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ALL-STORY WEEKLY



MODEST STEIN

Baffling Mystery
Rapid Fire Adventure
Charming Romance

Moors End

by Jeanette I. Helm

Author of "The House of the Purple Stairs," etc.

ALL-STORY WEEKLY

VOLUME CXII

NUMBER



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VOL. CXII



SATURDAY, JULY 10, 1920

NUMBER 2



Moors End

by Jeannette I. Helm

Author of "The House of the Purple Stairs," etc.

JEANNETTE I. HELM, the author of this most interest-gripping and entertaining mystery story, is not a newcomer in the ALL-STORY WEEKLY, although we have not had the pleasure of publishing any of her work since 1915, when her serial story, "The House of the Purple Stairs," found many enthusiastic readers. We are sure that this later mystery tale from her pen will prove equally popular with our readers.

CHAPTER I.

A LETTER FROM GREGORY DEANE.

I HAD been out late the previous night, tumbled into bed and fallen asleep at once. I only remember shedding my clothes as I entered my room, and didn't wake until many repeated heavy thumps on my door finally reached through to my inner consciousness.

Even then it was several minutes before I could pull myself out of bed. When, yawning prodigiously, I finally opened the door, I found Carter Coleman, my especial chum, who lived in the same boarding-house.

"Are you set for any special hour or only around the clock?" he asked. "I've been pounding here for ten minutes at least."

"What's the row?" I said sleepily. "Come on in."

He dropped into a chair, helped himself to a cigarette, and tossed a letter towards me.

"Mrs. Atkins gave me this to bring up to you. Looks as if it had had a tough job keeping up with your one day stands."

I don't know what feeling besides mere curiosity made me stop and waste a moment of precious time on opening the letter, for the handwriting was not familiar and my mail usually consisted of duns. I read:

SEETUCKET, MASS.

MY DEAR NEPHEW CARLOS:

I have at last decided to make my will, and naturally wish to do so in favor of one of my nearest relatives. As you doubtless are aware, there are only two who can claim to be such; your second cousin, Shirley Deane, daughter of the very worthless son of my elder brother, and yourself, the only son of the daughter of another of my brothers and her almost equally worthless husband. As I have not seen either of you since you were children, both then being, as I remember, equally forward and undisciplined, I have no personal predilections. Also, from the inquiries I have caused to be made about you and your cousin, I cannot find that either has any advantage over the other in steadiness of aim and occupation. You, for instance, having spent your small inheritance in unprofitable idling and travel,

have been living for the past three years (more or less unprofitably also) by your wits; your cousin declined the offered situation of companion to her, great aunt, a woman of piety and strict principles, in order to go on the stage, paint ridiculous pictures, *et cetera*, and is succeeding about as badly as you are. Indeed, I should imagine that you are both equally unreliable and unfit to become my heir.

But, since you two are the nearest of kin, and I have firmly resolved to leave nothing to charity or my distant relatives, and in no case to divide the property, I am obliged to choose one of you. To that end I am writing you to come at once by the Fall River boat on Thursday, October 2, and spend two weeks at my home, during which time I may, I hope, acquaint myself with your virtues as well as faults. Your cousin will follow you later and likewise remain two weeks with the same object. I will then announce my choice.

Very truly yours,

GREGORY DEANE.

P. S.—I enclose your fare to Seetucket.

N. B.—As I am a keen observer of human nature, any attempt to assume a character foreign to your own, would be disastrous. I prefer natural vices to assumed virtues.

G. D.

I read the letter a second time before its meaning dawned on me. Could it be true that my mother's uncle, Gregory Deane, whom I remembered quite as unpleasantly as he did me, was really going to leave his money to me! The thought made my blood sing in my ears.

I had never needed money more than just now, and even if he didn't give me anything but the prospect of it, I knew a place where I could borrow liberally on that. But there was this second cousin, Shirley Deane, to be reckoned with!

I racked my memory for some idea of what she was like, and could only bring up a vague recollection of a dumpy, decidedly too affectionate little girl at some party when I was ten, who had insisted upon offering me sugar hearts, and had hurt my masculine pride by calling me "Curley head." If that were she, I flattered myself that I knew how to keep up the good work. The money would be mine, and hurrah! for an end to worry as to ways and means. I rubbed the lamp of my imagination so recklessly that I had built up endless golden castles in a short time.

Coleman, surprised by my continued silence, emerged from his cloud of smoke

long enough to remind me that time was traveling faster than I was.

"Great Scott, don't I know it," I yelled, coming out of my dreams and making a wild dash at my suit-case. "Cole, what time does the Fall River boat leave?"

"Five-thirty, now, I believe; it used to be six in summer."

"Pray that it still keeps to summer schedules," I groaned, piling socks, coats, and shoes into my case.

"What's got you, Brent?" stared Carter.

"Cole, I've got to go to Seetucket on the Fall River boat to-night if I can make it." I threw him the letter.

"Read and catch on. And if you've got some extra iron-men on you, lend them to me, will you? My canny uncle has sent me just the exact fare, and I've only three dollars and fifty cents of my own. Otherwise I'd take the night train to Boston."

"Whew!" whistled Coleman as he dived down into his pockets. "And me accidentally paying the rent to Mrs. Atkins on the way up. Bad habit, that! All I can let you have is two dollars and twenty-five cents exactly."

"Thanks, that will help." I stuffed it into my pockets. "Get me a taxi, old man, will you? Gee, I've only thirty minutes to make this. It will be a hustle."

And it was a hustle, indeed. I shot out of the house, nearly overturning Tillie, the colored girl, who was scrubbing the front hall; was fairly pushed by Coleman, together with my suit-case, into the taxi that he had miraculously procured, and had only time to grasp his hand and yell out "Thanks," before we flew off.

I'd promised the man an extra dollar if we made the boat, and he did his best, going on one wheel most of the time, and taking equally good chances of arrest or damage. I was boiling with impatience even before I did a two-hundred-yard dash along the pier, and I was only just in time—in fact the big gangplank was rising by inches as I appeared. In spite of the warning grip laid on me by the pier hands, I made a wild jump for the plank, ran up it like a monkey, and was hauled aboard by the swearing deck-hands of the *Priscilla*.

After I had recovered my breath, wits

and suit-case, which had been fired after me by a sympathizing pier lounge, and accepted meekly enough the scolding of the officer in charge of the gangplank, I slipped into a seat on deck. I needed time for a little quiet thinking to adjust myself to this sudden change which had made me give up a job I had thought secure, and sent me literally sailing out into an unknown future without even the money for a return ticket!

I had spent two dollars and fifty cents on getting to the boat, and a hasty calculation showed me that I now had three dollars and a quarter left. I hadn't the faintest idea what the rest of my journey would cost. Seetucket! How far away was that, and where in the ocean was it? There are scores of islands, Nantasket, Quahasset, and the like, spotting the coast of Massachusetts like ducklings hovering near the parent fowl, but where this especial one was floating, I had no idea.

My careful great uncle had only sent me my Fall River fare—fortunately he had included a berth also. I wondered if it wouldn't be wiser for me to go without that and save the money for emergencies. A distasteful memory of the frowzled heavy-lidded men I had seen spending the night on chairs in the saloon, decided me—better arrive at Uncle Gregory's entirely broke than looking as though I had slept in my clothes.

I would go as far as I could with what I had, and my gold watch would take me the rest of the way. It wouldn't be the first time; in fact, it was a favorite joke of Coleman's that I went faster on my watch than by it. Anyway, if Uncle G. wasn't satisfied with me, he would have to pay my way back at the end of the two weeks; perhaps that argument might even influence his frugal soul!

I put aside all further speculation and watched the always fascinating operation of warping the big boat out of her pier. It was warm for the time of year, and a sort of yellow haze hung over the city against which the pigeons rose and wheeled in flashes of white and blue. The air had the warmed-over summer atmosphere which the city seems able to produce at a day's

notice, made up of sunbaked asphalt, smoke and the local smell of bilge and decaying fruit.

It was a relief to look forward to the freshness of the water, and my sense of romance, which is never far distant, began to respond to the increasing throbbing swing of the great paddles. No one has ever sung or written of the romance and adventure of a Sound boat; to most it means a cooler and cheaper way to Boston and Providence; but I've never got over my childish feeling of anticipation whenever I travel on one.

Besides the panorama of sky-scrapers, bridges, and islands, there are such fascinating bits of sea life; a line of scows, their owners sitting placidly smoking on their decks; a swift, gilded yacht slipping by; an old stone boat, her patched sails glorified by the sunset; and after you are well out to sea, rakish black craft that your search-light picks up and holds for an instant only to drop them astern into mysterious darkness.

Then there is always the hope, unspoken but latent, that some time a Sound boat will weary of being only a ferry, turning up regularly at her pier each day, and will start off in the night for a cruise of her own that will show you when you wake, not the grimy docks of Boston or New York, but a whole South Seas of adventure!

I came out of my fancies reluctantly, and as we were now well under way, went down to secure a berth. This was not difficult at this season of the year, for the travel was all in the other direction. In fact, there was only one person ahead of me; a young girl in a sailor hat and brown suit, the latter very well tailored.

I knew this, because I had plenty of time to study it while she discussed with the purser what seemed to be the entire cabin plan of the boat. I had also deduced that she must be pretty to keep him so attentive, and when she finally received her key and turned away, the glimpse I got of red-gold hair and a curved yet firm chin made me rise in my own estimation.

I guessed, too, that she was a determined young person, both from the chin,

and the fact that the purser wore the hurried look of one who has yielded a point against his inclination. When I asked for an outer stateroom, he shoved over the key irritably.

"I hope you're not going to want my cabin or the especial stateroom on the port side next to the first gangway," he grumbled. "She's got that, and it took ten minutes to find her the exact one she wanted."

"No, I'm not so particular as all that," I laughed as I gathered up my change. "Anything that has a decent berth, plenty of air and only me in it, suits me. Weren't there enough to-night for her choose from?"

"Nearly half the boat, but, no—she had to pick out the very stateroom I'd promised to a friend. Said that she never felt comfortable unless she had that one, so I had to give it to her. Anyway, she was pretty enough to take a little trouble for."

Then, as if he had said too much, he snapped out: "Well, what do you want?" to a man who was crowding in closely upon me. I moved back, and while stopping to stow away my change, took a look at the fellow.

He was certainly not prepossessing in any way; burly, with a two days' growth of beard on a face which didn't need that additional ornament to make it look both vicious and dissipated; and long arms that hung down at his sides like an ape's. I took away two facts from my casual glance—that his shoulders were broad and powerful in spite of his shambling gait, and that one ear was of the kind known as "cauliflower."

An ex-pug, most likely, and judging from his extra long reach and shoulders, not a pleasant sort to meet in a mixup. I've a habit of quick observation, and I noted all this subconsciously—had the fellow catalogued, put away in my mental gallery, and forgotten before I picked up my bag and started up-stairs to my stateroom. I'd blessed this unconscious faculty many times before this in a varied life, I was to do so again shortly.

I found my stateroom, a large outside one, very clean and pleasant, and proceed-

ed to open my suit-case and take out a tweed cap. Then my thoughts returned to my great uncle's letter, and I reread it carefully, racking my brains for some mental picture of its writer.

My memories of him were vague, boyish ones of an exceedingly unpleasant old man, who had glared at me from under shaggy brows and asked questions that exposed my entire ignorance. My only hope was that age might have softened him, but the tone of the letter did not seem to promise that he had lost any of his acrid humor and ability to make one squirm.

He had treated my mother, who had been the daughter of his favorite brother, harshly, had refused to help her after my father's death, and it did not seem likely that he would be much inclined to love me. But he had a strong family feeling, as was shown by his letter, and anyway, this other claimant, Shirley Deane, had no better chances than I.

I could only resolve to do my best and make the most of my two weeks' start.

CHAPTER II.

THE GIRL.

I SUDDENLY felt hungry, and realized that I had not had a bite to eat since—early that morning, so I went into the dining-room, but after studying the menu hungrily, restrained myself to a very modest meal of ham and eggs, and coffee, for I dared not cut too deeply into my small supply of ready money. The colored waiter looked disdainfully at my frugal tip, and I was glad to finish and get on deck once more.

We were already well out in the open Sound, and I chose a good position in the stern of the boat to watch the scene of which I never tire. I discovered that the seat I had chosen was just alongside of my girl of the brown suit, and I was glad of the lucky chance. She was not only very pretty, but something about her well-poised head and slender yet strong figure, interested me.

She looked as if she meant to have her own way and would get it. The skilful

manner in which she had managed the purser showed that, and the glimpses I had now of a clear profile and a decidedly entrancing dimple, hinted at interesting possibilities, of another sort.

I am not much different from other men in taking my amusement where I can get it, but I have not knocked about without learning how to do it. It would be much pleasanter to chat than to sit there in silence, but I knew I must wait for a suitable opening. She was not the sort that could be easily spoken to, and it only made the game more pleasant.

So I sat quietly for a time, silently watching the white wake slipping astern. On the distant shore of Long Island lights gleamed faintly. Involuntarily I said aloud:

"Isn't it beautiful?"

My companion had been gazing up with equal fascination, and she answered as involuntarily: "Yes, I have never seen anything more beautiful."

"That is because it is so late in the season. Early autumn is the finest time on the water."

"Do you take the trip often?"

I marked the significant transition from general to personal, and congratulated myself upon having a companion who evidently knew the finesse of the game. I ventured further.

"Not very, but I always take it whenever I can. I've never lost my childish sense of adventure in it. Anything may happen, although nothing ever does. The very name of Point Judith is associated in my mind with a delightful fear of shipwrecks, even pirates.

"By the way, there is a man on board who would do very well for one of the latter. He has as ugly a face as ever watched a ship being scuttled, or poor wretches forced to walk the plank."

To my surprise, she turned a startled face to mine.

"What is he like?" she half gasped.

"A big hulking fellow with extra long arms, and a mushroom ear. Looked like an ex-pug. He was just behind us while you were getting your tickets. Didn't you see him?"

She did not seem to see the slip in my admission that I had noticed her before. Her face still was grave and puzzled.

"Big and burly, long arms," she repeated. "It sounds like—oh, very terrifying!" This last with an attempt at a lighter tone.

"Well, in any case, even if he is the original Captain Kidd, you need not be afraid. The stewards are around half the night and I stand ready to rescue you at any time. I believe the purser gave me the stateroom opposite yours."

It was quite innocently said, but for some inscrutable reason she chose to take offense.

"Thank you, but I can take very good care of myself," she said stiffly. "I always carry a small pistol."

She got up, and with a very slight bow, walked to the other end of the boat. I sat still, annoyed, both at myself for having blundered, and for her for having so decidedly snubbed me. The tinge of red in her hair, and the decided tilt of her chin, should have warned me, although I had said what I did quite without intention.

I had only thought to make her acquaintance in order to pass pleasantly an otherwise tedious trip, and she had chosen to take my foolish joke as an insult, and walk off with her nose in the air. And, confound it all, what an attractive nose it was! I couldn't help thinking her as fascinating in a temper as in a pleasant mood, and equally alluring in both—if she chose.

I called myself a fool for thinking at all of a girl who had just snubbed me, and finding even a cigarette unsoothing, went below in a decidedly bad temper. I tried to read a magazine I had picked up from a sofa, but the stories were either crude or stupid, and at last in a thoroughly annoyed frame of mind, I went to bed. As I put out my light I heard the door of the stateroom opposite open and shut again, and wondered, with a drowsy grin, if my red-haired neighbor had her pistol ready.

I was awakened suddenly from a heavy sleep by an odd feeling, which, at first, I could not quite understand—a sensation that something was not entirely right. There had been no noise to awaken me; there was no sound now, but the occasional

scrape of a heavy boot overhead, and when I snapped on the electric light my cabin was as usual.

Yet something was wrong. The quietness seemed ominous—yes—that was it—the boat was not moving, merely gently swaying. It was an unusually still night, and warm for the season. I had gone to bed with the consciousness of a very gentle motion; but even the stopping of that had awakened me.

Something was wrong, and yet it couldn't be very serious, or I should have heard some noise or excitement above. Anyway, I would go and investigate, so I slipped into my trousers and coat, turned up my collar to hide my lack of linen, put on my shoes and went out.

As I opened my door, that of my neighbor, opposite, was opened also, and we nearly ran into each other. She was fully dressed, with a black scarf thrown about her head, which made her very picturesque.

"What is it?" she asked quickly. "We've stopped, haven't we? Do you think there is any danger?"

Evidently she had forgotten her distrust of me in the fright of the moment, for she stepped closer as the great whistle above us suddenly screamed out a warning signal.

"I don't think there is anything serious," I reassured her. "Something wrong with the machinery, probably. 'I'll go on deck and find out, then come back and tell you.'"

"I'd rather go up also," she answered promptly, but she was not too independent to refuse my aid in getting up the narrow stairs that were just outside our corridor.

It was between one and two o'clock, and a late moon was shining faintly through the October haze, giving an unreal look to everything. The big ship was lifting sluggishly on a gentle swell, and a couple of miles off the lights of the nearest land showed dimly.

Nearly all of the small number of passengers were on deck, but there was no excitement; groups stood about, or leaned over the rail, for all the world as if it were midday and the stoppage the most usual thing. In fact there was an air of unnatural reality about the scene, as though

it had been staged by some moving-picture director and we were all waiting for the camera man to begin.

I caught a passing steward by the arm and asked him what was the matter.

"One of the crank axles is broken, I think," he answered. "We've just stopped for an hour to fix it, and then will go on," and he hurried off.

Foolishly enough, I felt a bit let down by the palpable fact that there really wasn't any danger. Not that I actually wanted it, but because my romantic imagination saw the chance for an adventure: beautiful haughty girl rescued from wrecked vessel by noble hero, and subsequent relenting by haughty one. The scene was well set, and although I couldn't lay any claim to being a hero, my lady of the brown hair looked, under the soft mysterious moonlight, exceedingly well fitted for the heroine.

I was determined, however, not to lose the advantage of her momentary confidence, so I said with an air of being equal to any situation: "I don't believe there is any danger, but you never can tell what will happen. Suppose we go forward and see what they are doing."

Quite a little crowd had gathered on the upper deck, and as we joined them we saw that they were letting down one of the huge anchors that hung at the ship's bow. We leaned over the rail together, and with the rest, watched the big, black piece of iron slide almost noiselessly into the oily water.

"I wonder how long we will stay here?" she said rather curiously. "Do you suppose it will make us late in arriving?"

"I hope not. I've got to catch the boat for Seetucket, and there is only one, I believe."

"Are you going there? So am I."

"That's very nice," I said gallantly. "Perhaps we shall see each other there."

"Perhaps." But her tone, though laconic, was not unfriendly, and she smiled as if something amused her.

She had a most charming smile, one that took away from the guardedness of her expression, and made her companionably attractive. I began to feel that I was very

lucky to have such a traveling companion, and hoped that my uncle would not object to my seeing her again.

I seemed to remember that he was somewhat of a misogamist, but surely even he could not be proof against such a smile. I smiled, too.

"I'd hate to lose the boat for Seetucket. I only got this by the skin of my teeth."

"Yes, you had a close shave." Then, as if she had admitted too much, she added more stiffly: "I happened to be on deck when they dragged you on board."

"I hope I came up more gracefully than the anchor is doing. I see they are hauling it up again. We must be going on."

The passengers were beginning to straggle back toward their staterooms, so, as I couldn't think of any excuse for detaining her, we started to follow them. At that moment an agitated woman clutched my arm.

"Oh, can't you help me find my stateroom?" she wailed. "It's somewhere just around here, but I can't see."

CHAPTER III.

MIDNIGHT MYSTERY.

THE moon had slid under a soft cloud, and the half light made it very difficult to distinguish objects, so she had some excuse for her dismay. The stewards had all disappeared, and we three were alone except for a tall, lanky boy, who was trying to light a cigarette in the lee of one of the ship's boats.

The woman was pawing desperately at the paneling, which was so covered with the useless ornamental grooving used on the Sound boats that it was extremely difficult to find where the doors began or ended. I joined in the search and began pawing, too, but for the life of me I couldn't find any keyhole.

The lanky boy, becoming interested, tried to help with lighted matches, but the freshening wind blew them out, and presently he gave them up and began pawing also. It was like a scene in a nightmare, this trying to find an entrance to a strange woman's stateroom, and I think we should

have been there yet but for a sudden exclamation from the brown-eyed girl.

"Why," she said, with a little choke in her voice, "there aren't any staterooms here. This is the paneling of the saloon, the passageway is farther down."

And then she began to laugh. I couldn't help it—the whole situation was so absurd, three people trying desperately to get into the side of the ship—that I broke down, also, and fairly yelled. The lanky boy joined in, and we stood there rocking with laughter, while the woman, with one indignant glance as if she suspected us of having done it on purpose, sailed away with great dignity.

I hope she got into the right stateroom, after all. The brown-eyed lady was the first to stop laughing as she had been the first to start.

"Dear me," she said, still with a little catch in her voice, "I hope she was not offended at our laughing; but I really couldn't help it—it was all so ridiculous."

The lanky boy grinned and ambled aft. I mentally blessed the whole episode, for it had served effectually to break the ice between us.

"Funniest thing I ever saw. I don't see how any one could help laughing."

"I never did like the outside staterooms," she said rather irrelevantly. "They're so lonely; it would be easy for any one to get in them; but I can't get along without fresh air."

"It didn't seem easy for her," I answered dryly, and we both laughed again.

Suddenly she realized that we were the only passengers left on deck, and that the ship was proceeding steadily on its way.

"I think I will go down now and try to recover some lost sleep."

"There is better air above," I urged. "You never can sleep in those stuffy cabins; why not take a walk around the deck?"

She shook her head.

"I am tired enough to go to sleep anywhere."

She turned to go, and then added with a quick, friendly smile that made her face very charming: "I hope you will enjoy

your walk, and thank you for looking out for me so well."

"Then you don't think I am such a suspicious character, after all?" I asked.

Her smile grew a little more reserved. "Suspicious? Why, no; I can see you are a gentleman."

"I thought you seemed a little doubtful of that this evening when I spoke," I ventured. "You hinted at pistols and all sorts of terrors."

"Did I?" She seemed confused, but she still laughed. "When one is alone, one has to be careful; and I've had to look after myself."

Unconsciously, as she spoke, she glanced over her shoulder, with the same apprehensive look I had noticed before.

"So have I; I can understand. Knocking about makes one a bit distrustful. But I only spoke to you this evening because I was lonely, and you looked as though you would understand."

She flushed prettily. "I'm sorry; I wanted to talk to you, too." She stopped as though she had said more than she intended.

"Of course, you were perfectly right to be cautious; but you think I am to be trusted now, don't you?"

"Yes, indeed. Good night."

"I'm going to turn in, too. Let me help you down these steep stairs."

She did not object, and we went down together. At the entrance to our corridor I paused, for it struck me that it would look better if I left her there.

"I want to speak to the steward," I said. "I hope you will sleep well. Good night."

She showed her appreciation of my tact by another friendly smile, and went down the passageway to her cabin. I intended to follow as soon as she shut her door, so stood there idly watching her.

She opened the door, and I heard the click of the electric-light, then a sharp cry. The next moment a man dashed out of the room and ran toward me. Even in the subdued light I thought I recognized him as the man of the cauliflower ear.

I didn't stop to reason it out, but instinctively grabbed him. I am pretty strong; I have boxed and fenced a lot, and was

something of an athlete in college, but I might as well have tried to grab a huge Atlantic comber. He slid through my hold with a combination of strength and agility that sent me gasping up against the side of the passageway, and darted out of sight.

The girl was at my side in an instant, white-faced but quiet. "Are you hurt?" she asked quickly.

"No, but some one else soon will be—" for I was angry at the ease with which he had thrown me aside. "I think I know who the fellow is, and I am going to report this to the captain."

She laid her hand on my arm with the same little apprehensive look. "No, no, please don't; it will do no good, and he hasn't taken anything."

"But he must have meant to. How the dickens did he get in, anyway? He must be reported and caught."

"I don't know." She seemed more confused than frightened. "I had the key, and I thought I was safe here. How did he know? I was here," she added.

I looked at her sharply. "You know who he is, then?"

"Yes—no—I've reasons for not wanting anything said about this. Please do as I ask, won't you?"

"But he may come back again," I protested, very much puzzled.

"No, he won't." Her tone was assured.

"This wouldn't have happened if I had not gone on deck and foolishly left my window unfastened. I shall lock both my window and door, and feel perfectly safe for the rest of the night. Please don't worry any more about it, he hasn't taken anything."

I acceded with as much grace as I could, but I privately made up my mind that I would see the fellow the next morning, and have a word with him. I said good night, and we both retired to our staterooms.

I was too tired to go to sleep at once, so I lay down and went over the events of the night, with an ear alert for any sounds from the opposite state-room. I had expected to be bored by my visit to my uncle, but so far its beginning had been quite the reverse of tiresome.

The more I thought of my charming companion, the more I was glad that our

ways were the same. I guessed she could be a good friend as well as a good hater; and I preferred the former, although the latter might be just as amusing, too.

What was the connection between her and the villainous-looking man? She had known him or seen him before, that I was sure of, in spite of her denial. But why did she refuse to press the matter further? What was he after, anyway? She was not richly dressed and gave no impression of having valuable jewelry.

That there was some mystery, I was sure, but while I was turning it over in my mind, sleep came upon me as irresistibly as my pugilist friend had done, and swept me away into unconsciousness.

CHAPTER IV.

RIVALS.

IN spite of the exciting beginning, I had a very quiet night, and only woke when the steward thumped on my door next morning. In the dining-saloon I caught sight of the brown-eyed girl, and this time I went over and took my place by her side without any hesitation.

She, too, seemed none the worse for her night's adventure, and looked fresh and trim in her brown suit, as she smiled at me.

"No more adventures," I asked, "mysterious men; or lady passengers on the wrong side of the cabin door?"

"Never a one. I slept so well I am quite ashamed. You look as though you had done the same."

"My ability to sleep under all sorts of circumstances is a constant source of envy to my friends. By the way, I asked the purser if he thought we would be late for the Seetucket boat, and he said it always waited for this one, so we won't miss that, at any rate."

"I'm so glad," she said. "It means a lot to me to get that boat."

"The same to me, and I'm afraid we will have to hurry now, nearly every one has left."

I called for both checks, but she wouldn't allow me to pay for hers, which was lucky, for I noticed with a sinking heart that I

only had a dollar and fifty cents left. If the Seetucket ticket cost more than that, I should have to arrive C. O. D., an inauspicious beginning with my uncle.

I took both our bags and went on deck. I had not forgotten my intention of settling with him of the cauliflower ear, but although I scrutinized all the passengers carefully as they got off, I couldn't see any sign of him, and I had no time to speak to the purser about him. Probably he had gotten off at Newport; anyway, we were well rid of his ugly face. I noticed the girl, too, looking about rather anxiously and fancied she seemed relieved at his absence.

We took a trolley to the boat, finding her to be one of the snub-nosed, Noah's Ark variety, that seem to abound on the New England coast. She looked like some homely, good-natured country woman on a city street, as she bobbed up and down at her wharf.

When we stepped on board, I felt indeed that the city atmosphere had dropped away from me. I let it go gladly; early though it was, the sun was already shining with the translucent clearness of an October day; the air was cool and sweet as wine, and I had ahead of me a trip of four hours with a very charming companion.

There were only half a dozen passengers, and they all seemed to know each other and the captain, a red-bronzed New Englander, very well. The only outsiders were ourselves, and I noticed that he glanced at us several times, wondering, I suppose why summer people should be coming there so late in the season.

"You haven't a very big cargo to-day," I observed, as the purser, the double of the captain in looks, came around for our tickets. (The fare was only a dollar, I was happy to find.)

"No," he drawled, "not this time o' year. Season's pretty well over by now. Pity, too, for we get some of our best weather this month. Going to stay a couple of weeks?"

"Probably." Then I added, for I was curious to know how they regarded my uncle in his own place, "I am going to visit Mr. Gregory Deane. Do you know him?"

He gave me rather an odd glance.

"I've heard of him, which is about as much as most folks have. Ever been there before? I thought your face looked kind of familiar."

"No, it's my first visit."

He gave me another glance, and passed on without further comment.

I turned back, to find my companion staring at me with an expression equally strange.

"Are you going to stay with Gregory Deane?" she asked slowly.

"Why, yes. Is there anything unusual about it?"

I confess I was a little annoyed by her continuance of the purser's attitude, and tone was a trifle short.

"Not so very, perhaps, if you are the person I think you are."

Her eyes were studying me now with a strange mixture of curiosity and calculation, which changed her whole face, and made it seem less friendly than it had been before.

"Who do you think I am?" I asked still more irritably, for I didn't like the change.

"Carlos Brent."

"Yes; and you?"

"Shirley Deane."

"Great Scott!" I exclaimed, as the full significance of it all burst upon me. "So you are my second cousin, and you are going to visit greatuncle Gregory, too?"

She nodded, still studying me with the same inscrutable expression.

"But he said he was asking you down two weeks later," I exclaimed.

For answer she pulled out a letter and handed it to me. Word for word, it was the exact duplicate of mine, except for the necessary changes in names. Evidently Uncle Gregory played no favorites.

"Well," I exclaimed, looking up, "either he made a mistake in the date, or he wanted us both down together, for purposes of comparison. Perhaps it is a practical joke—I remember he used to be fond of making deuced unpleasant ones, too.

"Anyway, I am very glad to meet you, Cousin Shirley, and to have such a pleasant companion on my way to 'Moors End.'"

I extended my hand laughingly, but she did not put hers in it at once. Instead,

she looked at me with the same deliberating gaze.

"Come," I said jestingly, "even if we are going to be deadly rivals for both Uncle Gregory's favor, and his money, we can be good friends, too, can't we? And it's not every day that I meet such a charming cousin."

At that she laughed and gave me her hand, but I felt that the action was not as spontaneous as I could have wished.

"You are not very complimentary, after all. This is not the first time we have met."

"I meant—met in our own proper persons."

She shook her head.

"No, I don't mean that, either. This isn't the very first time we've seen each other."

"I swear if I'd ever seen you before I should have remembered you."

A little gleam of amusement came into her eyes.

"Yet you have, and don't remember it. See if I can jog your memory. There was a big Thanksgiving party; aunts and uncles and cousins galore, but strangely enough, only two rather shy children. They had a little table to themselves in a corner, where they ate in solemn silence, much impressed by their isolation. Then they were sent out to play while the oldsters sat around and tried to recover from their stuffing.

"The children might have forgotten their shyness, and played happily together as children generally do, if it hadn't been for an officious relative, who thrust at them a gorgeous papier-mâché turkey—which had been the pride of the table center-piece—and told them to go out and play with it. They both fell in love with it at the same time, and wanted the precious thing to have and to hold.

"To be fair, I think the little boy might have let the little girl have it eventually, for he was two years older and a shade bigger, but he had all the masculine desire for first possession. So, unfortunately, had the little girl, and very tactlessly voiced it, at the same time laying violent hands on the turkey's tail. The boy clutched the head, and a battle ensued—"

"And it was some battle," I interrupted.

"I remember now. But what happened to the turkey?"

"It became like Gaul, only in two parts instead of three."

"I'll bet you got the larger half," I laughed. "And were you that horrid little red-headed girl that kicked me, clawed my hair, and who was finally carried away with a defiant tongue still stuck out at me?"

"The very same," she laughed back. "And were you the same aggressive little boy, with coal-black hair, who pulled off my hair ribbons, and tried to choke me?"

"The honors were even," I answered, ruefully. "You went off, I remember, with tufts of that same hair clutched in your hands. And do you know I've been trying all this time to identify you as a sweet little girl I met at a party once who gave me a sugar heart and called me 'Curly.'"

"I'd never do that," she laughed. "Think again."

"I have. Another shattered dream! And so we are going to fight again for the possession of a turkey of another sort. Well, I won't try to choke you, or pull off your hair ribbons this time."

"No, I don't think you will; but it is going to be a fight all the same, for—I mean to have that money."

"And I've got to have it. But we can have an armed truce until we get there, can't we?"

"By all means. It is strange I didn't recognize you. You have the same straight black hair and black eyes, and you're as domineering as ever."

"But *you've* changed a great deal, with the exception of the red hair—and shall I say—the temper?"

"I've worn a lot of that off on the world," she laughed. "Knocking about takes it out of one. And I've had to look after myself for the last five years."

"What did you do? Uncle G. hands you one of his nice compliments about declining the companionship of our mutual great-aunt. If she was the stout lady with a decided mustache and beard and religious principles who tried once to get me to learn my catechism, I applaud your courage."

"I earned her deadly enmity by suggesting that she might use my father's razor,

even offering to borrow it for her. Dad gave me my worst walloping for that, but he laughed all the time he did it. I remember."

"I should have been just as bad, for they fascinated me, too. Ugh! I should have died in that awful prim house. I had a friend, an actress, and she got me in a theater as assistant to the wardrobe mistress. Like all young fools, I was crazy to go on, so I hung around the wings until I knew all the parts as well as the actors."

"Then one of the women fainted at a performance, and as my friend knew I was up on her lines, they put me on in her place. I did all right, I expect, for they gave me her part—she had to go to a hospital for an operation—poor soul."

"That sounds interesting. Then you made good and became a star, of course?"

She flushed slightly.

"I might have made good—but I left."

"Same old thing?"

She nodded briefly.

"When I get back I'll punch his head for you, if you like," I suggested.

"It's rather a big head to punch," she answered dryly. "But I wasn't sorry to leave the stage. It meant toadying and enduring slights, and my red head wouldn't let me do either gracefully."

"I had some funny times afterward: once I got a job in a restaurant to wash dishes. I never want to see one of those granite plates again!"

"Finally I took a studio in Greenwich Village with a friend, and we made block-prints and Batik draperies. She was a little genius, and we had lots of fun, and got along fairly well until she married. Then I went it alone very badly. What have you done since our last meeting?"

"Knocked about, too. I studied for an architect, but I never could remember to put stairways in my plans, and they had to be added anyway, until people finally got peeved at having to climb up by outside stairs, or get in by the roof. Then I got a place in a drug-store, but after I'd nearly killed several people by giving them spirits of camphor instead of ammonia, and Rochelle salts for soda bicarb, I was requested to leave for the public's good. It's

awfully easy to mix things up wrong, but not so easy to unmix them.

"I got low down and took a job as clerk in a five-and-ten-center. My early football training helped me to get through the crowds, but didn't make me popular, so I quit. Then I got the writer's bug and besieged editors. I managed to sell some stuff, and had great visions of a seventh best seller. My last job was reporter on the *Planet*. I left that to come here, so you see, I've got to get that money."

I said this in the purest joke, but she took me seriously.

"And I had no job to leave," she said steadily, "so I've got to get the money."

"Perhaps when Uncle Gregory sees how nice we both are, and how deserving, he will divide his heart and his money."

"I don't think he will"—doubtfully. "He says especially in his letter that he doesn't intend to divide his fortune."

"Then it's to be a duel *à l'outrance* between us." And, I added with a touch of malice, "I am sure you will be as good a loser as winner."

She flashed a glance at me, compounded of equal mirth and determination.

"I never lose when once I set my mind on a thing."

"Nor I, either."

"Then it will probably be a case of the immovable body meeting the irresistible force," she laughed. "And that makes me think that I'd like to meet a square-sized lunch just at this moment. The salt air gives one such an appetite. Isn't it wonderful? We are nearly out of sight of land; we might almost be on the ocean."

CHAPTER V.

AN EVEN START.

IT was, indeed, like being at sea. We had passed the last of the channel lights, and Boston was only a shadow in the distance. The wind had freshened, but not disagreeably, and the old boat stuck her snub nose bravely into the choppy waves.

The salt air had given me an appetite, also, and I was ready for a good luncheon. Undoubtedly they served meals of a sort

on the boat; I had noticed heaps of sandwiches, pie and the inevitable beans in the saloon. Anything would have satisfied me at that moment, but—a serious problem confronted me.

I had exactly fifty cents left. I wanted to pay for my companion, yet how could I? As if she sensed my thoughts, she said quickly:

"Let's go down and get some sandwiches and coffee. But it is to be a Dutch treat, remember. I won't go under any other condition."

I protested, but she was firm, so we went down together. Nothing ever tasted better than those sandwiches and beans. I ate as close to the edge of my allowance as I dared, and came away with fifteen cents to my credit.

I noticed, however, that my second cousin was equally moderate, so I rashly invested another nickel in popcorn, with which we regaled ourselves on deck.

She was a good companion; we had many tastes in common, and if it hadn't been for the unfortunate rivalry between us I think we should have gotten on famously together. Neither of us could quite keep out of our minds, however, the struggle that lay ahead of us, in which neither sex nor friendship could be considered.

It was like Uncle Gregory to give us no warning of our having been asked at the same time. He had a grim sense of humor, as I remembered, having heard that he had once sent a Christmas present of a gold toothpick to a distant relative, whom he frankly hated, and who hadn't a tooth in his head for years. I wondered if we were going to be favored with more examples of his wit, and I only hoped that I could keep my temper.

"What is the joke?" asked Shirley, as I involuntarily smiled to myself.

"I was only thinking how nice it would be if you were not my cousin," I answered.

"You are not very complimentary."

"I intended to be. If it were not for this confounded money, I really think we could get to be quite good friends."

She gave her chin a little rebellious tilt that I remembered in the red-headed child who had fought me.

"I'm not so sure, even if you are. You have a perfectly odious way, Carlos Brent, of taking everything for granted; just as you did when you were a boy."

"Are you going to begin to claw my hair out?" I teased. "You look as though you'd like to."

Then the devil that always gets into me when I meet opposition, prompted me to add: "Well, I always get what I want, so who knows but that I may not get your friendship in spite of you?"

The flash that came into her eyes argued ill for the immediate prospect.

"I don't give away my friendships, nor my secrets, to the first person I meet, and you may find that there is something that you can't get."

I was conscious that I had not made a very tactful beginning.

"Oh, come now, I was only joking. Please forget it, and say you will be friends. Cousin Shirley."

She shook her head, although she smiled.

"Washington said 'to avoid entangling alliances.' The best I can do is to promise to be a fair enemy—provided *you* fight fair."

"Agreed to that. Look! Isn't that the island off there in the distance?"

We forgot our argument in watching Seetucket gradually coming nearer; first as a long, hazy-blue shadow, then growing clearer, until we could make out the breakwater, stretching out to form a harbor, and the gray-roofed village that clustered about a single tall church spire. In the cool air of the October afternoon, everything was vividly distinct; the sea seemed like a clear-cut sapphire, and the numerous islets, with their splashes of vari-colored foliage that crowded about the harbor, lay on the water like Eastern jewels set in lapis lazuli. Shirley gave a sigh of pleasure.

"I've never seen anything more beautiful; I know I'm going to love it."

"If we could only get rid of Uncle Gregory, I think I should enjoy it better. Wonder if he will come to meet us?"

"I don't think he likes strangers," she answered. "Judging from what the purser said, he's not very sociable. Oh, isn't everything adorably quaint!"

We both stared around us with unaffected interest as we landed. Everything seemed unspoiled as yet by the summer people. No one fell on our necks with a welcome, however, and, after standing about the wharf, and being frankly stared at by a few village loafers, I began to make inquiries.

"Has Mr. Gregory Deane sent any carriage for us? Does he live far from here?"

The man I questioned, a broad-shouldered weather-beaten chap with a cast in one eye, looked at me in the same curious, impersonal way as the purser had done on the steamer.

"He does live some ways from here," he drawled—"the whole length of the island. He hain't sent no carriage, because he hain't got none to send."

This was another facer. Shirley and I looked at each other questioningly.

"How far is it? Perhaps we can walk there," I suggested.

"Can if you want to," he admitted grudgingly. "It's only a matter of five miles."

"Has he a telephone?"

"Dunno; if he has he never uses it." Then his curiosity getting the better of his dislike for imparting information, he asked incredulously: "Are you two going out there to see him to-night? Better look out for his dog, it's dretful ugly."

"All right," I answered rather shortly, for his manner irritated me excessively. "And now we've got to get out there somehow, so if you can't give me the information I need will you kindly tell me some one who can?"

For some strange reason, as I grew more irritable, he became more reasonable.

"Well, yes," he drawled. "I guess we can find some one to haul you over there. You could go round by boat; that's the quickest way, only most all but the fishing dories are hauled up for the season. Guess Cy Small can fix you up; I'll go and get him."

He rolled off and Shirley and I looked at each other again in amusement, tinged with consternation.

"This isn't exactly my idea of a warm welcome," observed Shirley, with a smile that was a little forlorn. "I know that

Uncle Gregory is some what of a recluse, but—"

"He may not be so bad when we get out there." I reassured, although I did not feel so hopeful as I sounded. Another problem of my own now presented itself. It would have to be solved before Cy Small made his appearance.

"See here," I said quickly, "it's such a beautiful afternoon I think I'll walk out. You won't mind taking my bag in the carriage with you, will you?"

"I was just going to suggest the same thing," she said promptly. "But how about our bags? I need mine to-night. Won't you ride and let me walk?"

"It can't be done," I answered firmly. "What would Uncle Gregory think if I arrived in state and you walked? And think what an unfair advantage I'd have in arriving there first."

She eyed me keenly. "That isn't your real reason; out with it."

For answer I put my hand in my pocket and drew forth my solitary ten cents, which I held out to her on my extended palm.

"That's my reason. I won't arrive C. O. D., and these island fellows are sharks at charging. And *your* reason?"

She laughed merrily. "Exactly the same as yours—only I am five cents the better of you."

We laughed in unison. After all, we were both young, and adventure held a lure for us that outweighed discomfort.

"Let's walk, then. Perhaps we can get some one to take over the bags."

We did. Fortune favored us, for our first friend reappeared, and informed us that Cy Small had gone home to supper. We, thereupon announced our desire to walk, and put the question of our bags up to him. He remembered that his nephew was going out that way with a lot of groceries, and would deliver our bags at the foot of the bridge—wherever that might be—for twenty-five cents.

We felt Midases, indeed, as we paid the money, and saw him carry away our bags, and still possessed five cents between us. Shirley nobly insisted on starting even, by getting a cake of chocolate.

"Now," she said, "at least we won't

come C. O. D., but if Uncle Gregory doesn't like us he will have to send us back that way. I only hope he won't," she added half nervously.

"Of course not. He has only to see you to be conquered, and to know me is to pity and embrace. And as it's getting later, don't let's lose any time in starting."

CHAPTER VI.

MOORS END.

WE set off gaily along the village street, which was broad and shaded with elms. The houses were very quaint, survivors of the old time when Seetucket was a shipping port, and the East India trade had made any of its citizens wealthy. Now its glory had largely departed, the fleets of "mackerelers," coffee, tea and spice schooners, that used to throng its harbor, had vanished; and nothing remained but a few sailboats and gaily painted Portuguese dories.

Following our friend's directions, we went through Water Street and thence to Milk Street, rather suggestively close, and by Gull Hill out on the sweeping moors beyond. They rose on either side of us like gently waving swells of color; the deep orange of the goldenrod, crimson of sumach, and the gray-green of the bayberry, vivid against the sharp blue of the sea beyond.

It was after five, and the sun was going down into a swirl of yeasty orange clouds. Close to the horizon was a stretch of greenish blue, which added an exquisite effect, as I pointed out to my companion.

"I hope it doesn't mean a storm," she said prosaically.

"More likely cold weather. Don't you remember Coleridge's, 'Green light that lingers in the west'?"

"Oh, do you love that, too?" she cried. "That's one of my favorites."

"I see it's going to be rather hard for us to be good enemies," I observed slyly.

"Our tastes, now, are much alike."

"We both have the grand talent for spending money," she answered dryly, "and we both need it. That alone should be enough to make us good enemies."

"Wait and see. In the meantime, I am enjoying this walk together hugely. What bully air there is on these moors; I only hope that Uncle Gregory give us a better welcome in the shape of a dinner than he did at the station. I've got a magnificent appetite."

"So have I. Let's have some chocolate."

"No, it's for you alone," I protested, as she began to unwrap the tinfoil.

"We share alike, until we reach 'Moors End,'" she answered firmly, giving me an exact half. "After that, each one for himself."

"Agreed." We sat down together on a high rock and ate our chocolate very thankfully, for our lunch had been a light one.

In spite of our penniless state and the dubious welcome that awaited us, I was enjoying myself thoroughly. I didn't doubt but that Shirley would prove a worthy adversary—I still remembered the little fingers that had clutched my hair so viciously—but in any case she was interesting, and a good companion.

She herself dragged me back from these reflections to common sense.

"Don't you think we'd better be walking on: it's getting darker, and we might lose our way—and our dinner."

I scrambled to my feet.

"Horrible thought! Let's go on. The road is a plain one, according to our friend at the station, and we must be nearly there. Isn't that the bridge that he said connected Moors End with the rest of the island?"

We set off briskly toward it. The road was very poor just here, and the wagon-tracks infrequent. In fact, the whole place had a deserted look, and seen in the fall twilight, gave a distinct impression of bleakness.

Half a mile below us was the bridge that led over the island, where, I had been told, my uncle lived. It must be still some part of the mainland, for the tops of rocks showed at intervals in the narrow channel, but the water was sufficiently deep to make the bridge necessary as a means of communication.

A red cupola rose out of a mass of dark pines, at the extreme end of the island, and I judged the house must be there. The

islet itself could not have been more than half a mile wide, and the abundance of shaggy, scrub pine on it, and the gray rocks, gave it a somber, forbidding look.

It was certainly the best place in the world for a recluse and misanthrope like Uncle Gregory to live in, but it did not hold out a lively prospect to visitors. Instinctively my companion moved a step nearer to me, as if she, too, felt the same thing.

I happened to look back of me and it was at this precise moment that I saw a man's head sink out of sight behind a dune, some fifty feet off. I only got an instant's glimpse, but I had a queer fancy that the head was the bullet-shaped one of the man with the cauliflower ear.

How on earth could he have gotten here without our seeing him, and why should he be following us, anyway? I dismissed the matter as absurd; it was probably some Portuguese who was taking a short-cut home, yet the promptness with which the head had disappeared seemed to indicate that its owner had been watching us. Under any other conditions I should have put the matter out of my mind, but the whole setting—the bleak moor on which we stood, the odd place we were going to, and the approaching dusk—set my imagination working.

"What is it?" asked Shirley quickly. "Do you see anything?"

"No, nothing," lightly. "Don't you think we'd better be moving on?"

She hung back a trifle irresolutely. "It looks so gloomy and uninviting." Then involuntarily, she added: "Oh, I'm glad we came together!"

"So am I," I answered, laughing. "I should be scared to death if I were alone; but, as it is, it is quite an adventure."

I glanced back again quickly, as I spoke, to see if I could surprise another glimpse of our follower, but there was nothing in sight but the cold, gray dunes.

We went swinging down the hill and soon reached the bridge. It was an old plank affair with a rustic railing and rather rickety. I insisted on testing it first, although Shirley scoffed at me.

"One good storm would blow that over," I said as we made our way across.

"It's very evident that Uncle Gregory doesn't have many visitors."

"I should think not. We must be careful that awful dog doesn't spring out on us unawares. How still everything is! Do you think he can't be expecting us after all?"

"It doesn't look like it. Perhaps we had better have tried to get him on the telephone somehow."

We had unconsciously lingered on the other side of the bridge. "Look," said Shirley, suddenly, "there's a man coming down the hill."

I whirled around sharply. If it was my bullet-headed friend, I meant to be ready for him.

Then my set muscles relaxed as I saw that this man had a suit-case in either hand. A horse attached to a grocer's wagon, stood at the top of the hill, and the prosaic sight gave me a sense of comfort, which I had not had since I had left the town.

"I seen you along the road and I hollered to you," he said as he deposited the suit-cases in front of us. "My horse can't make that hill, and old Mr. Deane don't like people trespassing."

"Doesn't any one ever come over here?" I asked.

"Not often," he answered dryly. "Him and his dog keep most folks off."

"Then how does Mr. Deane get his mail and provisions?" I somehow felt that I wanted to detain him in talk, and I was curious to know how Uncle Gregory managed.

"Oh, he has stuff sent in three times a week from town; and left at Dan Nickerson's house, up the road thereaways. Peter Duffy, his man, goes in and fetches it.

"Then he has a considerable truck garden back of his house there, and plenty of fowls and ducks. You folks won't starve, I guess."

He looked at us with the same mixture of curiosity and pity which I had seen in both the pursuer and boatman.

"Going to stay long?"

"A couple of weeks, I expect. We ought to have some fine weather now."

"Mebbe." He looked over at the red

sunset rather doubtfully. "We ain't had our fall northeaster yet and the wind's getting in the right quarter for it. But don't let that scare you. This is screwed on pretty right to the rest of the island." He laughed and went back up the hill.

My companion looked after him rather longingly, but she didn't say anything. I knew how she was feeling. In spite of the fact that I had been through many adventures and always enjoyed them, I think I should have infinitely preferred, at that moment, to be seated before a good dinner in town.

However, there was nothing to do but make the best of it, so I picked up the two suit-cases and we set off along the narrow pathway, which, presumably, led to the house.

The sun had already set, but in the crisp, clear twilight, everything showed up distinctly. We passed a patch of cultivated land, which, I supposed, was the truck garden the man had spoken of; skirted that, and still following the path by the pines, came suddenly upon the house itself.

It was so totally unlike any house that one would expect to find in that lonely spot, that we stood staring at it in astonishment. My imagination had led me to expect a gray, weather-beaten building of rather gloomy appearance, but this was the kind of house that would better have suited the village streets; square of red stone of some sort, with white-railed balconies, and an exquisitely symmetrical white Colonial doorway, that suggested elm-covered street and brick-paved walks.

How on earth had this stately mansion been built on this desolate bit of rocky coast? On three sides it was fenced in by high, white lattice, and beyond, rose the tall white tower, touched with yellow, of some outbuilding. All around were stunted pine-trees, and beyond them the rocks and the sea, a rich metallic-blue in the deepening twilight.

There was no sign nor sound of any life about the place, neither a curl of smoke from the chimney nor the bark of a dog, and yet the house did not appear uninhabited. It only seemed to be waiting for something or some one; houses, like clothes,

carry a faint trace of late occupancy, and this one still seemed to be full of it.

There was nothing either, as I have said, in the least gloomy or repellent about the place, and yet I'll confess that it was with a distinct effort that I went up the stone steps and plied the knocker.

I must have used a little more strength than was necessary, for the sound of my knock fairly slanged and vibrated on the still air until I expected to see the angry figure of Uncle Gregory appear, and order me off.

"Whew!" I said to Shirley, who had been standing quite close to me, rather silent and tight-lipped. "I didn't mean to sound a tocsin that way. It ought to raise some one soon, if only the dog."

But the echo died away into the silence and only the wind in the pines answered. I waited for what seemed to me a most reasonable length of time, and then knocked again, more softly, but with equal result. After nearly ten minutes of waiting, we looked at each other questioningly.

"We've got to get in somehow," said Shirley, decidedly. "Perhaps Uncle Gregory is deaf, or in the back of the house, and doesn't hear. He may be entirely alone now. Let's go round to the back and try there."

"All right, but how about leaving our bags here? Perhaps you'd better stay with them while I investigate."

"I'll go with you," she said promptly, and I didn't blame her for not wanting to stay alone in front of that curiously expectant door.

So we followed the line of lattice in an endeavor to reach the back entrance. It was presently borne upon us, however, that the lattice ran unbrokenly around the whole rear of the house, and the only door we came to, which was just behind the tall tower, was tightly locked.

The lattice itself was too high to scale and so closely joined as to afford not the slightest foot or fingerhold. It enclosed a garden, as I could make out from the glimpses of green and spots of color I got by applying my eye closely to the tiny holes in the lattice—adum was a complete protection against intruders.

It began to dawn upon us by the time we had made the entire round, that it might be as complete a bar to even invited guests! No one had answered my knocks on the rear door nor my calls, and we reached the front door again to find it as inhospitably closed as before.

"See here," I said angrily, for Shirley was beginning to shiver and I was both cold and hungry myself, "this is getting past the joke stage. We can't camp out all night. I am going to get in somehow if I have to break a window."

I gave the door-knob an angry jerk as I spoke, and to my utter surprise, the door opened and swung slowly inward. Evidently it had not been locked at all!

CHAPTER VII.

AN ODD WELCOME.

IN spite of the way being opened, we did not go in at once, but stood looking at each other rather foolishly. It did not seem rather absurd, after having taken the trouble to make the whole round of the house, to find at last that the door had been open all the time!

But, had it really been open? I could not rid myself of the feeling that it had been closed and locked when we first rang. Was it some grim jest on the part of Uncle Gregory, or was I getting foolishly suspicious under the influence of the darkening evening and the unnaturally quiet house? I made up my mind that it was the latter.

"I'll go in first and see if any one is home," I said carelessly, and swung wide the half-open door.

I heard Shirley give a nervous little laugh.

"I can't allow you to have any advantage over me, so I'll follow directly behind. How dark it is!"

It was both dark and still in the long hall in which we found ourselves. I could see by the faint glimmer of twilight that came through a window at the farther end, that the hall ran straight across the house.

The rounded newel-post of a staircase was vaguely discernible at the left, but I could make out nothing more, even though

my eyes were becoming accustomed to the semidarkness. That and the stillness were getting on my nerves, and I determined to end both.

"Is any one here?" I called out.

My voice seemed to make an immense amount of noise in that deadly quiet. It fairly boomed out and I could feel Shirley give a little jump behind me. I fully expected to hear indignant footsteps and my uncle's angry voice demanding who had broken in upon his solitude in this way.

But again a deep velvety silence closed over the wound made by my voice. Only quite far off, it seemed to me I imagined I could hear a clicking like the soft closing or unclosing of a door. It was this that held me motionless for a couple of minutes, but the sound was not repeated; only the far-off beat of the surf came to us translated as a faint whisper.

It was getting decidedly too creepy and I felt in my pocket for my box of matches.

"We'll have a light, anyway," I said as I found and struck a match. Fortunately, I caught sight of a large oil-lamp standing on a table near me, and it was the work of a moment to carry my match to its wick. As it settled down into a steady glow I looked around me.

It was strange what a difference the light made. What before had seemed a coldly inhospitable place now appeared almost inviting. The hall was wide and evidently was used as a living-room, for two carved oak chairs which looked as if they had come from some church stood on either side of the door by which we had entered; and two long mahogany sofas covered with horse-hair lined one side of the hall. Huge steel engravings of historical scenes hung above interspersed with family portraits. A great ecclesiastical-looking lantern of brass with red and green glass swung in the exact center of the ceiling and an equally churchly hat-stand of carved oak stood just beyond the stairs.

Only, strangely enough, there were no hats upon it nor any of the occasional litter about the place that betrays the presence of life. And yet, equally strange, there was not an unhabited air about it, either.

There are rooms and houses that wear

a suspended look, as if the passing of some personality through them had still left invisible traces. It is somewhat the feeling that is left after the passing out of a spirit, which seems afterward to our bereaved senses to be still lingering near us. Yet there was nothing benign about this presence which I felt had only recently been there, rather a sense of warning and ill omen. Had that door I still stubbornly felt that I'd heard open, let out or admitted—some one?

I felt that I was getting both hungry and overimaginative. Perhaps the relieving of one would help the other. Shirley had evidently reached the same conclusion.

"I'm hungry," she announced. "Shall we try to find Uncle Gregory first, or some food?"

"Food! Uncle Gregory can come in as a side issue. He's probably out calling on one of the neighbors."

Shirley laughed at my feeble jest.

"Then the next thing is to find either the pantry or the kitchen. I've an idea it's in the back. Take the light and let's explore."

On the right side of the main door were two other beautiful doors, of either solid rosewood or mahogany, with silver knobs, but when we opened them cautiously and peered within, there came out such a cold and unmistakably unused smell that we retreated. I took up the lamp and, carrying it carefully in both hands, for it was heavy with oil, made my way along the hall closely followed by Shirley. Whether she was nervous or not she concealed it like a good sport, and even went ahead of me when we reached the end of the hall.

"Why there's nothing here but a garden of some sort," she exclaimed, opening the big door, a mate of the one in front, and peering out. "Do you suppose there isn't any kitchen?"

I laughed at her anxious tone.

"You must be getting very hungry. Cheer up, there should be a kitchen—there always is. I noticed another door on the left just before we reached this. Let's try that. And let me go first, it's safer."

"Thank you," returned Shirley with a toss of her head. "I'm not afraid."

She marched off and I followed her with an amused grin it was as well she did not see. Looking over her shoulder I could make out a large mahogany dining-table and a carved sideboard, upon which heavy silverware gave back a dull shine.

"Cheers!" I exclaimed. "Here's a dining-room; at least, they eat somewhere in this place."

"But not here. Look at that table. It hasn't been dusted for days nor the sideboard either."

It was as she had said, and looking at the stiff, coldly formal room one could not even imagine any such human event as eating ever having occurred there. The air of it, too, although less chill, had the same unused feeling as had the other rooms.

"Ugh!" I exclaimed, stepping backward. "I'm sure they put the family corpses in here. Let's get out."

Shirley followed me with alacrity and we stood in the hall taking counsel together.

"They *must* eat somewhere," I concluded. "Perhaps it's down-stairs. I saw a closet with a door that looked very much like a dumbwaiter. It must lead to the kitchen, and where there's a kitchen there is food."

"Not always. I'm beginning to think that Uncle Gregory lives on bones and sawdust, there's such a dried-up look about everything. We can try, anyway, it's better than staying here."

In spite of the laugh with which she concluded, there was a tired, rather forlorn droop to her mouth. Remembering the sketchiness of our lunch and the long tramp, it was not unnatural, and I made up my mind that I would find both food and cheer if I had to burrow through the whole house.

I made for the place where mid-way of the main hall I had seen the staircase. A shorter hall ran beside it at angles, and tucked in just behind it was a door, which must evidently lead to the lower regions, so I pulled it open and began to descend. Two comforting facts were immediately borne in on me as I did so; the warm air that streamed upward showed that there was a fire going somewhere; and from a

pleasant smell of cooking, it was serving an active purpose.

We joyfully followed the smell and, turning to the right as we reached the bottom of the stairs, found ourselves in a large, roomy kitchen, spotlessly neat, with a big copper boiler shining in the glow of the fire. There were several pots on the stove from which came satisfying odors, and a big kettle puffed cheerily on the hob, in front of which lay a big black cat fast asleep.

Over all was the warm, pleasant smell of many good dinners cooked through many years, that lingers in old kitchens. There was a lamp burning on a bracket, so I set down my own lamp, turned the wick low to save the oil, and stood looking at my companion with proud satisfaction.

"There, how is this for faith being rewarded? Judging by the smell, it's going to be some reward."

Shirley was not listening to me, she had discovered the black cat sleeping before the fire, and advanced toward it, uttering the soft, friendly sounds that all cat-lovers use.

The cat opened its eyes lazily, stared—and then sprang to its feet tense as a black panther. It was evidently unused to a woman, for it arched its back and spit at Shirley when she attempted to pat it, and at last darted out the door with a parting hiss.

"It shares the welcoming spirit of the house," observed Shirley ruefully. "I wonder if it's a bad omen; I've never failed before to make friends with any cat."

"It only shows bad taste on the part of the cat."

Shirley looked at me coolly.

"I thought I told you compliments were to be barred. *They* decidedly show bad taste."

"Please pardon me. It's a habit I have -- I won't offend again."

"Very well. Oh, dear, do you suppose we've got to wait until some one comes before we can eat? I'm so hungry—but it doesn't seem right to help ourselves."

"Why not? It's evidently meant to be eaten."

"But somebody must have prepared the food and they ought to be back any minute. I really think we ought to wait."

She sat down with a weary sigh in one of the cane chairs and gazed resignedly before her. I had been unceremoniously investigating the pots on the fire, and I, now, turned toward her.

"See here, the person who put these on must have been gone some time, the water has all boiled away from these beans and the rice is nearly burned up. That water has been boiling in the kettle at least a half-hour, for it's perfectly dead. The person that left these things on intended to come back half an hour ago—if we don't eat now, nothing will be fit to eat."

Shirley brightened visibly.

"I believe you're right. And as this is probably the fatted calf that was being prepared for us returned prodigals, it is out duty to partake. Only, I shall feel rather foolish if Uncle Gregory comes in and discovers how we have helped ourselves."

"I won't. He has invited us to visit him and he is bound to feed us. It's nearly half-past seven now, and we are both starved, so we can eat with a clear conscience. Will you make the tea and cut some bread while I cook this bacon?"

I had been rummaging in the icebox as I spoke, and had found the above mentioned bacon and some eggs, beside a big apple-pie. I didn't intend to go hungry and my appetite felt capable of higher flights than beans and rice. Shirley looked at me several times while she followed my suggestions about tea and bread.

"Where did you learn so much about cooking?" she asked at last.

"Oh, I've had to look after myself for some time, and one gets quite expert in knocking together dishes when one is boarding. I feel as if Mrs. Atkins, my late landlady, ought to appear in the doorway and say: 'Now, Mr. Brent, you know I don't allow such things in my house.'"

"I only hope Uncle Gregory doesn't appear with the same words."

"Let's get finished before he does. There's a dish of bacon and eggs fit to 'mellow the heart' as Aunt Melinda used to say."

Shirley needed no urging and we ate for ten minutes in complete silence.

"Well," I remarked at last, cutting a huge slice of pie for Shirley and one for myself, "I never thought our day would end with a picnic supper; but I never ate anything that tasted better."

"Nor I," agreed Shirley. "Cousin Carlos, I would like a slice of pie, not a young dreadnaught."

"Cousin Shirley," I returned, dumping the piece on her plate, "you will need heartening to face Uncle Gregory and something tells me you are equal to eating it all."

"You are very intuitive," murmured Shirley, but I noticed that she finished the pie.

It was very cozy and jolly there together in the warm kitchen and we prolonged our meal as much as we decently could. Neither of us was very anxious, I suspect, to go up above in the silent, dark house, and when Shirley suggested that we wash up, I agreed and helped her to the best of my ability.

When everything was tidy and the dishes ranged in a spotless row, Shirley observed carelessly: "I suppose we must be parlor folks now. I like the kitchen best, I must confess."

"Oh, we shall soon make ourselves as much at home above," I said with an equal good show of carelessness. "I haven't any doubt that everything was as well prepared there, as it was below, for our comfort."

"Was it?" answered Shirley cryptically.

"What do you mean?"

"Do you really think this supper was being cooked for us? I know something about cooking, too, and it strikes me that one small pot of beans and an equally small dish of rice doesn't seem like overfeeding for two healthy young people. It's barely enough for two—and there would be four, including Uncle Gregory and his old servant."

"You must remember they are both old people and probably eat lightly. The pie was generous enough, at all events."

"Well, perhaps you are right, but I do wish Uncle Gregory would put in an appearance."

I heartily agreed with her for his continued absence was beginning to be not

only puzzling, but awkward. This strange welcome—or lack of one rather—was undoubtedly some grim jest on the part of our uncle; but he must surely realize that to force two young people to sleep alone in a deserted house would be carrying it too far.

Did he purposely intend to throw us together and was that why he had asked us down at the same time? I looked over at Shirley, who was standing in a rather intent attitude, and noting the tired shadows on her face made up my mind that come what might, I would tell Uncle Gregory what I thought of this stupid joke. As the thought crossed my mind Shirley gave a start that was nearly a jump.

"Listen! What's that?" she cried.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE MYSTERIOUS INTERLOPER.

EVEN before she spoke I, too, had heard it—the dull thud as of a closing door overhead. I realized now that unconsciously we had both been listening for the last hour for that very sound—and that it was a welcome one.

"That's Uncle Gregory!" I cried, catching up the lamp. "Careful now, let me go first with the light."

But Shirley was already ahead of me on the stairs, and I found her standing in the hall when I followed with the lamp. With one accord we looked around and then at each other. There was no one beside ourselves in the great, quiet place, and so far as we could see, no one had been there.

"Oh!" cried Shirley. "I certainly heard some one shut the door. Didn't you?"

"Yes, but did you hear any one walking overhead?"

Shirley admitted that she hadn't, and again we looked at each other nonplused. And then we heard another noise, this time, faint and stealthy as if some one were tiptoeing about in the farthest end of the hall. Shirley shrank back, but I was thoroughly angry at this playing with our nerves.

"Is there any one there?" I called out

sharply and reached for a heavy marble paper-weight which was lying on the center table. There was silence for a moment, and then the stealthy movement recommenced.

Lamp in one hand and weight in the other, I advanced down the hall, expecting every moment to see the spare figure of Uncle Gregory emerge from the shadow, and hear his sardonic chuckle, which I still remembered unpleasantly.

Instead, a quick, dark shadow sped past almost between my legs, and a hiss was flung at me from the blackness that engulfed it. I began to laugh loudly, for my own nerves, good as they were, were beginning to be a little tensed by the diverse happenings of this day.

"It's your friend of down-stairs, the black cat. He seems to be as pleasant tempered as Uncle Gregory."

"But who shut the door?" asked Shirley, who had been standing quietly and with admirable self-control, except for a slight paleness of the lips. "The cat couldn't have made that noise."

I had become gradually conscious of another sound making itself audible, though at a greater distance; a deep sighing that even here was felt like the vibrating of a violin.

"Listen," I said. "Is that surf or wind?"

"Both, I think. The wind is probably blowing up a surf. Don't you remember the man on the boat prophesied a storm?"

"That accounts for the door, then. It probably blew open and then shut again. I'll see it doesn't happen twice."

I crossed over to the door and opened it. A fresh salt wind blew against my face and justified our deductions. Scraps of ragged cloud were already covering the stars, and the moaning of the surf on the rocks came up clearly with an ominous note of storm in it. I shut the door and bolted it.

"But suppose Uncle Gregory does come back and wants to get in?"

"Then I'll let him in," I answered grimly. "He can't complain if we act up to the part of householders he has thrust upon us. Now let's go up-stairs and find some room for you to sleep in, you look tired."

"But what will you do?" began Shirley.

"Oh, I'll sit up here with the cat to let Uncle Gregory in," I returned lightly.

She gave me a quick glance, but said nothing as she followed me up-stairs. We found ourselves in a large, square hall with doors opening out on it, all of which were tightly shut.

A big stove stood in the middle, and from the rocking-chair and magazine-littered table that stood beside it, I judged that this was used as a sort of sitting-room. I swung my lamp higher and scrutinized the doors. There were just six of them, each one as inhospitable looking as the other.

"It's a sort of Bluebeard's choice," I observed. "I don't know in which of the rooms I'll be apt to find the murdered wives hanging."

Shirley moved impatiently, but said nothing. I was sorry myself for my simile which recurred rather uncomfortably as I opened the door nearest to me. I've extremely good nerves, as I said before, and I have tried them out in many tight places, but there was something about this job I didn't like.

The house knew something, and it was keeping its secret extremely well. The same chill, unused smell greeted me, as in the parlors below, and I shut the door hastily. The door opposite yielded the same result, and I jammed it shut and reached for a third knob.

"Do you really think we ought to poke around like this?" asked Shirley a little anxiously.

"No, but I mean to find a habitable spot if I have to go over the whole place." I returned grimly. "Uncle Gregory must sleep somewhere himself, unless he camps as well as eats in the kitchen."

Shirley laughed a little nervously.

"I never knew you had the Deane jaw until just now. On your head be it."

But the third door did not respond. I gave it a second vigorous pull. It still remained closed. I bent to the keyhole and shamelessly applied my eye to it, but all was dark and silent within.

"This evidently is the Bluebeard chamber, but I haven't the key. Come to think of it, this may be the old boy's own room

and he has probably locked it up on leaving."

"Yes, I wouldn't try any more to get in," agreed Shirley. "There must be some other rooms we can use."

She turned the knob nearest her as she spoke, and as I swung my lamp upon the room disclosed by the open door, we both had an agreeable surprise. It was smaller than the rest, and instead of the forbidding black walnut bed and marble-topped table of the other rooms, there were quaint chintz wicker chairs and a modern white enameled bedstead.

There was even a fire ready laid in the big brick fireplace, and in spite of a formal arrangement of the room that lacked the homemaker's touch, it gave enough of a feeling of welcome to be positively cheerful. We smiled at each other with satisfaction.

"This is decidedly better," I said. "Looks as if Uncle Gregory was expecting us after all. This will be your room, of course, and I'll find one for myself in a jiffy."

It was wonderful how much the discovery of the cheerful, if rather ordinary, little room steadied both our nerves. It seemed now less like a housebreaking expedition and more of a lark, to be stumbling around in a strange house so apparently deserted.

When we found an equally modern, up-to-date bath tucked away between the rooms, we were positively jubilant. Evidently Uncle Gregory believed in some of the comforts, even if he clung to the old kerosene-lamps. On further inspection I found one of the rooms I had looked into before not so forbidding, and soon made it still less so with a crackling fire which I found ready laid.

I had already started Shirley's fire going, and on coming up-stairs with two suitcases, which I went down to fetch, saw her curled up in front of the blaze like a contented, sleepy kitten. It was a pretty sight, and I lingered to watch the firelight on her tawny hair.

"Won't you sit down?" she asked with a luxurious yawn. "I'm dead sleepy, but this fire is too jolly to leave."

"Yes, but you need sleep," I answered, resisting the temptation to accept. "Get

into bed and then you can watch your fire from there."

"You're awful bossy, but your advice is good. Good night, Cousin Carlos."

"Good night and sweet dreams, Cousin Shirley. I predict we are going to have some jolly times together in this old house."

She smiled rather inscrutably. "Remember, we are rivals for Uncle Gregory's favor, and I warn you I intend to gain it by fair means or foul."

"So do I, but for all that I think we shall manage to be very pleasant enemies. If you feel nervous or hear anything you don't understand, call me. I'm going to have a pipe or two before I turn in."

I was sleepy myself, but I wanted to think by my fire over the day's events before climbing into my big four-poster. I built up the log fire, pulled a deep, old-fashioned rocker before the blaze, and, with my feet on one of the fire-dogs, gave myself up to reverie.

In spite of myself, however, my thoughts wandered from Uncle Gregory and my probable course with him to my new and very interesting cousin. What spirit she had and how pretty she was! I decided that I preferred red hair—even when accompanied by the traditional bad temper. What a pal she would make any man fortunate enough to win her friendship. It was really too bad that the situation had arrayed us against each other; much as I needed the money, I hated worse to fight with a girl for it, and if it had only been for myself I would have given up the idea and gone home next day.

But I had a very good reason for staying. My half-sister, Ethel, the only relative I had in the world, and of whom I was very fond, had recently lost her husband, a manly young chap, and a good friend of mine. The shock had nearly killed Ethel, and developed a latent consumptive tendency. She was recovering, but very slowly, in a private sanitarium in the woods, and as Phil hadn't left a cent, it was up to me to provide the hundred a month.

It had been a hard fight to do even that, and this chance of assuring Ethel's future seemed too good to lose. If I gave it up now for a sentiment of generosity toward

some one who evidently did not expect it, what would Ethel do, and what would become of my namesake and playfellow, little Carl? No, I had risked everything in coming here, and I intended to play the game for all there was in it.

At this point my thoughts grew hazy, and I must have dozed, for I was roused by my pipe slipping from my fingers to the floor. The fire had gone out, and as I had just put on a big log before sitting down, I must have been asleep some time. I bent over to poke it into new life, for the room was too cold to undress in, but stopped suddenly.

Even as I wakened I had been subconsciously aware of another sound besides the click of my pipe on the wood floor; a creaking noise that did not come from my room, but the hall outside. As I listened it came again.

Some one was going down-stairs, softly but unmistakably!

I went over to the door and quietly unlocked it. It might be Shirley, but why would she go down-stairs? Or Uncle Gregory might have returned and be wandering around to see if all was safe.

Nevertheless, although there might easily be a simple explanation of the noise, I felt that I wanted to see for myself just who or what was making it. I picked up the iron-knobbed poker, and stole out into the hall, my feet in the soft felt slippers I had put on after taking off my shoes, making no sound.

The big lamp in the hall was burning dimly, as I had left it, and everything seemed quiet except for the new heavy thunder of the surf. I was just deciding to go back to my room and finish my much-needed sleep when I heard the sound again, of a creaky board, which I remembered having encountered myself in the hall very near the bottom of the stairs.

I went forward still softly and peered over the banisters. I could see no one, but I caught a glimpse of a dancing spot of light which could come from nothing else but a pocket flash, and heard the footsteps moving down the hall, as far as I could judge, in the direction of the library.

I stopped and considered; the thought

of the man's head I had seen disappearing behind the sand dune recurring to me most unpleasantly. If he were the intruder, it might be the wisest course to let him leave unmolested. I remembered his easy upsetting of me on the boat; and realized that I would have a hard job, even if I surprised him and got the advantage.

The sensible course would have been to wait and see if he came up again, but I am always too impatient to wait. I shortened my grip on the poker and stole softly down the stairs. I had noticed on coming up that they creaked more when one walked on the end by the wall, so I stuck closely to the banister side and managed to get down almost noiselessly.

For some minutes I stood in the dark hall, listening, before I moved again. There was no sound, but how was I to know that my man was not lurking in the shadow only a few feet away ready to jump on me when I moved from the stair foot? I didn't like the idea, but the silence was getting on my nerves so much that I would have been glad of even an encounter in the dark, if only to break the suspense.

I forced myself to remain quiet a moment longer and it was as well I did so, for the next instant a spot of light traveled swiftly over the stair and wall beyond me just missing the big newel-post behind which I was crouching. The man had retraced his steps quietly, and was feeling his way back from the rear end of the house. I crouched still lower and tried to catch a glimpse of him as he passed, hoping that he did not intend to turn and go down to the kitchen, in which case he would run directly into me.

He kept on, however, toward the other end of the hall, and beyond the fact that he was tall and thin, I could not see anything of his figure. His face was in darkness, but I felt sure he was not Uncle Gregory or any one I had ever seen.

I waited until I heard him softly open the door of the library and go in, then followed. not sure just what I meant to do, but determined to find out what he was after. The library door was ajar when I reached

it, and I could just make out the dim shape of the man kneeling down before an old iron safe. He was directing the flashlight on it with his left hand, while with the other he was skilfully manipulating the different wards of the lock.

Evidently he was experimenting to discover the combination, for he listened with his ear close to the lock from time to time, and gave low muttered exclamations of annoyance when it still refused to open.

Now was my time. I could steal up behind him, knock the light from his hand and overpower him. I came closer and had just raised my poker when he sprang up with an oath and flashed the light full in my face. Whether he had seen my approach in the bright, reflecting nickel of the lock, I don't know, but it was I, now, who was taken at disadvantage.

Dazzled by the light, I struck out blindly and met empty air. The next instant the light was out and the man was making for the door. But I had recovered myself quickly, and no cat ever had anything on me for lightning action. I reached the door as soon as he did, and the next moment we were struggling furiously in the dark; he, to break my hold, and I, to keep him from escaping.

He was not my match, although he put out an amount of wiry strength that gave me all I could do to handle. Slowly but surely I got him down, first on one knee and then the other, and started to drag him toward the stairs and upper hall where the light would help me to finish the job. Just at that moment I heard Shirley's anxious voice over the banisters: "Oh, Carlos, what is the matter?"

"Nothing," I shouted back. "Hold the light over the stairs, but don't come down."

I had turned my head to call and unconsciously relaxed my grasp. My foot caught in the rug and I pitched to the floor, my man on top.

The next thing I knew he had wriggled free and something heavy crashed down on my head. There was a sudden blinding light, an excruciating pain, and then—darkness.

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.

Teach: Pirate De Luxe

by C.J. Cutcliffe Hyne



THE first of C. J. Cutcliffe Hyne's series of stories detailing the adventures of "Teach: Pirate De Luxe," was printed in the *ALL-STORY WEEKLY*, issue of May 22. One will appear in each of our issues throughout the summer months. While each story is complete in itself, all are concerned with the adventures of that likable blackguard, Captain Teach—descendant of the notorious pirate Blackbeard—and charming Mary Arncliffe.

VIII—THE FOREIGN SECRETARY

THE centipede, the ship's rat, and the Irish elephant were tallied in over the gangway," wrote Mr. Llewelyn Jones. "The two-toed horse, and a kind of bear with a blue nose like a baboon, also ran. These were passed down to first or second class accommodation strictly according to passage-money paid. We had moreover, on board ivory, apes, and peacocks like what Captain Tarshish got for Solomon. We made a hobby of collecting more of these when opportunity arose. An outbreak of mange in the second cabin was quickly mastered by the application of hair restorer, one wineglassful being served out to each passenger instead of the usual anti-scorbutic.

"The outbreak was traced to an Eye-talian who Miss Mary Arncliffe insisted on being given a chance to join instead of being hove overboard with the rest."

There was more to the same effect. But

the part that set England and America tingling was contained in the above quotation.

The tingle did not commence at once. To go back a little, Llewelyn Jones had been arrested on that vague charge of "being a wandering lunatic," and (on a police limit) "was remanded." Thereafter he produced literature, and amongst a bale of uninteresting twaddle, mentioned the name of Mary Arncliffe.

The papers of all countries were full of Mary Arncliffe's unfortunate carrying-off by the Pirate Teach, or Admiral Teach, as all who wished to embarrass their particular government now called him. Of course, there might have been nothing to it, but on the other hand, the thing might be a clue, and as William Arncliffe, of Arncliffe's Bent-wood Works at Skipton had offered £1,000 for any news of his daughter, a smart inspector took the chance, and sent

a brief, ungrammatical, but extremely official letter.

William Arncliffe replied by motor car; quite understood it was impossible to interview the man Llewelyn Jones except after much formality; and was talking to him within an hour's time. As the head of a controlled establishment during four years of war, William Arncliffe understood the ways of butting through official obstruction and getting things done.

So perfect had he been at the game, being obsessed by the fact that the country needed bent-wood for airplanes, that he offended high routine authority, and they saw to it that he did not get his baronetcy. But that did not worry William Arncliffe, as he was a sonless man. His only boy, a plucky subaltern in one of the many battalions of the West Yorks, had died for England on the Somme. So the whole of his mind was wrapped up in his daughter's fate.

William was accustomed to handling men, and he treated successfully Llewelyn Jones, who was something less than a complete man. At the same time, by a vigorous expenditure of brains and money he was dredging out all the former pages of Llewelyn's history. And as the whole interlocked and overlapped a good deal, I may as well give it here as William Arncliffe tabulated it for himself.

LEMUEL JOHNS, Born 1871.

At present a dapper grizzled man of five feet eight, with a strong outside squint. See three photographs enclosed.

Took name of Llewelyn Jones, 1892, after conviction for fraud as bogus photographer.

Employed as chemist's assistant. Discharged for eating stock.

Employed as ship's steward. Deserted.

Employed as museum assistant, 1897; discharged for selling museum specimens to American collectors.

Employed as ship's steward. Deserted.

Set up for himself as masseur, 1901; prosecuted for picking customer's pockets.

Employed as ship's steward. Deserted.

Set up for himself as quack dentist, 1912; prosecuted for pilfering stoppings from patients' teeth, 1916.

Employed as 2d Steward on S. S. Littondale (Captain Teach), 1916; subsequent history unknown.

He did not get all this matter in for a

couple of days, though it was telegraphed and telephoned to Skipton as collected, and set down by a relay of secretaries who stood watch and watch throughout the twenty-four hours of each day.

William Arncliffe was introduced to Jones as "Mr. Starbotton, a gentleman who takes an interest in the mentally afflicted," and Llewelyn began to talk.

Under the skilful—though concealed—cross-examination of one of the shrewdest business men in the West Riding, his "memory began to come back" to him, and he was on the verge of divulging interesting matter. But just then the jail governor, a well-meaning ass, dropped in, and, by way of brightening things, said:

"Now I'm sure, Jones, you'll tell Mr. Arncliffe all he wants to know. He's naturally much interested about the fate of his only daughter."

Jones said: "Yes, sir, so far as my poor memory allows," and promptly lapsed into dribbling imbecility.

With the governor in the background, William Arncliffe did not press matters further then. He went out and took a couple of rooms in a hotel.

He was entirely sure (1) that Llewelyn Jones was not a lunatic, either wandering or otherwise; (2) that Llewelyn had adopted the lunacy pose as camouflage; and (3) that he, William Arncliffe, was going to extract the information he wished out of the man—somehow.

If he got it easily, so much the better for Llewelyn. But if the steward was reluctant—well, so much the worse for him. Mary was all the daughter he had in the world and Llewelyn knew where she was, and what was happening to her, and had got to tell—somehow.

William Arncliffe forthwith pulled strings, hard, and that same night got Llewelyn Jones let out on bail—substantial bail—the bail being provided by a solicitor in the employ of William Arncliffe.

Llewelyn was met at the jail door by the gentleman who took an interest in the mentally afflicted and two burly friends, and found himself in a fine limousine, which presently exceeded the speed limits scandalously. William Arncliffe was a prosaic busi-

ness man in ordinary life, but just now when he was fighting for his only daughter he had gone back to something much more primitive.

He expected the information he wanted would not be easy to get. But he intended to get it—somehow.

Accordingly he had made preparations largely by that leaky instrument, the British telephone, and did not care twopence whether they leaked or not so long as they were efficient. He had summed up the steward's requirements under the circumstances, and provided for them.

The over-driven limousine decanted Llewelyn, in the dark, before a fire-gutted house in one of the valleys which led off Wharfedale. The roof had gone, and one end wall was in ruins. They went up to it through an avenue of nettles, one of the burly friends at each of Llewelyn's elbows.

The moon shone on them through blackened beams. An adjacent owl did its famous imitation of a crying child.

They went down cluttered stairs to a cellar that was lit by three tallow candles and a glow. The glow came from a charcoal fire under some infernal kind of huge gridiron. But in spite of the charcoal fumes, the place smelt dank and clammy, and indescribably terrible.

Llewelyn was infinitely sorry he had ever started to play the role of lunatic at all, but now that he had started, was firmly determined to carry it through to the bitter end.

"Now," said William Arncliffe, "you may cease playing the fool, Jones. I intend to hear from you everything that has happened to my daughter since that scoundrel Teach walked off with her.

"If you tell me freely, I'll do my best to save your skin; if you don't I'll grill the hide off you, and the meat from your bones after it. Also don't try to fill me up with lies. I know enough to check you when you switch away from the truth, and you'll suffer when you do."

"I don't know what you mean, kind gentleman," said the steward with a giggle.

"Oh, yes, you do. Come, I'll start you with the tale. My girl was engaged—is engaged, to Mr. Buckden, who was the

Littondale's chief officer. She went on board when the ship was in Liverpool River to see him off.

"Captain Teach sent him ashore with a cock-and-bull message, lifted his anchor, and steamed away without him. Captain Teach took Miss Arncliffe off to sea with him. That's as far as I've got. Now you go ahead and give me the rest, and give it to me straight."

"Willingly, my lord. The old Littondale is not what she appears to be. She is really Noah's Ark, and the arrivals go into her two by two from every port when she touches. I remember Miss Arncliffe well, a beautiful lady with long golden hair that she used to put up in a diamond net when she was on watch. She gave me an emerald ring as big as a walnut for bringing in her morning tea, which I would gladly show you if I hadn't left it in my other suit.

"Officially she was superintendent of the crocodile section, and that's why I seldom saw her at work, the musky smell of the beasts being displeasing to me. But Miss never minded a cent, and she had the beasts that tame they'd sit up on their tails to her and beg for nuts."

"Will you take off your clothes yourself?"

"I am very comfortable as I am, my lord, thanking you for the kind inquiry, sir."

"Alternately, my friends here will strip them off you."

Llewelyn Jones looked at Mr. Arncliffe, and squinted more horribly than was his normal wont. Otherwise he showed no trace of unusual emotion.

"Certainly I'll take them off if you order it, doctor. I'm afraid you'll find me only sixty-three but my heart's in the right place, and I trust you'll pass me to do my bit against the Hun. I'd very much like to get into the Glasgow and Southwestern Highlanders if you could manage it for me. I aye thocht the claymore a bonnie weapon. Maybe ye were oot in the '45 yersel'?"

William Arncliffe made no comment. Nor did his friends. The steward went on placidly with his undressing. But he varied his squint with every garment discarded.

Possibly that was his method of showing mental perturbation.

Once he was in the buff, the two big men proceeded to fasten his ankles together, and his wrists behind his back, not, as they were careful to point out to him, with rope that might burn, but with good metal handcuffs which certainly would not. Llewelyn Jones made no comment except to separate his eyes ten degrees beyond the right angle.

Then they lapped him in a roll of heavy wire sheep-netting, and hitched the edges together with tags of copper wire. There were copper wire clews to the head and foot of this, each made fast to a wire rope. Llewelyn looked like a man lashed into an openwork hammock.

There was a block at each side of the cellar. They rove the wire ropes through there, and hauled on them. Llewelyn Jones in his wire entanglement swung against the musty ceiling. The gridiron with its glowing charcoal was underneath him.

"Thought better of it yet, Jones?" William Arncliffe inquired.

"Yes, sir. I forgot to mention that all the animals on the Ark—that is, the Littondale as was—had their teeth most carefully attended to. He wasn't altogether a qualified dentist, the one we had shipped, but as one of his patients, me wanting bar work done, I can guarantee him a most efficient practitioner.

"He never used gas because none was needed. His was all painless extractions, and painless stoppings. But how contrived, you ask, not being in the profession?

"Mr. Arncliffe, I scorn to mislead you. All necessary pain, due to the natural functions of the dental processes, was deadened by a drug brought by the firm's special explorer at enormous expense from the unknown forests of South America.

"Slack up those halyards," said William Arncliffe to his two burly assistants. "Don't let him touch the bars yet. Belay that."

The squeak and rasp of the wire ropes through the ungreased blocks seemed to grate on the nerves on Llewelyn Jones. Possibly he had got to the end of his squint-

ing capacity. Anyway, he made rapid remarks in an unknown tongue. Possibly it was Welsh.

"This inquiry is being carried on in English," said William Arncliffe. "Enjoy yourself by all means in Choctaw if you are so inclined. But when you feel the temperature getting oppressive, be good enough to let me know in my own native tongue.

"George, give me a match, and a cigar, please. I hate the smell of roasting, especially roasting fat."

"Feeding time on the Ark," chanted Llewelyn Jones, "was very trying on the staff. Shem and Ham being farmers born, got on all right, but Japhet, who had been brought up to the taxidermy, never could remember the difference between sharps and thirds in mixing the food.

"Likewise he was caught one day pinching a live rabbit intended for the snake department, and giving it to the hen gorilla, who thereupon developed pulmonia. It was Miss Arncliffe's job to tend the dove we carried along ready for the signing of peace. She fed it on buttermilk and best captain's biscuit that the steward had set aside, in the glory-hole, for himself. Likewise bits of fountain pen ground up, to promote the functions of the gizzard, we being short of grit—"

Llewelyn Jones broke off, and wriggled vehemently inside his wire shroud.

"When you've told me what I want," said William Arncliffe, "you may clear out of here and jump your bail if you like, and continue going to the devil your own way. The crackling part of you is beginning to brown nicely. You won't be able to walk comfortably if it gets overdone.

"But if you want to go on cooking, please don't consider my natural impatience for your yarn. Never mind the dove part of it. Just hark back to what happened from the minute the Littondale sailed from Liverpool."

Each of the steward's eyes seemed to be looking into its adjacent ear. But he gave no other sign of discomfort.

"Miss Mary Arncliffe was that fond of birds—through association with the peace pigeon—that she learned to fly herself, and

was very useful running messages to other ships, the Ark being a bit old-fashioned, as the Scriptures saith, and not being fitted with wireless, as is there recorded.

"She wore for this service a special designed uniform of blue leather with yellow trimming. Her wing feathers was costly golden, with green on the underside, like one of those Australian parakeets. But her tail feathers—

"Hell! let me out of this, you blasted cannibals. I can't stick it. I tell you I can't stick it. Let me out, and I'll tell every bit you want to know."

"Hoist him," said William Arncliffe, and his two burly friends hoisted. "I wondered how much cooking you would require before your tongue started telling plain truths.

"You see, I was perfectly correct in spotting you to be a malingerer. Any time you made a ship too hot to hold you when you were serving as steward you tried the lunacy dodge, and it's acted up to now. You have got very perfect at it.

"Well, you may go ahead now, and I warn you I know part of the yarn. So don't lie, or you shall have another grilling."

Llewelyn, in the wire hammock, shut his strained eyes, and burst into rapid narrative. The most part of what he said will not be set down here in detail, as the gist of it has already been reported in this history.

His conclusion, however, was sufficiently startling. Mary Arncliffe had not been married forcibly, or otherwise, either to Admiral Teach or to anybody else. She had, of late, been wandering on Bahama Cays. But now she was "interned," if that was the right word, on a big empty steamer. Jones did not know where the steamer was.

"But Teach would," William Arncliffe supplemented. "Come now, my man, out with it, where's Teach?"

The steward said, glibly enough, that he had not an idea. But his eyes, in spite of himself, squinted nervously.

"Shall I help you a little? You and Captain Teach were set ashore by a trawler.

You left him soon after you had landed. Then you blundered into one, if not more people who knew you. You stoutly denied your identity, but you got very frightened. So you put on that old lunacy pose of yours, which I must say, is very misleading.

"You made a bolt for it, and contrived to get taken up by the police, and by maundering about a burglary, fooled them into putting you safely in jail out of the way of worse harm."

"Home, sweet home," said Jones with a sigh. "Captain Teach is a devil, and he'd have done me in as soon as look at me if we'd met. I went to the only place I knew of that was safe."

"Quite a sound scheme. What you've got to do now is to put me on this Captain Teach's trail, and I guarantee to free you from all further annoyance from him. Come, now, Jones, what part of England was he making for?"

Llewelyn Jones blinked his unpleasant eyes, and grinned. "Scotland, he went to."

"Ah! Well, he'll find himself against a hard race. But as I don't want to dredge through the whole of that interesting country, you may as well add details."

Llewelyn Jones added them.

The tenant of Balnamuchan Lodge proved his *bona fides*—so the factor explained afterwards—by sending five £50 Bank of England notes as rent in advance. Otherwise he conducted all the negotiations by reply-paid telegrams which were sent to John Yockenthwaite, Post Office Balnamuchan, and were there collected by a dapper, grizzle-headed man who was afflicted with a notable outward squint.

As the lodge and moor had been untenanted during the war, the factor jumped at Mr. Yockenthwaite's negotiations and money, and did not ask any superfluous questions. Incidentally it may be noted that the factor lived in Edinburgh. Balnamuchan, as you will remember from your school geography, is on the west coast.

Mr. Yockenthwaite was a gentleman who "kept himsel' to himsel'" and imported no unwieldy staff. He did not believe in grouse driving. He walked the moor with

the keeper, and showed himself to be a moderate shot. He said he had been penned up a good deal of late, and needed exercise.

The keeper's wife "did for" him—pretty roughly, from what I know of that good woman's cooking. But he always dressed for dinner most punctiliously, and sat complacently in an atmosphere made up of equal parts of peat-reek, and damp Harris tweed. For the rest he was a big, burly, dark-complexioned man with hard black eyes, and a hooked nose, and a jutting chin, and a close-cropped, rather surprisingly yellow beard. One of his ears had a bit clipped out of it in a way that reminded the keeper of a sheep mark.

Mr. Yockenthwaite always sent down to the village shop, which was also the post office, when the mail cart arrived. But no letters ever came for him.

Twice during his stay he went down to the shop himself, demanded a Leeds number on the trunk telephone, was visibly annoyed at the delay which the incompetent British service demands, and, from the tones of his voice, was unpleasant to his correspondent when at last he did get connection.

About his row with Llewelyn Jones, if there was a row, nothing was known in far-off Balnamuchan. It is not on record that Llewelyn's squint defaced that part of the west highlands for more than a week, and I have a dim trace that he got his scare at a pier*lower down the coast. Probably some member of the crew of the Macbrayne boat from Glasgow recognized him, and called out his much advertised name.

If only that recognition had been promptly reported, and the west highland police had acted at once (which I admit is unlikely) Teach might have been rounded up, and incidently with him, Llewelyn Jones.

But the coaster hand, after the manner of his kind, never spoke of the matter till ten days later whisky thawed him in the Coocaddens. The excellent police of Glasgow got on to this trail about a fortnight later still, and ran it hotly, a week after Teach was clear of Scotland.

In the meanwhile I ask you to contem-

plate Captain Teach as Mr. John Yockenthwaite. The keeper, a dour, snuffy, incomprehensible person from Carlisle, regarded him with favor, possibly because he exuded pound-notes where another man would have awarded the more courtly thank you.

Mrs. Keeper admired him because he approved of her cooking, and the peaty atmosphere of the lodge. (Teach always knew how to leave bad alone when it obviously could not be improved.) And the village shop, which was also the post office, considered him a most pleasing madman because of the lavish orders he gave for things he could not possibly want, and also because of his unheard-of habit of paying cash in advance.

The sparse neighbors kept to themselves—one does not call upon a mere shooting tenant in Scotland until he has been there at least six years, unless, of course, one butts into him at one's own particular kirk.

Certainly Teach was taking much needed exercise for the salvation of his figure. But he was at Balnamuchan for a far weightier purpose than mere exercise.

He had acclaimed himself as admiral commanding the navy of the Irish Republic. The politicians of civilization had their teeth set on edge by his recent actions. As an afterthought he was trying to get in touch with some responsible Irish Republican, if such a person existed. And, awaiting the advent of the plenipotentiary, he shot—or to be more accurate, shot at—the grouse-bird.

The Irish are famous conspirators. Some of them are even more celebrated as informers. Sheumas O'Toole (to give him the name he selected for himself), disguised in old clothes and seven glasses of the local whisky, arrived at Balnamuchan Lodge one night at eleven-thirty and stated that he was foreign secretary of a republic that was not to be mentioned.

Possibly he was. But Teach was not impressed by him. On the plea of hunger Sheumas demanded supper, but when it was set before him took all his nutriment in liquid form. Captain Teach put him to bed that night in his boots in the pious

hope that he would die of suffocation before morning.

But with breakfast came Sheumas O'Toole, bright and smiling. He was once a Nationalist Member of Parliament, it seemed, and late hours invariably upset his liver. A bottle of porter before breakfast always cleared him.

As the West Highlands did not produce porter, he was open to experiment with three fingers of their native dew. Being doubtful about the efficacy of the first application he tried a second, and then a third, before he could announce success.

He was a man that Teach would have shot within twenty-four hours on board the Littondale but although he felt the creature to be an active danger here in Balnamuchan, the pirate bore with him for the time being, in hopes of extracting information. But he kept him well charged with whisky.

On the subject of the Irish Republic, and its gratitude to its navy, Mr. O'Toole poured out much oratory, but delivered himself of surprisingly few facts. "Begor, me bhoy, the way ye've set thim all be the ears bates anything ould Gladstone could ha' done, an' that's saying a hape. Kape to it. Ye've all Oireland to the back of ye."

"Why doesn't somebody responsible put that in print, then?" Teach demanded.

"Be aisy. Losh! but the peak reek in this room is like a Tipperary cabin—Would ye be gratifying the brutal Saxon by buying paper when he's made a corner in it? Niver in your loife.

"Be aisy. Carry you on with the good work at say, and ye can rest assured of admiration in the ould counthry. I'll throuble ye for the decanter. This war whisky is a mighty flimsy drink even for a taytotaller.

"Come to business. I got your blessed republic a loan of \$2,000,000 without either interest or security, and I've set the whole world by the ears over you. I'm the best asset you've got, by a heap. What have you done for me in return, so far?"

"Me bhoy, I've drunk your health, and if you'll do as I say and push across that decanter, I'll do it again. If that's not

official countenance, I don't know what is. Did y'ever hear of the foreign secretary of a moighty republic drinking the health of any man his noble counthry was not partial to? Wait, you, and I'll expound further."

"Stop a minute. I suppose you are not in politics for your health?"

"I am not. Me bleeding counthry needs me. So I condiscind to take a second portfolio, Education being me mark. But there was another greedy divil after it, and he raised such a howl of 'No Pluralities' I had to give way.

"Ye see I'd been runing the 'Clane Politics' ticket meself, and one has to live up to one's election promises—whin they're not more than a fortnight old. So Dooley's education minister now, an ignorant corner boy, that cannot make out his first-class bar accounts at night, let alone the third.

"Losh! and I'm forgetting, admiral. Here's a decoration I have for ye, from the sacred hands of the president of the republic himself. The remarks on it are in Irish. I disremember what they say, exactly, but they mean well."

Teach snatched the medal, and flung it on the smoldering peats.

"If I'd you on my ship I'd flog you till you were sober, and then hang you while you were thirsty and could think." The pirate's black eyes glinted dangerously, and his big, ugly chin showed more than his usual aggressiveness. "I've come a long way, and taken a lot of trouble to realize on you, you swindling sot, and I'm hanged if I see how. But I think that hanging I spoke about will improve your looks—"

There was a thump on the door, and the keeper's red head jerked into the peat smoke. "There's a moty car, wi' yon felly in it ye was speakin' about, just crossin' ferry. I thocht I'd tell ye."

"That's right, Donald. Here's a note. Now you sit here and entertain Mr. O'Toole for a few minutes. He needs whisky. See he has it. I'll go and meet my friends."

The visit of William Arncliffe to Balnamuchan Lodge was not a success. He had with him his two burly friends, a very reluctant Mr. Llewelyn Jones, and a very

thoughtful member of the regular police force, and amongst them they carried two shot guns and two large-bore automatic pistols.

They went through the front door of the lodge with a rush, before Mrs. Keeper could open it, and seeing (on inspection) three empty rooms, concentrated their attention on the fourth.

They tested the handle violently, but the door remained shut. From within came a whiff of peat and the sounds of revelry, in accents that were faintly reminiscent.

"Run you round, and cover the windows," said William Arncliffe to his two big friends. "We three will break in the door when you're ready. I'll give you thirty seconds to get to your butts. If we flush the bird, shoot, and shoot damned quick."

At the end of that half minute, Mr. Arncliffe flung his thirteen stone against the steward, and hurled that unfortunate man against the door. The modern highland shooting lodge is not built to stand against siege tactics. The door jarred open. Llewelyn Jones fell ungracefully.

"Hands up," William Arncliffe ordered in most approved style, and jumped into the room with a 12-bore ready for prompt action.

"Here, what the hell are you doing?" inquired the keeper from his armchair. "This is no Carlisle on a bank holiday. This is a private hoose, an' has na' a license. Get oot."

"Where's Teach?"

The other inhabitant of the room with difficulty and the help of the table heaved himself to his feet.

"With joy,"—he hiccupped—"I may shay pro-profound joy, I rec'onize the upholders law 'n' order. Any information I c'n give you respecting Ad'mal Teach, blasted pirate, but member my gov'ment's navy, entirely your disper-sal—I should say, disposal."

Llewelyn Jones stepped forward and took the foreign secretary by the collar and kicked him viciously—kicked him, in fact, till he howled for mercy, no one attempting to interfere.

"You swine," said Llewelyn Jones, who had his own ideas of loyalty.

ADIEU, BUTTERFLIES!

BY SARAH N. CLEGHORN

THE bride looked eastward to her father's house—
The ax-built, three-roomed house beneath the hill;
The barnless, landless, never-painted house,
From children's shouts and frolic never still.

Eastward she looked; and what a flight of wings
Whirred in her ear, and fluttered in her eye—
Her maiden fancies rising from her breast,
Each like a small, white April butterfly.

The bride looked westward to the bridegroom's farm;
The spacious dwelling beckoned where it stood;
She saw the barns, the cattle, and the sheep;
The wheat and corn, the pasture and the wood.

Westward she looked, and tossed her golden head.
The small, white butterflies—Oh, where went they?
Adieu, adieu! They waved their wings and fled;
The aged bridegroom led the bride away.

Land of the Shadow People

by Charles B. Stilson

(A Sequel to "A Man Named Jones")

PRECEDING CHAPTERS BRIEFLY RETOLD

READERS of "A Man Named Jones" will remember that Jones married beautiful Katherine Manning. They settled in Detroit, and were made happy by the birth of a son, Bobby.

When Bobby was five years old he was kidnaped by an unknown man of foreign appearance. A little later he received a cable from the "Martian"—otherwise King Kelly, who had married the Ariki Foyara of the island of Bomavalu, and thus become its ruler—warning him that Grimshaw had escaped, and promising to come to Jones's aid.

Grimshaw called upon Jones and offered to help him find Bobby—after Jones had taken him to an emerald mine in Peru, of which Jones alone had knowledge. Jones was confident that Grimshaw was responsible for the kidnaping, but all efforts to find Bobby having failed he accepted the bargain offered. Meanwhile Jones had been joined by King Kelly and the latter's native follower, Nambe. Accompanied by Katherine, his friend, Jim Arnold, and by Grimshaw, King Kelly and Nambe, Jones went to Peru. In the town of Huarez he engaged as guide a Peruvian gentleman, Don Castro de Ulloa, who was anxious to return to the country beyond the mountains, of which few men had knowledge. Don Castro engaged natives to accompany them, including Tomás Porres, in charge of the Cholo mulcteers. One night Jim met a beautiful white girl, who spoke few words of English, and who said that her name was Nee-Nah. Next morning he found a large uncut emerald in his pocket. Jones said that this stone was very like the one given him by Halford Cooper, the discoverer of the mine they were searching for.

Guided by one of the men, Enrique, and Tomás, Katherine, Jones, and the Martian visited the Inca ruins of the castle of Chavin. Enrique entered the underground temple and was killed. When Tomás went to investigate he found his body and that of another man, but Enrique's machete was missing, indicating the presence of a third person. Jones was surprised to find that the lower part of the body of the murderer of Enrique was white, but that the upper part was exactly the color of the dun rock upon which it lay. When the body was taken outside this appearance vanished. While he had been investigating, Katherine and the Martian had waited outside the temple and had seen Nee-Nah and called to her; but the girl had waved her hand and vanished, followed by what appeared to be six shadows.

When Jones told Don Castro that he wanted to penetrate the country as far as the Rio Ucayli, the guide became greatly excited and said that he, too, wanted to go there.

Jim, accompanied by Nambe, and determined to find the girl who had made so great an impression on him, visited an Inca ruin approached by a flight of stone steps. As they rested before a sort of sentry-box, near the top, a human skull came bounding down the steps. Jim went on up the steps. Twenty minutes later Nambe heard a cry and started to camp to report.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE GREEN FEATHER.

AND you have dared to leave Mr. Arnold over there alone, and come back here to tell me this tale!" Such was the Martian's answer as, still

sitting the mule which he had just ridden into camp from Tantamayo, he heard the end of the story which Nambe poured forth to him in breathless Melanesian.

Kelly's usually calm and thoughtful features became stern with anger. Slowly he swung a long leg over the mule's back

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and confronted his crestfallen minister. He twirled his heavy rawhide quirt in his hand and his lean fingers tightened about its stock.

For a moment it looked as though the grand vizier of Bomavalu was in for a deucedly sound flogging. Nambe saw it coming, and he stiffened his back to take it like a man.

No other person in all the world might have laid lash on the stately islander with impunity; but this was his well-beloved *tamal* who was angered. Kelly could have cut Nambe's heart from his body, and the brown man would not have murmured. Besides, Nambe infinitely preferred the threatened whipping to the society of the jumping skull on the opposite hill.

"By damn! me not fight-um dead mans' bones," he muttered and set his chattering teeth.

"What is it that is wrong, *señor*," asked Don Castro, much surprised by the show of anger on the part of a man who customarily was mildness itself.

"What's the trouble, Martian?" called Jones at the same moment, coming from his tent.

Kelly's fingers relaxed. "I should remember that it is his nature, and that he could not help it," he murmured to himself, and let the whip fall on the grass. Hurriedly he transmitted Nambe's report to Jones and De Ulloa, and then swung himself into the saddle again.

"I will hasten over at once, Robert," he said; and to Nambe: "Do you come with me, Nambe. For your cowardice I shall see to it that you are the first up the stairs."

De Ulloa wheeled his mule alongside of Jones.

"It is necessary, *patron*, and for many reasons, that the camp be well guarded—because of the *señora*, because of the recent strange happenings, and—" He glanced significantly toward where Grimshaw sat, apparently dozing, beside the fire. "Keep you the camp, *patron*, you and the Cholos. I will take the Aymara and go with the Señor Kelly."

In another moment the don was spurring across the meadow, where the nimble feet

of Nambe were keeping pace with the gallop of the Martian's mule. Tomás followed, bearing torches.

Kelly waited for nothing. When Don Castro reached the foot of the stairs, the Martian already had begun the steep ascent.

As soon as he could avail himself of the light of the torches, De Ulloa followed. Above him in the semidarkness he could hear the Martian stumbling over the granite steps and prodding the reluctant Nambe along in front of him.

As has been stated, the Savovan would have followed his master anywhere; but that did not prevent his being most mightily averse to leading the way up that dreaded staircase, where each moment he looked for a grinning skull to bounce out of the darkness and set its yellow teeth in his shrinking body.

At the landing-place the don and Tomás overtook them. The Aymara relished this expedition little more than Nambe; but he, too, was with the man whom he acknowledged as his master, and whom he dared not disobey.

Half-way up the second span of the stairway Nambe met the expected, and balked.

Not one but three skull confronted him, sitting all in a row on one of the narrow steps and grimacing horribly as the dancing torchlight flickered on their bony features.

Though none of them bit him, or indeed stirred at all, the terror of the islander was hardly less than if they had done so; for in the center one of them he recognized by its battered appearance his former acquaintance, which had clacked down the stairs to greet him, and which he had last seen in Jim Arnold's hand.

"Ho, Tamal Kellee!" he exclaimed in dire affright, dodging back and pointing. "*Dar* he am! Him eat-um Tamal Jeem sure sartin, an' bring-um two hungry bruders wait for more us!"

But empty skulls could not daunt the Martian. With an exclamation of impatience he pushed past his terrified servitor. A single sweep of his hand sent the trio of death-heads clattering down the abyss.

As they went, Nambe prayed softly in Melanesian, and Tomás fervently echoed his sentiments in Aymara.

"Would the Señor Arnold have done this thing for his little joke, think you, Señor Kelly?" queried Don Castro when he had seen the skulls fly past him.

"No, sir," replied the Martian promptly. "Mr. Arnold no doubt is a facetious young man; but this is too serious for a joke; and, besides, he has other things on his mind just now than such uncanny pleasantries with his friends."

Presently, and breathless, for the last few steps were the most difficult of all, the four climbers gained the crest of the hill and passed through the narrow portal which protected the stair-head.

"James! James Arnold!" shouted the Martian. The walls of the grim towers intercepted his call and flung its echoes out into the void.

Partly by nature and partly by the hand of man, the hill's summit had been leveled. On a flat space nearly two acres in extent stood the towers, firm and unbroken. At their feet a low, extensive mansion, less solidly built than they, was beginning to bow under the touch of time. Its roof had long ago disappeared and some of its walls had fallen.

From one to another of its numerous chambers the search-party hurried, seeking and calling. Torchlight was cast into many an ancient corner that had known no light for centuries.

Did any of the citizens of Tantamayo chance to look that way, they must have crossed themselves, believing that the shades of the departed *Gentiles* were holding high carnival in their former stronghold.

But in none of the quaint old chambers did the seekers find traces of him they sought. Everywhere was silence, loneliness, and declension.

From the palace they proceeded to the towers, exploring each in turn from foundation to *azoteas*.

On the stone floor of the ground stage of the third tower a glittering blade caught Don Castro's eye. He sprang forward eagerly to pick it up.

"Cáspita!" he exclaimed; "that is—"

"It is the machete of Enrique, who is dead!" gasped Tomás, staring at it stupidly. "The ghosts have brought it hither from Chavin!"

"At least there is no blood upon it," said De Ulloa thankfully.

Not far from where the machete had lain Kelly made the second find. It was a long, green feather from a parrot's wing—such a feather as with others had waved in the crest of the wondrous girl whom the Martian had observed upon the bridge at Chavin.

"He has found his princess," Kelly muttered.

Don Castro heard the words, and looked at him curiously, but asked no questions.

From the moment of that discovery, though he could not have defined why, the fate of Arnold worried the Martian no longer.

The feather was the last trace the searchers found of any recent living occupation of the towers. Skulls they found in plenty. A corner of one of the upper chambers of the last tower was piled high with them and other bones. It was evident that here was the source of the grisly jest which had been played upon the staircase.

But who had played it? And where was Jim Arnold?

"He is not here, *señor*," declared Don Castro, when every corner and cranny had been searched. "I know something of these ruins. There are no chambers below ground, as at the Castle of Chavin. Let us return to camp. To-morrow we can organize a large search, giving it out that the young *caballero* has strayed and is lost."

Wearily the four descended into the valley. In the grass of the meadow a little way east of the base of the stairway, Tomás found Arnold's fountain pen. Its cap was gone, and ink had been spilled upon the grass, as though the instrument had been flung there violently.

A short distance farther lay a piece of crumpled paper. Kelly smoothed its wrinkles hopefully. Two words had been written upon it: "I am —" They were

followed by a sprawling line and a blot. Kelly could imagine a rude hand striking the pen from Arnold's grasp before he could complete his message.

Jones did not share in the Martian's intuitive conviction that their friend had come to no harm. Still, it seemed to him that little could be done until daylight should come.

While he considered, he twirled in his fingers the green feather which the Martian had turned over to him. Don Castro watched it for some time in silence, tugging at his mustache.

"*Señores*," he said at length, and with dignity, "I have observed that certain happenings are known to you, of which I know nothing. I seek to penetrate no secrets, *señores*; but if that"—he pointed to the feather—"has any significance as explaining the *caballero's* disappearance—"

"You are quite right," interrupted Jones with a sudden access of confidence in the little don. "A circumstance has been withheld from you with which you should have been acquainted."

He led the way to the larger tent, out of earshot of the camp-fire and Zalmon, and related Jim's encounter with the strange girl among the ravines of Yanashallas, and her appearance for a second time at Chavin.

During the recital De Ulloa, under his bronzed skin, slowly turned livid; his hands trembled so violently that he twisted them into knots to control them.

"She is a white girl. She told Mrs. Arnold in English that her name was Nee-Nah," Jones concluded.

"*Nee-Nah! Nee-Nah!*" shrieked Don Castro, leaping up and tossing his arms above his head in a state of frenzied excitement. "*Nee-Nah! It is the will of God! Bendito sea Dios!*"

He seized first Jones's hand and then the Martian's and kissed them, and rushed from the tent. They heard his big voice, broken by emotion, calling wildly upon his Indians and exhorting them to arise and arm themselves.

Before Jones and Kelly had recovered from their amazement at this extravagant behavior, De Ulloa, Tomás, and all of the

Cholos were speeding eastward down the Tantamayo Valley at a pounding gallop.

"Well—I'm—damned!" said Jones.

CHAPTER XIV.

JIM MEETS THE SHADOWS.

WITH a lively curiosity as to what he should find above him, and a faint flutter of hope, at which he smiled even while he entertained it, Jim Arnold toiled up the massive steps toward the fortress.

Once or twice he chuckled, thinking of Nambe's ridiculous fears of the skull which he carried in his hand. He weighed it on his palm. It was light and smooth and very odd.

Whose had it been? he wondered: the brain-shell perhaps of the proud lord of the towers; or of one of his lowliest slaves; or perchance—and that fancy pleased Jim best—of a dusky princess of the long ago, for whom brave men had fought and died. Time would never tell; and except to the cold knowledge of a scientist, a skull has naught to tell of station or of sex.

Near the summit, where the great slabs of granite were narrower and more steep, Jim found that the burden of the skull was impeding his climbing; so he left it sitting on one of the steps.

When he clambered over the last slab and entered the lofty court of the palace, there was still slant sunlight on the crest of the hill; but it was fading fast. Not liking the idea of negotiating the steep slopes of the stairway in the darkness, Jim hastened his explorations.

Such rooms of the rambling edifice as his time and the light allowed him to enter held little to detain his interest. He soon left the palace and passed on to what had attracted him so strongly when seen from the opposite side of the valley—the row of frowning towers, which stood like a band of dour, stubborn brothers, and which had bade such sturdy defiance to time and change through an unknown span of centuries.

Night was pressing him so that he could not visit all of them, as he would have

liked. He chose one at random, the third, and entered its lower stage, minded to ascend to the *azoteas* and watch for a few minutes the gorgeous spectacle of the sun slipping over the edge of the world behind the multicolored distant peaks of the *cordillera*.

It was quite dark in the tower chamber. Jim groped forward resolutely for a number of paces. Then, fearing that proceeding blindly he might stumble over débris or into the mouth of a pit such as Jones had met with at Chavin, he stopped and closed his eyes to accustom them more rapidly to the obscurity.

When he opened them again he did not go on.

At first he thought her a hallucination—a projection of his inmost thought against the curtain of the dusk before him. But she moved slightly; he heard the rustle of her garments, and he knew that she was not a vision.

"*Nee-Nah!* I have found you again!"

Each instant he saw more clearly. By some quality of his concentrated gaze, what light rays were in the dim chamber seemed accrued to her, revealing her as in a nimbus, about which all else was indistinguishable.

She stood against an old stone stairway, where she had been arrested by his sudden entrance. Jim could not see the expression of her face; but one hand was twisted into the links of the chain of green stones at her bosom; her head was erect, and her body was poised in an attitude of surprise.

Jim himself stood still as in boyhood he might have stood when he had searched out the hidden nest of a wild bird and found its builder at home.

"*Nee-Nah,*" he repeated softly, hardly above a whisper; for he did not wish to startle her and risk the loss of her again.

But she was not afraid. Her hand fell at her side, and she came toward him, her sandaled feet gliding noiselessly on the granite floor.

"Who—you?" she questioned haltingly, peering into his face and accompanying the words with a little gurgling laugh that was utterly without fear.

"My name is Jim Arnold. I am an

American," answered Jim, reassured by that low laughter.

Nee-Nah stepped nearer.

"*Ah-meer-e-can!*" she enunciated with difficulty, but with great eagerness. "*Ah-meer-e-can? What—that?*"

Arnold looked down at her. He had thought her taller than she was.

"Why, I am from the States," he said; "the United States. We call ourselves Americans, though I suppose you have as good a right to the word down here. You know where the United States is?"

Nee-Nah followed his words intently. It was evident that the sound of the young man's voice gave her pleasure. It was equally apparent by her amazed expression that she comprehended scarcely a word of his explanation.

She shook her head vaguely. Even through the dusk Jim could see the twin wrinkles of puzzlement that came between her black eyebrows.

"*Ah-meer-e-can.*" The words seemed to possess a strong attraction for her. She repeated it with soft stress upon each syllable. "How—you speak—like—I—forget?" she asked, searching among dim memories for every word.

But Jim was lost in an astonishment and puzzle of his own.

"Great guns! She never heard of the good old U. S. A.! She doesn't get my English. How in time am I going to make love to her? I'll be cussed if I do *that* through an interpreter! I'll try a pinch of Spanish. If that falls down, I'm up a hemlock." So he thought. Aloud he said:

"*Habla usted Español, señorita?*"

Nee-Nah shook her head with vigor, contorted her lips into a little *moue* of despite, and stamped her foot lightly.

"No—like!" she said imperiously. "*Ah-meer-e-can—no speak—so!*"

"The deuce you don't!" muttered Jim. "It's just as well; I'm not long on Spanish, anyhow. Me for the sign language—but it's getting too dark for it."

She came closer to him and laid a hand upon his arm—a small, shapely hand, but brown and strong. Its touch thrilled Arnold as though it had sent an electrical current through him.

"What you—say?" she asked.

Jim caught the little hand to him.

"Nee-Nah!" he cried; "come with me! Our camp is over yonder. I will teach you to talk the American; and you can tell me then who and what you are. You must not wander through the wilderness without a home. Come!"

Under the influence of that warm hand in his grasp, Jim forgot that she could not understand the plea that poured from his lips. The presence of his fingers was more comprehensible. A slow flush crept across her cheeks. She disengaged her hand.

Again one word which he had uttered had touched a chord of memory.

"Home," she murmured; "home," with a pathos in her tones that wrenched at Arnold's heart.

She pointed eastward, where he knew lay a land of wastes and perils. "Home—there. You—come." Sudden decision spoke in her words and manner as she concluded: "I—take you—to Pro-Tay-Us."

Arnold only half comprehended. Sooner than to lose her, he would have followed her—anywhere. She had touched a deep in his nature that would never more be still. But he did not think of that, perhaps did not yet realize it. She was here, within arms' length, a warm, breathing, desirable reality. Again her hand lay on his arm—and she spoke of going!

Young blood responding for the first time to passion's call; the beckoning finger of romance; the fascination and the mystery of romance's handmaiden; above all, the girl's nearness and her touch—these must be Arnold's excuses for what he did. He reached out his arms and swept her to him and kissed her passionately upon her warm lips.

"I love you, Nee-Nah!"

She turned in his arms, struggling like a young panther. With unexpected strength she broke his clasp and sprang back from him. She neither cried out nor spoke; but from her lips issued a long, sharp, sibilant whisper. She stood panting, her eyes blazing, her cheeks aflame.

Jim's blood, too, was on fire, and his brain was dizzy. He would have followed

her. But in the shadows at his elbow stirred a deeper shadow. A hiss like that of an angered python answered the girl's call.

Cold fingers clutched Arnold's wrist with a grip like closing metal. He shuddered at the touch of them, and in his first surprise and anger he shouted hoarsely, inarticulately.

It was that cry, echoing from the heights of the hill, that sent Nambe trotting across the meadow.

Doubly furious because of that momentary weakness, Jim turned on his adversary, wrenching and battering. He was a powerful man, well trained in all athletic sports; but, strive as he might, he could not break the grip of those icy fingers.

All that he could see of the man who had seized him was a dim, moving shadow, which swayed and danced and hissed, and shot out a shadowy arm, seeking to imprison his free hand. Beyond it other shadows were hurrying forward, adding their voiceless menaces to those of their battling companion, so that one might have thought that the ancient tower chamber had become a den of cobras.

Arnold saw them coming. His right hand was imprisoned; so he could not reach the heavy automatic at his belt. He must rely wholly upon his native strength and alertness.

Though he shivered with loathing at contact with the strange, reptilian flesh—the man he fought was naked—he jerked him forward, wrapped his left arm around him, and with a heave of his shoulders raised him shoulder-high to dash him down upon the rocky floor.

But the other shadows were too near. A lean arm encircled Arnold's neck from behind; a knee was pressed into his back. Overbalanced by the weight of the man he had lifted, he crashed down upon his back. In the dusk he saw above his head the faint shimmer of a blade—and it was descending. He closed his eyes.

Through the hissing mêlée pierced the girl's voice in a sibilant shriek. The falling blade turned as it fell. The flat of it struck Arnold's unprotected head above his

ear. His soul seemed to leap through a thundering void, beyond which was silence.

CHAPTER XV.

THE GREAT PAITITI.

JONES did not tell Katherine that night of the disappearance of Arnold. She had fallen asleep, and the clamor of De Ulloa's departure had not awakened her. Accompanied by the Martian, Jones himself passed a slumberless night beside the camp-fire.

Grimshaw, although his curiosity had been strongly aroused by a chain of events which he could not understand, forbore to question. He retired early to the larger tent and slept well, as was his custom. Nambe shared the vigil by the fire until drowsiness overpowered him and he collapsed upon his side and with untroubled conscience snored peacefully in the grass.

Early in the morning David and three of the other Cholos rode into camp with the pack-mules. Both men and beasts bore evidences of a hard night. No trace of Arnold had been found.

David had become quite attached to Jim, and there was moisture in the Indian's eyes as he made his report. Don Castro, said David, was awaiting the caravan near the village of Yanas, half a day's march to the east.

Katherine came from her tent feeling much better than she had for a number of days. While she did not at all make light of Arnold's mishap, if mishap it were, she shared the confidence of Kelly that nothing very serious had happened the young man.

"You haven't seen that girl, you know, Bob," she told her husband. "When you do, I'm sure that you will agree with Mr. Kelly and myself, and especially with Mr. Arnold, that she is not the wicked creature that you seem to suspect—though I have to admit that she certainly is queer.

"There is no proof that Jim has met foul play. He is infatuated with her. I presume that he has followed her in the hope of persuading her to return with him. I shouldn't be a bit surprised to see them come strolling into camp hand in hand."

"Hope that you're right, Kate," replied Jones, smiling at the sentiment of his beautiful wife; "but why should old Castor Oil, as Jim calls him, get so infernally excited at the bare mention of her name? He jumped up and tore out of here last night as though he'd sat on a tack."

"Perhaps he has heard of her or seen her himself, Bob. Maybe he's in love with her, too. That may have been the reason for his anxiety to come with us. He's not such an old man yet, you know; and stranger things have happened. Jim may find that he has a dangerous rival."

After a breakfast cooked and served by men who nodded as they walked, camp was broken, and the valley of Tantamayo was left behind. Before going, Jones took the precaution to inform the *gobernadore* of the village of their itinerary for the next few days, as outlined by David—information to be given to Jim, in case that young man should turn up in the neighborhood.

At Yanas, Don Castro had made temporary camp, and had enlisted a small army of Cholos to search in the hills for a young *caballero* who was lost. The don was careful to give no hint of the exact circumstances which had attended the disappearance of the *caballero*; for he knew that had he done so, he would have had to do his searching by himself. Whom *los demonios* have chosen for their own, let no Indian interfere with, is the motto of the Cholos.

De Ulloa himself had passed the night in the saddle, and a part of the morning also, until he was utterly wearied.

When Jones and his party rode in at noon, Don Castro, who had asked to be apprised of their coming, arose stiffly from the *poncho* where he had taken a few minutes' rest and went out to meet them.

"Any news?" asked Jones.

"Only this." De Ulloa handed him a small pocketbook of smooth black pigskin. "Tomás found it, *patron*, early this morning among the rocks at the side of the trail less than a mile beyond this place. Despite our vigilance, they have passed us in the darkness, doubtless carrying the *caballero* with them."

"Who do you mean by 'they,' don?" queried Jones rather acidly. He was get-

ting tired of dark sayings and mysterious references. If the don knew anything, he meant to have it from him.

The conversation had been in English. Several Cholos were standing near and listening with all their ears; and Zalmon, too, was regarding the speakers curiously. De Ulloa raised his big voice and spoke in Spanish:

"Why, the robbers of the hills, *patron*. The pocketbook is empty. Doubtless the *ladrones* will hold the *caballero* to ransom."

With a gesture of impatience, Jones urged his mule forward. As he passed, Don Castro stepped close to his stirrup.

"Note the pocketbook well, *patron*," he said quickly; "there is writing upon it. I must not talk with the *patron* alone."

Jones examined the pocketbook. On the smooth surface of its outer flap, scratched there with a sharp point, perhaps the corner of a finger-nail, was the following message:

O. K. Going east. Montaña, I think.

Though he wished that Jim might have been more explicit with his information, Jones felt mightily relieved. At least his friend was in no serious difficulty, else he would not have written that "O. K."

With Kelly and Katherine, Jones walked a short distance from the camping-ground, and the three seated themselves upon a grassy bank beside a small stream, which, with its setting of shrubbery and ferns, the broad, rolling meadows beyond, where sheep were grazing, and the bright sunshine, might have been a New England brook in midsummer. Don Castro joined them there.

"Let us dispense with all mysteries and deal only with the facts, Señor de Ulloa," began Jones, asking the Peruvian to be seated. "Mischances have twice overtaken members of our party, and each time in one of these old Inca ruins. There are circumstances which seem to point to a connection between the two occurrences. If we may believe the evidence of the green feather which Mr. Kelly found last night, one of these circumstances is the presence each time of the girl Nee-Nah."

"And the machete of Enrique, *patron*,"

suggested Don Castro, plucking at the grass beside him with agitated fingers.

"Exactly. Having had some experience in the ways of primitive people, I can understand the superstitious awe in which the Cholos hold these places, and their readiness to see the supernatural in any happening, no matter how trivial, which takes place in them. But two men have been killed, and my friend Mr. Arnold has disappeared.

"These are not trivial occurrences; nor, in this day and age, does a civilized man attach any supernatural significance to them. I do not, and I do not think that you do, Señor de Ulloa.

"Still, your words have been strange at times, and some of your actions have been still more strange. I mean to take measures to protect my friend; I intend also to go on to the River Ucayli. If we are to continue our work in harmony toward those two objects, there must be understanding between us.

"I have a theory that there is in this district of Peru a secret organization of men who are not Indians, and who do not fear the ruins of a past race; but who play upon the fears of the one while they make use of the other to further their pursuits, which seem to include brigandage that does not stop at murder. Am I anywhere near the truth, Señor de Ulloa?"

Don Castro leaped to his feet and drew himself to the full height of his inches.

"I am only surprised, Señor Jones, that you do not name me as one of the chiefs of these *ladrones*," he said with bitter irony.

Immediately he repented of his words. His face lost its proud fire. He shrugged his shoulders and once more seated himself upon the grass.

"Excuse my hastiness, Señor Jones," he said, with as near an approach to humility as was possible to his pride. "As to an organized band of *ladrones*; there is none such, *señor*. Would to God that were all we had to deal with. It would be an easy task. One company of brave Peruvian soldiers would soon accomplish it.

"There is a strange thing to be faced, *señor*—stranger than *ladrones*; and whether it is of God, man or *el diablo*, I know not. But I do not fear it, *señor*."

He laughed harshly, and one of his hands crept up to his curling mustache and caressed it.

"We will go on to the Rio Ucayli, you and I, Señor Jones; and we will find the young *caballero* and in doing so solve the mystery of the *Montaña*—if God allows it. But *Dios mio, señor!* I would that your *señora* had been left behind!"

Jones was about to break in impatiently, but Don Castro held up his hand.

"You complain, perhaps rightly, *señor*, that I have acted and spoken strangely, and but now I have seemed to deepen the mystery. But what will you, *señor?* When a man speaks of riddles, it is difficult not to speak in riddles. I will tell you the riddle of Peru.

"You are aware, *señor*, that the word 'Inca' is not the name of the people, but the title of their ruler merely, as 'Caesar' meant 'emperor' to the Romans. It is tradition that Mama-Huaco, mother of the first Inca, brought her son, Manco-Capac, 'the almighty child,' from some mysterious land or city in the interior to the island of Tia-Guanaco in Lake Titicaca, where he became the first Inca and the first law-giver to the wild Indians.

"Under the tutelage of his divine mother, he unified the poor tribesmen of the Quechuas and the Aymaras into a powerful nation.

"So much of the origin of the Incas is almost history, *señor*. But whence came Mama-Huaco and her son, and whence did they bring the advanced ideas and the wisdom to put them into being, that revolutionized the life and religions of the tribesmen? Tradition and Peruvian historians too, speak of a mysterious country known as 'the great Paititi'—home of a culture and civilization older and superior to that of the Incas. It is believed that the mother and son were lost, exiled, or sent from that place.

"In the year seventeen hundred and sixty-one, Eusebio Zapata, a Peruvian gentleman, wrote a history of his native land, which he presented in manuscript to Carlos III, King of Spain. It mentions this lost land of Paititi. The manuscript of Zapata has never been published. but I have seen a

written copy of it, *señor*. It cites various Inca and Spanish attempts to find Paititi.

"In eleven hundred and thirty-six, the Inca Sinchi Roca, successor to Manco-Capac, led the first recorded expedition into the *Montaña* in search of the hidden land. He failed to find it, though he penetrated as far as the Rio Caya-Huaya, where his engineers found gold.

"In thirteen hundred, the Inca Roca sent one of his sons to subdue Paucartambo, one of the regions of the *Montaña*. He did not find Paititi. Mama-Huaco had kept her secret well, even from her own children.

"The Inca Tupac Yupanqui, in the year fourteen hundred and fifty, fought his way to the banks of the Rio Madre de Dios; but he returned no wiser than his ancestors.

"Since the fall of the Inca empire, many Spaniards have tried to solve the mystery, no doubt lured more by greed for gold than by zeal for historic exploration. None has succeeded. The bones of many *hidalgos* lied buried beneath the mosses of the *Montaña*.

"No trace of Paititi has been found, unless the mighty ruins on the great island of Tumpinambaranas, where the Rio Madera meets the Rio Amazon, are one of its former cities or colonies. I have been at Tumpinambaranas, *señor*, and I saw there temples and fortresses much older than the oldest ruins of the Incas—older and different and more magnificent.

"Cholos, Quechuas and Aymaras of today—poor descendants of the subjects of the wise Incas—cherish the delusion always so dear to the hearts of a fallen people, that some day another Inca will come from the great Paititi and reestablish the glory of the dead empire.

"So much, *señor*, for tradition and history. Myself, I have been one of the seekers of the lost land."

Don Castro's face became sad, and he hesitated and sighed.

"I have lived among the Indians, *señor*. I have penetrated far into the fastnesses of the *Montaña*. Though I have not found it, nor until recently seen one of its people, I believe, *señor*, that somewhere in the unexplored interior is a land or city inhabited

by a strange people—whose faces are white, as yours and mine are white, *señor*—but who are not like other men.”

“Recently!” exclaimed Jones. “You have seen one of them recently?” De Ulloa nodded.

“Yes, *señor*; for I believe that the dead man whom you found in the Temple of Chavin was a man from the lost Paititi.”

Jones entertained no such belief; but he saw that the little Peruvian believed what he had said, and he did not contradict him.

“You have spoken of strange stories among the Indians of the mountain villages?” he suggested.

“Yes, *señor*; the tale is out that a mission from Paititi has traveled through the land, making ready for the coming of the new Inca. The poor Indians are prepared to greet him as a god and savior.”

“What did you mean, Señor de Ulloa, when you said that these people are not like other human beings?” asked Katherine, who had followed the don’s narration with intense interest.

De Ulloa turned to her, bowing profoundly, as he always did when he addressed her.

“*Señora*, in answer to your question I could only repeat foolish stories and traditions of the ignorant Indians, meaningless unless one took great time to study them and extract their few grains of seeming truth. But you have a saying in English that where there is much smoking there must be a spark; and—have not our own experiences with these people been of the strangest?”

He glanced keenly from one to another of his auditors, and found them all thoughtful.

“And this girl—you think that she is one of them?” queried Jones.

Under his immense mustaches Don Castro’s lips contracted in a sudden spasm. For a long moment he, too, was very thoughtful, and he did not meet his questioner’s eyes as he answered:

“It has that appearance, Señor Jones.”

“Mr. Arnold has been infatuated with her since he first saw her,” put in Katherine. “He declared that he would find her and marry her.”

“That is as may be, *señora*,” replied De Ulloa gravely. “The young *caballero* is a brave and worthy man. But he has run great risk in thus following his desires unadvised and alone. Had I only known what the *señor* your husband told me last night, we might have been spared a journey which will take us much farther than the Rio Ucayli.

“I think, *señora*, that the Señor Arnold will be the first stranger to set eyes upon the great Paititi. Whether he ever returns, will depend upon the wisdom of God which will direct us. We must press on while the trail is still warm. He may find still other means to let us know in what direction he is being taken.”

Blotted from the mind of Jones for the moment was thought of all other obligation save that of friendship.

“We will go on by forced marches as soon as you and the others are rested, Señor de Ulloa,” he said. “I will spare no effort; and if money will aid, it is at your disposal, *señor*, in whatever amount may be necessary.”

“And in the meantime what, may I ask, Mr. Jones, is to become of our little venture?” inquired a mild, affable voice.

CHAPTER XVI.

ZALMON SPEAKS FRANKLY.

THE four conspirators for the good of Jim Arnold whirled about as though a rattlesnake had warned them.

On a flat rock beside the purling stream, fishing-pole in hand and an unlighted cigarette in his mouth, the personification of peace and contentment, sat Grimshaw. Unobserved, the fat man had come softly from the camp in their wake.

While they had been absorbed in their conversation, he had sat quietly fishing, and listening. Three or four shining fish which he had lifted noiselessly from the brook lay in the grass beside his seat.

Four different looks of angered astonishment and contempt greeted his interruption. They no more disturbed his smiling complacency than so many pea-shooters might have ruffled the composure of a good-hu-

mored elephant. He continued to regard Jones steadily, and touched a match to his cigarette.

"Meaning that you have any objections to offer to what you have—overheard?" asked Jones in dangerously quiet tones.

"I think that I might name a few," responded Zalmon sweetly, laying aside his fishing-rod and clasping his hands about one lifted knee.

"Name them," said Jones, with the same ominous inflection.

Grimshaw bowed urbanely, including all of the party in the salutation.

"Being, as I might say, the prime mover of this expedition," he began, "I trust that I may be pardoned if I speak my mind quite freely in what has the appearance of a crisis in its affairs. Quite accidentally I have heard a story which undoubtedly would be of great interest, say to the National Geographic Society or the Smithsonian Institute.

"But, perhaps unfortunately, I am neither an archeologist nor an ethnologist; nor have I the slightest intention to become either. I hope, therefore, that Señor de Ulloa will pardon me when I say that his tale does not interest me in the least.

"My interest in this expedition is purely geological, one might say, and relates to the speedy location of certain green stones reported by a certain Mr. Cooper of our acquaintance.

"And I must beg to remind you, Mr. Jones, that you, too, came to Peru with a definite and not too trivial object in view, of which you appear temporarily to have lost sight."

Jones held up his hand. "You are wasting a lot of oratorical effort, Grimshaw," he remarked. "You mean that you object to our searching for Arnold? You would abandon him? Well, it is like you."

"Please allow me to continue my argument in my own manner, my dear Mr. Jones, and without the introduction of unpleasant personal reflections," continued Zalmon. "Then there will be no possibility of our misunderstanding one another."

Again he bowed to the party, but his eyes were upon Katherine, who was gazing

at him with a mixture of indignation and loathing in her glance.

"I must recall to you, Mr. and Mrs. Jones, that our bargain, which until now has not been threatened with rupture by either of its parties, contemplated no hare-brained and perilous trip into the wilderness in search of mythical cities or lovelorn young men.

"I am living what remains of my life, Mr. Jones, entirely for the pleasure and profit of Z. Grimshaw. I am getting too old to play the Good Samaritan where the play may cost me dearly.

"If our impetuous young friend has, through his interest in a somewhat startling young woman, fallen among thieves, or worse, as I gather that he has, he has my sympathies; but they are passive, not active. When it comes to imperiling the success of this expedition or risking my neck, why—young Mr. Arnold may go to Jericho, or Paititi; it is all one to me."

At that point Don Castro arose from the grass and advanced toward Grimshaw. He walked stiff-leggedly, and his very mustache quivered with suppressed ire.

The don had listened with astonishment to the conversation. He had seen in the faces of his companions anger and disgust, which he comprehended and shared; he had seen also a trouble, which he could not understand.

Moreover, the Peruvian saw that his cherished enterprise was threatened—an enterprise about which he cared vastly more than he did his own life. So he strutted to the bank of the stream and stood glaring over Zalmon like a small, wiry terrier bristling into the face of a fat and amiable bear cub.

"*Cáspita!*" he exclaimed, mouthing his favorite expression and emphasizing it with a ferocious twist at the right horn of his mustache; "and what devil gives you the right, Señor Grimshaw, to eavesdrop like a thief and to interfere like a coward?" His big voice sank until it was almost gentle; but every word was enunciated with mechanical clearness. "When the *patron* goes on to save his friend—as he surely will go on, for he has said it—if you fear to risk the neck which you have not, Señor

Grimshaw, you shall remain here. I will see that you are provided for.

"Or you may go back to Huarez if you prefer. I will furnish you mules and guides. But wherever you shall go, Señor Grimshaw, if you are a man, you will remain in Peru until my return, when I shall be happy to give you satisfaction for my present language in any manner that you may require. Do I make my meaning clear, Señor Grimshaw?"

"Oh, perfectly; absolutely, Señor de Ulloa," replied Zalmon, looking up at the little man easily, and unmoved by his nervous expletives. "As to my right to interfere—suggest would be a better word, *señor*—that is a matter which Mr. Jones probably would prefer to explain himself."

"*¡Carramba!*" rumbled Don Castro, more than ever angered by Grimshaw's cool demeanor, "were I the Señor Jones, I believe that I should turn you adrift, as you counsel him to abandon the young *caballero*—if, indeed, I did not bury you!"

"I am fortunate, then, *señor*, that it is Mr. Jones who commands," answered Zalmon: "for he will do nothing of the kind. On the contrary, I believe that I shall be taken care of, excellent care of. It doubtless has occurred to both Mr. and Mrs. Jones that my life and person are peculiarly valuable to them. He gazed at Jones.

The Martian, who had maintained silence through the entire course of the council, suddenly emitted a sound that was very like the snort of a horse, sprang up and started for camp with long strides.

Jones looked down at his powerful hands, so powerless now; and he smiled grimly at the thought of what he would have liked them to do for him. Zalmon read him.

"It would be fatal to your hopes, Mr. Jones," he said.

"See here, Grimshaw," said Jones, raising his head, "I have had my suspicions many times that I played the part of a rather poor stick in making any agreement with you whatever. I have felt like a worm about it. I may be one. But if I am, Grimshaw, the worm has turned.

"As Señor de Ulloa has just informed you, we shall start as soon as possible on the trail of Arnold. If there is any such

place, and we don't find him before he gets there, we will follow him to this Paititi, if it's seven leagues on the far side of hades!"

Having said which, and feeling much better therefor, Jones got up and threw back his wide shoulders as though he had cast a weight from them.

"And what does Mrs. Jones say to this decision?" inquired Grimshaw, bending his gaze upon her, but betraying neither chagrin nor anxiety.

Katherine's face was white with the pain of agonized mother love. She felt that upon her answer might depend the fate of Bobby. But she remembered that Jim Arnold had come with her husband and herself to Peru to stand by them in their trouble and to do what in him lay toward the recovery of the little fellow; and now Jim himself was in trouble. With spirit and without hesitation, she answered:

"You have made one division in the Jones family, Mr. Grimshaw; but there is none now. We should be the rankest kind of cowards did we even think of deserting our friend, no matter what the cost may be to ourselves."

"Good girl, Kate!" muttered Jones, squeezing her hand.

It had arrived to Don Castro that he had precipitated himself up to his ears in a private matter which he did not understand; but he had seen no graceful avenue of withdrawal. At Katherine's answer—and it had not escaped him that she made it at some great cost of which he knew nothing—he planted himself before Zalmon again, this time triumphantly.

"And what does the Señor Grimshaw have to say?" he inquired truculently.

"I shall go on with you, of course," replied Zalmon, almost with indifference, addressing his remark to Jones. "The matter is now fully understood between us and responsibility for the possible consequences is squarely placed."

He looked up at Don Castro.

"Can you tell me what kind of fish these are, Señor de Ulloa?" he asked, pointing to the trophies beside him.

"We call them *camarones*, Señor Grimshaw, responded the don wonderingly.

"Are they good eating?"

"They are excellent when freshly caught, señor."

Zalmon gathered up his catch and set off for camp to interview the cooks.

CHAPTER XVII.

HUALLA AND COMPANY.

THAT Jim Arnold did not die under the edge of Enrique's machete—for it was the missing weapon of the dead guide which struck at him from out of the darkness—was due to the very feminine curiosity of the girl Nee-Nah.

Angered as she had been at his attempt to lay hands upon her, she had not wished to see him killed—at least not until she could find out more about him. At her sharp command, the man who had struck with the machete had turned his wrist as the blow was falling and let go his hold of the haft of the weapon, so that the flat of the heavy blade instead of its edge struck Jim on the side of the head. Otherwise, the stroke assuredly would have cleft his skull. As it was, the steel struck with force sufficient to jar his senses from him and leave a painful bruise.

When consciousness returned to him, Jim's first impression, aside from a violent headache, was a wild fancy that he was standing at the brink of a bottomless pit itself, and that far below him the watch-fires of the damned souls were flickering up through the darkness. To his unutterable relief, he was not long in perceiving his error.

Unseen strong hands were gripping him by each elbow to support him, and he stood in the portal of the stretch of wall at the top of the stairway by which he had ascended the tower hill. What he had taken for the sulphuric illumination of the wrong side of the hereafter, were the dancing blaze of Jones's camp-fire on the opposite side of the valley and the flames of the outdoor cook-stoves of the housewives of Tantamayo.

As the quickening of his muscles warned them of his returning senses, his captors strengthened their hold of his arms. Across his back they carried on an animated con-

versation in whispers, of which he understood not a single hiss.

Suddenly they lifted him from his feet and propelled him forward and downward.

An involuntary groan escaped him at the thought of the terrible plunge down the double span of the stairway. But the clutching hands did not release their grip, and the two men who escorted him took the leap with him.

As agile as cats, they alighted on the top step of the staircase so softly as scarcely to jar their captive. Though it had become quite dark on the hillside, they continued on their course down the precipitous stairs as swiftly and sure-footedly as though it had been lighted by the sun of noonday. Half-way down the upper span they paused to take breath.

Arnold twisted his head around and looked back. A number of shadowy forms were coming down the steps above him, but he could not distinguish whether one of them was the girl. As the foremost figure reached the step which he had just left, it stooped, and he saw it arrange three skulls in a row upon the rock. A whispered chuckle was exchanged between his captors.

"Whoever they are, they have a sense of humor, anyway," he thought, and again he felt better.

"Nee-Nah!" he called softly; "oh, Nee-Nah!"

She did not answer. One of Jim's guides laid a clammy hand across his lips. Jim shuddered at the touch of it and jerked his head away.

"If that's the punishment, don't worry that I will repeat the offense," he thought. "I'd sooner kiss a dead toad."

At once the progress down the stairs was resumed. When they reached the walled landing-place, the men set Jim down, but they did not release him. One of their companions, coming from behind, seized him by the chin, yanked his mouth open and inserted between his teeth a small piece of wood, which was tied in place with a cord knotted at the back of his head.

Another halt was made at the edge of the meadow-land below the hill. There Jim saw the girl again. She was the last of the party to leave the stairway.

As she came near him, he saw that she was carrying his sombrero, which he had lost in the scrimmage in the tower chamber. She stepped to his side and glanced into his face, and then appeared to examine the fastening of the gag; for he felt the flutter of her fingers at the back of his neck.

She paused by him for a moment only, and then entered into a whispered conversation with one of her strange companions, of whom all that Jim could see was a stocky outline with exceptionally wide shoulders. This, though he did not know it, was the wielder of the machete.

Jim judged, from the amount of hissing which he heard, that a council was in progress; that it probably was occupied with what disposal should be made of his precious self; and that it had two minds on the matter. Presently the two men who held him released his arms and joined in the argument: though they remained near enough to him to intercept any attempt at flight.

But Arnold had no intention of running away. He was resolved to see it through. Moreover, he was not a little ashamed of his conduct toward the girl, and he wanted an opportunity to set himself right in her eyes.

If it came to the worst, his hands were still free, and at his belt was the automatic, which his captors had not seen fit to disturb. In his hands, the weapon would account for eight lives—twenty-four, if he were given a chance to use the two extra clips which were in his coat-pockets. Thus far he had counted only five men accompanying the girl.

It occurred to him that it would be well to leave a message for his friends, whom Nambe undoubtedly had gone to summon, unless he, too, had been gathered in. He cautiously slipped a page from his notebook and took out his fountain-pen.

Before he could write more than the two words which Tomás later found in the grass, the council arrived at a decision. His guards laid hold of him again, and he was forced to let his pen and paper fall.

Jim's mode of progress was now varied in a manner which he could neither approve nor prevent. Two of the other

members of the party came to the assistance of the pair who were managing him. At a sibilant order from the stocky chap who appeared to be in authority, they stooped and seized him by the ankles, and the four of them raised him upon their shoulders and set off at a brisk trot, their bare feet soundless in the thick grass. Nee-Nah and their chief disappeared in the darkness ahead of them.

They were hardly under way when their prisoner heard the pounding of a mule's galloping hoofs approaching the tower hill, and the sound of voices which he knew well.

"Good old Martian! He's on his way to find me," thought Jim. "Wish I could have left a longer letter."

His bearers heard the hoofbeats, too, and they increased their pace to a run. As the way which their leaders had chosen skirted the rocky slopes of the northern side of the valley, where the going was none too good, and as they were not over particular how they handled their burden, Jim found the locomotion anything but comfortable.

He was jolted, bumped, twisted and jarred. Cool dew of the night and the creeping mountain mists dampened his cheeks and his garments and chilled him. Occasionally a small, venturesome insect toiled itchily up the ridge of his nose, or made the circuit of his neck, breaking its journey by frequent stops for refreshments.

In the back distance the firelights of Tantamayo faded away. Jim, carried face upward, watched the stars and suffered in enforced silence, setting his teeth in his wooden bit, pitying all horses and mules, and deriving occasional comfort from the reflection that his bearers must tire some time under his one hundred and sixty pounds and set him down for a rest.

Stars paled and the moon came out, and still the eight feet beneath him padded on tirelessly, sometimes swishing through grass and weeds, sometimes spitting on bare rock, and sometimes splashing through shallow streams. Valley after valley was traversed.

Night birds flitted overhead and screamed down at the silent voyagers. Sev-

eral times the scurrying of hard little hoofs and a chorus of frightened *baas* announced that they had disturbed the flock of a mountain shepherd; and once a great sheep-dog came baying after them, to flee back whimpering with lowered tail as soon as he picked up the scent of the strangers. Once or twice a bull snorted his challenge at them; and once Jim heard the *woof* of an alarmed bear and the scratching of its claws as it scrambled frantically among the rocks.

Moonlight was turning gray, and Tan-tamayo was many leagues behind, when the first stop was made.

The four runners laid Jim on a bed of growing ferns in the shelter of a ring of shrubbery. He was much more wearied than they, and he was cold and hungry into the bargain. Had it not been for his stubborn resolve and his interest in the mysterious girl, he could have regretted his situation heartily.

He sat up and began to rub vigorously at his chilled limbs and aching neck. The men melted away among the bushes, and he heard them conversing in their eternal whispers at a little distance away from him.

He stood up and peered over the undergrowth. He could see nothing of them. The spot where he stood was near the lower end of a narrow, sloping valley. Toward its center, and a few rods from him, was what appeared to be an open trail.

He searched in his pockets for a pencil. Not finding one, he emptied his pocket-book, scratched a message on its smooth covering with the point of a metal toothpick, and threw it as far as he could in the direction of the trail.

His next effort was to rid himself of the distasteful gag; but his fingers were so benumbed that he could neither untie nor snap its cords. While he was fumbling at it, he heard the thudding of many hoofs and an excited shouting at the upper end of the valley. His "conveyance" came leaping through the bushes, grabbed him up unceremoniously, and once more set off on its travels.

An hour after dawn the second stop was made; that time in a dimly lighted glade

in the heart of the first real forest which Jim had seen in Peru.

As they deposited the young man at the foot of a tree, one of his conductors unknotted the fastenings and pulled the gag away. Unpleasant as it had been, its sudden removal gave Jim a twinge of exquisite pain. The poor chap's jaws were so stiffened that it was several minutes before he could close them with comfort; and every other bone of his anatomy was in sympathy with them. He staggered a step or two and threw himself upon the turf with a groan of utter weariness.

The four men, breathing deeply after their phenomenal run, sat upon their heels before him.

Nee-Nah and their chief were nowhere to be seen.

Arnold found his captors little more pleasing to the eye than they had been to the touch.

They were white men, as white as their prisoner, but deeply bronzed by the continual exposure of their nakedness to the sun. With the exception that they were alive, the description given by Jones of the corpse which he had found in the Temple of Chavin would have fitted any one of them to a T.

They were uncanny and repellant, as a plant which has grown blindly in the dark is repellant. All were entirely devoid of any vestige of hair upon either head or bodies; and four more expressionless countenances than those turned toward Arnold it would have been difficult to find.

Their similarity did not end there. There was among them a common resemblance, the stamp of a family tie, as though they might have been brothers, or at least cousins. All were naked, with the exception of bands about their loins.

Of about the same build, a sturdy medium height, they were, as was to be guessed from their recent performance, extraordinarily wiry and muscular. In the loin-cloth of each swung a small ax of beautifully hand-hammered copper, like the one which Jones had found with his dead mystery man.

So like they were that had the four of them exchanged seats while he was not

looking. Jim would not have been able to sort them.

"What a crew!" he thought, as they squatted in a row before him, regarding him out of lack-luster eyes that seemed hardly to wink. "For all the world like the three wise monkeys, only there are four of them."

Jim leaned his aching back against the bole of a tree and returned the scrutiny. Gradually the repulsion which the four bizarre figures had inspired gave place to a sense of the ludicrous. Jim grinned.

"You win, boys," he said. "When it comes to a gawping-match, you can stack up against a Chinese joss dummy any day, and he won't have a chance. That was a nice walk we took. Now, how about a little breakfast?"

Not a muscle moved in the four impassive faces.

"Breakfast — *desayuno* — you know," prattled Jim hopefully.

Not a flicker of interest or comprehension dawned in the eight dull, veiled eyes. Evidently that pleasant and necessary prelude to the labors of the day was unknown to his audience by either its English or Spanish name.

"Hell! you must eat in some language!" groaned Jim in desperation. "If you don't, you'll either have to get busy mighty quick and teach me the trick of cheating old H. C. L., or we shan't get along together at all. I could christen a cat rabbit and tackle it right now, with the fur on."

No results. Jim essayed the primitive. He rubbed briskly at the pit of his stomach, opened his mouth and pointed into it, and swallowed so convincingly that his outraged Adam's-apple bobbed up and down like a ball on a rubber.

That was comprehensive, it seemed. One of the end men of the queer quartette nodded gravely, pointed in the direction from which they had come, and lifted a hand to his ear, as though listening.

His wordless assurance was realized a couple of minutes later, when Nee-Nah and the thick-set man entered the glade, bearing with them evidences that some Cholo's henroost and his garden, too, had suffered despoliation.

At once the four wiseacres sprang into action. One of them wrung the necks from four or five fowls with all the aplomb of a dorky chef from ole Virginny; another stripped the husks from a number of ears of maize which the girl threw down to him; a third scraped the dirt and jackets from a mess of new potatoes, using his long finger-nails with a skill that told of practice; while the fourth grubbed a hole in the earth and filled it with dry grass and twigs.

Nee-Nah approached Jim. Evidently she chose to consider his impulsiveness of the night before as a closed incident; for she smiled at him brightly. He looked at her in amazement. She was fresh as the proverbial daisy.

"Weston has nothing on you as a traveler," he muttered. His every fiber cried out for rest and nourishment, though he had scarcely set foot to the ground.

"Ah-meer-e-can—good," she began, and hesitated, trying to remember.

"Good morning," said Jim with his best bow.

It was the words of the simple old salutation that had escaped the girl's memory.

"That it! Good morning!" she cried delightedly. With an aspirated exclamation she claimed the attention of her five companions.

"Ah-meer-e-can—this—Hualla."

She pointed to the chief of the band, who stood near, and who looked as though he might have been uncle to the other four; for he was much older.

"This—Rasco—Isako—Jaqui—Mush," continued Nee-Nah, pointing a rosy finger at each of the quartette in turn as she named him.

"Wallop, Rascal, Isaac, Jakey, and Mush, I'm sorry to meet you," responded Jim. But for cat's sake, hustle that breakfast, and I'll try and not hold it against you," he added appealingly.

"Here, Jakey; that's too slow, my boy!"

He stepped to the side of Jaqui, who was endeavoring to light his fire by striking together two fragments of flint.

Jim took a box of safety matches from his pocket and struck one.

"Hi! don't blow it out!" he cautioned. For Jaqui had greeted the approach of the flaming bit of wood with a prolonged hiss of consternation and awe which resembled that of a frightened gander. He sprawled back upon his hams and hands with an expression in his dull eyes that was akin to worship.

His exclamation drew his companions around him. With wide eyes they stared at the blazing match as its flame leaped into the piled-up fuel. Nee-Nah was as much impressed as the others.

When Jim threw away the burnt match-stick Hualla sprang to recover it, fingered it religiously, and ended by wrapping it in a leaf and tucking it in his loin-cloth. From that time, because of his simple miracle, Jim was known to Hualla and Company as the Fire-Maker, and they treated him with as much deference as circumstances would allow.

Half an hour later Arnold did a hungry man's execution on his share of breakfast. And though there was no salt for it, nor yet bread, and the only dishes were the forest leaves, no product of a French kitchen emperor, served upon Sèvres and silver, could have tasted better in his mouth than the broiled chickens which the nephews of Hualla cooked over their grass fire and the potatoes and ears of maize which they had gotten and roasted and toasted in its embers.

Nee-Nah sat beside him and watched him covertly while she picked at half a chicken with a daintiness which Jim would not have believed possible in the lack of table cutlery, and which he imitated very poorly. On the other side of the fire squatted Hualla and his relatives, as noiseless about their eating as they were about all their other concerns.

Once or twice the girl attempted to start a conversation with Arnold; but English, however much of it she might once have known, was a forgotten tongue, and the few words which she recalled were drawn from her memory at the cost of such mental effort that she gave it up with a *moue* of disgust, and allowed her great dark eyes to speak for her.

"One of my first jobs will be to teach

her United States," thought Jim. Not that he had the least objection to the language which she was using so eloquently; but he doubted his ability to reply in kind. One of his attempts at the speech of signs had failed disastrously.

When he had eaten, Arnold felt for his brier and pouch. Before he had finished filling the pipe, he was nodding. Desire to sleep descended upon his senses like a curtain. His head swayed lower and lower. The pipe fell from his fingers.

Smilingly Nee-Nah laid a hand upon his shoulder and pushed him gently backward. His head sank into the softness of the grass. Far overhead the interlaced branches, seen through his half-closed lids, waved lazily and darkened. The girl sang to him, the same wordless, voiceless, crooning chant with which she had lulled him on the night when he had awakened in the cave and found her beside him like a vision come out of the dim Peruvian past.

For a number of hours his was the sleep of exhaustion, too deep for dreaming. Then he dreamed that he was once more upon the march with his friends. He heard the stentorian tones of Don Castro, the creaking of the harness leathers, and the ceaseless cursing of the *arrieros* as they urged on their long-eared mules.

Hands gripped rudely at his throat. He sprang up to throw them off, and fell back again under the weight of a man on his chest. The noises of the marching caravan had not been a dream. He could hear it, very near to him.

Jones and his party had entered the forest. Jim opened his mouth to hail them; but Isako, who knelt upon his breast, clapped the gag between his teeth and made it fast, and Musth and Rasco restrained his limbs.

Nee-Nah he could not see. At the edge of the glade stood Hualla; and at sight of him Jim gurgled in his throat and closed his eyes, believing that he was still under the influence of his dream.

Hualla was poised, ready to spring through the shrubbery at the rim of the glade. He had not been more than a yard from Jim. Had he been farther, Jim could not have seen him.

For, from his bald crown to his bare soles, Hualla was a vivid forest green!

CHAPTER XVIII.

"HE SHALL GO WITH US."

WHEN she saw that Arnold was indeed asleep, Nee-Nah ceased her singing. She leaned over the young man and watched the measured rise and fall of his wide chest and the healthful tides of color in his tanned cheeks.

There was no love in the glance, but there was frank admiration and a deal of girlish curiosity. So a civilized maiden might examine the splendid representative of an unknown species, seen for the first time, or a striking piece of statuary.

Jim's sombrero lay where she had placed it when she entered the glade. She took it up and set it on her own shapely little head, patting it this way and that and pulling down its brim as she had seen Katherine do.

She was sorry that Ah-meer-e-can was not awake to see. She was sure that he would have smiled; and she liked him best when his merry grin lighted up his face. Her own people never smiled like that. But Ah-meer-e-can showed no signs of waking for a long time; and presently she covered his face with the hat and tiptoed to the side of the glade, where she curled up in the shade of a flowering bush and drifted into her own land of dreams.

Hualla and the others already were asleep, with the exception of Isako, who had been set to watch, and who busied himself for a time by burrowing in the earth and cleverly hiding all traces of the camp-fire and the remains of the meal. Such was the furtive nature of these people that they seemed to take joy in all manner of concealments, even to the most trivial.

When Isako had finished his task, he sat himself down in a thicket, turned his wooden face and inscrutable eyes toward the forest reaches, and remained as motionless as a carven image until one of the others arose to take his turn at watch.

After all of the four had stood their turns at guard duty, Hualla crept out from the grass where he had slept and gathered

them before him in the center of the glade, and there they talked together in their curious whispered language, which made no more noise than the rustling of dried forest leaves, and which was older than the speech of Egypt.

"It is my mind that the handmaiden of the changeful god has chosen wisely," said Hualla, indicating by a shake of his head the slumbering Arnold. "This Fire-Maker indeed is worthy to return to Paititi. He shall go with us. He shall become the founder of a family of servants of the great Pro-Tay-Us.

"Last night I would have slain him. But for the command of the god's priestess, I would have crushed his skull even as Orsai cracked that of the brown man who crept upon us in the Temple of Lua-Haco. Now I am glad that I did not. If he and the priestess have children, it will spare labor and perils to those of the house of Hualla, who are the guardians of the handmaidens of Pro-Tay-Us, and have been for nearly a thousand rains."

"Is it allowed by the ancient laws, oh our uncle, that a stranger shall enter the hidden city, and there be father to children who are not as the sons of Pro-Tay-Us?" asked Jaqui. "Will not the priests rather demand that he shall stand on the fiery knees of the god—which I should not care to see; for I find it in my heart to love this man well."

Hualla, before he answered, wriggled tenuous fingers among the folds of his waist-cloth and brought forth a folded leaf, from which he took the burnt match which Arnold had thrown away. He sniffed at it, and while his four nephews watched him with interest, he rubbed its charred end across the palm of his hand, slowly at first, then briskly.

No answering blaze leaped up. He tried it once more, that time upon the haft of his copper ax.

"It will not make fire for me," he whispered low to himself in disappointment.

"Doubtless the flame spirit obeys only this Fire-Maker," suggested Jaqui.

"I am sorry," his uncle replied; "for it is much easier than hitting flints."

He wrapped up the bit of stick and

returned it to his girdle. While he had played with the match, he had pondered an answer to Jaqui's question.

"Look you, nephews and sons of Sayono," he said, "these things of which I will speak, let them lie buried in thine hearts alone: else may thine uncle Hualla, head of thine house, be himself summoned by Ito the priest to stand upon the fiery lap of Pro-Tay-Us because of a tongue that is loose and long. For these are things forbidden for speech.

"But such a thing as ye have questioned has been, and therefore, seeing that all things repeat, it may be again.

"Very long ago, as time is reckoned in the lives of men, but only a little while if measured by the life of our people, such a thing was; and alien children played and prattled noisy speech within the shrine of Pro-Tay-Us.

"And how did that thing end? ye would ask. She that was the last priestess of that line, and whose first ancestors in Paititi were brought from I know not where, escaped the watchful priests and laughed at the ancient laws.

"She was widow of her own brother, as was the custom. With her two children, a little son and a daughter, she escaped into the wilderness.

"That was a wise woman, nephews. Out of her wisdom she knew how to cross the wilderness unharmed by the fierce barbarians. What think you are the ruins which we have left these last days? that they are those of our own people? They are not. They are the last remains of an empire which that wise woman founded beside the western sea. Among the barbarians who dwelt by the sea she founded it, building her first temple on an island in a lake; and the barbarians worshiped her for her wisdom, and her children for their beauty and strength.

"That boy and that girl, whom the woman had stolen from Po-Tay-Us, grew tall and wonderful, and that woman wedded them one to the other, as their ancestors had been wedded by our priests; for there was none in that land of the barbarians whom she deemed fit to mate with them. And the children of that boy and girl be-

came gods and rulers after them, and that empire was mighty and endured for many, many rains, until white wizards swam up out of the western sea and overthrew it with thunders and fire from the skies.

"Since the time of that woman, no handmaiden of Pro-Tay-Us has wedded a husband or borne servants to the god. After her time the duty was laid upon the house of Hualla that its sons should guard always the god's priestess; and if the god should please to take her spirit to dwell with him upon his heights, the sons of the house of Hualla must find another to take her place in the temple.

"That has been a hard thing for the house of Hualla. We, who once were many, now are few. We five are the last of the house of Hualla—I, who grow old and am childless, and ye four, who are young men.

"It is a hard thing to make the journey which each priestess must make to the great twin mountain of snow, which no man can climb, and on the top of which dwells Pro-Tay-Us, and his shining wives, but it is harder to provide the temple of the god with its white woman servant. Once in my life it has been done; for the last of the god's servants before this one was born before I was born, and she died old and ugly and was burned when I was a young man, as ye are young.

"To replace that woman cost the lives of your father Sayono and of Talao, who was his brother and mine.

"Already this journey to the home of the god has lost us Orsaii, thy brother. More of us may die before we cross the lands of the barbarians who dwell by the rivers.

"Should the girl die soon, then ye and I would have to fulfill the duty of our house and seek another to fill her place, and likely more sons of Hualla would perish.

"I say that it is a good thing that Nee-Nah the priestess does in taking back this stranger. Unless the priests are fools, they will receive him kindly and reestablish the ancient custom.

"I shall pray that they may have many children. So shall our house gain respite and the chance to wax strong again—

though, 'alas! children are not born in Paititi as once they were.

Hualla sighed.

"Uncle, I too would speak of forbidden things, now that you have started it," said Musth. "Why is it that Paititi grows weaker? Is it not the truth that when you and our father were small, folk dwelt within the ring of the third wall—and that very long before that time they filled the city, even to the rim of the seventh wall? Now there are scarcely enough of the houses of living men to fill the first ring about the temple of the god. Why do we dwindle and perish, uncle?"

"Nephew Musth, that is a question which you must save and ask of Pro-Tay-Us himself when you stand before him for judgment—which I hope may be a long time off—for I cannot answer it. I only know that each year fewer babies are born in Paititi, and the city shrinks in upon the temple, and the trees grow tall in the outer rings.

"Let us hope that this Fire-Maker pleases the god, and that he and Nee-Nah have many babies. Perchance, when Pro-Tay-Us hears them once more playing about his altar, he may soften, and so be more kind to the women of Paititi."

So engrossed had been Hualla and his nephews in his tale of the past, that for once their native vigilance was tricked. None of them perceived that Nee-Nah had awakened, crept from under her bush and come near to listen.

She had not heard much, only the question of Musth and his uncle's reply, and then Hualla's pious wish for the plentiful progeny of a union which she had not at all considered. Anger flamed up within her, and she sprang forward, hands clenched.

So it was that Hualla, hopeful for future benefits from his priestess, received from her immediately something which he had not wished for and which was far from being a benefit. It fell upon his ear, toppled him from his squatting position and stretched him sprawling sidewise on the grass. In his surprise he betrayed possession of a pair of excellent vocal cords by giving vent to an audible if rather breathless grunt.

He at once sat up, rubbing his smitten ear, and with something as near a grin on his face as his stony features would allow.

"Daughter," he said, for so it was his habit to call her, "there are hard bones in that hand of thine, though it looks so soft. Why didst thou strike me upon mine ear?"

Nee-Nah swallowed her breath.

"What foolish talk were ye five making?" she demanded.

"It seems that thou must have heard a part of it, daughter, else thou hadst not struck mine ear," Hualla retorted, still rubbing the afflicted organ and keeping an eye on Nee-Nah's clenched fists.

"Perhaps, had I heard more, I should have struck the harder," she rejoined. "Know this: I do not take Ah-meer-e-can to Paititi for my husband. I had not thought such a thing until I heard you say it. What need have I for a husband? Besides, he angers me."

With each hissed sentence the girl's temper mounted.

"I tell thee it is not true, Hualla!" she said furiously. "I take him only because—because—" She hesitated lamely. Tears were in her voice.

"Because he hath affronted thee, daughter, and thou wouldst have him punished as he deserves," supplemented Hualla dryly. "I see how it is. Myself I will make oath to Ito the high priest how grievous was the affront."

"Thou wilt do naught of the kind!" exclaimed Nee-Nah. "Mind thine own concerns, Hualla! Never have I known thee to be so meddlesome!"

"Then will I do just that, daughter, and say no more," answered the old rogue gravely. In secret he was hugely pleased with what he took to be a confirmation of his judgment.

At that moment came to the ears of the party a salvo of profanity from Jones's *arrieros*, who were forcing their animals through the thicks of the forest. Hualla sprang to his feet.

"Now here come the accursed strangers again!" he hissed. "I thought we had distanced them. In a moment they will be driving their beasts over us.

"Nephews, look ye to Fire-Maker, for he wakes and will try to summon his friends. I will go out and see what may be seen, and in which direction these noisy folk are heading. I will whistle and warn ye which way to go."

Jim stirred, and Rasco, Isako and Musth hurled themselves upon him.

Hualla advanced to the shrubbery, rested a hand upon one of its branches and peered through it, preparatory to quitting the little clearing.

As he stood there, a marvelous change passed over the man. The bronze skin of him paled. Not his face alone, but his entire body blanched, as one pales in the grip of deadly anger or fear. The pallor was succeeded by a ghastly, greenish tinge, which each moment grew more apparent.

Within forty seconds of the beginning of the change, the flesh of Hualla's body was as green as the foliage by which he

stood. It was as if the color of the fluttering leaves had flowed into him through the fingers of the hand with which he caressed them.

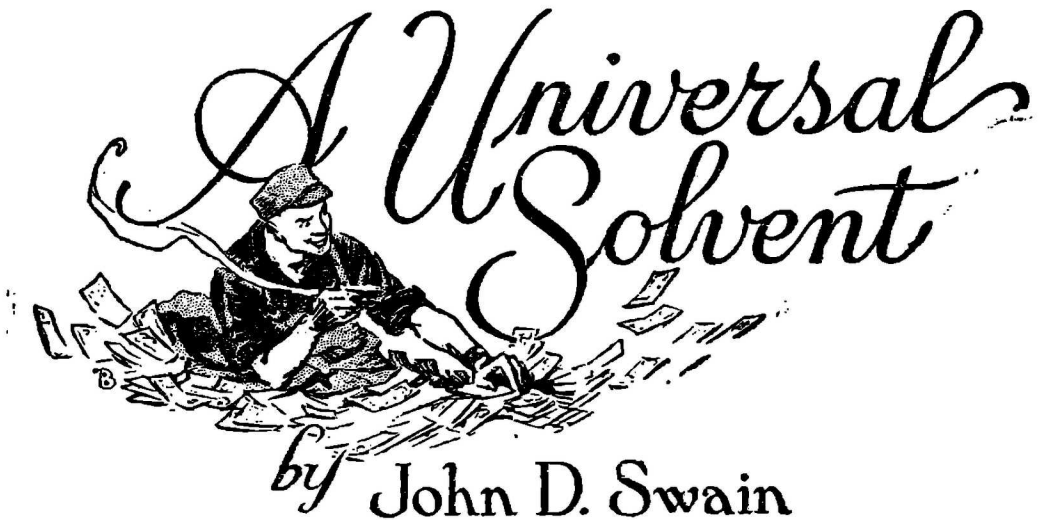
It was incredible; but it *was*. He stood like some strange vegetable freak, sprung up from the earth in the shape of a man.

So he was when Arnold, starting up, caught one glimpse of him and closed his eyes. He opened them at once and stared again; but Hualla had disappeared, and where he had been stood Nee-Nah, watching curiously for the approach of Jones's vociferous cavalcade.

From the depths of the forest sounded the piercing whistle of a parrot, thrice repeated.

Jaqui went to the aid of his brothers. They raised Arnold upon their shoulders and glided away through the undergrowth, leaving not so much as a swaying twig to mark that they had passed.

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



A PRETTY shopgirl in thick sables stopped to greet another less assertively clad in Hudson seal. She extended one narrow, patent-shod foot and wrinkled her nose concernedly.

"Forty-two fifty for them only last month—and both soles wore through already!"

The other one, with the evanescent Oriental splendor of her race, bent her dark eyes upon the offending boot and sighed.

"Ain't it the limit!" She agreed. "It takes all us poor girls can earn to look decent, even."

They moved on, giving place to a newsboy who arrived at his corner with another last edition.

Annie Warren, as always, felt the old urge to buy one, even though she realized that it would contain nothing but sporting news, comic, rumors of fresh strikes, advertisements of frothy shows and specious eat-

ing-places, with a flamboyant editorial lashing itself into a nicely calculated fury over something or some one a safe three thousand miles away. She consoled herself with the reflection, ignoring the truth that she could not afford the twenty-five cents anyhow.

She was a pretty girl, with the type of face which would have been piquant had it not been listless. Everything about her seemed toned down; the blue of her eyes, the russett of her hair, the carmine of cheeks, and particularly of lips. Her ears seemed translucent, the veins in her aristocratic hands a bit too prominent beneath her neatly mended cloth gloves.

The look was familiar enough, these days; an anemia due not to organic disturbance, but to lack of red meat. It was not unattractive; it lent to many rather ordinary faces an "interesting" touch. But Annie Warren's face was not ordinary. Two-thirds of the men entering the adjacent club appraised her lingeringly as they passed.

She had paused to rest for a moment on the corner where in marble insolence the Steamfitters' Club threw its haughty head ten stories into the lingering rays of a November sunset. No ordinary club, this; to be eligible, one's grandfather at the least must have been a steamfitter. One need not necessarily be one himself, though the majority were; the membership roll included two ambassadors, a Governor, and an ex-President, with such small fry as judges, university professors, and remnants of the vanishing Mayflower stock.

It was a pleasant corner to catch one's breath on, because a low wall fronted the club fencing in a few priceless blades of grass. No one was supposed to sit here; but pretty girls did, and were encouraged to do so by idle steamfitters at the windows of the club lounge. Annie detested it—but sensibly made use of this half-way point in the two-mile walk from the library where she worked, to her home in East Cambridge. The twenty-cent carfare, saved twice daily except in the worst weather, was not to be despised.

If only poor, dear papa were not so old-fashioned in his ideas! Little that went on

outside his Greek course at Harvard made any impression on his mind. Indifferent as to what he ate, he had not even shown any elation when the McKay Endowment established the Free Faculty Cafeteria in Cambridge, and would not have bothered to avail himself of its succulent stews and beneficent beans had not Mrs. Warren worn threadbare over the rising tide of household expense, insisted that he relieve the situation to this extent. Once he became accustomed to it, he was quite happy amid his brethren, and had not eaten with his family for the past two years save on Sundays, and of course during the vacation season.

He had steadily refused to permit Annie to sign an application for the Union of Department-Store Clerks, holding to the quaint notion that it was more in keeping with family traditions that she should enter the Public Library at a miserable pittance of fifty dollars a week. And now Winthrop, the brother, on the last year of his prep school course, must be casting about for something if the family were to hold together; and Professor Warren had stunned them at the codfish ball course of their last Sunday dinner by announcing that his only son must, of course, matriculate at Harvard.

To Annie, pondering these things as she rose from her wall and proceeded on her way unconscious of the yearning gaze of a young steamfitter, it seemed as if her mother had wept continually since then, while Winthrop had turned sullen, and would hardly reply decently to his sister's efforts to dispel the gloom of their frugal meals.

Her reflections were interrupted by a flock of little airplanes, skimming so low over the skyscrapers that laughter and song floated down to her as she stood with face upturned.

"Oh, you in the blue coat!" A jovial voice came to her ears, causing a little color to warm her face for an instant.

She recalled that it was the return of the hodgecarriers from their annual field day at Cape May. After they had passed, a thin rain of peanut-shells, banana-skins, and wads of chewing-gum trickled down. It was strictly against the air traffic regula-

tions, of course; but the easy-going American public was inclined to congratulate itself that it was only discarded fruit rather than spare parts and monkey-wrenches.

With railway travel nearly prohibitive, one was really obliged to own his own airplane these days. There was a very reliable little flyabout to be had, with a boat fuselage and folding wheels, which would go in air and water or on earth, though not very fast. Not every one could afford one, of course; but they were at least as commonly used by laborers as were bicycles twenty years or so ago. Even Annie's modest ambition extended as far as this.

Farther, indeed, than this; for when did poverty curb a maiden's dreams? There might be only a salt-fish dinner on the table—but there was always a visionary Prince Charming of the rolling mills, gayly bedight in imported tweeds, and reining his curveting steed—an eight-cylinder one—before the tenement in the genteel slum where blossom the daughters of university professors!

Arriving home, where her mother was taking the family wash from the back-yard line and exchanging gossip over the fence with the wife of Dr. Lloyd, similarly employed, Annie ears pricked to the rare sound of brother Win's voice raised in song. It was not wholly melodious—had not been since his changing voice had compelled his retirement from the vested choir more than a year ago; but it was distinctly stimulating to her, tired as she was after the hard day and long walk. She hastened her steps, and entered the house.

"Well, sis, I've done gone and just naturally crossed the Rubicon!" He greeted her boisterously. "Lil ole Win has taken the bull by the tail and made up what he fondly calls his mind!"

"What *do* you mean, silly?" she asked, breathless from his rough hug of greeting. "Can't you let me get my hat off before you ruin it?"

"Buy you a new one. Buy two—half a dozen! What's an old last year's hat to me?"

"Last year is right," she nodded; "and then a year on top of that. But whence the sudden wave of prosperity?"

The boy sat down astride a chair, his arms resting on its back. He was a big, hearty-looking lad, with clear, intelligent eyes, a good chin, and persuasive smile. He opened his lips before her last question was out.

"I don't know what ails dad; I can't make him see that nobody who *is* anybody goes in for college now? If he could afford Tech, why all right and lovely; but college! Why, it isn't good form to go there any more. I'm eighteen now, and don't you s'pose I see how mother slaves, and you, too, in that fudgy old library? Dad never sees anything but Greek roots. And now he wants me to perpetuate the family poverty. Nix! Not! Also, nothing doing. To-day I enrolled in the Garbage Collectors' Union. Tod Sweeny's father fixed it for me. No waiting at all. Could begin to-morrow as apprentice; but, of course, I'll finish up and graduate with my class at dear old Noble."

Annie, into whose eyes a rarely seen light came as she gazed fondly upon him, ran swiftly across the room and threw her arms about his neck, snuggling her head in his shoulder. She was afraid he would see her tears.

"Dear old Win! How perfectly wonderful! Have you told mother?"

"Surest thing you know! And probably the whole ward knows it now. I heard her breaking it to old lady Lloyd as you came in. She promised scrambled eggs for supper. With real butter in 'em."

The garbage collectors, one of the most desirable circles of Boston, had recently secured a minimum wage of eighteen dollars for a five-hour day. They drove nicely enameled blue-and-white trucks from house to house, whose occupants were obliged not merely to set out their cans, but to empty them into the big, low-swung tank. The collectors themselves never had to leave their seats, as their trucks were equipped with self-starters, and the turning of a switch opened the chute when they had their load to the municipal incinerator. On the waiting list of their union were names that read like those in the blue book. Small wonder that Annie wanted to laugh and cry at the same time!

As a bank-teller, which would have appeased Professor Warren's sense of fitness, Win could not have done more toward helping his family than to pay his own board. Marriage before thirty would have been out of the question. True, silly fads in clothing having long become obsolete, he could have worn a flannel shirt and sneakers in the trust company, which his position in the G. C. U. would hardly permit; but even here anything like ostentation was frowned upon. Starched collars, like top hats, were chiefly on view in motion-pictures of antebellum days.

"What you laughing about?" the boy asked suspiciously, Annie having passed from tears to chuckles.

"I can't help thinking how funny it all is! Papa a Harvard professor, grandpa a Unitarian divine, great-grandpa a noted Boston importer. His father, a cocky old Governor; and so on. They'd turn in their graves to think of one of their descendants handling garbage."

"We don't handle it. Never touch it!" he denied with some heat.

"I know it, dear; it's only the *name*. And yet, if they were living to-day they would raise their sons to do exactly what you have done. But don't you know how upset everybody was at first, when the great middle class went plunk! Down to the bottom of the social heap?"

It was true. There had been a frantic scramble at first. In Great Britain conditions were nowhere near settled yet. But America, whose old landed aristocracy was almost negligible, and where money has always ruled, adjusted itself to the new order with a smooth celerity that did credit to its citizenry.

For, once it dawned upon the intelligent bourgeoisie that there was no longer any money in teaching, writing, or counter-jumping, and that a healthy half-wit could, with his two hands, earn more in a short day than a fair bookkeeper could in a long one, the intelligent middle class went out with gladsome whoops and began to cop off some of the easy money.

Thenceforth, cultured families devoted their offspring to the humble but highly utilitarian tasks of laying bricks, rolling sheets

of tin, building houses, digging wells and cellars, and collecting ashes. They discovered the joy of creating something good and enduring, and threw overboard forever all silly prejudice against calloused hands and broken nails. Inasmuch as they brought to their tasks a very high average of intelligence, wherever they appeared they drove out the lazy, the professional striker, the clock-watcher, and the less alert.

To-day, the real economic problem of America was the ex-laborer, ousted by the thrifty bourgeois, and trying desperately to fit in somewhere. With typographers getting a cent a word, nearly as much as authors receive, many poets and writers of fiction became printers, to the vast betterment of the public. There were, naturally, some remaining injustices. The bank clerks had never been able to obtain a union charter; the old suspicion of Wall Street died hard. Teachers were still woefully underpaid, save in the great technological institutes, which received federal aid.

Annie Warren and her brother were not in any sense students of economics, but these facts were perfectly well known to them, since they had been developed during their brief lifetime. Their father was aware of them, too, but was strongly reactionary. The old days for him! The days when O. Henry wrote feelingly of the poor shopgirl starving on six dollars a week and being persecuted by the sleek broker's clerk. The days when laborers smoked short clay pipes, and hired a barge for their annual picnic, and respected college professors who earned two thousand dollars—and had vacations three months long! The days when noted men, upon the birth of a male child, entered him on the waiting list of one of three famous private schools—rather than, as now, in the Paperhangers' and Kalsominers' Union!

"I hate a snob," Winthrop continued. "But a fellow does like to run with his own crowd. Why, down at the trust company dad is so keen about getting me in with, ninety per cent of the clerks have names ending in *icz* or *ski*. And there is an esprit de corps among the garbage collectors that you don't find everywhere these days. The very motto on their stationery

—*noblesse oblige*—strikes the keynote. I suppose it is a little hackneyed at that; but the best young fellows in town belong, which is the main thing. The very crowd dad has always wanted me to cultivate."

His sister sighed.

"It's the same in the library. The poor pay has driven out all the efficient workers, and there are girls there on cataloging and even on the information-desk, who cannot speak good English. All my old pals have gone. Nina Sedgwick—the tea-importer's daughter—was the last to leave. She joined the Five-and-Ten-Cent Clerks' Union last week. They start them at fifty a week—exactly what I'm getting after three years' with no raise in sight for three more."

The family dinner was the most cheerful in many days. Professor Warren would not be in until nine or later, so the evil hour when he must be told was still far off. Mrs. Warren's harassed soul basked in the blissful reflection of coming prosperity, as she urged second helpings of scrambled eggs and buttered—not oleoed—toast on her children.

"I hope my dear boy will always be democratic," she said when they had finished and were clearing away the dishes. "Laborers are so stand-offish nowadays. I'd hate you to become in any way *exclusive*."

"No fear, ma! I'll still have the glad hand for the poor school-teacher and corner grocer. They'll be unionized, too, some day, and poverty will be abolished, or made a felony."

"I have no head for such things," Mrs. Warren admitted. "It doesn't sound possible; but neither would I have believed ten years ago that I'd be made happy by what you have done to-day. And your poor father—he never will see it, I'm afraid."

That Professor Warren would go up in the air to the point of establishing a new altitude record, did not occur to any of them. When, about half past nine his stooped figure in its ancient frieze ulster, half a dozen books beneath an arm, plodded through the untidy front yard, no premonition of the forthcoming storm disturbed his loved ones, peacefully surrounding the reading-lamp on the sitting-room table. He

greeted them absently, his mind still busy with an acrid dispute at the cafeteria with a colleague, as to the personal habits of Socrates. After he had draped his coat over the piano, placed his dusty felt hat upon it, kicked his goloshes under the sofa and spread his volumes over two-thirds of the table, he prepared to devote the evening to peaceful study of some topic of burning interest a couple of thousand years ago. Realizing that they must arrest his attention before he became hopelessly absorbed in his theme, Mrs. Warren, as agreed beforehand, broke the tidings to him, and as she was a trifle nervous, she may have done so somewhat abruptly.

For an instant it appeared that he had not heard her. Then, startling them all, he slammed upon the golden-oak table his copy of Mahaffy's critique, and raised his shaggy and rather noble head. A quiet, absent-minded gentleman, his rigidly old-fashioned notions none the less embraced a firm conviction that a man should rule his own household.

"Do my ears deceive me?" he demanded. "Has my own son arranged his future without consulting me?"

"But I have consulted you, father; many times!"

"Then you are deliberately rebellious?"

"Somebody's got to earn some money in this man's family. It's about time."

"And since when, may I ask, has economy become disgraceful? Our ministerial ancestor, during the Plymouth famine, rationed his family on twenty-four kernels of corn a day; and there is no record of any complaints."

"Well—we're not pigeons, I guess! Mothers' worn to a frazzle now, trying to get us enough to eat. Of course, you have your soup-kitchen, and don't realize."

The father sat up with a jerk, a purple flush replacing his scholastic pallor. Winthrop noted it, and hastened on:

"You know as well as I do that it's nonsense for me to waste four years at Harvard. Can't you see the different element that goes there now?"

"They seem much like the idle, lazy, shirking youths I have always labored with. But that is dodging the issue. I am refer-

ring to your odious—not to say odorous—choice of a vocation. Why!” The old gentleman’s voice rose to a trumpet peal. “In King’s Chapel is a marble tablet commemorating the fearless patriotism of a Warren at the time of the Stamp Act. Another fell at Bunker Hill. In the old Granary burying-ground lies Judge Warren, soldier and statesman. And you—with the blood of these great men in your unworthy veins—you, with this proud heritage, would sell your birthright for a—er—mess of garbage. *Faugh!*”

“But, papa,” Annie interceded, “can’t you see that it is the times which have changed, and not we? That to-day men are coming to see the dignity of manual labor? As a student, you know there was a time when artists and surgeons were despised because they worked with their hands. We have merely taken the final step away from false pride!”

Professor Warren raised his thin, scholarly hands in anathema.

“My own daughter, too! Oh, sharper than a serpent’s tooth is the sting of an ungrateful child! Sleep well on it, I conjure you. For if by this time to-morrow you have not apologized and bowed to my prayerful plans for your future, Winthrop, you shall leave the family roof-tree, to return no more.”

A euphemism for the bleak tenement rented by the Warrens. But it was all the home they knew. Little sleep visited them that night, save that the father retired at his usual hour, and his snores indicated a just man.

One and all, they knew his decision to be irrevocable. He never changed his mind. Fortunately he was often right; but right or wrong, he stood pat. Even the sorrowing mother could not bring herself to urge her boy to yield. With her husband ageing, and without a hundred dollars saved up, with Annie already buried in a non-union library from which wedlock alone could lift her above a bare living, it was sheer suicide to forego Winthrop’s wonderful chance, not to consider the social prestige he would enjoy in the G. C. U., and which as a mother she desired for him.

No word was spoken at breakfast save

the usual platitudes. Swollen eyes commiserated across the coffee-urn, and promptly at eight the father set forth for the Harvard lecture rooms.

A little later, Winthrop kissed his mother good-by. She noted tearfully that he did not have his school-books with him.

“I shall start in right away as an apprentice, mummsy dear! Twelve dollars per, and a uniform like a life guardsman’s. I’ll come to see you every evening—dad can’t stop me from doing that. If he does, I’ll get the union to refuse your garbage!”

“I suppose it’s for the best, my boy; but I did want you to graduate with your class and get a diploma!”

“I know; but look at all the dusty old diplomas kicking round in attics and cellars. Nobody ever looks at ’em once they’re framed. I’ll bet father has a dozen; and where are they?”

“I’m sure I don’t know,” admitted Mrs. Warren. “But I do hate to have my boy sleep away from home! I always look at you children the last thing, after you have gone to sleep.”

“I’ll get a room at the Y,” he promised her. “And I’ll bring you heaps of money every Saturday night—and take you and Annie to the theater and dinners, too. Come on, sis!”

As long as they were in sight, Mrs. Warren watched them from her doorway, and then had a nice, comforting cry in the silent kitchen.

At the Charles River embankment brother and sister parted, Winthrop to seek the union headquarters on Beacon Hill, and Annie to keep on to Dartmouth Street and the Public Library.

The girl walked slowly, oblivious to the children roller-skating past her, the Chow dogs and infants being exercised by the maids of the wealthy plumbers and masons whose town houses abutted on the embankment, or the oarsmen from the various boat-clubs paddling up and down this bracing November morn.

Her dejection at the quarrel between her father and brother was less than her fear for Winthrop in his new environment. Had he the stamina to resist the temptations sure to assail him? As the son of Professor

Warren, of Harvard, he had been safe in his very obscurity; but the garbage collectors were reputed to be a little fast. Their membership included youths whose manner of life had been entirely apart from the Warrens. They were clubmen, first nighters, drivers of fast roadsters, easy spenders. How long would Win remember the simple, pious standards of their home?

Mechanically she turned up Dartmouth Street, quickening her pace as a church clock struck the hour. The thin blood raced through her pale cheeks. Her breath came in rapid little exhausts. Undermined by lack of proteids in her diet, and more upset than she knew by the dramatic storm of the night before, she did not realize how weak she really was. Suddenly, as she was about to cross Marlborough Street, everything turned black. Her lips, with their pathetic, childlike droop, parted in a faint cry, and she felt herself falling from incredible heights.

The sense of motion remained when her eyelids fluttered open again; only it was horizontal rather than perpendicular motion. Beside her, on either hand, slowly flowed the sandstone palaces of the industrial aristocracy. She was snuggled deep in luxurious Russian leather, and luminous brown eyes were fixed on her own by the stalwart youth who was driving very slowly, one hand on his brass and mahogany wheel, the other—

She drew away from him with vague alarm. He seemed familiar—too familiar—yet was a stranger.

"Where am I? You must let me out at once!" she gasped.

The young man laughed reassuringly.

"This is your day for playing truant, Annie Warren! I was fortunately passing just as you started to fall; and I scooped you up as neatly as ever belted knight—or chapped cowboy—rescued fair lady."

"But—but I don't know you!"

"Oh, yes, you do; or did! Do you dare tell me your heart no longer bears the image of Beals Cabot, the harum-scarum of grammar school days who used to send you valentines and hand May baskets on your door, and swap gum with you, and pull hair, too?"

Beals Cabot! The black-haired, black-tempered scion of the great explorer, grown up to this broad-shouldered, six-foot estate! Of course she remembered him. Had they not been as good as engaged at fourteen? Did they not go to dancing-school together winters? Drink lemonade together at the old Pops? They had even been in business together, raising squabs; all their stock flapping off to the Common as soon as their wings would bear them.

But Beals's mother had looked askance on the Warren girl. She regarded her as a little rowdy; and while not worrying about her when the children were in rompers, she noted Annie's amazing development from thirteen to fourteen, her unusual beauty and charm; and, having no idea whatever of permitting the intrusion of a mere Greek professor's daughter into the ancestral halls of Cabot, Beals had been sent to a distant boys' school, and packed smartly off to Bar Harbor at vacation time, and in general removed from the horizon of Annie.

Still, he had never completely forgotten his little sweetheart, nor fallen in love with any of the charming débutants of the Sewing Circle, whom, as a brilliant young steamfitter he came to know. He still wore in a locket a strand of Annie's fourteen-carat hair, and had at least a dozen snapshots of her. The Warrens having moved many times, from grimy suburb to grimier, he had indeed lost track of her, until that day when lounging in the broad windows of the Steamfitters' Club, he instantly recognized her, changed as she was, when she paused for a moment to rest upon the low wall. Since then he had been on a constant lookout for her.

"I don't know where you work, Annie, and I don't care. I saw you last week, and I haven't fitted a steam-pipe since! And my reward came to-day when you dropped into my—er—roadster, so to speak."

"But I *must* go, at once! I'm late as it is. For the public library. I'm in the reference-room."

Beals's reply was to open the throttle another notch or two.

"Nothing doing! My grandfather—Judge Cabot—is a trustee. It was a much earlier Cabot, you know, who made me

eligible to the club. He had a mechanical bent, and rigged up a steam launch which blew up twice on Jamaica Pond. Otherwise, he was a respected surgeon. I'm the first one to desert law and medicine since his day."

Annie sank back with a sigh. After all, it was nice to be bullied again by Beals Cabot!

They sped out Commonwealth Avenue, and wide open spaces began to appear. Bits of grove, cows taking a final snack of late but vivid green grass, and presently, pretty villages, each topped by one or more white steeples.

Swerving to the right, toward the twisting Charles, the roadster presently came to a halt before one of the many country clubs dotting Massachusetts Bay.

"I've been too busy to breakfast this morning!" Beals prevaricated. "Would you have mercy on me and agree to an early lunch?"

The shrewd eyes of the young man had appraised the cause of Annie's wistfully lovely pallor. There were plenty of pale cheeks these days! Well, he proposed to paint the lily, for once.

The skill with which, a little later in the club breakfast-room, he managed to induce

her to eat fully three times as much tenderloin with fresh mushrooms, white rolls, coffee, and November buckwheats with maple sirup, as she had intended to—and still left her convinced that he had not noticed her appetite at all, all this indicated that young Mr. Cabot was not merely a gentleman and a steamfitter, but a diplomat. Forgive me—a *diplomatist*.

The short November day outdid itself in the matter of shortness. They played golf, gathered armfuls of bayberry and bitter-sweet to take home, ate prodigiously again, this time in the grill, surrounded by pretty women and sophisticated young laboring men, and sped home beneath a gibbous moon. They even had one or two old-time disputes. The last one took place in a mean street, before a dingy tenement mercifully tricked out in delicate moonshine and shadow.

"Remember what we always did, Annie, after we'd quarreled?" he whispered as she stood at what would have been the gate had it not gone long ago for fuel.

"Stop, Beals!" she commanded, stamping a small foot.

But he didn't stop. Neither would you have—nor I, nor any discriminating young man!



TO ONE FEELING DIFFERENTLY

BY DJUNA BARNES

O DEAR Beloved, shall I not go back
 From gazing on you alway with wet eyes,
 And mournful kisses from these lips where lies
 More honey than your aloes? Must I crack
 Yet darker herbs, and sighing keep the track
 With feigned lamenting, and with feigned cries;
 Slow twining you about with blasphemies
 Because I would be dancing? Nay, I lack
 The needed deep intoning of despair—
 Nor in me echoes your too somber mood,
 Nor is it in my heart. Nor anywhere
 Within my flesh the flesh that you once wooed—
 Then wherefore shall I loose my heavy hair
 And hide my eyes, pretending that I brood?

A Sagebrush Cinderella

By Max Brand

CHAPTER I.

WHISKERS.

SHE lay prone upon the floor, kicking her heels together, frowningly intent upon her book. Outside the sky was crimson with the sunset. Inside the room, every corner was filled with the gay fancies of the age of chivalry. Jac would not raise her head, for if she kept her eyes upon the printed page it seemed to her that the armored knights were trooping about her rooms. A board creaked. That was from the running of some striped page with pointed toes. The wind made a soft rustling. That was the stir of the nodding plumes of the warriors. The pageantry of forgotten kings flowed brightly about her.

"Jac!"

Jacqueline frowned and shrugged her shoulders.

"Jac!"

She raised her head. The dreary board walls of her room looked back at her, empty, barren, a thousand miles and a thousand years from all romance. She closed her book as the door of her room opened and her father stood in the entrance.

"Readin' again!" said Jim During in infinite disgust. "Go down an' wait on the table. The cook's gone an' got drunk. I've give him the run. Hurry up."

She shied the book into a corner and rose.

"How many here for chow?" she asked.

"Maurice Gordon an' a lot of others," said her father. "Start movin'!"

She started. Handsome Maurice Gor-

don! She had only to close her eyes and there he stood in armor—Sir Maurice de Gordon!

You might have combed the cattle ranges for five hundred miles north, east, south, and west, and never found so fine a figure of a man as Maurice Gordon. Good looks are rather a handicap than a blessing in the mountain desert, but "Maurie" Gordon was notably ready at all times for anything from a dance to a fight, and his reputation was accordingly as high among men as among women.

He made a stir wherever he went, and now as he sat in the dining-room of Jim During's crossroads hotel, all eyes were upon him. He withstood their critical admiration with the nonchalant good-nature of one who knew that, from his silk bandanna to his fine riding-boots, his outfit represented the beau-ideal of the cow-puncher.

"Where you bound for?" asked the proprietor of the hotel as the supper drew toward its close.

"The dance over to Bridewell," said Maurie. "Damnation!"

For as he mentioned the dance, Jac, who was bringing him his second cup of coffee, started so violently that a drop of the hot liquid splashed on the back of Maurie's neck.

"Oh!" she cried, and seized her apron to wipe away the coffee.

"Scuse me," growled Maurie, seeing that he had sworn at a woman. "But you took me by surprise."

With that he stopped the hand which was bearing the soiled apron toward his

neck, and produced from his pocket—marvelous to behold!—a handkerchief of stainless white, with which he rubbed away the coffee.

"Jacqueline!" rumbled her father, and his accent made the name far more emphatic than Maurie's "damnation."

That was her given title, but to every cow-puncher on the ranges she was known as "Jac." During, who rode, shot, and sometimes swore as well as any man of them all. She was Jacqueline to her father alone, and to him only at such a time as this.

"Well?" she said belligerently, and her eyes fixed on her father as steadily and as angrily as those of a man.

"Your hands was made for feet! Go back to the kitchen. We don't need you till the boys is through with their coffee. Too bad, Maurie."

"Nothin' at all!" said the latter heartily, and waved the matter out of existence.

He might banish Jac from his thoughts with a gesture, but he could not drive away her thoughts of him so easily, it seemed; for she stopped in the shadow of the doorway which led into the kitchen and stared back with big eyes at the cow-puncher.

"Who you takin' to the dance?" said her father.

"Dolly Maxwell," said Maurie, naming the prettiest girl in many, many miles.

"That pale-faced—thing!" muttered Jac, relapsing into a feminine vocabulary at this crisis. But she sighed as she turned back into the kitchen.

She threw open the door of the stove so that the light flamed on her red hair, which was tied in a hard knot on top of her head—the quickest, easiest, and unquestionably the most ugly manner of dressing hair. A vast and unreasoning rage made her blood hot.

The anger was partly for her own blunder in spilling the hot coffee. It was even more because of Maurie's ejaculation. With that one word he had banished the vision of Sir Maurice de Gordon. The plumed helmet had fallen from his head; his bright armor had blown away on a gust of reality. In the fury of her chagrin Jac caught up the poker and raked the grate of the stove

loudly. The rattling helped to relieve her as swearing, perhaps, relieves a man. In the midst of the racket she heard a chuckle from the dining-room, and her blood went cold at the thought that some one might understand the depths of her shame and wrath.

She ran to the door. There she sighed again, but it was relief this time. At least it was not Maurie who laughed. He was deep in conversation with his neighbor. She swept the other faces with a quick glance that halted at a pair of bright, quizzical eyes. Only one man had apparently understood the meaning of her racket at the stove.

"That bum!" said Jac, and turned on her heel.

But something made her stop and look back. Perhaps it was the brightness of those eyes; certainly nothing else could have made her look twice at this fellow. Even among these rough citizens of the mountain desert he was wild and ragged. His shirt was soiled and frayed from elbow to wrist. A bush of black hair was so long that it almost entirely hid his ears, and his face, apparently untouched by a razor for months, was covered by a tremendous growth of whiskers. She could only faintly guess at the features behind that mask.

It was very puzzling, but Jac would not waste time thinking of such a caricature of a man as he of the many whiskers. She turned back into the kitchen and broke off her meditations by kicking a box across the floor.

"It smashed against the wall. Jac sat down to think, and stared gloomily straight before her. Her throat swelled and in her heart was that feeling of infinite age which comes upon women at all periods of their life, but most of all during the interim when a girl knows that she is mature and the rest of the world has not yet found it out.

"Why was I made like this?" said Jac miserably.

And from within a still, small voice that was *not* conscience answered her.

"Aw," said the voice, "quit kiddin' yourself!"

"Why," repeated Jac dolorously, "was I tied to such a face?"

"You might as well be askin'," said the voice, "how the colors are painted on a pinto."

"Them colors never rub out."

"Neither will your face."

"It's awful."

"It is."

She stood in front of the speckled mirror.

"There's something wrong with the way I fix my hair," she muttered.

It was tied so tightly that it pulled up the skin of her forehead and raised her eyebrows to a look of continual plaintiveness.

"There's *certainly* something wrong with the way I do my hair!"

"Is that all that's wrong with your face?" whispered the voice.

"My hair is red," said Jac.

"Like paint," said the voice.

"There's no help?"

"None!"

To escape from this merciless dialogue, Jac went back to her post of vantage. The square shoulders of Maurie Gordon were just disappearing through the outer door. All the others were gone, with the exception of her father, her brother Harry, and the man of many whiskers. The last was hardly to be considered as a human being. She felt practically alone with her family, so she entered the dining-room and sat on the edge of the table swinging her feet.

"Harry," she said, "d'you see anything the matter with the way I fix my hair?"

Her brother glanced at her with unseeing eyes. The man of many whiskers stopped stirring his coffee and glanced up with the keen twinkle which Jac had seen before.

She turned her shoulder upon him.

"Throw me your tobacco, pa," said Harry.

"Did you hear me ask you a question?" said Jac fiercely.

Harry rolled his cigarette before he answered.

"Don't get so sore you rope an' tie yourself. What did you say?"

"I asked you if you was goin' to the dance at Bridewell."

The stranger chuckled softly.

"Say, what's eatin' you, Whiskers?" snapped Jac, but without turning.

"Sure I'm going," said Harry. "It's going to be a big bust."

"What girl are you takin'?"

"Nobody. I'll find plenty to dance with when I get there."

Jac blinked her eyes once, twice, and again.

"Why not take me?"

The cigarette fell from Harry's lips.

"What the—" he began. "Say, Jac, are you sick?"

The ache came in Jac's throat again. Her face changed color and the freckles across the bridge of her nose stood out with a startling distinctness.

"Don't I dance good enough, Harry?"

He had evidently been bracing himself for a straight-from-the-shoulder retort. At this gentle question he gasped and rose with a look of brotherly concern.

"Jac, if you was a man I'd say you'd been hittin' the red-eye too much."

"Oh," said Jac.

Harry touched her under the chin and tilted back her head. The deep-blue eyes stared miserably up to him.

"What's the matter with her, pa?" he asked.

"Plain foolishness!" said the latter.

Jac struck the hand from her chin and leaped from the table to her feet.

"Harry," she said, "if I was a man I'd hang a bunch of fives on your chin!"

The chuckle of the stranger made her whirl.

"Get out, Whiskers," she commanded, "or I'll pull a gun an' give you a free shave."

The man rose obediently and went from the room to the porch. Harry followed him out and swung into the saddle of his horse. His father delayed an instant.

"Now cut out this talk of goin' to the dance," said Jim During. "You stay right here, an' if any of the boys come in late fix them up some chow. I got to slide over to see old Jones on some—some business."

"Sure you do," said Jac scornfully. "I know that kind of business. It comes five in a hand and you draw to it."

The hair of her father seemed to take on a deeper tinge of red.

"Well?" he said.

"Well?" she replied no less angrily. "If I couldn't play no better hand of poker than you do, I'd go no farther than solitaire, believe me."

"Jacqueline!"

"Don't swear at me!" said Jac. "If you think I ain't right, just sit down and play a hand with me."

Her father was so swelled with wrath that he could make no rejoinder. At length he whirled on his heel and strode toward the door, pulling his sombrero down over his eyes.

At the door he turned back and pointed a long, angry arm.

"An' if I catch you leavin' this place to-night—" he began.

"Well?"

His face altered and the anger faded from his eyes.

"Jac," he said gently, "why in hell wasn't you born a boy?"

He went on out and a moment later his horse clattered down the road.

"Why?" repeated Jac.

CHAPTER II.

LAND.

SHE went out to the porch and stared after the disappearing horseman.

When he had quite vanished in the rapidly fading light of the evening she turned back. She stopped. The stranger sat on the edge of the porch whittling a stick.

His black hair bushed out under the brim of his sombrero, and for some reason it stirred the latent wrath in Jac. She went to him and stood with arms akimbo, staring down.

"Too bad," he said, but did not look up.

"What's too bad?"

"The red hair."

It was a long moment before she spoke.

"Huh!" she said. "If I was to talk about *your* hair you'd think I was discussin' a record crop of hay. If I was to—"

She stopped, for the twinkling eyes were smiling up to her.

"I look like the land of much rain, all right," said the stranger.

Jac dropped to a cross-legged position with the agility of an Indian and supporting her chin on both hands she stared impudently into the face of the stranger.

"What does the land look like when the forest is gone?"

"It ain't been surveyed for so long I've forgotten."

He shifted a little to smile more directly into her eyes, and the movement caused her glance to drop to his holster. It was open. With a slow gesture—for no one, not even a woman, makes free with the weapon of another in the mountain desert—she drew the revolver out, looked it over with the keen eye of a connoisseur, glanced down the sights, spun the cylinder, and tried the balance with a deft hand.

"Clean as a whistle," she said as she restored the revolver. "Some six-gun!"

With a new respect she looked the man over from head to foot.

"Maybe under the mask," she said, "you look almost human."

"I dunno. Maybe."

Her eyes wandered far away; came back to him, frowned; wandered off again.

"Can you dance?" she asked conversationally.

He broke into a deep laughter. Jac gathered as if for a spring.

"Go slow, partner," she drawled. "Maybe I ain't big, but believe me, I ain't a house pet."

"I'd as soon think of fondlin' a wildcat," nodded the man.

She hesitated between anger and curiosity, and then glanced around with needless anxiety lest they should not be alone.

"Give it to me straight, pal," she said. "How bad do I look?"

Her companion looked her over with a critical eye and a judicious frown.

"I dunno," he said at last. "It's pretty hard for me to tell. If those freckles was covered up, maybe I could see your face."

As he spoke he edged away, as if ready to spring from the porch when she attacked him.

Instead, she sighed. The other started and looked at her with a new interest.

"How old are you?" he asked sharply.

"Three years more than you think."

"Sixteen?"

"And three makes nineteen. You're right the first time. How'd you do it?"

He took off his hat and extended his hand.

"My name is Bill Carrigan," he said.

Even in the dim light he could guess at the curiosity in her eyes.

"Mine is Jac—Jacqueline. During. I'm awfully glad to shake hands with you."

There was a little pause.

"I suppose Maurie Gordon is nearly at the dance by this time?" he said tentatively.

She nodded. The lump in her throat kept her silent.

"How tall are you?" he asked suddenly.

"Five feet five and a half."

"What's your weight?"

"One hundred and twenty. Say, Carrigan, what you drivin' at?"

He looked away as if making a mental note.

"What size shoes?"

She looked at him with a dark frown, but the twinkle of his eyes was irresistible. She broke into a laugh.

"Look at 'em!"

She extended to his gaze a foot clad in the heavy shoe of a man, cut square across the toe.

"Well, Columbus, what have you discovered?"

"Land," said Carrigan, and rose.

"You goin' so soon?" she queried plaintively.

"But I'm coming back," said Carrigan.

"Coming back?" repeated Jac.

"With bells."

She watched him swing gracefully into the saddle of a clean-limbed horse and gallop swiftly into the gloom.

"Well, I'll be—" began Jac.

She checked herself. An instinct which was born with Eve made her raise a hand to pat her hair.

She began again: "I must look like—" Once more she stopped, this time with a

sigh. "What words are left?" murmured Jacqueline.

Carrigan pulled his horse up before the barber shop in the little village a mile away. He banged thunderously against the wall of the shanty with his gun-butt.

"What the hell!" roared a voice above.

"Business," said Carrigan. "Come on down and open your shop."

A few moments later he sat down in the chair while the barber lighted his lamp. The latter groaned when he saw the face of his customer.

"How much?"

"The price of your best razor," said Carrigan instantly. "Now start—chop off the heavy timber, saw down the undergrowth, anything to clear the land. And do it on the jump."

Hair flew—literally. At last the barber stepped back, perspiring, and looked at the lean face before him.

"I feel," he said, "more as if I'd made a man than shaved him."

"Maybe you're right," said Carrigan, and started on the run for the general merchandise store across the street, the only clothiers within a hundred miles, a place that carried everything from horse-shoes to hairpins. The proprietor was locking up the front door.

"What's your rush, partner?" he asked. "Wait till to-morrow. I got some business to—"

"To-morrow is next year," said Carrigan. "Start goin'."

The door opened.

He began shedding orders and old clothes at the same time. The storekeeper, on the run, brought the articles Carrigan demanded.

"More light!" Carrigan said at last.

The proprietor brought a lamp and placed it close to a large mirror, the pride of his place.

Carrigan stalked up to it, and, turning slowly around, viewed his outfit with one long glance.

"All right," he said. "Now I'm ready to begin buying!"

The proprietor gasped and then rubbed his hands.

"What next?" he asked.

"A beautiful girl."

The proprietor smiled in sympathy with the somewhat obscure jest.

"A beautiful girl," repeated Carrigan, "with red hair, weighing a trifle over one hundred and twenty pounds, standing five feet five and a half, and with feet—well, of the right size."

The proprietor moistened his lips and stepped back. His eyes were very large.

"Start for the ladies' department."

The proprietor was baffled, but he led the way.

"Dresses first," said Carrigan. "Something fancy. Best you've got. Here! Red—green! green—red!"

He picked out a gown and held it out at arm's length, a soft, green fabric.

"What size do you want?" asked the proprietor.

"What's the perfect size for five foot five, eh?"

"Thirty-six."

"What's this gown?"

"Thirty-six."

"How much?"

The proprietor doubled the price.

"Taken," said Carrigan.

"But maybe the lady ain't thirty-six, and—"

"You're right, old-timer. The lady ain't, but she will be. What's next? Petticoat?"

"Those are over here."

"I leave it to you, partner. Something that makes a rustle and a swishing like a light rain on leaves. You know the kind?"

"Taffeta will do that."

"Then taffeta it is. Now for the kicks. Something light. Slippers, eh?"

"Follow me."

He set out an array of dancing-shoes.

"What size?" he asked.

"The right size."

The proprietor made a gesture of despair.

"There ain't no woman in the world whose feet are the *right* size."

"Then we'll set a record to-night. How big ought they to be for a hundred and twenty pounds?"

"That all depends. If the lady is—"

"The lady ain't," repeated Carrigan

wearily. "I'm tellin' you we're making her here."

The proprietor wiped his forehead.

"Number four?" he suggested vaguely.

"Let's have a look. Make it something like this."

He indicated a pair of bronze slippers, but when the storekeeper produced the pair of number fours, Carrigan took one of them in the palm of his brawny hand and stared at it with something between awe and dismay.

"Are these meant for real feet?"

"Yep."

Carrigan thought of the mighty brogans he had seen on Jac's feet.

"Do or die," he said, "she'll have to wear 'em! What's next? Stockings?"

"Here they are."

"These green ones will do the work. And now—"

"Corsets?"

He indicated a model bust clad in a formidable corset.

Carrigan sighed.

"Friend," he said, "did you ever hear about the days when men wore armor?"

"Yes."

"When I'm dancin' with a girl that wears one of them things, I feel as if I had my arms around a man in armor. Anything else?"

A malicious light gleamed in the eyes of the proprietor.

"There's nothing else except these girdles that a drummer palmed off on me. They're jest elastic, that's all. They don't give a girl no figger."

"H-m! But they're a long way from armor-plate. I'll take one."

"What size?"

"How do they run? Large, small, and medium?"

"By inches."

"Make it something extra medium in inches."

"Most of 'em *wish* they could wear twenty-one."

"Twenty-one it is."

The proprietor grinned.

"But if that's too small—"

"Friend, what do you do when your cinch is too small for your boss?"

"Pull."

"Well?"

The proprietor added the girdle to the heap in mute surrender.

"And now that we've got down to the girdle," he said, "the next thing is—"

"Look here, friend," said Carrigan, "don't go too far!"

"Well?"

"Well, fix up the underlining any way you want, but make it the best you've got. One thing more. There ain't enough color in this outfit. Something for her shoulders?"

"A scarf. Right here."

Carrigan picked out a filmy, orchid-colored tissue.

"Now we've reached her face."

The proprietor groaned.

"Paint?"

"Nope. I don't want to add anything. I want to make something disappear. Freckles."

The storekeeper grinned.

"Vanishing cream and then rice powder. That's the latest hitch."

CHAPTER III.

CINDERELLA.

THE bundle which resulted was bulky, but Carrigan sang as he raced back.

He drew his horse to a walk as he approached the Daring hotel, for a light showed dimly from the dining-room; there might be some new arrival in the place.

It was only Jac, however. She sat by the table with her face buried in her arms. He saw one hand lying palm up beside her head. It was small and the fingers tapered.

"I never noticed she was so small," said Carrigan to himself in a hushed voice.

He stepped closer, softly.

"Jest a kid," he added.

There was the sound of a controlled sob; her body quivered; and Carrigan knew that she was struggling with some great grief.

"Cinderella!" he called gently and touched her shoulder.

Her head turned. Two marvelously deep-blue eyes shone up to him. Her lower lip was trembling; but when she saw him she stiffened with astonishment.

"What do you want?" she asked.

"A beautiful girl, five feet five and a half, one hundred and twenty pounds."

"Carrigan!" she stammered. "Is it really you?"

He dropped the bundle to the floor and turned slowly.

"Look me over."

"Wonderful!"

She had dropped into a chair and sat pigeon-toed, her hands clasped tightly in her lap and her mouth slightly agape.

"Carrigan, how did you do it?"

"Look in that bundle and you'll see."

He left the room hastily, but before he had gone far he heard a thin, short cry. Happiness and pain are closely akin.

"If she only—" began Carrigan.

He choked.

"If this was only a masked ball," he said at last, "she might get by. But even then that hair—"

He swore softly again.

"If Maurie turns her down after this—I'll bust his face wide open."

He thought of Gordon's wide shoulders and sighed.

After a time a voice called from the house:

"Carrigan!"

It was a marvelous voice. It was changed as the tone of a violin changes when it passes from the hands of an amateur to those of an artist.

"Is that my name?" said Carrigan, and he walked slowly toward the house.

She stood in the center of the room, with a piece of the wrapping-paper in which the bundle had been done up held before her face.

Carrigan started back until his shoulders touched the wall.

"My God!" he murmured with indescribable awe. "They fit!"

"But—" she said behind the paper.

"Well?"

She lowered the paper. The freckles looked out at him—and the eyes with plaintive brows raised by the hard knot of

the hair. At the base of her throat was a line of sharp division. All above was a healthy brown. All below was a dazzling white.

He could not meet the despair of her eyes.

"Well?" she said.

"Well?" said Carrigan.

"I didn't choose this face," she explained sadly. "It was wished on me!"

Carrigan sank into a chair and looked upon her as a general looks over a field of battle and calculates the chances of his outnumbered army. His eyes fell to the slender feet in the shining bronze slippers, with the small, round ankles incased in pleasant green.

His heart leaped. His eyes raised and met the freckles. He clenched his hand.

"If it wasn't for them freckles—"

"Yes?"

"I could see your face."

Crimson went up her throat with delicate tints, blending the clear white of the breast with the brown of the round neck. He jumped to his feet; he pointed a commanding arm.

"That hair!"

"I know it's—"

"I don't care what you know. Untie that knot!"

She obeyed. A red gold flood rippled suddenly almost to her knees.

Carrigan blinked.

"Sit down!"

She dropped to a chair, and Carrigan commenced to work. When a man has to do anything from roping a steer to jerking out a six-gun with the speed of light, he acquires a marvelous dexterity with his hands. Carrigan could almost think with his fingers. They seemed, in fact, to have a separate intelligence.

He gathered up the silken mass. The soft touch thrilled him as if every one of the delicate threads carried a tiny charge of electricity. It was marvelous that such a shining torrent could have been reduced the moment before to that compacted, bright red knot.

Carrigan closed his eyes and summoned up a vision of hair as he had seen it dressed, not on the heads of any of the

mountain-desert belles, but in magazine pictures.

With that vision before him he commenced to work, rapidly, surely. It seemed as if the hair, glad to escape from the bondage of that hard knot, fell of its own accord into graceful, waving lines. It curved low across the broad forehead; it gathered at the nape of the neck in a soft knot in the Grecian mode.

"Now!" said Carrigan.

She rose and faced him.

"What's happened?" she cried, for his lower jaw had fallen.

He swallowed twice before he could answer.

"I'm beginning to see your face!"

For the face, after all, is like any picture. The hair is the frame, and an ugly frame will spoil the most lovely painting. The eye does not stop at a boundary. It includes it.

"Once more!" said Carrigan, and seized the vanishing cream.

As he worked now he felt like the artist who draws the human face from the block of marble. He felt as Michelangelo when the grim old Florentine said: "I do not create; I take off the outer layers of the stone and free the form which is hidden within." Or perhaps he was more like Pygmalion and the inevitable statue when the artist saw the first hues of life faintly flushing in the cold marble.

When he stepped back and looked at her, she seemed strangely aloof. She had drawn away a thousand miles and a thousand years. He discovered the most ancient of truths, that a beautiful woman is a world in herself upon which all men must look from the outside. She escapes from experience. It cannot stain her. She escapes from herself. Her beauty is greater than her soul.

"It's done," said Carrigan sadly.

"Isn't it any use?" she queried.

He thought of Maurie and hated the handsome face which rose in his memory.

"You look sick," said Jac. "What's the matter? Is it all in my face? Let me take a slant at the landscape after the snow has fallen."

She ran to the cracked glass. She was a tomboy when she whirled to a stop in front of it. He watched her eyes widen; saw her straighten slightly, wonderfully. She was inches taller when she turned; she was years older.

"Are you ready, Mr. Carrigan?"

She moved to him with a subtle rustling like the fall of a misting rain on orchard blossoms. He could not answer for a moment. He had seen a miracle.

"Yes, Miss During," he said at last.

The light which came somewhere from the depths to shine in her eyes altered swiftly to a sparkle which he could understand.

She ran to him and caught both his hands.

"Carrigan," said Jac, "you're a trump!"

"And you," said he, "are the ace of the suit. Let's go!"

"One thing first," she said, and ran into another room.

She came back almost at once with a chain of amber beads about her throat—a loop of golden fire, trembling and changing with every breath she drew. She slipped the orchid-colored scarf over her shoulders. It was like a mist tinged by the dainty light of dawn. Three times the rich color was repeated; first in the red gold glory of her hair, then in the flash of fire that looped her throat, and last it splashed across the bronze slippers. But with the orchid-colored scarf the charm was complete; the spell was cast.

"How are we to go?" she asked as they stood beside his horse.

He looked on her with some doubt. The dim light caught at the amber beads.

"Perhaps we'll have to ride double," he ventured.

Her laughter reassured him. She caught the pommel of the saddle as if to vault up, man-fashion. Then she remembered, with a murmur of dismay.

"How—" she began.

He caught her beneath the arms and lifted her lightly to the saddle, then sprang up behind. The horse started at a slow trot.

"Carrigan?"

"Well?"

"Harry is at the dance. If he should recognize me?"

"He won't."

She chuckled. There was a brooding mischief in the tone that set him tingling.

"Are you sure?"

"Did the people recognize Cinderella at the ball?"

"And if there should be trouble because I'm recognized?"

"This fairy godmother wears a six-gun."

They were silent a moment.

"How far is it to Bridewell?" he asked at last.

"Eight miles—by the road."

"We're late already. Is there any short cut?"

"Across the river it's between two and three."

"The river?"

"It ain't very deep—sometimes. I've done it, but never in duds like these."

"Are you game to try the short cut across the river?"

Her head tilted back as she laughed. That was her answer. It was not laughter. It was music. It was the singing of one whose dreams are coming true, and where it left off on her lips the sound was continued like a silent echo in Carrigan.

As she swung the horse to the left toward the ford of the river, a puff of warm wind floated the scarf against Carrigan's face. He could scarcely feel its gossamer web, but a faint fragrance came from it, and his heart beat fast. The moon rolled like a yellow wheel over the tops of the black hills, and its light touched the throat and the turned face of Jacqueline, so that Carrigan could barely guess at her smile. When he spoke to her she did not turn. She stared straight before, crooning a hushed, joyous melody deep in her throat.

She would not turn her head, for then the vision with which she rode would have vanished. While she looked straight before her past the tossing head of the horse, it was not Carrigan who sat at her shoulder; it was not his voice which spoke to her; it was not his breath which touched her throat now and again. No! For though the horse had not journeyed far, Jacqueline had

ridden a fabulous distance into the regions of romance. The amber beads were now a chain of gold, and where they touched cold against her breast, that was where the jeweled cross lay, the priceless relic before which she said her prayers at dawn and evening. The hair was no longer red. It was yellower, richer than that golden moon. The slight clinking of the bridle-rein, where the little chain chimed against the bit, that was the rattle of the armor of her knight. He had ridden far for her that evening. He had stolen into the castle of her father. He had reached her chamber, where the tapestries made a hushing along the wall like warning whispers. And he had lowered her from the casement on a rope made of twisted clothes. And he had helped her across the moat. Then, with a rusted key, they turned the harsh lock of a secret portal and were free—free—free!

Jacqueline tossed up her arms. The air was like a cool caress upon them. Yes, she was free! They topped a hill. Below it ran the river, glimmering silver through the night, and jeweled by the shining of the stars. Suddenly she shook the reins and urged the horse to a frantic gallop down the slope.

"What's the matter?" cried Carrigan.

Yes, how could he know that even at that moment her father, with a band of hard-riding liegemen, had thundered into view behind them and that death raced closely on their heels? She drew rein, panting on the edge of the river.

Then Carrigan proved himself a knight indeed. They dared not imperil that gown of green, so he sat in the saddle with his legs crossed in front of the horn and lifted her in his arms. Then he gave the horse its way, and the cunning old cattle-pony picked a safe way along a sand-bank. The water rose higher. They slipped, floundering into little hollows, and clambered back into shallower places. Once the water rose so high that Carrigan could have put down his hand and touched it.

"Steady!" he said encouragingly to the girl.

The voice was deep and vibrant. It blended with her dream of romance. Her tyrant father with his villain knights sat

their horses on the bank of the river, not daring to attempt the passage, and now that her hero was about to bear her safe to the other shore— She drew a long breath and relaxed in his arms, her strong, young body now soft and yielding. The horse pawed for a footing and then lurched up the bank with a snort. Her arms tightened around Carrigan's neck; her lips pressed eagerly to his.

"Jac'!"

How could he know that that word carried her dream away like dead leaves on a wind? She covered her face from him.

"We are late already," she said.

CHAPTER IV.

THE SONG OF SONGS.

THE dance-hall was the up-stairs floor of Bridewell's general merchandise store. From the center of the ceiling was suspended a monstrous gasoline-lamp that flooded the larger part of the dancing floor with dazzling light, but the flicker of the flame sent occasional seas of shadow washing into the corners of the room. A thick line of stools and chairs and empty grocery-boxes made the seats for the throng around the wall. The floor glimmered and shone in mute testimony to the polishing which it had received earlier in the evening when a dozen strong men pulled about the room a heavy bale of hay with two men sitting upon it. Waxed hardwood could not have been more brilliant.

The music was supplied by a banjo, a slide trombone, a violin, and a snare drum; and the musicians operated their instruments with undying vigor. Lest they should falter in their efforts from weariness, glasses of liquor stood beside them at all times, supplied by generous cow-punchers who appreciated the soulful music. This stimulus was not applied in vain, for, as the evening wore on, each piece of music was increased slightly but perceptibly in cadence beyond all which had gone before.

This applied to the two-steps, which sent the dancers whirling over the floor with such violence that at the end of each dance there was a general stampede for the bar

which stretched across the farther end of the room. Here four men worked with frantic haste to quench the thirst of the multitude, and labored in vain. The exercise made the throat of every man as dry as that of Tantalus, and the glasses were snatched up and tossed off as rapidly as they were spun down the length of the bar.

Jac and Carrigan paused at the door to make a survey of the scene. The festivities were already well under way. Some of the men had removed their bandannas and stuffed the latter into back trouser-pockets, from which they streamed like brilliant pennons during the dance. There were other tokens that the dance had passed the stiff formality of the opening moments. The musicians played with the fierce resolution of long-distance runners entering the home-stretch. The violinist leaned back with eyes closed and jaw set in do-or-die determination, while his bow darted back and forth across the strings. The banjo man leaned far over and thrummed away with an expression partly of pain and partly of far-away yearning as he stared above the heads of the dancers. The expression was caused not by sorrow of soul, but by a cramp in his right hand. The trombone-player, however, was in far worse case than either of his two companions. He was very fat, very short, and his red, bald head shone furiously. Yet he would not diminish the vigor of his efforts. His long slurs were more brazenly ringing than ever. His upward runs raised the heart and the hair at the same time. His downward slides sent out a chill tingle along the spine. He jerked out his arm with such violence that it made his flabby body quiver like jelly; and the vigor of his blowing set a white spot in the middle of his puffed cheeks.

Orpheus stirred the trees as this orchestra stirred the citizens of the mountain-desert. It sent them whirling frantically about the dance-hall; it moved them to sit now and then in the shadow-swept corners, closely tête-à-tête.

A wild and ludicrous scene? Perhaps. But also there was beauty and youth as much as ever graced a ballroom. And there was rhythm. Rhythm of the dance, rhythm of the screeching, thrumming music; and to

the young, rhythm is poetry. It set a glamour upon the faces of the dancers; of the shadowy corners it made moonlit gardens.

"What is my name?" queried Jac. "We forgot that!"

He was dumfounded.

"Perhaps I'm your sister?"

He grinned.

"Jac, you look as much like me as a yearling short-horn looks like a long-horn maverick. Something fancy. Jacqueline Silvestre. How does that hit, eh? Miss Silvestre! You've come from the east. You're visiting at a ranch twenty miles away."

"What ranch?"

"Fake a name."

"Every one knows everybody else for miles around."

"It's up to you. Can you do the Eastern lingo?"

She tilted her head to one side and gazed upon him with naive astonishment.

"'Lingo,' Mr. Carrigan?"

"Good Lord!" breathed Carrigan.

Her laughter was low and filled with hints of many things. It made him distinctly uncomfortable.

"I've read books," she said. "I'll do my part. But you?"

"I'm simply a cow-puncher you've pressed into service to bring you here. Right? Now who do you want to dance with? Watch their eyes!"

They walked slowly into the room, and were met by a new sound over the clangor of music and voices. It was that buzz which to the heart of the débutante is the elixir of life, and to the city matron is the nectar which promises immortal beauty. In the dance-hall at Bridewell it was less covert, Jacqueline stood in the spot-light like a queen.

She knew that her color had heightened. She knew that the flare of the gasoline-lamp made her hair a glorious dull-red fire, touched with golden points of light, which fell again on the necklace at her throat, the only heirloom she had received from her mother, and still further down on the bronze slippers. The admiration of the men filled her heart; the trouble in the more covert

stares of the girls overflowed it. A sense of power flooded in her like electricity. She knew that when she turned and dropped her hand on the arm of Carrigan it sent a tingle through him.

Her smile was casual and her eyes calm. Her whisper was surcharged with a vital anxiety.

"Do you dance—well?"

"Regular fairy," grinned Carrigan, and she wished his mouth was not so broad.

"How about you?"

"Not so bad."

"Let's start."

Dancers are not made even by infinite pains and lessons. They are born, and Jac was a born dancer. With the smooth floor underfoot, the light slippers, the pulse and urge of the music, however crude, the newborn sense of dignity and womanly power, she became an artist. She danced not to the music, but to what the music might have been.

Through the film of pleasure she vaguely knew that people were giving way a little before her. She knew the eyes of the girls were upon her feet. She knew the eyes of the men were upon her face and the sway of the graceful body, and among those eyes she found one pair more bright and devouring than all the rest. It was Maurie Gordon.

He was dancing with a little golden-haired beauty, Dolly Maxwell. She let her eyes rest carelessly upon him. She smiled. Handsome Maurie started as though some one had stepped on his foot. He stumbled—he lost his step—his little partner frowned up at him and then flashed a look of utter hate toward Jac. A girl may guess at the heart of a man, but she can absolutely read the soul of another woman. It is a subtle system of wireless which tells a thousand words in a single smile; a glance is a spark driven by ten thousand volts. The heart of Jacqueline swelled with the Song of Songs.

"Do something!" she murmured in the ear of Carrigan.

He met her eyes with a cold understanding.

"You've just seen Maurie Gordon?" he asked.

"You're dancing wonderfully," she pleaded, "but do something new."

"Do you know the Carrigan cut?"

"I'll try it."

"It's a cross between a glide, a dip, and a roll. Take three short steps, then take a long, draggy slide to the left—and let yourself go."

The trombone started an upward flourish. They followed it, running forward. She began the draggy step to the left—and then let herself go. How it was done, she could not tell, but somehow he took her weight in the middle of the step, and they completed a little dipping whirl as graceful as the lilt of a seagull against a flurry of wind.

A gasp of applause broke out around them. The dancers veered further off to allow room for these beautiful new maneuvers. And Jacqueline, dizzy with the joy of conquest, saw the set, white face of Dolly Maxwell. It was the golden drop of honey in the wine of victory. The music stopped, but the rhythm still ran in her blood.

Carrigan's rather coldly curious stare sobered her.

"What's the matter?" she asked.

"I see a freckle comin' out to look the landscape over. Sorry you ain't got that powder-puff with you."

"I have it, all right."

"I didn't know you had pockets in that dress."

"It's my corsage."

"Your which?"

"Look at that funny trombone-player."

He turned to stare at the shiny bald head, and when he looked back she had just slipped something into the bosom of her dress. All traces of the freckle were gone. She flushed a little under his eye of inquiry.

Then very anxiously: "Is it gone?"

"It's behind a cloud, anyway," said Carrigan. "Here's Maurie Gordon."

The big cow-puncher came up, earnest-eyed.

"If you're not hooked up for this next waltz—" he began.

He stopped with a widening stare. She had glanced carelessly over him from head to foot, and now turned her back on him to take the arm of Carrigan. The move-

ment was slow, deliberate, casual. It left big Maurie Gordon crimson and breathing hard, the butt of open laughter from all.

CHAPTER V.

THE SILVESTRE SLIDE.

CARRIGAN found Jac trembling with excitement, though her face was still calm.

"What the devil," he began. "I thought Gordon was the man you wanted—"

"Don't you get me?" she broke in eagerly. "None of those swell Eastern ladies would bat an eye at a bum who came up to them without bein' introduced."

"Oh!" said Carrigan. "And who—"

"You will," she answered without hesitation. "Take me over to a chair and talk with me a minute. Then you can sidestep up to the bar and get a drink. When all the boys flock around and ask about me—"

He growled: "How do you know they'll flock around and ask about you?"

There was something akin to pity in her smile. The statue was walking away from Pygmalion.

"Take it from me. They will. Your money ain't any good at that bar—take me to that chair standing away from the rest of them—because every man will be wantin' to make your acquaintance an' buy you liquor. Drink beer, Carrie. I hate a breath. Then they'll ask about me, an' you tell 'em that I'm straight from the East, an' don't understand Western ways. Tell 'em they'll have to be introduced. An' don't bring over any one I don't point out."

"Beginnin' with Gordon?"

"Sure. Bring him first."

"Who's next? Are you goin' to corral 'em all?"

"If I want to."

They sat down—Carrigan rather gingerly, and edging away from her.

"You see that skinny feller with the black hair?"

"Yep."

"That's Dave Carey. He's engaged to that girl with the smile an' the fluffy pink dress. She called me a 'horrible tomboy' once. You can bring Dave Carey next."

"Goin' to bust up the happy homes, Jac?"

"Miss Silvestre," she corrected. "Watch Jenny Hendrix stare at me! She's whispering, too. I hate her! Then there's Ben Craig, the tall man with the thin, sad-lookin' face. Once when he was at the hotel he said my head was more like a turkey-egg than a face. You c'n bring him thir'd. I'll think of some more after a while."

"How're you goin' to keep up the bluff with all those fellers? They'll spot your lingo in a minute."

Jacqueline waved the suggestion airily away.

"I read a book once," she said, and her smile was very close to the grin of Jac During, now no more. "It told about an Eastern girl who came West an' she was terrible thrilled about the Western men. She had a great lingo. I'll stick by what she said."

"What was it?"

"Mr. Carrigan, have you lived all your life in the West?"

"Sure."

He started and stared at her.

"Is that part of the lingo?"

"I knew you had been all your life out here in these big open spaces. It makes you so much more real than the Eastern men."

"Huh!" grunted Carrigan, and blinked rapidly.

"Do you know that I feel that you—but you would think me foolish if I said it."

"You bet your life I wouldn't!" gasped Carrigan.

She leaned closer and dropped a hand on his arm. Her gaze dwelt tenderly on his startled eyes.

"I feel that you are the first *real* man I have ever known, Mr. Carrigan."

"The devil you do!"

"Yes. All the men I have met have been so superficial. But you are like your own great West, Mr. Carrigan, with a heart as wide as the desert and as open as the sky. I feel it. Am I foolish to tell you this?"

Carrigan loosened his bandanna.

"Jac, are you goin' to pull this sort of a line on all the boys?" he asked hoarsely.

"Sure I am. Why not? Don't it get by?"

"There'll be gun-play before the night's over, you c'n lay that ten to one."

"Why?"

"Don't look at me like that! You make me nervous. It ain't what you say so much as the way you say it. Where 'd you learn that way of talkin'?"

"I been to the movies, an' I used my eyes. I've seen Maude Merriam an' come home an' practised at the mirror. Has she got anything on me?"

"She generally ain't got half so much on," groaned Carrigan, and rose.

"Wait a minute, Carrie!"

"Say, Cinderella, maybe I'm the fairy godmother, but don't go callin' me by a woman's name. The brand don't no ways look well on my hide."

"All right, Mr. Carrigan. But just remember this: That ain't the Carrigan cut that we done in the last dance."

He rubbed a hand across his forehead.

"It's the Silvestre slide."

"What?"

"Sure. I introduced it in New York, an' everybody in the Five Hundred copied it an' named it after me. It made an awful hit."

Carrigan fled. He went straight for the bar by instinct, for he began to need a drink. Jacqueline proved a prophet. As he dropped his coin on the bar a broad hand swept it back to him. He looked up into the handsome, serious face of Maurie Gordon.

"Partner," said Maurie, "this drink's on me. My name's Gordon."

"Wait a minute, Maurie," broke in another voice. "You're lickin' with me, friend. I'm Dave Carey. Glad to meet you. Two comin' up, bartender!"

"I'm drinkin' beer," said Carrigan, remembering orders.

An odd look, which he understood perfectly, came in the eyes of the other men.

"Look here," went on Maurie, "that girl you brung to the dance is a hell bender. If you ain't dancin' all evenin' with her, maybe I could break in, eh?"

He reinforced his suggestion with a broad wink and a tremendous slap on the shoulder.

"Maybe you could," said Carrigan. "I'll have to introduce you. Miss Silvestre is straight from the East, an' she don't quite get the hang of our Western ways."

"Straight from the East?"

"Yep. New York, an' all that. Blood as blue as hell."

"The devil!"

"It is, all right, till you get to know her."

"How'd you pick her up?"

"She's been visitin' at the ranch where I work. We sort of ran off together to-night. She was strong for some sort of a lark. Kind of nifty?"

"Is she?"

"But you got to talk careful to her, get me?"

"I'll hang on to my tongue like it was a buckin' bronco."

"Then foller me."

"Hold on," said Carey desperately. "Carrigan, don't I get no look in here?"

"What d'you want to go hangin' around with every girl in the country for?" queried Gordon, and his frown was dangerous. "Ain't you engaged already?"

"Am I?" replied Carey, with an ominous lowering of the voice. "An' ain't Dolly Maxwell got you roped and throwed?"

"Suppose," broke in Carrigan anxiously, "that you get introduced at the same time, an' then Gordon c'n have the first dance an' you get the next."

They compromised on this basis and trooped obediently behind Carrigan.

"Wait a minute," said Gordon. "Maybe you'd like to meet Dolly Maxwell?"

"Sure," said Carrigan.

They stopped before the girl of the golden hair. There was soul-deep understanding in the cold eye she fixed upon Maurie Gordon. Carrigan received gushing recognition, not for him, he knew, but for the partner of the sensation in green.

"The next dance? Sure you can have it. Good-by, Maurie."

But her parting shot was wasted on thin air. Maurie was headed for other and more pleasant regions, and the light of the

discoverer was in his eye. He was a new Balboa looking out upon another Pacific. They ranged before Jac.

"Miss Silvestre, this is Mr. Gordon, an' Mr. Carey."

Maurie searched his memory, steeled his nerves, and spoke: "I sure feel it's a privilege to know you."

"Me, too," said Carey, and then bit his lips.

The scorn of a superior intelligence was haughty in the face of big Maurie.

"Thank you," Jac was saying. "Will you sit down?"

"Sure," said Maurie, and plumped into the chair beside her. "Maybe you ain't got the next dance taken. Can I have it? Thanks."

He glared his triumph at Carey, who turned away, dark-eyed with envy.

The cold glance of Jac cut short Carrigan's incipient grin.

"So-long," he said, and turned on his heel.

He joined Dave Carey.

"Fourteen degrees of frost in her smile," said that worthy, "but I'm bettin' on a river runnin' under the ice."

"Are you goin' to dance?"

"Nope. I need a drink. Have one on me?"

"I got work ahead," said Carrigan, and made for Dolly Maxwell.

The music began. They danced. The rather diffident arm of big Maurie gathered strength and confidence.

"You sure c'n throw your feet!" he burst out at length.

"You ain't travelin' very far behind," said Jac, amiably.

She felt Maurie start. She knew—with a growing coldness of heart—that he was staring down at her face with question. With a great effort she made her eyes rise and rest artlessly upon his. She was hunting her book-vocabulary desperately.

"I've picked that up from the western vernacular. Mr. Gordon. Does it sound natural?"

"It sure does."

The doubt was gone from his face. The triumph reinforced her smile. Dolly Maxwell sailed by in the arms of Carrigan. They were dancing beautifully.

"Say," said Gordon with sudden anxiety. "What was that funny step you done with Carrigan?"

"That was the Silvestre Slide, as they call it in New York."

"Oh!"

"I invented it and it was picked up all along Fifth Avenue. You've no idea how quickly things spread in New York. They named it after me."

In his awe he almost lost step. She enjoyed his consternation for a moment and then in pity spoke: "Shall we try it?"

"D'you really think I could get away with it?"

"Get away with it," Mr. Gordon?"

"I mean, d'you think I could be taught?"

"Oh, yes. It's this way. It's a cinch!—as you say out here in the west!"

They started the maneuver, but Gordon was afflicted with stage fright. He blundered miserably. A snicker sounded about them, and desire for murder flooded the heart of Jacqueline, for Carrigan and Dolly Maxwell had just executed the step perfectly. She set her teeth and drove ahead.

"Mr. Gordon, have you lived all your life in the West?"

"Yep. Every day of it!"

She sighed.

Then: "That is why you are so different.

CHAPTER VI.

THE GIRL FROM FIFTH AVENUE.

"SO long," quoted Jac. "Is that the Western way of saying good-by, Mr. Gordon?"

There was a serious question in her eyes. Maurie leaned back and drew a deep breath.

"Maybe your friend Carrigan talks that way, an' I've heard some others say the same thing, but it ain't considered partic'lar choice. Most of us says 'adios,' or something like that."

"Oh, I thought it was rather queer, but then Mr. Carrigan is"—she paused—"rather queer in lots of ways!"

It was plain that she considered him dif-

In the East the boys are so—well, so artificial!"

"Huh?" said Maurie vaguely. "That so?"

"But you are like your own wild west! with a heart as big as your mountain-desert and as open as your skies!"

The arm of Maurie tightened. She felt his breath coming quickly against her hair, and she thought of the spilled coffee and the "damnation!" of earlier in that same evening. Life was sweet indeed!

"What makes you so unusual, Mr. Gordon?"

Once, twice her lips stirred before the words came.

"It's a hard life on the range. It takes a strong man to get by."

"You look strong, Mr. Gordon."

Laughter makes the voice purr, and there was a carèss in the tone of Jacqueline. He stiffened, throwing his shoulders back.

"In a pinch I've done a man's work," he said modestly.

"I've heard about men who can take a steer by the horns and wrestle until they throw the big animal—but I suppose that it just western joking?"

"Nope. I don't think nothin' at all of throwin' a steer."

"Oh! And aren't you afraid of—their nasty horns?"

She stammered with admiration and wonder.

"I was brung up to take chances. Throwin' a steer ain't much—for a man like me. You see, I got the size for it. A feller needs weight on the range."

"But some of these cowpunchers seem quite slender."

"Yep. But they don't count much for a real man's work. Take Carrigan, over there. I guess he's a pretty fair sort when it comes to gettin' around, but he ain't got the weight. I guess he weighs about twenty pounds less'n I do."

"Do you know that I feel—but you would think me foolish if I said it!"

"Lady—Miss—Miss Silvestre, you c'n lay ten to one I won't think anything you say is foolish!"

"Well, then, I feel as if you are the only *real* man I have ever known."

"Honest?" said the deep, quivering voice.

"Yes. The rest I cannot understand. I—I stifle among them!"

"You ain't stringin' me along?"

"What other men say are merely words. But such a man as you are, speaks from the heart. I know! I could believe you!"

"Miss Silvestre—"

"Isn't it usual in the West to be called by first names?"

There was a sound of choking. Her wide, wondering eyes raised to his.

"Or is it usual, Mr. Gordon? To be called by one's given name seems to me—freedom!"

"My name's Maurie."

The hoarseness of his voice was the music of the spheres.

"And mine is Jacqueline."

"It's a wonderful name!"

"Say it."

"Jacqueline!"

She looked up with childish curiosity.

"I have never heard it spoken that way before. It seems—it seems to me free—like your own wild west!"

"Ain't you been free?"

Her head fell. Her left hand pressed his in her effort to keep back the bubbling laughter. He returned the grip with a mighty interest.

"I have lived all my life in a convent!"

He started.

"I thought you was hangin' out along Fifth Avenue?"

It was a close squeeze. She blessed a sudden thundering on the slide trombone. All fat men have kind hearts, she decided.

"Yes, but only for a little while. Only for a few months. Then they brought me west."

The last paragraph of a third instalment rose word by word before her eyes.

"They thought to bury me in the west! Even out here they guard me like a criminal! To-night I had to run away to be with you—you all. But they cannot bury me in this country. I look upon the stars at night and do not feel alone. The desert is my friend. I feel its mystery. And I feel the truth and strength of the men of

the desert. Somewhere among them I shall find *one* friend!"

She bowed her head again.

"Some memory, Jac!" she was saying to herself.

The deep rumble of his voice, broken and passionate, broke in upon her.

"By God, you *have* found that friend. I'm him!"

"Mr. Gordon—Maurie!"

He could not speak!

The music stopped, and as it died away they caught a clear laugh from across the hall.

"The feller that come with you seems to be havin' a pretty fair sort of a time," said Maurie.

Jac looked up. There was Carrigan laughing heartily with Dolly Maxwell. She seemed extremely beautiful when she laughed, and her voice was musical—it rose over the babble of the dance hall like the chime of a bell. Jac set her teeth. She remembered the Carrigan Cut—as Maurie had failed to do it! Dave Carey was approaching.

"Here comes my next partner," she said, "but—"

Her pause said a thousand things. It made Maurie stand very straight. He was taking the burden of a woman's happiness upon his shoulders—and such a woman!

"I will never forget!"

The tensify of his emotion made him grammatical.

"Come with me, an' we'll sit out the dance. Send Carey away."

"But if he don't want to go?"

"I'll bust his jaw for him if he don't."

"Please—Maurie!"

"All right," he said, relenting slowly. "I'll see you later."

As he retreated, Jac turned to Dave Carey. He was standing stiffly, like a soldier awaiting orders.

"'I'll see you later!'" she quoted. "I wonder if I should consider that a promise or a threat, Mr. Carey? Or is it just a westernism?"

Dave Carey expanded. He knew that the girl in the fluffy pink dress was watching him with a white face.

"Poor ol' Maurie," he said gently. "He

ain't much on manners. He was never given much of a bringin' up. Maybe you noticed it sort of in his way of talkin'. You're lookin' sort of sad."

She was gazing pensively on the happy faces of Dolly Maxwell and Carrigan. Now she lowered a gloomy eye to the floor.

"I try to seem gay, Mr. Carey."

"But there's somethin' eatin' on your mind?"

She looked up with childish admiration.

"How could you tell? But you westerners see everything."

The clear music of Dolly Maxwell's laughter floated to her. Her brow clouded.

"I cannot help being unhappy, Mr. Carey."

Carey's hand slipped down on his hip and then he sighed. No one had been allowed to wear a six-gun into the dance-hall.

"Somebody botherin' you? Pint him out!"

"If there were, you would protect me, Mr. Carey, I know!"

"*Would I!*"

"You've no idea how secure it makes me feel just to hear you speak that way."

"Honest?"

"Yes, for I know that you could keep danger and trouble far away from me."

He cleared his throat. His chest arched.

"Which I'd say I throw a six-gun about as fast as anybody in these parts."

"'Throw a six-gun,' Mr. Carey?"

"Sure," he explained. "Flash a six—pull a cannon—draw my revolver."

"Oh, Mr. Carey! Do you mean that you have ever drawn your revolver upon a man?"

"On a man? Me? I guess maybe you ain't heard any of the boys tell about me!"

"Oh, yes. Of course, I've heard a great deal about Dave Carey. You're the first man Mr. Carrigan pointed out to me when I came into the dance-hall."

"Is that straight? Well, Carrigan ain't a bad hand himself, I guess, but you can see by the way he handles himself that he ain't much in a fight."

"Can you tell simply by looking at a man?"

"Easiest thing in the world. Watch

their hands. Look at big Maurie Gordon over there. Too big! All beef! No nerve! If him an' me was to mix, I'd fill him full of lead before he ever got his gun clear."

"Mr. Carey! You wouldn't shoot at poor Mr. Gordon?"

"He knows enough not to pick no trouble with me."

"Mr. Carey, somehow I feel that I can talk frankly to you!"

He swelled visibly. His face was red.

"Tag-dance!" bellowed the announcer.

Carrigan was rising to dance again with Dolly Maxwell. The solemn face of Ben Craig drew near. His stare was a promise as she started off with Dave Carey.

With the rehearsal on Maurie Gordon to help, she talked very smoothly now. She reached her great point: "But they cannot bury me in this country. I look upon the stars at night and do not feel alone. And I feel the strength and truth of the men of the desert. Somewhere among them I shall find—"

Here she noted Carrigan standing unemployed at the edge of the hall. He had been tagged quickly, of course, because of pretty Dolly Maxwell. She signaled him with a great appeal in her eyes and before they had taken half a dozen more steps his hand fell on the arm of Carey. As she slipped into the arms of Carrigan, her smile of farewell to Carey was sad and wistful. He stood stock still in the middle of the floor, jolted freely by the passing couples. In his eyes was a melancholy light of the sea-bound traveler who sees the last towers of his home port drop below the horizon.

CHAPTER VII.

THE ROPING OF CARRIGAN.

"**C**AREY and Gordon roped, tied, and branded," said Carrigan. "But don't forget that powder puff."

"Carrigan, let me talk. I've been passing such a line of fancy lingo that my throat is dusty. I've been rememberin' everything that I ever read in love stories an' if I can't be myself for a minute I'll choke for want of fresh air."

"Thought you were having a pretty fair sort of a time," said Carrigan, absently.

His eyes were traveling over her head. She caught a glimpse of bright-haired Dolly Maxwell as they whirled. He was drifting away from her—that was plain.

"I've just been stringin' 'em along" said Jac. "But you're different, Carrigan!"

And here her eyes rose slowly to his. Far away she sensed the somber face of Ben Craig. She had not much time. Carrigan was looking down at her now.

"Look here," he said bluntly, "you can't tie every steer in the corral to one rope, Miss Silvestre. Keep the brandin' iron away from me. The fire ain't hot enough to hurt me yet. The iron won't make no mark."

Jac thought of Maude Merriam at the great moment when her husband tells her that he loves another woman. She caught her breath. She made her eyes grow wide.

"Do you really think that I would—"

"Damn it, Jac, ain't Maurie and Carey enough for you? And there's Ben Craig lookin' at you like a wolf at a calf."

"Carrigan!"

The timbre of her voice made him start. She knew that he would not forget her to look after Dolly Maxwell for some time.

"Well?"

"Do you think I'm a flirt?"

"Jac, I'm warnin' you now. Don't feed me the spur no more. I'm the fairy god-mother. I ain't the prince in the story."

"Is it all a story?"

He groaned.

"I thought I would find one man who wasn't just part of the fairy tale."

"There you go with your book English. Jac, you can't rope me. I see the shadow of the noose flyin' over my head an' I'm goin' to duck out from under."

She turned away with a far-off sorrow in her face.

"There's tears in your eyes!"

A pathetic smile quivered an instant at the corners of her lips.

"Honest, ain't you jest throwin' a rope, Jac?"

"I thought *you* would understand me, Carrigan."

He was breathing hard. She remembered a caption which had been flashed on a Maude Merriam screen.

"I thought you were *big* enough to understand!"

"My God!" whispered Carrigan.

"What?"

"The rope's on me!"

"Carrigan, why do you play with me like this?"

"*Me* play with *you*?"

"Yes. Is it fair?"

The keen eyes searched her intently. She felt as the duellist felt when the rapier of a foe slithered up and down his steel. The violin started a run.

"The Carrigan Cut!" she cried.

He went through with it automatically.

"No one can dance like you!" she whispered, as the hand of Ben Craig fell on Carrigan's arm, and as she moved away with the solemn-faced cowpuncher, she saw Carrigan standing as Dave Carey had done, with the far-away look, like a man who says farewell to everything that matters in his life.

Maurie Gordon and Dave Carey, their eyes fixed upon one object on the dancing-floor, came together at a corner of the hall. She drew closer. They started forward at the same time, then stopped and glared at each other with bitter understanding.

"Maurie," said Carey gently, "take my tip. Don't bother Miss Silvestre no more to-night. It won't bring you nothin'."

Maurie smiled from the deeps of his pity.

"Jacqueline," he said, with marked emphasis, "has found one man who understands her."

Carey shook his head slowly. He spoke carefully, as one would explain a difficult problem to a child. Jac was making the second circuit of the hall with Craig. She had reached the point: "But don't westerners as a rule call each other by the given name, Mr. Craig?"

"She's had a sad life, Maurie," said Carey, his eyes following the graceful vision in green. "You, with your bringin' up, you couldn't understand how to take to a swell girl like—"

He stopped, stiffening, and changed of face.

"I guess that'll hold you, Maurie. Did you see her smile at me?"

"Smile at you?" said Maurie with unutterable scorn. "Why, you poor sawed-off runt, that was all for me. She smiled at me like that before. They've tried to—to—bury her in the West, but she's found—"

"One real man!"

"Me!" said Maurie.

The music stopped.

"Maurie, aside from bein' a little thick in the head, you're a pretty straight feller in most ways. I don't want to see you make no fool out of yourself."

The smile of big Gordon came from an infinite distance, from a height of almost sacred compassion.

"Jacqueline and me," he said softly, "we understand. She's led a sad—what the hell!"

For as the dancers returned to their chairs, Harry During, lurching across the floor, stopped in front of Jacqueline. He had found it difficult to get dancing partners that evening and for consolation and excitement he had retreated to the bar and attended seriously and conscientiously to the matter of quenching his thirst. That thirst was deep-seated and it had taken him a long time to reach the seat of the dryness. Now, however, he had become convinced that he had done his duty by his parched insides, and he started toward the door to take horse and ride home. On the way a vision crossed his path—a vision in green, with a floating mist of dainty coloring over her shoulders. He paused to admire. He remained to stare.

If he had been sober he would have resumed his course with a shrug of the shoulders. But he was not sober. There was a film across his eyes and a mighty music swelling within him. Reason was gone, and only instinct remained. But the eyes of instinct are far surer than the eyes of reason. He moved closer with a shambling step. He leaned over his sister.

"It's Jac!"

He burst into Homeric laughter. Ben Craig rose slowly, a dangerous man and a known man in the mountain-desert. Even through the mists of "red-eye," Harry

During sobered a little under the crushing pressure of the hand which fell on his shoulder. He pointed, grinning for sympathy.

"Look!" he said. "Ain't it funny? That's my shister! That's Jac!"

Craig turned for an instant's glance at Jac. She had not changed color. There was a grave but impersonal sympathy in her steady eyes.

She said: "Please don't hurt the poor fellow—Ben!"

Craig turned back to Harry.

"It's a disgrace," he said, "to let a drunk like you wander around insultin' helpless girls. By God, it's got to stop!"

"My own shister—" protested Harry weakly.

"On your way!" thundered Craig, for he was conscious that many eyes were upon him.

Two formidable figures appeared on either side of him. They were Maurie Gordon, black of face with wrath, and Dave Carey, his lip lifted from his teeth like a wolf about to snarl. They were three formidable animals, facing the swaying figure of Harry. When men act under the eyes of a woman, the careful veil of civilization is lifted. The lovely Miss Silvestre was nearby. The three became ravening beasts.

"Out with him!" said Dave Carey.

"Move!" said Maurie.

"Start!" said Ben Craig.

But the same thing that made the hair of Jacqueline red made the blood of Harry hot.

"I'll see you damned first," he said thickly.

Instantly six iron hands gripped him. He was whirled, and, struggling vainly, borne across the floor toward the door. A universal clapping of hands came from the edges of the hall. It was understood that Harry had insulted the lovely stranger, and in the West, a woman, whether beautiful or ugly, *may* be treated with familiar words but *must* be treated with reverent thought.

At the very threshold of the door that led from the main hall into the little ante-room where guns and hats were piled, Harry managed to wriggle loose. The fury

of his anger was sobering him a little and restoring the nerves to his muscular control. He broke loose with a curse and swung feebly, uncertainly, at the nearest of his prosecutors. Carey and Craig ducked to rush and grapple with Harry; but big Maurie, with the thought of Miss Silvestre and "real men" floating in his brain, drew back his sledge-hammer right fist and smashed it into the face of young During.

Harry pitched back through the door as if a dozen hands had thrown him. The three turned and made straight for Jac like three little boys returning to their mother for praise due to a virtuous act after a day of naughtiness and spankings. The women around the hall were silent. They had heard the dull thud as that fist drove home. The men applauded the murmurs. It was the custom to applaud Maurie Gordon.

But when the three reached Jac, she sat white of face and still of eye.

"This don't happen often," began Carey.

"I never see anything like it before," added Craig.

"Anyway," said Maurie complacently, "I've taught him a lesson."

A hard voice sounded at his shoulder. He turned to stare into the furious eyes of Carrigan. There was nothing bulky about the latter, but now, with his lean, almost ugly face white with anger and his gleaming eye, he seemed strangely dangerous.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE THREE MUSKETEERS.

"GORDON," he said, "you need a lesson yourself."

Maurie stepped back.

"What's eatin' you?" he frowned.

"You hit him when he couldn't hardly raise a hand," snapped Carrigan.

There was no mistaking it. He meant fight. It shone in his eyes like hunger. It tensed his muscles till he seemed crouching to spring like some beast of prey.

"Please!" cried Jac, and stepped in between them.

"Shut up and sit down!" said Carrigan.

And he pointed with a stern arm. She shrank back to the wall.

"By God," snarled Dave Carey, "you can't talk to girls like that, stranger!"

"Then come outside with me an' I'll talk to a man. You too, Gordon, you—"

A thrilling cry from many women made them all turn. In the door stood Harry During with the light gleaming on his long six-gun.

"Gordon!" he called. "Git down an' crawl like the dirty dog you are!"

There was another flash of light on steel. It was the proprietor who had drawn, but he did not attempt to draw a bead on Harry During. His gun cracked; there was a clang of iron and a crash of glass as the big gasoline lamp went out; the hall was flooded with a semi-dark. And with the coming of the darkness fear rushed on the crowd. A stampede started for the door, but who could find the door in that chaos of struggling bodies and swinging shadows? Through the windows came the faint light of the early dawn.

"Jac!" cried Carrigan.

But tall Ben Craig was already beside her.

"Leave it to me!" he said reassuringly. "You didn't make no mistake when you picked me out. I'll show you that the mountain-desert's got one real man to make up for a lot of coyotes!"

"Wait!" she pleaded.

"Jac!" called Carrigan again.

"Here!"

"Don't trust to no one but me," said Craig.

"Then get me out of this mob."

"Follow me."

"I will if I can."

"Then—"

He picked her up and lunged forward through the crowd.

"Drop her!" commanded the voice of Carrigan.

"Not for ten like you."

He released Jac to turn and fight. A fist cracked home against his face, and he swung furiously. They grappled, and Craig felt as if he were fighting a steel automaton. The muscles his hands fell upon were rigid. The fist on his head and ribs beat a tattoo. Dave Carey had found Jac.

"Thank God!" he cried. "I thought you were lost. Trust to me. I'll see you through!"

Like Craig, he picked her up.

"I'll take you home if you'll go with me."

"Anywhere out of this crowd!"

"Jac!"

"Here!"

A hand caught Carey by the shoulder and jerked him around. In the dim light he saw the convulsed face of Carrigan and dropped Jac to strike out with all his might. His blow landed on thin air and a hard fist smashed against his ribs. He went to the floor with a crash. But though his breath was half gone, he clung to his foe and struggled like a wildcat. Wild tales were told of Dave Carey in a fight. He lived up to all those stories now. But finally a clubbed fist drove against the point of his chin. He relaxed.

The burly shoulders of Maurie Gordon loomed through the semi-dark above Jac.

"Jacqueline!"

"Maurie!"

"Thank God I've found you!"

"Yes, thank God!"

"This way after me. There's the door!"

"Jac!"

"Here!"

And a demoniac sprang at Maurie through the dark.

Accustomed by this time to the dim light, the crowd was swirling rapidly through the door, and in the outgoing tide went Jac. The same confusion which made a hell of the dance-hall reigned in the open air. But there was more space to maneuver, and Jac gathered her gown up high and slipped through the crowd to the place at which Carrigan had tethered his horse.

She caught the pommel and swung up to the saddle like a man. There was a sickening sound of ripping and tearing. The green gown was hopelessly done for. She gave no thought to it, and landing astride in the saddle—a position which completed the ruin of the dress—she gave the horse his head and drove forward with a shout like that of a drunken cow-puncher.

And she was truly intoxicated with triumph. The men of her choice fought for

her in the dance-hall. They were her knights battling for the smile of their lady. To one of them would go the victory, but hers was all the glory. She shouted at the coming dawn and urged the horse into a faster run. The wind caught at her face and whistled sharply past her ears—the song of victory!

No delay for the fording of the river! She took it on the run, splashed from head to foot with mud and water. She did not care. The gown was a wreck. Her hair tumbled down her shoulders. But she reached the further bank and drove on at a gallop, shouting like one of the Valkyrie.

A battle of giants waged in the dance-hall, where Maurie Gordon and Carrigan raged back and forth, sometimes standing at arm's length and slugging with both hands, sometimes grappling and punching at close range, sometimes rolling over and over on the floor and fighting every inch of the way.

If the great arms of Maurie gave him an advantage in the open fighting, the venomous agility of Carrigan evened matters when they came to close quarters.

Dave Carey drew himself up to a sitting posture with both hands pressed over his mid-ribs while he watched the conflict. Ben Craig leaned against the wall, sick and white of face. Through his swollen eyes he could barely make out the twisting figures. And still they slugged and smashed with a noble will, until, missing a swing at the same time, they were thrown to the floor by the wasted force of their own blows and sat staring stupidly at one another.

The growing daylight made them quite visible now. It showed two battered countenances. It showed equally torn clothes.

"Where's Jacqueline?" cried Maurie.

"Gone!" cried Carrigan, and started to his feet.

Gordon followed suit, but slowly. He was badly hurt in both body and mind. The two heroes stared at each other.

"Done for!" groaned Dave Carey from the distance.

"Stung!" sighed feeble Ben Craig.

"Beat!" growled Maurie.

"Roped!" said Carrigan.

"Fellers," said Carey, struggling to his feet, and still caressing his injured ribs, "I got an idea we better see that Fifth Avenue swell before we do more fightin'."

"I got to find her," said Gordon stoutly. "She depends on me. I'm the one real man she's ever known."

"You be damned before you find her," said Carrigan, and the light of battle flared in his eyes again.

"Hold on," interposed Carey. "You ain't the real man she's found. I'm it!"

"You are?" sneered Craig. "They tried to bury her in the West but she's goin' to be set free by a man who—"

"Who tried to bury her in the western desert?" asked Carrigan.

The other three spoke with one voice.

"Her uncle!" said Carey.

"Her cruel father," said Craig.

"Her older brother," said Maurie.

They turned and stared at each other, stunned. Once more they spoke in one voice.

"Stung!"

"I believe her," defended Maurie. "She's led a sad life in a convent all these years—"

"In a boarding-school, you mean," said Carey.

"Wrong; a girls' school," said Craig.

They stopped again. Light from the dim distance was coming in their eyes.

And Jac, after leaving the down-headed horse in front of her father's hotel, stole swiftly up the stairs to her room.

"Who's there?" roared the familiar voice from Jim Daring's room.

"Me."

"Where've you been all night?"

"None of yer business."

"Jac, I'm goin' to raise the devil if you try many more of these funny tricks."

"I been out walkin'."

"All night?"

"Ain't I got a right to walk?"

"Jac, why wasn't you born a boy?" groaned old Jim, reverting to his old complaint.

"Because it's a lot more fun bein' a girl," said Jac, "when you've got the golden touch."

And she went into her room.

It was hard to look at herself in the faint light and with the little round pocket mirror which had been ample for all her needs before.

The glory of Cinderella was gone—quite gone! The green gown was a wretched travesty; her hair was a tumbled mass; only in her smile and her eyes there was a difference, a new light of power which, having once come to a woman, dies only with her death. Truly, the victory was hers! She started to remove her clothes.

It was a long task, but finally they were rolled into a small bundle and tucked into a little corner. She put on her old clothes and carefully retied the hard knot in her hair. The fairy godmother was gone. She washed the powder from her face. Cinderella once more sat in the ashes.

She was rattling away at the stove, preparing to make the fire for breakfast, when a sound of singing down the road brought her to the window. There came another Three Musketeers. They were mounted—Porthos, Athos, and Aramis. And before them walked the new D'Artagnan—Carrigan. And with one voice they sang.

It should have been a sad song, for as they came closer she saw that they were battered of face and torn of clothes. Yet their song was glad. Experience, whether good or bad, makes strong men rejoice.

They trooped into the dining-room.

"Chow!" they thundered in unison, and Jac stepped to the door.

As one man they gaped.

Big Maurie Gordon walked to her with

a scowl, took her face between his hands, and stared into her eyes. His own were so swollen that he was looking out of the narrowest of slits.

"Where have I seen you?" he said.

"Maybe you been dreamin' about me, you big stiff!" said Jac amiably.

Maurie dropped his hands and turned away.

"Yep. A nightmare," he said.

"I got a start, too," growled Carey.

"An' when I seen Jac I thought about—"

"Don't say it," broke in Craig. "It makes me see red."

"Hit the kitchen, Bricktop," said Maurie, "'an' rustle some ham an' eggs—lots of 'em."

She smiled, and the expression changed her whole face. The Three Musketeers jumped and stared at her with a return of their first interest. The fairy godmother was waving the wand.

"This," said Jacqueline, "is worse than the convent."

"The devil!" groaned Maurie. "This ain't possible."

"When I came west," went on Jac with the same smile, "I thought that I should find one real man."

They listened with mouths agape. It was like watching base lead being transmuted before their eyes to gold.

Carrigan winked his one good eye. The other was black and puffed.

"And I have found one," said Jac.

And she winked at Carrigan.

"I can leave it to you," said Carrigan, "to lead me a real man's life."

(The end.)

FOR A LOVE

BY DIXIE WILLSON

YOU ask me for the ocean—

I can give you but a drop.

You ask me for the summer—

I can give you just a rose.

You ask me for the moon—

I show you just a silver shadow!

You beg me stay a passing hour—

And while you plead—it goes!

But ask me for a *love*—

And oh, I'll give you all that lives!

I'll give you love as deep as ocean

And as tender as the dawn.

The soul of all the summer,

Silver moon of all creation,

And a sun that will be shining

When the last twilight has gone.

Midnight of the Ranges by George Gilbert

Author of "The Flame Orchid," "They Were Seven," etc.

PRECEDING CHAPTERS BRIEFLY RETOLD

ED BURLANE seated on his stallion, Midnight, had witnessed the altercation between Nicked-Nose Peters and Bart Barnquist over the lease of the water-rights on Twin Springs Ranch, Peters's place. What he had not witnessed was the frame-up in Brown's saloon. Young Barnquist had proposed the idea which met with the enthusiastic endorsement of the elder Barnquist and his henchmen, Maltrane and Weaver. Barnquist was to invite Peters into the saloon, pretend friendliness, and, when his back was turned Maltrane was "to get" Peters while Weaver shot-up the place with a nicked .38, such as Peters always used. Then Weaver was to grab Peters's cold gun and leave his own, which was like it, in the dead man's hand, and the rest was easy; a mere matter of explanation and corroboration. Peters's daughter, Berenice, would inherit her father's place, but young Barnquist undertook to deal with her.

Burlane followed Peters to Twin Springs, where he was welcomed by father and daughter. Burlane undertook to remain indefinitely, since he had come from Vernon way on just such a chance.

On the way to the Barnquist ranch, which was the largest and richest place in that corner of San Felice County, father and son quarreled over money. Barney wanted his father to give him a big sum of cash. Greasewood Kate, the Papago Indian half-breed, who presided over the domestic arrangements, had heard the last of the wrangle. She tried to comfort Barney, and reminded him she expected him to marry Ess-Way, her daughter.

Barney hastily dismissed the girl with an indifferent caress and consoled himself with a visit to Mesclero Pedro's place, where Maretta sent him about his business until he could show a big roll like a real ranger. Before he retired that night, Barney lifted a bullet from Weaver's belt and prepared his gun and six blank cartridges which looked like good .45's. The next morning before they left for town, Barney exchanged the faked .45's for the good ones in Maltrane's gun.

When the party of four reached Coppered Jack they found Peters on the street and invited him for a drink. Burlane, a few minutes later, arrived at the saloon and found it in an uproar. With both guns ready for action, he immediately took charge of the situation. Peters was on top of a writhing mass on the floor, and young Barnquist was denouncing him as the murderer of his father. Peters explained he had been attacked from the rear, and when he had reached for his gun found it had been slipped from his belt. Then he started in with his fists.

Peters asked Burlane to take the news to Berenice at Twin Springs, and he would wait at the house of his friend, Wickson, until the sheriff arrived. Barney watched beside the body of his father while all the town seethed with excitement.

While Burlane was taking Berenice into Coppered Jack to see her father, Pedro Aguilar slipped into the Peters place and stole Midnight.

Meanwhile the sheriff arrived and the coroner. A preliminary inquiry was held, but not the inquest. Barney, Weaver, and Maltrane all testified they had seen Peters shoot down the elder Barnquist. The sheriff committed Peters to jail, to be held on suspicion. Then Burlane went back to Twin Springs to get Midnight.

Burlane tried to follow the trail of the horse, but Midnight's tracks were lost in the trampings of the herd. Impelled to follow somewhere, he came to Maretta's place. The woman denied all knowledge of the horse, but promised to keep a sharp lookout.

After the funeral, Barney assured his men the ranch would be run in the old grooves. Maltrane, who admitted he was aware how the shells in his gun had been changed, was taken on by Barney at an increased wage. He would continue to act as the private killer for the master of Ox Bow Ranch. Barney had been unable to find a will, but Kate assured him his father had confided a will to her keeping and she had sent it on to Vernon for safety.

The jury to consider the death of Barnquist was not impaneled. The sheriff seemed to delay of set purpose. Burlane waited impatiently.

This story began in the All-Story Weekly for June 19.

Then, when he was driving Berenice back to town, they met Maretta on horseback. The Mexican woman tried to imply things in her acquaintance with Burlane, and Berenice fell a victim to the other woman's wiles. That night she cried herself to sleep, having first dismissed Burlane with the taunt "he was just like other men." Mother Wickson, with whom Berenice stayed in town, thought she understood the girl's trouble.

Turning in the direction of Ox Bow, Maretta met Barney and carried him off to her place. In a gamblers' quarrel with two Mexicans, Barnquist gave proof of his skill with a gun. Maltrane wondered at a skill so carefully concealed hitherto. Pedro objected to Maretta's too intimate understanding with Barney, but Maretta made her plans independent of Pedro's wishes, though she agreed to get a specimen of Ed Burlane's writing for the Mexican.

When Maretta saw Maw Wickson and Berenice coming up the road toward her place, she maneuvered her farewell with Burlane to create the impression he had leaned from his saddle to kiss her. When Ed drew up alongside the pair of ponies, Berenice snapped a greeting: "A man who kisses a wayside bar-girl would do well to keep away from me, sir."

In the confidence of his new self-importance, Barney discharged Kate, and determined Mal would likely be the next to go.

Berenice, jealous and unhappy, rode again in the direction of the Mexican woman's place. She stopped to water her mount at a spring in a clump of hackberries. She heard a familiar whicker. That night she relented and told Ed Burlane—"Mr. Ed"—about her suspicions.

Did the girl have no suspicions of Ed's whicker?

CHAPTER XVIII.

"OH, MIDNIGHT!"

AFORK one of the tame Wickson nags, Ed soon was well outside of Coppered Jack, on his way toward the Chaparral Cock. He had no clear purpose in view save one—to locate a possible concealed stable. Ed had seen and heard enough of the tricks of the horse-thieves of lower San Felicé to be aware that there was a possibility of an underground stable, hidden under a cut-bank or in some steep-walled dry draw, and he knew that the dry draw behind the wayside joint was of likely formation for such a hiding-place for stolen equines.

He circled widely from the regular trail and, perhaps a mile from the Chaparral Cock, dismounted and left the sleepy old cayuse to drowse, with reins over his sedate head. Ed went on toward the spring, keeping well back of the joint and its outlying small buildings. He had moved slowly, so it was late.

He approached the spring in silence, gliding like a fox from swell to swell of the rolling prairie. He remained for a long time atop the high side of the dry draw, then slid over the edge into the dimmer shadows of the inward slope. The wind in the hackberries just whispered. There was a faint underfoot hum of insects; a nightjar, flitting overhead, made his wing-pinions thrum mournfully in the last effort of his downward swoop for moths.

The tinkle of the waters from the little

spring, as they overflowed the rim of the cup they had made in the lap of Mother Earth, was music to Ed's ears. Once there, he listened intently.

From the Chaparral Cock came the lilt of "La Paloma," as some lazy-fingered, oily-voiced Mexican played and sang Yradié's masterpiece. In the gloom of the hollow no light's beam penetrated, save the fading glow of the westering moon that made the high lights of the scene silver and left the low lights in umber.

Ed felt for his guns and edged forward. He suspected the group of hackberries—penetrated it. He did not care to strike a match and make himself a target for a possible bullet. That would have been too easy for the horse-thieves, for after killing him, they would only need to remove the stallion and then claim that Ed had been shot as a skulker in the night—and their defense would have been perfect.

An oblong patch of deeper umber still intrigued Ed. It was so at variance with the irregular shadows of the hackberry leaf-clusters that it plainly was of man-made origin. He wormed toward it—reached for it. It was but a hole in the ground. And an oblong hole, of depth not to be plumbed by Ed's arm. He felt to the sides of it. Timbering!

Ed forced his head into the gap. He listened. Not a sound. He had hoped there would be the deep-chested breathing of the horse. But he called softly:

"Oh, Midnight!"

Nothing rewarded him. No answering

stamp of impatient feet, no sound of a healthy, loose pelt being shaken in joyful token of recognition; no tenderly phrased whicker.

"Oh, Midnight!"

Nothing.

Ed fingered a gun's butt. He called again:

"Dear old son-of-a-gun! Oh, Midnight!"

"*Mater Dolorosa!*"

From the bottom of the deep hole came that groaning cry, poignant with agony.

Ed forced his body inward and dropped. As the big range rider landed on what his alert senses told him was dry earth at the hole's bottom, his hand flicked to his guns' butts. He was on tiptoes, ready to wheel, poised for a death struggle if one came.

He heard the voice again:

"*Nomine Domini, y Filis—*"

"A Mexican saying his last prayers," Ed judged.

He bent over, his ears guiding him as he inched forward. His boot-toe touched something.

He felt about. the man groaned again hollowly.

"If you're shammin', it's your last sham," Ed warned. "I'm goin' to have a look at you."

He flared the light of a match on to the prone form. It showed him a Mexican of the lesser breed—a man of peon class. One side of his face was battered out of all semblance of humanity. The eyes, dulling to a death-film, told their story.

A long, shuddering sigh; a rattle in the throat. The next match showed Ed that the man had gone Beyond!

The range-rider stood for a long time silent, with the thought that the flare of his matches might have been seen by any one in line with the opening by which he had entered. Then, lighting match after match, he read the tragedy in the tracks on the soft, earthen floor of the secret stable, in the blood and attitude of the dead man's useless clay.

The peon had entered the stable with a pail of water. Evidently the horse had taken the water, for only a few drops had struck the floor where the man had stood

while holding up the pail to the stallion—drops such as a horse will let fall from his damp muzzle after drinking well. Then, as the deeper imprint of the dead man's right foot showed and the pail's lower hoop, that had a jagged edge, corroborated, the man had struck the splendid stallion a wanton blow, cutting his glossy coat and tearing out a bit of hide that was still adherent to the pail's ragged lower hoop.

And then, wheeling, pivot-wise, the great animal had lashed out, and the strong hind-hooves had crushed the man's face. He had fallen, like a poled ox, and the stallion, finding the door ajar, had nosed it open and had gone.

The hoof-marks were those Ed knew so well—would have picked from among a thousand prints of common hooves—the prints of his own big black.

Yes, gone to the open prairie; astray, already on his way back toward his home range near Vernon.

Forgetful for the moment of the dead man, Ed stepped through the concealed door into the open. He walked down toward the spring, called, but softly:

"Oh, Midnight!"

There was no answer. The wind soughed in the hackberries. The nightjar swooped low with thrumming wings, a dun bat wheeled out between eyes and dropping moon. The lilt of "La Paloma" went on and on, like a strophe of regret recurrent.

"Darned old son-of-a-gun!" Ed voiced mournfully to the wind; "you got one of 'em, anyway."

Then, under the impulse of a sudden resolution, Burlane turned toward the Chaparral Cock, determined if possible to discover which one of the hangers-on there was guilty of the theft of his beloved horse.

Up till the time Berenice had given him the news, he had not been sure where the horse might be, but now search for the thief had narrowed; clearly it was some one that made use of the hospitality of the way-side *aguardiente* joint! For the spring, although not on the land on which the building was squatted, was used by the people who hung about the place, and the concealed stable was clearly a part of the

Chaparral Cock's secret sources of illicit revenue.

The lilt of Yradier's immortal song had ceased; the click of dice only was heard, as Ed came to the door and glanced in. He entered carelessly, hat-brim pulled well back, smile on face, with a nod for Maretta, who was chatting with Aguilar at the bar. The player sat against the side wall, the instrument in his lap. The gamesters hardly glanced up. Ed's eyes swept them all—a neutral, drab lot.

"A toss o' fire-water," he smiled at Maretta, clanging down his coin. She served him. He sipped, eying Aguilar's easy, graceful pose. Ed suddenly shot out:

"There's a man dead—down by th' spring by th' hackberries."

Aguilar swerved as if a serpent had stung his heel, then caught himself and steeled to quietude.

"Yes," Ed persisted, eying Aguilar intently, as the Mexican, hands hipped, swayed before him like a graceful viper reared in mid-coil; "a man there—plumb dead—"

"The *señor* spoke so queeck," Aguilar finessed.

"You ain't heard me out, *hombre*," Ed went on remorselessly.

"I attend, *señor*."

He swayed again, viperlike, hands snugged closer to hips. His pouting lips were drawn back in a half smile. The players at the games had ceased to wager; the man with the stringed instrument held it mute. Maretta, eyes dancing, eyed them in silence.

"An' that man," Ed finished, sipping the last of his drink and sending the glass spinning toward the woman, "he jus' plumb pushed his face so hard ag'inst a hoss's hind hoof that it caved in. His face, I mean, not the hind hoof."

Aguilar's face went black. He started, calmed, smiled, asked:

"And that man, where was he?"

"In some sort of an underground stable—queer place, *hombre*! I happened in there—heard the man groan when I was to the spring for a drink. So I did, *hombre*," his voice steady, level, his eyes holding those of the swaying man-viper.

"And then, *señor*?" the voice was liquid, easy, soft as silk.

"That's all, *hombre*, except this, *hombre*," menace flaring into the even tones.

"*Sí, señor!*" swaying again.

"My Midnight hoss, he was stole a bit back. It was his hooves that smashed in your peon's face, Aguilar. The big hoss, he's gone to th' open range. You're goin' to th' Coppered Jack calaboose."

The swaying ceased. The black eyes went to pins' points. The hipped hands jerked weaponward.

"*I wouldn't do that, hombre!*"

Ed's voice, low, firm, resonant, intoned his warning. His two guns were level with the other's chest before the Mexican could complete his draw. Having the "age" from hipped hands had not availed against the lightning draw of the Texan.

The gamesters' chairs scraped. Aguilar gave them a glance aside.

"None o' that," Ed warned; "if any one tips my hand, you die, Aguilar."

The Mexicans formed in a group between him and the door. Aguilar eyed them hopefully. One or two of them were already fingering weapons.

Ed threw one gun over, casually, the other still on the chest of his captive. The fiery spit of it flamed—a new-drawn gun leaped from the hands of the dark-skin who had drawn it.

Ed flicked a glance at the woman. Unseen by Aguilar, who was watching the other men, she made a sign, and at it the others stood aside.

"You march now, *hombre*," Ed ordered, throwing the other gun down in line with Aguilar. "When we get you into th' calaboose, you may feel like sayin' things that's to my likin' and, anyway, a Mexican hoss thief's not goin' to be held in such high regard as you might think, *hombre*. You march, now."

In silence Aguilar went from the place. Ed called an order back to have the dead peon buried. As he did so, the single back glance he could spare showed him the woman smiling, her smile unseen by the others, as they were all watching the going of Aguilar.

"I wouldn't say she was depressed much

over your coming enjailment," Ed said to Aguilar's back.

Once clear of the Chaparral Cock, Ed shifted a gun to his belt, jammed the other under the captive's ribs and put a hand on to the man's velvet collar. He piloted him toward where the sleepy cayuse drowsed, found the horse, forced Aguilar up, tied his legs underneath the belly of the horse and began his long walk across country to Coppered Jack.

Dawn found them in the town, and dawn, too, found Aguilar in the calaboose. Ed made the charge of horse stealing against the Mexican, and a man rode out to inform Lars Maltrane who, in his capacity as first deputy of that part of San Felicé, should notify Sheriff Harvison of the arrest and the reason therefor.

After a short nap and breakfast, Ed went to see Berenice and to tell her the outcome of his night ride. She greeted him happily, and their pleasant chat banished the last lingering memory of their recent estrangement. After that Ed went to the calaboose with things for Peters, and then he cross-questioned Aguilar. But the Mexican remained stubborn, refusing to admit that he knew anything of Midnight. As the man was in custody, Ed could not press him hard and was forced to go away, baffled for the time, followed by the low, derisive chuckle of the smooth-voiced Mexican.

Then Ed rode out to Chaparral Cock again and tried to take up Midnight's trail, but the dryness of the soil, after the moist vicinity of the spring was passed, the trampling of the trail by cattle coming and going, made it impossible for him to follow it. He gave ample notice to every one that his horse was at large and increased the reward, and then had to be content to wait for news that perhaps—probably—would never come.

As for Midnight, in his first blind rush for freedom, crazed by the scent of the bloodied human carrion who had tortured and worried him so often when the kindly equine giant, harried for drink, had approached him trustingly, he had gone far and fast. The feel of the cool night air on his skin, so long tortured by flies in that un-

derground, close stable, was glorious. The thrumming of his great hooves was music to his own ears. He made no sound at first, save that from his rhythmic galloping. He had only one great urge—to be away from men, the dark-skinned, the cruel men.

His muscles, softened by lack of exercise, hurt him at first as he kept up that reaching, mile-devouring stride, belly close to earth, legs opening, closing, with graceful force. The tang of the trampled earth under him, the swish of the air against his ears that were pointed forward in the direction of his course, were like spurs to his weariness, and he quite forgot that he had rested but little during his period in the buried prison, for he had been so heart-hungry for his own master, so worried over his own banishment from sunlight and blue of sky, that he had almost lost heart. But now the open spaces called, the inner springs of his energy were tapped by the urge of great opportunity to be free.

After a first great burst of matchless speed, Midnight slowed to a steady, relentless lope, and his big heart, eased of the strain of supereffort, quieted and ceased to hurt; the deep lungs lost their deadening ache as his second wind came to ease him of his fatigue.

He passed groups of cattle, burst through them like a whirlwind. A lean lobo wolf, angry over being frightened from a feast on a calf he had cut from a bunch of cattle, bared his fangs as Midnight burst upon him and sprang for the glossy, outstretched neck of the racing stallion. Hardly slackening his pace, Midnight caught the big wolf in mid-stride squarely in the middle of his gray back and left him to die, howling.

And now the night cooled still more, and ever the big horse fled, without anything to guide him except fear of man and desire to be out, away, in the dimmer, deeper solitudes of the open range.

The stars paled; sudden dawn smote them into nothingness. The hooves thrummed as Midnight topped rise after rise, sank into troughs between rolls of the prairie sod. With the inborn wisdom of the range horse he avoided dog holes.

The red sun came up, white clouds drifted; the big horse slackened his pace, began to fox-trot, then, after a time, to walk.

He had gotten the scent of that carter's blood out of his nostrils; the pain of the torn wound made by the water pail was eased. He was tired, but the palsy of imprisonment was gone from his immense muscles. His flanks heaved; his nostrils were dilated, his eye wild. But inside he was happy—almost. There was something lacking.

Afar he spied a group of hackberries. He knew them for a good tree, for often such trees meant water. He minced toward them, ears forward, nose quivering as he sniffed for human beings. No taint of man was on the air. Midnight strode into the trees' midst.

There was a small, old house there, and a lush touch of green beside it told of water.

Midnight took a nip of fresh grass, a drink—a little one at first, as Ed had taught him to do. Then, weariness of muscle overcoming him, he stretched out in the shade and soon was asleep.

Gophers, their cheek pouches filled with seeds, scuttled by, pausing to view the sleeping beauty, then whisked away. A dun hawk wheeled overhead, sending his piercing cry down to the earthfolk at times. A giant buzzard quested for prey off in the dimmer distances. Midnight slept on and on.

Of a sudden he awoke, got up, shook his hide, snorted, fell to feeding. Between nips he drank daintily.

It was the first time since colthood that he had been away from man. Petted by Burlane, brought up like a child, never misused, the treatment of the Mexicans had all but maddened him. And now he was alone.

He lay down and rolled, grunting in sheer ecstasy. Ways and habits of discipline rolled from him. The feel of the earth, the swish of the little baby-wind were good to him.

But there was something else. His thirst was satisfied; his hunger. The tide of life ran strong and sweet in him again. But there was something else.

He vibrated his deep chest in a delight-

ful whicker—and listened for a loved voice that had uttered phrases that he never had understood—but whose tones meant something that reached away down into the depths of his noble being, words like:

"Darned ol' son-of-a-gun, you Midnight!"

His muzzle, velvety, cool now after drinking, seemed to be ill at ease, to want a touch of something—the rub of a firm, loving palm. Midnight whickered again, gazed about him.

The house was deserted; no faintest taint of man-scent was on it.

The sun went down; the stars sprang forth. Night birds called in the little grove; gophers scuttled.

The big horse whinnied pleadingly, lovingly. There was no answer to his love-call.

He shook himself, laid down, stretched his long legs and let his neck relax, his head snuggle to the cool earth. And then he slept again, yet in his dreams he could still hear the familiar jingle of spurs, the sound of that voice that was to him the sweetest sound of all:

"Darned ol' son-of-a-gun, you, Midnight!"

CHAPTER XIX.

"LYNCH THE GREASER!"

CAME Lars Maltrane clattering into Coppered Jack in due time, when the shadow of the squat, strong, adobe calaboose had crept westward and made a rectangular blotch of shadow on the town's thin fringe where the jail stood apart from other structures in that section. He came thin-lipped, eyes close-lidded, but agate-chill still behind their ambushment of wire-fine brows. He came, thoughtful, grim—and alone. Ed's word that Aguilar was jailed on a charge of horse stealing had called Lars in.

Maltrane took charge at the calaboose at once. He made an inspection, gave Peters a few curt words of greeting, girded at Aguilar, then took his station at the door, sitting there, chair tilted back, hat drawn over his hard eyes.

Coppered Jack buzzed, but not to the boiling point. Perhaps the sight of that stern man-slayer there had its effect. He had been known as Barnquist's familiar spirit, but he had been known, too, as a man who never shot for pure love of blood. None of his killings ever had gone into court; self-defense, clearly shown, always had been his justification, or another had been found for him by the power of his dead employer. So now the buzz against Aguilar was subdued, if persistent, with Maltrane on guard.

Came, later, Barnquist, with Pardee, Weaver, and half a score of mean-faced Ox Bovians at their heels. Barney rode with a swagger, talked loudly, made the rounds of what places of solace for his kind were to be found in the town. Ever behind him he left slaked thirsts, and the buzz against Aguilar grew louder and louder.

They converged upon the jail in due time. Burlane, homing from his wonted trip out to Twin Springs, had unharnessed the ponies and strolled down toward the calaboose, minded to see Aguilar again, if only through the bars of the adobe's single window. From the edge of the narrowing circle of talkers Ed watched events.

"I'd git back a bit, if so-be I was you, boys," Lars Maltrane said casually. There was a chill assurance in his implied command.

The fame of him, the menace of him, were such that they all drew back—except Barnquist, who thus was left face to face with his hireling.

"You're whirling a pretty big loop today?" Barnquist bantered, but with an undertone of defiance not entirely assumed.

"Yes?" a deft hand idling with a sinister gun-butt, and so quickly had Maltrane's quicksilverlike muscles shifted that to Barnquist it came with a shock that the killer, at need and fair-warned, was easily his master.

"I was just a-joshin' you, Lars," with a smile intended to conciliate.

"Yes?" In the same low-pitched, casual way.

The deft hand dropped from sinister gun. The thin brows wrinkled, the eyes were uncovered, uneasily lidded. The tense form

in the tip-tilted chair did not move. Only the deep chest took a bit more of a breath than usual.

"But th' greaser ought to be hanged—stealing a hoss so—"

"You tell that to Harvison, Barney. I'm first deputy of San Felicé an' have a prisoner in my charge."

"You've done things—"

"I guess that 'll do you, sonny," with mock courtesy and deference. "When I'm at your back, on Ox Bow, I take your orders. But when I'm in Harvison's place here, I take nobody's but hisn. Your pap, he *all*-ways knew that, an' he let me be deputy when occasion required. You profit by his example."

Barnquist scowled, turned on his heel, went away. Ed had not sought to make himself apparent to the heir of Ox Bow, but now sauntered forward and stood before the door of the jail.

"Howdy, Maltrane," he gave.

"Howdy," never stirring.

"I'd like to inch in an' see Mr. Peters."

The cold eyes focused on Ed's smiling face, the grim mouth grave forth the ghost of an answering smile.

"Inch in then, pilgrim."

"Thanks."

Inside Ed found Peters by the window of the one room. Aguilar, on the long, wide bench that did as seat and by night as bunk, was smoking. He gave Ed a word of derision, but Burlane disregarded him. He rendered an account of affairs at Twin Springs to Peters, chatted as was his daily wont. Presently he went out.

Maltrane, against the door, was still meditative. Ed paused, affected to regard other things. Aside he studied the face of the somber guard. The other men, drafted by the emergency to act as jailers, were off below in the town eating, relieved therefore by Maltrane.

"Did you ever, young-timer," the grim guard asked suddenly, just as Ed was about to go, "shoot six times, hand-runnin', at a perfectly chunky man, an' miss him ever' time?"

"Why, no," Ed replied pleasantly. "I'd be surprised to be alive if so-be I'd ever done anything as foolish as that-all."

"Well, I did—once," Maltrane said, wagging his head positively. "An' I ain't overwondering how it come about yit."

Ed wisely countered:

"Well, a man that can't shoot better than that ought to quit, Maltrane."

"I been thinking of that, too, young-timer. I would, on'y—"

He shifted his weight, fell upon silence. Ed turned to go.

"Only I want to find out why it was. Savvy?"

"*Yo tambien, señor!*"

The afternoon waned. The Ox Bow crowd circulated, yipped, and yi-ed, let off a few careless shots. Maltrane, tiptilted against the calaboose wall, was silent. And ever the phrase was heard, more and more:

"Lynch the greaser."

Aguilar, peering through the barred upper half of the jail's strong door, heard the cry—and cringed. Peters heard it and spat.

"What beats my time," Maltrane called in to Peters toward night. "is that Barnquist is so busy working up a lynchin'-bee on this no-count Mex, when, by rights, he ought to be tryin' to hemp-tie you that killed his daddy."

"I been considerin' that, too," Peters said. "Only I didn't kill his father a-tall, Mal."

"I guess I'll have to class it wit' that other myst'ry 'bout your bein' alive, this day, 'stead of bein' full o' holes like Missus Wickson's colander."

"Yo' c'n class it where an' how you please; I didn't kill his daddy—an' you know it, Mal."

"Le's not be a'gmentatious, Peters. That's for Doc Alberstone t' settle, not us."

"Huh-uh!"

Then silence.

Off down toward the Thimble Belt the cry arose anew, louder, more menacing:

"Kill th' greaser!"

Aguilar came to the barred window on the side around the corner from where Maltrane guarded the portal. He hung on to the bars and yammered:

"Do not permeet dhat dhey heeng me. Señor Maltrane!"

"I'll do what a man c'n do—go clear

through," the serpent-eyed jailer answered in his slithering, oily smooth tones, "an' you stow yo'r gab an' go to th' bunk an' chaw a bone."

"*Sí, señor,*" all his suave braggadocio gone.

From the more hectic fringes of the milling mob below came the cry again:

"Hang th' greaser!"

Maltrane spat.

"Peters, a mob yellin' is ha'mless as a Mexican hai'less dawg. It's w'en a mob growls or is still—then, beware!"

And yet, toward sundown, the noise subsided, Barnquist drew his followers about him, and they clattered out toward the big ranch. When they went, the cries for lynching decreased, then the public desire for blood guttered out in a few whoops of joyful throats down at the Thimble Belt.

Maltrane, waiting for Harvison, heaved a sigh of relief and swung his chair down on all fours. He permitted the other guards to take charge and went to the Eagle Short Order for his bite, having been informed that Greasewood Kate was cooking there and that Ess-Way was waiting on the table.

At the head of his brusk clan, Barnquist made his big roan to *pasear* and dance. Now that he had learned the ways of the horse, once his father's, he liked it as much as his black nature would permit him to like anything. He did not like the beast for his bone, beauty of form, willingness to do well for a hard master, but solely for his ability to put miles behind him—to endure. In other words, to Barney the horse was simply a piece of mechanism to be driven hard—to the death if need be—if he, Barney, thereby was served.

And as he rode there crinkled in his pocket a letter that had arrived that morning and which was the reason for his going back to Ox Bow that early and for making his attempt to creating a lynching sentiment in Coppered Jack, merely tentative that day.

Arrived at Ox Bow, Barney gave this order to Weaver:

"Weav, see if there's some one waiting for me in th' office."

Weaver jingled away, spurs a-chime, to come back soon with the word:

"Mr. Blackwell from Vernon is the'e, Barney."

Barnquist swung down and turned the big roan over to Weaver. Pardee marshaled his men off to the bunk-house. Barnquist went into the ranch office.

The ruddy-faced lawyer met the heir of Ox Bow with profuse greetings that Barney brushed aside.

"Yes, I got your letter. I'm here. What is it?"

He pointed to the chair that Blackwell had vacated when he arose to greet him. Barney sat in its mate, across the rough table or desk.

"I thought the letter would make it plain?" with a deprecatory wave of a heavy hand.

"The letter jus' says you want half th' Ox Bow water—or all of it, less what the ranch itself will need."

"Yes."

"Well, Blackwell, you are attorney for the Soda Lake Company as well as for Ox Bow. I know that. It was on your advice that pap began those irrigation ditches and such. Now, I'm only a cub, it seems, but you can't sell me out—easy."

He eyed the older man narrowly. Blackwell blinked, "hawed."

"You wouldn't be offerin' to buy if there wasn't a reason—good to you."

"Why, we can get all th' water we want—free—at Twin Springs. Peters doesn't care."

"Then why not keep on gettin' it and let my ditches alone?"

This reply, snapped out with vigor, shot across the table like a bullet. Blackwell gulped with a force that told how the shot had centered the target.

He leaned back and twiddled his thumbs over his ample front. He scowled, considered, "hawed and hemmed."

"You been into your dad's papers?" he finally asked rather anxiously.

"Yes, Blackwell. At first I made fun o' pap 'bout those ditches. I was on'y a raw kid an' didn't understand business. But I'm of a new mind now. To-day, after your letter came, I came across some of th' letters you wrote him, urging him to go into th' irrigation project. Now show all your

cards. You can't fool me wit' soft sawder, Blackwell. The fact is, isn't it, that the Soda Lake Company is going to triple its business, has signed new contracts, will need all the water at Twin Springs and most o' Ox Bow's water, too? Mebbe I been hear-in' things, too."

The other's face showed how the shots had centered into the midst of his plans for getting Ox Bow water at a cheap rate for his bigger client, the Soda Corporation.

"Well, yes, Barney," he admitted at last; then, with a gush of apparent good feeling: "I was only trying you out to see if you were smart and able to 'tend your affairs, like—"

"Aw, keep in th' saddle an' ride, Blackwell. You feed that soft sawder to th' widows an' orphans down in Vernon. I don't want it. The man that runs Ox Bow needs guts, not lawyer talk, to put him through. Now, what's at the bottom o' your sack?"

Silence for a space. Horses neighed afar; a man, spur-heeled, went by the window, jingling.

Blackwell leaned impressively across the table to say:

"I thought I could swing this myself, Barney, that's true. But I see I'll have to let you in. We've tried again and again to reach old Peters, but he won't sell his water, less what he needs for his own small uses. He takes pride in being the son of a native son and in having a grant from Sam Houston that runs as long as grass grows and water runs. He can't sell the land, but he can lease it and th' water, but he has refused us a score of times."

"You know where he is?"

"Yes, and why."

Silence now. Evil eye met suave eye, as man measured man.

"How much will that soda gang pay for all the water, less what Ox Bow needs? They want to get it so's they can shut out possible competition?"

"Yes, talk of competition, too. Le's see," considering.

"No hidin' out, now, Blackwell; your fees all out."

The lawyer's fat tongue licked his livid lips. He gasped:

"For all, less what you use only, fifty thousand dollars a year—"

Barney's face almost betrayed him. The sum was so large to him, who theretofore had handled but little actual cash, that it seemed colossal.

It meant power, pleasure, everything. No more waiting for the round-up for ready, cash money. No bickering with supply houses in Fort Worth when the range dried and steers died by thousands. He saw the magic phrase: "fifty thousand dollars a year," and it meant gay times at the Planters', in St. Louis, trips to New York, jolly-dog *pasears* down to San Antonio—

"Blackwell, I'll get it all for you. But tell me one thing. If Peters dies without other heirs—is hung, we'll say, for th' murder o' pap—it all goes to th' girl?"

"Yes," with a smirk and a knowing leer.

"S'pose she dies," his voice ghostlike in its covert menace. His eyes were hardened to pins' points; his mouth white-lipped with intensity.

"The land would escheat to the State and be open to lease—by some ranch that really—ahem—really needed the water—say Ox Bow—one with pull."

The heavy voice came back to full again. The heavy fist of the new-made cattle princeling banged on to the table as he said:

"You go back to Vernon, Blackwell; go back an' leave me alone."

"Then you're going into it?"

"Yes, clear through with it. I'm going to have all th' water here and hereabouts; all that flows under the sky, except what Coppered Jack uses. Never do to meddle with their supply?"

"No; the Soda Company may need some useful public sentiment after a time—when taxes are laid, maybe damage suits brought, and th' like."

"You're talkin' plain now, Blackwell, manwise. You listen here, Blackwell. I'm goin' to have all that water, all or none. It'll take some little time, but I'll make it. When you go back to Vernon, make out what papers are needed an' have them ready. Then wait—till you hear from me."

Blackwell shook hands with him, and over

cigars they talked over the details of what might be for Ox Bow, if the deal with the Soda Company could be brought within the province of the real.

CHAPTER XX.

CHAPARRAL COCK'S LAST CROW.

BARNEY BARNQUIST was up betimes next morning, stirring with vigor about the ranch-house and among the men. Ever he talked of the villainess of Mexicans and the villainess of Mexican horse thieves in particular. He saw Blackwell, who had remained for the night down-trail a way, came back and stormed again against Mexican marauders.

The surly wolf-crew of Ox Bow, catching the drift of their master's seeming intent, growled among themselves against Mexicans, all and sundry. Weaver, sputtering away at the stump of his pipe's stem, echoed the words of his chief. Barnum, glib of tongue, followed suit, issuing from the "office" every little while to take his part.

"I want that you boys keep in close to th' home base t'day," Barney ordered, about midforenoon; "I'm goin' to take Weaver an' ride over to that Chaparral Cock joint an' see what I c'n find out. It's my notion it's stood long 'nuff. 'T was all right as a place to drop in an' get a drink, but if it's a hoss-thievin' joint, we might's well find it out."

There was a growl of approval at this. The young boss had said it—and anyway, amusements were few out in a range country. If it came to a foray against Mexicans, or a lynching, why—

"C'm on, Weav," and Barney swung up on to the big roan. Weaver followed him. They set off down-trail at a swift lope.

"Weaver," Barney said, when they had ridden a mile, "you know I've been fussin' 'round that Maretta down to the Chaparral Cock?"

"I ain't pryin' into none o' your private affairs," Weaver chuckled, champing at his pipe's stem with libidinous vigor.

"Well, I think I c'n whirl a neat loop on to her, an' she'll tell me what there is to

Aguilar. You play up to me when we get in th' place, an' we'll see what I c'n coax out o' her."

He smiled leeringly at his man, whose smile answered his own. Then he shifted.

"Weaver, what did you make of Lars Maltrane's bluff o' meanin' to protect th' prisoner yest'day?"

"Oh, Lars takes himse'f seriously as a dep'ty, boss. I think he'd shoot it out if we pressed him hard."

"Well, I dunno 'bout that thing, Weav. I got my doubts."

"You're sure entitled to 'em, boss. I've none. I *know* Lars."

Afar they viewed the Chaparral Cock. At that hour there would be few of its patrons in evidence. They clattered to the tie-rack, swung down and entered. The room was deserted. Over the bar Maretta leaned indolently, smoking.

"Two snorts o' your best," Barney ordered, his face beaming with the admiration she craved from him, for what it was to mean to her if—

She set out the bottle she kept apart for Barney. Weaver drank solemnly. He made a few commonplace remarks and, at a hint from Barney, which brought a smile to the face of the woman, went out to watch the horses. He grinned to himself as his spurs jingled in his going.

Left alone with the woman, Barney slid one of his heavy hands across the bar to engage her soft one. He drew her forward—took a kiss. She whispered a few love-words and he answered. They drank together; he took her newly lighted *cigarro* from her red lips and bade her, with laughter, to light another. She laughed, low and sweet.

It was while he had her so pleased, so softened in her expectancy of coming assurance in his deeper love, that he asked:

"Maretta, did it ever occur to you that mebbe Aguilar an' I might have to settle which of us is to have you?"

She seemed amused at this, for she smiled, her white teeth, like pearls a-row, gleaming enticingly between her full lips.

"Oha, dhat's joke, Barnee," she made fun. "Eef dhat Pedro he fools arroun' you, you shoot heem, eh?"

She puffed smoke at him playfully.

"Sure, if he gets out o' that hoss-thievin' scrape. He mos' likely will, as there's no real proof against him."

"No proof, eh, Barnee?"

"None; no real proof. C'm on, girl; you know a lot 'bout him. I never went into what you've been to each other, years back. But I want a show-down now, before—"

Gently enough his big hand closed on hers, and he drew her over the bar for another warm kiss. His eyes dwelt glowingly on the curve of her neck and chin.

The woman sighed gently, disengaged herself.

"One mo-moment, Barnee," as she slid from his hold. Into the little back room she glided, to emerge soon with some bits of paper.

"See, here ees proof," she said. "I get dhat Burlane, who lose dhat beeg black *caviard*, to wreet me a letter for friend down in Vernon."

"Yes," eagerly, caressing a strand of her black hair that had escaped from bounds and was trailing over her shoulder between them on the bar as she leaned over to explain to him.

"See, Barnee," smoothing the note on the deals for him to see; "I am not a wreeter, so I ask dhat Burlane to wreete. Well, Barnee, dhat Aguilar he steals my letter, I find dhat out just theesa morn', w'en I go eento his theengs, makin' readee to send up to Coppered Jack as he ask by a friend."

"Yes, girl, go on."

"An', Barnee, I find dhat Aguilar, hee's been usin' my note Burlane made for me to copy out-a bill sale for dhat *caviard* huge. Eh?"

She spread the incriminating draft of the forged bill of sale before her. Barney grasped it, his eyes showing his appreciation of the value of it.

"I'll use this," he said, kissing her again and again, "to make it sure no Aguilar gets in between us. Savvy?"

"Oh, Barnee," returning his kisses with renewed warmth. "You are so—so—brainee."

He stepped back, blew her a kiss from

his finger tips and was gone. She ran to the doorway and watched the men ride away together. Her eyes were dancing with gratified pride and aroused passions. The raw, pleading boy with whom she had toyed before he had grasped the reins of power at Ox Bow had developed a masterfulness, an intensity that fascinated the woman, whose wide experience with men had made her such a consummate actress.

Aguilar she looked upon as merely one of the many pegs upon which she had stepped her pretty feet in her climb from the obscurity of frontier vice to a position of ease. She had been relentless in her scheming and had no qualms about ending the career of Pedro thus summarily, and she knew enough of public opinion to know that positive proof of horse thievery would mean the end of Aguilar, without a court trial. She had been considering how to get this proof before the Americanos of the district, and Barney's coming had furnished her with the very excuse she had been looking for. Each had played the other with what each deemed to be success. But the woman had been touched deeply by the rough but seemingly natural display of affection Barney had shown. His direct hints at his intention to claim her, to lift her up beside him when he could do so and especially his determination to get rid of Aguilar, his seeming rival for her affections, had completely deceived her.

So she watched him ride away, and as he rode she saw, in a day-dream, herself as mistress of Ox Bow, with fine horses aplenty, queening it in San Antone's best hotels, perhaps—perhaps coaxing Barney to take her to Europe, to old Madrid, to Mexico City—where she could hunt bigger game than wayside horse thieves or even callow cattle princelings.

On the way in to Ox Bow, Barney made Weaver acquainted with the content of the papers he had secured from Maretta. He noted the effect of the direct proof upon his retainer.

"Proof 'nuff to hang a saint," Weaver sputtered into his pipe-stem. "What more do we want?"

"Nothin', I guess," Barney answered significantly.

They swirled up to the bunk-house, where Pardee had his clan marshaled. Barney was waving the papers in his left hand, and he called as he threw the big roan back on to his haunches and stilled him with his heavy right hand:

"Here's full proof, boys, absolute, 'nuff to hang a saint, as Weav says, that Aguilar stole Burlane's hoss."

He passed the papers to Pardee, explaining that he had gotten them from Maretta under threat of a raid on the Chaparral Cock if she shielded Aguilar. He watched Weaver as he said that and noted the saturnine grin with which Weaver heard it and so knew that Weaver had heard some of his blandishing phrases to the Mexican woman.

Pardee glanced at Barney inquiringly after he had inspected the papers and passed them to some of the ranch hands who had gathered about the two horsemen at Barney's first greeting.

"I vote to clean out that cussed joint," Barney said. "We got proof it's been used by hoss thieves. It ought to be wiped out."

"I'm sure agreeable t' that," Pardee bel-
lowed, catching the drift of the master's temper. "Whoopee, boys; le's get action on this."

"Youeeee!"

In a moment the Ox Bovians had snatched from the pegs their horse gear and descended upon the home corral, and man after man soon swung up into saddle. The horses, catching the excitement, danced, bucked; the men yelled.

Barney sat firmly in his saddle on the big roan, quiet, alert. He put on a sheepish face as Pardee glanced at him inquiringly again.

"No; I'm not goin' to ride out on such an errand," he explained; "you-all know I been makin' some eyes at that Maretta—"

Pardee laughed; the other men grinned.

"You men go down to th' Chaparral Cock an' jus' clean its clock. Make it no use to anybody. No killin' if so-be it c'n be he'ped—"

"But th' woman?" Weaver asked.

Barney hung his head a moment as if in shame-faced cogitation, then said:

"You put her on her white pony an' you tell her to go an' keep on a goin', an' if she sputters 'bout me, you tell her—"

He paused as if ashamed. Then he turned his face, bluff and fair, toward them and finished:

"You tell her t' go t' hell an' keep a hoopin' thataway. I been makin' sheep's eyes at her, O. K., but we can't have no hoss-thieves on th' skirts o' Ox Bow. Here, Pardee, gimme that bunch o' proofs before you go. I'll turn it over to Harvison. It'll furnish a good explanation."

"Don't blame you for not wantin' to horn in on this party," Pardee said heartily, turning the proofs over. Barney pocketed them.

"Ner none o' us do," Weaver echoed into his pipe-stem.

Barnquist ordered Barnum to remain, much to the ex-barkeeper's chagrin. Then he watched them go, the flicker of an amused smile on his ruddy face, an expression of covert craft about his mouth. When their dust had settled and they were out of sight down-trail, he swung down, turned the roan into the corral and went toward the ranch-house, calling upon Barnum to follow.

In the "office" Barney sat silent for a time, Barnum eagerly watching him.

"Barnum, you never told any one 'bout findin' that curious dirt on th' mirror behind the Thimble Belt's bar after th' shootin'?"

"No, Barney," with a sly smile.

"That play o' yours seemed to show brains, Barnum. Now I got a new one." His face was open, bluff, frank.

"Yes?"

"We gotta finish that Aguilar. It's a dead-open-an'-shut case on him. But you know Harvison. He's a procrastinator. Look how he's fooled over Peters! I'm 'bout sick o' these law's delays."

Barnum's sly smile deepened.

"Th' play is like this, Barnum. After th' boys are back f'om th' Chaparral Cock, we're goin' to *pasear* into Coppered Jack."

"Yes," with smile sly and weasel-like. An expression of growing pleasure showed on the long-jawed face.

"Lars Maltrane, he's got to make a

show o' fightin' to save his reputation like. I've had word to him a'ready, Barnum."

"You been busy this mornin', sure 'nuff."

"Pretty. Now, Barnum," leaning forward impressively, "as we swarm 'bout th' calaboose in Coppered Jack, Lars, he'll make a show, as I say. You be in front o' th' crowd and jump him—"

"Not me, boss," with an expression of fear.

"Now, Barnum, I said I'd had word to Lars."

"Yes?" but still with fear on his face.

"You jump him. That's th' play. He makes a show o' shootin' you, but he shoots high—a purpose—savvy that?"

"Oh, yes," good humor again appearing on his smooth face.

"You grab him and wrestle him; swarm on to him. We down him—gently, o' course. But he makes a whoopin' noise. Once he's down, th' other guard 'll lope. We takes th' Mexican out an' hangs him up as a reminder to Harvison to get a move on toward th' Peters case."

"Why not include Peters?"

"No; I'm jus' after th' Mexican—to-day."

"All right. I'm your man. I'll jump Lars. It's all understood?"

"Yes; he's got his tip on th' play. We might shoot it out wit' Lars. He 'd kill a few, an' get killed, O. K. But we save his face for him, an' it's all right. This little talk is between us. None o' th' other boys is on to th' play. But w'en they see Lars has missed you an' is down, they'll swarm onto him, an' then—" He made the gesture of a rope being placed about a man's neck. "That f'r th' greaser hoss-thief!"

Barnum laughed heartily.

"You act it to the queen's taste, Barney," he said, as he went out.

"What do I care how th' plays tip?" Barney was thinking; "I can't lose. I'll send that fool into Coppered Jack after th' boys are back an' let him spread news o' findin' th' proof on Aguilar, but tell him to keep away from th' calaboose so 't no one will suspect he's had a deal on for Lars to go easy on the break when th' fun begins."

In due time, with a swirl of dust, oaths, whoops, the Ox Bow men came riding back. Barney went out to hear Pardee's report, and one glance at the foreman's face proved that they were satisfied. Pardee called:

"We swirled on to th' Cock like a whirlwind. We threw a brace o' greasers out on to th' trail an' tol' 'em to moosey. We got th' woman on to her pony, give her what cash was in th' till, an' drove her off toward Vernon a ways. Then we came back an' wrecked th' joint. It's burned—nothin' left."

"An' a good job; I'll file on that little piece for Ox Bow an' add that mite o' a spring in the draw to our holdings. Did th' woman ask after me," with a rather sheepish grin.

"Yas, she did."

"Well."

"I tol' her jus' what you said—go to hell and keep a goin' thataway."

There was a general laugh at that sally. Barney joined it, adding:

"I had to cut that string—somehow, boys."

The men grinned and several ventured coarse jokes that he did not resent. After Pardee had given all the details of the eviction, Barney took the lead again.

"Wreckin' th' joint was all right, 's far's it goes, boys, but there's Aguilar. We got dead-open-and-shut on him. You-all know Harvison. Look at Peters, that ought to been in San Felicé for trial long 'go."

There was a rumble of anger at this and several cries of vengeful import.

"We need to show Harvison somethin' of the temper o' Ox Bow," Barney went on. "He's forgot, I guess, that this end o' San Felicé County 'mounts to so'thin' more 'n a hollow log, boys. I move we-all ride into Coppered Jack an' do what we didn't do yes'day."

"Whoopie!" from several. The excitement spread; six guns cracked.

"After we've had chuck, we'll ride in," Barney decided.

The men, animated and excited, dispersed under strict orders from Pardee to be ready right after the midday meal.

Barney called Barnum aside and gave him some private orders. Barnum, mount-

ing, was soon on the way to Coppered Jack. He was firmly impressed, too, with the idea that he must not approach Maltrane during the time between his arrival and that of the Ox Bow clan, as to do that, Barney insisted, would mean that folks would suspect he and Maltrane were in the plot, after he had downed the first deputy by jumping on him.

Her lips pouting scornfully still, her full form erect, her hand steady on the bridle-rein, Maretta Esquimala held in her pony on the last roll of land from which she could look back upon the smoking ruins of the Chaparral Cock.

"And to think," she self-accused, "that I, who have cozened so many men, should have been made the fool by a young Texano, with the down hardly on his lip. *Basta!* Maretta, when you cross the Rio Grande the first man you meet will steal your eyes out of your empty head."

Then she turned away with a shrug of her pretty shoulders and faced toward the south. For a time she rode as one dejected; then, bit by bit, she drew erect; then she solaced herself with a smoke, touched the pony with spur, swayed to the motion of his easy lope, and went singing, "My love is like the wood-bird wild," ending with inimitable verve, with the memorable phrase:

"But if I love you; if I love you—
Beware of me!"

And so she vanished—and the San Felicé ranges knew her no more.

CHAPTER XXI.

"SPECIAL FOR ME?"

COPPERED JACK drowsed in noon-day inactivity. At the Thimble Belt trade was slack; the Eagle Short Order was in the doldrums, after feeding the strays of the population. Lars Maltrane, chair tiptilted before the calaboose, seemed to nod, or at least his agate-cold eyes were veiled by his thin lids, and the thin line of eyebrow was almost lost, so smooth was it over the veiled eyes of him,

There was a whisk of calico skirts, the noise of well-worn shoes and, basket on arm, Berenice Peters stood before him, smiling.

"I'd like to take this in to dad," she explained, tapping the basket.

"Why, cer'nly," and he tipped his chair down and got out the big key. He swung the door inward. The vapor from Aguilar's perpetual *cigarro* reeked out. Peters called a cheery greeting to the girl. Lars stepped aside with a slight nod.

"See here, Mr. Maltrane," Berenice said, putting her hand into a corner of the basket and holding up a generous piece of golden-brown cake, "I thought you might want some—for a treat. You men riding ranges and living in bunk-houses seldom get any real homemade cake. I baked a big one for dad to-day: Ma Wickson let me—"

His hand slid forward to take the cake. His gesture was awkward; embarrassed. He poised the cake on his palm and eyed it longingly.

"S I understand this play," he asked, a curious vibration in his voice, "you give this here, special? For me?"

"Why, yes, Mr. Maltrane," with her open, frank smile. "You been fair to dad since you came on here, on 'count o' Aguilar. Yes, it's for you."

"You'll find it mighty good cake, too, Lars," Peters called from the inside.

"Special, for me?" and he bowed now. She went in.

Maltrane sat down, the cake poised still on his palm. He began slowly to eat it, to luxuriate in its flavor and texture. He ate slowly, as one who wishes to prolong a pleasure. While the daughter and father talked, the door slightly ajar, he nibbled at the unexpected gift. He finished it, licked his finger-tips, smiled with a writhe of thin lips, tiptilted his chair again, and waited.

Presently Berenice came out, humming, her basket swinging.

"Thanks, miss," Maltrane said in a low tone. He did not take the trouble to tip his chair down, reached behind her and slammed the door to, catching the lock fast with negligent skill.

"I'm sure you're welcome," she answered, nodding and flashing her winning smile at him. Then, basket wagging on her gracefully crooked arm, she went, her very presence breathing forth youth, happiness, trust.

Maltrane glanced after her as long as she was visible. When she had whisked into the Wickson place, Coppered Jack's aspect seemed to him lonesome. He licked his finger-tips again.

"For me, special, she said, cussed little charmer. I've been paid money to kill; I've been paid to work; I've beat men at cards; I've made my livin' by my wits an' guns—but she's th' first person, since my mother, that ever did anything, for nothing, for me, special."

The hard lips writhed into a half smile. The thin brows wrinkled. The hard eyes, for a veriest fraction of a heart-beat, seemed misty—less like agate. And then, with a shrug, he tiptilted the chair against the wall, beside the door, and let his hat fall over his thin-lidded eyes that again were hard, glittering.

The sun swung about; Coppered Jack began to wake up. There came a clatter of hooves; a "yip-tippity-yip!"

At the heels of Barnquist the Ox Bow crowd swept into town. Lars viewed them with eyes judgmental, then he spat. They paused before the jail a moment, then went on. Lars spat again.

"No guts in ye," he snarled quietly at their backs. He did not move his chair, as he watched them go.

"For me, special," he said softly. "For me, special, a killer, a skunk, with nothin' to my credit but that I hire out my gun to one man at a time an' play fair with him, an', by th' rules of my game, I'm hired to watch this jail now, an' I'm going to do it. For me, special!"

Meanwhile Barnum, who had been going from place to place in Coppered Jack, met Barnquist and the Ox Bow clan at the Thimble Belt. The whispered report he gave Barney seemed to please, for a grin of satisfaction wreathed the lips of the young cattle princeling.

"It's all right; when th' time comes, you grab Lars. He's on."

Barnum gave Barnquist a wink of appreciation and went out to spread the news of the finding of the proofs against Aguilar. He buttonholed the younger men of Coppered Jack and informed them what had been found at Chaparral Cock. In almost every case growls against "the greaser" were heard.

Ox Bovians now circulated, while their mounts rested against the Thimble Belt's tie-rail or lazed in the wagon-yard. Behind them the fever in the public mind swelled, burned ever more and more fierce.

A little later word came, by a rider from San Felicé, that Harvison, called down to the farthest tip of the county on a stage hold-up case, would not be in until late in the day, perhaps not until night. This, passed to Barnquist, made him smile behind one casually upheld hand, so placed as if to hide a yawn.

Ed Burlane, hearing of the excitement, came shouldering through the crowd about the Thimble Belt. He laid an ear to the talk that was toward, and noted that it dealt with the Mexican only. He twitched Pardee aside and put the question to him straight:

"Man to man, Pardee, is this just for the Mexican's sake? You-all ain't hidin' no projects against Peters, are you?"

"Why, no, son," Pardee answered. "Not a word said so far, except 'bout this slippery Aguilar."

Although chief of the surly Ox Bow clan, Pardee had the reputation of being square himself, and Ed felt obliged to be satisfied. But he went to Maltrane, still tiptilted against the jail wall, his deputy by now at his side. This man, a partizan of Harvison's, named Ambrose Gallagher, was plainly uneasy, but Lars brushed his uneasiness aside with:

"They ain't goin' to rush this man's jail; no, siree, Bob. They all know well that I'll shoot—if I have to."

But he looked to his six guns, nevertheless, for off toward the Thimble Belt the racket was increasing, and an occasional shot was to be heard as some overexuberant man let off a cartridge into the upper air.

Ed hastened back to tell Berenice what

was afoot and found her, already informed, on the point of going out to seek for him.

"Is it serious?" she asked, from the Wickson doorway.

"No, I don't think so. You remember they shot their wad like this yesterday and went home without firing a gun. But, if you say so, I'll go down to the calaboose and watch."

"I reckon we'd better all go," Pap Wickson called from the house. "I heard what you was a sayin' to her, Ed. I'll beat up some of th' old-timers, an' we'll be on hand, if so-be anythin' busts wide open."

Pap came out, spry and wiry, his old frontier six bobbing on his left hip, butt to front, where the right hand could clutch it easily.

"She's some ancient," and he patted her butt, "but she's deadly when she speaks."

Off down to the saloon zone the shots were getting more and more frequent; the "yip-i-i-i-is" more pronounced. Spurred on by this, Pap Wickson began to gather his men.

Ed, nervous still, bade Berenice go indoors, promising to go to the jail and to remain there, pending Pap's arrival.

As he turned to go toward the calaboose, there came a swirl of yelling men out of the Thimble Belt. They swung up on to horses, helter-skelter, and were off toward the jail, Barnquist, on his huge, scudding roan, and Pardee leading.

Ed, unmounted, ran. He knew the mob would be at the calaboose long before he could catch, saddle and mount a Peters horse, and be there, minutes also before he could arrive by running. But he ran, nonetheless—ran hard, jerking out his guns as he loped.

Barnum voluble, boastful, playing his part, was in the van when the yelling group came abreast the calaboose. Maltrane came down on to all-fours of his chair with a bang, almost jarring the rough-board seat to bits. He snapped erect and defiantly faced them.

"Now, what?" he snarled, poised on tip-toes.

Several men swung down, Barnum leading. Pardee was near at hand and Barnquist also came among the leaders.

Barnum, swaggering up in confident, braggadocio, thrust his face forward. Weaver was seen to edge toward the side of the jail where the lone window was. Barnum leered at Lars Maltrane.

"We wants that greaser, Lars," he belowed.

"You're whirlin' a big loop to-day, Barnum," Maltrane drawled, his voice acid, his eyes pin-pointed as the thin lids drew over them, and his thin lips tightened over his white teeth.

"You bet," Barnum cried happily, the effects of the last Thimble Belt drink not yet evaporated; "an' whatever, we want that greaser."

"I heard such talk yest'day," Lars grated. His eyes swept them all, and at the glance several of the more sober drew back, such was the power of his gaze to daunt those of lesser breed.

"You hear it agin now, an' we mean it," Pardee said.

"You, Alec, you keep back. I don't want to shoot you up."

"You goin' to shoot it out?" Barney asked. "No use. Some of us 'll get you, Lars. Give us th' Mexican."

"No; I'm first dep'ty o' San Felicé now, not your man, Barney. —You keep back, too."

Barnum, leering, winking, inched forward.

"Buck up, Barnum; show your spunk," Barney urged aloud. Then, in a low aside, "Jump him; he won't shoot. It's all fixed."

"You give us th' Mex, or we'll have t' shoot it out wit' you, Lars," Barnum insisted, inching still forward. His hands were not weaponward, so Maltrane merely smiled.

"Yiii-ipp!" some one in the crowd let off.

"You better do business; Pap Wickson an' some old-timers is comin'," Weaver, mounted, called.

"An' that Burlane duck, he's comin' on th' run. Mus' be they're feared we're after old Peters," another yelled.

"Gallagher, you stick it out if I go

down," Maltrane flung over his shoulder. "Slide inside an' bar th' door inside."

Gallagher started to obey. A flask from some one in the crowd came hurtling over, to fell Gallagher neatly. He flopped down, rolled over to the side of the door, and was silent. He had only inserted the key in the lock—not turned it.

At that, Maltrane, eyes on the bottle-thrower, reached toward his guns. Barney had his lips almost at Barnum's ear:

"Now, Barnum," from Barnquist, "it's all a bluff."

Barnum, low-crouched, sprang. So sudden was his move that it had all but succeeded, as Maltrane was watching for gun-play, for hands to stray weaponward, not for hand-to-hand work. But, as the yell over Barnum's move filled the air, as the dupe was within a foot, it seemed, of his intended victim, the gunman's quicksilver-like muscles had glided and writhed—and the gun spat—*once!*

Barnum spun around, upright, a neat hole in his forehead, on his face a look of intense surprise. He staggered toward Barnquist, his arm outstretched accusingly, a menacing forefinger waving, then fell prone.

"I told you I'd shoot it out," Maltrane said crisply. "Who next?"

The terror of the man's prowess daunted them for a moment. It was Pardee who recovered first and cried:

"Come on, boys; he's killed an Ox Bow man tryin' to keep a dirty greaser f'om bein' lynched."

They flung themselves from their horses and began to creep in. Maltrane, erect, his back to the jail door, snarled at them:

"Yes, c'm on, all Ox Bow and all Coppered Jack. I'll shoot it out with all."

A shout near by told of the approach of Burlane.

"Keep 'em off, Maltrane."

Shots of intimidation began to pop over Lars's head, the lead thudding into the door's lintel. Barnquist yelled—but did not shoot.

By now all Coppered Jack was swarming jailward, it seemed.

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

The Eighth Negative

By Arthur Tuckerman



THERE is, perhaps, no other metropolis in the world that can boast of such a vast ever-changing panorama of humanity as that presented by the streets of London at the height of the summer season. To Terry, a stranger in the city and a keen student of men, the spectacle was of absorbing interest as he sat gazing at Trafalgar Square through one of the great windows of the Empire Club early one June afternoon.

The United States Aerial Police had sent Terry to England to purchase certain aircraft for the newly-formed Pursuit Squadrons; the chief chose Terry for the mission because he had handled in his flying career more types of aircraft than any other American aviator. When his mission was completed, Terry found himself with a spare week on hand before he was due to report to the chief in Washington; at the urgent invitation of his English friend, Miles Wellsey, he accepted the comforts of the Empire Club for the balance of his stay in London. A fast mail dirigible would get him across the Atlantic in forty-eight hours when the time came for him to leave.

He had been sitting at the window for half an hour when Wellsey joined him.

"Terry," he began, "I've got a small favor to ask of you. When I was an undergrad at London Scientific there was a young Oriental in my class, a Mongol, by

the name of Tong Wang. A clever chap with a splendid education. He had an inventive turn of mind. The other day I met him in a restaurant and he told me he had just made a marvelous invention—a camera, I think it was, to be used on aircraft."

Terry showed interest by drawing his chair a little closer.

"Wang said he didn't know how to go about getting this invention of his accepted, and I couldn't help him as I know next to nothing about aviation, and I don't know a soul in the Air Ministry. However, when I met him again just outside the club, a moment ago, it occurred to me that you might be interested. If you'd like to see him, he's outside in the visitor's room."

"Certainly. I'd be glad to talk with him."

They went out together to the visitor's room where a young Oriental rose to greet them, introducing himself as Charles Tong Wang—he had added the Charles when he came to England to complete his very cosmopolitan education; he wore clothes of perfect cut and his hair was brushed smoothly back from his forehead like many a young European student.

His education was impressive, ranging from an engineering school in France to Boston Tech and back again to England; he spoke English with barely a trace of accent although at times he was prone to

use certain words with an unusual significance. He was, in fact, a product of the hypercivilization of the Orient, in spite of which Terry felt that behind his massive yellow forehead and shifting green eyes there was an abundant share of all the cunning and craft of Asia. His age might have been anywhere between twenty-five and thirty.

After the preliminary greetings he began to explain his invention to Terry.

"I have called it the Radio Camera," he said. "By a new process of utilizing Hertzian waves, they are impressed through a series of minute needles upon an auto-chromatic film treated with an emulsion of my own formula. In this manner the camera takes and automatically enlarges a picture to such a degree that you would be able to make an exposure, say, at three thousand feet, of an automobile traveling along a road; and, provided your focussing was accurate, you would be able to read the car's license number in the resulting photograph. Such a thing would be invaluable for the Aerial Police, would it not?"

Terry looked at the man sharply, but he appeared to be sincere.

"If what you say is not an exaggeration, Mr. Wang."

"I can prove it before you, Captain Terry. I would suggest that you attach my camera to a two-seated airplane, one fitted with telephonic communication between pilot and passenger. Then you and I would make a flight of, let us say, fifty miles, picking out any place or object you wished me to photograph. I would furnish you with the finished prints within twenty-four hours after the flight."

"That seems fair enough," said Terry. "There are plenty of two-seaters out at Hendon Air Park. I'll meet you there at eight to-morrow morning in front of the clubhouse, and you can bring your camera out with you. How does that suit?"

"Perfectly, captain."

Tong Wang bowed with ceremonious dignity and left the club.

The famous Hendon aerodrome, situated on the rolling plains of Middlesex, but a few miles out of London, has long

been the mecca of the flying world in the British Isles. Any fine afternoon a visitor will find a score of airplanes lined up on the emerald turf in front of the neat gray hangars which fringe two sides of the flying field, while the mechanics tune their motors and aviators gather to talk shop on the terrace of the trim white club house.

Here, promptly at eight o'clock the next morning, Terry met Tong Wang. The Mongol was carrying with him a peculiar conical-shaped object wrapped in a mass of colored insulated wires, and as they walked toward the aircraft Terry had selected for their flight, Wang explained how he proposed to attach his camera to the plane's fuselage at a point just below the passenger cockpit. When they reached the machine, Wang immediately set about his task. He worked slowly but steadily, and by nine o'clock he announced that the task was completed. From the shutter of the camera he laid a slender wire with a trigger release to the passenger's seat, so that he could make his exposures without leaning out of the airplane.

After adjusting the telephonic headgear, Terry mounted into the pilot's seat and Wang climbed into the passenger cockpit directly behind him. Terry gave the contact signal to his mechanic and the motor began to roar. An instant later they shot across the green turf and took the air. They climbed to three thousand feet before Terry swung his stick over and headed toward London.

"How many pictures does your film take?" he asked Wang over the telephone.

"Eight, captain. I think I will try three or four over London, first."

"Good. After that, we'll run down to the coast at Brighton; that will take us about forty minutes each way."

There was a thin saffron haze in the morning sky as they approached the outskirts of London. Far below them, the city seemed but a blurred mass of gray and black roofs, cut here and there by the straight lines of the larger thoroughfares. Presently, Hyde Park appeared out of the mist, a great irregular patch of emerald green slashed through the middle by the silver streak of the Serpentine. They

veered southward over the Mall and saw the distant Thames sparkling in the morning sunlight. Wang took several pictures as they flew over the city.

They crossed over the Thames just south of Westminster Bridge, where Wang made another exposure, and then headed over the seemingly endless suburbs of southern London. They flew past Streatham with its rows and rows of neat red-roofed cottages and over the dazzling glass dome of the Crystal Palace.

In the murky yellow haze above Croydon, with its forest of slender factory chimneys and tangled network of railway lines, they passed by the observation balloon marking the beginning of the London-Paris aerial mail route. Soon they left the smoke of the city far behind and were flying over the green fields of Sussex.

Presently, Terry saw far below them a tiny village, through which ran the chalk-white streak of a motor road paralleled by the twin tracks of the Brighton Railway. A typical English hamlet consisting of a double row of trim little cottages bordering the road and a parish church with a squat Norman tower rising from the center of a tiny graveyard. As they flew over the village Terry ascertained its name from the roller-map mounted in the cockpit before him—Fernham Cross.

Two miles south of the village they approached a great country estate, a place of noble old elm trees and vast rolling lawns; in the midst of the estate stood a low, rambling Elizabethan mansion with sharply pointed gables and ivy-splashed walls.

Terry suddenly heard Wang's voice over the telephone.

"Captain, will you circle over this place once while I focus my camera? I think that it will make a good subject for my last picture."

As they flew over the house, three thousand feet below them, Terry turned his head slightly and saw Tong Wang pull the trigger of his camera.

Still heading southward they sighted the coast line a few minutes later; at the height they were traveling it seemed to them like a mere sheering-off of the gray-green landscape into a sheen of flickering silver that

dazzled their eyes. Over the town of Brighton, Terry circled sharply and then headed back toward London.

According to his arrangement with Tong Wang, Terry presented himself at ten o'clock the next morning at the front door of 165-A Maida Vale, a house of dingy but respectable mid-Victorian appearance, and was ushered by the maid into the drawing-room. Wang appeared almost immediately and greeted him with enthusiasm.

"Come into my dark-room," he said, "I have some excellent results to show you."

Terry followed him to the back of the house. They passed through a small conservatory filled with geraniums and out into a yard. Here Wang had constructed his dark-room, a small wooden hut with a galvanized-iron roof. The Mongol excused himself a moment and entered the dark-room, reappearing an instant later, with a number of still-wet prints in his hands; one by one he gave them to Terry.

"I have been washing them," he explained. "You came a little earlier than I expected."

There were eight pictures in all, two of Hyde Park, one of Westminster Abbey, two of Westminster Bridge, two of Croydon and one of the Crystal Palace. Terry marveled at their intricate detail; it was almost unbelievable that these pictures had been taken from an airplane four thousand feet or so above the earth.

The first picture of Westminster Bridge particularly took his fancy. It had been snapped just as they crossed over the Thames, and so powerful was the camera that it photographed only a small section of the bridge—about a hundred feet—and this was depicted in minute detail. There was a motor omnibus in the picture, and Terry could read the destination signs upon it; even the faces of the passengers on the upper deck of the omnibus were distinguishable. He glanced at the second picture Wang had taken of the bridge and it appeared to him to be almost exactly the same as the first.

He gave voice to his thoughts.

"I wonder why you took two pictures of the same subject?"

"I took two to make sure." Wang replied a trifle nervously.

"It was such a good subject."

When Terry had completed his inspection of the pictures, he was enthusiastic over Wang's invention.

"They are wonderful," he said, "I think I can promise you that your invention will be purchased by the United States Aerial Police."

Tong Wang smiled with pleasure, but as he opened the door of the conservatory to show his visitor out, Terry somehow got the impression that he was anxious to get rid of him. A sudden thought struck him.

"By the way, Wang. I thought you took a view of that big estate near Fernham Cross, on the way to Brighton. I remember you said you were going to use your last negative—the eighth—on it. In fact, I believe I saw you pull your trigger as we flew over the house."

To his amazement, Wang seemed momentarily speechless. When he did reply, it was in a hesitating stammering fashion.

"Why—why, yes, captain. I remember the incident, now that you recall it. I did not take a picture after all, because I found I had made a mistake and did not have any film left after all."

He pointed eagerly to the pictures in Terry's hand.

"You see you have all the pictures there—eight of them."

"I understand," said Terry quietly. "And now, if I may have these prints, I will submit them to my chief in America, by mail, to-night."

They shook hands, and Terry left the house. Wang closed the door after him.

Terry had a lunch appointment that day with Wellsey. He hailed a taxi and directed the chauffeur to the Empire Club.

Wellsey was one of those lanky ruddy-faced English sportsmen who spend much of their lives knocking about in the odd corners of the world, and who have incidentally acquired a considerable knowledge of men and their ways while so doing. When Terry met him in the club dining-room, he found him in a considerable state of agitation; he was sitting at a table reading an afternoon paper.

"Extraordinary thing just happened," he remarked as Terry sat down opposite him. "Did you ever hear of Viscount Fallowsmith? A noble old chap. Gave lots of coin to charity. Every one liked him. He was years in the Indian Civil Service. Poor old chap."

"I've often heard of him. What's happened to him?"

"Murdered. At the age of eighty! Found dead, shot in the heart, on the terrace of his home. Nobody can think who did it as he is supposed to have had no enemies. He lived alone with his housekeeper and servants."

"Where is his home?"

Terry's detective instincts, always latent, were aroused at this new mystery.

"Elm Hill. Topping old place on the Brighton road, a couple of miles south of a village called Fernham Cross. You wouldn't know the place."

Fernham Cross. The name went through Terry's mind like a flash.

"I do know it! I flew over the estate yesterday morning on the way to Brighton. It's just east of the railroad line and has great sloping lawns."

"That's it. Jove! What a coincidence!"

They passed on to other topics, and after lunch Terry showed his friend the photographs Tong Wang had taken. For a long time Wellsey studied the two pictures of Westminster Bridge. Then he turned to Terry with a puzzled look on his face.

"Strange that Wang took two pictures of the bridge almost exactly alike, especially when he only had eight to take. And it seems that, moving at such great speed as you were, both pictures appear to have been taken from exactly the same angle!"

"I showed them to you just to see whether you'd say that!" cried Terry. "The same thing occurred to me."

He produced a magnifying glass from his pocket and began to examine the prints minutely. Suddenly he gave an exclamation.

"That's funny, too."

He showed Wellsey a tiny hair-line, shaped like the letter s, that spread for about a half an inch across the sky in the

left-hand corner of the first picture. Then he placed the second picture under the glass and pointed to a similar line in the same position. Then he put the two prints carefully away in his pocket-book.

"I've studied photography for several years," he remarked to Wellsey. "I know that kind of a defect well. It is a common thing on roll films; it is caused by a grain of dirt, or some gritty substance, which has collected on the rollers of the camera over which the tightly-wound film passes. It proves conclusively that the two prints were made from the same negative. For some reason, Mr. Tong Wang wants to conceal from me the eighth exposure he made on his flight with me; he therefore tried to fool me by making these duplicates and pretending that he took two pictures of Westminster Bridge."

"I don't see—" began Wellsey, rubbing his chin thoughtfully, and then suddenly saw daylight. "Good Lord! You don't mean it's in connection with Elm Hill?"

"It's mere supposition—" Terry began. He was interrupted by the cry of a newsboy in the street outside the window near which they were seated.

"Extree! Extree! All about the Fallowsmith Murder! Startlin' new evvy-dince!"

Terry ran out and purchased a copy of the paper. A paragraph in the stop-press column held him thunderstruck.

FALLOWSMITH MURDER

New Evidence by a Butcher's Boy

FERNHAM CROSS, 11 A.M., Tuesday.—An important piece of evidence was given to the local police this morning, when Joseph Briggs, a fifteen-year-old lad in the employ of a Croydon butcher, stated that he was passing Elm Hill at eleven o'clock yesterday morning when he heard a revolver shot. Briggs stated that he was so interested in watching a large airplane passing over the estate at the time that he forgot all about the shot until he read of the murder in to-day's newspapers. Briggs said that the airplane bore the number H56 on its lower plane.

"H56 was the number of our plane yesterday," said Terry, as he handed the newspaper to Wellsey. "All of this goes to prove that Wang and I flew over Elm Hill at the very moment the murder was com-

mitted. Wellsey, old man, I've got to get that eighth negative from Tong Wang."

The coroner's jury in the Fallowsmith case announced a verdict of "Murder by a person or persons unknown," and as suspicion could not be fastened on any one no arrests were made. Terry decided to work upon the case in his own way. He felt sure that the missing negative concerned the murder in some way, but as he had no proof of this he decided to say nothing to the authorities about the matter. As a captain in the Aerial Police of the United States he felt he could legitimately work on the case provided he revealed all he knew to Scotland Yard as soon as he obtained any evidence of value.

Late that night he boarded a motor omnibus and went to Maida Vale. When he reached the beginning of the block where Tong Wang's lodgings were situated, he turned down a narrow alley; fifty yards brought him to a similar alley running parallel to Maida Vale. It was a narrow poorly-lighted place, and along the walls on either side were the back doors of the houses on Maida Vale and the street next to it. With the aid of his pocket lamp, Terry made his way past seven of these doors and stopped at the eighth, on which was painted the number 165A—the rear entrance of the lodging-house where Tong Wang lived.

He placed his hand upon the latch and opened the door softly. As he had surmised, it led into the yard at the back of the small conservatory through which he had passed that morning. In the corner of the yard he saw Wang's dark-room and he noted with particular interest that its single red window was illuminated. It appeared that Wang was working in his dark-room very late that night, and this fact gave Terry a peculiar thrill of anticipation. Things would begin to happen very soon.

He walked swiftly to the dark-room door and tried the handle; the door opened with slight pressure. Under the red light of the small lamp in the corner of the room he saw Wang carefully mixing some chemicals.

"Good evening!" said Terry with studied cheerfulness.

Tong Wang wheeled round sharply and eyed him with an insolent stare.

"I think you intrude, captain," he said smoothly. "A man's house is his own. His guests are expected to announce themselves before entering."

Terry made a swift survey of the dark-room. On the counter he saw a pair of developing dishes and a measuring rod; in the corner of the room he noticed an enlarging lantern, and tacked upon the wall a sheet of opaque white material such as photographers use to focus their enlarging apparatus upon, preliminary to making an enlargement. None of these things interested him particularly.

"Let's get down to business, Wang," he said sharply. "I'm here to get that eighth negative from you. You're bluff won't go. I've got positive proof that those two snapshots of Westminster Bridge are from the same negative."

Wang eyed him inscrutably.

"I don't understand the cause for your rudeness," he remarked suavely. "There is no reason to excite yourself. I have the negative you refer to in this drawer."

He indicated a small drawer beneath the counter.

"I developed the negative yesterday, and I admit I withheld it from you. But before I give it to you I would like to know by what authority you demand it."

For a moment Terry was nonplused by this unexpected assent to his demand.

"If you want to sell your camera to the Aerial Police it's only reasonable that you show me all the pictures you took on that flight."

Wang seemed to realize the logic of this answer. His next remark left Terry speechless with surprise.

"I suppose," he said casually, "that you have some absurd idea that there is evidence in the negative relating to the Fallo-Smith murder. I will show you how wrong you are."

He opened the drawer and handed Terry a negative.

"There it is. Now, perhaps, you will see why I didn't want you to have it!"

Terry examined the negative under the red rays of the lamp. It was absolutely blank.

In a slightly apologetic tone Wang continued:

"My last exposure, you see, was a failure. For some reason the camera-shutter failed to work. When I discovered this it was natural enough that I didn't want you to learn of it, because I was very anxious to sell my patent to you. I knew that this unfortunate accident might prejudice you against my invention. I therefore resorted to a foolish trick, which failed, on account of your own cleverness."

Terry stared at the blank film for a long time, and then thrust it mechanically into his pocket. His whole theory had fallen down like a pack of cards upon him.

"I'm sorry, Wang, but all this wouldn't have happened if you hadn't tried to trick me. Good night."

With his hand upon the door-knob, he glanced for the last time around the dark room. His eye fell upon the enlarging lantern for the second time that evening, and a sudden inspiration came to him; one of those inspirations to which he owed much of his success as an investigator of crime. Carelessly he stretched forth a hand toward the electric-light switch at the base of the apparatus.

"That's a fine enlarging lantern," he remarked. "I'm interested in enlarging work myself. Let's see what kind of a light you use—"

It was only a hazardous guess on Terry's part, but it was a shot that hit the bull's-eye. The ruse worked. Like a madman Wang leaped upon him, his eyes ablaze with anger.

"Curse you! Leave my apparatus alone, you damned meddling Yankee!"

In a frenzy of rage he fell upon Terry's throat with his lean, yellow fingers. But Terry smiled coolly as he pressed his Colt automatic against the Mongol's ribs. He was always prepared for this kind of emergency.

Wang felt the weapon against his chest and released his hold, cursing softly.

"I'm going to turn on the light in that lantern," said Terry, as he backed Wang

against the wall. "Just out of sheer curiosity to see what negative you were about to enlarge when I entered this room."

Wang realized that he had been outwitted. He stood cringing against the wall muttering guttural sounds as Terry, still covering him with his automatic, stretched forth his hand and switched on the light in the enlarger. Instantly the image of the negative which Terry had guessed was within it was projected on the white sheet upon the opposite wall of the room, magnified many times, but clear cut as a magic-lantern view.

Terry, expectant as he was of something strange, gave a gasp of surprise, for the picture on the screen showed the terrace in front of Viscount Fallsomsmith's home at Elm Hill. On the terrace, in a large arm-chair, an old man was seated, reading a book. Terry instantly recognized him as the viscount—he had seen many pictures of the dead nobleman in the newspapers.

In the very corner of the picture, partly hidden from view by a thick growth of shrubbery at the base of the terrace, was the figure of a man creeping toward the viscount on hands and knees. In his right hand he carried a revolver. His features—clearly shown—were those of an Oriental, of the same race as Tong Wang.

The authorities at Scotland Yard were jubilant over Terry's discovery. Wang maintained a stubborn silence at first, but with the realization that the photograph gave away much of the secret, he made a full and surprising confession.

He swore that he had no idea that the murder was to take place; he even denied that he had known of the existence of Fallsomsmith before the murder. He took a chance photograph of Elm Hill, and when he developed it he discovered to his surprise that the picture portrayed the murder of the old nobleman which he had read about in the newspapers. A close inspection of the negative under a powerful magnifying-glass revealed, to his horror, that the murderer was Kang Fu, a noted Mongol leader, a sworn enemy of the white races, and the head of a number of Oriental societies, of which Wang was a member.

Wang knew that to reveal this evidence to the police would mean probable death to himself from Kang Fu's agents, and he determined to hide the negative from Terry, or any one else for that matter. He added that on the night Terry paid his surprise visit to the dark room he had just placed the negative in his enlarging lantern, out of sheer curiosity to see an enlarged projection of the scene; he had no intention of making an enlarged print of the negative, and thus burden himself with further incriminating matter, but by a whim of fate Terry had entered the dark room just as he was about to make the experiment.

As time went on, more and more evidence was gathered. The police captured Kang Fu, long under their suspicion for other crimes, in a cellar beneath a disreputable den near the East Indian docks, where he was planning an immediate escape from England.

Kang Fu, it turned out, had served a long sentence for inciting certain Punjabi tribes to rebellion, and the sentence had been dictated by Fallsomsmith, then a judge in the Indian courts. Actuated by sheer revenge, Kang Fu had come to England upon his release, ten years later, to slay the man who had sentenced him.

Tong Wang was held in jail for many weeks as a witness under suspicion, a light fate compared with that of Kang Fu, who paid the full penalty. Terry saw Wang for a few minutes in jail just before he left for New York to assure him that he would be paid for his invention which the Aerial Police had decided to purchase. But Wang evinced no sign of pleasure, and eyed Terry with a cool, inscrutable stare.

"This man," he said to his jailer in a puzzled tone, after Terry had gone, "has defeated me and caused me to be cast in an accursed prison-house. And yet he comes, with a smile upon his face, to offer me gold for my invention when I am freed, although he could well steal it from me and not suffer thereby. The Western mind is not to be fathomed in its ways; he must be a fool."

"I should say that was a matter depending on one's point of view," the jailer replied mildly.

Good References

By E. J. Rath

Author of "Elope If You Must," "Once Again," "Too Much Efficiency," etc.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE ROAD TO HOME.

THE motor-cycle was behaving excellently. As Pete began to get the feel of his steed he experimented a bit with the throttle, twisting the hand grip that controlled it farther and farther, until the machine responded with a burst of speed that alarmed the lady in the bathtub. She clung to the edges of the car and shut her eyes against the wind, bracing her feet with the instinctive effort of trying to apply brakes.

Pete knew only in a general way the direction of the main road, which he was seeking. When they emerged from the private grounds of the gentleman who owned the last bottle, he turned the car in what seemed to be the proper course and raced along a road that was bordered with villas. It ended at a crossroad, where he was forced to make a change of direction. Then, for the next five minutes, he was alternately covering short stretches of straightaway and turning corners. The residential section devoted to summer dwellers seemed to Pete to have been provided with streets that were designed on the plan of a labyrinth. It baffled escape.

They passed people on walks and cars in the roadways, passed them at a nervous speed. Mary Wayne was huddled as low in the bathtub as she could squeeze herself, but Pete was astride a saddle in the open, and he had an annoying sense of conspicuousity. He doubted if the ordinary citizen

of Larchmont would accept his pink-striped pajamas with the complete equanimity that had characterized his late host. The silk garments wrapped themselves tightly around his shins, but streamed out in the rear like pennants in a gale. The rush of air sculptured his high-priced haberdashery until he resembled the Winged Victory of Samothrace.

Mary reached both hands to her head with a little cry, but too late. The picture hat had been snatched by a gust and went sailing into a hedge.

"Can't stop!" he yelled. "Mine went long ago."

She shook her head to signify that she did not want him to stop.

Still the labyrinth held them. One of its trick passages brought them into a cul de sac, where he was forced to slow down and turn in his tracks. A man on the sidewalk shouted at him, but Pete did not answer. Mary huddled closer in her refuge.

They turned another corner and came to a dead stop, with a screeching of brakes, in order to avoid collision with a touring-car approaching in the opposite direction. The touring-car also stopped. Its driver uttered an exclamation, and an instant afterward switched on a spotlight. Mary shrieked as the merciless beam fell upon her. Somebody in the car tittered.

"When did they turn the club dance into a masquerade?" asked a voice.

"Ages ago," answered Pete promptly. "Swing your car; you're on the wrong side of the road."

This story began in the All-Story Weekly for June 12.

There was more laughter; the spotlight still held its victims.

"He looks like the Sultan of Sulu," commented the voice behind the spotlight.

"Running away with Marie Antoinette," said a second voice.

And then, in a sharp, feminine treble:

"Jack, look at that thing on her shoulders! Why, it's just exactly like my—"

Mary hid her face and shuddered. Pete slipped in the clutch and made a reckless *détour* that came within an ace of landing the side-car in a ditch. They shot away again with an echo of excited voices in their ears.

"We've got to get out of here quick!" shouted Pete. "I think they've got our number."

Mary knew it to a certainty. No woman who owned the piece of lingerie that graced her shoulders would ever fail to recognize it.

"Try the road to the left," she urged, as she looked back. "I think they're turning the car around."

He acted on the suggestion, for want of anything better, and shot into a new road that possessed the grateful advantage of poorer illumination. Fear of pursuit caused him to forsake it after a few hundred yards, and after that he spent several minutes dodging into one street after another, until he felt that the touring-car must have abandoned pursuit. Every time they passed a street light he accelerated speed, regardless of all considerations save a resolve not to linger in the illuminated places.

Mary was grim. She had abandoned hope of ever escaping from the hated town: she felt that she was the helpless prisoner of a nightmare, unable to loose the invisible shackles. They would either be dashed to pieces or fall afoul of the law, and between these alternatives she attempted to make no choice; one was as unhappy as the other. Yet during all this maddening and futile whirl she found a corner of her mind sufficiently detached from imminent perils to give its entire attention to the hating of Bill Marshall. He, and he alone, had done this thing, she told herself over and over again. Oh, how she hated him!

And then came sudden liberation from the labyrinth. They shot out of a narrow lane upon what was unmistakably the main road, missed a juggernaut limousine by inches, careened sickeningly as their machine straightened out in the direction of the city, and then gathered speed to put behind them forever the place of their undoing.

"We're all clear, now," he called, bending his head toward her. "Making out all right?"

"Go on!" was her only answer.

There was but one goal in the mind of Pete Stearns—the Marshall mansion in lower Fifth Avenue. It was of no avail to stop short of that; they had no money, no friends, no spare wardrobe elsewhere. A return to Larchmont was not for an instant to be considered. Probably the Sunshine was back in the harbor, looking for them. Well, let Bill Marshall look—and then worry when he did not find them. The same thought was in the mind of Mary Wayne; she prayed that Bill might now be in a frenzy of fright and anxiety.

In a general way, Pete knew the main road; if he had not, the volume of traffic easily served as a guide. They passed anywhere from a dozen to twenty cars every mile, and inasmuch as speed was their one available refuge from curious eyes, Pete employed it. It would have been better for peace of mind to make their way to the city by sequestered roads, but he did not know all the byways and turnings of the Westchester highway system, and there was the risk of getting lost in unfamiliar paths. The labyrinth of Larchmont had been a sufficient lesson in that.

The evening was warm, yet Pete found that two sets of silken pajamas were none too much for comfort, for the motor-cycle created its own little gale. Mary sat crouched in her lingerie, trying desperately to keep everything in place, yet discovering every little while that a homeward-bound pennant of filmy stuff was whipping the air half a dozen feet behind her.

New Rochelle flew past them in a blur of light. Pelham Manor came and went in a flash. Mount Vernon was little more than a brief burst of illumination.

"Safety first," whispered Pete to himself. "That means speed."

They were crossing the Harlem, still at a pace that was barred by all law save the primitive one to which alone they held allegiance—self-preservation. Riverside Drive! Should they risk it or seek less traveled paths?

"Stick to the Drive," urged the guiding spirit.

Pete stuck to it. Better to come to grief boldly on the highway of pleasure and fashion than to meet disaster ignominiously along some furtive route. But even the desperate urge of speed could not be completely satisfied now. There was the summer evening's traffic to be considered, and often it slowed them to a maddeningly moderate pace.

Mary was aware of the fact that they were not without observers. With another driver she felt that her own costume would have escaped notice; she was making herself as small as possible, wrapped tightly in her raiment. But Pete Stearns, astride the saddle, flaunted himself. He could not help it. The coat of purple and green shone in the city's glare like the plumage of a peacock. As for the trousers striped in salmon pink, they shrieked like a siren.

People in cars stared and turned to stare again. People atop the buses gesticulated and waved. People on the sidewalks halted in their tracks and blinked. A million eyes, it seemed to Mary, were boring into her from all sides. Oh, wait till she laid hands on Bill Marshall!

Fifth Avenue! The traffic increased; the pace slackened perforce. Mary gripped the edges of the car and closed her eyes. Why had they risked it? Why hadn't she urged him to seek a hiding place until long past midnight? Too late now. The machine came to a stop. She opened her eyes long enough to photograph the awful picture on her mind.

Fifth Avenue and Forty-Second Street—with the east and west traffic holding the right of way! A bus towered above them on the curb side. A millionaire touring-car flanked them on the left. Ahead were most of the automobiles in the world; of that she was certain. She did not dare to

look behind. Her eyes were shut again, but her ears were open. She could hear voices, laughter, a screeching of horns. Somebody flung a question; a dozen followed. And Pete Stearns was flinging answers! Oh, why didn't he keep still?

The traffic moved again, and with it the little chariot that had become their ark of preservation. Mary felt it bumping across the tracks on Forty-Second Street. Somebody shouted; she knew without looking that it was a policeman. There was a shrill whistle. The motor-cycle plunged forward.

"Hold fast!" yelled Pete, bending over. "That guy wants us, but he'll have to step some. No more traffic stops for mine!"

Just what they did after that Mary never knew. Nor was Pete himself particularly clear. They lurched, swayed, dodged; they scraped mudguards right and left; they shot behind, in front of, and around automobiles that were stupidly content to keep within the law; they scattered pedestrians; they ran past traffic semaphores that were set against them; they mocked cross-town trolleys by dashing across their paths; and all this to a constant din of shouting people and piercing police whistles.

The home of Miss Caroline Marshall stood on a corner, and the entrance to the garden and stable yard in the rear was on the side street. As Pete swerved from the avenue, Mary opened her eyes again and gasped incredulously. They were home!

He had leaped from the saddle, crossed the sidewalk, tried the tall, iron gate that barred the driveway and was back again before she could move her cramped body from the position into which she had twisted it.

"Gate's locked!" he cried. "We haven't any keys. Got to climb the wall. Hurry!"

Saying which, he seized her by an arm and dragged her out of the little bath-tub. The brick wall that flanked the Marshall garden on the street side stood about seven feet in height. Pete reached for the top, chinned himself, and squirmed astride it.

"Gimme your hands!"

Mary lifted them, felt them seized, and found herself slowly rising from the sidewalk. For Bill Marshall she would have

been a feather; for Pete Stearns she was a burden. He gritted his teeth and lifted until his muscles cracked. Inch by inch he raised her. Mary tried to dig her toes into the bricks, but they offered no foothold; all she accomplished was to tangle her feet in the lingerie. Two people across the street stopped to stare. Pete sighted them and gave another grim hoist.

Then victory. She was sitting on top of the wall, swinging her feet on the garden side, as he leaped down into a flower-bed and reached for her.

"Oh! The rose-bushes!" she cried, as he caught her and deposited her in the flower-bed.

"Damn the roses!"

"But it's me! The thorns!"

"Forget it."

Some of her raiment was clinging to Aunt Caroline's treasured plants as she stepped painfully out on the grass.

"Now to get into the house," he said briskly. "We'll have to break in. There isn't a soul home."

"Thank goodness," murmured Mary.

The house was dark, but never had Mary seen it when it looked so friendly and sheltering. The nightmare was over. They were really home!

Pete ran to the kitchen entrance. Locked, and undoubtedly the stout bar on the inside was also in place. It was not worth while to try the window-catches, for even if he were able to raise a sash there were stout steel bars through which they could not pass. He went to the cellar entrance, turned the knob in the door, and threw his weight against it. Nothing budged.

He stepped back on the lawn and made a survey of the rear elevation of the house. All of the windows that lacked bars were beyond his reach or that of any ordinary climber. If he could find a ladder— He ran back to the stable, but discovered it to be as stoutly resistant to intrusion as the house itself.

Mary beckoned to him.

"I should think you could climb up on the wall," she said, pointing, "right where it joins the house, and then make a jump for that nearest window."

Pete looked at her severely.

"Do you think I'm a trapeze performer? Do you want me to break a leg?"

Mary measured the jump with her eye.

"Mr. Marshall could do it," she said.

"Rot!"

"But he could. And he'd be willing to try, too."

Pete's glance had turned into a glare.

"There's gratitude for you! That's a fine thing to throw up in my face. Just because I'm not an overgrown brute you think it's a lot of fun to stand there making dares."

"If you think I'm having any fun," she said sharply, "you're tremendously wrong. I'm all stiff and scratched up from those rose-thorns—and I'm hungry. And thirsty! And Mr. Marshall may be large—but he is not an overgrown brute."

"Oh, that's it, is it? You're singing another tune. The last time you mentioned him it was in connection with murder, I think."

"Never mind. He could get in that window, just the same."

Pete eyed her for an instant, then walked toward the garden wall.

"Wait till I'm lying crushed at your feet," he said bitterly. "You're driving me to suicide."

"Pooh!" said Mary.

He climbed the wall and tested his reach in the direction of the window. The sill was at least a foot beyond the tips of his fingers.

"Jump for it," she said from below. "It looks easy."

"Does it?" he said scornfully. "You ought to see it from here."

"I can see it perfectly well. I could do it myself."

Pete Stearns marveled. Why had she turned on him thus? Had he not been playing the hero since mid-afternoon? Had he not brought her out of the jaws of Larchmont and into the sanctuary of Aunt Caroline's back yard? And now she taunted him, mocked him, dared him to take a senseless hazard.

"Are you going to stand on that wall all night?" she demanded. "Everybody in the street can see you."

He turned and faced the window desperately. He stepped back a pace and viewed it again. He considered the relative advantages of a standing or a running jump and decided upon the former. He crouched. He straightened and again measured the distance with his eye.

"Well?" asked the pitiless voice from below.

"Oh, give me a chance to figure it out," he retorted. "Stop staring at me. You make me nervous."

So Mary looked away. She even walked away. Her steps carried her to an asphalt driveway, where she paused, staring down at a metal disk that lay directly in front of her. It was about two feet in diameter, and fitted closely into an iron rim that was embedded in the pavement. She recognized the thing instantly. It was the cover of the coal hole. Aunt Caroline had objected to coal wagons unloading at her curb; and being the possessor of a back yard, into which wagons could be driven, she had built a chute from that point directly into the bins. Mary remembered that she had seen ton after ton of coal poured down that very hole.

She turned and glanced toward the adventurer on the wall. He was still staring up at the window, now crouching, now standing erect, now advancing, now retreating, but never leaping. With an exclamation of disdain, she stooped and laid hold of the cover of the coal chute.

As she tugged at the handle it moved. She applied both hands to the task. The disk came out of its rim and she dragged it clear of the aperture. She glanced downward into the depths. She might as well have closed her eyes, for the darkness within that coal chute was total. It was spooky. Yet her common sense told her that there was nothing spooky about it; it was merely a coal chute that sloped at an easy angle into a cellar bin.

She looked again to see what progress Pete had made; she could not observe that he had made any. He was still standing on top of the wall, making calculations and having visions of a little white cot in an emergency ward.

"He's afraid," she said. "I'm not!"

But she was, despite the brave boast—she was dreadfully afraid. Yet fear did not prevent her from sitting down and letting her feet dangle into the hole. Of course, she could summon Pete Stearns and bid him plunge into the Stygian shaft. But she scorned that; she was minded to show him what a little woman could do.

He was still fiddling on top of the wall when she glanced up.

"Oh, don't bother," she called. "If you're so afraid—"

"I'm not! I'm just taking precautions. If you'll leave me alone a minute—"

"I'm tired of waiting. You don't seem to be able to make up what you call your mind."

"If you'd stop talking to me—"

He turned to glare down at her.

Zip!

She was gone. He blinked rapidly and stared again. What— How— He rubbed his eyes. Only an instant before she was there; she was sitting in the middle of the driveway. Her white figure had been perfectly distinct; there could not be a possible doubt about it. And then the earth swallowed her!

Hastily he scrambled down from the top of the wall and ran across the yard. The open coal chute yawned at his feet. He stooped and listened. There was no sound. He called into the depths. There was no answer.

"The son of a gun!" he muttered in an awed whisper.

He was still standing there, dully contemplating the hole in the earth, when a flicker of light caused him to lift his head. She was in the kitchen. He heard the lifting of the bar and the turning of the key in the lock, followed by a rattle of bolts. As he approached the door it opened.

Mary Wayne looked as weird as the witch of Endor. Her white robes were streaked with black. Her face was smeared with coal dust; her hands, her hair. Out of a sooty countenance gleamed two dangerous gray eyes.

"You coward!" she said. "See what you've done!"

"But if you'd waited—"

"You've just made me ruin the loveliest

things I ever wore in all my life. Look at this peignoir. It's ripped, it's torn, it's— Oh, don't stand there! I'll slam the door in a second, and then you can stay out or else come in by way of the coal bin."

Pete entered meekly and closed the door behind him. Single file they mounted the back stairs that led to the servants' quarters.

CHAPTER XXIII.

HOME.

PETE STEARNS, dressed once more like a citizen of the United States, descended again to the lower floor by the back stairs and began a search of the pantry. He foraged some crackers, a jar of cheese, and some potted tongue, and with these he returned to the second floor, where he found the social secretary awaiting him in the sun parlor. Mary Wayne was a normal person again. The soot of the coal chute had disappeared, as well as the fragile vestments; she had not taken her entire wardrobe aboard the yacht.

Pete was still grumbling over her treatment of him. It was ungenerous, unfair, he contended; she was coldly ignoring all his prowess of the afternoon and evening and dwelling only upon a single incident in which he felt entirely justified in exercising reasonable precaution.

"I'd have gone down the coal chute myself if you'd only waited a minute," he said. "You didn't give me a fair chance."

"I notice you didn't follow me," she answered contemptuously. "You waited for me to find my way out of the cellar and open the kitchen door."

"Well, what was the use—"

"Please open that can of tongue. Do you want me to die of hunger?"

He shrugged gloomily and attacked the can. Mary picked up the telephone instrument and called for a number. Presently she was talking.

"Send Miss Norcross to the telephone."

Pete repressed a start and worked steadily with the can-opener. But his ears were alert. As for Mary, she appeared to have forgotten his presence.

"Oh, Nell; is that you? This is Mary talking. No; I'm not in Larchmont. I'm *home*. Oh, yes; we were there. But something awful happened. I want you to come around here right away. I've just got to talk to you; I need your advice. What? No; I can't tell you about it over the phone; it would take too long. Please hurry; it's important. I—I want your moral support. I'm afraid the beginning of the end is here, and you just can't desert me now. You've *got* to come. All right. Take a taxi, if you can find one. But hurry, anyhow."

As she replaced the receiver Pete Stearns was facing her. And then she remembered. A slow flush came into her cheeks.

"I've been guessing for a long time that there was something queer about you," he observed, with a cynical smile. "So it's 'Miss Norcross' at the other end of the wire, is it? And who are you?"

"You had no business to listen to a conversation," she said angrily.

"Strikes me it was stupid of you to forget I was here, Miss Norcross—Wayne—or whoever you are."

He eyed her maliciously.

"So it's the beginning of the end, is it? Well, let me in on it."

Mary returned his glance defiantly.

"I have nothing to say to *you*," she said. "It isn't any of your business."

"But, of course, you don't deny you're an impostor?"

"Well, if it comes to being an impostor, Mr. Valet, I don't believe you'll stand very much investigating."

Pete regarded her calmly.

"Let's form an alliance," he suggested.

"An alliance of what? Fraud?"

"Something like that. I see you confess it."

"I confess nothing," she retorted hotly. "And I don't care for an alliance."

"It might pay," he said, thoughtfully. "If we keep up the teamwork I believe we can get by yet. Between my ingenuity and your references—"

"Stop!"

Mary was shuddering at the allusion to references. Not only the thing itself, but the very word, had become hateful.

"Don't talk to me," she ordered. "I won't discuss anything with you."

Pete shrugged and pushed a plate of crackers and cheese toward her.

"Let's talk about your friend, anyhow," he suggested.

Mary rose to her feet abruptly and ran toward the door that opened into the hall. She opened it half-way and stood there, listening. Then she turned and beckoned mysteriously. When he had joined her she whispered:

"I thought I heard something—downstairs. Listen."

For half a minute neither spoke.

"Sounds like somebody talking," he said, in a low voice. "But it seems far away. Maybe it's out in the street."

She shook her head.

"I'm positive it's in this house. It's down-stairs. There! Hear it?"

He nodded.

"Maybe Aunt Caroline and the rest of 'em have come home again," he suggested.

"No; it's a man's voice, but it's a strange one. It's—burglars!"

"It might be, of course," he assented.

"Let's telephone for the police. Hurry!"

"No. Let's investigate first. We can telephone afterward."

He stepped softly out into the hall and started toward the front of the house. Mary seized his arm.

"Isn't there a pistol—or something—that we could take?" she whispered, nervously.

"Don't believe there's a gun in the house. Bill doesn't own one—except a shotgun."

"Get it."

He tiptoed toward Bill's room and reappeared with a double-barreled weapon, the mere sight of which gave Mary a thrill of reassurance. It was unloaded, but Pete did not disclose that fact.

In single file, with Pete leading, they moved cautiously along the hall in the direction of the main staircase. At the top of the flight they paused. There was a light burning in the lower hall. Mary pinched him and pointed at it.

"I'm going back to telephone the police," she said.

"Not yet. Wait!"

He started gingerly down the staircase, the shotgun thrust boldly forward in order not to betray its utter unpreparedness. Mary hesitated, but when he had descended half a dozen steps she followed, curiosity overwhelming her.

They heard the voice again, more clearly now:

"Understand, now: no noise. If we make a racket we'll have the bulls here. The first man makes a noise gets what's comin' to him."

Pete and the girl exchanged glances.

"A whole gang of them!" she said, in a frightened whisper.

Pete placed his finger against his lips and descended half a dozen steps more. She crept along behind him, clinging to the banisters.

The Marshall mansion was of old-fashioned construction. Over many of the doors there were transoms. This was true of the door that separated the library from the lower hall. As the pair of adventurers halted again and leaned stealthily over the railing they could see that there was a light in the library. The door was closed, but the transom stood open nearly to its full width.

Through the transom they could view a rectangular section of the library floor. Ordinarily, from where they stood, a table would have been visible, a chair or two, and a rug. But now table, chairs and rug had vanished, and there was nothing but smooth parquetry.

"They're packing up the things!" gasped Mary.

Pete answered with a gesture imposing caution.

As they watched the open space in the library a man stepped into view. He came to a halt and, from where he stood, was visible to them from the waist up. He did not look exactly like a burglar; he was too well dressed to fit Mary's notion of the fraternity. He was too stout, also, for Mary's idea of a burglar called for a lean and hungry Cassius. As he paused in the center of the library, he made a commanding motion with his arms. It was a sign for silence on the part of persons who were invisible to the watchers on the staircase.

Then he began to speak again.

"Now, what I said about keepin' your lips buttoned goes. Get me? I'm runnin' this and I don't want to have any trouble. There ain't goin' to be any yellin' or stampin' or any other kind of noise, except what can't be helped. Everybody understand that, now?"

There was a murmur from an unseen throng, and evidently an assent, for the speaker nodded.

"And I want everybody to be careful not to break nothin'," he continued. "You don't want to break no chairs or tables or nothin' like that. And be careful of them pictures on the walls."

"Why, they're going to take every single thing!" murmured Mary, in a shocked voice.

"S-sh. Wait!" answered Pete, staring wide-eyed at the man whose body was framed in the transom.

"All right, then," the man was saying. "Only don't forget. The gentleman who give us the use of this house is a friend of ours and we don't want to get him into no trouble."

"Aw, we're wise; we're wise," remarked a voice whose owner they could not see. "Start somethin'."

Mary was clutching Pete's arm and staring at him with widely questioning eyes. The gentleman who gave the use of the house! Why—

"Now, the winner of this bout, gents—" The beefy man was talking again. "The winner of this bout is goin' to be matched against the champion. Everything here is strictly on its merits. The men will wear six-ounce gloves, accordin' to regulations. Both of 'em was weighed in this afternoon at three o'clock, with the scale set at one hundred and thirty-five, and neither of 'em tipped the beam. And the bout goes to a finish."

There was a rumbling chorus of satisfaction from the invisible audience, and the speaker checked it sharply.

"Lay off the noise, now. That's just what we ain't goin' to have. You guys paid your good money to get in here and I guess you don't want trouble any more 'n I do. Now, in this corner is Charley Col-

lins, the Trenton Bearcat, lightweight champion of New Jersey."

As he spoke another person stepped into the field of vision. It was unquestionably the Bearcat. He was a blond-haired youth of sturdy proportions, clad in a breech clout, a pair of shoes and two six-ounce gloves. He nodded carelessly in response to the introduction and began testing the floor with his feet.

"In this corner," continued the stout man, "is Kid Whaley, pride of the East Side."

Whereat came briskly into view Signor Antonio Valentino. He was grinning cheerfully and bowing right and left. There was a suppressed murmur of admiration. Whatever his omissions as a sculptor of Carrara marble, the Kid had neglected nothing that would make his own body a living statue of grace and brawn. Save for the twisted nose and the tin ear, he was an undeniably fine specimen. His attire matched that of the Bearcat.

"Now, when I say 'Break,'" remarked the master of ceremonies, addressing himself to the Kid and the Bearcat, "I want you to break. Understand? Hittin' with one arm free goes, but no rough stuff in the clinches. And when you break, break clean and step back. No hittin' in the breakaways. All set?"

The two young gentlemen in breech clouts nodded nonchalantly.

"Go to your corners."

The Kid and the Bearcat stepped out of sight, and likewise the beefy man.

"It's—it's awful!" stammered Mary Wayne to her companion on the staircase. "Make them stop it!"

Pete viewed her with a look of amazement.

"Stop it?" he echoed, incredulously. "What for? Why, this is a bout they've been trying to pull off for the last two months. Stop it? Why, we're lucky to be in on it!"

There was nothing but horror in Mary's eyes.

"Then I'll get the police to stop it!" she hissed: "I'm going to telephone now."

"And get Bill Marshall into all kinds of trouble?"

She hesitated. Doubtless it would make a great deal of trouble for Bill Marshall, not only with the authorities of the law; but with Aunt Caroline. He deserved the worst, of course, and yet— Ever since the middle of that afternoon she had felt that the administering of justice to Bill was something that lay properly in her own hands. If she had cared to analyze the matter closely she would have found that it was not justice she sought so much as vengeance.

And while she still hesitated at Pete's reminder, a bell sounded in the library.

She looked again toward the open transom. The Kid and the Bearcat were in view again, no longer nonchalantly inert, but in animated action. Their bodies were tense and swaying, their arms moving in a bewildering series of feints, their feet weaving in and out in a strange series of steps that seemed to have an important relation to their task. The Bearcat was grim, the Kid smiling contentedly.

Suddenly the blond one shot an arm forward and behind it lunged his body. Mary clutched the banister. But Signor Antonio Valentino, still smiling, merely flirited his head a few inches and the gloved fist went into space across his shoulder. At the same time, he seemed to be doing something himself. Mary could not, with all her inexperience, discern exactly what it was, but she saw the Bearcat's head snap backward and she heard him grunt audibly as he clinched.

"The Kid 'll eat him," whispered Pete. "Gee, I wish I had a bet down!"

Mary shuddered. She decided to go upstairs, but somehow she could not release her grip on the banisters. She felt that she ought to go away and hide from this horror in Aunt Caroline's library. Even if she could not move, at least, she thought, she could close her eyes. But when she tried to close them, somehow they persisted in staying open.

The two young sculptors on the other side of the transom were now entering upon their artistic task with amazing speed and zest. Sometimes it took them entirely beyond the vision of the watchers on the staircase. Then they would come zigzagging back into view again; first their legs,

then their bodies, then their flying arms and low-bent heads. There was a constant smacking and thudding of gloves, a heavy padding of feet on the parquet floor. Now and then Mary heard the sharp voice of the beefy man: "Break! Break clean!" Once she saw him stride roughly between the panting pair, reckless of his own safety, fling them apart with a sweep of his arms and say something in a savage tone to the Bearcat. But no sooner had he passed between them than they met again behind his back, the Bearcat swinging a glove that landed flush on the celebrated tin ear.

The bell rang again. Kid Whaley stopped an arm that was moving in mid air, dropped it to his side and walked quickly away. The Bearcat also walked out of sight.

Mary felt as if she could breathe again.

"Thank Heaven, it's over!" she said.

Pete looked at her pityingly.

"It's just begun," he explained patiently.

"That was only the first round. There may be a dozen, or fifteen, or twenty, or Lord knows how many yet before they finish it. It won't end till one of 'em goes to sleep."

"To sleep? How can any man fall asleep when somebody is pounding him all over the head and body?"

"Wait and see," answered Pete with a grin.

But Mary was not minded to wait and see. All that filled her mind was resentment and horror that Aunt Caroline's library should have been loaned by her unredeemed nephew for such an awful purpose. She had a new account to square with William Marshall. She did not intend to tell Aunt Caroline; she would spare that shock to her benefactress. She phrased a little silent prayer of thanks because Aunt Caroline was safely removed from the scene of blood and violence. But there would be no softening of the blow when she came to deal with Bill.

"I'm going down to stop it," she said suddenly.

Pete seized her arm and held her.

"You can't think of it!" he said, in a shocked whisper. "You'd only be insulted and laughed at. And besides—"

He was about to remark that it was too excellent to stop when the bell rang for the second round.

To Mary it seemed no different from the first round. The two young men in breech clouts alternately flailed and hugged each other, the referee constantly danced between them crying, "Break!" and the stamping of swiftly shifting feet echoed again through the darkened recesses of the big house. Then another bell and another period of waiting.

"This Bearcat is good," explained Pete, carefully. "He's better than I figured him. The Kid 'll get him, but it may take him some time. Do you notice the way the Kid handles that left? Isn't it beautiful?"

"It's—it's horrible."

"Oh, not at all; it's clever. This other boy has a pretty neat left himself. But it's his right that the Kid's watching, and he'd better, for it's wicked. Only trouble with the Bearcat is he telegraphs every punch. Now, when they come up again I want you to notice—S-sh! There's the bell."

Mary, still gripping the banister, gazed with horrid fascination at the further desecration of Aunt Caroline's black walnut library. And yet, while the spectacle outraged her eyes and violated all the standards by which she measured domestic life in the American home, a subconscious partisanship was breeding within her. She hated this Whaley, almost as much as she hated Bill Marshall. Why didn't the blond bruiser annihilate him forthwith? Why didn't he make an end of the thing at once? Why wasn't Kid Whaley beaten ruthlessly to the floor and stamped under foot, as became his deserts?

She lifted her hands from the banister and clenched her fists. She was not aware that the cave woman was awakening within her, but it was. She thought she was still horrified; and so she was—in the civilized part of her. But Mary Wayne did not possess a hundred per cent of civilization, nor do any of her sisters, although she and they may be ignorant of the lesser fraction of savagery that hides within.

The third round was followed by a fourth, a fifth and a sixth, and still she stood on the stairway, with a conscience that cried

aloud in behalf of Aunt Caroline and a surge of primitive rage that demanded victory for the Trenton Bearcat. Pete Stearns was wholly given over to the spell of the battle.

Came the seventh round, more furious than any that went before. The invisible crowd in the library was becoming vocal. Throaty voices were demanding blood. And blood there was, for the Bearcat's crimson nose paid tribute to the efficiency of the Kid, while over one of the Kid's eyes was a cut that witnessed the counter prowess of the Bearcat. Some of the blood was dripping on Aunt Caroline's parquet floor, but not enough for the crowd.

Round eight. The kid sent two lefts to the face without return. They clinched. The Kid uppercut to the jaw in the break-away. The Bearcat swung right and left to the head. The Kid landed a right to the body, and followed it with a hook to the jaw. The Bearcat came back with a volley of short-arm jabs, rocking the Kid's head. The Kid rushed, sending right and left to the face. They clinched. The Kid swung a left to the jaw. It shook the Bearcat. The Kid—

Mary Wayne, following all this with blazing eyes and panting bosom, wholly free to sense the combat in its larger aspects because she knew nothing of its superb technique, was leaning half-way across the banisters, a battle-cry hovering on her lips, when her quick ear caught the sound of a key turning in a lock. It had the effect of a cold shock. She was the civilized woman again.

Fear and apprehension turned her eyes in the direction of the front door. Yes, it was opening. Police? *No!*

Aunt Caroline Marshall, Bill Marshall, the butler, and a file of the Marshall servants!

CHAPTER XXIV.

AUNT CAROLINE—REFEREE.

AS Bill stepped into the hall he glanced in dull surprise at the single light that was burning there. And soon he became of a din in the library. For an instant his bewilderment increased. Then

came sickening comprehension. The Kid was pulling it off to-night. He had changed the date. Why? And why, again, had fate summoned Aunt Caroline to the feast? Bill put a hand against the wall to steady him. He turned fearful eyes toward his aunt.

She was already in action. On occasion she was a brisk lady, despite her years; she was not timorous. Something she did not understand was taking place in her house. She proposed to look into the matter herself. Before Bill could clutch her arm she darted along the hall and flung open the door of the library.

She never really appreciated the beauty of what she saw. Like Mary Wayne, she was untutored in its scientific nicety and its poetic movement. She merely sensed that it was red carnage, titanic, horrific. Just what happened is most easily described by referring to the official version of the eighth round, which was uncompleted in the last chapter:

The Kid rushed again, landing left and right to the head. The Bearcat wobbled. The Kid stepped back, measured his man, and sent a right to the body. The Bearcat's hands dropped to his side. The Kid drove a terrific to the jaw, and the Bearcat crashed over on his back, completely out.

The official version does not say that when the Bearcat prostrated himself in dreamless slumber he did so with his head lying at the feet of Aunt Caroline, who drew aside her skirts with housewifely instinct and stared down at his battered, yet peaceful countenance. The Bearcat never slept more soundly in his life; so profound was his oblivion that Aunt Caroline, in her inexperience, thought he was dead.

She looked up and saw a stout man waving an arm up and down and counting. She saw Signor Antonio Valentino, poised and panting, waiting in vain for the Bearcat to rise again. Beyond she saw, through a haze of smoke, the faces of strange men. None of these persons whom she saw as yet appeared to be aware of her own presence, or that of Bill Marshall, who was now staring over her shoulder. They were all too utterly absorbed in the slumberous bliss of this young man from Trenton.

"Ten!" said the stout man triumphantly, as though it were an achievement to count as high as ten.

Then he seized Kid Whaley's right arm and held it high in air. There was hoarse roar of joy from the crowd. Two young men whose bodies from the waist up were clad in sleeveless jerseys rushed forward and hugged the Kid deliriously. They upset a bucket of water in their agitation, and it flowed across the parquet, to mingle with the powdered rosin. Two other young men, similarly attired, sprang into the picture, seized the Trenton Bearcat by the heels and dragged him into an open space, where they could more readily lay hands upon him.

And then everybody at once—except, of course, the Bearcat—seemed to observe Aunt Caroline Marshall, standing in the doorway. They froze and watched. Slowly she raised a finger until it pointed at the breast of the Kid.

"Murderer!" she cried.

The Kid blinked in amazement.

"Murderer!"

The stout man who had counted so excellently shook himself and spoke.

"There ain't anybody been murdered, ma'am. Everythin's all right. He won't be asleep more 'n a coupla minutes."

Aunt Caroline turned upon him in a blaze.

"Who are you? Who are all these men? What have you been doing? How do you come to be in my house?"

She surveyed her library—the wet and rosined floor, the rugs heaped in a corner, the chairs piled against the wall, the tables with men standing on their polished tops. Was it really her house? Yes; it must be. There was no mistaking that portrait of her grandfather, still looking down from its accustomed place on the wall.

She centered her gaze once more upon Signor Valentino, advancing as she did so. The signor backed away, plainly nervous.

"What is the meaning of this?" she demanded. "How dare you break into my house?"

The Bearcat had been propped up in a chair, and his seconds were squirting water over him, employing a large sponge for the

purpose. He had not yet responded to the reveille. There was an uneasy stir among the crowd. The men were trying to unfasten a window.

Aunt Caroline was still advancing when Mary Wayne pushed Bill Marshall aside and darted into the room.

"Come away! Please!" she cried, seizing Aunt Caroline's arm.

The mistress of the Marshall mansion turned a dazed glance upon the social secretary, uttered a little shriek of recognition and embraced her.

"Oh, my dear child! You're safe!"

"Of course. Please come up-stairs."

Suddenly Aunt Caroline stiffened and thrust her away.

"What do *you* know about this?" she demanded.

"Nothing — absolutely nothing. Oh, *please* come away. You mustn't stay here."

"I am entitled to remain in my own library," said Aunt Caroline, in stern tones. "And I propose to stay here until I discover exactly what this means."

And as she stood in the middle of the cleared space, she looked far more like a conqueror than Kid Whaley.

Bill Marshall, who had been standing in an awed trance at the doorway, abruptly came to life. He leaped forward with a yell. Aunt Caroline, the Kid, the Bearcat, the seconds, the crowd—all had vanished from his vision. He saw nobody but the social secretary. Her he gathered into his arms, lifted clear of the floor and hugged violently to his breast.

"Oh, girl," he muttered. "Oh, girl, but I'm glad to see you."

Mary gasped. She struggled. She tried to push herself free. But Bill was oblivious to all but his honest joy.

"Oh, girl!" he murmured, over and over again.

The crowd, which had been moving restlessly, became immobile again. It forgot even Aunt Caroline.

Mary Wayne writhed frantically in the grip that held her. Her feet, inches clear of the floor, beat the air impotently. She worked an arm free and tried to strike, inspired, perhaps, by a memory of the battle; but a series of futile slaps was all that

resulted. She stormed at him; she tried to slay him with her eyes. But Bill Marshall only smiled happily, bent his head and kissed her on the freckles.

"Oh, girl!"

At last he set her free, placing her gently on her feet and gazing at her with an intensity of admiration that ought to have made any woman proud. But Mary was in a cyclonic state of rage and consternation. She swung an open hand against his ear with a crack that resembled a pistol-shot, and fled ignominiously from the room. Bill looked after her, nodding his head proudly and grinning wide.

"Oh, girl!" he whispered.

Aunt Caroline tapped him sharply on the arm.

"William, do *you* know what this means?"

Bill rallied from his ecstasy and began to scratch his chin. He neither knew how to approach nor to evade explanation. Kid Whaley went generously to the rescue. He had draped a bath-robe over his shoulders, and now accosted Aunt Caroline with the assurance of a gentleman who regards himself fittingly garbed for an occasion.

"It's like this," said the Kid. "We got t' have a place t' pull off this mill, see? So Bill says th' fam'ly's goin' off yachtin', an' we c'n come over here, where it's all quiet an' no bulls t' horn in, an' go as far as we like. He gives me th' keys an'—"

Aunt Caroline halted him with a peremptory hand, and turned to Bill.

"William Marshall, is this true?"

Bill drew a deep breath and managed to look her in the eye.

"Yes, Aunt Caroline."

"You gave this creature permission to conduct a prize-fight in *my* house?"

"I'm afraid I did."

"And then you brought me home to be a witness—"

Kid Whaley interrupted her.

"Nothin' like that," he said. "Bill didn't know we was pullin' it off t'-night. It wasn't comin' till next week. Only I got trained down kinda fine, see? I was li'ble to go stale. So th' Bearcat, he don't mind, an' we touches it off t'-night. Y' wouldn't expect a guy t' wait till he gets

stale, would y'? I ain't makin' myself a set-up f'r nobody."

Aunt Caroline eyed Kid Whaley from head to foot.

"You have never been a sculptor, of course," she said in a bitter tone. "I might have known better. Of course, I placed confidence in my nephew. I shall take care never to do so again. You are nothing but a low prize-fighter, it appears."

The Kid was beginning to glower. There is a dignity that attaches to every profession, and those who rise high should always endeavor to maintain it.

"I'm a pr'fessional athalete," said the Kid, wrapping his robe about him. "There ain't nothin' low about me. I'm goin' t' fight th' champeen."

Aunt Caroline studied him with narrowing eyes.

"Bill, y' oughta been here," continued the Kid, turning to his patron. "Y' oughta seen th' mill. Take it from me, this Bearcat is good. He gimme a run. I got nothin' against him f'r it. Knocked him stiff in eight rounds, Bill. Say, if I'd had th' champ in here t'-night I'd 'a' done th' same thing. Bill, I'm gettin' better every time I put on th' gloves. Six months from now I'm gonna be champeen, Bill. Get me! *Champeen!*"

The Kid expanded his chest under his frowsy toga and glanced condescendingly at Aunt Caroline. It was time she acquired a proper perspective concerning his exact status, he thought.

"Out of my house!" she said sharply. "Out of my house—everybody!"

There was a sudden movement of the crowd, a slacking of tension. Men started crowding through the door into the hall. The Trenton Bearcat, groggy as to head and legs, went with them, supported on either side by his seconds. The stout man who had been general manager, announcer and referee, seized his coat and elbowed his way toward freedom as though seized with panic. A window had been opened and part of the crowd began flowing out through that.

Kid Whaley turned nonchalantly, sought a chair and began unlacing his fighting-shoes.

"Leave my house—at once!" commanded Aunt Caroline.

He glanced up with a confident grin.

"Y' don't think I'm goin' out th' way I am?" he inquired. "I got chucked outa this house once; I'm goin' when I get ready now."

Aunt Caroline turned to her nephew.

"William, I want this person out of the house—immediately."

"Beat it, Kid," said Bill tersely.

Kid Whaley regarded his patron with faint surprise.

"What's th' idea?" he asked. "Y' gimme th' run o' th' place. Y' gimme th' keys. Now y' want t' gimme th' bum's rush."

Bill Marshall was suddenly sick of the whole affair. He had no pride in his exploit. He was even acquiring a dislike for Antonio Valentino. And all this revulsion was quite apart from his fear of consequences at the hands of Aunt Caroline. He wanted to be rid of the whole business; he wanted a chance to go up-stairs and explain things to Mary Wayne.

"Beat it—the way you are," he ordered. "Go on, Kid."

Kid Whaley twisted his lip into a sneer.

"Gettin' cold feet, eh? That's th' way with all you rich guys. Puttin' on th' heavy stuff. Oh, well; I guess I got nothin' t' worry about. I'll be champeen in six months."

"Move quick!" said Bill sharply.

"What f'r? Just because th' old dame—"

Bill reached forth, seized the Kid by an arm and brought him to his feet with a single heave. He was beginning to get angry.

"Get out of this house," he said, shaking him. "Do you understand me?"

The Kid wrenched himself free and swung an upward blow that landed on Bill's ear.

"William!" cried Aunt Caroline.

"Don't worry about me, Aunt Caroline," said Bill grimly. "Just leave the room, please."

"I shall not leave the room. I want you to—"

"I'm going to."

And he made a rush for Kid Whaley.

Bill Marshall was a large young man.

So far as the Kid was concerned, he had every advantage that goes with weight. He was also something better than a mere novice in the use of his hands. But he did not have the skill of Antonio Valentino, nothing like it; nor his experience, nor his generalship. He simply had a vast amount of determination, and he was angry.

He missed a good many blows, whereas the Kid seldom missed. But the more often Bill missed the more resolved was he that Kid Whaley should leave the house a chastened artist. One thing that encouraged him was the fact that the Kid was not really hurting him. For several minutes they utilized all the available floor space.

Aunt Caroline had retreated to a corner, where she was standing on a chair, her skirts gathered about her. Frightened? No. She was giving Bill Marshall plenty of room. There was a battle-light in her eyes. And Bill, busy as he was, began to hear her voice, coming to him as though in a strange dream:

"Will Marshall, don't you let that creature beat you! Do you hear me? Don't you let him strike you that way. I expect you to thrash him, William Marshall. I want him thrown out of this house. *Thrown out!* Do you hear that? William! Look out! Don't you see what he's trying to do? There! Strike him again, William. Harder! Again, William; again!"

Aunt Caroline was stepping around on the chair-seat in her agitation. Her fists were clenched; her eyes blazing; her nostrils dilated. The butler and the servants and Pete Stearns, who had crowded to the doorway, looked at her in amazement.

"Keep on, William; keep on! I want him punished. Do you understand? I want him beaten! Harder, William! There! Like that—and that! Oh, dear; I can't think— Oh, what is it I want to say?"

What dear old Aunt Caroline wanted to say was "Atta boy!" but she had never learned how. She wanted to say it because matters were suddenly going well with Bill.

Kid Whaley, shiftier as he was, had been unable to stem the tide of Bill's rushing assault. A right caught him on the tin ear, and he went down. He was on his feet in a flash. Another right caught him, and he

went down again. This time he lingered for a second or two. When he got up Bill managed to land a left on the jaw. Down went the Kid. But he was game. Once more he got to his feet.

There was a shrill call from Aunt Caroline, who was now dancing on the chair.

"William, remember that you are a Marshall!"

Bill remembered.

The Kid went down. He got up. He went down. He got up. He went down—and stayed.

Bill Marshall stepped back and surveyed his work grimly. Two young men in jerseys came slinking forth from a corner and moved toward the prostrate warrior. Bill greeted the nearest with a critical inspection.

"Are you one of his seconds?" he asked.

"Uhuh."

Bill calmly let fly a punch that knocked him over two chairs.

He turned to the other youth.

"Are you a second, too?"

"No, sir," said the youth hastily.

"You're a liar," said Bill, and knocked him over three chairs.

He stooped, lifted the quiet form of the Kid and tucked it under his arm. As he made for the door the servants gave way to him. Through the hall he marched solemnly, bearing the burden of his own making as though it were merely a feather pillow. Through the front door, down the stone steps and across the sidewalk he carried it. Pausing at the curb, he dropped Signor Antonio Valentino into the gutter.

As he reentered the house, his mood gravely thoughtful, two young men who had waved towels for the conqueror of the Trenton Bearcat slid out a side window and hurried around the corner to see what had become of their hero.

Bill encountered his aunt in the front hall. He regarded her doubtfully.

"I am very sorry, Aunt Caroline," he said quietly, "that you had to see this thing. I asked you to leave the library, if you remember."

Aunt Caroline clasped her hands and looked up at him.

"Why, William Marshall! It was perfectly splendid!"

Bill scratched his ear and shook his head helplessly.

"I give it up," he said.

CHAPTER XXV.

WILLIAM DEVELOPS A WILL.

THEN he remembered something that had been on his mind all afternoon and evening. He wanted to see Pete Stearns. Although he had not encountered him, he took it for granted that Pete must be in the house, inasmuch as his secretary was there.

"Where's Pete Stearns?" he demanded of the butler.

"You mean your valet, sir?"

"Yes."

"He was here a moment ago, sir. Shall I look for him?"

"Tell him I'm going to lick him. No; wait. I'll look for him myself."

With stern deliberation Bill made a search of the first floor, then went up-stairs and began on the second. In his rooms he discovered the man he wanted.

"Put up your hands," said Bill quietly. "I'm going to lick you."

"Why, Bill!"

Pete was never more profoundly astonished.

"Hurry up," said Bill.

"Haven't you licked three men already? What in blazes do you want to lick me for?" demanded Pete.

"For running away with my girl."

"But I didn't do anything of the kind. Instead of running away with her I brought her home, Bill. You don't understand."

"You bet I don't. Ready?"

"No, I'm not ready." And Pete sat on the couch, crossed his legs and clasped his hands around one knee. He knew that Bill Marshall would not open hostilities against a defenseless opponent. But he knew also that in order to avert ultimate castigation he must make an excellent explanation. He decided to tell the exact truth.

"Stand up and be a man," ordered Bill. "We're going to settle things right now."

Pete shook his head firmly.

"Not on your life, Bill. I'm going to

tell you a story first. After that—" He shrugged. "Well, after that, if you decide to lick me, you can do it. But if you ever do lick me, Bill Marshall, remember this: I'll poison your coffee some day, if it takes me the rest of my natural life. I'm not going to be a worm. Now, listen."

While Pete was making his explanations up-stairs, Mary Wayne and Aunt Caroline were below, viewing the wreck of the library.

"Part of it was done by my nephew," remarked Aunt Caroline, as she pointed toward several overturned chairs.

Mary blushed at the mention of Aunt Caroline's nephew. Her humiliation in the presence of a crowd of strange men still rankled deep.

"It was awful of him," she said indignantly.

"Not at all," said Aunt Caroline. "Not at all, my dear. But you were not here when it happened, so you cannot be expected to understand. Do you see those chairs? My nephew knocked two men clear across them." She viewed the wreckage almost affectionately. "And before he did that he thrashed a prize-fighter. Yes, my dear; thrashed him and carried him out of the house. Right in my presence he thrashed three men."

Mary Wayne opened her eyes wide. Was it possible she had never discovered the real Aunt Caroline before?

"He thrashed them completely," added Aunt Caroline, with a slight lift of her head. "It was most thoroughly done. I do not believe anybody in the world could have done it better than my nephew. He is very like his father."

Mary gasped.

"My nephew is a true Marshall. I am very much pleased."

"I—I'm so glad to hear it," said Mary faintly.

"Yes, indeed, my dear. Why, do you know—" Aunt Caroline paused to indicate the spot on the floor. "Right where you see me pointing he struck this vulgar prize-fighter senseless. Oh, it is absolutely true. I saw it all. I was standing on that chair over there. My nephew was here." She indicated. "The other man was standing

here. It happened exactly as I am going to show you."

And Aunt Caroline proceeded to enact in pantomime the events that led to the downfall of Kid Whaley, reproducing as nearly as she could the exact methods employed by her conquering nephew. Her cheeks were flushed and her eyes bright when she had finished. Mary Wayne was overcome with astonishment.

"But—but the prize-fight that took place before?" faltered Mary.

"That is another matter," said Aunt Caroline, with a wave of her hand. "A minor matter, I think. Now, are you sure you understand exactly what my nephew William did?"

She was preparing to reenact the scene, when they were interrupted by a ringing of the door-bell and a few seconds later by the arrival of Nell Norcross in the library. Nell viewed the wreckage in one swift glance and ran forward with a cry.

"Mary Wayne, whatever in the world has happened?"

Aunt Caroline glanced quickly from one girl to the other, then smiled.

"You two young people are so excited over this thing that you are getting your names mixed," she said.

Nell clapped a hand to her mouth, consternation in her eyes. Mary sighed, looked at Aunt Caroline and shook her head.

"No; we haven't mixed our names," she said. "You may as well understand all about it now, Miss Marshall. I'm—I'm an awful impostor."

Aunt Caroline showed more evidence of perplexity than alarm.

"This is Nell Norcross," said Mary, in a miserable voice. "I am Mary Wayne."

"Dear me!" said Aunt Caroline. "More things to be explained. Well, come back into the sitting-room, both of you. I suppose somebody has been making a fool of me again. But whoever you are, my dear, don't let me forget to tell your friend about my nephew William."

She led the way to the sitting-room. Mary and Nell exchanged glances as they followed. Aunt Caroline was bewildering.

When they returned to the library half an hour later Bill and Pete Stearns were

standing there, the latter rendering a vivid narrative of the great battle between Kid Whaley and the Trenton Bearcat. Aunt Caroline walked directly over to the valet.

"I understand you are a Stearns," she said.

Pete made an acknowledgment.

"A grandson of Eliphalet Stearns?"

"Yes, madam."

"Don't 'madam' me. You have done quite enough of that. A son of Grosvenor Stearns?"

"Yes, Aunt Caroline."

She glowered at him for an instant, then her lips began to twitch. But she rallied herself.

"Your grandfather and your father were enemies of my house," she said. "They were both very bad men. I still think so."

Pete wore a pained look, but made no answer.

"But I believe there is some hope for you. Not, however, in the field of theology. In that connection, I will say that I expect you to make a personal explanation to the bishop. I never can. My nephew's secretary has been telling me something of what happened at Larchmont and also on the way home from Larchmont. For a Stearns, I think you have done fairly well."

"Thank you—Aunt Caroline."

Miss Marshall bit her lip.

"I think you may omit that," she said, but not with the severity that she intended to convey. "As I said, you did fully as well as could be expected of a Stearns. For your deception of me I shall never forgive you. That is understood. But I shall not let that stand in the way of safeguarding the reputation of my nephew's secretary. It will be necessary, of course, for you to marry her."

Aunt Caroline was serious again. She meant what she said. She had certain rooted ideas concerning proprieties and they had not been dislodged by the events of a day given over to the shattering of ideals.

Bill Marshall choked. Pete gaped. Nell Norcross went white at the lips and turned away.

"But," began Pete, "it seems to me—"
Aunt Caroline raised her hand.

"It is unfortunate, of course, that she

must marry a Stearns. It is not what I would have chosen for the girl. But there shall be no such thing as gossip connected with any person in my household; I will not endure it. You owe her the name of Stearns, poor as it is. I have not discussed the matter with her, but I feel that she will see it as I do."

Bill was watching Mary Wayne with horrified eyes. His knees grew suddenly weak when he saw her nod.

"I have no doubt it is the best thing to do," said Mary.

As she said that she cast a swift glance at Bill Marshall, then bent her head. Nell had crossed the room and was staring out of a window. She was holding a handkerchief to her lips. Pete Stearns was plainly frightened. He looked in the direction of Nell, then at Mary, then at Aunt Caroline, and last of all at Bill.

"There need be no immediate hurry about the wedding," observed Aunt Caroline, "so long as the engagement is announced. I have no doubt the bishop will be glad to perform the ceremony." Turning to Mary: "You can attend to the announcement yourself, my dear."

Mary slowly raised her eyes. Her glance met that of Pete Stearns. It wandered to the figure of Nell, then back to Pete. And then—could he be mistaken?—one of Mary's eyes slowly closed itself and opened again.

"I'll make the announcement whenever you wish, Miss Marshall," said Mary.

"To-morrow," said Aunt Caroline.

Bill Marshall emerged from his coma.

"Not in a million years!" he cried.

Aunt Caroline lifted her eyebrows.

"Not while I'm on earth!"

Nell Norcross, still standing by the window, half turned and glanced toward the group. She was very pale. Pete Stearns was trying to catch her eye, but she was looking only at Mary.

"Why, William!" said Aunt Caroline. "I do not see how the matter concerns you at all."

"Nor I," said Bill's secretary, throwing him a defiant glance.

"Well, I know how it concerns me," shouted Bill. "Before she marries Pete

Stearns there's going to be red, red murder! Understand?"

"But, William, she has already said she is willing," said Aunt Caroline.

"I don't care what she says. She doesn't know what she is talking about. She's crazy. There isn't a chance in the world of her marrying Pete Stearns. I'll not stand for it."

Pete again intercepted Mary's glance.

"If she is willing to marry me," remarked Pete, "I don't see where you have any ground for objection."

Bill swept him aside with an arm-thrust that sent him a dozen feet across the room.

"From now on I'm going to manage my own affairs," he announced grimly, "and this is one of them. I'm tired of taking doses that somebody else prescribes for me. I'm through running for society on the opposition ticket. I'm going to do as I please."

"William!"

He glared at Aunt Caroline, then shook a finger directly under her nose.

"See here, Aunt Caroline—I'm not going to let you marry her off to Pete Stearns, and that settles it. There isn't going to be any argument about it. She's going to marry me!"

"Mercy!" exclaimed Aunt Caroline. "Why, my dear, is this true?"

She turned to Mary Wayne, who met her with innocent eyes.

"Of course it is not true," answered Mary. "I never thought of such a thing."

"Then you'd better begin thinking of it," warned Bill, "because that's exactly what's going to happen. This is my affair and I'm managing it."

Mary did not deem that it was a politic time to discuss compromises. She had too long a score against Bill Marshall. Inwardly, she was having a glorious time, but it would never do to let Bill know it.

"Do you think that marrying me is entirely your affair?" she demanded.

"Absolutely."

"That I have nothing to say about it?"

"Nothing whatever," said Bill sternly.

"Not a word."

"Why, you—"

For an instant Mary feared that she was

really going to be angry. This was more than she expected, even from Bill Marshall.

"I won't be talked to in that manner!" she exclaimed, stamping a foot. "I—I'll marry Mr. Stearns."

Bill sent a dangerous look in the direction of his valet.

"If you want to see him killed, just you try it," he said. "We've had enough nonsense about this thing. There's going to be no more argument."

Even Mary could not but marvel at the change in Bill Marshall. He seemed suddenly to have grown up. He was not talking with the braggadocio of boyhood. Rather, he had become a man who was desperately resolved to have his own way and would not scruple to get it. But her time had not come yet.

"I'll marry Mr. Stearns," she repeated perversely.

"Aunt Caroline," said Bill quietly, "it's all settled. Miss Norcross and I are to be married."

There was an exchange of glances between Pete, Mary, Nell, and Aunt Caroline. The latter smiled at her nephew.

"Of course," she said, "if Miss *Norcross* wishes to marry you, William, that's different entirely. But this isn't Miss *Norcross*, you know; this is Miss *Wayne*."

And she laid a hand on Mary's arm.

Bill devoted seconds to an effort at comprehension, but without avail. He found four persons smiling at him. It was disconcerting.

"Your name is not *Norcross*?" he demanded.

Mary shook her head.

"It's *Wayne*?" he faltered.

"Mary *Wayne*."

"But, how the—"

He paused again to consider the astounding news. Somebody had been playing tricks on him. They were laughing even now. Suddenly his jaw set again. He transfixed Mary with steady eyes.

"Well, leaving the name part of it aside for a minute, let me ask you this: whose secretary are you?"

"Yours," answered Mary.

"No argument about that, is there?"

"None at all. I always made it perfectly clear that I was your secretary."

"Good," said Bill. "I have a matter of business to be attended to in the office. Come along, Miss Secretary."

He picked her up, tucked her under one arm and walked out of the library. Mary was too amazed even to struggle.

Aunt Caroline stared after them and shook her head.

"Do you know," she said, turning to Pete, "I have a notion that William will have his way about this matter."

"You're damn right he will, Aunt Caroline," said the theological student.

CHAPTER XXVI.

WITHOUT REFERENCES.

THE transaction of Bill Marshall's business required upward of half an hour.

When it came to driving a bargain, Mary Wayne admitted that he was ruthless and inexorable. He rode rough-shod over opposition; he crushed it.

"You're worse than a trust," she said, wrinkling her nose at him.

"I'm a monopoly," he admitted. "I've got the whole world."

Mary sighed and began straightening his tie.

"But you treated me so badly," she complained.

"Because I loved you," he said, kissing her some more. "Do I have to explain that all over again?"

"Oh, well, Bill Marshall; if you object to explaining—"

"Confound it! Did I say I objected? I *don't* object."

"Then let me see if you can explain it twice in the same way."

So Bill explained all over again. The explanation may not have been in identical words, but it amounted to the same thing. It ruffled Mary's hair all over again and left her freckles swimming in a sea of pink.

"Oh, Bill!" she whispered, hiding her face.

When they came down from the skies and recognized the familiar details of the office, Mary asked a question.

"Bill, do you think Peter is really serious about Nell?"

"Why?"

"Because she is—terribly."

"Well, then, if he isn't I'll break his neck."

"That's dear of you, Bill; I want her to be happy."

A moment afterward:

"Bill?"

"Yes?"

"What do you think your aunt will say about—us?"

"Let's find out."

They discovered Aunt Caroline in her sitting-room. She glanced over the top of her gold rims and marked her book with her finger.

"Well, what now?" she demanded, but her tone was patient. "Have you attended to your business affairs?"

"Yes, Aunt Caroline," assented Bill. "I've decided to give up society."

"William, I think possibly society has given up you. But I have no complaint to make. I have been thinking it over, and it seems to me that if you care to go into business—"

Bill interrupted her.

"Aunt Caroline, you're stealing our stuff. We've already decided that. I am going into business. I don't know just what—but I'm going."

"That can be decided later," said his aunt. "I'm very glad, William. I think perhaps I made a mistake in attempting—But we won't discuss that any more."

Mary Wayne was fidgeting.

"I have also decided to abandon my interest in art," observed Bill.

Aunt Caroline regarded him suspiciously.

"William, be careful. Are you sure you are quite well?"

Bill laughed.

"Never better. Now, as to Pete Stearns—"

Mary, who had been growing more and more restless, placed a hand over his lips. Then she ran forward, dropped to her knees and buried her head in Aunt Caroline's lap.

"He's teasing us—both of us," she said in a muffled voice. "That isn't what we came to say at all."

Aunt Caroline stroked the small head.

"And what is it you want to say?" she inquired.

Mary looked up suddenly.

"Will—will you let me marry Bill Marshall—Aunt Caroline?"

The eyes behind the spectacles were smiling.

"Just for calling me 'Aunt Caroline,'" she said, "I believe I will, my dear."

Mary hugged her.

Presently she and Bill went to hunt for Pete Stearns and Nell, who were reported to be in the conservatory. As they departed, Aunt Caroline called:

"If William requires you to give references, my dear, just come to me."

Mary uttered a small shriek.

"References! Oh, please! If anybody ever says 'references' to me again I'll just die. Bill, you'll have to take me without any at all."

Bill took her.

Aunt Caroline readjusted her spectacles and opened her book.

"There is only one thing that really upsets me," she said, half aloud. "I shall never find out what they say about Mrs. Rokeby-Jones's elder daughter."

(The end.)

U U U

RICHES

BY JANET SMITH

THE happy man of wealth is hard to find;
Not so of him who's rich in his own mind;
For what you do in life, not what you get,
Will count at last, and pay your earthly debt.

Local Color to Burn

by Charley Wood



ALTHOUGH Captain Jericho and his Mate Handy did not know it, they were to be directly concerned in a decision which Theodore Hesper, director of Superart Pictures, made when he got out of the wrong side of bed one morning in the late springtime and decided to change the general running of things. The director had run across a bit of nautical verse the evening before, and besides bothering him during the night, it was still running in his head when he awoke in the morning.

Said the captain to the cook,
As a hair he strove to hook,
"I'll lay a cat-o'-nine-tails
'Cross your bloomin' yellow 'ide."

Said the cook, "But you'll be sorry,
Fer when Christmas comes to-morry
I'll 'eave my plum duff recipee
In the Roarin' Forties tide!"

"Ha, ha," grunted the director as he stooped over to lace his shoes, "there's an inspiration for a picture that is different. Away with all the hokum and on with something that will make 'em sit up and gasp!"

Upon arriving at the Superart offices he went straight to the scenario department and asked the editor if he had any stories with a sea locale.

"Only one," replied the editor as he held up an envelope which he was about to return to its sender. "Rottenest of the rotten—pirate subject."

"Pirates!" ejaculated the director. "That's just the kind of a subject I want. The minute you said the word 'pirate' I was startled, and that's the way it will act on the public. Get me?"

He sank into a chair and ran over the erstwhile rejection with a rapid eye. At the end of the last page he flung it on the editor's desk and sprang to his feet.

"Have Miss Freebler start on the continuity right away, old topper," he said, with a slight return of his usual good humor. "I'll come in and give her a few suggestions later."

"The author wants five hundred for it," demurred the editor.

"I don't care, I want the story," quoth the director over his shoulder as he left. "I'm going in to see Swiberg about it."

Aaron Swiberg, president of the Superart Pictures Corporation, was seated in a leather-cushioned, mahogany swivel-chair before a mahogany desk with a glass top, and between his teeth was a cigar of the same rich shade as the office furnishings. Although the Superart concern might be termed a one-horse affair as picture organizations go these days, it was by no means in financial distress. The room in which he sat was a room which few, unless reasons were stated well and glibly, ever saw the inside of.

Theodore Hesper, being one of the few, entered unannounced and seated himself

without ceremony. Owing to the fact that the personnel of Superart was small he had few officials to fight with and was used to taking things in his own hands. Besides, both his name and Mr. Swiberg's were attached to a contract that had two years to run before expiration, and neither cared to be the defendant in a suit brought by the other. Therefore, although they wrangled now and then over a subject, they always agreed in the end.

"I want to do a special, Swiberg," began Hesper. "I'm ahead of the regular program and I want to do a pirate story that 'll make everybody sit up and gasp. I tell you the public and the exhibitors are tired of society and Chinatown hokum—they want something different. I want to get away from the usual, run my name big on all paper, and give 'em a punch that 'll make Superart a household word."

"How much 'll it cost?" asked the president.

"We've got to find a place that looks like a southern ocean, stick in a palm-tree setting, pay five hundred for the story, and probably about five thousand for a ship that will have to be burnt and blown up."

"Five thousand dollars to burn!" squealed Swiberg.

"It's got to be done for color or the story will fall flat. You can't make pictures for nothing."

"You don't get no five thousand from me to burn up," asserted the president.

"You're blame right I do," answered the director as he rose to his feet and registered anger. "Remember, I was making pictures fourteen years before you bought your way into the field. Although you may know how to run a cloak and suit shop you don't know how to make pictures, and I do. You're only the president."

The president banged puffily on his mahogany desk.

"Don't talk to me—don't talk to me," he sputtered. "I don't throw no five thousand in the fire for what you call local color."

"You either do or I quit," returned the director as he assumed a nonchalant air. "You know Sublime Films has offered to

double my salary and pay you what the court grants you if I go over to them. Suit yourself."

As he finished he went toward the door. The president threw up his arms in despair and called him back.

"What are you going away mad for?" he asked. "Ain't I always given you production money without a kick. If you got to have five thousand to burn up—why go ahead and burn and have it over."

"Best investment you ever made," said the director as he seized the phone from the president's desk. "Publicity-desk. Hello, Joe—will you get out a big story right away, like a good boy, about how Swiberg has seen the writing on the wall and will go to any expense to produce a picture that's unusual—he thinks the public is tired of this modern hokum and is ripe for a costume play. Jazz it up, you know. Working title is 'The Pirate's Bride,' and Miss Faire will star. Forget the Irish beauty stuff and have her have a Castilian ancestor, will you? She plays a Spanish girl in this. Miss Freebler's got the script. All right, by-by."

As the director hung up the receiver Hank Frayne, his assistant director, and George Stodd, Superart's star heavy, strolled in. The director immediately informed them of his new picture plans.

"You'll be cast for the pirate captain, George," he added. "A nice, big, juicy part."

"Wait a minute," said Hank. "Where you going to get this ship to blow up?"

"Amityville's about the best place, I guess," said the director after some consideration. "One of those old boats that take out parties is the thing. And for the pirates we'll get the crew of a deep-sea ship—no actors—sailors, see?"

"All right," said Hank, "but don't let any of those old Amityville boys know you want to buy a ship to blow up or you'll never get one. I know those old barnacle backs. They think more of their old tubs than a hen does of her chicks."

"Then we'll buy it without letting 'em know we're going to blow it up," countered the director. "As long as you know 'em you can put the deal over and we'll

take Mr. Swiberg right along so he can write a check and pay on the spot."

That is how Captain Abel Jericho and his mate, Mr. Adam Handy, although they knew nothing whatever about motion-pictures, became actively engaged in the making of one. They were co-owners of the two-masted schooner *Starshine*, and had a history which fully explained their close companionship at their present stage of life. They had done most of their early seafaring life before the mast in square riggers, leaving steam navigation for the class of seamen they called "deckhands."

They had lived as frugally as possible between cruises, Captain Jericho having lived just a little more frugally than Mate Handy, and they reached the pinnacle they had been working for when they bought the *Starshine*. Captain Jericho owned three-quarters of her and the mate owned the remaining quarter.

As for the *Starshine*, she was no more spring-chickenesque than her owners. In fact, she had an air of antiquity about her which commanded the attention of the director and Hank even in the conglomeration of craft which filled the harbor. They picked her as they advanced down the pier toward the spot where her captain and mate sat dangling their boots over the water. Mr. Swiberg also picked her, but for mercenary reasons.

"There's two old salt types for you," commented the director as he indicated the pair. "They don't need a stroke of make-up."

They paused to admire them. They noted their delapidated caps, which sat with an aggressive one-sidedness over faces which suggested the color and toughness of raw ham, and the bristling whiskers which thrust themselves out over neckerchiefs carelessly and picturesquely knotted about their necks. They saw the bell-bottom effect of their trousers which rung over old-time leather sea-boots, patched and mended now, but capable of registering a wicked imprint if used right.

Artistic impulse swept over the director and he was about to approach them when Hank held him back. So they conducted a subrosa inquiry instead and were grati-

fied to learn that the pair were the owners of the schooner they had picked.

"Let me show you how to handle this," advised Hank as he approached them.

"Shoot," said Hesper.

"Look there, fellows," said Hank to the director and Swiberg, as he pointed directly at the *Starshine* and made sure her owners could hear him. "There's a real craft for you. Look how her beautiful lines make those other craft around her look like washtubs in the middle of a Monday morning! She's the only real sailorman's ship in the lot!"

Captain Jericho nudged his mate and his mate nudged him as they turned to give the speaker a closer appraisal.

"There's the first lubber I ever seen that knows anything," said the captain.

"I wonder who owns her," continued Hank.

"Right here is her owners," spoke up Captain Jericho as he removed an ancient clay pipe shaped like a powder-horn from his mouth and rose. "You're the first land-lubber I seen for many a year with brains in your truck. Lead out your hand till I shake it."

"You're the kind of sailorman I thought owned a ship like that," said Hank as he strove to keep from flinching from the Samsonian grip of the captain. "What's her name?"

"*Starshine*," spoke up the mate, "give her a fair wind and a full set o' rags and she'll make any craft in this here harbor look like an Erie Canal hooker."

"How would you like to get her in the movies and let everybody see what a real, honest-to-goodness, seagoing sail-craft looks like?" asked Hank. "We're movie people."

The captain and mate hesitated, for they remembered having seen a picture once with alleged ships and sailors in it and they were not certain that they cared to have the *Starshine*'s name linked with the seaman-ship they had seen.

"We ain't anxious to trust our craft, what we thinks as much of as we do our mothers," said the captain, "to some o' these actors we've seen dressed in sailor clothes."

"You won't have to," quickly put in the director. "Our idea is to let you handle the ship yourself while we take pictures. Besides, we'll buy her if you'll sell her."

"What do you expect to use her for?" asked Mate Handy.

"Just to cruise around and take pictures with," answered the director, glibly, and mentally asked forgiveness.

"What's your price?" asked the captain.

"Two thousand five hundred," spoke up Mr. Swiberg before he could be prevented.

Hesper and his assistant glared at him from both flanks, and the owners looked as if they were about to smite him down.

"Five thousand dollars on the spot," said Hank quickly, in an effort to save the day.

The owners started at this extensive rise in the price. It was more than they had paid for her, and she was fairly aged when they bought her. Now she was ten years older. But they seemed to feel a grip about their hearts as they thought of irreverent hands handling her rigging and careless owners trodding her decks. Yet, money was money.

"I vote we let the old girl go fer that price, skipper," said Mate Handy, "as long as we'll have the sailin' of her, anyhow. We had owners wunst and we kin stand it agin fer that money."

"Let's go and have a bill of sale made out right away," said the director, who now thought he saw the way clear to his masterpiece and intended to have a hand in everything so that there would be no slips made.

A short time later Mr. Swiberg was in possession of a receipted bill of sale, which he did not want, and the erstwhile owners of the Starshine were in possession of a five-thousand-dollar check.

Hesper then explained to the captain and mate that he expected a carload of artificial palms in on the morrow, and the crew of a freighter which was laid up for repairs, and who would work as well as take the part of pirates.

"I know the place for you," said Captain Jericho as he grew interested in the working out of the thing. "She's a dangerous place to get in and out, but there ain't no better place to make look like a tropic island."

"He means Horse-Tail Reefs," put in Mate Handy. "I run them shallows many a time. I kin help you make them palms look natural, too. I was in the tropics in 1862 and again in 6—"

"I was in the tropics in 1861 and agin in 1874," interrupted the captain. "We'll show you how them palms sets."

The director and his assistant felt a twinge of shame as they observed this enthusiasm and thought of the calamity which was to happen to the Starshine.

The next day the crew that the director had hired came aboard and the properties were loaded. Although the erstwhile owners were old at the seafaring game they were more than once astounded at the relics of archaism which came aboard. There were old, muzzle-loading deck cannon, slave-irons, cutlasses, blunderbusses and flint lock-pistols, chests, grappling-irons, dynamite, tar, ammunition, and a deck load of artificial palms.

These aboard, the schooner was run out to Horse-Tail Reefs, and under the direction of Hank, who also acted as location director, the palms were put up with goodly effect by the freighter's crew. This took most of a day, and in the late afternoon the schooner was run back to Amityville, and Hank took the freighter's crew to be costumed at the studio and return in the morning.

Shortly after sunrise the next morning the company arrived at the dock in a touring-car and a bus, the latter containing the freighter's crew in piratical costumes. The captain and mate, who had been waiting since sunrise, regarded the procession which came down the dock in lofty wonder.

In the fore they saw Hesper, his assistant director, and Mr. Swiberg, all dressed in ordinary street clothes. But just behind them was Florine Faire, whom Joe Bird, the publicity man, invariable described as "the queen of electric thrills." She was swathed from comely head to dainty feet in a long cloak, and behind her walked a French maid with an Irish face. Beside her strode George Stodd, also swathed in a long cloak, but with wicked appearing mustachios protruding from the collar of the cloak, and an awe-inspiring click of an

unseen scabbard as he walked. He had spent many hours of the night learning to walk naturally with the thing dangling there.

Next came Raymore Wellsville, leading man, with a camera man, weighted down with machines and tripods, on either side of him. Following them was the erstwhile freighter's crew, now the most villainous, cutthroat, piratical-looking company the captain and mate had ever set eyes on in all their years of experience.

Hank took one of the camera men and left in a motor-boat, for they would take long "shots" of the ship and pirates.

The schooner made a brisk run, and some two hours later the captain and mate were guiding her over the dangerous Horse-Tail Reefs into the lagoon. Safely inside the anchor was dropped, and everything was made ready for the taking of the first scene.

About a mile off the starboard quarter lay the strip of sand with the palms waving in the breeze, just back of them, blue to the horizon, rolled the ocean with the hot morning sun glaring on it, all of which helped to lend a composite land and sea scape of a fair tropical order. But all about, so that the Starshine was virtually surrounded by them, jagged rocks stuck their noses up out of the rolling seas while big breakers rolled and thundered angrily over them.

"We couldn't have found a better place to shoot these sets," said Hesper as he looked admiringly around.

"It's all right so long as we don't get caught in a gale o' wind in here," replied Captain Jericho, as he squinted distrustfully to windward. "There ain't no hold-in' ground here, and if we get caught we got our choice o' bein' smashed to death on them rocks or chancin' to run that reef."

But the director, as he thought of what was going to happen to the Starshine anyhow, was not much concerned at this information.

"I'd feel safe on any ship with you two aboard," remarked Miss Faire as the maid helped her off with her cloak.

"I'll say so," said Hesper, as he also removed his coat. "I've got a little part

for the captain to play, too, when the pirates capture the ship."

From then on for many hours the captain and his mate watched interestedly while more or less dramatic scenes, close-ups, and shots of the pirates swarming aboard and over the rigging and the running up the Jolly Roger were taken. It was all like a hazy mystery to the captain and his mate, and they could make neither head nor tail of the proceedings. Finally the sweating director came over and posed the captain at the wheel for rehearsal while George Stodd advanced toward him with a devilish grin and a waving cutlass. This also was a hazy mystery to the captain.

"Fine, George!" he heard the director commenting. "Now, hold that, cap—you see him, but you think it's your duty to get the ship over the reef, see? Take another step, George—no, don't glare at him, cap, look as if you were praying—you're not armed, you have no hope and he has no mercy—no, don't swear, pray! That's fine! Advance, George, slowly—like a snake crawls—that's it. Hold your cutlass up to strike—"

"If he holds it that way I could easy catch a holt of his arm and heave him overboard," objected the captain.

"Never mind, it 'll look all right on the screen," returned Hesper. "Now, Florine, while George holds that you rush forward and throw your arms around the captain's neck—you're willing to give your life to protect him from the pirate, see? That's it, only do it with more abandon. Oh, heck! You're not Irish now, but Spanish—that's more like it—don't gulp so much, cap, it 'll soon be over—"

Shortly after the director had yelled "camera" and the scene was finally filmed, things that were not in the script began to happen, for the captain and the mate suddenly spied the freighter's crew pouring tar about the decks while a camera clicked.

They sprang forward simultaneously.

"Avast there!" bawled the captain as he and the mate vaulted into the scene. "Keep that tar off my decks, you egg-headed actors, er I'll tie every one o' you into anchor-chain links!"

The pouring of the tar ceased and every

one lapsed into silence. Miss Faire clutched the main shrouds and registered realistic alarm as she waited for the outcome. Mr. Swiberg, who had been lolling luxuriously on the cabin deck-house with a cigar, sat upright and hoped inwardly that the erstwhile owners would win.

"This is not your deck now, it's our deck," said the director, 'at last. But his heart was heavy within him as he continued: "Boys, I hate to break the news, but in order to carry out this story we've got to set this craft afire, blow her up with dynamite, then rake her with that cannon on the beach where the palm-trees are."

"Look here, you underhanded hugger-mugger!" bellowed the captain as he snatched forth the check and shook it in his large, tough fist under the director's nose. "Take back your dirty check. We didn't sell this ship for to be smashed up by no actors. Jest harm a thread o' her riggin' and I'll smash that camera over your truck!"

"If they's any one o' you who thinks he kin mistreat this ship while I'm aboard," followed up Mate Handy as he looked invitingly around at the assembly, "jest step out here one at a time er all together and see what happens."

"We don't want that check back," protested the director. "We've got to finish this picture and we've got the receipted—"

"Belay that actor gab," interrupted the captain. "You ain't going to harm this ship, not a splinter of her!"

The director, driven to the last resort, suddenly raised his hand as a signal.

Plainly, the freighter's crew had been waiting for just such a move, for they all sprang for the erstwhile owners of the Starshine at the same moment. The camera man, sensing the realism, instantly turned his lens upon them and began cranking.

"Don't hurt those poor old sailors, Teddy!" pleaded Miss Faire of the director. "They're hurting them, aren't they?"

"Calm yourself, Florine," returned the director, as he noted with pleasure that the camera man was on the job. "That freighter's crew 'll be lucky if they don't get hurt themselves by the looks of things.

They've got orders not to hurt 'em, but only to capture 'em and put 'em somewhere where they won't bother us again till we're done. Look, ain't that great? Oh, boy!"

But the business of "capturing" them was evidently no easy job, for the captain and his mate were fighting like a pair of hungry wildcats. Down and up and in and out among their adversaries the two mariners battled, and the fray, owing to the piratical costumes, became a seething mass of changing and varied colors. Neckerchiefs were torn from heads and necks, earrings rattled to the deck, false mustachios and whiskers floated away on the breeze, tin cutlasses were bent double, and top-boots sailed through the air with the feet of their owners inside them.

Finally the fighters were separated into two piles, which was caused by the captain and the mate being at last on their backs and held down by sheer weight.

"We can't hold 'em very long, though," yelled one of the victors to Hesper.

The director scratched his head as he realized that although the recalcitrant pair were "captured," the picture could not be gone on with if the freighter's crew had to spend all their time holding them down. Then he suddenly remembered the slave irons. He immediately dispatched a man for two sets of them, and while the camera still clicked they were adjusted about the mariners' wrists and ankles.

But even then the trouble was not settled, for the ironed twain kept up such a run of fiery language that the director, in another fit of desperation, ordered them removed to the hold. There the sailors, who had had a hard fight and wished to vent some of their spite on the causes of it, took advantage of the fact that the director could not see them, and clapped on all the other sets of irons they could find. Therefore, when they left them, the very weight of the incumbrances forced the irate mariners into harmlessness.

Peace and quiet was thus somewhat restored to the Starshine, and the work of taking the rest of the scenes prior to the burning of the craft were gone ahead with.

But, though the director did not suspect it, there was a worse trouble breeding, and

it began to manifest itself almost before the work was well started again. The camera-man noticed it first when he began to complain of a "yellow" light, and then for the first time they noticed that the sun was growing hazy. The director gazed off into the southeast and noted a bank of darkish clouds which seemed to be approaching with terrific speed. It was preceded by a line of white-caps and the winds was freshening each moment.

The director then bethought himself of the remark the captain had made about the lagoon being a dangerous place in a storm. He also noticed, with a sinking feeling in his stomach, that the owners of the boat in which Hank had been taking "long shots" were heading her for the reefs at full speed, evidently seeking to clear them before the storm broke.

He gazed anxiously at the way the sea was dashing ever higher on the jagged rocks which thrust their noses up all about, and wondered what would happen if the Starshine struck one, broke up, and left them to swim for their lives in that raging sea. The wind was beginning to sing a weird, awe-inspiring song in the rigging, too. Suddenly a heavy gust caught the Starshine's sails and she jibed with the noise of a thunderclap.

"We better get out of here before it's too late, mister," advised one of the freighter's crew, all of whom were beginning to look anxious, for they realized the danger better than the landmen.

"I don't want to be drowned out here in this lonely place, Teddy," said Miss Faire, who had been studying the situation on her own account. "You know, I can't swim, either."

"Neither can I," spoke up Swiberg. "Remember, I got a family."

"I give up!" finally said the director as he threw up his hands in disgust. "All right, get her out of here, boys."

"The only men who can get her out are down in the hold with chains on," said Miss Faire, but no one seemed to heed her.

With all speed the freighter's crew got up the anchor, and the Starshine was soon headed at a smart clip for the reefs in an effort to get to deep water.

"Get those old salts up here, I don't know this course!" suddenly yelled the man at the wheel.

The director started, for with his other worries he had forgotten all about them for the moment.

"Sufferin' cats, yes! Get 'em up here quick!" sang out the director. Several of the freighter's crew dropped into the hold and passed the captain and his mate up. All but the freighter's crew started as they saw the number of irons the pair were weighted down with. The freighter's crew set frantically to work to release them and were staggered to discover that it might be a long, hard job to remove so many and such rusty irons.

"How did they get all those on two men?" asked Swiberg.

"Don't ask me, I don't know," answered the director.

At that moment there came a sickening jar, and all on board were thrown from one side of the deck to the other as the schooner listed heavily over.

"You're aground, you lunk-heads," yelled the captain.

The director paled as he looked around, for although it was true that the Starshine was aground, the nearest land which met his eye was the sand reef where the palms were planted. He reckoned it was about a half mile away, and that half mile was a wind-swept mass of water, impossible to swim.

Simultaneously, the gale was on them with all its fury. The wind reached such strength that the palms lay flat on the ground. As the freighter's crew struggled with the irons a great sea reared and roared and crashed over the deck, sweeping everything before it. Luckily, it swept no one overboard, but the moment they found their footing again the entire movie company sprang into the rigging as with one thought, leaving the more adept freighter's crew still wrestling with the irons and the seas.

Owing to the force of the wind they found speech impossible. Mr. Swiberg, George Stodd, and Raymore Wellsville clung palely in the port main rigging. The director and the camera man climbed well

up in the starboard fore ratlines, and Miss Faire and her little French maid hung desperately to whatever they could grasp in the starboard main shrouds. Each time they tried to speak the wing flung the words back into their mouths.

They watched in helpless silence while sea after sea came aboard and the crew, stung to desperation, still wrestled with the irons. The wind bit and tore at them and the seas, with their white crests hissing like escaping steam, seemed to be growing to the height of houses. Finally, after what seemed hours, the last irons succumbed to the efforts of the crew and the captain and mate rose slowly to their feet.

The people in the rigging watched them aghast as, instead of belching into activity as they had expected them to, they merely took a firm hold on the wheel and conversed by putting their mouths to each other's ears. Finally Mr. Swiberg, divining what the delay was about, drew a piece of paper from his pocket and waved it at the captain with a trembling hand.

The captain reached up, took the piece of paper, read it, then tore it into shreds. It was the receipted bill of sale! Then suddenly everybody on the deck of the ship was filled with action and new hope. Under the direction of the captain and mate the crew worked like maniacs. As the pair had had a life-long training at making their voices heard above sea and wind, the rigging occupants heard snatches of the magic words.

"You three there, get that dory over the side and get that port kedge anchor in it—look alive or I'll make splinters out o' them wooden heads with a belayin' pin—"

"The rest o' you clap on to them jib and fore downhauls and slack away them halliards—come on, you lazy swabs—lay back on that downhaul—get some beef into it afore I knock you out o' them pirut boots—"

In this manner, while the movie people looked admiringly on, the captain and his mate worked and bellowed amid the breaking seas. With the lowering of the headsails, the hauling home of the main sheet, and the leading of a kedge anchor hause to the capstan, the Starshine began to twist

her nose toward deeper water. Hesper, even in his predicament, grunted with admiration and did his best to share his thought with the camera man, but was unsuccessful.

Round and round at the capstan went the crew, while Mate Handy stood over them and by the liberal use of his boot caused them to keep their backs straight. Certain of his words came to those who clung to the rigging:

"Put your weight on 'em—dig your toenails in the deck—keep them backs straight er I'll straighten 'em—"

Finally, after three shiftings of the kedge, the Starshine floated once more. There was no insincerity in the cheer that those in the rigging made an unsuccessful attempt to utter. With Captain Jericho at the wheel and the mate abusing the crew into getting the jib up in a hurry, she gradually gathered headway and held her own. He headed her nose straight for a seemingly impassable maze of jagged rocks, where the passage over the reef was hidden, and the task of getting her into the open sea was at last begun.

With the floating of the schooner the seas had ceased coming aboard, but still the movie company stayed in the rigging, for they feared they would only be in the way on deck and knew not what else to do.

They were still there when the running of the shallows was begun. Straight for the apparently unbroken line of breakers she went, and all but the captain and his mate paled again as though she was headed for certain doom. Sometimes she passed so close to jagged rocks that the spray from the waves which broke over them covered the decks. More than a few times it seemed as if the next moment would see the piercing of her hull, but each time the captain gave her a spoke this way or that and cleared in safety. It was a passage dangerous enough to make in good weather and doubly hard in a gale.

Despite the danger, the director was recovering his equilibrium to such an extent that he caught himself cursing because he had no camera man stationed on the rocks to film the thrilling passage.

At last she had passed the final line of

hungry, jagged rocks and was in the open sea once more. One by one the company came down from the rigging and began to recover their poise with unbelievable rapidity as they saw that all danger was practically over. Miss Faire suddenly went over and shrilled in the captain's ear:

"I'm glad you saved your ship!"

"Put us ashore anywhere—the sooner the better," shouted the director in his other ear. The captain put his mouth to the director's ear and replied:

"We're only goin' to one place, and that's Amityville. Three-quarters o' this hooker is mine ag'in and I goes where I please!"

As nobody could dispute the assertion, and as everybody was glad to be able to get ashore at all, there were no vain objections raised. Mr. Swiberg was far from happy, however, for with the lessening danger he began to feel the loss of his check cruelly, and he hoped the wind would soon cease to roar so loud so he could say all he wished to the director.



FROM the time she was old enough to toddle Rosita McPherson had been the acknowledged Belle of the Bad Lands; which title, however is not nearly so sinister as it may sound to some. The Belle of the Bad Lands, let it be understood, was not a bandit queen or leader of a bunch of raw and reckless cutthroats; she was merely the most popular young lady in that section of prairie and grazing country lying east of the Black Hills in South Dakota.

Rosita, as might be guessed from her name, was a Scotch-Mexican mixture; but the fact that no one ever thought of her as a breed is descriptive enough of her remarkable personal beauty and charm. Until she was nineteen years old Rosita had things pretty much as she wanted them. Then old John McPherson showed the poor taste of dying on his ranch practically insolvent, and her mother decided to get what she could from the wreck and return to Mexico. Rosita, in the local par-

lance, reared up and began to pitch and plunge.

For the past two or three years the hitching-rail at the McPherson ranch had been plentifully chewed by meditative broncos who had spent many evenings there while their owners wore out the rocking-chairs on the veranda and the grass in the front yards. Shortly before McPherson died, however, the contest had simmered down to Jimmy Sanders and Ramon Ortezt, public opinion deciding the plural lover was due to the fact that Rosita favored Jimmy, but couldn't get rid of Ramon long enough to show her preference.

Of course, in such cases anything might happen; but when the sudden showdown came, and Rosita saw a life in the chile-con-carne republic looming up, she decided quick to turn down both her mother's native land and that land's native son at one and the same time. So she became Mrs. James Sanders—and Ramon Ortezt became exceedingly profane and sullen.

Sanders and Ortez owned adjoining claims on the road to Hermosa, the Mexican's lying nearest to town; and consequently his successful rival, often accompanied by Rosita, passing his house frequently to and from the village could hardly be expected to help matters much. In fact, it was the general impression that Sanders or Ortez would some day give the sheriff a disagreeable job, but after several months of absolute quiet and harmony the general impression was put down as a mistake. Perhaps if General Impression had been snooping around the Mexican's premises a little he would have received a surprise and a shock; but as it was, after a time, all thought of bad blood between the two men was forgotten.

Ramon Ortez, after his first show of rather public disappointment, seemed resigned, and went on as he did before, except he stayed more closely at home and was seldom seen in town of evenings. If any one thought of this at all, they very logically decided this was because of natural chagrin; but here logic, too, was terribly mistaken. Ramon's evenings were fully taken up; he had become an animal-trainer.

On the Ortez place, besides the pack and work horses, were two saddle-mares, one a coal-black and one a spotted sorrel, more commonly known as a "paint"; and it was with this latter that Ramon was spending so much time.

To begin with, the paint, who was christened "Barbwire" on account of an experience during her early colthood, was a typical cow-pony with all of that breed's native intelligence and cunning. With this as a starter, her training was comparatively easy. The corral gate, for instance, was fixed with a catch which required a lever to be raised from the outside, after which it could be pulled open and would then swing shut and latch by its own weight. It took but a few days of training and starvation to teach Barbwire to open this gate and enter the corral, where she could always see and smell a pile of oats in her feed-box.

When this lesson was thoroughly learned the evening class began to operate. Here

the course of study was a little more difficult at first, because the paint couldn't understand it at all. It consisted of Barbwire being ridden briskly toward Hermosa until a point two miles from the town where an old path known as the Custer trail joined the road, then doubling back on the trail until it struck the road again about a mile below the Ortez ranch.

The trail had been the original highway, but when the road was surveyed and put through by the State, this particular piece, which was a large curve, was eliminated by putting the roadway straight through from the beginning of the bend to the other end, thus cutting off about three miles of travel. The trail was used only by ranchers looking for stray stock and the forest rangers guarding against fires.

As long as Ramon rode down the main highway and back by the trail Barbwire didn't seem to care, although perhaps thinking to herself it was a lot of foolishness to travel nine miles to get home when by road it was but six. When the next step came, however, Barbwire was plumb disgusted. Ramon had ridden her down as usual, but at the junction he got off, hit her a slap, and started her up the trail, he walking behind. The paint was puzzled, and the outcome was Ramon had to help her along with a club most of the way.

The next time Barbwire went better, and before long she became so callous she no longer waited for her master, but trotted up the trail home, let herself into the corral, and had supper of the oats always found there.

For many nights this program was kept up, while Ramon's days were fully as occupied. For one thing, he had purchased from a mail-order house a revolver and several hundred cartridges, together with a cheap black suit and a nutria tan felt hat; all of which might seem strange, for Ramon was known never to use a gun, rather preferring the knife, while his tastes in clothes took in all the natural and some artificial colors, and his hats were always great black-plush affairs straight from Mexico City. With the revolver Ramon practiced daily in a gulch as far as possible from the roadway.

Thus it may be understood why Ramon was so seldom seen in town. He was extremely busy.

Then came a day that Ramon rode away before sunup, and he was on the black mare. When he returned to his ranch he was afoot, and the paint pony noticed noisily that she had not been fed all day. She called Ramon's attention to this oversight frequently, but it was not until evening that he came near her. Barbwire hardly knew him. He was dressed in a black suit, light hat, and had a big belt around his waist. He had to speak to her before the paint recognized him. Then he leaped upon her barebacked and turned her head up the road away from town.

It was but a few minutes until they came in sight of the Sanders ranch, and, riding very slowly until within a few yards of the place, Ramon carefully adjusted a black mask on his face, dismounted, and dropped the reins over the bronco's head in plain sight of the house.

Then he examined the revolver, calmly walked up to the door, and knocked. There was a scraping of a chair, a few heavy steps, and Sanders stood in the doorway, silhouetted against the lamplight. Ramon aimed at the stomach and fired three times. From the interior came a scream, and the Mexican waited until the girl rushed to the door, then he fled to his horse, hesitated an instant until he was sure she had seen him in the growing dusk, then he dashed away toward Hermosa.

Barbwire was a good horse, as broncos go, and she covered the ten miles to the usual stopping-place in a little under forty-five minutes. Here Ramon dismounted, removed her bridle, slapped her flank, and Barbwire, breathing heavily, trotted slowly homeward where she knew a supper of grain was waiting.

As soon as she was gone Ramon stripped off the dark suit, showing his usual regalia underneath, drew his black-plush hat from inside his shirt, and with the suit, light hat, revolver and belt quickly made a neat bundle and dropped it into an old prospect hole a few steps up the trail. Then from a thicket he led forth the saddled black horse, slipped the bridle on her, mounted, and jogged into town.

As he expected, the sheriff, Jack Watson, was leaning against the bar in the Gold Nugget saloon, and, among friends, Ramon had a drink with him. They had just set their glasses down when, in a spray of gravel and dust, Rosita Sanders dashed up, her horse lathered and dripping from ears to tail.

"Jim—Jim," she gasped to the sheriff as she slid to the ground. "He—he has been murdered."

And to prove that the once general impression was not really dead, but only sleeping, all eyes turned to Ramon.

Rosita had recovered her breath by now, and, her fright somewhat calmed by her nearness to help, noticed the look of suspicion.

"No—no," she said hastily. "It could not have been Ramon. He—unless—unless—"

"Unless what," snapped the sheriff. "Come on, Rosy, let's have all the facts pronto."

So Rosita told what she knew. The assassin had been masked, wore a dark suit, light hat, and was mounted on a spotted horse, all this being indelibly fixed in her mind, as it was not yet dark when the thing occurred.

"It occurs to me that all that stuff about clothes could be a disguise," said a new voice, and the sheriff turned to see his deputy, Mr. Buck Reynolds, beside him. "And furthermore," continued Buck, as he looked straight at the Mexican, "they ain't a whole passel o' paint hosses in this neck o' the woods."

"That is true, Señor Reynolds," replied Ramon easily. "I have what you call the paint horse, and you have one also, and—"

"Where is your hoss, Ortez?" cut in the sheriff.

"Where but before you, Señor Sheriff?" smiled Ramon pointing to his steed. "Seldom do I ride the paint horse. As you see, I ride my black. Charcoal is her name, *señor*."

Some of the ladies had now taken charge of Rosita, and the sheriff withdrew to consult his assistant.

"Well, as the feller says," remarked Buck, "it looks to me like they's somethin' rotten in Denmark. That greaser is mixed

in it, or I'm a sheep-herder. Why, Sanders didn't have an enemy in the country, if you cut Ortez out."

"The clothes, I reckon, was a disguise," agreed the sheriff. "But the fact remains," he pointed out, "that Ortez got here before she did, and his hoss wasn't even sweated up, and besides it's black."

"Well," asked Buck, "why couldn't he rode the paint like hell until he got near town and then switched to this black mare that was tied up somewhere along the road?"

"I thought of that," said Watson, "and that would leave the paint tied up in a thicket somewhere unless she was turned loose to go back home, but in that case Rosita was tearin' right along behind and would met up with the nag."

"Well, it's a nice evening," continued the sheriff. "We'll take a little moonlight ride up to the ranch and look in at Ramon's place on the way."

"And if the paint ain't there—"

"Then we'll have something to work on—maybe."

The result of the night ride was as expected, and the jury brought in a verdict to the effect that one James Sanders met death at the hands of a person or persons unknown. A few days after the funeral Rosita returned home, and, with the sympathetic aid of Red Matthews, her husband's friend and assistant, the work on the ranch was resumed.

The wheels went round as before, with the exception that one active cog was missing. This cog was known as Buck Reynolds, deputy sheriff of Custer County. Buck was not satisfied, and after tumbling the matter over in his mind a few days he took up the rôle of watchful waiting. He practised it every night behind a large bush a few feet from the sitting-room window on the Sanders ranch. Buck had acquired a curiosity to look over any male visitors who might call on Rosita, and for several weeks his nightly vigil had not been relaxed, though it had borne no fruit.

The fact that Red Matthews owned a paint horse disturbed Buck momentarily, but when investigation proved that Red had been in Rapid City on the night of the

murder he put the thought from his mind; but he stuck by his bush.

Competent authorities differ greatly regarding the best time to hunt deer, some favoring early morning while others insist on early evening. When engaged in this sport during the closed season, however, all authorities agree on the evening ambush, because bringing the carcass in at night attracts less attention than it does in the broad daylight.

Of late, as the hunting season approached, game wardens and the forest rangers from the adjoining Black Hills had been greatly annoyed. As usual, at this time, the natives continually slipped out and bagged an animal, desiring to get theirs before the bloated aristocrats from the East came rolling in and spoiled the chances.

So far no one had been caught, which made matters worse. Thus when Ranger Charles Tate, riding one evening along the old Custer trail toward Hermosa, heard a shot ahead, he was sure of what he would see while he rode cautiously forward.

Sure enough, around a curve he could make out, in the dim light, a horseman, and on the ground near the trail a dark heap.

The wind, however, was in the wrong direction, and the poacher heard him coming. Tate had time to make out that the lawbreaker rode a paint horse, then he was gone.

All day long the ranger had been riding the hills, and he knew it was useless to follow, so after a bit of thought he planned another course of action. He was sure the man would try to recover his meat if possible, because deer were not plentiful that year; and trying to figure out how he would go about it, Tate hit upon an idea. He decided the hunter in all probability would follow the trail to where it joined the road, then double back up the roadway and again come down the trail with the air of a casual traveler until he could determine whether or not he was being followed or watched.

With this thought in mind Ranger Tate drew away into a thicket, tied his horse and sat down to wait. He spent the time figuring how long it would take the man to

make the loop and had just decided his surmise was all wrong, when he heard hoofbeats on the trail. Strangely enough, the rider was coming from the same direction as the deer killer had gone. This, thought Tate, was poor judgment, if it was the man he was waiting for. If the man had gone around the loop and come in from above it would not only have thrown off suspicion, but make it difficult for Tate to prove his case. As it was, the man had evidently rode into Hermosa and waited until he thought the coast clear, then boldly come back for his kill.

That the rider was his man, Tate had little doubt, because the old trail was hardly ever used. The ranger drew his revolver, stepped forward and square in front of a man on a "paint" pony.

It had been a long wait for the ranger, because he was tired and mad and supperless, so his words, while sounding natural to him, held a far different meaning to the rider.

"Well, I've got you at last," he snapped, "and you've done your last killin' for a while. Get down."

It was unfortunate for Ramon that he had ridden Barbwire to town that night, because when he started back the "paint" simply refused to return by the road, but insisted on taking the trail as she had been so carefully taught to do. This, of course, brought back unpleasant memories and made Ramon nervous.

Now when he was suddenly confronted by an armed man and the words "got you at last," and "killing" entered into the conversation, Ramon knew the game was up. He had taken chances before so he took one now and jabbed his rowels deep into Barbwire's flanks. The paint lunged straight at the ranger, but that person merely jumped aside and the next instant Ramon tumbled from the saddle with a bullet in his ribs and Barbwire was gone.

It was quite a job getting the Mexican up on his own horse, but Tate finally managed it and brought his captive into town.

Strangely enough the sheriff's office was lit up so here the ranger went and dragged his man in. Around the table were seated Sheriff Watson, his deputy, Buck Reynolds,

Red Matthews and a number of the townsmen. One of the town's two physicians was present, and while he was examining the wounded Mexican Tate unwound his narrative.

The doctor and the sheriff were busy in a low-voiced consultation and just at the moment Ortez opened his eyes and tried to rise.

"Don't exert yourself, my boy," said the doctor, soothingly, "you will only hasten the end."

Ramon looked up at the faces around him. "You mean," he asked feebly, "I—I am going to die, señor?"

"I'm sorry," replied the physician, "you have but a short while left."

A dozen expressions flitted over the Mexican's pale face. At last he drew a deep breath and the battle was over. In the presence of death he told everything just as it happened, even including the hiding-place of the clothing and revolver. At the conclusion Red Matthews laughed shortly and wiped the sweat from his forehead.

"Well, Red," said Buck Reynolds jovially, "that lets you out and I'm dang glad of it, old hoss, but when you comes crashin' up to the ranch on that old paint, busts in and commences tellin' Rosita something about a killin' and somebody bein' after you, why I just naturally thought you was the bird I was after."

"You old fool," grinned Red. "I got dizzy tellin' you it wasn't nothin' but a deer—"

"It seems to me, sheriff," drawled Ranger Tate, "that me and Buck can make a trade here. I'll swap my first-class murderer that you want, for your poacher that I want."

The sheriff scrutinized the ranger a moment. "It seems to me, Charley," he said, "as long as the huntin' season opens tomorrow, and in view of the extenuatin' circumstances and so forth, it might be just as well to sort a let Red slip out and take his deer home and we'll make out the papers for your reward."

"It's been a big night all around, sheriff," grinned the ranger. "You and me and Buck will just split that reward three ways and—"

A groan from the Mexican interrupted him.

"Aw, shut up, greaser," growled Watson, "you ain't hurt half as bad as you think you are."

A sudden light dawned on Ramon's face and in his surprise he sat up with a startled look.

"You mean," he gasped, "you mean—I—"

"Sure," replied Watson. "That was all just a little hoss of the doc's—to throw a scare into you. That little hole you got in you ain't nothin' at all—just plumb nothin'. You'll be all right in a couple weeks and live till you're hung, son."

A Postscript by J. R. McCarthy



BOSTON POWERS sat all night by the bed of the dying man. The poor fellow was unconscious, had not spoken a word for three days. His breathing became gradually weaker. The physician had said that he would not open his eyes again. But Boston Powers knew, as a friend sometimes knows more than a doctor, that poor old Bill Hammond would speak before he died.

As the dreary day came into the room and hid the little desk light by the bed, Bill Hammond did open his eyes. His hand touched that of Powers, lying on the counterpane.

"Boss," he said, "I promise. You shall hear from me. Some way, I shall let you know."

And that was all, for Bill Hammond.

Of course, the local world of Aken's Corners knew of the incident within an hour's time. The neighborhood had been familiar with the views of Powers and Hammond concerning the next world, and as the two men were stolid, successful citizens, sensible and unexcited even when talking of spirits and spiritualism, the interest shown was one of curiosity rather

than scorn. There was a good deal about this sort of thing in the papers, anyhow. Might be something in it. They would wait and see, said the neighbors.

Boston Powers, a meager man, with slight, gray beard and the stoop of one who has leaned over a hoe, was still equal to the day's work. He had no intentions of sitting in the barn or on the hilltop to wait for a message from Hammond.

"It 'll come," he told his wife, "in due time and in the right way. I'll know it when it comes, and I'm not going to worry until then."

Having sold his farm a few years previously, Powers spent most of his time during the summer months in his garden, raising a vast deal more than he needed. The surplus he had no need to peddle, for motorists, knowing the quality of his "garden sass," stopped daily and carried it away. The fact is that, especially with lettuce, Powers was making a name for himself far and near. Housewives in Harrisburg, forty miles away, had been known to demand that their husbands drive out to Powers's place for lettuce to grace an important dinner.

The spring following the death of his friend Boston put even more effort than usual into his lettuce garden. The first lot he planted very early. The care that he took with the preparation of the ground showed his special interest. He waited until there was exactly enough moisture to make it turn properly. After the plowing—for this year it was too large a plot to spade—he made it level as a carpet before he planted his seed. The seeding itself he would trust to no other hand than his own. Carefully, almost lovingly, he scattered the seed upon the bed, with perfect distribution, so that there would be easy growing and no loss from crowding. And then, over all, the wire netting, to discourage marauding birds. Powers was well satisfied with his work.

A slight rain came just about the time it should have appeared, and within a few days the little green leaves were springing up as if by magic. Powers, who delighted more in seeing things grow than in seeing them sell, was having a fine time. Not a weed had a chance to show its head. The plot for the next bed was being prepared for seeding, although it was not yet time. Poor old Bill Hammond and his message were completely forgotten.

The leaves were up a half-inch and had begun to look like the lettuce the housewife knows, when Powers noticed that in one spot the plants were not quite healthy. A less interested observer could have detected no difference. Powers was worried. The next morning he was out at daybreak, and, sure enough, some of the plants were wilting. Just a little, but they were obviously wilting, and nothing in the gardener's experience could give him the reason. He gave up all attention to the new bed. He brought water in a can, and sprinkled the sick leaves, sheltering them afterward from the sun. But there was nothing gained. The following day the wilting was more pronounced and covered a greater area.

"It beats all," Powers told his little wife. "The lettuce is dying, in spots, and not a bug on it. It's got all the water it wants. The ground's just as good in the bad places as it is beside them. The birds couldn't

touch it, and anyhow there's nothing that looks like a bird bite or any other kind of bite on the leaves. Too much for me. Suppose you take a look at it."

Mrs. Powers knew very little about lettuce, having other matters to attend to, but she was not averse to having a look, now that her judgment was given the compliment of a query.

She looked long and carefully, and studied the ground about the plot and the sky above it.

"Well, Boston," she said finally and thoughtfully, "I guess it's that man Hammond giving you a message from the other side. There ain't nothing earthly about it. This here's a message, all right, but it's meant for you, and I leave you to do the reading of it."

With that she went back to the house.

Powers thought he might as well have done his own figuring, as usual. Women always take advantage of a fellow, anyhow, if he gives them a chance. The next time he wanted help he would do the helping himself. This was a serious matter, and not to be taken lightly.

He turned to the lettuce. The spots gave no indication of their origin. They were uneven, sprawled nearly across the bed. Long and curved, they seemed almost to be letters. Suddenly he stood rigid, gazing intently. "C," he spelled, muttering under his breath; and then "o"; a slight hesitation, then "m" and "e." He could not take his eyes from it. "COME," not quite plainly, but still legibly, was printed there in his bed of lettuce, printed in wilting leaves.

Powers sat down. Not that day nor the next did he tell his wife. She would laugh at him. It was her own joke, for that matter. She had thought of it, and considered the idea funny, even before the glaring reality had been discovered. So Powers brooded alone.

Was it, then, Hammond with his message? But would he make himself known in so strange a way? And the message itself, "*Come*"—that was not a message as he had thought of such a thing. That was a command, and Powers refused to think of what the command entailed. He had

said that he would know when the time came, but he was not sure. Perhaps—perhaps—

The days passed, ever so slowly for the pondering gardener. And the healthy bed grew brighter and greener, while the miserable letters spelled themselves each day more clearly. Within a week there was no vestige of the wilted leaves. The word was written on dark earth.

Powers did not again invite his wife into the garden. He continued to work, however drearily. A new bed was started, with the same care but with little joy. The seeds were planted as regularly, and were as carefully covered with wire netting. Again the weather was favorable, and again the leaves shot up as if by magic. At another time Powers's delight would have been keen.

Daily he watched the new bed, almost fearing that there was more to the message, or that there was another message, for it had slowly grown upon his mind that there was no other explanation. One morning, when it was gray and raining a little, he slipped out to the garden before breakfast. Stooping close to the ground, he looked intently.

Was that a streak, there at the edge of the plot? He could not be sure, gaze as he might. And there, a little to the right, were not the leaves wilting? He could not be sure, but he was much disturbed when he returned to the house.

The day brought no relief in certainty. The next morning he was out before daylight. As soon as it was light enough to see he was stooping close over the bed. Yes, it was a streak, and there was more wilting to the right. He could not tell more.

All day he could read no more than the streak, which was a capital "I." That night he did not sleep. In the morning he loitered about the house, half fearful of seeing what he knew he must see.

At last he went, slowly, to the message. It was not hard to read. "I am in he—" And that was all. He looked closely for more letters, but to the right of the "e" the lettuce was fine and healthy—not a wilted leaf.

"I am in he—" Powers was angry. Well, what was it that Hammond was in—hell or heaven? Couldn't the man write? Hadn't he written that much? Or printed it, for it was all there in large sprawling capitals.

"Hell!" muttered Powers, who was not given to swearing. And this was the fellow who had said "Come." His anger gave way to a sort of unreasoned dismay. Had he not asked Hammond to communicate with him, and had not Hammond promised with his last breath? And here was his best friend, the man who had made him promise, cursing the message when it came. But what could he do? Powers was physically limp, mentally he was almost dazed. He continued the day's work, tramping on fine green plants for the first time in his life, pulling lettuce with weeds.

Another day came, and another, and the letters became legible to any who might pass. Powers did not care. He cared for nothing, did not even become interested as the first bed of lettuce neared table size. He stood for hours watching the green leaves to the right of that ambiguous "e."

A week after he discovered the second attempt at a message the worst happened. A new wilting had begun. There it stood, "ll." Even looking at the dark word, "Come," and turning to the newly completed "I am in hell," Powers was relieved.

At least now he knew. Even if he obeyed the first command, he would know where he was going. Through the long days and nights he had considered obeying. Word from another world was not to be trifled with. He was in a strange world now. Perhaps he would go—

Mrs. Powers had noticed that her husband was not himself.

"You are getting old," she told him.

Powers made no attempt at denial, and for some days he let that explanation for his condition pass. But he knew he must tell her.

One day he appeared at the kitchen door.

"Come out here," he said briefly.

At the garden he stopped, pointed to the word "Come," and waited. "Who's been ruining your lettuce?" she asked. Then

she saw the thing, and seemed partly to understand.

He pointed to the second message. She was amazed, frightened, and then angered. "Some fool neighbor trying to scare you; don't pay any attention to it."

But one could see that she was very thoughtful as she returned to the kitchen. Powers found her help unsatisfactory. This wasn't the sort of thing that "some fool neighbor" could do. If it were a hoax, it had a Satanic glint in it that no man he could think of possessed. He could not reason properly in that vicinity. He walked, miles interminable, and returned weary of body and depressed of mind.

The message had come, Powers was convinced. It had come and found him wanting. He hadn't the courage to answer. He could only go through the day's trials slovenly, sullenly. And day by day the trials became harder to bear, small as they had once seemed.

City people came out to buy lettuce. Visitors appeared, now that the hardest of the spring work was over. Knowledge of the message went abroad, and crowds came. A few laughed, but more looked out of slanting eyes at poor Powers, who said nothing but saw and heard everything. He was a marked man; he knew that whatever might happen he would presently obey the summons.

One night, toward morning, there was a knocking at the door. Powers heard and trembled. He could not move. His wife thrust her head out of the window. It was a neighbor woman, Mrs. Riscal, who said that her husband was dying, and must see Boston Powers.

Shaking in every limb, Powers dressed and went the two miles to Riscal's home. Not a word was said on the journey.

Riscal's eyes, in the feeble light, caught those of Powers as he opened the door. The dying man ordered his wife to leave and beckoned the visitor to a chair.

"I have a confession," he said abruptly. "I have done you a great harm, meaning nothing but a joke. I have no belief in any other world"—this slowly, defiantly—"and I thought there would be fun in it if I could make a fool of you. You had

the whole community guessing, you know. They were ready to believe, if anything should happen. I arranged to produce the message, and then, at the right moment, to show that it was a hoax."

Riscal closed his eyes for a moment. It was a great effort.

He went on:

"The right moment didn't come. You took it harder than I had expected. You were going down hill, and it was my fault. I hated to let the chance go, but kept thinking I must tell. Then came this stroke, and I knew that I had to tell you. Couldn't let you be killed by a joke." He tried to laugh.

"But how did you do it? There was no sign."

"Here." Riscal took a little atomizer from beneath his pillow. "This was the way. It was very simple. I had merely to spray the letters, as a man paints." He thrust the instrument into his visitor's resistless hand. "I was frightened the second time, and had to leave before I finished the job. So I went back and spelled the last two letters another night. I'm sorry, Powers, and now I've done what I can to make amends. No one knows this but you and me. Do as you wish about telling."

An hour later, on his way home, Powers was able to think.

"Odd that Riscal never entered my mind! He was the one man in the community who would either have reason to do a thing like that or the cleverness to discover a method. He looked at me queerly at Hammond's funeral. I remember his eyes then. Odd I never thought of him all this time."

He was talking to himself. Suddenly, without knowing why, he took the atomizer from his pocket, threw it to the road, and jumped upon it again and again.

When Powers told his wife that Riscal was dead the new note of freedom in his voice passed unnoticed. But the next morning, when he went to his garden whistling for the first time in many days, Mrs. Powers noted the change and was thankful, without asking any questions.

The first thing he did when he began work that morning was to plant new seeds

in the ground that formed the letters. He had not thought of doing so before, but now it was the natural thing. Weeding, working at this and that, finally preparing the ground for the season's third bed of lettuce, he was a new man that day. The people who came, whether for curiosity or to make purchases, found him vastly changed. He laughed with them, gave them word for word, even invited them to return.

The newly planted seeds turned the once terrifying letters green. The new bed prospered and came almost to marketing size, while both the old beds were cut away. Mrs. Powers no longer told her

husband that he was getting older. In fact, any one could see that he was a dozen years younger and becoming more supple and buoyant daily.

It was Sunday morning, and Powers slept late. After a hearty breakfast he took his wife's hand under his arm, and together they went to the garden, to the third and last bed of lettuce. They were laughing.

Powers went suddenly taut, like a stretched wire. There, spelled out in leaves that were not only wilted but withered and dry, were the words:

YOU WERE RIGHT—RISCAL.



MANHATTAN

BY ELDREDGE DENISON

A NARROW window underneath the eaves,
Where never touch of sunlight comes, nor moon
May shine to mix the magic of the night,
But where, across that little patch of sky,
Sometimes a while cloud smiles, or, in the dark
Between the chimney-tops, can gleam a star;

—
And there, night after night, one sits and stares,
Up from the depth below is heard the shout
Of children dancing in the street to some
Late organ's tune, the call of neighbor wives,
The laugh of passing women; and he sees
The arc's false moonlight lie along the wall.

The asphalt smell, hot, heavy, holds the air,
And comes the dull, recurrent sound of trains
Upon the pillared track. He, city-lured,
Has seen mirages pass; and it is still
A narrow window underneath the eaves,
Where, weary with vain quests, he sits and stares.

The odor of the town is now the breath
Of June across the fields of hay; the sound
Of voices, those who turn the windrow back;
And the commingled rumble of the trains,
The humming of innumerable bees.
Again it is sweet summertime at home—
And oh, the orchard walk, the little lane, and she!