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THE BLUE BOOK MAGAZINE

APRIL 1918

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by B. M. Bower *and* Buck Connor

"Unexpected Places"
A Complete Short Novel
by Frank R. Adams

"Kamerad Kelly"
by Edwin Balmer

"Two Kinds of Nerve"
by Frederick R. Bechdolt

A photograph of Cosmo Hamilton in the uniform in which he served during the first year of the war as an officer in the Anti-Aircraft Corps of the British Naval Air Service.

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Cosmo Hamilton

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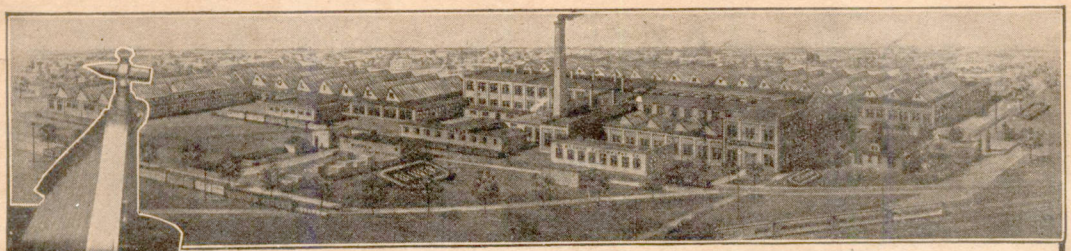
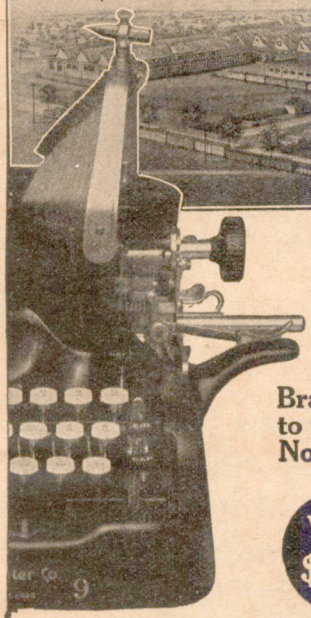
The story, of course, will appear first as a serial in

THE GREEN BOOK MAGAZINE

in which his novel of 1917, *"Scandal,"* appeared, It begins in the April issue, on sale the middle of March.





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THE BLUE BOOK

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DONALD KENNICOTT, Associate Editor.

HEADINGS: Drawn by DOM J. LAVIN

The Hero By Kenneth MacNichol 1020

The men of the coast-guard are a sturdy, weather-beaten crew, plain and simple-minded, as befits men whose work is so hazardous: this episode of their life is typical.

Are We Discouraged? By Crittenden Marriott 1027

He had thought himself something of a whirlwind inventor and a real fellow besides; then things began to happen and he didn't like himself so well.

The Rube and the Rubies By James Francis Dwyer 1035

A cowboy from the West Western breezes into little old New York and runs into a most highly colored adventure: by the author of "The Blue Lizard," "A Bust of Lincoln," etc.

Free Lances in Diplomacy By Clarence Herbert New 1042

"Between the Lines" describes a clever bit of maneuvering that takes our diplomatic adventurers on a jaunt from Austria through Russia and back to a "big third act" in Vienna.

Sibb's Six Specifics By Ellis Parker Butler 1081

One's mind reels to think of this poor devil: he was a Christian Scientist, and he inherited a patent-medicine business, and he got himself engaged to a lady M. D., and—wow!

The Fathers of Polly By A. C. Allenson 1086

Our old friend Dimples plays god from the machine again—helps the fetching Miss Polly to a musical education and defeats her real father's enemy.

A Complete Short Novel

Unexpected Places By Frank R. Adams 1094

The author of "Taking Care of Sylvia," Pleasure Island" and "Princess Bill" is at his joyous best in this lightsome but exciting tale of love and war and mystery in America.

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1918

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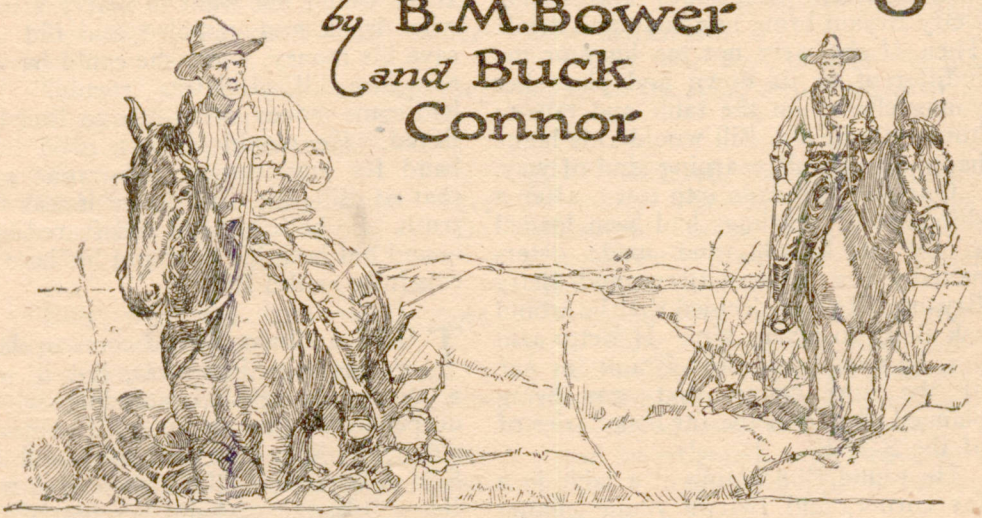
The Reckoning

by B. M. Bower and Buck Connor



THIS is a story of a great hate, and of something else with which it had to reckon at the last. A book might be made of it, but the real story lies in the final issue, and that is what I am going to tell. Of the growth of the hate you must know a little, lest you call them weaklings who hated so long and so bitterly; but I shall make that no longer than is needful to give you full understanding of what came afterward.

Bill Downey and Bud Downey were brothers—good men both, as men are counted good in Texas, though Bud owned more vices than Bill, and was the better loved among their fellows. They feared nothing on earth or under it—save to bare their hearts to the world or to each other. (Most men are like that, unless their hearts are empty and shriveled and worthless.) They were honest without splitting any fine ethical hairs, and they were stanch friends to those they liked, and uncomfortable enemies to all who earned their displeasure. Except that Bill was four years older and more weather-beaten, a little colder of eye and with harsher lines around his mouth, they looked so much alike that the S-M-S outfit called them the Downey twins.

You would naturally expect such men to be inseparable comrades; but these were the haters whose hatred went beyond that of most men. At first, I think, they did not realize what smoldering emotion held them always apart, so that they never could find much to say when they were alone together, as frequently happened. Bud, having a careless optimism for the top layer of his disposition, contented himself with calling Bill a natural-born grouch. Bill, being crusted with a certain diffidence that made him chary of speech, did not call Bud anything at all.

They never quarreled, except when Bud gambled himself into debt and expected Bill to help him out. Even then their words were not many, and Bud always got what money he wanted. Sometimes he paid it back to Bill, but more often he did not; Bill never asked him for it, and never forgot either, that Bud owed it.

THEN a girl—one Betty Bryant, a pert little waitress in Spur—began to play a strong part in their lives. Bill was the first to discover that Betty Bryant was the girl he had been waiting all his life to meet. Bill was a shy fellow, and even if he had dared, he did not know how to make love. His wooing consisted of dropping into the restaurant between meal-hours and letting Betty Bryant bring him food and drink. Then, if she were not too busy or too indifferent to sit down and plant her young elbows on the table and talk to him while he ate, Bill would ride home happy in a dumb, yearning kind of way.

One day Bill rode into town, after a shipment of yearlings had been loaded at the stockyards, and made determinedly for the restaurant and Betty Bryant. He had decided that he would ask Betty to marry him. If Betty said yes, he would ask Boss Frank for one of the new camps that was being planned on one of the far boundaries of of the S-M-S.

He found Bud sitting at a table in a far corner, and Betty's young elbows were planted opposite Bud's plate; and she was smiling at Bud in a way that started a prickly feeling in Bill's scalp, as though his black hair meant to rise like the bristles of his cave-man ancestors when they went to battle for their mates.

The slamming of the screen door made Betty look up, and she came to Bill at once, wearing an indescribable air of relief that wholly disarmed him. You will have to ask Betty how she did it without saying a word on the subject; I can only record the fact that each man grew complacently convinced that the other was merely being tolerated in that restaurant. Wherefore, they rode away together as good brothers should, and they even talked a little of commonplace things to hide their real thoughts.

That is where their hate of each other took definite form in their minds. Bill admitted to himself that he hated Bud because Bud was younger and better-looking, and because he had an easy way of making himself agreeable to a girl like Betty. He did not believe that Bud would ever make any woman happy —he was too self-indulgent, too thoughtless of others; but Bill feared that Betty would be taken in by Bud's plausible way of making people like him.

Bill would have been astonished to know that Bud hated him because of those virtues which Bill possessed as a matter of course. Bud feared that Betty would not want to marry a man who drank and gambled and did not save his money, when she could have a man like Bill. Bill was "steady." He had some money saved—or so Bud believed. He would make a good husband for any woman. Everyone said that of Bill, and Bud knew it was the truth. So he hated Bill and feared him —and hid both his fear and his hate as carefully as did Bill.

THAT a climax should come to their rivalry was inevitable, but it was a climax of misunderstanding which deepened the hate of both. There was a dance at Spur that Christmas, and the S-M-S boys were all there—and so was Betty Bryant. She did her best to be diplomatic and to preserve harmony and prevent awkward proposals, but something went wrong with Betty's diplomacy that night. Bill caught her off her guard at the end of a dance, and desperation made his words as harsh as were the lines about his mouth when he saw her glance quickly—it seemed to him appealingly—at Bud, who was coming up to ask her for the next dance.

"I guess you like some one else better," said Bill bluntly, letting go her arm.

"Y-yes, I do," Betty gulped quite undiplomatically, and turned away with Bud.

But her eyes followed Bill in spite of her intention. She looked at Bill questioningly when Bud asked her to marry him. And she said no; she was sorry, but— Bud's glance followed hers. He met full the look Bill gave him, and whirled Betty defiantly away in a two-step (for this was before that dance went out of style). Bill had won out, just as Bud knew he would, but he could stand there and chew his lip for one dance, anyway. Bud meant to have that dance, Bill or no Bill. After that—well, the trail was wide open into the

unknown. He wouldn't bother either of them again, ever.

Bud had his dance, and without a word he left Betty breathless at the exact point whence they had started. He went out of the hall and out of the little world that had known him. He went hating Bill and Betty Bryant—but mostly hating Bill.

Bill had gone at the beginning of that dance, instead of at the end of it. He went believing that Betty was going to marry Bud. She would be unhappy, and so he did not hate Betty at all. But he hated Bud the more for that reason, and he went because he felt that he could not trust himself to stay and hold back his hand from vengeance.

Whereas the truth of the matter was that Betty Bryant loved a cigar-salesman from Kansas City, and neither Bill nor Bud had ever been given serious consideration as a possible husband. Which was just as well for them, if only they could have believed it.

So the two became drifters, each according to his tastes. And having tastes very much alike because of their blood and training, it was not strange that their lives should, after a while, draw close together again as each worked out his destiny.

CHAPTER II

RANGER BILL DOWNEY, with four years of hard service with the Texas Rangers behind him, rode into camp at Ysleta in the teeth of a gale that seemed to bring all the heat, all the grit and all the parched thirst up out of Mexico, just across the river, and fling them into his face.

He squinted his eyes that way, muttered a few remarks about the wind and the sand and his hunger and thirst and general discomfort, and passed into the shelter of the adobe stable to dismount. Charlie Horn came across the corral and greeted him and stood talking a minute while with his handkerchief he attempted to remove a grain of sand from his right eye. Ranger Downey pulled the saddle and put it where he always put it, and added the blanket and bridle.

"And nothing to show for a darned hard scout!" he observed grumpily. "They're laying so low their bellies are makin' a hollow in the ground—and I never got a sign. Captain here?"

"You betcha. He's in the office right now, saltin' a new man. Got all the earmarks of a real go-getter, too. Ex-marshal from down Eagle Pass way, Vaughan was telling me. Name's Robert Doyle—but say! He shore does look a lot like you, Bill. Got any cousins named Doyle? You two could pass for brothers, easy."

"Well, not havin' a cousin or a brother named Doyle, I guess we-all aint related," Bill retorted unemotionally. "We need him bad enough." He went to the house with Charlie Horn to make his report before he ate, and as he went he wondered, and braced himself for what he might face.

In the office a man was just fastening the Ranger star on the under side of his left lapel. The Captain was gathering up some papers on his desk and smiling a little with his eyes and the corners of his lips. He looked up at the two, nodded to Ranger Downey and indicated the stranger with a turn of his hand.

"Boys, meet Ranger Robert Doyle," he said briefly. "Ranger Doyle, Ranger Horn and Ranger Downey. They'll help you get acquainted with the place."

Charlie Horn stepped forward with the smile of welcome and shook hands with Ranger Doyle. Bill Downey turned and looked into the new man's eyes. He nodded, and got a nod in return. Then he went up to the captain's desk to make his report.

There was nothing strange in that greeting, for Rangers are never very demonstrative. Beyond one half-questioning glance, Captain Oakes did not pay any attention to these two; and if Charlie Horn caught the look in their eyes when for an instant Rangers Downey and Doyle faced each other, it was because he was trained to observe little things that other men would never see.

He went across to the other house and showed the new man where he would sleep when he was at headquarters, and Ranger Downey made his report and went out to rustle himself a

makeshift meal. The incident had closed and left no ripple on the still waters of headquarters routine, save a small interest in the resemblance between the two men. But four years of hard living had aged Bill Downey and sprinkled white hairs among the black, while Bud, who took life easier, looked the same Bud whom Bill had last seen dancing with Betty Bryant. So the resemblance was not so striking as once it had been.

IN the Ranger force, more than in a larger fighting organization, there must be a real friendliness among the men. Look how few they are, and how great the work they are expected to do! Until soldiers were sent to patrol the border with a man to every half-mile or so of boundary,—so they say,—upon the Rangers lay the burden of preserving the peace and security of all that long, wild stretch of potential violence.

Ranger Bill Downey knew all that. Four years a Ranger, and every other Ranger his friend, every other Ranger a comrade to be counted on in any stress—and then Bud!

He drank his cold coffee, ate his cold bean-sandwich and meditated on all it was going to mean to him. Bud, of all the men in the world—Bud! Better an enemy of the blood-feud kind, a man whom he would feel justified in shooting at sight. Better any man than Bud, his own brother, whom he had no tangible quarrel with, yet hated with a dogged animosity that made reconciliation unthinkable because it would not be sincere.

Suppose they were sent out together, as sometimes was almost sure to happen? Bill forced himself to consider that contingency. "He wouldn't go with me," he told himself, setting down his cup. "He hates me worse than poison, worse than what I hate him. He's always hated me, from the time he was a kid and I licked him for sassin' me. He'll quit, now he knows I'm here. He wouldn't work alongside me—never."

Bill thought of resigning. But that would look as though he had let Bud drive him out. He could not contemplate giving Bud so much to gloat over. If anyone was to resign, let it be Bud.

But Bud, though he wanted to do it, would never resign on Bill's account. And let Bill think he had dropped tail like a yellow cur and slunk off at first sight of him? Not on your life! He had never done Bill any harm. Bill had the girl—or if he hadn't, it was his own fault. No sir! He was in it now, and he would stick. If Bill didn't like his company, Bill knew what to do about it. When you came to that, Bill hated him badly enough to do most anything. Bud had always known that, from the time he was a kid and Bill was always bossing him around.

With that agreement of viewpoint the two adapted themselves as best they might to the enforced intimacies of Ranger duties. It never seemed to occur to either that Bill might denounce Bud as a man living under a borrowed name. Bill wondered what devilment had made Bud change it, but he never thought of betraying him. Unobtrusively they avoided each other, and it looked at first as though they were merely slow to get acquainted, as though shyness with strangers, or at most indifference, held them apart.

But little Charlie Horn knew better. He had seen the look in their eyes when they met in the office, and he knew it for the recognition that does not want to recognize. He watched the two for a while, and then he spoke about it to Bill Gillis one day when they two were jogging home from El Paso with nothing much on their minds save the dodging of recklessly driven automobiles.

"Ever notice Downey and Doyle, Bill—way they act when they're together?"

Bill leaned and flicked a fat fly off the neck of his horse. "I've noticed how they *don't* act, when they're together."

"Can't put your finger on a thing, either. What do you make of it?"

"What do you?" As usual, Bill was wary about committing himself.

"Me? I don't. I'm plumb up a tree there, Bill. They're both good boys, and they're a lot alike in more ways than their looks. They're jolly and good company when they're apart, and they never give the bad-eye when they're together. Don't act to me like feud stuff. But I'll bet you they're related.

And I know they've met before somewhere. I got that when Bob first joined and they met in the office."

"I got that much, myself. They're too darned strange to be strangers. You know what I mean. Strangers git acquainted—size each other up, anyway. They don't do neither one. And they look enough alike to be brothers."

CAPTAIN OAKES had noticed the same thing Gillis and Charlie were discussing, and he sent for Bill and tried to get at the heart of the trouble, if trouble there was. He had gone straight at it in his usual fashion—in this wise:

"Downey, what is the trouble between you and Ranger Doyle?" Then he paused a minute. "One of the points I'm particular about is the harmony among my men. It's for that reason I'm asking you—not because I want to pry into your personal affairs. Just what is the trouble between you two?"

Bill dropped his eyes, bit a corner of his lower lip and afterward looked straight at the Captain.

"No trouble at all, that I know of," he said constrainedly but with an air of telling the truth.

Captain Oakes tried another angle.

"You two look enough alike to be related. Ever know him before he joined the force?"

"Well—I have saw him before—a few years back."

"H'm! Ever have trouble with him?"

"Not a bit in the world, Captain."

"I see." (But the Captain did not see.) "Well, do you know anything against him?"

"Not a thing."

"Don't you think he's making good here, then?"

"He is, far as I've seen. Just as good as any of us, Captain."

"Well, what's the matter with you two, then?" The Captain was becoming exasperated, and he showed it in the thinning of his lips. He hated this beating the air, and especially he hated this quizzing of one of his men about a purely personal matter.

"I don't know as anything is the matter—much."

"Much!" Captain Oakes lost a little of his habitual kindliness, and snapped out the word. "Downey, this is childish. If you haven't got anything against the man, why do you act as though you had? It puts a wrong atmosphere into the whole camp. You must have some reason for giving him the cold shoulder the way you do. What is it?"

"Nothing. Maybe we're too much alike, an' kinda don't take to each other." Bill was growing sullen. He too hated this quizzing, this beating the air—which he had beaten pretty thoroughly himself, in times gone. He knew how futile it all was, and how unmendable.

"That's a fine reason!" exploded Captain Oakes.

"I know it, but it's all the reason I can give." Bill's tone was dogged.

The Captain shuffled together some letters and handed them to Bill. "Take these in and mail them," he said shortly, as the quickest means of closing the unprofitable subject.

Captain Oakes did not stop there. He was bound to get his finger on the root of the trouble if that were humanly possible, and when Bud rode in from some mission afield and made his customary report, the Captain put the question to him quite as bluntly as he had presented it to Bill.

"Doyle, why is it you and Downey seem to be on the outs?"

Bud's eyes hardened at that, but he answered readily enough. "Why, I don't know, Captain. We aint, in particular."

"Ever have any trouble with him?"

"Not a bit in the world."

"H'm! Anything in his record that you think is against him?"

"Nothing at all, that I know of."

That left Captain Oakes exactly where he started, except that his theory of an old grudge was gone, with no other theory to take its place.

CHAPTER III

DOWN the rain-sluiced, rough trail which ran through wilderness that would always be wild because that was the way nature made it

and meant to keep it, Ranger Downey and Ranger Doyle rode, driving a bulkily loaded pack-mule before them. Stirrup to stirrup they rode most of the way, and spoke no word that could bide unspoken—rode with hats pulled low against the howling wind that whipped cigarettes to bits before they were smoked, and never once glanced into each other's eyes in friendly fashion—rode with jaws set stubbornly, as were their tempers.

For all that, their minds traveled the same trail, close together as were their bodies. They were thinking, as they swung down a steep, rough waterway into an arroyo gone dry, that the Captain might lead a horse to water, but that making him drink was another job. It was treating them like sulky kids, thought Bill, to send them off to ride the Big Pastures together, just to make them fall in with his ideas and grow chummy. It was, thought Bill, a dickens of a way to cure a person of not liking another person—to make them go off and camp together for a month or so! He was surprised at the Captain's lack of sense.

It was, thought Bud, about the poorest scheme he had ever seen in his life—to send a couple of men off into this God-forsaken hole—hunting friendship. Why, take the best pals in the world, and they'd get plumb fed up on each other's society if they had a deal like this handed out.

Out of the arroyo and into the barren flat beyond, and the two were thinking of Betty Bryant. Had she and Bud married and then "split up" after the too usual course of modern matrimonial ventures, Bill wondered. That would be Bud's fault if it had happened. Bill wished he knew, though he would not have asked Bud to save his life.

Bud wondered what had become of Betty. Maybe she and Bill had never got married at all. Perhaps she was dead, or had tired of Bill and left him. Not that Bud cared—he just wondered. It didn't seem to have done Bill any particular good to win her. He wouldn't be here in the Ranger force if he had a good home. Maybe, if the truth were known, he had won more luck than Bill in that love-game. Serve him right if she had turned Bill down; Bud wished he knew.

THAT night they camped in a little hidden niche in a precipitous mountain wall at the top of a slope where they could see for some distance down into the empty valley. It was Bud who chose the place, riding up and inspecting it first, and then returning for the pack-mule quite as if he were alone and there was no one to consult.

This angered Bill, who was older, and four years longer in the force than Bud, and by all the unwritten laws of their kind, should have been the leader. But he gathered dry wood—though it was mostly small brush broken over the knee, for the matter of that—and started their supper-fire. Bud sliced bacon and brought water, and Bill boiled the coffee and fried the meat. While he was mixing bannock-dough, Bud raked out coals for the baking. All this they did without speech, each doing his share, neither blundering into duplicating the other's work. They sat down with their backs to the wall and the fire and their full plates before them, and began to eat in the silence which carries the chill of unfriendliness.

Bill reached over and broke off another piece of bannock.

"Hereafter, I'm in charge of this outfit, as senior Ranger," he announced stiffly. "That's the custom, and that's what the Captain expects. I could have picked a better camp than this."

"Huh! Could, eh?" Bud slanted a hostile glance toward him. "Yo'-all are in charge of the outfit, you say; why didn't yuh?"

Bill grunted, sopped his broken piece of bannock in the bacon-grease and took a bite.

"What's the matter with this camp—if I may ask?" Bud's tone was not particularly truculent, but at the same time it did not make for peace between them.

"What's the matter with it? Well, for one thing, there aint a level spot big enough for a beddin'-roll. Maybe yo'-all like sleepin' with your toes diggin' in for a foothold, or braced ag'in' a rock. I don't."

"Huh! I like Cloudland mattrusses too, far as that goes. But I don't have

'em very often. If yo'-all want to sleep out in the open flat, take half the blankets and go to it. I'll take the wall at my back—snaky country like this."

Here a horse sneezed, down in the flat, and they both sat rigid for a minute, listening and peering into the translucent glow that comes in that country with the sunset. Bill, not quite satisfied that it was merely one of their horses sneezing, set down his cup, picked up his rifle and eased himself to his feet. He stood for a minute listening and looking, and then went cautiously down to where the horses fed. When he came back and sat down to finish his supper, neither man reverted to their argument about the camp.

They slept together—two beds for only two men being considered a useless piling up of the pack-mule's load. Bill brought up the horses and the mule and tied them closer to camp, as a precaution against thieves, while Bud unrolled the bed in the most comfortable-looking spot he could find and made the camp snug for the night. Back to back, their rifles beside them under the blankets, they slept under the wind-driven clouds and a rind of moon that presently lost its hold of a sharp peak in the west and slipped altogether out of sight.

DAYS and nights spent in such a fashion must leave their trace upon men's souls. Bad enough the isolation, the hardship, the constant need for watchfulness, when the two are friends. These never spoke except when question and answer were a part of grim necessity, or when one spoke in bitterness because of some fancied fault, something done wrong or left undone.

Day by day their hatred nagged and worried and harried the very souls out of the two. So close was the communion of their hatred that they came to feel each other's thoughts, to know by some unnamed sense the brooding memories that came trooping in like croaking ravens at nightfall. The thought of Betty Bryant was with them often, though they never mentioned her name. Each hungered to know where she was and how she fared. Each believed that the other knew, and had some intimate influence upon her life.

The thing became intolerable. When Bill rode in to headquarters to report and to get fresh supplies, he even went so far as to ask the Captain if he could not send another man back to the Big Pastures in his place. This, of course, was breaking more unwritten Ranger laws than Bill had ever thought to break; it reddened his whole face, too, with shame while he asked the favor.

"What's the matter down there?" Captain Oakes rapped out the words angrily. "Can't you handle the job, Downey?"

"Yes sir, I can. Or I have, up to now."

"What's the trouble, then?"

"Nothing." Truth compelled him to say it. "I don't like to work with Doyle, is all." Bill bit his lip. It sounded like a big overindulged booby speaking, and he knew it.

"Had any trouble?"

"No sir. No trouble—not what you could call trouble. I just——"

"Well, Downey, I have something to do besides pet and coddle you fellows. As long as there's work to do, my men will be expected to do it without whining over their little likes and dislikes. I didn't send you down there to have an outing with some particular chum. By your own word, you've nothing against Ranger Doyle. You've had no trouble, you say. I shall expect you to continue to have no trouble—with Ranger Doyle. Ride in and report in ten days. Better keep a close watch on the trail into Paso Segundo. Cattle and guns are being slipped through there, somewhere."

WHITE around the mouth with rage that was mostly directed against himself for placing himself in the way of being humiliated, Bill saddled a fresh horse which the Captain had allotted to him, though he was half minded to resign rather than return to camp. But stubbornness—or perhaps a nobler pride in his own strength of mind—held him to the trail. Let Bud be the one to quit.

The idea rode into camp with him, looked measuringly out of his eyes when he met Bud and neither spoke. Would Bud quit? Couldn't Bill make him quit? And so close was the com-

munion of their hate that Bud felt the change in Bill's thoughts. Bill was turning something over in his mind—something that had to do with him. He was laying some scheme, maybe, to get rid of him. Down there in that God-forsaken country the thing could be managed, if one man was careful and the other man was not.

It would be a damnably treacherous trick, even had they not been brothers, but Bud had reached a point of abnormality where he believed Bill capable of doing it. Well, let him try it, if he were that yellow and low-down! Just let Bill try something like that! He might stand well enough with the Rangers to get away with his yarn afterward, if he turned the trick. But—and Bud lifted his lip in a grin that was two thirds a sneer—there was a great big *if* in the trail. Bill would have to catch Bud napping first!

You know that two may become so closely allied in heart and soul that one immediately senses any slight change of mood in the other, one almost reads the other's thoughts without speech. That, they say, is the gift of love and a perfect trust. But it may be so with a great hate as well. It was so with these two, down there alone together in the Big Pastures.

That night Bill felt Bud's thoughts clinging to him with a new vindictiveness. He felt it in the tenseness, the guardedness of Bud's body when they went to bed and lay, as they always did, back to back, their rifles beside them under the blankets.

"Now, what's he milling over in his mind?" Bill wondered resentfully. "He's got something up his sleeve—he can't fool *me!*" He lay there thinking, more and more inclined to swing the weight of his hatred hard enough against Bud to make him either fight or get out of the Ranger service—though fighting did not greatly figure in Bill's thoughts, for that matter. Bill lay there waiting and thinking and planning, as wide awake as Bud. And Bud knew it, and would not sleep until he was sure that Bill slept. He felt a new malevolence in that still form at his back, and he was watchful. Bill, he reasoned, might be waiting to catch him off his guard.

TOWARD morning they slept, and at dawn Bill rose quietly—but not so quietly that he failed to waken Bud, who sat up startled and then lay down again. While Bill dressed and went over to the cooking-outfit to start a fire, Bud rolled himself a cigarette and smoked it to steady himself. While he smoked, he kept an eye on Bill.

"Why don't yo'-all lay yore gun out in sight?" Bill demanded suspiciously, turning unexpectedly when he felt Bud's gaze upon him. "What yo'-all keeping it hid under the blankets for?"

"I dunno," Bud drawled, maliciously ambiguous as to tone. "I play safe. Better be safe than sorry."

Bill gave a snort and went on starting the fire. But Bud's eyes were still upon him. It irritated Bill, and it puzzled him too. What was it that Bud was plotting? Something there was no good in, Bill felt sure.

Presently Bud dressed and went to look after his horse. When he came back, he went on with the breakfast preparation, while Bill went to water his own horse, as had come to be their custom. In hard-eyed silence they ate their breakfast and went to their long days' scouting.

That evening, when both were again in camp, Bill missed Bud for ten minutes or so. He had gone to the little creek for water, and when he returned with it, Bud was nowhere in sight. Ordinarily that would not have mattered, but after last night Bill was all on edge and ready to seize upon the smallest act of Bud's as some covert treachery. He scanned the near neighborhood cautiously—from the corners of his eyes, mostly, while he pretended to be engaged otherwise. If Bud were lurking behind some rock, watching, it would be folly for Bill to betray any uneasiness.

He made a show of gathering firewood and wandered here and there picking up dry pieces of brush. One full-armed trip he made back to the camp, and still there was no sign of Bud. He flung down the wood, studied the clouds for a minute as if he doubted the continuance of good weather, and then went farther afield, to where the bluff rose steeply.

There, after a few minutes of crafty stalking, he came suddenly upon Bud sitting behind a huge rock. He was cleaning his six-shooter, and his rifle stood leaning against the rock beside him. Bill, peering across the top of another rock near by, set his teeth together hard. His stare drew Bud's eyes swinging in that direction as a magnet pulls a needle. Bud stiffened a little when he met Bill's eyes, and his hand moved involuntarily toward his leaning rifle before reason stopped him.

For long enough to count ten quite slowly they stared hard at each other, reading at last without pretense of denial the black question, the blacker answer, in each brain. Then Bill forced himself to look away, to break off a dead branch from the bush beside him, to go back to camp with the wood he had gathered.

They should have separated then. They should not have tried to stay down there together. Law-abiding men as they both were, men who respected life and who placed duty high before all else, they should have known better than to go on in that way together. Bill did make an attempt to end the intolerable strain upon them both. It was when Bud came walking into camp, a few minutes later, his fresh-oiled six-shooter riding in its holster at his side.

"Why don't yo'-all quit?" Bill asked him bluntly, without preface. "There's other jobs in Texas."

Bud halted and looked at him steadily through the camp-fire smoke. "Why don't yo'-all?" he flung back. "If there's other jobs in Texas, why don't yo'-all go get one?"

"I'm no quitter; that's why!" Bill snapped out the sentence harshly—he who was reckoned a jolly, good companion by his other fellow-Rangers!

"Well, neither am I, if yo'-all want to know." Bud's tone matched Bill's for harshness.

Deadlocked again, they cooked and ate a tasteless supper in silence that tingled with the tension of their nerves. Since one would not yield, neither would the other. And through the warp of their animosity the shuttle of memory wove bitter recollections.

"He was always against me, from the time he was in short pants," Bill brooded into the dying camp-fire. "Plumb ornery when he was a kid, and worse when he growed up—giving me the dirty end of every deal, borrowing money and never paying it back—and sneaking in and cuttin' me out with the only girl I ever did want. And now, when I aint done a thing to him, he'd kill me like a dog if he got half a chance. He was laying for me behind that rock; I knowed it when I seen him. That's a fine kind of a brother to have!"

"Bill, he always did hate me, when I was a kid," Bud's thoughts ran sullenly along the same trail. "He never was like a real brother to me. If he ever had to help me out in a pinch, it'd make him sore so he wouldn't hardly talk to me. Treated me like I was a nigger. Getting the girl oughta satisfied him, but it aint. He's sore yet because he knows I wanted her, and he cheated me outa her. He'd kill me if I gave him half a chance. He was trying to sneak up on me, back there in the rocks; I'd swear to that on a stack of Bibles ten feet high. He'd 'a' got me, too, if I hadn't felt him watchin' me. He's a bird of a brother—he shore is!"

After a while Bill stirred, glanced toward Bud and got up. Bud threw his cigarette-stub into the graying coals and got up. Together they went to their bedding-roll, laid back from the camp-fire in a covert of thin bushes that fringed the bluff, and made ready for the mockery of trying to sleep. They were punctiliously careful to make no move that might be construed as hostile, the while they gave no tempting opportunity for treachery. They did not speak once. Together they crawled between the blankets and laid their guns beside them under the covers as was their habit. Back to back they lay wide awake and staring bitterly up at the stars, thinking, hating, aching with the injustice of their hate. "My own brother laying for a chance to kill me like a greaser!" was the wretched burden of their thoughts.

BILL lay awake, waiting for Bud to sleep first. Bud lay listening to Bill's breathing, waiting for Bill to fall asleep so that it would be safe for him

to relax his vigilance. And both men were tired as dogs after a hunt, for they had been in the saddle since sunrise.

Toward daylight, when both had unconsciously yielded to their weariness and were sleeping like dead men, a coyote slipped into camp and went prowling after the scraps of food thrown out from supper. The tomato-can that held bacon-grease stood on a box set on a boulder. The coyote stood and sniffed, then lifted himself and stood on his hind feet against the rock, snooping for the source of that tantalizing, meaty odor. He touched the box, and it went over, knocking the can against the rock with a clatter.

Bill, trained by hard service to sleeping lightly, woke with his fingers cuddling the butt of his six-shooter. He listened, heard the quiet breathing of Bud beside him, and beyond, by the camp-fire, the sound of a stealthy footstep. Easing himself out of the blankets so that he would not waken Bud, Bill got silently upon his feet and stole toward the alien sound.

Bill knew the camp, knew where every object about it was placed. In the darkness that was just beginning to clarify a little with the coming of light, he went confidently, sure of his ground, all his mind given to locating the cause of the noise that had wakened him. But the box that had been on the rock lay in the deepest shadow, and over it he stumbled, making more noise than the coyote had done.

That startled Bud from his sleep. He made two motions—one with his left hand to feel Bill's empty place in the blankets, the other with his right hand to pull his gun and fire at the vague object he saw rising up by the camp-fire.

Bill whirled when he was hit, fired back at Bud, and fell against the rock. Bud's head went back on his pillow with a soft thud. Two hundred yards or so away, the coyote stopped his slinking trot, sniffed back at the powder smell that hung over the camp, lifted his nose to the dawn and voiced his *yeh-yeh-yoo-eee-eee!* yap of defiance before he dropped out of sight behind a hillock.

After that it was very still in that camp—so still that an early-rising gopher came and hunted there for his breakfast, found a small piece of bannock which the coyote had overlooked, and sat up elatedly and nibbled it between his two paws while he twinkled his eyes at Bill's inert form.

SOME time after the gopher had eaten his fill and gone back to his kind, Bud stirred, groaned a little and drew his right hand up until it rested on his left shoulder. He opened his eyes, lifted the hand and stared hard at his bloodstained fingers. Now he remembered. He blinked a little, considering what had happened to him. He felt again, this time intelligently. His left shoulder was broken, he decided. He looked at the sun, more than an hour high, and wondered why a bullet through his shoulder should hold him senseless for so long. A big, strong man like him should not faint like a woman over a mere shoulder-wound. It worried him—until he investigated further and found a narrow, raw streak along the side of his head. That was it. His head had been tilted,—he had only risen to an elbow,—and the bullet had grazed just above his left temple before it struck home. That had knocked him out for a while, of course. It would any man—even Bill.

Thought of Bill struck him like a blow. What about Bill, all this time? Had Bill gone off and left him lying there, thinking he was dead? Or—and he winced—was Bill—had he killed old Bill?

Bud shut his eyes and lay quiet for a minute, trying not to think of Bill—or, thinking of him in spite of himself, trying to believe that Bill had gone off and left him. But a horse snorted at that moment, and Bud looked involuntarily down the short slope and saw the two horses and the mule switching at the pestering flies, waiting to be led down to the little creek for their morning drink. Bill had not left camp.

Bud had to know. He tried to think that he was merely thirsty, merely trying to nerve himself for the task of getting a drink, but all the while one question drummed at him, insisting that it be answered. He had to know.

Bud remembered just where Bill had stood when he saw him and fired. Why

he had fired he did not know, except that, half awake as he was, he had imagined that Bill was coming at him out of the gloom. But that was hazy in his mind. He had seen Bill and had shot, and Bill had shot. That much was clear—and that much was all that mattered now.

He raised himself painfully to his right elbow, looked toward the rock beside the camp-fire ashes, and went sick at what he saw. For several minutes he lay with his right arm curled around his face and shivered. But that could not last. He had to *know*.

IT was the smell of coffee boiling, and the feeling of blessed, cool dampness on his face and neck and chest, that pulled Bill back out of that mental void wherein the mind pauses on the edge of things mortal. A voice was saying, "Steady, there! Stead-y, stead-y—be-e careful!" with a droning monotony that soothed while it pulled insistently at his consciousness, like a child pulling at its mother's skirts. There was no sense to the words, no familiarity in the tones, but they pulled Bill back, away from the edge of things, back to a knowledge that a warm wind was blowing across his face, and that it brought the aromatic odor of strong coffee boiling near by.

Bill tried to move. He must have moved, for suddenly a familiar voice spoke, and it was like opening a door in a wall and letting Bill back into his everyday existence.

"Say, cain't yo'-all keep yore laigs still, 'thout I set on 'em?" That was Bud, gone back to the full melody of his middle-Texas drawl and dialect. "It's bad enough to tear bandages and tie 'em with one hand when yo'-all lays quiet!"

Bill looked out from under heavy, sunken eyelids and made sure it was Bud who knelt beside him and grumbled while he ministered. Their eyes met questingly, held for a minute and shifted self-consciously.

"We-all are bum shots, Bill," Bud said with a lightness that did not deceive. "I went and messed yore insides up something scan'lous—but I'm hopin' yo'-all kin hold a cup of coffee without leakin' it out through the bullet-holes. Ef yo'-all kin do that, I'm hopin' yo'-all kin tie me a band around my shoulder after a while. I taken one tea-towel for yo'-all—the cleanest one. But they's another I saved out for me."

"I—heard a noise and got up to—" Bill's voice told how he was groping for the lost link in the chain of his memory—told, too, how weak he was. "And then yo'-all—"

"We-all aint talkin' about that there," Bud cut in hurriedly. He had had more time to think than had Bill, and his hate had reckoned with something bigger and stronger, and had gone down defeated. "We-all are talking about coffee, right now."

Bud's face was pasty-yellow; his eyes were sunken and had the shine of fever; his lips were dry and blackened at the edges—but they smiled. "I shore am sorry I hurt yo'-all," he said gently. "I don't guess either one of us has been in our right minds lately."

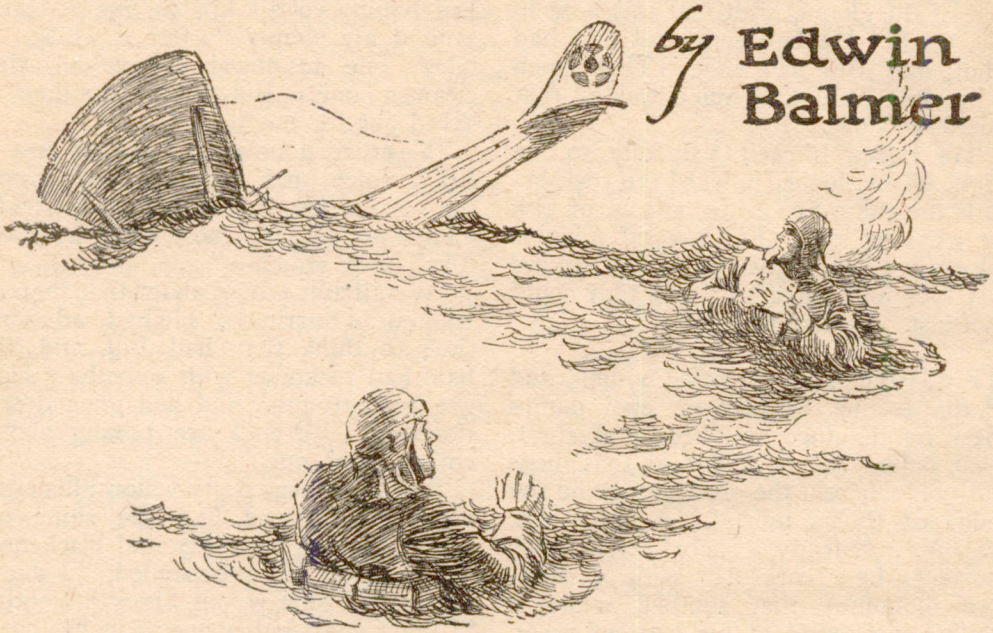
"We been damn' fools—an' then some," said Bill weakly.

PURE luck they called it when next day came Rangers Horn and Gillis to the camp, sent down by Captain Oakes to relieve Rangers Downey and Doyle, who were to report to headquarters. Pure luck, too, that Bud was tough of fiber and hard to kill, and so had been able to keep Bill alive and as comfortable as shade, water and plenty of one-armed ministration could make a man who has been shot through his middle.

They set Bud upon his horse, rigged a makeshift stretcher with a blanket and poles and made painful, slow progress to the railroad and a doctor. They did not question Ranger Doyle's statement that an attack had been made upon the camp just at dawn. They did not question the statement—but neither did they believe it. They simply repeated it to Captain Oakes and refrained from making any comment. And Captain Oakes, whatever he may have thought, reported Rangers Doyle and Downey wounded while on scouting duty, and let it go at that.

Stories of Yankees "Over There"

by Edwin Balmer



Kamerad Kelly

AWAY on the western rim of the ocean-horizon was a solitary ship—a mere mottled speck indistinguishable, at most times, from the swelling, spuming sea. It was only the altitude at which Billy Boal and Red Cumnor were flying which let them see it at all, so well mottled was the ship, and so gray and dim was the day. Otherwise the semicircle of the North Atlantic, west of the Kerry coast, appeared to be all empty. The seaplane was more than twenty-five miles, by reckoning, away from Sybil Head; and the right engine, of the two twin motors which propelled the seaplane, was running slow and stalling.

The big sea "bus" could fly with one motor; but—probably on account of the cold—the left engine also was running none too regularly; so Billy Boal leaned forward, tapped Cumnor's shoulder and signed to him: "How about going home?"

"Not yet!" Cumnor, the observer, signaled back; he pointed the direction in which he wished Billy to fly; and Billy bent his head and obliged him.

They were flying low, at little over a thousand feet, most of the time; for it was mid-January and very, very cold. It was altogether too stormy and cold for the regular patrol by seaplanes over the gale-tossed North Atlantic lanes. Billy and Red had set out that morning only for a short turn along the Irish shore when the will-o'-the-wisp of a periscope just ahead, a peculiar splash which seemed surely to be made by a wave against the conning-tower of a U-boat running awash, and the suspicion of a dim, shadowy hull stealing along under the surface, began to tempt and lure them. So, casting all caution to the gale, they had swooped on and on till now they were quite alone over the ocean—and with Red seeing another conning-tower.

An actual one, this time, and more than a conning-tower! It was a U-boat, a submersible cruiser of the largest class, afloat on the surface and headed to the seas. It mounted two large guns,

probably six-inch rifles; it showed the usual conning-tower, hatches and periscope-masts; and it showed something new, also—a big, blackish bulk about which most of the men on deck were gathered, just abaft the conning-tower.

It appeared to be a movable thing, and Red's first idea was that it must be a mine about to be laid; but that was a queer place to lay a mine, and the thing wasn't at all like any mine which he had seen. So he leaned back and signaled Billy, the pilot, to circle a bit and not get too near quite yet; for it seemed quite certain that no one on the U-boat had sighted the gray-painted seaplane up among the dun and dirty clouds, and Red wanted to watch what was going on below.

The Germans were lowering the big, bulky object over the side now—not at all as they would cast a mine adrift. The vibration of the seaplane made it difficult for Cumnor to keep his binoculars steady; but he could see that upon the deck, there was a great coil of heavy chain which went through a mechanism undoubtedly for lowering and hoisting. Astern of the submersible the water spumed slightly, showing that the screws were turning to hold the vessel against the wind.

A LOOKOUT on the U-boat saw the seaplane now; and something like a panic struck the crew. Men jumped to the guns; others set themselves to hoisting back the big object.

Red Cumnor turned his hooded and helmeted head; only his eyes and the bridge of his nose showed, but Billy knew that Red's request for "keeping off" was canceled and that his mittened hands were on the release-levers controlling the high-explosive bombs in the racks below. Billy turned the nose of the seaplane down for the dive of attack. Upon the submersible, the gun-crews had elevated and pointed their rifles and were letting go. Shrapnel puffed far in front of Billy and too high; shrapnel burst below and much closer.

"Contact-charges, Red! Contact!" Billy yelled. "Not the depth-bombs!" They were dropping down frightfully fast and with engines going. Red, of course, could not hear him; the smash of the shrapnel a few hundred feet away came only as a thudding "pop-pop." The displacement of air rocked and tossed them.

"All right, old top!" Red gave his battle-shout and took his eyes from the target below to glance at the altimeter. He swiftly calculated their rate of flight over the surface of the sea and made estimate of the speed of the U-boat; for he could see, from the wake, that it was moving now.

Billy simplified his problem of bomb-dropping by "flattening out" and flying level, and swerving the seaplane so as not to cross but to follow the course of the submersible. It got them more anti-aircraft shells, and it got them machine-gun fire—they could not hear the machine-guns, and the bullets did not hit them, but they could see the steamlike jets of the firing from the deck. Now they were just behind the German, and Red let one contact torpedo drop and, almost instantly, another.

Neither struck; they hurled up great geysers of water to the right of the submersible—not sufficiently close to damage it, but near enough to convince the commander that some one wasn't much shaken by a little shrapnel. At least, they seemed to set the Germans recalculating. Before Billy could bank and bring the 'plane back into position for another try, the Germans were getting the big object under hatches, and the vessel was dashing off at full surface speed, the gunners working rifles and machine-guns ceaselessly.

CUMNOR'S fingers tapped down the sending-key of his radio; he had not sent warning before, because the Germans recently had appeared to have their wireless receivers tuned to wave-lengths to intercept messages. Now, of course, he didn't care.

"Sighted U-boat, newest type, about 25 miles W. S. W. Sybil Head, making off W. Engaging. —Boal, Lieut. U. S. N., Seaplane 43."

Billy put the seaplane behind the German again; a bullet or two from the machine-guns tore through the wing-fabric; a bullet or a shrapnel-splinter hit the left engine and smashed the

feed-pipe. That was bad business, as it was the left engine which was doing most of the flying; but they were almost overhead again, and Red was releasing more bombs. They did not hit, but one was awfully close, Billy saw—close enough so that Billy patted Red as he bent sidewise and forward to try to fix the feed-pipe. It was no use; with one engine they could keep flying, but they could move but slowly into the wind, and quick maneuvering was almost impossible. The Germans saw this and speeded off straight into the gale; but when Billy, by a mighty effort, came about behind them and began to overtake them again, the submersible started to go under.

The Germans had got their big, unrecognizable object below the hatch; the crew tumbled down after it; the conning-tower hatch closed. Only two men remained on deck, one at each of the guns; these were loaded and elevated; and they fired as the seaplane fluttered up from behind. Then they went into the water; and the men who fired them were washed off and left in the swirling wake of the submerging boat. The guns went under water without being drawn below decks as usual; but the white churn of the wake was still visible below; and Billy Boal, leaning forward, reminded Red now: "Depth-charge, this time. Depth!"

Red dropped one and saw the splash of its strike too far to the left of the wake; it went down into the water for several seconds before a circle of sea uprose, mushroomed and deluged down again.

The wake of the submersible altered; it was no longer spuming foam; it was a whirling, much less distinguishable streak of wave-reactions to deep disturbance. It trailed off aslant, and Billy came about and followed from behind again before Red let go his next depth-charges. From a quarter of a mile away they gazed back to see clouds of white water rise and fall. Returning, they found no oil or débris where the maelstrom of the explosions was settling; but neither could they find the streak of further motion below the water.

They circled and waited. The specks of the swimming men, where the submerging of the ship had swept off the gunners, now were gone. Gone too—or at least unlocatable for the moment—was the mottled ship which they had seen off to the west. So Cumnor, putting his hand on his sending-key, repeated his first report and completed it to the empty atmosphere in general:

"Seaplane 43. Sighted enemy submersible, newest type, mounting two large guns, about 25 m. W. S. W. Sybil Head. Attacked with contact charges; after running fight, German submerged about 35 miles W. S. W. Sybil. Attacked by depth charges. All trace lost; destruction possible but not ascertained.—W. R. Boal, Lieut. U. S. N."

He repeated it twice, after short intervals, while Billy nursed the stuttering right engine to make it take them back to Ireland.

"S. O. S.," he added the appeal to whoever might be hearing. *"We're going it for land but hardly expect to make it; if you don't hear any more, look for us about twenty to twenty-five miles W. S. W. Sybil."*

HE felt Billy pummeling him, and turning, he found Billy yelling and pointing at the engine. Billy's shout became suddenly audible as the engine stalled and the air-screw simultaneously ceased its thrashing roar.

"Not going to make it!"

"All right!" Red bawled back. "Got any news?"

Billy was busy forcing the nose of the plane down to make as decent a volplane as possible; he got the bus dropping right and flattened out beautifully just above the waves; but that sea was no sort of landing-place that morning. The waves swept over the frail pontoons, battering and sucking them under; the waves tipped the lower left wing into the water, ripped it and drew it down; they receded and gave grace for Billy and Red to get into their sea-bags and with life-floats about them, to leap off the end of the fusilage before the bus became a tangle of smashed spars and wires and tattered fabric, weighted down by the engines, and sinking.

Billy seized the bit of line attached to his life-buoy and tossed it to Red, who tied it to his so they would drift together.

"Notice anybody about?" Billy asked.

"No; but I sent word we'd be somewhere about here."

"Supposed so; how'd you report the sub?"

"Possibly destroyed—not ascertained."

"Correct. What did you say they were doing?"

"When we came on them?"

"Yes."

"Didn't say anything about that; didn't know how to describe it. Do you?"

"No."

"Billy, what the devil you suppose they were doing?"

"Seemed mighty important to me."

Red choked with sea-water and sputtered: "Me too!"

"Did you see their guns? They didn't take 'em in—went right down with 'em mounted on deck."

"Yep; I got that. Nothing new, though—made of metal that water don't hurt. That other affair was different."

"You bet; seemed to me to be after something under water."

"Near here, too."

"What the—" Billy sputtered with water. "Look *there!*"

WHEN the wave had raised him, Cumnor saw a U-boat slipping out of the sea half a mile to the south, perhaps. Its top completely emerged, and it moved slowly along the surface.

"Our boy?" Red asked, having got only the barest glimpse. His tone told how firmly he had fixed in his mind the destruction of the ship which he had reported officially only as "possible."

"No; ours couldn't have got here yet; besides, this boy has to get his guns up; ours had his fixed on deck."

"I see," Red replied, observing the same distinction. This U-boat had emerged with bare decks, above which guns now were being hoisted. But it had no immediate plan of offense; it merely moved slowly and very methodically back and forth over a little patch of the sea. Now a second submersible, like to it in every appearance, emerged a quarter of a mile beyond it and set itself to the same strange task.

"That seems to be the subs' corner of Fifth and Broadway," Red commented, somewhat dazed. "Anyone else showing up?"

"What in the devil are they doing?" Billy demanded.

"What was big brother Archibald doing on the same corner when we blew by?"

RED shivered, drenched again by a wave. They both were in bags of rubberized fabric which went up through their life-floats and fastened tight under their arms.

"Feel in your bag alongside the ration," Billy suggested to Red. He referred to the emergency-ration pouch. "Roundish sort of thing—patent stove. Heats if you let a little water in."

Red investigated and discovered the object. "Thanks, old top," he acknowledged.

"Somebody sent me two," Billy said, "so I stuck one out of the way with your things. We both want to live to see this out."

"You bet!"

"Wonder if my Hun friend Kelly is among those present just over there?" Billy said, gazing back at the submersible.

Kelly—as many may remember—was the name assumed by a certain German U-boat officer with shore-going proclivities. Whether the shore was German or English or Irish was all one to "Kelly;" he merely changed clothes, conversation and food-cards and visited where he pleased. Upon one of his rambles along the Kerry coast, Billy had encountered him with eventualities which left lingering in Billy hopes for a return-engagement.

"This is his beat; hadn't heard you'd driven him off it," Red encouraged.

"Red, those boats are looking for something on the bottom!" Billy cried.

"Not looking," Red corrected. "Too deep here; Ireland's on the edge of the continental shelf; there's thirty to fifty fathoms of water below us."

"What do you think they're doing, then?"

"Listening!"

"For submarine-signals from below?"

"Yep! The near one's located 'em, too. Look at that!"

THE nearer of the two German submersible cruisers had ceased to move and was holding itself headed to the seas as had the original U-boat which they had discovered the hour before and driven from the same spot. The hatches of this boat opened, and the crew got out upon deck the same sort of strange object which Billy and Red had seen lowered from the side of the first vessel.

"Another sub down there, all right!" Red cried. "They're trying to raise it!"

"Not with that thing; that's no lifting-device for a ship."

"What is it?"

"A deep-sea box for sending down a man deeper than diving-armor'll take him—or for taking one up! There's a sub below, all right; and they're trying to take the crew out it! That's what Bro. Archibald was doing, too."

"Mighty important crew to have half the subs in the sea trying to help 'em. Huns must be mighty short of men to turn so considerate, with so many American ships to sink."

"What I was thinking, too."

"Hah! Shell!" Red announced when a white squirt of water spurted a score of feet into the air between the U-boats. A second sent its spray flying before the sound of the far-away gun came down the wind. "Thought, with all my signaling, some one must be happening in soon."

The submarine which was lowering the big steel box over its side remained motionless; but its companion instantly dashed away. It made no attempt to conceal itself; rather it was running openly and as a decoy to lead the attack away from the other vessel. It ran, opening fire with both its big rifles; and from three or four miles away an Allied vessel—of which Billy and Red could see only a splotch of smoke now and then—engaged it. The Allied ship seemed to be alone and to mount but two long-range guns, for the battle appeared to be even, as far as gunfire went, with the German evidently succeeding in his stratagem of leading the Allied vessel away; for the firing became more distant, and both combatants disappeared. There remained only the submersible with the great metal box lowered over its side. The box seemed to have missed its objective below, for it was drawn up part way.

Far off, the firing ceased; a few minutes later a spurt of spray went up beside the remaining submersible, and it offered no fight. It drew up the box, put it below hatches quickly and submerged, with shells striking beside it.

A SOLITARY vessel came up, of the type—familiar in English and Irish waters—which had been a private yacht in peaceful days, but converted to a ship of war by great daubs of gray-blue and green-gray paint, a couple of four-inch rifles and two pair of twelve-pounders. This had just come out of a fight, for its bow was shattered, its after mast was a stump and its pumps were going, as was evidenced by the great jets of water expelled from its side. But it came up looking for another fight, all alert, with crews at its guns, at full speed and zigzagging. Torpedoes, perhaps, were fired at it from below the sea; but otherwise it met no attack. The men in its crow's-nest, searching the spume for periscopes, sighted Billy and Red from far off, and the yacht steered for them.

"Cheshire Cat!" Billy recognized the vessel. "Lord Aliston, commanding."

"Hot old sport!" Cumnor praised affectionately. "He's going to stop to pick us up; nothing to him that there's a sub or two poking about the premises."

The *Cat's* commander sustained his reputation. He merely headed in the direction in which the U-boat had disappeared—this precaution being to present the breadth rather than the length of his ship to torpedoes—and picked up Billy and Red. Lord Aliston welcomed them in person as they came up over the side. He was delighted that they were aviators, refreshed at their being Americans. He was about fifty, a gen-

tleman and a sportsman, "With three sons, two daughters and a wife in France. Makes a man ashamed of himself, very, to be merely on patrol."

Billy glanced down the deck, where at least one German shell seemed to have struck forcefully if without fatalities, and he ventured to remark that Lord Aliston shouldn't feel himself absolutely aloof from the strife.

While he personally escorted them to his cabin and offered garments, stimulants and bed, they reported to him, briefly, what they had observed. The *Cheshire Cat* instantly had started, and its turbines were turning at full speed.

"All according to advance-notices, that old boy," Red appreciated as he drained his glass of "Johnny Walker."

Billy gulped and nodded. "'Bovril' and Cockle's Pills put out for us," he observed. "Everything as advertised in *Punch*. Two thumbs more of the John, please—thick ones."

Red helped Billy and himself. "Brrr!" He shivered, appreciating for the first time how cold he had been. "Come on," he urged Billy. "'Sall right; we're not in uniform now."

Then they garbed themselves variously from the offerings of different chests and drawers and went out on deck.

SOMEWHERE astern the radio was snapping audibly. They found their host forward on the bridge with his navigating officer, the quartermaster and a yeoman. Doubled lookouts were forward, astern and aloft; the crew was at torpedo-attack stations throughout the ship.

"Eccentric conduct, that, when you think about it," Lord Aliston now commented upon the report Billy had made when he came aboard. "Something extraordinary up,—or down, one should say,—*decidedly.*"

Sybil Head was just in sight; the *Cheshire Cat,* though steaming at full speed, was circling the area where the last submersible had disappeared.

"The first U-boat we saw here; we bombed it, you know, sir," Billy reminded. "Did you happen to see any trace of it later?"

"Ten men," Aliston replied. —"Or was it eleven, Clavelock?" he asked of the quartermaster.

"Eleven in all, sir," the quartermaster reported, "including their prisoner."

"Quite so. It was eleven we picked up back there. Reminds me!" Lord Aliston recollected with sudden concern. "I rather ran into the undergarment stock for some of them. Did you chaps find anything suitable left?"

"Camel's-hair, thanks," Billy replied, relieving his mind. "The best sort of wear for this weather. About the men you picked up, please—were they the U-boat's crew?"

"In collapsible boat," Aliston informed. "Their vessel had been badly bombed and so smashed, they said, that most of crew were killed. Just able to rise and float for period to put off the eleven in boat. Extraordinarily collapsible, it was; we got them none too soon. Good bit of bombing you two did."

"Thank you, sir," Billy acknowledged for himself and Red.

"About the designs of the enemy here," Aliston continued: "Gentleman from the submarine—the German's prisoner, whom Clavelock referred to; he's in saloon now—overheard most interesting information. Have a look at him; join you soon myself for lunch."

Billy and Red went below.

"The old boy's bothered," Billy informed Cumnor. "An Englishman of that sort always argues things like the most comfortable sort of underwear when he's expecting something to turn up the next second and blow him, or the blooming empire, to bits."

"He's sending for help, anyway," Red informed. "I've been listening to the radio; he's reported what's happened and part of what we've told him —but not all; and he's expressed the opinion that he may not be able to handle the outcome alone."

THEY went down to the quarters where the ten Germans who had been picked up in the collapsible boat were under care. They were two gunners, two torpedo-gunners, the chief engineer and three of his crew, the commander and one seaman. They had nothing to say. Up in the saloon

lounged a dark-haired gentleman with plaster across his nose from cheek to cheek; he was taking life very easily and reading a copy of the Paris *Matin*. He proved to be the gentleman who had made the first inroads upon Aliston's undergarments—Señor Ruez, a Spanish gentleman who had been a passenger upon the English ship *Gemmet* when it was sunk by the German submersible *U 297*. The rest of the passengers and crew had been left to drift in open boats; but the German commander had observed that he was a Spaniard, and as it had been the policy of the German government—at the time of receiving last news from Berlin—to keep good relations with Spain, the Germans had taken him aboard *U 297*, where as the Kaiser's guest he had observed the destruction of another British vessel. He had just escaped from the wrecked U-boat.

A steward was passing back and forth, laying plates and cups in the rack laid upon the dining-table. He brought in hot soup, and Lord Aliston descended from the bridge. There were four places set, and Aliston seated Billy Boal next him, with Cumnor and Señor Ruez opposite.

"Tell these chaps what you were telling me," Aliston bade Ruez.

The Spaniard gazed about doubtfully. "What I heard when I was upon the *U 297?*" he inquired. He seemed to fear punishment from the men now prisoners, for he bent forward and spoke in a low tone.

"I will tell you. I am not pro-German; I am not even neutral. I am for the ending of the war with Allied victory. From what I knew before being captured,—the same circumstances which everyone knew,—and from what I overheard when a guest of the Kaiser, this seems to be the fact:

"When the German army failed at Verdun, it was more than a military check for the Fatherland; it was a dynastic disaster. As the war went on, nothing had become more vital for Germany than for the heir to the throne to become popular—a national idol."

Billy gazed from Ruez to Cumnor, who looked back at Billy. Each wondered whether the Johnny Walker was going to his head. But Lord Aliston remained all attention.

"That was evident," he agreed. "It is well established that the tremendous attempt at Verdun was made with the Crown Prince's army primarily to manufacture popularity for the heir to the throne; when it failed, he descended to irremediable odium."

RUEZ nodded. "Quite so—irremediable. Obviously it became imperative, therefore, that another of the sons of the All Highest—and which one was actually chosen, I can only conjecture—be supplied with splendid and glorious deeds to bring him into popular favor. The military situation recently seemed to offer no certain promise for anyone; besides, the experiment for the benefit of the Crown Prince did not encourage another of the same sort. The high-seas fleet was still to be retained at its strategic base. There remained the submarine service."

Billy bent nearer now, and paid complete attention.

"Quite so," Lord Aliston encouraged.

"The underseas service—whatever the attitude regarding it in Allied or neutral countries—remains most idolized in Germany, where I may say that the figures which Allied officials call the facts are not known. The undersea vessels strike at the two most hated enemies—Britain and America. Signal success in the underseas service would put a prince upon a pinnacle of popularity. Moreover there were other reasons for sending a prince upon a U-boat: the difficulty of procuring crews, which recently has become known—this in spite of the idolizing of the submarine-service. Things had got to a pass where it became convenient to be able to say that a son of the Kaiser has shared your perils. Obviously the perils were very great for the prince; but the reward—the crown! At any rate, I am convinced that there is upon a U-boat near here a personage so important as to be referred to only in whispers; and that personage, this morning, is in most desperate peril!"

Billy straightened up, with his pulses throbbing. The business of *U 297*

when the seaplane first observed it, the business of the U-boat which had just disappeared, the reason for the other's running away as a decoy on the surface to sacrifice itself if need be—all this had become perfectly plain.

"And he is undergoing this danger where?" Lord Aliston inquired.

Ruez looked about him again before he spoke.

"Off Hag's Head; I heard that plainly. It is where *U 297* was summoned and was going when discovered and attacked; that is where all the U-boats in this part of the sea have been summoned—Hag's Head, above Liscannor Bay, County Clare, I believe—in deep water, ten miles from shore."

"Hag's Head!" Billy repeated. "That's eighty miles above here! You were below, I suppose, when *U 297* was first discovered, so you don't know—"

"Have a mutton-chop!" Lord Aliston offered calmly, at the same time that Billy felt Red kicking him violently. Señor Ruez, puzzled, resumed eating.

"You asked me to repeat what I had heard," he said to Lord Aliston. "That is all I can do."

"Quite so! Quite so!" Aliston commended. "Pray continue!"

BUT Ruez remained silent now, offended. Lord Aliston returned above. Billy gazed long and more critically at the Spanish guest, and a deep, crimson color suffused his face. He let Cumnor exchange a few trifles with Ruez; then a junior officer came for Red and himself and escorted them down to a compartment muffled off from the rest of the vessel and with one side the bare, thin steel of the hull.

Instruments — needle-pointed, jewel-balanced, delicately diaphragmed mechanisms to record vibration-waves, the minutest of disturbances—were screwed to the steel of the ship; certain of the instruments extended through to take their vibrations direct from the water. Two men, with microphones at their ears, were seated at tables recording what they heard. A third, with a thick notebook before him, was endeavoring to codify and decipher their records.

"We've known for some hours that a mighty important U-boat was in trouble not far away," the English officer informed. "We could get submarine radio-signals, but we couldn't read them; they seemed to have changed their code since we last learned it. We were pretty sure, though, that the first signals were distress-calls and that the others were answers from all about—ten or a dozen boats. Now, we couldn't locate the boat in trouble by tracing the radio; we could only guess the situation roughly; but we knew, if we came anywhere close, we'd get vibration-signals,—submarine bell,—for she'd be sending these to locate herself to her own vessels coming to help her."

"We saw a couple of subs doing that," Billy said.

"What you saw was probably the first and second attempts to aid the ship. It was undoubtedly guiding those vessels by bell-signals, but making them so faint that they didn't travel far. We picked up only one or two of them. Their microphones have been getting the vibration of our screws, so they know we're close, and they probably aren't signaling by bell at all, now."

One of the officers, who had the microphone at his ear, put a hand forward and pressed down a key; and from below the ship came a vibration broken and restarted and broken again in the letters of the Morse code.

"What's that?" Billy inquired in a whisper.

"Our submarine bell; we're asking them, in plain German, to surrender; we're offering to get a real wrecking apparatus out here, if they will."

THE vibration ceased; the officer who had signaled gave attention to his microphone again.

"Any answer?"

"No sir; I can make out the vibration of more submarine engines moving in the water near us, sir."

"How many altogether now?"

"Five, I think, within five miles."

"I'll report that," said the officer who had guided Billy and Red; and he went out. They followed him after a few minutes during which the microphones made out the sound of the submarine

screws more plainly and in addition heard them signaling to each other.

"You don't think the boat in trouble is off Hag's Head?" Billy asked.

"We're getting word that submarine bells are beating off Hag's Head; but we have no doubt that is merely a part of an organized effort to draw us up there, sir."

Billy and Red went out. "Organized effort is the word," Billy said. "What do you make of Ruez?"

"I guess he's obvious enough now," Red suggested. "Suppose you were commanding a U-boat ordered at any cost to save another; suppose your boat was bombed so you had to be captured; wouldn't it occur to you, perhaps, to pass yourself off as a Spanish guest among the Germans and to tell things you'd overheard?"

"I get that perfectly," Billy said. "But what's the idea in allowing him loose?"

"To hear his lies, of course; read up on your Bernhardi on how to make war. The Huns have the great system of lying, taught them in youth, and which they cling to; Bismarck or one of their really great brains worked it all out. When you want to lie, make it half the truth. Aliston knows they do that; so he left him loose to get the half-truth."

"That the reason for the excitement about that boat is that one of the Kaiser's sons is down there?"

"He told us two things," Red suggested. "One that a prince of the royal blood is in the boat in trouble, the other that the boat's off Hag's Head. Now, we know that isn't so; but he doesn't know we know it; for he doesn't know what we saw before he saw us and what we ran into afterward."

A YEOMAN saluted and requested them to report to the commander. Lord Aliston was upon the bridge, gazing out, apparently without a worry in the world, upon the wind-swept water.

"I've just received report," he said to Billy, "that we seem to be quite surrounded. I've sent for destroyers; but meanwhile—do you two wish battle-stations?"

"Please, sir!"

The Englishman assigned them. Gongs were beating throughout the ship, and on deck a bugle was blowing "General quarters." There had been a respite for a few minutes while some of the crew were given food; now, though nothing whatever showed above the water, the microphones told that the German submersibles were all about them, prepared for attack, and the gongs and the bugle were calling all men back to battle-stations.

Billy and Red went forward to the port twelve-pounder, where two men had been hurt in the morning fight. They swept the gun over the sea, still empty; but now, the word came, the submarine bells were beating through the water to right, to left, before and behind.

PRESENTLY three U-boats broke the water almost at once. The *Cheshire Cat's* forward four-inch gun flashed at the same second as the stern piece roared into action. Billy found an entirely private target for his twelve-pounder—light of projectile but a very quick firer. All four twelve-pounders were going now, as well as both fours; and shells were arriving from the U-boats. They strewed the crew of the forward four; they stripped the other forward twelve-pounder; they burst below the decks and stopped the engines. The after four was still firing; now it stopped, and Billy's gun leered up into the air. But though all the *Cat's* guns but one twelve-pounder were silenced, Billy saw the shells striking about the U-boats heavier than ever before.

The big submarine particularly, which he had tried to engage, got one fair and hard amidships; and while the others were submerging now, that one dared not go under, but ran away on the surface with a destroyer after it. More destroyers came up—American destroyers, breaking their battle-flags behind and lowering their boats as they came up. For they seemed to see, before either Billy or Red realized it, that the *Cheshire Cat* was sinking.

Sight of their lowered boats convinced Lord Aliston too and he called to the bugler to blow again—"Abandon ship!" He himself came down

from the bridge, where he had stayed all through the action. He was going about, seeing that all but the dead were got up from below. He saw the wounded men first, and then the prisoners and then his guests, and then his men and himself, into his boats and the boats which rowed to them from the destroyers.

SO he sent Boal and Cumnor together in the same boat which bore four of the German gunners and Señor Ruez. And as they were rowed to a destroyer, great bubbles of air burst from the water fifty yards off to the side. None of the U-boats which had just been fighting had been driven down in that direction; and when Billy saw the bubbles, he glanced quickly at Ruez; then he leaned over and tore off the bloodless bandage across Ruez's face which had half masked him.

"Well, Kamerad Kelly," he demanded, "what went then below?"

For a moment the man did not reply. Having masqueraded as he had, he had sacrificed his standing as prisoner of war; he had made himself a spy. But if the discovery of that brought emotion for himself, he did not show it; he was again a U-boat officer, with all feeling, for the moment, absorbed in the meaning of the great bubbles still breaking from below.

"When a boat is on the bottom and may not move," he replied to Billy very slowly, "and when they know from their microphones that their own ships have been driven off and the enemy is above and death is very near, it may become better to let in the sea." His hand came to his head, and he stood stiffly at salute, to the spot where the bubbles were breaking.

Blood rushed hot to Billy's face. "For your prince?" he asked. "For a son of your Kaiser?"

The German officer dropped his hand and sat down again.

"There are many, many mysteries which may not be answered till the end of the war," he said with dignity. "The list can stand another—not the least momentous. That I promise you."

The boat came alongside the destroyer, and Billy Boal and Cumnor took the German officer with them over the side.

"We report, sir," said Billy when he presented himself to the commander, "as probably destroyed, though not certainly ascertained, the U-boat which has been lying below here in deep water since early this morning. We have reason to believe that her commander was a personage of utmost importance, so that the three U-boats seen to have been destroyed put their own fate at nothing, to aid him. Our prisoner was commandant of one of those which we destroyed—an officer heretofore known as Kelly of the Kaiser's Own, who has tried to serve that personage most faithfully."

A BOMBING RAID

EDWIN BALMER has made another center hit with the next of these super-exciting "Stories of Yankees Over There." He sends *Ted Weldon* and *Barny Mac* on a night bombing raid across the Rhine. Next to taking part in a jaunt of that sort yourself, you'll find a reading of this story about the best sport ever. Watch for "Altitude, Ten Thousand Feet," in the May BLUE BOOK MAGAZINE.

Sour Grapes

by William Almon Wolff

CAMOUFLAGE isn't even a new word. You may find it in a dictionary of French slang that was published sometime in the early nineties, long before the airplanes that were to make camouflage, the practice, so vitally necessary. And camouflage isn't a new thing either. Charles Darwin went into it at considerable length in a best-seller he wrote about the origin of species—only, he called it protective coloration. Parrots, for instance: you know how bright and gaudy they look, when you see them in a cage or on a perch? But try to spot one, against its own background of jungle; you can't see the shrieking beast a hundred yards away!

No one in Elmhurst knew that Frank Chester was going in for something like camouflage and had been for years—ever since, indeed, his recovery from an illness which had, like so many serious illnesses experienced in adolescence, left him strikingly and permanently changed. His recovery? Well, of course, he did recover, in a way. That is, he went on living. But it wasn't the same Frank Chester who went back to school after the loss of nearly a full year's time—which involved dropping back a whole class, then going to college after all the fellows with whom he had gone.

Frank, before that illness, was a perfectly normal youngster. He'd always been exceptionally strong and active; his father, who had been an athlete himself, had seen with delight that his boy was altogether likely to outstrip him. The ambition to do just that, to make good for Elmhurst as his father had done, had been almost literally born in Frank. His father had begun, when Frank was absurdly young, to take him to football games, track-meets, baseball-games—even to take him along when Cranford was met at Charlestown, in odd years. Cranford, you must understand, was Elmhurst's great rival. Both were small New England colleges, but they maintained a rivalry as keen and as hot as that between Yale and Princeton, and their annual meetings on gridiron and diamond brought alumni back from every State in the union.

There was never any possibility of a doubt as to Frank's choice of a college. The Chesters lived in Elmhurst; Frank's father was easily the most active alumnus of his decade. So Frank was marked for Elmhurst. And at the age when most kids are wondering whether they'd rather go with a circus or drive an engine or go to sea, Frank was dreaming of saving a Cranford game by a run the length of the field

in the last minute of play, or of a home run in the ninth inning, with the bases filled, in the Alumni Day game.

UP to the time of that long illness of his, Frank bade fair to make his dreams come true, too. But that changed everything. It left him with various disabilities. There was some trouble with his heart that worried the family doctor; violent exercise of any sort was absolutely forbidden. Frank wasn't allowed to run, even. He was supposed to walk a good deal. But before long he began rather to shirk that.

His activity wasn't really much diminished. And it had to have some outlet. He found it in reading, in actual enjoyment of his work, in music. His mother had tried, rather pathetically, to make a musician out of him. Up to the time of his illness her efforts had shared the fate of those of most mothers who make their sons study the piano. Frank's attitude toward lessons and practice had been a perfectly normal one. But when he was comparatively well again, he found that the long hours of practice at the piano filled up the hours he had been used to devote to football or baseball or whatever the sport of the season might be. It hurt too much to go and look on.

If his father had lived, things might have shaped themselves in a different way. Mr. Chester would have seen, probably, what was happening, and would have found some way to shake the boy out of what was, after all, a rather morbid condition. But Mr. Chester died just before Frank was ready to enter college, and Mrs. Chester saw nothing wrong about Frank's way of meeting his problem.

FOR lack of a better word, Frank Chester must probably be considered the "hero" of this tale. So it is a pity that he must be revealed in an aspect far from heroic, an attitude distinctly not to be admired. The trouble is that Frank was a quite real and human person.

His illness, you see, had brought his dream structure tumbling down about his ears. He was forced to understand, by the time he went to college, that he would never run the length of the field against Cranford, never make a hit in the ninth or any other inning of a close baseball-game.

The proper thing for him to have done, of course, was to have accepted the mandate of fate, harsh though it was, to have grinned and borne it. In a sense he did. But he didn't grin. Just because the sort of thing he could never hope to do or be was, in his eyes, so supremely the only thing worth doing and being, he disparaged it. His attitude toward athletics and athletes was one of condescension; he stood for the essential superiority of brain over brawn. He couldn't have people being sorry for him. It was better to be unpopular, rather actively and generally disliked, in fact, as he was.

It was in the beginning of his senior year that he fell in love with Helen Morgan. He was a little older than most of the men in his class. And he was a good deal older than any other of them in everything except years; the life he had led was responsible for that. So falling in love, for him, wasn't the light and easy thing it is supposed to be—and usually is—for a man just emerging from adolescence.

HELEN was new to Elmhurst. Her father, Professor Morgan, was an Elmhurst man, but his own college had only now called him back, after letting him teach at strange shrines for years, to fill the chair of history. Frank met her at one of a series of small dinners Professor Morgan gave as a means of getting acquainted with his advanced students—of whom Frank was one of the most brilliant. It must be recorded that she didn't like him, and admitted that there was small reason why she should have done so. She had, as a matter of fact, singled him out for special favor, because of her father's reports concerning him, and after dinner she talked to him for a time rather exclusively.

"I want to know all about the football team, Mr. Chester," she said. She laughed. "I really am an Elmhurst girl, you know! I've seen two or three Cranford games in the last five years,

and even when we were out West I used to keep up as well as I could with what was going on here."

Frank's lip curved faintly, in a manner that had become almost automatic with him by that time, when people talked about games.

"I don't know much about the team, I'm afraid," he said ungraciously—although to be ungracious to her was the last thing in his thoughts! "I've got some pretty stiff courses, with a lot of outside reading—"

"Of course," she said quickly and sympathetically. For just a moment she was closer than anyone had ever been to stripping the mask from Frank's real feeling. "You've made a great impression on my father, Mr. Chester. And I can tell you that mighty few students do that."

He tried to smile his acknowledgment of that, and made rather a poor job of it. He knew already that it was upon Helen, and not upon her father, that he wanted to make an impression. But the frank confession that would have made her instantly his friend and ally was impossible, unthinkable.

SHE dropped him presently, left him to attach himself to the little group of which her father was the center. But that was not until she had learned, upon what appeared to be the best possible authority, that he considered that an altogether undue emphasis was laid upon college athletics, that in his judgment men ought to come to college to work and not to play, that the pretense that a man was better fitted for life by the various extra-curricular activities of the modern college was a sham, that—oh, that he was a first-rate prig and an intellectual snob!

He went home with his mind all jumbled. He thought of Helen Morgan—saw her, all the way, as he walked under the elms, bare now in the autumn moonlight. He saw her standing tall and fair and faintly flushed, as she waited to greet her father's guests, appraising them one by one with frank, friendly, questioning eyes. He remembered her dress—white and simple and low enough to show the line of tan the summer's sun had left, and her arms, still faintly brown. Not once during the long walk home—which needn't have been long at all, had he followed the direct road—could he quite reproduce in his mind's eye the witchery of her face; features the least, the most baffling bit irregular, nose turning up ever so slightly, mouth a broken line of beauty, throat and chin. . . . . He wanted to go back, you know, to see for himself, again. And he couldn't, of course. But he knew this much—that she was utterly adorable, that every atom of her called to him, stirred him, evoked a strange, mysterious response from him. And she— He knew, too, and cursed the knowledge, what she thought of him.

HE saw a good deal of her that winter. It was as if fate took a malicious delight in throwing them together. She was pleasant, always; it wasn't in her to be anything else. But it was plainly to be seen that he wasn't her sort; her light preference for men of an entirely different stamp was obvious. Frank had a wretched time. There were beastly interludes, when she was favoring some one of his rivals. He couldn't know that she took them all lightly, that she appraised at their true worth the avowals that came to her from men like Jack Butler, the football captain, and Bill Hutchison, who was being counted upon to do most of the pitching for the nine next spring.

Helen loved it all. But—she had no illusions. She knew too well the evanescent nature of such affairs as flourished in an academic atmosphere. In such matters she was wise beyond her years. But she had lived all her life in college towns. She had seen girls suffer, really suffer, because they had taken too seriously things said—and meant—on moonlit nights in June, just before Commencement.

Helen did, in a measure, get over her first sharp dislike of him. Perhaps it was because there were so few who had a good word for him, perhaps because her father did esteem him highly and take pains to try to influence her judgment of him.

"I can't understand you at all, Frank," she said. That was months

after their first meeting, in the spring—in the strange, lovely moment that precedes spring, rather. They were walking along a road soft with the thaw; in the woods on either side there was a bourgeoning of bush and tree; skunk-cabbage, shooting green, was a strident promise of the glory that was to come.

"About what?" he said.

"Oh, nearly everything! I don't believe you haven't any college spirit. But you talk about the teams as if you didn't care, and— I don't know; you're queer—"

"Because I realize that there's something more to college and to life than making one's *E!*" he scoffed. "I'd rather have a Phi Beta Kappa key than an *E* for every major sport at once! That means something; it shows you've done what you came to college to do."

"Well—I wish you joy of yours!" she said quickly. "You're sure of it—but so's Jack Butler, and he had time to be captain of the best football team we've had in five years!"

He let eyes and sneering lips answer for him. And he would have given every scholastic honor he had won or was still sure to win to have played on the football scrub—to have even that small share in adding to the glory of Elmhurst!

Helen frowned and bit her lip. She wasn't quite sure about Frank. That must be why she tolerated his attitude. She tried to change the subject.

"Dad says he thinks we're bound to get into the war," she said. "He says it's only a question of time—and a short time. So he's tremendously pleased to see the work that's being done here—the training-corps, and everything—"

"I don't believe we're going to get into the war," said Frank. "And if there is, I don't think the colleges ought to be swept off their feet. There are plenty of men who haven't had an expensive education to do the fighting—and to do it better than we can."

She laughed at him.

"You don't mean that!" she said. "Why, Frank, if there's war, of course college men will be the first to go! They always have been."

"Yes—like sheep!" he said bitterly. "Instead of supplying intellectual leadership and trying to work out some substitute for a resort to brute force, they throw away all their ideals and turn butchers!"

She stopped and turned around.

"I'm going home!" she said, two spots of color showing, high in her cheeks. "You—you're impossible!"

HE knew it—knew it better than she! But he was smarting under the most intolerable of all the humiliations that had come in the long train of his illness. He hadn't been rejected for the officers' training-corps that had been formed at Elmhurst; chance had spared him that. But just the day before, Dr. Carver, the physical director, had spoken to him casually.

"You can't stand the work with the fellows who are training, of course, Chester," he had said. "Too bad!"

Ever since the war-clouds had begun really to gather, Frank had been dreaming of rehabilitation through war, if war actually came. Strangely enough, it hadn't occurred to him that the disabilities that had made it so obviously impossible for him to play football or other games would, just as surely, bar him from combatant service. Two or three years earlier a doctor had suggested that much might be done to make Frank stronger, physically, if he took regular, moderate exercise. Work at the weight-machines, he suggested, daily runs, growing longer almost imperceptibly—such work might make a lot of difference. But Mrs. Chester, who was satisfied to see Frank alive, threw up her hands; Frank himself, by that time, had become the victim of a sort of lassitude, common enough in invalids or in those whose convalescence has been unduly prolonged. The doctor, a young man, and regarded in Elmhurst as rather radical, had been dismissed; nothing more had been said or done.

The march of great events was swift in the spring of 1917. Count von Bernstorff had gone home; Congress was called together; then American ships were sunk, and the date of Congress' assembly was advanced. All over

America the colleges were on a war-basis long before the actual declaration of hostilities.

Athletics went by the board at Elmhurst, as they did nearly everywhere. Men were seeking commissions, enlisting in aviation units, working to get into the great camp at Plattsburg. When the enlistment campaign for the naval reserve force—intended, in those early days, to man the submarine patrol—began, there was a rush to the colors. And Frank, forlorn, more wretched than he had ever been, was out of it all. He sneered; by some perverse twist in his mind he had to do that or suffer a broken heart. No one knew his real feeling—least of all Helen Morgan. She didn't go to the length of cutting him. But she was as distant as she could be, and he stopped going to see her, because she made it so unmistakably plain that he wasn't welcome.

FRANK said little. But the time had come when he had to do something. He now remembered the half-forgotten advice of the doctor who had suggested exercise. He tried to find him. But the doctor had already gone—he was in France, it was believed, serving in a base hospital behind the trenches. And so Frank began to get up very early, when the sun was just touching the crest of the ridge to the east of Elmhurst with gold and crimson. He slipped out, in the chill of April mornings, wearing a sweater and a gym' suit that he had smuggled into the house, and ran along deserted roads.

He found it hard going, at first. He was too tired to eat breakfast the first day, and had sense enough to understand that he had overdone it. But after that, things were better. He set himself, each day, a goal. The second day he ran, slowly, two hundred yards and back. The next day his turning point was a little farther from the start, and so it went. Within two weeks he was running a mile and back every morning before breakfast, and was making a little better time, too, each day. And he was making an attempt—rather grotesque, rather funny, if you had seen him without knowing what lay behind his running—to imitate the men he had seen training for cross-country work or long-distance running. He didn't want to ask questions, and he tried to remember things he had heard the track-coach telling candidates—things about the proper handling of the arms and hands, the way to breathe, how far back the head should be thrown.

It is well to make it plain that Frank Chester had some reason to believe that he was, quite literally, taking his life in his hands. For years he had been forbidden to hurry for a train or a car; he hadn't been allowed to do even the routine gymnasium work required of all Elmhurst men in their freshman year, and had been excused from it upon the order of his family doctor. The condition of his heart was rather more than dubious.

If the doctors were right, and this running before breakfast was going to be bad for him—well, it would have to be. If they were wrong—well, he was going to find out!

Find out he did. He learned slowly, laboriously, what a thorough examination by a new and competent doctor would, probably, have revealed at once—that the running made him better, not worse. His lungs, forced to do more work, expanded; he put on weight, slowly but appreciably. He grew straighter. There was more color in his cheeks. He astonished his mother and her cook by the voraciousness of his appetite. He began, surreptitiously, to go through a calisthenic drill in his room every night, before he went to bed, and he slept better than he had since his freshman year.

In the beginning he went at his running grimly, as a task. But before long he was actually enjoying it. The early mornings along the tree-lined roads were full of a sensuous delight; he learned the joy of lengthening his stride and racing along, head up, toward a fixed objective.

WITH the lengthening of the days and the earlier rising of the sun, Frank had more time before breakfast. By the time May had come, he was no longer limiting his runs to a fixed distance; it suited him better to run easily

for four or five miles, following his fancy along the country roads; deserting them, sometimes, to cross fields or meadows. Often he had to hurry to get in before people were up about the house. And now, when he reached home, one of the greatest joys his running brought was the bath he took before he dressed for breakfast. Cold baths had been taboo for him. But one morning, by some mischance the boiler was cold, and he stepped, before he realized that he was doing it, under an icy stream from the shower.

He gave back with a yell, for a moment. But then came the swift reaction, and he went under again, exulting in the stabbing assault of the cold water, to emerge for his rub with a coarse towel, his skin glowing as the blood rushed back. And after that day he always bathed in cold water. If his heart knew it, it made no complaint.

He began to be upheld now by a strange excitement. He was beginning to hope that he had outgrown the weakness that had held him so long after his illness. But he was afraid to put his new-found health to the test. He shrank from saying anything about what he had done, even when a call went out for candidates for a scrub track-team. At Elmhurst there were men in charge of athletics who realized that the loss of practically all the Varsity material was not a sufficient reason for abandoning athletics. So an effort was being made to put teams into the field, and abandoned schedules were being reconstructed. There were to be baseball games and a track-meet with Cranford, which was no better off than its old rival, so far as material went.

Sheer accident betrayed Frank's secret. He was making for home one morning, and because he was rather late, he was running pretty fast. A motorcar came along behind him, and an astonished voice hailed him by name.

"Here—what the deuce?" said Dr. Carver. "Let's have a look at you, Chester! So!"

He stared at Frank, smiling shrewdly.

"Thought there was something up!" he said finally. "Been noticing that you looked huskier and better. Taken the bit between your teeth, have you? How about it? Feel all right?"

"Fine—I never felt so well!" said Frank. Then he began to stammer. "But—don't say anything about it, please. My mother—worries a lot about me."

"I understand," said Carver. "But—well, you oughtn't to waste all this, Chester! Turn up this afternoon; I want to look you over. How about trying for the new track-team, if you're up to it? We're shy on distance-men."

Frank never did fully remember everything that happened that day. Early in the afternoon he went to the gym' and stripped, and Dr. Carver punched him and pinched him and sounded him—and finally slapped him on the back.

"I've seen this sort of thing before," he said dryly. "You're sound, Chester. You're not—well, you've got a lot of lost time to make up. I don't say you could pass the army examination yet. But you've put yourself in the way of getting up to the standard. And the way things look now, there's no reason why you shouldn't help us out a lot in the Cranford meet. Get out there now and do a mile around the track. I want to see what chance there is to get up your speed."

Frank had been doing better running by himself in the mornings than he did then. But at that, his mile wasn't so bad. His time was about four-fifty-five—which was slow, of course, but he'd never had any coaching and didn't know what he could do. Dr. Carver was satisfied.

"Stick to it," he advised. "I'll make a runner of you. Take it easy in the mornings; you can keep up your road-work for a while, though. It's good for your wind. And get here every afternoon after your last class."

IN any other year Frank Chester's appearance as a candidate for any team would have been a campus sensation. In 1917 things like that weren't vastly important. And still, Helen Morgan heard of it, and crossed the street to speak to him a day or two after his meeting with Carver.

"Frank, you look like a new man!"

she said. "It's splendid—and to know you're doing something for Elmhurst!"

He grew red.

"It isn't for Elmhurst!" he said almost gruffly. "I got tired of coddling myself—that's all. I want to feel better. It isn't efficient to be sick if you don't have to be."

"But everyone says you're showing fine spirit—"

"That's all they know," he said with a shrug. "I don't care anything about the Cranford meet."

In a sense, that was true. He was looking far beyond a track-meet with Cranford. He was looking to France and the chance a sound body would give him to get there. But he couldn't tell her that; he couldn't abandon his camouflage.

If Mrs. Chester hadn't gone away, about that time, for her health,—which was excellent,—Frank could not have kept on with his training without a battle. But she did go away, her suspicions unaroused, and Frank did go on. And the mile in the coming meet with Cranford loomed up more and more, each day, as the greatest event in his life. Carver expected him to win easily—so easily, indeed, that he wasn't even afraid of making him overconfident.

"I don't know," he said one day. "You may have started at just the right time, of course. But—if you could have done all this a year ago, you'd have had a good chance for the Varsity, no matter who was out against you."

JUST about ten days before the Cranford meet, Frank's whole structure of new-built hopes went smashing down. For it was decided, suddenly, to make every man who could get away from actual military work on the day of the meet eligible, in both colleges—and that happened to mean that practically the whole of both teams, as they had been made up, tentatively, before the outbreak of war, would be available. One or two men were lost irrevocably—men who had enlisted in the army or navy and were far away. But naval-reserve men and aviation candidates could run or jump or throw weights, as the case might be—and Brundage and Hazlitt, the two milers of last year's team, both turned up to crowd Frank out. Brundage, who had taken second place the previous spring in the New England intercollegiate, and fourth in the big I. C. A. A. A. A. meet, and was captain of the team, to boot, or had been, until he had donned the navy blue, tried to console Frank.

"Tough luck, old horse," he said. "But you'll run; Doc Carver says you'd beat me, in a year's time. And we'll need some one to make pace. I'll tell you right now I'll have to go some to run a mile in four-thirty! You go out there and run their men off their feet, and you'll be doing your bit, all right!"

Frank tried to convince himself that the meet and the race didn't matter—that he hadn't been thinking of them, anyway. But he knew that they did matter, knew that victory in the race had come to have a symbolic value for him. He couldn't have found words for his feeling, but he had it. It was all confused with thoughts and images of his old hopes, before his illness, and his new ambition to achieve the sort of manhood his father's had been. And Helen Morgan—she counted most of all. There was some vague feeling that if he could lay his victory at her feet he might explain himself to her at last. He couldn't go beyond that, but he had had dreams and hopes, centering on her, of late.

But after all, there was nothing to do—except to turn up, on the day of the meet, in his running-suit with the purple and white stripe that stood for Elmhurst barring his shirt, and wait for the mile to start. He listened to Dr. Carver's instructions.

"Get out and make the early running, Chester," said the Doctor. "Don't be afraid of running yourself out; your part will be over in the third quarter. Go out as if you were doing a half. About sixty-five or -six seconds for the first quarter—if that's fast enough to keep them behind you. Brundage and Hazlitt will lie back; they'll come up in the third quarter and be ready to fight it out in the stretch. Understand?"

Frank nodded—and wished they'd get the low hurdles out of the way.

The mile followed that event. It was a cool day, and he was chilly as he waited, in spite of his heavy sweater.

"ALL up for the mile!" The call came at last. There were six men in the race—three from each college. Cranford's third man, Dorrance, he knew to be negligible; Greene was nearly Brundage's equal; Vance a clever runner, not good for better than four-thirty-eight or so, but likely to beat a faster man, any time, because of his headwork. Brundage was not a clever runner; he had to depend on sheer speed and a marvelous capacity for sprinting at the finish. But it was common talk that he had been two seconds faster than the man who had beaten him in the intercollegiate meet a year before.

Frank just grinned when, in the first quarter, Dorrance dashed away out in front and tried to lure the pack on. He paid no attention to him at all, but was content to lead the others, edging away gradually, increasing his own lead over Greene just enough, he hoped, to worry him into hurrying too soon. Dorrance began to come back in the second quarter, and Frank increased his own pace. He thought his own first quarter had been, perhaps, a little slower than the time he had been told to run to, but the race was well in hand still, and that was what counted.

But now, as he turned into the stretch on the second quarter, cutting loose a little more speed, he saw Brundage, on the grass, limping, supported on either side by Carver and Forman, a hurdler! His heart leaped. Brundage must have turned his ankle! Swiftly he glimpsed the situation. That meant that Hazlitt and he were left alone—and that, moreover, Carver's carefully prepared plan for the race had gone by the board. He and Hazlitt, if they finished one and two, would bring enough points to win the meet for Elmhurst; if either of them failed, now, the result would be more than dubious.

And Frank hadn't run the first half as a man does who is trying to finish first or second in a mile-run. He was tiring already; there was no chance for him to hold the lead he had. Dorrance had slipped behind; Frank threw a glance over his shoulder and saw Hazlitt and the two Cranford men, closely bunched and running easily—Greene leading, Hazlitt next, Vance, whom he feared most now that Brundage was out, in the rear.

At once he slowed down, but he had real use here for the camouflage that he had used without real reason for so long. He was tiring, but he was not tired—yet. Still he faltered, swayed a little—reproduced, as early as he could, the way Dorrance, who had really run himself out, had been acting as he came back to him a minute before.

He didn't mean actually to relinquish his lead until he had to. But he wanted to lessen the gap between himself and the others; he was afraid that if he didn't, Vance might become alarmed and challenge him too soon. If he looked as if he were faltering, Vance might wait. And so he turned into the last quarter, still ten yards ahead.

NOW Greene passed him, swiftly, and he could hear feet pounding just behind him—Hazlitt's, he guessed. He had to fight every instinct that was driving him to accept Greene's challenge. But his reason asserted itself; the sort of fine, logical reasoning that had so enraged Helen Morgan when he had called upon it to back up that strange, long deception of his. One of two things was true. Either Greene was setting out now, at a pace he could easily maintain, to establish a commanding and winning lead, or else Greene was making his bid too soon. In either case the thing for Frank to do was to run his own race.

Hazlitt swept past him at the backstretch turn and set out after Greene, and Frank grunted as he saw him go by: he knew Hazlitt was throwing away his chance. And still there was the steady rhythmic patter of running shoes just behind him. He didn't have to look around to see Vance running behind him, just far enough back to miss the cinders Frank's spikes were throwing up—to see him running easily, waiting for his own moment to come.

Frank had one thought now, and only

one—to beat Vance. He forgot that he was supposed to have run himself out in the first half—that no one expected him to try to retrieve the situation that had been compromised by the accident to Brundage. He could see the two men ahead, and it seemed to him now that they were showing signs of distress. For the first time he disregarded Vance. He lengthened his stride. If he was tired, he didn't know it. He needed every bit of breath he had, or he would have yelled in exultation as he saw the space between him and the two leaders lessening. Faster and faster he ran as he turned into the stretch. Going into the last seventy yards, he passed Hazlitt—a moment later Greene. They were gone. That much he knew, although his eyes were no longer focusing properly, and all life seemed, for the moment, to be concentrated upon a line that stood out, with a startling whiteness, against the background of the gymnasium wall.

Now he was running with utter abandonment, forgetting all he had learned. He wasn't fully conscious. His mind had really ceased to function. He had to reach that white line, that tape, before the owner of the maddening, pattering feet behind him. Style, the niceties of running and of breathing, were beyond him now. He was running to win—to get there. He was responding directly to elemental impulses.

Something came into the narrowing field of his vision that hadn't been there before—didn't belong there now. It was a moving white blur, striped by a grotesque bar of crimson. With a sudden welling up of a primeval, Berserk rage, he called upon his brain to identify it—realized that it was Vance. And now he called upon heart and lungs and sinews for more than they had ever given him. He had to banish that blur that was Vance. It disappeared. Before him, monstrous, incredibly distant, loomed the tape—and then, as he lurched forward and fell stumbling, that too disappeared, and everything was black before his eyes. He was in a darkness filled with a million tiny dancing specks of light.

"Ugh!" He sat up abruptly as cold water dashed over him. "Whassamatter?"

Some one else was sitting on the grass grinning at him. That was Vance—who on Monday would go back to the task of becoming intimate with a biplane, Vance, whom he had just beaten by a foot in the best-run mile ever seen on Elmhurst Field.

"Didn't think I could do it, old man," said Vance. "Four-thirty-three—fastest mile *I* ever ran! Good work!"

It took time for it all to sink in. Dr. Carver was just behind him, waiting with words of congratulation. And:

"Oh—in case you want to try for any war-stuff, you needn't worry about the physical examination," said Carver.

BUT it was later, when he saw Helen Morgan, that he really understood what he had done.

"I suppose you didn't run that mile for Elmhurst!" she said mockingly. But there was a look in her eyes that he understood. He poured out the whole story.

"I—I don't know why I was such an idiot," he wound up wretchedly. "Gee—I couldn't bear to watch a football-game, because it hurt so not to be down there on the field! And this war—well, I'd rather have died than not have tried to get into it. Now—now, you see, I can go."

"So they were sour grapes, all the time!" she said. "I—oh, I was sure of it, but I couldn't quite understand, or I could have made you tell me, I think."

"Helen!" he said. "I—well, I'm going to try, right away, for whatever seems to be the best thing to get into. But you—do you think—"

After all, they were walking across the campus, and there were hundreds of people near them. He had some excuse for breaking down.

"Can I come to see you to-night?" he asked desperately. "I want—I want to ask you something."

It seemed that she didn't care in the least how many people were about.

"Of course you can!" she said. "And—you'll like my answer, Frank."

Another attractive story by William Almon Wolff in an early issue.

Two Kinds of Nerve

by Frederick R. Bechdolt

OLD MURPHY, the furniture factory guard, was eating his breakfast in the Red Front, which is the name the prison population gave the officers' and guards' dining-room. He sat at one of the tables back in the corner farthest from the door, a somewhat insignificant little figure in his shabby suit of blue; and he listened to the loud talk about him, watching the big, lusty young fellows in their carefully pressed new clothes as they bandied jests and greetings across the room. Gay dogs, these bachelors, and bold; the years had not yet begun exacting toll from their ebullient spirits; the grind of economizing for wives and families had not tarnished the sure joyousness of their outlook on life.

Murphy liked to hear them. And to have a solicitous convict-waiter bring his meal to order was unwonted luxury for him. Old Shanahan, the guard in the condemned men's yard, entered, and seeing Murphy, headed for him; the little gray-haired guard stretched out his short legs under the table then. To enjoy man-society during the progress of the breakfast capped the climax of this dissipation.

But a man's pleasures are somehow or other bound to be tinctured with regrets. Even as he brightened now, old Murphy sighed unconsciously. In the back of his head lurked two abiding memories—skeletons at the festival. One of these was the small slice which this eating away from home would shave from his salary at the month's end. When one has to hammer down family expenses until the total for thirty days fits within the limits covered by three twenty-dollar gold-pieces, he is bound to take all unexpected items seriously. The other disquieting memory was his wife, whose taking to her bed was the reason for his coming here. They had so few relaxations that it seemed unfair he should get one at the expense of her sickness.

Shanahan seated himself opposite Murphy. "I hear," he said, "the wife's laid up."

"She done herself out," Murphy told him. "She's been poorly lately—too much work."

The convict-waiter came behind his chair. "T bone steak," Murphy told him briskly, "and eggs—stack o' wheatcakes and a cup of Java." They

charged so much for every meal at the Red Front, and inasmuch as he didn't know he had a liver, Murphy intended making the best of a bad matter. While Shanahan was giving his order, the little guard gazed around him again at the blue-clad young bachelors of the day-shift. It came to him, as his eyes roved over the crowd among whom the stripes-clad waiters hurried to and fro, that he had put in nearly a quarter of a century serving the State within these gray walls and was still a guard, while some of those in the long room whose faces were ruddy with youth were drawing down their hundred and fifty a month. He sighed, and not being used to sighing, felt worse for it.

Shanahan finished with his order and turned to Murphy. "Heard the news?" he asked with that expectancy a man shows when he has startling tidings to convey. "No? Say! The board dropped six guards and the commissary at the last meetin'."

"So?" Murphy frowned. "All democrats, I'll bet."

"All democrats," said Shanahan. "I never see the like of these reformers for shake-ups, when they get in office."

"Well,"—Murphy shook his head,—"there's a lot of 'em, and times are bad. Good jobs are hard to get."

"Hard to get—ye're right!" Shanahan smiled grimly. "I bet there aint a free man inside the walls goes to next week's primaries."

"That's so." Murphy's voice had changed. "Next week *is* the primaries." He fell silent.

THE waiter brought his order, and he began attacking the steak with a vigor which made it seem as if he were taking out a grudge on the meat. His face was still placid, but into the placidity there had crept something intangible—it seemed to show more in the eyes than elsewhere—which made Murphy look larger than he really was, something which made him also seem implacable.

Shanahan saw it. "A man," he said, "would be a fool to do it, Joe."

"Well," Murphy growled, "I never missed a primary yet."

"That aint sayin' ye wouldn't be wise to stay away this time," Shanahan admonished him.

They both fell silent, devoting themselves whole-heartedly to the breakfast. But as he ate, Murphy began at length to find himself looking around the room again. Those younger men, so many of whom had outstripped him in the race up the ladder of promotion—how had they managed to climb beyond him? The answer stood out clear before him: they had in most cases trimmed their sails to what political winds were blowing at the time. He thought of his own long years of duty, years whose record was without a single blot. Somehow that very comparison made him more anxious to go to next week's primaries. He owned no exalted principle of party duty; politics had never meant much more to him than the victory or defeat of his own faction—a fight in which he had identified himself with one side. But—

"My business is my own," he told himself. "The warden nor nobody else hasn't got a right to go tellin' me what to do."

Shanahan looked up from his plate. "The trouble with these here reformers," he said in a low voice, "is this: they think that if ye're not with them, ye're a crook; and the best thing for all hands is to tie the can to ye. This new warden is square enough, but he's just as set on makin' a machine for the party over here as any of the others was —more so, the way he's actin'."

"That's just about the size of it," said Murphy. "Well—time to go inside." He rose, scraping back his chair noisily. Shanahan dallied to gulp down his coffee. Among the crowd of young men, Murphy went to the main gate, where he got his heavy black cane from the rack and passed on with these members of a new régime, through the heavy portal, to assume his duties for the day.

THE furniture-factory was on the second floor of the sash-and-blind building, a great bleak structure of brick which had been remodeled under the new prison administration for the use of various crafts, with the idea of teaching the inmates useful trades. The

convicts were coming to their work, and Murphy stood on the stair-landing taking tally as they passed inside. His mind was still dwelling on the news which Shanahan had told him at the breakfast-table. The commissary had been a good official, and there was no fault to be found with his work; but he had been active in his party—the sort of man they call a primary politician. Murphy remembered how many times they had gossiped together at the polls in the little town around the hill, how much of a small vice the local affairs of his party had been with the old fellow—like his pipe. And there was no doubt about it: that was what had cost him his job. It had come to a case where you herded with the sheep or with the goats. As Murphy ruminated, his vigilance relaxed; but the watching-instinct was strong in him, and suddenly it came to him that there was something wrong going on in that striped line.

Jonah Sheedy, of all the prison trouble-makers the most indefatigable, had taken note, midway up the stairs, of Murphy's absent-minded demeanor and straightway had set about improving the opportunity. Jonah's idea of pleasure was some fellow-creature's pain. Ahead of him in the line marched Big Erickson, a heavy-footed, large-faced man, with pig-eyes and a bristling shock of rope-colored hair. The length of him lay mostly above the waist-line, in consequence of which his muscular arms stretched down like a gorilla's; and there was something apelike in his bent-kneed gait. It is worth passing comment that he was doing life for having crushed the heads of two practical jokers with a peavey-pole, after they had attempted to make him the bunk-house butt in a Mendocino logging-camp, and that it had taken six men and a pint of chloroform to reduce him to the point of subjection where he could be brought from the county jail to prison.

Jonah Sheedy singled out Big Erickson as the man who must minister to his sense of humor while Murphy's vigilance was relaxed. By shifting his step and hastening his pace, he managed to tread on the other's heels—which, when accomplished on a stair-flight, throws the subject of the experiment off his balance.

Erickson fell against the man in front of him, who turned sharply to remonstrate; whereat:

"Faster, ye square-head," said Jonah Sheedy from behind. "Aye tank yo' bane too slow." And he trod again upon Erickson's heel.

There are safer places than prison in which to twit a man on his nativity, and the too-frequent attempting of dialect mimicry had been one of the errors which the humorous Mendocino loggers had so dearly paid for. Jonah Sheedy was saved from similar expiation by the appearance of Murphy upon the scene.

The little guard came down the steps two at a time and laid his hand on the shoulder of Erickson, who had thrown his portion of the line into a turmoil by whirling round on his tormentor, both arms outstretched, his huge hands clutching blindly for the trouble-maker's throat. Through the red mist which swam before his eyes he got sight of Murphy.

There was, in the face of the little guard, something of that quality which had shown briefly at the breakfast-table, making him look larger than he really was; and that same quality had come into his voice, so that although he was speaking quietly, his words dominated all other sounds.

"All right, there, Erickson. Hands down. Turn round." That was all he said, but it was quite evident that he expected obedience. Erickson's hands came slowly to his sides; he turned to his original position in the line.

"You, Sheedy!" Murphy's voice had taken on a sterner note. "One more yip out of ye, and I'll report ye to the captain of the yard. Now move on, boys, inside."

They went on in, and the eyes of Erickson were smoky with red light in them, like the eyes of a brooding bull. The machinery started, and the striped gang began to busy themselves at the day's task.

SPIKE DOLAN, the convict-foreman of the furniture-factory, himself an old-timer in the prison and a man of parts,—he was doing life for having

been "soup-man" in a gang of safe-crackers whose "stick-up man" had killed a policeman during a post-office job,—came silently to Murphy's side. Like most skilled crooks, he was an influence for law and order within penitentiary walls, and owned a first-hand knowledge of criminology which, were it set before some of our more famous theorists, would amaze them and cause them to rewrite the greater portion of their works. Between him and the little old guard there was a pretty good understanding, based on years of close acquaintance.

"This guy Erickson—" said Spike Dolan. Murphy nodded and glanced at the long-armed giant with the shock of rope-colored hair, as he stood bending over his lathe.

"Yes, what about him, Spike?"

"He's got a bad eye, Mr. Murphy. He's going to croak somebody before he's been here a month."

"Well, leave me know if he shows any signs of bilin' up again. We don't want anything comin' off like that in this here shop." Murphy frowned. "And keep cases on that fellow Sheedy: he's goin' to rib some trouble if he gets a chance."

As the stripes-clad foreman departed, Murphy scowled at the floor. "If he'd carve Sheedy into soup-meat, 'twouldn't hurt my feelin's," he told himself. "That dirty knife-man's got it comin' to him, anyhow. But he's got to do it som'eres else besides here." With that he settled down in his cushioned chair and resumed his meditations on the—to him—graver subject of next week's primaries.

He was facing one of those large moral issues which collide with a man—like drunkards on a narrow sidewalk—no matter how straight a course he may be holding at the time. Squarely that issue blocked the way, leaving him the choice of right or left. Had that choice only lain between miring his feet in the gutter of expediency and ramming his head against the blank wall of material disaster on the inner side, Murphy wouldn't have wasted a minute in deciding—for he was a hard-headed little man. But there was a complication in the problem.

"Right is right," he muttered to himself, "but what the dickens *is* right, anyhow?"

He frowned as his mind worked, like clumsy fingers trying to disentangle snarled silk. His eyes went to the convicts, busy at their tasks—three score of striped figures moving among the whirring belts and the dully gleaming machinery the noises of which filled the shadowed room. A pungent fog of fine sawdust permeated the air; the faces of the prisoners were coated with it, and it gave them a peculiar ghastly pallor. The smell of hot glue and varnish mingled with the sharp wood-odor. In his worn-cushioned chair, Murphy watched the men clad in their ugly uniforms of shame, and he was half inclined to envy them.

They didn't have to worry over the rules of life; *their* rules were posted all over the prison, printed plainly in large type; they had only their own salvations to puzzle out, while he—he sweated, figuring like a boy at his first long-division example. Must he make his family go hungry, or must he stultify himself?

A mind more subtle than Murphy's would have been able to see duty in self-abnegation and would have accepted the martyrdom of secure living coupled with an uneasy conscience. And hunger in Murphy's family was no vague generality, when he thought of it; they had pinched down close enough for him to understand the meaning of the word. But Murphy's was not a subtle mind; all the ethics he knew was "Right is right;" and somehow he felt that were he to secure good feeding for them by forgoing a custom which was nobody's business but his own and which inalienably belonged to him, the moral catastrophe would overwhelm them all. He was in somewhat the same predicament as a woman faced with the chance of selling her decency to fill the family larder—not in so bad a fix, but the dilemma had horns of the same shape, nevertheless.

So he sat bent over in his chair, a small patch of blue among the stripes; and the wrinkles on his face—which had grown deep enough from his ceaseless attempts to make two dollars plus

two dollars equal five dollars—seemed to be sinking visibly into the skin. His stubby fingers clenched his heavy blackthorn cane so tightly that the pressure drove the blood from them, and they showed white as paper. His blue guard's suit was shiny at knees and elbows, and on one sleeve there was a neat patch; his eyes fell on this, and he recalled the picture of his wife sitting in the cottage living-room with the coat across her lap, her thin fingers twitching to the needle-strokes.

"Drat these here reformers, anyhow!" said Murphy.

A HAND on his shoulder made Murphy start. Spike Dolan stood beside his chair, and the face of the convict-foreman conveyed its message of sharp warning before his lips moved. "Pipe Sheedy and that Swede," he said in an undertone.

Jonah Sheedy was carrying a number of chair-arms from his bench to the dryer at the other end of the room. The spike-haired convict Erickson was bending over his lathe, absorbed in his work; his face was smooth with placidity. Sheedy passed behind him, and passing, he spoke. What he said it was impossible to hear where Murphy sat, but Erickson's huge body stiffened; his smooth face became alive with ugly lines; his small eyes flamed. Sheedy had gone on before the man could do more than turn his head.

Murphy arose slowly from his chair and walked leisurely down to the dryer at the end of the shop. Although his bearing was relaxed, and there was no sign of emotion on his face, every convict in the place looked up to watch him. He laid his hand on Sheedy's neck. "You go over to the captain of the yard; tell him I reported you for disobedience," he said; and Sheedy departed precipitately as a kicked dog.

Erickson stood before his lathe, and he was looking straight ahead. His eyes were smoky again with that red light in them like the eyes of a brooding bull. Murphy came over to him. "Go ahead with your work," he said. The huge convict shivered and very slowly, as if it cost him an effort, bent to his task.

The hours went by; noontime came and passed; that afternoon the new warden came through the sash-and-blind building with two visitors. In the doorway between the bookbindery and the furniture-factory the trio paused; they were talking busily among themselves. Murphy was standing near the door, and as he saluted the warden, he recognized the pair with him. They were well-known politicians, leaders in the reform party which had gained victory at the last election, which was being organized more tightly in anticipation of the next struggle.

Fragments of their conversation reached the little guard. They were discussing the same topic which Shanahan had brought up at the breakfast-table; from their point of view they were speaking of the board's action. The two politicians talked—as the habit of politicians is—in undertones; but the warden spoke as one who is willing that the whole world should hear.

"With me," he said, "it's simply a matter of efficiency. I mean to get rid of that old crowd of primary politicians, because they're busier framing little intrigues than they are at their work—and I'm going to put younger men in their places. Too many old ones here."

Then, as the trio stood there, Murphy saw the bookbindery guard approaching them. Like Murphy, this guard had been enthusiastic in his devotion to party-politics; there had been no louder talker among the group who had attended last election's primaries than he. But now, as he addressed the warden, Murphy saw that a change had come into the man's demeanor. Usually a bold-eyed, swaggering young fellow, he was cringing in the presence of those three; and once he rubbed his palms. It was quite evident that he too had heard the news of that shake-up. Murphy realized it; and a huge revulsion came over him. The next moment the warden and his guests had stepped within the furniture-factory and he found himself answering their questions about the work. When they had gone on through the next door into the tailor-shop, Murphy sat down in his chair, and his mind went back to

the bookbindery guard. "Rats!" he said to himself. "Is *that* the way it makes a man? Then I'll take my chances of gettin' another job."

IT is one of the penalties for compatibility in married life that a man must share his worries with his wife, no matter how much he might like to keep them to himself. A few evenings later Murphy sat in the little sitting-room of his cottage and made up his mind that he might as well have it over with now as any time. Mrs. Murphy was up and about again—sickness is too expensive a luxury for sixty-dollar-a-month families. She was sitting with a huge basket of stockings on her lap, and her fingers were busy with the darning-needle.

"Sure," Murphy said abruptly, "I'm goin' to to-morrow's primaries."

She looked across the pile of stockings at him, and a frightened expression flitted across her faded eyes. She too had heard all about the shake-up and its cause. Murphy saw that look and how she banished it by an effort which showed in her tightly pressed lips.

"Like as not," he went on with the brusqueness which a man inflicts on those whom he loves when his heart is stirred because of them, "it'll cost me my job. But"—he struggled to find words—"I got to go or lose my own self-respect."

Her eyes were lingering on him. "You do what you think best, Joe," she said very quietly. "We'll manage somehow. We always have."

So he went. He went alone; of all the group who had gotten leave to absent themselves and attend that function in other years, he was the only one to seek permission this time.

The road to the little town around the hill passes the prison gate and the building outside the walls in which is the warden's office. Down this road Murphy walked, a short figure, clad in well-worn blue; and because he walked wide-footedly, he looked the less imposing as he passed the heavy portal and the little office-building beyond. He was not much of a spectacle; and yet his passing attained the prominence of a procession; it attracted far more attention than the departure of the prison board on the days when they traveled the same road. A half-dozen guards on the walls and in the watch-towers near by forgot their duties, and the usual morning group of men off shift in front of the main gate stopped their gossiping, to gaze after him and comment on his hard-headedness. Sentiment was universal as to what the result would be, and there were those who noted a bulky form standing behind one of the windows in the warden's office.

THAT form remained there long after Murphy had passed; and had anyone been in the office at the time, he would have seen a peculiar expression on the face of the warden as he turned away. He was accustomed to banish quickly whatever signs of emotion strayed to his features, and now his lips resumed their habitual tightness at once. Nor did he speak of the incident to anyone.

But he left the office a few minutes later, and he proceeded to the office of the captain of the yard, who was his confidant in many matters of prison policy. The captain was pacing back and forth on the concrete walk before his door. The warden's face was thoughtful as they exchanged greetings.

"What guard," he asked, "is taking old Murphy's place in the furniture-factory to-day?"

"That new man, Davis," the captain said, "—the one they had in the mill last week."

"Good man, isn't he?" The warden's voice was sharp. The captain looked wisely into his eyes.

"Yes," he answered reluctantly, for he liked Murphy well, "a good man."

"Tell the captain of the guard," the warden ordered, "to keep him there to-morrow, so Murphy can show him the ropes when he's back. I want to replace the old fellow on that job."

Some sharp-eared trusty heard it all, and so the news flew round the prison before the noon hour. By night nearly everyone knew that Murphy's days of service in the place were numbered; and men spoke of him in the past tense —as they speak of their fellows who have died or been discharged.

MEANTIME Davis, the new guard of whom the warden had been speaking, was sitting in the worn-cushioned chair which old Murphy had always occupied. He was a fresh-cheeked young fellow, big-bodied, alert and owning the self-sureness of youth. To him physical violence was something to be taken light-heartedly; so, when the monotony of the dusty room was broken by a sudden tumult of snarling voices and the crashing of two bodies on the floor, he leaped joyously to his feet, and dragged Big Erickson off from Jonah Sheedy with one vigorous jerk.

Spike Dolan, watching the affair with the interest of one who expects large results, saw Erickson leap at the guard's throat. Davis shifted his feet in time to avoid the rush, and planted a well-directed blow fairly on the point of the huge convict's jaw.

As the blond giant arose dazedly, Dolan stepped closer to the guard; but his aid, to his astonishment, proved unnecessary. Erickson stood there for a moment, and his eyes were directed toward the door of the tailor-shop which opened from this room. The ugly scowl left his face, and as the door closed behind some convicts who were passing through, he shifted his gaze to the floor. Without a word he went back to his lathe.

"You, there!" Davis said loudly. "Mind you, if you try the likes of that again, 'twont be the dungeon you'll be goin' to, but the hospital." The eyes of Erickson remained upon his lathe. Jonah Sheedy, somewhat fearful of dungeon-sentence himself, shuffled back to his work. And from that time nothing of note happened to mar the day's serenity.

There was one thing that even Spike Dolan, accustomed as he was to small details, had not noted—else he would have wasted no speculation on Erickson's quiet demeanor. When the giant had picked himself up after the blow on the chin, his dazed senses came back very slowly, and so the first thing of his surroundings he really was able to grasp happened to be the object on which his eyes were resting at the moment. Gradually that object became registered on his brain as an actuality. It lay within the tailor-shop, beyond that door which stood open. Upon a table where the cutters worked, it gleamed dully in a shaft of light which fell upon it from the window opposite. It was one of those enormous knives which are employed to cleave several thicknesses of cloth at the same time.

As he gazed at that huge knife, the red mist cleared away before the big convict's vision; and the blind rage which had swept through his whole body changed suddenly into crafty satisfaction. Erickson held his eyes upon the floor from that time on, lest anyone should see the joy which had come into them.

GOSSIP in prison flies faster among the convicts than it does among the freemen. By evening Mrs. Murphy knew all that had been said about her husband, and when he sat opposite her in the little living-room, Murphy learned the truth—no less bitter because it had been expected.

She sighed. "You know what is best, Joe," she said as she had said many a time before.

He frowned at the carpet. "I made a livin' before I ever saw this pen', and I can make a livin' after I leave it, I guess," he answered doggedly.

For more than an hour he sat there raking his memory, to no result. He was seeking to find some name to whose owner he could address himself in his search for work. Time had passed, a good deal of it, too, since he had been on the outside; men had come, and men had gone. He could now recall no one in a position of responsibility. And—it came to him often as he sat there thinking—looking for a job was a strange proceeding; he had forgotten what it was like. He felt a little forlorn. His wife stitched on at her stocking-darning. Murphy sat in silence, groping in the dusty corners of his memory.

The next morning, when he went to work, he noticed that the group at the gate stopped taking their canes from the rack to look around at him; there was that in their demeanor which showed they had been talking about

him. He knew, as well as if he had heard it, the nature of their comments —how many kinds of fool they had called him, how loudly those of his own party who had chosen the discreet course had condemned him for his act. He had a feeling of being very much alone when he went inside with these others.

Davis, the new man, was on hand according to orders, to learn what Murphy could tell him about the duties of the post. The little old guard found a sort of relief in showing the young fellow around; it helped him to forget. When he had done, he took his customary chair and he looked about him. For the first time he had a fondness for the dusty place; it would go hard to leave it. Aye, to leave it—and for where?

He bent his eyes upon the floor, trying again to think of some possible opening for a fifty-year-old man without either trade or profession.

Erickson was working at his lathe. His face was smooth; only his eyes showed expression, and he kept the lids lowered, so that no one might see the red light of murder that was smoldering far back in them. Under those lowered lids he watched the door which opened into the tailor-shop.

At times, as prisoners passed into other rooms, that door opened; and Erickson's red gaze sought the table where the cutters worked. Always he found that table surrounded by busy convicts; the large knives flashed, severing the folded cloth asunder as easily as though it were so much soft cheese.

THE door was closed after one of these intervals, and Davis, the new guard, passed the blond-haired giant on his way to the dryer, where Spike Dolan was waiting to show him some details of the work. He saw that the man was trembling. "I guess," he mused, "I put the fear o' God into *him* all right."

That was at eleven o'clock. According to the custom of the tailor-shop, the cutters left their table at that hour to confer with their foreman. Five minutes or so later a pair of convicts on their way through to the bookbindery opened the door; and Erickson saw the knives. They lay there, with no one near.

He glanced around him. Spike Dolan was showing the new guard the inside of the dryer, and both their backs were turned. Jonah Sheedy was busy at his bench. Old Murphy sat engrossed in his endeavor to remember some friend. Erickson walked away from his lathe and through that door; and so businesslike was his demeanor that no one who saw had any idea that his errand was beyond the ordinary routine. In the tailor-shop he went straight to the cutters' table; nor did any of the prisoners there take note of him.

Jonah Sheedy was the first to realize the impending tragedy; and before he had time to move, before his yell of terror had fairly begun, it died to a gurgle. He bent double, groaned and pitched forward face down upon the floor, his sins expiated so far as this world is concerned. Erickson withdrew the huge knife from the thing that had so recently been his tormentor, and turned toward the dryer where the new guard was standing staring at him, wide-eyed with horror of that dripping blade.

There is perhaps no feeling of helplessness more complete than that which a strong man knows when he is unarmed in the presence of one who comes toward him with a naked weapon, seeking his life. In that room there was, with the single exception of Erickson, no one who carried so much as a pocketknife. The murderer apparently realized the situation to its fullness, for he smiled as he advanced toward Davis. Those who saw that smile felt their blood chill. The lust to kill, so carefully repressed ever since Erickson had first seen his opportunity to gratify it, now flamed through his being like living fire, but he came on slowly. He meant to taste the enjoyment of anticipation to its utmost. His eyes hung on the young guard, and he licked his wet lips like a hungry dog which sees raw meat.

So intent was he upon this next victim that he did not see Murphy until the little gray-haired man in his shabby

uniform was standing fairly before him blocking his path. Erickson halted; his right arm flew upward until the knife was high above his head.

JUST how Murphy had come there no one, not even himself, exactly knew. From the time when he had heard that strangled scream of Jonah Sheedy's until the moment when he found himself facing the murderer, he acted apparently on reflexes, for his mind kept no record of that interval.

Some one had thrown the belt-lever shutting off the power, and the room was silent now. In the dust-haze the faces of the convicts showed paler than the powdered wood had made them; they crouched, every man shrinking as far as possible from the slayer.

He stood in the aisle between his lathe and the work-benches, gigantic, apelike, grotesque in his striped suit. The huge knife dripped crimson blotches on his barred sleeve. The red which had been lurking in his eyes now shot forth in little lurid beams.

Three feet away, almost under the upraised weapon, Murphy stood, his head tilted slightly back, that he might look upward into those flaming eyes. A little gray-haired man in shabby blue, he broke the thick silence of that room.

"Erickson, give me that knife," he said. And now, as he spoke, a change came over him, a change which made him the dominating figure in the place. His voice was unaltered, as if the occasion were usual; but there was in it that quality of flat implacability, which proclaimed the fact that he did not know how to yield to any man.

For a moment neither man moved or made a sound. They stood there looking into each other's eyes. Then the voice of Erickson came in a husky half-whisper.

"I bane goin' to kill that guard. Yo' gat out."

Murphy took a step forward, and now their bodies touched. The convict's upraised arm stiffened, and his shoulders swung back in a final effort to raise the knife higher before delivering the blow. "I kill yo' too," he said thickly.

Murphy stretched forth his hand. "Give me the knife," he repeated in the same flat voice, the stubborn voice of one who knows no course save that on which he has started, and no goal short of the end of that road. In that tone there was no appeal; nor yet was there the slightest ring of command; but there was in its very dullness something more potent, something which revealed a greater inflexibility of purpose, than any vibrancy could suggest.

Erickson looked down; and then, even as he was giving his shoulders the mighty heave preliminary to striking, a tremor seized them, as if he had suddenly turned cold; the shudder descended slowly over his chest and inwrapped his entire body. His scowl melted into lines of bewilderment.

"All right, now," Murphy said as if he had expected it, and took the huge knife which the giant lowered slowly toward his extended hand. "Come on." They went together from the room and down the stairs toward the office of the captain of the yard.

THE warden promoted Murphy to the position left vacant by the deposed commissary, and the day before the board-meeting at which the appointment was confirmed, the secretary of that body thought he had discovered a mistake in the recommendation.

"See here, Warden," he said, "your stenographer set down the date wrong—he's got it twenty-four hours ahead of the facts."

"What do you mean?" the warden asked.

"Why, the way he's got it, it was made the day before Murphy disarmed that big Swede."

"Oh, that Erickson affair!" The warden dismissed it with a smile. "Why, Murphy let me know the kind of nerve he has before *that* happened. He showed that he was something more than physically brave, the day before. That date on my recommendation is correct."

A "Sindbad of Oakland Creek" story will be Mr. Bechdolt's contribution to the May BLUE BOOK MAGAZINE. It's one of the best sea-stories you ever read.

The Conquering Woman

by Stanley Shaw

(Events of the First Installment:)

AILSA DANFORTH'S father, John Gray, had committed an unforgivable sin, not only betraying a sacred trust but adding to that enormity by evading the law's punishment—taking his own life rather than face a long prison-term.

Shortly afterward Ailsa's mother died; and Ailsa, realizing that her life in the Southern community where she had always lived could never be happy, took what money remained, and left for New York, determined to take a new name and win a new position in life.

On the train with her was a man with bandaged eyes, who, she learned, was Malvern Dane, a mining man coming from Canada; the woman with him, who appeared to be his wife, evidenced little affection for him, although he seemed, in spite of his injured eyes, a man of unusual attractiveness. Ailsa noted, idly, that the woman's voice curiously resembled her own.

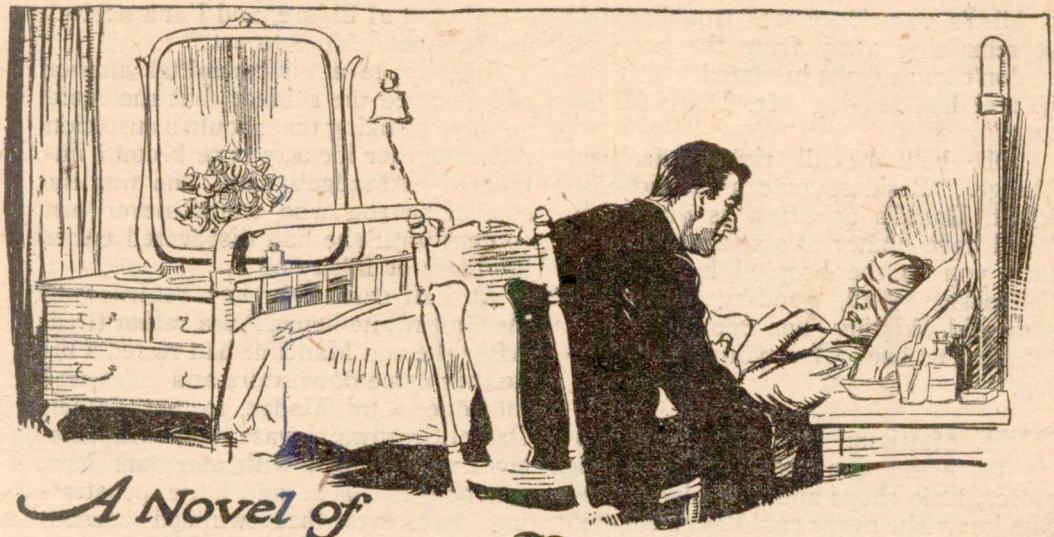
Then came the crash—a collision that pinned Ailsa under some wreckage with a broken arm; the car caught fire too, and she lay helpless while the flames drew near her—even saw them consume the handbag in which all her money had been carried. And then her cries brought to her rescue—the blind man. Terribly injured himself, he contrived to free her, and then Ailsa fainted.

She revived in the hospital whither she and Dane had been taken; and she found herself accepted by everyone—by Dane himself!—as his wife. The other woman had disappeared. Penniless and helpless from her injuries, she saw no other course than to continue the impersonation till she should be able to fend for herself.

BLIND (though hopes were held out that he would sometime regain his sight), lying strapped almost immovable until his broken bones should knit, Dane lay in his hospital room and planned with his friend Bobby Grathwaite a campaign to sell stock in his mine—a really valuable copper vein that needed only the money obtained from the stock-sale to develop into a valuable property. And when Ailsa was wheeled in from the adjoining room to join the consultation, she contrived to play her part successfully. Then came a letter—a letter from Malvern Dane's wife assuring Ailsa that she need not fear her return to claim her place, that she had never loved Dane, and that she had seized this opportunity to flee with the man for whom she really cared.

And then came a newspaper report that her old friend Judge Wardwell had refused to identify any of the bodies found after the wreck as that of Ailsa.

(The story follows in detail.)



A Novel of Mystery and Romance

CHAPTER IX

MADGE GRATHWAITE

THE Grathwaite family lived in one of the old brick residences on North Washington Square. As Bobby's car drew up in front, Ailsa was reminded keenly of her own home city; it was the first New York house she had seen that bore a Southern appearance. Ailsa drew in a quick breath of appreciation, and then, turning to Bobby, who was holding the car door open for her to alight, she said:

"Isn't it beautiful here? I believe you have selected one of the most delightful spots in New York for your home."

"Not me," answered Bobby. "My maternal great-grandfather did that. I'd rather—"

Madeline Grathwaite proved to be pretty and eager-faced; she had beautiful dark hair and an olive skin, but her eyes were a deep hyacinthine blue that sometimes gave her features a feline appearance and contrasted oddly with her skin. She took greedy delight in anything that promised to be novel in life. She knew every sight in the city worth seeing, and she had eaten her way from Charrera's Spanish restaurant on Pearl Street to Pabst's German Hotel in Harlem, searching for strange gastronomic delights with which to vex the Grathwaite family cook into attempting to duplicate. Bobby facetiously maintained that his sister "wept scalding tears and called that day lost whose low descending sun saw no foreign restaurant invaded, no new dish won."

Removing her outer garments and stepping upstairs into a pleasant sitting-room where a wood-fire burned in an open grate, Ailsa met Mrs. Grathwaite, who was a semi-invalid, afflicted with a chronic ailment of the lower limbs that prevented her from getting about. She was a fair, stout and motherly-appearing woman who adored her two children and thought her husband, who was the purveyor of a widely known breakfast-cereal, to be the greatest captain of industry in the world.

"What do you say, Mummy: shall we take lunch uptown and come back in time for dinner?" said Madeline after a little desultory chat. Then, before her mother could adjust her somewhat slow-moving mind to make a decision, Madge settled the question by adding: "All right, that's what we'll do." Then she turned to Ailsa, adding: "Of course you're going to take dinner with us. I told Bobby to insist on Malvern's letting you stay."

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Ailsa's conscience was troubling her at remaining away from the hospital. "I don't know," she hesitated. "I hardly feel like leaving Mr. Dane for so long."

"Oh, he'll be all right," declared Madge. "Besides, you can telephone up to St. David's as often as you wish. We'll have dinner at six-thirty and return you to the hospital by eight or half-past. Well, good-by, Mummy," she said, kissing her mother again. "Expect us back when you see us coming."

THE afternoon was for Ailsa Danforth one continuous whirl of big stores, little shops and more big stores. She knew she never could have covered one tenth the ground she did, had not Madge Grathwaite been with her; yet she felt a tiny grain of resentment at Madge's presence, for all that. She was not so sure whether it was Madge or herself who had made the final decision on many of the articles she had purchased, and the thought made her impatient with her own lack of assertiveness. She resolved to correct this.

They had luncheon at the Ritz-Carlton—Ailsa afterward discovered that this had been a well-meant deference on Madge's part to Mrs. Dane's supposed English ancestry—in the main restaurant, where Madge explained about the beautiful Girondist mirrors, reproduced from the eighteenth-century originals by Robert Adam, and told her they served the best English muffins and Stilton cheese in town. Ailsa partook of neither, but discovering Brunswick stew, a famous Southern dish, on the menu, knew she could handle that with one arm, and ordered it. Then she found she had made Bobby Grathwaite's gastronomically sophisticated sister acquainted with a dish which that young lady had never previously encountered. Madge raved over the Brunswick stew, sent down to the chef for the recipe and declared she would have the family cook prepare some the very next day for her mother's delectation.

"But isn't it funny," she said, "that you, an English girl, should know all about this delightful dish which I never even heard of before, and I'm a perfect fiend on new things to eat."

Ailsa made a noncommittal answer and changed the subject; but she could not help thinking that should a suspicion regarding her identity once become implanted in Madge's mind, she was the sort of person who would never rest content until she had discovered either the truth or falsity of it.

At half-past five they returned to the Grathwaite home, Ailsa rather tired. After she and Madeline had rested a little they came downstairs and Ailsa was introduced by Madge to her father. Daniel Grathwaite was a tall, dark, massive-framed man, with abundant hair, drooping mustache and large, penetrating dark eyes that twinkled beneath craggy brows. Ailsa was a little timid with him at first, but he soon put her at ease and asked no questions that bore on her life before coming to New York; in fact, he talked about the city, about the copper mine and very much about Dane.

"We're all Malvern Dane fans in this household, as perhaps you have guessed," he explained finally. "My son is very enthusiastic about that copper property; so are the rest of us. Do you find the subject interesting, Mrs. Dane?"

"Oh, tremendously," answered Ailsa, her eyes becoming animated and her fatigue slipping away like a discarded cloak under the influence of Grathwaite's deeply pleasant voice.

The dining-room was on the second floor, a convenience made necessary by the mother's infirmity. On their way there Daniel Grathwaite kept up a running fire of pleasant conversation, and from his attitude Ailsa felt sure she had managed to pass muster beneath his keen eye.

Bobby, it seemed, had not arrived home from business, but he came in just as the fish-course was being served.

"Hello, folks," he called, breezing into the dining-room. "Glad to see you're still alive after your shopping-trip, Mrs. Dane. Sis, you're looking rather extra chipper too; bet a big red apple you discovered something new to eat today—what?"

"I certainly did," answered Madge, her eyes sparkling. "Brunswick stew, at the Ritz, a Southern dish. Mrs. Dane made me acquainted with it. Wasn't it odd an Englishwoman should know one of our own famous dishes that I never heard of? It's just heavenly; we're going to have it served at home to-morrow. I've arranged with Belinda."

"H'm—Brunswick stew! Listens good, anyway," hummed Bobby.

"How's the stock going, Robert?" inquired his father.

"The demand is not exactly tumultuous—yet," answered Bobby, losing a little of his cheerfulness. "About seven hundred shares is what Oak, Ames & Offenright report for the day."

"Not at all bad—for a starter," declared his father. "In fact, it's rather better than I expected."

AILSA'S first dinner at the Grathwaites' was one of the most memorable events of her life. Accustomed as she had been to the moderate Southern manner of living among the well-to-do, where one seldom hurried, either mentally or physically, the Grathwaite family was a new experience. They seemed to live about twice as fast, and to get many times more out of life than had anyone she had previously known. The rapid-fire, give-and-take conversation of the dinner-table drifted from copper mines to the reigning theatrical success, from that to the current art-exhibition, the newest thing in motor-cars, Ruth Law's amazing flying record, then to the morals of the present city government.

It was a few moments after eight o'clock when Bobby Grathwaite left Ailsa at the entrance of St. David's. She bade him good-by and hurried inside to the elevator. Doctor Laesser being an old friend of Malvern Dane's, and Dane having taken a large double suite of rooms on one of the upper floors of the hospital, many of the minor rules of the institution were relaxed for his benefit. Thus Ailsa could come and go as she pleased, and Dane could receive visitors at almost any reasonable hour.

Entering her own room, Ailsa noted that the door that gave into Dane's room was slightly ajar. The sound of two men talking made her pause and listen. One voice was Dane's; the other she did not recognize. She had decided its owner must be an orderly, or perhaps one of the hospital internes, when she heard Dane call. Evidently his acute ear had caught the sound of her entrance, quietly as she had moved.

"Is that you, Nina?" he asked. "Come in a moment, wont you please, dear?"

Throwing aside her coat and hat, Ailsa answered: "It is I. I've just arrived."

Swinging wide the connecting door, she passed into Dane's room. Seated beside the bed was a short, rather stout man with pale features, very black hair and dark eyes. He was smooth-shaven, his heavy beard showing blue beneath the skin.

"Have a good time, Nina?" inquired Dane.

"Oh, splendid," answered Ailsa. "I'm just fascinated with the Grathwaites, every one of them. Have you been resting comfortably?"

"Oh, so-so," answered Dane a little wearily. "Peter and I have been talking over—things. I got in touch with his brother and sent for Peter to come up and see me. I'm going to need a lot of new clothes, and so on; what do you say if I engage Peter to come back with me on the old arrangement? He can be very useful. You wont mind much, will you?"

Ailsa, stepping toward the bed, had murmured, "Why, of course not," when her gaze met that of Dane's visitor, and she recoiled.

THE man had sunk back in his chair and was staring at her, his jaw sagging, his long arms hanging limp. For a moment she thought he had been suddenly taken ill. Then it came to her in a flash what his look of blank amazement meant. The man was Peter Cairn, Dane's former valet, and he had known the real Nina Dane.

There could be no doubt of it; Cairn's expression told the whole story; yet even while Ailsa watched him with a wildly beating heart, feeling as if an unseen hand was trying to strangle her,

the man seemed visibly to pull himself together.

His hands came slowly back to his knees; his mouth closed; and his face smoothed out to an appearance of complete imperturbability. Dragging his eyes from her face, he arose to his feet.

"I'm sure," he said in a queer, rasping voice that stressed no single word and sounded as if he might have run on thus for months without ever stopping to take breath, "I shall endeavor to give complete satisfaction if I am taken back. I am aware that a slight difference existed during our former relationship." He looked at Ailsa without any emotion. "But I desire to offer my humble apologies and to say that I am sorry it occurred." His voice trailed off, and he looked at Dane. For the first time since Cairn had been talking, Ailsa thought she caught the merest hint of an expression in the valet's large, dark eyes; they reminded her now of the eyes of a faithful horse or dog. It gave her the impression that Cairn thought a great deal of his former employer.

"Well, that's settled, then," said Dane, speaking as if he was greatly relieved. "You'd better drop in every morning, Peter, at, say, nine o'clock, for a while, and get my orders. Maybe I'll get a room for you on this floor, later, if I need you oftener."

"Very well, sir," answered Cairn. "I hope you have a restful night, sir." While Ailsa stared at him, he quitted the room, walking softly and with an air of quiet respectability that made her think of an undertaker.

"Now tell me about your shopping-trip and the dinner at Bobby's," said Dane.

Though Ailsa's brain was in a whirl of excitement, she managed to calm herself and tell Dane all about how she had spent the day. "After all," she thought, biting her lips as a look of determination stole into her eyes, "I may be mistaken about Cairn's having known Mrs. Dane, and I'm not going to run before I'm quite sure there is a reason for it; in fact, I don't think I intend to run, anyway; I'd rather stay and fight, even if Peter Cairn did know the real Mrs. Dane."

CHAPTER X

In the Sunlight

UPON awakening next morning, Ailsa discovered that some one, probably Miss Rockwell, at Dane's suggestion, had placed a pile of current magazines and weekly periodicals on the stand beside her bed. She picked up the topmost one and began to read.

It was a popular unillustrated society journal called *Town Talk,* rather given to spicy back-stairs gossip and thinly veiled innuendo about prominent New Yorkers. Some of its excellent poetry Ailsa found entertaining, and she was mildly amused at the crisply pungent epigrams and short fillers. Finally, under a column headed Beau Flaneur Says, she came across this:

> Just as Town Talk goes to press, a telegram arrives from San Frisco informing me that the bright lights of Broadway are not again to know Curtis Denman for many a sad and weary month—that hectic youth, after receiving his divorce from the winsome Lettie Allerton, having sailed for Hongkong this morning on the *Chinton Maru* of the Occident and Orient line.
>
> Among certain luscious ladies of the chorus of whom we wot, there will be many grieving hearts at this news; yet if Dame Rumor speaks truthfully, —and 'tis a way the lady has,—the son and heir to the Denman millions is not quitting our rugged shore entirely uncomforted by female companionship. There are whispers of a closely veiled young woman who also sailed on the *Chinton Maru* and who, as the steamer plowed her way out through the Golden Gate, was seen pacing the promenade-deck beside the aforementioned son and heir of old G. B. Denman.

This news fitted in perfectly with Ailsa's earlier supposition regarding the inner meaning of the letter she had received on her first morning in the hospital from Dane's real wife. It also confirmed her suspicion that Nina Dane had deserted her husband for Curtis Denman.

As soon as Miss Rockwell entered the room to assist Ailsa in dressing, she inquired for Malvern Dane, only to discover that he had passed a bad night, but was now receiving massage-treat-

ment to ease his cramped limbs. Sometime after breakfast, Doctor Laesser came to visit Ailsa and immediately brought up the subject of Malvern's condition.

"I'm a little worried about your husband," he said, adding reassuringly: "Nothing very serious, of course, but he had a miserable night, and he seems worse this morning. I think I shall have to shut down on his receiving so many visitors—his valet Cairn was in to see him this morning; Mr. Dane sent for him. I wish you would use your influence toward making your husband stop thinking so much about business matters. I considered it a mistake from the first, but—well, you know his insistence—and I decided to permit him to have a telephone and one or two visitors for a day or two and see what happened. Of course, with the state his mind was in, this has given him an opportunity to let off steam, so to speak; but the excitement seems to have been too much. He doesn't get the rest he should to make good progress."

AILSA'S conscience smote her. She feared it was not thinking about business matters that had made Dane worse, but something Peter Cairn had told him, and her quaking heart informed her what that something might be. Yet she did not fear for herself; her only thought was for Dane, and she wanted to go to him immediately.

At the same time Ailsa was conscious of a growing feeling of impatience with the house-surgeon of St. David's. The doctor had the reputation of being a wonderfully deft man with the knife, but in his contact with others he was apt to be very easy; the road of least resistance was always the most inviting to him, and he abhorred difference and argument. While he might and often did differ with people, he kept quiet instead of fighting matters to a conclusion. Ailsa was rapidly becoming convinced that Malvern Dane, strong of will and aggressively assertive, was managing his own case more than a sick man ought. She longed to instill a little stiffening into Doctor Laesser's spine.

"I don't know that I can be of much help in making him stop business," she said, thinking that if Doctor Laesser viewed the matter as he did, it was his duty to absolutely prohibit Dane's attending to affairs of that sort. "But I'll try. I'll go in and see him at once, if I may."

"Do," answered the Doctor. "I think the masseur is through." He opened the double doors between the two rooms. Ailsa glanced in, saw Dane, and rushed toward him with a hurt cry, falling upon her knees beside the bed. The harness had a few minutes before been readjusted on Dane's head by the nurse who had just stepped out of the room, and he was in tears, sobbing with deep, heart-tearing intakes of breath.

Ailsa grasped his hands and pressed them fondly to her cheeks. Every pain-tortured sob of this great, strong man stabbed through her sympathetic heart like a knife-thrust.

"Oh, my dear, why did they allow you to come in?" protested Dane. "It was enough that I must endure this. But never mind," he added, brushing the tears from his cheeks. "I'll not be a baby again; I—I didn't mean to give way this time, but I was alone, and the everlasting torment of this harness got me on the raw. I'll be good now."

"But you should give way, if you feel like it," protested Ailsa. "It is the struggling against your pain, trying to fight it down, that has caused a strained condition where your nerves are like taut violin-strings. There is nothing cowardly in giving way occasionally; it is sometimes wiser to bend before a thing than to waste precious vitality fighting it."

"Mrs. Dane is quite right," said Doctor Laesser kindly. "Tell us when you feel badly, and we'll know what to do to make you feel better."

"Oh, are you there, Doctor?" asked Dane, trying to speak cheerfully.

"Yes, I'm here," answered the Doctor. "I was just bringing in your good wife that she might add her voice to mine in urging you to relinquish business affairs. I'm afraid it's not doing you any good, and you know I can't be responsible for results unless you follow my advice."

"But I've simply got to see the thing

through now," began Dane impatiently. Ailsa for the first time became conscious that the hand she still held against her cheek was burning hot; she looked at Dane's flushed face and interrupted him. "When was Mr. Dane's temperature taken last?" she asked quickly, glancing toward Doctor Laesser.

"Why, I suppose it was taken about half an hour ago," answered the surgeon, a little startled at her abrupt question and himself peering through his pince-nez at Dane's flushed cheeks, a condition he had already noted, but laid to the man's momentary excitement.

DOCTOR Laesser lifted the report-card, glanced at it, and then shook his head and said:

"No, Miss Amber, the day-nurse, did not take Mr. Dane's temperature at nine-thirty as she should." He picked up the clinical thermometer from a tiny glass of aseptic solution that stood on the bed-stand, shook it down and slipped it beneath Dane's tongue. "We'll see what his temperature is now," he added, his air somewhat worried.

Ailsa had been thinking rapidly. Dane had surely not acted toward her as if Peter Cairn had told him anything, and in this event, Doctor Laesser was probably correct; it was thinking so much of business and seeing so many visitors that had affected Malvern adversely. She also felt sure Dane had a high temperature, and she saw in this a chance to get him off the business track.

Doctor Laesser took the clinical thermometer from between Dane's lips, glanced at it, frowned impatiently, hurriedly said, "Excuse me a moment," and started to leave the room.

Ailsa knew that her earlier suspicion had been confirmed. Dane had a high temperature. Doctor Laesser was going to blow up the day-nurse and institute immediate measures for the reduction of Dane's fever. Ailsa followed the Doctor into the corridor and caught his arm.

"He has a temperature, hasn't he?" she asked hurriedly.

Laesser turned and looked at her. "Yes, he has," he answered, a little reluctantly. "But we'll soon have that down."

"I know," said Ailsa quickly. "But isn't this just the opportunity we've been seeking to get Mr. Dane away from business? I don't think Miss Amber is quite experienced enough to have charge of his case, anyway, and Miss Rockwell is thoroughly capable; why not let me give him my room, move him in there and thus get him beyond reach of that telephone? I think I can keep most of the business affairs from him then."

Doctor Laesser's face brightened. "Splendid," he said; then he qualified his statement by adding: "If we can persuade him to be moved."

"Don't try to persuade him," said Ailsa, feeling a little amazed at her own display of spirit. "Move him."

Doctor Laesser smiled doubtfully. "I'm afraid it will be like attempting to shift an active volcano," he said. "But if you'll stay with me, I'll start it."

"I'll help all I can," answered Ailsa, turning back toward Dane's room. "I'd better give him some inkling of what is coming while you are getting ready."

"All right," agreed the surgeon.

Ailsa returned to Dane's room, knelt beside him and took both his hands in her single free one.

"What is this, a conspiracy?" he inquired a trifle petulantly, sensing from Ailsa's and the surgeon's recent actions that something must be on the tapis.

"We're going to move you into my room and have Miss Rockwell care for you," she answered, bracing herself for the explosion and holding his hands tightly imprisoned in her own. "She is a more competent nurse than Miss Amber, and mine is a much more comfortable room."

The explosion came. At first Ailsa thought Dane would throw himself from the bed.

"Good Lord! Have you lost your wits?" he cried. "I wont stand for it. I've got to be beside this telephone. I'll make them move me to some other hospital; that's what I'll do!"

"There, there!" she soothed, bending down and laying her soft cheek against his as she kept tight hold of his hands. "It is for your good. You've got a temperature, and it is caused by business cares and too many visitors. I'm to

take this room, and the telephone shall stay right where it is. I'll be here to answer it, and I swear that if any business matters come up that you ought to know about, I'll tell you." She rested her lips tenderly on his cheek as she whispered: "Now you're going to be good—aren't you, dear? Please, for me."

He turned away his head, and the agonizing pain the action brought made him scream. "I tell you I *wont* stand for this," he cried. "I'll telephone for Peter to take me to a hospital where—" He got one hand free from Ailsa's grasp and clutched blindly for the telephone-instrument. Unable to find it, he suddenly reached up and tore at the bandage bound across his forehead as he cried: "You are responsible for this. I'll—"

Realizing that a man in his fevered condition was utterly irresponsible, Ailsa had cast herself forward to restrain him when Dane succeeded in loosening the bandage. He threw it violently on the floor, raised his body on one elbow—and his torrent of words trailed off into a startled gasp as his eyes stared wildly at the window where the sun was pouring into the room.

"Oh! Oh! Oh!" he cried agonizingly. "It's God's sunlight. I can see! I can see!" Dane's voice died away, and he sank weakly back on the bed, covering both eyes with his hands as if the light hurt.

Ailsa bent over and pressed her lips to his forehead as she whispered softly, "I'm so glad. It's splendid. Now you will be good, wont you, dear?"

He lowered his hands and looked at her with blazing eyes. For an instant Ailsa was certain Peter Cairn had told him all, and that Dane was about to denounce her. Finally he took her face in both his hands and stared into her eyes that never once flinched before his own.

It seemed an age before he spoke. It seemed to Ailsa as if he was searching her very soul, as if he could never leave off looking on her face. She knew he was studying her; she knew his active mind was traveling miles each minute, while her own wildly beating heart was hammering in unison. What would he do? What would he say? Did he know, and would he turn from her with loathing at her deception?

At last, Dane uttered a deep sigh of relief.

"Oh, my dear," he whispered chokingly, "forgive me. I'm so glad I can see you. You know I never saw your face before. I don't know what I might have said if I hadn't torn that bandage off." He drew her down until his lips met hers, and his tears came in a flood.

"Yes, I'll be good," he promised finally. "I'll do anything in the world you ask. I have seen you, dear. I know I can trust you. Thank God for that blessing, I needed it so much just now." Then he fainted.

Beset with anxiety at Dane's sudden lapse into unconsciousness, Ailsa rushed out into the hospital corridor to summon assistance. There she met Doctor Laesser coming with Miss Rockwell and two orderlies.

"You must not be alarmed," said the Doctor reassuringly, after she had explained matters. "It is only a temporary syncope, caused by the sudden light after so long a period of darkness. We shall have to replace the bandages and only remove them for short periods at long intervals. And it will be merciful to move him to the other room before he regains consciousness."

AILSA was worried about Dane's condition; yet she could not, nor did she wish to, stop her heart from singing joyfully at the splendid news of his recovered sight and the fact that after seeing her he had voiced his trust. How vastly much the latter meant she was too excited at the present moment fully to realize; yet she was dimly aware that something had given her a feeling of strength and confidence she had not heretofore known. Love for Dane had so taken complete possession of Ailsa's heart that she made a silent resolve that, no matter where her own individual interests might lie in the future, his faith should never be betrayed.

Although she was not his wife, Ailsa could see nothing radically wrong, since his own wife had deserted him, in occupying the place she did; certainly, she thought, she was being helpful to

Dane, and she was in no way harming him. Until the hour came when he must be told the truth,—and she was as firmly resolved as ever that she would tell him before she could be an actual wife to him,—she would give him all the help and comfort in his illness the most faithful and affectionate wife could have given; her great love would permit her to do nothing less.

After Dane had recovered consciousness, Doctor Laesser informed Ailsa that it would be better if she did not see him until evening, as it would be necessary to keep the patient very quiet in order to allay the excitement caused by his removal. She therefore spent the greater part of the day reading the newspapers and studying her books on copper-mining. Bobby Grathwaite called during the forenoon, heard the good news of his friend's recovered sight and told Ailsa that Moosecap Copper was selling rather slowly, but that he expected the demand to pick up as soon as the next advertisement was printed, which would be on the following morning. Madge Grathwaite sent a huge bunch of flowers.

CHAPTER XI

Valley of the Shadow

THE following morning Dane showed no improvement, and Doctor Laesser appeared worried when he came to report to Ailsa.

At three o'clock in the afternoon Bobby Grathwaite called Ailsa on the telephone and after inquiring for Malvern, informed her that Moosecap Copper was "going strong," as he expressed it—the day's sales, so far, having jumped to five thousand shares.

"That's splendid," she answered.

"Sure," answered Bobby. "But I was just telling Dad about it, and he immediately began to croak. Said it was blamed funny the demand should leap from less than a thousand to five thousand in so short a time; but I guess that's just Dad's way. When it was selling slow, he said 'Fine for a starter.' Now it's getting its gait, he begins to suspect gummygahoo somewhere. I tell him it's only an active demand keeping pace with expert advertising."

Ailsa had just laid the telephone-receiver back on the stand when Doctor Laesser entered the room, his face grave.

"Your husband wishes to see you, alone, for a few moments," he said. "You'd better go in at once."

Ailsa's hand flew to her wildly beating heart. "Is he worse?" she asked.

The surgeon shook his head. "He is not any better," he answered. "And I don't quite understand it. There doesn't seem to be anything wrong with the injury to his spine except slow progress, and his other injuries are healing nicely. The heart-action is excellent, and he digests well; but his temperature persists; he is becoming weaker, and he has been greatly depressed since we stopped his attending to business. I sometimes fancy he may be concealing some worry."

Ailsa had been thinking swiftly. Liking Doctor Laesser personally, she was yet more than ever impressed with his lack of initiative.

"I will go in at once," she said. "But if you don't understand, you must consult. I know nothing of New York physicians, but get one or two of the highest skill and have them see Mr. Dane. Expense must not be considered; Malvern Dane is too valuable a man to lose."

She walked swiftly toward the double door between the rooms. She knew, of course, that Doctor Laesser's remark had no personal meaning when he had hinted at Dane's having some concealed worry; and she could not believe, in the face of Dane's recent display of affection toward her, that Peter Cairn had told him anything that might reflect on her own position as Dane's wife; yet she resolved to probe his mind if the opportunity could be found.

Dane himself, however, quieted any lingering suspicions she might have in this regard soon after she entered the room. Miss Rockwell stepped quietly into the corridor, and Ailsa knelt beside the bed, taking Dane's hand in hers.

"You sent for me," she said. "What did you wish?"

"Oh, nothing much," he answered wearily. "But I've had an idea for the

last two days that I'm not going to pull out of this. Of course I realize I'm not so well; that's why they took me away from the business. Well," he continued, slowly and wistfully, "I've always had a horror of dying alone in a hospital, among comparative strangers; I wanted you to promise that if I am to go, you'll stay with me to the end and that you'll send for Peter. Peter has been with me a long time; we were very close to one another—before the quarrel. I don't want to be alone when I go; that's all."

Ailsa thanked God that Dane's bandage had been replaced and that he could not see the anguish in her eyes or the tears that were flooding her cheeks. She took a slow deep breath and tried to call up every ultimate ounce of energy she possessed, that it might be used in controlling herself.

"Of course I'll promise, faithfully; but you are not going. I shall not let you," she said firmly. "You must get that idea out of your head; it's the worst possible thing you could think, and besides, it *isn't* true." Then Ailsa had what she thought was an inspiration. "You've simply *got* to hurry and get well," she continued cheerfully. "Moosecap Copper stock sold five thousand shares to-day. If that isn't news to—"

"What!" he snapped, becoming animated. "Five thousand shares so soon in one day? Are you sure?"

"Bobby Grathwaite called on the telephone," she answered, "and gave me the latest report from Oak, Ames & Offenright."

"Heavens!" cried Dane. "There's something wrong in that. That is a big demand for one day at this stage of the game."

Ailsa's confidence began to fail her; Dane was becoming excited; she feared she had made a mistake in telling him about the stock sales.

"But what can be wrong?" she asked. "I thought it was splendid."

"I don't *know* what is wrong," answered Dane. "But I do know it would require a veritable mob of ordinary buyers—that is, small-lot buyers such as we want—to demand as many shares as that in five hours. Look here," he snapped, attempting to raise himself on one elbow. "You get either Bobby or Oak, Ames & Offenright on the phone at once and find out in what sort of lots those shares went. I've a suspicion that we forgot to—"

Dane's voice died away; he sank back on the pillow and his eyes closed. The exertion had been too much for him. Ailsa hurried into the adjoining room to find Miss Rockwell and send her for Doctor Laesser.

The surgeon entered and applied restoratives; but when Dane regained his senses, he was delirious, and Ailsa in her excitement forgot all about telephoning to Bobby Grathwaite.

HALF an hour later Doctor Laesser had a consultation with two expert specialists, and Ailsa was told they advised an immediate operation. Realizing that the wise thing to do was to put implicit trust in these men of undoubted skill and knowledge, she told them to go ahead.

At nine o'clock that night Dane was put under the anesthetic. Ailsa's last action before Malvern was wheeled into the operating-room was to telephone for Peter Cairn, in order that she might be prepared for any eventualities. Then she donned a heavy coat and went out to pace the time away in Morningside Park. The operation would not be over for more than an hour.

Never until this moment had Ailsa fully realized how much she loved Malvern Dane. A hundred times she found herself stopping in her walk and staring anxiously with tear-dimmed eyes at the glowing windows of St. David's Hospital, high above, the stately building cut sharply in the darkness against the star-filled night. *"He must not die; God shall not let him."* was the thought her lips continually breathed.

At ten o'clock Ailsa returned to the hospital. Peter Cairn was waiting there. She told him of Dane's request; Peter's inscrutable features never changed. What the man was thinking of she could not guess, but sometimes she thought she again detected that hint of doglike wistfulness in his eyes. While she was talking to Peter downstairs, the news was brought to her that

Dane had recovered from the anesthetic, had been returned to his room and was asking for her. She hurried toward the elevator, bidding Peter come with her and wait in her room.

Dane lay on the bed, white and still, his eyes bandaged, but without the torturing harness. She took his hand in hers, bent across and laid her lips softly on his cheek. He pressed her fingers and whispered: "Is Peter here?"

"Yes," she answered. "In my room."

"Ask him to come in," he added faintly.

She looked questioningly toward Doctor Laesser, who stood on the other side of the bed. He nodded, and Ailsa's courage sank like a thing of lead. She knew that Laesser had given Dane up.

FOR a moment she felt she must scream. Then, at sight of the physician standing there idle, a wave of intense indignation overcame her. If looks could have killed, the house-surgeon of St. David's would have been annihilated on the spot; but he failed to notice her glance, and Ailsa went to summon Cairn.

Cairn entered, leaned over the bed, patted Dane's limp hand and spoke a greeting. Ailsa saw that there were tears in the valet's eyes.

"Hello, Peter, old chap," said Dane weakly. "Things seem a little dark, don't they?"

Ailsa drew a quick breath. Cairn turned toward her and appeared to sense her attitude. He straightened his shoulders and spoke.

"Not near as bad, sir, as after that explosion in the mine," he said. "You'll get through this easy enough."

Ailsa gave him a look of gratitude. "There," she said, as Dane began to brighten. "That is the way to talk. Of course he is going to get out of it; he has every chance." She squeezed Dane's hand fondly as she continued. "I didn't call Peter because I had the remotest idea you would die, but because I knew Peter would cheer you up. I'll be back in just an instant," she finished, arising and beckoning to Doctor Laesser to follow her out of the room.

In the corridor, she turned toward him, her big brown eyes blazing. She had been getting angrier every minute, but she tried to restrain herself, and resolved, if it were possible, to begin diplomatically with this apathetic surgeon whom she desired most to grasp by the shoulders and shake as she would have shaken a child.

"Doctor," she said, "you are older than I, and you should know your business; but can't you give that man something to brace him up? Are you going to stand idle and see him die?"

"But my dear lady," began Doctor Laesser, visibly embarrassed at this sudden onslaught, "I have already—"

"You are satisfied that his case is hopeless, aren't you?" interrupted Ailsa, clenching her fingers until the nails dug into her palms, and certain from the discouraged appearance of Doctor Laesser's features what his answer would be before he uttered it.

"I'm afraid there isn't much chance, Mrs. Dane," he said kindly.

"Then go back in there and take what chance there is," snapped Ailsa, stamping her foot. "You are a physician; give him something to brace him up; I don't care whether it is oxygen or a heart support or what it is—you know best; but you've got to do *something* or I shall scream until you have to put me in a straitjacket. I'm not going to sit quiet and see that man given up, until the final breath has left his body—not then, if there's anything more to do. Now don't argue—act," she concluded vehemently, whirling the Doctor toward Dane's door.

Laesser returned to the room and stood a moment beside the bed, gazing down thoughtfully on the patient's face; then he turned to Miss Rockwell, said, "I'll be back in a moment," and went out.

Returning soon with a hypodermic syringe, he injected a colorless liquid into Dane's hip that brought a wave of returning blood to his pallid cheeks. Then an oxygen apparatus was brought in, loaded with a sodium peroxide cartridge, and Dane uttered a sigh of relief as the warm bath of refreshing gas flowed over his face.

For the next ten hours Ailsa re-

mained at Malvern Dane's bedside, her free hand clasping his, while Peter Cairn sat opposite and Doctor Laesser sat curled up on his spine in a near-by chair intently watching Dane's face. Occasionally, Doctor Laesser explored the patient's heart-action and respiration, or again used the hypodermic. A half-dozen times Ailsa almost thought the flame of life had flickered out; but she refused to give up. During all that time Cairn spoke but once; that was at a moment when Dane's mind was wandering and Ailsa found it impossible to hold back her tears.

"He's not going to die, miss; you may be sure of that," said Peter, shaking his head and putting emphasis into his toneless voice for the first time since Ailsa had met him. "He's a wonderful man; I've known him many years; I'm sure he'll pull through."

It was not entirely what Peter said that made Ailsa's heart leap; if strength of desire and will could have kept a man from the dread portal, Dane would have been in no danger, for Ailsa's every pulse-beat as her fingers pressed his wrist was a call for Malvern Dane to live; it was the new look she saw in Peter's unusually impassive countenance. Only to Dane himself had that doglike glance of intense fidelity been given before. Now, as the man's eyes met hers, she was sure that she had found a place in his faithful heart beside that of his employer.

At about half-past eight in the morning Dane fell into a restful sleep in which he remained for the better part of an hour. Shortly after his awakening, Doctor Benton, the operating surgeon and one of the consultants, a huge, portly man, came in. He fairly beamed when he discovered the patient's condition.

"Well, well," he declared jovially, after ascertaining Dane's temperature, pulse and respiration. "This is wonderful. I thought this man was all but gone last night, but I see we have an entirely different case to deal with this morning. Why, he's in splendid condition." He turned to Doctor Laesser, "Excellent work, Laesser," he said approvingly.

"You must thank Mrs. Dane, not me," said Doctor Laesser, blushing boyishly. "I'm afraid I too had given him up last night; but she would not have it, and kept me right on the firing-line. She's been there all night herself, too."

Doctor Benton looked at Ailsa, who, already beginning to feel the strain of the night's vigil, needed nothing more than a glance to make her burst into tears. "There, there, little lady!" he said comfortingly, patting her on the shoulder, his bright eyes twinkling. "There's nothing like the support of a faithful wife to keep the feet of us miserable men on solid ground. Lie down and rest now; your husband has passed the crisis of surgical shock, and his condition is splendid. He's going to recover."

A weight that had oppressed Ailsa as though the pyramids of Egypt were piled on her heart, rolled away. She went to her room, sank down upon the bed, relaxed her taut nerves and slept.

Dane continued to make a slow improvement throughout the remainder of that day and through the two following days. Ailsa, however, was allowed to see him for but a moment or two at a time and was forbidden mentioning business matters; in fact, Dane was so weak and listless that he failed to press that subject himself, any more than to inquire once if everything was all right. Receiving Ailsa's assurance that it was, he seemed satisfied.

ON the seventh day after Dane's operation Ailsa, who had lain down to take a nap, awakened a few minutes after three o'clock in the afternoon just as Miss Druce entered the room. The nurse informed her that Mr. Robert Grathwaite had called up several times on the telephone during the last hour, but that it had not seemed best to have Ailsa awakened, though the young man had been quite insistent.

Not yet fully awake, Ailsa fell to wondering what Bobby could want; then suddenly remembering Malvern Dane's anxiety regarding the earlier jump in the sales of Moosecap Copper stock, she reached excitedly for the telephone-instrument and asked for Bobby's number.

"Gee, I'm glad I finally got you," Bobby declared in a relieved tone when the connection was made. "Is Malvern able to listen to any business?"

"I'm afraid not," she answered. "His condition is much improved, but it would be out of the question for him to discuss business. What is the matter?"

Ailsa heard a premonitory cough and could almost see Bobby hesitate before replying. Finally he began to talk.

"Well, I'll have to tell you, then," he said. "Haven't seen *The Evening Argus,* have you?"

"No, I haven't seen any of the afternoon newspapers. Why?"

"Well," said Bobby slowly, while Ailsa listened, wild with anxiety, *"The Evening Argus* is out with a vicious attack" (she closed her eyes and clenched her hand, prepared to receive the shock) "on Moosecap Copper," concluded Bobby, and Ailsa breathed freely for the first time in many moments. Then, as Bobby began to talk faster, her solicitude for her own safety vanished before an overwhelming anxiety for Malvern Dane's mining property.

"They claim to have had an expert visit the mine," continued Bobby. "He reports that our core-drilling was all done along a narrow, worthless stringer instead of across a wide and rich vein, that the mine is practically valueless, that we haven't a Dominion mining-license anyway, and that—" Bobby paused and then continued: "Wait a moment, please, Mrs. Dane. Oak, Ames & Offenright have just called me up on the other wire; hold the line while I see what they have to say."

Ailsa waited with growing anxiety. Not even a dozen daily papers claiming that the Moosecap Copper Mine was a fraud could have made her believe such a thing, or lessened her faith in the splendid integrity of Malvern Dane. Yet she knew enough of the pendulum character of public opinion to realize that the attack of even one journal, if persisted in at this crucial time, could do incalculable damage to the sale of Moosecap stock.

At last Bobby's voice again reached her strained ear.

"Worse and more of it," said Bobby dejectedly. "Somebody threw one thousand shares of Moosecap Copper onto the Curb market, just before it closed, for four-fifty. That kills our future sales through Oak, Ames & Offenright. Every newspaper in the country is likely to list Moosecap Copper as selling on the Curb at a half-dollar off. It means ruin for us. God only knows how low the price may go tomorrow."

While Bobby's explanation did not make the situation entirely clear to Ailsa, she understood enough to realize that if Moosecap Copper was being publicly sold on the Curb market for four dollars and fifty cents a share, Oak, Ames & Offenright could hope to dispose of no more of it for five dollars a share, the price it was absolutely necessary to maintain if Malvern Dane was to raise that much-needed million dollars for mine development. And if directly after this attack by *The Argus,* the stock had dropped to four dollars and fifty cents a share, there was no telling how low it might go when the news of both the drop and the attack became more generally circulated.

Ailsa's mind was in a turmoil; yet she put every ounce of her energy into trying to think clearly and connectedly. She felt her own tremendous responsibility, and made a decision. She knew that if Malvern Dane were unable to handle matters himself, he would depend on her to meet whatever emergency might arise; he had told her as much. She resolved to fulfill his expectations with the best that was in her.

"I'm afraid I don't quite understand all this," she said to Bobby. "Wont you please come up here and explain it in person?"

CHAPTER XII

A Copper Crisis

IMMEDIATELY after Bobby rang off, Ailsa dispatched one of the hospital employees out after a copy of *The Evening Argus* and read its attack on Malvern Dane's copper mine.

It was a serious arraignment, if it

were true. The paper stated—all in such clever manner as to avoid direct libel—that a Montreal mining-engineer named P. W. Weeks had investigated the property and found the cores from the diamond drills did not assay anything like what Malvern Dane had claimed, forty per cent copper, that instead they indicated very low-grade ore, scarcely worth mining. Weeks also claimed to have visited the mine and found the equipment secondhand, worn out and only put there for effect, anyway. He said he had been unable to find any record of a Dominion mining-license issued to the Moosecap Copper Company, hinted at flaws in the Moosecap patents and gave it as his opinion that the whole thing was merely a scheme to unload Dane's share in the mine on a confiding public, instead of an attempt to sell but two hundred thousand shares for development purposes, as the advertisements had claimed.

Weeks went into great detail in attempting to prove his case; in fact, it seemed to Ailsa that he said altogether too much. It made the entire article read as if it were inspired by some one who either possessed a long-smoldering grudge against Malvern Dane or was attempting to ruin the reputation of the mine and thus get hold of a lot of Moosecap stock for a low figure.

The whole attack produced a feeling of intense indignation in Ailsa's mind, aroused all her fighting instinct. She had just finished dressing and had picked up the newspaper to again refer to the article, when Bobby Grathwaite was ushered in. No smile decorated Bobby's features now.

"Well," he said dejectedly, falling with limp arms into a chair, "I see you've read it; what do you think?"

"What do *you* think?" countered Ailsa.

"I think it's one of the most disreputable fabrications ever put into printer's ink," he answered, leaning forward, setting his mouth hard and clenching his fist. "Furthermore, it's a plain, barefaced hold-up," he added. "*The Argus* received none of our advertising appropriation; this is the way they get back at us."

"Oh!" exclaimed Ailsa. "Is that what you think inspired the article?"

"It's an old game of theirs," answered Bobby, "and unhappily, it often works; but it wont this time. For two plugged nickels I'd go downtown, tell Orbay Duncannon, the *Argus* advertising-manager, I think he's mean enough to steal crumbs from a blind sparrow, punch his face into pulp and then give myself up to the police with as much cheer as I ever did anything in my blameless young life."

"For all the gravity of the situation, Ailsa could not help smiling. "I appreciate your provocation, but I'm afraid doing that wouldn't help the cause," she said. "Are you certain Duncannon is behind this?"

"No, I'm not certain," answered Bobby frankly. "I called him up and flatly accused him of it. Duncannon told me I was away off—said the article was straight as a string, came from their Montreal correspondent, a man above suspicion, and that there was no animosity or pique behind it whatever. But I don't believe him."

"Tell me exactly what this *Argus* article means in results," said Ailsa.

"It means just this," answered Bobby: "Every purchaser of Moosecap Copper stock who reads that article is liable to come to the conclusion that he has been badly stung, and in that event he'll try to unload his stock at once. To-morrow morning the Curb may be simply swamped with orders to sell Moosecap stock for any old price anybody will be willing to pay; and then, good night! As I said before, God only knows what the quotation price will drop to. We will be lucky if it is thirty cents a share, thirty minutes after the Curb market opens. Well, I guess you know the rest; there wont be a dead dog's chance of our getting that million your husband needs to develop the mine. He'll have to sell."

"We wont cross that bridge until we come to it," said Ailsa firmly. "The thing that worries me most at present is all those people who have already bought stock at five dollars a share and who may be scared by this article into selling for almost any price they can get. We've got to go to the rescue of

the mine, of course; but we are under even greater obligations to go to their rescue. I think it would break Mr. Dane's heart more to know about those poor widows and orphans than it would to know of the attack on the mine."

"You wouldn't find much Moosecap stock held by widows and orphans; that's only a sob-sister yarn," declared Bobby. "But the article is printed and circulated now, anyway, and we can't recall it. We might publish a defense; but the most difficult thing in the world is to catch up with a lie that has once got started."

"Yes, I understand that," said Ailsa. "But what do men do when a stock is going down in price and they wish to prevent it?"

"Where there is established worth behind it, and the drop is small and gradual, without any real reason, they usually support the market, as it is called," answered Bobby. "That is, several men of money club together and buy up every share as fast as it is offered. That brings the price back to normal, and so long as they hold on to their purchased stock, it keeps the quotation up to par, or wherever they desire to keep it."

"I understand that, then," said Ailsa. "Now, tell me how many shares of Moosecap stock have been sold, so far."

Bobby's face began suddenly to brighten. "By George!" he exclaimed. "I see what you are driving at now. Wait a moment until I call up Oak, Ames & Offenright. I'll find out from them exactly how many shares are outstanding."

Bobby picked up the telephone instrument and got the chief of the Moosecap fiscal agents on the wire; then he turned to Ailsa.

"Just 15,346 certificates had been made out and delivered up to last night," said Bobby. "Four thousand, nine hundred-odd shares were ordered, but no certificates have been made out, so those sales are not yet final. That leaves exactly 15,346 shares outstanding."

AILSA made a rapid mental calculation; 15,346 shares at $4.50, the curb-price quoted, would amount to about seventy thousand dollars. She knew that in order to have a broker buy curb-stock falling under fifteen dollars a share on margin, it was necessary to deposit with him one-third the price of the stock. Her idea had been to buy all the Moosecap stock offered, thus support the price and keep it there, at least until Dane was so far recovered that he could be told the state of affairs and advise with them. In order to accomplish this it would be necessary for her to possess sufficient capital to purchase all the Moosecap stock outstanding, since, if the *Argus* attack gained wide circulation, all the stock might be thrown on the market by its present owners. She reached into a drawer, found her check-book and had just looked at the balance when Bobby dropped the telephone-instrument and spoke.

"By George, Mrs. Dane, you have hit on the very thing," he said briskly. "We can support the market, accept every share of stock offered and keep this thing going safe until we have a chance to conclusively nail that damnable Weeks' lie."

"But I have a balance at my bank of only $9,478," declared Ailsa.

"I don't think we shall need it," answered Bobby, his dimple beginning to show. "I've pretty near enough spare-funds at my bank to swing this myself; I'll make Dad put up the remainder."

"No, no," insisted Ailsa quickly. "You must allow me to put in what I have."

"All right," agreed Bobby. "It shall be a joint affair, just us two, going to the rescue of Moosecap Copper, and"—with a grin—"those widows and orphans. I'll see Tom Kenyon at once; he's a curb man I'm acquainted with who has connections in the Chicago and Boston markets. I'll tell him to buy everything offered in Moosecap Copper at or below five dollars the share. Since there are only fifteen thousand shares outstanding, and I shall leave margin enough with him to buy them all if necessary, there is no chance of our losing out. If he does get them all, we'll hold on to the last until Malvern recovers, start the thing again and start it right. I'll also send a wire up to

Stephen Flare at the mine to-night and have him give me the exact truth about Professor Patrick Wellington Weeks and his visit to the mine. For myself, I don't believe the man was ever within even eyesight of our shaft. I think it's a case of plain bunk."

THE next day's plans decided upon, Bobby left St. David's to find Kenyon the broker, promising to have some one in Keyon's office keep Ailsa posted the following morning, by means of frequent reports nover the telephone, on just how matters were going at the curb-market.

Ailsa's sleep that night was intermittent. She managed somehow to get through the night without recourse to the sedative Miss Druce urged her to take. On the morrow she would need all the keenness of brain she possessed, and Ailsa did not propose to dull any of her faculties by taking a hypnotic.

Through the breakfast-period she was all impatience for ten o'clock, the hour when the Curb market would open, to arrive, and merely glanced through the morning papers to discover if there were anything more about Moosecap Copper. Only one newspaper made any reference to the stock, other than to print the Curb quotation of $4.50 the share. *The Morning Orbit* had a half-column editorial, saying very little about the mine, but stoutly defending Malvern Dane's integrity and plainly intimating that the previous day's attack in *The Argus* had been inspired by copper interests jealous of the entrance into the field of a big new producer likely to absorb much of the Canadian demand. While *The Orbit* was one of the most influential journals in the city, and had a comfortable circulation, it was read largely by business men, and Ailsa feared that this defense, fine as it was, would not be likely to reach many of the people who had bought Moosecap stock.

Malvern Dane's condition this morning was practically the same. Ailsa saw him for a few moments. He was again wearing the weighted harness, and his eyes were bandaged. Doctor Laesser assured Ailsa that he was progressing as well as could be expected, and he seemed mentally brighter and more cheerful. She did not dare stay with him for long, fearing he would detect her anxious condition and ask embarrassing questions.

AT ten o'clock Ailsa took one of her copper books and seated herself beside the telephone-instrument to read and await the first report from Kenyon, Bobby Grathwaite's broker. The time dragged on leaden wings until ten-thirty, and still no call for her. By then Ailsa had become so anxious she could bear the suspense no longer; so she rang up Bobby Grathwaite's office and got him on the wire.

"I thought you were to keep me posted on how the price of Moosecap stock was holding up?" she said a little reproachfully. "Did you forget?"

"No," answered Bobby reluctantly. "I didn't forget, Mrs. Dane, but the news wasn't exactly cheering, so I thought I'd wait awhile in the hope of some improvement."

"What do you mean about the news not being good?" interrupted Ailsa.

"Well, dash it all, the price isn't keeping up," answered Bobby. "It has dropped to three dollars and seventy-five cents."

"How can that be possible?" asked Ailsa impatiently. "You instructed your broker to buy every share that was offered, didn't you?"

"I did," answered Bobby. "But you see the Curb market during this furore over war-brides is rather an extensive affair. A few men can't possibly cover it all. Kenyon tells me that a couple of wildcatters sold a small lot of Moosecap off seventy-five cents, and the buyers disappeared before he or any of his men could get to them to bid it up. In that way somebody got a quotation of three dollars and seventy-five cents on record.

"But don't you worry, Mrs. Dane," continued Bobby cheerfully. "It's bound to react with Tom standing there ready to buy everything offered at any figure up to five dollars. I've just blown him up, told him to put men with more pep on the job and not let another share get by. I'll call you if there are any more developments."

Bobby Grathwaite's report increased Ailsa's anxiety. She waited a half-hour in growing impatience, then called up Bobby again.

"No more sales of Moosecap Copper stock," he told her. "It's peculiar, too. I can't understand why, if holders were scared at the *Argus* article, they don't sell their stocks to Kenyon for his five-dollar bid. Oak, Ames & Offenright explain it by saying that the stock is so scattered that neither the drop in price on the Curb yesterday nor the *Argus* article has had a chance to circulate among them yet."

BETWEEN noon and two o'clock Ailsa rang up Bobby Grathwaite a half-dozen times, but there were no new developments to report. There seemed to be a dearth of actual Moosecap Copper stock on the market in spite of Kenyon's bid of four dollars and seventy-five cents, and then of five dollars. A few brokers had offered "W. I." stock, which Bobby explained meant "when issued," but Kenyon had refused to accept anything save the actual delivery of certificates.

At two-fifteen Ailsa, weary from her sleepless night, had all but drowsed into complete unconsciousness in her chair when the telephone buzzer at her elbow began to hum insistently. She awoke with a start and answered. It was Bobby Grathwaite talking from the Brevoort House near his home.

"There's the very devil to pay, everything messed up all over the works," he said hurriedly. "Somebody has managed to jam the quotation on Moosecap Copper down to two-twenty-five. I just got it on the Curb ticker here at the hotel."

"But how, how, how?" returned Ailsa excitedly. "I can't understand it, when your broker has orders to buy all the stock offered at any price up to five dollars. Why, if anybody managed to buy it for two dollars and twenty-five cents, they could turn right around and sell it to Kenyon at a profit of two dollars and seventy-five cents on every share! That quotation seems ridiculous. Can you trust your broker?"

"I can't understand it any more than you can," answered Bobby perplexedly. "It looks as if we were being double-crossed terribly somewhere; but I'd trust Tom Kenyon with my life. I've been trying to get him to the telephone for the last ten minutes, but there seems to be something wrong with the wire in his office."

Ailsa's impatience was fast becoming anger. All she could understand was that the Moosecap Copper Company was traveling rapidly toward ruin, while Dane lay on a bed of illness unable to defend himself or the mine.

"Look here," she said quickly. "Jump into a taxicab, hurry up here and take me down to the Curb market. I've got to find out about this matter at first hand. I'll be ready the moment you arrive."

"All right," answered Bobby. "The market closes at three, but we've got time enough if we don't have a breakdown or get hauled up for exceeding the speed limit."

Ailsa dressed hurriedly in her street-clothes, left word with Miss Druce that she would be absent from the hospital for perhaps an hour, received the head nurse's assurance that Dane was resting comfortably and went downstairs to await Bobby Grathwaite's arrival.

How many speed laws Bobby fractured, Ailsa did not know, but exactly eight minutes after he left the telephone he whirled up the hill toward St. David's Hospital in a high-powered open motorcar. She met him at the edge of the sidewalk, and the car never stopped, merely slowed down to make the turn while Bobby opened the door, dragged her in and slammed the door shut again.

"Now get us down to Broad and Exchange as quick as the traffic cops will permit," cried Bobby to the chauffeur, and they made the turn, shooting down the hill on two wheels.

CHAPTER XIII

The Curb

THE journey downtown was to Ailsa a confused memory of a cutting wind beating against her cheeks, of blurred buildings flying past,

of anxious-eyed traffic officers who watched their progress with a perplexed air, only to discover the car was beyond call by the time they had decided to overhaul it and make inquiries. When they turned the corner of Hanover Street, Ailsa saw the mob of jostling, howling, gesticulating men filling Exchange Place. Bobby said, "Well, we're here," and she gasped.

"Oh!" she exclaimed in an infinity of surprise. "Is this the Curb market? Why, I supposed the Curb was composed of nothing but a few sedate business men standing on the sidewalk gossiping about the price of stocks. It looks as if bedlam had broken loose. Are they entirely mad?"

Bobby grinned. "Some of them are," he answered. "So would you be if you were losing money as fast as they. Those are a few of the well-known widows and orphans, and Submarine Boat is temporarily on the tobog."

Ailsa looked rather indignant; she didn't fancy Bobby's levity about the widows and orphans. Then she glanced up at the windows lining either side of the street, each one wide open and filled with eager-faced youths waving their fingers crazily at the crowd of men standing in the street below, who were dressed in all sorts of bizarre costumes, ranging from gay mackinaw jackets to that of one fellow clothed in pure white. Meanwhile these men in the street were ramping madly back and forth, jotting down hurried memoranda in books, shouting hoarsely in one another's faces and now and then pausing to make insane and wholly mysterious wigglings with their fingers toward the youths perched on the window-ledges above. And such a babel! It was at the height of excitement over war-brides, fast reaching the hour for the market to close, and every individual trader there was hurrying to make a killing or recoup losses before the gong clanged.

Ailsa had never before seen anything like it; for a moment she almost forgot her errand downtown in interest in the strange scene. Seasoned New Yorker that he was, the Curb was an old story to Bobby; he stood up in the car and held a flat hand at each side of his mouth as he began shouting Tom Kenyon's name.

Directly in front of their car was a confused welter of young men that bore every aspect of a football scrimmage at the forty-yard line. Four men on the outside of this rabble were attempting frantically, and with little success, to buck and elbow their way toward the center, where three red-faced, hatless individuals seemed to be a point of interest. One of the outside men turned at Bobby's shout, recognized him and began crying Kenyon's name toward the thick of the mêlée, telling him Bobby Grathwaite was here and wanted him.

Finally Ailsa saw a huge, broad-shouldered young man, coatless, hatless, his face smeared with dirt and dripping with perspiration, emerge from beneath the very feet of the struggling mass in front of them. He stood up, shook the beads of water from his eyes, saw Bobby and came running toward the car.

"What the devil do you mean, Tom?" shouted Bobby indignantly. "I gave you orders to buy every share of Moosecap Copper offered at any figure up to five dollars! And here I just got a quotation on the ticker of two and a quarter."

Kenyon put both hands on the fender and leaned panting against the car, his body shaking with excitement; for a moment he was unable to speak. "Two and a quarter, nothing!" he finally exclaimed disgustedly. "It's down to two!"

"Then why didn't you bid it up?" cried Bobby angrily. "What do you mean?"

"I mean those wildcatters are washing it down still lower every minute in spite of all we can do," answered Kenyon, pointing a shaking finger toward the mad scrimmage behind him. "I've done my level best for you, Bob, but it's no use. There have been but five legitimate sales of Moosecap Copper on the Curb to-day; if there had been any more, I'd have grabbed the stock for you. Those low quotations are the work of Leveredge, Akers and Armistead, three wildcatters who don't belong to the Curb Association. Lever-

edge offers two thousand shares at three; Akers picks the lot up for two and three quarters before anybody else can get a chance to bid. Akers offers the same two thousand shares at two and one half, and Armistead picks them up at two and one quarter, selling them back to Leveredge again for two. It's as raw as that, the way they get their quotations on record the last thing before the market closes. And *The Argus* has a man standing beside them to record and report the lowest price."

"But can't you straight fellows stop this churning?" asked Bobby, his eyes fairly blazing.

Kenyon threw up both hands in a gesture of helplessness. "How?" he asked. "The street is free."

"What the devil are Leveredge, Akers and Armistead doing this for, anyway?" asked Bobby. "I don't see where they can hope to profit."

"Search me," declared Kenyon. "But I know the dirty trio are tough customers, and I have a notion somebody is hiring them to depress your stock. Van Leveredge and Sands Armistead are mere satellities of Akers, who is the brains of the dirty trio. Akers is an old veteran of Goldfield excitement days. Before that he was a race-track tout. He's done his bit in jail, and is as unscrupulous as the devil can create them."

"Of course you read that malicious attack on us in *The Evening Argus,*" said Bobby. "Do you suppose Duncannon is also behind Akers? I think he is mighty sore because he got none of our advertising appropriation."

"It may be," answered Kenyon thoughtfully.

AS he finished his sentence, a gong rang. It was three o'clock; Curb transactions were over for the day. Like magic, the pandemonium became stilled and the horde of brokers and traders melted away toward the tall office-buildings near by. Kenyon beckoned to a man who was hurrying in the direction of Broad Street.

"Hey, Tim, what's the last sale quotation on Moosecap?" he shouted.

"Sixteen," answered Tim, and kept on.

"What, sixteen dollars?" asked Bobby joyfully.

"Sixteen cents," answered Kenyon with deep anger.

A man who had been entering notes in a book heard the remark, turned toward Kenyon, made a monkey face and thumbed his nose. He was a short, dumpy, evil-faced chap with close-clipped mustache and unmistakably Teutonic features. "That's John Akers," added Kenyon expressively, scowling and clenching his fist.

Ailsa could have cried when she thought of Moosecap stock being quoted in the newspapers that evening at sixteen cents a share; but she bit her lips and decided it was a time for fighting, not weeping. Suddenly Bobby realized that he had neglected to introduce Kenyon, and spoke.

"Let me make you acquainted with Tom Kenyon, Mrs. Dane," he said. "I was so flustrated I completely forgot you two did not already know each other. Tom is one of the straightest men on one of the crookedest streets in creation."

Ailsa offered her free hand impulsively. She liked the appearance of this big, square-shouldered fellow with his frank blue eyes.

"Mr. Kenyon," she said, "Don't you think we ought to come out with a statement exposing this stock-washing and refuting the newspaper charges against the Moosecap mine? I can't believe decent people would countenance this striking at Mr. Dane while he lies helpless and unable to defend himself."

Kenyon pondered a moment. "Is Malvern able to talk business at all?" he asked.

"We haven't thought it wise to bring any business matters before him since his last operation," she answered. "But of course, in an extreme emergency, or as a last resort, we might do so."

"Well, if ever there was an extreme emergency this certainly is one," declard Kenyon soberly. "There is no question but that the editorial in this morning's *Orbit* did a lot of good on the Street; and there's little question but that a clear statement from Malvern refuting *The Argus* attack and ex-

posing this stock-washing would help still more. Of course, there's no need of my telling you that this old town thinks pretty well of your husband, Mrs. Dane, and anything he says will have a strong effect."

HE peered about the vicinity to ascertain if anybody was listening before he continued: "And it may wake up the Curb Association. Under the rose, of course, there are a lot of us fellows would like to see the Street swept clean of such scum as Leveredge, Akers and Armistead; but the Curb Association believes that if you disparage one trader, you give a gratuitous black eye to them all. And they object to having our dirty linen laundered in public. Of course, being a member of the Association myself, I have to travel with the majority, but strictly on the Q. T., and positively not for publication, I don't care how hard you rub it into the dirty trio if it serves to wake up the Association. You can't possibly libel Akers or Leveredge or Armistead, no matter what you print; they are long past that and have already been publicly accused of about every crime in the decalogue, without producing a peep or protest from any of the three."

Ailsa's enthusiasm for her plan increased. It was, at least, doing something, and she abhorred inaction. Dane need only be told that there had been a newspaper attack on the mine by Weeks, and she and Bobby could prepare the defense, having Dane O. K. it.

"Do you know," she said, turning to Bobby, "I think full and complete publicity is the right thing to straighten this matter out."

"Then let's hustle back and get a statement ready," answered Bobby. "I'll see that it goes on the wire to-night for printing in every prominent journal in the country to-morrow morning."

Bidding good-by to Tom Kenyon, they started back toward the hospital. As they reached Forty-second Street, Bobby happened to recall that there might be a telegram in his office from Moosecap; so they switched across from First Avenue to Times Square, and Bobby darted into the *Times* Building while Ailsa waited in the car.

A few moments later Bobby emerged from the building, the dimple playing hide-and-seek in his cheek as he waved a sheet of yellow paper in the air.

"Listen to this," he said, jumping into the seat beside Ailsa and banging the door shut as the chauffeur turned his car uptown. "It's from Stephen Flare; this is what he says:

"'P. W. Weeks a half-baked, self-appointed mining-expert from Montreal. Came down here after a job. Got so obstreperous we had to run him off the claim. Easy enough to secure his record from any mining engineer in Canada. They all know him. Weeks now working for the Mid-Can Railway mine at Velton. No chance for doubt about our core-drillings. Malvern checked up every assay himself and for safety sent them all down to Shef' for a third verification. It's a forty per cent calcopyritic vein, all right. —Stephen Flare.'"

"That ought to help us settle Weeks," declared Ailsa, her hopes rising.

"Sure," said Bobby. "And Miss Mallen, my secretary, is sending a sheaf of telegrams to all the prominent morning newspapers in the country asking them to hold their advertising columns open until the last possible moment to receive a half-page, up and down, of important telegraphic copy from the Grathwaite Agency. I just telephoned to the hospital, too. Malvern is all right, resting easy, while Miss Rockwell reads 'The Rising Tide' to him. And by the way, there's a man by the name of Pettingill waiting to see you there, the operator says. He's been waiting since ten minutes after you left—says it's a very important matter, insists he must see you and nobody else."

Ailsa's hand flew to her heart, and her mind began roving over a vast field of dire possibilities. She knew no one by the name of Pettingill, and immediately she connected it with something terrible.

The conclusion of "The Conquering Woman" is absorbingly dramatic. It will appear in the May issue of THE BLUE BOOK MAGAZINE.

The HERO
A Story of the Coast Guard

by Kenneth MacNichol

THEY are a sturdy, weather-beaten crew, these men of the gray sea and yellow dunes—plain, simple and serious, as men must be whose business is plucking life from the cruel sea. They are men who look at death with resolution if not wholly without fear—men whose lives are compassed by such elemental things as wind and water, food and sleep, courage and unceasing watchfulness.

In the little kitchen of Station Thirty-four some of the surfmen stood with extended hands beside the glowing stove; others, with chairs tilted back against the wall, studied the marine news in *The Nautical Review*. Their talk was of homely things—the change of keepers at the Wood End Light, the dredging job completed in the harbor, the *Lola Silva's* splendid catch of fish. All was clean and snug within the room—woodwork scoured to shining whiteness, brasses glittering, clean white towels drying on a rack—prim housekeeping explainable only by the regulations which order the surfmen's lives with minute precision.

At dusk the wind fell upon the Station in gusty sorties; sand splattered against the windows, hissing like the sibilant sound of sleet. Slow tears distilled from the agony of flying clouds rolled down the frosted panes which the sand had ground to pallid opalescence. At intervals a curious moaning filled the room, rising and falling with the wailing wind—a sonorous, insistent warning from the Bar.

Peaked Hill Bar, it is marked down on the charts. Peaked Hill Station stands to guard the Bar. The siren is named Whistle Buoy Fourteen. But to the fisher folk of Provincetown the buoy is the friendly "Grunter;" the Bar is called by them "The Graveyard" of dead ships.

A bell struck the half-hour of the watch. The opened door let in a rush of chilly, sea-damp air. The surfman entering closed the door behind him carefully.

"Oilskins to-night," he said laconically. "Wind nor'-nor'east — an' comin' on to blow."

JOHNNIE TAIT rose from his chair. From a closet he took oilskins and sou'wester, lighted his lantern and unhooked from the rack his patrol-check and the coast-guard's packet of wind-proof Coston lights.

"Comin', son?" he asked when all was ready.

The wind caught us at the corner of the Station; the sand was a knife with a thousand blades. Where a raindrop fell, the sand stuck fast; one's cheeks grew rough as shark-skin to the touch.

It was weary walking on the beach that night, although the dunes offered a measure of protection. There was little chance for conversation until we came at last to the halfway-house, a tiny shanty just beyond the reach of the highest tides. Here Johnnie Tait slipped his check into the safe, to be taken by the surfman patrolling northward from High Head, and I cleared

the sand from my streaming eyes. Johnnie Tait whittled tobacco from a plug to fill his pipe.

"I cal'late now ye wish ye hadn't come?"

I answered him a bit resentfully.

"For all the good it does me, Johnnie Tait, I'd as well be in the Station, snug and warm. Three miles it is, and three miles back again without the comfort of a word from you!"

JOHNNIE gestured outward with expressive thumb.

"That waren't no fit time for spinnin' yarns," he said. "An' there's others knows a whole sight more'n me. They're all down in the wreck-book, anyway."

"To be sure!" I jeered. "I read the one you showed me yesterday: Boat came ashore; surfmen to the beach; six men saved; maybe a dozen drowned! Burned a few lights and rigged the breeches-buoy! That's all you did, according to report—never a word of how they died, or how you felt when you saw the wreck go down. I'd never learn from the wreck-book that Peter Brent took the last man from an icy cro'jack, with a freezing sea breaking full across the hull. Johnnie Tait, your wreck-book lies—there's nothing but raw, barebone facts in it. Why don't it say that Peter Brent's a hero, John?"

Deeply embarrassed, Johnnie Tait jammed a stubby finger in his pipe.

"Well—well, now, it's all in the day's work. He done what was expected; I'll lay by that. But heroes don't work for sixty-five a month."

And this was the man who treasured secretly the medal granted *For Heroic Deeds in Saving Life from the Perils of the Sea!*

We plunged again into the blinding night—and not another word from Johnnie Tait until we came again to the Station door. And then, when the heart of hope had ceased its beating, he performed a miracle of resurrection.

"If ye'd like to stand watch in the tower, son, there's a yarn that I just recollect."

It is impossible to reproduce the fine salt flavor of that tale told in the tower where we overlooked a thousand leagues of sea, with Highland Light winking and blinking across the wind-swept dunes. But it was the story of a hero, to my mind—a greater man than was ever Peter Brent.

"I WONDER if ye noticed Hugh McVeigh? He sat across from ye at supper-time."

"The quiet gray-haired chap—a little queer?"

"Well, in a way o' speakin', he might be. But he's seen trouble, he has that—'nough to kill many another man. Only that's goin' at the yarn all bow for stern. Let me get her heeled down to the wind.

"The *Santa Lucia,* Kingston to Boston, loaded with cargo to her Plimsoll mark, hogged into foul weather roundin' Hatteras. She was a spankin' new steamer—thirteen hundred tons—built by the Union Fruit the year afore. She was Cap'n Williams' first command. They said he was a careful, sober man, an' stood well with his owners. Like as not, now, all them things was true.

"But don't ye ever get the notion, son, that the sea is anybody's parlor floor. If 'twas, the surfmen wouldn't have no berth. For three days the *Santa Lucia* never saw the sun. Then they got a sight that showed 'em off the course, an' never another to show 'em where they be. So they took departure loggin' by the chart; the Cap'n was handy at dead reckonin', as most, havin' learned his navigation under sail. But that's a risky business at the best. At worst, 'tis chasin' a black cat blindfold in a coal-hold, when all the hatches has been battened down.

"Mebbe the patent log waren't workin' right; mebbe the compass was off a p'int or two; mebbe the lookout didn't hear the Grunter soon enough—ye can't know what makes ev'ry accident at sea. The *Santa Lucia* run aground on Peaked Hill Bar.

"It was a night—aye, such a night! A blind man's eyes would been fair as good as mine. Ye couldn't sight the Light from Peaked Hill, not so's to tell how far it was; it might 'a' been a fathom or ten miles—that thick the

vapor boiled in from the sea. Cold, too, an' a high surf risin' with the new flood-tide, with a livin' gale o' wind from the nor'east. Ye could scarcely hear the Grunter hoot, for the crash o' angry waters on the beach—a midnight gale blowin' colder an' stronger ev'ry hour.

"RIGHT out there on the Bar she struck—nor'west from the Station, down the beach a mile, where ye see the whitecaps run when the Light swings round. She didn't hang long on the outer bar, though it brought her up all standin' when she hit—just pounded enough to stove her bottom some; then wind an' tide lifted her an' brought her on. Four hundred yards or so she staggered, an' then brought up against the inner bar to stay. There the three masts o' her went by the board, along with a raffle o' standin' gear, an' she was poundin' hard before they lit a flare.

"Hugh McVeigh was the lad that sighted her—saw the flare glimmerin' through the smear when he come opposite to her on patrol. He phoned us from the halfway-house when he'd burned a couple o' lights to give 'em cheer. The *Santa Lucia* was puttin' up her rockets then—we could see 'em risin' up above the vapor. But she was a lost ship—that we knew; 'twas a question o' how many we could bring away.

"Ter'ble hard it was—haulin' the surfboat down along the beach against that wind with the wheels o' the cart cuttin' in the sand. We were most an hour takin' it that mile. 'Twas just after midnight that she came ashore—after one o'clock before we launched the boat. Three times we run her nose into the surf; three times the breakers threw us back on the beach. An' then, follerin' the undertow o' the third big comber, we finally caught her in the trough, an' Keeper gave the order: 'Pull away!'

"I'll mind me that we laid hard on the oars, an' felt a great swell heavin' under us—a space o' seconds when 'twas all the six could do to hold her up, but she gave a bit, an' the next comber broke behind. Pullin' out, we had the cheers o' the surfmen from Race Point an' High Head, where Keeper called for aid.

"Four miles an hour the tide runs on the beach—with the wind behind it, nearer six. An' we were drivin' in the teeth o' the gale that was blowin' forty miles at least. I was drenched with sweat, for all the bitter cold. But we drew into the lee o' her at last an' a bit o' water that seemed to us fair smooth—a blessed rest it was to tired men. The vessel was poundin' dangerous above our heads, but finally they heaved a line to us, an' we held her hard till they swung a ladder down.

"There was a crew o' thirty men aboard an' a matter o' forty passengers. You know how 'tis with wrecks—passengers first, women an' kids afore the men, all of 'em screechin' to be first to leave, or holdin' back to get somebody that they love to go. Here was the ladder hangin' an' the deck-rail lined with frantic folks, but nobody comin' down.

"Keeper says to me: 'You better go.' An' to Hugh McVeigh: 'You'd best go along to hand 'em down.' So McVeigh an' me—we boarded her.

"SON, have ye ever seen a man shot through the heart? I did oncet in my old tramp-sailin' days. His knees just sort o' give from under him, an' he looked su'prised; then he fell straight out fo'ard on his face. That was Hugh McVeigh when we first set our feet down on the deck. Only he didn't fall—just staggered, gropin' back to me. I 'member thinkin' that he'd had a stroke.

"'God!' he says, like there's somethin' chokin' him—an' then again the same way not so loud—just 'God!'

"'Hugh, lad,' says I, 'are ye sick?'

"'No, John,' says he short-like. 'Naught like that.'

"'Then we'd best be workin', Hugh,' says I, thankful it was only dizziness from pullin' too hard on the oars. An' then I seen what Hugh McVeigh had seen, an' my heart leaped up into my throat.

"After all, 'twas only a woman's face, white an' scared, an' a dark-haired little woman with her arms tight around a

young girl as if to keep her from the anger o' the sea. The girl was all o' eighteen years, at least, stronger an' fair as big as she. There was a man behind the two of 'em—a big, husky devil holdin' his feet like an old salt-water sailor, not a mite scared for all o' his fine clothes. It waren't nothin' —at least it wouldn't been if Hugh McVeigh hadn't kept that woman's picture in his chest o' clothes. He kept it to look at when the gloom was on him, an' we was all scared to speak to him for days.

"But it waren't no time to think o' pictures then. While we stood, the poundin' waren't so rough; the wreck was fillin' fast an' settlin' down—no tellin' when she'd go to pieces then.

"McVeigh—he took that young girl in his arms an' handed her down the ladder first o' all. Then there was a couple o' children went, an' then McVeigh, he says to me: 'Now you take her!' So I passed the woman down to him—soft she was, an' light, an' lay in my arms with never a whimper, like a sleepy child. McVeigh took her in his arms an' set her down right careful in the boat.

"THERE were two men on the *Santa Lucia* that night. There on the ladder I heard a rumpus on the deck. That big devil of a man, with a fat cigar clinched atween his teeth, had lined 'em up, an' cool an' easy, was biddin' 'em take their time. There was a crazy square-head sailor come runnin' aft, wild with desire to pile into the boat. I glimpsed a wicked knife in his hand. Son, 'twas a blow to wonder at —that man hit him just once. Against the rail he went, an' over the rail, clutchin' at the air, into the sea. An' that's the last we ever seen o' him. I cal'late the man was some su'prised himself, but seemed like he waren't a mite concerned.

" 'Women an' children first,' he says to all. 'If there's any drowned to-night, 'twill be the men.' They was meek as lambs, with never a word o' blame for what he done.

"Twelve of 'em we took on that first trip an' twelve more on the next trip after that. But then our boat broached too nigh the beach — capsized fair beneath a comber crest. But for the men of Race Point an' High Head enterin' the surf, I doubt if any had won in to the shore.

" 'Twould have been madness to go back again; so we set the Lyle gun an' tried to throw a line across the wreck. Two o' the shot-lines parted an' fell short; the third one the spray had frozen fast in the fakin'-box. In that gale they wouldn't carry up three hundred yards. An' so there waren't but one thing to do—Keeper called out for volunteers.

"We took the boat back to the wreck again—Hugh McVeigh an' me, with two men from Race Point an' two picked from High Head; an' death rowed all the way along with us. O' course we couldn't lay alongside now, but we tossed a heavin'-line aboard an' bent it to a shot-line to take ashore. Hugh McVeigh tied the line about his waist—well he did, for comin' in, we capsized again, an' the sea took one o' the surfmen from High Head.

"An' so we was able to rig the breeches-buoy — whip-line after the shot-line, an' the heavy hawser after that, all fastened shipshape an' snug to the stump o' the foremast on the wreck.

" 'Man lee whip—haul off!' Keeper yelled, an' away I went swingin' an' danglin' safe above the surf. Five minutes after, beside me on the wreck is Hugh McVeigh.

"IMMEDIATE comes up to us Caleb Bream—him who knocked the sailor overboard.

" 'There seems to be some difficulty aft,' says he. 'Might be better if we'd go and see.'

"Behind the after-funnel we meet with the first officer, shakin' more'n a man has a right.

" 'Cap'n Williams left the bridge ten minutes ago,' says he, 'an' I—I'm afraid —I heard a shot—'twas in his stateroom, I'm sure!'

"There in the Cap'n's stateroom we found him dead—half lyin' on the floor, where he'd slipped from sittin' on the bunk. The wound in his head was hidden by his arms, an' the pistol was lyin' on the floor—not a nice way, I'm

thinkin', to face disgrace. Hugh McVeigh leaned over to lift him up. The lantern was set down upon the floor—it brought his face full into the light.

"'McVeigh!' says Caleb Bream, all startled-like, staggering back against the cabin door.

"'Yes, Bream,' says Hugh McVeigh, comin' up with the pistol in his hand. 'I'm glad you know—you'll know now who killed you, an' what for!'

"An' with that he raised the pistol up. 'Twas still—so quiet I didn't even think to grab his arm. Bream stood with his back against the door, his face like bread-dough in the lantern-light.

"'Does *she* know?' he asked, an' 'twas a whisper more'n 'twas a word.

"'Aye, she does. She knew when I first took her in my arms,' replied McVeigh.

"SEEMED now he waren't like a man—no more'n when the gloom was holdin' him. Yet I'd never seen quite that same look before. 'Twas death in the face o' Hugh McVeigh.

"'Do you think of her?' asked Caleb Bream.

"'As much an' more than ever she thought of me—sixteen years ago. I've not forgotten, an' I always knew some day I'd meet with you. An' you might have known I'd not forget.'

"'I've always known—you'd trap me—'

"'God trapped you,' says Hugh McVeigh, solemn as if he was speakin' in a church. 'Unless you'd meet Him with a new lie on your lips, you'll tell me just one thing before you go. You'll tell me, Caleb Bream, whose is the girl—my baby Carroll—or is she yours?'

"'Yours, McVeigh, I swear—but she doesn't know. McVeigh, for God's sake, think of her!'

"An' now at last I found my tongue again, but I was afraid to lay a hand on Hugh McVeigh.

"'Hugh,' says I, 'Hugh, lad, whatever it is, there's death enough aboard this boat to-night—like to be more before another dawn. There'll be time for settlement atween you an' him when all is done—them others up above—they're needin' us!'

"'Sixteen years,' he says as to himself. 'Sixteen years is a long time to wait.' An' he licked his lips.

"'We may both be dead before the dawn,' says Bream. 'An' if not, then I will meet you, man to man.'

"Hugh McVeigh was thoughtful over this. I could see reason comin' back into his eyes.

"'Your word for that, Bream?' he asked finally.

"'I'll not lie to you,' says Caleb Bream. 'I'd like to have it settled, once for all.'

"'Gi' me the pistol, lad,' says I, an' now I dared touch Hugh on the arm. ''Tis no night to have a murder on your soul.'

"An' with that I took the pistol from his hand.

"''Tis only until morning, then,' he said, 'if, please God, we are both alive till then. I'll wait no longer—I've waited long enough.'

"THEN he went out, an' I after him, an' Caleb Bream behind the two of us. We left the Cap'n lyin' where he was. 'Twas God's mercy there were not two corpses on the floor.

"It had not taken very long with all. They'd scarce had time to miss us on the deck, but from the beach they'd sent a tally board with a message askin' cause for the delay.

"In a half-hour the last o' the passengers was swung ashore, draggin' an' half drownin' in the swell. In the next hour the crew went after them. Cold, cruel work it was, along at last, for the sea was breakin' fair across the wreck—all hands lashed fast to keep from washin' 'em all overboard. But Bream worked side by side with Hugh McVeigh—neither of 'em speakin' overmuch, but doin' the work well—wonderful well, considerin' the load was on their minds. An' Bream took chances that no man should take. He was the last but one to leave the wreck. I've thought since there might o' been a method in it, but if there was, death waren't kind to Caleb Bream that night, drawin' close a hundred times an' passin' by.

"There was a strange thing happened on the beach. The surfmen had built a fire there back in the shelter

of a dune. The people o' the wreck were gathered round, 'ceptin' those sent on to the Station with the cart.

"Beneath a blanket an' a tarp' the woman lay. The young girl was seated by her side, cryin' soft an' sorrowful to herself. The woman, she kept sayin': 'Has he come?'

"But when Caleb Bream came an' leaned over her, she says: 'Where is he?'

"'Twas only to Hugh McVeigh she said: 'You've come! Oh, I am so very tired, Hugh!'

"'Aye, Alice girl,' says Hugh McVeigh, 'I'm here.'

"The young girl stopped her cryin' to look at him. I don't know what she thought about it all.

"Hugh McVeigh carried the woman to the Station in his arms, with Bream an' the girl—Carroll—comin' along with us. I doubt if she spoke to him again. At the Station we knew that the sea had taken toll o' one more life.

"'TWAS in the morning that Hugh came to me.

"'John,' says he, 'have ye ever wanted to kill a man?'

"'Many the time,' says I, 'but mostly in the heat o' temper, an' only to be sorry afterwards.'

"'I know,' says he, 'but that's not the way I mean. What I mean is to wait an' watch an' long for the day to come, an' dream o' holdin' a man's throat in your hands.'

"'No, Hugh,' says I. 'By God's mercy, that thing I've been spared.'

"'He is down there by the boat-house now, waitin' for me to come. An' I want you to go with me, John. There's a word I've got to say to him. I'm afeared by myself I'd not have the strength.'

"'Not if you're a-meanin' murder, Hugh.'

"'Well,' says he, 'now that is a word. But I have grown kind o' used to it. I've lived with it in my heart for sixteen years. An' it don't sound bad to me at all—it sounds more like justice to me, John.'

"'Then,' says I, 'you'll not go down alone, an' others besides me will go with us.'

"'They will not!' answered Hugh McVeigh. 'But it will not be for killin'—no, John, I'd never need the aid o' man for that. There's other things I've thought of in the night.'

"An' so we went to where Caleb Bream was waitin' loo'ard o' the boat-house, with the damp vapor o' the sea shuttin' out the Station from our sight. I mind me he had on a heavy overcoat, an' a cap pulled down over his sunken eyes. For a little, Hugh just looked at him.

"'BREAM,' says Hugh finally, 'do you know just what you've done to me?'

"I'll say it for him—he spoke up like a man.

"'Yes,' says he, 'Hugh McVeigh, I know. With her lyin' in the Station there, it has come to me just what I've done. But,' says he, 'if it were twice as much, for her I would do it all again!'

"'Aye,' says Hugh McVeigh, 'if 'twas for her—but it was me she turned to at the last.'

"'Be sure,' says Caleb Bream, 'I've thought of that. God forgive me, if I've done her wrong! But you've not come to tell me what is gone?'

"'An' have you thought,' asked Hugh, as though 'twere a lesson he had learned, 'what you've to say to her—her that calls you father—my baby girl?'

"One thing I'm sure of—for all his sins Caleb Bream will not suffer more in hell.

"'God knows!' says he. 'What can we tell the girl?'

"Now Hugh McVeigh went on another tack.

"'They tell me that you are a rich man, Bream.'

"'I have plenty,' says he—mighty short.

"'An' you—you could do well by my girl?'

"Fair wonderful to see the light o' hope gropin' across that rich man's face.

"'You mean—what do you mean by that, McVeigh?'

"'You could do better by the girl than me.' Ev'ry word seemed like a

bitter tear. 'I aint got nothin' I could offer her.'

"'So, then, 'tis peace between us, Hugh McVeigh?'

"Then Hugh looked him fair between the eyes.

"'Not while the sun shines, an' the wind blows, an' the sea is hungry for the lives o' men. What's gone is gone, an' that I am willin' to lay by; but you'll not forget I'm your sea, Caleb Bream, hungerin' for your life all these years. For that you will go careful all your days, an' you'll think no evil to man or woman that might bring disgrace upon my child—death needs small excuse to gather you. But I'll not kill the only father she has known, an' give her a murderer to take his place—take her, an' do better by her than I could.'

"BREAM caught at the last words, for after all, he waren't a hard man—strong sometimes, an' weak sometimes, but a human sinner like the rest o' us. 'Twould 'a' been heart's-ease to him to speak out the pain, but against Hugh he was like water to a rock.

"'Why—why are you doing this for me, McVeigh? You must know how much I love the girl?'

"I couldn't tell whether 'twas a laugh or a sob risin' in the throat o' Hugh McVeigh—'twas like a man laughin' in the face o' God.

"'Love!' says he. 'An' if love was all, you would never live to see the night. Love brought me all the trouble I have known—robbed me an' cheated me an' made life a hell. Could you love her as her father would? There's naught o' love in anything between us two. Would you tell her what your love made o' her mother?'

"'Twas then that strong, proud, sinful man looked at his sin an' hung his head in shame.

"'No more would I,' whispered Hugh McVeigh. 'Swear you will not—in anger, or repentance, or the ripe bitterness o' age. Swear it to me—an' then I'll let you go—the livin' an' the dead along with you!'

"He made him swear it, standin' in the mist, with upraised hand an' head bared to the sky. An' we went back to the Station as we came.

"THEY left that morning, passengers an' crew—all the folks we'd taken from the wreck. They never knew, but there were two wrecks that they left behind.

"We stood on Peaked Hill to watch 'em go.

"'How could you do it, Hugh?' says I to him.

"Never a word from him until the whole procession had disappeared, windin' in an' out between the dunes, an' we turned goin' on back toward the Station.

"'When I entered the Service, John, I took an oath—our business is savin' life,' says Hugh McVeigh.

"They gave him the medal for that night's work; you'll mind what it says on the face of it—*For Saving Life from the Perils of the Sea.* I have thought of that thing often since. It waren't what was meant, o' course—but the sea o' life aint always calm; there's storm an' shoal, dark an' treach'rous shores, an' storms wilder an' more dang'rous than we often know. But Hugh McVeigh—he came safe to harbor through it all, an' was strong enough to bring others along with him."

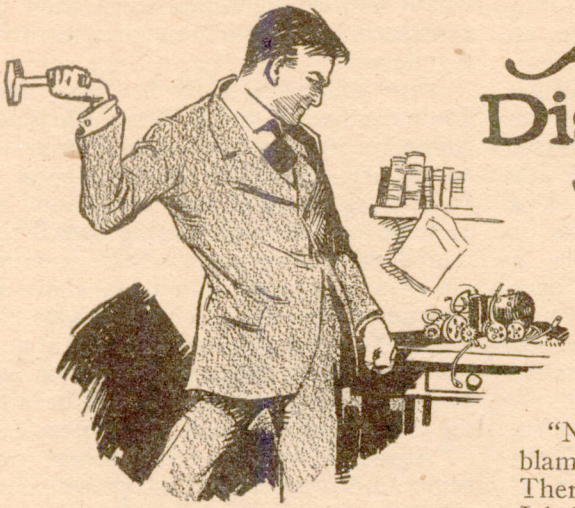
For a little while we were silent then, while I thought of the gray-haired man—"a little queer"—sleeping so quietly in his bed this night. I wondered about the kind of dreams that came to him.

Johnnie Tait swept the horizon with the strong night-glasses, pausing a long time in a single place.

"What is it out there?" I asked when at last he laid them down.

"A little fishin'-boat," he answered me. "They been sailin' mighty near the Bar. But they've tacked now an' are drawin' out to sea."

"A String o' Tools," another vigorous story by Kenneth MacNichol, will appear in an early issue of THE BLUE BOOK MAGAZINE.



Are We Discouraged?

by Crittenden Marriott

BRANT fitted into Mrs. Tuitt's boarding-house as if he had been born there. Within a week after he first rang the doorbell, he won Mrs. Tuitt's heart by his willingness and ability to repair anything and everything about the place. He made friends with Dinah, the cook, by calling her "aunty" and grinning at her spontaneous outburst: "Lor' bless you, massa! I aint been called aunty for fo'ty years." He got on familiar terms with all the girls in the house by one means or another; with little Miss Evans, the stenographer, by straightening the bars of a typewriter that was giving her unending trouble; with Miss Wilkerson, the "sales-lady," by showing her a way of standing that reduced the tiredness of bargain rush by at least twenty per cent; with Miss Morgan, the bookkeeper, by teaching her a new device for proving a sum; and—most adroitly of all—with Miss Fleming, the milliner, by asking her to sew on some buttons for him. It was little Miss Evans, however, whom he delighted to serve.

With the men boarders and particularly with Frank Tillotson, who had been the "star" of the house before his arrival and who was understood to be desperately in love with Miss Evans, his progress was somewhat slower.

Concerning his own history, Brant was not reticent and yet not egotistic. He explained that he was from Middleburg, Iowa.

"Never heard of Middleburg? Don't blame you. No reason why you should. There's one in every State in the Union, I believe. But it's a dandy little town for all that. Some day I'm going back; and then, if you'll come out, I'll show you the new waterworks and the view from the cemetery and the paving the women's club put down on Main Street and the new church steeple and all that. But I'm not going back till I've sold my patent."

THIS led, of course, to inquiries about the patent and to further explanation.

"Oh, yes! I've got a patent. That's what brought me to New York—to make my everlasting fortune, you know. I'm not the only one who's invented a vapor injector for a motor engine. There are others — lots of them. But mine's got the others beat a mile. It can be attached to any motor —stationary or automobile—of any size. Honestly, there are millions in it. If I had the money, I'd manufacture it myself. But then if I had the money, I wouldn't need to manufacture it, would I? So I suppose I'll have to divide with some manufacturer who'll take the cream and leave me the skimmed milk. It's tough! And what's tougher, I don't seem to be able to find a single solitary manufacturer who wants to make a million or two. Some of them had better speak up quick or the first thing they know I'll take my doll rags and go home to Middleburg."

This was in the early days after his arrival at Mrs. Tuitt's. Later, when the days had grown into weeks, and the

weeks were beginning to mount into months without bringing anyone to finance and manufacture his invention, he almost ceased to refer to it. When he did speak of it, he spoke in the same strain of bantering persiflage. But though his words were cheerful, his tones took on a shade of defiance, and his jollity was broken by moments of abstraction when his face wore a haunted look that more than once forced little Miss Evans to flee precipitately from the table to save herself from a breakdown. She was very tender-hearted, was Miss Evans.

The other girls noticed these fits also, though not quite so pityingly. Even Mrs. Tuitt noticed them—and not altogether because she feared for the time when her board money would be lacking. Mrs. Tuitt was always tired, always troubled and prematurely aged; yet she could spare time to worry over Brant's troubles and to try to cheer him up by special dainties which he devoured without noticing that they were special. The men boarders, except, perhaps, Tillotson, did not notice Brant's uneasiness at all; and Tillotson's real feelings were inscrutable, though outwardly, he grew more and more friendly.

EXCEPT during these moments of abstraction, however, Brant kept a stiff upper lip.

"Dog-gone these frosty-faced New Yorkers!" he grumbled one day when Miss Wilkerson questioned him. "They wont take time to tell a fellow what they don't like about the thing. Course there's a lot of them who aren't interested in my injector at all, and there's a lot more who are really too busy to listen. I understand them, and they don't worry me. But what gets my goat is the fellows who are interested at first and who stand to listen and then, all of a sudden, cut me short and back me out of the door without telling me what's the matter.

"Maybe, of course, they just don't like the cut of my jib. Maybe if I grew a bunch of down-East alfalfa on my chin or had a bald spot shaved on my head or sported a monocle, it would give me an air of age and dignity that would impress them and rouse them to a sense of the good thing they're turning down."

Miss Wilkerson sniffed. "Aw, they don't care what you're like," she said. "They're just giving an imitation of bein' busy. Half the little tin gods in New York think if they run round in a circle hard enough the big boss'll see it and raise their pay. Take it from me, you aint going to get anywhere as long as you see nobody but the little big men. You get at a real big man, and he'll buy your thingamadodger or tell you what's wrong with it. You been to the Transcontinental Motors people?"

"Sure! I've seen their door four times; and once I saw the private secretary to the vice-president."

"There you are. What's a private sec' know about vapor what-do-you-call-'ems? Think he's going to risk his standing by recommending anything that might turn out to be a lemon? Course, if he was a *Torchy*—you've read about *Torchy?* Well, believe me, there aint many *Torchys.* Most of them play safe every time." Miss Wilkerson turned to Miss Evans. "Say, Kitty," she demanded, "can't you get Mr. Brant in to see Mr. Gilbert?"

KITTY EVANS jumped as if she had been shot. Kitty was an old-fashioned girl—one of the sort that every man wants to cuddle, that every new woman pretends to despise and secretly envies, and that few people, men or women, can possibly speak to roughly.

"I!" she gasped. "Oh! I couldn't. I—I don't know Mr. Gilbert. I never spoke to him in my life. Oh!" Kitty's eyes filled with tears. "Oh! I *wish* I could, but—"

Brant was trying to say that he wouldn't have her do it for the world. But Miss Wilkerson broke in. "There! There! Dearie!" she said. "Course you couldn't. I'd ought to have known that in the first place. Course you'd do it if you could." She swung back to Brant. "All the same, Mr. Brant, it's sense I'm talking. You break into the big men's offices, an' you'll find out things. Politeness don't get you nowhere—not in this burg. You gotter

use strong-arm methods. Bul-lieve me!"

Brant's eyes brightened with kindling purpose. He had begun to suspect a condition something like that so emphatically painted by Miss Wilkerson, but he had never quite seen how to remedy it.

"It's all right to talk about breaking in," he objected. "But you can't actually do it. At least I can't. I'm from the provinces, you know, and I'm only just beginning to guess that the password in New York is 'bluff.'"

"You bet it's bluff," Miss Wilkerson broke in. "An' you needn't be afraid of making anybody real mad by breaking in on them. Lord, no! If you c'n get in when they're tryin' to keep you out, they're mighty liable to hire you and set you to break in on somebody else. Bul-lieve me."

Brant came to a sudden determination. "I'll do it," he cried. "I'll do it. I'll get into Gilbert's office somehow or other this very day or— No! There isn't any 'or' about it. I'll get in!"

He turned to go, then stopped and smiled down at Kitty Evans. "Thank you, dear," he said. The "dear" was utterly unconscious; he had thought it for a long time, and he spoke it now quite simply (and nobody noticed it except Tillotson). "Thank you, dear. I know you'd help me, if you could. But I don't want you to help. I'll fight this out myself."

WHEN he had gone, Miss Wilkerson looked about. "For the love of Mike!" she murmured. "I hope I haven't started that young man for Sing Sing."

Mrs. Tuitt, at the head of the table, spoke up. "He wont fail," she declared stoutly. "He's going to win. You'll see. And he deserves to win."

Miss Wilkerson stared. "Well, for the love of Mike!" she gasped once more.

Kitty Evans said nothing. But a desperate resolution was forming in her quivering but valiant little heart. Hurriedly she left the table and the house, determined to get to the big Transcontinental Motors building before Brant did.

A little later in the day she took her courage in both hands and walked deliberately into Mr. Gilbert's room. No one made the least objection to her entering; no doubt everyone who might have interposed took it for granted that she had been summoned there. Nevertheless she would almost as willingly have entered a den of lions.

Mr. Gilbert did not look formidable. In fact he looked very amiable. When Kitty came up to his desk, he glanced up at her inquiringly. Then, seeing that she was in distress, he gave her a lead. "You want to see me?" he asked. "What is it?"

"Ye-yes sir." Kitty tried hard, but she could not keep her voice steady. "Yes sir. I wanted to—to—" The words died in her throat.

Mr. Gilbert had placed her by this time. "Oh, yes!" he said kindly. "I remember you now. You're Mr. Carson's stenographer. He was bragging about you the other day. What's the trouble? Sit down and tell me."

Kitty did not sit. She clung desperately to the desk. "Mr.—Mr. Brant is coming to see you to-day," she exploded. "He says he's going to see you no matter what they do to stop him. And I'm afraid—afraid—"

Mr. Gilbert's eyes twinkled. "And who is Mr. Brant?" he asked.

"He boards at Mrs. Tuitt's, where I do. He's from Middleburg, and he's got a patent for something on a motor, and he's been walking the streets for months trying to interest somebody in it; and people look at it and then say: 'Very interesting, but I'm afraid it's not for us. Good morning.' Nobody will tell him what they think is wrong with it. And Miss Wilkerson—she's a saleslady from Macey's that boards with us—Miss Wilkerson told him he ought to see a big man like you, and you'd tell him. And so—and so—" Kitty's energy had run down after carrying her almost to the goal.

MR. GILBERT'S eyes twinkled more than ever. "He's a good young man, is he?" he asked. "You're sure?"

"Oh, yes sir!"

"And he's got a good attachment?"

"Sir? Oh! Oh! No sir! No at-

tachment! He's just a friend." A blush of dismay flooded Kitty's cheek.

Mr. Gilbert coughed. He had to cough or laugh, and he would not have laughed for the world.

Kitty did not notice. She was going on eagerly. "I—I didn't want him to get into any trouble forcing his way in and—and—"

"He wont need to use strong-arm methods to get in, Miss Evans." Gilbert could laugh now. "Tell him I'll see him."

"Oh, I couldn't! I couldn't! Please! Please! He mustn't know that I've spoken to you. He'd never forgive me. Oh! You wont tell him, sir!"

"No. I wont tell him." Gilbert rose, in order to give the girl a chance to escape. "I'll see him, Miss Evans; and I'll do all I can for him. If his invention is good, I'll try to use it. If it's not good— Well, I'll advise him, and perhaps he can make it good. I can see right now that he's a very lucky young man. Good morning, Miss Evans!"

When Kitty had fluttered out, Gilbert stared after her curiously. "A mighty plucky little girl," he breathed. "She's a darn sight too good for young Brant, I know, however good he is. She—she— Oh, well, I too once dwelt in Arcady."

This was why Brant obtained admittance to Mr. Gilbert's office after only sufficient delay to prevent him from suspecting that some one had smoothed the way.

BRANT'S heart was fluttering as desperately as Kitty's when he was shown into the room. He had worked so long and so hard over his vapor injector; he had saved the money to pay for the patent by such rigid economy; he had concealed his model so carefully from all possible thieves; and to a new inventor everybody is a possible thief; he had suffered such tortures when he was compelled to take a patent attorney into his confidence! He had waited in such heartbreaking suspense while the Patent Office mulled over his invention; and he had suffered so many heartbreaking discouragements as he went from place to place to show his model to little men, that he could scarcely believe that he had so easily secured access to one of the very "biggest" men in the business.

A little later, when he found that Mr. Gilbert was really interested, that he listened with care and asked intelligent questions, his heart overflowed. He threw himself into his subject; he explained the advantages of his injector better than he had ever done before. When he had finished, he sat back and waited, palpitating with a nervousness that he could hardly conceal.

Mr. Gilbert looked at him thoughtfully. "How old are you, Mr. Brant?" he asked.

"Twenty-five!" Brant did not understand what his age had to do with the sale of his patent, but he answered promptly. If Mr. Gilbert had asked him to stand on his head, he would have tried to do so.

"Education?"

Brant replied he had attended the public schools and in the tech' high school of a Western city. In answer to other standing questions he explained that he had always had a turn for tools and when he had invented his "vapor injector," he came to New York to sell the patent. He had lived on the proceeds of a little auto-repair shop that he had sold just before he left home. No, he was not married, and he had no one dependent upon him. And now he brushed aside further questions: "I'm glad I've found somebody that knows what's what at last," he said. "I can make you a mighty good proposition if you care to handle the thing, sir." He spoke offhandedly, confident of acceptance.

BUT Gilbert shook his head. "I don't care to handle it," he said slowly. "I think no one will care to handle it. It's no good."

"Wha-a-t!" Somehow Brant found himself on his feet. His cheerfulness turned into rage. "You—you—" he panted. "You've been playing with me. You've been leading me on, and now you say—Oh, confound you!"

"Sit down, Mr. Brant." Gilbert seemed not at all troubled by the outbreak; perhaps he had expected it. "Sit down, and I will tell you why your in-

jector is no good and how you may, perhaps, make it of some good. Sit down."

Brant sat down, but he did so hesitantly and unwillingly. He told himself that he had been fooled for a moment by Mr. Gilbert's manner, but that now he was on his guard. It was absurd for anyone to say that his invention was worthless. He knew that it was worth thousands and thousands. Mr. Gilbert was of course depreciating it in order ultimately to acquire it cheaply. He would give him rope enough and let him hang himself. So he sat down. "Go ahead," he said rather roughly.

Gilbert smiled to himself. He read Brant's thoughts like the pages of an open book.

"Your device is intended as an attachment to a gasoline motor," he said. "It gains its end by passing steam from a supplementary carburetor into the cylinders along with the gasoline. The explosion of the gasoline instantly superheats the steam and causes it to expand and help to drive the piston, thus effecting a large saving in gasoline. It also takes up the waste heat of the explosion and, later, voids it through the ports, thus lessening the task of the water-cooler and perhaps doing away with it altogether.

"The idea is good, even if not quite new; and I believe your injector—bad name that, by the way—I believe it will do what you claim. But the trouble is that for our purposes it is not practicable as you have worked it out. It would not fit in with our motors. We should have to redesign them from the very base. This would be very expensive; it would not only make our present models worthless, but would demand an enormous supply of new tools and new fittings at our service stations all over the country.

"Moreover, your device is cumbersome; it takes up too much room. It would increase the floor-space of our stationary motors by at least twenty per cent; that is, we could use only four motors in a space that now holds five. And I doubt whether you could get it into an automobile at all. That is why I say it is no good. Even if it does all that you claim—and I think it very probable that it will,—its advantages are not great enough to warrant the expense of the change. Undoubtedly this is why other men have dropped the thing as soon as they realized what it would cost. You see, Mr. Brant, inventing involves a good many things besides inventing."

BRANT nodded; but he was not in the least convinced. "You said I could make it work," he suggested rather scornfully.

"I said *perhaps* you could make it work. Just at present I don't see how. To make it fit our particular motor you'd have to reduce its weight and bulk. To the best of my belief you'd have to flatten it about one-half."

Brant laughed, incredulously. Such a suggestion was too preposterous to be taken seriously. "Oh, that's impossible," he scoffed.

"Perhaps. That's your business, not mine. And that isn't the only change you'll have to make. You'll have to reverse your worm and bring it in, from the side perhaps, with a universal joint."

"Eh? Oh, that's blamed foolishness!"

"Very likely. I don't see how it can be done myself. But you've got to do it if you want us to adopt your device. And you've got to make other equally impossible changes. I can count five of them offhand. And it's the same—only different—with all other makes of motor."

Brant got up. He thought he understood. Mr. Gilbert had said his worst, and would be ready to make terms. "Oh, well," he scoffed. "That ends it. I guess I'll just throw the whole thing away, unless you'd like to buy it cheap and work out the changes for yourself. What'll you give me for it as it stands—as a sporting proposition? How much, now?"

Gilbert shook his head. "Not a red cent," he answered patiently. "I'm not a gambler. You've got an idea that you may be able to work out. Whether you do so is a hundred-to-one shot. But if anyone can, you can. It's *your* injector. You've got faith in it. Now

the question is whether you've got faith enough and grit enough to go back to work and start all over. If you have, you may succeed in reducing the consumption of gasoline by one half. And that will do more than make you a fortune; it will render a great service to the nation and to the world —an enormous service."

BRANT was impressed in spite of himself. But he looked at his model, and a feeling of helplessness overwhelmed him. No one knew the difficulties better than he. It would take months to overcome them—if he ever did overcome them. "I can't do it," he cried despairingly.

"Looks tough, doesn't it?" Gilbert responded. "Well, it's as tough as it looks. If it wasn't, somebody else would have done it before now. That's one reason why it's worth doing. It's up to you. Come to see me when you get it altered to suit conditions. Good day."

Brant gasped. The abruptness of the dismissal was a frightful shock. All along he had been expecting Mr. Gilbert to end by making him some offer that would afford a basis for chaffering. And now everything had ended—pop! Twice he opened his mouth to speak. But no words came. At last he picked up his model and stumbled from the room. He could not wait another week, scarcely another day. He was down to almost his last dollar. His board was overdue. . . . . Slowly and despairingly he plodded home.

When he had gone, Mr. Gilbert sent for Kittie Evans.

At dinner, of course, Brant had to explain. Everybody wanted to know the result of his visit to Mr. Gilbert. And, of course, manlike, he pretended not to care. "That's the way with these rich dubs," he finished. "They tell you to do something that'll cost a barrel of money and then sit back and wait for you to pick the money off the trees. 'Scrap your whole patent,' says Mr. Gilbert, 'and start all over again.' Gee! he's got the nerve. And what's worse, I reckon he's right—dog-gone him!"

Brant's tones were laughing; his air was lively; his manner was careless. He deceived all the men except Tillotson and all the women but two. Little Miss Evans and Mrs. Tuitt read his soul—Miss Evans because she loved him, and Mrs. Tuitt for reasons of her own. Only He who reads all hearts could have told which was sorrier for him.

THIS light banter Brant kept up through the dinner and continued it for a time in the parlor. Soon, however, he slipped away and started up the stairs. As he did so, the mask dropped from him like an outworn garment. The light died out of his eyes; the corners of his mouth dropped; his shoulders sagged. Wearily he climbed the steps to his hall bedroom on the fourth floor, and went to the stand on which his model stood, polished and glittering. For a moment he stared; then he caught up a hammer and struck blindly. Not till the whole mechanism lay on the floor, a mass of shattered cogs and shifts, did he desist.

Then he dropped into a chair, panting. The work had not been hard—physically. But one does not destroy the labors of years without paying for it.

After a while some one knocked at the door. It was a man's knock, not a woman's; and Brant, after glancing at the broken model, set his teeth and called, "Come in!" It did not seem worth while to pretend any longer.

Tillotson came in. He glanced at Brant, then at the broken mechanism. Then he sat down. "You're in trouble, old man," he said. "You didn't tell us everything at dinner. Can I help you?"

Brant hesitated. Undoubtedly he was in trouble, but it was not trouble that was easy to tell, especially to a comparative stranger. Yet the desire to talk, to explain, was hot upon him. He felt, as all other men must feel in their great crisis, the need for some one to stand by him (not necessarily with him but *by* him), lending the mere prop of human companionship.

"Yes, I *am* in trouble," he burst out at last. "Maybe it wont seem much to you. I reckon we've all got different standards for trouble, and I reckon we've each got different standards at

different times. What I told you at dinner was true, but it wasn't the whole truth. I'm up against it—hard."

TILLOTSON nodded. "That's why I came," he said. "Miss Evans said she thought you needed some one."

"Miss Evans?" Brant's mind hung on the name for an instant. "So she guessed. I thought maybe she had. She's that kind! She reads you! She— Oh, I've had thoughts and hopes and—but I've got no right to any more. I— Here, let me tell you!"

"Go on!" Tillotson spoke calmly. Only a keen eye would have detected the quickening in his pulses.

"Well, Mr. Gilbert was right. Everything he said was right. I wouldn't believe it at first, but it's right. I've got to begin all over again. And I can't do it. It'll take a year—probably more; and I haven't got the energy. Do you know how hard I've worked on that thing?" He gestured toward the cogs in the floor. "I've worked on it ever since I was nineteen years old. Six years! Six years of hunger and cold and raggedness to save money to put into it. And in ten minutes Mr. Gilbert shows me that it's all wrong. He thinks I may be able to make it right, and I could—I know I could if I had the energy and the money. And I could find the energy if I had the money. But I haven't got it. It would cost at least a thousand dollars and a year's board money. And I haven't got a thousand mills. I'm broke. I'm expecting Mrs. Tuitt to turn me out—perhaps to-night. I didn't fool her at dinner one bit. I could tell by the way she eyed me that she was meditating things."

Pat to the moment came a rap on the door—this time unmistakably a woman's rap. Brant shrugged his shoulders. "What'd I tell you?" he demanded. "There she is now." He strode to the door and threw it open. "Come in, Mrs. Tuitt," he invited.

Mrs. Tuitt did not come in immediately. She appeared on the threshold, more drab, more wearied, more aged-looking than either man had ever seen her before. Only, surprisingly enough, a red spot burned in either cheek.

"I want—I want to speak with you, Mr. Brant," she faltered timidly.

Tillotson was already on his feet. "Excuse me," he said gracefully, as he bowed himself out. "See you later, Brant." Then, aside, he added swiftly: "Don't be downhearted, old man. Everything's coming right."

WHEN he had gone, Mrs. Tuitt came in.

Ten minutes later Brant, with hot cheeks and gleaming eyes, burst into Tillotson's room. In his hand he held a scrap of paper. "Look—look at this!" he gasped.

Hesitatingly Tillotson took the slip and scanned it. "It's a check!" he exclaimed. "A check for one thousand dollars, signed by Mrs. Tuitt! Good Lord, Brant! What does this mean?"

"What does it mean? What does it mean?" Brant's voice cackled high. "It means that Mrs. Tuitt's lent me the money to perfect my patent."

For a time, probably seconds, though it seemed minutes, Tillotson did not speak. But his eyes gleamed. Then: "You mustn't let her do it," he said quietly.

Brant's eyes widened. "Mustn't let her do it?" he gasped. "Mustn't let her— What the devil do you mean? Why shouldn't I let her do it?"

"Because it's a risk that Mrs. Tuitt ought not to take. Oh, yes, I know you think you'll succeed. You thought you'd succeed when you first came to New York. But you didn't succeed. Now if you fail again after spending Mrs. Tuitt's money?"

"I wont fail."

"But if you do?" Tillotson pressed the point.

Brant's voice grew suddenly defiant. "Well, suppose I do?" he rasped. "I'm taking chances too, aint I? People take chances every day. If I succeed,—and I will succeed,—Mrs. Tuitt will be rich. She knows the risk, and she is willing to take it."

Slowly Tillotson shook his head. "You don't understand," he said. "I know something of Mrs. Tuitt's affairs. That thousand dollars is every cent she has in the world. It represents fifteen years of saving, dollar by dollar—yes,

dime by dime. It's all she has to protect her in her old age. If she lost it, she would be penniless. Do you know what it means for a woman of her years to be thrown penniless on the street?"

But Brant's face did not relax. "She's willing to take the risk," he insisted. "She's got faith in the patent and—"

"Nonsense! What does Mrs. Tuitt know about vapor injectors and cooled motors and all that? She isn't lending you the money because she has faith in your device. She's lending it because she likes you. You've been very kind and considerate to her since you've been here. Oh, I know you were kind because it comes natural to you. You're kind to everyone. But that's why she's doing it. She's trusting her all to you blindfold simply because she likes you."

BRANT colored hotly. "Well, s'pose she is," he protested defiantly. "S'pose she is lending me the money because she's got confidence in me. Lots of people lend money for no better security and get rich off it too. Bah! I'm going to take the money. You'd do it in my place. Oh, yes, you would. You'd take it if you'd lost everything, and a woman came along and offered you back everything—everything, I tell you, and more besides. You wouldn't talk so high and mighty then. You'd grab at it. Of course you would."

Tillotson nodded a trifle wearedly. "Perhaps I should," he admitted. "No one can tell what he wouldn't do till he's tempted. But I'd know I was playing dog if I did. A man can't capitalize his kindness to women and stay a man. There are men who live by wheedling money out of women. But the world doesn't call them men."

"What!" Purple with rage, Brant sprang forward. You mean to say—Oh, confound you!" he cried. "Confound you and your preaching! I've had enough of it. I'm not robbing Mrs. Tuitt. I'm making a bargain with her and—"

"Yes. It's a bargain. But it's not a fair one. No such bargain with a woman can be fair. No man can fairly take advantage of a woman's ignorance. Men have taken certain privileges by right of might, but they're subject to certain restrictions for the same reason. You mustn't do this thing. You must break it off, now, at once—"

But Brant had gone. The house shook as he slammed the door behind him.

Once in the hall, he started for his room. But his steps grew slower and slower, and after a time he halted and stood thinking, fighting mankind's eternal battle between right and wrong, the hard way and the easy one. At last, still holding the check in his hand, he went slowly down the stairs. As he passed the parlor, he glanced in and saw Kitty Evans, sitting there alone, tense and frightened.

WHEN she saw him, she started up. But he waved her back. "One minute," he muttered hoarsely. "I'll be back. But I must clean my hands first." Ploddingly he went on to the back of the house and the kitchen. What he said to Mrs. Tuitt there he never told. But when he came out, he did not have the check.

To the parlor he went. "Kitty," he said, without preliminaries, "I've learned something about myself today. I'm a pretty poor dub. Mr. Gilbert showed me that I am half-baked; and Tillotson has showed me that I am a rotter. I don't know whether I'll ever be or do anything worth while; but I think I can at least walk straight—if you'll help me. In a way I've been loafing all my life. But I'm not going to loaf any more. I'm going to get a job and—"

"Mr. Gilbert said he would give you a job at good wages where you could learn how to work at your patent after hours." Kitty's voice was breathless. "He asked me to tell you."

"Did he?" Brant's face lighted. He did not inquire how Gilbert had come to send a message to him by Kitty. "Then — then — Oh, Kitty! Kitty! Wont you wait for me, dear?"

Kitty's arm went around his neck. A moment later—Kitty was getting bold —a moment later Brant heard a murmur from deep down above his heart and bent his head to catch it.

"I don't see why I've got to *wait*," said Kitty.

The Rube and the Rubies

By James Francis Dwyer

HE told it in the "Come an'-get-it Restaurant," at the rear of the grandstand at Sheepshead Bay. It was "Stampede Week," and New York had been invaded by an army of cowboys and cowgirls who had come to show the Easterners how to "bulldog" a steer, throw a rope and cling to a broncho whose whole effort was bent on hurling his rider in the direction of the nearest planet.

He stood six feet four, was wide of shoulder and so tanned by the Oklahoma sun that his teeth showed dazzlingly white when he smiled.

Said he, in answer to my question concerning the opportunities of New York: "The only two Westerners I ever knew who made good in the East are Will Rogers an' Heck Allen."

I knew of Will Rogers, the cowboy comedian; but I had never heard of Heck Allen.

"Where is he appearing?" I asked.

"Appearin'!" he cried. "Why, Heck's not appearin' anywhere! He's holdin' down a job that puts fifty plunks a week inter his jeans, an' he sort o' roped that job down out o' the pale blue."

I showed interest and a desire to catch the waiter's eye, and so, after a few minutes' interval, the man from Oklahoma told me this story.

THIS feller Heck Allen was a cowpunch on the Red Shingle Ranch, an' one day he saw an advertisement in a Noo York paper wantin' the whereabouts o' Hector Allen, who was in Kansas City in 1906.

"It's me!" says Heck, pokin' the piece o' paper in the faces of all the other punchers. "I was in Kansas City with a mob o' steers in December, 1906."

"There's more Heck Allens than you," says Long Bill Crowley. "I knew one down in Albykerky."

"Was he in Kansas City in 1906?" screamed Heck.

"Well, I couldn't say that he was," says Long Bill. "He wandered round some, but I couldn't swear that he was in Kansas City."

"That's the point!" yells Heck. "My name is Heck Allen, an' I was in Kansas City in 1906. It's money, that's what it is! Dad's brother went to Noo York an' made a lot o' money, an' I bet he's gone an' left it to me!"

"How d'yer know he made money?" says Long Bill.

"Well, he lived on a street called Grand Street," says Heck, "an' I guess only the swells live there."

Now, this Heck Allen had no more brains than a steer. We wanted him to write to the lawyers advertisin', their names being Kling, Kling an' Kling, but Heck wouldn't. He had six dol-

lars an' seventeen cents when he saw that advertisement, an' the plumb fool started off for Noo York right away.

Heck's six plunks faded away before he was twenty miles from the Red Shingle; then he started to beat it. He was about my height an' a lot stronger; so when the brakemen an' conductors tried to put him off the train, they had to try awful hard. He stuck like a bur in a broncho's tail, an' most of 'em guessed that discussion was the better part o' valor an' said things to him at long range.

Heck rolled inter Noo York on a train that was bringin' a lot o' steers, an' he dropped off an' streaked for a place called Nassau Street, where the three Klings had their law foundry. He was hoisted up seventeen floors; then he hopped through a door that was branded Kling, Kling and Kling an' whooped inter the ear of a clerk who was takin' a little nap.

"I'm Heck Allen!" yelled Heck. "I'm Heck Allen who was in Kansas City in 1906!"

The clerk looked at Heck like as if he was a noo kind of bug, an' Heck got mad.

"What's wrong?" he yells.

"Why," says the clerk, "you're not *our* Heck Allen!"

"Aint I?" screamed Heck. "Why, you little button-headed, wall-eyed cayuse, I'll twist yer neck so as you can count the knobs on yer spine! I'm Heck Allen who was in Kansas City in 1906, an' if you say I'm not I'll take yer dead carcass back to Oklahoma to poison prairie-dogs with!"

JEST then the fattest one of the three Klings ambled out o' his private office an' wanted to know who had gone an' let Heck off the chain.

"I want me leggersee!" says Heck.

"Yer what?" says the fat Kling.

"Me leggersee!" yells Heck, meggerphonin' with his hands like as if Kling was the other side o' the Rockies. "An' if any bunch o' crooks try to do me out o' it, I'll make 'em look like a squirrel that's gone an' made faces at a cattymount!"

This guy Kling had never met a cowpunch in his life, an' he waltzed over to Heck Allen an' tried to push him out o' the office. Now Heck, on account o' beatin' it from Oklahoma to Noo York, knew all there was to know about the evictin' business. When Kling made a grab at Heck's shoulder, Heck took the hobbles off a punch that went out an' flopped Kling in his private chuckwagon an' knocked him plumb across the room.

The racket brought two more Klings out o' their holes, but they were as lucky as Soapy Smith o' the Lost Cow outfit. Soapy was waitin' for his girl in a dark lane, an' hearin' somethin' movin', he reached out his arms, thinkin' it was her. It wasn't. It was a bear, an' that bear gave Soapy a hug that made him mighty cautious about matters like that afterward. These two Klings jumped at Heck Allen, an' Heck whooped like an Injun an' did some jumpin' in their direction to encourage 'em.

They say it was some fight in that office. I've seen Heck Allen fight jest for fun, an' I can imagine how he would rage around an' tear up things when he thought those lawyer guys were doin' him out o' his leggersee. He was a lace-edged cyclone, half a score o' mules an' a bunch o' cattymounts rolled inter one section o' amberlatin' manhood.

One o' the three Klings struck the floor, came back with a bounce an' remained standin' long enough ter yell "Police!" inter the telephone; so Heck Allen guessed he had better go away from that place.

Heck ran down the stairs, but the cops was comin' up; so he pushed open the door of an office on the next floor an' went in. A feller was sittin' there in front of a lot of glass bottles like perfessors have, an' he nods friendly-like to Heck an' asks him to take a seat.

"I'm tryin' to do some dellikit experimentin'," he says; "but the guys jest over me have been dancin' a war-dance, an' I couldn't work."

Heck grinned when he said that about the war-dance, an' he told him all about the fight, an' the feller laughed till he nearly fell off his chair.

"You' better stay here till they get

tired o' searchin'," he said. "If they caught yer, they might send yer up for five years."

HECK ALLEN waited in the feller's office, talkin' to him an' tellin' him yarns about Oklahoma. The feller said he might get Heck a job, an' when Heck said he wouldn't mind a job, the feller telephoned another chap, told him all about Heck, what he looked like an' how he would fight, an' the feller at the other end of the wire said that Heck was jest the feller he wanted.

"He says bring yer along this evenin'," said the guy with the bottles, whose name was Pritchard. "He'll meet us at the corner of Thirty-ninth Street an' Fifth Avenoo, an' I'll interdooce yer."

Well, Heck stayed in Pritchard's office till it was dark; then the two of 'em started to walk up to the place where they were goin' to meet the feller who'd give Heck a job. It took 'em some bit o' time to get there, an' it was 'long 'bout eight o'clock when they got to Thirty-ninth Street. The avenoo was nice an' quiet, all the people from the stores havin' gone home.

"He's not here yet," says Pritchard. "Let's walk up a block."

They started to walk up the avenoo, but they'd only gone a few yards when Pritchard stopped like as if he heard somethin'.

"What's that?" he said.

Heck pulled up to listen, an' he thought he heard a woman's moan come from behind a big packin'-case in the doorway of a store. He jumped for the case, an' as he did so, a feller hopped out from behind it an' streaked for a taxicab that looked as if it was waitin' for him. Heck was goin' to chase the guy, but as he turned, a beautiful woman staggered from behind the box an' dropped faintin' inter his arms.

"My jewels!" she screamed. "My jewels! Catch him! Catch him!"

Heck never knew how a taxi guy goin' down the avenoo guessed that he wanted a machine, but he did. The taxi feller pulled up at the curb, an' Heck pushed the lady inter the machine's insides while he hopped up on the saddle with the driver. He forgot Pritchard. The lady was the most wonderful thing that he had ever seen. She had eyes as big as mushrooms, lips redder'n all the poinsetyers yer ever saw bloomin', an' black hair that was so thick on her shoulders that Heck thought it was a shawl.

"Catch him!" she screamed. "He has robbed me of my treasure!"

"Don't worry, ma'am," says Heck. "We'll rope him if we have to chase him to Las Vegas."

Heck Allen was a chap that made everybody else's troubles his'n. He reminded me a lot of an old geek I read about once who went round the country huntin' fer maidens in distress. His name was *Don Quick City* an' he had a servant named *Santy Pansy*. If yer ever get hold of the book, jest read it.

Heck told the chap who was drivin' the machine to dig his spurs inter his old hearse, but the feller chatters back about speed laws an' traffic cops.

"Shucks!" yells Heck. "When a hoss-thief is loose in the West, no one talks about speed laws. Which is the little button which makes it go fast?" he says.

The taxi guy points to it, an' Heck put his big foot on it; an' that machine started to gobble up the furlongs like a jack-rabbit that's gone an' run inter a convention o' bulldogs.

FOUR cops tried to stop Heck in the first half-mile o' that run, but they had as much chance o' doin' it as a June bug has of sidetrackin' an elephant. The taxi feller was cryin' 'cause he guessed he'd lose his license, which all the cops was writin' down in their notebooks as he whizzed by, but Heck was beginnin' to enjoy himself. Jest behind him a motor-cycle cop was eatin' the dust the taxi flung in his face, an' police whistles were playin' "There'll be a hot time in the old town" all up and down the avenoo.

The lady reached through the winder an' patted Heck on the arm an' looked up at him with her big eyes, an' Heck trod harder on the speed button. He took part of the stairs off an avenoo bus that was slow in movin' outer his way, an' the blamed old taxi carried a lump of that stairway half

a block an' nearly brained a rheumaticky guy who changed from a turtle inter a mountain-goat when he saw Heck's airyplane comin'.

The thief's taxi was about a block ahead jest then, an' Heck was madder'n a bobtailed scorpion 'cause he didn't have his gun.

"Never mind," he yells out to the lady, "when I catch him, I'll break his neck or poison him or do somethin' else that's nice an' gentle to him."

The taxi feller tried to push Heck's foot off the button that was makin' the wheels go round; but Heck pinched him softly, an' the feller yelled like as if he was bit by a rattler.

"Full steam, skipper!" yells Heck. "Give her her head, or I'll fling yer out an' take the wheel myself."

The thief's bus swung inter the park, an' Heck's little ambylance takes the same trail, three motor-cycle cops, a police patrol an' five other autymobbils streakin' behind.

That park is all full of curly trails that don't go anywhere, an' the thief an' Heck an' the police an' all the other autymobbils that was attracted by the chase go merry-go-roundin' tootin' so loud that they woke up all the hobos that was sleepin' on the benches an' all the little monkeys an' ourang-outangs that was housed there jest to show people there is uglier forms of life than themselves. The whole place was a pandemonium, with Heck's little wagon the core of all the fuss.

The thief's taxi took a circ'lar trail an' Heck gave a yell yer could hear at Council Bluffs.

"I've got yer, yer low-down varmint!" he shouted. "I've got yer cornered!"

BUT Heck hadn't. That thief hopped from the taxi an' took to the timber, an' Heck went after him. He dived plumb from the seat an' nearly broke his neck over one of those "Keep off the grass" signs. But he was game. Every yard or so he tripped over a piece o' wire that some fool had put up to keep people from walkin' under the trees, but he always picked hisself up in time to hear Mr. Thief scootin' away in front o' him.

"I'll get yer!" yells Heck. "I'll get yer if I run yer out to Oklahoma!"

Heck struck a little clear patch in the middle of which was a statoo of a feller holdin' his hat in his hand, an' jest as he reached that clearin', he lost track of the thief. There was a moon, an' Heck could see clear across that patch; but the jewel-swiper had disappeared.

Heck stood close to the statoo an' looked around. He was awful mad to think the feller had got away from him, an' he thought how tough it'd be to go back to Miss Big Eyes in the wagon an' tell her that the thief had given him a pair o' clean heels.

"The durned sucker!" he says. "I'd give my noo spurs an' rope to get a clutch on him!"

Jest as Heck says that, somethin' dropped on the cement at the foot of the statoo, an' he stoops an' picks it up. What d'yer think it was? Say, yer couldn't guess in a year. It was a ruby, a big red ruby, most as big as Heck's thumb, an' Heck stared at it with his eyes bulgin' out.

There was another little tinkle on the cement, an' Heck stooped an' picked up another; then he jest stopped plumb still an' stared at one o' the legs of the statoo. That leg started to stream rubies, scores an' scores o' 'em, big red stones that glittered in the moonlight an' made a little pile that was like blood where they fell on the cement.

"Oh, gosh!" gurgled Heck. "Oh, gosh!" he says; an' as he said it, he made a jump an' grabbed the legs o' the statoo an' dragged him down onto the grass!

The thief guy who was maskyradin' as the statoo—him havin' found a block of marble doin' nothin' an' clawed hisself up on it—was some little bear-cat when he went to the mat with Heck Allen. Heck was used to bulldoggin' steers an' wrestlin' with guys who didn't care if they took the crease out o' their trousers while wrestlin', but he had one pesky parsnip in that ruby robber. The two of 'em rolled down the clearin' like a garden-roller an' rolled back ag'in so as to make sure that all the daisies had been murdered. He got Heck by the hair, an' Heck yelled, an'

jest as the lady came through the timber along with the cops an' the bunch of hobos, Heck got a grip on him an' sat up on his chest.

"I've got him, ma'am," says Heck, "an' there's yer jewels on the ground," —pointin' to the pile of rubies near the statoo.

The lady gave a little joy whoop an' flung herself at the stones, while the cops had to form a ring an' use their hick'ry sticks on the heads o' the hobos who tried to give her a hand at pickin' up the rubies.

"Oh, my jewels!" she cried, scoopin' 'em inter a little bag. "Oh, my beautiful jewels!"

Well, Heck Allen an' the cops an' the crowd watched her doin' that. The thief couldn't watch 'cause Heck had his nose driven inter the ground an' was sittin' on his back, but the others wouldn't so much as blink, for fear they'd lose sight of the jewels. Some o' that bunch o' fresh-air leaguers hadn't seen a five-spot since their dads flung one to the parson for christenin' 'em; so you can guess how they stared at the rubies.

WHEN the lady had gathered all the rubies up, the biggest cop got a clutch on Heck's prisoner an' lifted him to his feet.

"Lady," says the cop, "did this man try to rob yer?"

"Yes, yes," she says, "he was my sekkertary, an' he tried to steal my jewels."

"D'yer give him in charge?" says the cop.

"What is that?" she says.

"D'yer give him in charge?" chirrups the cop. "D'yer want me to arrest him?"

"No, no!" cried the lady. "I don't want him arrested. I'm goin' to India to-morrow, an' I can't wait to prosecute him."

One of the other cops opened a fat notebook an' says to Heck Allen, "What's her name?"

"Search me," says Heck. "I never saw her till this guy was gettin' away with her jew'lry."

"Ma'm, will yer tell me yer name an' address?" he says.

"I'm the Maharanee of Bahdpur," says she.

Those cops were ignorant guys. They looked at each other; then the silliest one o' the bunch says: "Yer say yer name is Mary Ryan an' yer came from Badport. Where's Badport? In Jersey?"

"No, no," says the lady. "I'm the Maharanee of Bahdpur. I'm a princess. Me husband is a roger."

Well, the cops scratched their heads an' looked at the lady an' Heck Allen.

"Where are yer stayin'?" says one o' the cops, speakin' to the lady.

"I'm stayin' at the Plaza," says the lady. "I've five rooms there."

Well, that little statement made the cops sit up an' take notice. An' Heck Allen opens his mouth too. Here was Heck, jest in outer the big grass-patches o' Oklahoma, an' he gets all mixed up in a thing that looks like the mainspring of a dime novel.

THREE newspaper reporters got there jest about that time, an' when they started to fire questions at the lady, she turns to Heck an' asks him to see her to her hotel. "But before I go," she says, "I must reward the p'licemen. If they hadn't been here, some o' my jewels might have been stolen."

She put a little hand that was whiter'n a clean tablecloth inter the bag, an' she forages round till she found eight stones that she thought were a nice size for scarf-pins for cops. She gave 'em one each an' knocked 'em so plumb silly that they couldn't thank her. When she did that, she turned an' looked at Heck Allen, who was pushin' the newspaper men away from her.

"You are a brave, brave man," she says. "Put yer hand inter this bag an' take what yer think is a fair reward."

Now no one had ever told Heck Allen to help hisself to rubies, but he was not a greedy guy. He jest stuck his big paw inter the bag an' took one good-sized stone.

"Take another," says the lady.

He stuck his paw out on another foragin' expedition an' fished up one that was bigger'n the first.

"Do it ag'in," says her ladyship.

"Oh, shucks," says Heck, who guessed he had about ten thousand dollars worth o' jew'lry in his hand, "I got two now."

"Three is lucky," says the Maharanee.

Well, Heck dived ag'in an' cops a stone that was near as big as a duck-egg.

"Oh, gee!" he says. "I've gone an' hooked the Jess Willard of yer collection!"

"Nonsense," she says. "Where that ruby came from there is hundreds of others, an'," says she, speakin' sort o' dreamy-like, "I own the Bahdpur mines, where they come from."

When she said that, those newspaper guys an' the crowd in general unloosed an "Oh" that yer could hear over in Noo Jersey. The park hobos were lookin' hard at the bag, so Heck reminds her of her intention of gettin' back to her hotel. One o' the reporter idjuts unloosed a flash-light that half scared her to death, so Heck steered her back to the taxicab quick.

Well, the cops came along 'cause they thought she might give 'em another ruby, an' the crowd came 'cause they thought some one might knock the bag outer her hand. An' the newspaper guys hung to the percession like flies to a hairless pup, askin' a thousand questions o' Heck Allen an' the cops.

The Maharanee got afraid as the crowd got bigger, an' when she got to the hotel, she jest squeezed Heck Allen's hand, looked at him quick with her great big mushroom eyes an' ducked inter the elevator, the manager, the night-clerk an' six porters tryin' their durndest to keep the crowd from streamin' up the stairs. There were other newspaper guys there then, an' they were firin' questions at Heck Allen till Heck got plumb sick o' 'em.

"Yer can go straight to Jericho!" he says to one little rat who was that small that he didn't reach up to Heck's gun-belt. "If yer don't stop pullin' at me, I'll cut the top off yer empty head an' use it as an egg-cup!"

ONE o' the cops told Heck he oughter be careful o' hisself on account o' havin' the three big rubies in his pocket, so Heck slipped out a side door an' started down the street. It was gettin' late, an' Heck remembers that he has no money an' no place to sleep. So he jest thought he'd pawn one o' those big rubies so as to get a bed for hisself an' somethin' to eat.

All the pawnshops were closed, every durn one of 'em, an' Heck Allen tramped up an' down the streets tryin' to think out how he could get some coin. The only guy he knew in Noo York was Pritchard, the feller who brought him up Fifth Avenoo to get him a job, but he had lost Pritchard when he started after the Maharanee's sekkertary. An' Heck was a bit skeery 'bout stoppin' strangers in the street an' tryin' to sell 'em rubies that was bigger'n walnuts. He was like ol' Sam Whitty who found the White Prince Mine. Sam had no water, but he had a chunk of gold that weighed a hundred an' eight ounces; an' he would have given that big chunk for one bottle o' beer.

"Well," says Heck, "I've got a fortune an' it'll keep. The only thing I can do is to keep walkin' till the pawnshops open. If I go to sleep on a park bench, I wont have any rubies in the mornin'."

So Heck Allen started to walk up one avenoo an' down another, an' every now an' then when there was no one about he would stop under a lamp an' take a peep at the three stones. "Wow," he would say, every time he brought 'em out to give 'em the once over, "I'll get inter some good clothes in the mornin', an' I'll go up to that big hotel where she's stayin', an' I'll put up there too."

You see, all the time Heck was hammerin' the avenoo he was thinkin' of the Maharanee, thinkin' of her big eyes an' her lips that was redder'n poinsetyers, an' her black hair. He couldn't think of anythin' else. She had said she was married to a roger, but Heck had a fool idee that if she saw him dekkyrated in good clothes she might hire him to run the ruby mines out in India. As I told yer, this Heck Allen didn't have no more brains than a steer, but he was a powerful big dreamer.

When it came daylight, Heck was way uptown; so he turns an' steams back to the middle o' the city. There was pawnshops up in the part o' the town he was in, but Heck guessed that none of 'em had enough money to give him what he wanted on one of those rubies. He wanted an awful lot, enough to buy eleven suits of clothes an' a lot o' shoes an' hats an' shirts an' collars an' things like that.

Heck came down Fifth Avenoo lookin' for pawnshops, but there was none there. He asked a cop when he got to Thirty-fourth Street, an' the cop told him to go over to Sixth Avenoo; so Heck swings cross town, his big hand holdin' the three rubies.

HECK was passin' the Waldorf Hotel when he saw a crowd in front of a shop that had jest opened, it bein' then about eight o'clock. People were millin' round like a bunch o' steers tryin' to get a look in that winder, so Heck thought he would take a squint to see what was there. He was taller than most of the people, an' he could see right over their heads.

What d'yer think Heck Allen saw? Yer wouldn't guess in a year. Bet yer a dollar yer wouldn't! That winder was chock-full of brooches an' bangles an' stickpins, all with rubies in 'em, great big shinin' rubies. There was a little pile o' rubies about two feet high right up near the front, an' on the pile was a sign readin': "Bahdpur Rubies! The greatest imitation ruby in the world! Cannot be detected by experts. Any one of these magnificent stones for sixty-nine cents!"

That wasn't all, either. All the front o' that store was pasted with the first pages o' the mornin' papers, an' what those papers didn't say about the Maharanee of Bahdpur an' the rubies that she grew an' watered in her own back yard could be written on the back of a postage stamp. There was a lot about Heck too, an' a photygraph o' him as the feller with the flash-light took him.

Heck stares at the show for about five minutes; then he tramps inter the store. A man behind a counter gave one look at Heck an' ducks down quick, but a woman with big mushroom eyes an' two lips the color of pointsetyers hops out of a little cage labeled cashier an' grabs Heck by the two hands.

"Oh, I knew yer'd find me!" she cried. "I knew yer would! I wanted to see yer an' ask yer pardon. I couldn't, last night, 'cause that would have put the show away, an' it was goin' so splendid with all the little reporters askin' questions!"

"An' you're not a Maharanee?" says Heck.

"No, no, no!" cried the girl. "I'm jest a plain American girl. My brother, Mr. Pritchard,—you met him yesterday,—invented these rubies, an' we planned to get some free advertisin'. Then you came along, an'—an'—an'—I'm sorry," she says, "but you was jest perfectly splendid. Jack, come out an' speak to Mr. Allen. You're not angry, are yer, Mr. Allen?"

"Angry?" says Heck. "Why I couldn't be angry with you if yer took me for a sheep man an' fed me on mutton for seven years. Angry? Why, I'm tickled to death at bein' able to help yer out. An' you certainly kidded those little newspaper guys a treat."

WELL, the girl's brother came out an' spoke to Heck, an' it ended up that Heck stayed an' went out to lunch with the two of 'em. John Pritchard offered him a job in the store, an' Heck took it. Yesterday I met him, an' he told me he was gettin' fifty plunks a week. He took me inter the store an' interdooced me to Miss Pritchard.

"What d'yer think of her, Bill?" he says to me when we came out.

"Think o' her?" I says. "Why, Heck, she *is* a Maharanee!"

"Of course she is, Bill," he says. "She is a Maharanee for sure, an' next week, Bill, I'm goin' to be her roger, her durned ol' cow-punchin' roger from the Red Shingle Ranch in ol' Oklahoma!"

Free Lances in Diplomacy

Between the Lines

by Clarence Herbert New

SHORTLY after the armistice was declared between the Bolsheviki and Germany, a small Russian steamer appeared off the harbor of Constanza—a Roumanian port on the Black Sea, occupied by the Germans—and was permitted, next day, to anchor inside. She had come down with a white flag at her foremast-head, bringing half a dozen representatives of the Provisional Government who desired to confer, unofficially, with certain representatives of the Austrian Government. As it was the policy of the Central Powers to encourage any sort of negotiations which either would keep Russian armies inactive or disintegrate them, the six delegates were received in a semi-flattering manner. They were entertained in Budapest—where they met various political leaders, did a great deal of indefinite talking and consumed a much better quality of food than the Austrian people were allowed.

At this time a suggestion came in a roundabout way to His Majesty and the Austrian premier that the little Russian steamer which still lay in Constanza harbor might be utilized in a manner distinctly to the advantage of Austria. The opportunity was pointed out as an exceptional one for them to introduce certain emissaries into Russia, who if they had the luck to remain alive might eventually return with first-hand information which it was vital for Austria in particular to possess. Certain Socialist politicians in the Austrian and Hungarian parliaments were suggested as being most likely to be well received in Russia; and to offset a presumable bias in the reports they brought back, three other men were selected to accompany them.

These men were in reality England's Free Lances in Diplomacy—men who in disguise had penetrated the enemy lines and there accomplished much for the cause of the Allies. They had been in Petrograd during the month preceding the revolution. It was known that they—or rather the men they purported to be—had been active in the German propaganda of the notorious Green Circle and Camarilla, also, that they had been visiting German and Austrian cities as the accredited representatives of the Russian Socialists. In addition to this, one of them had saved a visiting potentate in Vienna from assassination and rendered services to the Austrian imperial family which made the presence of all three welcome in the dual empire as long as they chose to remain. Neither Emperor Charles nor the premier remembered just how or through what channels the names of these men had been suggested as promising the Government a more conserv-

ative view of the Russian situation than the Socialist delegates were likely to fetch back, but there was no question as to their peculiar fitness for such an undertaking if they could be prevailed upon to go. As the whole scheme, as a matter of fact, had originated with these English agents, no great difficulty was found in securing their coöperation when the idea was explained to them privately by the Emperor.

SO, on a certain afternoon, the Russian steamer left Constanza with a not very optimistic quartet of Socialist politicians, under the leadership of a man named Sudermann, and the three foreigners referred to—the "Hon. Aloysius McMurtagh," an Irish-American capitalist, "Major Michael Brady," formerly of the Boer army, and "Selim Abdullah Pasha," a Turkish colonel of engineers. As hints concerning their previous activities had been given the others of the party, their advice was eagerly sought—in the saloon, after dinner—as to the best course for the commission to pursue after they were safely inside the Russian borders.

For a while, the former Green Circle members discussed the pros and cons among themselves, though including the others with an occasional question. Then McMurtagh, who appeared to be the leading spirit, summed up his ideas upon the subject.

"We'll not be overlookin' the fact, d'ye see, that the crowd who called themselves Socialists when we were in Petrograd have split up, since then, and joined various parties which have been shooting each other by way of diversion. Some of them, for example, are now with the Bolsheviki; others are supporting the Constitutional Assembly; and still others are in the Soldiers' and Sailors' delegation. Now, when we three reach any city or district where those who knew us a few months ago happen to run across us, we must be—outwardly, at least—in favor of one or the other of those parties. We'll not be able to run with the hare and ride with the hounds, because we're likely at any moment to find ourselves in a fight where we'll simply have to side with one or the other, d'ye see?

"The Bolsheviki we prefer not to side with. With you gentlemen, on the other hand, the Bolsheviki have been in communication; you bear credentials which they must recognize, and for a few weeks, at least, I fancy they'll be able to safeguard you anywhere in western Russia. So it seems to me that your safest course will be to get in touch with leading Bolshevists as soon as we land in Odessa, and have them pass you on up through the country—wherever you think you can get the most information."

"But you, mein Herr? How about you and your friends? What will you do? Where will you go?" The anxiety in the speaker's voice gave the impression of being personal.

"We also will look up the Bolshevists—but meet them secretly, if possible. Our instructions from His Majesty were to get as general a view of the whole situation as possible; consequently, we shall explain to those men that it is more likely to help their cause in Austria if we affiliate ourselves with one of the other factions and pick up all we can with regard to their intentions. If they are men of intelligence, they will see the point and drop a hint or two as to our best course in meeting representatives of the other sides. I fancy that under Bolshevist protection you'll be in far less personal danger than we, and should return to Odessa inside of a month without much risk of detention. So we'd best leave it that way. If we are alive and not under arrest, we'll meet you there a month from to-morrow. Whatever authorities happen to be uppermost at the time will probably send us back the way we came, because it will be decidedly against their interests to do anything else. Going down on the steamer, we'll have a chance to compare notes and decide upon what our general report should be."

THERE was so much common sense in McMurtagh's suggestions that they couldn't help but see it—and agree to them. Yet it was quite evident that all four had been relying upon his wider experience and tested nerve to keep the entire delegation out of such compli-

cations and unforeseen dangers as might threaten them from time to time. Probably nobody who reads the papers in these days would suggest Russia as an altogether safe place for tourists.

The four Socialists had been picked after a good deal of thought by Major Brady when the Free Lances were developing the scheme for a brief return to Russia; but so cleverly were the suggestions made, through people in touch with the Government whom they had found trustworthy, that tracing them back to him as the originator would have been almost impossible. Only two of the Socialists had seen any service in the army at all, since early manhood, and they had held depot billets which gave time for more or less political activity in the Hungarian parliament. The others were over fifty—journalist-politicians who waded in blood typographically each morning but were physically obese and timid men who had developed a terror of death along with the congested livers of sedentary life. One of them attached himself to McMurtagh for the remainder of the evening like a nervous child to his nurse, asking a dozen times, as they tramped up and down the little hurricane-deck, if he were quite sure there was no real danger of their being shot as spies or being killed in some other outrageous way. In fact, all four exacted the assurance in so many words that McMurtagh and his friends would not leave them until quite sure they were in safe hands as duly accredited delegates from one government to another.

Toward noon the steamer picked up the shore-line again; and presently, looming up ahead of them, they saw Odessa, lying along its plateau a hundred and thirty feet above the moles at sea-level. When they edged slowly in behind the breakwaters of the New Port, the great stairway of one hundred and ninety-three granite steps rose before them from the mole to the beautiful Nikolaievski along the crest of the plateau. As the Major was describing the place to the Socialist delegates, McMurtagh exchanged a few remarks with the steamer-captain which gave them a very creepy sensation.

"Any fighting on the steps in this last muss, Captain?"

"As is customary, Excellency. There are always a cruiser or two and some of the destroyers lying off the the breakwater, and the men from them naturally make for the steps as the shortest cut up to the city. No revolutionary crowd can hold the town unless the sailors are with them or are first defeated; so when anything breaks loose, it's a race to see who gets possession of that stairway. The Bolsheviki had their machine-guns in place at the top—simply riddled the sailors and longshoremen when they tried to rush the place; you can see the patches of dried blood on the stones from here!"

AS the steamer was Russian and well-known in that port, she was permitted to enter without challenge by the batteries and war-vessels. Arrangements having been made with the provisional authorities for the reception of the commission, examination of credentials was perfunctory, and they were escorted to a suite of rooms which had been reserved at the Hôtel de Londres, overlooking the sea. Here the Bolshevist leaders called upon them in the evening and outlined the arrangements which had been made to send the party around a circuit of the leading cities. Considerable surprise was aroused by McMurtagh's decision to split the delegation and proceed in other directions with his two friends, but in private interviews with some of the local leaders, his plan of seeking out the opposing factions and apparently affiliating himself with them seemed to be a most effective one for getting inside information, and they agreed to it with much satisfaction.

Leaving Odessa on the first train for Kiev, they spent but a few hours in the Ukraine,—which was now a republic, upon the point of signing a separate peace with the Central Powers,—and through the secret influence of the Constitutionalists they were permitted to reach Moscow with but a few minor detentions. All the way up, they had noticed various indications of the chaos into which Russia had been plunged—broken-down locomotives and cars on

sidings, supplies of every description rotting upon other trains which couldn't be moved, or dumped in piles by the side of the tracks, bread-lines of half-starved men and women in every town and village. But in the old Russian capital there was a difference, intangible at first, which seemed everywhere under the surface and was depressing in a dreary, hopeless way.

The old ever-present menace of the secret police, with their constant arrests, was quite evidently gone; one felt its absence in the air; but in its stead was something more sinister—a conviction that there was neither law nor order, no real protection of any sort for life or one's belongings. Property had ceased to exist, except in so far as one might hold it by force of arms and barricades.

THE daily life of city and country had to go on; yet the organization which had enabled it to do so with more or less smoothness in former years was now paralyzed. Inexperienced hands worked at cross-purposes in every quarter—trying to move food, clothing, supplies of all kinds to the places where they were desperately needed. The crops had been fairly good, but there were no trains to move them. Farmers with grain and vegetables in plenty had neither shoes on their feet, clothes to cover them nor agricultural implements that would stand the wear of another cultivating season.

The handsome equipages of the aristocracy were no longer to be seen along the city streets, and from noting this one realized at the next moment that there was no longer a Russian aristocracy in evidence at all. People of title were in hiding or in disguise.

Many of the more pretentious hotels were closed, their windows and furniture wrecked. But like others here and there, the Hôtel Continental on the Place des Théâtres had survived, and the Free Lances managed to obtain very comfortable rooms in it, though the food was decidedly of a makeshift variety. In the supposed French manager McMurtagh discovered a former agent of the Camarilla and through him obtained information as to where he might find others who had now, with a marked change in their political beliefs, gone over to the Constitutionalists. The peace-negotiations with Germany had shown them exactly what they might expect from that brutal autocracy, and they were now determined that there should be no domination or exploitation of Russia by the murderers of civilization, if it cost the last drop of their blood. It was this faction who had traveled the Bolshevik road up to the point of consenting to an armistice for the discussion of peace-terms but who vehemently swore there should be no bargaining with the Teutons unless it were upon the basis of a general peace with all of the Entente.

WHEN McMurtagh and the Major (who in England were Earl Trevor of Dyvnaint and Baron Lammerford) started off in one direction, Selim Pasha set out for the Oriental quarter, where he thought it might be possible to happen upon stray pieces of information otherwise unobtainable. Before he had gone a dozen blocks, however, a motorcar whirled past him and stopped before what appeared to be a food-distributing bureau—judging by the long line of people before it and the packages carried by those who were leaving. In the car a solitary figure in a fur-lined overcoat was hunched forward on the chauffeur's seat as if his knowledge of running such a conveyance had been recently acquired. Stopping by the curb in front of the food-bureau, he slouchingly pushed through the line of waiting men and women to a door at the foot of a second-floor stairway. His whole manner was that of a man unaccustomed to luxury, who now found himself in a position of more or less authority in the general upheaval—whose sealskin cap and sable-lined overcoat had been appropriated, possibly, from the wardrobe of some aristocrat. who had abandoned them with other belongings to save his skin.

Now, Selim Pasha (knighted at Delhi as Sir Abdool Mohammed Khan) was a man who had absorbed Oriental intrigue at his mother's breasts, a man

who spoke nine languages and dialects as if they were his own. Before he was fifteen, he had learned, in the bazaars of Kabul, to study a man's profile rather than a front view of his face, his height rather than girth (which may be padding), his unconscious gestures and relaxed positions of the body, instead of the mannerisms which may be acquired with practice. He had caught a straight side-view of the man's head as he drove by in the car, and a slight unconscious shrug of the left shoulder. The seal turban was pulled down nearly to the bushy eyebrows, and the black beard, streaked with gray, was strange to Sir Abdool—as also were the man's general manner and slouching carriage. But Sir Abdool was so positive of his identity that he pushed open the door when he came to it and ascended the stairs.

As Abdool expected, the second floor was divided into hastily contrived administrative offices. Though several clerks stepped forward to stop him, he walked through the entire suite with calm assurance until he came to a large office at the rear, in which he found his man seated behind a flat-topped desk, with two secretaries nervously scribbling in one corner by a window. With a bow, still maintaining an air which might have been that of superior authority, Abdool drew up a chair by the official's desk and laid his own fur cap upon one corner of it. In other days, the official's head—as Abdool recalled it—had been close-cropped, revealing the shape of the skull; whereas it was now camouflaged under a not-too-clean mop of grayish-black hair. With the other man, personal cleanliness had been almost religion. The finger-nails of this individual were in mourning; traces of misdirected soup were visible on the silk-lined frock coat, which appeared to have been cut for another man.

"Excellency," said Abdool (or rather "Selim Pasha"), "I have just reached Moscow with two associates who have documents indicating that more than two hundred tons of foodstuffs are now being hoarded in this city by a syndicate of four men—who expect to make a million on it by disposing of the various foods in small quantities at exorbitant prices. We were told at our hotel that the director in charge of this bureau had facilities for dealing with such a case—so I took the liberty of following you in. Was my information correct?"

The food-director had been examining his visitor through bifocal spectacles with unusually thick lenses—and though the glances had the appearance of being merely casual, they were none the less searching. In less than five seconds he had placed Selim Pasha accurately—knew him for an exceptionally capable secret-agent of Downing Street who had rendered services of great value to the Imperial Russian Government just before the revolution. But it seemed impossible that the British Foreign Office man could have recognized *him,* and for exceedingly potent reasons he had no disposition to assist the Pasha in that direction. So, with a carefully assumed bourgeois curtness, he asked for details.

"If your information leads to the discovery of any such hoard, sir, it will mean a firing-squad for every member of that syndicate, I can assure you! Where is it?"

"Pardon me, Excellency, but it seems to me that this is scarcely the place for a discussion of the matter. If Your Excellency has an hour to spare, later in the day, would it not be more advisable to call at our hotel—where we can go over the matter with my associates, who know considerably more about it than I do?"

After a moment's thought, the director nodded abruptly.

"Very well. Give me your card! I'll call upon you at five—and will have a dozen men awaiting my orders to raid the place."

For a second, it seemed to the director that his sensitive ear caught the ghost of a whisper in English: "Y-e-s—you—will!" But the Pasha's face was impassive as he bowed himself out.

McMURTAGH and the Major returned to the Continental before five, and were in their suite when the unknown caller was announced. Sir Abdool had purposely avoided telling

them of his discovery, from the desire to see if their eyes had lost any of the old-time keenness, but he had suggested talking with the man in the further bedroom, from which they could see anyone entering the suite before it was possible for him to get within hearing. Brady and the Honorable Aloysius met the director with the utmost courtesy, supposing him a stranger, but the moment they were secure from observation in the bedroom, they gave one searching glance at his face—and laughed.

"My word, old chap!" exclaimed the Major. "This is both amazing and delightful. We feared that some of that crowd would have managed to get you before this! Why, man, we heard they were combing every city in the empire! It was reported that they'd burned your place in Petrograd with all that mass of secret archives dating back two hundred years or more, but we'd a bit of a wager among ourselves that you'd manage to hide the bulk of 'em somewhere, if you got clean away, yourself. Eh? What?"

For a moment the director thought of bluffing it out and asking for whom they took him, but he saw that it would be farcical. He knew, and vastly admired, their breed.

"Gentlemen," he replied, "I am as pleased as you appear to be over this unexpected meeting. Precarious as my own position is, here in Moscow, allow me to say that yours is even more so—though of course that consideration has no weight or you wouldn't be here! It's merely common sense, however, not to make our discussion too definite. This room appears to have been well chosen, and you've presumably searched it for electric contrivances, but there's very little of which one is really positive in this world.

"You—er—referred to the mass of old estate documents which my former law-firm had been accumulating—handing down from father to son, as the succeeding generations grew up and were admitted to the firm? Well, perhaps you will appreciate my satisfaction when I tell you that scarcely a single important document was destroyed in that fire, when the rioters sacked and destroyed the building in which our offices had been located for a hundred and twenty years. You see, we had been watching the senseless work of the mobs all that afternoon and knew the old building was merely a tinder-box. So twenty-six barrels—apparently full of rubbish—were carted away from a rear door after dark and buried in one of the cemeteries. Within three weeks there were appropriate headstones over several new graves; and some day, when Russia has settled down under a stable government, we shall be in possession of just as much detailed information concerning half a million people, from every walk in life, as we were before the revolution."

"By Jove! And Lenine would give a cool million of anyone's else money to locate either you or those graves at this moment! Hmph! Your working in that bureau as one of the leading food-administrators, right here on one of the busiest streets of Moscow, is the richest joke I've yet heard on Lenine and Trotzky!"

THE reader will appreciate the force of this remark when it is explained that the man who so calmly performed the duties of an authoritative position, in the midst of revolutionists who would have killed him without a moment's argument had they guessed his identity, was actually General Serge Lipowski—the former executive head of the Russian secret police, for three years the most efficient, the most feared and hated man in the empire.

The General smiled grimly and then set about finding in what way he could be of service to his visitors.

"I assume that you three are still associated with the same—let us say business house, as you were in those other days? And that you are now in Russia to further its interests—as before? From the obligations under which you placed me, you would naturally look for my coöperation in every way possible, and you may rest assured it will be given. Of course, any hints you feel disposed to give will enable my coöperation to be more effective."

"Naturally, old chap. We'll be quite frank with you. First, however, give

us some idea as to the real conditions here."

"Chaos! And matters will get steadily worse until the Bolsheviki are permanently defeated! Consider the one point of land-division alone. They declare all lands and estates the property of the people as a whole—propose to parcel it out more or less equally among the peasants. How is it humanly possible to do that without civil war? Some land is good; some is worthless. Some peasants already hold ten times the amount of land an equal distribution would give them. You see, it is humanly impossible to maintain equal division of land, money and labor. It is also humanly impossible to run the affairs of any nation successfully without some form of centralized government; yet the Bolshevists would abolish all government save the collective voice of the people."

"But where is the vast middle class in all this? The people in every city and town who have been carrying on a vast amount of business, domestic and foreign—the people who have learned common sense by experience? Surely there must be a fair proportion of level-headed people in Russia! You can't be all crazed ignorant fools!"

"No. There is such a class, and I think in the final outcome they will bulk as a safe majority. My real work here in Moscow, and elsewhere, is more the solidifying of that element, the gradual building up of reasonable conservative ideas throughout the empire, than the administration of a food-bureau. I am in touch with leading men from Petrograd to Vladivostok and can force a clash between Cossacks, Constitutionalists and the Bolsheviki in fifty different cities at any time there's an object to be gained by anything of that sort. There have been minor fights between our parties and the Bolshevists ever since Kerensky was driven out, but they were ill-advised and not pushed to a conclusion—little more than tests of strength. For a while we're quite willing to have Lenine think he controls the country; it gives us time to perfect a workable organization of several different forces, to harmonize them."

"Hmph! It begins to look as if our meeting with you was a bit of amazing good luck. Briefly, our position here is this: We came to Odessa with a commission of four delegates from the Austrian Socialists—suggested by us to the Emperor in a roundabout way. The commission is to report upon the actual conditions here to His Majesty, but they'll give a much more detailed account to their fellow-Socialists who have been striking and rioting for the past month all through Austria-Hungary. Now, as you will readily see, a great deal depends upon the impression of conditions in Russia which those four delegates obtain. I may say that we hatched the whole scheme from a pretty careful discounting of the probabilities, and took, perhaps, a rather long chance. Catch the idea?"

THE General hesitated. "H-m-m! Let me see if I really do catch it—knowing whose salt you gentlemen eat. We'll say that your Socialists get safely back to Vienna with an impression that the Bolshevists are firmly in the saddle, that they are determined to make peace, a separate peace, though they will balk a long time at the annexation of Poland, Courland and Finland—even threatening to fight before they give them up. What effect would that sort of a report have in Austria and Germany?"

"Strengthen the Junkers and pan-Germans immensely! Knowing the Bolsheviki are in no position to do any serious fighting they will discount all threats of that sort—laugh at them! They'll take the risk of guarding the eastern borders with a thin line of middle-aged men and throw their whole fighting strength on the west front—which does not suit our game in the least!"

"*Au contraire,* supposing there is tangible evidence here that the real mass of the people favor a strong defensive party that will resist German robbery for years to come, persistently building up a formidable army system—and that the Bolshevists are slowly but surely losing their grip? What then, *mes amis?*"

"Increased Socialist clamor in Austria and even Germany for an immediate general peace without annexations

of any sort! Increase of the rioting and general protest against the military party now controlling the Central Powers! You see? That's the sort of report which we mean to have go back —one way or another."

"I comprehend, perfectly! You're at your old tricks, McMurtagh, of studying out the psychology and then making it accomplish what you're after! Capital! One sees that it is Russia's interest to give your game a little impetus in the right direction! For instance, where are your four delegates now? One comprehends, of course, why you separated from them in Odessa—particularly if they are inferior minds with little of your nerve or skill."

The Major drew a paper from his pocket, and consulted it.

"If they haven't run into any muss, and are within three days of their proposed schedule, they should be in Kharkov on Saturday. They were to come up through the Ukraine from Odessa by way of Kherson, swing round through the Volga towns and then back by way of Moscow. The Ukraine had been declared a republic before we left, and a separate peace was said to have been signed with it—but I notice by the afternoon papers that the Reds were fighting down there yesterday—over in the Kiev district."

"Lenine and Trotzky have no intention of permitting a separate republic there if they can help it, but there's little more than skirmishing at present, each side feeling the other out. H'm! It's entirely possible to start trouble in Kharkov on Saturday. Our faction control a number of wireless stations from the Baltic to the Black Sea, and we strongly outnumber the Reds around Kharkov if we suggest an attack to the Ukrainians and throw in with them—temporarily. In fact, I could start a pretty serious little fight in the suburbs of the city within six hours, if I decided there was anything to be gained by doing so."

"Could you have those four delegates arrested as supposed Bolshevists before the fighting begins—and kept where they wont be more than badly frightened until we can reach Kharkov?"

"So that you may rescue them, one way or another, and all escape together, out of Russia? Eh? That's not a bad idea—except for one consideration: your delegates haven't traveled quite far enough into the country. The farther they get toward the Volga cities, the more they will doubt the ability of Lenine's crowd to insure their safety. Saratov and Simbirsk are Cossack districts, in which our party can sweep the Reds out of existence at any time. We're not bothering our heads about them over there. And on the way from Kharkov your delegates will see so many evidences of military activity among the people—patiently working to bring order out of the general disintegration—that they will get a different idea from that which might be impressed upon them in the western provinces. Why not bring about a general clean-up of the Bolshevists the first night your men are in Saratov, and then let them escape with you to Rostov, where we'll have some kind of a steamer ready to leave for Constanza with you—eh? The ice is breaking up in the river-channel, and steamers are now coming up to the city."

TEN days later Sudermann and his brother delegates reached the city of Saratov, on the Volga River, where they found themselves guests of a perceptibly nervous Bolshevist family—it being understood that they would not be safe in one of the hotels. During their progress across southern Russia it seemed at times a miracle that they were able to get anywhere at all by rail. Mile after mile of the lines was clogged with broken-down trains and rotting supplies of every description. Just beyond Liski, on the River Don, three entire ammunition-trains blew up when they were approaching the place—totally obliterating the main line from Moscow for some distance north of the river and making it impossible to relieve the congestion at that junction for months. In the streets of Balashov there had been fighting just before they passed through; bodies were lying in pools of blood upon the stones within ten feet of the tracks. So by the time they reached the Polenskis at Saratov, each

member of the commission would have given all he possessed in the world to be safely back in Austria, even under the pinch of war-privations. It has been stated that they were of the non-combatant class—none of whom had seen active service in the war.

There was noticeable tension in the air during their first meal with the family, a scarcely concealed apprehensiveness. And at nine o'clock it proved to have been well grounded—when a number of armed men entered the house and arrested everyone in it. The former activities of Polenski, his brother and his three sons—during the time succeeding the revolution—could only be inferred from what happened to them. All five were placed with their backs against a wall and shot, while the others were forced to look on; then the Socialist delegates were taken to a partly fortified building and locked into a cellar from which, through a barred window just below the ground-level, they heard the rattle of machine-guns and musketry for another hour or two.

ABOUT the time the Socialist delegates were confined in the cellar, a veiled woman in furs hurried along the deserted streets until she came to a residence in what had been the aristocratic quarter of the city, and knocked in a peculiar way upon the door-panels with the butt of an automatic pistol. The door was opened slightly on a chain, but when the light struck her face, she was permitted to enter.

"The American who has just come from Moscova with two companions! Quick! Where are they?"

"In the drawing-room with Boris Radislav, madame. Come with me!"

Had it not been for a training which enabled them to maintain unmoved countenances under any sort of amazing conditions, McMurtagh and his two friends would not have been able to suppress exclamations of surprise when the man drew aside the portière with the remark: "Here is Madame Sonia, masters!"

The slender woman in furs was removing her veil as she came into the room. When last they had met, it was as guests in her beautiful Tudor palace in Petrograd, and she had been at that time the Princess Xenia Tarazine, only surviving member of a family which traced its ancestry back to Genghis Khan. She noted with secret admiration, however, that their faces were impassive, betraying neither recognition nor any suspicion of previous acquaintance with her. The introductions were courteously made by Radislav—who had been a lawyer under the old régime, with a very good practice, and who was now leader of the Constitutionalists in Saratov. The Free Lances had come to him from Moscow with a letter of introduction which conveyed a great deal more information than appeared in the written characters; and a number of cipher messages by wireless had preceded them.

As for the mysterious woman who appeared with so much quiet assurance in his house, she had been the brains and chief organizer of the Constitutional movement in the Volga cities from Nizhni Novgorod to Astrakhan. Calling herself Sonia Mouravief—volunteering no information as to her previous history, making no changes in her appearance save a darkening of the hair and the adoption of a different taste in dress, she had walked in upon a conference of revolutionists in Kazan one night, and dominated it, though it was a toss-up whether she would be shot as a spy before the meeting adjourned. Since then, her influence had extended very rapidly, as her genius for organization revealed itself, and her orders were carried out even by men supposed to be in higher authority.

"Gentlemen, were you delegates with a commission sent by the Austrian Socialists to investigate conditions in Russia, and provided with safe-conducts by the Imperial Government?"

"We were, madame. The commission separated after reaching Odessa, three of us going up to Moscow, and the four others traveling through southern Russia, with the Herr Johann Sudermann as chairman."

"Then the story they tell is really true, after all! It seemed rather incredible to the Constitutional commit-

tee here—particularly as they were arrested in the house of the Polenskis, who have been proved to be German spies and who were shot an hour ago! Your delegates claimed to have thoroughly proper credentials, but our men were unable to find any trace of them and were about to have the four executed when I happened in at the rendezvous where they are now confined. They all stuck to the same story, mentioning a Herr McMurtagh and Major Brady as the real heads of the commission—present whereabouts unknown. I seemed to remember that their description coincided with that of three gentlemen who were reported to have just come down from our friend in Moscow; so I came here to investigate. If their lives are worth saving, I think you gentlemen had better return with me at once. Ivan Ladislav is a man with very little patience; he may have already shot them just to get the matter off his mind!"

ON the way through the streets McMurtagh—whose arm Madame Sonia had taken—explained the details of a plan he had worked out to effect a seeming rescue instead of a perfunctory identification which might, it is true, possess some thrills, but which would not be so likely to convince the delegates of the deadly risk they had been incurring through their Bolshevist associations. With anyone else in Saratov, it would have been a very difficult matter to manage the affair as he wished; it seemed that for the second time, they had been favored by most amazing luck in running across the Princess Xenia—four people out of a hundred and eighty millions—in a corner of the vast country which three of them had never before visited.

As it was, however, a whispered consultation between Madame Sonia and the revolutionist in charge of the rendezvous ended in a burst of uproarious laughter over what he considered a final joke on his rabbit-hearted prisoners, —half an hour's grilling had established their status among the species,—and he placed his men at her disposal to carry it out.

In their cellar the victims of an enterprise demanding a somewhat different breed heard a heavy fall, on the floor above, which shook the building—a blood-curdling groan, silence. Followed minutes of suspense, and a cautious fumbling at the lock of the heavy cellar-door—which presently swung open, as they knew by the draught of cold air. A voice called: "Sudermann!" scarcely above a whisper.

"Yes! Yes! We are all down here!"

"Come up the steps—quietly! Don't make a sound!"

The four obeyed—literally. As Sudermann reached the top, a hand grasped his elbow and guided him along a pitch-dark hall, the others following close behind. A window was opened; they all climbed through and dropped into what seemed a rear yard; then they were led through a narrow door and another building, emerging upon a side-street, as it seemed. Here a motor-car stood by the curb, with a veiled woman at the wheel; and she managed to get them out of the city with only two challenges, which she answered to the sentries' apparent satisfaction. Through the night she drove them without stopping—at speeds which sometimes exceeded sixty miles an hour—until they reached a junction of the main-line to Rostov. And in order to insure their getting through without detention, she accompanied them on the train.

Three times—when Cossacks invaded it and dragged them out upon snow-covered platforms—it seemed as if they would all be arrested or shot as spies. But Madame Sonia had provided the party with documents that were respected even beyond the districts where she herself was personally known. Eventually they arrived at Rostov—to find the pack-ice sufficiently broken up for navigation down the River, and the promised steamer waiting for them. A rather wonderful accomplishment—considering that the man who had promised it was a fugitive from the existing government with a price on his head! Russia, however, presents many such contradictions just now, and her future rulers are men who may not step into the spotlight for months to come, while they perfect in secret a

system of organized government that will restore the stability after the most gigantic upheaval the world has ever seen.

STANDING in a secluded corner of the steamer's deck, by themselves, —as the last bunkers were being filled from the barge alongside, — Sonia Mouravief and McMurtagh were chatting in guarded tones of their former experiences in Petrograd, when he was a guest in her beautiful palace on the Kamennoi Ostrow, and Rasputin, the scoundrelly monk, was alive.

"What has become of your great estates in the Caucasus, my friend? Are your moujiks in possession?"

"Partly so, but not as they are upon other estates. To such of my people as had shown ability to handle them, who understood rotation of crops and modern methods, I transferred, in due legal form, parcels of land amounting to a hundred *dessatin* each. There are two and seven-tenths of your acres in a *dessatin,* as perhaps you know. To others I gave five *dessatin*—to be worked without hired labor. The people in charge of my chateaux and the grounds surrounding them are all salaried employees who are better paid than any of their acquaintances outside, and who have been with my family for several generations. Practically all of my people are Cossacks—though I have properties in Siberia as well; and I'll venture to say that no Russian government will attempt a redistribution of the land now held by them. There will be a deadly little civil war if they try it! But enough of my affairs! Tell me something of your own recent adventures. I supposed that you would have returned to England months ago, if it were possible to get there alive. The last I heard, you and your friends were leaving for Stockholm."

"We chose that as the safest way of getting into Germany, and we've been doing what we could there, ever since. Perhaps our poor endeavors haven't been altogether wasted. This Socialist commission, for example, was our little touch in jarring the Teutonic scheme of things, and I think the frame of mind in which our confrères are returning couldn't be improved upon if we took out their brains and reconstructed them to suit ourselves, thanks to you and our good friend in Moscow. There's one other grain of influence which might weigh perceptibly in the scale. It has occurred to me, more than once. Yet it would mean, probably, as great risk as we ourselves run in Austria."

"Ah! I think I understand! You mean—eh? I had been thinking of it myself; there is a chance that I might have some influence. His Majesty was my guest for several days in Petrograd when he was scarcely more than a boy. I am but two or three years older, but have been practically my own mistress since I was fifteen—we Tarazines have little patience with guardians! Charles will undoubtedly welcome and protect me as long as I am within his borders. To the masses of his people, I can still be Sonia Mouravief—one of the Russian Constitutionalist leaders risking a few weeks in Austria to describe the actual conditions in Russia and the menacing organization against German aggression. While this armistice lasts, my being in Austria is entirely plausible. I think, however, it will add a little more weight to my possible influence if you go to Sudermann and his companions, now, and suggest *their* urging me to accompany them back to Vienna. They're just timid enough to see the advantages of your suggestion at once —if you put it as I know you can. Poor little men! They've been entirely out of their element since they left home. From our side of it, their rescue in Saratov was farce-comedy, and yet there was a good bit of tragic possibility at that. For Ivan Ladislav was really itching to have them shot, and would have done so had we been an hour later! Ivan would rather kill a German than eat—there are millions like him in Russia! Go—make your suggestion to them! The captain will start down the River in an hour, and I'll have to make a few purchases before I can accompany you!"

THE few days on the rusty little tramp—crossing the Sea of Azov and the Black Sea to Constanza—were uneventful. As they neared the Rou-

manian port, color returned to Herr Sudermann's cheeks and those of his three companions. The past weeks began to seem like a nightmare, but the events which marked them had been real enough to brand themselves unforgettably on the memory. There was little danger that the Socialist contingent would forget or minimize what they had seen.

In Constanza, as they were about to board the train for Bucharest and Klausenburg, McMurtagh became conscious of an impression which presently communicated itself to the Major and Selim Pasha. Before the train started, they glanced at each other.

"Blessed if *I* know! But there's something queer going on! Not half so many of the Austrian troops in evidence, for one thing—and those we've seen appear to be relaxin' a lot from the usual discipline. Sort of let-down in the general morale, I'd say!"

"That's it! That accounts for the feeling I've had! The regiment we just passed had no appearance of being in an enemy's country at all!"

In Bucharest, as they passed through, most of the occupying regiments seemed to be Austrian or Hungarian, with a very small proportion of Germans, and they were fraternizing with Roumanians on the streets in a way that gave little impression of conquerors and conquered. When the train had gone over the mountain-pass to Kronstadt, the relaxation of discipline among the troops was even more noticeable, and there seemed to be rather dangerous rioting down one of the side-streets. All the way across Hungary to Budapest, there were crowds of striking workmen in the streets of the towns through which they passed, with a number of conflagrations undoubtedly started by incendiaries. In the Hungarian capital, the disorder in the streets had reached a point where the police were unable to handle it and the soldiers would not interfere.

Upon their arrival in Vienna, the Socialist delegates were granted an immediate audience with His Majesty, the premier and three of the cabinet ministers. From their manner, the four commissioners were not entirely at their ease with royalty, but under the influence of the young emperor's tact their nervousness disappeared, and they gave a vivid account of their experiences—coming away from the conference with increased respect for the young monarch as a man—also a considerably enlarged sense of their own importance. This led to their addressing various meetings in different parts of the dual empire—meetings at which a strikingly handsome woman sometimes appeared with them to corroborate their statements, rousing the audiences to wild enthusiasm by her impassioned eloquence and intimate knowledge of conditions in Russia. So carefully had the movements of this mysterious Sonia Mouravief been shielded from police espionage that no connection was traced between her identity and that of a titled Russian aristocrat—who, with McMurtagh and his friends, was a guest in the Spanish villa of Count Vladimir Racoczy, a man of old Hungarian family, secretly a revolutionist leader.

SHE had been in Vienna, supposedly, for a fortnight before they thought the proper time had arrived to make her presence known at court. During the two weeks she had figuratively lighted a dozen revolutionary fuses in the leading cities and now decided to abandon her incognito until she was safely out of the country. McMurtagh and his companions had purposely deferred making their own report to His Majesty until she was ready to accompany them—explaining, through the imperial chamberlain, that they wished the Socialist delegates to make their report unembarrassed by the presence of those who had not been with them all of the time, and that it seemed desirable to hear several of their subsequent addresses to their own faction before a final conference with the Emperor. This explanation was accepted as entirely satisfactory. When they finally made a request for a private interview with Charles and his lovely Parmese empress, they were summoned to the Metternichkammer of the Schönbrunn at ten o'clock the same evening.

For a moment His Majesty had difficulty in placing the Princess Xenia;

then he stepped forward with outstretched hands—an expression of the utmost amazement upon his face.

"The Princess Tarazine! Can it be possible! This is really most amazing! Your Majesty," (turning, with a smile, to the Empress Zita), "may I present the Princess Xenia, whose guest I was for several delightful days in Petrograd some years ago! Her family is older even than the Hapsburgs, I believe. But Princess, how is it—to what fortunate chance do we owe—"

"Majestät, for several months I have been the woman known as Sonia Mouravief; of whom your Socialist commission doubtless told you certain things connected with their escape from Saratov."

"Impossible! They said she was a leader of the Russian Constitutionalists, whose influence extended through practically all of the Caucasus! They said that almost the entire Russian aristocracy have been deprived of their estates and are in hiding!"

"Which is substantially true, Majestät. It is also true that I was associated with the Green Circle and Camarilla until I discovered their objects to be nothing less than German intrigue to betray and rob Russia. I broke with them. After the revolution, it was not in the Tarazine blood to hide from moujiks. My own have always been loyal to me and still are. It was child's play to become a leader of the revolution myself, and to work toward organized government for my unhappy country."

"But we are informed that Sonia Mouravief has been a firebrand here in Austria for the past two weeks—that she has been actually fomenting revolution among the Socialists and other malcontents!"

PRINCESS XENIA laughed—and lighted a cigarette of the brand she had brought as a souvenir to His Majesty, which he was thoroughly enjoying at the moment. Looking straight into his eyes, after a meaning side-glance at the Empress, she asked a question which would have been a bombshell in Berlin.

"Majestät, how much do *you* really object to the revolution in Austria-Hungary which is coming as certainly as to-morrow's sunrise? Just between us six, in the privacy of this room, will it not cut the Gordian knot for you? To openly withdraw from your alliance with Germany, recall Austrian troops from all fronts, bar the Oriental Railway and the Balkans to German armies—would precipitate a desperate attack upon Austria by every German division that could be concentrated here. But to have the Dual Monarchy crumble from internal disintegration, to have the people refuse any further supplies whatever to Germany, the armies melt away by desertion as Falkenhayn's hundred and eighty thousand Turks did last week, the Czecho-Slovaks and Hungarians proclaim themselves independent nations—eh? A different matter, is it not? A situation which the German Junkers cannot cope with, against which all their threats are but wasted breath!

"The movement is spreading, Charles. 'Some little talk awhile of Me and Thee there was'—as being of the heaven-born, with godlike privileges to work our will upon the commoner clay. Well, there has been a cataclysm. My estates are now legally in possession of my moujiks. In the working out of human life, by economic adjustments as old as the human race, they will naturally gravitate back to me in the fullness of time, because some of us have the brains to acquire what others lack the brains to retain. That is all merely the old game of life—and its immutable laws are beyond all human will to change by any lasting process of redistribution.

"But it may be that in this overwhelming upheaval we are working toward a more stable and just basis of living conditions. At all events, we approach a period—whether temporary or not—during which there will be no more of Thee and Me as autocratic factors in the scheme of life. The débâcle in Russia is sapping the foundations of autocracy in Austria and Germany—at first, imperceptibly, then noticeably. Your Socialist commission has been telling the people here that the underlying strength of Russia will resist German aggression to the last drop of its

blood. The Slavs are individualists by nature, not Socialists. And your people are now saying that Germany is deliberately throwing away the world-peace almost within their grasp. . . . . Listen! That sounds as though practically the whole population were in the streets!"

Echoes of a hoarse and continuous roaring penetrated even the seclusion of the Schönbrunn. Presently the telephone-bell rang, and His Majesty picked up the receiver—an expression of somewhat amused surprise appearing gradually upon his face.

"General Lazincski says that mobs in the streets have gotten entirely beyond police-control and that three of his regiments refuse to fire on them."

SLOWLY yet perceptibly the amusement faded out of the monarch's face, and his features stiffened as he glanced at the beautiful Russian. She was of his own order—very true; but she had emerged from a seething hell-brew of revolution in her own country with all her previous beliefs in chaos—had admitted preaching the most incendiary kind of talk at public meetings in Austria. If a crisis were actually at hand, overwhelming the entire scheme of autocratic government, it was to some extent her doing.

He was still holding the receiver at his ear as further details came over the wire; and reading his mind with her woman's intuition, she was looking smilingly, fearlessly into his eyes as she lighted another cigarette—when a series of sharp, unauthorized raps sounded upon the door which opened upon a second-floor hall of the chateau. At an irritable exclamation from His Majesty, the door opened—admitting a young lieutenant of the palace guard and two men in the household livery.

Of the six people who had been in the room, but two appeared to sense the imminent catastrophe. Before the lieutenant's arm had swung up level with his shoulder, the Princess Tarazine had sprung with marvelous quickness from her chair, to a position between the intruders and His Majesty. The explosion came, nevertheless—though, with an expression of horror upon his face, the lieutenant dropped his pistol immediately afterward. It had scarcely touched the floor when the room was jarred by the falling of two heavy bodies — McMurtagh having hurled himself upon the two household servants and knocked them senseless with terrific blows from his fist. In less than ten seconds afterward the Major had quietly closed the hall door, and Sir Abdool was covering the lieutenant with his pistol.

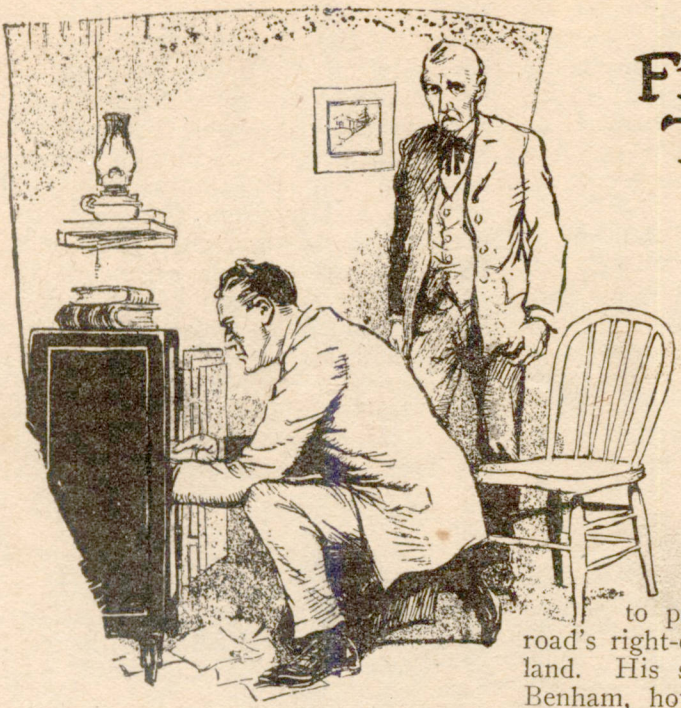
Meanwhile, His Majesty had caught the Princess in his arms as she swayed a little—turning and looking up into his face with an expression of rather wistful amusement as her strength left her.

"You thought I had been wantonly conspiring to rob you of your throne, my friend, and for a moment you missed the point, I think. I sowed a few seeds of discord—yes. But against pan-Germanism—not you! This disturbance—around the Hofburg—will blow over! They are not ready—yet! And this young fool—is but an—isolated anarchist—with two accomplices! You and Her Majesty are really popular—among your people! But a change is coming! You must face it, my friend—with open eyes! Who knows where we'll be to-morrow—a month from now, a year? Who knows? For so many—millions—there has been no—to-morrow! I wonder—"

The beautiful eyes closed, in utter weariness as the young Emperor gently laid her upon a sofa, the Empress holding a filmy handkerchief against the bleeding wound in her shoulder. The Major, who had been an army-surgeon in the Boer War, returned in another moment from a small adjoining room with a basin of warm water and was commencing to examine the wound when Xenia's lips began to move again—the words coming from them so faintly as to be scarcely audible.

"And when like her, O Saki, you shall pass
. . . . . .
And in . . . . . reach the spot
Where I made One—turn down an empty glass."

Another Free Lance story in our next issue.



Firebrand Trevison

by Charles Alden Seltzer

(Events of the First Installments:)

THE little Western town of Manti was booming. The railroad had reached it; close on the railroad's heels came Eastern capital with a plan for a big irrigation project. And to Manti there also came one Corrigan, an Eastern crook, with a bold plan for a gigantic land-theft. But there were real he men in Manti—in particular a cattle-man known as Firebrand Trevison. So between Corrigan and Trevison war was soon declared.

It began the day Rosalind Benham, daughter of J. C. Benham, the railroad president, visited Manti in his private car under the chaperonage of her Aunt Agatha. Trevison was putting his pet horse through its paces for the benefit of some friends when Corrigan saw Rosalind's admiration, and as he was a suitor for her, a quick jealousy prompted him to a jeering remark directed at Trevison. The result was a terrific fight in the back room of the bank; Trevison would have won had not the banker Braman, one of Corrigan's henchmen, treacherously tripped him from behind; even so he had Corrigan whipped to a standstill when the fight was stopped.

Out of revenge Corrigan tore up the check which had been made out to pay Trevison for the railroad's right-of-way through Trevison's land. His superior officer, President Benham, however, who was ignorant of Corrigan's underhanded plans, overruled him in this and sent Rosalind with the money to pay Trevison. In this way she became acquainted with Firebrand; and eventually she learned that he was a college-bred Easterner, that his real name was Trevison Brandon and that he had come West to make his fortune after his father had cut him off because of his wildness.

Meanwhile, Corrigan was maturing his plot. He had arranged for the presence of one Judge Lindman in Manti—a man whom he held in his power. The Judge was to declare land-titles invalid and to falsify the records; and Corrigan would get possession of much valuable property in this way.

"ALL right," exulted Corrigan one day as he glanced through the false record of land-transfers prepared by Lindman. "This purports to be an accurate and true record of all the land-transactions in this section from the special grant to the Midland Company down to date. It shows no intermediate owners from the Midland Company to the present claimants. There isn't a present owner that has a legal leg to stand on!"

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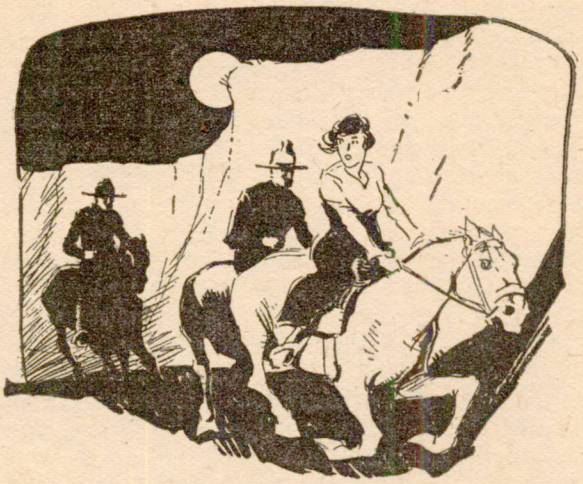
A Novel of the Great West



"There is only one weak point in your case," said the Judge. "Since these records show no sale of its property by the Midland Company, the Midland Company can come forward and reëstablish its title."

Corrigan flipped a legal-looking paper to the Judge.

"This shows," commented the latter when he had read it, "that the Midland Company—James Marchmont, president—transferred to Jefferson Corrigan, on a date prior to these other transactions, one hundred thousand acres of land here—the Midland Company's entire holdings."

SOON afterward the man Marchmont appeared, demanding hush-money of Corrigan. That consummate scoundrel finally gave Marchmont a thousand dollars, and then, foreseeing repetitions of the demand, hired a gunman named Clay Levins to kill Marchmont.

Corrigan, spurred on partly by his jealousy of the favor Trevison found in Rosalind Benham's eyes, laid claim to Trevison's land. When Trevison responded to a summons, Judge Lindman showed him the forged record in support of Corrigan's claim. Certain that there had been treachery, though he could not prove it, Trevison wired to his friend Judge Graney for help.

Trevison also went to see Corrigan. The latter infuriated him by claiming that Rosalind Benham was his ally, and provoked Trevison to draw his pistol. Banker Braman, concealed in the rear room, was to have shot Trevison at this point, but the cattle-man was too quick for them. He disarmed Braman and hurled him through the window into the street.

Next day Corrigan set on foot another plot against Trevison. He wrote to Mrs. Hester Harvey (whom Trevison and Ruth Benham had known in the East), summoning her to assist him in the overthrow of the cattle-man.

Not long afterward Trevison and Levins rode into town one night, disposed of the sentinel Corrigan had placed at the courthouse and broke in, determined to find the original land-record. They wrung from Judge Lindman an admission that the original record was still in existence and were working on the safe in search of it when the alarm was given and they were forced to flee.

Arriving home just before dawn, Trevison found Hester Harvey waiting for him; she had come to Manti, then had gone to Ruth Benham, and had ridden over to Trevison's place the evening before. She made a passionate appeal to Trevison, but he rejected her, and she returned to Ruth Benham—only to be "shown the door" because of her night-long absence at Trevison's house.

(The story follows in detail)

CHAPTER XVIII

Law Invoked and Defied

AS soon as the deputies had gone, two of them nursing injured heads and all exhibiting numerous bruises, Judge Lindman rose and dressed. In the ghostly light preceding the dawn, he went to the safe, his fingers trembling

so that he made difficult work with the combination. He got a record-book from the safe, pulled out the bottom drawer of a series filled with legal documents and miscellaneous articles, laid the record-book on the floor and shoved the drawer in over it. An hour later he was facing Corrigan, who, on getting a report of the incident from one of the deputies, had hurried to get the Judge's version. The Judge had had time to regain his composure, though he was still slightly pale and nervous.

The Judge lied glibly. He had seen no one in the courthouse. His first knowledge that anyone had been there had come when he had heard the voice of one of the deputies calling to him. And then all he had seen was a shadowy figure that had leaped and struck. After that there had been some shooting. And then the men had escaped.

"No one spoke?"

"Not a word," declared the Judge, "—that is, no one except the man who called to me."

"Did they take anything?"

"What is there to take? There is nothing of value here."

"Gieger says one of them was working at the safe. What's in there?"

"Some books and papers and supplies—nothing of value. That they tried to get into the safe would seem to indicate that they thought there was money there; Manti has many strangers who would not hesitate at robbery."

"They didn't get into the safe, then?"

"I haven't looked inside; nothing seems to be disturbed, as it would were the men safe-blowers. In their hurry to get away, it would seem, if they had come to get into the safe, they would have left something behind—tools, or something of that character."

"Let's have a look at the safe. Open it!" commanded Corrigan suspiciously.

WITH a pulse of trepidation, the Judge knelt and worked the combination. When the door came open Corrigan dropped on his knees in front of it and began to pull out the contents, scattering them in his eagerness. He stood up after a time, scowling, his face flushed. He turned on the Judge, grasped him by the shoulders, his fingers gripping so hard that the Judge winced.

"Look here, Lindman," he said. "Those men were not ordinary robbers. Experienced men would know better than to crack a safe in a courthouse when there's a bank right next door. I've an idea it was some of Trevison's work. You've done or said something that's given him the notion that you've got the original record. Have you?"

"I swear I have said nothing," declared the Judge.

Corrigan looked at him steadily for a moment and then released him. "You burned it, eh?"

The Judge nodded, and Corrigan compressed his lips. "I suppose it's all right, but I can't help wishing I had been here to watch the ceremony of burning that record. I'd feel a darn sight more secure. But understand this: if you double-cross me in any detail of this game, you'll never go to the penitentiary for what Benham knows about you; I'll choke the gizzard out of you!" He took a turn around the room, stopping at last in front of the Judge.

"Now we'll talk business. I want you to issue an order permitting me to erect mining-machinery on Trevison's land. We need coal here."

"Graney gave notice of appeal," protested the Judge.

"Which the Circuit Court denied."

"He'll go to Washington," persisted the Judge, gulping. "I can't legally do it."

Corrigan laughed. "Appoint a receiver to operate the mine, pending the Supreme Court decision. Appoint Braman. Graney has no case, anyway. There is no record or deed."

"There is no need of haste," Lindman cautioned. "You can't get mining machinery here for some time yet."

Corrigan laughed, dragging the Judge to a window, from which he pointed out some flat-cars standing on a siding, loaded with lumber, machinery, corrugated iron, chutes, cables, trucks, T-rails, and other articles that the Judge did not recognize.

The Judge exclaimed in astonishment. Corrigan grunted.

"I ordered that stuff six weeks ago,

in anticipation of my victory in your court. You can see how I trusted in your honesty and perspicacity. I'll have it on the ground to-morrow—some of it to-day. Of course I want to proceed legally, and in order to do that I'll have to have the court-order this morning. You do whatever is necessary."

AT daylight Corrigan was in the laborers' camp, skirting the railroad at the edge of town, looking for Carson. He found the big Irishman in one of the larger tent-houses, talking with the cook, who was preparing breakfast amid a smother of smoke and the strong mingled odors of coffee and of frying bacon. Corrigan went only as far as the flap of the tent, motioning Carson outside.

Walking away from the tent toward some small frame buildings down the track, Corrigan said, pointing to the flat-cars which he had shown to the Judge:

"There are several carloads of material there. I've hired a mining man to superintend the erection of that stuff; it's mining machinery and material for buildings. I want you to place as many of your men as you can spare at the disposal of the engineer; his name's Pickand, and you'll find him at the cars at eight o'clock. I'll have some more laborers sent over from the dam. Give him as many men as he wants—go with him yourself, if he wants you."

"What are ye goin' to mine?"

"Coal."

"Where?"

"I've been looking over the land with Pickand; he says we'll sink a shaft at the base of the butte below the mesa, where you are laying tracks now. We wont have to go far, Pickand says. There's coal—thick veins of it—running back into the wall of the butte."

"All right, sir," said Carson. But he scratched his head in perplexity, eying Corrigan sidelong. "Ye wouldn't be sayin' that ye'll be diggin' for coal on the railroad's right av way, would ye?"

"No!" snapped Corrigan.

"Thin it will be on Trevison's land. Have ye bargained wid him for it?"

"No! Look here, Carson. Mind your own business and do as you're told!"

"I'm elicted, I s'pose; but it's a job I aint admirin' to do. If ye've got half the sinse I give ye credit for havin', ye'll be lettin' that mon Trevison alone; I'd a lot sooner smoke a segar in that shed av dynamite than to cross him!"

Corrigan smiled and turned to look in the direction in which the Irishman was pointing. A small, flat-roofed frame building, sheathed with corrugated iron, met his view. Crude signs, large enough to be read hundreds of feet distant, were affixed to the walls: CAUTION—DYNAMITE.

"Do you keep much of it there?"

"Enough for anny blastin' we have to do. There's plenty—half a ton, mebbe."

"Who's got the key?"

"Meself."

CORRIGAN returned to town, breakfasted, mounted a horse and rode out to the dam, where he gave orders for some laborers to be sent to Carson. At nine o'clock he was back in Manti, talking with Pickand and watching the dinky engine as it pulled the loaded flat-cars westward over the tracks. He left Pickand and went to his office in the bank-building, where he conferred with some men regarding various buildings and improvements in contemplation; and shortly after ten, glancing out of a window, he saw a buckboard stop in front of the Castle Hotel. Corrigan waited a little, then closed his desk and walked across the street. Shortly he confronted Hester Harvey in her room. He saw from her downcast manner that she had failed. His face darkened.

"Wouldn't work, eh? What did he say?"

The woman was hunched down in her chair, still wearing the cloak she had worn in Trevison's office, the collar still up, the front thrown open. Her hair was disheveled; dark lines were under her eyes; she glared at Corrigan in an abandon of savage dejection.

"He turned me down—cold." Her laugh held the bitterness of self-derision. "I'm through there, Jeff."

The man cursed. She looked at him, her lips curving with amused contempt.

"Oh, you're all right—don't worry. That's all you care about, isn't it?" She laughed harshly at the quickened light in his eyes. "You'd see me sacrifice myself; you wouldn't give me a word of sympathy. That's you. That's the way of all men. Give, give, give! That's the masculine chorus—the hunting-song of the human wolf-pack!"

"Don't talk like that; it isn't like you, kid. You were always the gamest little dame I ever knew." He essayed to take the hand that was twisted in the folds of her cloak, but she drew it away from him in a fury. And the eagerness in his eyes betrayed the insincerity of his attempt at consolation; she saw it—the naked selfishness of his look—and sneered at him.

"You want the good news, eh? The good for you? That's all you care about. After you get it, I'll get the husks of your pity. Well, here it is. I've poisoned them both—against each other. I told him she was against him in this land-business. And it hurt me to see how gamely he took it, Jeff!"

HER voice broke, but she choked back the sob and went on hoarsely: "He didn't make a whimper—not even when I told him you were going to marry her, that you were engaged. But there was a fire in those eyes of his that I would give my soul to see there for me!"

"Yes, yes," said the man impatiently.

"Oh, you devil!" she railed at him. "I've made him think it was a frame-up between you and her—to get information out of him; I told him that she had strung him along for a month or so—amusing herself. And he believes it."

"Good!"

"And I've made her believe that he sent for me," she went on, her voice leaping to cold savagery. "I stayed all night at his place, and I went back to the Bar B in the morning—this morning—and made Rosalind Benham think that— Well, she ordered me from the house, the hussy! She's through with him; any fool could tell that. But it's different with him, Jeff. He wont give her up; he isn't that kind. He'll fight for her, and he'll have her!"

The eager, pleased light died out of Corrigan's face; his lips set in an ugly pout. But he contrived to smile as he got up.

"You've done well—so far. But don't give him up. Maybe he'll change his mind. Stay here; I'll stake you to the limit." He laid a roll of bills on a stand—she did not look at them—and approached her in a second endeavor to console her. But she waved him away, saying: "Get out of here; I want to think!" And he obeyed, looking back before he closed the door.

"Selfish?" he muttered, going down the street. "Well, what of it? That's a human weakness, isn't it? Get what you want, and to blazes with other people!"

TREVISON had gone to his room for a much-needed rest. He had watched Hester Harvey go with no conscious regret, but with a certain grim pity which was as futile as her visit. But lying on the bed, he fought hard against the bitter scorn that raged in him over the contemplation of Rosalind Benham's duplicity. He found it hard to believe that Rosalind had been duping him, for during the weeks of his acquaintance with her he had studied her much — with admiration-weighted prejudice, of course, since she made a strong appeal to him; and he had been certain, then, that she was as free from guile as a child, excepting the natural girlish artifices by which she concealed certain emotions that men had no business trying to read. He had read some of them,—his business or not,—and he had imagined he had seen what had fired his blood, a reciprocal affection. He would not have declared himself, otherwise.

He went to sleep, thinking of her. He awoke about noon, to see Barkwell standing at his side, shaking him.

"Have you got any understandin' with that railroad gang that they're to do any minin' on the Diamond-K range?"

"No."

"Well, they're gettin' ready to do it

—over at the butte near the railroad cut. I passed there awhile ago an' quizzed the big guy—Corrigan—about a gang workin' there. He says they're goin' to mine coal. I asked him if he had your permission, an' he said he didn't need it. I reckon they aint none shy on gall where that guy come from!"

Trevison got out of bed and buckled on his cartridge-belt and pistol. "The boys are working the Willow Creek range," he said sharply. "Get them—tell them to load up with plenty of cartridges and join me at the butte."

He heard Barkwell go leaping down the stairs, his spurs striking the step-edges, and a few minutes later, riding Nigger out of the corral, he saw the foreman racing away in a dust-cloud. He followed the bed of the river himself, going at a slow lope, for he wanted time to think—to gain control of the rage that boiled in his veins. He conquered it, and when he came in sight of the butte, he was cool and deliberate, though on his face was that "mean" look that Carson had once remarked about to his friend Murphy, partly hidden by the tiger smile which, the Irishman had discovered, preceded action, ruthless and swift.

THE level below the butte was buzzing with life and energy. Scores of laborers were rushing about under the direction of a tall, thin, bespectacled man who seemed to be the moving spirit in all the activity. This man shouted orders to Carson; the big Irishman repeated them, added to them, sending men scampering hither and thither. Pausing at a little distance down the level, Trevison watched the scene. At first all seemed confusion, but presently he was able to discern that method ruled. For he now observed that the laborers were divided into gangs; some were unloading the flat-cars; others were assembling a stationary engine near the wall of the butte—they had a roof over it already; others were laying tracks that intersected with the main line; still others were erecting buildings along the level.

They were on Trevison's land—there was no doubt of that. Moreover, they were erecting their buildings and apparatus at the point where Trevison himself had contemplated making a start. He saw Corrigan seated on a box on one of the flat-cars, smoking a cigar; another man whom Trevison recognized as Gieger—he would have been willing to swear the man was one of those who had thwarted his plans in the courthouse—was standing beside him, a rifle resting in the hollow of his left arm. Trevison urged Nigger along the level, down the track, and halted near Corrigan and Gieger. He knew that Corrigan had seen him, but it pleased the other to pretend that he had not.

"This is your work, Corrigan, I take it?" said Trevison, bluntly.

Corrigan turned slowly. He was a good actor, for he succeeded in getting a fairly convincing counterfeit of surprise into his face as his gaze fell on his enemy.

"You have taken it correctly, sir." He smiled blandly, though there was a snapping alertness in his eyes that belied his apparent calmness. He turned to Gieger, ignoring Trevison. "Organization is the thing. Pickand is a genius at it," he said.

Trevison's eyes flamed with rage over this deliberate insult. But in it he saw a cold design to make him lose his temper. The knowledge brought a twisting smile to his face.

"You have permission to begin this work, I suppose?"

CORRIGAN turned again, as though astonished at the persistence of the other. "Certainly, sir. This work is being done under a court order issued this morning. I applied for it yesterday. I am well within my legal rights, the court having, as you are aware, settled the question of the title."

"You know I have appealed the case?"

"I have not been informed that you have done so. In any event, such an appeal would not prevent my mining the coal on the property, pending the hearing of the case in the higher court. Judge Lindman has appointed a receiver, who is bonded; and the work is to proceed under his direction. I am here merely as an onlooker."

He looked fairly at Trevison, his eyes gleaming with cold derision. The expression maddened the other beyond endurance, and in his eyes danced the chill glitter of meditated violence, unrecking of consequences.

"You're a sneaking crook, Corrigan, and you know it! You're going too far! You've had Braman appointed in order to escape the responsibility! You're hiding behind him like a coward! Come out into the open and fight like a man!"

Corrigan's face bloated poisonously, but he made no hostile move. "I'll kill you for that, some day!" he whispered. "Not now," he added, laughing mirthlessly as the other stiffened. "I can't take the risk right now—I've too much depending on me. But you've been impertinent and troublesome, and when I get you where I want you, I'm going to serve you like this!" And he took the cigar from his mouth, dropped it to the floor of the car and ground it to pieces under his heel. He looked up again at Trevison, and their gaze met, the hatred in their eyes betrayed clearly for the first time—frank, bitter, malignant.

Trevison broke the tension with a laugh that came from between his teeth. "Why delay?" he mocked. "I've been ready for the grinding process since the first day."

"Enough of this!" Corrigan turned to Gieger with a glance of cold intolerance. "This man is a nuisance," he said to the deputy. "Carry out the mandate of the court and order him away. If he doesn't go, kill him! He is a trespasser and has no right here!" And he glared at Trevison.

"You've got to get out, mister," said the deputy. He tapped his rifle menacingly, betraying a quick accession of rage that he caught, no doubt, from Corrigan. Trevison smiled coldly and backed Nigger a little. For an instant he mediated resistance, and he dropped his right hand to the butt of his pistol. A shout distracted his attention. It came from behind him, and it sounded like a warning. He wheeled, to see Carson running toward him not more than ten feet distant, waving his hands, a huge smile on his face.

"Domned if it aint Trevison!" he yelled as he lunged forward and caught Trevison's right hand in his own, pulling the rider toward him. "I've been wantin' to spake a word wid ye for two weeks now—about thim cows which me brother in Illinois has been askin' me about, an' divvil a chance have I had to see ye!" Then as he yanked Trevison's shoulders downward with a force that there was no resisting, he whispered rapidly:

"Diputies—thirty av thim wid rifles—on the other side av the flat-cars! It's a thrap to do away wid ye; I heard 'em cookin' it!"

"An' ye wouldn't be sellin' 'em to me at twinty-five, eh?" he said aloud. "Go 'long wid ye; yere a domned hold-up man, like all the rist av thim!" And Carson slapped the black horse playfully in the ribs and laughed gleefully as the animal lunged at him, ears laid back, mouth open.

HIS eyes cold, his lips hard and straight, Trevison spurred the black again to the flat-car.

"The bars are down between us, Corrigan; it's man to man from now on. Law or no law, I give you twenty-four hours to get your men and apparatus off my land. After that I wont be responsible for what happens!" He heard a shout behind him, a clatter, and he turned to seen ten or twelve of his men racing over the level toward him. At the same instant he heard a sharp exclamation from Corrigan, heard Gieger issue a sharp order; then a line of men raised their heads above the flat-cars and trained rifles on the advancing cowboys.

Nigger leaped; his rider held up one hand, the palm toward his men, as a sign to halt, while he charged into them. Trevison talked fast to them, while the laborers, suspending work, watched, muttering; the rifles, resting on the flat-cars, grew steadier in their owners' hands. The silence grew deeper; the tension was so great that when somewhere a man dropped a shovel, it startled the watchers like a sudden bomb.

It was plain that Trevison's men wanted to fight. It was equally plain

that Trevison was arguing to dissuade them. And when, muttering, and casting belligerent looks backward, they finally drew off, Trevison following, there was a sigh of relief from the watchers, while Corrigan's face was black with disappointment.

CHAPTER XIX

A Woman Rides in Vain

OUT of Rosalind Benham's resentment against Trevison for the Hester Harvey incident grew a sudden dull apathy—which presently threatened to become an aversion for the West. Its crudeness, the uncouthness of its people, the emptiness, the monotony, began to oppress her. Noticing the waning of her enthusiasm, Agatha began to inject energetic condemnations of the country into her conversations with the girl and to hint broadly of the contrasting allurements of the East.

But Rosalind was not yet ready to desert the Bar B. She had been hurt, and her interest in the country had dulled, but there were memories over which one might meditate until—until one could be certain of some things. This was hope, insistently demanding delay of judgment. The girl could not forget the sincere ring in Trevison's voice when he had told her that he would never go back to Hester Harvey. Arrayed against this declaration was the cold fact of Hester's visit, and Hester's statement that Trevison had sent for her. In this jumble of contradiction hope found a fertile field.

Rosalind had a dread of meeting Corrigan this morning; also, Agatha's continued deprecatory speeches had begun to annoy her; so at ten o'clock she ordered one of the men to saddle her horse.

She rode southward, following a trail that brought her to Levins' cabin. The cabin was built of logs, smoothly hewn and tightly joined, situated at the edge of some timber in a picturesque spot at a point where a shallow creek doubled in its sweep toward some broken country west of Manti.

Rosalind had visited Mrs. Levins many times. The warmth of her welcome on her first visit had resulted in a quick intimacy which, with an immediate estimate of certain needs by Rosalind, had brought her back in the rôle of Lady Bountiful. "Chuck" and "Sissy" Levins welcomed her vociferously as she splashed across the river to the door of the cabin this morning.

"You're clean spoilin' them, Miss Rosalind!" declared the mother, watching from the doorway. "They've got so they expect you to bring them a present every time you come."

Sundry pats and kisses sufficed to assuage to pangs of disappointment suffered by the children, and shortly afterward Rosalind was inside the cabin, talking with Mrs. Levins and watching Clay, who was painstakingly mending a rip in his cartridge-belt.

Rosalind had seen Clay once only, and that at a distance, and she stole interested glances at him. There was a certain attraction in Clay's lean face, with its cold, alert furtiveness, but it was an attraction that bred chill instead of warmth, for his face revealed a wild, reckless, intolerant spirit, remorseless, contemptuous of law and order. Several times she caught him watching her, and his narrowed, probing glances disconcerted her. She cut her visit short because of his presence, and when she rose to go, he turned.

"You like this country, ma'am?"

"Well—yes. But it is much different, after the East."

"Some smoother there, eh? Folks are slicker?"

She eyed him appraisingly, for there was an undercurrent of significance in his voice. She smiled. "Well—I suppose so. You see, competition is keener in the East, and it rather sharpens one's wits, I presume."

"H'm! I reckon you're right. This railroad has brought some *mighty* slick ones here. Mighty slick an' gally." He looked at her truculently. "Corrigan's one of the slick ones. Friend of yours, eh?"

"Clay!" remonstrated his wife.

HE turned on her roughly. "You keep out of this! I aint meanin' nothin' wrong. But I reckon when any-

one's got a sneakin' coyote for a friend an' don't know it, it's doin' 'em a good turn to spit things right out, frank an' fair.

—"This Corrigan aint on the level, ma'am. Do you know what he's doin'? He's skinnin' the folks in this country out of about a hundred thousand acres of land. He's clouded every title. He's got a fake bill of sale to show that he bought the land years ago,—which he didn't,—an' he's got a little scalawag of a judge here to back him up in his play. They've done away with the original record of the land, an' rigged up another, which makes Corrigan's title clear. It's the rankest robbery any man ever tried to pull off, an' if he's a friend of your'n, you ought to cut him off your visitin' list!"

"How do you know that? Who told you?" asked the girl, her face whitening, for the man's vehemence and evident earnestness were convincing.

"Brand Trevison told me. It hits him mighty hard. He had a deed to his land. Corrigan broke open his office an' stole it. Trevison's certain sure his deal was on the record, for he went to Dry Bottom with Buck Peters—the man he bought the land from—an' seen it wrote down on the record!"

Levins laughed harshly. "There's goin' to be hell to pay here. Trevison wont stand for it, though the other gillies are advisin' caution. Caution, nothin'! I'm for cleanin' the scum out! Do you know what Corrigan done yesterday? He got thirty or so deputies —plug-uglies that he's hired—an' hid 'em behind some flat-cars down on the level where they're erectin' some minin' machinery. He laid a trap for Firebrand, expectin' him to come down there, rippin' mad because they was puttin' the minin' machinery up on his land, without his permission. They was goin' to shoot him—Corrigan put 'em up to it. That Carson fellow heard it an' put Firebrand wise. An' the shootin' didn't come off. But that's only the beginnin'!"

"Did Trevison tell you to tell me this?"

The girl was stunned, amazed, incredulous. For her father was concerned in this, and if he had any knowledge that Corrigan was stealing land, —if he *was* stealing it,—he was as guilty as Corrigan. If he had no knowledge of it, she might be able to prevent the steal by communicating with him.

"Trevison tell me?" laughed Levins scornfully. "Firebrand aint no pussy-kitten fighter which depends on women standin' between him an' trouble. I'm tellin' you on my own hook, so's that big stiff Corrigan wont get swelled up, thinkin' he's got a chance to hitch up with you in the matrimonial wagon. That guy's got murder in his heart, girl. Did you hear of me shootin' that sneak Marchmont?"

The girl had heard rumors of the affair; she nodded, and Levins went on. "It was Corrigan that hired me to do it—payin' me a thousand cash." His wife gasped, and he spoke gently to her. "That's all right, Ma; it wasn't no cold-blooded affair. Jim Marchmont knowed a sister of mine pretty intimate, when he was out here years ago, an' I settled a debt that I thought I owed her—that's all. I aint none sorry, neither; I knowed him soon as Corrigan mentioned his name. But I hadn't no time to call his attention to things; I had to plug him sudden. I'm sorry I've said this, ma'am, now that it's out," he said in a changed voice, noting the girl's distress, "but I felt you ought to know who you're dealin' with."

ROSALIND went out, swaying, her knees shaking. She heard Levins' wife reproving him, heard the man replying gruffly. She felt that it *must* be so. She cared nothing about Corrigan, beyond a certain regret, but a wave of sickening fear swept over her at the growing conviction that her father *must* know something of all this. And if, as Levins said, Corrigan was attempting to defraud these people, she felt that common justice required that she head him off if possible. By defeating Corrigan's aim she would, of course, be aiding Trevison, and through him Hester Harvey, whom she had grown to despise; but that hatred should not deter her. She mounted her horse in a fever of anxiety and raced it over the plains toward Manti, determined to find

Corrigan and force him to tell her the truth.

WHEN Rosalind sat opposite Corrigan at his desk, she found it hard to believe Levins' story. The big man's smooth plausibility made Levins' recital seem like the weird imaginings of a disordered mind goaded to desperation by opposition. And again, Corrigan's magnetism, his consideration for her feelings and his ingenuous, smiling deference—so sharply contrasted with Trevison's direct bluntness—swayed her; and she sat perplexed, undecided, when he finished the explanation she had coldly demanded of him.

"It is the invariable defense of these squatters," he added, "that they are being robbed. In this case they have embellished their hackneyed tale somewhat by dragging the court into it and telling you that absurd story about the shooting of Marchmont. Could you tell me what possible interest I could have in wanting Marchmont killed? Don't you think, Miss Rosalind, that Levins' reference to his sister discloses the real reason for the man's action? Levins' story that I paid him a thousand dollars is a fabrication, pure and simple. I paid Jim Marchmont a thousand dollars that morning, which was the balance due him on our contract. The transaction was witnessed by Judge Lindman. After Marchmont was shot, Levins took the money from him."

"Why wasn't Levins arrested?"

"It seems that public opinion was with Levins. A great many people here knew of the ancient trouble between them." He passed from that, quickly. "The tale of the robbery of Trevison's office is childlike, for the reason that Trevison had no deed. Judge Lindman is an honored and respected official. And"—he added as a last argument—"your father is the respected head of a large and important railroad. Is it logical to suppose that he would lend his influence and his good name to any such ridiculous scheme?"

She sighed, almost convinced. Corrigan went on earnestly:

"This man Trevison is a disturber; he has always been that. He has no respect for the law or property. He associates with the self-confessed murderer Levins. He is a riotous, reckless, egotistical fool who, because the law stands in the way of his desires, wishes to trample it underfoot and allow mob rule to take its place. Do you remember you mentioned that he once loved a woman named Hester Keyes? Well, he has brought Hester here—"

She got up, her chin at a scornful angle. "I do not care to hear about his personal affairs." She went out, mounted her horse and rode slowly out the Bar-B trail.

CHAPTER XX

And Rides Again—in Vain

ROSALIND'S reflections as she rode toward the Bar B convinced her that there had been much truth in Corrigan's arraignment of Trevison. Out of her own knowledge of him, and from his own admission to her on the day they had ridden to Blakeley's the first time, she adduced evidence of his predilection for fighting, of his utter disregard for accepted authority when that authority disagreed with his conception of justice, of his lawlessness when his desires were in question. His impetuosity was notorious, for it had earned him the sobriquet "Firebrand," which he could not have acquired except through the exhibition of those traits that she had enumerated.

She was disappointed and dispirited when she reached the ranch-house, and very tired physically. Agatha's questions irritated her, and she ate sparingly of the food set before her, eager to be alone. In the isolation of her room she lay dumbly on the bed, and there the absurdity of Levins' story assailed her. It must be as Corrigan had said; her father was too great a man to descend to such despicable methods. She dropped off to sleep.

When she awoke, the sun had gone down and her room was cheerless in the semidusk. She got up, washed, and combed her hair; much refreshed, she went downstairs and ate heartily, Agatha watching her narrowly.

"You are distraught, my dear," ventured her relative. "I don't think this country agrees with you. Has anything happened?"

The girl answered evasively; whereat Agatha compressed her lips.

"Don't you think that a trip East—"

"I shall not go home this summer!" declared Rosalind vehemently. And noting the belligerent and defiant flash in the girl's eyes, Agatha wisely subsided, and the meal was finished in a strained silence.

Later Rosalind went out alone, upon the porch, where, huddled in a big rocker, she gazed gloomily at the lights of Manti, dim and distant.

Something of the meaning of life trickled into her consciousness as she sat there watching the flickering lights of the town—something of the meaning of it all; the struggle of these new residents twanged a hidden chord of sympathy and understanding in her. She was able to visualize them as she sat there; faces flashed before her—strong, stern, eager, the owner of each athrill with his ambition, going forward in the march of progress with definite aim, planning, plotting, scheming, some of them winning, others losing, but all obsessed with a feverish desire of success. The railroad, the town, the ranches, the new dam, the people—all were elements of a conflict waged ceaselessly. She sat erect, her blood tingling. Blows were being struck, taken.

"Oh," she cried, sharply, "it's a game! It's the spirit of the nation—to fight, to press onward, to win!" And in that moment she was seized with a throbbing sympathy for Trevison, and filled with a yearning that he might win, in spite of Corrigan, Hester Harvey and all the rest of them—even her father. For he was a courageous player of this game. In him was typified the spirit of the nation.

ROSALIND might have added something to her thoughts had she known of the passions that filled Trevison when, while she sat on the porch of the Bar-B ranch-house, he mounted Nigger and sent him scurrying through the mellow moonlight toward Manti. He was playing the game, with justice as his goal. The girl had caught something of the spirit of it all, but she had neglected to grasp the all-important element of the relations between men, without which laws, rules and customs become farcical and ridiculous. He was determined to have justice. He knew well that Judge Graney's mission to Washington would result in failure unless the deed to his property could be recovered or the original record disclosed. Even then, with a weak and dishonest judge on the bench, the issue might be muddled by a mass of legal technicalities. The court order permitting Braman to operate a mine on his property goaded him to fury.

HE stopped at Hanrahan's saloon, finding Lefingwell there and talking with him for a few minutes. Lefingwell's docile attitude disgusted him; he said he had talked the matter over with a number of the other owners, and they had expressed themselves as being in favor of awaiting the result of his appeal. Trevison left Lefingwell, not trusting himself to argue the question of the man's attitude, and went down to the station, where he found a telegram awaiting him. It was from Judge Graney:

> Coming home. Case sent back to Circuit Court for hearing. Depend on you to get evidence.

Trevison crumpled the paper and shoved it savagely into a pocket. He stood for a long time on the station platform in the dark, glowering at the lights of the town; then he started abruptly and made his way into the gambling-room of the Plaza, where he somberly watched the players. The rattle of chips, the whir of the wheel, the monotonous drone of the faro-dealer, the hum of voices, some eager, some tense, others exultant or grumbling, the incessant jostling, irritated him. He went out the front door, stepped down into the street and walked eastward. Passing an open space between two buildings, he became aware of the figure of a woman, and he wheeled as she stepped forward and grasped his arm. He recognized her

and tried to pass on, but she clung to him.

"Trev!" she said appealingly. "I want to talk with you. It is very important—really. Just a minute, Trev. Wont you talk *that* long! Come to my room, where—"

"Talk fast," he admonished, holding her off, "and talk here."

She struggled with him, trying to come closer, twisting so that her body struck his, and the contact brought a grim laugh out of him. He seized her by the shoulders and held her at arm's-length. "Talk from there; it's safer. Now, if you've anything important—"

"Oh, Trev—please!" She laughed, almost sobbing, but forced the tears back when she saw derision blazing in his eyes.

"I told you it was all over!" He pushed her away and started off, but he had taken only two steps when she was at his side again.

"I saw you from my window, Trev. I—I knew it was you; I couldn't mistake you, anywhere. I followed you—saw you go into the Plaza. I came to warn you. Corrigan has planned to goad you into doing some rash thing so that he will have an excuse to jail or kill you!"

"Where did hear that?"

"I—I just heard it. I was in the bank to-day, and I overheard him talking to a man—some officer, I think. Be careful, Trev—very careful, wont you?"

"Careful as I can," he said. "Thank you." He started on again, and she grasped his arm. "Trev," she pleaded.

"What's the use, Hester?" he said. "It can't be."

"Well, God bless you, anyway, dear," she said chokingly.

He passed on, leaving her in the shadows of the buildings, and walked far out on the plains. Making a circuit to avoid meeting the woman again, he skirted the back yards, stumbling over tin cans and débris in his progress. When he got to the shed where he had hitched Nigger, he mounted and rode down the railroad tracks toward the cut, where an hour later he was joined by Clay Levins, who came toward him, riding slowly and cautiously.

PATRICK Carson had wooed sleep unsuccessfully. For hours he lay on his cot in the tent, staring out through the flap at the stars. A vague unrest had seized him. He heard the hilarious din of Manti steadily decrease in volume until only intermittent noises reached his ears. But even when comparative peace came, he was still wide awake.

"I'll be gettin' the jim-jams if I lay here much longer without slape," he confided to his pillow. "Mebbe a turn down the track wid me dudeen would do the thrick." He got up, lighted his pipe and strode off into the semigloom of the railroad-track. He went aimlessly, paying little attention to objects around him. He passed the tents wherein the laborers lay—and smiled as heavy snores smote his ears. "They slape a heap harder than they worruk, bedad!" he observed, grinning. "Nothin' could trouble a guinea's conscience, anny-way," he scoffed. "But accordin' to that, there must be a heap on me own!" Which observation sent his thoughts to Corrigan. "Begob, there's a man! A domned rogue, if iver they was one!"

He passed the tents, smoking thoughtfully. He paused when he came to the small buildings scattered about at quite a distance from the tents; then he left the tracks and made his way through the deep alkali dust toward the tents.

"Whativer would Corrigan be askin' about the dynamite for? 'How much do ye kape av it?' he was askin'. As if it was anny av his business!"

He stopped puffing at his pipe and stood rigid, watching with bulging eyes, for he saw the door of the dynamite-shed move outward several inches, as though some one inside had shoved it. It closed again, slowly, and Carson was convinced that he had been seen. He was no coward, but a cold sweat broke out on him, and his knees doubled weakly. For any man who would visit the dynamite-shed around midnight, in this stealthly manner, must be in a desperate frame of mind, and Carson's virile imagination drew lurid pictures of a gun-duel in which a stray shot penetrated the wall of the shed. He shivered at the roar of the explosion

that followed; he even drew a gruesome picture of stretchers and mangled flesh that brought a groan out of him.

But in spite of his mental stress, he lunged forward boldly, though his breath wheezed from his lungs in great gasps. His body lagged, but his will was indomitable, once he quit looking at the pictures of his imagination. He was at the door of the shed in a dozen strides.

THE lock had been forced; the hasp was hanging suspended from a twisted staple. Carson had no pistol; it would have been useless, anyway.

He hesitated, vacillating between two courses. Should he return for help, or should he secrete himself somewhere and watch? The utter foolhardiness of attempting the capture of the prowler single-handed assailed him, and he decided on retreat. He took one step, and then stood rigid in his tracks, for a voice filtered thinly through the doorway—hoarse, vibrant:

"Don't forget the fuses."

Carson's lips formed the word: "Trevison!"

Carson's breath came easier; his thoughts became more coherent, his recollection vivid; his sympathies leaped like living things. When his thoughts dwelt upon the scene at the butte during Trevison's visit while the mining-machinery was being erected,—the trap that Corrigan had prepared for the man,—a grim smile wreathed Carson's face, for he strongly suspected what was meant by Trevison's visit to the dynamite-shed.

He slipped cautiously around a corner of the shed, making no sound in the deep dust surrounding it, and stole back the way he had come, tingling.

"Begob, I'll slape now—a little while!"

As Carson vanished down the tracks, a head was stuck out through the doorway of the shed and turned so that its owner could scan his surroundings.

"All clear," he whispered.

"Get going, then," said another voice, and two men, their faces muffled with handkerchiefs, bearing something that bulked their pockets oddly, slipped out of the door and fled noiselessly, like gliding shadows, down the track toward the cut.

ROSALIND had been asleep in the rocker on the porch when the sound of hoof-beats aroused her. An instant later she stood at the head of a horse which came to a halt at the steps.

"Why, it's Chuck Levins!" she exclaimed. "Why on earth are you riding around at this hour of the night?"

"Sissy's sick. Maw wants you to please come an' see what you can do—if it aint too much trouble."

"Trouble?" The girl laughed. "I should say not! Wait until I saddle my horse!"

She ran to the porch and stole silently into the house, emerging with a small medicine-case which she stuck into a pocket of her coat. Once before she had had occasion to use her simple remedies on Chuck's sister—for an illness as simple as her remedies; but she could feel something of Mrs. Levins' concern for her offspring, and—and it was an ideal night for a gallop over the plains.

It was almost midnight by the Levins clock when she entered the cabin, and a quick diagnosis of the case, with an immediate application of one of her remedies, brought results. At half-past twelve Sissy was sleeping peacefully, and little Chuck had dozed off, fully dressed.

It was not until Rosalind was ready to go that Mrs. Levins apologized for her husband's rudeness to his guest.

"Clay feels awfully bitter against Corrigan. It's because Corrigan is fighting Trevison—and Trevison is Clay's friend; they've been like brothers. Trevison has done so much for us."

Rosalind glanced around the cabin. "Mr. Levins isn't here?"

"Clay went away about nine o'clock." The woman did not meet Rosalind's direct gaze; she flushed under it and looked downward, twisting her fingers in her apron. Rosalind remembered the killing of Marchmont, and had a quick divination of impending trouble.

"What is it, Mrs. Levins? What has happened?"

The woman gulped hard, and clenched her hands. Evidently, whatever her trouble, she had determined to bear it alone, but was now wavering.

"Tell me, Mrs. Levins; perhaps I can help you."

"You can!" The words burst sobbingly from the woman. "Maybe you can prevent it. But oh, Miss Rosalind, I wasn't to say anything—Clay told me not to. But I'm so afraid! Clay's so hot-headed, and Trevison is so daring! I'm afraid they wont stop at anything!"

"But what is it?" demanded Rosalind, catching the woman's excitement.

"It's about the machinery at the butte—the mining machinery. You'll never say I told you, will you? But they're going to blow it up to-night—Clay and Trevison; they're going to dynamite it! I'm afraid there will be murder done!"

"Why didn't you tell me before?"

"Oh, I ought to," moaned the woman. "But I was afraid you'd tell—Corrigan or somebody. And—they'd get into trouble with the law!"

"I wont tell, but I'll stop it—if there's time! For your sake! Trevison has led your husband into it."

She inquired about the location of the butte—the shortest trail; then she ran out to her horse. Once in the saddle she drew a deep breath and sent the animal scampering into the flood of moonlight.

DOWN toward the cut Trevison and Levins hurried, and when they had reached a gully at a distance of several hundred feet from the dynamite-shed, they came upon their horses. Mounting, they rode rapidly down the track toward the butte where the mining-machinery was being erected. They had taken the handkerchiefs off while they ran, and now Trevison laughed.

"That was easy. I thought I heard a noise, though, when you backed against the door and shoved it open."

"Nobody usually monkeys around a dynamite-shed at night," returned Levins. "Whew! There's enough of that stuff here to blow Manti to Kingdom Come—wherever that is."

They rode boldly across the level at the base of the butte, for they had reconnoitered after meeting on the plains just outside of town, and knew Corrigan had left no one on guard.

"It's a cinch," Levins declared as they dismounted from their horses in the shelter of a shoulder of the butte about a hundred yards from where the corrugated-iron building, nearly complete, loomed somberly on the level. "But if they'd ever get evidence that we done it!"

Trevison laughed, with a grim humor that made Levins look sharply at him. "That abandoned pueblo on the creek near your shack is built like a fortress, Levins."

"What has this job got to do with that 'dobe pile?" questioned the other.

"Plenty. Oh, you're curious. But I'm going to keep you guessing for a day or two."

"You'll go loco—give you time," scoffed Levins."

"Somebody else will go crazy when this stuff lets go," laughed Trevison, tapping the bulging front of his shirt.

Levins snickered. They trailed the reins over the heads of their horses and walked swiftly toward the corrugated-iron building. Halting in the shadow of it, they held a hurried conference and then separated, Trevison going toward the engine, already set up, with its flimsy roof covering it, and working around it for a few minutes, then darting from it to a small building filled with tools and stores, and to a pile of machinery and supplies stacked against the wall of the butte. They worked rapidly, elusive as shadows in the deep gloom of the wall of the butte, and when their work was completed, they met in the full glare of the moonlight near the corrugated-iron building and whispered again.

LASHING her horse over a strange trail, Rosalind Benham came to a thicket of gnarled scrub oak that barred her way completely. She had ridden hard, and her horse breathed heavily during the short time she spent looking about her. Her own breath was coming sharply, sobbing in her throat, but it was more from excitement than from

the hazard and labor of the ride, for she had paid little attention to the trail beyond giving the horse direction.

"To the left of the thicket is a slope," Mrs. Levins had told her. She stopped only long enough to get her bearings, and at her panting, "Go!" the horse leaped. They were at the crest of the slope quickly, facing the bottom—yawning, deep, dark. She shut her eyes as the horse took it, leaning back to keep from falling over the animal's head, holding tightly to the pommel of the saddle. They got down, somehow, and when she felt the level under them, she lashed the horse again and urged him around a shoulder of the precipitous wall that loomed above her.

She heard a horse whinny as she flashed past the shoulder, but she did not look back, straining her eyes to peer into the darkness along the wall of the butte for sight of the buildings and machinery.

She saw them soon after passing the shoulder, and exclaimed her thanks sharply.

"ALL set," said one of the shadowy figures near the corrugated-iron building. A match flared, was applied to a stick of punk in the hands of each man, and again they separated, each running, applying the glowing wand here and there.

Trevison's work took him longest, and when he leaped from the side of a mound of supplies Levins was already running back toward their horses. They joined, then split apart, their weapons leaping into their hands, for they heard the rapid drumming of a horse's hoofs.

"They're coming!" panted Trevison, his jaws setting as he plunged on toward the shoulder of the butte. "Run low and duck at the flash of their guns!" he warned Levins.

A wide swoop brought the oncoming horse around the shoulder of the butte into full view. As the moonlight shone momentarily on the rider, Trevison cried out hoarsely:

"It's a woman!"

He leaped, at the words, out of the shadow of the butte into the moonlight of the level, straight into the path of the running horse, which at sight of him slid, reared and came to a halt, snorting and trembling. Trevison had recognized the girl; he flung himself at the horse, muttering: "Dynamite!" Then he seized the beast by the bridle, forced its head around despite the girl's objections and incoherent pleadings—some phrases of which sank home but were disregarded.

"Don't!" she cried fiercely as he struck the animal with his fist to accelerate its movements. She was still crying to him wildly, hysterically, as he got the animal's head around and slapped it sharply on the hip, his pistol crashing at its heels.

The frightened animal clattered over the back-trail, Trevison running after it. He reached Nigger, flung himself into the saddle and raced after Levins, who was already far down the level, following Rosalind's horse. At a turn in the butte he came upon them both, their horses halted, the girl berating Levins, the man laughing.

"Don't!" she cried to Trevison as he rode up. "Please, Trevison—don't let *that* happen! It's criminal; it's outlawry!"

"Too late," he said grimly, and rode close to her to grasp the bridle of her horse. Standing thus, they waited—an age to the girl, in reality only a few seconds. Then the deep, solemn silence of the night was split by a hollow roar which echoed and reëchoed as though a thousand thunderstorms had centered over their heads. A vivid flash, extended, effulgent, lighted the sky; the earth rocked; the cañon walls towering above them seemed to sway and reel drunkenly. The girl covered her face with her hands. Another blast smote the night, reverberating on the heels of the other; there followed another and another, so quickly that they blended; then another, with a distinct interval between. Then a breathless, unreal calm, which distant echoes rumbled;—then a dead silence, shattered at last by a heavy, distant clatter, as though myriad big hailstones were falling on a pavement. And then another silence, the period of reeling calm after an earthquake.

"Oh," wailed the girl, "it is horrible!"

"You've got to get out of here; the whole of Manti will be here in a few minutes! Come on!"

He urged Nigger farther down the cañon, and up a rocky slope that brought them to the mesa. The girl was trembling, her breath coming gaspingly. He faced her as they came to a halt, pityingly, with resignation.

"What brought you here? Who told you we were here?" he asked gruffly.

"It doesn't matter!" She faced him defiantly. "You have outraged the laws of your country to-night! I hope you are punished for it!"

He laughed derisively. "Well, you've seen; you know. Go and inform your friends. What I have done I did after long deliberation in which I considered fully the consequences to myself. Levins wasn't concerned in it, so you don't need to mention his name. Your ranch is in that direction, Miss Benham." He pointed southeastward. Nigger lunged, caught his stride in two or three jumps and fled toward the southwest. His rider did not hear the girl's voice; it was drowned in the clatter of hoofs as he and Levins rode.

CHAPTER XXI

Another Woman Rides

TREVISON rode in to town the next morning. On his way he went to the edge of the butte overlooking the level and looked down upon the wreck and ruin he had caused. Masses of twisted steel and iron met his gaze; the level was littered with débris which a gang of men under Carson was engaged in clearing away; a great section of the butte had been blasted out; earth and rocks had slid down upon much of the wreckage, partly burying it. The utter havoc of the scene brought a fugitive smile to his lips.

He saw Carson waving a hand to him, and he answered the greeting, noting as he did so that Corrigan stood at a little distance behind Carson, watching. Trevison did not give him a second look, but wheeled Nigger and sent him toward Manti at a slow lope. As he rode away, Corrigan called to Carson:

"Your friend didn't seem to be much surprised."

Carson turned, making a grimace while his back was yet toward Corrigan, but grinning broadly when he faced around.

"Didn't he, now? I wasn't noticin'. But, begorra, how could he be surprised, whin the whole domned country was rocked out av its bed be the blast! Would ye be expictin' him to fall over in a faint on beholdin' the wreck?"

"Not he," said Corrigan coldly. "He's got too much nerve for that."

"Aint he, now!" Carson looked guilelessly at the other. "Would ye be havin' anny idee who done it?"

Corrigan's eyes narrowed. "No," he said shortly, and turned away.

Trevison's appearance in Manti created a stir. He had achieved a double result by his deed, for besides destroying the property and making it impossible for Corrigan to resume work for a considerable time, he had caused Manti's interest to center upon him sharply, having shocked into the town's consciousness a conception of the desperate battle that was being waged at its doors. For Manti had viewed the devastated butte early that morning and had come away seething with curiosity to get a glimpse of the man whom everybody secretly suspected of being the cause of it. Many residents of the town had known Trevison before; half an hour after his arrival he was known to all. Public opinion was heavily in his favor.

"I aint blamin' him a heap," said a man in the Belmont. "If things is as you say they are, there aint much more that a *man* could do!"

"The laws is made for the guys with the coin an' the pull," said another vindictively.

"An' dynamite aint carin' who's usin' it," said another slyly. Both grinned. The universal sympathy for the "under dog" oppressed by justice perverted or controlled, had here found expression.

It was so all over Manti. Admiring glances followed Trevison, though he said no word concerning the incident; nor could any man have said, judging from the expression of his face, that

he was elated. He had business in Manti; he completed it, and when he was ready to go, he got on Nigger and loped out of town.

A MILE out of town Trevison met Corrigan. The latter halted his horse when he saw Trevison, and waited for him to come up. The big man's face wore an ugly, significant grin.

"You did a complete job," he said, eying the other narrowly. "And there don't seem to be any evidence. But look out! When a thing like that happens, there's always somebody around to see it, and if I can get evidence against you, I'll send you up for it!"

He noted a slight quickening of Trevison's eyes at his mention of a witness, and a fierce exultation leaped within him.

Trevison laughed, looking the other fairly between the eyes. Rosalind Benham hadn't informed on him. However, the day was not yet gone.

"Get your evidence before you try to do any bluffing," he challenged. He spurred Nigger on, not looking back at his enemy.

Corrigan rode to the laborers' tents, where he talked for a time with the cook. In the mess-tent he stood with his back to a rough, pine-topped table, his hands on its edge. The table had not yet been cleared from the morning meal, for the cook had been interested in the explosion. He tried to talk of it with Corrigan, but the latter adroitly directed the conversation otherwise. The cook would have said they had a pleasant talk. Corrigan seemed very companionable this morning. He laughed a little; he listened attentively when the cook talked. After a while Corrigan fumbled in his pockets. Not finding a cigar, he looked eloquently at the cook's pipe, in the latter's mouth, belching much smoke.

"Not a single cigar," he said. "I'm dying for a taste of tobacco."

The cook took his pipe from his mouth and wiped the stem hastily on a sleeve. "If you don't mind I've been suckin' on it—" he said, extending it.

"I wouldn't deprive you of it for the world." Corrigan shifted his position, looked down at the table and smiled. "Luck, eh?" he said, picking up a black brier that lay on the table behind him. "Got plenty of tobacco?"

The cook dived for a box in a corner and returned with a cloth sack, bulging. He watched while Corrigan filled the pipe, and grinned while his guest was lighting it.

"Carson'll be ravin' to-day for forgettin' his pipe. He must have left it layin' on the table this mornin'—him bein' in such a rush to get down to the explosion."

"It's Carson's, eh?" Corrigan surveyed it with casual interest. "Well," —after taking a few puffs,—"I'll say for Carson that he knows how to take care of it."

He left shortly afterward, laying the pipe on the table where he had found it. Five minutes later he was in Judge Lindman's presence, leaning over the desk toward the other.

"I want you to issue a warrant for Patrick Carson. I want him brought in here for examination. Charge him with being an accessory before the fact, or anything that seems to fit the case. But throw him into the cooler—and keep him there until he talks. He knows who broke into the dynamite-shed, and therefore he knows who did the dynamiting. He's friendly with Trevison, and if we can make him admit he saw Trevison at the shed, we've got the goods. He warned Trevison the other day, when I had the deputies lined up at the butte, and I found his pipe this morning near the door of the dynamite-shed. We'll make him talk, curse him!"

BANKER BRAMAN had closed the door between the front and rear rooms, pulled down the shades of the windows, lighted the kerosene lamp, and by its wavering flicker was surveying his reflection in the small mirror affixed to one of the walls of the building. He was pleased, as the fatuous self-complacence of his look indicated, and carefully, almost fastidiously dressed, and he could not deny himself this last look into the mirror, even though he was now five minutes late with his appointment. The five min-

utes threatened to become ten, for in adjusting his tie-pin it slipped from his fingers, struck the floor and vanished, as though an evil fate had gobbled it.

He searched for it frenziedly, cursing viciously. It was quite by accident that when his patience was strained almost to the breaking-point he struck his hand against a board that formed part of the partition between his building and the courthouse next door and tore a huge chunk of skin from the knuckles. He paid little attention to the injury, however, for the agitating of the board disclosed the glittering recreant, and he pounced upon it with the precision of a hawk upon its prey, snarling triumphantly.

"I'll nail that infernal board up, some day!" he threatened. But he knew he wouldn't, for by lying on the floor and pulling the board out a trifle he could get a clear view of the interior of the courthouse and could hear quite plainly, in spite of the presence of a wooden box resting against the wall on the other side. And some of the things that Braman had already heard through the medium of the loose board were really interesting, not to say instructive, to him.

He was ten minutes late in keeping his appointment. He might have been even later without being in danger of receiving the censure he deserved. For the lady received him in a loose wrapper and gracefully disordered hair, a glance at which made Braman gasp in unfeigned admiration.

"What's this?" he demanded with a pretense of fatherly severity which he imagined became him very well in the presence of women. "Not ready yet, Mrs. Harvey?"

The woman waved him to a chair with unsmiling unconcern, dropped into another, crossed her legs and leaned back in her chair, her hands folded across the back of her head, her sleeves, wide and flaring, sliding down below her elbows. She caught Braman's burning stare of interest in this revelation of negligence, and smiled derisively.

"I'm tired, Croft. I've changed my mind about going to the First Merchants' Ball. I'd much rather sit here and chin you—if you don't mind."

"Not a bit!" hastily acquiesced the banker. "In fact, I like the idea of staying here much better. It is more private, you know."

"Well, then," she laughed, exulting in her power over him, "let's get busy. What do you want to chin about?"

"I'll tell you after I've wet my whistle," said the banker gayly. "I'm dry as a bone in the middle of the Sahara Desert!"

"I'll take mine straight," she laughed.

BRAMAN rang a bell. A waiter with glasses and a bottle appeared.

"And now, what has the loose-board telephone told you?" she asked two hours later when, flushed of face from frequent attacks on the bottle, they relaxed in their chairs after a tilt at poker in which the woman had been the victor.

"You're sure you don't care for Trevison any more—that you're only taking his end of this because of what he's been to you in the past?" demanded the banker, looking suspiciously at her.

"He told me he didn't love me any more. I couldn't want him after that, could I?"

"I should think not." Braman's eyes glowed with satisfaction. But he hesitated, yielding when she smiled at him. "Hang it, I'd knife Corrigan for you!" he vowed recklessly.

"Save Trevison; that's all I ask. Tell me what you heard."

"Corrigan suspects Trevison of blowing up the stuff at the butte—as everybody does, of course. He's determined to get evidence against him. He found Carson's pipe at the door of the dynamite-shed this morning. Carson is a friend of Trevison's. Corrigan is going to have Judge Lindman issue a warrant for the arrest of Carson on some charge or other, and they're going to jail Carson until he talks."

The woman cursed. "That's Corrigan's idea of a square deal. He promised me that no harm should come to Trevison."

She stopped in front of him finally. "Go home, Croft—there's a good boy! I want to think."

"That's cruelty to animals," he laughed in a strained voice. "But I'll

go," he added at signs of displeasure on her face. "Can I see you to-morrow night?"

"I'll let you know." She held the door open for him and permitted him to take her hand for an instant. He squeezed it hotly, the woman making a grimace of repugnance as she closed the door.

SWIFTLY she changed her loose gown to a simple short-skirted affair, slipped on boots, a felt hat, gloves. Leaving the light burning, she slipped out into the hall and called to the waiter who had served her and Braman. By rewarding him generously she procured a horse, and a few minutes later she emerged from the building by a rear door, mounted the animal and sent it clattering out into the night.

Twice she lost her way and rode miles before she recovered her sense of direction, and when she finally pulled the beast to a halt at the edge of the Diamond-K ranch-house gallery, midnight was not far away. The ranch-house was dark. She smothered a gasp of disappointment as she crossed the gallery floor. She was about to hammer on the door when it swung open and Trevison stepped out, peered closely at her and laughed shortly.

"It's you, eh?" he said. "I thought I told you—"

She winced at his tone, but it did not lessen her concern for him.

"It isn't *that,* Trev! And I don't care how you treat me; I deserve it! But I can't see them punish you—for what you did last night!" She felt him start, his muscles stiffen.

"Something has turned up, then. You came to warn me? What is it?"

"You were seen last night! They're going to arrest—"

"So she squealed, did she?" he interrupted. He laughed bitterly, with a vibrant disappointment that wrung the woman's heart with sympathy. But her brain quickly grasped the significance of his words, and longing dulled her sense of honor. It was too good an opportunity to miss.

"I expected it," growled Trevison. "She told me she would. I was a fool to dream otherwise!" He turned on Hester and grasped her by the shoulders, and her flesh deadened under his fingers. "Did she tell Corrigan?"

"Yes." The woman told the lie courageously, looking straight into his eyes, though she shrank at the fire that came into them as he released her and laughed.

"Where did you get your information?" His voice was suddenly sullen and cold.

"From Braman."

He started, and laughed in humorous derision. "Braman and Corrigan are blood-brothers in this deal. You must have captivated the little sneak completely to make him lose his head like that!"

"I did it for you, Trev—for you. Don't you see? Oh, I despise the little beast! But he dropped a hint one day when I was in the bank, and I deliberately snared him, hoping I might be able to gain information that would benefit you. And I have, Trev!" she added, trembling with a hope that his hasty judgment might result to her advantage.

"For you, boy!" she said, slipping close to him. "Old friends are best, boy. At least they can be depended upon not to betray one. Trev, let me help you! I can, and I will! Why, I love you, Trev! And you need me, to help you fight these people who are trying to ruin you!"

"You don't understand." Trevison's voice was cold and passionless. "It seems I can't *make* you understand I'm grateful for what you have done for me to-night—very grateful. But I can't live a lie, woman. I don't love you!"

"But you love a woman who has delivered you into the hands of your enemies," she moaned.

"I can't help it," he declared hoarsely. "I don't deny it. I would love her if she sent me to the gallows, and stood there watching me die!"

The woman bowed her head and dropped her hands listlessly to her sides. In this instant she was thinking almost the same words that Rosalind Benham had murmured on her ride to Blakeley's, when she had discovered Trevison's identity: "I wonder if Hester Keyes knows what she has missed."

CHAPTER XXII

A Man Errs—and Pays

FOR a time Trevison stood on the gallery watching the woman as she faded into the darkness toward Manti, and then he laughed mirthlessly and went into the house, emerging with a rifle and saddle. A few minutes later he rode Nigger out of the corral and headed him southwestward. Shortly after midnight he was at the door of Levins' cabin. The latter grinned with feline humor after they held a short conference.

"That's right," he said; "you don't need any of the boys to help you pull *that* off; they'd mebbe go to actin' foolish an' give the whole snap away. Besides, I'm a heap tickled to be let in on that sort of a jamboree!" There followed an interval during which his grin faded. "So she peached on you, eh? She told my woman she wouldn't. That's a woman, aint it? How's a man to tell about 'em?"

"That's a secret of my own that I'm not ready to let you in on. Don't tell your wife where you are going *to-night.*"

"I aint reckonin' to. I'll be with you in a jiffy!" He vanished into the cabin, reappeared, ran to the stable and rode out to meet Trevison. Together they were swallowed up by the plains.

At eight o'clock in the morning Corrigan came out of the dining-room of his hotel and stopped at the cigar-counter. He filled his case, lighted a cigar and stood for a moment with an elbow on the glass of the show-case, smoking thoughtfully.

"That was quite an accident you had at your mine. Have you any idea who did it?" said the clerk.

Corrigan glanced at the man, his lips curling.

"You might guess," he said through his teeth.

"That fellow Trevison is a bad actor," continued the clerk. "And say," he went on confidentially, "not that I want to make you feel bad, but the majority of the people of this town are standing with him in this deal. They think you are not giving the landowners a square deal. Not that I'm knocking you," the clerk denied, flushing at the dark look Corrigan threw him. "That's merely what I hear. Personally, I'm for you. This town needs men like you, and it can get along without fellows like Trevison."

"Thank you," smiled Corrigan, disgusted with the man, but feeling that it might be well to cultivate such ingratiating interest. "Have a cigar."

"I'll go you. Yes sir," he added, when he had got the weed going, "this town can get along without any Trevisons. These sagebrush rummies out here give me a pain. What this country needs is less brute force and more brains!"

"You are right," smiled Corrigan, mildly. "Brains are all-important. A hotel-clerk must be well supplied. I presume you see and hear a great many things that other people miss seeing and hearing."

"You've said it! We've got to keep our wits about us. There's very little escapes us." He leered at Corrigan's profile. "That's a swell Moll in number eleven, aint it?"

"What do you know about her?" Corrigan's face was inexpressive.

"Oh, say, now!" The clerk guffawed close to Corrigan's ear without making the big man wink an eyelash. "You don't mean to tell me that you aint *on!* I saw you steer to her room one night—the night she came here. And once or twice since. But of course us hotel-clerks don't see anything! She's down on the register as Mrs. Harvey. But say! You don't see any married women running around the country dressed like her!"

"She may be a widow."

"Well, yes, maybe she might. But she shows speed, don't she?" he whispered. "You're a pretty good friend of mine, now, and maybe if I'd give you a tip, you'd throw something in my way later on—eh?"

"What?"

"Oh, you might start a hotel here—or something. And I'm thinking of blowing this joint. This town's booming, and it can stand a swell hotel in a few months."

"You're on—if I build a hotel. Shoot!"

The clerk leaned closer, whispering: "She receives other men. You're not the only one."

"Who?"

The clerk laughed, and made a funnel of one hand. "The banker across the street—Braman."

Corrigan bit his cigar in two and slowly spat that which was left in his mouth into a cuspidor. He contrived to smile, though it cost him an effort, and his hands were clenched.

"How many times has he been here?"

"Oh, several."

"When was he here last?"

"Last night." The clerk laughed. "Looked half stewed when he left—kinda hectic, too. Him and her must have had a tift, for he left early. And after he'd gone, right away after, she sent one of the waiters out for a horse."

"Which way did she go?"

"West—I watched her; she went the back way, from here."

CORRIGAN smiled and went out. The expression of his face was such as to cause the clerk to mutter dazedly: "He didn't seem to be a whole lot interested. I guess I must have sized him up wrong."

Corrigan stopped at his office in the bank, nodding curtly to Braman. Shortly afterward he got up and went to the courthouse. He had ordered Judge Lindman to issue a warrant for Carson the previous morning, and had intended to see that it was served. But a press of other matters had occupied his attention until late in the night—and now he found Lindman missing.

Corrigan stalked through the building, cursing. He examined the cot and discovered that it had been slept on. The Judge must have risen early. Obviously there was nothing to do but wait.

At ten o'clock he jumped on his horse and rode out to the butte, where the laborers were working, clearing away the débris from the explosion. No one there had seen Judge Lindman. Corrigan rode back to town, fuming with rage. Finding some of the deputies, he sent them out to search for the Judge. One by one they came in and reported their failure.

At six-thirty, after the arrival of the evening train from Dry Bottom, Corrigan was sitting at his desk, his face black with wrath, reading for the third or fourth time a letter that he had spread out on the desk before him:

> Mr. Jefferson Corrigan:
>
> I feel it is necessary for me to take a short rest. Recent excitement in Manti has left me very nervous and unstrung. I shall be away from Manti for about two weeks, I think. During my absence any pending litigation must be postponed, of course.

The letter was signed by Judge Lindman, and postmarked, "Dry Bottom."

Corrigan got up after a while and stuffed the letter into a pocket. He went out, and when he returned, Braman had gone out also—to supper, Corrigan surmised. When the banker came in an hour later, Corrigan was still seated at his desk. The banker smiled at him, and Corrigan motioned to him.

Corrigan's voice was silky. "Where were you last night, Braman?"

THE banker drew his breath tremulously. One could never be sure of Corrigan.

"I spent the night here—in the back room."

"Then you didn't see the Judge last night—or hear him?"

"No."

Corrigan drew the Judge's letter from the pocket and passed it over to Braman, watching his face steadily as he read. He saw a quick stain appear in the banker's cheeks, and his own lips tightened.

The banker coughed before he spoke. "Wasn't that a rather abrupt leave-taking?"

"Yes—rather," said Corrigan dryly. "You didn't hear him walking about during the night?"

"No."

"You're rather a heavy sleeper, eh? There is only a thin board-partition between this building and the courthouse."

"He must have left after daylight. Of course, any noise he might have made after that I wouldn't have noticed."

"No, of course not," said Corrigan

passionlessly. "Well—he's gone." He seemed to have dismissed the matter from his mind, and Braman sighed with relief.

Corrigan went over to the Castle and ate supper. He was preoccupied and deliberate, for he was trying to weave a complete fabric out of the threads of Braman's visits to Hester Harvey, Hester's ride westward, and Judge Lindman's abrupt departure. He had a feeling that they were in some way connected.

At a little after seven he finished his mail, went upstairs and knocked at the door of Hester Harvey's room. He stepped inside when she opened the door, and stood, both hands in the pockets of his trousers, looking at her with a smile of repressed malignance.

"Nice night for a ride, wasn't it?" he said, his lips parting a very little to allow the words to filter through.

The woman flashed a quick, inquiring look at him, saw the passion in his eyes, the gleam of malevolent antagonism. And she set herself against it, for her talk with Trevison last night had convinced her of the futility of hope. She met Corrigan's gaze with a look of defiant mockery.

"Swell! I enjoyed every minute of it. Wont you sit down?"

He held himself back, grinning coldly; the woman's look infuriated him.

"No," he said, "I'll stand. I wont be here a minute. You saw Trevison last night, eh? You warned him that I was going to have Carson arrested." He had hazarded this guess, for it had seemed to him that it must be the solution to the mystery, and when he caught the quick, triumphant light in the woman's eyes at his words, he knew he had not erred.

"Yes," she said, "I saw him, and I told him—what Braman told me." She saw his eyes glitter and she laughed harshly. "That's what you wanted to know, isn't it, Jeff—what Braman told me? Well, you know it. I knew you couldn't play square with me. You thought you could dupe me—*again*, didn't you? Well, you didn't, for I snared Braman and pumped him dry. He's kept me posted on your movements; and his little board telephone—Ha, ha! that makes you squirm, doesn't it? But it was all wasted effort—Trevison wont have me—he's through. And I'm through. I'm not going to try any more. I'm going back East, after I get rested. You fight it out with Trevison. But I warn you he'll beat you—and I wish he would! As for that beast Braman, I wish— Ah, let him go, Jeff," she advised, noting the cold fury in his eyes.

"That's all right," he said with a dry laugh. "You and Braman have done well. It hasn't done me any harm, and so we'll forget about it. What do you say to having a drink—and a talk, as in old times, eh?" He seemed suddenly to have conquered his passion, but the queer twitching of his lips warned the woman, and when he essayed to move toward her, smiling pallidly, she darted to the far side of a stand near the center of the room, pulled out a drawer, produced a small revolver and leveled it at him, her eyes wide and glittering with menace.

"Stay where you are, Jeff!" she ordered. "There's murder in your heart, and I know it. But I don't intend to be the victim. I'll shoot if you come one step nearer!"

He smirked at her venomously. "All right," he said. "You're wise. But get out of town on the next train."

"I'll go when I get ready; you can't scare me. Let me alone or I'll go to Rosalind Benham and let her in on the whole scheme."

"Yes, you will—not!" he laughed. "If I know anything about you, you wont do anything that would give Miss Benham to Trevison."

"That's right; I'd rather see her married to you—that would be the refinement of cruelty!"

He laughed sneeringly and stepped out of the door. Waiting a short time, the woman heard his step in the hall. Then she darted to the door, locked it and leaned against it, panting.

"I've done it now," she murmured. "Braman—well, it serves him right!"

CORRIGAN stopped in the barroom and got a drink. Then he walked to the front door and stood in it for an instant, finally stepping down into the

street. Across the street in the banking-room he saw a thin streak of light gleaming through a crevice in the doorway that led from the banking-room to the rear. The light told him that Braman was in the rear room. Selecting a moment when the street in his vicinity was deserted, Corrigan deliberately crossed and stood a moment in the shadow of the bank-building, looking around him. Then he slipped around the building and tapped cautiously on the rear door. An instant later he was standing inside the room, his back against the door.

Braman, arrayed as he had been the night before, had opened the door. He had been just ready to go when he heard Corrigan's knock.

"Going out, Croft?" said Corrigan pleasantly, eying the other intently. "All lit up, too! You're getting to be a gay dog, lately."

There was nothing in Corrigan's bantering words to bring on that sudden qualm of sickening fear that seized the banker. He knew it was his guilt that had done it—guilt and perhaps a dread of Corrigan's rage if he *should* learn of his duplicity.

"Yes, I'm going out." He turned to the mirror on the wall. "I'm getting rather stale, hanging around here so much."

"That's right, Croft. Have a good time. How much money is there in the safe?"

"Two or three thousand dollars." The banker turned from the glass. "Want some? Ha, ha!" he laughed at the other's short nod. "There are other gay dogs, I guess! How much do you want?"

"All you've got."

"All! Jehoshaphat! You must have a big deal on to-night!"

"Yes, big," said Corrigan evenly. "Get it."

He followed the banker into the banking-room, carefully closing the door behind him, so that the light from the rear room could not penetrate. "That's all right," he reassured the banker as the latter noticed the action. "This isn't a public matter."

He stuffed his pockets with the money the banker gave him, and when the other tried to close the door of the safe, he interposed a restraining hand, laughing:

"Leave it open, Croft. It's empty now, and a cracksman trying to get into it would ruin a perfectly good safe for nothing."

"That's right."

They went into the rear room again, Corrigan last, closing the door behind him. Braman went again to the glass, Corrigan standing silently behind him.

Standing before the glass, the banker was seized with a repetition of the sickening fear that had oppressed him at Corrigan's words upon his entrance. It seemed to him that there was a sinister significance behind Corrigan's silence. Then he caught his breath with a shuddering gasp, for he saw Corrigan's face reflected in the glass, looking over his shoulder—a mirthless smirk on it, the eyes cold, and dancing with a merciless and cunning purpose. While he watched, he saw Corrigan's lips open:

"Where's the board-telephone, Braman?"

The banker wheeled, then. He tried to scream—the sound died in a gasping gurgle as Corrigan leaped and throttled him. Later he fought to loosen the grip of the iron fingers at his throat, twisting, squirming, threshing about the room in his agony. The grip held, tightened. When the banker was quite still, Corrigan put out the light, went into the banking-room, where he scattered the papers and books in the safe all around the room. Then he twisted the lock off the door, using an iron bar that he had noticed in a corner when he had come in, and stepped out into the shadow of the building.

CHAPTER XXIII

First Principles

JUDGE LINDMAN shivered, though a merciless, blighting sun beat down on the great stone ledge that spread in front of the opening of the low-ceilinged chamber. The adobe walls, gray-black in the subdued light, were dry as powder and crumbling in spots; the stone floor was ex-

posed in many places. But for the presence of the serene-faced, steady-eyed young man who leaned carelessly against the wall outside, the Judge might have yielded completely to the overpowering conviction that he was dreaming, and that his adventures of the past twelve hours were horrors of his imagination.

Sometime during the night he had awakened on his cot in the rear room of the courthouse to hear a cold, threatening voice warning him to silence. He had recognized the voice, as he had recognized it once before, under similar conditions. He had been gagged, his hands tied behind him. Then he had been lifted, carried outside, placed on the back of a horse in front of his captor, and borne away in the darkness. They had ridden far; then his captor had forced him into his present quarters with a gruff admonition to sleep. Sleep had come hard, and he had done little of it, napping merely, sitting on the stone floor.

"Where have you brought me?" he demanded now of his jailer.

"You're awake, eh?" Trevison grinned as he wheeled and looked in at his prisoner. "This"—he waved a hand toward the ledge and its surroundings —"is an Indian pueblo, long deserted. It makes an admirable prison, Judge. It is also a sort of fort. I'll take you on a tour of examination, if you like. And then you must return here, to stay until you disclose the whereabouts of the original record."

THE Judge paled.

"This is an outrage, Trevison! This is America!"

"Is it?" The young man smiled imperturbably. "There have been times during the past few weeks when I doubted it, very much. I have given up hoping to secure justice in the regular way, and so we are in the midst of a reversion to first principles—which may lead us to our goal."

"What do you mean?"

"That I *must* have the original record, Judge. I mean to have it."

"I deny—"

"Yes—of course. Deny, if you like. We sha'n't argue. Do you want to explore the place? There will be plenty of time for talk."

The Judge's face, as he came out, indicated that he understood.

"Ever make the acquaintance of an Indian pueblo, Judge?"

"No. I came West only a year ago, and I have kept pretty close to my work."

"Well, you'll feel pretty intimate with this one by the time you leave it—if you're obstinate," laughed Trevison.

The pueblo seemed to be nothing more than a jumble of adobe boxes piled in an indiscriminate heap on a gigantic stone level surmounting the crest of a hill. A sheer rock wall, perhaps a hundred feet in height, descended to the surrounding slopes, the latter sweeping down to join the plains.

"I suppose," remarked Trevison presently, "that the people who inhabited these communal houses had laws to govern them—and judges to apply the laws. And I presume that then, as now, the judges were swayed by powerful influences in—"

The Judge glared at his tormentor. The latter laughed as he went on:

"Can you picture a hot-tempered fool of some pueblo tribe abducting a judge of the court of his people and carrying him away to some uninhabited place, there to let him starve until he decides to do the right thing?"

"Starve!" gasped the Judge.

"This place is pretty bare and cheerless, if we except scorpions, horned toads, centipedes and tarantulas. Not a pleasant place to sojourn in until—How long can a man live without eating, Judge?"

"My God!" moaned the Judge, "you talk like a man bereft of his senses!"

"Or like a man who is determined not to be robbed of his rights," added Trevison. "Well, come along. We wont dwell on such things if they depress you."

He took the Judge's arm and escorted him along a broad stone ledge.

"I forgot to mention to you," Trevison observed, "that Clay Levins went to Dry Bottom on a night train. He took with him a letter, which he was to mail at Dry Bottom, explaining your absence to Corrigan. Needless to say,

your signature was forged. But I did so good a job that Corrigan will not suspect. Corrigan will get the letter by to-night. It says that you are going to take a long rest."

The Judge gasped.

"In the first analysis this looks like a rather strange proceeding," said Trevison. "But if you get deeper into it, you see its logic. You know where the original record is. I want it. I mean to have it. One life—a dozen lives—wont stop me. Oh, well, we wont talk about it if you're going to shudder."

He led the Judge up a flimsy, rotted ladder to a flat roof, forcing him to look into a chamber where vermin fled at their appearance. Then through numerous passages, low, narrow, reeking with a musty odor that nauseated the Judge, into an open court with a stone floor, stained dark—in its center a huge oblong block of stone, surmounting a pyramid appalling in its somber suggestiveness.

"The sacrificial altar," said Trevison, grimly. "These stains here, are—"

He stopped, for the Judge had turned his back.

Trevison led him away, back to the chamber from which they had started. The Judge sank to the floor of the chamber, groaning.

The hours dragged slowly. The Judge had been without food or water since the night before. The gurgle of water as Trevison drank from a canteen maddened him.

"I'd like a drink, Trevison."

"Of course. Any man would."

"Can I have one?"

"The minute you tell me where that record is."

The Judge subsided. A moment later Trevison's voice floated into the chamber, cold and resonant:

"I don't think you're in this thing for money, Judge. Corrigan must have some hold on you. What is it?"

The Judge did not answer.

At sundown his captor entered the chamber and gave him a meager draught from the canteen. Then he withdrew and stood on the ledge in front of the door, looking out to the darkening plains. Watching him, a conviction of the futility of resisting him seized the Judge. He stifled a moan—or tried to and did not succeed, for it reached Trevison's ears.

"Did you call, Judge?"

"Yes, yes!" whispered the Judge hoarsely. "I—I want to talk with you, my boy. I want to tell you—all—everything!"

AN hour later they were sitting on the edge of the ledge, their feet dangling, the abyss below them, the desert stars twinkling coldly above them. Trevison had an arm around the Judge's shoulder.

After a while a rider appeared out of the starlit haze of the plains below them. The Judge started. Trevison laughed.

"It's Clay Levins, Judge. I've been watching him for half an hour. He'll stay here with you while I go after the record. Under the bottom drawer, eh?"

Levins hallooed to them. Trevison answered, and he and the Judge walked forward to meet Levins at the crest of the slope.

"Slicker'n a whistle!" declared Levins, answering the question Trevison put to him. "I mailed the letter an' come back on the train that brought it to him!" He grinned at the Judge. "I reckon you're a heap dry an' hungry by this time?"

"The Judge has feasted," said Trevison. "I'm going after the record. You're to stay here with the Judge until I return. Then the three of us will ride to Las Vegas, where we will take a train to Santa Fe, to turn the record over to the Circuit Court."

"Where's the record?"

Trevison told him, and Levins grumbled. "Corrigan'll have his deputies guardin' the courthouse, most likely. If you run ag'in' 'em, they'll bore you."

"I'll take care of myself—I promise you that!" he laughed. A moment later the watchers on the ledge saw him riding away into the haze of the plains.

The conclusion of "Firebrand Trevison" will appear in the May issue of THE BLUE BOOK MAGAZINE.

Sibb's Six Specifics

by

Ellis Parker Butler

ON this particular sunny morning when Mattie Miller stepped from the cool hall of Hanway's upon the wide veranda, Walter Sibb, instead of greeting her with his usual cheery "Ah, good morning!" looked up from a letter he held in his hand and said, with extreme gravity, "Good morning, Miss Miller!"

"Oh!" she exclaimed in a tone that betrayed how great her interest in Walter Sibb had become, "you have bad news!"

Walter Sibb folded the letter and placed it in his pocket.

"Yes," he said. "My Uncle Oscar is dead."

"I'm sorry," said Miss Mattie; and her voice conveyed more sympathy than the mere words indicate. She had no idea how deeply Walter Sibb loved his Uncle Oscar, nor whether he loved him at all, nor, indeed, anything about Walter's Uncle Oscar. It was enough that Walter Sibb's forehead was creased with lines of what might have been either sorrow or annoyance. In either case Miss Mattie felt her sympathy would not be resented. Thus rapidly had their intimacy grown.

Miss Mattie was, when not at Hanway's, Dr. Martha J. Miller; and it had been a great relief to be able to place her rapidly increasing medical practice temporarily in the hands of Dr. Fanny Norton and to steal away for a month of absolute freedom from the care of other people's ills. When she tossed her suit-case into the creaking suburban taxicab at her office-door and gave the word "station" to the driver, she put away all thoughts of medicine. For a month she meant to be plain Mattie Miller having a good time, and not Dr. Martha J. Miller, successful but overworked "female physician." At Hanway's she registered as "Mattie J. Miller" and became at once one of the summer pleasurers. So merry-eyed and care-free was she that not even the neurotic Mrs. Higgs, whose series of physicians was as long as the pedigree of a king and who should have been able to detect a physician at first glance, suspected Miss Mattie for an instant.

Not until her third day at Hanway's did Miss Mattie meet Walter Sibb, introduced by a veranda acquaintance, but she had singled him out from among the other men almost upon her arrival. "Eighteen males and one man," was what she had said to herself when she saw Walter Sibb on the veranda. No doubt she maligned the eighteen, or some of them, for it was a sweeping characterization, made upon too slight investigation; but she let it stand, because, after meeting Walter Sibb, she had no desire to bother with the others at all.

WALTER SIBB had a certain well-balanced and serious cheerfulness that was most satisfying to Miss Mattie. His motto might have been: "Keep an even mind under all circumstances." His deep-set eyes, face longer than broad, and calm self-pos-

session were in marked contrast to the evident desire to be gay and happy that marked the other male guests of Hanway's. Walter Sibb seemed to need no desire to be gay, because he was so even-mindedly happy. His happiness was not effervescent; it was deep and serene. It was as if his happiness was grounded in his soul and anchored there beyond all chance of disaster. Perhaps it was the contrast between this and Miss Mattie's frank eagerness in happiness that drew them so closely together, almost without either understanding that the tie was becoming so strong. And now the satisfying happiness of Walter Sibb was too evidently stricken by the news of the death of his uncle. Miss Mattie was all sympathy.

"I'm sorry," said Miss Mattie. She was tempted to add "Walter," making it the more sympathetic "I'm sorry, Walter!" but although he had been calling her "Miss Mattie" quite freely, she hesitated. It might be too evidently an admission that she liked him well.

"It—it is extremely annoying," said Walter Sibb. "I can't see why he did it, unless he did it to annoy me."

"Died to annoy you?" asked Miss Mattie with surprise. They had descended from the veranda and were taking their customary path to the flower-scented hillside.

"No, not that," said Walter Sibb. "A man must—I suppose a man must pass sooner or later. I don't blame him for that. It is leaving me his laboratory. It clears," he said with a frown, "—it clears two hundred thousand dollars a year."

Miss Mattie turned and faced him.

"He left you a laboratory that earns two hundred thousand dollars a year!" she exclaimed.

"Of course," said Walter, as if he must do the dead man justice, "I am the only man left in the family. I suppose that was what he thought. He had no one else to leave it to. I should not blame him. But it is a great trial."

"But two hundred thousand dollars a year!" cried Miss Mattie.

"He was a good man," said Walter with a sigh. "He was honest. He worshiped his father and everything his father did. And I suppose his father was honest. I suppose Uncle Oscar supposed he was carrying on a great work. And then there were the testimonials."

"The testimonials?" queried Miss Mattie.

"Bales and bales of them," said Walter sadly. "Thousands of photographs —hundreds of thousands of testimonials—and all genuine! Naturally they would convince a simple-minded man like Uncle Oscar. He believed them. He believed his father was a great physician. He believed Tom Munro was trying to blackmail—"

THEN Miss Mattie understood. Until that moment she had not connected the name of Walter Sibb with the Sibb of Sibb's Six Specifics, but the reference to Tom Munro and the articles in a famous weekly exposing Sibb's Six Specifics—and other proprietary medicines—as frauds and fakes, was too direct to leave a doubt in her mind. Walter Sibb had inherited the great Sibb medicine factory, and he did not relish the idea.

"Then your Uncle Oscar was 'Good Old Doctor Sibb!'" she exclaimed.

"His father was," said Walter almost dolefully. "He was a good old man. He did not know he was putting forth poisonous trash. He was of the old school. He was honest. Uncle Oscar was honest." He walked awhile in moody silence. "And it is a great, a very great industry," he said at length.

Miss Mattie kept silence. Walter was struggling with the problem, and it was not for her to interfere in the struggle—not yet, at any rate. She bent and plucked a flower.

"It would throw a thousand workers out of employment," said Walter glumly. "A thousand at once! And there are so many idle. Some of them would starve. Have I the right to starve them?"

Miss Mattie said nothing. She picked the flower to pieces and plucked another.

"And then—and then," said Walter Sibb, "there are the widows and orphans."

"What widows and orphans?" asked Miss Mattie.

"That own the minority stock," said Walter. "Uncle Oscar sold stock, and he would not sell it to anyone but widows and orphans. It paid twenty per cent, and he wanted to help widows and orphans. He was a good man. If I— Can I let the widows and orphans starve? Can I?"

"Couldn't you give it all away?" asked Miss Mattie timidly. She did not know much about corporations and business. "Couldn't you give—"

Instantly, as she saw the deep frown on Walter Sibb's face, she knew she had made a mistake. It was not in a desire to free himself from the responsibility of running the laboratory that Walter Sibb hated the predicament his uncle had placed him in. The majority of the stock in the Sibb's Six Specifics was now his. It was in his power to kill what he believed to be a fraud and a menace. It was a matter of conscience with Walter Sibb. They walked on, Walter striking angrily at the herbage with his stick, Miss Mattie thinking deeply.

"WHAT are the Six Specifics?" she asked at length.

"Fakes and frauds," said Walter violently.

"I know! But what are they called? What are they supposed to cure?"

Walter told her. There was Sibb's Alimentary Bitters, composed of ninety-eight per cent alcohol, one per cent burnt sugar and one per cent quinine, the last to give a bitter taste. It was supposed to cure all stomach troubles. There was Sibb's Liver and Kidney Corrector. For all the curative properties it contained, it might have been made of chalk and yellow ochre in eighty-seven per cent alcohol. So with the remaining four Specifics. They were all simple and palpable frauds. They could cure nothing but a temporary desire for alcohol, and this they fed as they sated. Miss Mattie walked with her head lowered as Walter Sibb recited these facts. It was as if he were reciting Tom Munro's article in the weekly. Walter Sibb ended with a sniff of disgust. He dropped upon an outcropping rock and clasped his head in his hands.

"The poor working-girls! The widows! The orphans!" he exclaimed dully.

"Walter!" said Miss Mattie, and he looked up into a brightly smiling face. His eyes expressed a query—a query combined with hope. "I think—I think, Walter, I know a way!" said Miss Mattie, bold in the use of his name, now that it had slipped her lips. "I'm sure I know a way! I am certain I know a way to make everything all right for you and for everybody!"

"How?" he asked eagerly.

"I wont tell you now," she said. "I wont tell you until I have worked it all out, but I'm sure I know the way. You can trust me, Walter. I wouldn't say it unless I meant it."

Walter looked deep into her honest eyes. With a feeling of immense relief, he drew a deep breath. He took her hand in his and drew her toward him, and she seated herself upon the rock at his side. She tried, gently, to disengage her hand, but he held it firmly.

"Miss Mattie," he said, "you may not know it, but you called me 'Walter' a moment ago. You called me 'Walter' twice. But for this mind-wrecking catastrophe of Uncle Oscar's death, I would ask you to let me call you 'Mattie,' or something even dearer than 'Mattie.' No, listen!" he urged. "I do not know how I will come out in the Specifics affair. I do not know how strong I am; whether I shall have the strength to throw Uncle Oscar's legacy back in his teeth, and he a dead man, or whether I shall succumb to the temptation of the two hundred thousand dollars combined with the good of the employees and the widows and orphans. Until you spoke my name, calling me Walter, no false hopes found root in my heart. I knew I could not hope to marry you, for I—to be frank, Miss Mattie, I cannot afford to."

MISS MATTIE tried to speak, but he silenced her.

"Wait!" he said. "I knew I could not afford to marry you, and that it might be years, even if I started at

once to create an income, before I could expect to marry you. But now—"

"Now?" asked Miss Mattie softly.

"Now," said Walter Sibb, "I know I can never marry you."

Miss Mattie drew a quick breath.

"Because," said Walter Sibb sadly, "I know myself as you do not know me. I should make you unhappy. If I fall before the temptation of Uncle Oscar's two hundred thousand dollars,—Sibb's Six Specifics' annual income,—I shall be so mean, so despicable, that I shall never dare to look in your sweet, honest face again, and—"

"And?" prompted Miss Mattie as he hesitated.

"And if I am strong enough to do what I should, and exert the power of the majority stock left me by Uncle Oscar, close the laboratory, throw the poor working-girls on the street and take the bread from the mouths of the widow-and-orphan stockholders, I will always see the faces of the sufferers before me, and I shall never dare to look in your sweet, honest face again, and—"

"And?" prompted Miss Mattie again.

"And—and there you are, you see!" said Walter Sibb wearily. "Miss Mattie, I am a ruined man. I face a lifetime of sorrow if I must go on making and selling six rank frauds like Sibb's Six Specifics, or I face a lifetime of sorrow over having driven my working-girls into the hungry streets and the widows and orphans to paupers' graves. I must give you up, dearest Miss Mattie, and when I look in your sweet, honest face—"

"Oh, tut-tut for my sweet, honest face!" cried Miss Mattie, jumping up from the rock and drawing her hand away from Walter's clasp. "I dare say my sweet, honest face is an asset, in a way, but my sweet, honest brain is what I am counting on just now. Do cheer up, Walter! You look like a graveyard on a damp day. I know there is a way out. Give me three days,—just three days,—and if I cannot show you the way, then—then—" She could not utter the words, "Then I will give you up." She said: "Then you may be justified in giving way to despair."

They turned and walked slowly back toward the inn, but they were silent. Miss Mattie went at once to her room, and for three days she hardly left it, even for meals. Now and then, it is true, she came down to say a cheering word to Walter, but the word did not seem to cheer him. His gloom seemed to increase from day to day. He moped on the veranda.

IN her room Miss Mattie sat at the small table the inn provided each guest, and before her were six sheets of paper; and as she worked, they became filled with scribbled words and signs. Again and again she went over each sheet, thinking long and deeply over each item on the sheet, correcting and amending. At the head of each sheet was a title. One bore the title "Sibb's Alimentary Bitters;" another bore the title "Sibb's Liver and Kidney Corrector." There was one sheet for each of Sibb's Six Specifics, and the words on the sheets were the names of drugs and solvents; the signs were quantity signs.

Out of her book- and college-knowledge and out of her practical experience with the diseases the Six Specifics were supposed to cure or alleviate, Miss Mattie was formulating new combinations of drugs that would actually cure or alleviate. Sibb's Alimentary Bitters, if compounded after the formula Miss Mattie was so carefully preparing and amending, would cost no more to manufacture than the trashy, alcoholic stuff Walter Sibb's Uncle Oscar had been putting on the market for years, and it would work some cures and give alleviation in all cases. The same was true of her formula for each of the others of Sibb's Six Specifics. As formulated by Miss Mattie, the honestest and most conscientious man might safely manufacture and sell them—not, perhaps, as cures but as remedies. They were such combinations as she herself would willingly prescribe for her own patients. It was with a feeling of splendid elation that she completed the last of the formulas, folded them small and, with them in her hand, sought out Walter Sibb.

Miss Mattie did not jump up from

her work-table and run to Walter Sibb. She was too much a female to do that. She bathed in crisply cool water, spent a goodly time over her hair and chose her most becoming dress. It must be a fair and sweet Miss Mattie that carried his happiness to Walter Sibb. She knew, the moment she met him, that her preparations had been wasted. He was so deep in his distress that he did not notice her charming freshness at all.

"Come!" she exclaimed cheerfully. "I have it! I have the way out!"

Walter Sibb arose wearily. Miss Mattie chattered brightly as they traced their way to the jutting rock. She made him seat himself, and then, with a charming gesture, she put the folded papers in his hands. He opened them.

The first—the topmost paper—was the one with the new formula of Sibb's Alimentary Bitters. Walter Sibb, upon whose face had come a momentary gleam of relief, looked at this, and his face fell again. He stared at it as if unseeingly. He held it so long before his eyes that Miss Mattie began to feel uncomfortable. Then he slipped the sheet aside and looked at the next. It was the formula for the new Sibb's Liver and Kidney Corrector. Walter Sibb's gloom deepened. At each fresh sheet, with its honest formula, his gloom became denser and denser.

"DON'T you—don't you understand?" asked Miss Mattie at last nervously.

"More drugs? More medicines? More specifics?" asked Walter Sibb in a tone close to disgust.

"You don't understand," said Miss Mattie. "These are honest drugs, honest medicines, honest specifics! These are combinations a reputable physician might prescribe. If you order your laboratory to substitute these formulas for those you now use—"

"What difference would that make?" asked Walter Sibb almost roughly. "I couldn't be back of them, anyway, could I? Don't you see how it would look for me, a—"

"But Walter, if—"

"No! I can never run a patent-medicine business and retain my self-respect," he said firmly. "And I can't close this one and retain my peace of mind. It is no use!"

"But if the specifics were honest? If they did cure?"

"They don't cure," said Walter Sibb. "Uncle Oscar's wouldn't cure. These will not cure."

"These will not—" Miss Mattie was too shocked to complete the sentence. Then she remembered that Walter Sibb did not know she had prepared the formulas herself. "But these *will* cure!" she declared. "I know, for I prepared them myself. I have used them in my practice."

And now it was Walter Sibb who was surprised.

"In your practice? In your practice?" he repeated.

"Yes," Miss Mattie declared gleefully. "You didn't know I was a physician, and a very good one too, did you? But I am! I am very much of a physician, Walter Sibb. So you see, when I prepare a formula—"

Instead of leaping up to clasp her in his arms, as she had hoped he would, Walter Sibb groaned.

"You, a doctor of medicine?" he said. "Then it doesn't matter. I couldn't marry you anyway, then. It is all over. Nothing matters. You can see how awful it was for me to inherit a medicine factory. Can't you see how impossible it would be for me to have my wife practicing medicine?"

As the full truth came to her, Miss Mattie looked at him aghast. She too saw the impossibility of it all. Her heart throbbed with sorrow on her own account but still more it throbbed with pity for Walter Sibb, the Christian Science healer who had inherited a patent-medicine factory!

"The Stump," a delightful story of boyhood by Ellis Parker Butler, will appear in an early issue.

The Fathers of Polly

by A. C. Allenson

ELEVEN o'clock, and a fine, bracing, late-winter morning. "Dimples" Holt sat in the city offices of Ransome and Holt on Broadway. Gayly debonair of aspect, he was in excellent spirits, despite the fact that he had not gone to bed till five and had risen at seven-thirty. He lay back in a luxurious lounge-chair that would have cut the credit of any ordinary firm at least thirty per cent; his legs were cocked up on a paper-littered desk. A small, vellum-bound copy of the Iliad lay on the table near by, ready to provide mental refreshment when the memorandum he had in hand had been thoroughly studied.

The contents of the slip of paper must have been gratifying, for ever and anon he burst into song, to the unconcealed horror of Judson, office-manager, in the adjoining room. Judson was a serious person to whom levity in business was something worse than crime. A criminal is often an astute man of affairs; a feather-weight, never. He suspected that his frivolous principal had been making a night of it, and Judson disapproved of orgies, particularly when they left hold-overs with harmonical fringes. His own musical repertory was bounded by the "Doxology" in the sphere of sacred song and "Tramp, Tramp, Tramp, the Boys Are Marching," in that of secular.

Usually Dimples warbled the latest lyrics from froth-and-frill musical comedy, or the selections blared to the breeze by the more popular street-piano organs. This morning, however, he was singing in a foreign tongue, something with a lot of "Adore" and "Amore" and things like that in it—French or Italian, Judson suspected, either of which implied a sentiment too improper to be nudely exposed in moral English. There were runs and trills to some of it, with now and again a descent into rumbly bits of basso profundo. Judson was glad when he heard Mr. Holt's friend, the next-door lawyer, bang on the wall and demand if the singer thought he was Caruso, begging him, as he loved him, to chop it off, as he had a serious maiden lady just coming in to have her will drawn. Dimples reviled him as an unappreciative Philistine but obligingly dropped the music.

The fact was, he had been to the Metropolitan Opera House the night before, and had spent the subsequent hours until four, with Polly and a party of friends — Polly otherwise being Signorina Maria Serafina Campanini, the famous young soprano, who had made her farewell appearance for the season, closing her engagement in a blaze of great glory.

PICKING up the Iliad, after putting the sheet of paper aside, Dimples was immediately immersed in its pages and lost to the world of Judsons, legal luminaries and maiden clients—so much so that he did not hear the door open behind him, close again and a light step steal across the floor to the back of

his chair. He was roused by a pair of soft hands covering his eyes and a light, fragrant kiss falling like a scented rose petal on his nose. He betrayed no alarm whatever, but smiled with vast content of soul as he laid the book on his knees.

"That's Betty. No, it's Josie. Wrong again, it's you, Jane. Go to the foot of the class, dunce! Yes, ma'am, I'm going. It's Polly! Kindly repeat the operation and just one inch lower down," he requested.

"No, Daddy Dimples, you don't deserve it, after those dreadful revelations. I hate to go away and leave you unprotected, you dear old thing." And the dark, graceful girl, who had moved the opera house to ecstasy a few hours before, sat down in his desk-chair and swung to and fro in it.

"And so you are really going, Polly?" he queried mournfully. "Leaving the dovecot, the parental cage and the ancient papa-bird, for the woods and wilds of Europe?"

"Yes. London, Paris, St. Petersburg and Milan," she replied. "I hope Daddy's proud of his daughter?"

"Proud isn't the word, Polly," he replied. "My chest swelled out like a pouter pigeon's last night. I am jealous of Europe and the kings and lords and dukes and things. Well, now about business. We have got the 'Two Shoes' into shape at last. You rake in a quarter-million in cash and fifty-five per cent of the stock. It is going to be a big thing, so I retained a controlling interest for you. The cash is invested. Here is a memorandum of it, and we'll pay a visit to the Deposit Company's place and run over the securities."

The girl stopped swinging and sat regarding him silently, her face very gentle and grave.

"I don't know how to say what I think and feel, Daddy Dimples," she said. "I know I am the luckiest girl in all the world to have had two such fathers, and I try to be the gratefullest."

"And if your old daddy didn't look after you, I'd like to know who would," he said. "I know what you mean, dear, and all you think, and it makes me a very proud and happy man. I only wish your real father Epiphanio could have lived to see it, but maybe he knows. I thought of him last night in all that blaze of light and grandeur. Think, Polly, what it has meant to me to be a sharer in it all. The luck doesn't come everybody's way to have a pretty and famous daughter bestowed on one. Remember, though, if I hear of any moth-eaten count, with a rat-hole in the rocks that needs open plumbing and steam heat, hanging round, I'll come over by wireless and stuff him headfirst into one of the cracks of his ancestral dug-out."

"If I thought it would really bring you, I'd annex one right off," she replied, and they went again into affairs of business.

"What a funny name for the mine—the 'Two Shoes,'" she commented.

"Yes, an absurd one," he answered. "You know how these names are given? Some silly catchword, or rustic witticism. Well, it fetched a quarter of a million and controlling interest. We couldn't have done better had it been called 'Paradise.' Come along, Polly; we'll hop along to the Deposit place and then have some lunch."

IT was the year after the separation between the two prospectors, Bulstrode Ransome and Dimples Holt, the separation that divers persons—notably, and to their exceeding discomfiture, three land-pirates, Mycroft, Skinner and Pye—had misconstrued as a bitter personal quarrel. Dimples had yet to make his strike on what came later to be known as the "Holt Discovery." "Bull" Ransome, silent, grimly dour, was, as men thought, still fighting a losing battle with fortune at Mooseyard, like some indomitable Titan.

There had wandered into the hills, even at this early stage, unconscious pioneers of the great gold-rush of after-days, a few dark-skinned, earringed Italians, transplanted from the campagna east of Naples and Vesuvius—a curiously vivid little colony in those bleak uplands that are swept most of the year by bitter winds from the Arctic ice-fields.

Its members were attractive, if for nothing more than the warmth, vitality and color they gave to a coldly gray-

and-white world. The gay kindliness of those alien folk, conspicuous among the phlegmatic natives, appealed to a kindred spirit in Dimples Holt. They, in turn, recognized the absence of the domineering Northern contempt in him and responded to a rare friendliness. There came periods in the notable after-history of Dimples, when the genial, uncalculating kindliness that radiated from the cosmopolitan New Yorker, came back to him, laden with a thousandfold harvest of practical good will.

It was the early afternoon of a glowing summer day. For the good of his soul and under the pretext of fishing, Dimples had taken a day's respite from rock-pounding. The lake was a flawless mirror, the water clear as crystal, the fish in indifferent sporting mood. Tired of inaction, but finding the place much too pleasant to abandon, Dimples fixed his rod to one of the seats of the punt, the line trailing over the shingly shallows near the tree-shaded lake margin.

Then lying on his back at the bottom of the punt, he read of sulking Achilles by another, far-distant shore. Presently he was roused to the world of to-day by the pleasant voice of a girl.

"HELLO, there! Hello! You've got a bite!"

And leaning on an elbow, he saw a girl of perhaps sixteen. A pretty, slight slip of a dark-faced child, her black eyes dancing with fun, a smile flitting about her delightful red-lipped mouth. She had taken off her shoes and stockings and was wading on the smooth, fine gravel, her short, striped cotton skirt gathered closely about her slim figure, just out of reach of the water. The shapely head was uncovered, the white cotton waist open at the throat.

"Great snakes! so I have," said Dimples, jumping to his feet. "Think of that!" And he set to work with great enthusiasm and many "Whoa, theres" and "No, you don'ts" to deal with the hooked monster.

"A three-pounder, if he's an ounce! Gee, Whitaker! Pulls like a tugboat! Isn't he the dandy scrapper? Come along to home and papa, oh, you beauty!" Picking up a landing-net with his left hand, he played his catch in wide circles, then reeled him in with prodigious splashings, stuck the net deftly under him and landed the finnan haddie, amid the girl's shrieks of delight.

"Guess, he's been strolling on the beach without his parasol and got sunburned," he said, examining the catch critically. "Got any more haddies in your pocket? No? Well, come aboard, and we'll pull out where the water's deeper, and the sun don't bake them for you."

She hesitated a moment; then, putting on her shoes and stockings, she stepped into the boat, and they pushed out into the middle of the lake. He had a fine new rod and the most seductive of flies. She produced a tin of grasshoppers, and with a hook and piece of whipcord had half a dozen trout in the boat before he got a bite. He put down his rod and regarded her gravely.

"You're cheating," he said. "I sha'n't play any more. I saw you peep over the side, and that fish came and looked at you and went right off and made a grab at the hook. Anyway, we've caught enough, so you might just quit killing the poor things and explain to me how it is that when the rest of the fairy folk went away, before all this dynamiting, steam-whistling and pick-axing began, you stayed behind."

"I don't go till next week," she explained, laughing.

"I knew it!" he exclaimed, surveying the attractive, boyish figure. "And to what new fairyland?"

"New York," she replied. "You know my father, Epiphanio Campanini? I have been away at school for three years, and came back to spend a few days at home."

"Why, yes, your father is a great friend of mine," replied Dimples. He thought of Campanini's wife, and wondered at the girl's type.

"My mother died when I was a baby," she continued. "I want to become a singer. They say in New York that I have a voice, and I am going to have it cultivated here first, then in Italy. I shall come back to New York to sing afterward. You will come and hear me?"

"Wont I just?" he replied enthusi-

astically. "If I have to rob a bank to get railroad fare and admission price—What is it to be, musical comedy, concert or grand opera?"

"Grand opera, of course," she replied as gravely as if the engagement had already been booked.

"Of course," he agreed as solemnly. "A silly question to ask. I'll start in to save right away. What is the full name? I'll want to know so that I can watch the bills outside the Opera House."

"Maria Serafina Campanini," she said. "That's the name that will be on the posters, but my friends call me Polly. You see, Maria sounds pretty stiff. Mary is better, but Polly suits me best, they say."

"I THINK so too. Yes, Polly suits you perfectly," he decided critically. "I'll make a note of the full name, to be quite sure. 'Maria Serafina Campanini.' There I've got it. It will look fine on the big posters, Polly. I wonder— I wonder if you would—"

"What is it you wonder?" she asked.

"If you would sing to me now. It's great fun to make believe; don't you think so? Just fancy I am the world of New York; this, the stage of the Opera House; you, the famous singer you are going to be. Then I can tell people when you come back as queen that I heard you first the day you fastened the finnan haddie on my hook, that you sang to me then, and we became friends, real friends, and always will be friends, world without end, amen. Eh, Polly?"

Her eyes danced and sparkled, a rosy shyness for a moment flitted over her pretty face. She nodded and began to sing a simple little ballad, Dimples listening, with bent head, in delighted amazement. The girl was already an *artiste*. In her voice was the clear rapturous abandon of the skylark's hymn to sun and morning blue, the golden melody of the nightingale in the hushed grove, beneath soft, starry, velvet skies.

Dimples rowed to shore presently, and watched her flit, light and graceful as a woodland nymph, up the hillside to the farmhouse. Then he set off to tramp through the woods, whistling and thinking, first of the girl, then of her father. Campanini had always been a fascinating study, and the discovery of Polly did not lessen the man's interest. The personality of the tall, slenderly built Italian was unusual and compelling. His shaven, patrician face had a classic, sculptured dignity that separated him from his fellows as distinctly as if he had belonged to a superior caste. Uneducated, he had the grave-mannered, old-world courtesy of the natural gentleman, a fineness of quality that environment could neither destroy nor coarsen. Knowing him, one might understand the wild flower charm and fineness of Polly.

HIS second marriage had been a disaster. Dimples now recalled the woman—tall, buxom, half her husband's age, with great, dark eyes of slumberous fire and laughing deviltry. The bloom of vigorous youth tinting the soft duskiness of the vivid, oval face, red lips parted to show strong, milk-white teeth, gay yellow-and-crimson scarf slipped back from the shining coils of raven hair and folded across the tightly laced, full bust—she possessed the beauty of a goddess, the unwisdom of a child, the instincts of an animal.

Naturally there had been the completion of the triangle—an Italian peasant admirer, a lavish spender with plenty of money and the noisy gayety that contrasted strongly with the gravity of the elderly husband. He was a big, robust man, the most noticeable thing about him being a pair of girl's feet on which he wore the neatest of pointed, patent-leather shoes, sufficiently odd-looking in that rough country to elicit comment. Some camp wit named him "Little Two Shoes," and most of the colony knew the Adonis by no other name.

Those who understood Campanini, or thought they did, could not fail to perceive the tragic possibilities of the situation. The Neapolitan, in such cases, usually has his own sharp corrective for household errancies.

To the general astonishment, the final scene was a lame and undramatic anti-climax. The two took their departure in apparent peace and amity with the deserted husband. The woman went

first, ostensibly to visit friends at a distance; the man, later. There had been even a farewell celebration in Two Shoes' honor at Campanini's farm, as if to proclaim the amicable compact. Feasting, drinking, dancing—then the man took his departure to join the woman.

It was a tawdry, if peaceful, ending. Gossip had it that the husband had received a round sum of money, and when, about the same time, he purchased an addition to his mining-lands, satiric observers, deciding that the price of complaisance had bought it, named the venture "The Two Shoes." There was much subsequent mirth, as at the turning of an exceptionally neat trick, when it became known that the woman, on her way west, had called at the bank in town and withdrawn her husband's savings. The story of complaisance was false, as a matter of fact; that of the woman's theft, true.

AT the edge of the wood Dimples came to the pit where Campanini worked alone in his plodding, unresting fashion. It was wonderful what the solitary man had accomplished. Dawn to dark, his labor limited only by the sun, seven days a week, with an hour off for mass on Sunday, the human mole toiled, pick, pick, picking, with an occasional shot, then pick and shovel and drill again. Industry Dimples could admire, perhaps the better because aloofly. The lure of the dream-treasure hoarded by Nature near her heart, he understood too; yet the ceaselessly bent back and downward gaze always appealed to him as rather pitiful and pathetic.

Looking down into the pit, he was about to shout a greeting, when he saw that Campanini was not alone. He checked himself, drew back, wondering what Murton's business with the Italian could be. No good—he was sure of that. A sharper, banned by the reputable element in camp, where standards of judgment were not overexacting, Murton was suspected of being the "fence" of pilferers of precious ore; but so far he had escaped detection. None knew his reputation better than Campanini, who was a shrewd judge of men.

The visitor was speaking earnestly, from time to time pounding a package he carried as if to emphasize his words, the Italian listening with head bowed over the pick. What was said, Dimples could not hear. Evidently the reasoning and pounding were not convincing, for the miner shook his head. Then, with an angry gesture, Murton opened the package to show its contents, folded it up again and waited to hear what the other had to say.

The last argument must have been conclusive. Dimples saw the bills counted into the outstretched palm. Murton then backed away to the foot of the ladder, as if afraid to turn, climbed quickly to the surface and disappeared down the road. Dimples waited; then he walked forward to the clearing where the shanty and hoist stood near the brink of the pit. The mole was at work again, as if to make up for lost time, pick, pick, picking at the ground.

"HELLO, there, Bifanio!" shouted Holt. "There's another day tomorrow. Don't finish all work today."

The miner lifted his head and waved an answering greeting. Throwing down his pick, he climbed up and came forward to meet a more welcome visitor. They entered the shanty. Glasses and a straw-covered flask of Italian wine were produced. Epiphanio filled his pipe from Dimples' pouch, and the two prospectors talked of accomplishments and hopes for the dawning of the golden day when faith should be lost in sight. Yet the Italian was not himself. Something had ruffled the placid exterior of the deep, mysterious life.

Then Dimples spoke of the girl, their little amusing adventure, her aspirations and the marvel of her glorious voice. It was the highest tribute Epiphanio could pay him that the hour spent with Polly roused neither suspicion nor fear. He guarded the girl as the apple of his eye, his wary prudence perplexed at times by her frank American freedom. Her stepmother she had scarcely known; the history of domestic trouble had been kept from her. He had suffered her only lately to visit him for a few days, for a mining-camp was no good home for her. She was the jewel, rare, radi-

ant, priceless, of the lone man's inner heart. Her dreams were his beliefs. The prophecies of her future were more to him than his mine's utmost promise, except as that would aid her.

He bared his heart to Dimples. One day she would be a great *artiste,* before whom a world would bow. With all his fervent heart he believed it. To him the good God had intrusted a treasure, and he was faithful to the charge laid upon him. The farm earned money too slowly and insufficiently. For the common life it was more than enough, but not for the great purpose; so he had left it to his hired man. One day, by the blessing of God, the pick or shot would open the treasure-house, and the task would be accomplished.

And to Dimples, who had seen in the bent back, the unresting toil, only the symbol of a dull, lifeless avarice, there came a vision of a life outwardly dark and solitary, irradiated within by the glowing lamp of self-sacrifice.

AS they talked of the girl and her dreams, Epiphanio gradually led up to the matter uppermost in his mind, and now he spoke of it. He was growing old. Life was uncertain. Accident in the pits was not uncommon.

There was some heart-trouble, continued the Italian, of which the doctors had warned him. Unusual exertion, a moment's sudden excitement, and the candle might swiftly go out. That would be of little moment if the task were done. Indeed it might be better so, for such as he could be no fit father for the woman Polly was to be. There was a sublime dignity in the man's self-abasement, more of spirit than word, that touched Dimples inexpressibly. He was content to be the dust of the road over which she should pass to honors and fame; his love, living or dying, was the ladder by which she could climb. He spoke of the depth and tenderness of her affection for him as a thing of wonder past belief.

Dimples now thought he understood how this supreme love had enabled the man to pass over, as inconsiderable trifles, the bitter humiliations of his own life. The arrows of outrageous fortune had rebounded unheeded from the impenetrable armor of selfless love. And he wondered again what the significance of Murton's dark presence in the life of the man before him could be. There was, he felt, a more immediate dread than that of the ordinary hazard of life, in the Italian's mind. Then, with a great effort, Campanini spoke plainly.

"I want," he said slowly, "to give all my land, my farm, this mine, everything, to Polly. To give it now—now. I have talked with the lawyer in the city. He tells me I can do it, but she is a child. She must have a guardian, some good man, to see that no one steals it from her, to take care of her when I die, or trouble comes."

He looked up at Holt with grave, searching eyes.

"Mr. Holt, will you be guardian, father to my girl, when I go or trouble comes, and keep the thieves and wolves away?" The sweat stood on the man's brow; his lip trembled; the hand, outstretched in appeal, shook.

Had Dimples been more of a business man, he might have hesitated prudently and at least asked time for consideration. Being the man he was, he answered at once:

"Yes, I will, Bifanio." And he gave his hand in ratification.

The light of a great gladness shone on the swarthy, dust-grimed face.

The following day they met in the lawyer's office in the city, and in due course Dimples became the trustee of the estate for Polly, and her legal guardian.

DURING the ensuing weeks the puzzle of the relations between Murton and Epiphanio engaged much of Dimples' thought. That the Italian was being blackmailed was beyond all doubt. Two or three times he gave Campanini an opening so plainly that had he wished to speak he would have accepted it.

Casting about for possible reasons, and spending many convivial evenings with members of the Italian Benevolent Society of which he was a much esteemed honorary member, he began to pick up bits of inside, intimate history concerning the colony and its members. Not without reason had Dimples been

regarded as a star newspaper man—when he cared to work—among the New York aristocracy of that eminent brotherhood.

At last after many weeks of thought and investigation, he felt that he was on the right track, framed up a theory of his own, and set to work to discover whether he was as wise a tracker as he had been credited with being. Gradually the tangled skein began to unwind, the mystery to emerge to the light. One day he was called to New York, and there he spent many days in not over-refined society, but profitably, notwithstanding. Then he called to see how Polly was progressing grand opera-ward and returned to camp in excellent form.

The following day, as he sat at his solitary lunch, he saw Murton ride past, evidently on his way to his banker, Campanini. While finishing his cheese and beer, Dimples decided that his trusteeship had responsibilities as well as privileges; so he took the trail after Murton. When he reached the pit, the two men were in close conversation below. This time Dimples made no bones about interruption, but clambered down the ladder. Murton, hearing footsteps, swung round angrily, a frown on his face. There was but one man in the wide Oxbow country he feared more than Holt. Ransome had once manhandled him in modern cave-man fashion, and it had hurt fearfully. Holt had milder manners, but somehow Murton felt that trickery, useful in handling the Italian, would look less effective in contact with the city man.

"WHAT are you doing here, Murton?" demanded Dimples. "I warned you before against setting foot on property I control."

"Time enough to talk when I'm on your property," replied Murton. "I'm on Campanini's land. When I feel like going, or maybe when he tells me to go, I'll think about it."

"Campanini has nothing to do with this place, except as a workman," answered Dimples. "The property belongs to a ward of mine, so clear out and keep off."

"A pretty neat trick," said Murton, turning to the Italian. "I guess that's what you meant by turning down my little proposition just now."

"What proposition?" demanded Dimples. "Look here, Murton, I've been watching this blackmailing game pretty closely. What does it mean?"

"Ask the dago." Murton grinned evilly. "Speak up, Campanini. It's up to you, or since Mr. Holt appears to be boss here, if you like, I'll put it to him."

"I've no fancy for being blackmailed in the open air," said Dimples. "Somebody might hear and laugh. If I've got to eat crow, I'd sooner do it privately. I'll suspend my prohibition against you coming on my property so that we can talk in my house."

"Suits me," replied Murton. Campanini picked up his coat, and they went down to the shack.

"There's no one within hearing," said Holt, closing the door. "Now, Murton, let the black cat out of the bag."

"I made a proposition to Campanini just before you came to the pit," said Murton. "There is something I know, which it is in Campanini's interest nobody else should get. My price for silence is a half-interest in the mine and two thousand in cash."

"You wont get any part of either," answered Dimples crisply. "That's easy. What else is in the bag?"

"I don't think Campanini agrees with you," said Murton confidently.

"I say what Mr. Holt says," replied the Italian. "You can do what you like now, Murton. I fear nothing. For what I did, I am willing to pay the price, but to the law, not to you."

"You mean that?" snarled Murton, shaking his fist at the miner.

"Of course he means it," said Dimples. "Cut the stage stuff and talk the nearest to man-way you know how. He's called you. What do you hold?"

MURTON hesitated. Then he tapped the package he carried. Holt burst into laughter, spoiling the effect entirely.

"You're the rottenest, thinnest bluffer that ever sat in a game," he sneered. "You've got nothing, Murton, with all your parcels and tappings. A thing

like you couldn't scare a five-year-old kid. He'd call you, and you'd quit cold, like the yellow dog you are." The slow, stinging contempt pierced even the tough hide of the blackmailer.

"Wait till you hear what I've got to say," he answered.

"Almighty Jupiter!" shouted Dimples. "We're asking for it. Spit it out, you closemouthed clam, or get out."

"You shall have it, then," replied Murton, stung to speech. "You remember, Campanini, you had a wife who ran away from you. Found a man that suited her fancy better and skipped. The fellow that got her away from you stayed some days. There was a party at your house, drinking and music and dancing. At two in the morning you went into the woods with the man to set him on his way. You got him into the thick bush. There was a quarrel and a fight. You cut him to ribbons. There was a knife-slash across each cheek, given, I guess, to spoil the beauty your wife had fancied."

He paused to watch the effect of his words on the inscrutable Italian. Dimples pulled out pipe and pouch, lighted up and handed the tobacco to Bifanio.

"Have a fill," he said. "It's the damnedest long cat I ever saw. Got the body in that parcel, Murton?"

Murton broke the string, unwrapped the cover and exposed a tiny pair of pointed, patent-leather shoes.

"I was looking for a strayed heifer," he continued, "and I saw Campanini come out of the bush. I wondered what he was doing there at that hour, and I found out. I took these as a souvenir, and when I got back later, I found the body gone. I guess he got it and buried it."

"You're a disappointment, Murton," said Dimples. "I thought you'd be sure to have the body. To convict of murder without the body of the murdered man is quite a job."

"I'll leave that to the Court," answered Murton.

"YOU needn't," said Dimples, going to the door and whistling. A man came in through the back kitchen from the barn, where he had been having a pipe with Scar-Faced Angelo, Dimples' factotum. "There's the body." And Two Shoes, a foolish grin on his face, stood before them. There was a long white seam across each cheek from temple to chin. Never again would he be famed for beauty of face.

"Here's a pair of shoes this crook stole from your feet the night you and Menelaus here had the scrap in the bush, and you, my Paris, took the count, and before you were wafted away." And Dimples began to recite grandly from the Iliad:

> "But him the Queen of Heaven
> (As gods can only) from the field conveyed,
> Wrapped in a misty cloud, and on a couch
> Sweet perfumes breathing, gently laid him down.

"It must have been Venus pulled you out as she did the other Paris," Dimples continued.

"Say the word, Paris, alias Two Shoes, and I'll call the policeman and have him pinched, though it jars the classic fitness of things most damnably. No? That's better. There's the soul of the artist in you, Two Shoes."

Then he walked to the door and flung it wide open.

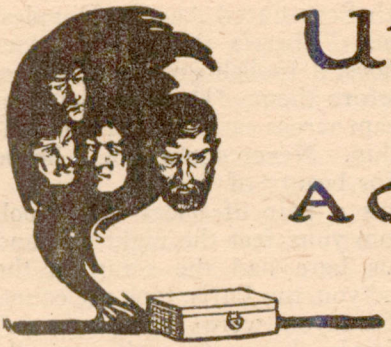
"Get out!" he ordered Murton. "If an hour from this I hear of you within range of these camps, there'll be a lynching-bee that will make the party for two Bull Ransome gave you, look like a Hague Conference picnic. 'Vootsak! Vamos! Scat!' as the classic writers say."

After he had gone, Dimples turned to the two men.

"Now, Bifanio, you've got to shake hands with Two Shoes. He took your troubles off your hands and paid for it with his beauty. She skinned him too and left him, so you can shake on your luck."

He went to the sideboard and brought forth beer and glasses.

"Drink, warlike Menelaus! Drink my one-time pretty Paris. It isn't every man can shake his Helen so cheaply. And I will drink too," and he breathed to himself the name "Polly" and drank.



Unexpected Places

A Complete Novelette

By Frank R. Adams

COPPERTHWAITE came to the door of his office and bawled "Holway! Burnett!" Without waiting for an answer he slammed the door shut once more.

He might have pressed a button by his desk, which would have summoned an office-boy whom he could then have dispatched formally with a request that Mr. Holway and Mr. Burnett were wanted at the city editor's desk. But "Copper" wasn't that kind of a newspaper man. He had been brought up to yell for what he wanted, and he did not take kindly to electric buttons.

From the opposite ends of the city-room came young Mr. Burnett and the slightly older although equally alert Mr. Holway. Copeland Burnett settled his tie carefully before appearing before his superior. Copperthwaite, the superior aforesaid, scorned the young man's attention to the niceties of attire, but he had to admit that in spite of all, he did have a nose for news and a faculty for translating it into good copy. "Duke" Holway, who also reported at the city-desk, was the best man on the entire reportorial staff of *The Times-American*. Any story that required the services of both Burnett and Holway either must be of surpassing interest or else it was something that demanded extraordinarily delicate handling.

The city editor was busy sorting some blue-penciled clippings from the evening papers when the two men he had summoned came into his glass-partitioned coop.

"Lord Harold Varden is at the Astor," he said without preamble. "Arrived on the *Numidia* this morning, refused to be interviewed, has not left his rooms so far to-day. His valet was taken away this afternoon in a police ambulance—wont talk either—pretty sick. Look into it. He's registered incognito—John Hallmain; everybody knows it, though. Both of you go; call up the office from there; let me know if there's anything in it. If not, I'll give you an assignment over the phone. On your way." Copperthwaite thrust a half-dozen clippings into the hands of Holway, who stood nearest, and waved them from the room.

"'Copper' isn't really busy at all, you know," commented young Burnett as they stood in the corridor waiting for the elevator. "With all the cable-news smeared over the front page, the city-desk is a cinch since the war broke."

"He has to do that rapid-fire stuff to keep in practice," Holway replied, absently skimming through the pasted clippings which his chief had given him. "If a city editor didn't bark, half the fun would be gone out of the newspaper game. What do you suppose this Varden chap is really doing over here?"

Burnett yawned. "Probably wants to marry an American million," was his uninterested comment. "That's what they usually come for, isn't it?"

"Not now, they don't." Duke Holway was speaking as they stepped into the elevator. "They're too busy stopping bullets and pieces of shell from the German trenches. Every time an English lord sees a bullet nowadays, he tries to get in the way of it. That's how this fellow comes to have a look-in

on the title. Before the war he was the youngest kind of a younger son. Nobody ever would have heard about him at all if he hadn't been such an awful rounder. Remember he used to pull off freak parties that made the Sunday supplement every once in a while. He's a sort of gambler, too—one of those fellows who will take either side of a fool bet."

"I've got him now. He's the fellow who made a bet of ten thousand pounds with his doctor that he would outlive him."

"That's the one. The physician had just told him he couldn't live a year if he didn't quit drinking."

"And he came right back at him with the bet. The doctor took him up, probably because that was the only chance he saw of ever collecting his fee."

ARRIVED at the hotel they inquired at the desk for the number of His Lordship's room, which was promptly and courteously refused to them—courteously because the clerk knew them, and no hotel cares to get in wrong with the newspapers, but none the less promptly because, as the clerk explained, they had positive orders from His Lordship to that effect.

"We're here because we're here," irrelevantly observed Copeland Burnett after this rebuff. "Shall we wait for a stroke of our justly celebrated luck, or can you suggest some criminal method of procedure to outwit the guard by which his royal highness is surrounded?"

"Do you suppose it would pay to bribe a bellboy? They must all know the room the disguised nobility is occupying."

Cope Burnett considered this thoughtfully. "It is not a good scheme, because most of these boy-bandits are wealthier than we are. I doubt if we can tempt their virtue."

They were standing not far from the information-desk behind which stood the affable clerk who had refused to help them. To this desk now came a messenger-boy.

"Got a letter for Mr. John Hallmain?"

"Pretend to be talking to me," said Duke Holway quickly to his companion. "Say anything, but keep talking in a low tone of voice."

The information-clerk took the note from the messenger-boy and stamped it with an electric time-stamp. Then he tapped a low-toned bell on the desk. When a bellboy came to the desk, he glanced hastily in the direc-

tion of the two reporters to see if they were listening. When he discovered that they were apparently conversing between themselves, he handed the bellboy the message and murmured something which they could not catch.

"Well-known Goddess of Chance takes a hand," murmured Holway, and then seeing the question in Cope's eyes, he added: "Keep on talking, but come with me. I'll buy thee a drink." He led the way in the direction the bellboy had gone.

Burnett started to turn off at the bar at the left. "Not there," Holway told him. "This drink is going to be taken sitting down in one of the many famous restaurants under this roof."

The *maître d'hôtel* met them. "Two?" he questioned.

"Yes," Holway admitted. "Wait a moment until I see where our friends are sitting."

He rapidly scanned the half-filled salon. "They're not here yet. Please give us a table near the other end. About where that bellboy is standing will be the correct location, I think."

"Yes sir. Thank you, sir." The latter was for the two-dollar bill which had just changed hands.

"Why this particular table?" Burnett questioned when they were seated.

"Thought it would be nice to sit near to Lord What's-his-name."

"Where?"

"Partly on your left. Don't stare, you boob. One more symptom of rubber in your neck and I'll kick you beneath the damask."

"If you do, I'll have you arrested for mayhem. What's he like?"

"Nice-looking chap. Could pass for an American anywhere. I suppose being a younger son so long, he didn't get very chesty."

"How old?"

"Oh, about thirty. Eyes blue, fair hair, and a mustache something like mine."

"Yet you say he is good-looking?"

"And repeat it. It's the mustache that makes me know he is a lord. The common herd can't wear 'em with distinction. You have to have nobility inherent at least, or they become mere mulligatawny-strainers. He is opening the note on blue ladies' stationery which the bellboy brought him."

"How do you know it was a blue lady who sent him the note? And why don't we go over and interview him?"

"Because we haven't any desire to be bounced out of the restaurant by the stick-up man who got my next-to-the-last two-dollar bill. By the way, if you ever want to get your hat back, you'll have to buy it from the check-room trust yourself. No, we're not going to interview His Lordship. I doubt whether he will ever know that we are newspaper men. We'll deceive him into thinking we are gentlemen. Can you do it?"

"I can. Watch me closely, and you can't go wrong."

A WAITER stood unobtrusively at Burnett's elbow. The latter indicated his friend.

"What do you wish to drink?" Holway asked.

"I'll take some Blue Points and a little of the baked halibut and a—"

"I said what did you wish to drink?"

"Oh," Burnett subsided with a sigh. "A stein of Würzburger," he decided.

"There is none left, zurr, since the war," the waiter said respectfully and regretfully.

"Bring him some dark beer," ordered Holway, "and I'll have a Bronx."

After the waiter had gone, Holway continued. "You wouldn't know Würzburger if they had it."

"I admit that, but you wouldn't want me to ask for just beer in a place like this, would you?" Burnett expostulated. "You may not be familiar with the customs of these first-class places, but I assure you that anyone who orders anything less than a vintage wine is looked down upon even by the bus-boys and the scullery-maids in the kitchen. I was trying to be a credit to you."

"Hush a minute—developments in the Lord Varden mystery," warned Duke. "Contents of note vaguely disturbing. He twirls his mustache in indecision. Watchful-waiting stuff ad lib. By George, he looks ill. I believe he wants help. If he wasn't English, he'd speak to us. He's going to, anyway."

"Pardon me, gentlemen." This diffidently from the next table.

Burnett whirled in his seat and got his first glimpse of Lord Varden. His face would ordinarily have been very pleasant, and was in detail about as Holway had described it. Just now the pleasant expression was partly obliterated by a look of pain and uncertainty.

"Come on," directed Holway, rising from his chair and leading the way to the next table. "This chap is in real trouble."

To Lord Varden he said: "What's the matter? Can we help?"

"I seem to be taken suddenly ill," the Englishman replied. He spoke the language very much as a Harvard man, much as Holway and Burnett spoke it themselves, and there was no trace of the "silly-ass" accent so common in the stage-portrayal of an Englishman.

"You want a doctor?" Burnett asked quickly.

The Englishman shook his head. "Not sufficient time, I fear, unless one of you gentlemen happens to be a physician."

He looked hopefully and questioningly at the two reporters. They both shook their heads.

"Then you know what's the matter?" Holway doubled the tempo of his regular method of speaking. If speed were any object, he did not intend to waste time on words.

His Lordship nodded.

"What?"

"Mercuric poisoning."

"How long ago?"

"Just now." He pointed to the food on his plate. "It's in that."

"How do you know?"

"Note of warning here." He tapped the sheet of blue note-paper. "Came too late. I had already tasted it."

HOLWAY scanned the table rapidly. Then he took charge of the situation with true American briskness.

"Cope," he ordered sharply, "take Lord Varden to the pharmacy in the next block. You know where it is. The druggist will tell you the first-aid antidotes. Telephone from there to Dr. Carmini. He's the one who has been successfully treating these mercuric cases lately. Have him meet you at the nearest hospital. Take Lord Varden there in a taxi. Wait a minute—change taxis somewhere en route if possible, and enter His Lordship at the hospital under another name, not even *John Hallmain*. There's no use letting his enemy, whoever he is, get a second chance at him. Understand? Better not let anybody know anything at all about this until we can get at the facts ourselves. Don't ask questions, Your Lordship. Never mind how we know you. Go! And hurry! I'll stay here to get hold of that waiter who served you this stuff, and handle the police end of it."

This last was hurled at the retreating backs of Copeland Burnett and Lord Varden as they hastened across the floor in the direction of the entrance to the restaurant.

Duke Holway's next move was to summon the majestic *maître d'hôtel*, who came to the table with ponderous dignity. Holway wanted to kick him to life but hesitated even under stress of excitement. It might be lese majesty or *noblesse oblige* or some horrible crime like that.

"I want the waiter who attended this table," Duke requested, suppressing the intensity of his interest because it was to his advantage not to raise a lot of excitement over this affair and attract the attention of all the newspaper men in town. This looked like a big story, and there was no reason why it should not be exclusive.

"The waiter will be back in a moment," the *maître d'hôtel* assured the guest politely. "He has doubtless gone for the balance of Monsieur's order. If there is something special, perhaps—"

"Please send for him," Holway demanded, cutting short the other man's formalities, "at once."

The *maître d'hôtel* shrugged his shoulders expressively and sent a busboy on the errand. This man was crazy, but it was not his place to dispute with a guest, especially one who had tipped him.

Duke Holway drummed impatiently on the tablecloth. The routine red tape of the hotel was galling. His impulse was to jump to his feet and dash out into the kitchen himself, but he doubted

whether that would be allowed; and again, that would create a disturbance and entail the publicity which he was anxious to avoid. All he could do was to sit and wait while the matter was put through in the regular channels.

"'This is the gentleman, lady."

DUKE HOLWAY looked up. The bellboy who had delivered the note on the blue stationery to Lord Varden was again standing beside the table, but he was not alone. Behind him was a young lady.

The sight of her drove away for the moment Holway's pressing interest in the waiter for whom he had sent. He had seen girls before, many of them. His own acquaintance was as wide and varied as that of the average New Yorker—wider, perhaps, because a newspaper reporter knows people in so many different strata of life. But he had never seen anything quite like the young woman who confronted him with parted lips and eager welcoming eyes. That the lips were a healthy red and the eyes a deep and earnest blue he noted in passing, also the aureole of fine-spun gold that softly framed her face.

But he didn't have time to absorb fully all the sweetness of her, because she spoke almost instantly and held out her hand to him.

"You don't know me, Harold," she said, "but I am your cousin Ruth Penfield. We met once when we were quite children, but I don't remember anything about it, and I don't suppose you do either."

He took her hand. He couldn't have helped doing that; nobody could have unless made of stone. Explanation could come afterwards. At best he would have the privilege of this girl's acquaintance but a few minutes, and it seemed unfair to start to push her away the very first instant that she crossed, meteorlike, through his orbit.

"You don't remember me, do you?" she went on while he held her soft hand in his and gazed at her with a bewildered expression which it is only fair to say was not habitual with him. Usually he appeared rather bright.

"No, I don't remember you," he admitted frankly. "But," he added fervently, "I promise you that I shall never forget you again."

She laughed. "You might ask me to sit down, if only for a moment. We can talk here as well as anywhere."

Duke Holway repaired the omission of courtesy, and they seated themselves opposite to each other across the table.

"You don't seem particularly glad to see me," she said.

"Oh, but I am," he told her truthfully.

"It's just the difference between the English branch of the family and the American, I suppose," she said with a sigh. "We Americans are more impulsive than you who live across the water. Now, one of my American cousins would have kissed me even here in the restaurant."

"I—ah—"

"But never mind—I guess I can get used to your coldness. I will understand that it is just temperament. You got my note in time, of course—else you wouldn't be talking to me calmly this way. I am so glad. You must never take any more chances eating in a public place like this. Father was furious when he heard about the plot, and Mother is home crying her eyes out. I am to bring you back with me. You will be a lot safer in our own home, surrounded by servants we can trust."

SHE seemed to take everything for granted, and Duke Holway was still dazed by the swiftness with which the adventure had overtaken him.

He started to answer, but was interrupted by the *maître d'hôtel,* who came up just then, his dignity suffering a temporary eclipse from excitement. He was really flustered.

"Something is wrong with the waiter who attended Monsieur," he explained, "and he cannot be found. He has left the kitchen."

Holway snapped his fingers with impatience. "Gone!" he repeated. "Where does he live?"

"I don't know."

"Then find out."

"I will try. He took some money—"

"Then it is a matter for the police. Get a description of him for me, any

peculiarities—how long has he worked here, who hired him, how he was dressed when he arrived—not his waiter's uniform but his street-clothes. He must have changed to them before he left. Send the details to Lord Varden's room. It is number—" he looked down at the key which lay on the table beside the plate and read therefrom the room-number on the attached tag.

The head waiter, infected with some of Holway's brusque vitality, hurried away to execute the commands of his dictatorial guest.

"When can you be ready to go home with me?" the girl asked.

"Just a minute," the young man answered, only half conscious of her question, because hurrying toward the table was another bellboy.

"A message for Duke—" began the bellboy.

"That's me," said Duke Holway, taking the envelope from the boy's hand. "Pardon me," he said to the girl. "May I read this?"

He had the envelope torn open before she had said "Surely," and he scanned the contents in Cope Burnett's well-nigh illegible scrawl.

> Leaving for Garfield Memorial Hospital with his knobs, who is terribly worried for fear that everything will go to pot during his absence. To quiet him I have promised that you would look after anything that comes along for him. Go to his room, take all papers and valuables, including dispatch-box, and guard them with your life until he can give you further directions. Call up the hospital and let me know where I can find you in an hour.
>
> Yours,
>
> COPE.
>
> P. S. I don't envy you your job.

DUKE HOLWAY was forced to smile at that postscript. Sitting opposite the girl who to all intents and purposes was the most beautiful creature in the world, and having been invited by her to come and live at her home indefinitely, he could admit with all truth that Cope Burnett might very well envy him his job.

"Do you suppose your parents will remember me?" he mused aloud.

"Probably not," she replied. "You were such a little fellow when we were in England. You don't mind, though, do you?"

"On the contrary, I am delighted to hear it. No false preconceived ideas to overcome, and all that sort of thing."

"They'll be sure to like you right away, just as I did. There's something in this relationship-thing, after all, I guess, because I never took to anyone so quickly before in my life. Will you be ready to start soon?" the girl finished, rising suggestively and drawing on the kid gauntlet she had removed to greet him.

"Yes, in about ten minutes," Duke Holway said with sudden decision. "It wil take me that long to get my things packed. Then I'll meet you downstairs."

"Good. Come to the automobile outside. It's a big black touring-car. I think you will recognize it without any trouble, because I shall be waiting in it for you."

CHAPTER II

DUKE HOLWAY jingled Lord Varden's key in his pocket as he stood in the hotel lobby debating the situation. It would be perfectly simple to go to the clerk's desk and ask for the manager and then, backed by official sanction after he had told his story, go to Lord Varden's room and take charge of his valuables, whatever they might be.

But there was another way of going about it, and this latter method entailed no danger of giving the situation away to the police and through that channel to the other newspapers. And he rather imagined that Lord Varden himself would prefer that he should not make a public scandal of the afternoon's adventure.

Therefore he took a place in a crowded elevator and got off at the floor where His Lordship's suite was apparently located. Fortunately the Astor does not employ floor-clerks. If they did, Holway's ingenuity would have been baffled to get any farther than the floor-desk. Judging by the number on the key-tag, Lord Varden's room

was on the front corridor on the right-hand side. Holway stopped at the door bearing the right number. The key fitted. He turned the lock and stepped inside.

It was a conventional hotel parlor. A door at the side led presumably to a bedroom. It stood just ajar.

A swift glance around the parlor convinced Holway that there was nothing of Lord Varden's there. The dispatch-box must be in the next room. Holway strode to the door and opened it. Against the opposite wall stood a steamer-trunk, battered and labeled as the scars of years of Continental travel. Over the trunk knelt a man in a modest livery.

This complicated matters. Duke had not expected to encounter a servant. He had been led to think that Lord Varden's valet had been taken suddenly ill that morning. It had not occurred to him that a member of the English peerage might be attended by more than one servant.

It was too late to withdraw. The man was starting to get up.

The kneeling servant arose and turning, faced Duke Holway as he stood in the doorway. He was a full-bearded man. Holway noted that instantly as they came face to face. It struck him as curious, because most menservants that he had seen were clean-shaven.

When the other man saw Duke for the first time, he gave an almost imperceptible start; then he schooled his emotions hastily and said deferentially, "I beg Your Lordship's pardon."

"'Your Lordship's pardon,'" Holway repeated mentally. Then this wasn't one of Lord Varden's servants. No one who had ever seen both of them would mistake him for the Englishman. "Who are you?" he inquired coolly.

Without the flicker of an eyelid the other answered, "I am the valet employed by the hotel. I came for the clothes Your Lordship wanted pressed for this evening." He indicated with his hand several garments which lay across his left arm. This seemed a logical-enough explanation, and Duke stood aside to let the man pass out through the parlor. When he was halfway to the outer door, Duke halted him. "Wait," he commanded.

The other turned inquiringly. Duke went up to him. "You say you are the hotel valet?"

"Yes."

"And you entered the room through that door?"

"Yes sir."

"But that door was locked. How did you get in?"

"The maid let me in."

"But it was locked while you were in here. How do you account for that?"

Suspicion was growing like mad in Holway's heart, and he stepped between the other man and the door. "There is something wrong about this, my friend, something *très phony,* as we say in that dear Paris."

The man in livery straightened up. He had been bent a little before in the attitude of a servant, but now he stood at his full height, which was a couple of inches better than Holway's own—and Holway was five feet ten. As he did so, he drew from his pocket an automatic pistol.

Duke Holway's eye lighted. "Now, imagine a valet carrying that kind of a weapon! That's what I call using up-to-date methods."

"You made me do this," said the whiskered individual, pointing the pistol at Holway. "I would have been glad to go peaceably, but now that you have spotted me, I suppose you know what I came for. Well, I've got it."

Holway grinned. "I suspected as much, and from the looks of your face, I don't think there is any cure for it."

"I want the key to it now," the man with the revolver said roughly. "You might as well hand it over, because I've got the drop on you."

"The key to what?"

"To the dispatch-box."

"Oh."

"I want it quick, too. Hand over that key, or I'll let you have this."

Holway laughed. "You wouldn't dare. You couldn't leave this place alive if they heard a shot in this room."

"No one would hear it. There is a silencer on this gun, and I would just as soon use it as not. You know what we did to your man this morning."

"Ah—'we!' Now we are getting at this matter—the psychology of crime and all that sort of thing."

"Quit your kidding. Pass over the key. I'll give you ten seconds."

Holway laughed out loud this time.

"What are you laughing at?"

"The joke is on you."

"I fail to see it."

"You will in a minute, when I tell you that I haven't any key and that I am not Lord Varden."

"Not Lord Varden? Then are you one of us?"

"Not if I have to wear whiskers like those, I'm not."

IN bewilderment at the other's evident frankness, the man with the weapon let the point of it waver ever so slightly. It was the moment that Holway had waited for, and he jumped toward him and grabbed the wrist that held the gun, forcing the point downward. As he did so, the other pulled the trigger. A slight sound like a hacking cough was the only indication of the explosion. Almost instantly Holway twisted the man's wrist, and the pistol dropped to the carpet.

Holway picked up the gun. "You've got to be more careful, man," he said as the other rubbed his wrist. "That darn thing went off, and you blame near hit me in the foot. The bullet went through the floor, too. I hope it didn't annoy the lady in the room below who is taking a bath. Don't ask me how I know she is taking a bath. As a matter of fact, I don't know. I am simply building up the news features of this story. How do you operate this thing, anyway?"

"For heaven's sake, don't touch that trigger," prayed the former owner of the pistol. "It only takes a touch to fire ten shots from that gun. Point it some other way, please."

Holway refused to obey. "You certainly have a highly nervous temperament. A person with your constitution should never have taken up the spy-business as a profession. I advise you to change to some less nerve-racking occupation such as gardening. You may now pass over the dispatch-box, which I judge you have."

The other man sullenly produced a japanned case from under the garments on his left arm.

"Lay it on the table. Turn your pockets inside out."

Duke Holway was enjoying to the full the part in the melodrama which he was playing. There was nothing of further interest in the man's pockets. Duke looked him over with a searching glance.

"Take off those whiskers!" he ordered suddenly.

"How can I?"

"I'm sure I don't know. If you don't take 'em off yourself in ten seconds, I'll shoot 'em off like William Tell. One, two, three—"

"I'll take 'em off."

The whiskers were duly unfastened and removed from the face of the intruder. Holway studied the features critically.

"I might meet you again, you know," he volunteered in explanation of his close scrutiny. "It would be handy to remember that you have a red scar along your jaw."

"We'll meet again all right, Lord Varden."

"Still insist upon calling me Lord Varden, do you?"

"Sure, I knew it was you all the time. You fooled me for just a second—that was all. It was a good trick."

"A peach," Holway agreed complacently. "I guess I know what you look like now, unless there is another layer which comes off. If you think there is any danger of catching cold from exposure, you may replace your hanging gardens before you leave."

"You're going to let me go?" the man inquired incredulously.

"Regretfully, yes," Holway replied. "If I had time, I'd escort you to the police station, but unfortunately I have an engagement and cannot be annoyed by your society. Besides, there are other reasons known only to myself. Good-by. On your way!"

THE man left the room without further parley. Holway wondered for a while at his incredulity at being allowed to get away. There must be

something more in this than appeared. Of course it was perfectly obvious that the waiter who had poisoned Lord Varden and this man who was robbing his rooms were working in unison. There must be some desperate stake to cause them to take such heroic measures and to risk their lives so indifferently, regardless of the consequences of crime.

"I don't get it at all," he said to himself. Then his glance fell upon the disputed dispatch-box. He picked it up and tapped it softly with his fingers. "Anyhow, you are in my possession now, baby, and since everybody else seems to think so much of you, I am going to hang on to you like grim death." It was an ordinary-looking flat metal case with a small businesslike lock which held it securely shut. Holway dropped it in his inside pocket. It was rather bulky, but he deemed it best to keep anything of such apparent value upon his person.

The thought of the girl waiting downstairs in the automobile occurred forcibly to his mind. That part of the adventure had been rather crowded into the background for a few moments by the excitement occasioned by the encounter with the false valet in Lord Varden's rooms. But now the pleasing picture reverted with refreshing vividness.

She had expected him to come ready for a visit to the country. He had to make some semblance of preparation. He looked around hastily. A suit-case and a kit-bag lay open on a rack beside the bed. It was completely packed with all the necessities for a week-end trip. Apparently Lord Varden was anticipating a journey of some sort. Duke Holway snapped the cover shut. He also took the precaution of looking in all the drawers and the closets of the suite to see if there were any papers or valuables which it would be inadvisable to leave behind. There was nothing but a few letters. These he put into his pocket to give to the rightful owner later. Of His Lordship's trunks, all were locked with the exception of the steamer-trunk which had been broken open, apparently by the man who had just left the room.

Holway selected a gardenia from a bouquet on the table and drew it through a buttonhole in his coat-lapel, surveying himself meanwhile in the mirror.

"If the author of 'Burke's Peerage' could see you now, old top," he told his reflection in the mirror, "he'd rush right around to the printers to get out a new edition, revised and enlarged by the addition of the noble name of Bill, Duke of Holway."

CHAPTER III

SHE was waiting in the driving seat of a big black touring-car just as she said she would be. William Holway, who hitherto had vaguely disapproved of women operating gasoline cars, was obliged hastily to revise his creed. Obviously Ruth Penfield belonged exactly where she was—behind the steering-wheel.

"You didn't take long," she assured him when he had handed his, or rather Lord Varden's, grip to the mechanician who rode in the rear seat, "considering all you had to do. Will your man be driving out with us?"

"No."

"Oh, I forgot—he's at the hospital, isn't he? We saw that in the papers. You can telephone to him, and he can come right to our place as soon as he gets out. In the meantime you can get along somehow, I suppose, with the servants we have."

"Oh, I'll worry along," Holway agreed with airy nonchalance.

The car started smoothly and dropped into the traffic procession across Forty-fourth Street to Fifth Avenue. Ruth threaded the narrow and crowded thoroughfare with instinctive precision. Holway complimented her upon her skill.

"Oh, I've always driven," she explained carelessly, "ever since I was a kid."

"You're not much more than that now."

"Oh, yes I am. I'm coming out as soon as the war is over. That will be soon, I hope."

"And I."

"I suppose you're anxious to see a

little of the actual fighting, though, before peace is declared. Father says that you will be going on active service in the aviation corps as soon as you go back from America. That will be glorious. I wish I could. Do the Allies take girls for aircraft pilots?"

"I'm afraid not."

"Not even if they furnish their own machines?"

"Have you a 'plane?"

"Two. We'll go out and loop the loop in one of them to-morrow, and you can tell me if I do it right."

"You mean I'll stay on the ground and watch you do it?"

"No, that wouldn't be any fun for you."

"Yes, it would. There's nothing I enjoy more than seeing a good looper perform."

"But it's nothing like doing it yourself. My largest machine carries a passenger very comfortably. I couldn't ask you to stay on the ground."

"Really, I fly so much at home that it's no hardship whatever for me to stick to something stationary once in a while. Look at that crowd gathered in front of The Plaza. I wonder what has happened?"

The girl's attention was successfully distracted for a moment, long enough for her to discover and report that an ex-President of the United States was leaving the hotel for an automobile waiting at the curb.

Then for another moment she devoted herself to an intricate bit of steering at the entrance of the Park. Finally she said musingly, as if speaking to herself: "It's funny that you should have known that that was the Plaza when you have never been in this country before to-day."

"It is funny unless you know," he agreed hastily; "but as a matter of fact I drove out here first before I secured an apartment at the Astor. They did not have what I wanted here."

Holway wiped away a bead of perspiration from his brow. This was nerve-racking business.

ALMOST as if on a magic carpet they were whisked out of the city and were running along beside the Palisades. Ruth pointed out the famous estates along the line and made the statement that some of them were supposed to resemble closely English feudal mansions such as the one he had been born in. Duke admitted circumspectly that some of them were even more magnificent than the place of his birth. To tell the truth, which Duke had no intention of doing, there was nothing in Plattsmouth, Nebraska, where he first saw the light of day, which compared even faintly with the gold-plated shacks which perched insolently on the high places on both sides of the river.

At the gateway of one of them Ruth turned in and by a long, winding roadway began the ascent to the top. The grounds on the hillside represented natural wildness under high cultivation. There was a great variety of dense shrubbery, but every space between clumps of bushes and trees was covered with green grass closely trimmed such as never grew wild anywhere in the world. Not a fallen branch or a twig, not a pile of last year's autumn leaves, cluttered up the ground. Nature must contemplate the grounds of "Pencrest" with envy and wish she could do as well.

At each turn of the zigzag inclined road that raised them nearer the summit of Pencrest, Holway's spirits dropped a notch. He was thinking how much longer that driveway would seem when he was walking down alone than it did now riding up beside this glorious girl.

The girl aforementioned noticed his abstraction and removed one hand from the steering-wheel to reach over and pat his knee encouragingly.

"Don't worry, cousin; you'll come out all right."

"I know it," he acknowledged, and added to himself: "That's just the trouble."

"Father will help you out, I'm sure," she told him. "You can tell him your troubles, and he'll settle everything for you in a hurry. Father is very capable, even if I do say it myself that raised him. Difficulties vanish before him like mist before the summer sun. He's so direct and honest that nothing crooked or deceitful can stand for a

moment before him. I know, because I've tried to conceal something I've done when I've thought he would not approve, but he always finds me out and makes me tell the truth at once."

"He must be a charming man for an impostor to meet," Holway mused out loud. "I imagine that a good chief of police must be like that." The car was slowing down under the porte-cochère. "It seems a shame to go in the house on such a nice day as this," he said frantically. "Isn't there some little sight-seeing spin we could take while the car is running so nicely. I've always wanted to see San Francisco."

Ruth laughed melodiously. "San Francisco is three thousand miles away. Didn't you study geography at school."

"No—that is, isn't that your father coming out to meet us?" Duke had the door open on the opposite side, all ready to jump if necessary.

"No, that's Jocelyn, the butler," she reassured him with a sidelong glance of inquiry. She laughed at the worried look on his face. "You can trust Jocelyn even with that precious dispatch-box of yours. He has been in our service for twenty years."

DUKE started at the mention of the dispatch-box. He had quite forgotten it himself in the fearful exhilaration of this ride with the most wonderful and at the same time the most unattainable person he had ever seen.

The butler directed one of the footmen to take Lord Varden's luggage, and himself led the way up the white steps of Pencrest.

"We do things simply here," Ruth apologized. "I suppose you are accustomed to lots of formality."

"Not at all," the false Lord Varden assured her. "This seems like the extreme of formality to me. Why, I rather fancied you would come for me on horseback, and that probably you lived in a wigwam or tent of some sort."

Ruth laughed in appreciation of his comedy. "Jocelyn, put Lord Varden in the north wing," she told the butler, "and then tell Mother he is here and that we'll hunt her up just as soon as he is settled in his quarters."

Duke found himself in charge of the imperturbable Jocelyn, who ushered him to an electric elevator. That device obviated the fatigue of climbing the two flights of stairs which led from the tapestried magnificence of the reception-hall to the rose-and-ivory coziness of a bedroom, dressing-room and bath on the third floor. This apartment Jocelyn intimated was for Duke. Holway doubted very much whether he would ever sleep in that bed, but it seemed useless to dispute the question with a servant.

"Mr. Penfield's man, Hawsh, will look after you, My Lord," Jocelyn was saying, "if that is perfectly satisfactory to Your Lordship."

"Perfectly," Duke acquiesced.

"I will send him at once," the butler suggested.

"I shall be pleased to meet him."

From the flicker of astonishment which showed momentarily in Jocelyn's eye Duke knew that he had made an unexpected statement. Well, it did not make much difference—a few moments now and all would be over, anyhow.

The butler started to withdraw.

Duke stopped him. "Send Mr. Penfield's man in ten minutes, please," he said.

"Very good, Your Lordship."

DUKE had spied a telephone during his rapid inspection of his room, and he had a true newspaper man's instinct to use it. Besides, Burnett had instructed him to call up the hospital where Lord Varden was being taken care of. It seemed only fair and honest to report to His Lordship what had happened and to ask him what disposition he should make of the documents in the dispatch-box before he got thrown out of Pencrest to tramp back to New York City. For it was going to be a case of walking when he was put out, because Duke had expended his last cent at the Astor.

As soon as the butler backed out of the room, Duke got the Garfield Hospital on the wire. Copeland Burnett was apparently waiting for him to call up, because he was found almost immediately by the hospital telephone-operator.

"Where have you been for the last month?" Cope demanded hotly as soon as he recognized Duke's voice. "Don't you realize that my time is valuable? My salary on *The Times-American* is—"

"Hush," Duke cut him short. "I know all about your salary, and I've always wondered how you had the nerve to accept it. Just remember for a minute that I'm talking on a house-telephone extension and that the entire world may be listening-in. Do you get that?"

"O. K. Suppose we speak Chinese."

"Dry up and listen. Tell the party who was hurt that his papers are safe with me. Say that Penfield sent for me and I am—"

"P. J. Penfield?"

"Yes."

"Sent for you?"

"Yes, for Lord Varden—get me?—and I came to Pencrest. That's where I am now."

There was a puzzled pause at the other end of the line.

"Would it help any," Duke prompted, "if I asked you if you had ever read 'The Prisoner of Zenda'?"

A delighted exclamation from his friend. "It would. I'm hep. How did you—"

"Never mind—tell you later. Ask the person who was hurt what I shall do next."

"I will. Hold the wire. I'll see if he's conscious."

While Duke was waiting there was a discreet knock on the door. Duke called "Come in," and Hawsh, Mr. Penfield's valet, entered. He seemed to require no instructions but went about the business of unpacking Lord Varden's bags, which he had brought with him.

In a moment or two Burnett's voice in the receiver greeted Duke once more.

"Are you there, old chappie?" it said sweetly.

"Yes," Duke replied, "I am waiting in my room until Mr. Penfield's man unpacks my bag."

"Unpacks your— Oh, I see. Very delicately conveyed, My Lord. Thou art not alone. But why Mr. Penfield's man?"

"My own man was poisoned this morning."

"So he was. I had forgotten. Well, listen: The chap in the private room M 6—get that?—says to guard everything with your life until he gets there. Says no one knows him where you are, and you are to keep up Anthony Hoping until further notice."

"What's that?"

"Keep on the job, *Rudolph Rassendyl.*"

"Oh, but that's impossible."

"Why?"

"With the family and everything?"

"That's all right. The party in M 6 says all are strangers to him. There's a girl or a boy—he forgets which—only child. For further information about your ancestral estate and family get hold of an encyclopedia or 'Burke's Peerage.' You can do it. It's the chance of a lifetime. I'll be right over to help."

"No! no!" The exclamation was startled out of Duke.

"Why? Aint I good enough to meet your new friends? I want to be in on this thing. Introduce me as your friend from Medicine Hat, Canada. I may not have any royal blood in my veins, but I'm a swell dresser on and off, and I certainly know a lot of interesting facts which I can use in the course of an ordinary conversation."

"Can't do it, old chap," Duke interrupted the other's catalogue of accomplishments. "Would like to awfully, but it's out of the question. I must dress now, old fellow. Call me up again sometime, do. By-by!"

DUKE hung up the receiver. He had made the remark about dressing in order to get rid of Cope, but now it was up to him to do it or appear a liar and a faker in the eyes of the valet. He prayed fervently that the Englishman's clothes would fit him.

They did passably — well enough, anyway, for a white flannel outing suit. Duke made a secret resolution to try on the evening clothes sometime in private before nightfall.

"Is everythink all right?" the manservant asked before leaving.

Duke looked at him sharply. It was

practically the first thing the man had said except "Yes, My Lord," or "No, My Lord."

"Everythink?" Duke repeated. "Do you speak that way naturally, or are you putting on a cockney accent solely in my honor?"

"I'm a Hinglishman, Your Lordship," the man returned with the modest pride of those of that nationality. "Often I've seen Your Lordship around Piccadilly and Shaftesbury Havenue, at the 'alls and theaters, you know. I was a bit of a sport myself—in my own way, of course."

Duke had an uneasy feeling that the man was cognizant that he was an impostor and was now playing with him in cat-and-mouse fashion. Surely no one who had seen Lord Varden frequently would ever accept Duke Holway in his place. For a moment Duke considered making a clean breast of the matter to this servant, but a moment's reflection convinced him that the secret of Lord Varden's whereabouts and condition was not his to give away.

So instead of questioning Hawsh further, Duke ended the conversation peremptorily by intimating that he was ready to go downstairs once more.

"Yes, Your Lordship." Hawsh held the door open. "What shall I do with Your Lordship's keys?" He held up a key-ring with several keys on it.

"Where did you find those?"

"In Your Lordship's kit-bag."

"I'll take them."

Duke wondered casually if the key to the dispatch-box was on that ring. Anyway, it was best to have it on his person. The fact that the real Lord Varden had been careless about leaving valuables around was no reason why his impersonator need to follow his example. Duke made his way to the elevator.

CHAPTER IV

IN the living-room downstairs, which Duke found with no difficulty, were Ruth and an older lady, doubtless her mother. She was a dumpling of a woman, very small in stature but built upon the model of the late Queen Victoria. Her hands and feet were tiny, and her face was fine, placid and patrician.

There seemed no question of her intent to admit him to the sacred circle of those of whom she approved. Almost as soon as she saw him, she stood up, absurdly small, and held out her arms to him. There was but one thing to do. Unquestioningly Duke stepped into the embrace.

"My boy!" Mrs. Penfield explained.

Duke looked across at Ruth to see if she disapproved of his reception. Quite the contrary. From a lazy position on a divan she was beaming upon them.

"I knew Mother would love you instantly, just as I did," she told him. "We heard so many stories of your wildness that we wondered what you would be like, but anyone meeting you would know that the reputation you have is a false one."

Mrs. Penfield held him off at arm's-length. "It's like a breeze from home to see you, nephew. You're an Englishman every inch. Anyone would know it at a glance. There's something that the American young man can't cultivate, a certain air about you that marks an Englishman born and bred in Great Britain. I believe you're the finest race of men upon earth."

Duke shifted uneasily under this panegyric.

"Mother is proud of her English blood," Ruth told him with a laugh. "Father and I have tried to convince her that she is as American as we are, but she sticks to her guns like an admiral. Mother is a lot more British than a Yorkshire pudding."

Mrs. Penfield started to expostulate, but she checked herself instead and said: "Can you blame me, my dear? You know there isn't a man among the dozen or so you keep dangling about who can come up to your cousin for appearance or manly bearing."

She gave him a little pat on the arm to assure him that part of the conversation was chaffing and the other part sincere affection for one of her own blood.

"I'll admit that Cousin Harold is better looking than most of my American boy friends, but I don't care. They've probably got a lot of qualities he lacks.

Stop praising him to me, Mother, or you'll make me sorry he's my cousin."

"He isn't your first cousin, you know."

"Thanks for your permission, Mother dear. Then I'll set my cap for him right away."

"I only wish you would, but I'm afraid I've spoiled everything by throwing you two at each other."

"Don't mind Mother," Ruth assured the now tongue-tied young man, speechless with embarrassment for the first time in his life. "The mere fact that she plans every move in the life of her entire family does not interfere in the least with our going ahead and doing just as we want to. When you get used to her, you wont think it necessary to blush at her apparent knowledge of your innermost thoughts."

Duke managed to recover the power of articulation. "You think she knew, then, that the minute I set eyes upon you I wanted to marry you?"

"Surely—everyone does. Now that we've both said what we have, Mother's mind is at rest and we can be good friends once more. Do you care for a set of tennis before Father comes home? Or would you rather lie down and rest after your strenuous adventures and trip across?"

DUKE gathered from her tone that she would be scornful of a man who would need rest in the middle of the day, no matter what he had been through. Therefore he chose tennis. Besides, he played a very fair game, and he felt inclined to show off a little before this eminently desirable person.

The courts were wonderful turf ones, "nearly like the English courts you are accustomed to," Ruth explained, and Duke could see at a glance that their care was the constant work of a couple of men and a team.

Now, Duke played a good net-game and could place a tennis-ball in exasperating odd corners of his opponent's court. It scarcely seemed fair to play a swift net-game against a girl, however, and he resolved to stick pretty close to his back line and lob them to her gently.

He had to break his resolution inside of five minutes. Two or three swift Lawfords from her side of the net to the back line of his, interspersed with carefully placed dribbles just over the net made him pull up his muscles to fighting trim and drew him down toward the net, where he had a possible chance of fielding Ruth's swift drives. She laughed when he changed his tactics, and placed a ball just over his head to prove that she had a few tricks of her own that had not been used yet.

The contest developed into a real one. Duke, who had started to play with his coat on, first removed that and hung it on one of the net-posts, and later discarded his necktie and turned back the collar of his—or Lord Varden's—silk polo shirt. By using every ounce of steam he possessed, the young man upheld the supremacy of his sex by taking the first set at 7-5. The second set he lost ingloriously with a score of 6-3 against him.

This left the third set technically in doubt. Actually, however, Duke was not betting anything on himself. She had him on the run, which counts more in tennis than in any other sport, and he lost the first two games in succession.

It was when he started to serve the third game that he noticed that his coat had disappeared from the post where he had hung it. It was with a terrible sensation of nausea that he realized that the document-case was in the inside breast pocket of that coat.

"Wait!" he cried in sudden anguish. "Where's my coat?"

At his exclamation, one of the gardeners who had been working near-by started up from a grass-trimming position and began to run. In his hands he carried the light coat.

"Stop, you! Drop that coat!" Duke ordered.

THE man turned to see how much of a start he had, and grinned when he discovered that the net was between himself and Duke. He even went out of his way toward the girl's court. But a tennis-net was not any considerable obstacle to a man who had once won

the high-hurdles in an intercollegiate championship track-meet. Duke went over it with a foot to spare and began to shorten the distance between himself and the thief almost immediately.

He would have caught him inside of three hundred yards, but before Duke had gone more than fifty he was knocked flat by an unseen hand. After he was struck, he heard the crack of a rifle, and he knew that he had been shot.

Slightly dazed, he propped himself up on one arm to look about. There was no sign of anyone with a gun. The only excitement in view was the false gardener making off as rapidly as possible—and in pursuit of him like a white streak, the agile person of Ruth Penfield.

Duke's faculties were not serving him well, but he was conscious of thinking that the robbery must have been planned and carried into execution after the time he had appeared on the tennis-court. Apparently the enemies of Lord Varden were hot upon the trail, and they had followed him to Pencrest posthaste. One man must have been detailed to get the coat and another with a rifle planted somewhere in the shrubbery to cover his retreat by picking off pursuers.

Duke managed to bolster himself up unsteadily and survey the field. Servants were coming out of the house in answer to Ruth's cries for help, and grooms, gardeners and stablemen were coming up from the rear. Duke wondered how many of them were in the employ of the opposition and how many were genuinely bent on helping capture the thief.

There was little chance of their being able to do anything, however. The man with the coat had too much of a start. Ruth was not so far behind him, but even if she should catch up with him, what could a girl do against a really active man?

But her nearness to the thief was a cause of imminent danger to herself. What if the unseen sharpshooter should try to stop her with a bullet as he had the false Lord Varden? Duke groaned when he thought of that, and raised himself to a sitting position. He prayed aloud and shouted weakly for her to come back.

His fears increased when he saw that she was gaining on the man. The girl ran like an athlete; it was obvious now that she would overtake her quarry.

BUT the fleeing thief had no intention of fighting. Possibly it was wind he lacked, and not intention. At any rate, he kept on slowly and more slowly to the crest of the hill that sloped steeply down to the Hudson.

At the very edge of the table-land on the top Ruth caught him. She too must have been spent with exertion, because all she could do was to reach cut and grasp the tails of Lord Varden's coat, which the man was carrying under his arm. He turned and made a threatening motion toward her. Duke held his breath and kept repeating: "Let go, dear—let go!"

But Ruth had no intention of letting go. Instead there were a few swift and inexplicable movements of white arms and legs, and in some way the sole of her foot caught the man squarely in the stomach and pushed him over the crest of the hill.

As he fell, the outing coat became a two-piece garment, one portion remaining in the hands of Ruth Penfield and the other accompanying the pseudo-gardener in his motion-picture exit down the hillside. Duke could not see him go, but judging from the watchful attitude of the girl at the crest of the hill, his descent must have been spectacular.

At length she relaxed and held up for inspection the half-coat which was her trophy. She fumbled in the pocket and drew forth something which she waved in the air.

A sharp crack from the shrubbery somewhere near by told that the concealed sharpshooter also knew that she had recovered the document-case.

That rifle-shot brought Duke's thinking apparatus to a swift tension once more. He forgot the shock to his own nervous system and scrambled unsteadily to his feet. A hasty glance in Ruth's direction assured him that as yet she was untouched. It was up to

him to distract the attention of the man, or men, who were doing the sniping.

The sound had appeared to come from the bushes about a hundred feet from the tennis-courts, and Duke ran uncertainly in that direction. He laughed grimly to himself as he wondered what he could do when he got there, but he lurched unsteadily on, a pale, wild-eyed spirit of vengeance.

That he never got so far as the bushes was no fault of him. His determination held strong, but his legs folded up under him like jackknives, and he found himself on the ground once more, with no recollection whatever of any intention of sitting down.

THE excitement seemed to be over, however. There was no more shooting. Duke himself now became the center of interest, and he was immediately surrounded by a group of servants who had seen him fall. They crowded close with sympathetic but useless inquiries.

"Stand back!" ordered a voice crisply—Ruth's voice; Duke recognized it instantly even though the rest of the world was confused and distant. "Give him a chance to breathe."

She was beside him. The servants had fallen back to a respectful distance. A maid who came up regarded Duke with hypnotized horror. "My, his shirt's all bluggy!" she shuddered.

"'Ush!" silenced the voice of Hawsh.

From those remarks Duke deduced that he really had been shot. Up to that time it had seemed incredible, and although he had been knocked down, it was more as if from a blow of a fist than by a bullet.

Ruth knelt alongside. "I've got your package," she reassured him briefly. "Where are you hurt?"

"I don't think I'm hurt at all," he told her with a weak smile. "I don't feel anything."

"I suppose this is from a bottle of red ink you carry in your pocket," the girl observed coolly, pointing to his shirt. "Hawsh," she directed sharply, "telephone to Dr. Marken! You stablemen, get a cot and bring it here for a stretcher. Googings,"—this to the housemaid,—"bring some whisky and a lot of gauze bandage."

The curious crowd dissolved before the magic of her curt command.

"Don't bother," urged Duke, strangely self-conscious. "I've hurt myself worse than this with a safety razor."

Ruth laughed approvingly: "I didn't know anyone but an American could joke about getting shot."

Duke pondered this idea for a moment. "You are rather partial to the American type," he suggested.

"I'm afraid so. Like Mother, I admit that English and American men are different."

"With the difference in favor of the American?"

"Not necessarily—I'm merely a partisan. I love everything that's my own a little more than anyone's else—my home, my people and my country. Sounds like George Cohan, doesn't it? Only of course you don't know who George Cohan is."

"Isn't he the chap who wrote the Declaration of Independence?" Duke observed, in character.

"No, but he's the one who set it to music. —Don't attempt to carry him upstairs." This last was addressed to four stablemen who arrived on the run with an improvised stretcher. "Take him to the library until the Doctor has bandaged him up. Some one tell Hawsh to bring some of His Lordship's clothes to the library."

DUKE was beginning to be conscious of a stinging sensation in his left side and upper arm. That must be where he had been struck. A slight movement of his left arm when he was placed on the stretcher hurt like the devil, although only a few seconds before he had not been conscious of any pain there at all.

Duke's first act as soon as he was made moderately comfortable was to examine his document-case. Apparently it was intact. He laboriously fished Lord Varden's key-ring from his pocket and tried each of the keys in turn. The last one fitted the lock. Duke opened the box thoughtfully. It seemed a bit curious on his part, but he felt that he was entitled to know

what he was carrying. It was a very small packet of papers. It was while he was looking them over that the hastily summoned local practitioner arrived. When he had made a rapid examination, he smiled.

"Young man, you bear a charmed life," he told Duke as he dressed the wound. "That bullet passed between your arm and your side. Aside from the loss of a pint of blood, you aren't hurt a bit. You'll have to keep it bandaged for a week, but drink a lot of water and you can forget about it tomorrow."

Duke was disappointed. If you're going to be shot, you might as well be shot seriously and be an interesting convalescent. He had been picturing himself compelled to live at Pencrest for a long time, forced to endure the gentle ministrations of Ruth for possibly a month or six weeks. Now this damfool country doctor was making a commonplace person of him.

Even as they were helping him to walk out to the veranda—the stretcher was abandoned on Duke's own suggestion—a whale of a limousine cruised up the hill and hove to at the front steps of Pencrest. From it emerged a lean six-foot giant with heavy Gothic features. He was dressed in a conventional frock coat and striped trousers, with spats, gloves and all the accessories, but he looked as if he would have been happier and more appropriately clad in flannel shirt and corduroy pants tucked into the tops of laced boots.

Ruth, who had been banished from the library while Duke's wound was being dressed, greeted the new arrival as "Dad" and introduced Duke to him. Her manner of doing it reminded Duke of a cat which has caught its first mouse and wants to bring it into the house for the approval of the ladies.

"Glad to see you, my boy," he said, surveying his supposed relation with friendly criticism.

"He isn't always quite so pale," Ruth said, hastily forestalling any adverse verdict upon her mouse's looks. "He was hit by a rifle-bullet about ten minutes ago and hasn't quite recovered."

"A rifle-bullet!" Incredulity startled the exclamation out of the older man.

There had to be explanations, mostly by Ruth, who painted the incident with glowing colors all tending to make Duke's part in it appear more creditable. The young man wondered idly why she was at such pains to make her father like him.

AT the conclusion of the narrative Mr. Penfield sat and regarded Duke narrowly with appraising eyes. "You're more of a man than I had hoped for," he admitted candidly. "I don't see how a man named Harold ever managed to turn out so well. I suppose your name isn't your own fault, at that. If you don't mind, I'll call you something else—maybe Hank or Sam."

"Don't let Mother hear you do it," Ruth warned.

Penfield snorted. "Why not? Do you think I'm going to stand by and see you two ruin what looks like a pretty fair specimen of manhood just because he happens to be English and has a title? Listen, son: if you wear a monocle, don't let me know it. I'm going in to dress for the next meal." This last sentence was an acknowledgment of the appearance of his wife on the veranda.

She overheard his remark. "You don't have to dress this evening," she told him. "It would be difficult for Harold to change, wounded as he is, and so you needn't either, Percival."

Mr. Penfield winced. "Woman, haven't I told you never to call me by that damfool name?"

In spite of himself Duke laughed.

Mr. Penfield grinned at him ruefully. "Yes, it's my real name," he admitted. "No one knows it in New York except my wife, and I didn't think she'd ever betray me."

"I thought you wouldn't mind before Harold," she explained.

"Well, I do. I'm just a plain, ordinary American. I started on a farm, and I don't know who my great-grandfather was. There, that's off my chest. If you're still willing to admit you know me, there's my hand, Harold."

"And there's mine, Percy." Duke extended his with a grin. He wished that he also might shed the mantle of falsehood which was perforce draped

about his shoulders, but justice to Lord Varden forbade it.

"Jocelyn, bring us a drink," the older man commanded his butler, who was hovering respectfully in the background. "I'll have a Martini. What's yours, son?"

"I'll take the same."

"I didn't know Englishmen drank cocktails."

"I—er—learned to on the boat coming over."

"Two Martinis, Jocelyn."

"Yes sir. There's a person to see His Lordship." Jocelyn communicated the information formally.

"Some one to see me?" Duke asked.

"Yes, My Lord."

"Who is it?"

"He said he was your valet, My Lord."

"My valet? But my valet is ill. He was severely poisoned."

"He does look a little pale, My Lord. Shall I send him out here, My Lord?"

"Yes—er—no."

"You'd better see him here," suggested Ruth. "It may be some kind of a trick on the part of the men who are trying to steal that dispatch-case from you."

"I couldn't think of exposing the rest of you to danger," Duke explained hastily. "I'd better see him alone."

The young man was in a panic. If it really were Lord Varden's man, the jig was up. There would be instant exposure and immediate expulsion from this earthly paradise.

"No, send him out here," Mr. Penfield ordered, overruling Duke's objections. "If it's another one of those spies, I'll wring his neck."

CHAPTER V

MR. PENFIELD looked perfectly capable of wringing a man's neck, too. His hands were big and strong, and his pantomime of dealing with a spy was quite convincing.

Jocelyn was gone on his double errand. Duke hoped he would bring the cocktails before he sent in the valet. He felt that he was entitled to some fortification against the coming interview. But his luck had deserted him. The butler returned almost immediately without the drinks but followed at a short interval by a young man.

He looked more like the ghost of a young man than like a real flesh-and-blood individual. His clothing was all right, orthodox for an English servant off duty. It consisted of a brown solid-color suit, square-cut and boxy, finished off at one end with ugly black shoes surmounted by gray spats, and at the other with a gray bowler hat. This latest-mentioned article was not adorning the top part of his anatomy at the time he was introduced into the company on the porch, but instead was pressed firmly and deferentially over his stomach.

But the face scarcely looked as if it could be worn by anything that still inhaled the breath of life. It was deathly pale, with a sort of a greenish-gray tinge that was truly terrifying, and the eyes were dark and sunken. The lines around the mouth were deep with suffering and pain. The poor fellow walked with weakly tottering steps. It scarcely seemed as if he would last to reach the chair-back for which he groped to steady himself.

There seemed little to apprehend from an individual so weak and emaciated, but nevertheless Mr. Penfield rose to his ominous six feet (referring to altitude only) and towered aggressively over the newcomer. "Who are you?" he demanded as he motioned Duke back to the seat from which he had risen. "Let me handle this fellow."

"I am Lord Varden's man, sir," the hollow-eyed ghost croaked dismally.

"How about it, Hank? Is he right, or shall I heave him down the hill by the slack of his union-suit?"

When Mr. Penfield turned to address Duke, the scarecrow servant made a terrifying face at his supposedly noble employer and shook his fist with a threatening gesture.

"Is he your servant?" Mr. Penfield repeated, noting Duke's hesitation.

"No—er—that is, he is," Duke decided finally, his verdict hastened somewhat by the horrible convulsions which were contorting the face of the new arrival. "He looks strange, but it is be-

cause of the poison they gave him. I can see now that it is my man Dusinberry. I never expected to see you here, Dusinberry."

"I know it, sir. I wanted to surprise you, sir."

"Well, you got your wish."

"That man has an evil face," Mr. Penfield decided after a careful study of the servant's features. "I wouldn't trust him with a paper of pins, and I am never wrong when it comes to judging an employee's character."

"It's partly because he is sick," Duke defended. "He never was what you'd call good-looking, but he isn't ordinarily like this. Are you, Doolittle?"

"No sir."

"He's a clever valet—can do most anything. He not only takes care of my clothes, but he acts as a mechanician for my 'planes. Why, he can run a flying machine as well as I can myself. When he's feeling a little better, I'll send him up for you and see if we can't break his altitude record."

"Extraordinary!" Mr. Penfield exclaimed perfunctorily, and added in an undertone to Duke: "At that, I'm never wrong about a face."

"Just now I shall have to get along without Doolittle," Duke went on, apparently out of deference to the older man's judgment. "If you can spare me a servant, I'll send him back to the hospital until he has fully recovered."

"Good!"

"Oh, no sir, I couldn't do that, sir."

"Why not?" Penfield demanded impatiently.

"Because, sir," the valet observed with injured virtue, "I promised his dying mother I wouldn't let him out of my sight."

"But his mother isn't dead." Mrs. Penfield, who had hitherto taken no part in the conversation about servants, spoke up in a tone of conviction. "I received a letter from her about Harold only yesterday."

"No, she aint dead, ma'am," Dusinberry corrected obediently, "but once when she was nearly dying she made me promise I would stick to her son through thick and thin, and if I broke that promise, ma'am, I wouldn't be a son of old England." There was a modest ring in the voice of the young manservant as he finished his declaration.

Mrs. Penfield kindled to him at once. "There speaks an Englishman. You don't find loyalty like that among American servants."

Penfield sniffed but did not reply.

"I may stay, sir?" This question deferentially to Duke.

"Of course," Mrs. Penfield answered for him. "I want you to be near your master. That is all settled. I'll have Jocelyn show you the servants' quarters. You will be amply provided for."

Jocelyn was summoned and the invalid incarnation of devotion was intrusted to his care.

"Dusinberry," his master ordered sharply as he was being led away, "as soon as you have been assigned a place, come to my room at once."

"Very well, sir."

A FOOTMAN had been standing patiently by with a tray of cocktails during the latter half of the dialogue with and about Dusinberry. Now as that faithful retainer was led away, Mr. Penfield motioned the man forward. Duke took his with a sigh of relief. Meeting his old servant had been a distinctly trying ordeal.

"Here's how," greeted Mr. Penfield, and Duke abbreviated it to "How" as a preliminary to obliterating the Martini.

"Ugh!" Duke exclaimed involuntarily as the cocktail when down, and then a terrible fear convulsed his features. "Don't drink that!" he commanded Mr. Penfield, hastily laying a hand on the arm that was raised with the glass.

"What's the matter, son?"

"I'm afraid they've got me, sir. I think my cocktail was poisoned."

"Here, Charles, stand by!" Penfield ordered, speaking sharply to the footman who had brought the drinks. "Who mixed these cocktails?"

"I did, sir."

"You did?"

"Yes sir. Jocelyn was busy and told me to do it."

"Did you ever make one before?"

"No sir."

Penfield laughed. "That accounts for it. Charles has been with us for

years, and I'd trust him with my life. But he'd never make a success as a bartender." He took a taste of his own cocktail, just a taste. "Pure hair-tonic," was his verdict. "Take this out, Charles, and throw it away some place where it wont kill the grass. I'm sorry you drank yours, son, but you'll recover from it before dinner. I'll mix you another with my own hands until it will make you forget that cocktail and also every other one you ever had."

Duke was relieved to find that he was not dying, and after a space the stinging sensation caused by the cocktail left his throat and stomach. This was partly due to the soothing presence of Ruth, with whom he waited while her father went in to demonstrate his ability as an amateur bartender.

"Father is the best cocktail-mixer among the deacons of our church," volunteered Ruth, gazing in admiration after the retreating figure of her male parent. "They almost always hold their meetings here."

"He seems to be a good scout," offered Duke in confirmation of her devotion.

"It looks now as if he were going to like you too."

"Which, I take it, was more than you dared to hope?"

"Well, the fact that you are English doesn't help you any there as it does with Mother. And if you don't mind hearing about yourself, I might say that you are supposed to be one of the wildest young men in the right little, tight little isle of England. Of course, that reputation aroused my interest when I heard it, but you should have listened to what Father said on the subject."

Ruth had risen and now stood beside his chair. Absently she brushed back his hair with one hand. "But for the moment you are one of the family," she said; "you couldn't fit in any better if you were a pup that had been born on the place. How did you work up that reputation for devilment and still be as nice as you are? I can't imagine, for instance, how a man who looks as sensible as you do could have made such a foolish wager as you did about outliving your doctor when he told you that you would have to take care of yourself."

"Well, a man has to have a little excitement, doesn't he?" Duke cautiously defended the man he represented.

"It strikes me there is plenty of excitement going on these days since war was declared."

"Oh, but that isn't fair. When I made that wager there wasn't a sign of war."

DUKE welcomed the advent of Mr. Penfield with his homemade hand-grenades, not so much because of the stimulant as because it put an end to his temptation to tell the truth. It was growing increasingly hard to lie to this fearless-eyed, open-hearted beauty who took him so unreservedly at his face value and trusted him accordingly.

"Taste this, my boy," ordered Penfield *père,* beaming upon his guest. "You can't get a cocktail like that at the Biltmore."

Duke swallowed, choked a bit and admitted weakly that the other was right.

"It's a sort of a gift," Penfield admitted complacently. "You can't get the effect by measuring. You have to use a dash of this and a squirt of that, and half the result depends even then on the way you can chip the ice you use in the shaker."

"I can't see how you do it," Duke admitted with heartfelt sincerity. "Try as I might, I could never produce anything like this." He squinted at the deadly-looking potion of which half still remained in his glass, and then, when his host's back was turned, threw it over his shoulder onto the lawn below and wiped his lips immediately after with convincing appreciation.

"Shall I make you another?" Penfield inquired, driven to further heights by Duke's acting.

"No," Duke hastily forestalled. "I would not care to destroy the recollection of that cocktail with another which might not be so good. I would prefer to keep this one with me. Besides, my man is waiting. With your permission I'll get him straightened out before dinner."

Duke had really not the slightest desire to see the hollow-eyed ghost who

claimed to be his valet, but it was the first excuse that occurred to him, and he was not one to scorn a small lie if it proved temporarily useful.

Something—the footman's cocktail, Mr. Penfield's ditto or else just the stimulation of Ruth's tenderness—had restored some of the stiffness to Duke's underpinning. But he was glad of the elevator, at that. He even noted a slight fatigue when he had traversed the distance from the elevator to his room.

HE opened the door. There sat the gaunt creature who had arrived so unexpectedly. He continued to sit even in the presence of His Lordship. Further, he was smoking a cigarette.

"You certainly took your time," the valet growled, but added, "—although I was grateful for the opportunity of getting acquainted with this brand of cigarettes. I doubt if I'll ever be able to buy any on my own hook, though."

Duke scowled at him. "Now what the Sam Hill is the idea?"

"Nothing much. You needed a man. Who am I to see a friend lack for a valet, while I have nothing to do?"

"But listen, Cope, you're apt to ball everything up. You don't know anything about being a valet."

"I know as much about it as you know about being an English peer."

"Besides, I can't have anyone around with a face like that. It's too terrible."

"I do look pretty sick, don't I?" Burnett observed, getting up to survey himself complacently in the mirror. "Never mind, I'll get much better tomorrow, and the next day I'll wash it all off. I had to look the part, and everybody knows Lord Varden's valet very nearly croaked from the poison they fed him this morning."

"You think this is a joke," Duke accused his friend hotly. "Well, it isn't. It's a serious matter. I've already been shot once on this job, and I've been held up in Lord Varden's rooms, besides."

"I noticed you were wrapped up like a Christmas present, and I'm all full of healthy curiosity to hear the second installment of your serial. Pass me a cigarette and commence." Lord Varden's valet reclined comfortably in one chair and placed his feet on another.

"If I tell you about it, will you go back to the city and let me alone?" Duke inquired hopefully.

"I will not. I was assigned to this story too, you know, and I might lose my job if I didn't stick."

"I'll speak a good word for you with Copper," his friend offered magnanimously. "If you report back to the office now, I'll agree to resign. That will make you star man on the staff."

Cope considered this narrowly. "Get thee behind me," he decided at length. "If it's as good as that, I'll take my chances of getting in on it. I think I begin to get the idea. Has it anything to do with that girl I noticed down on the veranda when I came in?"

"She's Lord Varden's cousin," Duke informed him noncommittally.

"I didn't ask who she was. My idea was to find out if she was the cause of your obvious desire to make a pig of yourself about this assignment. I admit that she is a very fair-looking sort of a kid."

"'A fair-looking sort of a kid!' Heavens, man, I thought you were supposed to be a wizard at description. Would you write up the Battle of the Somme as a skirmish? 'Fair-looking sort of a kid'? Why, Cope, there isn't any girl in the world like her."

Burnett took out his watch. "When I left you at two o'clock, you seemed sane. This is a very rapid decay of what was once a serviceable sort of a mind. Have no further fear, John McCullough, your keeper is here now. Now you may just as well tell me what has happened so far."

"Drat it!" observed Duke gloomily.

"Unappreciated again, Dusinberry," Burnett commiserated to himself gently. "Gad, how ungrateful our employers are. I've a good mind to bust a hard-boiled family portrait on his grouchy, selfish bean. No, Dusinberry," he continued, mournfully addressing himself, "that wouldn't be the act of a Christian, even if it would make you feel lots better. No, you must serve and suffer in patience. Then some time later when he learns that you came all the way out here in order to tell him

all about Lord Varden and what he is to do, then maybe he'll be sorry."

"What's that?" Duke, lost in a personal meditation, heard enough to arouse his interest.

"I was merely pointing out in a general way that I am simply loaded with information about Lord Varden, what he is supposed to be doing in this country and who the gang is that is attempting to put him out of business. Of course, I suppose that information would be useless to a person as far gone as you are, anyway."

"For heaven's sake, if you know anything about this Varden chap and what the idea is in attempting to assassinate him every few minutes, come across with the dope." If Cope could furnish any help in steering through the difficult shoals just ahead he must tolerate his presence, even at considerable inconvenience to himself. Therefore he sketched hastily the events which had preceded Burnett's arrival at Pencrest.

"HOW you ever got your reputation as a space-writer, I don't know," Cope observed critically at the conclusion of the other's recital. "I get the bare facts all right from what you say, but otherwise it shows less imagination than a market-report. Before you try to sell that story, you want to dress it up a bit. Tell what that impostor thought when he discovered that he was falling in love with a girl he could never possibly meet again and—"

Duke groaned. "Don't joke about it. I've been telling myself that every other minute since I saw her. Suppose that you spill what you know about Lord Varden. Later if I need your help in planning anything I'll call you up by long-distance telephone."

"Concealed trust at an old bosom friend," Cope observed with detachment. "So be it. I could hold out my information, but being of a generous disposition, I haven't the heart to do it. In the first place, and this is what you need to know most of all, this Varden chap is visiting our delightful little country in the interests of the British war-office. Why? Because a lot of their armament and munitions are manufactured here. You know that.

"The secret part is that an English army officer who has spent some time at the front has invented a new kind of a rapid-fire gun that will be especially useful in this close-range trench-fighting that is all the go nowadays. Lord Varden did not tell me the details, but in effect the new weapon, handled by one man, takes the place of two ordinary rapid-firers. They want to get a lot of them made here. They've even got a sort of a tentative contract for a few thousand with a Bridgeport factory. But they do not want to let go of the new idea in construction until everything is all settled with the manufacturers over here.

"Hence they send the specifications of the gun by friend Varden instead of using regular channels. Ordinarily no one would suspect Varden of being chosen by anyone for an important mission; therefore he was the best kind of a messenger; but in some way the news of this particular errand of his leaked out. Somebody else wants the plans of that gun. As soon as they hear that Lord Varden is over here with them, they cable agents here to get them. The plans are in that dispatch-case he asked you to get. Simple, isn't it?"

"BUT what does Lord Varden want me to do with the documents?"

"That's just the point. The man you are to turn them over to is in Chicago and wont be back until tomorrow or the day after!"

"Then I'd better catch a train west right away."

"That's what I suggested, but Varden said no. That way there would be too many opportunities for robbery—in the first place from you, going out to Chicago, and then from the other man coming back. Besides, you can guard them better here than anywhere else."

"Then all I do is wait. For what?"

"Either for the real fellow to get well and come to take your job off your hands, or for him to die. If the latter happens, he wants you to go through with the deal just as if you were the real Lord Varden."

"Humph!" Duke contemplated the future with a sniff. It was pleasant or disappointing, according to whether he

considered the alluring dream of the present or the rough awakening that was bound to come in the near future.

The telephone-bell tinkled.

"Let me answer it," suggested Cope, anticipating Duke's movement. He took the receiver from the hook. "Hello!—Yes—No, I am his valet—Just a moment, please."

Cope put his hand over the mouthpiece and turned toward his friend. "A woman named Sherry wants to speak to Lord Varden."

"Sherry? Did Varden say anything about having an appointment with this lady?"

"No."

"What had I better do?"

"I don't know. From the sound of her voice, my first impulse would be to tell her to wait where she is until I could get there."

"Why, what kind of a voice is it?"

"It's a sort of a rich golden voice, soft but not a bit sticky. You can tell by listening to it that her skin looks like rich cream and that there is a dimple over each of her shoulder-blades."

Duke wheeled on the man at the telephone. "If you can tell that much from her voice, I suppose you could give her Bertillon measurements if you had a sample of her handwriting."

"Will you speak to her?"

"I don't believe I had better. She may know Lord Varden's voice and might notice the difference. Tell her Lord Varden has just stepped out but that you will take a message."

WHILE Duke watched, Cope uncovered the mouthpiece once more and transmitted the falsehood. This seemed to evoke quite a considerable amount of comment from the other end of the wire. Cope made one or two unintelligible interruptions and finally hung up the receiver. He stood for a moment eying the instrument with vacant, unseeing gaze.

"Well, what about it?" his friend interrupted his reverie harshly. "Am I going to hear what the lady wants, or are you going to stand there all day making bets with yourself about the color of her hair?"

Cope grinned guiltily. "I was wondering what she really looks like," he confessed. "My boy, that lady has some voice."

"But what did she say?"

Cope looked at him reproachfully. "Don't speak of such things in connection with this girl. I don't think she eats anything as common as potatoes. If you want to know what she said, it was that she is in New York now, just arrived on the *Casparia* and that she intended to catch the steamer you came on, was heartbroken when she found that she had missed it, but that now she was here, she must see you at once. She said she would come right out on the first train."

"Come out? Here?"

"Sure! She's crazy to see you. By the way, her name aint Sherry, like wine. It's *Chérie,* the French word for *darling.* Gee, you should hear the way she says it! Even when she spelled it out, it was like having an angel whispering about heaven in your ear."

"Turn off the south wind and tell me what to do."

"Why, see her, of course. A woman with a voice like that ought to be seen, no matter what it costs."

"But I don't want to see her. It complicates matters terribly. Suppose this Chérie is Lord Varden's fiancée or—or something. Did he say anything about her?"

"Not a thing."

"What right did he have to keep a woman like that dark? She may be a spy, or she may be a friend. How can I tell?"

"You'll know inside of an hour or so. It doesn't take the New York Central more than forty-five minutes to make the run out here."

"But I can't see her. I certainly couldn't have her here."

"Why not? A woman with a voice like that would be a hit anywhere, in the lowly hovel of a millionaire or in the palace of a plumber. If you don't want to see her yourself, invite her over for me to play with."

Duke observed his friend grimly. "If she comes anywhere near here, you're going to be the one to play with her, all right. You let her come out here; now

you think up some way to get her back. I've got troubles enough without adding another woman."

"Another woman!" Cope struck his forehead dramatically. "Man, you speak of women as if they came in dozen lots."

"Save a trifle of your conversation until you meet her," observed Duke.

"Scarcely believe it will be necessary, old chap. I imagine that when she gets a flash at me there on the platform all thoughts of you or anyone else are going to flee from her brain."

"You needn't hand yourself any bouquets. You've forgotten that make-up you have on."

Cope touched his face, and an expression of horror came over it. "Good heavens, I'd forgotten it, and this terrible suit of clothes too. What will she think of me?"

"Don't worry, my dear Dusinberry. She wont pay any attention to you."

"But I say, that wont do. She mustn't see me this way for the first time. First impressions are lasting, you know, and when we start up the church aisle together, I don't want her to be able to think back and remember me in any comedy rig like this."

"I wouldn't worry about the wedding arrangements for a bit, anyway. This woman may be somebody's grandmother, for all you know!" Duke turned away coldly as if he were done with the conversation.

COPE was through with conversation also for the present. He turned abruptly to His Lordship's closet and began laying out several suits of clothes. That in itself was nothing extraordinary, but when he got out of his own outer garments and began robing himself in the best-looking apparel of the lot, Duke felt called upon to protest.

"I might point out, Dusinberry, that you are taking the deuce of a lot of liberty with your master's clothes. I don't doubt but that you servants do just that quite frequently, but not before the very eyes of the man who is paying your salary."

Copeland Burnett, arrayed in a smart sack suit, examined the fit carefully in the mirror. "Not bad! This will do, I think. I hear and note what you said about paying me a salary. First intimation I had of the financial value of my new job. Thanks, Your Lordship. I'll just take this light overcoat to cover up my new elegance of attire until I get outside the grounds, and then I'll have plenty of time to wipe off the make-up down at the local hotel before the train gets in. As I shall not return until late, no one will notice my marvelous recovery until to-morrow. Then I can account for it by a good night's sleep. By-by, old chap. Don't forget, will you, that when you're in the deuce of a fix like this, I can always be depended on. Don't sit up for me."

With a debonair swagger in exaggerated burlesque of a stage man-about-town, Copeland Burnett opened the door leading to the corridor and made a leisurely exit.

CHAPTER VI

INSIDE His Lordship's room, the young man who had so hastily assumed the noble shoes paced up and down the floor in them for half a dozen turns, a harassed contraction of the eyebrows indicating intense mental perturbation.

Eventually he came to a sort of decision. This involved going to the telephone and being connected with the Garfield Hospital.

"Room M 6," he requested of the hospital operator.

"No calls are allowed on M 6," the operator told him pleasantly. "The patient is in a critical condition and must not be disturbed."

"But this is very important!" Duke protested imploringly.

"I'll let you talk to the head nurse in charge of floor M," the operator conceded graciously.

"Hello," said a sweet voice when the connection had been made.

"I wish very much to ask a question of a patient at present in Room M 6, but the operator says she is not allowed to call that room."

"No, the patient is very low."

"Could you take a message?"

"I might. What is it?"

"Ask the man in M 6 if he knows anything about Chérie."

"What's that?"

Duke repeated his request. "I know it sounds foolish, but I've simply got to know."

The nurse giggled a little but promised to do her best if he would hold the wire.

Duke did as requested for a full two minutes before there was any further reaction at the other end.

"Hello," came the nurse's voice. "The man in M 6 is unconscious, but when I said *'Chérie'* he smacked his lips over and over again."

"Would you think from the way he did it that he thought he was drinking wine or kissing some one?"

"I couldn't tell. It might be either. I never drank any wine. Wait a minute while I ask the interne. I think maybe he has."

There was a low rumble of conversation at the other end of the wire, and then a masculine voice cut in at the hospital.

"For the love of heaven get off this wire. If you want to know anything about booze, call up the Bellevue Hospital. This man you want to talk to may not live till morning. We cannot have him annoyed any further. Good-by!" The receiver was hung up with a vicious snap.

"Unmannerly pup," growled Duke into the lifeless mouthpiece. "I've a good mind to come over there and operate on your cranium with a brick."

A PLEASANT deep-toned gong from somewhere below-stairs he took to be a warning of the imminence of dinner, and with a hasty glance at himself in the mirror to see if he would do, he descended once more to the living-room floor of Pencrest.

Ruth was there before him in a pale green shimmery cloud the hue and material of which had apparently been stolen from the crest of a wave in a sunlit sea. And Duke was permitted to sit beside her at dinner.

Jocelyn served more cocktails. "No, thank you," Duke refused. "Owing to the nature of my mission from home, I have to be almost a total abstainer."

"Jocelyn mixed these," Ruth told him in an undertone.

"But I will take just one," he amended hastily upon receipt of the friendly tip.

"You must tell us all about the family over home," suggested Mrs. Penfield hospitably.

Duke suddenly stopped eating. His enjoyment of the meal faded instantly. A look of pain crossed his features.

"Don't you see, Mother, he can't," said Ruth.

Of course that was the truth, but Duke wondered how she knew. So did the others.

"Why can't he?" persisted her mother.

"It's too painful a subject. Have you forgotten about Lady Jane?"

"I had forgotten. I suppose it is rather a gloomy subject for the dinner-table. But I want you to tell me all about Lady Jane later. I should like to know how it happened."

Duke would have liked some information on the same subject himself. He also wished that he knew who Lady Jane was. So far, he had nothing to tie to except the name. She might be his sister or his mother or even his wife or fiancée, for all Duke knew. And something had happened to her, something unpleasant, apparently. It might be anything from death down to an operation for adenoids.

Duke was jolted out of this unpleasant self-catechism by a question from the head of the house.

"How long is this war going to last, anyway?" demanded Penfield *père* in a scowly tone of voice, as if Duke were personally responsible for it. But he gave the young man no chance to evade the charge, for he went on relentlessly. "There are too many chuckle-headed kings over on your side of the Atlantic. I'll bet that if you took a composite photograph of the insides of their heads, you'd get a blank plate. For instance, King George—"

"Percival!" said Mrs. Penfield with ominous repression. "Remember that Lord Varden is a subject of His Majesty George the Fifth, and cannot sit at your table while you criticize his sovereign."

Mr. Penfield looked quizzically at his guest as if he wondered what Duke would do if he went on. Duke for his part squirmed uneasily in his chair, equally uncertain whether English court etiquette required that he sit still and let the matter go unnoticed or get up and hurl a plate of soup at the caitiff who dared to criticize his king.

"Ask him what he thinks of the President of the United States and the army and navy," suggested Duke's beautiful mentor in the usual guarded undertone.

The young man acted with alacrity upon this tip, and the result was that the storm of criticism was diverted from the dangerous European channel to the safer and saner one near at home. It is so much the custom in this country to jump heavily with both brogans on the administration currently in power that no one notices any particular outburst. Mr. Penfield pounded the table, wagged his forefinger and so nearly died with repression at his wife's edict barring profanity at the table that the rest of the dinner passed off without reference to a single dangerous subject.

The dinner was rather formal and took a long time to serve. For this Duke was both glad and sorry—glad because it deferred the inevitable questions from Mrs. Penfield, and sorry because it gave him just that much more time to worry about them. At last it was over, and the family moved as a body to the hospitable living-room, where a wood-fire had been built to ward off the chilliness of a slight mist from the river.

Jocelyn brought cigars.

"To-morrow evening we are going to have some of our friends in," Mrs. Penfield was saying as they settled themselves before the fire. "There will be a dozen guests for dinner, and nearly a hundred for a dance afterward. We would have had a reception in your honor to-night, but we thought that it would be nicer just to spend a quiet evening together talking over intimate matters. It has been so long since we have been in England that there are lots of family affairs of which I have heard only meager details, but about which you can doubtless furnish full information."

DUKE stirred uneasily in the supposed-to-be comfortable chair in which he was ensconced. Here he was, trapped!

"How is your mother?"

That was easy. "Mother is about the same."

"That's what she said in her letter, but I was afraid that all of her worries since the war began had depleted her already frail strength."

"Why, I suppose that possibly she is not quite so strong as when you saw her last, but Mother is a true Englishwoman and she puts up a good front, as you Americans say." Duke was careering along famously—almost too fast, he feared.

"And the Earl is quite feeble, I suppose?"

"Yes and no," Duke replied, feeling that he was entitled to a trifle of latitude. "Some days he is as chipper as a wren and then other times—" He shrugged his shoulders.

"I understand. But with an old man you have to expect that. I suppose he chafes at not being able to be in the fighting that is going on."

"I should say he does! It's really pathetic. Sometimes at night he will wake up with a cry and when we go to him he says he thought he heard a bugle-call." That touch was high art. Duke resolved to remember it and write a story around it sometime. "Just to humor him, we keep his uniform laid out to make him think that he can go if they call out the reserves, and we even have a horse saddled and ready with his old equipment."

"A horse?" Mrs. Penfield inquired with curious surprise.

"Yes," Duke admitted hesitatingly, with a sinking feeling in the pit of his stomach. "Why not?"

"Wasn't the Earl a rear admiral in the navy when he retired?"

"Of course! Yes, I see, you thought it was funny for him to use a horse in the navy. It would sound peculiar, if you didn't know that when his fleet was on duty near home he used to come ashore and ride over to the castle for

most of his meals. That's why we always kept his horse ready for him." It seemed a trifle warm in the room, and Duke wiped his brow with his handkerchief. It was warm enough so that he wished that he might go outside—anywhere, in fact, to be alone.

But there was no chance. Mrs. Penfield shot the fatal question at him unrelentingly. "What about Lady Jane? I realize that it is a painful subject, but you know we all sympathize and are desperately interested."

WILDLY Duke cast about for an avenue of escape. There was none. Even Mr. Penfield, who had been only mildly and perfunctorily interested in the proceedings before, was now regarding his young and noble guest with lively attention.

"Yes, do tell us about her now," Ruth urged. "I nearly cried my eyes out when I heard the news."

So far, no clue! Duke cleared his throat. "It's a long story. You remember her, don't you?"

"I do," answered Ruth. "I remember her better than I do you. When we were at Castlebayne, she was very little—only about so long." Ruth measured off eight inches on her arm.

"She was small," Duke admitted, "but of course later she grew up." This was an incontrovertible statement, but Duke paused there before going on. If some one would give him a lead— "She became very beautiful," he suggested to fill in the silence.

"So I understand," admitted Mrs. Penfield. "Your mother often mentioned the wonderful white spot on her chest."

"White spot on her chest!" Duke's mind was completely upset by that remark. The entire mental picture of Lady Jane he was constructing for himself was suddenly destroyed. Lady Jane could not be a lady after all. She was evidently some sort of animal, either a horse or a dog, probably. It was a relief to know that much, but he was up against it now to know whether to speak of her whinny or her bark.

"She always limped a little in the left hind foot," he offered, choosing, as he thought, perfectly safe ground.

"Left hind foot?" Mrs. Penfield repeated in horror. Mild amazement likewise sat upon the countenances of her daughter and her husband. "You speak as if she had four feet like a cow or a horse!"

Duke's brain groped wildly, but there was nothing to grab onto but the empty air. What could this Lady Jane be? Apparently she had only two feet, was quite beautiful and had a white spot on her chest. It was very baffling, like the conundrum which says: "What is it that is all covered with feathers, walks on two legs and barks like a dog?" You may remember that "barks like a dog" was put in "to make it harder."

Duke gave up. "I may as well tell you the truth," he said, speaking his decision out loud. "There is no use trying to deceive you any longer. I am—"

He was about to proclaim loudly his real identity and show Mr. Penfield where to grab him as he threw him out of the house, when a mild interruption in the shape of the excited entrance of Jocelyn transferred attention from himself to the butler.

"Pardon me, ma'am, but His Lordship's man is outside in a taxicab."

CHAPTER VII

"DUSINBERRY is outside in a taxicab?" Mrs. Penfield repeated incredulously. "Why, I thought he was here in the house."

"I sent him on an errand down at the village," Duke explained. "Why doesn't he come in?"

"He's unconscious, My Lord. The taxi-driver said he found him on the street with this note pinned on him." Jocelyn handed over a grimy bit of paper.

Duke took it incredulously and held it to the light. There was writing on it, smeared but still decipherable.

"*'Deliver to Lord Varden's private hospital at Pencrest. There will be others soon.'*" Duke read it out loud.

"The driver wants to know what he should do." This from the butler.

"Is Dusinberry dead?"

"I don't think so, My Lord. He's unconscious, but I think he is just a little balmy—that's all."

"Then take him upstairs to my room, and I will see what is the matter."

"The driver says it's five dollars." Jocelyn offered with discreet insistence.

"Pay him," ordered Penfield, thus greatly relieving his noble guest, whose pockets were painfully empty.

The butler left hurriedly to attend to his errand of mercy both to Duke and his friend Copeland Burnett.

The former, in the stress of excitement, had time fervently to thank Heaven for the respite from searching questions which Cope's timely arrival had given him. Now he had a good excuse for putting off the explanation of Lady Jane's misfortune until a later date. Possibly by that time he could get hold of some facts that would help him out. Just now it was perfectly reasonable that he should leave the fireside and go to his supposed servant.

They brought Cope to Duke's rooms. The young man, when they carried him in, appeared to be intact—that is, there were no arms, legs, nose or ears missing, and there was no blood in sight to indicate a serious wound. But he was gracefully limp just the same, and when deposited upon a couch looked almost exactly like an ex-champion two or three seconds after he has been exed.

"Would Your Lordship wish a doctor?" Jocelyn inquired in a respectfully suggestive tone as they stood viewing the wreck of what had been a well-dressed man.

"No, I think some cold water and possibly a piece of raw beefsteak later for his eye will be all the simple remedies we shall need." Duke had seen that recipe used before as a restorative, and knew whereof he spoke.

"Very well, My Lord."

Jocelyn and another masculine servant brought water and towels. Duke administered them personally in rough allopathic doses. It was five minutes before Cope's fluttering soul decided that it might better come back to life rather than be drowned, and he opened one eye experimentally to see if it was still raining.

"Chérie," he murmured, as if taking up the thread of a conversation that had been interrupted by the loss of consciousness.

"I will take care of him further," hastily interposed Duke, addressing Jocelyn and his assistant. "You might bring up a little brandy in a few minutes."

The servants withdrew, and as soon as the door closed, Duke bent over his friend and colaborer.

"Did Chérie meet you?" he inquired, anxiety for news overcoming his solicitude for Cope's comfort.

Cope groaned. "I don't know. Does Chérie wear brass knuckles, and does she carry a piece of lead pipe wrapped up in a stocking? If she does, she did."

"What happened?" Duke demanded ruthlessly. It seemed imperative to learn the details of this last move on the part of the enemy. There might be a follow-up on it for which it would be necessary to prepare.

COPE groaned again like a rusty piece of machinery getting under way. "I went down to the station," he said with painful articulation. "It isn't far, but it's dreadfully dark. This is one of those artistic suburbs, you know, where illumination is an abomination and everybody has their own car to travel about in after dark, anyway. When I left the grounds here, I thought some one was following me. I didn't see a soul, but I heard one or two funny noises, and I had that creepy feeling that you read about.

"By the time I got near the station, there was a train coming in from the direction of the city; so I quickened my pace in order to get there first. I got to the platform just before the train pulled in. The station down there is one of those tiny coops with a long roof over the platform alongside the tracks where passengers stand in summer to wait for transportation. I didn't know where this girl would get off; so I started for the middle of the platform with the idea of looking both ways. I was sure I would recognize her a lot further off than the mere length of a passenger-train.

"The train came to a stop. Just as it did so, a well-dressed man stepped up to me and asked for a match. I hated to be annoyed just then, but I put both hands in my trousers pockets, not knowing which one held my match-case. Just as I did so, Chérie got off the train."

"How do you know it was she?" demanded Duke abruptly.

"Just knew it—that's all," Cope returned. "I was just as sure of her as if she had carried a torch and banner with her name on it. She had on a blue dress, sort of a robin's-egg shade, just the right color to go with her hair, and she was corking in it." Cope sighed wistfully. "But I hadn't any more than got an eyeful of her when this man who was asking me for the match grabbed me by the arms so I couldn't take my hands out of my pockets, and then—*zowie!* Somebody bent a piece of gas-pipe right across the repository of my college education. I'll bet I have a dent there like the Yale Bowl."

"A dent!" exclaimed Duke incredulously. "Man alive, if you think that's a dent, what would you call the dome of Saint Peter's? My boy, you have a swelling on your head worth looking at merely as scenery."

Cope lifted up his hand and touched the hen's egg which was developing just above his forehead. "And I suppose I have a black eye too?" he inquired without much hope.

"You have," Duke sighed.

"The fates seem to be against my looking like anything for my first meeting with the future Mrs. Burnett tomorrow!"

DUKE discouraged his friend's rhapsodies. "Supposing this was Chérie you saw at the station, why do you suppose anyone would want to prevent you from meeting her?"

Burnett pondered over the question for a minute.

In the interval Jocelyn rapped at the door and entered with a bottle of brandy. Duke poured out a drink for his friend which Cope absorbed with alacrity.

"That will be all, Jocelyn," Duke told the servant. "I'll send Dusinberry down to his quarters shortly, and if he needs anything further, I will ask you to see that he is supplied."

"Yes, My Lord." Jocelyn bowed himself through the door.

Cope seemed strangely cheered with one drink. "Those fellows who tapped me down at the station must have thought that I was you," he reasoned. "I suppose the fact that I had on Lord Varden's clothes may account for it."

"It is more likely," observed Duke, "that this Chérie woman is a fake and that the telephone-call from her was only a trap to get me out of the house. Probably one of them was waiting for me outside. As soon as you started for the station, they were sure that you were me going to answer that telephone-call; and then they attempted to beat your brains out, not knowing how well protected they were."

"No matter how it happened," declared Cope, "Chérie had no hand in it. There may have been some one listening in on the line, but she could not have been a party to it."

"Could not! Why?"

"Not with that voice. A girl that can wear a blue dress the way she can hasn't got a treacherous bone in her body."

Duke threw up his hands in disgust. "You make me tired. Here you are talking about a girl, when an attempt was made upon my life."

"Upon *your* life?" Cope repeated.

"Yes! The mere fact that you got in the way of it doesn't alter their intentions. They were after me, you know, and I hate to think what would have happened if I had been struck on the head as hard as you were."

"You never would have known it," Cope observed witheringly. "It is impossible to make a dent in a bowl of mush. I'm going to bed. Good night."

He got up and slammed the door after himself with unservantlike disrespect.

THE room-telephone uttered its well-bred jangle. Still smiling, Duke answered it.

"Hello!"

"Hello!" came Ruth's voice. "How is the patient?"

"Quite recovered, thank you. I've just sent him to bed."

"Mother was wondering if you'd like to come down and exchange a little gossip about the family."

"Why—er—I'm pretty tired."

"I thought you would be. I'm going out on the south veranda myself for a while before turning in. It's a lovely moonlight night."

"Is it? I hadn't noticed."

"You had better look out your window and see."

"Is there, by any chance, a way of getting to the south veranda except through the living-room?"

"There is not."

"And your mother and father are there?"

"Yes."

He sighed. "H'm!"

Her voice: "Good night."

"Good night."

He reluctantly let her break the slight vocal thread that connected them. How confoundedly annoying not to be able to see her without having also to engage in conversational blindman's buff with her family!

Wait—she had suggested that he look out the window to see how beautiful the night was. Did she mean anything particular by that?

The sash was already open. Duke merely parted the curtains, and the night in all its glory lay before him. Down the hill the soul of the crawling river hovered over it in a mist. An unbelievable moon poured an endless stream of cold fire across the domes and minarets of the temples which by daylight were the Penfield stables, greenhouses and servants' quarters.

But Duke Holway had seen moonlight before, though possibly never before when he was quite in the same mood. More immediately interesting was the narrow balcony outside the window. If he had noticed it at all before, it had been with an eye adjusted solely to decorative effects. That it might be useful had not occurred to him.

He stepped out experimentally. Yes, there was more of it extending laterally around the building. He followed the extension a little way, passing half a dozen dark windows as he did so. He thanked his lucky stars that none of the rooms was occupied.

And then he came to one window that was wide open, with some one leaning far out. Duke paused, nonplused. The person had not noticed him yet; he or she was too fondly wrapped in admiration of the moon. What should he do? If he went on, he must explain; if he went back, he could not see Ruth.

While he stood tangled in indecision, the whispered words, "Chérie, darling!" escaped the lips of the moongazer. It was only the spoken accompaniment of a sigh.

But it was enough for Duke. "Take your head in, *Juliet*, so I can pass," he told his friend. "That bump on it sticks out so far it blocks the entire balcony."

"Oh, it's you, is it?" Cope recognized him conventionally. "Have you been appointed night-watchman, or is there a fire in your room so that you can't stay in it?"

"I just thought I'd slip out and get a little air," Duke vouchsafed.

"Wait a minute, and I'll go with you."

"If you do, I'll raise another lump on your roof that will make this one look like a navy bean alongside of Pike's Peak."

"I'm not welcome?"

"Not unless you go the other way from that in which I am headed. Good night!" To shut off further parley, Duke hastened to pass his friend's window and go on about his business. A muttered, "Selfish pup!" floated after him.

At the rear of the building, where it would be out of sight, the balcony ended in a perpendicular iron ladder. Evidently the whole affair was an ornamental fire-escape. Duke applauded the architectural ingenuity which had so carefully concealed its utilitarian purpose.

It was hard work to descend with one arm more or less out of commission, but he did it a step at a time for the entire two floors. He paused a moment on the ground to get his bearings. The south veranda, obviously,

was around on the more moonlit side of the house, and thither he wended his way.

The veranda was apparently unoccupied, but a still swaying couch-swing betrayed the fact that some one had been there recently, and he sat down upon it.

AFTER a moment or so of contemplation of the moonlight all by himself, he began to be bored and in a mournful voice chanted the gloomy madrigal about Little Miss Muffet, the young lady who had such an abnormal appetite and was so easily frightened off her tuffet by a member of the Arachnida family.

At the conclusion of the lyric, Ruth came out of the shadows.

"Do you consider that fair tactics?" she inquired.

"What?" he countered blandly.

"To sing until I had to betray my presence in order to stop you."

"All is fair in love and war."

"But we are not at war."

"I am. For that reason I show no mercy. If I really had you in my power, I wouldn't give two straws for your chances of ever escaping."

She came nearer. "I love to hear you brag. Go on."

He accepted her challenge. "The sun never sets on the English."

"If it did, I don't suppose it would do any good."

"Come on back and sit on your tuffet. Better come," he repeated as she hesitated, "or 'I'll sing thee songs of Araby.'"

"I'll come," she decided hastily.

"If I can do this much with my voice unaided, I believe that if I had my ukelele I could make you my slave."

She sat gingerly beside him.

"All ashore that's going ashore," he announced with subdued stentoriousness. "Captain, you may ring eight bells on the larboard watch and put out to sea. Only be careful of that dark coral reef over there, and keep away from the island of pines on the starboard mizzenmast, because I think there's a pirate over there waiting to sink us with a broadside of chain-shot."

"Aye-aye, sir."

"Oh, are you the captain? Good heavens, Captain, what adorable little soft hands you have for a sailor!"

"Excuse me—I need that hand to steer with."

"Suppose you do. Why not let the mate steer?"

"There isn't any mate."

"Oh! Well, Captain, it wont do any harm, will it, if I take hold of the end of this bit of ribbon you're wearing at your shoulder? I'll feel so much safer if I have something to steady me now that it is beginning to get a bit rough."

"Steward, show this passenger to his room. I think he has *mal de mer* and is slightly out of his head."

"Ouch! Captain, sound your horn; that traffic-cop is in the way."

"And if necessary," she went on, addressing the imaginary steward, "put him in irons for the rest of the voyage."

"Go on, Captain—speak some more. It makes lovely ripples in the cream velvet there at your throat. It fascinates me to watch them. Go away, Steward—can't you see I'm a prisoner already, practically chained to this spot?"

"If you feel that you must have companionship, why don't you go down and visit the engineer?"

"I believe I will. Thanks for the tip, Cap." There were a few moments of silence, and then he again addressed her: "Hello, Engineer, the captain up on the bridge sent me down to amuse you."

"He needna ha' worrit hissel'," growled the supposed-to-be engineer.

"Good heavens, the engineer of this boat is Harry Lauder! Harry, you've changed greatly since I saw you last, and as far as I'm concerned, it's a tremendous improvement. As I remember, you did not use to have such soft fluffy hair; nor were you quite so smooth and pink right there where most of us are vaccinated."

SHE turned and faced him squarely. "Oh, I like to play with you," she declared half wistfully. "I only hope you wont spoil it all."

"By falling in love with you?" he

supplied intuitively. "I can't help that, you know. God knows I'm trying to keep from it. There are reasons why it isn't right."

"What?" she asked, her curiosity inadvertently causing her to overlook the fact that she had just declared she did not want his devotion.

"That's a secret just yet. I've got to keep from caring for you, and yet everything you do makes it harder. Why do you have to look the way you do out of those eyes? Try frowning more like this. . . . . It's no use—you're only more adorable when you do. And the lips of you, girl: can't you straighten them out just once and kill those dimples at the corners of your mouth? How can you expect me to talk sense while they're there and the moonlight has gone to sleep in your eyes? Don't you dare let me take your hand like this—I don't think I'm going to be quite responsible after I have touched your fingers with my lips. There, I knew I wouldn't be. I wonder if people in New York can hear the thundering of my heart. Don't let me pull you toward me; I don't think I can possibly stand the nearness of your lips."

Yet she leaned ever so slightly toward him. Duke, who had the instincts of a gentleman, made the fight of his life against the call of youth. He had a right to love her, no matter who he was, but it was all wrong to tell her so while she thought he was some one else. And yet he could not tell her that he was an impostor, not if he kept faith with the young Englishman over there in the hospital who had placed his fortunes in his hands.

It was all wrong. And yet nature was and always has been on the side of those who love, whether rightly or wrongly. The universe stood still while he tried to prevent his arm from encompassing those lovely young shoulders. It was no use. She held him off a moment, reluctant to yield, and then the magic of the moonlight melted her to him.

It was only for a second. A door at one side opened. They, who were in the shadow, could see the figure of Jocelyn in the lighted frame.

"Beg pardon," he said, "but a lady has just arrived to see Lord Varden."

"A lady? To see me?" Duke repeated, incredulous.

"Yes, My Lord."

"Who can it be?"

"She said, My Lord, that she was your wife."

CHAPTER VIII

WATER never turned to ice so fast as the shoulders of Ruth stiffened beneath the masculine arm which encircled them. One instant she was his, pliable to his every word; the next, a glittering sword had passed between them.

Duke rose in a daze.

"My wife?" he echoed mechanically. "I have no wife."

"Shall I tell her that, My Lord?"

"Yes—no, wait a minute. Perhaps I had better see her. You will excuse me, Miss Penfield?"

"Certainly." Somehow the way she said it made him feel as if he had been picked up by giant pincers and thrown out of sight across the horizon.

At the door Duke squared his shoulders before plunging into the uncertain waters that lay across its threshold. With outward calm, he stepped in upon a scene which neatly upset all his plans.

Mr. and Mrs. Penfield were there seated side by side near the fireplace, like a judge and jury not quite knowing whether the verdict would be "guilty" or "not guilty" and ready to be severe or to unbend graciously as soon as the decision was reached.

Over against them at a forlorn distance on the other side of the room sat a tiny, wistful-eyed person, scarcely more than a schoolgirl, who rested gingerly on the edge of a great chair that threatened to swallow her at one bite.

Duke stopped and looked at her inquiringly. She looked back at him, and as she did so, a flicker of uncertainty came into her eager eyes and then an expression of abject fear. The words of denunciation that were on the tip of his tongue were never uttered. You cannot berate a baby who

hasn't a friend in the wide, wide world and tells everybody so with mute, appealing eyes and a quivering, sensitive mouth that is set in an unsuccessful attempt at a smile.

Instead of scolding her, he said nothing. He only waited, frankly puzzled himself, for some explanation. She could not be a spy; that seemed ridiculous.

"You, monsieur—" she faltered. She stopped and then continued once more: "You are Lord Harold Varden?"

"Yes." He took the plunge; it was necessary to keep it up until his identity was discovered.

"And I am your wife?"

Good heavens, she put it in the form of a question. Didn't the girl know the man she was married to? Duke strove vainly in the vacuum which took the place of his mind to find some explanation which would account for the uncertain attitude of this person who had thrown herself on his mercy.

"Don't you know?" he countered with another question. This thing had to be felt out cautiously.

"I thought I did," she stated uncertainly. "I married Lord Varden a week ago in London, but somehow he doesn't look exactly as I expected." She had addressed this remark in piteous appeal to Mrs. Penfield. Heaven knows, Mrs. Penfield did not look much like a refuge in time of trouble, but at least she was of the petticoated and persecuted sex, and the girl laid her problem before her as one who might understand.

"Aren't you positive about your husband's appearance?" the scandalized matron demanded.

"I was pretty sure until I saw him," the girl stated miserably. "You see, we were married very early in the morning; it was not quite daylight, in fact."

"Why on earth choose such a time for a wedding?" Mrs. Penfield's curiosity got the better of her outraged sense of propriety.

"Well, we were both there, and so were all the others."

"But how did you come to get up at that unearthly hour?"

"We didn't get up; we were up. Harold, you tell them about it." She turned suddenly to Duke and thrust the responsibility upon his unwilling shoulders.

"I—I—don't remember the details," he confessed weakly, wishing that something would happen to create a diversion. He even seriously considered doing an imitation faint, but decided that even with his bandaged arm he scarcely looked the part. "If you know what happened," he instructed the girl, "tell them about it."

"Poor dear," said the girl, "you were a bit what you call sewed up, but I never thought it was so bad that you wouldn't remember.

"We had a party after the show," she began her story, adding by way of explanation to Mrs. Penfield: "I was in the chorus of the new De Courville review before I married Harold. Several of us girls were invited out by Lieutenant Ware—he's engaged to Dolly Wayne and is home on sick leave. He said there would be several other army men and Lord Varden besides, who was in some other branch of the Government service—I don't remember what, exactly. We went because there aren't so many chances for good times since the war started, and besides, those poor boys back from the front ought to have any pleasure we girls can give them, don't you think?

"It was midnight before we got started. The party was at Lieutenant Ware's apartment—I forgot to say that. Lord Varden seemed an all-right sort, and he took to me right from the beginning. He was awfully sorry, he said, that he had only met me just before he was going away. He was leaving the next morning for America, he said. I felt badly about that too, and we talked a lot about writing one another and meeting just as soon as he returned.

"The idea of losing each other just as we had found us pretty nearly spoiled the whole evening. We pretended to be gay like the others, but mostly we were thinking about the boat that was going to sail in the morning. Everybody noticed it after a while, and they began to make fun of us. They

drank the health of Lord Varden and his new bride, just teasing us, you know, but it gave him the idea, and he said that he was going to marry me and take me with him. The others thought that was a great idea, and we all drank some healths and trooped out to find a minister. We found one all right, and he married us just about daybreak.

"One of the girls took me to my room to pack up my things, and Lord Varden went on with the men to get ready. We were to meet at the boat-train. After I got my luggage ready, I lay down just for a minute on my bed. I must have gone to sleep, because when I woke up it was afternoon, and I had a terrible headache. I went to the station, but of course the train had left hours before. When I telephoned Lord Varden's apartments, no one answered, and then I called up Lieutenant Ware. He laughed when I said who it was, and told me that Lord Varden had been put on the train fast asleep but that he was in charge of his man, so everything was all right. Lieutenant Ware didn't seem to remember much about the wedding, but when I cried, he agreed to help me catch the next boat so I could be with Harold in America. So I came, and here I am."

SHE turned expectantly toward Duke, but on seeing him again, her face fell and her enthusiasm vanished. "Something is dreadfully wrong," she wailed. "You're not a bit as I thought you were. Why, I'm even sorry I'm married to you."

Mr. Penfield chuckled. "That often happens," he consoled her, "but most of us never speak our regrets."

"Percival!" The withering exclamation came sharply from Mrs. Penfield.

"I was speaking editorially," he explained hastily. "Now everyone knows that our marriage—"

"Never mind about going into particulars. The question now is: 'What is to be done?' This girl says she is Harold's wife, and Harold doesn't remember whether she is or not. The poor boy was probably tired, and they gave him too much to drink."

Mr. Penfield's jaw dropped as he heard his wife's sudden defense of her kinsman. Here he had expected her to turn on him in just indignation and rend him hip and thigh, and now she was offering excuses!

The question of what to do had rallied the dispersed faculties of the chief victim of the situation. Duke knew better than anyone else that something had to be done, and done quickly, before any further explanations were made in public. His original idea of denying the marriage and claiming that the girl was an impostor now seemed impracticable. You can't do that to such a pretty baby-faced girl. He had to protect her, to bluff it through until the papers which were in his possession had been safely delivered.

"Lady Varden is tired," he suggested with the idea of deferring further cross-questioning and debate until he could have a private interview with this girl and coach her for the future. That she was genuine and believed her own story he did not for a moment doubt.

"Of course," Mrs. Penfield assented. "I will have her shown to her apartment at once. It is the one adjoining yours, and I will have Jocelyn unlock the connecting doors."

Jocelyn was summoned, and the girl, not quite comprehending, was led away.

"Now," said Mrs. Penfield, when they were *en famille,* so to speak, "suppose you give your explanation."

That was the question which Duke had been fearing. What was his explanation of it?

Mr. Penfield came to his rescue. "Probably he can't explain, Clara," he said. "You know lots of times when a man has been kept up all night by a lot of friends who don't really mean any harm, he can't tell the next morning what happened."

It seemed as well to fall in with his host's kindly suggestion. "I have only a hazy recollection of my marriage," said Duke. "Mr. Penfield knows how it is."

"Not from experience," that person interposed hastily. "Only from hearsay, my boy, only from hearsay."

"But surely," insisted the lady of the house, "you must have come to your senses before you sailed. You must have realized that you were leaving your wife behind."

"Oh yes," Duke admitted, and then went on with fresh inspiration. "But you see, I was on Government secret-service work and could not wait. I simply had to go through with it, wife or no wife."

"Of course," agreed Mrs. Penfield proudly. "The members of our family have always done their duty to their sovereign, no matter at what cost to themselves."

THIS matter of explaining was getting easier than Duke had expected. With both members of the family anxious to help him out, all he had to do was to let matters drift. At least, that was what he thought until Jocelyn returned.

That dignitary intimated by his presence that he had an official communication to make.

"What is it, Jocelyn?" his mistress inquired, answering the high-sign.

"Lady Varden has been shown to her room," Jocelyn replied.

"Perhaps you had better send one of the maids to help her with her things," suggested Mrs. Penfield by way of command.

"I had already made the same suggestion to Lady Varden myself, madam," the butler returned with injury in his tone, "but Lord Varden's man Dusinberry said not to bother and that he would take care of Lady Varden himself."

"What!" The exclamation was startled out of Duke, who with a sense of security had allowed himself to sit down comfortably in one of the living-room chairs. In his excitement now he arose.

"This is most extraordinary," was Mrs. Penfield's gasping comment.

"Dusinberry does not understand," Duke managed to offer apologetically. "He is an excellent valet, but I—we—er—never had a wife before. He isn't quite sure of his duties in the matter. I will go up and give him my instructions."

Making this do duty as a good-night speech, Duke left the room and went to the third floor, not by the elevator, because that seemed too slow, but by the velvet-carpeted stairs, which he managed to negotiate two steps at a time.

His own door he flung open. There was no one there, but he heard voices, and he went on to another door that stood ajar in the adjacent wall.

This he also opened and stood there gazing upon the spectacle of Copeland Burnett engaged in unlacing the high boots of the tiny girl with the wistful baby eyes, accompanying his actions the while with a running fire of soothing words of which Duke caught only the startling phrase: "Chérie, darling!"

CHAPTER IX

AND the worst of it was that the girl seemed not to mind. A casual spectator might even have thought she liked it.

"Dusinberry!" Duke ejaculated sharply. "What are you doing in Lady Varden's boudoir?"

Cope looked up, startled for a moment.

"W-w-what?" he asked.

"Who ordered you to valet the entire Varden family?" his pseudo-master demanded.

"Don't you understand?" countered Cope belligerently. "This is Chérie."

"What if it is? What difference does that make?"

"I told you about her the first time I heard her voice over the telephone, didn't I? And when I came back from collecting this black eye when I went down to meet her, I told you some more. Don't you remember?"

"Yes, I remember; but don't you forget that this girl is married to me." In the heat of the argument Duke was beginning to forget that he was not the real owner of the title or the wife, and he was having all the emotions of an outraged noble husband.

"Bosh!" ejaculated Cope with feeling.

"I think Cope Dusinberry is very nice," opinioned Chérie noncommittally.

"Oh, he has told you his first name already, has he?" growled Duke sarcastically.

"Listen, Duke," interposed Cope. "Don't be unreasonable. This girl and I are not really meeting for the first time. I think we were married once about the time Cleopatra was cutting her first tooth."

Duke threw up his hands. "I call Heaven to witness that I am trying to save this man's reason. Can't you get it through that fool nut of yours that this girl is married?"

"Only temporarily, at best."

"Only temporarily!" Duke stopped short in his exasperated pacing of the room. "What in the dickens do you mean by only temporarily?"

"There isn't a chance in the world that her husband will live more than a day or so, not with so many crack shots and poison-mixers on his trail. When she is a widow, then I shall come to her honorably and lay my plea before her."

A pregnant pause ensued, in which Duke managed to choke back a dozen things that simply demanded to be said to and about his engaging young friend.

"What has convinced you so thoroughly that the young lady is so soon to be a widow?" he at length managed to sort out from the more vivid sentences that begged for utterance.

"For one thing," Cope replied, "I am impressed by the reckless extravagance of our friends outside." He jerked his head toward the window as if he were speaking of a cordon of besiegers surrounding a beleaguered stronghold.

"Why?"

For a reply Cope felt in his breast pocket and produced a slip of paper which he handed to his employer, so to speak. It was a strip of thin bond only about four inches wide, such as might be torn or cut from anybody's letterhead, and on it was typewritten a single sentence: *"You will receive one thousand pounds if your master drinks this in his tea."*

Duke stared at the sentence.

"What does it mean by 'this'?"

"A small white pellet," Cope returned. "I have it in my vest pocket. It came in a tiny glass bottle with that paper around it fastened with a rubber band."

"How did you get it?"

"Found it on my dressing-table half an hour ago. I can't imagine how it got there."

WHILE the discussion had been going on, Chérie had finished removing the high boots herself, and retiring for a moment to another room adjoining, now reappeared in a distractingly lovely negligee. It was a sky-blue sort of cloud business, all soft and billowy.

The two men stared at the vision speechless.

"I got it for my honeymoon," she explained naïvely, correctly interpreting the flattering astonishment of the two young men.

"But you aren't having a honeymoon," Cope objected strenuously. "Why, this poor nut is no more—"

"Dusinberry!" checked Duke sharply. "Remember M 6 in the Garfield Hospital."

"Oh, hang M 6!"

"Your language is very unbecoming to a servant of the house of Varden. You will have to moderate it or leave my employ at once."

"Don't leave, Monsieur Dusinberry," pleaded Chérie, advancing just a step toward Cope with a mist of unshed sympathetic tears in her eyes.

"Oh, well," decided the valet, "I'll stay. I suppose I've got to in order to protect you from this ruffian."

Duke laughed. "Faithful Dusinberry! We shall have a doormat placed in the hall outside of Lady Varden's door, and you shall sleep on it tonight."

"Me outside on a mat, and you—"

"Hush, Dusinberry! You may go to your room at once. I will send for you when I require your services in the morning."

Dusinberry stood gazing at his master in mute horror. That he might be ordered away from the vicinity of this divinity whom he had begun to worship had apparently not occurred to him.

Horror in his eyes changed to pleading protest.

"I said 'Go!' Dusinberry," Duke repeated sharply, "and I meant it."

Cope looked from one to the other. Especially long did he dwell upon the soft blue eyes of Chérie, as one quaffs deeply at a cooling spring before plunging into an arid desert.

Duke advanced threateningly toward his friend. Cope, noticing this maneuver, stiffened perceptibly and withdrew his glance from the girl.

It was upon this tableau that the freezing words "Hands up!" fell.

ONE of Duke's hands was already up, doubled into a fist, but he obligingly raised the other one when he saw that the request was reinforced by a pair of automatics in the hands of the intruder, who stood, considerably covered with whiskers, in the door which led to the other room. Cope also elevated his arms. Chérie, with a rippling laugh of amusement, did likewise.

"Good evening," Duke greeted when the first shock of surprise was over. "You certainly spring up from the floor like *Hawkshaw* the detective. I claim it is very thoughtful of you always to wear the same set of whiskers. Lots of times the villain complicates the plot terribly by changing his shrubbery every time he is off-stage for a few minutes. Now, you—"

"Shut up," the man instructed briefly, and then he whistled between his teeth, two short notes, one low and one high, something like the call of a bobwhite.

He was joined presently by a slender, agile young man in the uniform of a Pinkerton watchman.

"Any luck?" the whiskered one inquired of him in uniform.

"Not a bit."

"Probably he has it on him. Frisk him. Hands up. A little higher, there."

"He hasn't a thing on him," the false detective reported after a businesslike search of Duke's pockets.

"That's funny." The leader of the expedition considered this thoughtfully. "Search the woman too," he decided.

The younger man hesitated a moment and then crossed to Chérie, who was eying him defiantly. "I protest, monsieur," she said, indignantly stamping her foot.

"This is an outrage," declared Cope, advancing toward the man who had given the order. That individual merely backed away, keeping one of his guns accurately pointed at each of the two men as he again uttered the signal consisting of two whistled notes. In response to the call the young man assistant transferred his attention from Chérie for the moment and with three rapid steps landed in back of Cope, whom he immediately floored with a blow from a loaded black-jack which he apparently carried in his pocket.

"My poor boy!" Chérie wailed commiserately. She started toward him.

"Stay there," the master of the situation insisted. "You notice that we don't mind using force, and we will continue to use it, even on a woman. If you've got any papers that you think we want, you might as well pass them over quietly. If you don't, we will get them anyway, and it will probably save you embarrassment to hand them to us yourself."

The glances of the man and woman met and clashed in an indecisive struggle.

"Search her," the man commanded of his asssitant, who stepped forward.

"I'll give up," said the girl.

"Where are they?"

"I'll get them myself if you don't mind. May I turn my back?"

"Sure, I'll take a chance. If you've got a gun there, take my advice and don't try to spring it, because I'll shoot, no matter who you are."

The girl smiled pleasantly enough and turned her back upon the man. There was only a moment of delay while she apparently reached into a receptacle inside of her skirt. When she turned around, the locked document-case which Duke had brought from New York City was in her hands.

"This is what Monsieur wishes?" she asked.

"It is," said the man with the guns after a brief inspection. Turning to

his assistant, he said: "Get it." The latter obeyed.

"That's all. You start ahead with it. I'll give you a minute's leeway before I leave the room." The young man carrying the document-case departed silently and swiftly. "One thousand one, one thousand two—" said the man, counting slowly.

"Oh you have been a photographer, haven't you?" exclaimed Duke brightly. "I have counted time-exposures that way myself."

"Shut up! One thousand ten, one thousand eleven, one thousand twelve," —and so on until sixty seconds had been slowly paid out like drops of water. Then as the counter backed away, he said significantly: "If you know what is good for you, you will be quiet for another minute. I might mention further that anybody who sticks his head out of the windows is going to get his hair singed by a bullet from one of these persuaders."

WHEN he was gone, Duke and the beautiful lady in blue lowered their arms slowly and gazed one at the other. Finally they both broke into a smile which increased in voltage until they laughed.

"You didn't lose any time, did you?" said Duke, rather by way of a compliment. "And you certainly fooled me with that story about the marriage. My little document-case appears to be very popular this evening. If I'm not mistaken, I left it in the bottom of my kit-bag, which was locked."

"Wow! My head!" This interrupting exclamation came from the slowly reviving Cope, who with a tremendous effort sat up for a second and then dropped back with another thump upon the hard floor.

"Does it hurt?" Chérie inquired solicitously, bending over the young man, who had accumulated a second swelling upon his cranium on her account.

"Does it hurt?" Duke repeated, speaking for his speechless friend. "I can tell by the expression on his face that he has a pain, right where he thinks he thinks, that doesn't leave room for anything else, not even a thought of you."

But Duke was mistaken. Chérie was bending over her prostrate champion, murmuring soothing nothings as she patted him tenderly on the face, and suddenly Cope ceased groaning and reached up to grasp the hand that hovered about his face. Possibly he was afraid she would touch one of his bumps, but anyway he took the hand and held it pressed close to his lips while he poured out his soul from his eyes, especially from the one that was not discolored, in large, passionate pailfuls. If Shakespeare could have seen Copeland Burnett Dusinberry, he would have destroyed the manuscript of "Romeo and Juliet" as being pretty tame stuff.

"We must get him into bed," said the volunteer nurse, looking up from her babbling patient into the cynical eyes of Duke Holway.

"Also we must have an explanation of what has happened!"

Chérie shrugged her shoulders. "As you wish," she acquiesced. "But first take care of my darling Cope."

"Your darling?" reiterated Duke.

"He says he is," the girl declared. "And he must have his head bathed with cold water, and he must have some smelling-salts." She turned and cooed to the man on the floor in rather adorable French. Even Duke, to whom the speech was not addressed, listened entranced.

"And I love you too," declared Cope brazenly when the lady paused for breath.

"I didn't know you understood French," ejaculated Duke, amazed at the shamelessness of his friend.

"I don't, except when she speaks it."

"I think he is out of his head," Chérie diagnosed. "He must be made comfortable."

"I'll help you get up, old man," said Duke, putting his good arm under the shoulder of his friend and dragging him bodily to his feet. "Guide him a little bit on that side, and I think we can get him to my bed."

Cope's pins were decidedly wabbly, but with the assistance of the man on one side and the girl on the other he was piloted into the next room and

deposited on the outside of Duke's bed.

"Now, monsieur," Chérie said, taking charming possession of the situation, "will you bring a wet towel for his head, and I will get some smelling-salts from my grip."

DUKE departed upon his errand. He had to let the water in the bathroom run quite a while in order to get it cold enough. Even then, when he returned to the bedside, the girl was not there. He plastered the cold towel on his friend's head and waited. Still Chérie did not come back. "What's the matter—can't you find it?" he inquired, raising his voice so that it could be heard in the next room.

There was no answer.

A growing suspicion burst into sudden flame, and leaving the bedside of the wounded hero, he dashed quickly into the adjoining room.

It was empty. Her traveling bag was there, abandoned as impedimenta of too much tonnage for rapid flight, but her traveling suit and her hat were gone, snatched in passage. Duke thoughtfully looked at the open window. No need to wonder how she had left. He returned to the other room.

"Where is Chérie?" demanded the hero petulantly.

"Gone—beat it—flew the coop."

"Left?"

"You guessed it."

"Why?"

"Because she didn't want to be arrested, I suppose."

"What for arrested?"

"For stealing my document-case."

Growing understanding was flashing in Cope's eye. "Then she is a spy too?"

"Apparently." Duke told his friend briefly what had happened while he was unconscious.

"It looks to me," he concluded, "as if there were some bad teamwork amongst the spies. She didn't seem to know them or they to know her, and yet they were all after the same thing."

"Anyway," said Cope thoughtfully, "it's pretty nearly a cinch that she isn't Lord Varden's wife."

"Probably not. She came here with that story just in order to have access to my rooms. She probably found out that Lord Varden was entertained to a standstill before he left London and knew that she was safe in claiming to be married to him. The chances are that she isn't married to anybody."

"Yet," amended Cope, sitting up in bed, "I'm glad she got away."

"You wouldn't fall in love with a spy, would you?"

"Why not? I would rather have her that than married. After she is my wife, I wont let her be a spy any longer. I'll train her to be what I want her."

"That's what everybody says before marriage. The cemeteries are full of secondhand wife trainers."

"Huh!" Cope snorted. "It seems to me you are feeling pretty funny for a man that has just been robbed of a lot of important papers that may ruin somebody for life."

"Thanks for your criticism, old top. I would feel terrible if it were justified, but as a matter of fact, I haven't been robbed of anything important."

"But you said that they got away with your document-case that Chérie pinched off from you."

"Oh yes, they got away with that, but there was nothing in it but some blank paper. I took the plans out this afternoon just after they tried to steal them from me down on the tennis-court."

Cope gazed at his friend in silent admiration. "Clever, my boy, clever! Then you've still got the papers, as I believe they are called in the melodramas."

"I certainly have."

"Where, may I ask? Those guys couldn't find them."

"That's a secret," declared Duke. "If you knew, you probably would want to steal them yourself and trade them to Chérie for a couple of gold-plated smiles."

CHAPTER X

THE pseudo Lord Varden and his valet ditto slept together in one bed. It was probably in flagrant violation of every precedent laid down and cemented by the customs of the

English nobility since the Norman conquest, but Cope was so weak from his encounter with the black-jack, and they had so much to talk about, that it seemed scarcely worth while to separate.

The sun had been across the horizon quite a while when Cope sat up in bed with a startled exclamation which aroused Duke to protest.

"Wha's a matter?" he asked sleepily.

"Look!" Cope exclaimed. "Look at what's on my wrist!"

Gingerly he unclasped and removed a tiny blue silk elastic band to which was fastened an envelopelike affair of blue silk with a snap button that held the flap down firmly.

"Well, what is it?" Duke inquired, his interest partly aroused. "Is that your new wrist-watch, or what?"

"It's a lady's garter-purse," Cope said with conviction. "It's Chérie's garter-purse, I'll bet a dollar." He clasped the circlet once more and held the dainty thing up for inspection. "You remember she was wearing just that shade of blue last night. What do you think of that?"

Duke eyed it and sniffed. "She's skinny, isn't she?" was his sleepy decision.

"Hang it, man, no one is asking you for a criticism of my future wife's figure. It's mighty funny," Cope continued. "I dreamed that she was here and that she kissed me."

"That part had to be a dream," Duke interjected.

"I don't see why," Cope observed.

"You forget that I was here too. Now given a choice—"

"Rats! How do you suppose it happened?"

"Simple. They discovered, after all the trouble they took last night to steal the plans twice, that they did not have the right ones, after all, and so somebody came back for another look."

"Did they get them?"

"They did not."

"You seem ungodly positive."

"I am."

"Have you looked where you hid them?"

"I don't have to."

"For heaven's sake, keep your secret, Hester. I don't really want to know where you've put the things."

"Good! Now let us see what's in that dingus you've got in your hand."

"Let *us* see? Where does this *us* business come in? This is my garter-purse, isn't it? Us, my eye! I'm going to open this thing in a dark closet with the door locked. I shall probably die with the secret of this garter-purse locked in my bosom."

He was as good as his word, too. Not that he locked himself in to examine his trophy, but he did open it with his back turned to Duke, and when he had read the scrap of paper which he found in it, he carefully replaced it without offering to let Duke see it. But it was impossible to conceal the smile that was in his soul, and he went about the business of dressing in a fatuously absent-minded fashion that accounted for his attempt to wear both shoes on one foot.

"Can you get along without me all right for the day?" inquired Cope presently.

"Why? What do you mean?"

"I think I am about to turn traitor and become a Hungarian spy or whatever Chérie is. This story ought to be covered from both sides by members of the staff of *The Times-American*. My loyalty to my newspaper practically forces me to investigate this conspiracy from every angle."

"As far as I am concerned you are perfectly at liberty to go out and hunt up all the trouble, feminine or otherwise, that you wish, but don't say that I haven't warned you. Besides, how will you ever connect up with the members of this gang?"

"That's easy. I'll bet I can go out and throw a brick in any direction and hit one of 'em."

"My guess would be that if a brick were heaved at random anywhere in this neighborhood, it would eventually land on your own head."

"Besides, for all we know, Chérie may belong to some other bunch. You remember those men last night did not seem to recognize her, and they were not above robbing her themselves. Anyway, I'm going to find out about it, if it's all the same to you."

"Better have breakfast first," Duke suggested.

"Right-o! I'd forgotten that."

COPE departed to the servants' quarters to carry out that eminently practical suggestion.

But Duke's own breakfast was practically ruined. No sooner had he opened the door which led to the corridor than another door farther down the hall opened and through it stepped what appeared to be a rather slender boy.

A second look corrected that impression. No lad, however graceful, had quite the lithe suppleness of the figure which strode down the hall. It was Ruth, dressed from head to foot in a brown whipcord single-piece garment something like idealized overalls, with puttees and a close-fitting hood of the same material. One gauntlet was on, and the other she carried in her hand.

He started to speak to her, but something in her look kept him from saying more than "Good morning."

She replied to that greeting in kind but in a manner that precluded a follow-up, and walked past him to the stairway.

If she had cut him dead or if she had appeared the least bit confused or angry, Duke would have had something to buoy up his opinion of himself. But on the contrary she gave the unmistakable impression that she regarded the intimacy of yesterday as an unavoidable mistake over which she was wasting no regrets. Apparently the girl did not care how many wives he had.

Duke found the dining-room deserted. Mr. Penfield had breakfasted early and had driven to the city on some errand, and Mrs. Penfield was having breakfast in her room. This information was apologetically offered by Jocelyn. From his own observation Duke had knowledge of the whereabouts of the daughter of the house. Even had he not met her in the hall, the prodigious clatter which soon arose outside would have told him where she was.

He went to the window to see. Up from the flat level of the lawn a biplane skimmed easily into the air and then with breath-taking nonchalance shot over the brow of the hill and in a moment was flying gracefully above the Hudson in a long, swooping semicircle with one plane banked to the wind, on which it rose up and up steadily until it was only a tiny black cross against the morning sun.

With a sigh Duke returned to his muffins and poached eggs. How utterly beyond his reach that girl was!

AFTER breakfast Duke discovered that his volatile and highly romantic friend had made good on his plan to go in search of the will-o'-the-wisp Chérie. He was not to be found either by Duke himself or by one of the under-servants who volunteered to hunt for him. Not that it mattered—Duke merely wanted to have him call up the hospital and find out how their patron patient was getting along. It was Duke's hope that Lord Varden would be well enough to take back his title and its attendant responsibilities; Duke was tired of posing and lying.

So Duke telephoned for the information himself and was told by the nurse in charge that M 6 was doing nicely—would undoubtedly recover, she thought, although he seemed restless and worried about something. Duke told her to reassure him with the news that everything was all right. He held the wire while she took the message to the patient, and she soon returned with a message from him to the effect that he, Duke, was to let a certain person in Bridgeport know that he was at Pencrest and to request that an official of some sort be sent to Pencrest to receive certain documents in Duke's possession. All of this Duke, with a newspaper man's alertness, was perfectly able to decode into the plain English information that the time had come to turn over the gun-plans and that Lord Varden wished the transfer to take place at Pencrest and not at Bridgeport.

He told the nurse that he would take care of everything and then called up the Bridgeport firm by long distance. It took an hour of watchful attendance on the telephone to get that call put through to the proper party, but it was done at last and the message delivered. Duke sighed with relief as he laid

the wires which would lead to the conclusion of his part in the adventure.

BY the time the telephone transactions had been completed, Mrs. Penfield was about and had sent Jocelyn to tell him that she would be on the south veranda if he wished to see her. This, Duke knew, was equivalent to a command to appear and give an account of himself. He groaned inwardly.

But it had to be done sooner or later, and so he went down. Mrs. Penfield was seated in the very couch-swing where he had sat the evening before at the side of her daughter. She motioned him to a woven-grass chair facing the swing as she inquired solicitously after his wounded arm.

"And your wife?" she went on after he had assured her that he was convalescing nicely.

"My wife," he answered, "needs quite a bit of explaining. You see, she was not really my wife at all, but a spy who took that means of trying to steal my papers. During the night she left."

Mrs. Penfield pondered this startling bit of information for several seconds before her stunned mind reacted with another question. "You say she was not your wife, really? Then how did she dare say that she was last night?"

"She knew my reputation," Duke answered. "Apparently she knew also that I might have been married during one of my escapades without having much of any recollection of it afterward."

Mrs. Penfield looked at him quizzically. "At any rate, you are frank about it," she declared. "Can't you let liquor alone?"

Duke hung his head. She took this for a silent denial.

"You ought to try. It leads to worse things."

"Do you mean marriage?" he asked.

"No, I don't, and I'm glad Mr. Penfield isn't here to back you up in teasing me. As it is, you and I can have a nice, long, serious talk."

Duke groaned inwardly. There he was anchored to his seat with no available excuse for leaving!

"Of course," began Mrs. Penfield, "the thing I am most anxious to hear about is Lady Jane."

"Oh, yes," Duke admitted vaguely, as if it were not the very subject he had been praying she would not bring up. He achieved quite an air of indifference as he said it; for his ears, strained to detect some sound that might create a diversion, had just caught the faint strains of singing upon the air.

"That's curious," he said.

"What?"

"That I should hear music. Is it a phonograph?"

"I don't hear it."

"Listen!"

Yes, it undoubtedly was music, choral music, and it was growing louder.

"I do hear it," Mrs. Penfield admitted. "It sounds like children singing. Maybe the wind is just right and we can hear the exercises down at the village school. We were speaking of Lady Jane—"

Here entered Jocelyn a trifle flustered.

"The lodge-keeper, madam, has just telephoned," he reported. "There is a procession of children below who wish to wait upon His Lordship, and Darby wants to know if he should let them come up the hill."

"Is this anything that you know about?" the lady of the house asked of her guest.

"I do not, but it is doubtless one of your pleasing American customs."

"Shall I let them see you?"

"I think there is no harm in it."

The permission was transmitted to Jocelyn, and he in turn left to telephone the order to the gate-keeper.

"Perhaps we had better go around to the front in order to receive them," Duke suggested.

"It will take several minutes for them to walk up," Mrs. Penfield advised.

BUT by the time Duke had moved the regal Mrs. Penfield, her footstool and her wraps, the singing had drawn perceptibly nearer. The music seemed to be a sort of marching hymn and was very pleasant on the summer breeze. Now that it was more distinct, it was possible to make out a few deeper voices reinforcing the childish treble.

In a moment the head of the column appeared over the top of the hill. Four abreast they came, little girls in white dresses, very tiny ones in front, breathless from the climb, and larger ones following. Each one carried a branch of some sort held more or less gracefully above the head. It seemed an endless stream, and the lawn was quite covered with little white figures before the end of the procession arrived.

This rear guard deserved special attention from the spectators, because it was so different from what had gone before. In it were about a dozen grown people wearing white sashes across their tummies and carrying leafy branches in their hands. Among the besashed ones Duke recognized instantly his old friend and coworker Copeland Burnett waving his leafy branch gracefully and smiling fatuously upon a little lady in blue who marched at his side.

CHAPTER XI

WHEN they were all there, an expectant hush fell upon the assembly. Apparently the singing was only a prelude.

Copeland Burnett stepped forth.

"Lord Varden—" he began.

"What is it, Dusinberry?" Duke inquired pleasantly.

"I am no longer Dusinberry," the speaker replied gently. "I am now known as Dove Burnett."

"Dove?" Duke repeated in startled interrogation. "What is the idea?"

"We are all 'doves,'" Cope explained with unfailing patience. "Each comrade in the Army of International Peace immediately assumes the title of Dove. It is symbolic. For instance, the lady on my right is Dove Chérie; the gentleman on my left is Dove Claus Biedermann; in back of me are Dove Henry P. Nippersink, Dove Lauretta Spiegel, Honorable Frederick Wormser and Dove Bill Egan. Dove Bill is our latest recruit, and he wears his halo a trifle lamely as yet."

True enough! Dove Bill Egan was in strange company. With the unmistakable bull-neck and tin ear of a prize-fighter, he did not match up worth a cent with the high-hatted, white-vested Doves Wormser and Nippersink who stood nervously on either side of him. True, Dove Bill had on the regalia; the white ribbon traversed his midriff from shoulder to opposite thigh, and the leafy branch was clasped firmly in his clenched fist, but he wore his rue with a difference. You felt instantly on beholding Bill in all his glory that it were best not to laugh. The others were prepared to be martyrs, but Bill was still militant.

"We are proud to wait upon you, Lord Varden," went on Cope, who appeared to be the Dove spokesman, "in the interests of universal peace. You wish to have peace, do you not?"

"Why, yes, I suppose so," admitted Duke noncommittally, "although I cannot see that I have much to do with it."

"That's where you err, My Lord—I wish I might call you Fellow-Dove, but that will come later. That's where you err, as I said before. You have it in your power to do a great deal for the cause of universal peace. You have in your possession the plans of a new weapon which fires twice as many bullets as any quick-firing gun now in existence. If you turn those plans over to the manufacturer, twice as many men will be shot as at the present time. Any child can see that. Let us, with our pure hearts and smiling, childish faces, implore you to give up those plans to us that we may destroy them and bring peace that much nearer to the earth."

As if that were a signal, all the little Doves sank to their knees. It was an impressive picture, if you except the spectacle of Doves Nippersink, Spiegel, Biedermann, Wormser and Egan, and it looked as if it might have been rehearsed by one of our great moving-picture directors.

THERE is no telling what effect the plea might have had upon the heart of the false Lord Varden, because almost at the very moment that all the Doves were settled on the lawn with every hand and leafy branch upraised, Jocelyn, the butler, appeared at Duke's elbow with the statement: "Your Lord-

ship is wanted urgently upon the telephone."

Duke excused himself indefinitely to the visiting delegates and went inside. The Doves, thus abandoned, knelt for a while longer until extended arms and bent marrowbones could no longer stand the strain, and then straggled to their feet.

Duke found the nearest telephone in the hall.

"Hello," he said into the receiver.

"Lord Varden?" It was the voice that he had never expected to hear again, the cool, crisp tones of Ruth Penfield.

"Yes," he acknowledged.

"I am very sorry to trouble you," Ruth went on evenly but with a curious strained tone in her voice that Duke failed at first to understand, "but Jocelyn tells me that Father is not there and I should prefer not to worry Mother if possible."

Duke's hopes fell. The idea that she had voluntarily called him had foolishly pleased him and raised him to a fool's seventh heaven above the stars. But of course she was speaking to him simply because there was no one else.

"My machine is hopelessly smashed," she went on hurriedly. "Something went wrong with the motor, and I was not able to choose a landing-place."

"Are you hurt?"

"Scarcely at all—shaken up a little, that's all. But I can't possibly get home for hours unless some one comes for me with a car. There doesn't seem to be a single automobile hereabouts. If you could send one of the men for me quietly without Mother's knowing anything about it, I could manage to get home before she had time to worry."

"Surely I can attend to it," he assured her formally, quite as he imagined she would wish to be assured, he thought.

"And ask whoever comes to hurry. There are many strange and rough-looking men hereabouts, and some of them have followed me to this road-house from which I am telephoning."

"I'll hurry. I'll come myself. Where are you?"

"Just a minute until I ask some one the name of this place."

The other end of the wire was silent for a few seconds, and then came to life again with "Hello!"

"Hello," he answered.

"This road-house is called—"

The speech ended with a sharp exclamation as of pain or fright.

"Hello—Ruth, dear! Hello! hello! hello!" Duke shouted into the receiver.

The only reply was a rumble in the receiver followed by several taps and a click. After that the telephone gave back nothing at all.

A PERFECT tumult of ideas paralyzed Duke from action for a moment. What had happened to that girl at the other end of the wire? Did her interrupted speech mean that she had fainted from her underestimated injuries? Had something happened to distract her attention? Or worst of all, had she been silenced by physical force? She had spoken of the men who had followed her to the road-house from which she was calling.

He pumped the telephone-hook energetically. After an interminable wait he got the telephone operator's "Number, please."

"Where was that last call from?" he demanded, sputtering from excitement.

"What last call?"

"The party that was just on this line. It was a lady, and she was speaking from some road-house."

"I am sorry, but it is against the rules of the company to furnish such information. If you wish to make any further inquiries, you will have to speak to the manager."

"Good heavens, girl, this is a matter of life and death."

"Shall I connect you with the manager?" the girl asked imperturbably.

"Yes," Duke shouted.

"The manager is telephoning just now. I will call you in a moment," the girl said with exasperating coolness.

Duke paced up and down the hall with restless fury. What could he do to get quicker action?

The outside door opened, and Mr. Penfield, still clad in his motoring duster, entered with unhurried composure, a marked contrast to the younger man who met him with rumpled hair.

"Ruth's in danger," Duke told him abruptly.

"Ruth? What sort of danger?"

Duke told him.

"You must be mistaken. That sort of thing couldn't happen here," the older man protested. "We have the best local police-force anywhere around here, and besides that, we owners of the estates along the Hudson hire a special guard of Pinkerton watchmen to patrol the banks."

"Yes, I know that," Duke admitted. "A man in a Pinkerton uniform held me up in my room last night."

"Impossible."

"Not at all. It happened. There are forces stirring nowadays that you people in your snug police-protected homes know nothing about. The world is aflame. Life has ceased to have its former significance. Don't, I beg of you, neglect your daughter's call for help. As soon as I can find out where Ruth telephoned from, I'm going after her. I'm afraid."

DUKE, impatient, strode to the telephone once more. "Give me the manager," he demanded.

"Still busy," the operator responded.

"There's something funny about that manager's preoccupation too," thought Duke, and he began to use language.

"Easy, boy," said Penfield. "You're imagining things."

"What road-house would she be apt to be at?"

"That's hard to tell. There are fifty of them within ten miles of here. We're just the right distance from New York for motoring parties."

"We haven't time to search them all."

"Certainly not; but I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll call up the police-department and have them get on the case. If there is anything wrong, they'll round it up in no time." In good-natured acquiescence to Duke's nervousness, Mr. Penfield took a whirl at the telephone himself.

"Hello! Central, get me police-headquarters. . . . . What's that? H'm —that's funny!" He put his hand over the mouthpiece and told the other man: "She says the police-station doesn't answer." Once more into the transmitter he went on: "Central, rush a long-distance call through for me, will you? Get the chief of police of New York City on the wire. Yes, he'll talk to me, I'm sure. Just tell him it is Mr. Penfield."

Mr. Penfield hung up the receiver.

"The chief is an old friend of mine," said their host, explaining his call, "and I am sure he will be willing to send out a dozen or so regular policemen who will be able to cope with the situation."

"Don't do anything that will jeopardize Ruth's safety," urged Duke, a trifle appalled at the energy with which the girl's father was taking charge of the situation.

Mr. Penfield looked at him keenly and started to speak but held his tongue as the telephone-bell rang. He answered it, and as he spoke and listened alternately, a look of baffled wonder came into his eyes. Finally he hung up and turned to Duke to make an explanation.

"The voice of that girl sounded very peculiar, as if she were frightened or something. She said she couldn't get any connections with New York, and when I asked for the manager, he said the same thing; and when I wanted to know why, he refused to explain and cut me off."

"That's funny," Duke mused with swiftly knitted brows. Somehow this situation reminded him of something he had read in a newspaper somewhere, and his mind was busy correlating and comparing. "By George, I believe this place is as thoroughly surrounded as if we were in the war-zone."

"Surrounded? By whom?"

"I'm not sure, but I'm willing to bet that the man you talked with who said he was the manager is not in the employ of the telephone-company."

"What are we going to do about Ruth?" The contagion of fear had shaken even the confidence of Mr. Penfield. "She ought to call up again if she's all right, to tell us where to come for her."

"If you don't mind," said Duke, "I would like to consult with a friend of mine who happens to be out in your yard. My own mind is too torn with anxiety to think clearly. Sometimes he has an idea."

ACCORDING to this suggestion, Mr. Penfield and Duke went outside. Cope was engaged in an effort to hold his army of peace in a semblance of order until their mission should be accomplished. His efforts were meeting with only tolerable success. The children were getting restless, and Dove Bill Egan was beginning to feel foolish. Duke motioned to Cope to join them on the veranda.

"You have decided to give us the papers?" decided Cope eagerly.

"No, I haven't." This from Duke. "Forget your army of peace for a minute and give us a little help. We've got some real trouble."

Swiftly he outlined what had transpired so far. "What shall we do?"

"Have you any idea where this road-house is?"

"No."

"H'm! Well, I'll find it. Dove Spiegel, step here a moment."

The angular lady who walked among the honored dove elders came forward at Cope's request. She blushed a little at the prominence she attained by being singled out for the especial attention of the head of her division.

"Instruct the children to scatter," he ordered. "Keep half on this side and have the remainder put across the River. Tell them to follow all the main roads until they come to a wrecked airship in a field near a road-house. Whoever finds it is to report immediately. Is that clear?"

"Quite."

"All right. Get busy." Unconventional language for a dove, but she understood it, and with the sparkle of activity in her eye the lady turned to execute the order.

"Dove Egan, please," Cope ordered, and that worthy responded to the crispness of Cope's speech with alacrity, abandoning his leafy emblem of peace as he did so.

"Dove Egan," Cope began without preamble, "we need a lot more two-fisted doves in the army of peace. The trouble with a great many of our present doves is that their hearts and their heads are too soft. We need some heads in this organization that a brick will bounce off of without busting anything but the brick. Do you know any such peaceful citizens, Dove?"

"Surest thing you know, bo."

"Would they enroll under the banner of peace?"

"They would if they was a chance of a good scrap and five dollars a day."

"Good. Go and purchase about fifty dollars' worth of that brand of loyalty and I will meet them in the village inn shortly. Don't get anybody whose head is any bigger than either of his fists. We don't want brain-work. I represent that part of the organization. Begone, gentle dove, and may the blessings of Jess Willard rest upon thee."

Dove Egan, slightly confused by Cope's flippancies, nevertheless got the idea—and also two twenties and a ten which his chief held out to him.

MR. PENFIELD had followed with amazement the activities of young Mr. Burnett. Now his mind closed with the identity of this person he had been striving to place. "Why, you're Lord Varden's man Dusinberry."

"No longer, sir," Cope declared. "I am now Dove Burnett of the International Army of Peace. I have shed the hateful name of Dusinberry and my bondage at one and the same time as a molting hen parts with her tail-feathers, and now I stand forth a free man. Conventions fetter me no longer. I valet no man save myself, and I'm thinking somewhat of hiring some one to do it for me."

"Just where do you come in on this Dove business?" Duke asked his friend. "I didn't know you had any serious feeling about universal peace."

"Would it help any if you knew that Chérie is the international secretary of the organization? I don't say that it had anything to do with my peaceful proclivities, but it might."

"Well, if you can get Ruth back, you can name your own reward."

"The only thing I want are the plans for that gun and I don't want that reward for myself but because Chérie said she would marry me when I got them."

"If you save her, I will give them to you," declared Duke.

"That's a go," his friend fired back.

"They are as good as mine now. Come on, Chérie," he called carelessly to the lady who had been watching him wistfully from the lawn. "We'll stop at the city clerk's office for our marriage-license on our way as we go through the village."

CHAPTER XII

"I WISH I shared his confidence," said Duke, pacing the veranda. "This looks more serious to me than it did. Ruth is undoubtedly under restraint of some sort or she would have telephoned before this." Almost as if in answer to his suggestion, the telephone inside rang.

"I'll answer it," Duke said, starting for the door.

"Hello," he said nervously into the mouthpiece.

"I wish to speak to Lord Varden, please."

"This is he, talking."

"This is Max Brauer."

"What can I do for you?" Duke asked, carefully schooling his voice not to show eagerness.

"I did not intend to ask you to do anything for me exactly," said Mr. Brauer. "I called up merely to suggest that we might do something for each other. If anything, the favor will be on my side."

"What is it you propose?" Duke interrupted.

"I was going to suggest that we would trade the safety of a certain young lady who is at present being entertained by us, for a few documents which have so far eluded our most careful search. The reason I say the favor is largely on our side is because we will get them anyway."

At this Duke laughed.

"We will get them anyway," Max Brauer repeated, "but it will be much pleasanter not to have to take extreme measures."

"What do you mean by extreme measures?"

"We haven't really decided yet ourselves. But you must know by this time that our intentions are serious. If you don't believe the girl is here, I'll let you listen to her voice." His own speech became a trifle more indistinct as if he had turned his head away from the mouthpiece to address some one near by. "Twist her wrists a little, there."

A second or two elapsed, and then came a suppressed sort of scream that froze the blood in Duke's veins.

"Stop!" shouted Duke over the telephone.

"Stop!" commanded the voice at the other end of the wire.

There was no further noise.

"You wish to present us with something?" Brauer inquired pleasantly.

"Yes," declared Duke without hesitation, "—provided you will instantly release Miss Penfield."

"Of course we can scarcely do that," Brauer told him in a voice of diplomatic suavity, "because we have no assurance that you will keep your part of this purely informal agreement. However, we can promise that Miss Penfield will suffer no further inconvenience of any sort should you arrive to take her home within the hour."

"All right—I'll come for her. Where are you?"

"That," observed Brauer, "is of necessity a military secret. We will send for you. One of my men will be at the gates of Pencrest shortly. You will please be waiting—alone." This last he added significantly. "We will take steps to make sure that you are not followed."

THERE seemed nothing further to say, and so that closed the conversation. Duke reported the gist of it to Mr. Penfield, who, at his elbow, had already heard one end of the controversy.

"And you have agreed to surrender everything they want?" Mr. Penfield asked incredulously.

"Yes."

"Might it not have been better to wait until we see what your friend can do toward a rescue?"

"They only gave me an hour," Duke returned. "Burnett could hardly find her in that time."

"What if you didn't get there in an hour?"

Duke shrugged his shoulders. Why

tell her father of the scream he had heard over the telephone?

"I don't know, but I do realize more fully than you do to what lengths these fellows are willing to go in order to gain their ends. Frankly speaking, life, to those who have lived through the war, has lost its relative value. To you life is still your most cherished possession. To us it is nothing, because lives have become the everyday sacrifice to the cause we serve."

"But if you give up now," Mr. Penfield observed, "it will entirely destroy the value of your mission to America, and you will certainly be disgraced, perhaps punished for failure."

Duke shrugged his shoulders. "That doesn't matter," he told his host with nervous impatience. "Nothing matters except to get your daughter out of the clutches of these unscrupulous men."

Mr. Penfield looked at him keenly. "Ruth is an attractive girl," he observed with a chuckle. The strain was beginning to let down, as far as he was concerned. "Yes, she's very attractive, and I might say in passing that I like young Englishmen better than I did before I met you. I wish you luck, my boy."

"Thank you," Duke responded gravely, "but I'm afraid it wont do any good, sir. Now I must be going. I have no desire to keep these fellows waiting."

"Shall I go with you?"

"They said to come alone.

"How about arms?"

Duke shook his head. "Useless, I imagine. They would only take a revolver away from me. I am safer without weapons, and so is she. I don't need a thing. Good-by, sir."

"Good-by, son."

HALFWAY down the hill Duke became conscious that a chill wind was coming up from the River and bringing with it black clouds which presaged a spring shower. Duke was rather glad to have the day end up in physical gloom. It fitted in with his own waning fortunes.

He reached the lodge gates before the car arrived, but he found that several uniformed policemen were chatting with Darby, the old lodge-keeper, and almost immediately after he got there half a dozen more came up in charge of an officer who stationed them on both sides of the highway.

"What's the idea?" Duke asked, with a newspaper man's usual lack of awe of anything in police uniform.

"It is not permitted to explain, Your Lordship," the officer answered formally.

Duke stared. They knew who he was. And the reply had been couched in curious phrases for a "harness bull" to use. "It is not permitted to explain," sounded more like the wording of an international diplomatic note. A New York officer should have said: "None of your business—beat it."

A car came along, a powerful one of racing type.

"Get in, Your Lordship," instructed the police officer.

It was evidently the machine for which Duke was waiting. This police officer seemed to know exactly what was supposed to happen. There was no hurry about anything; it seemed to be thoroughly planned out in advance.

While Duke was getting settled, another car carrying half a dozen ladies and gentlemen besides the driver came up from behind. The policemen from either side of the road closed in and stopped it.

Duke heard them respectfully informing the automobile party that the road ahead of them would be closed for a quarter of an hour during repairs which made it dangerous. The driver had begun to expostulate over the fact that the car ahead was allowed to pass and that it was an outrage to hold them up with a storm coming on, when Duke's driver let in the clutch, and as they shot ahead further conversation from the rear became inaudible. There was no doubt in Duke's mind, however, as to the meaning of the maneuver he had just witnessed. His enemies did not propose to have him followed, and they were stopping even the most innocent-looking automobiles along the road by which he was going.

The plan was still more in evidence when they turned in swiftly at a private driveway and mounted the hill,

passed a house and came out on the other side on another public highway headed in the opposite direction. Doubling on the trail that way practically eliminated all possibility of pursuit.

They kept well ahead of the storm, but it was coming on with an ominous growl of thunder. From the speed at which they went Duke figured that the road-house for which they were headed might be a considerable distance away. On the other hand, they made so many turns and detours that it was quite possible that it really was quite near to Pencrest and that they had gone around in a circle. By the time they arrived, he was thoroughly confused as to directions and had little or no idea of where they were.

The car pulled up at an unprosperous-looking inn. It was evidently a little too far from the main highway to attract much of the spendthrift New York trade. It was a quaint little place, but it needed paint sadly, and the veranda sagged both as to floor and roof where the wooden supports in the ground had rotted and given way.

A couple of men in motorcycle costumes were loitering outside. When the car rolled up, they arose from the steps where they had been resting and touching their caps, opened the door of the car and invited Duke to descend.

"You will get out here, Your Lordship," one of them said respectfully.

Duke descended from the car and following the motorcyclist went up the steps and through the door of the inn. The other motorcyclist and the chauffeur who had driven Duke fell in behind.

THE office was deserted. A curved desk with an open register upon it showed where guests were supposed to report for accommodations, but there was no one behind that desk, and there were no names upon the blank page of the book.

The motorcyclist led the way without hesitation through the office to a hall at the end. The hall was dark; the doors on either side were all closed.

At the farthest one, Duke's guide knocked.

"Herein," some one inside muttered. The man opened the door, and in the light thus disclosed motioned Duke to enter before him.

Duke stepped in.

The old room had evidently once been the parlor of a suite, but now the lace curtains were down and little of the furniture was left—practically nothing except a long table and a number of kitchen chairs. The only cheerful thing in the place was a snapping woodfire in a large old-fashioned grate. It had evidently just been built as a protection against the dampness of the coming storm. It was the only light save what came in from a single window. The others were shuttered.

Around that table sat half a dozen men, among them Max Brauer, he of the prolific though false whiskers. Something about the bearing of all these men attracted Duke's attention. He had noticed it first in the physical carriage of Max Brauer, but now he discovered that the same stiffness was duplicated in each of the men who sat around the table. They looked some way chesty, like pouter pigeons. You couldn't imagine them being comfortable leaning back in an easy-chair.

Vainly Duke looked for the slender figure in brown whipcord which was the only thing in life he really did care to see. She was not there, but the closed door at the other side of the room suggested possibilities. "Well?" he said, interrogatively smiling down at the only man in the lot whom he knew.

"Well, Your Lordship? You have brought what we wish?"

"Are you ready to release Miss Penfield?"

Brauer did not answer. Instead he nodded to the motorcyclists who were still standing one on either side of Duke.

Without saying anything, they pinned Duke's arms down at his side and held him firmly while the chauffeur with rapid, deft fingers went through his pockets. He even felt inside of Duke's clothing and made an examination of his shoes.

"It is not here, Excellency," the searcher reported, saluting stiffly.

"So, you thought you would trick us?" Brauer said harshly.

"Thought I'd trick you?" repeated

Duke. "What do you call this you have just done to me? What's the idea? I'll play fair when you do. You produce the girl, and I'll produce the documents."

"How?"

"Leave that to me. I'll do my part."

Slightly mystified, Brauer decided to take him at his word. "Heinrich, bring her in."

One of the motorcyclists went to the closed door, unlocked it. He stepped inside for a second, and something was said in a low tone of voice. Immediately afterward Ruth stepped into the room. If Duke expected to find her frightened or ill from her experience, he was doomed to disappointment. Her step was as unfaltering as his own, and she held up her chin defiantly to all the world as they opened the cage to her tormentors.

"Ruth!" he cried, taking an impulsive step toward her.

She started to reply in kind and then schooled herself. "I am sorry if any regard to my safety has imperiled you on your mission," she said coldly. "I would really not care to purchase my safety at the price they have put upon it."

They were speaking as if there were no one else in the room except themselves.

He addressed her once more across the soundless void that seemed to fill the room. "I was in hopes," he said, "that I might explain what happened last evening and make you care for me a little once more."

"It is hardly necessary," she said unemotionally. "Once is enough."

Duke paled. Of course he had a right to expect a rebuff, but his heart had been hoping that under the stress of danger maybe she would forget a little and that perhaps she would understand.

"Come!" said Brauer impatiently. "You see we are ready to fulfill our part of the bargain. If you have anything to trade, produce it."

UNOBSERVED, Duke had been gradually shifting his position until he had managed to get his back to the fireplace. He stood on the hearth now, within reaching-distance of a pair of heavy brass fire-tongs and a poker. He noted with pleasure that either one of them would be an effective weapon in a tight pinch.

Outside, a growl of thunder reverberated among the hills. The room darkened a bit as a cloud reinforcement came scurrying up.

"If I may have the assistance of the young lady, please."

"Why not Heinrich?"

"I said the young lady," repeated Duke with set jaw.

"Very well." Brauer, who seemed to be in command, motioned Ruth to accede to his request.

She crossed the room to his side. They both stood in front of the fireplace.

"You will help me take off my coat, please," Duke suggested.

She complied.

"Now lay it down out of the way somewhere."

Mystified, Ruth put it on the table between two of the men, who half turned to see what was going on.

With his right hand Duke was carefully unwrapping the bandages which bound his left arm. Not until he had them half unwound and had exposed a small packet of papers which had been deftly concealed by the wrappings did the others understand what he was doing.

When the papers came into view, they all rose to their feet, excited and expectant.

"Sit down," ordered Duke. "If any one of you makes a move that I don't like, I am going to drop these documents in the fire. Even if you shoot me as I stand here, I promise you that before I drop, this paper will be in flames. This kind of thin paper will burn up in a second, so if you want it, do as I tell you."

One or two motions toward hip pockets were hastily reconsidered.

"Sit down," said Brauer, evidently in command.

"I'll play fair with you," declared Duke, "but the girl has got to be free first, and safe. I don't give a single rap what you do to me after she is gone, so I will take my chance, but if you make a move to molest her as she

leaves, the papers go. That's clear, isn't it?"

There was no answer, and he did not seem to expect any.

"Take a look out the window, Ruth," he said without turning to her, but addressing her over his shoulder. "See if you can run that car that is sitting in front of the inn."

She laughed as she looked. "I can run any car."

"Very well. Go out through the window. Don't use the door. I want to be able to see you get away. Get in that car and drive like the devil. You'll get wet, but never mind that. Don't go home,—they will stop you there,—but drive to the next town and telephone the nearest military headquarters. Tell them what has happened and ask them to give you an escort to take you home. Don't telephone from your own exchange. These fellows have a man there. That's all. Beat it."

"But you?" suggested Ruth.

"Never mind me. You will find out why later. Do as I tell you. Time is precious."

Reluctantly the girl yielded to his dominance. She crossed to the window, but the sash was down and refused to yield to her efforts to raise it.

One of the officers around the table laughed.

"Hit it once with a chair," Duke advised.

Ruth grasped the nearest piece of furniture and obeyed orders enthusiastically. The glass shivered all over the floor.

"Quick now," Duke continued, "and when you get in the car, keep as low down in the seat as possible. They might be foolish enough to fire at you. Good-by."

THE girl sprang through the window and with a dozen steps was beside the car, into which she clambered. It only took a second's inspection for her to solve the mystery of the starter and the clutch.

With a jerk she started off, and waving back at Duke,—a little wistfully, he hoped,—the girl bent over the wheel of the racer which disappeared like a streak down the road.

Crack! Crash! A tongue of lightning seemed to reach out after the slender figure in the car and thunder growled harshly when she escaped.

But in the room at the inn there was silence which lasted for perhaps a minute. Finally Duke tossed the papers on the table.

"There you are. I'll keep my share of the bargain."

Almost automatically the men who comprised the group around the table bent eagerly forward over the papers which Duke had given up.

But the darkness of the storm made it difficult to read.

"Heinrich!" ordered Brauer. "Light that lamp and put it on the table."

The motorcyclist thus addressed brought a common kerosene lamp from the mantelpiece and placed it, lighted, upon the table.

"There. Close the shutters on that window which the young lady so inconsiderately broke," Brauer went on, directing the activities of his subordinates. "Now, Lord Varden, we are as cozy as can be, and no one shall interrupt us while we see what is in this little love-letter you have taken so much trouble to bring us from London. Ah, my boy, you are clever but not clever enough to outwit an old fox like Max Brauer." He waved the packet of papers gloatingly in front of Duke. "Take your last look at these plans, because now you shall never see them again."

It was the taunt more than anything else which stimulated Duke to foolhardy action. One moment he had no idea of doing anything except to suffer stoically whatever fate had in store for him; the next instant a plan, fully worked out, jumped into his head and demanded to be tried out.

Brauer gave him credit for not being fool enough to start anything. That's why he turned his back on Duke and started to lay the plans on the table.

It was in that instant while he was still near to the young man at the fireplace that the heavy brass fire-tongs managed somehow to get into Duke's itching hands, and once there, described a parabola through the air ending with a sickening contact on Brauer's skull.

Brauer dropped back as if he had been shot.

Duke caught him with his right arm and supported the limp figure in front of himself.

"Don't shoot!" he commanded the others, who had risen with a crash of overturning chairs. "You'll only plug your little friend here, and he's feeling bad enough as it is."

With his injured arm Duke managed to reach out and take the packet of papers from the unresisting fingers of the senseless man. These he stowed hastily in his trousers pocket; then he shifted the fire-tongs to his left hand.

"Now to go on with the rough work," he warned. "Stand back and watch the home-wrecker in action."

One sweep of the fire-tongs finished the kerosene lamp on the table. It went out like a snuffed candle, only more noisily.

"Come on, Max, we've just got time to catch a train." Duke dragged the unconscious man across the floor to the door. "Sorry we have to leave you fellows just as things are getting interesting."

Duke felt in back of himself until he found the key in the door. This he removed, and when he had opened the door, placed it in the outside keyhole. Then he dragged Brauer through, carefully keeping the latter in front of himself.

"Ta-ta, men, I hope to see you again sometime. So long."

He slammed the door shut and locked it.

Pandemonium broke loose in the room. Every man in it made a dash for the door. The lock resisted their united efforts.

"Wait," declared one of them. "No, this way. Out the window, and we can head him off."

It was reasonable counsel, and cursing the wasted seconds, they clambered through the broken window and started on a run around the house in the driving rain.

NO sooner had they left the room than the lock in the door clicked once more, and Duke stepped in again, cautiously, dragging after him the still inert body of his foe. He locked the door after himself once more.

"Just as you said, Max," he declared as he laid the other man out on the floor, "this is what you might call cozy. You and I are great company for each other, especially when you are unconscious. Let's have a look through your pockets before the Männerchor boys get through chasing themselves around the house. Just as I thought, here's the automatic you taught me how to use yesterday at the Astor, and another one, and a whole pocketful of cartridges. Man, I don't see how you ever keep your clothes in shape. Pardon me, wont you, old chap, if I remove this alfalfa from your face. I want to be able to see where to hit you if you should happen to come to life at an inopportune moment. My, but don't those whiskers burn fine. I wish for your sake that there was a little more furniture in the room to use for building a barricade, but as it is, you will have to serve as my principal bag of sand."

During this running fire of cheerful conversation Duke had been piling the table, flat on its side, and the chairs, across one corner of the room. It was a flimsy defense at best, but he reinforced it with the bulky body of Max Brauer, whom he wedged in uncomfortably in the very center.

From one point of view it seemed foolish to try to defend a corner of the room that way, but from another it was the only possible thing to do. In a moment the men outside were going to discover the trick, and they would be back after him. If Duke tried to hold the door against attack they could pot him from the rear through the window. No, decidedly the best scheme was to get in the windowless and doorless corner, where he was as much in the dark as possible, and pick off anyone who entered the room from any direction. It was a temporary measure at best and doomed to ultimate failure, but Duke was not looking ahead more than a few minutes. A song was on his lips and in his heart when the knob of the locked door was rattled by a hand from without and a deep guttural voice commanded him to "Surrender!"

CHAPTER XIII

"DO you hear that, Max?" he asked joyously of his barricade. "They want us to come out and play. They don't know that this is our day at home. Did you forget to send them a card? Never mind; I suspect they'll come anyway, and we'll do our best to make them welcome. Here they come!"

The party was indeed on. The blows of some heavy weapon on the door were splintering its panels. It was only a moment until one of them fell through and a hand reached in cautiously for the key.

"Now, why didn't you or I think to put that key in our pockets?" Duke demanded querulously of his silent comrade. "I wonder if I could hit that hand with a bullet. I suspect not. But the time has come, Max. You do your part, and I will try to do mine. Gosh, don't these automatics make a loud noise in a small room like this. I wish you had put those silencers of yours on."

It had only taken two shots to convince the attacking party that discretion was the better part of valor. Two of them had entered the room as soon as the door was unlocked, but one had withdrawn almost immediately. The other was writhing on the floor with a crippled leg.

"More material for our fort, Max. Hey, you, Heinrich, crawl this way, please. Drop that revolver. I'll get you good if you don't. That's the stuff. Now hustle over and lie quietly here beside Max, and don't move or I'll paste you right where you wear your toupee. . . . . Just in time!"

Duke's last exclamation was called forth by a pistol-shot at the window. The plaster over their heads cracked, and white dust settled down on their clothes.

"I thought they'd shoot high. It's lucky for you boys that they did. I only hope they don't get mad and forget that you're here. I wonder if there is a man's head in that hat at the window. It wont cost much to find out."

Bang!

"It wasn't a head. Either that, or I'm a worse shot even than I think I am. Quiet, Heinrich—quiet, Max! Don't groan. You annoy me. I'm so tenderhearted I might be tempted to put you out of your misery."

A PERIOD of quiet on the part of the attacking party seemed to indicate either a council of war or else some new method of attack that took time to prepare. There was no noise save the booming of the thunderstorm outside.

The nerve-racking inactivity came to an end finally. A dozen shots in swift succession from the door and window engaged Duke's attention. He replied busily at random until he realized rather suddenly that perhaps they were trying to get his ammunition exhausted and then rush in on him. He resolved to husband his resources, and not to fire from both automatics at once unless it was absolutely necessary. By keeping one gun full all the time he would never be caught napping entirely. To this end he emptied one pistol and then stopped to reload, leaving the other part full lying close to his hand if anything started. Then he repeated the same tactics, changing weapons, and thus managed to get both pistols up to their full war strength once more.

The fusillade from outside continued vigorously, but Duke noticed that almost all the bullets were taking effect in the ceiling. He expected them to fire high to avoid hitting their own men but it seemed almost as if they were excessively cautious. There must be some explanation besides the desire not to hurt their comrades which was actuating the marksmen, who were dotting the plaster with pockmarks. They must be firing simply to make a noise. Why? To cover some other racket.

Duke listened intently. He was rewarded. In spite of the clatter of shots and the dull boom of the thunder, he could detect the regular *thud-thud* of some one striking a solid substance a series of heavy blows. It took a moment or so to locate the direction from which the sounds were coming.

"By George, Max, they're attacking from the rear. I wish I had thought to inquire if there was a vacant room in back of this wall."

Sure enough, the plaster began to crack off from one angle of Duke's rear defense. Simultaneously he noted that the smoke from the fireplace was streaming out into the room.

"Some wide-beamed comrade of yours is sitting on the chimney, Max," Duke told his unconscious ally. "I wish I was over there for a second with a bean-blower or even with a wasp that didn't have any engagements for the afternoon."

The end of a pickax made its appearance through the plaster.

"Here they come, Max. I wonder if I hadn't better eat these plans now, for the sake of the Army of Universal Peace." He placed the papers in his mouth. "Do you suppose they'll think to look inside of me for them."

With which gruesome little thought he turned to fire point-blank through a ragged hole in the wall as the plaster came tumbling in.

THE real joy of a good scrap had thoroughly entered into the soul of Duke Holway, temporary heir of Castlebayne. The smoke from the fireplace was in his eyes, and the powdered plaster dusted his hair and clothes, but he noticed it not all all. He fired three shots through the hole in the wall and then wheeled, to discover most of his enemies entering cautiously by the door and window.

Two of them he managed to wing in the legs, if such a thing is possible, before the chambers of his automatics were empty, but the others came on. Duke grabbed one of his pistols by the barrel and hurled it accurately at the tummie of an advancing foe with gratifying results and was about to repeat the maneuver when he was grasped suddenly from behind and yanked unceremoniously through the hole in the wall.

"This is the finish," thought Duke as he tried vainly to swallow the tough little wad of paper which he had been chewing on for several minutes. "Why do they make their plans on such a good quality of paper?"

Duke expected to be shot immediately or at least to be hit over the head with a pickax. He shut his eyes in anticipation.

He was surprised to find that neither of these happened. Instead he was stood roughly on his feet and shaken by no gentle hand.

"Come out of it, bo. Youse is in the han's of frien's."

"Don't be rough with him, Bill," cautioned an excited voice, Cope's. "He has a bum arm. Come on, fellows,—close up this hole in the wall?"

DUKE opened his eyes cautiously and looked around. This room in which he found himself was moderately light. On the floor, sleeping peacefully, he recognized two of the men who had sat around the council-table in the next room. He doubted not that their slumbers came from having been knocked out by Dove Bill Egan and his friends, because Duke knew now to whom he owed his rescue. It was the militant wing of the International Army of Peace. There were eight of them besides Doves Bill and Burnett, and you couldn't have found a finer set of bruisers in the back room of any saloon in the world. It was as good a collection of undershot jaws as Duke ever expected to look at.

He didn't have much time for inspection, however.

"Where is the girl?" demanded Cope of his friend. "Is she with you?"

Duke shook his head. "No. She got away. She has been gone for some time."

"Gone?" reiterated his friend. "Then we have made this trip out here for nothing."

"Not at all," Duke assured him. "You have saved my life." He was a trifle indignant that his own rescue was considered so negligible.

"I know," returned Cope, "but Chérie doesn't want your life. She wants those plans."

In the excitement Duke had continued chewing the tough paper on which the plans were drawn, and now he thoughtfully removed the wad from his mouth and placed it in his pocket for future reference.

"Well, we might as well be going," said Cope ungraciously. "Those fellows will be on to the trick in a minute, and it wont be so easy to get away."

Duke found it difficult to keep up with the rapid action of the bodyguard with which he was surrounded. Dove Bill Egan noticed this, and in kindly fashion grabbed him under the arm and directed one of his comrades to do likewise on the other side. It hurt cruelly on the wounded side, but the feeling of security was such that Duke was forced to grin and bear it. It was raining cats and canines outside and the cold water on his face was refreshing. They disregarded the road and went straight across country in the back of the inn.

They were several hundred yards before they were discovered and fired upon. At that, the pursuit did not amount to anything. Either the enemy had a stomachful of fighting or else they had decided that they had no chance if they adopted war measures throughout the countryside. It was one thing to pull off a friendly scrap in a deserted tavern and quite another to go chasing all over the public highways and byways discharging firearms.

"WHERE are we and how did it happen?" demanded Duke as soon as the party had slowed down to a walk and he had time to catch his breath.

"We are about eight miles from Pencrest and pretty nearly a mile from the river. We have a boat waiting over there. It was the luckiest kind of a chance that we found this place. An automobile party saw the wrecked airplane and reported it to the garage near Pencrest. We didn't wait to hear from our kids but hired a boat and started up here right away. I didn't get quite as big a gang as I wanted, but the ones I got are certainly beauties, you've got to admit; and say, boy, they certainly are handy with their mitts. You should have seen the way they laid out those two chaps who were standing by that hole in the wall waiting to plug you when you came through."

Ten minutes more of walking took them down the slope to the shore of the Hudson. There they found a motorboat which Cope claimed had been chartered by the party. All piled aboard, and one of the members of the gang, whom Cope addressed as "Cap," managed to awake a spark of life in the rusty-looking old engine. With a mournful but steady grind it propelled the launch down the stream at a reasonable pace.

Both Duke and Cope, now that the excitement had died away, settled back to communion with their own glum thoughts.

"You want to go back to Pencrest?" Cope asked finally.

"Yes," Duke admitted. "I want to finish things up there, and then I'll be taking the next train to the city."

"I guess I might as well go along," said Cope with another heavy sigh.

By the time they landed, the thunderstorm was breaking up and nothing remained of the heavy rain but damp drizzle, dispiriting enough, but nothing like the earlier downpour.

They were listlessly going up the hill at Pencrest when the squad of policemen at the gate hove into view.

"You are not permitted to enter here," said the officer in command.

"The dickens we aint," said Cope in surprise, his spirits perking up a trifle.

"It is forbidden."

"Do you hear that, boys?" Cope asked, turning to his following cohorts.

A low growl of mingled pleasure and rage was their answer.

"Stand aside, you measly policeman," Cope urged, "or you'll never know what hit you."

The policeman failed to stand aside, and Dove Bill Egan made good on Cope's promise. The officer dropped peacefully to rest.

BUT the trouble was not over. There were more policemen there standing shoulder to shoulder with clubs drawn, prepared to dispute the progress of any and all Doves desiring to enter the grounds of Pencrest.

This was a Dove's meat, so to speak. Nothing enrages the true American citizen quite so much as a policeman with uplifted club prepared to dispute his inalienable rights. The mere fact that these were not real policemen did not make any appreciable difference. Therefore the ruction became general. If it had not been for the fact that Dove

Egan had recruited his comrades with special reference to the thickness of their skulls, many a brain would have been severely jarred by the impact of those loaded police clubs. As it was, it seemed a fairly even thing.

The only real casualty was suffered by Duke, who, unable to hang back while the others were in the thick of the fray, had managed to accumulate a wrench on his less useful arm that had opened the wound and made him a little dizzy with pain.

Unable to proceed, he sank by the roadside half across the path. The warning of an automobile-horn made him try to struggle out of the way; but it was no use—he couldn't make it, and he reconciled himself grimly to being run over as a finishing climax of the day's adventure. But the sudden grinding of machinery told him that the driver had seen him and was endeavoring to stop in time. The car was equipped with wonderful brake-linings, for it came to a full stop with the front tire resting against his shoulder, and in an instant some one was bending over him.

"You!" said some one, and then Duke knew who it was.

He recognized also the long, low racing car in which he had last seen her escaping down the road. She had gotten in back of him and had lifted him up by his shoulders.

"I thought I told you not to try to come here alone," he scolded weakly.

"I am not alone," she defended herself. "There is a troop of cavalry on the way. I just came on ahead to see if there really was anyone here who would try to prevent my going home." She looked thoughtfully at the fracas around the gates. "I did not believe what you said back there at the inn, but now I see that you were right."

She helped him to his feet.

"Do you think you can hang on to something on the car long enough for me to drive you home?" She was leading him around to the side of the automobile and now gently lowered him so that he could sit on the floor of the car in the open door. "Put your feet on the running-board," she commanded, "and hang on tight."

"What are you going to do?" he asked.

"We are going right through the gates," she replied.

"But you can't."

"You don't know what a good car this is. I always wanted a new set of gates there, anyway. Hang on."

In spite of his protests, the girl spun the motor lustily and with a raucous honking of the horn, the car backed away for a running start. The men who were fighting around the barrier sensed in some way that she meant business, and they hastily scrambled to one side as the motor roared up to the gate. With one crash, the gate gave away, split in the middle and swung open on either side.

"Power to burn," Ruth exulted. "That sort of a game is awfully rough on the radiator, but we don't know who this car belongs to, anyway. Gee, I wish I had been born a pirate. I love to destroy property so." The balance of the hill was negotiated in a minute or less, and the car whirled up to the front veranda, which was crowded with people from the house who had come out to see what was causing the rumpus at the foot of the hill.

"Here Jocelyn, help Lord Varden," ordered Ruth. "Hawsh, you too."

"What's the matter?" demanded Mr. Penfield, breaking through to his daughter's side. "Are you safe? Are you hurt anywhere?"

"Nope, not a bit," she declared with matter-of-fact briskness. "But I am afraid Lord Varden is."

Mrs. Penfield had joined her daughter by now.

"It's all right," she declared. "He isn't really Lord Varden, anyway. Your cousin has been in the hospital all the time, and this fellow is merely taking his place. The real Lord Varden called up and asked your father to take charge of the plans."

RUTH PENFIELD absorbed this information with slow amazement. "I don't believe I quite understand," she said, and turned unconsciously to Duke for verification.

He stood supported on either side by Jocelyn and Hawsh. "It is quite so,"

he told her. "I am merely a substitute. I told you when I found you this afternoon that it didn't matter if I got away or not. That's what I meant. Mr. Penfield, I am very glad to turn over these plans. I don't know whether they will be decipherable or not. I started to swallow them once in order to save them from the enemy, but I think they are all there." He placed the still damp wad of paper in his host's hands.

The clatter of horses' hoofs on the driveway trotting up the hill distracted the attention of those on the porch from the valedictory of Duke Holway, ex-Lord Varden. There appeared on the crest a dozen or more troopers in uniform, driving before them on foot a handful of civilian prisoners.

One of the men on horseback, an officer, saluted as he reined up at the steps.

"We have quieted the disturbance, sir, and have made prisoners of the miscreants who have annoyed you."

"Miscreants?" Duke loosened himself weakly to look over the prisoners. "Why, you have arrested the Doves of Peace."

"These fellows were attacking the policemen."

Duke laughed, this more particularly at the woe-begone features of Copeland Burnett, who had accumulated a new black eye and was covered with grime and blood all over his face. This inventory makes no mention of a torn suit of clothes which looked as if they had been rescued from a junk wagon.

"Of course you let the others go?" he asked.

"Of course," the soldier acquiesced wonderingly.

"It's all right," Duke decided finally. "They will never come back. Mr. Penfield, I advise you to ask these soldiers to remain here as a guard until you have turned over those plans to the contractor from Bridgeport. With your permission, I think I shall ask to be excused. I am a little tired. I am sorry that I have been obliged to deceive you all," he said with a glance that included Ruth, "but it had to be. I hope that you will forgive me. Jocelyn, your arm, please. Thank you."

Piloted by the butler, Duke made his way to the elevator and was taken to the apartment on the third floor to which he had been assigned. There he was left in charge of Hawsh, Mr. Penfield's manservant.

DUKE looked at the stiff, unbending figure of the carefully trained servant and wondered if there were a man inside that shell of conventionality, anything that could be shocked into an expression of natural emotion.

Duke resolved to find out.

"Hawsh," he said, "I am not a real Englishman at all. I have never seen Piccadilly nor Shaftesbury Avenue, where the music halls are. I'm only an American, Hawsh." Duke eyed the servant narrowly to see how he would take it. What he saw was a curious transformation such as takes place in a trout-stream when the ice goes out in the spring. It was a sudden melting like the smile of a girl who has just received her second kiss. "I said I was only an American," Duke repeated.

"You want to thank God for that," Hawsh declared with an unmistakable change of accent.

"Why, Hawsh, that's a funny thing for an Englishman to say."

"I'm not English any more than you are. I just put on the accent and make a few remarks about places in London because you can get more money if you're an English servant. Mrs. Penfield wont have any other kind in the house."

"H'm!" Duke mused. "Then I'm not the only one who has fooled her. Hawsh, as a fellow-American, do you think it would be possible for me to borrow five dollars from you with my watch as security?"

"Sure you can borrow five dollars. And forget about the watch. My real name is Burke—Edwin Burke."

"Thanks, Burke. I'll send this back next pay-day. If you'll help me get out of here the back way, I'd certainly appreciate it. I don't feel as if I could stand seeing these people again. I've done all I can, and there's no use hanging around any more. There ought to be a train to New York soon."

"Every half-hour at this time of day, sir."

"Thanks. I'll wash my face and hands

and borrow a dry suit of clothes from His Lordship before I start."

CHAPTER XIV

SORE of body and spirit, Duke Holway took the suburban train at the tiny little station at the foot of the hill. Hawsh had let him out through the servants' entrance and guided him down the river-bank by a tradesman's road.

From the car-window Duke could see the setting sun painting all sorts of glorious promises for to-morrow on a mutable canvas of breaking clouds. It was very miserable not to be a party to the general cheerfulness that the clearing up of the storm induced but Duke could not scare up any enthusiasm.

What was it Ruth had said when in the midst of danger he had asked to be allowed to try to win her regard again? "Once is enough!" That was it, her unequivocal reply. It left no opening for him to renew the subject—ever. It closed debate and turned the key against him for all time. The phrase rang in his ears and drummed with the beat of the car-wheels. Not that he had any right to expect anything different, but what lover doesn't hope for more than he deserves?

Duke retired to the smoking-compartment. Possibly cigarettes would shorten the leaden miles that were being dragged out between him and the damfool heart he had left behind.

He had no matches, and when he was about to ring for some, a young man in the neighboring leather seat offered him a light.

"Wonderful day, isn't it?" the young man offered when Duke accepted.

"Umph!" Duke growled as unsociably as he dared.

"It has been a great year," the brash neighbor went on. "I've made more money than I ever did—munition-business, rapid-fire guns and so forth, for the Allies. Are you in the game, too? Nearly everybody is, these days."

Duke groaned. How could he make the affable stranger abandon this unpleasant topic without being absolutely rude?

"I've made money, and now I'm going to spend some of it," the munition-man confided complacently. "There's a girl in New York who is going to meet this train at the Grand Central; and say, boy, it's going to make *Antony* and *Cleopatra's* meeting look like a mere handclasp."

Duke tried to close his mind to this babbling idiot's happiness. Was all the world speeding toward the fruition of its desires save only his unhappy self? He longed for a companion who was mourning the decease of all his relatives and who had suffered business reverses besides.

"Great sunset, aint it?" chirped the rapid-fire-gun manufacturer. "I don't know that I ever saw the sky quite so wonderful. Look at that black speck coming up against the sunset. Gee, it's an airplane. Don't you want to see it?"

"No," Duke answered shortly. He certainly did not care if he never saw an aircraft of any kind again.

"Wonderful developments they've made in those things lately in the way of stability and general safety. Even the women are taking them up now. There's a girl up here along the line somewhere who— What's the matter, old chap? Are you getting off here?"

"No, but I feel a little faint. I've been sick, and I'm going out on the back platform for some fresh air."

"Just a second, and I'll go with you. I want to tell you about the girl I'm going to meet in New York. I'm so happy I've got to tell somebody."

"Then spring it on that elderly gentleman there in the corner seat."

"Oh, I've already told him all about it, but he don't appreciate it. You're younger, and more apt to understand."

Duke sank back in his seat. "Then I'll stay here. Give me one of your cigarettes,—they look stronger than mine,—and go ahead with your story."

The only thing that cut short the torture of Duke's quivering heart was the arrival of the train at the Grand Central Station.

BECAUSE he did not want to see the meeting between his new-found acquaintance and "his girl," as he called

her, Duke found excuses to delay until most all of the passengers had disembarked before he left the train. He had no baggage, but he pretended to be looking for something under the seat and stopped to adjust his tie in the mirror at the end of the parlor-car.

There were only a few stragglers and half a dozen uniformed colored porters on the long concrete platform when he stepped out of the car. The latter gave him up when they discovered that Duke had no baggage, and the scurrying passengers left his loitering steps far behind. When he reached the gate, he was alone—the last passenger. A gateman was impatiently standing by to close the iron grating after him. It gave Duke a certain satisfaction to walk even more slowly in order to make him wait.

Where should he go when once he had stepped through that gate? To the office? Would it be possible to take up that thread now? Could he write out for his city editor the story of Lord Varden? Or should he go home—to his bachelor quarters that he shared with Copeland Burnett? What a cheerless empty place it would be!

And then as he stepped through the gate, the sore heart of him stood still and then leaped forth to greet the glorious sunset that had suddenly burst forth upon his horizon. For there was a figure waiting, a figure in a long brown coat such as army officers wear, but a slender figure withal, and wearing a close-fitting hood-cap that covered all but the face.

There wasn't any question whom she waiting for. The way she stepped toward him with a smile like God's on a pleasant day was sufficient to prove that.

He greeted her with pleading eyes and, for a moment, dumb lips.

She stopped in front of him.

"Say something or do something," she commanded in consternation.

"Right here before everybody?"

"Of course. This is where people meet after long separations. These railroad men are used to it."

When he kissed her, he found that her eyes were wet.

"Why?" he demanded.

"I was afraid I wouldn't get here in time. No one knew where to find you, so I had to get here before you got off the train and were lost in the city."

"Cope knew."

"He is gone. With that woman!"

"Meaning my wife?" he teased.

"Yes." She pouted.

"So you came to town in your other airplane to head me off?"

"Naturally."

"What will your father say?"

"Oh, he has already said it. He told me to tell you it was all right with him, and that Mother would probably calm down in time."

"Are you proposing to me?"

"No, and I'm not going to, either. You had better let go of me now, too. This has been pretty long, even for people who have been separated for a hundred years."

"All right!"—reluctantly. "Do you mind being proposed to in a taxi on the way to a minister's?"

"N-n-no."

"Boy, call a taxi. Keep in back of me, dearest, where I can't see you, or I'll never be able to wait until the car gets here. Tell me why you should have changed your mind from this afternoon."

"But I haven't."

"Don't you remember? When I asked you to give me a chance to make you care for me again, you said 'Once is enough'?"

"Yes, I said that, but what I meant was that when you made me care for you the first time, you did it for always, and—"

"Here's your taxi, sir."

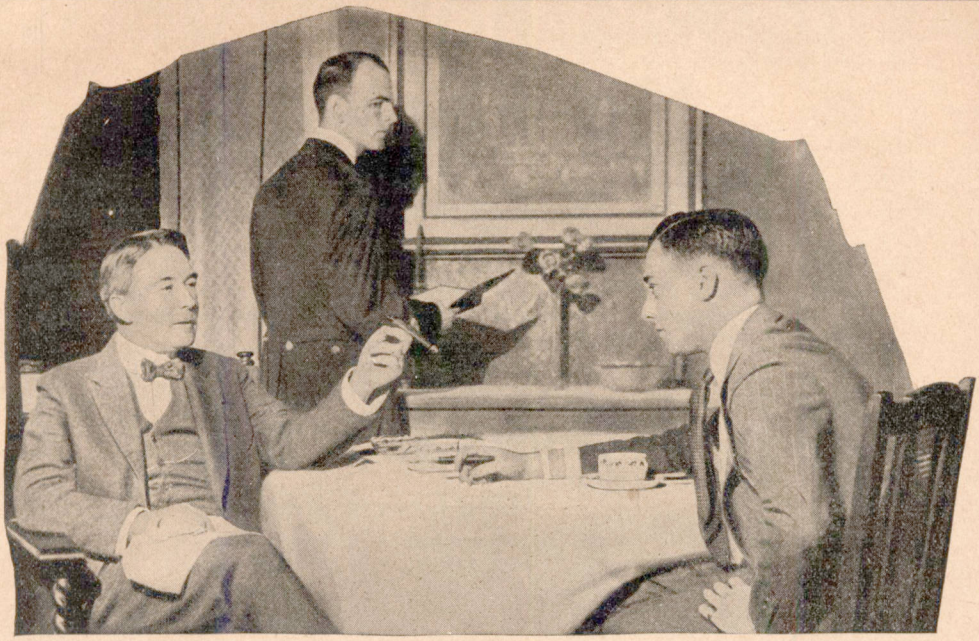
"Thank Heaven, just in time."

They got in, and Duke slammed the door shut on his wheeled paradise.

The taxi-starter inquired, "Where to?" several times without getting any answer before he finally told the driver:

"Take 'em to the Aquarium, James. They're a couple of poor fish."

THE END



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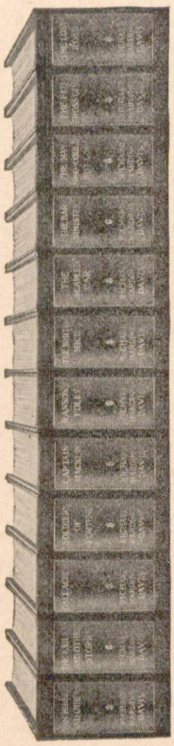

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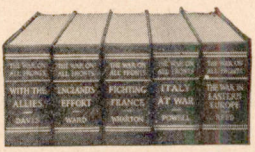

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"Three short years ago I was $5,000 'in the hole'—and earning $30 a week. I had a wife and two children to support, and I used to worry myself sick about the future.

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"What, then, is the secret of my success? Let me tell you how it came about.

"One day, about three years ago, something happened that woke me up to what was wrong with me. It was necessary for me to make a decision on a matter which was of little consequence. I knew in my heart what was the right thing to do, but something held me back. I said one thing, then another; I decided one way, then another. I couldn't for the life of me make the decision I knew was right.

"I lay awake most of that night thinking about the matter—not because it was of any great importance in itself, but because I was beginning to discover *what was wrong with me.* Along towards dawn I resolved to make an experiment. I decided to cultivate my will power, believing that if I did this I would not hesitate about making decisions—that when I had an idea I would have sufficient confidence in myself to 'put it over'—that I would not be afraid of myself or of things or of others. I felt that if I could smash my ideas across I would soon make my presence felt. I knew that heretofore I had always begged for success—had always stood, hat in hand, depending on others to give me the things I desired. In short, I was controlled by the will of others. Henceforth, I determined to have a strong will of my own—*to demand and command what I wanted.*

"With this new purpose in mind I applied myself to finding out something more about will power and in my investigation I encountered the works of Professor Frank Channing Haddock. To my amazement and delight I discovered that this eminent scientist, whose name ranks with James, Bergson, and Royce, had completed the most thorough and constructive study of will power ever made. I was astonished to read his statement, 'The will is just as susceptible of development as the muscles of the body!' My question was answered! Eagerly I read further—how Dr. Haddock had devoted twenty years to this study—how he had so completely mastered it that he was actually able to set down the very exercises by which anyone could develop the will, making it a bigger, stronger force each day, simply through an easy, progressive course of training.

Prof. Haddock's rules and exercises in will training have been placed in book form, and I have been authorized by the publishers to say that any reader who cares to examine his startling book on will power may do so without sending any money in advance. In other words, if after a week's reading you do not feel that "Power of Will" is worth $3, the sum asked, return it and you will owe nothing. When you receive your copy for examination I suggest that you first read the articles on: The law of great thinking; How to develop analytical power; How to guard against errors in thought; How to drive from the mind unwholesome thoughts; How to develop fearlessness; How to use the mind in sickness; How to acquire a dominating personality.

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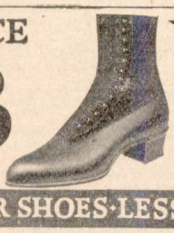

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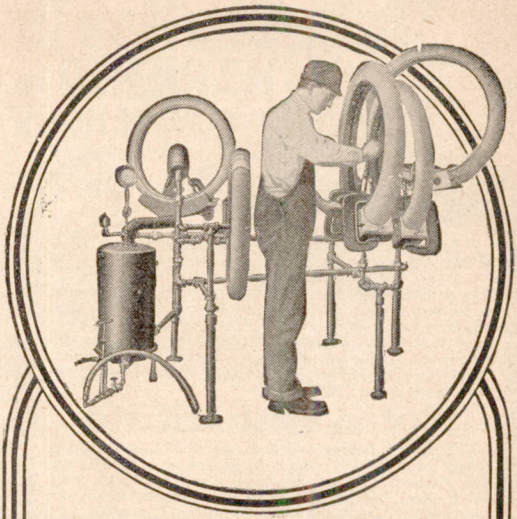

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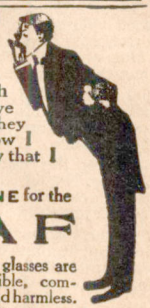

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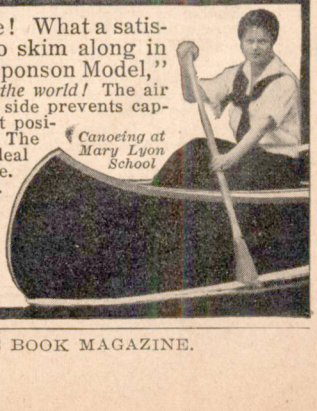

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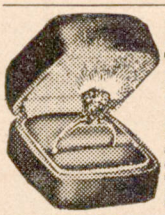

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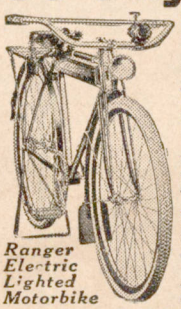

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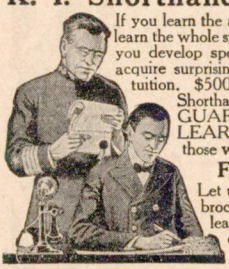

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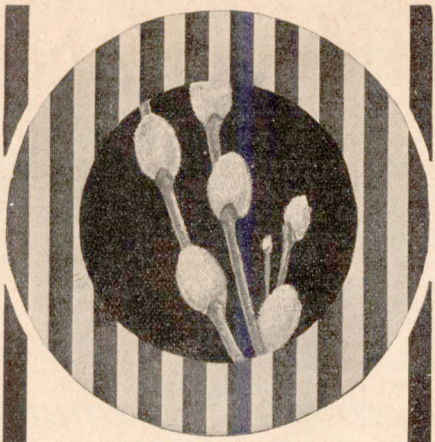

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I Simply Must Make More Money

I am not a professional advertising writer. I am simply a salaried man and believe thousands of men have experienced the same problem which confronted me.

When I was married four years ago my salary was $100 a month.

It wasn't quite enough for us for all the things we wanted. "It will soon be larger," I promised my wife. "It won't be long before I have $2500 a year."

Well, four years passed and my salary has been increased to $2500. But the increase in salary is not in proportion to the increase in our expenses.

To be sure, there are four of us now, but we don't spend a cent unnecessarily. We aren't extravagant and yet we are harder up than when I was getting $1200.

To earn more — learn more

I had a solemn session with myself when I realized my predicament.

About that time an advertisement of the Alexander Hamilton Institute caught my eye. It was the story of a big man — a $100,000 man — a successful man who wanted to become more successful.

I thought if it was good for a $100,000 man it should be good for a $2500 man. Anyway, it cost nothing to find out.

I am now in my fifth month of the Alexander Hamilton Institute Course. Already, I can note my improvement. I haven't had a raise, but I am not worrying about that now.

I have something that the other fellows in my class haven't and aren't getting. If the company I am working for doesn't recognize the fact, there are other companies that will.

The solution — increased earning power

I am fitting myself for one of those jobs that is always looking for men and am preparing to leave behind me forever the kind of a job that men have to look for.

The Alexander Hamilton Institute has asked me to write my experience for the benefit of other men. I do it gladly. I hope a thousand of them will clip the coupon on this page, as I did four months ago. It was the key that opened the door for me.

It is the only door of hope I see for the two thousand, three thousand and four thousand-dollar men, to fit themselves so that they will earn more money.

I'm doing it, and it's the most interesting and richest experience of my life.

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Every man and woman with either a business or a career to guide to bigger, surer success, should read our book, "Forging Ahead in Business," which we will be glad to send you free. Simply fill out and send the coupon below.

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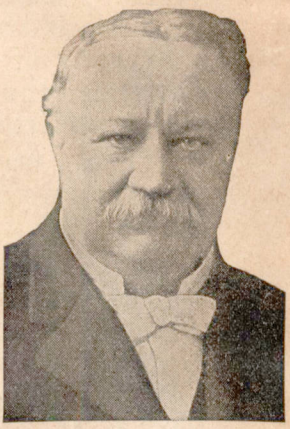
in Pure Food and Drug Legislation, Father of Rural Free Delivery System

Says Nuxated Iron

Increased His Power and Endurance so Much, That He Feels It Ought to Be Made Known to Every Nervous, Run-down, Anaemic Man, Woman, and Child.

Opinions of Dr. Ferdinand King, New York Physician and Medical Author; Dr. James Francis Sullivan, formerly Physician of Bellevue Hospital (Outdoor Dept.) New York and others.



Former United States Senator Wm. E. Mason, recently elected Member of the U. S. Congress from Illinois

WHAT SENATOR MASON SAYS:

"I have often said I would never recommend medicine of any kind. I believe that the doctor's place. However, after the hardest political campaign of my life, without a chance for a vacation, I had been starting to court every morning with that horrible tired feeling one cannot describe. I was advised to try Nuxated Iron. As a pioneer in the pure food and drug legislation, I was at first loath to try an advertised remedy, but after advising with one of my medical friends, I gave it a test. The results have been so beneficial in my own case I made up my mind to let my friends know about it, and you are at liberty to publish this statement if you so desire. **I am now sixty-five years of age, and I feel that a remedy which will build up the strength and increase the power of endurance of a man of my age should be made known to every nervous, run-down, anaemic, man, woman and child."**

Senator Mason's statement in regard to Nuxated Iron was shown to several physicians who were requested to give their opinions thereon.

Dr. Ferdinand King, a New York Physician and Medical Author, said: "I heartily indorse Senator Mason's statement in regard to Nuxated Iron. There can be no vigorous iron men without iron. Pallor means anaemia. Anaemia means iron deficiency. The skin of anaemic men and women is pale, the flesh flabby; the muscles lack tone; the brain fags, and the memory fails, and often they become weak, nervous, despondent and melancholy."

Dr. James Francis Sullivan, formerly physician of Bellevue Hospital (Outdoor Dept.) New York, and the Westchester County Hospital, said, "Senator Mason is to be commended on handing out this statement on Nuxated Iron for public print. There are thousands of men and women who need a strength and blood builder but do not know what to take. In my own opinion there is nothing better than organic iron——Nuxated Iron——for enriching the blood and helping to increase the strength and endurance of men and women who burn up too rapidly their nervous energy in the strenuous strain of the great business competition of the day"

Former Health Commissioner Kerr of the City of Chicago, says: "From my own experience with Nuxated Iron I feel it is such a valuable remedy that it ought to be used in every hospital and prescribed by every physician in this country."

Dr. E. Sauer, a Boston Physician who has studied abroad in great European medical institutions, said: "Senator Mason is right. As I have said a hundred times over, I regard organic iron as the greatest of all strength builders. Iron is absolutely necessary to enable your blood to change food into living tissue. Without it, no matter how much or what you eat, your food merely passes through you without doing you any good. You don't get the strength out of it, and as a consequence you become weak, pale and sickly looking, just like a plant trying to grow in a soil deficient in iron. If you are not strong or well you owe it to yourself to make the following test: See how long you can work or how far you can walk without becoming tired. Next, take two five-grain tablets of ordinary nuxated iron three times per day after meals for two weeks. Then test your strength again and see how much you have gained. I have seen dozens of nervous, run-down people who were ailing all the while increase their strength and endurance in from ten to fourteen days' time while taking iron in the proper form. And this after they had in some cases been going on for months without getting benefit from anything. Many an athlete and prize-fighter has won the day simply because he knew the secret of great strength and endurance which comes from having plenty of iron in the blood; while many another has gone down in inglorious defeat simply for the lack of iron."

Senator Mason's championship of Pure Food and Drugs legislation, his fight for the rural free delivery system, and his strong advocacy of all bills favoring labor and the rights of the masses as against trusts and combines, made him a national figure at Washington and endeared him to the hearts of the working man and the great masses of people throughout the United States. Senator Mason has the distinction of being one of the really big men of the nation. His strong endorsement of Nuxated Iron must convince any intelligent thinking reader that it must be a preparation of very great merit and one which the Senator feels is bound to be of great value to the masses of people everywhere, otherwise he could not afford to lend his name to it, especially after his strong advocacy of pure food and drugs legislation.

Since Nuxated Iron has obtained such an enormous sale—over three million people using it annually—other iron preparations are often recommended as a substitute for it. The reader should remember that there is a vast difference between ordinary metallic iron and the organic iron contained in Nuxated Iron, therefore always insist on having Nuxated Iron.

NOTE—Nuxated Iron which was used by Senator Mason with such surprising results and which is prescribed and recommended above by physicians is not a secret remedy, but one which is well known to druggists everywhere. Unlike the older inorganic iron products, it is easily assimilated, does not injure the teeth, make them black, nor upset the stomach. The manufacturers guarantee successful and highly satisfactory results to every purchaser or they will refund your money. It is dispensed by all good druggists.

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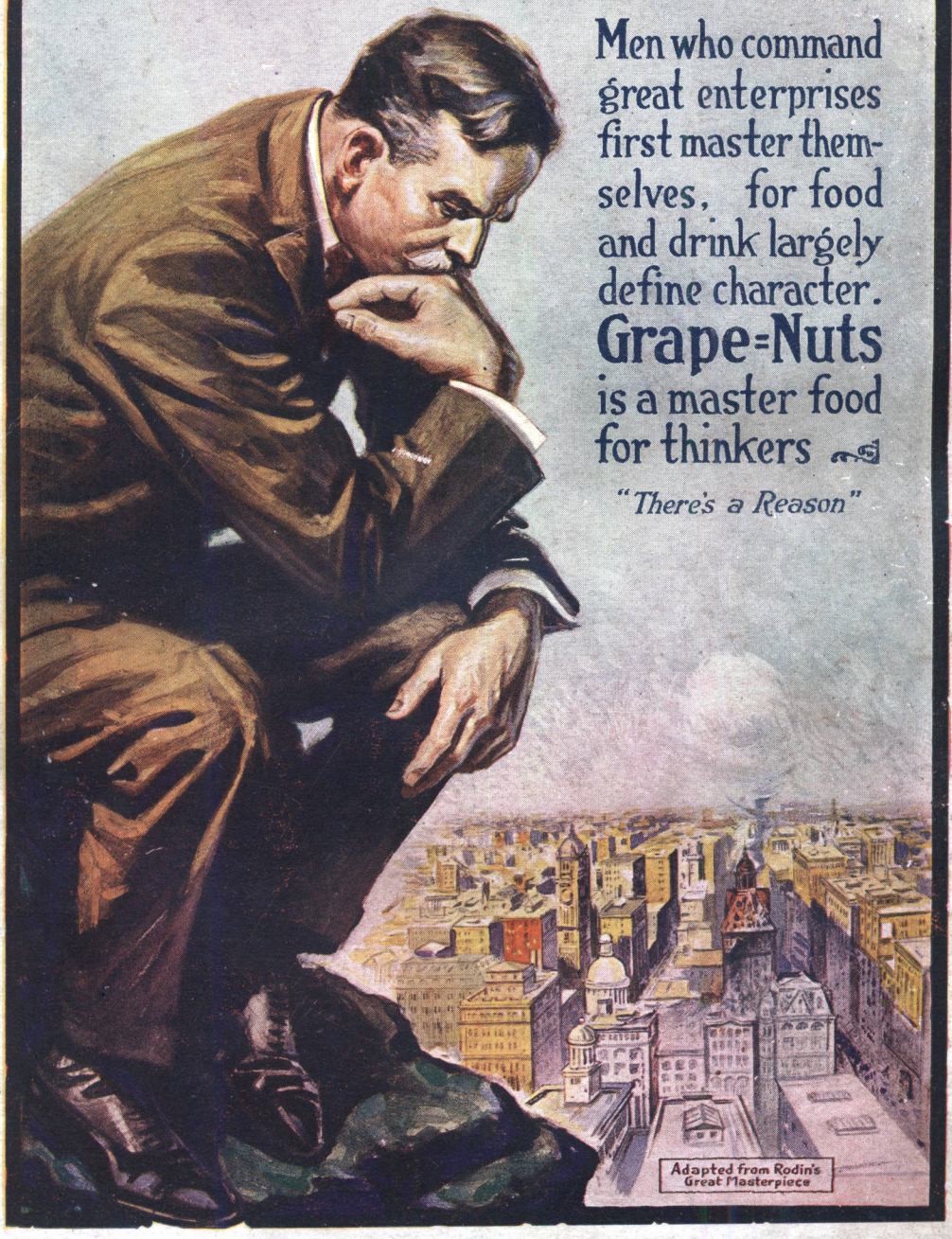

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