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AUGUST 1916

THE
BLUE BOOK
MAGAZINE

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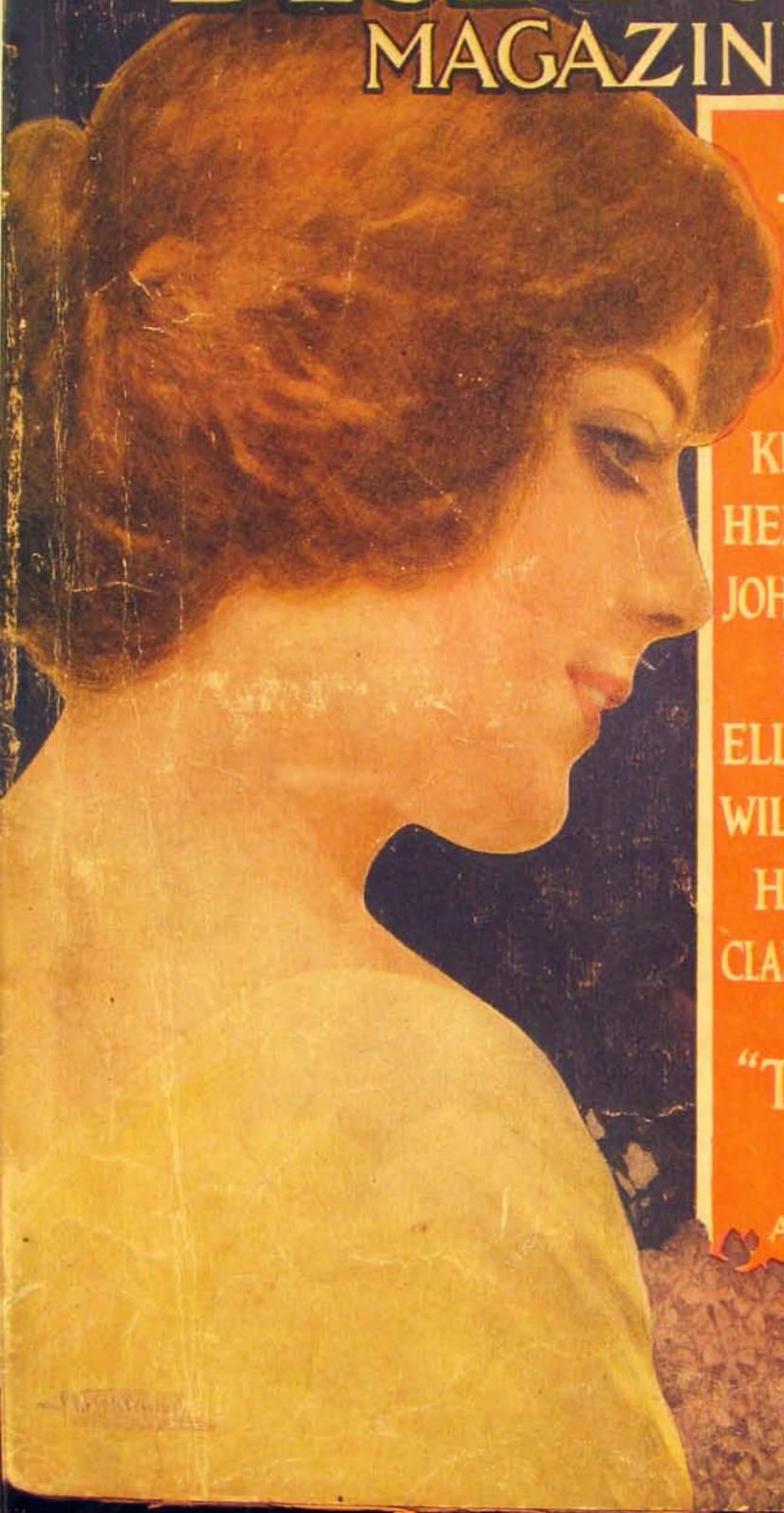
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"The Unknown
Mr. Kent"

A COMPLETE NOVEL

by

ROY
NORTON





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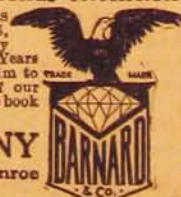
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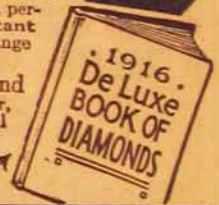
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THE BLUE BOOK

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The Eleven Best Short Stories of the Month

The Youngest of the McMahons. By Gilbert Parker 721

A story of the sort that has made Gilbert Parker one of the really great writers of his generation. Like his most notable successes, it is located in western Canada.

A Hairbreadth 'Scape for Euphemia.

By Kennett Harris 737

The author of "Marrying Mr. Micklejohn" and "A Promoter of Pure Provender" has surpassed himself in this delightful story.

T. Jebberson.

By Ellis Parker Butler 761

Jabez Bunker invades the lair of a professional stock-promoter and comes away with three thousand dollars shorn from the shearer.

The Pay Streak.

By Robert J. Casey 770

A powerful story of the Black Hills country, by a new writer who shows exceptional ability.

A Sour Infield.

By William Almon Wolff 780

Big baseball becomes doubly exciting when civil war starts in the infield. . . . A fine story by the author of "Quarter Limit."

The Girl Who Was Afraid. By Charles Wesley Sanders 807

A few moments of real terror teach her not to fear smaller things: an unusual and well-written story.

That Little Mother.

By Hapsburg Liebe 816

An appealing tale of the Army and the Philippines, by the man who wrote "God Bless Bill."

An Interest in Life.

By Philip Gibbs 822

The boy was bored and on his way to the demnition bow-wows. How he won back his interest in life.

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MAGAZINE AUGUST 1916

DONALD KENNICOTT, Associate Editor.

HEADINGS: Drawn by HERBERT MORTON STOOPS

Notice of Dissolution. By John E. Rosser 851

Wherein thieves fall out in a quaintly amusing fashion—and with interesting consequences.

Free Lances in Diplomacy. By Clarence Herbert New 858

"The Greater Plot:" this story of a diplomat in the Great War will suggest that its author has special sources of "inside" information.

The Guile of Ruth. By Elliott Flower 870

"I'm going to marry Mr. Watson," she announces at the end of the story. "But you mustn't congratulate him. He doesn't know it yet."

Three Continued Stories

Jane. By Henry C. Rowland 748

"She needs marryin'," said the *Waccamaw's* mate of Jane after she'd neatly capsized a plate of fried eggs on his head. Captain Bill married her, and then—well, big trouble followed.

"Number 17." By Louis Tracy 788

This "Mystery of New York," by the author of "The Red Year" and "Wings of the Morning," more and more intrigues the reader's interest. The resumé, on page 788, will give you the situation if you haven't read the previous installments.

The Temporary Heir. By John Fleming Wilson 832

The second half of this impressive story of the South Seas: *Hendricks* reaches San Francisco and finds *Susan Mathews*; and then a series of surprising events transpires.

—And—

A Complete Book-Length Novel

The Unknown Mr. Kent. By Roy Norton 880

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HAROLD MACGRATH, author of "The Goose Girl," "The Man on the Box," and of "Madam Who."

Features of Our Next Issue

"The Sheriff of Panamint"

By Peter B. Kyne

A captivating story of the desert such as only the author of "The Sheriff of Panamint," "Big Tim Meagher" and the "Cappy Ricks" stories knows how to write.

"Mrs. Mellinger's Militant Methods"

By Walter Jones

The author of "The Outing at Stroebel's Lake" and the "Pembina" stories has put some of his happiest touches into this blithesome tale.

The New Stories of "Tarzan"

By Edgar Rice Burroughs

No fiction character of recent years has so many friends as "Tarzan," the white boy who roams wild among the wild things of the jungle. You will enjoy these vividly imagined narratives hugely.

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By Harold MacGrath

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"The Rose Cliff Job"

By Frederick R. Becholdt

A short novel of the West, written in Mr. Becholdt's most attractive style. If you remember his "Lighthouse Tom" stories and "At the Rancho de la Tierra," we don't need to tell you how good that is.

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August

1916

THE
BLUE BOOK
MAGAZINE

Vol. XXIII

No. 4

THE BLUE BOOK is publishing the only short stories by Gilbert Parker to appear during 1916



The **YOUNGEST** *of the McMAHONS*

By **Gilbert Parker**

Author of "The Right of Way," "The Seats of the Mighty,"
"The Money Master," "Blood Will Tell," etc.

THEM McMahons, Y'r Anner, they'll be the death of some one before they're done with it, the way they carry on! Look at him—look at him now, ragin' up the street with them harses, and he drunk too, and no constable annywhere.

There's no good in them fellas, not a ha'purth."

It was Patsy Kernaghan who spoke. He was standing outside the office of the Young Doctor, to whom he addressed his complaint.

The Young Doctor was just getting

into his buggy for a long drive across the prairie on a visit to a patient. In silence, for a moment, he watched the galloping horses and the swaying wagon, with the driver erect, his outstretched hands holding the reins above his head as he shouted wild encouragement to the excited pair. Presently, with a sorrowful shake of the head, the Young Doctor replied:

"It's the best of them, too. It's Phil McMahon. The cut of his jib isn't the same as the other two. It isn't a bad face, and he's open in his ways. The others go blanketed, as the Indians say."

"It doesn't do 'em much good, anyhow," remarked Patsy. "Everyone's got onto them. They're horse-thieves, and that'll come out all right some day."

The Young Doctor was in his buggy now, getting the reins into his hands. "Patsy," he said reprovingly, "don't give your tongue so much mouth. It's dangerous calling a man a thief even when it's true. For myself, I don't believe Phil McMahon would steal horses—or anything else."

Patsy scratched his head. "Well, Y'r Anner," he said, "I'd take your word about a man quicker than I would anyone else's. All I can say is, he's aither a damned hippycrit, with his laughin' face and roarin' voice, or he's just a scamp with the devil in him. But how could *he* be straight and open, and his blood-brothers what they are!"

"Patsy, you'd be keeping me here all day if I'd let you, though you know there's the sick waiting me," remarked the Young Doctor, preparing to start and yet looking at the other with a benevolent eye, for the little Irishman had not an ill streak in him. "There's this to be said for him, you'll admit—that he has only joined his brothers within the last month, and he mayn't know what they are."

"Shure, that's true for you, Doctor dear," answered Patsy quickly. "That's as likely as annything else. He's been in Idaho, in the States yonder, for years past. But I know what Tom and Matt McMahon was in Ireland twenty years ago—begare, I do! I've h'ard tell. Like boy, like man, sez the man that

told me. They're no credit to Ireland, them two, though yourself too only come from Inniskillen, that I never h'ard anny good of, Y'r Anner."

The Young Doctor smiled quizzically, and laid his whip on Patsy's shoulders. "I left Inniskillen because I'd have starved to death as a doctor, the place being so healthy, and so little for me to do. The Lord loveth Inniskillen, Patsy. Goodness is health, and the place was healthy because it sent the bad men straight away to Hell or Kerry, and Hell had the preference with them."

Patsy flushed, for he was a Kerry man and loved it, and he was ready to burst forth in protest, but he caught the look in the other's eye, and he only smiled helplessly as the Young Doctor continued:

"Never mind, Patsy. They tell me Kerry's better the last fifteen years—since you left. So no one can say you haven't done some good in the world."

"Get along, my lads," he added to the fretful pair of horses, which instantly tightened the traces and bravely trotted away.

Patsy watched the Young Doctor out of sight admiringly. "If he asked me to hand me liver out for a dog's breakfast, I'd do it," he said with decision, and then swung round to watch Phil McMahon tearing down the street again, his voice breaking into snatches of ribald song.

PHIL was having what he called a "hoot." He had had only one hoot since coming to Askatoon, and the place had got on his nerves, somehow. Down in Montana and Idaho and Wisconsin and Wyoming he had had the time of his life, as he called it, and it was only homesickness to see his two elder brothers—so much older than himself—which had brought him to Askatoon.

He had been warmly welcomed by Tom and Matt, who forthwith determined to make him settle down on the ranch and ultimately join their gang of horse-thieves operating on the Border. They had skillfully organized it, but they needed one who had Phil's popular gifts, his daring and resource, his ingenuity and brains, to carry through

their boldest proposals successfully. Neither of them had Phil's gifts or looks, though in one sense Tom McMahon was a handsome man, with a strong blue eye and well-molded head, a fine full beard, while in stature he far exceeded Phil. Yet he did not inspire confidence, and Matt was little better.

Phil, however, had made friends ever since his coming to Askatoon, particularly among the casual population and non-church-members. He was the essence of querulous good-nature, if such a contradiction may exist. He was free with his money, and full of good stories, and an attraction to every saloon and hotel in the place. Though the Young Doctor and Patsy Kernaghan had frowned upon his reckless driving in the streets, the people who looked out of the doors of the saloons at the tearing onset of man, horses and wagon said merely that he was showing off, and they yelled rude remarks at him.

The town constable, however (moved thereto by the complaints of certain citizens), intent to repress riotous conduct and the sale and use of strong drink, went out and stood in the middle of the street, holding both hands up against the thundering pair of horses and their driver. As for Phil, he took no notice, and the constable would have been run down, had he not jumped aside just in time.

It was lucky that the street was fairly empty of people and conveyances. This was chiefly by accident, for it was market-day and market-time, and most traffickers were in the market-square. There were enough people left, however, to furnish tragedy for Phil's escapade; and Priscilla Meekin, who had a preoccupation of mind and a self-will which, working together, might make dark mischief for herself and others, nearly made it a fact.

PRISCILLA was of an age from which the tassels of hope do not hang in any numbers, and her life had been a series of disappointments. It did seem absurd that a girl should have an income of seven hundred dollars a year, and yet should not have been able to abandon the title of spinster and set up a home for two. Was she not thrifty

and careful? Would she not be a devoted wife to a real man—not the men she talked to in the mirror when alone in her room? Yet no one really worth while, in all her thirty-three years, had ever asked her to marry him, and she had not been successful in her own way of asking, which of course was not asking outright. Still, Rigby the druggist, when finding it difficult to carry on his business for lack of increased capital, heard opportune hints from Priscilla's gentle lips, and several young ministers of religion had been carefully waylaid in seasons and circumstances when the young man's fancy lightly turns to thoughts of love. Indeed, in desperation, she had even starved herself ill so that the Young Doctor might be called in to attend her; all to no purpose. It was not easy to face the future with the straw-colored, faded Priscilla, whose eyebrows were like strips of dandelion-white, whose lips were so thin that they seemed a mere line of faintish pink, whose body was so deprecating and pliant that it almost wriggled, whose voice had a coaxing, affected tone which only the most toneless ear could endure—and Rigby sang in the Methodist choir; and the young ministers, to their credit, married for love rather than money. As for the Young Doctor, he soon showed himself very unsympathetic. "A perfect butcher and brute," Priscilla had called him in her pique after his expensive treatment,—for the Young Doctor determined to teach her a lesson,—though he had only cut up her feelings and not her body. Indeed, there was so little of that to cut away that he had ordered for her much starchy food to stiffen her pliant back and make impossible her ingratiating wriggle.

It was the anemic Priscilla, with the watery blue eyes, who brought Phil McMahon's career as a charioteer to an end for the moment, by throwing herself at great peril into his tempestuous path. It was all pure accident, which, however, might easily have ended in her being driven decorously and somberly to the churchyard on the hill near by to Askatoon.

It was like Priscilla to bungle her accident as she had bungled everything

else in her life, save in the hard bargain she had driven for bed and board with the wife of her cousin Jonas Billings. She had lived with them free of charge for months after her father's death, and then had so worked upon the feelings of Jonas' wife, who was a devout Methodist, by becoming "converted," that when the bargain was struck, she got her living far below market price, much to her husband's disgust; for he was no Methodist, he hated cant, he did not like Priscilla and he felt more at home when she was not there. He was a spectator of her accident now.

Priscilla had had some words with a smirking clerk in a dry-goods store, because of certain advice he had given her as to the color and size of some stockings; and with angry eyes and an unbecoming flush to her mottled cheeks she flung out of the shop and proceeded to cross the street. She was even talking to herself—for the stockings urged upon her by the officious clerk were much too large; and why should he recommend a "gold-yellow to match her own coloring," as he had said!

SHE was oblivious of all sounds save the loud noises in her anemic brain, when she stepped from the sidewalk into the street. Suddenly some one called out to her. It was Jonas Billings. He saw her danger from the oncoming horses and wagon and he shouted at her.

"Priscilla—say, look out!" he called. "Look out—you damn fool," he added under his breath, for unless she hurried she would be run down.

Jonas' familiar voice roused her out of her distempered abstraction, and she looked up, startled. She saw Phil McMahon erect in the wagon shouting, the reins held high above his head; and panic seized her. She was fully three-fourths of the way across, and could have made the remaining distance easily, but with frantic excitement she jerked round and started back.

"Hell—don't—go on!" called out Jonas in anxiety and alarm. She was too dumfounded to grasp what he said. In her mind's disorder there was a vague sense that it was safer to return than to make for the farther shore on

which stood repellent Rigby the druggist. Back she went, scrambling like a lame hen, toward the store where she had been "insulted," as she afterwards declared to a sympathetic listener—a spinster older than herself, who repeated the insult wherever it would be effective.

People stood on the sidewalk transfixed with alarm, for nothing could be done to save her. Everything depended on herself and on a drunken fellow in the juggernaut thing bearing down on her. She herself had terrible sensations of black clouds smothering her, and through the clouds huge monsters flinging themselves on her. There was no will, no control of the disordered senses. She was far more drunken, in a way, than Phil McMahon. That was proved presently when he, in a sudden and sobering realization of her danger, dexterously gathered in the loose reins and wrenched at the maddened horses' mouths. It was a great tribute to his strength, his skill and his presence of mind, that he saved Priscilla from death and himself from a charge of manslaughter. The horses did not quite clear her, however. As they swept by, the shoulder of one struck her slightly and threw her on the ground free of hoofs and wheels, but only by inches.

She lay motionless where she had fallen.

JONAS BILLINGS was the first to reach her, and Rigby, racing across, came next, followed by several fussy folk, much excited, asking if she were dead. Rigby soon set all doubts at rest about that. He had her taken over the way to his store, and in its half-mysterious atmosphere, with its suggestive and magical odors, she was presently restored to consciousness.

Her awakening was not unhappy. She at once realized how soothing it was to be an object of interest—a thing dear to a certain type of woman. This first satisfaction was darkened, however, by the fact that she was in the arms of her cynical cousin, Jonas Billings, who would waste no sentiment on her even at the last gasp. She had hardly struck the balance between the

advantages and the disadvantages of her situation, when Phil McMahon entered the store a little noisily. He made straight for where she lay looking round in a languishing way, supported by Jonas Billings' knee.

"Say, missus, I'm sick and sorry and silly over this business," he said to Priscilla, one hand waving, and pulling off his hat with the other. "I must ha' been well soaked. But it sobered me all right. When I saw your trouble, I felt like a boy when he watches castor-oil coming to him in a spoon. It knocked me. It,"—he turned to the other people in the store,—“well, I don't hesitate to say that I got as skeered as if I was hittin' my own mother in the face.”

Some one in the store giggled. He had called Priscilla “missus,” and he had indirectly placed her on the list of the elderly ones. Truth is, with her attempt to make the most of the situation, Priscilla had lengthened her face, and she looked so piously piteous that it increased her years very noticeably. She forgot that only vivacity—even her assumed and affected vivacity—could keep her looks in line with her years. She certainly was throwing away her profits out of this transaction.

These profits were squandered entirely a moment later when, indignant and chagrined at Phil's manner of addressing her, and seeing the effect of it upon the lookers-on, she heard him say:

“Missus—say, missus, I hope you'll forget it. All's right that comes right, but of course it don't wipe the blame off me. I might ha' robbed a happy home of its pride and beauty. I hope you'll take it kindly and say, ‘Philip, I forgive you’—Philip being my baptismal name, but called Phil by everybody. You've seen enough of young people in your time to forgive 'em. I was always young for my age, and I was feelin' partickler young to-day, it bein' my birthday—thirty—sweet and simple thirty. That's why I let myself go. . . . Say, missus, let bygones be bygones, and I hope you'll accept this here fifteen dollars, the last I got in my pocket, and take 'em home to the little ones—a gift from a repentant sinner.”

HE held out three five-dollar bills toward her with an ingratiating manner, and added: “I bet your husband'll be so glad you escaped that he'll forget all about me, and the children wont mind— Why, Jeerusalem!”

The last exclamation was caused by Priscilla's knocking his hand aside with spirit, not to say temper.

By words he certainly had wiped out much of the profit in the incident which might have been hers. She could see people sniggering at the reference to her “little ones” and her “husband;” and there was Rigby the druggist with his hand over his mouth—Rigby whom she had once tried to capture, Rigby happily married now. Also there was her cousin Jonas, who would gibe at her forever after; it was a humiliation not to be borne!

She sat up, and with finger outstretched to the constable, said:

“Take him to jail. I'll never be well again. I've got internal injuries. Put him in handcuffs. He tried to kill me. He don't care who he rolls in the dust. I was as near death—take him to jail at once!”

The constable was precise in his reply. He was a man of few words. He would probably have tried to marry Priscilla long ago if she had not talked so much, for her seven hundred dollars a year was quite worth while; but he could not stand people who babbled. He was notoriously hard on brawlers and loud-talking drunken men, and lenient with the silent and morose disturbers of the peace.

“I can't put him in jail,” he said in response. “It aint the law. But you can summons him—and I can summons him; and that's what I'm goin' to do. He's got to see that this town aint in Idaho. He's got to realize he must stop when I hold up my hand. I done that, and he kept on, and here you are! I'll have him up all right, miss. Get home, and don't worry.”

“What a fuss—and I was ready to square it!” said Phil in cheerful disappointment as he put the money in his pocket again. “Well, I'm sorry you can't forgive me, missus.”

“She aint married,” said Rigby the druggist, with friendly intent.

It was too much for Priscilla, however. She scrambled weakly to her feet.

"He'll have to pay for this," she said almost hysterically, for Rigby's comment had touched her in a tender corner.

"Say, I'd have offered you more if I'd known you was a single woman—honest, I would," remarked Phil, holding out a friendly hand to her as she passed him, making for the door.

No one knew why Phil said that. Perhaps it was his native chivalry towards women.

II

THE net result of Phil McMahon's dangerous escapade was a summons. It was followed by a trial of short duration, because the law-breaker was not willing to put up a defense. He pleaded not guilty, but that was merely to give his lawyer a chance of making a plea for an easy sentence. During the trial Phil was carefully, and almost amusingly, sympathetic. In the thrilling, dramatic moment to Priscilla when she gave evidence, his eye was limpid with magnanimous regard. He beamed upon her. That was his way. Scamp as he was, he had regard and respect for the opposite sex. Anyone that wore a dress—if that dress was clean and its wearer had a clean name also—commanded his homage. In other words, he liked 'em clean and damn the looks, though if they had the looks it was better fun. He was an incorrigible Adonis, and yet with no evil toward women in him.

Phil's trial gave Askatoon a great day, not so much because of the misdemeanor as because of Priscilla, whose incursion into the realms of legitimate drama, with a smack of comedy, was a relish to every meal eaten by the people of Askatoon for several days. They all admitted that Priscilla had come into her own in a way. Sensation, in which she should be a living, breathing, central figure, had always been the desire of her heart; and here it was. Phil had opened up for her doors to a red sky of sensation.

In the witness-box she was so moved by the central position she occupied that she seemed oblivious of the biting, suggestive and subtly insolent questions of Augustus Burlingame the lawyer—who, none too secretly disreputable, had even borrowed money of her in the past; and because she had babbled of his unpaid loans, he did not scruple to make her modest goodness appear naked assurance when he had her now under cross-examination. He did not, however, carry his ruthless game far, because Phil McMahon intervened, saying:

"Give it the hush. Let the girl be. It's me that's done the harm, and all I can say is I'm proud to see her alive."

The wind being taken out of Burlingame's sails, the trial soon ended, a fine of fifty dollars or a month in jail being imposed. The month in jail was a heavy punishment, but when he announced it, the magistrate assumed that Phil would naturally elect to pay the fine. His experience had been that men would rather pay five hundred dollars than be in jail for three days.

After a judicious and reproving little speech from the Bench, Phil stood up, but he did not put his hand in his pocket. He seemed to be waiting patiently for something.

"Pay the fine—fifty it is," whispered Burlingame to him.

"I'll not pay a cent of any fine," returned Phil loudly. "I've spent all I mean to spend on the fun I had. A blamed good drunk it was, but it's over. I paid in cash all it was worth. Money's no punishment to me. When I have it, anybody can have it; it burns my pocket. Money can't pay for breakin' the law, not with me. I've broke the law, and I'll see it through. On principle, I'm a friend of the law, and prison's a good place for them that's broke it and are weary of ill-doin'. So take me where I'll be eatin' bread that I wont have to pay for."

Everyone laughed except the magistrate, Priscilla and the chief constable. Priscilla did not laugh, because now that the thing was over, the reaction had come. The way Phil had looked at her during the trial had fluttered her in spite of herself. She had taken the attitude of an avenging goddess, and

she had got out of it all there was to get. Somehow punishment was not so sweet as it looked.

Being what she was, an epitome of the weaknesses of her sex, she suddenly gave way to one of them, which was to punish and then to pity. Besides, Phil McMahon's voice was a thing to remember; it had a coaxing element which had been too much for women of more character than herself; and when, in leaving the courtroom, he turned, and with deviltry in his eye and kindness on his tongue, he said to her, "Priscilla, oh, Priscilla, 'tis for you I go to jail!" she felt a shiver of emotion go through her. So powerful was it that she even failed to notice how everybody's attention was fixed on Phil, while she remained unnoticed save by a few of her own sex who gave to their congratulations a tone of assassination.

PHIL went to jail cheerfully. It was not the first time he had been there. It had no terrors for him, particularly in summer-time, when he could be nice and warm and sleep to his heart's content. Also, he liked doing the unexpected thing, and certainly his going to jail was not expected. As he said, "It flabbergasted the old rooster on the bench."

When the door of the cell closed on him, he remarked to the warder: "Well, there's a lot of people can't bother me for a while. Blessed be Jonathan and John!"

For some days, what with sleeping and reading things like "The Story of the Jumping Frog" from the jail library, he got along quite well, but presently he became the bored victim of a conspiracy which even the jail walls could not shut out.

For Priscilla, troubled in spirit, became a conspirator. No sooner had Phil gone to jail than she repented having sent him there. His playful, reproachful words to her as he left the court kept ringing in her ears. She took them seriously, and by the time forty-eight hours had gone round she flung herself into the storm of another of her romances. Her mind kept turning to the jail, and despite the disparag-

ing remarks of Jonas Billings,—who heard of her intentions through his wife,—she conceived the noble idea of converting Phil.

With the consent of the sheriff, who had a sense of humor, and saw no moral breach of the rules in doing the thing, she sent Phil tracts, books of travel, "The Life of John Wesley," "The Adventures of a Missionary in Uganda," and so forth. Also, at last, she secured permission to send him good things to eat, including a frosted cake, on which, in beautiful pink sugar, she inscribed the words:

Pull for the shore, sailor,
Pull for the shore.

To the cake she attached a paper giving the whole of the words of the hymn.

She was indifferent to the fact that Askatoon made sport of her. She was bent on a high enterprise, or such was her make-believe. As for Phil, he really had a taste for reading, and though the tracts startled him, he became engrossed in the adventures of the missionary of Uganda; and even the life of John Wesley had its interest for him, especially that part where the great man was persecuted for his convictions. Indeed, he talked quite sympathetically about Wesley to the warders.

AS for the food sent him by Priscilla, it was very palatable, and his native tact and common sense made him share it with his greedy and grateful warders. However, in spite of the Uganda missionary, John Wesley and the jelly-cake, he became intensely bored at the end of a fortnight, in which he made up his mind that Priscilla's attentions were not wholly virtue pursuing Vice for Vice's good, but woman stalking man for sentiment's sake.

Yet when he was informed by the sheriff that Priscilla wished to visit him in prison, and to read to him in the presence of the warder, he recklessly consented. He was really pleased when she did come, and still more so when the warder stood outside the cell, not within hearing, though able to see

what was going on inside at any instant.

Phil made short work of the reading of the tracts, and presently engaged Priscilla in such conversation as she had never known in the thirty odd years of her harmless life. Nothing he said, however, might not have been published in a Sunday-school paper—or a comic journal. Yet despite the blameless speech, Priscilla's hot eyes, slightly trembling lips and nervous fingers, all of which told a tale of emotion, conveyed to Phil that it was her will to put him in greater danger than she had been from his wild horses and the murderous wheels of his wagon. Suddenly he felt as a man would who must fight an armed enemy with his naked hand. He had no courage at all with women if they were "straight," as he called it.

"Your time in jail will be up in another week," Priscilla said at last. "I won't be a bit happy till you're free again."

"Aw, a week or so is nothin'!" remarked Phil carelessly. "There's plenty to do here. There's the physical exercises and the eatin' exercises, and"—raising his voice—"there's the fatiguin' exercise of watchin' them fools of warders stick their noses in where they're not wanted."

He said this at the moment when his warder had stepped forward to the barred opening in the door to warn Priscilla that her time was up. So taken aback was the warder at the tone of Phil's voice, and the humorously malicious character of the remark, that he fell back with a grim smile.

"I pray for you every night," said Priscilla with curious little undulations of her body and an embarrassing, misty look in her eyes.

"Think of that!" Phil returned. "Just think of that! Now, about what time every night is this holy action performed for the man that put the life of a pious, paramount woman in danger?"

He had to indulge in extravagance to cover his actual helplessness. He was free from entanglement with any woman alive, but he would have run till he dropped, if he were on the trail

and Priscilla pursued him. His bones became ropes at the thought of what might happen.

"At nine o'clock every night," she answered, fluttered, "and I feel it in me that my prayer will be answered."

PHIL was like one trying to beguile a lunatic. He had the stark premonition that what she prayed for was a walk up the aisle of the church with a man about his size, carrying a gold ring in the right-hand pocket of his waistcoat, while another man with a big book in his hand and a white tie under his chin would wind up an embarrassing business with the words, "let no man put asunder."

"Now, think of that!" he repeated. "I've often wondered what was the right time to say prayers, and whether they ought to be said standin' up like the Presbyterians, or sittin' down like the Quakers, or gettin' on the knees like all the holy people of the Methodists and Baptists. Are you a Methodist or a Baptist?" he added in a tone that was like the interest which one of the Apostles might have felt in the Sadducees.

Priscilla undulated modestly. "Oh, I'm a Methodist," she answered. "I found grace five years ago."

Phil brightened. Something familiar had struck his ear. It gave him a chance of getting away from her smothering sentimentality.

"Oh, well, we're both in the same box, then," he remarked. "Five years ago it was down in Montana I went huntin' Grace, and I found her too. Dang it, but she was a prize-packet! She wasn't unmarried like you. She was married, but her boy got smashed in the ranges, and she went huntin' him, and got lost. Well, the way Bill Sparks, Nick Godalming and myself went huntin' her hell-to-leather was a caution! And 'twas me that found her. Five years ago you found grace, and five years ago I found Grace. Well, well, it shows, doesn't it!" He did not, however, say what it showed.

There was something devilishly innocent and childlike in his face. His natural sense of humor had suddenly given him courage.

"Time's up!" said the warden peremptorily through the barred opening, and then he straightway swung the door wide open.

Phil turned on him with mock indignation. "Is there no sense of convenience in a jail? Is there no manners in a warder? We were finding grace," he said, "and you've put your ugly face between."

He reached out a hand. It swallowed Priscilla's as a hippopotamus might swallow a fly. "Nine o'clock's the time to be remembered!" he added in a voice at once malicious and mockingly tender.

He could not help it. He was born that way, and the woman was going—that was the great thing; and in sheer gratitude he would say to her anything that came to his mind.

"I hear they're to let you out of prison before the full time is up," she said at the door. "You'll let me know when you're leaving, wont you—the very minute you're leaving, please, dear friend?"

"I'd die before I'd forget," answered Phil; and she did not see the double meaning in his words.

A minute afterward he sat down limp and helpless.

"She'll *not* be waitin' for me at the door of the jail when I go," he said huskily. "No, by jiminy-jo—I'll go in the middle of the night."

Then he asked the warden for a dipper of water. He had never been so thirsty in his life.

"Phew! Coppers all hot!" he said as he gulped the water down.

III

THE day after Phil left jail with the regrets of the sheriff and the warders following him,—for he had made himself popular in that stern circle,—he plunged into the mild dissipation of a logging-bee at the house of old Brick Tannahill. His brothers, Tom and Matt, with six of their ranchmen, were also present. It was the McMahons' cue to make themselves neighborly, and also, for some time, Tom had been "looking toward" Eileen, Tanna-

hill's daughter. "Looking toward" has more than one meaning in the West. You "look toward" with a glass in your hand, and you "look toward" a woman who has your admiration. The sturdy ranchman had made up his mind that he would add Eileen to his household, if it were possible, though he had not yet conveyed his purpose to Eileen. He had been on his good behavior to her on the few occasions they had met, and he had won her gratitude by organizing the bee for the building of the new house, and rounding up over sixty helpers who were trained in the work of building log-houses.

Brick Tannahill was by no means a prepossessing man in appearance, for his nose had been broken in his youth, and he had had an injury to one eye, which somewhat disfigured him; but he was a whimsical old fellow, and he had a kindly disposition. There was no doubt, however, about the comeliness of Eileen. She was alone and separate in her good beauty, with her soft blue eyes and their long lashes, her wavy black hair, her dimpled cheek and chin and a figure of sweet suppleness. She would have been the pride of better places than Askatoon; but she had no preferential position, because she was only the daughter of "old Brick Tannahill," who had been little better than an ordinary laborer till he had been left two thousand dollars by a relative in Ireland, and had taken up a government grant of land.

The girl, however, had none of the characteristics of a laborer's daughter. She had mental gifts above the average, and she was ambitious and determined. She had secretly been sorely hurt by the petty "uppishness" of those who arranged the social tests of Askatoon; and she had determined that she would yet be recognized, for had there not been a canon of the Church in her family! By which it will be seen that Eileen was not perfect, though her imperfections were no crime in one of her sex. It remained that she was bright and cheerful, simple and unaffected, and she easily captured the good will of all the men that came to the logging-bee, among them Phil McMahon, who had never seen her before.

THE subjection of Phil was instant. For the first time he was ashamed of having been "a jail-bird." But he worked like a Trojan at the bee, and was the life of the crowd, meeting chaff and gibe by chaff and gibe, putting one man against another in the competitive work of the day, completely usurping his brother Tom's leadership—not wholly to his regret, unselfish though he was, for there was Eileen!

Eileen was conscious of what the glance of his eye meant; and it brought a flutter to her pulse—a little to her chagrin, for Phil had done no good to himself by having gone to jail, and people had said dark things about him and his drunken exploits. Yet to her, in spite of all, there was something compelling in his devil-may-care ways and laughing, impudent face. Also he had great physical strength and athletic grace. So it was that when their eyes met, or their hands touched as he helped her to place the pails of coffee and cold meats on the tables, she had a thrill of interest and excitement. She could not help coquetting with him shyly. It was done carefully, though spontaneously; yet it attracted the attention of two or three rough spirits who were secretly envious of "the McMahon Gang;" and as the day wore on, a spirit of provocation began to show itself. Once after Eileen had had a few friendly words with Phil, Sam Shorthorn of "the Shorthorn lot," as the men from his ranch were called, said to Eileen: "Did you know, Miss, the new name for a jail?"

Eileen recognized a malicious purpose, but she shook her head and poured Shorthorn out another cup of coffee.

"It's the courtin'-house," was the sarcastic reply. "From the courthouse to the courtin'-house—that's the game. It's a regular system now. The things that go on in the courthouse aint nothin' to what goes on in the courtin'-house."

"I'll have to take your word for it; I've never been in either," answered Eileen. "I suppose it's funny," she added as the Shorthorn lot laughed loudly, "but I don't see it, and I can't laugh."

"Priscilla saw it, all right," Short-

horn said, and laughed loudly. "'Pull for the shore, sailor, pull for the shore,' says Priscilla, and the sailor pulled his weight. He knew a lot about pullin' before Priscilla pulled him into court, and that was a way-up maritime display. Hip, hip, hooray, for Priscilla and the sailor. Hip, hip, hooray!"

"I thought no one was to drink liquor till the bee was over," remarked Eileen sarcastically, and there was a flush to her cheek.

"He hasn't been drinking liquor here, Miss," said Phil McMahon softly. "He come here drunk—what was left from yesterday and the day before, and last week—and so 'way back!"

PHIL was getting angry. Several had chaffed him rudely all morning about Priscilla, and he had met the gibes good-humoredly; but when there were insinuations of a vulgar kind about the spinster who had drawn upon herself the comment of the community, he grew steadily resentful and answered his tormentors brusquely. As a rule, he was very quick to anger, but there was in him a real sense of delicacy where women were concerned, and he did not want a row here at Eileen Tannahill's home; nor did he want further gossip about Priscilla. He saw now that he had been a fool in permitting Priscilla to send him things and visit him in jail, and he thought the less said or done on his part the soonest mended.

For some hours there was a lull in the coarse chaffing and sidelong remarks, but toward evening Sam Shorthorn, who, through jealousy, was evidently determined to punish Phil as much as possible, began to torment him. He initiated his attack none too strategically. And at last he ventured a remark of an offensive nature about Priscilla, within hearing of Eileen. On the instant Phil, touched in his most chivalrous corner, and hot with accumulated anger, flung the pail of coffee he was carrying for Eileen in Shorthorn's face.

"Long in the tooth, but good sport for them that don't pick and choose—and watch the census, boys!" was the remark made by Shorthorn.

He never made another of that kind in his life, for the coffee was in his face, and a moment later Phil and he were locked in each other's arms. Shorthorn tried to draw his knife, but to no purpose. Phil's blood was up, and all the resources of a lifetime were called into play, while his brothers stood watching the crowd, lest there should be a movement on the part of Shorthorn's friends. There was, however, no necessity for the vigilance, for the one unpardonable thing in the Western men's eyes had been done,—a woman had been slandered,—and sympathy was with Phil.

Moreover, it was over too soon for any faction fight. Phil had suddenly got the grip for which he had been working since they closed, and he flung the stalwart Shorthorn over his shoulder like a bag. Shorthorn came down with a thud, his head striking the splintered bole of a small tree which had been cut down. He did not move. For half a minute the crowd waited; then some one rushed forward, knelt down beside him and felt his heart.

It was still.

Phil looked at the body in a dazed way for a moment, then put on his coat and turned to go. Two of the Shorthorn lot moved forward as though to prevent him.

"I'm goin' to the sheriff to give myself up," he said. "It was an accident, but I'll take what I get, without squealing."

Then he marched away, his brothers following; and Eileen watched them go with horror in her eyes.

IV

IN jail again on a charge of manslaughter, Phil awaited his trial with indifference. In the town of Aska-ton, Priscilla awaited it with an immense emotion—one much too big for either her mind or her body. A man was to be tried for killing another man who had defamed her! She was the center of a tragic situation. She had been the object of a supreme act of devotion. A man had been killed for her sake, and the slayer was in jail!

It was a bigger thing by a thousand times than Priscilla had ever expected to happen in her life. It transcended the most brilliant dream of her imagination. People who had never been very nice to her now treated her with respect. She had a share in the heroic in spite of her watery blue eyes, her faded cheeks, her straw-colored eyebrows and hair. Even Jonas Billings' disparaging and sarcastic remarks could not lower her temperature. Her chance had come at last. She was sure now that Phil was in love with her.

She insisted on being called for the defense when the trial came on. Burlingame, with useful intuition, saw the danger of such a course, for it was supremely necessary that his client should not suffer ridicule, that he be kept in an atmosphere of heroism and chivalry before the court. And so he told Phil, who was greatly alarmed at the idea of Priscilla's appearing at the trial at all. He could face judge and jury, but he wilted at the thought of facing the woman who would lay her life at his feet.

At last Phil devised a scheme that he believed would temper her transports. He asked the sheriff to allow her to visit the jail, and he arranged that she should be admitted at the very time when he expected the new unmarried minister of the Baptist Church to visit him.

At the appointed time Priscilla entered the door of his cell, with an intolerable romance in her eyes and the flush of a hectic sentiment on her cheek. Phil had braced himself to the ordeal, but he was hardly prepared for the trembling, passionate figure who came toward him with hands outstretched. He suddenly felt weak, for he seemed to feel her arms around his neck. He caught her hands, however, in time to counter that danger.

"O my defender—my dear, dear defender—at last!" she said with a smile sick with sentimentality.

"Heaven is our helper!" returned Phil with a veiled grimace.

"Oh yes—how sweet it is to owe our debt to Heaven!" she replied. "But you were Heaven's handmaid," she added gushingly.

IN her excitement she did not notice what is called in the West her "break." Phil as a "handmaid" was truly an illusion.

"Maid-of-all-work," added Phil dryly. "Salary no object—workin' for Heaven its own reward."

She did not realize yet the silly mistake in grammar she had made, nor that Phil was "taking a rise" out of her. She was so agitated that her eyes were glazed by the fire of her emotions.

"Oh, dear friend, I felt sure you would find peace if you had time," she said with simpering solemnity. "Those tracts and books I sent you—in the solitude of your cell they opened up the gates of understanding, they brought conviction and a sense of sin, they—"

"I'm likely to have conviction twice in a month," remarked Phil, "and as for a sense of sin, I guess I've had that ever since I stole Pap's tobacco and Ma's pies outen the pantry when I was a youngster. Senses was always a strong point with me."

"But your stay here has brought you to the Mercy Seat, hasn't it?" asked Priscilla.

"If you call a jury of twelve men from Sokash County the Mercy Seat, I expect I'm here; but I'm not mashed on mercy—leastways I was mashed on Mercy once—Mercy Maggs she was, but not the mercy you mean."

The palpitating Priscilla began to doubt her own hopes. "I know it's only your manner of speaking, but you should not trifle with such things," she remarked ruefully. "I'm sure it's only because you feel deeply and don't want your real feelings to be seen."

"Well, it's plain I succeed in it," rejoined Phil maliciously. "If you—"

She interrupted him with a hysterical little simper. "Oh, you needn't say it—I know it all—Philip! You killed a man for my sake, and I can never to my dying day, never—oh, I thank the Lord morning and night that I have helped to snatch a brand from the burning, that there was something which roused in you—"

Phil could stand it no longer. "Say," he said, "I only done for you what I'd have done for any woman on earth, when a man spoke of her as Shorthorn

done. And you'd been kind to me—that cake and currant loaf, and pumpkin pie and the books, they clinched it. But if it had been old Sary Ginnis the washerwoman, I'd have done it just the same. He riled me a lot, that Shorthorn, and I wasn't takin' any more from him. I itched to lay him out the minute I set eyes on him at the bee. A skunk, he was, but I wasn't aimin' at killin' him, not for no woman on earth. I got to face a judge and jury too for it, and—"

She almost threw herself in his arms. "Oh, my brave one, you—"

"Don't talk that way," he interrupted irritably. "That's no way to talk to a man that's to be tried for manslaughter. I aint fit company for you—not for one frozen minute. I put Shorthorn out of action forever, and I got to pay. I'm sorry I killed him. There aint no woman that's worth a life like that—and I'm tired of jail already."

"You shall not be here long—you shall go free. I'll go into the witness-box and say why you did it. That'll clear you. I told Mr. Burlingame so."

"I'm not sure I wouldn't rather go to jail for ten years than see you in the witness-box," remarked Phil with meaning, but not a meaning that she apprehended. "I wouldn't want to be in that position. I couldn't stand it. I'm tough, but I'd break down if I saw that."

THIS time he spoke with an apparent purpose. The first words were full of sarcasm not understood by her, but the last two sentences were spoken with mock feeling and tenderness. He was determined to bring things to an issue at once, and he anticipated accurately what she would do.

She stood gazing at him for one instant; then, in spite of the fact that one of the warders was looking in the opening of the door, she almost threw herself upon him. Her hands caught at his arms; her lips trembled.

"You shall not suffer alone—you shall not, Philip," she said ecstatically.

He loosened the storm on her without warning.

"I wouldn't suffer alone—that's the trouble," he said, coolly bracing himself

for the lie he was to tell. "I wouldn't—that's the trouble. There's my wife and children—my dear little ones, two lovely little girls, down in Idaho."

She started back with face abashed. Her body seemed to shrink. She became suddenly wilted and forlorn. All in a second her wonderful romance was shattered by a lie as big as it was useful. On hearing it, the warder fell back from the door in a fit of laughter. Phil regarded his visitor mournfully.

"It's for them I feel, you see," he said. "They're all I've got. I need to be braced. That's why the new Baptist minister is comin' to-day. Have you met him?" he added.

She shook her head mournfully. "He's only just come to Askatoon," she murmured.

"He's young and good-looking—about thirty-two; and I like his talk," Phil continued. "He's not too religious. He puts things without licking his chops—d'ye see?"

She nodded sorrowfully, for she had been sorely hit. Yet she was interested. The new Baptist minister had only been in Askatoon a very short time. When he learned that Phil had said he was a Baptist when asked his religion by the sheriff, he had gone at once to the jail, and he was again waiting now outside the cell.

"He wont have much of a living in Askatoon," Phil remarked with careful sympathy in his voice, and Priscilla raised her head a little, for now a faint spirit of fresh adventure came into her eye. A new, good-looking Baptist minister—and poor! One romance had just been slain, but as though Providence had stooped to bring comfort to her, here was the faint vision of another.

"He'd be better if he was married," reflected Phil. "He could do more good. He's coming to pray with me. He's waitin' outside now, I expect."

"Time!" said the warder at the door to Priscilla.

"Bring in the sky-pilot, Warder," said Phil.

A MOMENT later the Reverend Enoch Milton was in the cell, a lean, affectionate, soulful-looking man

who looked a fit companion for Priscilla Meekin. Phil introduced them.

"One of our heiresses of Askatoon, Mr. Milton," he said. "She's done me real good. I got to say it. She's always thinkin' of others."

He gave a swift and unnecessary description of the incident of running her down in the street, of his going to jail and of her subsequent "holy work," as he called it.

"Doin' good—always doin' good," he added. "I'm a Baptist, if I'm anything, but it didn't make no difference to her. She'd have spent her fortune on me. And now, since I killed Short-horn, the man that insulted her—of course you've heard," he added.

"I have heard—indeed I have heard," unctuously remarked the Reverend Enoch Milton.

"Time!" said the warder peremptorily.

"Shake hands, you two people who go about doin' good," said Phil.

This was done with real and primitive eloquence. The Reverend Enoch Milton was thinking of what acquaintance with an heiress might mean, and as for Priscilla, when she fluttered from the cell there was the light of a new romance in her eyes. She even gave the warder a dollar—which showed how much she was moved.

"She's a wonder, that girl—a prize, and so holy." Phil watched her go with benevolent satisfaction.

"A true handmaid of the Lord," answered the Reverend Enoch Milton.

V

THE country around Askatoon was particularly fertile. This was due, so said some dry-as-dust scientific men, to the fact that the river at Askatoon had in the past overflowed its banks, and like the Nile, had deposited good nourishing deposits of the hills from which it came. The scientists further added that there had been recent deposits, and that the river would probably overflow its banks again. Such statements made very little impression upon Askatoon, because, in the first place, the scientists

did not look like practical, knowledgeable men; and secondly, because not in the memory of the oldest Indian had there been a great flooding of the river, though the Indians had legends of flights of the tribe from the sudden overflow of the banks of the Mattalan.

There was only one person in the town who took both the scientists and the Indian legend seriously, and that was the Young Doctor. He was absolutely certain that the river had overflowed within the memory of the living. Indians were migratory, and the tribe now in the reservation at Askatoon might very likely have been five hundred or a thousand miles away when the last flood occurred. He spoke his mind about it in the early days of the place, and urged building the town on the rise above the lowest level of the prairie, without avail.

Nothing had happened to justify his fear. Nevertheless, the flood came like a thief in the night.

There had been two days' rain, and the river had risen; then there had been sunshine again, but the river remained still within a dozen inches of the bank. Yet one morning, before daybreak, there was loud crying in Askatoon, and people scrambled out of their beds into their doorways to hear the alarm rung by the bells of the churches and the shouts of people in trouble. The Mattalan had overflowed its banks according to the prophecy of the scientists.

MORNING broke upon a town almost deserted, as most of the population had stampeded to the upland, taking little with them. In one of the driest places of the West every individual and separate house was now an island; streets were canals; women and children were crying from upper windows; boats—and there were very few—were passing here and there, rescuing and bringing food and clothes to the refugees. A few people who lived on the opposite side of the river from Askatoon were safe, as there the bank was several feet higher than on the Askatoon side. It was on the farther side that Tannahill and his daughter

Eileen lived. They were safe, at least. They could see the cattle carried away by the flood—also barns and outhouses which had had no foundations.

Askatoon never showed to better advantage than in this first crisis of its existence. Men like Jonas Billings were tireless in their efforts to save people, and were full of resource, cheering and comforting. They slaved without ceasing, and only two lives were lost—those of little children. It was a time of mutual help, of bravery and of good organization, which was practically controlled by the Young Doctor, the mayor being absent from the town.

Yet in spite of organization, one spot was forgotten. Nobody thought of the jail. It was not on the lowest ground of the town; it stood somewhat apart, nearer to the channel of the river. It was naturally thought—if there was any thought at all—that the officials of the jail would look after their own particular population. As it happened, however, the sheriff was absent from the place; the deputy-sheriff, in his excitement in the early morning, having nothing to eat, drank whisky and became intoxicated; and two of the warders forsook their posts to look after their own families, who were living in the town.

In the great excitement, Phil McMahon begged permission to assist in the rescue work, promising on his word of honor to return, and being refused, fell upon his warder, laid him out senseless, abstracted his keys and escaped from jail, taking to the water. With unerring instinct he swam toward the farther shore in the direction of Tannahill's farm, having taken off his boots and hung them around his neck.

AS he made his way through the flood, here and there able to walk, he felt pleased with himself. This was the kind of thing that added interest to existence. He passed a crowded boat, which hailed him, and was told that practically everybody was safe. The melancholy of the outlook all around him did not overwhelm him. Cattle were floating down the main current of the river; trees and brushwood

swept by; the outhouses, on which small animals found refuge, slowly moved past; overhead the sun was shining brightly, while all round the horizon great piles of clouds were scattering and breaking—the last fringes of the storm in the mountains and the foothills which had made the peaceful Matatan a savage destroyer of homes.

Suddenly he heard a cry in the distance behind him. He turned round. A man in a boat, flourishing a rifle, was calling upon him to stay his course. By this time he had just come to the main current of the river. He paid no attention to the summons, which came from the warder whom he had overpowered in his cell, and now, faithful to his duty, was trying to recapture his prisoner. A shot was fired, but the bullet went wide, and then the warder settled down to row, making unskillful use of the oars, however. In spite of that he gained on Phil, and would have overtaken him in due course had he not, by unshipping an oar through accident, been caught by a flood-tree, at the same time striking some underwater obstruction which overturned his boat. At the moment he was but a few hundred feet from Phil, who, seeing the accident, swam back. Caught by the tree, the warder, who could not swim, was in imminent danger of drowning.

Ensued the interesting situation of a prisoner saving his jailer from a watery grave, and with great difficulty keeping him up, while he endeavored to swim to the opposite shore, the current impeding him. The chances were terribly against his making it, unless he abandoned the warder to his fate. That might have to be done, since it was better that one should drown than both; but Phil was not the man to save himself so long as there was a chance of saving anyone else.

He would not have been able to do that, however, had it not been for Eileen Tannahill. From the opposite shore she had seen Phil take to the water from the window of the sheriff's office in the jail; she had seen him making for the shore where she was; and before the warder's boat had overturned, she had already seated herself

in a heavy Indian canoe and struck out from the bank. Instinct told her the whole situation when she had seen the shot fired by the warder, and when Phil turned back to rescue his jailer, a thrill of admiration and pride possessed her. Why should she be proud? Somehow she had a feeling for Phil not founded on an understanding established between them on the fateful day when Sam Shorthorn had been killed by the man now struggling to save the life of another.

"He's a wonder, he's a wonder—oh, dear, why doesn't he let go the warder!" she exclaimed as she paddled hard.

"No one else would do it, and that's why—why—!"

She broke off sharply. Something was stirring her more than the excitement of the rescue she was attempting.

SHE reached the two only just in time. There was no chance of getting either into the canoe. With a word of warning, followed by a word of greeting, she laid her canoe alongside Phil, whose chin was only just above water.

The warning was not needed. Phil had no intention of clutching at the canoe and overturning it. His hand caught the stern of it; he got it firmly in his grip; and with cheerful spluttering bade Eileen go ahead.

Even now, with the greatest difficulty, he supported the warder. Yet Phil's indomitable optimism, his refusal to see the bad end to anything, enabled him even to make a joke as they moved slowly toward the bank.

"Pull for the shore, sailor,
Pull for the shore—"

he spluttered gayly to Eileen.

And so at last the bank was reached, and old Brick Tannahill, and a couple of other men, with the assistance of pike-poles—the hooks catching in the warder's uniform—were able to land the insensible official.

As for Phil, relieved of his burden, his strength came back, and with an effort at jauntiness he almost sprang ashore. His boots were still around his neck.

"I'd shake hands with you, if I wasn't so wet," he said to Eileen.

The tears started to Eileen's eyes. Impulsively she caught both his hands in hers.

"They ought to give you a gold medal and put up a statue to you," she said.

Phil laughed. "They'll put a broad-arrow on my clothes if they get a chance," he returned; "and they'll take care of me at government expense for ten years, mebbe. Isn't that enough? Well, it'll certainly be enough if I let 'em, but I'm off! I'm off! I've broke jail, and I'll watch them catching me again, I don't think. But there's my friend the warder to be looked after first," he added, and he turned to where Tannahill and the two men were working the warder's arms up and down, in an effort to restore him to consciousness.

AFTER a moment Tannahill exclaimed excitedly: "He's comin' back; his eyes are open! Halleluyeh, his eyes are open! Aw, he's breathin'. Aw, here, the fella's back again safe and sound. Here's to ye, Mr. Warder! 'Tis in the land of the livin' y'are. Now, where did ye think ye were, with that look in yer eyes? Ye're in the land of livin', I'm tellin' ye."

The warder looked round dazedly. Then his eyes fixed upon Phil. "I owe it to you," he said feebly. "But I fired wide—honest I did," he said.

Phil nodded. "That's all right," he replied, "and—good day, old locksman! Say, I got to go. This aint no place for me." He turned to Eileen: "Well, I'll be back with thanks to you by and by," he continued. "There's a horse here that'll do the trick for me. I'll see you get it back," he added to Tannahill, as he pointed to a sturdy little Indian pony, saddled and bridled, tethered near by.

"Why should ye be off?" demanded Tannahill indignantly. "Haven't ye saved the warder here? Hasn't he said so? Back he is in the land of the livin', and who's done it?"

"Your daughter's done it, and she's done it in style," replied Phil, getting

into his boots. "If it hadn't been for her—"

"That's all very fine—I think we know all about it," remarked Eileen gently. "Give yourself some credit, please. You need it after what's happened. Take all you can get—and come back some day. You'll be welcome."

"Come back!" exclaimed Tannahill vigorously. "How can they jail him now? What Sam Shorthorn got he deserved; what the warder here's got he didn't deserve. Firing at a man in the water—think of that! Sure, wouldn't the law make the balance between the two?"

"I'm not taking any chances. I guess I got to go," answered Phil decisively.

"The law is the law," said the warder, making a feeble effort to rise. There was warning in his voice. It was as though he meant to take Phil into charge; yet it was plain also from his face that he wished him to go. It was his duty to take Phil back to jail, but he wanted to avoid it. "I've got to take you back," he persisted. "The law's the law."

"Don't trouble to rise," said Phil dryly. "Rest when you can, and bless the Lord for all his mercies. But I'll be gettin' on." He nodded toward the pony. "Is it a go?" he asked Tannahill. "I'll give you fifty dollars for it if it doesn't get back."

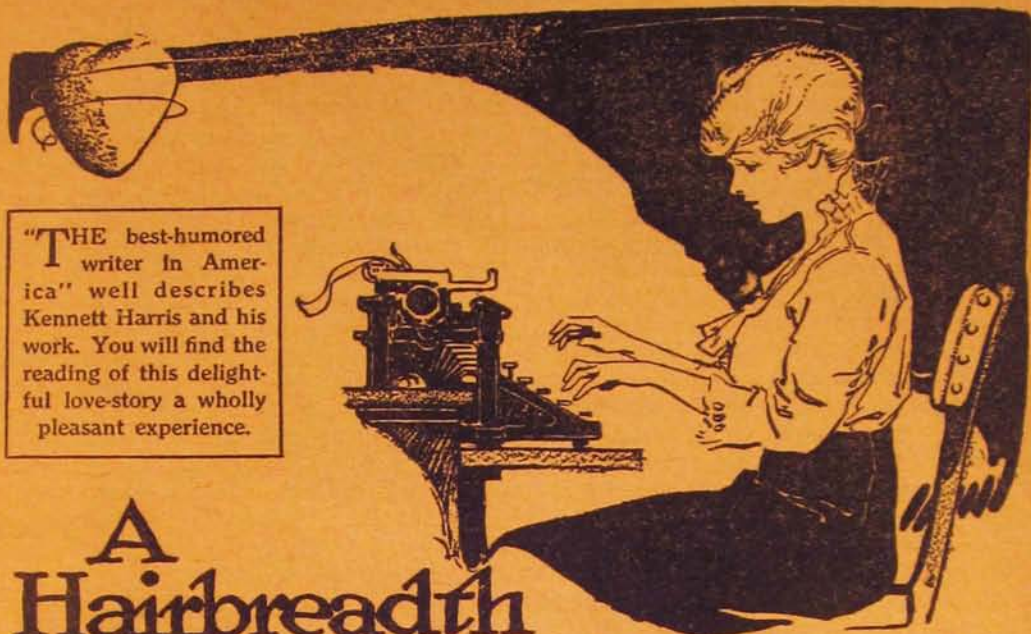
Tannahill nodded. "Never mind about the fifty. Take the cayuse."

"I can't hold you," said the warder. "I'm too weak."

"Don't you try, old boy," remarked Phil ironically. He caught the warder's hand for an instant. "There's no strength in y'r grip," he said. "Tell the sheriff it's up to him now. I've done my part by the jail." Then he turned to Eileen. "Mebbe, I'll find you here when I get back," he added smiling. His eyes had a meaning look, and she understood and was glad.

"You'd better come back soon," she said.

"I don't wish him no bad luck!" said the warder warmly a moment afterwards, as Phil cantered away on the cayuse in the burning heat of noon.



"THE best-humored writer in America" well describes Kennett Harris and his work. You will find the reading of this delightful love-story a wholly pleasant experience.

A Hairbreadth 'Scape for Euphemia

by Kennett Harris

Author of "Marrying Mr. Micklejohn," "A Promoter of Pure Provender," etc.

"GEE!" ejaculated Euphemia Regan as the door of the board-room closed behind the last of the Association members. "Gee! they're an elegant bunch! Will you tell me how they're ever going to make a gentlemen's agreement?"

Miss Regan wrinkled her nice nose scornfully, as she spoke, and with a vicious stab thrust the pencil that she had just sharpened, into a coil of her plentiful golden hair. Her friend and co-laborer, Sadie Sanders, nodded acquiescence, and stripping the foil from a package of gum, she tossed a stick to the golden-haired one.

"Bite on that, dearie, and you wont wear the edges off your teeth," she advised.

Euphemia took the gum and the advice, and then, deftly inserting a sheet of paper in her machine, began to type

Form-letter 16a at top speed. Miss Sanders busied herself in like manner, and for several minutes nothing was heard but the clean staccato of the keys under their nimble fingers. Then the door of the inner room opened and let out a burst of loud guffaws, together with Willie, the office-boy, who was grinning widely and doubling himself with mirth as he came.

"That was a peach," gurgled Willie, as soon as he had closed the door. "Want me to tell it to you, girls?"

"You dare to, and I'll slap you dizzy," warned Miss Sanders with an earnestness that evidently impressed the youth. "G'way, you imp, and get busy, or I'll report you to Mr. Wenlock.—Aint the male sex the limit!" she continued, appealing to Euphemia. "Even an infant in arms like that!"

"They give me sharp, darting pains in

the back of my neck," agreed Euphemia. "They were four days in session last quarterly. Four two-hour days, and the tireddest lot of business men that ever sagged into a front-row seat at a musical comedy! Talk about reporting! I'd like to report them to their home towns—and their trusting wives. Ugh!"

"Maybe they haven't all got trusting wives," suggested Miss Sadie.

"Well, I wouldn't undertake to say about the trusting part," Miss Euphemia conceded. "They're all married, though."

"How do you know, dearie?"

Euphemia smiled a Mona Lisa smile. "How long have you been stenogging in this bustling little burg?" she inquired. "If you can't pick 'em by this time, you'd better get back to the sheltered life."

"There's Riggs—the Detroit man."

"Sure. He doesn't count, though; he aint a human being. And there's Whatshisname from Keokuk; I don't count him, either. He's fairly decent. I heard some of them talking about his engagement. About time, at that."

"How about the one they call Dick—Luttrell? None of the earmarks about him. And you can't say he's fresh." Miss Sanders looked mischievously at her friend, who slipped another sheet of paper into her machine and began to write with an air of great concentration. She stopped at the first line, however.

"I've got his number," she murmured—and then, with an access of energy: "They've got on my nerves, the leering, fat-headed old frauds! I'd like to—" She bit her ruddy underlip and made another spirited attack upon her machine. Miss Sanders watched her for a moment, smiling, and then, with a half-suppressed giggle, turned to her own work.

IT may have been Horatio J. Joplin, the member from Silsbury, Indiana, who had particularly got on Euphemia's nerves. The rest of them seemed inoffensive enough, even if they did take notice of the extremely personable stenographer. It may be here mentioned that Miss Sanders herself was,

as Johnson of Racine expressed it, "no revolting spectacle," but undoubtedly Miss Regan was unusual.

The trouble with Mr. Joplin of Silsbury was that his face was too pink and his eyes too little and slitty. Also his neck overflowed his collar, and his waistcoat was grossly protuberant in its lower region. Euphemia might have pardoned that, if he had not made a point of stopping at her desk on his way to and from the board-room and trying to be conversational. During the last quarterly session he had complained to her most pathetically of his loneliness in the big city—particularly in the evenings—and told her how gratefully he would appreciate the charity of bright, youthful companionship. Euphemia had looked at him with her clear and candid Irish blue eyes—eyes of a glacial clearness and blueness and a contemptuous candor—and remarked that he should have brought his family with him. "But you might hire one of the bright young bell-hops at the hotel to talk to you when you get too lonesome," she suggested, and added, "—if you paid him enough."

"Expense wouldn't be any object," Mr. Joplin had said. "But it's a belle I want, not a bell-hop."

"I wish you had one long enough to ring off," Euphemia had replied.

That was a little discouraging, but Mr. Joplin was not altogether discouraged, for only two days after, he had come to the office rather late and laid a two-pound box of candy on her desk. "Sweets to the sweet," he had observed originally, with a greasy smile that almost obliterated his eyes. Then he had passed on to the meeting in the inner office. Five minutes later, Willie, the office boy, had come into the board-room, bearing the opened box, which he passed around the big table, beginning with the president.

"Mr. Joplin's treat," Willie had explained, grinning; and that little incident actually had discouraged Mr. Joplin for the remainder of the session. But he seemed to be beginning again.

ELEVEN-THIRTY! There was a stir in the board-room, and then the door opened and the members flocked

out, some talking with the intense seriousness demanded by questions of business interest and some with the boisterous jocularity of schoolboys newly released from intellectual occupation. Altogether, they were a fine, representative lot of business men, well groomed, well clad and, with a few dyspeptic exceptions, well fed. They all made for the long hat-rack that flanked the stenographers' desks (the lockers were for the regular office force) and donning hats and coats, straggled out by twos and threes. Mr. Joplin settled a glossy silk hat on his sleek, pear-shaped head, but removed it with a flourish as he paused by Miss Regan's desk.

"And how are the young ladies standing the fatigue of the morning's labors?" he inquired with a smirk.

He addressed himself to Miss Sanders, but his little eyes shifted to Euphemia, who was laboring without any sign of fatigue whatsoever.

"Fainting for food," Miss Sanders responded with a long-drawn sigh. "Did you notice it? Were you going to ask us—but no, it cannot be!"

"It could be," said Mr. Joplin. "Anywhere you say and whatever you like. How about it, Miss Regan?" He looked at Euphemia hopefully.

The clicking of Euphemia's machine stopped abruptly as she arched her eyebrows and smiled at the portly Joplin.

"And any time we say?" she asked.

"The surest thing you know."

Euphemia turned to her friend. "Let's do, Sade," she said, and as Mr. Joplin's smirk broadened, she continued: "This is February twenty-fifth. S'pose we take Mr. Joplin up and make a date with him for the thirty-first?"

"Couldn't suit me better," replied Miss Sanders. "Reely, it's the only evening I aint spoke for."

"Same here," said Euphemia. "The thirty-first of this month, then, Mr. Joplin. We'll be duh-lighted."

Joplin's pink deepened, and his smirk stiffened until it became absolutely rigid. He bent over Euphemia's desk and waggled a fat forefinger at her. "Naughty!" he whispered hoarsely. "Naughty!"

"You don't happen to have such a

thing as an egg about you, do you?" Euphemia asked coldly.

"She thinks you might be able to beat it, if you had," Miss Sanders explained.

Just then Mr. Richard Luttrell of Birmingham, Alabama, appeared at Mr. Joplin's elbow. One of the youngest members of the Association, Mr. Luttrell, but arrived and still going strong. Core-boy, helper, puddler, molder, foreman and finally independent founder, he had supplemented the industrious work of his hands by remarkably judicious headwork, and his rise had been rapid. He was not quite so natty as most of his associates, and his big, sinewy hands and finger-nails, clean and well tended as they now were, still showed marks made by the pinch of castings and grubbing for "jaggers" in those early days of his apprenticeship. He was further distinguished from the present quorum by an athletic build and a complexion neither too florid nor pasty. His eyes were brown, set well apart and usually harboring a twinkle, although just then they were somber enough. As a general thing, too, he smiled easily, a quick, illuminating smile in pleasant contrast with his normally grave expression; but while his voice sounded passably good-natured, he did not smile as he gripped Mr. Joplin's arm.

"Going my way, Joplin?" he inquired briskly. "Come along!" With which he propelled Mr. Joplin to the door, out into the corridor and into an already crowded elevator that was just closing its gates.

"I'll take the next down, Joppy," he called as the elevator descended; but he turned away almost as he spoke, and reentered the office. Miss Sanders saw him and smiled at him with friendly approval. Euphemia saw him too and gave him a rapid and very stony glance, upon which Mr. Luttrell murmured, "Oh well!"—one might say sighed—and went back to the elevator. He saw nothing of Mr. Joplin in the lobby, but he hardly expected to.

"WHAT'S eating you, Phemie?" inquired Miss Sanders as Mr. Luttrell's broad shoulders vanished.

"What do you mean?" demanded Euphemia crossly.

"The gent'mun from Alabama. I thought you were strong for him, but he seems to have got in bad with you somehow, and he's all broke up about it, if you should ask me."

"Trying to kid somebody, aint you?" said Euphemia.

"Oh, I don't know," replied her friend. "Did you get that look of dumb anguish when you put him on long-distance? Well, I did, and if sobbing in office hours wasn't against the rules, I'd be soaking up my handkerchief with salty tears right now."

"Chop it!" snapped Euphemia.

"Oh, hurry well! but if you aint got any further use for him, I'm not too proud to do my little best. There's many a heart is caught on the rebound, and I've got a fair catching average m'self."

"You don't need to jump for a foul," said Euphemia. "Look here." She glanced around the office and then opened the drawer of her desk and fished out a folded sheet of note-paper covered with writing in an angular feminine hand. Miss Sanders took it and read as follows:

—forget little Eddie's shoes and be sure to get them at Kinder & Garten's, and if you see a nice little silk sweater—garnet, and eight-year-old size—for Phoebe, I wish you'd get it, with the understanding that I can return it. There isn't a thing in the shops here, and the poor child will be so disappointed if you come back without it. Kinder & Garten's, remember. Meadows might have one, but everything we have got at K. & G.'s for the children has been so satisfactory. Dick, boy, it doesn't seem like home without—

Miss Sanders handed the note back. "Aint that the limit!" she exclaimed indignantly.

"I guess he's within his rights," said Euphemia indifferently. "Being a married man is no crime."

"Just a misfortune, I suppose he'd say," sneered Miss Sanders. "But when they make out they're carefree bachelors and—"

"Mr. Luttrell never gave out that he was single," Euphemia interrupted hastily. "I'll say that for him. And he never acted like anything but a gentle-

man. I hadn't got any reason to think—" She stopped, and something in her face made Sadie hasten to change the subject. But she recurred to it later, being human.

"Where did you get that note?" she asked. "Maybe it belongs to some of the others. Old Wingate's name is Richard."

"I—I saw him drop it," Euphemia answered, "—out of his pocket."

"Why'n't you tell him he dropped it?"

"Well," replied Euphemia defiantly, "how could I tell for certain it was his, without reading it? It wasn't in an envelope."

MR. RICHARD LUTTRELL found he needed some cigars, and being rather particular about the quality of the tobacco that he smoked, he took plenty of time to make his selection at the lobby cigar-stand. Incidentally he entered into conversation with the proprietor of the stand, finding a starting topic of interest in the decline of the Pittsburgh stogie. In spite of his interest, he kept the tail of his eye on the elevators and did not fail to notice when Mesdemoiselles Regan and Sanders came down, although he did not look at them openly.

"Well," he observed to the cigar man, as the young women left the building,—and the remark may have been a mere coincidence,—"well, this wont buy the baby shoes."

As soon as he was outside, he glanced up and down the street and caught sight of Euphemia's black velvet, beaver-fur-trimmed toque bobbing southward; but, alas! Sadie's putty-gray hatter's-plush sailor was bobbing companionably along beside it, and he decided that under the circumstances he would ask Miss Regan for an explanation on some other occasion. But he meant to have that explanation. When a girl has always shown herself friendly to a man, and when she suddenly and without any earthly reason becomes blankly oblivious of his existence, or at the best acknowledges it grudgingly and with chilling disapproval—then certainly a man is entitled to know the reason why.

But the moment for demanding that reason was clearly inopportune, and so Mr. Richard Luttrell turned northward and then eastward to State Street and, locating Kinder & Garten's, bought the baby shoes.

OUT of the tail of her eye Euphemia had not failed to notice Mr. Luttrell at the cigar-stand. If she had overlooked him, Sadie's sharp pinch would have properly directed her attention. But Euphemia expected that the Alabama man would be sticking around, and Sadie was with her to render the sticking futile. It was against her preference, really, that Euphemia presently found herself lunching in Stoggin's Cafeteria, though Sadie was a daily habitué of Stoggin's.

"And you'll come again to-morrow, wont you?" asked Sadie.

"Not after that, though, Sade," Euphemia answered.

"Being as to-morrow is the last of the session, I s'pose."

"I don't get you," said Euphemia, and it was an untruthful thing to say.

But the next morning's meeting was to be the last of the special session, and that suggested another idea to Miss Sanders. With much giggling, she broached it when they got back to the office, and it is fair to say that Euphemia objected.

"I thought you were aching to frame up something on them," Sadie observed scornfully. "You need a charcoal stove for your feet."

"You need something for your head," Euphemia retorted.

"Listen, Phemie," the other urged: "Nobody's going to know a thing about it—ever. The deenoomong is sprung in their happy homes—see? And the next meeting they'll get together at eight A. M. and adjourn *sine die* at six with a session's work done. Meantime, their wives will do a little Chicago shopping. Phemie, you've gotta come in on this. You've gotta!"

"I don't see where I come in, anyway," said Euphemia, relenting, nevertheless.

"If I had your yellow mop, you wouldn't have to, but I'm brown-haired; and brown hair stands for

wifely devotion and all the domestic virtues. You haven't read much, if you don't know that. I bet you Mrs. Joplin has brown hair and a low, gentle voice. Oh, fudge! Brown wouldn't be noticed, in the first place, and it would be all right if it was. Hubby would just stall about the way she sheds it. No, dearie, yours is the real siren shade—the genuine trouble-breeding vampire hank."

"Much obliged, but I'll fool you just the same. You must think I'm easy."

"It wont hurt. Le' me show you."

Mr. Wenlock had gone home, and they were practically alone in the ante-room; so Sadie showed Euphemia, and Euphemia cried "Ouch!"

"I got hold of three at once," explained Sadie contritely. "Now keep still. There, that didn't hurt, did it?"

"Not more than pulling a tooth," Euphemia replied sarcastically. But she submitted, and it was quite a sizable hank that Miss Sanders locked in her desk about five minutes later.

THERE was no apparent necessity for chaperonage that evening. Sadie boarded an Ashland Avenue car; Euphemia lived with her Aunt Norah in a small North Avenue flat near Wells Street, and so they only walked together for a couple of blocks. It was a cold, wet evening with a threat of snow in the flurries of rain, and Euphemia had to struggle to keep her inadequate umbrella at a protective angle. She was so occupied with this that Mr. Joplin had to cough two or three times and finally take her by the arm before she became aware of his presence.

She disengaged her arm with a quick jerk when she saw who it was, and the look that he got ought to have been enough for him. But it was not. He only leered at her.

"G'd evenin', li'le bright-eyes," said he, clipping his words curiously and speaking with a certain huskiness. "Whither 'way?" He repossessed himself of her arm, and this time Euphemia knew that she was not going to shake him off easily. She saw that his face was very red, and he was close enough to allow her to analyze his breath. This did not alarm her—to

speak of—but she was distinctly annoyed.

"I'll be obliged to you if you'll let go of me and chase yourself," she said as calmly as she was able, deeming plain language best.

"Anything in world t'blige you, 'cep'in' that," said Joplin. "Two 'mbrel's not ness'r'y. Put yours down and c'm'up close und' mine. No? Pu' mine down, then, and come close und' yours. Where you think you going to, kid?"

"I'm going to my car," Euphemia answered with rising indignation. "See here, Mr. Joplin: I know you're not yourself, so you might as well try to be a gentleman. If you don't let me go, I'm going to slap you and then have you arrested right here."

"Bluff!" Joplin chuckled hoarsely. And he was right about that. Euphemia had a sharp tongue upon occasion; indeed, she had found it indispensable, but in spite of that and her always assured manner, she was as modestly averse from a street scene as any shrinking young highly-cultivated creature secluded in a ladies' seminary. At that moment all her fortitude could not keep the tears from her eyes.

"Bluff!" Joplin repeated. "And you've got it wrong about that car. No night fr' young girlsh in stree'-carsh. Lile dinner comf'ly with y' Uncle Dudley. Atta girl! Tackshy home. Been waiting all aft—"

THEY were crossing the intersection of an alley, and Joplin seemed to stumble on its rough paving, relinquishing his clasp of her arm. Euphemia instantly quickened her pace almost to a run, but at the same moment she cast a frightened look backward and saw, to her astonishment, there was no Joplin behind her. He had vanished!

Yet not altogether, perhaps, for she had a fleeting glimpse of a figure that might have been his. It was hard to tell, though, for another figure was immediately behind it, and the alley quickly swallowed both in its gloom. Nor did Euphemia linger, but made what speed she might to her car corner. There, however, she was obliged to wait. There were a dozen others wait-

ing, and when the second overflowing car had passed, Euphemia, recovering from her natural agitation, surveyed them casually. Then she had a relapse.

Not Mr. Joplin, this time, but Mr. Luttrell. He was standing within ten feet of her, apparently as ignorant of her proximity as she had been of his. He carried no umbrella, but wore a rain-coat and a cloth hat with its brim well pulled down and looked quite equal to resisting the elements. One thing Euphemia noticed: that his rain-coat—a new and expensive-looking garment—was torn, a long strip of the cloth with a button attached dangling from his breast below the collar-fastening. Obviously this was the result of a recent accident; Euphemia caught herself wondering why he had not pinned it up. What could he be doing here?

Another car came up, and Euphemia was aboard of it before it had fairly stopped. Making her way through the rear-platform jam with an insinuating skill due to long practice, she secured a strap just inside the door. The next moment Luttrell swung to the step and the car moved on.

They were at Chicago Avenue before Euphemia ventured another glance at him. He was on the platform now, standing half a head at least above the rest, and yet she almost persuaded herself that he had not seen her. He seemed unusually grave, almost stern, just as he had looked when she first noticed him at the corner. Several times after that Euphemia looked at him—quickly and furtively, at first, but soon with a more sustained regard; yet not once did she detect anything in his expression to indicate that he was aware of her. His face was half averted, but only as he happened to be standing—not purposely, she was sure. But at North Avenue he turned and unhesitatingly jumped off the car; and when she struggled out to the step, he was waiting to help her to descend.

"NOW," said Luttrell coolly, as they crossed the street, "now you're going to tell me what's the matter. Let me take that umbrella first!"

"I don't know what you mean, Mr.

Luttrell!" Euphemia's heart was beating fast, but her tone was as cool and matter-of-fact as his own—and she allowed him to take the umbrella. It was still blowing hard, but he held it quite easily against the wind.

"Yes, you do," he contradicted bluntly. "What's the matter, Miss Regan?"

"Why are you following me this way?" Euphemia flared out.

"To ask you that question. You haven't given me any other chance. What's the matter, Miss Regan?"

"Nothing's the matter," Euphemia snapped. "Now that I've answered your question, perhaps you'll let me take my umbrella and leave me alone." In a gentler tone, she added: "I didn't think this of you, Mr. Luttrell."

"Don't get me wrong," said Luttrell earnestly. "I certainly wouldn't want to pester you, but I thought— We seemed to be on friendly terms, but lately— If I have done anything to offend you, I haven't meant to, I know that. I want to be—friends, Miss Regan. Wont you tell me, please—"

"How did you tear your coat?" asked Euphemia.

Luttrell looked down at the dangling strip and was clearly surprised. "I didn't know it was torn," he said, "but I reckon that hasn't anything to do with the question."

Again Euphemia broke out angrily: "Why is it that you gentlemen think that any girl who works for her living— This is the second time this evening. Mr. Joplin—"

"Mr. Joplin wont bother you any more. I promise you that," interrupted Luttrell grimly. "And I'm sorry to have you even me with trash like him, Miss Regan. Did I ever act up like him?"

"No," Euphemia admitted, "you haven't, Mr. Luttrell. Don't begin now; and let it go at that."

THEY had reached the entrance to the modest little flat-building where Euphemia lived, and she ran quickly up the steps and into the shelter of the vestibule. Luttrell deliberately closed her umbrella, shook it and then followed her. "Give me a minute, please,"

he said. He smiled for the first time, and Euphemia wished he wouldn't, because when he smiled it was hard—oh, very hard—to feel what it was proper to feel under the circumstances.

"Then, if I haven't done anything, we're friends again?"

"Why—yes," Euphemia faltered. She almost took his extended hand, but the proper feeling came on her with a rush. "No," she said with spirit, "we're not friends, and we're not going to be. What do you want with my friendship? Why don't you amuse yourself with girls of your own class? Oh, I know!"

Luttrell laughed, honestly amused. "My own class!" he exclaimed. "Why, girl, there's no class to me. That's the trouble with me, I guess. I'm plain as an old shoe—just home folks, Miss Regan."

Euphemia's eyes sparkled with anger. "Home folks," she echoed with bitter emphasis. "Yes, I know you are. Well, if you ask me, I think you'd better go home—and stay there."

She almost whirled to the door, opened it and darted up the stairs. The door swung back, and its latch clicked viciously.

Luttrell stood staring blankly for a full minute and then reluctantly left the building. He almost slouched back to Clark Street, and it may also be said that he looked the foiled villain to a marvel.

"Didn't make much by that," he muttered.

IT was quite evident the next morning that Euphemia had caught cold in the rain. Her eyes showed it, and so did the swollen condition of her nice little nose. Sadie was all sympathy and immediately produced a menthol inhaler for present relief, and Euphemia was obligingly sniffing at it when the members of the Association began to arrive. Then she took up her work and at once proved that the unpleasant malady had not affected her fingers. She was so intent upon what she was doing that she noticed neither Mr. Luttrell's arrival nor Mr. Joplin's failure to arrive. Sadie presently informed her of the latter circumstance.

"All here but him," she said dole-

fully. "The curtain up, and all set for the play, and no *Hamlet*. Wouldn't that jar your sensibilities! But cheer up!" she continued hopefully. "Maybe he'll come in after a while, staggering under a load of hot-house flowers. Still, we wont wait for him."

She took something from her desk and was starting for the coat-rack when Euphemia called to her. "Lay off that, Sade," she said sharply. "I wont stand for it. Bring that hair back here."

Miss Sanders stopped, and then seeing that her friend was in earnest, stuck out her tongue and began to busy herself among the coats.

"Oh, well," said Euphemia with a sort of listless resignation. She went on with her work, but in a moment or two she straightened up and beckoned imperatively. "Sade!"

As Sadie refused to come, she got up and went to her. "Don't put any in Mr. Luttrell's coat, anyway," she requested earnestly.

Sadie gave her a queer look. "Which is his coat?" she asked, and Euphemia pointed it out—a shaggy ulster.

"Just as you say," Sadie consented, and Euphemia went back to her desk and paid no further attention to the matter. Sadie resented that. Euphemia was not acting in a sportsmanlike manner, she considered, leaving it all to her. Nevertheless she went on with it zestfully and she did it artistically—not so that the long golden hairs would be at once perceived, but that from their concealment beneath coat-collars, in sleeve-linings, behind lapels and under pocket-flaps, they would in time work out to the confusion of those who had unknowingly harbored them. And she put an extra allowance in and about the shaggy ulster belonging to Mr. Richard Luttrell.

ELEVEN-THIRTY arrived. Out came the victims, but they did not, as Mesdemoiselles Sanders and Regan

expected, linger to exchange handshakes and farewells. That was the usual thing at the end of a session, but now the members assumed their coats and hats without any indication that they were parting to meet no more until the first Monday in April; and presently, amid the babble, arose the voice of Legette, of Marion:

"You can make the six-thirty easy enough, Peterson. We'll be all through here by four o'clock."

The young women looked at one another in consternation. "Gee!" whispered Sadie, "they're coming back this afternoon."

It was only too true. Willie, the office-boy, confirmed it. Some little measure was still to be debated and voted upon—little but important.

"Can't be helped," said Sadie, "and maybe it wont make any difference, anyway. We'll hope so."

But it did make a decided difference, for the afternoon debate had not begun when Riggs, of Detroit, discovered a long golden hair on Mr. Luttrell's shoulder and gleefully proclaimed his discovery. Euphemia and Sadie heard the jovial uproar that ensued, and their faces blanched with apprehension. Presently the board-room door opened and disclosed Mr. Riggs, who held his closed finger and thumb delicately before him. He looked narrowly at Miss Regan,—at her coiffure particularly,—and a roseate flood of color overspread Miss Regan's attractive young face; whereupon Riggs grinned broadly and withdrew, closing the door carefully. Again noisy laughter, and above it Luttrell's voice in sharp remonstrance. Comparative silence then, but only for a minute. Somebody uttered a yell of delight and shouted, "Here's one on Bristow, too!" and another burst of laughter greeted the announcement.

Euphemia started up, nearly overturning her chair, and hurried to her locker. In record time she jammed the beaver-trimmed toque down atop

WATCH FOR THIS ONE

WALTER JONES, who wrote "The Outing at Stroebe's Lake," and the "Pembina" stories, will have an especially joyous tale in our next issue. Don't fail to read "Mrs. Mellinger's Militant Methods," in the September BLUE BOOK MAGAZINE—on sale August 1st.

of her shining tresses, pinned it and slipped into her coat. Her face was still crimson, and she dabbed quickly at her eyes with her handkerchief before she slammed the locker door—at which instant Sadie came up. Sadie was thoroughly alarmed.

"Where are you going, dearie?"

"I'm going home," Euphemia answered, with an effort to control her emotion. "You can say that I am sick—and you bet I am. Oh, see what you've done!"

"But dearie—"

Euphemia broke from her detaining hand and fled.

IN the parlor of Mrs. Hennessey's select boarding-house on Ashland Avenue, Sadie Sanders, that evening, related the story of the following events to Mr. Art Brenker, who was lucky enough to be her steady company.

"I was sorry for the poor kid," said Sadie, "but believe me, I was some twittered when I thought of what was going to happen to little me. Mr. Wenlock, our manager, is easy dispositioned most of the time, but when he gets sore, he aint got no more chivalry than a rabbit, and I didn't lose time getting to those coats to gather up the circumstantial evidence. But no, I hadn't picked half a dozen hairs when out he comes and I'm caught in the act. He just looks at me like a wooden Injun for about an hour and three-quarters—it might have been less, but that's my guess; then he asks me where is Euphemia, and I tell him she's gone home with the lagrippe.

"A very good place for her," says he, and walks up to the coat-rack and begins investigating. 'What were you doing here just now, Miss Sanders?'

"Picking 'em off," says I. 'It was me put 'em on,' I says nobly.

"Oh, did you indeed?" he says—just like that. 'Did you, indeed? Willie, come here and carry these coats into the board-room.' He takes an armful himself, and Willie takes the rest. When he comes back, he fires me in a few well-chosen words; so here I am.'

"I should worry!" said Art, happily. "Kid, how long is it going to take you

to get good and ready? I'll give you till the day after to-morrow morning."

"Make it a week from now and you're on," was Miss Sadie's blushing response. "But Art, dear, don't you never think that two can live as cheap as one. This recklessness is going to put an awful crimp in your pay-envelope."

A little later Sadie said: "I feel mean about Euphemia. It aint the job so much, because she can get another 'most anywhere, but it's that skate Luttrell I was telling you about. Art, the cold gray dawn will soon be breaking, and this has been my busy day, so I'm going to let you go and treat m'self to—to—a n-nice little w-weep!"

EUPHEMIA'S cold was worse the next morning. Her eyes, her Aunt Nora told her, were "like two burned holes in a blanket," and her nose "a sight to behold." Going to the office was out of the question. Euphemia agreed that it was out of the question, Sadie having acquainted her by telephone with what had transpired there; so she kept her room and submitted to Aunt Nora's ministrations. It was hard to be obliged to lie and think and fight against thinking and then think again all through the day with no other distraction than quinine capsules, herb tea and beef broth. There was so much to think of that hurt. It was not, as Sadie had said, so much the loss of her position; yet that was to be considered. But that humiliation of the afternoon before! Her body tingled with the shameful recollection.

And she had laid herself open to it. Sadie had proposed the mischief, but she, Euphemia, had consented to it; it had even seemed quite justifiable to her at the time, aside from the joke of it. Now the thing appeared in its true light—an unmaidenly folly whose consequences might have been serious enough. Those men were not all Joplins. Some of them were decent, so far as she really knew. That was a bitter thought, too, and she had to think of it.

But, as Sadie had said, it wasn't so much that, as that skate Luttrell; and the worst of it was, Euphemia had

come to the conclusion that he was not a skate. She had fancied admiration in his eyes,—or something more,—when it was nothing but pure kindness and good nature. Thinking it over, it was not until she found that note and basely read it that she had really thought— And now, oh, why was he so tall and strong, and why did he smile in that quick, sunshiny way and let that little twinkle come into his eyes even when he seemed most grave? And why did she so like to hear him laugh or speak, when—

Hard to be obliged to lie and think.

The day went, somehow. Once, during Aunt Nora's absence for necessary marketing, Euphemia went to the telephone and called up the office. Ed Rogers, one of the clerks, answered the call and told her that Mr. Wenlock was out.

"Will you please tell him that I'm not able to get down to the office and that he had better, please, get somebody in my place. Say I'm sorry, please, Mr. Rogers, and—have they got through with the session?"

"Got through yesterday afternoon, Miss Regan," Rogers answered. "They are all home by this time. Is there anything I can do?"

"Thank you very much," said Euphemia, "—just the message to Mr. Wenlock. That's all."

"That's settled," said Euphemia to herself. "I couldn't go back."

NEXT morning, Euphemia decided, she would start out on her search for new employment; but with the morning came rain in torrents with the usual late February admixture of sleet; and although her cold was much better and her eyes and nose of nearly normal appearance, Aunt Nora sternly forbade any out-of-doors nonsense; so Euphemia contented herself with a careful perusal of the advertisements in the morning paper. The paper exhausted, she tried a novel, but there was no thrill in the book now, and it hardly carried her through the morning. Then there was lunch, and some little domestic tasks that were better than none. Shooed from the kitchen, she discarded her apron, rearranged her hair and got

into a pretty little house-dress—which was an inspired proceeding, for she had hardly made the change before the bell rang and Aunt Nora at the speaking-tube said: "Yes, she's in. Mr. Luttrell, is it? Well, come right up."

Euphemia flew to stop her, but it was too late. There was nothing for it but to open the door and admit him, which she reluctantly did. Mr. Luttrell had been quite obviously exposed to the weather, and this circumstance removed some of the awkwardness of the meeting.

"Why, you're wet through!" exclaimed Euphemia with real concern. "Haven't you an umbrella?"

"Yes, but I didn't need it," Luttrell answered with a smile. "I'm not wet underneath my coat. Here's the umbrella. It's yours. I—er—thought I'd bring it to you." It was quite embarrassing to Euphemia, the way he looked at her. He had never stared before; but then he'd never seen her in that particular little dress and with her hair in that particular style.

"You should have worn your rain-coat," said Euphemia when they were seated. "Couldn't you get it mended?" She was still a little confused.

"I suppose I could have, but I didn't think of it," Luttrell answered. "It's good to have you talking to me again like this," he continued with sudden warmth. "Like old times."

"Not very old times," said Euphemia a little coldly.

"No," he agreed in a regretful tone. "But—we're friends now, aren't we?"

Why not? Euphemia thought. Yes, they could part friends—perhaps. But—

"Perhaps you wouldn't want—" she began nervously. And then: "Will you excuse me for a minute, please?"

She left the room, but returned almost immediately and handed him the fatal note. "This is something of yours," she said very steadily. "I saw you drop it, but I picked it up and read it. Do you think that you would want to be friends with a girl that would do such a thing as that?"

Luttrell, who had given the note the merest glance, answered that he thought he would.

"And that—that—the day before yesterday—in the office—" Euphemia continued, not quite so steadily. "I didn't mean—at least I did mean to, but it was more on Mr. Joplin's account. He was so horrid and I thought it might teach him a lesson and—and—"

"And teach me a lesson too?" asked Luttrell, looking gravely at the note in his hand.

"Sadie didn't put any in your coat, did she?" Euphemia exclaimed, her eyes widening with horror.

Luttrell nodded.

"Truly, I told her not to."

"I'm glad she did. Anyway, Joplin has had his lesson. I took him away from you the other night (I don't think you saw me then)—took him into a quiet alley and bumped it pretty thoroughly into his understanding." Luttrell spoke indifferently—absently. Apparently he was reading the note. Suddenly he looked up, and his eyes seemed to blaze with understanding as they met Euphemia's.

"Lord!" he cried. "You thought I was a married man!"

He laughed and crumpling the note, let it fall to the floor. "That's from my sister Bessie," he explained. "She and the kids came to me when her husband died." He got up, and Euphemia would have got up too, but all at once she felt too weak for the effort—too weak to resist when he took her hand and turned her averted head toward him.

"I believe there's a chance for me. Phemie, Phemie, is there?"

He would have been very dull indeed if he had had to ask the question twice.

BUT presently Euphemia pushed him away in a panic of doubt and fear.

"You didn't really care until just this minute," she breathed. "It's an impulse. You haven't thought what it means to you—and to me. Mr. Luttrell—please!"

"Listen," said Luttrell earnestly. "I've been in love with you from the first minute I fairly saw you, and I never gave a girl or woman a second thought in that way in my life. Listen to me, Phemie, darling. Perhaps I was

too busy with other things, but it's so. And it didn't make me happy to be in love with you, because it seemed to me I was too rough and too homely, and maybe, too old for a girl like you to care for. I was afraid of you—afraid to speak to you, almost. And when I did speak to you, and you were nice to me—why, I thought, maybe, if I was very careful, went very slow, perhaps— But it got too much for me. I fixed up this special session because I couldn't wait any longer to see if I had a show. I said, 'I'll ask her to marry me anyway;' but I held myself in pretty well, didn't I, dear? And then you stopped me—short. Then I thought there was somebody else, maybe, and that you had guessed how I was feeling about you. I thought that even when I came into this room just now—honest!"

He fumbled in his waistcoat pocket. "I don't often buy jewelry but—this is something that belongs to you, Phemie, but I wasn't going to return it to you. Look."

It was a massive locket, gemmed outrageously, that he showed her. His big thumb pressed its spring, and it opened. Behind the gold-edged circle of glass was more gold—a thick coiled strand, every thread of which had made Euphemia wince with pain as it was plucked from her head for the disruption of possible happy homes.

"It's all there," cried Luttrell triumphantly. "I got it all, and I meant to take it back with me, anyway. I can take all this back with me, too, can't I, Phemie—dear little Phemie?"

He put his hand gently on her head, and the locket fell to the floor with a thump, entirely unregarded. In fact, it was Aunt Nora who picked it up—some little time later.

"And what may this be?" she asked.

"It's a locket," answered Euphemia, blushing.

Luttrell showed some little embarrassment too, as he took the trinket; but he leaned to Euphemia and quoted Hood:

"The next time I come, Love, I'll come with a ring."

There'll be another story by Kennett Harris in the October issue—on sale September 1st.



JANE

A TWO-PART STORY

By Henry C. Rowland

CAPTAIN WILLIAM WILLIAMS, or as he was much more widely known, "Cap'n Billy Bills," pushed his tall and frosted julep back on the table and indulged in one of his hearty laughs. "I declare," said he, "this yere Jane gal just 'minds me of the propeller on my ol' Waccamaw tub when it breezes up off the bar. Needs a hand at the throttle all the time. First she digs up some sand: then she races like to tear the engines off'm the bed-plates. She needs a hand on her throttle, Jane does."

"She needs marryin', a whole lot; that's what she needs," opined the mate. "But who ever would sign on for a long v'yage with a cranky craft like that? I kicked about the fried aigs the other day, and you know what she done? Capsized 'em on my conch and rubbed 'em into my ha'r, sayin' a aig shampoo was what I needed to take out the dandrif. No use kickin' to the boss. He jes' grins and lets her be. You bet I didn't pay for them aigs, though." And he blew loudly through his high-bridged nose.

The object of this conversation was observing the two mariners covertly through the crack of the door. The conversation changing to the current price of cocoanuts, she opened it and came in with a cargo of fried chicken and white sweet potatoes—yams known as "mudas," probably the African for "Bermudas."

Jane was eighteen years of age and well grown. Her gray-green eyes were

rather far apart; the bumps of her brows over them, and the high cheekbones directly under them, had inspired Cap'n Billy to remark that they were "set in sponsons." Her hair was of the color and consistency of oakum. Her nose was short and

"raked up'ard a mite," to quote the same *arbiter elegantiarum* of female beauty from the West Indies to Boston docks. Her mouth was so wide that Cap'n Billy

had warned her to be careful how she smiled or she might foul over the bight of her ear. She was broad in the beam, full in the bows, strongly sparr'd, with a great deal of flare and shear, and stanch as a whale-boat.

This description does not sound particularly seductive; yet the clients of the Fig Tree Tavern seemed to find her so—very. For one thing, her skin was uncommonly fine and clear for that region, and she was always immaculately neat and clean. There was also about Jane a certain intense femininity which made its appeal to the strongly masculine natures of the men she came in contact with. She loved the atmosphere of men, and roughness left her undismayed. It is probable that she could have trounced the average sailor in a rough-and-tumble and would rather have enjoyed the scuffle. She loved a noisy dance with perhaps the added zest of a fight, and she had seen more than one carouser knifed or stunned. Pensacola was a pretty tough port at that time, what with the great flotilla of lumber-vessels loading the yellow pine which was rafted out to them by the

THIS story, by the author of "Sea Scamps," "In the Shadow," "Mon Filleul" and other noted stories, is one of the most extraordinary this or any other magazine ever printed. Don't fail to read it.



big gangs of stevedores, both black and white. There were also the men of the fishing fleet, and from the big "lime juicers" and other vessels: a hard, cosmopolitan crew.

The Fig Tree did not cater particularly to this crowd, but was rather a port of call for the local native sailormen and coasters—an old fashioned establishment which had its name from a very large specimen of the genus *figus* which littered the untidy front garden with decaying fruit, nobody appearing to relish fresh figs. To this class of custom belonged Cap'n Billy, who had been fisherman, sponger, coastwise sailorman, smuggler of tobacco from the Tortugas and Cuba, and who had made his start as the half owner of a cocoanut brig. He was a good seaman and a solid, was Cap'n Billy; and now at the age of thirty the skipper of a flat-bottomed tub of a wooden steamer displacing some thousand tons and cruising variously about the coast as freight opportunities occurred, whether

carrying fruit or fish, or cypress shingles from some up-river sawmill, or cotton bales, or even guns to Cuba—this last a highly profitable if risky trade.

THE first things to impress one at viewing Cap'n Billy were his abounding vigor and merry, mischievous manner. His bright blue eyes with their mirthful twinkle at the corners seemed always roving in search of some harmless joke. They could be very stern and even fierce at times, but this occurred only when emergency demanded and when he had been pouring fusel oil on the fires of his tremendous vitality. He drank only when ashore and then seldom to excess, but it did happen at times, and then those members of the circles he frequented gave him plenty of scope in which to swing. Very rarely he ran athwart the hawse of any hostile craft, and then the trouble was usually over after the first bump and nobody so sorry and repent-

ant for the damage as Cap'n Billy. Thereafter he would go long weeks without a drink.

Jane was secretly and passionately in love with him. He filled her eye. She loved to tease and torment him, inviting a good-natured scuffle for the delight of feeling the strong contact of his powerful strength. "You, Jane gal, if you muss my ha'r again, I'll shore take you in hand!" Cap'n Billy had threatened, and then at her tug on his thick, short chestnut curls, he had sprung up, chased her around the table, out through the swinging door to the kitchen, around the kitchen table, capsizing it in his rush; and having caught her halfway up the outdoor stairs which led to the broad veranda encircling the old wooden shack of a house, he had rolled her over his shoulder, carried her to terra firma, kissed her thoroughly and ducked her swing at his head as he let her go, returning with a broad grin to encounter the vigorous protestations of the old yellow mammy who officiated as chaperon.

Such encounters left Jane breathless, panting, half wild for their repetition but knowing better than to carry the romp too far. The sleepy old proprietor of the Fig Tree would have been displeased. A kindly Creole of French extraction, by name Desportes, he and his childless wife, now defunct, had practically adopted Jane, whose own antecedents were rather vague.

So Jane cherished her secret passion for Cap'n Billy, though often her heart sank at its hopelessness. It seemed to her that she had always been in love with him since the days when as a tempestuous little girl he had severed a lock of her oakum hair with his keen-edged sheath-knife and told her that he wanted to calk a leak in his dinghy. Sometimes he had brought her little presents, demanding a kiss in return which he was invariably obliged to collect by *force majeure*, usually getting as cumshaw a cuff which made his ear sing. Jane, adoring him, had infinite faith in his goodness, though she feared that where light loves were concerned he might not be a stable quantity—which was the truth, for Cap'n Billy's amours up and down the coast were

topics of common gossip in his set. He could hardly be blamed for this. The women had invariably forced the fighting.

"YOU Jane!" called Cap'n Billy, presently. "Aint y'all got amite o' po'k or bacon or the like to go with this yere Shanghai?"

"What's the matter with your nose, Cap'n Billy?" Jane demanded, resting her hands on her broad hips and regarding him with her impudent face cocked at an angle. "Don' y'all smell it a-cookin'?" She stepped around to his elbow, and before the wary mariner had time to duck, took a full handful of his chestnut curls in her strong hand. "Out that way, Cap'n," said she, and gave his head a twist toward the kitchen. "Smell good and hard. Listen, too, and you can hear it a-sizzlin'." A man with lugs like yours hadn't ought to be deaf." In her other hand she seized one of Cap'n Billy's auricular appendages and tugged it forward. "Hear it hissin'?" she asked. Jane found it difficult to keep her hands off Cap'n Billy when he was about. His crisp, curling hair particularly appealed to her.

"Ouch! Tu'n loose my ha'r, gal. Leggo my ear. What you-all take me fo'—a mule?"

"I sholy don't, Cap'n Billy. Most mules got some sense. They know when their grub's a-comin'." She loosed her hold and skipped around the corner of the table with the agility of a Russian dancer, evading Cap'n Billy's grab at that part of her which was most adjacent. "Be'ave yo'rse'f," said she, and shook her finger at him, for Cap'n Billy, with two juleps permeating his central heating system, was showing signs of restiveness.

"Y'all better b'ave yo'rse'f," he growled with a smothered chuckle. "You keep on pesterin' me thataway, and something will shore happen to you one o' these days. I shall certainly maltreat you, gal!" (Prophetic words, for which Jane affected huge contempt!)

"You aint man enough," she answered, and cast her eye at the swinging door.

"You dare me to? Look out, gal.

Y'all are grown up now and ought to 'ave more sense than to pester a pelican like me. I'll shore stow you in my pouch and swaller you, when I get hongry."

"Y'all would certainly choke," Jane answered. "Don't give me no sass, or I might see reason to take yore measure on the flo'. Go 'way from me, man. Here's yo' po'k." And she fled through the swinging door, colliding violently with Aunt Mandy, which elderly negress was growing bored at the persiflage and disgustedly fetching a mess of acorn-fatted razor-back swimming in a pepper sauce. Jane rescued the dish before it fell, scalding her arm. The pain of the burn gave her a peculiar sensation of pleasure.

"Yere's you' po'k, Mister Cap'n Billy Bills," said she, shoving the dish against his left elbow and trying to stifle the cry which the boiling fat on her bare arm was nearly driving out of her.

Cap'n Billy disregarded his favorite dish, and his blue eyes fastened on Jane's arm.

"Thar," he said. "You done scalded yoreself, child. Run out quick and tell Aunt Mandy to put some cottonseed oil on it. Go 'long, honey. We aint pressed none. That all is what comes o' trifflin'. I'd ought to've known better."

"Taint your fault," said Jane. "I always was a fliberty-jibbet." And she fled to the kitchen.

CAP'N BILLY and his mate, the latter a serious-minded Yankee of Yarmouth, Maine, consumed their food in the silent and serious manner befitting sailor-men with shore appetites and with Aunt Mandy's excellent cooking before them.

"She needs marryin'," repeated the mate, pushing away his well-polished plate.

"Well, why don't she go and get spliced, then?" asked Cap'n Billy earnestly.

"I don't know," answered the mate, "but all the same she needs it. Why don't you marry her, Captain?" He absorbed a little more pork and gravy from the large dish. "She's ornery—no

question about that. Look how she rubbed them eggs into my ha'r. But I got sort of an idea that she's a good girl and might make a man a good wife—him bein' a good provider, o' course. She fancies you a lot, and you fancy her. She aint no beauty—"

"Shet your ol' fool mouth!" said Cap'n Bill. "You better be gettin' out aboard, I reckon. That there condenser pipe is all adrift and needs some tinkerin' afore we start for Georgetown. I'm aimin' to leave at sun-up with the tide. We got to get there this day week, if we want to load them shingles for Philadelphia."

"When you comin' off aboard?" asked the mate.

"Oh, to-night, some time. Don' y'all go botherin' about me. I'll come when I get ready. You might go round up the hands. They were headin' out for Nick's place, and they's always the chance of onpleasantness on the eve of Mardi Gras. Herd 'em out afore midnight if so you can. She begins to boil after eight bells."

So the mate departed, and Cap'n Billy lighted a twisted cheroot, rich and mild and contraband; then leaning back in his chair he gave himself up to the pleasant exercise of a perfect digestion. He was agreeably intoxicated, well fed, with a good smoke between his strong white teeth; later he had a tryst with a certain pretty Creole lady. As the short semitropic twilight faded, Cap'n Billy reflected its waning glow in face and heart. After all, it was a pretty good old world and a pleasant one to live in.

Then Jane entered with a taper to fire up the big brass lamp. Aunt Mandy had thrown a bandage around her scalded arm, and as she reached upward, Cap'n Billy observed her with great approval through his enveloping cloud of tobacco-smoke and thought what a fine big girl she had grown to be. Seeing her in some difficulty because of the burnt arm, he gallantly arose and performed the function himself, slightly unsteady on his strong legs, but successful withal.

"Yore arm still hu'tin', honey?" he asked kindly.

"Oh, nev' mind about my arm, Cap'n

Billy," answered Jane. "What diffe'nce does it make to you about my li'l ol' arm?"

"No call to git orn'ry if I just ask you," protested Cap'n Billy.

"I aint orn'ry," snapped Jane. "Yo' shorely aggravate me, Cap'n Billy. Sometimes I feel like I'd like to break yore head with a board. What for do you torment me fo'? Y'all got no call to misname me—callin' me orn'ry and the like o' that. You leave me alone, Cap'n Billy." And she leaned against him, breathing very hard.

Cap'n Billy drew her on his knee. Jane resisted, but not very much. "I jes' hate you men-folks, with your domineerin' ways," said she.

"I reckon no man ever got round you much, li'l gal," said Cap'n Billy.

"No need to fash yoreself about that," Jane answered, and sprang up. "I can't stop here triflin' with you, Cap'n Billy. Maybe y'all got yore comp'ny waitin', too. Anything for yo' pleasure, Cap'n?"

"Oh, give me a stoup o' that cane rum and then I'll go," Cap'n Billy answered. "The Matanzas I fetched the *patron*."

JANE rested her hands on her hips and looked at him very hard. Her face was white, and her full lips pushed out in front.

"You don' need no mo' drink, Cap'n Billy," said she. "What if I brew y'all some good hot tea?"

"Thank you kindly," Cap'n Billy answered, "but I aint sufferin' from cold. Get me that rum, gal, like ah tol' you." The blood surged into his face. Cap'n Billy was good-natured as a rule, but cross when his cups began to wear themselves out of his system.

Jane stared at him for a moment; then she turned her back and walked toward the door. On the threshold she paused and looked back over her shoulder.

"Don' ask me to serve you, Cap'n Billy, 'cause I wont," said she. "Y'all can go address yo'self to Aunt Mandy. All this yere rovin' and drinkin' will shorely be yore ruin some day, Cap'n Billy. And you such a strong man!" She turned and rushed at him, seized

his shoulders in her hands and shook them, glaring into his face. "Are you such a strong man, Cap'n Billy? Answer me! Tell me true! Are y'all stronger than—than thish yere li'l old black bottle. Answer me, man. Has the cat done got yore tongue? Can't you speak?" She gave him a harder shake. "What-all is the matter with you, Cap'n Billy? Answer me! Are you a real man or a bottle man? Tell me true." And she gave him another shake.

"Tu'n me loose, gal," muttered Cap'n Billy. "You keep on like that an' I might do you some harm."

"Yes," Jane answered, "and I might do you a heap o' good, Cap'n Billy." Seized by an irresistible impulse, she flung her arms around his neck, tilted back his head and kissed him passionately on the lips. "I jes' adore you, Cap'n Billy," she said. "I reckon I always have loved you. Of co'se I know you don' care nothin' about me and wouldn't marry me even if you did. But it just hu'ts me through and through to see you ruinin' yoreself with drink, honey. If only y'all will leave the nasty stuff alone, I'll do anything yo' ask me, Cap'n Billy."

She stood for a moment looking down at him with glowing eyes and heaving bosom. Vitally feminine as she was, the ardor pulsating from her smote on Cap'n Billy's strong masculinity with an overpowering appeal. But to his everlasting credit let it be said that his kindness and decency and all of those other qualities of a strong man the sum of which is his personal honor, still held like the straining spars of a tempest-tossed, gale-driven but stanch and honest ship.

He sprang to his feet, capsizing the chair, and his powerful grip fell on Jane's uninjured wrist.

"Yo' mean that, gal?" he demanded, almost roughly; and the tone of his voice and the gleam of his blue eyes terrified Jane—yet fascinated her. Her breathing was so violent as to interfere with speech, but her eyes, meeting his for an instant, fell in acquiescence. Cap'n Billy drew her to him until her bosom was crushed against his broad chest. "Put on yore bunnit and come

with me, Jane," he muttered, and kissed her.

"Wh-wh-where, Cap'n Billy?" quavered Jane.

"Uptown a mite—to ol' Mr. Jackson, the Baptist minister. I figger to marry you a heap, li'le gal, and right off. We won' say nothin' about it till I get back from this trip, and then we will set up ship-shape and proper. But I sho' want yo', honey, and I jes' can't wait. Come 'long, child. I'll have to leave yo' before it makes day."

"But—but, Cap'n Billy," Jane protested, "are y'all sho'—"

"Co'se I'm sho'. Come 'long, sweetheart mine. I'll fix it up with Aunt Mandy to look after things while you're gone. Come quick, honey."

He caught her to him again, and so strongly that for all of her resilient strength she was left half suffocated. She swayed unsteadily as he loosed her, then looked up at him with stricken, unseeing eyes.

"Jes' a minute, Cap'n Billy, darlin'," she murmured, ecstatically. "Le' me get my breath, dear. I'll come."

IT is a question if Cap'n Billy was altogether to blame for what immediately followed. In his sober senses he would no more have thought of marrying Jane than he would have thought of deliberately wrecking the *Waccamaw*; nor could any passion otherwise have so much as tempted him to such a course as he had followed.

And Jane? When her bridegroom left her a little after midnight, her mind rocked at the knowledge that she was Cap'n Billy's wedded wife. It was too supreme for her powers of imagination.

Poor Jane! If she could have seen her husband during these transports of hers!

"I shore gone and made a plum' fool o' myself," reflected Cap'n Billy as he trudged down to the fish-house to go aboard. "I aint built fer no marryin' man."

Almost to the jetty he scented rum and hung in the wind. He might have stood on again, avoiding temptation, but for a tiny half-caste brat which fleeing from an irate mother fell almost

under his feet. Like most strong men, Cap'n Billy was possessed of great tenderness for children, and so he picked up the baby and carried it into the low restaurant-bar whence it had escaped.

"Y'all don' deserve to have no kids," said he severely to the mother, a flamboyant mulattress whom he knew, "—lettin' 'em run loose and hu't themselves the like o' that."

"I don't want 'em," answered the mother insolently.

Cap'n Billy set down the child and then reached in his pocket for a dime.

"Yere—stop a-cryin' and buy yore-se'f some candy, li'le sweetheart," said he. Then turning to the mother: "I'll 'ave a drop of cane rum, Mis' Millicent, if you'll be so kind."

She served him, and her hot eyes glowed.

"You're a nice man, Cap'n Billy," said she. "Too bad y'all aint married, and you so fond of chillun."

"Oh, I figger to one o' these days," Cap'n Billy answered, with a sinking of the diaphragm and a little cough as the raw Matanzas went home to make trouble. "That's a 'good sample, Miss Millicent. Let's 'ave another, please you."

She served him another, long and strong. Cap'n Billy eyed it and then took it at a gulp.

"Good night, Mis' Millicent," said he. "I reckon I better be gettin' out abo'd." And he lurched out into the street.

So Cap'n Billy stood across the fairway under a full pressure of steam. All day long he had been loading alcohol in bulk, and the violence of recent emotions having now subsided, the poisonous fumes began to assail all parts of his fabric with overpowering force. He realized that his powers of resistance were waning, and with the usual fatuity of a drunken man decided to take another bracer "to put him back where he belonged." Then he decided that as he was to sail with the tide it might be just as well to look into Nick's place and see that none of the *Waccamaw's* crew were still lingering there. So he put his helm over and bore away for this treacherous haven, of which presently he sighted the lights of the

bar and breakwater. And after that he remembered nothing.

CAP'N BILLY awoke and was ill. He went to sleep after this—then reawakened, feeling badly but in full possession of his faculties, though still nauseated.

But it was not his sickness which bothered Cap'n Billy. He was wondering where he was and why. While turning these problems in his mind, he spied a water-monkey swinging over an empty bunk next his, and reaching for it, he drained it in about three gulps. Slightly refreshed, he sat up. A poisoned sailor in a bunk under his groaned and gazed up at him with the eyes of a dying fish, but Cap'n Billy was not interested. He had a low opinion of drunkards.

His head presently clearing, he managed to get on deck steadily enough to discover Fort Pickens dissolving in the haze astern and a tug casting off from the sailing vessel which he happened to be aboard. Some unsteady persons up aloft were gyrating about on the foot-ropes.

"Well, 'ere you are at larst," said a querulous voice in Cap'n Billy's ear. "Turn to and lend a 'and."

Cap'n Billy surveyed him with hostile contempt. He guessed him to be the mate; standing aft beside the wheel was one whom he correctly surmised to be the skipper. Both were meager, scrawny individuals, and Cap'n Billy could have taken one in either hand and dashed their heads together.

"I'll lend nothin'," he growled. "How dasted you-all to shanghai me—and me a ship's captain? Y'all set me ashore and plum' quick, or by the 'tarnal I'll tu'n myse'f loose and t'ar things up!"

With his powerful body, square jaw and the fighting light beginning to kindle in his fierce blue eyes, Cap'n Billy looked quite capable of taking charge. The two officers exchanged glances.

"We never did shanghai you," snapped the mate. "We don't 'old with no such practice. This is a Christian ship, my man, with a God-fearin' skipper and a righteous crew, barrin' only the bosun, maybe, who at times takes the Lord's name in vain. You and your

mate came aboard of your own accords—leastwise 'e did, fetchin' you along. 'E arsked if you might work your passages to Plymouth; and us, bein' undermanned, agreed. So there you are. If you want to know any more, 'op up aloft and arsk 'im." And the mate jerked his head at the royal yard of the little bark.

Cap'n Billy stared and then glanced aloft. Something familiar in the squat figure at work up there caught and held his eye. It turned, and Cap'n Billy discovered to his astonishment that it was none other than one Jake Saunders, a smart young hand of his aboard the *Waccamaw*.

"Yo' Jake!" he called. "Come down yere this minute."

The mate turned on him angrily. "Git aloft yourself, if you got anythink to s'y," said he. "Carn't ye see we're m'ykin' sail?"

"Yo' shet yo' fool mouth!" retorted Cap'n Billy, whose respect for the bark and those aboard her had not been enhanced by the information imparted by the mate as to her virtuous character. "I'm Cap'n William Williams, master and half owner o' the steamship *Waccamaw*, and I'm aimin' to learn the reason why, befo' I let myse'f git toted off thisaway!"

THE mate shrugged his bony shoulders and turned to the silent skipper, who stood frowning and biting at his straggling mustache beside the ancient mariner who was at the wheel.

"'Ere's a nice go, Matthews," said he bitterly. "A drunken and violent" (he pronounced it *wurlent*) "party comes aboard a ca'am and decent wessel and starts in to tyke charge. Wot s'y you we 'eave to and lower and set 'im back on the beach?"

"'Ave patience, Luke," replied the skipper. "Let 'im see wot 'is pal 'as got to s'y."

Cap'n Billy regarded the pair, whom he rightly took to be brothers, in wrath and wonder. Then, as Jake swung lightly down to the deck, Cap'n Billy stepped forward.

"What all is the meanin' of this?" he demanded fiercely. "Am I still drunk, or dreamin', or what?"

The young man stared at him in astonishment. "Don' y'all remember nothin' about it, Cap'n Billy?"

"I shore don't. I don' remember nothin' from the time I left Millicent's place."

"Sakes alive, Cap'n Billy! Y'all was steerin' a straight co'se enough when yo' come into Nick's place. Yo' eyes was sure some bloodshot, but yo' acted intelligent." (Which was very far from the truth.)

"Seems to me I do rec'lect goin' into Nick's place," Cap'n Billy answered. "But I disremember if 'twas afternoon or night."

"It was nigh midnight, and the mate 'ad rounded up the boys and druv 'em off abo'd. I see 'im come in and hid out, feelin' sort o' frolicksome and frisky and not wantin' to tu'n in straight off. Jes' as well fo' yo' I did, Cap'n Billy." And Jake's face assumed a drawn and tragic look.

"Why?" demanded Cap'n Billy, struggling against a sense of impending ill.

Jake lowered his voice. "Y'all done killed a man, Cap'n Billy."

"Wha-wha's that?" Cap'n Billy felt his knees buckling under him. "Me killed a man? What y'all talkin' about, boy? Me killed a man—in Nick's place?" He struggled against a sudden sense of faintness and nausea.

"That's what y'all done, but not in Nick's place," Jake affirmed. "Mebbe I done killed another. I caint be sho'. Didn't wait fo' to make certain. When y'all went out o' Nick's, I seed yo' was shore some blurred and tangled, and I was feelin' het up a mite myself. We went down to Sailor Kitty's—"

"That low-flung stew!" cried Cap'n Billy in horror.

"That's wheah. But we didn't stop none. Jes' looked in, an' you set down and fished out a dough-ball and peeled off a V and they-all yallow gals start the music. 'Thish yere's my weddin' night, and yere come the villagers,' says you. 'Y'all can heah the hawns on the mountains!' And sich-like talk. Yo' was shore intoxicated a heap, Cap'n Billy. Well, they was a gang o' them geeses and Cubians offen their snapper boats, and they got lookin' rusty a

whole lot when you done h'isted that dough-ball, and I didn't much fahncy the cut o' their jibs; so I got yo' out, and we laid a co'se for the fish-house. We was a'most to the landin', and I was a-figgerin' to borrow a skiff and tote us off abo'd, when they come a flash, and *blim!* yere was a knife thrummin' in the plankin'. It jist skimmed under yore arm. 'Twas at the corner of the fish-house, and they was a couple of fish-fo'ks lyin' handy, so I whipped 'em up and handed you one. I give my man the butt, but you socked yores in like yo' was pitchin' out groupers. Them tines sho' went their len'th. He squalled like a bu'nt cat, and the others run. So I drug you down to the landin' and woke up a half-drunk negro and made him fetch us out abo'd this one. I knew she was fixin' to sail."

CAP'N BILLY lurched against the rail and drew his shirt-sleeve across his dripping face.

"Killed 'em!" he groaned.

"Reckon so," Jake answered, now beginning rather to relish his narration. "The pair of 'em seemed laid out pretty stiff, so fur as I c'n rec'lect. I got an idee this ol' fool of a skipper suspicioned us o' some wrong doin', but he was sho't-handed and wishful to sail, so he didn't interrogate me to no great amount. I tol' him we was outward bound, and he let her go at that."

Cap'n Billy pulled himself together with great effort. The breeze was light, still off-shore, but there had been a strong sou'wester blowing for three or four days previous, and the chunky little bark was pitching and rolling and clashing her gear and slatting her sails and shifting loose dunnage here and there. But all of this was the picture of stability as compared with the rocking of Cap'n Billy's mind.

"I reckon y'all done the right thing, Jake," said he heavily, after a few moments of bitter reflection. "It's true we was set on and defendin' of ourse'ves, but all that crew would sw'ar we was the aggressors, and us hevin' been on the loose, so to speak, makes the business black. We better lie low a leetle. Whar's she bound, this un?"

"To Plymouth," Jake answered.

"Oh, that aint so far. Mebbe it'll blow over a mite afore we git back."

"It's some trot, Cap'n Billy," Jake answered. "Nigh onto four thousand miles, they tell me, and this aint no cracker-jack fer speed, espeshul loaded scuppers-under with turkentine and pine."

"Lordy!" gasped Cap'n Billy. "Four thousand miles! Y'all aint talkin' about Plymouth, *England*, boy?"

"That's whar she's due to fetch up if she keeps on driftin' long enough," Jake answered. "Stop an' think, Cap'n Billy. Thish yere's a British ship."

Cap'n Billy stopped and thought. Bitter, oh bitter, was the cud of his reflections. But they were brief. He turned and strode aft. The mate had been wearily occupying himself about the decks, his querulous voice exhorting the lagging steps of the old men and young boys who manned her. Occasionally his rheumy eyes had turned with a sort of dreary curiosity on Cap'n Billy and Jake—the only two strong men aboard.

Cap'n Billy tightened his belt, went to the scuttlebutt and took a swig of water; then he walked aft.

"Still insistin' to be sot ashore?" asked Luke.

"No," Cap'n Billy answered, tightening his lips. "Tu'n me to, Mister Mate. I'm strong and willin'."

IT was a tedious voyage, but eventually they arrived. In its course the mate was taken ill with some insidious trouble which deprived him of his scant forces. The skipper proved to be a cupboard drinker, and was vague and inefficient. Cap'n Billy and Jake bore the brunt of such hard and difficult work as became necessary now and then.

During this long voyage across the storm-set Atlantic, Cap'n Billy had plenty of time to reflect upon his bad conduct of one night, which had brought all of this misery to pass. But he did not, to any great extent. Having no recollection whatever of his picking up a Portuguese fisherman on the end of a fish-fork and tossing him to one side, that careless act worried him not

in his moral sense but in his civic responsibility. At that time the civil law of Pensacola had been swept by a tidal wave of reform. There had been too many of these casual killings for the city to support with due dignity, and examples had to be made. The fête of Mardi Gras had become so obnoxious in this respect that there was talk of suppressing it entirely. Masque and domino offered too many possibilities for working off private grudges.

And Jane? Cap'n Billy tried his best to put Jane out of his thoughts, and failed absolutely. Jane's image haunted him continually, but not with the pleasant retrospective picture of so many light loves. The adoration in her gray-green eyes cast unpleasant lights against the carnal illumination of his soul, and he tried to banish them, but without success. He well knew that she was the only one who had ever loved him with absolute unselfishness—and his soul squirmed when he was compelled to remember what he had given her in return for that greatest gift of all, love without alloy, the elemental force.

Soon after landing in England, Cap'n Billy wrote to a friend, a young lawyer of Pensacola, stating his case and asking for advice. In due time he received an answer, and what was his amazement and that of Jake, to learn that the lawyer could discover nothing whatever in connection with the case—that in his opinion the damage could not have been very serious, that Cap'n Billy had been a fool to bolt off as he did, and that he ran no risk whatever in returning whenever he felt like it!

Cap'n Billy's intense relief at this information was all that saved Jake from a mighty bad quarter-hour. The two men had stuck together and had found work in a ship-yard, though this was not immediately necessary, as the night of his debauch Cap'n Billy had in his pocket about three hundred dollars with which he had intended to pay a store bill. The letter also told him that his friends and Jake's had been sorely grieved and puzzled at their disappearance and had finally come to believe that while drunk they must have met with foul play along the water

front and their bodies flung into the harbor to be carried out by the tide. And then at the very end of the epistle came a bit of news that aroused contradictory emotion in Cap'n Billy's breast. It read as follows:

I dropped in at the Fig Tree a few days before receiving your letter, and the old man told me that Jane took on something terrible when about six weeks had passed with no news from you. She wouldn't believe that you had been murdered. Said you were too well able to take care of yourself and that besides, you had promised her not to drink any more that night. She moped and pined, and then one day somebody told her they'd seen you coming out of Sailor Kitty's house along about one o'clock in the morning. She wouldn't believe it at first, but there were three or four boys off the *Favorite* that swore they'd seen you and Jake go in there earlier in the evening.

Jane went sort of wild after that, and began to behave so reckless that the old man told her he wouldn't permit such goings on by a female member of his household. A little later there came along a flashy sort of patent-medicine faker, and Jane took up with him. The old man had already put up with a lot, so he lost his temper and just up and bundled her out, and that's the last he's heard of her. Some of the boys saw her at the station getting on the train with this patent medicine fellow.

CAP'N BILLY'S first emotion on reading this was one of bitter remorse and self-reproach, but it was soon followed by a certain sense of involuntary relief. After all, he reflected, Jane had brought the trouble on herself. He had not desired to marry her, and the mischief done, he had firmly intended to keep his promise to her. He had been drunk all the late afternoon, and she had known it and ought to have shown some sense of caution. Besides, Jane ought to have waited longer in the hope of hearing from him. He might have been shanghai'd. He was honestly grieved about Jane and blamed himself severely, but the thing was done, and there you are!

A FEW weeks later Cap'n Billy and Jake arrived in Pensacola, where they received a warm welcome in their own particular circles. Acting on the advice of the lawyer friend, nothing was said about the incident which had

occurred in the lee of the fish-house. Their story was simply that they had been shanghai'd aboard a British bark while blind drunk and had made the best of a bad business which they could not help but admit had been due to their own silly fault.

"We had a nice sail," said Cap'n Billy, when questioned as to the adventure. "It didn't do us no harm, and maybe it's done taught us some sense. Co'se, we might 'a' took charge and sot ourselves asho', but that might 'a' meant a killin', and we was too sick and so' and hadn't the heart fo' no sich triflin'. We was jes' two nat'ral born plum' fools, and we knowed it and made the best of it. But y'all can have my share o' the drink, yereafter. There's shore to be a devil in every bottle."

About the first thing he did was to go to the Fig Tree and make inquiry for Jane. The old *patron* had no news of her and showed not the slightest desire for such tidings. Neither did he appear particularly gratified at the sight of Cap'n Billy, though entirely polite. Cap'n Billy wondered how much old Desportes knew, or suspected, and left the Fig Tree with his favorite dish of pepper-pot half eaten and the resolution to strike this venerable tavern off his calendar as a port of call.

FOR nearly four years Cap'n Billy pursued an industrious and legitimate trade, and flourished thereat. He drank nothing stronger than beer, or on certain occasions when extremely thirsty, a brimming goblet of lime- or lemon- or bitter-orange-juice with the slight dash of gin required to relax the tension of mind and muscle to be found in a person of his force. His acquaintances found him less amusing—a little dull at times—and they wondered why he did not marry. "Oh, I reckon I aint the marryin' kind," said Cap'n Billy, in answer to certain anxious queries on this vital subject.

A tidy little iron ship replaced the wooden *Waccamaw*, which was gutted from stem to stern, and her vital organs scrapped—her empty shell being converted into a coal-barge. The new boat was rather smart as to speed and

earned a good living in the transport of fruit from the West Indies to the northern markets—pines, bananas, coconuts, oranges, avocados and the like. Cap'n Billy was her master, of course, and the faithful Jake, now married and the paterfamilias of two small squeakers, his mate.

Cap'n Billy sometimes carried a passenger or two; at times even four or five, more for the pleasure of their society than the profit of their passage—or to put it more accurately, the interest of their society. This measure was strictly illegal, the ship having no passenger license. But the letter of the

law was adjustable as children's blocks—and no harm was done unless some hyperconscientious fool in a bureau felt disposed to kick and slam, through patriotism and the off chance of getting a promotion. The passengers were listed as

members of the ship's crew: "Henrico Valdez, Ass't Steward" (the chief steward being an aged black who understood terrapin as made from alligator-tail and hard-boiled eggs), "Delphine Valdez, Stewardess" (said Delphine being the friend of Henrico and going with him to help demonstrate the real Venezuela tango to club-footed New Yorkers)—and the like, all going from Pensacola to South Street, N. Y., or Boston, as the fruit market decreed, for fifteen dollars per capita. They amused Cap'n Billy, and often he got very fond of some of them. He liked to talk to the more serious ones after the less serious ones had been talking to him.

CAP'N BILLY enjoyed such passengers, and tried his best to make them comfortable—which they seldom were after cutting the edge of the Gulf Stream and plugging along on the meridian until the water shoaled and the sea flattened out. All the same, he liked to have them aboard, even as his unpaying guests, which often they were, and

so when a short, squat quartermaster whose face had always puzzled Cap'n Billy came and told him that a lady with a little boy desired a passage from New York to Pensacola, or some other port adjacent, Cap'n Billy told the man to tell Mr. Ponsonby (the black steward, and blacker than most) to arrange her a berth. The little steamship was due to sail in an hour, and it was three days after Christmas. The winter had been very mild, but Cap'n Billy was not entirely pleased with the softness of the air for that season. "She's a-goin' to bust some time 'twixt 'ere and the Delaware," he said to himself. "But it don't

matter much. I could wade in be'ind the breakwater in my boots."

Off Sandy Hook they ran into a bank of fog, and about midnight, as Cap'n Billy had predicted, it began to blow. The new *Waccamaw* was a steady little ship of about

eighteen hundred tons, and being fairly deep with her cargo of miscellaneous freight, she pushed stubbornly along through the smother without making any fuss about it. The weather went rapidly from bad to worse, with the wind backing into the southeast and the air filled with the moist, warm welter of the Gulf Stream and as thick and heavy as porridge. Cap'n Billy was on the bridge most of the night, uneasy in his mind. Big iron sailing ships flying northward under a heavy press of canvas were what he most feared, and it was precisely one of these which he encountered.

This happened in the gray dawn of the third day out, the weather having remained practically unchanged. It was still blowing what sailormen would call "a fresh gale" from the southeast. A fresh gale rates in between a stiff breeze and a gale, after which come a hard gale and a hurricane. In this case it was merely a fresh gale, and judging from experience and the behavior of the barometer, Cap'n Billy opined that it would soon blow out,

ANOTHER PETER B. KYNE STORY

"THE SHERIFF OF PANAMINT,"

In a vivid story of the desert by Peter B. Kyne, will head the September BLUE BOOK MAGAZINE. It is in the inimitable Mr. Kyne's best vein—and that means a story to read with enthusiasm and remember with un fading pleasure.

probably to be followed by an abrupt hauling of the wind into the northwest with clear and colder weather and great relief from anxiety. He had been living on the bridge and in the little chart-room wedged under it, whither his meals were brought him by Mr. Ponsonby, the very black steward.

MR. PONSONBY informed him that the lady passenger was recovering from acute seasickness. Her little boy, a baby of three, had not been sick at all and had spent most of his time with Mr. Ponsonby, for whom he had conceived a great affection, fully reciprocated.

"Ah do declar', Cap'n Billy, dis li'le marster am de mos' ingratiatin' chile! An' eat? His paw mus' shorely hev been a seafarin' gentleman. I done fix him little messes o' po'k an' beans an' brade an' 'lasses, an' seems lak he caint git full up."

"Don't y'all go fo' to kill that kid with kindness, Mr. Ponsonby," warned Cap'n Billy. It had always tickled his fancy to call the old black by this high-sounding name.

"No fear, Cap'n Billy. Yo' got a moment ob leisure, sar? I'd sho' like to make you 'quaint ob li'le marster."

"All right. Go fetch 'im," said Cap'n Billy, who was feeling very jaded from intense vigilance and lack of sleep. He trusted no man's sea eyes as he did his own.

So Mr. Ponsonby (ci-devant second mate of a New Suffolk whaler) dodged heavy sprays to the ladder, and going below, sought out his young friend and parceling him snugly in an oiler, tucked him under his massive, bony arm and bore him to the chart-room, where he set him down for the inspection of Cap'n Billy.

"Wish Cap'n Billy good day, li'le marster," said Mr. Ponsonby, solicitous for the etiquette of the occasion.

The baby, a sturdy little chap, though not thick-set, regarded Cap'n Billy from a pair of widely set and very luminous blue eyes. There was a peculiar intensity about this contemplation strangely disturbing to Cap'n Billy. In one of those swift flashes of recollection he saw himself as a very little boy, study-

ing himself in a cracked mirror and wondering who he was, and why. His heart smote his strong ribs as he examined that small, earnest face. Then a small hand like a star, and with stubby fingers freely spaced, fell on his knee.

"Papa!" said "li'le marster," and squirmed against him.

Mr. Ponsonby smote his thigh.

"Ya-ha-ha!" he chuckled. "He sho' has done took to you, Cap'n Billy, sar, jes' lak I done know 'e boun' to." He steadied li'le marster against the sling of the ship as she breasted a sea. "Dar, honey—dat gen'man am Cap'n Billy Bills—dat who all he is."

"Papa!" repeated the baby, staring earnestly up into Cap'n Billy's face.

Mr. Ponsonby, presuming on his favor with the Captain, found it impossible to restrain his senile mirth.

"Dar, Cap'n Billy," said he, "hit done say in Holy Writ dat wise chillum know dere papas—and dis yere li'le marster sweetie am sho' a wise chile. Who gwine know, Cap'n Billy? Yo' done rove a heap in yo' time."

"Shet you dam' fool mouth!" snapped Cap'n Billy, and reached to remove the baby's hand. It closed around his finger—and at that moment there came terrific, tremendous uproars impossible to describe. Rending crashes, and cries hoarse and shrill—and then the stanch little *Waccamaraw* reeled and staggered and shrieked in pain. Over she went on her beam ends. The lights went out, and there was the rip and tear and clash and clatter of utter dissolution. Cap'n Billy, sitting on the edge of the narrow bunk, pitched forward; but as he felt himself going, he snatched for the baby and rolled, the child in his arms.

THROUGH all this horrid clamor Cap'n Billy did not for an instant lose his head. He knew precisely what had happened. He had not pictured some such event in vain during those long hours of anxious watchfulness. He could almost see the great spreading spars raking him fore and aft, sweeping away masts and funnel and boats and everything that was possibly detachable, and he could feel the massive iron forefoot of this great clip-

per ship peeling the skin from his little *Waccamaw* as one rips the rind from an orange.

He struggled up, still holding the baby in his arms. But the elderly African was even quicker and had fished a match from his pocket and lighted the lamp, which was set in gimbals, of course, and suffered only the loss of its chimney. Cap'n Billy was always a firm believer in oil standing-lights at sea.

"Somet'ing done hit us, Cap'n Billy," mumbled Mr. Ponsonby, "an' hit us right hard."

"Take the kid," said Cap'n Billy. "Wait here." And he dived out into the murk.

At first he naturally could distinguish nothing. Glancing aloft, he saw that masts and funnel were gone. The ship was heeled at about thirty degrees, and the sea beginning to fling over her as she broached to. Cap'n Billy jumped up to the bridge. There was nobody. The rail was gone; the wheel was gone; the men were gone, Jake and the quartermaster. Then he looked aft and discovered that the boats were gone. The superstructure of the little *Waccamaw* looked like the top of a raft. Then, as he stared wildly about, there came terrific noises from below and great masses of steam seething up through the aperture where the funnel had been, to be swirled away in the rush of wind.

He searched the pale gloom to leeward, but there was nothing to be seen. Undertoning the crash of the seas he could hear gurgling, sucking noises, and he realized that the ship was sinking rapidly. All of this in brief seconds of time, during which he realized that it would take the tall ship which had ridden them down a good hour to shorten sail and heave to and lower boats, if that were possible in the general havoc

which must have happened to herself in the collision.

The game was up, thought Cap'n Billy, feeling the lurch and stagger under his feet. There was the kid and its mother. They must be floated off, somehow, and such of the crew as remained aboard would have to shift for themselves. And they were doing so. Cries and shouts came from the stern, which was thrusting upward as the ship settled forward. There were no boats, so far as he could see, but a couple of life-rafts used sometimes for hogging the ship's sides were still secure.

Clambering aft through the wreck and litter, he made his way to the lamp-room, where he lighted a lantern, and then made for the companionway. His passenger's room was on the side of the ship hove down, and as Cap'n Billy plunged into the cabin, he heard the woman's muffled shrieks and a battering upon the door of her stateroom, which was jammed.

"All right!" bawled Cap'n Billy. "Stand one side, ma'am. I'm a-going to bust 'er in."

Two blows with the heel of his heavy sea-boot splintered the door and drove it clear. Cap'n Billy raised his lantern and looked within. The woman, clad only in night-robe and wrapper, was leaning against the side of the bunk, and as the glare was reflected from her pale face Cap'n Billy's heart gave a tremendous bound.

"Jane!" he cried. "Yo', Jane!"

"Yes, Jane!" she answered, fiercely. "What y'all gone and done with yore ol' ship? Where's my li'le boy?"

"Up in the chart-room with the steward," he answered, and held out his hand. "Come quick, Jane. She's sinkin', and there aint no time to lose. Nev' mind yore clo's. I'll fix yo' up with a heavy overcoat and a pa'r o' boots. Come 'long, gal!"

The conclusion of "*Jane*" will appear in the September BLUE BOOK MAGAZINE—on sale August 1st.



T. Jebberson

by

Ellis Parker Butler

Author of "Pigs Is Pigs," the "Philo Gubb" stories—
the foremost humorist in America

NEW YORK boarding-houses shelter, from time to time, some extremely differing types, and it would be hard to imagine two couples more different than Grandma and Grandpa Bunker, and Colonel and Mrs. Jebberson, who had rooms on the same floor at Mrs. Wimmer's. Jabez Bunker was as sweetly innocent as a baby, and with his bald, pink head, kindly eyes and little nubbin of a nose, he looked like a baby. He was round and cheerful and guileless, and his gold-rimmed spectacles and little bunch of white chin-whiskers only emphasized all this. He looked, as he was, an innocent mid-West retired farmer; and nothing but his desire to do New Yorkers as they like to be done had induced him to give up the comforts of his home at Oroduna, Iowa, and come to the great metropolis to enter the profession of bunco-steerer and confidence man.

Dear old Grandma Bunker—than whom no gentler and sweeter old lady ever lived—was right proud of the way in which Grandpa Bunker has thus far succeeded in buncoing New Yorkers.

JABEZ BUNKER invades Wall Street itself and comes back with three thousand dollars shorn from the hide of a get-rich quick concern. . . . One of the Ellis Parker Butler stories you ever read.

"Jabez," she often said to him, "it aint right becomin' for your own wife to praise ye, but I must say that I'm downright glad you aint loafin' around the grocery at Oroduna, listenin' to land knows what shameful

gossip. A hundred times a day I thank my stars you've got a nice, clean, honest bunco-business to keep you busy."

Mr. Bunker agreed with her. Not for all the money in the world would he have turned his hand to anything dishonest, but bunco-steer-

ing was an easy, respectable calling. It kept Mr. Bunker from getting rusty, and as the cashier of the Oroduna Bank had once told Mr. Bunker: "It's a favor to take money from them New Yorkers; when they aint being stung, they don't know they're alive."

The Jebbersons were a different couple entirely. Colonel Jebberson was an elderly and distinguished-looking gentleman, but at the time Mr. and Mrs. Bunker first entered Mrs. Wimmer's boarding-house, he seemed in evident hard luck. It was understood, vaguely, by Mrs. Wimmer and her boarders that Colonel Jebberson had

some connection with Wall Street, but just what he had do with that money lane no one seemed to know. In any event Colonel Jebberson was quite evidently waiting for the hard times to take a turn for the better. He was a large and ruddy-faced man, somewhat Southern in appearance, and this he emphasized by wearing a long, black frock coat, a wide-brimmed soft hat and a goatee.

Mrs. Jebberson was, in a way, a hold-over. She might have been called, if you chose, a remnant of one of Colonel Jebberson's jags of prosperity, for she still retained seemingly unending supplies of once fashionable and expensive gowns. She had jewels, too, but these faded from sight week after week as the Jebbersons remained at Mrs. Wimmer's.

In spite of his aristocratic Southern bearing, there was something sporty about Colonel Jebberson. He did not at all give the impression of a Virginia gentleman who had come to New York to wither peacefully among the high-balls. His wife's appearance increased this effect. Her hair was a mass of that yellow that comes naturally from no place but the peroxide-of-hydrogen bottle; her complexion quite evidently came in tubes and boxes. For all this, Mrs. Jebberson was, as Grandma Bunker said, "a real nice lady."

And so she was. The Colonel's lady could not help her looks. During one of his periods of prosperity the Colonel had snatched her from the front row of the chorus of the "Giddy Widow" burlesque troupe, but Mrs. Jebberson was a kindly, simple creature at heart. The weeks spent at Mrs. Wimmer's were intoxicating to her. She looked back on her many years of champagne suppers quite as ordinary mortals look back on Mother's cooking, and the gay life of Broadway was to her what to me or you would be the old life back on the farm. She enjoyed Mrs. Wimmer's boarding-house, and she loved Mrs. Bunker. They were great friends. One thing, however, Mrs. Jebberson never did: she never touched on the subject of Colonel Jebberson's past.

YOU may remember, if you have a good memory, that in 1915 things began to look better down Wall Street way. If you can't remember that far back, you can look it up in the newspapers of that year, and you will see that Bethlehem Steel went to shocking heights, and an entire long list of stocks tagged along. Brokers who had been eating dry crackers, and wishing they had not used the cheese-rinds to bait mousetraps seven years before, began once more to scold the waiters because the pheasant was browned a bit too much. Little Bo Peep, the patron goddess of Wall Street, was leading whole droves of lambs back to be sheared. Everybody was gathering wool.

By the beginning of 1916 everyone was feeling fine.

"My dear," said Mrs. Jebberson to Grandma Bunker, early in January, "I'm just as happy! The Colonel is in business again, and when the Colonel gets into business, you can believe me—things hum. When it comes to this stock-and-bond thing, the Colonel is no slouch. Don't ask me anything about it; I'm a dead one when it comes to business, but the Colonel says we'll be rolling in wealth. Gee! do you know, I kind of hate to have to leave here. I've been happy!"

"Do you have to leave?" asked Grandma.

"Say, honest, you don't think the Colonel will stand for this hashery when he has a million in his pocket, do you? No," she sighed, "it will be Riverside Drive and a limousine and champagne for me again. Gee! but I hate it! It will be start the Swedish, and begin the Turkish baths, and commence the bant and do that 'Eat and Be Thin' stuff all over again! Honest, you don't know how I've enjoyed prunes and old clothes!"

"Poor thing!" said Grandma Bunker sympathetically.

"What's your husband makin' money at?" asked Jabez, looking up from his favorite book, "The Complete Confession of the King of Grafters."

"Oh! stocks, I guess!" said Mrs. Jebberson.

That evening, when they were alone together, Grandma spoke to Jabez.

"Pa," she said, "don't you think maybe you'd ought to speak to Mis' Jebber-son's husband? Seems like he's such a nice, well-meanin' man, and sellin' stocks don't seem it was honest. Aint it kind of gamblin'?"

"All depends," said Mr. Bunker as he removed his shoes. "Some stock-sellin' aint gamblin'—it's straight bunco-business, Ma."

"Oh!" said Mrs. Bunker, much relieved. "Then it's all right. Maybe the kind of stock-sellin' Mis' Jebber-son's husband is doin' is bunco-business. If it is, I don't feel so bad. Jabez, do you reckon it is bunco stock-sellin' he is into?"

"Shouldn't wonder, Ma," said Mr. Bunker. "He sort of strikes me as the kind of feller that would sell bunco stocks."

"Yes," said Mrs. Bunker placidly, "he is a nice man, aint he?"

WITHIN a day or two after this conversation, newspapers in New York and several other large American cities blazed (if black and white can blaze) with advertisements of the Timpantee Oil Wells Company. The stock in this company was offered at the shockingly generous price of ten cents per share, but as the company was incorporated for \$100,000,000 with a par value of one dollar a share, it was easy to see that, if all the stock was sold, the amount received would be ten million dollars.

What particularly interested Mr. Bunker was the fact that the firm of Jebberson & Hick was given as the fiscal agents of the Timpantee Oil Wells Company. Hardly a week later, another striking advertisement appeared in the newspapers, and this time it was the Podwolloger Munitions Company, and again Jebberson & Hick were the fiscal agents. The capital stock of the Podwolloger Munitions Company was \$50,000,000, par value one dollar per share, and Jebberson & Hick offered the stock at twenty cents per share.

The advertising of these two companies was enticing, but it was safe. The fiscal agents of the Timpantee Oil Wells Company stated, in bold head-

lines, that hundreds of billions of dollars had been made in oil wells, and that millions had been made out of properties on either side of the Timpantee holdings, but they did not promise anything for the Timpantee. They avoided making any definite promise of returns; all they promised was to sell stock to whomever wanted it.

The same was, in a general way, true of the Podwolloger Munitions advertising. Bethlehem Steel and Dupont Powder were mentioned, but Podwolloger Munitions did not promise, in cold type, any such profits as those companies had reaped. It left that to the imagination of the possible investor. This was wise, because time and again fake companies that had seemed veritable gold mines for their promoters had jolted against the law by promising what they could not perform. Many an eager fiscal agent and promoter has had to drop a bonanza and fly into hiding because he was so careless as to promise some definite return on a sucker's investment. Such promises were often made before it was learned that no such bait was needed to catch the sucker. Many a promoter has gone out of sight forever because, in a moment of enthusiasm, he has written into his prospectus "We feel safe in promising—"

The week after Jebberson & Hick began advertising Podwolloger Munitions, they advertised with equal publicity Camera King Photoplay Company, capital stock \$100,000,000.

"Well," said Mrs. Jebberson to Mrs. Bunker the Sunday morning the Camera King Photoplay Company advertisement first appeared, "I guess it's pack the trunks for me."

"Goin' to move?" asked Mr. Bunker.

"Oh, yes!" sighed Mrs. Jebberson. "Back to the champagne belt for me and the Colonel! It's perfectly awful, the Colonel says, how money is coming in. His partner, Mr. Hick, is a wonder."

"Old hand at it, I reckon," suggested Mr. Bunker.

"That's just what he aint," said Mrs. Jebberson. "He's new and fresh at it. The Colonel says that's why he is so good. He aint afraid to cut loose."

"Young man, hey?" said Mr. Bunker.

"Twenty-eight," said Mrs. Jebber-son, "but wise—wise as Noah, or whoever the feller was."

"Solomon," suggested Mrs. Bunker.

"Seems like this fiscal agenting was a good business," said Mr. Bunker.

"Well, I'll tell you one thing," said Mrs. Jebber-son. "The office took in forty-seven thousand dollars week before last from Timpantee Oil Wells alone, and last week sixty-five thousand from Timpantee and Podwolloger, and goodness knows what it will be this week with this Camera King added on. And the Colonel is going West to-night to pick up a couple of flivver copper prospects so they can spring the Rory O'Boris Copper Company week after next. Honest, I feel all wined up already!"

"Colonel going to be gone long?" asked Mr. Bunker.

"Ten days," said Mrs. Jebber-son. "He's got to be back then to help launch the Ultra-oceanic Mercantile Marine Company."

THAT evening Mr. Bunker sat long studying the advertisement of the Camera King Photoplay Company.

"Pa," said Mrs. Bunker, "aint you ever goin' to bed to-night?"

"In a minute, Ma, in a minute!" said Grandpa. "I'm tryin' to figger out what kind o' bunkin' I'll do this week."

"Oh!" said Grandma, "I thought maybe you was wastin' your time readin' the Sunday paper. If it's business, Pa, you can set up as long as you like."

"Well, I guess I wont set up no longer," said Jabez. "I guess I got a kind of idea I can sort of work up, somehow."

The next morning Mr. Bunker was up bright and early. He chuckled from time to time as he drew on his socks and laced his shoes, and Grandma Bunker, as she dressed, cast loving glances at the bald top of his head, for she liked to see Jabez happy in his work. After breakfast she gave him a kiss and nestled his scarf neatly under his overcoat collar.

"Well, Jabez," she said, "I hope you'll have good luck. Don't do nothin'

you'll be ashamed of, but if you have a chance to bunk, bunk good and hard. A man had ought to put his whole heart in his work."

"Yes, Ma," he answered; "I wouldn't feel honest if I slighted my work."

Once before, Mr. Bunker had had occasion to do business with a small printer in one of the side streets off Fifth Avenue, and now he went there again. The printer looked up as Mr. Bunker entered.

"Hello!" he said. "How's the Italian-American War Supply Company?" for that was the name Mr. Bunker had had printed on certain stock-certificates at his former visit. "Come back to have a few more bales of that stock printed?"

"Why, no, I aint," said Mr. Bunker as he unbuttoned his coat and removed his scarf. "I reckon I wont bother with no more of that stock. I wonder if you could print me up some nice, likely-lookin' gold-mine stock?"

"Sure!" said the printer. "Sure! but between you and me, sir, gold-mine stock aint what folks are crazy for now. If you want to catch 'em now, you ought to have oil-well or copper or motion-picture stock printed, or stick to this war-baby kind—munitions or something like that. Look at how this Timpantee and Podwolloger and Camera King is advertising!"

"Seems like I did take notice of it," said Mr. Bunker. "I guess maybe you're right; fashions change, don't they? One time the easy marks don't want nothin' but gold mines, and another time copper mines, and another time the style runs to something else. But I don't know! I been wearin' the same style of pants for goin' on forty years, and I reckon I aint stylish, anyway. I guess an old feller like me had better stick to what he's used to. In my day gold-mine stock was what we was buyin' out to Orodana, Iowa, and I guess if it's all the same to you, I'll let you print me up a hunk of nice gold-mine stock."

"You're the boss!" said the printer.

"I sort of figgered on gold-mine stock with some sort of name like

Orobotoro Gold Mining Company. Something with, say, about five hundred thousand dollars capital, five dollars par per share, one hundred thousand shares."

"Now, listen!" said the printer earnestly. "Folks don't fall for five-hundred-thousand-dollar-capital companies any more. You take my advice and make it one hundred million, or something like that, and—"

"I kind o' set my heart on havin' it one of them old-style conservative companies," said Jabez, so reluctantly that the printer waved his hand.

"Have it your own way!" he said. "How's this for the sample of the certificate?"

"Kind of nice, aint it?" said Mr. Bunker as he examined the golden yellow engraved sheet. "I guess you can print me up about a quire or two like that."

"And how do you spell this name, Orobotoro, or whatever it is?"

"Spell it any way you want to," said Mr. Bunker. "It don't make much difference how it's spelled. I aint partic'lar."

MATTERS being thus nicely arranged, Mr. Bunker left the affair in the hands of the printer, and when he returned, later in the day, the printer had the stock-certificates ready. Mr. Bunker took the package under his arm and went home with it.

When Mr. Bunker entered his room, he found Mrs. Jebberson and Grandma Bunker having tea together for the last time before Mrs. Jebberson's removal to her superb apartments on Riverside Drive.

"Well, Jabez," asked his wife after he had greeted her with a kiss and had shaken Mrs. Jebberson's hand, "have you done good?"

"I got started, Ma," he said cheerfully, and he unwrapped the stock-certificates.

"My! them look real nice!" said Mrs. Bunker, and Mrs. Jebberson agreed.

"They certainly ought to make the heart of an easy mark happy," she said. "The Colonel was saying to me that the time for him to make money out of this stock game was right now, be-

cause everybody would jump into it as soon as they saw what a lot of money Jebberson & Hick were making. If this don't prove it, I don't know what does, but I don't know who I would rather see make money than your husband, Mrs. Bunker. Only—"

"Only what?" asked Mr. Bunker.

"Only I do think you hadn't ought to have blown your cash for gold-mine certificates. Gold mines are back numbers. You might as well try to make a Broadway audience go crazy over a 'Black Crook' show as to get the easy marks to buy gold-mine stock in this day and age. There was a time not so long ago when the Colonel went in for gold-mine stocks, but—never again! Not until the style changes back to gold mines, anyway."

"Pshaw, now!" said Mr. Bunker; and Grandma Bunker looked glum for just a moment, until Jabez winked at her slyly. Then, her faith renewed in her husband's wisdom, she was happy again.

"Ma," said Mr. Bunker, looking at his thumb, "these here certificates aint right dry yet, and I don't want to fold 'em up whilst they're wet. S'pose you and Mis' Jebberson help me spread 'em out to dry?"

Mrs. Jebberson and Grandma were glad to be of assistance. They spread the certificates over the bed and over the chairs until the room glowed with yellow, and then Jabez seated himself at the table, and with a stub pencil, began composing the document advertising the Orobotoro Gold Mine stock. Again and again he erased a word with the greasy rubber in the end of the pencil, until at last he had the document to his satisfaction; then he set his gold-rimmed spectacles firmly on his nose, and like a boy reading a school composition of which he is proud, he read it aloud.

To dear old Grandma Bunker it seemed a work of genius, but when Jabez had completed the reading, Mrs. Jebberson wrinkled her brow and shook her head.

"Let me see it," she said, holding out her hand. "I don't pretend to be up in such things,—if the Colonel was here, he could tell you easily enough what is

wrong about it,—but there's one thing I do know: this is dangerous."

"Hey?" asked Mr. Bunker. "Dangerous?"

"This line here," said Mrs. Jebber-son. "There's one thing the wife of a man who has been selling stocks as long as the Colonel has gets to know in spite of herself. Hick could tell you; he's a wise boy; but I know enough to know this is all wrong. This line says: 'We guarantee enormous profits.' You had better scratch that right out, Mr. Bunker, because that is where fraud comes in, and the post-office people come right down on you."

Mr. Bunker took the paper and held the stubby pencil poised over it.

"You think that's enough to get me into jail?" he asked.

"Oh, absolutely!" said Mrs. Jebber-son, and Mr. Bunker ran his pencil through the offending sentence.

IT was still early, and Mr. Bunker went out with the manuscript, leaving the ladies to their own devices. There was a small printer near at hand (for printing a circular was less of a job than printing the stock-certificates), and Mr. Bunker confided the printing of the circular to him; but before he handed the manuscript to the printer, he added a line in which the name of T. Jebber-son appeared; and he carefully rewrote the sentence, "We guarantee enormous profits."

The printer noticed the offending sentence the moment his eye fell on the circular manuscript.

"I'd leave this out," he said, indicating it. "Maybe you know this game, but somebody told me once that that was the sort of thing that gets all you stock fellers into trouble."

"Leave it in!" said Mr. Bunker.

"All right, I suppose you know your business," said the printer, "but you must have a jim-dandy of a mine if you are willing to take a chance like that. You must have a mine that will make good."

"I guess maybe I have," said Mr. Bunker.

"And about how many of these do you want printed?" asked the printer.

"Well, now," said Mr. Bunker,

beaming through his spectacles, "I reckon one might get torn or something. Print up two of them."

"Two?"

"Yes, two."

"It wont cost any more to print a hundred."

"Well, I guess two will be about plenty," said Mr. Bunker, and he seated himself cosily until the printer had set up and struck off two copies of the circular. These Mr. Bunker folded carefully and placed in his pocket, after which he returned to his rooms.

MRS. JEBBERSON had departed when Mr. Bunker returned; Mrs. Bunker was gathering up the Oroboto certificates, which were now thoroughly dry. Mr. Bunker wet one of the printed circulars in the water pitcher and hung it behind the gas-jet. After supper he and Grandma spent a pleasant evening folding the Oroboto stock-certificates.

The next day was Tuesday, and opened with snow which turned to slush as it fell. By nine o'clock one of the pleasant New York drizzles had set in, but Mr. Bunker did not care. He did not intend to go out until noon. All morning he sat at the table in his room, folding and refolding one of the circulars he had had printed, until it was limber at the creases and greasy at the folds. Long before noon it looked as if it had been carried in a pocket many days, and then Mr. Bunker placed it in his pocket. From the closet he dragged his empty oil-board telescope valise, and into this he threw a few garments. From the neat pile of Oroboto Gold Mine shares he selected enough to represent three thousand dollars par value, and these he placed in the telescope valise on top of the garments.

"Pa," asked Mrs. Bunker anxiously, "be you goin' to take a trip somewhere?"

"Yes, Ma, I be," said Mr. Bunker, his eyes twinkling; "us bunco men don't ever know when we got to go travelin'."

"Are ye goin' to be gone long, Jabe?" asked his wife.

"Well, I sort o' figger on gettin' back

in time for dinner to-night," chuckled Mr. Bunker. "Matter of fact, Ma, I aint startin' for nowhere; I'm arrivin' from Oroduna, as you may say. I'm an old fool of an Iowa farmer arrivin' in New York and gawkin' up at the tall buildings. I'm a jay with straw clingin' to my heel, and the stable smell not quite wafted out o' my clothes."

"Jabez!" said Mrs. Bunker sharply, "don't you talk to me that way! Where be you makin' this trip to?"

"Well, Ma," said Mr. Bunker seriously, "I'm goin' down to Wall Street to bunk folks there. I'm goin' down to sell some o' this Orobotoro Gold Mine stock before it gets fly-specked. Don't you fret, Ma; I'll be back in time for dinner."

IMEDIATELY after the light lunch Mrs. Wimmer provided for such of her boarders as did not take lunch elsewhere, Mr. Bunker issued from the boarding-house with his telescope valise in his hand and walked to the subway station. Here he boarded a train for Brooklyn Bridge, where he changed cars to the Brooklyn Express, which, as all the world must know, stops at Wall Street and other downtown stations before it plunges under the river. At Wall Street, Mr. Bunker left the train and climbed the stairs to the street. Three boys (one newsboy and two W. U. messengers) laughed at him the moment he reached the street, which is Broadway.

Unmindful of their mirth, Mr. Bunker stood awhile looking up at the tall buildings while the hurrying pedestrians bumped into him and pushed him from side to side. He seemed confused and lost when he next gave his attention to the street, and a policeman stepped up to him.

"Well, Uncle," he said to Mr. Bunker, "lost? What are you looking for?"

Mr. Bunker placed his telescope valise on the walk and put a foot on either side of it. He searched his pockets until he found a crumpled clipping and unfolded it. It was an advertisement of "The Timpantee Oil Wells Company, Jebberson & Hick, Fiscal Agents."

"Where kin I find them folks at?" he asked.

The policeman grinned. It was not his duty to steer innocent country folk away from Jebberson & Hick. He took Mr. Bunker by the arm and pointed down Wall Street.

"You see that building down that street?" he said. "That's Wall Street, and that's the building you're looking for. You go into that building, and you'll find a man there in uniform. He's the elevator starter. You ask him where to find Jebberson & Hick, and he'll tell you. Don't be afraid to go right into the elevator; they're safe, those elevators. And when you get to the floor where the elevator man tells you to get out, you just look around and you'll find the name on a door."

"Much obliged, Officer," said Mr. Bunker, and insisted on shaking the officer's hand. He picked up his burden and crossed Broadway and entered the gully called Wall Street. As the policeman had said he would find the elevator starter, so he found him, and in a few moments he was before the entrance to Jebberson & Hick's offices on the eighteenth floor of the building. He opened the door cautiously and entered.

THERE were some eighteen or twenty clerks in the office, and many of them seemed to have nothing to do but open mail and take out checks and money-orders. Boys were carrying heaps of these from desk to desk, and through an open door Mr. Bunker had a view of seeming dozens of bookkeepers and other clerks. There was an unending rattle of typewriters and jingling of telephones and call-bells. Across the front of the office, shutting Mr. Bunker off from this busy enclosure, was a mahogany railing with a small gate, and just inside the gate sat a young woman, alert, saucy and overdressed for her position. As Mr. Bunker stood staring, she turned her head toward him, and he walked up to the gate.

"Hooja wanta see?" she asked.

Mr. Bunker looked past her at the clerks.

"I don't see no sight of him in there,"

he said. "Maybe this aint where he stays at."

"Whatziz name?" asked the girl.

"Well, now," said Mr. Bunker, "I reckon it's Jebberson. Tall, fine-lookin' feller, with a sort of goatee and a reddish face. Looks sort of like a Confed'rate gen'ral."

"It's Jebberson," said the girl. "Sowta town."

"Pshaw now!" said Mr. Bunker regretfully. "Jebberson, hey? Yes, that's the name. Well, I guess maybe it don't matter; I guess maybe you can give me my money back."

The look the young woman gave Mr. Bunker indicated that, in her opinion, he must be the prize easy mark of the world. Money back! Who ever heard of such a thing!

"Fyou gottany Timpantee 'r Podwolloger, you better hang onto it. 'S goinup," she said briskly.

"Well, now, I dare say maybe you're right," said Mr. Bunker, "but I aint got any of them stocks. I've got Oroboto-ro Gold Mine stock, a whole hunk of it, and seem' as Mister Jebberson said when I bought it that it was goin' to make a lot of money, and as it aint made a durn cent, I reckoned maybe he'd buy it back. Bill Ransom, he's the county attorney out to Oroduna, Iowa, and he says all I got to do is show a post-office detective the letter I got from Mister Jebberson, and I can have Mister Jebberson jailed, but I don't want to do nothin' as mean as that, 'less I have to. But I guess I can't spend no great time around New York. I'm figgerin' on startin' back to Oroduna to-morrow and I guess if Mr. Jebberson aint in town, I'll go to the post office and—"

"Staminute! Maybe Mr. Hick 'll see you," said the young lady, and she hurried into an office opening into the main room. Mr. Hick came out not a minute later. He walked right up to the gate and opened it and invited Mr. Bunker inside and led him into the private office. He waved Mr. Bunker into a chair and thrust a cigar at him.

MR. HICK was a brisk young man with a face as hard and keen as a flint. His eyes were like bits of metal.

Jebberson & Hick were making money so rapidly he was almost frightened. It was pouring in on them by every mail, and he saw new deluges of money threatening as soon as the new ventures were launched. He was keen, and he had a high-priced attorney go over every form letter and advertisement to make sure Jebberson & Hick were well within the law, but the rapid growth of the firm's mail had attracted the attention of the post-office authorities, and he had no doubt his firm was being investigated. It was evident that if the golden flood was to continue for a while, Jebberson & Hick must bear a decent reputation.

"What's this Miss Miggs is telling me?" he snapped. "Did you buy some stock from Jebberson? When? Where? What kind of stock?"

"Out to Oroduna, Iowa, by mail," said Mr. Bunker, unstrapping his telescope valise. "Bout eight years ago. Three thousand dollars. Oroboto-ro Gold Mine."

"Never heard of it!" said Mr. Hick.

"Well, there she is!" said Mr. Bunker, slapping the pile of stock certificates on Mr. Hick's desk. "Never paid me a cent, and here's the letter Mr. Jebberson sent me; it says right here, 'We guarantee enormous profits.'"

"The swelled-up old idiot!" said Mr. Hick angrily, glaring at the crease-worn circular that Mr. Bunker had had printed Monday afternoon. "Oroboto-ro Gold! A nice name! That's what a soft-brained fellow like Jebberson does when he tries it on his own hook. Eight years ago?"

"Well, I reckon it was about eight years ago," said Mr. Bunker. "'Twas the year my red cow got into the turnip-patch and—"

"I don't want to hear about your turnip-patch!" snapped Mr. Hick. "You say you paid three thousand dollars for this stuff?"

"That's what it says on the certificates," said Mr. Bunker, leaning forward to take one of them.

"Oh, tut!" exclaimed Mr. Hick angrily. "You wait here—understand?"

With the bundle of Oroboto-ro shares and the circular letter Mr. Hick went

into another room. He closed the door. In a chair in this room sat an elderly man with an unusually large head, almost as bald as Mr. Bunker's head.

"Judge," said Mr. Hick, "here's a nice business! There's a jay in my office who brought in this stock and this circular. Some of Jebberson's brilliant work! Read that circular!"

The judge read it slowly, shaking his head as he read it.

"Penal offense, Hick," he said.

"Yes, and I had an inkling Jebberson had been in some dusky games," said Hick angrily. "He swore his skirts were clear, but I had a feeling, I tell you! A young man shouldn't tie up with a man as old as Jebberson; who knows what will pop up out of his past? Well?"

"Hick," said the lawyer, "buy him off! Buy his stock back! You might say wait until Jebberson comes back and let him buy his own dead horses—but can you take the chance? How much are you and Jebberson taking in now? Ten thousand a day? Twelve thousand? You and Jebberson are well inside the law in these new deals; they're making you a mint of money; you can afford to buy up all the old dead horses Jebberson has floating around, and you *can't* afford to have any scandal strike this firm now. Buy him off!"

"My idea exactly!" said Hick, and being a man of action, he walked back into his own office.

"You say you want three thousand for this stock?" he asked.

"Well, I sort of thought—" Mr. Bunker began.

"I'll buy it from you for three thousand, and not a cent more," said Mr. Hick. "Take it or leave it!"

Mr. Bunker sighed.

"I'll take it," he said, "but I feel sort of cheated. The letter said enormous profits was guaranteed."

"And the price includes the circular letter," said Mr. Hick.

"Well, I guess you can have that if you want it," said Jabez. "Taint worth nothin' to me. If you was to pay me in cash, I guess I can throw in the letter."

Mr. Hick pressed one of the numerous buttons at the side of his desk.

"Brownlee," he said to the man who appeared in answer, "bring me three thousand in bills and charge it to advertising expense."

WHEN Mr. Bunker had pocketed his three thousand dollars and re-straped his telescope valise and disappeared down the elevator, Mr. Hick entered the judge's office.

"A thing like that we can't afford to have get out," he said.

"No," said the judge, who was still scanning the circular, "you are right, Hick. A thing like that you can't afford to have noised around. Why, hello!"

He bent his head closer over the circular.

"What is it?" asked Hick.

"Look here!" said the judge. "See this printer's mark on the bottom of this circular? 'P. Murphy, Printer, 963 W. 122 Street, New York.' Hick, there wasn't any printer there eight years ago. There wasn't any printer there five years ago. There wasn't any printer there two years ago. I know, because I own that property. Two years ago that was a vacant lot."

"Stung!" said Hick. "Worked for easy marks by a jay!"

"Yes, stung! Buncoed!" said the judge. "And Hick, that's another thing a prosperous firm of fiscal agents can't afford to have noised around!"

When Mr. Bunker returned home, Grandma Bunker was already in the dining-room; he took his seat at her side, and opening his napkin, tucked it in his collar and spread it across his broad front.

"Well, Jabez," said Mrs. Bunker, "I guess by the way you look you done some business."

"Yes, Ma," said Mr. Bunker, "I'm right proud of it, too. I stang the Wall Street folks themselves to-day. I sold 'em them certificates you and me folded last night."

"Well, I dunno as they'd feel bad about it," said Grandma Bunker. "Most anybody'd be glad to own them certificates—they're so pretty."



The PAY STREAK

by Robert J. Casey

THE woman rose wearily from her battered chair by the unpainted pine table and regulated the air-valves of the assaying furnace. She had been beautiful once—was still, in a way, despite the pinch of poor nourishment in her cheek and the film of disappointed hope and wrecked pride in her eyes.

In the chalk-lined pot of the furnace the fumes from the roasting ore bubbled up soggily. An atmosphere redolent with arsenic added, if addition were possible, to the squalid discomfort of the little shack's single room. The gas, spiced to a nauseating degree with sulphur and antimony, curled about the ship-lap walls, rose lazily along the angle of the squat tar-papered roof and found egress in a dozen poorly patched leaks.

A rough bunk was built along one side of the cabin. Near by, a sheet-iron stove discharged more smoke

through its fuel door than through the tin stovepipe. Picks, pans and drills, ore-specimens and acid-carboys, littered the corners of the slab floor. So far the discomfort was merely that of the pioneer, the advance agent of civilization.

ROBERT J. CASEY is a new writer whose stories are sure to attract immediate attention. Novelty, vivid color, a sledge-hammer power—these qualities make them impressive indeed. This is one of his best; others will appear regularly in THE BLUE BOOK MAGAZINE.

The bedding was cheap and worn; the clothing which hung to nails behind the door was of a style little adapted to the needs of the hills, and ragged beyond hope of further patches. A five-pound flour-jar, a handful of beans in a broken cup and the remnants of a slab of salt pork on a shelf over the stove constituted the commissary. The handles of the mining implements had been broken and often repaired with rusty wire—and this was not the hardship of the pioneer but poverty.

As the woman turned away from the furnace, she looked at her gown, a Paris creation of black velvet and satin, and she laughed. Poverty has varied

manifestations. She realized that she could not afford the luxury of a calico apron to cover the ruins of her former grandeur.

Her hair was blonde—ruddy in the flickering light from the little crater; her fingers were more like those of a pianist than the blunt, calloused hands of a mining camp drudge. After a while the fumes of sulphur and antimony ceased to rise from the pot. She sank back in her chair, laid her head in her arms on the table and waited.

A MUFFLED step in the deep snow before the door aroused her, and she was animation again as a stooped figure in mackinaw, sweater and high boots shuffled in with the tails of the blizzard still clinging to him.

The man threw a few packages onto the table and dropped limply to a box before the stove.

"It was a bad day to-day, Nell," he said.

She smoothed her bodice, rearranged a rosette of black on her breast, brushed back a few strands of hair from her forehead and smiled at him inscrutably.

"It's always a bad day, isn't it, Harry?" she asked.

He stared at the glowing door of the tin stove as if he had not heard her.

"Don't you know, Harry, I get so tired of it all sometimes," she went on. "You and your bad days have ceased to be interesting, even as disappointments—"

He turned sharply, the light of some repressed emotion in his eyes; but even as he looked at her, the fire died and he drooped down again into a shapeless bundle.

"Please don't talk that way, Nell," he pleaded. "There'll be a strike some day—we'll be rich."

"Rich!" she laughed. "Look at the queen of your house, Harry. Cascade City would turn over backward if I walked into town in this rig. And I'm wearing it because my body wasn't brought up to stand cold, and the last of my rags are too thin to keep the chill away. Rich! It's always been that.

"Always money was just ahead. To-day we could eat abominable salt pork

and such delicacies as might be turned out of a pot. To-morrow it would be back to the champagne again. Your to-morrows and your pay dirt are all made of the same stuff. We never quite reach them."

"Nell," he begged, "please don't. I can't have you talking that way. It—"

She interrupted him calmly and insistently and dispassionately, disregarding his protest as though it never had been made.

"I've grown rather used to it, considering my reputation as a voluptuary. I've kept my form fairly well in spite of crazy beds and a man's work and nothing to eat. What's more remarkable, I've kept my mind—that's the wonderful part of it—I've kept my mind.

"When we first moved up the cañon and into this shack, I thought I'd go insane just from the loneliness of it. At night when the wind would sing in the pines, I used to hear the great organ in the cathedral. Childish, wasn't it? It seemed as if the wind could play nothing but dirges.

"Then when you built that little dam, and the board at the top got to rattling, I would imagine it was an automobile engine. It sounded just like that. I would lie awake and listen to it all night, and I could see myself going to the opera with other women, sitting in the cafés, living as it was intended I should live.

"But somehow I have managed to keep sane." She stretched her slim hands out to the furnace again. "I am sane enough to see the humor in your 'bad days' and to take your promises with salt."

THERE was quiet for a moment, save for the whispering of the wind as the blizzard sifted in through the chinks in the wall and the snow-spray from the leaky roof spattered on the stove.

"I saw a man killed to-day," the man said abruptly. He seemed suddenly to have grown very old despite the youthful evidences of his smooth cheeks and black hair.

"I saw a man killed to-day. He was expecting it—knew he was going to be

killed—told me so. Caught his arm in a conveyor, and was dragged onto the saws It was terrible, Nell."

"You have no business in a place like that," commented the woman without sympathy. "It's making you maudlin."

"They pay a dollar and a half at the mill," he retorted. "I suppose if I stay there, I'll go like John did. He felt it. I feel it—but it's a dollar and a half a day."

She shrugged her shoulders.

"Did you bring back any lead?" she asked. The man hung his head again.

"Of course you didn't, Harry," she observed in mock solicitude. "Oh, well, it's like you, you poor dear. We have a good assaying furnace. We can afford to keep that, but lead is much too expensive—"

The man leaped up, overturning the box as he arose.

Some strength of character, buried under the harrowing memories of a none too remote past, was reaching the surface. His body straightened; his shoulders grew broader. The down-curving ends of his weak mouth suddenly were transformed into a tight, straight, determined line.

"I'm tired of this, Nell," he breathed harshly as she drew her gown closer and posed languidly and with audacious, unruffled vanity against the table.

"You're not getting anything that isn't coming to you," he went on. "You aren't suffering any more than I am. I took a job in the sawmill for the winter just so that you might have a little better food and maybe some decent clothes. I could have lived; I could have worked on what little we had left."

"There needn't be any of this stage play about loyalty between us. You've stayed here because you've hoped that the claim would show a pay-streak—not because of any love for me. You married me for the same reason—the pay-streak. I had money, position, prospects. You weren't making any sacrifices, marrying a combination like that."

"We went broke because you kept two jumps ahead of the bank-account."

It wasn't any expense of mine that brought the smash. You're here because you want to be. You're poor because you've made yourself poor. You have a chance to be rich some day, and you sneer at it—"

"Don't you think you are forgetting yourself, Harry dear?" she asked dryly. "I may have been a mercenary creature—maybe not—that's beside the question. I could have done better. I'm entitled to three meals a day and enough clothes to keep me covered. There's this to my loyalty: I've gone through starvation with you. I've shared any hardships you may have suffered. I've had no reward except your doubtful promises."

The last trace of the man's self-control vanished. He smote the table with a heavy fist until the furnace shook and threatened to spill the metal out on the floor.

"Loyalty! I saw Fred Greave's last letter to you," he grated. "I read it. Loyalty! You'd go to him to-morrow, only he wouldn't have you and couldn't give you any better support than you're getting now, if he would. You're no better than a woman of the streets. They at least make no pretense regarding their profession."

Something in the woman's attitude bade him pause.

Her face still was passionless, her eyes still coldly unconcerned. But her bosom was heaving, and her hands had clenched until her knuckles were white.

"I'll kill you for that," she said quietly.

He did not answer her.

NELL RIAL marked the close of the incident with a toss of her shoulders as her husband threw aside his mackinaw and cap and helped himself to a cupful of strange soup from a pot that sizzled on the stove.

She took down a handful of cartridges from a belt that hung behind the door, extracted the bullets with monkey-wrench and pliers, and granulated the metal with a heavy file. She weighed the filings and then poured them into the ore-pot to flux the metal.

"You might go out and get some

stove-wood if your spirited nature would permit the effort," she reminded her husband.

He arose mechanically and departed, as she stripped a package of nails of its newspaper wrapping and settled herself in her chair to read the month-old news.

No sooner had the door closed behind him than she was alert. Her wedding ring was off her finger in an instant. She laid it on the iron block that served Rial as an anvil, and in another minute had hacked it into six pieces with hammer and cold-chisel.

Five pieces she hid under the slab floor. The sixth she tossed into the furnace. She was back in her chair with the paper before her again when Rial staggered in with an armful of fuel.

Presently the woman raised the pot from the furnace and busied herself in the preparation of cupels, little conical cups of pressed bone-ash, for the final step in the assay. Very carefully she set them in the place where the pot had been. When the molten metal had cooled, she lifted the spongelike mass from the vessel with a pair of tongs and laid it on the anvil. She broke away the slag with a hammer, disclosing a bright ball of gold-silver-lead alloy, which she cut into several pieces.

Rial looked on in fascination. He could not make an assay himself. He never had been able to acquire the patience and accuracy. It was like Nell to succeed in such things. She was painstaking in matters of detail. What she set out to do she did thoroughly.

THE woman distributed the metal among the cupels. She regulated the flame again and sat down to wait until the lead should be absorbed. When the fumes rose straight upward, she cut down the flame lest some of the precious metal might be carried away with the base. If the currents failed to rise at all, she gave the blaze more air. As the buttons flamed over, and the dark mists circled about the little cups in their ascension, she remained motionless.

Rial peered forward in eager interest.

Each day this was the climax of his search, the recompense for his double burden of labor. Usually the end was disappointment. The cupels cooled to show a blackened center where the lead had been, and only enough gold to spur him on in his search for more.

Nell's face was expressionless. There was neither haste nor interest in her movements as she adjusted the furnace. It was always that way. She made an assay with the same precision and disinterestedness that might have been displayed by a fatigued physician performing a routine autopsy. The work alone was her concern, and then only as a matter of established routine. Timbuctoo might have been the sole beneficiary in the result, for all the visible impression it made upon her.

Presently Rial abandoned his effort to remain in his corner by the stove. He arose, kicked aside the box on which he had been sitting and peered down into the furnace. He blinked unbelievably and gasped.

Tiny points of brilliance seemed to float in the circling fumes at the center of each cupel.

"We've hit it, girl," he exulted. "We've hit it. That ore ought to run five hundred dollars to the ton—five hundred dollars!"

Then he fainted among the chisels and pans beside the bunk. Nell paid no attention to him. She completed the assay by extracting the gold-tinged metal globules from the cones and dropping them into a glass of nitric acid to eat out the silver. She smiled when later she weighed the button of gold and found it neither more nor less than the piece of ring which she had dropped into the pot.

NEXT morning Rial walked down the railroad track in the cañon to the mill, drew his pay and resigned. He had to take a time-check—for the mill company had difficulty meeting the demands of the pay-roll even once a month, especially in winter. From there he went to Cascade City, where a genial saloonkeeper cashed the check at a ten-per-cent discount. With the forty dollars remaining, he bought ten dollars' worth of flour, five dollars'

worth of salt pork and twenty-five dollars' worth of dynamite.

Bill Seymour, saddle-maker, undertaker, prospector and pistol-merchant, got the contract for the dynamite. Being a remnant of the old order, he asked no questions but took the twenty-five dollars. He arranged for the delivery of the explosive via the logging railroad the next day.

Having thus observed the etiquette of the age he represented, he was at liberty to talk as much as he pleased—which he proceeded to do no sooner than his customer had stepped out the front door.

NOTHING spreads faster than the rumor of a gold strike.

Bill stepped across the street and held converse with Nate McIntosh, a banker who was strongly suspected of having obtained his start in life by robbing sluice-boxes. Whatever the grounds for the charge, it left Nate with a reputation as a mining expert second to none in the Black Hills.

"Is there any gold up Cascade Creek within ten miles of Cascade?" asked Bill abruptly.

Nate bit off a generous portion from a black plug before replying. Such matters could not be decided hastily.

"I guess there is," he replied at length. "You could pan a couple of dollars a day out of the creek right here. I'll bet on it."

Bill shook his head impatiently. He had heard it all before.

"Don't talk like the Commercial Club," he counseled. "I'm not askin' you this just to hear myself or you. I'm after stuff worth goin' after—a real high-grade, free-milling proposition."

"There aint any," judged Nate. "But I couldn't say that definite. You can find pretty near anything in the Black Hills except banana-trees. All the good claims is taken, anyway; so what's the use of worryin' about it?"

"That's the way I look at it, exactly," agreed Seymour. "I thought I'd taken a squint at everything between here and Mystic. But there's been some funny doin's up the creek, and I've been a-thinkin'."

Somehow the story circulated. Before Rial strode out of town with the first installment of his food purchase strapped across his shoulders, the sidewalks were filled with men who stared at him queerly until the sweep of a new snowstorm swallowed him up. Some of these were argonauts of the pioneer days, more of them fleecers of the new. They hoped that the impossible had happened, that a gold-strike had been made up the creek—not that any claims worth while remained for the taking, but because a gold-strike meant a new financial status in the community: more money to be spent and more assistance needed in the spending.

Close on Rial's trail as he left Rapid was Bill Seymour. Bill skirted the back streets of the town to Hangman's Hill and down the side of it unobserved. He carried a queer outfit—a blanket, a sack of provisions and a pair of binoculars. Seymour went not as a prospector but as—well, as an observer.

He grinned as he saw Rial fighting the wind and snow at the entrance of the cañon. If a gold-strike had been made, he intended to be the first outsider to share in the results. If the signs proved false, he would not have taken up his task in vain—it meant something to be able to take up the insignia of a forgotten youth and live once more the beloved "old days." And it was history in the hills that the rumor of a gold-strike meant an inevitable sale of coffins.

Rial was too much absorbed in the task of keeping his footing, once the narrow cañon threw the blizzard in his face, to notice the older but more agile man following the winding track behind him.

RIAL dragged a few saplings to the head of his shaft and constructed a rude snow-shield. Then he set about rediscovering the lead whence had come the wonderful specimen. Nell appeared to have forgotten their recent encounter. She encouraged him.

Clad in an impromptu working-skirt made of canvas, a pair of her husband's boots, a discarded mackinaw and a fur cap, she appeared at the head of the

shaft and held the drill for him when he commenced operations.

It was bitterly cold. The pine-clad mountain reared away on one side, blending with the gray of a winter sky; a red stone cliff towered on the other. The trees, muffled by the heavy coating of snow that made them look like sagebrush, were strangely silent. The dirge that Nell hated had ceased to sound. Instead, the wind passed on with a pulsation felt rather than heard, adding fear to infinite loneliness.

Nell heated the point of a drill in the rough forge near the head of the shaft and beat out the point to an edge with a hammer. Then she directed it as her husband plied the sledge. After each smash she moved the implement a quarter turn. Steadily it dug down into the rock.

It was work that presupposed silence. Both seemed to feel the influence of the cañon and to recognize the futility of words. The *smash, smash, smash* of the sledge was thrown back from the red-stone walls in a cannonade. It sounded sacrilegious. To Nell it was like biting downward stroke by stroke, turn by turn, through the marble floor of a great Gothic church—ever advancing to break through, presently, into a musty crypt.

AFTER a while the hole in the rock was partly filled with dust. Rial paused, perspiring despite the chill of the gale and the beating snow, and Nell scooped out the débris with a long-handled spoon.

When enough of a hole had been drilled, the man tamped in a charge of dynamite and inserted a fuse. The explosion was another desecration. The roar of it through the pent-up gulch left both of them deafened, and sent snow tumbling down the hillside in a miniature avalanche.

Then they shoveled away the wreckage and went back to the drill, working down a fraction of an inch at a time toward the gold-veined heart of the stone. So it continued all during the day and long after the early nightfall had turned the half-light of the cañon to impenetrable gloom. From a tiny cave at the top of the opposite cliff Bill

Seymour watched the performance through his field-glasses as long as the light permitted. He cooked his frugal supper over a carefully shielded fire as the smashing of the drill echoed up out of the cañon below. And he wondered what it all meant. Why was the woman urging the man on so pitilessly?

APIECE of ore was roasting in the assaying furnace when Rial arrived at the shack. Nell, who had left the drill only when his unsteadiness at the sledge imperiled her head, had slipped out of the canvas skirt and mackinaw. Now she stood radiant in her black velvet—a creature from another world, a débutante in a slum. All this was a long foreseen detail in her plans. In playing a game with a stacked deck of cards, she told herself, it is customary for the stacker to deal himself a good hand.

The inevitable bean soup was cooking on the tin stove. The rest of his supper, Nell informed her husband, he must prepare for himself.

Only a little piece of the ring had gone into the furnace this time. Nell was methodical and had mapped out in advance the complicated steps of what promised to be a long campaign. The attainment of her object meant much to her. Nothing could be considered a sacrifice that contributed toward that end.

"It shows only about two dollars a ton, to-night," she announced as she weighed the button at the completion of the assay. "Think we could have missed the vein?"

"We tested all that top ore," he objected. "I'm sure last night's sample was an outcropping from the cliff. We'll get it to-morrow, girl. We'll be rich."

Her only reply was a smile—a smile in which the man saw nothing of evil purpose.

Rial spread out a blanket on the floor, rolled himself in it and fell asleep almost as soon as he had stretched out his legs.

Nell changed her gown for her nondescript working costume and lay down on the bunk without undressing.

The next day the volume of the wind

and the chill of the blizzard increased, but behind the rough wall of saplings, the woman and her husband went on with their drilling.

That night there was another assay and another announced result of two dollars a ton. The woman, aching in every bone, fought with herself as fatigue periled determination. She held her eyes open by a superhuman effort until Rial was snoring in exhaustion on the floor. Then she arose and set the alarm-clock.

AT midnight Bill Seymour, snug in his cave with the embers of his fire at his feet and the blizzard warded off by a jutting rock at the entrance to the hole, was aroused from sound slumber by a dynamite blast.

He crawled to the edge of the cliff and looked down in bewilderment. There was a light in Rial's shack. A fire was being scattered in the grip of the gale over the snow not far from where he knew the shaft to be.

Then as he listened came the amazing sound of sledge striking drill—the metallic note that rose above the muffled noises of the storm.

"They must have something down there," he puzzled himself. "Either they've hit pay dirt, or they're mighty close to it—or that woman is up to something mighty queer."

AT the edge of the shaft the weary woman mechanically turned the drill. Sometimes her shrieking muscles rebelled and her arm was unsteady. At such times she was in danger of losing a hand under the descending hammer. Yet whenever the man showed signs of wearying, she urged him on.

"We can't stop now," she pleaded. "We can't stop. The gold is here. We must find it."

Presently he got to repeating it as a sort of refrain which he only half understood.

"Must go on," he chanted sleepily as he swung the sledge. "Gold." Then Nell knew she had won.

FOUR days Bill Seymour looked on. He was far from understanding the activity at the Rial shaft. He would have visited the claim and taken samples, but he dared not. There seemed to be no regularity about the work of the man and woman he watched. All day they worked, and far into the night—then at ten o'clock, midnight or two o'clock they began again.

Their working days started at day-break—or the morning twilight which answered for dawn in the cañon. They made no stops for food.

Bill could not make it out. Gradually the mystery of the affair gave way in his mind before the certainty that the Rials had won where all the prospectors since 1875 had failed. He went back to town for more supplies and confided his theories in Nate. Before he was well out of town on his way back to his conning tower, Cascade was pre-

paring for a new gold-boom.

After a week Nell, so worn-out physically and mentally that she feared ill-timed illness might interrupt her plans, abandoned her place at the drill, and the downward movement into the rock progressed less rapidly. She slept all the first day of her reprieve.

She was awake and had an exceptionally palatable supper on the table when the man staggered into the shack at nightfall. He fell asleep in his chair as soon as he had finished his meal. She dragged him to the bunk, rolled him comfortably in a blanket and braved the storm to get stove-wood, that he might not be uncomfortable. She laughed at her inconsistency, but she realized that although her object precluded sentiment, its ghost might prove acceptable. For the success of her experiment it was necessary that the subject be in a receptive mood.

"THE ROSE CLIFF JOB"

FREDERICK R. BECHDOLT, who wrote the famous "Lighthouse Tom" stories, "At the Rancho de la Tierra," "The Sea Is Not for Women" and other memorable tales, will be a contributor to our next issue. "The Rose Cliff Job," a short novel in Mr. Bechdolt's best vein, will commence in the September BLUE BOOK MAGAZINE—on sale August 1st.

She did not go through the formula of an assay. A bit of the ring, melted down to a button, produced the result without the labor.

At midnight she lighted the furnace, strewn crumbs of slag about the table, sprinkled nitric acid on the floor until the fumes were thick through the room and then awakened her husband.

"It's fifty dollars to-night," she told him excitedly. "See, there is the button."

He rolled out of his bunk in a daze of fatigue and sleeplessness. The gold-lust was battling with exhaustion.

"Maybe we'd better try to finance it right away," he suggested.

She shook her head.

"You can't raise money on one button of pay. Get the specimens. Get the ore. Find the lead. We're close to it."

Then the dullness of fatigue faded from his face once more. His eyes brightened unnaturally, and he reached for his tools.

"We'll get it, girl," he said. "We'll get it. The gold is there. We'll find it."

So he went out into the storm and forced his aching body to its endless task.

Half an hour later, Bill Seymour was roused from his rest by another dynamite explosion.

It has been said that pocket-mining—the search for an elusive vein of high-grade—is the most fascinating sport in the world, because the prize is always just ahead. If the miner sinks his shaft a mile, he can't quit there, because the vein or the pocket may be a mile and one foot below the surface. So he keeps on until his strength or his pocket-book or his mind gives out.

THE tenth day, Mr. William Seymour grew inquisitive. He resolved to make certain whether or not the golden days had returned, and he clambered down from his cave. At first fortune favored him. He saw Rial, hunched up to ward off the ungentle caress of the driving snow, plodding down the cañon in the direction of town.

Seymour judged correctly that he was on his way to bring in the rest of

the supplies he had ordered with the dynamite. The woman he believed to be negligible.

The snow was swirling about the shaft-head as he emerged from the protection of the cañon rocks and started the climb toward Rial's claim. Up above him, the tumbling ledges so characteristic of Black Hills topography jutted out of the wall: a layer of black, a layer of white—a funereal band. He reached the top of the cliff as he had calculated, near the mine. He picked up a few bits of rock at the ore-dump and leisurely surveyed his surroundings. There was no one in sight, and every chance seemed to favor the success of his effort.

Then a bullet sang by his ear, and the cañon echoed the crack of a rifle. That convinced Seymour. He lay flat on his stomach and slid precipitously to a safer place among the brakes. Then he too took the trail to town.

SEYMOUR knew every foot of the gulch from his old expeditions as a prospector and the land-bartering days that succeeded the gold rush.

For years no assessment work had been done on the little claim in the brakes immediately adjoining Rial's shaft. Therefore it had reverted to the Government and had remained public property pending the arrival of some adventurous soul unacquainted with the fate of its previous holders. As a matter of precaution, Seymour filed on it—much to the wonder and amusement of the populace—and arranged for an investigating expedition.

Rial was still in town when the news of Seymour's unaccountable folly spread over Main Street. Sundry attempts to question him were unsuccessful.

"There is promise in the cañon," he would observe after the tight-lipped fashion of the two-gun days. "Some day I'm going to hit it rich." And opinion was divided over whether he was a prophet or merely insane.

Rial shouldered a sack of flour and started up the cañon again that afternoon, not knowing that the eyes of the city were on him as he passed through

the gateway under Hangman's Hill. After him went Seymour, and with Seymour three armed men.

Rial stumbled and fell half a dozen times in the seven-mile walk back to his claim. Seymour and his men would have helped him, but they feared to disclose their presence or their mission. They kept well behind, wondering each time the man stumbled, whether he would ever get up again.

The sixth time Rial crumpled down under the weight of the flour and mine supplies, he left a mark. There was a little pool of red in the snow when the pursuers came to the spot a few minutes afterward.

THREE tanned men in mackinaws, selected for their ability to hit a penny at a hundred yards and a somewhat picturesque attitude toward life, camped in the snow on the heights of the cañon, covering both sides of the Rial shaft.

Behind a rock on the floor of the gulch Seymour squatted expectantly. He was unarmed. He meant no harm in his attempt to learn the value of the claim next that on which he had just paid an entry-fee, but he did not believe in taking chances on being killed. Hence the grim bodyguard.

Rial went immediately to his task.

The *smash, smash, smash* of hammer and drill, grown weaker since Seymour first had listened to the sound, was echoing now from somewhere beneath the surface. The watcher in the brakes judged that the shaft must have been sunk several feet.

At times the men on the cliff-walls saw a woman in black velvet, her head and shoulders wrapped in a fur scarf, picking her way with difficulty through the drifts between the shaft and the hut. Seymour watched her curiously, for there was that in her driving of her husband that perplexed him.

Once the man appeared. He said something to her, and she laughed at him. He strode angrily past her into the shack and emerged with a handful of food which he devoured as he hurried back to his drilling. The woman, still smiling, stared after him. Then she went inside.

At seven o'clock that night the watchers clustered with Seymour behind the rock. The sound of the drill ceased. The door of the shack opened. The woman, her golden head uncovered, appeared in the doorway with a lantern. The light moved along quickly though uncertainly toward the mine.

Two minutes later there was an explosion that sent a shiver through the rocky spine of the hills. A shower of pebbles beat down upon the watchers, and they were buried neck-deep in snow. They waited expectantly for a resumption of the drilling. But there was no further sound coming from the shaft.

"I guess she got him that time," remarked Bill ominously, and he began to lead his men up the mountain-side.

TWO forms lay still on the snow when the quartet stepped into the ring of light thrown by the flickering lantern. The woman's arms were about Rial, who lay face downward. A muck of broken rock was scattered over them.

The woman's hair, fluffed out by the wind, was like a flame in the unsteady light against the snow. A trickle of red ran down from a gash in her forehead.

"I don't make it out," observed Bill Seymour uncomprehendingly. "She must have pulled him out of it."

As he spoke, Rial loosened himself from his wife's grasp and lurched to his feet. One of the armed three forced a draught of whisky through his white lips and steadied him in the wind. He did not seem to realize what had happened.

"I was too tired to climb out," he repeated to himself in a dazed monotone. "Too tired. Then she came—"

Seymour's men gave him no more attention. They carried the woman to the hut and laid her on the cot. Unsentimental hands washed the wound in her head with turpentine, the pioneer's only antiseptic; and in a few minutes she too opened her eyes.

She stared about in horror, caught sight of Rial, smiled and dropped back onto her pillow.

"Better luck to-morrow, boy," she greeted him with a shaking voice. For

answer he dropped to his knees beside the cot, drew her as close as his withered strength would permit and sobbed convulsively. She tried to push him away.

"Don't, don't," she moaned. "I can't have you pitying me I tried to kill you."

"Hush, girl," he interrupted brokenly.

But she refused to be silenced. "When you doubted me," she persisted, "I said I'd kill you. I meant to. I tried to. I starved you, forced you to work; then—then I couldn't go on with it—"

THERE was a moment of tense silence, but Rial didn't rise from his knees or loosen his embrace. Bill Seymour and the armed three looked on the scene in stark amazement.

"Better go get grub an' a doctor," Bill instructed one of the men. For once in his checkered existence he could think of no other comment.

"Poor little girl!" mumbled Rial. "We'll hit the pay to-morrow. I'll sell out, and then we'll start all over again."

Bill had been toying with a piece of ore. He stopped suddenly and threw himself into the tableau. Here was a situation he could understand.

"Now you're talkin'," he observed. "I'm goin' to put sheep in here this year. I'll give you a thousand dollars for the claim."

The man blinked at him in astonishment.

"A thousand dollars!" he repeated. "Food and a home, girl. Let's chuck it."

Nell Rial raised herself on her elbow and peered across the tattered blanket at Seymour.

"Ask him what he's holding in his hand, Harry," she directed her husband. Seymour did not indicate that he understood the significance of her command.

"Open your hand," she pursued. "Put that piece of rock on the table."

Bill followed her instructions with a sheepish grin. He knew better than to back a pair of deuces against a royal flush.

"That," she explained as the stones clattered against the assaying furnace, "is natural cement. Our claim is worth perhaps forty thousand dollars. Am I right, Mr. Visitor?"

"Bein' a bidder for the claim, I aint talking loud, lady," said the miner, unabashed. "But bein' the sole owner, manager an' stockholder of the claim just next door, I'm willin' to admit it aint bad lookin'." He grinned again.

"The gypsum and shale are close together," he drawled, an' it's just so good that you wouldn't had any hard luck if you'd knowed about it a month ago."

The woman smiled strangely.

"I did know about it a month ago, Mr. Visitor," she answered evenly. Then she lay back on the cot and settled her head comfortably in her husband's arms.

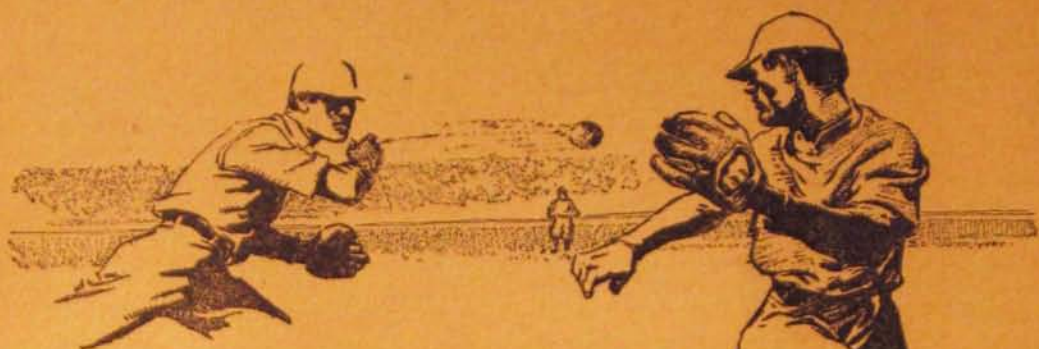
Bill and his cohorts stepped gingerly out of the cabin.

"Knowed it a month ago," he ruminated as he faced the blizzard again. "Knowed it a month ago, an' starved so she could croak a man because he starved her. All I gotta say is that mines an' women is about the same kind o' proposition. Yuh never can tell how they're goin' to pan out."

And in the shack on the cliff another man was thinking, though not quite so coherently, the same thing.

"THE MIDAS TOUCH,"
another of Robert J. Casey's striking stories, will appear in the September BLUE BOOK MAGAZINE. Like the foregoing, it is a tale of the Black Hills country. And to an even more marked degree it shows the unique power of this new writer.





A Sour Infield

by William Almon Wolff

CIVIL WAR in a whirlwind infield takes the ginger out of a pennant-winning team. . . . A delightful story of big baseball, by the man who wrote "Quarter Limit."

THERE is nothing in the world just like big-league baseball. Every year, when the World's Series comes along, and the papers are full of the tremendous receipts, and baseball reporters, who have to have something to write about, fill their space with guesses as to how the players mean to invest their gains, there is a lot of talk about the commercialization of the sport. Some of it is justified, too; there isn't any doubt that a lot of men in baseball, from club-owners down to players, think mostly of the profit there is in the game for them. But if baseball has ceased to be purely a sport, it is certainly still a long way from having become a matter of business, pure and simple.

And there's a good deal of sentiment, too. If Charley Malone hadn't been just the sentimental Celt he was, this story couldn't be written. Charley was manager of the Eagles a few years ago, and he was one of the few really great managers the game has produced. The public has a way of attributing greatness to any manager whose team wins a pennant. But baseball-players are

more chary in their praise. They want to know what sort of material a man had to handle, before they grow enthusiastic.

Many a manager who wears laurels in the eyes of the bleachers is almost unanimously rated "a lucky stiff" in the dressing-rooms of the big leagues. But Charley Malone was not among them. He had his enemies, but friends and enemies alike admitted his quality.

MALONE understood, always, that he had to keep two objects in his mind. He had to turn out as good a team as he could, and he had to make money for the owners of the Eagles. Nearly always, of course, the fulfillment of one of these objects takes care of the other too, but that rule has its exceptions. Championship teams have had unprofitable seasons; clubs that were out of the race by the Fourth of July have been able to show a big balance on the right side of the ledger. A mechanically perfect team is often

unpopular, while there will be something about a losing team that satisfies the crowds. The Athletics, playing baseball so good that it could hardly have been better, never won the heart of Philadelphia; the White Sox could never play badly enough, even if they finished last, to alienate the affections of Chicago.

The Eagles were a good deal more like the White Sox, in that respect, than the Athletics. Charley Malone won his fair share, to put it mildly, of pennants, but even in years when he was rebuilding his team, the home crowds remained loyal. Malone himself was responsible for this, to a great extent. His appearance on the coaching-lines was always the signal for a round of applause.

I knew Malone pretty well, because, for several years, I traveled with the Eagles. A baseball reporter who is attached to a club gets to be pretty intimate with it, as a rule. He learns all sorts of things that never find their way into print, and when the players understand that he will respect their confidence, mighty little is hidden from him. I broke in as a baseball reporter with the Eagles, and in my first season Malone and some of the other old-timers saved my job for me half a dozen times apiece. After that I went South on the training-trip every spring, and made all the road trips with the club, traveling in the club's private car and staying at the hotels it favored. I saw the Eagles win three pennants, and then, in the season that saw Charley Malone's hope of breaking modern league records by winning a fourth consecutive flag shattered, I was out of baseball.

In that year I tried to get away from newspaper work, but the next spring saw me back on the job, and I went South with the Eagles again. I don't mind admitting that there was a lump in my throat when old Sam, my particular hackman, grabbed my suit-case away from a lot of fresh young darkies at the station; and the lump got bigger when I got my first glimpse of the Marvin House and saw old Doc Porger, just as fat as ever, standing in his shirt-sleeves in the door, looking to see what guests the train had brought him.

CHARLEY was on the job, of course, and a few of the regular battery men had come down early. But the hotel was swarming with the rookies the scouts had sent along for Charley to pass on, and the veterans of the team weren't due for a week. Still, there were enough of the old timers around to make me feel as if I'd stumbled into an Old Home Week celebration, and they acted as if they were just as glad to see me as I was to be there again. By the time the poker-game broke up, along about midnight, I felt as if I'd never been away at all. And then Charley and I sat up, "fanning," until it began to get light. Charley wasn't a playing manager, and so it didn't matter what sort of hours he kept. And it was a sort of special occasion, anyway.

I knew, in a general way, that the whole club had fallen down the summer before, and that was why the Panthers had been able to slip in and win a pennant that Charley could have borrowed money on from any man who knew the league. But I didn't know the details, because I'd been away and hadn't seen the team in action, and I hadn't been around all winter to hear the gossip, either. I supposed it was just another version of the old story: the sudden collapse of a championship team.

This has happened often enough; one summer the team will be invincible, and then, during the winter, something happens. There isn't much warning, as a rule; the third baseman's arm will stiffen up a little, perhaps, so that his throw will be delayed just long enough to account for a lot of infield hits that would have been outs the year before; the lead-off batter will slow up a step going down to first, and be out where and when he used to be safe; the star base-runner will need a fifth of a second more between first and second—there will be half a dozen things that don't amount to much in themselves, but are enough, taken together, to account for fifteen games or so—and a pennant.

But when I suggested that explanation to Charley, he shook his head, rather sadly.

"It's worse than that, Bill," he said. "I'm not saying Pete Megrue had quite

as much speed as he used to have, but he's been working on his slow ball, and he's made up for any speed he's lost by using his head more. And it's the same way with the others. After we began to slump they looked bad, part of the time, but they're not youngsters, you know, and they didn't kill themselves when they once saw the Panthers were going to cop. Anyhow, they knew the reason we went bad just as well as I did. Flint and Murphy got sour on one another."

WELL, that explained everything right away. If the shortstop and the second baseman of a team aren't working together, playing out the schedule is just a matter of form. There's about as much chance for the team to do anything as there would be for an automobile to run if the carburetor and the transmission had a quarrel.

"For heaven's sake—why?" I asked.

"Search me!" said Charley. "They never were bunkies, or anything like that, but they got along all right, and you know how they played around that bag! I've seen as much baseball as any man alive, I guess, and I've never seen a pair like them. I remember you wrote a piece, once, about how they seemed to have the same thoughts—how each of them would always take a chance on a blind throw, if he'd been caught off his balance after a hard stop, and be sure the other would get the throw. And you sized them up right, too. They seemed to know what the other was thinking, sort of by instinct. I never taught them the way to play—they worked it out by themselves."

"Couldn't they do their scrapping off the field?"

"Oh, I guess they tried, all right. They're both hard-boiled eggs. I don't mean anything against 'em, but they both had sense enough, and you know it, to remember that they couldn't keep on playing ball all their lives, and they've been salting away their money ever since they've been with us. They wanted to cut in on the big series, sure enough. But, shucks—if you're sour on a man you can't help showing it. The first time Flint made one of these

blind chucks of his and Murphy wasn't there in time to stop it, Flint bawled him out so that everyone in the stands could hear him. And it got worse, of course. By August, Flint straightened up and waited till Murph' was on the bag before he'd throw—and so did Murph'. If either of them started a double play in the last two months, I don't remember it!"

"Couldn't you shift them around?"

"Where to? I suppose Murph' could play the outfield—he's got the better arm. But what for would I break up a good garden? If it hadn't been for the outfield, we'd have finished last instead of second! Those two birds had the whole infield up in the air after a while. Neither of them's any good except in his own position. I tried to make 'em see reason first—I slapped fines enough on 'em to make them both ready to quit. But by the time I saw it was hopeless, it was too late to do anything. I'm not handing Bergman any bouquets, but if you give the Panthers a ten-game lead on the first of September, he'll cop a pennant unless his club gets into a railroad wreck!"

IT sounded pretty bad. I knew Malone's plans, and I knew he'd counted on both Flint and Murphy to be good for two or three more seasons, so that he probably didn't have any coming star covered up to take the place of either of them. As a rule Charley could figure out, a season or two ahead of time, when one of his regulars was due to fade out, and when the proper moment came he'd call in some kid that had been getting seasoned in a minor league and flash him, so that managers who didn't have his forethought would talk about his luck in always drawing a prize rookie when he needed him. Generally speaking, there was about as much luck in Charley's "discoveries" as there is in the success of a man who has won in business by working sixteen hours a day while his rivals loaf.

"How about this year?" I asked him.

"I don't know—yet," he said. "I'm going to play a hunch. Bill—we ought to come back this season and show the Panthers up—not to speak of the rest

of the league. But there's only one chance for us to do it—and that's for Flint and Murph' to forget their foolishness and play ball the way they can if they want to do it!"

"You can't replace either of them?"

"Not this year. I've got some youngsters, but it would spoil them to bring them up too soon, and I'm going to need them later. Flint and Murphy are both too old to break in with a new side-partner around second. And there's another thing: you've got to keep this dark—but there'll be a new manager for the Eagles next year."

"Huh?" I said. "What's this, Charley?"

"Straight goods," he said. "I've been saving my money for quite a while, and I've made some lucky turns in real estate, between seasons. The boss knew about it, and he made me a proposition. He's going to let me buy a big block of stock, and slip into his place. He's got a whole lot of things to attend to, and the club's been taking too much of his time. I'm planning to break Scotty in as manager and spend most of my time in the office. I'm getting too old for the road, anyhow. So—this is going to be my last season, although I suppose I'll butt in a good deal on Scotty for a while. And I'd kind of like to finish by copping one more pennant."

"I know you," I said, when I'd got used to the idea. "You'd like to win with the old team, too, wouldn't you?"

"Well, I would," he admitted. "Was there ever a team like it? I've had pennant-winning teams before—but never one like that! Will you ever forget the year we came from away back and caught the Reds on the wire? The year Pete Megrue was out for six weeks, and we played our big series with the Panthers with half the boys more fit to be in hospital than in uniform? I've seen teams, and been on them, that knew more baseball, perhaps, and could play better—but on none gamer! 'Twouldn't be the same thing at all to win another flag if my infield's broken up. And so—"

"I'm glad I'm here!" I told him, and meant it, from the bottom of my heart. "I take it I'll see things!"

"And I take it you'll keep them out

of your paper!" he said with a grin. "Be off to bed, Bill, and let an old man get his sleep."

BY the time the regulars had been in Marvin for twenty-four hours I had heard the story of the trouble between Flint and Murphy from every veteran on the club—except from the two principals, of course. The thing had a lot of aspects that would have seemed queer to one who didn't know the Eagles as well as I did. No one took sides, for one thing, to any noticeable extent. Each man had his particular friends, of course, but the trouble hadn't spread, as it might well have done on another club. And the Eagles, considering that Flint and Murphy, by their inability to get along together, had cost every man on the team between two and three thousand dollars, representing the individual shares of a World's Series gate, displayed mighty little resentment. They seemed to take the whole business as a stroke of bad luck.

There were all sorts of stories about the scrap; it seemed to me that no two accounts of how it had begun tallied. I judged, for myself, that the first cause might have been trivial enough—that if Flint and Murphy hadn't been under the strain of a pennant-fight nothing much would have come of it. I liked them both. Flint was a New Englander—a bit taciturn and inclined to be reserved without being at all uppish. He had been graduated into professional baseball after starring for a small college team, and had been studying law for some years. I think he expected to spend one more year, after he retired from the game, in law-school before opening an office of his own.

Murphy was as Irish as his name—a good-natured, grinning chap who had fought and smashed his way into the Big League after serving an apprenticeship on the sand-lots and in the scrubbiest of minor leagues. Murph', I believe, must have learned to play baseball about as soon as he could walk; certainly I have never seen a man with such a passion for the game. Most ball-players like baseball well enough, but have a sort of feeling that they ought to conceal their fondness for it—

that they ought to affect an indifference that, as a rule, they do not feel. But if Murphy ever had that feeling he couldn't live up to it. His enthusiasm for the game bubbled up in him all the time. He was never so happy as when he was on the field, and he was just as keen about winning the last game of the season, when everything was settled, as he was on the crucial games with a rival pennant-contender.

I wondered a good deal, in the week that passed between my talk with Charley Malone and the coming of the regulars, what he meant to do to save his infield. I was ready to back him; I knew Charley well enough to be certain that he had some trick up his sleeve. But the more I heard about the trouble, the harder his task seemed likely to be. I plagued him to tell me what he was going to do, but he wouldn't. And Scotty, who was down on the club roster as Sandy Monteith, the veteran catcher who confined his activity now chiefly to coaching young pitchers, and was to succeed Charley as manager, though he didn't know it, was frankly skeptical.

"Not a chance, Bill," he told me. "Not a chance. Charley's just foolish enough about the old team to try to straighten things out, but he can't do it. Say—here's a tip: Watch this kid Ramsay from Bloomington. He wasn't supposed to come up till next year, but Charley put in a hurry call for him just before we started out this spring. If he hasn't got the makings of a real infielder, I'll eat my shirt. And look at him in the batting practice! 'Course they're not feeding many curves, but he's got a way of walking into a ball that's mighty comforting."

"What's he play?" I asked.

"Short or second—it's all one to him," said Scotty. "If you wire anything to your paper, act like you'd thought it out for yourself. But I guess you wont go far wrong if you announce that Ramsay's going to take a job away from either Flint or Murph'. I guess the boss'll keep the one that shapes up best and slip Ramsay in in place of the other one."

"It would be a toss-up between them, wouldn't it?" I said.

"It sure would!" said Scotty. "I guess Murph' is the better fielder, but Flint bats about fifteen points better. Murph' has more speed on the bases, but Flint's the best waiter we've got. Toss-up is right."

THE more I saw of Ramsay and the way Charley nursed him along, the more likely it seemed to me that Scotty was right. After the regulars got limbered up a bit and the practice games began, Ramsay alternated between second and short on the second team. Sometimes he switched from one side of second after four or five innings; sometimes he played one position one day and the other the next. And he was just as good as Scotty had said. He had a beautiful pair of hands, and he went after everything. He seemed to judge ground-balls by instinct; on the Marvin diamond, which wouldn't have won any medals in a convention of ground-keepers, no bounce seemed too erratic for him to judge. It was too early to tell much about his hitting; for that matter, you never can tell much about a recruit's batting until the league pitchers have had a chance at him. But it looked as if he would be able to hit well enough. He didn't give promise of being a slugger, but I judged he would probably bat about .270, and that's enough for a really brilliant infielder.

I tried to talk to both Flint and Murphy about their quarrel. Flint shied away from the subject at once; he wasn't really ugly about it, but he made it impossible for me to refer to the matter again. Murphy just laughed.

"Oh, nothing much," he said. "The old boy's touchy. I'm ready to call it off if he is. Say, Bill—I suppose you know we two hicks tossed off the flag last year? If I'd been Charley, I'd have tied the can to the two of us."

"Maybe he's going to do it—to one of you—this year, instead," I suggested. "This Ramsay kid looks pretty good, Murph'."

"Isn't he a bird?" said Murphy, at once, with the utmost and most genuine enthusiasm. "Say—you don't see 'em break in like that any too often, Bill."

If things were just right I guess I could beat him out all right this year—but next year! That'd be different!"

"There's just as much chance for him to beat Flint as you," I said. "He's no better at second than he is at short."

"Yeh—that's true enough. But—well, I guess Charley would pass me up if he can't keep us together."

"Can't he?" I asked.

"Search me," said Murph'. "I doubt it, though. As I say, I'm willing to bury the old hatchet any time—on the field, anyhow. Flint and me—well, we never were such extra special pals, but we always got along all right. I kinda like the old boy, at that. But I guess he thinks I'm pretty small potatoes. I don't believe we'll ever get working right together again."

I WAS pretty thoughtful after I left Murphy. There's a lot of truth in the old saying that it takes two to make a quarrel, and it didn't seem to me that Murphy was doing his share now, whatever had been the case the season before. I made a chance to tell Charley Malone what Murphy had said, and he just looked wise and wouldn't say anything at all. So I edged up to Flint, a day or two later, and walked back to the hotel with him after the afternoon practice.

"You must want to see Ramsay break into the infield—you and Murph'," I said. "Can't you get together to hold your jobs against the kid?"

"I wish you'd drop that sort of talk," he said rather unpleasantly. "I'm doing the best I can to play short for Malone and the club. If Charley can get some one who can work in better with Murphy than I can, I've got no complaint to make. You know as well as I do that this young fellow Ramsay will be better than I am next season."

"Next season isn't this," I said.

"It might as well be, as far as I'm concerned," said Flint. "I'm rather sorry I reported at all this spring. I might as well have gone to work and saved some time."

Well, I wasn't sure, by any means, but after that I had a sort of hunch that kept me from being very much surprised with the way things finally

turned out. And it certainly wasn't any shock to me when, a day or two later, Charley did something that was highly unusual—not to say unprecedented. He called a bunch of us together one night in the hotel, including me and one or two of the other old-timers among the reporters, because we really did belong to the club, in a way.

"Look here, boys," he said. "This is a sort of family party, and I'm going to use the shorter and uglier words. You all know I was pretty well broken up when we didn't cop last year, after the start we made, even if I didn't say much. And you know I'm specially anxious to have this old team win one more flag before it begins to break up, as it's sure to do after this season.

"Well, it was a bit of foolishness that beat us last year. I hoped Flint and Murph' would cool off during the winter, and come down here showing some signs of human intelligence. But they haven't. I'm not going to curse them out, or try to find out which of them is right. If you ask me, I think they're both wrong—and I sort of hope they both choke! But it's come down to this: one of them can stay—the other's got to go. Ramsay can fill in for one of them, and it doesn't seem to make any difference to him which it is. I'm sorry; I hoped I could keep the old infield together. But I can't. So I'm declaring it an open race between them, from now on. I'm asking them both to do the best they can, and when we start the season I'll choose between them.

"Flint, and you, Murph'—I'd like to keep you both. Maybe I'm stronger for one of you than for the other, and maybe I'm not. That wont cut any ice, anyhow. It's the one that can do most for the team that's going to stay. I expect you to make it as easy as you can for me. Maybe, if you know it wont be for long, you can play together something like the way you used to. And I've told you like this, before the rest of the boys, because we've always talked out in meeting on this club, and the boys are in this too, in a way."

HOW that affected the practice games must be fairly easy to imagine. All of us watched that scrap

around second base, of course; if another Ty Cobb had broken into the outfield he'd have had a hard time getting any attention. Just at first Murphy and Flint both cut loose with all they had, to try to prove which was the better man. That was human nature; they couldn't do anything else. But after the first day or two, things began to develop in a rather curious fashion. I had a good chance to study the two of them, because I umpired a whole lot of the practice games, and standing around second base, as I naturally did a good deal of the time, I could hear a lot. I didn't feel that it mattered an awful lot, you know, if I booted a few decisions; I was a lot more interested in those two than I was in whether a man was out or safe. I'm afraid I made some pretty raw decisions, and I heard a lot of plain truths about my eyesight.

The first thing that made me hide a grin was something Murphy said about three days after Charley's little sermon. Flint had gone away off to his left for a hard grounder. There was a man on first, and Murphy streaked over to the bag to take the throw. In the old days Flint would have thrown at once, even if he'd fallen and landed on his ear making the stop. But now he waited to get set and make his throw sure, and they lost the play.

"Come on—come on," said Murphy. "Take a chance—I'll get your throw after a stop like that if it's within ten feet of me!"

SO, the next time there was that sort of play, Flint did make a crazy toss. The ball was low, and Murph', keeping one foot on the bag, just did make the pick-up—completing a singularly brilliant play. And a little later Flint returned the compliment. That wouldn't have been remarkable two years before, but it was the first time they had done anything of the sort since they had quarreled. They hadn't made up, you know; they still avoided all but absolutely necessary speech. But it was easy enough to see what was happening. Each of them was so anxious to give the other a square deal that they both leaned backward. Murphy, when

he saw that I understood, condescended to explain.

"It's this way, Bill," he said. "I haven't any more use for Flint than I've had for a long time. But I'm not going to have anyone saying I threw him down or messed up plays just to show him up. And I guess he feels the same way. He's got white spots."

It was beautiful to see the way they worked together now. It was a revelation of perfect team-work where team-work is absolutely essential. As for choosing between them, I didn't see how it could be done. They were both so good that it was heartbreaking to think that it couldn't last, and that one of them would have to go. Sometimes that thought made me laugh, and sometimes, knowing what it would mean to Charley to have them play that way through the season, it made a sort of lump come in my throat.

As I said, I had a hunch that Charley was up to some trick, but I couldn't figure out just what it could be. I could go just about so far. Of course, anyone could see this much: he had counted on the love of fair play in each of them to get them to showing good team-work again. But what use would that be if they weren't reconciled? They wouldn't keep it up; I did think, for a while, that he meant to string them along, and get them into the regular season by pretending he couldn't choose between them. But they thought of that themselves. Murphy did, anyhow, and I knew Flint well enough to be sure that he'd think of it too.

"Charley's pretty foxy," Murphy told me. "I guess he's figuring on making us keep this sort of thing up. But it won't do. It's too much of a strain. I'm afraid of slipping up some time. He's got to make his pick and let one of us out. Say, Bill—I used to think I'd want to croak when I got through. But I guess I'm sort of getting used to the idea. I told you about that ranch I had my eye on, didn't I? I got a chance to get it cheap if I make a move pretty quick."

THE time wore on, and we started North, on the way home for the opening, stopping off, of course, to play

exhibition games, and still Charley kept saying he couldn't make up his mind between them. And then, one day, when we were playing Baltimore, I saw Murphy grin, suddenly, as he set himself for an easy roller—and the next moment the ball went right through his legs and on to the outfield. He acted pretty well—bent down and looked for a pebble or a worm-cast or something—the infielder's regular alibi when he makes an error. And he kept on acting. You never saw such an exhibition of fielding as he gave that day! He'd made five errors on easy chances when I lost count—and the reason I lost count was that I got interested in Flint.

He didn't pay much attention to that first fumble. But when Murph' dropped a pop fly in the next inning, he turned around and stared at him, and by the time Murphy had done about all the horrible things a good infielder dreams of doing after he's been eating Welsh rarebit, Flint was crazy. Then he started in to boot a few himself, but he wasn't as good an actor as Murphy, and everyone could see he was doing it on purpose.

Of course, the crowd was wild, and I can't blame them; those two imbeciles turned that game into a burlesque. But Charley just sat and grinned, when he knew they couldn't see him. He looked like the original Cheshire cat. I don't hang around the clubhouse as a rule, after a game, but you couldn't have kept me out of the dressing-room that day with anything short of an army corps. I trotted across the field right behind old Charley, and I was at his elbow when he opened up on Flint and Murphy.

"You're a fine pair of misfits!" he said. "I didn't tell you I wanted to get rid of both of you, did I? I said I wanted to know which was the better! Until you began to run wild, Flint, I thought I could tie the can to Murph' on the showing he made to-day! Now—"

Flint turned on Murphy suddenly.

"You poor bonehead!" he shouted. "Did you think I didn't know what you were doing? Trying to show yourself up so I'd get the job, eh? What's the

matter? Do you think I'll starve if I get my release?"

"Aw, shucks!" said Murphy. "It didn't matter to me, Jim. I'd as soon hit the trail for my ranch this year as next."

"Rot!" said Flint. "You'd rather play ball than eat! You always were that way! It didn't matter to *me*! If I'd landed the job, it would have bothered me to think about you reading the box-scores when you got your paper a day late!"

THEY stared at each other. And suddenly Charley grabbed them both, each by a shoulder.

"I ought to knock your thick heads together!" he said. "You're sore as blazes at one another, aren't you? So sore that you've been lying awake nights wondering how you could fool me into keeping the other one, the two of you! Do you know what you're going to do? You're going to stay and play the way you've been doing until to-day—the way you played before you went bugs!"

I couldn't help it. I fell down on the nearest bench and began to laugh. And as soon as I could speak, I went at them too.

"You had a fine chance with Charley Malone!" I told them. "He's had your number from the start. He knew just about how serious that wonderful quarrel of yours was. What in time was it about, anyhow—now that it's all over and done with?"

They looked at one another. And then they began to grin, rather shamefacedly. It was Murphy who stuck his hand out first, but Flint didn't waste any time in grabbing it. And then Flint turned to me.

"None of your business!" he said.

But I didn't mind. He was still grinning as he said it.

"That's right," said Murphy. "You said something, Jim! These newspaper guys are too nosy, anyhow! Gosh, Jim—to think you cared about my losing my job! I—"

Charley and I started outside together. It seemed to us that we weren't wanted there any more.



“NUMBER

A COMPLETE RÉSUMÉ OF THE OPENING INSTALLMENTS

FRANCIS THEYDON, a novelist, stopping outside a New York theater to wait for a taxi, was much struck by the beauty of a young woman whose father was just putting her into a limousine.

Theydon overheard the man excusing himself to his daughter, saying he had an appointment at the Union League Club. As the novelist neared the Innesmore Apartments (where he lived), however, he happened to see through the window this same distinguished-looking gentleman striding along in his own direction. Now, the Innesmore is in a very different direction from the Union League, and Theydon—wondered.

Theydon wondered still more when, poking his head out a window of Number 18, his own apartment, he saw the deceiving parent enter the Innesmore. A moment later a step sounded on the stair, and the visitor rang and was admitted to Number 17, the apartment opposite Theydon's, occupied by an attractive widow named Mrs. Lester.

Next day, however, the novelist discovers he has come in contact with tragedy rather than intrigue. For on returning from a day spent at an aviation field, he is met at the station by his valet, Bates, accompanied by two detectives, Steingall and Clancy. And they inform him that Mrs. Lester, the lady in Number 17, has been found strangled to death that morning.

Contenting themselves with a superficial questioning, the detectives allow Theydon to keep a dinner engagement upon his promise

to meet them later at his apartment. So the novelist goes on to his appointment—and recognizes in his host, James Creighton Forbes, a millionaire and a fellow aviation-enthusiast, the man whose conduct had so puzzled him the previous night.

Returning to his apartment, Theydon meets the detectives, and they cross the hall to the apartment where the murder was committed. As they talk, the matter over, he notes that the odor of Chinese “joss-sticks” clings about the room. From the detectives he learns that Mrs. Lester had written a letter at eleven-thirty the night of her death, addressed to Miss Beale, an aunt in Connecticut, and stating that a friend had just called and given the writer information that had influenced her to leave New York at once. Theydon also learns that a curious carved ivory skull was found in the bodice of the dead woman. The detectives leave—but not until Theydon, in his desire to protect the father of the girl he admires, has cast suspicion on himself by his evasive statements.

NEXT day Miss Beale calls on Theydon. He learns from her that Mrs. Lester had recently returned from a six-years' residence in Shanghai, where her husband, a lawyer, was employed—and where he had suddenly died, presumably of poison. And the added fact that Mrs. Lester's income had been paid her by the bank of which Forbes is the head again links the two together.

Theydon telephones Miss Forbes. She tells him her father has gone to the district attorney's office—and that he has received by mail a strange anonymous gift—a tiny carved-ivory skull. Later Forbes himself comes to see Theydon, and asks his help to obtain the key to the dead woman's apartment. As they stand talking just inside the door of Number 17, Forbes asks if any sign was left by the murderer to indicate that the crime was an act of vengeance. Before Theydon can answer, a voice comes through the half-open door: “Are you thinking of a small ivory skull, Mr. Forbes?”

17" *by* Louis Tracy



CHAPTER VII

MR. FORBES EXPLAINS HIMSELF

EVEN the boldest may flinch when confronted with that which is apparently a manifestation of the supernatural. Theydon and Forbes were standing in a chamber of death. To the best of their belief they were alone in an otherwise empty flat, and those ominous words, coming from some one unknown and unseen, blanched their faces with terror. But Theydon was a healthy and athletic young American, and Forbes was of the rare order which combines a frame of exceptional physique with a mind accustomed to think imperially; two such men might be trusted to display real grit if surrounded by a horde of veritable spooks.

The door was thrown wide as they turned at the sound of the words, and Theydon recognized in a strange little figure—wearing a blue serge suit, a straw hat and brown boots—Clancy, the man whom he had looked on as somewhat of a crank and visionary during their talk of the previous night.

"You!" he gasped, and the note of recognition was sharpened by a sudden sense of dismay, almost of alarm, because of the overwhelming knowledge that now all his scheming had collapsed, while the representatives of the Bureau would regard him as nothing more than a poor sort of trickster.

But Forbes was not in the habit of

yielding to any man, no matter what his status, or howsoever awe-inspiring might be the governmental department he represented.

"Who the devil *are* you, at any rate?" he cried angrily. "And what right have you to spy in this manner, listening to conversation, and breaking in with a cheap stage effect like this?"

Clancy remained motionless, his feet set well apart and his hands thrust into his trousers pockets. The trim, natty figure, the spruce and summerlike attire, the small, wizened face with its cynically humorous and wide-awake aspect—above all, a certain jauntiness of air and cocksure expression—certainly did suggest a comedian fresh from the boards. His beady eyes sparkled slightly at the taunt about "stage effect," but he seemingly gave heed only to the millionaire's caustic demand for an explanation.

"You tell," he said to Theydon.

"This is Mr. Clancy, of the Detective Bureau," said the latter nervously. He imagined he could detect in Clancy's glance a mixture of amusement and contempt—amusement at the notion that any amateur should harbor the belief that the two best men in the Bureau could be so egregiously hoodwinked, and contempt of one who so

far forgot himself as even to dare attempt such a thing in relation to a police inquiry into a murder.

"I don't know, and care less, who Mr. Clancy of the Detective Bureau may be," went on Forbes hotly. "I resent his intrusion and wish to be relieved of his presence."

"Why?" inquired Clancy.

"I have given my reasons to the District Attorney. That mere statement must suffice for you."

"Really, I must ask you to be more explicit."

"I visited the District Attorney's office this morning, and placed such evidence in his hands that your department will be requested to suspend all further investigation into the death of Mrs. Lester."

"Do you mean that the District Attorney has sanctioned the breaking-off of this inquiry?"

"In the conditions."

"Because, if that is what your words imply, Mr. Forbes, I may tell you at once that I don't believe you. It is more than any official dare do; and if you harbor any lingering doubts on the point, go to Mr. Theydon's telephone, ring up the Attorney's office and tell the gentleman at the other end of the wire exactly what I have said. Of course, you really don't mean anything of the sort. By virtue of some special and inside knowledge of certain facts communicated to the District Attorney, you may have persuaded him to promise that, provided the ends of justice are not defeated thereby, every precaution will be taken to keep the main lines of the inquiry secret until the whole position can be laid before the law officers of the State. The District Attorney may have gone that far, Mr. Forbes, but not one inch further; and you know it."

THE two antagonists, so singularly disproportionate in size, were yet so perfectly matched in the vastly more important qualities of brain and nerve that the contest lost all sense of inequality. Theydon felt himself of no account in this duel. He was like an urchin watching open-mouthed a combat of gladiators.

Forbes, not without a perceptible effort, choked down his wrath and recovered his poise.

"You have gauged the state of affairs accurately enough," he said, speaking more calmly. "May I, then, recommend you to consult your direct superiors before carrying your investigations any further, Mr.—"

"Clancy—Charles François Clancy."

"Just so, Mr. Charles François Clancy."

"I gave you my full name, because one of the peculiar features of this case is the inability of some persons mixed up in it to recall names, or even the most salient facts." The detective's glance dwelt for an instant on Theydon, who again, in his own estimation, shrank into the boots of a small boy detected by a master in overt breach of school rules.

But the little man was speaking impressively, and Theydon compelled his wandering wits to pay attention.

"It will clear the air, perhaps," went on Clancy, "if I point out that if anyone here is playing the spy,—carrying on some underhand game, that is,—it is not I. These apartments are in charge of the police. The manager of the whole block of flats and the janitor of this particular section have been warned that no one can be allowed to enter Number Seventeen, on any pretext, until our inquiry is closed. Now, Mr. Forbes, kindly explain how you contrived to get possession of a key."

An experienced man of the world like Forbes could hardly fail to see that he was in a false position, and that any persistent attempt to browbeat the detective would not only meet with utter failure but might possibly compromise him gravely.

"That was a simple matter," he said. "Mrs. Lester's servant left her key in Mr. Theydon's establishment. Bates surprised both his master and me by producing it when I expressed a wish to examine the place."

"But why adopt such a clandestine method?"

Forbes' face, usually so classic in outline, assumed a certain rigidity, and his firm chin grew markedly aggressive.

"I don't answer questions put in that way," he said.

Clancy laughed sardonically.

"You meet with greater respect in Wall Street, I have no doubt," he snapped. "There you stand on a pedestal, with one hand flourishing a check-book and the other resting gracefully on the neck of a golden calf. Here, you are simply an ordinary citizen behaving in a suspicious manner. If the patrolman in the next block knew what I know of your recent movements he would arrest you without ceremony, and charge you with being concerned in the murder of Mrs. Lester. Between you and Mr. Theydon, the work of my department has been hindered most scandalously. Don't glare at me like that! I don't care a rap for your millions and your social position. What I do care about is the horrible risk you and each member of your family are incurring. You know why, and while you are still alive, I mean to force you to speak. Tell me now why Mrs. Lester was killed. Tell me, too, why the same hand which thrust a little ivory skull into the dead woman's under-bodice caused a similar token to be delivered to you by this morning's mail. Ah, that touches you, does it? Now, my worthy financier and philanthropist, step down from your pedestal and behave like a being of flesh and blood!"

FORBES positively wilted under that extraordinary attack. His white face grew wan, and his eyes dilated with surprise and terror. The detective's words seemed to have the effect of a paralytic shock. Thenceforth he was under-dog in the fight.

"How do you know that I received an ivory skull this morning?" he gasped. "Have you been to my house? Did my daughter tell you?"

Clancy chuckled.

"You're ready to listen, eh? Well, I don't mind telling you that I've not stirred out of this flat since seven o'clock this morning, and I question if your letters were delivered in Madison Avenue at that hour."

"I give in," said Forbes curtly. "Need we remain here? The smell of that cursed joss-stick oppresses me."

Then Theydon found his tongue.

"If Mr. Clancy cares to abandon his vigil, my flat is entirely at your disposal," he said.

"My vigil, as you accurately describe it, has ended for the time being," said Clancy, apparently mollified by the millionaire's surrender. "I was sure that if I remained here long enough I would clear away some of the fog attached to a case which promises to be one of the most remarkable I have ever investigated. Come, gentlemen, let us be amiable to one another. I'm sorry if I lost my temper just now, but I regard myself as being the only detective in existence who uses other sections of his brain than those governed by statutes made and provided, and it riles me when men of superior intelligence like yourselves treat me as though my mission in life were to direct the traffic and keep a sharp eye on mischievous small boys. . . . Mr. Theydon, can that soldier-servant of yours make coffee?"

"His wife can," said Theydon.

"Will you be good enough, then, to set her to work? Thus far, this morning, I've had only an apple."

By this time Theydon had thoroughly revised his first estimate of the diminutive detective. Indeed, Theydon was beginning to look on him as a very noteworthy person indeed, a man whose mental equipment it was most unwise to assess at any lower valuation than the somewhat exalted one which Clancy himself had set forth with such refreshing candor.

AS for Forbes, the millionaire seemed to have sunk into a species of stupor since Clancy spoke of the ivory skull. He uttered no word until the three were seated in Theydon's room, and his expression was so woe-begone that it stirred even the mercurial sleuth to pity.

"I imagine a cup of coffee will do you also a world of good," he said. Then, whirling round on Theydon, he stuck a question into him as if each word were a stiletto.

"Where do you get your coffee?"

"At the grocery store," was the surprised answer.

"Is that all you know about it?"

"Yes."

"Singular thing, isn't it," mused the detective aloud, "how idiotic men and women can be in their attitude to the supreme things of life? What is of greater importance than the food we eat and the liquids we drink? Through them the body reconstitutes itself hourly and daily. Providence gives us a perfect engine; yet we clog and choke its shafts and cylinders by supplying it haphazard with any sort of fuel and lubricant, no matter how unsuited either may be to its purpose. Take coffee, for instance: The physiological action of coffee depends on the presence of the alkaloid caffeine, which varies from six-tenths per cent in the Arabian berry to two per cent in that of Sierra Leone. Again, the aromatic oil, caffeone, which is developed by roasting, increases in quantity the longer the seeds are kept. Unfortunately, coffee beans lose weight during storage, so you have a clear commercial reason why grocers should not sell the best coffee, unless under compulsion of an enlightened public opinion. You, Mr. Forbes, would never dream of putting your money into an investment without full and careful inquiry into the history and scope of the proposed undertaking, while our young friend here would snort furiously at a split infinitive or a false rhyme; yet when I submit the vital problem of the sort of coffee you imbibe,—the very essence and nutriment of your brains and bodies,—you hear the kind of answer I receive."

All this, of course, was excellent fooling, intended to dispel the brooding horror which had suddenly descended upon Forbes since it was borne in on him that the demoniac wrath wreaked on Mrs. Lester was now directed with equal ferocity against his family and himself.

To an extent, Clancy's scheme succeeded. A gleam of interest shot from the millionaire's eyes. They lost their introspective look. He even smiled wistfully.

"You are a man after my own heart, Mr. Clancy," he said. "I had no idea that the New York Detective Bureau employed philosophers of your caliber.

I suppose it would be unkind to suggest that you and I are about to swallow coffee containing indeterminate percentages of the chief constituents you named."

"One does not look at gift coffee in the cup," grinned the little man, obviously well pleased with himself. "But if ever you two gentlemen favor me with a visit to my obscure dwelling and partake of a meal, you will have a strict analysis with every bite and sup. There is a storekeeper in Brooklyn who used to tremble at sight of me. Now he has learned wisdom, and has quadrupled his trade by publishing learned disquisitions on the nature and quality of each principal article he sells. You ought to read his treatise on butter! He is an authority on the dietetic value of jam. The nutritive properties of his cheese are ruining the local butchers."

CLANCY'S efforts were rewarded when the really excellent beverage provided by Mrs. Bates was disposed of. Forbes seemingly atoned for his earlier secretiveness by placing every fact in his possession fully and fairly before his auditors.

"Nearly seven years ago," he said, "I made a very large sum of money by amalgamating certain shipping interests at a favorable moment. Thus, as it happened, I had at command practically unlimited resources when I was asked to finance the cause of reform in China. The wretched lot of the Chinese nation had always appealed to my sympathies. Some hundreds of millions of the most industrious and peace-loving people in the world have been exploited for centuries by a predatory caste. Given a chance to expand, freed from the shackles of the Manchus, the Chinese, in my opinion, contain the elements which go to form a great race. But the Manchus held them in bondage, body and soul; and so powerful is self-interest that there has never been an emperor or statesman who strove to elevate the masses who was not mercilessly assassinated as soon as he allowed his intent to become known.

"The only path to freedom lay through revolution, and I had reason to

believe that the ruling faction could be overthrown by a well-organized and properly financed movement without the appalling bloodshed which often accompanies such dynastic changes. At any rate, I entered the conspiracy, heart and soul. But I met with two difficulties at the outset. I could not exercise efficient financial control from New York, and I could neither go and live in the Far East nor transact my business through ordinary banking channels. So I had to find a substitute, and my choice fell on a rising young lawyer named Arthur Lester, whom I had known since he was a boy, and who had married the daughter of an old friend.

"Lester had a taste for adventure, and was alive to the magnificent career which lay before one who helped materially in the rebirth of China. In a word, he went to Shanghai as my agent, and the outcome of his work there is the present Chinese constitution. Of course, as holds good of all human affairs, events did not follow the precise track mapped out for them. But on the whole, he and I were satisfied. China is awake at last. The giant has stirred, and if his first uncertain steps have deviated from the open road of reform, he will never again sink into the torpor of the past centuries. Manchu arrogance and domination, at any rate, are shadows of the past.

"But unhappily, the conquerors who have been so effectually thrust aside have now embarked on a secret campaign of vengeance and reaction. A society which calls itself the 'Young Manchus' is inspired by one principle, and one only, and that is 'Death to the reformers.' I don't suppose you gentlemen follow closely the trend of affairs in China, but you must have read of the assassinations of prominent men reported occasionally in the newspapers."

CLANCY clicked his tongue so loudly that Forbes stopped speaking and looked at him—thinking, apparently, that the little detective meant to say something. He did, but it was Theydon whom he addressed.

"I'd give a week's wad if Steingall

were here now, and I could see those big eyes of his bulging out of his head," he cackled.

Theydon nodded. He understood perfectly. Then he caught Forbes' inquiring glance and explained matters.

"Mr. Clancy hinted last night at some such development as that which your present statement conveys, and his colleague Mr. Steingall pretended to scout it," he said.

"Pretended!" shrieked Clancy, instantly in a rage.

"That was how it struck me," said Theydon coolly.

"Didn't I drag the Chinese aspect of the crime out of him with a pincers?" came the indignant demand.

"Unquestionably. I only remark that your large-sized friend had it tucked away all the time at the back of his head."

Clancy pounded the table so viciously that the cups rattled.

"Of course he has a nose to smell joss-sticks, and eyes to see an ivory skull, but didn't he say I was talking nonsense when I spoke about Shang Ti scowling from a porcelain vase?" he shrilled.

"Yes. For all that, I don't think he missed the least hint of your meaning."

Clancy gazed at Theydon fixedly.

"Sorry!" he said, with an acid tone that was almost malicious. "I imagined you were so busy throwing dust in our eyes that you wouldn't have noticed such fine shades of perception on Steingall's part."

BUT Theydon was now able to measure this strange little man with some degree of accuracy; he only smiled and said:

"As a thrower of dust I was a most abject failure."

Clancy sniffed, and then turned to the millionaire.

"Pardon the interruption," he said. "Like every artist, I am pained when my best efforts are scoffed at by heedless mediocrity. You, at least, will understand what a big thing it was to deduce even the vaguest outline of the truth from the facts at my command."

"I certainly do," agreed Forbes. "Until this morning I was convinced that Mrs. Lester's death removed the one person in America who knew of my connection with the revolution in China. To revert to the Young Manchus—they have secured far more victims than the world at large is aware of. I am sure that they poisoned Arthur Lester, and his wife held the same view. They aim at nothing less than the extinction of the democratic cause by the murder of every prominent man connected with it.

"But they have never yet been able to obtain a full and authentic list of the reform leaders. They suspected poor Lester of complicity in the movement, and killed him. It was through Mrs. Lester that I first became aware of their existence as an active organization, and I hoped that when she had returned to America, and was living quietly in New York, she would be lost sight of—ignored, in fact. Nevertheless, both she and I thought it prudent that our acquaintance should cease until the turmoil in China has subsided. For that reason I never visited her, nor did I permit the growth of friendship between her and my wife and daughter, a friendship which, in happier conditions, would have been natural and inevitable.

"But we were woefully mistaken. An Oriental vendetta neither slackens nor dies. By some means wholly unknown to me the Young Manchus must have discovered, or guessed, that in leaving Lester's widow out of their reckoning they had lost a promising clue. Be that as it may, they followed her to New York, and by a singular fatality I was the first to know of it.

"Last Monday, while driving home from Wall Street, my car was held up in Madison Square for a few seconds. Looking idly out at the passing crowd, I saw a Chinaman in European clothes. He was waiting to cross the road, so I was able to scrutinize him carefully, and owing to a scar on the left side of his face I recognized him. His name is Wong Li Fu, a Manchu of the Manchus, a Mandarin of almost imperial lineage. Some years ago he was a young attaché at the Chinese Embassy

in Washington. Suddenly, while on the way to my house, I recollected that certain members of the Revolutionary Committee had spoken of this very man as being one of the ablest and most unscrupulous adherents of the Manchu faction in Peking. Somehow, his presence in New York was disconcerting and menacing. Who more likely than he, I argued, to be a leading spirit among the Young Manchus?

"In any event, New York was not big enough to hold both Mrs. Lester and him, and I decided to visit her that very night, tell her I had seen Wong Li Fu and advise her to go away into the country, leaving no record of her whereabouts. I happened to be taking my daughter to Daly's Theater, and contrived to slip away on some pretext after the performance. I found Mrs. Lester alone in her flat, and she fell in with my views at once, because she too had heard of this very man, and the mere sound of his name terrified her. I was half inclined to urge that she should go to a hotel for the night, but the lateness of the hour, and the seeming fact that if danger threatened she was safe at least till the morrow, prevented me. Ah, me! I obeyed the one intuition. Why was I deaf to its logical successor?"

CLANCY, sitting on the edge of a chair, his head bent forward, his piercing black eyes intent as those of a hawk, a hand resting on each knee, his attitude curiously suggestive of a readiness to spring forward at any instant, now leaned over and tapped the millionaire decisively on the shoulder.

"You couldn't have saved her, Mr. Forbes," he said. "She was marked down as the first warning. Didn't the letter you received this morning tell you something of the sort?"

Agitation gave place to utter astonishment in Forbes' face.

"In Heaven's name, how do you know anything of any letter?" he cried.

"I'll tell you later. But am I not right?"

"Yes, you are."

"Where is it? May I see it?"

Forbes took a creased and folded

document from a small, flat cardboard box which he carried in the breast pocket of his coat. But first he withdrew from the box a little round object, and placed it on the table. It was an ivory skull, and the very presence of such a sinister token brought some hint of the charnel-house into a cosy and sunlit room.

Clancy, a creature oddly constituted either of all nerves or of no nerves, disregarded the skull. He had eyes only for the few words typed on a single sheet of note-paper. They ran:

James Creighton Forbes:

If you are willing to come to terms, announce the fact by advertisement in Thursday's *Times*. Address your reply to Y. M., and sign it J. C. F. Yield, and you will hear further. Refuse, and no other warning will be given.

CHAPTER VIII

THE FIRST COUNTER-STROKE

CLANCY apparently made up his mind with reference to the contents of the somewhat enigmatic message after one quick, unerring perusal.

"The man who wrote that took a great many things for granted," he said. "He assumed, first, that you knew of Mrs. Lester's death and understood its significance; secondly, that you are aware of the nature of the 'terms' he will offer; thirdly, that you may hesitate between compliance and threatened death. 'Y. M.,' of course, can be read as 'Young Manchus.' Even there, the writer exhibits artistic reticence. . . . Frankly, Mr. Forbes, I wish you had come straight to the Bureau on Monday evening instead of wasting those precious hours at Daly's Theater."

Forbes was moved to energetic protest.

"How was I to deduce the true nature of these hell-hounds' mission from a casual glance at one who may or may not be their leader?" he cried.

"Yet you treated your discovery as serious enough to warrant a prompt visit to the woman with whom association was dangerous?"

"Yes; I wanted to act secretly."

"Just so. You were afraid the police would bungle the job. Between you and Mr. Theydon, you have exhibited remarkable skill in heading us off the scent. Fortunately we were able to dispense with your assistance, having other matters to occupy our brains. You two were ripe nuts waiting to be cracked and have the contents extracted at leisure. There were a few freshly broken shells lying about which invited immediate attention. For instance, some four months ago a well-known and reputable firm of private-inquiry agents was instructed from Canton to secure all possible information about Mrs. Lester and you,—yes, you, Mr. Forbes,—your household, friends, methods of living, servants, tradesmen—every sort of fact, indeed, which might be useful to a thoroughgoing and well-organized society of cut-throats like the Young Manchus.

"The inquiry-agents did their work well, and were handsomely paid for it. I haven't the least doubt that Wong Li Fu knows what brand of cigars you favor, and what cereal you eat for breakfast. His informants sent us a copy of their notes an hour after the murder was announced in the newspapers. And kindly note the sequence of dates. Mr. Lester is 'removed' in Shanghai. His widow comes home. The inquiry-agents receive instructions. They forward their report to Canton, and Wong Li Fu turns up in New York. The program is a tribute to the excellence of the mail service between America and the Far East."

WHILE the detective was speaking, Forbes' face, already haggard, had grown desperate.

"I care little for my own life," he said, "but I shall stop short of no measures to protect my wife and daughter."

"I certainly recommend that an armed guard be on duty day and night in any house where you may happen to be living at the moment," replied Clancy airily. "I really think that if your safety alone were at stake, I would do you a good turn by arresting you on suspicion."

"On suspicion of what crime?"

"Of killing Mrs. Lester, to be sure."

"I regard you as a clever man, Mr. Clancy, so may I remind you that this is neither the time nor the place for a display of gross humor."

Theydon expected that Clancy would flare into anger at this well-deserved rebuke; but much to the novelist's surprise, the detective treated the matter argumentatively.

"Personally, I have looked on you from the outset as an innocent man," he said placidly. "But just to show how circumstantial evidence may be twisted into plausible error, let me point out that nearly all the known facts conspire against you. Have you considered how dexterously a prosecuting counsel would treat your admission that Mrs. Lester was the one person in America who knew of your connection with the revolutionary party in China? And how would you set about convincing an average New York jury that you were acting in the interests of law and order in concealing your visit to Number Seventeen on the night of the murder? These fine-drawn speculations, however, are a sheer waste of breath. Suppose we concoct an advertisement for the *Times*?"

"Do you mean that I am to parley with these ruffians?"

"Of course, you are."

"But the District Attorney agreed with me that no action should be taken until the Chinese Legation had considered the matter."

"And pray what can the Legation do?"

"They have their own sources of information. When all is said and done, Orientals are best fitted to deal with Orientals."

CLANCY laughed sarcastically.

"If I remember rightly, the way in which the Chinese Embassy in London dealt with one of your pet reformers some years ago did not win general approval. . . . No, Mr. Forbes, we must try and circumvent the wily Chinese by other methods than torture and imprisonment. Of what avail will it be if this fellow, Wong Li Fu, is

laid by the heels? Isn't it more than certain that he has plenty of determined helpers? Do you imagine *he* killed Mrs. Lester? Not a bit of it. He will be able to produce the clearest proof he was miles away from the Innesmore on Monday night. . . . Now, let's see how we can get him to show his hand a little more openly. How would this be? 'Y. M.: Terms can be arranged.—J. C. F.' The terms are, of course, that the whole gang be electrocuted or sent to Sing Sing."

"One moment," struck in Theydon. "I have something to say before you decide on any definite action. I need hardly inflict on you, Mr. Clancy, an explanation of my silence hitherto. I don't even apologize for it. Faced by a similar dilemma to-morrow, I should probably take the same line. But to adopt your own simile, now that Mr. Forbes has come out of his shell, and admits his presence here on Monday night, my self-imposed restrictions cease. In the first place, then, Miss Beale came here this morning—"

"Excellent! I wondered who the lady was," put in Clancy.

"And secondly, the gray car which pursued me on Monday seems to have been partly identified later. A car resembling it in every detail deposited some one at the residence of some Chinese Envoy in Fifty-ninth Street at an hour which corresponds closely with its presence here."

"Ah, that is important! I like that! I wasn't far wrong when I sensed you as an absolute carrier of clue-germs in this affair," cried Clancy.

"The Chinese Envoy!" gasped Forbes. "What car? And why should any car pursue you? Do you mean that you were followed on leaving my house?"

It was lamentable to watch the inroad which each successive shock was making on Forbes' physical resources, but Theydon affected to ignore the new fright in his eyes, and told him what had happened. Although he could see that Clancy was in a fever of impatience to learn the later news, he thought that Forbes should know the facts, in view of the remarkable statement that he himself had visited the

Chinese Envoy that morning. In one respect, the recital was a test of the millionaire's professed readiness to deal candidly with the police. Theydon was half inclined to believe that the other was still wishful to conceal that part of the day's doings. But he was mistaken. When he had finished his own story, and given the taxi-man's version of the gray car's appearance in Fifty-ninth Street, Forbes threw out his hands in a gesture of despair.

"If the Plenipotentiary is playing me false, I do not know whom to trust," he said brokenly. "I have just come from him, and he assures me that if Wong Li Fu and his gang are in New York, he is absolutely ignorant of the fact."

"Pooh!" cried Clancy, snapping a thumb and forefinger. "Don't worry about that! Put yourself in the position of the Chinese Envoy. He can't even guess who may be the ruler of China from one day to another. Yesterday it was an old woman, to-day it's a dictator, to-morrow it may be the mob; who can foretell what shape the lava spouted from a volcano will take? Bet you a new hat, Mr. Forbes, that the minute the Envoy heard of Mrs. Lester's murder he put two and two together and kept a sharp eye on these mansions and on your house. That gray car is nothing more nor less than a red herring accidentally drawn across the trail. The murdered woman is the wife of Forbes' agent in Shanghai. Now, let's see what Forbes is doing, and who visits him, and perhaps we'll learn something. Is it a bet?"

FORBES could not help but recover some of his shattered nerve in view of the detective's airy optimism. Still, he was shaken and dubious.

"Don't forget that the Chinese Plenipotentiary has no knowledge whatsoever of my share in the revolution," he said. "He is here to arrange a big international loan."

"And don't forget that for ways which are dark and tricks which are vain, the heathen Chinese is peculiar," retorted Clancy. "How can you be sure that there is not in the Envoy's house at this moment a full statement

of your payments to the reformers' funds, as well as the list of conspirators which our friend Wong Li Fu is in search of?"

"I think that such a thing is almost impossible."

"Is there anything really impossible? We used to believe that once a man was dead he could not be brought to life again. A Frenchman has just demonstrated that by a judicious application of galvanism to the heart, and salt-water to the veins, any average corpse can be revived."

Evidently, Clancy was enjoying himself. He sat there absorbing new impressions and irradiating scraps of irrelevant knowledge in a way that would have been full of significance to Steingall had he been present. Clancy was never so mercurial, never so ready to jump from one subject to another, as when his subtle brain was working at high pressure. He actually reveled in a crime which lay on the borderland of the exotic and the grotesque. Like the French philosopher in Poe's "Tales of Mystery and Imagination," the *savant* who read his newspaper in a dingy Paris room and solved by sheer force of intellect extraordinary criminal problems which baffled the shrewdest official minds, Clancy felt in relation to this particular tragedy that he required only to be brought in touch with certain contingent forces bound up with it,—Forbes, for instance, and, in a minor degree, Theydon,—and in due course he would be able to go forth and find the master wrong-doer.

SUDDENLY the millionaire seemed to cast off the cloak of despair which clogged his energies and impaired his brilliant intellect. He rose to his feet and involuntarily squared his shoulders.

"Surely we are wasting valuable hours which should be given to action!" he cried. "I am going downtown and shall arrange for a prolonged absence from my office. Then I'll hurry home, perfect my defenses and defy these murderous curs. My wife must come to New York. In a crisis like this I must have my loved ones under my own personal supervision. I can still shoot

straight and quick, and woe betide any man, white or yellow, who enters my house unbidden. As for this infernal symbol—"

He raised a clenched fist and would have pounded into fragments the thin fabric of the ivory skull still lying where he had placed it on the table, had not Clancy snatched it into safety.

"No, no!" protested the detective. "I want that for purposes of comparison. Kindly give me that typed note, too, Mr. Forbes. It may bear finger-marks. You never can tell. The cardboard box in which it was posted, also. Thank you. Now a few more questions before you go. How much money did you provide for the revolutionaries?"

"Ten million dollars."

"As a gift, or a loan?"

"If they failed, I lost every farthing, of course. If they succeeded, I was to recoup myself by financing the new government."

"But I gather that they have neither failed nor succeeded. China has a constitution, but the presidential election was conducted on lines suspiciously akin to those recently adopted in Mexico."

"Nevertheless, negotiations are now on foot for a loan."

"If you died, what would become of the ten millions?"

"They would be lost irretrievably."

Clancy sat back in his chair.

"That gives one furiously to think," he said. "The gray car comes back into the picture."

"What do you mean?"

"I don't know. But I'll tell you what: the man who first spoke of a Chinese puzzle as a metaphor for something downright bewildering knew what he was talking about."

Forbes put a hand to his forehead in an unconscious gesture of hopelessness.

"My brain is reeling," he muttered. "Good God! To think that in the New York of to-day we should live in abject terror of a band of Mongolian ruffians! Why do you remain here, man? You vaunt the prowess of your department—why are you not scouring every haunt of Chinamen in the

Bowery? Spread your net widely enough, and you will surely get hold of some minor scoundrel who will talk for fear or money. Bribe him to the point where he cannot refuse to speak. Wong Li Fu is the only man I fear. Put *him* where he can accomplish no mischief, and the rest of his crew will be powerless!"

"When you come to count up the achievements of my friend Steingall and myself,—in the face of stupid but none the less disheartening obstacles,—we have not done so badly in two days," said Clancy complacently.

"Can I drive you anywhere? My car is waiting."

"No, thanks. The truth is, Mr. Forbes, I look on you as a disturbing influence. A man who can talk as calmly as you about dropping ten millions on a crazy project to introduce Western methods into China is not fitted for the phlegmatic and judicial atmosphere of the Bureau. If I want any money, I'll come to you. If not, and all goes well in Madison Avenue, the next time I'll trouble you will be when you are asked to identify Wong Li Fu, dead or alive."

Forbes seemed hardly to be aware of Clancy's words. He went out. Theydon accompanied him, and as they descended the stairs together, the older man said brokenly:

"It is my wife and daughter for whom I fear. I can hardly control my senses when I think of these yellow fiends contemplating vengeance on me through them. Theydon—do you believe in that detective? He is either a vain fool or a genius. By the way, I forgot to ask him how he found out that I had received the warning delivered by this morning's mail."

"I'll try and worm an explanation out of him. If he tells me, I'll phone you later. He is an extraordinary creature, but abnormally clever at his work, I am sure. For my own part, I feel disposed to trust him implicitly. I wish you had met his colleague, Chief Inspector Steingall. He is the sort of man whose mere presence inspires confidence."

Forbes halted on the steps of the automobile and glanced at his watch.

"I shall be home in an hour," he said. "After that I shall not stir out all day. Telephone me if you have any news. Why not dine with us to-night?"

Theydon's eyes sparkled. He was longing to meet Evelyn Forbes once more, but a wretched doubt diminished the glow of gratification which the prospect brought. Should he, or should he not, tell the girl's father of the rather indiscreet admissions she had made during their brief talk that morning?

THAT minor worry, however, was banished suddenly and forever. Clancy, taking the three steps which led from entrance hall to pavement with a flying leap, cannoned right into Forbes, whom he grabbed with both hands, quite as much by way of emphasis as to check the impetus of his diminutive body.

"In with you!" he piped. "Tell your chauffeur to obey my orders, no matter what they are!"

Action, determination, were as the breath of the millionaire's nostrils. He aroused himself instantly.

"You hear, Downs!" he said to the chauffeur.

Downs was one of those strange beings who have been evolved by the age of gasoline, an automaton compounded, seemingly, of steel springs and leather. He had long ago lost the art of speech, having cultivated delicacy of hearing and quickness of sight at the expense of all other human faculties. The old-time coachman possessed a certain fluent jargon which enabled him to chide or encourage his horses and exchange suitable comments with the drivers of brewers' wagons and market-carts, but the modern chauffeur is all an ear for the rhythm of machinery, all an eye for the nice calculation of the hazards of the road fifty yards ahead.

At any rate, Downs mumbled something which resembled "Yes sir," Forbes sprang in and slammed the door; Clancy raced round the front of the car and perched himself beside Downs; and the heavy automobile was almost into its normal stride before it had traveled twice its own length.

Theydon was left gapping on the pave-

ment. He saw that the car turned up-town, and caught a glimpse of Clancy's outstretched hand, with forefinger pointing like the barrel of a pistol.

"Fool!" he cried, in bitter self-apostrophe. "Why didn't I jump in after Forbes? Now I am out of the hunt! I wonder what the deuce Clancy saw, or heard?"

That concluding thought sent him back to the flat, two steps at a time.

"Bates!" he shouted, "has Mr. Clancy used the telephone, or did anyone ring?"

"No sir," said Bates, coming hurriedly at that urgent call. "Fust thing I knew was he was tearin' out, an' runnin' downstairs like mad."

"Oh, double-distilled idiot that I am!" growled Theydon again. "Why didn't I go with them!"

AS though the gods heard his plaint and meant to crush him with their answer, the telephone-bell sounded at his elbow. Mechanically he lifted the receiver off its hook, and immediately became aware of Tomlinson's voice, with some element of flurry and distress in its unctuous accents.

"That you, Mr. Theydon?" said the butler.

"Yes."

"Any news of Mr. Forbes, sir?"

"Yes. He has just left me."

"Ah, if only I had known, and had given you a call before ringing Wall Street!"

"What is it? Can I do anything?"

"It's Miss Evelyn, sir."

"Yes, what of her?"

"She's gone, sir."

Theydon's heart apparently stopped for a second, and then raced madly into tumultuous action again.

"Gone! Good Lord, man, what do you mean?" he almost groaned.

"A telegram came from Mrs. Forbes, at Oyster Bay, saying she was ill and wanted Miss Evelyn. I tried all I knew to persuade Miss Evelyn to wait until she had spoken to her father, but she wouldn't listen—she just threw on a hat and a wrap, and took a taxi to the Long Island depot."

Some membrane or film of tissue which might have served hitherto to

shut off from Frank Theydon's cheery temperament any real knowledge of the pitfalls which may beset the path of the unwary seemed in that instant to shrivel as though it had been devoured by flame. He knew, how or why he could never tell, that the girl had been drawn into the hellish plot which had already claimed so many victims and sought so many more. All doubt vanished. He spoke and acted with the swift certainty of a man tackling an emergency for which he had prepared during a long period of training and expectation.

"Mr. Forbes may arrive at any moment, Tomlinson," he said. "Tell his office people to let you know if he goes first to Wall Street. When you hear from or see him, say that I have either accompanied or followed Miss Evelyn to Oyster Bay. If I do not catch the same train, I shall take prompt measures in other respects. Got that?"

"Yes sir."

IT was easy to distinguish the relief in Tomlinson's utterance, relief mingled, doubtless, with astonishment that a comparative stranger should display such an authoritative and prompt interest in the family's affairs.

"That is all. Write down my message, lest you forget any part of it."

Theydon rang off.

"Come!" he said to Bates, who had not retired to his den, but was listening, discreet yet rabbit-eared, to these queer proceedings. Followed by the manservant, he darted into the sitting-room and did several things at once. He unlocked a drawer and took from it a considerable sum of money which he kept there for emergency journeys, also pocketing an automatic pistol. Pouncing on a Long Island Railway folder, he looked up the trains to Oyster Bay. A fast train left New York at one-twenty-five P. M. It was now five minutes past one.

Meanwhile, Theydon was talking.

"Bates," he said, "I promised Miss Beale, the lady who came here this morning, that my sister, Mrs. Paxton, would visit her this evening, say about six. Miss Beale is staying at Central Hotel, Madison Square. Go to Mrs.

Paxton and see her, waiting at her house if she happens to be out. Tell her everything you know about Mrs. Lester's death, and ask her to take care of Miss Beale this evening. She will understand. I'll wire her at the Central before the dinner hour, if possible. If anybody calls here, I leave it to your discretion, and your wife's, whether or not they should be informed of my movements. Mr. Forbes, or the police, of course, must be told everything. Miss Forbes is probably in the one-twenty-five train for Oyster Bay, and I am going with her. Do you understand?"

"Yes sir."

"I'll wire or 'phone you later."

Grabbing a straw hat and a bundle of telegraph-forms, Theydon vanished, not even waiting to slam the outer door. Bates, who had seen service, knew that men in times of stress and danger acted just like the detective and his own employer.

"By jing!" he muttered, beginning to assemble the empty coffee-cups on a tray. "Things is wakin' up here, an' no mistake!"

THEYDON was fortunate in finding a taxicab depositing a fare at a neighboring block. Just before he reached the vehicle, a gentleman hurried out of the building and forestalled him. Theydon dashed up, and caught the other man by the arm.

"My need is urgent," he said. "Let me have this cab."

The stranger smiled good-humoredly. He was an Englishman, and had not the least objection to being hustled by an American; indeed, being new to the country, he appreciated this exhibition of haste as a novel experience.

"I'm rather on a hair-trigger myself," he said pleasantly. "I want to reach the station for Long Island. Can I give you a lift?"

"In with you!" cried Theydon. "Now, push her!" he cried to the driver. "Three dollars if you get us to Coney Island Depot inside of fifteen minutes. I'll pay all fines."

Then they were off, and the transatlantic cousins were banged against each other in the sudden start.

"Oh, I say!" cried the Briton, "this reminds me of home. I've been here a week, and I had a suspicion that the American live wire was a bluff. But you're awake all right. Bet you a quid you're after a girl!"

"I pay," said Theydon, his eyes glistening. "And such a girl!"

"Dear, dear! Is it like that? Go right ahead, Augustus! Never mind me. Take this old 'bus all the way to Chicago. I'll find the fares and hold your hat. But kindly shift that gun into the opposite pocket. You've dug it into my thigh quite often enough. If you want first drop on the other fellow, shove it up your sleeve!"

CHAPTER IX

SHARP WORK

THE Englishman's easy-going badinage provided the best sort of tonic. Theydon laughed as he transferred the pistol from one pocket to the other.

"My motto is 'Defense, not Defiance,'" he said. "I hope sincerely that I shall not be called on to shoot, or even threaten, anyone. Using firearms, although for self-protection, is a tough proposition in New York, no matter what you have been told to the contrary. May I ask your name? Mine's Theydon. I live in those flats we have just quitted."

"And I'm George Handyside, Middlecombe-cum-Ugglebarnby, Norton-in-Cleveland, when I'm at home, which is seldom."

"When you're away, do you ever remember where you live?"

"It's an effort, but long practice has made perfect."

"Well, Mr. Handyside, if ever I come to England, I'll hire a guide and give you a call."

"Tell you what, Mr. Theydon, I'm very glad to make your acquaintance. This great big country of yours is all right, but I do wish your people wouldn't assume that no Englishman can see a joke. Great Scott! Life isn't worth living unless one has a real laugh occasionally."

"Tell me where I can find you in

New York later in the week, and we'll see if we can't find a smile somewhere."

The Englishman scribbled the name of a hotel on a card, which Theydon disposed in his pocketbook, at the same time producing one of his own cards.

"You'll hear from me," he said. "Now, Mr. Handyside, pardon me during the next few minutes. I have to write telegrams."

The first was to Forbes, addressed in duplicate to Wall Street and Madison Avenue. It ran:

If this message is not qualified by another within a quarter of an hour I am in the 1:25 for Oyster Bay.

Then to Steingall:

Young lady summoned to Oyster Bay by telegram stating that her mother is ill. Suspect the message as bogus and emanating from Y. M. See Clancy. He will explain. Am hoping to travel by same train. If disappointed will wire again immediately. THEYDON.

He read each slip carefully, to make sure that the phraseology was clear. The speed at which the cab was traveling rendered his handwriting somewhat illegible, but he thought he saw a means of circumventing that difficulty.

"Which way are you going?" he inquired of his unexpected companion.

"Manhattan Beach."

"What time does your train leave?"

"About one-thirty."

"You have five more minutes at your disposal than I have. Will you hand in these three messages at the telegraph office? I'll read them to you, in case the counter clerk is doubtful about any of the words."

"Certainly, Mr. Theydon. You've interested me. I don't care a hang if I drop out Manhattan Beach altogether."

"I'm greatly obliged, but that is not necessary. You'll have heaps of time. We're across Fourth Avenue already, and our driver has a clear run to the East Side. Now, listen!"

Mr. Handyside did listen, and pricked his ears at the mention of the Detective Bureau.

"By Jove!" he exclaimed, "this is

better than a life-line cinema! For the love of Mike, let me in by the early door! Now, how does this notion hit you? You send those telegrams, an' I'll pay the cab and buy the tickets to Oyster Bay for the pair of us. I have no pistol, but I may be useful, and I'll jab any fellow in the solar plexus at call."

THEYDON gazed at this self-avowed knight-errant in surprise. Handyside was a man of forty whose dark hair was flecked with gray. He was quietly dressed, a wide-brimmed, flat-crowned hat of finely plaited white straw providing the sole note of markedly British origin in his attire. The expression of his well-molded features was shrewd but pleasing, and the poise of a spare but sinewy frame gave evidence of active habit and some considerable degree of physical strength.

"'Pon my honor," said the American, "I'm half inclined to take you at your word, except in the matter of expenses—which, of course, I must bear. You see, if my services are called for, and prove effective, I may need help."

"Just do as you like," said the other calmly. "Tell me as much or as little as you like. Where's this place, Oyster Bay?"

"On Long Island."

"I thought it would be. Everything of consequence in the neighborhood of New York seems to be on Long Island. Even the Atlantic breeze stops short there at this time of the year."

Theydon grinned, but the taxi was crossing Second Avenue, and the hour was one-seventeen P. M.

"I can't give you any sort of an explanation now, Mr. Handyside," he said. "Later in the week, perhaps, I may have a big story for your private ear. All I can say at the moment is this: I have reason to believe that a young lady, a daughter of Mr. James Creighton Forbes, a well-known citizen of New York, is being decoyed to Oyster Bay in the belief that her mother is ill. Now, I may be wholly mistaken. Her mother *may* be ill. If that is so, I am making this trip under

a delusion. At any rate, my notion is to try and fall in with Miss Forbes accidentally, as it were, and watch over her until I am quite sure that she is with her mother. You follow me?"

"Seems to me," said the Englishman imperturbably, "it's the most natural thing in the world that Mr. Theydon should want to show his friend, Mr. Handyside, of England, Long Island's most bracing and attractive seaside resort, if that's the right way to describe Oyster Bay."

"Both the plan and the description are admirable."

"The plan sounds all right; as for the description, I've been looking up a selection of posters, and those seven words apply to every half-mile strip of beach along the coast. When it comes to a real showdown, your poster artists have got our real-estate men skinned a mile. You see, I'm learning the American language. How much did you promise the taxi-man?"

"Three dollars."

"Half a quid! By Jove, if ever I want a job I'll start cabbing in New York. And the railway tickets—first class, of course."

"There is none other."

THE cab stopped. Theydon sprang out and raced to the telegraph office, where, as he anticipated, there was a slight delay. Handyside awaited him at the correct barrier, and together they hurried through the train. Theydon eagerly on the *qui vive* for Evelyn Forbes. Thus, not being a detective, but only a very anxious and perplexed young man, he had eyes only for such ladies as were already seated, and failed to note the immediate interest his appearance aroused in a man apparently buried in a newspaper but watching unobtrusively everyone who passed. Oddly enough, after the first wondering glance, this observer was more closely taken up with Handyside. It was as though he said to himself:

"Theydon I know, but who in the world is his companion, and why are they traveling by an Oyster Bay express, to-day of all days?"

The train was well filled. And there were only a few seconds to spare when

Theydon came across Evelyn Forbes in a section otherwise unoccupied.

Recognition was mutual, and Theydon flattered himself that he betrayed just the right amount of pleasurable astonishment.

"Miss Forbes!" he cried, raising his hat. "Well, of all the unexpected meetings! Don't say you are going to Oyster Bay!"

"But I am," she said, and though she smiled, her eyes were heavy with unshed tears. She was deeply attached to her mother, and the thought that the loved one was too ill even to communicate with her by telephone was distressing beyond measure.

"Well, just imagine that!" went on Theydon, determined to rush his fences and travel with her unless openly forbidden. "I'm taking an English friend there for the afternoon. May we sit here?"

Now, although Evelyn Forbes had been attracted to Theydon during their vivacious conversation overnight, she would vastly have preferred the comparative solitude of a journey with strangers. Still, she could hardly refuse such a request, and common sense told her that a pleasant chat with a man who could talk so well as Theydon offered a better means of whiling away an hour than brooding over the nature and extent of her mother's unknown illness.

"I shall be delighted," she said.

WITHOUT further ado Theydon introduced his companion, who promptly said the right thing.

"I seem to have known what I was doing when I forced Mr. Theydon to take me out of New York to-day," he said, with a smile which left the girl in no doubt as to the nature of the implied compliment.

"But it is hardly an hour since I spoke to my father at Mr. Theydon's flat," she said. "Were you there too, Mr. Handyside?"

"No, in the next block. That was the nearest I got to Mr. Theydon before we met and took a cab to the Long Island station—sorry, I mean depot."

Theydon was pleased with his ally. No diplomat, trained during long years

to conceal material facts, could have headed the girl off the track more deftly, while every word was literally true.

"Ah!" she said, glancing meaningly at Theydon, "we are all the sports of fortune, then. How strange! Of course, Mr. Theydon, you don't know why I am here. I have had a telegram from my mother, or one sent in her name. She has been taken ill suddenly."

"That is bad news," was the sympathetic answer. "If the message has not come direct from Mrs. Forbes, may it not be rather exaggerated in tone? Some people can never write telegrams. The knowledge that ten words cost twenty-five cents weighs on them like a nightmare."

As he hoped and anticipated, she produced the message itself from her hand-bag.

"This is what it says," she said, and read: "'Mrs. Forbes ill and unable to communicate by telephone. Come at once. Manager, Minnehaha Hotel.'" Then she added, with a suspicious break in her voice: "That sounds serious enough, in all conscience."

"Is it addressed to you personally?" said Theydon, racking his wits for some means of lessening the girl's foreboding without tickling the ears of the other passengers who might be listening by suggesting that she could have been brought from her home by some cruel ruse of her father's enemies.

"Yes."

"But isn't that somewhat singular in itself? One would imagine that such a significant message would have been sent to your father."

"Why?"

"Well, men are better fitted to withstand these shocks, for one thing. It was heartless, or, to say the least, thoughtless, to give you such news with the brutal frankness of a telegram."

"I cannot understand it at all. Mother wrote this morning telling me that she was going to Eaton Point this afternoon with a picnic party."

"I am convinced," said Theydon gravely, "that some one has blundered. It may be the act of some stupid foreigner. I shall not be content now,

Miss Forbes, until I have gone with you to the Minnehaha, and learned what the extent of the trouble really is. Then, if Mrs. Forbes needs your presence, perhaps you will allow me to telephone to your father, as he will be greatly disturbed when he returns home and learns the cause of your journey."

"But I can't think of allowing you two to break up your afternoon on my account. I'm sure, when we reach Oyster Bay, I shall see an array of golf-clubs among your luggage."

"No," smiled Theydon. "My friend here refuses to play until he has seen something of the country. He knows that the golfer's vision is bounded by the nearest bunker."

Handyside took the cue.

"That's the exact position, Miss Forbes," he said. "I was warned by the horrible experience of a friend of mine. He left Newark, New Jersey, bound for a sight-seeing tour in Europe, but unfortunately took his clubs with him. Now, if you ask him what he thought of Westminster Abbey or the Wye Valley, he tells you he hadn't time to look 'em up, but that the fifth hole at Sandwich is a corker, while the thirteenth at St. Andrews had been known to restore the faculty of speech to a dumb man. You see, some poor mute had either to express his feelings or bust."

Evidently, Miss Evelyn Forbes would not be allowed to mope during the run to Oyster Bay.

AS between Theydon and herself, the situation was curiously mixed. On the one hand, Theydon had now a remarkably close insight into the peril which threatened Forbes and each member of his family; the girl, on the other, knew well that her father was bound up in some way with the tragedy at Number Seventeen, the Innesmore. Nevertheless, an open discussion was out of the question, and the two accepted cheerfully the limitations imposed by circumstances; so the other passengers in the car little suspected what grave issues lay behind an apparently casual meeting between a pretty girl and two men that summer's afternoon in the Oyster Bay express.

The Englishman played his part admirably. When not passing some caustically humorous comment on American ways and manners, he was being even more critical of his fellow countrymen.

Thus the journey passed pleasantly enough. When they alighted on the crowded platform at Oyster Bay, the girl reverted to the topic uppermost in her mind.

"You two will have to look after your baggage," she said. "I'm sure you will forgive me if I hurry to the hotel. If you come there, Mr. Theydon, I'll take care that I see you at once. It is exceedingly kind of you to bother yourself with my affairs."

But Theydon had a scheme ready, having foreseen this very difficulty.

"Mr. Handyside will attend to everything," he said glibly. "Please let me come with you. I sha'n't have a moment's peace until assured that Mrs. Forbes is suffering from little more than a slight indisposition."

Evelyn looked puzzled, but was willing to agree to anything so long as she reached her mother quickly. Handyside, too, made matters easy by lifting his hat and walking off in the direction of the baggage-car.

"Well," she said, "I really don't care what happens if only I lose no time."

SUITING the action to the word, she hurried toward the exit, and was murmuring something that sounded like an apology for her seeming brusqueness as they passed out. A gentleman approached and raised his hat.

"Miss Forbes, I believe?" he said.

"Yes," she answered breathlessly, because the man's garb suggested, before he uttered another syllable, that he was a doctor. He had a curiously foreign aspect, and spoke with a pronounced lisp.

"I am assistant to Doctor Sinnett," he said, "and he has sent me to take you to the hotel. This is his car. Will you come, quick?"

He pointed to a smart limousine drawn up near the exit, and in his eagerness to be polite, almost pushed the girl toward the open door. Insensibly she resisted, and turned to explain matters to Theydon.

"Mr. Theydon—" she began.

"There ith no time to wathe, I athure you," said Dr. Sinnett's assistant imperatively. Theydon's temper was ruffled. He resented the man's manner, and did not scrutinize his appearance as closely as might be looked for in one who was actually on his guard against foul play.

"What is it now?" he asked.

"This gentleman has been sent by Dr. Sinnett to bring me to the hotel," said Evelyn. "Now, Mr. Theydon, perhaps it will be better if you wait for Mr. Handyside and come on at your leisure."

"I'm a stiff-necked person," said Theydon, trying to smile unconcernedly. "I've made up my mind to see you safely to your destination, and I refuse to leave you on any account. I'm sure the doctor will let me sit beside the chauffeur."

Then, for the first time, he glanced directly at the interloper, and was almost stupefied to discover that the man, despite his faultless professional attire, was a Chinaman. Moreover, this Chinaman bore a livid scar down the left side of his face, and his eyes were set horizontally, a sure sign of Manchu descent, because all Southern Chinese have the oblique Mongolian eye. Though prepared for treachery of some kind, the very simplicity of the scheme almost disconcerted him, and he blurted out the first words that rose to his lips.

"Is your name Wong Li Fu?" he demanded.

Half unconsciously, a hand dropped to the pocket containing the revolver. For answer, he was struck a violent blow on the throat and sent sprawling. The attack was so sudden that he was nearly unprepared for it—nearly, not quite, because a flare of baffled spite in the dark eyes gave him a ghost of a warning. It was fortunate that he saved himself by a slight backward flinching, since he learned subsequently that his assailant was a master of jiu-jitsu, and that vicious blow was intended to paralyze the nerves which cluster around the cricoid cartilage. Had he received the punch in its full force he would at least have been disabled for the remainder of the day,

while there was some chance of the injury's proving fatal.

THE Chinaman instantly seized the terrified girl in an irresistible grip, and was about to thrust her into the automobile when a big, burly man flung himself into the fray, and collared the desperado by neck and arm.

"Quit that, now!" he said authoritatively. "Hands off the young lady or I'll shake the life out of you!"

By this time Theydon was on his feet again, and rushing to the assistance of Detective Steingall, who seemed to have miraculously dropped from the skies at the right moment. The Chinaman, seeing that he was in imminent danger of capture, released Evelyn, wrenched himself free by another jiu-jitsu trick, swung the girl into Steingall's arms, thus impeding him, and leaped into the car, which made off with a rush.

Naturally, the people coming out from the depot, reinforced by the crowd of semi-loafers always in evidence in such localities, gathered in scores around Evelyn Forbes and her two protectors. Such an extraordinary scuffle was bound to attract a crowd; few had seen the commencement of the fray, because nothing could be more usual and commonplace in a quietly fashionable place like Oyster Bay than the sight of a gentleman handing a well-dressed lady into an automobile. The first general intimation of something bizarre and sensational was provided by Theydon's fall. After that, events traveled rapidly, and the majority of the onlookers imagined that it was Steingall who had knocked Theydon off his balance, while the rush made by the latter to intercept Wong Li Fu was actually stopped by a well-intentioned railway employee.

Worst of all, Theydon was quite unable to speak. He indulged in valiant pantomime, and Steingall fully understood that the Chinaman's escape should be prevented at all hazards. But Steingall could only accept the inevitable. The landaulette was equipped with a powerful engine, and the only vehicles available for pursuit were some ancient horse-drawn cabs. He noted

the number on the identification plate, and that was the limit of his resources for the moment.

Moreover, Evelyn Forbes, finding herself clutched tightly by a tall, stout man whom she had never seen before, was rather more indignant than hurt.

Disengaging herself from the detective's hands, she looked to Theydon for an explanation.

"Has everybody gone mad?" she said vehemently. "What is the meaning of this? Did you know who that man was? And why did he try to force me into his car?"

SLOWLY regaining his breath, Theydon stammered brokenly that he would make things clear in a minute or so. Then he gasped to Steingall:

"That is Wong Li Fu—the man wanted—at Number Seventeen!"

"We'll get him, all right," was the grimly curt answer. "Meanwhile, are you and Miss Forbes going to the hotel?"

Hardly less surprising than Steingall's appearance on the scene was his seeming knowledge of the purpose of their journey.

"We must side-step this crowd," he went on, gazing around wrathfully at the ring of curious faces. "Here, you!" he cried, singling out a policeman who was forcing a passage through the mob. "clear away this bunch of gapers and get us a cab!"

The policeman seemed inclined to resent these masterful directions, but a word whispered in his ear when he reached Steingall acted like magic, and he soon had the group of onlookers scattered.

A cab was called, and Evelyn Forbes was already inside when Theydon remembered the Englishman. He looked around, but could see nothing of him.

"Where is—Mr. Handyside?" he said, still finding a good deal of difficulty in articulating his words.

"Is that the man who came with you from New York?" inquired Steingall.

"Yes. He's—an Englishman."

"Well, he may have been scared, and

made a bee-line for London. He's not anywhere in sight."

"Oh, please, Mr. Theydon, do let us go to the hotel," pleaded Evelyn. She was pale, and yielding to reaction after the excitement of the fracas.

Unwillingly, since he was certain now that there were absolutely no grounds for the girl's alarm on her mother's account,—at any rate, so far as illness was concerned,—Theydon entered the cab and Steingall followed.

"The first thing to do," said the canny Steingall, when they were en route, "is to assure this young lady, whom I take for Miss Forbes, that she has probably been brought to Oyster Bay by a lying telegram, and that her mother is quite well in health. Secondly, why should Wong Li Fu be described as the man wanted in the Innesmore inquiry? And thirdly, how and when did Mr. Handyside come on the screen?"

"I can't—talk—just yet," wheezed Theydon hoarsely. "In a few minutes—I'll—tell you everything."

Evelyn had not realized earlier that her self-appointed champion had been seriously hurt. She was deeply concerned, and wanted to take him straight to the nearest doctor.

But he smiled, and essayed to calm her fears by whispering that he would soon be fully recovered. It was pleasant to know that he had succeeded in rescuing her from some indefinable though none the less deadly peril; yet the insistent question in his subconscious mind was not connected with Evelyn's escape or the flight of her assailant or the mysterious presence of Detective Steingall, but with the vanishing of Mr. Handyside. What had become of him? It was the maddest of fantasies to imagine that he could be bound up in some way with the Young Manchus. Yet why did he fail to turn up at the critical moment? Theydon could not even guess at a plausible explanation. He leaned back in the cab and closed his eyes. Really, there were times in life when it would be a relief to faint!

A GIRL who was AFRAID



by Charles Wesley Sanders

AS she stepped down from the suburban trolley-car, Virginia found herself in the heart of the driving March storm. The storm had been pounding at the car all the way from the big Ohio city where she had taken it, to Jetson's Harbor, which was her destination. She had watched it shudderingly through the clouded window.

Now the wild wind buffeted her and the sleet stung her face, and the rain drenched her to the skin. She staggered across the slippery pavement and put down her suit-case at the curb. There was a drug store on the corner, and after a moment of hesitation she entered it. At the door a man in oilskins stood aside to permit her to pass. The clerk came forward affably, after the manner of clerks attracted by an

extremely pretty girl apparently in distress.

And it was a distressed face which Virginia turned to the young man. There was a cloud of uncertainty in her very brown eyes and a pucker between them. Her red-lipped mouth drooped a little. The clerk found her pale, though usually Virginia was rosy-cheeked. The clerk noticed, however, that her brown hair curled all the more tightly on account of the rain. It was the crinkly kind of hair that could never become straggly.

"I want to go to 809 Alburn Street,"

Virginia said in a low, throaty voice. "I wondered if you could direct me."

As she spoke the address, the man at the door turned. The clerk reached for the thin city-directory. While he was fingering its leaves,

CHARLES WESLEY SANDERS always has a real story to tell; and he has a rare gift for terse, word-sparing expression. This tale of the Great Lakes is one of his best.

the man at the door moved to Virginia's side.

"Excuse me," he said. "You're lookin' for the Jordans, aint you? It's only three blocks to where they live. I'll take you there if you like."

Virginia, fresh from the country, hesitated anew. The doubt in her eyes was deeper as she raised them to the man's. What she saw reassured her a little. The man's eyes were large and bright blue. His face had been bronzed and hardened by weather and labor. It was a big face, but it held a quick and kind intelligence.

THE clerk looked up and noticed Virginia's hesitation. He closed the directory.

"It's all right if Captain Bob says so, lady," he told her. "Everybody knows Captain Bob in the Harbor here."

"Well—" Virginia yielded.

"Come right along," said Captain Bob. "We'll be there in a minute . . . I thought I saw you carrying a suit-case when you got off the car."

"It's outside," said Virginia.

Outside, Captain Bob picked up the suit-case. Virginia made a murmur of protest. Captain Bob looked down on her with a smile.

"One of us has got to carry it," he said. "Do you think it ought to be you?"

In spite of her anxiety, Virginia had to return the smile. It was a fine, wholesome smile, which seemed to bid Virginia to forget her troubles. They turned into the street running alongside the drug-store, and there the wind smote them mightily. It leaped up the hill as if eager to get at them. Virginia gasped and struggled with her skirts.

"You better take my arm," Captain Bob said.

Virginia thought that rather an intimate thing to do, but she had no choice. Alone, she could scarcely keep her feet. She tucked her wet, gloved hand under Captain Bob's big elbow, and together they fought their way along.

"This is the place," said Captain Bob after fifteen minutes' hard walking.

"Oh, thank you," Virginia breathed.

"Go right along in," said the Captain. "I'm going in too."

"Oh!" said Virginia. "You know them?"

"Rather. Dick Jordan is one of my men."

VIRGINIA understood from that who Captain Bob was. Her cousin Dick Jordan was, she knew, a Great Lakes fisherman, working for the past few years out of Jetson's Harbor. Captain Bob must be his boss, master of the tug Dick worked on.

Virginia preceded the Captain up the walk. He followed her closely and reached around her and knocked on the door. There was a stir within, and the door was flung open. A heavily built, blonde young woman stood on the threshold. For a moment she stared at Virginia, and then she sprang forward and clasped Virginia, wet clothes and all, to her breast.

"Virginia!" she cried. "Why, Virginia! Why in the world didn't you let us know you were coming, so's we could have met you? The idea of your trustin' yourself to a scamp like Captain—why, Virginia, dear!"

She broke off her raillery, and her voice fell to touch the note of a mother's croon. For Virginia had dropped her head to the girl's ample shoulder and was sobbing so unrestrainedly that her whole young body shook.

The girl quickly drew her inside. Captain Bob paused with the suit-case in his hand, but the girl ordered him in with a vigorous backward jerk of her head. He entered and closed the door behind him.

"You come right up to my room, Virginia," the girl said. "You must get those wet clothes off."

She seized the suit-case and putting her arm around Virginia helped her up the stairs. Captain Bob went into the parlor. There he met another man coming toward the door.

"What's the row?" Dick Jordan asked.

"Darned if I know," Captain Bob answered. "I found a little girl at the drug-store, inquire' her way to your house. I fetched her here, and she

busted out cryin' right on Mary's shoulder."

"Pretty, little, brown-eyed girl—shy, sweet little girl?" Dick asked.

"That fits," said Captain Bob.

"Why, that's our cousin Virginia from down State," Dick said. "Wonder what brings her here? You say she was cryin'. What made her cry, I wonder!"

"I give it up," said Captain Bob.

"Well, come in and dry yourself," Dick said. "They'll be down before long."

Captain Bob went to the kitchen and removed his oilskins. He stood forth then, neatly dressed in blue with a blue shirt. His clothes were dry, but he sat down beside the base-burner. He was a handsome sailor lad as he sat there, listening for some sound of the girls' returning. In the lamp-light his eyes sparkled, and there was even more color than usual in his cheeks. His close-cropped black hair lay damp on his smooth forehead. His stocky figure suggested repose and strength.

"I aint keepin' you from doin' anything, am I, Dick?" he asked after a while.

"As if that would make any difference to you," Dick scoffed. "You know you're goin' to sit here till Virginia comes down, whether it bothers me or not. Aint she a nice little girl?"

"She's a dandy little girl, Dick," the Captain said. "When we were coming along through the rain with her hanging to my arm and peeking up into my face every now and then—say—well, never mind."

And Captain Bob did not smile. He could still see those appealing brown eyes and feel that light clasp on his heavily muscled arm.

UPSTAIRS, Virginia had got off her wet clothing and put on a warm, dark house-dress. Mary had combed out the crinkly dark hair that needed no combing. Virginia had dried her eyes, but now and then a sob shivered through her.

"I had to run away, Mary," Virginia said in a low voice. "Jimmy is gone, and I don't know where he is. I had no place to come but here, and I didn't

have time to let you know. Is it all right? Do I have to tell you anything more to-night?"

"It's as right as right can be, and you don't need to tell me a thing now or ever," said Mary, and kissed her heartily. "We'll go downstairs now and I'll make you some hot coffee and get you something to eat."

A moment more, and they were in the sitting-room. Captain Bob rose, and he and Virginia were face to face. Mary hustled Dick into the kitchen to help her with the fire in the cook-stove.

"I declare," she said, "if Captain Bob aint hit at last. I don't think he ever looked at a girl before, and just see how he's eating Virginia up with his eyes."

In the sitting-room Virginia murmured:

"I'm much obliged to you for helping me with my suit-case."

"Oh, that's all right," said Captain Bob.

Virginia's color came rushing back. They sat down, and then they could find nothing else to say till Mary and Dick came back. But over the coffee Captain Bob's tongue was loosened, and he talked a good deal about the only things he was familiar with—the Great Lakes and fishing.

"If it's fine to-morrow, I'll come and get you and we'll go out on the break-water," he said at parting. "It's quite a sight—the docks and the ships in the harbor and—and everything."

"I'd like to go," said Virginia, who seemed somehow to have forgotten her trouble a little.

CAPTAIN BOB came the next afternoon as soon as dinner was over. There was a biting wind off the lake, but the sun was shining. The Captain and Virginia walked down to the docks, where the great freighters were being outfitted for the summer. Once in a while, as they walked out to the pier, Captain Bob touched Virginia's elbow to steady her over a particularly rough bit of planking. At those times he watched the color come and go in her smooth, oval cheek.

When they came to the end of the

docks and the concrete pier lay straight ahead of them out to the lights, the wind caught at them and roared past them. Virginia gasped and stepped back to the lee of the last warehouse. She stood gazing out across the blue-gray waters. Here and there white-caps were breaking.

Suddenly Virginia's eyes filled with tears. She bit her lip and turned her face from the Captain. She looked so small and helpless in her mysterious grief that the Captain felt a lump come into his own throat.

"You're in some kind of trouble," he said impulsively. "Is there anything I can do?"

"No, oh no," she said. "Only it looks so lonely—so forbidding. Don't you ever get afraid of it?"

The Captain lifted his head and laughed.

"I love it," he answered. "It's given me my living ever sence I was a kid."

She looked at him with eyes in which her tears still shone.

"Yes, I suppose you would be like that," she said; "but it makes me afraid."

They turned back. She was very quiet. The Captain did not speak, for he felt that he was outside her thoughts; it made him a little unhappy.

Their slow strolling brought them presently to the foot of the hill. The girl turned for a last look toward the lake. As she did so, a man stepped out from the lee of the corner building. With his eyes fixed steadily on the girl, he advanced toward her. Captain Bob knew everyone in the village, but he did not know this man. Yet the man seemed to know the girl.

THE man was within three feet of the girl when she turned. She uttered a kind of strangled cry and drew back quickly, her hand at her breast. Her face had gone white. She was trembling. Captain Bob took her by the arm.

"What is it?" he asked. "Is this fellow bothering you? If he is, just say the word and I'll throw him in the river."

"Oh no, you mustn't," Virginia said, and she faced the newcomer.

"Well," he said smoothly, "you've led me quite a chase." He smiled grimly. "Didn't you suppose I'd have you watched? I knew the moment you left, and about the moment you arrived here. You had an idea your brother had got safely away, and so you ran. . . . I'd like to talk to you alone. I know just where your brother is. I had him watched too, you know."

"Will you leave us, please?" the girl asked Captain Bob.

Captain Bob's abundant muscles tightened all over his body. He eyed the stranger malevolently. He disliked the man's looks. He was a sandy-haired, pallid, weak-looking imitation of a man, thought the Captain. He didn't relish leaving the girl with him, especially since he seemed to have frightened her by some sort of veiled threat.

"Not so you could notice it," he answered roughly. "I'll just stick around and see what your friend tries to pull off." His ready anger was mounting. He turned on the stranger. "If you'll just excuse yourself a moment," he said, "we'll take a walk. We can settle this little matter, man to man, in about four seconds."

"I'm talking to this young lady."

"And I'm talking to you. I—"

"Captain Bob, please leave us alone," the girl said.

CAPTAIN BOB turned on her. She was still white and shrinking. Her great brown eyes looked larger than ever, because of her pallor. And they pleaded with him to do as she said.

But Captain Bob was a fighting man, sprung of a long line of fighting men. The smell of the salt had been in the nostrils of his forefathers in the old sailing days. His women had cradled their children to the sound of wind and wave. In times of stress he knew no way but to do battle for those for whom he cared. And he had liked Virginia from the first.

"Are you afraid of—that?" he demanded.

"Yes, I'm afraid of him."

Captain Bob's shoulders swayed from the impulse to strike the man, but he

suddenly remembered that he had no claim on Virginia. Twenty-four hours ago he had not even known her. He might make a fool of himself and get no thanks.

"You know the way home, do you?" he asked.

"Oh, yes," Virginia answered.

He turned up the hill. Virginia sent a look of dumb misery after him, but he did not see it. He was simple enough to be angry with her and a little scornful of her. He had often said he couldn't abide cowardice in man or woman, and he thought Virginia was a coward. Why didn't she spurn the man, let *him* plant his fist in the man's face and thus settle the matter.

AS Captain Bob reached the corner of the street on which the Jordans lived, he paused irresolutely. He had a notion to go and tell Mary what had happened. Mary had sense. Virginia was her guest. It might be only fair to tell Mary what was going on. But he knew he could not do that, and he started on again.

There was a rush of little feet behind him, and his name was softly called. He wheeled; Virginia faced him. She was breathless with excitement. He noticed that the pupils of her eyes had widened, so that now her eyes seemed black.

"Captain Bob," she said, "I want to explain. Perhaps you don't care, but I—I don't want you to go and leave me only the recollection of the way you looked. . . . You've been nice to me. . . . I'm engaged to marry that man. . . . My brother was employed in his bank back home. My brother stole some money. That man said he wouldn't do anything about it if I would marry him. He had asked me a thousand times before. . . . I loved my brother, and so—I became engaged. Then my brother disappeared, and I ran away. I hoped my brother was safe somewhere. But that man told me he has tracked him just as he tracked me. So you see I've got to keep my promise. I've got to go home next week. He'd put my brother in jail. My brother's so young and so—so helpless. He didn't mean to do

wrong. . . . You see, don't you, Captain Bob?"

"Darned if I do," said blunt Captain Bob. "If the kid is a thief, he ought to go to prison. I aint got no use for this martyr stuff. Let every man pay his own score, I say." He lifted his head and his blue eyes shone. "What right has this lad got to ask you to sell yourself?" he challenged her.

"But he hasn't asked me," she said. "He doesn't know anything about it. He wouldn't let me if he knew."

"Well, he stole, and then run away and left you to face the music," the Captain said. "A fine piece of a man he must be. My girl, we haven't got any use for such people down here. We don't understand people like that. We play the game all the time. . . . You take my tip and pass this man up."

She lifted her white face to his appealingly, as if he were a judge who had passed sentence on her and hers. But she found no relenting in his proud face. She saw that for him life was exceedingly simple. He would enter into no situation which made it complex.

"I can't," she said.

"Very well," said Captain Bob, and in his righteousness he turned away from her and so left her.

VIRGINIA went wearily back to the Jordans. She was doubly unhappy now. Her case had been bad enough before, when she had been about to give up her liberty odiously. Now she was to give up Captain Bob as well. All that night she lay staring into the dark. She tried to find a way out, but there was none. She could not let the brother she loved go to jail.

She was still in bed next morning when she heard Mary mounting the stairs. Mary came in hastily. She was as near to excitement as her calm nature ever permitted her to be. She held a little book and a letter out to Virginia.

"It's a special-delivery letter," she said. "Sign right there."

Virginia signed, and Mary went downstairs to return the book. Virginia looked at the address on the

envelope. The letter had been originally sent to her home and had been forwarded to her by the postmaster, whom alone she had trusted with her new address.

She broke the seal and drew out three pages of closely written letter-paper. She read the letter rapidly. At the end she bowed her head, and her tears flowed out on the boyish handwriting.

"Oh, Jimmie, Jimmie!" she sobbed.

The storm of her grief subsided in a moment. She sprang from bed and dressed. Downstairs she found Mary in the kitchen. Virginia's eyes were shining, and her cheeks were pink.

"Mary," she said, "I've had a letter from my brother. I want to tell Captain Bob about it first, if you don't mind. Where can I find him?"

"You can't find him till to-night, dear," Mary said. "He took his fishing tug out this morning for its first trip. Unless the weather should turn bad, the tug won't come in till night."

"Oh, do you think they might be caught in a storm?" Virginia asked.

Mary glanced through the kitchen window. The sun had risen in a clear east, but low-hung clouds had filled the sky to the north and west. It was a March day typical of the lake coast. Its beginning gave no guarantee of what its ending would be.

"You never can tell what will happen to us fisher-folk in the spring and the fall," Mary said soberly. "But Captain Bob is careful. He'll come in if the weather changes."

ALL day Virginia sat by a window and watched the sky. Once or twice there was a flicker of rain out of the northwest. The wind moaned softly throughout the day. Then toward five

o'clock it suddenly died. Darkness came down swiftly.

Virginia went to the front door and looked out. Afar she could hear an ore-train making its weary way. That seemed to be the only sound. Soon that died away murmurously in the distance. Brooding silence wrapped the village. The street-lamps began to glow into life. A couple of pedestrians hurried by, glancing apprehensively at the sky.

Mary came and stood at Virginia's elbow, slipping her arm about the girl's waist. Mary looked at the northwest.

Out of the darkness of the sudden night a looming shape seemed to define itself there. Mary knew it was a bank of jet wind-clouds. "Come in, Virginia," she said in a low voice.

Virginia's ears were attuned for a note of alarm in

Mary's voice. She found it—and she did not stir.

"There's going to be a storm—a bad storm—isn't there, Mary?" she asked.

"We can't tell how bad it will be," Mary answered. "Storms on the lake come in a minute at this time of year. But don't worry, dear. Captain Bob is inside the breakwater by this time, more than likely."

"But suppose he isn't? Suppose he should be caught outside in a terrible storm. Is there anyone to help him?"

"The life-saving station isn't open yet," Mary answered. "It will open right away, now that one tug has gone out. That's all that's needed. That opens navigation, for the life-savers."

"But is there no one else?" Virginia asked.

"If Captain Bob got into trouble, he would flare," Mary answered. "If a tug could get out to him, it would go. If it couldn't get out—why, they would just have to take their chances Come in, Virginia."

IN OUR NEXT ISSUE—

"The Sheriff of Panamint," by Peter B. Kyne.

"Mrs. Mellinger's Militant Methods," by Walter Jones.

A "Tarzan" story, the first of a new series, by Edgar Rice Burroughs.

"Madam Who," a book-length novel (published complete) by Harold MacGrath.

"The Rose Cliff Job," a short serial by Frederick R. Bechdolt.

And many other stories of exceptional interest in this September BLUE BOOK MAGAZINE—on sale August 1st.

AS Virginia half turned, there was a mutter out of the hidden shape in the northwest. Then there was a soft, easy flare of lightning, much like heat-lightning in summer. For that instant it looked as if the storm would break gently. But of a sudden there was a rocking crash, and the sky was split by a living, zigzag line of lightning. Still there was no rain.

Virginia turned swiftly back into the house and ran up the stairs. When she reappeared from her room she had on a long raincoat with a scarf tied tightly over her head.

"Virginia, where are you going?" Mary cried.

"Down to the docks," Virginia answered. "I want to see if Captain Bob is in. If he's out there in this storm, perhaps there's something I can do."

Mary prisoned the slighter girl in her arms.

"You poor child!" she said. "There's nothing you can do. If there is anything to be done, it's work for men."

"But I'm going to see," Virginia declared.

Mary stepped back and scanned her cousin's face. In Virginia's eyes there was a light from an inward flame stronger than anything that burned in Mary's breast, stronger than anything that had ever burned in Virginia's before. Mary understood. In the thought of Captain Bob's peril, Virginia had forgotten her native timidity. If Captain Bob were in danger, she wished to be in danger too. It was woman's age-old instinct toward self-immolation.

"Wait," Mary said. "I'll go with you."

As they went down the hill toward the docks, the wind began to rise again. By the time they reached the docks it was sobbing along the river, backing the dark water away from the mouth. Now and then thunder crashed in the northwest, and lightning ran up the sky.

The docks were dark and silent. The big freighters loomed up, dull, dark, motionless shapes. Here and there a fish-tug hugged up to the piling. Virginia and Mary walked to the end of

the docks without encountering anyone. Beyond them the basins inside the far breakwaters lay lonely, silent and unlighted.

"Captain Bob's boat isn't in," Mary screamed at Virginia.

"Can we get out to the lighthouse?" Virginia screamed back.

Mary nodded. More than Virginia, she understood the peril Captain Bob's boat was in. Doubtless by now he was headed toward the gap, but the gap would not show in the dark. If the sea began to run, as it surely would in a few minutes, he would have nothing to guide him. His little craft would be as likely to be dashed against the breakwater, and pound to pieces there, as to make the harbor.

MARY put out her hand. Virginia clasped it tightly, and together they stepped out from the shelter of the last building. Virginia remembered curiously how she and Captain Bob had stood there just a few hours before.

The wind, still rising, had free sweep of them as they made their way along the pier. It snatched their breath away, so that they had every once in a while to turn their backs, and it wound their skirts about them so that they could scarcely walk. But they kept on, and after what seemed a long time they gained the lighthouse.

They stood behind this a moment to get their breaths. Virginia was panting and her body was shaking. She sank down on the lighthouse base. Mary, stronger than she, got herself together first. She moved cautiously to the side of the lighthouse and peered around it. On the instant she was back, clutching at Virginia's sleeve.

"They're out there," she cried, "—Captain Bob and Dick and the other men. . . . They're—they're—oh, Virginia, they're flaring."

Virginia felt her heart turn to ice. Her nerves went dead, as if they had been charged with an electric current and the current had been suddenly turned off. She put her lips to Mary's ear.

"We've got to keep cool," she said. "Maybe we can help them. What can we do?"

With a shudder Mary looked out across the east basin. Lightning flared up and held. The basin was as illuminated as if at midday. Inside the big concrete breakwater the sea was comparatively smooth, though outside, the waves were already beginning to dash against it and break in a smother of spray.

"They've got to have a light," Mary said. "I think that's what they're flaring for. There hasn't been enough sea to damage their steering-gear yet or to put out their fires. They are probably headed inshore, but they're afraid they can't make the gap. There isn't time to go for help. Captain Bob's boat is fast, and he will be coming in under a full head. . . . There ought to be a flare on the east arm of the breakwater—out there, Virginia, where the storm is. . . . Captain Bob has a launch at the shore end of the pier. I can run it. . . . It's smooth enough inside the breakwater. . . . We can get some oily waste from the car-boxes."

Virginia felt a surge of terror through her whole being. Her mind was working like some high-power machine, and her imagination was vivid. In a breath she could see herself and Mary in the little launch, speeding out to where the storm was wreaking its fury. . . . She put her hand on Mary's arm and started along the pier.

They came to a string of ore-laden cars along the shore, and Mary showed Virginia how to dig the oil-soaked waste out of the car-boxes. By the time Mary brought the launch around, Virginia had a pile of it ready. Regardless of the oil, they gathered it up in armfuls and put it into the boat. Then Mary headed the launch out across the basin toward the breakwater.

THE lightning flared constantly now, and thunder crashed and broke and died in the distance. Big drops of rain began to fall, and soon there was a torrent of it. Mary peered ahead, but Virginia dropped her face to her knees and hugged herself together before the blast. She was conscious of little feeling except the flame of hope in her

brain. She whispered to herself that she was not afraid.

She was roused by the bumping of the boat against the breakwater. She lifted her head. The boom of the waves on the outer side of the breakwater filled her ears. White spray broke above her and dashed over her. When the lightning flared again, she saw that they were close to the gap and that through it the water was pouring without restraint. The wash of it caused the launch to dance.

Mary held the nose of the boat against the concrete. It constantly tried to pull away as the gap-current caught it. It seemed to be a thing alive, conscious of the peril to itself and its passengers.

With her left hand Mary tore open the bosom of her waist and drew forth a little oilskin packet. She held out her hand and Virginia crept aft and took the packet from her.

"Matches," Mary screamed. "Take an armful of waste and pile it up on top of the breakwater. Touch a match to it as soon as you get it up there."

Virginia hugged an armful of waste up to her and got back to the bow. Twice she tried to stand, but each time she had to sink back. The boat rocked so that she was afraid she would be pitched overboard. But on her third attempt she managed to hoist the waste to the top of the breakwater. She struck a match on the under side of one of the boat-seats. It flickered and died. Another suffered a like fate. With a moan she struck another. Was she to fail here just at the crucial moment? The third match flared up, flickered in the wind, almost went out, and then grew to life between her hollowed hands. She reached up quickly and thrust it into the waste.

For an instant the waste sizzled, and then it suddenly sprang into red, smoky flame. Its light went out across the dark waters.

"Watch it," Mary cried. "As soon as it burns down a little, throw on more waste."

For five minutes Virginia fed the flare. At the end of that time she piled on the last of the waste. Her hands were numb, and her body was so nearly

paralyzed that she could scarcely move to gather up the flare's fuel. Now she sank down to the bottom of the boat.

That was the last of their signal, up there in the pelting rain and the dashing spray. If Captain Bob had not seen now, he would never see any signal from them. . . . The waste burned steadily on, wavering and flickering and being nearly gone half a dozen times. Then slowly it began to die. . . . Virginia huddled herself on her knees and began to pray incoherently.

Now the rain was a flood. The lightning was intermittent. The thunder had almost ceased. But the wind howled along the wide expanse beyond the breakwater.

OUT of the darkness came the hoarse cry of the tug's whistle. Mary screamed hysterically. Virginia only huddled further down on the bottom of the boat.

She was so huddled when the forward lights of Captain Bob's tug showed at the gap. The tug wallowed, narrowly missing the east abutment. The aft lights showed, and the tug came through. It kept on for a hundred feet, and then it came round out of the sea and into the smoother water. Its engines were shut off, and Mary screamed. There was an answering shout from some one in the bow of the boat.

The tug had come to a standstill. Mary put the launch about and came alongside. Captain Bob leaned down. Then he sprang and landed deftly in the center of the launch.

"Mary!" he yelled.

"Never mind me," Mary cried. "Look after Virginia."

She pointed to the huddled figure, and Captain Bob with a cry that seemed to tear up from his heart bent and gathered Virginia up in his arms. Dick Jordan appeared in the tug's bow. Mary threw him the rope, and he made

it fast. He held his hands down to Mary, and she clambered over the side. Captain Bob passed Virginia up and followed her. Then he took her from Dick again and ran to the engine-room door. Mary followed him.

"Get us ashore quick," Captain Bob ordered his engineer.

WHEN Virginia opened her eyes, she was in her own bed with hot irons at her feet. Mary was standing beside her. Mary put a cup of something hot and pungent to her lips. Virginia drank and seemed to doze.

After a while she opened her eyes again. She was very warm and comfortable. She looked for Mary. But Mary was not there. Captain Bob stood where Mary had been.

Captain Bob dropped to his knees and began to stroke her crinkly hair. "Virginia," he whispered. "Virginia!"

Suddenly Virginia sat up in bed. Her dark hair tumbled down about her shoulders. Her eyes were shining. Her cheeks were pink.

"Captain Bob," she said slowly, "I'm not afraid of that man any more. I don't think I'm afraid of anything after to-night. I had a letter from my brother to-day. That man lied when he said he knew where he was. He's in Canada. He got over the border at Buffalo. He's going to enlist for the war. He said he had been a coward but he was going to wipe that out. He may never come back. . . . If this had happened before to-night, I'd have been afraid for him, but now—"

Captain Bob took her slender hands in his big ones.

"You're not going to be afraid of anything any more, are you, Virginia?" he murmured.

Virginia only shook her head. She was afraid to answer, lest the tears that were so very near should come flooding out.





THAT LITTLE MOTHER

by
Hapsburg Liebe

Author of "God Bless Bill," "Soldiers of Destiny," etc.

THERE'S an old saying that the army will either make a man or break him; and in some instances I've seen it work. In the case of the young sojer who answered roll-call as Private Llewelyn, it done both: it broke him, and then it made him. The first come easy. The other, it was hard and terrible.

Now, a man can't be a sojer for twenty-three years in continuous service and not know men—even if he aint got no more book-learning than me. The knowledge will be beat and ground into him, forced into him whether he wants it or not. You see them come, and you see them go; you see them live, and you see them die—and by this last I say you read the most, sometimes. As soon as my eyes caught sight of Private Llewelyn walking into the barracks, I says to myself:

"Sergeant Flowers," I says, "that lad's been brought up under glass; he knows about as much o' the world as you know o' the planet they call the Big Dipper."

He was in civilian clothes, and mighty well dressed. His hands and his face was as white as a society belle's. Although he was barely grown, he was as fine a figger of a young man as you'd care to see, with shoulders anybody might ha' envied. He was good-looking, too, with his blue eyes and brown hair; but his mouth and chin, they struck me as being a little weak.

The minute he was in his new khaki uniform, he turned himself loose. He soon went wild. The free-and-easy life of a sojer, after his careful guiding at home, completely upset his head. By the time we had spent a year campaigning in the Philippines, he had sunk almost as low as a man can go without being kicked out o' the service with a dishonorable discharge hanging to him. He drank like a fish, swore and gambled like a pirate, fought at every chance; he spent half his time in the guardhouse. He played off sick when there was anything hard on hand; he even sneaked out o' the common

duties o' the garrison. He was a regimental pariah, a outcast, a nobody, among his comrades. And I noticed that he never wrote any letters home, nor never got any letters from home.

THE regiment was in Catbalogan, on the coast o' Bloody Samar—that word "Bloody" belongs to Samar the same as the word "damned" belongs to a dog in a woman's lap. We was resting after a hard campaign in the interior, and there was a hundred or more sick and wounded in the big old Spanish Government building which served us as a hospital—and a dozen or so o' them was waiting for wooden overcoats. The whole outfit, except a few old reg'lar army men like me, was so lonesome and heartsick and homesick that they couldn't sleep o' nights only when they was a-doing o' guard duty.

It was a little after dark, and I was sergeant o' the guard. As usual, Private Llewelyn was one o' the prisoners. In walks our capt'in, a good-hearted Yankee from Lewiston, Maine. He acknowledges my salute, goes straight to Llewelyn's bunk, and sets down by the side o' Llewelyn. I couldn't help a-overhearing what they said.

"Llewelyn," begins Capt'in Pollard, mighty kind-like, "the first thing you know you're going to get a court-martial and be fired out o' the army. You'll be disgraced. It'll be published in your home papers, you know. What'll your folks think about it? For their sake, if not for your own," says he, "you ought to turn a new leaf."

Llewelyn replies like he's talking to himself: "I aint got any folks but one."

And there was a quiver in his voice that told me and the Capt'in who that one was.

"What'll *she* think of it?" asks the company commander.

Llewelyn he looks at the Capt'in and frowns. "She wont neveh know it," he says. "It was like this: She wouldn't let me go into the army," says he, "and so I run away and went to the nearest city and enlisted unde a false name and with a permit I wrote and witnessed myself."

"Went to Jacksonville," says the Capt'in.

"How did you know?"

"The records show it," answers Capt'in Pollard. "Besides, I know your dialect."

"Humph!" And Llewelyn almost makes a face.

"South Georgy, then," guesses the company commander.

And Llewelyn's count'nance gives it away that the Capt'in had hit the mark that time.

"Did you know," goes on Capt'in Pollard, "that it has been only because o' the mercy of Colonel Lockwood that you have not already been court-martialed?"

"Please tell the Colonel foh me that I said to give his mehcies to somebody that wants 'em," says Llewelyn.

Capt'in Pollard, that fine, good man, got no promise to do better from Private Llewelyn. I tell you, the boy had fell to a awful depth. The only things on earth he cared for was something to drink and somebody to curse, gamble with or fight. I don't think he even cared for the one he had left back in South Georgy to worry her old heart out for lack of him.

NEXT afternoon Luk Ban's hordes of Moros, Pampangas and Visayans, armed with rifles, poisoned bamboo-spears, bolos and silver-mounted, flame-shaped crises that could take away a man's head at one blow, crept down from the range of scrub-covered hills that laid half around Catbalogan. We was not expecting nothing at all, and they was almost within rifle range of us before we knowed it. The Colonel he put us all in the trenches the Spaniards had dug years before around the outskirts of the town, and there we waited patient for Luk Ban to start the ball to rolling. And we knowed well that the big insurgent had a s'perior force, because he never would ha' attacked the whole regiment in the day-time without it.

I remember it as well as if it was yesterday. The sun it was that b'ilin hot that we was near roasting there on our stomachs in the trenches; there wasn't a breath o' wind from nowheres.

The prisoners had been armed and sent out with the rest of us to help defend against them savages; and by my side, seeming not to care nothing at all about it, was the pariah Private Llewelyn, in his reddish-brown fatigue uniform and bareheaded. I suddenly begun to feel sorry for him, in spite o' myself. I mops my sweating face with the sleeve o' my blue shirt, and I says to him:

"Kid," says I, "you're in a mighty bad fix with the regiment, sure. If you see any chance to do any redeeming o' yourself," I says, "you better take it."

He shakes his head sullen-like and looks hard at me with his dissipated blue eyes.

"Even if you get your wooden head shot off," I goes on, a-getting a little mad, "it's better than a bobtail discharge—a million times better," I says.

"Not to me it aint," Llewelyn replies careless-like. "I wish," he says, "I had a quaht jug o' gin."

I said something pretty scalding, but I forget just what it was. For Luk Ban's brown men broke in a solid line from the edge o' the jungle that laid along by the foot o' the hills, and we got the order to fire. Luk Ban's rifles opened up too, and the hell of war broke loose upon us all. The roar of our Krags drowned out the keen whine o' the Mausers and the nasty, coarse hum o' the Remingtons, except when they come close to the ear.

It lasted until very near sundown, when we drove them back across the hills. It had cost us something to win that vict'ry. The horspital was crowded full o' the wounded, among them being the chaplain, who had been offering the last comforts to a man with a flung bolo still through him. A good many had went through the door of death. The young regiment, in spite o' the vict'ry, dropped into a deeper gloom than ever.

AMONG the wounded was me. It was a bullet wound across the temple, and when I come to myself it was after night and I was in the horspital. The thing that brought me back was the touch of a hand too soft and too gentle to belong to any man on earth;

it was a-smoothing back my red hair from my bandaged brow. I opened my eyes and looked up into the face of a little, gray old American woman! She was dressed in solid black. She was smiling; but in her blue eyes there was the shadow of some great worriment.

"Say, if—if you please, ma'am," I stammers, "when d-did you come, and who might you be?"

In the richest 'way-down-South brogue I ever heard she tells me that her name is Mrs. Halliday, and that she has just arrived a hour before on the Campania Maritima's steamer *Saturnus*—the *Saturnus*, which now lies, twisted and burnt, on the west shore of upper Luzon. And her voice reminded me so much o' Private Llewelyn's that I jumped immediate at the conclusion that she's his mother. I starts to tell her where to find Llewelyn,—which was in the guardhouse, of course—when I happens to think.

"Lord," I says to myself, "it would kill that woman to know what he is!" And I decides to bide my time.

Pretty soon she walks away and goes to another wounded sojer; and him, bad hurt and a-raving delirious, he takes her hand and kisses it and calls her "Mother."

My head it commenced to aching, and not a wink o' sleep did I get that whole night. I raised myself a little, and there I sets a-looking at the gray little old woman as she goes from one man to another with her comforting words and her good smile. I remember it as well as if it was yesterday.

It would be hard for me to tell about everything she done. She petted them heartsick, homesick and wounded young sojers, and wrote last letters for some who was never to see American shores no more; and once or twice I seen her on her knees, with her hands clasped and her head bent, while some man passed out. We all commenced a-loving of her. She was a mother to us all.

Along toward daybreak the big *medico* he turned over his room in the downstairs o' the horspital building to her, and persuaded her to go to bed for some rest. Yes, he had had a mother just the same as anybody else. And when the under doctors offered their

quarters instead, why, the head *medico* he straightens and looks stern and says: "I claim the honor, gentlemen!"

I've seen them come, and I've seen them go; I've seen them live, and I've seen them die. Some are men, and some aint. The big doctor was a man.

There was scores of wishful eyes watched that little lady leave the main ward, and mine was among them.

THE following day I was discharged from the horspital building, and as I enters my company street I meets Capt'in Pollard.

"Sergeant," he says, "I am going to give you the job of being orderly to Mrs. Halliday while she is with us."

"I thank you, sir, Capt'in," I says, a-meaning every word of it.

"Please report to her for duty, Sergeant," he says.

And I salutes and makes a staggery 'bout-face and returns to the horspital building. Just as I takes my place before the little woman's door, she opens it.

"I beg leave to say, ma'am," says I, "that I have been sent to you to be your orderly."

"Awdehly?" says she. "And what is that, suh?"

"Flunky, ma'am," I explains. "I am to stay close to you, ma'am, to do anything you want done."

"Ah—a suhvant—I undehstand," says she. She hands me a chair from her room. "Then foh goodness' sake," she says, "set down; it's too tiahsome to stand theah like that!"

"Not at all," I says, passing the chair back. "It's military to stand."

"You must obey my awdehs, mustn't you?"

"Of course, ma'am!" I agrees.

"Then, suh, I awdeh you to set down!" says she, handing the chair back to me.

And I obeys orders.

Well, the whole regiment was soon a-worshipping Mrs. Halliday. During the time she felt she could spare from the sick ones in the horspital, she went around among the different companies, with me at her heels; and I could tell easy that she was a-looking for somebody. And one afternoon while we

was out on one o' these rounds, she turns to me and says:

"Sahgent," she says, "have I seen every man in this regiment?"

Now I had to tell a lie, I felt; so I salutes and answers with a innocent face on me:

"Every man, ma'am," I says.

"All but them in the prison—I mean the guardhouse," she says; and she looks toward the low stone building, a old Spanish *carcel*, that stood down close to the bay-shore.

"Oh, yes," I says, "all but them in the guardhouse. "But," I adds, "there aint nobody much in the guardhouse, you know, ma'am—just a few raky fellows," I says.

I barely caught what she said next, which wasn't meant for my ears at all. She says to herself:

"Anyway, he would neveh be theah. He was too good for that, my David."

IT was only a few hours later that it happened. The night was as clear as crystal. The tropic stars hung so low in the sky that a man felt he could reach them from a housetop; they twinkled and shined like balls of white fire. The breeze was from the landward, and it brought with it the sweet smell of ylang-ylang and hibiscus, the lonesome cry of a nightbird of the jungle, the *acquoo!-acquoo!* of a iguana. Off from the horspital building somewheres come the jangling of brass strings on a native guitar, and a female voice singing a melancholy Visayan love-song in minors.

I was a-setting just outside o' Mrs. Halliday's door, expecting any minute to see the thin shaft of candlelight at my feet fade away, which would be my time to leave. Suddenly her voice comes to me, low and sad:

"Oh, Sahgent Flowehs!"

"Yes ma'am!" I says.

I went in at her command. She was standing by her open window, with her frail, white hands resting on the sill and her gentle face turned toward the breeze that brought the smell of ylang-ylang and hibiscus.

"You wanted me, ma'am?" I says, saluting.

"Is it too late foh me to go to see

the Colonel?" she asks, without facing about.

"Of course not, ma'am," says I.

"Then I think I will go, Sahgent," says she.

She puts a shawl or something around her shoulders, and we goes to headquarters, which was in a small frame building covered with curyated iron that had bullet-holes in it enough to ventilate it. The door was open, and she walks in. I stops on the upper step. The Colonel, two o' the majors and a capt'in was gathered around a little table that had two burning candles and some campaign plans on it. The officers all bows and greets Mrs. Halliday polite.

"Please have this chair, Mrs. Halliday," invites Colonel Lockwood.

They all sets down, with the big guns saying how delighted and honored they felt at her visit.

"I come heah to have a talk with you, Colonel," says the little gray woman.

"Shall the others leave us?" asks the regimental commander.

"I—I guess it aint necessary," smiles Mrs. Halliday. "Colonel," she goes on, "I come all the way from South Geohgy to look foh my son. He was always such a good boy until he took the ahmy feveh. I wanted to please him; but—but I just couldn't let him go! Finally he become desp'rate about it. He told me that if I didn't let him go he would run away to some city wheah we has not knowed, enlist undeh an assumed name and with a fohged pehmit, and go anyway. Still I could not let him leave me—my boy David, who his fathen named foh the David of old, the man afteh God's own heaht. He's all I've got, and I'm all he's got. I knowed of no otheh way to reach him," she says, "because of the assumed name; so I come the ten thousand miles to look foh him. . . . And," she says, "theah wasn't time to do anything else."

She stopped and looked down. The Colonel glanced toward Major Thornton, and Major Thornton said something I couldn't catch. Then the little mother she goes on, sadlike:

"I have had an ohganic disease of the heaht foh several yeahs; and afteh David left me to be a sojeh," she says,

"I leahned from the doctohs that I had but a few months of life left. . . . I had but one wish in my soul. That one wish was to see my deah David once again. So theah was reelly nothing else to do but to come. I wanted to ask you, Colonel: Is theah any way that you could help me? Could you send to the otheh regiments o' the Philippines and cause copies of a letteh from me to be read aloud befoh' them all, in the hope that it might reach my David's eahs? If he knowed the truth, he would hasten to me," she says; "foh David he was a good boy—all but that running away to be a sojeh. . . . He promised me that if I would let him go he would come home with the shouldeh-straps of a capt'in on him," she says. "Oh, he wanted to go so much!"

THE Colonel looks thoughtful. When he replies to Mrs. Halliday, it's plain it's all he can do to talk. A man with feelings inside of him was Colonel Lockwood.

"Be assured," he says, kindlike, "that I will do everything in my power to find your son for you. If you will write the letter you mentioned," says he, "I will send to every regiment in the Islands and cause copies of it to be read to every sojer. If you will just set down at the table here, Mrs. Halliday, ma'am," he says, "—there's pen and ink and paper."

Mrs. Halliday she goes to her feet. "Thank you so much, Colonel Lockwood; but I think I could write the letteh best in my own quahtehs. So I'll go, and I'll send it to you the first thing in the mohning by the Sergeant, suh," says she.

"By the way," says the regiment's commander, "the Sixty-seventh Volunteers has just arrived at San Pedro, which is two miles around the coast; you might look that outfit over in the morning. Doubtless we can find some way of getting you there without your walking."

"Thank you so much, suh!" she cries. "I will be ready to go at any minute tomorrow, suh. Gentlemen, I bid you good night!"

I went back to the little lady's quar-

ters with her. When we had reached her door, she turned and smiled at me, and dismissed me. Then I hurried back to headquarters and dashes into the presence o' the four commissioned officers like a whirlwind.

"Colonel," I says, out o' breath, mighty near, "I sure beg pardon for coming to you without permission. But I felt that there wasn't no time to fool away with red tape. Colonel," says I, "Private Llewelyn, the regimental pariah, the outcast and the nobody, is that old woman's son, as sure as I aint a leper!"

Colonel Lockwood he knowed about Llewelyn, of course, the same as the balance o' the regiment did.

"Impossible!" cries he.

"Impossible!" cries Major Thornton.

"Yes sir!" I says. "I've done reasoned it all out. I heard Llewelyn tell Capt'in Pollard that he'd enlisted under a assumed name and with a forged permit because he couldn't enlist any other way. And his brogue is the same as Mrs. Halliday's and he come from South Georgy too. Please, sir, Colonel Lockwood," I begs, "let me bring Llewelyn here for you to examine!"

"Bring him," nods the Colonel.

AS soon as I seen that dog Llewelyn, I felt like I wanted to horsewhip him. He knowed his mother was there, of course—he couldn't help but know it—and yet he didn't seem to care nothing about it at all. When we entered headquarters, he didn't even stand at "Attention."

"What is your name?" asks the Colonel, a-snapping it out like a rifle-shot.

"Robeht—"

"David, and not Robert!" clips the Colonel.

"David Llewel—"

"Not Llewelyn!" Colonel Lockwood breaks in.

"David Halliday, then," grins that desp'rate young man.

"I thought so." And the Colonel lifts his brows. "David, your mother has but a short time to live, and she has come all the way to the Philippines, ten thousand miles, to see you once again before she goes—"

He went on with it, and never have I heard, in all my life, such a going-over as David Halliday received. And David Halliday he felt the force of it. He went red and white by turns; once he staggered and sunk almost to his knees. He begun to beg the Colonel to quit. But the Colonel wouldn't quit until he was through. I tell you it was turrible!

And no sooner had Colonel Lockwood reached the end of that awful grilling when a runner from the horspital bursts in at the doorway and jerks out breathless:

"She's dying—that little mother—leakage of the heart—a few minutes, at most—"

Then the Colonel he interrupts in a voice like iron:

"Take off your uniform, Capt'in Bruce! Quick!" he says—and he faced back to David Halliday. "You're going to put on Capt'in Bruce's uniform—you're going to deceive her—d'ye hear, you unspeakable young scoundrel! You belong to 'M' of the Sixty-seventh Volunteers, just arrived at San Pedro, up the coast—d'ye hear? And you've got to act the part, too! Quick, I say, Capt'in Bruce, for God's sake!" he says.

He takes Capt'in Bruce's blouse and tears away from each side o' the collar-band the crossed guns, because they had the figgers 73 instead of 67 on them.

IN a very short space of time David Halliday was in a capt'in's uniform, with a capt'in's hat on his head and a capt'in's sword and scabbard hooked to a belt around his waist—and damme if he didn't look like a officer in spite of himself! Then the Colonel he took Halliday by a arm and went running toward the horspital building with him, with me a-following close in their wake.

"Act the part, d'ye hear?" pants the regimental commander as they go. "If you don't, David Halliday, I'll make you wish you had! She come ten thousand miles just to look upon your dirty, villainous, scoundrelly face. Act the part, or I'll—I'll make you regret that you was ever borned!"

The regiment had got the news. It was gathered around the horspital

building, waiting, silent and mighty anxious; for I tell you it loved her to a man. The Colonel and Halliday, with me at their heels, broke through the close-packed sojers; and the Colonel he begun to cry out in a voice that rung like the ring o' steel, so that the little woman could hear him:

"Make way there, I say! Make way for Capt'in Halliday, of the Sixty-seventh Volunteers! Make way there ahead!"

The sojers divided, and we passed through. We hurried into the room where the little lady set in a big chair, with the head doctor bending over her. She was white; but she was still alive. As her son went in at the door she seen him and knowed him.

"David!" she gasps. And the happiness that was in her voice is a thing I can't tell about.

Halliday gave a great, sobbing cry and fell to his knees before her. With her last strength she put out her frail, white arms and put them around him, drawing his head close to her poor old failing heart.

"Fohgive me!" he says, all choked in his throat, kneeling there at what I once heard a good chaplain call the first altar of life, his mother's knee.

"Ah—a capt'in's—shoulder-straps—deah son!" she mutters; and we seen she tried to tighten her arms and couldn't. "Don't ask—my fohgiveness! *But fohgive me!* I wanted—to hold—you—back. . . . Oh—deah son—fohgive—me—"

Her gray old head fell forward. She kissed the golden bars on his shoulder.

And then she passed out.

WE put her to rest in the regiment's silk flag, under a fragrant ylang-ylang, under starry hibiscus. We fired the three volleys of a sojer over her, and a bugler tried hard to blow "Taps" while the regiment knelt. For it was the greatest and finest and best sojer of all that had went to sleep—that little mother.

David Halliday he made of himself a man like the David of old, a man after God's own heart; it become the work of his life to win the commission of a capt'in, and he has done it.

An INTEREST IN LIFE

By Philip Gibbs

PHILIP GIBBS is a war correspondent of distinction and the author of much entertaining fiction—"The Joyous Lady," for instance. This story of a young man who was bored, and of how he came to take an interest in life, is one of Mr. Gibbs' best.

MY friend Gerard Langbaine has told me many amusing stories of his experiences as a "pup trainer" (by which he means a private tutor), but when he described his four weeks or so with young Ingleton, his laughter did not ring quite true. I think the anxiety of that time accounts for some of the white hairs which are powdered about the temples of his fine, strong, clean-shaven face.

It was his friendship with Lady Ingleton—the widow of "Ingleton of India," as he was called for his work on the northwest frontier—which induced Langbaine to take in hand a boy who was obviously in need of mental and moral discipline.

"Mr. Langbaine," said this charming, old-fashioned lady, whose spirit had been saddened by her early widowhood, "my poor Frank terrifies me. He is suffering from a bad nervous breakdown, and the doctors can do nothing with him."

Langbaine raised his eyebrows in his whimsical way.

"A nervous breakdown at twenty-one! That's bad. Who's the lady?"

But there seemed to be no lady in the



case. Viscount Ingleton's illness was due to a highly strung temperament, a touch of religious doubt, too many Egyptian cigarettes, quack medicines with which he stocked his bedroom mantelshelf, literature of a morbid character, and a continual craving for mental excitements which had their inevitable reaction in restlessness and boredom.

Langbaine whistled.

"Bad symptoms for a boy," he said. "Religious doubt plus quack medicine and Egyptian cigarettes are the very deuce, my dear Lady Ingleton."

She agreed, and begged him, as her good friend, to look after the boy for a while—on a business basis, of course—and to restore him to mental health by those gifts of strength and comradeship and knowledge of youth which made Gerard Langbaine so successful with all young men.

"If you would take him away to your country cottage," said Lady Ingleton, "I believe it would do him a world of good. And when you bring him back well to me, I will thank God for your kindness."

She spoke the last words with a tremor in her voice, and though Lang-

baine was halfway through a new novel which he wanted to finish in peace and quiet, this appeal of a charming lady on behalf of her son stirred the chivalry in the heart of this knightly man.

"Send the boy along," he said, "and I will see what I can do for him with golf on a nine-hole course, country walks, with an old-fashioned inn at the journey's end, my faithful banjo, and old Bounder, who is the wisest fellow of a dog that ever taught philosophy to foolish man."

WELL, that was the bargain, but when young Ingleton drove his car up the muddy lane outside Langbaine's country cottage, on the high woodlands of Buckinghamshire, and called out an irritable question across the garden hedge, Langbaine knew that he had invited trouble to be his guest.

"Where the devil is Bramble Cottage?" asked Viscount Ingleton.

"This is Bramble Cottage," said Langbaine very cheerily, as he plucked a big weed out of a flower-bed and wiped some sweat off his forehead with a bare bronzed arm. "But the devil aint at home to-day, if you're wanting him."

The boy in the car permitted himself the flicker of a smile, and then hardened his lips and spoke gloomily.

"Oh, I suppose you're Mr. Langbaine? I'm Viscount Ingleton."

"Glad you've come," said Langbaine.

"You'll be sorry soon. The mater has sent me down here as a prisoner on parole. I ought to warn you that my nerves have gone to blazes and that I've got the giddy jimjams. I expect she told you?"

"Lady Ingleton told me you were a bit run down," said Langbaine; "but you'll soon pick up again after a little exercise and fresh air. Look at that view, my boy. Does you a bit of good, doesn't it?"

He pointed to the wide stretch of landscape sweeping away to a far horizon of woods which were caught on fire by the glow of the afternoon sun. It was a scene of peace, very restful to the spirit, with long shadows across the fields and with a shimmer of golden light above the standing corn.

Viscount Ingleton turned in his car and gazed back with mournful eyes.

"Horribly boring, isn't it? Nature always seems to me so devilish monotonous. And it makes one think—which is rotten."

"Depends in what way you do your thinking," said Langbaine. "At present I'm thinking a good deal about the psychology of slugs, and I find 'em extraordinarily entertaining. However, come in, and make yourself at home. I've some excellent old ale for lunch, which will put the joy of life into your blood and bones."

But after putting his car into the shed behind the cottage, unpacking his bags in the bedroom above the porch, arranging a dozen medicine-bottles on the mantelshelf and a score of morbid novels on the book-shelves, Viscount Ingleton sat down to the luncheon table without an appetite, refused the old ale and swallowed a headache tablet in a tumblerful of water. Then he gave a great sigh, which seemed to come up from his brown boots, and asked the alarming question:

"What's the good of this absurd thing called life? I utterly fail to see the point of it."

Langbaine was getting through half a pint of old ale in a pewter pot which glistened like burnished silver, and when he had wiped off a little froth from his lips, he smiled cheerily into the gloomy eyes of this good-looking boy who was on the other side of the gatepost table.

"My dear lad, don't adopt that silly old pose! It's gone out long ago. Life's a jolly game if you keep your liver working and cultivate a sense of humor. . . . Let's have a look at those pills of yours."

Ingleton passed over the box with a nervous hand.

"They're pretty strong—arsenic and strychnine. I couldn't keep going without them."

"Couldn't you?" asked Langbaine amicably. "Well, supposing you have a try, just for the sport of the thing."

With a sudden flick of his finger and thumb he shot the pill-box into the middle of the old-fashioned fireplace, where some logs were burning.

"That's the best place for things like that!" he said with a smile.

Viscount Ingleton sprang up from the table with a white face and angry eyes.

"Look here, sir—I call that infernal cheek, you know."

His voice suddenly halted as there was a deep-throated bark from a shaggy old sheep-dog which had been asleep by the fireside, but now sprang up with its hair bristling and a glint of red in its eyes.

"Lie down, you silly old devil!" shouted Langbaine; "this young gentleman aint going to be frightened by your ridiculous temper. He knows perfectly well you haven't a tooth in your ugly old jaw."

To his surprise, Viscount Ingleton did not seem at all alarmed by the demonstration of a dog who was the terror of the neighborhood on account of a somewhat ferocious demeanor and an insane jealousy of his master's affections. The young man thumped him in a friendly way on the side of the head and then fondled him, so that old Bounder forgot his anger and made friends. In spite of his nervous breakdown, the boy showed pluck, and Langbaine made a mental note in his favor. But he was still angry about the loss of his drugs, and with a touch of aristocratic *hauteur* which amused Langbaine a good deal, begged him not to take such liberties again with what happened to be his private property.

"My dear chap," said Langbaine very calmly, "I don't allow my friends to take a slow poison in this cottage, and I make a hobby of putting temptation out of harm's way. Let's go and have a round of golf."

FOR a young man with a nervous breakdown, Viscount Ingleton played a remarkably fair game as far as the first five holes, and he had a strong, leisurely, graceful drive which carried his ball unerringly to the green within nice putting distance of the hole.

"Good Lord, man!" said Langbaine, "what's your handicap?"

"It used to be two," said the Viscount in a melancholy voice. "But I've gone to pieces now with my rotten nerves."

"Nerves be blowed!" said Langbaine. "I don't believe you've got a nerve in your body. I'd give my eyebrows to have a stroke like that."

Viscount Ingleton smiled gloomily.

"What's the good? It's a fool's game, anyhow."

Then he putted home in three, with a careless certainty which took Langbaine's breath away, and after heaving a deep sigh at the unutterable boredom of things, drove off the next tee with a low ball which just winged across the bunkers and settled cosily within five inches of the flag. To Langbaine's shout of approval he answered with a short, mirthless laugh and waited silently, puffing an Egyptian cigarette, with the gravity of a funeral mute, while his opponent made a bad drive and sent the ball into the rough.

At the fifth tee the young man, who had smoked his third cigarette, topped his ball badly, said "Damn," and putting his driver across his knee, broke it deliberately in half and flung the pieces over the hedge.

"Can't play for toffee!" he said with a frown.

Langbaine sat down on the sand-box and laughed until the tears came into his eyes.

"What's the joke?" asked Viscount Ingleton, lighting another Egyptian.

Langbaine did not explain the joke, but on the way home, with laughter still in his eyes, he put his hand on the young man's shoulder and spoke a few fatherly words to him.

"Look here, old man, I want you to go easy with those cigarettes of yours. How many do you smoke a day?"

"Oh, I'm very moderate," said Ingleton. "Thirty or forty, at the most."

"Well, I'm going to knock you down to five," said Langbaine. "It will be a saving in golf-clubs, as well as in tobacco. So hand over that case of yours."

Ingleton protested violently. But when he was reminded of a promise he had given to Lady Ingleton to play the game according to Langbaine's rules for at least a month, he yielded up his case.

"I shall be dead before the month's out!" he said rather piteously.

BUT the real tragedy came when he went up to his room after saying good night to Langbaine, who had been playing ragtime on his banjo as a kind of musical accompaniment to a conversation on the existence of God and the futility of life. Viscount Ingleton had confessed that he could see no sign of God anywhere, and that, as far as he was concerned, life was a senseless farce. Upon which conclusions he drew up his long legs, rose from the depths of a low armchair, nodded to Langbaine, patted Bouncer on the head and went up the wooden stairs to his room. Langbaine listened to his footsteps across the landing, heard him light his candle, open the bedroom door and tramp heavily across the polished boards. For a few moments there was silence. Then there was the sound of a sharp cry, which made old Bouncer sit up with his ears cocked.

"Hulloh!" said Langbaine in a loud, cheery voice. "Is anything the matter up there?"

Ingleton flung the door open and stood at the top of the stairs with his candlestick in a hand which trembled violently, so that the light of it flickered on his white face. He spoke in a voice of anguish and rage.

"Mr. Langbaine! For God's sake! What have you done with my medicine?"

"Your medicine?" asked Langbaine calmly. "Oh, yes, I did remove a lot of medicine bottles. I smelt the drugs in 'em and didn't like the stench."

"Give them back!" said Ingleton. "I demand to have them back! What have you done with those bottles?"

He was almost inarticulate with anger, but there was also a sound of fear in his voice.

"The bottles are all right," said Langbaine, "quite all right. They're in the scullery. But there's nothing in them. I emptied the filthy stuff down the sink, old man."

The effect of those words upon the young man at the head of the stairs was extraordinary. He gave a moan like a wounded animal, and then, letting the candlestick fall with a crash upon the topmost stair, leaned up against the wall and sobbed.

Langbaine was up the stairs in a moment, with his arm round the young man's shoulders.

"My dear lad! I'm sorry. I'm horribly sorry. But all those drugs are killing you. Pull yourself together! Show your pluck! In a few days you'll be able to do without them, and life will be full of fun again."

FOR more than a week, however, there was no fun in life for either Viscount Ingleton or Gerard Langbaine. The agony of the first night when Langbaine sat by the bedside of the young drug-victim was succeeded by days when he was sullen and silent, and moody and dispirited, so that Langbaine could not rouse him. After one or two outbursts of passionate anger against what he called Langbaine's "tyranny," he became quiescent and, indeed, strangely obedient to Langbaine's strong will and masterful spirit. He would go for long walks with the man whom he seemed to regard as his "jailer;" he would help him weed the garden; he would play cards with him in the evening; he would even listen patiently to Langbaine's fantasias on the banjo and to his stories of comedy and tragedy in the Street of Adventure. But all the time there was a look of pain in his eyes and about the lines of his mouth, and he had a habit of sighing with a quick indrawing of breath as though his spirit were in travail. At night he was restless and sleepless, and would pace up and down the floor with a white, haggard face, until, sometimes, Langbaine would go into his room and read him into a fitful slumber from which he would awake with a moan on his lips.

AT the end of a fortnight Langbaine saw the first sign of improvement. It was when young Ingleton came back from a lonely walk in the woods one afternoon, while his "jailer" was writing a chapter of his novel, for which the publishers were now clamoring. Langbaine had been a little nervous and conscience-stricken about letting the boy go off alone, and he was profoundly relieved to hear Ingleton's footsteps come up the gravel path, while old

Bounder thumped his tail on the floor and grinned a welcome.

"Well, my noble lord," said Langbaine, looking up from his papers and smiling, "had a good walk?"

"First class," said Ingleton. "It's splendid in the woods this afternoon."

Langbaine glanced at him quickly. There was a cheery note in his voice for the first time since his coming to Bramble Cottage, and—actually—there was a keen, clear light in his eyes instead of the old blank look of sullen despair. The young man seemed aware of Langbaine's penetrating silence, for he flushed a little and then confessed that he was feeling "uncommonly chirpy—for a wonder."

"That's great!" said Langbaine. He thrust the papers away, and said: "Hey ho! for a merry game of golf!"

It was a good game, and Ingleton, who borrowed Langbaine's driver, made a series of hefty hits which put Bogey to bed. He came back with a good appetite for supper, and afterwards suggested a game of dummy poker. For a young man with a nervous breakdown he bluffed with a cool assurance which not only took Langbaine's breath away but also twenty-five of his hard-earned shillings, before the candles had burned down to their sockets. It was with quite a gay laugh that Ingleton shoveled the money into the pockets of his Norfolk jacket and apologized for his own success.

"I've had all the luck to-night," he said.

Gerard Langbaine did not begrudge his own losses. Twenty-five shillings was cheap for that laughter on the lips of a boy who had come to Bramble Cottage with despair in his face. It was almost as though some miracle had worked a change in him, for he did not pace his room that night, and slept soundly for the first time.

SEVERAL times during the following fortnight Ingleton had slight relapses when he was again moody and irritable and when he vowed bitterly that he was in an intolerable position of moral bondage to Langbaine, who treated him "worse than a dog." But he was quick to apologize in a quick,

boyish, warm-hearted way for these ill-tempered words, and better than that, he showed unmistakably that he had been cured of the drug habit.

Langbaine had a sense of real triumph when at the end of the month's probation which had fulfilled the contract with Lady Ingleton, the boy asked "to stay on a bit."

Langbaine smiled and pretended to look enormously surprised.

"What! The prisoner on parole is reluctant to leave his jail?"

Viscount Ingleton blushed in a very youthful way and then gripped Langbaine's arm.

"You've been a splendid pal to me, sir, and I'm frightfully grateful. The fact is I'm a new man. I'm beginning to feel that God hasn't got a grudge against me, after all."

"Good!" said Langbaine. "That's fine, my lad. And as those lonely walks in the woods seem to agree with you, sling your hook for a couple of hours and leave me to finish the most wearisome novel that will ever exasperate Mr. Mudie's customers."

"Right-o!" said the young man, and with Bounder as his faithful companion, he went off for one of those strolls in the Buckinghamshire woodland which had helped to give him a new lease of life.

As it happened, however, Gerard Langbaine's last chapter did not run easily, and developed a deep wrinkle in his forehead. The sun was streaming onto his blotting-pad, and having a streak of paganism in him, he heard the beguiling voice of nature calling him out of doors.

"To the deuce with literature!" he said. "Let's go and have a look at life."

BUT the novelist found life rather too startling when he came face to face with it in the dusky woods a mile away from his house, where he had gone in the hope of meeting Ingleton and the honest Bounder. It was on a slope of grass on the edge of the woods by White Cross that he suddenly perceived Bounder, no longer honest, sitting with his tongue lolling out and with an idiotic grin, by the side of a young aristocrat

who had been suffering from a nervous breakdown, but who was now in vivacious conversation with a girl in a white frock and a pink sunbonnet. The sudden recognition by the dishonest Bounder of the master whom he had betrayed by treacherous concealment of strange secrets caused Ingleton and the girl to spring up in a guilty way as Langbaine approached.

Viscount Ingleton flushed to his temples but made a quick recovery as Langbaine raised his straw hat and halted, with just a perceptible elevation of his expressive eyebrows.

"Well met, sir! Let me introduce you to Miss Ella Harewood. —Miss Harewood, this is Mr. Langbaine, who looks after my mental and moral well-being."

"Not with extraordinary success," said Langbaine rather severely. But then he laughed, and took the girl's hand and bowed over it.

"There's no need of an introduction, Ingleton. Miss Harewood and I have met before, I think, at her father's cottage. But I didn't know you were a friend of the family."

"I hope to be," said Viscount Ingleton very gravely. "Miss Harewood and I met in rather an unconventional way, about a fortnight ago."

The girl spoke for the first time. She had been rather painfully embarrassed by Langbaine's sudden appearance, and a little wave of color had ebbed and flowed beneath her skin, while she kept her head bent, with a little flickering smile about her lips. But now she looked Langbaine straight in the eyes, and he was pleased with the simplicity and candor of that glance, as well as by the charm of a face which had not excited his interest when he had first seen it in the cottage of her father, a retired schoolmaster who seemed to spend most of his time in tending his roses in the front garden.

"I met Lord Ingleton in the woods," she said. "He seemed so unhappy that I had to stop and speak to him, because I was feeling almost selfishly happy that afternoon. Everything was so beautiful after the rain."

"And you cheered him up a little?" asked Langbaine, allowing just a

twinkle of a smile to creep into his eyes for a moment.

It was Viscount Ingleton who answered.

"Marvelously. I was right down in the dumps—in a regular cutthroat mood—but Ella—Miss Harewood, I mean—seemed to put everything all right. It was like meeting a fairy in the woods, if you can understand what I mean."

He laughed, as though he had spoken jestingly, but there was a queer thrill in his voice.

"I understand perfectly," said Langbaine. "But you were a selfish dog to keep the fairy princess all to yourself. Miss Harewood, would you come and have tea with both of us? I'm just as lonely as Lord Ingleton, and need cheering up by a fairy lady just as badly."

"Oh, that would be ripping!" said Ingleton with boyish enthusiasm.

But Ella Harewood shook her head.

"My father is expecting me back to tea. He would be very angry if I kept him waiting."

She laughed a little, as she added a few words with a glance at Ingleton.

"Father's anger makes a coward of me."

Then, with a wave of the hand, she fled up a path into the woods and disappeared like a fairy creature, as Ingleton had described her, between the trees.

THE boy gazed after her and drew a deep breath.

"Life's a great thing, after all," he said, in a low voice.

Langbaine took him by the arm in a comradely way. He did not want to play the "heavy father" with this young man, and he did not object to a youthful flirtation which had helped to give the lad an interest in life and to lift the pack of care off his back. Obviously the girl Ella had been the miracle which had wrought the change in him. But the flirtation must not go too far. The girl was the daughter of a middle-class schoolmaster, retired on eighty pounds a year, and Ingleton was—Viscount Ingleton of Ingleton.

"Look here, old boy," said Langbaine,

"don't you go hurting that little girl. We don't want a broken heart in this respectable village where peace has dwelt. D'you follow me?"

"I have never hurt any girl yet," said the boy rather haughtily. Then he added, with more humility.

"I've been a blighter in many ways—but not like that."

"Good," said Langbaine. "I think I can trust the honor of an Ingleton."

And yet he had a nasty shock a few nights later when he sat late in his bedroom by the open window, an hour after he had said good night to his guest, who had gone early to bed. The night was warm, and the air came through the window laden with the incense of the earth and grass. Langbaine was wakeful, and thoughtful in a vague, dreamy, subconscious way. But suddenly his senses became alert. For some time he had been watching a queer light which seemed to be blinking intermittently, like some kind of code, from a window in the village below. What window was it? It was between the church and the tall, solitary elm at the cross roads. That would be old Harewood's cottage. What was the old gentleman doing at midnight, wagging a lantern about?

Rather strange, thought Gerard Langbaine. Then he noticed that from the window next his own another light was blinking up and down with a dash-dot, dash-dot. He could see the rays streaming out into the darkness. Langbaine raised his eyebrows and smiled. So this was another little trick played upon him by a young gentleman suffering from a nervous breakdown! He was signaling to his lady-love's bedroom window. Those little flashes of light were messages of love. Langbaine whistled very softly to himself. This game was going just a little too far. It was about time that Viscount Ingleton was returned to his mamma.

SUDDENLY the lights went out, and a few moments later Langbaine heard a door creak in the passage and quiet footsteps going downstairs. Old Bouncer growled for a moment, until a voice whispered to him. In a stride Langbaine was at his own door, with

his candlestick raised, peering down into the hall, which was also the front sitting-room.

"Is there anything you want, Ingleton?"

He saw the boy turn with a start. He had a cap on, the peak of which flung a shadow across his face as he stood with his back to the table on which he had placed his candle. When he answered, his voice wasn't quite steady.

"I'm just going out for a breath of fresh air, sir. It's too hot to sleep."

Langbaine went down the stairs, and stood in front of Ingleton so that the candlelight fell upon the boy's face.

"I'm going to ask you a straight question," he said, rather gravely. "You're not going to Ella Harewood's cottage, are you?"

Viscount Ingleton hesitated. For a moment, perhaps, falsehood tempted his lips. Then he answered haughtily.

"As a matter of fact, I am. Just to say good night through the open window. . . . Any objection?"

"Yes," said Langbaine. "Lots of objections. Do you want to hear them, or do you take them for granted?"

"I should like to hear them," said Ingleton with icy courtesy.

"Number one: I don't want a scandal in the village. Number two: I don't want a girl's heart to be broken in a foolish game. Number three: while you are a guest under my roof, I expect you to obey the rules of the house, and my little whims. It is one of my whims that I don't allow any guests of mine to creep out like thieves after I have gone to bed."

He had spoken sternly, but now he put his hand on the young man's shoulder and said, very gently and winningly:

"Play the game, old chap!"

But Viscount Ingleton shrugged his shoulders and went toward the door.

"I'm sorry," he said, "but I don't think your whims are quite reasonable. Anyway, I'm going out."

"I think not," said Langbaine.

He slipped past Ingleton and stood with his back to the door.

"You will oblige me by going to bed," he said, with great courtesy.

Viscount Ingleton breathed quickly, and his eyes seemed on fire.

"Mr. Langbaine," he said quietly, "you have no possible right to keep me here a prisoner. Let me pass, sir, or I shall have to put you on one side."

Langbaine laughed. It was really too absurd.

"Have a try, old lad!" he said in a genial way.

But he was hardly prepared when Ingleton stepped back, seized a brass candlestick and raised it swiftly for a smashing blow.

Langbaine stood quite still and spoke quietly, but rather quickly.

"I wouldn't do that, if I were you."

Those quiet words disarmed the boy, in a literal way. For a moment he still held the candlestick raised, as though about to strike. Then his arm fell limp, and the candlestick dropped to the floor.

"Sorry," he said. "I didn't mean to hurt you."

Without another word he walked upstairs again and locked himself in his bedroom. Langbaine had mastered him, it seemed.

IN the morning Ingleton came down to breakfast and without reference to the scene in the night behaved politely, and as though to show that he harbored no ill feelings passed the marmalade pot to Langbaine with almost excessive courtesy.

"The fellow's a sportsman," thought Langbaine. Yet he decided to take no risks, and soon after luncheon walked down to Harewood's cottage for a little conversation with the father of the girl. He passed Ella in the passage, and though she smiled at him, it was obvious that she had been weeping. She put one hand on his arm, and whispered to him outside the sitting-room.

"Father is furious. Some of the villagers have been gossiping and telling tales. Isn't it absurd?"

"Utterly absurd," said Langbaine. "But annoying, too, don't you think?"

She laughed, rather pitifully, and put her finger to her lips as Langbaine tapped at the door and went inside the room where Mr. Harewood was reading his *Morning Post*. The old man

rose courteously, but it was clear to Langbaine that he was grievously agitated and that he had just recovered from one of those outbursts of passionate temper for which he was well known in the village, so that his daughter was pitied by her friends.

"I'm glad you have come, sir," he said. "I regret, however, that a guest of yours should have behaved in a most dishonorable and disgraceful way to my daughter."

"Hardly disgraceful," said Langbaine. "With boyish indiscretion, that is all."

"Disgraceful, sir, I repeat!" said the old gentleman, banging his hand down on the table. "They have been meeting in the woods. This young whipper-snapper lord of yours has been seen to kiss my daughter's hand. A farmer's boy reported it to the village tap-room. Good God, sir, my daughter's honor and good name have been the subject of a scandal in the village inn!"

He was furious, and yet in the midst of his rage there was also a sign of fear. The thought that a young man had been making secret love to his daughter seemed to have terrified him. He had taken his precautions, it appeared, with considerable speed. Ella was to be packed off to her aunt at Windsor that very afternoon. She had wept bitterly, but her tears had only hardened him.

Langbaine defended Viscount Ingleton's moral character, and endeavored to soothe the old gentleman's ruffled feelings, but he was glad to get away from the cottage, and relieved to know that pretty Miss Ella was to be removed from the temptation of an impossible love. Old Harewood, in spite of his rather comical rage, had done the right thing.

FOR nearly two hours before tea-time Langbaine strolled through the woods, pondering over his troubles as a private tutor and over the last chapter of a novel which would not come right. Then he struck home by a short cut, rather remorseful for having left young Ingleton so long alone.

Langbaine whistled cheerily as he came through his garden gate and said

"Hello, boy!" when old Bounder raised a sleepy head from his paws and thumped his tail on the red tiles beneath the porch.

"Ready for tea, Ingleton?" shouted Langbaine, looking up at the window of the boy's bedroom, where he was probably reading a novel.

But there was no answer from Viscount Ingleton. It was the house-keeper who came out of the hall, looking rather disturbed.

"If you please, sir, His Lordship went off in his car an hour ago. He gave me this before he went.

She held out her hand, and in the red palm of it a sovereign glistened.

"Went off in his car?" said Langbaine blankly.

"Yes sir. His Lordship packed two of his bags all by himself, and then wrote a letter to you. It's lying on the tea-table. He only laughed, in his queer way, when I begged him to wait till you came back.

Gerard Langbaine strode quickly into the sitting-room. Some foreboding of a trouble greater than had yet happened in this episode of Viscount Ingleton made his heart thump. He tore open the letter and read a few lines in a dazed way. They were clear and simple enough.

Dear Mr. Langbaine:

You once said you could trust the honor of an Ingleton, but I think you forgot those words. That was a pity, for if you had trusted me I should not have gone off with Ella without letting you know. Her father refuses to see me, and has bullied her beyond all reason. It's strange that old age is always an enemy of youth. By the time you read this, Ella and I will be miles away on the beginning of a journey which I hope will last as long as life.

Yours always sincerely,

INGLETON.

P. S.—I am grateful to you for all your kindness, though we almost came to blows last night.

GERARD LANGBAINE was always cool in moments of real crisis, and now he folded up the letter neatly and put it in his breast pocket without a trace of the nervousness with which he had opened it. Yet when he had his tea, alone, there was a curious little wrinkle in his forehead. What

in the world was he going to do? He had only an old bicycle in the shed, and it was no use chasing after a powerful car which already had an hour's start. Nor had he the least idea in which direction the runaways had gone. If he telephoned to the police and put them on the track, there would be a pretty scandal which would probably get into the half-penny papers. What should he say to Lady Ingleton, who had entrusted her son to his safe-keeping? He had made a pretty mess of things. For a young man with a nervous breakdown, Viscount Ingleton was the limit. That poor mother of his! Well, she would have to know, and the sooner the better. And so Langbaine looked up the next train and then set off for the station.

A few hours later, when he stood in Lady Ingleton's drawing-room, he would have given all his savings to avoid telling her that this boy had run off with a village schoolmaster's daughter whose honor he had compromised. How could he defend his own carelessness and the failure of his trust?

Langbaine knew that he turned a little pale when the drawing-room door opened and Lady Ingleton came in. She came forward to him with outstretched hands and a look of gladness.

"How can I thank you?" she said. "You have restored my boy to health and good spirits!"

"Did he write and tell you so?" asked Langbaine, still more of a coward because she was so gay.

Lady Ingleton was holding his hands, and she smiled into his anxious face.

"Frank is here now."

"Here?" said Langbaine.

"Yes, with that charming girl of his. They have fled for shelter to my protecting wings."

Langbaine sat down in a chair and laughed quietly.

"Well, for a young man with a nervous breakdown, that boy of yours is a masterpiece! And to think that I have been worrying myself into a fiddle-string!"

Then he sat up in the chair and asked an abrupt question.

"What are you going to do with the girl?"

"Keep her!" said Lady Ingleton. "Keep her until we can arrange the wedding. I have fallen in love with her myself, and I think poor Frank would have a relapse without her. So there's nothing else to do!"

"Well, in that case," said Langbaine, with polite sarcasm, "everything seems to be nicely arranged, and I can go back to the peacefulness of my country cottage, where I have a novel to finish."

BUT in spite of Langbaine's reluctance, Lady Ingleton prevailed upon him to stay to tea, her invitation being cordially, though a little nervously, endorsed by Viscount Ingleton, who came into the room holding Ella Harewood's hand.

"You're a pair of wicked wretches," said Langbaine, gazing at their flushed faces with mock ferocity. "I think both of you ought to be locked up as dangers to society."

"As long as we're locked up together, I shouldn't mind a brass button—not even if it were in Bramble Cottage!" said young Ingleton. Then he caught hold of Langbaine's arm and gave it something like a hug.

"You've been a splendid brick to me, sir! I'm sorry for the worry I gave you."

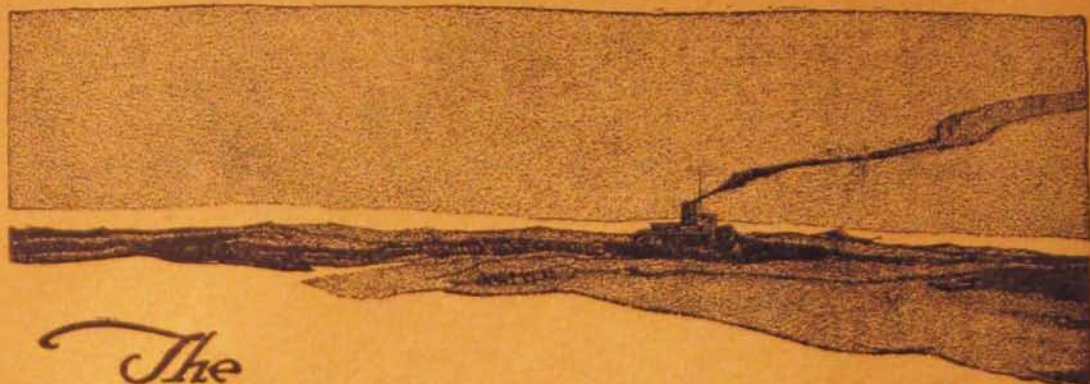
"Don't mention it!" said Langbaine, with a pretense of sarcasm. "It was a pleasure, I'm sure!"

Yet, after he had received Lady Ingleton's private thanks, a message from Ella pleading for her father's forgiveness, and a silver cigarette-case as a keepsake from a Viscount who had sworn off "Egyptians," he was glad to end an episode which had been unusually troublesome. Walking through Hyde Park on the way to his club, he met a friend of his, who happened to be myself. After the usual greeting I ventured to speak of his health.

"You're looking a bit fagged out, Langbaine. You haven't had a nervous breakdown, have you?"

He gave me a queer look.

"Yes," he said. "I've had it staying with me in my country cottage."



The
Temporary Heir
By John Fleming Wilson

Author of "The Active Director," "Emil Kunst's Strange Soul,"
"The Weak Sister," and other noted stories.

A COMPLETE RÉSUMÉ OF THE
FIRST HALF OF THIS STORY

CAPTAIN EZRA AMES, an over-man of the South Seas, dies in his cabin on a lonely island where he has been pearl-fishing. With him is Hendricks, a young American sailor. On the shore and on his schooner in the harbor are Wilks, an old sea-captain whose wife "Killer" Ames has stolen and whose spirit the dominating Ames has crushed; Peterson, who has been Ames' lieutenant; and a crew of Kanakas.

Before he dies, Ames gives to Hendricks a bag of pearls and the address of a girl in San Francisco and asks that he take her the legacy. Hendricks agrees, and feels he must carry out his promise even when he finds the pearls have lost their luster—are "dead."

Hendricks does not tell the other white men, who are drunk, of "Killer" Ames' death; instead he informs them that Ames has ordered that they sail for Honolulu next day. During the night Hendricks smuggles Ames' body aboard. And with the tide the schooner departs for Honolulu.

The alcohol in Wilks' brain inflames his old passion for revenge; sneaking to Ames' cabin, he drives a knife into "Killer's" body and believes he has killed the man. Later he kills Peterson and (Hendricks humoring him) assumes command of the ship—old Captain Wilks, freed from the over-man's domination, has become a man once more!

THE schooner makes Honolulu; and Wilks, thirsting to rehabilitate his reputation as a man among the men of the South Seas, abandons the schooner to Hendricks and goes ashore, where in the barrooms he arouses suspicion by reporting: "Well, well! Ames is dead and gone, but look who's here—Captain Billy Wilks."

Hendricks arrives in San Francisco—where the port officials, having heard by cable that Wilks has babbled of Ames' murder, confine Hendricks aboard his ship pending an investigation. Hendricks escapes, and with the pearls in his belt goes to find Susan Mathews, legatee of "Killer" Ames.



HENDRICKS went up the broad, low steps to the great bronze doors with an awkwardness due to long habit in leaping up ships' ladders with their steep treads. At the top he was puzzled to find the bell, discovering it at last within a circle deeply carved in the stone lintel. He pushed it and turned to look at the bay. In the distance he saw Angel Island and the *Empress*, with the yellow flag still flying at the truck. Then the door opened and he faced it to inquire of a staid manservant if Miss Mathews was at home.

The man nodded slightly, but said nothing. Hendricks found himself surprised that he had the right address. Somewhere in the back of his mind he had had a suspicion that Susan Mathews was a figment of Ames' imagination, and to find her really living at the given address startled him. But he recovered quickly and said: "Will you tell her it's Captain Hendricks calling? From Captain Ames, please."

"Ah!" said the servant, drawing back. "If you will step in, I will ask if Miss Mathews is at home."

Hendricks entered and was ushered promptly into a little room off the reception-hall. It was bare and evidently a place of business. He began to feel that very likely his errand was to be purely a cold, matter-of-fact transaction without a tinge of romance to it. Then the heavy curtain across the doorway was lifted quickly, and he was face to face with a young woman who was saying, "Is this the gentleman from Captain Ames?" in a low tone.

"I'm Captain Hendricks," he answered. "Captain Ames asked me to call."

"Yes?" she suggested.

He looked at her and flushed. She was a tall, well-made girl, dressed in a style that set off to advantage a fine figure and carriage; she was extremely handsome, with an expressive and whimsical mouth. But her eyes were as chill as a mountain lake.

To Hendricks it seemed as if everything he had experienced in his life of many vicissitudes was commonplace beside meeting such a woman; he had not known that the world he had left so many years ago held such distinctive and splendid figures. His first clear thought was: I must have known girls like her when I was young. His second ran differently: There never has been anyone like her. He felt out of his element and shy. But instead of proceeding gently about his mission, he came straight to the point.

"Ames didn't have much time to explain matters to me," he said, staring at his own rough hands. "He died very suddenly."

In the stillness he slowly raised his eyes, wondering why she did not speak. He saw her face, and its expression baffled him. Was it possible that she did not understand? Of course, such as she would care little for a rough customer like Ames; but surely she would be surprised—disappointed, maybe. And what *was* that strange look on her face?

PRESENTLY she rose, turned away and went to the window. She stood there in immobility, without speaking. Hendricks began to fear that he had really hurt her; it might be that she liked Ames—or was a relative.

"He never spoke of you," she said at last.

"Quite likely," he admitted, much relieved that she wasn't offended at him. "We weren't intimate. But when he died, I was with him, and I couldn't do much less than listen to his last wishes, could I? There was no one else."

"Then he sent a message?"

"It may be a message," Hendricks answered doubtfully. "Possibly it is. As a matter of fact, you see, he didn't tell me to tell you anything. He only sent you something. So far as I recollect, he didn't actually mention anything in the way of a message."

"No letter?"

"No. He died suddenly, unexpectedly to himself, I think, Miss Mathews. By chance I was with him when he was taken sick. He realized that he

was dying and merely asked me to bring his vessel and other things to San Francisco to you."

She turned her face to him, and he perceived that she was very calm. "The schooner, you say? What else?"

Hendricks slipped one hand into a side pocket and drew out the cigarette-case. "They are in this," he said, offering it.

She glanced at the tarnished silver and then met Hendricks' eyes. "And he—he told you nothing about me?"

"He never mentioned your name in the two years that I knew him," he replied.

"You knew him well!" she affirmed quietly. "He chose you from among many."

He stared at her in increasing bewilderment and then looked at the cigarette-case, as if it held something he had not discovered in it. He said curtly: "I was with him, to be sure. But we weren't intimate, at all. As I said, I was the only man available."

"He died at sea?"

"On shore, on an island in the Stranger group."

"Where were the rest?" she demanded. "Weren't they there too?"

"The others?" he said blankly. "Only a couple of white men—Wilks and Peterson."

She shook her head slightly. "They—they knew he died?" Before he could answer, she had taken the case; he saw her slender fingers tremble over it. Then she looked up at him, and he saw growing distress in her eyes that had been so cold. He was embarrassed, but stammered a reply.

"They—they didn't know," he said.

Now she was facing him with an intense expression of pain on her face, mingled with one of dread. "Are you sure—are you certain—that he is—not alive—still?"

Hendricks suddenly was aware that she cared terribly. After all, she hoped! He perceived the tragedy of it all, and bowed his head. "I was with him when he died," he responded in a low tone. "I believe that is all. The schooner is over at quarantine, and from what I understand, there is some irregularity in the papers, something

done against port regulations. I thought best to leave secretly and come to you immediately. I thought possibly you might not—possibly you wouldn't care to be mixed up—in an irregular affair."

"What was it?" she asked quickly.

"I'm not sure. From what was hinted, I think Wilks—an old fellow who didn't like Captain Ames—spread some foolish report in Honolulu."

"About my husband?"

"Your husband?" he repeated in a puzzled tone.

"Captain Ames," she answered.

HE forced himself to look at her still face. He was bitterly disappointed—just why he did not know. So this was the mystery in the life of Killer Ames! His wife! For the first time he understood a little of the enormous growth which springs from the root of a single tragedy. Why hadn't some one killed Ames before he had accomplished the vilest act of his despicable existence? It was incredible that he should have been suffered to crown his bestial villainy by winning the heart of the splendid girl who now stood silent and tearless in this little bare room on Steiner Street.

"If I had known," he muttered, "—or suspected—"

She nodded slightly; then, as if to spare him further pain at his blunt breaking of such news, she murmured: "I got a divorce long ago. Our marriage was a mistake." She paused a moment and then continued: "He never mentioned me?"

"Never. Even at the last he said no name—merely told me I should find an address in the log-book."

"How did you know—were there no other addresses?"

"None."

She sighed. "It was like him. If he had set his mind on a thing being so, he never admitted that it was not so, even to himself. It was like him to write down the address of the one woman who—who hated him, and let the world think she loved him."

Hendricks drew a long breath. "I hated him," he said quietly.

"Exactly. And yet he knew you

would come all these thousands of miles, on a useless errand, just as if you were his warmest friend and would do anything for him. You obeyed him, even against your will!"

"I suppose so," Hendricks replied hesitatingly. "Ames was a man used to having what he wanted. But in this case I merely did the decent thing, nothing more."

"I'm glad he sent you and not—one of his friends," she said simply.

They stood in silence, sharing an intimacy for a moment, neither one free to say more than had been said. Mrs. Ames (or Miss Mathews) presently opened the cigarette-case, without haste. As she looked at its contents, Hendricks was amazed to see her fine eyes grow misty—two tears flow down her cheeks.

"Ah!" she breathed. "Pearls! And like everything else he ever won, they died in his possession. It was his fate, wasn't it?—to kill what he loved."

"I don't think he knew they were—spoiled," he ventured gently.

She looked at him through suffused eyes. "How could he help knowing? Yet—it is like him, to send them as if they were precious. It is his message to me."

She cried softly a little, while Hendricks stared into vacancy, unwillingly seeing again the austere figure of Killer Ames, dying in a rough shanty on a desert isle, sending dead pearls as a last legacy to the woman he loved. A message? Possibly she was right, and Ames had spoken no word of farewell at the end of his lawless life but had, stubbornly silent, still seen to it that she received the sum of his rapine and robbery—lusterless, valueless nacre.

There was nothing to say under such circumstances. His errand was done. He stepped back and laid one hand on the curtain. Mrs. Ames looked at him a moment, and her stormy eyes bade him farewell. Feeling that every second that he remained put him more firmly in the position of the bearer of a taunt and an insult, he passed out.

The cabman drew the blanket off his horse and whispered huskily: "Where now, sir? Downtown?"

Hendricks glanced down at the bay

below the hill, glimmering in the last rays of the setting sun. He was a stranger, with no place to go.

"The ferry," he said at a venture.

Back amid the throng of home-going folks, he realized that very likely he was in quest by the authorities for his lawless evasion from the schooner, and passed through the first gate, buying a ticket without asking whither it would take him. He found himself on the Sausalito boat. As good as any!

THAT night George Hendricks signed his full name for the first time in two years—twice. When he had registered and been shown to a room high up in the rambling hotel on the hill above the bay, he opened the worn leather belt and extracted the old draft for two thousand dollars, which had been given him as payment for a cargo of curios landed in Sydney, and endorsed it. As he did so, it occurred to him again that Killer Ames must have been struck with some qualms over the fashion in which he had obtained the money, and put the paper aside for further consideration.

"At any rate," he thought, "I'm not broke. Gottal will cash it for me." He recalled the alert, nervous figure of the ship-broker who had financed his early voyages. Gottal was a good sort—a crank on queer curios, a little prone to preening himself over his connoisseurship, but a readily kind man and understanding the oddities of human nature almost as well as he did the queer things in which he dealt. He had picked up Hendricks in a pawnshop, where the bargain was over a sextant. Their conversation had been brief and to the point.

"I beg pardon," Gottal had said after a moment's impatient listening to the pawnbroker's eulogy of the battered instrument; "I have a better sextant at my office, Captain."

Hendricks remembered distinctly the respectful way in which the man behind the counter had nodded and withdrawn the offered article with an apologetic smile. "Ah, Mr. Gottal!" he had said, shaking his head, "you have spoiled a bargain for this young man."

"Nonsense!" Gottal had answered curtly. "He knows better than to take that thing. Come on, Captain; we'll go to my office." Then he had turned to the broker with a brief, "Keep your eyes open for what I asked you for, Levi," and led the way out on Kearney Street.

"My place is on Commercial," he had said, and they walked silently down to a small dusty office on that street.

"Here's the sextant, Captain," the ship-broker had said, handing down a case.

"Brand new," Hendricks had commented.

"Sure. What ship have you?"

"None. Going as mate of the *Mercy Fellows*."

"Nonsense! Go skipper of the *Bertie Minor*—my schooner—Papua."

"Rum folks, the Papuans," Hendricks had remarked.

"You'll go?"

"Sure," said Hendricks.

He had made three voyages in the vessel. A nice packet, she was, too! he thought. And he had left her only when Gottal had announced that he had sold her, with the dry remark: "She's getting too well known in the South Seas. I'll pick up an Eastern craft pretty soon, Hendricks. Wait a month or two."

The event was that Hendricks had grown weary of waiting and shipped West on a steamer after a farewell call on Gottal, who had shaken his head and snapped: "All right! You'll be around this way some time. I'll have something for you."

So now Hendricks said to himself that he must see Gottal and ask for the "something" promised so long ago. He could explain to the broker a good many things about Killer Ames which few others would understand. Also Gottal would square matters with the authorities. It was all simple enough: to-morrow he would settle the business and soon be outward bound again. Ames' affair was finished, so far as concerned him; let the widow—

AT this point Hendricks' thoughts traveled back over the afternoon's events. He saw himself entering the

big mansion on the hill and asking for Miss Mathews. He felt again the thrill he had experienced when she had appeared, so beautiful and so cold, so exquisite and so fine. Then there was his own blunder in telling outright of Ames' death and his subsequent amazement at finding he was speaking to the Killer's wife. Well, who could have suspected it? A big house, servants at the door—no one would have dreamed of finding Ames' woman in such surroundings.

Suddenly Hendricks went to the window of his little room and stared out on the bay, starred with scattered lights. A new thought had struck him. One certainly did grow ignorant down under the Equator! He had naturally taken it for granted that Miss Mathews was the mistress of the Steiner Street house. Why? Merely because she had looked it. But she could not have been, especially in view of the fact that she had received him in what was evidently a bare business office. She was a maid, a servant. And this explained a tremendous amount—her quietness, her restrained manner, her apparent dread of becoming excited by his news. She was a servant, afraid of disturbing her mistress or intruding her own affairs into a household which knew her impersonally.

"My word!" he said aloud to himself. "Of course! And it makes it clear how Ames got acquainted with her. She was a pretty servant, and he married her. Probably she thought herself lucky to become the wife of a man who was master of a ship."

This settled to his satisfaction, he decided that he hadn't done all that was necessary. Mrs. Ames—or Miss Mathews, as she was known to her employer—couldn't be expected to know how to proceed in business matters. She would need some one to tell her about things, and guide her through the intricacies of legal forms and maritime regulations. Very possibly she had no male relatives at hand. She was undoubtedly without money, except what she earned in her menial capacity. Ames was a brute, anyway, sending worthless pearls to a wife who had had to go to work to

support herself. No wonder she had shown dread at the thought of not having even an absent husband from whom to hope for help.

At this point Hendricks smiled bitterly at himself. "I'll do it," he resolved. "But what would my people say? It would strike them as the last step in my depravity—to stand friend to a serving-maid." He scowled, undutifully committing his family to limbo. "What did they ever do for me?" he demanded of the night. "Took somebody's say-so that I had disgraced them, and threw me out on my own."

At first he decided to write Miss Mathews a letter, assuring her of his intent to help her. Then this seemed a poor way to do the thing; anyway, how was he to get an answer? With the police hunting for him, as he had little doubt they were, he must be on the move. Why not go and see her again?

HE was up and on his return to San Francisco by breakfast-time. He had mentally arranged the day's program and doggedly started out as he had planned. His first call was on Gottal, for whom he had to wait an hour. The broker shook hands without expressing surprise and led the way into a small inner room.

"I take it you are the chap who killed Captain Ames," Gottal said briefly.

"No such luck," Hendricks returned, handing over the draft. "I brought his old packet up to the Coast after he died down on one of the Strangers."

"This draft is more'n two years old," the broker continued, examining the paper.

"Sure. I didn't have any need for the coin."

"Lucky man. I suppose you want me to cash it for you, when the police are looking for you?"

"Yes," Hendricks replied. "Let 'em look. I didn't kill Ames."

"Who did?"

"Nobody. He was struck with paralysis. Died in an hour."

Gottal frowned. "But you skipped away from the *Empress* without waiting for leave."

"Of course I did," Hendricks

responded. "The fools! Everybody knows what an ass old Wilks is. When I heard that he was yarning down in Honolulu, I saw that there was no use arguing the matter. I had business ashore and I came ashore."

"Exactly," the broker assented. "And now they think you're the murderer. It's jail for you if they catch you."

"No chance," Hendricks boasted. "Just let me have that cash and settle up a little affair here and I'm off again. They'll find out quick enough that Papa Wilks was drunk and didn't know what he was talking about."

Gottal refused to lose his serious demeanor. "You are in great danger of your neck, my dear sir," he expostulated. "I'll give you the money and carry the draft till some English advices come in and cash it with them, as if I had got it from London. But—may I ask what this 'little affair' is?"

"About Ames' wife," Hendricks returned.

"Ahem! I didn't know he had one."

"It seems he did. And she's helpless and I'm going to help her get her rights. I don't know that there's much for her in the whole outfit, from what I've seen of it. But she's entitled to what there is."

"Have you known her long?" inquired the broker, darting his eyes at everything on his desk as if in quest of a morsel of common sense to be instantly offered his visitor.

"Never knew there was a Mrs. Ames till yesterday." Hendricks briefly explained the events which had led to his being almost thrust into the position of executor of the Killer's last will and testament. "So," he concluded, "I looked up the address in the old man's log-book and went ashore during the night and next day called on Susan Mathews."

Gottal stiffened in his chair. "What name?"

"Susan Mathews," Hendricks repeated. "At 4847 Steiner Street."

"You're crazy, Captain," the broker announced dogmatically. "Do you know who Miss Susan Mathews is?"

"I do," was the curt reply. "It's

nothing against her that she married Ames. In fact, she got a divorce. And because she works for her living up in that big house merely means that she's too proud to live off that brute's money—if he has any, which I doubt!"

GOTTAL laughed queerly, stared at his caller a moment and then pushed the button for a clerk, who poked his head in questioningly.

"Maury, go to the bank and get me two thousand dollars in gold, small gold," came the command. When the clerk had vanished, Gottal swung on Hendricks. "I've got a schooner loaded for Midway Island, Captain. You can have her, if you'll sail to-night."

"Thanks!" Hendricks replied stiffly. "I may take you up this afternoon."

"Why not this morning?"

"I've got to go up and see Miss—Mrs. Ames again, on Steiner Street."

"She—she told you she was a maid there?" Gottal asked quietly.

"No. But she must be, from all that I saw. Naturally, she isn't boasting of having been Ames' wife. She goes by the name of Miss Susan Mathews."

"She does, does she? Well, young man, my offer holds good till this afternoon—if you aren't in jail before that time. And if I were you, I'd just keep quiet about Miss—er—Mrs. Ames. Your story sounds all right to me, but then! I'm famous for believing things that aren't so. Here comes your money. You'll need it."

Hendricks stowed the heavy mass of coin into his pockets without counting it. Then he shook hands with the broker. "I know what you think," he said abruptly. "You fancy I'm traveling around with slaveys and nursemaids. Well, I don't seem to be very much of a person, but I'll tell you one thing: and that is that Miss Mathews is a lady, and I'm not a bit ashamed of knowing her. Hard luck comes to the best of us."

Gottal shook hands warmly. "You're right, Captain," he said gravely. "It does. And nobody knows what a queer world this is till they start believing the things that nobody thinks could be true. Be sure and let me hear from you this afternoon." As Hendricks opened the

door, the broker followed him to say in a low voice: "If I can be of any service to—er—Miss Mathews, I'll gladly act. But quietly, of course!"

"Understood!" Hendricks agreed and departed.

Gottal sat alone in his office for a long period, staring at the dusty ceiling. Then he picked up the morning papers and carefully read the brief news about the arrival of the *Empress*, the secret escape of her unknown skipper and the cabled dispatch from Honolulu stating that it had been reported that Captain Ames had been slain at sea and his body thrown overboard while the mutineers sailed the schooner to Honolulu, but took fright there and set sail again, leaving on shore the single passenger, Captain W. Wilks, who was very ill but had intimated enough about the tragedy to warrant the officials in instituting a sea-wide search for the alleged murderer, one Hendricks, who was also charged with slaying Ames' loyal mate, Peterson. The papers ended their stories with the statement that the authorities were convinced that it had been Hendricks who brought the *Empress* into San Francisco.

"A pretty muddle!" groaned Gottal. "And of all the people in the world to be mixed up in—Susan Mathews!"

Later he addressed his clerk: "Maury, the *Orchis* will sail to-night. The man you saw in my office will take her. Don't make the transfer of masters at the Custom House till I tell you. And don't breathe a word about anything to anybody! Not a blessed word!"

"I know that was Hendricks," Maury replied in an aggrieved tone.

"The deuce you do!" was the tart reply. "But there are a million things you don't know and never shall."

Presently Gottal again spoke to Maury. "By the way, if you happen to be sure that a thing *isn't* so, for heaven's sake don't tell it. Ten to one it's exactly the fatal truth."

HENDRICKS arrived before the Steiner Street house in mid-afternoon. The sun was still hidden by rolling clouds of fog; the avenue was a

gloomy channel through which slow carts and carriages found their way under the sullen guidance of chill and dispirited drivers. To a man whose blood had been long warmed by the blaze of the tropics, the scene was unutterably distasteful. Hendricks shivered in his light clothes and regretted the overcoat still on the *Empress*. When he rang the bell, the same manservant received him—but this time ushered him into a room quite differently furnished from the one he remembered as the scene of his first interview with Miss Mathews. A bright coal fire was in the grate, and various articles about showed that it was intimately tenanted by a woman. Almost before he had determined to seat himself, Mrs. Ames came in.

"I expected you," she said quietly. "I thought you wouldn't be afraid to come."

"No," he answered. "Why should I?"

"Didn't you see the papers?" she demanded. "There is trouble over the *Empress*. They say my—Captain Ames was murdered with his mate, and that you have fled."

"That's old Papa Wilks talking down in Honolulu," Hendricks answered, flushing hotly. "I told you that there seemed to be some trouble over some irregularity in the ship's papers. That was why I came ashore right away to see you."

"Then you didn't see either to-day's or yesterday's newspapers?"

"I did not. Too busy—not interested, anyway."

"Tell me exactly what happened," she said briefly, sitting down.

AT this Hendricks glanced around him in some perplexity. "I will. Wont somebody disturb us here—the people of the house?"

She shook her head impatiently. "Please go on."

"It's not a long story. I wonder whether you could understand it."

"If you mean can I understand somebody wanting to kill Captain Ames? I may reply that I was his wife—for three months."

"It isn't like you to be bitter," he

returned simply. "That is why I fancied it would be hard to make you comprehend just how things were, and believe my story."

"I'll believe you," she answered. "Only, please get ahead with it. Yesterday I was so stunned to hear that he was dead, actually gone forever, that I couldn't seem to think of anything else. Now I must know more."

"I didn't kill him," Hendricks said slowly, "—though he robbed me of my schooner and took my money and made me join him. I never felt really ugly towards him, Mrs.—"

"Miss Mathews," she corrected crisply.

"And as a matter of fact, no one caused his death," he went on. "He was paralyzed during the night, I think. I found him dying, in the morning. He was dead before either Wilks or Peterson knew he was sick."

"How comes this report from Honolulu that Captain Ames was murdered?"

"If you will listen, I'll tell you all about it," he answered earnestly. "As I told you, Ames took my schooner away from me by getting me into Dutch waters and then leaving me to fight it out with a Dutch gunboat. I was in forbidden seas, and as I had pearls and shell aboard which I couldn't have proved came from unforbidden regions, I stood to be captured and imprisoned. Then Ames came along and offered to save me from prison if I turned everything over to him. I did. He left me broke, with the choice of starving or joining him. I took the easiest way out of a bad mess and went with him, though I gave him to understand that I didn't consider him above the level of a robber."

"I beg your pardon," said Miss Mathews, "but where did you say you came from?"

"I didn't say. Well, some years before that, Captain Ames had had a set-to with Billy Wilks. Wilks had a hard name, ran a hard ship and was generally known as a bad customer. His quarrel with Ames was over—it was a personal affair."

Miss Mathews lifted her cloudless eyes. "A woman, of course."

"Mrs. Wilks," Hendricks muttered. "And Captain Wilks?"

"He went insane. That's the truth of the matter. He had to give in; it was too much for him. But Ames laughed at people who told him old Billy was dangerous, and took him along with him after he—he had punished him. I used to think he wanted Wilks to start something with him—was curious to know what the old fellow would do if he ever got his nerve up again."

"And what did he do?"

"You wont understand me when I say that Captain Ames had the upper hand of all of us. There was nothing Wilks could do. Ames had completely cowed him. Then there was Peterson, you see, always behind Ames."

"And Peterson? Did I understand that he is dead too?"

HENDRICKS solemnly nodded. "I'll make it short. This was Ames' last voyage, so he told me. He said several times that he was going to quit the South Seas. But just before this voyage was done, he takes sick and dies, telling me to take the schooner and the pearls up to you.

"You see the quandary I was in? Ames was dead in a shanty, and Peterson and Wilks, a hard couple to handle in the best of times, didn't know it. Wilks would fly right off the handle when he learned his old enemy was gone, and Peterson was plain brute. So I played Ames against them, fooled them about his death, got the body off to the ship at night, pretended the Captain was sleepy and cross, and got to sea. I figured that I could manage some way of getting rid of Peterson and Wilks; then the schooner and the money would be mine, which it seemed to me it rightfully was. Then I'd have been free again. But before I could make my plans, Wilks runs amuck, sneaked down into the cabin and thought he killed the skipper. See? It looked like he—or some one else—had really committed murder. Wilks didn't know the man was already dead; nor did Peterson. I had no witnesses to my story that Ames died on the island. I knew that those two men

would swear my life away. So I let Wilks kill Peterson."

"Then this Wilks still thinks—"

"That he killed them both." Hendricks suddenly caught himself up and glanced apologetically at her. "Excuse me for speaking so plainly. I told you you wouldn't understand! How could you, when you hadn't been on that ship for months and years, with Killer Ames always making a faint noise somewhere and what few strangers you happened on grinned at you in a superior manner? I tell you that when the old man thought he'd done murder, I hadn't the heart to disabuse him. It sounds awful to you; but—that was the only mercy ever shown on that craft."

"Mercy?" she said wonderingly.

"Mercy," he repeated firmly. "Papa Wilks had dreamed of the day when he'd do that and I—I was merciful and didn't spoil his fun at the last. And after all, what was it to me?"

"Yes!" she breathed. "That's the question everybody is asking, will ask: What was it to you?"

"Nothing at all!" he answered. "I see what you mean, of course. In a way, it worked out to my advantage."

"And you say you 'allowed' this crazy old man to murder Mr. Peterson, the mate?"

WITH a comical gesture of despair, Hendricks threw his hands palm upward. "I said you wouldn't see how it was, how it all worked out as it must." He looked about the comfortable room. "Of course you couldn't. Here you are, quite comfortable, and working, I dare say, for nice folks. I'll warrant Captain Ames is pretty much of a dream to you, though you say you were his wife. How could you understand Papa Wilks?"

She leaned forward, and he saw a great gentleness in her expression. The formerly cold eyes were warm, glowing. "Maybe I understand better than you think," she told him, her chin on her cupped palms. "Poor man! And they are hunting for you high and low as a murderer."

"It seems likely they are," he said, rising. "And I mustn't embarrass you

any more. What would your employers say if they found you had a caller who was liable to be hanged?"

She laughed and rose with a nervous movement which he could not interpret. For a little while she gazed out of the window at the fog and said nothing. When she turned to him again, he saw a strange flush on her cheeks. She seemed younger.

"You saved me," she said quietly. "The least I can do is to repay you by saving you in turn."

"I saved you?" he questioned with incredulity in his tone.

"Yes. I thought I was forever in that man's power."

"I didn't kill him," he said dully.

"You don't understand, Captain Hendricks. Listen to me a moment: You see this house? All mine. I'm rich. I have always been rich."

He glanced at her oddly. "I took you for a maid here."

"Why?"

He puzzled over the answer and conceded frankness. "I didn't see how you could have met and married Ames if you were—well, not a foolish but good-looking servant. Captain Ames wasn't exactly the man who, I'd fancy, would impress a woman like you."

She laughed shortly. "I accept the criticism, but I'll explain. I was barely twenty when I met him. He was at a dinner at a friend's house. He was introduced to me as an explorer, a man who had had tremendous adventures all over the world. You know what a man he was. I came under his spell and ran away with him. I came back to this—to my own home. He was a fiend. Yet he didn't follow me, nor try to get me back. It was his way. He simply ignored me, as if we had never been married. It was his devilish scheme of never setting me free. He disappeared. I got a divorce. My marriage had been secret, and nobody except a very few knew of either that or of the divorce that followed. So I was free again, I thought. What a mistake! I knew he was still alive, somewhere, that some time he would come in and look at me and tell me to come back to him. And I should have gone to him, Captain. He was

that kind of a man. I lived in horror. I was always thinking of him.

"And twice he sent word: both times it was just as if he had gone overnight and would be back in the afternoon. Every day I trained myself to meet him coldly and drive him from me. But at the bottom of my heart I felt helpless. Then you came. I didn't believe you when you said he was dead. I set it down as another cruelty of *his*—what he would call discipline!"

HENDRICKS did not like her smile of self-derision. "You had better not say any more," he muttered soothingly.

"But now I am free," she went on, heedless of his distress. "I know you spoke the truth. He is dead. He can never walk in and stare at me out of his cold eyes and make me his slave again. I'm free!"

So extraordinary was her last gesture that Hendricks looked at her, appalled. He felt impelled to say:

"You would have killed him yourself!"

"If that could have bought my liberty. But then I'd have had to fear death—for he would be there."

"And yet you shed tears," he said heavily.

"It is true," she sobbed.

"Papa Wilks was right, then," he muttered. "He said: 'Some woman will miss him.'" He turned his disconsolate face to the window. His being stirred with a new and poignant emotion. He did not venture to glance at her longer.

His attitude and the words he quoted affected Mrs. Ames strangely. She choked back her sobs and composed herself. Then a new, swift tenderness enveloped her.

"You saved me," she said in a low voice. "You knew nothing about me, but you came thousands of stormy miles and risked your own liberty to make sure that I got my rights. You brought me pearls, not knowing that you brought me a thing of infinitely greater value, my freedom from terror and dread and shame. Now—"

"Now I'm going away," he said in a strained tone.

"No!" she protested quickly. "They will catch you. Can't you understand that there is a hue and cry for you? Haven't you told me yourself that you have no witnesses? and that Wilks has a terrible grudge to satisfy? that he will be wild to clear himself at your charge? There is only one thing that can save you now."

Hendricks rose and squared his bulky shoulders. Now he knew what this strange emotion was that held him in thrall. He must never cost any woman so heavily as Ames had cost this one. The Killer was gone—utterly gone from the life of this girl. No other man with impure hands and stained conscience should take his place, even in the slightest degree. He, Hendricks, would and must protect her. He looked calmly down into her splendid eyes and smiled.

"You mustn't be mixed up with any more of us," he said. "As you say, you are free. It wouldn't do for you to be mixed up in this business—a lady like you. If they came here after me—if anyone suspected that you were once Ames' wife—it would be horrible."

"Where are you going?" she demanded.

"Down to the police-station," he answered.

"But why? What will you say?"

AGAIN he smiled confidently, reassuringly. "Why, I'll just tell 'em I did kill Ames and stand pat on that."

"But you didn't kill him!"

"That's true," he said, "just as true as that Papa Wilks didn't, either. But if I'd known you, I'd have killed him. See? We can't get away from that, can we?"

"And you will go down and be put in jail and tried for a murder you didn't commit, and be hanged, just because—oh, what nonsense!"

"It isn't nonsense," he said with firm quietness. "Don't you know that you will be mixed up in this pretty soon, unless they stop searching? They'll discover you were his wife, which you have kept a secret, and they'll heap scandal on you, and make a witness out of you. Now, if they have me, I'm the only man that knows anything about

the affair, and I can keep a tight mouth and you never say a word, and somehow I'll pull through with nobody a mite the worse. No one'll suspect you of being connected with the matter, or with Ames, or me, in any way."

She stared at him with wide eyes, scanning his face, scrutinizing every movement of his lips. When he had done, she sighed. "I never thought I would do it," she said enigmatically. "Much less suppose I'd be glad to!"

"Do what?" he questioned.

"A very simple thing," she responded. "You say you aren't known here?"

"Only by one or two people."

"Would they—tell?"

Hendricks recalled Gottal's nervous figure and alert countenance. He shook his head. "No, they wouldn't tell."

"Then we shall get along famously. You must do exactly as I ask you this afternoon. It's a simple little way out of this matter. I want your promise that you will do precisely what I ask you to, and say exactly what I tell you to."

"Will it mix you up in this?" he demanded.

"If you do what I say, there won't be any 'this' or 'that' by to-night. I want your promise, Captain."

He hesitated long, wondering at the reason of her eagerness to bind him by his word of honor. He decided that she had some scheme that would not matter either way. Her lovely pleading deserved a reward. He promised: "Honor bright!"

"Wait here a moment," she said swiftly. "No—I'll ring."

THE manservant appeared. "Judkins, have the carriage around in five minutes. Tell Cicely to bring my hat and coat and gloves."

Hendricks surveyed his own coarse clothes with a flicker of amusement in his eyes. "I'm hardly dressed to go out with you."

"You do look as if you were just back from the uttermost seas. So much the better! Ah, here's Cicely."

Curiously he watched the delicate fashion in which Mrs. Ames garbed herself for the street, with the elderly

maid's assistance. It struck him as altogether an experience to be allowed to witness it. Then Judkins entered and performed his part in the ritual. He observed that the man was extremely grave and once or twice looked at his mistress appealingly. She responded by a faint, kind smile.

"You probably think me an awful fool for taking you for your maid," he remarked as they went down to the carriage.

"How should you know?" she returned. "You gave me a very good excuse at the time."

"I've had a chance to compare you with the real article," he said with a certain grimness.

Within half an hour the carriage had threaded the foggy streets, descended into the lower city and rolled down Market Street to a high office-building. Hendricks followed his companion into the lobby and was about to ask a question when she laid one hand gently on his arm.

"Remember," she whispered. "You have promised me!"

In the elevator he pondered the nature of their errand, and gave it up. He resolved that he would take care not to let her compromise herself.

They were received in the first room of what seemed a large suite by a young clerk who ushered them on and into a large room occupied by a gray-haired man; it struck Hendricks that he had never before seen a man so completely and distinctly elderly without being old. He jumped up, quite youthfully, holding out both hands to Mrs. Ames.

"I'm glad to see you, Susan," he said cordially. "I saw the story in the papers this morning—" He glanced at Hendricks and was silent.

"About Captain Ames' schooner turning up without him," she finished, putting up her veil. "Yes, that's what brought me here. I told the Captain here I would explain it. You never met Captain Ames, did you, Judge?"

"Never," he remarked with a second careless glance at Hendricks. "Unless I had helped you—" Again he stopped.

"Unless you had helped me get a divorce, you'd never have known he existed, is what you intended to say.

The Captain here—you may as well not beat about the bush, Judge."

"As sure as my name is Barrett, Susan, I always considered Captain Ames as a myth. The Captain here will excuse me for speaking so frankly, as I suppose he knows about it."

MISS MATHEWS swallowed, flushed and cast down her eyes. "He ought to," she said slowly. "Judge Barrett, let me introduce Captain Ames. Captain Ames, this is Judge Barrett, who—got our divorce."

The lawyer flushed, too, in anger. His shrewd eyes met Hendricks' with a cold sharpness that could be felt. "So you've turned up at last?"

Hendricks was about to respond with an equally chill protest against being identified wrongfully, when he caught his companion's warning glance. He was silent. The attorney sat down, as if feeling more secure that way, and there was absolutely no cordiality in his tone as he said curtly: "Well, what is the business for this morning, Susan?"

"I see by the papers that there has been a report that Captain Ames—my husband—was killed down in the South Seas. He tells me that the rumor is due to the idle talk of a man who is crazy."

"Evidently," was the dry response.

"And so I told him we had better get the matter settled right away. So I brought him here."

"Simple enough, in one way," Judge Barrett replied, scowling. "If he's alive and well, that is enough for the Government. No *corpus delicti*, naturally. But"—here he swung his chair round so that he faced Hendricks—"you will allow me to tell you that I don't admire your fashion of turning up here, Captain. It looks to me like a plain case of plotting to get your former wife mixed up in your affairs again. Understand me right here: she is absolutely divorced from you (I saw to that) and you have no claim on her, on her sympathy or on her fortune. I honestly believe you set the stage this way, and have worked on her feelings. There is just one consideration which influences me to go ahead and stop the Government's

search for you, and that is the fact that this fine woman here hasn't a single honorable soul in this world to look after her interests unselfishly, and I'm going to still do my best for her, even to saving your worthless self from an investigation which would doubtless uncover more sins than you care to have made public and for which you might be held answerable."

His tirade was interrupted by a husky, "Please don't!" from Mrs. Ames. The Judge gave her one glance of pity and continued, looking hard at Hendricks.

"Miss Mathews (thank God the court gave her back her own honest name!) told me enough about you for me to judge you. You may impose on poor wretches in the coral islands, but right here in San Francisco your bluff doesn't go. —Susan, be quiet! —Now I'll tell you exactly how far I'll go. I'll tell the United States District Attorney that you are alive and I've seen you and that the report from Honolulu is a canard. That'll make him drop the matter instantly. Then I'll take up the formal complaint against your schooner of violating port regulations and settle that. All this I do on one single condition, and that is that you never breathe to a soul that you ever had the honor of being this lady's husband, that you leave the city immediately and that you don't ask her for, or accept from her, a solitary red cent! Do you understand?"

DURING this speech, delivered in a low voice with an intensity of utterance that seemed born of an almost uncontrollable inward emotion, Hendricks had been first astounded, then wrathful, then vigilant; at the end of it he made up his mind that he couldn't at this late stage go back on his word given to Miss Mathews. He must play up! Just as he had smiled at Killer Ames, so he now smiled at Judge Barrett. And as the Killer had felt thwarted, so the lawyer, for all his deep disgust, could not assume that he had been wholly superior to the man before him.

"I can't discuss the matter with you, Judge," he said easily. "I promised

Miss Mathews I would leave things in her hands. If she puts them in yours, all I can do is to see to it that you—"

"That I what?" rasped the lawyer, breaking in at the slight pause Hendricks had allowed.

"That you look after her interests without bothering her too much about your own," was the calm conclusion.

"You impertinent scoundrel!"

Hendricks laughed, and was himself amazed at the insolence in his own voice. "Easy to talk here in your own office," he remarked. "Clerks in the next room, men outside the door and a policeman within call. When I talk, it's nobody between me and the other folks except myself. So go ahead." Hendricks smiled more broadly. "You would cringe like any other whelp if you were on a ship's deck facing Killer Ames."

Barrett saw the point, and undaunted as he was, knew he had gone too far under the circumstances. He nodded, with a scowl, and rang his bell.

"Get the United States District Attorney's office on the 'phone for me," he snapped to the clerk.

The ensuing conversation over the wire was lengthy, and several times the lawyer was compelled to repeat: "Yes, Captain Ames is in my office at this moment." Presently he looked up and asked Hendricks gruffly: "Who brought the schooner into port?"

"I did," was the reply.

"Why that preposterous mystery about your being on board? Who was the fellow who assumed to be the master of the ship and later escaped from the quarantine station?"

"Myself. I had important business ashore, and I wasn't going to be hindered by a lot of fools."

"H-m!" responded Barrett and resumed his conversation over the telephone.

"Well, that's settled," he said at last and turned to Miss Mathews. "Now, Susan, you've done your part nobly. What next? You know you're not bound to this man in any way, explicit or implied. Within an hour the newspapers will have the information that Ames is alive and in San Francisco. You mustn't be mixed up in this. Not

at all! So you leave him here, and I'll see to it that he tells the reporters exactly enough and no more. You go back home and thank your stars that you *did* come to your senses and get a divorce from him." The Judge rose and stood over her. "He's not your husband! You understand that, Susan?"

"Yes, yes!" she said.

"Well! Now you just slip home and sit quiet and forget him."

THERE was a moment's silence, in which Hendricks tried to catch her eye and failed. "That's good advice," he said presently.

Miss Mathews paid no attention to this; she seemed to be in a profound reverie. Both men slowly fell into easier attitudes, as if she should be allowed to take her time. But when she did speak Barrett straightened up with a curious expression on his face, and Hendricks leaned forward.

"You are concealing something from me," she said slowly. "I know it, Judge. The district attorney told you something which you are keeping back, and you want to get rid of me right away, so that you can do something to Captain—Ames here."

"What could I possibly do, Susan?"

"Something," she said firmly. "I am sure of it. You hate him, and you fancy you would be doing me a great favor if you—if you punished him." She turned to Hendricks with a troubled glance. "I'll stand by you," she said simply.

"My heavens!" Barrett burst out. "Listen, Susan, do you want your name in big type all over the first pages of the newspapers? with the story of your childish elopement written in full? branding you as the divorced wife of a—"

"Of a what?" she whispered. "Tell us, Judge! *What else is there?*"

The lawyer's stern countenance grew tender. He leaned over and patted her hand with a paternal air. "All right, Susan! I guess I'm your oldest friend, and I'll—I might as well tell you now as later—for you'll find it out. This man here is wanted for *murder*."

"But he's here to answer for him-

self and—" she began. Then a look of horror came into her eyes. "Oh!" she gasped. She forced herself to glance at Hendricks. "But you said you didn't kill him," she breathed.

"Mr. Peterson *was* killed," the Judge said in a flat voice.

Hendricks knew that he could no longer play the part thrust upon him. He bent over towards Miss Mathews and said in a fresh, strong voice: "I'll tell him the whole thing."

Her expression of terror stopped him. "No!" she whispered. "Let me think."

"She is right," said the lawyer calmly. "And I may as well tell you, Captain Ames, that anything you may say in this office will go straight to the district attorney. I thought you were a myth and trusted never to hear of you again. Now that you have put me in a position forever to destroy your power over this good woman here, whose confidence you have so grossly abused, I shall hesitate at nothing." He shot his cold, steely glance at him. "At *nothing*. You aren't my client. And as sure as I am before you, I'll see you swing for the murder of Peterson."

"The Judge is absolutely right," Hendricks told her instantly. "Nothing you can do now."

MISS MATHEWS rose, her face unclouded again, her eyes once more as cold and chill as a lake. She smiled serenely on her attorney. "Oh, you're so wearisome at times," she remarked, pulling down her veil. "The Captain and I are much obliged to you. I'm sure. We come here for help, and you,"—she laughed lightly,—"you forget yourself. —Come, Captain!"

Barrett rose, his face scarlet. "You are not going out on the street with this man," he said curtly.

"Why not?" she demanded.

"Because within five minutes he will be arrested as a murderer. I am not going to see you mixed up in this."

"But I am," she responded. "And now I have one thing to tell you, my dear friend—for I know you have been and always will be my friend. If you have set the officers on my—yes, on my husband's track, you will keep

them off for a while. I came here because I wanted advice and help. I made a terrible mistake. You will regret it to your dying day if you make my poor error without remedy!"

"I am acting for your own good," he protested.

"And I tell you," she responded quietly, "that I shall refuse to leave this office until you assure me that you will not betray Captain—Ames."

"But they will get him anyway, anywhere he may go to—even in your own home, Susan—the last place, I pray heaven, that he will go."

"Nobody knows him by sight," she returned. "Nobody except you and a few others—whom I have trusted—know anything about my unhappy past. He is safe with me, for a while—unless you tell."

Barrett swung on Hendricks. "Haven't you manhood enough to stand on your own feet?"

"Sure," was the troubled answer. "But Miss Mathews may insist!"

"I shall," she said composedly. "Either he goes freely out of this place with me, and you promise not to betray him, or I'll stay here and take the consequences with him."

"They'll arrest you too, Susan! as an accessory after the fact—at best, as a witness."

"That is your lookout," she responded dryly.

"All right, I give in," the Judge muttered. "I'll keep my hands off for—until to-night. Then I'll keep my word to the district attorney and help the Government all that is in my power."

"Till to-night!" she repeated. "Thank you!" She held out her hand and smiled. The Judge looked into her cold eyes and grew white. "I am acting for your own best interests, Susan," he said heavily. "And a thankless job it is!"

"Ah, your good conscience!"

THEY passed out and descended to the street without a word. Once more in the carriage, Hendricks said briefly: "If you will let me out in a block or so, I'll see what I can do to straighten this affair."

"I made an awful mess of it, didn't

"I?" she murmured. "I thought of course that if Captain Ames were found, the rest would be simple. I only made things worse, for now they will be sure you killed Peterson."

"You did a very fine and gallant thing," he said quietly. "I know what it must have cost you to claim the name of Ames even for an hour."

"I never expected to do it," she said thoughtfully. "I had prayed that he would die. Strange that I should have tried to bring him to life again—in you."

"The Judge is right in his advice and his warning," he went on. "He will keep your confidence, I know. He'll never tell that you were in his office with me. He'll simply say he refused to accept me as a client. I have till to-night. By that time you will know nothing about me, and never be disturbed in any way. So I'll just leave you now."

"I knew you would insist on that. It is like you." She was silent a little while before going on: "I like to know that there is a man like you in the world. You have forgiven me for criminal stupidity."

"The finest compliment a woman could pay a man!" he protested. "I want you to remember that all my life, and in the next, if there be one, I'll never forget that you accepted me as your husband, for a little moment. I wish—"

He ceased abruptly and gazed gloomily out into the fog. Miss Mathews presently laughed a little. "I'll always remember too. It was so fine that the name of Ames could be carried by a gentleman, even if for a moment only—it makes me a trifle happier. I'm not sorry for myself—sorry for you."

"It was worth all that it will cost me," he returned simply. "And in the future, when you think of me, just recall that I bore the title of your husband helplessly at first, willingly at the end."

"But you aren't—you can't—"

"I must," he said. "You have taken the responsibility with Judge Barrett. He must never know you told a falsehood. He could not forgive you, because he loves you. And while no one

else in the world will know, you and I will always remember that I—that I was glad to be Captain Ames. If matters had been different—what's the use?" He paused a moment. Then: "Stop the carriage and I'll get out here," he finished huskily.

Obediently she signaled the coachman and they drew up by the curb. Hendricks moved out in the driving fog and looked into the interior of the carriage at the woman who had turned her face to his. "It's good-by!" he murmured.

"Not yet!" she said hastily, and stepped out beside him. Before he could protest she had directed the coachman to go home without them.

"We'll walk together a way," she said, glancing about them. "What a thick fog! No one can ever see us."

"What is the use of taking risks?" he demanded. "We are near your house. At any moment a friend may come on us. It may compromise you."

"I don't care, just now," she said coldly. "I must satisfy my conscience before I let you go."

"Your conscience ought to be more than clear! You've suffered and endured and finally suffered again—to save a man you never saw in your life before!"

"Look at it sensibly," she remarked, stepping along with a graceful, free movement. "I thought to repay you for what you did for me, and merely made it impossible for you to escape from a false charge."

HE was about to answer when a figure came out of the mist, came toward them, was almost past but stopped short.

"Of all the people!" said Gottal, lifting his hat. "Miss Mathews, I was just up to see you. Hendricks, you've got to vanish in an hour. Somebody has lit a bonfire and you'll be scorched. I can't understand it! Word has gone out that Ames is in the city."

Miss Mathews lifted her misty veil and glanced at the broker's nervous face. "Then you are acquainted with Captain Hendricks?" she asked wonderingly.

"Known him for years," said Gottal

promptly. "Saw him this morning. Know his story—and yours too," he added. "That was why I went up to see you, Miss Mathews. Knowing what I did, I thought I'd warn you. Never expected to find Hendricks with you, I swear!"

"So you know about—my marriage," she said.

"Never so surprised in my life!" said the broker, turning with them and walking on. "But—well, you're well rid of *him*. But some one has made an awful stir—the Federal Building hummed with the news that Ames had turned up. Now, who the deuce—"

"It's my fault, Mr. Gottal," she interposed. With a detached air, as if she were chatting merely to pass the time, she briefly related the morning's events. When she concluded, the broker reached over and shook hands with her.

"It doesn't surprise me a bit," he announced. "Just like you! But we'll admit the mess. Now for a way out of it! Barrett is a chump. Should never have called the district attorney up. Wholly needless. Ought to have seen into things first. Trust a lawyer in love with his client to lose his head."

"Judge Barrett is not!" she said warmly.

"Nonsense," returned Gottal. "We're all in love with you, and you know it. All of us. Hendricks is, I know, and he's seen you for the first time yesterday."

"I believe that is true," Hendricks remarked.

Suddenly the woman between them sobbed. Both men glanced at her in alarm. They saw her face contorted with pain like a child's, heard the choking in her throat.

"What's the matter?" demanded Gottal hastily.

She shook her head, then gave way to her emotions. "I'm only a girl—and so lonely," she sobbed, hiding her face in her hands. "I want to do things right—and I always do them wrong, and people pity me and say unkind things! I know I've done wrong. I've got Captain Hendricks into awful trouble. I—I don't know which way to turn."

"There are two of us here, my dear!" Gottal said gently. "I can answer for Hendricks—known him for years. Know my own heart. Turn to us!" He took her shaking hands in his and went on: "Now you've done your part. You've made no mistake this day, dear girl. You've done the finest act ever a woman did—taken a name you hate to save a man you,"—he bent far over her bowed head,—"*a man who loves you.*"

"I don't want to be loved!" she whispered desperately. "I want to be free—to be my own master, to do right things all by myself."

"Good enough!" the broker assented promptly. "We're both here. Hendricks has an hour to get aboard my schooner the *Orchis* and beat to sea or fall into the hands of the authorities with little chance of clearing himself. I have a lifetime to spend doing anything that will help you to gain your own sweet ends. This is no time for us to argue. Which of us is it to be?"

"Which?" she repeated, looking up in bewilderment. "I don't understand."

"*We* understand perfectly," Gottal returned. "You're the widow of Ezra Ames, and you fought to be free of him. Comes George Hendricks from the South Pacific with a message. Murder's been done. Somebody says Ames was killed. Hendricks is the only man who knows all about it. He tells a story that no one will quite believe. You have a story which sounds fishy. Ezra Ames' two worst enemies together! Who killed him? George Hendricks. Why? Because he loved Susan Mathews, and because Ezra had plenty of money and left it all in a will to Susan. There's just one other human being who knows all the parties, and that's Henry Gottal, ship-broker. He's in love with Susan Mathews too. Not in love with her like Judge Barrett, who'll kill and slay to win her, but really and honestly and humbly in love with her—and willing to make her choice easy."

"I understand one thing," Hendricks put in quietly: "That is that Miss Mathews needs us *both*. I must get away. She must never be connected with Ezra Ames. You must look to that."

"Too late!" said Gottal. "Ames may be dead, but he still has a finger in the pie. She is mixed up in this affair already. That's why I'm here away from my office. I tried to get ahead of the reporters."

"Judge Barrett promised he wouldn't say a word till to-night!" she put in, sadly.

"It's out of his hands," was the response. He pulled a damp newspaper out of a pocket and pointed to the great headlines on the first page. "Read that!"

HENDRICKS took the sheet and read aloud from it, in a dull voice that barely reached his companions' ears.

Captain Ezra Ames is alive and in San Francisco, according to a report which reached the office of United States District Attorney Fenton to-day. But the mystery surrounding the report of his murder in the South Seas and the secret arrival of his schooner *Empress* at this port day before yesterday is deepened by the following dispatch from Honolulu which brings into this strange affair the name of one of San Francisco's most prominent heiresses:

HONOLULU—4 p. m. Bishop & Company, bankers, this afternoon offered for probate the last will and testament of Ezra Ames, late master of the schooner *Empress*, for whose murderer a world-wide search has been begun and W. Wilks held as a witness in the case. The document, dated two years ago, bequeaths the entire estate to Ames' divorced wife, Susan Mathews of San Francisco. Bishop & Company set the value of the property in their hands at a million and a half dollars.

"That's an extra," Gottal remarked. "Inside of two hours the papers will have columns, with pictures and interviews."

"You will get that fortune easily enough, anyway," Hendricks said slowly. "If I go down and give myself up as George Hendricks, I guess no one will keep Ames alive even in the papers. Then you can claim your money."

"Exactly," the broker added. "Barrett will keep his mouth shut as soon as he finds out you told him a fib. Hendricks here takes what blame is going; you merely keep quiet, allow the affair to blow over and are a couple

of millions richer. That's your choice: Hendricks, and allow people to guess whether Ames is really dead or not and the courts keep the estate till seven years pass; or we 'fess up and I identify Hendricks here, identify you as the widow and generally act as your agent. What could be simpler?"

"You haven't made the matter clear," Hendricks remarked, his face very sober. He turned to the girl beside him with a little gesture of reassurance. "What Gottal means is this: your secret is out, and that's all there is to it. But there is no shame attached to it. Ames has paid you the biggest of compliments—left you his money, after all. You simply take it, as your right. Ames dies right here—again. I swear I'm Hendricks, and Gottal backs me up. My papers prove it. I'll tell my yarn and I get clear after a while. There is one thing for you to do. Gottal will escort you home. Here's where I leave you."

"All right," growled the broker. "Hendricks isn't wrong in that."

"But he'll go to jail!" she said.

"Or get away on my schooner," Gottal remarked. "Of course if he does *that*, you wont be able to prove Ames' death, and the legacy will be tied up."

"What do I want of the money?" she cried. "I wouldn't touch it. It would be only another bond to tie me down to what I hate. Captain Hendricks, you must go away on the schooner!"

"Hush!" the broker warned hastily, and pointed to the big house looking up in the fog. "There are reporters on the steps already. Probably a few detectives, as well."

THEY paused and then drew back to the corner, by common consent. There Gottal said emphatically: "Now or never! Susan Mathews, if you go up those steps, you've got to tell your story. You've got to say whether Ames is alive or dead. You've got to explain whether Hendricks is known to you or not—you've got to talk, and what you say you've got to stick to till your dying day."

"If I say he's dead?"

"They'll want to know how you know it. They'll demand information as to the man who escaped from the schooner over at Quarantine and came to see you. But when you've told 'em, it's all ended."

"Then you wont be able to save Captain Hendricks," she assented. "He'll be caught and put in jail." She raised her head proudly and addressed Hendricks.

"I've made my choice," she said in a low, clear voice. "Maybe I'm wrong, and maybe I'll suffer once more for doing it. But—will you take me with you?"

"On the *Orchis*?" he stammered. "As—as Mrs. Ames?"

"Have you nothing better to offer me?" she demanded in a whisper. "No better name?"

Hendricks did not move but stood in the blowing fog, as if suddenly fallen into a profound dream. His face was that of a man seeing an inward vision, undisturbed by the world about him. He stood at the climax of his adventurous life, and the woman whose voice called to him, though silent, knew that the man before her was deciding for them both, as a man should, in the innermost heart of him. Now and then a sound of expostulating voices reached them, the voices of men seeking their lawful prey. But unperturbed Hendricks thought to the end. He lifted his austere face and said: "We must go."

It was as if destiny spoke at last, irrevocably and finally. Without a word the three of them turned their backs on the great house lifting its stony walls to the veiled sky, left behind them the voices of men who would burst their world to shards, and proceeded down the long hill towards the

bay. Gotal sighed once or twice, peering at the ground as if to rediscover what he had lost. He did not observe the girl's look of exaltation nor her companion's steady expression of resolution. Yet some inner sense told him when their groping hands clasped. He raised his eyes and smiled.

MID-AFTERNOON, and the fog swirled over the Coast, flooding in from sea before the wind as if to bury all that man had built under its tide of darkness. Out of the shadow a schooner swept, plunging her high bows under the foaming crests of the long Pacific rollers. For a moment she remained visible to the eyes of a little group on the bridge of a tug whose black streamer of smoke flew against the low gray clouds; then the vessel rose on a great surge, balanced an instant and swept on and

into the invisible. Gotal shivered, drawing his dripping overcoat closer about him. The tug-boat master dropped a husky remark.

"So Hendricks married an heiress, did he? Lucky dog!"

"Heiress? Hardly. Hendricks did all the inheriting himself, I guess. He was only a temporary heir at first. Now he's permanently in possession of all that Killer Ames left that was worth a cent."

"Ames left a lot o' money and pearls, too," expostulated the other.

"Pearls? Dead pearls, Captain."

And on the flying *Orchis*, Susan Hendricks, looking into her husband's eyes, laughed, letting the pearls for which Killer Ames had ravaged a world drip through her careless fingers to the deck—to roll back and forth, lusterless and forgotten in the great light of love and life.

"THE SHERIFF OF PANAMINT"

PETER B. KYNE'S fine story of the desert, "The Sheriff of Panamint," will appear in next month's BLUE BOOK MAGAZINE. No one writes a better story of the West than Mr. Kyne, and this is one of the most engaging he's ever produced. Be sure to order your September BLUE BOOK early.

THE END



Notice of Dissolution

by *John E. Rosser*

THIS is to notify all and sundry that Slim Jim and Cutaway Bill, experts in flimflamming, brace games and diverse con' schemes, have permanently dissolved partnership. What I'm saying is that I'm plumb smackdab done with Cutaway, and that I'm now looking for a new sidekick in the laudable enterprise of alienating the come-on from his exchequer.

Now, get me straight on this: I'm not sore with Cutaway, personally. With just one exception, no man could buck on any of Cutaway's habits. He never has held out on me, and the bulls haven't got pliers enough to twist a snitch out of Cutaway. And nobody could call him a fool. He's got a fine head for special and assorted graft. But you never can tell what his heart will make him do. And that's where we busted up.

Why, after we'd had a fine run of suckers and had padded our clothes with the long green until we were warm enough to side Doc Cook on his next jaunt after fiction material, I've seen Cutaway slip a kid a ten-spot for a yellow extra, and if a curbstome panhandler would whine half like he meant it, my philanthropic partner would strip off one of the yellow-backed boys and part with it with a yawn. And although that sort of doings is somewhat out of my line, I didn't make any howl on Cutaway so long as he confined his donations to what you might call the interest on our capital and didn't dig into the principal. My theory is, as I told Cutaway, you aren't supposed to have any heart when you get down to your working capital. And you know yourself that I'm right about it.

You see, Cutaway hasn't been a crook so very long—a half-dozen years

or such a matter. I tied in with him four years ago, and I know that then he had to have a guide if he got off the main streets of New York. He had been a cashier of a bank down in Georgia, he told me, and he got a little flip-like with other people's coin. That's why they gave him a full and complete course in overall-making. The stir sure didn't make much of a hit with him, for when he got out he was pretty sore against 'most everybody and everything, with the exception that, as I've already told you, he'd have those wild spells of giving the dough away.

Cutaway wouldn't talk much about the prison part of it, but if you wanted to find out why he blew up in the bank, all you had to do was to ask him why he always wore a white carnation in his buttonhole. No matter what season it was, Cutaway could always find a flower for the lapel of his coat; and I guess he never has worn any kind of coat but a cutaway: that's where he got his monaker.

NOT long after he and I had drawn up articles of agreement preparatory to our mutual dash into high finance, I put it up to Cutaway about that flower.

"Look here, Cutaway," says I, "why in the name of smoke do you want to go around with that flower on you all the time? It's such a dead give-away that one of those ivory-domes from the Central Station could track you with that through a Coney crowd if a Rube ever squealed on us. It aint safe. That la-de-da coat of yours is tip enough, without that posy. Next thing, I guess you'll be wanting to advertise our business in the papers."

Then I was sorry I had jacked him up like that, because the saddest look I ever saw settled in his eyes. He sort of cleared his throat before he spoke.

"Slim," says he, "I surely don't want to be the cause of your getting the nippers put on you, but I hope you'll indulge me in this little habit of mine. I guess there's enough other guys wearing flowers in their clothes to make it fairly safe for me. Anyway, this is for the Girl's sake, or rather—er—er—her memory."

And with that he told me how a human skunk of an opera-singer had come down his way and stole the affections of the Girl that Cutaway was engaged to. I guess she must not have been fitted for the cold weather up East, because they hadn't been up there long before she contracted the T. B., and then that dirty devil deserted her. She wrote Cutaway about it after a while, telling him that she believed if she could get out to Colorado she might pull through alive.

Well, Cutaway had become reckless after she left, and he'd thrown his money to the winds. But when the Girl's letter came, he just took from the bank what he thought he needed, made a few cover-up entries, expecting to pay it back when he could, and caught the train for Boston. He gave the Girl his roll, and she started for Trinidad. While he was gone, a bank-examiner came round, and when he stepped off the train they put the cuffs on him. They gave him ten years, and while he was making overalls, word came to him that she had died.

"Slim," says he, with a kind of gulp, "she pressed a white carnation into my hand the night she promised to marry me."

SO, after that, I never said anything about the flower, and we got along harmoniously until the break came that I was telling you about. Cutaway and me made a good pair. I had had a fine bit of schooling as a crook, and Cutaway was as fine an actor as you'd expect to see in a two-dollar show. Just give him the idea, and he'd put it over in great shape. I'm not much for looks, myself—skinny as a side-show freak, and no tailor on earth could make a suit of clothes look right on me. Cutaway would make Beau Brummel look like a hobo. Not even a wise guy would ever think of us working together. And that's where we got the Rube.

But, as I said, that's all over now, and I'm looking for another partner. And I know the fellow I want to hook up with, too. That's 'Frisco Dick, the cleverest crook that ever came from the Slope, a man naturally endowed for

grafting, and having had the unsurpassed advantage of a postgraduate course among the Juarez gang; and if there's a game those boys don't know, nobody has sprung it yet.

I've looked up 'Frisco Dick's record during the past few days, and he's the guy for me. He not only has a bunch of flossy little stunts of his own devising, but he can let the other fellow name the game and then beat him at his own lay. I know genius when I see it, and 'Frisco Dick's got it. He may be in New York right now, but whether he is or not, I'm going to stay on his trail until I find him. Me for him! But I want to make it perfectly clear why I've quit Cutaway.

We had tried all sorts of con' games, and we got results, too. But it was my idea that we ought to specialize on one trick and stick to it. Simplicity is the thing you are looking for in business methods. You want to work out something that a Rube's head can follow, or nearly follow. If you put too much paint on the fly, the trout wont strike. Given a neat, naughty little scheme that appeals to a Rube's greed, something with a get-rich-quick twist to it, especially if it's based on the ponies, and you'll get your game nine shots out of ten. That's my idea, and Cutaway agreed with me. And we were going good when the blow-up came.

IT was Sunday morning, the latter part of December, and I was strolling around on Sixth Avenue and the cross-streets along in the Thirties. Sunday morning's a mighty good time to work a trick on the wayfaring Rube: whatever suspicions he may have any other time, he seems to leave off then.

Cutting across to Fifth Avenue, I saw a tall guy standing with his back to me, looking up at the buildings on the opposite side. Just the once-over was enough to tell me that he was new to the Big Burg. When I came alongside of him, I saw that his face was sort of tan-and-red, like you see on all folks from the plains country. He was wearing a boad-brimmed black hat, and his fob was a pair of gold cattle-horns.

You couldn't ask for better game than a cattleman from the Southwest,

come to town to have his little fling, and always with a roll big enough to stop a busted hydrant with. They're out for something different, and they expect to pay for it.

"Beg pardon," says I, "but can you tell me the name of that building?" I pointed toward the Knickerbocker Trust Building.

"Nope," says he, with an easy drawl. "Looks like it might be the courthouse, though."

That was all I wanted. I always make it a point to be sure what I'm doing when I start anything.

"Ah," says I, "then you're a stranger in Little Old New York the same as me?"

"Yep," says he; "never had time to leave the ranch before. Had to come this time, though, business or no business."

The more I looked at that affidavit face of his, the better he looked to me. His clothes were wrinkly, like he had slept in them instead of taking a Pullman. I saw that he had on boots instead of shoes, and he was wearing a black string tie as an unusual concession to the requirements of city folks. I knew his kind; everywhere you poke them your finger hits a bulging wallet.

"Same way here," says I; "just run up to Philadelphia on a little business for the old man, and I thought I wouldn't go back without hitting a few spots in New York. Collected a big overdue account down in Philly, so the old man can't kick if I'm a little reckless with spending money on the trip. Where you from?"

"Down in Texas," says he. "If I'd had ten guesses, all of them would have been Texas."

"That so?" says I. "I'm from down that way, myself. I live in Parsons, Kansas. Old man runs a big store there. Don't think much of me, though. Gives me a little spending money,—I've got two thousand in the bank now,—but he thinks I'm too wild yet to be taken into the business. Maybe he's right; I guess I am a little gay. But believe me, whenever I'm dead I want 'em to bury me. Aint that right?"

"You bet," says he, and laughed.

"By the way," says I, "I've just

started out on the Avenue to find Senator Clark's home. They say that is one bird of a place. I've read in the papers about it—cost four million, and got pictures and things in it from all over the world. Open to the public, too, they say. Don't have 'em like that down our way, do they? Thought I'd like to see it so I can tell 'em about it down in Parsons. Gee, their eyes'll bulge out on the stems! Join me?"

"Don't care if I do," he drawls, careless-like.

WE started up the Avenue, and after a while I asked a bull how far out the Clark place was. It was eleven o'clock, and the silk-hat swells were thick as flies around a bowl of sugar.

"These boys with the shiny lids wouldn't last long down our way, would they?" says I.

"I guess not," says he, and his face wrinkled up on one side.

"Thompson's my name," says I, "—just plain old John Henry Thompson. Call me John. That's the way I am—plain as an old shoe."

"Williams is mine," says he, "—Richard Williams, to be exact."

"Well, Dick," says I, "you and I both have got plain handles. Good enough for us, though, eh?"

So I rattled on, and I could tell I was getting closer to him all the time, although he was the kind of fellow that don't talk much about his own affairs to everybody. He acted like he was worried about something, too. I told him how that morning I had pretty near made up my mind to knock the block off the waiter who had turned up his nose and swept onto the floor a dime tip I had left by my plate. I could tell that kind of talk made a hit with Williams.

By the time we reached the Plaza Hotel, Williams was liking me fine. I asked a messenger-kid what building the Plaza was, and Williams said he'd like to take a look inside.

Both of us said we'd had late break-

fast, but I took Williams into one of the eating-rooms and asked him to have a sandwich with me, anyway. While we were eating I said:

"By the way, wait here a minute for me: I want to go find a paper from down our way; they ought to have it at this swell dump."

Then I got on the 'phone and talked to Cutaway. At the news-stand I got a copy of *The Kansas City Star*.

"Didn't have a copy of *The Parsons Herald*," says I, when I got back, "so I had to take this."

I paid for the lunch, and when we got up, Williams said he'd buy the cigars. The girl at the stand pulled some twenty-five-cent straights. Williams was going to pay for two when I said:

"None of that Gotrox stuff, girlie! We don't want to go beyond ten-centers."

NEW TARZAN STORIES

READERS of THE BLUE BOOK may count upon a rare treat in Edgar Rice Burroughs' stories about Tarzan,—the white boy who lives a primitive life among the wild creatures of the jungle,—the first of which will appear in the September BLUE BOOK MAGAZINE—on sale August 1st.

WE walked out the door fronting on Central Park and continued our walk along the Avenue. We hadn't gone more than three or four blocks when I squeezed Williams' arm and pointed toward a man standing on the curbing. He was wearing a cutaway coat, with a white carnation in his buttonhole.

"Do you see that guy?" says I in a whisper. "I know that bird; now see if I don't."

We drew up alongside of Cutaway, and I says:

"My friend, haven't I met you before?"

Cutaway gave me the icy up-and-down and back again.

"Not to the best of my knowledge and belief," says he.

"Oh yes, you have," says I. "Weren't you down in Parsons, Kansas, last summer a year ago, and didn't you win a hundred thousand dollars in a pool-room there on the Sunstar Sweepstakes in Juarez?"

"You evidently have me confused with some one else," says Cutaway. "I'll bet he looked just like that when

he used to turn down a fellow's request for a loan at the bank.

"Aw, come on," says I; "I was right there at the time you did it. When you cleaned up, everybody said they'd never seen you before, and we couldn't find where you come from. The proprietor of the Elite Hotel offered to sell out and go with you. Now, aint I right?"

"Since you've got the dope on me straight," says Cutaway, with a grin, "I guess I might as well own up the corn. But say, you fellows are not reporters, are you?"

"Forget it," says I. "My friend here, Dick, and I are just out for a good time. We live down Parsons way. Say, you haven't got anything good you could give us to-day, have you?"

Cutaway reached in his inside pocket and took out his wallet. He tried to hand a twenty-dollar bill to me and one to Williams.

"You got me wrong, friend," says I. "We're not trying to panhandle you, and we don't want your money. What I was asking is, have you got any good tips on the races to-day? I don't know what your system is, but I'd back your guesses for a little one."

Cutaway looked at his watch some time before he spoke.

"Well," he says, "you two look like sociable fellows, so I'll tell you. Yes, I've got the dope on Juarez for to-day. The races are just about to begin there—their time is faster than New York time, you know. I was just starting round the corner to the Commission Club. Going to lay a couple of thousand on the first race—Sea Lion, at four to one. If you want in on that, all right."

CUTAWAY took a telegram out of his pocket. He showed it to Williams and me, holding his thumb over his name. Up in the corner of the message was written, "*Rush.*" It was all in cipher, but the names Sea Lion, Myrtle Maid, Autumn Breeze and Dipper were clear enough.

"Here," says I, "take this twenty and lay it on Sea Lion. I know it's a piker's bet, but racing is out of my line."

Cutaway took my money and placed it with a handful of bills of his own. Neither of us said anything to Williams about putting up any money. Cutaway walked across the street, diagonally, and disappeared around the corner of one of the big houses of Millionaire's Row.

"If we win," I told Williams, "I'll divide with you. I just want a little sport, that's all."

Pretty soon Cutaway was back.

"Did we win?" I asks, fairly jumping up and down with what Williams was to take for excitement.

"Not so fast," says Cutaway, laying his finger on his lips. "I just put up the money; the race is being run now. I didn't want to stay over there among all those sports until my face became common to them."

He looked at his watch, and says:

"I'll be going. It ought to be over now."

I noticed that Williams fidgeted a good deal where he and I were sitting on an iron bench up against the park wall. There are mighty few of them that can see easy money coming in without getting the fever.

When Cutaway came back he drew out his swollen wallet and coolly skinned off a hundred dollars.

"Here's yours," he says, "—eighty dollars winnings and your twenty back." It made my hand quiver as I took it.

"Take half of this," I says to Williams, holding out the money. He didn't want to take it, but I stuck it in his pocket anyway. "Good cigar money while you're here in New York, eh?"

Cutaway made as if he were going to leave us.

"Gee," says I, "this is great! When is the next one to come off?"

"Right now, pretty quick," says Cutaway. "I've got to be going, to get my money up. It's Myrtle Maid—six to one. I'm going to put up three thousand on her."

"Look here," says I, "do you think she'll win?"

"If I didn't, I wouldn't put up my money on her. I'm not a blamed fool. What's more, I don't *think* she'll win; I *know* it."

"Well, then," says I, "I'm going to put up five hundred. That's all I've got with me!"

"Hold on, my friend," says Cutaway to me. "Now, if you want to bet on this race, you can help me. You see, I don't want to go over there too much. Those rich guys will get my number. If you will go over and put up my money with yours, I'll let you in on this."

"You're on!" says I. I took out my five hundred, and Cutaway laid a wad of greenbacks in my hand. Then he took a printed card out of his pocket. Up in the corner were the names of James R. Keene and August Belmont. Across the top, in big type, was THE MANHATTAN COMMISSION CLUB.

"Here," says he, "just go to the first door round that corner. Rap three times, and the porter will open up. Then you hold the card just so, with your thumb lying along the edge, and the doorman will take hold the same way on the other side of the card. Then you just walk right upstairs. You'll make it all right from there on."

I made him show me all over again, and then I started.

"Wait a minute," says Williams; "I'll go you five hundred on that myself, if you'll let me."

They can't keep out of it long. I took his money and walked across the street.

I KNEW what was happening while I was gone. Cutaway pulled a fake newspaper-clipping about that Parsons clean-up, and explained that he was in with a syndicate that bet on sure things. He told how the whole Juarez bunch are crooked, and how everybody is fixed, from jockey to judges, so that, having been given in advance the winners of the day, there was no way on earth for him to lose. And he said that the syndicate cleaned up by having agents like him to go about over the country and hit the fancy betting-joints. You couldn't find a flaw in his spiel anywhere.

When I came back, Cutaway and Williams were talking. Says Cutaway to me:

"You got the money up all right, did you?"

"Now, wait a minute," says I, "and I hope you don't get sore with me. But the truth is, I didn't find the right door at first, and I got there too late to get the bet down. They were cashing in just as I stepped up. Myrtle Maid won, all right."

You would have thought Cutaway was going to bust wide open, he looked so mad. But then, I told you he was some actor.

"You idiot!" he roars at me. "I thought I could trust you, and now what have you done? You've got me in bad with my syndicate! I have to bet on the horses they tell me, and turn in their part of my winnings. You've fixed me, all right! Give me my money and get away from here!"

"Say, friend," says I, "I couldn't help it, honest I couldn't. If you'll just give me another chance—"

"Another chance! You've spoiled this one, and you want to ball up another one, do you? Not on your life!"

All the time Cutaway and I were talking, Williams was just listening and walking back and forth. Finally he says:

"If there's to be another one, I wish you'd give my friend another chance. I know he feels as bad about it as either of us. I don't think he'd lummix up the next one."

Cutaway scowled and pulled his watch again. Then he says to me:

"All right, I'll try you on this last one. It's Dipper—the killing of the day, a ten-to-one shot. And mind you, you'd better get it right this time!"

Then Williams said he would put up a thousand—all he had on him but twenty-five dollars, he declared. Cutaway said he would put up ten thousand even. Then I chimed in.

"I've got a check on a Philadelphia bank for twenty-five hundred. Will they let me put up a check?" I says.

"Sure," says Cutaway, "only hurry up!"

So I placed the check against the park wall and endorsed it. While I was doing this, Cutaway instinctively stuck all of our money into his pocket, but Williams didn't seem to notice this,

and to tell the truth, I didn't either, at the time.

NOW I'll have to explain a little about what Cutaway and I were working toward.

It was our custom when we had the sucker putting up his last bone, to work in the check stunt. You see, the horse wins, but when I go back for our winnings, they tell me that because they've lately taken in so much in bad checks, without casting any doubt on the one I have up, they must wait for it to go through the banks before they can settle with me.

That's the story I'm to bring back to Cutaway and the Rube. Then Cutaway asks about the check, and I explain it's made out to the old man's company, and that I just signed it for him. Cutaway goes up in the air and says I've committed forgery and that we'll all be pinched, unless we can get together the money at once to cover the check, knowing that the Rube has put up his pile, just as have the rest of us. Then the Rube gets scared and beats it, and Cutaway and I divide.

WHEN I came back over, after I was supposed to have put up the money, I found Cutaway sitting on the bench, with tears in his eyes.

"Where's the Rube?" says I, quick enough.

"He's gone," says Cutaway. "Sit down."

"Gone? Gone where?"

"Back to Texas," says Cutaway. "Just be easy, and I'll tell you about it. You see, while you were gone, that fellow told me his story. A scoundrel from New York lured his girl away from her home in San Antonio, and he's scouring the continent for her. He knows that the mean devil only pretended to marry her, and he guesses she's somewhere here.

"He says that he's going to find

her if it takes his lifetime to do it, and then he's going to find the scoundrel who ruined her and kill him. He said he never has bet on a horse-race before, and that he wouldn't have done it now, only he needed more money to go after that pair with. And when he said that, I turned over to him every cent I had on me and told him how we had been framing up on him. He certainly was grateful."

You could have knocked me down with a straw.

"You gave him back his money?"

"Not only so," says Cutaway, quietly, "but I've just told you that I gave him yours and mine, too. I tell you he needed it, and we can get some more some day."

DURING the next week I didn't want to see Cutaway—I was afraid I would do him violence. Around at Murphy's place—Murphy knows every crook in the country—I asked certain questions and received some real enlightenment. That's when I decided to leave Cutaway.

I found him one night drinking high-balls upstairs in Mooney's. He was sitting off by himself in a corner.

"Cutaway," says I, "what was the name of that guy you gave up the dough to?"

"Why, Williams, wasn't it? That's the name he gave, I believe. Why?"

"And another thing," says I: "didn't he ask you about that flower in your buttonhole?"

"Why, yes, I believe he did."

"And you told him why you wear it, and then he told you about the girl from San Antonio—that's the way it happened, wasn't it?"

"Yes, I believe I did tell about the carnation and then Williams—"

"Williams! Williams!" says I. "I want to tell you that the full name of the guy that got our pile is 'Frisco Dick!'"



Free Lances in Diplomacy



The Greater Plot

By Clarence Herbert New

IN the Rue Vignon, up back of the Madeleine, a small wrought-iron hanging sign projects over the narrow entrance of a restaurant which has become famous during the last few years—particularly since the beginning of the war. The quaint old French letters inform passers-by that it is the Café des Trois Gascons—the name having come down from a small hostelry in the fields outside the walls of Old Paris, in the fifteenth century. Inside, after one has gone some twenty paces and passed the cage where the stout proprietress sits, the passage opens into a large room with a mezzanine balcony, lighted during the day by a skylight over the center. To-day the place is a popular rendezvous for officers on weekly furlough from the trenches—and for war correspondents, government officials and the sprinkling of outside civilians who are

permitted by the police to remain in Paris for legitimate purposes.

The waiters, who formerly knew and were known to most of the patrons, are in shallow graves back of the firing-line or in the trenches around Verdun. Their places are filled in the Café des Trois Gascons by girls in short black skirts, white aprons and caps—girls, between eighteen and twenty-five, who possess the wit to be entertaining, as they serve, and do not underestimate the responsibility which rests upon every woman of France to provide the nation with its soldiers of the future.

At the table in a rear corner, one evening, were four officers who had come down from the front on a week's furlough—three of them Irish and the other a Gordon Highlander. They were in high spirits—making the most of their brief respite from the soul-deadening trench-life. They joked with

Marie, their waitress, and exchanged anecdotes of various engagements and discussed the entertainments to be seen in Paris, with the absorbing interest of men who do not know whether to-night's comedy or opera may be their last. Presently two more Irish officers came in with three ladies and a well-known member of the Chamber—seating themselves at a near-by table and bowing to the group in the corner as Marie came in from the kitchen with a paté and four "bocks."

For a moment or two she stood by the corner table, easily holding her own in the duel of repartee; then she moved on to take the order of a couple who had just entered the room. Subconsciously, however, she was noticing a subtle change in the talk among the Irish officers. As soon as she left them, the voices of at least two dropped to a more confidential tone; they appeared to be discussing something which they preferred not having overheard.

Now, for one memorable year, Marie had lived in London as the assistant of a Bond Street modiste, and had picked up enough English to follow any ordinary conversation. By occasional words that reached her from the table in the corner she sensed the fact that the officers were referring to some undertaking in which a number of their fellow countrymen were interested—some approaching day upon which certain plans would be carried out with the cooperation of all.

There was nothing said which indicated a treasonable element in whatever it was they were planning; in fact, it was far more likely to be some preliminary concentration for a summer offensive against the German lines. After some consideration she decided that what little she had overheard could have no other application, and almost forgot the intensely patriotic curiosity which prompted her to listen so closely—almost, but not entirely. After a while, passing the table of the Deputy, Henri Couramont, she noticed that he was talking in much the same confidential manner to one of the officers at his table—which also bore out the supposition of an impending army campaign.

WHEN Couramont and his party left the Trois Gascons, the corner group of Irish officers were not long after them. Three hours later, Deputy Couramont came walking along through the arcades of the Rue de Rivoli with Captain Tim Delaney, who had followed him from the café. As they reached the Rue Castiglione, the light from an arc-lamp shone down upon their faces with a bluish-green reflection that distinctly revealed every line and feature to a tall man in evening clothes—Sir Francis Lammerford of the English diplomatic service—who was coming down the other arcade from the Place Vendome. At first, he noticed them in merely a casual way as they stopped for a second or two before crossing to the Hotel Continental; then a fleeting expression upon the Deputy's face held his attention sufficiently to make him study the man closely. He recognized the two men in the second glance, but the expression he had caught reminded him of some one who was not Couramont, some man whom he couldn't remember to have seen for years, a person whose name and identity escaped him, spur his memory as he might.

Lammerford's mind was still occupied with the evasive resemblance when he dropped in at the Café Sylvain and found there Gaston de Marais, of the Corps Diplomatique. In the years preceding the war, De Marais and Sir Francis Lammerford had been diplomatic adversaries, but each man respected the other's ability, and their interests were now identical, at least until the final readjustment of European boundary lines. As Sir Francis had been in Russia for nine or ten months,—had been twice reported dead,—the Frenchman was genuinely pleased to see him.

"My dear friend! Is it really thou? Come! This is a happy meeting! We will exchange experiences—with champagne to stimulate the memory—eh?"

For a while, they chatted of various campaigns and the political undercurrents which, more than the taking or losing of trenches, moved the warring nations this way and that toward the final showdown upon which a return

to peaceful life was possible. After a while, Lammerford casually mentioned having seen the Deputy, Henri Couramont.

"The man appears to be gaining in political strength—if I'm a judge of stray gossip and the manner of people toward him."

"Ah—*oui!* Couramont's leaders in *Le Courier du Matin* have been most daring; he has fought seven duels in consequence. He is a man to be reckoned with, and the Cabinet are well aware of the fact—they even mention him for the Postes et Télégraphes portfolio."

"Let's see; he was from the Côte d'Or, wasn't he—originally?"

"I thought it was Haut-Saône—pretty well over toward the Rhine valley, at that. Was he not running a small weekly sheet at Belfort before he came to Paris—eighteen years ago? It is said he gets his extreme hatred of the '*boche*' from having lived within a stone's throw of him so long."

"Seems pretty thick with the English and Irish officers!"

"Ah! That makes itself to be understood, my friend. Officers are not permitted to say too much, you know—but one may smile, affirmatively, when another makes a tentative statement which is known to be true. One hears that much of Couramont's accurate information concerning matters at the front comes from his frequent *déjeuners* with people of that sort. And, besides—one hears that his mother was the daughter of an Irish baronet, which makes the accounting for his excellent English—as his early years on the German border gave him German which is practically without accent."

LAMMERFORD'S mind was flashing from one half-remembered face to another—groping, considering, fitting together the various points in this gossip concerning the Deputy and trying to construct inferences that would prove up.

"There's no question as to his patriotism, I suppose? No chance of his having imbibed Prussian ideas from having lived so long in close touch with them?"

"Pouf! You should hear him speak of the '*boche*,' my friend! He spent a day, last month, in the trenches at Verdun—and sat in a puddle of water for hours, potting at every German head he could see! One hears that he got two of them—the man is an artist with rifle or pistol!"

"Humph! From what you say, De Marais, the man appears to be one of those tried and proved individuals to whom no possible suspicion can attach? Eh?"

"It makes itself obvious that one's actions influence the opinions of others—more than the spoken word! The man has given proof, at the risk of his life—and more than once! Is it that you have something in mind concerning this Couramont, *mon ami?*"

"No There's nothing upon which I could base a fragment of suspicion against him. Only—when you mentioned his early years upon the German border, I thought of the many instances which show the extent to which a Prussian will risk his life, unhesitatingly, if, at some crucial moment, he may find himself in position to do the one vitally important thing for his Government—the one thing impossible were he known to be German. With Couramont, as you say, one has proofs enough as to where his sympathies lie—and he's half English, or Irish, so that removes even the possibility of any German taint in his blood, *n'est ce pas?* Well,"—yawning slightly,—"I've had but six hours' sleep in two days; I shall have to make some of it up. You must tell me where I may find you most frequently—I may be in Paris for a week or so."

DESPITE De Marais' information, however, Lammerford was by no means wholly reassured concerning Couramont. And when he studied a half-tone portrait of Couramont which appeared in one of the popular illustrated papers, Lammerford felt again that haunting impression that the Deputy was not what he seemed—was convinced that he had at some previous time, in some other environment, seen the face that looked out at him from the page of the journal.

Sir Francis knew that Couramont's early life was a matter of little interest to him if it had been passed in France. If by any chance, however, it should prove that the man's previous life had been spent in Germany or Austria? Ah! Here was the short-cut in his theoretic reasoning. If a man achieves prominence in any German city, it's a foregone conclusion that he will spend more or less time in Berlin. If his face and personality stand out from the mass in Berlin, even for a brief period, it is morally certain that one of three or four great illustrated weeklies will reproduce his first obtainable photograph. And the greatest of these weeklies in size and popularity, is the *Illustrirte Zeitung*.

At ten next morning, therefore, Lammerford walked down to the old Palais Mazarin and made out a "bulletin" of the volumes he wanted, in the Bibliothèque Nationale. He had taken with him the copy of *Le Monde Illustré* in which Couramont's portrait appeared—entering it upon his "bulletin" as personal property which he might afterward carry out of the building.

For over an hour, Lammerford rapidly turned page after page of the big volumes—dismissing each half-tone portrait with a single glance, as he passed it. Then—in the second volume—his hand paused. At the head of a paragraph recording a scandal which had been the talk of Berlin society for a week or more, was the picture of a young captain in one of the Uhlán regiments. Hauptman Heinrich Schmaltz had, by his good manners and soldierly appearance, attracted the attention of the Imperial family—being given a very desirable command at the Schloss. After a few months, he was frequently seen with a handsome Viennese countess who had been five years married, but detested her husband. The

count heard rumors and came to Berlin; there was a duel in which the count was killed. Captain Schmaltz was sent to America on a mission promptly arranged with the Wilhelmstrasse—and the countess disappeared at the same time.

The incident and the gossip came back to Lammerford as he read the paragraph. So far as he knew, Berlin never heard of the young captain again.

Yet the expression he had noticed upon Couramont's face in the glare of the arc-lamp had been identical with the one caught in a glimpse of Captain Schmaltz, as he stood under one of the arched entrances of the Schloss in Berlin, nineteen years before—with the light from one of the park lamps falling upon his head and sharply outlining it against the deep shadow under the arch, behind him.

Lammerford placed the two half-tones side by side. That of the

young captain showed merely a small mustache, while the Deputy wore a thin Van Dyck; but the lines of the face, the prominent chin and forehead, the eyes, the whole expression, were unmistakable. The popular member of the French Chamber—supposed bitterly to detest everything German—was, in fact, Heinrich Schmaltz, formerly captain in a Berlin regiment of Uhlans, and in the service of the Wilhelmstrasse at the time he disappeared.

For perhaps the thousandth time in his diplomatic career, Sir Francis knew that his sense of intuition had been vindicated—that what seemed an absurdly groundless suspicion had been based upon that inner consciousness of his which automatically recorded impressions and stored them up for future use. Making a memorandum of the volume and page-numbers in the big German weekly, he left the Library and went back to his apartment.

A REMARKABLE RECORD

SINCE "The Affair of the Kiel Maneuvers," published in the March, 1910, BLUE BOOK, Clarence Herbert New's stories of the "Free Lances in Diplomacy" have appeared practically without interruption in THE BLUE BOOK MAGAZINE. Including "The Greater Plot," Mr. New has written no less than seventy-seven of these fascinating stories—an unequalled record for the sustained production of high-class stories built about one group of characters. What is more, the stories are getting better and better; for Mr. New has developed a special technique of his own; and history, upon an inside knowledge of which these stories are based, is now indeed being made with dramatic rapidity.

THAT afternoon, Sir Francis went down to the Isle de la Citie and called upon his old acquaintance, Lepine, at the Prefecture. Without implying that he was interested in one, more than others, he asked for brief résumés of the careers of certain French politicians—including the Cabinet ministers, two Senators and three Deputies. Knowing Sir Francis Lammerford to be associated with the British Foreign Office, it was—to Monsieur Lepine—a perfectly natural inquiry. Since the conference of the Allies, at which it was agreed that they should act in concert during the remainder of the war, each of the chancelleries has been vitally interested in the membership of the other governments. A rather unusual harmony prevailed—but, under the surface, there was necessarily a close observation of opinions and actions among government officials, everywhere, in order that anything which seemed to threaten this harmony might be promptly dealt with.

With the vast amount of minute information at his disposal, Lepine was able to give an accurate account of what each man's private life had been, as well as that recorded in the daily prints. If anything, Lammerford seemed less interested in Henri Couramont's biography than those of more prominent men—the Prefect couldn't decide whether his friend's request had been actually what it appeared on the surface, or not. But Lammerford left the Boulevard du Palais with data concerning the Deputy which gave him more than one clue as to where he might look for evidence of nefarious activities. For one thing, he learned that Mlle. Obregon, of the Folies Bergère—said to be Couramont's *bien aimée*—was an intimate friend of Mrs. Boyle Fitzpatrick, wife of a captain in one of the Irish regiments, and that the four dined frequently with other officers and their wives at the Café des Trois Gascons in the Rue Vignon.

Lammerford had taken a table at the Trois Gascons at the rear of the larger room, and was finishing his soup when they arrived that evening. While studying the party in casual glances, he was conscious that his pretty waitress

looked at him rather intently as she brought in his meat-course. The only other diners in their vicinity were a group of Irish officers—too much occupied with their own conversation to overhear anything said in guarded tones. After glancing at them to estimate how far her voice might carry, she leaned over the handsome Englishman—arranging his dishes.

"M'sieu' does not, then, remember me? Behold—I am that Marie Latour whom *les bêtes* Apaches were dragging up the Rue Pierre Sarazin from the 'Boul' Mich' one night, three years ago—when *le bon M'sieu' Anglais* knocked them down, and shot the one who drew a knife!"

"*Ma foi!* One has the great pleasure in seeing thee again, *ma fille!* In the darkness of little streets, it makes itself very difficult to see a face distinctly. One remembers we had a bock in one of the 'Boul' Mich' cafés, to restore thy *nerfs*, and that one accompanied thee to thy apartment, for safety, afterward. My affairs made it necessary that I should depart from Paris next morning—so I had but the little souvenir of cerise ribbon to remind me of the adventure. You have now a husband—*oui?*"

"*Ah, non—M'sieu'!* For two months, only! He was killed at the Marne. For a year, before, I was in your big foggy London—where one acquires the Anglais with much labor; then I returned, before the war. M'sieu' is perhaps of the Corps Diplomatique?"

"And why think you that, *ma belle?*"

"Because one observes that M'sieu' came out of the Prefecture this afternoon, and spoke to M'sieu' de Marais on the Pont Neuf. M'sieu' has the bearing of *un soldat*; yet he is never in uniform. One observes little things in a place like this, concerning which it is desirable to speak with some one who is of the Government. *Oui!*"

Lammerford was apparently paying more attention to his dinner than to the pretty waitress. "*Par exemple?*" he inquired.

"Behold the Irish officers at the corner table! They talk of the trenches—the Opera, the amusements

of Paris—when one is within hearing. The moment one is at a little distance, they mumble among themselves of other matters."

"Possibly orders for a new 'offensive'—which must not be known! Regimental gossip of their own—affairs of the army in general, *ma fille!*"

"*Oui—oui*—one thinks of all those things. They do not altogether explain. *Par exemple*, M. Couramont, the Deputy, dines frequently with some of their party, and ladies—as he does this evening. Those at each table bow to the others—also, to people in different parts of the cabaret. When they leave here, most of the Irish officers go by different streets to the apartment of M. le Capitaine Fitzpatrick—where they play at cards until midnight. M. Couramont I have three times seen there with them. While they play, it is evident they discuss other matters of great importance. Me—I am *chez moi, au cinquieme*, in the rear of that house which is on the other street. From my window, one looks into those of M. le Capitaine, one floor below, across the court. Upon four evenings of the week, I leave Les Trois Gascons at six o'clock; upon the other three, I am here earlier and leave before the dinner."

"H-m-m—you have not fear of me, *ma fille?*"

"But no, M'sieu' le Chevalier! *Pourquoi?* It is that you rescued me, that time! It is that you are *gentil-homme!*"

"*Peste!* It is not that which I meant! You believe that, me, I have the love of France, the love of my England? That I despise and am ever suspicious of *le boche?*"

"Ah! *Oui! Oui! M'sieu'! Ma foi*—it is of a certainty—that!"

"*Très bien!* Then—you will permit that I accompany thee to thy apartment when thou leavest—at ten o'clock?"

"But certainly, M'sieu'! It is my wish! Me—I am but a girl who knows little of State affairs—*mais une fille de France, de tout temps*. Perhaps I am foolish, that I watch the officers so closely and suspect—ah, one does not know what to suspect in such times!

At least, one does no harm to be alert."

LATER, at a corner three blocks away, Marie met Sir Francis and they rode in a taxi to her apartment. As she had her own keys, there was no occasion to disturb the concierge; they climbed the five flights of stairs in silence and bolted her outer door after entering the suite. In order that no attention might be directed their way from the apartment across the court, she didn't turn on a single electric. Motioning him to an easy chair by the window, she perched herself upon the broad arm of it while he drew from his pocket a pair of powerful opera-glasses.

The night had proved warmer than usual, and so all three windows of Captain Fitzpatrick's apartment were open. Through a passage, they could see the card-players in a further salon, but men and women drifted back to the living-room at the rear, from time to time, examining pictures upon the wall, books and curios upon the table, or refreshing themselves from a cellaret in one corner. As Lammerford focused his opera-glasses, a group of three were examining the paintings, and one called to Fitzpatrick in the other room:

"I say, old chap! Is this the picture you did on the Meuse?"

"Aye—an' I can assure you I've painted under more favorable conditions! We had a bomb-proof dug from clay in front of the trench, with a floor of misfit planking about six inches off the ground. It was right enough in good weather—but after a day's rain, our feet were always in the water. To get a decent light, I had my easel stuck up at the trench-opening—had a narrow escape, once or twice, before I finished the picture. Y'see that bit of a patch on the canvas, where the color is laid on thick with a palette-knife? That was done by a fragment of shrapnel which missed my forehead by a quarter of an inch an' made an awful hole in Tommy O'Brien, just beyond me, in the bomb-proof. It was two days before we could get his body to the rear."

"I see you've a bunch of new rec-

ords! Taking them up with you on Thursday?"

"Aye—as far as commissary-head-quarters. Pat O'Donnel is the last of our crowd to be stuck with trench-detail; we'll have him back of the lines, next week. Then every man will be available when the time comes—"

"Faith, Boyle—be careful! One never knows how far a voice may carry, ye know!"

"True for you, Phaidrig! But there's no harm done. 'Tis understood that we talk a bit among ourselves on what we hear of the Staff plans, an' everyone knows there'll be somethin' afoot before long."

FOR an hour, Lammerford and Marie Latour caught no remarks from the other apartment which might be construed as having a double meaning. Then Couramont came into the rear room with one of the women for a glass of wine. They were chatting upon commonplace topics, but in the midst of it, Sir Francis noticed her lips moving in an undertone. Having had a good deal of practice in lip-reading, he had little difficulty in understanding the question she asked: "When is it to be, *mon ami*?" But as the Deputy was standing with his back to the window, the watchers could make nothing of his answer. In a few moments, the party broke up—and Marie whispered: "Is it that some danger threatens France, M'sieu'?"

"*Oui, ma belle!* One which is serious, of a certainty! And it's a question whether one may discover the details in time to kill the whole of it. Me—I know, now, of a dozen people who must be watched from hour to hour; yet if one speaks of the matter to M. le Prefect, it is possible that plans of the War Staff may be disarranged in consequence. As yet, we have no proof that it is not some portion of the summer campaign which they have been discussing with so much secrecy—but me, I convince myself that it is something more serious than that. You will continue to watch, *ma belle*—both at Les Trois Gascons and here. I will write down the number of my own *pied-à-terre* in the Faubourg St. Hon-

oré—so! You will come to me if you learn anything of importance. My concierge, Madame Fauvette, will admit thee to wait, if I am not *chez moi*. In the meanwhile, I will find others to keep our friends over there under observation."

As he picked up his hat and gloves, there was an expression upon her pretty face which indicated the extent to which his service, three years before, had won her affections. He kissed her in friendly camaraderie—and went down the stairs.

IT was but eight or ten blocks to the Rue Royale, where he dropped in at the Automobile Club—happening to overhear a remark in the foyer which indicated a bit of unexpected good luck. A member was speaking of the English Admiral and European celebrity, Lord Trevor of Dartmoor (known to intimates like Lammerford as "the Diplomatic Free Lance"), as having left the club not fifteen minutes before.

Calling a taxi, Sir Francis motored out to His Lordship's modest but perfect house on the Avenue de Neuilly—maintained in constant readiness for occupancy, the year around, by his staff of English and Afghan servants. As Lammerford was considered practically a member of His Lordship's family, the Afghan *khansamah* welcomed him with deep respect and ushered him up to the room he usually occupied—His Lordship not having arrived. Within a few moments, however, Trevor came in—followed by Sabub Ali, more companion than servant, with the suit-cases. Joining Sir Francis in the library, he lighted one of his famous long cigars and drew a breath of quiet satisfaction.

"Gad, Lammy, it's a bit of luck, findin' you here—what!"

"That's the remark I made to myself when I heard you were in Paris! I lost no time getting out here!"

"Why? Have you picked up another thread—when nobody in the city appears to dream that anything's amiss, yet?"

"Humph! I don't know what you've happened upon! I've learned since morning that a prominent Deputy—an intensely loyal Frenchman for eighteen

years, mind you—is actually a Wilhelmstrasse agent, and is now planning some *coup* so far-reaching and unexpected that I'm more nervous than I've been in a good many months! What do you know about it?"

"As to anything at *this* end—nothing! Of course, there'll be little in the Paris papers for several days; we're keeping the thing as quiet as possible for obvious reasons. But—Sinn Feiners captured the Dublin post office, the Metropole and practically all of Sackville Street, yesterday—shot a number of officers as they were returning from the races, are sniping off soldiers and civilians in every direction and have burned hundreds of buildings—and scattered mobs of them are rising all through the South of Ireland. We knew, of course, that they were armed and drilling, but didn't look for any such treacherous outbreak while the Empire was fighting for its life! It'll take fifteen or twenty thousand of the army to handle the thing—an' there's no telling in how many other directions it may show itself! Sir Roger Casement was arrested near Tralee, after being put ashore from a German submarine—and convoying a supply-ship with enough arms to have set half Ireland ablaze, or at least all the disaffected lot. Fortunately, three-quarters of the country is loyal to His Majesty's Government, an' will remain so! But—"

"Aye—but! Now listen to what I've stumbled upon!" As briefly as possible, he sketched the haunting resemblance in Couramont's face as he came out of the Rue Rivoli arcade, and what he had since learned. "There's not one of those officers, or the women, either, who isn't Irish—and, to the best of my knowledge, from the southern counties. Couramont, or Schmaltz, we know to be a Wilhelmstrasse spy who has been waiting eighteen years to do, at some critical moment, what he is ordered to do by his superiors in Berlin—probably serving the *Auswärtiges Amt* many times to good purpose, during those years, as well. And, undoubtedly, there are a dozen or more like him in this thing! From what you tell me, it's rather obvious that what they and those

Irish officers are planning is the more serious part of the Sinn Fein plot—and they've worked in the surest possible way to avert suspicion."

"We've certainly no proof to act upon yet, Lammy! Wait a bit! I think I know of a way to get some! Do you know—or do you remember hearing about—Corporal Dennis Corrigan, of that Limerick regiment? He lost his left hand and wrist in the early retreat—the rear-guard action—and was decorated for an act of conspicuous bravery. Being disabled, of course, he couldn't serve any more, and he opened a gambling club for officers in the Rue de Savoie, south of the Seine. It is winked at by the Prefecture because he maintains a quiet, orderly place where there is seldom any very high play—catering, largely, to the foreign element in Paris, though his rooms are patronized by journalists and members of the Chamber, as well.

"I happen to know that Corrigan was an old-time Fenian—he's nearer sixty than forty-five, though you'd never imagine it from his appearance. I also know practically all the signs and passwords of the old Fenian organization and the Sinn Fein. One of my press syndicate editors obtained them for me at the risk of his life. Now, it'll be a simple matter for me to obtain any sort of special passport I wish, for one of my syndicate war correspondents—say, an Irish-American New Yorker. Eh—what?"

"Humph! . . . We'd best let no word of this reach Lady Nan! She'd see the necessity, of course—but she'd have not a moment's peace until you were back in London. I'd undertake it myself—but your knowledge makes discovery less likely. I can watch the *Trois Gascons* and that apartment of Marie Latour's. It's even possible that I may be able to conceal myself in Fitzpatrick's rooms, during the next twenty-four hours."

NEXT evening the usual habitués of Corrigan's Club in the Rue de Savoie observed with respectful interest the skillful play and almost unbelievable luck of a well set-up, middle-aged stranger whose manner and occa-

sional remarks indicated the American war correspondent now becoming so familiar to the Parisians. The *banque* had been winning heavily from its regular patrons when the New Yorker arrived with Lieutenant James O'Connor,—down for a two-day furlough,—who had run across him in the *Café des Trois Gascons*. The smile of half-recognition upon the American's face convinced O'Connor that they had met before—"Reilly" (none other than the disguised Lord Trevor) being so thoroughly conversant with the families of Kerry and Cork, so prompt with certain words and signs which such a man should know, that the Lieutenant was anxious to have him meet Corrigan without delay. His sitting-in at the game and winning so irresistibly was merely incidental—but it won the admiration of every Irishman in the room, most of them having some knowledge of the deadly game a Tammany politician learns to play in New York.

Reilly at last cashed in for thirty thousand francs, the bulk of which had been won by the house from a Russian diplomat and one of the wealthy journalists of Paris, before his arrival. Afterward O'Connor and a Major Phelan escorted him through a concealed passage into another building, where the one-handed Corrigan was smoking in a little private den. The ex-corporal appeared to be thoroughly informed as to Reilly's winnings and his supposed antecedents—greeting him with a grin of appreciation.

"Faith, 'tis said a Tammany Irishman bates the worrld, me fri'nd—an' it's mesilf believes it! Sit ye down an' smoke a seegyur with me! Tell me, now, Misther Reilly—how's the b'ys in New Yorrrk, an' what ye'll be doin' over here in the newspaper line?"

Reilly—whom Lord Trevor's intimate friends would not have recognized, so completely misleading were the subtle changes he had made in dress and facial expression—named several papers of the syndicate he represented, exhibited very unusual credentials in the way of passport and special permits to visit the trenches, and implied, more by looks than words, that his errand in France was not altogether a journalistic

one. He delighted them by handing over to Corrigan the entire thirty thousand francs he had just won—to be expended in any worthy cause which the ex-corporal might have in mind—and casually remarked that he had left Dublin two days before, completely disgusted with the impatience which had led to an outbreak there at a moment when it was practically certain to fail.

THEY listened to this in amazement—then put a sinister question or two which would have cost him his life had he answered with the slightest hesitation. But he exhibited such a grasp of details—having received by radiogram, three hours before, reports of the Dublin situation which they would have no means of getting for several days—that he convinced them by what appeared to be absolute knowledge of far more than local conditions. After demonstrating the force of his contention until they saw it clearly, he risked a shot in the dark.

"I suppose you'll agree with me that the business over yon changes matters a good bit? For, d'ye see, if you attempt to go on with this end of the plan now, 'tis likely that many of ye are bein' watched! Before ye can act together, in one grand series of blows, they'll be nipping first one and then another of ye—till 'tis the devil's own mess you'll be in, and a file of sharpshooters against the first wall, for every man!"

It was a chance. He scarcely dared hope it would draw them; yet it had been done with such consummate naturalness that they must have been gifted with almost superhuman telepathy to have avoided the trap. They fell into it with no suspicion of the bait.

"But—domn it all, man! There'll be never another such chance in years! 'Tis ourselves has schamed for months—has watched this one an' that one till we know the day an' the hour they'll be in certain places! 'Tis the wires we've laid an' the frame-ups we've planned to lure them all into five diff'rent places the same hour—so we may make a clane job of it! They'll be two min doggin' every Mímber of the British Cabinet—fourteen l'aders of the

peers an' commons—six admirals—an' eight major-ginerals over here—whin the hour strikes!"

"An' that night? Ye've set it for less than two weeks away, of course! That's why I'm tellin' ye 'tis madness—after the fools' work in Dublin!"

"Man—'tis one wake from this night has been set f'r the job!"

"Aye! While our own leaders are bein' shot in Dublin or the Tower! When the eyes of Europe are watchin' every Irishman in the British Isles and on the Continent! Go on with it, if ye will! This day, two weeks, ye'll all be *rottin'* four feet under the sod! Send out the worrd, I tell ye! Send out the worrd to-morrow! Put off the day two months! Then 'twill come upon them like a blow in the dark—from heaven knows where—and ye'll paralyze the Entente! Do it now, an' the Entente'll snuff ye out like so many candle-wicks! Go awn—any way ye like! I'm *tellin'* ye—that's all!"

They were impressed, convinced even; yet the sudden disarrangement of their plans threw them into momentary panic. How to inform each member of their organization in time? It seemed an impossible task.

"An' who'll carry the worrd to England, I'm wishin' to know?" (This, from Corrigan.) "'Tis possible, no doubt, to pass the word through France. But, d'ye see, the most of us is detailed, here an' yon, behind the firin'-lines. They get away for a bit of furlough to rest from the strain of constant fightin'—but they must account for every move they make. We've no way of givin' the whisper to those in England unless one of us bears it there! 'Tis no aisy job to go an' come as ye plaze in these days—as ye well know, Reilly!"

REILLY lighted a fresh cigar and spread open his special passport upon the table.

"Faith, 'tis myself can do the job, if ye wish! My papers'll pass me with little trouble, d'ye see. I would not be sittin' idle an' seein' a lot of the finest men old Ireland ever grew—God bless her!—lined up against a wall an' shot for makin' the mistake of strikin'

before 'twas possible to drive the stroke home!"

The offer was made so naturally, so spontaneously, that it carried them off their feet and banished every particle of suspicion they might have had. In half an hour he had committed to memory a dozen names and addresses in London, Manchester and Liverpool, with additional passwords, and the cards of three officers which had little pencil-dots under certain engraved letters in each name.

Reilly was stopping at a little hotel frequented by Americans in the Rue de l'Echelle, and O'Connor went there with him when he left. In the morning, the war correspondent assumed that he would be shadowed by some of the organization, and so, after making a few purchases, he walked along to the Café des Trois Gascons for a late breakfast, casually sitting down at one of Marie Latour's tables as if he preferred the quieter part of the room. She had no consciousness of ever having seen the man before; yet something in the glance he gave her appeared familiar. When she brought his omelette and coffee, he said—in so low a tone that it couldn't have been overheard ten feet away:

"You remember M. le Chevalier—who was in your apartment last evening, *ma belle?*"

"M'sieu' is insulting! One does not comprehend!"

"*Très bien, ma fille!* Me—I make my apologies, and I entrust a message to your care. M. le Chevalier will be here for his coffee and rolls very soon. Whisper to him: '*The Calais boat—this afternoon—without fail!*' He will understand perfectly—and you will have served France better than you know. Another *café-au-lait*, if you please—and bacon with the kidneys."

The message was delivered in his exact words—Marie feeling much relieved at Lammerford's assurance that it was from one of the great ones in the Corps Diplomatique. So it came about that Sir Francis was in the Gare du Nord when the Calais train pulled out—having barely time to run along the platform and jump into a compartment in which there was but one other

passenger, an American war correspondent who was reading an afternoon journal. After the guard had inspected their tickets,—proceeding along the running-board outside of the coupés,—Lammerford borrowed a light for his cigar from the American, and they fell into a casual discussion of the situation in the trenches. Long before the train reached Calais, he was asleep by the window at one end of the compartment—and Reilly, at the other; yet Lammerford was now conversant with the whole plot and knew just what action to take upon his return to Paris by the morning train.

WHEN Reilly arrived at Charing Cross, a telegram from Sir Francis had preceded him. Consequently, after registering at the Piccadilly Hotel, he was given a room and bath on the second floor which, if required for such a purpose, could be made part of a suite—there being a communicating door on the opposite side of the bathroom. He had assumed that Corrigan was telling only the simple truth when he said it was practically impossible for one of their organization to leave for England without a good deal of red tape which was sure to attract undesirable attention. But he was also convinced that the Sinn Feiner would manage in some way to have him followed at every step if it were possible to do so—hence the precautions which Lammerford had taken for him.

He reached the hotel about midnight—too late to see the men whose names he had memorized; so, after a supper in the grill, he went to bed, turning off the lights within fifteen minutes after locking the door of his room. Meanwhile a wealthy mine-owner from the Cape—secretly connected with Downing Street—had been given the suite adjoining Reilly's. At ten o'clock, Sir Edward Wray, Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, had arrived at the Piccadilly in his motor and sent up a card to the mine-owner, who received him in his suite. When Reilly opened the door from his bathroom at half-past twelve, Sir Edward was smoking in the dark, while his mining friend had shut himself into the further room of the

suite. During that half-hour interview in the dark, Sir Edward was given names and addresses which he jotted down in pencil to avoid mistakes.

For the next forty-eight hours Reilly was busy motoring about London in a taxi, leaving cards, as a war correspondent desiring interviews, at the houses of various people more or less prominent in the army or London society. In several instances, he found the men at home and gave them Corrigan's instructions—the Londoners seeing the danger of immediate action in carrying out their prearranged plan more quickly than had the men in France. The fiasco in Dublin was having its effect upon them, and the military executions had a very sobering influence even while they enraged the conspirators almost beyond endurance.

IN each interview Lord Trevor—as the pseudo-Reilly—had the feeling that the man with whom he had been talking was merely an executive, that the brains of the whole movement was a person of much greater influence and prominence. Consequently his casual glances about the different rooms took and recorded every little detail which might be of use in tracing the chief conspirator. In one house, the gentleman was obliged to leave the room for a few moments in response to a message from one of the ladies of his family. During his absence Trevor noticed a fragment of paper covered with fine handwriting, upon the flat-topped library desk—a half-page apparently torn from some letter. The writing appeared curiously familiar, but he couldn't place it—so he pocketed the scrap for more careful examination later.

He knew that anyone who might be following him about during the day would consider his calling upon one or two prominent men not connected with the conspiracy a clever blind to cover the work he was actually doing, and so he motored around to the handsome Park Lane mansion of Lord and Lady Trevor, about six in the afternoon. As soon as he was inside and had been recognized by his Afghan *khansamah*, he went into the big library to search through half a dozen great scrap-books

which contained many thousands of handwriting-specimens, arranged and indexed according to their style—their heavy or light strokes, peculiar formations of vowels and consonants, and general alignment. In the course of an hour he came upon two pages of specimens very closely resembling the scrap he had managed to secure—but not exactly. Upon the next page he found a fac-simile—with a well-known signature under it.

"Lord Kilimainine! My word! A Kerry man, to be sure—and yet—who'd have thought it! A man who has served for years in the diplomatic service—has received honors and preferment from the Crown!"

THE man who left the Trevor mansion and motored away in his taxi resembled Mr. Reilly in a general way. The chauffeur didn't look at him closely, but drove him back to the Hotel Piccadilly, where he paid the taxi-fare and went in as if stopping there. At the desk, however, he merely asked for a gentleman whom he knew was not in at the time—and went out by the Regent Street entrance. That was the last ever seen of Reilly, the New York war correspondent. His suit-case was held by the hotel people for a month or so, and Scotland Yard notified, but it was finally assumed that he had been waylaid and killed in some mysterious manner.

At nine o'clock the evening Reilly disappeared, Lord Trevor, with Sir Edward Wray and two officers of the General Staff, called upon Lord Kilimainine at his luxuriously furnished town house. He received them courteously, escorting the party back to his den and smoking-room at the rear of the house, overlooking a walled garden. Lord Trevor indicated the object of their visit by expressing his understanding that Kilimainine was rather well acquainted with the French Deputy, M. Henri Couramont—asking if he could give them any information as to the man's antecedents. The Irishman's eyes narrowed slightly as he glanced from one to another of them. Subcon-

sciously, he noticed that none of the four had lighted the cigars he offered them.

"I've met the man, Your Lordship, more than once—but in a purely social way. Do you mind telling me your object in asking such a question?"

"Why—er—Couramont was executed this afternoon, in Paris, in a rather sensational way. He was arrested at his offices in the *Courier du Matin* building—placed, handcuffed, in an open cart, driven up and down the Champs Élysées and Boulevards for several hours, with a placard on his back. This placard stated that for eighteen years he had posed as a loyal Frenchman, gaining honors and position in Paris, while all the time he was actually Captain Heinrich Schmaltz, a secret agent of the Wilhelmstrasse. At sunset, in the Place de la Concorde, which was packed with one of the largest crowds ever gathered there, he was shot. It had been discovered that he was one of the chief instigators of a Sinn Fein plot which contemplated a good deal more serious and widespread action than the Dublin affair. The other leader is known to be a certain Irish peer."

With a smile of sardonic incredulity, as they supposed, Kilimainine opened a drawer of the table by which he sat—and reached in, apparently, for a document which they could see at the back of it. When his hand came out, however, there was a flash—a stunning report.

Lord Trevor winced a little as the ball went through the inner muscles of his left arm—though the eye behind his monocle continued to gaze inquiringly at his would-be assassin. Then there came an answering flash from the vicinity of his right hip. Lord Kilimainine sank back in his chair, shot through the heart—and Trevor was hurried out of the house by one of the generals before the arrival of the doctor or members of Kilimainine's family. As the starched front of the dead man's evening-shirt was somewhat blackened by powder-grains, it was assumed that he had committed suicide.

Another story of "The Free Lances in Diplomacy" in our September issue—on sale August 1st.



The Guile of Ruth

by Elliott Flower

Author of "The Best Policy," "Delightful Dodd," etc.

THOMAS GARDNER, President of the Haven Satchel Company, nodded toward one of the workmen. "That's Haven," he said. "He owned the whole plant once."

"Yes," returned Nathan Matson, "I've heard about it. Pretty hard for a man to have to work for wages in a factory that he built himself."

"How did he come to make the high dive?" asked Christopher Matson, his son.

The senior Matson, who disapproved of flippancy in business matters, gave the young man a withering look, but Garner replied with a laugh: "Father gave him a push."

"Must be a good pusher!" commented Christopher.

"He is," asserted Gardner.

A little later, in another department, Gardner pointed again, this time to a girl. "Haven's daughter," he explained.

"If anybody pushed her," asserted Christopher, after a quick glance, "I'd crawl a thousand miles on my hands and knees for the sake of a chance to boot him!"

"Chris!" admonished his father sharply.

"Well, call it nine hundred, then," modified Christopher.

"Oh, no one pushed her," Gardner hastened to assure him. "She just clung to her father and went down with him."

"If she'd cling to me," commented Christopher, "you could push me off the Washington monument, and welcome."

The senior Matson frowned his disapproval but said nothing in reply to this.

The inspection of the plant finished, Gardner and the Matsons returned to the former's office, where Nathan Matson went to the heart of things in his usual direct way.

"Now, exactly what's your proposition?" he asked.

"We need more money," explained Gardner. "The company is capitalized for only fifty thousand, and it should be double that. Fifty thousand isn't enough to swing the business we are now doing."

"Can't swing the cat with so short a tail," suggested Christopher.

"Chris," said his father, "I wish you'd talk English when we're considering a strictly business proposition like this."

"That's the latest English I know," returned Christopher. "Some of the boys could beat it, but I'm not strictly up to date now."

"Haven began in a small way," Gardner went on, ignoring the interruption, "and when he finally incorporated he was too modest—didn't look far enough into the future. We want to issue fifty thousand more stock, sell at par and put the money into the business, but it's too good a thing to be tossed out

to the crowd. That's why Father suggested you. He's going to take twenty-five thousand himself, and he thought you might like to get in for the other twenty-five."

"You'll be in control?" suggested Matson.

"Father and I will," replied Gardner. "We'll still have a five-share majority, just as I have now."

Matson reflected. "If I put in twenty-five thousand," he said at last, "it will be for Chris, and I shall want him to come in here so as to learn the business."

"Been at large too long," explained Christopher. "Here's where they put the shackles on."

"Quite right," agreed Gardner, replying to the senior Matson. "I had to do that myself, and I've never in the least regretted it."

Matson asked a few searching questions and then picked up some papers that Gardner had given him earlier. "I'll look over these statements and reports to-night," he said, "and let you know to-morrow."

"One thing more," put in Gardner, detaining the two as they were about to leave. "We plan to change the name of the company when we increase the capitalization. Rather absurd to have Haven in the name when he's no longer in the company."

"I don't know about that," returned Matson doubtfully. "The Haven Satchel and the Haven Shopping-Bag are distinctive in some ways and have attained wide popularity."

"We'll substitute 'Gardner' for 'Haven,'" explained Gardner.

"And throw away a lot of money advertising the change," commented Matson. "It costs about as much to change the name of a popular article as it does to introduce a new one."

"But Haven—"

"I don't care a hoot about Haven," interrupted Matson. "He sold his name with the Company, and the name's worth money. Only a fool throws away money. Ask your father."

"As for me," put in Christopher, "I'd rather draw down the big money at the box-office than have my name on the billboards."

THIS had a tendency to make Gardner peevish, for it compelled the abandonment, temporarily at least, of a cherished plan. In the absence of objection from any other source, his father might have been prevailed upon to agree to the change of name, but David Gardner was a decided materialist in business matters, unswayed by either vanity or sentiment, and it was a foregone conclusion that he would side with the Matsons if they made a definite stand. This in itself was sufficient to irritate the junior Gardner, but there was also humiliation in the way they had disposed of his suggestion. He would have been glad to drop the negotiations with them and sell the stock elsewhere, but here again his father had to be considered.

"Just the same," he grumbled, "they're going to be badly fooled if they think they can run things here, for I won't have it."

That evening the Matsons, senior and junior, sat late in the former's library busy with the facts and figures revealed by the papers Gardner had given them.

"It's a good proposition," was the conclusion the senior reached. "I don't know much about the boy, but David Gardner isn't in the habit of losing money, and I guess we can rely upon him to see that a prosperous business isn't jeopardized by any foolishness. Besides, you'll have a strong enough minority interest to entitle you to consideration. It's as good a chance as any young man can ask, but you'll have to buckle down and learn the business from the ground up if you're going to make the most of it. You must go into the shop—"

"Under an assumed name," stipulated Christopher.

"Why?" questioned his father.

"Papa's boy isn't very popular with the workmen," explained Christopher. "He's likely to be a good deal of a joke, and they're a bit afraid of him, too. Anyhow, that's the way it looks to me, and I wouldn't want that girl giving me the frosty eye."

"What girl?"

"Why, Haven's daughter, of course," replied Christopher. "She's a pippin."

"I have always understood," re-

turned Mr. Matson austerely, "that a pippin was an apple."

"Sure," agreed Christopher, "the apple of my eye. But what's this Haven story, Guv'?"

"As near as I can make out," returned the senior caustically, "all you acquired at college was slang and flippancy. I don't care to be addressed that way. 'Father' is more dignified and respectful."

"Too formal," objected Christopher. "Let's compromise on 'Dad.' What's the Haven story, Dad? For of course there is a story."

Mr. Matson tacitly accepted the compromise, because it was about the best he could do with his effervescent son. His brow clouded as he considered the question, however. "Rather an unpleasant one, as it comes to me," he replied, "but it doesn't concern us. Jim Haven made the business. It had been his life work. He started alone in a small way, took in a partner, and finally incorporated. Dave Gardner took some stock in the company and put his boy in to learn the business, just as I am doing with you. He and Haven had been close friends, but they had a misunderstanding of some sort—I never did hear just what it was. Anyhow, he set out deliberately to get Haven's scalp, and it was not a particularly difficult job. Haven was a good man in the shop end of the business, but he was weak in the office end of it. Moreover, he had a propensity for taking an occasional flier in stocks, of which he knew nothing, while Gardner knew the stock market game backwards and sideways. So, playing upon these two weaknesses, Gardner finally got him in a corner, and he didn't leave him even a postage stamp when he got through with him."

"Got it on the collar-button!" commented Christopher. "But why did he go to work in the shop?"

"That's what I can't understand," replied the senior Matson.

"Some sentiment in it, possibly," suggested Christopher.

"Quite likely," agreed his father. "Anyhow, he applied for a job and got it. The idea rather appealed to Gardner's sense of humor, I imagine. Then,

too, Haven must be a very valuable man in the shop end of the business, although I judge from the fact that his daughter is working also that he isn't getting what he should be worth."

"Anybody who'd put that kind of a deal over on a peach—" began Christopher indignantly.

"Peach!" exclaimed Matson. "Are you referring to Haven?"

"I wasn't even thinking of Haven," replied Christopher.

II

JAMES HAVEN emerged from the little den in which he potted and pondered when not at the shop, and his face was radiant with the joy of achievement. Haven was one of those men who are always working, either with hand or brain. There were always problems relating to the business that he was seeking to solve, but they were always shop problems, never office problems. In the office end of the business he had never been very deeply interested, and it was through the constant improvement of the output of the plant that he had achieved success while he was in charge. Now, as a mere salaried man, he still potted and pondered in his little den at home when he was not in the shop, for his pleasure lay in what he did rather than in what he earned.

"I've perfected the self-locking catch," he announced. "I'll take it to Gardner to-morrow."

Mrs. Haven looked up from her sewing and nodded. Mrs. Haven, knowing nothing of business matters, took everything that her husband did on faith. But Ruth Haven shook her head.

"No," objected Ruth; "you must patent it first."

"Do you think he'd steal it from me?" asked Haven.

"He stole the whole business from you, didn't he?" retorted Ruth.

"No," replied Haven dubiously; "no, I'd hardly say that."

"But he got it," insisted the girl.

"Yes, he got it—that is, Dave Gardner got it and gave it to his son. But it was mostly my own fault, I guess,

and it was business, no doubt. I don't think I'd ever have taken the same advantage if I'd had the chance, but I can see that it was business, and Dave Gardner is a business man. Anyhow, I wasn't thinking of going to him with it, but to Tom. It's Tom who's the head of the company now."

"The figurehead of the company," scoffed Ruth.

"You mustn't be too hard on Tom," contended Haven. "He wasn't the one who got me out of the company, and he made a place for me in the shop when I asked him. I don't know what I'd have done otherwise; I've been so wrapped up in the work for so long that I don't think I'd fit in anywhere else."

"He took you back," retorted Ruth, "to feed his own vanity. He likes to point you out as the man who once owned the business and lost it to a better man. He finds humor and flattery in it. I guess I've seen him. You're Exhibit A, and I'm Exhibit B."

"Oh, no, not that," expostulated Haven.

"Oh, yes, just that," insisted Ruth. "He's got all his father's unscrupulousness without his father's brains. He isn't paying you what you're worth, either."

"Perhaps not, perhaps not," conceded Haven, "but that's business too. However, I'll apply for a patent before saying anything to him about it."

"Is it really so very valuable?" asked Mrs. Haven.

"Well, no, not intrinsically," confessed Haven. "It's merely a catch that you lock by touching a spring and then can't unlock without a key, but it ought to be worth a good deal as a feature of the Haven bags and satchels."

"It ought to be worth a good deal to the Haven company just to keep rivals from getting it," suggested Ruth.

"Why, yes, I think so," agreed Haven. "No doubt they can devise something similar, but the concern that gets into the market first with that improvement should have a big advantage. I'd like to talk to Mason about that."

"No," objected Ruth.

Haven and his wife were both surprised, and showed it. "He's a very bright young fellow," argued Haven,

"—rather flippant, but still with a deal to him. I'd have considerable confidence in his judgment."

"No," insisted Ruth; "not until it's patented."

"I thought you liked him," said Haven in bewilderment.

RUTH'S cheeks reddened at the simple directness of that, but she replied to it indifferently. "Oh, I find him entertaining," she said; "I like his company well enough, and there's a good deal of purpose under his flippancy, but do you happen to know who he is?"

"Why, he's Mason, of course, just Mason, a man in the shops," responded Haven. "What more should he be?"

"No, he isn't just Mason, of course," retorted Ruth. "He dropped a letter out of his name when he went to work for the Haven company. He isn't Mason at all, but Christopher Matson, owner of a one-fourth interest in the company."

"Are you sure of that?"

"There's no doubt at all," asserted Ruth. "I saw Tom Gardner showing him over the plant, and my curiosity was aroused when he came to work later; so—well, Kitty Barnard, Gardner's stenographer, is a friend of mine, and I found out about him. He's Christopher Matson, and his father took half of the new stock issue in his name."

"But why—why—" floundered Haven.

"I don't know," replied Ruth. "He was probably put in your charge to learn the business, but why he should choose to go under an assumed name I don't know."

"You've been unusually nice to him," commented Haven.

"Why not?" retorted Ruth defiantly. "Isn't he just the man I should be nice to when I have the chance? And you made the chance."

"No," returned Haven, pondering; "no, I did not. He made it himself by asking if he could come here some evening to talk shop matters over with me, and then he never said a word about shop when he came. And he never has yet," he added; "I hardly even see him when he comes."

Ruth blushed and laughed, but her reply was almost brazen. "So much the better," she said. "He may be useful to us."

"Ruth," reproved Mrs. Haven, "I don't like to hear you talk that way."

"Especially about a man you don't trust," added Haven.

"I never said I didn't trust *him*," protested Ruth, "but he's in financial company that I don't trust, and there's no use taking chances. Don't you say anything to anybody, Father, until your application for a patent is filed."

"Oh, very well," agreed Haven.

"And then assign it to me," added Ruth.

"What!" exclaimed Haven.

"Assign it to me," repeated Ruth. "You're too easy and innocent to handle the matter—so I'll do it myself."

HAVEN objected to this, but he ended by doing as his daughter wished. He usually ended by doing as she wished in any matter upon which she was insistent, for, in spite of her youth and sex, hers was the more practical mind and the stronger will. He had a great admiration, as well as a deep affection, for his daughter. So, by her advice, he took his self-locking clasp to a patent lawyer, and nothing was said of it to anyone else until the application was recorded in the patent office. Then Ruth mentioned it to Christopher, although without intimating that she had discovered the missing letter in the name he had given. She had a personal reason for going to him with it.

"I took the precaution of applying for a patent first," she explained, watching him narrowly.

"Wise girl!" commended Christopher, who, by the way, had not deemed it necessary to change his given name. "No use taking any chances with these smooth business boys."

"It ought to be worth a good deal to the Haven company," she suggested.

"Sure," he agreed. "Stick 'em up and take it away from them. Make 'em come across with a dray."

"Still," she qualified, "one mustn't be too acquisitive. It isn't a necessity; they can get along without it."

"Oh, yes," he returned, "they can get along without it, but they can't afford to let anybody else have it. That's where you've got 'em by the ear."

He seemed to be perfectly sincere, and she wanted to believe that he was perfectly sincere; but, if so, he was certainly blind to his own interests, and there was also the fact that he was masquerading under an assumed name to raise a doubt. Still, there was the pleasant thought that in the matter of the self-locking catch he might be sacrificing his own interests for her, and it was a very pleasant thought. Anyhow, there was nothing for her to do but go ahead with her plan. That would uncover his real attitude in the matter.

RUTH took the catch to Tom Gardner. He was considerably surprised when she asked to see him, for he was under no misapprehension as to her attitude. Haven himself might accept his financial downfall as the fortune (or misfortune) of business, but she made a personal matter of it. That was the trouble with women, anyway, he reflected; they made everything personal. They were utterly unpractical in business matters. So he was surprised and somewhat disturbed when she sought an interview with him in his private office. So far as he could judge, she was not one of the tearful kind, but she blamed him for her own and her father's troubles, and there might be a scene of some sort.

He was relieved, therefore, when she produced the catch and made a very businesslike explanation of her purpose. But he was annoyed when she casually mentioned that the necessary steps had been taken to patent the device.

"Is your father afraid we'll steal it?" he asked.

"Oh, dear, no," she replied. "Father is very trusting—too trusting. I made him patent it."

"Because you're afraid we'd steal it?" he questioned caustically.

"I believe," was her evasive rejoinder, "that the first rule of business is self-protection, isn't it?"

He did not answer that directly. "What's done in our shops on our time

is ours," he said. "I doubt if your father has any right to a patent."

"This work was done in his own den on his own time," she returned, "and you'll have some difficulty taking the patent away from him, I think."

"It's of no great consequence, anyway," he remarked indifferently. "It's a nice little device, but not at all necessary."

"So long as no one else gets it," she suggested.

"If he took it to anyone else," he threatened, "we'd hardly feel justified in keeping him in our employ."

"If he took it to anyone else," she countered, "he'd sell his services with the patent, and you couldn't keep him in your employ."

Gardner was irritated, and he showed it. In spite of her sex, she was far too businesslike to suit him, for she had gone straight to the point that had the most influence with him. "Oh, of course we'd like to have it," he conceded, "but it's not important enough to command much of a price. What does he want for it?"

"Twenty-five shares of stock in the Haven company," she replied.

"What!" he cried in amazement.

"Twenty-five shares of stock," she repeated.

"Don't joke, Miss Haven," he advised. "Where do you suppose I could get twenty-five shares for that purpose?"

"That doesn't concern me," she said.

"The stock is held by a few people," he argued, "and none of it is in the market. You don't expect me to let go of any of my own, do you?"

"It might be apportioned among you all," she suggested, "each selling to the company in proportion to his holdings, and the company could then turn it over to Father in payment for his patent."

SHE was certainly very businesslike—too businesslike. He had an uncomfortable feeling that he was somehow outmatched—and by a woman.

"Even if that could be done," he argued, "you're asking more than the patent is worth to us."

She did not think so, but she finally receded somewhat from her position,

agreeing to take twenty instead of twenty-five shares. That little victory made him feel better, merely because it was a point scored and not at all because of the comparatively trifling amount of money involved. But she still insisted upon payment in stock.

"It's a matter of sentiment," she explained. "Father should have an interest in the company that bears his name."

"I'll talk the matter over with your father," he said.

"Oh, very well," she agreed, "but it won't do any good."

"Why not?" he demanded.

"Because Father has assigned his patent to me, and I want a Haven in the Haven company."

"It may not be the Haven company very long," he retorted.

"What!" cried the girl in amazement. "You surely wouldn't change the name!"

Gardner had let his irritation betray him into an admission that he had not intended to make at that time, but, having made it, he felt that he must hold to it. "It will be the Gardner company and the Gardner satchel and the Gardner shopping-bag and the Gardner everything," he declared.

"I'm glad to know that," she returned thoughtfully, "but it makes no change in the present situation. We want twenty shares of stock for the patent."

"I'll think it over," said Gardner. "I doubt if the matter can be arranged on those terms, but I'll let you know later."

His first move then was to send for Christopher, to whom he explained Ruth Haven's proposition.

"Foxy girl!" commented Christopher. "The stock is worth more than par—so she's getting more for the patent than appears on the face of the deal. But let her have it, of course—pass it out to her with a smile. The patent's worth it, I guess."

"She'd make trouble if she could," complained Gardner.

"But how could she?" rejoined Christopher. "In her place, I'd throw a harpoon myself, if I could, but how could she—with only twenty shares out of a thousand?"

GARDNER nodded. There was implied censure for the company and sympathy for the Havens in what Christopher said, which Gardner did not like, but the reasoning was correct. "She couldn't, of course," agreed Gardner. "I suppose we might turn in the necessary stock at par, as she suggests, but I'll have to give the matter a little thought before deciding. You'll put in your proportion, I presume?"

"Oh, sure!" replied Christopher. "Glad to do it. Why, say, if she should put anything over on us—"

"Yes?"

"I'd laugh myself to death."

This was so far from Gardner's idea of a humorous situation that he ventured to voice his displeasure. "I fear you fail to see this from a business viewpoint," he said coldly.

"A pretty face always blocks my view," returned Christopher.

"I'll think it over," said Gardner again—which was merely his way of saying that he would talk it over with his father. He liked to pretend, even to himself, that his power was autocratic, as he meant it should be some day, but as yet his father had to be considered in all important matters. At the same time, he did not deem it necessary always to tell his father everything, and in this case he neglected to mention his plan for changing the name of the company. Perhaps that would have made a difference in the result of the interview. Perhaps the senior Gardner would have reposed less confidence in his son if he had known. However, he did not know, and he was inclined to agree that the self-locking catch was worth having.

"And," argued the junior, "if we need the stock we give Haven, we can take it away from him, just as we did before."

"Possibly," admitted the senior dubiously, "but sometimes it's not so easy to turn a trick the second time."

"What can he do with twenty shares, anyhow?" persisted the junior.

"In a fight," answered the senior, "twenty shares might represent the balance of power."

"But there is no fight," urged the junior, "and I'll still be far and away the heaviest stockholder."

"You!" exclaimed the senior.

"Why, yes," returned his son coolly. "You're going to turn your stock over to me, aren't you?"

The senior Gardner studied the young man for a moment, and then laughed. "You're not such a bad business man in some ways, Tom," he declared. "In the matter of plain nerve you're very good, and nerve counts for a good deal. But you mustn't be impatient. Of course I intend that the business shall be yours, so far as I'm concerned, but you mustn't be impatient. I want to be sure that you can handle it."

"Haven't I proved that already?" demanded Tom.

"You've done very well," replied his father. "I've had to apply the brakes once or twice, but you've really done very well."

"Then try me without the brakes," persisted Tom. "Leave the whole business to me, and see what I can do."

"Perhaps I will, Tom, perhaps I will," returned David Gardner after a moment of thought. "Responsibility is necessary to development, and perhaps it's time you had more of it."

III

MATTHEW QUIGLEY owned ninety-eight shares of stock in the Haven Satchel Company. He had owned one hundred, but the company had taken over at par two shares as his proportion of the purchase price of the self-locking catch. That it was a good purchase he did not doubt, but there was something in the way the affair had been handled that he did not like. The Gardners were too autocratic—always had been too autocratic. This could be forgiven in David, who was a big man, but it was decidedly exasperating in Tom. He never had liked Tom, and he liked him less than ever now, for Tom had first tried to bully him into providing all the stock necessary to secure the invention.

To Quigley, in this frame of mind, came Ruth Haven with a most astounding proposition.

"I want your stock," she explained.

"It's not for sale," he replied as soon

as he recovered from his astonishment.

"Oh, I don't want to buy it," she returned; "I just want to control it."

"Control it!" he replied, his bewilderment increasing. "For what purpose?"

"To reorganize the company."

Here was the most amazing young woman he had ever met. He knew her as Haven's daughter and an employee in the shop, and she was talking of reorganizing the company! A right pretty girl, but her success in acquiring a few shares for her father must have unsettled her reason.

"But my dear girl," he expostulated, "my proxy wouldn't enable you to do that."

"Of course not," she agreed; "but yours and a few others would."

"Do you realize how many?"

"Perfectly." She picked up a pencil from his desk and began scribbling on a blank sheet of paper. "There are one thousand shares," she went on, jotting down the figures. "Until recently, the Gardners owned five hundred and five of them, but they had to give up ten to get the self-locking catch, and now Tom Gardner owns four hundred and ninety-five, his father being out of it."

"Well, your figures are correct," admitted Quigley, "but—"

"In other words," she interrupted, "Tom Gardner owns forty-nine and a half per cent, and I've got to line up all the rest."

"It's evident you've given the subject some study," he commented with a smile.

"My one ambition has been to get back ever since they squeezed us out."

There was something very wistful in her eyes and voice as she said that, and Quigley nodded. "I see," he murmured. "I see."

"Not part way back, but all the way," she added.

"You'd put your father back at the head of the company?"

"Why not?"

Quigley shook his head now. "I doubt if I could agree to that," he said, "even if I could to the rest. He's too unpractical in a business way."

"If he's smart enough to win back what he lost—"

"That would be you, not him," interrupted Quigley.

"It's all the same," she asserted. "You probably wouldn't want a woman at the head, even if she did succeed where you failed."

"What do you mean by that?" he asked.

"Why, Mr. Quigley," she replied, "you'd have put Tom Gardner out long ago if you could, but you couldn't. I can, but you couldn't."

HE smiled at that. She was so refreshingly frank and certain!

"The office and the shop know more of what goes on than you suspect," she added, "and I haven't been studying the situation all this time for nothing. You would like to have Tom Gardner out, but you haven't been able to see a way to get him out. I have made a way. And it's not such a difficult way as it seems," she went on quickly, forestalling his interruption. "There are only five stockholders in addition to him—Matson, Barnes, Turner, yourself and my father, for whom I am acting. You and I are already in accord in this matter—"

"Oh, we are!" he exclaimed.

"Entirely so," she asserted calmly. "That's why I am so frank with you. . . . And that leaves only three," she continued. "Matson is the biggest, holding two hundred and forty-five shares, since his contribution to the self-locking catch fund; and Barnes and Turner hold the rest between them. Barnes and Turner have not been aggressive, as you have been occasionally, but there is plenty of reason to believe that personally and in a business way they also find Tom Gardner offensive and unsatisfactory, and they have great confidence in you. Now, if I can get Chris Matson in line, you ought to be able to get Barnes and Turner."

"Have you spoken to Matson?" he asked dubiously.

"Not yet."

"He may not come in."

"I think he will."

Quigley reflected. "He seems to be a very capable young man, in spite of a rather frivolous streak in him," he

commented, "and he's the heaviest stockholder next to Tom Gardner, now that Dave Gardner is out. He's in training for a position of authority, and he might object—"

"I don't think that he will," she interrupted. "You see, he's a very good friend—of my father's."

"Oh!" murmured Quigley, and again he relapsed into thought. "I don't think I can do it," he decided at last. "You're a very wonderful young woman, but you're planning on too small a margin, and it might result in the disruption of a business that is at least fairly successful."

"Could it be hurt much worse than by a change of name?" she asked.

"A change of name!" he repeated, puzzled.

"From Haven to Gardner," she explained, "—the Gardner satchel instead of the Haven satchel, and so on."

"Oh, that would be idiocy!" he declared. "Look at the money the company has spent establishing its name."

"Well, that change will be made," she asserted, "if Gardner remains in control. He told me so himself."

"I believe," reflected Quigley, "that he hinted something of the sort to me once, but it was so foolish that I merely laughed at it, and I supposed he had abandoned the idea."

"But he can't do it!" insisted Quigley. "He hasn't the necessary control."

"The party in power," argued the girl, "has a much better chance of getting and clinching that control than anybody on the outside, and now is our chance to get in."

"You're a very wonderful young woman," said Quigley again, "and you almost convince me; but even if we can oust Gardner, I doubt the wisdom of putting your father in charge. We need a younger and more practical head—"

"My head is younger and more practical, isn't it?" she demanded. "As a matter of fact, you'd be getting two heads instead of one."

"It's certainly young enough," conceded Quigley with a whimsical smile, "and after the experience of the last half hour I see no chance to deny that

it's practical; but if we decide to do this, why is it necessary for you to handle all the stock? Why not let the stockholders vote their own stock after we come to an agreement with them?"

"That," she replied, "is a little matter of personal gratification and poetic justice. I want Tom Gardner deposed by a Haven, and I'm the only Haven equal to the task."

"I guess you're right," he agreed, fairly grinning over the idea; "I guess you're right, and when you tell me you have Matson in line, I'll go after the other two."

RUTH naturally was in haste to take the question up with Chris Matson then. He still called frequently, but now it was avowedly to see her and not on the pretense of talking shop with her father. She telephoned him to be sure and come that evening, and she opened the subject as abruptly as she had in the case of Quigley.

"Chris," she said, "I want your stock."

"Stock!" he exclaimed. "What stock?"

"Haven company stock."

"All in the discard!" he grumbled. "You've discovered—"

"I discovered the missing letter in your name a long time ago," she explained.

"I'm sorry," he said glumly. "I'd rather you hadn't learned that until—"

"Until when?"

"I don't know," he answered in some confusion, "but I'd rather you hadn't learned it yet, anyway."

Ruth seemed to find something amusing and also pleasing in this, but she held to the main question. "I want your stock," she repeated.

"Oh, sure," he agreed; "and what do I get?"

"Don't ask silly questions!" she reproved. "This is a business matter. I'm going to depose Gardner."

"Say!" he ejaculated as soon as he had recovered from his surprise, "he was bowling in the right alley, after all."

"What do you mean?" she asked.

"He said you'd do something of that sort, if you could."

"Well, I can," she asserted; and then she explained her plan.

He passed quickly from bewilderment to laughter, and his laughter was long and loud.

"What does that mean?" she demanded.

"I'm just keeping my promise," he explained. "I told Gardner I'd laugh myself to death if you harpooned him. Whom will you make president?"

"Don't you think," she returned, now watching him narrowly, "that it would be poetic justice to put Father back?"

He hesitated a moment then, but only a moment. A glance at her face seemed to decide him. "Sure!" he agreed. "Go to it! I'm strong for Father—if you want him."

"I thought you'd feel that way about it," she said, nodding and smiling, "but I wanted to be sure."

"Oh yes," he repeated resignedly, "I'm strong for Father."

IV

QUIGLEY was awaiting, with some impatience, a report of Ruth Haven's interview with Tom Gardner. Armed with the necessary proxies, Ruth had gone to Gardner to demand the calling of a stockholders' meeting—a meeting that must be formally called, but that, as matters then stood, would consist of only herself and Gardner. And of course she could not ask for this call without explaining the purpose.

"Such a foolish man!" laughed Ruth when she finally appeared in Quigley's office. "I'll have to have some more money."

"More money!" exclaimed Quigley. "I don't understand."

"Yes," said Ruth, "more money. I took some that I borrowed on Father's stock, just as precaution, but it wasn't enough. You see, he got quite excited—"

"I should think likely," laughed Quigley.

"Oh, yes, quite excited," repeated Ruth, "when I told him what I was going to do, and even more excited when I showed him that I could do it.

He stormed and raged a good deal about traitors and sentimentals, said it meant the wrecking of the company, declared a wise man would get out as quick as he could, and announced that his stock was on the market. So I optioned all I could before he could back down."

"Oh, you did!" Incredulous amazement was reflected in Quigley's face.

"Of course," replied Ruth. "I couldn't take it all, but I got enough to make our margin of control a safe one—only you'll have to help me through with it. You or some of the others will have to take most of the stock I optioned."

"Most surprising young woman I ever knew!" murmured Quigley. "But we'll do it, of course," he added. "It finally clinches the whole deal, and we'll be only too glad to do it. But you—you—well, you have me dazed. No wonder he went out of his head, and I suppose it made him crazier when you told him you were going to put your father back."

"Oh, I didn't tell him that."

"You didn't?"

"No. You see, I changed my mind about that, and when I told him I was going to make Mr. Matson president—"

"Here! Here!" cried the startled Quigley. "That won't do!"

"Why, you've always spoken most highly of him!" she urged.

"Oh, yes, he's capable, and he's a large stockholder, and he's got some grasp of the business now," he admitted, "but we can't have plans upset in this crazy way. We agreed to your father—"

"No, you didn't," she retorted; "you agreed to me."

"That's true, too," he conceded with a smile. "We did in some measure—"

"Then that's all right," she declared, "for I'm going to marry Mr. Matson."

Quigley sank weakly back in his chair. "Marry Matson!" he repeated, groping blindly for his wits. "Marry Matson! You're going to— Oh, I surrender! Have it your own way. But I must certainly congratulate Matson."

"Oh, no!" she cried in confusion, "you mustn't congratulate him—not yet. He doesn't know it yet."



The UNKNOWN MR. KENT

DID you enjoy "The Prisoner of Zenda"? —Yes. Will you enjoy "The Unknown Mr. Kent"? —Yes also—most emphatically. For Mr. Norton has written a novel of the same delightful sort as Anthony Hope's famous story, and he contrives to cast a most enchanting glamour about his doll-house kingdom of Marken and the exciting events which transpire therein. And his American hero, "Mr. Kent"—well, just watch him; he's the real thing. . . . This is a story to make you forget your troubles, be they mosquito-little or war-big.

THERE are just three sorts of men in this world who have an ambition that is worth a cuss—hermits, billionaires and burglars; and all they ask is to be left alone," declared John Rhodes on the day when, with painstaking attention to details, he took the last precautions to obliterate his footsteps and disappeared. He might have added, "I'm one of 'em," and if the inquisitive had asked which one, would probably have answered, "Burglar!"

Furthermore there were numerous financiers over different sections of the globe who would have agreed with him heartily, perhaps vociferously. Not that the methods by which, with amazing and cumulative steadiness, he had acquired his vast fortune were more reprehensible than those of other financiers, but because he was endowed with such appalling foresight, steadiness of nerve and ingenuity of resource that it seemed impossible to drive him into a corner and keep him there. And this was naturally much of a disappointment to rival magnates.

Rhodes' most peculiar characteristic,

however, was such a morbid hatred for publicity that even those who could have identified him on the street were few; it became a tradition that, whenever possible, his business was transacted through agents—also that of these agents Richard Kent was the one who effected nearly all the largest deals, and that if there was any truth in the adage, "Like master like man," Rhodes must have been a "terror," inasmuch as, in the parlance of the street, Kent was "a humdinger!"

It was admitted that Kent could be neither bullied, bribed, influenced nor employed, because at different times all these tactics had been tried unsuccessfully. There were diverse opinions of him. Some agreed with that expressed by a certain renowned financial light, pillar of a fashionable church, advertised as a philanthropist, moralist and patriot, who declared wrathfully: "Kent is nothing more nor less than a blithering idiot! A fool! Why, do you know, he's so stupid that he can tell Rhodes' money from his own? He refused fifty thousand dollars I offered him as a gift, when all he had to do to

A COMPLETE NOVEL

by
**Roy
Norton**

Author of "The Boomers,"
"Mary Jane's Pa," "Captain
Bill, Rebel," and other
memorable stories
and novels.



get it was to tell me whether Rhodes was a bull or a bear on steel Common? Plain dishonest, I call him!"

Others, disagreeing, liked Kent because he kept his word; but most of those were unimportant people—who, therefore, didn't count.

That Kent was astonishingly qualified to act as Rhodes' agent in foreign countries, some were aware; for among his conspicuous talents was that of languages, of which he made a hobby. And on one point everyone agreed: Kent's loyalty to Rhodes.

This fidelity found further proof when the master financier disappeared, inasmuch as at somewhere near the same time, or at least within a few weeks after it had been announced that Rhodes had gone on an extended vacation, Kent likewise departed from New York—presumably to attend his employer's interests abroad. He said that was why he was going; but he lied, this being his blunt idea of diplomacy.

And so, having lied when he stated that he was going abroad in behalf of the formidable Mr. Rhodes, the square-jawed Mr. Kent was now turned loose

on war-stricken Europe for a holiday, to wander as his somewhat erratic fancy dictated, cheerfully agreeing with himself that he "didn't care a continental cuss" where the renowned John Rhodes was, what he was doing, what he wanted to do or what he did. All that Mr. Kent, the agent, desired was that Mr. Rhodes, the financier, should leave him, Mr. Kent, undisturbed.

"John Rhodes," said Kent to himself, "has bossed me around and run me here and there, like a small boy hopping a cat over hurdles in the cellar, until I'm sick and tired of it. He's paid me well, and I'm fairly well off; but I've sure earned every cent I ever got out of him. He's gone on a long vacation. So shall I. And if John Rhodes doesn't like it, he can go—further."

MR. RHODES' disappearance was noted: Mr. Kent's wasn't. Watchful financiers rumored it that Mr. Rhodes was traveling in the Far East, intent on new plunder; but about Mr. Kent there were no rumors at all, and

for the simplest of reasons—Kent had hopped completely beyond the reach of rumor, had hopped almost out of the known world, beyond finance, railways, automobiles and State highways, into the unknown, unchanging sixteenth-century village of Steinweg. Accompanied only by his factotum Ivan, who for years had gone with him, everywhere, he had found in Steinweg his two great objects, fish and freedom.

Probably Kent would not have admitted any sentimental or artistic interest in the quaint village itself, with its single crooked street, lined by houses whose gables seemed forever to reach across and whisper of conspiracies, the next robber-baron raid or the public flaying of some poor wretch accused of stealing a purse or a ham. He might have admitted the comfort within the old houses, once one had passed through the low doors to the cool interiors where low ceilings, heavy beams, ancient fireplaces, blackened wainscotings and all, were lighted by the cross shadows cast through the tiny leaded panes of the narrow windows. This would have been his excuse for renting one of those quaint houses in the quaint street—renting it and all it contained, including the aged but competent widow who owned it. Proof of his daring! It requires nerve to rent a widow, although anybody can rent a house.

Kent wished to be free, obscure and unmolested; and within a month he must have been gratified, for he had been accepted as a part of the village, like the village forge, the shabby little priest, or the town-pump: none suspected that within his uncommunicative mind were concealed the methods by which so many of the old-new, or new-old, States had been financed.

But not so with Ivan; he commanded an uncanny interest—couldn't avoid it, because of his enormous size, strength and agility, and because of his strange manner of ignoring all sounds and of speaking only to those who faced him in the light.

VISUALIZATION is necessary to attract the attention of the unimaginative, and without visualization they

have small interest: hence on a certain night in Steinweg no one had even the slightest curiosity in either the widow, Mr. Kent or Ivan, because it stormed—stormed as it can in those mountains, with sweeping rain, vivid lightning and violent thunder. The villagers were inside and under cover on that turbulent night of late spring. So were Kent, financial agent on a holiday, and his factotum Ivan.

Kent lounged in the room he had converted into a den, and luxuriously stuck his feet, carpet-slipped, toward the fireplace wherein surged a blaze that robbed the spring dampness of a winter chill. In the corner of the room, the uniform and blackened wainscoting of which Kent had, with his own hands, desecrated by building a makeshift bookcase, Ivan knelt. His huge shoulders were bent forward, and his shock head was stretched, turtle-wise, as he sought, patiently and laboriously, along the well-packed shelves, for a book that the widow had replaced in her customary hit-or-miss fashion. Suddenly an interior door was jerked open, and the widow appeared, holding her work-gnarled hands upward, and rolling her eyes with fright.

"I hope it struck the Catholic church!" she exclaimed. "I'm a Lutheran."

She paused to look backward over her shoulder, as if afraid the thunderbolt had legs and might be chasing her; and then, suddenly discovering that she was safe, made garrulity serve for apology.

"It isn't often that we have such weather here, it isn't! The sides of the house are waterfalls; the street's a river, the garden a lake. I was afraid the pig would drown. I brought him into the kitchen."

"Very humane of you," commented Kent dryly.

Another crash of thunder and flash of light so close as to be simultaneous caused her to throw her arms above her head as if to protect it. Ivan did not so much as raise his eyes. His imperturbability exasperated her.

"I tell you," she exclaimed, pointing a declamatory finger at Ivan, "he's not natural! Sometimes he doesn't answer

when a body speaks to him. Something uncanny about him, and—and I don't like it!"

"There is something wrong with him," Kent checked her. "He can't hear. Deaf as an adder, or a bad man's conscience."

Her look of incredulity, her sniff, were equivalent to disputing her employer's word. He thought best to explain.

"Listen," he said: "I don't want you to dislike him. He can't help it. When he was a young man he had spinal meningitis. It left him deaf. Before that he was a tutor of languages. He taught me all I know, and so I shall always keep him. He can tell what you say to him only by watching your lips—lip-reading, we call it in English. I want you and everyone else to be kind to him, because he's sensitive."

She shook her head doubtfully; but won over by natural sympathy, she said: "I see. He's your three-legged dog—no good, but you keep him because he loves you."

KENT tried to discourage her limberness of tongue by picking up a book; but she talked unceasingly while heaping more fagots around the back-log and dusting the ashes from the grate. Her voice, raised to a snap, brought him back from a reverie.

"You've not heard a word I said!" she declared, vastly annoyed.

"Eh? What's that?" He lifted his eyes and placated her with a smile that was rare and winning.

"A man came from Marken," she repeated, intent on impressing him with prodigious news. "Pierre La Franz, it was, and says there might be a revolution over there that will shake the world! 'Shake the world,' Pierre said."

Kent could not restrain a laugh.

"Don't you bother about the world," he said soothingly. "Marken's standing army might give the Pope's Swiss guard a good tussle, but—humph! If Marken went to war, the world would probably never hear of it—let alone shake. Why, Marken's so small it's a secret!"

As he proceeded she reddened with

indignation, tried to speak; and then wagging her head at the obtuseness of a man who could not believe that the two-by-four kingdom, bordering on Steinweg, and regarded with awe by every peasant within forty miles, was not of world-wide importance, she retired to her kitchen. She slammed the door with a fine expression of disgust; but Kent was already thoughtfully recalling what she had said of that inconspicuous but completely independent kingdom called Marken, a kingdom so small that on a map of Europe it would be but a tiny pink spot, a kingdom so small that no one had ever taken the trouble to upset it.

His face became grave, and he emitted a disgruntled "Humph!" John Rhodes was again intruding on his peace of mind, and could not be put aside. Marken threatening revolt! That meant that the loan of five million dollars that Rhodes had extended to His Majesty Karl II, King of Marken, might prove worthless. And Kent had met the negotiators of that loan, passed upon their securities, accepted them and caused that loan to be made. Hang Rhodes! He could afford to lose many times that sum; but the question of the wisdom of his agent Kent was involved, and a financial agent's judgment is his sole stock in trade. Now Marken might prove a slap at Kent's judgment; Rhodes wouldn't like it. And there were many other agents who—

Kent twisted his big, capable fingers together and muttered some unpleasant objurgations consigning Karl II, the Marken loan and John Rhodes, indiscriminately, to the outer world. It was his plain duty, as he was well aware, to travel without delay to Marken and do what he could to protect Rhodes' interests; that might mean the end of this vacation, and the trout were at their best.

SCOWLING, Kent turned to his desk, unlocked a drawer, took therefrom a steel dispatch-box, unlocked that and sought a paper, which he opened and scanned. It was a private report he had caused to be made on Marken affairs, and now that its substance was recalled and his memory

refreshed, it did not appear to add to his mental comfort. He used one or two very vigorous Americanisms, and replaced paper and box in the desk. He thumped vigorously on the floor with his heel, and when the huge man in the corner, feeling the shock, looked up, addressed him in a voiceless whisper of the lips.

"Ivan, have you happened to learn anything about a revolt over in Marken? You see more of these tongue-wagging peasants than I do."

The giant advanced to the desk, across which he spoke.

"No sir, not exactly a revolution; but I heard they were discontented, over there. Some of the villagers said—you know it is an autocratic government?"

"Yes, autocratic government with a man born to the job who doesn't happen to be a real, good, all-wool-and-a-yard-wide autocrat. Good deal like a fellow being born to inherit a farm whose nearest idea of a plow is an ice-scraper for cocktails."

While Kent spoke, Ivan's eyes were fixed on his lips attentively; but discerning that his employer's speech was at an end, he slowly wagged his massive head and added all his information:

"They say, sir, that the king is credited with being a well-meaning man, but not just the one to advance the kingdom. They are afraid Marken will be swallowed by some of the big fish around it."

"That's where an autocrat comes in," declared Kent. "A first-class autocrat ought to be a big enough fish to get out, and under the guise of charity, culture or some other bosh like that, swallow the other fellow first. Any sort of an excuse will do, just so he eats them, dead or alive. I'm rather a believer in autocrats, myself. Now, if I were advising Karl the Second, I'd say—"

He stopped abruptly, interrupted by a prolonged peal of thunder, and when it died away there became audible a terrific bumping and thumping on the door outside as some one knocked for ingress. At the same moment the door from the kitchen opened hurriedly and the gnarled widow entered.

"Some one wants in—some one

who raps on the outside door," she grumbled.

"Well, let them in," said Kent; and Ivan, reading his lips, straightened up and stepped backward to his corner, intent on withdrawing himself, now that others desired audience with his employer.

CHAPTER II

THE widow opened the door leading from the room to the little storm entrance, a mere square of vestibule, and withdrew the bolts from the outer door. She swung it wide and stepped back. Instantly, as if already rendered impatient by the delay, a man stepped inside. A long raincoat dripped water on the floor, and the visor of his military cap trickled until, annoyed, he jerked it from his head and wiped his brow with his hand. He appeared to be scarcely more than thirty years of age; though of slender frame, he had an erect carriage that lent him a false dimension of height.

Close behind him crowded a burly, gray-haired man with fierce mustaches demanding more attention than any other part of his face, who pursed his lips and blew the water from this adornment with a single loud, explosive "Poof!" His eyes, round, pale and staring, almost childlike but appraising, fixed themselves on Kent across his leader's shoulder, and at sight of them Kent, who had looked up with casual curiosity, smiled slightly and arose.

"We are sorry to disturb you," said the younger man in apologetic French, "but we failed to find an inn. Yours was the only light. Can you direct us—"

"There is no inn open at this hour. We can perhaps accommodate you," Kent replied; and Ivan, reading his lips, lifted his eyebrows, knowing that within less than a quarter of a mile was an inn of late habit though excellent repute.

"Then—" The young man turned dejectedly as if to consult his companion, while Kent watched him.

"Perhaps," suggested Kent, "you could be comfortable here—you and your friend. You're welcome."

Ivan wondered at his master's pertinacity.

"But her High—that is, my sister, and her maid are outside," the younger man said with faint eagerness. "My sister and her maid, and the man who—their chauffeur. Can you provide for so many?"

"Easily, if you don't mind a little discomfort," was the instant response. "Bring them in. Don't keep them out there in the rain."

The elder man, with a grunt, swung round and reopened the door of the vestibule, through which his companion, as if too relieved to think for the moment of offering thanks, preceded him out into the storm.

"You said there was no inn!" indignantly remonstrated the old peasant woman. "You said that—"

"Sh!" Kent silenced her with twinkling eyes. "Forget that," he said quietly. "All you are to do is to see that they are made comfortable. Understand?" Grumbling, but obedient, and more or less subjugated, she turned back toward her kitchen just as the outer door opened and through it stepped a young woman who, without hesitation, walked to the fire and with gloved fingers fumbling at the buttons of her coat, doffed it with an air of satisfaction, exposing a graceful, well-rounded figure clad in a serviceable tailored costume. Kent, watching her, and ignored, saw that her fine eyes were somber and absent, as if her mind were concentrated on something other than her surroundings, and that her hands, when ungloved and lifted with feminine habitude to adjust her disordered, exquisite hair, were white and graceful. Her features were refined, sensitive, well bred and of strength. Her lips, grave and compressed, made him wonder what they might be like when relaxed by laughter.

BEHIND her came a most haughty personage carrying a jewel-case. Nothing save the fact that she carried it indicated that this might be the maid and the other the mistress.

"Well," said the lady with the box, addressing him abruptly, "can't you offer a chair?"

She fixed Kent with a haughty stare; and he, realizing that in his inspection of his new guest he had forgotten to be polite, hastened to make amends.

"Pardon me," he said lamely; "I forget."

He drew two chairs toward the fireplace, and was then aware that during his ministrations the door had opened and another young man had entered, carrying a suit-case and handbag. This, Kent decided, eying the visitor's long gauntleted gloves, was the chauffeur. The latter carefully deposited the luggage out of the way at one side, removed his cap and stood by the door. He appeared to be the youngest of the party, and was clean and fearless of face and eyes. Kent, the student of men, mentally appraising him, concluded that he liked the young man as one who could be depended upon in almost any emergency.

Kent, however, had scant time for his inspection, for the door from the vestibule again swung open and the two men who had first disturbed him appeared, closed the door after them and divested themselves of their rain-coats. The younger man, evidently the leader of the party, was clad in the uniform of an officer of hussars from which the shoulder insignia was missing, and his high boot-tops were here and there splattered with mud, proof that his ride had been far from leisurely. One of the frogs of his coat-braid had been torn loose and dangled by a thread as if it had been ripped away in the haste of fastening it, and one of his spurs was missing. He fumbled absently at his belt, unfastened it and threw belt and sword carelessly on top of the suit-case before turning toward the fire.

The stout and elderly man was far from being as neat in his attire, being clad in a rather startling mixture consisting of a pair of dress trousers tucked into cavalry boots, a dress waistcoat exposing a soiled dress-shirt-front, and a heavy hunting coat from each pocket of which protruded letters and papers crammed in hastily. Around his portly waist was strapped a cavalry saber and mixed with the papers in one pocket of his coat projected the handle

of a huge revolver. Before he was clear of his rain-coat he began roaring orders like an important guest newly arrived at an inn.

"Here, woman," he called to the aged peasant dame, "have some one take our horses to a stable, rub them down, water and feed them—not too much, mind you! And you might take these rain-coats out and clean the mud off the skirts. And bring us all something hot to drink. Quickly! We're half frozen and wet to our hearts!"

WITH considerable resentment the widow faced Kent, as if accepting orders from none other; and he, smiling sardonically, made a swift gesture commanding her to obey. She tilted her nose high in the air, tossed her head and disappeared. The younger man, in the meantime, with an air of great weariness and dejection, dropped into a chair by the side of the fireplace, where he suddenly leaned forward until his elbows rested on his knees, and held his white, well-kept hands toward the blaze. On one of his fingers was a huge old signet ring that now and then he absently twisted in distraction, while moodily staring in front of him.

Kent, finding himself still ignored, smiled knowingly and reoccupied his chair by the desk, where he pretended to absorb himself in a book. Ivan, taking the cue from his master, resumed his search of the bookshelves as if receiving unexpected guests on such a night were a regular routine, and the young officer by the door, on an invitation from the leader of the group, joined the others by the fireplace in an attitude of respectful waiting.

"Well, we are this far and—" began the elder man in his booming French; and then, recalling that they were not alone, turned stiffly and stared at Kent, made a significant gesture of warning with his hand and changed to a dialect language that was plainly a mixture of German, French and Italian in quality. Had he been observing the financial agent, he might have been startled by another flicker of a smile on that absorbed gentleman's features—due to the fact that Kent, the polyglot, spoke

the language of Marken almost as fluently as he did his own tongue.

"And a close call it was, too, Your Majesty. It was very fortunate that I had the foresight to divert them from following Captain Paulo across the border by—"

The King of Marken interrupted him impatiently.

"Your foresight? Humph! It seems to me that if your foresight as chancellor of my kingdom had amounted to much, we should never have been compelled to run like a hutch of rabbits to save our lives. However, my sister is safe," he concluded; and then observing that the acting chauffeur, Captain Paulo, appeared restlessly eager to speak, he added: "What is it, Paulo?"

"Does it not seem best, sire, that I stand guard outside the door for at least an hour or two to make certain we are not pursued, even here across the border? We are but an hour's ride from—"

He hesitated. The King vented a short, bitter laugh.

"Go ahead," he said. "What you mean to say is that our cousin, Baron Provarsk, is not the sort to pay much attention to boundaries on a dark night when out for a chase?"

"Exactly, sire."

"Then do as you wish," the King assented with a shrug of his shoulders and a gesture of helplessness. Instantly, and with an air of willingness, the young officer saluted and passed outside to stand guard in the storm.

"Karl, I cannot yet see the sense of all this," asserted the Princess, who up to now had not spoken; and Kent caught himself starting at the musical sound of her voice.

"But, your Royal Highness!" blurted the Chancellor, "it would have been extremely dangerous for you to remain there. I foresaw that, and being a man of action, I—"

HE paused, interrupted by the opening of the door from the kitchen and the appearance of the peasant woman wearing draped about her head and shoulders a gunny-sack that she

had used to protect herself from the rain. She glared haughtily at the visitors and spoke directly to Kent, the only one she acknowledged as her master.

"I have put the horses in the woodshed," she announced. "That fool Peter helped. He is feeding them now. The poor beasts! Scandalous, I call it, to ride animals so hard on such a night!"

Kent smiled at her tolerantly.

"That being done," he said, "you will now prepare the best chamber for our lady guests. Make it comfortable in every way you can. After that, do the best you can with other rooms."

The lady's maid, as if to assure herself of the Princess' comfort, arose, saying, "I will help you. Please lead the way," and when the peasant woman disappeared, followed her. Kent, after a glance at his guests,—who, as if too dejected to be interested in anything save their own plight, still stared at the fire,—again resumed his pretense of reading. Now and then his bushy eyebrows tightened and his mouth took on a grim, firm look, as if he were slowly threshing his way toward a resolution; but his guests, evidently feeling safe behind the barrier of their language, again took up their conversation.

"What I fail to understand, despite your somewhat lame explanations, Von Glutz," remarked the King with asperity, "is how Provarsk could have hatched his plot and taken possession of the palace before you suspected it."

"A chancellor cannot see everything," doggedly grumbled Von Glutz. "And you will remember, sire, that it was you who did away with our secret service."

"Bah! Why not? It accomplished nothing and cost much to keep."

"Now, when your father was alive, under whom you must not forget I had the extreme honor to act as chancellor—" began Von Glutz crustily and pompously.

"Yes, Father willed you to us," interjected the Princess with acerbity.

The Chancellor said "Humph! Hum-m!" noisily, and then, having cleared his throat preparatory to speaking, contented himself by getting extremely red in the face, opening his

lips, closing them and tugging at his white mustache.

"And things went from bad to worse, regardless of all I wanted to do for my people!" The King spoke with a voice of regret and sorrow.

This evidence of sincerity appeared to be the final spur necessary to bring Kent to a decision. He turned slowly around and stared hard at the young man; then he abruptly closed his book, tossed it on the table and said, addressing him in the tongue of Marken: "And so, abandoning your good intentions, you ran away, eh?"

THE falling of one of the beams of the ceiling could scarcely have proved more startling to the three refugees by the fireplace. The King pivoted in his chair and faced Kent with a look of consternation. The Princess, aghast, opened her eyes widely; and the Chancellor, bristling with annoyance, jumped to his feet and roared loudly: "What business have you listening? Do you know whom you are addressing?"

To a man who, throughout his life, had been accustomed to see his hearers quail when he vented that tremendous roar, the effect was more than disappointing. The roar seemed to have lost its efficacy, for the financial agent merely grinned at him and snapped his fingers. He even had the temerity to eye the Chancellor slowly, from his round eyes down to the tips of his boots and then back up again, almost contemptuously, but with infinite good nature. Yet there was a something about him suggesting that he might grin just as pleasantly if he were ordering the Chancellor taken out to the hen-house and hanged by his fat neck.

"Suppose you drop that style of talk with me," he said at last, "and sit down like a good boy. Certainly I know whom I address. Otherwise—humph! I don't think I'd take the trouble. This pleasant little party consists, first, of Her Royal Highness Princess Eloise; second, of His Majesty Karl Second, King of Marken; and third, of His Excellency, that clever, astute and far-sighted chancellor, Baron Von Glutz."

He chuckled softly as the Chancellor writhed under his sarcasm, stuttered

and threatened apoplexy; and then Kent added with a soft drawl that even the language of Marken could not hide: "Don't trouble to speak, Baron, if it hurts you. I undoubtedly have the advantage of you in this, that while you don't know who I am, which after all matters but little, I know all about you."

"You—you—you! Impudence, I call it! How dare you—"

"Easy! easy, Baron," Kent admonished, with much of the good nature vanishing from his eyes, and his firm mouth adjusting itself to harshness. "Best not make a fool of yourself. You have my permission to scowl at me. Perhaps it's just as well, so that in future meetings, if there are any, you can identify me quickly and thus learn to suppress what I fear is a rather truculent temper."

THE King, who had watched Kent closely, evidently had greater control of his emotions and faced his chancellor sharply.

"Baron, sit down," he said, quietly. "We are not in a position to domineer. You forget yourself. We are this gentleman's guests—although, as he says, he has an advantage of knowledge."

Kent refused to accept this suggestion that he make himself known; turning to his desk and the steel dispatch-box which he had opened, he took therefrom a packet of papers that rustled as he spread them before him.

"That there may be no further doubt of my knowledge," he said, dryly, "and that you may realize how thoroughly I do know you, I ask you kindly to listen while I read."

The face of the Princess expressed nothing save expectancy, while the King watched his strange host with a look of curiosity. The Chancellor, subdued momentarily by the command of his superior, fidgeted and moved restlessly in his chair.

Without preliminary, Kent read, slowly, distinctly, as if to impress his words upon them, but in rather a kindly tone of tolerance:

"In obedience to your request for a thorough report, I submit as follows: After some six weeks' study of the situ-

ation, I may add: His Majesty Karl II is in character a well-meaning, morally clean young man. He has neither bad nor extravagant habits. There is small doubt that he cares for his people and has at all times their welfare at heart. His unfortunate failing is that he clings to the old monarchical ideas, but without the strength and firmness to enforce them upon his subjects and thereby control them. He may possibly have the courage to face the issues that are certain to confront him as a ruler, but I am inclined to doubt it. He is too kindly disposed and is given to the evasion of those harsh or unpleasant duties, the prompt meeting and deciding of which can alone make his reign a success. I had not the means of studying him very closely, and therefore may be mistaken; yet I cannot help but regard him, until he proves otherwise, as what is termed a slacker."

KENT paused and looked up at the King, who bit his lip, frowned thoughtfully and said quietly: "It is the truth!"

The Princess gazed at her brother angrily and urged him to speak in his own defense.

"Karl! Karl!" she demanded indignantly. "Are you going to sit here and let a stranger dare criticise you in this manner?"

"If the Princess will but listen—" Kent began politely, and with an air of deference; but he was interrupted by the Chancellor, who again blustered until he was silenced—and that, too, without politeness or deference.

"Suppose, Baron, you keep out of this!" Kent's voice was stern albeit satirical. "No, no, wait a moment, and I'll give you an excuse to talk. The best part of this report deals with you, and no doubt an outside appraisal of your character might prove interesting."

He flipped the pages over, rapidly, paying no heed to the Chancellor's angry protests, until he interrupted with a dry, "Here we are!" and again read aloud: "Chancellor Von Glutz is in person a large, pot-bellied man with a bulbous red nose, eyes like a goll-

wog's, given to boasting, overeating and arrogance, who has a vastly exalted opinion of himself and is, in reality, a man of but mediocre ability.' Steady! Steady, Baron! I've not finished."

"Yes, do be quiet!" insisted the King, with a slight grin of satisfaction.

"It is largely due to his incompetence and pigheadedness that the kingdom is secretly in a state of unrest at the time of rendering this report; but it is doubtful if the King will dismiss him from office, inasmuch as the Baron is a sort of family heirloom. I find nothing to his credit save that he is bluntly honest and loyal."

"There you are, Baron!" the King laughed; but the Chancellor, after gasping like a large and overfat codfish hauled from deep water, was now on his feet bristling with rage, his eyes completely round and blazing, his mustaches quivering, his face red and his fist clenched and threatening assault on Kent—who grinned cheerfully and said in English: "Hoity-toity! Got a rise out of you that time, you old porpoise!"

"By what right, I demand to know," shouted the Baron, "did you dare to send a detective to Marken? You have gone too far, even if we do have to accept you as host. By what right, sir? Answer me!"

Kent's bushy eyebrows closed in a heavy frown, and all tolerance and good humor disappeared. Even his voice underwent a subtle change and became frigid and emphatic. His eyes coldly met and held those of the Chancellor.

"If anyone had the right to investigate the procedure by which you and your King, between you, blotched up the affairs of Marken, I am that man. Let's be done with paltering, flattery and rubbish, and talk plainly. I happen to be Richard Kent, who, as confidential agent for John Rhodes, gave the unfortunate advice by which he advanced five million dollars in gold to start Karl the Second, just come to the throne, free from other debt. Oh, I had right enough!"

AS if touched by an electric spark, the King arose from his chair, stared for an instant and then slowly

dropped back again with a long sigh of resignation. Von Glutz breathed heavily through his nose, and appeared to wilt into an equal state of helplessness. There was a moment's silence in which Kent sternly eyed him, and then a voice broke out, filled with anger and defiance, that of the Princess Eloise.

"And so," she said scornfully, "the vultures gather on the borders, waiting to fatten from our misfortunes!"

"Mademoiselle—Your Royal Highness! You—"

She swept his attempted defense aside with an eloquent gesture.

"John Rhodes! The nightmare that has been over our heads for four years! Men might worry and work, but John Rhodes' interest must be paid! That magnificent usurer who thrives fat from the misfortunes of nations, of peoples, of private enterprises! The gigantic spider that crouched behind the war, waiting, that he might plunge forward with money and twist his prey harder than ever. *Shylock* clutched and hung to his pitiable victims. And you have the effrontery to tell us here to-night, when we are your reluctant guests, with everything lost behind us, that you are the agent of the infamous John Rhodes!"

Kent looked at her in a strange admixture of annoyance and admiration. Here, at least, was one who was not afraid. His eyes lowered themselves to the papers on his desk. And it was as if the great John Rhodes—before whom, as she said, kings and financiers alike had trembled—was for the first time being presented to Kent's mind in true light.

"It is true," he said thoughtfully, "that I am the agent of John Rhodes. But I have not, as your Royal Highness implies, been sent here as a spy in waiting for your flight—for an abdication, or to make terms for John Rhodes' protection. My being here is an accident."

SHE shrugged her shoulders with an air of disdain, as if expecting a financial agent to evade, or lie. It added to his distress. Men he understood, and could fight. He was no

quaverer. He had, in his capacity as agent, boldly met and boldly browbeaten half the chancellories of Europe. His nerve and bravery were recognized by those of far more importance than anyone connected with this paltry, petty, betinsed little kingdom—which had survived by accident, and the disruption of which had been delayed by his own efforts, merely because it was the whim of John Rhodes, for financial purposes of his own, that it should continue to exist.

"An accident?" she said mockingly. "An accident! They are strange, such accidents as these! Mr. Richard Kent admits being the financial emissary for the gentle Mr. Rhodes—Rhodes! whose crimes of selfishness and remissness are greater than those of any man living. Who ever heard of John Rhodes ever doing anything to lessen the cares and sorrows of kingdoms or of peoples? The Rothschilds, with less power than this hard-hearted American, found ways to save many; but not so Rhodes. There was in them a respect for the dignity of those who had suffered responsibilities, and a desire to assist those nations that struggled for existence and, because they had endured, were worthy of some respect and veneration; but Rhodes, the cruel, uncanny and monstrous genius of money, had no such saving grace. Not even you, his agent, can truthfully tell of one unselfish and kindly act in his career. I am not afraid to tell you this, though 'Like master like man' is a fine old proverb in your tongue. And you have the temerity to declare that you were not lying here in wait, that you—"

Without thought she had advanced, as she tempestuously spoke, until she stood at the end of the desk! and he, to meet her approach, arose and, from its opposite side, stood and looked at her. The King and Chancellor in turn tried to check her, but she imperiously waved them aside.

"Does not your Royal Highness understand," objected the Chancellor pleadingly, "that you are making a powerful enemy of the only man, possibly, who can assist us in the future?"

"Future? There is no future!" she declared, impatiently gesturing the

Baron aside; but Kent, who stood almost stolidly under her words, objected to interference.

"If you please, Baron," he said steadily, "I prefer that the Princess have her say. She is at least candid, and honest. From her, at least, I shall not find subterfuge." He stepped around the side of the desk until his back was to Von Glutz—and also by the change he carelessly and impolitely ignored the King.

"I implore Your Highness to proceed," he said, respectfully yet firmly meeting her eyes. "There is nothing that so clarifies the atmosphere of misunderstandings as freely uttered truths. And Mademoiselle—even a money-lender may be permitted to admire bravery such as yours. I have told you that my being here was an accident. I told the truth. Is it fair and just to believe that I also may not be candid? To condemn me unheard as a liar? Neither of us is afraid! I listen."

FOR some reason that she could not have analyzed, her defiance faltered and waned. There was the protest of honor affronted in his quiet, musical voice; and she suddenly discerned in this alien some prodigious power, some inflexible strength, that hitherto, blinded by anger, she had not recognized.

"What is the need?" she asked lamely. "You are in a position to laugh at our distress, a distress that you do not, and cannot, understand! Oh! if I were a man—"

She paused. He smiled, vaguely, at this sign of femininity.

"Other women have said that," he declared softly. "Other brave women—ever since thrones and kings began. It is the most hackneyed cry of creation. And I doubt not that if you were—"

He turned sharply as the sound of a door opening disturbed him, and glanced across the room to where the lady-in-waiting had entered and stood with her hand upon the latch.

"Your Royal Highness' apartment is ready," the lady-in-waiting said as perfunctorily as if they were still in a royal palace and undisturbed. The King arose wearily to his feet, and the

Chancellor bowed punctiliously before the Princess as she slowly turned and advanced toward the door. She paused for an instant, as if torn by a desire to speak again, hesitated with other words on her lips, and then slowly passed from sight.

CHAPTER III

THE King, harassed by his own misfortunes, slowly dropped back to his seat, and resumed his listless attitude, while staring into the fire that crackled and glowed as a black-log dropped, broken, to be consumed in the bed of embers beneath—symbol of his broken kingdom from which he had fled. The Chancellor, diplomatic, became obsequious in the presence of the man who stood as a possible dictator of destiny, stared at Kent and resumed that nervous tugging at his mustache. Kent, bent from the hips forward, still leaned across the desk with his eyes fastened absently on the door through which the Princess had departed.

"I hope," said the Chancellor, apologetically, "that Mr. Kent does not take too seriously what the Princess Eloise has said. Her Royal Highness is exhausted. She has endured much tonight, and—at times all of us are worn to irritability."

Abruptly Kent scowled at him and stood erect. Almost resentfully he said: "The Princess requires no champion. She appears abundantly able to fight her own battles—better, I might suggest, than some of those stalwarts around her."

Heedless of the Chancellor's discomfiture, he walked around the desk and seated himself, with all the air of energy and business capability that dominated him when on guard. He folded the scattered papers, placed them in an envelope, put them back into the dispatch-box and then brusquely turned toward the King.

"Now that we understand more or less of the conditions," he said coldly, "I should like to have you tell me exactly what happened in Marken that explains your presence here in this vil-

lage. You need not hesitate or stand on your dignity. I have talked with other fallen kings. I have made and unmade some of them," he added, with grim significance.

The King looked at him and smiled, almost sadly, yet not without dignity. The Chancellor, after a perplexed and hesitating glance, grunted, wiped his bald head with his handkerchief and left the task of reply to royalty. The King shrugged his shoulders, and his eyes wandered around the room as he mentally formulated speech and sought the true beginning. They fell upon Ivan, and for the first time he appeared cognizant of his presence.

"Perhaps," he suggested, "in the discussion of a subject so delicate as the admission of one's own defeats, it would be better if we were alone."

Kent turned toward Ivan. He started to explain the latter's affliction and then, checking himself, said: "Quite right. It is better if we are alone."

It flashed through his mind that it might be as well to humor the King, and also mental habit controlled him, a habit of caution that had grown from the policy that it was far better never to tell anything that could remain untold. He saw that his follower's eyes were on his lips, and said: "Ivan, you may go. I shall not want you this evening."

The giant, alert in his own world of silence, smiled quietly, understanding all that was implied, and turned toward the door with the lost book in his hands.

"Thank you," he said. "If you need me, I shall be in my room."

He bowed to Kent's guests and passed out, while the King, with an air of relief, watched his departure.

"WELL," said the King abruptly after a minute's silence, "I tried to reform and be a father to my people without giving offense, and—made a mess of it!"

Kent liked him for the frankness of his confession, and his eyes softened to a more friendly shade.

"His Majesty was not—" began the Chancellor.

"Suppose you let him tell it," interrupted the financier. "He seems to have maintained his position as well as you did yours."

The King lifted his hand, palm outward, toward the Chancellor, and it was quite as effective as if the open palm had been clapped over the Chancellor's mouth.

"Go ahead," Kent urged the King. "You tried reforms, and they didn't succeed. Most of them don't. Er—what particular mania—I mean brand of reformation, was yours? Anti-gambling? Prohibition? Eugenics? Votes for women? Universal peace? What was it you tried?"

At first the King scowled at the American, a good, hearty scowl of outraged dignity; and then, discerning that beneath the banter was more or less of sympathy, he smiled a trifle sadly.

"I tried," he said quietly, "to give them more liberty."

"Oh!" Kent let the exclamation slip. And then, after a slight pause: "I remember that yours was an absolute monarchy. Always has been; people brought up to respect the King boisterously when he happened to be respectable, and to swallow their disrespect when he happened to be the other thing. May I ask what form of liberty you proposed? Was it a Magna Charta, or something like that?"

"Of course not!" indignantly objected the Chancellor. "The rights of the Crown had to be respected."

"Um-m-mh! So! Sort of curtailed liberty, eh, with a leash on it that could be jerked when necessity arose? Just like an April Fool purse designed by a small boy who lurks around the corner."

"I gave them councils where they could vote," protested the King. "That was a step toward liberty, wasn't it?"

"But I suppose your very able chancellor saw to it that you could veto any act they passed, and in fact dissolve them, any time they had plans you did not approve of?"

THE King tried to appear offended, and the Chancellor was sulky and sullen.

"Did you finally dissolve them?" Kent asked when neither answered.

"No," said the King sadly, "I tried to reason with them. That was after one of them proposed a resolution inviting me to abdicate."

Kent leaned back and laughed quietly.

"Listen!" he said. "There are just two ways of reasoning with a man who tries to throw you out of your own house. If he is big enough to do it, grin and move. If he isn't, call for the police or take a club and chase him into the middle of the next block. It appears they were strong enough to put you out; so—here you are!"

"No, you are wrong," disputed the King. "It was not the people who caused me to leave. It was my cousin, Baron Provarsk, who wants to rule in my place, and who laughs and snaps his fingers at any idea of reform."

"I rather approve of him," Kent volunteered. "How did he do it?"

"He has money. He gathered a good-sized band of mercenaries from the surrounding States, without our knowing it, surprised the palace to-night, which was easy because I have dispensed with much of a guard, and we had to escape."

"His Majesty fails to be explicit," declared the Chancellor crustily. "Provarsk would have murdered him."

"But what I can't understand," said Kent, "is why you didn't fight it out. Why you two come mounted. Why Her Royal Highness arrives in a car accompanied by a maid and one officer. Why didn't all—"

"When the attack was made, it was entirely unexpected," explained the King. "I had not the faintest fear that any of my subjects would lay hands on my person. I was unable to defend the palace alone, and couldn't escape and leave my sister there at Provarsk's mercy. You see, sir, my sister was also one of his objects. Twice he has tried to marry her. It was because I didn't want her to fall into his clutches that we ran away. We would have remained to fight it out, but for her presence. We did hold them off until Captain Paulo had succeeded in carrying her away; then—well—the Chan-

cellor and I mounted, led Provarsk's followers off in the wrong direction to give Paulo time, and rejoined my sister here at this village."

"We fought," observed the Chancellor, as if theirs had been an achievement scarcely worthy of note. "We held them up from door to door, and charged them once in the woods, cutting our way through and back again."

THE King nodded agreement; and Kent, astonished, studied both his and the Chancellor's faces as if he had discovered unexpected cause for commendation.

"His Majesty made most excellent swordplay," observed the Chancellor. "We dared not fire, lest we bring others against us."

The King lifted his hand in deprecation.

"Well, you did, sire," insisted the Chancellor.

"No more, or as much, as you, Baron," protested the King.

"I did not mind that so much as the difficulties of getting Her Royal Highness to assent," boomed the Chancellor.

"My sister," explained the King to the financier, "is—somewhat difficult. She has—and I don't mean this as disparagement or criticism—quite a will and temper of her own. She rather stubbornly insisted on all of us remaining and fighting to the death."

"Positively refused to recognize the hopelessness of the odds," the Chancellor seconded. "Declared she would go and face them alone, which was just what Provarsk would have liked. Tried to call for help by telephone, but Provarsk's crew had cut the wires. Tried to shoot a man who crawled round the balcony toward the chamber—but the pistol wasn't loaded. It was very difficult, sir, very. We had to threaten to carry her away by force for her own safety before she would go."

"Whose task was that?"

"His Majesty's."

"I should say that too required some bravery," commented the American.

"It did," assented Von Glutz, grinning dryly and stroking his nose in an effort to hide his mirth.

"And this Paulo is?" Kent questioned.

"The captain of the King's guard, which unfortunately consists, owing to His Majesty's desire to appear democratic, and also to conduct the affairs of the kingdom with the utmost economy, of barely four-score men, of whom but five are ever on palace duty. Provarsk had about fifty followers," he concluded, as if to explain how the palace had been overwhelmed.

KENT leaned his chin on his hand and meditated for a time and then said: "I don't see how you could have done anything else than escape from the palace; but why cross the border?"

"There seemed no other direction open," replied the King, with a heavy sigh of discouragement.

"But certainly, if what I understand is correct, you must have had some friend who could shelter you until you could formulate some definite plan?"

"Yes; but that," said the King, "might have meant civil war—bloodshed. And I don't want any of my people killed on my account. If they have decided that the country and their happiness are more assured by my going—well—I must go!"

"What do you think on those points?" Kent asked the King.

"If it were anybody but Provarsk—" The latter faltered, with an air of resignation.

"Provarsk is a reactionary—a would-be tyrant—a man who would think no more of taking one or a hundred lives than he would of throwing dice for his castle," Von Glutz roared.

"With the natural result that if he gets into power, the people of Marken will at least have a ruler," Kent retorted. "And quite plainly, from my way of thinking, that is what they have lacked. The country has had a king who, with the best intentions, has been misunderstood. Firmness was the element lacking. To like a man's motives but to doubt his ability to carry any of them through, is even worse than to doubt his motives but be certain that, whatever they are, he will force them over. A resolute bad man is frequently better than a vacillating good man."

The King nodded his head and scowled at the fireplace.

"I admit all that—now that it is too late," he said in a bitter monotone.

"Too late! Heavens, man, you don't mean to tell me that you are brave enough to cut your way through a band of murderers in the night, after defending your sister, and yet are ready to abdicate rather than make another fight for it, do you? Humph!"

Kent's tone conveyed contempt mixed with wonder.

"I am not personally afraid of anything, sir," declared the King, nettled. "But I do not want, and will not have, hundreds, perhaps thousands, of men killed on my account. After all, they are my people, as they have been the people of my ancestors for hundreds of years! I have conceived it to be my duty to protect them and their happiness and welfare."

"Well spoken!" said Kent. "Very nice theory, too, but it lacks this much: that quite frequently it is necessary to compel people to do the right things for their own happiness. For this reason we sometimes spank boys when they run away from schools—paddle them when they yield to the delights of chewing tobacco; and we admonish our daughters when they go to places of gayety that they should not enter, whip our dogs when they begin to delight in snapping at strangers' heels, and a thousand and one other things that make the admonished howl or yelp at the time, but work out for their own good."

FOR a moment Kent stared in a kindly way at the King, as if expecting the latter to dispute, and then added grimly: "If I were in your place, I'd not let this man Provarsk win so easily. I'd fight!"

"I would, if I knew how!" The King spoke impetuously.

"But you must have some friend who can assist you," suggested Kent, "some man you can depend upon."

The King shook his head sadly.

"There are many who like me," he said, "but they fear Provarsk."

"Pooh!" Kent accompanied himself with a snap of his fingers.

"If His Majesty would run the risk of a war—" began the Chancellor.

"Rubbish!" exclaimed Kent. "War, nothing! The thing to do is to beat him at his own game. See here, young man,—I beg Your Majesty's pardon,—you've got to do it! You've got to be one of two things—a king or a coward. You've got to decide to-night, too, before the people of Marken know that you have been driven out by Provarsk. Don't you understand that from to-night you are either just beginning, or just finished?"

"If I could see any way on earth without a civil war," declared the King desperately, "I'd try it."

Kent studied him closely, with steady eyes—then turned to his desk and consulted a memorandum-book.

"I'm going to be perfectly frank with you," he said at last. "It doesn't matter much to me who is the ruler of Marken; but I like you for the ideals you have had, and admire your sister for wishing to stay to the ultimate end. And most of all, I've got considerable at stake in this myself, because John Rhodes hasn't much use for a man who causes him to lose five million dollars—and what's more, he's a good fighter. He does pretty much as I suggest. Besides, this strikes me as an interesting proposition, and at present I haven't much to do. Provarsk is promising. I admire him too. It requires courage to do what he has done."

HE suddenly threw the book back into the drawer and shoved the latter shut with an emphatic bang. He arose from his chair, frowned thoughtfully at the lampshade, then looked across it at the King.

"I'll make a bargain with you," he said, chopping his sentences. "You assist me, and I'll assist you—under, let us say, very peculiar conditions. If you will agree to do exactly as I say, I'll either make a real king of you, or give you a chance to die like a man instead of a runaway. And if we fail, we'll fail together. But I shall at least make an effort to save John Rhodes' money, and you your throne! Be certain of that!"

The King looked at him hopefully,

and the Chancellor with grudging respect.

"I can't see what else I can do but listen," said the King. "I am—as you see. What do you propose?"

"This," said Kent, deliberately: "that you are to go back to your country and fight it out, but that you are to fight it out just as I direct; that from now onward, until I have recovered the money John Rhodes lent you,—which would naturally mean the clearing of Marken's finances and a restoration of peace and industry,—I am to be the absolute, untrammelled dictator of your kingdom. Not only that, but that you and this chancellor, or any other that I name, are to do exactly as I order. I'm to be temporarily the tyrant, the ruler. Also, that not a soul on earth besides ourselves is to know that I am such. I can be anything we wish, a visitor at court, or anything that doesn't matter, so long as you and the Baron here obey me implicitly, no matter how difficult my demand."

The King gasped and stared at him as if fascinated, while the Chancellor went red and white by turns. Both were speechless at the boldness of his proposition.

"Come," he said, in a friendly tone, "you've everything to gain and nothing to lose. You've lost all you had, both of you. And I believe, if you agree to give me a free hand, that we can succeed. Administration is, after all, largely a matter of finance. Furthermore, if you do not agree to this, I am compelled to take steps immediately to ally myself with Provarsk, the insurgent, for the protection of that loan which I caused to be made, and which I represent. Hence, after to-night, I shall be either your friend or your enemy! No halfway measures with me. I must be one or the other, squarely, uncompromisingly. You must decide."

THE King settled back into his chair, and appeared to hesitate and consider, while the Chancellor fixed his stare on the floor, greatly perturbed and quite helpless. The old clock in the corner ticked heavily, and the rain lashed the windows audibly, as if wait-

ing outside the room were enemies, defiant and challenging onslaught. The American slowly opened his strong-box a second time, selected some papers with care and handed them to the King.

"That there may be no doubt in your mind that I am the original man who made the loan to your government, and that I am empowered by John Rhodes to act as I deem best, you will please read these. They will serve as credentials."

He handed the papers to the King, who read them and handed them back—but with an increased look of respect in his eyes. His gaze shifted back to the Chancellor. Plainly he was hesitating—yet, devoid of funds or other plans, an exile, tempted to plunge.

"If you were out of money, why didn't you sell those manganese mines you own, or a concession on them for a number of years?" Kent asked the King, as if by afterthought.

"Because I could conceive of no one being fool enough to offer me such a sum for a concession," replied the King. "It would require more capital or labor than I can produce to make them pay."

Kent stared speculatively at him, and took a turn through the room.

"I'm not certain that I wouldn't be foolish enough to try it," he said thoughtfully. "I've been well informed that they are valuable. Why not grant me a twenty-year concession, out of which I give you ten per cent of the profit—but with this clear agreement: that I am to have full power to handle you and your kingdom to make them pay? It's the only way I can find to save Rhodes' money for him."

The King looked tempted, yet cautiously considerate; he did not answer in haste.

KENT paced the room thoughtfully, and at last, with a kindly air, walked across and laid his hand on the King's shoulder.

"You are not a king to me," he said, quietly. "You are just a fine, brave young fellow, with high ideals, who deserves a chance. I hate to see as decent a young chap as you are fail, irretrievably, for the want of some one

to back him, and to show him the way through. We don't have kings in my country; but we have the young fellows. And I have helped a lot of them, when about all they needed was some one to pat them on the back and say: 'It's all right, Boy. You're not licked yet! Get up and try again!' And 'most always they take heart and go in and win! That's what I want you to do. Go in and win! Your duty is to be a king! And I now tell you, go and be one! If you'll do as I say—well, Provarsk is much abler than I think he is if we don't beat him, hand and foot. In any event, he shall have a struggle that will make him about the busiest usurper that ever tried for a throne!"

The King, trained to repress display of emotions since childhood, and passed through the course which makes of princes wooden-faced images, forgot all that education as the American progressed, and became merely a desperately hurt human being, craving friendship and support. His lips twitched and strained under this unexpected tender of sympathy. For a long time he still weighed the situation with all its alternatives, asking now and then cautious questions and receiving reassuring answers. At last, quite like one taking a final and desperate chance, he made his decision. He rose to his feet, as befitted the gravity of the situation, and said, very simply: "I accept. The concession is yours, and I put myself completely in your hands, because I trust you and because I have no other recourse. Our agreement is one of honor, to last until you have secured your superior's money, or by your own word release me from further obligation."

"That is fair, very fair," Kent replied with equal gravity. "And you may trust me to make my stay as brief as possible, because I've no wish for the job." He paused a minute and added with one of his rare smiles: "You see, the fact is, I never have run a kingdom before. Once when I was young, I ran a sawmill, and after all, running kingdoms and sawmills is not much different. Both consist in seeing that the work is well done."

THE King extended his hand to the financial agent, who took it, and for an instant held it, and studied the King's face as if to make a last appraisal of this material with which he must work.

"And I take it that the Chancellor—"

"For more than twenty years, as boy and man," Von Glutz rumbled, "I have served the house of His Majesty. And behind me are four generations of my name who have also given all they had to give. I ask nothing but to serve. The King's wish is to me an order."

"Phew! That's going some! Takes me back to a gallery seat at the melodrama," Kent said in English, much to the Chancellor's bewilderment. But with the Chancellor too, the American shook hands as if this were to seal a binding contract; and then, almost abruptly, he swung round to his desk, seated himself and was the man in command. His head appeared to set more doggedly, his voice to become more crisp and authoritative.

"I'll take your word for the concession until we can draw it up. Now who is this friend of whom you spoke?" he asked the King.

"Baron Von Hertz, distantly related, who dwells most of the time in a medieval castle he has rehabilitated. It is less than ten miles from Marken."

"And you can depend on him?"

"Implicitly. On him and all his followers and tenants."

"And how far is his castle from here?"

"About thirty miles, I should think."

"All right. We shall have to use the car the Princess arrived in. We three will start at once."

"And leave my sister here alone—undefended?"

Kent stepped to the door and turned back to answer over his shoulder.

"No, I shall leave my man Ivan to guard her. She will be as safe as if we three were here."

HE was gone from the room but a few minutes, and when he returned was clad in a heavy rain-coat, and

carried in his hand a light sporting rifle. He was very brusque and determined in the directness with which he crossed the room, possessed himself of a magazine pistol, examined the clip to make certain that it was filled, and gave an order that was entirely devoid of deference. "You will now call in Captain Paulo and instruct him," he said. "Also there must be no forgetfulness of our relative positions. You are now and hereafter to be my mouth-piece. You are still the King. You will give such orders as I give you as your own, obey my instructions, and see that they are carried out as if they were your own. You understand, thoroughly?"

Both the King and Chancellor bowed, the latter with a quick military salute of acquiescence.

"Summon Captain Paulo," said the King, accepting his new rôle; and when, in answer to the stentorian hail of the Chancellor through the lattice, the officer appeared, the King commanded, evenly, as if nothing unusual could be found in the situation: "Captain Paulo, bring the car around to the door, headed in the opposite direction. We return to our kingdom."

The officer's youthful face flashed to exultation. Almost he voiced it; but recovered and saluted, while his eyes danced with satisfaction. He would have turned to obey, but the King restrained him.

"Just a moment, Paulo," he said. "Mr. Kent accompanies us, and will remain with us for some time. It is my wish that you obey anything he asks as you would me. Do you know the road from here to the Castle Hertz?"

"Quite well, sire."

"Then it is there that you are to take us."

Kent gave his first direct order to the officer a few minutes later as the three men climbed into the car.

"Drive!" he said. "Drive like the devil!"

And the car, with big headlights ablaze, roared its way down the village street, skidded as it made a sharp turn, and then leaped out on a long straight road like a racer on the home stretch reaching for a goal.

CHAPTER IV

FOR what seemed to Kent a long and perilous time the car jolted and slipped and ran at a fearsome speed over long level stretches, up hills and over mountain roads; at last it rushed noisily up a harsh incline and across what he surmised had once been a moat-bridge, to come to a halt in a courtyard, where it stood and steamed like a spent racer finishing a course.

"Well! What's wanted?"

A watchman, flashing an electric torch, challenged them, and they climbed out to observe that the storm was abating, that off on one horizon stars were shining through a cloud-opening, and that they stood in front of a huge and gloomy old pile that Kent knew could be nothing but the Castle Hertz.

"The Baron is within?" asked the Chancellor.

"Without a doubt. And asleep as such an honest man should be," was the watchman's surly response.

"He must be aroused," grunted the Chancellor.

"Not by me!" exclaimed the watchman. "I'm an old man with a family dependent on me. Can't you gentlemen wait until morning?"

"You go and tell your master that—" Von Glutz began in a hoarse bluster, but was quietly elbowed aside by the American, who continued the sentence as if it were his own.

"That three gentlemen have called here in the most urgent haste and cannot be delayed. Also that we are on the King's business. Here! This may help!"

He slipped into the watchman's hand a gold coin, which the latter took, inspected under the light of the torch, bit to make certain that he was not dreaming, and acknowledged by doffing his cap and bowing very deeply.

"It must be on the King's business," he declared. "No one else could possibly have that much money in these times, sir. I'll take a chance."

"Wonderful what one can accomplish by diplomacy," Kent remarked dryly, as the watchman ambled around to a side entrance and disappeared.

A LONG wait ensued, which indicated either that the Baron Von Hertz might have been hard to awaken or had calmly murdered his watchman and returned to his repose. Then when Kent was beginning to be annoyed, a huge door in front of them opened, a light glowed within and they were invited to enter.

"I trust," observed the watchman meaningly, as he conducted them toward a waiting-room, "that you gentlemen are really on the King's business. Otherwise I fear that my Lord the Baron will prove—a trifle unpleasant. At first he swore that he wouldn't get up for the King himself. It was not until I suggested you might be robbers, and there was a prospect of a good fight, that he consented to arise. He is now loading his shotgun. Pray be seated."

"Must be a pleasant old chap!" said Kent with a soft chuckle.

But the King, failing to see any humor in the situation, threw himself wearily into a chair without removing his hat or coat, and stretched his legs in front of him and stared at his boots. The watchman took his post outside the doorway. Kent was calmly inspecting the room when he was disturbed by a sharp "Ahem!" in the doorway and looked around to discover a tall, gaunt, white-whiskered old gentleman whose bald head was protected by a flaming red nightcap, and who carried a heavy fowling piece in dexterous habitude that suggested he might be perfectly willing to use it on slight provocation. The three visitors rose, and for a moment he glared at them; then, entering the room, he hastily deposited the shotgun in a corner, turned his head and bawled to the watchman: "It's all right! Go on outside and watch the weather for a while. I'm expecting a hailstorm."

After that he came quickly forward and offered both hands to his sovereign.

"Well, Karl, what is up now? What brings you here at this time of night? Some one been lifting the lid to let the sulphur out?"

"Provarsk," replied the King sentimentally.

The old man smiled a wry smile, nodded to Von Glutz and favored Kent with a harsh stare from under his scowling eyebrows.

"It's all right!" said the King. "We can talk freely. This is an American gentleman, Mr. Kent, who is the agent for John Rhodes, the financial magnate."

"Oh! Can't he collect interest in daylight?" demanded the irascible old man. "Since when did you begin to make night journeys with money-lenders?"

Kent stood unmoved, but the King rushed to his defense.

"Baron," he asserted steadily, "Mr. Kent has proved to be my friend. As such I am certain you will regard him."

"Pardon me," the American interjected; "I do not seek the Baron's friendship."

BEFORE the amazed old nobleman could recover, Kent walked directly across the intervening space until he confronted him.

"Whether you like me or not, whether you object to me or not, my Lord Baron, is to me of the very slightest importance. There is but one attitude I expect from you, that which is current between gentlemen, and which consists of courtesy. That I demand!"

There was an intense stillness in the room as they eyed each other, Kent inflexible, the King distressed, the Chancellor open-mouthed at such uncompromising words. The old Baron was the most affected and stood as if stupefied with astonishment. For a pregnant time he met Kent's stare and then suddenly chuckled in his throat with a queer, wise acceptance. He turned to the King and exploded, much as an explorer might have done on announcing a discovery. "Why, Karl! You've got a friend who is a man! By Saint Dominique, this is a man!"

The Chancellor twisted and frowned. The caustic inference was not lost upon him; but he had no opportunity for speech, for the Baron advanced to the American, put out his hand and exclaimed: "My kinsman needs a few

like you. It should straighten affairs out, unless I mistake."

FOR a time they stood and eyed each other, the one stalwart in developed strength, the other elderly, weak—and wise.

"I have placed myself at the King's disposal," Kent said then, mollified. "And that is one of the reasons why we are here. We now seem to understand one another. His Majesty himself will tell you what has happened in Marken. He seeks a friend. He has come to you."

He turned to the King, as did the Baron, and they seated themselves around a tête-à-tête table that stood conveniently in a corner of the room. Without evasion, the King told the Baron all that had taken place, observing his promise to Kent that nothing should be said of their private agreement.

"I have undertaken," explained the American, "to assist His Majesty in the difficulty, by advice; and furthermore I am in a position to command for him substantial financial support in our enterprise."

His three auditors alike exposed their surprise and gratification.

"I mean it," he declared, "—mean that I am going to save, if possible, the Rhodes loan, though doubtless it may require additional resources. If they are needed they will be forthcoming. The financial side does not in the least disturb us, therefore, and we have come to you because the King understands that we must have support and possibly refuge. That is all he asks of you. I shall attempt to clear Provarsk out without bloodshed. After that I shall endeavor to advise the King how to rehabilitate himself as the real ruler of Marken."

"But what do you propose to do?" demanded the Baron. "What is the first move? It looks rather difficult to me. Provarsk has brains. He is fearless—fearless in the adventurer way. If you think you have an infant to fight, you are wrong. You might lose."

"I never play to lose," retorted Kent. "I make no such calculation."

"Karl," said the Baron, after a thoughtful study of the American, "all the support I have to give is yours."

"That being so," hastily suggested Kent, "the next move is to send Captain Paulo back to bring the Princess, her maid and my man Ivan here as quickly as possible. It must not become known to the public that the King has ever been driven from the kingdom. For the present, if his absence is noted, it must be given out that he and his sister have been here as your guests, voluntarily."

The Baron assented with an enthusiasm that had in it a suggestion of mischievousness.

"That will do nicely," said he. "And it will be easy as far as my part is concerned, because I have the finest body of liars around me that the world has ever known since Ananias gained repute. Send for Eloise."

AFTER Paulo had been summoned and sent on his journey, they fell to discussing the plan which the American slowly outlined, and were still enlarging upon it when the young officer returned with his passengers. Kent, as though curious to interpret the Princess' attitude, was a silent spectator in the background when she arrived, and smiled his approbation when he saw her hasten to the King and study his face, unabashed by the presence of the others, and meet his eyes with an encouraging stare.

"I am glad!" she declared. "Very glad! You are going to fight it out, and drive Provarsk, that unspeakable traitor, from Marken!"

"With Mr. Kent's help I shall try," he said. Disappointed and perplexed, she slowly dropped her hands, and her eyes sought the American, for whom she had already pronounced aversion and distrust.

"You are accepting his support, rather than—"

Kent, alert and diplomatic, stepped forward to prevent the completion of her sentence.

"Your Royal Highness will permit me," he said suavely, "to say that I am trying as best I can to support your

brother. I may be of service or not; but what I have to offer, I give. And at least we are here, together, ready for an effort."

"And what is more, Eloise," sharply exclaimed Baron Von Hertz, "this is no time for any woman folly of tongue. You'd better be thankful that Karl has got some one back of him who, if I'm not badly mistaken, is going to do things. Hoity-toity! Don't start in to make faces at me! I'm old enough to know a man when I see one. You had better go upstairs to bed. So had all of us. Come on. No foolishness. I'll show you the way. This man—what is his name?—Kent has plenty to do in the morning, and I will not let him be bothered by anybody. You just stop any desire to interfere, and leave him alone. I'll have my way here. This is my place."

Rebelliously she obeyed, and Kent watched her as she followed the crabbed old man up the grand staircase, while the latter's voice came back through the deserted halls, querulous and admonitory, until it died away. A half-hour later he too stood alone in a vast room surveying the bed in which he was to sleep, and as he pulled off his shoes and threw them outside the door for much needed attention, he grinned as if secretly pleased with his adventure. His lights were out within fifteen minutes; but the watchman, wondering, noted that farther along, in the room assigned to His Majesty Karl II, the lights did not go out and a harassed guest continued to pace, with monotonous insistence, backward and forward in front of the windows on which his shadow was thrown.

CHAPTER V

IN the city of Marken, the capital of Marken, early rising might have been a crime. Here was no sordid place so highly fascinated by industry

that lights began to glow in workmen's homes before the sun arose. Not thus in Marken!

The only people who ever opened windows in Marken at dawn, were those who, usually with nightcaps on their heads, poked the said nightcapped heads out to look at the weather, then with all observations necessary for prognostication, shut the windows again and retired to "think it over" for an hour or two. For the Markenites were a people of stolid temper.

True, if the day happened to be fair and somnolent, the sun, shining in their eyes through some quaint old lattice, or climbing almost boisterously like a second-story burglar into the depths of some high-hung balcony, caused them to arise grumbling. People in Marken always did the same things—came deliberately to the front doors and opened them,

"MADAM WHO"

HAROLD MacGRATH, the author of "The Goose Girl," "The Man on the Box," "Splendid Hazard," and other noted stories, has written for THE BLUE BOOK MAGAZINE one of his most captivating novels—"Madam Who." It will be published complete in our September issue—on sale August 1st.

walked out into the narrow, cobbled streets, took another look at the weather, yawned, thrust their fingers through their hair, grunted good morning to their neighbors and then sought the kitchen-sink to wash their faces. Then, by about nine o'clock, there might be a haze over Marken—a most savory haze of ethereal, palpitating blue, the blue of a fair dream perfumed; but the perfumed haze in Marken was due to the unanimous habit of frying sausages.

The dogs, of which population there was nearly as great a number as of other people, aroused themselves from the doorways, stretched, exchanged neighborly canine salutations by the customary methods of identification, and then with noses properly dilated, headed for those places where, according to their fixed belief, the sausages grew and might be obtained.

Later the children, swarms of them, appeared in the narrow cobbled streets, accompanied by the dogs, all of them adorned by sausage-grease on their chops and an air of contentment. Then, still leisurely, the shop-shutters began

to come down with creaks and bumps, and portly shopkeepers in their shirt-sleeves stood in the shade of their doorways, leaning more or less heavily on the door-jamb, and smoked and read their papers.

THE storm of the night had completely disappeared with the dawn, and a spring sun busied itself in drying the mud on this particular market day, when some of the more observant arrivals noted with curiosity that for the first time since Karl II had become a king,—with vast and delightful ceremony,—the gates of his palace were closed and two grim and foreign-appearing sentries stood guard beside the main entrance, each squarely planted in his sentry-box as if he had grown there overnight like a fungus. And so he had, in truth!

The palace stood on the flat top of a fair hill and was surrounded by a wall. Every good palace has to have one, and all others do not count. Doubtless in some ancient day there had been a moat, but this had been filled and turfed; and where in the time of his august predecessors had been a considerable *place d'arms* for the drilling of fighting men, Karl II had created a garden of distinguished beauty, in which, it was scornfully whispered by the malcontents, he himself occasionally worked, with pruning-shears and spade. He had approached sacrilege by modernizing the palace itself, something criminally undignified, inasmuch as no good palace should have either drains or sanitary contrivances. It makes them too much like other folk's houses, and, somehow, people expect kings to be different from everybody else. Furthermore, as a final proof that he was not fit to be a real king, he tried to pay his debts!

FROM the palace windows the quaint old city of Marken, red- or moss-roofed, flowering from window-ledges, its streets dotted here and there with colorfully clad inhabitants, could be scanned as it stretched away on three sides. From the smaller throne-room, by stepping to a balcony, on this morning, a great deal might have been seen;

but nobody in the throne-room took the trouble. There was much other business to be done, because when a first-class usurper usurps, there are usually several things that require attention. At least that was the opinion of one Baron Provorsk, who on this gay morning was, as Kent might have said, "on the job."

The usurper sat in a big chair at the head of a table the like of which could be seen any day, in any directors' room of any bank in America. Neatly proportioned, middle-sized, carelessly but well clothed, and about thirty-five years of age, he appeared competent. His was rather a handsome, fearless, albeit reckless face, fairly strong and without trace of any excess. He was more the rapier type of soldier of fortune than usurpers usually are, and as far as looks were concerned, Kent afterward said, he "had it on the King."

On the side of the room opposite from the balconied, or garden, side, were ornate inner windows looking out upon a corridor, and—proving that the Baron proposed to take no chances—there could be seen standing in this generous passageway a file of armed men. As for them, the foreign legion of Africa could not have been more mixed or mongrel. Apparently the Baron had been interested in such of the King's papers and letters as he had been able to find by ransacking the palace. He scanned them hastily, grinning pleasantly now and then. A good usurper displays no more delicacy in nosing into another's palace than does a cuckoo intent on laying an egg in another's nest.

PROVARSK shoved the papers into a heap and picked up several other sheets in his own handwriting, just as a scar-faced man with a scraggly mustache and stubby goatee swaggered into the room and stood opposite his new master.

"I don't see anything to prevent my proclamation being sent to the printing office just as it is," said Provorsk, looking up at his lieutenant, who had become such by recruiting from various foreign sources and drilling Provorsk's

army. "Here, Ubaldo, read it. Read it aloud—so I can hear how it sounds."

The new commander-in-chief of the army took the paper and after mumbling over a flowery preamble which "viewed with horror and alarm," read aloud the following:

"It having come to my knowledge, fortunately, that the erstwhile sovereign of the free and independent Monarchy of Marken, King Karl II, had practically completed secret plans to borrow in the name of the State a second and larger loan than that with which his suffering subjects were already grievously burdened, I, his cousin by direct descent from the royal Dynasty, Ferdinand Matilda George Wilhelm Ludwig Humberto Provarsk, Baron of the realm, did expostulate with him in the name of the people of Marken, and was rebuffed, and threats made against my person.

"I therefore gathered for my own protection a few followers, but was astonished, grieved and humiliated to learn that presumably some time within the past few days King Karl II had taken all the available funds in the treasury and all the royal jewels, and with his sister the Royal Princess Eloise, his Chancellor the Baron Von Glutz (who apparently is a fellow-participant and partner in his defalcation) and the renegade Captain Paulo, fled to parts unknown. The abdication, to my sincere and lasting grief, is made certain by the fact that the former king and his party are known to have abandoned the sacred soil of our beloved fatherland without legal notice and have been seen on their way to Paris.

"It has therefore become incumbent upon me as one of the hereditary royal family, and as a true patriot, ready to sacrifice himself for the kingdom, to assume at least temporarily the reins of government and to bring chaos from the muddle into which the foolish extravagances and corruptions of the late king and his chancellor have plunged it."

This much Ubaldo obediently read aloud, after which for a time he read to himself, while the Baron yawned and drummed the table with his fingers.

"It's all right," said Ubaldo, tossing it back on the table. "But I always like to see them end up properly. Most of those I've helped get up before have something about how the people are to be freed from taxation, work and all that stuff. Then all of 'em have one of two things at the tag end—they either beseech the dear, faithful subjects and patriots to rest quietly and peacefully until the new ruler, always aided by God Almighty, gets down to the concrete foundations and straightens everything out, or else they warn the damned public to avoid congregating in groups on any public street, showing any lights at night, making any undue disturbances or speaking above a whisper, on penalty of being shot dead, instantly, all their goods and likely womenfolk escheating to the crown."

"Um-m-mh! That's so," thoughtfully observed the Baron.

"And I should advise the dear-people-keep-quiet stuff and all that," hastily observed Ubaldo; "otherwise we might have a scrap, and there might not be enough of us. Also eighteen or twenty of the army signed on as soldiers with the understanding that they wouldn't have to do any fighting, and there aren't more than three that could hit a barn with a shotgun at ten paces distance."

Baron Provarsk grinned amiably, and hurriedly wrote another page or two, pausing but once to look up when part of the new army flattened its nose against the panes of the corridor window.

"Pull those curtains across that window so nobody can see in," he growled irritably. "Also see that handkerchiefs are made part of the regulation uniform. Some of your men er—rather disturb my cultured side."

THE new commander-in-chief dutifully obeyed; then he disappeared into the hall and swore, painstakingly but fluently, in seven different tongues, while Provarsk completed his manifesto.

"There," he said, as if highly satisfied, when his lieutenant returned. "I've added in the gentle appeal for peace and order. Also I've offered ten

thousand pounds for old Von Glutz, dead or alive, five thousand for that fellow Paulo, and stated that we are making indefatigable efforts to recover the loot from the royal absconders and have hopes of getting it."

The new commander-in-chief was making mental calculations.

"About that fifteen thousand pounds—" he said, abstractedly staring at the ceiling. "I didn't know you had found that much on tap. Let me see! Fifty men, and me getting ten shares makes sixty, and sixty goes into fifteen—"

"You needn't badger your empty skull about that!" angrily remarked the usurper. "There isn't any fifteen thousand that I know of."

"But supposing somebody does catch the Chancellor or Paulo?"

"Then we'll have the Chancellor and Paulo killed in their cells, after which we'll accuse the fellows that claim the reward, of murder and have them hanged publicly as proof of how lawful and orderly we are," cheerfully replied the Baron. "Besides, either old Von Glutz or Paulo will be hard to catch. They'll not show up until long after I've got so firmly fixed in the saddle that no one will dare try to upset me. I think I shall have this posted on every church and— Well, what is it?" he demanded as a sentry appeared at the door.

"A man to see you, sir, who insists on an immediate and private audience. Says you will be glad to see him at once. Here is his card, sir."

He advanced and tendered a card, which Provarsk, scowling with annoyance, took and scanned. His face changed from a look of anger to one of amusement.

"He is right," he said. "I've an idea that this chap and I might do some profitable business together. No one I want to see so much just now. You can bring Mr. Richard Kent, agent for John Rhodes, Esquire, up at once."

The sentry saluted and disappeared, and Provarsk turned to his lieutenant.

"I want to be left alone and undisturbed when this man comes up," he said, pointedly. "When he gets in the room, you go outside, shut the door

after you, stand guard, to see that no one gets his ear tangled up with a crack in the door, and—by the way, keep your own away too. This is going to be private business! Strictly private! Understand?"

UBALDO grinned mirthlessly and said orders should be obeyed. Evidently, at a pinch, he stood in considerable awe of his new master; for he was threatening to wax voluble concerning his own sense of discipline when the visitor arrived. His advent was preceded by the persistent thumping of a stick on the tiled floor, by sundry titters and muttered gibes from the guardsmen in the corridor and then by his own voice admonishing, somewhat testily, some unseen person to exercise more care and not let him fall.

Provarsk saw an apparently infirm, decrepit and palsied man being half led, half carried into the room by a veritable giant of an attendant, as if the visitor were paralyzed from the hips downward and could but drag his legs with difficulty.

"You discern my infirmities, sir," said the financial agent; "hence I crave your permission to be seated. In asking such a favor I—Ivan! What are you trying to do? You lumphead! Trying to let me fall and murder me, eh? Big, slow, clumsy lout! I'll get another valet! I will, so help me Bob! I will!"

His voice had risen by degrees to a querulous, irascible scream that ended with: "There! There! There! Easy now! That does it! Now stand by me with the ammonia. And don't go to sleep if I get faint!"

He settled helplessly into the chair toward which the Baron had waved a hand, panted laboriously as if the exertion had been trying and seemed startled when the doors leading to the corridor closed with a harsh clicking sound.

"You are Mr. Kent—" suavely began Provarsk.

"Financial agent for John Rhodes, who loaned this kingdom five million dollars on my advice," the visitor finished the sentence, eying the usurper at the opposite end of the table.

Provarsk smiled sadly and shook his head, quite with a regretful air, but politely waited for his visitor to proceed.

"Dangerous man, this. Knows how to keep his mouth shut," was Kent's mental measurement. Aloud he said: "I came here in my employer's interests and was told at the very gates of the palace that the King had abdicated and that a distinguished Baron Provarsk now ruled in his stead, or at least was at present the head of the government."

HE paused and watched the Baron, who bit his lower lip, tried to keep from frowning, and mentally swore that he must find out which sentry had been so frank in statement and see that his case was amply attended to.

"I presume, therefore," continued the visitor, "that it is the Baron Provarsk I must interview concerning the State indebtedness."

"That is true," replied the usurper. "And I am Baron Provarsk. Now that you are made comfortable, perhaps it is as well, considering the confidential nature of our interview, that you dismiss your man for a few minutes, Mr.—ah—" (he consulted the card to refresh his memory) "—Mr. Kent."

"Quite impossible! Quite impossible! Quite impossible!" declared the agent, resuming some of his former air of irritability. "Can't you see for yourself that he is both hands and feet to me? I'll answer for him. He always goes where I go. Don't mind him. Talk as if he isn't here. He forgets. I pay him for that—and for being dumb. Besides, if he ever said that you said, or that I said, or that anybody ever said anything, at any time, or any place, I'd say he was a liar! All men of affairs deny all interviews and call all reporters liars when it suits their convenience. So they're all liars—everybody's a liar but you and me."

Provarsk decided that there was quite a lot of wisdom in that speech. It indicated possibilities. Moreover, as it fitted in so closely with his own cynical code, it was up to this money-lender to take the responsibility if anything embarrassing was said.

"As you wish," he said with a little shrug.

"What I came for, and all that interests me," said the agent, "is to know what provisions the new government proposes to make for the payment of its bonds. They are almost due. I don't care a rap who pays them. All I want is the payment. Money alone does not change. It has no regard for the hand that borrows, spends or pays. It absorbs no personality, no identity. It has neither fealty nor religion. It outlasts kings and cardinals. It is admirable, being steadfastly itself." His eyes were wide and vacant as he rhapsodized; but now they came quickly to another cast, and he demanded: "What does the new government of the great sovereign State of Marken intend to do about the bonds held by Mr. John Rhodes?"

THE usurper stared straight at him, wondering if there was intentional sarcasm in this money-lender's speech, but meeting with a stare even steadier than his own, and devoid of anything save inquiry, resolved to continue in diplomacy.

"I am exceedingly sorry, Mr. Kent," he said with an admirable assumption of regret, "to say that the late king, my cousin Karl, was not—ah! What shall I say to seem kindly yet truthful? In fact, Karl was anything but a great and farsighted monarch. Indeed, he was a plain, unadulterated idiot."

"It appears so. You are here!" dryly observed the American, and again the usurper wondered if there might be a double significance in his words. Patiently, however, he resumed:

"He managed the affairs of the kingdom of Marken very faultily. He was a theorist and a reformer. The Markinites wish neither theory nor reformation. It is a staid, sober and self-satisfied nation. It is not the most powerful nor the richest nation in the world; but such as it is, it is. My unfortunate and lamented cousin did not understand it; it did not understand him. With the very best of intentions, he failed—failed because he was not adept, as you and I are, Mr. Kent, in financial affairs."

He waited for an instant for this suggestion to sink in; then, satisfied by the twinkle of his visitor's eyes that it had been fully understood, and being thereby emboldened, he proceeded in that same gentle, courteous, well-modulated tone that was quite nearly, if not wholly, ingratiating.

"Owing to this mistaken direction of funds, and failure to realize from resources, it will thereby be necessary, regrettable as it may seem at first sight,—and at first sight only, Mr. Kent,—that Mr. Rhodes' loan be extended, and also that the State be provided with additional funds, that it may redeem not only its original bonds but all others that follow."

KENT had been thoughtfully staring upward, but now he dropped his eyes to those of his vis-à-vis.

"Quite so," he said encouragingly.

"It would be—let us say—profitable, for all concerned." The Baron's voice had lowered itself and conveyed much. "It is the business of your superior to lend from his enormous stores of wealth. A man with so much money has but one object: to lend it. You, as his agent, have but one employment, to see that it is lent. Is that not so, Mr. Kent?"

The Baron was now leaning eagerly across the big table with a meaning smile, like an angler who sees a coveted trout nosing his bait.

"Quite so," came again the encouraging assent.

"And you, as a most capable agent for the most distinguished financier in the world, perhaps receive, for doing the lion's share, the brainy share, let us say, a commission?"

"You are right about that," declared the American, grinning steadily into the Baron's face and inviting him to come still further.

"Then," said the Baron, dropping all pretense and confident of his ground, "what use is there for you and me to ride this merry-go-round any longer? You want money. So do I. Rhodes has it—plenty of it. What commission do you usually make on a loan of five million dollars?"

Kent eyed him in perfect under-

standing, and pretended a certain amount of caution by throwing a quick glance over his shoulder at Ivan, who with a face as blank as the wall stared straight in front of him and even yawned deliberately, as if infinitely bored by hearing a lot of stuff that he had heard before.

"Suppose I said one per cent?" questioned the American with an air of slyness.

"Then I should say," instantly reciprocated the Baron, now fully convinced, "that if you induced John Rhodes to advance another million dollars, you should be entitled"—he stopped short, got to his feet, resting his palms on the long table, leaned far across and spoke scarcely above a whisper—"to a bigger commission than you ever had in your life. Enough so that you could relinquish your difficult and burdensome duties, Mr. Kent, and retire. If you can induce Rhodes to extend the time of the previous bonds five years, and to advance a million dollars more for ten years, on the same terms as those preceding, I'll make you an independent man by giving you one million francs. Think of it! A million francs for your own! Is that worth while?"

Kent sat stolidly in his chair, and to all outward appearances considered the proposition.

"But what of Rhodes?" he asked, lifting his eyes slowly. "What of Rhodes? Does he ever get his money? How will you raise it?"

"Sweat it out of the hands and hides of these citizens of Marken!" was the emphatic reply, still carried across the desk in that suggestive and meaningful undertone.

"And yours? How much do you get?"

"I'll get enough. That is not your affair," somewhat stiffly responded the usurper. "All that need concern you is that I hope, and think, Rhodes will lose nothing and that you will make a million francs. Also that no one but you and I are ever to know anything about it. It is, after all, a clean deal. You get well paid for your work. I get well paid for my management. Rhodes gets well paid for his advance."

AGAIN the American made that queer twisting movement and glanced over his shoulder to reassure himself that Ivan was still standing behind him. The Baron complacently dropped back into his seat, beaming with satisfaction. He accepted the conclusion too speedily, as was evinced by his visitor's next remark. Kent leaned slowly back, rested his hands on his hips and laughed. The usurper frowned at him.

"Hot stuff! Fresh from the bat!" Kent said in his native tongue. Then he reverted to the language of Marken. "Say, I admire your line of talk! I do! You are quite all right! I rather expected something like this. Why, I really believe you are trying to bribe me personally, aren't you?"

"Of course I am." The usurper smiled placidly. "You had no idea I was sending you out into this cold and cruel world to start an orphans' home, or a hospital for indigent and decrepit chorus-girls, did you? I put no conditions on what you are to do with the money. It's for you."

"Have you ever sold any green-goods?" demanded Kent. "If not, you've certainly missed your calling."

The Baron failed to understand this literal translation of an unknown swindle; but he surmised that his proffer was being ridiculed, and having made his last pitch in this direction, his face hardened and he displayed the real man he was, resourceful, striving for a new hold. He became quite natural, ready to storm his way through, strike, smash under-foot and pass on.

"You jest!" he said unsmilingly. "You think you can play with me. Good! If you don't induce Rhodes to advance another five million francs, I promise you this: that he shall never get a single centime of the money he has already advanced, and that I shall also tell him that you made me take this decision. How does that strike you, Mr. Richard Kent?"

He sat back with an air of triumph, and waited.

"Strike? How does that strike me? Why, very good, Baron, save for this: that I took a few precautions before I came here. In fact, you rather please

me, when I recall that you are somewhat younger than I and doubtless lacking in experience. I think you might do well on Wall Street, or in a good stiff game of poker. Ever play it? That's too bad! You're ignorant of a lot that we teach schoolboys, over in America. By the way, have you a telegraph-form?"

Puzzled by this swift speech, and inclined to believe that the difference in national characteristics accounted for any failure of agreement, after all, the Baron resumed his air of suavity and threw a blank sheet of paper across the table. Ivan, as if schooled to service, laid the blank in front of his employer and handed him a pencil.

"You said," remarked Kent, with the pencil poised in his fingers and looking across at the Baron, "that if I didn't get Rhodes to advance you five million francs more, you would repudiate the loan?"

"I said it."

"You don't dare do it!"

"I don't, eh? Try me, Mr. Kent."

THERE was the utmost assurance in his words, but his manner belied them as he watched the American, who painstakingly scrawled a message on the sheet of paper and then, almost carelessly, tossed it along toward Provarsk. It fell short, and Ivan, like an automaton, picked it up and handed it on to its destination. With a show of nothing more than cursory interest, the Baron read it. It was addressed to the foreign minister of Austria and read:

Provarsk, who is now dictator of Marken, owing to the abdication of Karl II, repudiates Rhodes' loan. The action previously agreed upon between us is now expected and will be responded to as promised. Immediate results will be easy of accomplishment.

RICHARD KENT
(Agent for John Rhodes.)

The Baron read it with an unmoved face.

"Of course," he said, as placidly as if discussing the weather, "I don't understand its meaning."

"That's easy to explain," declared the American, and there was something in his attitude quite like that of a cat play-

ing with a beetle, or a gentleman holding a royal flush while the others consider. "Austria has borrowed money, quite a lot of it,—and wants more, I might add,—from Mr. Rhodes. Funny condition attached to that loan, Baron. Might interest you to know about it. Laughable and unusual, in fact!"

He bent forward and smiled sweetly at the usurper.

"Something like this: that loan was granted and the second request considered, with the proviso that if Marken refused to pay that five million dollars, Austria was immediately to take over Marken and assume the indebtedness."

Provarsk read the message again, and pondered, while gazing at the sheet. Then he laid it on the table, impolitely yawned while holding his finely shaped hand over his mouth, excused himself and drawled: "That was rather neat of you. All right! I'll have it sent." And he arose to reach for the bell on the far side of the table.

"Just a moment," the American interrupted. "Why are you so willing to destroy Marken, your native country?"

Provarsk laughed heartily.

"Destroy nothing!" he retorted contemptuously. "I am merely amused at the bewilderment which will be sustained by the Austrian minister on receipt of this message!"

KENT continued to watch him, unmoved. The Baron, indicating that he would no longer dally with a situation over which he had control, sharply rapped his knuckles on the outspread message and said insolently: "This is what your countrymen call a bluff! You know it. I'll let you know a little more. It doesn't in the least influence me. You can send it if you wish. I don't care! Furthermore, this twaddle about destroying the country makes me laugh. Rubbish! Sheer rubbish, when addressed to a man who has seized a throne and who thereby stakes not only his fortunes but his life on the result and his ability to maintain himself! I don't care much more about this country than you do, and you may as well know that, too."

"Give me the message," Kent said.

The usurper thrust it across toward him, facilitated its passage by blowing it sharply with his pursed lips and then calmly sat down. Kent took it, twisted it into a knot, and with thumb and finger flipped it into the air. For a moment they looked at each other, Provarsk alert and with increasing insolence, the American humorously, and secretly pleased.

"Why, do you know," he said suddenly, almost as if speaking to himself and expecting no reply, "you are a lot more interesting and much smarter than I gave you credit for being? Somehow or other, though, I don't believe you are going to put it through. You don't dare to ruin a kingdom. You've called my bluff, and now I call yours!"

The Baron sneered.

"Don't dare to carry it out to the end, you mean? Try me!"

"Perhaps I shall. That depends. Yes, I rather think I will."

"That old saw about possession being nine-tenths, you know, Mr. Kent?" The Baron now spoke with painful gentility.

"That being the case, I suppose I may as well go," replied the American.

"Oh, I shouldn't be in too big a hurry," the usurper said with a meaning grin that did not extend above his lips. "I'm afraid, Mr. Richard Kent, agent for John Rhodes, that you shall not make your departure from this palace until you have induced your employer to advance the additional loan. Needless to add that under these new conditions you can scarcely expect any commission whatever."

The American did not appear disturbed; yet there was a peculiar watchfulness in his manner.

"Humph! You don't dare to detain me," he said.

"Don't dare to detain you? That's a joke. Don't dare? I not only dare to detain you, but in case this money-lending, penny-scraping master of yours doesn't advance, I dare to have both you and that stupid dummy behind you shot and put nicely out of the way."

If he had expected to frighten his visitor, he must have been disappointed; for with the utmost contempt the latter grinned directly across at him and then chuckled deep in his throat.

"You're not half the man I thought you," he said jeeringly. "I'm quite disappointed in you, to tell the truth. Dare? Why, you wouldn't dare do anything! It's a pity. You had me respecting you as a pretty fair gamester; but this last lot about detaining me, brigand and ransom stuff, cheap melodrama, really hurts me! Call in one of those louts outside, and by an exchange, take your proper place. You and your mob are, after all, a lot of penny whistles squeaking thinly in a country lane."

THERE was everything of studied insult in his tone, his look, the play of his hands as he spoke; and the Baron, surprised, upset, angered and tired by his long hours of excitement, responded as the American wished—lost his temper, jumped to his feet in a fury. Unnoted by him, the American had given an odd signal across his shoulders by curiously twisting his fingers and waving them; and, expectant and watchful, Ivan had observed and slowly, cautiously, edged around the table side to his employer's elbow. Now he came, inch by inch, a little farther, to a position where he could fix his eyes on Kent's lips. The Baron, resolved to exert his authority, came around the corner and reached for the bell. Kent's lips moved noiselessly, although he sat still.

"Now! Ivan! Get him! Quickly!" he said, and the giant whirled and leaped even as the Baron's fingers were within an inch of the bell that would summon assistance. One of Ivan's huge hands was clasped over the usurper's mouth, the fingers seeming bent on crushing the lower part of the Baron's face, while the huge servitor threw his other arm completely around the Baron, pinioned him and lifted him from the floor as if he were but a combative boy in weight and strength. Roughly Ivan bent Provarsk back across the table—then slammed him down on the top of it with such force

that the Baron's breath was almost churned from his body; then, swiftly releasing his arm from around the Baron's body, he lifted himself on one tiptoe and planted a heavy knee in the pit of Provarsk's stomach, while the other hand shot to the usurper's throat and threatened by main strength to crush the bones of his victim's neck. The Baron's eyes protruded and he began to struggle feebly.

Kent rushed to Ivan's side and attracted his attention by tapping him smartly on the shoulders with his knuckles. Ivan, without relaxing his hold, looked at his employer's lips.

"Don't kill him! For heaven's sake, don't kill him!" Kent muttered.

"I've got to choke his teeth loose. He has set them in the palm of my hand," the giant replied; but he was saved from executing the Baron, who at that moment dropped back inert, his face purple and his eyes dazed with threatened unconsciousness. Unnoted by either Kent or Provarsk, an automobile-horn had been tooting lustily outside, its mellow notes playing a trumpet-tune that swept vigorously through the open windows. Again it sounded, and Kent threw his head up and listened.

"What can that mean?" he said aloud, forgetting that Ivan could not hear. "That is one of the royal automobiles, because no others are allowed to carry such horns!"

It did not sound again. The Baron was beginning to recover his senses and anger, although now the latter was curiously intermingled with respect, if not fear. Kent stood over him, perfectly calm and self-possessed.

"Listen, Provarsk," he said, "and make no mistake: My man and I may have trouble getting you out of here; but of one feature rest assured. If any of your sentries come in to take us, or to help you, they will find a dead leader on this table!"

AN almost sly smile shifted the grim outlines of his mouth, as he added, speaking entirely for the Baron's ears, and well aware that Ivan, watching his prisoner, could not take the order: "Ivan, if the Baron opens his mouth to call for help, or makes any attempt to

reach that bell, kill him instantly by breaking his neck across the edge of the table. If you prefer, you may cut his head off with that knife on your hip, but make no noise. Do it quickly and surely."

He saw that Provarsk was impressed with his peril, but also saw a sudden gleam of exultation leap into the man's eyes at a sound which now became audible throughout the corridor, a sound of commotion and a woman's voice raised to an indignant pitch of determination.

"How dare you attempt to block my way?" it demanded. "Who are you and your scrapheap band of adventurers to attempt to keep me from coming into my own palace?"

"But, but, Madame!" they heard the voice of Ubaldo protesting.

"I am not Madame. I am the Royal Highness, the Princess Eloise, and I am going to see and talk to Baron Provarsk, no matter who interferes. Out of my way!"

"That's the bird the Baron wanted us to make sure of last night, Captain," another voice, coarse and heavy, called out. "Better let her go in. He'll be glad to see her."

"But the Princess does not understand that my orders are—"

It was evident that Ubaldo was retreating in front of her up the corridor toward the entrance to the throne-room, and that she was steadily advancing, bravely and impetuously intent on confronting the usurper.

Kent's face hardened. He thrust his hand into his pocket, brought out a heavy automatic pistol, slipped the safety-catch off with hands that did not tremble, and planted himself just inside the door. Ivan, obedient to previous understanding that, no matter what occurred after they were in the palace, Provarsk was to be his especial charge, held the usurper down with the steadiness of a stone man. The noise in the corridor increased, making it plain that the guard, highly entertained, had fallen into the Princess' wake. They heard her turn on them:

"What do you mean by following after and annoying me?" she questioned, angrily.

UBALDO, anxious to find some means of extricating himself from a ridiculous position, bawled: "The Princess is right! Halt, you men! Fall in! Stand at attention!"

There was a quick shuffling of feet as the guardsmen obeyed.

"Now, Your Royal Highness, if you still insist, I will announce you."

"No, you won't!" she said. "All you can do is to stand to one side. I'll announce myself!"

That she gained her way was evident by her entrance, as she swung one of the doors open and, with white cheeks and blazing eyes, stepped inside. Instantly the American closed the door behind her. At the sound of the closing door she turned apprehensively like one entrapped, but both fear and anger gave way to astonishment as she grasped the signs of struggle that were before her, the American with pistol in hand, and on the table the discomfited usurper intently watched by the giant, who did not so much as glance up at her entrance.

"What—what is the meaning of this?" she faltered, all her own resolutions upset by the strangeness of the tableau.

Provarsk dumbly rolled his eyes toward her; Kent replied.

"It means that the Princess has arrived at a most inopportune moment," he said coldly. "I left positive instructions that neither you, nor anyone else, was to interfere with my plans."

"And my brother took orders from you," she said, sarcasm in her inflection. "And I told him that if there was no man of our house who dared to face this upstart Baron, I would do it myself and alone!"

A reluctant approval of her bravery shone in Kent's grim, resolute face.

"How could my brother know," she demanded, as her temper again came uppermost, "that the agent of John Rhodes, who seeks his pound of flesh and nothing more, would not come here and ally himself with this adventurer?"

"I am not without honor," Kent answered, quietly and with a fine dignity of his own. "The situation as you find it is sufficient proof."

She hesitated, bit her lip, and looked back at the other participants in this *outré* scene into which she had recklessly forced her way. The proof of Kent's fidelity to her house was palpable in that restrained and desperate figure stretched out and held relentlessly by the silent giant, and by the American's readiness to defend her against the squalid band outside.

"You have impugned my motives before," his cold, restrained voice again broke in, and with a quality that she could not misinterpret. "But you have now interfered, seriously, in an emergency whose difficulties are increased by your presence. You have jeopardized our chances; so you shall and must obey what I am going to tell you."

"Must? Must?"

"Must and shall!"

For an instant they eyed each other; then, frightened by his very domination and strength, she felt suddenly disturbed.

"Come," he said, "we have no time to quibble. If you value your life, or your brother's possession of the throne, you will do precisely as I tell you. If this cannot be accomplished with your friendship as an aid, it shall, nevertheless, be accomplished. I expect you to obey, implicitly! It is our only chance."

Overawed by his determined pose, she bowed her head in enforced assent. He stepped across to the side of the table, touched Ivan on the arm and gestured for him to release their prisoner.

"Get up, Provarsk!" the American curtly ordered, and as the Baron stiffly descended from the table and began with nervous fingers to rearrange his disordered cravat, Kent glanced swiftly at Ivan to assure himself that the latter's gaze was fixed on his lips. He spoke slowly, distinctly and with forceful quietness, addressing himself to the Baron but with his head slightly turned that the giant might read.

"PROVARSK, you and I are going out of this room and through that corridor arm in arm, while you apparently assist me in a friendly fashion. Ivan will support me on the

opposite side, because my arms will be crossed, the one on your side being beneath my coat. You will support me with your left side toward me, my gentle friend, for a definite reason."

He grinned and paused to give his words effect.

"That reason is, as you may have surmised, that every foot of the way the hand beneath my coat will be pressing this gun against your heart, and that if you even falter, attempt to break loose or give the slightest alarm, I'll kill you as remorselessly as I would a snake. Our peaceful progress is the only way by which you have the remotest chance of being alive fifteen minutes from now. If we are compelled to fight our way out, it will be after your dead carcass is left behind on the corridor tiles. Make no mistake concerning my determination and ability to carry this through. This time there is no bluff."

Terrified by the possibilities of tragedy before her eyes, the Princess asked in an awed whisper: "What do you intend to do with him?"

"If he lives through the next few minutes, I shall take him to the automobile waiting there in the streets, and kidnap him. After the King has returned to his throne, we shall see! Probably I shall permit him to live. That depends entirely on his behavior. I expect you to play your part well."

He turned to the Baron with a scowl on his face.

"Now!" he said. "This, as sure as you're alive, is a moment of fate for you. Also, lest any of your fool guard might suspect, you must pretend to engage me in friendly conversation. The friendlier the better, my lad, for I shall listen earnestly to that pleasant discourse that I expect to fall from your lips. I have observed that you can talk rather well, on occasion. Open the doors, Princess Eloise, and pass out. You know the way."

Right royally she obeyed, nerving herself to a direct and unfaltering progress, her pale, clean-cut face, the haughty carriage of her finely poised head, and her deliberate, graceful stride proclaiming her the royal princess in truth.

Provarsk felt the strength of the rigid arm that clasped his own against the American's side, and the rigid pressure beneath it of the firmly held steel tube. Any doubts he had relative to the helplessness of his position were confirmed. Any hope he cherished of escape was subdued by the fear and certainty of death, imminent, ready and inexorable; for now, to increase his discomfiture, the hobbling, dragging man, a picture of physical incapacity, had bent a trifle forward and turned his gaze upward that he might watch even the expression of his prisoner's face. The surreptitious wink of an eye would, Provarsk felt, be as fatal as a shrill scream.

"Ah! My dear Baron, you were saying—?" He writhed mentally at the sound of the high, querulous, assumed voice, and hastened to reply when he felt the pressure of the pistol's muzzle harshly increased against his ribs.

"I was saying," he replied, with cool, untrembling bravado, "that we can finally rearrange our affairs at a later date. At present, of course, you have the best of it."

"Decidedly! Decidedly!" croaked the visitor. "And there is nothing I love better than a man who tries to balance his obligations. But I trust, my dear Baron Provarsk, that the cares of state which now burden you will soon be over with."

THE usurper's face flushed red, but he controlled himself to pass the crisis. But whatever else Provarsk was, he was a good sportsman, and somehow the humor of the situation, even in this time of stress, appealed. He broke into a cynical laugh that echoed through the corridors and convinced the wondering Ubaldo that there was nothing overt in the situation. The latter even grinned and winked at his comrades after the procession disappeared and declared: "Trust him! He's a fox! Already he has that doddering old ass just where he wants him. Now you fellows can take a rest!"

The two sentries on guard in the gayly painted sentry-boxes outside the palace gates decided, when they saw the Princess, who had almost forced her

way into the palace, reappear and enter her car, that they had done well to admit her; for surely that great leader, Baron Provarsk, whom they had assisted to the throne, talked most gayly when he drove away in the second car with the high-voiced, cackling old man who still clung to him in a most friendly manner. The only difficulty about a revolution, after all, the sentries decided, was that it robbed the invaders of enough sleep; and thereupon they yawned widely and tried once more to interest themselves in the appearance of the villagers and farmers who passed leisurely with baskets and fowls, totally unaware that they were in the midst of a revolt.

CHAPTER VI

TWO automobiles—the first a closed car carrying a royal princess who was still in a state of mental turmoil and distress, largely punctuated at times by the knowledge that she had met one man who paid no deference to her title, and the second a long, stream-line touring-car bearing on its panels the arms of Baron Von Hertz and carrying three passengers and a chauffeur in the Baron's uniform—stormed up the steep ascent to the Castle Hertz and came to a halt.

Two men emerged anxiously from the great doors and smiled with satisfaction when they identified the occupants of the second car.

"Got him!" exclaimed Kent, leaping easily from the car. "And by the way, Baron Von Hertz, if those gates, or the drawbridge, still work, it might be as well to close them until we finish our business with our guest. He's able, and slippery."

The old baron, chuckling, ambled away to obey the request. Ivan alighted; the Princess Eloise had already reached earth and told her chauffeur to take his car to the garage; and Provarsk, resigned for the moment to his capture, slowly descended. He smiled cheerfully at the King, bowed with mock politeness and quite airily waved his hand.

"Good morning, cousin," he said. "I hope I see you well?"

The King stared at him with smoldering eyes. The Princess tossed her head, turned her back and walked into the castle.

"She doesn't seem fond of me, cousin," whimsically exclaimed the usurper.

The King disdained reply.

"It's a very cold, formal, inhospitable place to which you have brought me, Mr. Kent," observed Provarsk, turning toward the American with an air of gentle reproof. "I had anticipated a welcome! Glad shouts from the peasantry! Ringing of joy-bells in the castle."

"Why?" questioned Kent dryly. "Perhaps none of us regarded you as worth it." He suddenly dropped all badinage and turned to Baron Von Hertz, who had returned from his mission. "I suppose you have some place where you can keep our guest securely?"

"Several very fine, unhealthy dungeons here," was the cheerful reply.

THE American thoughtfully stared at the usurper, and then said: "No, I don't think I like that. I don't want him to contract typhus, or influenza, or croup. He's too nice a boy for that. Besides, I may want to use him, later on. What's up in those towers?"

"That one over there," Von Hertz indicated with a pointed finger, "contains rather a fair prison chamber—strong enough, but no one has entered it, so far as I know, for about a hundred years."

"Good! Can't it be made comfortable for Baron Provarsk?"

"Quite easily," declared Von Hertz. "And in the meantime I can have him guarded in another chamber. Bring him along."

Provarsk unhesitatingly followed the owner of the castle, with the American leisurely pacing by his side and Ivan in the rear.

"That's decent of you, Mr. Kent," the prisoner said calmly.

"Why not? I've no ill feeling against you, Provarsk. We've merely played in the same game and you've lost."

"So far!" the prisoner qualified.

Kent laughed approvingly.

"Now you're talking!" he declared. "That's just the kind of spirit I like. I had sort of lost interest in you awhile back. You seemed too easy; but now I really begin to regard you as worth while. Hello! Here we are. Nice room, too."

He walked across and looked through a window, observing that it overlooked a precipitous cliff with a sheer drop below it of several hundred feet. No other doors save the one through which they entered gave egress. The room was spacious and quite modernly furnished. He walked back and examined the heavy, old-fashioned, cumbersome-keyed lock on the stout oaken door and spoke to Baron Von Hertz.

"Why not leave him here? With a proper guard on the outside, this makes a very nice prison for our friend. I prefer that he be treated as a distinguished guest, who has a queer desire to remain in his own room for the time being. Have I your assent, sir?"

The fine old eyes of Baron Von Hertz twinkled humorously at the American, for whom plainly he had formed a distinct liking.

"It shall be exactly as you wish, Mr. Kent," he assented. "Also you may trust me to see that your guest does not lack for prompt attention. Indeed, to make sure of it, I shall keep at least four men on guard in the corridor from now on, so that on the slightest sound from within they may hasten to learn what the Baron Provarsk desires. And that even his slightest restlessness in the night may be noted, I will also have a night service as well. Prompt attention shall be the rule of the Hotel Hertz. Is there anything he wishes now, prior to our departure?"

Provarsk grinned nonchalantly and threw himself into a chair.

"Some ham and eggs, landlord, and see to it that the eggs are fried on both sides. Bread and butter—no rancid stuff, mind you, or I'll complain to the management. Coffee! lots of it, with ample cream. The fact of the matter is that some small business affairs of mine have been so urgent that I've not had time to eat during the last twenty-four hours. I shall be glad for a rest—just a slight one, you understand,

because I really must resume my industries at the first opportunity."

"Quite so! Quite so!" Von Hertz replied in the same vein. "You may trust me to observe even the most minute details for your comfort."

"And before we go—sorry!" Kent stepped quickly across, and relieved Provarsk of a small pocket-pistol and a penknife, while the latter said gayly: "So am I sorry! Rather hoped you'd overlook them."

PROVARSK had calmly cocked his heels up on the edge of the casement and was whistling softly between his teeth when they bolted the door on him. Ivan was left on guard for the few minutes necessary for his relief, and when he descended the stairs was at once directed to the small reception-room in which Baron Von Hertz had received his guests on the previous night. The King and the American were standing in the center of the room, the latter evidently repeating some former instruction.

"And you are quite certain that Captain Paulo has had sufficient time and can be depended on to the minute?" the American asked.

"Positive!" declared the King with great earnestness.

"And you will attend to the other arrangements?"

"Yes, Mr. Kent."

"Then here goes, and—good luck to us all!"

The American would have turned from the room without further ceremony, but the King's face glowed, and impetuously he held out his hand.

"Just a moment, sir," he said. "If anything goes wrong and—your mission may be dangerous! I want you to know that I appreciate all you have done and are trying to do for me."

The American seemed embarrassed by this display of gratitude. He took the King's hand, but answered brusquely: "Pshaw! You fail to understand that what I am trying to do is to save my own credit, and to make certain that John Rhodes' money is not lost. I have no sentiment—that is—to amount to anything. Good-by."

He beckoned to Ivan and passed

directly out to the still-waiting touring-car, into which he climbed.

"Drive us back to the palace in Marken," he ordered the chauffeur, and as the car swept forward down the winding road to the valley below he reflected that this was the finest sport he had ever engaged in.

KENT'S meditations were brought to an abrupt stop by a sharp explosion. The car swerved and came to a halt beside the highway. Almost as the chauffeur's feet struck the macadam, Kent was by his side. The cause was plain, a flattened tire sagging flaccidly under the weight above. Anxiously the American looked at his watch.

"Hang it all!" he exclaimed savagely. "We've no time to lose—not even five minutes. Any delay at the other end and—" He snapped his fingers conclusively. He stood above the chauffeur while the latter unstrapped an old-style wheel. He himself seized the jack but was thrust aside by Ivan, whose mighty muscles sent the lever flying up and down. Together they worked with the adjustment, and again Ivan worked the pump with which the car was provided, grumbling in the meantime that they had to resort to such old-time methods and thereby lose precious minutes. When he climbed back into the car and they moved ahead at high speed, he again studied his timepiece and said to Ivan, in that voiceless motion of the lips: "This difference of twenty minutes may upset the whole game; but we've got to do our best. It cuts us out of a chance for overcoming awkward preliminaries. Two o'clock was the hour set for everything."

Again they halted in front of the palace, and the sentries saw the crippled old gentleman assisted from the car. Baron Provarsk, he explained to them, would return shortly, and had requested that he, Mr. Kent, should be conducted to the smaller throne-room, there to await. Unquestioningly the sentries admitted the caller; for was he not the usurper's friend? And also the news had spread that through this old simpleton money was to come—plenty of it—enough to make them all rich. One of

the lounging soldiers of fortune inside even assisted the visitor up the wide marble steps and along the corridor, where drowsy men fell back to give space.

Inside the room Ubaldo, Provarsk's captain-at-arms, sat beside the table talking to two other men, and his face, which had been perturbed, cleared when he saw the American ushered in. He stared at the door through which Kent and Ivan entered, as if expecting the usurper to follow them, and betrayed disappointment that this expectation was not fulfilled. Without asking consent, Ivan led Kent to a seat at the head of the table, as if unaware that this post of honor was reserved for the ruler of the country, then respectfully backed away until he stood to one side of the door.

"Baron Provarsk did not return with you, sir?" Ubaldo asked with an effort at politeness.

THE American quietly consulted his watch before answering, and a look of satisfaction crept over his face. Leisurely he snapped the case shut, slipped the timepiece back into his pocket, leaned back in his chair and clasped his hands together carelessly. A dry grin broke over his lips, as he looked at Ubaldo and then answered:

"No, Baron Provarsk did not return with me. In fact, the last I saw of him he was—er—whistling with satisfaction while waiting for some ham and eggs, some bread and butter, and a cup of coffee to be served with pure cream."

The three adventurers looked at one another perplexed. It was Ubaldo who spoke.

"When may we expect him, sir—may I ask?"

"Why, as for that, not at all," Kent answered with evident candor.

"For what reason?" Ubaldo demanded, while his comrades looked their intense anxiety.

"Well, mainly for this reason," Kent said, with the same dry grin: "As you, being his right-hand man, doubtless know, the principal thing he wanted was money, and after that power! Provarsk is no fool, I can tell you. Pretty farsighted, I should say. He

wanted to see the King—insisted on it, I believe. As a result of it all, they seem to have come to a most satisfactory understanding—quite satisfactory, one might conclude. The Baron is thus rendered quite happy by being enabled, with money, to go his way rejoicing. The King is probably equally happy at being enabled to return to his throne without any fuss whatever, and so there you are!"

"You mean we've been sold out?" This time Ubaldo's voice rose to an angry roar, and his two comrades lent their anger to the occasion.

"Put it that way if it suits you best," Kent remarked, carelessly lifting his hand to conceal a yawn.

Ubaldo's companions broke for the door and out into the corridor, bawling: "Betrayed! We've been betrayed! Sold out by that—" And what they called Provarsk would not have been pleasant to the usurper's ears. Ubaldo turned, hesitantly, as if to call them back, and Kent seized the opportunity to give a noiseless command to Ivan.

"When I get them all inside," he said, "you slip out quickly and see that the palace gates are not barred." Then, speaking aloud, he called to Ubaldo.

"It seems to me that your fellows are making a pretty good-sized noise over nothing. Noise wont help you."

IN the corridor outside could be heard oaths, hoarse exclamations and the sound of running boot-heels over the tiled floors. Several of Provarsk's adventurers came tearing into the throne-room, shaking their fists and wanting to know if what they had heard was the truth. Their leader tried in vain to control them for some minutes; and at last, when he obtained attention, did so by outbawling them all.

"Silence! Silence there, you men! Who's leader here? You or me? I tell you to hold your tongues until we find out about this. Do your hear me?"

Slowly and sullenly they became subdued. Ubaldo then turned fiercely on the American, who sat impassive at the head of the table, his manner portraying nothing more than a melancholy, almost disinterested curiosity in his surroundings.

"Now, you limping old fossil!" Ubaldo snarled, "you'll tell us exactly what happened. And don't forget this: if you don't tell the truth, I'll cook you, inch by inch, and then throw the cinders into the streets."

The "old fossil" looked mildly surprised.

"I thought I did tell you," he said. "If I've got to tell it again, suppose you call all your men in to hear it. It strikes me that you're only one of them, and that any man that joined your expedition has just as much right to know what is up as you have."

"That's right! You're right there!" The other adventurers in the room yelled in chorus, some of them in the meantime scowling at Ubaldo and muttering to their neighbors that he was the one, after all, who had got them into the mess. Ubaldo recognized this sign of danger and tried to quell it; but he was unheeded in the turmoil. Two of the guardsmen rushed out of the room to summon their comrades. Ubaldo was vainly trying to bring those within the room to a cooler state of mind when the others began to arrive, some of them hurriedly pulling on their tunics, and frowsy-headed, attesting that they had been aroused from sleep. Kent, imperturbably watching, decided that they were all there, inasmuch as the two men who had rushed out to give the summons came in last, accompanied by the gate-sentries, and the corridor was still.

"All I can say," he remarked quietly, "is just about what I've said before. Baron Provarsk is at this moment the contented guest of the King. He's in a place where you men can't reach him. I fancy he will remain there so long as he fears he might meet any of you. In fact, he doesn't seem eager to renew the acquaintance of any of you. I don't believe he likes you. Indeed, he has been unkind enough, once or twice, to refer to you as a lot of idiots; and what he said about Mr. Ubaldo I don't care to repeat. Why, Mr. Ubaldo, do you know, he said to me, Provarsk did, that if all your brains were taken out of your skull and boiled into tallow, they wouldn't make a candle for a glow-worm! He said your head would make

a fine snare-drum! For goodness' sake, man! Don't be angry with me! I'm just telling you what the Baron Provarsk said after he left the palace with me this morning."

Ubaldo grew red with anger and sputtered, and his temper was not improved by the remarks of some of his army.

KENT observed with satisfaction that Ivan had disappeared from his post by the doorway. In an instant's lull in the turmoil about him he heard the faint, clarion warning of an automobile-horn that played the same gentle notes indicative of the approach of the royal automobile, and keenly alive to the necessity of holding this swarm of adventurers a few minutes longer, he rapped on the table with his bare knuckles and called, in his powerful voice: "Gentlemen! Attention, please! Let me finish."

He waited until they were again quiet, straining his ears the while for a repetition of the horn's warning; but hearing nothing, he settled to his task.

"Now let us be reasonable," he said. "You are all reasonable men, I take it. You joined this expedition, somehow, with the hope of bettering yourselves—making money, securing steady places. Well, you didn't get it. You are done. Your jig is up. You are in jeopardy. You've no more chance than a lot of dogs in a city pound. There is no one now but the King who can grant you amnesty. You couldn't escape from Marken, if you tried. You know what they usually do with fellows like you, when they catch them, don't you? If you don't, I'll tell you. They hang them! Why, I wouldn't give a centime for all of your chances, unless you can square it, somehow, with the King. There's no use for you to fight. You are probably pretty good, and used to it, but fifty men can't do anything against—say—five thousand husky peasants armed with everything from a blunderbuss to a high-powered, flat-trajectory rifle. They'd get you, sure! The only thing for you chaps to do is to lay down your hands."

He cocked his head sidewise and paused, in a listening attitude, for

again he heard the horn—quite distinctly now. His suspense grew, and with it ran his resolution to hold this mob to the last moment.

"Don't pay any attention to him!" shouted Ubaldo. "Don't be fools!"

"Why, that's what Provarsk called you," Kent said plaintively. "He said that if you had had the wisdom of a garden-worm, everything would have been all right. And he said—"

"Shut up!" yelled Ubaldo menacingly, dropping his hand to the hilt of his sword. "I'll run you through, if you don't! You men keep quiet. Hear what I've got to say. You don't know but what this old paralytic is a liar, sent here by the King to blindfold you!"

The crowd glared at the American as if this suggestion had not hitherto dawned upon them.

"Very unkind of you," Kent murmured. "And maybe they are already convinced that *you* are one."

Ubaldo wasted no time in retort.

"The only chance we've got," he said loudly, "is to hold this palace until Baron Provarsk returns, or until we can make terms! Besides, we've got this old imbecile as a hostage, and if he's a friend of the King's they'll let us go rather than let him be toasted. Get back to the gates, some of you fellows. Others of you go to the walls. Don't let anyone but Provarsk in. I've warned you about that before, and now you see what kind of a fix you are in by not obeying my orders. Get out and get ready to defend yourselves," he shouted to spur them to action. But before any of them could obey, the pretended paralytic had leaped from his chair and now stood in the door with his hand upraised, his eyes blazing at them.

"Stop!" he commanded.

THEY paused, astonished at his physical agility and the aspect of power presented by his commanding gesture. Suddenly, while they hesitated, through the corridor rang the loud blare of a trumpet.

"Gentlemen! You are too late! See!"

Kent sprang to the hangings that barred the view of the corridor, jerked

them aside; and the discomfited adventurers huddled backward to a solid group when they saw the corridor nearly filled with trimly uniformed soldiers of the royal army who stood quietly with rifles at the "Ready."

There was another blast of a trumpet, and the American moved slowly toward the side of the doorway, announcing as he did so: "Here comes the King!"

In a desperate, awed silence, helpless and defeated, they fixed their eyes on the door through which, followed by the Princess Eloise, Baron Von Glutz and Captain Paulo, and accompanied by a bodyguard, the King entered, walked slowly across the room and then halted and scornfully eyed them, man by man, these who would have murdered him for a usurper's hire.

"I present to Your Majesty," said a calm, sarcastic voice, "fifty gentlemen-at-arms—a fine batch of jailbirds who at present are idle, having just been mustered out."

CHAPTER VII

CAPTAIN PAULO, standing in one of the small reception-rooms of Castle Hertz, and staring absently across the lawn on which the morning sun was shining, whistled softly a very gay tune, indicative of a contented spirit. A movement behind him caused him to turn quickly; instantly he came to attention and then made a punctilious bow.

"Your Royal Highness—"

"Is up early. I know what you are going to say."

The Princess spoke with something akin to petulance, and being adroit in danger-signs, Captain Paulo held his tongue expectantly. The captain of a royal household-guard has to be something of a diplomat if he wishes to continue in his billet. The Princess walked across the room and looked absently out at the lawn for a moment; then, glancing over her shoulder to make certain that they were alone, she asked him a question.

"What took place in the palace yesterday, after I left the room?"

"Mr. Kent pointed out to Provarsk's men the folly of resistance and made them surrender their arms, after delivering them a homily on the dangers of rebellion, and told them that he would then appear as their solicitor before the King."

"Well? Well?" she urged him when he paused. "What was done with them? Where are they confined?"

"They are not confined anywhere, Your Royal Highness."

She gave a start of astonishment, as if incredulous.

"At Mr. Kent's suggestion, His Majesty granted them full amnesty, with the exception of the man called Ubaldo, who has been sent to prison on an indefinite sentence. After that, Mr. Kent selected a few of the most likely ones that he said he had use for, and suggested that the others be escorted across the border. He also suggested that each one's picture be taken. Said he thought this would serve two purposes, one to identify them for hanging if they ever returned, and the other because he thought Marken should start a rogue's gallery and this was an excellent opportunity to lay a foundation."

"Suggested! He suggested! And everything he suggested my brother did! I simply cannot understand this situation. How on earth it happened that my brother fell so suddenly and so completely under the influence of this money-lender is incomprehensible!"

HER annoyance was unmistakable. Captain Paulo was secretly thankful that he was not her brother and was vastly relieved by the entry of that gentleman in person. By the troubled frown on the King's brows, the young officer decided that every word of the Princess' last and captious speech had been overheard.

"You may go, Captain Paulo," the King said significantly, and the young officer saluted and discreetly retired, glad that he was not in the King's shoes.

"Eloise," the King remonstrated with an attempt at severity, "I am sorry to say that I heard what you said to the Captain. Does it seem quite fitting that you should discuss our affairs with—"

"Why not?" she retorted coolly. "It's time they were discussed with some one on whom I can depend, isn't it? If I don't, I'm afraid this man Kent will be running the kingdom as he pleases before long."

The King winced and lost his air of admonishment. He knew, from past experience, that this sister of his dealt in very plain truths. Sometimes they were highly unpleasant. Anger at his own impotence caused him to rush to Kent's defense. Moreover, he was filled with great respect for his new ally's rough-and-ready method of doing things, a method that so far had been invariably successful.

"Why should you object?" he asked. "Has he not proved himself a stronger and a better adviser than I ever had before?"

"But there comes a time when advice assumes domination! It looks to me as if his suggestions were assuming the nature of orders."

"Well, what of it?" he retorted, goaded by the knowledge that she had put her finger on the truth. "You wouldn't have me decline to do as he suggests when I can see for myself that those suggestions are exactly the right course to follow?"

"But isn't it time that he were given to understand—"

"My dear sister," he exclaimed, as another loophole offering escape from this unpleasant interview presented itself, "can't you see further than that? How do you suppose this dynasty is to maintain itself without financial support? Can't you fix it plainly in your mind that John Rhodes, whose agent Mr. Kent is, could practically ruin Marken if he chose?"

"Oh! Those bonds again? I thought so. Well, do you know what I would do if I were king? I would calmly notify this fearsome Mr. John Rhodes that I wasn't ready to pay his bonds, and that he could wait until I did get well ready!"

"Is that Her Royal Highness' conception of honor in financial undertakings?" questioned a dry voice behind them, and they turned to observe Kent standing quietly in the doorway.

"I didn't hear anyone announce you,"

she said, nettled by his unexpected interruption.

"No," he replied affably, "I don't suppose you did. As an admission, I will say that I'm so unused to court affairs, and dwelling with royalty, and the presence of superiority, that I have not yet learned all that is expected of one under such circumstances. In many ways I'm what we call, over home, a rube. But now that I am here—I don't remember that you answered my question."

His eyes met hers unflinchingly, insistently. She wondered if there was not a little of scorn in them—tolerant, but scorn such as one bestows upon those guilty of moral delinquency. She was driven to defense.

"I feel no compulsion to answer the questions of one who is merely a financial agent," she retorted, "but since you have willfully tried to misconstrue my meaning, I will explain that there are occasions when, of necessity, one is forced to adopt measures that under other conditions would not be at all considered. This is one of them. The dignity of royalty must be maintained."

"The dignity of royalty—must be maintained, even by the repudiation of its honest debts? You are now quite explicit. I did not see your attitude before."

UNDER this sirocco of sarcasm she withered, but still fighting for her standard, replied, hotly: "You deliberately misapply my words."

"Motives," he corrected, unmoved.

It was too much! She felt like a schoolgirl being quietly admonished by a head master.

"Since you are so exact," she remarked petulantly, "perhaps you will try to make me see that your motives in assisting us as you have—and we recognize that service, too—are entirely unprejudiced? That you are here as a philanthropist giving service to our house, one that you have never known! That you are not here because you want to save money for that person Rhodes, for whom you work."

"That last may be so," he declared patiently. "I am here to save John Rhodes' money. Do you believe that

a kingdom any more than an individual, can advance itself without money?"

"Honor is better than money," she asserted.

"It seems to me I've heard that before," he said smiling. "I didn't know that was in your copy-books also. Since you are intent on fighting me, suppose you draw the line for me by telling where honor begins after one has practically abrogated one's debts. I am interested, mademoiselle. I would know the ideas of royalty in those matters. You see, as I have confessed, being an American, I have never before been a sort of member of a king's household."

A slow, patient smile spread over his ingenuous face as he looked at her; and she, more than ever angered at the strange sense of power that this man exhaled, felt herself again worsted in the tilt and in proportion hated herself for her weakness. She lifted her head and, with a gesture of indifference, walked toward the door. He did not seem at all overawed, or impressed. Indeed, it was more as if he were inwardly amused, yet desirous of parting friends for future needs. He dared to bar her way, and to stand in front of her with his hands holding the hangings on either side.

"Come," he said, "you are wrong. It is you who do not understand; and understanding is necessary. I've come here to make good. I'm going to do it!"

A strange jargon this. And she found herself pondering its meaning and usage.

"You needn't trouble to answer," he continued when she hesitated in a bewildered study. "But I'll tell you something before you go. It is not yours to play the part of an obstructionist to your brother's hopes and ideals, if you love him as a sister should. I don't know it, but I presume that it is permitted for the sister of a king to love her brother and advance his interests. If not, kings and princesses should never be brothers and sisters. Anyway, it's going to be a lot easier for me to—to get John Rhodes' money,"—she could scarcely account

for the strange sarcasm in his tone,—“and incidentally to help your brother, if we act as friends. Come, will you not act as our ally in this troublesome undertaking?”

SHE was strangely and unreasonably moved by his appeal; for appeal it was, his mellow voice hastening to his will, and his thoughtful, searching eyes fixing themselves questioningly upon her face.

“Unity of action is necessary to success,” he added, while she stood before him, waiting for him to stand aside.

For quite a time they confronted each other, he with his hand outstretched, as if inviting her compact; and then slowly his look shifted and lost all its warmth and veiled itself, and his lips straightened to a harsh, obdurate line. He bowed and stepped to one side, beckoning with unconscious grace toward the open door. She knew that he was wounded by her refusal, and she was no longer aggressive. She fought an impulse to put her hand in his and become, after this relinquishment, his faithful partner in the enterprise; but that meant, she knew, that she must become, as her brother threatened to become, his subordinate. Without looking back, neither disdainful, haughty nor yet subdued, she passed through the door and away.

For an instant his face was grave and hurt; and then, as if arousing himself to his task, an inexorable master of himself as well as of others, his face again hardened and he walked toward the King, who throughout the interview had stood with his back toward the room, as if politely leaving the situation to adjust itself.

Kent put his hands in his pockets, frowned reflectively and said as brusquely as if addressing an office-boy: “Please summon Von Glutz and Captain Paulo and Ivan at once.”

And like an office-boy the King obeyed. He stepped to an electric button and pressed it, after which he stared at Kent, who stood lost in thought. Von Glutz was the first to enter. He bowed deeply to the King and with marked respect to the American.

“Sit down, Baron. Make yourself at home,” Kent said, careless of royal etiquette; and the Chancellor, disturbed by this invitation, looked at the King beseechingly.

“Certainly, Baron. Sit down,” said the King, smiling a little at the strangeness of their positions.

Captain Paulo appeared, and at him Kent smiled and nodded, and immediately afterward the giant stood in the doorway with his eyes fixed on Kent’s lips.

“Ivan, did you serve Baron Provarsk in person, this morning?” the financier asked.

“Yes sir.”

“Ah! How did the Baron appear? Resigned? Cheerful? Or grumpy and discomfited?”

Ivan grinned widely.

“I am not certain, sir, but I think that when I entered he was whistling. Resigned? Perhaps. Discomfited? Not at all. Certainly he did not seem out of spirits. Indeed, he was rather gay. He asked me if I had ever seen a blind-folded dog with a wooden leg playing football with a one-eyed pig, and when I said no, declared that he was rather astonished, because he understood one could see almost anything in America.”

“Good! He’ll do, all right!” Kent exclaimed.

His lips opened as if to give a command, and then, observing Captain Paulo, he turned toward the King respectfully and said: “If it meets with your approval, sir, can we not have the insurgent brought here?”

THE King, appreciating Kent’s constant care to avoid humiliating him in the presence of any of his people, gave Captain Paulo the order, and the latter disappeared with alacrity. The Chancellor, who, plainly ill at ease, had shifted restlessly from one side to the other, seized the opportunity to stand up, looking an apology at the King, but the King, evidently good-humored and curious, was watching the American. He could not repress a scowl, however, when Provarsk was ushered in with two sentries in front, two behind, and Captain Paulo bringing up the rear.

The sentries saluted the King and stepped to one side.

"You will stand guard outside with your men," the King directed Paulo. Kent gestured Ivan to guard the door from the inside.

"Good morning, cousin, and everybody else, Americans included," blithely saluted Provarsk. "Nice weather, isn't it—ah—after the storm?"

Kent was the only one who seemed to enjoy his humor. The King turned his back, walked to a chair and seated himself. For nearly a minute, in the silence of the room, Kent studied Provarsk's face.

"Well, Provarsk," he said genially, "my bluff seems the best of the lot, doesn't it?"

"Evidently," quite freely agreed Provarsk. "Only, of course, I don't as yet know just how badly I am let in."

"You'll find that out, soon enough. One usually does, you know," was Kent's response. "I believe His Majesty gives you permission to sit."

"I do," said the King carelessly, and Provarsk smiled and seated himself after an ostentatious and exasperating grin at the Chancellor, who promptly turned purple with rage.

"You will pardon me," said Kent dryly, as he pulled a chair into a position where he could directly face Provarsk, "if in our conversation I seem to be assuming; but His Majesty has graciously granted me certain privileges of speech and action which he will sanction. Is that not true, sire?"

The King, reverting to that strange, curious look of expectancy, said it was, and Provarsk shielded his mouth with his finger-tips as if to conceal a smile.

"Provarsk," said Kent decisively, "you're whipped—all down the line."

"For the moment, yes, I suppose," the usurper admitted gracefully. He smiled in an amused, friendly way.

"The King has decided," continued Kent placidly, "that you are a man of some talent, and has therefore concluded to make none other than you Chancellor of his kingdom."

FOR once Provarsk was so completely surprised that his looks betrayed him. He leaned forward in his chair

and stared at the American doubtfully. Baron Von Glutz cleared his throat explosively, and was nearly speechless with wrath.

"This is going too far!" he exclaimed but was silenced by Kent, who turned toward him and said: "Steady! Steady, Baron. You needn't worry. You will be cared for later in this—this reconstruction."

"But—but—" hesitated the King, vastly distressed, "Baron Von Glutz has been my mentor since my boyhood, and was Chancellor of Marken under my father!"

"Doubtless his administrative excellence accounts for Marken's present peaceful conditions—and also for our unexpected meeting across the border," Kent said suavely. "But as I understood you, sire—"

Provarsk interrupted with a sneering laugh and exclaimed: "Pshaw! I might have known it. It is you who ask me to be chancellor. Eh? All right! I accept—under you, but not under His Majesty. But pray tell me why I am thus honored?"

"Honored? Well, for several reasons. One, that it's not so messy as to have you taken out and hanged. Another, that you still represent to me a sporting proposition, and I like fearless men who go out after a thing when they want it. It's been a long time since I have met such an interesting sort of a personage as you seem to be; and inasmuch as His Majesty wants me to remain with him for a time as an adviser, I'd like to see what you can do—whether you can get the best of us."

"I promise to do the very best I can to get the best of you," Provarsk asserted.

"I like that, too," Kent said heartily. "You're welcome to get away with all you can—with this understanding: that you must agree to accept and honestly carry out all orders given you. Otherwise—"

"Otherwise what?" queried the Baron when the American hesitated.

"Otherwise, we'll have you promptly shot. Also, you are 'honored,' as you put it, because I believe you are a good enough gamester, once having given your word, to obey orders."

PROVARSK studied Kent wonderingly, while the latter without a change of expression stared back at him.

"You don't want to be bothered hanging or shooting me now; you think I'm too dangerous to exile; and you therefore prefer to keep me directly under your eye. So you appoint me chancellor! Rather clever, it strikes me."

Kent nodded and smiled.

"You have it," he said.

"All right, Mr. Richard Kent, I accept this chancellorship, and agree to obey all of your orders—or should I say His Majesty's?—with just one provision: which is that after one year's service I have the privilege of resigning and walking away, scot free, whenever I choose to do so."

"Quite a nice agreement! A very pleasant agreement, indeed!" Kent assented. "We will now have an interview with Captain Paulo."

He gave Ivan the order, speaking loudly, as though to impress on the new chancellor that his man was a trifle hard of hearing, and in a moment Captain Paulo stood before them.

"Captain Paulo," said Kent, "His Majesty the King has graciously delegated me to reorganize the Cabinet of Marken, and because of your fidelity, you are now appointed Minister of the Treasury."

Paulo stood with a look of astonishment on his face. It was an advancement he had never thought of. Truly there must have been some foundation for the "Arabian Nights." For once, the King was not disturbed by the American's plans, and began to wonder if, after all, there was not some method in this new form of madness.

"These are my wishes, Captain Paulo," said he.

Kent bowed his head gravely to the new Minister of the Treasury.

"Permit me to introduce the new Chancellor of the Realm, Baron Provarsk."

Paulo found it difficult to bow; but by desperate effort did so. Provarsk acknowledged this deference to his position by an airy, "That's all right, Paulo. Never can tell what your luck may be. Perhaps I'll make you a field

marshal yet," a piece of pleasantry that Kent appreciated with a slight smile, and which the King plainly resented.

"And the Baron Provarsk is therefore now at liberty?" queried Paulo, evidently unable to grasp the extraordinary changes that had taken place.

"My goodness, man! Your Excellency, the Minister of the Treasury, does not suggest that so exalted and important official as the Chancellor should be pinched, do you?" Kent asked with unsmiling lips.

"Why, I should say not!" exclaimed Provarsk with a great assumption of dignity. "I couldn't think of such a thing! I've a mind to ask my cousin instantly to remove you from office!"

"If I am to act as a Cabinet minister—" began Paulo.

"I would suggest that you and the Chancellor retire to the anteroom and come to an amical agreement to leave each other alone," Kent interrupted. "His Majesty expects you to do so. It must be understood that all previous differences have, from the moment of His Majesty's appointments, been obliterated."

Provarsk arose with an air of relief, bowed deeply to the King, eyed Kent quizzically and led the way. Paulo, still bewildered, made his salutes and followed after, leaving the American with his eyes fixed on Von Glutz, who had steadily drooped and wilted into an effigy of injured innocence, not unlike a wilted turnip.

"Baron," Kent began, "all this may appear a trifle strange to you: but I have reasons."

"Does it not seem to you, Mr. Kent, that you are in a measure taking advantage of our somewhat singular position?" the King asked. "I am still striving to keep my share of our agreement, but I cannot quite grasp—"

"You aren't supposed to grasp anything, owing to that agreement," was the concise retort. "You were, and still are, in a passive position. It's my job to pull you out. I'm probably upsetting a lot of precedents; but I take the responsibility for running this board of directors—pardon! I mean this kingdom—in my own way."

Rebuffed, the King met Kent's look;

and then, reassured by the intelligence he saw there, said: "I am sorry to have interfered. I am doing the best I can to learn. It requires some patience, under the—the unusual circumstances, to—"

He stopped, the confession itself being difficult; but the American liked him for his outburst. Indeed, he decided there might be some hope for the King, properly handled.

"Our ways are different," he said less aggressively. "Your way has been tried and failed. Therefore mine can be no worse."

HE faced Von Glutz again, and was about to speak, when as if it were her particular mission in life to interfere, Princess Eloise came hurriedly into the room, again with full danger-signals flying.

"Karl," she asked, "is it true, as Provarsk just now informed me, in the anteroom, that you have appointed him Chancellor of Marken?"

"It is true," the King replied.

"Then," she declared stormily, "I suppose this outrage is also due to the sage advice of your new friend Mr. Kent? Are you still the King of Marken, may I ask? Or are you a marionette, pulled by a string? Have you gone mad? Have you no spirit left?"

Exasperated by her return, as well as by the contempt that had so deftly conveyed itself in the selection of her words, the King forgot his promise of secrecy to the American.

"Eloise," he replied desperately, "sheer force of circumstances has for the time being drawn me into a pact with Mr. Kent, by which he is to have the controlling voice in the affairs of the kingdom. You forget that without his efforts we should scarcely be here now. So far he has proven—"

"Why doesn't he have himself crowned?"

The King did not answer. Kent was amused. She stared at him as he sat noiselessly drumming his fingers on the arm of his chair, entirely self-possessed, and apparently indifferent to anything she might say.

"I suppose it was you, then, who

appointed our enemy Provarsk to the position of chancellor?" she said.

"The King appoints. I merely advise," he replied with a smile in the corners of his eyes that stretched slowly downward until it created circumflex wrinkles around his firm lips.

"What is to become of Baron Von Glutz?" she demanded, directly to the point.

The American slowly moved his head in the Baron's direction and assumed a deep study of that person that caused the latter to squirm, puff his cheeks and adopt the habitual recourse of tugging at his mustache.

"Do you know," replied Kent slowly, "that is the question which has bothered me a whole lot. I've given considerable thought to him and—er—I hardly know what to do with him. At first I thought of appointing him the King's dog-catcher. Then, observing something faintly suggesting a military character, a regular fighting general behind the lines,—a long way behind,—I concluded that he might make a good Minister of War. That is one of the most important places in every kingdom of this kind. The smaller the army, the more important the position. There is such a billet as that, in Marken, isn't there?" he concluded in a bland tone of inquiry.

VON GLUTZ was the first to recover from this attack.

"When one has been a chancellor, it is rather difficult to step back to a portfolio," he protested.

"Then why not step out into private life?" retorted Kent, and added with great enthusiasm: "It would be such a change for you! By Jove! that's the very thing! Become a plain citizen! All sorts of things to do! Opportunities to criticise the government. Tell admiring friends what you would have done if you had been Chancellor. Point out the incumbent's mistakes. Get a lot of figures together to show wasteful extravagance in expenditures—tariff reform, income tax, workingman's friend, poor girls' benefactor! Be a Cromwell, and get the power of a king by having His Majesty's head cut off. Sort of fellow-citizen, friend-of-the-

people, Napoleon, and clap the crown on your bald head. You might even Cookize, and discover a new North Pole. Say! If you've been a good Chancellor, why did the hen cross the road? Why was Provarsk?"

He paused with mock earnestness, waiting deferentially for a reply.

"You don't answer," he continued, and again that subtle change that distinguished him was apparent. "Baron Von Glutz, I respect you for being an honest man, and a faithful one. But there has been a task that you could not grasp. There are many different kinds of brains in this world. Yours was not the kind for the place. This one requires a callosity that you don't possess. You can't cheat or dissimulate. You can't bluff. You were not a good Chancellor. So I've made you Minister of War. Do you want the place?"

The Baron gave a heavy sigh and looked doubtful. Apprehensive lest he decline the proffered portfolio, the Princess hastened to urge his acceptance.

"Since there seems no way of disregarding our new adviser's wishes, Baron Von Glutz, I ask you in my own behalf to accept. If you should retire to private life, you would leave me with one less friend in whom I can confide. There is none left now, save Paulo."

The American did not dispute her; but the King looked at her strangely and said: "That is unfair, Eloise."

She paid no attention to him but walked to the side of the Baron.

"For my sake, old friend," she appealed; and Von Glutz, for whom Kent was secretly rather sorry, lifted his head and said: "Very well! I accept."

"Good!" said Kent bluntly.

HE waited, as if expecting the Princess to leave the room; but she, divining his wish, stubbornly made her way to a chair and seated herself with the evident intention of remaining indefinitely. Observing this, Kent smiled slightly and announced himself.

"Having thus come so easily through our reorganization, and now being on such friendly terms of amity and unity," he said, "we may as well get

down to business and understand what we propose to do. I have studied the situation pretty thoroughly. First, we have army enough now to do police duty. That is what it shall do. Next we shall have conscription."

His hearers gave a gasp of dismay.

"The trouble with a large majority of Markenites," he went on, "is that they are lazy. They don't produce enough. Therefore we will have conscription for labor, and compel them to work whether they want to or not. If they don't obey, we confiscate their property and throw them out of the kingdom. I'm going to compel every man in Marken to earn more money than he ever has hitherto!"

His voice was now hard and emphatic, and he punctuated his declaration by rapping the table with his knuckles.

"I'm going to make them rich, and the kingdom rich, whether they like it or not. When a country is in such distress as this kingdom is, it needs an autocrat—and, by heavens, it has one now! Those mines shall work full tilt, and this government is going to force the building of factories and encourage industries. The kingdom of Marken shall not only pay its debts, but while doing it, shall learn how to keep out of debt."

The King could not entirely repress a look of enthusiasm; but the Princess was still rebellious.

"And may I ask what rôle the modest Mr. Kent purposes to play in all this miraculous work?" she inquired.

"I've thought of that too," cheerfully replied Mr. Kent, ignoring the inference that he had been boasting. "Some kings have an official known as 'the King's Remembrancer,' whose job it is to stand at the king's elbow and remind him of what he has to do. I shall be the King's Remembrancer in Marken, Your Royal Highness."

CHAPTER VIII

JUST prior to the hour of the matutinal sausage in Marken, on the following morning, those who strolled sleepily out into the narrow streets

found a topic for conversation. Notices had been posted in the nighttime on the doorways of churches, lamp-posts and pillar-boxes. Languidly these were read, and a mild flutter ensued that caused many to forget—almost to forget—that the sausage-hour was due.

The notices were printed in plain white, with plain type, and plainly stated that His Gracious and Benign Majesty, Karl II, King of Marken, by Divine Right, had, in the interests of the great kingdom, seen fit to exercise his august prerogative of forming a new ministry, in the confident belief that his subjects and the welfare of the State would therefore be benefited. Baron, etc., etc., Provarsk was now the Chancellor of the realm, succeeding Baron etc., etc., Von Glutz.

"Ha!" said those who read, gleefully, "the old pouter pigeon has got his wings clipped!" Or, "Baron Provarsk? What does this mean? Continually he has tried to make us believe that King Karl is a blunderer. Now he sides with the King and becomes Chancellor. Ahem! We shall see what kind of a chancellor this high and mighty baron makes!"

Baron Von Glutz now Minister of War!

At that they laughed a little and expressed pity for the few score men who formed the King's standing army. They hoped the new minister would not alter the uniforms, because those new scarlet tunics and white trousers, pricked out with profuse gold braidings, were very effective.

Captain Philidor Paulo to be Minister of the Treasury!

"Well! Well! Well! That's something. The common people are at last beginning to be recognized!" They were flattered. They remembered, some of them, what a merry lad he was when his widowed mother conducted the *charcuterie* in the Alley of the Capuchins. Pity she had not lived to see her son a Cabinet minister! What a lot of money he would have to count. He always was good at counting, stoutly asserted some of the old dames who had watched his growth.

They discussed it vigorously while eating. They had placid disputes about

it after the shops opened; but they forgot it by bedtime. Affairs couldn't be worse than they had been, they decided, and let it go at that.

ON the following day the shops had nice pictures of the new Chancellor for sale, all of which had been left by a giant, "on commission," who was voted a queer sort of chap, inasmuch as sometimes he failed to hear, or at least declined to answer. This gave them cause for gossip, it being an innovation thus to advertise the face of a chancellor. They did not know that a more mystified person was the Chancellor himself, who speculated vainly on what the fertile-brained King's Remembrancer could have "up his sleeve" in this latest divertisement, and not in the least suspecting that it was for the purpose of making his features so widely known that he could never run away.

The Court Gazette, that highly aloof official organ the smallest paragraph of which was read with awe, proved the next distraction. It intimated that great changes were about to take place in the administration of the kingdom, all of which would tend to the aggrandizement of Marken, and would probably bring it into the rank of first powers of the world—whatever that might be. Elderly gentlemen wagged their heads sagely, and younger ones unconsciously swelled their chests as duly become citizens of one of the "great powers." The cautious ones hoped that Marken was not going to plunge the world into war of conquest, and a village oracle who had once seen the Adriatic Sea and declared that it was impossible to see across it because there was so much water, and who had for twenty years been discredited therefore as a notorious liar, arose again to prominence and sagely declared that he believed, after long deliberation, that Marken was about to have a navy of its own.

Then, after a week's excited argument, there appeared that memorable announcement that it was the duty of all to support the State, and that at the places named, on the dates named, all able-bodied citizens of both sexes would

appear and register themselves—that failure to do so would be punished by fines, imprisonment, confiscation of property and various other humiliations. Also, God save the King! And this manifesto was signed by the Chancellor! This was carrying it too far! The idea of expecting people to do something for the State! Why, who ever heard of such a thing? Of course, anything done for the State was wasted time. Didn't they pay taxes? Wasn't that enough? Things were coming to a pretty pass. Anyway, two weeks must elapse before the new conscription measures became effective; and this, they decided, was ample time to consider so startling an innovation.

And innovation had been made in the palace itself, unknown to the placid, indolent citizens of the quaint old city. The American, after effecting the organization of the new Cabinet, was the cause.

"Thank you for the invitation to make your palace my home, sir," he said to the King on His Majesty's formal reentry into his ancestral home.

The King, astonished, inasmuch as he had never conceived or voiced any such invitation, answered with a whimsical smile not too unlike Kent's own: "Oh, it's nothing! Nothing at all, Mr. Kent. It was thoughtful of me, wasn't it?"

"Very," replied the new guest. "It was very kind of you, also, to suggest that inasmuch as a King's Remembrancer must be a mighty busy man, because a king has so much to think about, that I should select such rooms of the palace as would serve for business offices."

Thus he seized a reception-room, overlooking the gardens, and a smaller room that was metamorphosed into his private office, and in a third a staff of bookkeepers was installed.

"It looks," said the King to Paulo, while making a surreptitious visit, "like a bank. What on earth can so many bookkeepers do?"

"Opening a new set of government books, sire, under the direction of a London accountant for whom Mr. Kent telegraphed."

The King looked helpless and puzzled and said: "Weren't the old ones—Um-mh!"

"Mr. Kent said all the old books were mere waste. Said he would put the accounts of Marken in such shape that he could tell each night exactly where the kingdom stood, or know the reason why."

"Incredible!" exclaimed the King. "No one ever heard of such a thing."

"That is what Baron Von Glutz told Mr. Kent."

THE King grinned, and his eyes lighted as he asked what Mr. Kent had replied.

"Mr. Kent asked the Baron if he had ever heard that in America there were now large and thriving orchards of cheese-trees, and when the Baron answered that he had not, Mr. Kent said: 'There you are! You see there's a lot of things you never heard of. Every child in America knows as well about the cheese-tree as every big corporation knows about the watermelon. Whenever possible, every big board of directors in America assembles in solemn conclave and cuts one.'"

The King looked as if he almost believed it; but he did not disclose ignorance, having been carefully instructed on this point when a crown prince.

"Mr. Kent has retained one of the expert accountants sent him from London as his private secretary," Paulo added as a further note of interest. "He speaks our tongue. Also Ivan has brought all their personal belongings from Steinweg. Mr. Kent has also bought a strange sort of clock-arrangement that he compels the Chancellor and the Minister of War to punch in a curious fashion whenever they enter or leave their offices. Mr. Kent said he was thinking of getting one for Your Majesty. This curious device registers the time when one comes in or goes out, so that by referring to it Mr. Kent says he can tell whether they are doing a full day's work."

His Majesty decided that it was time for him to retire to his own part of the palace. Mr. Kent seemed to be doing quite a lot of things. Among others, His Majesty learned a few days later,

was the reorganization of the working plant of the mining concession, effected by a distinguished mining engineer who had not only arrived but had telegraphed for new machinery that was to be installed. Also local engineers had been sent to make surveys and plans for electric power-plants at several places where hitherto some noble waterfalls had been permitted to flow as nature made them, untrammled by harness.

Quarries, too, owned and long neglected by the Crown were being prepared for reopening on large scales, and the King was further surprised when it was publicly announced that His Majesty Karl II was heading a scheme for the utilization of some mineral springs, and would from State funds establish a spa that it was hoped would be second to none in Europe, where gout, rheumatism, Bright's disease and many other ailments would be promptly alleviated, or cured, under the supervision of famous specialists.

The King wasn't sure that he liked it. The best he could hope for was that Kent would not have a picture of the King and His Majesty's personal guarantee on every bottle of water exported.

MR. KENT, cause of all the disturbance, was happier than he had ever been in his life. He was the first in his office in the morning, and the last to leave at night. The dignity of the staid old palace was being rudely shaken by constant streams of those who came on business, were received by the square-jawed man who always explained that he was merely the King's mouthpiece appointed to transact whatever was to be done in this particular case, and so forth and thus:

"Sit down! Did you bring those plans? Well, skip all that! What's it going to cost? That's too much. Ought to be shaved by twenty per cent. Take those estimates back and go over them again. No use in your trying to fool the King, is there? You fellows around here have got to wake up. The King has been studying over this affair, and knows what it ought to cost just about as well as you do. Bring the new

figures around to-morrow at seven minutes past three o'clock. Good day!"

Like a Gatling gun that voice snapped and boomed all day long, and a close observer might have discovered that in the cafés of Marken by night, and in the Market Place by day, men began to speak of the King with something more than stupefaction, something bordering on fear and respect. "Who would have ever thought it?" they muttered. "No one ever expected him to do any more than any other king does!" And where on earth would he get workmen for so many enterprises? Pessimists opined that the King was mad and the kingdom going to the dogs.

THE days of registration passed with good-natured tolerance. It was fairly good sport, the Markenites thought, quite like some foolish festival season. But why was it that when they registered themselves they were also given a physical examination and issued cards of different colors stating that they had been assigned to a certain class? It certainly did indicate that the King was preparing to go to war, and was therefore organizing all his resources. The citizens of the toy capital of the toy kingdom were vastly perplexed, but not quite alarmed.

Secretly Provarsk speculated on what this bold alien expected of him, and suspected that the sole reason why he was compelled to keep office-hours was that a watch might be kept over his activities. Secretly the new Minister of War fussed and fumed. Secretly the King began to hope for the best, and secretly the Princess Eloise came to the conclusion that there was some characteristics of the redoubtable Mr. Kent that she could not understand. Fight as she would, she had to admit that he threatened to do things, and exhibited no slovenliness of mind; and for that she could not help liking him.

And then, on a certain day, the curiosity of everyone promised to be satisfied. Again the public announcements appeared, assembling all of Classes A, B, C, and F at certain central points, notably one in the Market Place of Marken, and now there would be but two weeks more of suspense.

CHAPTER IX

IT was the morning of the day on which the announcements were to be made to the citizens of Marken that they had been conscripted for something far worse than war—namely, work. Early in the day, as Kent had foreseen, Marken began to fill not only with those of the classes called, but with members of all other classes. Peasants, chattering volubly, poured into the capital, some on foot, others in carts, and all gayly clad in their best garb. There was an expectant and serious air pervading everything.

The American was early at his desk, and was never more methodical and energetic. This he recognized as a crisis. People, he knew, could be asked to go to war and would go cheering; but to ask them to go to work was an entirely different and more serious request. They might rebel. All that foresight could suggest had been done. The standing army, the first and second reserves, had all been called out and posted in various places where trouble might occur; and Baron Von Glutz, faithful to orders and ever willing to do his best, had puffed and sweated and bellowed commands that all might be prepared to quell disorder.

Noon was the hour fixed, but already the town was filled. At noon they were to be told the worst!

Kent, referring to the lists on his littered desk, was jotting down figures, with an air of satisfaction, as if to reassure himself that he had made no mistakes in his estimates.

"A and B to the mines," he murmured. "That fixes them up. C men are carpenters and brick- and stonemasons, and there's enough of them to care for all constructions. And there are enough F men, all machinists, to look after the plants. Yes, that leaves plenty of common laborers for the quarries. Must call them up next."

FROM the window overlooking the palace gardens came the voice of Ivan: "The Chancellor and his friend the banker Wimplehurst are walking in the gardens together," he said, and turned inquiringly to Kent.

"By Jove! Is that so? I've been rather bothered about our friend the Chancellor in the last few weeks," Kent said. "He's so uncommonly bright that I haven't been able to get a line on him."

He got up and came to the side of the window, caught the curtains in his hand to shield himself from possible observation and looked through the meshes.

"Wonder what the deuce that rascal has on hand now? It's something. Otherwise he wouldn't have selected the garden for the meeting. No place like a garden or a crowded street to keep from being overheard. He's afraid that walls have ears like an elephant's. And so they have—under my especial provision," he added with grim humor.

He suddenly turned and hastening to his desk, pulled open a drawer and handed a pair of binoculars to Ivan.

"Keep out of sight and tell me what they say," he ordered—after which he returned to his desk and quietly lounged over its corner with folded arms.

Ivan grinned, adjusted the glasses, focused them at a conveniently thin place in the curtain design and began talking, disjointedly, as if to himself.

"Wish I could open these curtains. They bother me—when there's two hundred yards between us. Hard to read the lips unless they turn this way. Ah! They've stopped and I can see them both. Lucky that the banker is smooth-shaven and speaks distinctly."

He paused for a moment as if picking up the thread of conversation that was being unwound across the wide, intervening space.

"It seems that Provorsk has arranged with the banker to get together a certain number of men to create a disturbance when the announcements are made. Provorsk thinks enough fuss can be raised to stop your conscription scheme. The banker doesn't want it to go as far as open revolt. Provorsk laughs. Says what if it does. Banker says that part is up to Provorsk. Provorsk hopes that the center of unrest and objection being the capital, it will spread out into the country. Says he knows your affairs are critical, and that if you are beaten

in this, you'll either have to give up or try something else. Banker's men are to be posted around different spots in the Market Place.

"Provarsk wants to know how they are to act unitedly. Banker says he will get up close to the stand where the announcement is to be read; then, when he thinks time is right, will get up and give signal. Immediately a riot will start. Says all his men know one another by a red cockade in the left buttonhole. Provarsk wants to know if the banker followed his instructions and confined his efforts to Marken, because he thinks concentration here is important. Banker says yes, all are to be at Market Place. Banker says had to pay men four dollars each in advance. Wants Provarsk to pay him back. Provarsk smoothing banker down with his promises. Tells him he's to be Minister of Treasury some day and not too many questions asked. Banker appears satisfied. The Baron has an idea—"

HE was interrupted by Kent, who had arisen, walked behind him and now took the glasses from his hand and said: "Never mind the remainder. I've only got an hour in which to move. Go and get Paulo and bring him back with you on the jump! And hold on a minute! As you go out to get him, order my car brought around and kept in waiting at the private door. Also, as soon as you've brought Paulo here, don't wait, but skip over to your room and arm yourself, and bring a gun for me. Just as well to be prepared. Hurry, Ivan! We've got quite an uncertain job."

After Ivan had rushed from the room, Kent dawdled back toward his desk, stood above it for a moment, carefully sorted the lists and papers, and then, with hands in trousers pockets, sat on the corner, swung his leg and carelessly hummed a tune as if perfectly satisfied with all things. Only his eyes betrayed excitement, and they

danced as happily as those of a boy just starting on some wild adventure. But when Paulo, eager to be of service to this leader whom he trusted and admired, came through the door, Kent lost no time in beckoning him to his private office, where he leaned forward and mumbled hasty instructions, checking them off on his finger-tips, and having them recapitulated to make certain of their intelligent understanding. He was quite gleeful when Paulo ran from the room, calling back: "Leave it to me, Mr. Kent. You can depend on me."

Kent consulted his watch, saw that it lacked but half an hour of noon, and, locking his desk, twirled the knob of his private safe. He clapped his hat on his

head and whistled merrily as he closed the office door, after telling his secretary that he would not return until late in the afternoon. He was exactly like any other American business man as he walked alertly to his waiting car—smiled at Ivan and told the driver, another man on whom he could depend, to make his way to the Market Place.

In the outskirts of the crowd the car was stopped by an officer who, on seeing the palace uniform worn by the driver, was prepared to give the car right of way. The American dismounted.

"Permit this car to stand here at the side where we can reach it when we return," he said. "Clear a way and conduct my man and me to the platform where the announcement is to be made. I am on the King's business."

"I recognized you, sir," said the officer respectfully, and at once called to two of his men and began conducting them forward. The crowd swayed, commented and drew back, leaving a free lane down which they passed. Gay it appeared with all the colors of the rainbow, a strange motley of gorgeous hues, now that the holiday costume was donned. Under their feet the rounded cobbles, polished by many feet for many ages, were littered with broken flowers,

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tinsel from sweetmeats, and confetti. Any great gathering in Marken betokened a holiday, sacred or secular, and habit could not be overcome in a day. At the foot of a gray old tower whose clock, daintily veiled with ivy, stared down at the assemblage, a stand had been erected; for here, from time immemorial, had been read the King's commands.

It was always the same scene. First the waiting crowd, then the King's heralds brilliantly clad, the shrilling of silver trumpets, the silence, sometimes murmuring, sometimes breathless and expectant, as befitted the gravity of the situation, while some person of importance shouted, in long-drawn, deliberate tones the King's decree. Always it closed with the same statement, that confirmation would be found on the printed announcements hereafter to issue, and "God Save the King!"

Sometimes the people had approved. Sometimes they had looked at one another sullenly, or humorously, and asked what God should save him for, being a little in doubt on that point, and finding no sufficient reason of their own. Legend said that away back in distant times, some of their kings, a very few, being those who could read, had in person bawled their own decrees. But that had been a long time ago, and—well—the ways of God's anointed were sometimes incomprehensible to those of meeker mold. An unexpurgated history, now suppressed, declared that Ferdinand First while addressing his loyal subjects had fallen over the platform-rail because at the time he happened to be drunk; but none dared criticize a king.

KENT reached the platform and saw one of his own men there, clad as a king's crier. The man looked like a cross between haughtiness and an attack of fever and ague. Kent thanked the officer, climbed to a back seat on the tiny platform and stared over the crowd below. He observed, with satisfaction, that here and there in this crowd there were tiny swirls and lanes like those of cross-currents in a sluggish stream, and that every now and then an automobile at the extreme edge of the pool

appeared to have been granted a burden, and dexterously whirled away.

A gun boomed from an old fortress that stood sentry above the Market Place. The old clock in the tower began a ringing of cracked and ancient chimes. A wooden crusader, clumsily carved, and riding a clumsily carved figure presumed to represent a horse, went rocking around a circle with creaking jerks, met a similar wooden monstrosity and passed from sight; and a toy rooster opened a door and crowed as if to impress those below with the fact that he had a serious bronchial affection, or had lost part of his crow. Another effigy supposed to carry the colors of Marken creaked around the circle, and the official announcer got to his feet and made his way to the front of the platform.

"In the name of His Gracious Majesty, Karl II, King of Marken, Duke of the Trentheim, Baron of the Oberwald," etc., etc., he announced, and began reading the decree, which, stripped of the *whereases* and *wherefores* and constant references to divine right, bluntly told the citizens of Marken the appalling truth: they would have to go to work.

In the horrified silence it was explained that a State form of conscription had been evolved, not for the purpose of bearing arms, but that workers might be obtained for the conduct of various State enterprises, the profit therefrom to be derived by the State and applied to the payment of its debts and upkeep—that ultimately the citizens themselves would receive that profit after the State debts had been paid, and that the new form of taxation, that imposed by the work of their hands, would abrogate all others. Furthermore it was announced that certain factories and public utilities were to be commandeered and in future operated by the government, acting over and legitimately protecting the original owners. The voice of the announcer closed with, "God save the King," and he took his seat.

THERE had been attentive silence while he read. Out there in the clear noon, under the clear blue sky, the

Markenites listened, and struggled to comprehend. Then an abrupt murmur arose, to become in a moment a roar, and the American sitting stolidly and listening attentively caught an under-note that threatened anger; so without a moment's hesitation he threw himself forward to stem the tide before it got beyond control. He signaled to the trumpeters and shouted: "Blow! Throw your lungs into it! Quickly! Blow!"

Obediently the two men trumpeted for attention. Kent had jumped across the platform and shouted into the announcer's ear: "Tell them the King has sent his agent to explain what the new conscription amounts to!"

In his gorgeous uniform the announcer again stepped to the front between the trumpeters, gestured them to stop and raised his hand for silence.

"Hear Ye! Hear Ye!" he called, and paused until the silence was absolute. "That his people may understand, His Majesty the King has sent to you his personal agent to explain more fully than could be done by royal decree the objects and effects of the new law. Give heed to the King's mouthpiece!"

Kent came forward and studied his audience—which waited ominously.

"Listen, to the King's desire," he said in a big, resonant voice that swept over their heads and through the Market Place. "His Majesty has but one wish, to make Marken and Markenites respected and prosperous. He wishes to make the title of Markenite, all over the world, a proud synonym for honesty, industry and prosperity."

He paused a moment with his shrewd senses alert—and decided that he was on the wrong track when he tried to arouse them to patriotism. Instantly his facile imagination adopted another course, and a momentary sneer flickered over his lips as he shifted to demagoguery, the fine old method used from the days of Rome to the days of the present, forever effective and invariably ephemeral, but potent for a crisis such as this.

"The King has studied the situation. He believes that the poor are getting poorer and the rich richer, and that the great throbbing, honest frame of man-

kind is about to be crucified on a cross of gold! 'Down with the trusts! Give the honest, horny-handed son of toil a chance! One man is as good as another and better. E pluribus unum! Multum in parvo! Who is to blame?' " said His Majesty the King, after years of study.

"And then, like seeing a great white light, he understood. It was because these who had riches no longer worked but devoted themselves to idle luxury and looked down upon the real Markenites, those who, with rugged arms, sweat-stained brows and hopeless eyes, looked up to the heavens and cried in patient agony, 'How long, O Lord, how long!'"

"Ground beneath the heel of the octopus wealth, those who had nothing saw about them many who had much, but saw no way of getting any of it. 'Many of my beloved people,' said the King, 'produce nothing and will not work with their hands, whilst their brothers till the fields from rooster-crow to nightingale-song for a mere pittance. I want,' said the King,—the great, sorrowing King of this imperial realm,—'to know that the workingman's dinner-pail is full!' That is what he said."

HERE Kent paused and saw with satisfaction that his words were having effect. He went them one better. He lowered his voice to a tone of pathos, rolled his eyes upward, shook his hands up at the clear blue sky and said in a still more impressive silence:

"I would that you could have seen that great King that governs us all, Karl the Second, whose name shall pass down through all ages, immortal, enshrined in the tender memories of men, as he stood with great, pitiful eyes suffused with unshed tears and cried: 'The salvation of my people lies in that simple thing, the full dinner-pail! And that this may come about there is but one way, that all men shall work, produce, develop and do their share. The richer the plutocrat, the more he should do. The poorer the man, the more opportunity he should have to become independent among his fellows. Therefore each and all shall work as his or their abilities seem fitted. There shall

be no more starvation-wages. Some wages shall be increased by the hundredfold, and others in proportion. The man who now earns but a kroner a day shall have two kroners. The rich man shall work with his brothers and actually earn the same.'

"Thus spoke His Majesty. The gracious King will see that work is forthcoming, and the gracious King will see that no one in all this broad land shall go hungry to his humble couch whilst others who have heretofore prospered beyond their deserts shall with full bellies rest between silken sheets."

He paused dramatically and lifted his hands above his head, crossed in a peculiar manner, and instantly a wild cheer broke out that began in a singularly scattered way, but was so insistent that the people themselves took it up at last and roared loudly, "God save the King! Long live the King!"

Kent, discerning the same sort of frenzy that prevails alike in negro camp-meetings and Madison Square political meetings, where individuals yell and shriek principally because the men on either side are setting the example, played another fine old oratorical trick by furiously bawling for silence and gesturing appeals, polite requests and commands.

"No man dares speak against the King's wish," he roared as if intent on being heard by some one across the Atlantic Ocean, "because his intelligent and wise fellows will understand, at once, that such an objector is a disgrace to the name of manhood, an obstructor to progress, a rebel at heart and, worst of all, one who would trample under foot the grand and noble flag of labor, that sacred standard that has been followed, defended and died for since time began!"

AGAIN Kent made that peculiar gesture; this time the cheers were hysterical in volume, and mingled with them was the roar of firearms as a group of soldiers stationed at the side of the Market Place, in obedience to a command from their officer, fired a blank salvo in the air. A man stationed in the tower banged the cracked bells and lashed them up to a fine imitation

of joy. Men and women hugged one another. Dogs howled. Children shrieked with excitement, and the quaint old buildings surrounding the Market Place rocked with the universal ecstasy that intoxicated the Markenites, now that they had been plainly told what a wonderful King was this—this monarch who had come to lead them to universal riches, and, therefore, to such a state of plenty that they could buy anything in sight, eat the best there was to be had and patiently look forward to an earthly paradise where nobody at all had any work whatever to do.

The King's Remembrancer turned and winked slyly at Ivan and voiced silently the cryptic remarks made by many another renowned orator, when closing a successful campaign speech: "Guess that'll hold them for a little while. Comē on! Let's beat it!"

Like a stern conqueror, with head erect and steady eyes, he moved slowly through the lane that opened wide to give him egress. He seemed not to hear the shouts of approval, or the cheers of those who paid him adulation as the one who had spoken for the King. Only once he halted in this triumphal progress, when his eyes fell on a puffed-up and self-important contractor with whom he had become acquainted and whom he thoroughly detested for his garrulity. To him he extended his hand and spoke. The little man swelled visibly at being thus recognized by the great man, and was gratified that so many could see this evidence of friendship.

"The people understand," murmured Kent confidentially. "The King told me they would, because he could always trust to their good sense; but His Excellency the Chancellor will be furious because, you see, he wanted the King to lower all wages, and not compel any of the rich ones to work. The Chancellor, born to a golden spoon, I am afraid, hates the honest sons of toil. Trust the King to set him in his place if he goes too far!"

He gave a lugubrious shake of his head, again shook hands very warmly and hastened onward.

"One for you, Provarsk," he said to himself. "Before I've got out of this

square, that fat gas-bag will pass it around with exaggeration, and my worthy little Chancellor wont dare travel without a guard for some time, I reckon. Hope they don't catch him and hang him on sight!"

CHAPTER X

IN the precincts of the palace, on that eventful afternoon, there was considerable apprehension sustained by the King, who, born to precedent and hedged in by conventionalities, believed in doing all things slowly and with decorum. As Kent once said, he was "as fine a watchful-waiter as ever succeeded in ponderously doing nothing." Indeed, there was but one person visible after Kent's hasty departure for the Market Place who did not seem anxious, that person being the Chancellor himself. He strolled languidly into Kent's office within three minutes after the American had passed out, and looked for the King's Remembrancer. Not seeing him, he smiled slyly, took a seat, waited a few minutes and then rang the bell that summoned Kent's secretary. That astute and well-trained young gentleman entered the room and stood like a statue of respectful attention.

"Good morning, Your Excellency," he said, while in the back of his brain ran the question: "Wonder what that pusillanimous blighter wants in here at this time?"

"I should like to speak with Mr. Kent," announced the Chancellor.

"I regret to say, sir, that he is not in at present," replied the secretary with due deference. "Any word which Your Excellency might—"

"When will he be in?" curtly interrupted Provarsk.

"Probably not until late this evening," was the calm response.

"Where is he?"

"I rather think, sir, that he has gone to inspect some new work over at the mines," deliberately lied the secretary, but with a convincing air of innocence and candor that proved his worth as either a secretary or a witness before a Congressional investigating committee.

He stood at ease, still with that air of deference, but noted that the Chancellor, after a moment's thought, was undoubtedly pleased.

His meditations were interrupted by the entrance of the King, who came in with more than usual haste. Provarsk instantly rose to his feet; but the King took one glance at him and frowned in lieu of greeting.

"Your superior—where is he?" demanded the King, addressing the secretary.

"He is not in at present, Your Majesty," promptly responded that worthy.

The King was undoubtedly anxious. A certain nervousness of demeanor expressed it.

"That is just what I was asking, cousin," airily interjected the Chancellor.

"Suppose you stop 'cousining' me," the King said, eyeing him with no attempt to conceal his dislike. "Besides, I don't know what you had been asking. Few people ever do."

With undisguised enjoyment that he had succeeded in exasperating the King, Provarsk smiled and flicked his fingers.

"Oh, tut-tut!" he said. "What I had just remarked was that I thought it very discreet of Mr. Kent to remove himself on such a momentous day. To take to the woods, I might say, lest a storm arise."

THE King turned his back and walked toward the door leading out to the hanging balcony, where he stood gazing off toward the city. Not in the least disconcerted, Provarsk added, with mock gravity: "I even told him that affairs were critical and that perhaps the power of the throne itself had been cast on an issue of extreme doubt."

"That must distress you terribly," remarked the King with a sneer in his voice.

"Ah, good morning, Your Royal Highness," Provarsk said with great heartiness, and the King turned to discover that his sister had entered the room and was now facing Provarsk with a cool stare.

"Karl," she asked, "is it true Mr. Kent still insists on forcing his wishes through to the very utmost? That enforced labor measure?"

"So far as I know," moodily replied the King.

"And aren't you afraid that—" She paused and looked at Provarsk, who declined to depart without direct orders.

"Afraid of what?" the King asked in a tone of irritation.

"Afraid there will be trouble," calmly interjected Provarsk. "That is what the Princess Eloise means. Afraid the people won't submit. And why should they? I wouldn't if I were one of them. You can give odds on that."

The secretary created a diversion by discreetly bowing himself backward to the office door and then through it, with the staid fervor of an automaton. The Princess looked at her brother a polite request to order Provarsk from the room; but the King, through obstinacy, refused to heed it.

"You were about to say, Eloise?" he asked politely, as if the Baron had not been present and therefore had not impertinently added his voice to the conversation.

SHE had no time to answer; for at that moment there came from the distance a loud roar of many voices, and immediately afterward the sound of firearms in ragged volley. The effect on the King was as if some one had propelled him with a swift kick out to the balcony, where he gazed anxiously in the direction of the city. The Princess, distressed, also moved toward the balcony, while Provarsk grinned pleasantly and seemed to understand the meaning of the sound. He was confident that he alone knew all that was conveyed by that uproar. He rather hoped that enough Markenites had been killed and wounded to make his revolt a good one. He cocked his head intently to listen for further shots, heard the distant clangor of the bells in the city tower and decided it must be an alarm. And then another noise became audible, the sound of some one hastily coming through the tiled corridors; and this latter noise perplexed

him. It grew louder and more distinct, and both King and Princess, hearing it, hastily reentered the room.

Stentorian puffs and wheezes were now accompanied by the ringing of boot-heels and spurs, and through the door galloped the Minister of War. He was in full uniform of his own proud design, and the red of his broad sash was no redder than the red of his face. His eyes protruded and were wide, and his hand was on his sword-hilt. So fast had been his progress, and so intense his excitement, that for a moment he appeared unable to speak. Then he burst out: "Has anyone seen Mr. Kent? Has anyone seen Mr. Kent, Your Majesty? Oh, this is horrible. Horrible!"

"I regret to say, sir, that he is not in at present. Any word which Your Excellency might wish to leave will be duly repeated," Provarsk said in admirable imitation of Kent's secretary—and then added: "My goodness! It's all fussed up, isn't it?"

"Everything is lost!" exclaimed the Minister of War, speaking to the King.

"What has happened?" asked the latter quietly, confronting an issue that brought out his better fighting qualities.

"Mr. Kent! He told me that he proposed to put the decree through regardless of anything, and that if I had to fight, fight it would be—told me to have my army stationed at places named, but said he would be there and that I wasn't to give the command to fire until he told me to. Great crowd! People all excited and restless! Accidentally dropped my glasses and stepped on them! And I've lost the oculist's prescription."

"You're rattled!" said the King, growing still cooler now that he faced an emergency.

"So I am! So I am!" admitted Von Glutz hastily. "But I couldn't see Mr. Kent anywhere, and the crowd grew threatening. I asked if any of my officers had seen him. No one had. I hurried here to inform him, and on the way I heard shots. It can mean but one thing—that, pressed to the limit, my soldiers have fired, and that Marken is in a state of civil war!"

HE paused for want of breath, and the King clenched his hands and made as if to go to the front himself; then he whirled and asked sharply: "If he told you to stay there in command of the troops, who is in charge now?"

"General Handers."

The King hesitated; but the Princess asked stormily, "Did Mr. Kent say you were to kill the people if a disturbance resulted?"

Von Glutz in his turn hesitated, trying to recall his exact orders.

"On signal from him," he replied.

"Karl! Karl!" she called. "Something must be done at once! This will never do. You must act, regardless of your promises to this American. Now! This comes, you see, from your putting yourself into the hands of such a man."

Emboldened by her criticism of the dictator, Baron Provarsk thought he saw his opportunity and assumed an air of extreme honesty and distress.

"The Princess is right!" he declared to the King. "It is time to cast off such an incubus before the kingdom itself has gone to the dogs."

The Princess recognized his presence for the first time.

"What do you mean by that?" she demanded, regarding him sternly.

It nettled him to an unfortunate retort.

"I mean that the only way in which affairs can be straightened out is to at once counteract everything this fellow Kent has done, and if I had my way, he would be taken out and shot before the day is over."

At his callous indifference to either justice or life she gasped and eyed him with a wide stare. Provarsk wondered if, in overlooking the complexities of a woman's mind, he had not made a mistake; but he was still daring to hope to turn the situation to his own advantage. "If I am to be an actual chancellor—" he began suavely, but he was cut short by the Princess.

"Which, no matter what happens, you are not to be, and so of course all talk about it is useless. You would have Mr. Kent shot! You! Why, the worst blunders he ever made are sure to be better than the best things you

have ever done. You have told what you would do if you had your way. Well, I'll tell you what I would have done if I had mine! I'd have you booted into the street and through the Market Place. Kent? Whatever else Mr. Kent is, he is a man. No matter if he has made mistakes, and is a money-lender, and all that, he is still a real man and unafraid. Who are you, to talk about having him shot?"

SHE faced her brother as if her last contemptuous gibe at Provarsk had been her final one for him, and saw that her brother's eyes were fixed on the door and that Von Glutz also stared in that direction with a look of relief. She also turned, and saw that the American had entered the room and was now coming gravely toward her.

"I overheard Your Royal Highness," he said, "and I thank you for your defense. I had not hoped for so much, and I am grateful—very, very grateful—for a friendship that I esteem as of great worth."

She was visibly embarrassed, and took refuge in a diversion.

"What has happened in the Market Place?" she and the King asked in chorus.

"It's a terrible situation," wheezed Von Glutz.

Kent's eyes flickered as if he now understood the cause of the assemblage in his reception-room.

"In some ways," he said; "but I don't see how I could have acted differently."

"Why didn't you—" began the Princess impatiently, and then hesitated and looked at the King.

"Will the Princess please finish?" the American asked. "I wish you would extend your friendship to the point of advice. What would you have done?"

"First of all, I should quell the riot. It comes from misunderstanding. There are no kindlier nor more amenable people, Mr. Kent, than ours. They should not have been fired upon at all."

He stood quietly to one side, listening attentively, as if all his own plans had been defeated.

"I don't see why we waste time talk-

ing now," the King declared impatiently.

"Please, sir, allow the Princess Eloise to proceed," Kent said. "Her suggestions might be valuable." He turned his face toward her and encouraged her by asking, "And what then? After the riot is quelled?"

"Then they must be dealt with kindly, but with resolute firmness. It will not do to seem to give in to them. They must be made to obey; but there can be a compromise of some sort, can there not? This new plan was too unexpected, too drastic. It would have been better to have prepared them gradually. That would have been my way, Mr. Kent."

She stopped in expectation of his defense, and gazed at him with sympathy and regret, as if wishing to assist him in any way she could, now that his plans, all energetic, all hopeful, had gone awry. She had never by word, until this day, credited him with any virtues.

"Thank you," he said quietly, lifting his fine eyes to hers. "I applaud your firmness. It's like encouragement from a friend to hear you talk. But I think, after all, that my way was the best. Something abrupt and sensational had to be done to arouse them. I did it. It worked all right."

ALL in the room fixed him with looks of interrogation and suspense. The Chancellor emitted a sarcastic, "You certainly did!"

"And now we've got a revolution!" grumpily muttered Von Glutz.

Kent was still watching the Princess, and had opened his lips as if to explain the situation to her when Ivan came striding into the room, stopped and would have retreated when he saw those present, had not Kent halted him with a gesture.

"Well, Ivan," Kent asked, "have you got them all right now?"

"Yes sir. Captain Paulo said to tell you that the last of them had been rounded up and that all of them are now in jail. Also that he had followed your instructions and ordered an hour of free refreshments in the name of the King. The Market Place is filled

now with people singing the national air and shouting their heads off for His Majesty. They've wrapped a big banner round the clock-tower that reads: 'At last we have a king in Marken. God preserve His Majesty Karl the Second.'"

Kent calmly grinned at Provorsk, whose face had grown black as an August thundercloud. The King looked bewildered and vastly relieved. Von Glutz exclaimed, "God help us! What does it all mean?" and the Princess Eloise broke into a surprised and gratified smile.

Kent again faced Ivan and asked: "And by the way, did you learn what they have to say about our most noble Provorsk?"

Ivan grinned broadly, and with marked enjoyment said: "Yes. Most of the things they said I can't repeat; but I should think it would not be very wise or safe for His Excellency the Chancellor to be seen without a strong guard for a few days, or until this celebration blows over. On that point they dispute among themselves—some being in favor of tar and feathers, while the others insist on hanging."

"You remember of whom you are speaking!" roared Provorsk, betrayed in spite of himself into an unusual display of anger.

"If necessary," said Kent, eyeing him, "I'll see that you are handed over to the mob in the Market Place within the next ten minutes, and with the word that the King agrees with those who want to lynch you."

"You asked my advice a few minutes ago, Mr. Kent," the Princess broke in with a malicious little laugh. "Let me offer it. Send him down there now, regardless of whether he has anything more to say."

PROVARSK controlled himself and was again the polished, self-contained and fearless man of the moment. He brought his heels together and bowed very low toward the Princess.

"To be hanged by Your Royal Highness' wish would be happiness to me," he said.

"Come! Come! We've had enough

of this, it seems to me," said the King. "If Mr. Kent will but relieve our suspense by explaining what took place—"

"Very easily done," the American replied with the utmost calmness. "I learned that a combination had been effected between a certain number of men to provoke a riot at what they believed a suitable moment. It was to be such a row that it might become a full-grown revolt. I therefore took measures to see that each one of these hired lambs was shadowed by a guardsman I could depend upon. The Princess Eloise will be delighted to know that these guardsmen consisted of former adherents of a petty baron named Provarsk, who have taken service under me personally. Money paid into an itching palm at regular intervals and in sufficient sums does make some men loyal. These fellows swear by me."

He did not look at the discomfited Provarsk, who affected an air of the utmost indifference and stared absently out toward the garden.

"So," Kent went on, "when the hired disturbers started their outburst, each one was instantly clapped on the shoulder and carried away to a nice, secure little place protected by iron bars. I gave the people a treat. Talked to them myself and was—ahem! received with marked enthusiasm. The firing you heard was prearranged by me. It was a salvo of joy fired with blank cartridges. The ringing of the bells was also arranged by me, to give due dramatic effect. The feeling of love for the Chancellor was also stimulated by me. I pointed out that it was he who signed the harsh decree enforcing labor, and suggested that only the unswerving efforts of His Majesty the King had ameliorated what might have been a most heart-rending condition of toil. We turned the proposed revolt into a celebration of joy and enthusiasm for His Majesty, who is probably at this moment the best loved man in Marken."

The King threw off royal dignity and impulsively tried to express his thanks, but seemed to have trouble with his throat.

AS if to relieve himself from an embarrassing position, Kent suddenly swung round toward Provarsk and fixed him with mocking eyes.

"By the way, Chancellor," he asked in a casual tone, "isn't the banker Wimblerhurst a friend of yours?"

"It seems to me that I am acquainted with the gentleman," Provarsk replied, not in the least perturbed.

"Too bad! Too bad!" said Kent. "He was the leader of the disturbers. He was the first one I had arrested and put in jail. To-morrow he shall be deported and all his property escheat to the Crown."

"Dreadful person!" said Provarsk with a slight grin.

Kent's eyes lost all mockery and stared harshly at Provarsk with an unmistakable menace.

"Take care, Your Excellency, lest you overwork and the cares of State become too great for your zeal. It would indeed be pitiable if you were suddenly compelled to join that estimable gentleman, your friend the banker, in an equally penniless state."

Provarsk did not waver. He sniffed disdainfully and with the utmost politeness asked: "Am I to understand that this is a command for my departure?"

"Not at all! Why should it be?" Kent retorted with cynical courtesy. "Oh no, indeed! You are too good a thing to lose sight of."

CHAPTER XI

NEARLY three months later the various steel manufacturers of the world were stirred and agitated by the announcement that the redoubtable John Rhodes had again been heard from, and in a most unsatisfactory way. The manganese deposits, of which there were but two or three of any size on earth, had been secretly bought in, or concessions gained therefor, and word came from the blithe John Rhodes, dated from his London offices, that hereafter manganese would double in price. Steel manufacturers swore volubly, but the market went soaring. Some of the manufacturers used cables and wires to

find out if that deposit which was said to exist in a dinky little kingdom called Marken was open for sale, lease or concession.

The replies provoked renewed profanity, inasmuch as they tersely said:

Nothing doing. Concession already held by John Rhodes. KENT.

And the steel industry of the world threw up its hands in horror and was compelled to submit to unheard-of prices for a commodity that was indispensable for all manganese steel. Richard Kent, smiling plaintively in his offices in the palace, found much cause to feel well satisfied. He had "made good" with John Rhodes for life, for on his judgment John Rhodes was making "a killing." Kent could now see the way not only to repay Rhodes all the money advanced to Marken, but in addition thereto was enjoying himself to the uttermost in the development of his big machine of State enterprise.

"I've put Marken on the map, you can bet," he confided to Paulo. "A year ago mighty few people had ever heard of it. To-day it's known everywhere, and there's a nice crowd of kings here in Europe who have a hundred times more power, but who are sick with envy. Marken markets on manganese are quoted daily all over the world. That's going some!"

Daily, also, the American was giving the King lessons in finance that made that dreamer take a new interest in life. The royal automobile no longer hooted over the drives, because the King was too busy poring over the books which Kent had caused to be opened for him. Kent assured the King that in due time he would be made into a first-class accountant. He also suggested at times that it would be a fine thing for Her Royal Highness to study stenography and typewriting so she could assist in confidential matters; but at this the King drew the line. Paulo had already succumbed and became as busy an office man as any concern might wish; Von Glutz had been burdened with the Department of Highways and Railways, and could be daily seen inspecting steam-rollers and consulting

with traffic officials; and the Chancellor was the only man about the palace who was entrusted with nothing at all.

It began to be rumored that the King of Marken was due in time to make the distinguished Prince of Monaco look like a deuce-spot in the financial world. Meanwhile Richard Kent, hustling, scheming, sat in his den and pulled wires from morning to night, and remained the least known man on the scene. The Markenites liked him and called him, familiarly, the King's Errand-Boy, a title to which he made not the slightest objection.

BUT the Princess Eloise was troubled. Prior to that day in the palace when the throne seemed rocking on its stately legs, the American had striven for her friendship. She had disapproved of him with an intensity that she could not now understand. He had lashed her with gentle raillery; he had dared to command and subdue her; and then, after the day of her brave championship, when she had wished to be his friend and ally, he had cultivated a studious and aloof politeness.

Her brother, too, had become this man's admiring slave, and appeared to enjoy with him a friendship that was constantly increasing in intimacy. And he was amazingly improved by this contact, for now he moved with a confident air, as if no longer uncertain of himself. The improvement was not without another change that she was not certain she liked; for her brother no longer carried himself with the august dignity of a king, but had fallen to the American's carelessness of dress and dislike of functions. He forgot to change clothes several times a day and formed an affection for an ordinary sack suit, which, she observed with horror, was gradually bagging at the knees.

And worst of all, he was eating like a workingman—as if he wanted no amenities and only food. Plain deterioration, she thought it. Also his conversation had undergone a subtle change. He no longer talked of the standard topics of royalty such as the weather, reports from the last yacht-regatta, and the court scandal of

neighboring kingdoms. Instead, he waxed enthusiastic over another electric power-plant, of the possibilities of all taxation being remitted owing to national prosperity, of old-age pensions, and how a new way had been found to increase production and lower costs of this or that, by Kent. Always Kent!

SHE sought that staid old gentleman, the Minister of War, for consolation; but here again she was rebuffed.

"Haw! Haw! Haw!" roared Von Glutz. "One can't attend to all things, Your Royal Highness. Of course none of us are as polite as we used to be. Haven't the time. No indeed."

"There is time for civilities, isn't there?" she demanded hotly, and the red-faced old man became grave.

"Eloise," he said, "I trotted you and Karl on my knees when you were nothing but babies. I was Chancellor under your father. Your grandfather used to pat my head when he met me in these gardens out here. Now listen! I want to tell you something. In all its history there has never been a Marken like this. It's a kingdom, now! It is going to be able to buy and sell a lot of its neighbors. It is respected. It pays its bills. Its bonds are away above par—among the best in the world. If it wants more territory, it doesn't have to go to war to get it. It can buy it outright!"

He even slapped his fat, sun-tanned hand on his knee to emphasize his point, and added: "We were all mistaken. It took a Kent to show us how. He is a great man, Eloise, a very great man—the greatest that ever came to Marken. Why, do you know, I was angry when he used to call me a doddering old fool, and now I know he was right. I like it, I do!"

He threw his head back proudly and defiantly. He, the dignified, stately old Chancellor, admitted that he was pleased to be called a fool so long as it was this phenomenal alien who called him that!

She ended that interview by lifting her head in the air and passing from the room; and she reddened with annoyance when she thought she heard from behind her a soft, chuckling noise.

THEN came the worst shock of all. The King had actually gone, with bag-kneed trousers, ink-stained fingers and all, accompanied by Kent only, into the city and attended an evening band-concert in the Market Place. And most undignified had been the consequence; for the people, recognizing him, had given him an ovation and with locked arms escorted him home to the very palace gates! When, mortified, she had reproached him for this lack of dignity, the King had casually replied:

"To the deuce with it! I've got something that beats all that, and from now on I'm going every night I can find time. What I've found out is that the people like me. There was a baker down there, and his name was Pete, sort of a man of affairs, I think, who is on the city council, and he made a speech. In a café, it was, and I had to make a speech. Kent says I did well. Says I've got them all buffaloed, whatever that is. Says I've got the makings, whatever that is, of a fine orator. And next week I'm going to a banquet given by the ironmongers' guild, and Kent says that after this when there's a decree to be read, he wants me to go and read it myself. He says I'm a—what is it that he calls it in English? Oh, yes, I'm a good mixer. Kent says I've got to learn how to get acquainted with everyone, and yet keep my dignity. Says I must never let anyone talk about royal affairs, but that I must make them feel that they can come to me when they are in trouble. Says I can get them so that they would die to the man if I asked them to."

"Rank democracy!" she exclaimed.

"All right. Call it that if you wish; but I tell you I am learning that the way to make men do things for me is to make them do it because they wish to and not merely because I happen to be a king," he answered with emphasis, and then she realized that the change had been greater than she had seen, and that her brother had thrown aside all the precedent that had made the dynasty a mysterious potency, because this money-lender had shown a new way. She shuddered with apprehension when alone. She resolved to make further efforts to understand this

strange man Kent, and if necessary check his aggressions.

SO it was that the American, in his private office one morning, was told that Her Royal Highness the Princess Eloise waited in the reception-room. He responded at once and stood before her with his grave air of attention.

"Mr. Kent," she said, smiling up at him, "I have come on affairs of State."

He wondered, mentally, what this dispute could be about, but said courteously: "I am, of course, at Your Royal Highness' service."

His steadfast, calm aloofness bothered her.

"Why is it that you do not make use of me?"

"Make use of you? Make use—I scarcely understand."

"Yes, make use of me. I am the only one you do not employ. You have my brother converted to your creed. Baron Von Glutz is working harder than he ever did in his life. Captain Paulo has no time for anyone or any other occupation than his own affairs. I am the only one left out. Surely I am as much interested as anyone, and surely there is something I can do. I came to learn what it is."

His face relaxed into a warm smile that was his chief charm, a smile that forever came unexpectedly, that displayed his firm white teeth, that brought little wrinkles to the corners of his clear eyes. Then, as if studying the face of a child, he looked at her with an odd kindness and approval. She was the first to lower her gaze and could not understand why she suddenly felt like a small girl appealing to a very great man.

"Will you not be seated?" she asked, and heard him obey. She did not look up until he began to speak, and there was nothing of ridicule, sarcasm or railery in his musical voice.

"There is much that you might do, Princess Eloise, if only you understood; but the barrier between a princess and her people, the common people, I mean, is—well—it's a mighty hard hurdle to take. I don't know much about such things. I wasn't brought up exactly as those of royal families are,

you see. I graduated from a sawmill. Outside of lumber-kings and soap-kings and others of that sort, we haven't any kings in America. The way I look at the situation here is this: First we had to make Marken honest and prosperous. To do that we had to make people work, make them all get their shoulders to the wheel and shove in the same direction. That far we have got.

"Next, so that the people may keep shoving for all they are worth, we have got to get closer and closer to them—got to make them loyal to Marken and its ruling house because they want to be so. People can be forced to do things for a while by law; but that wears off, some time. People don't have to be forced when they do things through respect and affection. They do them because they want to—because it's natural for them to do so. Our task now is to win their affection without losing their respect. You could do some very good work in that direction. It would help, materially. It might, some time, Your Royal Highness, avert a serious crisis."

"You mean?" she asked earnestly.

"I mean that in the past there has been too much royalty here and not enough people, that the time has come when a—a very small place like Marken must begin to wear its clothes differently, when its royal house must stop trying to ape the emperors and kings and czars of great and powerful nations, must drop the royal-splendor pretense, and begin to make itself a power in its own way, on new lines, and let all others think whatever they please and be perfectly indifferent to what they do think. You've got to forget that you are a princess, and try to make friends out there.

"Every one of those women working in the fields, every girl out there of your age, has just as many perplexities and sorrows and hopes and ambitions as you have. They've got just as much right to live and to hope. Doubtless some of their sorrows and some of their hopes would seem ridiculous to you. Doubtless a lot of your sorrows and hopes would look equally ridiculous to them. So, if you wish to help, and I

know you do or you wouldn't be here now, you must go out among them and establish a new line, a common ground, whereon their difficulties no longer seem trivial to you, and yours no longer ridiculous to them.

"Find a way to rub shoulders with your people. They'll not contaminate you. You'll make it a whole lot easier for them. Get to know their names. Help christen their babies. Learn to advise. Learn to accept advice. Make them feel that you are not only a princess, but a woman as well. Why, the proudest title any man ever had in my country, Princess Eloise, was given to a ruler when they commonly called him old Abe. Everybody knew who old Abe was. And the reason it was the finest title was because they gave it to him from their hearts! A nation fought when he asked them to. A nation wept when old Abe died."

SOME great pathos in his voice, unsuspected from such a man, some prodigious seriousness, impressed and subdued her as she listened. This was not the money-lender. Here was one who had pulled the curtain from the alcoves of his mind, and exposed therein something so noble that it brought her, a princess, to her knees. A glimpse had been given her of a fair landscape beyond all that she had ever seen, fairer than she had ever seen, tenderly appealing, warmly alluring, like unto the dream of Parsifal—a land through which she might not pass save through nobility of spirit alone. She was crushed by a sense of littleness, of unworthiness. The American had arisen to his feet, and she felt his glowing eyes. She arose, confused by the swift tracery of her thought, and stood before him with bent head and hands clasped before her. She spoke, still under the spell of the dream invoked by his clear insight, but could only stammer: "I am trying—am trying, Mr. Kent, to see. And I understand, now—and I don't blame you—for despising me!"

Had she looked up, then, she would have observed the swift look of pain that swept across his face, and his struggle to hold himself in leash. Just

for an instant; and then, curbed by his relentless will, it was gone, and he was merely the quiet, inflexible and kindly man regarding her with serious eyes.

"I did not say that," he rebuked her. "You asked what you could do to help. I tried to help you. You must find the way. I can't. I don't understand women. And because of this, I have most always avoided them. I do know men. I've had to. I've made my way by knowing them. And after all, I may be mistaken in my ideas. Sometimes I think they are foolish; but it seems to me worth thinking over, Princess Eloise, and I've learned that, by thinking hard enough, one can almost always find a way. I hope you can, because, you see, you could do a heap of good. This place we're in has no jobs for cripples or pigmies."

She glanced at him to reassure herself that he was not again mocking her; but she saw nothing beyond the utmost candor in his look; yet she was secretly pleased to discover, with a woman's intuition, that he felt awkward and embarrassed. She proved merciful to him and to herself, by uttering a single sentence.

"Thank you," she said. "I promise to try."

He bowed deeply to her as she walked from the room without looking back, and then for a long time stood with his hands in his pockets and glowered out over the roofs and spires of the city, dimmed and empurpled by the evening glow.

CHAPTER XII

IT was spring again, and as if the change of weather, or the indefatigable work of winter, had worn him to laxity, Kent sat in his private office, for once idle. The King, wearing another business suit that had also assumed bags at the knees, came hurriedly in and closed the door behind him.

"Hello!" said the American, swinging around to greet him. "What's up? You look worried."

"I am!" was the King's reply as he threw himself into a chair and wiped

his brow. "I've got the worst of news."

"Where did you get it?" asked Kent with a grin that the King did not return.

"Down in the village," he said. "Two or three of the men I have made friends came to warn me. I listened and came back here as quickly as I could to talk it over with you. Provarsk has been undermining us again."

Kent's eyes twinkled, and he settled back into his chair and lighted his pipe.

"Is that so!" he exclaimed without excitement. "Well, what do you think you ought to do about it?"

"Do? I can't do anything without your consent, and you won't give it. I wanted either to have him tried for conspiracy against the State or throw him out of it two months ago. You wouldn't consent. You said something about giving the calf rope enough to hang itself, and did all you could to assist him by gradually giving him more power."

"Well, has he hanged himself yet?"

"Hanged himself? Of course not. He's trying to have us hanged."

"How?" asked Kent with that same air of quiet enjoyment, that did not at all please the King.

"By surreptitiously making the people discontented. He has them believing that working the mines the way they do is an injustice; that from the mines I am getting rich; but that all the other State institutions are scarcely paying at all. It's useless to tell them that they are all profitable—"

"Save one," slyly interjected Kent. "That free bath-house is a complete failure. It has required all the means at my command to keep people from knowing it. The mineral springs turned to salt more than six weeks ago."

The King showed his surprise.

"Well, then—why—why didn't you close the place up? I didn't know that."

"True," said Kent with the same easy demeanor. "I don't suppose you did know it. I haven't told anyone, and there's not a man working there who isn't a confidential employee of mine. I had reason."

"But we have made money out of all the other State enterprises?" asked the King anxiously.

"Out of every one of them. Marken, whether it wants to be or not, is due to become one of the richest nations, per capita, in the world."

HE laid his pipe to one side and leaned toward the King in a brisk business attitude.

"Listen," he said, "and I'll tell you what it means: The time had come to eliminate Mr. Provarsk. The very reason we kept him here in the first place was either to give him a chance to make good, or to fix him so that he would be forever harmless. Well, we've had to take steps to do the latter."

The King shook his head and said: "I don't see how."

"When we opened up the State enterprises, we permitted anyone to buy stock in small blocks, didn't we? We held control only. Provarsk tried to bribe my secretary to give him inside information as to what ones would be the most promising, and to which ones we would give the greatest support. My secretary told me. Already I had decided to drop the mineral-water-resort project because it couldn't be made to pay. I had my secretary take Provarsk's bribe, and then tell him that the mineral-water company was to be our biggest winner. Provarsk, through straw men and in divers ways, bought and bought until every dollar he could rake and scrape is in the venture. He owns forty-nine per cent of the project, which isn't worth ten kronen the minute that State support is withdrawn and the reasons made public. Now do you see it all?"

"No, I don't," admitted the King thoughtfully. "What has that to do with a fresh disturbance among the people?"

Kent laughed, amused at what he regarded as the King's dunseness.

"Why, just this: He expects to arouse the people to a point where they will demand a big share in the profits of all enterprises—perhaps the absolute relinquishment of State control and ownership. Then those who hold the

controlling stock in the best enterprise will find themselves rich. He thinks he has the best one."

"Pshaw! You haven't understood me," declared the King soberly. "I said that he aims his efforts at the mines."

"Quite true," replied the American. "In that way he kills several birds with one stone. He thinks he upsets my house of cards on one hand, and builds his own with the other. Also, he embarrasses you because he knows that you dare not tell the people of Marken that you have given John Rhodes a concession for these mines, and that, although they have been getting big pay, they have been enriching you, as well as paying back John Rhodes' money. The people themselves have been helping to do it."

"Can't agree with you, quite!" stubbornly insisted the King. "Why, the men who work there are getting double the wages, and sometimes quadruple, that they ever before had in their lives. They are prosperous—prosperous beyond any hope any of them ever had. You don't mean to say that prosperous men are the ones to revolt?"

"Nothing more certain in the world! Too much prosperity is just the same, if not worse, than too much poverty. An autocrat, I have come to the conclusion—can make, with fair luck, either one or the other: too much wealth or too much poverty. And the end will always be the same—they will get rid of the autocrat, who is the most obsolete being on God Almighty's earth. There are times when one seems a necessity; but the moment that necessity vanishes, so does he. Three very great nations in this world proved it, Great Britain, France and the United States. Sometimes I think the others don't count!"

"But we must stop Provarsk!" insisted the King desperately.

"You leave Provarsk alone. He is doing just exactly what I foresaw, and what I want him to do."

For a moment they stared at each other, and the King was vexed.

"Come," said Kent seriously, "haven't I accomplished nearly everything I have undertaken? Have you lost by my suggestions? Think it over."

THE King thought. Then, as abruptly it all recurred to him, his own desperate condition when first he met this man, the startling innovations, the progress they had made, their friendship, and above all, the strength and independence that this alien had taught him, he was ashamed of his own doubts. He made frank confession.

"Kent," the King said, "I'm still a—what you call—a chump!"

"Nothing of the sort," remonstrated the American. "You're all right! Only, you don't do things the way I do, and I think that when it comes to handling rogues, my way is better than yours. Now see here! This is what is going to happen. I am going to make our choice chancellor believe that he has it all his own way. Going to give him a lot more authority. Going to be blind and deaf, apparently. Don't you interfere. I'll let you know when I want you. Let him stir up his revolt. It can take but one course, that of demands, because it is far too late for him to dare to do anything against Your Majesty, personally. Why, if he harmed a hair of yours or your sister's heads, or suggested such a thing, they would take him down into the center of the Market Place and burn him at a stake! And when the demands come up, it's got to be up to you. You've either got to give or refuse, and may Heaven help you if you blunder. I shall decline to advise you. The time will then have come when you must act for yourself and be your own adviser."

AN hour later the King, with an anxious but resolute look, made his way to his private dressing-rooms to prepare himself for a court reception in which he was to be invested with a decoration from a neighboring monarch, who, hearing of the wealth of Marken, was on the eve of asking for a loan and also opening negotiations leading to a marriage between his eldest son and the Princess Eloise.

Provarsk, who had accidentally met the King's Remembrancer in the corridors, was being complimented by the latter on a manifesto that the Chancellor had issued without authority and told that, inasmuch as all old hatchets had

been buried, there was no reason why the Chancellor should not really assume more power and do what he could to assist in the nation's welfare. Provarsk smiled gleefully when he left the King's Remembrancer; likewise the King's Remembrancer smiled. They met once more that day, when in the palace gardens the Chancellor, self-confident, came upon Kent and the Princess Eloise. He paused to pay her his respects, which she accepted with cool politeness.

"I learned a few days ago that Your Royal Highness had joined the others of us in the efforts for the good of the kingdom—er—got money to build a hospital for women, or something like that. Subscription lists all closed, grand hurrah, and all that."

"So?" she retorted in a calm drawl. "You are as nearly correct as one could expect. I haven't joined an effort, because I have made the effort. It is true that there is to be a hospital, but not true that its cost was raised by subscription. I am building it out of my own private funds, and the women of Marken have gratefully agreed to support it."

He laughed tolerantly.

"Oh, they're grateful, all right—for anything they can get for nothing."

An angry retort was on her lips, but she caught a warning look from Kent and remained silent. Disappointed in his failure to exasperate her, Provarsk took a fling at the American.

"Your methods are much better, Mr. Kent. You make them earn what they get, and at the same time take good care to get yours."

"To be sure I do!" Kent agreed heartily. "That is your great weakness, Baron, your philanthropy. You should take a lesson from me, and learn how to secure your own profits first."

"I am trying to prove an apt pupil," the Chancellor responded. "I've always wanted money. You have taught me several ways of getting it."

"Quite possible," declared Kent, almost with enthusiasm.

PROVARSK pleaded the necessity for greeting some one, and after a very low bow to the Princess, and a

light salute to the American, sauntered away. She stood with a frown on her face and watched him. Kent, after a moment's wait, laughed quietly.

"Isn't he fine?" he asked. "I rather like that chap. If he could only run straight, he might go a long way. He's got the assurance of a pet tomcat and the persistence of a flea, and I don't believe he knows what fear is."

"I hate him!" exclaimed the Princess.

"That never pays; it's a waste of time," he declared—and then suddenly shifting the subject said: "Will you permit me to congratulate you on your hospital plan? It is something that has been needed here. I have been watching your work. You have done as I thought you might—found that common ground between the women of the kingdom and yourself. And you have done it alone and unadvised. I am afraid you were a little too liberal, though. It must have strained your private resources."

"Strained them?" she said, and then laughed softly. "It did more than that, Mr. Kent. But I didn't want to do it by halves, and the more I thought over it, the more I became enthused, and—there we are!"

"Was it worth while?" he asked quietly, and staring at her profile, which, against the darkness of the foliage, looked pale under the swinging fête-lamps above them.

She turned toward him in a frank outburst.

"Yes, more than worth while! And I owe this new world of mine to you. I started badly. I must tell you, to be really honest, that I came to you that day through pique. I saw that you permitted nearly all the others to be friends with you, but barred me out. I wanted to be your friend too. I couldn't come to you as the others had, because I had insulted you. And Mr. Kent, if you knew half how much I suffered, and despised myself for my insolence and rudeness, I think you would take pity on me and forgive."

"I have nothing to forgive!" he declared stoutly. "You said nothing more than the truth. You called me a money-lender. I am. You said I came here to keep John Rhodes from losing his

money. I did. Neither of us should be ashamed of the truth."

"But what of all the other things you have done?" she asked curiously.

"The others don't matter. I have advised your brother as best I could, because I liked him. He has very fine ideals. He has become a good king, and in time will become a great one. It was in him all the time; but he needed some one whom he trusted to give him plain horse-sense, and shape him to practicality. I don't really see how I could have acted differently."

"He gives you far more credit than you take," she said. "I think sometimes I am a little jealous of you. He talks of you so much. You and his work have absorbed him, and I am neglected—treated like a child, no longer advised with or consulted. They all treat me that way now! Not even Baron Von Glutz, or Paulo, can spare me a minute's time. I want to be something more than a doll-baby in the affairs of Marken!"

"You are," he assured her earnestly. "They recognize the part you have undertaken. They believe it as important as anything they are doing. You must not bother them. Keep a stiff upper lip and hoe your own row well!"

The Princess gasped. It was the first time she had ever been told to keep a stiff upper lip. And strangest of all, she enjoyed it.

NEARLY two weeks later the Princess again sought Kent, and this time she was in a state of angry alarm. She did not wait to be announced, so urgent was her haste to speak to him. She scarcely took time to respond to his friendly greeting.

"I've got news—terrible news!" she exclaimed desperately. "It was told me by three different women, wives of men who work in the mines. Provarsk is stirring up a revolt on the new lines. He is encouraging the men to demand a share in the profits of the mine, and leads them to believe that if they can win this step, they can get anything they want."

She paused for breath, and was surprised that her news had so little effect on the American.

"Thank you," he said, "for coming to tell me about it; but I knew it already."

"And you are calmly letting him go ahead with this vile campaign?"

She could not understand such complacency.

"Yes," he said. "In fact I am surreptitiously encouraging him. Want to see just how far he can go. Things have been rather dull around here lately. Provarsk promises some entertainment."

He stared at the floor, and his face softened.

"It's great!" he declared before she could find speech. "Positively great! I knew you had it in you. By Jove, I knew it."

She feared something had gone wrong with his mentality, and with an anxious, bewildered question strove to bring him back to realities.

"What do you mean? Great? I was talking of Provarsk's treachery."

"I mean," he said, slowly, and unreasonably embarrassed, "that you are great. Why, just think of it, Princess Eloise! You were told the news by the wives of three men who work in the mines! Don't you see how you have won them—the wives of the men who work in the mines? Would any of them have done so six months ago? Did any of them, six months ago, care enough for you, the royal princess, to be alarmed when anything threatened you or your house?"

She had not considered it in that light before. There was a change, and it had come so gradually, so imperceptibly that she had been the last one to recognize it. Somehow this knowledge that there were those in Marken who cared for her for her own sake, gave her a greater sense of security and bravery than she had ever known.

"Come," he said gently, "what harm do you think a man like Provarsk capable of, now? Why, if I wanted to take the trouble, I could start whispers throughout the kingdom to-night that the real reason for his plotting is that he intends to seize the throne and exile your brother and yourself, and the people—yes—the very ones that he is now stirring to make foolish demands

—would tear him to pieces and feed them to their dogs!"

"But why not do it?" she demanded, with all the eagerness of a conspirator.

"Because," he said slowly, "I don't want it done that way. I want to punish him in my own way—also because I enjoy watching him, just to learn how far he is capable. Why, if he can succeed, we ought to walk out! It would show that we are a lot of incompetents! If any other women talk to you of him, just tell them how grateful you are, and forget it. Provarsk must have no inkling that I suspect him. I want that much understood. When the time is ripe—we shall see!"

After she had gone, the American sat for a long time, alone and staring absently through the open window, as if made very happy by the knowledge that at last the Princess was a real ally. Then, smiling, he sent for Von Glutz, who happened to be accessible, and told his secretary that they were not to be disturbed.

CHAPTER XIII

A STRANGE lassitude seemed to have overtaken Kent. In direct contrast to his old habitual energy, he now loitered habitually, taking long walks alone, dreaming alone, like a man who, finding his task done, has no further ambition and devotes himself to useless meditation. For weeks he appeared apathetic—so much so that the King and the others of that little cohort whose activities he had directed and stimulated were gravely concerned. They suggested that he needed a rest, that he must be ailing, that it were better if he sought change. And to all these suggestions he smiled gravely and shook his head.

"It's like this," explained Ivan to Paulo, in private conference: "There is something on his mind, some trouble, some worry, that none shall ever know. I cannot understand it—I who for years have been his shadow, his right hand, his friend of thought and service. He has not confided in me, which in itself is strange! Were he a youth, I

should say he was involved in a hopeless love-affair; but being what he is, a rock, a being as independent as the poles of the globe, I cannot conceive what it is that has overtaken him!"

"And all the time," angrily asserted the Minister of Finance, "that Provarsk plots!"

It was true. And Kent as well as his adherents knew it, for Kent's sources of information brought him the constant and unanimous reports that the Chancellor was adroitly using his time. The managers of the mines stated that the men were becoming daily more intractable and sullen, that nightly meetings were being held from which no information ever leaked, and that there was a growing unrest. There was no room to doubt that Provarsk was behind it all, and that Provarsk was carefully laying a powder-train to cause an explosion; yet Kent, the master spirit of change, read the reports, or listened to them, and was lethargic.

Baron Von Glutz, the new enthusiast for road-improvement, slipped hastily away to the outer world to inspect some new road-making machinery. Kent smiled at his enthusiasm. Paulo went to the other side of the toy kingdom to inspect work connected with his department. Again Kent smiled, and seemed happy to be left alone and unmolested.

AND then, when least expected, Provarsk acted with his customary boldness. Kent, walking alone in the garden late one night, and absorbed in thought, was abruptly startled by a soft crashing sound in the laurels on either side, and suddenly realized that he was in the midst of a huge thicket where, if it came to a struggle, he would have but small chance. He whirled with the intention of running to a better field, but his foot caught on a rope that had been tied across the path, and he fell headlong.

A man crashed through the bushes on one side and threw himself on Kent before the latter could regain his feet. He gathered his big, powerful body, that had in youth been injured by hard work and hard battles with lumbermen, and threw himself quickly to one side,

broke the hold on his arms with a sharp wrench, and rolled on top of his assailant.

Kent's hope had been to get to his feet; but the man beneath, disappointed in one way, took advantage of another and shifted his hold to Kent's neck. Instantly another adversary caught the American's heels and jerked his legs from under him so that he sprawled at length on the man in the path. Kent lifted his arm to strike, and another man seized it strongly and clung to it. Kent's left fist struck this new assailant and elicited a grunt. Then, while he was trying to land a second blow, another man was added to the corps of assailants.

Kent fought so well that it took the best efforts of the four men to subdue him—after which he was immediately handcuffed and lifted to his feet.

"What's the meaning of all this?" he demanded.

"It means that you are under arrest," growled a hoarse voice. "Bring him along, men!"

"But where are you taking me?" Kent insisted.

"You'll find that out soon enough," was the reply.

Kent walked doggedly along in silence and without further protest, and was led directly to the private entrance to the palace and thence upward to his offices, where, despite the warmth of the night, the shades were drawn and the room in a blaze of light. As soon as his eyes were accustomed to the change, he beheld, through the open door of his private office, Provarsk lazily seated in his private chair, and saw that the drawers of the desk had been wrenched open and that numerous papers were scattered on the floor.

"Ah! Got him, did you?" the Chancellor remarked to the soldiers conducting Kent. "You did well. Couldn't have done much better, in fact; but I was rather in hopes he would fight sufficiently hard to make extreme measures necessary!"

PROVARSK smiled pleasantly and came into the other room. Kent looked at the men around him and

sneered when he discovered they were some of Provarsk's original mercenaries, now become double traitors.

"However, it is just as well that you didn't have to knock his brains out," the Baron continued. "I find that the papers which are accessible are—not exactly those I wanted. Perhaps Mr. Kent will oblige us with the combination of his private vault?"

"Bless my soul! What an oversight!" Kent exclaimed. "You've not got the combination? Thoughtless of you. But, by the way, it would do you no good this evening anyhow, Baron. It has the best time-lock I could buy."

The Baron walked over to the vault and inspected it, and it was evident that he was not familiar with such a modern device.

"Suppose you broke that clock off?" he inquired of Kent.

"Then even I could not open it," the American replied. "You may be certain that the vault will not open until after ten o'clock tomorrow."

"In that case, all you can do is to give me the combination," said Provarsk, eying Kent insolently.

"For two centimes I wouldn't," Kent replied.

"And for two centimes, if you didn't, I'd throw you into a wet dungeon without food until you did," Provarsk promptly retorted.

"By Jove! I believe you would," said Kent, admiringly. "And that being the case, I suppose I may as well give it to you."

"Exactly!" replied the Chancellor. "Little courtesies will be duly appreciated."

"I've noticed that you were appreciative," Kent said meaningly; "but inasmuch as I'm here and you are there, I don't see what else I can do but oblige. If you and my good faithful friends here are not afraid of me, perhaps you would kindly request them to remove this jewelry; otherwise I can't write."

Provarsk smiled at what he thought a sarcasm and asked the leading soldier if Kent had any weapons. On being assured that the American was unarmed, the Chancellor ordered the handcuffs removed.

"And let me caution you, Mr. Kent," he threatened, "that any attempt to escape or call for assistance may necessitate action on my part that I should regret to take. Furthermore, it would be useless on your part, because there is no one in the palace who would attempt to assist you save the King and his royal sister, both of whom are now slumbering sweetly—with a guard outside their doors."

Kent looked about him as if seeking some one. Provarsk divined his look and added: "And that bear-man of yours has also been taken in, and I believe is now nicely secured in one of the old dungeons. I hope one was selected where there are plenty of rats."

KENT looked at the leader of the mercenaries, who stood stockily by him, and whose protruding eyes batted themselves at intervals and were devoid of expression.

"He's got to be taken out of that dungeon," Kent said emphatically.

"To quote one of your own phrases, 'Nothing doing!'" retorted the conspirator.

"All right! Nothing doing in the combination line either," stubbornly returned the American.

Provarsk grinned at him with the kindness of a hungry wolf, but influenced by his prisoner's fearless stare, paused to consider.

"I'll tell you what I'll do," said Kent: "I'll compromise. You have your friend put Ivan in a comfortable cell, and I'll not only give you the combination, but my parole. I'll agree that you can take me to my own room, and that I'll not leave there without first notifying you that I intend to do so. How's that?"

"This is to be a gentleman's agreement, is it, Kent?" Provarsk asked.

"It is."

"All right," the conspirator replied, "I'll accept it. Whatever else you are, I'll admit your word is absolutely good. Give me the combination."

Kent walked across to his desk, sat down and with a steady hand wrote it on a piece of paper, blotted it and passed it to Provarsk. The latter

smiled lazily and turned to the leading soldier.

"You have heard the agreement," he said. "See to it that we keep our part. Have that Ivan put in the most comfortable place of confinement we have. Take Mr. Kent to his room, and see that he is not disturbed. Of course he has no objections to a guard outside his door?"

"Not in the least," Kent assured him. "I like it. Keeps me from being lonesome. Sort of soothing, in the dark. Now, before I retire, would you mind telling me what you are up to this time, and what it's all about?"

"Not in the least," said Provarsk with the same air of courtesy that was, in itself, akin to insult. "What I am up to is, first of all, to get rid of you. I'm going to put you out of the kingdom, and also I've taken steps to cut your claws. I secured the address of your employer, John Rhodes, at 65 Regent Street, London, West, yesterday, and wrote him enclosing correspondence showing that you had not only made overtures to sell his concession to me, but had actually transferred it to me for a cash consideration, which I presumed was with his sanction. I explained that my object in writing was to have him remove you to other scenes of commercial activity, because you were personally obnoxious to His Majesty the King, and also to me, the Chancellor. Needless to say, the correspondence I sent him proving the sale of the mining concession, was signed by yourself—unmistakably so."

Kent's eyes opened with genuine astonishment. This was a more adroit invention than he had credited Provarsk with being able to devise. He had written to Rhodes, and—

"You forged my name to those letters, eh?" he asked hotly. "Well, before I'm through with you, I'll—"

"Do nothing! You can't! you are helpless. I've got you, this time, my smart Yankee friend, and got you in such a way that you can't escape. When I kick you out of Marken, you can take your choice: be tried by John Rhodes as a defaulter and convicted on my evidence that the letters are genuine, or put as much distance as you can

between yourself and your employer. That is immaterial to me, either way."

"But—but the King! He will not submit to it!" declared Kent, on the defensive.

"The King? Pouf! The King will do as I say, after this; otherwise I'll send him trailing along after you in short order."

Kent's face was impassive.

"Take him to his room and let him think it over," ordered Provarsk with a grin. "Good night, Mr. Richard Kent! I hope you have a very comfortable rest. I may call on you in the morning to assure myself of your comfort."

FOR once astonished at the man's ingenuity, Kent turned and led the way out with never a word. Provarsk had proved a better enemy than he had believed him to be. He could but think of the letter and enclosures to John Rhodes and remember that the financier's reputation was that of being an inflexibly hard and unrelenting man whenever one of his underlings had proved delinquent. He tried to recall whether John Rhodes had always been just in such cases. Perhaps poor Barry, who had been sent to an American prison for something similar, had been a victim of some other Provarsk. And Simmons, the Englishman, when led from the dock to serve his sentence of three years' hard labor, had protested his innocence to the very last. And both Simmons and Barry had been master agents, entrusted with great transactions, enjoying intimate acquaintance with John Rhodes! Kent looked very grave and preoccupied as they escorted him through the long, resounding corridors of the palace.

His guard halted and opened a door. Kent walked through and closed it behind him. He was alone in his accustomed room with his problem. And then it occurred to him that there is such an influence as justice, and that justice will not be denied. There was the King. The King, though it cost him his throne,—though it cost him everything he prized in the world,—would under such circumstances find and confront Rhodes, and declare it all a lie.

And Rhodes under those circumstances would be compelled to believe.

Kent disrobed, bathed the dust of that stiff physical contest on the garden path from his face, and climbed into bed. To-morrow was merely to-morrow, to be met as his judgment dictated. Within ten minutes he was sleeping as soundly as if nothing mattered and he were but a tired boy.

CHAPTER XIV

KENT, breakfasting in his room, heard not only the singing of birds in the garden but a persistent and increasing monotone of sound that pervaded everywhere, caused by the shuffling of many feet along the streets outside the palace walls, the indistinct hum of many voices, the grating of cart-wheels over the roads and an occasional shrill call rising above others. The atmosphere itself seemed charged and ready for a single spark to cause the explosion of revolt. He heard some one coming rapidly along the corridor, the guard's heels coming to a salute; then the door opened and the King entered, his whole personality radiating indignation.

"This is an outrage!" he declared. "I found a guard in front of my door this morning, who told me of your arrest and confinement to your room. He made no objection to my coming here, and so I came at once. We will go immediately and have Provarsk seized. Come!"

Kent slowly shook his head.

"I cannot," he said. "I am under parole of honor to remain here."

The King stood aghast.

"You gave your word to that treacherous—"

"Yes, and shall keep it."

"Then I will at once go alone and act. I'll—"

"No, no. Let us consider," Kent checked him.

"But—but it may mean revolt! How do we know that he has not bribed or overcome enough of the guards, that—"

"No fear," said Kent easily. "Some of them, perhaps; but I have certain

reason to believe that on Baron Von Glutz' return there will be a—a change in the situation."

"But Kent! Kent! Are you mad?" demanded the King. "Time! Time is against us. You don't know what is happening! What do you think of this!" he cried, thrusting a paper toward the American.

Kent took it, said, "Have a seat, Your Majesty," and read. It was a proclamation with all official seals and form, calling upon the inhabitants, and especially those employed in the manganese mines, to assemble in the Market Place at eleven o'clock of that day, where communications of the utmost importance to their welfare and the welfare of the State would be made. Kent read it slowly to himself, gave a wry twist to his mouth and looked at his visitor.

"I observe," he said with quiet meaning, "that it does not end quite as royal decrees customarily do. It does not bear the words, 'God save the King!'"

THE King, who had been twisting impatiently on his chair, exclaimed, "No! It doesn't. I noted that point."

"When did this appear?" the American asked, recalling the hour when the attack had been made on him.

"It was posted up by the Chancellor's orders between one and two o'clock this morning. The guard told me so."

"The guard, then, was friendly?"

"Yes, and very much distressed. He apologized to me, and said that he could not obey his orders—that he could not understand. I called him inside and closed the door, and told him to tell me all he knew. He did. He says that Provarsk has won over some of those adventurers he first brought here, and that they have been talking to all the others in the guard-room."

"Did this man get any inkling of Provarsk's intentions?"

"Yes! enough to cause him and all the others that are loyal to be highly alarmed. These passed the word around that they believed they could best serve the throne and you by obeying up to a certain point. They wish to know what to do."

"But Provarsk's intentions?" interrupted Kent, bringing the King back to the point.

"Provarsk is going to announce this morning that the mining concession has been turned over to him, wrested from you and John Rhodes in behalf of the people by him, and he will promise that hereafter the profits shall be shared by those who do the work. After that he proposes to inflame the people to demonstrate in force and demand of me that a like course shall be pursued with all other State holdings, and that those which the State does not completely own shall be returned to the original or minority owners, to be run hereafter without State interference. My guard gathered all this from stray talk made by Provarsk's henchmen, who, already certain of success, are beginning to boast of the authority they are going to have."

Kent's eyes glowed with interest.

"That guard of yours," he declared, "is due for a good commission after this is over. I seem to have overlooked him." He meditated for a moment, and then to the King's surprise, as if vastly relieved, leaned back in his chair and laughed.

"Amateur work, after all!" he declared. "I'm disappointed! Provarsk had me guessing last night. I thought he was a much cleverer fighter than I had believed him to be. He always boggles in the end."

"I don't see the joke!" exclaimed the King, but more hopefully.

"Why, it is this way," explained Kent, "—plain as day now: He poses as a national benefactor, but no one would be able to tell, if he did actually get possession of the mines, what the profits are. He probably would divide up some of the profits as long as it served his purpose. And after that!" He snapped his fingers derisively. "In the meantime he insures my being driven from Marken, and forces you to turn over everything that produces an income—also to let government-controlled private industries revert to those private individuals who own the outside stock. That includes the Marken mineral springs, in which he has invested every dollar he has in the world, and all

he could borrow. It's so easy, now, that it's scarcely interesting!"

"But the people don't know that you have the concession," objected the King. "They think I still own the mines for the State, and that the profits have been turned to the redemption of the State bonds; and they are confident that after the bonds are redeemed I'm going to spend more money for the good of the State. The minute Provarsk exposes the whole affair, they will lose confidence in me and my intentions."

The American regarded the King's distress with sympathy.

"But, suppose you had never granted the concession, and that you did own the mines, free from everything?"

"As soon as your bonds have been met, I'd give them the profits—all of them! You certainly know that I do care for my people and am unselfish! I want to be just what they have thought me to be, Kent, the best king that Marken ever had! I want to be able to do again what I have done, walk out among them, and know that they respect me as a king, and like me as a man and a friend."

HE spoke impassioned, voicing the hunger of his mind, confessing his dream, while the American watched him kindly, as an elder brother might watch the anxieties of a younger one when about to tender sympathy and assistance.

"All right!" he said bluntly. "I think we can fix that up. It may be foolish on my part—but a man can't pass through this world without being foolish once in a while. I'm going to give you that concession."

The King's face expressed many emotions, among them solicitous affection.

"But—but Rhodes?" he asked excitedly. "What will Rhodes think?"

"I've got to take my chances of squaring it with him. 'Most always he does about as I want him to. I've made a lot of money for John Rhodes, one time and another, and he knows it. Besides, I'm going to tell you something. The last penny that Marken owed John Rhodes, together with two

per cent interest, was paid him more than a week ago. If, after all that, he kicked, he'd be more of a dog than I ever suspected him of being."

The King, stupefied by the news that he was free from debt, gasped; but Kent disregarded him. He got up and locked the door to make certain that he could not be disturbed, walked briskly across the room to a bookcase, and spoke with the proud delight of a boy.

"Come here," he said. "I wish to show you something. Pretty clever, I call it. My own idea! Ivan and I did most of the work. Now look over here. On this side of the room, right under the mantel—see this marble ornament? Well, it's nothing but a plain, common electric latch—the kind we have over home when we live on the top flat and wish to open the ground-floor door for a caller. Push on it."

The King, still speechless, did so. There was a sharp click, and the bookcase swung away from the wall, exposing a modern safe behind it. The King's eyes were wide with curiosity.

"That's the way she works!" Kent exclaimed proudly. "Thought it out myself, for emergencies. I haven't kept any papers of importance in the vault of my office for more than three months. I'd give a hundred dollars to watch Provarsk when he opens it with the combination I gave him last night. It's quite empty."

He chuckled as he bent over and twirled the knob, pulled the heavy door open, brought out a drawer and took from it a piece of paper that the King recognized. Kent opened it and glanced at it to make certain of its identity, held it before the King to show what it was and then deliberately tore it to shreds, which he threw into the fireplace and lighted.

"There goes the concession," he said, gazing at the flames. "The manganese mines are yours, unmortgaged, free from all debt and all obligations."

He turned with a warm smile on his face, and silenced the King, who began remonstrating.

"I'll 'tend to my part of it," he said. "It's up to you to do yours. Let me handle the situation here. You must rush back to your rooms, summon the

heralds, get into your State glory so as to be more impressive than Solomon, and hurry down to the Market Place."

He consulted his watch.

"You've no time to lose. If I were you, I'd not let them know but that you personally summoned them. You'd better go now; and whatever you do, don't let Provarsk know you've been here."

He fairly shoved the King toward the door, hushing his protestations of gratitude with a gruff, "We can talk about all that later. Not now! Not now! Hurry."

He carefully closed the safe and swung the bookcase back into its normal position, after which, for some minutes, he stood scowling thoughtfully out over the garden, as if formulating new plans; then he walked slowly across to the door and opened it.

"I'd like to speak to you," he said to the guard. "Come inside."

THE man hesitated, looked up and down the corridor and grinned. Kent was secretly pleased and knew that he was not mistaken in his surmise that one who had always been ready to betray for money would do so again to the highest bidder. The man entered and closed the door behind him, with a look of cupidity in his eyes.

"You are out for money," Kent said brusquely. "I'm going to make it worth your while to go at once, get my man Ivan and bring him here. You can tell the sentry it's Provarsk's order. If you do that within the next fifteen minutes, you get five thousand francs in gold and no one the wiser. Can you do it?"

The man took another look in the corridor, seemed satisfied, and said: "How will you pay me?"

"You know that I keep my word, don't you?" Kent retorted. "I tell you I'll pay you the minute Ivan gets here."

The mercenary hesitated, scratched his head and took the plunge. He ran on tiptoe down the hall. Kent hastened to his secret safe and took therefrom some rolls of coin and waited. His bribe was effective, for within the time, Ivan appeared and the guard took the bribe-money with a chuckle and left them alone.

"Ivan," Kent said in the soundless speech he employed when they were alone, "I rather think that, within a short time, Provarsk will be here, and our interview may not be pleasant. Go into my dressing-room there, and leave the door ajar sufficiently to observe what takes place. If he gets ugly, I may need you."

"I understand," said the giant, nodding his head. "And I shall be there if needed. Is that all?"

"Yes," replied Kent, "that's all. And Ivan, be wary of him if you do have to come out. I don't believe that man likes you! 'Pon my word I don't! And if he could, he might try to hurt you."

Ivan's mouth opened into a wide grin, as he went to Kent's dressing-room and pulled the door carefully shut, save for a tiny crack. Kent paced restlessly about the room, pausing once to admire, absently, as he had done a hundred times before, the intricate carvings of a huge wooden screen that formed a snug little corner. Time was moving, and he wondered why Provarsk did not appear, for he confidently expected him. Had that astute gentleman discovered the counter-move that was being made against him, and taken steps for its circumvention?

WITH brisk elation he heard a tap on the door, and when the sentry entered, looked expectantly over his shoulder, confident that Provarsk was there.

"Her Royal Highness, the Princess Eloise," announced the sentry, and the American was troubled as he bade the man open the door for her, and himself moved toward it.

She entered hurriedly and closed the door behind her. Her anxiety and excitement were marked.

"Tell me," she said, hastily advancing, "what has taken place. Karl had no time. He told me to come here and ask you. Why is there a sentry?"

"Princess Eloise," he said quietly, "I am under arrest by Provarsk's orders; but your brother and I have taken steps that will render him very harmless—"

She looked at him with pronounced consternation that was augmented when he added, "—steps also that ren-

der my remaining longer in Marken unnecessary; so I shall soon be going."

"In the midst of such an emergency?"

"I do not believe it will be an emergency very long," he said gravely. "And I do not believe that after to-day I shall be needed. Therefore I expect to leave Marken within a few days."

"But you can't!" she insisted desperately.

A slow change came over his face, the change that his intimates in big affairs would have called his "poker face," a face that would be wooden regardless of whatever depression, elation, craft or plan passed through his mind.

"Nevertheless," he replied quietly, "I am going!"

"Surely not!" she expostulated. "I don't believe it. It's as if you were beaten—were running away!"

"Perhaps it may look that way—now," he said, watching to see the effect of his words.

The Princess' distress increased. Her hands came together, and he saw that her slender fingers had interlocked as though by this grip to obtain strength for repression. He would have given all that was his to have caught them in his own strong palms and to have comforted, soothed and reassured her; but he dared not. He had schooled himself to the knowledge that from her viewpoint he was but a capable money-lender, possibly a good friend, while she was that product of nurturing and breeding, a princess royal. His rebellion at this condition brought out a trifle of that controlled savagery that made him strong.

"Why should I stay here any longer," he asked, "when all I came to do is done? I have paid John Rhodes every cent of his money. That was my mission, was it not?—that and nothing more."

SHE lifted her head and regarded him with astonishment. His immobile face bespoke no inward hesitation—nothing but calm purpose. He was inscrutable. She sustained a conflict of emotions, but all her respect and liking, so slowly upbuilt, were wounded by his words.

"I thought," she said hesitantly, "that you had remained for something more—than that. I thought friendship, a liking for a great work, a happiness in doing something worth while, had been reasons."

He smiled but did not answer. She interpreted his silence as an admission that she had been mistaken in her estimate of him, and that he had been imbued with nothing but selfish motives. She spoke regretfully now, and he saw that her reserve was breaking—saw that she was giving way.

"I thought we meant something to you, my brother and I! And I tried to be worthy of what I thought you were. I believed you to be the greatest man I had ever known! Karl would have done anything for you. I would—"

She paused, twisted her fingers still harder and then looked at him with eyes like those of a hurt child, candid, outspoken in humiliated confession.

"I would have given anything to have you be my friend, as you have been Karl's." She paused, bit her lip and then impetuously clenched her hands and with sheer recklessness added: "I would have given much more—to have helped you—always. If you had failed and been beaten, honorably fighting, I would have liked to go to you, and put my hand in yours, and walk with you in defeat! I was sick of illusion—of sham royalty—of polite lies! I wanted your esteem! Yours! all of it! And now I despise myself for it!"

She stopped, choked by her own humiliation, and looked at him; but his eyes were on the floor, his hands hanging listlessly open, his heavy shoulders and stalwart frame inert and passive, as if all she had confessed, and all her scorn, were not capable of moving him. For a long time she stood thus, quivering, while he stood dumbly before her. The chirping of birds in the sunlit gardens outside, the slow, measured footsteps of the sentry in the corridor without, and that ominous, distant hum of Marken itself came to them accentuated in volume by their own silence.

NUMBLY, like one astounded by some overwhelming surprise, he lifted his head—she saw his eyes. 'All

the old bravery was gone from them. Gone, too, all the old mockery, the old readiness of response, the quick acceptance of ever-changing chance. Something in their great seriousness, in their very depths, made her catch her breath. She saw that he was humbly yet desperately fighting to speak, that words were being sought and that none satisfied.

There was a clamorous, insolent note added to that murmuring diapason of sound that swept monotonously through the room, the sound of some one clanking his way through the outer corridor. It stormed his ears like the call of a trumpet announcing battle. It whirled him back to his own sphere of action, where men were to be met, where a fight, the fight he knew as a veteran, was imminent. His hands shot forward and caught hers, and his big body became endowed with a suggestion of bent steel, alive, ready to spring. He was the master again.

"Listen!" he commanded her, his words crowding one upon the other. "Go quickly behind that screen and sit down! Hurry! Sit there and hear what is said. Say nothing! My honor in your eyes may depend upon it—and that—is more to me than everything else in the world."

He caught her by the shoulders in his strong hands, whirled her, bewildered, across the few steps intervening, thrust her into an easy chair behind the screen, and was out again toward the door through which Provarsk was entering and which he locked behind him. She heard Kent's voice, cool, casual, greeting his sole opponent.

"Well," it said, "I've been expecting you. Have you opened that vault yet?"

PROVARSK laughed—but not with mirth.

"Yes, I opened it. And found just what I rather expected—nothing."

"Disappointed?" queried the American with cool insolence.

"Not much," came the ready reply with equal coolness. "The way you passed the combination over was—well, significant."

"Suppose we sit down," Kent sug-

gested. "We've got quite a lot of things to discuss, haven't we?"

"That depends on you. Of course, if you are quite amenable,—I seem to be in the position of strength,—I'll listen to anything you've got to offer."

"You'll listen? That's good. If you only came to listen, why did you come at all? Say, Provarsk! You don't think I'm fool enough to believe you came here merely on a polite visit, do you? Just because you wanted to hear the sweet sound of my voice? You came because I've got things you want—things you think I might trade, things that if you don't get, might upset your little pile of bricks and tip you over into the gutter. Come, let's not try to play blind-man's buff. What are you after? What card do you need to fill your flush?"

"Pretty fair talk for a man who is shut in his own room under arrest," commented Provarsk. "What is it the English call it—swank? Yes, that's it. Bluff, I think you style it, you Yankees."

"Not at all," Kent insisted seriously. "A real bluff is where you haven't got the goods, but try to make the other fellow believe you have. Swank, on the contrary, is merely an exaggeration of what you possess. Neither word is applicable, because I've got what you have to have. I under arrest? Pough! That's nothing, because I've got what is known as the moral supremacy, the initiative. Also because you are afraid of me and that I might possibly kick your apple-cart with a lot of freckled wares into the garbage-pile."

"Good!" gayly responded the Baron. "Quite good! Nothing like frank admission to get to a business basis, is there? You can make it a lot more certain for me. And in return I can at least make it certain that you shall have a chance to wander farther afield with a whole hide."

"And if I don't prove agreeable?" questioned Kent.

"Then," declared the conspirator with a great air of regret, "I am afraid you wont wander anywhere at all. About the cheapest thing in Marken is a lot in the cemetery."

"H'm!" mused the American. "If

you are so certain of your ground, I can't quite see why you bother with me. You wouldn't do it. No indeed! You'd order the lot."

"Right again," cheerfully agreed the Baron.

"Well, then, let's get down to brass tacks. What are you after?"

THE Baron got up and began to move about the room, much to Kent's disturbance.

"Sit down," he said. "I don't like to talk business to a man who is running a race with himself."

Provarsk sat down and came straight to the point.

"I can get your transfer of that mining concession whether you give it or not," he said meaningly.

"In the same way you got my signatures to letters I never wrote, eh?"

"Exactly," admitted Provarsk with a grin. "But it might save some further trouble with your employer, John Rhodes, if I actually got the transfer from you."

"I believe you are right about that," Kent agreed. "But you haven't yet explained where I come in? I'm not fool enough to believe you are doing this for the good of the State, you know."

"Of course I'm not!" Provarsk declared contemptuously. "I'm doing it for my own good and no one's else."

"How do you propose to handle the King?" demanded Kent.

"He'll have to do what I want him to, for the simplest of reasons, that I shall have the people behind me. He'll get nothing! He can be King. That's enough for him."

"Yes?" said Kent invitingly. "Now about me. You have already written to Rhodes. Do I get nothing, too?"

"That's just what I'm coming to," observed the Baron. "You've been a good gamester, but you've lost, all the way round. You and I agree on just one thing—which is that either of us keeps his word when he can do so. That's right, isn't it?"

"Yes, I think it is."

"Then if I gave you my word as a gentleman on anything, you'd accept it, wouldn't you?"

"I think I should."

"Very well, that simplifies matters. The King has been getting ten per cent of the net revenues from the mines. From now on he gets nothing, and you shall have five per cent hereafter, to be forwarded to you wherever you choose to hide from Rhodes, provided that you give me that concession. Only, of course, you've got to stay away from Marken. That's understood in any event."

WITH a studied air of deliberation Kent looked up at the ceiling, until Provarsk began to move restlessly.

The latter consulted his watch and got hastily to his feet.

"I've no further time to waste in politeness," he declared with sharp emphasis. "I shall give you just five minutes more in which to decide."

"Why this haste? Got anything important to do?" asked Kent in bland surprise.

"I have," asserted the Baron crisply.

"Well, Provarsk, you can spare yourself the trouble," said Kent with the utmost sarcasm. "I know your full plans. I even surmised you might try to seize me, and instructed Von Glutz, who, by the way, will be on hand with sufficient strength to act this very morning, that unless it became a question of saving my life, he was not to interfere with you. With the exception of perhaps a half-dozen men, the palace guard is still loyal and awaiting my orders. I could have summoned assistance last night with a single call!"

Provarsk looked incredulous. He concealed the fear that slowly gripped him, and snapped his fingers.

"Bluffing again," he said. "Come, my time is up."

"Going to read a proclamation to the people, or anything like that? If so, you may as well save yourself the trouble. By this time the King is already reading his."

Provarsk's face, at this statement, went white with rage.

"You lie!" he shouted.

"I don't," calmly disputed Kent, in his turn arising to his feet. "I've already returned him his concession,

and he is by this time presenting the manganese mines, gratis, to the citizens of Marken. Another thing! You needn't worry about what John Rhodes might do to me. I happen to be John Rhodes myself! You are—"

THERE was a shout, a curse, a woman's scream and a pistol-shot sounding together in confusion. Provarsk, infuriated, had whipped a gun from his pocket so unexpectedly that Ivan had not time to reach him; but the Princess had, with desperation, flung the screen heavily against Provarsk's arm, and the bullet, deflected from its mark, spattered itself in minute particles of flying lead over the tiled floor. Outside, the sentry battered clamorously on the stout door. In the débris of the screen, two men now struggled furiously—Ivan and Provarsk, the latter striving with desperate intent to twist his pinioned hand once more in Kent's direction, and swearing that, no matter what happened, he would at least kill him. His persistence angered the giant, who had seized his forearm, and now threw him to the floor.

With a roar like that of a charging lion, Ivan seemed for the first time to exert his full strength. He was unswerving and pitiless. His huge right shoulder suddenly lifted until the muscles of his neck were swollen and rigid; there was the harsh snap of breaking bones, an agonized scream from Provarsk, and Kent leaped forward.

"Ivan! Ivan!" he shouted, forgetting that the latter could not hear. The Princess backed away against the wall, with a stare of fascinated, expectant horror; for Ivan, with all the hatred he had sustained for the Chancellor unleashed, was intent on killing him this time, regardless of Kent's entreaties. He snatched the pistol from the floor and despite Kent's efforts planted the muzzle against Provarsk's temple. He tried to discharge it, but in his haste had unwittingly thrown the safety clutch. Provarsk, helpless beneath him, glared upward with eyes that did not quail.

The curious, reckless, fearless daring of the man did not desert him in the

least, now that he was at the end. Kent caught Ivan's arm in both his own, but the enraged giant threw him off, dexterously dropped the pistol, caught it by the muzzle, and lifted his arm high above his head, intent on crushing Provarsk's skull with the butt of the weapon.

QUICK as light, Kent saw his opportunity, and caught the upraised wrist from behind, threw all his weight against it, and slowly bent Ivan sideways from over his victim. The giant, though taken at this disadvantage, yielded only inch by inch, overborne by the strength of Kent, a strength that with any ordinary man would have been overpowering. Kent's jaws were set until the muscles of his cheeks shone in knots, and his eyes were aflame.

"Let me kill him! For God's sake, don't interfere!" Ivan shouted. And then, still pleading for the privilege of destroying Provarsk, was toppled over, breathing hoarsely, and looking up into Kent's face. Slowly the red flame burned out of his eyes, as he recovered control of himself. The pistol fell from his hand, and the Princess, with a spring as graceful as a leopard's, seized it and retreated to a safe distance.

"Promise me that you will not hurt him, Ivan! I tell you not to! Are you mad, man?"

"I promise," said Ivan sullenly, but relaxing himself; and Kent arose. Ivan got slowly to his feet, with a stare of hatred and defeated intent at Provarsk, who was painfully trying to extricate himself from the pieces of splintered screen.

Kent put his hand firmly but gently beneath him and assisted him to his feet, and then to a chair. There was no need to ask his condition. The loosely swinging arm told its own story.

The door gave way under a fresh onslaught, and several guardsmen fell into the room. Behind them could be seen two others holding Provarsk's mercenary between them. Kent smiled grimly and said: "Thank you, men; but I do not require your help. Pull what's left of the door shut and at once go and arrest or kill Provarsk's hired

men. Leave one man on guard outside, in case I want him."

They saluted and obeyed with convincing alacrity.

"Provarsk," said Kent, "I'm very sorry! I didn't wish that done to you."

"That's all right, Rhodes, or Kent if you prefer it. It's nothing to what I wanted to do to you," gamely retorted the Baron.

"Or nothing compared to what Ivan wanted to do to you," remarked Kent.

"Why didn't you let him finish it! In your place I should have done so," Provarsk asserted, without rancor, and clutching his shattered arm.

"Because," declared Kent with quiet dignity, "I have punished you enough. You are finished, as it is. Somehow, I'm sorry! You're a game man, Baron, and—I like them. I shall send for a surgeon."

"Oh, may as well put that off for a few minutes," the Chancellor said, wincing with a physical pain that barely exposed itself in his level voice. "May as well tell me the worst."

"There's not much more to tell," Kent said gently. "Only that I've beaten you past any chance of your coming back. By this time you are not even the Chancellor, I think. I fancy Von Glutz, the loyal, has come back to his own. And you are broke—broken like an empty eggshell!"

PROVARSK shut his teeth, tried to get his arm to a less painful position, attempted a brave smile, and said: "I think not. The Marken Mineral Company, my dear Mr. Rhodes—"

"Is worthless! I couldn't quite forgive your trying to bribe my secretary, Provarsk. That wasn't playing the game. I went after you on that. It's a rule of finance to get a man who tries to bite your leg under the table. I got you! The only unprofitable, completely worthless enterprise in Marken is the one in which you've put every dollar you could get. I saw to that. I kept it going at a total loss, just for your benefit. You're not worth a copper centime. You'll have to borrow money to buy your railway ticket out—unless—unless I relent. Maybe I shall.

There are a lot of things I like about you. There are a lot of places where I can use brave men, if they are willing to be honest, and you are at least brave."

"I don't think," said the Baron, biting his lip to hide his mental and physical pain, "that I can accept anything from you; but I will say this—just to show you that in my way I am fair: If I can ever learn this game you play—this thing of finance—and I can find any way to have another go at you, I'll do it! And—and while I'm doing it, all the time I'll like and admire you, and—" He shut his teeth savagely in a determined effort to subdue the giddiness and weakness that was mastering him, and then, with a long sigh, fell sideways and would have fallen to the floor had not Kent leaped forward and caught him in his arms.

He picked him up as if he were of no weight, and strode across the room, followed by the Princess and Ivan, whose eyes had roved from lip to lip, seizing the spoken words.

"Princess Eloise," the American called anxiously over his shoulder, "please summon some one to help me—and also a surgeon. Send them to my private room. And—and," he stammered, "wait for me—here!"

Her face flushed, as if, in this turmoil, she had interpreted some hidden significance in his words; but she ran across the room and called the sentry from the corridor, and Kent heard her words.

"Send two men from the guard-room at once to assist Mr. Kent. Then go quickly—as fast as you can—and summon the court surgeon. Hurry! Mr. Kent asks you to. Go quickly!"

Ivan closed the door dumbly, and the sound of her voice was cut off.

"Here, Ivan," Kent's lips moved as he turned his head toward his follower from the side of his own bed, on which he had deposited the Chancellor. "Help me to get his clothes off, while he is unconscious. You should not have done this. I can't fire you, because after a fashion you and I are pals. But I'd give a thousand dollars to be big enough to take it out of your hide, you big ill-tempered chump!"

And Ivan, knowing a lot that was not embodied in his employer's speech, merely grinned and began unlacing the Baron's shoes.

CHAPTER XV

THE Princess tiptoed to the shattered hall door, and with infinite care passed through and closed it behind her. Then, hesitant, perturbed, distressed, she looked down the long reaches, lonely as a deserted avenue, as if considering a direction for flight. She paused, torn between the tugging hand of convention and that of her own inclination. Convention urged her that she was of the blood of proud and lasting kings, certain to find her place upon some potent throne, inevitably destined to rule. But her feeling cried that all was vain, all happiness lost, the world barren, the future a desert, if now she closed her ears to the cry of her heart. Steadily, with clear eyes and clarity of mind, she weighed one route against the other; and then, with bent head and tremulous breath, she made her decision. She turned, retraced her steps, opened the door very gently, stepped inside the room she had left, and closed the door behind.

Kent, grave, embarrassed and yet determined, came but a moment later from his sleeping chamber, and closed the door leading to it—but not with his habitual directness and decision. Instead there was about him a curious attitude of awkwardness, appeal and reverence, a strange lack of confidence. For an instant only she forced herself to meet his eyes. They cried their message to hers across the silent, waiting room. Forced by decision to meet this portentous issue, she heard him coming toward her. His voice sounded as if reaching her from a long distance, so quiet, so gentle, so grave it was in this decisive moment of its existence.

"You," it said, "are a princess. I am nothing, save that which I am—a man who has done his best. But—what I am—I am."

The voice paused in that time she stood with hands crossed above her

breast, not daring to lift her eyes to his—paused as if gathering power to find the way.

"I should not dare to speak," it proceeded, more firmly, "had you not said what you did awhile ago. You said that you would have given anything for—" He hesitated and spoke scarcely above a whisper, as if a repetition of her words were profanation: "You said that you would have given anything for my friendship, for my esteem! That you had wanted to help me—always!"

HE spoke the last word like one reading the ultimate word of life from the open book of destiny. "Oh, Eloise!" he cried with a tenderness beyond all she had dreamed, "I am like that poor, foolish juggler of Nôtre Dame, who, unable to do more than juggle gay balls upon his hands and feet, yet dared toss them at the shrine of Our Lady, and thus gave all he had to give! I am helpless! I am nothing, in this fight—the only one from which I've ever flinched. I wanted to go before I gave myself away; but you said—you said—"

He stopped, and she knew that the poet soul of him, so scrupulously concealed from all the world, was bursting its way, released by the alchemy of love, to his last abashed declaration. She waited, intent on what he might say, this man who had posed through all his life as one without sentiment, hard, inflexible, masterful, and who now for the first time was stripping bare his spirit.

"Do you know," he said. "I've always been ashamed of something that I liked—something I read. It seemed too fine to say aloud; but it's what I want to say now:

"I am he that cries aloud beneath your gates,
With eyes uplifted to the moon, the night, your castle walls.
No begger I for paltry dole! No suppliant for paltry favors,
Worthless, ephemeral and indifferently thrown.

I ask all you have, all you have been, all you are,
All that you may ever be.
I am that throbbing thing of love,
Venturesome, calling for its own."

There was a child's bashfulness and simplicity in his declamation. Nothing but the quick knowledge that she had seen him as he was in truth kept her from laughing at him. And then there came to her the realization, not without a sense of triumph, that she knew, beyond all others, this strange, reticent, retiring man whose very name had been feared by some of those esteemed as powerful—that of her alone, in all the world, he stood in awe.

"If I had known then who—who you really were," she faltered, "—if I had not been so terribly disappointed, I should not have said what I did."

She paused; but without ever looking up at him, she knew that he recoiled as from a blow. And then, bravely, she took the plunge, and added in a voice that was scarcely louder than the exquisite sound of the wind's fingers playing upon a harp: "But now that I know my mistake, and that you have not been defeated, I—I have nothing to retract."

SHE heard him coming slowly toward her, and lifted her eyes to his grim, rugged, homely face, and beheld it transfigured like some weather-scarred crag suddenly illumined by sunlight. The warmth and majesty of a great love were there, the imperative will to seize and to shield, and the longing to prove worth by sacrifice.

He would have taken her hand, awkwardly, as some poor courtier might, but nothing less than full relinquishment was in her heart. And so she lifted her arms swiftly upward, caught his face for a long moment between her hands, looked deeply into his eyes and then, content with what she saw, bent farther toward him and was caught and held.

Forgetful of all else, deaf to all else, they had not heard the roaring tumult that came sweeping toward the palace, increased in the crescendo of proximity, and that now suddenly burst overwhelmingly upon their ears in terrifying volume. It sounded as if something had gone wrong, as if revolt had in full strength rushed upon them.

They turned and hastened to the window. The great garden of the palace

had been invaded by a mob of people, the foremost of whom rushed excitedly to places beneath the windows, while other waves rapidly surged behind, closed in and became more dense until even the walls were mounted by upthrown crests. For a moment it was difficult to distinguish the character of that tremendous shouting, or to know whether menace or approval was the dominant note. And then, suddenly, a red-faced man who had been crowded into the basin of a fountain climbed triumphantly to its top, where he stood silhouetted against the sky, waved his arms, and in a stentorian voice that swept over all else began to sing the national anthem.

Instantly other voices took it up, until the beating of time by that lone figure aloft it became united and overpowering, battering the walls, the trees and the skies with stately blows. The lips of the Princess Eloise quivered, and her eyes filled with tears of emotion. Kent felt his hands clenching as he caught the meaning, and knew that it was an ovation to the King; but even then he could not understand why the giving of the mines had so stirred the people. His door was jerked open unceremoniously and the King ran in, followed by Paulo and Von Glutz, all appearing scarcely less excited and jubilant than those below.

AT sight of his sister and Kent, the King waved his sword above his head and saluted the hilt with his lips.

"Marken! Marken!" he shouted as gallantly as any of his mailed ancestors might have done when announcing victory after battle.

"What have you done?" demanded Kent, once more the cool man of affairs.

"I've gone you one better, my friend, and acted without anyone's advice. I've not only done as you suggested, but I've taken a long step farther. I've told them that, without their asking it, and because I have faith in them, I surrender all arbitrary rights of the Crown, and that from this time henceforth Marken is to be a liberal government, in which the people are to exercise their own judgment and powers, and that not

even England herself can boast of greater freedom and democracy. I've given them their liberty. Marken is no longer an autocracy!"

He paused, proud of the effect he had produced, and saw the great approval that shone from his sister's eyes; but before he could proceed, the doughty old Von Glutz took up the tale.

"That's not all! He didn't tell you all!" he roared. "His Majesty ended by telling them that if they chose they could even do away with a king and make Marken a republic. That was when they first shouted so loudly, and what they yelled was, 'No! No! God save the King! God save Karl the Great!' And by the Lord Almighty, they meant it! They stormed the platform. They lifted him up and carried him in their arms. Old women cried and knelt at his feet. They held their dirty babies up for him to touch. And then some of the women began to shout 'God save the Princess Eloise!' and that started them all off again. The King got himself heard at last and told them that the credit was not his—that they owed it all to you, Kent. And then Karl did a fool thing. Told them that you two were here and that the palace grounds were open. Listen! Hear that!"

The song had ceased and great shouts were again storming them.

"The Princess Eloise! Our Princess Eloise!" and "Kent! Kent! Kent!"

They saw him, the man who loathed publicity, quail like a bashful youth, and saw the Princess catch his hand and almost drag him toward the balcony. Then he seemed to recall something that must be done and braced himself and strode forward. He stopped abruptly just inside the door and motioned to the King. The King smiled and stepped out, followed by the Princess. Like the abrupt discharge of heavy guns the noise renewed as Kent followed them, and Von Glutz and Paulo, rigid, unmoved, came behind and took their posts in the background like watchdogs of state.

KENT stepped to the edge of the balcony and lifted his hand for silence, the same heavy, unflinching man that had addressed them on one

other occasion, when he mentally derided them and then disappeared. Again, as then, his great voice reached them like some enormous trumpet; but now there was nothing of cynicism or demagoguery in his words, no jesting with their ignorance.

"His Majesty Karl Second—"

"God save Karl the Great!" they corrected him.

"—has told you that you owe much of what has been to-day given you, to me. With all respect for His Majesty's word, I wish to tell you, flatly, that it is not so. I did nothing. You owe it all to him. All I did was to advise regarding the employment of your industries. I approve of his grant of self-government, for I am an American; but I am as surprised as were you that he gave so freely."

They interrupted him with cheers, while he stood watching them, and evidently waiting to add something more.

"You owe me nothing," he declared. "But to others you owe much. You owe Her Royal Highness the Princess Eloise for her advice—" Again they interrupted him with cheers.

"You owe to a much misunderstood man, a nobleman, steadfast, loyal and true, a great payment for his unflinching devotion to the King, to you and to his duty; and to his plain honesty you are indebted beyond all words. I speak of Baron Von Glutz!"

He did not look around in that mad interim when again they shouted; but had he done so would have seen that Von Glutz was for once abashed to dumbness. All that he, plain, simple old man, had ever asked, was to serve as best he might, careless of reward.

"Beyond this," continued the voice, "you must not forget the services of as good a Minister of Treasury as has ever conducted the affairs of a people or a king, Captain Philidor Paulo."

In cheering mood, they cheered again.

"And from now on you owe it to yourselves and your king, to those who have done the best they could for you, to make, by continued industry and integrity, the kingdom of Marken great. The King has made no mistake. You were not fit to conduct yourselves a year ago. Many of you were idle, lazy

and indifferent. It required the inflexibility of an autocrat to arouse you. An autocrat is, after all, but a nurse. Once the necessity for a nurse passes, it passes for all time. You are a nation now, known and respected by the whole world. It rests with you whether that respect shall continue, and respect is a thing that accumulates or diminishes in just proportion to your deeds. It does not stand still.

"The respect given a nation is not measured by the breadth of its lands, or by what it owns. It is measured by the acts of the individuals who compose it. On each individually rests the good name of his nation. It is by his individual acts that his country is estimated. I ask you to remember my words and to consider them when alone, that you may find the right way, in this hour of your assumption of great responsibilities, each to adjust his own personal life to the demands of a high standard."

THE crowd beneath had become hushed and thoughtful as he shot his words out to them. They expected in that grave moment that he would say more; but as if daunted by his own temerity and unwonted publicity, he abruptly stopped, and like one suddenly frightened, turned and fled. The man on the fountain again lifted his hands and sang with that far-reaching voice. Again they joined him with a new fervor, containing in its volume some enormous throb, quite without excitement, grave in its sincerity.

The King, regardless of everything, forgetful of all save the terrific song which for centuries had led his people to the heights of endeavor, there to be crowned with death or victory, shut his eyes, threw his head back and sang with them. With a final outpouring of fervent wishes, the crowd saw him pass through the door, followed last of all by the white-haired Von Glutz. The noise died away, and the palace gardens began to empty. The King looked around the room for Kent. He was not to be seen. As if mortified by his own moralizing, he had gone.

The door of the room adjoining stood ajar, and the King walked to it, looked in and halted in astonishment. Kent was standing alone by the side of his bed, in which lay Provarsk. The King hesitated for an instant and then turned and tiptoed away. The broken screen caught his glance, and he paused above it, observing that Von Glutz and Paulo were both inspecting the same object.

The Baron looked around with his slow eyes and pointed at the tiny dent in the tiles, bordered with splotches of lead, and called attention to it with a significant smile.

"That," he said, "I take to be the last shot of the last revolt in Marken."

ONCE more that day the King saw the American. It was after twilight; dusk and a full moon had followed one another across the trail of the skies. In the distance, where Marken huddled and shouldered on its hills, could be heard, mellowed, but expressive, the faint sounds of revelry. Great rockets marked fiery courses in the night and then showered upon the red roofs their softly floating and multi-hued rain of stars.

Exhausted by his day of excitement and work, the King strolled meditatively in the garden that had so short a time before been trampled by the feet of a people freed. He came to a secluded path on which the moon seemed to peer intent. He stopped short and bent forward, unconsciously eavesdropping. Those were familiar voices, and familiar shapes, those of the Princess walking with the American, their arms, outlined in somber black and silken white, around each other's waists. The King stepped into the path behind them and gave a loud "Ahem!"

Startled and confused, they fell apart as they faced him. There was but a moment's hesitancy, and John Rhodes, recovering, closed the space between him and the Princess Eloise, and caught her waiting hand in his.

"By your leave, sir," he said to the King.

"Sir," said the King, "the honor is mine!"

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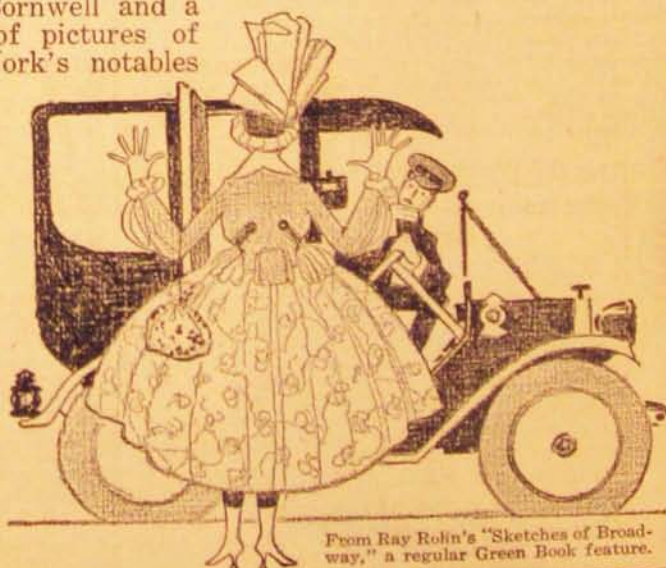
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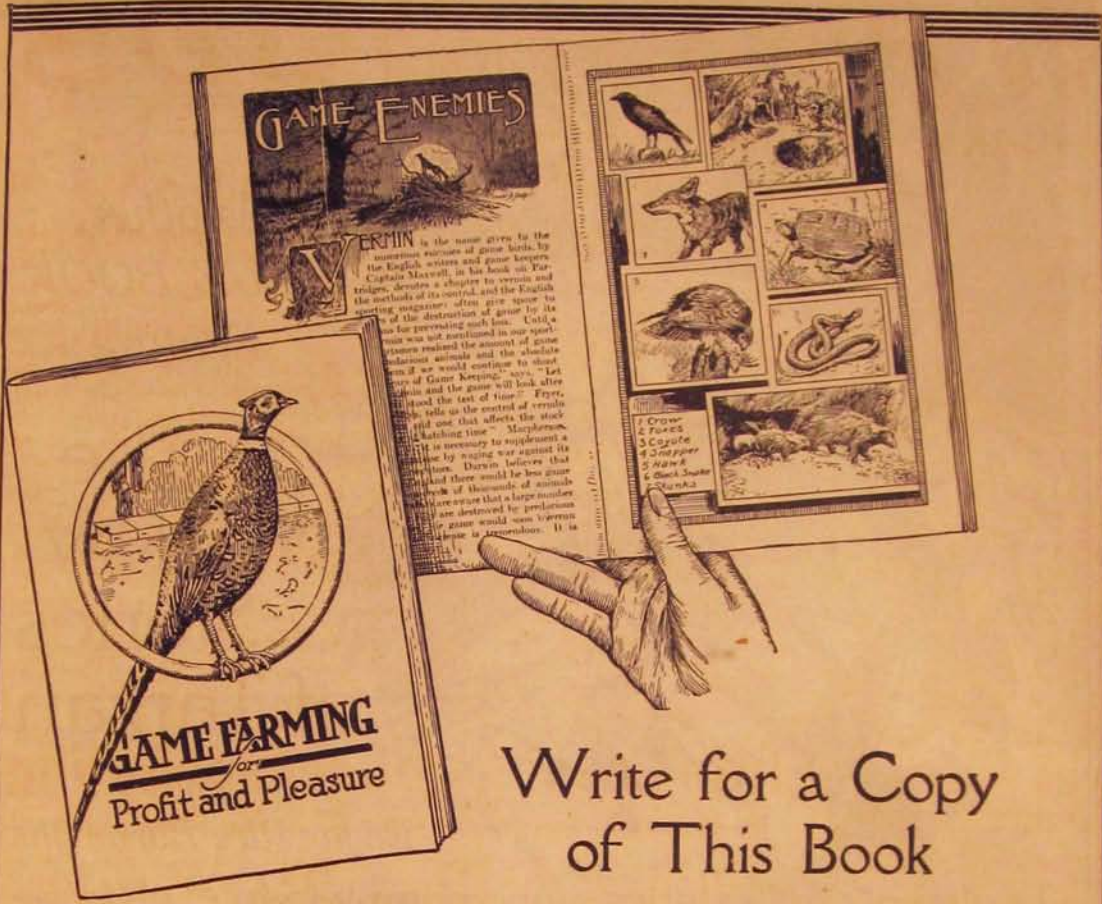
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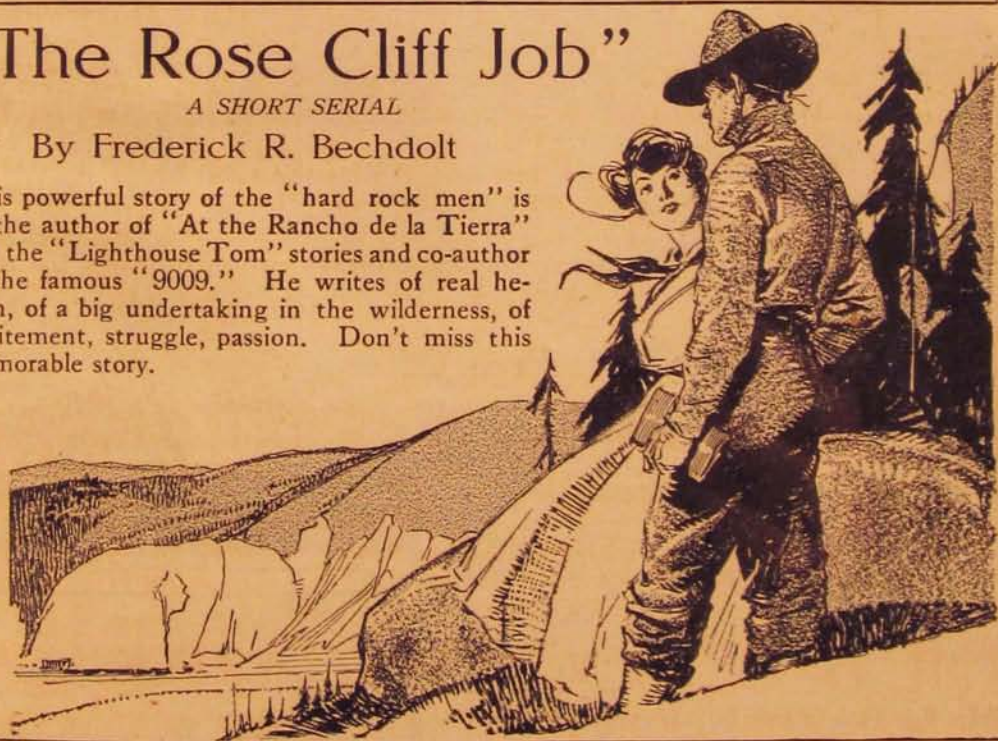
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