone were the great pots and kettles before whose steaming fragrance he had sat as a boy on his little three-legged "cricket," while his grandmother made pan-dowdies and clam fritters and quahaug stews and cranberry pies, and the black cat blinked in the chimney jog at the blazing driftwood with its green and blue flames.

Presently Capen groped cautiously in the deep wood closet on the side opposite the Dutch oven. At the far end he felt for the wooden bar which should have been there; but at his touch the entire partition fell inward, and a draft of cool air sucked out of the dark interior. Striking a match, he entered the secret chamber. Built into the very core of its massive, ten-foot chimney, its purpose lost in tradition, it had not really been a secret at all, since it was the favorite play-spot of his boy chums on rainy days.

Holding a lighted match before him, he gazed curiously about the little hole, and was rewarded by finding in a sooty corner two or three faded and mildewed copies of the dime novels of his boyhood; under the ban in those days, insipidly harmless to modern taste. A bit of half-burned grapevine brought a twisted smile to his lips, and a crudely chalked scrawl upon

the bricks he dimly recalled as the effigy of one Kidd, or possibly Blackbeard.

In this house, but for his own folly, he might have seen his wife busy in the great kitchen, his kiddies playing in the secret chamber, or the deep orchard, or on the dunes rustling with wiregrass and luminous with beach plums and devil's paint-brushes.

The thing was not merely possible—it had been understood; and he had, in his lad's heart, half-consciously chosen the maid who should have ruled his hearth. Now he had come back, moved by an odd impulse, to attend the Old Home Week which was jointly designed to renew pleasant associations of the past and boom the summer resort of the future—since nearly the entire Cape had felt the rejuvenating hand of the city boarder upon its thin old pulse.

Capen was glad to have seen the old home first, and alone. He set forth to look over the crowd at the Town House, where the day's exercises began. No one, he felt certain, would know him, but he should know many of them. Perhaps here and there a word about himself would be dropped. Legally he was dead. The court had so decreed. He would be like a ghost haunting his old environment—silent, but observant, all but invisible.

It had been chance that threw in his way a stray newspaper announcing the Denport Old Home Week. He was only a couple of hundred miles away at the time, nearer than he had been in a decade. Having nothing to call him elsewhere, he had beaten his way home. He had even dressed for the occasion. His shoes were new soled and shined; for once he possessed a hat with both crown and brim. By diligent scrubbing with soap and water at a brookside, he had removed the most aggressive smears from his clothes, had cut the fringe from his trousers, and terminated them in modish cuffs, dampening and pressing them between heavy planks. He had yielded weakly to the allure of a celluloid collar, and approached the Town House with the ap-

prehension that he was slightly overdressed.

There were many he recognized at once; they were merely the boys of his schooldays, still retaining their fresh color and clear eyes, but oddly decorated with grizzled whiskers which might have been put on as a jest, or leaning on canes, and decked in old mannish clothes. Women, too, in whose thin, sharp faces or plump placidity he discerned but the fulfilment of girlish promise; slim, lithe brunettes gone to seed; fat, roly-poly youngsters who had passed from the rose to the peony stage.

In others he could identify nothing familiar, even when he heard them addressed by name. Age had stripped them; theirs was not a fulfilment, but an anticlimax. There were many that slept in the little churchyard whose low walls could not keep out the gray sea fog or the driving spume of the nor'easter, and new settlers had come in since his time and taken root in the sandy soil.

The chiefest pang he had to endure was a physical one. A shore dinner was served—dear Heaven, how many years was it since he had tasted one? Clam chowder—scallop stew—steamed clams and lobsters—scup and rock-cod and flounders and perch fried crisp and served on clean cedar shingles—tantalizing pies and hot coffee.

Of this bounty, Capen dared not partake. Already many curious eyes had observed him, many curious comments been smothered behind sunburned hands and black lace mitts. Several had tried to draw him out; but he had briefly explained that he was a stranger, a passer-by. Probably he would not have been denied—there was more than enough for all—but he could not bring himself to follow his quivering nose and adventure it.

In the end he slouched under the old sign reading "Asahel Snow & Son, East India Goods and Groceries," and stood before the counter gazing upon the familiar clutter of oilskins, sea boots, tackle,

galvanized fittings, and cordage which distinguished it from the general country store. He bought a frugal morsel of salt pork, a little paper of salt and pepper, some pilot bread, and a hatful of onions and potatoes.

Thence he betook himself to a near-by cove where, unless the world had indeed turned upside-down, there should be found plenty of clean white clams, and where, indeed, there were, waiting to be dug with the cover of a lard pail he had secured from the grocer for the asking, and in which some time later the last of the Capens cooked his own solitary chowder. Meanwhile the sand peeps played tag with the advancing and retreating waves, and little fiddler crabs scurried in and out of their houses of sand.

The afternoon address in the old Meeting House he passed up. As a boy he had squirmed through enough droning exhortations there, and besides, he greatly desired to visit the school-house alone. It was but half a mile from the cove, where he had eaten his clam-chowder, and found its door ajar.

He might have passed out of its entry but the day before for any change he could note. The whittled desks and rude, home-made benches, the curious little round-barreled stove with its disproportionate length of funnel, the bleak, white-washed walls startlingly framing wooden blackboards, the uneven floor with its protruding knots polished by the little scuffling feet of many generations, all were as he remembered. Further investigation revealed more modern text-books than those he had known, and a new map behind the teacher's desk on its little platform, scene of much unhappy oratory on declamation days.

As he stood quietly in the room, one by one the benches were peopled by little silent ghosts, the boys and girls with whom he had fought and played and droned through his lessons. There was a goodly attendance; only here and there a vacant seat whose owner for some obscure reason failed to develop on his memory film.

There came to his mind, as well, all the familiar sounds of which he had been scarce conscious at the time, but which now echoed loudly in the still room. The melancholy iteration of the bell-buoy, swelling and dying with the veering wind; the deep call of the fog-horn as the cautious schooners felt their way across the bar while the gray mist left the open windows only pale smears of light, and it was difficult to read the figures on the blackboard; the crash of breakers, the hiss of November gales which drove the sand through every casement; the hoarse comment of crows seeking periwinkles along the shore.

Without hesitation Capen walked to his own desk and sat down. It was so low he had to extend his legs straight beneath it to make room for his knees. Throwing up the cover with but a quiet glance at the contents, he studied the ambitious work of art carved on the reverse by his patient jackknife: two big hearts, linked, with the initials "A" and "E"—a design whose sincerity made up for lack of originality.

Alfred—Esther. And now, on the hill, an old house rotting down, and in his seat, a prematurely old man.

And Esther? After he had left town her mother had died, and she had gone to live with an uncle in the West. Long after that, he had learned in a round-about way of her marriage. Her name, or address, or condition in life, he knew nothing of.

Her seat was diagonally across, on the girls' side, of course; he knew it as well as his own. They had never really been sweethearts—they were too young. He had so managed it as to come swinging down the lane just as she passed by, and was thus justified in walking to school with her. He was always greatly surprised at the coincidence—but it seemed silly not to walk together when they *chanced* to meet!

In secret he clothed his heroines of juvenile fiction with her dresses, gingham apron, plump little legs in checked stock-

ings and stout boots, pigtails and all. In public, he jeered at her sex, and vociferously denied even a passing toleration for it.

Two or three times he had kissed her shyly—once, to his undoing. Tom Stevens had witnessed the tender passage, and had given it the widest publicity. Later on he had gloriously “whopped” Tom Stevens.

He wondered vaguely if she had ever been twitted about him by the other girls, as he had been by his fellows. Girls were so secretive, one could never tell. Probably she hadn’t thought much about him anyhow.

He shut his desk and crossed over to hers. Like those of all the girls, it was comparatively free from cuts and scratches. He raised the lid with no conscious motive—since nothing of hers could have been there for years. And then he paused, stupefied, his weak mouth half agape, his eyes staring from their thicket of grizzled brows. For underneath, cut clean and deep, he read his own initials. “A. H. C.”; and that there might be no possibility of error, the date—the very year he had “whopped” Tommy Stevens and at the same time proclaimed his freedom from feminine entanglement!

On the dried husk of his heart were laid the rosy fingers of romance. The bitter-sweet taste of what might have been was in his mouth. Inspiration clutched him. He set to work to wrench from Esther’s desk the lid in which she had graven his initials. He would bear it with him wherever he went. It should be his escutcheon—leading, perhaps, to better ways. It signified that somebody had thought of him—somebody had cared.

Having no screwdriver or other tool, and the wood being tough and its hinges strong, he wrestled grimly at his task—so grimly that his first warning of another visitor came from an unsympathetic demand to know “what in time be ye doin’ of?”

He raised a flushed face to behold the majesty of the law, accompanied by lesser satellites. It was Tom Stevens—he whom Capen had “whopped” long ago, oddly masquerading in a baggy blue suit, with a little querulous gray chin whisker, and a glittering star.

“I’ve had me eye on ye,” he said unfeelingly. “Most of our folks is tendin’ Old Home Week, with houses shet up an’ unguarded. Likely time fer somebody to look round and do a leetle breakin’ and enterin’. Well, I can’t arrest ye on that charge, because the schoolhouse door was open, and I can’t arrest ye for vagrancy, because fur as I know we hain’t begged for nothin’ yet; but I *can* take ye fer damagin’ town prop’ty, an’ by gosh, I’m a goin’ to! What ye doin’ with that lid there?”

Capen shrugged his shoulders without replying.

“Well, it beats me what ye are up to, but no matter. Ye can explain that to the squire to-morrow. I’m a goin’ to shet ye up anyhow.”

Unresisting, Capen allowed himself to be led outside where the depot hack waited. As he entered it, accompanied by the constable and two members of the reception committee, he noticed that the ancient vehicle bore a broad white cloth band marked with heavy black lettering, “Denport Welcomes Her Children Home!”

They rattled slowly down the street, and presently Capen was installed in the tiny brick lock-up with the iron-barred window and padlocked door, which as a boy he had regarded as an impregnable dungeon.

Late that night, having scraped out a bit of mortar and loosened a brick or so, he removed an iron bar and leisurely took to the road. He waited near the depot in the shadow of a water-tank, and in due time boarded a flat-car and composed himself to sleep.

Accidents barred, he figured on arriving at Middleboro in time for a hand-out breakfast.

The Hiding Places

by Allen French

SYNOPSIS OF PRECEDING CHAPTERS

LAMON HARTWELL, retired pirate, buccaneer, privateer, before his death in 1824 has packed his fortune—all in rare jewels—into six small, lead boxes and hidden them in odd places about his Massachusetts farm. By will he has left half of the farm to each of his two sons, and provided that the boxes shall belong to whoever finds them, whether they happen to be on the finder's land or not. The "Thick Oblong" box was found in 1839; the "Flat Oval" in 1847; the "Flat Round" in 1854. The story opens with the finding of the "Flat Oblong" by Binney Hartwell, great-great-grandson of the buccaneer, on the land of his cousin, Lon Hartwell; Margery Hartwell, Lon's daughter, and Gertrude Worthen, daughter of a wealthy summer resident, are present. Lon is furious and, advised by Al Stidger, a mean little country pettifogger, makes up his mind to get hold of the jewels (thirty thousand dollars' worth) the box contains. His attitude, however, makes no break between Binney and Margery, who have been chums from babyhood. Mr. Worthen disposes of the jewels for them and invests the money, also he takes Binney into his large brokerage office in Boston. Binney does very well, is introduced into society by Gertrude, and advanced to a confidential position by Worthen. Binney hears various rumors that Worthen's business is no more than a bucket-shop; but his faith is so great he will not believe until his eyes are opened by the discovery that Worthen has fleeced one of the customers Binney himself has brought to the office. To think it over he goes home, after questioning Worthen about his father's account. While talking to his father the next morning a letter arrives from Worthen announcing that the thirty thousand dollars is lost and six thousand dollars besides. Old Mr. Hartwell drops dead of heart disease from the shock, and Binney goes back to Boston, where he forces Worthen to give up the accounts with his father. He also demands a copy of the old will which Stidger has been trying to get hold of for some reason, and which had been given to Worthen for safe keeping. Worthen tells him Gertrude has it, and Binney goes to her. She knows nothing of his loss of money or his father's death, and is disturbed at his manner. She finally gives him the will, but in such a way that he, thinking it some worthless old paper, tosses it into the fire. Not till it is consumed does he realize what he has done.

Binney returns to the farm and settles down to run it, but Stidger, learning that the will has been destroyed (and knowing that the original had been burned in a fire years before) persuades Lon to sue for the value of the jewels. Gertrude visits Binney at the farm, and tries to persuade him, for his own sake, to return to Boston and take a position in the office of Colleston, a lawyer who is in love with her and a friend of Binney's. He refuses, and in saying good-by Gertrude kisses him, leaving him dazed and wondering.

CHAPTER XXXI.

AN INTERVIEW.

THROUGH the maze of my ideas when, in order to lessen their confusion, I at last turned to my work, gradually two came clearest. First, I was to give up this life in

order to start fresh in the city. Secondly, there was an understanding between Gertrude and me, of a nature defined by the fact that I might not kiss her, while she might, if she wished, kiss me. This implied (and somehow it was very clear in my head) that she was not bound to me unless she chose to be satis-

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fied with me, but that meanwhile I was quite at her service.

The strange tingling in my cheek, where a butterfly still seemed to hover, kept through the afternoon the memory of Gertrude's kiss. With it often returned the thrill of that impulse to seize upon her. Her face, with its brilliant eyes and smile, frequently was before my eyes. Her daintiness, her insight, her masterfulness, her poise, the position which she could gain by their means, and the adornment which she could bring to it—these were constantly in my mind, always followed by the thought that perhaps she would condescend, and that they would be mine. How she had condescended to-day!

Yet deeper still lay question. In spite of my youthful reverence for the girl, excusing her vagaries and loyally abiding by the step to which I had tempted her, I felt a doubt. Had Gertrude and I gone too far on ground too weak to hold us? Of flirting I knew nothing whatever. It never occurred to me that I could draw back. I started homeward with a clouded mind.

Then, when I thought of mother, I felt a deeper trouble. How was I to explain all this to her?

Said mother at supper, "You don't talk very much to-night, Binney, but you eat a good deal."

Now I had mechanically been filling a great emptiness, and I had to laugh. "I guess you know why."

"She wouldn't make a good provider," remarked mother, with that approach to grimness which I had before seen in her when she spoke of Gertrude. I felt that my doubts were deepening.

A little later I tried mother once more. We sat on the porch in the dusk, and the evening was beautiful. Mother spoke of the gold in the sunset. "Yes," I agreed. "But mother, the real gold is in the city."

Mother was obstinately silent.

A quitter? The word haunted my uneasy sleep. It spoiled my waking. Whichever way I turned, was I not a

quitter—a traitor to the old life, or a traitor to the new?

Before I went further with mother I wanted to see Colleston. He had spent one day with Joe, and was likely to spend another, so I went out to my work. The morning changed from cool to sultry, so that the horses were all of a lather, and I dripped until great clouds began to pass slowly overhead, cutting off the sun. Then a storm broke over Philipston, blotting out the town; and that was a rare thing in the morning. I watched to see if it would back up against us, which often means hail and a bad storm. But it marched southward along the ridge, within three miles of us, and so passed away toward Williamsville. To the west, when the sky cleared again, the sky was a wonderfully deep blue—too deep, I knew, for peace. So when I drove dinnerward I resolved to keep near the house in the afternoon, for the sake of mother and the cattle.

A patch of our millet was so tall that it was sure to be lodged by wind or rain, so I cut it down and got at least half under cover, as green fodder for the next two days. Then I climbed to the roof of the barn and replaced a few split shingles as precaution. Here I became absorbed by the landscape, and sat on the ridge-pole to study how the great floating clouds were casting wonderful shadows, while the distance was hazy. Greylock, which we see clearly in fair weather, was out of sight, lost in the shadow of a single cloud, miles broad at the slaty base, but climbing, mass on mass, to pure whiteness in the sunlight. From this would come our storm, if from anywhere.

I heard a voice hailing me, and there on the ground was Colleston. Joking, I invited him up; nevertheless, up he came, nobly disdaining clothes, and neatly managing the two ladders. We sat on either side of the ridge-pole, facing the west, with our discussion entirely safe from eavesdroppers.

We spoke for a while of Cousin Lon's suit, and he praised Joe's work. "In gen-

eral," he summed up, "the outlook is promising. The real difficulty lies in the fact that the one apparently disinterested witness who read the old copy before it was destroyed, may testify against you."

"Mr. Worthen keeps his grudge?" I asked. "He is ungrateful, for I might have brought suit against him."

"He hates you," said Collester. "Nobody ever treated him as you did. In the one talk which I have had with him he swore viciously when I mentioned your name. The question is whether he can afford to keep his grudge. At the best he is in a fair way of losing a good deal. If a certain suit is brought he is likely to be bankrupt. And he has the idea that I can save him from the worst results."

I thought I saw hope. "He surely can't expect you to help him unless he helps you against Stidger."

Collester nodded, but kept his eyes on the landscape. Not fathoming what might further be in his mind, I waited. But I felt very cheerful, as if my suit were as good as won, with the help of Mr. Worthen.

And now a rattling of wheels came from behind us. Turning, I saw a buggy approaching. In it sat the man himself.

His clothes betrayed the state of his mind. Mr. Worthen usually dressed for the occasion. In the country he sported his tweeds; while traveling he was neat in pepper-and-salt; in his office he wore, with proper dignity, his frock coat. But it was the latter which he wore now, and his silk hat was a little tilted over one eye from the rough jolting of our road. From under its brim, as he tried to straighten it, he peered up at us.

Behind him, very carefully choosing footing on the grassy edge of the road, came Gertrude quietly on her horse, looking very demure. That her father knew she was following I gathered from a hitch of his shoulder as he half turned to glance back. Then impatiently he controlled himself, and resumed his scrutiny of us. Gertrude stopped at a little distance and cheerfully smiled upward.

Mr. Worthen, at first unable to believe, I suppose, that there was Collester calmly seated on the ridge-pole of a barn, called up doubtfully. "Collester, is that you?"

"Yes."

"Then come along down. I must speak with you."

"Presently," answered Collester. And he turned very composedly to me again.

"His coming proves that that suit has been entered against him, and now I have him where I don't want him, ready to do anything for me."

"You don't want him so?" I asked, surprised.

"Hartwell," he answered, "this is important to you, so come and listen." And he started to climb down.

"Let me go first," I said. "Going down is different from coming up."

It certainly is. To change from one ladder to another is easy when going up, for the eye can see and the hand can grip. But to look down over the eaves of a high barn, and to feel with the toe of a slippery boot for the upper rung of a ladder that is just a little too far below, needs practise. When I looked up from the lower ladder, and saw Collester peering for his foothold, for the first time I perceived in his eyes hesitation and doubt. Then I told him to slip over to me, and he did it with perfect confidence. A man is in no very graceful position when his lower half dangles into space; but the eaves concealed us from those in the yard, and I quickly placed his feet on the ladder. Speedily we were on the ground.

I followed behind Collester as he approached Mr. Worthen. The banker-broker had left his buggy, and was awaiting us at the wall, out of earshot of his driver. Yet the latter never would have heard us as we talked at his side, so absorbed was he in examining every cranny in sight for a glimpse of a leaden box. It was the way with all of them.

My old employer scowled at me, disdainful recognition. "Collester," he said impatiently, "I want to talk with you alone."

Gertrude's horse whickered as she moved him closer. She sat within a couple of yards of us, and again Mr. Worthen hitched his shoulder, but controlled himself from looking round. I had to smother a smile, but Colleston answered with perfect gravity.

"I thought as Mr. Hartwell was in a way concerned in anything we might say, he ought to be present."

Mr. Worthen sullenly glowered, while I, sensing deep changes in him, tried to analyze them. His clothes were wrinkled from his journey; his hat had been rubbed counter to its gloss, streaked in roughened lines; and on his face were the cinders of the train. But the deepest change was in his fidgety manner. As he stood he shifted on his feet; his once hearty and confident glance was restless and uneasy; and he repeatedly moistened his lips. He looked again at me, and I half expected a roar such as he often, in old times, let out at an offending clerk. But he turned to Colleston and hesitated.

"I suppose," Colleston pursued, "that the Clark people have at last taken steps against you."

"They have, the treacherous brutes," snapped Mr. Worthen, glad to turn his resentment against some one. "I have kept them on their feet for years, and this is how they treat me!"

Colleston made no comment. "And what shall you do?"

"I came here about it," answered Mr. Worthen. "Your office sent me to Peter-sham. The hotel people directed me here. And," he added pettishly, "Gertrude saw me, and had to up and follow."

Behind him Gertrude nodded her head. "I had to." Softly.

"And what do you want of me?" asked Colleston.

The cold inquiry brought an abrupt pause between them. Mr. Worthen's face expressed the small boy's dismay when, at the end of a long and panting chase of the baker's cart, he fears he has lost his dime. The overwhelming reason which was to bring Colleston to his side,

in the face of this indifference seemed suddenly weak. But he collected himself and answered:

"You've got to take my case." His manner made this less of a demand than a suggestion.

"Well," asked Colleston, "and if I do?" As if the baker were saying: Your dime, little boy, supposing you find it, will scarcely purchase this magnificent pie.

Mr. Worthen's little eyes glared for a moment at me. Then he hitched backward a resentful shoulder. Finally he jerked out an answer.

"I will testify for you in this Hartwell suit."

For a moment my spirit sang within me. Stidger was downed! The farm was safe! Warm satisfaction flowed through me.

I cannot excuse this. It is natural, of course, to be very quick in perceiving one's own advantage. And when I saw Gertrude's sparkling eyes, and her bright nod of congratulation at this assurance of success, I almost tossed my hat.

All I can say in my own defense is that I recovered myself quickly. I needed no reproachful glances from Colleston, but only, I thank God, my own reflection.

For the bald terms! Bribed, Worthen would tell the truth. And the bribe? That Colleston would save him from punishment. I thought of poor Canby. I thought of my father in his grave. I thought, too, of Colleston's honorable standing in his profession. And then, shamed, I looked at Colleston's face.

Hopefully—yes, truly I can say that hopefully he was looking at me. As our eyes met, our hands, of their own accord, came forward and gripped. And then I understood his kindness to me, and, too, in part repaid him for it. He liked me, he believed in me, and now he found me worth his liking and belief. The clasp of our hands expressed it all.

There came to me such a change of spirit—joy at this new understanding, resentment at the trap that was baited for

us—that I turned to break out upon Mr. Worthen. But recollecting myself, I looked at Colleston again. He smiled.

"Say it," he said. "He will understand you quicker than me." And so I stepped closer to my old employer.

If I had not seen, behind him, Gertrude closely watching, I might have said all that was in my mind. But I remembered that she did not yet understand his treachery to me, and (for her sake, not for his) I tried not to tell her.

"Go and get another lawyer," I told him. "Mr. Colleston will not help you."

I heard Gertrude's "Oh!" of surprise. Worthen knew at once that I told him the truth, and his red face grew pale. But he tried to bluster through. "What have you to do with it?" he demanded.

"Everything," I answered. "If the price of his working for you is to be your help in my suit, then I don't want your help."

"You fool!" he cried. "You are throwing your case away. The side I testify for will win."

"You flatter yourself," I retorted.

He stood glaring. Behind him Gertrude urged her horse a pace nearer, and knowing her about to speak, I hurried on.

"Mr. Colleston is the only reputable lawyer that you could hope to secure. Yet you couldn't approach him but for personal acquaintance. Try another sort of man. Try Stidger!"

"Binney!" appealed Gertrude.

"There is nothing else to be said," I answered, but would not look at her.

Indeed, Mr. Worthen was a more interesting sight than even Gertrude at that minute could be. His whole face grew as purple as his nose, his very eyes seemed red, and his strong teeth showed. A fine stirring picture of an angry brute.

But he choked on his own fury. Inarticulate words rasped his throat, and he was seized by a fit of coughing. I even sympathized with his exasperation as, trying to still the convulsion, he grew almost blue, while his glare faded in spite

of his effort to fix it on me. The sweat was on his forehead before he had mastered himself. And seeing him stand before me breathless and shaking, I took him by the arm and led him to the buggy.

"Better leave the matter as it stands," I told him. "Nothing can be gained by further talk." I helped him into his seat, backed the carriage about, and supposed that we had peaceably got rid of him.

But, as the driver was about to start his horse, Mr. Worthen seized the reins. With recovered voice he roared at Colleston.

"Do you stand by what he says?"

"Yes," answered Colleston quietly.

"Painted dummy!" shouted Mr. Worthen. "Tailor's model! Cold Boston fish-ball!"

He yanked at the horse's mouth till the beast began to back; but quite unconscious of it, he turned his attention to me.

"But I've got you!" he jeered. "Where's the money that you and your silly father left with me? It would help you out of this scrape. But it's gone, by heck! And don't you need it now? I guess not!"

The wheels were cramped now, and the buggy began to tip as the horse still backed. The driver snatched the reins and used the whip. But still the horse backed, and still Mr. Worthen was unconscious of it.

"A fine figure of a fool you were in my office. And mighty cocky now, you cooked goose. I'll show you! I'll own this farm that you're so proud of. My summer residence, you idiot! You—"

As he was proceeding in true washer-woman style, the driver in vain still lashing with his whip, the heavy cant of the carriage at last brought Mr. Worthen to himself. He clutched at the side of the seat as his rolling eyes measured his danger. Another moment and the buggy would have been over. But a hand on the bridle checked the excited horse, and I led him again into the middle of the barnyard. I headed him straight, and slapped his haunch, and let him go. The

carriage whirled by me with Mr. Worthen clutching the seat with one hand, his hat with the other. The buggy-top eclipsed him, the clatter drowned anything he might say. And so he made his exit.

I wanted to laugh, but all was not yet over, for Gertrude was still there.

CHAPTER XXXII.

AN AWAKENING.

APPREHENSIVELY I looked at Gertrude.

She was magnificently disgusted.

"And you will lose this chance to win?" she demanded of me. "Binney, what are you thinking of?"

"Under the circumstances," I answered, very vaguely, as I knew, "there was nothing else to be done."

Gertrude showed that she understood me only too clearly. "But men have to put up with things. It's the only way to get ahead. It's what women do. You can't be free from it."

"I wasn't thinking of myself only," I mumbled, scarcely able to face her, though I knew myself right.

Gertrude's disapproval included Collester. "It wouldn't have hurt him to take father's suit," she cried. "I see that father cheated you. But here was a chance to set him on his feet again, and save your farm, and probably get your money back. Why, it would have helped any lawyer's reputation to do a thing so neatly."

It pained me to know that Collester must have heard, even though he was walking away. Indeed it pained me to hear. For this was Gertrude's outlook on life!

"How can you win your suit?" she demanded.

"I will win it, or I will lose it," I answered, "on the facts of the case as everybody knows them." But I knew that as I spoke my manner was sullen, as if she had put me in the wrong.

She merely sat her horse like a scornful statue, and looked at me.

"Gertrude," I pleaded, "we look at things differently."

"Indeed we do," she responded. "As for the suit, let it go. We agreed that it was of no consequence. But the future. How are you ever to succeed in the city if you set yourself up for a little George Washington?"

Her clear voice rang in the yard. Collester must have heard.

"Gertrude!" I pleaded again.

With a sudden, delightful smile, she leaned and put her hand upon my shoulder. "Let's not discuss it further now. But just remember how I think of it. I've thought so much on the subject, and I've heard a lot of idealistic talk, but it never brings success. Binney, you mustn't be soft. But we'll speak of this another time."

And with the friendliest of light farewells, as if now the important matter were to soothe me, she gathered up her reins and darted toward the gate. I heard her cast a jolly good-by to Collester as he plodded toward his horse. Then she was gone.

Plodding was the word for Collester. His heavy shoulders seemed to carry a load. I could not let him go without another word, and so I caught him before he mounted. As he heard me behind him he turned; but when we stood facing I realized how little there was to say. For we both were thinking of Gertrude, yet neither of us could speak of her.

"So it's settled," I said clumsily.

"Settled," he answered. "And you are satisfied?"

As to my feeling about the suit, he knew it. I never stood up to a man with a kindlier feeling. All my little doubts of him, all my boyish resentments, had fallen away. We shook hands upon an understanding that could not have been made clearer by a day's discussion. And so I let him go.

But not happily. His head was bowed

as he slowly rode away. And I knew that the ache in my heart as I thought of Gertrude was not so great as his.

The sun was still high when my visitors had left me, but during their short visit the atmosphere had changed. A glance at the west showed me that a storm was surely coming, and I thought of the cattle. If some of the young stock should be frightened and stray, it would be a great bother; therefore I started for the woods, on a short cut for the further end of the pasture, intending to drive the cows before me to the lane. And as I like to do, I went a little out of the way to take a drink at the spring.

They say that in spite of my bulk I walk very lightly. It comes, I suppose, from my squirrel and rabbit hunting as a boy. At any rate, I was within a couple of strides of the spring, and already saw the gleam of its waters through the bushes that surrounded it, when I roused some one on the other side of the leafy screen. I heard a little cry of alarm, but saw no start nor flight. And when I had rounded the bushes, there cowered little Bertie Stidger.

All eyes she seemed, with her body pressed within the covert, and held there by quivering repression. And the great eyes, under their cloud of hair, looked at me in pure fright.

"Why, you surely aren't afraid of me," I said. And sitting down on the stone where so many times I had rested, I followed the course which seemed to me best, and waited for her to come to me.

Thank Heaven for the instinct that teaches a child to trust its elders! In Bertie its long suppression made it stronger than homesickness. In just a moment, and even while her doubtful glance was studying my smile, her thin little legs were already in motion. She writhed herself out of the bush, and with delightful bashfulness came slipping toward me. When she sat beside me, and fearlessly put her hand in mine, she looked up at me in perfect confidence.

"I wasn't going to take anything," she said.

"What could you take that you aren't welcome to?" I asked.

She answered innocently. "Father said if I looked I might find a little lead box."

"If you looked where?" I asked.

"Into holes, or hidden places. Under things. But there it's damp and slimy."

"Very much so," I agreed. "Bertie, you are very sensible."

"And if I found anything," she said with honest shrewdness, "the box wouldn't be father's, but yours."

"Of course," I agreed again.

"So I ought to give it to you, and not give it to father."

So little was I then interested in our boxes, that I thought it a perfectly fair chance to risk this child's finding them. "But," I said, "if you find it across the big double wall, you should give it to my cousin, Margery."

The little girl's eyes shone up at me. "Oh, she is so good! Oh, yes, I will! To pay for the omelets, and the cookies!"

"And are omelets," I asked, "as good as cookies?"

"Nicer!" she cried. "They smell so nice! They fill you so! And the bread, and the milk, and the butter! Why are milk and butter and eggs better in Peter-sham than in Athol?"

I might have said, "They needn't be," but I did not wish to betray the father to the child. "Because they are fresher," I answered. "And, Bertie, I believe your cheeks are already redder and fatter because of it."

She nodded triumphantly. "Margery says so. And I sleep so sound!"

"Will you come some day and see me at my house?" I asked. For I liked the little cuddly thing, who now was within my arm. But she drew away and looked up in alarm.

"Oh, no!" she cried. "Father says there's a great dog there, and I must never go near him."

"You must be introduced to him," I said, "and then he will not even bark

at you. And in just a minute—" I whistled. For the spring was not very far from the house, and Jones might have been straying on my trail.

Then I was sorry, for Bertie clutched me. "Oh, will he come?" she cried. I nodded, for I heard his answering bark. "Oh, will he bite me?"

"Why, he is my dog," I answered. "Do you suppose he would bite my visitor?" And when the idea had taken her, and she asked, "I am your visitor, ain't I?" then she sat upright, and complacently smoothed her dress. I whistled again as a guide to Jones, and looked with pity on a child that was afraid of a dog. But I tried to prepare Bertie's mind.

"What are dogs in your street like?"

She shuddered. "Oh, dirty, and lazy, and stealing at back doors, and always scratching themselves. And they lie in the middle of the road in the sun." From which I got a perfect picture of the street where Stidger resided.

"Jones," I explained, "can't get as dirty as a dog can get in town. And he isn't lazy, for he has his business, and he attends to it." She looked up at me inquiringly. "Killing woodchucks," I told her, "and chasing rabbits, and guarding the place. But Bertie," I hastened to add, for I heard him coming, "though his big mouth is red and wet, and though he has a deep growl and noisy bark, he needs them in order to be a good policeman. But being a good policeman, he never yet has hurt anybody."

"I hear him!" cried Bertie, suddenly clinging to me tight.

Scrambling headlong through the brush, his excited whimper sounding before him, Jones hurled himself into the open. With one arm I kept his feet from Bertie, while he fawned on me, pawed at me, and ventured on such familiarities as he dared.

"See," I said to Bertie, who cowed very close, "he doesn't pay any attention to you. But now I'll introduce you."

So I smote Jones lightly on the nose,

to command attention, and made him lie down before me. But even then all he would do was to look at me, and pant, and slobber.

"Dogs have very bad manners," I said. "Now I will pay him no attention at all, but will tell you the story of Ali Baba, and we shall see what the dog will do. Listen to me, but watch Jones."

She watched and listened, and I watched her. And Jones, seeing that I would not look at him, presently began to notice Bertie. Since she was with me, he accepted her as harmless, wagged at her, and panted amiably. She shrank a little from the great red mouth, and looked up at me for an assurance of safety. My smile she echoed faintly, but again needed my encouragement when Jones began to sniff at her foot. Bravely she kept still, though in her little trembling frame I felt the effort.

Jones wriggled nearer, but the child was stanch. And now he laid his big head in her lap, and yearned up at her. With courage she put her white hand on him. Then he stood up, walked around her, and burrowed vigorously under her arm until he had forced his head through. Then laying his head against her breast, and languishing up at me, he plainly said: "Since you will have none of me, this is next best."

And she, putting her thin little arm tightly around his neck, laughed aloud with pleasure.

The tale of Ali Baba came to an abrupt stop.

But while we were joking about Jones, and petting him, and agreeing that he was the nicest dog in the world, he started and pricked his ears. "What is it?" asked Bertie.

"Some one is coming," I answered, for the low growl of warning was beginning in Jones's throat.

"Oh," she cried, "do you suppose they think I'm lost?"

I heard Margery's call, and answered her. But to my disgust I saw, coming through the trees, not Margery alone, but

also Stidger. Bertie, who at the sight of Margery had begun to wave to her, dropped her hand on seeing her father. She shrank nearer to me.

Stidger, thrusting forward as he saw us, came in angry haste. "Bertie," he reproved, "don't you know there's a storm coming on? And," he demanded of me, "what you keeping my daughter here for?"

Jones growled, and Stidger stepped back. "Bertie," he commanded, "come away from that beast!"

Docilely though she went to his side, her great eyes looked back at Jones with regret.

"And you let that brute come near her!" Stidger complained.

"Very good company, wasn't he, Bertie?" I asked.

But in her father's presence she would not speak. Margery, who had joined them and stood silent, shook her head at me. Her little anxious frown begged me not to anger him.

Yet he needed very little provocation. "I'll trouble you," he said in his harsh and quarrelsome voice, in which already sounded the thrill of one of his outbursts of passion, "never to speak with that child again. And, Bertie, you are to keep away from here. Understand?"

She answered "Yes," but I saw her look down sadly at the pool below her. The murmur of the overflow and the dancing of the sand in the spring meant much to the town child.

"Oh, come!" I protested. "Let the child have her pleasure. She may come here whenever she pleases, and I will let her alone."

But, holding her tightly by the arm, he turned away. "Come now!" he rasped out. "Come, Margery! It's lucky I was here with you both." And with clumsy show of protection, he laid his hand on Margery's shoulder.

She shrank away instantly, and the hand fell at his side; but I had seen the action. I saw, too, the stiff turning of her head away from me, and his sneering

backward glance. Since he knew I could not resent his familiarity, perhaps he tried to rouse my burning desire to duck him in the spring. If so, he was successful. Not all the exasperations I had provoked in him could equal my disgust and resentment at this single act of his. It was well that he did not stay. Marshaling the two before him, while they hurried with lowered heads, away went the triumphant male, leaving me to fume.

Was it fuming? It was, rather, a great and strange dismay. Until that scrubby rascal laid his hand on Margery's shoulder, she had been to me merely a sister, my indifferent property, to make me doughnuts and to sympathize on demand. Stidger's outrageous familiarity, rousing my indignation, roused also my knowledge of what she really was. In the shadowy woods I saw the vision of a new Margery. Yet not newly discovered qualities, but rather the magnetic pull of a great new force drew my thought to her.

And a sneak-thief stretched out his vile hand for her, while only yesterday Gertrude gave me to understand that she reserved me for herself. Only yesterday, too, Gertrude had laughed at the dull prospect of my marrying Margery; and only to-day had I discovered the hopeless difference between Gertrude's ideals and mine.

Oh, fool! Oh, dull and slow! In nothing had I blundered worse! What could I do?

I stood there in a great amazement till the startling thunder roared fairly overhead. Then hurriedly, lest mother should worry about me, leaving the cattle to themselves, I ran to the house.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE THICK OVAL.

THE darkness in the woods had come so gradually that I had not noticed it. When I reached the open, whimpering Jones keeping close by my side, I found that the storm had sent its ad-

vance-guard far ahead. In the swirling masses above me the lightnings were already playing, the thunder rumbling warningly. No rain had yet fallen, and waving my hand to mother, who stood on the porch anxiously watching for me, I ran to the pasture lane, where, luckily, all the cattle were waiting.

Jones had rushed to the house, so he was not under my feet in my rapid maneuvers. I threw down the bars; and while the cattle were filing to the barn I swung the great doors to and propped them shut, then hastily put away all tools that were about. It was a lesson on the value of neatness. The cultivator, which I had left outside its shed, I had to drag in by hand. Some hand tools, blankets long since dried in the sun, and the milk cans all had to be hurriedly put in their proper places. Then I secured each cow and heifer, shut the side door of the barn, chased the poultry under cover, closed every shed door, and was ready.

Sometimes a storm hangs strangely off. This one delayed. For a quarter of an hour I stood on the porch with mother, studying the gloomy landscape, listening to the rumblings overhead, and wincing at the pale flashes before which no eyes could remain open.

"I don't see how you can like it," mother said at last. "I'm going in the house."

"But see the magnificence of it," I protested. "Look at the strange half-darkness. The Double Pine never looked finer than now, when it is the central point of all these sullen shadows."

But she would not stay, and left me there alone.

The storm did not live up to its promise. The big, surly clouds withheld their lightning; their advance was slow. The first drops fell wide and scattering, and even when the great sheets came, the lack of thunder robbed them of dramatic interest. Nothing prepared me for what followed. I was sitting in the open doorway, protected by the roof of the little porch, and looking quite idly at the

screen of rain, when there fell the single bolt which, before all was finished, meant so much to me.

It came in one broad sheet of light, against which I put up both hands. Behind me, in the kitchen, mother uttered a little scream. And while I was yet blinking, unable, for the fire in my eyeballs, to see anything clearly, the thunder seemed to split the very rocks, so did it crash and echo.

Mother gasped. "Is anything struck?"

"None of the buildings," I answered. "The noise came a couple of seconds after the flash, so the lightning must have fallen perhaps a third of a mile away, in the woods."

No other flashes came. Slowly the storm passed. The last grumble of thunder, the last drop of rain, passed by. The final little wisp of cloud lifted from the woods and left the view quite clear. For my part, I did not at first notice what had happened, since I was thinking of what was next to be done. I did not wish to begin milking until the cattle had quieted down. Only slowly did I sense an odd emptiness in the landscape.

Then mother came hurrying. "Binney, the Double Pine!"

It was gone! No wonder the landscape was empty. The giant dome of beautiful deep green, the central point of all our best views, had been swept away. Only a belt of woods remained, featureless and dull.

"It was the lightning," quavered mother. "Oh, Binney, the tree your father loved so! It must have been a fine young tree, he used to say, a hundred years ago."

I felt a great resentment at the loss. Of no value as timber, on account of the double and slightly curving trunks, the tree had been spared for generations. The taller it grew, the fonder and prouder of it we had felt. Twenty-five more years of life were its due; it might even have lasted out my days. And here a single lightning-stroke had cut it down!

Gloomily I fetched my ax. "Mother," I said, "I'll go down and look at it. If

it lies across the cart-track, I must cut it up to-morrow before I can get a wagon to the west meadow." And so, angry at my fortune, I went out.

The air, so fresh and cool after the rain, soothed me somewhat, and the dripping woods pleased me. It was a comfort to pass the spring and see its bower unchanged, too humble to be injured. Yet the depression of my loss remained with me; and when, emerging from the woods into the little glade where the Double Pine had stood, I saw its prostrate majesty, I had to choose between swearing and weeping. So I swore.

The two great boles had fallen straight apart, and lay in the tangle of smaller trees which they had borne down before them. For some fifteen feet above the ground they had been united. This enormous trunk had now been cleft down the middle, and dozens of great shining yellow splinters had been hurled all about. Twoscore of fine young trees were ruined; a gap had been made in our pretty woods which would tell the tale for thirty years. And I felt as if the glory of our farm had departed.

Amid the strong odor of pine, I made the effort to approach and plan to repair the damage. The smashed branches had been scattered everywhere; I had to pick my way among them. Poising the ax, I planned to mark out the morrow's work. The stubbed branches must be trimmed off, the great bole marked out in lengths. In this I found a little relief. For as I forced myself into the mood for labor I felt, as I always feel with an ax in my hand, like a man equipped for his job.

Some day will be written, I hope by a poet, the romance of the ax. No bitterer enemy, no kinder friend, has man ever devised. Its warlike use has gone; to-day it is only the peaceful tool of farmer and pioneer. I love its balance and its grim face, its simplicity, its harsh, triumphant efficiency.

And so, as I swung it at a limb, heard its sharp hack, and felt it bite, something of my disgust and sorrow left me. I

trimmed off several of the limbs; then, with a few notches, I laid out the work for the morrow and started to take a look at the other top.

As I passed the great splintered central trunk, out from the woods into the glade came Cousin Lon. The gap in the landscape must have brought him, as it brought me; but he could scarcely have heard me, since during the last five minutes my notching had been slight, my eye-measuring deliberate. He stopped for an instant when he saw me; then, as if ashamed to do otherwise, he came slowly forward.

Now I was sorrier for Cousin Lon than resentful against him. Surely he was troubled by his conscience. Therefore, greatly preferring to be the injured party, I felt my advantage over him, and hailed him cheerfully.

He halted among the yellow splinters, but would not look at me; he sniffed the pungent resin. Slowly his eye roved along the blasted tree. "Terrible stroke, that," he said at last, in acknowledgment of my greeting. Then he passed me and went closer to the central trunk.

Believing that to try to make him talk would be unkind, I laid down my ax and went to view the farther half of the pine. It was as long as the first, had fallen as swiftly, smashed right and left as destructively. Being now thoroughly practical, I calculated the work of cutting it up, and was saying to myself that here we had kindling for years, when suddenly I heard the sound of furious chopping.

For a moment I turned to look, uncomprehending. Cousin Lon was standing on one part of the split trunk near where the two huge stems had joined. In his hands he was swinging my ax in breathless haste; I heard him panting. Then as his axman's "hah!" came to my ears, I understood, and before I knew what I was doing, was running toward him.

Before I reached him I saw I was too late. He dropped the ax, stooped, and clawed from the wood an object which he

held carefully in both hands. And stepping to the ground, he faced me, triumphant.

My fascinated gaze, fixed on his find, knew it at once. The Thick Oval Box! Though slightly changed in shape by the pressure of the growing tree, it could be nothing else. On its dull surface the hasty ax had bared one streak of silvery lead; the rest was lusterless. Here, securely hidden all these years, and a thousand times I had been so near it!

As my eyes reluctantly left it, impelled by a strange idea, Cousin Lon's also ceased to caress his treasure. Our glances met. His, besides his triumph, showed sympathy.

"I'm sorry, Binney," he said.

As I put my new idea to the test of thought, I laughed aloud. "Sorry!" I cried. "Why, that box is mine!"

"Yours?" Startled, he held it closer to him.

"Mine!" I replied. "You claim the other because it was found on your land. Then this is mine."

The argument confounded him, as his uncertain eye showed. "Why, no! Why, no!" he repeated.

As I felt a strong impulse swelling within me, and deliberately prepared to yield to it, I never thought more clearly in my life. Slow I may have been in other things, but not in seeing my way through this difficulty. There was one way, only one way, to forestall Stidger's trickery, and my muscles stiffened for the attempt.

"Mine!" I answered, and my teeth closed on my lower lip. I sprang at my cousin and seized the box.

Our four hands were on it; his grip was firm; he was stronger than I. Yet I too was strong, and I was the quicker. Also, I had the advantage of attack, and of the fury of my determination. It was finished soon. Shifting my grip, I crooked my arm in his; his leg I pinned with mine; I forced him backward till I bent him across the tree. With a twist of my body I could have broken his bones; but

as I pressed with knee and shoulder, his grip came apart. And I leaped away from him, the box in my hands.

Then of my deliberately seized advantage I repented as I faced my cousin. What beastly fury there had been on my face I know not; but on his I saw slow puzzlement and dull surprise. That was Cousin Lon, and my anger had been against not him, but Stidger. So I was sorry, and on an impulse risked all that I had gained. I laid the precious box down on the tree, and taking my ax, threw it into the woods.

"I gave you no warning," I said. "Look, there is the box, and you are stronger than I. Come, let us fight for it—if you think you are right."

He had no heart for it. Though for a moment, after a glance at the prize that lay there, there gleamed in his eyes such a flame of fight that I glimpsed what it would be to meet him now, my last words disarmed him. The flame faded, and he shrank away.

"Wait," I said, more repentant still. I wished to tell him what further was in my mind. But he would not listen. His pallor, which for this moment had left him, returned. His eyes looked down. And with a drooping of the head, a gesture of the hands almost expressive of despair, he hurried away from me.

I, too, was soon away, safely carrying the new-found treasure. What machinery Stidger might put in motion to take it away from me I could not guess. My intention was to forestall him by putting it out of reach.

But where could I lay such a thing where no search-warrant could uncover it? There was no hiding-place in our house. I had no confidence in the safe-deposit vaults in Boston, for a writ would force the bank to give the treasure up. Think as I would, I saw nothing to do until, finding myself at the spring, and nearer to the house than I wanted to be, I sat down on the margin of the basin to consider the matter.

Even now, such was my half-guilty

feeling, I had fears of interruption, and looked about me for a temporary hiding-place. And then I saw what I could do. Of course! Not for nothing did I come of the buccaneer's blood.

Down on my knees I dropped by the side of the spring and reached into the water. Not in the middle, where the water was deep and the sand shifting, but at the shallow side, I scooped among the silvery grains. Fast as I dug, the sand soon settled into place again; therefore, quickly I made the hole as deep as I could, worked the box in, and swept the sand over it. With eager, nervous haste I smoothed the bottom, and then stood up and looked at it.

Slowly the clouded waters cleared. In the middle still danced the quartz grains; at the sides the bottom was level and still. Nothing showed change. The box might remain there safely for another seventy years.

I had scarcely, after my early chores, finished telling mother of what I had done, and had just put the question, "Did I do right?" when she pointed to the road.

"Stidger is coming."

Coming he was, at a quick walk that was almost a run, in a haste that kept him stumbling among the rough stones. For he had seen us on the porch, and was keeping his eyes on us lest we escape him. Foreseeing a stormy interview, I said to mother:

"I don't want him to think I am hiding anything. So will you shut up Jones?"

She put the dog safely out of the way and returned to me. Meanwhile, anticipating its use in exasperating our visitor, I took out one of the last of my Boston cigars and very leisurely trimmed its end.

Straight across the yard Stidger came at me. His bloodshot eyes were redder than ever; their rims seemed fiery. Ill health, evil temper, malicious thoughts showed upon every feature of his unwholesome face. Nowadays Margery tries to make me think better of him.

Perhaps because I always roused his bile, he never showed himself to me except at his worst.

"I want," he rasped out when he was a few yards away from me, and still advancing, "that box you stole an hour ago from your cousin. He has just told me."

Panting and angry, he halted within arm's length. At his sides his clenched hands shook, as if eager to be at the work of tearing the box from me. I snapped my penknife shut, put it in my pocket, and slowly took out a match.

"I like plain speaking, Mr. Stidger," said I, "but let's stick to the truth. I didn't steal the box from my cousin; I took it by force. And if you want to know why, it was because of you."

"Of me?" he shrilled.

"I could have trusted him with it," I said. "But I intend that it shall never get into your hands. From this minute," and I lighted my match, "you are out of this legal tangle into which you have dragged my cousin and me." I puffed at the cigar. "You are permanently side-tracked." I threw the match away, and squinting across the end of the cigar, saw both that it was lighted well and that his temper was blazing furiously. Nor did I care. "Now, Mr. Stidger," I went on, "with that box in my possession as a pledge, I intend to sign an agreement with my cousin, before a magistrate, that the terms of the old will shall stand. Only one lawyer will be present, and that lawyer will not be you."

He was in a strange white heat. Every trace of color had left his face, except the uncanny redness of his eyes, the vent-holes of the furnace within. No man that I ever saw could so visibly burn with consuming fury. And he shook with the effort to contain himself.

"Give it to me!" he quavered with a sharp, high hoarseness. "Give it to me now!"

I shook my head. "It's hidden. And I can hide as well as the old buccaneer. No search-warrant, no writ, will ever get that box."

As he saw that I told the truth, and realized himself to be completely baffled, with that same gritting of the teeth which once had startled me, he moved his hand swiftly to his hip. Now, mother and I are peaceful folk, knowing nothing of the carrying of weapons. And yet the man's action conveyed to us both, and instantly, the notion of danger. She screamed.

As for me, quicker than I can now explain, and purely instinctively, I was on my feet and standing over him. My fist was ready.

"Have you a weapon there?" I demanded.

His hand dropped at his side. "No!" he cried.

"Lucky for you," I replied. "I would have knocked your teeth down your throat. And lucky for you, too, that when you came I sent the dog to be locked up. If he had seen that action of yours he would have leaped at your throat. Now go, and send in your bill to my cousin, and leave us in peace."

I had so startled him by the swiftness of my threat, that for a moment he remained fixed where he stood. But he gathered himself together, turned, and in a shambling trot hurried out the gate.

"Binney," cried mother, clutching me, "I know he had a pistol there. He will try to shoot you!"

"He could not hit me at ten feet," I answered, in contempt of the man's shaking hand. "He could not get me unless he jabbed the muzzle into me from behind, and against that Jones will keep me safe."

CHAPTER XXXIV.

STIDGER'S PROPOSAL.

MY triumph over Stidger was very short, for as he passed out the gate I realized where he was going. To Margery—and my thoughts switched violently. I ought to have wished to tell my news to Gertrude. Instead, I felt that I must see Margery.

Nor did I so much want to explain my actions to her, as to demand that she explain herself to me. For every thought of satisfaction at defeating Stidger vanished before the haunting recollection of his hand upon her shoulder. I needed to hear her own lips tell me that she loathed him.

"Mother," I said, "I want to see Margery before Stidger gets back to her."

"Half an hour to supper," she reminded me.

"I'll be back in time," I assured her.

So I hurried through the woods, where the leaves had ceased their dripping, and the path was already drying under foot. Stidger's route by the road was five times as long as mine, and I knew that I could find Margery first.

Now Joe, nicely drenched, had come in soon after the storm, and I had supposed him to be still in his room until I came upon him, just beyond the wall. The sight of him with Bertie Stidger stopped me dead. I had never reasoned that during his residence at Stidger's he must have become very intimate with the child.

Joe was seated on a boulder that lay beside the path. His arm was around her. Bertie, on his knee, her head against his shoulder, was looking, absorbed, up into his face. He was smiling down at her, and I heard his words: "And so he cried aloud, 'Open, Sesame!'"

The story of Ali Baba, per Joe Lippitt, vice Binney Hartwell, forgotten!

But where did Joe, waif, charity boy, scrub lawyer's half-starved clerk, learn the story of Ali Baba? Somehow into his sordid surroundings had shone the light of the fairy tale, and now he was reflecting it into hers. Pity to interrupt such happy absorption—yet after all I scarcely broke into it. For though at my footfall they started at the fear that I was Stidger, at the sight of me they dropped into security again. They smiled as I passed by, smiled dreamily. She was already settling against his shoulder again, and I had gone but a little way beyond them when I heard Joe's voice again:

"And then the cave opened."

I wondered, after I had left them well behind, whether I ought to have warned them that Stidger, in an angry mood, might soon be looking for Bertie. But they were safe enough. So as I went on I fell to thinking of Joe, good fellow, whose chief troubles were those of others, and whose cares were to make his friends happy. With an undivided heart, no pledges to keep, no perplexities in his simple duties—I would willingly have changed places with him, if only I might name the one who should lean against my shoulder.

The thought ought to have checked me in my haste. What business had I to come seeking Margery on an errand to which Gertrude might object. But I recalled Stidger, and plunged on with some fierceness. I must know what was going on.

Margery was on the doorstep, sitting gazing at the vacancy in the landscape where the Double Pine ought to have been. Her first words showed me that she was thinking of it. "Binney, I shall miss it so!"

I sat down beside her. "And to think what it has been concealing all these years!"

"It is strange!" she mused. And then, not with blame, but as asking for an explanation which she was sure would be forthcoming, she inquired, "Why did you take it from father?"

"I will tell you presently," I replied. "But while we are alone, Margery, tell me—tell me—"

It was very hard to say. I had come boldly to begin the question, only to realize that I had no excuse for asking it. Stammering, I stopped. She asked, "Well?" She was still looking away.

It must be said! I made the plunge. "Tell me what Stidger meant, there by the spring, by putting his hand on your shoulder."

Seeing her figure stiffen, I knew that I had intruded. Slowly she turned her head and looked at me. Her lips were

firmly set, her brow bent, and with an inward recoil I recognized that she looked just a little—defiant.

"Am I," she asked, very coolly, "not yet old enough to have a man of my own?"

Was it possible? Without power to speak, but shudderingly chilled, I stared at her. Not even the shock of the discovery of Mr. Worthen's treachery had brought upon me such cold dismay.

"Which reminds me," she said, beginning to rise, "that I ought to make sure if his supper is coming on properly."

His supper! Roused, I caught her wrist. "Margery, do you mean this?"

Quite composedly she took her place again. She prepared to speak, but with such a businesslike manner, as if the affair were entirely comprehensible, that I was frightened, and released her wrist. She looked at it, rubbed it a little, and then, "Why not?" she asked. "Where is there a better man for me to take?" And as if open to conviction, she sat and waited for my answer.

Unanswerable! For my tongue failed me when I tried to cry out, "Take me!" I must first get my freedom from Gertrude.

Margery had no mercy. The smile of kindly reasonableness with which she spoke again was a most awful witness of her state of mind. "If a girl is tired of loneliness," she explained, "if she has had a glimpse of outside things and wants more—why, when a man comes after her she does a bit of thinking, that's all."

As she uttered this appalling axiom, she was quite placid. I was stung into incoherent protest. "No!" I cried. "No, never!"

"But why not?" she asked, smiling patiently.

Gertrude! I must find Gertrude! Until I could see her and free myself, and then come honestly to Margery, I could have no rest. I sprang up.

"Why, Binney," asked Margery with innocent kindness, "what is it?"

Choking with dismay, disgust, revolt, I turned from her. Oh, to find Gertrude!

And here Gertrude was, riding briskly into the barnyard, waving her hand to us. Margery sprang up and went to meet her, while I stood watching her in gloomy doubt. If I were half a man, which I questioned, I would find a way to get myself clear of her. For what a contrast there was between her artificiality and Margery's sweet naturalness! How could I for so long have failed to see it? And yet when Gertrude's quick eye glanced from Margery, hastening forward, to me hanging back, and snapped with an "It's time I came," I felt that I was standing guilty before my lawful owner.

I always sulk when I'm opposed, and I sulked now. Gertrude had to call me to come and help her down.

"What is it?" she whispered in my ear as I lifted her.

"I want to speak with you," I blurted, taking no pains to prevent Margery's hearing.

Gertrude drew away and scanned my scowling face. Then "Oho!" she laughed, and saucily tossed her head. While I swore bitterly to myself, and she left me standing like a hitching post, the reins in my hand.

"Margery," she cried, "I've come to supper. Will you take me in?"

Margery visibly hesitating, I thought of the cruelty that Gertrude was committing. Into hampered Margery's household, with its simple fare, its ancient table fixings, its odd mixture of persons, Gertrude must needs come prying.

"Don't turn me away," she begged, as Margery groped for an excuse. And twining her arm into Margery's, she drew her close, coaxing. "It's so lovely here, and so dull at the hotel. Mr. Colleston's gone; he just sent me a good-by, and vanished in chase of a train. And Mr. Stidger will be here, and I want to make his acquaintance. I passed him coming on your road. He was talking to himself, and scowled at me so delightfully! He must be so interesting!"

This was said with bewildering sweetness. Stidger interesting? Gertrude knew better. Yet Margery found it difficult to make a stand.

"We live so differently—"

Gertrude let her get no further. "Oh, I like simple living! Don't you know I often long for it? And I'll help with the dish-washing. I know how."

Margery resigned herself. In much disgust, I hitched the horse. How could I now speak privately to either of them? But sullenly I stayed, standing by the horse, and watching the two girls.

It was now that Joe appeared with Bertie. The story had been finished, and mindful not to vex her father, Joe had brought the child home. Here was the diversion that I had vaguely wished for. Gertrude cried, "Oh, the darling!" and made for startled Bertie. And Margery, seizing her chance, walked toward the house.

Vaguely intending to make some kind of an appeal, I stepped in her way. "Margery!"

But she had caught Gertrude's own perversity. She looked me coolly in the face. "I must set my table," she said, and passed me by. But at the doorstep she paused, calling to Joe. And he, leaving the others, went to her.

Well, if I had lost once chance, here was another. I went where Gertrude, on her knees, was trying to cuddle Bertie. Only trying, for the child, her delicate face very serious, and her eyes gravely studying this stranger, held stiffly in Gertrude's arms the thin figure which she had yielded so willingly to Joe.

Gertrude, thus successfully repulsed, and somewhat flushed at the open failure, looked up at me. "Isn't she a beauty?" she demanded, to cover her defeat, which she already recognized. Where Gertrude was not at once victorious, she rarely persisted.

"Gertrude," I said as she stood up, releasing the child, who quickly slipped away, "walk over here to the wall. I want a few words with you."

Even had I been less peremptory, the sting of little Bertie's repulsion had lost me my opportunity. No one but feels a child's suspicions. Gertrude at least was cut by them, and meant to wound me too. She tossed her head. "Indeed, Mr. Frowning Man! But I am not going to the wall with any one."

"Right here, then," I said doggedly. "No one is listening. Gertrude, I want to say—"

She was not rude to me, merely charmingly independent. And with a little sideways, taunting smile, pointing at the same time to the others, she showed me that I was not to have my way. "Here is more fun. Look!"

For Stidger, with his customary scowl, had come marching up to Joe and Margery where they stood by the step. Gertrude took some quick steps nearer, and I—perforce I followed her. What the fellow might do was too important for me to neglect.

He thrust out his jaw as he lowered at Joe. "What you doing with one of my witnesses?"

"Why, really," answered Joe, mildly, "I had no idea that she was one."

"I am not!" cried Margery, startled.

He turned on her with what he meant for politeness. "I may need you," he said.

"But I don't want to testify," she protested, very much dismayed.

"If the court summons you," he returned, "you will have to come."

She warned him. "I can't testify on your side."

Her opposition was already wearing his politeness away. Under his gnawed mustache his mouth was grim. "You can prove what I want proved," he said inexorably.

From this dialogue Joe turned away. "Binney, what about supper?"

"Tell mother not to wait," I answered. While he went, I lingered, for if Stidger was to become ill-natured, I felt ugly enough to want to be there. But his first victim was his daughter, upon whom his

eyes fell as she stood shrinking by Margery's skirts.

And yet I think, to do him justice, that he did not mean to frighten her. He felt as one who stands alone, trying to call to his side a natural ally. And so, with an attempted smile that fitted wryly on his lingering scowl, he stretched out his hand to Bertie. "Come," he said. And with an effort he added, "dear."

Margery says she has seen him play clumsily with the child, evenings after supper. Yet always the little one met him with caution, doubtful how soon he would tire or scold. How could she now respond? With a quick little shake of the golden locks, she slipped further behind Margery.

It was bad enough for him that she should do it, worse still that I should see. The deep flush that came to his forehead was not from anger, for to my surprise I saw the quiver of his lip, and heard the little catching of his breath. He could feel mortified. For the first time I felt sorry for him. And rather than humiliate him by staying, I went away.

I did not wish to follow Joe, for he might have lingered for me, and I did not want to talk. I had been defeated by both Margery and Gertrude; Margery had in addition confessed to a horrible plan; and I had been deeply struck by the touch of humanity in Stidger. So I struck off into the woods, meaning to wander for a while, and get home a little late for supper.

What happened later I know from Margery's words, given me in solemn earnestness and careful accuracy, when that day's doings were finished.

"I believe," said Margery, feeling obliged to give her convictions, "that if Gertrude had not been there nothing would have happened. Mr. Stidger turned around to glare at you, but you were going away, and he seemed relieved until his eye fell on Gertrude."

"As for her, Binney, I can't suppose she knew what she was doing. Her tact just deserted her; certainly she cannot

have realized the strength of his feelings. For he was very ready to break out against any one. The fact that he had shown his hurt was enough to exasperate him. All this Gertrude missed—or else she did not think about him at all, as if he did not matter.

“At any rate, as he stood scowling she came forward and spoke in her breezy offhand manner, as if mentioning facts that of course everybody understood. ‘Children are ungrateful things,’ she said. ‘Very little affection there, Mr. Stidger.’

“He turned an unhealthy gray. I think that if he believed in one thing, it was in Bertie’s perfection; and if he had a hope, it was that she would love him. Not that Gertrude destroyed either his faith or his hope; but for the minute she made both of them seem like secrets that were exposed for us to smile at.

“That could only make him savage. He would take his disappointment out on some one. I saw I could count on that. But I did not know that your telling him your plan for an agreement with father had made Stidger feel that he must hurry with both father and me. All I knew was that for the first time I felt afraid of him. Yet when I felt myself wishing that either you or father were with me, I knew that I ought to be glad that you both were away. His eye looked too spiteful.

“So I was very glad to slip into the house to set the table for supper. Bertie I sent up-stairs, to wash her face and hands, and brush her hair. Gertrude half offered to help me, but really she was quite content to sit on the door-step and look at the hills, and call out remarks to me through the screen door. Of course I couldn’t attend to her if I wanted to have my table and my supper right, and so I merely answered as I could, meanwhile going back and forth between the two ends of the kitchen. You know the stove is at the farther end, quite out of sight of Gertrude, and almost out of hearing.

“At the window by the stove Stidger came and stood. I had to go to the stove every few minutes, and so passed close

by him. Now such liberties as Stidger had attempted with me were such as you saw in the woods, a touch on the shoulder, or the sleeve. They were usually so slight and stealthy that I doubted if I had felt them at all. So I had not snubbed him for them. But now three different times, when I bent over the stove, he touched me, on the arm, the shoulder, and at last my neck. The first time, because I doubted, I paid no attention. The second time I knew, and drew away; but I didn’t speak because of Gertrude’s nearness. But when he touched my neck—!

“I pretended to you, Binney, this afternoon when you spoke of Stidger and me. You had had your months of liberty; I had had but one day away from the farm. You and Gertrude evidently had come to an understanding, and I couldn’t see why you should grudge me any freedom. So I was just perverse enough to pretend that I was considering marrying Stidger.

“But when I felt his hand on my neck, it made me shudder. For a long time I had put up with him, for father’s sake. But now I knew how much I disliked the man. You can’t know, I was surprised to learn myself, how nearly a girl can come to hating a man who is familiar with her.

“I said to him that he must either stop touching me, or go away.

“‘I must talk with you,’ he said. ‘And that city thing outside must not hear.’

“‘Very well, then,’ said I. ‘Talk now, before father comes home, and have it over with.’

“I thought I knew what his attentions meant, and what he would say. Your farm would be his as his fee in the lawsuit, and I should marry him and live there, to keep him comfortable and bring Bertie up. It’s the sort of business proposition a girl can’t resent, however much it goes against her ideals.

“But I never suspected what he believed I thought of him. Because, for decency’s sake, I never laughed or sneered at him, as I suppose most women did whom he approached, he believed I cared

for him. He had no modesty, and so he thought it sure. He gloated over me before he spoke, and in his eyes I saw that his feeling for me was just a horrible—appetite.

"And that insults a girl. Before he even spoke, the place where he touched my neck burned hot from shame. I would have backed away from him, but he caught my hands and began to speak.

"His hands were cold and damp like the touch of a snake; but his eyes were fiery, and his words scorched. There was no leading to the point; he just took me for granted, and told me his plans. We needn't wait till he had your farm; it might take a long time, for the law was slow. But that would all come out right, and meanwhile we could marry now—now! And clinging to me, and pulling me closer, he tried to kiss me.

"For a few minutes it was just a degrading struggle to keep his head away from mine. For I had to fight him silently, lest Gertrude should know. He was stronger than I had supposed; but I am strong, too, and I was angry. And so I was able to throw him off just as father came in at the door.

"Father is a pale man, as you know. Before he understood what we had been doing I think he grew paler than common. But after he had looked from Stidger to me, and had seen the anger in my face, then he flushed red, and turned on Stidger so threateningly that the man shrank away.

"'You touched her?' said father. 'Explain quick, if you value your skin!'

"You know Stidger's doggedness. In spite of his natural drawing back from father, he quickly became sullen. 'What if I did touch the girl?' he answered. 'There's no harm, if I mean to marry her.'

"Father was so surprised that he turned and looked at me. 'He means to marry you?' he asked, as if to make sure of his hearing.

"'So he says,' I told him. 'But he hasn't consulted me.'

"Perhaps up till then Stidger had laid my struggle to bashfulness. But now he glared at me, and I knew that by a sudden shift of his mind he was ready to hate me as he hated all the world except Bertie. No, he was ready to hate me more than the rest, for now I could make everyone laugh at him.

"Father had turned to him. 'And how will you support her, if you can't pay your own way down in Athol?'

"If Stidger had entirely lost hope of me, or if he knew that father would have been against him, he wouldn't have explained. But he answered cautiously: 'You will need some help on that other farm.'

"'You would get the run of it, then,' said father, 'so that you could look for the last box. I'm likely to give you the chance, I think.'

"'Ask him,' I added, 'whether he expects to rent the farm, or whether he counts on owning it.'

"Then Stidger knew that both of us were against him, and his little eyes glimmered redder and redder. And as you say he has done so often with you, Binney, but never before in my sight, he lost all thought of gaining his purpose by any other way than by snatching it.

"'Of course I'll own it!' he snapped. 'It will be my own. How else can you pay my bill?' And he laughed as triumphantly as if he had served father for years, and were pressing for payment.

"Nothing explains him to me but the fierceness of his selfishness. He was one of those scavenging birds that hurry down before their victim is dead. That is how he defeated himself so often. And father was not dead—not yet, not yet! Listen, Binney, to what father said:

"'Al Stidger,' said father, standing up big and calm, and speaking with that quiet force to which everyone has to listen, 'this afternoon Binney Hartwell took that box away from me, and I was ashamed of hounding him so that he had to do it. Now I have been thinking what I must do to set things right with him

again. For there shan't be any more law between the Hartwells, Stidger. God forgive me for listening to you! I thought of my girl's future—and all the time you were planning this against me. Go and make out your bill. And while you are doing it, I will walk over to the other farm to tell Binney the box shall be his, to pay for all my unkindness to him.'

"I was almost dizzy with happiness, to hear him talk so nobly. But Stidger turned gray as ashes, and came staggering forward, and caught father by the coat. 'You won't!' he cried. 'To have that boy beat me. To lose all my work! You won't! You can't!'

"Father very calmly unclasped his hands. 'I can and I will,' he said. 'Your work was your own speculation, and you've lost.' And holding Stidger by both wrists with one hand, he set him back, and released him.

"The little man came running forward. He was snarling; he struck father on the breast with both hands, one, two. And then while father, quite indifferent, stood and looked at him, Stidger rushed to the stairs, and stamped noisily up them to his room.

"Oh, thank God that I ran to father then, and clung to him, and kissed him! Thank God that he kissed me too, with tears in his eyes, and called me his dear daughter. I shall always remember it, always! But very soon he stood upright. 'There!' he said. 'I'll just step over and make my peace with the boy, so that I can eat my supper in comfort. And tomorrow we'll get that sneak out of the house.'

"He went like a soldier, and from the doorway I watched him go. So fine and tall, my father; and the strongest man in town, except perhaps you, Binney. I had forgotten Gertrude, who had moved away from the doorstep, until I heard her speak at my elbow.

"Such an exciting life we live on the farm! Why Margery, what a proposal!'

"I couldn't bear to talk with her then, and went to the shed for more wood. And

she went out again. What happened after that you know better than I."

Yes, I can tell the rest of the story best.

CHAPTER XXXV.

MURDER.

AFTER much lingering on the path, expecting me to join him, Joe had finally reached home. Mother at once sent him back. "You go and fetch Binney," she said. "Tell him that supper will be spoiled." It was indeed spoiled before any of us were ready to eat it.

About the time that Joe started back, I, wandering in the woods, had come to an end of my thinking. Gertrude's perversity had vexed me; I was disgusted at her evasion. Margery's scheme worried me: could she really mean it? But I had found a partial solution. I would ride around after supper to the other farm, escort Gertrude back to the hotel, and on the way secure my freedom.

Therefore I started back to the path, which was not far away. My mind was unworried; I was so certain that I should soon be free of Gertrude that my spirits were almost joyful, so that I strode along noisily. Thus it was that I approached the path within a hundred feet, before I heard any sound from it. Then at a sudden loud cry—demanding? threatening?—I stopped and listened.

I heard only a murmur, as of a quieter voice answering. And through the thick leaves I could see nothing.

There came a snarl of anger, so like a beast's that even at that distance my hair rose up. The snarl ended in a "There!" that sounded like a yell of vengeance satisfied. A choked scream answered, and a heavy fall. Then feet scurried in flight. While, with my skin creeping, I still listened, I heard a single sob. And then was perfect silence.

Though now I sprang to action, and as I ran kept saying to myself, "Something has happened," my mind knew more than

that. Otherwise I should never have run so frantically, blocked by the bushes, stumbling over roots, recoiling from trees, all in that short distance. More than a mere something had happened: my mind shuddered with the certainty of murder. And when I came out on the path, by the rock where Joe had sat with Bertie, I was not surprised at what I saw.

Prone and motionless, there lay Cousin Lon. His frowning eyes were staring upwards, but there was no light in them. His pale lips were firmly set. One hand, red-fingered, was pressed above his heart; blood, only a little, had trickled out. And I knew, as I prepared to try revive him, that the attempt was hopeless.

Hopeless indeed. Though I knelt and listened, there was no breath; and though I felt his wrist, no pulse. The weapon that made the wound, so accurately placed, must have struck deep enough to reach the heart.

Where was the weapon? Even as I prepared to rise and look for it, I saw it lying at his feet? Four inches of reddened blade!

It was not until, standing, I had wiped the weapon with a bunch of grass, that I suddenly knew it as my own. The clasp-knife that I had lost, and that Stidger, as I believed, had found! Was it this that he had offered to draw on me that afternoon? At any rate here was proof, supposing any to be needed, of the murderer.

But I needed no proof. No one else would have done the deed. No one else was so passionate that, at some slight check to his dearest scheme, he was ready to strike. Proof absolute!

I was so absorbed that I did not hear the approaching steps. Some one gasped, "Oh, Binney!"

There stood Joe. Pale, trembling visibly, his mouth wide open for his hasty breathing, he was staring at me in fright. I stepped aside for him to see the body.

"See, he is dead already. With this he was stabbed to the heart. You know this knife? It is my own."

"Yes," answered Joe, shaking violently, and shrinking away. "Yes, I remember."

"I lost it weeks ago. Stidger found it. This murder is his work."

Joe reeled and clutched a tree. "Stidger? Oh, yes—oh, yes! I—I did not think."

I thought he was going to faint, and sprang to support him. "Let me sit down," he begged, and sat, and wept. "Don't blame me, Binney," he said, when at last he let me raise him. "This shook me terribly. And what now?"

"I must carry the body home," I said. "No, don't try to help me; you aren't yet fit. Just follow me. We ought to find the man at the house. He won't expect us to come on him so soon."

So, carrying the dead weight of my cousin's body, his head, for all my care, lolling terribly, I strode indignantly along the path. Behind me Joe followed, until at last I heard his voice, still unsteady.

"Binney, we ought to have left him as he was, for the police to examine the place."

"It is done now," I answered, going on. "And to have left him—how horrible!"

I hurried on, in burning haste to catch the murderer before he should escape. Behind me I heard Joe trotting in the endeavor to keep up, until again he spoke.

"If Stidger ran this way, we have tramped out all his footmarks."

This at least was true; the remark showed that Joe was master of himself again. We had now, leaving the woods, reached the hard dry gravel, where no print would show; but back in the loamy foot-path, soft from the recent rain, our feet might have obliterated all traces of flight. And surely where the deed was done no betraying footprint could have remained.

"That is too late to remedy," I replied. "We must go on."

My own speed was slackening now, because of my burden. Dead weight! Never before had I carried, and never

again do I wish to bear, such a dragging load. My back, arms, and shoulders were weakening.

"We are almost at the house," suggested Joe, at last. "Oughtn't I to go ahead and prepare Margery?"

But again it was too late. I had stepped into the barnyard, and instantly heard Gertrude's shriek. In immediate response, Margery came running from the house. My crowning blunder!

Yet Margery stood still, without screaming or fainting, while I brought her father to her. Pale and intent, she saw at once that there was no hope for him. "Inside, upon the sofa," she directed. And in the big kitchen, on the couch in the dark corner, I laid my cousin's body.

Very sadly, forgetting the business of my quest, I stood while Margery knelt at her father's side, closed his eyes, smoothed his hair, and kissed his pale lips. Joe was behind me somewhere; when I glanced about for Gertrude I saw her by the window, shrunk against the casing, and watching me in terror.

Margery rose and laid the hands together, crossed upon the breast. She murmured quietly, "I must wash the blood away." But next she turned to me.

"Binney," she asked, "how did it happen?"

Her manner was very gentle. And she stood quietly, waiting, as once before that day, for the explanation which surely I could not deny her.

And I had no glimmer of her dreadful suspicion. I took the weapon from my pocket. "It was with my old knife," I explained.

Now she did draw away a little, beginning to breathe quickly.

Then I heard on the stair the tread of Stidger's feet. Down he came, actually humming to himself. The old, old method of showing peace of mind. As if the man ever hummed, except for such a purpose! As if he ever had peace of mind, even in his sleep. I watched to see how he would act.

Carelessly into the kitchen. Not forgetting to scowl at the sight of me. Starting at the sight of the body, and hastily coming to its side. Quickly making sure, by a hand on one wrist (could he have been sure before now?) that Cousin Lon was dead. And then coldly, nastily, sneering at Joe and me.

"Well, which of you two did it?"

Over by her window, Gertrude smothered a little shriek.

"Which, Joe," I asked, and smiled at the good fellow who now, his color returned, stood steadfastly by my side. He was studying Stidger very closely, and answered with much deliberation:

"It had all happened before I arrived on the spot."

Stidger's eye lighted up. How much that answer meant to him I now saw. Suppose, for instance, that Joe and I had come to the spot together. Now he believed himself safe.

"You were coming this way alone?" he asked.

"Yes," answered Joe.

"Then where had he been?" And he pointed at me.

"I do not know."

"Yet he left the house soon after you, and a good quarter hour before Lon Hartwell. You found him by the body?"

"Yes," answered Joe.

"And—he," pointing to the couch, "was already dead?"

"Yes."

The sneer of triumph grew on Stidger's face. "And—he," pointing at me, "was holding the knife?"

"Yes."

"Perhaps wiping it?"

"He was wiping it."

Stidger laughed aloud. "They had a quarrel this afternoon. This—this Hartwell attacked his cousin, violently. Now he has done it again." Again the short harsh laugh as he pointed at me. "Caught, you fool!"

I, too, was about to laugh when I heard a gasp behind me. So full of shocked conviction, so near a sob of fright! And

Gertrude, when I looked, was sidling toward the door. Her shrinking, when I moved toward her, amounted to a start away from me. All her certainty of self, her jaunty self-possession, gone, quite gone. "No, no!" she gasped. "Keep away!"

Her eyes, full of fear, her mouth, weakly quivering, brought home to me her meaning. "Gertrude!" I cried, "don't you understand that he did it?"

"He?" cried Gertrude. "He has been in the house ever since Mr. Hartwell went away."

Entirely taken aback, I could only stand and try to think.

"He has been up-stairs," gasped Gertrude, now almost breathless. "He hasn't come down-stairs at all. But you— And your knife— Joe found you wiping it! Aach!"

Her hysterical cry shuddered in the room. And now she showed such panic-eagerness to get away, such dread to be stopped! Sidling along the wall, watching me in breathless fright, Gertrude made a sudden dash for the door and stumbled out.

In the silence which followed I could only stand gloomily, looking at the door by which she left. She believed it of me! She could believe it of me! I could hear her, outside, still in her panic, rattling the chain of the hitching-post. I heard it, when released, fall with a little clash against the stone. She began imploring the horse. "Stand still! Oh, Bessie, stand still!" Then the jingling of the bit, the squeaking of the saddle, and her panting "Whoa! Whoa!" as she struggled to mount. And at last came the slap of the reins, the thud of hoofs on the turf, the sudden rattling of the gravel, sharp at first, then dying away.

Yes, Gertrude believed it of me!

As I drew a long breath I felt a sudden dread to face the others. Did Joe think this of me? Did Margery?

"Well," said Stidger, briskly, gloatingly, "I'll run down to the village and get the constable." I heard him take one step.

"Close the door, Binney," said Joe, sharply.

"Quick!" Margery cried.

My heart leaped, for my questions were answered. Quickly, indeed, I shut the door, and leaning against it, looked at them. Each was poised, intent upon the trapping of Stidger, heart and soul with me. And yet I now knew that earlier they had not been.

"You, too, thought it of me, Margery?"

"How could I help it, Binney, until you said he did it?"

"And you, Joe?"

"Oh, my dear boy, consider what I saw!"

"But you both took my word!" I cried, elated. And at Stidger, standing in the middle of the room, I shook my finger. "We shall get you now!"

"Let me go!" he demanded.

"No!"

"This is assault!" he warned me.

"So long as it is not murder," I retorted, "call it what you wish."

There stood by the wall a little pine table. I took it up and set it in the middle of the room, and before it placed a chair.

"Sit down there," I said to Stidger. "I want to talk with you."

He eyed me, as he obeyed, with much contempt. Very scornfully he made himself comfortable, crossing his legs beneath the table, and squaring his elbows on the chair-arms. "So you mean to prove that I did it?"

"Yes," I answered.

"Pah!" he snapped. "First get around the fact that I have been up-stairs ever since Lon Hartwell left the house. That girl that ran away, she'll witness it. Margery," and he turned sharply to her, "she knows it."

"It puzzles me," said Margery slowly.

"Yes, I thought you were in the house."

"See," he said to me, "that's clear. Explain away, next, your fight with Lon this afternoon. Show, after that, why you didn't go straight home from here when

you left a half hour ago. And then explain how it happens that you were found wiping that knife."

I looked at the knife as I held it in my hand. "The case looks pretty good for you, doesn't it?" I asked. To myself I admitted that it did. Many such cases, not so good as this of Stidger against me, had hanged their men. But I was not troubled. The knife would prove everything. I opened it, and stuck it into the table before him, so that it stood upright, and quivering like a live thing. "Look at that," I said. "No, look at it!"

For he was not able. I saw him make the attempt, and fail. His wavering glance looked at the table, at Margery, at Joe, defied me. But on the knife he could not fix his eye.

"Where has it been this month and more?" I demanded.

"Where?" The question relieved him. He changed position, and lolled back. "In your pocket, of course."

"In yours!" I rejoined. "Weeks ago I accused you of finding and keeping it."

"Looking forward to this," he retorted. He challenged. "Prove that I had it!"

"If I can prove it," I answered, "I have you."

"But there's no proof," he sneered. "And what of the fact that I have been up-stairs all this while?"

"I will believe that," I replied, "when I find that there are no heel-marks on the shed-roof outside your window. Ah, you see a little light? From every window in the back of the house I have climbed to the ground by way of the roof when I was a boy; yes, and climbed in again, too. As I now believe somebody did in the rain last summer, when our house was entered, and a search was made for the copy of the old will. Are there fresh scratches on those old shingles now? Have you nails in your heels?"

In spite of himself he tucked his feet under him. Then with a spiteful look he planted them in front of him again. "That will prove nothing," he asserted.

I looked down at his shoes. "There's black mud, not yet dried, on the edges of your soles and heels. Perhaps there's some of it on the roof. I fancy that Joe and I haven't quite tramped out all the footprints on that muddy path. Perhaps your shoes will fit those that remain."

"You've been reading detective stories," he scoffed.

"Mr. Stidger," said I, "all these proofs of mine are doubtful. But something, some little thing, that I can't now foresee, but that you can never forestall, will come and lay bare everything to us. Between you and me, I depend on the knife. Can you look at it now any better than a few minutes ago? Try it. No, try it!"

Again his unwilling glance could not turn to it. "See," I said, "you know you're afraid of it."

"Listen!" warned Joe.

Bertie was coming down the stairs. We heard the careful placing of her feet on the steep flight. For a moment all of us were startled, and no one thought of turning her back. But Stidger, with a glance at the couch, said, "Don't — don't let her—"

Quickly Joe, snatching up the afghan that lay there, spread it over the body.

Bertie, hastening as she neared the bottom, where the light was better, came into the room. She had carefully brushed out the thick hair, and had made herself very neat; for in these things she had been forced to do for herself, to satisfy the native daintiness that was so noticeable in her. But when she saw us watching her she stood still. "Why do you look at me so?"

The sudden coming of the child had troubled every one of us, and we had no answer. But her eye fell on the knife, and she needed none.

"Why," she said, and came a step nearer. Her little face lit up; her eyes grew larger. "Why, father, it's—" She was doubtful, looked at him and then at me, and came close to the table.

"Yes, it's the same!" she cried. "With

Binney's initials on the handle. The one you had last week in Athol, father—I remember!" And she clapped her little hands.

Clapped her hands—and her words gave him over to death!

"Binney," she asked, "isn't it yours?"

I could not speak. My throat was choked with horror. Death from the hand that he loved so!

"It's his, Bertie," said Joe, very gently. "But we were talking over something important, and supper isn't quite ready. Will you run outdoors for a little while?"

She looked at us a little wistfully, but obediently trotted toward the door. "Don't be long," she begged, and went out.

When her footsteps had died away there was silence. We three looked at the man on whom proof had so overwhelmingly descended.

He did not look at us. It was as if we had suddenly become little things, or nothing, as compared with the great reality that faced him. With head sunk low, he stared at the silent witness, the knife, upright in the table. And I, for one, acknowledged in him a certain unsuspected greatness.

What plan of life did he recall then? As passively he accepted his defeat, what theory, greater than any action of his life, dictated his course. Anger he put by; hatred of the world had passed; spite at me, who so many times had balked him, did not stir in him. He merely saw the end, and prepared to press on to it.

Rising, he plucked the knife from the table.

I did not understand. My first act was to make sure that I was between him and Margery. Then I was preparing to disarm him, when Joe said, very quietly, "Let him go."

Puzzled, because I had learned that Joe was so much wiser than I, I hesitated.

Stidger paid us no attention at all. Wearily, and not as if we were there, but as if he were alone in the universe, he

turned to the stairs. In this there was nothing assumed; I felt that he had forgotten us. And out of respect for a defeat which I knew myself incapable of appreciating, I let him go.

Step by step he mounted the hollow stairway. His slow footfall creaked in the hallway above. I heard his door shut. And still considerably puzzled, I turned to Joe.

With an uplifted hand that warned me not to call Margery's attention, Joe stood listening.

For what? Margery had gone to the couch in the corner. Bertie, at the distant bars, was calling "Co-boss!" I knew from Joe's attitude that he was listening for the next sound from the story above. And in a flash I knew what the sound was to be. Joe had foreknown it from the first. Shuddering, I, too, waited. I did not need Joe's expression of calm certainty to tell me that this was the best way.

Stidger was very quick. A distant coughing sob, the dulled sound of a fall, the slightest rattle of the windows. We both looked toward Margery. On her knees and sobbing, she had not heard.

I could not move, so was I chilled and shaken; but Joe very quietly went up the stairs. After a minute, very quietly he came down. His sober face said to me, "It's done!"

I wanted the open air! Margery was absorbed in her grief. "Keep Bertie out of doors till I come back," I said to Joe. "I'm going to fetch mother."

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE LAST HIDING PLACE.

IN the little graveyard of the Hartwells I dug Cousin Lon's grave. The occupation, they say, makes some morose, and some ghastly facetious; true solemnity does not spring from it. As for me, do what I would I could not fix my mind on the lesson of the suddenness of death, though violence had taken two almost be-

fore my eyes. I tried, quite honestly, to impress myself with the need of living well in order to be prepared for death; but always I soon found myself remembering and planning.

Memory dwelt on Gertrude. In spite of my denial she had believed me my cousin's slayer. Though it was somewhat shameful to recall, I saw with satisfaction the picture of her frightened eyes, her gasping mouth, her hands shaking as she held them before her to keep me away. In Gertrude's mind at the moment there may have been fear of scandal, care for her future, perhaps even genuine horror of the murderer. Certainly there was no trust in me.

Where had she fled to? For more than two days I had had no sight or word of her.

But wherever she now was, whatever she might once have thought of me, surely the understanding between her and me, the bond she had put me under, was broken. I was free to do as I wished, if it was not too soon to wish it.

Wish and plan I must. Though this deep grave was not yet ready for its occupant, I was busy disposing of his daughter. Often, though, I reproached myself, each time I was soon busy again, painting Margery's picture as I liked to see her. Even the memory of her fighting with her grief could not stop my selfish planning. She was so capable, so sweetly composed, so brave. And she, if once I could win her, would never desert me.

As the four walls of the grave and the heaps of earth rose above my head, they seemed to shut me in with brighter and brighter thoughts. Then I heard footsteps close at hand. It was Joe who came to the foot of the grave and looked down at me.

"Almost done?" he asked.

"Practically finished," I answered. "Just these corners to square out."

"I'll wait till you come up," he said. "I want to speak with you."

When presently I climbed out, he was sitting on the wall of the little enclosure.

I made my heaps neat, laid over them the evergreen branches that I had brought, and concealed my shovel under these. Then Joe and I slowly walked homeward together.

He told me that since early yesterday he had been occupied with Stidger's affairs. The man had been buried in Athol. He had left no will, and, except for a few sticks of furniture and the little money in his pocket, no property. His money had not even been paid for the funeral.

"Well," I said, "it would have been hypocritical of me to go to his funeral, I despised him so. But I'll pay those expenses."

"They are paid," said Joe. "I hated him less than you. Sometimes I was even sorry for him. So, if you please, I'll be his heir."

His spirit was finer than mine. And because it was better not to insult the dead man by paying for his funeral in a spirit of contempt, I yielded.

"I have advertised that bills against him are to be sent to me," said Joe. "I can't stand the idea that some day Bertie might be reminded of them. And now, what is to be done with her?"

"To-day, after the funeral," said I, "she and Margery come to us, to stay as long as Margery is willing."

If I could persuade Margery, I said to myself, she would spend the rest of her life under my roof.

"You know," hesitated Joe, "that Bertie is really no relative of your cousin. Only a distant connection by marriage."

"Well?" I asked, as he fumbled for words.

"There is no reason," he managed to say, "why either of you should support her."

I was about to turn upon him indignantly, when the oddity of the thing came over me. That I should take Stidger's daughter into my house was a thing I never could have foreseen. "Funny, isn't it?" I answered.

"So, perhaps," went on Joe, "you will be willing to let me support her."

I stopped short. "You?" I demanded, completely surprised.

"You know," he explained, stopping also, and deeply flushing, "that we've lived together, Bertie and I. And we're—fond of each other. So, rather than have her a burden on any one, I should like to bring her up."

Good, unselfish Joe! He stood there, embarrassed with the effort to explain himself, while I looked him over carefully. The longer I looked, the redder he grew, until at last he added:

"Even if she lived here, I could only pay her expenses. And when she's a little older she could go to boarding-school."

I looked further ahead. "And if," I asked, "when her schooling is finished, you might some day wish to say a word for yourself—"

He had thought of it, too, for he cried out instantly: "No! I will never press any claim on her!"

I put my arm around his shoulder. "Dear boy, I know you weren't thinking of yourself. But if ever you should wish to, the obligation would be a barrier to you, perhaps a burden to her. Let me take care of the child."

So Bertie is now my ward. Joe has not made his request of her, for she is still too young. But mother and Margery agree that there is every reason to hope. Meanwhile, it is a delight to watch the two together.

That day of Cousin Lon's funeral was wonderfully perfect. It seemed to bring hope into the midst of grief. The sun was not too bright, its warmth was gentle, the breeze was mild. Scarcely a dozen from the village came to the services, for Cousin Lon had few friends, and our folk are too self-respecting to come from mere curiosity. When all was over, Margery and Bertie went directly home with mother, and Joe and I drove to fetch their slender baggage.

After I had carried the trunk and suitcase up-stairs, and had unharnessed, the afternoon hung heavy on my hands. For mother and Margery were unpacking, and

Joe and Bertie were reading in the orchard; and though I felt a kind of half-Sunday peace, and so was unwilling to work, I was also restless, plagued by my wishes and hopes. I sat on the steps of the porch, and tried to content myself. But although I had dug and filled a grave that day, so little was my spirit humbled, and so strong was my youth in me, that when at last Margery came out alone, and stood at my side, my heart cried out: "Now!"

"No," I corrected myself. "Not on the day of her father's funeral." But I could not help looking at her, to enjoy the sight.

Margery was very sober in her black, but her mourning could not conceal the firm erectness of her graceful figure, the poise of her head, the curling hair at temples and at nape, and the sweet composure of her countenance. Yet I thought that she was troubled, and not with her own concerns, as she looked at me.

"Binney," she said, "Joe brought me from the post-office this morning a letter from Gertrude. She is in Boston. It has news for us."

I knew at once. "Colleston?"

"Yes," answered Margery, with sympathy in her voice. She hesitated to say more.

"Go on," I directed, watching the dear face, and delighted with its kindness. "You are sorry for me?"

"Very sorry, Binney."

"Sit down beside me," said I. "Tell me what she says."

"I'll read," answered Margery. "I know she meant it for us both." And sitting by my side, she read to me:

"MY DEAR MARGERY:

"I want you to know how sorry I am for you just now. The death of your father was terribly shocking, and I hope you are not breaking down under the strain of it. I do so wish I were with you now, to comfort you."

She might have been, I thought grimly. Margery read on:

"As for what happened afterward, the newspapers, or the little local items which your

local reporters send in for news, have told me the main facts. If only you had had a city writer there, to give the full story! But then I should be dragged into it, and you."

"A moment," I interrupted. "Were those two last words, 'and you,' written in afterwards?"

Margery looked. "Yes. Interlined."

"All right," I said. "Go on."

"And so that dreadful man was proved to have killed your father, and went and killed himself. I gather that this was just after I had left, and am curious to know how it was proved. And I cannot help thinking how fortunate you are to be spared the long strain of a trial, especially considering that he accused Binney, which was, of course, preposterous.

"As for me, you see how overcome I was by the shock. It frightened me so that I had to get away. I did not even stay in the town, but hurried for the evening train. Innocent witnesses are sometimes so hounded by reporters, and the police, that I cannot tell you how relieved I was to reach Boston. It was quite late when I got home, but I sent for Mr. Colleston, and made him promise to do everything he could, the first thing in the morning, to make things easy for you, and to defend Binney. I was overjoyed when he came at breakfast time, and showed me the newspaper, and assured me that neither of you could now be bothered.

"I should have written before, but these two days I have been so occupied! You know, of course, how things come about. I was so agitated, and John so sympathetic, that—well, my dear, you must always have seen that we were fond of each other. And we are engaged. You must write and congratulate me at once, for I am very happy. And John has convinced father that he has not been doing business in quite the right way. It seems, John tells me, that without knowing it father has transgressed a very complicated Federal statute, and there is no decent treatment to be expected in a Federal court, and we are very much afraid of what will happen. But men live down these things; and there is no reason why in a few years father shouldn't be doing as well as ever, if he can only get capital to start with."

"Which means," I interpreted, "that in the interim father is likely to be very much occupied elsewhere, in a suit of clothes supplied by Uncle Sam. Is that all?" For Margery was folding up the letter.

"All except that I must write at once, and you are to be sure to congratulate her, and she hopes to see us again before very long."

The letter interested me exceedingly; I tried to see behind it. If it didn't contain a whole novel, it held at least a short story—in two parts. Part one, giving Colleston to understand that she was ready at last. Part two, Colleston's plain talk with father, giving him to understand that the best policy was, "Don't shoot, I'll come down." I wished, oh, how I wished, that I had seen it all.

But more than that, it seemed to me that the character analysis was here a special feature. Mr. Worthen blustering but beaten. Colleston, with Worthen very firm, with Gertrude very gentle, perhaps a little pitying, not thinking of himself at all. Gertrude, deciding that it was time she was settled in life, and oh, subtle, very subtle!

"Indeed?" asked Margery when I had said all these things. "But you don't seem—" She could not quite explain.

I looked her carefully over. "You aren't disappointed in me?" I asked. "Didn't expect me to tear my hair?"

"Why, no," she said. She added, slowly, "I did suppose—" And there she stopped entirely.

"Margery," I said, "I won't pretend a lie. There was a kind of an understanding between Gertrude and me. I was on probation. But remember, the magic words had not been said by either of us. Either of us!" I emphasized.

All she said was "Oh!" But I had been watching closely. Now there is a moment when with any one, even with a girl on guard, the feeling of the heart peeps out at the eyes before it can be suppressed. And Margery's eyes danced. I saw them. It was for but the merest fraction of a second, but I saw them. No matter what day it was, there was now no holding back.

"Do you suppose," I asked, "that I could ever think again of a girl who deserted me as Gertrude did?"

"Binney," returned Margery bravely, "remember that at first I thought as she did."

"But only for a moment," I cried. "Not when I gave my word. And she? She was sure of it! And in what a panic she ran away, and hurried to Boston, and sent for Collester, to cut herself off from me before the matter should be public. Margery, can I regret her?"

She would not look at me; she did not answer. But did I not see in the down-turned face, half looking away, a gleam—Gone! Suppressed. Yet I knew I had seen it.

"But Margery," I said, "I didn't need to wait for that. My understanding with Gertrude was so—unplanned that it—alarmed me." She looked at me quickly when I began to choose my words. Very intent she was, breathing a little fast. "Yes, I was doubtful almost from the very first. But I knew my mistake when I saw—shall I tell you what?"

"Yes!" she breathed.

"When I saw Stidger put his hand on you!"

Ah, the bright blush! The little smile that would not be suppressed, even though she looked away! The yielding of her hand to mine!

"Margery," I said, "I had been dazzled, but then I saw clearly at last. Oh, how stupid I have been for so long! But when I came to you, that afternoon, I was trying desperately to make matters clear. And now—Margery, will you have me?"

She gave me the sweet glory of her welcome.

Porches were too public: we wandered down into the woods. And straying along the cart-track we talked everything over, from the time when Gertrude first came among us, to that awful recent day. We discussed Collester. If he had known of Gertrude what we did, would he have taken her? But she was a habit with him. And to his ideals, quixotic though she might consider them, even Gertrude must submit. As for her, Boston's social

citadel was now open—but would she find it dull? And would she ever truly appreciate him?

But there were more important things to be talked about. I laid down my plans. We two, Margery and I, should live with mother. The other farm must lie fallow for a while.

"Binney," cried Margery, stopping, "is that all? Can you think of nothing better to do with the other farm? Can you plan nothing better with this one than to work yourself to death over it? Oh, my dear boy, you are as gaunt from your labor as my own father. Let us change it all!"

I saw where she was tending, but I made her explain.

"Put a tenant on the other farm," she said. "Make him keep laborers. Work both farms with him on shares. Take the risk of losing the last box. Is it worth our lives? For that is what the old buccaneer's legacy has required of the family for so long. Oh, Binney, let us put an end of the drudging loneliness that made slaves of all of us, men and women, in both our households for the last three generations. Oh, Binney, promise it!"

This was different from, and finer than, Gertrude's plea. There was no hollow ambition in it, nor any calculation of reward, except the widening of our humanity, the deepening of our lives.

We were well within the woods now; nobody could see. My arm had ached to go about her waist—nothing could stop it now. And as I drew her to me she turned to me willingly, her arms coming, so naturally, about my neck. Then and there I made my promise, and sealed it. And so the bugaboo of our hidden treasure was chased away. We had but one life to live, and would live it as easefully as we could.

"But now," I demanded, "when is this new life to begin? When will your trousseau be bought?"

"Bought?" asked Margery. "What with? Perhaps we can sell some of

father's hay. Or you can get in his potatoes."

"Wait for slow pay for a September harvest," I cried, "when there is money nearer, thousands?"

She clasped her hands. "The box?"

"Come and see," I answered, and began to lead her toward the spring. As we went we spoke of the plans which her father and I had made for a reconciliation. "And the box is there!" she said, when I stood her on the margin of the basin and pointed into the water. "Down in the sand! Who would ever have thought of such a hiding-place?"

"What place could be better?" I asked. "No one ever digs here. The spring never has to be cleaned, for the overflow carries away the leaves and twigs that fall into it. And now are you willing to wet your sleeve by taking out the box? For no one should lift it out except its proper owner."

She bared her pretty rounded arm and dropped on her knees. "Only tell me where to feel," she said. "Here? How soft the sand is! Is it deeper than this? Binney, I don't find it."

"It is more to the right," I said. "No, to the right, dear." For her hand had moved leftward.

But her eyes shone up at me. "I have it. See!" She rinsed it in the spring, drew it to the surface, and with both hands lifted it to me. "Take it; it is very heavy. Why, Binney, what is wrong?"

For I could only stare at it. That box I had never seen before. Thicker, squarer, bigger in every way; darker, too, it

was, as if the water had acted on it. But I knew it. "The Cubical!"

"No!" cried Margery, and dropped it.

But I made one scoop into the water, one plunge downward of my arm, and dragged out the other. I placed it at her feet. There lay the two boxes together.

People often come to the farm to see the spring and the little treasure chamber in the stone wall, and the piece of pine which, with the impress in it of its oval casket, I hewed out and brought to the house. They like to marvel over a romance which to mother and Margery and me is quite commonplace. That romance is long behind us; our marvel is at the happy days that pass so gently.

Colleston, when he comes to the farm, looks mostly at the children. There are none in his home. My John, he declares, is to be educated as a lawyer, and is to enter his office. Gertrude seldom comes with her husband, and when she is here she must ride, must walk, must chatter. But Colleston sits basking in our peace, or walks slowly about with the youngest; he smiles much, says little; gives such hand-shakes when he comes or goes; sends such tremendous boxes at Christmas; is sure to come at apple harvest, and helps to pack the fruit. He is very fond of my wife, says so, and defies me to be jealous.

My favorite walk with Margery of a fine summer evening, or Sunday afternoon, is to the spring. We like to look down into it, and talk of what it has seen. But when Joe is with us on his frequent visits, we keep away, lest we should disturb him and Bertie.

(The end.)

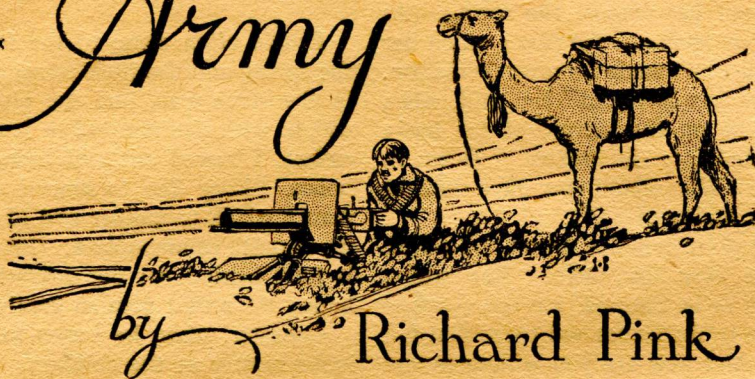
NEXT WEEK

THE HOLY SCARE

BY GEORGE WASHINGTON OGDEN

Story of a Fight to a Finish When the Homesteaders Sought Their Rights

The One-Man Army



by Richard Pink

It was a little war, my masters—

IN the middle of a desert, five hundred miles from the nearest public-house, the sentry on No. 2 post, one John Trehearn, stoker first class, was discovered drunk and incapable.

The officer going rounds gazed upon his recumbent form at first with sharp fear, then, having smelt him, with astonishment; and finally, as he ordered the petty officer of the guard and one of the reliefs to carry him back to camp, with a very real pity.

"I wonder where the devil he got it from?" he murmured, shaking his head. "This will mean a shooting party in the morning."

Then, having replaced the somnolent Trehearn with a more virtuous sentry, he proceeded upon his way.

So it came about that when John Trehearn had been examined by the staff surgeon, and made violently sick with an evil decoction of salt and water, he was led in a state of lamblike stupidity induced by the combined effects of alcohol and the subsequent emetic to the rear, and there, under a strong guard,

put to sleep it off between the wheels of an ammunition wagon.

Meanwhile the officer to whose vigilance John owed his unhappy position was making his report to the admiral commanding the little expedition, Sir Richard Buckhouse.

"I can't think where he could have got it, sir," he explained, "but from what the doctor tells me there's no doubt he was as full of gin as can be."

The admiral frowned.

"I don't care a damn where he got it from," he snapped. "The fact remains that he was drunk on his post, and consequently we shall have to court-martial him first thing in the morning."

He turned to his flag captain.

"You'd better be president, Raikes," he went on. "The major of marines and the gunnery lieutenant can form the other members of the court."

The flag captain got up and saluted.

"Aye, aye, sir," he said. "I'll go and see about it now."

The admiral turned to the waiting lieutenant.

"You look as though you'd a touch of fever coming on, Somers," he said.

"You'd better have a dope of my special medicine, quinin and gin. I brought a bottle with me."

He leaned back on his stool, and without looking round, carelessly opened the lid of his shikaree-box. For some minutes his fingers groped in the dim depths; then he said something violently and turned round to investigate further. As he searched, a puzzled look came into his face and his countenance took on the tinge of a ripe plum.

"Well, I'll be—" he thundered.

The young lieutenant leaned forward.

"What's the matter, sir?" he asked anxiously.

The admiral stood upright and faced him.

"Matter?" he shouted. "*Matter?* Why, that blessed son of a sea-cook must have got drunk on *my* gin! The bottle was undoubtedly here when we started this morning."

The lieutenant gazed open-mouthed for a moment at his superior, and then, with a hurried "I'll go and investigate the affair, sir," turned and fled.

Some distance away he flung himself into the arms of the astonished staff surgeon, and when he had been roughly entreated by those of his brother officers who could get near enough either to kick or punch him, told his story.

And presently, as Sir Richard Buckhouse, in the stuffy silence of his tent, sat and mused upon the amount of original sin existing in first-class stokers, he heard undoubted sounds of merriment rising from the small pile of bags which represented the officers' mess.

For a time he frowned, and almost made up his mind to send a messenger to stop the noise; but at last he, too, chuckled, and finally laughed.

"It's serious, of course," he muttered ruefully, "but really I shall have to think out some way of not shooting the fellow."

He laid his coat upon the sand, forming as comfortable a bed as possible, and presently, after issuing his orders for the

morning's movements, laid himself down and slept the sleep of the just.

II.

SIR RICHARD was a first-rate sailor, but he was no soldier, or sleep would hardly have come to him so easily. The little naval brigade—two hundred all told—had now encamped in a small sand hollow, far from all support. There were no pickets out; only a slight breast-works of cases and sand-bags, with twelve sentries pacing the desert beyond, guarded against possible surprise.

Like many a better man before him, Sir Richard despised his enemy, and when the major of marines and the gunnery lieutenant had remonstrated with him, he had snubbed those excellent officers most heartily. The enemy had already bolted back to Oomooopoo in terror. His spies had told him so. Besides he was certainly not going to hang round for ever, waiting for the transports.

"The Tommies have made a mess of it before," he told them, "and this time—orders or no orders—I'm cursed if I'll hang about waiting for them."

The major of marines attempted to argue, but the effort was futile.

"You attend to your infernal housemaids," snapped the admiral. "*I'm* in command of this expedition!"

So with his untroubled sleep came happy snores that echoed through the camp like a challenge, and, far away in the rear, John Trehearn, stoker first class, sleeping between the wheels of an ammunition wagon and guarded by sentries with fixed bayonets, answered him snore for snore and challenge for challenge.

And so the camp, too, fell asleep, except for those keen-eyed watchers who strained their eyes at the shadows and brought their rifles to their hips at the faintest fluttering of the night wind. They did not intend to be caught napping. They cried shame upon Trehearn

and gazed more fiercely into the deepening darkness as the moon slipped out of sight behind the distant hills.

Two previous expeditions against that obese old reprobate, the Sheik Mimbassa, had failed—failed miserably, with the loss of many lives and much British prestige. This time there was going to be no failure. The navy would show the army how these matters should be carried through.

They trusted their admiral, for in spite of all their determination and enthusiasm, they knew even less of shore fighting than he did. They were going straight ahead until such time as they had carried out their appointed task, and broken up the establishment of the unpleasant gentleman who had earned fame by his successful combination of the professions of blackmailer, publican, slaver, and purveyor of smuggled arms.

Nothing could stop them!

No, there should be no mistakes this time. Sir Richard might snore in safety; and in safety, too, Stoker Trehearn might answer him from afar. They were well guarded, and the camp might snuggle sleepily under its blankets and dream of home.

Everything was peace; perfect peace.

And then—"Halt, who's there?"

The sentry on No. 5 post had fired even as he challenged. His eyes, partially fogged by the sudden departure of the moonlight, had shown him a gray shadow that moved stealthily toward the camp. It could only mean one thing—and he did not wait.

Pandemonium broke loose.

The sailors, casting their blankets wildly from them, blundered blindly into each other in a vain attempt to form a square.

A shrill war-cry from every side burst upon their sleep-ridden senses. There was no time for formation; it was every man for himself.

The sentries were overwhelmed and cut down, fighting grimly; like cornered foxes beneath a pack of hounds.

And then a black flood broke over the camp, shouting, stabbing, shrieking and firing.

The sailors might have broken and run for it had there been anywhere to run to, but they were hemmed in on every side. And so, with bayonets dripping red and rifle barrels scorching to the touch, they formed little detached squares and piled the dead around them as they fought grimly in a vain but gallant effort to win through.

Numbers, surprise, and darkness were all upon the side of the tribesmen. It was slaughter pure and simple.

Sir Richard Buckhouse, having emptied his revolver and broken his sword, went down, with a spear through his neck, lashing out with his telescope to the bitter end. His flag captain guarded his body for a moment before he, too, sank down lifeless beside his chief.

That was the end.

It only remained for the enemy to kill the wounded, mutilate the dead, and possess themselves of the excellent Lee-Enfield rifles—worth sixty or seventy pounds apiece inland—which England had so thoughtfully provided for them; and this they proceeded to do with much vocal enthusiasm.

They did their work systematically. But still—quite undisturbed—John Trehearn slept between the wheels of the ammunition wagon, sending his snores heavenward with a persistence worthy of any or all of the Seven Sleepers of Ephesus.

It was this cheerful sound that at length attracted the attention of one of the natives, and he, with a grin of delight, set forth to discover and assassinate the maker of the noise.

In due course, because John's snores were both loud and penetrating, he found his quarry; and then very foolishly decided first to make sport with this heavily sleeping white man.

So, with gentle humor, he pressed the point of his spear firmly through the

white hand that lay outstretched upon the ground. He expected a thunderous outburst as the result of this effort, but he was quite unprepared for what actually happened.

John Trehearn had never been exactly a good-tempered man, and even in his sleep his recent potations and subsequent dose of salt and water had their rankling effect.

With a suddenness that surprised the dark gentleman he seized the spear shaft with his other hand and tore it free. Then, with a shout of rage that sounded absolutely diabolical, he sprang to his feet, and before the astonished native could sufficiently recover his wits to produce either knife or pistol, John had stabbed him vigorously through the stomach, and with an eldritch shriek had disappeared into the darkness.

He ran for fully a mile before his fuddled brain began to ask his active body what it was running for, and then he stopped and considered the matter. His memory of past happenings was extremely vague, so he sat down upon the sand to think the whole puzzling situation out.

There were so many points to consider. First, why his hand was bleeding. Second, exactly whom he might have killed and why. Third, what he had been doing asleep when his last sane memory was of surreptitiously uncorking the bottle, which he had stolen from the admiral's shikaree-box during the mid-day stand-easy.

He passed his tongue around his parched mouth as the thought struck him.

"I wonder wot the blazes that stuff were?" he asked himself. "It suttinly smelt like gin, but by gosh, it tasted like the Red Sea! It must 'ave bin damn' strong to flop me out like that."

He tried to consider the matter, but his mind refused to clear. Mental effort was too much for his drugged senses. His head sank back gently on the sand and once more he slept, while the blood

dripped slowly from his hand and soaked into the thirsty desert.

III.

It was the pain of his wound, combined with the incessant chatter of a crowded congregation of vultures which sat around him in an ill-omened circle and implored him in no uncertain voice to hurry up and die, that, ten hours later, caused him to awake for good and all.

"Gawd Awmighty!" he muttered in a sweat of fear, "I must 'ave bin asleep on my post!"

The thought sent him to his feet with a bound. He wiped the sleep from his eyes with the back of his hand, and looked around for his rifle.

The birds of prey rose with a sudden clatter of scabious wings and flew off in unfeigned disappointment.

John Trehearn felt thoroughly dazed. He had no memory even of the events which had brought him to his present position. He imagined himself still as the sentry on No. 2 post, and he could not understand the absence of his rifle. He did not realize that the sun was setting; he thought that the day was just breaking, and that by some fortunate chance he had not been discovered asleep at his post by an officer.

And then, while the idea uppermost in his mind was the loss of his weapons of offense and before he could turn to examine the landscape, he saw a native disappearing into the distance, carrying upon his head a large box and what appeared to be a rifle.

John gave a roar of rage. He saw it all now. The man must have stabbed him as he slept upon his post, and was even now escaping with his booty.

"I'll teach yer!" said John, and set off in pursuit as fast as his legs would carry him.

The sand made for silence, and his quarry, a straggler from the night-raiders, gorged with slaughter and loot, was deaf

to every sound till John had almost reached him. Then the worthy warrior, hearing a sound of panting breath and flying footsteps behind, turned with a grunt.

To his infinite surprise he beheld one of the already dead and exceedingly accursed white men dashing unarmed toward him. With marvelous rapidity he dropped his burden to the ground and tore loose the rifle. But before he could manage to get it to his shoulder the raging John was upon him.

"I'll teach yer, yer black swine!" roared John. "I'll teach yer to attack a lor-abidin' man!"

He smote the thief with extreme accuracy and mighty force exactly between the eyes, and then jumped upon him. This was a new method of warfare to the tribesman, and he was quite unprepared to meet it. Still, he managed to secure his knife, and struck upward with all his force.

John Trehearn leaped aside and laughed; then picking up the rifle, brought it down with all his might upon the dark face.

"Would yer?" he grunted. "I'll teach yer!"

He gave the silent form a kick in the ribs as a further reminder, and was about to depart when the box his enemy had been carrying caught his eye.

"Crumbs!" he murmured, "if it ain't a Maxim belt-box. Where the blazes could 'e 'ave got *that* from?"

He gazed around the horizon, and at last his eyes fell upon the spot where the camp had stood.

"My Gawd!" he murmured. "My Gawd!"

Forgetting everything in his sudden panic he raced off in the direction of the blot upon the distant desert. As he neared the scene the vultures rose hastily from their banquet, and flew off in noisy disgust.

He pulled up, panting, and then his worst fears were confirmed. Pile upon pile of bodies met his gaze. Out of the ruin a

white face gazed at him with fixed, accusing eyes.

"Gawd!" he breathed. "The admiral!"

IV.

FULL realization, with all its awful horror, fell upon him. The camp must have been attacked while he slept at his post! *He* was responsible for this massacre! His drunkenness had sent his friends to their deaths!

Somehow, he felt he must excuse himself. He could not bear the blame of this occurrence alone; it was too much. Some one must help him with the weight of the responsibility. He turned to the admiral's face once more, and met the accusing eyes with as fixed a glance as their own.

"It were your fault as well as mine, sir," he said piteously. "You'd no business to disobey orders an' get out o' range of the ship—at least, not till the sojers come. If yer 'adn't bin so pig-'eaded (if you'll excuse me sayin' so) this wouldn't 'ave 'appened. Ye're more to blame nor I am."

The admiral's gaze did not waver. He had paid for his mistake with his life.

Slowly John Trehearn walked around the battle-field, recognizing face after face, his eyes starting from his head with horror as he gained a closer view of the mutilated bodies and realized the immensity of his blood-guiltiness. For a long, long time he wandered aimlessly.

"All alone," he muttered; "the only one left!"

Unconsciously he returned to his starting-point; the spot where he had first seen the admiral. The dead eyes seemed to haunt him. He walked slowly up to the heap of dead, but this time another face caught his attention. For a whole minute he gazed at it in silence, held dumb by his emotion. Then he gave a wild scream.

"Mick! Mick!" he shrieked. "It weren't my fault! I swear it weren't!" He dropped on his knees. "Mick!" he entreated. "We've bin raggies for years, yer an' me. Don't look at me like that,

Mick. Speak to me, Mick; speak to yer Jack!"

In desperation he threw himself forward on his dead friend's body, and vainly tried to drag it from the heap. It was too firmly wedged, and resisted all his efforts. At last he stood up and looked wildly around him. At any cost he must get Mick out of that awful mound.

Mick couldn't be dead; people with such bad characters as Mick's were born to be hanged; they couldn't possibly die on the field of battle. He determined to have another try to get his chum away from that grisly pile.

The admiral's body was nearest him.

"You come first, sir," he said hoarsely.

He placed a hand under the admiral's head to get a purchase, and then he screamed even louder and more shrilly than before. The head had fallen at his touch and rolled a dozen feet away, but still those awful eyes gazed straight at him, silent and accusing.

The shock broke him altogether. He laughed with a sudden and ghastly intensity that scared even the ever-circling vultures. Then he threw up his arms, and his face was devilish to behold.

"Listen to me," he cried. "Listen—all of yer! As sure as Gawd made little apples I'll revenge yer. I won't sleep till I've paid 'em back life for life an' cut for cut! D'yer hear, there?" he roared. "You above there! Write it down in yer strongest ink, for I means it!"

He dropped his hands to his sides, and, with the heat of his vow upon him, set at once to business.

First of all he searched the camp from end to end for a possible life, but a bare glance told him that wounds like these could only mean one thing. The bodies, too, had been stripped of everything likely to prove of value to the raiders. Indeed, little remained of the camp but its dead.

As he searched, the sheen of brass under a heap of corpses caught his eye. Roughly and hastily he threw the bodies aside, a new-born hope of restitution animating him.

There, apparently overlooked by the raiders in their hasty search for arms, was a Maxim-gun with its field-stand. John wrenched it from its resting-place, and a hasty examination showed him that the weapon was still serviceable.

"Praises be!" he murmured, as he carried his treasure some distance away. "The Lord 'as delivered my enemy into my 'and," he added with gusto. He liked the phrase, and repeated it with even greater pleasure. He found himself becoming strangely biblical. Old, forgotten tags rose easily to his mind. He began to think of himself as an Israelite of old going forth to fight the Philistines.

"The Lord is good, shipmates," he called to the camp. "'E's given me a Maxim, an' now all I want is an animile to carry it!"

He became thoughtful for a moment, but finally lifted his head triumphantly.

"The Lord 'll pervide, messmates!" he called. "The Lord 'll pervide!"

A cloud of dust in the distance answered him. He watched it with interest, and a smile grew upon his face.

"'Is name be praised, messmates!" he shouted. "'Is name be thanked. Damn my eyes if it ain't a bloomin' camel!"

He rushed forth into the desert to greet this divine gift. As the animal approached he addressed it loudly in a suitable mixture of British and Arabic bad language, tintured with the vocabulary of the lower deck.

The camel, having served with former expeditions, apparently understood him, for as it grew nearer it showed its delight by charging John open-mouthed, and at the same time attempting to kick him with its forelegs.

But John Trehearn knew no fear. The Lord was on his side. He stepped briskly aside and smote that camel vigorously on the nose with the butt of his rifle; and then, before the indignant animal could repeat its efforts, swung off on the nose-line.

"Down, damn yer, down!" he shouted.

The camel, exceedingly surprised by

this unexpected treatment, obeyed without further argument, except for a playful bite at John's arm as he secured the nose-line to its foreleg. As this friendly advance was rewarded by a kick from its new master's heavy, regulation boot, it decided not to attempt any further pleasantries—at least for the present.

John turned to the camp in triumph.

"By gosh!" he shouted. "Wot did I tell yer, messmates? The Lord 'll pervide, I said, an' ain't 'E done it? I arsts yer, raggies, ain't 'E done it? An' wot's more," he added enthusiastically, "'E's pervided somethink else!"

He looked around the battle-field. "Can any on yer guess wot it is?" he asked.

No answer came from the grim mounds. John Trehearn laughed—laughed heartily. He bent down and held his sides in abandoned merriment.

"I knowed yer couldn't," he explained. "Not in a thousand years. I expec's as I'll 'ave to tell yer."

He put his hand to his mouth and whispered as one who tells a great secret.

"Maxim belt-boxes, messmates!" he chuckled.

He walked slowly around the camel and counted its load.

"One, two, three, four—ten of 'em, messmates—an' a breaker of water!" From the latter he slaked his raging thirst.

Once more mirth overcame him. "Ain't it a joke, townies?" he cried. "It's a proper bonanzer. I wish I could 'ave seen their faces when the Lord whispered to this 'ere black devil to do a bolt. Cricky! Wot a 'ell of a panic they must 'ave bin in!"

A sudden thought struck him.

"By gosh!" he murmured to himself. "P'r'aps they'll come arter the blighter."

He gazed in the direction from which his camel had appeared.

"Hoo-bloomin'-ray!" he cheered. "Delivered into my 'and, O Lord!"

He turned thoughtfully to the camel. "I don't think I'll unpack yer yet, ole pal," he told it. "That there box as the

nigger dropped 'll about finish this little hash."

With cheery words of explanation to his messmates, he raced off toward the camp, and presently staggered back with the Maxim in his arms. He placed it in position well away from his camel and filled the water-jacket.

"I don't want 'em to shoot yer, Jerry," he explained to that long-suffering beast. "Ye're too bloomin' wallyble."

He retrieved the belt-box from where it lay beside its dead purloiner. He opened it without haste beside the gun and fed the belt into place.

It was at this moment that the tribesmen, thirty-odd of them, espied him. At first they were somewhat inclined to look upon him as a spiritual visitant. They could not understand how any man could have escaped their trade-marks. The bolder spirits among the band, however, urged them on—spirit or not—and John Trehearn, sitting at his gun, waited for their coming with a happy smile upon his lips.

At five hundred yards one of them dropped the reins upon his horse's neck and fired. John Trehearn spat upon his hands and got ready. At three hundred yards a perfect hail of lead darkened the air around him. Two hundred yards. A hundred yards.

"O Lord!" said John Trehearn earnestly. "Now lettest Thou Thy servants depart in peace—or pieces!"

He pressed the firing lever.

Three minutes later he rose from his seat and waved his hand gaily to the camp.

"There yer are, messmates!" he said. "The righteous shall prosper, saith the Lord, an' I've sent a few of the black devils back to 'ell now."

He returned the unused ammunition-belts to the box. Then, collecting the gun and stand over one arm and the box under the other, he once more approached his camel. He lashed the weapons of war into place and cast off the nose-line. With the experience bought of many bites among the camels of Bushire, he dragged the an-

imal's head well around to the right and cautiously threw his right leg over the camel's neck, seating himself as comfortably as the boxes would allow.

"Rise, Jerry, rise!" he ordered, kicking the camel's left shoulder with his foot.

With a drunken lurch, and a stagger that nearly dislodged John, the camel got to its feet. It was already distinctly tired, and a further journey did not appeal to it at all. Still, anything was better than having its nose pulled out of shape; so, promising itself a large and exceedingly vicious bite out of John Trehearn at the earliest possible opportunity, it prepared to obey his behests.

For a last time John gazed back at the camp of the dead.

"Good-by, messmates," he called. "Good-by!"

He listened for an answer.

"Wot's that? Where am I off to? yer arst; where am I off to?" He winked blatantly. "'An eye for an eye an' a tooth for a tooth,'" he quoted viciously. Then with a note of triumph: "I'm the One Man Army, I am, an' I'm goin' to do this bloomin' poonitive expedition on me own!"

Darkness settled down on the desert.

V.

It was two days later when John Trehearn, once a first-class stoker in his majesty's fleet, and now an entire punitive expedition, found himself, in the pale moonlight, before a city whose component parts were mud and wood and thatch.

Six hours earlier his camel, determined not to be cheated out of its revenge, and having had no opportunity for its promised bite, had laid itself down upon a convenient thorn-bush and died.

John had at first cursed it, then kicked it, and finally prayed over it; but nothing had made any difference to that camel. It had made up its mind to die, and it was not going to be stopped.

So John unstrapped the Maxim and paused at the gurgle in its water-jacket,

running his blackening tongue over his dry and cracked lips. He had an inspiration. Unscrewing the cap and tipping up the gun, he drank long and deeply from the somewhat oily contents of the jacket.

Immensely refreshed, he poured the rest of the water back into the empty cask, and turned with his bayonet to the camel. Its usefulness was not yet at an end, for the water-pouches in its paunch served to fill the Maxim's jacket anew.

Then John, with the knowledge that the victorious raiders, marching slowly and exceedingly noisily in their triumph, were only a matter of four or five hours behind him, strapped one of the ammunition-belt boxes upon his back and, carrying the Maxim, proceeded at a staggering run upon his way.

"The Lord will deliver the oppressed," he mumbled over his blackening tongue. "The Lord will make them fiery swords in the flesh of the oppressor!"

How he had covered the distance along the desert track to Oomooopoo no one can ever know, nor does history relate how he had escaped detection. He made no attempt at concealment. The only time that he had left the feet-marked track was when signs and noises in the night had pointed out to him the near presence of the returning army. Then he had made a detour, smashing his way around till he had joined a beaten road once more, and, deciding that this must lead to his destination, had pressed on faster than ever.

He was now beyond fear, for the time of his revenge had arrived.

The path opened out suddenly toward the town, and behind a mass of thorn-bushes John deposited his gun and the box of ammunition. Then, advancing boldly, he reached the palisades.

With rifle slung across his back, he swarmed up the stockade. A venerable and exceedingly decrepit old man saw him coming and strove to shriek, but John dropped on him like a stone, and the aged bones cracked beneath his weight. John exerted a little pressure upon the old gentleman's wind-pipe, and rose with a smile.

"The 'umble shall in'erit the kingdom of 'eaven!" he said jubilantly.

He fumbled in his pockets for a moment, and at last produced a box of matches.

"They shall be cleansed in the fires," he told the body of the elderly native. "Yea! in the fires of adversity!"

His wounded hand was already festering and painful, but he reached up with it and drew forth a handful of thatch.

"A light! A light from 'eaven!" he cried as he put a match to it. The flame shot up with a roar, and he rushed on to the next hut. In a moment half the town was ablaze. Old men, women, and children—like pale ghosts in the darkness—appeared, shrieking, and fled past him to the gate. It was flung open, and they disappeared like ghosts into the night.

John stood and watched them idly, until a younger man raced past him, and him he spitted neatly upon his bayonet.

"An eye for an eye, an' a tooth for a tooth!" he shouted, tripping up an exceedingly fat man clad in a white linen robe and an immense turban. John was about to smite him lustily with the butt of his rifle when a sudden thought struck him, and he held his hand.

"If yer ain't old Mimbassy, I'm a Dutchman," he said as he seized the prostrate chief by the scruff of the neck and hauled him to his feet for a closer scrutiny. "Nightshirt an' turbing an' all. I'll take care of you."

He whipped off the chieftain's headgear and placed it upon his own head.

"I'll wear this for yer, cocky," he went on. "Verily shall the righteous be uplifted."

Mimbassa essayed to escape, but John pressed heavily upon him, and kicked his shins with genuine delight.

"The orders of this bloomin' poonitive force," said John, "are to bring yer back a pris'ner. Take my tip an' come quiet or I'll bash yer."

The portly chief resisted with teeth, arms, feet, and lungs, but his efforts were futile. John seized him by the back of the

neck, and, almost crushing the life out of him, marched him to where he had left the Maxim.

"Now, Goliath of Gath," he said, as he secured the adipose sheik with the nose-line of the late-lamented camel, "when yer blessed army sees them flames, they'll be in a 'urry to find out all about it. They'll come 'ere 'ell-for-leather, an' it won't do to keep 'em waitin'. We'd better be gettin' ready to welcome 'em."

Selecting an ideal embrasure formed of two thorn-bushes, which commanded a perfect vista of the path through the scrub, he placed his Maxim in position and, feeding the first of his remaining belts into the block, sat down comfortably on the lower chest of the recumbent chief and waited for his enemies' approach.

"'Ellish funny, ain't it?" he asked his uncomfortable prisoner. "'Ere'm I an' there's you, an' comin' up in the next bucket is yer bloomin' army, an' they're goin' to get the biggest surprise-packet they ever struck, d'yer see?"

He paused for a moment and gently gouged his captive's eye with his thumb in an attempt to emphasize his point.

"They 'ave digged a pit," he added, "an' they're goin' to bloomin' well fall in to it theirselves."

Slowly the hours passed, and when at last the light began to steal across the eastern sky, a distant noise informed the "poonitive expedition" that the enemy were close at hand.

"Now," said John thoughtfully, "I'll shove yer up in a first-class seat, where yer can see all the fun."

Despite the chief's howls and struggles, John picked him up and deposited him on top of one of the thorn-bushes.

"Cricky!" he said, "wot a fuss about a bit of a scratch! Wot d'yer want in a free seat—ploosh cushions?"

He took up his position at the Maxim and waited. Five minutes later dim shadows through the gloom gave him a line of sight, as the warriors, with wild cries of rage, rushed heedlessly and vigorously to their fate.

Then John Trehearn smiled grimly as he saw them collect in a gesticulating mob in front of the gate, shouting and pointing to the flames.

"Thus shall the evil-livers perish!" he shouted as he pressed the firing lever.

The Maxim, with its hail of death, turned confusion into panic. The natives broke and raced in every direction for safety.

"Death! Death! Death!" screamed John, as he raked the muzzle from side to side. "How are the mighty fallen!"

He raised his voice and cheered.

With sudden perversity the Maxim choked. For a brief moment John struggled with the gun; but at length, with a final curse, picked up his rifle, and, yelling defiance, plunged toward his panic-stricken foes.

The tribesmen, gallant fighters though they were, did not wait to face him. His white skin showed through his torn clothes. They realized, with awful fear, that these Englishmen were supernatural.

With one accord they turned and fled deep into the desert, vowing whole-heartedly that nothing short of an earthquake should drive them forth for at least three days.

John stopped in mid career. There were no enemies left to fight; only black bodies decorated the earth—scores of them, piled in every direction. He was about to return to his Maxim when suddenly a cry of delight escaped him.

"The Lord is my 'elper!" he yelled. "I shall not want!"

He did not stop to question the why or wherefore; he merely realized that once more the Almighty had come to his aid; for there, kneeling quietly in the background and apparently exceedingly bored by the whole proceedings, was yet another of the captured camels.

Back in the navy, when John Trehearn had been a first-class stoker, he had not been renowned for rapidity of thought; but, as general commanding a one-man punitive expedition, brilliant ideas flowed in upon him without the slightest exertion.

"Gimme thirty seconds!" he prayed; "thirty seconds, O Lord!"

He rushed once more toward the smoldering town. With a mighty effort he jerked Sheik Mimbassa's ponderous form across his shoulders and carried him to the camel. The rope's end that had so securely bound the chief served to lash him in place, and a moment later John himself had thrown his leg across the neck of the long-suffering animal.

"Rise, yer darned beast, rise!" commanded John.

The camel was exceedingly loath to leave the ground; it was both tired and hungry, and the only thing it desired was to sleep. But when John jabbed the point of his bayonet into its neck, it suddenly decided that it would be more comfortable for it to obey. It rose, grunting, to its feet and started off at a lumbering trot down the track.

By this time it was broad daylight, and one or two of the bolder among the natives fired at John as he passed, but he took no notice; he only urged his mount faster and faster.

VI.

THREE days later the British consul at Bheto, anxiously watching the distant hills through his binoculars, observed the staggering advance of two men toward the town. At first he could not make them out at all clearly, but as they drew nearer, he gasped.

The leader, an obese black man, was clad in an exceedingly dirty linen robe, and almost doubled up with fatigue. Behind him marched a grotesque and ragged figure, whose principal adornments consisted of an immense turban and a naked bayonet.

For an agonizing half-hour the consul watched their approach, but at last he could restrain himself no longer. Dignity fled, and, seizing his solar tope, he ran forth from his house outside the city wall, and made toward the amazing procession.

The adipose black man he recognized as the well-known Sheik Mimbassa, very

much the worse for wear* the other appeared to be an emaciated and disreputable-looking white man.

"Good God! What's this?" he demanded.

The white man gave a drunken lurch, drew his feet together, and saluted.

"Oomoo-poo-poonitive force, sir," he reported. "Burnt the town, smashed the army, an' 'ere's the sheik, 'cordin' to orders, sir."

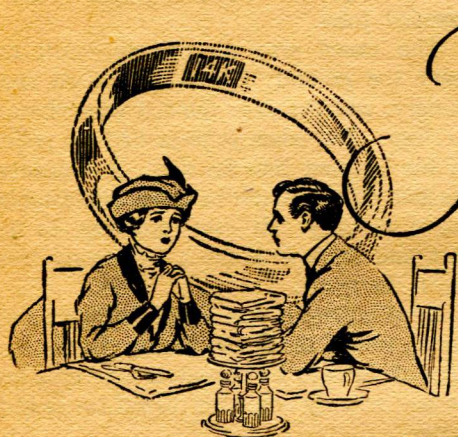
The consul started back with a cry.

"But—but we heard you were all wiped out!" he exclaimed.

The white man tottered, but still kept his hand to the salute.

"So—so we are, sir," he replied thickly. "Last camel died this mornin' twelve miles off. An eye for an eye—"

John Trehearn, stoker first class, threw up his arms and fell, face forward, on the sand!



Partners

by
Mary S. Chandler

THE fresh April wind flapped the winter-soiled lace curtain into Missimer's face and woke him, cross and disgruntled. He dressed, then leisurely shaved.

Suddenly his mild-featured face took on the nearest approach to savageness of which it was capable, and he ground his teeth wrathfully as he listened to the man across the hall clumping merrily down-stairs.

"Now that chap across the hall," he muttered, "doesn't look as though he had sense enough to pound sand, and he earns twenty-five dollars a week."

With an air of resignation he put on his hat and overcoat and started out to get some breakfast. Opening the door, he almost bumped against Mrs. Townsend who occupied the second floor front.

"I was just coming to see you," she announced.

"To see *me*?"

"Yes, my boy. Don't mind the looks

of the room," as he began hurriedly picking up things and jamming them into closet and drawers. "No room looks spick and span at this hour of the day, but—well, yours, if you'll pardon me for saying it, proves what I came to tell you. You need a wife."

Missimer's shout of boyish laughter, as she pronounced sentence on him, restored his courage. Mrs. Townsend, a whole-souled woman whom every one in the lodging-house loved, was always ready to help in time of need, even to the extent of astonishing counsel.

Finally he stopped laughing.

"Here I'm broke and jobless," he said. "My luck's divorced me for non-support. Nobody loves me, unless you do. Things could hardly be worse. And yet you wish a wife onto me. What did I ever do to you? About the only trouble in this mean town that I've managed to side-step is the devil's gift of a wife!"

"A wife's what you need," she insist-

ed. "Folks 'll give a married man work. He's got to have work. He'll fight for it. You back down too easy, boy. You pick and choose when you ought to take anything. If offices won't have you, get a spade and dig sewers. Here you half starve around town while the farmers are all squealin' for help. Why don't you go back on the farm?" she finished.

"How did you know I was brought up in the country?"

"Why, bless you, any one who carried their eyes around with them could tell it. You're a fish out of water. You don't belong in town."

Missimer stared at her. "Well, I'm not going to bury myself in the country," he growled. "If I'd have wanted to do that I could have gotten a job yesterday. I'm for the bright lights!"

Mrs. Townsend and youth had long since parted company. Her plainness of face equaled her plainness of speech.

"Be careful or you'll get lazy," she went on. "I've seen plenty like you—likely to go up or down according to what hits 'em. You want gumption." She wheeled on him, little black eyes snapping: "How long since Farlow's fired you?"

"They didn't fire me," he defended. "Business was rotten. The pay-roll was too long and I was the last man, so I had to go. They're turning men off everywhere. I've tramped the streets for work for two weeks, and had only two days' work extra bookkeeping."

"How much money you got left?" she demanded.

Missimer thrust a muscular hand into his trouser-pocket and fished up what he had.

"That's my pile. Count it yourself," he said, handing her some silver and two small bills.

"Humph! Let's see. Eleven dollars and sixty-three cents. Quite a fortune." The little woman deliberately lifted her hand-bag and dropped the money into it. Missimer stared a moment, then he laughed.

"Here, what's the big idea? I want my money. I'm hungry."

"You aren't. You ate last night. You won't get work till you're really hungry. You ain't up against it while you have a place to sleep and while your clothes are decent. I'll keep this until you land a job. I once had a boy of twenty-three," she added.

"Give me a dollar," he said. "I'll eat and then try again."

"Dollar nothing. You can have fifty-five cents. Fifteen for breakfast, fifteen for lunch, twenty-five for dinner. And no free lunch, mind! Walking's good. You don't need car-fare. Yes, here's an odd cent for a paper so's you can read the ads. Report to-night. Now get out. But I repeat, you need a wife. Then you'd hustle. You're clean and good-looking. Some nice girl might take a chance on you."

"Matrimony calls for cash, not good looks," laughed Missimer, keenly relishing the game since it was Mrs. Townsend who was playing it. "The girls are willing enough. Every other girl you meet is hunting down some man to pay her bills for life. But I'm gun-shy. I'm not hunting trouble. So-long!"

It pleased Missimer's humor to accept Mrs. Townsend's fifteen-cent limit on breakfast. Presently he entered a noisy, odorous lunch-room where, hat on, he elbowed his way to a counter, grabbed two sandwiches and a cup of coffee and his check, and glanced about for a place to sit down. The room was crowded, but near the door he saw a table for four with two vacant chairs. He sat opposite two hard-faced, bright-eyed girls who ogled him while he gave himself sure elbow room by turning the vacant chair beside him up against the table.

"What a place for girls to eat!" thought Missimer, country instinct uppermost. And at that instant he saw a girl, undeniably "nice," as frightened as she was pretty, hesitating at the door. Then she entered with a perverse air of bravado. Her neat blue suit was shabby, but

her slim, boyish figure lent it style. She was tall, with a beautiful head and shoulders and slender throat.

Ignoring stares, she came straight to Missimer's side, pushed back the chair he had turned up, and sat down. The bold little girls eyed her and Missimer frowned. Then he decided to enlighten her evident ignorance of the place.

"They don't have waiters here. You have to go to the counter." She turned wide, dark eyes upon him, but she did not answer, for close by a fat man crashed his plate and cup to the tiled floor and besplashed an indignant middle-aged woman with coffee. The girl gave a nervous scream and winked back the tears that seemed to be at the surface.

Missimer rose. "Here, you sit down and I'll get you something. What 'll it be?" he coaxed.

"Oh, anything," she replied, still struggling to be calm.

He returned presently.

"Drink this coffee," he commanded. "It 'll make you feel better."

She took a few sips and put it down. With a curious restraint, belying the fascinating look in her face, she took a spoonful or two of the cereal, and then stopped.

"Isn't it good? What's the matter?" he asked.

"It's better to begin slowly," she confided, "after two days—without. I'd have had work yesterday if I hadn't fainted in a manager's office. They want strong girls. You have to look prosperous." She spoke in a cheerful, matter-of-fact way. "But I guess my luck's going to change now. I found fifty cents this morning."

"Poor little kid," murmured Missimer. "Wish I'd seen you sooner. Maybe I could have helped you. It's awful for a girl like you not to have money. Gee!"

"You know better," she said coolly, over the cup's rim. "I've been in the city long enough to know that a strange man doesn't give a pretty girl something for nothing."

"Why don't you go home?" he asked suddenly, seeing a way out.

Her glance pitied his stupidity.

"If I had a home I'd be in it," she rejoined shortly. "The country is less kind than the city to the homeless and penniless."

"Is your room-rent paid ahead?"

"Not that it's any of your business, but it isn't. My rent was up last night. I can't go back there unless I have work. Why do you ask?"

The crowd in the lunch-room was thinning out now, and it was a little quieter. Missimer pushed back the dishes, leaned his elbow on the table, and turned till he almost faced the girl. His dark eyes were bright and alive, the discouragement had left his face.

"You'd better marry me," he said simply.

Instant free gaiety cleared the girl's eyes of trouble. Humor lifted the corners of her sweet mouth, surprise and amusement filled her eyes. She looked John Missimer over from head to foot. Then she laughed with soft heartiness, a laugh that gently ridiculed him.

"You'd better," he repeated, his jaw tightening.

"I'd—starve first. I don't want you. I don't want a man just to pay my bills. I want work so I can support myself. I won't marry you just because I'm up against it. When I marry I shall give as much as I take. I've sense enough to know that marriage ought to be a partnership, not a charitable institution. And I want a man I can depend on—the kind of man I want doesn't ask every girl he sees to marry him."

"You'd better marry me," he said again. Her contempt killed his conceit, but his will rose to conquest. "You'll be safe and you'll give me something to work for. You would give me more than I'd give you. I need you. Do you know, I've never been really afraid before? Now I'm afraid that you'll leave me. I'm afraid something will happen to you. I'm afraid I won't amount to anything. All in a

minute everything makes me afraid. But I'm fighting mad, too!"

"Fighting mad's better than afraid," she said slowly, leaning toward him, searching his eyes. Their heads were almost touching, and they forgot where they were.

"Fighting mad lands a man somewhere, if he gets busy," she commented shrewdly. "But you don't want a wife. You want to make good first. I—I suppose you haven't or you wouldn't be eating in a place like this."

Her self-forgetful, young motherly wisdom, her sympathy, drew from him his brief tale.

"I'm out of a job. Work's hard to get now. My room-rent's paid a week ahead, and when I've paid for this breakfast there'll be thirty cents left. That's all I have in the world except eleven dollars and eight cents that Mrs. Townsend won't let me have until I land a job."

"Who's Mrs. Townsend?"

"She rooms at the place where I do, and sometimes she tries to mother me. This morning she said I needed a wife—"

"So that's why you asked me!" the girl remarked indignantly.

"It isn't," laughed Missimer. "I said I'd had everything in the hard-luck line but the devil's gift of a wife. I said I would not have a wife, that's what I said! I didn't want a wife—"

"So you proposed to the first strange girl you saw. Well, I'm going to pay for this breakfast and go out and hunt work."

"You'd better marry me," he persisted. "I didn't want a wife, but I do now. I never wanted one before. I guess I've always wanted you," he went on, originally. "We'll go and get Mrs. Townsend to give me my money and I'll get a license and a preacher, and you can stay at home in my room while I hunt work. They'll take on a married man, I'm sure."

She did not answer, and he paused, disconcerted by the amused look in her big eyes.

"Anything else?" she asked finally.

"Yes; it's an even game. We've

neither of us anything nor anybody. It's give and take. We could stand by each other and work for each other. I'll have something to be responsible for. I mean it. Won't you marry me?"

"No," she said flatly. "Good-by."

She rose, and Missimer caught her hand.

"Sit down," he commanded. "I want to tell you something."

Slowly she obeyed.

"Yesterday I ran across Burch Haley, a man from the country near where I was born. He owns a rattling good farm and wants to find some one to run it for him while he goes to the city to educate his children. He tried to get me. I know all about horses and farms—"

"Then why didn't you take the job," interrupted the girl.

"For two reasons. In the first place I hadn't had enough of the city, and besides he wanted a married man—had a notion I was married when he offered it to me."

"Oh!" She eyed him suspiciously.

"It's a beautiful old place," continued Missimer. "It's in Connecticut. The house is large and old-fashioned—about the prettiest place outside of heaven to look at. You'd better try it with me. You'd like it. It's getting green now, and you could have your chickens and flower-beds."

"We aren't married," said the girl shortly, blushing for the first time.

"But we can be in an hour. It's our chance. Don't you know it is?"

But she rose and drew on her shabby gloves. Her face was very serious.

"It's your chance, yes. You mustn't miss it. You surely know some nice girl who would be glad to go with you."

"I don't want 'some nice girl.' I want you," he persisted ambiguously.

She smiled. "For the looks of it, we'd better go out of here together," she said, exactly as though she hadn't heard him nor seen the pleading in his eyes. "I must be hunting work for myself. Time is precious."

Missimer's heart sank, but he walked along beside her. At the end of the first block she turned to him, queerly embarrassed.

"Good-by," she said. "You get a wife and go to the country with that man."

"I won't say good-by, and I won't go to the country. I didn't want the job before I saw you, and I don't want it now. I'm going to stay where I can see that you're safe. I'll look after you and you can get acquainted with me and take me or leave me then. I shouldn't have asked you so suddenly."

She had stopped mechanically before a shop during what she meant to be their final leave-taking. Outside, a fat, bald Hebrew stood bareheaded while he gesticulated orders to the young man who was dressing the window.

"You can depend upon me and you'll never regret that you met me—this way," asserted Missimer to the girl.

The fat man eyed her disturbingly as he came closer.

"Ain'dt you the girl that wanted vork yesterday, eh?" he finally said. Missimer clung belligerently to her side. She nodded, and the fat man went on, "Vell, ve lost a girl to-day—sick. Ve could take you on, budt in the gloak undt suits. You're chust the height undt you're bretty enough. You can come to-morrow."

Missimer looked down at her.

"It's your chance—if you like it," he said slowly, with the life gone out of his voice. For an instant the window claimed the fat man's attention, and Missimer was inspired to say the right thing.

"You'd better come with me. I—I love you, you know. I did almost from the first minute. You know that. You have work now, but wouldn't you rather come with me?"

Again the man approached her.

"Vell, how aboutt it?"

"You are very kind," she said, "but I can't come."

Missimer saw her face soften and

brighten delicately. The fat man snorted in disgust.

"Goin' to git marriedt, eh? Vimmin iss all alike. Dey vork dill dey git a man to vork for dem. Undt chust de shape for dem new sloppy styles!" he wailed. "Tall undt noddin' to her, undt a stylish little headt!"

He waddled into his shop, still inveighing against the sex.

But Missimer, radiant, unbelieving, gazed silently down at the girl. It was she who spoke first, and very quietly.

"It's different now. I have work if I want it. I could get on my feet again. I am not driven by danger to marry you. But I *want* to. You need me—"

"We need each other," he interrupted.

"And neither of us," she continued, "has anything except the other. It's an even game, as you said."

"You'll not regret it," said Missimer fervently. "Wait! Let's go in the drug-store so's I can phone Haley."

"It's all right," he reported a few minutes later, coming out of the booth with a broad grin. "Come, there's a car. We'll go for my money, get the license and preacher, and meet Haley at one."

He helped her into the car, and as he seated himself close beside her, he said in her ear:

"What's your name? Mine's John Missimer."

She immediately grew grave and turned a little pale.

"My name's Edith Fisk." She turned to face him, her eyes truthful and steady on his. "And I've never in all my life done anything I'd be ashamed to tell you. I want you to know I've always been—good." Her voice was passionate.

"My dear," he whispered, "anybody'd know you're good. Gee, but I'm a lucky guy!"

She smiled that half-sad, whimsical smile that went straight to his heart.

"I guess we're both lucky. When I've been lonely and homesick I've prayed and prayed to get back to the country. And now I'm going back—with you."

Heart to Heart Talks



By the Editor



PERHAPS one of the most interesting, and certainly one of the most dramatic, periods in the development of the West were those tragic years—still in the memory of the present generation—during which the rising tide of small farmers and homesteaders flowed over the great, free ranges, beating against and finally breaking the almost feudal power of the mighty cattlemen.

At first the lordly cattle "barons," as they were called, had little difficulty in suppressing any impertinent "nester" who attempted to take up and fence a homestead on "their" range. They set their boundaries by rivers and mountains, a single ranch often including twenty-five hundred square miles, and the fact that they had no more legal title than the next man, that they paid no fee to State or nation for grazing their vast herds upon it, made no difference whatever. They apportioned the land between themselves, and back of the individual holders stood the mighty "Drovers' Association," with a power in the various States affected little short of absolute. Homesteaders who did not know the conditions drifted there on the westward-mounting wave only to be hustled rudely away or to pay the penalty of refusal with their lives. It is in this period that our new five-part serial,

THE HOLY SCARE

BY GEORGE WASHINGTON OGDEN

Author of "The Bondboy," "Cowards," "The Crucible of Courage," etc.

is set. I am not going to tell you a thing about the story—it is too good to spoil by anticipating—but I will introduce you to a few of the characters that you will meet; characters that will live in your heart and memory long after you have forgotten the story itself. First of all there is *Alan Macdonald*, the young Easterner, who, roused by the outrages and injustice practised against the innocent homesteaders, has placed himself at their head with the avowed intention of breaking the power of the Drovers' Association. Then there is *Saul Chadron*, president of the association, almost a king in his way, and (in his way) with very kingly qualities, who, as a preliminary to eliminating *Macdonald*, has fastened upon him the name of "rustler" and "cattle thief." And his daughter, *Nola Chadron*, a strangely complex character you will not understand until the end; and another girl, *Frances Landcraft*, a true heroine in every sense of the word, daughter of *Colonel Landcraft*, commander of the post, a disappointed man and a martinet, but withal an officer and a gentleman. Nor must we forget *Major King*, to whom *Frances* is engaged, nor least of all *Mark Thorn*, the hired assassin of the Drovers' Association, who has for years lived by the murders that have thrown the necessary "Holy Scare" into the homesteaders. This is, perhaps, the most remarkable character in the story; remarkable in just the opposite way to *Banjo Gibson*, the gentle little wandering minstrel, who really belongs back in the days of knighthood and romance, but whose small body contains as stout and true a

heart as the best. There are other characters each a living, vital entity, but these are the more important; and I will only add that this is *really* a wonderful story. Do not fail to read it.

HAVE you ever wished, on reading one of the fascinating and veracious histories of Tickfall, that you might have a chance to meet one of those delightful characters—*Skeeter Butts*, *Hitch Diamond*, *Pap Curtain*, or the rest—long enough really to get acquainted with them? Yes, I know you have had some mighty good novelettes of that interesting Louisiana town, but none of them were very long.

We take great pleasure, therefore, in announcing for next week a complete and almost book-length novel about *Hitch*, *Skeeter*, *Pap*, the *Revun Vinegar Atts*, and a host of others whom you have either already met, or else will be mightily pleased to "meet their 'quaintance'" in

HOODOO FACE

BY E. K. MEANS

Author of "Diada, Daughter of Discord," "Two Sorry Sons of Sorrow," etc.

the most ambitious and, in many ways, the best story that this famous depicter of negro life and character has yet written.

Speaking from the hypercritical view-point of a blasé editor, Dr. Means has achieved something very like a new technique in handling his plot. Maybe you'll think at first that there isn't any—but you'll go on reading just the same! For the things that happened to poor *Hitch Diamond*, pugilistic hero of Tickfall, when he started back from a successful match in N'Awleens were a plenty.

His troubles began when he met *Dinner Gaze* on the train. *Dinner's* legs made a display of glorious silk hosiery; his vest was gold and purple; his bright-green cravat contained a bright-yellow diamond, and the broad expanse of his shirt-bosom was immaculate. *Hitch* was no less glorious. He wore a Prince Albert coat, high collar, a stiff-bosomed shirt, a magnificent silk hat, all white-silk lining on the inside and smooth, shiny, imitation beaver on the outside; while on his feet were a pair of real patent-leather shoes, which had necessitated the ransacking of nearly every shoe-store in all New Orleans to locate.

Why? Because *Hitch Diamond's* feet, to put it mildly, were immense.

The Tickfall champion's troubles began to edge up over the horizon about the time that *Dinner Gaze* was wadding a handful of old newspapers to about the size and shape of a plethoric bank-roll. And when *Hitch* stepped off the train at Sawtown, *Dinner* gently raised his coat-tails, and—

But that's the story.

"FIFTEEN MILLION CANDLE-POWER," by Guy Thorne, is one of the most thoroughly out-of-the-ordinary stories we have seen in some time. In a good many respects it belongs to the "different" category, but we have decided not to label it thus. Just think of it for a moment—fifteen million candle-power! What light is there that is so powerful? And what kind of a story can you make with merely a light?

Well, you shall know in just seven days!

Are you in favor of votes for women? Are you opposed to it? In either case you must, by all manner of means, read, next week, "AN OFFICER AND A LADY," by Rex T. Stout—which has absolutely nothing to do with votes for women. It is, however, a very delightful little comedy—and maybe, after all, it has its bearing on this vital subject!

"THE ANTAGONISTS," by Frank Lapham, is a story about a fight—no, not a squared circle, nor the European war, nor the Mexican imbroglio, and not even a domestic spat.

However, it approximates the last-named function, and it's a bully good story. Furthermore, that's all you shall know about it for the present.

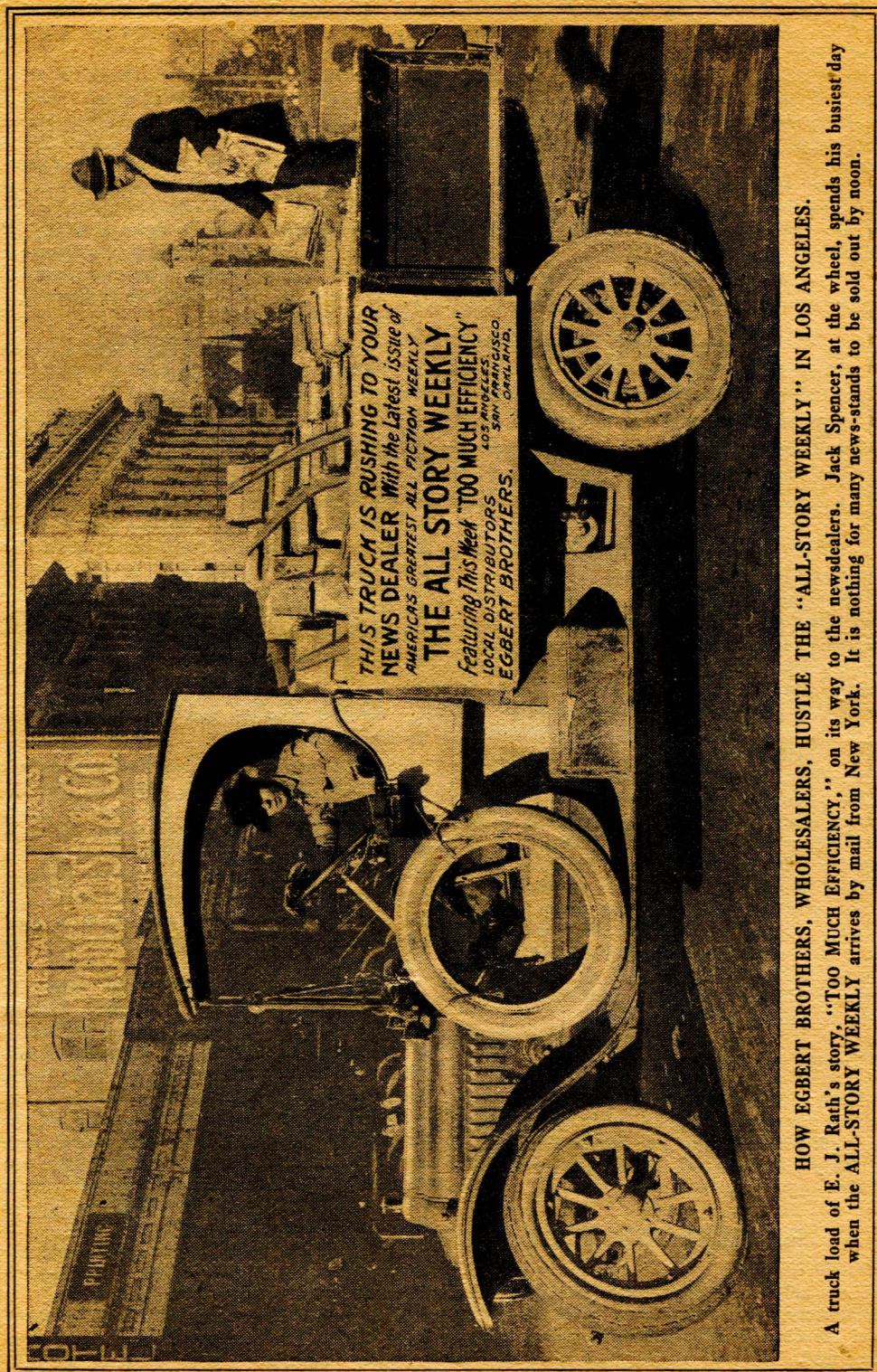
"THE SPIRIT CABINET," by James Frederick Topping, is another delightful yarn about *Mrs. McJimsey*, the fat, forty, and not fair (save in character) proprietress of a theatrical boarding-house. You met *Mrs. McJimsey* in "The Jonah Man" and "Professor Punjab," if you will remember.

The present stirring adventure of her sylph-like youth is recounted by *Mrs. McJimsey* to the paperhanger, and deals with the lady's sojourn in a hick-town that boasted of an honest-to-goodness medium. To add to the complications, *Mrs. McJ.* was hitched up with a fake mind-reading outfit at the time, and—

But wait till you see what happened!

"TOO MUCH EFFICIENCY" IN BOOK FORM

E. J. Rath's great comedy serial, "TOO MUCH EFFICIENCY," which ran in this magazine from November 11 to December 9, will be for sale in book form all over the United States and Canada on January 3, \$1.35 a copy; W. J. Watt & Co.



HOW EGBERT BROTHERS, WHOLESALERS, HUSTLE THE "ALL-STORY WEEKLY" IN LOS ANGELES.

A truck load of E. J. Rath's story, "TOO MUCH EFFICIENCY," on its way to the newsdealers. Jack Spencer, at the wheel, spends his busiest day when the ALL-STORY WEEKLY arrives by mail from New York. It is nothing for many news-stands to be sold out by noon.

Nothing from the pen of this delightful story-builder has attracted more attention. Happily and with only the best feeling it turned into humor the world-wide tendency in the direction of efficiency. Rath injected a love story, exquisite in its facial aspects, sympathetic in its tendencies, and, at the same time, lofty in its ideals.

Those who have inquired as to when the book would be out are now in a position to buy a copy from their news-dealer. If he hasn't got it, he can get it.

NOTICE.—Inquiries concerning stories that we have published will be answered in the Heart to Heart Talks only when the name of the author as well as the title of the story is supplied by the correspondent.

"BREATH OF THE DRAGON" FINE

TO THE EDITOR:

We moved to Lansing last fall and by chance purchased an ALL-STORY magazine when I expected to spend an evening alone, and in place of praising your magazine will say we have missed just one copy since, and that only because they were all sold before we could get one.

My husband and I have enjoyed all the stories, but I think perhaps "The Border Legion," by Zane Grey, appealed to us most. I have read many requests for sequels to some of the stories in the Heart to Heart Talks, but have only seen one letter which referred to "Breath of the Dragon," by A. H. Fitch. It seems to me as though there should be more to that story. Have you ever published the story, "White Roses," written by Katherine Holland Brown? It is of Western life, and was published in some magazine five or six years ago. I have read the opening chapter somewhere, and I very much wish to get the remainder of it.

MRS. S. D. STRAIGHT.

Lansing, Michigan.

NOTE: "White Roses" did not appear in any of our magazines, but as the story was published in book form in 1910, you can doubtless get it at the public library or through any good book-dealer.

SERVISS IN BOOK FORM

TO THE EDITOR:

I am only a boy of fourteen, but I can tell a good story when I read one. The ALL-STORY and the Cavalier are the best magazines I have ever read. When do we get some more Martian

and "Pellucidar" stories by E. R. Burroughs? We need some more of *Semi-Dual* and the Honeymoon Detectives.

We are still waiting for the sequel to "The Brass Check." I was delighted when I read in the Heart to Heart Talks that we were to have another adventure of *Stuart Vandewater*. I read "The Moon Maiden," by Serviss. It was great.

I would like to know if you have "The Second Deluge," "A Columbus of Space," "The Moon Metal," and "The Conquest of Mars," all by Garrett P. Serviss? Kindly let me know, in your Heart to Heart Talks, as soon as possible.

EDWARD SCHULTEN.

Closter, New Jersey.

NOTE: We have published the following stories by Garrett P. Serviss besides "The Moon Maiden" (*Argosy*, May, 1915): "The Second Deluge" (*Cavalier*, July, 1911, to January, 1912, seven numbers); "A Columbus of Space" (*All-Story*, January to June, 1909, six numbers); "The Sky Pirate" (*Scrap Book*, April to September, 1909, six numbers); and "Moon Metal" (*All-Story*, May, 1905). We can supply all of these except the last (which is out of print) for twenty cents per number. "The Conquest of Mars" we did not publish. "The Second Deluge" is also published in book form by McBride, Nast & Co. at \$1.35; "A Columbus of Space" by D. Appleton & Co. at \$1.50.

LIGHT BURNS TILL TWO A.M.

TO THE EDITOR:

We have been reading your magazine quite a while, and disliked it some when the *Cavalier* was stricken, but after we got used to it, we really did not mind it at all. Some time back we quit getting it, as we were disappointed, and thought you must have been on a vacation. Perhaps it was so, for they got better, and now we say you are certainly putting up a great collection of good ones, and we never miss one (magazine or story).

We like the *Semi-Dual* stories, also the Western. Well, with few "exceptions," I guess we like them all. I generally save up until I get the complete story of the continued ones—then read them. Sometimes my light burns until 2 A.M. But what a good cause!

Isn't it queer that those who kick all the time keep on handing their little round dime across and walking off with the magazine just the same? But then, if you did not get a knock once in a while, you would not appreciate the boosts, would you?

You never can judge a story by the title, for often those that have the most uninteresting titles prove to be those I like best.

Give us another illustrated Heart to Heart Talks. That one was great!

Azusa, California.

E. H. RYAN.



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