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ALL-STORY WEEKLY

*The Forging of
a Super-Soul*

Little Crooked Master

by Charles B. Stilson

*Author of "A Man Named Jones,"
"Polaris of the Snows," etc.*

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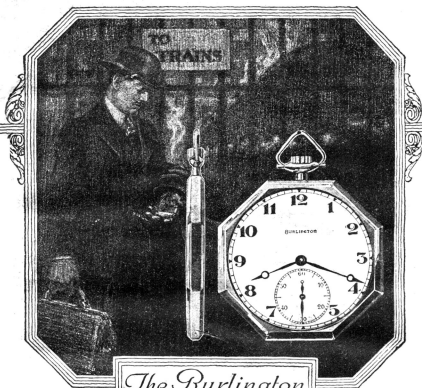


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ALL-STORY WEEKLY

VOLUME CVI

NUMBER 3



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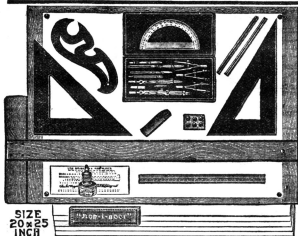
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Yes, I will give you this complete drawing outfit absolutely free. The instruments are in a handsome high class, plush lined folding case. They are regular draftsman's working instruments. Besides I will give you absolutely free, a 20 x 25 inch drawing board, a 24 inch T square, a 12 inch rule, a supply of drawing paper, two triangles, a French curve, pencils, erasers, thumb tacks, etc.

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CHIEF DRAFTSMAN DOBE

Engineers Equipment Co., Inc., Div. 1451, CHICAGO

Chief Draftsman Dobe
ENGINEER'S EQUIPMENT COMPANY
Div. 1451, Chicago, Ill.

Without any obligation on me whatsoever, please mail your book, "Successful Draftsmanship," and full particulars of your liberal "Personal Instruction" offer to a few students. It is understood that I am obligated in no way whatever.

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Classified Advertising

The Purpose of this Department

is to put the reader in touch immediately with the newest needfuls 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.

Classified Advertising Rates in The Munsey Magazines:

	Line Rate	Combination Line Rate
Munsey's Magazine	\$1.50	\$3.25
THE ARGOSY COMB'		10¢ each discount
The Argosy All-Story Weekly	1.75	
Feb. 28th Argosy Combination Forms Close Feb. 4th.		

"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.

AGENTS & SALESMEN WANTED

RAINCOAT AGENTS. I'll pay you \$12 daily taking orders for Reversible Raincoats. Two coats in one. One side rich, tan dress coat, other side storm overcoat. Something brand new. Not sold in stores. Also other styles. Don't miss chance for new women, children. Popular prices. Newest styles. Guaranteed waterproof or money back. We manufacture and make to measure. Shortage of raincoats and high cost of overcoats make sales easy. Elaborate outfit and sample coat to workers. Parker Mfg. Co., 506 Blue Street, Dayton, Ohio.

\$65.00 A WEEK AND YOUR SUIT FREE— If you take advantage of our starting offer. Write us at once and we will send you a full line of samples and everything necessary to start at once, absolutely free, postage prepaid. Spencer Mead Company, Dept. 1132, Chicago.

AGENTS: SELL NEVERFAIL IRON RUST AND STAIN REMOVER. HUGE PROFITS. BIG LINE SAMPLES. Write today. Sanford-Bell Co., Inc., Newark, N. Y., Dept. A.

SELL What Millions Want. Now, wonderful Life Portraits. Creates tremendous interest. Absolutely different; unique; enormous demand—30 hours' service. Liberal credit. Outfit and catalogue free. \$100 weekly profit easy. Consolidated Portrait Co., Dept. 22, 1036 W. Adams Street, Chicago.

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Don't accept agency until you get particulars regarding Bero Tablets. 40% profit. Customers excited. Agents coinining money. Prohibition assures quick sales. Wonderful opportunity. Write quick. Particulars free; sample 25c. Bero Co., 545 1/2 N. Dearborn, Chicago.

AGENTS—MAKE A DOLLAR AN HOUR. SELL MENDETS, a patent patch for instantly mending leaks in all utensils. Sample package free. Collette Manufacturing Company, Dept. 30-B, Amsterdam, N. Y.

Wonderful Sanitary Whispering Mouthpiece for telephones. Gives secrecy in conversation. Unlimited field. Every telephone user a prospect. Retail \$1. 100% commission. Sample 50c postpaid. Collyt Laboratories, Dept. M, 565 W. Washington St., Chicago.

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WE START YOU IN BUSINESS, furnishing everything. Men and women, \$30.00 to \$100.00, weekly operating our "New System Specialty Candy Factories" anywhere. Opportunity lifetime; booklet free. Ragdale Co., Drawer 53, East Orange, N.J.

\$10 DAILY: GOLD WINDOW LETTERS; SAMPLE FREE. Write to-day. Detroit Sign Letter Company, Dept. A, 1043 Gratiot Avenue, Detroit, Mich.

SALES AGENTS WANTED IN EVERY COUNTY TO GIVE ALL OR SPARE TIME. Position worth \$750 to \$1500 yearly. We train the inexperienced. Novelty Cutlery Co., 77 Bar Street, Canton, Ohio.

YOUNG MAN, WOULD YOU ACCEPT A TAILOR-MADE SUIT just for showing it to your friends? Then write Banner Tailoring Co., Dept. 400, Chicago, and get beautiful samples, styles and a wonderful offer.

AGENTS: \$100 weekly possible introducing new winter automobile fuel. Specially adapted to cold weather. Starts easy. Adds power, mileage and reduces operating expense. Endorsed by thousands. Territories going like wildfire. Act quick. \$28 sample outfit free. L. Balfour, Dept. 57, Louisville, Ky.

MICHIGAN FARM LANDS FOR SALE

LAND! LAND! BIG MONEY IN GRAINS, livestock, fruit, poultry, Michigan's best hardwood land. 10 to 165 to \$25 per acre. Easy terms. Markets, schools, churches. Free insurance. Farm advisers. No swamps or stumps. Only \$100 acres. Best land offered in United States from largest company. Booklet free. Write today. Swigart Land Company, 11245 First National Bank Building, Chicago, Ill.

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SALESMEN—Side or main line, to sell low-priced 5,000-mile guaranteed tires; 30x2 1/2 non-skid sells for \$1.55; other sizes in proportion. Good money-making proposition for live wires. Write Consolidated Tire Co., 1777 Broadway, New York City.

Salesmen: If you are looking for new money-making specialties, Mr. Opportunity is here, ready to serve you with the best paying and liveliest lines of ready selling Automobile Specialties ever offered. Splendid opportunity for territory managers, sell auto owners, dealers and appoint sub-agents. Every co-operation, exclusive territory contract, particulars and complete selling plan free. Don't pass this up. Write quick. Car-Bon Ale Sales Co., Dept. E, Lincoln, Nebraska.

MR. GALLAHER MADE \$336.00 IN ONE WEEK selling Guaranteed Collection Cabinets, used by all business men. Write to-day. Sayers Mfg. Co., 2875 Sheffield Ave., Chicago, Ill.

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AGENTS—OUR SOAP AND TOILET ARTICLE PLAN IS A WONDER. Get our Free Sample Case Offer. Ho-Ro-Co, 137 Locust, St. Louis, Mo.

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AGENTS—\$40 TO \$100 A WEEK. Free Samples. Gold and Silver Sign Letters for stores and office windows. Anyone can put this on. Big demand. Liberal offer to general agents. Metallic Letter Co., 431-B, N. Clark, Chicago.

AGENTS—YOUR OWN CLOTHES FREE and \$60.00 a week. Start in your spare time. Tailoring business simply great this year. Write American Woolen Mills Company, Dept. 1433, Chicago, for cloth samples of 60 big sensational styles.

WE PAY \$100 MONTHLY SALARY AND FURNISH BIG AND EXPENSES to introduce guaranteed poultry and stock Powders. Bigler Company, X-596, Springfield, Illinois.

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, and 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. Our Classified Service Bureau will gladly show you how to use this section most profitably and at the least cost. Write to-day to the Classified Manager, The Argosy Combination, 280 B'way, N. Y.

AUTHORS—MANUSCRIPTS

STORIES, POEMS, PLAYS, ETC., ARE WANTED FOR PUBLICATION. Good ideas bring big money. Submit MSS. or write Literary Bureau, 110, Hannibal, Mo.

WRITERS: HAVE YOU A POEM, STORY OR PHOTOPLAY TO SELL? Submit MSS. at once to Music Sales Company, Dept. 60, St. Louis, Mo.

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WANTED—STORIES, ARTICLES, POEMS for New Magazine. We pay on acceptance. Typed or handwritten MSS. acceptable. Send MSS. to Woman's National Magazine, Desk 139, Washington, D. C.

Classified Advertising continued on page 3, back section.

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Examine These FREE NEW AUTO BOOKS

Be an expert auto repair man. You can have the skill that makes every complicated trouble as easy to fix as taking out a spark plug. Learn every detail of all makes of cars and trucks. Know exactly how to find what's wrong and how to make all repairs quickly. These great new Auto Books show you how.

Make Money Repairing Autos

The limited output of new cars does not anywhere near meet the demand. Rebuilt cars are selling at a premium. Never before have expert auto repair men been in such great demand and made so much money.

Now is your great money-earning opportunity in the auto repair business. Every mechanic, every chauffeur, every car owner needs this great New Library of Automobile Engineering.

Tells About

Explosion Motors, Welding, Motor Construction and Repair, Carburetors and Settings, Valves, Cooling, Lubrication, Fly-Wheels, Clutch, Transmission, Final Drive, Steering Frames, Tires, Vulcanizing, Ignition, Starting and Lighting Systems, Shop Kinks, Public Garage Design, Equipment and Operation, Electrics, Storage Batteries—Cars and Repair, Steam Cars, Motorcycles, Commercial Trucks, Glossary. More than 100 blue-prints of wiring diagrams.

50c a Week If You Decide to Buy

Let us send you the complete six volume set of Automobile Engineering for one week's examination. Read the simple directions for repairing every automobile trouble. Six thick volumes, 5 1/2 x 8 1/2 inches, flexibly bound in American Morocco, 2,650 pages, 2,100 illustrations, wiring diagrams, etc. Everything in plain, every-day language, simple to understand. If you decide to keep them, send only \$2 in seven days, and \$2 a month thereafter until the special introductory price of \$19.50 has been paid. The regular price is \$30.00, so you save \$10.50 by acting at once.

Send No Money

Don't send a penny! Your name and address in the coupon brings the six books to you at once for seven days' trial. With each set we give you absolutely free a \$12 Consulting Membership, entitling you to ask our staff of automobile experts as many questions as you wish a whole year free.

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American Technical Society

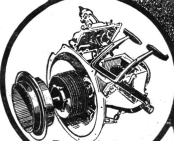
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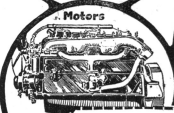
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Motors

AMERICAN TECHNICAL
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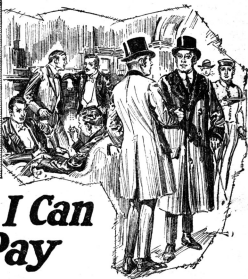
Please send me the six-volume set of Automobile Engineering for seven days' examination, shipping charges paid. If I decide to buy I will send \$2.00 within seven days and balance at \$17.50 a month until \$19.50 has been paid. Then you will send me a receipt, showing that the set of books and the Consulting Membership are mine and fully paid for. If I think I can not along without the books, I will return them, after 7 days, at your expense.

Name.....

Address.....

Reference.....

In answering this advertisement it is desirable that you mention this magazine.



Free Proof that I Can Raise Your Pay

No matter how much you are earning now, I can show you how to increase it. I have even taken failures and shown them how to make \$100—\$200, and in one case as high as \$2,000 weekly. I am willing to prove this entirely at my risk and expense.

LET'S have a little chat about getting ahead—you and I. My name is Pelton. Lots of people call me "The Man Who Makes Men Rich." I don't deny it. I've done it for thousands of people—lifted them up from poverty to riches.

I'm no genius—far from it. I'm just a plain, everyday, unassuming sort of man. I know what poverty is. I've looked black despair in the eye—had failure stalk me around and hoodoo everything I did. I've known the bitterest kind of want.

But to-day all is different. I have money and all of the things that money will buy. I am rich also in the things that money won't buy—health, happiness and friendship. Few people have more of the blessings of the world than I.

It was a simple thing that jumped me up from poverty to riches. As I've said, I'm no genius. But I had the good fortune to know a genius. One day this man told me a "secret." It had to do with getting ahead and growing rich. He had used it himself with remarkable results. He said that every wealthy man knew this "secret,"—that is why he was rich.

I used the "secret." It surely had a good test. At that time I was flat broke. Worse

than that, for I was several thousand dollars in the hole. I had about given up hope when I put the "secret" to work.

At first I couldn't believe my sudden change in fortune. Money actually flowed in on me. I was thrilled with a new sense of power. Things I couldn't do before became as easy for me to do as opening a door. My business boomed and continued to leap ahead at a rate that startled me. Prosperity became my partner. Since that day I've never known what it is to want for money, friendship, happiness, health or any of the good things of life.

That "secret" surely made me rich in every sense of the word.

My sudden rise to riches naturally surprised others. One by one people came to me and asked me how I did it. I told them. And it worked for them as well as it did for me.

Some of the things this "secret" has done for people are astounding. I would hardly believe them if I hadn't seen them with my own eyes. Adding ten, twenty, thirty or forty dollars a week to a man's income is a mere nothing. That's merely playing at it. In one case I took a rank failure and in a few weeks had him earning as high as \$2,000.00 a week. Listen to this:

A young man in the East had an article for which there was a nation-wide demand. For twelve years he "puttered around" with

it, barely eking out a living. To-day this young man is worth \$200,000. He is building a \$25,000 home—and paying cash for it. He has three automobiles. His children go to private schools. He goes hunting, fishing, traveling, whenever the mood strikes him. His income is over a thousand dollars a week.

In a little town in New York lives a man who two years ago was pitied by all who knew him. From the time he was 14 he had worked and slaved—and at sixty he was looked upon as a failure. Without work—in debt to his charitable friends, with an invalid son to support, the outlook was pitchy black.

Then he learned the "secret." In two weeks he was in business for himself. In three months his plant was working night and day to fill orders. During 1916 the profits were \$20,000. During 1917 the profits ran close to \$40,000. And this genial 64-year young man is enjoying pleasures and comforts he little dreamed would ever be his.

I could tell you thousands of similar instances. But there's no need to do this as I'm willing to tell you the "secret" itself. Then you can put it to work and see what it will do for you.

I don't claim I can make you rich over night. Maybe I can—maybe I can't. Sometimes I have failures—everyone has. But I do claim that I can help go out of every 100 people if they will let me.

The point of it all, my friend, is that you are using only about one-tenth of that wonderful brain of yours. That's why you haven't won greater success. Throw the unused nine-tenths of your brain into action and you'll be amazed at the almost instantaneous results.

The Will is the motive power of the brain. Without a highly trained, inflexible will, a man has about as much chance of attaining success in life as a railway engine has of crossing the continent without steam. The biggest ideas have no value without will-power to "put them over." Yet the will, although heretofore entirely neglected, can be trained into wonderful power like the brain or memory and by the very same method—intelligent exercise and use.

If you held your arm in a sling for two years, it would become powerless to lift a feather, from lack of use. The same is true of the Will—it becomes useless from lack of practice. Because we don't use our Wills—because we continually bow to circumstance—we become unable to assert ourselves. What our wills need is practice.

Develop your will-power and money will flow in on you. Rich opportunities will open up for you. Driving energy you never dreamed you had will manifest itself. You will thrill with a new power—a power that nothing can resist. You'll have an influence over people that you never thought possible. Success—in whatever form you want it—will come as easy as failure came before. And those are only a few of the things the "secret" will do for you. The "secret" is fully explained in the wonderful book, "Power of Will."

How You Can Prove This at My Expense

I know you'll think that I've claimed a lot. Perhaps you think there must be a catch somewhere. But here is my offer. You can easily make thousands—you can't lose a penny.

Send no money—no, not a cent. Merely clip the coupon and mail it to me. By return mail you'll receive not a pamphlet, but the whole "secret" told in this wonderful book "POWER OF WILL."

Keep it five days. Look it over in your home. Apply some of its simple teachings. If it doesn't show you how you can increase your income many times over—just as it has for thousands of others—mail the book back. You will be out nothing.

But if you do feel that "POWER OF WILL" will do for you what it has done for over a quarter of a million others—if you feel as they do that it's the next greatest book to the Bible—send me only \$3.50 and you and I'll be square.

If you pass this offer by, I'll be out only the small profit on a three-and-a-half-dollar sale. But you—you may easily be out the difference between what you're making now and an income several times as great. So you see you've a lot—a whole lot—more to lose than I.

Mail the coupon or write a letter now—you may never read this offer again.

PELTON PUBLISHING COMPANY

54 A Wilcox Block, MERIDEN, CONN.
PELTON PUBLISHING COMPANY
54 A Wilcox Block, Meriden, Conn.

You may send me "Power of Will" at your risk. I agree to remit \$3.50 or return the book to you in five days.

Name.....
Address.....

A Few Examples

PERSONAL EXPERIENCES

Among over 350,000 users of "Power of Will" are such men as Judge Ben B. Lindsey; Supreme Court Justice Parker; Wu Ting Fang, Ex U. S. Chinese Ambassador; Assistant Postmaster General Britt; Gov. McKelvin of Nebraska; General Manager Christensen of Wells-Fargo Express Co.; E. St. Elmo Lewis, former Vice-Pres. Am. Metal Construction Co.; Gov. Ferris of Michigan, and many others of equal prominence.

\$300 PROFIT FROM ONE DAY'S READING

"The result from one day's study netted me \$300 cash. I think it a great book and would not be without it for ten times the cost."—A. W. Wilke, Faulkton, So. Dakota.

WORTH \$15,000 AND MORE

"The book has been worth more than \$15,000 to me."—Oscar B. Sheppard, 1417 E. Locust St., Decatur, Ill.

WOULD BE WORTH \$100,000

"If I had only had it when I was 20 years old, I would be worth \$100,000 to-day. It is worth a hundred times the price."—S. W. Taylor, The Santa Fe Ry., Milans, Tex.

SALARY JUMPED FROM \$150 TO \$800

"Since I read 'Power of Will' my salary has jumped from \$150 to \$800 a month."—J. F. Gibson, San Diego, Cal.

FROM \$100 TO \$3,000 A MONTH

"One of our boys who read 'Power of Will' before he came over here jumped from \$100 a month to \$3,000 the first month, and won a \$250 prize for the best salesmanship in the state."—Private Leslie A. Still, A. E. F., France.

How to Save \$10 on Your Next Suit

An Amazing Offer!

\$20 for a Real \$30 Tailored-to-Measure Suit is an example of the savings you make in buying your clothes on our economical plan. You don't have to pay a prohibitive price for your suit. No matter what style or what grade you select—\$20, \$25, \$35 and up—we can show you how to save at least \$10—never less, often more. It is true that the wool shortage, high labor costs, the heavy demand and limited supply have made clothing prices higher than ever before. But our direct plan brings your suit to you at practically wholesale cost. We have no agents, no salesmen, no dealers. The great overhead expense of middlemen is all cut out of the price you pay. Our enormous business, buying and selling for cash, makes every penny go for real quality. There is no waste.

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Little Crooked Master by Charles B. Stilson

Author of "A Man Named Jones," "Polaris of the Snows," "Mimos of Sardanes," etc.

CHAPTER I.

THE TURNING OF THE STONE.

"**I**T is a big stone, this, old chap. I'll bet me a ten-dollar bill there's not a man in this town can budge it where it lies—not even Joe Simms the blacksmith, husky as he is."

Jim Ellis, one of the perennial loafers' on the green before the Culver House, struck with his palm on the rough gray back of the object under discussion to lend emphasis to his challenge in behalf of its immobility.

"No sir; not a man in Kingston can stir it. It's a two-man job, that—and a four-man job to turn it over. Here's ten dollars that says so."

"T's a bet?"

"Huh!"

Ellis turned where he sat on the grass, the better to stare at the speaker who had taken the challenge. This last was a small, dark, sharp-countenanced fellow, who had lain on his stomach, chin on crossed arms, while the other half-dozen had gossiped. His half-closed eyes had been following dreamily the traceries of the Catskill summits against the sky, two score of miles away. Now he rolled over and sat up to

regard the group with an expression partly humorous, partly contemptuous, playing about his thin-lipped mouth.

"I'll take that bet," he said.

"Layin' it on yourself?" parleyed Ellie with an impatient chuckle. A laugh from the others followed. The man, Malvin Britten, smoothed a crackling new bill across his knee. He was a scant five-feet-zero, and his small limbs and flat torso denoted nothing herculean.

"I'll take the bet," he continued. He laid the money carefully on the top of the boulder and weighted it with a pebble.

"You said any man in town. Does it go?"

"Sure does," replied Ellis, producing a five, a two and three ones to lay with Britten's stake. "Who's your grizzly bear?"

But his voice was not so confident as it had been. This Britten—the man from "over there," somewhere across the slowly-flowing Hudson—in his few weeks stay at the Culver House had made for himself a formidable name as a taker of chances. He seldom backed a losing proposition, be the argument cards, dice, or a mere difference of opinion.

Ellis was momentarily uneasy. Ten-spots were not plentiful with him. To his cost,

he had proven that Britten was an ill man to gamble against. Who was he, anyway, this small, quiet-spoken stranger? What was his business, beside the laying and winning of saloon wagers? Why was he in Kingston? These questions, asked often, passed again through Ellis's mind as he studied his antagonist with narrowed eyes.

Britten's face told nothing. It was the mask of the born gambler—immobile, inscrutable, withholding all hint of what might be passing in the alert brain behind it; hiding even the age of its wearer.

Britten might have been twenty-eight; he might have been forty, or anywhere between. The smooth cheeks and unlined forehead did not betray him. Had the thin lips spoken truly, they would have told that he was forty-three. A bad man to lay a wager against. Young Jim hesitated, almost of a mind to pick up his money.

A glance at the stone was reassuring. Pshaw! it was a candy bet. Ellis guessed that not even Sandow could have stirred the boulder unaided.

Gray, mossy, pitted and irregular in shape—a fragment of limestone as old as its cousin hills up yonder—it was half as long as a man, a ponderous, inert mass, sunken deeply in the earth, with the grass springing up around it. Its weight was to be counted in hundreds—perhaps half a ton. This Britten was crazy! No one man could stir the stone.

"Who's your strong man?" Ellis asked again, his confidence renewed.

"Comin' along there with the kids," Britten replied; "and his arms full of daisies. He's the lad."

"Bull Michael!"

Ellis's exclamation was mixed with jeering and relief. His bet was safe. For once Britten would be a loser.

"Bull Michael!" chorused the other idlers, who had been lazily interested in the wager, after the manner of their kind, and who now saw prospects of entertainment fading.

"Why, that boob, that nutty idiot!" said one; he hasn't got the brains to lift his spoon straight to his face, let alone move a rock like that! He's only a kid, too—a poor, batty idiot. Any ten-year-old

little Bill of the lot of 'em can hammer him and get away with it."

"Yes; but it doesn't take brains to move a stone," interposed Britten. "It takes arms and legs and a back—and most of all, not knowin' that you can't. My ten is on the boob. But I must go talk to him first. Hands off, you, till I've made my powwow."

Britten arose and went to meet the group of children straggling down the street from school.

Among the little ones, taller from his breast up than the tallest of them, shambled Bull Michael, a great, gangling oaf of a lad, loosely framed and slouching. Big as he was—and he could look down on the man who went to meet him—the boy was clothed in a blouse and knickers of coarse blue stuff, such as workmen's overalls are made of. His legs and feet were bare and brown and scarred with scratches and stone-bruises. A confused mass of hair, soft and dull-black, was flung back from his forehead. At his crown rode an absurd cap, a black velvet tam-o'-shanter, rescued perhaps, from an ash-barrel, the discarded last year's fancy of some jaunty miss, and considered fit enough for him who was known as the town idiot.

The blue blouse was far too short of sleeve for its wearer, and there was a wide gap between its gathers and the waistband of the meager trousers below. Bull Michael was guiltless of undershirt. In the interval showed his naked skin, brown and healthy, and withall of a cleanliness that led one to guess that he and the creek that flowed back of Higginsville were old friends and recent comrades.

One of the draw-strings of the frayed blouse swung dangling. The other was drawn taut, its end fast-clutched in the hand of a little, brown-haired miss whose years were half past five. She trudged proudly at the side of her strange henchman, yanking now and then at his tether to remind him of his servitude.

"Pretty flowers. They're all mine—all for me—ain't they, Michael?"

The lad's arms were filled with nodding, long-stemmed daisies, white and yellow.

"Yes, Lizzie Smith; all for you."

Then Britten stepped into the path and stopped him.

The little man's hard black eyes, full of a rat's sharply-learned wisdom, looked into those of the lad, big blue eyes, dark blue, deep and vacant of all wisdom—for the face of Bull Michael, despite his eighteen years, was the face of an undeveloped child.

Britten's features softened into a peculiarly winning smile, of which one would not have thought them capable.

"Give Lizzie her posies, Michael, to take to her mother, and listen to me," he said. "I have a story to tell you, a true story—about the fairies."

"Fairies?" Michael's empty eyes lighted under their heavy brows. An expression of pathetic eagerness overspread his vacant face.

"Oh, the fairies! Yes; tell me; I'll listen. Here, Lizzie Smith—all for you—to take to your mother." He shifted the burden of flowers to the upstretched arms of the little maid, and stood looking into Britten's face with strained attentiveness.

"Yes; the fairies?" he repeated eagerly.

"You see that stone over there?" Britten pointed to the boulder.

Michael nodded.

"Well, it's kinda like this about the fairies," the man went on. "The king of 'em all—a queer little old boy with long white whiskers and a crown of eighteen-karat gold, all set with shiners—diamonds and pearls—a fine piece of work, Michael—this old chap has been looking around for a place to build him a summer palace, something sort of extra fine, so to say, where he and the queen and the rest of the fairies can hold their little masquerade balls by moonlight. Think of that, Michael! All of 'em dancing by the light of the moon, with no one there to see 'em; and the crickets playing the violins for 'em to dance by, and the creek-frogs comin' in strong on the chorus."

Under the spell of that imagery Michael's face became wrapt.

"Yes, the old fairy king has been looking for the right spot for that summer garden, and where do you think was the only place that would suit his nibs? You'd never guess it; but he'll be satisfied only with the

one particular little piece of ground that a fellow'd find if he was to turn that old stone there over on its back. You see, that's the one spot hereabouts that the fairies are right sure no man has ever set a foot on. That's because the stone has always been there.

"These fairies are very particular little gazabos, especially when it comes to picking a place to build a summer palace on. They wouldn't want to put it where any human person ever had walked or sat."

"Hey!" called Ellis from the Culver House yard. "You goin' to be all day? You goin' to win that bet, or shall I pick up? Us fellows are getting some dry."

"Shut that trap!" snapped back Britten, waving an impatient hand and never losing the mastery of Michael's eyes. "I'm just telling Michael a secret. We'll be there in a minute.

"Now, Michael," he resumed to the boy, "here's just what's the matter: The fairy king—his name's old Paramaraboo—he sent word to me last night, for I'm an old friend of his, that he was in trouble and needed help. For the fairies can't move that stone to get at their building site that old Paramaraboo has set his heart on. Strong as they are—and you know how strong the fairies are, Michael—that old stone stumps the whole lot of them. Old King Paramaraboo's messenger—he's a little green chap with wide ears and a long, thin nose like a darning-needle—came to tell me that they are sure you can help 'em out.

"They wanted me to tell you all about it and ask you to do your best. The stone's an enchanted stone, Michael. The only chap that can ever move it has got to be an enchanted prince. And you—do you see, Michael?"

"I? Me!" Michael's lower jaw sagged, and his eyes rolled in their sockets with the awesome delight of that idea.

"You got me right, Michael!" cried Britten. "Right the first time!" He clapped the boy on the shoulder. "You're the fellow old Paramaraboo's been looking for. I didn't believe it at first; but I see it now. You're an enchanted prince fellow, Michael, and you will move the stone for the fairies, won't you, Michael?"

Michael nodded his head slowly. The

wonder of this thing had quite overpowered speech for the moment. His eyes swam mistily: Prince Michael!

"You'll do your best for the fairies, now, won't you, Michael?" Britten asked anxiously.

"Yes; oh yes! I will move the stone," said Michael.

"Good boy! I thought you'd want to help the fairies," said Britten. "It may not be easy; but remember that you're the enchanted prince they've been looking for, and how fine that summer dance palace is going to look with 'em all dancing in it by the light of the moon—only we won't see it. No one can ever see these fairy castles; but they're there just the same. Come on."

They entered the Culver House yard, the little man and the big child, and went to the sunken stone.

"Bull Michael, hell!" sneered Ellis. "You can't move this stone in a thousand years, no matter what line of bull-con this fellow Britten's been feeding to you—and I'll say that he shoves a lot of it. Well, fellows, here's where we all get a drink out of this bird's ten-dollar william."

But Bull paid not the slightest attention to the scoffing of Ellis. It is to be doubted that he so much as heard it. He was under the spell of the Little Folk, strongly woven by his new preceptor. He bent and laid a hand on the old gray stone.

Someone removed the bills from the boulder.

"Ready now, Michael—and don't forget," cautioned Britten as Bull Michael bent his broad back and groped for handholds on the lower sides of the rock where the grass grew thick.

A gang of swarthy-skinned laborers from the cement quarries came down the street just then. They saw the group in the yard of the Culver House, and they stopped to stare curiously. Their foreman stood at the gate and called:

"Hey, boss! You wanta that rock moved? We do him fora you. How mucha?" He gave an order in his own tongue, telling of the number of men he thought necessary for the task. Five of his laborers started to troop through the gateway.

"Go back, you fellows," commanded Britten. "This boy will do it all by his lonely. He hasn't started to pull yet."

The foreman smiled with a flash of white teeth and shook his head.

"No, *signore*," he said with conviction. "No boy mova that rock veree queeck. No."

"You got the right dope," rejoined Ellis triumphantly. "He can tug till he turns from red to blue, and he won't stir that tombstone."

Michael was red indeed. His legs set wide apart, his back bowed, both hands clutched under the sides of the stone, where he had found firm holds at last, he tugged desperately. But the effort was too much for his loosely-joined frame. His shoulders heaved. The sinews of his back cracked. So did the seams of his trousers. Tears of vexation started to his eyes. The ground seemed to sway around him. A myriad silver flecks swam in the air about his head. The stone did not stir. One of his hands slipped from its hold, and the jagged surfaces of the limestone tore the flesh of his palm so that the blood started. He stood up, panting and dizzy.

"Told you so," chirruped Ellis. "That boob'll never move it. Betcha another ten that two of the ginnies out there can't do it. Pick any two you like." Ellis had seen the foreman send five men to the job.

"You don't know Michael, you fellows," said Britten with a confident laugh, although his face was worried. "You don't know him at all. Sure he'll move it a-whoopin' next time he takes hold. He was only trying her out before. That's right, Michael; take a good hold this time!" For Bull Michael had bent to his task again.

Once more the lad set his hands to their holds. Once more his back strained to the effort and his breath came in gasps.

Britten bent over and whispered in his ear.

"Good boy, Prince Michael! You've got her this time. Pull! Pull hard!—for the fairies—*pull!*"

And Michael, hearing that magic title, did pull. No longer vacant of face and loose-knit of frame seemed the lad. His expression became earnest, and even intel-

ligent, and his muscles gathered into a unified and sustained effort. His face, neck and arms were flooded with perspiration. Something roared in his ears, and his back began to yield. Was his hold slipping once more?

"By God!" almost shrieked Ellis, "he's done it—that boob!"

Michael stood up. His bleeding hands groped in front of him. For an instant all the summer sunshine turned to blackness. What had happened to him?

"Prince Michael!" a voice whispered in his ear as the light began to filter back into his eyes, "you have done it. To-night the fairies will dance to the light of the moon and thank you."

With restored vision, Michael looked down at his work. He stood at the edge of a yawning, unlovely hole; for the limestone had been bedded deeper than even Britten had guessed. The boulder lay on its side, uprooted, the damp, dark mould clinging to its lower surface. There was a smell of fresh-stirred earth in the air.

"My twenty," said Britten quietly, collecting his bet; and to himself:

"God! to have such a body—with the brain to make it work." He looked contemptuously at his own slender wrists and puny fingers.

"Good boy, Michael! Come on, boys, let's get a drink."

Through the warm sunshine of the summer afternoon, Bull Michael went down the street in the direction of the Poor House, where was his home. Despite the warmth, he felt chilled, and at times the trees he passed seemed to him to be trying to dance an ungainly waltz. His hands were bleeding, and his back hurt cruelly. But Prince Michael the Enchanted had done a good turn to King Paramaraboo, and was content. Behind him the swarthy workmen stared after him and jabbered excitedly in their mother tongue.

At the door of the Culver House bar-room Britten paused for a moment to watch the plodding lad.

Whatever it was that the little man had wished to learn of Michael—and he had been observing the boy for some time—he had made his test, and he too was content.

Again he nodded sagely, then went in to get his drink.

CHAPTER II.

THE BROKEN BARS.

AT the rear of the Culver House was a raised porch which served the double purpose of a daytime lounging place and an evening dance pavilion. Late in the forenoon of the day following the turning of the stone, a dozen and a half of the hotel habitués were gathered on the porch, most of them sitting around "double-decker" tables.

Games of pinocle were in progress at two of the tables. At a third the dice clicked dryly, where old Colonel Baxter, with a diminishing roll of big bills, but a confidence as ineradicable as the tobacco stains on his white moustache, was backing against all comers his unerring (in)ability to throw full-houses.

Invariably, when the colonel changed one of his yellow-backs to pay a loss, his opponents gave him in exchance all of the small bills, preferably one-spots, that they could muster. These he crumpled and stuffed carelessly into the side pocket of his black broadcloth. If a bystander asked him how his game was prospering, the colonel would thrust a hand into that pocket. Feeling a comfortable accretion of currency, he would smile expansively and answer, "Big winner, b'gosh!" Later on it was always a mystery to the colonel where his "big winnings" had vanished.

It is sad to relate; but poor, genial old Colonel Baxter was about the only visible means of support of a number of the Culver House loafers. Colonel didn't mind. Periodically, when the stocks which he owned returned their dividend checks, he had plenty of the stuff, and he liked to spend it in his own peculiar way. Once in a while a streak of full-houses did get into the colonel's dice, and he chuckled them like a fiend. Then his hangers-on melted away, to come back when his luck had changed; or, if they did stay, were sure to rue it in a short period of cheerless and beerless existence.

This day the colonel had a new joke.

"Noticed my front yard?" he asked.

"Why, yes, colonel," one of his cronies replied. "Had it all fixed up, haven't you?"

"Wife did that. Had a landscape gardener lay it out. Noticed that front walk, though, that weaves in and out and around the flower beds? Wife hadn't made up her mind how she wanted that walk. Then I went home late one night. It had been raining, and the ground was soft. Next day wife told the landscape gardener to follow my tracks. That's how we got the serpentine. Suits both of us, b'gosh!"

At a fourth table Britten sat behind an imposing rampart of poker chips. Across from him Ellis was losing steadily and noisily, as was his wont.

Sudden clamor, proceeding from the front of the hotel drew the attention of the gamblers.

"Fight! Fight! someone yelled. Cards fell and the bones clicked into silence.

"It's that fool Bull Michael again," drawled Billy Sellers, the bartender, appearing at the back door of the barroom, wiping his hands on his apron. "Britten, your pal is in a bad way," he continued with a grin. "Simms, the blacksmith, is giving him a tidy beating up. Watcha know about the boob's nerve—to tackle Joe!"

Chairs scraped on the board floor as the counter-attraction emptied the gaming tables. Britten hurried through the barroom ahead of the others. Jim Ellis was the last man on the porch, and he delayed only long enough to upset the poker table. Scattered chips were still rolling across the floor when he hastened away.

Britten emerged from the front of the hotel and ran across the grass to the corner of the yard where a crowd was forming.

Beside the overturned stone stood Bull Michael. His face was bleeding and tear-stained, and he was breathing in heavy sobs. His blouse had been torn by no friendly hand, leaving a shoulder bare. One eye was swollen, and the cheek below was discolored. In front of him, Simms the smith, a stocky, thick-necked fellow of forbidding and truculent aspect, regarded the work of his fists with surly satisfaction.

As Britten pushed to the center of the crowd, the blacksmith struck the boy again, a brutal blow in the face. Britten saw with inner exultation that Michael, though he made no move to fend himself, did not flinch from the fist-stroke.

"What's the trouble here?" asked the little man, laying a hand on Michael's bare shoulder and looking Simms over with unveiled disapproval.

"Why, if it's anything to you, this boob got fresh with me, and I'm givin' him a lesson," replied Simms. "And I ain't done yet," he continued threateningly, angered afresh by the tacit sympathy in that hand on Michael's shoulder.

"But what did the boy do to you?" persisted Britten.

"Squared off at me," answered the smith with a contemptuous laugh. "Him! Huh! Woulda hit me too, if he'd known how to land. Someone's filled him full of gas. Well, I'll let some of it out. Now beat it!" he commanded Michael, and raised his fist.

But Michael did not move. The lad's face bore an expression of ox-like stubbornness, and in his eyes was the same intent look that had flashed there momentarily on the previous day when he had set his strength to the stone.

"Just a minute, Simms," interposed Britten. "You've punished the boy good and plenty." He spoke quietly, his eyes meeting those of the smith with a level, passionless regard. Simms rumbled in his throat, but said nothing audible.

"What is it, Michael?" asked Britten. "What happened?"

The boy recognized the voice in his ear; but he did not turn. He pointed a finger at Simms.

"He was going to step on the palace and break it," he accused. Only Britten understood the allusion. The others laughed.

"You can't see the palace; but it is there—you said so," Michael continued.

"Michael has guarded it since the sun came up. No one must step on it and break it. Michael won't let them. It is wrong.

"No! Damn you!"

Shaking off the friendly hand, Michael struck out wildly at Simms, who, with an

ugly laugh, had taken a step toward the hole in the earth. The blacksmith dodged the poorly-aimed fist and crashed a blow to the boy's unprotected cheek.

"That's right; smash him, Joe!" called Ellis from the crowd. "Swat him one more for me—ten dollars' worth!"

Simms' fist was raised.

"Prince Michael!"

In the ear of poor, witless Michael a voice whispered the magic words.

"Don't hit him, Michael. *Lift* him—as you lifted the stone, Michael—and throw him!"

Bull Michael heard, comprehended, and floundered forward. The threatened blow fell cruelly, and another; but he did not stop. His big, brown hands groped for his enemy, and found him. One of them closed on Simms' left arm between elbow and shoulder; the other caught him by the belt.

Bruiser and wrestler, the smith was nothing loath to come to grips. Once the two of them were on the ground, he knew a hundred artful holds to turn the trick and put the boy at his mercy.

But that was not to be the way of it.

"Good boy! Now *lift* him, Michael!"

In his excitement, Britten's voice rose clearly.

Michael responded. The hold Simms essayed to take was torn away. With a heave of his back and a swing of his shoulders, Bull Michael lifted. He raised the smith from the ground, swung him shoulder high, and dashed him down. In the fall Simms' shoulder struck against a corner of the old gray limestone. For a moment he lay sick and still.

Presently he raised himself on his elbow.

"Blast you!" he growled, and shook his head at Britten; for he could not raise his fist. "I'll fix you for that!" He picked himself up and walked away, nursing his benumbed arm.

"He! he! he!" chuckled Colonel Baxter, looking after the retreating form of the smith with an entire lack of sympathy. "Few more falls like that might do Joe a pile of good. He's kinda got to runnin' this town lately—and made a gosh-whumpin' poor job of it."

Patrolman Dogey Jackson came across

the street from Kraft's place, wiping surreptitiously at his damp moustache, which he had been moistening at Kraft's back door. Asking a few questions as he came, Dogey approached Michael, fingering his club apprehensively.

"Never knew him to do like this before," said Dogey, to no one in particular. "Come on, Mike; you and me has got to take a little walk together."

"What are you goin' to do with him?" Britten asked.

"Sh-h!" Dogey edged closer and laid a finger alongside his lean nose. "Got to take him to the lockup," he whispered. "I hope they won't keep him there long. Never knew him to do like this before, an' I've known him sence he was a little feller—always a-playin' with the kids and such like. But Joe might complain of me if I didn't take him in. Come along with me, Mike, that's a good kid."

Bull Michael, hesitating beside the boulder, might have shown signs of further rebellion; but Britten fathomed the cause of his reluctance.

"Sall right, Michael," he said in the lad's ear. "Go along with Dogey and do what he says. I'll watch out that no one disturbs the fairy palace. And to-night, Michael—to-night I'll come to see you. Don't forget. I'll come by the light of the moon, when the fairies are dancing."

Michael's damaged face smiled bravely, and he nodded his comprehension. Then he suffered old Dogey to lead him away.

That afternoon Britten strolled down Wall Street to the clothing emporium of Tibbills & Son. He made a number of purchases there that caused Johnny Middaugh to wonder as he did them up, comparing the size of the purchaser with the sizes of the articles he had selected. Charley Wood's shoe store was next door. Britten stopped there too. On his way back to the Culver House he dropped in at Reynolds' hardware store.

Stinging with the wrath and pain of his defeat, Simms lost little time in making his way to the office of old Judge Van Etten, where he registered a formal complaint and an application to have Bull Michael "put away."

"He's turned violent, Judge," said the smith. "After what he's done to me, no knowin' what he might do next. He ain't safe to be at liberty. Think of the children, Judge. 'Sylum's the place for him."

The old lawyer looked over his gold-bowed specs and nodded slowly. Like Dogey, he said:

"Strange, the boy has always seemed to be gentle. I never knew him to do anything like this before."

He reached into a pigeonhole of his desk for a sheet of foolscap.

"I suppose that I'll have to make out commitment papers. Let's see. Dearie me, how time does slip away! Do you remember when the lad first came here? Ten long years ago, it was. Poor little chap. He was sitting in the waiting-room down at the West Shore Station one morning, waiting patiently for someone to come back and get him—someone that never came. Stage people I guess his folks must have been—just left him there like that and went on. Dogey Jackson found him there in the morning—a poor, witless little fellow, all eyes.

"What a time Dogey had getting him away from that station! And how, for a long time he used to wander back there. He'd always find that same seat and sit down to wait. Used to say the 'Gold Lady' left him there, and that she would come back to get him. They had to almost club him away from the station. His 'Gold Lady' never came for him. He never found out who she was. Poor Michael!"

Kindly old Judge Van Etten sighed. His pen began to scratch across the foolscap.

Britten cut short his gaming at the Culver House and went early to his room that night. No one saw him leave it. But when the moon was riding high, Bull Michael was awakened from his hard cot in the Ulster County Jail by something that came gently tapping at the barred window. The friend of the fairies had kept his promise.

That was in the days before Mynie Teller built the new gray-stone jail in Wall Street, else Britten's task might have presented greater difficulties.

Some hours later when Sheriff Dick Smith made his rounds, Bull Michael's cot was empty. Three of the bars at the window

of the lad's cell had been neatly sawed part way through, and then had been broken and bent outward from their sockets as though a powerful jimmy had wrenched them. That last was Bull Michael's work.

Far down the Hudson, the Mary Powell of the Romer & Tremper line carried two strange passengers on their way to the big city, a small, sharp-faced man, who spoke seldom, and a hulking overgrown lad in ill-fitting garments, who said nothing at all.

CHAPTER III.

DADDY GAIL'S JAIL.

THEY stood, Britten and Bull Michael, on the New York boat-dock. A few feet beyond them the pulsing life of the city shrilled and shrieked, fretted and hurried. The lad looked back. Up the pathway of the river yonder, whence the Mary Powell had brought him, lay one phase of his life, his past, though he could not comprehend it. Almost at his elbow his future crowded and shouted to him out of the many-tongued clamor of the streets. Vague unquiet stirred in the dim twilights of his consciousness. He was like a bewildered child. He pressed closer to Britten's side.

"We are far away," he said.

"What?" Britten asked; and then, catching the look in the boy's eyes, "Don't you care, Michael. We ain't goin' back. You're just goin' to begin to live." They started toward the street.

Passers-by stared curiously at the little man and his shaggy-haired companion. Britten felt their regard with uneasiness. Some distance away a policeman took note of the two and began to thread his way leisurely toward them through the traffic. Britten's sharp eyes saw that too. He frowned. Questions just now would be embarrassing. A horse-cab stood by the curb, waiting for fares.

"Come on, Michael!"

They jumped in and were whirled away.

In lower Third Avenue they left the cab and once more proceeded on foot. There, where in the course of one block one might meet the representatives of twenty nation-

alities, clad in all the degrees of garb, from tatters to full dress, no one paid any attention to the keen-faced little man and his shambling comrade.

They ate in a Hungarian bakery-restaurant not far from Fifteenth Street. Someone, at some time, had been at pains to teach Michael how to eat properly, and he had not forgotten. Britten took notice at table that the lad handled knife, fork and spoon as daintily as a woman.

When they left the eating-house, night was settling. Street lights had flickered up. L-trains screeched through the upper shadows. Garish flares from the shop-windows illuminated the sidewalks. Urchins, dirty-faced and bare of leg, played along the gutters. Through the noisy crowds on the walks an occasional Chinese shuffled by on furtive feet.

Michael smiled at the shouts of the children. Though many of them spoke in a foreign tongue, he understood and felt akin to them. Of the Chinese he was obviously apprehensive, and he shrank against Britten when they passed.

"They won't hurt you," Britten reassured. An ancient memory wrinkled his forehead, and he continued to himself, "Not if you don't mix up in their affairs."

"Wicked fairies," was Michael's comment. He always remained of that opinion. It was incomprehensible to Michael that any creature could wear its eyes on the bias and its shirt outside, and be otherwise than a *mauvais sujet*.

Turning into East Nineteenth Street and proceeding toward Second Avenue, the travelers passed along the fronts of continuous rows of four-story buildings of brown stone. Every twenty-five feet a staircase of cast-iron led from the sidewalk to a closed front door. Only the number on the door made any one of those silent fronts different from its neighbors.

Half-way between the two avenues and on the north side of the street Britten ascended one of the flights of steps and thrust a key in the lock. The door opened into a gloomy hall, where a crackling gas jet projecting from the wall made more noise than it did light, and far more smell than either. With the exception of a frayed

rug near the threshold, the floor was bare. The only furnishing was a tottering hat-rack leaning against the wall. To the left was a steep stair with battered newel-post and rickety balustrade. At the rear of the hall a door stood half open. Beyond it was light and the sound of voices.

Britten led Michael up the stairs to the first floor, turned two or three cross-corridors in the dusk with the assurance of one who knew his way, and unlocked the door of a room at the back of the building.

"Come in, Michael," he said as he applied a match to a gas jet. "Come on in; we are at home—for a while."

Two chairs, a dresser, a writing table and an iron bed furnished the room, which was some fourteen feet square. Three or four pictures hung on the wall. In a corner a door opened into a wardrobe closet, which contained also a bowl with hot and cold water taps.

Britten set his suit-case in the closet. He opened the top drawer of the dresser, felt in a corner near a pile of handkerchiefs, and produced a twenty-dollar bill. At sight of that, he chuckled somewhat grimly.

"Still got the fear of God in their souls—so far as I'm concerned," he muttered, stuffing the bill into his pocket. "Not many hotels in this burg where a man could leave a twenty like that and find it waiting for him."

"You stay here till I come back," he said to Michael. "I want to find out some things."

Michael slouched obediently into one of the chairs and looked about him apathetically. Britten went out, turning the key after him. In the lower hall he pulled open the door to the back room. A high folding screen confronted him.

"Hey, Daddy! Daddy Gail!" he called softly.

"Come in, Mal," a voice replied in a sing-song falsetto. "Come right in, son, you son-of-a-gun! Guess that rhymes, doesn't it?" The voice broke into shrill laughter.

Britten moved the screen.

"Come on right in; there's nobody here but Clink and me—and Bill. Eh, Bill?"

A hoarse screech followed the words, and

a guttural voice intoned, "Bill! Bill! Shut-tup! Shut-tup! Shut-tup, Bill!"

It was a large room, wide and high-ceilinged. It served its tenant at once as living-room, kitchen, bedroom and studio. There were in it a bed, chairs, table, a small gas-range, a kitchen cabinet, and a dresser. In one corner stood a small easel, with a camp-stool and a metal case of water-colors. A half-finished picture was on the easel. It depicted a pretty little corner of Central Park near the Mall, and the execution was not without merit.

Walls and ceiling had been done originally in cream-colored paper; but that was long ago, and now the paper was nearly hidden by close-written couplets of doggerel verse, inscribed in chalks of many colors and in a hand as neat and legible as copper-plate. These verses began at the wainscoting on all four walls and extended with hardly a break clear up to the mouldings. They even encroached on the ceiling. There were literally thousands of them.

Here and there the instinct of the poet had yielded to that of the artist, evidenced in small paintings, landscapes and street scenes, some of them of passing artistry.

In the center of the ceiling was pictured in vivid orange a crescent moon, surrounded by a number of the constellations in gold-paint, with the legend in green chalk:

Daddy Gail's limit is this sky;
Bet 'em up, boys; it's not very high!

With Mr. Clink Wilson to keep him company, the artist-poet sat at table, playing blind showdown.

Gail was a wisp of a man, hardly taller than Britten, with a thick brush of snow-white hair, sunken, but astonishingly bright gray eyes, a big hooked nose, and an immense moustache that entirely hid his mouth and covered most of his sharp chin. He was in his shirt-sleeves—a shirt as white as alabaster, and of the finest linen. His vest and trousers were of quiet brown goods, elegantly cut and carefully kept. A modest emerald sparkled on his necktie, and its counterpart adorned one of his slender fingers. A flat-topped brown derby was pushed back from his forehead. Through his moustache thrust out an amber cigar-

holder, with the smoldering remnant of a black cigar.

From the dustless crown of his hat to the soles of his polished boots, he was as clean and trim as a tailor's dummy. The skin of his face and hands was as pink and fresh as that of an infant. And fragile—he looked as though a heady gust of wind might blow him away. Alas for appearances! there wasn't a tougher, more wiry old scoundrel in all New York than Daddy Gail, proprietor and presiding genius of what it pleased him to call "Gail's Jail."

Across the table sat his antithesis, a burly person of some five and thirty years, in a ragged sweater and stained corduroys. His hair vied in color with Daddy's moon above him. His complexion was a mixture of prison pallor and rum-blossom. In the not far-distant past his nose had been flattened artfully by the impact of four knuckles not his own, and only the tip of it had recovered.

Bill, a green parrot with a prodigious beak, sat on a standard perch back of Daddy's chair. As Britten entered the room, the bird fixed on him an eye that blazed like molten gold, and gave utterance to profane thoughts in gibberish, punctuated with vicious rattlings of its leg-chain.

Daddy turned over his last card, exposing kings-up. He chuckled ecstatically.

"I've got—that pot—*not!*" the last word added as Mr. Wilson turned up his third six-spot. The old man tipped back his chair and tilted his hat.

"Well Mal—old pal! Glad to see you back. And so's Bill. Hear him, now. He says, 'Hello Mr. Britten; come here and get bitten.' Aw, Bill! Shame!" For Bill had summed up his ill-feeling toward the newcomer in the terse and forceful expletive, "*Hell!*"

"I heard you come in, Mal," Daddy resumed. "I knew it was you as soon as you set foot on the stairs. You can't fool Daddy on footsteps. You brought a friend with you—a big chap, judging by the way he puts down his feet."

Britten nodded. "I brought a pupil," he said. He leaned on the back of a chair, "Hello, Clink."

Mr. Wilson managed a grin and a nod.

"What's the good word?" asked Daddy.

"Oh, so-so."

"Sit in, Mal, and take a hand. Playing with Clink here, isn't the most interesting occupation in the world. Clink not being in what you might call fortuitous circumstances just now, I have to stake him myself. I'd like to play against somebody else's money for a change. Sit in, Mal, Daddy Gail—needs the kale." He looked up at Britten hopefully.

Mal shook his head. "Too tired to-night," he answered, "and got something else on my mind. Things ain't changed much around here, have they?"

"No." Gail cocked his head on one side and regarded Britten with twinkling eyes.

"Say Mal, don't you go to flatter yourself that that's the same twenty-paper that you left upstairs; for it ain't," he remarked irrelevantly. "I've borrowed that twenty, as you might say, precisely four times since you went away. But I put—"

A crash on the floor above interrupted his words. It was followed by the shriek of Sundered timber. Heavy footsteps in desperate haste sounded in the upper hall. then came the prolonged rumble and bump of one who poured himself down the front stairs without using his feet.

"Sacred Sarah!" ejaculated Daddy. The three men ran into the hall.

"Michael! What ails you? What's the matter, boy?" Britten cried.

Under the gas jet was crouched Bull Michael. His back was against the front door, his hands spread out at each side of him, as though he sought to sink the nails on his crooking fingers into the wood of the panels. His lower jaw projected, his eyes rolled, and his hair literally bristled.

"What's the matter?" repeated Britten. He laid a hand on the lad's shoulder. "Come."

But Michael was in the grip of a terror that was all too powerful to be conveyed by his limited means of expression. He stared up the stairway. He raised a hand and pointed. The hand quivered. At length he found words.

"A bad fairy!—up there!" he gasped. "Hatchet—all blood!" The trembling fit left him. He looked stupidly at the others.

"Umph!" grunted Gail. "He must have found the Chink under the bed." He eyed the boy sharply. "He's gone clean daffy about it." Daddy looked at Mr. Wilson, who returned the scrutiny with interest. Britten whirled around and regarded both of them.

"What's the idea?" he asked.

Daddy nodded his white head wisely. "H-m-m, ah-hum-m," he droned. "Yes, Clink—he killed a chink. Guess that rhymes, doesn't it? We'd better go up." He led the way up the stairs. The others followed, Bull Michael clinging to Britten's coat-tail.

All was dark and still on the first floor. From the head of the next flight of stairs came a murmur of voices. A feminine voice shrilled down, "Fer the luvva Gawd, Daddy, what's comin' off?"

"It's all right, Maggie. Go to bed up there. New boarder had a bit—of a fit—and now he's quit," replied Daddy gayly. "Luckily most of them are out at this time o' night," he muttered.

The lower panel and cross-cleats had been knocked out of the door to Britten's room as though a battering ram had struck them. Daddy surveyed the ruins and whistled. He looked at Michael. "Strong lad—that tad," he remarked. He unlocked the wrecked frame with his master-key, and the four entered the room. Gail took a blanket from the bed and hung it across the hole in the door.

"Now, let's have him out," he said to Clink; "and you," turning to Michael, "you keep your holler—in your collar."

Mr. Wilson knelt on the floor, not without grunting, and peered under the bed. He thrust in an arm and pulled. Something heavy stirred across the matting. Mr. Wilson tugging steadily. A pale, clenched hand and rigid arm appeared from under the side of the bed. Michael recoiled against the door, stirring in helpless fascination. Britten frowned down at the gruesome apparition, which, under Clink's urging, crept inch by inch into the light. Daddy hummed gently to himself.

Clink stood up and wiped his hand on the leg of his corduroys. "That's him," he said.

The body was that of a squat, heavily built Chinese. One fat hand, its fingers yellowed with cigarette smoke, was clutched at the bosom of his loose velveteen blouse. The other arm extended stiffly at right angles to the body. A soft black hat had been jammed down over the head so that it hid most of the face. Across the stomach lay a hatchet, the brightness of its keen blade dulled by dried blood.

Britten bent and twitched away the hat. A gaping hatchet-cleft above the left temple explained the manner of the man's death. Despite the dark disfigurement of coagulated blood which adhered to the wide face, Britten recognized it.

"By God! it's Charley Ong!" he said. He sat down on the edge of the bed and looked at Gail. "When did this happen?" he asked.

"Night before last." Daddy stooped and peered at the terrible head. "Gad; the rats have been at it," he said disgustedly. "The lad must have heard them, and that's what made him look. Clink should have put it in the river last night; but he didn't get an opportunity. Do it to-night, Clink—throw the Chink—in the drink. Now that's a good rhyme, ain't it? Mal, I'll put you and your friend in another room for the night. I must get that door fixed, too."

"How did he come here?" inquired Britten, pointing at the body, which Mr. Wilson was proceeding to shove under the bed again.

"He's haunted the place ever since you went away," Daddy replied. "He meant to get even with you, I suppose, for working his place the way you did, and breaking his bank. I told him you were away; but he didn't believe it. Three times I caught him sneaking around in the place, and I warned him; and three warnings are all that any man has a right to expect."

"Night before last he came again—over the roofs from Third Avenue. But Clink here has been sleeping on the roof lately; and Clink, when he hasn't had too much red-eye, is a tolerable light sleeper. He heard this Chink-chap, and got up and followed him through the scuttle. He trailed him to the door of your room, and then he killed him, nice and quiet, using the Chink's

own hatchet. We put him in here; for there didn't seem to be any better place. That's all. Come, get your duds, you two, and I'll put you away for the night. Clink will do the rest."

In the middle of the night Britten awoke and felt the bed shaking. Michael was weeping.

"Poor devil," thought Mal; "this isn't a very good start for him—scaring him half to death the first night out."

But in thinking that Michael wept for fear, Mal deceived himself. The little man had still to learn that one of the many strange phases of Michael's character was, that he rarely was swayed by any terror for more than a very short time; and he never feared the same thing twice. Michael had met his first dead man. It had frightened him; doubly so because it happened to be a dead Chinese. Henceforth Michael would always view Chinese with suspicion; and he never would cultivate any great liking for dead men; but of neither would he ever again be afraid.

No; Michael was not weeping for fear. He had awakened to the terrible thought that he had not seen his playmates for a whole day—probably never would see them again. It was good-by Louis, and good-by John, and—good-by, Lizzie Smith.

That was why Michael wept.

CHAPTER IV.

SCHOOL DAYS.

EARLY one bright July morning Mr. Clink Wilson, asleep and snoring sonorously on a mattress in his tent on the roof of Gail's Jail felt an impulse move him to be up and doing. Such impulses were rare with Mr. Wilson, and by no means to be heeded. He wriggled sluggishly, murmured, "What t'ell?" and rolled over on the other ear. The impulse stirred again, this time in the vicinity of his floating ribs. Exasperated, Clink laid violent hands on it.

"Hey! leggo my foot, you loon!" piped Daddy Gail, "I just paid ten cents for a shine!"

"Quit yer ticklin' then." The red-headed

one swung his heels around off the mattress and sat up, rubbing his eyes sulkily. He reached under the edge of the mattress and produced a half-pint flask, which he held up to the light. It was stopperless and empty.

"Ain't that hell?" he complained. "Cork musta come out over night."

"I'll bet it did—three or four times," said Daddy unsympathetically. "Tell you, Clink—when you drink—how you do stink! Huh! guess that rhymes, doesn't it? Seeing you've had your breakfast, come along out of that. Mal's got a job for you."

Thus adjured, Clink arose leisurely and made his toilet. It consisted in stretching prodigiously and pulling on his cap. Clink was a disciple of efficiency, in that he practised religiously the economy of motion. To avoid the needless detail of putting on his clothes when he got up, he simply left them on when he went to bed. With a last yawn and click of his teeth, he sauntered blinking into the sunlight.

Like its neighbors for a considerable distance on both sides, the roof of Daddy's rooming house was walled in by a breast-high coping of brick and floored with sheet-iron, over which was laid a sheathing of tar and gravel. The day in question being Monday, sundry garments of various hues and divers unmentionable patterns were fluttering from the lines along the row of roofs.

Daddy's roof differed from the rest in two respects: he allowed no clothes-lines, and he cultivated a garden. Next to the front coping he had curbed with bricks a space some twenty-five feet long by five wide, and filled it in with earth, which he had been at great pains to fetch up from below, a scuttle-full at a time. At one end of this little plot a half-dozen sturdy sunflower plants were nodding.

Around their roots pansies turned their bright faces to the sky. Mignonettes grew in a border along the curbing. Sweet peas and climbing nasturtiums clung to a trellis of sticks and strings nearby. Daddy had not forgotten his table when he planted. Most of the remaining space was occupied by tomato plants; and the fact that he had made them thrive there, spoke volumes for

his skill as a gardener. Last of all were two prim rows of onion sprouts.

Assured that Clink was on his feet and wide awake, Daddy picked up a big watering pot and stepped briskly off to water his plants. As he worked he puffed contentedly at his ever-present black cigar and hummed in his throat the notes of a song that had been popular many years before.

Every one that knew her loved the gentle power—

A narrow chimney thrust up in the center of the roof. At one side of it was the scuttle with its trap door of iron. At the other side, in the shade of the chimney, Britten and Bull Michael sat on a wooden bench. Clink approached them.

"Lo, Mal."

"Lo, Clink."

"Daddy says you've got a lay fer me."

"Ye-uh; sit down." Britten made room at the end of the bench.

Time had been, in his early twenties, when Clink was a promising heavy-weight fighter. He had even cherished aspirations for the championship. But he had entered the semi-finals against the redoubtable John Barleycorn and had been badly worsted. In spite of that and the flight of the years, Clink could not quite bring himself to believe in the truth of the dictum, "They never come back." He still had hopes that "sometime" he would shine again in fistiana. "Some day" he would "cut th' booze an' start trainin'."

This pleasant fiction led him to call the big square tent on the roof his "gymnasium," so named by virtue of a set of faded green boxing gloves which hung from its rail and a punching-bag frame which stood in a corner. These portions of the history of Clink were well known to Britten.

"You used to be a pretty good scrapper, Clink," said Mal, as Clink settled on the bench with an audible sigh; "got anything left?"

Brought face to face with the bald question, Clink did not answer at once. He rolled the sleeve of his sweater slowly back from his right arm. The member thus exposed was undeniably flaccid under its freckled skin. Clink considered it. He

closed his hand, watching the flexion of the muscles under their fatty covering. He doubled the arm and felt the "ball" of the biceps. When the answer came it was frank.

"Might be all right in a rough-'n-tumble. Dunno about my wind. Steam's all there yet; but the speed ain't what it used t' be. But I sure could train to it. What's doin'?"

"I want you to show Michael how to put up his dooks—and I want him showed right."

Clink's face fell, and his lip curled. He rested his elbows on his knees and bent so that he could see Bull Michael at the other end of the bench.

"Learn him!—t' box!" he growled contemptuously; "it's my opinion that nobody won't ever learn him much of anything. He's a dummy."

"There's ten dollars a week in it for you, if you'll make the try," Mal answered; and that's a darnsight more than you get pan-handlin' and moppin' up booze-joint floors."

At this category of his daily pursuits Clink took no umbrage. He continued to study Michael, who sat placidly, his eyes following Daddy Gail's maneuvers with the watering-pot.

"Looks better'n he did," remarked Clink after a pause.

Two weeks had passed since the lad had found the body of the roof-prowling Chinaman under Britten's bed. In the interim, the remains of Charley Ong had been duly fished out of the East River by the crew of a police launch, morgued, sat upon by the coroner, and turned over to the decedent's slant-eyed kinsmen, who, with much beating of gongs and burning of joss-sticks, had spiced it and packed it for its long journey to the Flowery Kingdom.

The police had promptly forgotten the incident; nor did its memories distress the slumbers of any of the denizens of Gail's Jail. But in the rice-paper ledger of the Hop-Sing Tea and Importing Company—the main business of which was a gambling room—was an entry in red ink, which began at the lower right hand corner of a sheet and covered half the page. That memorandum dealt with the decease of a half-partner in the business, and it spelled future trouble for someone, in Chinese italic

capitals—trouble that was implacable, methodical, and that knew how to wait.

In those two weeks Clink had seen little of Michael. There was reason for the fighter to remark that the lad looked better. Mal had been busy. In the first place, Michael's hair had been cut, and a razor had removed the down of his first beard. Better fitting clothing had aided in the transformation. Britten's incessant admonitions had taken much of the slouch from his figure. Given something to engage his interest, or a task on which to concentrate his mind, and Michael, in his light cloth cap, blue flannel shirt and flowing tie, and dark trousers belted at the waist, was a remarkably personable youth.

If, on the other hand, he were left to himself, in idleness, his shoulders sagged, his lower lip drooped, and he became the old Bull Michael of the vacant face and fathomless eyes.

Clink finished his scrutiny. "What's the big scheme? Whatcha goin' t' do wit' him?" he inquired. Mal's eyes narrowed.

"I'll give you ten dollars a week for two hours a day of your valuable time, if you will teach him how to handle himself," he replied coldly. "Will you do it?"

Clink shrugged his shoulders. "I c'n try," he said. "When d'ya want me t' start?"

"Now."

Under the tent the fighter drew a pair of the old gloves over Michael's hands and laced them fast. When the other pair had been adjusted to his satisfaction by Britten, Clink stepped in front of Michael and assumed his favorite battling crouch.

"Put up yer hands," he commanded.

Obediently Michael raised his arms to their full stretch above his head and stood waiting and wondering.

"Aw, nix!" bawled Clink in high disdain. "In fronter yuh, like I do; there, t's better. Now stand like me, left foot for'ard; so."

Michael fell into a clumsy imitation of Clink's fighting posture.

"Now when I hit yuh, don't lemme," went on the instructor lucidly. "An' when yuh git a chanst, hit me—if yuh can. An' remember this ain't no goid's game.

A flash of interest lighted Michael's eyes. So this was to be a game. When Clink made a feint at him, he attempted to parry with a bungling sweep of his left arm.

"Hit me! Hit me!" ordered Clink, beginning to dance on the balls of his feet.

Michael started his right fist back of his hip and swung it wildly with the motion of a man delivering a bowling-ball.

"Hell!" sneered Clink; "whatcha tryin' t' land on—th' moon?" He tapped Michael lightly on the cheek.

"Don't be afraid to hurt him," Britten cut in. "He can take punishment."

"He's *goin'* to," rejoined Clink grimly. "Don't swing like that," he continued to Michael. "Poke straight out, an' put yer shoulder behind it—like this—" Clink pivoted swiftly on his left heel and shot out his right fist, putting behind it every atom of weight and strength he could muster. The blow fell on Michael's chest with the boom of a drum.

Such a punch, reaching its mark un hindered, would have almost knocked any man from his feet, and the fighter had so intended it. It only staggered Michael. Clink's bloodshot eyes opened a trifle wider. "Uh! this boid needs somethin' t' warm him up an' git him *goin'*," he grunted. "Here goes!" In succession he struck the boy between the eyes, on the point of the jaw and in the throat, and added a jab in the wind for full measure. The blows were all skillfully delivered and merciless.

Michael attempted vainly to defend himself. Stung by the pain and swallowing hard, he turned and looked at Britten. The big blue eyes swam with tears. Mal nodded at him with a word of encouragement.

"Go on. Wade into him!"

And Michael waded in.

"Hey, you damn big stiff, whatcha doin'?" yelled Clink, making a wild grab to arrest Michael's hand. There was a noise of tearing leather: Michael was taking off his gloves. He accomplished it in two movements. Then he laid hands on Mr. Wilson. Clink tried to back away; but he was too late. The boy's arms closed around him.

"Cut it! Cut it!" exploded Clink furiously making ineffectual attempts to extricate himself. The fighter was a wrestler as

well; but he was handicapped by his gloves and could get no hold. He went down, cursing manfully.

Britten and Daddy Gail, both of them laughing, stepped in and, with difficulty, righted matters.

Winded from his unwonted exertions, Clink sat up.

"Look what th' simp went and done!" the fighter protested with bitterness. He held up the ruined gloves, the sleeves of which were still laced around Michael's wrists. Britten handed him a five-dollar bill.

"Go and get another pair over in the avenue," said Mal. "With a little patience, the boy will learn."

"Mebbe," replied Clink, somewhat mollified. "I helped train a bear t' box wunst, an' he acted that way at foist. This kid's got lots o' steam, all right, all right." He went to get the gloves.

"Michael the fool—Mal Britten's tool," crooned Daddy Gail in the boy's ear, as Michael sat once more on the bench. Michael looked up at him and smiled. Michael's smile was a most compelling thing—a thing to stir the sweet memories of one's lost childhood, if one had them. Daddy received the full benefit of it, and effaced himself, retiring precipitately behind the chimney. Arrived there he kicked himself viciously in the calf of his left leg with his right foot.

"Damn!" he said under his breath, and with singular emphasis. "When that innocent looks at me like that, it shames me as I ain't been shamed since before I cashed my first stack of chips on a Mississippi packet-boat; and that is a—long—time—a—go!"

Clink fetched the new gloves, and Michael learned to use them—not quickly or readily, but slowly, surely, and above all, efficiently. Impatient at first of his pupil's awkwardness, the red-headed fighter often was discouraged and sometimes disgusted. But presently, when the results of his training began to tell, Clink yielded grudging approval, to be succeeded in the course of time by enthusiasm.

Life began to take on a new interest for Clink. As the growing skill of Michael

made more demands on his powers, the fighter was ashamed not to be fit. The rigorous training wore away his gross fleshiness and freshened his blended complexion. His eyes became clear, and he drank less and less whisky. His dreams of future honors in the pugilistic arena took new and definite shape; only this time it was his pupil and not himself who figured in them as the principal. Clink taught Michael all that he knew of fighting, and as has been hinted, that was a very great deal.

But it was far from Britten's intent to make a pugilist of Michael. Entrusting to Clink the development of the boy's body, Mal devoted himself no less assiduously to Michael's brain. He found it an empty loom, on which he wove such patterns as he listed and in such colors as pleased him. Learning early that the lad's best moments were those when he had something to do, Mal kept Michael incessantly employed. Other activities failing, he took the lad for long walks in all quarters of the city and accustomed him to its sights and sounds, both by day and by night.

No detail that he could think of—and he thought of many—did Mal overlook. He had almost inexhaustible patience. An example of his painstaking was the manner in which he effected a change in even the expression of face of his pupil. To rid the lad of his vacuous stare and the lag of his lower lip, Britten practiced him for hours before a mirror, teaching him to contract his eyelids and gain control of his facial muscles. It was a long, hard task; but Mal succeeded. Michael came to look like other men.

Anomalous as it may seem, Michael was extremely observant. He would sit for hours where he had been left, not moving, not thinking, but seeing and remembering all that passed about him. In Central Park—best beloved by Michael of all spots in New York—not a policeman, not a child, not a squirrel even, passed him unnoticed.

"Anyone could have taught him *something*—for he's no idiot," thought Britten; "only nobody ever cared. He learns only by doing things. If he is made to do enough, he will develop—but how far?"

Mal's theory—partly correct—was up-

held by the fact that the day after Michael had lifted the stone in the yard of the Culver House, he had dared to withstand the blacksmith.

And Mal's reasons? Why all of this laborious and seemingly fruitless attempt at salvage in behalf of one who was nothing to him? He loved power. Had he been born a Roman, he undoubtedly would have been master of many slaves; probably he would have beaten them; and he would have taken a fierce pleasure in the lash. Afterward he would have given a largess; for he was not cruel at bottom. Shortly after his arrival at Gail's Jail with Michael, he had purchased a heavy riding crop, which he had hung in his closet. He never used it. Eventually he took it down and threw it in Daddy's ash-barrel.

Notwithstanding his careless language, Britten was not lacking in education. He would have been capable in any of the professions, had he chosen to apply himself; but he preferred to travel along his own crooked path. Mal loved power. In the lad he had found a domain in which he was absolute. Some day he would make practical use of his ascendancy.

Daddy Gail, too, took a hand in the up-bringing of Michael.

"Michael," he said one day, "you'll never truly appreciate me until you can read my verses. I'm going to teach you to read."

Perhaps Daddy set himself the hardest task of the lad's three preceptors. But he managed, nevertheless, after many disappointments, to teach Michael his letters, and from that actually to read—providing the reading was not too complicated.

Michael retained his love for fairy-tales. They were his reward for work well done. When Britten's inventiveness failed him, he had recourse to books; and great was Michael's delight when, under Daddy's tutelage, he spelled laboriously through his first excursion with the brothers Grimm—and was able to gather, as through a veil, a dim sense of the meaning of the words he read.

So they educated Michael. And Michael, though he did not refuse to learn, showed no active desire to be taught. Doing always to the last jot and tittle any

task within his powers to which he was assigned by the superior mind, he showed none of the quality of determination, only a vast stubbornness to do, purposeless except as purpose was imparted to it.

For he seemed to be absolutely lacking in the vital spark of will. Will is the soul, and the soul of Bull Michael slept and dreamed and would not awake. Perhaps Britten expressed it as well as could be.

"There's a soul somewhere in those big works, all right," he said; "but it's loafin' on the job and won't take hold."

So they educated Michael, each in his own way; and he in turn brought a single-mindedness to the accomplishment of his tasks that surprised all of them.

"I aim to furnish him the soul," thought Britten.

"I'll teach him to read," said Daddy.

"I'll make a champeen outa him," declared Clink.

But who would wake up the soul that was asleep?

Michael was tireless; but his teachers found that there were distinct limits to their accomplishments with him.

Britten could not teach Michael to act independently.

Clink could not teach him to swear. Michael's few emotions felt no need for such translation. A profane word on his lips was a rarity.

And Daddy Gail could not teach him to make rhymes.

CHAPTER V.

THE GIRL IN THE WATER.

FOR more years than he cared to recall, Britten had lived beyond the limits circumscribed by the law. He was, in one short word, a crook, and pre-eminent in his vocation. His return to Gail's Jail was a home-coming—Gail's Jail, which Daddy had named whimsically because in its time it had sheltered more crooks than most jails.

Mal came back as from a short vacation. He came to take up the thread of his life where he had laid it down for a time. When he had decided to bring Bull Michael with

him, it was in no spirit of philanthropy or uplift. Britten was not a philanthropist. But he had imagination. He had brought the lad because in his future purposes Michael filled a large niche. Michael could be put to use.

"Michael the fool—Mal Britten's tool," Daddy Gail had crooned. That was it. But first the tool must be tempered and made fit. What a wonderful tool it would be, Britten thought, seeing the possibilities unfold in Michael—a man, yet not a man, but a delicate, soulless machine, to be controlled and guided by the master-mind.

So Mal had brought the machine to Gail's Jail to be perfected; for Daddy's place was not only an asylum; it was a college. All of the modern black arts were in its curriculum.

Hidden by the coal in Daddy's cellar was a trap which opened on a flight of stone steps. Below was a crypt, or room—it was more than twenty feet square—which had been blasted out of the rock. Gail's Jail was old; but it had been built on the site of a far older mansion, for the owner of which that rock-walled vault had served as a secret granary or cistern, more probably the latter. Daddy had discovered it and turned it to his own uses. He called it the Catacomb. It had graduated many a super-excellent cracksmen.

In due time Michael was initiated into the mysteries of the Catacomb. There he learned step by step and slowly—for he never learned anything quickly—mastery of all the criminal devices of the day, from the crude tricks of the tyro yeggman to the noiseless finesse of the expert manipulator of safe combinations.

He learned the uses of bar and wedge and jimmy, of glass-cutter, gum-mastic and wire. He was taught how, with a few drops of oil and a bit of a blue-steel saw hardly larger than a watch-spring, to remove a bar of the finest chilled steel. He learned to use blanket and soap, and how to pour "soup"—an operation with nitroglycerin which much belies its culinary sound.

Such things were the rudiments only of the trade in which Michael was apprenticed. From them he progressed through the uses of bits and drills, of keys and of slender,

long-nosed pliers, until he reached the higher mathematics of the oxy-hydro blast flame and the electrodes, the spitting, sizzling green jet of which fuses its way through walls of tempered metal as a hot knife sinks through a pat of butter.

In the muffled silence of the Catacomb, surrounded by the paraphernalia which had been assembled there—complete, even to panels exhibiting the latest patterns of the lock-makers' skill—Britten poured this knowledge into the empty chambers of Michael's brain, poured it and watched it set.

When the little man had finished, there were few of the palisades with which men surround the things they value here, that Michael could not pass.

He could cross a flooring of loose boards or negotiate a rickety stairway as softly as a cat, with never a creak or rattle to betray him. He learned to unlock and open a strange door in the darkness, with the almost infinite patience that can proceed by the hundredth of an inch at a move and, if needful, spend an hour at the task—a feat the difficulties of which are to be appreciated by those only who have essayed it. He could ascend a slender wire with no other aids than a couple of handkerchiefs and a pair of small door-hinges, the inner surfaces of which had been corrugated with a file. To climb a smooth pole or the angle of a wall of masonry, was child's play for Michael.

If the New York park custodians still are curious to know who it was that on a certain autumn night in 190—shinned up the ancient Egyptian obelisk in Central Park and balanced at its apex a big yellow pumpkin, they may read their answer here. The whimsey was Britten's. The climber was Bull Michael.

All of this training took time; but Britten had time, which is to say that he had money. Unlike the majority of his ilk, he was not improvident. When one of his enterprises proved lucrative, he knew how to care for the profits.

Some months before his appearance in Kingston, Mal had conceived and carried through his raid on the coffers of the Hop-Sing Company. His helper had been one

Scarborough, a broken-down croupier, who had strayed East from somewhere beyond the Mississippi. Mal had put him on his feet, and at an opportune time Scarborough had sought and obtained employment in the Hop-Sing gambling-room. He had demonstrated his worth to the entire satisfaction of his employers. For six months he had been an exemplary and profitable croupier. But one night a small, dark man had sauntered in, "gone against" the table, and broken the Hop-Sing bank to the tune of a sum in five figures.

The successful gamester had disappeared as quietly and unostentatiously as he had come. Scarborough was to have had a share in the "plant"; but he did not come to claim it, never was heard from again. It was that coup which had led the ill-fated Charley Ong to go over the roofs to Gail's Jail, seeking further vengeance.

Shortly after his return to New York, and as a cloak to future operations, Britten purchased a part interest in a small saloon in Second Avenue. That gave him not only an ostensible source of income, but also a certain and grateful prestige with the men in the precinct houses. Within loosely-held limits, his doings would not be questioned too closely.

And Michael? Always passive in the hands of his masters, the boy thrived and developed much as Britten had foreseen and wished; and if his brain did not attain intelligence as intelligence is reckoned in the normal brain, at least it laid in a great store of curious knowledge which it did not forget.

Of his three mentors Michael had his own limited conceptions. For Britten he held a vast respect, a devotion tinged with awe, and he obeyed Mal's slightest command with never a thought of question. He liked Clink as a rather rough playmate and comrade who laughed at him, mussed him up and occasionally hurt him; but that was all in the game. It must be said that with Michael's growing proficiency in all things pertaining to his body, the time was not long in arriving when it was Clink who was hurt fully as frequently as Michael in their encounters. Clink's contemptuous tolerance of the lad changed rapidly into a strong

and abiding friendliness. He even would have shared his liquor with Michael; but that was sternly forbidden by Britten, who was determined that his pupil should have no vices except those of his (Britten's) own choosing.

For Daddy Gail Michael cherished a still different feeling. He loved the old man as a fragile and precious sort of a fairy who aroused in him a dim instinct to protect—manifestations of which amused that old freebooter mightily.

Then came for Michael a never-to-be-forgotten night when Britten needs must go forth and test the tool he had forged. Mal chose a jewelry store well up-town for his operations. A barred window in the rear wall offered little obstacle to his ingress. Showcases obscured it from the view of passers-by in the street. The safe which he meant to attempt, however, stood plainly in sight at the back of the store. An electric light burned above it.

An alley from another street, a fire-escape, the roof, and a length of rope, made a trackless path to a blind court, into which the window opened. Shortly after one o'clock in the morning Britten and Bull Michael, crouching at the end of the showcases, received a signal from Clink in the street, which told them that the coast was clear.

In two minutes Britten had adjusted in front of the safe a square of canvas done in Daddy Gail's best art. When the painting was in place, no one glancing in from the street would have suspicioned that he was not looking at the front of the safe, so well had Daddy limned his representation.

Behind that screen Britten kept watch and Bull Michael worked. Under the magic of Britten's tongue, Prince Michael once more was doing a good turn for his old friends the fairies. Masking his electrodes carefully under a hood, Michael in half an hour cut the combination out of the front of the safe as cleanly as though the fairies themselves had aided him.

It was not a big haul, perhaps six thousand dollars in platinum and unset gems, of which Britten, with connoisseur's wisdom, selected only the best; but it was the precursor of many more to follow. All were

made with a neatness and absence of tell-tale bungling that appalled the police. By the daring and skill of the workmanship, they recognized that one who had mocked their best efforts aforetime had returned among them.

Once more the coals glowed white under the melting-pot in the Catacomb; and Daddy Gail, watching its chill of disuse disappear in the glow, furbished up his old-time wiles as a "fence" and prepared for an era of prosperity.

It was not alone the prospect of renewed opulence that the old man welcomed with glee. Toasting his breakfast, so to speak, at the edge of a powder-pit, was as the breath in Daddy's nostrils. His enjoyment was marred by no qualms of either conscience or fear. He believed in "Gail's luck." The police had never "had anything on" him. That he would meet his come-uppance some day, he did not doubt. "But none of these chaps that the city hires to keep the bartenders busy, is going to give it to me," said Daddy.

As for the other residents of Gail's Jail: they never gossiped. What they knew was dangerous to repeat. What they did not know was not a source of worry to them.

When automobiles came into general use, Britten bought one. Daddy, tenacious of old ways, viewed the purchase with suspicion.

"Don't do it, Mal; devil's truck—bad luck," he advised. But Mal laughed and bought the car. By its means he was enabled to enlarge his field of operations. The raiders who laired in Gail's Jail were among the first of the so-called "motor pirates." Many a wealthy suburbanite, many a comfortable commuter, was the poorer after their visits. Michael learned to operate the car and loved it; but Daddy never could be induced to ride in it.

Three years wore away. Michael came to his full growth. Six feet and a generous three inches he stood in his twenty-first year, a stature that would have made him a conspicuous figure had it not been for the breadth of shoulders that made him seem much shorter than he really was. The once loosely-hung frame had knit firmly under his training, and in his muscles was

that compound of strength and elasticity that makes the jungle animal terrible. Scarcely a hint remained in either face or figure of the shambling boy with the lagging lip who had come down the river on the Mary Powell three years before.

But the years and Britten's careful teaching had not bred initiative in Michael. He was still no more than a well-nigh perfect tool.

"'S'e always goin' t' be a nut? Won't he never learn to do nuthin' by his lonesome?" asked Clink of Britten. Clink, less and less given to cups, had been elevated to the position of Mal's trusted lieutenant. He affected a modest diamond stud and felt himself competent to speak in council. When Mal shook his head, the fighter sighed. He liked Michael.

"Look at th' way he drives th' buzz-wagon," Clink went on. "When there's some one wit' him, he's a reglar eat-'em-up speed devil, better 'n 'leven outa ten of yer real chuffeers. But send him out alone somewheres, an' there won't none of these jay constables earn any of their pork-chops off'n Mike. He drives like an old woman an' gets there day after to-morrow."

Crossing one day from the Jersey shore, where they had been on a pleasure tramp along the marshes, Clink and Michael stood aft near the rail of the ferry. It was an afternoon in midsummer, and the sun cast a hot sheen on the water. Passing boats seemed to be pushing their way through a heavy flood of molten metal. Clink, turning from a fruitless search for "peacherinos," saw that Michael's eyes were fixed on the reaches of the river, and in them was the vague, brooding expression which always made Clink covertly uneasy.

"Hey, Mike!" The fighter nudged his comrade in the ribs. "Whatcha t'inkin' about?"

It was a question which Clink often asked of Michael. More times than not, the answers were meaningless to Clink.

"Up there—the gold comes down the river," Michael replied softly, without looking around. He pointed to the sun-glitter on the ripples. "Always coming down—all the gold and silver from far away—to New York. Where does it go to, Clink?"

Here, for a wonder, was a reply of which the red-headed one thought he could distil some sense.

"To th' banks," he answered promptly.

Up-stream a little way and on a parallel course, another ferry-boat was crossing. As they neared the New York side, the courses of the craft converged. They were to make landing at adjacent docks. A trick of moving color on the other boat caught and held Michael's wandering eyes.

A girl stood on the after-deck near the folding gate. She was looking down the river. One hand rested on the rail. With the other she pressed lightly on the crown of a wide straw hat, of which the vagrant river breezes were trying to rob her. She wore a waist of soft, pale blue crape, open at her throat and short of sleeve, a belt of shining leather, and a white skirt. Nature had not been niggardly with her in either face or figure, and had crowned the endowment with a generous gift of red-brown hair.

Clink had failed dismally in the search of his boat for anything feminine that was worth mentioning. Could he have had a near view of this girl, he would have feasted his eyes and felt that his day had not been wasted. And he would have said:

"Oh, *boys!* A peacherino!"

But Clink was looking elsewhere; and it was Michael who saw the vision. His eyes had been attracted by the blue of her waist, and he continued to watch her dreamily. She was dividing her attention between the scene on the river and an elderly woman who stood at her elbow and toward whom she directed a succession of animated remarks. An immense young man in a fawn-colored suit, who was one of a group of chatters near the door to the cabin, stared continually at the girl with unconcealed approval.

At last came the chance that the mischievous breeze had waited for. The girl, making a vivacious gesture, forgot her vigilance and relaxed for an instant the pressure on her hat. The breeze snatched at it, caught it and tossed it over the gate, where it flapped perilously near the edge of the deck.

With a little cry, the girl started in pur-

suit. Before any one could forestall her, she darted under the horse-chains and ran along the unrailed decking. Steadying herself with one hand on the lifted gangway, she bent swiftly.

Almost the rescue succeeded. Her fingers were closing on the hat-brim, when the breeze, with a last spiteful breath, whipped it fluttering into the air. The girl leaned farther, stretching her hand above the water, slipped and lost her hold on the gang-plank. The hat rose in brief, foolish flight and fell back on the deck. The girl plunged head-first into the river.

Shrieks and shouts arose from the deck, followed by the clangor of bells and the puffing of reversed engines. The man in the fawn-colored suit rushed into the cabin and out again, heavily-laden, threw four life preservers into the water in the general direction of the Jersey shore, and a great deal of profanity to the winds.

Hardly had the echo of the first cry reached the lower ferry, when Michael left Clink's side in a diving leap that carried him clean over the rail and many feet on his course.

"What th'—" shouted Clink. Then his eyes and ears told him what had happened. He heard the clamor, saw the girl struggling ineffectually in the water behind the other boat, and saw that Michael was making his way toward her. Clink laid a hand on the rail to vault it and follow, hesitated, looked down at a brand-new suit, cursed and dismissed the intention. Already Michael was too far away to be overtaken by water.

"He c'n take care of himself—an' her," muttered Clink, and he hurried to the front of the ferry, which was wearing into dock between her floating buffers.

It was not until some time afterward that Clink remembered, and wondered at it, that Michael had taken action independently, without any word of command or guidance; in fact, had seen and appraised the predicament of the girl and had gone before Clink himself had realized what had happened.

Years before, in the creek that flows back of Higginsville, Michael had learned to swim. He had improved that knowledge since his coming to New York by many

dips with Clink at Sheepshead, Brighton Beach, and Coney. He now tore his way through the golden flood with the long, carrying side-stroke of a powerful and practised swimmer. No one else had gone to the rescue of the girl; none other was needed. Long before the young man in the fawn suit had quit a wild search for more life-preservers, Michael had reached her.

She too knew how to swim. But in her first plunge she had swallowed considerable unpleasantness; her fall had been sudden and unexpected; her clothing hampered her. She floundered, choked, swallowed more brine and—lost her head. When Michael came alongside of her, she forgot the first principles of her swimming instructor and laid hold of her rescuer with the blind clutch of panic.

Michael had a glimpse of her face before her arms clipped around his neck, and it aroused a strong memory from slumber. That red-brown hair, that saucy mouth, those straight, dark eyebrows—Michael's heart warmed to the sight of them. How well he remembered the last time he had seen them, looking down at them through a screen of nodding daisies, white and yellow. He passed an arm beneath the girl's shoulders.

"Don't be afraid—Lizzie Smith," he said; "Michael will—"

The tightening arms drew his head down, and he too tasted of the bitterness of the golden river. He fought himself free of it, turned on his side and dragged at the girl's arms. They relaxed under his pressure, but tightened spasmodically, and more desperately than before. But he had seen her face again, her eyes terror-wide. They were gray eyes. Lizzie Smith's were brown. This was not Lizzie Smith.

In vain he tried to loosen that frenzied hold at his neck. The half-bare, slender arms clung fast, and he feared lest he break them with his efforts. He could still swim; but the girl's face was under water. He turned on his back. That did not effect his purpose. She had burrowed with her head under his chin and was strangling there.

Perhaps it was a fragment of Clink's water-wisdom that returned to Michael then. He did not reason it. He knew only

that this clinging, struggling she-thing was hampering his every movement, would drag them both to the bottom if she were allowed to persist.

Kicking vigorously to sustain them, Michael with one hand turned her head around on his chest and with the other fist struck her on the point of the chin.

He struck lightly; but a blow from Bull Michael, thus planted, even though lightly delivered, was a thing to stagger a strong man. The girl's struggles ceased, her arms fell limply away from his throat, and she became inert in his hands. For him, the rest was easy. He swam to the rear of the ferry-boat and with his burden was hauled to the deck at the end of a rope.

Frightened, half-hysterical women received the girl from his arms and cared for her.

Michael shook the water from him like a big dog and started to go forward. He was stolidly indifferent alike to praise and comment. He wanted only to find Clink again and to get away.

His way was barred by the large young man in the fawn clothes, who was snorting with excess wrath, a four-carat-power diamond on his soft shirt-front rising and falling with each indignant breath. He was even larger than Michael.

"I seen you, you damn, measly pup!" he bellowed. "I seen you clout th' lady in th' jaw, you mutt! An' I'm goin' to bust your bean open for it! T' swat a lady like that!"

He paused and gulped. The innocent regard of Michael's steady blue eyes added flame to the fire of righteous wrath he had worked up.

"Boob!"

A big arm swung through the air with a vigor that made its owner grunt. Evidently the large man had intended to slap Michael's mouth. But Michael removed that feature with a celerity born of long training. The aftermath of that blow was terrific.

As the open hand fanned past him, Michael threw his weight on the ball of one foot, and shot out his right fist. His adversary saw it coming, and with a ludicrous expression of consternation, tried to

"cover." But he had left too wide an opening. Michael's knuckles caught him cleanly on the point of the jaw—and this time Michael was not striking lightly. His shoulder was back of the blow. The man in fawn thwacked down on the deck so hard that its flooring creaked.

Companions of the fallen man ran to his assistance. There were a number of them, and they might have attempted reprisal on Michael; but the boat had docked, and Clink had come up—barely in time to witness with awesome joy the ruinous work of his pupil. The red-headed fighter pushed determinedly through the crowd and led Michael away.

And Michael never knew that he had knocked "cold" the second-best prize-fighter in the Americas. Because the gladiator cherished ambitions to become shortly the first-best, and because vaudeville was making signals in his direction with a silken purse, Michael was allowed to slip away, and press-agents were active to hush accounts of this laurelless encounter. But Clink had recognized the adversary, and he went home to tell Mal with bated breath of Michael's prowess.

Scarcely had the two disappeared, when the girl recovered her jarred wits. The elderly woman was bending over her when she opened her eyes.

"Oh, aunty!" she shuddered. And then, her gaze straying about the cabin where they had laid her:

"Where is he? Who was he?"

Those questions were like to have remained unanswered. But a newsboy—one of those urchins who go everywhere, hear everything, and amass knowledge that the police pine for in vain, piped up:

"Say, loidy, dat was Bully Mike, th' strongest guy in Nuh Yoik!"

CHAPTER VI.

DEVIL'S TRUCK.

CLINK finished a fervid account of Michael's adventure, stated his own conclusions therefrom and looked eagerly at Britten.

"Got a good chanst to be world's cham-

pecn his next battle, that bird has—'n Mike gets one clean punch in on his jaw 'n puts him down fer th' count! I'm tellin' yuh, Mal, youse is wastin' this boy's time! He might be champeen his ownself an' make a million or two, wit, th' punch he carries—an' a good manager!

"T'ink what a drawin'-card he'd be—yuh could bill him as th' Silent Wonder, er th' Marv'lus Mystery, er somethin'," pleaded the red-headed one. "We could make a fortune. Aw, Mal, lemme take him an' go to it."

Britten, Daddy, Clink and Michael were sitting in Daddy's kitchen-studio. The three older men had drawn their chairs around the table. Michael, as usual, occupied a chair near the stove, and was greatly interested in the feeding of Bill the parrot, to whom he was portioning out small fragments of cracker.

Keen interest and considerable satisfaction had marked Daddy's and Mal's reception of the recital of the afternoon's incident. At the denouement, graphically related by Clink, Daddy chuckled audibly. Mal laid a hand on the table and drummed absently with his finger-tips while the other two awaited his verdict.

"Might be right—to let him fight; and then again, it mightn't," hazarded Daddy, and touched a match to a fresh cigar.

Britten, stubborn in his own purposes, shook his head slowly.

"I hope the newspapers don't get hold of this and make a mess of it," he said.

"Aw, yuh needn't worry about them doin' nothin' with' it, unless yuh go to 'em wit' it," said Clink; "which yuh won't," he added with patent disgust. "Huh! t'ink if I was a guy's manager, 'n th' guy had th' chanst this one's got, that I'd chase to th' papers an' shoot it to 'em that he'd been 'laid cold by some unknown gazabo in a ferry-boat row? Nix. This chump's managers 'll singe their shoes gittin' to th' papers to see that it's left out. Why wouldn't they?"

"Who was the girl? What was she like?" asked Daddy.

"Dunno," replied Clink; "th' only flash I got at her was after she'd been in th' drink, an' she was soaked, knocked stiff an'

her hair comin' down. Judgin' by her feet, she might 'a' been a neat little jane if she'd been dry. But there was an old dame wit' white hair wit' her that looked like a t'oroughbred."

"And Michael—you didn't tell him to go in after the girl?" queried Britten.

"Naw; ain't I been tellin' yuh? I was lookin' th' other way, an' I didn't know th' skirt was in th' drink till Mike done a brody off th' boat an' went after her. An' I hustles myself around to th' other boat an' gets there just in time to see his nibs take a swing, an' Mike soaks him in th' chops wit' a short-arm lallapaloosa—God! What a haymaker he put over!"

"What I think is this," Mal went on, unmoved by the enthusiasm of Clink; "the boy's got something in him somewhere—a soul or a will, whichever one wants to call it. We haven't been able to get hold of it, and he don't know it's there; but once in a while something reaches it and stirs it, and it moves, as it did to-day. I've seen it before—just flashes of it. You saw it to-day. It gets stronger. The more he *does* things, the stronger it gets. It's possible that the time will come when he'll wake up and not be so far different from the rest of us—maybe a damn sight better."

"Yuh mean his brains 'll begin to tick, an' he won't be a nut any more?" demanded Clink.

"No; I don't mean brains," Mal replied. "He's got a better set of brains right now than any one of the three of us—"

"Youse don't put that down me," interrupted Clink. "'F he had 'em, he'd use 'em, an' he wouldn't have to be wound up all the time like th' dinky little tin dolls yuh see 'em sellin' to th' kids on th' sidewalks over in Twenty-T'ird Street."

"But you think he can fight. You want to put him in the ring," suggested Britten.

"Sure; he knows *that*. He knows—"

"You're dead right, he knows; and how in blazes do you think he *would* know if he didn't have a brain to put the knowledge in—and a good one, too? You just tie that up for a minute, and I'll try to tell you what I mean."

Some of Britten's theories might have

been of interest at the board of the Society for Psychical Research. It is certain that they would have met a response from those patient experts who are doing so much in the reclamation and development of sub-normal children. He proceeded to roll one of them over Mr. Wilson's prostrate form.

"You, Clink, and a lot of other fellows think that your brains are all there is to the works. Because you use them to think with and to dream with, you think that they are *you*. I don't think so. I think there is a something beyond the brain, something higher, that makes use of the brain just as the brain in turn makes use of the hand. I think that the brain is a mere part of the machinery of the body, like the eye or the stomach. When the rest of the body dies, the brain dies. But this other something—call it will, or call it soul, or what you like—does not die when the body dies. It is not a part of the machinery, any more than the electric power is a part of the motor through which it works.

"That's what is the matter with Michael; this other thing, the real power, the true Michael, which lives in his brain or behind it, is out of touch with the brain. In a sort of a way it is asleep. To show what I mean: When you are asleep, your brain goes on working sometimes, and you dream. You don't know anything about it, though you sometimes remember your dreams, because your brain has made a record of them. Unless the dream becomes violent and disturbs the brain so that it wakes the real you up, you don't know any more about it, or feel it, any more than you feel your stomach at work on the food you put in it. Sometimes the food makes the stomach ache; sometimes the dream makes the brain ache; that's all.

"Perhaps some day the real Michael will climb into the cab and take charge of the engine. Until he does, some one else must, as you say, wind it up and see that it goes straight. Do you get it?"

"Damned if I do," said Clink, and scratched his red head. "That's too deep stuff fer me. I know he c'n hit like hell." He turned to Michael, who had been listening uncomprehendingly to the conversation. "Can't yuh, Mike?"

"What?" asked Michael.

"Can't yuh hit like hell?"

Michael looked down at his swollen knuckles and nodded.

"Yes," he said.

"Does it ever strike you, Mal," said Daddy, "that, after all the thinking you've done, and the way you look at things, you're taking quite a bit on yourself, managing Michael the way you do?"

"How's that?" Britten queried.

"Why, by your own theory—and it may be pretty near to the truth—Michael's soul is clean, and you can't do anything that will spot it. No matter what you make him do, you are as responsible as if you'd done it yourself—absolutely. Seems to me that your own soul is carrying double. I'd be kinda careful."

Mal laughed. He shook his finger at Michael.

"Whatever else you do, Michael, never kill a man, or it's me that will be live-wired for the murder."

"You'd ought 'a'," said Daddy.

"Since when have you turned to moralizing, you old pirate?" chuckled Britten.

Britten, keenly watching through many weeks, saw no further soul-flashes from the depths of Michael's being. To all outward seeming, the lad was as he had been—a wondrously trained body with a brain which, mirrorlike, reflected only that which passed before it.

"To be developed, that soul must wake up. It must *use* itself," thought Mal. "It's like a man trying to get his 'touch' playing billiards. He works and works and doesn't seem to improve; and then all at once some day it comes to him. But to start Michael's soul to working; I'll be cussed if I know how. And if I had the key, I wonder would I turn it? He might not be so useful then."

In the late autumn an incident occurred, which, if it did not surprise the imperturbable Britten, puzzled him mightily and set his inquiring mind on a new train of thought. He stood one night with Michael in the library of a splendid home in Riverside Drive. The immediate object of their call was a small safe, set into the library wall at breast height and masked by an

ornamental panel. Within that strong-box, if Britten's information did not lie, was a comfortable sum of money and gew-gaws which the melting-pot in the Catacomb at Gail's Jail would convert speedily into a small fortune.

It was November, but still warm. A side window above the lawn had been left open as a way to retreat. Somewhere in the shadows outside Clink was on guard. Britten found the safe-panel, opened it noiselessly and threw the ray of his flash-lamp on the inner door. It was not a combination affair, to be solved by sensitive fingers, but a complicated lock, accessible to its own peculiar key—a job for the drills. Mal touched Michael on the shoulder. The lad laid out his tools on the floor and flashed his own light on the work in hand.

Something on the wall above the safe caught Michael's eye. He raised the light.

A picture hung there—a large framed picture of a slender girl with laughing eyes and saucy mouth. She was in yachting costume. One hand rested on a taffrail, and a section of decking showed behind her. From under her white cap strayed a cloud of wind-blown hair. It was not a posed photograph, but an enlargement from a snapshot, the unstudied naturalness of which made it particularly charming.

At sight of that smiling face with its straight, dark eyebrows and piquant mouth, Michael's heart jumped queerly. An old memory brought to his lips the whispered words: "Lizzie Smith." A newer memory stilled them. It was the girl of the ferry-boat—so like and yet so unlike his old-time playmate.

For the moment forgetful of time and place, his lips parted with pleasure in the recognition, Michael gazed at the picture. Britten touched him impatiently on the shoulder, signaling that it was time to begin work.

But that safe was destined to stay unopened. In the eyes of Michael it had a guardian more potent than blue-uniformed men or triple plates of tempered steel.

He bent over, gathered up his tools with silent fingers, and started back across the room the way he had come. Britten turned

his flash-light on the lad and plucked at his elbow with a quick gesture of inquiry. Michael, taught long before to be wordless on such excursions, shook his head and continued on his way. In a moment he had swung out through the open window and was lost in the blackness.

Britten was left alone with the realization that for the first time in their long comradeship Michael had rebelled against his authority. Though he was unable to guess the entire reason for the sudden defection, Mal's quick eyes had not missed the incident of the picture. He went back and turned his light upon it.

"Damned pretty girl," he soliloquized under his breath. "Michael, Michael, what's coming over you?"

As he started toward the window, a head bobbed up in its opening. Clink drew himself into the room.

"What's doin'?" hissed the fighter. "Mike's gone back to th' car wit' th' tools. Yuh ain't cracked it this quick?"

"No; Michael backed out on me," whispered Britten. He led Clink to the picture and once more turned the flash on it. "There's the reason. Can you figure it out? He got one look at it, picked up his tools and beat it."

"By me," was Clink's comment. "Say, that little jane's a real peacherino, ain't she? But I didn't tink th' dames was gettin' Mike's goat any—yet." Clink laughed soundlessly. "Well, yuh goin' to crack th' crib?" he asked.

"How can I? Michael took the tools with him, and by the way he was hanging onto 'em when he left, he ain't going to let anybody else handle 'em to-night."

Britten laughed in turn. In the darkness he bowed to the picture on the wall.

"Good-by, Miss Mystery," he whispered. "You may keep your jewels. I ain't coming back."

"Goin' to try it again?" asked Clink when they were outside.

"No," Mal replied. "Not twice in the same place. I'm superstitious. I'd give the value of all we're leaving back there, though, just to know what is passing through that fool Michael's brain."

That was something that Britten never

found out. Although he and Clink and Daddy by turns questioned Michael about his strange behavior, they could draw from him no more enlightening reply than that he had seen a "good fairy."

But in the heart of Michael a new deity was enshrined. She was called the Gold Girl, and she held equal place there with the lost Gold Lady of his childhood.

"Michael, beware of girls—with naughty curls," rimed Daddy Gail; but Michael was impervious. He had not learned how to blush. Britten pondered the picture incident and wondered. Could it be that, in spite of all Mal's tales and teachings, there was dawning within Michael a dim sense of right and wrong, and that his conscience was awakening?

Two weeks later, in a furrier's office in Sixth Avenue, Michael opened a double-combination safe with all the neatness and aplomb of a veteran. So his nerve wasn't impaired, at any rate. Britten gave up the riddle. Michael was—just Michael.

It was in the fifth summer of Michael's life in New York that Daddy's prophecy against the automobile came true with crushing force.

Summer residences were a specialty with Mal. Did the news appear in the society columns that Mr. and Mrs. Goodspender had closed their palatial manor at Yonkers for a few weeks, while they enjoyed a trip to the mountains or shore, that residence stood a good chance of receiving a nocturnal trio who laughed at locksmiths and who converted massy family plate into lucrative nuggets.

At such a place—a villa near Irvington—ill-luck swooped one night upon the three companions. They found the grounds in charge of a watchman, an old fellow, whom Clink disposed of easily by tying him elbow and knee and throwing him, gagged, across the bed in his cottage near the rear of the grounds.

It so happened that the watchman owned a friend, a garrulous body, who was wont often to slip across lots and sit half the night with his crony over a jug of stale ale. As fate willed it, he chose this night for a visit, found his gossip in a predicament; and, not daring to stop even long enough to

cut the bonds, set off for town as fast as his shaking old legs could toddle.

So it fell out that, as the three motor pirates left the grounds, carrying a bag of plate of fabulous thickness, and went out into the moonlit roadway, six men of the town constabulary, accompanied by a few of the boldest spirits among the townsmen, charged nobly down the road with a thin cheer and a prodigious letting-off of fire-arms.

Britten had left his automobile behind a clump of trees at the side of the road some distance from the house. While he and Clink opened fire in an attempt to hold back the attacking party, he sent Michael to run on ahead and start the machine.

Michael reached the car without mishap and stowed the bag of plate under the seat. He then started the engine and backed the automobile out into the road. Mal and Clink, who had taken cover in a thicket of bush, made a dash for it.

In the running fight that followed, Clink was grassed with a bullet through his left shoulder. Britten felt his hat leap from his head; but he stopped and stood firm beside his fallen henchman.

"Seems I've always got to be th' goat of th' occasion," groaned Clink, as he tried weakly to stagger to his feet. "Where's Mike?"

Strong arms that caught him around the middle, answered the question. Leaving the car in the road, its engine purring, Michael, heedless of danger, had come back to the aid of his pals. He swung Clink up in his arms.

While Britten kept up a rear-guard action with two revolvers, Michael carried Clink to the machine. In another minute all three had clambered aboard and, with Michael driving, were under way in the thick of a parting fusillade from their balked pursuers.

Clink, cursing with pain, struck his foot against the bag of plate, and it heartened him.

"Damn their pictures!" he growled. "We've got th' swag on 'em, anyhow. Drive her like hell, Mike!"

And Michael did so.

Britten, examining two neat round holes

in his soft hat, speculated as to what the sensation would have been had the bullet gone three inches lower.

Ill-luck was not finished with the fugitives. A bullet had punctured the gas-tank of the car, and at Kingsbridge they were forced to abandon it, a flaming ruin. Britten thoughtfully removed his license plate and threw it into the river. Before they encountered police, fortune relented enough to send their way a night-hawking taxi-driver, who took them aboard, Michael still clinging to the sack of loot. They were set down a few blocks from their own neighborhood.

Mal dared not be driven any nearer. Long before that, he knew, the telephone wires had been singing from Irvington. That song, coupled with the abandoned

wreck of his car and the tale that the taxi chauffeur could tell, would make all too wide a trail as it was.

They reached Gail's Jail at last on foot, weary and anxious, Michael carrying the booty under his arm and Britten assisting Clink, who stifled a groan at every step, from the pain of his wounded shoulder. Mal dared not run the risks of summoning a doctor; so he bandaged the wound as best he could, and Clink was hidden in the Catacomb, to lie there until it should be thought safe to fetch medical aid to him.

To the Catacomb too Michael carried the bag of stolen plate and set it clinking down.

"Bad luck — devil's truck," chanted Daddy Gail. "We'll melt that down tomorrow night."

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



LOVE'S EYES

BY MELBA PARKER

I LOVED you, but I went away—
My boy heart longed to roam.
The far lands held so mystic much;
Things were so old at home.

And yet, no matter where I turned,
My thoughts fled back to you.
Your eyes were all that I could see
In Adriatic's blue.

Sleep flowers of Khan were like your lips,
Koyukuk gold, your hair.
I saw your cheeks in cherry blooms
In Nippon everywhere.

The tinkle of Shonhaikwan bells
At twilight was your laugh;
The ivory of Dar Banda
Was not as white by half.

And so at last I turned me back—
What use was there to roam?
For all the beauties of the earth
Were there with you at home.



The People of the Glacier

by Clyde B. Hough

V—WINGS AGAINST THE CAVE WALLS

WAH and Ga were the world's first lovers. And love, even in its initiatory venture, was showing some of the traits which have characterized it ever since. Already, the lovers were in an ecstatic state of conflict, a conflict that was primarily within themselves, but which was beginning to manifest itself in their actions relative to each other.

In their daily foraging for food, as in their rough play and crude games, Wah and Ga were the best of pals, and being beset by infinitely fewer complications, their love ran smoother than do most loves of to-day. Yet she would not voluntarily go to his cave and live there; which was equivalent to a marriage ceremony. And Wah had learned by experience that something in him revolted against following the custom of his fathers and forcing Ga to become his mate. Still he could not understand her attitude, for she spent all of her waking hours with him and preferred him and his company to any of the other young males.

On the other hand, Ga could not explain to Wah—the People had no spoken language. She could not tell him of the strange yearnings that she felt in the gloom of her cave, nor of how the damp walls seemed to press in upon her. She could not, even in her own mind, formulate the meaning of

this vague unrest. In short, Ga had come to loathe the caves and dream dim dreams of life with Wah under more tolerable conditions. What conditions, she did not know. At any rate, she was not content to become his mate in a cave.

It was early afternoon. A westering sun still warmed the young earth. The People, trooping back to their caves, from a day's foraging in the Deep Forest, came in groups of twos and threes, their long arms dangling awkwardly, their short, stringy legs seeming to bend under the weight of their powerful bodies. They reached the little basin below their caves and the older ones squatted about on the ground, resting and watching the younger ones and the children at their awkward play. As a rule, Wah and Ga were the most lively of all the grown-ups in these frolics. But on this afternoon, they sat moodily apart from the others and also from each other, taking little notice of the rough sport.

For a while, Wah sat with his back to the north wall of the little basin, a tall peak towering above him, a tapering, steep-walled column of dry lava that reached more than two hundred feet into the azure blue. Diagonally across from him Ga leaned moodily against the cliff, apparently oblivious to everything around her. Down near

the edge of the Big Water, Zel, a stringy, short-legged, flat-breasted young female of the People, was romping and squeaking with all the vigor and energy that any cave man could desire in a mate.

Suddenly, it came to Wah that were it any other female than Ga whom he wanted he would take her by force. He knew, for instance, that he would not hesitate to knock Zel over the head and take her to his cave. And he knew, also, that once taken to his cave, Zel would remain there, unquestioning, obedient. Then why not take Zel and satisfy his longing for a mate? It would be a logical, if a cold-blooded way to settle the matter. Wah did not reason thus clearly, but in some vague way he reached a similar conclusion.

When ideas came to Wah, his system was to try them and learn the consequences thereof. Argument, debate and consideration were no part of his mental equipment. He rose and walked down to the beach, where Zel was running around in circles, playing some game with a number of other youngsters. Wah stood at the edge of the circle till Zel came opposite him. He did not strike her down as many of his brothers would have done in his place. Wah was in a way humane. He reached out with one powerful arm and curved it securely about the cave girl's waist, just as she was about to run by him.

Zel came to a sudden stop, perforce, and squealed in surprise. But even as she cried out, Wah threw her across his shoulder and started with her toward the base of the cliff. The People were startled out of their stolidity. Not because of the action. That was customary. But because it was Wah who committed the act. By reason of visionary association, the People had come to link Wah and Ga together, and for some reason, the meaning of which they had not the slightest inkling, they had set these two apart from themselves and all others.

Wah reached the base of the cliff, but before he even began to climb, there came a vicious shriek. He glanced around and had a vision of flying red hair and the next instant Ga pounced upon him and his burden. All three of them, they fell to the ground in a tangled, scratching, screeching

heap. Although she was not yet ready to mate with Wah, Ga was not one to stand idly by and see him mate with another. Along with her unusual intelligence had come a certain amount of will and a somewhat energetic personality. Wherefore, she followed the dictates of her very primitive mind and proceeded to interfere vigorously with Wah's intentions.

Wah was the first to disentangle himself from the writhing, scrambling mass of humanity. And because he was Wah and not an average man of his time, he undertook to separate the two females. Or rather to assist Zel in the escape she was so ardently trying to make. For in reality, Ga was the only belligerent member of the trio. Wah succeeded, after being severely scratched himself, in separating the two. Zel immediately took herself to a safe distance as fast as she could propel her short, stringy legs. She was somewhat marked and disheveled. Moreover, she had missed becoming the mate of Wah. Still, she wasted no time in futile regrets, but soon joined in the play from whence Wah had snatched her.

On the other hand, Ga by no means passed over the episode so lightly. As soon as the wrangle had subsided, Wah felt it incumbent upon himself to make a peace offering. It was then that Ga showed her femininity. She had fought and was still willing to fight, to keep Wah for herself. But now that she had him all to herself and repentant, she would have none of him.

Scarcely had Wah begun to chatter conciliatingly, in what he intended to be soft tones, and started toward Ga, when she tossed her head indignantly and moved away. Then when Wah quickened his pace, she ran. And having considerable will of his own, Wah ran after her, determined to pacify her. Ga ran toward the beach, and when she came to the edge of the Big Water, because Wah was on the south side of her and she could not run that way without going toward him, she ran out into the water, turned north and passed around an outjutting point of the cliff.

Ga was the first who had been north of this point since that eventful day when the People, running from the Great Cold, passed it and came into the little basin and found

their new caves. It required but a few moments for Ga to pass beyond that part of the cliff which bulged out into the water. Then she turned out on the sandy beach which was here considerably broader than in front of the caves. Almost as soon as she reached the sand, she looked back and saw Wah rounding the point, but a short distance behind her.

By this time, it had become a sort of game between them. Ga determined to shake off Wah, to leave him behind, to make him quit; although she would have despised him could she have done either. On the other hand, Wah was equally determined to overtake Ga. Just what he would do with her, he himself was not sure. However, he intended no harm or rough usage. He had started out in a repentant mood, but that had given away to the spirit of the contest which was now on between them.

On the spur of the moment, Ga decided to climb the cliff that was here a part of the base of the tall peak which rose from the ridge above. Between her and the cliff, set about on the beach like gigantic saucers, were a number of great prehistoric shells; some of them eight or ten feet long and five or six feet broad and in the middle, at least two feet deep. So that when they lay on the beach, inside up, the pink and white of them sheeny, satiny, showed like the bathing pool of some fairy princess; and they were filled with water from recent rain.

In making her way toward the cliff, Ga stepped on the edge of one of the shells, it rocked, threw her off her balance and she plunged into it, slipped and sloshed around and was thoroughly wet. However, the water was not cold—it had been warmed by the sun. Still Ga was in no mood for a bath. She scrambled to her feet, clambered out of the shell and hurried on toward the cliff.

Ga was just far enough up the face of the cliff to be out of Wah's reach when he arrived at the base. For a few moments she tried to outclimb him, but seeing that he was rapidly gaining on her, she stopped and waited, standing on the nub of a boulder, holding with both hands to a ledge above.

Apparently, she had given up and only

waited for Wah to overtake her. But when his head was just a little above the level of her feet, she swung away from him, like a pendulum, and still holding to the ledge above with her hands, swung back, planted both feet against his shoulders with the full weight of her moving body. The blow tore Wah loose from his holds and he fell to the ground. Then Ga hurried up the cliff at her best gait.

By the time Wah had started again to climb the cliff Ga had reached the top, and crawled over onto a broad shoulder which spread between the edge of the cliff and the tall peak. Here she rested for a few moments, then looking over the edge of the cliff, saw Wah more than half-way up. Once more, the spirit of the game possessed her and she ran around to the other side of the tall peak, desiring to lead Wah on a chase, rather than to shove him back to the ground, as she might easily have done from her position on the brink of the cliff above him.

Wah finished his climb and looked around for Ga. Not seeing her, he started to circle around the massive pillar of lava. Just as he rounded the eastern side of the peak he had a glimpse of Ga, who had seen him and started running back to the west side. Several times they ran around and around, making the complete circle of the peak. And all the time Wah was gaining on Ga, till at last there was only a few yards between them.

Then in a reckless fit of daring, Ga decided to climb up the peak itself. There were many holes, crevices and rough hand-holds to be had in the exterior lava. Ga jumped for one of these and almost instantly swung herself out of Wah's reach. Then she looked down at him and squeaked gleefully, exhilarated by the thrill of her own daring.

A new obsession, a new phase of the game had taken hold of her. She would test him, she would see if he dared to follow up the perpendicular wall of the peak. One side of her wanted to outdo him, do that which he would not dare to do. And yet another side of her cried out the hope that he would come on, that he would even surpass her efforts. Ga did not think these

things. She merely answered to the veer of impulse, as a ship answers to its rudder.

Without the slightest hesitation, Wah followed Ga up the peak. When they first left the ground, they had been on the west side of the peak, but as they worked their way upward, following the easiest hand-holds and foot-holds, they gradually came diagonally around to the south side. By this time, they had gone about fifty feet up the peak and this added to the distance from the bottom of the basin up to the top of the ridge, made Wah and Ga, altogether, between eighty and ninety feet above the People, who stood in the basin below and gaped up at these two open-mouthed.

Ga looked down and experienced a sudden feeling of panic. She became sick and weak; she grasped hold of the lava with her hands so tightly that it hurt. The People, far below there, looked, to her, less than half their natural size. For a moment, she felt that she would turn loose and fall down amongst them in spite of herself. Then she turned her head resolutely away, looked upward and learned that as long as she did not look down, she could climb with comparative assurance.

Meantime, Wah had looked down also, and had been disturbed by the same experience. So that, he, too, kept his eyes up and followed after Ga. But the climbing was difficult and required infinite care and attention. The situation had shifted from a chase to a contest of nerve endurance. Ga and Wah had nothing to do with this shift, of course. It was a natural consequence. Nevertheless, each one was striving now for the sole purpose of making the other quit, of climbing higher than the other dared to go.

Naturally, Wah had the advantage in this. For his sole aim was to outdo Ga. His mind and all of his energy was set and centered on that one object, while Ga's faculties were split and her desire divided between the wish to outdo Wah and the hope that he would prove to be her superior. There is no possible analysis to fit this condition, no logic and no reason will explain it. It stands alone, an irrefutable, illogical truth.

As Wah followed doggedly up and Ga continued to climb, to ever more dizzy heights, the afternoon sun, which was still an hour high, showed them to the People below, like climbing ants. Once Wah was almost startled into loosening his holds. Just as he raised his head above the level of a rather deep cleft in the lava, a large snake thrust out its slender, black head and struck, venomously. But in its anger and excitement, the snake missed Wah's head and its own head and a part of its body passed over the caveman's shoulder. Instantly, Wah let go with one hand and struck a blow to ward the snake off.

His hand closed over the glossy, black body and he gave a sharp, downward tug, pulling many feet of the snake out of the cleft. In fact, Wah pulled so much of the snake's body out of its lair that it went hurtling, squirming and hissing down the face of the peak, unable to check its own descent. Nor did it stop until it landed among the frightened, amazed People in the basin below.

While Wah had been deterred by his encounter with the snake, Ga had gotten far ahead of him and having found a deep declivity in the sheer wall of lava, she crawled in and seated herself for a rest.

When Wah had climbed to just a few feet below the recess wherein Ga sat swinging her legs, the cave girl suddenly wriggled out of her seat, kicking and screeching and slapping while she supported herself by one hand in a most precarious and dangerous manner. Wah was both surprised and frightened and hurriedly scrambled to one side lest Ga strike him in her wild descent and knock him loose from his holds.

They were still on the south side of the peak and considerably more than a hundred feet above the basin and the People. But to have seen Ga scrambling down the sheer wall of lava, careless and forgetful of distance, one would have thought that she was not ten feet above the ground.

Wah, of course, could not understand what had excited Ga to such an extent, or why she slapped and screeched in such terror. The swarm of small, brown insects that hummed and buzzed about her angrily covering her shoulders, conveyed no mean-

ing to him. It was the first time that he, or any of the People, had come in contact with wild honey bees. Unthinking, Ga had disturbed a swarm of them which were hiving in the declivity, where she stopped to rest.

But as the cave girl hurried past Wah on her way down, a number of the angry, buzzing bees settled on him. Wah immediately decided that there was a fire up above and that these were small sparks falling on him. He understood now why Ga was in such a hurry. Often sparks from the fires he built had popped on him and they felt exactly as these things did. However, Wah's first idea was soon dismissed as he learned that he was dealing with something alive, with some kind of beings that could direct an attack. And the more he fought them, the more they crowded onto him.

The People below in the basin, still watching, were astounded at the wild, careless way in which the two youngsters scrambled down from their most dangerous position. However, they both retained presence of mind enough to hold on; and as they descended, they began to leave the bees behind. Then, after what must have been centuries to them, they reached the broad shoulder at the base of the peak, Ga somewhat in the lead. Instantly, she rushed to the cliff facing the Big Water and began to scramble down to the beach, Wah following almost at her heels.

As soon as Ga set foot on the beach, she began running around in circles and scratching herself and screeching as if she were insane. And Wah was scarcely less frantic, although he expressed his misery in a different way. He lay down in the sand and rolled over and over, sometimes stopping in his rolling to drive his fingers in the sand and pull himself forward, dragging on his breast and stomach, like a worm. But this afforded him about as little relief as did Ga's running and scratching afford her. By this time, the numerous bee stings had raised great, red, burning welts on their heads, faces and shoulders.

Then while Ga was running around, blindly, she accidentally stumbled against one of the massive shells filled with sun-

warmed rain water and fell headlong into it. The shell rolled a little on its oval back and some of the water was sloshed out. But still enough remained to cover Ga's body as she stretched out, full length. The warm, soft water, she found, gave her considerable relief. Presently, Wah, looking around, found that Ga was nowhere in sight. Then he stood up, scratching and clawing himself, and saw her lying in the shell. He was quick to perceive that she was in less misery there than anywhere else; so he, himself, immediately crawled into a shell full of water.

The sun went down and the People, having lost sight of Wah and Ga, climbed into their caves. The long, autumn twilight grew dim. And still Wah and Ga lay in the great, pink and white shells, the water soothing their burning, throbbing bodies. The stars came out and on account of the fear of night, the cave man and the cave girl crawled out of the soothing water. The night air chilled them and with the flat of their hands, they rubbed and pressed the water from their bodies, drying their heavy coats of hair. Their bodies still ached and throbbed from the poison of the many stings, but the burning pain had ceased.

Ga was no longer angry nor jealous. She no longer wanted to avoid Wah, and Wah had forgotten that another female besides Ga existed. They turned, and together waded past the projecting point which separated them from the caves, walking side by side, his arm over her shoulder.

When they came into the little basin, now silent and deserted, they stood for a moment on the beach, the water lapping softly at their feet, a full, large moon bathing them in mellow light, while Wah's arm was still around Ga's shoulder.

Suddenly he turned, drew close and laid his great, hairy lips to hers. The act was as original as the first dawn. Ga snuggled close to him for a moment; and in that moment, they both knew that whatever might come, conflict between them personally was at an end. Then Ga snatched herself free, ran swiftly and silently to the base of the cliff, climbed rapidly to her cave and, without looking back, dashed in.

(The end.)

In the Words of Silence

by Douglas Dold

CHAPTER I.

A LEGACY OF VENGEANCE.

THEY were not thieves in any ordinary sense. They were commercial pirates who had stolen, under cover of seeming legality, enormous tracts of thickly timbered Georgia pine lands, below Atlanta, which should have enriched the State.

But just as they had been about to reap a fruitful money harvest, the brilliant State's attorney, Edward March, a restless, gifted man, who, it seemed, could never let well enough alone, had nosed out their carefully covered trail of illegalities; had started on the scent hot-breathed, eager as a bloodhound, and, like a hound, they had killed him.

Not with their own hands, of course. The matter had been attended to by an underling.

This underling had, not being as intelligent as they had thought him, left trails which might lead to themselves; unless the question of who murdered Edward March could be satisfactorily settled by the law—in quite another point of the compass.

It had been so settled. The scapegoat selected to carry the irregularities of the three on his shoulders—or his neck, rather—to the gallows, was Charles Minturn.

Minturn was a no-man's-lander. He had done crooked things with the three. But he had never showed that whole-hearted unmorality which alone makes crime enjoyable. He was not really a criminal—just as he was not really an honest man.

Considering his unplaced state of mind, he seemed an excellent sacrifice to the herd idea that the sheepish public must be protected.

So the three forged an intelligent chain of damnatory evidence around Minturn. A chain in which they, by their regretfully expressed, but unshakable testimony, were the three strongest links.

Not that there were any weak links in the chain. There weren't.

Minturn was not only accused by his heretofore apparently friendly associates and educators in dubious operations, but he was, through the free use of their money, railroaded to condemnation with such speed and such firm denial of appeals that popular clamor loudly applauded the court's rapid "justice,"—and Minturn found himself on the edge of eternity.

It was at this point that Robert Minturn, his only child, rushed home from an industrial exploration expedition in Central America.

There had been rumors of young Minturn's death. The three had hoped these rumors were exact. For, after their former colleague was properly hanged, it would be awkward to have his son knocking around the State, turning up now and then, reminding them, by his presence, of matters they would prefer to forget.

To their sincere annoyance Robert Minturn arrived safely in their city.

The eldest of the three discovered this, and asked the other two at once to have dinner with him at his costly home.

Stepney Gales, the dinner giver, had

generations of culture back of him. This culture had beautifully polished his scoundrelly grandfathers whose ancestry ran into several titled houses, notorious for delicately done wickednesses.

It was a regret to Gales that his two partners in swindling were coarse men, who, although they frequented the best hotels, never learned any little elegancies. They really seemed to enjoy eating soup in such an auditory way that the sound frequently deeply irritated Stepney Gales. But they had an exceptional craft, an unreplaceably intelligent daring in predatory schemes which made them too valuable to discard.

Dinner was over now, and Gales had taken his two guests to his sound-proof library, one of the few walled spaces Gales ever trusted with confidences.

As he sat smoking with his companions, Gales's thin, aristocratic face showed palely through his cigarette smoke. He had a composed, intellectual look, tempered by a dreamy, smilingly tender mouth. His fingers were long, soft, sympathetic; they caressed you in shaking hands; his touch lingered pleasantly in one's memory.

Only his eyes, old with inherited wickednesses, dark, narrow, heavy lidded, watchful eyes, ever betrayed him, and that to singularly few.

Joyce Wilberforce, secretly engaged to Robert Minturn, was one of those few. But Joyce was Gales's private secretary, and must either have distrusted or loved this magnetic-voiced, graceful aristocrat whose courtesy to her was always exquisite.

Gales had a theory that deft compliments, euphemistic civilities, blind any woman, confuse her judgments. This theory had worked out wonderfully well through his life. But Joyce constituted an exception, and one so quietly self-poised that he never perceived he had failed with her.

Had he know she was Robert Minturn's fiancée he would have dismissed her, because she would recall a disagreeable incident. But he did not know it, and so Joyce stayed on.

He found her competent and very lovely.

But her loveliness showed no warmth. She seemed to him a little snow woman and he preferred this. He held it equally poor

taste and poor judgment to have affairs with an employee, especially a confidential one.

He wanted her to like him enough to rouse her loyalty; but as to flirting with her, he preferred women of whom he knew little, over whom he could cast the glow of his quite poetic imagination.

He grew to trust her, and, as he found her as well-bred as himself, occasionally remarked viciously to her on the uncouth, clownish breeding of Weldon and Sedgwick, his associates.

Now, as he sat eying these worthies, he felt no disposition to modify his past criticisms.

Weldon was sucking crassly at his cigar. Buried in his florid, red-gold mustache was unnapkinéd débris from dinner. His big, red, vulgar, sunflower face had offensively coarse features. His scanty red-gold hair was oiled, he sprawled brutishly as he smoked.

Gales found Sedgwick no better. He didn't sprawl, but he was dressed in checks that howled to heaven for loudness, his lean leathery fingers desecrated several magnificent diamond rings which flashed from nude settings intended to be smart, but which were merely obscene. He smelt vilely of expensive, ill-chosen perfumes and his leathery, shrewd face had "ringster" written all over it.

Sedgwick now grinned knowingly at Gales.

"What's up, Gales? You never asked *us* here for pleasure only. We're not popular with Mrs. Gales."

"There's no fooling *you*, Sedgwick. I brought you both here to say that Robert Minturn is *not* dead. He is back."

The others stopped smoking, abruptly.

Gales pursued:

"Of course he can't save his father—I suppose you realize that Charles Minturn, in these last hours of his, is pretty sure to set his son after us—it would be natural, you know."

The faces of Weldon and Sedgwick had hardened in unpleasant surprise over the news. Weldon growled:

"That's a damned nuisance! But you ain't thinking we orter—like Charles—"

"Not at all! Not at all! I was merely anxious to forewarn you. He could complicate things—so it's best we carefully impress on him what a torture it was to us to witness against his father. We were simply driven into it by conscience, of course.

"If he is rude, we must be patient with him, very patient. I would not, for worlds, be driven to the same measures with him that we were forced to use in regards to—Charles. Such—er—measures—should, as we've agreed, *never* be taken except where unusual, *very* unusual, circumstances make it imperative to use a man as—er—a shield.

"In the case of the son, as soon as he gets over his—I mean as soon as Charles is er—is gone—we can throw in the son's way some really brilliant, enticing offer that will bury him again in South America."

"I get you," Weldon grunted. Sedgwick nodded approval.

They talked a little longer, then immersed themselves in a game of poker. Until nearly two they drank temperately, smoked inordinately and bet with imperturbability, burying in the game's intensity all thought of the Shield, staring sleeplessly into the darkness of his last night, or of Robert Minturn raging in vain frenzy up and down his hotel room.

For, unfortunately, the father and son loved each other. All that was best in Minturn, the no-man's-lander, in Minturn neither wholly criminal or decent, went out to his boy.

Charles Minturn was fifty-eight. Tomorrow, the day on which he would die, was his son's thirty-fourth birthday.

For his years, Charles Minturn was singularly young; a well-set-up, rather soldierly looking man who, until this treachery, had delighted passionately in life. It was his determination to enjoy which had drawn him, though imperfectly, into the swindles of the three.

The trouble with Minturn was, he only wanted to steal when he needed money for pleasures. He did not love piracy as a game. So he made an inconsistent, unsatisfactory pirate and doomed himself to be a shield instead. To gain the loyalty of such confederates as his, a man must seek piracy and ensue it.

Arrested in the midst of a burst of pleasures, forced by his former instructors to become an efficient cover for their doing to death of the obnoxious attorney, Minturn's heart boiled now with a hate of their smooth treachery. A hate that almost blurred his natural horror of his closely approaching, infamous doom.

He had permitted his son only one interview for fear their mutual emotion might break down their courage.

But that single agonizing scene would live with Robert forever.

Father and son had met in the death cell, under the pitying eyes of the death-watch.

Ignoring the latter, Minturn had, after the first natural outburst of despairing love between Robert and himself, forced his son into composure, and had used their flying moments to leave to Robert the legacy Gales had foreseen—vengeance.

"You're way above the average in keenness, Bobbie," Minturn said, in dreadful self-control. "It's for you to track 'em down—one by one. In the end you are bound to win because—"

The agonized son, who had sternly accepted the legacy, found himself asking dully, so certain was his father's voice—

"Bound to win? Why?"

Minturn had answered very simply, though in so low a tone the words escaped the death-watch:

"Because there will be some one there to help you."

CHAPTER II.

• THE BEGINNING.

CHARLES MINTURN was duly and properly hanged by the neck. His last moments were expertly watched by the newspaper representatives who were there to make copy out of his death, for the benefit of the public, which needs such horrors written up as a dramatic amusement. They searchingly focussed their attention on Minturn in his prison stripes, as he walked slowly toward the swinging noose.

These trained observers found themselves puzzled. This man, about to be strangled,

carried neither fear nor courage in his face; his countenance was dominated, instead, by a grim, fixed expression of deliberate purpose.

They had a confused feeling that instead of looking as a dying man should, he bore the appearance of one who was about to walk through death as through a gate—to some task beyond; a task on which every source of resolution in the man was unalterably fixed.

But, of course, they did not put down anything of this sort in the copy they turned in to their respective papers. They wrote Minturn's death up in the usual way, being dominated by a newspaper man's natural disbelief in anything psychic. They did not even mention to each other the odd impression Minturn had given them.

That night the three read in the papers the well-headlined account of Minturn's death. Apparently it had been anything but sensational. To their surprise Minturn had not denounced, on the scaffold, his betrayers. He had not exerted his last breath in curses on them.

They said to themselves, each in his own phraseology, that Minturn had died in good taste. The unostentatious fact that he had also died with no expression of forgiveness quite escaped them.

But in the two weeks which followed Minturn's death and burial, they certainly did not give his son credit for good taste.

Although it was obvious he would remain a mark for morbid curiosity, as the son of a man recently hanged, Robert Minturn, after following his father's coffin to the grave, remained in the city.

Remained in spite of no less than three brilliant, tempting business offers made to him, in sequence, by the secret agents of the three.

The aristocratic Gales complained, in great annoyance, of this to Welden one evening, late, as the two were crossing a badly lighted side street.

"The fellow lacks a gentleman's instincts," Gales said, in keen disgust. "I can't understand him! I really must say—"

He broke off abruptly as a figure passed them in the shadows, a tall, soldierly built

man who looked neither left nor right and promptly was swallowed up in the night.

"Who was that?" Gales demanded sharply.

"I d'no," Welden grunted. Then added irrelevantly: "That dark suit he had on kinder seemed, in this measly light, to have stripes on the pattern."

"Why shouldn't it? Plenty of men wear stripes," Gales said, with a faint note of irritation. "I didn't give a damn about his suit—I just thought the fellow seemed familiar, yet I couldn't place him."

"Has he passed you before? Recently, I mean?"

Gales hesitated, then:

"I think so. Several evenings ago."

"Dark, like this?"

"No, in a theater foyer. I didn't see his face, and I lost him almost the instant I saw him in the crowd. But I got the impression of—of some one I might have known. It annoyed me, because I always like to place people."

"Same here!" Welden grunted. Then as they came into the brilliant lights of Peachtree Street, he added: "But such trifles ain't worth puzzlin' over."

They went over to Gales's office and occupied themselves, until nearly twelve, with a prospectus of some swamp lands which, as an irrigation prospect, seemed to offer opportunities for fleecing the public in such artistic phraseology as to prevent interference by so vexatious an institution as the Department of Justice.

It was during their work on this that Sedgwick joined them. As usual he was so flashily dressed as to give Gales an actual pain. This style of garmenting, however, was so satisfactory to Sedgwick that he seldom bothered, as Gales did, about what other men had on.

But to-night Gales, to his surprise, finally discovered that the eyes of Sedgwick, every now and then, were raised from the papers to gaze in an odd sort of way at Gales's quiet gray silk tie, ornamented with an equally quiet stickpin, whose head was a small ruby.

At last Gales said impatiently, yet politely:

"Look here, Sedgwick, why are you staring at my tie? Is it on crooked?"

Sedgwick had started slightly at the inquiry. He answered sheepishly:

"Why, no! It ain't on crooked. I—I just don't like it."

"The devil you don't," Gales sneered with a burst of irritation not common to his self-controlled personality. "If I can stand your ways of parrot-colored decoration, you certainly can't be annoyed with my simple tastes!"

He had risen, as he spoke, and stalked over to a panel mirror, in which he often studied his clients' faces without their knowing it. He glared at his tie. The soft gray silk was marked by faint stripes of black, and on the stripes the little ruby shone, like a solitary drop of blood.

Sedgwick had also risen and now came up to him.

"I didn't mean any reflection," he said uneasily. "Truth is, I reckon I need some glasses. Those stripes in your tie looked like they were movin', and that ruby kinder seemed like a little old drop of blood squeezed out of 'em. You see that's why I like bright colors; you don't get those queer effects."

Gales laughed shortly and stalked back to the table.

"Better see an oculist to-morrow," he counseled.

But that night, when he undressed, he flung the tie impatiently in his waste-basket.

CHAPTER III.

A VISIT.

IF at the beginning of the two weeks which had now elapsed since his father's dreadful death, Robert Minturn had tried to foretell what those weeks would be, he would have dully declared he saw before him only horror unalloyed.

But the most intolerable situation often reveals, in its surface frightful heart, a point of such assuaging sweetness that the shaken spirit takes new courage toward life.

For three days after the execution, Robert Minturn lay in his rooms, which had been his father's, wrapped by a half-stunned misery.

This house had belonged to Charles Minturn. Through his turbulent widowerhood it had seen feverish gaieties. There was no gaiety now. Nor any of the parasites who had once spent Charles Minturn's money.

Only the wretched and sickened son lay there, in the room next the one his father had especially used.

Robert Minturn had not eaten since the hanging three days ago, though he had drunk a great deal of cold water. Hunger would come back to him, of course. But thought of food was still loathsome.

He had not been out of doors since the funeral. He had not voluntarily talked to Joyce over the phone more than for a brief declaration to her that he was now out of her life permanently; that she must not call him up again. If she did he would not answer.

After this she had tried twice to get him, and twice had met with his sternly insistent rebuke that she might have the decency to be thankful he was saving her from sharing an unspeakable ignominy. After which he had abruptly cut her off—the last time warning her he wouldn't again answer the phone.

Now, the night of the third day he lay staring up at the ceiling in a chaos of despairing horror and of helpless hate toward the dominant Three who walked so successfully through life.

It verged on midnight. But he took no thought of hours; because each one was as long, as hideous as the one before.

His windows were open, the night being warm. Some drunken diners went lurching past. Their tipsy songs, screeching in broken keys of maudlin satisfaction, were horrible to his ears.

In the next room, his father's room, the bed was flush with his against the dividing wall. On that unseen bed, something suddenly yet quietly stirred, vibrating through the heavy wall.

It was a vitally pregnant vibration, as though that dumb product of nature, mere wood, had been informed with life. A distinct sense of shock ran through Robert Minturn. He sat up; what could be stirring in that jealously locked room?

Astounded, he pressed his nervous hands

against the wall; the pulse seemed beating into his own, so gently that it lessened greatly the sequent terror bred by the sound of a hoarse whisper, a difficult, strange whisper that made his hair slowly stir with that uncomplying terror we have of the dead, or those we call dead.

Unnatural as the whisper sounded, plainly as its hoarseness indicated a dreadful reminiscence of the strangling noose by which Charles Minturn had died, the sound sent new life into the unhappy son, even through the unavoidable fear bred at first by this communication.

The whisper might not have been a whisper. He did not know whether it was actual sound or an interpenetrating of his own consciousness by a realism in which words were not needed.

But whether or not the words could have been heard by anyone else, Robert Minturn heard them:

"I promised you there should be—some one to help you in—breaking them. It wasn't easy to come to you—far harder—than—I thought it would be—"

As though this cost a singular effort, the voice faltered, then began again:

"These—over here—let me come—let me—have words—this once—that I might save you from—the legacy—I left you—not justly yours. I—"

Again it faltered with its strangely painful effort; its laboring, titanic effort.

Then, while the son's heart almost stood still with listening the message, in unconquerable tenacity, began again.

"Not yours the task ahead—not yours—but mine—given to me—over here—as it is, I find, always given—to the seduced—the betrayed. By all that is holy I implore—I command you—leave those Three alone—absolutely—alone—"

The whisper came no longer. The charged, tense, arresting atmosphere grew normal. The stirred hair of the gasping listener matted against his skull once more; then the apparent stoppage of his heart changed to a swift, tumultuous, exultant beat.

For at the whisper's cessation Robert Minturn's fear had vanished. A wonderful flood of emotions rushed through him.

He had never thought about personal survival. He had accepted, with the easy philosophy of one who has never lost, the true saying that "Death ends all."

When his father was so ignominiously executed, Robert Minturn conceived, as part of the whole hideous affair, that the elder Minturn was now only a shocking memory, on which men would mentally spit.

Naturally, then, his first hint of a surviving consciousness in the man so frightfully betrayed had come as an astounding, terrifying thing. A strengthening wonder took fear's place, a healing, revivifying wonder.

His father lived! The grave had done its loathsome worst, and yet—his father lived. Life then, was greater than treachery, greater than despair.

An hour longer he lay listening patiently. No further message came; but at the hour's end he experienced his first sensation of hunger. He went to the kitchen, found enough for a meal, and ate, with pleasure in the act.

An intense belief in the power behind that whisper filled him; an unreasoning, exquisitely comforting belief; not in the least justified by life as Robert had hitherto known it.

And certainly the Three were just then playing, drinking, smoking, betting, in all the carefully guarded security of their triple, acute intelligence.

His meal finished, Robert went to bed again and slept soundly. This was Saturday night. He did not wake until nine Sunday morning, and then only because some one was knocking at his bedroom door.

The front door of the pretty suburban cottage had been left unlocked. Who would trouble the house of the hanged man? Yet it seemed some one *had* come.

He rose, flung a dressing gown over his pajamas and quietly opened his door. As quickly, Joyce walked into the room.

As he gazed at her in amazement, her darkly blue eyes, tender and serious, met his. She smiled at him unaffectedly, and said gently, as heedless of the tumbled bedroom as though it were a parlor:

"Good morning!"

"Joyce—my God—you were mad to come here—alone, too!"

She rested a small, gloved hand on a chair back.

"I should have been worse than mad *not* to have come. Must I be one of those who in the presence of great hours think only of petty things? Oh, Rob—how petty you have been with me!"

"Petty!" he clutched at the breast of the heavy robe swathing his well-set-up, muscular figure. His hurt, his indignation blazed at the word *petty*!

"Because I've been brave enough to give you up? Decent enough to save you from ruinous disgrace? If I had loved you in any common way, I'd have let you marry me—the murderer's son—the man whose father— And you call it—petty!"

She answered quietly:

"I do indeed, Rob. For little loves there are little ways, which is all right. But for such love as yours and mine there can be no disgrace, unless we do something low ourselves.

"It was part of my passion for you that my body loves you. But it is far more part of my love that my soul loves yours. If we had been friends, not lovers, I should have come to you. Being lovers, soon to be married, I had a double right to be here, because I couldn't get at you any other way.

"I have come unseen, without damage to my name. But if you insist on breaking with me, I'll come to you again. And when I do I shall have taken pains to call myself publicly what you know I am not. So, if that's the only way we can be on common ground, I'll come to you shorn of reputation—because if I am to fail you for my mere reputation's sake, it shall go."

Robert Minturn fell back a step from her. The waters of a tide so sweet he could hardly bear its laving exultation, flooded his soul.

"Joyce—Joyce—" he cried brokenly. "Oh, life is more splendid than the horrors in it—greater than—"

"Then you *will* come to see me again? Just as before?"

"Yes—yes—anything you say— Oh, Joyce—"

She smiled again, almost whimsically, as

though to check his emotion, and was gone, closing the door softly behind her.

CHAPTER IV.

A MESSAGE FROM CHARLES MINTURN.

WHEN the hands of Robert Minturn's clock reached 10:45 that same Sunday, Mr. Wesley Weldon went to church. He frequently did. He regarded the practice of religious ceremonies much as he had regarded Minturn's death—as a shield. The more one went to church the less the public worried about one's record.

Besides, the pew he scrupulously paid for was a comfortably cushioned spot in which to think out new schemes for dividend-bearing illegalities.

He found the dim, colored light, the pleasant monotone of the minister, or the music of the choir, at once mentally soothing and stimulating. He seldom heard any words; if a few, owing to a break in his thoughts, got in, he easily dismissed them, as one does an importunate beggar.

There was another advantage in church-going. His wife was shrewish. At home she annoyed him. But in church she couldn't.

So, to-day, as he sat there, his thoughts took steady shape.

"The man we need on that prospectus is Quint Liewell. He'll paint the swamp up until the boobs, with their stocking stores of money will fall for it.

"And being an irrigation scheme, a little water on the lands is easy to explain—delay in ditching—labor conditions—the war. Later, under these same war conditions, the comp'ny can fail, just as natural and—"

From the altar the fastidiously fragrant breath of lilies drifted, across the quiet air, mingling with the pastor's steady voice.

"—and though we ought, at all times humbly to acknowledge our sins before God, yet ought we chiefly so to do when we assemble and meet together—"

Absently, Weldon thrust the words aside and pursued his thoughts:

"After Liewell's done that prospectus, we'll get a first-rate criminal lawyer to go

through it carefully. We don't want to be bothered with any more State attorneys—"

One of the church windows, or else a door, was open. A wandering errant breeze was flowing through. It stirred the American flag which the minister had loyally draped not far from the altar.

Faintly the soft breeze moved the silken colors. The voice of the minister was reading the litany. Stirred by private sufferings of his own, his voice rose in almost passionate imploration:

"Oh, God, the Father of Heaven, have mercy upon us, miserable sinners—"

Weldon pondered over a choice of lawyers. Glassfield might do.

Glassfield had been strikingly successful in watching over the illegalities of Wolfert, of Ceteran, of Stokes & Co., and they had, untroubled, put over schemes which had drained their especial section of the public bone-dry.

For a second now the walling litany caught at his consciousness.

"Remember not, Lord, our offenses—"

With a scarcely conscious effort he thrust the words aside. The only objection to Glassfield was, he charged so much—

Still, it might be a paying proposition to give a man like that what he demanded. After all it was a question of "safety first"—he, Weldon, had always looked thoroughly to his own safety, and he reflected on this with a pleased smile, even though he was aware of being annoyed by the unusual forcefulness in the young minister's troubled, imploring voice:

"From all blindness of heart, from pride, vainglory and hypocrisy, malice and all uncharitableness—" the voice flowed into his ears. It was followed by the minor-keyed cry of the congregation:

"Good Lord, deliver us!"

Angrily Weldon shook the superstitious nonsense off. Why the devil didn't the fool keep his hysterical voice down?

Of course, instead of Glassfield they could hire young Quest, he was sharp as a needle, that fellow Quest—

"From lightning," the passionate voice pleaded on, *"and tempest, from plague, pestilence and famine, from battle, murder and—"*

Damn this new man's voice! How it drove in and bothered a busy man. What sense was in it? Murder? What the heck was he gabbling about now? Murder—Who had murdered any one? Self-protection—that wasn't murder— That—

The current of his thoughts were changed by the lily-fragranced drift of air. It was so cold, that air. It began to lay chill touches on him like queer, impalpable fingers, a silly fancy. So he shook the idea off, and impatiently stared at the altar and its surroundings.

The light that shafted down went gray, burying itself in the undulating insinuating flowing of what—stripes? Stripes, the arresting sickening prison stripes—in a church—where a man went for comfort? For comfort, and was startled, annoyed, insulted by a damnable decoration of crawling, tentacular prison stripes, in—no—that hellish, silken thing had bars—bars that a whitely yellow face pressed against, bars that—

His eyes suddenly cleared from the blurring gray. It was only the flag! Just the flag—the normal, quiet thing he had passed so often; why, it was as harmless as a church; usual, every-day, negligible as a church.

He grinned savagely at his own annoying interlude of now quite-past fancy.

Leisurely, his eyes left the flag, left the white, cold, shining cross and wandered to a very lovely young girl, scarcely grown, in the pew ahead.

Her face had a charmingly infantile, dancing beauty. She was so harmless, so childishly lovely he felt a sense of relief in her as a safe point of vision.

His eyes fell to her girlish shoulders. These shoulders, so prettily curved, were modestly clothed in a new blue organdy through which ran wide stripes of pink; a rose-starred pink; but, as Weldon stared, the color ran, or seemed to run, into scarlet; as if dull prison stripes were soaked in blood.

Convulsively his gaze took refuge on his wife's dark-purple silk gown.

Around Mrs. Weldon's throat a gray silk neck ribbon lay, a fashion of the hour, innocuous enough.

But as he looked the ribbon, very, very

slowly, began to slip upward, tightening in a noose—a hangman's noose that—

Startled out of all repression, he leaned quickly toward her:

"Kate, look out! It's—"

The shrewish temper of Mrs. Weldon blazed up instantly at the indecorum of his loud whisper.

In the soft religious light, she turned a snarling look on him and hissed:

"You fool! Be quiet, can't you?"

As she whispered, the ribbon again lay harmlessly, fashionably, around her neck, its foolish little tassel swinging aimlessly at her brocaded belt.

He shrank into himself, like a cuffed dog; quivering to think how his eyes had tricked him. An oculist—he must see one.

He tried to distract his mind by really listening to the words now, running like a surging tide of imploration:

"In all times of our tribulation, in all times of our prosperity, in the hour of death and in the hour of judgment—"

By heck, a man wasted his time in such a place! How had he ever thought it so comfortable? What on earth was the fellow saying? Oh, yes, the litany. A tiresome concoction—that *"—in the hour of death—and in the hour of judgment—"*

Angrily he drew out a greasy note-book. Sheltered by his tall pew he began figuring up the advertising expenses of the irrigation project. The columns of figures absorbed and steadied him. There was nothing wrong with his eyes. He'd been dreaming.

He drew a line under a new column and began setting down the total. The total? He stared at it. A shock of cold surprise, a stabbing uneasiness ran through him. The total?

He had not written it down in numbers, but in words, sprawling in rough chirography. These words flared up at him from the little page:

"You never told me all your secrets. But I know them all now. And in the hour of death—in the hour of judgment—"

His eyes tried to start back into his head. That writing—that sprawling, impetuous hand—that was the perfectly familiar, easily identified writing of the executed man—Charles Minturn.

The book dropped to the pew floor with quite a little thud. Deeply annoyed, Mrs. Weldon dived for it and thrust it indignantly at him, whispering viciously:

"D'you want to have us stared at for heathens? If you're sick, go home."

CHAPTER V.

"THE HOUR OF DEATH AND JUDGMENT."

IT was ten days after that especial Sunday that Stepany Gales received the honor of an unexpected visit from Mr. Weldon.

Gales never encouraged his two associates to visit him. Socially, they were no credit. Gales tried never to make them feel this. He protected himself by urging on his associates that he and they could work together more concordantly, if they were not seen together too often.

But this evening, it was nearly ten o'clock, here was Weldon, not only coarse as usual, but annoyingly odd and nervous.

At first he wouldn't talk at all in the handsome, sound-proof library. He sat fiddling clumsily with a costly ivory and gold paper knife. When it snapped, as the provoked Gales had foreseen it would in Weldon's spatulate fingers, the visitor merely flung the pieces brutishly aside, without any apology, drew out an exasperatingly scented handkerchief, mopped his red forehead and mumbled:

"Gales—"

"Well—go ahead—" Gales urged courteously, but his courtesy was tried.

"When a man's choked to death, buried, rotten—he's dead, ain't he?"

"One would assume so," Gale said lightly, smiling easily at Weldon.

"Then Charles Minturn is dead, ain't he?"

"Of course, my friend. The late departed is only a memory, and an unsavory one. Why mention him?"

"Memory, hell! I ain't a childish fool to be bothered by memory. Gales, this killing business—it ain't what it's boosted up to be. He's—back—"

This time Gales didn't smile. He leaned keenly forward, shooting a piercingly ap-

praising glance at Weldon, and said anxiously:

"See here, Weldon, men like you and I can't afford to have nerves like a silly woman."

"It ain't nerves. I wisht to God it was. I—why, Gales I could have stood seeing Charles Minturn's handwriting comin' from my own pen; coulder stood those stripes of his, those damned prison stripes weaving into everything—coulder stood the noose that seems to be lyin' around everywhere—when I know it ain't—but it's gone further than that, Gales—"

"Steady, man! Steady! What do you mean?"

"He made me write it in my little old note-book—'*You never told me all your secrets. But I know them all now—*' He does know. He does! Gales, I had a box hid in my house, hid in such a way nobody, nobody, I tell you, could have found the hole it rested in.

"Yesterday I went to it. It was gapin' open, the hole was; the iron box was gapin' open, as if it had never been locked. My private papers were scattered all around, promiscuously—it made me sick as a dog to see 'em—papers I hid so carefully—so carefully—" The thick voice ran into a whimper. "It's awful hard on a man, Gales, not to have any safety for his private papers, not to feel any security—"

"Have a drink!" Gales invited curtly. His look of anxiety deepened. He rose.

"No! Sit down! I don't want a drink. I've gotter keep my head level. I need it. Those were terribly particular papers. One of them was that—you know—about Sanderson—"

"*What!*" Gales sprang forward. "You kept that? After swearing to me you'd destroy it! You infernal liar!"

Gales was quivering with a rage that for the moment completely destroyed his usual tact. He poured a torrent of furious words at Weldon, who looked dully up at him and said, as dully:

"A while back I'd a punched your head for some of that mud you're slinging at me. But now, I don't care. What difference does a live man make, chestin' around? Gales—God—it's the dead ones—rotten

and dead I tell you—and here still—that can—

"He touches my hand—and it writes *his* writing. He touches my spring in the wall—the hiding-place gapes open. He touches my locked box—it spills over—open, too. He sets a shadder on my pillow just before I go to bed—and it turns into a noose—a noose—a—noose—"

Gales, silenced, horrified, stared at his colleague. The strange, alien indifference of Weldon to his caustic rage had made him feel singularly helpless. He said, with sudden gentleness and great anxiety:

"The paper was gone, you say?"

"No. It *wasn't*. None of 'em were gone. Evidence enough to send you an' me to the pen ten years was just scattered around contemptuously. Much as to say it wasn't worth takin'. Because—because he—he could do so much—more—than that."

"Yes—yes! But—you'll bring me the paper, to-night?"

"I just as soon. It don't make any difference."

"And about these fancies. Did you see a doctor?"

"Yes. I went to a specialist. He's high up in the profession because it costs like the devil to talk to him. I told him a lot—"

"Not too much, you fool?" rasped Gales, driven again into anxious anger.

"I dunno. I reckon not. It wouldn't matter. Every day in the year he's busy turning minds inside out. He did mine—like an old glove."

"You—you—what did he say?"

"About the handwriting? He said something about secondary personalities. About the box of papers—he just said I'd been sonambulist."

"Talkin' about sleep—Kate don't sleep with me any more. She has taken herself off to the blue room and—"

"Listen, Weldon! You *didn't* say anything about me to that alienist, did you? Think!"

"About you? If I did—you should worry! It ain't alienists that troubles a man. What could he do? Alive like he is. It's when a man's dead, I tell you, dead—rotten—in all times of our prosperity, in the hour of death and in the hour of judg-

ment—what was I saying? About Kate—she won't sleep with me now. She has taken herself off to—"

"Weldon, I'm going home with you—now. We'll get the papers together."

Weldon rose obediently.

"All right. I just as soon. You should worry! What a man wants is safety. Hasn't been but such a little while since I really felt secure—about papers—about everything—my hat? It's right here, Gales. Ready? Yep. You see a feeling of security—"

CHAPTER VI.

STRIPES.

AS Gales and Weldon left the house together, Hector Sedgwick was just coming home.

His sister kept house for him. They lived in a highly ornate apartment.

You entered a decorated marble hallway first. When you reached the elevator the attendant negro running it seemed to have more brass buttons on his lavish uniform than any other elevator "boy" in the city.

Near the elevator was a glittering switch-board, with another brassily decorated negro at it. If you were merely a caller, this Afrit called up the apartment you wanted, gave your own name and inquired whether the owner was at home.

If the owner assured you personally that he or she was not there, you could ask no better evidence of a social vacuum, and went away; or if you were asked to come up you were landed in a corridor containing the correct number.

Hector Sedgwick, being in his rightful quarters, sent up no name and presently applied a latch-key to the costly duplex apartment.

When he entered the sitting-room his sister looked up from a dubious novel and gave him a careless:

"Lo, Hector."

She was in an exquisitely embroidered silk kimono. She reeked of perfumes, like Hector.

But unlike her brother, she was handsome. Her thick blond hair massed over

a large, well-featured, highly colored face. Her bold, bright blue eyes, a little too prominent, were set under long lashes. The eyebrows were finely arched. Her nose was admirably cut and her mouth was exceptionally handsome in its full, red, sensual contour. That her plump figure was a good one the kimono left little doubt.

Hector Sedgwick scowled.

"I wish you wouldn't sit around half dressed like you do, Mirabel. Twice I've run comp'ny in on you this way—"

She flung the novel impatiently down on the velvet divan.

"Yes—'cause you were such a simp you forgot to phone up. Take it from me, I ain't goin' to sit around corsetted when I ain't lookin' for gentlemen friends. At least not until we are ready to break into society. Grouch about something else. D'you bring the bird seed for the canary?"

He nodded. On the lace-decked center-table of the elaborately furnished living-room he laid the little package. Across from it the bright yellow canary slept in his handsome cage, darkened by a silk cover. The cover was worked in a nest design with overlarge eggs in them, hints of a domesticity to which the canary would never attain, as she had no mate.

The big pianola was heaped with jazz records. One had been dropped on the Persian carpet.

Miss Sedgwick yawned, eying the bird-seed package.

"I'm getting sleepy. This novel is punk. I wish I could find a novel with real pep in it. Your business going all right?"

He nodded absently, his hat and gloves discarded, he stood staring at the jazz records, his hands jammed in his loudly checked pockets, hands so brilliant with diamond rings that it is a wonder their flashing didn't show through the cloth.

In his gorgeously brocaded silk tie a diamond pin caught the light expertly and flung it at the canary cage.

"I guess I'll go to bed," Miss Sedgwick declared. Her loud voice was rather sweet in timbre. "Hector, I hope you're going to sleep. This way you've taken up lately of pacin' through the rooms till two an' three o'clock gets me awful nervous.

"Why you uster turn in like—like a machine, an' sleep like everything. I haven't heard you snore in days."

He made no answer. Really, he had not heard her. His eyes had passed the jazz records and were resting on the new curtains Miss Sedgwick had bought and put up that very day. She got tired of draperies quite easily and was given to expensive changes, which Sedgwick, who supported her, rarely grumbled over.

These new curtains were of corded silks. From their gray-green background, quite gray in the night light, scarlet stripes leaped out in a weave "guaranteed not to fade," wicked scarlet stripes, heavily insistent stripes—

Sedgwick suddenly rushed forward in a kind of fury. Before his sister's amazed, horrified eyes, to the accompaniment of her loud scream, he seized on the curtains, tore them down, trampled them, then turned on her, cried with a horrifying rage which froze in her throat the outburst she had been about to screech at him:

"Didn't I tell you not to bring a single damned stripe into here? Am I to have no place safe from 'em?"

She had sprung up. Under the dreadful fury of his glare she fell back toward the wall, feeling it for the door, though she did not dare go out.

"And when you get more curtains," he hissed, standing on the trampled silks, "don't noose 'em back with those devil's slip-knots of cord. Understand me? Nail 'em back—fix 'em any way except those hellish nooses. D'you get me? D'you?"

"Oh, yes—yes!" she faltered, her tongue clumsy with terror. "I do getcha. I forgot, Hector. I did really forget! An'—an', besides, I thought you was jokin'."

"Then don't forget again!" he snarled. He gathered up the costly curtains, tore their silken loops from the wall, strode to the screened grate, wrenched the screen aside so violently that he wrecked it, crammed the curtains and their cords into the grate, struck a match and fired them.

The silken-garmented girl watched him in silent terror, and as she saw the flames eat through the stripes, she caught, or seemed to catch, vaguely in the air, apart

from them both, yet near them, a faint breath of ironic laughter, of complex, dreadful laughter—though no such thing could be.

CHAPTER VII.

ONE!

IT was at Weldon's house, that same night, he and Gales got the wire calling them both to a near-by town on a matter of no small financial importance, into which Sedgwick eventually would come also.

Gales was annoyed. Some rare and beautiful paintings were to be on sale tomorrow by an estate which Gales had himself very deftly, very courteously ruined. He expected to get several of the paintings, especially an exquisite Madonna of Bouguereau's, for nearly nothing.

But he had to go with Weldon. In the present state of Weldon's nerves his judgment couldn't be trusted. They left at midnight.

Next morning they together put through a most successful deal. They had to do with a mild-eyed old professor who trusted to their mutual honor. The professor knew Sophocles, and much of Plato, backward as well as forward. But he did not know that his own world, his seemingly civilized, innocent world, was walked by devils as well as decencies.

He was stripped and never knew it. Though he would know it later on.

Feeling they had earned the best of lunches, Gales and Weldon went into the town's most prominent hotel.

It was in the midst of the fish course that Weldon caught sight of Dr. Grierson coming in.

J. Everstone Grierson was a physician of high standing. Weldon like him very much, for Grierson was one of those excellent mixers who took his atmosphere from those he was with.

He could say even coarser things than Weldon, and in Weldon's society affected a carelessness of manner which was very pleasant to the latter, who felt Gales's fastidiousness a check. Weldon was too primal to understand that the "double en-

tentes" of Gales, expressed with such edged wickedness, were even worse than the vulgar rottenness of himself.

Weldon, the instant he caught sight of Grierson, rose, hailed him joyously and hauled him over to their table.

The physician consented smilingly, though he never liked lunching with such opposing types; they forced him into a middle course which would offend neither. This was hard to keep up.

Gales greeted him pleasantly as he sat down.

"Thought we left you in the city," Weldon continued. "What a hop-about you are, Dr. Grierson."

Grierson smiled, gave his simple order to the waiter, then said:

"No more a hop-about than you two—I was called down here by an old uncle who is to be operated on this afternoon."

He broke a piece of bread, with strong, assured white fingers, crumbled it, observed both men shrewdly, from his slanting gray eyes, and said questioningly: "You two haven't seen the afternoon papers?"

Weldon looked puzzled—Gales's finer sensibilities took instant alarm. He stared sharply at Grierson.

"No, we haven't. Is there an extra of any importance?"

"To you, I think. I'm just down from the city, and knew it before I left. The morning papers didn't have it."

"Well, then, don't be so damned slow in givin' us the news!" Weldon protested, extracting a fish bone from his teeth with unabashed fingers. The process made his voice thick.

The waiter set the lamb and green peas Grierson wanted down on the white cloth. The physician helped himself critically. He said:

"About dawn Miss Sedgwick, Miss Mirabel Sedgwick, you know, rang me up in great distress." He salted the peas slightly, or tried to, but the salt was lumpy in the cruet. The waiter hurriedly annexed another cruet for him. This proved more successful. Grierson went on:

"Arriving at the Sedgwick apartment, I found your friend Sedgwick, fully dressed, stretched on the floor of his hall. He must

have been on his way out, or trying to get out."

Grierson paused to give the waiter an order which sent the negro out of hearing. The darky went reluctantly. That was always the way, his woolly head reflected indignantly. An order just when your customer was about to say something interesting.

Gales and Weldon had stopped eating. They stared hard at Grierson. Weldon suddenly said thickly, as if his fingers were still in his mouth:

"I know. He was dead."

"Quite so. He had not slept well for some nights, it appears."

"How could he?" muttered Weldon.

"Eh? What?" Grierson interrogated crisply.

"He—he told me he had insomnia," Weldon stammered.

"Yes—his sister confirmed that. She also said he had behaved queerly that evening—something about some new curtains. He burned them—merely because they had stripes."

Weldon's face paled. That of Gales grew expressionless.

"She said he had been odd for days," Grierson went on. "We got him to a bed. He was still warm. She had been waked by a sense of uneasiness, it appears; she had thought he had merely fainted, but I found his heart had entirely ceased."

"Wh-when you got his collar off," Weldon faltered in a low, terrified voice, strangely out of touch with the careless crowd in the big dining-room, "w-was there any—any mark on—on his throat?" The question came as though tortured from Weldon's coarse red lips.

Grierson gave him a searching glance.

"Odd you should guess that! Yes—there was a faint red line about his throat—but *under* the high, white collar. The collar was not mussed in the least.

"If any one had noosed and strangled him, the collar must, inevitably, have been crushed or mussed up. I couldn't account in any way for the mark."

"His—his face"—Weldon stammered on, clutching the table edge—"was—was swollen, or—"

"Markedly congested. Taken altogether his appearance was really that of a man who—well—who has been hanged, you know, in good health. The indications were all there of strangulation—yet the idea, under the circumstances, is absurd."

"Damned ridiculous," Weldon agreed in a high shrill falsetto that made several diners turn and look at him.

Realizing his tone, he became nervously silent just as the negro returned with the next course.

Weldon ate nothing more. His eyes vacantly on the table-dotted room, his ears filled with a blare of popular music, he sat silent, his pallor deepening into ashen gray. Then, through the band's primitively riotous, insistent beat of "Where Do We Go From Here?" Weldon caught a metallic, distinct strain of laughter, of anticipatory algid laughter that struck freezingly through the careless popular chords.

CHAPTER VIII.

TWO!

IT was a week later that Stepney Gales received in his home an uninvited guest.

Mrs. Gales was away overnight, at her sister's. Gales himself was just thinking of bed when the negro man servant announced rollingly, on the heels of a heavy bell peal: "Mr. Weldon, suh."

The negro disappeared and Weldon lurched defiantly in, slung off his hat, flung on the carpet of the library a suit-case he carried, dropped his gloves by it, slouched into a chair, and declared hoarsely:

"Gales, I've come to stay a coupler weeks with you. I've got to stay. Kate's turned fool."

"How has she turned fool?" Gales inquired coolly, masking his anger over this crude intrusion on his privacy.

"She—she says I'm mad. She—she's threatening to have a warrant of lunacy sworn out against me, unless I go to the Farhill Sanatorium for a mental cure. A mental cure!" He laughed loudly, then getting no response from Gales, asked anxiously: "Ain't that funny, Gales? A mental

cure! Me! Don't that strike you as funny?"

"Certainly; you are all right."

"Of course I am. Same as a sailor—But *you* know what women are!"

"Certainly! I have a wife myself, Weldon. And unfortunately, she has arranged to fill the house with her kin to-morrow, for a month. I am awfully sorry, but I haven't a corner to offer you."

This was a lie. But Gales's memory did not extend back to where he hadn't lied. He would have done so embryonically had any opportunity then existed.

Weldon stared at him, like some red, crude mass trying to throw out antennae, endeavoring to feel for friendship, for safety.

Then suddenly his face purpled with rage, he lurched up, screaming hoarsely:

"You're nothing but an empty gourd! A bitter, hollow, gourd, full of windy lies! You're not my friend. I haven't a friend. I've nothing but myself. But I'll be too much for you, too much for Kate, too much for *him* with his dirty stripes waving at me.

"I won't look at them again. I won't see—what's that? What's that over there? You floated those hell-stripes on that wall, you Judas! You son of—"

His screeching voice rose to a yell. The negro ran in, then receded, screeching himself at the figure now crouched on the floor, beating the air as though to fend off something which momentarily came closer.

It was next morning that Weldon, white and furtive-eyed, went voluntarily to the Farhill Sanatorium.

And it was in this place that his attendant three mornings later, found him dead in bed, his congested face horribly ensanguined and a thin, unaccounted-for, faint, scarlet line around his bull-like throat.

CHAPTER IX.

THE SICK CHAMBER.

AT the urging of Robert Minturn, Joyce had remained in Gales's employ as secretary; had continued to keep secret her engagement.

Robert Minturn felt vaguely that she might, by staying with Gales, be of great help in some crucial hour, though he could not justify the precognition.

He had learned to obey any strong feeling about the righting of his father's wrong as part of his father's voice.

For instance, during the nights, which saw the deaths of Sedgwick and Weldon, Robert had been miles away from these scenes of horror; he had followed an urge to leave the vicinity for twenty-four hours, and in each case had, after learning of the deaths, realized how the protective influence of the treacherously betrayed, murdered Minturn had guided his son. In both cases young Minturn's alibi was perfect.

Robert had never heard the voice again bodily, but he kept his soul receptive, passionately receptive.

For the sake of Robert's hopes, which she did not understand, because he dared not explain, Joyce worked on under Gales.

As the days passed, she saw odd changes in her employer. Directly after the death of Sedgwick and Weldon he had been singularly gay. But this festivity of mood had suffered a feverish decline, alternating with bursts of wild savagery toward several men with whom he dealt, or with fits of strange, uneasy gloom.

Physically, Gales took on an unhealthy look.

Naturally, then, Joyce was not surprised when one day he didn't come to the office. Neither was she astonished to learn from Mrs. Gales that he was ill in bed.

A week elapsed and Joyce remained idle, on salary. Then a phone message from Mrs. Gales summoned her to the Gales's residence—to take some dictation from her sick employer.

Joyce promptly complied. Arriving she started up the handsome steps, but almost immediately her gait slowed; she halted. There was nothing to trouble her—at least nothing visible. Yet she had a feeling of being almost tangibly stopped; thrust back.

A blotchy shadow, a grotesque writhing shadow, crawled down the steps toward her, but no doubt thrown by some jutting part of the house.

For a second Joyce thought it looked singularly tentacular, singularly like a blackly blotchy octopus trying hideously to defy and challenge her; or like some twisted Cerberus endeavoring to guard—what?

A moment later she laughed at herself, ran up the steps, ignoring the shadow, rang and was admitted by a servant.

For in the face of daylight, in spite of the conventional flunky leading the way, there suddenly seemed to come flooding from different parts of the house strange, whirling currents of chaotic, evilly anxious challenge.

She had an incomprehensible, dismaying sensation that something was trying to turn her away.

Not in kindness; but because if she stayed she might help to lessen the forces of these very currents.

As she came nearer to Gales's room, she had an insistent conception that these currents, distracted, malignant, forced out of their usual lodgment, were emanations thrown off, or torn from, Gales's own soul—leaving him in the hands of a greater force, against which he had heretofore secured his life. She felt, in a quickening, initial terror, that these malignant emanations were like swirling bees unhived and leaderless, but filled with an instinct of destruction against anything likely to aid the greater force now in possession of Gales.

Almost they took nebulous shape in the air around her; almost, but never quite.

In the last corridor they so increased, mistily flooding from the room in which he lay, that the daylight sickened from them, and paled from ruddy sunshine to a wan and ominous gray.

This gray smothering of the wholesome day sent a thrill of terror through Joyce. She was just reassuringly telling herself that it was mad fancy, when the leading servant shuddered, and turned a quick, frightened look over his shoulder, a look of unspoken, apprehensive questioning.

His rosy face was full of cracks now, cracks through which fright showed plainly. There was no time for words with him. He let her into the sick-room and, unceremoniously took to his heels.

The room that Joyce entered was of noble proportions, with a very high ceiling. Ordinarily it was lighted by four great windows.

But, at some fancy of the man lying in the wide-high-posted bed, these windows were carefully darkened by closely drawn shades. The light in the room sprang from a brightly burning wood fire in the small grate, and from the soft rays of a shaded lamp.

Had he shut out the daylight because it had paled here also into that wan, foreboding spectral gray?

Had he had the fire lighted for its humanlike cheerfulness? For its warmth?

But as she asked herself this about the fire, she discovered that the blaze was neither warm nor cheerful.

It burned, quite freely. But although it was summer, a faint yet deadly chill was in the air, which, Joyce realized, no fire could lessen. And the little chuckling, crackling sounds, which should spring happily from a wood fire were not audible. It burned without a sound.

Gales lay half reclining on a heap of pillows.

Joyce was shocked by the dreadful change his illness had brought.

The immaculate white spread, drawn half-way over him in tumbled, wrinkled lines, was not whiter than his drawn, thin, face, nor more wrinkled than his hands which picked restlessly at the cover.

By the fireplace, wrapped in the impersonal patience of her merciful profession, the trained nurse sat in good-humored quietude. Her evident practicality was written plainly on her whole plump, white-gowned personality.

Joyce felt keenly that this woman did not know what even the wooden-faced servant had known—that there was something strangely wrong with the atmosphere of this house.

With that strangeness the bedroom quivered—emphasizing the pressure from some unseen presence which was driving Gales into an abyss of horror, at which the secretary scarcely dared guess.

Joyce realized that if the good will of this presence had not flowed in to her, that

if she were in Gales's dreadful position of beleaguement, she might have gone mad under a terror so inhuman.

CHAPTER X.

SHADOWS.

THIS luxurious, modern sick-chamber was really, in its algid atmosphere, a desert, a terrible Sahara, desolate, infinitely menacing, infinitely cold, across which blew the chill and driving forces of the presence.

The very shadows in the corners of the darkened, firelit room were not real shadows; they were blotchy forms of those delights and successes Gales had lived by, and which had been beaten from his soul in the very hour when he most terribly needed their sustaining strength.

With these perceptions, scarcely translated into thoughts, came to Joyce the distinct, rank reek of pipe tobacco, odd enough in the fastidiously kept room of a man who smoked only the mildest of cigarettes. Her nostrils quivered to the smell. Gales caught their dilation.

"So *you* smell it, too. The infernal Kentucky Belleflower he 'smoked,'" Gales said hoarsely, without preliminary greeting. "But my nurse here, Miss Smith, never smells it, though her nose is keen enough."

"Mr. Gales thinks he catches a whiff of rank pipe-tobacco," the nurse explained kindly, with an intonation which plainly conveyed: "Since he wants to think you smell it, humor him."

"It is quite obvious, Mr. Gales," Joyce said faintly, laying her note-book and pencil on the table. Miss Smith gave a nod of approval, but Joyce felt a deeper quiver of terror that she and Gales alone detected this scent.

"Sit down," Gales half whispered. "I sent for you because—because I'm being driven—"

He broke off. The nurse sent him a critical but masked glance. Then looked placidly at the fire.

But the blotchy shadows in the corners seemed to swing forward as though to help

at the word "driven," then slunk back from the cold firelight, as though again defeated.

Gales continued, after a restless tossing on his pillows:

"I'm being driven—always—he—Get ready, if you please, Miss Wilberforce, to take down—"

Even in his hunted protest, that unflinching, almost princely courtesy toward all women broke through in his "if you please—"

Joyce got ready, telling herself that this fearful, inexplicable tension she felt, like a rising tide in the room, could not last.

Now she was sitting near the bed. At his direction, she had drawn up a small table for herself and had made ready pen, ink, and legal cap for her writing, which was to be in long hand, Gales explained.

She looked at him. His eyes, which had been old at twenty-one with inherited wickednesses, were aged further now by the addition of those evils he had taught himself—but this adulthood of evil had not dimmed them. They burned with a red radiance of suppressed fury against the sense of being, as he said, "driven," though on his thin lids fear plainly hovered.

He had paused, as though listening keenly, in a sort of resentful terror. The look passed. He complained with a dreadful querulousness:

"I'm being hounded, I tell you—compelled—against—I don't get any sleep—I've got to sleep—but even after I've—Do you think he'll let me alone then—do you? answer!"

Then, as she hesitated, his lifelong courtesy fell writhing from him. He yelled, rather than cried: "Answer—you fool! Answer!"

Joyce faltered hurriedly, desperately.

"I don't know! You can only try—"

"I've got to—anyway—I've got to—I'm being driven—I—"

The nurse rose calmly and came to the bed. She laid a steady hand on his pulse. Her voice declared pleasantly:

"Don't excite yourself, Mr. Gales. Dictate what you wish in as few words as possible, but try not to excite yourself."

Gales jerked his wrist away from her,

The look he cast up at her was blasting in its contemptuous anger. He snarled:

"Get back where you were, damn you!"

The nurse good-humoredly returned to the fireplace. There she sat listening absently for what he would dictate—some business paper, no doubt.

Gales, after the preliminary dating, began slowly, as though each word was wrung from him:

"I, Stepney Gales, being of sound mind, do hereby profess and declare this hereafter signed statement to be exactly true; that I and Wesley Weldon, now deceased, and Hector Sedgwick, now deceased, did in their recent lifetime form a coalition of three, whereby we worked together to our combined advantage."

It seemed a very ordinary sort of paper, the nurse thought indifferently. Her mind wandered to a sale of rubber-heeled shoes at Bernstein & Beagle's the next day. Pity she couldn't go.

Gales went slowly on, the white, professionally steady little fingers of Joyce flying over the smooth paper. She was trying desperately to bar out from her consciousness everything except the hoarse, reluctant, curiously forced voice of her employer.

"Being pursued and uselessly hounded by the State's attorney, Edward Marsh, we consulted together and decided we had no choice but to kill him."

The startled nurse let fall a buffer, with which she was now surreptitiously polishing her quite excellent nails. The pen shook in Joyce's fingers; she managed to steady it to go on.

"This killing was done, under our triple guidance, by Antonio Saltelli, an Italian, who died last week. He made certain blunders which were dangerous to us, and made us consider our decision about Marsh an error. It became clear that to protect ourselves from possible grave consequences we must make the law fix the killing on some one. We could not use Antonio, he could ruin us. We therefore selected, as a shield, Charles Minturn."

The nurse gasped. This was concretely horrible; something that she could understand. But to Joyce far more awful was her

unalterable conviction that the blotchy crawling shadows were snatching at the bed, trying to grasp and check the presence which was compelling from Gales, by an indisputable will, the carefully worded statement.

But presently the shadows slunk back again, reeling into their corners, and Joyce's terrified soul had a consciousness of the angry susurrations of their baffled rage. Gales's voice went faintly on:

"Minturn had never been really one of us. Whenever we tried to do anything really worth while, his damn-fool honesty interfered with us, or demoralized our plans. He knew more than we liked. So by our own false testimony—"

Again Joyce felt the protesting, contorted surge of the misshapen, grasping shadows, stretching out tentacular arms with writhing snatches. This time their clutching, invisible feelers must have taken some hold on the compelling, unseen presence. For Gale stopped aggressively as though intangibly relieved, assisted. Visibly in his haughty, aristocratic face a change showed.

Something of his former mastery came back to him, as the shadows, taking desperate hold at last, dragged and dragged monstrously at the unseen force.

A palsy of suspense gripped Joyce. No one could help—if this were what she believed it now to be, an awful duel—over the body of this man. She wanted to cry out, to call on God, and could not.

But in the very heart of her gripping terrors, the shadows let go their hold, wavered, flickered, writhed, in a strange, black agony of malformation. Then, beaten in the very crux of success, they rushed backward, like sullen but terrified octopi, to writhe again toward new strength in their flood of darkness.

CHAPTER XI.

CONFESSION.

A LOOK of crooked rage, of vicious hope frustrated, swept rancorously over Gales's face. His thin, delicate hands struck out—at nothing; swept in a semicircle and found—nothing.

Nothing, at least, that any ordinary sense might detect. To the nurse, now watching eagerly, it was merely an emotional gesture.

To baffled viciousness in Gales's face succeeded fear, eloquently written.

The seeking circle of his hands changed suddenly to a gesture of trying to ward off something he could not combat.

A chill ran shudderingly through the girl's whole body; then her forces unlocked in a gasping sigh of horror.

For she got a vivid impression from Gales's quivering, fending hands and starting eyes, that he believed himself trying to fend off a dangling noose. So eloquent of this were his gestures, so deep the insensate terror of his whole atmosphere, that almost she thought the gray wraith of a threatening, strangling cord might become visible.

I did not; yet when Gales shrank frightfully, as though a hand had clutched his shoulder, a hand that might invisibly be guiding a noose toward his throat, it seemed a natural sequence of his gestures.

Gales's white fingers flew to his throat and banded it protectingly. His dry lips gasped in a hoarse squeak unlike a human voice.

"So by our own false testimony we got him hanged and—"

Sucking in a gulp of air, as though the words placated and, at least for the moment, drove aside that invisible shadowy noose which the girl felt he believed he saw, a swift relief came into his face. Gales hurried on, as though he meant to take no further chances.

"And so saved ourselves from any possibility of suspicion. Of the four concerned in the death of Minturn, I only survive. But I now have a right to live, Fully and freely, I have made honorable amends out of my own generous repentance—"

He broke off, crying desperately to Joyce: "You heard that, didn't you? Heard it interrupt me! That breath of faintest laughter, of swift, sardonic, dreadful laughter that blew across the room?"

"N-no," she stammered. But the nurse frowned at her and lied soothingly. "That

was just somebody laughing on the street. I heard it myself."

Reassured by her ready prevarication, Gales, immersed in his now passionately eloquent register of his own goodness, hurried on with it.

"Few men," he dictated sharply, yet scarcely as though to Joyce, but rather as if to some listener unseen, "would do what I am doing—surrender friends and reputation that the memory of an obscure failure, a weak, valueless citizen, might be cleared. Only a gentleman would make such reparation and—"

Once more he seemed checked. Had he, Joyce wondered, strangely uneasy, a recurrence of his fancy that laughter, that faint, derisive yet incalculably fearful laughter, with its cold notes of blasting imperishable sarcasm, currented across the great room? She heard him mutter to himself that under it the blotchy shadows shrank closer together, and the cold light of the unwarmed fire came further into the room, though the fire crawled the floor and kept there, unable to rise and lighten the gray atmosphere at the chamber. Then—

"Out of my own generous repentance," Gales repeated firmly, sitting up with waxing strength. "And being of sound mind, and a recuperating body, I hereby, before three witnesses, affix my hand and seal, attesting, so help me God, the truth of my confession."

He paused, licked his lips eagerly. Then—

"Call in my wife, Miss Smith. She knows she is to witness—this—"

Obediently the nurse disappeared.

The coal fire burned on. The shadows monstrous, troubled, panic seized, crowded each other in their corners. The crawling light on the floor drew nearer them. But the gray thickness in the room lowered heavily, and the soft lamp-rays labored with difficulty through it.

Joyce, forcing herself to calmness, pushed a lap-table before her employer, its surface, swung on an iron arm, extended in a comfortable way in front of him.

She laid there the inkstand, and pen he demanded, and the confession—just as

Julia Gales glided into the room, her white face an expressionless mask.

There were two underlings in the room—Joyce and the closely following nurse. Mrs. Gales had no intentions of letting any employee see any secret misery of her well-descended soul. And if her pride was misplaced it nevertheless controlled her emotions valuably.

Gales greeted her. In a sort of tumultuous satisfaction, he signed.

As he did so the cold, unwarmed fire-light rolled further along the floor. From the huddled shadows the wraith of a choking susurrant chaotically breathed, they turned on each other, writhing together. Over their tentacular blackness the looming gray darkened.

The nurse witnessed, signing in a fine, little, shadeless hand of precision.

Joyce witnessed; she made a poor job of it—her little fingers rocked with a sudden confusion of mingled joy and terror.

Mrs. Gales witnessed; her name was written with a haughty composure and a glance of instinctive scorn at Joyce's scrawl.

Gales fell back on the pillows. Mrs. Gales went quickly to the coal fire and stood there, apparently utterly impassive, looking into the bed of the unheating flames. The nurse moved with professional quiet to a curtained window and stood there, puzzling over the surge toward new strength in her patient.

Gales said excitedly to Joyce, licking his lips in oddly unctuous way.

"Lock the paper up in the escritoire, over there. And give me the key."

CHAPTER XII.

GALES PASSES AWAY.

SHE understood. He had only stripped bare his treachery in that confession as a cunning sop to the terrible presence at his elbow.

As soon as he was well again, and he would get well now, he would, with all his old audacious, intellectual courage, destroy the confession.

He would declare it born of his feverish brain. He would appeal to the profession-

al loyalty of his highly paid secretary; he would fill the nurse's lap with money. And even if they failed him, a great closed case would not be reopened, nor a man hung, on a statement he declared to be sprung from his temporary insanity.

Confused, horrified, by such monumental craft, which extended toward that strange cold presence threatening him, the secretary tottered rather than walked toward the polished escritoire, sickened, dismayed.

As she faltered to the desk, put the paper miserably in, locked the desk and turned key in hand, Gales cried eagerly:

"Bring me the key! I shall be all right now. I've done what a gentleman should; I've cleared my record. Nothing can hurt a man who has freely, generously—"

The gray in the room darkened. Before Joyce's staring eyes, through the prison-cell gray, the thin, dropping wraith of a noose sprang into view.

It dangled over the shadows, the twisted scurrying shadows, nearly home. Joyce's very breathing halted, caught in her arrested lungs; for a misty, guiding hand, a hand running into a gray-sleeved arm, was guiding the noose, coldly, steadily, above the vainly leaping shadows, toward—

She saw Gales's mouth open—in a horrible, soundless yell. She saw his impotent hands try to fling themselves out defensively; only to fall writhing across his loins, among the helpless shadows that could not stay the hand guiding the noose toward Gales's throat.

Before the deadly horror in Gales's face, before the awful silence of his vainly struggling lips that writhed for sound and could not make it, the senses of Joyce reeled.

His maddened eyes, old with a hundred inherited wickednesses, old with the incalculable evils he had added to these, lost their dark fire and blanched with what they saw—becoming fields of terror.

The wife staring at the fire, thinking her own locked thoughts—saw nothing.

The nurse, her eyes on the wife, wondering how Gales's confession would affect Mrs. Gales socially—saw nothing.

Only Joyce, in a lonely, shocking comprehension, saw—and understood.

And now around him, in a last desperation of purpose to save their home, the crawling shadows threw vainly defensive tentacles on the noose itself. Then, suddenly, those shadows fled—flushing, blotchily, into their corners, cowering there.

The eyes of Gales bulged; his white face swelled; darkened with congesting blood; his fingers clawed madly at his throat.

The senses of Joyce more than reeled. She dropped, almost fainting, into the nearest chair, trying to cry out, though, in the very effort, she knew this would be impossible until—

A half oblivion cut off her sight. Her ears roared with the noises of her blood rebelling against her terror. Her face dropped into her hands.

Perhaps only a second passed—as we measure time—in that blurred consciousness. Then a very human cry from the nurse roused her.

She sprang up. Miss Smith had suddenly touched the shade-spring at the nearest window. Daylight flooded the room.

The shadows were utterly gone. A tide of warmth ran from the fire.

Sprawled across the lap-table still before him, the over-set ink running in a black tide from his hidden face, Gales lay in a tumbled heap, so eloquent of death that the three women, who instantly ran to him and lifted him, knew, before they touched him, there would be only clay.

As they finished laying him flat on the bed, the nurse exclaimed sharply and in a perplexity never lightened for her, over the distinct red mark around his throat.

Joyce only said, in a mechanical way to the wife:

"You'll not deny your signature?"

The haughty face flushed deeply; but Mrs. Gales said with steady composure:

"I will not deny it."

Quietly, swiftly Joyce unlocked the desk; took out the statement, thrust it into her blouse and hurried from the house, neither of the women trying to stop her.

Outside, her lungs gasped in the fresh sweet air, the kindly wholesome summer air, and her eager feet ran swiftly, carrying her toward Robert Minturn.

(The end.)

The People of the Golden Atom

by Ray Cummings

A Sequel to "The Girl in the Golden Atom"

A "DIFFERENT" SERIAL

PRECEDING CHAPTERS BRIEFLY RETOLD

FOUR men sat in the clubroom. They were the Doctor, the Banker, the Big Business Man, and the Very Young Man. It was just five years since the Chemist had gone into the ring for the last time. The Doctor read a letter the Chemist had left, in which he gave the formulae of the compounds for decreasing and increasing the size, and his instructions in case any or all of them wished to follow him into the ring. Three of them had decided to go, leaving the Banker to care for the ring, and see that it was kept safely, so that should they desire to return they might do so without danger. After arranging all their plans, and testing the chemicals on a baby alligator and a sparrow, they separated to arrange their worldly affairs.

On November 4 they met again, and at 8 P.M. the three simultaneously took the drug, and shortly were helped by the Banker to the edge of the ring. Rapidly they grew smaller and smaller, and their surroundings in the ring larger, the way rougher, until at last they reach the great gorge that, to the human eye (in its natural state), was but a tiny scratch on the inside of the ring. At first the way seemed impassable, but gradually as it grew and extended ways opened and the three adventurers began their descent into the ring.

CHAPTER VII.

THE VALLEY OF THE SCRATCH.

FOR the first half-hour of their climb down into the valley of the scratch, the three friends were too preoccupied with their own safety to talk more than an occasional sentence. They came upon many places that at first glance appeared impassable, or at least sufficiently hazardous to cause them to hesitate, but in each instance the changing contour of the precipice offered some other means of descent.

After thirty minutes of arduous effort, the Big Business Man sat down suddenly upon a rock and began to unlace his shoes.

"I've got to rest a while," he groaned. "My feet are in terrible shape."

His two companions were glad of the opportunity to sit with him for a moment.

"Gosh, I'm all in, too!" said the Very Young Man with a sigh.

They were sitting upon a ledge about twenty feet wide, with the wall down which they had come at their back.

"I'll swear that's as far down there as it ever was," said the Big Business Man, with a wave of his hand toward the valley below them.

"Further," remarked the Very Young Man. "I've known that right along."

"That's to be expected," said the Doctor. "But we're a third the way down, just the same; that's the main thing." He glanced up the rocky, precipitous wall behind them. "We've come down a thousand feet, at least. The valley must be three thousand feet deep or more now."

"Say, how deep does it get before it stops?" inquired the Very Young Man.

This story began in the All-Story Weekly for January 24.

The Doctor smiled at him quietly. "Roger's notes put it about twelve thousand," he answered. "It should reach that depth and stop about"—he hesitated a moment, calculating—"about two o'clock," he finished.

"Some climb," commented the Very Young Man. "We could do this a lot better than we're doing it, I think."

For some time they sat in silence. From where they sat the valley had all the appearance of a rocky, barren cañon of their own world above, as it might have looked on the late afternoon of a cloudless summer day. A gentle breeze was blowing, and in the sky overhead they could still see the huge light that for them was the sun.

"The weather is certainly great down here anyway," observed the Very Young Man, "that's one consolation."

The Big Business Man had replaced his shoes, taken a swallow of water, and risen to his feet, preparing to start downward again, when suddenly they all noticed a curious swaying motion, as though the earth were moving under them.

"Now what?" ejaculated the Very Young Man, standing up abruptly, with his feet spread wide apart.

The ground seemed pressing against his feet as if he were weighted down with a heavy load. And he felt a little also, as though in a moving train with a side thrust to guard against. The sun was no longer visible, and the valley was plunged in the semidarkness of twilight. A strong wind sprang up, sweeping down upon them from above.

The Very Young Man and the Big Business Man looked puzzled; the Doctor alone of the three seemed to understand what was happening.

"He's moving the ring," he explained, with a note of apprehension in his voice.

"Oh," ejaculated the Big Business Man, comprehending at last, "so that's the—"

The Very Young Man standing with his back to the wall and his legs spread wide looked hastily at his watch. "Moving the ring? Why, damn it—" he began impetuously.

The Big Business Man interrupted him.

"Look there, look!" he almost whispered, awestruck.

The sky above the valley suddenly had become suffused with red. As they watched it seemed to take form, appearing no longer space, but filled with some enormous body of reddish color. In one place they could see it broken into a line of gray, and underneath the gray, two great circular holes of light gleamed down at them.

The Doctor shuddered and closed his eyes; his two friends stared upward, fascinated into immobility.

"What—is—that?" the Very Young Man whispered.

Before he could be answered, the earth swayed under them more violently than before. The red faded back out of the sky, and the sun appeared sweeping up into the zenith, where it hung swaying a moment and then poised motionless. The valley was flooded again with light; the ground steadied under them and became quiet. The wind died rapidly away, and in another moment it was as though nothing unusual had occurred.

For a time the three friends stood silent, too astonished for words at this extraordinary experience. The Doctor was the first to recover himself. "He moved the ring," he said hurriedly. "That's twice. We must hurry."

"It's only quarter past ten. We told him not till eleven," protested the Very Young Man.

"Even that is too soon for safety," said the Doctor back over his shoulder, for already he had started downward.

It was nearly twelve o'clock when they stopped again for rest. At this time the valley appeared about seven or eight thousand feet deep: they estimated themselves to be slightly more than half-way down. From eleven until twelve they had momentarily expected some disturbing phenomena attendant upon the removal of the ring by the Banker from the clubroom to its place in the museum. But nothing unusual had occurred.

"He probably decided to leave it alone for a while," commented the Big Business Man, as they were discussing the matter. "Glad he showed that much sense."

"It would not bother us much now," the Doctor replied. "We're too far down. See how the light is changing."

The sky showed now only as a narrow ribbon of blue between the edges of the cañon's walls. The sun was behind the wall down which they were climbing, out of sight, and throwing their side of the valley into shadow. And already they could begin to see a dim phosphorescence glowing from the rocks near at hand.

The Very Young Man, sitting beside the Doctor, suddenly gripped his friend by the arm. "A bird," he said, pointing down the valley. "See it there?"

From far off they could see a bird coming up the center of the valley at a height apparently almost level with their own position, and flying toward them. They watched it in silence as it rapidly approached.

"Great Scott, it's big!" muttered the Big Business Man in an undertone.

As the bird came closer they saw it was fully fifty feet across the wings. It was flying straight down the valley at tremendous speed. When it was nearly opposite them they heard a familiar "cheep, cheep," come echoing across the valley.

"The sparrow," whispered the Very Young Man. "Oh, my gosh, look how big it is!"

In another moment it had passed them; they watched in silence until it disappeared in the distance.

"Well," said the Very Young Man, "if that had ever seen us—" He drew a long breath, leaving the rest to the imagination of his hearers.

"What a wonderful thing!" said the Big Business Man, with a note of awe in his voice. "Just think—that sparrow when we last saw it was infinitesimally small."

The Doctor laughed. "It's far smaller now than it was then," he said. "Only since we last saw it we have changed size to a much greater extent than it has."

"Foolish of us to have sent it in here," remarked the Big Business Man casually. "Suppose that—" He stopped abruptly.

The very Young Man started hastily to his feet.

"Oh, golly!" he exclaimed as the same

thought occurred to him. "That alligator—" He looked about him wildly.

"It was foolish perhaps." The Doctor spoke quietly. "But we can't help it now. The sparrow has gone. That alligator may be right here at our feet"—the Very Young Man jumped involuntarily—"and so small we can't see it," the Doctor finished with a smile. "Oh it may be a hundred miles away and big as a dinosaur." The Very Young Man shuddered.

"It was senseless of us to let them get in here anyway," said the Big Business Man. "That sparrow evidently has stopped getting smaller. Do you realize how big it will be to us, after we've diminished a few hundred times more?"

"We needn't worry over it," said the Doctor. "Even if we knew the alligator got into the valley the chances of our seeing it here are one in a million. But we don't even know that. If you'll remember it was still some distance away from the scratch when it became invisible; I doubt very much if it ever got there. No, I think probably we'll never see it again."

"I hope not," declared the Very Young Man emphatically.

For another hour they climbed steadily downward, making more rapid progress than before, for the descent became constantly less difficult. During this time they spoke little, but it was evident that the Very Young Man, from the frequent glances he threw around, never for a moment forgot the possibility of encountering the alligator. The sparrow did not return, although for that, too, they were constantly on the lookout.

It was nearly half past one when the Big Business Man threw himself upon the ground exhausted. The valley at this time had reached a depth of over ten thousand feet. It was still growing deeper, but the travelers had made good progress and were not more than fifteen hundred feet above its bottom.

They had been under tremendous physical exertion for over five hours, too absorbed in their strange experiences to think of eating, and now all three agreed it was foolish to attempt to travel farther without food and rest.

"We had better wait here an hour or two," the Doctor decided. "Our size will soon remain constant and it won't take us long to get down after we've rested."

"I'm hungry," suggested the Very Young Man, "how about you?"

They ate and drank sparingly of the little store they had brought with them. The Doctor would not let them have much, both because he wanted to conserve their supply, and because he knew in their exhausted condition it would be bad for them to eat heartily.

It was about two o'clock when they noticed that objects around them no longer were increasing in size. They had finished their meal and felt greatly refreshed.

"Things have stopped growing," observed the Very Young Man. "We've done four pills' worth of the journey anyway," he added facetiously. He rose to his feet, stretching. He felt sore and bruised all over, but with the meal and a little rest, not particularly tired.

"I move we go on down now," he suggested, walking to the edge of the huge crevice in which they were sitting. "It's only a couple of thousand feet."

"Perhaps we might as well," agreed the Doctor, rising also. "When we get to the floor of the valley, we can find a good spot and turn in for the night."

The incongruity of his last words with the scene around made the Doctor smile. Overhead the sky still showed a narrow ribbon of blue. Across the valley the sunlight sparkled on the yellowish crags of the rocky wall. In the shadow, on the side down which they were climbing, the rocks now shone distinctly phosphorescent, with a peculiar waviness of outline.

"Not much like either night or day, is it?" added the Doctor. "We'll have to get used to that."

They started off again, and in another two hours found themselves going down a gentle rocky slope and out upon the floor of the valley.

"We're here at last," said the Big Business Man wearily.

The Very Young Man looked up the great, jagged precipice down which they had come, to where, far above, its edge

against the strip of blue marked the surface of the ring.

"Some trip," he remarked. "I wouldn't want to tackle that every day."

"Four o'clock," said the Doctor, "the light up there looks just the same. I wonder what's happened to George."

Neither of his companions answered him. The Big Business Man lay stretched full length upon the ground near by, and the Very Young Man still stood looking up the precipice, lost in thought.

"What a nice climb going back," he suddenly remarked.

The Doctor laughed. "Don't let's worry about that, Jack. If you remember how Rogers described it, getting back is easier than getting in. But the main point now," he added seriously, "is for us to make sure of getting down to Arite as speedily as possible."

The Very Young Man surveyed the barren waste around them in dismay. The floor of the valley was strewn with even larger rocks and boulders than those on the surface above, and looked utterly pathless and desolate. "What do we do first?" he asked dubiously.

"First," said the Doctor, smiling at the Big Business Man, who lay upon his back staring up into the sky and paying no attention to them whatever, "I think first we had better settle ourselves for a good long rest here."

"If we stop at all, let's sleep a while," said the Very Young Man. "A little rest only gets you stiff. It's a pretty exposed place out here though, isn't it, to sleep?" he added, thinking of the sparrow and the alligator.

"One of us will stay awake and watch," answered the Doctor.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE PIT OF DARKNESS.

AT the suggestion of the Very Young Man they located without much difficulty a sort of cave amid the rocks, which offered shelter for their rest. Taking turns watching, they passed eight hours in fair comfort, and by noon next day, after

another frugal meal they felt thoroughly refreshed and eager to continue the journey.

"We sure are doing this classy," observed the Very Young Man. "Think of Rogers—all he could do was fall asleep when he couldn't stay awake any more. Gosh, what chances he took!"

"We're playing it safe," agreed the Big Business Man.

"But we mustn't take it too easy," added the Doctor.

The Very Young Man stretched himself luxuriously and buckled his belt on tighter. "Well, I'm ready for anything," he announced. "What's next?"

The Doctor consulted his papers. "We find the circular pit Rogers made in the scratch and we descend into it. We take twelve more pills at the edge of the pit," he said.

The Very Young Man leaped to the top of a rock and looked out over the desolate waste helplessly. "How are we going to find the pit," he asked dubiously. "It's not in sight, that's sure."

"It's down there—about five miles," said the Doctor. "I saw it yesterday as we came down."

"That's easy," said the Very Young Man, and he started off enthusiastically, followed by the others.

In less than two hours they found themselves at the edge of the pit. It appeared almost circular in form, apparently about five miles across and its smooth, shining walls extended almost perpendicularly down into blackness. Somewhat awed by the task confronting them in getting down into this abyss, the three friends sat down near its brink to discuss their plan of action.

"We take twelve pills here," said the Doctor. "That ought to make us small enough to climb down into that."

"Do you think we need so many?" asked the Big Business Man thoughtfully. "You know, Frank, we're making an awful lot of work for ourselves, playing this thing so absolutely safe. Think of what a distance down that will be after we have gotten as small as twelve pills will make us. It might take us days to get to the bottom."

"How did Rogers get down?" the Very Young Man wanted to know.

"He took the twelve pills here," the Doctor answered. "But as I understand it, he fell most of the way down while he was still big, and then got small afterward at the bottom."

"I don't know how about you," said the Very Young Man dryly, "but I'd much rather take three days to walk down than fall down in one day."

The Doctor smiled. "I still think," he said, "that we had better stick to the directions Rogers left us. Then at least there is no danger of our getting lost in size. But I agree with you, Jack. I'd rather not fall down, even if it takes longer to walk."

"I wonder—" began the Big Business Man. "You know I've been thinking—it does seem an awful waste of energy for us to let ourselves get smaller than absolutely necessary in climbing down these places. Maybe you don't realize it."

"I do," said the Very Young Man, looking sorrowfully at the ragged shoes on his feet and the cuts and bruises on his legs.

"What I mean is—" persisted the Big Business Man. "How far do you suppose we have actually traveled since we started last night?"

"That's pretty hard to estimate," said the Doctor. "We have walked perhaps fifteen miles altogether, besides the climb down. I suppose we actually came down five or six thousand feet."

"And at the size we are now it would have been twelve thousand feet down, wouldn't it?"

"Yes," answered the Doctor, "it would."

"And just think," went on the Big Business Man, "right now, based on the size we were when we began, we've only gone some six feet altogether from the place we started."

"And a sixteenth of an inch or less since we left the surface of the ring," said the Doctor, smiling.

"Gee, that's a weird thought," the Very Young Man said, as he gazed in awe at the lofty heights about them.

"I've been thinking," continued the Big Business Man. "You say we must be

careful not to get lost in size. Well, suppose instead of taking twelve pills here, we only take six. That should be enough to get us started—possibly enough to get us all the way down: Then, before we moved at all we could take the other six. That would keep it straight, wouldn't it?"

"Great idea," said the Very Young Man. "I'm in favor of that."

"It sounds feasible—certainly if we can get all the way down with six pills we will save a lot of climbing."

"If six aren't enough, we can easily take more," added the Big Business Man.

And so they decided only to take six pills of the drug and to get down to the bottom of the pit, if possible, without taking more. The pit, as they stood looking down into now, seemed quite impossible of descent, for its almost perpendicular wall was smooth and shining as polished brass.

They took the drug, standing close together at the edge of the pit. Immediately began again the same crawling sensation underfoot, much more rapid this time, while all around them the rocks began very rapidly increasing in size.

The pit now seemed widening out at an astounding rate. In a few minutes it had broadened so that its opposite side could not be seen. The wall at the brink of which they stood had before curved in a great sweeping arc to enclose the circular hole; now it stretched in a nearly straight, unbroken line to the right and left as far as they could see. Beneath them lay only blackness; it was as though they were at the edge of the world.

"Good God, what a place to go down into," gasped the Big Business Man, after they had been standing nearly half an hour in silence, appalled at the tremendous changes taking place around them.

For some time past the wall before them had become sufficiently indented and broken to make possible their descent. It was the Doctor who first realized the time—or perhaps it should be said, the size—they were losing by their inactivity; and when with a few crisp words he brought them to themselves, they immediately started downward.

For another six hours they traveled

downward steadily, stopping only once to eat. The descent during this time was not unlike that down the side of the valley, although toward the last it began rapidly to grow less precipitous.

They now found themselves confronted frequently with gentle slopes downward, half a mile or more in extent, and sometimes by almost level places, succeeded by another sharp descent.

During this part of the trip they made more rapid progress than at any time since starting, the Very Young Man in his enthusiasm at times running forward and then sitting down to wait for the others to overtake him.

The light overhead gradually faded into the characteristic luminous blackness the Chemist had described. As it did so, the phosphorescent quality of the rocks greatly increased, or at least became more noticeable, so that the light illuminating the landscape became hardly less in volume, although totally different in quality.

The ground underfoot and the rocks themselves had been steadily changing. It had lost now almost entirely its yellowish, metal look, and seemed to have more the quality of a gray opaque glass, or marble. It appeared rather smoother, too, than before, although the huge boulders and loosely strewn rocks and pebbles still remained the characteristic feature of the landscape.

The three men were still diminishing in size; in fact, at this time the last dose of the drug seemed to have attained its maximum power, for objects around them appeared to be growing larger at a dizzying rate. They were getting used to this effect, however, to a great extent, and were no longer confused by the change as they had been before.

It was the Big Business Man who first showed signs of weakening, and at the end of six hours or more of steady—and, toward the end, extremely rapid—traveling he finally threw himself down and declared he could go no farther. At this point they rested again several hours, taking turns at watch, and each of them betting some measure of sleep. Of the three, the Very Young Man appeared in the best condition, although possibly it was his enthusiasm

that kept him from admitting even to himself any serious physical distress.

It was perhaps ten or twelve hours after they had taken the six pills that they were again ready to start downward. Before starting the three adventurers discussed earnestly the advisability of taking the other six pills. The action of the drug had ceased some time before. They decided not to, since apparently there was no difficulty facing them at this part of the journey, and decreasing their stature would only immeasurably lengthen the distance they had to go.

They had been traveling downward, through a barren land that now showed little change of aspect, for hardly more than another hour, when suddenly, without warning, they came upon the tremendous glossy incline that they had been expecting to reach for some time. The rocks and boulders stopped abruptly, and they found at their feet, sloping downward at an angle of nearly forty-five degrees, a great, smooth plane. It extended as far as they could see both to the right and left and downward, at a slightly lessening angle, into the luminous darkness that now bounded their entire range of vision in every direction.

This plane seemed distinctly of a different substance than anything they had hitherto encountered. It was, as the Chemist had described it, apparently like a smooth black marble. Yet it was not so smooth to them now as he had pictured it, for its surface was sufficiently indented and ridged to afford foothold.

They started down this plane gingerly, yet with an assumed boldness they were all of them far from feeling. It was slow work at first, and occasionally one or the other of them would slide headlong a score of feet, until a break in the smoothness brought him to a stop. Their rubber-soled shoes stood them in good stead here, for without the aid given by them this part of the journey would have been impossible.

For several hours they continued this form of descent. The incline grew constantly less steep, until finally they were able to walk down it quite comfortably.

They stopped again to eat, and after traveling what seemed to them some fifteen miles from the top of the incline they finally reached its bottom.

They seemed now to be upon a level floor—a ground of somewhat metallic quality such as they had become familiar with above. Only now there were no rocks or boulders, and the ground was smoother and with a peculiar corrugation. On one side lay the incline down which they had come. There was nothing but darkness to be seen in any other direction. Here they stopped again to rest and recuperate, and then they discussed earnestly their next movements.

The Doctor, seated wearily upon the ground, consulted his memoranda earnestly. The Very Young Man sat close beside him. As usual the Big Business Man lay prone upon his back near by, waiting for their decision.

"Rogers wasn't far from a forest when he got here," said the Very Young Man, looking sidewise at the papers in the Doctor's hand. "And he speaks of a tiny range of hills; but we can't see anything from here."

"We may not be within many miles of where Rogers landed," answered the Doctor.

"No reason why we should be, at that, is there? Do you think we'll ever find Arite?"

"Don't overlook the fact we've got six more pills to take here," called the Big Business Man.

"That's just what I was considering," said the Doctor thoughtfully. "There's no use our doing anything until we have attained the right size. Those hills and the forest and river we are looking for might be here right at our feet and we couldn't see them while we are as big as this."

"We'd better take the pills and stay right here until their action wears off. I'm going to take a sleep," said the Big Business Man.

"I think we might as well all sleep," said the Doctor. "There could not possibly be anything here to harm us."

They each took the six additional pills

without further words. Physically exhausted as they were, and with the artificial drowsiness produced by the drug, they were all three in a few moments fast asleep.

CHAPTER IX.

THE WELCOME OF THE MASTER.

IT was nearly twelve hours later, as their watches showed them, that the first of the weary adventurers awoke. The Very Young Man it was who first opened his eyes with a confused sense of feeling that he was in bed at home, and that this was the momentous day he was to start his journey into the ring. He sat up and rubbed his eyes vigorously to see more clearly his surroundings.

Beside him lay his two friends, fast asleep. With returning consciousness came the memory of the events of the day and night before. The Very Young Man sprang to his feet and vigorously awoke his companions.

The action of the drug again had ceased, and at first glance the scene seemed to have changed very little. The incline now was some distance away, although still visible, stretching up in a great arc and fading away into the blackness above. The ground beneath their feet still of its metallic quality, appeared far rougher than before. The Very Young Man bent down and put his hand upon it. There was some form of vegetation there, and, leaning closer, he could see what appeared to be the ruins of a tiny forest, bent and trampled, the tree-trunks no larger than slender twigs that he could have snapped asunder easily between his fingers.

"Look at this," he exclaimed. "The woods—we're here."

The others knelt down with him.

"Be careful," cautioned the Doctor. "Don't move around. We must get smaller." He drew the papers from his pocket.

"Rogers was in doubt about this quantity to take," he added. "We should be now somewhere at the edge or in the forest he mentions. Yet we may be very far from the point at which he reached the bottom

of that incline. I think, too, that we are somewhat larger than he was. Probably the strength of our drug differs from his to some extent."

"How much should we take next, I wonder?" said the Big Business Man as he looked at his companions.

The Doctor took a pill and crushed it in his hand. "Let us take so much," he said, indicating a small portion of the powder. The others each crushed one of the pills and endeavored to take as nearly as possible an equal amount.

"I'm hungry," said the Very Young Man. "Can we eat right after the powder?"

"I don't think that should make any difference," the Doctor answered, and so accustomed to the drug were they now that, quite nonchalantly, they sat down and ate.

After a few moments it became evident that in spite of their care the amounts of the drug they had taken were far from equal.

Before they had half finished eating, the Very Young Man was hardly more than a third the size of the Doctor, with the Big Business Man about half-way between. This predicament suddenly struck them as funny, and all three laughed heartily at the effect of the drug.

"Hey, you, hurry up, or you'll never catch me," shouted the Very Young Man gleefully. "Gosh, but you're big!" He reached up and tried to touch the Doctor's shoulder. Then, seeing the huge piece of chocolate in his friend's hand and comparing it with the little one in his own, he added: "Trade you chocolate. That's a regular meal you got there."

"That's a real idea," said the Big Business Man, ceasing his laughter abruptly. "Do you know, if we ever get really low on food, all we have to do is one of us stay big and his food would last the other two a month."

"Fine; but how about the big one?" asked the Very Young Man, grinning. "He'd starve to death on that plan, would he not?"

"Well, then he could get much smaller than the other two, and they could feed

him. It's rather involved, I'll admit, but you know what I mean," the Big Business Man finished somewhat lamely.

"I've got a much better scheme than that," said the Very Young Man. "You let the food stay large and you get small. How about that?" he added triumphantly. Then he laid carefully on the ground beside him a bit of chocolate and a few of the hard crackers they were eating. "Stay there, little friends, when you grow up, I'll take you back," he added in a gleeful tone of voice.

"Strange that should never have occurred to us," said the Doctor. "It's a perfect way of replenishing our food supply," and quite seriously both he and the Big Business Man laid aside some of their food.

"Thank me for that brilliant idea," said the Very Young Man. Then, as another thought occurred to him, he scratched his head lugubriously. "Wouldn't work very well if we were getting bigger, would it? Don't let's ever get separated from any food coming out."

The Doctor was gigantic now in proportion to the other two, and both he and the Big Business Man took a very small quantity more of the drug in an effort to equalize their rate of bodily reduction. They evidently hit it about right, for no further change in their relative size occurred.

All this time the vegetation underneath them had been growing steadily larger. From tiny broken twigs it grew to sticks bigger than their fingers, then to the thickness of their arms. They moved slightly from time to time, letting it spread out from under them, or brushing it aside and clearing a space in which they could sit more comfortably. Still larger it grew until the tree-trunks, thick now almost as their bodies, were lying broken and twisted, all about them. Over to one side they could see, half a mile away, a place where the trees were still standing—slender saplings, they seemed, growing densely together.

In half an hour more the Very Young Man announced he had stopped getting smaller. The action of the drug ceased in

the others a few minutes later. They were still not quite in their relative sizes, but a few grains of the powder quickly adjusted that.

They now found themselves near the edge of what once was a great forest. Huge trees, whose trunks measured six feet or more in diameter, lay scattered about upon the ground; not a single one was left standing. In the distance they could see, some miles away, where the untrodden forest began.

They had replaced the food in their belts some time before, and now again they were ready to start. Suddenly the Very Young Man spied a huge, round, whitish-brown object lying beside a tree-trunk near by. He went over and stood beside it. Then he called his friends excitedly. It was irregularly spherical in shape and stood higher than his knees—a great, jagged ball. The Very Young Man bent down, broke off a piece of the ball, and, stuffing it into his mouth, began chewing with enthusiasm.

"Now, what do you think of that?" he remarked with a grin. "A cracker crumb I must have dropped when we first began lunch!"

They decided now to make for the nearest part of the unbroken forest. It was two hours before they reached it, for among the tangled mass of broken, fallen trees their progress was extremely difficult and slow. Once inside, among the standing trees, they felt more lost than ever. They had followed implicitly the Chemist's directions, and in general had encountered the sort of country they expected. Nevertheless, they all three realized that it was probable the route they had followed coming in was quite different from that taken by the Chemist; and in what direction lay their destination, and how far, they had not even the vaguest idea, but they were determined to go on.

"If we ever find this city of Arite, it'll be a miracle sure," the Very Young Man remarked as they were walking along in silence.

They had gone only a short distance farther when the Big Business Man, who was walking in front, stopped abruptly.

"What's that?" he asked in a startled undertone.

They followed the direction of his hand, and saw, standing rigid against a tree-trunk ahead, the figure of a man little more than half as tall as themselves, his grayish body very nearly the color of the blue-gray tree behind him.

The three adventurers stood motionless, staring in amazement.

As the Big Business Man spoke, the little figure, which had evidently been watching them for some time, turned irresolutely as though about to run. Then with gathering courage it began walking slowly toward them, holding out its arms with the hands palm up.

"He's friendly," whispered the Very Young Man; and they waited, silent, as the man approached.

As he came closer, they could see he was hardly more than a boy, perhaps twenty years of age. His lean, gray body was nearly naked. Around his waist he wore a drab-colored tunic, of a substance they could not identify. His feet and legs were bare. On his chest was strapped a thin stone plate, slightly convex. His thick, wavy, black hair, cut at the base of his neck, hung close about his ears. His head was uncovered. His features were regular and pleasing; his smile showed an even row of very white teeth.

The three men did not speak or move until, in a moment more, he stood directly before them, still holding out his hands palm up. Then abruptly he spoke.

"The Master welcomes his friends," he said in a soft, musical voice. He gave the words a most curious accent and inflection, yet they were quite understandable to his listeners.

"The Master welcomes his friends," he repeated, dropping his arms to his sides and smiling in a most friendly manner.

The Very Young Man caught his breath. "He's been sent to meet us; he's from Rogers. What do you think of that? We're all right now!" he exclaimed excitedly.

The Doctor held out his hand, and the Oroid, hesitating a moment in doubt, finally reached up and grasped it.

"Are you from Rogers?" asked the Doctor.

The Oroid looked puzzled. Then he turned and flung out his arm in a sweeping gesture toward the deeper woods before them. "Rogers—Master," he said.

"You were waiting for us?" persisted the Doctor; but the other only shook his head and smiled his lack of comprehension.

"He only knows the first words he said," the Big Business Man suggested.

"He must be from Rogers," the Very Young Man put in. "See, he wants us to go with him."

The Oroid was motioning them forward, holding out his hand as though to lead them.

The Very Young Man started forward, but the Big Business Man held him back.

"Wait a moment," he said. "I don't think we ought to go among these people as large as we are. Rogers is evidently alive and waiting for us. Why wouldn't it be better to be about his size, instead of ten-foot giants as we would look now?"

"How do you know how big Rogers is?" asked the Very Young Man.

"I think that a good idea," agreed the Doctor. "Rogers described these Oroid men as being some six inches shorter than himself, on the average."

"This one might be a pygmy, for all we know," said the Very Young Man.

"We might chance it that he's of normal size," said the Doctor, smiling. "I think we should make ourselves smaller."

The Oroid stood patiently by and watched them with interested eyes as each took a tiny pellet from a vial under his arm and touched it to his tongue. When they began to decrease in size his eyes widened with fright and his legs shook under him. But he stood his ground, evidently assured by their smiles and friendly gestures.

In a few minutes the action of the drug was over, and they found themselves not more than a head taller than the Oroid. In this size he seemed to like them better, or at least he stood in far less awe of them, for now he seized them by the arms and pulled them forward vigorously. They laughingly yielded, and, led by this

strange being of another world, they turned from the open places they had been following and plunged into the depths of the forest.

CHAPTER X.

THE CHEMIST AND HIS SON.

FOR an hour or more the three adventurers followed their strange guide in silence through the dense, trackless woods. He walked very rapidly, looking neither to the right nor to the left, finding his way apparently by an intuitive sense of direction. Occasionally he glanced back over his shoulder and smiled.

Walking through the woods here was not difficult, and the party made rapid progress. The huge, upstanding tree-trunks were devoid of limbs for a hundred feet or more above the ground. On some of them a luxuriant vine was growing—a vine that bore a profusion of little gray berries. In the branches high overhead a few birds flew to and fro, calling out at times with a soft, cooing note. The ground—a gray, finely powdered sandy loam—was carpeted with bluish, fallen leaves, sometimes with a species of blue moss, and occasional ferns of a like color.

The forest was dense, deep, and silent; the tree branches overhead locked together in a solid canopy, shutting out the black sky above. Yet even in this seclusion the scene remained as light as it had been outside the woods in the open. Darkness indeed was impossible in this land; under all circumstances the light seemed the same—neither too bright nor too dim—a comfortable, steady glow, restful, almost hypnotic in its sameness.

They had traveled perhaps six miles from the point where they met their Oroid guide when suddenly the Very Young Man became aware that other Oroids were with them. Looking to one side, he saw two more of these strange gray men, silently stalking along, keeping pace with them. Turning, he made out still another, following a short distance behind. The Very Young Man was startled, and hurriedly pointed them out to his companions.

"Wait," called the Doctor to their youthful guide, and abruptly the party came to a halt.

By signs they made their guide understand that they wanted these other men to come closer. The Oroid shouted to them in his own quaint tongue, words of a soft, liquid quality with a wistful sound—words wholly unintelligible to the adventurers.

The men came forward diffidently, six of them, for three others appeared out of the shadows of the forest, and stood in a group, talking among themselves a little and smiling at their visitors. They were all dressed similarly to Lao—for such was the young Oroid's name—and all of them older than he, and of nearly the same height.

"Do any of you speak English?" asked the Doctor, addressing them directly.

Evidently they did not, for they answered only by shaking their heads and by more smiles.

Then one of them spoke. "The Master welcomes his friends," he said. And all the others repeated it after him, like children in school repeating proudly a lesson newly learned.

The Doctor and his two friends laughed heartily, and, completely reassured by this exhibition of their friendliness, they signified to Lao that they were again ready to go forward.

As they walked onward through the apparently endless and unchanging forest, surrounded by what the Very Young Man called their "guard of honor," they were joined from time to time by other Oroid men, all of whom seemed to know who they were and where they were going, and who fell silently into line with them. Within an hour their party numbered twenty or more.

Seeing one of the natives stop a moment and snatch some berries from one of the vines with which many of the trees were encumbered, the Very Young Man did the same. He found the berries sweet and palatable, and he ate a quantity. Then, discovering he was hungry, he took some crackers from his belt and ate them walking along. The Doctor and the Big Business Man ate also, for although they had

not realized it, all three were actually famished.

Shortly after this the party came to a broad, smooth-flowing river, its banks lined with rushes, with here and there a little spot of gray, sandy beach. It was apparent from Lao's signs that they must wait at this point for a boat to take them across. This they were glad enough to do, for all three had gone nearly to the limit of their strength. They drank deep of the pure river water, laved their aching limbs in it gratefully, and lay down, caring not a bit how long they were forced to wait.

In perhaps another hour the boat appeared. It came from down the river, propelled close inshore by two members of their own party who had gone to fetch it. At first the travelers thought it a long, oblong raft. Then as it came closer they could see it was constructed of three canoes, each about thirty feet long, hollowed out of tree-trunks. Over these was laid a platform of small trees hewn roughly into boards. The boat was propelled by long, slender poles in the hands of the two men, who, one on each side, dug them into the bed of the river and walked with them the length of the platform.

Onto this boat the entire party crowded, and they were soon well out on the shallow river, headed for its opposite bank. The Very Young Man, seated at the front end of the platform with his legs dangling over and his feet only a few inches above the silver phosphorescence of the rippling water underneath, sighed luxuriously.

"This beats anything we've done yet," he murmured. "Gee, it's nice here!"

When they landed on the farther bank another group of natives were waiting for them. The party, thus strengthened to nearly forty, started off immediately into the forest, which on this side of the river appeared equally dense and trackless.

They appeared now to be paralleling the course of the river a few hundred yards back from its bank. After half an hour of this traveling they came abruptly to what at first appeared to be the mouth of a large cave, but which afterward proved to be a tunnel-like passageway. Into this opening the party unhesitatingly plunged,

Within this tunnel, which sloped downward at a considerable angle, they made even more rapid progress than in the forest above. The tunnel walls here were perhaps twenty feet apart—walls of a glistening, radiant, crystalline rock. The roof of the passageway was fully twice as high as its width; its rocky floor was smooth and even.

After a time this tunnel was crossed by another, somewhat broader and higher, but in general of similar aspect. It, too, sloped downward, more abruptly from the intersection. Into this latter passageway the party turned, still taking the downward course.

As they progressed, many other passageways were crossed, the intersections of which were wide at the open spaces. Occasionally the travelers encountered other natives, all of them men, most of whom turned and followed them.

The Big Business Man, after over an hour of this rapid walking downward, was again near the limit of his endurance, when the party, after crossing a broad, open square, came upon a sort of sleigh, with two animals harnessed to it. It was standing at the intersection of a still broader, evidently more traveled passageway, and in it was an attendant, apparently fast asleep.

Into this sleigh climbed the three travelers with their guide, Lao; and, driven by the attendant, they started down the broader tunnel at a rapid pace. The sleigh was balanced upon a broad single runner of polished stone, with a narrow, slightly shorter outrider on each side; it slid smoothly and easily on this runner over the equally smooth metallic-rock of the ground.

The reindeerlike animals were harnessed by their heads to a single shaft. They were guided by a short, pointed pole in the hands of the driver, who, as occasion demanded, dug it vigorously into their flanks.

In this manner the travelers rode perhaps half an hour more. The passageway sloped steeply downward, and they made good speed. Finally without warning, except by a sudden freshening of the air, they emerged into the open, and found them-

selves facing a broad, rolling stretch of country, dotted here and there with trees—the country of the Oroids at last.

For the first time since leaving their own world the adventurers found themselves amid surroundings that at least held some semblance of an aspect of familiarity. The scene they faced now might have been one of their own land viewed on an abnormally bright though moonless evening.

For some miles they could see a rolling, open country, curving slightly upward into the dimness of the distance. At their right, close by, lay a broad lake, its surface wrinkled under a gentle breeze and gleaming bright as a great sheet of polished silver.

Overhead hung a gray-blue, cloudless sky, studded with a myriad of faint, twinkling, golden-silver stars. On the lake shore lay a collection of houses, close together at the water's edge and spreading back thinly into the hills behind. This they knew to be Arite—the city of their destination.

At the end of the tunnel they left the sleigh, and, turning down the gentle sloping hillside, leisurely approached the city. They were part way across an open field separating them from the nearest houses, when they saw a group of figures coming across the field toward them. This group stopped when still a few hundred yards away, only two of the figures continuing to come forward. They came onward steadily, the tall figure of a man clothed in white, and by his side a slender, graceful boy.

In a moment more Lao, walking in front of the Doctor and his two companions, stopped suddenly and, turning to face them, said quietly, "The Master."

The three travelers, with their hearts pounding, paused an instant. Then with a shout the Very Young Man dashed forward, followed by his two companions.

"It's Rogers—it's Rogers!" he called; and in a moment more the three men were beside the Chemist, shaking his hand and pouring at him excitedly their words of greeting.

The Chemist welcomed them heartily, but with a quiet, curious air of dignity that

they did not remember he possessed before. He seemed to have aged considerably since they had last seen him. The lines in his face had deepened; the hair on his temples was white. He seemed also to be rather taller than they remembered him, and certainly he was stouter.

He was dressed in a long, flowing robe of white cloth, gathered in at the waist by a girdle, from which hung a short sword, apparently of gold or of beaten brass. His legs were bare; on his feet he wore a form of sandal with leather thongs crossing his insteps. His hair grew long over his ears and was cut off at the shoulder-line in the fashion of the natives.

When the first words of greeting were over, the Chemist turned to the boy, who was standing apart, watching them with big, interested eyes.

"My friends," he said quietly, yet with a little underlying note of pride in his voice, "this is my son."

The boy approached deferentially. He was apparently about ten or eleven years of age, tall as his father's shoulder nearly, extremely slight of build, yet with a body perfectly proportioned. He was dressed in a white robe similar to his father's, only shorter, ending at his knees. His skin was of a curious, smooth, milky whiteness, lacking the gray harder look of that of the native men, and with just a touch of the iridescent quality possessed by the women. His features were cast in a delicate mold, pretty enough almost to be called girlish, yet with a firm squareness of chin distinctly masculine.

His eyes were blue; his thick, wavy hair, falling to his shoulders, was a chestnut brown. His demeanor was graceful and dignified, yet with a touch of ingenuousness that marked him for the care-free child he really was. He held out his hands palms up as he approached.

"My name is Loto," he said in a sweet, soft voice, with perfect self-possession. "I'm glad to meet my father's friends." He spoke English with just a trace of the liquid quality that characterized his mother's tongue.

"You are late getting here," remarked the Chemist with a smile, as the three

travelers, completely surprised by this sudden introduction, gravely shook hands with the boy.

During this time the young Oroid who had guided them down from the forest above the tunnels, had been standing respectfully behind them, a few feet away. A short distance farther on several small groups of natives were gathered, watching the strangers. With a few swift words Loto now dismissed their guide, who bowed low with his hands to his forehead and left them.

Led by the Chemist, they continued on down into the city, talking earnestly, telling him the details of their trip. The natives followed them as they moved forward, and as they entered the city others looked at them curiously and, the Very Young Man thought, with a little hostility, yet always from a respectful distance. Evidently it was night, or at least the time of sleep at this hour, for the streets they passed through were nearly deserted.

CHAPTER XI.

THE CITY OF ARITE.

THE city of Arite, as it looked to them now, was strange beyond anything they had ever seen, but still by no means as extraordinary as they had expected it would be. The streets through which they walked were broad and straight, and were crossed by others at regular intervals of two or three hundred feet. These streets paralleled each other with mathematical regularity. The city thus was laid out most orderly, but with one peculiarity; the streets did not run in two directions crossing each other at right angles, but in three, each inclined to an equal degree with the others. The blocks of houses between them, therefore, were cut into diamond-shaped sections and into triangles, never into squares or oblongs.

Most of the streets seemed paved with large, flat gray blocks of a substance resembling highly polished stone, or a form of opaque glass. There were no sidewalks, but close up before the more pretentious of the houses, small trees were growing.

The houses themselves were generally triangular or diamond-shaped, following the slope of the streets. They were, most of them, but two stories in height, with flat roofs on some of which flowers and trellised vines were growing. They were built principally of the same smooth, gray blocks with which the streets were paved. Their windows were large and numerous, without window-panes, but closed now, nearly all of them by shining, silvery curtains that looked as though they might have been woven from the metal itself. The doors were of heavy metal, suggesting brass or gold. On some of the houses tiny low-railed balconies hung from the upper windows out over the street.

The party proceeded quietly through this now deserted city, crossing a large tree-lined square, or park, that by the confluence of many streets seemed to mark its center, and turned finally into another diagonal street that dropped swiftly down toward the lake front. At the edge of a promontory this street abruptly terminated in a broad flight of steps leading down to a little beach on the lake shore perhaps a hundred feet below.

The Chemist turned sharp to the right at the head of these steps, and, passing through the opened gateway of an arch in a low gray wall, led his friends into a garden in which were growing a profusion of flowers. These flowers, they noticed, were most of them blue or gray, or of a pale silvery whiteness, lending to the scenes a peculiarly wan, wistful appearance, yet one of extraordinary, quite unearthly beauty.

Through the garden a little gray-pebbled path wound back to where a house stood, nearly hidden in a grove of trees, upon a bluff directly overlooking the lake.

"My home, gentlemen," said the Chemist, with a wave of his hand.

As they approached the house they heard, coming from within, the mellow voice of a woman singing—an odd little minor theme, with a quaint, lilting rhythm, and words they could not distinguish. Accompanying the voice were the delicate tones of some stringed instrument suggesting a harp.

"We are expected," remarked the Chemist with a smile. "Lylda is still up, waiting for us." The Very Young Man's heart gave a leap at the mention of the name.

From the outside, the Chemist's house resembled many of the larger ones they had seen as they came through the city. It was considerably more pretentious than any they had yet noticed, diamond-shaped—that is to say, a flattened oblong—two stories in height and built of large blocks of the gray polished stone.

Unlike the other houses, its sides were not bare, but were partly covered by a luxuriant growth of vines and trellised flowers. There were no balconies under its windows, except on the lake side. There, at the height of the second story, a covered balcony broad enough almost to be called a veranda, stretched the full width of the house.

A broad door of brass, fronting the garden, stood partly open, and the Chemist pushed it wide and ushered in his friends. They found themselves now in a triangular hallway, or lobby, with an open arch in both its other sides giving passage into rooms beyond. Through one of these archways the Chemist led them, into what evidently was the main living-room of the dwelling.

It was a high-ceilinged room nearly triangular in shape, thirty feet possibly at its greatest width. In one wall were set several silvery-curtained windows, opening out onto the lake. On the other side was a broad fireplace and hearth, with another archway beside it leading farther into the house. The walls of the room were lined with small gray tiles; the floor also was tiled with gray and white, set in design.

On the floor were spread several large rugs, apparently made of grass or fiber. The walls were bare, except between the windows, where two long, narrow, heavily embroidered strips of golden cloth were hanging.

In the center of the room stood a circular stone table, its top a highly polished black slab of stone. This table was set now for a meal, with golden metal dishes, huge metal goblets of a like color, and beautifully wrought table utensils, also of

gold. Around the table were several small chairs, made of wicker. In the seat of each lay a padded fiber cushion, and over the back was hung a small piece of embroidered cloth.

With the exception of these chairs and table, the room was practically devoid of furniture. Against one wall was a smaller table of stone, with a few miscellaneous objects on its top, and under each window stood a small white stone bench.

A fire glowed in the fireplace grate—a fire that burned without flame. On the hearth before it, reclining on large silvery cushions, was a woman holding in her hands a small stringed instrument like a tiny harp or lyre. When the men entered the room she laid her instrument aside and rose to her feet.

As she stood there for an instant, expectant, with the light of welcome in her eyes, the three strangers beheld what to them seemed the most perfect vision of feminine loveliness they had ever seen.

The woman's age was at first glance indeterminate. By her face, her long, slender, yet well-rounded neck, and the slim curves of her girlish figure, she might have been hardly more than twenty. Yet in her bearing there was that indefinable poise and dignity that bespoke the more mature, older woman.

She was about five feet tall, with a slender, almost fragile, yet perfectly rounded body. Her dress consisted of a single flowing garment of light-blue silk, reaching from the shoulders to just above her knees. It was girdled at the waist by a thick golden cord that hung with golden tasseled pendants at her side.

A narrower golden cord crossed her breast and shoulders. Her arms, legs, and shoulders were bare. Her skin was smooth as satin, milky white, and suffused with the delicate tints of many colors. Her hair was thick and very black; it was twisted into two tresses that fell forward over each shoulder nearly to her waist and ended with a little silver ribbon and tassel tied near the bottom.

Her face was a delicate oval. Her lips were full and of a color for which in English there is no name. It would have

been red doubtless by sunlight in the world above, but here in this silver light of phosphorescence, the color red, as we see it, was impossible.

Her nose was small, of Grecian type. Her slate-gray eyes were rather large, very slightly upturned at the corners, giving just a touch of the look of our women of the Orient. Her lashes were long and very black. In conversation she lowered them at times with a charming combination of feminine humility and a touch of coquetry. Her gaze from under them had often a peculiar look of melting softness, yet always it was direct and honest.

Such was the woman who quietly stood beside her hearth, waiting to welcome these strange guests from another world.

As the men entered through the archway, the boy Loto pushed quickly past them in his eagerness to get ahead, and, rushing across the room, threw himself into the woman's arms crying happily, "*Mita, mita.*"

The woman kissed him affectionately. Then, before she had time to speak, the boy pulled her forward, holding her tightly by one hand.

"This is my mother," he said with a pretty little gesture. "Her name is Lylda."

The woman loosened herself from his grasp with a smile of amusement, and, native fashion, bowed low with her hands to her forehead.

"My husband's friends are welcome," she said simply. Her voice was soft and musical. She spoke English perfectly, with an intonation of which the most cultured woman might be proud, but with a foreign accent much more noticeable than that of her son.

"A very long time we have been waiting for you," she added; and then, as an afterthought, she impulsively offered them her hand in their own manner.

The Chemist kissed his wife quietly. In spite of the presence of strangers, for a moment she dropped her reserve, her arms went up around his neck, and she clung to him an instant. Gently putting her down, the Chemist turned to his friends.

"I think Lylda has supper waiting," he

said. Then, as he looked at their torn, woolen suits that once were white, and the ragged shoes upon their feet, he added with a smile, "But I think I can make you much more comfortable first."

He led them up a broad, curving flight of stone steps to a room above, where they found a shallow pool of water, sunk below the level of the floor. Here he left them to bathe, getting them meanwhile robes similar to his own, with which to replace their own soiled garments. In a little while, much refreshed, they descended to the room below, where Lylda had supper ready upon the table waiting for them.

"Only a little while ago my father and Aura left," said Lylda, as they sat down to eat.

"Lylda's younger sister," the Chemist explained. "She lives with her father here in Arite."

The Very Young Man parted his lips to speak. Then, with heightened color in his cheeks, he closed them again.

They were deftly served at supper by a little native girl who was dressed in a short tunic reaching from waist to knees, with circular disks of gold covering her breasts. There was cooked meat for the meal, a white, starchy form of vegetable somewhat resembling a potato, a number of delicious fruits of unfamiliar variety, and for drink the juice of a fruit that tasted more like cider than anything they could name.

At the table Loto perched himself beside the Very Young Man, for whom he seemed to have taken a sudden fancy.

"I like you," he said suddenly, during a lull in the talk.

"I like you, too," answered the Very Young Man.

"Aura is very beautiful; you'll like her."

"I'm sure I will," the Very Young Man agreed soberly.

"What's your name?" persisted the boy.

"My name's Jack. And I'm glad you like me. I think we're friends, don't you?"

And so they became firm friends, and, as far as circumstances would permit, inseparable companions.

Lylda presided over the supper with the charming grace of a competent hostess.

She spoke seldom, yet when the conversation turned to the great world above in which her husband was born, she questioned intelligently and with eager interest. Evidently she had a considerable knowledge of the subject, but with an almost childish insatiable curiosity she sought from her guests more intimate details of the world they lived in.

When in lighter vein their talk ran into comments upon the social life of their own world, Lylda's ready wit, combined with her ingenuous simplicity, put to them many questions which made the giving of an un-

derstandable answer sometimes amusingly, difficult.

When the meal was over the three travelers found themselves very sleepy, and all of them were glad when the Chemist suggested that they retire almost immediately. He led them again to the upper story into the bedroom they were to occupy. There, on the low bedsteads, soft with many quilted coverings, they passed the remainder of the time of sleep in dreamless slumber, utterly worn out by their journey, nor guessing what the morning would bring forth.

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.

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LOVE'S ALPHABET

BY CLINTON SCOLLARD

SYLVIA, the winsome pet,
Bids me sing Love's Alphabet.
Can I frown, and answer nay?
Soothly, not to Sylvia!
That were folly, so, you see,
Here it is, from A to Z:

A comes first, and that's her air,
Delicate and debonaire!
B—that means her beauty. She
Is "the fairest fair" to me!
C—her cheeks, blush-roses they,
Or the dawning flush of day!
D—behold her dainty dress,
Modest in its modishness!
E—can mean naught save her eyes
Tinted like the twilight skies!
F—her foot so shapely, hid
In its tiny case of kid!
G—her grace! It is a thing
Subtle as the grace of spring!
H—must be her hat or hair;
Both, methinks, are like a snare!
I—her independence is;
Yet who would not call her his?
J—that is her jollity;
Truth, she sometimes "jollies" me!
K—her kindness! No sting
Slips her lips for anything!
L—her love, beyond all hap!
Would I were the lucky chap!
M—her mouth, which Cupid wrought
After giving it much thought!

N—her nose—admire it, pray,
Though a trifle retroussé!
O—her ornaments I'll call;
She is fairer than them all!
P—her purse—I fear it's light;
Yet I'd dare, if I but might!
Q—is for her quiet moods
When but one—that's me—intrudes!
R—her roguishness, no doubt!
You should watch the shy minx pout!
S—her speech! 'Tis more like pearls
Than is any other girl's!
T—her teeth! It's pat, I see,
To repeat the simile!
U—the universal cheer
That she spreads afar and near!
V—her voice—a very dream;
Melody of bird and stream!
W—ah, that's her way,
And she wants it every day!
X—is Chi in Greek. Must be
That's her strange chi-rography!
Y—her youth! Against all odds,
It's a guerdon from the gods!
Z—her zest—her endless zest—
For she's always at her best!

"There, miss, now that I have done,
Tell me what reward I've won!"
She, with dimple-deepening chin:
"I can't see where Love comes in,
You've just sung some girl!"
"That's true!"
You are Love, dear Sylvia, you!"

The Eye of Balamok

by Victor Rousseau

Author of "Draft of Eternity," "The Diamond Demons," "Midsummer Madness," etc.

CHAPTER XV.

THE FALL OF THE FAITHLESS.

SLOWLY the darkness cleared away. I heard shouting all around me, and through the drifting spirals which the fading blackness assumed I was aware of confused struggling in the quadrangle.

Then I perceived Mnur with a band of Wallaby Priests about me.

"Quick, my Lord Gowani!" he cried. "The Ellabortans are in battle against the horsemen of Thaxas, and we must save the day. Leave the princess in the charge of these two of my priests, who will know where to guard her, and come with me, for our people are hard pressed."

Even as he spoke I saw a squadron of Thaxas's cavalry, upon their ferocious, three-toed horses, surge over the mob, which fled in all directions. The inner wall was lined with Ellabortans, shooting arrows into the Avian horsemen, which, however, had little effect against the formidable leather and iron armor which protected man and beast, and only goaded the huge monsters into greater fury.

It was a terrible sight to see the horses tearing with their great jaws at the flying Ellabortans, and doing hardly less damage than the riders with their sabers, while their fearful three-toed hoofs split skull and face together as they brought them down upon the prostrate men beneath them.

Reluctantly, but inevitably, I consigned

Hita to the care of Mnur's two men. She smiled at me bravely. "You must leave me, my lord," she said. "For, if Ptuth and Thaxas win, all is lost, and our love, too."

I pressed her to me for a moment, and then the two Wallaby Priests extended their wings and, each holding one of Hita's hands, rose with her into the air. I watched her as she ascended to the temple top, and then a drift of darkness swept across her, and, when it drifted away, she was no longer to be seen.

Next moment Mnur and I had risen above the quadrangle, surrounded by a band of our Wallaby Priests. I had discovered, in the brief space of time during which I had flown, that I could direct my course instinctively with my arms and legs, much as a swimmer does.

A confused picture lay beneath us. The Ellabortans had turned out *en masse* to aid in the revolution, and the streets of the lower city were packed with a great armed mob, carrying spears, swords, bows and arrows, and shields, all surging up toward the wall.

Unfortunately, this was a period where armor had outstripped propulsive weapons in development—that is to say, the bow. Fendika appeared to be on the eve of the discovery of firearms, or something of that nature, although at present explosives were known only in the form of a sort of coarse gunpowder, used in construction work.

This story began in the All-Story Weekly for January 17.

It was curious that the Fendeks should have invented the dynamo, and learned laws of light which were wholly unknown to us, while in other respects the people were semibarbarians. But of course their situation in the interior of the planet would turn their energies in this direction.

Thus the arrows did little harm, but the fury of the assaults soon won the inner wall. The Ellabortans also held the outer walls of the capital, from which they successfully repelled the hordes of Thaxas's cavalry, who seemed to fill the plain.

But the Avian cavalry were supreme inside the inner keep, and it was here that the decision must be made. And there was no doubt that Thaxas was gaining the day. Once he had the inner part of the city under control, the Ellabortans would be crushed like the meat in a sandwich between the Avians within and without. Then a terrible revenge would be wrought upon them.

Unfortunately there was no doubt but Thaxas was gaining the day. The cavalry swept in furious and untiring charges across the square, driving the last vestige of the defense before them. And behind them, gathered about Ptuth and Thafti, I saw the columns of red-cloaked swordsmen, ready to regain the inner walls with a rush, as soon as Thaxas had crushed out all resistance.

High overhead, but flying singly, for the most part, were priests of the Serpent, directing the charges of the Avian cavalry with signs, and dropping dark bombs wherever a charge or rally of the Ellabortans temporarily changed the issue.

However, only a few of the Serpent Priests had managed to obtain wings, presumably from some reserve store which we had not discovered, and there were forty of us. Sailing overhead in squadron formation, we forced them to flee before us.

But one, a huge man, carrying a sword in his hand, suddenly turned as we went sweeping past, and made a furious charge at me. I was trying desperately to draw a light bomb, but I was compelled to turn all my thoughts to the endeavor to evade him. Twice the sword came within an inch of my heart, and we circled round about each other for half a minute before I flung the bomb and broke it against his breast.

In that flash of blinding sunlight he seemed to crumple up. I saw his hair catch fire, his clothing begin to char. He yelled out of his twisted lips; then he collapsed and went crashing down upon the court below, a shapeless mass of burned flesh and crumpled iron.

Now, at Mnur's command, we wheeled, and let our light bombs fall among the horsemen of Thaxas, as they swept over the quadrangle, driving the last vestiges of the defense before them. I saw the Ellabortans on the walls bending their futile bows in vain. The horsemen droye madly up the ramp which led to the summit from the interior, Thaxas leading them. They had almost gained the top when our bombs fell.

Instantly the situation was reversed. A panic broke out among the horses, which bolted wildly along the ramparts, the Ellabortans flinging themselves to the stones beneath them, and, as they passed over them, rising to hamstring them, or thrust their long spears into their bellies, or pull the horsemen from their backs and plunge their swords through leather corselet and body.

A squadron, however, managed to regain the quadrangle, and, before they could disperse, we flung our bombs again.

And that restored the fortunes of the day. With shrieks of pain and terror, the monsters flung their riders and bolted in all directions, racing round and round the quadrangle until they dropped exhausted, or dying under the withering light. And, with shouts of execration, the Ellabortans leaped down from the walls and rushed upon the red-cloaked swordsmen.

It was now impossible for us to drop further bombs, for fear of destroying our own men. We could only watch; and there followed as gallant a feat of arms as I have ever seen.

For, though outnumbered by a score to one, the red-cloaked courtiers gathered about Thafti and Ptuth. Their weapons, used with terrible effect, worked havoc among their assailants, who soon lay in a ring of dead about them. Foot by foot they fought their way toward the walls. Among them I saw Thaxas, dismounted, his helmet

awry, his armor bloodstained, his sword dripping red. He leaped forward alone, scaled the rampart, and held it single-handed against the snarling, crouching, fearful Ellabortans about him, until, with a rush and a cheer, the red-cloaks followed him, bearing Thafti and Ptuth among them, and emerged into the lower city.

Within the streets, a compact legion, they easily scattered the mob, which fled before them, and so, even as we watched, they gained the outer wall, forced it, and were received by the horsemen with a wild cheer that reached us where we flew over the quadrangle.

But Ellaborta was ours, and the remnant of the Avian horsemen within were at our mercy. They came forward with hands upheld in token of surrender. We lodged them as prisoners in the keep, under the inner gate. The ferocious horses, being untamable except by the Avians, who knew the secret of subduing them, were put out of their suffering.

My first thought was, of course, for Hita. She had been safely hidden in a secret room in the Wallaby Temple, and our reunion, though we could find time only for a brief exchange of words, filled me with joy and resolution.

We placed strong forces of trained men upon the outer walls, and our fears of an immediate assault disappeared within the next hour, when we saw the vast hosts of Thaxas effecting a retirement to their camp upon the river, some two miles from the city. From this point bodies pushed out to right and left, until they were posted on all the main roads leading out of Ellaborta. Within a *psus* the capital was surrounded and in a condition of siege.

CHAPTER XVI.

LIFE AND DEATH.

OUR position was thus a perilous one, for there was little store of food within the walls, and, whether or not Ptuth guessed it, we had used up all our light bombs. My first act, therefore, was to summon the scientists of the capital into the chamber where were the dynamos.

It was soon seen that it would be an easy matter to control the light supply, for the machines were automatic in their action and would run indefinitely. But not even the Wallaby Priest who had once served the Serpent knew the secret of manufacturing the bombs.

This would make our situation more precarious daily, for there was little doubt that Ptuth could set up a laboratory and fashion both bombs and wings. We should have secured his priests when we had captured them.

I sent out criers to summon a popular meeting in the quadrangle for two *psus* later, resolving that the Ellabortans should ratify any decision arrived at. And I must mention something—a trivial matter, but one which rather depressed the spirits of the people, who looked upon it as an omen of ill.

It was the custom to keep the two dinosaurs beneath the grille supplied with victims, chosen from among petty malefactors. These men were tossed alive to them twice weekly, and it was this custom that the people demanded should be abolished forever. They surged into the temple, shouting for the destruction of the monsters.

The grille was quickly pried up with crowbars, and men descended, carrying swords and torches. The floor of the crypt was white with human bones, but the dinosaurs could not be found.

In vain the upper parts of the temple, and all the rooms over the altar were searched and ransacked. The dinosaurs had evidently ascended through the hollow serpent, and made their escape by way of the roof; but all search proved fruitless.

I thought they might have destroyed each other when they met within the gold serpent, but, after the mechanism that controlled it had been stopped, a venturesome lad ascended, and emerged at the upper orifice, reporting that the gold shell was empty.

At our council, the very first thing decided was that the Serpent worship should be driven out of Fendika for ever, and that of the Unknown God established as the state religion. The lesser priesthoods, how-

ever, were to be allowed to exit under the rule of the Wallabies, being of the old Fendek order before the Serpent Priests had overcome the country. This compromise, ill pleased Mnur, who had expected to be proclaimed chief pontiff, and he submitted with an ill grace.

Then Hita and I, standing in the center of the quadrangle, were acclaimed by wildly cheering crowds. And the old hag, Ros Marra, being led forward by Nasmaka, publicly acknowledged that she had lied at the bidding of Ptuth, and in fear of him.

Nasmaka and I had previously decided that so long as the land was in the throes of civil conflict, it would not be advisable for Hita and me to be married, as jealousy of a stranger might cause a change in the fickle Fendek mind. But now, being chief pontiff, Nasmaka solemnly reaffirmed our betrothal, and proposed that, after the overthrow of Thafti and the Avians, we should rule the land jointly.

At that there was thunderous applause. I recall Hita, in her blue cloak, wearing the electrum circlet of plain gold that betokened rulership about her forehead, addressing the crowd in simple and dignified words, surrounded by the exiles. She told them that the time had come to expel the Serpent priesthood forever from the land, and to reassert the supremacy of the Fendeks over their hereditary enemies of the Avian province.

And so the meeting dissolved, and every man went to his post, and preparations for the coming fight were made. Swords were hammered out on anvils, and trained officers endeavored to form an invincible army out of the Ellabortan footmen. If this succeeded, there was little doubt that we could overcome Thafti and Ptuth, even with the aid of the Avian horse.

I was assigned new quarters in the palace. And that night—strictly, I should say, to about what corresponded to our midnight—when the alternate *psus* of torpor held the city, Nasmaka came to me.

I was struck by the old man's look of utter weariness. He seemed to have aged even in the few weeks I had known him.

"My Lord Gowani, would you have your heart's desire?" he asked.

"Who would not?" I returned.

"Listen then. Although statecraft forbids your marriage with Hita to be made publicly, what is there to prevent a private ceremony, according to our laws, so that your mind may be at ease, knowing that she is wholly yours? Besides, my time is come, and I would see you united before I die."

I sprang to my feet, wide awake, despite the torpor which had overcome me—for by this time I had fallen into Fendek habits, though, where they rested merely, I actually slept.

He smiled and laid his hand restrainingly upon my arm. "Hope not for overmuch," he said, "for in truth I do not know what the ultimate issue shall be. But at least I shall know before I die that the princess is mated with you, whom I have come to look on as a son.

"Soon I go to my rest, but I shall return. For we know that it is our fate, when we are dead, to be born again in other bodies, and perchance next time it will be in the world above us."

"Many *psus* must pass before you die, Nasmaka," I answered.

He said nothing to that, but led me out of the palace, past the guards, drowsing at their posts, across the quadrangle, and into the Temple of the Eagle, on the further side of the Serpent Temple. The empty fane—for, of course, there were no males left alive to worship there—was a plain structure of white stone, with an altar at the far end, and an electrum eagle, with wings extended for flight, above it.

Before the altar, wearing her blue cloak, stood Hita. At her side was an Eagle Priest—the sole surviving one, who remained as guardian of the empty temple.

Hita came forward, and, as I took her hands, a vivid blush suffused her cheeks, and her eyes, raised for an instant timidly to mine, dropped again.

"Nasmaka has told you, my lord?" she murmured.

"He has promised me all that my heart longs for," I answered ardently.

"My dear lord, before this takes place I must say something you do not know," said Hita. "Nor even you, O Nasmaka, for I have kept this hidden until now even from

you, fearing to distress you and cause you anxiety."

As she spoke I saw a look of fear creep into her eyes.

"Ptuth has revealed to me," she said, "that it is prophesied that my Lord Gowani and I shall indeed be happy for a brief space, but after that he shall lose me. Yet not forever, for some day we shall be reunited; but not until all this has passed away. And more than this I know not.

"And know, my Lord Gowani, that there is a means devised whereby the Princess of the Fendeks who shall be in mortal peril may find respite. And this secret has been from of old in the charge of the Eagle Priest. What it is, I know not, but he knows; and at the appointed time, by its means he shall deliver me."

"Aye," croaked the old man, "it is in my keeping for the use of the princess whenever she shall demand it."

"Or I?" I asked.

"If you demand it in her name, my Lord Gowani," he answered.

I made light of Hita's fears, and told her that Ptuth lied, and that he could no more foresee the future than he could unveil the dreaded Eye of Balamok. But Hita listened without encouragement.

"O my dear lord," she answered, "it should be known to you that Ptuth, the magician, has lived since the beginnings of time. Nor can he ever die, and, even were he slain, he would create a new body for himself by his arts. And by this secret I must be renewed unto eternal youth when I grow old, until the dubious prophecy be fulfilled."

"A long time hence, beloved," I answered, thinking of the many years that must elapse before old age stole on us.

But she only glanced at me with a troubled brow, until Nasmata, coming forward, pronounced the words that secretly united us. And then, as if her fear had gone, she let me take her in my arms.

Standing thus, we heard Nasmata's benediction die away. Suddenly there came an exclamation from the Eagle Priest. We turned hastily, to find the old man lying upon the ground.

He opened his eyes as we knelt over

him. "My time has come, as I foresaw, O my Lord Gowani," he said simply. "May the Unknown God preserve you—and my princess—again the wiles of Ptuth—against—"

Nasmata died.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE BOOST OF THAXAS.

DURING the successive *psus ama* (ten *psus* periods) we perfected our plans of defense. Hopes began to run high within Ellaborta, for the enemy remained inactive, and only those of us who understood the powers of Ptuth feared the outcome.

It was mortally certain that he would attack as soon as he had fashioned new wings and prepared light bombs, and in this predicament it was resolved to send a trustworthy messenger at once to summon Sar, the Aonorian prince, to lead his footmen to our rescue. Then, by a simultaneous sally from the gates, we could hope to place Thafti and Thaxas at our mercy.

But the question whom to send was a perplexity. He would have to fly, and this limited us to the choice of one or other of the twoscore Wallaby Priests. Now the Wallaby Priests were clearly disaffected since the establishment of the Unknown God in place of the Wallaby God, as they had expected. Indeed, Mnur's attitude toward me was constrained and distant. I did not distrust him, but it added a new trouble to the many that beset us.

About the fifth *psus ama* an embassy arrived under the llama flag, the symbol of truce, and, when it was admitted within the walls, we were astounded to discover that it consisted of Thaxas himself, with three retainers.

So great was the awe of the great Avian prince, that the people followed only at a great distance. Thaxas was hated more than any of our opponents, on account of the cruelties of his horsemen. Nevertheless, my impression of him had been a favorable one, and it was not lessened when I saw him stand before Queen Hita in the Council Hall.

"Greetings, queen!" he began—and at that recognition of her a murmur of surprise ran through the courtiers. "I am an Avian, and our speech is short, and not honeycombed with praise like that of the Fendeks, though here there is need of it."

And he bowed low before her, and his complement left us agape with wonder.

"You know, O queen," he continued, "that I had no part in your exile, nor care I whether you or your sister reign, so far as my desires rule me. I was betrothed to the Princess Regnant after your father's death; therefore, since I do not believe the story of the old hag, Ros Marra, I claim you as my queen."

At this the courtiers were fairly stupefied, and could only stare at Thaxas, wondering what was to follow.

"For a contract cannot be annulled," continued the Avian Prince. "My task is but to support the rightful queen, my duty and my right to mate with her; but I tell you, Hita"—here he made a sudden, violent gesture with his gloved hand—"I would sooner be false to my word, my vow, my duty, and the great Avian God than mate with Thafti.

"My desire is for you, and, where my desire is, there my will is. Aye, and my will is unbreakable. Therefore, bid this foreign lord depart in safety out of the Fendek realm, and let the and have peace."

He ended, and a murmur of admiration stirred the counselors. For the man spoke honest and true, and there was a dignity in him commanding admiration, while the vehemence of his words commanded even sympathy.

Hita rose from her throne, and I think she was a little touched by Thaxas's outspokenness.

"I have heard you, Prince Thaxas," she said. "Truly, I would that all my counselors were as frank and outspoken. But what you say may never be, for I had no part in my father's contract, and no contract can annul a woman's wishes in such a matter as marriage."

Thaxas glared at her. "Aye, queen, well I know it is this foreign lord, this impostor, who hath won thy heart," he answered. "Yet, I swear that within *psus ama hak*

(five days) I will have him torn limb from limb and feed the serpents with his flesh. That I, Thaxas, swear. And as for you"—he swung upon the assemblage—"I will level your proud city flat with the earth, and pass the plowshare over it."

He bowed to Hita and stalked away, leaving us silent and troubled. Especially myself, for I well knew that this placed the responsibility for the future on my own head.

I think the counselors perceived that, too, and pondered, for a few of them eyed me askance as we broke up. And it became clearer than ever, what with this new event, added to the disaffection of Mnur, that matters must be brought speedily to an issue.

In fact, the mission of Thaxas so infuriated the people that they surrounded the Council Hall, clamoring to be led out against the Avian hosts. They looked warlike enough, and, being well-armed and led, it seemed to us might effect at least a sortie that would prove the forerunner of a general victory. Accordingly it was decided that a surprise attack should be made that night upon the main host of the Avians, encamped upon the river bank.

At the same time we selected one of Mnur's priests, and gave him letters for Sar, who lay on his frontier with his army, telling him that Ellaborta was closely invested, and that he must march to our relief immediately.

We watched him rise from the quadrangle and wing his way beyond the walls, where the low-lying mists hid him from view. And then we set about our preparations for the sortie.

Five thousand men, under K'hauls, a veteran campaigner, were to move in a single column upon the main camp of the Avians. Smaller bodies of about three thousand apiece were to make feints against the other positions along the main roads. I myself, with a reserve force of ten thousand, was to string out my men obliquely along the river bank, thus keeping them in touch with the capital, in case of need, and being, at the same time, able to unite forces with K'hauls should his attack prove successful beyond expectation.

It was a splendid sight to see the bodies

of Fendek warriors marching out, confident of victory, and to hear their ringing applause as Hita, clothed in her blue cloak, and wearing the royal diadem, stood on the ramparts, surrounded by her counselors. Not a man but would have died for her! I knew that I filled her thoughts, and I resolved that I would make Thaxas's boast meaningless, and strike a blow that should decide the fortunes of the day.

Before us, across the meadows, marched K'hauls's men, first a line of veterans, armed with long spears, then two lines of youths, with short stabbing-spears, with which to break the columns of our opponents; following them the main body, armed with the wide, straight Fendek swords, capable of effecting terrible execution.

My men, on the contrary, were all swordsmen, and mostly veterans of other wars. I divided them into three parts. One body, under Nohaddyi, a brave and skilful old general, I placed between the main gate of the capital and the road that ran north-east, in support of one of the subsidiary forces. The second, under Hamul, I left encamped about a half-mile from the city, to hold the principal bridge which gave us touch with our right flank. The third I myself commanded, following about a half-mile behind K'hauls.

Overhead flew the winged priests, but useful only for reconnoissance, since our light bombs were exhausted.

At length, having reached the place appointed, I ordered my men to rest, and took my seat upon a small mound in front of them, which partly concealed their number from any Avian airmen. Here and there I saw a winged priest of the enemy floating high above both lines, but he always fled when tackled by our own Wallaby fliers; and very soon the clouds descended so low that aerial reconnoissance proved impossible.

There was, of course, no possibility of surprise in that perpetual day. We had moved out during the last *psus* of work, and we had a *psus* to wait before attacking, since a breach of this resting period would have been considered an abominable atrocity; furthermore, it was very doubtful whether the languid warriors could have

been driven to the attack during the rest *psus*, even had they been willing to violate what was regarded as a divine law.

My thoughts were strange as I sat there alone, watching the weary soldiers, devoid of all interest or thought, resting in their habitual torpor. I thought of Hita principally, of Sewell, wondering where he was; then of old Joe, who dreamed that he had been a king, and wondered whether by any chance he had entered this subterranean country. And I, too, drowsed, until at last the thrill of the *psus* of battle ran through my veins, and, turning, I perceived my men rising, and gathering up their corselets to strap them on, and taking their swords in hand.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A PYRRHIC VICTORY.

FROM where I stood I could see the panorama of the whole battle-field.

On our extreme right, across the river, our outposts were already driving in the skirmishers of Thaxas's cavalry, who circled about them on their ferocious horses, but dared not charge those lines of well-armed spearmen. A few of the hostile forces were reconnoitering the bridge, but, finding it well guarded, also withdrew.

In front of me the hostile camp was throwing out line after line of horsemen, who circled to right and left to find the weak places in our forces. Before Thaxas's camp an enormous force of horsemen was marshaling, and I fancied that the rider who moved up and down before them was Thaxas himself.

Between ourselves and them, K'hauls was quietly and resolutely marshaling his own men into column to receive the attack.

It came. With wild cheers, and the flash of swords, and the thunder of thousands of hoofs, the Avian horsemen rode straight at the massed column before them. I caught my breath as I saw that unbroken leading line make straight for our spearmen. In another moment the fight was joined.

Yells dinned in our ears, the clash of sword on spear; a cloud of heavy dust covered the face of the plain. For whole min-

utes that mad medley continued, a dust whirl like a cyclone, broken by serpentine gleams of light.

Now all along our front the issue was joined. Simultaneously with the charge of Thaxas I saw a large force of horsemen riding toward the bridge. But I had only time to glance at them and pray the Fendeks would hold. Then, to my dismay, as the dust began to settle, I saw K'hauls' line cleft asunder. It was falling back sullenly on either wing, in two irregularly shaped masses; and straight through the cleft, yelling, Thaxas rode at the head of his men.

I gave the sharp command, and our forces moved forward in unison and lined the crest. Beneath us I saw the Avian cavalry riding straight toward us, Thaxas leading them, his helmet half sheared away. Now they were within fifty paces. And Thaxas knew me. I heard his roar of challenge. I saw his monster horse uprear.

Now! *Khoom!*—go at them. We were at them and among them, slashing, receiving blows and fighting like madmen in the midst of those thunderous hoofs. One slit my arm from shoulder to the wrist, as if the three toes had been razors. I felt nothing. Time and again I ran at Thaxas, but before we could more than exchange blows men ran between us. The Fendeks were fighting loyally to the death.

Dust all about us, everywhere confusion, and no longer the merest semblance of a line. The battle had resolved itself into a series of individual contests. But presently the tumult thinned, and in the subsiding dust I saw that Thaxas had ridden clear through us, even as he had ridden through K'hauls'. But there was this difference: then his horsemen and their beasts had been fresh and flushed with victory; now their strength and ardor were spent, and nearly all the horses were suffering from wounds. The field was a swamp of purple blood.

Thaxas was reforming. We far outnumbered him, but by this time, what with our own broken ranks and stragglers from K'hauls' men, it was impossible to present any sort of front to the Avians. Yet we surrounded them.

I saw the victory ours. For the body at the bridge had held victoriously, and now the old veteran, Nohaddyii, was coming up to our support. I saw the gleam of his helmets, and heard the shouting of his fresh troops.

Then I saw Thafti among the soldiers of Thaxas, wearing a long veil, flying in the air. She was pointing toward us and inciting her men to the charge, while Thaxas seemed to sulk beside her.

Once more there came the thunder of the charge. Once more the savage horses were upon us, straining with outstretched necks and snapping jaws. Again the play of sword and spear, again the dreaded Avian war-cry. Again the dust, and once again I found Thaxas and lost him, found him, lost him finally, and found myself with dripping sword standing alone in a sort of center of the dust-storm, while the roar of the battle raged unseen about me.

Suddenly I was aware of Sewell at my side. He was dismounted, clutching at the bridle of a spent horse, on which was Thafti.

"Take her, Gowan!" he shrieked. "I have made her prisoner for you. And take me, too. That was my game. Don't you see, Gowan? I was helping you—"

Thafti raised her veil, and her hideous face was stern, and almost beautiful with command and spirit.

Now men came running up. They knew them and, shouting eagerly at such prizes, surrounded them. I called one of my captains and ordered him to convey the prisoners with a strong guard to Ellaborta.

Then I turned to the battle, which was dwindling into the distance. Nohaddyii was at my side, and pointing with his sword: "The day is ours, my lord!" he shouted.

As the dust settled I saw Thaxas retiring with the remnant of his forces.

"Now, my lord, let us charge their camp, and they are beaten beyond hope!" old Nohaddyii cried.

But even as he spoke there came a renewed tumult from our right wing, and to my dismay I saw the Avian horsemen swarming over the bridge, and Hamul's troops borne backward, fighting bravely but impotently against overwhelming numbers,

If the Avians could hold our communications at their central point, the day was not won, but lost.

I at once despatched Nohaddyii with his reinforcements to retake the bridge. But as his men attacked they became mingled with the dispersing remnants of Hamul's men, and, in their confusion, the Avians rode them down easily.

Simultaneously Thaxas launched forth a last attack upon us. But seeing that we formed front to receive him, he declined the shock and spread fanwise along our front and toward our left, seeking to roll up our flank with an enveloping movement. Meanwhile Nohaddyii's men were in full flight back toward Ellaborta. I saw the brave, old warrior, scorning to flee, turn, face the victorious enemy alone, and receive his death-thrust.

There was nothing to do but give the order to retire, for now our communications were cut by the loss of the bridge. The Avians, swarming across, had already joined Thaxas, and we were completely encircled by the savage horsemen, who made desperate rushes to throw us into confusion, and so complete their victory.

For this they were disappointed, for my men held steadily. And yard by yard we fought our passage back toward the capital, seeing clearly the ramparts packed with spectators and encouraged by their cries. We left a bloody trail behind us, and at the last, seeing that we were unshakable, the Avian cavalry sullenly withdrew a little more than bowshot range from the walls.

The gates opened to receive us. In the entrance stood Hita among her counselors. And, to my amazement, instead of reproaches for a lost fight, we were received with thunderous applause.

"Bravely fought, my Lord Gowani!" Hita cried. "Assuredly one never thought our Ellabortan swordsmen would make so brave a show against invincible Thaxas."

And after all the battle had been in no sense a defeat save one. Thaxas had left nine thousand men upon the field; our own losses were little more than half as many. But for the forcing of the bridge we had won the day completely. And that, as we learned afterward, was by the disaffection of a small body of Fendek auxiliaries, men

from another city, who had broken before the first charge of the Avian horsemen.

Yet in one respect Thaxas had won the day. For now the lines of communication between our forces were obliterated, and we had been driven back within the shelter of the walls. And on the next day Thaxas advanced his camp until almost within bowshot of us.

But we had Thafti. The princess was already lodged, with Sewell, her captor, in the dungeon beneath the inner gate, and was to be brought, after the rest *psus*, before Hita and her council.

So our return to the inner city was more a march of triumph than an acknowledgment of failure. Thaxas had won a victory of the Phyrriic kind; another such and his army would exist no longer. Already half his men were dismounted and resolved into infantry.

But what was Ptuth doing? How soon might we expect his dreaded fire-bombs to come into play, and his winged warriors to scatter destruction over Ellaborta?

Would they come before Sar, Prince of the Oonorians, arrived to aid us?

The answer was to be supplied sooner than any of us dreamed.

CHAPTER XIX.

A LITTLE HIDDEN DAGGER.

AT the end of the rest *psus* we assembled in the council hall, which was packed with a multitude. The scarlet cloak of Thafti gleamed in the midst of all.

Beside her stood Sewell, and even those who hated Thafti most pitied her, to have been made prisoner by such an act of baseness.

And I could see that Sewell's treacherous act lessened my own prestige among the Fendeks, for the man had been my comrade, and I saw doubtful looks cast at me, and realized by how slender a thread I held my place—and that thread but a woman's love and faith in me.

Mnur arose. "It is the custom to interrogate the captives," he said. "Therefore let the Lord Seoul explain how he comes here with the Princess Thafti and claims to be her captor."

Sewell spoke boldly, apparently without the consciousness of shame committed. "Listen, then, O queen, and lords of the council—and you, Gowan, who came into this land with me in friendship," he began.

"Not many *psus* since my Lord Gowan was betrothed to Thafti, Queen of the Fendeks—aye, and protested not at all, though his heart had already turned toward you, O queen. Therefore, seeing that we are equals in our own country, I sought the hand of your sister, O Thafti, who was then merely a princess. And this, too, was accorded me. Then in the temple the Prince Thaxas claimed you, Thafti, and this honor was accorded him. And then, seeing that treachery surrounded us everywhere, I, too, resolved to play a part. Therefore, to save my life, and place it at your service, Queen Hita, whose hand was given me, I feigned to ally myself with Thafti here. And I knew that by this means I should be able to deliver her into your hands. So, having proved myself a loyal servant, I ask that my service may be rewarded."

At this a great hubbub broke out among the populace, and the council, too, some protesting that Sewell was a double-dyed traitor, and others that he had been hardly treated, and had acted loyally. And one by one we gave our opinion, some favoring Sewell's release and reward, and others demanding that he be put to death or driven from the city. Finally came my turn to speak, and I was silent some time, for I did not know how to answer.

I knew Sewell to be a coward, traitor, and murderer, but this knowledge of mine had no bearing upon present circumstances; and then, despite all this, we had come into Annyorpii together.

"O queen!" I said at last, "he has performed a service and come of his free will into Ellaborta. Therefore no punishment can befall him. But place no trust in him."

Hita arose. "It shall be as you say, my Lord Gowan," she answered. And at that black looks were cast at me by all, for it was seen that Hita's judgment favored mine.

"Soon," whispered one of the priests of Mnur, "we shall be altogether under the foot of this stranger."

Hita turned to Thafti. "Greetings to you, sister," she said. "Not many *psus* *ama* since I stood before you in this place; therefore my heart inclines to pity for you."

"I seek no pity," returned Thafti haughtily.

"Nevertheless," said Hita proudly, "you are a captive, and in my hands. What have you to say, sister, concerning the lie that Ptuth, the magician, put into Ros Marra's mouth concerning your birth and mine, usurper?"

With that Thafti stiffened herself with that characteristic gesture of contempt and pride that I had observed before. She stood erect before the queen and flung her veil aside. And there was hardly a man present but winced at the sight of her. And Thafti turned her eyes on each in turn, as if she wished to drain the cup of humiliation to the dregs.

"O queen! O Hita! O sister!" she began in a melodious voice that gradually increased in tension and in volume until it filled the hall with melody, "sister, we two were born under different moods of our Lord Balamok. For I go veiled, like him, because my face is hideous in the sight of men, while you are fair and good to look upon. And yet I have a heart—strangely, for it should have been seared, like my face, by suffering and the contempt of man.

"Many times it has been sought to give me in betrothal to some prince, and each time he has scorned me. Aye, and did not the blind prince of the Lassayii send word that, though his eyes were sightless, his ears were open to the repute in which men held each other? A delicate hint to send his liege, truly.

"Therefore, sister, because the love of man was denied me, I sought power. I sought to rule this realm. Worthily I ruled it."

Here, to our consternation, a voice among the spectators in the vast council hall called: "Aye!" And two or three more took up the shout before it was drowned by the disapprobation of the rest. And then a storm of cheers broke out for Hita. And again two or three called for Thafti. Thafti listened and bowed ironically toward the spectators.

"I thank the few of my former subjects who remember their past faith and loyalty," she said. "But I speak to you, sister. When it was proposed that you should be put to death, I forbade it, though I knew, in accordance with the old prophecy, that you should supplant me, and that my death should come through you in some measure.

"I have shown you clemency in my day of power, but were I queen in Ellaborta now, I swear that you should die under torture, and your carcass should be cast to the serpents."

There was a sudden, tremulous stir, then breathless silence in the council hall at these bold words. The seamed face of Thafti looked steadily into that of Hita. And I saw that Hita's gentleness masked a no less indomitable will.

For Hita's face was red with anger, and her mien was now no less haughty than Thafti's.

"It is ill for you, a captive, to threaten me, a queen," said Hita. "Perchance I may forget the appeal for pity that you have made; also, that we had the same father."

"I do not ask your pity, sister," returned Thafti steadily. "Yet you shall know that even I, who veil my face because of its abomination—I have a heart and loved. Once I loved—one man whom I shall love all the short remainder of my life—even my Lord Gowani here!"

She paused, and in that dramatic moment she held the assembly spellbound. And, with her woman's heart, even Hita was softening into pity—that pity that Thafti scorned.

As for myself, I felt unutterably foolish.

Suddenly, without a word, Thafti caught a little hidden dagger out of her robes and thrust it into her body. The gush of blood was dark upon her crimson cloak.

For another moment she stood, looking defiantly upon her sister. And then her eyes sought mine. And it seemed to me in that moment that love made Thafti almost beautiful.

Then, as the counselors rushed toward her, Thafti sank to the floor, sobbed, and lay still. The blade had pierced her heart.

Hita cried out, and then, forgetting their

enmity, forgetting that she was queen, she knelt at Thafti's side, holding her head upon her knees. She looked up at me with anguish in her eyes.

Suddenly shouts from without stirred us to other action. The crowd was fleeing in panic from the assembly chamber. As some of the counselors clutched at me, reluctantly I left Hita beside her sister and went out.

High overhead appeared one of the flying Serpent Priests, and as he swooped toward us it could be seen that the llama flag of truce, upon a long stick, hung from his breastplate.

Lower he dropped; and now we saw that he held something in his left hand. He raised and hurled it, and we saw it curve through the air and smash upon the stones of the quadrangle.

It was a man's severed head. It was the head of the Wallaby Priest, our messenger to Sar.

Hamul came up to me. "This means the end of all unless—" he said, and led me to the ramparts. Looking down I saw the warriors of Thaxas encamped all about the walls.

"Unless some other messenger fly swiftly," I interpreted. "Whom can we trust?" And, seeing his eyes bent in silent deference on mine, I understood.

"How long will it take to reach the Aonorian border?" I inquired.

"With wings, *psus hak*, if one fly steadily."

"I will go," I returned. "Inform the council."

And without hesitation I made my way to the palace and strapped my wings upon me.

CHAPTER XX.

THE EYE OF BALAMOK.

HARDLY five minutes elapsed between my leaving the council hall and my flight toward Aonoria. And fortunately I had started during the beginning of the rest *psus*. Already an apathy was falling upon the mob below. They dropped down where they stood, and lay in dreamy, careless meditation. Inside the council hall I knew Hita would recline beside her sister's

body, and the councilors in their seats until the rest *psus* ended.

As for myself, I was not yet so acclimated to this custom but that I could readily shake off the languor stealing over me. And I knew that this time would render me safe from pursuit by any of the Serpent Priests. I rose high into the air, and then directed my course, straight as an arrow, and almost as swift, over the horsemen of Thaxas, encamped beneath me, winging my course toward the Aonorian border.

Soon Ellaborta was but a blur in the distance, and in a little while it disappeared. For hours I flew over the tops of the great fern-trees, suffering no fatigue, since the action of the wings was automatic. Resolutely I fought back the sleep that weighed upon my eyelids. Hours passed—days, perhaps; I dozed in the air, waking with a start to find myself falling, orientating myself by a strange instinct which, in the absence of any stars or visible sun, seemed common to all of us in Annoryii.

At last I discerned through my bleared eyelids the fires of a great host spread out over a level plain beneath me. I dropped into Sar's camp.

The sight of those thousands of spearsmen, young, vigorous and disciplined, revived my courage. I was conducted to Sar, who crossed his hands on his breast and then took mine, and listened while I recounted briefly the events of the past days.

"Rumors of this have already reached me," Sar answered, "and I was but awaiting the summons to lead my troops across the border, as Queen Hita commanded me. They shall start within an hour. Do you, my Lord Gowani, rest and accompany us then?"

But I shook my head, and told him that I must return immediately. Weary and worn though I was, I felt that I could not close my eyes until I had carried back news of my success to Hita.

At that Sar looked at me very strangely. And this is a curious thing, for which I cannot account: as he looked at me I seemed to see in him the lineaments of a young prospector whom I had known in Kalgoorlie a year or two before—a young man who had gone on a prospecting trip and never

returned. Some had thought him lost in the desert, others that he had gone out by another route.

It was the merest fancy, of course, and next moment Sar was saying:

"My Lord Gowani, what came you into this country for, and why do you linger? Ethnabasca is no further from here than Ellaborta. If you flew there resolutely and made your way up the mountain, and so emerged into the world without, none would hinder you.

"My father, who was versed in much wise lore, told me that it is a secret known to the Priests of the Sun, who rule in Zelryii, my capital, that every man has two lives: a waking one, and one of his *psus* rest. And in the *psus* rest the waking life seems but a dream. And in the waking life the *psus* rest seems but a dream. And which is the dream, and which the reality, none but the gods know.

"Nevertheless, if one tarry too long in either state, the gods who attend the man, waking or dreaming, may seize him utterly, so that his alternate life is lost. Oh, my Lord Gowani, if I were you I would leave Annoryii, where all these combats, battles, rivalries and treacheries may be no more than a dream of your *psus* rest, and seek the land of your birth."

A strange philosophy. And he went on to say something which I do not wholly recall; something to the effect that the whole drama of life is but illusion, staged for the benefit of the individual soul in its progress from life to life. I think he tried to convey the impression that all that had happened in Annoryii was a sort of play for my benefit, a sort of morality play for the soul. I listened with impatient, listless interest.

For, Heavens, how real it all was!—Hita and the traitor Sewell, Ptuth, Thakas, and that great host of his spread out beside the camp-fires.

So I bade him adieu, and rose into the air to wing my weary course back to Ellaborta. Now this was at the end of the working *psus*; the instinct common to us all told me that the rest *psus* was at hand, and that it was doubtful whether I could pass through another.

And suddenly unutterable weariness came over me. I could no longer even guide my course. Softly I let myself fall to earth, and slept almost before I touched the ground beneath the giant fern-tree.

I awoke as suddenly as if I had been hauled out of sleep by some invisible hand. A presentiment of danger was growing stronger every moment. I did not know how long I had slept, but I felt that many *psus* must have passed while I lay unconscious.

I rose hastily, started the mechanism, and began my flight once more. But as I flew my uneasiness increased. For there was a strange heat in the air, such as I had never known in that land of clouds, and lurid luminosity about the zenith, like a great halo of light. And there was also the undefinable sense of danger to Hita.

Hours passed. At last the forest ended, and the great Ellabortan plain lay extended beneath me. That distant blur was the capital. But the plain was filled with legions of armed men—men of Sar who had preceded me while I lay days in a stupor. And the walls were packed with fighting warriors.

I heard the din of battle raised, and, as I neared the ramparts, I saw the Avians swarming up the streets of Ellaborta driving our men before them.

Other bodies, having gained the walls, were holding Sar at bay. The Avians must have been hugely reinforced, and only a miracle could save the city before Sar could storm the outer defenses.

As I circled above the keep I saw that Thakas was already master of the inner city. The palace was on fire. The council hall was flaming furiously, and bodies of horsemen were driving our men like sheep to massacre.

I swept to the ground in the middle of the quadrangle, where a small force of Ellabortans still disputed supremacy with the Avians. I snatched a sword from a dead man and, placing myself at the head of the defenders, led them against the advancing horsemen.

Then out of the press Thaxas leaped at me, dismounted, his eyes shooting fire. "Well met, my Lord Gowani!" he cried.

"Here and now do I fulfil my promise made to you in the council hall, impostor from the upper earth!"

In a moment we were in the center of a ring of warriors, who ceased their combat in order to see the singular duel between the two leaders. Thaxas dealt terrific blows at me with his huge sword, but his armor encumbered him, and I was able to parry them or leap aside, always watching for my opening. He aimed a fierce stroke at my head, and as I sprang to one side the point of his blade caught my cheek, laying it open from ear to chin. Next instant my point had gone through corselet and breastbone, and stood out three inches or more behind him.

He coughed, whirled, snatched at the blade and tried to draw it forth; then, sinking upon his face, his eyes upturned in hate to mine, he died.

For an instant the Avians remained stupefied at the death of their great leader, and, seizing the advantage, the Fendeks drove them back toward the smoking palace. All was not lost, although our situation was a desperate one. But suddenly one of the Wallaby Priests came running to me, clutching at me.

"Treachery, my Lord Gowani!" he screamed in my ear. "The Lord Seoul, the traitor, came here for no good purpose, for, being pardoned, he conspired with Mnur, the double traitor, according to the plan which they had made, and opened the inner gate to the Avian forces during the rest *psus*, so that, the moment the *psus* was ended, the Avians stormed our defenses."

"Hita?" I cried.

"She is in the Eagle Temple, where a body-guard defends her. But, my lord, there is worse work afoot. Mnur has been in conspiracy with Ptuth, and has wrought evil in the Room of the Light. I know not what, but something impends worse for Fendika than anything that has—"

I shook him off and raced toward the Eagle Temple, over a ground littered with dead and dying. Upon the steps I saw a swarm of Avians, dismounted, but fully armed, running forward, their swords in their hands, their shields raised above their heads. Inside I saw the blue cloaks of Hita's

defenders, now reduced to a handful, with a ring of slain about them.

But Hita was not there. I ran past the blue cloaks, who, recognizing me, turned toward me for an instant and then resumed their battle. None regarded me, so fierce was the fray, so mad the hate.

In the interior of the temple I saw a very aged man standing by the low altar in an attitude of contemplation. It was the Eagle Priest, the last attendant left after the massacre of the Eagle males; but in the few *psus* that had passed since I had seen him he seemed to have passed from hale old age to utter senility.

"The queen!" I gasped.

He looked at me, and recognition slowly dawned on his wrinkled face.

"Was it not you who came to me to demand the secret in the queen's name?" he babbled.

"No, fool!" I shouted, seeing Ptuth's trickery in this. For of course Ptuth had known; nothing escaped the knowledge of the magician whose hold upon Fendika appeared unshakable.

"Then it must have been the other lord from afar," he mumbled.

I caught his shoulders and shook him violently. "Which way?" I howled in his ear.

He staggered to the altar and, pressing a knob, swung round a great block of stone, disclosing a secret stairway.

I rushed down into utter darkness. But at the end there was a gleam of light. Before me lay a courtyard, concealed from view from the quadrangle by the high walls that rose on all sides of it.

The center of this yard was filled by an enormous, hideous monster. It was a pterodactyl, a great lizard, twenty feet in length, with short, stout limbs and a curving, undulating back, on which was strapped a soft-pad saddle.

Beside it Hita was struggling in Sewell's arms. He was holding her tightly, and striving to mount the enormous beast with her, though how it could escape from that enclosure I could not divine.

Seeing me, he stopped and gaped in fear and astonishment. And I was struck in that instant by the singular change in him,

even as in the Eagle Priest. For he seemed to have aged, too; he had left Kalgoolie with me as a young man; now he looked in middle life.

But I ran at him with my sword raised, and he dropped Hita and fled. Unarmed though he was, to all appearances, I would have struck him down even in flight. But suddenly he turned and pulled from his cloak the automatic which he had told me he had lost in the encounter with the savages at the entrance to the underworld.

Six shots followed in rapid succession before I could close with him. I heard them hiss about me, and I was conscious of a vicious pain in the breast, over the heart. Next instant I had sliced his right arm from his body with a single blow of my sword.

The little court was swinging round me. I turned to Hita; I saw a band of Avians burst into the place. They had overcome the last resistance of Hita's followers and surged forward, yelling with triumph.

Half swooning, I felt Hita drag me to the pterodactyl. With all her strength she dragged me upon the monster's back, and sat behind me, holding me.

And, even as the Avians were within sword's reach of me, the winged lizard rose into the air.

It rose; it cleared the temple roofs. Beneath me the quadrangle was still filled with a confused clamor, and little groups were fighting to the death. The outer city was now in the possession of Sar's men, who were advancing with locked shields toward the keep. And all the capital was aflame. Ruin and destruction everywhere.

Then suddenly the clouds above were rent, and there appeared a huge, fiery sun that seemed to fill all the zenith. Mnur's treachery had succeeded. The removal of the cones that concentrated the rays had permitted the interior luminary to disperse the clouds. Men had spoken truly when they ascribed this power to Ptuth.

A fearful cry arose: "The Eye of Balamok! The Eye of Balamok!"

I drew Hita's cloak over her head and mine above that. I placed my face beside hers. I heard her whisper:

"With thee, my lord, the dark lands

beyond Balamok, where we may dwell together."

CHAPTER XXI.

THE PROPHECY OF OLD.

HERE the manuscript was torn, as if intentionally. It ended, and the young Englishman, who had read all day in utter absorption, looked up for the first time.

The sun was dipping toward the west, the afternoon mirage still danced on the horizon of the Great Victoria, but there was the cool breath of night in the air. He rose and paced the little house of stone.

He was consumed with eagerness to learn the remainder of Gowan's adventures. He scooped the sand away about the table-legs, without much hope of finding anything more, and it was with a cry of delight that he came upon another piece of the manuscript, apparently written and then flung away. He smoothed out the wrinkles in the brittle sheet and read, as well as he could decipher:

. . . that earthly paradise, where ripe fruits hung from the trees and never a soul but Hita and myself. Cool water from crystal springs . . . was the origin of the story of creation, the lost Garden of Eden . . . ant of passing time, seeing each other's faces dimly in the darkness.

. . . sadness that I could not but notice. For a long time she turned a smiling face to mine and professed her happiness. Yet at last the time came when I prevailed on her to tell me what it was troubled her.

"My Lord Gowan," she answered "said I not to you in the Temple of the Eagle that Ptuth the magician cannot be overthrown, and that I must be renewed unto eternal life when I grow old, according to the command laid upon me, until the prophecy be fulfilled?"

"Many long *psus ama* must pass before you grow old, Hita," I answered. "And as for the prophecy, has it not been fulfilled?"

"No, my lord," she answered softly. "For we have not ruled in Ellaborta, as it decreed. Therefore I must be renewed unto

youth by Ptuth, who doubtless rules there still."

I strangled down the cry that choked my throat. "Do you mean that—that I am not he who shall rule with you?" I cried.

"I do not know, my lord," she answered simply. "But take me in your arms once more and look upon me."

I did so, and as I looked into her face a cry of terror broke from me. I was looking at an aged woman. The hair that hung formerly in great clustering curls about her head was thinned and white, her eyes were dimmed, and her face lined and puckered.

Then it was that I knew the fearful lot that had been laid upon me. I have said how Hita expressed the thought, when first she saw me sleep, that my life must be half wasted unless it were immeasurably longer than her own. I have written of old Nasmaxa's death from old age, of the senility of the Eagle Priest. And yet it had not occurred to me that, living without real sleep, the inhabitants of Annoryii must needs have a shorter span of life than we.

How long had we dwelt there? Where there is no sun to measure days, no seasons to tell the passage of the years, the sense of time soon vanishes. I tried to think. One year? Two years? Hardly two weeks, as my own senses spoke.

Hita had grown old, and I was still a young man. A cry burst from me; I flung myself upon the ground. When I arose I saw Hita watching me with infinite compassion in her eyes.

"Let my lord order me," she said.

"If the old prophecy must be fulfilled, so be it," I returned. "Let us go back to Ptuth and bid him renew you unto eternal life. And once again I shall attempt to rule Fendika, that I may show you I am he whose coming was foretold."

She smiled very wistfully, but made no answer. And so, veiling her head once more, we mounted the winged lizard and made our way toward the light.

But this precaution was needless, for the Eye of Balamok slumbered beneath his eyelids of cloud. Long afterward we came into the Fendek land, and, halting the winged monster, looked down on Ellaborta from above.

But this was a city such as I had not known before. The inner walls were gone. The capital extended far beyond the outer ones, and in the heart of all a huge structure towered into the skies, apparently palace and council hall and temple all in one.

As we descended and came to rest in the great enclosure, a big crowd came round about us, shouting in wonder. And, to my astonishment, they were dressed differently from the Fendeks, even their speech, though recognizable, was different.

A chant was raised. Through their midst came a band of priests, dressed, not in yellow, but red. At their head, unchanged, his smooth face wrinkled as of yore, was Ptuth.

Hita and I were conducted into the great temple set within a grove of flowering trees. But the interior was different, the altar stood low toward the ground, and there was no longer the electrum serpent, nor any sign of serpent worship.

And Ptuth, eying me strangely, seemed only to have some vague remembrance of me.

"Who are you, strangers?" he asked in his curious Fendek, which I could hardly understand.

At that my anger flamed out, as if some curvy trick had been played on me. "You know me, O Ptuth!" I cried; "aye, and the princess here, Hita, Queen of Fendika!"

At that a gasp of astonishment ran through the temple, and men put their heads together and whispered.

"You know us both," I cried. "I came to this land, O Fendeks," I continued, turning from Ptuth to the assembly, "to restore Queen Hita here to her own throne, against the usurper, Thafti, and Thaxas, chief of the Avians. And what I could do I did; but at the last, to save the queen, being sorely wounded, I left the country with her. That is known to all of you, and not least to Ptuth, the magician."

There was a constrained silence for a minute before Ptuth answered me.

"I am not Ptuth, but Lokas, Priest of the Unknown God," he answered. "All that you say is well known to us, as you have claimed, but surely you and this old woman are bewildered with age, to come here with such a story. For the events of which you

speak happened *psus* uncountable ago, at the time of the last unveiling of the dreaded Eye of Balamok, and even our records admit them to be dim legends of the past. The Priest Ptuth died long ago, and the Serpent Worship is banished forever as a relic of our barbarous ancestors, and the descendants of Sar, legendary chief of the Aonorians, rule this land from Zelryii, the capital of the Aonorian Empire."

I gazed about me in a frantic bewilderment. It was true, everything was strange; and yet this old man before me was either Ptuth, or Ptuth reincarnated.

And I wondered whether the "renewal unto eternal youth" meant birth in a new body, with hardly a memory of the past.

"Nevertheless, O Gowani, if indeed by any possibility you can be he whom you claim to be," Lokas continued, "our ancient prophecies foretell the coming of a stranger, an old man, and of an aged woman, whose appearance shall be the forerunner of a queen named Hita, who shall rule this land. And the wisdom of our fathers tells us, furthermore, that this old woman, dying, shall pass into the body of a babe about to be born, who shall be she. But as for you, Gowani, our prophecies are silent."

I caught Hita in my arms. "Tell him that I am your lover," I cried. "Tell him that if you die I shall die to be reborn with you. Am I not he of whom the prophecy spoke?"

"I do not know, my Lord Gowani," she answered wistfully. "Fair was our love while this body was mine, but whether—whether you—be he—"

She trembled and suddenly collapsing, sank down upon the temple floor.

And it was only that which had contained Hita's dear, loyal and loving spirit that I held in my arms.

CHAPTER XXII.

SYMBOLS.

THEY took me many days' journey across the desert, telling me that when they had deliberated they would summon me. And so I wait here until the call comes.

What gives me cause for hope is this: I am a young man, and hardly a year will pass before the babe that is Hita will have grown to young womanhood. Surely, if she be queen, she will remember me and bid them recall me.

They have given me food, and every few days some of the blacks appear with supplies brought from Ethnabasca underneath. By that I know they have not forgotten me.

Surely in a few weeks, or months, they will recall me. Meanwhile I wait, and sometimes all seems like a dream to me, but for my memory of that surpassing love which I dare to dream is destined to be mine again. I have employed the time in drawing up this memoir, for my relief, rather than in the hope that—

Here the fragment of manuscript ended abruptly, as if the writer had suddenly been surprised, for there was the scrawl of the implement with which the manuscript had been written, terminating in a blot and scratch.

The reader rose, stretched himself and went outside. In the glancing rays of the sun, now almost on the horizon, he saw something among the salt crystals beside the pool. Approaching it he found it to be the skeleton of a man.

The right arm lay a little distance from the body, but whether it had been severed after death it was impossible to say, for even the bones had been corroded by the

salt crystals. Nor was it, for the same reason, possible to determine whether it was the skeleton of Sewell or of the black, Peter.

If the traveler had found a second skeleton, he might have believed that Gowan's screed was the product of delirium, induced by the sufferings of the Great Victoria. But though the tale seemed unbelievable the fleece upon the water-bag was like a llama's. And Gowan had not brought a camel from Kalgoorlie.

Had the priests come for Gowan at last and summoned him back to the underworld to meet Queen Hita, risen, lovely and radiant, from death?

He, too, had heard legends of a white queen across the Great Victoria. If the story was true, Gowan had not known that he had grown old with Hita in that earthly paradise whose description had been torn from the parchment.

At least the story seemed symbolical of life—the quest of the heart's desire, always unattainable, the lure that beckons across the deserts of life to those who watch.

Gowan, old Joe, the prospector—what were these but symbols of those who seek, attain and ever lose the paradise of the soul, only to hope with hope unquenchable?

The traveler looked wistfully about him. Almost he was tempted to seek for the hidden entrance into the city below. Then, shrugging his shoulders at his folly, he filled his waterskin, swung it upon his shoulder, and set out on his long journey eastward.

(The end.)

THE WAY OF THE WORLD

BY HAROLD SETON

TO throw oneself upon a sled
Affords a throb and thrill
That's not unmixed with doubt and dread,
When coasting

down

a

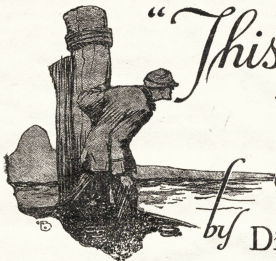
hill!

But ev'ry pleasure has a price,
Permit me to explain,
And I detest, o'er snow and ice,
gain!

a-

up

The climbing



"This Beats Hell"

by Dixie Willson

THE second hour after night is a queerish time. It really doesn't seem to be a time of itself at all, but just a cross between has-been and will-be—a time which things elect, when they want to happen outside the sense of the world's schedule hours. And it looks even more of a rusty time than it is, from the cold iron bench of a park in November. The nothingness of it trickles with awful coldness down a spine, and, if pockets are empty, it trickles even more coldly through them and on down a pant leg—and it makes cold feet—it makes cold feet!

Such an hour—entertaining such a spirit in his back and through his pockets, did Darby—find his feet cold.

The rear of the park gave into a high wall, beyond which lay tracks, freight-cars, wharves, boatmen's shanties, and a sullen river. The river was black and ugly, but life is sometimes black and ugly too, and Darby felt that of two ugly things, the river—in which it took the least effort to be carried, was quite the choice.

But as his leg swung to take itself over the wall riverward, it was frantically clutched—his balance undone to the park side again, and a near-three-hundred-pound woman with a shapeless hand at her panting throat, and her fat sides heaving, met his startled gaze.

Suddenly straightening his hat, brushing his clothes, and shifting his twisted coat-

shoulders, he sat down on the iron bench again.

"I thot I'd never get clost enough to stop you!" she panted—righting her sad little turban and drawing her scraggy black shawl closer about her throat. "Darby it's—it's against the law!"

"Law nothn'!" replied Darby disgustedly. "Law can't keep nobody from goin' to hell when he's ready. Next time, you keep your hands off me."

"Mr. Michael Darby," Amy Shores informed him—her returning breath permitting a try at dignity. "Hell means nothin' to me, when you're owin' me eleven dollars board-bill. You can clean the lady on the top floor's ertire rugs to-morrow, and so on. When you get me paid up—do as you like—but it's against the law, plum against the law, Darby," she finished in the tone of one objecting to oysters in June, and seated herself beside him.

Darby sniffed disgustedly. "Everything you ever set your eyes on is against the law," he said, "and incidently, I ain't cleanin' rugs for nobody. I see plenty o' men have money without cleanin' rugs for it, and I've got as good a right to have it as see it."

The chill gray park, with the November moan through its gaunt trees, hung around them so sepulchraly that, after the moment of silence which Amy's still struggling breath demanded—neither found

voice to speak again. They were very much alone.

Far down a dead-leaf path, one pale street light made cold thin shadows. The bare ground, the bare sky, the dank, raw air—made hopelessness out of everything, and presently Amy began to feel cold feet, too. She spread one hand over her eyes and nose and began to snivel softly into it. Behind the wall the river breathed coldly against the wharf posts. Coldly, yes, but after all.

Amy's snivel grew into a little wail, but Darby, slouching heedlessly beside her, paid no attention.

"D-D-Darby," her choking voice came at last, "I—I—guess you're right. Hell's the easiest. Let's you and me just— You think it *would* be hell?" she interrupted herself a bit anxiously.

"Speakin' for me—yes," he answered shortly.

"Well," she took up again in a hopeless tone, "we reapeth as we soweth, and I don't deserve no better 'n others—but the stewing veal on the cheapest corner of the market was twenty-two cents to-day, and four rooms empty, winter comin' on—and me takin' on more size constant. I wouldn't never have the heart by myself—but with a strong man at my side—"

But the thought proved greater than the spirit, and with the sudden coming of a raw wind from the river, Amy broke—her chin dropped itself on her heaving bosom, and her shoulders shook with sobs.

Darby shivered, put his raw-boned hands in his pockets, and absent-mindedly framed the picture of his bony lankiness, and Amy's short bulkiness going down together. The picture provoked a mental parade of the entire event till, in backward sequence, he visioned its beginning, and then—then he laughed!

Amy's mightiest sob held itself on the rise. Her chin came up—and her lips tightened, as she faced him.

"You—you poor Scandanavian," she blubbered. "You—you poor I mean Irishman. Are you laughing at me? You—you—"

Something in her manner entirely changed the spirit of the scene for Darby,

and inspired a new pep in him, somehow, that brought his shoulders up smartly as he met her indignant gaze.

"I was thinking of you getting over the wall," he said.

For a moment she looked at him with scorn. Then out on the river a wailing two-toned boat whistle began to mourn. Simultaneously, a sad little drizzle added itself to the dismal scene, and line by line—the haughteur of Amy's face fell into tragedy—the sobs began again—and heaving to her feet, she turned her face skyward. Her shapeless straw turban slipped as far as her rear belt buckle where it clung by a leaf—her dull old skirt moved forlornly in the raw wind, and the black shawl pitifully scant, pinned close to her neck, made her face seem very white—very living-and-dying white.

"Oh, death," she cried, her voice sharp with despair that had long struggled against itself. "You can't sting me no worse than life. I guess I choose you after all."

Her face brought Darby to his feet—brought him where he could see beyond the dead November park—to the living light at the gate of it—made him feel a thing he had long forgotten—that he was a living man in a living world—as big a man as ever made a million—a man bigger than any circumstance that ever dared construct itself!

And then over *that* feeling—flooded another. A strange one, to him. One no less human, but quite unprecedented. A tender, gentle surging thought for the tear-stained white face before him. A forgetfulness of Amy Shores's superfluous bulk—in remembrance of her fingers once upon a time bandaging his broken wrist—of her voice singing the neighbor's baby to sleep—her care with the darn on his coat-sleeve—his warm coat and her thin one—her thin skirt—her poor hat—her ragged shawl—panting, achingly, out in the night to save him.

And he'd laughed at her! He'd laughed! What, for a yellow dog was he anyway! What did he have for a soul in his worthless skin!

But when he'd got all hold of himself again, and his human eyes came back to where Amy's white face had been—she

wasn't there! With the determination born of anguish—she'd reached up on the bench—and up on the wall—and down on a truck and all alone—quite without the "strong man beside," she'd got to the ground on the other side, and she'd gone through the freights—and across the tracks, and, when Darby, with an exclamation of alarm, sprang over the wall after her—she was past the shanties, and at the water's edge!

"Amy!" he cried sharply. "Wait! What you doin'! Wait!"

But she waited for nothing! Up on the wharf she climbed, and without a backward glance—hurried down the water-washed length of it.

"Amy!" begged Darby frantically—as he plunged after her. "Wait!"

But his cry, unanswered, echoed mockingly along the cold shore, while Amy, well out now, planned calmly enough that she wouldn't jump—she'd just slip in "easy."

So when she came to the end, she sat down on the wharf's edge—a little sideways, so that one foot dangled in—and a pleasantly gentle wave folded over it.

Darby leaped up the wharf steps—but just too late to see her! She was gone! Kind, sweet, Amy! The only soul on earth who'd ever cared whether his head ached and his stomach went empty or not. And he'd laughed at her! Laughed at her!

"Amy—" he cried brokenly. "Forgive me, Amy. I can't get along without you—"

The river wind shoved him against the rail, and he clung there like a rag in a storm—staring down the black wharf. After a while a stern hand touched his shoulder.

"Come along," came an officer's voice. "No loafing here. Come along with me—so I can be sure you keep moving."

So Michael Darby went back through the park, and past the light—and into the town again, but all the while he kept thinking how pretty and pink Amy's cheeks had looked on her birthday, when the ice-man had dared him to kiss her.

II.

THE next morning was the beginning of the third half of Michael Darby's life. The

first half had been the years from nothing to twenty-four—when nobody could say for a fact that Darby would never amount to anything. The second half—the years from twenty-four to thirty-five, when everybody knew—and so did Darby, that he was worthless, which two halves ended in his decision for hell on the certain gray night in November.

Then began the third half—which did as a third half of anything would be bound to do—disproved everybody's conjectures—even Michael Darby's.

His bed in the station served him acceptably. Since he knew he really hadn't done himself to it—it was a kindness of the state to him, rather than a safeguard *against* him—and in a big new spirit of going to live and do and be, he knew that such a care for such a man as himself was quite due, and so, whereas the night before it would have stung him as making him a man cursed with a keeper—it now warmed him, as making him a man blessed with a host.

In the morning his straight shoulders, keen eyes, and quiet manner, offset his rumpled clothes to such an extent that his man's apology to the judge for having had to take advantage of a public shelter, was received with a man's reassurance—and Michael Darby went out into the good air, and saw the world before him.

And Amy? He couldn't sense her—gone. He sensed just that the new man he was, was *her* doing—not his. It seemed as though this new determination was a trust to her—an answering act to her anxiety for him of the night before.

She'd saved him, and now he must prove to her that her effort had been worth while!

Then came thoughts that she'd lost her *self* for him. Lost *her* courage to his account. Came thoughts that through the dark halls of the old brick boarding-house, her voice wouldn't be singing: "Just a Song at Twilight" any more—that all the dirty little children cramming around the big old wicker chair for an evening story—would just wait, and wait. But somehow,—that couldn't seem to be. It didn't seem that, that chilly, gray, wailing hour could have *been* at all—coming like that, and

taking Amy away with it, and leaving such a new Michael Darby behind it!

Well—he'd buy a paper, and see. But at the news-stand, he remembered his pockets and so turned, instead, to a high tin street-box, which every morning found full of discarded news sheets. He selected one—and opened it, but from all over the page Amy's visioned face looked at him—and he couldn't read a thing. Hastily he turned it over, blinked the thoughts out of his eyes until he could see again, and then hunted for "job ads."

It seemed right and proper that the first he saw should be for a man to beat rugs—and right and proper, as a crowning of his new spirit, that he should hurry to the address, really hoping for the privilege.

And all day long, Michael Darby beat rugs. But he wasn't Darby beating rugs at all. He was a man *making* good. A man exchanging ability for capital. A man who was going to pay for his dinner, and have his shoes shined, and hunt up a room to own, and never take a newspaper out of a street-box again as long as he lived!

III.

AND all those things he did—and then, in the quiet of the bare little room, came Amy's voice—shone her laughing eyes—soothed her gentle fingers—blushed her cheeks at mention of the ice-man, and over Darby surged such a wish that it were true—that he had to leave the house and go for a walk to try and put his thoughts behind him.

Still, through it all, she seemed more to have *come*, than *gone*. When he finally went back to bed, it was with tender care that he hung his coat over the chair. Amy's darn was in the sleeve of it! With smooth precision, he put his tie in the top drawer. She had pressed it! And when he took a hot bath, and got between the two sheets he had paid for—he found a humble satisfaction in being sure that somehow she knew what this twenty-four hours had done for him.

For a week Darby beat rugs. For three weeks he loaded sawdust. For a month he moved freight, and then he took the

night-watchman's place in "The Harding Lithograph Company," where posters were supplied for bill-boards all over the world.

So Darby passed into a salary. He had thirty dollars a week. But he had more money than he wanted—more than was comfortable. And the reason thirty dollars a week was more than was comfortable, was because every cent of it stung him with a memory of Amy as he had seen her last—her thin shawl—her poor shirt—her white face—giving up the sunshine of the world because stewing veal was twenty-two cents—and because Darby wouldn't lift a hand to pay her eleven dollars board—and he'd laughed at her!

That was one thought of Amy and the thirty dollars a week, but always hand in hand with *that*, was another. The thought of Amy, as pretty and fresh and sweet as any lady in the land, waiting with a smile for his home-coming—minding his little needs with tenderness—and then, after a while he was bound to understand that he'd loved Amy Shores better than any of the world, or all of it—that the world, in fact, was merely a working machine without her—that the manhood suddenly sprung up within him, had been just an intuition to *do* for Amy, and *be* for Amy—that it was love for her that had come when she had gone, and had made her seem so close to him then.

On that same birthday, that same ice-man had taken a snap-shot of her in her sunny back door. Darby had it in his pocket, and one Saturday night, at the desk in his little office, he found courage to take it out and look at it.

There had been a time when Darby had been so *little* of a man—that he'd let tears come to his eyes once, about something—but he had the mind to be ashamed, and get them out. Now he was so *much* of a man—that tears came, and came and ran all down his rough cheeks, and down his chin—and made little water blisters all over the picture in his hand—and he didn't even know them for tears. He knew them just as love for the truest, best, most courageous heart he had ever known. He thought of those tears as the best of his man's estate.

The corners of the picture were getting

ragged. It wanted a case. So he went to the jeweler and bought a fifty-dollar watch—and cut out Amy's dimpling face, and framed it—haloed it—in gold.

The next day, the janitor, cleaning up, carried the rest of the picture out in his waste-basket, and the next night, as Darby sat cleaning his light—came a rap at his office door.

Surprised, he opened, to a jauntily-dressed gentleman with a blond mustache, plaid socks, and a walking stick—who promptly came in past Darby, took the only chair—and made himself at home.

Then from his pocket he produced the lower half of the snap-shot of Amy—of which Darby promptly relieved him. The man laughed.

"Touchy, eh!" he remarked. "Well, I just thought you might know the lady."

Darby's eyes narrowed, but he said nothing, and the man, flecking patent toe, with mahogany stick, went on.

"My name's Chapin," he announced. "I've been connected with this paper firm, buying bill-posters for ten years, and I called around to-day to stock for the new season, and the janitor—friend of mine who knows where my interests are—saved me this half of a scene from your waste-basket, thinking you'd know the lady's address, and for a reasonable price would put me hip. Needn't get mad, Pard. All fair and honest you know. Just helping a man find somebody he's looking for!"

Darby, having nothing to say, did the unusual thing under those circumstances—said nothing, and presently the man put his question again.

"Know her?" he asked pointedly.

"Yes," said Darby. He couldn't trust himself to say more.

"Good!" exclaimed the other. "Fine! I'll pay you a hundred dollars for her address!"

Darby didn't know what the game was—but he didn't want to discuss Amy.

"She's—dead," he said almost under his breath. And, picking up his light, went into the main building, and locked the heavy doors behind him, leaving his guest the choice of the little outer office, or the street.

When he returned two hours later, Chapin was gone, and on the desk was a scrawled note. It read:

Sorry, but I don't believe you. I don't think your lady friend is dead, and I'm going to find her. Her picture and a detective can get her for me as quick as you could, and save me the hundred besides. Thanks.

When Darby made ready to go home, he found that, not only the lower scrap of the snap-shot was missing—but in his watch, which had been left as usual in his street-coat, the place where her face had been was empty.

Two or three days went by, and Darby missed the picture much. It had come to mean a lot to him—that face. He missed it so much that he forgot to wonder why Chapin had wanted it—why he had wanted *her*—and finally he took a day to hunt up the ice-man and ask for another.

He went to the ice-office and got the route and, at the hour which brought the wagon farthest from the brick boarding-house, Darby came up beside and waited till Jim and his iron hook, came clinking around from the nearest back door.

He hadn't seen Jim since Amy's birthday. It took all the courage he had to see him now. Apparently it took all Jim's courage too—for a foot from Darby's trim straight figure, he stopped and stared utterly speechless.

"Great Gizzards!" he cried at last. "It's Michael Darby!" and slamming his hook over the hedge—he seized Darby's hand with a grip like the end of the world.

"Hello, Jim," said Darby at last. "Been quite a while, ain't it? You look just the same though."

"Yes, *me*," laughed Jim, "but not *you*, old top. Gizzards but you're slicked up some. Though you'd forgot your old friends! Looks like the world's doin' good by *you* all right."

"Yes," Darby smiled. "I'm gettin' on good. Looked you up to ask"—he hesitated for a minute, swallowed, then met Jim's eyes squarely to make himself be calm—"to ask for one of them little pictures you took of—Amy."

"Sure thing," answered Jim heartily.

"I keep all my filums. Make you one to-night. Say"—pulling his watch from his damp overall pocket—"it's ten to eleven. I'll hurry up and do the block and meet you at Martie's for lunch at twelve, and we'll print one this noon!"

"All right," Darby nodded, "twelve o'clock it is. Here's your machinery." And exchanging Jim's hand-shake for the iron hook, as the ice-man mounted the dripping rear step, and shucked his horses on, Darby turned up the street. But twenty feet away Jim hailed him.

"Just happened to think," he called "I took that filum over to Amy yesterday. But we can get it off her after we eat. So-long."

IV.

THE ice-wagon lumbered on, Michael Darby staring after it. Amy! Yesterday! Pink and white and words and smiles and sun and grass and eyes and lips came in a crazy kaleidoscope of sound and scene to his breathless senses. The day—the day—the ice-man had dared him—and he'd kissed her—and her voice singing—the neighbor's baby to sleep—her fingers on his broken wrist—and then—and then—the night and her thin skirt, and her white face and maybe—maybe after all he could tell her—maybe he could tell her—show her—find her—give her.

His next conscious moment was in her kitchen, his head on her kitchen table, and once more he knew tears, not as tears, but just as love for the truest, best, most courageous heart he had ever known.

Gently Amy smoothed his hair, and patted his shoulder—and by and by, he felt other tears than his own—hot drops flooding the back of his neck where he knew his happiness couldn't have spilled them—and he reached for the hand on his arm—and—and in the door of Martie's, Jim looked up the street and down the street, and at two o'clock, he swore from the bottom of his heart and went back to the ice-wagon in an unnecessary clean collar!

"Say but you're fine, Darby," Amy beamed, when the end of the afternoon had them fairly calm again. "Just be taking the peeling of banana for your lunch off, so

I won't have to let you out of my sight a minute! Such head aches I've give myself for you—and—and heart aches too," she added softly. "But I knew you'd come. I knew you'd come. When I heard you that night sayin' you couldn't get along without me—I was so happy I could 'a' gone on dyin' 'thout knowin' it at all. Even if I *was*' sittin' down, and in the shadows so you couldn't see me—you could 'a' heard all of me beatin' for joy."

And that night—when Darby turned smiling, at the corner, to wave answer to Amy's radiant farewell—that night began the fourth half of Michael Darby's life.

V.

NEAR noon the next day, after Darby, in his once cherished room, had tried in vain to sleep—he rose, dressed carefully, and hurried like a boy on the top of the world—back to the glory of Amy's smile. He found her, much agitated, sitting as stiffly as was possible for her—on the red velvet settee in her parlor—and in her best spring rocker—sat a hawk-nosed gentleman with dark-rimmed glasses, and impatient fingers—tapping the chair arms.

Amy rose nervously to meet Darby, and with her hands managed to motion the introduction her lips failed in making.

"Mr. Biswell is a detective," she added, trying to smile, "he got me off Jim's snapshot picture from—from your waste-basket. He—came to—to see me."

Her face was a queer mixture of emotion, and Darby, facing Mr. Biswell, remembered for the first time to wonder about the meaning of that call from Chapin! And there flashed, too, a thought of the terror Amy had always had for things "again the law." But quicker than both thoughts, was one of thanks that, whatever the trouble, he could have come back in time.

"What is it, Amy," he said gently—reaching for her hand. "Tell me all about it—won't you?"

"Darby," she faltered, "if you—if just it don't lose me you—it's all right. I'll tell you all the paper of the man with the big spectacle says—if you promise to stick by me—no matter what, Darby."

"Why sure, you bet, Amy," he assured her. "There ain't nothin' can take us apart now."

Amy searched his face with anxious eyes. "Promise?" she persisted. "You'll sure stick by me, Darby?"

Darby nodded solemnly—and glanced at the now impatient Mr. Biswell.

"Well then," began Amy, drawing a long, legal-looking document from her pocket, and unfolding it slowly. "It's—here's what it says—Darby."

And Darby—as he drew his chair close to hers, and patted one of her hands reassuringly, saw the faces of the neighbor's children mashed excitedly against the window—looking for what the "police" was going to do to Amy Shores!

VI.

THROUGH the sweet wide country of summer time in Iowa—a special train took its way one late afternoon, some four weeks later, and in a special car—a car with wide windows, a fresh green rug, and a vase of flowers on its table, sat Michael Darby in white ducks and canvas shoes, a panama pushed back on his head, busily checking in a small note-book.

Across from his wicker chair, was another—a specially made one—in which Amy, in a cool, blue silk, coming from the rear platform, presently seated herself.

In her hands was a bit of white sewing—a dainty curtain for one of the car windows—but she put it aside now, to lean back in her chair—and study a brightly lettered three-sheet, pinned across the opposite side of the car.

Darby, smiling fondly at her, shoved back his hat, and let his eyes follow hers.

"Funny, ain't it?" he chuckled. "The world do move fast. You—you like it all right, do you, honey?" he asked anxiously. "It—it doesn't tire you?"

Amy laughed a gay answer: "I'm crazy about it," she said. "I never knew such excitement! I was crazy about it right from the start—right from when the detective that followed up my picture for Mr. Chapin first told me, but I was afraid you wouldn't feel so free for me if I took to gettin' five hundred dollars a week salary. But you'll have me beat out pretty soon," she dimpled. "Mr. Chapin says you're the best manager on the show!"

Darby smiled his appreciation and went on sizing up the poster critically.

"Them's nice fancy letters on the second line, ain't they," he remarked. "Beginnin' with the 'Princess Amy, have you seen her. She tips the scale at five hundred and thirty-seven pounds, measures five feet nine and a half inches around the waist and—' Amy, now, ain't you afraid such overfed statements are against the law?"

But Amy—was too busy fitting the new curtain to the back window to mind. When it was done, she stood looking out across the moving country, over which the warm twilight was folding caressingly. Darby, joining her, had to pinch her cheek and then kiss it soundly to bring back her wandering attention.

"Mrs. Darby," he demanded, "what you thinkin' about?"

"I was thinkin'," she smiled, taking his hand in both hers. "I was thinkin' of that night by the river—and where you was goin' so fast when I stopped you—and I was thinkin'"—she said tenderly—"I was thinkin' that by quite considerable—this beats hell!"

BETWEEN

BY GRACE H. BOUTELLE

LIFE means to us a thousand different things;
The highest meaning is the one we miss;
And yet a warning voice unceasing sings,
"Life is eternity's parenthesis."

The Big Story

by George Dilnot

PRECEDING CHAPTERS BRIEFLY RETOLD

JIMMIE SILVERDALE, reporter, "crime merchant" of the London *Daily Wire*, learned from Wing, of Scotland Yard, that Sir Harold Saxon, self-made millionaire airplane manufacturer, had been murdered in his apartment by being stabbed with a woman's hatpin. While he was at work on the story, Hilary Sloane, the girl he loved, asked him to get her and Nora Dring, her chum, out of London secretly. He agreed.

Chief Detective Inspector Garfield took Jimmie into his confidence. Together they questioned "Velvet Fred" Blunt, a crook, whose finger-prints had been found on articles in the Saxon apartment, who admitted that he had been hired by Eston, a "big" crook, to rob Saxon's safe of some letters, for a woman. In the apartment Garfield found a photograph—of Hilary Sloane.

Next morning Hilary denied any connection with the murder. Jimmie took both girls to the railroad station in a motor-car, and sent them to his aunt, who lived in the country. Later he was stopped by Eston, who asked him to "come in with him." Jimmie knocked him down.

Meanwhile Scotland Yard men had learned that Jimmie had taken the girls to the station, and in Hilary's apartment had found a hatpin exactly like the one that had been used to kill Saxon. Jimmie told Garfield the whole story, and they agreed to work together on the case, Jimmie being confident that Hilary was innocent. Then Jimmie heard from his aunt that she had received a wire from Hilary reading: "Tell Jimmie Twyford." Jimmie, Garfield, and Sergeant Wade at once went to Twyford.

When the train on which Hilary and Nora was traveling stopped at Twyford, Nora had made a signal and Eston had entered the carriage. He told Hilary that she would have to go with him. She managed to write and give to a porter the message that had reached Jimmie.

When they reached Twyford, Garfield and Jimmie learned that Eston and the two girls had been taken three miles into the country in a carriage, and there picked up by a waiting automobile. At the spot where this transfer had been made they had an encounter with Eston, disguised as a police officer, and Garfield purposely allowed him to escape. Jimmie reluctantly consented to Garfield's request that he help find Hilary by means of newspaper publicity, and when they met the other reporters on the case told them that he would share his story with them.

From police sources Garfield learned that, some years previously, Saxon had married an English girl, known as Hilary Sloane, in America; also that he was being blackmailed. There was also evidence to the effect that Hilary had never been in America.

Nora and Hilary were being held on a house-boat by Eston, who begged Hilary to marry him, and threatened her when she would not consent. Upon the arrival of the police he and the girls escaped in a motor-car. Hilary left a note for Jimmie, saying that she was remaining with Nora and Eston so that she could clear herself. On the envelope she had hastily penciled the single word: "London."

CHAPTER XX.

KNUCKLEDUSTER SAYS "NO."

NEVER let a trail get cold," is one of the unwritten axioms of Scotland Yard and Garfield owed no little of his success in his career to his unswerving tenacity in clinging to a scent. He left only a couple of men at Twyford to co-operate with the local police in case of accidents, and with the big car packed full of his staff made his way back to town.

Hilary's letter had helped in more ways

than one, and being a human being as well as a detective, he could understand her resolution to remain with Eston and Nora Dring. Yet he was disappointed, for there was much on which he was anxious to question the girl.

He had no doubt that, in good time, he would be able to run Eston down; that was inevitable. What he chiefly needed, however, was enough evidence to present a convincing case against both Eston and against the murderer—or murderess. That was where Hilary could have helped.

This story began in the *All-Story Weekly* for January 10.

If Eston had returned to London, there were ways and means of smoking him out. Part of the way back to town Garfield occupied with pencil and paper. Long before they reached the western outskirts, he had drawn up instructions that on his arrival at Scotland Yard would be flashed over the private wires to every one of the two hundred police stations in the metropolis.

There are more than six hundred detectives in London, to say nothing of twenty thousand or more of the uniformed force. The instructions would automatically reach both, but it was on the Criminal Investigation Department that Garfield chiefly relied.

Velvet Fred was, in the hackneyed phrase, well known to the police, and Jim, who had assisted in overpowering one of Garfield's staff, was perhaps not less well known as "Knuckleduster"—a young international crook who had played a prominent part in several bank "hold-ups" in the United States, and was believed to be a leading spirit in several daring diamond robberies that had been effected in London.

Eston himself was only a name to most detectives; he was too clever to have ever become familiar to his natural enemies. Yet he had an awkward team to handle and if the police could only lay hands upon one of them—Garfield was no believer in third-degree methods, yet he had his own ways of persuasion.

Wade dropped off the car at Hammer-smith. He was still in flannels and as there remained work for him to do that evening, he took the opportunity to change.

Later in the evening he turned up, a big-built, well-groomed man, in scrupulous evening dress over which he wore a light coat, in the West End. Half a dozen men west and east were on a similar quest to his—not excluding Garfield himself.

It is only on very exceptional occasions that detectives take the risk of facial disguise. The dangers of using stage properties in public are too great. The real art of the detective is to camouflage himself so that he is not too obvious or obtrusive among his surroundings.

Wade was going to rake the West End—therefore he wore evening dress, but to any

one who knew him, he was just the same old Wade. If he had been going east, he would have had a dirty face, uncombed hair, untidy clothes, and a muffler instead of a white collar.

Steadily, systematically, he worked his way through a series of saloon bars, restaurants, and night clubs. At most of them he was recognized; at very few did he refuse to take a drink with some friendly acquaintance or other. In some cases, indeed, he deliberately sought out men and invited them to drink with him. None refused, although in some cases, there was a shade of nervousness or constraint in their manner.

Wade drank much that night—chiefly ginger ale. For weeks afterward the very thought of ginger ale sickened him. He had need of all his wits and he did not propose to drown them.

The men he selected to drink with were mainly associates, or possible intimates, of Velvet Fred or Knuckleduster. Wade had no airs. He might be a detective by profession, but this, he led those with whom he consorted to believe, was his night off and he was just a good fellow among good fellows. Somehow, however, the conversation always swung round to either one or both of Eston's two assistants.

"Talking of that," Wade would observe genially, "I haven't heard much of young Knuckleduster lately. How's he getting along? Well, here's how," and he would tilt his glass for another drink.

There is a hoary lie that there is honor among thieves. There is sometimes community of interest among thieves, but there is never honor. If there were, half the effectiveness of the detective forces of the world would be swept away.

The backbone of all efficient detective work is the informant. Sometimes the informant volunteers information and sometimes he is sought out as Wade was now seeking him. Seldom is there any reluctance to talk, save through fear or self-interest.

Every man with whom Wade spoke that evening guessed that the detective's casual inquiry had something behind it, yet they were willing enough to talk so long as they themselves were not concerned.

Although the detective learned much, of

which he made a mental note for future reference, he gained little to his immediate purpose for some hours. After a time, however, he strolled into a little public-house in the network of streets between Oxford Street and Leicester Square, and his eye roved casually round the habitués.

A thin, weedy looking youth caught that glance and immediately tried to melt among a group of people at one of the little tables. Wade smiled beneath his mustache and moved forward, looking anywhere but in the direction of the youth.

The other sighed heavily with relief and tried to make an unobtrusive exit. He had about reached the door when Wade's hand fell on his shoulder and he started violently.

"Feeling pretty shy to-night, Jack. What are you trying to dodge me for?"

"Why, it's Mr. Wade!" Jack made an effort to conceal profound astonishment. "I wasn't trying to dodge you, sir. I was—just going."

Wade tucked his arm through that of his victim and felt him shivering like a trapped rabbit. "So I see," he remarked pleasantly. "Well, there's no need to be in a hurry. Come and have one with me. Don't get wind up, my lad. I've got nothing against you just now."

"Sure, Mr. Wade," agreed Jack obsequiously, but disengaging his arm with a certain relief. "What'll you 'ave?"

"Dry ginger, please," said Wade with inward nausea. "I'm on the water wagon for a bit. Well, here's luck. How's things going with you?"

For a while conversation rambled round various points until at last Wade brought it to a definite question.

"Knuckleduster?" repeated Jack, echoing the name. "Why, yes. He's about. I saw him to-night—not half an hour ago."

"Ah." Wade fingered his drink, outwardly with only perfunctory interest in the conversation, inwardly with tense watchfulness. "I was wondering what had happened to him. Where did you see him?"

"He was 'aving dinner with a baby doll up at Duller's in Piccadilly. He didn't speak. He seemed to be enjoying himself and I didn't want to interfere."

"That so? Glad he's managing to keep out of worse mischief," said Wade. "Well, I must be off, Jack. Early to bed and early to rise, you know—well, so long." He nodded and strolled out.

Duller's—which is not its real name—is a well-known restaurant, lavish of gilt and glaze-glass and beloved of suburban residents who "see life" in town once in a while. Wade kept his eyes open as he made his way thither, and delayed long enough to pick two plain-clothes men off their patrols.

He was not afraid to tackle Knuckleduster singlehanded, but he believed in taking precautions. If the crook caught sight of him too soon, he might make a bolt, and it was as well to have the exits guarded.

Posting his men at the doors, he walked into the restaurant. The manager hastened forward to greet him. Wade was a well-known figure in places of this kind.

"Just lookin' for a friend of mine," said the detective. "It will be all right. You leave me alone."

It was on the basement floor that he at last found Knuckleduster. The young gentleman was seated at a table with the lady Wade's informant had described as a baby doll—a young lady with a very loud laugh, bright blue eyes and a somewhat transparent green frock cut low. They had reached the liquer stage, and Knuckleduster was leaning across the table in an amorous attempt to make the lady take a sip from his crème de menthe when his jaw dropped and he stiffened in his chair.

"It's all right, Knuckleduster," said Wade, quietly dropping into a seat facing him. "I'm not a ghost."

There was a tinkle of glass as Knuckleduster's hand dropped heavily on the table. Yet he turned fierce fighting eyes on the detective.

"I don't know you," he said defiantly. "Who in blazes are you, and what do you mean buttin' in on us like this?"

"Sock 'im in the jaw," advised his innamorata considerably.

"You've got a short memory, Knuckleduster," said Wade quietly. "My name's Wade. I'm a police officer. If the lady will be kind enough to leave us for a little

while, I want to talk over some business with you. I've just come from Twyford," he added meaningly.

Knuckleduster's manner changed. "Oh, all right, Mr. Wade. Take no notice of Gwennie. She's liable to get excited. I'll just see her off the premises and then we'll have that talk."

"Sit right down," advised Wade quietly, but with a note of command in his voice. "Gwennie can find her own way out, I believe. You'll have to excuse us, my dear. This is all going to be very private."

"Right. Beat it, Gwen," ordered Knuckleduster, and settled himself defiantly in his chair.

The girl looked from one man to the other, and then, with a shrug of her shoulders and a shrill laugh, left them. Wade waited until she was out of earshot.

"I'm afraid I've got to take you in, Knuckleduster," he said.

"What for?" The other was brusque. "You ain't got nothing on me."

"I don't know what you call nothing," said Wade, "but if a little thing like beating up a police officer with a sandbag is nothing, you're on. I've got the goods on you, laddie, and it's no good putting up a squeal."

"You're a liar," said Knuckleduster bluntly. "I ain't been near Twyford today and I can prove it."

"How did you know this assault took place at Twyford," retorted Wade. "Don't be a damned fool! Why, we can easily identify you—you and Eston and Velvet Fred. You're for it good and proper, this time."

"I'll wait till you prove it," declared the other. He was the type of criminal that always believed the other man was bluffing until it came to a showdown.

"That may not be necessary," said Wade. "We've got it on you, and you were a sucker to come out to-night."

"If you're a sensible man, though, it won't need to go much farther. I'd hate to have to jug a man like you. Why can't we talk this over as between pals—you and I and the guvnor?"

"Come across," said Knuckleduster suspiciously, "I don't get you."

Wade looked him squarely in the eyes. "Oh, yes, you do," he answered firmly.

"You're asking me to squeal on Eston." "I'm asking you to save your own skin. You're up against it, Knuckleduster, and you know it. Are you going with the rest of 'em or are you going to take a chance and give us a straight griffin?"

Knuckleduster's jaw set hard and he met Wade's eyes with a gaze as straight as his own. "Let's get this without any camouflage," he said. "If I cough up all I know, you'll let me make a clean get-away?"

Wade hesitated. It is a ticklish business getting a statement from a man implicated in a crime. The law is a jealous task-master.

"That all depends," he parried. "We might pass over this affair at Twyford if—if there's nothing else. The man isn't very seriously hurt."

"You gotta give me a clean sheet," persisted Knuckleduster.

"Not on your life," said Wade. "You can talk or you can keep your trap shut, which you like. If you do the last, you'll take what's coming to you. What about it?"

"Nope!" declared Knuckleduster, and shut his jaws tight.

"Well," said Wade smoothly, no trace of the chagrin he felt in his face. "I think we'd better be taking a walk along, Knuckleduster."

Arm in arm, like two friends engaged in intimate conversation, the two men walked through the crowded dining-rooms and out of the restaurant.

CHAPTER XXI.

A GETAWAY.

WHILE Knuckleduster cooled his heels in a cell at Grape Street police-station Wade got busy on the telephone. His conversation with Garfield at Scotland Yard was short and correct. When he at last laid down the receiver he winked portentously at Rack, the divisional detective inspector, who was standing at his elbow.

"Downy, old bird, Garfield," he ob-

served. "He tells me not to charge this man yet. He doesn't want any steps taken to identify him."

Rock frowned a little. After all, he was a divisional detective inspector in charge of one of the most important districts in London, and Wade was only a first-class sergeant. He believed in being on good terms with his subordinates, but he rather resented familiarity.

"I have always found Mr. Garfield a very able man," he declared pompously. "He's got some sound reason at the back of his head whatever he decides to do."

Wade was as quick to accept a hint as most men. "You can bet your life on that, sir," he said, accenting the "sir" a trifle. "He's going to use Knuckleduster as a stool-pigeon, and he suggests that you can help."

"H'm." Rock fingered his chin. "What does he want me to do?"

"He asks if you'll question this man as closely as possible, particularly as to what he knows of Eston. He thinks it likely you will be able to drag something valuable out of him, though speaking for myself, I judge that he'll keep a tight mouth. He's no raw hand, is Knuckleduster."

"You must know," said Rock, more amiably. His occasional little bursts of pomposity were more a mannerism than anything else and he had earned the position he held by able and clever work. "Still—suppose I fall down in this? What then?"

Again Wade so far forgot the difference in their ranks as to let his lid tremble. "Why, then," he said, "I'm to take him up to the Yard to see Mr. Garfield himself. Mr. Garfield is very anxious to see him, though somehow I don't think they'll meet quite in that way."

Now, suspected spies were occasionally taken to New Scotland Yard during the great war for purposes of interrogation by specialists, but to take an ordinary criminal prisoner there from a police station is an extraordinary thing. There was no apparent reason why Garfield should not come to Grape Street himself. Rock scrutinized Wade's brick-red immobile face steadily.

"What's the game?" he demanded.

"Why"—Wade made a slight gesture with the open palms of his hands—"I take Knuckleduster up to the Yard myself. No other must. I don't take a cab or even handcuff him. Somewhere, somehow, while we are walking along together what happens?"

"You take your eyes off him," broke in Rock smilingly.

"I've never lost a prisoner in my service," protested Wade solemnly, "but if he should chance to get away perhaps it wouldn't be a black mark against me. It might happen by luck that we'd have one or two people to follow him up."

"Knuckleduster will hot-foot it, likely enough, to wherever Eston's hang-out may be. It's all a chance, but there are men keeping an eye on the little lady who brought him out to-night and we'll be able to pick him up again."

Knuckleduster Jim was surly when the deputation of two detectives accompanied by a jailer called on him in his cell. He felt that luck had played him a shabby trick. He was reclining in his shirt sleeves on the thick board couch, glumly contemplating his stockinged feet when the door opened and shut again with a clang.

"Well, Jim," said Wade cheerfully, "been thinking it over?"

Knuckleduster's gaze never shifted from his feet. He sat glum and silent.

"Come, my man," said Rock sharply. "Pull yourself together. We want to help you all we can."

The prisoner gave a short rasping laugh. "Say—I know all about that," he sneered.

Rock laid a gentle hand on his shoulder.

"I hate to see a man go down because he's been played for a sucker by some one else. You've been let in for this. I guess that man you dropped across down at Twyford is pretty bad."

"Suppose you go down for attempted murder? Don't you hold out too much hopes on Eston, my lad. He may be in the pen himself to-morrow. Where will you be then? Better cough up and give us a hand."

Knuckleduster gave a contemptuous grunt. "Say your little piece," he sneered. "What am I?"

"Just a blame fool," retorted Rock. "You don't know who are your friends."

"Yes, I do." Jim's upper lip contorted so that they could see his gums. "Your bluff don't go. Just you chew on that."

A quick glance passed between the two detectives. They realized that it was hopeless. Nothing they could do or say was likely to move the crook. His mind was plainly made up to defy them and when a criminal of Knuckleduster's caliber is obdurate coaxing and threats are futile.

"Get your boots and coat on," ordered Wade. "You're coming with me."

"Where to?" Jim swung himself up and languidly began to thrust one arm in the sleeve of his coat.

"Up to New Scotland Yard. Mr. Garfield wants to have a talk with you."

Slowly, rather as one voluntarily descending to a favor than as being forced to a course of action whether he willed or not, Knuckleduster assembled his attire. Rock pressed the bell that summoned the jailer and presently the judas hole that enabled one to see the interior of a cell from without, without opening the door, dropped back. At Rock's word the jailer opened the door and they passed into the corridor, Wade's hand encircling the prisoner's wrist.

As they walked into the big bare charge-room Jim remembered something. "We coming back here?" he demanded.

"Sure thing," said Wade. "Why?"

"Only there's that stuff they took off me. I don't want to lose that."

The usual formality of search had been made when he had been brought to the charge-room, but Wade, being in a hurry, had not followed the usual custom of making an inventory. Nor had he confined himself to merely relieving the prisoner of knife, matches and other articles with which he might do injury. He had simply cleared his pockets and left examination till later.

"You won't lose any of it that you're properly entitled to," said Wade. To the station sergeant in charge of the room he added: "You might send it along to the Yard, if you don't mind—I'd like to look it over some time."

If Knuckleduster had suspected the elaborate arrangements that had been made in order that he might once again take the air of freedom, he might have been grateful. On the other hand, he might not. As they strolled down Regent Street toward Trafalgar Square, he was restlessly on the alert.

All Wade's genial approaches at conversation were wasted on him. He did not intend to talk—even about the weather. One never knew these bulls from Scotland Yard.

It was in Cockspur Street that chance took a hand. A stout man, lumbering heavily in pursuit of an overloaded bus, brushed blindly into the detective sergeant. Wade staggered back and his grip on his prisoner loosened. In an instant Jim had wrenched himself free, while the detective measured his length on the pavement.

So far as Knuckleduster was concerned, it was fortunate that an empty taxicab should glide slowly by at that moment. He pulled open the door and stooped on the running-board for a second while he addressed the driver.

"Chancery Lane," he said, "and rush it."

Satisfied that his injunction was being obeyed, he slipped inside and flung himself upon the cushions with a grin. Circumstances had fallen his way and having a large stock of human nature, Knuckleduster was inclined to take the credit to himself.

At any rate he had gained full advantage from them. It was not every man who could escape from custody in broad daylight in a frequented street, with the daring and cleanness that he had shown.

His self-congratulation might have been less undiluted had he known that another taxicab containing four men was rolling along not fifty yards behind him. Further back still, Wade and the fat man who had been the original cause of the contretemps were walking amicably together toward Scotland Yard.

"As good as a picture show," declared the fat man. "You've missed your vocation, Wade. You ought to be on the stage."

"I reckon Knuckleduster is riding away now and hugging himself at his own clever-

ness," said Wade. "Well, we've got several ends to work on now—things ought to be coming our way pretty soon."

Meanwhile, as Knuckleduster fondly imagined, he was being carried farther and farther away from the instruments of justice. The luck that had sent the cab along just at the precise psychological moment never occurred to him as odd.

Yet he was no fool. He knew that the chances were that Wade had had time after his recovery to take the number of the cab. In any event, taxicabs were always easily traced.

That was why he had given Chancery Lane as a direction in which to drive. Chancery Lane could afford no hint to those who followed up his trail. Within easy walking distance of that thoroughfare there were tubes, omnibuses and trams to every part of London. It would be odd if, in the circumstances, he couldn't make a clean get-away.

Yet he overlooked one fact—a fact which came as a shock to him when he realized it. He had no money. Every article of value he had on him had been taken when he was searched at Grape Street.

Knuckleduster cursed fluently as he thrust his hands hastily through his pockets with a faint hope that something might have been overlooked. It was vain.

In ordinary circumstances the prospect of trouble with a bilked taxi-driver would have weighed little on his mind. Now, however, he could not afford to have an altercation, which might end in the intervention of the police.

The cab slowed up at a slight block in the traffic and Knuckleduster cautiously unlatched the door. Standing on the running-board he watched his opportunity and dropped off in the roadway.

Then he took to his heels in the direction of Kingsway, where he plunged off to the right. Meanwhile four men in the other taxi were gliding behind in easy pursuit. Not till he slowed to a walk did it stop to let two men emerge, who sauntered in the same general direction, while the cab kept well in the background.

Knuckleduster had got away—at the end of a piece of string.

After twenty minutes of easy walking he came to one of those severe Victorian by-streets of Bloomsbury, lined with the tall, ugly basement houses so familiar to the Bloomsbury boarder. He ascended the half-dozen steps to the front door and pressed the bell three times. The door opened without any obvious person behind it and Knuckleduster passed within.

Outside a couple of men strolled casually by and at the top of the street a taxi, obeying some unobtrusive signal, halted and Chief Detective Inspector Garfield and Jimmie Silverdale descended.

CHAPTER XXII.

AT THE TOP OF THE STAIRS.

THERE arrive moments when a Criminal Investigation Department man has to take chances; if possible, however, he prefers as a general rule to act on certainties. Cello Street, Bloomsbury—that is not its real name—was a short street containing at the most fifty or sixty houses, of which No. 15, the house which Knuckleduster had entered, was roughly the center.

Once those two men had strolled by No. 15, Garfield took no further chances of alarming his quarry till he was good and ready. A couple of men picketed one end of the street. At the other hand a taxi-driver was tinkering away with some machinery in the bonnet of his car.

In the car, idly enjoying a cigarette, sat Jimmie Silverdale. Garfield had disappeared in search of a telephone and presently returned humming a comic song.

"If I'm right in the guess I'm making, Jimmie, this may be an amusing night."

Silverdale lifted his shoulders. "Always a chance of its being a wild-geese chase. This pigeon of yours—Knuckleduster Jim may not be with Eston at all. He may be putting up at an ordinary boarding-house."

"That's conceivable, Jimmie, but"—Garfield carefully tapped out his pipe on the heel of his shoe—"but not very likely. You see, I know Cello Street—and I know Knuckleduster. I wouldn't be at all surprised at anything Eston did, but Knuckleduster has his limitations.

"That's probably why Eston is using him. And if I'm not away off my guess, I'll tell you another thing. Three or perhaps four of these austere old-fashioned houses are fitted up as gambling hells—perhaps something worse. Eston's adroit—I'll give him his due. At certain times there is probably a very keen lookout about here for any persons who look as if they were contemplating a police raid.

"I'm prepared to bet there's a bolt-hole round one of these back streets and I want to stop it before we get busy. I've phoned through to Wade to bring half a dozen men."

With the arrival of his reinforcements, Garfield was able to direct a quiet investigation of the neighboring streets. The bolt-hole he suspected he found in a narrow alley, giving access to the back entrances of Cello Street. There he posted three men.

Having thus inspected the enemies' quarters, he held a little council of war with Silverdale and Wade, well out of sight of the place that was being kept, as the technical phrase goes, "under observation." Indeed, to the casual passer-by there was no indication that anything unusual was stirring, or about to stir, the neighborhood.

An hour passed. Now and again a man or woman would enter the watched house. Two people had come from it, and once out of sight of the place, they had been stopped and questioned. Both adopted the same attitude of haughty resentment that collapsed like a pile of bricks when they realized that bluffing was no good.

"Look here," said Garfield. "You have been frequenting a gaming-house. That is illegal and as a police officer, one should have a perfect right to arrest you. That is a course I am not anxious to take if you are reasonable.

"I'm not going to run any risks of a hint getting back that we are on the job. If you're willing to go to the nearest police-station with one of my men and wait there for an hour, you'll hear no more of this. I take it you are anxious to avoid publicity. Now what do you say?"

In each case, they said "yes." More, a little adroit questioning revealed several

things that it was good to know. As a result, Jimmie found himself deputed to make a reconnaissance of the house itself.

"I'd go myself," said Garfield, "but it's too much of a chance that some one will know me. And we mustn't let Knuckle-duster catch sight of Wade. "Here"—he drew a police-whistle from his trousers pocket—"take this and you can bet we'll come a running if we're needed.

"But we want to do the business quietly and neatly, if we can. I hate to make a fuss. You'll have to take your chance of Eston. Here's a card if you need one. It's always useful to have a spare card."

There was no immediate answer to Jimmie's ring at the door of No. 15. He stepped inside as the door, actuated by some unseen mechanism, glided open and immediately shut again as he crossed the threshold. He was in a dimly lighted hall, shoddily furnished—just such a hall as one might have expected from the exterior aspect of the house, save that three or four yards along, the passage was blocked by another door.

He had an uncanny sense that, although he saw no one, he was being scrutinized and in a while the other door opened. A middle-aged man in well-fitting evening-dress appeared.

"Did you want any one, sir?" he demanded.

"Well," drawled Jimmie with well-assumed nonchalance, carrying out the instructions he had received from the people bagged by Garfield, "they do tell me that Mr. Smith lives here—Mr. Jones sent me." He presented the card Garfield had given him.

"Ah, yes. Captain Iles. Delighted to see you, captain. Won't you come in? It's a little early yet, and we haven't many people here, but perhaps you'll take some refreshments."

The interior apartment, to which Silverdale was introduced was in great contrast to the hall. Two rooms apparently had been thrown into one and decorated and furnished with lavish disregard of cost. A heavy carpet, on which every sound was deadened, covered the floor and the walls were panelled in rich mahogany.

Palms, big armchairs and little occasional tables gave it something the appearance of a lounge of an expensive club, and the center of the room was occupied by a table, now surrounded by a group of people who were intently watching the spin of a roulette-wheel.

"Zero," announced the croupier, and a hum of conversation broke out among the punters as the bank raked their money in. "Make your game, ladies and gentlemen."

In a swift glance, Silverdale failed to recognize any one. His new acquaintance led him toward a small service-bar and ordered drinks.

"Here's to our better acquaintance, captain. I haven't seen you here before, but I trust you'll be along now and again."

"What are you going to play? There's roulette, you see, and we have baccarat upstairs. Or, letting you into a secret, a few of us have a little room of our own upstairs where we play poker—just a select game, you understand. Of course we have to be very careful and our clients are always cautious in their introductions. By the way, you gave the formula, but you didn't say who really sent you."

Silverdale finished his drink. Here was a danger he had hoped to avoid. There was, however, no help for it. He must face the situation.

"That's funny," he declared. "A chap at the club put me on to this. I know him as well as I know my own brother, but for the life of me I can't remember his name."

"What club?"

Jimmie named one of the most exclusive clubs in London—a club that appeared on the card Garfield had lent him, and the other nodded, apparently satisfied. "It would be Colonel Slaron, I expect—yes, that's probably who it is. He's a member of that show."

"He was a colonel, I believe," admitted Jimmie, dismissing the point. "If you don't mind, I'll just wander round for a little and watch things. I don't quite know what I'll fall for yet. I just slipped in on the spur of the moment."

"Make yourself at home," urged his new friend, and left him.

Jimmie obeyed the injunction as literally as possible. In such a place as he judged this to be, a few pounds would not go far and he had only about ten in his pocket. He staked two ten-shilling notes on roulette and lost.

A gambler by instinct, he yet refrained from risking more at that moment. He could not tell how long it would be necessary to remain in the place and it was as well to have some money in reserve.

He wandered around the place, keenly alert to every detail. If Garfield was right, Hilary Sloane was somewhere in the building and, if possible, he wanted to see her.

For a while he sat in at baccarat. Playing as lightly as possible, he found luck with him. In the course of half an hour, his capital had turned into fifty pounds. Then the luck changed. He lost ten and rose.

No one paid any attention to him, as hands in pockets, he sauntered about, apparently intently interested in the pictures which were displayed on most of the walls. Whenever he came to a door, he tried it, but invariably those leading to the private portion of the house were locked.

He had half made up his mind to return and let the detective ransack the place by force when a big white panel in the ante-room of the saloon where baccarat was being played swung outward and a woman emerged. Silverdale shrank behind a statue of Mercury and held his breath. It was Nora Dring.

She did not observe him and passed down-stairs with quiet self-possession. The moment she was out of sight, Silverdale was at the panel, his fingers searching for the spring he knew must control it.

He found it at last and slipped through, closing the panel behind him. A small flight of stairs led upward and Jimmie followed them.

A woman passing along the corridor caught a glimpse of him, gave a gasp, and came to a halt.

"Jimmie! Jimmie!" she whispered.

Regardless of the need for caution he sprang up the remaining stairs with outstretched arms. All he knew was that Hilary Sloane was waiting for him.

Before he reached her, however, he recoiled. A blue-tinted barrel was behind the girl and behind that the lean, sardonic face of Eston.

"Good evening, Mr. Silverdale," he said. "I told you we should meet again."

CHAPTER XXIII.

JIMMIE SILVERDALE'S CHANCE.

TO face the business end of an automatic was no new thing to Jimmie Silverdale. Yet four years of war, so far from making him careless, had given him a keen appreciation of the potentialities of a deadly weapon in the hands of a determined man.

A reckless man may be brave; but he is usually a fool. There were men who could have borne tribute to Jimmie's courage; and these same men could also have told that he was far from being a fool.

He stood stock-still and a slow grin spread over his face.

"Why, it's my dear old friend, Eston!" he exclaimed.

Eston advanced a step, and with his left hand thrust Hilary behind him. He held his pistol very steadily.

"Just myself, Mr. Silverdale," he said softly. "You expected to see me, of course—but not at this precise moment. Keep very still, please. I fancy you were trying to edge along a trifle and I prefer to have you at a reasonable distance. I'm a little at tension myself and something might happen if you moved. I suppose you are, so to speak, an advance courier for the Scotland Yard folk."

Jimmie yawned. "Dear old lad," he drawled. "Still playing lead for the pictures. For an intelligent man, Eston, you make me tired. You know as well as I do that you daren't murder me. It isn't done, old boy."

"Put down that howitzer and take things reasonably. In about an hour's time, when you're sitting comfortably in a nice, cool cell and are able to think things over, you will realize that this is good advice. You're hooked, old bean."

There was a sneer on Eston's face. "All

very humorous, I've no doubt," he said. "I've never been a funny man myself and I'm not at all alarmed, thank you. I know that Knuckleduster didn't make a getaway to-night through his own brains."

"It was a frame-up, as I guessed. I've been expecting you and your friends for some considerable time."

"Well, I'm here," said Silverdale coolly.

"Yes, you're here." I think you'll stop here, too. I've made arrangements for just such a contingency. I'm afraid the *Daily Wire* will soon be missing one live, very alert, reporter. You see—"

Hilary suddenly gave a cry and sprang forward. "Look out, Jimmie!"

She was too late. From behind two men had stealthily approached while the journalist was being held in conversation and, taken from behind, he stood not a dog's chance. In a few seconds he was lying prone, a heavy knee pressed into the small of his back and strong arms wrenching his wrists back till they could be lashed behind him.

At the same moment, Hilary had tried to spring past Eston to Jimmie's aid. The crook overbalanced and half feil, but recovered himself. He seized the girl roughly by the wrists and hurled her backward.

"You keep out of this, my lady," he ordered.

She picked herself up as the men jerked Jimmie to his feet. The journalist was very white.

"You—Eston!" he snarled. "I'll find a way to get even with you for this!"

Eston knew that it was not his own predicament that had transformed Silverdale's jaunty nonchalance to white-hot passion and an unpleasant smile passed across his features.

"The dear lad," he smirked, repeating Silverdale's words. "He is a chivalrous boy. He doesn't like to see the pretty dear knocked about. Don't you worry, Silverdale. Hilary and I understand one another. If I've hurt her, a kiss will put it right."

He stepped back, placed his arm round the girl's waist and bent his evil face to hers. "Won't it, Hilary?"

Tied though he was, it took the united

strength of his two assailants to hold Jimmie Silverdale back then. Hilary, however, fought herself free and, with surprising vigor, crashed her fist full in Eston's face. He dropped back with an ugly oath and she fled along the corridor.

Eston wiped his face with a silk handkerchief and shrugged his shoulders. He seemed to have regained control of himself.

"A bit of a spitfire, Silverdale," he observed, "but I like 'em, with a little spice. Now we'll have to deal with you. I'm afraid I cannot offer you that nice, cool cell which you kindly spoke about to me just now.

"But we'll try the next best thing—a little attic that we have fortunately got available as a spare room. I think perhaps that it might be advisable if you were gagged. I don't want to seem hard, but we never know what may happen."

Some one whipped a handkerchief over Jimmie's mouth and then with an escort each side he was urged along. Eston led the way to what Jimmie judged was the topmost floor of the house and he was pushed into a tiny, bare windowless room with, as he noticed almost automatically, a strong, heavy oaken door.

"I guess you will wait for your friends here," said Eston mildly; "that is, if they ever come. Just take a turn round his ankles, if you don't mind. We'll be on the safe side."

Lashed hand and foot, Jimmie heard the door closed, and the thrusting of the bolts and a clash as the key turned, told him that Eston was taking no chances.

To Jimmie Silverdale, tied hand and foot in that garret, things became curiously quiet. His ears strained to catch the slightest sound, he could hear nothing. Either the house was very substantially built or the people in it had become very noiseless.

Apart from the physical discomfort of his bonds, and the hard floor, the journalist was little worried. It could only be a matter of minutes at the longest before Garfield moved. If only he could have smoked a cigarette, he could possess his soul in patience. It was no use worrying over spilled milk.

Time passed very slowly. He wished

he could look at his watch. The floor became intolerably hard and he rolled over on his other side for a rest. His wrists and his ankles were sore and he had more than once felt a twinge of cramp.

Something must have gone wrong—yet what could have gone wrong? Why had not the police carried out their raid? It must have been an hour—no, more likely two hours—since he had got into the place. He concentrated on an attempt to free his wrists. But there had been no mistake when they had been secured. The only result of his struggling was an increased rawness of the skin.

Then he caught a slight sound and his eyes lighted. Muffled steps were ascending the stairs. Jimmie waited alert.

Bolts clicked back into place and, with the turning of the key, Eston slipped quietly into the room. He wore a hat and overcoat and seemed cool and smiling. He carried a candle.

"Well, Silverdale," he said. "I seem to have trumped your trick for once. You have had a little time for reflection.

"Don't you think you would be a wise man to call quits? You can get all you want if you come in with me. Ah, I forgot." He stooped and freed the bound man from his gag. "Now, that's better. What do you think?"

Silverdale took one or two heavy breaths. The gag had oppressed him. "I'd be able to think better if you cut my hands and feet free," he observed.

Eston shook his head smilingly. "I have no doubt," he retorted. "You'll forgive me if I remark that I have a great respect for your physical prowess. Until we come to some amicable arrangement, I don't wish to put you in the way of temptation. You can talk quite well as you are."

"I don't know that I want to talk to you," said Jimmie. "You know that everything you say will be used as evidence against you at your trial."

The smile on Eston's face widened to an appreciative grin. "A sense of humor must be a great asset to a journalist. There are several reasons why what I say will not be used against me at my trial.

"For one thing I shall never be tried,

Alternatively, as the lawyers say, you will not give evidence. Get that?

"We've got to come to a thorough understanding right now. Either you play partners with me, or the game ceases to interest you at all. You're up against it."

"Really, this sounds interesting. You're going to murder me."

"Oh, dear no. Nothing nearly so crude as that. You must give me some credit for a little ingenuity, my dear Silverdale. It may happen that, in a little while, your friends outside—who I have provided with occupation for a time—will take it into their heads to raid this place.

"As a fact, they'll have to break the door down to do it, and meanwhile there is enough petrol and enough matches in the place to make quite a considerable blaze. In the confusion, it is not unlikely that you will be overlooked. I'm afraid you are liable to get somewhat—ah—scorched, unless you listen to reason."

"Don't bluff."

Eston lifted his shoulders. "I was afraid you might think that. Therefore—I am going to tell you a few things—things that I'd only tell to a trusted ally—or a man who will be dead in a few hours."

The picture of scornful incredulity outwardly, Silverdale gave an inward shudder. He knew enough of Eston to realize that he was a man utterly without scruple, especially when pushed into a corner. Trapped and surrounded as he was, it was likely that he would go to any lengths to gain a chance.

He believed that Eston was speaking the truth when he said he had found some method to distract the detectives. Otherwise, he would merely be wasting time with his prisoner.

"There were between twenty and thirty people in all in this place a little while ago," went on Eston. "They are mostly inoffensive fools with a taste for gambling which I try to gratify. You will probably have surmised that this place is mine, though, as a rule, I take no personal part in its management.

"Well, I've given them and the staff orders to clear out in different directions. I judge there isn't an enormous force of

police in the cordon round about and they'll be reluctant to let any one get away from here—as I say, their hands will be pretty full. I hate to break faith with my clients, but after all, it's only a question of a fine.

"Now I'm going to confess that I played a little trick on you when we bottled you on the stairs just now. I wanted to find out whether you were really in love with Hilary—or whether you were playing a devil of a deep game—or whether you knew, in fact, what I know.

"You fell for it. You are in love with the girl. What's more, she is in love with you."

"One of these days," observed Silverdale, "if you escape the hangman—which I doubt—some one will confer a benefit on society by strangling you. I'd volunteer for the job myself."

"Don't be hasty. I want you to hear me through in patience. You are aware, of course, that the lady is not Miss Hilary Sloane at all. That she is a widow?"

A flicker of surprise passed across Jimmie's face to be instantly suppressed. He remembered his conversation with Garfield. He was determined to let Eston go as far as he would.

"I have known Miss Sloane some considerable time," he said. "I suppose it's waste of breath calling you a liar?"

"Ah, you are a little astonished! There is no reason why I should lie to you. I want your help and I am treating you quite frankly. The lady was secretly married some years ago in America, and she is the widow of our late lamented friend, Harold Saxon.

"More than that"—he stretched out a hand eagerly—"she is his heiress. Oh, you may laugh, but I assure you that I have my facts all straight. I have even a copy of the marriage-certificate and I know that Saxon left the whole of his property to his wife."

"That latter point," said Jimmie, "explains why Velvet committed a burglary at Saxon's flat a few days before the murder took place."

"Draw what inferences you like," said Eston. "I am just telling you. Saxon's fortune, I may say, amounts to several mil-

lions—a stake worth playing for. I'm no piker. If you come in on this, you're a made man."

Silverdale puckered his brow, as one who considered a proposition. "If all this is true," he said, "and not a fantastic nightmare. Where do I come in?"

"I can see something of what you're after, but I don't see where I fit into the scheme. You're not making me this offer out of sheer altruism, I suppose?"

"Scarcely," said Eston dryly. "Listen. I have had this in mind for a year or more, ever since I learned that Saxon had made a secret marriage. First of all, I had to find out where the girl was and chance helped me there, since she was living with a lady who was under some obligation to me."

"Nora Dring?"

"That doesn't matter. What does matter is that I found her. I don't want to wear any halo with you and I'll admit if you like that I have made rather a specialty of using my knowledge of little family secrets now and again."

"Don't trouble about the gloss," said Silverdale. "Use the word 'blackmail.' It's shorter."

"As you like. I saw further than blackmail, though. Blackmail meant at the best a few thousands now and again. As I said before, I'm no piker. I believe in big business."

"If Saxon died, his widow would get his money. I took precautions to be sure of that. My idea was that I might marry the lady and so get my fingers on things. I believe I might have carried out that part of the program, had there not been complications—in other words, yourself."

"You flatter me. As I understand it, what you intended to do was to kill Saxon and marry his widow?"

"If I had killed Saxon," said Eston, "I shouldn't have made the mistake of making it an obvious murder. That was clumsily done. Otherwise you have summed up the situation. I took advantage of things."

"If you had been less in Hilary's mind, it might have come off, or I might do what I shall do if you refuse my terms now and make her marry me whatever her feelings

in the matter. Now, here is my offer. You want to marry her; she wants to marry you. I want to finger some of Saxon's money. You will take a million and I will take the rest."

"And what about the police?"

A sneer passed across Eston's face. "Oh, the police! You and I ought to be able to fix things so far as they are concerned. I'm not worried about that. They suspect Hilary of the murder, but we'll be able to arrange an alibi."

"They don't suspect Hilary, as you know quite well. For one thing, she could never inherit Saxon's fortune if she had killed him."

"Well?" Eston shrugged his shoulders. "It doesn't matter who they suspect. I'll give you my word that we'll be all right. Now, time is getting short. I've put my proposition up to you—what do you think of it?"

Silverdale struggled to a sitting position. "I think you have made a mistake. I'll see you in the deepest corner of the infernal regions before I agree to anything you put up. Go away."

"You're a little overstrained. Just consider it sanely for a moment. I offer you a million pounds more than you are fighting for. You only want the girl."

"Why refuse? You'll have nothing on your conscience. Look here, Silverdale, I'm in love with Hilary myself. On my soul, I shall be almost glad if you refuse."

Silverdale rolled over so that his back was toward the other and remained contemptuously silent.

"You've had your chance," said Eston. "I'll be damned if I'll waste more time with you!"

The door closed behind him.

CHAPTER XXIV.

A WAY OUT.

SO far as Garfield and the other Criminal Investigation Department men who were watching the place were concerned, Eston had estimated the situation well when he had turned loose a score of people for them to deal with. The chief

inspector had too great a respect for the capacity of his antagonist to do anything hastily or to jump to any assumptions of his own.

Among the scattered crew emerging from the house might be Eston himself. He had had experience of the crook's histrionic ability. Therefore, he played safety. Men and women alike were questioned, scrutinized and, despite their protests, hurried off to the nearest police-station.

The provision of escorts wofully skeletonized Garfield's meager force, but he calculated that he could well afford to wait. There were just enough men to watch the place, but not enough to raid it. No one puts a ferret in a rabbit-hole until the bolt-holes are safely watched.

The inspector was, perhaps, a little concerned about Silverdale, whose continued absence without giving the signal was, to say the least of it, disconcerting. For the time, however, Jimmie must look after himself. Garfield was not going to lose his quarry by pouncing too hastily.

One by one his men trickled back to their posts, accompanied by other detectives from the divisional staffs of local police-stations. Garfield took a turn up Cello Street keenly alert to discover any signs behind the closely curtained windows of the gambling-house.

There was nothing. From outside, at least, the place was dead. Garfield returned to his post at the corner.

"I'll not wait any longer for Silverdale," he told Wade. "We'll make a move. You take some men and try the back street."

Accompanied by the divisional detective inspector of the district and a couple of other officers, he passed quickly back along the street and mounted the steps of the house. The signal that had secured Silverdale's admission produced no reply.

Garfield had scarcely expected that it would. The wholesale migration of staff and of patrons of the gambling-house had been clear proof that the inmates had taken alarm.

Nevertheless, formalities had to be complied with. Garfield thundered with the knocker and gave repeated rings. Then he

lifted his heavily shod foot and kicked at the solid door.

"Look!" said the divisional man suddenly, and Garfield stepped back to follow the finger that pointed upward. A thin trickle of smoke was emerging from an open second-floor window.

Garfield ripped out a swear word. He realized instantly that Eston had frustrated him again. Criminals of that type will fight against heavy odds, but they do not willingly die in the last ditch. If Eston had fired the house, he had done so not to die in its ashes, but for it to cover his retreat.

One of the detectives, without waiting for orders, was already running full pelt down the road toward a fire-alarm. Another had climbed the railings and, clinging like a fly to what in similar houses in the neighborhood would have been the dining-room window, protected his hand with a cap and, smashing a pane, inserted his arm and pulled back the fastening. A wave of thick, black, oily smoke gushed out and, choking and gasping, he leaped clear.

"Smoke-bombs," observed one of the other men.

Garfield slipped his arm through that of the divisional detective inspector and pulled him back into the street.

"You take charge here," he said. "I've got half an idea and I'm going to chance it."

It had been a matter of seconds since the alarm was given, but already the street, which had seemed asleep up to now, save for the detectives, was waking up. Heads were appearing at windows and half-dressed figures at open doors.

Garfield accosted a pajama-clad man two doors away. "Who's the owner or agent for this property?" he demanded, and as the man gave him the information he desired, he capped his question by another. "Where's the nearest telephone?" He accepted it as an interposition of Providence that there was one in that very house and expressing a word of thanks, he was soon feverishly turning over the leaves of a telephone-directory.

Meanwhile Jimmie Silverdale lay wondering what was going to happen. Since Es-

ton had left him for the second time, the silence that had bothered him before had not been quite so obvious.

There were muffled noises which he could not always interpret. Presently a smell of burning came to him.

Jimmie Silverdale was a brave man, but a shiver shook him from head to foot. Eston was carrying out his threat, then.

It is given to few people to face the slow approach of the inevitable and painful death with stoicism. Jimmie was no stoic. He wrenched frenziedly at his bonds until his heart felt that it would burst, but still the bonds held.

By some inadvertence Eston had omitted to replace the gag and Jimmie raised his voice in loud, but what he instinctively knew, must be futile cries. If he could only have met his fate fighting, he would have been happier.

But to die like this—roasted to death—appalled him. For the time, he was a trapped, unreasoning, frantic animal.

He called wildly on Eston, cursing him like a mad man. Once or twice he found himself imploring Hilary to come and save him. Then exhaustion brought him back to sanity.

He regained something of that philosophy which every man who has served in the trenches knows. A bullet either had one's name on it or it didn't. If he was going to be saved, he was going to be saved. If not—well, he would die in possession of his own self-respect, not as a screaming coward. He set his lips grimly.

The smoke was increasing now and eddying in under the crack of the door. He began to cough. He regretted now that the gag had been removed. It would at least have protected him to some extent from this blinding, choking torment.

He rolled over and tried to hold his mouth and nostrils close to the bare boards. It was a feeble expedient, but it failed in its purpose.

His nerves were beginning to fail him. He saw visions. There were people around him—people who were slipping a knife under the cords that held him.

There were voices—dim, faraway voices calling him. Why couldn't they let him

alone? He was just going to drop into a pleasant doze—and now!

Racking pains affected the muscles of his limbs and brought back his fleeting senses.

"Oh, Jimmie, Jimmie! If you don't pull yourself together, what shall I do?"

He sat up, shakily. The room was full of swirling wreaths of heavy smoke. Dimly in the darkness, he made out a figure, gaunt and fantastic with something round its head that gave it a singularly weird effect. The figure was kneeling near him with one arm round his shoulders. He sensed, rather than recognized, her identity.

"Hilary!" he gasped.

"Yes, it is Hilary. Can you stand, Jimmie? Here—let me wind this round your head." She twisted something round his face so that the intolerable smoke pangs were minimized. "Now, don't talk. Try to stand."

Hilary Sloane was a good type of the modern athletic girl. She did not believe that femininity implied weakness and she had need of all her strength now, for Jimmie was as weak as a kitten.

Half supporting, half carrying him, she groped her way toward the door. At the stairs, he stumbled and only a superhuman effort on her part saved them both from disaster. Smoke was rolling up from below in thick, oily wreaths, with weird effects, as in the far distance little flashes of blue and yellow flame appeared.

Staggering, choking, gasping, they descended the stairs, a feat only to be achieved with infinite slowness. As they neared the ground floor, the heat became more intense and the smoke hung more closely. Jimmie swayed and would have fallen, but for the presence of that slim arm against him.

"Hold up! Oh, Jimmie, hold up! Only a few steps more and we shall be safe."

He felt that they were passing into the basement and the air grew a trifle clearer. She stooped and fumbled on the ground until she felt a ring-bolt and flung back a trap-door.

Then came her supreme test. A steep ladder led to the depths. It was out of the question that they could descend side

by side, as they had down the stairs. It was clear that Jimmie could not make the trip unaided, and, though he was a comparatively lightly built man, Hilary doubted if she was equal to the task of carrying him down.

The dilemma, however, had to be solved. There was no time for hesitation.

"You must slide down, Jimmie," she urged. "Understand?" She shook him slightly, as if that would make her meaning clear. "You will probably bruise yourself, but that cannot be helped. It is better than remaining here."

"I'll try, Hilary," he gasped.

She supported him to the opening, and getting a firm grip of his collar, let him down till she could bear the strain no longer. Then she let go and he slid to a heap at the bottom of the ladder.

Hilary followed, closing the trap-door behind her. They were in a cellar as dark as a pit, but comparatively free from the suffocation and heat of the house itself. Silverdale had fainted in good earnest.

When he came to, feeling very weak and sore, they were still in impenetrable darkness. He felt his own hand clasped in a soft warm one and heard the sound of gentle sobs. Hilary—the girl who had no nerves—was crying. She ceased instantly as she felt the pressure of her hand returned.

"Are you all right, old boy?"

"Fit as a fiddle, dear," he lied brazenly, though he ached all over and felt as weak as a rat. "What are you crying for?"

"I wasn't crying," she declared indignantly. "At least—Jimmie—I suppose I was a bit overdone."

He sat up. "I don't wonder at that. You've been through more than most men could stand. Where are we?"

She struck a match and by its glimmer he saw that they were in a small, low-pitched, bricked tunnel, the damp oozing from the walls.

"I don't know exactly," she admitted. "This is a secret way out, according to Eston, but where it leads to, I haven't the faintest idea."

Silverdale was a man who possessed wonderful powers of recuperation. He felt his

strength returning to him with every breath he took and he remembered with a shudder the nightmare horror they had passed through. He retained only a shadowy notion of what had happened since he had lain in that garret, waiting for death.

"It occurs to me, Hilary," he said, "that you have saved my life."

She smoothed his face with her free hand. "Don't be silly, Jimmie," she said.

"It's true," he insisted. "I'd be a pretty cheap sort of a corpse just now if it hadn't been for you. I'm afraid my legs are a bit wobbly yet, so if you don't mind we'll wait a bit before we begin to explore this private tunnel of Mr. Eston's. Meanwhile, you might tell me how it all happened."

She laughed—a merry, musical, happy laugh, that echoed strangely among their dismal surroundings. "You got my note?" she asked.

"The note you left on the house-boat—sure!"

"And you don't think that I murdered Sir Harold Saxon now?"

He lifted the hand that was clasped in his own to his lips. "That's your answer," he said. "Now, how did you get away from Eston?"

"Oh, there was nothing in that. He knew a great deal and guessed more after you and he met on the stairs. He told us—Nora and myself—that the place was surrounded and that we had a back way out through which he proposed to take us if the police tried to force an entrance. 'A private emergency exit'—he described it. I asked what he had done about you. He laughed—he can be diabolical at times you know, Jimmie—and said that he had you safely stowed away in a lumber room."

"He's a bright lad," he said, "and I take rather a paternal interest in him. Since you won't marry me, I thought that it wouldn't be a bad plan to elect him to the office of bridegroom. What do you think?"

She fell silent and Jimmie, though he couldn't see her face, knew that she was blushing. "Very kind of Mr. Eston," he said drily. "Go on, Hilary."

"Well, after that, he went away. Of course I didn't know what to think, except

that he had some black scheme at the back of his mind. Then he returned, told me that you had refused pointblank to marry me and that he had turned you loose, as he phrased it, to 'stew in your own juice.'

"We were hustled down-stairs and through the trap-door down here; I smelled the smoke and demanded to know what he had done with you. He protested that you were quite all right—that he had set you loose and that you would be able to take care of yourself.

"I knew that he was lying, and though he had hold of my arm, I tore myself from him and dashed back and somehow got through the trap-door in front of him. He followed me no farther, though I could hear him swearing.

"The place was full of smoke. He had told me that they used a combination of smoke-bombs and petrol. The smoke was meant to hold back the police till the place got well alight and so prevent them from discovering our retreat too soon. I tore my skirt off and bound a piece of it around my face. So at last I found you."

"I know men who have won the V. C. for less," said Silverdale. "Now our immediate problem seems to be where are we and how do we get out? Eston seems to have wriggled out of his difficulties once again. Have you any matches?"

"I have got one left," said the girl.

"And I have none. Well, I should save yours in case we want it. Meanwhile, we'll grope our way along and see what happens."

He pulled himself stiffly to his feet and, arm in arm, they began to grope their way along the tunnel.

CHAPTER XXV.

TRAPPED.

BIG business in crime, as big business in ordinary commercial pursuits, takes account of contingencies. Eston, when he became proprietor of a gambling hell, took account of the risks as well as the profits. It was to minimize these risks that he had had a tunnel constructed at an outlay which many people might have looked upon

as prohibitive, but which he regarded as an insurance.

Although the possibility that he might find a use for it personally may have been in his mind, it is doubtful if that was a prime reason. There are many people who frequent gambling houses who would hate the publicity of a police court. It was their convenience rather than his own that Eston had in mind when he provided this other unobtrusive exit.

The emergency which had now arisen, however, had thrown the question of preserving the "good-will" of his clients into the shade. In fact, Eston had flung them, as well as the permanent staff of the place, into the street, as part of the policy to occupy the police till he was ready. His chief concern was to get away whole to carry out his own greater plans.

When Hilary rushed back into the burning house he had pursued her to the trap-door and then paused, baffled. He had nerve on occasions, but he calculated swiftly and two things flashed across his mind.

The likely probability was that the girl would be driven back by the flames and smoke, in which event he would be waiting to deal with her. Alternatively, if she would be mad enough to fight her way to the top of the house, her chances of return were negligible. To follow her was to court certain death. Eston preferred to wait.

A couple of minutes had perhaps elapsed when Nora Dring, picking her way by the aid of an electric torch, returned. She laid a hand lightly on his arm.

"She has got away?" she asked.

He swore fiercely. "She slipped me. She's gone sheer crazy over the pen-pusher. I guess they're both burned to cinders—or will be. It's no good waiting. Where's Velvet and Jim?"

"They didn't stop."

"No, they wouldn't," he sneered. "You've got more nerve than either of them, my girl. Why did you come back?"

She slipped her hand through his arm and he could feel her trembling. "We were friends—Hilary and I," she said.

He laughed scornfully and quickened his pace. "She was your friend, you mean,"

he corrected. "I hadn't noticed that you had been playing the Jonathan to her David stunt—not to any extent since I've known you.

"Why, girl—" He halted as though seized by a sudden inspiration, disengaged her arm and held her with his torch blazing full on her face—"if I'm not away out in my guess, you'll not be sorry that she's gone. You little devil—I think you are glad!"

Eston had done cruel things in his fight against society and he was brutally reckless of everything, even human life, when he had an end to achieve. He had left Jimmie Silverdale to a painful death without a pang of remorse, but there was a light in the girl's green eyes which stirred even in him a feeling of revulsion. She was shivering beneath the grip of his hand, but there was a cold smile on her face.

"Perhaps—I'm not so sorry as I might have been," she confessed. "I liked Hilary—she was useful to me in the old days. But she became a prig—and I can't stand prigs."

He jerked his thumb backward and regarded her cynically. "So you don't mind much that we've left her behind—there. By God! I hate to think of it—and you smile!"

"You see, you were in love with her—or thought you were," she countered. "No, I didn't come back because of Hilary. I came because of you."

"Of me?" Eston took no trouble to conceal his sneering surprise. "I didn't know you were interested in me to that extent."

She sprang forward suddenly and threw her arms around his neck. She was kissing him hotly, passionately, clinging convulsively to him in an ecstasy of passion. Eston pushed her brutally away.

"Ugh!" he gasped contemptuously, "you're mad!"

"It was you," she insisted, speaking with a fierce intensity as she faced him. "Why have I been helping you all this while, blindly, unhesitatingly? If you hadn't been taken up so with Hilary, you would have seen.

"I'm the woman for you. I'm glad she's gone—glad, glad, glad!" She stamped her foot. "I have helped you, but I tell you

this—you would never have married her. I'd have killed you both first!"

"You would, eh?" he said quietly. "I'm almost inclined to believe you, my dear. Now, if you don't mind, we'll defer discussing the question until some more suitable time.

"Just now, the main idea seems to me to get away from here. You'll feel better when we reach the fresh air."

"Don't address me as if you were speaking to a child," she snapped. "I'm a woman and I'm not to be played with." Her tone changed and she sank on her knees in front of him, gripping his hand tightly. "Oh, my dear, my dear! Say that we shall—"

Eston cut her short. Even if he had had the inclination, he felt it was no time for such a scene. Hilary had attracted him; but Nora Dring, though she had proved useful in the game he was playing, had never caused his pulse to move a single beat quicker.

If Hilary Sloane had gone, his use for her companion had vanished. He cared nothing for her sex or her feelings. He pulled his hand away and pushed her roughly aside. She fell with a little moan, and he pressed on, unheeding.

"Get out of my way, you Jezebel!"

She picked herself up and followed him without a word and the darkness concealed her face. Nora Dring, it is probable, would have been ready to take many things from Eston. The physical violence with which he had repulsed her counted nothing; it was the contemptuous nonchalance with which he brushed her from his path that grated on her.

He was half-a-dozen steps or so in front of her when she called after him. "You had better listen to me."

"We can't hang about," he retorted, and pushed on. The exit from the tunnel was almost the exact replica of the entrance, a low-pitched cellar from which one left by way of a ladder and trap-door.

It was as he approached the ladder that Eston's pace became slower. Some uncanny intuition warned him that all was not well, and yet there was no obvious reason for the supposition. He paused with

one foot on the ladder and listened. He could hear nothing.

Indeed, it may have been the extraordinary quietness of the house above that confirmed his latent suspicion. It was impossible that this means of retreat could have been guessed and yet—and yet!

He thrust a hand out behind him and whispered a warning to the girl. "H'st!"

Still the silence hung about them, oppressive, impenetrable as the darkness itself. Then some one sneezed.

In an instant, Eston was back at the mouth of the tunnel, an automatic in his hand, the beam from his torch concentrated steadily on the trap-door ladder. He raised his voice. "Is that you, Jim?" and the trap-door swung back.

"Come right on, guv'nor," said a husky voice. "It's all quiet."

The hand that held the electric torch shook a little. Eston's senses were too keyed up for him to make a mistake. At another moment he might have taken that voice for Jim's—but not now.

He knew that, somehow, in spite of all his foresight, he had been outwitted. He was trapped.

The realization of all it might mean swept across him in a flood. Not only had he lost the game—the big game for millions that he had been playing—but he had overreached himself.

Whatever their suspicions in the Saxon business, they could prove little—certainly not, he told himself, that he had had any finger in the event that led to the murder of that eminent munitioner.

This, however, was different. There was Jimmie Silverdale, for instance. He was known to be in the gambling house when it had been fired, and there would be remains.

No legal adroitness, no slice of luck could possibly save him from conviction on that charge of murder, once he fell into the hands of the police. He had blundered, execrably, horribly. He had played and lost.

Nora Dring crept close to him. "What is it?" she whispered.

He kept his eyes steadily on the shaft of light that flickered on the ladder and would outline the first figure to descend. "It's the gentlemen from Scotland Yard, if I don't

miss my guess," he said. "We're in for it, my dear."

She glanced apprehensively toward the trap-door. Then before he could guess her purpose, she had raised her voice. "Is Mr. Garfield there? It's Nora Dring speaking."

"Keep quiet, you!" ordered Eston sharply. Then he shrugged his shoulders. The situation, from his point of view, was as bad as it could be. There was nothing the girl could do that would worsen it. He raised his voice.

"Don't trouble to answer, Garfield. You're a darned poor minnie, and I've had you taped this last minute. You'll get cramp if you stick outside that trap-door waiting for me to come up. You've got to come and fetch me."

Something white appeared in the opening of the trap-door. The pressure of Eston's finger tightened and the explosion of the automatic in the confined space was deafening. Nora Dring gave a half-suppressed scream and the white face in the opening disappeared.

"Not so bad," came the cool voice of the chief detective inspector. "You've chipped a bit out of my ear, Eston. I'll forgive you that if you'll be the reasonable man I know you to be and come up without making a fool of yourself."

Eston hesitated. His arm curved slowly till the muzzle of the pistol was resting against his temple. His finger curled slowly round the trigger. That would be the quickest way. It was all just the same in the end. Why should he endure the long, drawn-out formalities and delays of the law when—

The pressure of his finger relaxed and the weapon dropped to his side. After all, he was not taken yet. He would not take that way out until the last minute. There was no telling what might happen, desperate though the affair seemed.

"I hate to disappoint you, Garfield," he said sardonically. "You haven't got your hooks on me yet, but if you want to take tea with me, come along. We will be a merry party. You can sit on that trap-door till it's red-hot, and you can't find me walking into your arms."

He heard the striking of a match as Garfield lit his pipe. The inspector had learned more than he needed to know when he had placed his head inside the trap-door. He was disposed to take things comfortably.

"That's all right, then," he said amiably. "We've got all the time there is and we're ready to wait. You'd find yourself much more comfortable in our hands—but suit yourself.

"If Miss Dring likes to come up, we'll make her welcome. Is Miss Sloane there?"

"She is not," answered Eston, and composed himself for his vigil.

"Well, what does Miss Dring say?"

Nora Dring, her face white, her knees trembling, collapsed in a heap at Eston's feet.

"I'll stay with Mr. Eston," she declared shakily.

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



SNOW and ice on that mountain. Nothing but snow. The wind drove it with a howl against the windows, where it stuck on the warm panes. Sometimes I could just make out the blur of the semaphore lights and sometimes I couldn't. All day the blizzard had dumped its swirling load about us, and now, when night closed down, the storm took the tower in its teeth, shaking it like you've seen a dog shake a rat.

Oh, we were warm and cozy enough with our stove red hot. Which was more than Donaldson, the agent at Hastings, could say. His wire talk was rotten, chattery, and he told us he'd run out of coal. Looked like he'd freeze to death, according to him. But Big Ben prophesied grimly that Donaldson could take care of himself, so we might as well save our worries.

I don't suppose you ever heard of Big Ben, but that is your loss. Every soul on the Mountain Division knew him. His Morse snapped out like a track torpedo,

fast, too, but accurate, staccato, with a smooth flow as if a machine had hold of the key. Dots and dashes were part of him, for, after years of it, he could express himself better that way.

Sort of feeling for the language, I suppose. I've seen the same gift since, but never to the extent Ben possessed it. Why, he could come mighty close to telling the color of your eyes over a telegraph-wire.

He and I had worked tower BB-17 on the Mountain Division for three years, and during that time I never saw him flurried. Once a freight, running extra, got by us—dispatcher tangled up his train-sheet. Forty minutes later a relay came into stop her or she'd meet 87 on the big grade.

It takes just forty minutes to run from our tower to Hastings, further down the line. Hastings is the last station with a siding before the grade. In other words, the freight ought to have been getting her O. K. from Hastings right then.

Was Ben excited? Not one little bit.

Donaldson caught his first call. Clear as a bell it was. And Donaldson had time to flip the freight.

But the particular night I'm speaking of, my side partner appeared a bit uneasy, which was enough to set my think-tank working. He'd drop down alongside the key for a moment; then he'd wander over to the windows, trying to pierce the blizzard.

He was a big man with a hearty laugh and a mouth full of teeth and a whiskered chin full of determination. His red hair, as brilliant as the glow in his corn-cob pipe, usually stood on end. But his eyes were gray and pleasant; that is, generally they were. Yet I've noticed 'em hard as rocks, drilling into you with a gleam in 'em like you see jumping across a spark-gap. Right now they were anxious.

Perhaps that wasn't so strange, either, for all day long, from the length of the division, had come bunches of trouble. A snow-shed out here; a freight ditched there; hell to pay everywhere.

Wires were down, too. Not a word could we get below Hastings or north of the junction. Toward night every siding was overflowing with dead-headed rolling stock. You see, the big grade—it's four and a half per cent in places—handicaps us because even our best oil-burners won't haul much tonnage on it in a blizzard. They can't make steam.

And this particular frolic of the elements promised to beat anything that had struck us in twenty years. At 10 P.M. the chief dispatcher ordered the line cleared for the night, barring No. 77 southbound, which was to make her run as usual. I reckon you've heard of that train—the Cumberland Limited, all steel and solid Pullman? She was to follow a snow-plow, and headquarters gossip filtering to us hinted she might find the blizzard a bit of a teaser.

Suddenly Big Ben turned on me. "Jim," said he, "I don't like it. What's the old man thinking of to let 77 through? Have you heard what she's carrying to-night?"

I allowed I hadn't.

"Well, there's something like one hundred thousand in gold in her express-car. Government consignment. I got it straight. What a chance for a hold-up! Remember

that cut below Hastings?" He shook his massive head dubiously. "It's been done before."

As if to emphasize his words, the storm swooped down with renewed energy until the tower swayed like a lighthouse. Great guns! how the wind shrieked at us. How the snow thudded against the windows. And when you *hear* snow, you know there's a double-headed gale behind it.

About that time our call came over the wire: "N-H, N-H, N-H."

As Ben jumped in, I put down my paper to listen. I find it's a good thing to pay pretty strict attention to anything on a night like that. It keeps you from seeing shadows that aren't there, and hearing sounds which your common sense tells you must be the wind.

Presently came the professional dot and dash of Donaldson down at Hastings. Now Donaldson, next to Big Ben, was a star operator, and the two of 'em could talk better and with more satisfaction over a stretch of singing wire than if they were sitting together in a parlor.

Even I knew Donaldson's style, although I wasn't more than middling expert. There were tricks in his stuff such as shortening his o's, but his Morse ran mighty smooth. I read off the message to myself.

"Freezing cold down here, Ben. Lonely, too. Damn lonely. What do you get on 77?"

The big man at the table cut in: "Brace up; 77 on time. Nothing to bother her to-night except the storm. All freight dead-headed."

That seemed to satisfy Donaldson, for there was a long silence broken only by the whine of the wind and the *thud, thud* of driven snow. I had just picked up the paper again when "N-H, N-H, N-H," snapped at us.

The crispness of dots and dashes suggested excitement. Ben acknowledged deliberately, but when he closed the wire I saw a narrowing of his eyes.

Donaldson was in a hurry. "Going to quit to-morrow," he began. "Can't stand this joint. Say, there's two of you up there. You're lucky. Old man will have to come across with an assistant or I quit. Do you

know you're the nearest white man to me? Just me alone here. No night for a man to be alone. Hold on, I think I hear somebody in the waiting-room. Maybe I'll have company."

But he opened up again the next moment with: "Good Lord, must be going off my nut. Nobody in the waiting-room. It's the wind. I tell you this place is like the north pole. If I could only hear a fire crackling. Say, there it goes again. No, I'm way off; that's a fact. I'll have to look around. Do you notice anything funny in the wind? I seem to. Why the devil didn't they put shades on these windows? What's the matter with me anyhow?"

Ben went back at him, calm as a summer's day. "Hold on, old man; take some whisky. It's your nerves. Get a grip on yourself."

"All right," answered Donaldson, his wire-talk becoming calmer. "Yes, I'll take the whisky. Let me know about 77."

That was all for a while, but Ben eyed me through the fumes of his pipe. "I don't like it," he muttered. "Not a bit. Never knew Donaldson to wildcat before. Wonder if there is anything wrong?"

I didn't say what was on my mind, for the shriek of the storm interrupted. So we just sat still and looked at each other and wondered what it would be like if either of us weren't there.

Somehow I couldn't get rid of the picture of Hastings station—a little frame building backed up against a cliff, with a siding cutting in behind it and the banked curve of the main line stretching away before it. A few farmers used the station, but a water-tank was its real excuse for existence.

I could see how the snow had half-buried it, and how Donaldson, veteran that he was, might hear strange sounds in the gale. I could see a great many things right then, but the sight wasn't pleasant.

Snow, snow and more snow, and icy rails and low, hurrying clouds you felt were brushing against the tower. "Listen!" I snapped.

Ben jumped to his feet. "This won't do. Here, you quit listening or you'll be as bad as Donaldson." Then he came over to me. "I guess it's just as well there're two of us,"

he said very quietly. "Try the junction for a report on 77."

I took the key with a sense of awe—only a couple of slim wires between us and the world, and a thousand chances for the storm to tear 'em down. But if we felt it, what about Donaldson? What about Donaldson, anyway?

The junction answered after a bit, though there was no life in the sending. "McFlin," nodded Ben. "I know his style. Ask him whether the orders for 77 stand."

I did.

"Sure," clicked McFlin; "77 on time. Pass her through. Rotten night, isn't it? They got a plow leading the limited like a blind baby. So-long."

That was at eleven two. Twenty minutes later Donaldson started after us again, but it was a chattering, wild Donaldson; a new Donaldson who tumbled his letters over each other.

"N-H, N-H, N-H," he stuttered, even after I had opened the wire. "N-H, N-H."

I sent him a string of Rs a mile long before he acknowledged. Then:

"What's the matter with you up there?" he clicked. "Gone to sleep? But you can't sleep now; you've got to talk to me or I'll be ready for the queer house. Something is walking up and down outside my window. I've seen it twice. It can't be a man, and animals don't prowl about in a storm like this. Listen to that wind. I tell you it's walking around the station. What am I saying? Do you believe in ghosts? It was in the waiting-room a while back, but it got out before I had a shot at it. What would you do if you were down here alone, snowed in like a damned Eskimo? What would you do if it started to walk—"

Big Ben strode across the room. "Give me the key," he thundered. His eyes were hard gray now, like rock, with little points of fire in them, and it seemed he would smash the instrument as he crashed down with Donaldson's call.

"Stop that!" went the dots and dashes, clear cut, fast, but Lordy, they had a punch behind 'em. "Pull yourself together. Take some more whisky. Wake up. Remember you're an operator. You've got to handle

the Limited to-night. No more of that. You know damn well nothing is walking around down there except you. Rub some snow in your face. Wake up, I say. I'll talk to you as much as you like, but no more spook stuff."

"You're right," came the slower response. "I won't bother you any more. Nevertheless, it's walking around here. Maybe I'll get a shot at it. I'll let you know if I do."

That was all, and Ben and I looked across the table into each other's eyes. "Well?" I questioned.

He shook himself as if trying to get rid of something clinging. "Oh, Donaldson is getting old," he muttered. "It's lonely down there, and his fire's out. That's what I make of it.

"When the wind howls, and you're on a night shift in a God-forsaken spot like Hastings, you're mighty apt to hear and see a little more 'an you've any business to."

The next word that came flashing over the wire left no doubt in our minds. Either Donaldson was clean crazy or—well, he *must* be crazy!

"Ever see a face half black and half white?" stuttered our instrument. "I had a shot at it. It's still walking."

Ben waited an instant then sent "J-J," Donaldson's call, steady for three minutes. But he might as well have opened the window and yelled out into the storm. The wire was either dead or Hastings wouldn't answer.

Presently McFlin at the junction got busy. "Just O. K.'d 77," he said. "Devilish night. The Limited looked like a hunk of the mountain on wheels. Bet the snow on the car-roofs gets scraped off on the top of the tunnels. Happy dreams."

But we weren't to indulge in any happy dreams for some time to come. Hardly had McFlin shut up when "N-H, N-H, N-H" called Ben back. "Lord," he groaned, "hear that style? It's Donaldson, but what's happened to him? I hate to listen to it."

Dull, lifeless, flat, came the dots and dashes from Hastings. "No use," clicked Donaldson. "This hide-and-seek is beyond me. Its face is half black and half white,

and bullets don't worry it. I'm a gone duck. Never mind me. Anyhow, hell is warm and not as lonesome as this. I'm freezing, and that's no ghost story."

"For God's sake," Ben's reply flew forth, "can that stuff. Pull yourself together, old man. Forget the face or whatever it is; 77's on time. Hold hard."

"Sure," agreed Donaldson wearily, "I'll handle the Limited. How's the storm up there?"

"Quitting," lied Ben, and went to the window.

Then followed an hour of silence, with only the shriek of the wind and the thud of snow. I reckon the two of us smoked considerable tobacco during that hour, and we played a few games of checkers, too, but our minds wandered.

When at last we heard the shrill squeal of 77's whistle above the noise of the blizzard, we felt happy. Just to know there were other people near us—believe me, that was some relief!

Far off up the line we could make out the headlight of the Limited like a blinking, misty moon creeping toward us. Ben glanced at his semaphore levers. Down she bore on us, the din of her drivers muffled by snow.

There was the thunder of moving tons, a blast of cinders against the tower windows, and a snaky line of black as the Pullmans flashed past under their white-caps. We watched her red tail-lights around the curve.

"J-J, J-J, J-J," clicked Ben, back at the table. And directly Hastings answered in the same lifeless style.

"Limited just passed O. K.," went on my side partner. "How are you feeling?"

Donaldson's wire-talk was worse than ever. "Fine," he stuttered. "Maybe I can hold out. The damn thing's always near me. It's cold here. I've got my feet on the stove. Say, this stove is a joke. It's so empty it's going to cave in pretty soon. Wait a minute, let me try another shot."

Nothing more. Not another word, though we took turns at the key. And when Ben relighted his pipe I didn't like the look on

his face. "Jim," he began, "there's things in this world none of us can understand. I reckon after all that maybe, I misjudged Donaldson; perhaps he's up against one of 'em."

"Quit!" I bellowed. "You watch yourself or you'll be splitting a switch, too. As you said a while back, Donaldson's nervous and cold. That's what's the matter with him; nothing else."

Ben, mumbling a reply, turned again to the window. If possible the storm was worse.

I don't exactly remember how it happened; I must have dozed off about then, being pretty tuckered out. Anyhow, the first thing I knew Ben was shaking the life out of me. I'll never forget the expression of his face as I opened my eyes.

His eyes were all red, his hands were working, his jaw set. "Wake up, Jim," he hissed. "I heard it, too."

"No," he went on as I instinctively looked toward the windows. "Not there; over the wire. Listen!"

I listened, but for a long time nothing broke the vibrating stillness of the tower. And I got to thinking it was another case of nerves. Then, Father above us! may I never again hear such a sound!

Our instrument started to whisper. You laugh, do you? But if you'd been there you wouldn't have laughed. We went over to the table on tiptoe, hardly daring to breathe. The little steel bar trembled; moved down; snapped back, barely closing the contact.

It was like a dying man framing words he couldn't utter. I followed in my mind the course of the single, drumming wire over the trestles, through the ravines, under the mountains. What manner of thing was pressing the key at the other end?

Ben dropped forward with an oath and pillowed his elbows on the table as if his nearness might aid him. "Listen!" he begged. "Oh, Jim, listen!"

Presently the instrument quivered again, but this time the impulse was stronger. Horribly flaccid, monotonously regular, like the labored effort of an amateur, came the message which shall forever scar my memory with unspeakable horror.

"God—in—heaven—help me. I—can't—stand—this. They—chained—cross—ties—to—the—rails. They—will—ditch—the—Limited. I'm—done—for. Hell—is—nearer—now. Help. Dear—God—help—me—"

That was all. Ben tore at the key, sending out into the night, "J-J, J-J, J-J," until my head swam.

But no response came; not the least flutter. Only agonizing, storm shrieking silence.

Then he gave it up and staggered to his feet. His face was as gray as slate. "Jim," he gasped, "Donaldson is dead! I know it. It was a dying man who sent that message."

I grabbed him by the shoulders. "You fool!" I yelled. "He can't be dead—he sent it. Don't you understand? They're going to wreck the Limited. Donaldson was telling us. He may be wounded. We've got to get to him."

Slowly, as if his body was awakening from sleep, the muscles in his shoulders under my hand tightened. "Sure, I get you," he whispered. And before I knew what he was doing, he shook me off, rushing blindly for the stairs. "Come on, Jim. For God's sake, hurry!" he called. "Bring my gun and some torpedoes. It's only five miles by the road; thirty down the mountain by the track. Let's try the car—"

I stopped long enough to be sure the revolver we kept in a drawer was loaded, stuffed some torpedoes in my pocket, and followed him. Out into the gale he sped to where he kept his little second-hand, mud-spattered gas-wagon. I had always kidded him about it, laughed at it; but now I prayed.

Yes, funny when you think of it, me praying! But I did—prayed it would run; prayed there was gas and oil in it.

Once away from the lee of the building, the storm wrapped around us, flinging the snow in our faces, making us gasp for breath. We were taking desperate chances and breaking all rules—this leaving a tower vacant, but what could we do? What in God's name could we do?

When I caught up with Ben he was cranking the engine desperately. I propped

the shanty door open, though the blast of wind threatened to fairly tear it from its hinges.

Fortunately the radiator of the car had antifreezing mixture in it. After an agonizing moment, the engine gave a couple of disgusted coughs and died. But Ben went right on. He spun that thing till I was dizzy as I sat with my hand on the throttle, feeding it raw gas.

When there seemed no chance left, and I could see the Limited a burning, blackened mass, and hear the cries of the injured, the engine started, missing like thunder, to be sure. Ben leaped in beside me and let in his clutch.

Once beyond the shanty our headlights ended in a whirling bank of snow, and the cold stabbed like a driven nail. But the engine was running better now.

How my side partner found the road, or how he kept that rickety piece of junk from chucking us down a ravine I'll never know. But he did. Yes, by the grace of the Lord, he did.

Pitching like a ship in a storm, sinking now and then up to our hubs, we jounced on down that mountain. What everlasting miles of emptiness! What biting pain as our ears and hands and noses turned red, then white.

Once we heard the shriek of the Limited below us on the grade; once we saw the flash of her furnace door. Seconds turned into minutes; minutes into hours. Would we be in time? I set my teeth and prayed some more.

Ah, we had hit the last stretch and through the smother we could see the semaphore lights of Hastings station. Also the light in the building itself. Our car snorted and groaned as Ben fed it the gas, skidding to the edge of a precipice or flinging us half out of our seats, but we never thought of that.

And now came the wail of the Limited's whistle, this time above us. Her headlight flickered across the cut, touching the station with uncertain fingers. The semaphore was set green.

I shivered, but not from cold. If only we had half a chance, but the everlasting snow—how it clung to our wheels! And under

it our tire-chains spun gratingly in red clay which flecked the white of the road like blood.

Bearing down on Hastings station, gathering speed with each pound of her drivers, thundered the Limited. We were playing the passage of a minute against a pile of cross-ties—and the forfeit was death!

Now we reached the nearest point to the right-of-way, and as we jerked to a halt, a black figure appeared on the depot platform against the light. I saw the flash of a gun and heard a bullet sing past.

But Ben paid no heed. Throwing himself from the car, he floundered over to the track. I ran toward the station, firing as I went. Once I looked back. Ben was kneeling down, adjusting torpedoes under the very pilot of the plow.

Now there isn't any use of my explaining how the Limited roared by, her engineer satisfied with the green of the semaphore; nor how he gave her the air when the torpedoes warned him.

Nor, for that matter, of the futile pursuit of the bandits who had intended to ditch her. All that came out in the morning paper. If I remember, there was even a picture of the pile of cross-ties chained to the track.

The fact that will interest you is what we discovered in Hastings station. Without bothering to explain to 77's wondering crew, we dashed into the waiting-room and threw open the door of the ticket office.

At the table sat Donaldson. He was stiff and rigid, and from an ugly blotched hole in his neck there crept a frozen stream of blood. His right hand still rested on the telegraph-key.

"Good God!" I muttered. "Dead! He never moved after he was shot."

And then, somehow feeling Ben's eyes upon me, I looked at him. His smile was ghastly.

"Sure?" he said. "I told you so back in the tower. He never moved after he was shot? Then what about that message? How did he know about the cross-ties?"

"Shut up!" I shrieked. "Here, let's get him out of this. We'll go down on 77. I'm through!"

Raspberry Jam

by Carolyn Wells

Author of "Faulkner's Folly," "The Curved Blades," etc.

CHAPTER XXIX.

FIBSY'S BUSY DAY.

"IT'S this way, F. Stone," said Fibsy earnestly, "the crooks of the situation—"

"The what?"

"The crooks—that's what they call it—"

"Oh, the crux." Stone did not laugh.

"Yes, sir—if that's how you pronounce it. Guess I'll stick to plain English. Well, to my way of thinkin', the little joker in the case is that there raspberry jam."

"Thought you were going to talk plain English. You're cryptic, my son."

"All right—here goes. That jam business is straight goods. The old lady says she tasted jam—and she *did* taste jam. And, that sweet, pleasant, innercent raspberry jam will yet send the moiderer of Mr. Embury to the electric chair!"

"I think myself there's something to be looked into, there, but how are you going about it?"

"Dunno yet—but here's another thing, Mr. Stone, that I ain't had time to tell you yet, that—"

"Suppose you begin at the beginning and tell me your story in order."

"Supposin' I do!" Fibsy thought a moment before he began. It was the morning after the two had dined at the Embury home, and they were breakfasting together in Stone's hotel apartment.

"Well, Mr. Stone, as you know, I left Mrs. Embury's last night d'reckly after Mr.

Hendricks took his dee-parture. As I s'pected, there was trouble a waitin' for him. Just outside the street doorway, that Hanlon chap was standing and he met up with Mr. Hendricks—*much* to the dismay of the latter!"

"Your English is fine this morning—go ahead."

"Well—Hanlon fell into step like with Mr. Hendricks, and they walked along, Hanlon doing the talking. I didn't dare get close enough to overhear them, for they're both live wires, and I don't fool either of 'em into thinking meself a kinky-poop!"

"So I trailed, but well outa sight—and, hold on, Mr. Stone, while I tell you this. The fake mejum that Miss Ames went to see yesterday afternoon, was none other than friend Hanlon himself!"

"What? Fibs, are you sure?"

"Sure as shootin'! I spotted him the minute he came up to Mrs. Embury's. I didn't reckernize him at first, but I did later. You know, Mr. Stone, I saw him do stunts for newspapers in two towns, and I wonder I didn't tumble to him in the spook-shop.

"But I didn't—I dessay because when I saw him doing his mind-readin' tricks outdoors, he was blindfolded, which some concealed his natural scenery."

"Is he mixed up in the Embury case?"

"He's mixed up with Mr. Hendricks in some way, and he learned from Miss Ames that Hendricks was to be among those pres-

This story began in the All-Story Weekly for January 3.

ent, so he made up foolish excuses and be-tok himself to the vicinity of said Hendricks."

"Why?"

"Wanted to converse with him, and couldn't get hold of him otherwise. Hendricks, it would seem, didn't hanker for said conversation."

"I remember Hanlon asked Mr. Hendricks if he were going his way, and Hendricks said he was going to spend the evening where he was."

"Egg-zackly. And did. But all the same, Hanlon waited. And a wait of an hour and a half registers patience and perseverance—to my mind."

"Right you are! And you trailed the pair?"

"Did I!" Fibsy fell back in his chair, as if exhausted. "I followed them to Mr. Hendricks's home, they chatterin' glibly all the way—and then after a few minutes' further remarks on the door-step, Hendricks, he went in—and Hanlon— You know Mr. Stone, Hanlon's nobody's fool, and he knew I was follerin' him as well as he knew his name!"

"I don't know how he knew it—for I was most careful to keep outa sight but all the same, he did know it—and what do you think he did? He led me a chase of miles—and miles—and miles! That's what he did!"

"On purpose!"

"On purpose! Laughin' in his sleeve! I was game, I trotted along—but bullive me! I was mad! And the galoot was so slick about it! Why, he walked up Broadway first—as if he had a business appointment in a desprit hurry. Then, having reached Hundred an' Twenty-Fi'fth Street, he pauses a minute—to be sure I'm trailin', the vilyun! And then, he swings east, and across-town, and turns south again—oh, well, Mr. Stone, he simply makes me foller him till I'm that dog-tired, I near drops in my tracks.

"And, to top the heap, he leads me straight to this hotel, where we're stayin'—yes, sir! Right here, and makin' a sharp turn, he says: 'Good night!' pleasantlike, and scoots off! 'Can you beat it!'"

"Poor old Fibs, that was an experience!

Looks like the Hanlon person is one to be reckoned with. But it doesn't prove him mixed up in the murder mystery in any way."

"No, sir, it don't. It's only made me sore on him—and sore on my own account, too!" Fibsy grinned ruefully. "Me feet's that blistered—and I'm lame all over!"

"Poor boy! You see, he's a sprinter from 'way back. His stunts on that newspaper work prove he can take long walks without turning a hair."

"Yes, but it's croolty to animiles to drag a young feller like me along too. I've got *his* number! Remember, Mr. Stone, he played Spook Catcher to Miss Ames. That means something, sir."

"It does, indeed. This is a great old case, Fibsy. Are you getting a line on it?"

"I think so, sir," and the lad looked very earnest. "Are you?"

"A strange one. But, yes, a line. To-day, Fibs, I want you to interview that Mrs. Desternay. You can do—can do it better than I. Jolly her along, and find out if she's friend or foe of Mrs. Embury."

"Yes, sir. An' kin I do a little sleuthin' on my own?"

"What sort?"

"Legitermit—I do assure you, sir."

When Fibsy assumed this deeply earnest air, Stone knew some clever dodge was in his mind, and he found it usually turned out well, so he said: "Go ahead, my boy; I trust you."

"Thank yer." And Fibsy devoted himself to the remainder of his breakfast, while Stone read the morning paper.

An hour later Terence McGuire presented himself at the Embury home and asked for Miss Ames.

"Good morning, ma'am," he said, as he smiled brightly at her. "Howja like to join me in a bit of investergation that 'll properly end up in a s'lution of the mystery?"

"I'd like it first-rate," replied Miss Ames with enthusiasm. "When do we begin?"

"Immejity. Where's Mis' Embury?"

"In her room."

"No use a disturbin' her, but I wanta

see the jersey—the gymnasium jersey that your ghost wore.”

Aunt Abby looked disappointed. She had hoped for something more exciting.

But she said: “I’ll get it,” and went at once to Sanford Embury’s room.

“Thank you,” said Fibsy, as he took it. But his eager scrutiny failed to disclose any trace of jam on its sleeves.

“Which arm did you bite?” he asked briefly.

“I didn’t really bite at all,” Miss Ames returned. “I sort of made a snap at him—it was more a nervous gesture than an intelligent action. And I just caught a bit of the worsted sleeve between my lips for an instant—it was, let me see—it must have been the left arm—”

“Well, we’ll examine both sleeves—and I regret to state, ma’am, there’s no sign of sticky stuff. This is a fine specimen of a jersey—I never saw a handsomer one—but there’s no stain on it, and never has been.”

“Nor has it ever been cleaned with gasoline,” mused Miss Ames, “and yet, McGuire, nothing, to my dying day, can ever convince me that I am mistaken on those two subjects. I’m just as sure as I can be.”

“I’m sure, too. Listen here, Miss Ames. There’s a great little old revelation due in about a day or so, and I wish you’d lay low. Will you?”

“What do you mean?”

“Why, don’t do or say much about the affair. Let it simmer. I’m on the war-path, and so’s Mr. Stone, and we’re comin’ out on top, if we don’t have no drawbacks. So, don’t trot round to clariants, or harp on that there ‘vision’ of yours, will you?”

“My boy, I’m only too glad to keep away from the subject. I’m worried to death with it all. And if I can’t do any good by my efforts, I’ll willingly ‘lay low,’ as you ask.”

“All right, ma’am. Now, I’m off, and I’ll be back here when I come again. So-long.”

Fibsy went down in the service elevator and forthwith proceeded to interview the rubbish man of the house, and some other functionaries.

By dint of much prodding of memory, assisted by judicious silver offerings, he

finally learned that there was an apartment occupied by a couple, with four children, who, it appeared, consumed large quantities of jam, of all flavors. At least, their rubbish was bristling with empty jam-pots, and the deduction was logical.

Seemingly unimpressed, Fibsy declared it was pickle-fiends he was searching for, and departed, outwardly crestfallen, but inwardly elated. Going out of doors, he walked to the corner of Park Avenue, and turned into the side street.

Crossing that street to get a better view, he looked up the side of the big apartment-house, and his gaze paused at the window in the tenth story which was in Miss Ames’s sleeping-room. Two floors below this was the apartment of the family who were reputed jam eaters.

Fibsy looked intently at all the windows. The one next Miss Ames’s was, he knew, in the Embury’s pantry. Hence, the one two stories below was in the Patterson’s pantry—the Pattersons being the aforesaid family.

And to the boy’s astonished and delighted eyes, there on the pantry window-sill sat what was unmistakably a jam-jar!

CHAPTER XXX.

AN INTERVIEW WITH MRS. DESTERNAY.

SO far, so good. But what did it mean? Fibsy had learned that Mr. Patterson was a member of the Metropolitan Athletic Club and was greatly interested in its presidential election—which election, owing to the death of one of the candidates, had been indefinitely postponed.

But further investigation of Mr. Patterson was too serious a matter for the boy to undertake. It must be referred to Fleming Stone.

So Fibsy glued his eyes once more to that fascinating jam-jar up on the eighth story window-sill, and slowly walked away.

Under his breath he was singing: “*Raz Berry Jam! Raz Berry Jam!*” to the tune of a certain march from “*Lohengrin*,” which somehow represented to his idea the high note of triumph.

He proceeded along the cross street, and at Fifth Avenue he entered a bus.

His next errand was at the home of Fifi Desternay.

By some ingenious method of wheedling, he persuaded the doorman to acquaint the lady with the fact of his presence, and when she came into the room where he awaited her, he banked on his nerve to induce her to grant him an interview.

"You know me," he said with his most ingratiating smile, and he even went so far as to take her beringed little hand in his own boyish paw.

"I do not!" she declared, staring at him, and then, his grin proving infectious, she added, not unkindly: "Who are you, child?"

"I wish I was a society reporter or a photographer, or anybuddy who could do justice to your charms!"

His gaze of admiration was so sincere that Fifi couldn't resent it.

She often looked her best in the morning, and her dainty negligee and bewitching French cap made her a lovely picture.

She tucked herself into a big, cushioned chair, and drawing a smoking-stand nearer, fussed with its silver appointments.

"Lemme, ma'am," said Fibsy eagerly, and, though it was his first attempt, he held a lighted match to her cigarette with real grace. Then, drawing a long breath of relief at his success, he took a cigarette himself, and sat near her.

"Well," she began, "what's it all about? And, do tell me how you got in! I'm glad you did, though it was against orders. I've not seen anything so amusing as you for a long time!"

"This is my amusin' day," returned the boy imperturbably. "I came to talk over things in general—"

"And what in particular?"

Fifi was enjoying herself. She felt almost sure the boy was a reporter of a new sort, but she was frankly curious.

"Well, ma'am," and here Fibsy changed his demeanor to a stern, scowling fierceness, "I'm a special investigator." He rose now, and strode about the room. "I'm engaged on the Embury murder case, and I'm here to ask you a few pointed questions."

"My Heavens!" cried Fifi. "What are you talking about?"

"Don't scoff at me, ma'am—I'm in authority."

"Oh, well, go ahead. Why are you questioning me?"

"It's this way, ma'am." Fibsy sat down astride a chair, looking over the back of it at his hostess. "You and Mrs. Embury are bosom friends, I understand."

"From whom do you understand it?" was the tart response. "From Mrs. Embury?"

"In a manner o' speakin', yes; and then again, no. But aren't you?"

"We were. We were school friends, and have known each other for years. But since her—trouble, Mrs. Embury has thrown me over—has discarded me utterly. I'm so sorry!"

Fifi daintily touched her eyes with a tiny square of monogrammed linen, and Fibsy said gravely:

"Careful, there, don't dab your eyelashes too hard!"

"What!" Mrs. Desternay could scarcely believe her ears.

"Honest, you'd better look out. It's coming off now."

"Nothing of the sort," and Fifi whipped out a vanity case, and readjusted her cosmetic adornment.

"Then I take it you two are not friends?"

"We most certainly are not. I wouldn't do anything in the world to injure Eunice Embury—in fact, I'd help her, even now—though she scorned my assistance. But we're not friends—no!"

"All right, I just wanted to know. Ask right out—that's my motto."

"It seems to be! Anything else you are thirsting to learn?"

"Yes'm. You know that 'Hamlet' performance you and Mis' Embury went to?"

"Yes," said Fifi cautiously.

"You know you accused her of talkin' it over with you—"

"She did!"

"Yes'm—I know you say she did—I get that from Mr. Shane. But lemme tell you, ma'am, friendly like, you want to be careful how you tell that yarn, 'cause they's chance for a perfectly good slander case against you!"

"What nonsense!" but Fifi paled a little under her delicate rouge.

"No nonsense whatsoever. But here's the point. Was there a witness to that conversation?"

"Why, let me see. We talked it over at the *matinée*—we were alone then—but, yes, of course, I recollect now—that same evening Eunice was here and Mr. Hendricks was, too, and Mr. Patterson—he lives in their apartment house—the Embury's, I mean—and we all talked about it! There! I guess that's witnesses enough!"

"I guess it is. But take it from me, lady, you're too pretty to get into a bothersome lawsuit, and I advise you to keep on the sunny side of the street, and let these shady matters alone."

"I'll gladly do so—honest, I don't want to get Eunice in bad—"

"Oh, no! We all know you don't want to get her in bad—unless it can be done with absolute safety to your own precious self! Well, it can't, ma'am. You keep on like you've begun and your middle name 'll soon be Trouble! Good morning, ma'am."

Fibsy rose, bowed and left the room so suddenly that Fifi hadn't time to stop him if she had wanted to. And he left behind him a decidedly scared little woman.

Fibsy then went straight to the offices of Mason Elliott.

He was admitted and given an audience at once.

"What is it, McGuire?" asked the broker.

"A lot of things, Mr. Elliott. First of all, I suppose the police are quite satisfied with the alibis of you and Mr. Hendricks?"

"Yes," and Elliott looked curiously into the grave, earnest little face. He had resented, at first, the work of this boy, but after Fleming Stone had explained his worth, Elliott soon began to see it for himself.

"They are unimpeachable," he went on; "I was at home, and Mr. Hendricks was in Boston. This has been proved over and over by many witnesses, both authentic and credible."

"Yes," Fibsy nodded. "I'm sure of it, too. And, of course, that lets you two out. Now, Mr. Elliott, the butler didn't do it—

F. Stone says that's a self-evident fact. Bringin' us back—as per usual—to the two ladies. But, Mr. Elliott, neither of those ladies did it."

"Bless you, my boy, that's my own opinion, of course, but how can we prove it?"

Fibsy deeply appreciated the "we" and gave the speaker a grateful smile.

"There you are, Mr. Elliott, how can we? Mr. Stone, as you know, is the cleverest detective in the world, but he's no magician. He can't find the truth, if the truth is hidden in a place he can't get at."

"Have you any idea, McGuire, who the murderer was?"

"No, sir, I haven't. But I've an idea where to get an idea. And I want you to help me."

"Surely—that goes without saying."

"You'd do anything for Mrs. Embury, wouldn't you?"

"Anything." The simple assertion told the whole story, and Fibsy nodded with satisfaction.

"Then tell me truly, sir, please, wasn't Mr. Embury a—a—a—"

"Careful, there. He's dead, you know."

"Yes, I know—but it's necessary, sir. Wasn't he a—I don't know the right term, but a money-grabber?"

"In what way?" Elliott spoke very gravely.

"You know best, sir. He was your partner, had been for some years. But, on the side, now, didn't he do this? Lend money—sorta personally, you know—on security."

"And if he did?"

"Didn't he demand big security—didn't he get men—his friends even—in his power—and then come down on 'em—oh, wasn't he a sort of a loan-shark?"

"Where did you get all this?"

"I put together odds and ends of talk I've heard—and it must be so. That Mr. Patterson, now—"

"Patterson! What do you know of him?"

"Nothing, but that he owed Mr. Embury a lot, and his household stuff was the collateral—and—"

"Where did you learn that? I insist on knowing!"

"Servants' gossip, sir. I picked it up in

the apartment-house. He and the Emburys live in the same one, you know."

"McGuire, you are on a wrong trail. Mr. Embury may have lent money to his friends, may have had collateral security from them, probably did, but that's nothing to do with his being killed. And as it is perhaps a blot on his memory, I do not want the matter made public."

"I understand that, Mr. Elliott—neither do I. But s'posin' the discovery of the murderer hinges on that very thing—that very branch of Mr. Embury's business—then mustn't it be looked into?"

"Perhaps it must—but not by you."

"No, sir. By F. Stone."

CHAPTER XXXI.

HANLON'S AMBITION.

AN important feature of Fleming Stone's efficiency was his ability to make use of the services of others. In the present case, he skillfully utilized both Shane's and Driscoll's energies, and received their reports, diplomatically concealing the fact that he was making tools of them, and letting them infer that he was merely their coworker.

Also, he depended greatly on Fibsy's assistance. The boy was indefatigable, and he did errands intelligently, and made investigations with a minute attention to details, that delighted the heart of his master.

Young McGuire had all the natural attributes of a detective, and under the tuition of Fleming Stone was advancing rapidly.

When assisting Stone on a case, the two usually lived together at some hotel, Stone going back and forth between there and his own home, which was now in a Westchester suburb.

It was part of the routine that the two should breakfast together and plan the day's work. These breakfasts were carefully arranged meals, with correct appointments, for Stone had the boy's good at heart, and was glad to train him in deportment for his own sake; but also, he desired that Fibsy should be presentable in any

society, as the pursuit of the detective calling made it often necessary that the boy should visit in well-conducted homes.

Fibsy was, therefore, eating his breakfast after the most approved formula, when Stone said: "Well, Fibs, how about Sykes and Barton? Now for the tale of your call on Willy Hanlon yesterday."

"I went down there, Mr. Stone, but I didn't see Hanlon. He was out. But, I did a lot better. I saw Mr. Barton, of Sykes and Barton, and I got an earful! It seems Friend Willy has ambitions."

"In what line?"

"Upward! Like the gentleman in the poetry-book, he wants to go higher, higher, ever higher—"

"Airplane?"

"No, not that way—steeplejack."

"Painting spires?"

"Not only spires, but signs in high places, dangerous places. And, you know, Mr. Stone, he told us, that day at the Embury house, that he didn't climb—that he painted signs, and let other people put them up."

"Yes; well? What of it?"

"Only this: why did he try to deceive us? Why, Mr. Barton says he's a most daring climber—he's practising to be a human fly."

"A human fly? Is that a new circus stunt?"

"You know what I mean. You've seen a human fly perform, haven't you?"

"Oh, that chap who stood on his head on the coping of the Woolworth Building to get contributions for the Red Cross? He wasn't Hanlon, was he?"

"No, sir, that man was the original—or one of the first ones. There are lots of human flies, now. They cut up tricks all over the country. And Willy Hanlon is practising for that—but he doesn't want it known."

"All right, I won't tell. His guilty secret is safe with me!"

"Now, you're laughing at me, Mr. Stone! All right—just you wait—and Hanlon goes around on a motor-cycle, too!"

"He does! Then we *are* undone! What a revelation! And now, Fibs, if you'll explain to me the significance of Hanlon's as-

piring ambitions and his weird taste for motor-cycles, I'll be obliged."

Fibsy was extremely, even absurdly sensitive to irony. Sometimes it didn't affect him seriously, and then, again, he would be so hurt and embarrassed by it, that it fairly made him unable to talk.

In this instance, it overcame him utterly, and his funny little freckled face turned red and his eyes lost their eagerness and showed only chagrin.

"Come, come," said Stone, regretting his teasing, but determined to help the boy overcome his sensitiveness to it, "brace up Fibs, you know I meant no harm. I know you have something in your noddle—and, doubtless, something jolly well worth while."

"Well—I—oh, wait a minute, Mr. Stone, I'm a fool, but I can't help it. When you come at me like that, I lose all faith in my notions. For it's only a notion, and a crazy one at that, and—well, sir, you wait till I've worked up a little further—and if there's anything to it—I'll expound. Now, what's my orders for to-day?"

Fibsy had an obstinate streak in his makeup, and Fleming Stone was too wise to insist on Fibsy's "expounding" just then.

Instead, he said, pleasantly, "To-day, Fibs, I want you to make a round of the drug-stores. It's not a hopeful job—indeed, I can't think it can amount to anything—but have a try at it. You remember Mr. Hendricks had the earache—"

"I do, indeed! He had it a month ago, and what's more, he denied it—at first."

"Yes; well, use your discretion for all it's worth, but get a line on the doctor that prescribed for him—it was a bad case, you know, and find out what he got to relieve him and where he got it."

"Yes, sir. Say, Mr. Stone, is Mr. Hendricks implicated?"

"In the murder? Why, he was in Boston at the time—a man can't be in two places at once, can he?"

"He can *not*! He has a perfect alibi—hasn't he, Mr. Stone?"

"He sure has, Fibsy. And yet—he was in the party that discussed the possibilities of despatching people by the henbane route."

"Yes, sir—but so was Mr. Patterson—Miss Desternay said so."

"The Patterson business must be looked into. I'll attend to that to-day—I'll also see Mr. Elliott about that matter of personal loans that Mr. Embury seemed to be conducting as a side business."

"Yes, do, please. Mr. Stone, it would be a first class motive, if Mr. Embury had a strangle-hold on somebody who owed him a whole lot and couldn't pay, and—"

"Fine motive, my boy. But how about opportunity? You forget those bolted doors."

"And Mr. Patterson had borrowed money of Mr. Embury—"

"How do you know that?"

"I heard it—oh, well, I got it from one of the footmen of the apartment house—"

"Footmen! What do you mean?"

"You know there's a lot of employees—porters, rubbish men, doormen, hallmen, pages and Lord knows what!"

"Anyway, one of those persons told me—for a consideration—a lot about the private affairs of the tenants. You know, Mr. Stone, those footmen pick up a lot of information—overhearing here and there—and from the private servants kept by the tenants."

"That's true, Fibs, there must be a mine of information available in that way."

"There is, sir. And I caught onto a good deal—and especially, I learned that Mr. Patterson is in the faction—or whatever you call it—that didn't want Mr. Embury to be president of that club."

"And so you think Mr. Patterson had a hand in the murder?"

Stone's face was grave, and there was no hint of banter in his tone, so Fibsy replied, earnestly: "Well, he is the man who has lots of empty jam jars go down in the garbage pails."

"But he has lots of children."

"Yes, sir—four. Oh, well, I suppose a good many people like raspberry jam."

"Go on, Fibsy; don't be discouraged. As I've often told you, a scrap of evidence is worth considering. A second one, against the same man, is important and a third, is decidedly valuable."

"Yes, sir, that's what I'm bankin' on."

You see, Mr. Patterson, now, he's over head and ears in debt to Embury. He was against Embury for club president. He was present at the henbane discussion. And he's an habitual buyer of raspberry jam."

"Some counts," and Fleming Stone looked thoughtful. "But not entirely convincing. How'd he get in?"

"You know his apartment is directly beneath the Embury apartment—but two floors below."

"Might as well be ten floors below. How could he get in?"

"Somebody got in, Mr. Stone. You know as well as I do, that neither Mrs. Embury nor Miss Ames committed that murder. We must face that."

"Nor did Ferdinand do it. I'll go you all those assumptions."

"All right, sir; then somebody got in from outside."

"How?"

"Mr. Stone, haven't you ever read detective stories where a murder was committed in a room that was locked and double-locked and yet somebody *did* get in—and the fun of the story is guessing *how* he got in."

"Fiction, my boy, is one thing. Fact is quite another."

"No, sir, they're both the same thing!"

"All right, son, have it your own way. Now, if you're ready to get ready—skittle off to your chain of drug-stores, and run down a henbane purchase by any citizen of this little old town—or adjacent boroughs."

Fibsy went off. He had recovered from the sense of annoyance at being chaffed by Stone, but it made him more resolved than ever to prove the strange theory he had formed. He didn't dignify his idea by the name of theory, but he was doggedly sticking to a notion, which, he hoped, would bring forth some strange developments, and speedily.

Laying aside his own plans for the moment, he went about Stone's business, and had little difficulty in finding the nearby druggist whom Hendricks patronized.

"Alvord Hendricks? Sure he trades here," said the dapper young clerk. "He buys mostly shaving-cream and tooth-paste, but here's where he buys it."

"Righto! And, say a month or so ago, he bought some hyoscin—"

"Oh, no, excuse me, he did not! That's not sold hit or miss. But maybe you mean hyoscyamin. That's another thing."

"Why, maybe I do. Look up the sale, can't you, and make sure."

"Why should I?"

Fibsy explained that in the interests of a police investigation it might be better to acquiesce than to question why, and the young man proved obliging.

So Terence McGuire learned that Alvord Hendricks bought some hyoscyamin, on a doctor's prescription, about a month ago—the same to be used to relieve a serious case of earache.

But there was no record of his having bought hyoscin, which was the deadly henbane used in the medicine dropper—nor was there any other record of hyoscin against him.

Satisfied that he had learned all he could, Fibsy continued his round of drug-store visits, in an ever-widening circle, but got no information on any henbane sales whatever.

"Nothin' doin' " he told himself. "Whoever squirted that henbane from that squirter into that ear, brought said henbane from a distance, which, to my mind, indicates a far-seeing and intelligent reasoning power."

CHAPTER XXXII.

"WHAT A FELLER!"

HIS present duty done, he started forth on his own tour of investigation. He went to a small boarding-house, in an inconspicuous street, the address of which had been given him by Mr. Barton, and asked for Mr. Hanlon.

"He ain't home," declared the frowning landlady who opened the door.

"I know it," returned Fibsy, nonchalantly, "but I gotta go up to his room a minute. He sent me."

"How do I know that?"

"That's so, how do you?" Fibsy's grin was sociable. "Well, look here, I guess this'll fix it. I'm errand boy to—you know

who—" he winked mysteriously, "to the man he takes his acrobat lessons off of."

"Oh," the woman looked frightened. "Hush up—it's all right. Only don't mention no names. Go on up-stairs—third floor front."

"Yep," and Fibsy went quietly up the stairs.

Hanlon's room was not locked, but a big wardrobe inside was—and nothing else was of interest to the visitor. He picked at the lock with his knife, but to no avail.

As he stood looking wistfully at the wardrobe door, a cheerful voice sounded behind him:

"I'll open it for you—what do you want out of it?"

Fibsy looked up quickly, to see Hanlon himself smiling at him.

Quick to take a cue, the boy didn't show any embarrassment, but putting out his hand said: "How do you do, Mr. Hanlon?"

"Fine. How's yourself? And why the sneak visit?"

Fibsy looked his questioner square in the eye, and then said, "Oh, well, I s'pose I may as well speak right out."

"You sure may. Either tell the truth, or put up such a convincing lie that I'll think it's the truth. Go ahead."

"Here goes, then," Fibsy made a quick decision that Hanlon was too keen to stand for any lie. "I'm engaged on the Embury murder case."

"I know that's true—though it's hard to believe."

Fibsy chose to ignore this dig, and went on. "I'm here because I want to see how you're mixed up in it."

"Oh, you do! Why not ask me?"

"All right—I ask you. How are you connected with the murder of Sanford Embury?"

"Will anything I say be used against me?" Hanlon's tone was jocular but he was staring hard at Fibsy's face.

"If it's usable," was the quiet reply.

"Well, use it if you can. I'm mixed up in the matter—as you put it—because I'm trying to find the murderer on my own account."

"Why do you want the murderer on your own account?"

"I didn't agree to answer more than one question. But I will. I don't want the murderer particularly, but I'm interested in the case. I've the detective instinct myself, and I thought if I could track down the villain—I might get a reward—"

"Is there one offered?"

"Not that I know of—but I daresay either Mr. Elliott or Mr. Hendricks would willingly pay to have the murderer found."

"Why those two? Why not Mrs. Embury?"

"Innocent child! Those two are deeply, desperately, darkly in love with the—the widow."

"Let's leave her out of this!"

"Ha, ha! a squire of dames, eh—and at *your* age! All right—leave the lady's name out. But I've confessed my hidden purpose. Now tell me what brings you to my domicile, on false pretenses—and why do I find you on the point of breaking into my wardrobe?"

"Truth does it! I wanted to see if I could find a false beard and a white turban."

"Oh, you did! And what good would that do you? You have cleverly discerned that I assumed an innocent disguise in order to give aid and comfort to a most worthy dame of advanced years."

"You did—but why?"

"Are you Paul Pry? You'll drive me crazy with your eternal why?"

"All right, go crazy—but, why?"

"The same old reason," and Hanlon spoke seriously. "I'm trying, as I said, to find the Embury murderer, and I contrived that session with the old lady, in hopes of learning something to help me along."

"And did you?"

"I learned that she is a harmless, but none the less, positively demented woman. I learned that she deceives herself—in a way, hypnotizes herself, and she believes she sees and hears things that she does not see and hear."

"And tastes them? And smells them?"

"There, too, she deceived herself. Surely, you don't take in that story of her 'vision'?"

"I believe she believes it."

"Yes, so do I. Now, look here, Mc-

Guire, I'm a good-natured sort, and I'm willing to overlook this raid of yours, if you'll join forces. I can help you, but only if you're frank and honest in whacking up with me whatever information you have. I know something, you know something—will you go in cahoots?"

"I would, Mr. Hanlon," and Fibsy looked regretful, "I would if I was my own boss. But, you see, I'm under orders. I'm F. Stone's helper—and I'll tell you what he says I can—and that's all."

"That goes. I don't want any more than your boss lets you spill. And now—honest—what did you come here for?"

"To look in that wardrobe, as I said."

"Why, bless your heart, child, you're welcome to do that."

Hanlon drew a key from his pocket, and flung the wardrobe door wide. There you are. Go to it!"

Swiftly, but methodically, Fibsy took down every article of wearing apparel the wardrobe contained, glanced at it and returned it, Hanlon looking on with an amused expression on his face.

"Any incriminating evidence?" he said at last, as Fibsy hung up the final piece of clothing.

"Not a scrap," was the honest reply. "If I don't get more evidence often somebody else than I do from you, I'll go home empty-handed!"

"Let me help you," and Hanlon spoke kindly; "I'll hunt evidence with you."

"Some day maybe. I've got to-day all dated up. And, say, why did you tell me you wasn't a steeplejack painter, when you are?"

"You're right, I am. But I don't want it known, because I'm going to branch out in a new field soon, and I don't want that advertised at present."

"I know, Mr. Barton told me. You're going to be a human fly, and cut up pranks on the edges of roofs of skyscrapers—"

"Hush, not so loud. Yes, I am, but the goal is far distant. But I'm going to have a whack at it—and I know I can succeed, in time."

Hanlon's eyes had a faraway, hopeful look as if gazing into a future of marvelous achievement in his chosen field. "Oh, I

say, boy! It's glorious, this becoming expert in something difficult. It pays for all the work and training and practise!"

The true artist's ambition rang in his voice, and Fibsy gazed at him, fascinated, for the boy was a hero-worshipper, and adored proficiency in any art.

"When you going to exhibit?" he asked eagerly.

"A little try at it next week. Wanta come?"

"Don't I! Where?"

"Hush! I'll whisper. Philadelphia."

"I'll be there! Lemme know the date and all."

"Yes, I will. Must you go? Here's your hat."

Fibsy laughed, took the hint and departed.

"What a feller!" he marveled to himself, as he went on his way. "Oh, gee, what a feller!"

CHAPTER XXXIII.

LOVE—OF TWO KINDS.

"ALVORD, you shock me—you amaze me! How dare you talk to me of love, when my husband hasn't been dead a fortnight?"

"What matter, Eunice? You never really loved Sanford—"

"I did—I did!"

"Not lately, anyhow. Perhaps just at first, and then, not deeply. He carried you originally by storm—it was an even toss-up whether he or Elliott or I won out. He was the most forceful of the three, and he *made* you marry him—didn't he, now?"

"Don't talk nonsense, I married Sanford of my own free will—"

"Yes, and in haste, and repented at leisure. Now, don't be hypocritical, and pretend to grieve for him. His death was shocking, fearful, but you're really relieved that he is gone. Why not admit it?"

"Alvord, stop such talk! I command you! I won't listen!"

"Very well, dearest, I'll stop it. I beg your pardon—I forgot myself, I confess. Now, let me atone. I love you, Eunice, and I'll promise not to tell you so, or to talk

about it now, if you'll just give me a ray of hope—a glimmer of anticipation.

"Will you—sometime—darling, let me tell you of my love? After such an interval as you judge proper? Will you, Eunice?"

"No, I will not! I don't love you—I never did, and never can love you! How did you ever get such an idea into your head?"

The beautiful face expressed surprise and incredulity, rather than anger, and Eunice's voice was gentle. In such a mood, she was even more attractive than in her more vivacious moments.

Unable to control himself, Hendricks took a step toward her, and folded her in his arms.

She made no effort to disengage herself, but said, in a tone of utter disdain: "Let me go, Alvord; you bore me."

As she had well known, this angered him far more than her own angry words would have done.

He released her instantly, but his face was blazing with indignation.

"Oh, I do—do I? And who can make love to you, and not bore you? Elliott?"

"You are still forgetting yourself."

"I am not! I am thinking of myself only. Oh, Eunice—dear Eunice, I have loved you so long—and I *have* been good. All the time you were Sanford's wife, I never so much as called you 'dear',—never gave you even a look that wasn't one of respect for my friend's wife.

"But, now—now, that you are free—I have a right to woo you. It is too soon—yes, I know that—but I will wait—wait as long, as you command, if you'll only promise me that I may—sometime—"

"Never! I told you that before—I do not want to be obliged to repeat it! Please understand, once for all, I have no love to give you—"

"Because it is another's! Eunice, tell me you do not care for Elliott, and I won't say another word—now. I'll wait patiently—for a year, two years, as long as you wish—only give me the assurance that you will not marry Mason Elliott."

"You are impossible! How dare you speak to me of my marriage with anybody,

when my husband is only just dead? One word more, Alvord, on the subject, and I shall forbid you my house!"

"All right, my lady! Put on your high and mighty air, if you choose—but before you marry that man, you had better make sure that he did not prepare the way for the wedding!"

"What do you mean? Are you accusing Mason of—"

"I make no accusations. But, who killed Sanford? I know you didn't do it—and Elliott has engaged Stone to prove that you didn't. It is absurd, we all know, to suspect Aunt Abby. I was out of town—who is left but Mason?"

"Hush! I won't listen to such a suggestion! Mason was at his home that night."

"Are you sure?"

"Of course I'm sure! And I don't have to have it proved by a detective, either! And now, Alvord Hendricks you may go! I don't care to talk to anyone who can make such a contemptible accusation against a lifelong friend!"

But before Hendricks left, Elliott himself came in.

He was grave and preoccupied. He bowed a little curtly to Hendricks, and, as he took Eunice's hand, he said: "May I not see you alone? I want to talk over some business matters—and I'm pressed for time."

"Oh, all right," Hendricks said, "I can take a hint. I'm going. How's your sleuth progressing, Elliott? Has Mr. Stone unearthed the murderer yet?"

"Not yet—but soon," and Elliott essayed to pass the subject off lightly.

"Very soon?" Hendricks looked at him curiously.

"Very soon, I think."

"That's interesting. Would it be indiscreet to ask in what direction one must look for the criminal?"

"It would, very." Elliott smiled a little.

"Now, run along Hendricks there's a good chap. I've important business matters to talk over with Eunice."

Hendricks went, and Elliott turned to Eunice, with a grave face.

"I've been going over Sanford's private

papers," he said, "and Eunice, there's a lot that we want to keep quiet."

"Was Sanford a bad man?" she asked, her quiet, white face imploring a negative answer.

"Not so very, but as you know, he had a love of money, a sort of acquisitiveness that led him into questionable dealings. He loaned money to any one who could give him security—"

"That isn't wrong!"

"Not in itself—but, oh, Eunice, I can't explain it to you—or at least I don't want to—but Sanford lent money to men, to his friends, who were in great straits—who gave their choicest belongings, their treasures as security—and then, he had no leniency, no compassion for them—"

"Why should he have?"

"Because—well, there *is* a justice, that is almost criminal. Sanford was a—*a* Shylock! There, can you understand, now?"

"Who were his debtors? Alvord?"

"Yes; Hendricks was one who owed him enormous sums—and he was going to make lots of trouble—I mean Sanford was. Why, Eunice, in Sanford's private safe are practically all of Hendricks's stocks and bonds put up as a collateral. Sanford holds mortgages on all Hendricks's belongings—real estate, furniture, everything.

"Now, just at the time Sanford died, these notes were due—this indebtedness of Hendricks to Sanford had to be paid, and only the fact of San's death occurring just when it did, saved Alvord from financial ruin."

"Do you mean Sanford would have insisted on the payment?"

"Yes."

"Then—oh, Mason, I can't say it—I wouldn't breathe it to anyone but you—but could Alvord have killed Sanford?"

"Of course not, Eunice. He was in Boston, you know."

"Yes, I know. But—Mason, he hinted to me just now, that—that maybe you killed San."

"Did he, dear? Then he was angry or—*or* crazy! He doesn't think so. Perhaps he was—jealous."

"Yes, he was! How did you know?"

"I have eyes. You don't care for him—particularly—do you—Eunice?"

Their eyes met—and in one long look, the truth was told. A great love existed between these two, and both had been honest and honorable so long as Eunice was Sanford's wife. And even now, though Embury was gone, Elliott made no protestation of love to his widow—said no word that might not have been heard by the whole world, but they both knew—no word was necessary.

A beautiful expression came over Eunice's face; she smiled a little and the love-light in her eyes was unmistakable.

"I shall never lose my temper again," she said, softly, and Mason Elliott believed her.

"Another big debtor to Sanford is Mr. Patterson," he went on, forcing himself to calm his riotous pulses, and continue his business talk.

"How that man seems to be mixed into our affairs."

"He's very much mixed up in San's affairs. But, Eunice, I don't want to burden you with all these details. Only, you see, Alvord is your lawyer, and—it's confoundedly awkward—"

"Look here, Mason, do this—can't you? Forgive Alvord all Sanford's claims on him. I mean, wipe the slate clean, as far as he is concerned.

"I don't want his money—I mean I don't want his stocks and things. Give them back to him, and hush the matter up. You know, we four, Sanford and Alvord and you and I, are the old quartet—the 'three boys and a girl' who used to play together. Now one of us is gone—don't let's make any trouble for another of the group.

"I've enough money without realizing on Alvord's securities. Give them all back to him—and forget it. Can't we?"

"Why, yes, I suppose so—if you so decree. What about Patterson?"

"Oh, those things you and Alvord must look after. I've no head for business. And anyway—must it be attended to at once?"

"Not immediately. Sanford's estate is so large and his debtors so numerous, it will take months to get it adjusted."

"Very well, let anything unpleasant wait for a while, then."

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE GUILTY ONE.

NOW, on this very day, and at this very hour Fibly was in Philadelphia, watching the initial performance of a new "human fly."

A crowd was gathered about the tall skyscraper, where the event was to take place, and when Hanlon appeared, he was greeted by a roar that warmed his heart.

Bowing and smiling at his audience, he started on his perilous climb up the side of the building.

The sight was thrilling, nerve-racking. Breathlessly the people watched as he climbed up the straight, sheer façade, catching now at a window ledge, now at a bit of stone ornamentation, and again, seeming to hold on by nothing at all—almost as a real fly does.

When he negotiated a particularly difficult place, the crowd forebore to cheer, instinctively, feeling that it might disturb him.

He went on, higher and higher, pausing at times to look down and smile at the sea of upturned faces below. Then, in a moment of bravado, he even dared to pause, and hanging on by one hand and one foot, he "scissored out" his other limbs and waved a tiny flag which he carried.

On he went, and on, at last reaching the very top. Over the coping he climbed, and gaily waved his flag as he bowed to the applauding crowds in the street.

Then, for Hanlon was a daring soul, the return journey was begun.

Even more fascinating and dangerous than the ascent was this feat.

Fibly watched him, noted every step, every motion, and was fairly beside himself with the excitement of the moment.

And, then, when half a dozen stories from the ground—when success was almost within his grasp, something happened. Nobody knew what—a slip, a misstep, a miscalculation of distance—whatever the cause, Hanlon fell. Fell from the sixth story to the ground.

Those nearest the catastrophe jumped back. Others pushed forward. An ambulance, ready for such a possible occasion, hurried the injured man to the hospital.

For Hanlon was not killed, but so crushed and broken that his life was but a matter of hours—perhaps moments.

"Let me in—I must see him!" Fibly fought the doormen, the attendants.

"I tell you I must! In the name of the law, let me in!"

And then, a more coherent insistence brought him permission and he was admitted to Hanlon's presence.

A priest was there, administering final unction, and saying such words of comfort as he could command, but at sight of Fibly, Hanlon's dull eyes brightened and he partially revived.

"Yes—him!" he cried out, with a sudden flicker of energy. "I must talk to him!"

The doctor fell back, and made way for the boy.

"Let him talk if he likes," he said. Nothing matters now. Poor chap, he can't live ten minutes."

Awed, but determined, Fibly approached the bedside.

He looked at Hanlon—strangely still and white, yet his eyes burning with a desperate desire to communicate something.

"Come here," he whispered, and Fibly drew nearer.

"You know?" he said.

"Yes," and Fibly glanced around as if to be sure of his witnesses to this strange confession. "You killed Sanford Embury."

"I did. I—I, oh, I can't talk. You talk—"

"This is his confession," Fibly turned to the priest and the doctor. "Listen to it.

Then addressing himself again to Hanlon, he resumed: "You climbed up the side of the apartment house—on the cross street, not on Park Avenue, and you got in at Miss Ames's window."

"Yes," said Hanlon, his white lips barely moving, but his eyes showing acquiescence.

"You went straight through those two rooms—softly, not awakening either of the ladies—and you killed Mr. Embury, and

then—you returned through the same bedrooms—”

Again the eyes said yes.

“And, when you were passing through Miss Ames’s room, she stirred, and thinking she might be awake, you stopped and leaned over her to see. There, you accidentally let fall—perhaps from your breast pocket—the little glass dropper, you had used—and as you bent over the old lady, she grabbed at you, and felt your jersey sleeve—even bit at it—and tasted raspberry jam. That jam got on that sleeve as you climbed up past the Patterson’s window, where a jar of it was on the window sill—”

“Yes—that’s right—” Hanlon breathed, and on his face was a distinct look of admiration for the boy’s perception.

“You wore a faintly-ticking wrist-watch—the same one you’re wearing now—and the odor of gasoline about you, was from your motor-cycle. You, then were the vision Miss Ames has so often described, and you glided silently away from her bedside, and out at the window by which you entered. Gee! It was some stunt!”

This tribute of praise was wrung from Fibsy by the sudden realization that what he had for some time surmised, was really true!

“I guess it was that jam that did for you,” he went on, “but, say, we ain’t got no time for talkin’.”

Hanlon’s eyes were already glazing, his breath came shorter and it was plain to be seen the end was very near.

“Who hired you?” Fibsy flung the question at him, with such force that it seemed to rouse a last effort of the ebbing life, in the dying man and he answered, faintly but clearly:

“Alvord Hendricks—ten thousand dollars—”

And then Hanlon was gone.

Reminding the priest and the doctor that they were witnesses to this dying confession, Fibsy rushed from the room and back to New York as fast as he could get there.

He learned by telephone that Fleming Stone was at Mrs. Embury’s, and, pausing only to telephone for Shane to go at once to

the same house, Fibsy jumped in a taxicab and hurried up there himself.

“It’s all over,” he burst forth, as he dashed into the room where Stone sat, talking to Eunice. Mason Elliott was there, too, indeed, he was a frequent visitor, and Aunt Abby sat by with her knitting.

“What is?” asked Stone, looking at the boy in concern. For Fibsy was greatly excited, his fingers worked nervously and his voice shook.

“The whole thing, Mr. Stone! Hanlon’s dead—and he killed Mr. Embury.”

“Yes,—I know—” Fleming Stone showed no surprise. “Did he fall?”

“Yes sir. Got up the climb all right, and ’most down again, and fell from the sixth floor. Killed him—but not instantly. I went to the hospital, and he confessed.”

“Who did?” said Shane, coming in at the door as the last words were spoken.

“Willy Hanlon—the human fly.”

And then Fleming Stone told the whole story—Fibsy adding here and there his bits of information.

“But I don’t understand,” said Shane at last, “why would that chap kill Mr. Embury?”

“Hired,” said Fibsy, as Stone hesitated to speak; “hired by a man who paid him ten thousand dollars.”

“Hanlon a gunman!” said Shane, amazed.

“Not a professional one,” Fibsy said, “but he acted as one in this case. The man who hired him knew he was privately learning to be a ‘human fly’, and he had the diabolical thought of hiring him to climb up this house, and get in at the only available window, and kill Mr. Embury with that henbane stuff.”

“And the man’s name?” shouted Shane. “The name?”

Fibsy sat silent, looking at Stone.

“His name is Alvord E. Hendricks,” was Stone’s quiet reply.

An instant commotion arose. Eunice, her great eyes full of horror, ran to Aunt Abby, who seemed about to collapse.

Mason Elliott started up with a sudden: “Where is he?” and Shane echoed, with a roar: “Yes, where is he? Can he get away?”

"No," said Stone, "he can't. I have him covered day and night by my men. At present, Mr. Shane, he is, I am quite sure, in his office—if you want to go there—"

"If I want to go there! I should say I do! He'll get *his*!"

And in less than half an hour, Shane had taken Alvord Hendricks into custody, and in due time that arch criminal received the retribution of justice.

Shane gone, Fibsy went over the whole story again.

"You see, it was Mr. Stone's keeping at it, what did it. He connected up Hanlon and the jam—he connected up Mr. Hendricks and the Hamlet business—we connected up Hanlon and the gasoline—and Hanlon and the jersey and the motor-cycle and all!" Fibsy grew excited; "Then we connected up Hendricks and his 'perfect alibi.' Always distrust the perfect alibi—that's one of Mr. Stone's first maxims.

"Well, this Hendricks, he had a pluperfect alibi, couldn't be shaken, so Mr. Stone, he says, the more perfect the alibi, the more we must distrust it. So he went for that alibi—and he found that Mr. Hendricks was sure in Boston that night, but he didn't have any real reason, not any imperative reason for going—it was a sorta trumped up trip.

"Well, that's the way it was. He had to get Mr. Embury out of the way just

then, or be shown up—a ruined man—and, too, he was afraid Mr. Embury'd be president of the club—and, too—he wanted to—"

Fibsy gave one eloquent glance at Eunice, and paused abruptly in his speech.

Every one knew—every one realized that love of Sanford Embury's wife was one reason, at least, for the fatal deed. Everybody realized that Alvord Hendricks was a villain through and through—that he had killed his friend—though not by his own hand.

Eunice never saw Hendricks again. She and Aunt Abby went away for a year's stay. They traveled in lovely lands, where the scenery and climate brought rest and peace to Eunice's troubled heart, and where she learned, by honest effort, to control her quick temper.

And, then, after two of the one-time friendly quartet had become only past memory, the remaining two, Eunice and Mason Elliott found happiness and joy.

"One of our biggest cases, F. Stone," said Fibsy, one day, reminiscently.

"It was, indeed, Fibs: and you did yourself proud."

"Great old scheme! Perfect alibi—unknown human fly—bolted doors—all the elements of a successful crime—if he hadn't slipped on that raspberry jam!"

(The end.)

REMEMBRANCE


BY LOUIS GINSBERG

I SAW two lovers in the park—
And felt as if a spark was caught
Swift from a flash of memory
To kindle all my boughs of thought!

Till branch on branch, and bough on bough
Flared with the fire leaping fast—
Blazed to the roots of all my mind,
In conflagration of my past!

And in the circle of the flames
That ranged around like tongues of fire,
Again I saw you lean to me,
O sweetheart of my heart's desire!

The Worth of the Diamond

by 

Patterson McNutt

A LITTLE boy and girl sat beneath the cooling shade of a twisted old oak-tree and dreamed the dreams that are the almost realities of childhood. A party of tourists waved at them, and they watched the big car with interest until it disappeared into the dust and haze of the languorous midsummer noontime.

"I'd kinda like to go out there sometime," the boy said dreamily.

"Out where?"

"Oh, out there." The child waved a scrubby, brown little hand vaguely toward the distant hills. "Out there—where the people's goin'."

"Huh! What'd you do if you did go there?"

"I'd kill Indians—that's what I'd do," the boy replied stoutly.

"Aw, I wouldn't do that."

"Huh! You wouldn't do anything. Why, you're only a girl"—he crushed her with the scorn of his glance—"what *could* you do?"

Her little pig-tails tossed as she flung up her head with a haughty gesture.

"Well," she said, "I guess I could be a princess or sump'n. I could—"

The boy interrupted her with a sudden exclamation of excitement.

"Oo-o, lookut! Lookut what I found," he cried.

From the side of the road he snatched a glittering, sparkling, brilliant diamond. A

connoisseur of diamonds would have wept over it and fondled it like a human thing. A queen would have considered it a handsome gift from the royal consort. An artist would have marveled at the brilliance and variety of the bluish-white coloring which danced to the rays of the summer sun.

The little girl regarded the boy's prize indifferently.

"Aw, what you so excited about?" she inquired. "It ain't nothin' but glass."

A young man and girl strolled along the edge of the Milburn Country Club's golf-course. The silence between them was not the easy, unconstrained silence of comradeship; the young man was embarrassed—a sort of anticipatory embarrassment; the girl seemed resignedly waiting his words; and she was just a little bored.

"I want to speak to you," he began finally. "It's about something important."

"I know what it is," she interrupted quietly. There was no coldness, no hint of anger in her voice. Just indifference, resignation and a little annoyance.

"You know what?" the boy asked.

"I know that you're going to ask me to marry you," she informed him.

"Why—why, how'd you know that?" he asked incredulously.

"My father spoke to me last night, too. Oh, our fathers have arranged everything perfectly for us, haven't they?"

She sighed and added: "It—it isn't at all like I thought it was going to be."

The boy gazed at her in dazed surprise. "I don't understand," he said. "What isn't like what it was going to be?"

"Getting engaged," she replied. "When I used to dream of being a princess I always thought of a prince who some day would come to me on a snow-white steed and—Oh, I know I'm awfully foolish, but I want romance. I've always wanted it."

"I don't want to stay in Milburn where everything is cut to an ordered pattern. I want to go out into the world and search for the prince and romance. I—"

"Why, say," the boy interrupted her excitedly, "you've got the same ideas I have. I'm a nut about romance. I never told anybody about it before. It seemed kind of foolish, but just the same *Don Quixote* and *François Villon*, and all those romantic fellows were the chaps I liked best. In college I just ate 'em up. Why, I think romance is the greatest thing there is."

He stopped in sudden embarrassment at this impulsive revelation of his intimate feelings.

"Well," he said ruefully, "you certainly can't find any romance in Milburn."

"No," the girl agreed with him, "you can't. And I'm going to tell you something. I'm not going to be cheated by staying in Milburn. I'm going out into the world and find my romance. I'm going right away."

"And—I think you ought to go, too. You'll always be unhappy if you stay here and know that your dreams will never come true because you were afraid to venture."

The eager, determined resolution of the girl found instant sympathy reflected in the eyes of the boy.

"I *will* venture," he said.

"Romance," she whispered softly. "It isn't in Milburn. It's out there somewhere."

The last faint rays of the setting sun had disappeared from the purpling sky and the fast-gathering twilight had driven the few remaining players from the course as they finally turned homeward. A long, contented silence of happy hopes, and only a few fears for the future was broken by the boy.

"We haven't got any use for this now," he indicated a ring which he had taken from

his pocket. "I had our lucky diamond we found as kids set into this ring. I was going to give it to you for our engagement."

The beautiful, cold blue brilliance of the exquisite stone was set in a circle of plain, dull gold. No satellites of pearls or sapphire offered humble evidence to the perfection of the diamond.

The beauty of the ring evoked no response from her.

"Oh, well," he said as he fingered the ring, "I guess it isn't much, anyway."

A man and a woman sat on a rustic bench in the garden of a beautiful estate on the Hudson. The man was a brilliant, widely known engineer who had just returned from a difficult job of construction, recently finished in South America. The woman was a beautiful, accomplished actress of exquisite charm and grace.

The soft light from an August moon at full filtered through the trees and gave silent battle to the dancing shadows. The murmuring splash of a small fountain mingled with the lilting strains of a waltz carried by the soft night wind from the windows of the house through which the gliding forms of dancers could be seen.

"My dear," the man said gently, "I think we've come to the end of the circle. I want to announce our engagement to-night. You're the princess and I'm the prince. We've found our romance after all these years of search, haven't we?"

The woman offered no answer except an affirmative pressure of the hand.

"I have a ring here I want to give you," the man continued. "I hope you will like it. It's really a very wonderful bit of jewelry."

It was a ring of gold he offered—a ring set with a wonderful, priceless diamond caught in a design of changing, merging colors from hardly less brilliant jewels.

"Oh, my dear," she said breathlessly, "what a perfectly beautiful diamond. It's certainly the most exquisite one I have ever seen!"

"It is a beautiful stone." The man sighed a little sadly. "And it's the same diamond we had so many years ago; only now—it's in a different setting."

The Gold Girl

By James B. Hendryx

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CHAPTER XXXI.

TRUE COLORS.

THE girl's first impulse was to turn and fly, but as if divining her thoughts, the man pushed nearer, and she saw that his eyes gleamed horribly between lids drawn to slits.

Had he discovered that she had tricked him with a false claim? If not why the glare of hate, and the sneering smile, that told plainer than words that he had her completely in his power, and knew it.

"So, my fine lady—we meet again! We have much to talk about—you and I. But, first, about the claim. You thought you were very wise with your lying about not having a map. You thought to save the whole loaf for yourself—you thought I was fool enough to believe you. If you had let me in, you would have had half—now you have nothing.

"The claim is all staked and filed, and the adjoining claims for a mile are staked with the stakes of my friends—and you have nothing! You were the fool! You couldn't have won against me. Failing in my story of partnership with your father, I had intended to marry you, and failing in that, I should have taken the map by force—for I knew you carried it with you. But I dislike violence when the end may be gained by other means, so I waited until, at last, happened the thing I knew would happen—you became careless. You left

your precious map and photograph in plain sight upon your little table—and now you have nothing."

So he had not discovered the deception. But, through accident or design, had seized this opportunity to gloat over her, and taunt her with her loss. His carefully assumed mask of suave courtliness had disappeared, and Patty realized that at last she was face to face with the real Bethune, a creature so mean that he boasted openly and with satisfaction of having stolen her secret, as though the fact redounded greatly to his credit.

A sudden rage seized her. She touched her horse with a spur. "Let me pass!" she demanded, her lips white.

The man's answer was a sneering laugh, as he blocked her way: "Ho! not so fast, my pretty! How about the Samuelson horse raid—your part in it? Three of my best men are in hell because you tipped off that raid to Vil Holland! How you found it out I do not know—but women, of a certain kind, can find out anything from men. No doubt Clen, in some sweet secret meeting place, poured the story into your ear, although he denies it on his life."

"What do you mean?"

"Ha! Ha! Injured innocence!" He leered knowingly into her flashing eyes; "It seems that everyone else knew what I did not. But I am of a forgiving nature. I will not see you starve. Leave the others and come to me—"

This story began in the All-Story Weekly for December 27.

"*You cur!*" The words cut like the swish of a lash, and again the man laughed:

"Oh, not so fast, you hussy! I must admit it rather piqued me to be bested in the matter of a woman—and by a soul-puncher. I was on hand early that morning, to spy upon your movements, as was my custom. I speak of the morning following the night that the very Reverend Christie spent with you in your cabin. I should not have believed it, had I not seen his horse running unsaddled with your own. Also, later, I saw you come out of the cabin together. Then I damned myself for not having reached out before and taken what was there for me to take."

With a low cry of fury, the girl drove her spurs into her horse's sides. The animal leaned against Bethune's horse, forcing him aside. The quarter-breed reached swiftly for her bridle reins, and as he leaned forward with his arm outstretched, Patty summoned all her strength and, whirling her heavy braided rawhide quirt high above her head, brought it down with the full sweep of her muscular arm.

The feel of the blow was good as it landed squarely upon the inflamed brutish face, and the shrill scream of pain that followed, sent a wild thrill of joy to the very heart of the girl. Again the lash swung high, this time to descend upon the flank of her horse, and before Bethune could recover himself, the frenzied animal shot up the valley, running with every ounce there was in him.

The valley floor was fairly level, and a hundred yards away the girl shot a swift glance over her shoulder. Bethune's horse was getting under way in frantic leaps that told of cruel spurring, and with her eyes to the front, she bent forward over the horn and slapped her horse's neck with her gloved hand. She remembered with a quick gasp of relief that Bethune prided himself upon the fact that he never carried a gun. She had once taunted Vil Holland with the fact, and he had replied that "Greasers and breeds were generally sneaking enough to be knife-men."

Again, she glanced over her shoulder and smiled grimly as she noted that the distance between the two flying horses had increased

by half. "Good old boy," she whispered, "You can beat him—can 'run rings around him', as Vil would say. It would be a long knife that could harm me now," she thought, as she pulled her Stetson tight against the sweep of the rushing wind. The ground was becoming more and more uneven. Loose rock fragments were strewn about in increasing numbers, and the valley was narrowing to an extent that necessitated frequent fording of the shallow creek.

"He can't make any better time than I can," muttered the girl, as she noted the slackening of her horse's speed. She was riding on a loose rein, giving her horse his head, for she realized that to force him, might mean a misstep and a fall. She closed her eyes and shuddered at the thought of a fall.

A thousand times better had she fallen and been pounded to a pulp by the flying hoofs of the horse herd, than to fall now—and survive it.

The ascent became steeper. Her horse was still running, but very slowly. His neck and shoulders were reeking with sweat, and she could hear the labored breath pumping through his distended nostrils.

A sudden fear shot through her. Nine valleys in every ten, she knew, ended in surmountable divides; and she knew, also, that every valley in every ten did not. Suppose this one that she had chosen at random terminated in a cul-de-sac? The way became steeper. Running was out of the question, and her horse was forging upward in a curious scrambling walk. A noise of clattering rocks sounded behind her, and Patty glanced backward straight into the face of Bethune. Reckless of a fall in the blind fury of his passion, the quarter-breed had forced his horse to his utmost and rapidly closed up the gap until scarcely ten yards separated him from the fleeing girl.

In a frenzy of terror she lashed her laboring horse's flanks as the animal dug and clawed like a cat at the loose rock footing of the steep ascent. White to the lips she searched the foreground for a ravine or a coulée that would afford a means of escape. But before her loomed only the ever steepening wall, its surface half concealed by the

scattering scrub. Once more she looked backward. The breath was whistling through the blood-red flaring nostrils of Bethune's horse, and her glance flew to the face of the man. Never in her wildest nightmares had she imagined the soul-curdling horror of that face. The lips writhed back in a hideous grin of hate. A long blue-red welt bisected the features obliquely—a welt from which red blood flowed freely at the corner of a swollen eye. White foam gathered upon the distorted lips and drooled down onto the chin where it mingled with the blood. The uninjured eye was a narrow gleam of venom, and the breath swished through the man's nostrils as from the strain of great physical labor.

"Oh, for my gun!" thought the girl, "I'd—I'd *kill* him!" With a wild scramble her horse went down. "Vil! Vil!" she shrieked, in a frenzy of despair, and freeing herself from the floundering animal, she struggled to her feet and faced her pursuer with a sharp rock fragment upraised in her two hands.

Monk Bethune laughed—as the fiends must laugh in hell. A laugh that struck a chill to the very heart of the girl. Her muscles went limp at the sound of it and she felt the strength ebbing from her body like sand from an upturned glass. The rock fragment became an insupportable weight. It crashed to the ground, and rolled clattering to Bethune's feet. He, too, had dismounted and stood beside his horse, his fists slowly clenching and unclenching in gloating anticipation.

Patty turned to run, but her limbs felt numb and heavy, and she pitched forward upon her knees. With a slow movement of his hand, Bethune wiped the pink foam from his chin, examined it, snapped it from his fingers, cleansed them upon the sleeve of his shirt—and again, deliberately, he laughed, and started to climb slowly forward.

A rock slipped close beside the girl, and the next instant a voice sounded in her ear: "I don't reckon he's 'round yere, miss. I hain't saw Vil this mo'nin'." Rifle in hand, Watts stepped from behind a scrub pine, and as his eyes fell upon Bethune, he stood fumbling his beard with uncertain fingers,

"He—he'll kill me!" gasped the girl.

"Sho', now, miss—he won't hurt yo' none, will yo', Mr. Bethune? Gen'ral Jackson! Mr. Bethune, look at yo' face! Yo' must of rode ag'in' a limb!"

"Shut up and get out of here!" screamed the quarter-breed. "And if you know what's good for you, you'll forget that you've seen anyone this morning."

"B'en layin' up yere in the gap fer to git me a deer. I heer'd yo'—all comin', like, so's I waited."

"Get out, I tell you, before I kill you!" cried Bethune, beside himself with rage. "Go!" The man's hand plunged beneath his shirt and came out with a glitter of steel.

The mountaineer eyed the blade indifferently, and turned to the girl. "Ef yo' goin' my ways, ma'm, jest yo' lead yo' horse on ahead. They's a game trail runs slaunchways up th'ough the gap yender. I'll kind o' foller 'long behind."

"You fool!" shrilled Bethune, as he made a grab for the girl's reins, and the next instant found himself looking straight into the muzzle of Watts's rifle.

"Drap them lines," drawled the mountaineer. "Thet hain't yo' hoss. An' what's over an' above, yo' better put up yo' whittle, an' tu'n 'round an' go back wher' yo' com' from."

"Lower that gun!" commanded Bethune. "It's cocked!"

"Yas, hit's cocked, Mr. Bethune, an' hit's sot mighty light on the trigger. Ef I'd git a little scairt, er a little riled er my foot 'ud slip, yo'd have to be drug down to wher' the diggin's easy, an' buried."

Bethune deliberately slipped the knife back into his shirt, and laughed: "Oh, come, now, Watts, a joke's a joke. I played a joke on Miss Sinclair to frighten her—"

"Yo' done 'hit, all right," interrupted Watts. "An' that's the end on't."

The rifle muzzle still covered Bethune's chest in the precise region of his heart, and once more he changed his tactics. "Don't be a fool, Watts," he said, in an undertone. "I'm rich—richer than you, or anyone else knows. I've located Rod Sinclair's strike and filed it. If you just slip quietly off about your business, and forget that you

ever saw anyone here this morning—and see to it that you never remember it again, you'll never have reason to regret it. I'll make it right with you—I'll file you next to discovery."

"Yo' mean," asked Watts, slowly, "thet you've stoled the mine offen Sinclair's darter, an' filed hit yo'self, an' thet ef I go 'way an' let yo' finish the job by murderin' the gal, yo'll give me some of the mine—is thet what yo' tryin' to git at?"

"Put it anyway you want to, damn you! Words don't matter. But for God's sake, get out! If she once gets through the gap—"

"Bethune," Watts drawled the name, even more than was his wont, and the quarter-breed noticed that the usually roving eyes had set into a hard stare behind which lurked a dangerous glitter, "yo're a ornery, low-down cur dog what hain't fitten to be run with by man, beast, or devil. I'd ort to shoot yo' daid right wher' yo' at—an' mebbe I will.

"But comin' to squint yo' over, that there damage looks mo' like a quirt-lick than a limb. Thet ort to hurt like fire fer a couple o' days, an' when it lets up yo' face hain't a-goin' to be so purty as what hit wus. Ef she'd just of drug the quirt along a little when hit landed she c'd of cut plumb in to the bone—but hit's middlin' fair, as hit stands. I'm a-goin' to give yo' a chanst—an' a warmin', too.

"Next time I see yo' I'm a-goin' to kill yo'—whenever, or wherever hit's at. I'll do hit, jest as shore as my name is John Watts. Yo' kin go now—back the way yo' come, pervidin' yo' go fast. I'm a-goin' to count up to wher' I know how to—I hain't never be'n to school none, but I counted up to nineteen, wunst—an' whin I git to wher' I cain't rec'lec' the nex' figger, I'm a-goin' to shoot, an' shoot straight. An' I hain't a-goin' to study 'long about them figgers, neither. Le's see, 'one' comes fust—yere goes, then: One—two—"

For a single instant, Bethune gazed into the man's eyes and the next, he sprang into the saddle, and dashing wildly down the steep slope, disappeared into the scrub.

"Spec' I'd ort to kill him," regretted the mountaineer, as he lowered the rifle, and

gazed off down the valley, "but I hain't got no appetite fer diggin'."

CHAPTER XXXII.

PATTY MAKES HER STRIKE.

IT was noon, one week from the day she had returned from the Samuelson ranch, and Patty Sinclair stood upon the high shoulder of a butte and looked down into a rock-rimmed valley. Her eyes roved slowly up and down the depression where the dark green of the scrub contrasted sharply with the crinkly buffalo grass, yellowed to spun gold beneath the rays of the summer sun.

She reached up and stroked the neck of her horse! "Just think, old partner, three days from now I may be teaching school in that horrid little town with its ratty hotel, and its picture shows, and its saloons, and you may be turned out in the pasture with nothing to do but eat and grow fat! If we don't find our claim to-day, or to-morrow, it's good-by hill-country 'til next summer."

The day following her encounter with Bethune, Vil Holland had appeared, true to his promise, and instructed her in the use of her father's six-gun. At the end of an hour's practice, she had been able to kick up the dirt in close proximity to a tomato can at fifteen steps, and twice she had actually hit it. "That's good enough for any use you're apt to have for it," her instructor had approved. "The main thing is that you ain't afraid of it. An' remember," he added, "a gun ain't made to bluff with. Don't pull it on anyone unless you go through with it. Only short-horns, an' pilgrims ever pull a gun that don't need wipin' before it's put back—I could show you the graves of several of 'em.

"I'm leavin' you some extry shells that you can shoot up the scenery with. Always pick out somethin' little to shoot at—start in with tin cans and work down to match-sticks. When you can break six match-sticks with six shots at ten steps in ten seconds folks will call you handy with the gun."

He had made no mention of his trip to town, of his filing a homestead, or of their conversation upon the top of Lost Creek divide. When the lesson was finished, he

had refused Patty's invitation to supper, mounted his horse, and disappeared up the ravine that led to the notch in the hills. Although neither had mentioned it, Patty somehow felt that he had heard from Watts of her encounter with Bethune. And now a week had passed and she had seen neither Vil Holland nor the quarter-breed. It had been a week of anxiety and hard work for the girl who had devoted almost every hour of daylight to the unravelling of her father's map. Simple as the directions seemed, her inability to estimate distances had proven a serious handicap. But by dogged perseverance, and much retracing of steps, and correcting of false leads, she finally stood upon the rim of the valley she judged to lie two miles east of the hump-backed butte that she had figured to be the inverted U of her father's map.

"If this isn't the valley, I'm through for this year," she said. "And I've got today and tomorrow to explore it." She wondered at her indifference—at her strange lack of excitement at this, the crucial moment of her long quest; even as she had wondered at her absence of fear, believing as she did, that Bethune was still in the hills.

The feeling inspired by the outlaw had been a feeling of rage, rather than terror, and had rapidly crystalized in her outraged mind into an abysmal soul-hate. She knew that, should the man accost her again, she would kill him—and not for a single instant did she doubt her ability to kill him. Vaguely, as she stood looking out over the valley, she wondered if he were following her—if at that moment he were lying concealed, somewhere among the surrounding rocks or patches of scrub?

Yet, she was conscious of no feeling of fear. She even attempted no concealment as, standing there upon the bare rock, she drew her father's map and photographs from her pocket and subjected them to a long and minute scrutiny. And then, still holding them in her hand, gazed once more over the valley. "To a, to b," she repeated. "What is there that Daddy would have designated as a, and b?" Suddenly, her glance became fixed upon a point up the valley that lay just within her range of vision. With puckered eyes and hat-brim

drawn low over her forehead, she stared steadily into the distance. She knew that she had never before seen this valley, and yet the place seemed, somehow, familiar.

With a low cry she bent over one of the photographs. Her hands trembled violently as her eyes once more flew to the valley! Yes, there it was, spread out before her just the way it was in the photograph—the rock-strewn ground—she could even identify the various rocks with the rocks in the picture. There was the lone tree, and the long rock-wall, higher at its upper end, and—yes, she could just discern it—the zigzag crack in the rock-ledge!

Jamming the papers into her pocket she leaped into the saddle and dashed toward a fringe of scrub that marked the course of a coulée which led downward into the valley. Over its ledge, and down its brush-choked course, slipping, sliding, scrambling, she urged her horse reckless of safety, reckless of anything except that her weary, and at times it had seemed, her hopeless search, was about to end. She had stood where her daddy had stood when he took that photograph—had seen with her own eyes—the jagged crack in the rock-wall!

In the valley the going was better, and with quirt and spur she urged her horse to his best, her eyes on the lone pine tree. At the rock-wall beyond, she pulled up sharply and stared at the jagged crevice that bisected it from top to bottom. It was the crevice of the photograph! Very deliberately she began at the top and traced its course to the bottom. She noted the scraggly, stunted pines that fringed the rim of the wall and that the crack started straight, and then zigzagged to the ground. Producing the "close up" photograph, she compared it with the reality before her—an entirely superfluous and needless act, for each minute detail of the spot at which she stared was indelibly engraved upon her memory. For hours on end, she had studied those photographs, and now—she laughed aloud, and the sound roused her to action. Slipping from the horse, she fumbled at the pack-strings of the saddle and loosened the canvas bag. She reached into it, and stood erect holding a light hand-axe. Once more she consulted her map.

"Stake l. c.," she read. "That's load claim—and then that funny wiggly mark, and then the word center." Her brows drew together as she studied the ground. Suddenly her face brightened. "Why, of course!" she exclaimed. "That mark represents the crack, and daddy meant to stake the claim with the crack for the other. Well, here goes!" She vehemently attacked a young sapling, and ten minutes later, viewed with pride her four roughly hacked stakes. Picking up one of them and the axe, she paced off her distance, and as she reached the first corner point, stared in surprise at the ground. The claim had already been staked! Eagerly she stooped to examine the bit of wood. It had evidently been in place for some time—how long, the girl could not tell. Long enough, though, for its surface to have become weathergrayed and discolored.

"Daddy's stakes," she breathed softly, and as her fingers strayed over the surface two big tears welled into her eyes and trickled unheeded down her cheeks. "If he staked the claim, I wonder why he didn't file," she puzzled over the matter for a moment, and dismissed it, "I don't know why. But, anyway, the thing for me to do is to get in my own stakes—only, I'll file when I get to the register's office."

After considerable difficulty, she succeeded in planting her own stake close beside the other, which marked the southwest corner of the claim, a short time later the northwest corner was staked, and the girl stared again at the rock-wall.

"Why, I've got to put in my eastern boundary stakes up on top—three hundred feet back from the edge," she exclaimed. "Maybe I'll find his notice, on one of those stakes." It required only a moment to locate a ravine that led to the top of the ledge which was not nearly so high as the one that formed the opposite side of the valley. She found the old stakes, but no sign of a notice. "The wind, and the snow, and the rain have destroyed it long ago," she muttered. "And now for my own notice."

Producing from her bag a pencil and a piece of paper, she wrote her description and affixed it to a stake by means of a bit

of wire. Then, descending once more into the valley, she produced her luncheon and threw herself down beside the little creek. It was midafternoon, and she suddenly discovered that she was ravenously hungry. With her back against a rock fragment, she sat and feasted her eyes upon her claim—hers—hers! Her thoughts flew backward to the enthusiasm of her father over this very claim. She remembered how his eyes had lighted as he told her of its hidden treasure. She remembered the jibes, and doubts, and covert sneers of the Middleton people, her father's death, her own anger and revolt, when she had suddenly decided, in the face of their counsel, entreaties, and commands, to take up his work where he had left it.

With kaleidoscopic rapidity her thoughts flew over the events of the ensuing months—the meeting with Vil Holland, her disappointment in the Watts ranch, her eager acceptance of the Sheep Camp, the long weary weeks of patiently riding along rock walls, taking each valley in turn, the growing fear of running out of funds before she could locate the claim. She shuddered as she thought of Monk Bethune, and of how nearly she had fallen a victim to his machinations. Her thoughts returned to Vil Holland, her "guardian devil of the hills," who had turned out to be in reality a guardian angel in disguise.

"Very much in disguise," she smiled, "with his jug of whiskey." Nobody who had helped make up her little world of people in the hill-country was forgotten; the Thompsons, the Samuelsons, the Wattses—she thought of them all. "Why, I—I love every one of them," she cried, as though the discovery surprised her. "They're all, every one of them, real friends—they're not like the others, the smug, sleek, best citizens of Middleton. And I'll not forget one of them. We'll file that whole vein from one end to the other!"

Catching up her horse, she mounted, and sat for a moment irresolute. "I could make town some time to-night," she mused, and then, her eyes rested for a moment upon her horse's neck where the white alkali dust lay upon the rough, sweat-dried hair. "No," she decided, "We'll go back to the cabin."

"Mr. Christie was right," she smiled, as she took the back trail for Monte's Creek, "I don't have to teach school. But, I wonder how he could have gotten that 'hunch,' as he called it? When I've been searching for the claim for months?"

In a little valley that ran parallel to Monte's Creek, Patty encountered Microby Dandeline. The girl was lying stretched at full length upon the ground and did not notice her approach until she was almost on her, then she leaped to her feet, regarded her for a moment and, with a frightened cry, sprang into the bush and scrambled out of sight along the steep side of a ravine. In vain Patty called, but her only answer was the diminishing sounds of the girl's scrambling flight. "What in the world has got into her of late," she wondered, as she proceeded on her way. Certain it was that the girl avoided her, not only at the Watts ranch, but whenever they had chanced to meet in the hills.

At first she had attributed it to anger or resentment over her own treatment of her when she had tried to get possession of the map. But, surely, even the dull-witted Microby must know that the incident had been forgotten. "No," she decided, "there is something else." Somehow, the girl no longer seemed the simple childlike creature of the wild. There was a furtiveness about her, and she had developed a certain crafty side glance, as though constantly seeking a means of escape from something. Her mother had noticed the change, and had confided to Patty that she was "gittin' mo' triffin' every day, a roam-min' 'round the hills a huntin' her a mine." "There's something worrying her," muttered the girl. "Something that she don't dare tell any one, and it's sapping what little wit she has."

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE SPECTER OF THE JUG.

IT was late that evening when Patty ate her solitary supper. The sun had long set, and the dusk of the late twilight had settled upon the valley of Monte's Creek as she wiped the last dish and set it upon

the shelf of her tiny cupboard. Suddenly she looked up. A form darkened the doorway, and quick as a flash, her eyes sought the six-gun that lay in its holster upon the bunk.

"You won't need that." The voice was reassuring. It was Vil Holland's voice. She had recognized him, a second before he spoke, and greeted him with a smile, even as she wondered what had brought him there. Only three times before, had he come to her cabin; once to ascertain who was moving into the Sheep Camp, once when he had pitched Lord Clendenning into the creek, and again, only a few days before, when he had come to teach her to shoot. The girl noted that he seemed graver than usual, if that were possible. Certain it was that he appeared to be holding himself under restraint. She wondered if he had come to warn her of the proximity of Bethune.

"I was in town, to-day," he came directly to the point. "An' Len Christie told me you're goin' to teach school." He paused and his eyes rested upon her face as if seeking confirmation.

Patty laughed, she could afford to laugh now that the necessity for teaching did not exist. "I asked him if he could find a school for me some time ago," she replied, trying to fathom what was in his mind.

There was a moment of silence, during which Patty saw the man's fingers tighten upon his hat brim. "I don't want you to do that. It ain't fit work—for you—teachin' other folks kids."

Patty stared at him in surprise. The words had come slowly; and at their conclusion he had paused. "Maybe you could suggest some work that is more fit?"

The man ignored the hint of sarcasm. "Yes—I think I can." His head was slightly bowed, and Patty saw that it was with an effort he continued: "That is, I don't know if I can make you see it like I do. It's awful real to me—an' plain. Miss Sinclair, I can't make any fine speeches like they do in books. I wouldn't, if I could—it ain't my way. I love you more than I could tell you if I knew all the words in the language, an' how to fit 'em together. I loved you that day I first saw

you—back there on the divide at Lost Creek. You was afraid of me, an' you wouldn't show it, an' you wouldn't own up that you was lost—'til I'd made the play of goin' off an' leavin' you. An' I've loved you every minute since—an' every minute since, I've fought against lovin' you. But, it's no use. The more I fight it, the stronger it gets. It's stronger than I am. I can't down it. It's the first time in my life I ever ran up against anything I couldn't whip."

Again he paused. Patty advanced a step, and her eyes glowed softly as they rested upon the form that stood in her doorway silhouetted against the afterglow. She saw Buck rub his velvet nose affectionately up and down the man's sleeve, and into her heart leaped a great longing for this man who, with the unconscious dignity of the vast open places upon him, had told her so earnestly of his love. She opened her lips to speak, but there was a great lump in her throat, and no words came.

"That's why," he continued, "I know it ain't just a flash in the pan—this love of mine ain't. All summer I've watched you, an' the hardest thing I ever had to do was to set back an' let you play a lone hand against the worst devil that ever showed his face in the hills. But the way things stacked up, I had to. You had me sized up for the one that was campin' on your trail, an' anything I'd have done would have played into Bethune's hand. I know I ain't fit for you—no man is. But, I'll always do the best I know how by you—an' I'll always love you. As for the rest of it, I never saved any money. I know there's gold here in the hills, an' I've spent years huntin' it. I'll find it, too—some time.

"But, I ain't exactly a pauper, either. I've got my two hands, an' I've got a contract with old man Samuelson to winter his cattle. I didn't want to do it first, but the figure he named was about twice what I thought the job was worth. I told him so right out, an' he kind of laughed an' said maybe I'd need it all, an' anyhow, them cattle was all grade Herefords, an' was worth more to winter than common dogies. So, you see, we could winter through, all right, an' next summer, we could prospect

together. The gold's here, sure enough, somewhere—your dad knew it—an' I know it."

Receiving no answering pat, the buckskin left off his nuzzling of the man's sleeve, and turned from the doorway. As he did so the brown leather jug scraped lightly against the jamb. The girl's eyes flew to the jug, and swiftly back to the man who stood framed in the doorway.

She loved him! For days and days she had known that she loved him, and for days and nights her thoughts had been mostly of him—this unsmiling knight of the saddle—her "guardian devil of the hills."

Without exception, the people whose regard was worth having respected him, and liked him, even though they deplored his refusal to accept steady work. They're just like the people back home, she thought. They have no imagination. To their minds the cow-puncher who draws his forty dollars a month, year in and year out, is, in some manner, more dependable than the man whose imagination, and love of the boundless open, leads him to stake his time against millions. What do they know of the joys and the despairs of uncertainty? In a measure they, too, love the plains and the hills—but their love of the open is inextricably interwoven with their preconceived ideas of conduct. But, Vil Holland is bound by no such conventions. His "outfit," a pack-horse to carry it, and his home—all outdoors! Her father had imagination, and year after year, in the face of the taunts and jibes of his small-town neighbors, he had steadfastly allowed his imagination full sway, and at last—he had won. She had adored her father, from whom she had inherited her love of the wild.

But—there was the jug! Always her thoughts of him had led up to that brown leather jug, until she had come to hate it with an unreasoning hatred.

"I see you have not forgotten your jug."

"No, I got it filled in town." The man's reply was casual, as he would have mentioned his gloves, or his hat.

"You said you had never run up against anything you couldn't whip, except—except—"

"Yes, except my love for you. That's right—an' I never expect to."

"How about that jug? Can you whip that?"

"Why, yes, I could. If there was any need. I never tried it."

"Suppose you try it, for a while, and see."

The man regarded her seriously: "You mean, if I leave off packin' that jug, you'll—"

"I haven't promised anything." The girl laughed a trifle nervously. "But, I will tell you this much. I utterly despise a drunkard!"

Vil Holland nodded slowly. "Let's get the straight of it," he said. "I didn't know—I didn't realize it was really hurtin' me any. Can you see that it does? Have I ever done anything, that you know of, or have heard tell of, that a sober man wouldn't do?"

The girl felt her anger rising: "Nobody can drink as much as you do, and not be the worse for it. Don't try to defend yourself."

"No, I wouldn't do that. You see, if it's hurtin' me, there wouldn't be any defense—an' if it ain't, I don't need any."

For an instant Patty regarded the man who stood framed in the doorway. "Clean-blooded," the doctor had called him, and clean-blooded he looked—the very picture of health and rugged strength, clear of eye and firm of jaw, not one slightest hint or mark of the toper could she detect, and the realization that this was so, angered her the more.

Abruptly, she changed the subject, and the moment the brown leather jug was banished from her mind, her anger subsided. In the doorway, Vil Holland noted the undercurrent of suppressed excitement in her voice as she said: "I have the most wonderful news! I—I found daddy's mine!" Seconds passed as the man stood waiting for her to proceed. "I found it to-day," she continued, without noting that his lean brown hand gripped the hat brim even more tightly than before, nor that his lips were pressed into a thin straight line. "And my stakes are all in, and in the mornin' I'm going to file."

Vil Holland interrupted: "You—you say you located Rod Sinclair's strike? You really located it?" Somehow, his voice sounded different.

The girl sensed the change without defining it. "Yes, I really found it!" she answered. "Do you want to know where?" Hastily she turned to the cupboard and taking a match from a box, lighted the lamp. "You see," she laughed, "I am not afraid to trust you. I'm going to show you daddy's map, and his photographs, and the samples. Oh, if you knew how I've hunted and hunted through these hills for that rock-wall! You see, the map was like so much Greek to me, until I happened by accident to learn how to read it. Before that, I just rode up and down the valleys hunting for the wall with the broad, crooked crack in it. Here it is."

The man had advanced to the table, and was bending over the two photographs, examining them minutely. "And here's his map." He picked up the paper and for several minutes studied the penciled directions. Then he laid it down, and turned his attention to the samples.

"High grade," he appraised, and returned them to the table beside the photographs. "So you don't have to teach school," he said, speaking more to himself than to her. "An' you'll be goin' out of the hill-country for good an' all. There's nothin' here for you, now that you've got what you come after. You'll be goin' back—East."

Patty laughed, and as Vil Holland looked into her face he saw that her eyes held dancing lights. "I'm not going back East," she said. "I've learned to love—the hill-country. I have learned that—perhaps—there is more here for me than even daddy's mine."

Vil Holland shook his head. "There's nothin' for you in the hills," he repeated, slowly. And abruptly extending his hand: "I'm glad for your sake, your luck changed, Miss Sinclair. I hope the gold you take out of there will bring you happiness. You've earned it—every cent of it, an' you've got it, an' now, as far as the hill-country goes—the books are closed. Good night, I must be goin', now."

Abruptly as he had offered his hand, he withdrew it, and turning, stepped through the door, mounted his horse, and rode out into the night.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE RACE FOR THE REGISTER.

BESIDE the little table Patty Sinclair listened to the sound of hoofs splashing through the shallows of the creek, and thudding dully upon the floor of the valley beyond.

When the sounds told her that the horseman had disappeared into the timber, she walked slowly to the door, and leaning her arm against the jamb, stared for a long time into the black sweep of woods that concealed the trail that led upward to the notch in the hills, just discernible against the sky where the stars showed through the last faint blush of afterglow in winking points of gold.

"Nothing here for me," she, repeated dully. "Nothing but trees, and hills—and gold. He loves me," she laughed bitterly, "and yet, between me and his jug, he chose—the jug." She closed the door, slipped the bar into place, thrust the photographs and map into her pocket, and threw herself face downward upon the bunk.

In the edge of the timber, Vil Holland turned his horse slowly about and headed him up the ravine. At the notch in the hills he slipped to the ground and, throwing an arm across the saddle, removed his Stetson and let the night wind ripple his hair. Standing alone in the night with his soul-hurt, he gazed far downward where a tiny square of yellow light marked the window of the cabin.

"It's hell—the way things work out," he said thoughtfully. "Yes, sir, Buck, it sure is hell. If Len had told me a week ago about her havin' to teach school, or even yesterday—she might have— But now—she's rich. An' that cracked-rock claim turnin' out to be *hers*—" He swung abruptly into the saddle and headed the buckskin for camp.

Patty spent a miserable night. Brief

periods of sleep were interspersed with long periods of wakefulness in which her brain traveled wearily over and over a long, long trail that ended always at a brown leather jug that swung by a strap from a saddle-horn. She had found her father's claim—had accomplished the thing she had started out to accomplish—had vindicated her father's judgment in the eyes of the people back home—had circumvented the machinations of Bethune, and in all probability, the moment she recorded her claim would be the possessor of more gold than she could possibly spend.

But in the achievement there was no joy. There was a dull hurt in her heart, and the future stretched away, uninviting, heart-sickening, interminable. The world looked drab.

She ate her breakfast by lamplight, and as objects began to take form in the pearly light of the new day, she saddled her horse and rode up the trail to the notch in the hills—the trail that was a short cut, and that would carry her past Vil Holland's little white tent, nestling close beside its big rock at the edge of the little plateau. "He will still be asleep, and I can take one more look at the far snow mountains from the spot that might have been the porch of—our cabin."

Carefully keeping to the damp ground that bordered the little creek, she worked her way around the huge rock, and drew up in amazement. The little white tent was gone! Hastily, her eyes swept the plateau. The buckskin was gone, and the saddle was not hanging by its stirrup from its accustomed limb-stub. Crossing the creek, the girl stared at the row of packs, the blanket roll, and the neat tarpaulin-covered bundles that were ranged along the base of the rock.

"He has gone," she murmured, as if trying to grasp the fact and then, again: "He has gone." Slowly, her eyes raised to the high-flung peaks that reared their snowy heads against the blue. And as she looked, the words of Vil Holland formed themselves in her brain: "If there ain't any 'we,' there won't be any cabin—so there's nothing to worry about."

"Nothing to worry about," she repeated,

bitterly, and touching her horse with a spur, rode out across the plateau toward the head of a coulée that led to the trail for town. "Where has he gone?" she wondered, and pulled up sharply as her horse entered the coulée. Riding slowly down the trail ahead, mounted on the meditative Gee Dot, was Microby Dandeline. Urging her horse forward Patty gained her side, and realizing that escape was hopeless, the girl stared sullenly without speaking.

"Why, Microby!" she smiled, ignoring the sullen stare, "you're miles from home, and it's hardly daylight! Where in the world are you going?"

"Hain't a goin' nowher'. I'm prospect-in'."

"Where's Vil Holland, have you seen him?"

The girl nodded: "He's done gone to town. He's mad, an' he roden fas' as Buck kin run, an' he says: 'I'm gonna file one more claim, an' to hell with the hill-country. Tell yo' dad good-by!'"

Patty sat for an instant as one stunned. "Gone to town! Mad! File one more claim!" What did it mean? Why was Vil Holland riding to town as fast as his horse could run? And what claim was he going to file? He had mentioned no claim—and if he had just made a strike, surely he would have mentioned it—last night. She knew that he already had a claim, and that he considered it worthless. He told her once that he hadn't even bothered to work out the assessments—it was no good.

Was it possible that he was riding to file *her* claim? Was he no better than Bethune—only shrewder, more patient, richer in imagination?

With a swish the quirt descended upon her horse's flanks. The animal shot forward and, leaving Microby Dandeline staring open-mouthed, horse and rider dashed headlong down the coulée. Into the long white trail they swept, through the cañon, and out among the foot-hills toward Thompson's "Why did I show him the map, and the pictures? Why did I trust him? Why did I trust anybody? I see it all, now! His continual spying, and his plausible explanation that he was watching Bethune. He asked me to marry him, and

when, like the poor little fool I was, I showed him the location, he was only too glad to get the mine without being saddled with me."

If Vil Holland reached town first—well, she could teach school. Scalding tears blinded her as with quirt and spur she crowded her horse to his utmost. Only one slender hope remained. With Thompson's fresh horse, Lightning, she might yet win the race. The chance was slim, but she would take it! Her own horse was laboring heavily, a solid lather of sweat, as his feet pounded the trail that wound white and hot through the foot-hills. "It's your last hard ride," she sobbed into his ear as she urged him on, "win or lose, boy, it's your last hard ride—and we've got to make it!"

She whirled into Thompson's lane and, in the dooryard, threw herself from her horse almost into the arms of the big ranchman, who stared at her in surprise: "Must be somethin's busted loose in the hills, that folks is all takin' to the open!" he exclaimed.

"Where's Lightning?" cried the girl. "Quick! I want him!"

"Lightnin'?" repeated Thompson. "Why Lightnin's gone—Vil Holland come along an hour or so ago, an' rode him on to town. Turned Buck into the corral, yonder—he was rode down almost as bad as yourn."

Patty's brain reeled dizzily as from a blow. Lightning gone! Her one slim chance of saving her mine had vanished in a breath. She felt suddenly weak, and sick, and leaning against her saddle for support, she closed her eyes and buried her face in her arm.

"What's the matter, miss? Somethin' wrong?"

The girl laughed, a dry, hard laugh, and raising her head, looked into the man's face. "Oh, no!" she said. "Nothing's wrong—nothing except that I've lost my father's claim—lost it because I relied on your horse to carry me into town in time to file ahead of *him*."

"Lost yer pa's claim?" cried Thompson. "What do you mean—lost? Has that devil dared to show his face after the horse raid?" He paused suddenly, and smiled. "Now don't you go worryin' about that

there claim. Vil Holland's on the job! I knowed there was somethin' in the wind when he come a larrupin' in here an' jerked his kak offen Buck an' throw'd it on Lightning without hardly a word. Vil, he'll head him! An' when he does, Bethune'll be lucky if he lives long enough to git hung!"

"Bethune! Bethune!" cried the girl bitterly. "Bethune's got nothing to do with it! It's Vil Holland himself that's going to file my claim. Have you got another horse here?" she cried. "If you have, I want him. I'm not beaten yet! There's still a chance! Maybe Lightning will go down or something. Quick—change my saddle!"

Catching up a rope, Thompson ran to the corral and throwing his loop over the head of a horse led him out and transferred the girl's saddle and bridle.

"I don't git the straight of it," he said, eying her with a puzzled frown. "But if it's a question of gittin' to town before Vil Holland kin beat you out of yer claim—you've got plenty of time—if you walk."

Patty shot the man one glance of withering scorn. "You're all *crazy*! You're hypnotized! Everybody thinks he's a saint—"

Thompson grinned. "No, miss, Vil ain't no saint—an' he ain't no devil—neither. But somewheres between the two of them is the place where good men fits in—an' that's Vil. You're all het up needless, an' barkin' up the wrong tree, as folks used to say back where I come from. Just come and have a talk with Miz T. She'll straighten you around all right. I'll slip in an' tell her to set the coffee-pot on, an' you kin take yer time about gittin' to town."

Thompson disappeared into the kitchen, and a moment later when he returned with his wife, the two stared in amazement at the flying figure that was just swinging from the lane into the long white trail.

CHAPTER XXXV.

VIL AND PATTY GO TO CHURCH.

HOURS later the girl crossed the Mosquito Flats, forded the river, and passed along the sandy street of the town. Her eyes felt hot and tired from continual straining ahead in a vain effort

to catch a glimpse of a fallen horse, whose rider must continue his way on foot. But the plain was deserted, and the only evidence that any one had proceeded her, was an occasional glimpse of hoof-prints in the white dust of the trail.

A short distance up the street, standing "tied to the ground," before the hitching rail of a little false-front saloon, stood Lightning. Patty noted as she passed that he showed signs of hard riding, and that the inevitable jug dangled motionless from the saddle-horn. Her lips stiffened, and her hand tightened on the bridle reins, as she forced her eyes to the front.

Farther on, she could see the little white-painted frame office of the register. She would pass it by—no use for her to go there. She must find Len Christie and tell him she had come to teach his school. A great wave of repugnance swept over her, engulfing her, as her eyes traveled over the rows of small wooden houses with their stiff, uncomfortable porches, their hideous yards, and their flaunting paintiness.

"And to think that I've got to live in one of them!" she murmured dully. "Nothing could be worse—except the hotel."

Opposite the register's office she pulled up, and gazed in fascination at the open door. Then deliberately she reined her horse to the sidewalk and dismounted. The characteristic thoroughness that had marked the progress of her search for her father's claim, and had impelled her to return to the false claim and procure the notice, and that very morning had prompted her to ride against the slender chance of Vil Holland's meeting with a mishap, impelled her now to read for herself the entry of her father's strike.

The register shoved his black skull-cap a trifle back upon his shiny head, adjusted his thick eye-glasses, and smiled into the face of the girl: "Things must be lookin' up out in the hills," he hazarded, "you're the second one to-day and it ain't noon yet."

"I presume Mr. Holland has been here."

"Yes, Vil came in. I guess he's around somewheres. He—"

"Relinquished one claim, and filed another?"

"That's just what he done."

Patty nodded wearily. She was gamely trying to appear disinterested.

"Did you want to file?" asked the man, whirling a large book about, and pushing it toward her. "Just enter your description there, an' fill out the application for a patent, an' file your field notes, and plat."

The girl's glance strayed listlessly over the adjoining page, her eyes mechanically taking in the words. Suddenly she became intensely alert. She leaned over the book and reread with feverish interest the written description. The location was filed in Vil Holland's name—but, *the description was not of her claim!*

"Where—where is this claim?" she gasped.

The old register turned the book and very deliberately proceeded to read the description. In her nervous excitement Patty felt that she must scream, and her fingers clutched the counter edge until the knuckles whitened. Finally the man looked up. "That must be somewheres over on the Blackfoot side," he announced. "Must be Vil's figuring on pulling over there. Too bad we won't be seeing him much no more." He swung the book back. As the import of his words dawned upon the girl she leaned weakly against the counter.

"Ain't you feeling well?" asked the old man, eying her with concern.

Without hearing him Patty picked up the pen, and as she wrote, her hand trembled so that she could scarcely form the letters. At last it was done, and the register once again swung the book and read the freshly penned words.

"Well, I'll be darned!" he exclaimed, when he had finished.

The blood had rushed back into the girl's face and she was regarding him with shining eyes: "What's the matter? Isn't it right? Because if it isn't you can show me how to do it, and I'll fix it."

"Oh, it's right—all right." He was eying her quizzically. "Only it's blamed funny. That there's the claim Vil Holland just relinquished."

"Just relinquished!" gasped the girl, reaching out and shaking the old man's sleeve in her excitement. "What do you mean? Tell me!"

"Mean just what I said—here's the entry."

"Vil—Holland—just—relinquished," she repeated, in a dazed voice. "When did he file it?"

"I don't recollect—it was back in the winter, or spring." The old man began to turn the pages slowly backward. "Here it is, March the thirteenth."

"Why, that was before I came out here!"

"How?"

"Why did he relinquish?" The words rushed eagerly from her lips, and she waited, breathless, for the answer.

"It wasn't no good, I guess, or he found a better one—that's most generally why they relinquish."

"No good! Found a better one!" From the chaos of conflicting ideas the girl's thoughts began to take definite form. "The stakes in the ground were *his* stakes. Her father had never staked—would never have staked until ready to file."

Gradually it dawned on the girl that, without knowing it was her father's, Vil Holland had staked and filed the claim.

It was his. He did not know its value as her father had. He believed it to be worthless, but when he learned, only last night, back there in the cabin on Monte's Creek, that it was really of enormous value—that it was the claim Rod Sinclair had staked his reputation on, the claim for which Rod Sinclair's daughter had sought all summer—when he learned that, he had relinquished—that she might come into her own!

Hot tears filled her eyes and caused the objects in the little room to blur and swim together in hopeless jumble. She knew, now, the meaning of his furious ride, and why he had changed horses at Thompson's.

And *this* was the man she had doubted! She alone, of all who knew him, had doubted him. Her cheeks burned with the shame of it. Not once, but again and again, she had doubted him—she, who loved him! This was the man with whom she had quarreled because he had carried a jug.

Suddenly she realized why he had turned away from her—there in the little cabin. She recalled the words that came slowly from his lips, as, for a brief moment, he

stood holding her hand. "There is nothing for you in the hills." "And now, he is going away—his outfit's all packed, and he's going away!" With a sob she dashed from the office. As she blotted the tears from her eyes with a handkerchief that had been her father's, a wild, savage joy surged up within her.

He should *not* go away! He was hers—hers! If he went, she would go, too. He should never leave her! And never, never would she doubt him again!

She glanced down the street and her eyes fell upon Lightning, standing as he had stood a few minutes before. Only a moment she hesitated, and her spurs clicked rapidly as she hurried down the sidewalk. The door of the saloon stood open and she walked boldly in. Vil Holland stood at the bar shaking dice with the bartender. The latter looked up surprised, and Vil followed his glance to the figure of the girl who had paused in the doorway. She beckoned to him and he followed her out onto the sidewalk and stood, Stetson in hand, regarding her gravely, unsmiling as was his wont.

"Vil—Vil Holland," she faltered, as a furious blush suffused her cheeks, "I've—I've changed my mind."

"You mean—"

"I mean, I will marry you—I wanted to say it—last night—only—only—" Her voice sounded husky, and far away.

"But, now it's too late. It was different—then. I didn't know you'd made your strike. I thought we were both poor—but, now, you've struck it rich."

"Struck it rich," flared the girl. "Who made it possible for me to strike it rich? Don't you suppose I know you relinquished that claim? Relinquished it so I could file it!"

"Old Grebble talks too much," growled the man. The claim wasn't any good to me. I never went far enough in to get samples like those of your dad's. I'd have relinquished it anyway, as soon as I'd located another."

"But, you knew it was rich when you did relinquish it."

"A man couldn't hardly do different, could he?"

"Oh, Vil," there were tears in the girl's eyes, and she did not try to conceal them. The words trembled on her lips: "A man couldn't—your kind of a man! But—they're so hard to find. Don't—don't rob me of mine—now that I've found him!"

A shrill whistle tore the words from her lips. She glanced up, startled, to see Vil Holland take his fingers from his teeth. She followed his gaze and a block away, in front of the wooden post-office, saw the Rev. Len Christie whirl in his tracks. The cowboy motioned her to wait, and taking the girl gently by the arm, turned her about, and together they walked toward the Bishop of All Outdoors, who awaited them with twinkling eyes.

"It's about the school, I presume," he greeted. "Everything is all arranged, Miss Sinclair. You may assume your duties to-morrow."

"If I were you, Len," replied Vil Holland dryly, "I wouldn't go bettin' much on that presoomer of yours—it ain't workin' just right. An' Miss Sinclair has decided to assoom her duties to-day. If you ain't got anything more important on your mind, we'll just walk over to the church an' get married."

The Rev. Len Christie regarded his friend solemnly. "I didn't think it of you, Vil—when I bragged to you yesterday about the excellent teacher I'd got—I didn't think you would slip right out and get her away from me!"

"Oh, I'm so sorry! Really, Mr. Christie, I didn't mean to disappoint you in this way, at the last minute—"

"Don't you go wastin' any sympathy on that old renegade," cut in Vil.

"That's right," laughed Christie, noting the genuine concern in the girl's eyes. "As a matter of fact, I have in mind a substitute who will be tickled to death to learn that she is to have the regular position. Didn't I tell you out at the Samuelson's that I had a hunch you'd make your strike before school time? Of course, every one knows that Vil is the one who made the real strike, but you'll find that the claim you've staked isn't so bad, and that after you get down through the surface, you will run onto a whole lot of pure gold."

Patty, who had been regarding him with a slightly puzzled expression, suddenly caught his allusion, and she smiled happily into the face of her cowboy. "I've already found pure gold," she said, "and it lies mighty close to the surface."

In the little church after the hastily summoned witnesses had departed, the Rev. Len Christie stood holding a hand of each. "Never in my life have I performed a clerical office that gave me so much genuine happiness and satisfaction," he announced.

"Me, neither," assented Vil Holland heartily, and then—"Hold on, Len. You're too blame young an' good-lookin' for such tricks—an' besides, I've never kissed her myself, yet—"

"Where will it be now?" asked Holland, when they found themselves once more upon the street.

"Home—dear," whispered his wife. "You know we've got to get that cabin up before snow flies—our cabin, Vil—with the porch that will look out over the snows of the changing lights."

"If the whole town didn't have their heads out the window, watchin' us, I'd kiss you right here," he answered, and strode off to lead her horse up beside his own.

Swinging her into the saddle, he was about to mount Lightning, when she leaned over and raised the brown leather jug on its thong. "Why, it's empty!" she exclaimed.

"So it is," agreed Holland, with mock concern.

"Really, Vil, I don't care—so much. If it don't hurt men any more than it has hurt you, I won't quarrel with it. I'll wait while you get it filled."

"Maybe I'd better," he said, and swinging it from the saddle-horn, crossed the street and entered the general store. A few minutes later he returned and swung the jug into place.

"Why! Do they sell whisky at the store? I thought you got that at a saloon."

"Whisky!" The man looked up in surprise. "This jug never held any whisky! It's my vinegar jug. I don't drink."

Patty stared at him in amazement. "Do you mean to tell me you carry a jug of vinegar with you wherever you go?"

For the first time since she had known him she saw that his eyes were twinkling, and that his lips were very near a smile: "No, not exactly, but, you see, that first time I met you I happened to be riding from town with this jug full of vinegar. I noticed the look you gave it, an' it tickled me most to death. So, after that, every time I figured I'd meet up with you I brought the jug along. I'd pour out the vinegar an' fill it up with water, an' sometimes I'd just pack it empty—then, when I'd hit town, I'd get it filled again. I bet Johnson, over there, thinks I'm picklin' me a winter's supply of prickly pears. I must have bought close to half a barrel of vinegar this summer."

"Vil Holland! You carried that jug—just to—to *tease* me?"

"That's about the size of it. An', gosh! How you hated that jug!"

"It might have—it nearly did, make me hate *you*, too."

" 'Might have,' an' 'nearly,' an' 'if,' are all words about alike—they all sort of fall short of amountin' to anything. It 'might have'—but, somehow, things don't work out that way. The only thing that counts is, it didn't."

Out on the trail they met Watts riding toward town. "Where's Microby?" he asked, addressing Patty.

"Microby! I haven't seen Microby since early this morning. She was riding down a coulée not far from Vil's camp."

"Didn't yo' send for her?"

"I certainly did not!"

The man's hand fumbled at his beard. "Bethune was along last evenin' an' hed a talk with her, an' then he done tol' ma yo' wanted Microby should come up to yo' place, come daylight. When I heern it, I mistrusted yo' wouldn't hev no truck with Bethune, so after I done the chores I rode up ther'. They wasn't no one to hum." The simple-minded man looked worried. "Bethune, he could do anythin' he wants with her. She thinks he's grand—but, I know different. Then I met up with Lord Clendennin' in the cañon, an' he tol' me how Bethune was headin' fer Canady. He said, had I lost anythin'. An' I said 'no,' an' he luffed, an' says he guess that's right."

As Vil Holland listened, his eyes hardened, and at the conclusion something very like an oath ground from his lips. Patty glanced at him in surprise—never before had she seen him out of poise.

"You go back home," he advised the greatly perturbed Watts, in a kindly tone, "to the wife an' the kids. I'll find Microby for you!"

When the man had passed from sight into the dip of a coulée, Vil leaned over and, drawing his wife close against his breast, kissed her lips again and again. "It's too bad, little girl, that our honeymoon's got to be broke into this way, but you remember I told you once that if I won you'd have to be satisfied with what you got. You didn't know what I meant, then, but you know now—I won—an' I'm goin' to win again! I'm goin' to find that child! The poor little fool!"

Patty saw that his eyes were flashing, and his voice sounded hard. "You ride,

back to town an' tell Len to get his white goods together an' ride back with you to Watts's. There's goin' to be a funeral—or better yet, a weddin' an' a funeral, in it for him by this time tomorrow, or my name ain't Vil Holland!" And then, abruptly, he turned and rode into the north.

A wild impulse to overtake him and dissuade him from his purpose took possession of the girl. But the thought of Microby in the power of Bethune, and of the sorrowing face of poor Watts stayed her. She saw her husband hitch his belt forward and swiftly look to his six-gun, and as the sound of galloping hoofs grew fainter, she watched his diminishing figure until it was swallowed up in the distance.

Impulsively she stretched out her arms to him: "Good luck to you, my knight!" she called, but the words ended in a sob, and she turned her horse and, with a vast happiness in her heart, rode back toward the town.

(The end.)

Eleven Hundred Bucks

by Evans Emoe Kel



BY far the most unpopular man in Franklinville, old Curtis Green was, for the most part, distinctly satisfied with himself. At any moment he could lay his gnarled hands on more than twenty thousand dollars in cash, more than two-thirds of the mortgages on properties within a radius of twenty miles were recorded in his name, and his position as selectman of

the little village was one that not only fed his vanity, but added not a little, in devious ways, to the hoard that meant more to him almost than did life itself.

More than once, through his position as selectman, he had ordered improvements made on a property that he was certain would eventually fall into his own hands because of a default in payment of interest

or principal. Three of the properties he now owned outright were equipped with improvements, the costs of which had been the direct result of the default that had enabled him to get possession of the properties by reason of the mortgages he held. His system was a good one from his own point of view, and worked both ways against the unlucky borrower.

As a note-shaving penny-pincher he held a reputation that was as far-reaching as it was unenviable, but he lived his serene, profit-taking way, his hard eyes ever on the alert for a chance to extract a penny or a dollar from his fellow townsmen. There was but one thing that could cause him alarm, and that was the prospect of parting with any of the wealth he had accumulated. Any threatened inroad upon his bank-roll would cause him to bristle like a frightened dog, nor was his speech, upon such occasions, unlike the whine of a dog, a fact that will go a long way toward explaining the worried look upon his seamed countenance as he perused the letter clutched tightly in his fist.

The letter was written in pencil on cheap, yellow paper. The penmanship was an almost indistinguishable scrawl, but the peering eyes of Green deciphered enough of it to cause him alarm. He read it, half aloud, for perhaps the tenth time:

DEAR SIR:

You don't remember me, but I got good cause to remember you. Ten years ago you was the cause of my mother losing her propitty up on the old Nicetown road. You played a mean, sharp trick on her because she couldn't help herself. Now I am going to get that money back. Don't think because you are selectman and constable that that's going to help you any, because it ain't. When I come for the money you'll give it up. You'll give it up, or else— Well, never mind what else. I would tell you just what day I was coming, only it might put you on your guard. So long, until I see you and be sure and have the money ready for me.

There was no attempt at a signature, and an examination of the envelope revealed only the fact that the letter had undoubtedly been dropped in the box at the local post-office, since there was no mark of an outside post-office.

"It's an outrage," snarled Green, as he

finished the letter. "I wonder who wrote that there letter. I bet it was some smart Aleck in this town tryin' to scare me. Nothin' but a lot of shiftless, lazy no-goods that's mad because I managed to get a little money together.

"It ain't my fault if they ain't smart enough to take care of themselves. The law says I can do certain things, and them things is all I ever do. I ain't got a cent that I didn't come by legal, and I defy any man in the world to say different."

It was no new thing for Curtis Green to talk to himself. In fact, that was about the only manner in which he could be sure of a sympathetic listener. He held no part in the comfortable discussions in front of the post-office or in the lobby of the old frame Franklinville hotel. His appearance in either place was usually the signal for silence or the breaking up of whatever sociable group might have gathered there.

Any time Green was found in conversation with any of his fellow citizens, it was a safe bet that money was the topic of conversation, money that was either owing, or was about to become owing, to Green. His self-communing, as a result, had taken on the nature of a two-part conversation, in which he both asked and answered his own questions.

"Maybe it ain't no joke," he argued with himself. "Maybe some darn fool has got the idea that you done them wrong. You can't be sure about people nowadays, specially when they ain't calm and easy-goin' like yourself. Law don't mean nothin' to some people. Look at them Bolsheviks."

"But it was all legal, I'm telling you," came the retort. "Lemme see. I can't just get in my mind what property on Nicetown road it could of been. There's the old Garner place I got long about seven years ago. It couldn't of been that, 'cause Missus Garner died a couple of months after I foreclosed, and, besides, she didn't have no kin.

"Then there's that little bit of a house and fifteen acres that I got from that Eye-talian family. What was their name? Messana; that's it. Maybe it's them. They had a lot of kids, seems to me. An' them foreigners is wicked!"

"I don't see where it makes any differ-

ence who it is," came the answer. "All you got to do is to make some kind of preparations, so's if anybody comes along and tries to rob you or harm you, you can nail them and stick them in the jail house where they belong.

"It seems to me, you bein' a selectman thataway, and in charge of the whole police force, you ought to be able to make some arrangements with Ty Winters to kinda hang close around you. He ain't much of a constable, I admit, but he's all we got, and between the two of you, you ought to be able to handle any slicker that comes along and tries to do you."

"By gosh! that's a good idea," assented the first half of Green. "I don't know but what I'll do just that. Old Ty owes me forty dollars that he borrowed on a note from me three weeks ago, and he's got to come pretty close to doin' just what I tell him to do, or I'll tie up his wages and collect that forty. Guess I might just as well go out right now and hunt him up."

He arose, creakingly, from the broken-backed chair that constituted fifty per cent of the furniture of the dingiest office in the world. He arose with the intention of hunting up Constable Ty Winters, to depute him as a bodyguard, but his intention was never carried out. Instead, he sank weakly back into his chair and would have screamed for help had not the tall, roughly clad stranger who had noiselessly entered the office, stepped quickly forward and slapped a huge paw over Green's mouth, effectually stifling the incipient outcry.

"None o' that, now," came the command in a husky voice. "If you know what's goin' to be good for you, you'll keep that bazoo of yourn shut."

The hand was removed for a cautious second and immediately replaced over the widespread mouth of the terrified Green. Again a scream died in the making.

"Listen, old man; I don't want to get rough with you, but I ain't goin' to stand for no squawk out of you. The first thing you know you'll wake up that funny-lookin' constable you got here, and then I'll have to take his star away from him and spank him.

"Now I'm gonna take my hand off'n your mouth again, and this time I don't

want you to try to make any holler. If you do, then I'll have to tie you up. You best take my advice and listen to what I got to say; 'cause I think you and me is goin' to have quite an interestin' talk together. What do you say; shall I tie you up, or will you be quiet?"

Green nodded a weak assent.

"What does that mean?" inquired the other. "Are you gonna keep quiet without me having to tie you up?"

Again Green nodded in the affirmative.

"All right, then," said the stranger, removing his hand. "But remember," he cautioned, "no funny business and no squawkin', or else you're liable to regret it mighty sudden."

The stranger searched the office in vain for a chair. Finding none, he sprawled ungracefully upon the old pine-top table that served Green for a desk and as the counter over which his many financial deals were put through.

"I guess you don't recognize me, do you?" he asked after he had comfortably disposed of his long, lank body.

"No, I don't," snapped Green. "But let me tell you this, young feller. You better not try any of your funny business on me, or the first thing you know you'll land in the lock-up." There was more than indignation in Green's voice. There was also a note of desperation, mingled with righteous anger that he should be thus bearded in his own den.

"Cut cut the comedy," responded the stranger easily. "First thing you know, you'll get me to laughin', and when I once start to laugh, I ain't much good for business. And, believe me, I got some business with you, friend. I suppose you got my letter?"

"If you mean that fool piece of writin' about makin' me pay back some money that I got legal and honest, then I got it, yes."

"That's the one I mean. My name is Tincher; Willie Tincher it was when I lived around here. Does that say anything to you, old man?"

Green pretended to think deeply. As a matter of fact the name Tincher did mean something to him. It meant one of the most valuable pieces of small property

within a radius of ten miles, a property that he had owned for some ten years, and one that had been steadily growing in value. He had always considered it one of his most comfortable assets.

"No," he lied at last. "I never heard the name before." And then he overstepped his own caution. "Anyhow, what call have you got to come pesterin' me? Even if I did hear the name, and even if I did lend money to somebody by that name and I had to foreclose a mortgage to get what was comin' to me, what call have you got to come pesterin' me now? I tell you it was all done legal and proper."

"So you do remember it," commented the stranger dryly. "I thought you would. I thought you'd remember the name, although I couldn't very well expect you to remember me. You see, it's been about fourteen years since I was in this place last, and then I was only about thirteen years of age.

"Can your memory go back far enough to remember the time when Willie Tinchler run away with the circus? No? That's too bad, 'cause I'm the Willie Tinchler that done the runnin' away."

"What's that got to do with me?" snapped Green. His courage had, in a measure, returned. So far the stranger had made no demands of him, nor had he attempted violence, other than the initial stifling of his outcries.

Green's shrewd old wits were marshaling themselves for a battle with this stranger. There was little doubt in the old man's mind that he would be able in some way to outwit the stranger, who appeared but little more than an ungainly youngster, despite his twenty-seven years. What the newcomer's game was, Green was not quite certain, but if it came to a battle of shrewdness, he had no fear of the outcome.

"I'm comin' to that part of it," went on the stranger, in answer to Green's testily flung question. "After I run away from home, about two years after, my daddy died. That left my mother without no one but herself to look after the little farm she had up there on Nicetown Road. You know where it is. You can't help knowin', seein' as you're the owner of it now.

"Well, anyway, things got bad, and then they got worse, and maw was compelled to come to you to borrow five hundred dollars from you. She was mighty grateful to you at the time for lendin' her that five hundred. She thought you was a kind-hearted angel of some kind. She found out different later on.

"She had hard work makin' things go, but for a year or so she managed to pay off the interest on that five hundred every time it came due, and she was also puttin' a little bit by toward payin' off the debt. I wasn't makin' a whole lot of money then, bein' only a kid, but every time I wrote to her I would try and put somethin' in.

"Maybe it would be a ten or a five, and once it was a twenty. Sometimes it was only a one or a two, but I always managed to slip a bill in the envelope when I wrote to her. She put all that away toward payin' off that five hundred.

"Then you and that gang of weak-kneed idiots that was selectmen then got together, and mainly by your doin's a lot of improvements was ordered around here in the pavin' and drainage and things like that. Improvements that wasn't necessary, except that you was foxy and knowed just what you was doin'.

"Take a walk up Nicetown Road now, and you'll see that the only property within two miles walk that has got a brick walk in front and a paved yard around it, and that is all under-drained, waitin' for the sewer that was never put in, is the one my old maw used to own. That pavin' and that under-drainin' was done by your orders.

"It was a slick game and you worked it just right, 'cause it took pretty near all the money my maw had saved toward payin' off the mortgage and then when she came to you to have the mortgage renewed, you refused and the house was sold.

"No, it wasn't sold. It was give away, 'cause nobody bid on it except you, and you only bid enough to satisfy the mortgage. You kept everybody else from bidin'."

Green opened his mouth to protest, but the stranger interrupted angrily.

"Don't say you didn't, you cheap crook. I've been snoopin' around, findin' out what

I could find out, and I got the goods on you right. I know what you did and what you didn't do.

"After you stole—yes, *stole*—my maw's house, you made her move out, and she went to work as a hired girl down at Petit's. Her as old as she was, she had to go out and work for other people for a livin'.

"She didn't have to do it long. Losin' her home that way kind of broke her heart, and then the hard work on top of that helped her to peter out. I kinda figure you killed that poor old lady just as sure as though you had shot her with a gun."

The stranger finished and was abruptly silent. For perhaps two minutes neither spoke, the stranger eying Green with a look of supreme disgust, the latter squirming uncomfortably in his chair. He wanted to turn in his seat so that he could command a view of the window and, if the opportunity offered, surreptitiously summon help of a passer-by.

He had lost some of his faith in his ability to rid himself of the stranger. There was purpose in that hard voice that had so monotonously and baldly recited facts that Green well knew. He wished, fervently, that some one would enter his office, but discounted that probability in view of the fact that his office was looked upon locally as a good place to avoid.

"And now," continued the stranger, "I've come to collect the difference between what you paid for my maw's place and what it was worth. I figure it amounts to about eleven hundred dollars.

"My paw paid thirteen hundred for it, and them improvements you ordered cost about three hundred more. That makes sixteen, and you paid five. The difference is eleven hundred dollars and that's what I'm a gonna get out of you."

"You talk like a fool," said Green. He attempted a fine show of scorn at the other's irrational request, but his voice quavered in spite of himself. "You don't get no 'leven hundred dollars out of me. There ain't a court in the whole world that would give it to you."

"Court!" The stranger laughed, a hard, mirthless laugh. "Maybe not, old man. Maybe not. But just the same, I'm gam-

blin' on carryin' eleven hundred dollars away from here this afternoon.

"Maybe I'd better tell you what I want it for. Maybe you remember that at the time you put my old maw out of her home there was a little bit of a girl about four or five years old. That was my sister. I guess you never paid no attention to her, seein' as how she was too little to have any money for you to try to get ahold of.

"Well, that little sister of mine was sent to my paw's folks in Indianapolis after you put my maw out, and she was raised by them. They done the best they could by their relative, but they didn't have any too much for themselves and their own five children.

"That little sister of mine is growed up now, and she's just about old enough to think about goin' to some good boardin' school to get an education. Then after she comes out of there, like as not she'll want to marry some good, clean young fellar. Well, I figure that that eleven hundred dollars that's owin' to us will just about do the trick fine."

The stranger made a lazy movement toward his hip pocket and produced a wicked-looking revolver. For a long minute he toyed with it, while cold beads of perspiration broke out on Green's forehead.

"Do I get it?" asked the stranger, in a persuasive tone of voice.

"I—I ain't got it. I ain't got that much here. Maybe I could give you a check for it." A gleam of hope brightened his crafty features.

"Haw-haw," boomed the stranger, but without mirth. "A check, heh? Don't you give me credit for no brains at all? Checks is no good with me. I want the cash, and I'm a gonna get it, too.

"Do you think I'd come here and take a chance like this without knowin' you had the money handy? Don't I know that you bank your money in Lehigh? Don't I know that that's too far to go when you need money in a hurry, and that you always keep a good-sized roll in that big iron kettle over in the corner?"

He pointed contemptuously with the muzzle of his revolver in the direction of Green's antiquated and rusty iron safe,

"You got it figured out good, old man. You know when a man needs money real quick, the sight of long green and yellow bills is apt to make him take much less than just a check would.

"Your system is all right for the hicks you do business with, but this is one time that it gets you into trouble. Come on, now, open up that safe. I'm gettin' tired of your comp'ny."

"I won't," snarled Green. "I'll put you in jail for this, young fellar."

"Never mind that, now. You can do all the puttin' in jail you want to after I get that eleven hundred dollars. After I once get the money you can put me in all the jails you got a mind to—if you ever catch me.

"Now, you're gonna open that safe in about two minutes or the folks around here is gonna have a hard time findin' your head. It won't do them any good to look near your carcass, because I'll be some distance off, and maybe it'll be mussed up considerable. This old pop-gun of mine sure does spit a mean mouthful. Come on, now! I ain't gonna fool with you no more."

There was little use for resistance on the part of Green. The old man was wise enough to see that. Nor would the stranger argue further with him. The menace of the gun he held in his hand, the grim determination in his eyes and the fact that he would not speak further, merely waving the terrified Green toward the safe in the corner, was what broke down the old man's resistance.

Almost sobbing, he crossed the room, opened the safe and wrung his hands piteously as the stranger pushed him roughly aside and extracted from the tin box in which they reposed a crisp sheaf of bills.

With unhurried care and scrupulous accuracy the stranger counted out eleven hundred dollars, which he pocketed. The balance he pushed toward Green.

"There," he said, "there's the rest of your money. I ain't no thief. Eleven hundred dollars is what I figure we're entitled to, and eleven hundred dollars is what I got. That's all I want. I guess it's polite to say 'thanks,' but I don't feel like sayin' it, so I won't."

"You got the money now," said Green, sudden hope lighting his soul, as he realized that the hardest part of the stranger's work—the get-away—was still to be accomplished. "You got the money, but you ain't goin' to get away with it.

"No more than you step out that door, I'll have the whole town after you. Tonight, Master Willie Whatever-your-name-is, you're goin' to sleep behind jail bars."

"Do you think so, old man?" laughed the stranger happily. "Well, I don't. Suppose you turn around and look through the window and tell me what you see."

Green turned apprehensively. For a moment or two nothing met his gaze except a lazy, half-hearted rain and the sleepy main street of the little country town; then, walking slowly and with measured tread, there came an overgrown, loutish youth, a tentlike, greenish-hued umbrella upon his shoulder, his serious eyes fixed upon the door leading from Green's office.

For perhaps twenty feet the gangling figure walked in one direction, then, with a snappy, military about face, he retraced his steps in the other direction, where the same thing took place. He patrolled his post as meticulously as a sentry on the eve of battle.

"That's why you're not going to land me in jail," said the stranger complacently. "The minute you put your foot outside that door, my friend out there will blow your head off. He's got the daddy of this little pop-gun in his pocket, and he's gonna stay there until I make a get-away, and if you try to go out that door, he'll take mighty good care you don't get very far, and if you holler, why—he'll just get you through the window.

"It took me a long while to think all this out, old man, but I flatter myself that when I did get it figured out, it was a hummer. I guess I can leave you now. Remember, don't put your foot outside that door, nor don't holler. That is, if you care anything for a whole pelt.

"Good-by, old man. I'll tell sister Minnie how you was so good as to send her to boardin'-school with her own money."

In another instant the stranger was gone,

and with him Green's eleven hundred dollars. Huddled up in the rickety chair, the old man cursed long and deeply. His first impulse was to spring to the door and brave the fire of the pistol-toting youth across the street, but even as he considered the attempt to rise from his chair, the youth's snappy about-face brought Green in the direct line of his vision. With a groan, Green slumped back into his chair.

For more than a half hour the frantic Green hunched himself up in the chair and watched the military precision of his jailer. *Twenty feet, about face; twenty feet, about face* and always those serious eyes glued on the door to Green's office.

Suddenly, and at a time when Green's nerves had reached almost the breaking point, the youth stopped. An expression of pleased relief broke over his face and he reached his hand into a capacious hip pocket and extracted a bandanna with which he mopped a perspiring brow.

For a second or two he rested, breathing his relief in audible exhalations. Then, closing the umbrella, he grasped it by its middle and strode easily toward Green's office, an amiable grin wreathing his features.

Green, who had been watching him, and who had determined to give the alarm the moment the youth turned his back, cowered in his chair as the knob turned and the door swung wide to admit the youth. Even the grin, which was friendliness itself, failed to reassure him. He was fearful that fresh indignities were about to be heaped upon him.

The youth advanced to the middle of the floor, shifted the antiquated rain-shedder quickly and came to a correct "order-arms." With his left hand he executed a clumsy rifle salute.

A self-conscious but wholly satisfied smile covered his freckled features. For a moment there was dead silence. The youth broke it.

"Well, cap'n, do I make it?" he asked anxiously.

"Make it," parroted Green. "Make it—what do you mean?"

The youth relaxed his military pose. Disappointment shone in his features.

"Oh, say, now," he coaxed; "don't try to make fun of me. You know what I mean. Do I make the militia? Are you goin' to put me in it?"

"The militia?" Green was puzzled. He could extract not a particle of reason from the youth's remarks.

"Sure, the militia," responded the other. "That's what I was out there for. Oh, you know all about it, cap'n. Didn't you get that other fellow to bring me all the way here from Lehigh, just so's I could show you what I could do, how I could drill and everything?"

"Didn't you tell him that if I showed you I could walk post in a military manner and could salute and stand at 'attention' and all like that, that you'd get me in the militia, didn't you?"

"I don't understand," babbled Green. "Did he tell you that?"

"Sure he told me that," answered the youth. "Say, you ain't backin' out, are you? Didn't I do all right? I c'n do lots better with a reg'lar rifle."

"And you weren't out there to shoot me, if I came out that door?" queried Green wonderingly.

The youth laughed.

"Shoot you! What with?"

"Didn't he tell you to stand out there and shoot me through the window, if I hollered," persisted Green, brushing a trembling hand before his dazed eyes.

"No, sir," replied the youth, and there was unmistakable honesty and truth in his eyes. "No, sir; I wouldn't never think of shootin' nobody. All I want to do is get in the militia. I been tryin' to learn how to drill and everything just so's I could—"

But the rest of the aspiring youth's words were never uttered. With a shriek of rage, Green leaped from his chair and laid violent hands on the would-be soldier. Surprised, the youth allowed himself to be whirled about.

The youth's progress toward the neighboring town of Lehigh was slow and painful. From time to time an inquiringly sympathetic hand would explore that portion of his trousers that had come in violent contact with the irate Green's foot. The umbrella trailed in the mud.

Heart to Heart Talks



By the Editor



THE years have more than justified the wisdom of Horace Greeley's advice to our fathers: "Go West, young man, go West." Many among us (unavowedly, of course) suspect the virtue has not wholly evaporated from this remedy. If we could shake the dust of the effete East from our feet, free our nostrils of the pungent odor of gasoline, and disengage our eyes from their preoccupation with the glitter of Mammon's mountain, a larger life and a bigger slice of health and happiness would be the reward of our journey. But debt and habit hold us in their net, and here we waste away, engrossed in business, housed in bricks and brass, dreaming of open spaces, the fair face of the ranges and the healing cool of the mountains. Blessed are they who escape and win contentment in the joy of the open.

Here, where men so often fail, in things of the spirit and the will to happiness, women come through with "Excelsior" on their banners.

In our next week's serial—

TH' RAMBLIN' KID

BY EARL WAYLAND BOWMAN

two open-minded women who were surfeited with bromides in correct clothes and the atmosphere they engender, concluded the Greeley command covered their case. Accordingly, they voted to quit their gilded cage in Connecticut and to throw in their lot with Uncle Josiah Heck and the Quarter-Circle Ranch. The result is an engaging story, in which the West wins the allegiance of these high-spirited women after sharing her riches with them. Uncle Heck, to say nothing of th' Ramblin' Kid—we can't stop to give you close-ups of these delightful leads—had cast his lines in pleasant places. But "the best-laid plans of mice and men—" Well, see this novel version by an author who makes his initial bow to our readers in this number.

SOME forty miles south of the coast of Cuba there lies the Isle of Pines, sometimes called the "Gem of the Caribbean." It belongs to Cuba, although of late it has been Americanized to some extent. It isn't a large island—not much more than forty miles in circumference—but it has a diversity of beautiful scenery and natural resources that are of interest to business men. But, more important to the fiction-reading public, it furnishes a fine setting for romance. And in the splendid four-part serial that starts in next week's ALL-STORY WEEKLY the author, with more than usual skill, has taken full advantage of this setting for a romantic and exciting tale of treasure-quest under southern skies. You must not miss the first instalment of

UNDER THE SIGN OF SCORPIO

BY STEPHEN CHALMERS

Author of "The Frozen Beauty," "The Invisible Empire," "The Castle on the Crag," etc.

Mr. Chalmers is a story-teller of quite exceptional ability, and in this, his latest novel, has given us of his best. This new ALL-STORY WEEKLY feature has all the

qualities needful for a tale of buried treasure—rapid action, strong characters, a plot that keeps you guessing right up to the end—and all told with that craftsmanship that makes a story a living and convincing thing. Next to a vacation in the South, the best winter entertainment that we can suggest is the reading of this fine story of Stephen Chalmers.

HAVE you ever met the man who "never felt a moment's fear"? We always had a shrewd notion that most of these fearless ones have done most of their adventuring in a comfortable armchair. Most of the fellows who fought in France will tell you frankly that there were a good many times when their knees weren't any too strong—but they went ahead anyhow and finished their job. To us it seems that the difference between a coward and a brave man is that while the coward is afraid and acts in accordance, the brave man is afraid but overcomes his fear. Turenne, a famous French soldier of bygone days, on going into action remarked: "You tremble, body! Well, you would tremble more if you knew where I am going to take you." The hero of the novelette in next week's issue—

THE EYE COMES OUT

BY JACK BETHEA

had a trembling body and shaken nerves, but he forced it to go ahead and carry out the work which his mind and soul demanded that it do. The stage of his testing wasn't a battle-field—it was the inky depths of a coal mine. What he did wasn't easy to do—but worth-while things seldom are. And what is more worth while than the mastery of a man's mind over his body? This is a story well worth reading.

THE popular misconceptions which obtain about the stage and stage-people would fill a good-sized book. Just how the legends are born and continue to flourish is of less importance than an honest desire to exhibit stage-people as they are. For this reason we have a special predilection for George Kerr O'Neill's vaudeville stories because he lets us all see what delightfully normal and human people they are. His latest revelation, "A MAGNET," in next week's magazine, is a gem of a story and a faithful portrait of some of these people who have been done a grave injustice by the sensational nonsense which is talked about them. Don't miss this story if you want to know the truth about "a headliner."

We don't want a single reader to miss Solita Solano's lovely story, "DOMINGO," in next week's magazine. Here is a tale which deserves more than passing attention because it is written with that sympathy and understanding of a primitive people which can only come from long residence among them. The story is laid in the Philippines, and all the characters are Filipinos.

Most of us know too little about this country and its people, for whose emancipation we have made ourselves responsible. "Domingo" is a bit of the real thing.

THE splendid impression created by Raymond Barrett in his series, "BROWN: BENEFACTOR AT LARGE," is well sustained by the third story, which will be found in next week's magazine: "ADVENTURE OF THE STRAY HAIR." Most of us, unwittingly, have at add times picked up a stray hair which has called for explanations, but I question whether any among us has ever been projected into such a medley of adventure and misadventure by so harmless a phenomenon as the hero of this tale.

We confess to a social conscience and a desire to benefit our fellow wayfarers, but not to the extent of Brown's benefactions. However, you may think differently. Consult Brown.

WANTS SEQUEL TO "THE FLYING LEGION"

TO THE EDITOR:

I have just finished the story, "The Flying Legion," and if you will please tell Mr. England that unless he writes us a sequel in a short while I'm afraid that something will happen. That story is not complete. Possibly he is now writing one, for he did not tell what happened to Nissir, the plane, or the fate of the other five left with it, and there are quite a few things that point to the fact that a sequel must follow soon.

I have liked it so well, that if he does not finish I believe that I will get the assistance of some one who can give me passages in the Arabic tongue, and try to let the Master go back to get the treasure, find Bohannon, and establish the fate of the rest of the legion.

Your magazine has been read by me for about three months lately, but I read your publications some three years ago, and have enjoyed many an hour perusing same.

Among other stories that I have liked in your late issues are: "The Hidden Kingdom"—a sequel to this might prove acceptable; "A Buccaneer in Spats," "Grey Dusk," and "Traillin'." I am now reading with interest "No Fear," "The Red Seal," and also "A Buccaneer in Spats," which I have mentioned above.

Let me hope that you will ask Mr. England to give us an early sequel to "The Flying Legion," and I wish your magazine the best of luck in the future.

L. E. LLOYD.

Fort Worth, Texas.

LITTLE HEART-BEATS

Please send me ALL-STORY WEEKLY for November 15, 1910, for inclosed ten cents. I have been a constant reader of your wonderful magazine for nearly ten years. For some reason I missed this number but trust that you have a copy on hand. I have never written you before, but, nevertheless, I have appreciated the ALL-STORY WEEKLY more than any magazine on the market. The stories are such a nice variety, unlike other magazines, that it is very hard to pick out a favorite. Each and every story is a favorite of mine. Did you say I was not hard to please? Not with an ALL-STORY WEEKLY; they all please. Trusting that I may soon receive the copy I mentioned, I am now and always for the ALL-STORY WEEKLY.

MRS. GEORGIA NICHOLS.

Calumet Avenue, Chicago, Illinois.

Have been reading the ALL-STORY WEEKLY for a long time. I was quite a little girl when I read my first copy, and have missed very few since then. I love your Southern stories, and E. K. Means's negro stories very much. Also the Western stories. "The Untamed" was great. "The Gold Girl" promises to be good, too. Why do we never hear from E. R. Burroughs? When will we have another "Janie Frete" story by R. S. Spears? I would like very much to see another story like "The Mucker," by Edgar Rice Burroughs. Like your serials better than the short stories, but you can't please every one. Wishing you success,

PERCIE B. SELIGMAN.

Little Rock, Arkansas.

As I have been a reader of the ALL-STORY WEEKLY for some time I thought I would write

and tell how much I like it. I just couldn't get along without it. I couldn't get it for a while on account of the printers' strike, and I think I appreciate it all the more because I had to do without it. I would like some more stories by E. R. Burroughs. I think he is splendid. Some stories I liked especially well were "Black But-terflies," "The Conquest of the Moon Pool," "The Substitute Millionaire," "Ashes to Ashes," "Twenty-Six Clues," "The Girl in the Golden Atom," and others too numerous to mention. I am so glad to have a sequel to "The Girl in the Golden Atom." I would like to hear from ALL-STORY WEEKLY readers, and will answer any letters I may receive. Best wishes to ALL-STORY WEEKLY and readers.

MISS MARGARET SHEA.

Nelsonville, Ohio.

I enclose one dollar to renew my subscription for another three months, beginning with the issue of January 3. Have just finished "Eastward Ho!" and think it was 100 per cent. My opinions of other recent serials are: "On Swan River," 100 per cent; "Comrades of Peril," 100 per cent; "The Clean-Up," 95 per cent; "Misery Mansions," 90 per cent; "The Grouch," 90 per cent; "Children of the Night," 88 per cent; "Lions' Jaws," 85 per cent; "From Now On," 88 per cent; "Conquest of the Moon Pool," 5 per cent; "Mouthpiece of Zitu," 10 per cent; Means's Tickfall stories, 100 per cent; "The Ivory Pipe," 99 per cent. Well, there are many people of many minds, and many minds of different kinds, but I don't see why so many go daft over the "Moon Pool" stories. I simply can't see them. Something nearer home for mine. G. A. England and Parrish are great. Hope they will come again soon.

O. L. REITAN

Kathryn, North Dakota.

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