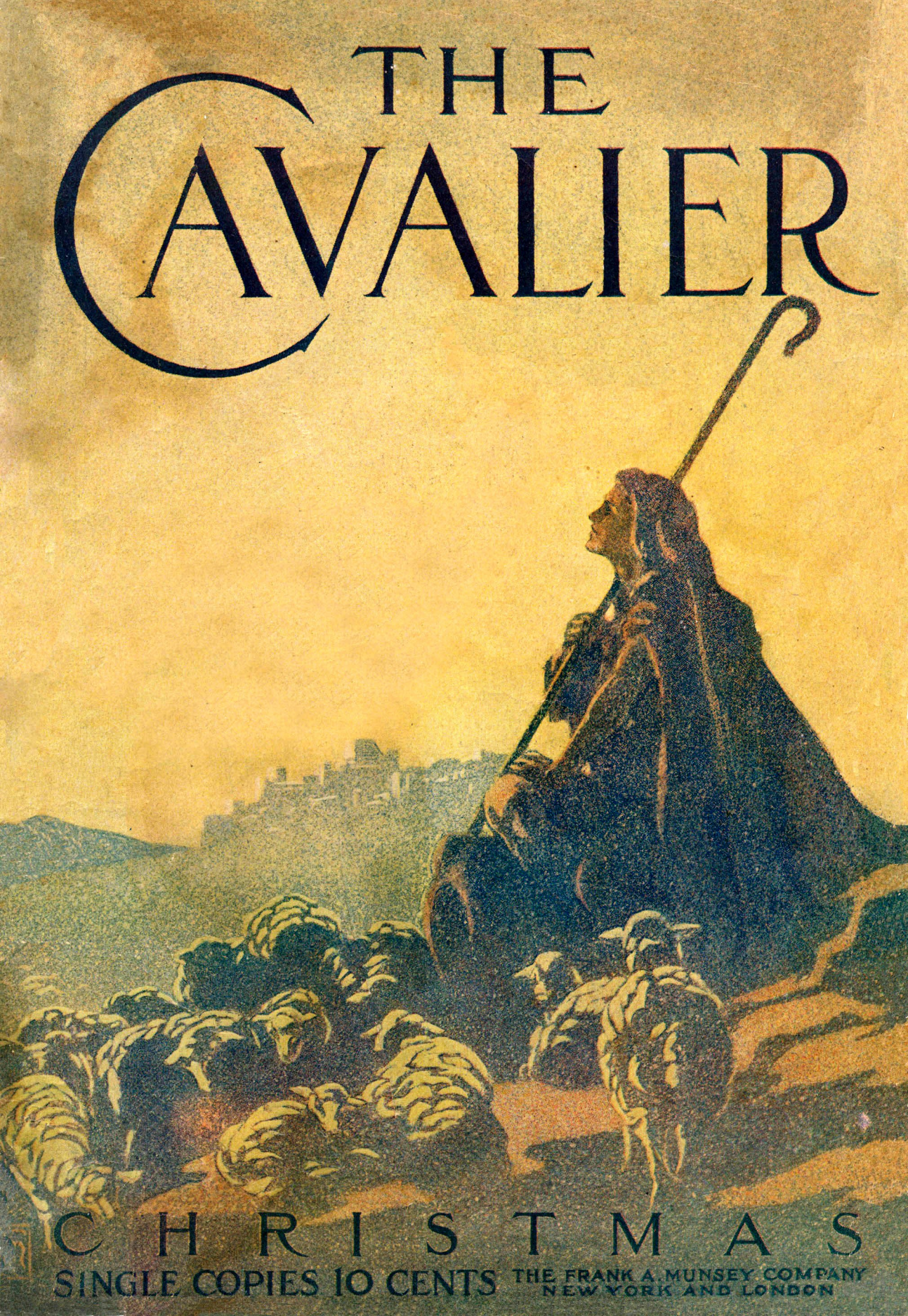
THE CAVALIER



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THE CAVALIER

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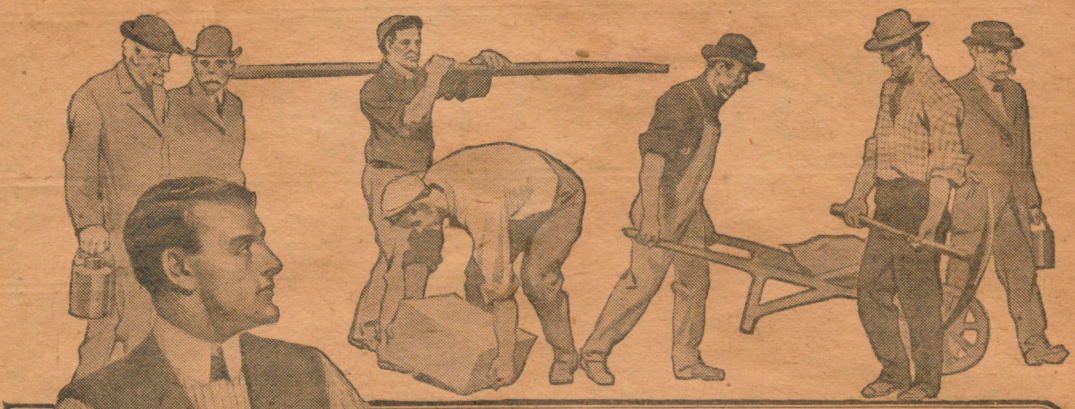

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THE CAVALIER

Vol. IV. DECEMBER, 1909. No. 3.

THE PADDINGTON CASE.

BY ALFRED L. DONALDSON.

A SERIAL STORY.

CHAPTER I.

THE DILEMMA.

ON May 10, of a recent year, an evening train swung with ponderous grace into the terminal gloom of Paddington Station, London. The final clutch of the brakes gripped the wheels with a perceptible jar. In the far corner of one of the first-class compartments a sleeping American awoke with a start. He jumped to his feet, glanced hastily at his watch and then through the closed window beside which he had been sitting.

The platform was on the other side. He turned to the opposite window, therefore, and saw a young man, who had been his only traveling companion, leaning out of it in an evident attempt to undo the door.

He was small and slight, and seemed to find some difficulty in accomplishing his purpose.

While waiting, the American remembered that this stranger had been leaning forward with his elbow on the window, looking out of it, as he himself had dozed off to sleep. He recalled also, in a vague way, that whenever he had opened his eyes this man had been in a similar position. Becoming a little impatient at the delay in getting the door open, he addressed himself to the person who was trying to do it.

"Can I be of any assistance?" he asked politely.

No answer.

He drew nearer to the window and spoke a little louder.

"I am somewhat taller, and have a longer reach than you. Let me try the door."

Still no answer.

The speaker became a little nettled, and laid his hand none too gently on the stranger's shoulder.

As he did so, the leaning body lurched limply forward, instead of offering the expected resistance of surprise to the impact. The American knew at once that something was wrong, and leaned slightly forward over the body of the smaller man. The result was a shock of horror and amazement.

The arms and head of the man beneath him hung limp and motionless from the window. At the back of his neck was a small bullet-hole, from which the blood was still slowly trickling. The man was dead.

The American started back, dazed at his discovery.

Although strong and healthy, he was unaccustomed to such sights as this, and for a moment he felt sick. But he soon recovered his self-control and began to think—to think quickly, as was his wont. He was alone with the murdered man—for he reasoned rightly that a wound in such a place could not be self-inflicted—and he would be held to account for an occurrence of which he had no inkling.

He had not gone to bed the night before, having had an all-night session in

an important business conference. Consequently he had been in a dull, dead sleep, only broken by semiconscious spells of twisting and turning, during the entire journey. He had passed the time of day with the stranger in the compartment on entering it, and had asked him to be kind enough to hand his ticket to the collector whenever he came along. The American explained that he had been up all night and wanted to sleep all he could. Thereupon he settled himself in the opposite corner, and was soon fast asleep.

When he awoke at Paddington Station, he found himself in the unexpected situation which has been described. He realized in a moment that the circumstantial evidence would naturally point to him as the murderer. At all events, he would be detained as a suspicious person until the mystery could be somewhat cleared.

Delay at this time meant not only personal inconvenience, but detriment to others. He was booked to sail for New York the following day. On his timely arrival depended the clinching of an international deal, for the consummation of which his known ability had made him the mediator of conflicting interests.

He had accomplished the desired results in England, but certain concessions from his American contingent were necessary, and these only his personal intercession could procure.

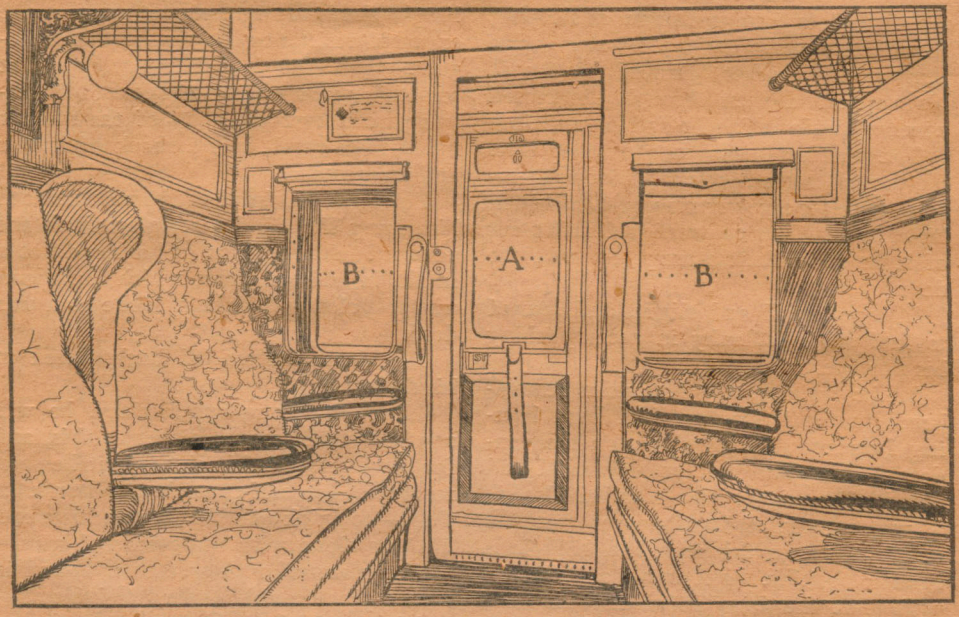
Furthermore, he was engaged to be married, and the ceremony had only been postponed to allow for this important trip. He had cabled over the date of his probable arrival, and a day closely following that had been set for the wedding.

He was no coward. He knew a moral obligation when he met it, and was not usually inclined to shirk one. But this one presented abnormal involutions.

Flight meant liquidation of personal obligations, but — and he foresaw this clearly — a probable increase of future complications. To remain meant trouble for a score of innocent people, and a sacrifice on his part that could neither help the dead man nor the cause of justice.

His peculiar situation simmered down to this: did he owe more to the men who had trusted him and to the woman he loved, or to the unknown man who had been shot while he slept?

Men who think and act wisely in crises



CROSSWISE VIEW OF A COMPARTMENT IN AN ENGLISH RAILWAY-CARRIAGE.
THE ARRANGEMENT OF DOOR AND WINDOWS AT EACH SIDE IS THE SAME. WINDOW "A" LETS UP AND DOWN BY MEANS OF A STRAP. WINDOWS "B" DO NOT OPEN. THE MURDERED MAN WAS LEANING FORWARD, LOOKING OUT OF THE CENTER WINDOW (A) WHEN SHOT, FROM BEHIND, IN THE BACK OF THE NECK.

do not achieve their grasp of potentialities by slow reasoning and laborious detail such as print makes necessary. They get panoramic effects in tablet form. Impressions come to them in condensed cipher. They illumine large vistas of possibilities at a flash—as lightning reveals mountains and valleys that steady sunlight would obscure.

In a few seconds the American had sifted the above pros and cons, and decided on escape, if possible. Turning to the closed window beside which he had been sitting, he started to open it. He had tried the door and found it locked, so that the window was his only hope of escape. It stuck at the top, and required pushing to be forced down. The delay was trifling but annoying.

As soon as he had succeeded in getting the window open, he reached back for his overcoat, lying on one of the middle seats of the compartment, and tossed it out ahead of him. He then snatched up his bag, intending to throw that out also; but, remembering that it contained several bottles, he set it on end near the window, thinking he could easily reach back for it after he had climbed out.

This he found to be a more acrobatic feat than he had anticipated. Being an athlete, however, he managed to get his legs through first, and then, by using the straps on each side of the door, to wiggle and twist his body through after them. He had to undergo a few wrenches and bruises, but fortunately dislocated nothing but his clothes.

He paused a moment to straighten these out before reaching back for his bag. Just as he was going to do so, however, he heard the exclamation of the guard on discovering the murdered man at the other door—and the chance was gone.

All the American could do now was to make good his own escape, and trust to some later opportunity of recovering the bag. So he picked up his coat and beat a hasty retreat. Fortunately for him a train on the next track shut off all observation, and he was able to thread his way between the two, unnoticed. On reaching the end of his own train, he was able to cross the track and walk up the short incline to the platform, without attracting any special attention.

As he strolled back and neared the compartment he had so unceremoniously left, he saw the usual crowd of horror-seekers bunched around it. He paused and peered into the compartment to see if his bag were still there. The dead man had been taken out, and the door was wide open, but it was so dark inside that the black bag was scarcely discernible.

The American was not sure whether he saw it or not, but he saw clearly that, even if it were there, there was no chance of his getting it without attracting unwelcome attention; and unconsciously he muttered his annoyance over the fact. He could only hope now that the gloom in the compartment would at least delay the finding of the bag, for it contained letters that would easily identify him. This thought also suggested the advisability of his getting away as soon as possible.

As he turned to go, he bumped into a man who must have been standing just behind him. He apologized and received a courteous waiver. But somehow the incident and a haunting recollection of the man stayed with him.

The stranger, of medium height and very stocky, was dressed in black, with a carefully tied white cravat, and carried, all in all, the suggestion of a clergyman. Something in the keen, black eyes, however, seemed to deny the superficial allegation; and something in his unyielding impact made the American observe him more closely than he would ordinarily have done. As soon as the incident was over, he hurried to the luggage-van, claimed his steamer-trunk, and had it carried to a cab.

"Hotel Cecil!" he called to the driver as he took his seat and drew a deep breath of relief at being rid of an awkward entanglement.

CHAPTER II.

THE DEACON.

THE American would hardly have felt much relief, however, had he noticed, in the lee of the deepening shadows outside the station, a stocky man, dressed in black, who watched his departure with close interest. Immediately after it this man returned to the inner

platform, just as the body of the murdered man was carried to a private room.

The door was quickly closed, and the crowd excluded—much to its disgruntlement. The coalition of morbidity is a much swifter process than its disintegration. The purely curious always lack the initiative of dispersal. They dissolve like lump sugar—they need to be poked.

The man in black made his way through the slowly ebbing crowd to the door of the room. He gave a short, incisive rap. The door was opened slightly by some one who asked, rather gruffly, what was wanted.

"I want to get in," was the answer, in a soft but clear and penetrating voice. "I am Wilson—Stanley Wilson."

The name worked a change—as names sometimes do. The door opened wide, and the opener became clothed in deference. Wilson walked in and looked about.

There were several railroad officials and newspaper reporters in the room. The corpse lay on a table, and the coroner's doctor was already probing for the bullet; for both he and the coroner happened to be in the station when the murder was discovered. The coroner was telephoning when Wilson entered.

"This promises to be a hard nut to crack," he was saying. "Can't you let us have the deacon?"

The man at the other end said something.

"That's too bad!" exclaimed the coroner. "When will he be back?"

Just as the answer started to buzz, Wilson approached and said quietly:

"He's back now."

The coroner knew the voice, and turned round in surprise.

"Well, deacon," he exclaimed, "you are certainly a bad penny in the right place this time! Where did you drop from?"

"I dropped off the train a few minutes ago."

"Off the same train that this man dropped from?" asked the coroner, pointing to the body on the table.

"Yes," was the laconic reply.

"Then, you know something about the case?"

"Nothing."

"Will you take it?"

"Yes; if it's all right at the Yard."

During this colloquy the coroner had held the receiver in his hand, and the man at the other end—Scotland Yard—had heard what passed.

He now began to speak, and the coroner repeated what he said.

"Langham says you can go right on this case, if everything is all right where you came from."

"Tell him," said Wilson, "we are sure of our man there—so sure that there was no need of my waiting. I'll report on that to-night after picking up the threads here."

And so it came about that the "deacon" took official charge of the famous Paddington Case.

Stanley Wilson had acquired the nickname of deacon rather early in his career—just how, he may tell you later.

Suffice it to say here that the dark clothes and white tie, which he almost invariably wore, had suggested the name originally and justified it still. Familiar epithets usually connote a suggestion of humor by antithesis. In this case, the demure-looking man, whose toggery and title proclaimed clerical passivity of mind and body, had a clockwork brain with an alarm attachment set to strike twelve; an arm that fell like a sledge-hammer, if raised, and an eye that never erred when trained on a trail or a trigger. Withal he had an even temper, a sweet disposition, and a sterling character.

He had never been known to comment upon or object to his nickname, and the assumption was that he rather liked it. At all events, he had carried it with him into prominence, and people who had never heard of Stanley Wilson knew of the deacon.

At the time of this story he was considered the most efficient and trustworthy detective on the London force. Among his associates he was both envied and admired. His manners, like his clothes, precluded familiar popularity, but he was generally liked and universally respected. His ways were leisurely, but he seldom loafed or gossiped—except for a purpose.

He was continuously *en route* for somewhere, and usually arrived. But he wore the badges of achievement inconspicuously, and was glad, whenever the

opportunity offered, to pin them on a comrade's breast.

This rather unusual trait condoned all lack of hobnobbing, in the estimate of his associates, and established him firmly in their favor.

On the other hand, ever since he had been in a position to do so, he had stipulated that he should have exclusive control of all cases he undertook, and that, if any assistance were required, it should be of his own choosing. Such, in general outline, was the deacon.

He now strolled over to the center table and accosted the doctor.

"Have you found the bullet?" he asked.

"Here it is," said the doctor, handing him a small bit of smooth elongated lead not more than three-eighths of an inch in length.

The deacon took it with an exclamation of surprise.

"I should not have believed that so small a bullet would kill a man," he said. "This is only a twenty-two—a twenty-two long."

"If it had been no bigger than the head of a pin," answered the doctor, "it would have killed this man, for it happened to penetrate one of the most vital parts of the body—the *medulla oblongata.*"

"Show me exactly where that is," requested the deacon.

The dead man was lying face downward, and the doctor pointed to a scarcely perceptible scar in the center of the neck at the base of the skull.

"The *medulla* lies here," he said. "It is the hindmost segment of the brain, continuous with the spinal cord. To penetrate it with anything is quick and certain death. In the laboratory we kill dogs by inserting a needle there."

"There is no doubt that the man died instantly, then," said the deacon. "How long has he been dead?"

"About an hour, I should say."

"Could he have shot himself?"

"Not in this instance," said the doctor decidedly. "In the first place, it would require too much contortion to be natural; in the second, the bullet would have penetrated farther; and thirdly—which is conclusive—the weapon must have dropped behind the suicide. He could not possibly have thrown it away, and yet none was found in the carriage."

"In that case, it is clearly murder," acquiesced the deacon, slipping the little bullet in his pocket. He then turned to one of the railroad officials. "Is the train still in the station?" he asked.

"Yes," was the answer, "and we have placed a guard over the compartment where this tragedy happened, but we must move the train very soon to make way for another."

"There is a bag in it, I think, which I would like to have," said the deacon. "Could some one fetch it for me? Then I would like to have the compartment locked and kept where I can examine it if necessary."

"All right, deacon, we'll run that coach under one of the sheds and hold it there at your disposal. I have something to do outside, and I'll look for that bag myself," saying which the official left the room.

The deacon then asked for the guard of the train.

"He'll be here in a moment," said the coroner in a low voice. "He was the first to discover the murdered man, and I thought best to take some precautions. I told him to take off his uniform, and I sent a man to watch him do it and search his clothes afterward for a concealed weapon. The fellow acted a little suspiciously, I thought. Here he is now! Mickleham!" the coroner called, raising his voice. "Step this way."

A small, sallow, nervous-looking man approached the two officers of the law, and saluted them as those about to die saluted Cæsar. He had heard of the great detective; he had read about him in the papers and seen his pictures, and he now stood before him with inquisitive awe and meticulous delight.

"Ah, Mickleham," said the deacon in his most pleasant and propitiatory manner, "you are just the man we want to help clear up this mystery! Your good memory will put us on the right track, I am sure. No doubt you remember seeing this unfortunate man on the train, and can tell us something about him?"

The little guard was so delighted at being suspected of knowledge he really possessed that his face glowed with pleasure at the eyes and mouth, like a dimly

lighted Hallowe'en pumpkin, and his tongue lost all its fear, and even caution.

"Yes, yer honor," he replied, "I remember 'im that was but isn't, very well. 'E was a lookin' out o' the winder quite a bit—seemed fond o' seein' the land escape—an' 'e 'ad sunthin' to say every time I passed 'is carriage. When we stopped at Reading, where the tickets for Lon'on are c'llected, 'e called me, an' asked how long we'd stop. 'E was a pleasant kind o' gen'l'man, an' kep' me chattin' till the ticket-collector come along. An' then 'e took 'is out o' the fattest wallet I ever see! Full o' bank-notes, it was. 'E must 'ave 'ad a fortun' in it!" and the pumpkin eyes glowed again with the memory of the untold wealth they had looked upon.

"How about this wallet?" asked the deacon, turning to the coroner. "Did you find it?"

"Yes, indeed," was the answer. "Here it is. Quite a wad of bank-notes, you see—about a hundred pounds; but samples of dress-goods are what made it look so fat. He was evidently a traveling salesman. We found his watch and other things intact; so robbery does not seem to have been the motive. We don't find much to identify him, however—only a letter in his overcoat-pocket."

When the guard heard and saw the above explanation of what he had supposed to be fabulous riches, the light in the pumpkin seemed to go out, and disappointment spread gloom over his face.

"Do you remember the other occupant of the compartment?" asked the deacon, noticing the change that had come over the man, but not commenting upon it.

"Well, yer honor," the guard answered hesitatingly, not feeling nearly so sure on this point as he did on the other, but wishing to justify the deacon's high estimate of his memory, "I couldn't 'ardly swear to 'im, but I think there was a sleepin' party at the other end o' the compartment—in fact, I'm sure on it!" he ended decisively.

"I'm glad to know that," answered the deacon, "for I was not sure of it myself. What became of him?"

The unexpected admission of ignorance on the detective's part showed Mickleham that he had been led into a trap, and that, instead of establishing his reputation, he had deliberately undermined it. He realized now, when it was too late, that if he had seen a second person in the compartment at Reading he should have seen him again when he opened the door and discovered the murdered man at Paddington.

The deacon took mental note of the little guard's abashed confusion, and repeated his question somewhat sternly:

"What became of this sleeping party, I say? Under the circumstances, he could not have left the compartment before you opened the door."

"I was that much knocked up to find a dead man that I didn't take much note o' strangers," said Mickleham feebly; as if death meant friendship, in its inability to ask questions.

"Did you happen to notice a hand-bag in the farther end of the compartment?" asked the deacon, not without a kindly intent.

But the crestfallen guard, fearing another snare, only repeated his denial of having seen anything else in his excitement over discovering the murdered man. Thereupon the deacon dismissed him, and he went away feeling that he had missed a great opportunity of distinguishing himself, and wishing he could do something to retrieve his reputation with the famous detective.

After Mickleham had gone, the deacon asked if any one had noticed a second passenger in the compartment with the dead man. No one remembered seeing such a person, however, and the deacon let the matter drop for the time being.

"What is Mickleham's general record?" he asked, turning to one of the railroad officials.

"Good," was the answer. "He is not overbright, and we could not use him on the fast trains; but he is conscientious and reliable."

"Do you know where he lives?"

"I can easily find out."

"Please do so. I would rather like to be sure that he spends the night at home."

"Why, you don't suspect him, do you, deacon?"

"Only as I must suspect everybody at this stage of the game. He was much impressed by the supposed amount of money in the dead man's possession, and

rather unduly disappointed, I thought, at learning the truth. However, he has helped matters by seeing the man alive at Reading. That limits the radius of time and place for the shooting. The train should leave Reading at six-thirty, but we were delayed in starting, I know, on account of some obstruction on the track.

"But we made up the lost time, and reached here at seven-fifteen. It is now eight o'clock. If the man were shot immediately after leaving Reading, would that tally with his condition when you found him?"

The deacon had turned to the doctor while speaking.

"Very nearly," was the answer. "I told you a little while ago that I thought he had been dead about an hour before I saw him."

The deacon then turned to the coroner and asked if he had found anything to identify the dead man. He was told that in the man's overcoat, found on the seat beside him, there was a letter.

"Here it is," said the coroner, handing the deacon a crumpled envelope, postmarked America, and addressed in a woman's handwriting to Arthur W. Branbane, in care of some London bankers.

As the deacon took the envelope and quickly read the name, he noticed that some of the reporters in the room started toward him. For reasons of his own, however, he slipped the envelope quickly into his pocket without allowing any one else to see it, and continued his conversation with the coroner.

"The man appears well dressed. Did you look for the tailor's name in his clothes?"

"Yes, I looked," answered the coroner. "There is no name in the overcoat, but the suit bears the label of one of the big shops; so does the hat."

"Were there no papers in his pockets?"

"None," was the answer. "We found a handsome watch, and the usual things a man carries in his pockets. They are all on the chair over there."

The deacon stepped over to where the things lay, and began examining them. The clothes seemed to interest him more than anything else, especially the overcoat. This he picked up and examined carefully. Finally he threw it over his arm, and told the coroner he should want to take it away with him. He then conferred a few moments about various details, and went out.

At the door he met the railroad official who had gone to look for the bag or anything else in the compartment.

"Nothing there," he said to the deacon.

"Not a hand-bag?"

"Nothing that I could find."

"Have you been hunting all this time?"

"Oh, no," replied the official. "Some one stopped me on another matter as I came out, and I was only able to make my search a few moments ago."

"Thank you for your trouble," said the deacon, and passed on.

He went straight to the compartment the official had just left, and made a thorough search on his own account. He felt pretty sure that he had seen a bag in the far corner of the carriage when he had looked into it first from the platform, following the line of gaze of the man who stood in front of him. He realized, however, that in the existing gloom at the time he might have been deceived. At all events, he soon satisfied himself that there was no bag in the compartment now. At the end of ten minutes he came out of it, and spoke to the man on guard.

"Just tell Mr. Norris, please, that he need not have this carriage watched any longer. I would like to have it locked, however, and kept unused where I can find it if necessary."

Saying which, the deacon hurried off, jumped into a cab, and drove to Scotland Yard.

CHAPTER III.

ON BOARD.

MEANTIME the man in the hansom had been doing some more quick thinking and acting. His first sense of relief had been followed by a constantly increasing perception of the difficulties ahead.

He realized now the fatal mistake of having left his bag behind. It contained letters and papers which would easily identify him, and, worst of all—it only

just occurred to him—it contained his steamer ticket. This would make it easy for him to be followed to the ship and apprehended there.

The ticket itself bothered him very little, for he had plenty of money with him, and quickly decided it would be best for him to take another room under another name.

The steamer sailed at noon the next day. He had intended to have a good night's rest in London, and go down to Southampton by the steamer train in the morning. He now decided it would not be safe to do either of these things. He therefore poked his cane through the trap-door above him, and directed the cabby to drive to Waterloo Station instead of to the Hotel Cecil.

He found there would be a train for Southampton in about an hour, so he went into a near-by coffee-house and ate a very fair dinner for one in his uncertain situation. After a good meal, and over a good cigar, most things look more rosy than before; and our American friend soon began to perceive a certain humor in his dilemma, and to take some relish in the rôle of refugee so unexpectedly thrust upon him.

He was a man who tried to do well anything he undertook, and, having undertaken to sail for America in the morning, and believing it could only be accomplished by evasion, he decided to evade to the best of his ability.

He had taken the precaution to spend the night at one of the smaller and cheaper hotels at Southampton. In the morning he rose early, and went out with the intention of buying a false beard.

As soon as he found one, he slipped it into his pocket, and returned to the hotel. He paid his bill, tagged the assumed name of H. H. Higgins on his trunk, and ordered it sent to the steamer.

He then left the hotel on foot and strolled through unfrequented streets. Finding at last a deserted alley, he stepped under the archway of an old house and put on his false beard. As he came out he looked carefully around, but, as far as he could see, no one was in sight.

He then went to the steamship-office and secured a room — although by no means a good one—under his new name of Higgins. He then started for the steamer.

As he mingled with the crowd, he felt increasing concern over possible discovery and detention. A panicky fear seized him that his beard would suddenly drop off, and that it was on crooked became an obsession. It certainly itched, and was most uncomfortable. Everybody seemed to look at him, and to smile in doing so. Instead of feeling secluded and elusive in his disguise, he felt inflated and protuberant.

He hurried to his cabin as quickly as possible. It was a small, dingy one on a lower deck, but he knew he was lucky to get any at the last moment. He threw down the overcoat he had been carrying on his arm, took a book out of his trunk, as soon as it arrived, and then went up to the smoking-room, which, to his great relief, he found empty.

He chose a secluded corner, and sat down to read. Soon after, a middle-sized, broad-shouldered man, with a heavy mustache, dressed in a check suit and red tie, appeared in the doorway.

He looked the room over searchingly, and fixed his eyes sharply for a moment on the sole occupant. He seemed inclined to address him at first, but refrained. Instead, he walked on into the room, lighted a cigar, drew a paper from his pocket, and sat down at a table directly in front of the alcove which the American had chosen for seclusion.

The latter had looked up when the stranger first appeared, but, remembering the necessity for keeping in the background as much as possible for a while, he had dropped his eyes to his book again. His disposition was open and friendly, and he was prone to make acquaintances easily, but his new rôle forced him to curb his natural inclinations. The appearance of this stranger, moreover, just when the bustle of departure was at its height outside, struck him as suspicious; and the searching look the man had given him did not help to allay his alarm. He bent fixedly over his book, but he was not reading—he was watching the stranger out of the corner of his eye.

This person, on his part, was only pretending to read. Every few minutes he looked up and eyed the other furtively.

Finally he laid down his paper, and spoke.

"I beg pardon," he said, in a rather loud and nasal voice that had an unpleasant twang of assurance about it, "but this is Mr. Higgins, if I am not mistaken?"

The American started perceptibly, and turned pale; and he was very grateful for the gloomy corner he had chosen. For a moment things swam before his eyes, and he felt that the game was up. But he made a struggle, and pulled himself together with an effort, though his voice was weak and trembled slightly as he said:

"That is my name."

"You don't seem to remember me!" said the stranger, drawing nearer with an evident disposition to shake hands. "My name is Littlejohn. We crossed together last year—or can I possibly be mistaken?" he added, noting the lack of responsiveness in the other's attitude.

"You are surely mistaken," was the coolly polite answer. "I have never had the pleasure of meeting you before."

"Well, now," exclaimed Mr. Littlejohn, "that is remarkable, really remarkable! I could have sworn you were the Higgins I knew—William Higgins, of Higgins & Toole, Stock Exchange brokers of Wall Street. If you are not the man, you are certainly his double. That beard is exactly like his—unnatural and aggressive-looking. I always used to tell my friend Higgins that his beard gave me an itching desire to pull it, so as to make sure it was not false."

After rolling this off with jaunty affability, Mr. Littlejohn reseated himself, and gazed in real or assumed astonishment at the double of his friend.

The American felt most uncomfortable, and all this rigmarole about the beard made him very uneasy. Was Mr. Littlejohn really the dupe of a not impossible similarity in name and looks, or was this voluble stranger in fact a detective feeling his way and having a little fun into the bargain?

The American was puzzled and worried, but he saw that whatever the truth might be, he would gain nothing and lose much, perhaps, by repelling the advances of the stranger, however distasteful they might be to him. So, summoning all the ease of voice and manner which was possible under the trying circumstances, he forced himself to make a civil reply.

"I am sorry to disappoint you," he said, "but I cannot claim even distant kinship to the Mr. Higgins whom you know. I have often heard that everybody has a double, but it is the first time that I have ever heard of mine. The coincidence is certainly interesting."

"Indeed it is!" resumed the stranger. "You are as alike as two peas—that is, as far as I can see in the rather obscure corner where you have chosen to hide."

The word "hide," whether used with intent or by chance, set the American on edge again. Indeed, almost everything the stranger said seemed charged with double meaning, and somehow involved a defensive attitude.

"I am not hiding," said the American, emphasizing the word slightly. "I merely chose this corner because the glare of the water hurts my eyes."

"It hurts mine, too!" said the other. "Quite a remarkable coincidence, isn't it? By the way, have you seen last night's paper? Queer murder, that, at Paddington Station! Unidentified man found shot in the back of the head, and no clue to the murderer. Oddly enough, I happened to be on that very train; but I knew nothing of the murder till I saw it in the morning papers. Hallo! What's that? Why, we're off! By-by; I'll see you later!" and he stepped hastily out on deck, leaving his paper behind him.

The American felt the first small, far-off jar of the turning shafts, as the initiative of motion crept like a thrill through the sleeping hulk beneath him. A thousand feet of wood and iron sheering away to bridge three thousand miles of ocean!

He heaved a sigh of relief. The ship had started, and he had started with it. Nothing could well stop him now. He realized that there might be trouble waiting for him at the journey's end, but that seemed a long way off. Moreover, he would be in his own country then, among influential friends, and the situation would be quite different.

With the vessel under way, the Littlejohn incident lost much of its terror, and

assumed more and more the complexion of an odd, but by no means impossible, coincidence.

Even if it were nothing more, however, Mr. Littlejohn's acquaintance was not one that the American cared to renew, and he made up his mind to avoid the necessity as carefully as possible. He had hit on Higgins as the first name that came into his head when he decided to use an assumed one. That the false beard should have made him resemble an actual Mr. Higgins would have been only amusing had not conditions made it very annoying. He decided, therefore, to disappear for a while and get rid of his beard before it attracted any more unwelcome attention.

In starting to pass out of the smoking-room, he noticed the paper which Mr. Littlejohn had left on the table. He picked it up and glanced at the account of the murder.

After a somewhat lengthy descriptive introduction, the paper said that the dead man was still unidentified. Nor was there any clue to the murderer, although some suspicion attached to the train-guard, a man named Mickleham. There being no evidence produced against him, however, he had been dismissed after examination, although still under surveillance.

The case was really shrouded in dense mystery—how dense might be inferred from the fact that Stanley Wilson, better known as the deacon, had been summoned to take charge of it. The article closed with some account of this famous detective and his achievements.

The American gleaned items of real comfort from the printed report. Clearly, his bag had not been found, up to the time of going to press, and consequently no suspicion rested on him yet.

He felt more than the relief of personal escape over the fact that his name had not been discovered or printed in the papers; for this alone might have led to the very complications and worries which he was trying to elude, quite as much for the sake of his friends as for his own.

He put down the paper with a light heart, and went to his cabin. He rang for the steward, and told him he would like his meals served in his room for a while. He also mentioned, as a precaution, that he was going to the barber-shop to have his beard shaved off. He stayed quietly in his cabin until the following afternoon, when, as nothing disturbing had happened in the interim, he thought it would be quite safe to make a beardless reappearance in public. He decided to visit the stateroom he had originally engaged, and, if he found it unoccupied, to have himself transferred to it under the name of Higgins. It was one of the large *de luxe* cabins on the promenade-deck.

He knew the number and location, and found it easily. The door was open, and he saw no signs of occupancy. Feeling delight at the prospect of changing his rather dingy quarters below for this luxurious and airy room, he stepped in and looked around.

Quietly reading in one corner, at an angle hidden by the door, sat the clerical-looking man who had bumped into him at Paddington.

"Ah, Mr. Branbane," said the deacon pleasantly, looking up from his book without the least show of surprise, "I have been expecting you."

CHAPTER IV.

AT SEA.

BRANBANE — for the American's name was Arthur W. Branbane— stood rooted to the spot in sheer amazement for some moments. As soon as he recovered from his astonishment at seeing this man again and hearing his real name from the detective's lips, he quickly took in the situation and realized what had happened: his bag had been found, and this man had connected him with it and followed him.

His first impulse was to throw the detective out of the room as an intruder. The better counsel that comes of second thoughts, however, showed him that he was fairly caught in the web of strange circumstances that had woven themselves about him. He had failed to elude them, and now no violence could shatter them. Time and patience alone could undo the ugly tangle.

Moreover, if this strange man were a mere instrument of the law, he was only

doing his duty, and to treat the matter as a personal one was clearly illogical. Branbane could do nothing better than to accept the inevitable with composure; and it was obviously to his advantage to turn this man into a friend rather than an enemy.

As all this passed through his mind, and as the blood first left his face and then rushed back in anger and annoyance and finally subsided to its normal under the pressure of reason, he stood there gazing fixedly at the unexpected occupant of his room.

The deacon returned his gaze steadily, but not unkindly. He was taking a new and careful measure of the man before him. The tall figure, the broad chest, the open face, the deep-blue eyes behind dark lids, the sensitive nostrils of the tapering nose, and the well-set mouth and chin were making a strangely sympathetic appeal to the imperturbable detective.

He was the first to speak after Branbane had fought his inward battle and regained his composure.

"Well," he said, smiling slightly, "have you decided to put me out, or to let me stay?"

"I think," replied Branbane slowly, with a tinge of sarcasm in his voice, "that, under the circumstances, I will allow you to stay."

"A most sensible decision," said the deacon; "for I am not only armed officially with all necessary staying powers, but I may be able to help you out of this scrape."

"Just at the moment, however," smiled Branbane a little grimly, "you would appear to be the one who is helping me into it!"

"That is, unfortunately, part of my duty. By the way, my name is Wilson—Stanley Wilson. I am a Scotland Yard detective, with a warrant for your arrest. I am usually called the deacon, because I wear a white tie and dark clothes."

"I have seen the name in the paper," said Branbane. "I also remember getting a clerical impression from your dress at Paddington Station—but not from your bump."

"Ah, you remember the incident, then?"

"Very distinctly. I carried away the impression you jostled me intentionally."

"I did," admitted the deacon. "I had been attracted by the crowd around the dead man, and chanced to stand near you. I heard you mumble—quite unconsciously, I imagine—something about a bag; and, as I noticed that you were looking eagerly into the carriage, I thought it worth while to look in the same direction. Am I right in thinking I saw a bag in the farther end of the compartment, and that you were annoyed at not being able to claim it without attracting unwelcome attention to yourself?"

"Hold on!" said Branbane. "Before I begin answering your questions, I want to ask a few myself, and thoroughly understand this situation and our relationship to each other in it."

Whereupon he closed the door, took off his hat, and sat down. He leaned back in his chair, and remained silent for a few moments.

The vessel was dipping gently to a rolling sea. Every now and then, through the open port, an arc of blue waters swelled into view, and somehow it came into his mind that, like the vessel, he too was being pushed by unseen forces out into a plumbless sea of circumstance.

"Well, deacon," he said at last—"I suppose I may call you that?—I am so full of conflicting thoughts and emotions that I hardly know where to begin! Two days ago I was at a sort of climax of earthly happiness. I entered the train at Wolverhampton with the elation of a man who had completed a difficult task. I was starting home to receive my reward and marry the girl I love—the wedding having been postponed merely on account of this trip.

"Being completely fagged out, I slept most of the way. I woke up in London to find myself alone with a dead man; and I left the train, to all intents and purposes, a suspected murderer, as your presence here clearly indicates. Perhaps you will understand a little better now how confused I feel?"

"The more you tell me, the better I shall understand, of course," said the deacon politely, but in a tone that was cool and unsympathetic.

Branbane felt the chill of it. It was hard for him to realize that he was in a position where his word and character suddenly counted for nothing, while

among all who knew him they commanded that high esteem which only gravitates to impeccable integrity.

For this reason more than any other, perhaps, he had been chosen for the mission just completed. The opposing interests were large and powerful, and could only be fused by a man whom all trusted implicitly. Such a man was Arthur W. Branbane.

It was strangely hard for him, therefore, to find himself in a position where he was constantly open to the sting of implied accusation, and the still worse torment of being forced to see its apparent justification in events which he could not explain.

All his early talks with the deacon were punctuated with long pauses, during which he had to fight down spasms of anger and indignation by a painful pressure of pure reason. One of these spells had to pass after the deacon's last remark, before Branbane felt able to speak with calmness.

"What I want to know is this: Am I accused of this crime? Am I your prisoner?" he asked.

"Only constructively at present—as I believe you would say in America," replied the deacon. "You are under suspicion and surveillance, and I may have to place you under arrest. It depends entirely on yourself."

"You mean it depends on what I tell you of my knowledge of this mystery, and on what I can prove as to my general character and standing?"

"Exactly."

"One thing more," said Branbane. "If I tell you all I know and answer all your questions, I may say things incriminating to myself, which can be used against me if I have to appear in court. Is that not so?"

"Quite right," answered the deacon. "You are under no obligations to answer my questions; but I believe, in the present instance, it would be to your advantage to do so."

"Why?" asked Branbane shortly.

"Because if you don't, I must arrest you and take you back to England as a suspicious person. But if you do, I shall take the time and trouble to corroborate all you say, and to investigate personally everything concerning you. You may be innocent without being able to prove it, Mr. Branbane; but if you can convince me of this, I will do all I can to help you out of a very awkward predicament."

"Do you consider me guilty at the moment?" asked Branbane.

"At the moment," replied the deacon, "I have nothing to consider but the facts. You were the only person in the compartment with the murdered man, and the circumstantial evidence all points dead against you. You know that as well as I do."

"Yes, I know that as well as you do," repeated Branbane slowly, as though he were thinking aloud rather than speaking. "I knew it the moment I awoke to the situation. That is the reason I attempted to escape." Here the words died away into the concentration of unspoken thought.

After a short pause, Branbane straightened up with the reflex of attitude and expression that accompanies a definite mental resolve.

"Deacon," he said, looking up squarely at the detective, "I am going to make a clean breast of this matter. I believe your advice is good and offered in my interest.

"The petty deceits and subterfuges I have practised for the last two days are both unnatural and distasteful to me. I have done with them. If I am to fight deceitful circumstances, I'll fight them as I have always fought deceitful men—in the open and aboveboard. I'll pin my faith, as I have always done, to plain truth and sheer honesty.

"And, once for all, I make this solemn declaration before God and man: that I am as innocent of this mysterious crime as you are, and have no more knowledge of how it was committed than you have. Now, ask me any questions you like!"

Branbane had risen while speaking. His voice, naturally deep and musical, had caught the added solemnity of word and mien. The deacon felt more than he cared to, at this early stage of their contact, the sympathetic appeal of the man before him. His impulse was to say more than his judgment could sanction under the difficult circumstances. He felt forced to compromise with the following words:

"I admire the stand you have taken, Mr. Branbane. If I can do my duty in this matter, and at the same time prove myself your friend, I shall be very happy."

Again Branbane felt the coolness of the words—the doubt, the suspicion, the lack of confidence that seemed to poison everything the deacon said. He felt the sting of disparity between his own fervid outburst and the detective's whitewashed politeness. When he spoke, therefore, he harked back to something that had gone before.

"You asked me a while ago," he said rather stiffly "if I had left a bag in the compartment and was anxious to recover it? I now plead guilty to both indictments."

"How did you come to forget it?" asked the deacon.

"I didn't forget it," was the answer. "I left it behind most unwillingly. I was sound asleep when we rolled into the station. The jar of stopping, I suppose, awoke me. I jumped up, and discovered that the man hanging out of the window on the platform side had been shot and was dead.

"I saw at once that suspicion would rest on me, and that, if caught, I would be detained until this mystery, of which I knew nothing, could be cleared.

"On the other hand, two supremely important events depended on my sailing by this steamer the next morning—the consummation of the business deal of which I have spoken, and my own wedding.

"Weighing these obligations against the fact that my detention could not in any way help the dead man, or even further the ends of justice, I decided not to be detained if I could avoid it. I turned to the opposite window in the compartment, and opened it—"

"It was shut then, was it?" interrupted the deacon.

"Why, yes; I just said as much," replied Branbane somewhat tartly.

"I know you did," rejoined the deacon quietly. "But the point is so important that I wanted to be very sure of it. Was the window closed during the entire trip?"

"I see the point," mused Branbane slowly. "If the window had been open, some one might have fired the fatal shot from outside it while I slept; but if it was closed all the time, the shot must have been fired within the compartment."

"That would be the natural inference," the deacon assented.

"Whatever the inference may be," resumed Branbane, "I am going to stick to my resolve. To the best of my knowledge and belief, that window was shut from the time I entered the compartment—and I closed it myself to keep off the draft while I slept—up to the moment I opened it at Paddington."

"A very damaging admission for yourself, Mr. Branbane, and one that complicates matters for us all," said the deacon thoughtfully, tapping lightly and irregularly with his finger on the table. This was the only outward sign he ever made of being puzzled or worried. The action seemed to typify the mental processes at work at such a time—as if he were telegraphing questions and answers in rapid succession to the outposts of his deductions.

Suddenly he stopped tapping, and looked up.

"Are you sure," he asked slowly, "that the glass in the window was not broken when you let it down?"

"The question has been in my own mind," replied Branbane. "You must remember two things, deacon—the darkness in the compartment, intensified by a train on the next track, and my condition of excitement and haste. Allowing for these, however, and the fact that the window stuck at the top, and that I had to push down very hard to open it, I believe I should have noticed if it had been broken—and I don't think it was."

"You certainly have the courage of your resolutions!" exclaimed the deacon, with undisguised admiration at the other's cool statement of facts regardless of consequences. As he said this, he pulled out his watch and looked at it. "Nearly dinner-time!" he said. "Let us dine first, and discuss later. I know the window was not broken, for I examined it myself—but enough of that until after dinner.

"Now, about this room. When I came on board I found the ship full, so I told the purser, whom I know, that I had noticed this room was unoccupied, and that

I would be glad to take it. I moved in, but did not put my things about, because I felt quite sure that sooner or later you would come to see if it were empty. Now, however, I wish you to take possession of it, Mr. Branbane, and I will take yours.

"And, by the way, you came on board as Mr. Higgins, I believe, and perhaps it will be just as well for you to keep that name during the voyage. In order to change it now you would have to make explanations to the purser, which might prove awkward, and for which there is no necessity that I can see. If I simply change rooms with my friend, Mr. Higgins, it is nobody's concern to know why."

Branbane immediately saw the force of this, and willingly agreed to continue the use of his assumed name. He also thanked the deacon for the tender of the room, which, under the circumstances, he felt quite justified in accepting.

"All right," he said, in concluding the parley over these matters; "I'll go down and have my things sent up," and he started for the door.

The deacon most unexpectedly interposed, however.

"Pardon me, Mr. Branbane," he said blandly, "but I prefer to save you that trouble, and to see to the sending up of your things myself. You can stay here to be sure that you receive them *all.*"

The deacon emphasized the last word not only by intonation, but by a slight smile, and left Branbane staring blankly after him as he went out and closed the door.

CHAPTER V.

UNDER THE STARS.

BRANBANE felt both annoyed and puzzled; annoyed over the unexpected interference, puzzled over the uncomprehended innuendo. He sat down to try and reason himself calm and good-humored again.

He argued that, until he could clear himself of all suspicion, he must in the very nature of things expect to be treated as a suspect—to have his feelings constantly jarred and his sensibilities chafed—and the sooner he became accustomed to it the better.

If he had any fixed philosophy of life, it was a mild stoicism condensed into the formula that the inevitable should always be met and borne with dignity and composure. He had run against this large block of concrete inevitableness with such an impact of suddenness, however, as to seriously impair the equipoise of his philosophy. He saw clearly the frequency and uselessness of these lapses, and made up his mind to avoid them in the future, if possible.

As he sat there turning the matter over, his things were brought into the room — his trunk and overcoat. He looked at them and smiled. In his nervous state he had probably misinterpreted both the deacon's words and intentions. How foolish!

A moment later the deacon himself appeared, affable and smiling. He suggested that they dine together, and meet in general on a basis of friendly acquaintance, assuming their less pleasant relationship at such times only as expediency made necessary and privacy less embarrassing. The offer was cordially made and accepted in the spirit of its proffer; and the two men went off quite cheerily to dinner.

Each found the other, in an uncommissioned mood, most companionable. Both had those fundamentals in common that make the exchange of ideas, refracted by personality, sympathetic and interesting. Both were men of action and energy. Both had made a success of life. Both had traveled and read intelligently.

After dinner they lighted their cigars, and found a sheltered corner on the deck where they could talk unheard and unobserved, save for the casual passer-by.

It was a beautiful sea-night, studded with stars; and set, seemingly, in the segment of a huge black pearl. The sea was calm—as the cricket is silent when it sings. The ship undulated with rhythmic heave. The music of the pushing prow came down the wind in clear crescendos at each spreading dip. High overhead a blue-black mast swung slowly back and forth against the sky, and seemed to touch the low-hung stars in passing. It was a night to dream.

Both men felt its charm, its high attuning, its vast vistas of impalpability. In such a setting the petty bickerings of

life seemed strangely small and sordid; but each felt them sternly beckoning for attention, and Branbane was the first to speak.

"What an imperious coquette Dame Nature is!" he said. "She is forever imposing her mood on us; never conceding to ours."

"You mean that you would rather lie there and dream at the stars than discuss the details of a murder?" asked the deacon.

"I mean rather," replied Branbane, "that nature bids me dream, but will only let me dream of the murder and read false accusation in the stars. The mood and the matter do not mix."

"Then let us eliminate the mood and annihilate the matter," suggested the deacon, smiling.

"You are right, deacon, I guess," replied Branbane. "The sooner I get this nightmare off my mind the better. Go ahead; I'm ready."

"Let us begin then where we left off," said the deacon. "We had established the fact that the window was closed and unbroken on your side of the compartment, and you were telling me how you came to leave your bag."

"It was this way," said Branbane. "I saw I could not hold on to it while climbing through the window, so I set it on the nearest seat, intending to reach back for it. But, just as I got through the window, I heard the exclamation of the guard at the other door. I ducked, and jumped to the ground as quickly as possible; and, leaving the bag to its fate, picked up my coat and hurried away."

"Your coat?" queried the deacon.

"Yes; my overcoat. I forgot to say that I had dropped it out of the window before getting out myself."

"Where was it in the compartment?"

"On one of the middle seats, I think."

"Did the dead man have a coat?"

"I think I remember one on the opposite seat when I snatched up mine," said Branbane.

"If I remember rightly," continued the deacon, "you have carried that coat on your arm whenever I have seen you since?"

"Yes," assented Branbane, "the weather has been so mild, there has been no occasion to wear it."

"Now, after you picked up your coat, let me tell *you* what happened," said the deacon. "If I go wrong, correct me. You walked around the end of the train, and so reached the platform. As you came opposite your compartment, you paused to see what was going on and if your bag were still there. Then you bumped into me—or I into you. This recalled to you the danger of lingering, and you hurried off to claim your trunk and have it carried to a hansom. You got in with the intention of going to the Hotel Cecil—"

"How did you know that?" interrupted Branbane, who was following this recital of his own doings with wondering interest.

"Never mind now," smiled the deacon quietly, and then proceeded: "On the way you changed your mind and the order of your going, and drove to Waterloo Station instead. You took a late train for Southampton, and there you went to one of the smaller hotels, where you appear to have had a most terrible experience."

"What do you mean?" asked Branbane, considerably puzzled.

"Merely that you came out of it a changed man—both in name and appearance," laughed the deacon, "and looking for all the world like my friend Higgins—of Higgins & Toole."

"Oh, I see!" exclaimed Branbane, forced to smile himself, as he thought of the situation. "Mr. Littlejohn and the deacon are one and the same person. I had my suspicions all along."

At this the deacon laughed more than ever. "I had not thought of that," he said. "It makes the situation funnier than ever. So you thought Littlejohn might be myself in disguise! No, no; Littlejohn has an individual existence all his own. He is your man of many trips; your oracle of the smoking-room; your patron saint of all who go down—first-class—to the sea in ships. I saw him sitting just outside your room this afternoon. He made some excuse for addressing me in the smoking-room this morning, and in five minutes had told me all about meeting with the double of his friend Higgins—of Higgins & Toole."

"But how did you know I had assumed that name?" asked Branbane.

"I didn't know it," answered the deacon. "I came on board at the last moment, and the ship had started before I had time to look around for you. When I failed to see you anywhere, or to find you in your room, I began to fear you had given me the slip, after all. I conceived the possibility, however, of your having taken just the precautions which you did; so, when Littlejohn told me his story this morning, I immediately recognized in the dark corner the strange beard and the embarrassed manner of Mr. Higgins, the man I was looking for. After that I merely went to your room and waited."

"I see," said Branbane musingly. "And now how did you know about the incident of the Hotel Cecil?"

"A little trick of the trade," answered the deacon, smiling. "When you had claimed your trunk, it was very easy to anticipate your next move. So I stepped out ahead of you and gave a little whistle, which the cabbies in line all understand. When you came out and hailed a hansom, I gave the whistle again, and the driver knew that by reporting where he took you he would earn an extra fare."

"Very simple, I see," said Branbane. "And what trick of the trade informed you of the hotel in Southampton?"

"The trick of deduction," answered the deacon. "I merely reasoned out the probable precautions you would take."

"Are you always so correct in your deductions?" queried Branbane.

"Why, yes," answered the deacon, "where the premises are so simple. We can't always argue exactly what a person will do, but we can usually determine pretty closely certain things they will not do. As I knew you were trying to avoid notice, I felt quite sure you would avoid the larger hotels usually patronized by traveling Americans."

"The reasoning is simple, but seems to be productive," remarked Branbane. Then, after a slight pause, he added: "Well, that clears all minor matters up to the present moment, as far as I see."

The deacon turned and looked at his companion closely before speaking. "It seems to me, Mr. Branbane," he said slowly, "that there are still one or two important details calling for explanation."

"They certainly don't occur to me," said Branbane.

"Let me jog your memory," suggested the deacon. "Were you not surprised to find me in possession both of your room and of your name?"

"I was surprised to find you in my room, certainly; but the means of your being there and of knowing my name were, on a moment's thought, self-evident."

"Indeed!" said the deacon blandly. "You interest me. But I thought you said you had not worn your coat?"

"What has that got to do with it?" retorted Branbane sharply. "I refer to my bag, of course; the bag which contained my steamer ticket and letters, and the finding of which put you in possession of my name and plans for sailing."

"We are talking at cross-purposes, I fear," remarked the deacon, looking slightly perplexed. "I found no bag."

"What!" exclaimed Branbane in amazement. "Didn't you find the bag I left in the compartment?"

"I supposed you had it," replied the detective, quite as much surprised as Branbane at this new turn in affairs.

"How could you suppose that, when you yourself saw me leave it behind?"

"As no bag was to be found in the compartment," replied the deacon, "I naturally concluded that you had paid some one to go back and abstract it. It was to prove this conviction that I insisted on seeing to the moving of your things, expecting to find the missing bag."

"And I have thought you were hiding it from *me* all the time!" exclaimed Branbane. "What has become of it?"

"I have no more idea than you have," admitted the deacon. "Let us go inside. It is getting a little cool here, don't you think so? I'll take a turn around the deck to start my circulation, and then I'll join you in your cabin, if agreeable."

After the deacon had strolled away, Branbane settled back in his chair for a few moments. Both men looked up at the hieroglyphic stars again, but neither was seeking to read in them the riddle of the universe; only asking an answer to the new mystery that confronted them —the question:

"Who took the bag?"

(To be continued.)

THE PRODIGALITY OF DANIEL FRAME.

BY MELVILLE F. FERGUSON.

A SHORT STORY.

DANIEL FRAME blew frostily into his lantern, and hung it up on its accustomed peg; shook the fine snow from his rusty greatcoat, and spread it upon a chair-back to dry; wiped the wet from his mangy fur cap with his sleeve, and methodically laid it, side by side with his mittens, on the elbow of the stovepipe.

His entrance had admitted a wintry blast that all but extinguished the lamp, by the light of which his sister industriously plied a bristling *cheval-de-frise* of knitting needles; yet she bent her attention upon her work without looking up.

Daniel sidled noiselessly toward the stove and softly lifted the lid. Four or five of the topmost billets, newly put on the fire, had not yet ignited. These he deftly removed and replaced in the woodbox, apparently unobserved. But he dropped the stove-lid with a clatter, as the woman, still with averted face, sharply challenged him:

"You put them sticks back in the stove!"

Sullenly Daniel obeyed. When the last smoking faggot had been reconsigned to the flames, his sister raised her head, eying him scornfully. She was spare and angular, and the jutting bones of her lean figure emphasized the asperity of her manner as she spoke:

"It's near ten o'clock. Where you been?"

Daniel rubbed his rough hands together, and answered evasively:

"I been lookin' after the critters."

"Where you been?" she insisted.

"Oh!" said he weakly, "you mean where-all since tea? I been over to Gowdy's, dickerin' with Jake fer that yaller heifer."

"You ain't been to Gowdy's all evenin'—don't tell me. You been settin' like a bump on a log in Seth Pollock's front parlor most of the time, haven't ye?"

"I looked in at Seth's on the way back," reluctantly admitted Daniel.

Beulah Frame sniffed. "No fool like an old fool," she muttered, returning to her knitting. "You goin' to marry that gal, or hang aroun' moonin' till your teeth drop out?"

"Drat it, I've asked her often enough, ain't I?" retorted Daniel, stung by his sister's taunts. "She won't hear to it at all."

Beulah laid aside the half-finished stocking, and regarded him with just a shade less of disfavor.

"You been keepin' company with Sophronia Pollock the best part o' ten years," she said.

"Ten years," echoed Daniel.

"An' you can't figger no reason why she shouldn't say the word?"

Daniel shook his head perplexedly. "Ain't nobody cut me out," he murmured. "I reckon she jest ain't a marryin' woman."

"Marryin' fiddlesticks!" sneered Beulah. "If that ain't jest like a man's conceit! 'Cause a woman don't turn to sugar soon's he tells he has a sweet tooth, he blames the good Lord for makin' her different from her kind. I'll put a flea in your ear, Dan'l Frame—the gal's a skeered to take ye."

"A skeered?" queried Daniel blankly. "What's she a skeered of?"

"A skeered of your everlastin', tight-fisted meanness. She's afeared to tie herself up to a man that's so close it takes a double team an' a yoke of oxen to drag

a dollar out of him. An' I don't blame her."

Daniel's round, red face grew a trifle ruddier. He was accustomed to his sister's domineering ways, and no stranger to her plain speaking; but this touched him on the raw.

"You ain't got no call to say that," he protested, instantly on the defensive. "I've spent a sight o' money on Sophronia. Haven't I took her no end o' places? What about the earrings I give her on her birthday?"

"Humph! What about 'em? Trash she's ashamed to wear! As for totin' her around, I'll allow you been mighty liberal takin' her to everything that was free. But it ain't so much what ye spend or don't spend on her, as the name ye've got around the town. I've heerd of a woman marryin' a drunkard to reform him; but a skinflint—never!"

Daniel opened his mouth to retort, thought better of it, and closed his jaws with a snap. Sulkily he took his candle from the shelf and stalked toward the door. On the threshold Beulah called him back.

"You goin' to bed?" she asked.

"Aye," said Daniel.

"Oh! I didn't hear ye say good night."

"G'night."

"Good night, Dan'l. You think over what I tell ye. You'll never git Sophronia Pollock till ye show her you set more store by her than you do by skimpin' an' gougin' to pile up money ye don't need."

With an inarticulate growl Daniel slammed the door and thumped up-stairs to his own chamber. He was morally certain that Beulah had done him a grave injustice. He was careful—careful was the word—in the use of his worldly possessions and in his dealings with his fellow men—but not stingy. In the bottom of his old horsehair-covered trunk there reposed at that very moment a genuine nickeloid open-face lady's watch, almost brand-new. He had got it on exceptionally advantageous terms from a delinquent creditor, and he designed to bestow it on Sophronia as her Christmas gift on the morrow.

With Beulah's gibes ringing in his ears, Daniel got out the watch, and admiringly examined it. To him it was a tangible proof that he was the victim of a baseless slander. But would it convince Sophronia Pollock, if by any chance she so thoroughly misunderstood his character, as his sister represented?

Through half the night Daniel lay awake, pondering the problem, alternately torn by fierce resentment of Beulah's theory concerning Sophronia, and tortured by misgivings lest, after all, it might be substantially correct. The season was appropriate, he reasoned, to refute malignant gossip by showing himself unmistakably in his true colors; but the means puzzled him. The tinny gong of the kitchen clock announced the hour of three before he hit upon a satisfactory solution and resigned himself to sleep.

II.

EARLY as Beulah arose on Christmas morning, she heard Daniel stirring in the adjoining room, and in the attic overhead, long before she completed her simple toilet. As he still remained in the upper part of the house when she descended the stairs, however, she was mildly astonished to find that he had been down ahead of her, laid the fire, opened a path through the snow to the barn, and apparently performed all the usual before-breakfast chores.

Her astonishment appreciably increased when, in response to her summons to the meal, he declared that he was not yet dressed. It reached a climax as he made his appearance after a quarter-hour's delay, and took his seat at the table.

"Merry Christmas!" shouted Daniel cheerily.

"Lord save us!" gasped Beulah, clutching at a chair for support.

Daniel undoubtedly presented a striking figure. In place of the corduroy coat of every-day wear, he had drawn over his other clothing a heavy red flannel undershirt, which clung to his rotund form with elastic tenacity. The front of this strange outer garment was embellished with a vertical stripe of cotton batting, visibly held in place by a heterogeneous array of safety pins, while a broad trimming of the same material, secured in like manner, ran around the neck, the sleeve-ends, and the snug-fitting tail of the shirt.

A counterfeit presentment of flowing white whiskers, cut out of pasteboard, to

which fluffy shreds of cotton had been glued, conformed to the outline of Daniel's face, and clung there with the precarious aid of pins, attached to his old fur cap. The cap itself was disguised by a band of white. There the amateur costumer's art exhausted itself. Daniel's nether extremities frankly revealed themselves in a pair of his workaday trousers, tucked into high-topped boots.

Beulah was gifted with little imagination, and no sense of humor. To connect her brother in this garb with the patron saint of Christmas day was a strain of fancy beyond her capacity. So, after staring at him, dumfounded, till the details of his get-up finally percolated through her mental fog, she ejaculated:

"Dan'l Frame, are ye gone clean daft?"

"Not I," chuckled Daniel. "I'm Santa Claus."

"You're what?" shrieked Beulah.

"You heerd me," said he. "Hold out your hand."

Wonderingly, his sister obeyed. Daniel fished something from his trousers-pocket, reached across the table, and slipped it on Beulah's middle finger. It was a battered silver thimble. She instantly recognized it as her mother's. It had been strangely missing since its owner's death, a dozen years before.

"There!" said Daniel complacently. "That's your Christmas gift."

Beulah gulped two or three times in an ineffectual effort to speak, and finally managed to stammer: "Thank ye kindly!" Then, with fascinated eyes still on her brother's remarkable attire:

"What are ye doin' with your cap on? You're not goin' out in them heathenish clothes?"

"Ain't I?" said Daniel. "You watch me."

The injunction was unnecessary. Her half-frightened gaze never left him as he despatched his sausage and buckwheat cakes. It followed him, from the window, as he got out the old bay mare and hitched her up to the long-bodied box-sleigh. It trailed his every movement as he brought down from the attic load after load of discarded clothing and bedding, broken-down furniture past all hope of repair, and an armful or so of crippled toys, relics of his own boyhood. The accumulated rubbish of a generation made up the pile which he deposited on the kitchen floor, and thence carried out to pack in the commodious body of the sleigh.

Not a word spoke Beulah while these preparations progressed. But as Daniel climbed up behind Nancy, she rushed out frantically and clutched at the reins.

"Stop, Dan'l! Stop!" she cried. "In the name o' the Land o' Goshen, what are ye goin' to do?"

Daniel bent over the side of the sleigh and beckoned her nearer.

"I'm goin' to give all them things away," he said earnestly. "Give 'em away—d'ye hear?—without money an' without price! I'll show ye whether I'm a skinflint or no!"

Before Beulah could recover either her mental equilibrium or her post of vantage, Daniel smartly plied the whip and dashed away from the house. He left her gaping after him, with the firm conviction, written in every line of her countenance, that disappointment in love had overthrown her brother's reason and turned him into a raving maniac.

Santa Claus set forth upon his philanthropic mission that morning, without any very definite notion of contributing to the pleasure either of himself or others. The dominating idea of his expedition was merely to demonstrate publicly his capacity for generosity. The evidences of hilarity with which he was received everywhere he went among his poorer neighbors, puzzled, though they did not disconcert, him. Here he left a rickety, backless chair, scarred with the marks of a lifetime's usage; there, a frayed and outworn quilt or a pair of befringed and shiny trousers resurrected from a capacious rag-bag; at yonder farmhouse, where children made merry the Christmas morn, a decrepit hobby-horse, marvelously prancing on two legs and a half, or a *blasé* jumping-jack, long since oblivious to the twitching of its string, or a headless, stickless, paintless, noiseless drum.

"Merry Christmas!" he shouted formally, as he drove from house to house, distributing his largess.

Never did it occur to him that the grotesqueness of his appearance had anything to do with the shouts of laughter

that greeted him. He flattered himself that he was making an impression upon the community, that could not fail to work to his advantage, when the news thereof should penetrate to the ears of Sophronia Pollock and Beulah Frame.

III.

DANIEL'S material supply of holiday cheer was well-nigh exhausted when, at the close of a fatiguing tour, he drew rein before a shabby little one-story dwelling on the extreme outskirts of the town. To judge by all outward evidences, the place was deserted. No smoke issued from the squat chimney. No dog barked frantic warning of the visitor's approach. The previous night's snow lay undisturbed about the premises. Yet some one stirred within, in response to Daniel's vigorous knock, and the door was timidly opened an inch or two.

"Mornin'! Mornin', Mis' Trumbull! Merry Christmas to ye!" bellowed Daniel.

"Why, if it ain't Daniel Frame!" said the woman, throwing wide the door. "Come right in."

Promptly availing himself of the invitation, Daniel deposited on the floor a rather rusty wash-boiler, somewhat the worse for sundry perforations in its copper bottom; a pair of time-stained boxing-gloves, and a venerable, short-winded accordion, destined for Mrs. Trumbull's two half-grown daughters, and, for the delight of her baby boy, a box of partially used water-colors, apportioned in cakes of convenient size for infantile deglutition.

"Christmas trifles from old Santa," explained Daniel modestly, turning to his hostess. "Hulloa! What ails your eyes? Ain't been cryin', have ye?"

The woman wiped away a tear from her wan face and shook her head.

"'Tain't nothin'," she declared stoutly; "leastways, nothin' that can be mended. I been worrited a little 'cause Lydie ain't so well as she might be."

Daniel cast his eyes curiously about the room. He knew from the neighborhood gossip of a community where everybody knew the details of everybody else's affairs, that since the husband and father had been sent to a State institution, incapacitated by an incurable disease, the Trumbull family had had a desperate struggle for existence. But he was not prepared for the evidences of dire poverty that met him on every hand.

The room in which he stood was bare of the most common articles of furniture. The floor was innocent of carpet or any other covering. Of chairs there were none. Even a table was missing, and the stove—though the day was bleak and the wind biting—was cold and cheerless.

A little girl of six, clothed in meager rags, clung shivering to her mother's threadbare skirts; while the baby, only its pinched face visible amid the folds of some nondescript garment that wrapped it round and round, slumbered fitfully in the woman's arms.

Incredulously Daniel strode to the stove, removed the lid, and peered in.

"For the Lord's sake, why did ye let the fire go out this bitter day?" he demanded.

Mrs. Trumbull reddened. "Wood all gone," she explained, after a moment's embarrassed silence.

"We'll soon fix that. Where's your ax?"

"We—we lent it, an' it ain't been sent back yet."

Daniel knew that was a lie. He knew that the ax had gone where the chairs, and the table, and the rest of the necessities and comforts of that home had gone. Without another word he rushed out of the house, jumped into the sleigh, and drove furiously away.

At the first bit of wooded land he came to, he pulled up, and with his naked hands tore a dozen stout limbs from the low-growing young hemlocks. These, with prodigious energy, he succeeded in breaking into usable lengths by laying them slantwise against a protruding rock and hurling a heavy stone against them.

Within a quarter-hour he reappeared at the Trumbull home with a tolerable supply of fuel, green, but resinous enough to burn readily, nevertheless. In a jiffy he had a roaring fire blazing in the stove.

"How you been gettin' along about the cookin'?" he demanded, with sudden suspicion, as he completed his labors.

"Why, we ain't had no hot food since we used the last o' the wood, yisteddy," the woman hesitatingly answered.

"Susan Trumbull, I don't believe ye've

got no grub of any kind in the house!" said Daniel. "Cross your heart an' hope ye may die, ain't that the truth?"

Tears welled up in Susan's eyes; sobs choked her utterance. She averted her face and buried her head in her tattered apron. The man needed no other answer. A telltale drop of moisture trickled down his cheek and fell glistening on his scarlet sleeve. Then a miracle came to pass.

Daniel Frame drew from his hip pocket a fat, brown wallet. He unwound the yard of stout cord that engirdled it, and extracted from a varied assortment of bank-notes a ten-dollar bill. Stealthily, quite unobserved by either mother or child, he snatched up the box of paints he had brought for the baby, slipped the money inside and laid it on the mantel.

There was an awkward pause, while the woman continued to give vent to her grief and shame. At length Daniel shook her, not ungently, by the shoulder.

"Come," he said, "don't ye take on like that. I got to move along now—I'm a goin' to make a bee-line for the store. If they ain't a prime turkey an' a bushel basket full o' fixin's dumped at this door inside of an hour, I'll eat my shirt—cotton, safety-pins an' all—with my whiskers throwed in for good measure!"

A torrent of broken phrases of gratitude burst from Susan's lips; but Daniel checked it by the simple expedient of putting himself out of hearing as swiftly as his legs could carry him. Once safely in the sleigh, he looked back, waved a cheery farewell, and drove townward at a smart pace to make good the letter of his promise.

Virtue is said to be its own reward. Daniel reached home well satisfied with himself, after leaving an order at Hickey's Metropolitan Mercantile Emporium that made old Hickey's eyes bulge out like rivet-heads on a boiler-plate. But his contentment was, unfortunately, short-lived.

His mind dwelt persistently on that ten-dollar bill. Was it, after all, judiciously bestowed? Would not the sudden possession of so large a sum turn Susan's head, and tempt her into some act of riotous extravagance? How much better it would have been had he given her a smaller amount at first, and supplemented the donation later, if necessary!

Daniel heeded not Beulah's quizzing at dinner, nor said one word of his visit to Susan Trumbull. Nevertheless, the subject was uppermost in his thoughts throughout the day. He pictured the bank-note, spread out beneath the lid of the paint-box, and wondered whether Susan had yet discovered it. Of course, if she had not, it was still really his. Suppose—

He started guiltily, and put the notion away from him. But the devil has a very insinuating way. If you eject him at one door, he promptly sneaks back through another. And the devil had very particular business with Daniel Frame that Christmas night.

IV.

It was close to midnight. The moon, in her last quarter, shed a sickly light upon the white blanket, beneath which slept the Trumbull homestead, and disclosed the muffled figure of a man slinking across the lot from the roadway to the house. He approached the single window of the living room, peered in, and cautiously raised the sash. Unweighted, it would not stay in place until he propped it with a broken broom-handle that lay upon the sill. With infinite care, the man drew himself upward and crept through the window. Noiselessly he stole across the floor to the mantel, whence he took a shallow wooden box and opened it. The ten-dollar bill was there. He removed it, put in its stead a two that he had ready in his hand, and replaced the box. Back to the window he glided stealthily, and balanced himself a moment on the sill, with his legs outside, body within the house.

At that instant one of the sleepers in the adjoining room stirred uneasily. The man, in a panic, essayed to make good his exit. His elbow struck the prop that supported the sash and knocked it flying. A heavy blow caught him across the back of his head, on a level with his ears; there was a crash of shattered glass, and he dropped senseless on the snow beneath the window.

Daniel Frame opened his eyes a little, opened them wider, stared a minute, and quickly closed them again. It was broad daylight. He could not account for that.

An unpapered ceiling was directly in the line of his vision. He did not understand that. A frightful pain racked his brain and made it difficult to think. One of his legs burned like a red-hot stove. These things puzzled him.

He felt a cool hand on his brow. He opened his eyes again. They dwelt on the kindly, anxious face of Sophronia Pollock. That settled it. He was dreaming.

Some one said in an undertone: "He's comin' round all right. Don't you worrit, dear." Daniel turned his head in the direction of the voice with great effort, and beheld Susan Trumbull. Still he did not, could not, remember. "Where am I?" he murmured.

"Sh!" answered Sophronia. "Don't you talk—just lay still. You're at Mis' Trumbull's."

A spasm of mental anguish convulsed Daniel's features. He knew now. He tried to sit up, but fell back, almost in a faint. A hot, grateful fluid trickled down his throat, and he swallowed eagerly. After a short interval he timidly ventured to inquire:

"What's the matter with me?"

The two women exchanged a telepathic glance. "Why," said Susan, reading Sophronia's signal affirmatively, "ye've hurt your head a mite, an'—we're afeared your leg is broke. But don't ye lose heart—the doctor'll be along to see you pretty soon."

"Gimme another swaller o' brandy—I want to ask ye something, Susan Trumbull," said Daniel. "Does she know?"

"Does Sophronia know what brought ye here, ye mean?"

"Aye."

"Bless your soul, I jest had to tell her," said Susan glibly. "Why, ye had the ten-dollar bill in your hand when me an' Rosa dragged ye in, an' when I looked in the box an' found the twenty-dollar note ye'd put there in place of it—"

"What's that? Say that agin," interrupted Daniel, contracting his brows in a puzzled frown.

"Why, the twenty-dollar note ye come here to give me 'stead o' the ten," insisted Susan, winking violently by way of warning him against an exposure of her well-meant deception. "As I was sayin', I was that flabbergasted ye could have knocked me down with a feather. I had to tell somebody what a kindness ye'd been doin' me, or bust, so I sent Rosa right over for Sophronia. I'm sure ye'll not be cross with me if I done wrong, for certainly I didn't mean no harm."

In his befuddled mental condition the subtle meaning of Susan's winks was almost lost upon Daniel. One fact alone saved him from believing that he might have made a curious mistake in his proceedings of the night before. That fact was that he had not happened to have a twenty-dollar bill in his possession for months. His head had throbbed before. Now, as it gradually dawned upon him that the woman who had caught him red-handed in the meanest act of his career was cheerfully lying to shield him, the proverbial coals of fire intensified his pain.

It was weeks before Daniel was able to get around without a crutch; weeks, too, before he could muster up the courage to make the confession that every atom of his manhood told him he must make before he should renew his proposals to Sophronia. One day he unfolded his miserable story, and waited in fear of scornful dismissal. But Sophronia only smiled, and then warmly clasped his hand.

"I'm mighty glad ye told me with your own lips," said she, "but I knowed it long ago."

"What! Did Susan tell ye?" he asked.

"No. But I happened to be at Hickey's when she sent Rosa to break that twenty-dollar bill, and I seen it was nothin' but a two."

"An' ye didn't wipe me off the slate then an' there?" exclaimed Daniel, wonderingly. "Sophronia, once more: *Will* ye marry the meanest man in Jeffersonville?"

"No," said Sophronia decisively, "I won't."

Daniel, chopfallen, looked ten years older when he heard the verdict.

"I won't, 'cause he's dead," murmured Sophronia. "He died the day ye settled with Susan Trumbull for helpin' to nurse ye. But," she added, hiding her face on Daniel's arm, "I'll marry *you*, Daniel, if ye still want me."

PUNISHMENT.

BY JOSEPH ELLNER.

A SHORT STORY.

SCHLOMÉ was well-nigh exhausted shaking hands with the visiting townsmen and repeating his set phrase: "He? Oh, he is dead!" In his wildest fancies Schlomé had never dreamed that the little town of Hamelina, in Finland, had given forth so many Jewish souls. To his bewildered eyes it seemed that the entire town had settled on the East Side and diligently carried out the divine injunction to multiply.

Since early morning, when he was dumped from the foul steerage onto these hospitable shores, there had been no end of hearty though wearying embraces and demands for news of folks and friends "at home." The tired newcomer found it an excellent expedient and saving of energy to dismiss the news-thirsty inquirers with the brief, fatal answer, "Dead." When the fate of nearest of kin was in the balance Schlomé staid his hand and answered to the best of his knowledge.

More often, though the visitor was merely curious to know of his former cronies, what the town characters were up to, or if old enemies were meeting with the ill luck he had so often wished them of old.

"How is Samson the Great," one would ask, "the little tailor, who was the joker of the town in the old days?"

"He? Oh, he is dead long ago," Schlomé replied, hurrying into an early grave a very active, albeit a very small, tailor who kept the town in continual good humor.

"What is Bessy, the bakerwoman, doing?" another wanted to know. "Does she still put the dough into the bed to warm the yeast?"

"She? Oh, she is dead;" and there was an end to it and her so far as Schlomé was concerned.

To all appearances, Schlomé was the only survivor. But his old bones were very sore after the long, cramped journey over sea in the stenching bowels of the ocean liner.

As the evening waned Schlomé heaved a sigh of relief when he found himself at last alone with his son and daughter-in-law. The continual flow of insistent visitors had given him hardly a minute's quiet with his son, whom he had not seen for many years, or to make the acquaintance of his son's young wife. The father and the young couple drew their chairs close to the stove, and Schlomé reflectively filled his pipe.

"Ah, what a day!" he was saying softly. "What scenes, what streets, what noise, what people"—and, with a twinkle in his eyes—"what slaughter of good, healthy townfolks!" He lit his pipe and, between puffs, continued: "When I have straightened out my bones, and taken the knots out of my cramped old body, I shall bring them all back to life again, and then we shall have a *simcha* as befits the rebirth of a townful."

Then he talked of other scenes, of dear little Hamelina, where Schlomé was born and grown old, and where now his dearest were buried. The place was much changed, Schlomé was sorry to say. The few Jewish families were emigrating, and the Christian peasants, who had always been friendly and neighborly, were becoming sullen and distrustful. Evidently the vague rumors of the atrocities against Jews in Russia were affecting the simple, good-hearted Finnish peasants. Jew and Christian were suspicious of each other; and, besides, the means of

living were becoming poorer and more precarious. On the whole, the picture was gloomy; and if it had not been Schlomé, burdened with his sixty odd years, he would not have ventured on the perilous journey to the new, strange world, America.

The peace of the group was broken by a loud knocking at the door. The old man groaned in despair at the prospect of another round of handshakes, questions, answers and killings.

Schlomé's son sprang to the door and opened it. A young man, conspicuously well dressed, uncovered his head and entered. In rather uncouth Yiddish, interspersed with English words, he said he had heard of one who had just come from Hamelina. He was from Hamelina, too, and he wanted to hear news about his mother.

"And who are you?" asked Schlomé, eying the visitor with much curiosity, because he was so different from those that had preceded him.

"Kalmen, the butcher, was my father. He died a year before I left Hamelina, about sixteen years ago."

"Oh, so you are Kalmen's son, who was supposed to be dead or—" Schlomé did not complete his words, but closely examined the Americanized young man, who had left home when a mere stripling to seek his fortune in America.

"Can you tell me how my mother is?" asked the young man. There was no eagerness in his voice, rather bashfulness, or shame.

"You did not send news of yourself for many, many years," said Schlomé, either not hearing or disregarding the question.

"I wrote during the first few years," the young man began, speaking rapidly, "and sent mother something. Then I became more taken up with business. You know how it is in America; or, rather, you don't know yet. You are tied down to business day and night—you work, work all the time. The more my business grew the more enslaved I became to it, and never had the time to write. As for sending money to mother, I thought the shop would be sufficient to keep her out of need. She has not been in want, has she?"

Schlomé shook his head. She had not. His face was gloomy, and his sad eyes were upon the man who, with much uneasiness, was accounting for his filial neglect.

"Is she well?" asked Kalmen's son anxiously, as he scrutinized the old man's clouded face.

Schlomé did not answer either by word or gesture.

"She is not dead?" pursued the young man.

Schlomé answered slowly: "No; the good God has not been so merciful to her."

The Americanized young Jew became pale, his face took on an expression of fear and apprehension. He was nettled by the indirect manner of speech of the old man, whose half-uttered words seemed to issue from his profound, sad eyes rather than from the mouth. He also chafed at Schlomé's deliberateness and at the prolongation of his anxiety. He wished to know the worst, and be done with the matter.

The group sat in silence, the little gilded clock on the mantle ticking loudly. Schlomé looked steadily into space, his head gently swaying in sad meditation.

"Will you not tell me what you know about her?" the young man implored, his spirit humbled by the awe-inspiring sadness of the old man.

For some time Schlomé did not reply; then, seeming to shake off some persistent thought, he said: "It is a long story, and painful memory to one who has seen it all. Your mother sinned, and she was judged. The Almighty, in his infinite justice, saw fit to spare her body, but He took away her mind and her soul."

"What do you mean?" demanded the young man in a loud voice.

Schlomé was silent, his eyes averted and absorbed. He laid aside his pipe and said: "I'll tell you, my young friend, because you have the right to know, and also because you, in justice, ought to carry your share of the burden of guilt.

II.

"It is sixteen years that your father, Kalmen, the butcher, died. You left the town and went to America. Great promises were held out to you, and much was expected of you. Your letters came often and regularly during the first four or

five years. Your mother carried them about the town, and everybody read them. Those who could not read heard your mother read them. A lonely widow possessing an only son, and he at the other end of the world, is it any wonder that she talked of nothing else but you? Your great success in America was a regular topic of conversation.

"She lingered over every word in your letters, and made others linger, too. Naturally, a mother's eye read into them a great many things that were not there. But it was a sorry day for any one who dared to contradict her or breathe a word against her darling son in America. Meekness had never been her characteristic, and in guarding her son's reputation she was doubly assertive.

"I remember how once the whole town was thrown into confusion because some unhappy, talkative woman, waiting for your mother to serve her, had casually asked if you worked on the Sabbath in America. Your mother flew into a passion, dashed the chopper into the block, almost splitting it in two. She abused and drove the woman out of the shop, refusing to supply her with meat. They carried their quarrel into the market-place, where the whole town gathered. It was a nasty spectacle, and in consequence one family in town was without meat for the Sabbath. Henceforth your mother adopted that method of avenging a reflection against her absent son—no meat, and hers was the only shop in town.

"Then your letters began to fall off in number, and your mother became morose and more quarrelsome. She no more carried the letters about for the town's enjoyment, although everybody knew when she received one. She became more sensitive than ever, and the idle tongues of the town wagged behind her back. Some said that you had become immensely rich, and had cast off your mother; others said that you had abandoned your religion, and had sold yourself to the missionaries; others said other foolish things.

"Your mother knew what the town was whispering under its breath, but could not place her finger on the culprit. She became more bitter and peppery. She settled scores with many a gossiping woman, and had many more outstanding accounts. Not a week passed but she wrecked the wigs of at least two or three malicious babblers. The wigmaker in Hamelina was decidedly prosperous, thanks to your mother.

"But these endless quarrels told on her health and trade. She was aging fast. Evidently she was eating her heart because her son did not write, because her son neglected her. The shop was losing its custom. People were afraid to enter the place. There was talk in town of opening another shop, as meat was becoming scarce, and no one knew who would next be without it for the Sabbath. Finally, Chaim, who had been your father's assistant in the old days, with the help of some of your mother's enemies, established a rival shop. Your mother was furious, but could do nothing. Naturally, Chaim's shop became the center of your mother's enemies. There all sorts of gossip, foolish and blackening, was retailed with the meat. To be sure, your mother was not ignorant of what was said, and by whom said, at Chaim's. Neutral women, that is, those who had not as yet chosen sides, took care that she be duly posted.

"It sickens me to tell this petty squabble in all its childish details. Were it not for the awful ending it would be like a hundred other senseless feuds in other small towns where people have nothing else to do.

"However, all would have come to nought, because some of the townfolk who had not been drawn into the squabble continued to buy meat from your mother, if something had not happened. You may remember Hannele, the dairy woman, who lived on the hill near the Russian church. Well, she lived there with three children, her husband being in America. The Almighty, in his beneficence, had bestowed upon her, also—may she pardon me in the world to come—a most fiery temper, besides other inflammable qualities.

"She had been from the very first the most persistent and annoying thorn in your mother's side. They had fallen out for some reason or other, and Pharaoh's plagues were exchanged daily between them. By all manner of means they tried to ruin each other's business, and finally

lugged each other before the rabbi. He was a pious man, and his arms were strong with righteousness. He sternly forbade them to disturb the town further. He said that the continual strife was setting a bad example for the Christian peasants, and was bringing our brethren into contempt.

"After the rabbi's rebuke there was peace in the town for a few weeks. But mischief was brewing in both camps. One fine day Hannele rushed into Chaim's butcher-shop when it was most filled with women. She held a letter in her hand. She received it from her husband, in America, and it told all about Kalmen's widow's son.

"Her husband wrote that he had met you, and that you had refused to be recognized; that you worked on the Sabbath, and had turned Christian. The miserable tale went on further—the entire letter was about you. The whole town was on fire. Kalmen's son an apostate, and Kalmen's widow selling *kosher* meat to the community!

"Your mother was wild with grief and shame and hatred. She did not dare show her head in town. There was talk of asking the rabbi to pronounce the burial service over the renegade. The rabbi, good man that he was, refused to believe Hannele's letter, and summoned her to appear before him. He worked with her for two days, until he forced her to confess that the letter was a fabrication from beginning to end.

This fact he had announced the following Sabbath after the services in the synagogue. Your mother was triumphant. But she was almost alone in her triumph, because most of the town had committed itself through Hannele's malicious lie. This galled her, and she raved at everybody.

"About a week after, Hannele's milk-cart failed to appear on its daily round. Some one went to the dairy woman's house, and found her and her three children dead. Two of the children were lying on the bed, one on the floor. Hannele was crouched in a chair. All their faces were discolored.

"The town flocked to the dairy-woman's house, and all were terrified. This could be the handiwork only of a Gentile, and here were we hemmed in on all sides by muttering peasants. Rumors of the Russian pogroms had reached us, but we had never expected to be visited by them.

"To be sure, the old neighborly good-feeling with the peasantry had been much cooled, but there had been no open strife. When the Jewish town-doctor declared that death had come by poison, our fear increased. Nobody knew whose turn would be next, nor whence the blow would come. The four bodies were quietly hurried to the cemetery. We expected that the peasants would make a disturbance at the funeral, but it all passed without incident. Some of the peasants we met on the way to the cemetery asked how death had come so suddenly. We merely answered that the cause was unknown.

"Thereafter the town was in a state of terror. We were suspicious of every morsel that passed our lips, and jumped at every shadow. We all—all, except your mother. She wore an inexplicable smile, and never ceased saying that God had at last punished the wicked; that God had espoused the cause of a poor, defenseless widow.

"Well, the suspicion was finally whispered about town that Kalmen's widow knew more about Hannele's taking-off than she cared to tell. The suspicions were brought to the rabbi, and he went to your mother—and verified them.

"A cloud of gloom fell upon all the town. The fear for the flesh was gone, but a black terror clutched every soul. The hand of God would surely be put forth in punishment. A solemn meeting was called in the synagogue on Friday night, to which all adults of Jewish blood came.

"The rabbi, amid an awful and impressive silence, spoke to us long and earnestly. He told us what to expect if it were generally known among the Christian peasantry that a Jewess had poisoned four of her own kind. He said that with the rumors from Russia, which were disquieting the Finnish peasants, it would act like a torch in a haystack. Jewish life and blood would become cheap. The whole town would be wiped out. He enjoined us that the peasants must never know by whose hand Hannele and her children had met their death.

Every man and woman swore by the Holy of Holies never to breathe a word of the crime.

"But a murmur of dissatisfaction was heard through the synagogue. All thought that the rabbi's caution was to be bought at the price of injustice. The rabbi, divining the meaning of the whisper, ordered the Sacred Scroll uncovered. It was rolled to the Ten Commandments. The shuffling of the parchment in the breathless silence sounded like the sharpening of a great scythe.

"In a clear, unfaltering voice the rabbi read God's commandment, 'Thou shalt not kill.' He then added that Kalmen's widow should die.

"We did not understand the doom uttered, but our souls shrank in terror. We dispersed, the women wailing, the men silent and awed.

III.

"That was a black Sabbath in the town. As I was leaving the synagogue after services, the sexton told me that the rabbi wanted to see me at his house. I was one of the first to arrive. Soon others came—all well past the fifty-year mark. The rabbi then unfolded to us the punishment he had meted out for Kalmen's widow. Death was the penalty.

"After receiving full instructions we went to our homes to wait for eleven o'clock at night, when we were to meet at the rabbi's. At the appointed hour we proceeded to your mother's house, the rabbi walking before us, bowed in silence. We walked through the hushed, deserted streets. All the town was asleep in darkness. We knocked on the door of your father's house. No answer came.

"Presently the door opened with loud creaks that echoed through the house like screams. A figure stood framed in the dark doorway. It looked at us in silence, then turned about and walked slowly in. We followed, and came to a room dimly lighted by a small smoky lamp.

"As the little flame rose and fell our shadows danced and jumped about the room and on the walls. Kalmen's widow looked at us as pale as death, and as silent. Her eyes were large, and their lids seemed never to close. Her lips were dry, parted and trembling; hard, gasping breaths hissed through her teeth. She sat down by the table in front of the little lamp, her eyes fixed on the rabbi.

"Somebody lit two candles. The rabbi stood before them and began the funeral services. Then he read the evening prayer, and in muffled, fearsome voices we repeated it after him. Finally the prayer for the dead was said by the rabbi. He pronounced the name of Kalmen's widow as the one dead, and we all said, 'Amen!'

"After that we left as we came, in silence. The following night we returned at the same hour. She was sitting in the same place, eyes dry and bloodshot. A green-yellow paleness was spread over her face in blotches.

"The rabbi did not once look her way, nor did he seem conscious of her presence. The usual evening prayer was said, as is done when death comes into a house. Then prayers for the dead were offered up by five different men. One for Hannele, one for each of the three children, and one for the departed soul of Kalmen's widow.

"For months we came each night.

"Once, after the death-prayer was said, we heard her voice cry out, 'Amen!'

"After that time her lips always formed the 'Amen,' but never said it.

"One night we came, and did not find her at the accustomed seat. We continued with the prayer as if she were present.

"In the morning she was found wandering in the open fields, screaming to the sky: 'Amen! Amen!'"

PERSISTENCE.

Of fortune's gifts men need but three,
Life's highest reaches to attain;
For, whatsoe'er the prize may be,
Self-trust and toil and time will gain.

Eugene C. Dolson.

MORNING STAR.*

BY H. RIDER HAGGARD,

Author of "King Solomon's Mines," "She," "Mr. Meeson's Will," "Allan Quatermain," "Swallow," Etc., Etc.

SYNOPSIS OF PRECEDING CHAPTERS.

ONE evening in Egypt, thousands of years ago, Prince Abi, Governor of Memphis, arrives at Thebes to visit his brother Pharaoh. He is ambitious to supplant Pharaoh, but is dissuaded from any attempt by violence through the counsel of Kaku, his astrologer, and by the captain of his guard. In audience with Pharaoh, his queen and court, Abi reminds them that they have no heir, and suggests his brother install himself as successor. Pharaoh tells Abi he knows of his treacherous designs, makes him swear fealty, and sends him back to Memphis.

By special favor of the god Amen, Pharaoh's queen, Ahura, bears a daughter, called Morning Star. On the death of Ahura, Morning Star is reared by Asti, the enchantress, who is the mother of Rames. Pharaoh makes Morning Star queen when years weigh heavily upon him. Princes and foreign kings seek her hand in marriage, but she loves Rames, though she dare not marry him. Knowing that Asti can summon the gods, she compels her to call Amen that she may question him. Asti bids the queen follow her if she dare.

CHAPTER IV *(continued).*

THE SUMMONING OF AMEN.

ALONG narrow passages they crept and down many a secret stair, till at length they came to a door at the foot of a long slope of rock. This door Asti unlocked and thrust open; then, when they had entered, relocked it behind them.

"What is this place?" whispered Tua.

"The burial crypt of the high priestesses of Amen, where it is said that the god watches. None have entered it for hard on thirty years. See, here in the dust run the footsteps of those who bore the last priestess to her rest."

She held up her lamp, and by the light of it Tua saw that they were in a great cave, painted with figures of the gods, which had on either side of it recesses. In each of these was set a coffin with a gilded face, and behind it an alabaster statue of her who lay therein, and in front of it a table of offerings. At the head of the crypt stood a small altar of black stone; for the rest, the place was empty.

Asti led Tua to a step in front of the altar, and, bidding her kneel, departed with the lamp, which she hid away in some side chapel, so that now the darkness was intense. Presently, through the utter silence, Tua heard her creep back toward her, for, although she walked so softly, the dust seemed to cry beneath her feet, and her every footstep echoed round the vaulted walls. Moreover, a glow came from her—the glow of her life in that place of death.

She passed Tua and knelt by the altar, and the echo of her movements died away. Only it seemed to Tua that from each of the tombs to the right and to the left rose the Ka of her who was buried there, and drew near to watch and listen. She could not see them; she could not hear them; yet she knew that they were there, and was able to count their number—thirty and two in all—while within herself rose a picture of them, each differing from the other, but all white, expectant, solemn.

Now Tua heard Asti murmuring secret invocations that she did not understand. In that place and silence they sounded weird and dreadful, and as she hearkened to them, for the first time fear

* This story began in THE CAVALIER for November.

crept over her. Kneeling there upon her knees, she bent her head almost to the dust, and put up prayers to Amen that he might be pleased to hear her and to satisfy the longings of her heart. She prayed and prayed till she grew faint and weary, while always Asti uttered her invocations. But no answer came, no deity appeared, no voice spoke. At length Asti rose, and, coming to her, whispered in her ear:

"Let us depart ere the watching spirits, whose rest we have broken, grow wroth with us. The god has shut his ears."

So Tua rose, clinging to Asti; for now, she knew not why, her fear grew and deepened. For a moment she stood upon her feet, then sank to her knees again; for there, at the far end of the great tomb, near to the door by which they had entered, appeared a glow upon the darkness. Slowly it took form—the form of a woman clad in the royal robes of Egypt, and bearing in its hand a scepter. The figure of light advanced toward them, so that presently they saw its face. Tua did not know the face, though it seemed to her to be like her own; but Asti knew it, and at the sight sank to the ground.

Now the figure stood in front of them, a thing of light framed in the thick darkness, and now in a sweet, low voice it spoke.

"Hail! Queen of Egypt," it said. "Hail! Neter-Tua, daughter of Amen. Art thou afraid to look on the spirit of her who bore thee, thou that didst dare to summon the father of the gods to do thy bidding?"

"I am afraid," answered Tua, shaking in all her limbs.

"And thou, Asti the Magician, art thou afraid also, who but now wast bold enough to cry to Amen-Ra, 'Come from thy high heaven and make answer'?"

"It is even so, O Queen Ahura," murmured Asti.

"Woman," went on the voice, "thy sin is great, and great is the sin of this royal one at thy side. Had Amen harkened, how would the two of you have stood before his glory, who at the sight of this shape of mine, that once was mortal like yourselves, crouch choking to the earth? I tell you both that had the god arisen, as in your wickedness ye willed, there where ye knelt there ye would have died. But he who knows all is merciful; and in his place has sent me his messenger that ye may live to look upon to-morrow's sun."

"Let Amen pardon us!" gasped Tua. "It was my sin, O mother, for I commanded Asti and she obeyed me. On me be the blame, not on her, for I am torn with doubts and fears for myself and for another. I would know the future."

"Why, O Queen Neter-Tua, why wouldst thou know the future? If hell yawns beneath thy feet, why wouldst thou see its torments? If heaven awaits thee, why wouldst thou peep through its golden doors before the time? The future is hid from mortals, because, could they pierce its veil, it would crush them with its terrors. If all the woes of life and death lay open to the gaze, who would dare to live and who—oh, who could dare to die?"

"Then woes await me, O thou who wast my mother?"

"How can it be otherwise? Light and darkness make the day; joy and sorrow make the life. Thou art human—be content."

"Divine also, O Ahura, if all tales be true."

"Then pay for thy divinity in tears and be satisfied. Content is the guerdon of the beast, but gods are wafted upward on the wings of pain. How can that gold be pure which has not known the fire?"

"Thou tellest me nothing," wailed Tua, "and it is not for myself I ask. I am fair, I am Amen's daughter, and splendid is my heritage. Yet, O dweller in Osiris, thou who once didst fill the place I hold to-day, I tell thee that I would pay away this pomp could I but be sure that I shall not live loveless, that I shall not be given as a chattel to one I hate, that one—whom I do not hate—will live to call me—wife. Great dangers threaten him—and me, Amen is mighty; he is the potter that molds the clay of men; if I be his child, if his spirit is breathed into me, oh! let him help me now."

"Let thine own faith help thee. Are not the words of Amen, which he spake concerning thee, written down? Study

them and ask no more. Love is an arrow that does not miss its mark; it is the immortal fire from on high which winds and waters cannot quench. Therefore love on. Thou shalt not love in vain. Queen and daughter, fare thee well awhile."

"Nay, nay, one word, Immortal. I thank thee, thou messenger of the gods; but when these troubles come upon me—and another, when the sea of dangers closes o'er our heads, when shame is near and I am lonely, as well may chance, at that time to whom shall I turn for succor?"

"Then thou hast one within thee who is strong to aid. It was given to thee at they birth, O Star of Amen, and Asti can call it forth. Come hither, thou Asti, and swiftly, for I must be gone, and first I would speak with thee."

Asti crept forward, and the glowing shape in the royal robe bent over her so that the light of it shone upon her face. It bent over her and seemed to whisper in her ear. Then it held out its hands toward Tua as though in blessing, and instantly was not.

Once more the two women stood in Tua's chamber. Pale and shaken, they looked into each other's eyes.

"You have had your will, queen," said Asti; "for if Amen did not come, he sent a messenger, and a royal one."

"Interpret me this vision," answered Tua; "for to me, at any rate, that spirit said little."

"Nay, it said much. It said that love fails not of its reward, and what more went you out to seek?"

"Then I am glad," exclaimed Tua joyfully.

"Be not too glad, queen, for to-night we have sinned, both of us, who dared to summon Amen from his throne, and sin also fails not of its reward. Blood is the price of that oracle."

"Whose blood, Asti? Ours?"

"Nay, worse—that of those who are dear to us. Troubles arise in Egypt, queen."

"You will not leave me when they break, Asti?"

"I may not if I would. The fates have bound us together till the end, and that, I think, is far away. I am yours as once you were mine when you lay upon my breast, but bid me no more to summon Amen from his throne."

CHAPTER V.

HOW RAMES FOUGHT THE PRINCE OF KESH.

NOW for a whole moon there were great festivals in Thebes, and in all of these Neter-Tua, "Glorious in Ra, Hathor Strong in Beauty, Morning Star of Amen," must take her part as new-crowned queen of Egypt. Feast followed feast, and at each of them one of the suitors for her hand was the guest of honor.

Then, after it was done, Pharaoh, her father, and his councilors would wait upon her and ask if this man was pleasing to her. Being wise, Tua would give no direct answer; only of most of them she was rid in this way.

She demanded that the writing of the dream of her mother, Ahura, should be brought and read before her, and when it had been read she pointed out that Amen promised to her a royal lover, and that these chiefs and generals were not royal; therefore it was not of them that Amen spoke, nor did she dare to turn her eyes on one whom the god had forbidden to her.

Of others who declared that they were kings, but who, being unable to leave their own countries, were represented by ambassadors, she said that, not having seen them, she could say nothing. When they appeared at the court of Egypt, she would consider them.

So at length only one suitor was left, the man whom she knew well Pharaoh and his councilors desired that she should take as husband. This was Amathel, the Prince of Kesh, whose father, an aged king, ruled at Napata, a great city far to the south, situated in a land that was called an island because the river Nile embraced it in its two arms.

It was said that, after Egypt, this country was the richest in the whole world, for there gold was so plentiful that men thought it of less value than copper and iron; also, there were mines in which beautiful stones were found, and the soil grew corn in abundance.

Moreover, once in the far past, a race of Pharaohs sprung from this city of Napata, had sat on the throne of Egypt until at length the people of Egypt, headed by the priests, had risen and overthrown them because they were foreigners and had introduced Nubian customs into the land.

Therefore it was decreed by an unalterable law that none of their race should ever again wear the Double Crown. Of the descendants of these Pharaohs, Rames, Tua's playmate, was the last lawful child.

But although the Egyptians had cast them down, at heart they always grieved over the rich territory at Napata, which was lost to them; for when those Pharaohs fell, Kesh declared itself independent and set up another dynasty to rule over it, of which dynasty Amathel, Prince of Kesh, was the heir.

Therefore, they hoped that it might come back to them by marriage between Amathel and the young queen, Neter-Tua.

Ever since she was born, the great lords and councilors of Egypt, yes, and Pharaoh himself, seeing that he had no son to whom he might marry her after the fashion of the country, had been working to this end. It was by secret treaty that the Prince Amathel was present at the crowning of the queen, of whose hand he had been assured on the sole condition that he came to dwell with her at Thebes.

It is true that there were other suitors, but these, as all of them knew well, were but pawns in a game played to amuse the people.

The king destined to take the great queen captive was Amathel and no other. Tua knew it; for had not Asti told her, and was it not because of her fear of this man and her love for Rames that she had dared to commit the sacrilege of attempting to summon Amen from the skies?

Still, as yet, the Pharaoh had not spoken to her of Amathel, nor had she met him. It was said that he had been present at her crowning, in disguise, for this proud prince gave it out that were she ten times queen of Egypt, he would not pledge himself to wed as his royal wife one who was displeasing to him; and that, therefore, he must see her before he pressed his suit.

Now that he had seen her in her loveliness and glory, he announced that he was well satisfied, which was but half the truth; for, in fact, she had set all his southern blood on fire, and there was nothing that he desired more than to call her wife.

On the night which had been appointed for Amathel to meet his destined bride, a feast had been prepared richer by far than any that went before. Tua, feigning ignorance, on entering the great unroofed hall lit with hundreds of torches down all its length, and seeing the multitudes at the tables, asked of the Pharaoh, her father, who was the guest that he would welcome with such magnificence which seemed worthy of a god rather than of a man.

"My daughter," answered the old monarch nervously, "it is none other than the Prince of Kesh, who in his own country they worship as divine, as we are worshiped here in Egypt, and who, in truth, is, or will be, one of the greatest of kings."

"Kesh!" she answered. "I thought that we claimed sovereignty over that land."

"Once it was ours, daughter," said her father with a sigh, "or, rather, the kings of Kesh were also kings of Egypt, but their dynasty fell before my great-great-grandfather was called to the throne, and now but three of their blood are left, Mermes, captain of the guard of Amen; Asti, the seer and priestess, his wife, your foster-mother and waiting lady, and the young Count Rames, a soldier in our army, who was your playmate, and, as you may remember, saved you from the sacred crocodile."

"Yes, I remember," said Tua. "But, then, why is not Mermes king of Kesh?"

"Because the people of the city of Napata raised up another house to rule over them, of whom Amathel is the heir."

"A usurping heir, surely, my father, if there be anything in blood."

"Say not that, Tua," replied Pharaoh sharply, "for then Mermes should be Pharaoh in our place also."

Tua made no reply, only, as they took their seats in the golden chairs at the head of the hall, she asked carelessly:

"Is this Prince of Kesh also a suitor for my hand, O Pharaoh?"

"What else should he be, my daughter? Did you not know it? Be gracious to him now, since it is decreed that you shall take him as a husband. Hush! answer not. He comes."

As he spoke a sound of wild music arose, and at the far end of the great hall appeared a band of players gorgeously attired, who blew horns made from small tusks of the elephant, clashed brazen cymbals, and beat gilded drums. These advanced a little way up the hall and stood there playing, while after them marched a body-guard of twenty gigantic Nubian soldiers, who carried broad-bladed spears with shields of hippopotamus hide curiously worked, and were clothed in tunics and caps of leopard-skin.

Next appeared the Prince of Kesh himself, a short, stout, broad-shouldered young man, thick-featured, heavy-faced, and having large, rolling eyes. He was clad in festal garments, and hung about with heavy chains of gold, fastened with clasps of glittering stones, while from his crisp, black hair rose a tall plume of nodding ostrich feathers. Fan-bearers walked beside him, and the train of his long cloak was borne by two black and hideous dwarfs, full-grown men, but no taller than a child of eight.

With one swift glance, while he was yet far away, Tua studied the man from head to foot, and hated him as she had never hated any one before. Then she looked over his head, as from her raised seat upon the dais she was able to do, and saw that behind him came a second guard of picked Egyptian soldiers, and that in command of them, simply clad in his scaled armor of bronze, and wearing upon his thigh the golden-handled sword that Pharaoh had given him, was none other than the young Count Rames, her playmate and foster-brother, the man whom her heart loved.

At the sight of his tall and noble form and fine-cut face rising above the coarse, squat figure of the Ethiopian prince, Tua blushed rosy red; but Pharaoh, noting it, only thought, as others did, that it was because now for the first time her eyes fell upon him who would be her husband.

Why, Tua wondered, was Rames chosen to attend upon the Prince Amathel? At once the answer rose in her mind. Doubtless, it had been done to gratify the pride of Amathel, not by Pharaoh, who would know nothing of such matters, but by some bribed councilor, or steward of the household. Rames was of more ancient blood than Amathel, and by right should be the King of Kesh, as he should also be Pharaoh of Egypt; therefore, to humble him, he was set to wait upon Amathel.

Moreover, it was guessed that the young queen looked kindly upon this Count Rames, with whom she had been nursed; and who, like herself, was beautiful to behold. Therefore, to abuse him in her eyes he had been commanded to appear walking in the train of Amathel and given charge over his sacred person at the feast.

In a moment Tua understood it all; and made a vow before her father Amen that, soon or late, those who had planned this outrage should pay its price; nor did she forget that promise in the after days.

Now, the prince had mounted the dais; and was bowing low to Pharaoh and to her, and they must rise and bow in answer. Then Pharaoh welcomed him to Egypt in few, well-chosen words, giving him all his titles and speaking meaningly of the ancient ties which had linked their kingdoms—ties which, he prayed, might yet draw them close again.

He ceased and looked at Tua, who as queen had also a speech to deliver that had been given to her in writing. Although she remembered this well enough, for the roll lay beside her, never a word would she read; but turned round and bade one of her waiting ladies bring her a fan.

So, after a pause that seemed somewhat long, Amathel delivered his answer that was learned by rote, for it replied to "gentle words from the lips of the divine queen that made his heart to flower like the desert after rain," not one of which had she spoken. Thereon Tua, looking over the top of her fan, saw Rames smile grimly; while unable to restrain themselves, some of the great personages at the feast broke out laughing, and bowed down their heads to hide their merriment.

With an angry scowl, the prince turned

and commanded that the gifts should be brought. Now slaves advanced, bearing cups of worked gold, elephants, and other beasts fashioned in gold, and golden vases full of incense, which he presented to Pharaoh on behalf of his father, the King of Kesh, and himself, saying boastfully that in his country such things were common, and that he would have brought more of them had it not been for their weight.

When Pharaoh had thanked him, answering gently that Egpyt, too, was not poor, as he hoped that he would find upon the morrow, the prince, on his own behalf alone, offered to the queen other presents, among them pectorals and necklaces without price, fashioned of amethysts and sapphires. Also, because she was known to be the first of musicians and the sweetest-voiced lady in the land —for these were the greatest of the gifts that Tua had from Amen—he gave to her a wonderfully worked harp of ivory with golden strings, the frame of the harp being fashioned to the shape of a woman, and two black female slaves, laden with ornaments, who were said to be the best singers in the southern land.

Now, Pharaoh whispered to Tua to put on one of the necklaces; but she would not, saying that the color of the stones did not match her white robe and the blue lotus-flowers which she wore. Instead, she thanked Amathel coldly but courteously; and, without looking at his gifts, told the royal nurse, Asti, who stood behind her, to bear them away and to place them at a distance, as the perfumes that had been poured over them oppressed her. Only, as though by an afterthought, she bade them leave the ivory harp.

Thus inauspiciously enough the feast began. At it Amathel drank much of the sweet wine of Asi or Cyprus, commanding Rames, who stood behind him, to fill his cup again and again, though whether he did this because he was nearest to him, or to lower him to the rank of a butler, Tua did not know.

At least, having no choice, Rames obeyed, though cup-filling was no fitting task for a count of Egypt and an officer of Pharaoh's guard.

When the waiting women, clad in net, worked with spangles of gold, had borne away the meats, conjurers appeared, who did wonderful feats, among other things causing a likeness of Queen Neter-Tua—wearing her royal robes and having a star upon her brow—to arise out of a vase.

Then, as they had arranged, they strove to do the same for the Prince Amathel; but Asti, who had more magic than all of them — watching behind Tua's chair—put out her strength and threw a spell upon them.

Behold! Instead of the form of the prince, which these conjurers summoned loudly and by name, there appeared out of the vase a monkey, wearing a crown and feathers that yet resembled him somewhat, which black and hideous ape stood there for a while, seeming to gibber at them, then fell down and vanished away.

Now, some of the audience laughed and some were silent; but Pharaoh, not knowing whether this were a plot or an evil omen from the gods, frowned and looked anxiously at his guest. As it chanced, however, the prince, fired with wine, was so engaged in staring at the loveliness of Tua that he took no note of the thing, while the queen looked upward and seemed to see nothing. As for the conjurers, they fled from the hall, fearing for their lives, and wondering what strong spirit had entered into the vase and spoiled the trick which they had prepared.

As they went, singers and dancing-women hurriedly took their place; till Tua, wearying of the stare of Amathel, waved her hand and said that she wished to hear those two Nubian slaves, whose voices were said to be so wonderful. So they were brought forward with their harps; and, having prostrated themselves, began to play and sing very sweetly Nubian songs — melancholy and wild — whereof few could understand the meaning. So well did they sing, indeed, that when they had done, Neter-Tua said:

"You have pleased me much, and, in payment, I give you a royal gift. I give you your freedom, and appoint that henceforth you shall sing before the court, if you think fit to stay here—not as slaves, but for hire."

Then the two women prostrated themselves again before her majesty and

blessed her, for they knew that they could earn wealth by their gift; and the rich courtiers, taking the queen's cue, flung rings and ornaments to them, so that in a minute they got more gold than ever they had dreamed of, who were but kidnaped slaves. But Prince Amathel grew angry and said:

"Some might have been pleased to keep the priceless gift of the best singers in the world."

"Do you say that these sweet-voiced women are the best singers in the world, O prince?" asked Tua, speaking to him for the first time. "Now, if you will be pleased to listen, you provoke me to make trial of my own small skill that I may learn how far I fall short of 'the best singers in the world.'"

Then she lifted up the ivory harp with the strings of gold and swept her fingers over it, trying its notes and adjusting them with the agate screws, looking at Amathel all the while with a challenge in her lovely eyes.

"Nay, nay, my daughter," said Pharaoh, "it is scarcely fitting that a queen of Egypt should sing before all this noble company."

"Why not, my father?" she asked. "To-night we all do honor to the heir of his majesty of Kesh. Pharaoh receives him, Pharaoh's daughter accepts his gifts, the highest in the land surround him;" then she paused, and added slowly, "one of blood more ancient than his own waits on him as cup-bearer, one whose race built up the throne his father fills," and she pointed to Rames, who stood near by, holding the vase of wine. "Why, then, should not Egypt's queen seek to please our royal guest as best she may—since she has no other gift to give him?"

Then, in the dead silence that followed this bold speech, whereof none could mistake the meaning, Neter-Tua, Morning Star of Amen, rose from her seat. Pressing the ivory harp against her young breast, she bent over it, her head crowned with the crown of Upper Egypt, whereon glistened the royal *uræus*, a snake about to strike, and swept the well-tuned strings.

Such magic was in her touch that instantly all else was forgotten, even the Pharaoh leaned back in his golden chair to listen. Softly she struck at first, then by slow degrees ever louder, till the music of the harp rang through the pillared hall. Now, at length, she lifted up her heavenly voice and began to sing in a strain so wild and sweet that it seemed to pierce to the watching stars.

It was a sad and ancient love-tale that she sang, which told how a priestess of Hathor of high degree loved and was beloved by a simple scribe whom she might not wed. It told how the scribe, maddened by his passion, crept at night into the very sanctuary of the temple, hoping to find her there, and for his sacrilege was slain by the angry goddess. It told how the beautiful priestess, coming alone to make prayer in the sanctuary for strength to resist her love, stumbled over the lover's corpse, and, knowing it, died of grief.

It told how Hathor, goddess of love, melted by the piteous sight, breathed back life into their nostrils, and, since they might not remain upon earth, wafted them to the underworld, where they awoke and embraced and dwell on forever and for ay, triumphant and rejoicing.

All had heard this old, old story; but none had ever heard it so divinely sung. As Tua's pure and lovely voice floated over them, the listeners seemed to see that lover — daring all in his desire — creep into the solemn sanctuary of the temple. They saw Hathor appear in her wrath and smite him cold in death. They saw the beauteous priestess with her lamp, and heard her wail her life away upon her darling's corpse; saw, too, the dead, borne by spirits over the borders of the world.

Then came that last burst of music, thrilling and divine; and its rich, passionate notes seemed to open the heavens to their sight. There in the deep sky they perceived the awakening of the lovers and their embrace of perfect joy; and, when a glory hid them, heard the victorious chant of the priestess of love, sighing itself away, faint and ever fainter, till at length its last distant echoes died in the utter silence of the place of souls.

Tua ceased her music. Resting her still quivering harp upon the board, she sank back in her chair of state, outworn,

trembling, while in her pale face the blue eyes shone like stars. There was stillness in the hall; the spell of that magical voice lay on the listeners; none applauded; it seemed, even, that none dared to move, for men remembered that this wonderful young queen was said to be daughter of Amen, master of the world, and though that it had been given to them to harken, not a royal maiden, but to a goddess of the skies.

Quiet they sat, as though sleep had smitten them; only every man of their number stared at the sweet, pale face and at those radiant eyes. Drunk with passion and with wine, Amathel, Prince of Kesh, leaned his heavy head upon his hand and stared like the rest. But those eyes did not stay on him. Had he been a stone, they could not have noted him less; they passed over him, seeking something beyond.

Slowly he turned to see what it might be at which the Morning Star of Amen gazed, and perceived that the young captain who waited on him, he who was said to be of a race more ancient and purer than his own — he whose house had reigned in the southern land when his ancestors were but traffickers in gold—was also gazing at this royal singer.

Yes, he bent forward to gaze as though a spell drew him—a spell, or the eyes of the queen—and there was that upon his face which even a drunken Nubian could not fail to understand.

In the hands of Rames was the tall, golden vase of wine; and, as Amathel thrust back his chair, its topmost ivory bar struck the foot of the vase and tilted it, so that the red wine poured in a torrent over the prince's head and gorgeous robes, staining him from his crest of plumes to his feet as though with blood. Up sprang the Prince of Kesh, roaring with fury.

"Dog-descended slave!" he shouted. "Hog-headed brother of swine, is it thus that you wait upon my royalty?" And, with the cup in his hand, he smote Rames on the face; then drew the sword at his side to kill him.

But Rames also wore a sword—that sword hafted with the golden crocodile which Pharaoh had given him long ago —that sword which Asti, the foresighted, had seen red with royal blood. With a wild, low cry, he snatched it from its sheath; and, to avoid the blow that Amathel struck at him before he could guard himself, sprang backward from the dais to the open space in the hall that had been left clear for the dancers.

After him leaped Amathel, calling him "Coward!" And next instant the pillars echoed, not with Tua's music, but with the stern ringing of bronze upon bronze.

Now, in their fear and amaze men looked up to Pharaoh, waiting his word; but Pharaoh, overcome by the horror of the scene, appeared to have swooned—at least, he lay back in his chair with his eyes shut like one asleep. Then they looked to the queen; but Tua made no sign, only, with parted lips and heaving breast, watched—watched and waited for the end.

As for Rames, he forgot everything save that he—a soldier and a noble of royal race—had been struck across the mouth by a black Nubian, who called himself a prince. His blood boiled up in him, and through a red haze, as it were, he saw Tua's glorious eyes beckoning him on to victory. He saw and sprang as springs the lion of the desert—sprang straight at the throat of Amathel. The blow went high, an ostrich-plume floated to the ground—no more—and Amathel was a sturdy fighter and had the strength of madness. Moreover, his was the longer weapon; it fell upon the scales of the armor of Rames and beat him back, it fell again on his shoulder and struck him to his knee. It fell a third time, and, glancing from the mail, wounded him in the thigh so that the blood flowed. Now, a soldier of Pharaoh's guard shouted to encourage his captain, and the Nubians shouted back, crying to their prince to slit the hog's throat.

Then Rames seemed to awake. He leaped from his knees, he smote, and the blow went home, though the iron which the Nubian wore beneath his robe stayed it. He smote again more fiercely, and now it was the blood of Amathel that flowed. Then, bending almost to the ground below the answering stroke, he leaped and thrust with all the strength of young limbs trained to war. He thrust, and behold! between the broad shoulders of Amathel, pierced from breast to back,

appeared the point of the Egyptian's sword. For a moment the prince stood still, then he fell backward heavily and lay dead.

Now, with a shout of rage, the giants of the Nubian guard rushed at Rames to avenge their master's death, so that he must fly backward before their spears —backward into the ranks of Pharaoh's guard. In a flash the Nubians were on them also; and how, none could tell, a fearful fray began, for these soldiers hated each other, as their fathers had done before them; and there were none who could come between them, since at this feast no man bore weapons save the guards. Fierce was the battle; but the Nubians lacked a captain, while Rames led veterans of Thebes picked for their valor.

The giants began to give. Here and there they fell, till at length but three of them were left upon their feet, who threw down their arms and cried for mercy. Then it was for the first time that Rames understood what he had done. With bent head, his red sword in his hand, he climbed the dais and knelt before the throne of Pharaoh, saying:

"I have avenged my honor and the honor of Egypt. Slay me, O Pharaoh!"

But Pharaoh made no answer, for his swoon still held him.

Then Rames turned to Tua and said:

"Pharaoh sleeps, but in your hand is the scepter. Slay me, O queen!"

Now, Tua, who all this while had watched like one frozen into stone, seemed to thaw to life again. Her danger was past. She could never be forced to wed that coarse, black-souled Nubian, for Rames had killed him. Yonder he lay dead in all his finery, with his hideous giants about him, like fallen trees; and, oh! in her rebellious human heart she blessed Rames for the deed.

But as she, who was trained in statecraft, knew well enough, if he had escaped the sword of Prince Amathel, it was but to fall into a peril from which there seemed to be no escape.

This dead prince was the heir of a great king—of a king so great that for a century Egypt had dared to make no war upon his country — for it was far away, well fortified, and hard to come at across deserts and through savage tribes. Moreover, the man had been slain at a feast in Pharaoh's court, and by an officer of Pharaoh's guard, which afterward had killed his escort under the eyes of Egypt's monarchs, the hand of one of whom he sought in marriage.

Such a deed must mean a bitter war for Egypt, and to those who struck the blow — death — as Rames himself knew well.

Tua looked at him kneeling before her, and her heart ached. Fiercely, despairingly she thought, throwing her soul afar to seek out wisdom and a way of escape for Rames. Presently in the blackness of her mind there arose a plan, and, as ever was her fashion, she acted swiftly.

Lifting her head, she commanded that the doors should be locked and guarded, so that none might go in or out, and that those physicians who were among the company should attend to the wounded and to Pharaoh, who was ill. Then she called the high council of the kingdom, all of whom were gathered there about her, and spoke in a cold, calm voice, while the company flocked round to listen.

"Lords and people," she said, "the gods for their own purposes have suffered a fearful thing to come to pass. Egypt's guest and his guard have been slain before Egypt's kings—yes, at their feast and in their very presence—and it will be said far and wide that this has been done by treachery. Yet you know well, as I do, that it was no treachery, but a mischance. The divine prince who is dead, as all of you saw, grew drunken after the fashion of his people, and in his drunkenness he struck a high-born man—a count of Egypt and an officer of Pharaoh — who, to do him greater honor, was set to wait upon him, calling him by vile names, and drew his sword upon him to kill him. Am I right? Did you see and hear these things?"

"Aye!" answered the council and the audience.

"Then," went on Tua, "this officer, forgetting all save his outraged honor, dared to fight for his life, even against the Prince of Kesh, and, being the better man, slew him. Afterward the servants of the Prince of Kesh attacked him and Pharaoh's guard, and were conquered

and most of them killed, since none here had arms wherewith to part them. Have I spoken truth?"

"Yes, O queen," they answered again by their spokesman. "Rames and the royal guard have little blame in the matter," and from the rest of them rose a murmur of assent.

"Now," went on Tua with gathering confidence, for she felt that all saw with her eyes, "to add to our woes, Pharaoh, my father, has been smitten by the gods. He sleeps; he cannot speak; I know not whether he will live or die; and, therefore, it would seem that I, the duly-crowned Queen of Egypt, must act for him as was provided in such a case, since the matter is very urgent and may not be delayed. Is it your will," she added, addressing the council, "that I should so act as the gods may show me how to do?"

"It is right and fitting," answered the vizier, the king's companion, on behalf of all of them.

"Then, priests, lords, and people," continued the queen, "what course shall we take in this sore strait? Speaking with the voice of all of you and on your behalf, I can command that the Count Rames and all those other chosen men whom Pharaoh loves, who fought with him, shall be slain forthwith. This, indeed," she added slowly, "I should wish to do, since although Rames had suffered intolerable insult such as no high-born man can be asked to bear, even from a prince, and he and all of them were but fighting to save their lives and to show the Nubians that we are not cowards here in Egypt, without doubt they have conquered and slain the heir of Kesh and his black giants, who were our guests, and for this deed their lives are forfeit."

She paused, watching, while although here and there a voice answered "Yes" or "They must die," from the rest arose a murmur of dissent. For in their hearts the company were on the side of Rames and Pharaoh's guards. Moreover, they were proud of the young captain's skill and courage; and glad that the Nubians, whom they hated with an ancient hate, had been defeated by the lesser men of Egypt, some of whom were their friends or relatives.

Now, while they argued among themselves, Tua rose from her chair and went to look at Pharaoh, whom the physicians were attending, chafing his hands and pouring water on his brow. Presently she returned with tears standing in her beautiful eyes, for she loved her father, and said in a heavy voice:

"Alas! Pharaoh is very ill. Set the Evil has smitten him; and it is hard, my people, that he, perchance, may be taken from us, and we must bear such wo, because of the ill behavior of a royal foreigner, for I cannot forget that it was he who caused this tumult."

The audience agreed that it was very hard, and looked angrily at the surviving Nubians; but Tua, conquering herself, continued:

"We must bear the blows that the fates rain on us, nor suffer our private grief to dull the sword of justice. Now, as I have said, even though we love them as our brothers or our husbands, yet the Count Rames and his brave comrades should perish by a death of shame, such a death as little befits the flower of Pharaoh's guard."

Again she paused, then went on in the midst of an intense silence; for even the physicians ceased from their work to harken to her decree as supreme judge of Egypt.

"And yet, and yet, my people, even as I was about to pass sentence upon them, uttering the doom that may not be recalled, some guardian spirit of our land sent a thought into my heart, on which I think it right to take your judgment. If we destroy these men, as I desire to destroy them, will they not say in the southern country and in all the nations around that first they had been told to murder the Prince of Kesh and his escort, and then were themselves executed to cover up our crime? Will it not be believed that there is blood upon the hands of Pharaoh and of Egypt—the blood of a royal guest—who, it is well known, was welcomed here with love and joy, that he might—oh! forgive me, I am but a maiden, I cannot say it. Nay, pity me not and answer not till I have set out all the case as best I may, which, I fear me, is but ill.

"It is certain that this will be said—aye, and believed, and we of Egypt all

be called traitors; and that these men, who, after all, however evil has been their deed, are brave and upright, will be written in all the books of all the lands as common murderers, and go down to Osiris with that ill name branded on their brows. Yes, and their shame will cling to the pure hands of Pharaoh and his councilors."

Now, at this picture the people murmured, and some of the noble women there began to weep outright.

"But," proceeded Tua with her pleading voice, "how if we were to take another course? How if we commanded this Count Rames and his companions to journey, with an escort such as befits the majesty of Pharaoh, to the far city of Napata, and there to lay before the great king of that land, by writings and the mouths of witnesses, all the sad story of the death of his only son? How if we sent letters to His Majesty of Kesh, saying: 'Thou hast heard our tale, thou knowest all our wo. Now, judge. If thou art noble-hearted and it pleases thee to acquit these men, acquit them, and we will praise thee. But if thou art wroth and stern and it pleases thee to condemn these men, condemn them, and send them back to us for punishment, that punishment which thou dost decree.' Is that plan good, my people? Can His Majesty of Kesh complain if he is made judge in his own cause? Can the kings and captains of other lands then declare that in Egypt we work murder on our guests? Tell me, who have so little wisdom, if this plan is good, as I dare to say to you, it seems to me."

Now with one voice the council and all the guests, and especially the guards themselves, who were on their trial, save Rames, who still knelt in silence before the queen, cried out that it was very good. Yes; they clapped their hands and shouted, vowing to each other that this young queen of theirs was the Spirit of Wisdom come to earth, and that her excellent person was heroically filled with the soul of a god.

But she frowned at their praises, and, holding up her scepter, sternly commanded silence.

"Such is your decree, O my council," she cried, "and the decree of all you here present, who are the noblest of my people, and I, as I am bound by my oath of crowning, proclaim and ratify it; I, Neter-Tua, who am named Star and Daughter of Amen, who am named Glorious in Ra, who am named Hathor, Strong in Beauty, who am crowned Queen of the Upper and the Lower Land. I proclaim —write it down, O scribes, and let it be registered this night that the decree may stand while the world endures—that two thousand of the choicest troops of Egypt shall sail up the Nile forthwith, for Kesh, and that in command of them, so that all may know his crime, shall go the young Count Rames, and with him those others who also did the deed of blood."

Now, at this announcement, which sounded more like promotion than disgrace, some started, and Rames looked up, quivering in all his limbs.

"I proclaim," went on Tua quickly, "that when they are come to Napata, they shall kneel before its king and submit themselves to the judgment of his majesty, and, having been judged, shall return and report to us the judgment of his majesty, that it may be carried out as His Majesty of Kesh shall appoint. Let the troops and the ships be made ready this very night, and meanwhile, save when he appears before us to take his orders as general, in token of our wrath, we banish the Count Rames from our court and presence, and place his companions under guard."

So spoke Tua, and, the royal decree having been written down swiftly and read aloud, she sealed and signed with her sign-manual as queen, that it might not be changed or altered, and commanded that copies of it should be sent to all the governors of the Nomes in Egypt, and a duplicate prepared and despatched with this royal embassy, for so she named it, to be delivered to the King of Kesh, with the letters of condolence, and the presents of ceremony, and the body of Amathel, the Prince of Kesh, now divine in Osiris.

Then, at length, the doors were thrown open, and the company dispersed, Rames and the guard being led away by the council and placed in safe keeping. Also Pharaoh, still senseless, but breathing quietly, was carried to his bed, and the dead were taken to the embalmers, while Tua, so weary that she could scarcely

walk, departed to her chambers, leaning on the shoulder of the royal nurse, Asti, the mother of Rames.

CHAPTER VI.

THE OATH OF RAMES AND OF TUA.

STILL robed, Tua lay upon a couch, for she would not seek her bed, while Asti stood near to her, a dark commanding figure.

"Your majesty has done strange things to-night," said Asti in her quiet voice.

Tua turned her head and looked at her, then answered:

"Very strange, nurse. You see, the gods, and that troublesome son of yours, and Pharaoh's sudden sickness threw the strings of Fate into my hand, and—I pulled them. I always had a fancy for the pulling of strings, but the chance never came my way before."

"It seems to me that for a beginner your majesty pulled somewhat hard," said Asti dryly.

"Yes, nurse, so hard that I think I have pulled your son off the scaffold into a place of some honor, if he knows how to stay there, though it was the council and the priests and the lords and the ladies who thought that they pulled. You see, one must commence as one means to go on."

"Your majesty is very clever; you will make a great queen—if you do not overpull yourself."

"Not half so clever as you were, Asti, when you made that monkey come out of the vase," answered Tua, laughing somewhat hysterically. "Oh! do not look innocent; I know it was your magic, for I could feel it passing over my head. How did you do it, Asti?"

"If your majesty will tell me how you made the lords of Egypt consent to the sending of an armed expedition to Napata under the command of a lad, a mere captain, who had just killed its heir apparent before their eyes, which decree, if I know anything of Rames, will mean a war between Kesh and Egypt, I will tell you how I made the monkey come out of the vase."

"Then I shall never learn, nurse; for I can't, because I don't know. It came into my mind, as music comes into my throat, that is all. Rames should have been beheaded at once, shouldn't he, for not letting that black boar tusk him? Do you think he poured the wine over Amathel's head on purpose?" and again she laughed.

"Yes, I suppose that he should have been killed, as he would have been if your majesty had not chanced to be so fond—"

"Talking of wine," broke in Tua, "give me a cup of it. The divine Prince of Kesh, who was to have been my husband—did not understand, Asti, that they really meant to make that black barbarian my husband?—I say that the divine prince, who now sups with Osiris, drank so much that I could not touch a drop, and I am tired and thirsty, and have still some things to do to-night."

Asti went to a table, where stood a flagon of wine, wreathed in vine-leaves, and by it cups of glass, and, filling one of them, brought it to Tua.

"Here's to the memory of the divine prince, and may he have left the table of Osiris before I come there. And here's to the hand that sent him thither," said Tua recklessly. Then she drained the wine, every drop of it, and threw the cup to the marble floor, where it shattered into bits.

"What god has entered into your majesty to-night?" asked Asti quietly.

"One that knows his own mind, I think," replied Tua. "There, I feel strong again; I go to visit Pharaoh. Come with me, Asti."

When Tua arrived at the bedside of Pharaoh, she found that the worst of the danger was over. Fearing for his life, the physicians had bled him, and now the fit had passed away, and his eyes were open, although he was unable to speak, and did not know her or any one.

She asked whether he would live or die, and was told that he would live, or so his doctors believed, but that for a long while he must lie quite quiet, seeing as few people as possible, and, above all, being troubled with no business, since, if he were wearied or excited, the fit would certainly return and kill him. So, rejoicing at this news, which was better than she had expected, Tua kissed her father and left him.

"Now will your majesty go to bed?"

asked Asti when she had returned to her own apartments.

"By no means," answered Tua; "I wear Pharaoh's shoes, and have much business left to do to-night. Summon Mermes, your husband."

So Mermes came and stood before her. He was still what he had been in the old days, when Tua played as an infant in his house: stern, noble-looking, and of few words; but now his hair had grown white and his face was drawn with grief, both for the sake of Rames, whose hot blood had brought him into so much danger, and because Pharaoh, who was his friend, lay between life and death.

Tua looked at him, and loved him more than ever, for, now that he was troubled, some new likeness to Rames appeared upon his face which she had never seen before.

"Take heart, noble Mermes," she said gently; "they say that Pharaoh stays with us yet a while."

"I thank Amen," he answered, "for had he died, his blood would have been upon the hands of my house."

"Not so, Mermes; it would have been upon the hands of the gods. You spring from a royal line; say, what would you have thought of your son if, after being struck by that fat Nubian, he had cowered at his feet and prayed for his life like any slave?"

Mermes flushed and smiled a little, then said:

"The question is rather, What would you have thought, O queen?"

"I?" answered Tua. "Well, as a queen I should have praised him much, since then Egypt would have been spared great trouble, but as a woman and a friend I should never have spoken to him again. Honor is more than life, Mermes."

"Certainly honor is more than life," replied Mermes, staring at the ceiling, perhaps to hide the look upon his face, "and for a little while Rames seems to be in the way of it. But those who are set high have far to fall, O queen, and—forgive me—he is my only child. Now, when Pharaoh recovers—"

"Rames will be far away," broke in Tua. "Go, bring him here at once, and with him the vizier and the chief scribe of the council. Take this ring; it will open all doors," and she drew the signet from her finger and handed it to him.

"At this hour, your majesty?" said Mermes in a doubtful voice.

"Have I not spoken," she answered impatiently. "When the welfare of Egypt is at stake I do not sleep."

So Mermes bowed and went, and while he was gone Tua caused Asti to smooth her hair and change her robe and ornaments for others, which, although she did not say so, she thought became her better. Then she sat her down in a chair of state in her chamber of audience, and waited, while Asti stood beside her, asking no questions, but wondering.

At length the doors were opened, and through them appeared Mermes and the vizier and the chief of the scribes, both of them trying to hide their yawns, for they had been summoned from their beds who were not wont to do state business at such hours. After them limped Rames, for his wound had grown stiff, who looked bewildered, but otherwise just as he had left the feast.

Now, without waiting for the greetings of ceremony, Tua began to question the vizier as to what steps had been taken in furtherance of her decrees, and when he assured her that the business was on foot, went into its every detail with him, as to the ships and the officers and the provisioning of the men, and so forth. Next she set herself to dictate despatches to the captains and barons who held the fortresses on the Upper Nile, communicating to them Pharaoh's orders on this matter, and the commission of Rames, whereby he, whose hands had done the ill, was put in command of the great embassy that went to make amends.

These being finished, she sent away the scribe to spend the rest of the night in writing them in duplicate, bidding him bring them to her in the early morning to be sealed. Next addressing Rames, she commanded him to start on the morrow with those troops which were ready to Takensit, above the first cataract of the Nile, which was the frontier fortress of Egypt, and there wait until the remainder of the soldiers joined him, bearing with them her presents to the King of Kesh, and the embalmed body of the Prince Amathel.

Rames bowed, and said that her orders

should be obeyed; and, the audience being finished, still bowing and supported by Mermes, began to walk backward toward the door, his eyes fixed upon the face of Tua, who sat with bent head, clasping the arms of her chair like one in difficulty and doubt. When he had gone a few steps she seemed to come to some determination, for, with an effort, she raised herself and said:

"Return, Count Rames; I have a message to give you for the King of Kesh, who, unhappy man, has lost his son and heir, and it is one that no other ears must hear. Leave me a while with this captain, O Mermes and Asti, and see that none listen to our talk. Presently I will summon you to conduct him away."

They hesitated, for this thing seemed strange; then, noting the look she gave them, departed through the doors behind the royal seat.

Now Rames and the queen were left alone in that great, lighted chamber. With bent head and folded arms he stood before her, while she looked at him intently, yet seemed to find no words to say. At length she spoke in a sweet, low voice.

"It is many years since we were playmates in the courts of the temple yonder, and since then we have never been alone together, have we, Rames?"

"No, great lady," answered Rames, "for you were born to be a queen, and I am but a humble soldier, who cannot hope to consort with queens."

"Who cannot hope! Would you wish to, then, if you could?"

"O queen," answered Rames, biting his lips, "why does it please you to make a mock of me?"

"It does not please me to do any such thing, for, by my father Amen, Rames, I wish that we were children once more, for those were happy days, before they separated us and set you to soldiering and me to statecraft."

"You have learned your part well, Star of the Morning," said Rames, glancing at her quickly.

"Not better than you, playmate Rames, if I may judge from your sword-play this night. So it seems that we both of us are in the way of becoming masters of our trades."

"What am I to say to your majesty? You have saved my life when it was forfeit—"

"As once you saved mine when it was forfeit, and at greater risk. Look at your hand; it will remind you. It was but tit for tat. And, friend Rames, this day I came near to being eaten by a worse crocodile than that which dwells in the pool yonder."

"I guessed as much, queen, and the thought made me mad. Had it not been for that I should only have thrown him down. Now that crocodile will eat no more maidens."

"No," answered Tua, rubbing her chin; "he has gone to be eaten by Set, devourer of souls, has he not? But I think there may be trouble between Egypt and Kesh, and what Pharaoh will say when he recovers I am sure I do not know. May the gods protect me from his wrath."

"Tell me, if it pleases your majesty, what is my fate? I have been named general of this expedition, over the heads of many, I who am but a captain and a young man and an evil-doer. Am I to be killed on the journey, or am I to be executed by the King of Kesh?"

"If any kill you on the journey, Rames, they shall render me an account, be it the gods themselves; and as for the vengeance of the King of Kesh—well, you will have two thousand picked men with you, and the means to gather more as you go. Listen, now, for this is not in the decree or in the letters," she added, bending toward him and whispering. "Egypt has spies in Kesh, and, being industrious, I have read their reports. The people there hate the upstart race that rules them, and the king, who alone is left, now that Amathel is dead, is old and half-witted, for all that family drink too much. So, if the worst comes to the worst, do you think that you need be killed; you," she added meaningly, "who, if the house of Amathel were not, would, by descent, be King of Kesh, as, if I and my house were not, you might be Pharaoh of Egypt?"

Rames studied the floor for a little, then looked up and asked:

"What shall I do?"

"It seems that is for you to find out," replied Tua, in her turn studying the ceiling. "Were I in your place, I think

that, if driven to it, *I* should know what to do. One thing, however, I should *not* do. Whatever may be the judgment of the divine King of Kesh upon you, and that can easily be guessed, I should not return to Egypt with my escort until I was quite sure of my welcome. No, I think that I should stop in Napata, which, I am told, is a rich and pleasant city, and try to put its affairs in order, trusting that Egypt, to which it once belonged, would in the end forgive me for so doing."

"I understand," said Rames, "that, whatever happens, I alone am to blame."

"Good; and, of course, there are no witnesses to this talk of ours. Have you also been taking lessons in statecraft in your spare hours, Rames, much as I have tried to learn something of the art of war?"

Rames made no answer; only these two strange conspirators looked at each other and smiled.

"Your majesty is weary. I must leave your majesty," he said presently.

"You must be wearier than I am, Rames, with that wound, which I think has not been dressed, although it is true that we have both fought to-night. Rames, you are going on a far journey. I wonder if we shall ever meet again."

"I do not know," he answered with a groan, "but, for my sake, it is better that we should not. O Morning Star, why did you save me this night, who would have been glad to die? Did not that Ka of yours tell you that I should have been glad to die; or my mother, who is a magician?"

"I have seen nothing of my Ka, Rames, since we played together in the temple—ah! those were happy days, were they not? And your mother is a discreet lady, who does not talk to me about you, except to warn me not to show you any favor, lest others should be jealous and murder you. Shall you, then, be sorry if we do not meet again? Scarcely, I suppose, since you seem so anxious to die and be rid of me and all things that we know."

Now Rames pressed his hand upon his heart, as though to still its beating, and looked round him in despair. For, indeed, that heart of his felt as though it must burst.

"Tua," he gasped desperately, "can you for a minute forget that you are queen of the Upper and the Lower Land, who perhaps will soon be Pharaoh, the mightiest monarch in the world, and remember only that you are a woman, and, as a woman, hear a secret and keep it close?"

"We have been talking secrets, Rames, as we used to do, you remember, long ago, and you will not tell mine, which deal with the state. Why, then, should I tell yours? But be short; it grows late, or rather early, and, as you know, we shall not meet again."

"Good," he answered. "Queen Neter-Tua, I, your subject, dare to love you."

"What of that, Rames? I have millions of subjects, who all profess to love me."

He waved his hand angrily, and went on:

"I dare to love you as a man loves a woman, not as a subject loves a queen."

"Ah!" she answered in a new and broken voice, "that is different, is it not? Well, all women love to be loved, though some are queens and some are peasants, so why should I be angry? Rames, now, as in past days, I thank you for your love."

"It is not enough," he said. "What is the use of giving love? Love should be lent. Love is an usurer that asks high interest. Nay, not the interest only, but the capital and the interest to boot. Oh, Star! what happens to the man who is so mad as to love the Queen of Egypt?"

Tua considered this problem as though it were a riddle to which she was seeking an answer.

"Who knows?" she replied at length in a low voice. "Perhaps it costs him his life, or perhaps—perhaps he marries her and becomes Pharaoh of Egypt. Much might depend upon whether such a queen chanced to care about such a man."

Now Rames shook like a reed in the evening wind, and he looked at her with glowing eyes.

"Tua," he whispered, "can it be possible—do you mean that I am welcome to you, or are you but drawing me to shame and ruin?"

She made no answer to him in words, only, with a certain grave deliberation, laid down the little ivory scepter that she held, and, suffering her troubled eyes to

rest upon his eyes, bent forward and stretched out her arms toward him.

"Yes, Rames," she murmured into his ear a minute later, "I am drawing you to whatever may be found upon this breast of mine—love, or majesty, or shame, or ruin, or the death of one or both of us, or all of them together. Are you content to take the chances of this high game, Rames?"

"Ask it not, Tua. You know, you know!"

She kissed him on the lips, and all her heart and all her youth were in that kiss. Then, gently enough, she pushed him from her, saying:

"Stand there; I would speak with you, and, as I have said, the time is short. Harken to me, Rames, you are right; I know, as I have always known, and as you would have known also had you been less foolish than you are. You love me and I love you, for so it was decreed where souls are made, and so it has been from the beginning, and so it shall be to the end. You, a gentleman of Egypt, love the Queen of Egypt, and she is yours and no other man's. Such is the decree of him who caused us to be born upon the same day, and to be nursed upon the same kind breast. Well, after all, why not? If love brings death upon us, as well may chance, at least the love will remain which is worth it all, and beyond death there is something."

"Only this, Tua; I seek the woman, not a throne, and, alas! through me you may be torn from your high place."

"The throne goes with the woman, Rames; they cannot be separated. But say, something comes over me; if that happened, if I were an outcast, a wanderer, with nothing save this shape and soul of mine, and it were you that sat upon a throne, would you still love me, Rames?"

"Why ask such questions?" he replied indignantly. "Moreover, your talk is childish. What throne can I ever sit on?"

A change fell upon her at his words. She ceased to be the melting, passionate woman, and became once more the strong, far-seeing queen.

"Rames," she said, "you understand why, although it tears my heart, I am sending you so far away and into so many dangers, do you not? It is to save your life; for, after what has chanced to-night in this fashion or in that, here you would certainly die, as, had it not been for that plan of mine, you must have died two hours ago. There are many who hate you, Rames, and Pharaoh may recover, as I pray the gods he will, and override my will, for you have slain his guest, who was brought here to marry me."

"I understand all these things, queen."

"Then awake, Rames; look to the future, and understand that also, if, as I think, you have the wit. I am sending you with a strong escort, am I not? Well, that King of Kesh is old and feeble, and you have a claim upon his crown. Take it, man, and set it on your head, and, as King of Kesh, ask the hand of Egypt's queen in marriage. Then who would say you nay—not Egypt's queen, I think, or the people of Egypt, who hunger for the rich southern land which they have lost."

So she spoke, and as these high words passed her lips, she looked so splendid and so royal that, dazzled by the greatness of her majesty, Rames bowed himself before her as before the presence of a god. Then, aware that she was trying him in the balance of her judgment, he straightened himself and spoke to her as prince speaks to prince.

"Star of Amen," he said, "it is true that, though here we are but your humble subjects, the blood of my father and of myself is as high as yours, and perhaps more ancient, and it is true that, now yonder Amathel is dead, after my father, in virtue of those who went before us, I have more right than any other to the inheritance of Kesh. Queen, I hear your words; I will take it if I can, not for its own sake, but to win you; and if I fail you will know that I died doing my best. Queen, we part, and this is a far journey. Perhaps we may never meet again; at the best we must be separated for long. Queen, you have honored me with your love, and therefore I ask a promise of you, not as woman only, but as queen. I ask that, however strait may be the circumstances, whatever reasons of state may push you on, while I live you will take no other man to husband—no, not even if he offers you half the world in dower."

"I give it," she answered. "If you should learn that I am wed to any man upon the earth, then spit upon my name as woman, and as queen cast me off and overthrow me if you can. Deal with me, Rames, as in such a case I will deal with you. Only be sure of your tidings ere you believe them. Now there is nothing more to say. Farewell to you, Rames, till we meet again beneath or beyond the sun. Our royal pact is made. Come, seal it and begone."

She rose and stretched out her scepter to him, which he kissed as her faithful subject. Next, with a swift movement, she lifted the golden *uræus* circlet from her brow and for a moment set it on his head, crowning him her king, and while it rested there she, the Queen of Egypt, bent the knee before him and did him homage. Then she cast down crown and scepter, and, as woman, fell upon her lover's breast, while the bright rays of morning, flowing suddenly through the eastern window-place of that splendid hall, struck upon them both, clothing them in a radiant robe of glory and of flame.

Soon, very soon, it was done, and Tua, seated there in light, watched Rames depart into the outer shadow, wondering when and how she would see him come again. For her heart was heavy within her, and, even in this hour of triumphant love, she greatly feared the future and its gifts.

(To be continued.)

THE TRAVELING-RUG.

BY JOSEPHINE A. MEYER.

A SHORT STORY.

"BUT you can't possibly go to town dressed like that," protested Ella helplessly.

Priscilla jammed the pins in her hat, and burrowed in her top drawer for gloves that mated.

"Watch me," she invited briefly.

"Oh, Pussy, you look *awful,* and you've missed the train anyway."

"Not quite yet. Bless this rug, how *do* you fold it?" Priscilla struggled savagely and to no purpose with the kaleidoscopic steamer-shawl.

Ella crammed the yellow telegram into her mouth to lend a hand.

"But," she spoke through her teeth out of necessity, "you are not going to carry this without wrapping it up!"

"Wrapping it! If it's good enough for Aunt Lydia to telegraph for, because she can't start for Europe without it, it's good enough for me to dangle before the eyes of belated commuters. Oh, let it go! I'll fold it on the train; I haven't time now."

She snatched it from her sister's hands and, bundling it awkwardly under her arm, hurried out. Ella still followed, pessimistically prophesying the uselessness of all this trouble. Half-way to the station, they saw the train.

"Good-by, Ella; I've got to catch that," gasped Priscilla.

"You can't! oh, Pussy, don't try!" were the last words from Ella.

Priscilla was a good runner, but Aunt Lydia's gay steamer-rug and her own ill-pinned hat were two stout hindrances. She made the train by jumping on as it started. With the aid of a Good Samaritan who wasted no time on foolish questions, she tore open the first window to wave triumphantly to Ella.

She was surprised to find her sister so near, red, blown, and still running, as if in pursuit of the moving train. She was shouting and gesticulating, but the ever-increasing speed of the train sent her words back with the wind. All Priscilla was able to distinguish was: "Get off! . . . Come back!"

"Well, I like that!" exclaimed Priscilla indignantly as she drew her head in from the window and dropped into a seat. She was unconscious that she had spoken aloud until she beheld an amused smile on the face of him who had acted the rôle of Good Samaritan with the rug. Then she noticed that he was young, with humorous eyes and a very prepossessing, rather boyish, face.

Her embarrassment at this discovery led her glance downward to where the darling rug of Aunt Lydia's heart lay, with its black and white side in prominence, looking like a disintegrating zebra spread over her knees. She tried to fold it, unostentatiously, but at her first jerk it tumbled in a sudden, brilliant cascade to the floor at the Samaritan's feet.

He picked it up for her politely.

"Perhaps," he ventured, "I could assist you in folding it. They're so hard to manage alone. Unless—perhaps you wish it open."

Priscilla's amazed brown eyes stared from her hot, flushed face. Did he think she was the sort that traveled on half-hour journeys with a rug? And in that weather!

"Thank you," she said loftily. "I can do very well without aid."

The car-door behind her clanged, and her nervous jump at the sudden sound did not conduce either to neatness or despatch.

"All tickets, please," said a cheerful voice.

She handed out hers. The conductor looked at it and handed it back.

"This," he remarked, "is a New York ticket."

"Of course," answered Priscilla; "what of it?"

"This, madam," replied the conductor, with the severe look of one indicting a suspected thief, "is a Philadelphia train."

"Heavens and earth!" Priscilla sprang to her feet. "Let me off!"

"Impossible, miss. It's an express. No more stops till we reach Philadelphia."

"But—but—" Priscilla glanced wildly at her rug. "What shall I do?"

"Pay your fare to Philadelphia, miss," advised the conductor dispassionately.

"But I don't want to go to Philadelphia," almost wept Priscilla.

"We can't change our schedule for one passenger, miss," was the crushing reply, delivered with irritating ultra-courtesy.

The Good Samaritan in the seat beside her could stand no more. He spoke timidly.

"Can I help you, madam?"

"No, I thank you. I got on at this station. What is the fare?" Priscilla opened her purse haughtily. Her pride froze, panic-stricken, when he told her. Her purse seemed to gape back at her inanely; she was exactly seventy-two cents short!

The Good Samaritan settled matters without another word, while she sat biting her lips, her cheeks blazing. She was silent till the detested voice of the conductor receded to a faint echo of itself.

II.

"WHY did you do it?" demanded Priscilla of the Good Samaritan. She spoke aggressively.

"People were getting too interested in your affairs," he answered bluntly.

"And what about yourself?" flared Priscilla. "Besides, I sha'n't be able to get back from Philadelphia with all your cleverness. And anyway — I — don't — want—to—go!" She half rose from her seat.

"You've got to go, now," he assured her equably. "What did you get on this train for?"

"I was in a hurry." She saw him press his lips together tightly. Her indignation at the sight gave way to her sense of the ridiculous. Suddenly she felt her own lips tremble, then her shoulders shook and her eyes swam with tears. He gave her one startled look and joined in.

"Oh," she gasped, "I don't know why I'm laughing! It's—it—it's tragic—" And she fell to laughing again. "I have no money to get back!"

"Don't worry; I can lend you some."

"No, no! Once is enough!"

"Then you must pawn something."

Simultaneously they eyed the rug.

"How much do you think it would bring?" she asked speculatively.

"As a steamer-rug?"

"No; a patent sort of checker-board. Really," she added confidentially, "I think that's what makes it so valuable to my aunt. She rolls herself up in the rainbow side, and plays chess on this on her knees. Oh!" she added suddenly, with a little start.

"What is the matter?"

"I had really forgotten her share in this. Isn't it terrible? She's waiting for me! Perhaps she'll lose her boat! And me in Philadelphia!"

"For Europe?" she nodded. "What time?"

"I don't know. 'Round lunch hour. The telegram said there was no time to spare. It's the Maritime Line."

"It's the Algeria. A cousin of mine sails on her to-day, too. She leaves at twelve, I'm afraid." He pulled out his watch and shook his head over it. "An hour and a half to Philadelphia, and about two back; reckon four altogether—and it's after ten now—you'd just miss it."

"Just," she repeated, "by about two hours or so, if I'm lucky. Oh, I know I only had time to scramble for the train."

"*Any* train?"

"No!" Then her wrath died. "The nearest," she added. "Well, this will be a checkerless trip for my aunt— Oh, if it would only stop—break down, or anything!" She had leaned out of the window. "This is so silly! Running away from her at this rate!" She motioned to the swiftly vanishing poles along the track. Then suddenly she sat back and stared at him, and her jaw dropped. "*That* was it."

"What?" He looked around, startled at her tone.

"Ella. No wonder she wanted me to get off! Think of her feelings, watching me snatched up and whirled away in an entirely opposite direction from the one I was aiming for, waving good-by in triumph as if my one object in life were being fulfilled!"

The little sketch of her predicament finished both of them for a few minutes.

When two people have laughed themselves limp over a common joke, they cannot return to the air of polite extinction so highly recommended to young ladies traveling alone. Before it occurred to Priscilla that the conventional course would be to ignore utterly any youth who had the audacity to address her without the proper introduction, they were running in among the low red-brick houses characteristic of Philadelphia.

"Now, you must recommend me to a good pawnbroker," declared Priscilla as their train slid into the semidarkness of the railway shed.

"It is a strange coincidence; but temporarily, at least, I have taken up that line of business," he answered.

"Very well, then. But I hope you won't presume upon my lone feminine state to give me more than the rug is worth."

"Oh, must I take the thing?" he exclaimed.

"That's the only proper course," she answered doubtfully.

"It wouldn't be at all proper," he said emphatically. "I should be drawing a crowd by walking about the streets clad as an unclassified species of Indian."

"Oh, well, then; perhaps you're right. My aunt may have waited over for the next boat for it, anyway."

He purchased her return-ticket for her at the station, and informed her that her train left in twenty minutes. He looked at her a little wistfully.

"You wouldn't—you wouldn't be surprised if I took the same train back?" he suggested.

"I shouldn't see you," she answered, suddenly prim. "Have you a card, so I may know where to return the money I owe you?"

They separated coldly as if the remembrance of the unusual manner of their acquaintance had chilled them both.

She made her way to one of the long benches in the waiting-room, whence she saw him move slowly toward the door.

He passed a news-stand, stopped, then with a quick glance at one of the papers, purchased it and came rushing back to her, waving it.

"Look!" he cried excitedly. "Liners held up by fog in river in New York. You've got a chance, if it will only hold out!"

"Let's see!" She devoured the headlines.

"Listen," he said rapidly, "I've got

to see this thing through. My business takes me exactly ten minutes from the station. I intended to lunch here and take the one o'clock train back, but now I'm going back with you. You have no money to get lunch, so we can eat together on the train. Oh, please say you don't mind. I'm a gentleman, I promise—"

"Hurry up!" she interrupted. "If you stay here talking any more, you'll miss your train!"

His face beamed as he actually ran down the long waiting-room to hasten through his work.

As they neared New York they watched the fog close about them. It grew denser and denser, till the train was forced to creep along with nerve-wracking caution, almost continually tooting.

"It's good we don't have to cross the ferry," panted Priscilla finally, as they ran headlong in pursuit of a car in Jersey City.

"I'm afraid the fog is lifting," he said anxiously.

It was true. A little wind had risen, and the white mist rolled about uncertainly. They inquired about the steamers of the conductor.

"One of 'em went out," he told them. "She's held up in the Narrows, though."

"We might charter a tug if it's ours," suggested the Good Samaritan.

She laughed hysterically, and the conductor eyed the pair with new interest.

"What idiocy!" she exclaimed. "But Aunt Lydia must have her rug."

"Aunt—what?" he demanded.

"Lydia."

"Not Mrs. Robert Lackman?" He looked incredulous.

"Do *you* know her?" She was amazed.

"She's my mother's first cousin. The one I told you was sailing to-day."

"No!"

"All out!" called the conductor. "The docks are over there to your left."

They had no time for more revelations, and no breath for anything but a mad run. The fog had lifted, and now they heard a new whistle, the unmistakable call of the departing liner.

"Come!" He grasped her hand and pulled her after him, the incomparable steamer-rug floating from his arm, flaunting one instant the dizzy mixture of colors of all the Scottish clans, and the next a striking poster effect in black and white. Down the long dock they sped, only to hear the sucking of the waves along the slowly moving hull as the big ship backed out into the river.

They saw Aunt Lydia, and called to her lustily. She looked upon them in amazement. The Samaritan waved the rug at Priscilla's urgent bidding.

"Come back!" Priscilla cried desperately. "You've forgotten this!"

There was a pause. Aunt Lydia's maid, standing beside her, evidently transmitted to the rather deaf old lady what they had said. She appeared to take some time to grasp the truth fully, then leaned over the rail and shouted back to them with all her might:

"That's not the one! We found it ho-ome!"

To illustrate, she held up a symphony in greens and browns that blended and faded into the shadows of the deck as the steamer swung out with another deafening farewell whistle.

"Did she say—" Priscilla turned her tired eyes on her companion and rested against a gigantic windlass.

"She did," replied the Good Samaritan, fanning his flushed face with his hat. The rug drooped from his other hand, serving as a hectic carpet for several feet of dock.

"Well"—Priscilla pushed back her hair, settled her hat, and folded her arms—"I've been racing all around the globe at a record speed for *nothing!*"

The Good Samaritan stopped fanning himself and jerked at the rug, averting his eye.

"Would—would you call it altogether that?" he asked.

INTERPRETATION.

Music, since none would harken to his song,
Wandered, unheeded, down a woodland way
Until he met with Beauty, who e'er long
He charmed with lyric art and lilting lay.

And Beauty, underneath his golden spell,
Fashioned to house his vagrancy forlorn,
A place where Music might forever dwell;
And so, of Beauty's love, was Silence born.

Joan Burleigh.

BACK IN GOD'S COUNTRY.

BY MAUD MORRISON HUEY.

A SHORT STORY.

IT was cold in the Duck's Nest in January. Women, their heads bundled in old shawls, searched the drift for loose sticks. Frozen ropes squeaked dismally as the boats beat against icy banks and tugged to be free. Smoke swirled out of rusty stovepipes, to be torn into fragments by the savage wind.

People in the Duck's Nest never made any provision for cold days. The day always brought sufficient for the day's need. What use laying by for a future that was so uncertain. To-morrow they might be far beyond the reach of winter's sting. They had but to loosen the ropes and give themselves over to the current, that was always hurrying south.

Then there was always drift. If they used what came to-day, to-morrow there would be more. While they were searching the hills for winter fuel, the river might be bringing a washout of cut wood. Who knew? The river was kind. Once the women had pulled out enough cut wood with their pikes to last a month. So it was only a needless waste of time to lay by for a cold day.

Besides, weather along the river was a fickle thing. Yesterday it had been warm, and the children had played outside and dug caves in the soft, slumping banks, and they had shouted and thrown pebbles up into the blue sky; now they peeped through frozen panes at the flying flakes in the air, then scampered back to the fire, their fingers wrapped up in their pinafores. Winter had swooped upon them so unexpectedly.

Little stricken groups huddled over cracked stoves, and waited for this thing to pass. Everything passes in its own sweet time. They were always waiting. A tremor of terror possessed the tiniest as the wind howled in the chimneys.

Men swore loudly and stamped their soggy boots upon the snowy decks, as they tugged at great piles of stiff rope, and brought their frozen nets in to thaw; rubbed their ears and slapped their hands and blamed the women folks.

"Pretty howdy! Bank friz till a cat couldn't scratch it. Winter's come sure 'nough."

Dogs cringed on deck, watching a chance to dodge in between their masters' legs, their hind parts quaking with cold and terror, their fur standing in a bristling ridge along their spines. A few disgusted hens patrolled the icy banks, looking for a place to scramble up, the wind whipping their feathers into ruffs.

A gaunt figure emerged from the drift pile, carrying a load. Meg Meyers had outstayed the other women, and had succeeded in kicking enough sticks loose to fill her arms.

"Washin' on a day like this!"

The neighbor women snorted their contempt as they watched her from the warmth of their own firesides. Only babes and idiots would work in such weather.

She was a common sight along the banks carrying wood—when it was not wood it was a bundle of clothes—to and from the village. Her line of drying clothes was the one white spot in the Duck's Nest. It was never empty.

The wind whipped the woman's scarf out in long ragged lengths, and tore at her thin cotton skirts. She seemed such a frail thing to withstand its fury. She pushed against it fiercely, though she made small headway.

"Seem's though even the wind's agin me," she said bitterly.

An old boat—in the very bottom of the Nest was what she made for—a dilapidated boat, gray with mold and burdened with litter. It had one window, from which a pane was missing. Rags had been stuffed in to keep out the cold.

She threw her load of icy sticks down by the stove. The fire was low, only a few smoldering embers showed in the dull ashes. She raked them carefully to the hearth; then sorted out the dryest pieces from her load, knocking the ice off upon the floor.

In one corner stood a basket of clothes, and upon them slept a child. The woman unwound the tangled scarf from her head, and tried to thaw the chill from her numbed fingers. Then she went over and lifted the top garment carefully. The child was sleeping, its little skinny fists clenched; its naked, weazened legs drawn into a knot. She tucked extra cover round it, and went back to the fire.

The wood was sizzling and sputtering miserably, and the wind, whisking down the chimney, blew the smoke in the woman's face. She felt the water in the boiler. It was not yet warm. She sat down, and began hopelessly to blow at the sickly flame.

A man came kicking his way in, cursing because he found the little cabin comfortless. A gust of icy air came with him. The crouching figure shivered.

He looked over the untidy table, where was small prospect of a noonday meal, and at the preparations for washing.

"You sure is a right smart housekeeper," he taunted her sneeringly. "I'm proud of you, I am. Dishes not washed, hey? Jest like you-uns shiftlessness." He sent a stream of tobacco juice sizzling into the ashes over which the woman stooped.

"Git up from there!" he commanded. "Down a wallerin' in the mess. Is you-uns a haug, to be a wallerin' that-a-way? Git up!" he commanded again, giving an impatient poke with the toe of his wet boot.

The woman rose stiffly and faced him, her attitude one of defiance.

"Leave me alone!" she cried fiercely. Her eyes were like coals.

His ugly mouth was sneering. "Huh! Who minds what you-uns says, anyhow? You is a poor no-count critter. I hain't a needin' to be so p'tic'lar 'bout what I says to you-uns." He went close and leered threateningly into her face, his great brute hands clenched.

"Lucky man I am a gittin' me such a peart woman," he went on insultingly. "I aims I cheated Jake Sheffles outen a heap when I got you. If he could see you-uns now, I reckon he'd be eased in his mind concernin' his loss. You sure be a sorry bargain for any man to grieve hisself over. Come — don't look none o' your sass at me! I aims to be boss around here. Go, get my gun. You mind!"

She went slowly, and took it down from the wall.

"I hopes you-uns'll shoot yo'self. I do!" she cried bitterly. "I don't see why the Lord lets the likes o' you live. You hain't fitten to live nohow."

He laughed an evil, taunting laugh. She watched him as he climbed stolidly up the bank, his coarse red neck beaten upon by the wind and sleet. He turned as he reached the top and spat back at the little boat, a great yellow stain that soiled the roily water below.

II.

"I BELIEVE to the Lord I hates him," muttered the woman desperately, as she went back to the fire.

The wet sticks were still sputtering and smoking. It was useless to hope for flame. She sat down and folded her hands in her lap, with a sense of relief, that he was gone for the day. Once the baby in the basket stirred, but the mother did not rise to go to him. The clothes were warm. It was best to sleep. Sleep brought oblivion. A memory of the man's insolence haunted her. It was not the first time he had twitted her of being "no 'count."

"If I was as no-'countin as him I'd die," she said resentfully. "He's the no-'countin'est critter that ever lived on yea'th." She looked sullenly into the dead ashes. "Me to stay and be beat o- by him!" she said.

The vision of a pleasant farmhouse back in God's country rose before her—the thrift of her comfortable little mother, the dignity of her gray-haired father.

"Oh, Lord! If my poppy could see me now!" she groaned.

The smarting red that the wind had whipped into her face changed to a stagnant purple. She seemed to have forgotten the fire, but put her cold hands under her apron and sat thinking. The slush from her load of sticks melted and ran down into a sickening puddle at her feet—a handbreath of porch strewn with roses, pink and yellow ramblers; a young girl sitting there in the sunlight, rose-leaves drifting down upon her hair. The woman stirred uneasily. Her hand went up to her head, rough and uncombed. It had been long since she had wandered from God's country. Roses, and over her own window a white honeysuckle, emblem of purity, planted by a mother's hand. "Oh, Lord, to think of me now!" her thoughts reproached her.

She bowed her head at a vision of her mother, meek and patient, moving through the rooms, trying to teach her child. How far astray had the feet gone? The woman groveled in the dust, thinking of the fatal hour of rebellion.

"Seems like I'd paid for my sins. Hain't I suffered enough, I wonder?"

The baby began to cry—a wailing, hopeless cry. The mother took him up and held his cold feet to the stove.

"There—there!" she said. "There—there!"

The child wept himself to sleep again in her cotton skirts. She stroked the thin hair on his head with her numb fingers. There was nothing she could do for him. She had ceased to promise the child that it would ever be different.

"'Twould be a heap better if the likes of us was dead," she told him bitterly.

The wind outside grew louder, and sleet rasped the bit of glass in the window. Now and then a cake of rough ice grated the gunwales on the river side. The small boat tossed unsteadily and tried its frozen moorings.

And back there was the fireplace, always bright with a crackling log, and the great swinging iron pot ever full. Her eyes sought the wretched cupboard here, its door hanging by one hinge. There was only a plate of cold bacon and a half loaf of corn bread inside, she knew.

"We'd throw the likes o' that to the haugs back in God's country," she thought bitterly. "To think what I've been raised to," she sighed. "It 'pears like raisin' don't count nohow." She took the baby's cramped feet in her hand.

The memory of her own little bedroom, with its crisp curtains and snowy counterpane, haunted her; of the little armed rocker, where she used to sit, singing, at tasks. She thought of the dear knitted head-rest and the cushion made from a piece of her mother's dress. And there was the table strewn with her girlish trinkets, and the orderly wicker basket, with its lumps of undarned stockings and waiting patches.

And the bright rag carpet underfoot. She remembered the pattern, red and green, edged with black. "Lord forgive me!" she groaned. "If I could only have known the end."

A mighty swell came and shook the boat from prow to stern, and bent the feeble spar-pole threateningly. The stiff ropes creaked under the added strain. Overhead the storm thickened.

The woman's eyes traveled slowly over the squalor that surrounded her. The floor was her bed now—the floor and a litter of rags. She must hold the baby close to her breast on cold nights lest it freeze.

"Seems like I'd done some sin fittin' for torment," she said bitterly.

She thought of the days when she had planned for her "setting out." There were ten quilts and a goose-feather bed, six sets of bed-linen, all sewed by hand. In the little cushioned rocker beside her mother she had sat and learned the stitches. There had been table-linen and towels, all hemmed by her own hands. Something of the sweet girlish dreams she had woven in with the stitches came back, too—the love and the happiness that was to come to her with these things. Oh, so far had she missed the way!

There had been dainty cushions, all done in silk. Her mother had taught her to embroider. And she could sew. She thought of the good wool dresses she had made for herself. Contemptuously she touched the garment that clothed her.

"Rags like this wa'n't fittin' for mops back in God's country," she said.

There had been the garden, with its rows of sage and mint, its clumps of

carroway and its dill, and the long hedge of currant leading from the gate. Away beyond, stretching up from the river-banks, were her father's fields, clean and thrifty, and proud in summer with the fruits of a good sowing. She remembered how she had enjoyed to wade through the billows of ripening grain. There had been no want then, nor sorrow.

Just below the bend, where she had gone to dance in the sun and splash her bare feet, had stood the fisherman's cabin, gray and solid against the western sky. From her earliest infancy she had seen it there, and had known that Jake Sheffles was a faithful man. She pictured now his sturdy, sea-beaten figure braving the waves, the earnest lines of his face that never changed. And she had been a fickle maid, laughing ever to mock him. Now the humble hut upon the sands would have been a haven of peace and rest. She thought of it as a beacon reaching out sheltering arms, though powerless to save her.

She laid the baby back in its basket. A box was in the corner. She went to it. The top was piled high with rubbish—cotton rags and worn shoes. She threw them off impatiently. From underneath she took a little crotcheted mat of red and green—a rose in its leaves. It was soiled. Moths had eaten away a part of the pattern, but she sat flat, and spread the thing upon her knee. Her cold fingers traced how the stitches went. She rummaged farther. There was a dirty linen frame, bent and disfigured—a useless thing; but she touched it reverently, feeling the frayed silk forget-me-nots in the corner. It had been pretty once, and had hung above the stand and held her mother's picture. Through all the years she had clung to it. She laid it down now beside the moth-eaten mat.

Next came a tiny trim-toed slipper, with a rusty black silk bow and a silver buckle. She snatched it from the rubbish fiercely. Once she had worn that. She held it down beside the sogged, run-over calfskin upon her foot; then she laughed, a hard, bitter laugh, that made the baby stir in his sleep. The wet sticks in the stove ceased to sputter and smoke. The wind howled louder, and wrenched at the little boat more madly.

She found a silk half-mitt, and went seeking its mate. When she found it she drew them upon her hands. There was a cluster of faded ribbon knots that once she had worn upon her bodice. She picked at the loops helplessly. There in her lap was all that was left to her of God's country.

Then she thought of the vacant place at the warm fireside—the empty cushioned chair; thought of the lonely mother wandering in the silent rooms—the feeble father. It waited still—the upturned plate on the snowy cloth, the little room with the white honeysuckle trailing the pane—a place to pray. But her thin lips grew whiter, thinner. She was an exile from God's country now.

III.

Outside, the waves were tearing at the boat's stern. One of the lines had given way, and trailed uselessly in the water; but the woman did not know.

She had chosen between them—that and this. It was too late now. There was no going back. She had chosen. She faced the squalor defiantly. If she must suffer, they should not know. It was too late to undo what she had done. Pride drew her face into firm lines. Though they were but a few miles from the old home, she could never go back. In the spring they were going to drift away into the Mississippi; then, perhaps, it would be easier to forget.

She sat stroking the faded things miserably while she dreamed on and on. The sky grew darker, but it was not night. The storm was thickening. Underneath, the boat's hull was quivering, straining like a tortured thing. Something snapped, but it did not penetrate the woman's dulled consciousness. So like were the strugglings of the fettered boat to the travail of her tortured soul.

Then there was a mighty lunge that sent the water gushing in along the gunwales. It startled her to her feet stupidly. She thought of the ice floating in the river, of the drift loosening up above. She stood helplessly in the center of the room. Perhaps *he* was coming back. She turned to tuck her scattered treasures from sight. "Kickin' and cussin'," she said, and then she waited for him to come in, but he did not.

The boat gave another lunge, and

white froth hissed at the window. She ran to the door. A black gulf of water stretched between her and the bank. Through a swirling cloud of snow she could see bush and snag and bank passing swiftly. The last boat in the Duck's Nest was but an uncertain blur in the distance. If she had called, perhaps some passing fisherman would have heard her voice; but she stood dumb, fascinated, watching things pass.

A fallen tree stretched its sprawling limbs toward her. One of them grated the boat's side. She could have thrown a line, but she did not even stoop to gather up a rope. The boat caught in an eddy at the tree's crown, and whirled about madly—only a moment. A great wave clutched the stern and pulled it out again into the current.

Still there was a chance. The great calling-horn hung at her hand, but she did not reach to take it down. If she should call, boats would row out and take her in, but she stood, staring back, with horror-stricken face—back at the hateful frozen banks, with their scattered drift, their heaps of rotten rubbish. She was leaving them behind—leaving them forever.

A sense of relief mingled with the horror of it—a sudden joy in freedom. She thought she saw a black figure waving wildly where the boat had been tied, but she did not open her mouth to call. She was being hurled away from it all. She stood fascinated till the last familiar thing was lost to sight.

Old seamen on shore, protecting their eyes from the storm, peered through the darkness, and wondered at the tiny speck they saw. The storm obliterated its shape. They went back, shaking their heads doubtfully.

Then a great terror possessed the woman. The boat was plunging and pitching helplessly; great waves broke in froth along the gunwales, and washed the handbreadth of rotten decking. It was bearing into the channel—into the midst of the floating ice. Huge cakes grated and crushed against its sides threateningly. She could no longer see land. The swirling storm wrapped the boat about like a cloud. Once she tried to cry out, but her throat had gone dry and hard. Nowhere was there rest—rolling sky, rolling sea. The tiny boat was thrown like a chip from wave to wave, its timbers creaking with every fresh onslaught.

In terror she ran to the stern, then she grabbed a bucket and began to bail desperately. Cold, hissing froth spat defiance as she bent over the port-hole. She was thrown from side to side of the little fore-cabin. Still she persisted, with grim desperation. Her face had blanched to a sickly pallor, her eyes were black with terror. Great jams of ice were gathering. By and by they would close in upon the little boat, and crush it as though it had been a paper box.

The water came up to the floor. It was gaining. Soon it would ooze through the cracks. It was useless to bail. It was only as a drop in a bucket. She straightened her back and stood watching the ice rise in mighty piles that were higher than the boat's roof—listening to a sound that was like the grinding of teeth. It would soon be over.

She tottered to where the child lay—still sleeping. There was no terror in its little face. She looked at it, and found her own fears suddenly growing calm. It would be easy to go so. She laid her cheek down beside the baby's soft, thin hair, and cooed to him tenderly: "There—there!" She gathered the little clenched fist in her hand and waited.

She lost all sense of time as she lay there listening to the horrible sound of clashing ice and timbers. Presently it seemed to flash slowly upon her numbed senses that the boat was growing stiller; that the sounds were less. She thought they were sinking, and waited, but the water did not come higher. She sprang up and looked out. The ice jam had gone ashore. An eddy anchored them fast.

The woman found her voice then. She shouted. She grabbed the heavy pike-pole and began wrestling with the bulk of ice that held her back from land. One by one she forced them back and drew herself a little nearer. She worked till sweat stood in beads on her face, in spite of the cold; worked till the veins were like whipcord in her long, angular arms, and throbbing in knots at her temples; beat at the great, formidable masses and chipped them away, piece by piece,

till they no longer obstructed her pathway.

And at last she was near enough; so near that, with the child in her arms, she leaped to the land—the land! They were safe. She hugged the little one close, and went, sobbing, up the bank.

IV.

JAKE SHEFFLES, honest fisherman, standing in his own cabin door, lifted a lantern and swung it high over his head—swung it again and again. Perchance some luckless traveler might be guided safe to shore. The woman saw it, and a great joy filled her heart, though she knew not why. It was like a beacon. She felt sure that it was the light that had beckoned her.

She snuggled the child in her skirt and ran on and on—across a field of frozen corn-stubble, into a meadow that was spongy to her feet. The sky grew lighter, the snow swirled less madly. She could see the way—a row of orchard trees, a great red barn in the distance. She stumbled on. Something familiar flashed upon the woman—an orchard-swing dangling from the trees, holding its burden of snow; long rows of currant leading up to a gate. Then she saw the house, the withered rose-vine clinging to the front porch, the clambering honeysuckle against the window. Surely this was no delusion. She lifted her head.

There in the window was a waiting face, a patient, tender face—her mother. The door opened, and a thin little woman ran out into the storm with a glad cry. Behind her tottered an aged man, his face suddenly illumined with hope.

"Father—mother!" She felt herself being drawn into loving arms. Gradually the ice closed in again upon the deserted boat, and the insistent current bore it out.

Up river that night a man stood, leaning upon his gun-stock, and looking out upon the calming waters that had robbed him of home and family. After a moment's contemplation he turned again to the bank and stooped to pick up a bundle of dead hares at his feet.

"She warn't no 'count, nohow," he said, with an ugly laugh. "Rotten, an' the corkin' all punked out o' her. She bean't no great loss. Been a lookin' f'r 'er t' go t' pieces this year back. She didn't cost me a cent, an' I've floated 'er since '90. Guess she don't owe me nothin'. Let the devil take 'er. There was a right smart heap o' junk on 'er, though." Some little shade of regret passed over his face. "Dubbs is a payin' a sight f'r junk."

Almost for the sake of the junk he would have gone down the river a piece with his pike, but he didn't. He went to hunt up Daddy Dave, and get him to cook the hares.

A HOLLY-BOUGH.

A HOLLY-BOUGH am I
Under the winter sky,
Fain of the sun, and fain
Of the snow and rain!

Never a touch of grief
Hides in the sheen of my leaf;
Spars of joy in an urn—
Thus my berries burn!

A holly-bough am I,
And I typify—
Swaying and gleaming above—
The glory of Love!

Archibald Crombie.

THE KING TO COME.

BY EDGAR FRANKLIN.

A SERIAL STORY.

CHAPTER I.

THE MAN WHO ASKED QUESTIONS.

SOMEHOW, if I looked at it for any considerable time, the glitter of the sun on the blue of the South Atlantic always made me desperately sleepy.

Certainly it did on this particular morning, as we sat at a table on the veranda of the old Posada Republica, and smoked and stared down at the flattest and most uninteresting piece of water-front in all South America.

Or perhaps the chronic somnolence of La Concha, the laziest and the largest city of the two-by-four republic of Bonaria, had something to do with it, too. And Bonaria is the spot Rip Van Winkle should have picked when he started his long-distance sleeping stunt. If he could have survived the mosquitoes and their first, second and third cousins, he wouldn't have burst into type before the year two thousand two hundred.

Anyway, I remember that my eyes were pretty well closed, and I was drifting off into a dream about what I'd do with fifty million dollars, when Wendell kicked my foot under the table—and I sat up, and said:

"Huh?"

"Wake up, you confounded dope!" snapped Mr. James Wendell.

"What do you want, Jim?"

"Well, we were discussing the future before you went into the trance."

"Were we?" I yawned. "Well, let's cut it out for to-day. It's getting too hot."

Jim must always be the forceful, though. He planted his big elbows on the table and glared at me through the smoke of the worst cigar I ever met, save the one that was giving an imitation of a Roman candle under my nose just then, and he fairly snarled:

"We can't cut it out! Day after to-morrow, if that blasted fruit-steamer ever gets ready to sail, we'll be on the way to New York. A week or so more, and we'll be there, and then—"

"And then?"

"And then what are we going to do for a living, Tommy Cook?" Jim sat back and grunted. "We'll have about three hundred apiece, cold cash, then. We have no jobs. We have no immediate prospect of getting jobs. We can't start a trust or bust Wall Street on six hundred dollars. What, then, are we going to do?"

"For a start, I imagine we're going to find a cheap boarding-house. Then we're going to look over ads and look up old connections, in the way of getting work—and after that we're going to do the best we can."

Jim grunted again, and threw away his fuming bit of fireworks — threw it far over the terrace, so as to be safe in case of explosion when it landed.

"And that's a dandy situation for two college men nearly thirty-five years old!" he observed as he stared over the water.

There wasn't much answer to that comment; still, I didn't see why Jim should settle down and gloom about it at that particular date, and with a big, cherry-black fly sitting on the bridge of his nose and biting pieces out of it, Bonaria fashion.

Just about the same situation had brought us together six years ago. We were both, apparently, children of misfortune. We had grown up in fairly wealthy families, in different parts of

the country; we had both been shoved through college; we had both seen the family finances go to pieces; we had both dropped suddenly on the world, orphans, and impoverished — and almost simultaneously.

Then, meeting in New York, we had suddenly clubbed forces and finances, and made the best of it. We had clerked, we had traveled, we had ended up in the metropolis as "sporting" writers at last, and the final venture had been this endless job of escorting two ship-loads of thoroughbreds to South America in good shape. Now we were on the way back and—

"For one thing," Jim observed, as he captured the fly and stamped on him, "it shows the great, overwhelming beauty of a general college course. If we'd been made engineers, or lawyers, or doctors, or chemists, or scientific farmers, we'd have something definite to look for in the way of employment. As it is—"

"As it is, racing news has gone to pot in New York, and we'll have to find something else to write up and make a fortune out of."

"Yes! That's what we want!" said Jim brightly. "We want to make a fortune! I mean it! We're bright enough to do it, Tom—there's no doubt of that! We can adapt ourselves in seven minutes to any blasted situation on earth! We're not cut out for the little things of life! We were made for the big ones! We're going to land a way, way, way up, sooner or later! And the later it is, the more we'll appreciate it, for we were born to—"

"Well, that'll be about all now!" I suggested soothingly.

"Eh?"

"The Bonaria Federal Commissioner of Lunacy has just stepped in. He's coming this way, and he's got his eye on you."

Jim turned and stared in an ugly sort of way that suggested throwing a few tables and glasses at any one who dared invade that veranda.

And then he almost smiled. That newcomer was a man of remarkably pleasant and ingratiating appearance!

He was! I have met men almost all over the world, but I never met a man so absolutely striking at first glance as this tall, slender gentleman in the black frock coat who came strolling down toward us. He must have been well over six feet; he had the build of an athlete, and the bearing of a man whose position in the world is perfectly assured and impregnable.

His dark face, with its small black mustache and its close-cropped, curling frame of crisp black hair, looked more like an artist's conception than a flesh-and-blood reality — until his black eyes began to snap and twinkle. Then one began to know that something distinctly superior was in the neighborhood and very much alive.

Slowly, steadily, almost majestically, he stepped down that veranda; until finally he seemed to see that Jim and I were occupying the same earth.

He started a trifle. He smiled. He stopped and removed his hat—and I'll be eternally hanged if Jim and I didn't reach for our respective top-pieces and execute a pair of sweeps that nearly touched the floor!

Whereupon the stranger laid a hand on the vacant chair and bowed again with:

"Your permission, gentlemen?"

I fancy we both stared. With that face and bearing, he shouldn't have known a word of English. I thought he was a full-blooded Spaniard, at the least; and yet his words, barring the slightest foreign intonation, were the real Harvard article!

Jim all but blushed as he got up and pushed out the chair.

"Sit right down," he said. "We're not expecting anybody."

The gentleman sat down with an ease that suggested more than a correspondence course in Delsarte. He landed in that chair as if he owned chair, veranda, hotel, La Concha, Bonaria itself, and the rest of the world, and didn't take any marked interest in any of them except ourselves.

"It is a fine morning," he said as he removed his hat and ran his long, thin fingers through his hair. "A fine morning, gentlemen, even for La Concha."

"It's a nice—day!" Jim said. Just then I was rather glad he was the spokesman for us two. For a little, that newcomer had taken my breath away.

"A fine morning." He nodded and smiled again. Then he fished out a nice little gold-and-seal cigar-case and displayed something real in the line of rolled tobacco, and said: "You smoke?"

We did. We allowed him to clip off the ends with his gold clip, and we allowed him to light a match for us. After that, he tossed his hat to another chair and unfurled that smile with:

"English, gentlemen?"

"American!" I said.

"I knew it. Pardon me," he laughed. "To me, it's always a pleasure to hear that very prompt contradiction." He played with his little mustache. "A wonderful country—the United States."

"You've traveled there?" I managed to ask.

"From—as you say—Maine to California, and Florida to Puget Sound. A wonderful country and a wonderful people! Ah!"

"She's all of that!" Jim agreed cheerfully.

"You are making the tour of South America?" the stranger inquired interestedly.

"Well, we're coming up from a few hundred miles farther south. We're going to take the steamer for New York."

"Your home?"

"Yes," said Jim.

"And you have been looking over the rich plantation properties to the south!" mused our friend. "Ah, the ever-enterprising American! So does he go to the farthest corners of the earth, with his money and his—as you say—'ginger'!"

It would have been a shame to contradict him. If he wanted to look on us as capitalists, it was a pleasure; being the first time anything of the sort had happened. I said nothing and smiled. So did Jim. After a while the stranger smiled too, and pursued:

"And now, back to the great New York?"

"As soon as we can get there?"

"You are—planters, perhaps?"

"Well—not exactly," Jim admitted.

"Merely for the pleasure, then, this trip?"

"That and what we can make out of it."

"I see." The stranger nodded comprehendingly, and his smile became even more genial. "The—the—shall I say the soldiers of fortune, perhaps?"

"I guess that'll fit us as near as anything," I said grimly.

"And perhaps, of all, it is the best way for men of good red blood to live," said our friend enthusiastically. "The wide, free world! The good sound of battle, whether with steel or with dollars! The strife—the victory! Then on to new fields!"

He waved his hands with really impressive and illustrative grace; and then, as Jim nodded soberly, he said:

"And you have fought in real wars, too—eh?"

"We did our time in the cavalry squadron, somewhere back around New York," came from Jim.

It sounded real well, too, considering that our active service consisted of two weeks in camp and two Decoration Day parades. But the stranger filled in the gaps, apparently, from his own imagination; for his eyes narrowed.

"And now that you are returning to your own country," he speculated gravely, as if talking to himself, "what then? You will live in idleness for a while? You will tell yourselves that you desire the great quiet and peace? Presently will come the *wanderlust* once more and you will go forth." He smiled at his cigar. "But for a time—the idleness."

This cross-examination romance business was getting on my nerves. Somehow escaped me:

"It'll be a blamed short time, then. We'll have to get to work or starve!"

"Eh?" The stranger opened his eyes. "Oh! *You have not the wealth?*"

"Not so's you'd notice it!" said Jim.

"And you desire wealth?" He was getting downright interested now.

"We could stand more than we have without risking a collapse."

"So that already you are looking for new fields?" murmured our friend.

With that, he fell silent and took to studying us. It was a nice process. Facing those sharp, black eyes, I, personally, felt more or less like a butterfly—already classified, but with the chloroform and the pin and the gummed label right at hand. They seemed to go through you, and around you, and inside.

Pretty soon he turned away from me and took to examining Jim—and Jim wriggled around and grinned apologetically.

Then, with a suddenness that made us both start, that tall person flopped forward and stretched out both his hands.

One of them caught Jim's fist and the other caught mine, and the stranger gripped hard. His eyes flashed; then they grew quieter and narrower, and extremely intense. He looked all over the empty veranda, at doors and windows and all; and then:

"Gentlemen!"

We stared.

"Will you give me the most kind permission to make you both millionaires?"

CHAPTER II.

THE FACTS AND THE PLOT.

THERE was nothing offensive in that, of course.

Even a chance acquaintance may offer to make you a millionaire, without any offense being intended. But it is just a little bit unusual on hot days in Bonaria—and I glanced at Jim, and Jim was glancing at me; and we both understood, or thought we understood.

Our tall and handsome friend was due for a little ride in a nice, comfortable, padded ambulance, if La Concha sported such a thing, and then about five days in the observation pavilion. Meanwhile, he was sitting right here, and, for all we knew, he might have half a dozen guns concealed around him; and he might change his mind suddenly and decide that death would be better for us than wealth—and if I could have seen a La Concha policeman just then, I'd have risked everything in making a dive for him.

The unknown's grip on us tightened and then let go, and he sat back and let his eyes do a few more fantastic, glittering stunts as he said:

"You are willing, gentlemen?"

"I haven't the least objection in the world to being a millionaire," I said soothingly.

"And you are willing to risk much—adventure, danger, your lives even?"

"For a million dollars—" Jim began.

"Good! It is done!" The stranger leaned forward, snapped his fingers, and it was pretty plain that the whole matter was settled. All we had to do was collect the million and settle down in peace and comfort.

"My card, gentlemen!"

He shoved it forward from his little gold case, and we read:

Mr. ARTURO VELASQUEZ.

"My name—*for the present!*" Mr. Velasquez found a cigarette and lighted it. "And your own?"

Curiously, Jim and I still possessed cards. We handed them out, and the dark man glanced at them and pocketed them.

"Mr. Wendell and Mr. Cook? Good! Gentlemen, can you begin at once?"

"Well—begin what?" I asked in a sort of temper, for the lunatic's absolute air of business was beginning to confuse me a little.

"The work which is to make you millionaires," smiled Mr. Velasquez. "Ah, you seem incredulous?" He laughed aloud. "You regard me as—shall I say, mentally unbalanced? Believe me, you are altogether wrong, Mr. Cook. In the course of the next two days I shall show you, with your help, that I am quite, as you say, 'all there'!" He chuckled again and played up his magnetic eyes, and all of a sudden, considering Jim's serious face and the rest, I was ready to swear that Velasquez was decidedly "all there."

"May we begin work within fifteen minutes?"

"I haven't any objection."

"Better still. Listen. There are matters to be talked of which cannot be discussed here. I shall leave you at once. Exactly ten minutes after my departure, walk out slowly. You will find a cab waiting. Enter it."

With which he found his hat, bowed, and strolled out of sight around the corner as calmly as if he had merely arranged to meet us for lunch!

The next ten minutes can be left out. As a rule, Jim and I fight hard over any particular point that may come up—and Jim wins. Therefore, precisely ten minutes later, we arose and walked through the hotel to the street in front.

The cab was there, all right enough. It was a sinister kind of thing, too. It had something the air of a hearse, and the half-breed Bonarian darky on the box had managed to twist his parted hair until it stuck up at either side like a horn, and gave him the appearance of the Old Scratch. He looked at us significantly and nodded, and we walked in.

As a matter of fact, we hadn't seen much of La Concha during the couple of days we had put in. Now we were given a real treat in the way of a drive through the town and suburbs.

We went through the one-horse business section; we passed the palace, where the president held forth; we took a glimpse of the other state buildings—and if a business block in Cohoes or Kokomo looked half as wretched and unimportant and generally poor, the owners would have burned it down for the insurance long ago. Then we passed the residential end of the town and jogged along through the suburbs; and at last we pulled up before a tumble-down villa that was white before it turned grayish-black.

This was the place. A darky trotted out and opened the door, and we walked after him. He seemed to know all about us. He took us to a big, dark room on the first floor and closed the door on us.

Another darky popped up across the apartment and beckoned; and then we stumbled up a darker stairway and into a still darker cubby-hole of some sort.

"Knock three times, *señors!*" he said in the hashed-up Spanish they use down there.

Then he popped out of sight again down the stairway. Jim looked around. There was something that looked like a door just ahead of us, and he tapped it thrice. Very promptly came:

"Enter!"

We did it. We were in a room of ordinary size and extraordinary appearance for the tropics. In the middle of it, at a table, sat Mr. Velasquez, smiling and magnetic as usual. Around the walls were hangings heavy enough to deaden the sound of a shot, and as we closed the door Velasquez pressed a button and a thick curtain dropped over it!

All in all, it was a pretty queer arrangement for that part of the world, where an ordinary lace curtain will conceal at least fifteen kinds of bugs ten minutes after you hang it up. When Velasquez's voice came again, it sounded as if we were all in a tomb.

"If you will take chairs, gentlemen?" he suggested. "Draw them near to the table, please. The walls have ears here, though I have tried to stop the ears."

We obeyed — Jim in a matter-of-fact way, as if he understood the point of the whole thing, and I with a sneaking suspicion that we were going to be sandbagged and relieved of the six hundred dollars we carried.

Velasquez, though, didn't look very ominous just then. He leaned his elbows on the table and smiled.

"There is much to talk about, gentlemen, and much to do, and the time is very short indeed. If you will give me your fullest attention for ten minutes?"

We nodded.

"For a beginning, then, the work which I propose to have you do is that of building an empire!"

I gulped. Jim just nodded again; you might have thought that Jim was used to knocking together a few empires every week in his odd moments, about as a man sets up knocked-down furniture on rainy evenings.

"You are familiar with the history of Bonaria?" Velasquez pursued. "Not fully? At least you know, then, that some fifty years ago the king was assassinated—King Juan—and the country seized by the revolutionary party and made a republic, which it has remained to this day?"

We both nodded. Somewhere I seemed to have heard something about it.

"It was murder—the foulest and most unjustified of all murders!" Velasquez went on, with his black eyes snapping. "It was the slaughter of a grand, noble, innocent man by a rabid political clique! Even to-day, the great mass of the people remember only with love the great King Juan. So!"

He folded his long arms and smiled very queerly.

"They've had their presidents and their presidents since then. Some have been bad, some worse; this Silviera is the worst of all—and yet, through the machinations of the clique, he has been

elected to a second term of office. To-morrow afternoon at five o'clock, before the palace, the people suppose that the inaugural ceremonies will take place, and Silviera take his second oath of office!"

"Too bad we're going to miss it!" I said. "Our boat goes about that time!"

"You are not alone in your regret, although the others do not yet know it," smiled Mr. Velasquez. "Silviera will never be sworn into office, for—at five to-morrow the true King of Bonaria will be hailed by the populace!"

"Huh?" said Jim.

Velasquez rose very slowly and expanded his chest. He looked at Jim and he looked at me, and he said gently:

"I am the grandson of Juan the Martyr! I am Juan Cario y Demina, the King of Bonaria!"

I presume it should have been impressive, but it didn't impress me a little bit. It just confirmed what I had thought before — that Mr. Velasquez had something a little wrong with his mental carbureter, which might be straightened out by a few years in a sanatorium.

Jim seemed hard hit, though. He stared and bowed and stared some more, and Mr. Velasquez, or King Juan, or whatever he was, sat down again and plunged into some more feverish talk:

"I am indeed the king! Fifty years has our family lived in Spain, as refugees. My father would have claimed the throne but that he was all his life an invalid. On his death-bed, scarcely a year ago, he told me everything, to the smallest detail, and ordered me to return here and seize that which is my birthright. I have come! To-morrow, I seize! Thereafter—ah!"

He and Jim both seemed tickled to death with the idea, for I could see Jim's eyes glittering a little on their own account. Mr. Velasquez got up again and trained his own fiery orbs on us.

"To-morrow at five, when the hound Silviera is coming to the palace, *I* shall rise before the multitude and come into my birthright! It will be, I think, without strife, for our people well remember Juan the Martyr. If not—a little blood for a great cause! What is it? It is that, gentlemen, in which you are to assist me, and I assure you the reward shall not be small!" He nodded and smiled. "When the little strife is over, if strife there be, you, gentlemen, shall be prime minister and chancellor of the exchequer respectively! I give you my royal word!"

I had a brother once that was studying law, and he used to try cross-examination stunts on me. Somehow, this story-book king business brought back the old instinct. It was all making a big hit with Jim, but it hadn't entirely convinced me—just yet—and I sat back and asked:

"Have you got the public with you, Mr. Velasquez?"

As I figured, he should have turned ugly. Instead, he just sat down and said very quietly:

"I have been here in seclusion for nearly two months, Mr. Cook. During that time, I and my agents have sounded every quarter of public sentiment. I can say very safely that, at the signal, seventy-five per cent of my people will stand together on the instant for their only true government!"

"Sure of it?"

"Absolutely." He waved his hand. "The time has come now when I have grown too conspicuous, although I believe the so-called authorities have not noted my presence or suspected my identity. Until to-morrow afternoon I must remain hidden. There are several final details to be accomplished. These I propose to entrust to you. That is all, and your reward shall be very good."

"All the reward an American needs for putting the right on the top of the pile—" Jim began grandly.

"Mr. Velasquez!" I said loudly.

"Well?"

"I hate to seem to question you, but we're both business men—Mr. Wendell and I. As I take it, you want us to risk a good deal?"

"I want you to stand by me, to do as I direct, to fight if necessary, and for substantial gain. That, I believe, satisfies the American business man?"

"It does, if he knows what he's doing it for. You—you'll have to excuse me, but how the dickens do we know you're king at all?"

Velasquez glowered at me for a minute or two. Then his expression softened into a sort of Christian tolerance for any imbecile that could doubt him.

He leaned back in his chair and smiled. He fished into the inner side of his waistcoat, and seemed to be undoing something. Then he brought into sight a huge black leather wallet, nearly two inches thick, and spread it out on the table.

"You have heard, I know, of the crown jewels of Bonaria—the jewels which disappeared at the death of Juan the Martyr? They are world history."

"I remember!" said Jim earnestly.

Velasquez said nothing. He just undid that wallet and turned out a collection of gems that would have blinded a regiment on a sunny day.

"The Demina ruby!" he announced, holding up a pigeon-blood stone as big as an egg.

He reached down again, and brought up a diamond nearly the size of a paving-block.

"The Cario blue diamond—the diamond which has been in the dynasty since its founding, and which can be traced back, in the Cario house, to the eleventh century. Familiar as you must be with precious stones, you know that it has been valued conservatively at two millions of dollars!"

He reached again and displayed a pearl necklace, and another big bunch of diamonds caught on his little finger and hung there.

"The necklace of Queen Zania, my great-grandmother," he explained quietly, "and the royal tiara, worn by the queens of Bonaria since the founding of the kingdom. Here, too, are the jewels of the crown itself, and the diamonds of Queen Juanita. Here, also, is the Mendoza emerald and the Vannita sapphire, reputedly the largest in the world. The collection was secreted and removed by my father, then a half-grown boy, at the time of the flight to Spain. They are convincing—convincing at least that we shall not want for funds? Yes?"

They had finished me.

"You bet they are!" I cried. "I—"

"A little more quietly, Mr. Cook," smiled Velasquez. "Here" he held up a thin, black package—"here, gentlemen, are the secret archives of the realm. Documents which would convince you in one minute of my own identity. Are they, all in all, sufficient?"

Jim was on his feet. So was I. We reached across that table and grabbed Mr. Velasquez's hands and shook them, and Jim choked:

"They are!"

"And you are ready to serve me? To stand with me and fall with me if necessary?"

"It isn't going to be necessary," I said. "If you'll just unfold your scheme and give your orders—"

The man on the other side of the table took a last, long, searching look at us, and then gripped our hands the more tightly.

"I was not mistaken in my men!" he muttered. "I was not mistaken! You are, indeed, the two for whom I have sought so long in vain."

A genial warmth surged all through me. You may be as much a free-born American as you like; but when a king squeezes your hand and tells you that you're the individual whose absence from the picture has been keeping him awake, there is likely to be a mighty pleasant sensation somewhere inside of you.

Mr. Velasquez began talking again, very deeply and softly this time:

"You will be faithful to the death?" he said. "You will take my orders and follow them to the end? You will serve me as you would serve your own interests? You will allow no word of what I am about to reveal, to be dragged from you, even though torture comes? Speak."

"Yes!" roared Jim.

"Yes!" I roared.

The grip relaxed.

Mr. Velasquez reached into his back pocket; when the hand came forth, it held a long, jeweled dagger—an old, ornate thing, with a gold hilt and a wide crusting of gems. He took it by the blade and held it aloft.

"Gentlemen," he said very solemnly, "you see the blade which was taken from the body of my noble grandfather—the blade by which I have sworn to avenge him and restore the ancient rights of our royal line! On this dagger, gentlemen, swear your allegiance!"

Jim, with his eyes popping out, grabbed that dagger and slammed it against his lips, and planted a kiss on the golden hilt that you could have heard across the street.

And I'm hanged if I didn't catch the last limit of the infection and follow the example!

CHAPTER III.

IN THE SERVICE OF THE KING.

WE left that interesting house some two hours after lunch, which meant about four in the afternoon. We had had a real lunch, with real food and real fizzly wine; and it came pretty near to being the first genuine meal we had stumbled over since leaving New York. We had also had directions enough to fill a good-sized book, and all of them oral, for Velasquez—as he preferred to be called until the grand, spectacular stunt had been pulled off — allowed nothing to go in writing.

Further, we had left by a secret entrance at the rear of the house and walked over eleven blocks of blistering gridiron pavements to the burlesque version of a trolley line, that ran from the suburbs to the water-front.

Now we were back at our table on the Republica veranda—and I am bound to say that, personally, I was cooling off a little on the king business. There was something too big, and fantastic, and dreamy about the whole affair. After I'd stared the Atlantic Ocean out of countenance for a while, and made sure it was still in place, I said:

"What d'ye think of it, Jim?"

"Think of it?" Jim turned and looked at me amazedly. "I don't think anything about it. We've nailed the biggest cinch that ever was handed to two men, Tommy. That's the beginning and the end of it."

"And you think this stunt of making that cuss king is going to go through?"

Jim banged the table sturdily.

"Tom," he said, "I grasp big things quicker than you do—and that's no joke. We've got the whole situation at our finger-tips; we've got our instructions—and to-morrow at five that fellow'll be proclaimed king just as certainly—"

He broke off and looked at the red-hot sky, and his smile broadened like magic.

"And, after that, you for prime minister and me for the chancellorship of the exchequer!"

"Hold on!" I said. "That last job was mine. His majesty said so."

"Hush! Velasquez didn't say anything of the sort. There's more dignity in being prime minister, anyway!"

"Yes, and there's more cash in being chancellor of the exchequer!" I said.

"Well, it's going to be my job, Tommy, and I'll attend to the cash!" replied Jim.

"Well, I don't know whether it's going to be your job or not! Velasquez said very distinctly to me that I—"

And then the ridiculous side of the whole blasted thing struck me, and I began to laugh. Jimmy turned on me again, and snapped:

"It seems to me that you're treating this whole affair with a good deal of levity."

"Who the dickens wouldn't? There's nothing to it! That man's crazy as they make them. He's got the idea—"

"Whatever his idea may be, the proof of the pudding is the eating, isn't it?"

"Yes."

"He's given us instructions in every detail. He has made us his deputies to act for him in these last few hours of his seclusion?"

"Yes."

"Then we'll very soon have an opportunity to find out whether he's lying or not—and he isn't. At half past four, that—that—"

"General Tanzio?"

"Yes! The general of the First Army Corps is due to land here in plain clothes and report to us as to the general sentiment of the corps for to-morrow's fun. It's about half past four, and—"

"Here he comes!" I said.

He was coming, from the same spot in which Velasquez had made his first appearance. He was a fairly good-looking, dark-skinned little fellow, with a chest something over a foot deep and big, black eyes.

He walked down the veranda, and surveyed us as he passed; he slowed up, and Jim called very softly:

"Relampago!" that being the countersign and the password for the day.

The new man turned with a broad smile, shook hands, and sat down.

"The day is fine!" said he in his own version of English. That settled it. Ac-

cording to all instructions, that established his identity beyond a doubt; and Jim leaned forward and whispered:

"What is your report, general?"

"Nothing but of the good!" smiled Mr. Tanzio. "As one man, the First Army Corps of our glorious army stand together."

"For—"

"For King Juan the Second!" said the general, removing his hat.

"And if it comes to a fight to-morrow?" Jim asked excitedly.

"If there be battle on the morrow, *señor,* believe me I shall be there—*I,* with the First Army Corps! There will be swift victory for our sovereign!" answered the general, as he twirled his black mustache and expanded his chest a little farther. "But—pah! Of the republicans, what? Nothing, I say! A little protest, perhaps? It is nothing! A little shout—a shot, it may be. And then—King Juan!"

It sounded pretty good in his mixed up English. Some of my enthusiasm began to come back, and I was getting ready to ask questions, when the general arose in a matter-of-fact fashion and said:

"And now I go. By our king's command, upon that telephone, it was told me to come here and make the report. Most happily, there is of trouble nothing to say. I know you not, *señors,* yet"—he gave a last twist to his mustache—"I congratulate you upon your serving of—our king!"

He picked up my glass of the expensive wine we'd felt able to afford on the strength of the business, drank the whole thing after the fashion of a toast, saluted, and walked off!

Jim sat back and stretched his legs.

"The first detail seemed to work out all right!" he said complacently.

"There wasn't much to it," I said.

"It showed that Velasquez isn't a fake, anyway. I saw that little fellow in uniform in a carriage yesterday, and—"

Just here our esteemed landlord came trotting out, with a grin about ten times as genial as he had shown before. He stopped at the table and beamed:

"So! The *señors* are friends of our noble Tanzio? Ah!"

It wasn't much in itself, but he'd brought another bottle of wine on the strength of our high connections, and insisted that we drink it at his expense—and that was something, if you happen to know the average Bonario hotel-keeper.

"Now for the next job!" smiled Jim, when he had disappeared.

"The bill-posting job?"

"The task of getting the official proclamations of the king from the printing-office of *La Luna,* and placarding them all over town between midnight and morning! The proclamations, Tommy, which are going to bring this country back to its normal state—arouse the people to their proper senses—put the right on top, and—"

"Say, have we got any paste to stick 'em up with?" I asked suddenly.

Jim turned on me again.

"To the dickens with paste!" he thundered. "Haven't you got a mind above paste? Don't you realize that we—you and I—have been entrusted with a mission in restoring Velasquez to his own, and that the biggest part of that mission is getting those bills around town, so that to-morrow morning every mother's son in this capital city shall read them?"

I subsided.

We had dinner later, such as it was. Then we steered for the newspaper office of *La Luna.*

It wasn't much of a place, particularly as the electric-light bills hadn't been paid, and they were using kerosene-lamps that evening. It was the publishing plant of La Concha's smaller newspaper, and it was about as forsaken a spot as a man could have wanted for a good, comfortable suicide.

But, at any rate, it seemed able to print things, for *La Luna* was a survival of the old royalist idea, and appeared every morning in the week. Furthermore, it was in charge of a gentleman who spoke English very nearly as well as Velasquez himself.

He, too, was a peculiar little man. When he spoke, he twisted his lips into a circle and shot words at you, so that the general effect was that of standing in front of a stream of bullets.

He, too, was ready for the password; and when we gave it, he conducted us very quietly into an inner office and sat down in the desk-chair, with:

"Señors Wendell and Cook?"

I admitted it.

"From the king?"

There was no disputing that, either.

"The bills—they are ready. Myself, I have printed them alone at night, that none might know." He nodded. "To you is the task of placing them about the city?"

"Yes."

"Good. I give them to you."

He opened a desk and dragged out a roll of paper, something like a yard long and a foot thick. He extracted a poster and held it up.

I presume it was convincing. It had a pitch-black, ten-inch head, at any rate, and there were enough exclamation points in the text to spike a fence.

Jim, who knows more Spanish than I do, grunted his satisfaction over it, and our friend tore the thing in several thousand pieces and dropped it in his waste-basket.

"It is good," he said. "It tells our people what they should know. It announces the coming of their king. My work is done. The rest is for you!"

He held out the big roll, and Jim tucked it under his arm.

"You're going to do something pretty hot yourself in the way of a morning edition to-morrow, aren't you?" he said.

"*La Luna* for to-morrow morning will contain everything that should be said for our king!" responded her editor.

"Aren't you afraid?"

"No."

"Why?" persisted Jim. "Something might slip up."

"To me it is the same," said the *La Luna* gentleman. "When we go to press at twelve, I pack my bag and leave. Later, as the papers are on the wagons, my two assistants leave. We go by rail to Brazil!"

"And chuck up the whole thing—newspaper, plant and all?"

"It is nothing. Our king has bought and paid for *La Luna!*" said the owner placidly. "It is now the royal organ, and I leave satisfied."

He looked it, too. He was a wise man, that editor and owner of *La Luna*. He got his cash in advance, and stepped out before any stray avalanches could land on his gifted skull.

I said nothing. Jim tucked his sulfurous poster collection a little tighter and looked very wise.

We didn't go back to the hotel.

When you're meditating placarding the chief city of a republic with posters damning the present government up hill and down dale, sideways and through the center, you have to turn into a stage villain and walk around on tiptoe and speak through your teeth. Anyway, that was Jim's idea.

Therefore, we steered for the place to which the editor had directed us—the Café Something or Other, where everybody was a descendant of somebody who had grabbed a fat job under the former monarchy, and where everybody was now ready to upset the republic and grab another.

It was a smoky place, filled with a lot of fire-eaters, who flourished their arms and smoked cigarettes and talked in whispers about the coming of King Juan II.

Jim went out to find a wagon and some paste, and a royalist by name of Allio went along to help him. The crowd went on with its ranting, and I dozed. Ten o'clock came along, and eleven, and La Concha had subsided altogether. At twelve, I was taking a mental vote as to going back to the hotel and indulging in a little Christian slumber, when Jim bounced in.

It was all ready, at the back door—wagon, paste, brushes, and all! Mr. Allio and two of his associates were coming along to assist in the work—and, to make a long story short, we piled into that cart and drove away into the calm Bonarian night.

Certainly, it was a great evening for bill-posting or empire-building or anything else that might take a man abroad.

Camped in the extreme rear of the wagon with Jim, on our way to the suburbs, where the bill-posting was to begin, it struck me that it was altogether too calm a night to mess up with any unusual stunts. The stars looked as if all the crown jewels on earth had been dumped into the sky for the occasion. There wasn't a sound, save the very soft crunching of the wagon-wheels and the softer hoof-beats of the horses, as they went jogging along. And at last:

"It's a shame to disturb things here," I said.

"Eh?" Jim turned suddenly, came out of his dream, and laid a hand on my knee and fairly purred:

"We won't do much disturbing here! I've been talking with Allio. He's a little bit excitable, but he says that ninety per cent of the people, at the very least, will get up to-morrow and hail the king as the biggest blessing that ever struck them!"

"Maybe."

"Oh, there isn't any doubt about it," smiled Jim. "And when what little excitement there is to be is over, you and I are going to be pretty well fixed!"

"But there are so many things that can slip up—"

"Not now!" Jim chuckled, and he seemed beyond arguing. "I've gone over the whole thing with Allio, and there isn't a chance for a slip! At last, Tommy, we've got something good cinched down hard and fast!" He took a few puffs at his cigar and stared at the beautiful sky. "After to-morrow, you and I settle down in peace and comfort, with a whole lot of dignity and power on the side, for the rest of our days!"

"And live here for good?" I gasped.

"We can take two or three months in New York every year," said Jim calmly. "I've thought the whole thing out. As a matter of fact, we might get Velasquez to appoint us ambassadors—or something—to Washington, and spend a few years there, or—"

"The outskirts of the town, *señor*," said Mr. Allio. "It is here the blank walls through which pass in the morning those who go to market. It is well to begin in this spot."

We began.

We hustled noiselessly out of the wagon and decorated the side of somebody's house with a couple of those posters, with their huge *Proclamacion!!!* at the top. We passed back toward town, and found a fence on either side of the road—and we left a few more proclamations.

We went up one street. We went down another. We left posters wherever they would stick—and still the supply didn't seem much lower. That *La Luna* man must have worked overtime.

We met, perhaps, five people, and they paid as little attention to us as we tried to pay to them.

Slowly but surely, we began to get into the heart of town.

There are some dandy walls in La Concha for a bill-poster — nice big stretches of white and yellow plaster that are just cut out for the work. We were slathering one of them with blobs of paste, when I straightened up and whispered to Jim:

"Do you see those three across the street?"

"Huh?"

"They've been following us for five or six blocks."

"Nonsense!"

"They have, though," I said, as Jim made another dive for his paste pail. "They—look as if they were in some kind of uniform, too."

"Bah!" Another copy of the proclamation went up.

"And—say!"

"What?"

"Where's Allio and the other two?"

Jim looked around. They weren't in sight! They'd merely folded their little tents and silently stolen away; and about the time that the full realization of the fact came to Jim, the three gentlemen across the street advanced suddenly.

They were in uniform, all right enough. What was more, they carried guns in their hands. What was still more, they pointed them at us; and the biggest fellow thundered in Spanish:

"Into the wagon!"

We obeyed. We were driven off, with a cold muzzle stuck against each set of ribs. We turned down-town and galloped.

And, not more than ten minuets later, we were marched into a cell by a new person in uniform who carried a rifle; and the cell-door slammed.

All in all, it was just the least bit startling. Jim seemed dazed; but as the new gentleman was making sure of the lock, my breath came back suddenly, and I said:

"Say, you!"

The keeper stared viciously.

"Are we—arrested?" I asked.

"Yes!"

"What for?"

"Treason to the state!" He glared a little more, by way of good measure. "Anarchy!"

"Um-um!" I said. It seemed reasonable.

"Where are we now?" Jim asked in a far-away, dazed little voice.

"In the military prison." The gentleman shouldered arms, right-about faced, and raised his left foot.

"Say!" I called.

The foot came down. He looked at me, and he seemed almost bored. "What do they do to anarchists in this country?"

"They are shot to death, without trial, upon the day following arrest!" answered our friend in sweetly pure English, as he started his foot into motion again and marched away.

CHAPTER IV.

CAKES, TOOLS, AND PLANS.

JIM stared at me. I stared at Jim—and for a little time there were no audible comments on the situation. Then the irony of the thing came over me, and I smiled:

"How do you feel about it now, chancellor of the exchequer?"

Jim looked up, white and nearly cross-eyed.

"Don't be an ass, Tommy!" he groaned.

"I'm not. Got any spare proclamations on you, Jim? Let's stick one on the wall."

"Bah!"

"You can 'Bah!' all you want to!" I grunted. "We're in! And we're in good! To-morrow morning, when this town wakes up, and the authorities wake up, we're going to be marched out and perforated with lead!"

"Nonsense!"

"It isn't. Can't you see it? Just consider what we've heard and done today, and what the effect's going to be. The boss of this republic—or the bosses—are simply going to realize that there's a movement on foot against them. Then they're going to realize that we're the only two arrests so far. Then they're going to make examples of us!" The breath was leaving me. "Good night and good-by, Jimmy. Take a last look at the moon. You won't see it again—from this side, anyway!"

"Bosh!"

"It isn't—"

For answer, Jim picked up the beautiful agateware wash-basin and slammed it across the cell. Perhaps that is the way you ring for the chambermaid in Bonaria. At any rate, our uniformed friend came on the jump, stared through the bars, and brought his rifle to aim.

"Send me the American ambassador," said Jim with the air of ordering a steak.

"*Que quiere, señor?*"

"Send me the United States ambassador!"

"There is no United States ambassador!"

"What?"

"He left a year ago, *señor*. He has never returned."

"Well, do you mean to tell me the United States isn't represented here?"

"At times the British minister—"

"Then send me the British minister!"

"He also is absent, *señor*. He has not been in Bonaria for three months."

"Then who the dickens tends to the affairs of America and England?" Jim demanded.

"The German consul, *señor*."

"Then get me the German consul. Say to him that an American citizen demands to see him!"

"He is at Paso Alto, *señor*."

"Telegraph him, then!"

"Impossible, *señor*. He rests. He has left the order that business shall not disturb him."

Jim rose—and there is some of him when he rises.

"Then the general idea is that we're to be shot without a hearing, and that there is nobody to look after our interests?"

"Should the *señor* have been arrested in the civil matter, he would have that grand justice done by our jury. A military prisoner, captured in treason, shall be shot!"

"Without trial?"

"*Si, señor!*" said the keeper, as he executed a pretty salute and marched off again.

"Well, I'll be darned!" said Jim.

"I hope not. We're too near the next world to contemplate that sort of thing."

"But the idea—"

"It isn't the idea. It's the cold reality," I said dismally. "There's nobody here to defend us, and it's going to be highly advantageous to this government to plug us full of holes in full view of the populace. We might as well try to be resigned to it, Jim."

"Well, I'm not making any effort at resignation, I can tell you! I—"

He stopped there.

Apparently, more fun was on the way, for from some distant point came a low, wailing voice, singing some kind of song. It might have been a professional mourner or a water pedler, from all one could divine by the inflection. Not entirely familiar with South American jail etiquette, I listened with a good deal of interest.

Nearer and nearer it came, sing-songing something or other in Spanish, until at last an old, old man tottered to a standstill before the cell-door and stood there, staring in and wagging his head.

"What is it?" I asked. "The undertaker?"

"No. It's a tamale and cake pedler," said Jim. "Don't you see the basket?"

"Tell him we're not dining this evening," I muttered. "I never wanted to die on a full stomach."

The old man went on with his wail. Jim got up after a minute and walked over to the bars—and I'm hanged if that old fossil didn't dig down into his basket and haul up a bundle of corn husks and cakes that would have choked a cow!

He grinned and nodded and handed the bundle through the bars, and I heard him mutter something about El Rey. Then Jim took the whole collection and walked back to his bunk, and the old man tottered on.

Jim's eyes were glittering. So were mine. It was food, and I hadn't seen any since luncheon.

"There's more behind this than appears on the face of it!" said Mr. Wendell.

"All right. Give me one of those cakes," I said.

"It isn't all cakes! That old cuss said he came from the king!" Jim tossed over a wad of something greasy and appetizing; and I went to work while he examined the rest of them.

Very shortly there was a sharp clink on the floor!

Jim stooped down quickly and grabbed the bundle of corn-husk. He looked toward the door—and he opened the bundle and stared at half a dozen big files!

"And he said they were sent by the king," said Jim solemnly.

"God save the king!" I warbled, as the significance of the thing came over me.

"Shut up!" said the chancellor of the exchequer. "Do you want to have the whole blooming jail down on top of us?"

"Maybe they can help with the filing," I suggested. "How do you bust out of jail, Jim?"

The coming chancellor straightened up and looked at the bars on our two-foot window.

"We'll cut right through there and drop to the ground. We're on the second floor, and it can't be more than twelve or fifteen feet."

"And then? There must be walls around this place. We came through a big gate."

Jim kicked the stool over to the window, stood on it, and looked out. Then he snorted:

"Well, there's no wall on this side, anyway. There's what looks like a back street, but— Oh, punk!"

And therewith he dragged the biggest file out of his inner pocket, and went to work with an abandon that would have fitted a stage convict a good deal better than a real man trying to get out of jail.

Noise didn't seem to cut any particular figure with Jim — or anybody else, for that matter. He filed and filed and filed, and the wheezing din it made sounded to me like a sawmill. Then he gave a good, heavy wrench and—the bar parted and bent outward, and stuck straight up in the air!

"It's soft iron, and it isn't even decently anchored," said the chancellor. "It cuts like cheese, and I'm not going to bother cutting out the next one. I'll dig the lead loose, and—"

And he pried out another bar and turned it skyward. Sometimes, it's a good thing to have been the strong man of your class.

Jim grinned and went to work again. I walked to the bars and looked out into the corridor. There wasn't a soul in sight; but at a pleasantly long distance, I could hear the mix-up singing of the several gentlemen who must have been our jailers. The filing went on. There was another soft crunch; and Jim turned and yawned:

"Are you going to spend the rest of the night here, Tommy? I thing I'll leave about now."

His big frame wriggled up to the window and out through the space; and as his feet disappeared, one graceful hop took me up to the ledge. Jim was standing outside; then he crouched; then he dropped. And I dropped after.

It wasn't much of a fall—just about enough to set out a few stars before your eyes and make your teeth rattle. Moreover, the ground was soft, and inside of five seconds I was sitting up in the blackness and laying out a mental program. One dive for the hotel, and word to ship our stuff to New York. Another dive for the steamer, and a ten-dollar bill for the first steward we happened to strike, to hide us under the bed-linen or among the potato barrels till the vessel cleared. Then—

"You're not hurt?" Jim whispered.

"No. You?"

"I'm all right. Get up! There's somebody around here, and—"

He was hoisting me to my feet and steering me toward what looked like a rear street; and I let off one big sigh of relief and began to trot. It was all right. It was very much all right; and now all we had to do was to use our legs for a little distance, and after that Bonaria and her gifted king and all the rest could go to blazes! Just a little while—

Just then I heard a snort from Jim. His grip loosened suddenly, and there was a soft thud as if he had fallen. At about the same second, a thick rag went around my mouth and was dragged tight; strong hands grabbed mine and twisted them behind my back, and a voice hissed:

"Be silent! You are with friends!"

There was no choice about the silence part of it. The hands, with the help of a knee, gave me a mighty prod forward. Stumbling, kicking, I plunged through a dozen yards of inky night.

Then a big coach loomed up, much as if it had shot out of the ground bodily! The door was open, and I went in—flat. Two or three seconds, and Jim piled on top of me, and the door slammed.

There was a stamping and crunching of hoofs; the carriage gave a lurch and began to move, halting'v for a minute or so; then at a full gallop!

(To be concluded.)

THE GAME WARDEN.

BY THEODORE ROBERTS.

A SHORT STORY.

JOHN HINCHEY was not popular, but he was respected wherever he was known. Honest in his dealings with all men and all things, diligent in his duties, and orthodox in his views and practises of religion and morality, he went through life with a high head and a serene spirit, as becomes a right-living and upright man.

But on this night of late April his serenity was somewhat troubled. He sat by the open window of his sitting-room, with a lamp at his elbow and a well-thumbed Bible on his knee; but he was not reading. His eyes were fixed on the blackness of the damp fields that sloped away from his house to the public road; and, to the piping of the frogs along the ditches and in the sodden hollows, his spirit was harking back to old days.

His wife was alive then, and Alexander was a child. His wife had been a good and a lovable woman, but at times unreasonable in little things. She had petted the boy too much—had been too tender with him—and so had made the management of him difficult for the father.

Shortly after her death the harvest of that sowing had been gathered in bitterness by the man and the boy. Alexander had run away from home, under cover of night.

John Hinchey sighed, and turned his face from the blackness without.

"Springtime don't seem the same as it used to," he murmured, "and I'm growin' downright sick of the pipin' of them frogs."

He raised his hand to lower the sash of the window, but the action was arrested by the sound of a heavy step on the wooden veranda outside.

"Sorry to trouble 'e at yer readin', warden," said a voice from the dark, "but I just struck town about an hour back, and have somethin' to say that'll interest you, I guess."

The speaker appeared at the window, in the full glow of the lamp. It was Richard Proute, a trapper and guide from up Moose River way. The two men shook hands across the window-sill.

"Glad to see ye, Richard," said Hinchey. "I'll step round to the door and let ye in."

Half a minute later the trapper was seated in an easy chair, facing the game warden. His heavy stream-driver's boots marked the carpet with mud and water, and his blanket "jumper" was patched and stained; but he sat square in his chair, good-natured and unabashed, superior to carpets and patches—an unspoiled New Brunswick woodsman.

"D'ye mind if I light my pipe, Mr. Hinchey?" he asked. "Mighty few men are as strong-minded as you be about such things—and I ain't one of them."

"Light up," said Hinchey with a quiet smile. "I've nothin' agin tobacco but the taste of it. Then let's have the news."

"There's bin some dirty work goin' on up my way," said Proute as soon as his short, black pipe was fairly areek. "I run across a trap set with moose meat as late as March—and another baited with a piece of a beaver's tail."

A flush of indignation crawled slowly up to the game warden's eyes and brow.

"Injuns?" he asked.

"Guess not," replied the trapper. "I caught an Injun—Simple Mike—with some of the goods on him yesterday, but I reckon he ain't to blame. I happened to come up onto him just above the falls, so we made the portage together. 'Ye've got a all-fired fine outfit, Mike,' said I—an' so he had. ''Tain't mine,' says he. 'B'longs to Bill Sand, up yer way on Moose River. He give me five tollar to fetch um out.' Just then Mike tripped on a root an' let a wooden box he was luggin' go smash on a rock. The bottom come clean out of her, an' there laid a lot of rice, an' dried apples, an' *six beaver pelts.*

"Well, sir, Simple Mike was just as took aback as me at sight of them pelts. He gaped at 'em for half a minute—an' so did I. Then he let a yelp outer him an' cut into the bush afore I could think to get a grip on him. So I hid the canoe in the bushes above the portage, an' brung the rest of the outfit along with me. I wish I'd thought to ax Mike who he was takin' the stuff to—who Bill Sand was tradin' with. But Bill Sand's the sinner, ye kin swear to that—an' I guess that's the name of the man I've bin suspectin' all winter."

"Got the pelts anywheres handy?" asked Hinchey.

"Here be a sample," returned the trapper, unbuttoning his jumper. "I sunk t'others in the river, for fear of my decent reputation."

He drew a large beaverskin from his breast and laid it on the table. John Hinchey examined it with care.

"A dirty business!" he exclaimed at last. "D'ye know anything about the feller? D'ye think he's still in the country anywheres? By George! I'd like fine to get him."

"I reckon as I know somethin' about him," replied Proute. "He be the same party, I take it, as came into the Moose River country last fall, and built a shack about fifteen mile higher up nor me. I've only set eyes on him once, an' that was by chance; but I've run acrost his traps many's the time. I have an idee he don't figger on comin' out this way, but means to stop in the woods till he's cleaned out

what beaver is left—gettin' 'em easy at high water—an' then strike across the height of land to the Ox-Bow country. He sent his canoe out by Simple Mike, so he'll wait till the woods be a bit dryer afore he lights out himself."

"That sounds like a good enough chance for me," said John Hinchey. "Are you standin' in with me, Richard?"

Proute nodded. "You kin gamble on that!" he exclaimed. "I ain't got no sorter use for a man who kills beaver through the ice, Injun style, nor moose in close season. An' if he's still in the country I figger we'll get 'im. I guess ye ain't ever missed a man yet that ye went after."

"One," replied Hinchey quietly. "That was ten year ago, over to Miller Brook. A half-breed caught my hand and sp'iled my grip for a month or two—and got clean away."

He showed his big right hand, turning it over slowly in the light of the unshaded lamp. A white, puckered scar gleamed on the brown back of it, and a deep pink crack disfigured the palm.

"He nailed me to the gunnel of my canoe with his fish-spear," he said.

II.

From the village at the mouth of Big Moose, where it spills its logs and brown waters into the main river, the warden started a message, that, in a few hours' time and by many wires, would reach and set on the alert his assistant warden over on the Ox-Bow. Then he got together his rifle, blankets, and some grub, locked up his house, and accompanied Proute down to the bank of the swollen river.

It was an hour past midnight when they embarked and headed up-stream. They paddled steadily against the flood until dawn. Then they breakfasted, rested for an hour, and made a long portage that brought them to the smaller stream. All that day they plied pole and paddle against the racing brown water.

It was about ten o'clock in the morning when the game warden and Richard Proute lifted their canoe to the muddy bank and crawled up to the little shack that overlooked it. The hut was empty, but in the bunk lay a couple of blankets, and on a bench an unwashed tin plate and a tea-kettle. On the plate were several scraps of meat, which both men examined with interest.

"It's moose," said Hinchey. "I guess he cooked his own dough when he cooked that."

"He'll be back for his dinner, like as not," said Proute. "See! here is another steak, all ready for the fryin'-pan.

"He must be a fool!" exclaimed the warden, "to leave things layin' round this way. Don't he know we have game laws in this country, I wonder?"

"Look'e here what he's got stowed away in his bunk!" exclaimed the other. "Gold watches!—and chains! Four as purty gold watches as ever I see!"

"A hard character," remarked John Hinchey. "He don't seem to care for any kind of law. Guess we'll do a good job for the country when we get him."

Ten minutes later all was quiet in and about the shack again. Proute lay hidden in a clump of alders on the top of the bank, with the canoe behind him and the door of the shack in front. This was a well-chosen position, from which he was sure to get his prey whenever he should make his appearance.

The warden was somewhere back in the woods, moving as noiselessly as a shadow, still-hunting the breaker of laws. Of course, his chances of finding him in this way were few; but with Proute watching the shack, rifle in hand, he could well afford to take those chances. This silent stalking at large was a mode of hunting that he delighted in, for it was difficult and sportsmanlike.

Suddenly John Hinchey lay perfectly still, listening. Again he crawled forward for a few paces, and again lay still. Now, through a thin screen of underbrush, he looked into a tiny, moss-carpeted clearing.

In the center of this sylvan theater, a man was sitting, with his elbows on his knees and his face hidden between his hands. His rifle leaned against a tree several yards away.

"I guess it's you I want," said the game warden dryly.

The other sprang to his feet, then stood helpless, facing Hinchey's rifle. From the muzzle of the rifle his eyes lifted to the face behind it.

The rifle wavered, then lowered.

For a full minute the two stood silent

and motionless, staring each into the other's haggard face with incredulous, horrified eyes. The warden was the first to find his voice.

"You!" he exclaimed in a harsh whisper. "You, a poacher and a thief! My God! Can it be?"

The younger man tried to smile. His weak mouth succeeded, but his blue eyes were full of tears.

"It looks like it," he said unsteadily. "I've fallen pretty low, and no mistake; but now that you've got me, why raise a row about it? I'm the man you were after, I guess—the breaker of game laws."

"And other laws, too," rasped the warden. "I've seen them gold watches in your bunk."

"You have not changed," replied the other bitterly. "You are still eager to believe the worst of me. Those watches are not gold, and they were honestly come by. I tried peddling last year, and those tin watches are what's left of my stock in trade. I was robbed of the rest of it. I have to keep on doing something, for there's a wife and three youngsters down in Maine—and they have to eat and wear clothes. I've no trade—but I'm handy in the woods—and this looked like a pretty easy way of making a little cash to send home."

"You—you should have written to me—Alexander," said John Hinchey.

The lawbreaker brushed the back of his hand swiftly across his eyes and laughed bitterly.

"Yes, and got some damning, cold-blooded text out of the Bible sent me for my trouble," he said. "For, did you ever give me anything I asked you for, even when I was a little chap? Never! Never so much as a tender word! It was mother who gave me things—and you who took them away. You said she'd be the ruin of me with her tenderness—but, by Heavens! it was your everlasting drilling and reproving that did it. Not even a decent word from you when I—when she was dead! You said a boy of seventeen was too old to be blubbering. Do you remember the night I ran away?"

The game warden's glance did not waver, but it dimmed. "I remember," he said. "I remember everything. God forgive me!"

"You have softened," said the other. "It's age, I suppose, that's softened you."

III.

SUDDENLY the father let his rifle fall to the moss, turned away, and pressed his open hands to his face.

"You are forgetting your duty," said Alexander after a long silence. "You're taking chances, standing there with your eyes shut. There's no reason why I shouldn't make a run for it, is there?"

"Don't run," replied John, without turning his head. "There are only two ways out—and they're waiting for you over on Ox-Bow, and I've left a man down at the shack. So don't run."

Still standing with his back to his son, he rubbed his face violently with the sleeve of his flannel shirt. At last he turned.

"I ain't got any money on me, Alexander," he said, "but you drop me a letter from the first safe place you strike and I'll send some along."

"Do you mean that? Do you mean to let me go?"

The warden nodded. "You are my son, and this is my fault. But I can't take you out with me—for the man watchin' the shack an' the canoe knows ye by sight. You get into cover, Alexander. Then I'll fire a couple of shots, to draw Proute up this way, an' make him think we've got into a mix-up. Then you sift for the canoe, an' travel down-stream as hard as you know how. That's the only way, I guess."

Then he stepped forward and placed his scarred hand tenderly on the young man's shoulder.

"I'll ask ye to make me one promise, Alexander," he said. "Promise ye'll not be afeared of me any more—promise ye'll let me know whenever help's needed. I'm your father, lad—an' I reckon ye're right about age softening me. I used to be hard—but, Heaven knows, I didn't mean it that way. Promise ye'll let me help you, Alexander—and pretty soon, maybe, when ye feel more kindly toward me, you and yer family will come home to me."

Alexander trembled under the tenderness of these words and the loving pressure of the big hand. Tears ran down his cheeks, unheeded.

"I promise," he whispered brokenly. "I'll live straight. I'll come home—soon. I'm not afraid of you—father."

"God bless you, lad," returned the warden, "and thank God that we have found each other. Now take to cover, lad, and slip along quietly toward the canoe. It lays right in front of the shack, under the bank. I'll fire the shots in about two minutes, an' that will bring Proute on the run. Now, go! Don't forget the promise. God bless you, son!"

Alexander pressed his father's hand, and then slipped noiselessly into the underbrush. Silence closed in upon that greenroom of the forest. The warden lay down on the moss, half dazed with the keenness of his emotions. He wanted to call the young man back, to look at and touch him again, again to remind him of his promise; but, with an effort of will that seemed to wring his heart, he kept silent.

John Hinchey looked at his watch. He sat up, drew his rifle to him, lowered the muzzle to within an inch of the ground, and pressed the trigger. The report cracked sharp and thin across the silence of the wilderness; but, quicker even than the explosion of the cordite, the warden's mind sprang awake.

He saw, clear as sunlight, that to be found empty-handed and unharmed, after coming in touch with his man, would excite suspicions of his honesty in the alert mind of Richard Proute.

Cases were known of wardens having been bribed—of officers who had served honestly for years slipping at last. Inquiries, even suspicions, might prove fatal to his plans of reunion with his newfound son.

All this came to his mind, quick and clear as sunlight. Then, still sitting, he placed the muzzle of his rifle against the top of his left foot and pressed the trigger. So the two shots rang across the wilderness, with not more than five seconds of time between them.

IV.

RICHARD PROUTE found the game warden seated in the mossy clearing, his face colorless, and his left foot undressed and bound with a blood-sodden shirt.

"Hit?" cried Proute.

"Slap through the foot," replied the warden. "It struck blood, too. Ye'll have to give me a hand to the canoe, Richard."

"Mighty queer place to get plugged," remarked the other. "You must have bin crawlin' on the ground."

"I was on the ground, but I wasn't crawling," replied John Hinchey, still fighting against telling any more lies than were absolutely called for. "I fired the first shot—and made a clean miss."

They reached the river after a painful struggle—and, behold! The canoe was gone! The game warden turned upon the astonished trapper.

"Now ye've done it, Richard Proute!" he cried. "Now we're in a pretty fix, ain't we! If ye'd stopped where I told ye to, we'd have 'em both now—both the poacher an' the canoe."

Proute felt ashamed of himself. "I reckon we'll have to go home on a raft," he said humbly.

THE TRAVELER.

SHE looked on fair Italian lakes,
Where glistening sunbeams play,
And saw a far-off mountain pool
Where twilight shadows lay.

Soft music sounded for her ear—
The woodland thrush she heard;
Viol and harp were blended in
The note of one shy bird.

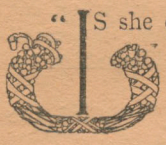
Her dreaming gaze spanned hill and lea,
And miles of ocean foam;
The smiling lake grew dim and far—
She saw the hills of home.

Alice Turner Curtis.

BEYOND.

BY GRACE TABOR.

A SHORT STORY.



"IS she dead?" asked the younger, taller man, bending down.

"I think — not," answered the other slowly. He had turned the ragged lump of humanity over, and was feeling for a pulse. "Though she hardly looks alive."

"And not a soul in sight!" The first speaker frowned as he glanced up and down the city street, deserted under a midnight silence. "Is she hurt—been left here by somebody?"

"No; she smells of liquor, and fell, but not hard enough to do much damage. You see, she's starved"—he stood erect and drew back so that his companion might look at the drawn, dirty, emaciated face—"and a goner generally."

"Lordy!" said the other as he looked.

They exchanged glances, with a shake of heads and a shrug. After a moment, the taller spoke again, somewhat uncertainly.

"What's to be done? I don't suppose we can leave her here, Bakhera," said he; "do you?"

"Hardly," replied Bakhera, with a faint smile.

"Suppose I go on home and call up the police station. There's no chance of getting an ambulance way out here. Meanwhile, you stay by her."

Bakhera did not answer at once, but gazed down at the unconscious figure thoughtfully.

"Or shall—shall I stand guard while you do the phoning?"

"Neither one, Rupert," came the unexpected reply at last. "I've a different plan."

"She can't be left here alone," persisted Dole, a shade of anxiety in his tone.

Bakhera laughed. "I've no notion of leaving her alone," Bakhera said. "We'll take her home."

"*Home!* Are you crazy? Take *that* into the house—into our place?"

Undisturbed, Bakhera nodded. "Why not," said he, "is there any good reason against it?"

Dole looked from him to the creature before them and back, eloquently, whereat he laughed again.

"Granted that there is a reason," said Bakhera, indicating their find with a jerk of his head, "is it sufficient to make us lose this opportunity?"

"What opportunity?"

"The opportunity we were talking about when we came upon her—the opportunity we've been looking for to test the ozomator. Here, literally flung at our feet, is what we've been seeking for days. Are dainty scruples and prejudice to prevent us from making the most of it?"

"But suppose she dies—suppose she is dead now?"

"Well, it's simply explained to the coroner if we have to—and with absolute truth. We've found her lying almost at our door. At such an hour of the night what better could we do than to take any one like this into our house—and what more natural, considering the remoteness of the locality, if we have human hearts in our bodies? It's right here, while aid of any other sort is a long way from here."

Dole shook his head. "That's carrying the Good Samaritan a little far for these days—and this town," he commented, but remonstrated no further, for Bakhera was already moving about, preparing to pick up the senseless figure.

In a huddled heap the woman lay, a

battered straw hat hanging, with her hair, partly over her face. Her rusty black skirt had trailed along so many miles of dirty city streets that it was stiff with its accumulations. Above mismated remnants of shoes showed the bare skin of her stockingless ankles, stained and grimy; the open neck of her waist, too, uncovered a hint of similarly unclad and unclean conditions beneath.

In spite of himself, Dole shivered and held his breath as Bakhera gathered up her head and shoulders from the pavement. Then he shut his teeth, stooped down, and drew the filthy dress over her feet gingerly, and, wrapping it closely, lifted them. Thus they advanced in silence to their door.

Outside it was a plain house, standing modestly in a row of city houses, with only its unusual width to distinguish it from the rest; and inside it was likewise plain, with the fine simplicity that distinguishes masculine housekeeping—plain and unusual, in a subtle way.

II.

When Dr. Jaipal Bakhera's university appointment had first been urged upon him—his achievements, notably in chemistry, had set the lay and scientific world both in a tumult—he declined it flatly because it would force him to residence within the city. Not that he minded the city, but it would mean giving up the privacy of his own laboratory, consequently giving up the experimental and research work which he could—or would—carry on only within the shelter of its walls. Great though the honor offered him, he preferred staying in his quiet, out-of-the-way corner of the world, where he could work alone and uninterrupted.

Honors were uncoveted by him; all that men could heap upon him were as nothing to the dark, silent Hindu who sought Truth with the matchless concentration inherited from the race of ancient seer and magi. Knowledge he craved, but nothing else; knowledge he craved with the insatiable desire of the Eastern mystic, burning at white heat beneath the veneer of careful restraint and analytical materialism which science and Western education had imposed upon him.

But through Dole he finally consented to come—or, perhaps, it is more exact to say because of Dole. The two had long been friends; though Dole was, as might have been expected, temperamentally somewhat less imaginative—a type of the West, as Bakhera of the East. He had a fondness, however, for dabbling fancifully with the mysterious force which, under his comprehensive title of electrical engineer, he dealt with practically and prosaically day by day—and this made them less unlike than they seemed.

Rupert Dole knew better than the majority of his profession how far the work lay beyond the limits of the prosaic—he knew better than even the few, the daring heights to which its possibilities will bear a free imagination.

Naturally enough, their needs and tastes crystallized finally, urged on by the earnest and unceasing petitions to Bakhera to accept the aforesaid appointment, into the joint purchase of the house which they remodeled and fitted with every kind of device for their labors.

Here each had a laboratory — Dole called his a workshop—and a home as well. Old black Peter and his wife, Susan, who had been Dole's nurse from the day he was born, valiantly presided over the latter, in spite of their dread of the powers of darkness which they knew to be rioting in the former.

It was into an unusual harbor, therefore, that the two men were bearing the lax and inanimate thing which the police-blotter would have recorded as "vag."—a bit of life's flotsam cast, as Bakhera had said, literally at their feet.

Whether the next wave bore it up and along its crest, or drew it under finally and made an end, couldn't matter much—that was certain. Dole reflected thus as they went up the steps, and he lowered his share of the burden to unlock the door. And Bakhera had been seeking through hospitals and prisons and dens of every sort for the past fortnight without finding a human creature available for the experiment they both were bent on trying.

The idea of it had been Bakhera's, but it appealed to Dole almost as much. Indeed, from the very first it fascinated him strangely, though he did always try

to "keep his feet on the ground"; and he felt a tremor of anticipation through his whole body as he realized that now they had the means to undertake it.

Over and over he told himself that an ozone generator was simply a practical, useful article when developed along practical, useful lines — that it would clean up foul atmosphere, devour smoke, and purify things generally—but that it *was not* a miracle-worker. Yet the tremor of expectancy remained, as if subconsciously he knew that something about it was undiscovered, undreamed of—some power or property mightier than any they could guess.

But he would not confess it. Instead, he asked, in a very matter-of-fact tone: "What are you going to do with her now?" as they deposited their burden on the floor of the chemical laboratory.

"Aunt Susan and a tub of water and plenty of soap," answered Bakhera, as they both brushed their garments fastidiously where they had come in contact with the woman's. "That's the next proposition. She'll have to be scrubbed if it kills her—but it won't. After that"—he nodded toward a door which stood open at one end of the big room—"the ozone—and then more ozone, and more ozone!"

After a perplexed and somewhat scandalized Aunt Susan had received instructions, they went through this door and along the short corridor into which it led, to the smaller room beyond. A table with a few books, some comfortable chairs, a dressing-table, and a bed, high and narrow, furnished it. The generators occupied a niche beside the door at one end, and were protected by a grating set some distance out before them.

Four of the largest size had been installed, though a single small one would have been sufficient for the cubic dimensions of the room, if the purpose were simply to purify the atmosphere. But it was the excessive use of the element which Bakhera especially wished to test. What would happen to one breathing air laden with it, continually and exclusively? To what would its properties of stimulation and exhilaration lead if their effect were uninterrupted?

Back of his keen desire for the experiment lay a half-formulated, daring theory that perfection of tissue, amounting practically to indestructibility — in other words, to immortality—might be the result of an oversupply of life-fuel to the lungs. Vibration was his hobby, and, according to his belief, material life itself was nothing less than a lower form of that vibration which, at its inconceivable highest, was Spirit. If, therefore, the rate of vibration in a material body could be increased artificially, it was possible that there would be nothing to hinder such a body's acquiring, even while in its material form, the attributes of pure Spirit.

He held to the ancient Hindu belief in breath as *actual* life, thus finding in the ozone, without which breathing ceases to be possible, a much subtler virtue than science commonly recognizes as belonging to this element, powerful though it is. Therefore through the function of breathing he saw that great changes might easily occur, though he seldom hinted at such speculation, even to Dole.

III.

THEY came out from their final inspection of the generators and the generator-room, and sat waiting until Aunt Susan appeared, besplashed and a little out of breath, at the door.

"I done finish, Marse Rup't," she announced, "an' she am in de li'l' bed—but she ain' cum to."

Discarding pipe and cigar and starting up on the instant, they hurried into the generator-room.

Under the bright light which depended from the ceiling above their heads, lying upon the plain, high, hospital bed, the woman looked more hopelessly beyond recovery than she had in the dusk of the street, or even in the light of the laboratory. Washed clean, her pallor was frightful; her hands were like the claws of some loathsome bird of prey as they lay, one across her breast and the other beside her, on the cover. The bones of the fingers were as distinct as though the papery skin had been stripped from them, and the fingers themselves seemed elongated into talons by the sinking and shrinking around the framework of hand and wrist.

In the same way the skull was outlined beneath a ghastly, tight drapery, so scant

and thin as barely to cover it; for the abundant hair, which perhaps saved her from a broken head as she fell where they had found her, had been sacrificed to Aunt Susan's shears and razor—and absolutely nothing remained of it from which to guess its color. Nothing broke her deadly pallor but a discoloration which lingered around one eye in sickening shades of flesh greens and browns and purples.

They gazed at her in silence, and then at each other, as they had done when she lay at their feet on the walk. Then Dole, turning away, again muttered, "Lordy!"

He moved slowly to the switches just outside the door, and stood before them thoughtfully before laying a hand on them.

Then he reached up and shifted a handle-bar gradually — the size of the machines demanded care in manipulating —watching a spot where now and then a spark darted forth. Presently he threw something else into a place, and a low hum stole into the silence. After this he waited, leaving the switchboard, to glance in at the woman from time to time.

Little by little the characteristic smell of ozone crept into his nostrils; then he set the second machine going. The odor did not perceptibly increase, yet very soon both he and Bakhera were coughing spasmodically at short intervals. The woman's breathing grew deeper. He turned on the third machine; and finally the fourth, the time occupied in getting all four running being possibly an hour.

At last they came out and closed the room, leaving its occupant still unconscious. She had moved her head from side to side, however. Watching through the glass, which formed an upper panel of the door, they saw her dreadful hands claw aimlessly now and then.

Ranking among the foremost of his discoveries was one which Bakhera had not yet given to the world. Indeed it was, as yet, almost unknown even in scientific circles. Rumors of it were afloat, to be sure, but only two persons besides himself positively knew that it existed. Dole was one of the two, an eminent psychologist the other.

Briefly, this discovery related to a process of sensitizing a photographic plate, by which Bakhera had produced a plate so delicate it was capable of recording the emanations from a body which are not commonly visible to the eye. In other words, those mysterious emanations very generally recognized under the name of "aura," which are regarded severally, according to the temperament of the investigator, as being astral, subconscious, mental, or electrical manifestations of force.

From the first their involuntary guest was made the subject of daily photographs, in which these special plates were used; and from the very first the pictures were different from anything previously obtained. The curious appearance in them of the astral light—or what he had always termed light—Bakhera was totally at a loss to account for.

Heretofore radiance had been its aspect — radiance varying in degree, but always recorded as a glare, lighter than the rest of the picture. In these negatives, however, it had recorded as shadow — dark, muddy shadow — which might have been mistaken for a defect in the plate but for the fact that every plate developed it similarly.

It cleared somewhat as the woman grew stronger, becoming less opaque day by day and possibly a little lighter—yet it remained, during all the hideous weeks of her raving and reviling and cursing, definite and unmistakable shadow.

This was a period and a phase of the situation which sickened both men to their souls. Even when she was silent, they felt the very atmosphere about her oppressing them with horror. Yet still more trying, if that were possible, were the intervals during which the wretch pleaded piteously for release, mad with terror at she knew not what.

If their faith in the ozone's restorative powers had not strengthened daily—for every day showed improvement in her, physically—they would have abandoned the whole proceeding. But, for her own sake, they did not. In spite of her revilings and cursings — in spite of her pleadings—they grew more and more determined to carry it on until she was well and capable of understanding what had been done.

Meantime they avoided, by common consent, all speculation and discussion regarding the experiment's final issue, and each occupied himself with solitary labor in his own domain. But with Dole, at least, all effort was so mechanical that the results came to nothing. The whole thing was getting on his nerves to a discouraging degree, and uneasy dread began to pervade his thoughts—the brooding, oppressive dread of ugly presentiment.

He sat before some drawings and charts pondering this, late one night, when Bakhera came to him, an unusual glitter in his deep eyes.

"Come," he cried softly; "come! I have something for you to see."

IV.

Dole rose at once from his drafting-table and followed, wondering. It was not often that the self-control of the other relaxed enough to allow that look to creep into his eyes.

"I have been waiting until I was sure," he went on, "before telling you—before showing you. Now—!" He did not finish, but closed the door gently behind them as they went into the laboratory.

The white, intense light of a miniature flaming arc above the table at the far end of the room was deflected downward by a colorless shade so that the rest of the room was in half shadow. Spread out upon the table lay a score or more negatives.

One of these he picked up and handed to Dole. "Let me know what you make of it," said he briefly, and turned away with hands clasped behind him, to walk the dim length of the room.

Dole held it to the light, sinking into a chair to reach a more convenient level. "Been trying color, eh?" he said casually as his eyes took the first glance. Then he looked closer—and closer still, turning it now at this angle, now at that.

His mouth opened as his gaze grew more intense, and he sat breathless for a space before it slowly closed, with a low, indrawn, rasping "*What?*"

Above and around the white-clad figure of the woman, as she reclined in a low chair, was the usual semi-transparent, fairly regular shape which Bakhera's peculiar plates, or prints from them, invariably presented. It did not obscure the sitter in the least though it veiled her from the camera, being apparently between her and it. It was indeed, in all respects save one, precisely what Dole was familiar with. But in that one lay the startling difference.

Instead of revealing itself merely as shadow, in this negative which he held in his hand, the astral substance *had color!* Dull, dirty red it was—a sinister color; and as he looked at it he felt a shiver run along his spine.

"It's devilish uncanny," he blurted at last, "for one thing."

Laying it down he took up another. Clearer red he found in this, less sooty consequently more vivid—but in some strange way quite as terribly unpleasant. With a frown and mutter of perplexity he laid it aside to examine the others hastily, one by one.

In each the same lurid hue tortured his nerves. Beating against his vision it burned his eyeballs like fire, until slowly a futile, aimless fury rose within him.

The interval during which he essayed to check it, as he sat with swelling muscles, both hands gripping a negative, seemed interminable. The red swam before his eyes, but he could not look away. Even as the overcharged electrode retains the unwilling hand which has inadvertently clasped it, so the picture compelled his gaze.

At last the seething emotions within him forced him out of his chair with a spring that sent it crashing backward even as the negative, which he had savagely hurled from high above his head, shattered into a thousand tiny pieces on the floor before him.

Out of the shadows came Bakhera swiftly, with a smothered exclamation. He went to the table and gathered into a pile the negatives that were scattered upon it before looking once at Dole. Then he glanced at him, apprehensively.

He had not moved out of his tracks but, white to the lips, bewilderment and alarm in his face, he stared at the fragments at his feet. In silence Bakhera waited. Slowly at last Dole raised his head and met the Hindu's gaze. Slowly he drew a deep, long breath.

"What does this mean?" he gasped

hoarsely. "What devil's work made me do that?"

The inscrutable eyes which lighted up Bakhera's dark, sensitive face so wonderfully, narrowed at the words. But he only said, "Some sudden impulse," with an inflection which neither suspended the words as a question nor gave them the finality of an assertion.

"Impulse — yes! But why — and whence—*such* an impulse? What powers are at work?" Dole was shaking like a man with ague, and his speech was sharp and rapid.

Bakhera pressed a button that flooded the room and an alcove at one side with light, then turned off the flaming arc before he answered.

"Sit down," he said, swinging one of the alcove's lounging chairs forward suggestively, "and light up. We can talk better."

Mechanically, Dole obeyed; and in the action found, as Bakhera had calculated, a measure of the calm which had been so violently disturbed.

"You were angry?" The question was tentative, breaking a rather prolonged silence.

"Yes—and no! It was more than anger that made me do that—and yet less. It seems to me that a madness to destroy possessed me."

Bakhera's dark face quivered. "True," he cried, "just that!" But instantly he restrained himself and in his usual tone added: "The destructive impulse is what might have been foreseen."

Uncomprehending, Dole stared. Then he laughed faintly, without mirth. "Presumably you know what you are talking about," said he, "but I don't."

"I'm talking about the red vibration," answered Bakhera, with unexpected Western directness. "Red is the color of destruction, of discord, of the underworld. The red vibration is the destroying force."

"Destroying force," echoed Dole, scowling, "red vibration?"

"From my people this kind of knowledge comes," explained Bakhera. "The West has it not except from the East. It seems foolish to the Western mind—but if I had ever doubted my own people, what you have just done under the red's powerful and baneful stimulus must have convinced me."

"I'm not aware of ever succumbing to it before," said Dole with some warmth.

"Probably not—yet the color's influence is never good. You'll grant that when you recall its effect on some of the lower animals. And you must remember that the red shown in these plates is something very different and far more powerful than the color—or vibration, for that's what it is—as it normally reaches the eye."

V.

A SILENCE followed during which, with his brow knotted into fine, upright lines Dole pondered.

"Had it this effect on you?" he asked finally.

Bakhera did not answer at once. He had lain his cigar aside—he was a very temperate smoker, rarely taking more than a dozen whiffs at a time—and sat abstractedly watching the thin, bluish, wavy film that flickered lazily up from its nearly extinct fire. The uncertainty that made him pause was concerned with the question whether he should answer at all, and not with how he should answer, as his answer evidenced.

"Yes—at first it had," he confessed, "but it did not take me quite so unaware. I should not have exposed you."

"Mmm—I suppose you mean that you didn't smash a negative?"

He nodded with a fleeting smile, adding, "But it's likely I'd have done worse if I had not been on my guard."

Dole rose and restlessly began pacing out into the body of the room and back.

"Hang it all!" he blurted at last, rubbing his forehead with perplexed energy, "it gets away from me. It's all confusion." Facing about he stood still and looked fixedly at Bakhera. "How does it get into the negative?" he demanded. "*What* is it that's vibrating red?" Then in a hushed voice: "The woman's *soul?*"

All was breathlessly still for a moment. Bakhera met his inquiring eyes with a long, steady, strange look. Then his lids lowered, he drew a deep breath and let it forth. Just as Dole was expecting his answer, he rose with a lift of his shoulders and went back to the big table.

"There are other plates," said he, "with different colored aura."

"Different," echoed Dole.

Bakhera nodded. "She has escaped, or emerged from, or passed the red—put it as you choose—within the week." He was returning the negatives already shown to their cabinet. "It's within the week, you know," he went on, as he took three others out and laid them in a row, "that she has quieted and changed so much. Here are to-day's and yesterday's and Wednesday's—these three are beginning to show the color which is second in the astral sequence."

He stepped back and shifted the lights once more. Dole picked up the first of the three. The enveloping luminance in this glowed distinctly orange about the woman—a lively color that seemed by contrast to the ugly shadows of the other negatives to lighten the whole picture. It, too, danced before his eyes, but his sensibilities felt no such irritation as the red had induced.

He examined all three carefully, going over them several times and studying the woman herself as well as the orange light. At last he said reflectively: "She seems to be fully recovered."

Bakhera assented with a nod, adding in a gratified tone: "I doubt if there's a trace of starvation or disease remaining."

Dole looked at the pictures a little longer, saying nothing, but the angle of his jaw grew sharp and rigid as his teeth bit hard against each other, and his frown deepened. At last with sudden, impressive, startling vehemence he said: "Then, let's stop this!"

Bakhera turned astonished, and looked at him for a moment in questioning silence. "Are you in earnest?" he asked at length.

"I am indeed—never more so."

"But why? What for? Why would you do this—now?"

"Because," his voice was tense, "because; that's not a reason, but—I want to. I can't express the 'why,' but I can feel it. Let's stop this thing, *now*—at once!"

"But we have not learned the half yet. We know nothing about the full power of the ozone—and we shall not learn it, if we stop here."

"I know, I know; that's just it. We *don't* know, and we haven't learned, its full power. It may be unknowable—and what may we jeopardize in the attempt to plumb it? What may happen? I don't like the way it's working, Bakhera—it makes me devilish uneasy—it's too far beyond my ken and moving too fast."

There was no question about his earnestness. His manner was full of the brooding anxiety which the evening's experience had not tended to allay, and Bakhera, in replying, considered this more than he did his arguments.

"Of course," said he, "that which we do not understand is apt to make us anxious—but there is surely nothing alarming in a condition which shows such constant improvement. What *can* happen?"

"I don't know," answered Dole in a kind of desperate defiance; "I don't know! If I did perhaps I wouldn't be concerned—but I *don't*. And that's the thing I'm dreading—the *thing I don't know!*"

A long silence followed. Once Bakhera opened his lips to speak, but on second thought did not—just then. Finally, he said quietly: "All right, old man. The machines are yours—your work. It's you that made the thing possible at all. Do as you wish; turn them off if you feel that way about it."

"What? You're really willing," cried Dole incredulously, starting up.

The other smiled a little. "Perhaps not quite that," he qualified, "but I'll withdraw my objections. Go ahead—try it."

Dole sprang up at once, in nervous haste, and went through the door to the switches outside in the corridor.

What a relief to swing them over, to silence the whir of the big fans! His revulsion of feeling was like the awakening from a nightmare.

But when his hand reached the lever regulating the third of the four generators something made him hesitate. Perhaps it was something intuitive; perhaps it was the unrealized warning in Bakhera's words, "*Try* it." He never knew. Yet something, however, held his hand at the third lever, and after an instant's reflection he did not change its position, but left it, and the next one, as they were.

Thus two of the machines remained in action, and the volume of ozone was re-

duced one-half only, instead of being cut off altogether.

This was all that saved her life. He realized it the moment his eyes rested upon her when, in the early morning, Aunt Susan's frightened summons hurried both him and Bakhera to the bedside. Unconscious and gasping she lay, her head stretched back and up, and her mouth opened in the agonizing struggle for air—or for sufficiently charged air.

He rushed to the switches and threw them in with reckless haste, trembling in the grip of the nameless terror which seized him. Already circumstances had gone beyond their control. There was no turning back—there was, indeed, no stopping! Every nerve in him palpitated at the thought as it recurred over and over—there was no turning back!

Whatever the end might be, they must go on now until they reached it; and they must force her on! Whither? From his heart there went up an inarticulate, dumb cry that was too hopeless to be a prayer: "What have we dared—what have we done?"

The stupor of asphyxiation released her at last, and the blood receded from her purple face. They came away and left her, fallen into a natural sleep, in the strange, strong atmosphere where they now realized that she must remain always if her life was to last.

There was no sign of emotion on the Hindu's face, and he said nothing, but Dole, chalky white even to his tightly shut lips, made one comment, grimly:

"We seem to be puny things, Bakhera, before the forces which we have loosed."

VI.

THE permanence of Lois Alden's abode in their house, now fully recognized, was provided for at once by extending the single room wherein she had been put to bed, a derelict, half a year before, to a modest suite, quite as shut off from the free air of heaven, but roomy, complete and charming. More generators were added to keep up the requisite percentage of ozone.

It was an odd existence that the girl lived, with only books and pictures and flowers for companions — strange and beautiful flowers borne by common plants grown to enormous size under the generators' queer-smelling product. Her solitude was rarely broken, for no one could comfortably remain for long in the overcharged air which her lungs had grown to demand imperatively; and she was absolutely shut off from the world. Yet the days of her discontent, once gone, did not return.

She read much, with growing taste, and taught herself to sew and embroider. Then Dole remembered the old 'cello which he had long since abandoned, having less skill than his musical taste would tolerate. This he hunted up and brought her.

She handled it awkwardly, almost fearfully, and touched it delicately at first, learning to play it with shy reverence. At last playing it divinely, with the full joy and certainty of genius.

Of course, they studied her with the greatest care, noting daily every trifling indication of expanding life, physical or spiritual, with satisfaction and keenest relief, for their dread of discovering a contrary sign was a constant torment. Yet in spite of their close observation, the fact that she was beautiful escaped them completely, until Dole was startled into the discovery.

Approaching the outer door of the room leading to her apartment one evening, Bakhera met Dole as he burst through it and hurriedly closed it behind him.

Before it he paused, an unseeing look in his eyes, and put both hands to his temples. Bakhera, struck by the incident, stood still also, without speaking, and waited.

Faintly there rose and fell, beyond the doors and walls that shut her away from the world, a wonderful cadence, pulsing up out of the heart of the 'cello. It thrilled him as music never had; yet still he was mystified, for, beautiful as it was, he could not think that it afforded the clue to Dole's manifest excitement. Dole remained standing, with the same blank look, after the sound had died away.

"Improvising?" asked Bakhera finally.

Dole looked at him, blinking. At length, with an effort, he made an incoherent attempt at speech. She's—she's," he began, then brushed his hand

across his eyes. "Heavens—how beautiful she is!" he cried at last. "My eyes are dazzled! I can't think; I can't understand. Have you noticed?"

"Beautiful!" echoed Bakhera. "Beautiful!" Incredulity followed on the heels of interrogation.

"Like a spirit." His hushed voice told it excitedly, as one imparts wonderful news. "Like moon-white, shimmering radiance. It's wonderful, Bakhera—it's beauty of another world. I *ran* away lest I fall down on my knees and worship her."

"Perhaps the music moved you," suggested Bakhera, unbelieving.

Dole shook his head. "It was herself," positively. Then, with a laugh, nervously apologetic, he added: "I tell you, old man, it fairly floored me. Ministers in heavenly places must have that look, if there be such."

Extravagant as the words were, Bakhera, going to see with his own eyes, agreed at once that they did not exaggerate the rare quality of her loveliness. Whether it had been an unnoticed attribute accompanying her gradual general metamorphosis, or was something but recently acquired, was of no consequence. Certainly she was beautiful *now*. And it was not only a fairness of form and feature and coloring exceeding all others, but the higher, wondrous beauty of spirit shone in her flesh—the resplendence that is perceived, but cannot be told.

The daily negatives recorded the story so plainly that one who ran might read—providing he understood. The advance in the colors of the astral light conformed absolutely to the astral sequence, and in this circumstance alone Bakhera saw the verification of his theory. This afforded him such satisfaction that he would not let his attention be diverted by a possibility which he now realized lay in the future, before which even his controlled nerves shrank.

For his unerring instinct saw vividly the doom where Dole's apprehension but vaguely conceived a chance of danger. But nothing could be done. This was equally plain to him. Events must take their course. For all that it lay in the power of either of them to do, the fearful potentiality must, in its own time and fashion, develop into harrowing actuality. When that time came, if it came—and he was beginning to believe it would—well! Meantime, the present was of absorbing interest.

Through faintest shades of progression the orange had changed to a living green, the color which predominated in plates made from time to time of other subjects—such as friends, acquaintances, students who were persuaded to sit before Bakhera's camera. This green lingered, giving way reluctantly, it seemed, through a withdrawal of the orange, to blue—glorious blue, clearer, fresher, purer than wind-washed spaces in the sky. Her love for the 'cello and mastery of it came with this color.

Following the blue came a wonderful color that it was difficult to gaze at steadily—a violet so scintillant as to be almost intolerable to the eye. Not until this startling violet had advanced subtly to yellow, however, did Bakhera grow seriously concerned at the change in Dole. He had detected it from the time he met him, fleeing so precipitately from the marvel of Lois Alden's presence, and had watched him narrowly, though in silence. But with the clearing of the yellow to its own luminous purity, free from the taint of the lower colors, came a corresponding further etherealization of the girl until she seemed too exquisite a thing to rest upon the earth.

With this evidence of change in her, the alternating moods of spasmodic garrulity and saturnine silence, which made Dole their victim, settled into the latter. The look in his face was of an animal brought to bay. Then Bakhera spoke.

VII.

"You're spending too much time, at a time, in that atmosphere," he said casually, as Dole came into the laboratory one night coughing violently.

The veins of Dole's temples were distended to bursting by the blood which his heart pumped through them so furiously under the stimulus of the ozone. Not answering, he sat down.

"Don't you think so?" Bakhera went on, busying himself over a small kiln. "It's a foolish thing, if not a risky one. I wouldn't take chances if I were you."

"Oh, yes, you would—if you were I," retorted the younger man wearily. Then,

suddenly springing to his feet, he faced him, quivering. "Great God, Bakhera," he cried, "*can't* we do a thing? Is it out of our hands completely?"

"Is what out of our hands?" asked Bakhera quietly, as though he did not already know.

"This whole devilish business — the fate of this girl." There was a break in his voice. "I'd give my life a thousand times to have her out of there."

Bakhera turned sharply, regarding him with steady, serious eyes, under which Dole flushed, though he met them unflinching.

"I don't know what it is," he went on hurriedly, uttering each word in the staccato of desperate alarm. "I don't know, but there is some fearful danger—there is. That I know."

He tramped to and fro, his shadowed eyes burning in the pallor of his haggard face like coals. Then suddenly he stopped short before Bakhera again, extending a hand toward him eloquently.

"Find a way to save her," he implored. "It's danger threatening the woman *that I love,* Bakhera. Find a way. I must save her, or"—his voice dropped—"share it with her."

The Hindu said nothing at first, but came to him and laid a hand on each shoulder and looked at him long and earnestly. Then he shook his head slowly.

"You can do neither, my friend," he said. "There are some things that cannot be shared—that should not be shared. Don't assume, however, that danger is threatening. Bear in mind that danger is, after all, only a relative thing."

Dole looked at him for a moment dully, as if his meaning were not clear; then shook off his hands with a twist of his shoulders.

"There's nothing that can't be shared," he asserted doggedly; and, turning on his heel, he left the room.

In her little parlor, sitting by the low table whereon burned a shaded lamp, he found Lois Alden, upon his return to her apartment, just as he had left her. A book which she had been reading had slipped from her lap to the floor, where its weight dragged at the folds of her gown. She was plunged in abstraction so deep that she did not notice his entrance.

The soft tendrils of her hair, grown long now, were bound down simply about her small head, framing the pure beauty of her face in a luminous glow of pale, burnished color. Her skin was transformed into the warmth and softness of the rose's petal, and tinged with the petal's faint blush; but most wonderful and beautiful of all were her eyes, as she raised them finally and looked at him from under the arch of her perfect brows.

Their color was indescribable, because of the light within them—an actual light—and he felt himself tremble as he met their gaze. They glowed with a magnetic, mystic force.

He hesitated for an instant, possibly thinking to choose his words, but only a simple phrase at last expressed his errand.

"I want you to be my wife," he said. "I've come back to ask you. I cannot endure it as it is any longer. You know my love, Lois. Will you?"

She did not flush and evade his eyes; neither did she coquette and smile. Instead, she sat perfectly still, looking at him with the same unwavering gaze; then, slowly, she put out her hand. He caught it eagerly, and sank down beside her, searching her fathomless eyes.

And then, though unbroken silence held them, the Unspoken reached him in the stillness—distinctly, clearly. He understood what spoken words could not have told him—all that might and might not be—and, awed and reverent, he, too, was still before that inward revelation.

Bakhera entered the room in time to see the change as it began creeping over her—or, to speak more accurately, through her—but neither she nor Dole stirred or gave any sign of knowing he had come in.

Slowly, however, she rose from her chair and moved a pace or two away from the table, as the curious mutation advanced. Her hand still lay in Dole's, and he moved with her, but his eyes were held captive by her eyes, and he did not see that the substance of her flesh was altering.

Yet, in an incredibly short time, it had become glowing and attenuated to a degree that made its reality seem doubtful, and the room was filled with its super-

natural effulgence that shimmered even through her garments, dimming the other light.

Spellbound by the magnitude of that which he was about to witness, Bakhera forgot Dole's peril, forgot his own, forgot everything save the one supreme fact of having penetrated to the very heart and core of the Great Mystery.

But when she bent toward Dole, in the ecstasy of a joy that was dissolving her shining in her face, and Bakhera saw her lips frame his name, he suddenly remembered.

With a cry, he hurled himself against the younger man, just as the latter opened his arms to fold them about the shining vision.

The impact jostled Dole back just in time. Bakhera caught a last gleam of glory within her eyes while his own seemed torn from their sockets, and then a blinding something hurled him backward, senseless, to the floor.

VIII.

DAYLIGHT flooded the room when Dole came slowly out of the oblivion which had enveloped his senses, for he knew not how long. He sat up painfully, and looked about.

Beside him lay the fragments of a vase that had stood on a small table which had gone down in his fall. Beyond the other table, over by the wall, lay a figure. That was all he noted at first.

Laboring to his feet, choked and nauseated by the taste and smell of the ozonified air which he had been breathing so long, he moved toward the door. But, half way there, he spied a little pile of clothing—woman's garments—lying in curious disorder on the floor. He stopped suddenly at sight of them, and just then he heard, or fancied he heard, a faint moan from Bakhera. He turned to him at once. A cry of horror broke from him, and he stood rooted to the spot at what met his eyes.

It was but the shape and form of the Hindu, in what seemed pearly white ashes, that lay before him. The flesh, though not consumed by the awful force from which he had succeeded in protecting Dole, was only a lifeless, bloodless, and mercifully nerveless cast, retaining its form as the ash of a cigar will sometimes do. Dole dared not even approach him then, lest the resemblance be still further borne out by a crumbling to shapeless dust at a touch or breath.

He made his way cautiously to the door of the accursed place and threw it open. Then he stopped the purring of the big machines—the monsters that had done this thing. He stole back into the room, pausing where the clothing lay—the spot where Lois Alden was standing as he looked at her for the last time.

Shivering, he turned to the fragment of a man lying so near that some of the garments brushed him. The stiff lips could not move, but they were parted enough to emit what he thought at first was a groan, but soon realized was an attempt at speech. A sound resembling his own name came out of the depths of the throat, where the word was formed.

He knelt quickly beside him, though still he dared not touch him. "Here I am," he said gently. "Here, Bakhera."

"The—white—white," said the Hindu, slowly and immovably, and with terrible effort, in the deathly guttural, "was—the—white—vibration. Seven—highest—seven—plane; plane—*beyond*. At which man—disintegrates."

Dole shuddered. "You mean," he said gropingly, "that she—that her soul, or whatever it may be—advanced to white? To the seventh and last astral color—is that what you mean?"

Bakhera assented, with a monosyllabic sound.

"Then death comes of the highest as well as of the lowest," said Dole bitterly. "The white destroys, even as the red and those below."

"Not—death." Bakhera was hardly equal to another utterance, yet his will sustained and controlled the halting gasps. "*She—did—not—die;* she—passed"—the word was especially difficult, and he waited until Dole repeated it, making sure that he understood—"before—our—eyes. All—spirit—into—the—plane—*beyond!*"

With the supreme effort of the last words, what little of earthly life remained to Bakhera left him.

The man who knelt beside him, with fixed, wide eyes gazing into baffling space, was alone.

MISS JACK OF TIBET.*

BY CHARLES WILLING BEALE,

Author of "The Onyx Ear," Etc.

SYNOPSIS OF PRECEDING CHAPTERS.

THE Ganders, a London club of globe-trotters, commission Peter O. Gallomeade to go in search of his friend and fellow member, Gwynne Roedler, who has disappeared while on an expedition to Assam. Peter is summoned by a queer old German to a remote part of London, where he discovers that the German is no other than Roedler in disguise. Roedler is going into Tibet to rescue from a Buddhist monastery two American girls, Misses Jacqueminot and Jill Varney, daughters of missionaries, deceased. Roedler is in love with Jacqueminot, but is actuated also by gratitude because, through the aid of the girls, he made his escape from the monastery. Roedler empowers Peter to lay a bet of a thousand pounds at the club that Roedler will reappear the next club-day, October 15.

He proposes to reach the lamasery of Tad-sa-fuh in his air-ship, following the course of the mysterious lost river, Tsanpo. He describes the region as a world of enchantment and a labyrinth of horrors, where he has discovered something that impels him to return there.

Toko, a worthless servant, steals their yaks and abandons them without guide or means of transportation. Gwynne leaves Gallomeade alone on the road for a time, where he is suddenly accosted by a snake-charmer, who, after several occult performances and the appearance of the Ya-ti ghost, gives Gallomeade a parchment with a symbol inscribed upon it.

Gwynne returns, and they push on with a vague hope of being on the right trail. Days pass without sight of a human abode. Just as they are going into camp one night, Roedler, with a wild cry, calls Gallomeade's attention to one of the heights on which they see a monastery. They are entertained here by the lamas and monks, and discover two Englishmen—Fenchurch and Chumley—who have arrived before them. The Englishmen also are bound for Tad-sa-fuh in quest of the Varney girls. Roedler and Gallomeade steal away in the air-ship and, after considerable travel, alight in a plain, where they find a herd of yaks, dead but in a state of perfect preservation.

CHAPTER XVI.

TIBETAN DEVILS.

THERE was something gruesome in the sight, and we would have hurried away but for curiosity. There was nothing whatever to indicate the cause of the phenomenon. Naturally we suspected poison, but the grass was like all we had seen, and there were no more weeds here than elsewhere.

But even poison could not have made the beasts stand up dead—their *post mortem* condition was something not to be guessed at.

Gwynne leaned against one of the yaks and pushed as hard as he could, but it was immovable. Then we observed that there was an unnatural spread of the legs and a peculiar bulginess about the knee and hock joints. Passing our hands over these, we discovered that the hide was broken, and that there was something hard and unusual under it.

Taking out his knife, Gwynne cut the skin from the joint, and found that it was incased in an iron band. Going from one to the other, we found that all had been treated alike. It accounted for their upright position, but not for the mystery. We puzzled over this an hour, regardless of time and our mission. It was not until some time later that we hit upon the truth.

It was noon before we reembarked. Again came the ecstasy of rising into the

* This story began in THE CAVALIER for September.

air—the knowledge that we were its masters, and that the vessel was still intact. I think our short visit to the earth had really enhanced our ability to revel in this joy of flight. Each time we mounted into the upper atmosphere it came to us as a new sensation—it was a thrill that never staled with usage.

We swept on down the valley of the dead cattle, as we called it, close to the ground, as there were no obstructions, and its direction being nearly upon the line we wished to travel. The temperature was perfect, and we speeded upon our course as a homing-pigeon to its goal.

Suddenly we heard the wildest shrieks, and an instant later saw an extraordinary sight. From a cranny in a rock there rushed a creature of human shape and size, but of demoniacal aspect. At a rough guess I should have said it was a man of ordinary height. From his head hung a banner of milk-white hair, reaching nearly to his waist. Protruding through this mat were ears of abnormal size, pointed and reaching upward. The mouth was of frightful dimensions, showing huge curly teeth like the tusks of a bear, while the yellow cheeks were scarred in great repulsive-looking gashes of blue and vermilion.

This alarming object came rushing toward us, gesticulating and shouting. When we were nearly over it, the thing threw itself upon the ground as if dead. I was filled with amazement, and sought an explanation from Roedler.

"Tibetan devil! They're not expensive!" was all he answered, and we swept on, leaving the monster prostrated behind us. Gwynne was busy with his cords and levers, so I did not press him to explain, feeling sure it would come later. Another minute, and this strange creature was out of sight, and I wasn't sorry.

We were following a ribbon of green, a mile wide, and hemmed in by the eternal barriers of rock, peak, and glacier. The trend was upward, the herbage excellent, and I was still wondering why only dead cattle were to be found, when suddenly there came into view a herd of yaks in splendid condition and in the unmistakable act of grazing.

Almost at the same instant there sprang from the shelter of a rock a dozen or more of these fierce Tibetan devils, shouting and running toward us as before. But, as before, Gwynne paid no attention, merely slowing down and giving the ship a dip earthward to enable us to get a better view. When we had passed over these monstrosities, leaving them flat upon the ground, Gwynne turned and said:

"Very, very inexpensive!"

But he was busy with the tackle.

I do not think we had gone more than a mile—possibly two—beyond this extraordinary sight, when we came upon another bunch of dead yaks, standing exactly as the others had been. As before, we landed to examine them.

This time there were only six, but they were dead. They had the same iron rings about the joints, and were solid, as if hewn from a block of stone. It was impossible to move them, as it was also impossible to guess how long they had been standing there.

We didn't waste as much time over this phenomenon as before. Gwynne did not seem as much interested, and perhaps I was getting used to the mystery of the thing. In a few minutes we had risen above the gruesome sight and were sailing down the valley again.

Presently Gwynne turned toward me with a very sagacious expression on his countenance.

"Do you know, I think I understand it—I really do," he began. The ship lurched a little as he moved to reach for his pipe. Having lighted it, he went on:

"No Tibetan but believes in ghosts and devils. A wreath of mist or smoke suggesting a spirit is far more deadly than a bullet. Their belief in the supernatural is more firmly fixed than it is in the eternal hills that hold them. A devil or ghost is more respected, and far more feared, than the grand lama; and the knowing ones play ghost and devil to the ignorant.

"I saw a lot of this practised while here before, and I know it for a fact. Pasturage is one of their principal means of livelihood. The fellows we saw are masqueraders—they've frightened off the others with a pretense of magic and supernatural powers. To do this, they killed a few yaks and stood them up. A dead yak could only be made to stand erect by witch or devil. While herding their own

cattle these men are careful to preserve their disguise.

"It is a horrible sight to see dead animals standing and still in the act of grazing. No Tibetan dares to investigate the cause when he knows the fact, and especially after a glimpse of the devils. He will give up the right of pasture first. Hence this magnificent valley has been given over to the trust."

Shortly before dark we came down for the night. The valley was more broken—the rocks and headlands more close around us. We had seen no house since leaving Gim-ra, though at long intervals there had been a faint column of smoke in the distance.

We touched earth, just after sundown, for supper, having eaten nothing since breakfast. Indeed, the novelty of the situation, the constant change and unrolling of the landscape, put all thought of food from our heads.

Again we were fortunate in finding wood—*jo* not being in evidence—and our fire was soon started. Gwynne made an estimate of the distance traveled since leaving Gim-ra. It could not be less than ninety miles, and might be more, he said.

We slept soundly upon the ground in an absolutely unknown region—to us—and from the desolate character of the country, we doubted if it were known to any one. We had no fear of being disturbed, for it was an untrodden wilderness which even beasts avoided. There was neither pasturage nor evidence of life upon any side. The wind moaned dismally through the rock clefts and lulled us to sleep.

We waited till the sun was well up before rising in the morning, on account of the cold. Then we crawled out of our sleeping-bags and got ready for breakfast. By nine o'clock the air was fairly warm, and, having finished our pipes, we left the fire and climbed over the side of the machine.

A minute more we were up and away.

Again the fascination of flight. We never wearied of it, fresh as ever, always new and entrancing.

Gwynne settled down to his cords and levers, while I, leaning over the side, drank in the landscape and the strange new life that was pouring in upon me. I don't think either of us spoke for a dozen miles. The air was constantly growing lighter—more rarefied—and, before we stopped for dinner, Gwynne said we had reached an altitude of seventeen thousand feet.

Our valley had become a gorge. The mountains had grown closer together. There was a sense of oppression in the awful heights. But with our increased elevation there was no feeling of mastery toward the great precipices—the pinnacles that still towered higher and higher as we approached them.

The mountains grew as we advanced. The air was constantly more difficult to assimilate. Tea, as we had understood it, was no longer possible. The water boiled before it was hot, and we had to chew the leaves instead of drinking them. That night we had added another thousand feet to our height above the level of the sea.

Gwynne was consulting his chart by the glow of the fire.

"If this thing is right," he said, "Tad-sa-fuh is over there." He pointed. "I sketched it as well as I could from memory."

He explained that he referred to the army map of the Englishman.

I looked for the dot that marked Gim-ra.

"Then, we're more than half-way," I said, guessing roughly at the distance of the dot representing the position we then occupied, from the T and G indicating the lamaseries at either end of the line.

"More than half-way, as the crow flies, yes; but—"

"But! My dear fellow, there should be no buts. The advantage of the air-ship is that we can go as the crow flies."

Roedler glanced up at the stars.

"Can we?"

"Of course we can! Put on more speed, bury ourselves in the sheepskins, and presto! the thing's done in crow style."

"I should be sorry for the crow that undertook to fly over the heights that lie between us and Tad-sa-fuh!"

"Then, what do you propose to do?"

"Pick our way as best we can. Of course, we may get lost up there. We may have to take our lives in our hands and dip into the sky, before we can catch

sight of the lamasery. If so, I'm afraid Jack and Jill will have to take care of themselves. God help them!"

In a minute he added:

"You don't seem to realize that a fellow can't breathe up yonder, any more than a fish can breathe when it is out of water!"

I knew, of course, that he was right, but hoped that an extra spurt of speed might carry us over without any serious trouble.

There was an ominous brooding in the air. I can't describe it. Perhaps it was more mental than physical, though there seemed a queer intonation that drifted down from the heights above. The absence of life, the vast uninhabited regions, all contributed to the sense of loneliness and impending evil. I had never seen Gwynne so downcast. He was positively melancholy. Ignorance of the country and conditions may have made me more hopeful, but I must confess to my own share of this strange mental depression.

"Brace up, you old chump!" said Gwynne from over the fire. "What are you brooding about?"

"You!" I said chaffingly. "What's the color of Miss Jack's hair?"

"I'm afraid it will be gray before we see her!" Gwynne answered.

"Probably. But what was it when you saw her last? You've never told me."

"Same as Jill's," he replied, and then fell to scraping out his pipe.

It was clear that he was not in a mood to discuss the charms of the Varney girls, and we soon turned into our sleeping-bags.

But that night I couldn't sleep.

That strange moaning that seemed to drift down from the higher mountains kept me awake. Sometimes I thought it was a roaring in my ears caused by the rarity of the atmosphere. But I couldn't tell.

Just as I was falling into a doze, Gwynne roused me.

"Do you know what day of the month it is?"

"The 15th of August!" I answered.

"Good Lord!"

A minute later he added: "Only two months to find Tad-sa-fuh, rescue the Varney girls, and get back to London. Begins to look as if our money was gone."

The prospect was not cheering.

CHAPTER XVII.

LOST IN THE SKY.

ROEDLER was up before me. He seemed a trifle more cheery than on the previous evening, though still anxious. It was not alone the prospect of losing his bet that troubled him, nor the serious difficulties that beset our path to the lamasery. The situation was bewildering, the physical conditions that surrounded us inexplicable. Never for an instant did he despair of finding the lamasery, or of rescuing the girls, although he was beginning to see that the time set for the task was all too short. Jack Varney was the guiding star that held him with unflinching determination to the work.

All that day we followed the windings of a saw-shaped gash between walls of inconceivable solemnity. At times the chasm was dark and solemn, again it dazzled with the reflection of the icy glare that shot down from the peaks above. At one time the cataclysm was miles across, at another it would close about us till we doubted our ability to thread it.

At noon we settled upon a gravelly bottom, near where a pool of water had collected from the glacier. There was not a sign of vegetation. We could heat no water, and were reduced to tinned meats and barley cakes. Fortunately our supply of these, with tea and butter, was still abundant.

Gwynne made a calculation.

"We're nineteen thousand feet above the sea!"

There was an unmistakable look of anxiety as he said this.

It was very uncomfortable. Breathing was difficult, and the cold intense. Even the midday sun no longer warmed us.

"We can't go much higher without freezing," I casually remarked.

"Nor much farther, for another reason," Gwynne replied.

"Do you think we're going to be choked off by those glaciers?" I asked.

"Worse than that!" He was looking

down at the ground, his head resting upon his hands as he spoke.

I was conscious of a mental chill. What did he mean?

"I'm afraid we're lost," he went on after a minute. "I've been trying to keep the thing in my head, but the twists and turns of this infernal gorge have put me out. It was all right to sail west from Gim-ra, but it has been impossible to keep the bearings through all this labyrinth. In fact, we may be too far west already. We may have made more northing than westing, more southing than either. Who can tell?"

"Maybe we'd better go back," I suggested. "We're sure to find some habitation in the lower country."

"We can't do it!"

"Why not?" I exclaimed.

"For the simple reason that we're out of power. We can't walk and we can't fly. In short, Pete, we're trapped. We're doomed!"

"Do you mean to say the air-ship won't rise again?"

"Not exactly, but she's near the end of her tether. You remember I told you I wanted to save her for emergencies."

"How much farther will she go?"

"That's hard to say. The greater the elevation, the greater the expenditure of force. At sea-level she would probably last a week, but here—who can tell? I never calculated on such scarcity of air. Do you remember in the London garret I showed you an empty crucible, and told you that the lifting power came from what was in it—air?"

"Perfectly."

"And do you remember that I showed you a ring on shipboard, before reaching Calcutta—and—"

I also remembered the ring.

"Well, there's something in the rudimentary principle of Alexandrite, that—combines with— But it's not necessary to tell you now; you wouldn't understand. Let it be sufficient to say that we're nearly out of a very important element—perhaps I should say a mineral in chemical combination with an element which has a peculiar effect upon the air we breathe. It requires twice, four times, as much of this material here as in a lower altitude, and we are nearly out of it."

"Even if we got to Tad-sa-fuh then, we couldn't fly away with the Varney girls," I ventured.

"Don't be too sure of that," said Gwynne. "We shall fly again if we ever get there with the air-ship!"

"Perhaps the young ladies have a supply of this queer mixture with them?"

"Perhaps!"

"Did Jack give you that ring?"

He shook his head.

Gwynne was at work with a pinkish powder and some liquids. He was weighing, measuring, and assorting. From time to time he sighed. I was dismayed upon reflecting how much time had elapsed since leaving London, and now we were about to be stranded, without power to proceed, or even discover our present position.

The loss of a thousand pounds was bad enough, but even the thought of that didn't seem to trouble Gwynne as much as the present and very formidable conditions that confronted us.

"Of course, I can't tell how long this stuff will last," he said, returning the chemicals to their proper places in the vessel. "I mean that it is impossible to estimate the density of the air at the varying altitudes between here and Tad-sa-fuh. But—if it doesn't get any worse—we can probably hold out for a day or two longer at a slow rate of progress—and—"

"But if it should get worse—"

"Don't know that it will matter, for the simple reason that we couldn't breathe it."

We now wore our skin jackets continuously. Even during the warmest part of the day we were barely comfortable, while throughout the hours of darkness the bags were necessary.

I said something about the strange sound we had heard in the night. It was only another of the perplexities that had been forced upon us.

"Do you mean the roaring?"

I nodded.

Gwynne thrust his long fingers into his curly locks. It, too, had been troubling him.

"Can't tell. I've been thinking about it," he said. "Might have been a waterfall, the melted snow pouring over the glaciers. Who can tell?"

The suggestion was not entirely satisfactory, and I said so.

"Echoes, then!" returned Gwynne moodily.

"Echoes of what?"

"Waterfalls, maybe. All that snow and ice must get away somehow. The highest point in the Himalayas finds its way to the sea at last."

"Yes, but—"

"It doesn't matter, we've left it. Let's think of what's ahead."

"Jack and Jill, I suppose."

"If you like."

We continued to sit and smoke, though without the usual sociability. Presently I got up and walked away, thinking it best to leave Gwynne alone. I shook the ashes from my pipe, put it in my pocket and looked around. A more desolate spot could not be imagined. Snow and ice to skyward. Huge ghats of gravel. Black rock—cavernous, split, gullied—heaped in monstrous forms above and around us. No scrap of vegetation was visible; no prospect of better things to come. The little bed of gravel, where we had anchored, was the only available landing-ground in sight. The situation gave me the horrors. I couldn't stand it there alone, and so went back to where Roedler was still sitting.

"I suppose we might as well take another dig in the direction of Tad-sa-fuh." This from me, trying to be cheerful.

"The *direction!* Yes—if we knew what the direction was. I confess I don't know whether the place we're after is north, south, east, or west of here. Still, we may as well have another try while the juice holds out."

So we climbed back into the air-ship. I could feel that she rose more heavily than before. Perhaps Gwynne didn't give her as much head. I couldn't tell.

All that afternoon we crept slowly forward. It was evident that Gwynne did not wish to exhaust our resources immediately. Beyond this, it often required extreme care and the most accurate judgment in rounding the headlands. Sometimes I was allowed to help in this, but generally Gwynne was afraid to trust me. It was more difficult than steering a yacht through Hell Gate—or any other gate, I thought.

At last I settled back among the cushions to look on, while Gwynne did the work. I felt for my pipe, but couldn't find it. I remembered distinctly having put it in the great sheepskin pocket of my jacket, but it was gone. I examined the lining, and shook out the rugs. Of course, I had another pipe, but when a man wants a special one, he might as well have a wooden ham when he's hungry, for all the good it will do him. I don't know why this is so, but it's a fact.

I was attached to the pipe; first, because it possessed that peculiar quality of goodness that comes from use; secondly, because I had many associations with it, and we had grown up together, so to speak. Intrinsically it was probably worth a shilling; to me—well, the way I felt just then about it, I would hardly have given it for the air-ship.

Gwynne sympathized with the loss, and, as soon as possible, he made fast his lines and levers and helped me look. But it was useless. The thing had disappeared as if by magic. I was really out of temper, and refused to smoke anything else. After all, the incident was lucky, as it gave us something else to worry about, and our silence for the rest of the afternoon was not entirely due to the dangers that threatened to destroy us.

We touched earth long before dark, Gwynne not wishing to run the risk of collision by traveling after sunset. It was difficult to tell how far, or in what direction, we were sailing, owing to the nature of the country. We were traversing a network of valleys, or gorges, that split up the mountains and ran into one another. We generally followed the main gulch, or thought we did, though sometimes it was hard to choose.

One thing comforted us; we were no higher than at our last resting-place, though the region was equally forbidding. As we looked down through the cloud-mist it appeared as if thousands of vast cones had been thrust upward from a bottomless pit—some higher, some lower—but all with the same ambition of reaching to the great blue vault above them.

It was steering in and out of these that taxed Roedler's nerve, and filled him with constant anxiety. We towered above the lesser sugarloaves; the higher ones we threaded.

It was difficult landing in the drift. We were literally obliged to feel our way to the ground, but we did it — rather, Gwynne did it with my poor assistance— and we crept over the vessel's side.

The sun had set, and it was impossible to see through the fog for more than a dozen yards ahead—perhaps not so far.

There was no indication of fuel, so we got out a spirit lamp, and heated up some tinned meats and vegetables. It was very cheerless. Desolation of desolations! It was as Gwynne had predicted—we were lost in the sky!

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE RED LIGHT.

THAT night it was cold. The wind whistled through the gorge and defied our efforts to sleep, so Gwynne and I climbed into the air-ship for protection. Here, wrapped in skins, under the lee of the rail, we lay and talked until after midnight.

"Of course, we are far above the lamasery of Tad-sa-fuh," Roedler was saying, "and we must get to a much lower level before we can hope to reach it. Yet these intervening ramparts must be crossed first."

"But we've a better chance of catching sight of the old pile from high ground than low," I observed.

"True, but for the fogs."

"But the fogs are bound to go," I suggested; "they can't last forever."

Gwynne sighed.

"Looks as if Fenchurch and Chumley might get there before us, after all."

"Rubbish! Can an ox travel faster than a flying-machine?"

"Than a flying-machine that can't fly —yes. Besides, they have a guide."

"True, a murderous hound that will carry them off to some dong-ky and rob them. I'd rather be alone than with such scoundrelly guides as we've met so far."

"Maybe you're right. I hope you are. Of course, I've every confidence in the machine, if the power holds out—without it, we're worse off than we would be with the yaks. What's that?"

I listened.

Out of the stillness a faint murmur rose upon the air. It was hardly perceptible; yet, when once the attention was directed toward it, it seemed to grow in importance—to fill the ears. I was quite sure it was not the surging of the blood against the ear-drums. Neither was it quite like the wind. Besides, the wind was dying.

"Another of your darned waterfalls, I suppose!"

"Perhaps." Gwynne grunted.

We lay perfectly still and listened. It was a solid, steady roar, though faint and distant, and unlike the surging of the wind.

"Reminds me of the Tsanpo," said Gwynne sleepily. There was, indeed, a lullaby cadence in the humming monotony of the voice. It was soothing, restful, and now seemed to come from under the ground.

"But the Tsanpo is too far away— and—"

"There's no telling where we are," Gwynne corrected. "Besides, I've a notion that much of this ground is honeycombed. The drip of that eternal snow and ice up yonder has got to get off somehow; and when we don't see the water above, it's bound to find its way by subterranean passage. That rumbling may, of course, be something else; but, in my opinion, it's water tumbling over rocks either above or underneath the ground."

We talked until quite late, and finally fell asleep, listening to the strange, hollow droning in the air.

By morning the fog had lifted, but it still hung like lead over the higher peaks. I climbed over the side of the vessel and looked around. Dull walls of gray and a close curtain shut out the view. It was impossible to see where we were; and, if the atmosphere didn't clear, it would be equally impossible to proceed upon our journey.

I walked slowly from the side of the vessel, in the hope of finding some dead grass or brushwood. But there was nothing. The place was as barren as any we had seen. Another cold breakfast—or, at most, a chafing-dish one—was the best we could hope for.

I was about to turn and report the discouraging news to Roedler, when there before me, half a dozen feet ahead, lay my pipe. If it had been an appari-

tion, I don't think I should have been more startled. I knew it at once, and, going slowly forward, picked it up. My initials were cut upon one side of the bowl. The mouthpiece had been bitten nearly through in a peculiar way by an ill-shaped tooth. I should have known it in the moon. How on earth had it got there?

With a queer feeling of being haunted, I hurried back to the vessel. Gwynne was just tumbling out. There was a half-frightened look about the eyes when I told him of my discovery.

"Your dead sure there's no mistake about it?"

"Sure!"

"Then, of course, it can only mean one thing, Pete, and a darned unlucky thing, too."

I asked what he meant.

"That we camped here yesterday for dinner. That we've been going round in a circle, and that we haven't advanced a single rod since yesterday noon."

Strangely enough, I hadn't thought of that. The most impossible theories had forced themselves upon me. At one moment I had imagined that an eagle, or some other high-flying bird, had picked up the pipe, being attracted by the silver band around it, carried and dropped it here. At another I fancied the wind had borne it aloft and—but, of course, the idea was absurd; I knew it at the time, but they were the only explanations that occurred.

Now, it was perfectly clear. We had simply been pirouetting around one of these awful peaks of the Himalayas and come back to the starting-point. We had sailed into the wrong valley—that was all.

"I think I know where I made the mistake," Gwynne said. "It was when you first discovered your loss, I made the wrong turn."

"It puts us a whole day back," I replied.

Gwynne was thinking. He was toying with the great bushy locks that clustered about his forehead. Presently he looked up.

"There's a few hours left in the old boat yet," he said. "I've a notion to risk 'em."

I waited for him to go on, but he hadn't quite done scratching his head. I still waited.

"What are you going to do?" I asked at length.

"How are your nerves?" Roedler asked.

"Never had any," I replied, knowing that I was lying.

"Then we'll do it—but not until night comes."

He still hesitated to tell me.

"Go ahead," I urged. "What are you thinking of?"

"There's something under the ground here where we are. I want to go up higher and make sure what it is."

I begged him to explain how greater elevation could reveal the secrets of the earth, but he only repeated the query about my nerves.

"Do you think you could stand a dip heavenward of, say, three or four thousand feet? Do you think it would unnerve you?"

I laughed.

"Perhaps, if you go with me—but what's it for?"

"I believe at that elevation we can see Tad-sa-fuh."

I started.

"What makes you think so?"

"These cursed waterfalls!"

"Why do you want to wait until after night?" I asked.

"Listen, and I will tell you. If the water we've heard growling around us for the last few days is not the Tsanpo, it's very much like it. If the formation of the country here is not the same as that about Tad-sa-fuh, it's extremely similar. Mind, I don't know a thing—I'm only guessing. But—"

"Go on."

"We can tell a little after midnight—if—"

"What's midnight got to do with it?"

"A whole lot."

"Mean to say you can see better in the dark?"

"Some things, yes."

"Let's have an example of one of them."

"A light!"

"What kind of a light?"

"A red light."

"Gwynne, you've got something in that woolly head of yours that you think

is smart—but it's not. Out with it, and I'll convince you that you were never more deceived. What has a red light got to do with Tad-sa-fuh?"

"Everything."

"Mention one."

"Jack Varney."

"That's one."

"And her sister Jill."

"That's two."

"That's enough," he answered.

"Maybe it's too much, old man; I don't quite like the idea of red lights and fire being mixed up with my prospective sweetheart — dickers too much of footlights and rockets."

"You ought to look at it the other way," said Gwynne. "Picture the lonely maiden in the giant's tower watching for her lover. See sister Ann, by sunlight, moonlight, and starlight, and then when the nights are dark and there are no lights at all. Fancy her still sitting, wondering, hoping, in the gloom of her lonely chamber by the dull red flame of a lamp—the one lurid eye in all that wilderness to light her lover to her side."

"Romantic, if true."

"Jack promised to burn that lamp while life remained — or until I returned," Roedler said.

"And what about Jill?"

"The sisters are keeping it together. From sunset to sunrise. Whether the moon shines or not, whether the stars are visible or hid beneath the clouds, that light is always there. They have an arrangement by which I am to know it from a setting star—done by grouping half a dozen wicks behind a crimson shade. When the clouds are banked above, leaving a lucid atmosphere beneath, that red light from the lamasery ought to show for several miles."

I wondered why he had never spoken of this before, and told him so.

"It hardly seemed a tangible asset," he answered. "In the first place, I always pictured Tad-sa-fuh by day. I rarely thought of the lamp; and, when I did, it was more in the way of a pretty romance. Lately the difficulty of recognizing the pile, in this glare of ice and snow and shifting clouds, has brought to mind the red light again. I've been thinking of my guiding star; and, if the atmosphere is suitable, I'd like to swing aloft and look for it. Mind, it would be worse than folly unless the conditions are favorable."

"We're pretty high now, Gwynne."

"I'll leave it to you," he said. "It's a risk at best."

"How much power have we left?"

"Enough for the experiment."

"Well—but—"

"Yes, I know what you are going to say. If by good luck we happened to see the light, how are we going to get to it? Isn't that what you were thinking?"

I told him that it was.

"Don't you see we shall be ever so much higher than the light, wherever it is. It takes no power to come down-hill. We can run down an incline without effort. If, by any chance, we happen to see the red fire, I'll set her straight for it and slide down-hill to the lamasery."

It was an amazing proposition, full of daring and resource. There was a certain amount of plausibility in it—Gwynne was always plausible.

"But, if we didn't see it?" I suggested.

"Then we'd be food for the eagles. If we're not in the vicinity of Tad-sa-fuh, I confess frankly that we're lost."

"And when do you propose to sail?"

"Not until after midnight, if the weather favors."

"I'm with you," I answered.

CHAPTER XIX.

MYSTERIOUS VOICES.

WE turned in early—not to sleep, but to rest. The half dozen hours to midnight would doubtless have availed much could we have utilized them; but the impending venture made sleep, or even rest, impossible to me.

At nine o'clock I got up and climbed out of the machine. The clouds had rolled away, and the air was still. I walked off a short distance and sat down. Despite his intention, Gwynne had fallen into a sound sleep.

The gravelly spur where we had anchored dipped a short distance below, growing into a steep incline a little farther down. As I sat there, brooding over the situation and staring into the blackness, I was startled by the sound

of voices. Bristling with amazement, I got up and walked back to the air-ship. Gwynne was still sleeping—there was no one near him, neither was there any possible explanation for what I had heard.

Returning to the rock, I sat down again. All was still. I filled my pipe and lighted it, and was just beginning to wonder if I could have been mistaken, when—there it was. The sound of human voices, and not very far away.

For the second time I got up, tingling with excitement. No road, path, or habitation was visible. We had been there twice, and all day. We knew the place thoroughly, and had pronounced it the barrenest, most isolated spot upon the globe. We had seen no trail or footway for days, and we did not think we could have crossed one unobserved. Of all the mysteries, the sound of human voices in such a spot was the most inexplicable.

I crawled out upon a projecting ledge and listened. A black void stretched beneath me. As far as I could see there was nothing to suggest the abode of man, nor in the faint glimmer of the stars could I see anything like a road. It was a shelf built out from the wall, and overhanging a bottomless pit. To the right and left and partly behind me the wall continued to rise.

Then I thought I detected the faintest possible shimmer of light upon the rock above. I looked at it carefully, and even climbed a little way up toward the spot of illumination. But there was nothing. Though full of irregularities and uncouth projections, the rock was solid. I mean that there was no opening. It was a pale disk of light. There was no ice, mica, or snow as a background for the reflection of the stars.

There was nothing to explain it, and yet I was sure I was not deceived. The place was distinctly lighter than the spaces around it. I climbed to the right and to the left. I went as near to the edge as I dared. I crawled in and out among the crevices, more puzzled each time. But the voices continued. Spasmodic, now lower, now more distant.

I was about to go back to Gwynne and report, when I was startled by a streak of light issuing from the rock under my feet. Moving my head from side to side, I perceived that it was the reflection of this light that I had seen above. I now got upon all fours and crept cautiously toward the opening. It was a split that communicated with a cave beneath, in which there was some kind of illumination.

From time to time there were intercepting shadows, and I could dimly perceive that human figures were moving beneath me. Placing my eye close to the opening, I looked in.

Fenchurch and Chumley were sitting upon the ground directly under me.

So astounded was I at this sudden discovery that I drew back, dazed. Nothing could have been more unexpected. How had they outstripped us? How was it possible that they had reached this desolate place before we had, and without visible means of transport, road, or beasts of burden? For a minute I was tempted to make myself known through the opening, but an instant later changed my mind and was very still.

With eyes and ears alternately applied to the crack, I watched and listened.

Fenchurch was speaking.

"It surely can't be far from where we are," he was saying. "But, how to get there? My dear boy, if Tad-sa-fuh is where that scoundrel said it was, we ought to be in sight of it to-morrow. See! Here is the mountain we're on, I'm sure of it; and over there, just beyond that ridge, is the monastery. Perpendicular? Yes, of course; everything is perpendicular here—but—"

"How far are we from the trail?" asked Chumley.

"Just below. Not a dozen yards."

"So! Are the guns loaded?"

"Rather! What do you take me for?"

"There couldn't be a better place for a stand," said the younger man.

"Nor for an ambuscade," answered Fenchurch.

"There must be no parleying, no hesitation. We must not give them the shadow of a chance."

"Naturally, if we can help it."

"I mean we must open fire at the approach of a shadow or the sound of a foot."

I was intensely interested, and watched and listened alternately with all my might. In the dull glow of the lantern there was a look of expectancy on the

men's faces. There were also traces of blood upon the hands of each, and I thought I noticed a scalp wound on Chumley's forehead. But it was hard to make sure of these details, my point of view being restricted and the light bad.

Besides this, there were shifting shadows that cut off the vision and left the cave quite dark for a moment. These alternating flashes of light, though not intense, made it doubly hard to see what was going on. In addition to this, the smoke from the lantern was constantly rising through the crack, directly against my eyes, so that I had to stop again and again to rub them.

From what I heard, I concluded that this cave was just above and immediately off some mountain trail, which we had not observed from the air-ship. Such caves are common by the roadside in Tibet, and are frequently used in winter as places of refuge from the cold and the hordes of bandits that infest the country.

I had no doubt that the Englishmen had taken shelter there from an enemy. I also felt sure that the enemy was likely to appear at any minute. I now lifted my head and listened. But the night was still.

"If we can reach Tad-sa-fuh to-morrow," said one of the voices, "the reward can wait—if we're not cut off from the prize."

"Darn the reward, Chumley! You're not as mercenary as that, surely."

"What did we come here for?"

"The girls, of course."

Chumley laughed.

"True. But the girls may be bald-headed and toothless. What guarantee have you that they're less than eighty?"

"None."

"And what guarantee have we of the reward?"

"The ladies' word—and—"

"You're flying the point, old man," put in Chumley. "We have the ladies' word, of course, in the matter of age, name, and recompense. It's only natural they should want to present their case attractively — being interested — and I don't blame them for doing so. If it should turn out that they were prejudiced in their own favor, we have the promise of the British government to reimburse us for every expense, and a reward in the coin of the realm besides. This, I take it, is more certain than the visionary statement of the Varney girls. If they should turn out to be a couple of servants, tired of doing work for the lamas, we shall not lose our grip upon the empire."

"I'll tell you what I'll do, Chumley," said Fenchurch. "I'll go it alone with the Varneys, and turn over the other to you."

"What do you mean?"

"Simply this. I'll take my chance with the ladies and give you the government. Mind, you're to have no share in whatever I get out of Tibet, and I'll make no claim on you for my interest in the state reward. In other words, I'll swap one for the other. What d'ye say?"

"You take the Varney girls without claim from me, while I have the other on the same terms. Is that it?"

"Precisely."

"I'll do it."

"No squealing now if it turns out a fortune," added Fenchurch.

"That check on Threadneedle Street will satisfy me, old man," Chumley returned.

"It's a go, then."

"Sure. But, stop!"

"Weakening already?" asked the elder man.

"No. I only want to have this thing settled in detail before it's too late. Who's to take care of the girls?"

"Why, the fellow that gets their dough, of course. Provided he can't get some elder relative to take the job off his hands."

"That's all right, Fenny; but if one of them should happen to be pretty—"

"Nothing mean about me, Chummy, old boy. If you insist, I suppose I'll have to toss you for her—that's all."

The laugh that followed was interrupted by a shot—then another, and another, in quick succession. The light was put out and the cave filled with smoke. It came pouring through the crack where I was stationed, and forced me to retreat.

There was a yell of triumph, a groan, a cry that came from somewhere else! I was sure it was not from the cave. Then all was very still. I could not see what had happened, and there was no way to help, anyhow.

Getting my bearings as quickly as possible, I hurried back to the air-ship. The dim outlines of the vessel loomed in the darkness. I felt for the rail, calling softly. But there was no reply. Striking a match, I looked for the ship's lantern, but could not find it. Then, by the aid of numberless matches, I searched the vessel—Gwynne was gone.

Filled with horror, I bounded back to the cave as quickly as the darkness permitted. Once more I found the cleft in the rock, and peered down into it; but, as before, all was still and dark. I called loudly for Roedler, but save for the echo of my own voice there was no reply.

I was convinced there must be some way to get to the mouth of the opening from where I was, if I could only find it. It was hopeless and very dangerous to flounder around there in the dark, with only the uncertain light of the stars and the occasional flicker of a match to guide me. I determined to go back to the vessel in search of another lantern. In this I finally succeeded, though it was not the one we generally used, and took some time to put in order.

I first looked carefully for footprints, hoping to discover Gwynne's tracks; but, the ground had been so tramped over, it seemed hopeless.

Suddenly I stumbled over a gravelly ridge, and found what I was looking for — Roedler's footprint. It was unmistakable. He was a larger man than I, while the shape of his boot was different. I traced him to a kind of natural stairway leading downward, and which terminated in the road we had never seen. Along this I crept cautiously—constantly upon the lookout—a lantern in one hand, a pistol in the other. It was not far to the opening of the cave—just under the roof where I had stood. Pausing upon the threshold, I looked in.

The place was empty.

CHAPTER XX.

THE SIGNAL!

NOT only was the cave empty, but there was no appearance of its having been occupied. The smoke had cleared, and I could see into its remotest corner. There were no remnants of food, clothing, empty tins, or débris of any kind to suggest a deserted camp or the recent struggle; nor was there the faintest sound.

For a minute I felt as if I must have been dreaming, and yet I knew that what I had just witnessed was an actual fact. Where had they gone? There was not even the remnant of a broken lantern.

Groping my way back to the road, I went to the edge of the precipice and listened. The wind sucked over the cliff mournfully, but brought no sound of life. Again and again I called, but there was no answer. Having done all I knew how, I sat down to smoke and to think, feeling sure that Gwynne would turn up presently. My ability to do this was a case of natural compensation.

I have often observed that in extreme crises, when we have reached the end of our power to act, that nature will step in with her own tools and do the work, provided we let go and give her a chance. When we let go, we don't care, and when we don't care, something is bound to happen; indeed, something has happened. However this may be, I smoked as peacefully as if resting in my favorite corner at the Gander Club. There was nothing to do, and I did it.

Before I had finished, Roedler was standing before me.

"Peter," he began, in a strained voice, "we'd better get away from here while we can."

He took out his watch and held it to the light.

"Twelve o'clock! If you're ready we'll make that dive for the lamasery."

"What's become of the Englishmen?" I asked.

"What Englishmen?"

"Fenchurch and Chumley."

He had seen nothing of them since leaving Gim-ra, and presumed they were still there.

I exclaimed, in amazement:

"Do you mean that you didn't know they were here?"

Gwynne knew of nothing but the shooting. The sound of it had waked him, and he had hurried off in the direction from which it seemed to come. Finding the stairway, he had followed it, and reached the road in safety. His one

thought was that I was in trouble. He had shouted, but received no answer, doubtless due to the great rock mass that lay between us. He hurried along his narrow road, stopping from time to time to call and listen. Hearing no more shots, he concluded that he must have been dreaming, and turned back.

Then, when he saw me sitting quietly smoking, he was convinced that this was the case, and that all was right. Hence his want of knowledge and lack of surprise upon reaching me. But now, when I told him the story of all that I had seen and heard since leaving him asleep in the air-ship, he was greatly astonished.

"And you've no idea what has become of them?"

"Not the slightest. They simply disappeared."

Gwynne searched the cave, as I had done, but with like result. I showed him the crack overhead through which I had witnessed the scene, but it revealed nothing.

"Deuced queer! Can't understand it. And you're dead sure you couldn't have been mistaken in the men?"

I told him there was not the shadow of a doubt about their identity; that I had recognized them distinctly, that the shooting was genuine, and that the smoke had nearly blinded me. I showed my eyes in proof of the assertion.

"Queer there's no blood about the place."

He held the light to the ground, but the floor of the cave was as clean as if swept. There was nothing to indicate a struggle. We concluded that the Englishmen had escaped—possibly that they had slain their enemies, or perhaps that they were pursuing them.

"That darn rumbling in the air sounds like the Tsanpo, and I believe those lamas waylaid the Englishmen to block their scheme of finding it."

"You mean the monastery?"

"Well—or the river either. Only a dead man can go through it, and I doubt if even he could do so without losing his soul."

"You evidently don't think well of the river?"

"On the contrary, I think too well of it. Maybe you'll know why a little later. But, come, let us get out of this."

He started ahead with his lantern. I followed with mine. We climbed the rough stairs to the level, where the air-ship awaited us. It was twenty minutes after midnight when all was ready for a start.

Again we were lifted bodily aloft. The cold night enveloped us; the stars looked down.

Gwynne was anxious. He was busily staring into the blackness beyond. Higher, higher, into the icy air we rose, while upward loomed the inquisitive ghosts of the Himalayas to watch and emulate our position.

"It's that blank wall to leeward I'm trying to look over," said Roedler at last, without turning. "There's something in its shape that looks familiar."

But the wall crept skyward as we did, while the air grew colder and less suited to the wants of man. A vast, empty bowl, with chipped and ragged edge, was set beneath us. Could we clear the rim? Never for a moment did Gwynne falter. His determination to rise above the obstacle was fixed; his eyes set hard upon the rampart.

But stars were rising above the snowy heights; stars we had not seen before were peeping at us from over the ridge. We were conquering. Another world would soon be spread below. Then Gwynne gave the flier a dip toward that awful crusted edge.

A minute more and we would be looking down upon the ground which no human eye had ever seen, or human footstep traversed. I could see that Gwynne was working hard to clear it, but the ship could rise no higher.

But on we swept—nearer, faster, toward the scarred and uplifted face of the monster that stood there to crush or pass below our swiftly flying vessel. Which would it be?

A collision was imminent, the wreck of the air-ship was assured, had not Roedler called loudly at that instant to heave over the tins. Immediately we began to throw overboard our canned provisions, and so lightening the vessel. She responded at once and, rising against the black wall, reached the summit and swept ahead. The immediate danger was passed—or it seemed so.

A sea of snow and ice was spread close

beneath our car—perhaps not twenty feet away. It dipped, it swelled, rose and fell. Great jags of uplifted rock challenged our ability to pass them. Horrible chasms—gorges, pits, and valleys—opened up below, and from their watery depths flung back the stars upon our strained and wondering eyes. We sat there huddled in our robes, not daring to move lest the effort prove disastrous.

But it became evident that this gigantic spine was dipping westward. We had passed the greatest elevation, and were gradually sliding down to lower levels. The cold was less intense, the breathing not so difficult. Then the earth began falling away in mighty plains and terraces. No longer did we need to rise. At every onward dip we were farther from the ground. The world itself was flying from us.

The tenseness gone, we stretched our legs and breathed. A minute later Gwynne had left his seat and was creeping forward. Clutching tightly to the rail, he peered into the blackness. Suddenly he took off his cap, waved it and yelled:

"There it is! Thank Heaven!"

I sprang to my feet.

"What is it?" I shouted, seeing nothing unusual.

"*The red light!* Tad-sa-fuh!"

Far below and beyond us the lurid rays of the Varney signal shot into the night. The fiery eye that marked the spot we had so long sought was winking at us to mark that home of mystery. We were headed straight toward it!

"There's one thing we mustn't forget," he said. "I left Tad-sa-fuh under sentence of death. I must not be recognized when we get there."

I had forgotten about it, and said so.

"It'll come mighty handy to remember," he said. "I've no ambition to go down to posterity as an example of Tibetan justice."

"What do you propose to do?"

"I've brought a cooler for the brothers, and I'm going to use it—that's all."

He went on to tell me that he had a disguise—perhaps it was the same he had used in London—and that he was quite sure the lamas would not know him.

"It's a risk we've got to run, though, on account of the girls," he added.

By two o'clock the red eye of the gomba—if it was the gomba—had materially strengthened. It cast a faint, nebulous glow, like a danger-signal on a misty night. Both Gwynne's eyes and mine were fixed upon it as the most important feature of the universe. It was still far—very far—away, but it was steadily growing nearer. We were to land in a sheltered nook, more than a mile from the lamasery, Gwynne said. From there we were to make our way afoot. He was to assume the guise of a state sorcerer, while I was to be a novitiate and companion, who was traveling with him.

Of course he must make himself known to the Varney girls as soon as possible. The best way to do this could not be decided upon till the time came.

Roedler was now staring into the blackness intently. He was trying to identify the landmarks and to locate the ground we were to settle on. But the darkness, our great elevation and the strange look of things made it hard.

Gradually the wall of the lamasery took shape. It rose, swelled, stretched itself into rough protuberances, went nosing among the rocks with unwarranted curiosity, till it was impossible to tell where it began and where it ended.

Then, in the dim light of approaching day, an amazing picture was wrought beneath us. A cloud had settled over the valley, assuming the perfect appearance of a lake. It was a vast body of water, into which gigantic headlands thrust themselves, and upon every side of which rose mountains of indescribable splendor.

Across this sequestered bay, and directly opposite, a huge promontory raised its head, and upon its brow was the lamasery of Tad-sa-fuh. It was startling—the more so from the fact that a few minutes later the lake had vanished, together with the quaint old pile and the red light that had marked the spot. In short, the cloud had risen, engulfed us, and shut out the world.

We floated on in darkness—not even the light of a star to guide us. Glimpses of the world again, but the lake had gone. Then we settled earthward—down—down—while the walls of Tad-sa-fuh rose steadily skyward!

(To be continued.)

THE HIPPLES' SENTIMENTAL JOURNEY.

BY JOSEPHINE DIXON.

A SHORT STORY.

"WELL, that's over," said Mr. Hipple with a long whistle of relief, as he fumbled in his pocket for a quarter to give the colored porter, who stood expectantly waiting. "Sure you've got everything in? Tally them up—one suit-case, two umbrellas, one hand-bag, a bundle of rugs—what did you have, Mary? Well, well, that's all right! I dare say we're all here."

The porter took the tip and retired, closing the door of the stateroom behind him. The locomotive whistle gave a shrill blast, there was the sound of the banging of doors, the closing of the vestibules, and the train pulled slowly out of the station.

Mr. Hipple took out a handkerchief, and mopped his forehead and the back of his neck. He hung up his hat, and took a seat beside his bride. Just as she thought he was going to kiss her, he made a sudden exclamation:

"By Jove! I don't know whether I've got the tickets!" he cried, jamming his hands into his pockets.

He got up, and began with the inside of his coat and made a circuit. Then he proceeded to his vest, starting high on his chest and descending with hurried gestures to the region of his stomach. He was getting warm, and one might have thought, from his expression, that he was getting angry; but this was Mr. Hipple's wedding-journey, and a man can't very decently give way to anger before he has been married an hour.

After he had gone through the pockets in his trousers—front, sides, back, inside and out—he threw up his hands tragically.

"They're gone!" he said.

If Mary had been married a year, instead of an hour, she would have said:

"Look in the upper inside left-hand pocket of your coat;" but she didn't.

She didn't know about men's pockets, and the wonderful number and depth of them, and she didn't know that a man always has to look through every pocket twice, at least, before he finds the thing that is all but scrambling to come to light out of the first pocket into which he rams his hand.

Now, if Mr. Hipple had been a story-book or play-actor kind of a bridegroom, he would have waved the thing away as a matter of the smallest and most insignificant importance. He would have sat down beside her, put his arms about her, and told her that a man who had just won such a prize couldn't be expected to bother about railroad tickets, etc., etc. Every one knows just how it should be done.

But Mr. Hipple wasn't a story-book hero nor a play-actor. He was just a man who had lost his railroad tickets.

He was hot, too, for the weather can get sizzling in April, and happy may be the bride whom the sun shines on; but a bride don't have to wear a coat padded on the shoulders to make her look manly, a high hat, and a vest as stiff as the Athanasian Creed. She isn't bothered by the crowd of people, and the congratulations, and that nightmare of a march up the church aisle, and the rice-throwing, and all the rest of the rotten nuisance of getting married.

Mr. Hipple was still going through his pockets.

The fact that he had a whole roll of money, a rich and luscious letter of credit, and an unlimited bank account, didn't figure in the case. He *had* had

those tickets. Baines had bought them and pressed them into his hands, and told him, with a pitying glance, as though he suspected the mental incapacity of the bridegroom: "Get a grip on them, old man."

He *had* gripped them, and jammed them into a pocket; but he couldn't remember which pocket. Just as like as not, they were in the pocket of the trousers that were now sprawling ungracefully on the floor of the bath-room, where he had jumped out of his church clothes into his traveling togs.

Of course, he found the tickets.

He had felt them half a dozen times, as he plunged in and out of the pockets; but he thought it was the license, or the certificate, or some of the fool letters of congratulation.

He breathed a sigh of relief—not that he felt any especial relief—for it made just the barest atom of difference whether he found them or not; but, then, when a man goes fishing, he likes to catch a fish, even though he knows he will get his supper if he doesn't.

Mary breathed a sigh of relief, too. Now, perhaps, he would do like the story-book and play-actor bridegrooms; he would sink into the seat beside her, and wrap her in his arms, and say in an ecstatic undertone, filled with the music of the heart, *enfin seules,* or something like that.

But he didn't. He wasn't ready yet.

He got down on his knees, but not to her. He dragged his suit-case out from under the seat, and opened it. He thought he should find a thin silk coat in it, but he had forgotten to pack it.

"Gee! did you ever feel such heat?" he inquired, instead of saying things like *enfin seules.*

Mary was undecided whether she should cry or not, but she was a sensible girl, and she offered a hand when he tried to wrench the screen out of the window, to let in a little more air. When they had done that, Mr. Hipple threw himself on the couch, and began to fan himself with a newspaper.

The cinders flew in in a cloud, and one landed in her eye.

She hadn't been married long enough to rake it out in silence, but told him all about it. Did he look concerned, and fly to her, and bend over her, and beg to be allowed to kiss it? No, he didn't! He continued to fan himself with the newspaper, and he said:

"Rub it toward your nose."

Evidently his advice was good, for the cinder, after a while, came out, with more tears than it could possibly have produced all by itself.

Then he grew restless again, and kept poking his chin out and stretching his neck up over his collar, and muttering things about the heat. Then he rang the bell, and, when the porter came, he ordered a whisky-and-soda for himself, and afterward asked her what she would have.

The highball made him feel better, and a delicious wind was sweeping in through the open window.

Then Mr. Hipple began to think how awfully jolly it was to be married. The church, the flowers, the crowd, the congratulations, and the rice all seemed to fade away like a bad dream. Here he was with the most desirable of all girls—here, alone. Married, by Jove! And thumping glad of it!

Then he did come and sit down beside her, and take her in his arms, and say—not *enfin seules,* but things infinitely nicer and more satisfying. In his heart he was very happy and very proud, and a little afraid of her, and a little sorry for her, and awed by his good fortune—all the things that a good man feels when he finds himself alone with his bride for the first time.

II.

THE Hipples went to Europe on their wedding-trip. He was thirty and she was twenty, and they ought to have known better; but you can't blame them. They didn't know it was loaded. No one had warned them about wedding-trips. In all their lives not one person had come forward and said:

"Try driving in front of a racing-automobile, try falling out of an aeroplane, or going over Niagara in a barrel, rock the boat, or blow out the gas; but don't risk your life on a wedding-trip."

Their mothers ought to have done it, or the priest who married them, or a commission appointed by the President—but nobody had. So they went off to Italy

together, as cheerfully as a kid with a toy pistol.

The morning they went on the steamer, Mary was feeling low and out of sorts. There had been months of preparation for the wedding, a final week of luncheons, dinners, bridesmaids, trying on clothes, and eating dreadful things. Then there was the wedding, with all the hurrah, and the trip to New York, and then —the reaction.

The sudden drop into isolation with a man whom she suddenly realized she scarcely knew, the sudden sense of desolation, disappointment, and disillusionment that every woman feels after three days of marriage; the sudden sickening wonder as to why she had done it, the homesickness, and the dreadful feeling of being caught in a trap that there was no way out of—all this, and a stray germ or two, of which she knew nothing, were working in Mary when she boarded the steamer.

She staggered on the gangplank, and, while the steward was helping her to regain her footing, she wondered if, after all, she hadn't better throw her arms about his neck and beg him to take her home. Just make a scene, and be done with it.

But she did nothing so outrageous. She just stumbled along to the cabin, threw her hat and cloak into the two-by-two-and-a-half wardrobe, and collapsed on the couch.

When Mr. Hipple had finished with the purser, had secured places at the table, arranged the hour and temperature of his bath, located the deck-chairs on the sunny side, where the galley smells couldn't reach them, he came to the cabin. He found her stretched out, pale and unhappy, with one bag under her head and another under her feet, and a horrid-looking vessel within easy reach.

Mr. Hipple was in the first golden flush of a less than a week-old marriage. He was brutally well, brutally in love with life, and appallingly well satisfied with fate and himself. Moreover, he was a capital sailor, and didn't know anything about seasickness. His face clouded over as he looked at her.

"Gee! you're not seasick already!" he exclaimed. "Why, we're hardly away from the dock."

She did not reply. It didn't seem necessary.

Mr. Hipple put his hands in his pockets, and whistled a long, sirenlike strain. Then he went up on deck to have a look at the crowd.

The next morning was cold and rainy. The fog-horn had begun its dismal wail at three in the morning, and was still at it. The sea was rough and choppy, and Mary stayed in bed. The decks were wet and the chairs were deserted.

Mr. Hipple ate a hearty breakfast and took a constitutional. He smoked a cigar or two, examined the chart, talked with the third officer about the barometer; and, as it was still several hours until it was time to change his watch, he wandered into the smoking-room.

There were only a few fat Germans there, taking care of babies for their seasick wives. It was a German boat, you see, where the smoking-room is always a kind of nursery or home for abandoned children. At eleven o'clock the deck stewards brought trays of bouillon and dreadful-looking sandwiches.

Mr. Hipple, thinking what a considerate old married man he was becoming, carried a cup and plate of these delicacies to Mary with his own fair hands. She turned upon him one pale, green glance, and he threw the things into the wash-bowl and rang for the stewardess.

For three days the sea went on like that. The vessel bobbed up and down like a diabolo spool, and you couldn't have told whether it was going toward Europe or back to New York. Mr. Hipple liked it.

The rougher it was, the more he enjoyed it. He liked the spray in his face, and the fun of walking on the slippery, swaying decks. If Mary had been up and going around with him, it would have been perfect.

After breakfast, he walked the ship's length thirty-five times. That made a certain number of miles, which was fine for his health; but it was kind of lonely, and it was a hateful long time until luncheon. After luncheon he slept three hours. That got away with the time until afternoon coffee. Then he ate a great many tongue, and ham, and cheese sandwiches. Then he took another turn on the deck.

At six he dressed for dinner, and grumbled about the size of the stateroom, which was pretty full of women's things. After dinner he drank coffee in the smoking-room, and played a rubber or two of bridge with a partner who led from strength, when he didn't lead from weakness or some other suit.

Those days had forty-eight hours of daylight, at the closest calculation. Mary continued to be seasick and silent. One couldn't get more than a word out of her at a time. He got a book out of the library, and tried reading to her one afternoon; but she wouldn't laugh at the funny passages, and, on pressure, confessed that she didn't feel like Mark Twain.

It was almost as bad with the other women. Most of them weren't out, and those who ventured up, sat about chewing lemons and looking most uninviting. Mr. Hipple was a social being. He liked cheerful women, conversation, and all that sort of thing, and he was getting lonesome.

Having more time to think than was good for him, he got ideas about the beauties of a firm will, and began to develop a belief in Christian Science and the Immanuel movement. While he undressed for the night, he delivered stirring lectures on those subjects.

"Seasickness," he said, as he dragged his shirt over his head, "is entirely a matter of the imagination. You think you are sick, and then you are sick. See? You make up your mind you won't let the motion affect you, and then it don't. After a while, you get to like it. Now, look at me. I've never been seasick in my life; wouldn't give way to it, you know, and the more the old tub pitches and rolls, the more like a three-year-old I feel."

Then he climbed into his pajamas, leaped into the upper berth, and turned out the lights.

After he had done that, he never forgot to lean out and ask her if there was anything she would like to have. For he was determined to be a considerate husband.

When he decided, from her murmured reply, that she lacked nothing to complete her happiness, he drew the covers up over his head and snored contentedly until the steward came to call him for his bath.

III.

By the fifth day he was beginning to be sorry for himself. I don't mean to say that he actually thought he had made a mistake, or that he regarded marriage in any despairing way as a failure; but it did seem deuced hard lines to have one's wife obstinately staying down in her cabin, when she might be out on deck playing shuffleboard.

He thought a good deal about it, right after breakfast that morning; and then he went to the cabin, strong in his determination to get her out. Was it Lincoln who said: "A friend is a person who will do what's good for you, even if it isn't what you like?" He didn't know, and he didn't care, but the principle was sound.

At first she resisted. She even cried a little; but that didn't bother Hipple. He fastened her shoes and helped her do her hair, giving her the pins, one at a time, and wondering what the deuce made her hands look so thin and tremble so. He wrapped her in a cloak and half carried her up the stairs, and out on the deck.

The steward packed her into a chair, and Hipple made several trips back and forth for cushions and smelling-salts.

"You're looking better already," he said, as he stood over her. "You're getting a better color. It's just lying down there in the dark and bad air that's made you sick. In an hour you'll be wanting a square meal."

She tried to smile, but it was the kind that will come off; and it disappeared almost before it was realized. He had not finished his constitutional, and, after he had her settled, he began his rounds again. Every time he passed, he stopped to tuck in the rugs and tell her how much better she was looking.

About the ninth time around he thought she must have dropped off to sleep; and, as he marched by, it occurred to him how much she had changed. Her face was thin, and had a peculiar color anything but becoming. For the first time he was struck with the fact that her forehead was too high. Her eyes seemed sunken, and the lids had a brownish tinge where they had been an infantile white before.

The tenth time around he noticed her figure. Of course, she did not have on a corset, and the steamer clothes were not calculated to improve a woman's lines; but he hated to see a woman lop over like that. It made her look old and—well, it wasn't smart, and he wouldn't have thought it of her! She had always been so correct and well set up. He remembered a middle-aged half-sister of hers. Phew! Suppose she got to look like that!

At the eleventh round she seemed to know his step, opened her eyes, and motioned to him. Would he order her a little brandy?

Well! Would he? Just the thing! Why hadn't he thought of it before? But then, wouldn't champagne be better? He had heard of champagne for seasickness. Oh, it didn't make any difference about it being morning. There wasn't any morning, noon, or night on shipboard. Now, what would she think of a split of champagne? Did she like it sweet or dry? He ought to know, of course.

"But we've only been married a week!" he laughed jovially. A man couldn't be expected to remember if his wife liked sugar in her tea after a week. Now, just say what kind she wanted. The ship was hers.

She did not answer, and he turned to exchange a word with a couple that was passing. When he looked again, she seemed to crumple up before his eyes. Her face had gone livid and white. Her head fell forward, and her steamer hat dropped into her lap. The bottle of smelling-salts rattled on the deck.

He howled for a steward, and the pair of pedestrians sprang toward him. Somebody brought a bowl of water and splashed it over her. Somebody else pushed the crowd back and said to let her have air. They took her up, blankets, pillows, and all, and carried her to the stateroom. Her poor thin hands dangled, deathlike, at her sides.

Hipple, who had hunted big game and been treed by a grizzly once; Hipple, who had done some of the biggest automobile races, and had his lungs smashed in during a football rush; Hipple, who had once gone on a tied street-car line, and, for the fun of the thing, had run a car back and forth for a day through a mob of cursing, stone-throwing strikers; Hipple, the strong and unafraid, followed, whimpering.

Once he stepped on the rug that was dragging behind her; and at the angry exclamation of the steward, he had hopped off like a pup threatened with a whip.

The ship-surgeon, a gentle youth of some twenty-odd summers, was summoned; and Hipple, frightened out of ten years' development, begged him, in a trembling voice, to "sa-a-ve" his wife.

Presently she opened her eyes; and when Hipple knew that she was not dead, he gave a great cry and fell down among the pans and wet towels, and cried and thanked Heaven and did a number of foolish and emotional things.

The ship-surgeon came in regularly after that. He was not abashed by his youth and want of experience. What he lacked in years, he made up in assurance; and no man looking on while your chauffeur is sweating under your car could have been freer with advice or more positive about knowing what is the matter.

"It was just a simple case of seasickness," he said. "They had them every trip." He prescribed croton-oil and calomel. The stewardess shook her head; but, of course, she knew better than to give advice.

When the croton-oil and calomel did not kill the patient, he prescribed quinin for the headache, and bromid for the pain in her back, and digitalis for her heart—which seemed weak—and trional to make her sleep, and a tonic of his own composition, and several other little things, that every medical student knows will fly right to any aching part and make it well.

Hipple hung about in a fever of anxiety and trepidation. It seemed beastly to force all those things down her—but what was a man to do? If a doctor did not know what to do for a sick woman, who, in thunder, did know?

He wouldn't go to bed at night; but sat beside her, awkwardly trying to count her pulse. When she slept, he held his head close to her heart to listen to its beating.

When she sighed, his own heart stopped, for fear that she was dying.

When she finally began to mumble in delirium, Hipple all but died himself.

Oh, that was a hard time for Hipple!

IV.

FINALLY they landed at Naples. You know the bay there; the heavenly blueness, and the warmth, and old Vesuvius, smoking so placidly while you rage at the slowness of the customs officials. But Hipple didn't even glance over toward Amalfi, bathing her white feet in the shining summer sea. He didn't give a hang for the frowning Posilipo, or Homer's tomb, or the Blue Grotto. He was just looking for the two hooded, nursing-sisters, who had been summoned by wireless.

When he found them, he wanted a carriage that was roomy enough for the little, wasted, fever-consumed body of his only, onliest, beautiful young wife. At the hotel they must have thought Hipple was crazy; but as he ordered the best rooms—a half-dozen of them, with baths, and balconies, and open fires—and didn't ask the price of anything, they gravely overlooked his unshaven face, his reckless disregard of a dragging shoe-lace, his unpressed clothes, and the wildness with which they had been pitched on.

Poor Hipple, who, in happier days, might have posed for the advertisements of men's wear in the back of this magazine!

Of course Mary didn't die.

This is just a little story from real life, and she wasn't *Daisy Miller*. She was just Mary Hipple on her honeymoon.

The physician said it might have been a simple case of typhoid, if it hadn't been for the croton-oil, and the calomel, and the tonic, and the ship surgeon who was now on his way back to the States. So there wasn't any chance to look him up and strangle him before breakfast. She was probably ready to come down with it at the wedding, he said. Hipple remembered she had said something about not feeling well, but he supposed women always said that when they were nervous and getting married, and Heaven knew the preceding week had been enough to do one up.

She dragged through six or eight weeks of delirium, fever, and pain, which made an old man out of Hipple. Then she began to get better. Finally one day she sat up in bed.

Her hair had been shaved off, and Hipple did his best not to let her have the hand-mirror; but he was in the state then, you see, where he would have plucked out his heart and given it to her if she had asked for it. When she saw herself, she laughed, and then she cried, and then she did them both at once.

The nurses came in and looked at Hipple as though he were a snake, and ordered him out of the room, and he went just like a whipped spaniel and wandered miserably along the bay front, where the fashionable world was driving and sunning itself.

But her recuperation proceeded without a hitch. One day, when the weather had grown so warm that the tourists had all fled to the north, Hipple and Mary took the train for Rome. Hipple stood on the back platform until the city of Naples was out of sight. Then he shook his fist at it in one fierce final gesture of farewell, and went back into the compartment.

Then he counted the bags—they had increased in number since the beginning of the journey. Hot-water bags, and ice-caps, and feeding-cups, and medicine-cases had been added. Just as he had made sure that everything was there, and was about to subside into a seat, he uttered a familiar exclamation:

"Jove! I believe I've lost those tickets!"

Mary was still too new to marriage to suggest the upper right-hand inside pocket of his coat, and she was still weak and easily disposed to laughter and tears.

But she didn't do anything unwifely. She waited until he had finished his frantic flight through all his pockets a few times and brought the tickets to light.

It was too hot to linger in Rome, so they went by easy stages, as fast as her strength would allow, to Paris. A month there made her over. Her hair grew out in clustering curls that clung tight to her small, finely molded head. She was still thin, but it wasn't necessary to puff out her cheeks whenever she looked at herself, and call his attention to the fact that this was the way she would look after a while.

Her eyes were still a little too large,

and one saw the suggestion of the "planes" in her face; but Hipple liked her that way. In the Louvre he stopped before the bust of an "Antinous," and, not knowing a word of that young gentleman's history—or he wouldn't have said it—he exclaimed:

"I say, Mary, you look like that. With your curls and your fine pallor, you look like a Greek statue. There's something fine and young and boyish about you."

Mary laughed.

"There's something boyish about my appetite, too, isn't there?"

There was! And a little of their happiness broke on that rock. Hipple was the kind of an animal that likes to eat three times a day, and the same hour every day.

He had submitted to the hourly, milky feast of Mary as an invalid; but now that she was well, and going about to galleries, shops, and cafés, he couldn't understand her desire for food between meals, in the middle of the night, and at all odd times.

In the second act of "L'Aiglon," just when he was fully under the spell of Bernhardt's voice, she had leaned toward him with the words:

"Dear, I'm starving to death."

Between the acts they had had a glass of wine and a wafer, but in the third act she had been ready to cry again for something to eat.

At first it made him tired, and then it made him mad. He had never been ill in all his life, and he didn't know anything about the passionate hunger of a convalescent.

He stood it a while, seeing her eat a bird's ration at meal-time and then developing an imperative appetite an hour later. He carried bundles of stuff to eat into the hotel, sneaking past the servants like a thief. He ordered meals up to midnight and the closing of the hotel-kitchen, and he even got up one night and dressed and went out to a café with her at two o'clock.

It was about that time he got wild, and declared it was nonsense, and, warming up under his own voice, declared it was monstrous, ridiculous, abominable, shameful, and—oh, a dozen of horrible things.

It's an odd thing how insupportable criticisms of our appetite are. We can stand a man hinting that we are not beautiful, that we have a bad disposition and a hopeless character; but the one impossible thing is the suggestion that we have more than an average appetite. Mary couldn't stand it.

She developed a vocabulary for the occasion. It was astounding, the picture she painted of him. Even a king's consort would be justified in getting a divorce from such an inhuman moral degenerate.

Of course, he threw his clothes into his suit-case. What man wouldn't? He slammed a handful of gold on the table, jammed his hat on, and flung himself out of the door, banging it most eloquently behind him.

Mary, of course, took a chill and went to bed; and she cried until the red of the ticking came through and streaked the pillow-case.

He did not come back for upward of four hours. Meanwhile he had walked along the river, and wondered how he would look propped up in the morgue. He had looked in the windows of the shop where they sell pistols. He had gone into a café and ordered a whole bottle of absinthe, but it was such blamed nasty stuff he couldn't manage more than one glass. He had even reached the point where he contemplated a life of shame in this modern Babylon.

Then he crept back to the hotel, and when he found her teeth chattering and her hands like ice, he filled all the hot-water bottles, and rubbed some warmth into her feet with his hands, and ordered a fire, and came near having a nervous chill himself as he thought of Naples and all she had suffered there.

They outdid each other in self-condemnation. Each insisted on taking all the blame, and they made it up rapidly, and had dinner in their rooms, and drank out of the same wine-glass, and all that.

V.

For another month they traveled on the Continent, and Hipple always declared the tickets lost as soon as the train had started. They might have been fairly happy if it hadn't been for those tickets. You know, the agency does them all up together in a little book; and it's

such a silly thing; for you are sure to tuck them away, under the impression that they're a hotel souvenir, or a courier's plan, or something of the sort.

It would have all but broken your heart to see Hipple chasing a dray through the streets of Geneva, howling to be allowed to climb to the top of the mountain of trunks, and in that perilous position throwing out women's night-gowns and hats, while he rummaged for the tickets.

Of course, he didn't do that at every place he stopped. It generally was just this horrified exclamation: "Jove! I believe I've lost those tickets!" that made Mary's nerves, none too strong yet, snap like a rubber band.

It may have been the tenth, or maybe only the seventh time it occurred, that she remarked, caustically, that "If a big, strong man wasn't equal to taking care of two small packages of tickets, he had better let her carry them in her hand-bag."

It was a very presumptuous thing for a woman to do. When a woman ventures to suggest any superior capacity in any direction, she must be put back in her place, or Heaven only knows what the world would come to.

Hipple, with an eye on the future, put her back in her place with a jolt; and she didn't like it; and said so. If they hadn't been going through a tunnel, it is possible that Hipple would have grabbed his suit-case and really done something desperate.

It went on like that until they got to England. The criticisms of each other that they exchanged would have furnished conversations, startling and varied enough to fill the pages of a psychological novel. A peace conference couldn't have arbitrated the differences that sprung up between them in the process of really getting acquainted with each other's insufferable idiosyncracies.

But their passages at arms, from which they emerged pale, panting, and furious, were alternated with such periods of tenderness and affection, of mutual toleration and unselfish devotion, that they did manage to reach the shores of Merry England together.

Perhaps the fog, perhaps the English breakfasts, perhaps just being thrown together without intermission or relief, brought their irritability to a climax. At any rate, before they had been a week in London, the obsession of infallibility had taken such possession of each of them that they found themselves unable to agree on anything.

If Hipple liked the hotel, Mary found it insupportable. If Mary thought it was going to rain, Hipple wouldn't carry an umbrella. If Hipple liked the play, Mary pronounced it immoral. If Mary admired a picture, Hipple launched into an artistic flight on its demerits in line, color, expression and general asininity that ended in a sulking silence of hours' duration. They couldn't eat the same things; and they spent days and days arguing about menus, hygiene, and food values.

It's always like that with travelers. Eternal hatreds have been engendered by throwing two people together for a length of time, and aggravating their sentence by subjecting them to the irritations of travel.

Still, we must have our wedding trips. Young people must have their honeymoons, or what would become of the romance of the world?

Perhaps they might have managed to get home with some pretense of happiness if Mary had known better than to take Hipple shopping. Sensible married women don't do that; but Mary was only a bride, and a bride can't really be called a married woman. She has just matriculated, and the course is all before her. By the time she gets her degree, or decree, she has learned a wonderful number of things.

But Mary couldn't go home without some hats and things, and Hipple looked so lonely, wandering about the hotel, that she took him with her. It isn't worth while to go into details.

Every one knows how a man acts in a shop. He begins by looking bored, and complaining of the air. Then he gets lost and follows the wrong woman, and gets mad when he is rescued. Then he says it gives him a pain in his neck to stand around so long, doing nothing. Then he makes comments about the slowness of the saleswomen. Finally he asks why in thunder you don't take the most expensive thing and be done with it! It

wouldn't be the most expensive if it wasn't the best!

When his wife tries on a hat, he looks out of the window, and, pressed for a verdict, declares she looks a fright in it. Eventually he says he can't see what she wants with a hat, anyway, seeing how many she has already that she never wears.

At last he can't keep up the martyr pose any longer, and his temper gives way altogether. And when she says, "Well, you needn't shout so the whole store can hear you," he is apt to do violent and ungraceful things.

That is what Hipple did, and, when Mary gave way and began to sob right there before every one, he got very white and speechless with the rage and shame of it all. He took her arm, none too gently, and bounced her away, with the wide-eyed, snickering, black-bearded floor-walker directing him toward the lift.

VI.

It was only a day or two until the boat sailed, but the silence that rose between them could have been heard as far as Windsor. They didn't speak on the way down to Southampton. In fact, they went down in different compartments. On the way across they exchanged any necessary remarks through the stewards. Hipple spent his time in the smoking-room, and Mary herded with the women in the ladies' saloon. She was not sea-sick. Perhaps she was too angry, hurt, and heartsick to think of the motion.

They got far-sighted straining their eyes toward New York, and the Statue of Liberty, and South Dakota. Hipple looked old and seedy, and had rotten luck with the pools. Mary was withered and careworn, and wouldn't wear her puffs. When they were packing their cases to land, and stepping out of each other's way with icy politeness, Mary cried a little into her best hat-box.

"Are we really the same people who got married and left here such a little while ago?" she asked once, when she couldn't bear it any longer.

Hipple's heart was sore, and he could have cried like a baby; but he strapped the rugs together without a word.

There was a furnished house, filled with servants, waiting for them in Baltimore. They had to go back there together. It wasn't worth while to make a scandal. They could settle about the divorce afterward. The word divorce was not spoken, but they both knew that was the only solution of their irreparable incompatibility.

They found family, friends, and servants waiting for them, and they put on the best face possible. Had they had a lovely time? Oh, but hadn't they! They did not look at each other. The lie was painful and embarrassing enough, without having to go over it so often in each other's presence.

After the guests were gone, it began to look silly to sit and glare at the open fire. Hipple thought they might as well look through the house. When they came to the suite that was to be their own, both felt the knife-edge of their misery.

It was such a pretty place—the big, light room, with its windows overlooking the park, the good American furniture, the two fine mahogany beds, side by side; the dressing-rooms, one so simple and Spartan, the other so delicate and feminine; the bath-rooms, so white and shining. Hipple felt a choking sensation in his throat. This, then, was marriage—this!

Hipple wasn't a literary man, but somewhere he heard the Swinburne refrain: "This is the end of every man's desire." He didn't know whether it was apropos or not, but it sounded the way he felt. He looked at Mary, and saw that she was biting her lips and struggling to keep the tears back.

"I say, Mary," he exclaimed, almost like a sob—"I say! Aren't we a pair of idiots!"

She didn't know what he meant. She didn't care. She threw her arms about his neck—which was a very sensible thing to do under the circumstances.

"I think, Mary," he said, after a moment, "Congress ought to pass a law against wedding-trips, or the humane society ought to take it up, or the society for the prevention of vice, or something like that. Somebody ought to get out a tract on the subject and leave it on people's door-steps, don't you know."

"I don't know as I would go that far," said Mary.

HIS CREED.

BY GERTRUDE BROOKE HAMILTON.

A SHORT STORY.

INSIDE the door, Charles Edward Brinkley, called by his mother Charles Edward, paused. The roar of thunder and the flashes of lightning confused him; the fast nearing of horses' hoofs, mingled with a voice shouting from the heart of the storm, confused him. He put his hands to his forehead. Some one brushed roughly by him; that broke the spell. Charles Edward woke up.

The thunder was evolving from sheets of tin, the lightning from an electric, man-directed battery, the horses' hoofs from coconut-shells being pounded together, and the voice in the storm from an actor, who, between shouts, listened for his cue. Charles Edward, not in the dull daytime, but in the heat of the third act's climax, was behind the scenes!

He marveled that no one rebelled against his presence among the giants of the drama—otherwise members of "The Hills's Power" company—who had included Walton in their one-night stands. But he stayed there unnoticed; until, with an abrupt ending of storm and horses' hoofs, the curtain fell, and Miss Magda De Mille, clumsily fat—even for her fifty years—stepped off the stage.

Charles Edward drew a quick breath and clasped his hands.

She passed without raising her eyes.

He took a step toward her, and called, "Miss De Mille!" As her eyes came around inquiringly, he faltered: "You told me I might—I took the liberty to—"

Now she smiled. "The boy with the umbrella! My part in the play is over. Come up to my dressing-room."

Charles Edward followed her up some rickety stairs to a closed door. When she pulled it open, a wave of warm air heavily scented with grease-paint rushed out. Breathing deep, he entered.

"Come on in," she invited; "you can sit on the trunk. Look out for that pile of clothes. That's it." She eyed him kindly. "Now I remember all about you. It was yesterday afternoon—"

"At five minutes after two," prompted Charles Edward.

"I was caught in the rain, you offered me your umbrella, and for a second I thought you were my son Jules. You're the image of him."

She seated herself before the little wood-framed mirror and picked up a can of cold cream.

Charles Edward watched breathlessly. "Is your son on the stage?" he ventured.

"Jules? He isn't on to anything, except spending money." She sighed, and began smearing her face with cold cream. "But I'm a great one to talk. Jules swears I'll die in the Actors' Home!"

"You—with your wonderful gifts!"

She gave him a sharp look. Then she said: "I like you, boy. Do you live here?"

"I've never been outside the town."

"How old are you?"

"Twenty-two."

"Jules is just twenty! And you wanted to go on the stage?"

Charles Edward clasped and unclasped his hands; one of the many tricks attesting to a shut-in life. "Do you think"—he spoke haltingly—"that I could get there? Have I any chance?"

She began ruthlessly destroying pink cheeks and tinted brows. "I don't say you haven't. The first thing is to get to New York." Having finished her face by a final dusting of rice-powder, she brushed up her black hair, whose roots showed white. "Can you recite for me?"

Charles Edward nodded.

"Then go down-stairs and wait. I've got to change my dress." She began to unhook her waist, and Charles Edward backed out so hastily that he all but pitched down the steps.

The play was over. A great space of lifted curtain showed rows of ghostly chairs. Stage hands were running about setting up scenery; every minute members of the company, dressed for the street, passed Charles Edward. There was one girl in blue, with a flaring hat, whom he thought beautiful. As she went through the doorway, their eyes met; she smiled; and he, to his own amazement, smiled back. Then she vanished, and Charles Edward blushed, until Miss De Mille came down the stairs.

"You'll have to hurry," she told him; "the lights might be turned off."

Feeling that his future depended upon it, he began the "Queen Mab" speech. He had reached, "And in this state she gallops night by night," when some one shouted: "Lights out!" And the lights went out.

Charles Edward stood frozen.

Miss De Mille's laughing words came through the darkness. "Be careful of the junk around. You'd better take my hand."

He reached for it, and they went out into the street. "I hope I pleased you," he said.

"You spoke very nicely. You've a good deal to learn, but nothing to unlearn. Let me see—my tour closes the twentieth; the twenty-first I'll be in New York. Come and see me then. I'll introduce you to my manager. Here's my hotel. Don't forget."

"But where shall I find you, Miss De Mille?"

"Oh, I'm generally around some of the theaters. But maybe you'd better have my address." She opened a huge red bag. "Got a pencil?"

He fished one from his pocket. Under the wavering light of the street-lamp, she scribbled down two addresses. "One's mine," she explained, "and one's a good theatrical boarding-house."

"If my mother were here," he said solemnly, "she'd thank you. I can't."

"You're a nice boy. I like to hear a young fellow speak that way about his mother; Jules doesn't always. Good night!"

"Good night, Miss De Mille." He bared his head and stood so; while she, a figure laden with fat and advancing years, toiled up the hotel steps. From an open door a gleam of light, and he was left alone with the bit of pasteboard in his hand and all sorts of high hopes in his heart.

II.

When Charles Edward told his mother the next morning, she said: "The town's shrunk to too small a size for you, son."

He looked across at her, protesting; but no words came, and the silence that arose was full of good-byes to be said and of great adventures.

No dread of the unknown stirred Charles Edward. He went about his preparations for departure with soft tunes upon his lips. On the twenty-first he left for New York. His mother waved faithful hands to him; and as long as the specks of white showed, Charles Edward waved, too. Afterward he took out a card and gazed at it. Arrived in New York, even before he went to his boarding-house, he steered for Miss De Mille's—he felt that he ought to keep his promise at once—and found a shabby apartment on a crowded street. A woman was sweeping the steps.

"Where do I find Miss De Mille?" questioned Charles Edward.

She answered without raising her eyes: "Third floor, front."

"Thank you." Charles Edward started up the steps. At the second landing he came upon Miss De Mille herself, apparently just going out. Charles Edward halted. "Miss De Mille! I hope I haven't caught you at an inconvenient time."

She returned his gaze coolly. "Really," she said, "I don't know who you are."

"Don't know who I am!"

"Not in the least. What is your name?"

This was a blow. Only a week! Not to remember him! "My name is Brinkley," he faltered. "Charles Edward Brinkley."

Still, she shook her head. "I'm sorry. We meet so many people in the profes-

sion. I thought at first that you were my son Jules, but now I see that you are not at all like him."

A week ago he had been Jules's image! Charles Edward gripped the banisters. "It was in Walton," he explained weakly. "I lent you my umbrella. After the play I came to see you—you asked me to recite—"

"And you recited. Now I remember you—very clever, for an amateur. You had a mother, didn't you? How is she?"

"I left her well."

He waited for her to broach the all-important topic.

"You spoke so nicely of her; Jules isn't always so respectful. That reminds me—I'm to meet that boy at two." She pulled out her watch. "My! it's nearly half past!"

"I came to New York—" he began.

"I'm glad to have met you again, Mr.— Really, I can't remember your name."

"I came to New York," Charles Edward went on steadily, "because you—"

"Really? You're a nice boy. Good-by!"

He straightened then, not even neglecting to remove his hat; motionless, until she had vanished down the stairs.

Then he went down, too.

In the streets he walked blindly. What kind of a person would promise and then —forget? What kind of a person would call him the image of her son one week, and the next—

In these bitter moments his own mother's face rose before him, and he remembered to be glad.

After that, Charles Edward went to the theatrical boarding-house. The landlady showed him a tiny hall-room. As they entered it, cries of "Mercy! Mercy!" sounded from the next apartment.

Charles Edward paled.

"It's that vaudeville team," explained the gray-blond landlady; "they've got a new sketch they're rehearsing. Are you regularly in the profession, Mr. Brinkley?" And when Charles Edward shook his head: "I thought not. Going on the stage?"

"I'm going to try to." Taking courage from her good nature, he added: "Perhaps you will be good enough to tell me how."

The landlady looked flattered. "I could tell you something about it," she admitted. "For five years I was the lady member of the only acrobatic team doing eight hand-turns in mid air. I used to wear pink tights and spangles." She sighed. "You wouldn't think so now, but my curves was something grand!"

Charles Edward blushed.

From the next room came: "Move an inch, I shoot!" He was making for the door, when he recalled the sketch.

A trilling voice floated up the stairs, then a flash of blue went by.

The landlady called out: "Wait a minute, Miss Vokes."

"Can't; I'm in a hurry."

"But there's a young gentleman here wants to ask you something."

Charles Edward rose in protest.

"He can do all the asking he wants, but I'll do the answering, Mrs. Landers." Some one in blue and a flaring hat appeared at the door.

Thrilling, Charles Edward recognized the girl who, a week ago, had smiled back at him in Walton's Opera-House.

The landlady rose to the occasion.

"This is Miss Tessie Vokes; she's out of an engagement now, but she's got ten standing offers."

"Sure," said Tessie, and winked.

"And this is Mr. Brinkley—a mighty nice young fellow, who wants you to tell him how to get into the profession."

Then the landlady walked off.

"It's up to me," grinned Tessie.

Charles Edward was fearfully embarrassed.

"Really, I didn't ask—"

"Why shouldn't you? If you're green, and don't ask, you'll die stung; if you're green, and do ask—the right person—you'll land a contract."

"The money—or your life pays!"

"It's the sketch," explained Charles Edward.

"I know. Pretty bum, isn't it? Now, what's your line, Mr. Brinkley—vaudeville, legit., or melodrama?"

"Oh, I just want to go on the stage."

She laughed. "Well, I guess the legit.'s the thing for you—the kind that starts in a dress-suit and ends in one; only, beginning as a butler and ending as a star."

He nodded, dimly comprehending.

"Well, the first thing to do" — she leaned against the door, one hand emphasizing her words — "is to dike out in every glad rag you own, eat a good breakfast if you can afford to, look like you've eaten one if you can't—and trot up and down dear old Broadway."

"Why Broadway?"

"Why Broadway!" She faced him sharply. "Say, where did you come from?"

"Walton," he replied seriously.

"Is this I'm-mother's-only-boy stunt a bluff?"

He did not understand her, and he showed it. But, repaying her interest in him, he poured out his story—why he had come to New York, and the strange forgetfulness of Miss De Mille.

When he had finished, Tessie said:

"Ain't that the perfesh? Raving over you one week on a sort of love-on-the-fortieth-of-a-second plan, and the next week handing you a lemon!"

"I don't think she remembered me," sighed Charles Edward.

"Don't you? Here's hoping you won't have many more eye-openers, Mr. Brinkley. I'll see you later."

III.

In the next few days Charles Edward met the inmates of the house—a hungry-looking set, who, Tessie informed him, cooked their own meals in their rooms, when they had any to cook. Full of horror, he wanted to help them through their hard luck.

"If you do," she warned, "they'll settle on you like flies. Get wise. Never say 'loan' to a hard-up."

Two weeks after his introduction to Broadway, Charles Edward was standing at Thirty-Fifth Street when a young man in a well-cut suit ran against him and then elaborately asked his pardon.

"Don't mention it," responded Charles Edward, and walked on. He was bound for one of the many theatrical offices that lined the street. In an entrance he again encountered the young man.

"Hallo!" said the young man. "Looking for a job?"

Charles Edward nodded.

"Paid anything to the agents yet? I see you have, and I'm sorry for you; they will do you every time." The young man looked Charles Edward over speculatively. Suddenly he drew closer and put a finger through his buttonhole. "You need a fellow who knows this little old town from start to finish to see that you get the square deal," he confided. "I'm that fellow. I'll get you an engagement."

Charles Edward thrilled under the words and the manner of the speaker. "But what—how can I repay you?" he faltered.

The young man waved a lofty hand. "What's pay to a man-to-man affection?"

"I'm the luckiest boy!" Charles Edward laughed. "I no sooner lose a friend than I make another. Isn't that a happy faculty?"

A slight smile crossed the other's face. "Had your lunch?" he queried. "I know a jolly place to eat."

He took Charles Edward's arm and led him to a café, where, after ascertaining what ready money Charles Edward had about his person, he ordered an elaborate luncheon. Half-way through the meal a crowd of loudly dressed youths sauntered to their table.

"Look what Dearie's swung on to!" grinned one of them.

"A sugar-coated pill," remarked another.

A boy with sneering eyes drew closer with: "Introduce us, Dearie."

"Chase yourself!" retorted the young man hotly.

But the boy insisted. "Introduce us." And then leaned down and whispered a laughing something into the young man's ear.

Instantly springing to his feet, the young man aimed a furious blow at him. It landed squarely upon the temple. Without a sound, the boy with sneering eyes fell to the floor.

Confusion rained upon the place. Waiters ran this way and that. From a far corner, a pale-faced proprietor came running toward them. The young man gripped Charles Edward's arm, and whispered "Run!"

Dodging all outthrown hands, they bounded for the door, and the next second were flying along the street. They soon had, through the young man's knowledge

of byways, their pursuers most blunderingly mixed.

"Come to my boarding-house," panted Charles Edward.

The young man did not speak until they were behind Charles Edward's door; then he blurted out: "I've killed Billy Greenley. My God!"

"Hush! hush!" Tears stung the boy's eyes. "Don't go under. Bear up. It was a fearful thing, but bear up."

The young man beat his head with his hands dramatically. "Phone my mother. Tell her I've killed Billy Greenley. Tell her not to try to prove me insane. I'd rather hang for murder!"

Charles Edward put an arm about the young man's shoulder. He himself was trembling from head to foot; but it was fear for this stranger, who had befriended him, and who must now be befriended. "Tell me your name," he whispered.

"Jules Henshaw."

"Shall I phone to Mrs. Henshaw, then?"

"No, my mother is an actress—she goes by her stage name. Ask for Miss De Mille."

IV.

THERE was dead silence in the moment that Charles Edward stared at the young man. Dead silence, too, in the moment that he slowly took his arm from the bowed shoulder. The son of Miss De Mille! The person who had promised and then cheated! The person who had killed something in his heart that would never smile again! Her son! His friend, to be befriended by him? To be saved and protected—by him? Never—never!

He looked down at the young man's bowed shoulders, and remembered her words, "Jules is only twenty!" He looked at the hands hiding the face, and saw something slide through the laced fingers and fall to the floor—tears! Charles Edward tiptoed from the room and closed the door.

Outside he met Tessie coming up the stairs, and poured the story into her ears. At his apology for haste, she said:

"You're not going to phone her?"

He nodded.

"After the way she turned you down—to pay her off like that!"

"It isn't the easiest way," he admitted slowly, "but it's the best way, I now think."

He hurried off then, and, calling up Miss De Mille, hinted at what had happened. The voice that promised to come at once to the boarding-house was strained with alarm.

In his room again, he found Jules repeating, "I've killed Billy Greenley!" He kept this up, until some one came laboring up the stairs, and Miss De Mille, her face drawn and her hat awry, rushed into the room.

"Jules!" she implored, "what is it?"

Jules slid deeper into his chair. "I've killed Billy Greenley!"

"No, no," cried Charles Edward; "don't tell her that!"

Facing him, an exclamation of bewilderment broke from her.

The door was jerked open, and Tessie, bouncing in, stood with her back against it. Her eyes sought Miss De Mille's.

"So! You're Johnny on the spot! Should think you'd feel like digging your grave and jumping in, when you see who has saved your son from the station-house." She turned to Charles Edward, and said bluntly: "I went to hunt news. They didn't even have to take him to a hospital. Billy Greenley's all right."

Miss De Mille went to her son and put her arms about him. Charles Edward took Tessie's hand, and led her toward the door.

"Wait!"

It was Miss De Mille who spoke, and who came across the room and put her hands on Charles Edward's shoulders. "There isn't any place for you here," she said earnestly, "and if there was, you wouldn't want to stay. You'd find out so many things. So many people would cheat and lie to you. The gold would wear off. You'd have to use plate. Boy, boy, go back to Walton."

He drew a long breath. It was honest advice, honestly given, and it stung him with its truth. Beyond the countless roofs that stretched away from his small window he saw, in fancy, the streets of Walton, peopled by souls who lived eventless, little lives, who neither dreamed nor dared. And then, as if in answer to some battle-cry within his soul, he straightened. His head went up.

"There is a place for me," he cried.

"I'll have to fight to win it. I'll have to be scarred and knocked down a million times, and a million times get up again. But it's free! It's a race any one can run—and win!"

New courage was in his voice, and in his eyes the flame of new convictions burned. Through a tense silence, Miss De Mille searched his face, and suddenly, as if she found there something she had not thought to find, she nodded.

"I was wrong," she said. "To show you how wrong can be righted, I want you to meet me at my manager's to-morrow at ten o'clock. No, don't thank me—just come." She slipped her arm through her son's, and hurried from the room.

Tessie gazed after her. "Just take this from me," she advised. "There are heaps of straight-to-heaven-without-any-changes kind of people outside the profession; but you won't find many who will come out and say, 'I was wrong.' Those three little words take spunk. That old-mother-in-the-third-act speech got me. She's all right!"

"The money! Or your life pays!" came again from the other room.

Tessie made a wry face. "Land! there goes that sketch again! Say, I've got some oysters in my room, and a girl across the hall is going to bring in some bottled bubbles; we signed yesterday, you know. Come on up, Mr. Brinkley."

"Thank you," said Charles Edward. "I don't believe I want to come—just yet."

From the sketch-room floated: "Move an inch! I shoot!"

Tessie gave him a look of quick comprehension. "Feel kind of first-nighty? Have it out with yourself. Oysters can keep their shells." And Tessie spun across the room and up her flight of stairs.

Charles Edward closed his door. Surging emotion that called for speech was in his heart, and he dropped on his knees beside the iron bed, and buried his face in his hands.

"Oh, God!" he prayed, "my chance has come to me—"

"Now, let's have a song!" sounded stridently, mingled with the scraping of feet; the vaudeville team always wound up with a dance.

"I want to be true," whispered Charles Edward, "because they trust me. I want to be brave, because there is so much to dare. I want to be strong, because there is a great fight before me. I want to keep the simple things I learned in Walton, and be the boy these people think I am. Help me. Amen."

ON SINKING ISLAND.*

BY BERNICE STROHM RUTH.

A SERIAL STORY.

CHAPTER XIX.

A FIT OF NERVES.

"IF you are afraid," Devry said finally, "all that is necessary is for you to say so, and we'll wait for nothing. We'll provision the Lolita, hoist sail, and leave the island this afternoon."

She toyed with her spoon for a time, a slight, perplexed wrinkle between her brows.

"I'm not afraid," she said. "I was never less afraid in my life. Etienne's a colossal coward—he hasn't the nerve to try such a thing." She lifted her eyes, sweet, collected. "I should greatly prefer waiting for the commissary, which is due now almost any day, as we could not take my trunks in the Lolita. But I leave the matter entirely to you. If you

* This story began in THE CAVALIER for August.

think it wise to go, we'll go. You know best."

The way in which she deferred to him nearly robbed him of self-possession—a thing that would not do, he decided—since they had tacitly dropped all love-making, neither referring nor intending to refer to the little scene on the beach the night before. He rose and saved the situation by pacing up and down the floor.

"You are worrying now," she said.

He paused in his walk.

"How do you know?"

"Because a man doesn't tramp back and forth like that unless he is worried. Are you afraid these men will burn the bungalow?"

"I discredit the idea even more than you."

"Then, what's the trouble?"

Devry hesitated a moment.

"Put it down to nerves," he suggested at length.

She laughed merrily.

"I don't wonder. Mine never were so ragged. You came to the wrong place to get rid of yours. It's too bad you chose this sanatorium. Don't you wish you had gone to St. Vincent or Martinique?"

Then she realized that she had made an unfortunate remark; and nervously tried to cover it up, talking of Denslow and her ride to the shore in his launch—a topic as unfortunate as the one she had abandoned. It brought the frown back to Devry's face.

Lolita shrugged her shoulders and dropped that theme likewise. She had had it in mind to tell Devry of the girl somewhere out in the wide world still pinning her affections, if not her faith, to the king of the island counterfeiters, thinking better of it after a moment's reflection. Devry would laugh at her for her pains, would reject the idea of Denslow's reformation, and call her credulous because of her belief in the story.

So she sighed, kept the counterfeiter's confidence, and watched her "loyal knight and true" put on his hat and take his way toward the beach, where he spent the morning packing into the box in which they had made their voyage to the island such of his belongings as had escaped ruin during the burning of the tent.

As for Lolita, she was busy after her own fashion throughout the major portion of the day. The Carib girl was a passable cook and dish-washer; but there ended, practically, her domestic virtues. Sweep or set to rights she would not; therefore, when the accumulation of dust tried Lolita's soul too much, she donned a voluminous apron of blue-and-white material, bound up her head, Turk fashion, with a towel, and worked with an energy that would have won the commendation of her surviving New England relative, Aunt Georgia.

The rooms in order, she went to her apartment, divested herself of the homely apron and improvised dusting-cap, searched through her wardrobe for a favorite pink organdy gown, which she put on after arranging her black hair to her satisfaction, and twisted a pink rose into its midnight meshes. She smiled at the vision reflected by the mirror, dabbed her hands with the delicious violet scent in the effort to forget that they had been in contact with dust, and went out to supper.

Devry was not an entertaining fellow diner that night. He ate next to nothing, and seemed hardly to notice Lolita's dainty attire. She fancied the wound on his forehead was paining him, asked timidly regarding it, and received an answer so short that she sat for an instant regarding him, then left her place at the table and started from the room.

Instantly he was on his feet.

"Come back, Lolita," he requested, and, as she continued her progress toward the door, he made a few strides and barred the way. "Please come back," he supplemented.

Her lip was caught a trifle hard by her teeth.

"What reason had you for speaking to me in that way?"

"None whatever," he replied instantly. "I beg your pardon. Forget that I was a bear, and come back and finish your supper."

She allowed him to lead her back to her place at the table; but the atmosphere was still somewhat clouded when, at the close of the meal, she retired to her own room and tried to interest herself in one of the novels he had given her.

She put the book aside after a while,

yawned, and went to the kitchen with the intention of making her favorite drink of oranges and pineapples, minced and mixed with sugar and water.

Devry came in as she was quartering the oranges.

"I've fastened all the doors except this," he volunteered, indicating the rear exit of the bungalow.

"Yes?" she assented, wondering at his tone.

"I want you to fasten this after you have let me out of it. Draw the bolts and lock it with the key as well."

Lolita paused in measuring the sugar.

"What are you going to do?"

"Spend the night outside."

"Watching the bungalow?"

"Yes."

She dropped her spoon and leveled an accusing finger.

"You told me this morning that you discredited the idea of harm befalling the house."

"I do yet," was the reply, "but I think it best to be on the safe side—and the safe side in this particular instance is the outside."

Lolita gave her attention to the fruit-punch she was preparing. Her lids were down, her lips slightly compressed.

"Are you going to stir that all night?" Devry asked amusedly, after a time.

She looked up coldly.

"It must be well stirred, if the sugar is to dissolve. I make this after a recipe of my father's, and he was something of a connoisseur. May I give you some?"

"If you please."

She found a glass, filled it, and watched him drink the beverage.

"Is it good?" she asked, as he put down the empty glass.

"Excellent," was his reply. "May I have some more?"

She refilled the glass, pouring out a quantity for herself; but for some reason or other she did not drink it, setting her glass aside after the first sip. It had a flat taste, and the one swallow she took threatened to choke her. Devry was looking at her in a puzzled way.

"What is wrong?" she heard him inquiring.

"Nothing."

"Lolita, there is," he declared. "Your eyes are full of tears."

She looked at him haughtily.

"Yours would be, too, if what you had been drinking tried to go down your Sunday throat."

He laughed.

"Oh, laugh!" she said angrily, turning away. "Whenever I feel the least like hearing merriment, some one has to laugh. I never knew it to fail."

"Lolita," he said gently.

"Please—" And then she tried to laugh, and the only sound that rewarded her efforts was a curious gurgle in her throat. "Don't—my—I've got sugar on my hands. They're sticky," she finished desperately, in a last attempt to keep him at arm's length.

"Tell me what's troubling you."

"Nothing is troubling me. Let me alone," she said fiercely.

Then she crumpled up in his arms and dropped a few scalding tears on his shoulder.

"Are you crying, Lolita?" he asked, for he could not see her face.

"No!" in a low voice.

"Do you want me to let you go?"

"No," lower still.

"Lolita!" he said, in laughing reproof. "Your ancestors probably helped to frame the famous blue laws."

"I don't care," she said defiantly. "I'm tired of being good and lonesome. I'm frightened to death, and I want to go away from this terrible place."

"Terrible place!" he repeated. "Your island that you love so well—is that what you call it?"

"At night," she said, shivering. "It's terrible then. The wind moans so strangely among the trees. It's different when the sun shines. I'm ashamed then to remember my fears of the night, and wonder how I could ever want to leave this place forever. But the thing repeats itself. The horrid fear comes back and grins at me again as soon as the trees begin their moan, and I know that somewhere those men—" She drew away from him, shivering, her dry eyes burning. "I'll lose my mind if I have to endure it much longer."

"You are unstrung, dear," he soothed her. "It's not like you to feel so."

"I'm ashamed of myself," she said drearily; "but I can't help it. I want to go away from here. Can't we go?"

"In the morning — as soon as it is light."

His voice fell soothingly again. She was beside herself with nervous excitement, on the point of collapse. Devry understood the situation—had understood it even before she voiced her trembling speech.

When the eastern sky should glow with the rose and pearl of dawn, the fearsome fancies of the night would be forgotten, and once more she would evince deep reluctance to leave the island, her only home, and of all earth's pleasant places, to her the most endeared.

CHAPTER XX.

THE FIREFLY.

SHE calmed herself after a while, and went with him to the door.

"Shall you be within call?" she queried.

"All the time," he returned. "If you need me, whistle, and I'll come. Or," with a laugh, "if I need you, I'll whistle. Will you come?"

"You know I will," she answered quickly.

He smiled.

"That's my brave girl. She's not afraid. She only thought she was."

Lolita flushed.

"You talk as if I were three years old," she said with a touch of her quick temper.

"You act like it sometimes," was his laughing retort. "Good night, my Lady of Shalott. Dream of me."

"I'm not even going to bed," said she shortly.

"You are a law unto yourself," he answered—"always will be, I suppose; but if you take my advice, you'll go to bed, sleep as soundly as if your conscience never troubled you—and I see no reason why it should—and get up with the nerve of that girl who threatened to shoot me through the heart."

"Oh," she said crossly, "stop talking about that. I grow tired of hearing it day in and day out."

He backed through the door, laughing, and she shut it in his face. The next instant the bolts were drawn.

"Good night, sweetheart," her voice said softly, behind the protection of the wooden barrier.

"That's unfair," he wrathfully complained. "Why couldn't you have said that before you fastened the door?"

Her answer was a light laugh; then the click of her heels across the floor and her call to Nina across the room.

He went down the steps, taking the path through the pale starlight, past the cistern, and on along a wide walk fringed by low, thick-growing shrubs bearing spikes of sweet white bloom. He heard the voices of the night, the lap of the waves, a bird's raucous cry, and the strange wind blowing through the trees.

Poor girl, he thought—she had passed through enough to try the stoutest soul, but—Heaven love her!—she should be happy one day. There would come a time when she saw things in his way.

His place in the world of affairs was no mean one, and the home he could offer her, if not affluent, would be a habitation not even she could scorn. He saw it in fancy—a suburban cottage set back of a velvet sward, an abode kept aglow by "lamps of love's own lighting."

He was at the terminus of the shrub-bordered walk, facing the sea. The moon was coming up, a silver crescent riding through the vast blue of the east, and soon the beach, the softly lapping water, the groves, and the dark shape of the bungalow rising not far away were touched with eery light.

As Devry bent his head to inhale the sweetness of the flower-laden shrub, a twig crackled on the other side of the hedge, the soft pad of feet was on the sand. He straightened himself, laying a hand on his revolver, every muscle tense.

"Laurence," said a low voice, "where are you?"

The voice was Lolita's. His hand dropped from the weapon.

"Here," he replied, and she came around the bush between them. "What are you doing out here?" he asked, a trifle displeased.

"Don't scold," was her beseeching answer. "I couldn't stay indoors. The night is too beautiful, so when I saw you so near I threw this round me and ran out to join you."

A fleecy wrap enveloped her head and shoulders. She looked up at him, her

eyes deep, unfathomable, catching something of the moonlight's glamour.

"You'll not send me in?" she entreated. "Not for a while, anyhow. Why, it's only nine o'clock. I locked the door and brought the key along because Nina is asleep. I'm going to drop it into your coat-pocket."

This she proceeded to do.

"The sea is calling me," she said, with a soft little laugh. "I am going to it."

He followed her.

"If we stay near this strip of beach," she told him, "we can keep the house in sight." He said nothing. "Silence gives consent," she added, laughing again, and slipped her hand through his arm.

Then for a time they paced the shore.

"I'm not at all sure that I am doing right to let you stay," he said at last.

She laid silencing fingers across his lips, the same slim, sun-browned fingers he had first seen curled about a rifle barrel, and he took them away, holding them in a grip from which there could be no escaping, even did she care to escape, a desire that had no place in her mind just then.

"I've been thinking," she said, "of that man Denslow."

"Yes."

Devry's tone radiated frost. She lifted her white-draped shoulders.

"I wanted to tell you something about him, but I will not while you speak in that tone."

"Tell me," he said.

"What is the use? You'll jeer when I've finished."

"Probably," he answered dryly. "I jeered the time you came to my camp and told me you were afraid of Perrault, didn't I?"

"No," Lolita said. "You did not. You were perfectly dear about that. But this is different. You were not with me this morning, and did not hear the story Mr. Denslow told me."

"I'll hear it now," he replied—"from you."

So she told him, and he smiled at the woman of it, at her credulity, her eager interest in affairs of the heart—she whose own heart story was a thousand times more interesting.

"How much of that," he asked, when she had finished, "do you suppose is true?"

"All of it," indignantly.

He laughed.

"Lolita, you are too credulous. He invented that as he went along, and you sat there with your mouth open and swallowed it. I don't believe a word of his statement about reforming. I'd wager almost anything I possess that he's on this island to-night, three deep with Perrault and the hawk-nosed villain. Did I tell you he offered to take us—you, the Carib girl and myself—in the launch to St. Vincent?"

"No," she replied, surprised.

"Well, he did, and I declined with thanks. I put that down as a ruse, too. He'd load us all into his launch, run as far as that clump of bushes, and throw me overboard with a bullet in my heart. That's about what he'd do."

Lolita sighed.

"It's a dreadful thing not to have faith in any one. Suppose that some day—it's just possible—we find out that the story he told was true, and he really did reform. What then?"

"I don't know, I'm sure," was the response. "But it will be the best chance you ever had to say 'I told you so,' and I wouldn't lose much time about saying it, if I were you."

Her hand was still in his.

"You're going back to the house now," he said firmly, and she sighed again.

"Well, if I must," with a last, lingering look at the sea. "What are you looking at?"

"The house. Doesn't it strike you as odd that it should be lighted up like that?"

She turned and looked toward the bungalow. Every window was agleam.

"It was in darkness when I left," she said uneasily. "Nina surely would not—"

"Come," he interrupted, and they went swiftly from the beach back along the walk with its border of shrubs.

Laughter reached their ears as they drew nearer, boisterous talk, and the trampling of feet upon the verandas.

"The commissary must have come!" cried Lolita excitedly. "The captain, Rafael Rodriguez, is my cousin, and he always makes himself and the others at

home about the place, but where is the ship? Why didn't it anchor back there at the landing as usual?"

Devry had no answer for either of her queries. They quickened their steps, and arrived, panting, on the veranda. The door of a side entrance had been forced, and Lolita noted that it was sagging on broken hinges. She stood for an instant on the threshold just back of Devry, surveying a scene that was not calculated to help her retain her equanimity, for the house was in possession of a set of men who had shown little respect for her property.

During her brief absence the place had been ransacked from top to bottom. Her eyes went about the room; anger blazed in them. She snatched her riding-whip from the wall, and before Devry could stop her, laid the lash about the head of a fellow who sat with vandal feet on the fragile top of a piece of furniture she especially loved. The man retreated before the rain of blows, while his friends laughed. The one presumably in command of the expedition stepped forward.

"Beg pardon, ma'am. We wasn't meaning no disrespect to you."

"Who are you?" she demanded.

"Captain Black, of the brig Firefly." He turned pompously to Devry. "I got a warrant for your arrest—yours and the lady's."

"Indeed?" said Devry coolly. "What is the charge?"

Captain Black emitted a soft laugh.

"Innocent, ain't you? Well, counterfeiting's the charge, and I don't want to hear any arguments. I got evidence enough to satisfy *me,* I have."

"It's a lie!" said Lolita thickly.

Her face was ashen. She turned with a sob to Devry, and he put his arm around her.

"Don't give way," he whispered.

Captain Black, who had seemed a trifle disconcerted, recovered his official brusqueness of tone.

"I'm right sorry about the lady, but she hadn't ought to have went and been an accomplice in this ugly business."

"How do you know she is an accomplice?" Devry inquired with a quietness that surprised himself.

The captain of the Firefly laughed softly again.

"I got proof all right—plenty of it, and some to spare."

"Produce it," commanded Devry shortly. Captain Black issued the order:

"Bring in the others."

Then through the door leading into the bungalow's sitting-room were marshaled Perrault and the hawk-nosed man.

The Frenchman's yellow face wore its invariable evil grin; his companion's features were twisted into a scowl of pain. The limp with which he walked told of a wrenched ankle. Both were handcuffed.

CHAPTER XXI.

CATASTROPHE.

THE Firefly's captain emitted a third irritating soft laugh.

"Museer Perrault and Mister Lindon," he sarcastically said, "don't you know your bosom friends?" He laughed coarsely. "There's your proof. Museer Perrault says she's his wife and his accomplice, and I reckon he knows."

"He lies," said Devry contemptuously.

"By the bones of my ancestors," screamed Perrault, "it is true!"

Captain Black forestalled Devry's speech.

"Don't say a word, sir—it ain't no use. You're wanted in St. Vincent for passing bogus money, and there's a fat reward for your delivery, dead or alive. You can take your choice how you go," with a shrug. "I ain't to say exactly particular myself."

Lolita disengaged herself from Devry's arm.

"I am going to my room," she said in a low voice.

The white shawl had slipped from her shoulder to the floor. Devry stooped to pick it up, and escorted her from the room. The voice of the Firefly's captain followed them:

"It looks, *museer,* like you'd got the mitten, don't it?"

A roar of laughter from the assembled sailors greeted this sally. Out of hearing of the band, at the door of her apartment, Lolita turned a blanched face to Devry.

"Oh, why didn't we go this afternoon? Why didn't we? I expected such a fate for myself. But you—"

Speech failed, and he took her in his arms.

"I'm glad I'm here. Lolita, promise me something."

"What?"

"That you'll do nothing rash."

"I won't promise that," passionately, "for I'll kill myself before I will go away in this ship."

His voice was quiet.

"I'll have to ask you for that revolver of yours."

"Why, you have one of your own."

And then she realized why he had requested the firearm.

"Will you promise, Lolita?"

"Yes," in a subdued voice. "Let me keep my revolver, please. I always feel so safe when I have it."

There was an embarrassed cough, and they moved apart. Captain Black was in the room.

"Beg pardon, Mrs. Perrault; and yours, sir," he began awkwardly. "I just wanted to say there ain't no immediate hurry. My men wants to spend the night on the island, and I never likes to put to sea of an evening if I can help it; so we won't get away before morning, and if you don't mind, ma'am, my men would like to cook some supper on your stove—us using our own supplies, Mrs. Perrault."

Lolita gave the desired permission, and laughed as the captain disappeared.

"I wonder where Nina is?" she sighed. "Under the bed, or behind something in the wardrobe. I must search for the frightened child."

Her hand was on the knob of her door.

"Remember your promise," he said.

"I will."

His shoulder was conveniently near. She dropped her head on it a moment, then went composedly into her room and shut the door.

In the kitchen, blue with the smoke of frying bacon, and redolent of boiling coffee, Captain Black looked at Devry long and thoughtfully.

"It runs in my mind that I've seen you before. Now where was it?"

"Haven't the ghost of an idea," was the reply.

"Ever been up in Havana?"

Devry nodded.

"Ha, I got it!" cried the other with a jubilant snap of his fingers. "You're the surgeon that showed me over the hospital the day I went to see my brother. He was a corporal—wounded in the charge up San Juan Hill, and you patched him together as good as new. Name was William Black. Mebbe you remember."

"Hardly," Devry smiled.

The captain continued to stare at him.

"What's your name? I forget."

"Devry—Laurence Devry."

"Snakes!" was the ejaculation. "Say, ain't you the fellow that's had your picture life size in all the papers, and no end of write-ups about your great discovery of something or other?—I don't remember just what. Hail from Philadelphia, don't you?"

"Yes."

The captain laughed softly.

"That lets you out all right, but what in time are you doing here with this bunch?"

The explanation finished, he laughed, and vouchsafed one of his own.

"You see, there's been all kinds of grumbling up in St. Vincent, and even in Martinique, account of the racket this gang worked there. I know the islands pretty well—been all over, you might say—so one day Rawlins—know him? He's head of the police force at Kingston, and got a stand in with the governor—he calls me in. 'I want this gang run down,' says he, so he swears me in as deputy, and sends me off to do it. Well, e-a-s-y spells easy, and that's all there is to it—*Sherlock Holmes* would not lay a finger to such a game. We hove in from the north about sundown, thinking to get the lay of things before we come on up to the house, and blest if we didn't run into them two out there first off. Know where that big inlet is a couple of miles back? Well, they'd just hauled an old tub ashore there, and was unloading their traps as happy as you please." The captain guffawed. "Wish you could 'a' seen that hawk-nosed fellow. He took a double-header over the contraptions piled on the beach and hurt his foot a bit. Frenchy didn't do a thing but turn green in the face and swear. Oh, snakes!" with another laugh. "Bill, that coffee's boiling over."

He meditated a moment.

"D'you know," he said then, "I thought we'd find a nest of 'em here. Kind of surprised me when it turned out to be just them two."

"There were three," Devry observed. "One got away this morning."

"That so?" asked the captain, with interest. "Who was he?"

"Denslow, he called himself."

Captain Black's jaw dropped.

"You hear that?" he screamed to the sailor nearest him. "Denslow was here—the counterfeiter king! Just my luck. Why didn't I come yesterday? Why, I could buy a township in my State up North with the price that's on his head. What'd he pull out for? But, I reckon, he'd heard we had him spotted."

The captain was drinking a strong infusion of black coffee from a battered tin cup.

"Pass me the sugar, Regan," he said. "This'd knock the props from under the constitution of Dutch Guiana."

"Didn't know they had one," replied Regan, a jolly-faced son of the Emerald Isle. "It's too particular yez are, cap. Sure, and this ain't no hotel on the European plan, and they don't serve caffy aw lay a thousand miles from nowhere. Have some bacon and biscuit."

The captain accepted a biscuit, and turned his attention and speech to Devry again.

"Who's the eternal feminine?" he inquired. "Frenchy says she's his accomplice, but I don't know whether I want to believe that or not. He swore till he was black in the face that you was mixed up in it, too. I tell you how it is. Rawlins, he says for us to bring along every suspicious character we find—man, woman, or child."

"Does she look like a suspicious character to you, captain?"

The captain pondered.

"No, she don't. But, you see, she's that man's wife; and, you can take it from me, that the leader of a counterfeit band I helped run down in the States was a woman, and she looked like she'd never done nothing but teach Sunday-school all her life. I come to find that you can't go much by looks."

"When you've finished your supper, captain," Devry remarked quietly, "suppose you join me in a smoke on the porch."

"Yours to command," was the genial reply.

The captain put down the battered cup and prepared to follow Devry's lead. He was in high good humor. Handcuffed and under guard in the room beyond were the criminals he had been sent to capture; down on the beach, waiting to be taken aboard the Firefly, were the tools and a quantity of spurious coin—the fat reward was all but within his pocket. He had stationed sentries indoor and out. Escape of the prisoners was a thing impossible, so he was not loath to accept a cigar from Devry, and puff contentedly at it while the latter talked convincingly and at length.

It was ten by the little gilt clock ticking industriously on Lolita's dressing-table. No lamp had been lighted there. The moon's beams, straggling in through the steel-barred windows, fell upon the crouching form of the Carib girl, whom her mistress had found hiding behind garments hanging in the wardrobe. Ever and anon the black girl's fright found expression in an explosive little sob, a sound that racked Lolita's nerves until she could endure it no longer.

"Stop it, Nina!" she said curtly at last; and Nina, who was afraid of her mistress when she assumed that tone, crushed her mouth down on her cotton-clad arms and managed to grow passably quiet.

Finally she stretched herself out on the floor, pillowed her head on one of the soft goatskin rugs, and fell asleep, and save for her occasional snores, the only sounds were the ticking of the clock and the tramp of the sentry past the windows.

Lolita sat on the edge of the bed. Her face showed white in the moonlight, her eyes somber; the small brown hands were tightly clenched. After the weeks and months of dread, of secret terror so constant that she dimly wondered why it had never whitened her hair, the fate long feared had overtaken her. There had been times before Devry's coming when she would have welcomed even this sordid means of gaining her freedom from the despised Frenchman; other

times when she had almost steeled her courage to the point of making known to the officers of the commissary the questionable pastime of Perrault and his hawk-nosed companion in villainy and crime.

There had occurred to her, unprompted by Perrault's threat, the possibility of her implication, and many were the moments when not even that possibility, horrible as it was, could have daunted her. Better, she thought, the government prison and the brand one who entered it must inevitably wear than an existence that each day grew more insupportable. Then, one morning, a short six weeks before, she walked down to the beach, met the eyes of Laurence Devry, and the work of those days and months of dread was undone. She thought of the anger that had urged her to strike down his tent; of his laugh, and the teasing twinkle in his eyes; of the days when, unaided save by the incompetent Carib girl he had nursed her back to health; of all his kindnesses since; of the day she had learned of his love for her—and beat one small hand against the other with the fury of her helplessness.

The sentry's tramp was on the sand outside. Lolita drew the tiny revolver from her bosom and, creeping to the window, hid herself behind the silken hangings. Crouched there, she waited, on her knees, taper fingers on the little weapon's trigger. When that fellow came by again she would shoot, and shoot straight. She, who was innocent, would not be watched like a criminal; if she were to be punished, she would at least have something to be punished for. What right had the world to use her so—to cheat her of the love and happy security that was the natural birthright of every woman?

The sentry came into view. Nearer and nearer, shadowly—he was before the window—had passed it—was gone, and the revolver had fallen from her shaking fingers, and she was lying, face down, on the floor.

Devry's words, "Promise me you will do nothing rash," rang in her ears. She shivered, and tried to shut them out, rose and paced the floor, stumbling once over the sleeping Nina, and flung herself at full length again, in the madness of desperation. His arms—his lips—his kiss! Had any one ever kissed her like that, ever spoken her name with his intonation? Lolita—a counterfeiter's wife, fallen in shame, yet still, and always to be, the proud daughter of a patrician race. Gasping sobs shook her.

She moaned.

"Lolita!"

It was his voice answering. She sat up, bewildered, staring at him where he stood in the doorway, and he came and lifted her to her feet, took the revolver from her tense fingers, crushed her in his arms, and kissed her fondly.

"Come with me," he said, "and see how I've won the captain over."

"What—"

"Come," he interrupted. "I want—"

The sentence was never finished. The bungalow shook suddenly, rocked on its foundation. Windows were shattered; lighter pieces of furniture were overthrown. The silver lamp on the dressing-table was dashed violently to the floor. It struck the sleeping Nina as it fell, and she started to her feet with a wail of fright, only to be thrown, as the bungalow rocked again like a great cradle.

"Earthquake!" Devry yelled. "Out of the house—quick!"

CHAPTER XXII.

FREE.

TO Lolita the rushing events of the next half-hour were never quite clear when she tried to recall them in after years. She had a vague memory of stumbling a perilous way across rocking floors under Devry's guidance, escaping, in a manner that was nothing short of providential, death by collapsing ceilings and wildly careening articles of heavy furniture.

The din was terrific; added to the strange cracking and twisting of walls that had stood sedately on their foundations for something more than a quarter of a century, was the frightened hubbub of the Firefly's crew, piling pell-mell through the bungalow's doorways.

Outside, in the light of the crescent moon, at a safe distance from the leaning walls of the ruined bungalow, with Nina

wailing loudly at her feet, the island's mistress sat on the trunk of an uprooted tree and tried to fix in her confused mind some sense of what had actually happened. Desolation was everywhere. Great trees had gone down all about with thunderous sounds; the perilous path over which they had come to what they hoped might be at least some small degree of safety, was seamed by ragged, yawning gaps. The uncanny noises of the night which had once unstrung her nerves were forgotten now, passed over for stranger and more terrifying ones—dull, muttering rumbles, the peculiar vibrations of the ground beneath her feet, the frightened neighing of the ponies in their corral, and down on the low beach the voice of a distant sea—giant wave crashing on giant wave as the agitation drove them inshore. The Carib girl's wails increased, and Lolita silenced them sharply after a moment. Oddly enough, she herself owned to no feeling of fear. Her face, as Devry saw it in the half light, was as serene as it had been during their moonlit stroll along the flower-bordered walk by the sea an hour earlier. He moved to her side; she slipped a hand into his, and he heard the smile in her voice as she said, in speech keyed to his hearing alone:

"We are going to die—all of us. I am sorry for the others. But—for myself—it will be inexpressibly sweet—to go—with you."

Devry, after a moment's stare at her, laughed.

"Who is talking about dying? Because there has been an earthquake, it does not follow that there will be another in a hundred years."

She dissented.

"It is more than probable. You do not know these islands. We are at the mercy of the sea—a tidal wave may wash over us any moment."

Devry, while refraining from disputing the stated fact, refused to discuss its probability, and gave his attention to the war of words between Regan and the captain of the Firefly.

"Took the bracelets off, you say?" the captain roared. "What, in the name of the seven sleepers, did you do that for?"

"I couldn't let the byes starve, cap, with enough left to feed the pigs," was Regan's protest; "and sure, the way they looked at the bacon and biscuit after you'd finished your supper and gone with the doctor there—"

"Oh, snakes!" the captain roared. "You soft head, why didn't you feed 'em with a spoon and leave the handcuffs on? You ought to have a gold medal and your name in the hall of fame, that's what you deserve."

"Sure, and I meant to fasten 'em up again, good and tight," Regan replied. "'Twasn't the fault of mesilf at all; but when the world stood on its head, kicked its heels in the air, and tried to elope wid itself, self-preservation being the first law of nature—"

"Oh, shut up!" the captain snarled, and twirled the lantern he held. Its sickly light fell on the hawk-nosed man sitting on the ground a distance away.

"Hi! There's one of 'em," came Regan's delighted shout; and, drawing the revolver from his belt, he covered Lindon with it.

"Move, and you're a dead man."

Lindon laughed.

"Go on; you tire me to death. I couldn't run a yard ten minutes ago, and now I can't even stand—I twisted my foot getting out of the house. I'm safe enough. It's the other chap you'd better worry yourself about."

"Frenchy?" interrogated the captain eagerly. "Where is he?"

Perrault's partner shrugged his shoulders.

"Here, you!" cried the Firefly's captain in an angry roar to his assembled crew. "Help—everybody! Scatter out and find the other fellow!"

Not a man moved. The pale light of the moon fell on their sullen faces. The Firefly's crew had mutinied.

"Cap'n," Murphy said, and the captain knew the tone, "if you wants to find that Frenchman, find him; but you does it alone. Us gets out of here as fast as the Firefly can take us. Aye, boys?"

"That we does, Murphy," they chimed.

"You cowards!" the captain roared. "Never met an earthquake before? You act like a set of children."

"That may be, cap," the roguish Regan replied; "but I make bold to notice that you ran farther and faster than any of us when the sofa made its bow to the

table and the two of 'em commenced to waltz."

The others laughed.

"As for me," Regan added, "I'm leavin' here if I have to swim."

"How soon do we go, cap?" Murphy persisted, and the crew took up the query.

The captain pleaded for time to search for the missing counterfeiter.

"How much?" he was questioned darkly.

"Half an hour."

Murphy snapped an order.

"You got a watch, Regan. Time him. Ten minutes, and not a second more. Mebbe we'll all be in kingdom come by then."

"I see him!" a voice shrieked suddenly. "Look out, Regan—he's got a gun!"

From the shelter of an uprooted tree a shadow skulked. Perrault stepped into view, a rifle—procured from some source unknown—at his shoulder.

"Regan," screamed the captain, "*shoot!*"

Perrault's rifle cracked, but the insufficient light, and almost hysterical excitement to which his nerves were strung, played havoc with his aim. Regan's bullet found its mark. The counterfeiter swayed, doubled up on the sand, and lay still.

"You got him right, Regan," Murphy said, after a brief examination of the fallen man.

Regan looked bewildered.

"Not dead? You don't mean it. I never meant—"

Murphy interrupted brutally.

"Don't care what you meant. He'll never be any deader than he is right now. You aimed too straight that time; but 'twas all you could do, so what's the use of grieving? He'd 'a' got you if you hadn't got him."

"Pick him up and carry him to the ship," said the Firefly's captain coolly. "Dead or alive—them was the orders, and he took his choice when it come to going."

His eyes fell on Lolita as the dead counterfeiter was carried past her. She was lying on a grassy plot close by, the Carib girl wailing beside her. The captain walked to the spot.

"Fainted?" he asked superfluously, Devry thought.

"Yes," was the curt reply. "Nina, take my cap and bring some water, if you have to go to the sea for it."

The girl sped away.

"I thought I had it all figured out," the captain offered in a puzzled voice. "She didn't care the snap of her finger for—*him*, did she?"

"No."

"Then what made her go off like that?"

"She's a woman," was the answer. "She wouldn't be if she could see a man—any man, black, white, or yellow, and Perrault was the yellow kind—shot through the heart and never wink an eyelash."

"No, I reckon not," replied the captain, rendered slightly uncomfortable by the other's tone. "Well, how about leaving with us? You, Mrs. Perrault here, and the black girl. My men wants to get away, and we'll take you to Kingston in the Firefly, if you only say the word."

Lolita sat up, pushed the heavy hair back from her eyes, and spoke shiveringly:

"No!"

"You better go, ma'am," advised the captain respectfully. "It ain't saying there'll ever be another earthquake on this particular spot, but still you can't always tell. I like to be on the safe side myself."

"No!" said Lolita again, and this time she spoke to Devry. Her hand, which he held, was like ice. "No, *please!*" she entreated, and her shaking voice decided him.

"Thank you, captain, but we'll wait until morning to go. There's a sailboat here, and we'll put off in that."

"Well, suit yourself," was the reply. "If you got a boat, you're reasonably safe, I reckon. Snakes! I'd better move, or my men'll leave me. So long, and good luck to you."

He hurried away. Nina came back with the capful of water, and poured it out on the sand when she saw her mistress had regained consciousness. Quiet reigned where the late uproar had been. The Carib girl coaxed Lolita back to her former seat on the trunk of the fallen tree, and the two sat there long after the Firefly had put to sea, and the last faint

shout of the sailors found its way across the water.

Lolita was silent—a silence Devry, standing near, made no attempt to break. Hers was a strange position.

Without expectation and without warning, she was freed from the hateful bondage of four years, and she could not at once grasp realization of it. After a while, when the sun rose and warmed the island, when the reeling horror of the night should be partly forgotten in joyful relief of a new day, would come understanding and, later, an almost overwhelming thankfulness. Just now she could see nothing but malignant eyes sighted along a rifle-barrel, a figure that swayed like a seasick being before it doubled helplessly upon the sand.

CHAPTER XXIII.

NO MORE OF SINKING ISLAND.

AS for Devry, he had worries of his own to keep him company just then, dividing his fears between the possibility of a repetition of the shock before opportunity to leave the island came and the still more worrisome prospect of finding themselves at dawn without the means to leave it, since there was but one dependable boat to be had—that the Lolita. And it was ten to one that she had broken her painter long since and been washed out to sea. Devry considered this probability until, at last, it became too maddening for endurance. He glanced at Lolita, saw that she was sleeping, her head against the Carib girl's shoulder, and made his way with due caution through the orange grove, found the boat still there, and dragged it up on the sand, fifty yards from the water's edge.

Dawn was breaking as he followed the path back to the spot he had left—a gray dawn, that showed strange sights to the watchers on the island. The bungalow was a wreck, its walls cracked and partly fallen. The débris in the rooms was appalling.

Lolita unearthed her cherished tea-set, and Devry found her looking mournfully at the fragments. One cup alone remained intact, and she presented that to the Carib girl, who received the gift with childish delight.

"Lolita!" said Devry sharply.

"The looters are at work," she called gaily in answer. "Don't shoot."

"Come out of there before the wall falls and crushes you under it," he commanded.

She laughed, stepped over the litter of glass and wood, and let him lead her back to the yard.

"I went in there to search for this," holding up the string of pearls he had first seen about her throat. "They were my mother's, and I couldn't lose them."

"Imperil your life for a few beads," he grumbled. "Well, we're all savages under the layer of varnish—all spending our energies to gain a few silly baubles."

"Don't moralize," she lightly said. "The morning is too beautiful, and it's so good just to be alive."

He looked at her keenly. The swiftness with which her spirits were returning was incredible.

"Come with me," he requested.

"Where?"

"To the water's edge."

"What is there to see?"

"I'll show you."

They went to the place where they had stood that day looking at the partly submerged bushes. And now the bushes were gone.

Lolita glanced at Devry uneasily. He called her attention to the Lolita, lying high and dry on the sand.

"Where is the inlet?" he queried.

She rubbed her eyes.

"It's gone. But the boat—"

"I dragged her up here—while you were asleep. What I prophesied is coming to pass. We shall have to leave the island."

"When?"

"As soon as we can get away. We must go while there is still time; another shock, and the whole place may sink and take us with it. Will you help me provision the boat?"

She nodded, and they turned to take their way back over the dew-damp path.

"I was not sure," Devry offered, "that you would not mutiny when the matter of going became a reality."

Lolita laughed a little sadly.

"And I am not sure that I would not have done so—yesterday. To-day it's different. I'm anxious to get away. I'm

sick of horrors—I've lived with them so long."

Her voice broke in spite of herself, and she swallowed painfully, refusing to look at him. Day had not obliterated the specters of the dark. It would take many dawns to accomplish that, and the total number of those remaining to her might never be able entirely to accomplish it, bravely as she was beginning. She looked down at her draggled pink skirt and smiled ruefully.

"I'm a beautiful-looking object to present to civilized eyes. I simply can't go to Kingston or St. Vincent, or wherever it is we are bound for, in this dress."

"You'll have to do it, nevertheless," was Devry's reply. "You are not going back among those walls again if I have to tie you to a tree and keep you there until we are ready to embark."

This made her laugh with something of her old enjoyment.

"I'll be obedient, so please don't tie me up. But I haven't even a hat—I can't go without something on my head."

"Your pink sunbonnet hangs on the sitting-room wall," he told her. "You may go that far safely, but not a step farther, remember."

The work of provisioning the boat and hoisting sail occupied them thereafter. When this was done, even to cushioning the seats of the stanch little craft, and adding to its stores freshly gathered fruit, Lolita stood back and surveyed the result of their labors.

"Why, we're all ready to go!" she cried.

"All ready," he repeated.

"May I not go back for one last look at the bungalow?"

"I would not," Devry replied. "Nina is coming, and it seems to me better to get away at once. As I said before, delay may render escape impossible. There is a continual tremor of the ground, if you have noticed—slight, but perceptible."

She nodded.

"It is just possible," he added, "that the island is directly over some subterranean volcano, and the upheaval is not unlikely to occur while we are standing here. Let's take a cheerful view of the circumstances. Things are never so bad, you know, that they could not be worse."

Nina came up to them. Devry dragged the Lolita down to the water's edge and set her afloat. She was a well-built, roomy craft—the only property the island's mistress might carry away with her as a reminder of days that were to be no more.

They embarked, Devry entering last.

"My poor, beautiful island!" Lolita mourned. "My spotted ponies — the goats — the orange groves—my only home!" Grief choked her.

A wandering breeze had filled the sails and was sweeping the Lolita rapidly out to sea. Half a mile from the island the breeze died. About them was only the smooth expanse of the Caribbean. Lolita's eyes were still trained on her deserted home.

"Oh!" she gasped suddenly, and Devry turned to follow her gaze.

The island was gone. The sea had sucked it down.

Only the tops of the taller trees were visible, and they for but an instant, outlined dimly against the turquoise skyline. Then the hungry waters closed over them, too.

"It's gone!" Lolita wailed. "My island is gone!"

But Devry's attention was required elsewhere. A great wave was rushing down upon them from the direction in which they had come. It caught the boat up. For an instant she rode on its crest, a helpless plaything of the deep. Then the wall of water passed on, leaving the stout little craft floundering, half full. The drenched occupants bailed it out, and the Lolita righted herself. The sails filled with another momentary puff of wind, and she swept on over the bright track.

"A near thing, that," said Devry, with a deep breath.

Lolita was white-faced, but smiling.

She looked at the Carib girl, still clinging to the solitary china cup, smiled again, and let her eyes go to her dripping dress and water-soaked shoes. And from them she glanced at Devry.

"Do you suppose," she said, "that it would be possible to find a single biscuit that did not get wet? We had no breakfast, you know, and I am very hungry."

Devry laughed, but did not tell her why.

"The biscuits are in that tin box at your feet. I provided for just such an emergency."

The vagrant wind died out, and he took the oars. They could not make much progress until the afternoon breeze set in, but none of the three cared for that. They were alive and safe, and the sun was drying their drenched garments very fast.

Nina dipped water from a wide-mouthed jar with her pink china cup and politely tendered it to her mistress. The Carib girl was guilelessly happy, as always.

She sang a little Spanish song. The song made Lolita laugh, but she refused to translate it for the benefit of Devry. She did not look much like a widow, sitting there in her pink organdy gown, the midnight hair disheveled and damp about her face.

"Nina is asleep," she said suddenly. "Did you ever see such a creature? She dropped off with a half-eaten biscuit in her hand."

"Obliging Nina," Devry murmured, and, extending his hand for the cup of water Lolita was offering him, drank a toast to the sleeper.

The Lolita rested motionless on the summer sea — the Lolita's mistress was laughing.

"Stop it," Devry requested. "Don't you dare to laugh at me!"

Still laughing, she left her seat, and made her way past the sleeping Nina, to where he sat.

He dropped the oars and caught her to him in a grasp that was almost rough.

"You've come to me, my beauty," he murmured. "Lolita, you've come to me at last!"

The boat drifted, drifted. But for the two on whom the scandalized Nina, rousing from her nap, looked, time and the world stood still.

Five years later, in their pretty suburban home, the postman brought a letter for Lolita. After reading and rereading it with a thoughtfulness that made her husband wonder, she silently passed it across the table to him.

DEAR MRS. DEVRY:

On that day, years ago, when you climbed aboard my launch, and somehow hypnotized me into telling you the story of myself and the only girl, you said you would like to hear some day that I had gone back to the girl, been forgiven, and was living the life I was destined for.

Those were your exact words—I wrote them down later. . . . Well, dreams come true, sometimes. Mine did. I took your advice, gave up the game, went back to the girl, told her the story, and from that day to this neither of us have ever spoken on the subject, and between us there has never been the slightest shadow of distrust. She takes me for what I am, not for what I was once misguided enough to allow myself to be, and we both feel that, in a measure, we owe our happiness to you. I hear of you and your husband frequently. I saw *you*—once—and could hardly restrain myself from pushing through the crowd to speak to you. But I felt that it would not do. Edith and I are happy; you and Mr. Devry even more so, I know. We have let the dead past bury its dead, and a meeting could only open that grave.

Just a word more and I've finished. We have a small daughter. She is two years old and has black eyes and hair as dusky as your own. And partly because her eyes are black, partly because my wife would have it so, we named her Lolita. . . . If she has half the high courage and moral strength of the one for whom she was named, I shall feel that she was not named in vain.

With best wishes for your continued happiness and prosperity, I remain,

Very sincerely yours,

WINSLOW ELLISON.

Devry put down the letter and looked at his wife, still as slender and supple and finely formed as she had been on the day of their meeting, five years before.

"Well?" he encouraged, with a smile.

"His name wasn't Denslow, after all," she said rather irrelevantly.

Devry laughed.

"Lolita, I'm disappointed. That was not what I expected to hear you say."

"I've not finished my say yet," she warned him. "It consists of four words more."

"Let's hear them," with an expectant grin.

"I—told—you—so," was the triumphant answer, and his enjoyment of the situation was not a whit less keen than her own.

(The end.)

THE GIRL, THE REBEL, AND THE KING.

BY WADE WARREN THAYER.

A SHORT STORY.

AT the gate of the princess's villa Lani left John Arden holding her horse.

"I won't keep you waiting more than five minutes," she promised.

She ran up the pathway through the palm-trees to the big silent house, and in a moment the key was clicking in the lock of the front door. All was dark within, for the shutters were closed tightly, and she stood a moment accustoming her eyes to the gloom. Then she groped her way to the broad staircase. At its foot she collided with some one coming hurriedly down, and she cried out in fear.

"Hush, Miss Comyns; don't make a noise," a voice whispered in her ear, and a man darted to the open door to close it. The light from without disclosed his identity to the girl.

"Robert Williams! How you frightened me!" she exclaimed, leaning against the wall and pressing her hand to her breast to regain her composure. "Don't close the door. It's so dark in here that I can't see my way about."

The man did not reply. He was peering out into the garden anxiously. Presently he closed the door silently and shot the inside bolt.

"Why do you do this?" the girl asked in rising alarm. "Why are you locking the door? Is anything wrong?"

He made no answer. Through the gloom she heard his steps upon the polished floor.

"Robert Williams, I insist upon an explanation," she cried, retreating up the stairs as she spoke. "What do you mean by locking the door when I asked you to leave it open? Answer me."

"I cannot tell you," came the reply. "You should not have come; but, now that you are here, you must remain for a while."

Panic seized Lani and she darted up the stairway.

"Stop; stop!" called the man. "Do not be frightened, Miss Comyns, and please come back. I will explain."

Lani paused at the turn of the stairs and looked down. It was silly to run away, and she was angry at herself for her sudden fear.

"Explain then," she said curtly. "What is all this mystery? And what are you doing in this house alone?"

"Don't speak so loud," Williams urged. "The others will hear, and if they knew you were here they would not let you go again."

"The others? What others?"

"Listen," the man said.

From above-stairs there came a low murmur of voices.

"Who are those people? What are they and you doing in the princess's house when she is at Waialua?"

"Her royal highness is—" began Williams, and then he hesitated. "Yes, the time has come to speak," he went on. "Friend of the princess as you are, you should be told the facts. We are settling to-day, Miss Comyns, the last details of a plan, we—and all who are loyal to the king—have long contemplated. You know the position of his majesty, ruled by a missionary clique; you know how he chafes under the hated thraldom which he has not been strong enough to throw off. To-night he sleeps at his boat-house, and in his absence, we shall seize and fortify the palace and proclaim a new constitution. At dawn we shall throw open the gates of the palace to him, and welcome him to a

throne where he will be surrounded and advised by a new cabinet, composed of those who love him and who love *Hawaii nei*. The reign of the missionaries ends to-night!"

Lani listened with fast-beating heart and eyes that widened, as she realized the meaning of Williams's words.

"But this is revolution, Robert!" she cried. "And there will be fighting and bloodshed! The cabinet will not give up without a struggle."

"We know that, and we are ready," Williams answered. "I, myself, am to lead the loyal forces. We are well armed and all our men are drilled and disciplined."

"Does the king know of this? Does he approve?"

"We have not told him yet. But he will welcome the relief we bring him from missionary domination," Williams said confidently. "And, Lani, there is something else I want to say to you."

He was near her now, and he took her hand and pressed it in both of his. She tried vainly to draw it away.

"Lani, sweetheart," he murmured passionately in her ear, "I am glad you came here to-day. I have longed so to tell you of our great plans, but until now I dared not. It is for you, dear, as much as for the king, that I have planned and plotted. If we win to-morrow—and we shall win, we must—I shall be the leader of the government. I shall be the ruler of Hawaii. When we have driven the missionaries from the government, I shall be the right hand of the king.

"Nay," he amended boastfully, "I shall be his left hand also. He loves his pleasures and his vices too well, does our genial Rex, to bother overmuch with the cares of state, and once I am in control at the palace, I shall own these fair islands of ours. Yes, own them!

"It is only to lay them at your feet, sweetheart," he went on tenderly, "it is all for you. Tell me you love me, dear. Tell me you will marry me. I have loved you so long, and now, when I am going out to fight, I must know that I am fighting for you."

"I—I—please don't ask me now, Robert," Lani begged. "You frighten me with your great plans. I am not sure. I—I like you very much, you know, but I cannot be sure."

"You must answer; you must tell me," the man urged. "I cannot let you go without your promise. So much depends upon it. Think, dear; you shall have a palace of your own—carriages, horses, wealth—everything your heart desires."

He tried to draw her to him; to put his arm about her, but she eluded him, and, snatching her hand away, she darted down the stairs.

"Lani, come back; oh, come back to me," he called pleadingly.

She ran to the door, unbolted it and flung it open. The dazzling light from the sunny garden flooded the hallway, and she turned a moment and looked up at the man upon the landing. He stood there, arms outstretched to her—silent, expectant, smiling. His handsome, swarthy countenance gleamed with passion. He looked very tall and straight, very much a man, and she hesitated. But only a moment.

"I hope you'll win, Robert," she called up to him softly. "Oh, I hope you'll win; but it is for the king you fight, remember. Come to me afterward, and then, perhaps—"

With a brilliant smile she turned, and closing the great door after her, fled down the pathway to the gate.

II.

ARDEN looked at his watch as she came to his side.

"It was a long five minutes," he said chidingly. "Nearer half an hour."

"I did not mean to be so long," she apologized, as he helped her into the saddle.

"Where are your gauntlets?" he asked suddenly, noting her bare hands as she took the bridle-reins from him. "I thought you went to seek them."

"My gauntlets? I—why, I must have dropped them in the hall," she stammered in confusion. "I had them a moment ago."

"Shall I go back and look for them?" he asked.

"No, no," she hastily answered him. "I can get along just as well without them. I am enough of a Kanaka, you know, not to mind sunburned wrists."

"Yet you insisted on stopping here to get them," her companion observed, mystified.

She laughed gaily and rode off down King Street toward the Nuuanu stream. Arden mounted and followed her.

As they trotted through the business section of the city, they noted groups of men gathered about the bulletin-boards of the newspaper offices. Other groups stood at the corners, talking earnestly. Few women were upon the streets; the stores were empty; the clerks lolled at the doorways or joined the gossiping gatherings at the corners. In the triangular plaza before the palace a force of men in uniform was drilling.

In front of the government building a square-built man, with a close-cropped beard, spoke to Arden. With an apology to Miss Comyns, Arden drew up to the sidewalk for a moment's low-voiced colloquy with the other man.

"I am afraid our ride is spoiled, Miss Comyns," said Arden as he rejoined her. "Mr. Thorsdale tells me I am wanted at once at a cabinet meeting."

"At once? Is it so important as that?" Lani asked. "Why, you told me an hour ago that you had locked all the affairs of state up in your desk for the day, and that you were going to give the afternoon to me. Perhaps your friends are displeased at seeing you riding so openly with me," she went on banteringly. "My sympathies are well known. I do not at all approve of the high-handed manner in which you rule our poor Rex."

"Please do not say such things, Miss Comyns," said Arden. His fine eyes looked into hers gravely, and under his drooping mustache his lips twitched as though her words had stung. "You know that nothing but affairs most urgent would compel me to end our ride together. You must know that I care too much for you to let the—"

"Then it is something very, very important?" she interrupted lightly. "Another revolution? Don't tell me we are to have another! Heavens, they have been so numerous of late that one never knows from day to day which party is in and which is out. Another constitution, I suppose; and a new cabinet. I do hope this time that you will give the king a little power, at least. Of late, he hasn't seemed to have anything to do but spend his time at his boat-house, or ride about Honolulu in a carriage. You missionaries are running everything, without giving poor Rex a word to say about it."

"I do not know what the summons means, Miss Comyns," Arden replied, "but it is peremptory. I must take you home at once and return to the government building."

Vainly Lani tried to draw him out, but he pleaded total ignorance of any impending trouble; nor by the deftest hints could she extract any information from him.

"Of course, you won't tell me anything," she said at length as they cantered up the driveway of her Beretania Street home. "You missionaries are all alike; just because I am part Hawaiian, you think I am not to be trusted with any information about the government, lest I tell it to Bob Williams or some other of the malcontents, who don't like the way you run things."

This shot told. Arden started perceptibly at the name of Williams, and he was pale and very angry as he leaped from his horse at the door and helped her to alight.

"I am sorry you think as you do of me, Miss Comyns," he said rather stiffly. "I had hoped— But I must not stay to talk with you now. In a day or so I shall call and have this out with you."

He sprang upon his horse and was gone, drawing his hat down tightly upon his head and sitting close for a rapid ride back to his scene of duty.

III.

Lani followed him with her eyes, thinking hard. She was vexed with him. When he had called for her that afternoon and had put her on her horse, he had stood a moment by her side, bareheaded, looking into her eyes. He had seemed about to say something then, and she had waited, letting him hold her hand just an instant. There was such a tender, grave smile upon his lips, and his hand had pressed hers with so firm and masterful a grasp that she had been near to loving him at the moment. Had he spoken she knew not what she might have answered. But his horse had chosen that

instant to become restive, and Arden had left the words which were upon his lips unspoken.

Then had come that sudden encounter with Williams, his passionate avowal, and his glowing plans for revolution and power. After that, the silent, grave Arden had seemed cold and distant. Even his half-spoken offer had left her without a thrill. His silence, under her eager questioning for news, had piqued her. If he had really loved her, he would not have left her thus, without a word of excuse but business of state.

Then her thoughts came back to the mysterious cabinet meeting. It boded ill, she feared, for Williams and his co-conspirators. The success of their plans depended almost certainly on taking the cabinet unawares. If the party in power had received information of their impending coup, it must inevitably fail.

Ought she not to warn them? At the thought she woke from her musings with a start. She had been standing upon the steps, just as Arden had left her; and the native stable-boy was still waiting close at hand, holding her horse. She summoned him with a gesture.

She would hasten back to the house of the princess and tell the conspirators of the sudden calling together of the cabinet. Her forgotten gauntlets would furnish an excuse.

Fifteen minutes later saw her once more at the portal of the silent house among the palm-trees. She was a little out of breath from her rapid ride, and very much frightened at her own reckless dash into the blind maze of politics; but she did not waver.

The key was still in the big door, for she had utterly forgotten it in the hurry of her flight from Williams and his love-making. Indoors all was yet dark and still. She climbed the stairs, her heart beating so loudly in her breast that she was forced to pause at the top and calm herself a moment by an effort of will.

At that fatal instant a door at the head of the stairway was flung open, and the strong light of a large lamp shone into the hall. Full in its glare, poised as if in meditated flight, Lani stood revealed.

She was a very scared, very pathetic little person, her Panama hat slightly awry and her abundant dark hair blown about her eyes by her quick ride through the streets. Her white duck riding-suit made her a conspicuous figure against the polished *koa* wainscoting.

The little group about the table in the room gazed out at her in tense, almost panic-stricken, silence for a long moment.

"Miss Comyns! You here?" said the man at the door.

He was a very tall, thin man, with a flowing black beard. Lani scarcely appreciated at first the significance of his presence; but there was a stir at the back of the room, and in its semidarkness she saw the familiar figure of a lady of exalted rank. There came to her in a flash the extent of the conspiracy and the personages it involved. Then she realized that the gentleman at the door was addressing her.

"Will you be good enough, my dear young lady," he said with icy calm, "to explain what you are doing, eavesdropping at our door?"

Lani's wits forsook her entirely, and she utterly forgot the purpose of her mission.

"My gauntlets — I left them here — I came to get them," she stammered confusedly.

"You will kindly come within," the tall gentleman said. "I think we must inquire further into this."

Grave looks, and stern, met her gaze in the group about the table. They were all familiar faces; most of them were old friends, and at the end of the table she saw Robert Williams. His face was pale and set. He, too, had judged her. She suddenly remembered her message.

"I forgot to say," she began hurriedly," that the cabinet had been unexpectedly called together this afternoon. I rode over to tell you. Mr. Arden said—"

At the name there was a stir about the table, an exchange of glances, and a lifting of eyebrows. The lady in the back of the room leaned forward in her large chair. She held a fan before her face, but Lani knew her too well to be deceived as to her identity.

"You rode over to tell us that the cabinet was in session," said the tall man. "Also you rode over to obtain your gauntlets. One statement is as likely as the other. Kindly tell us the truth,

now—if you can. Why were you listening at our door?"

"Come, come, Governor Lord," interposed Robert Williams. "There is no time for an inquiry as to this young lady's eavesdropping. That she was attempting to learn our plans is evident. What may have been her purpose is now of little consequence, as we shall take precautions lest she carries it out. Let us proceed with the business in hand."

Lani could scarcely believe her ears. This from Robert Williams, the man who an hour ago had been laying at her feet all the wealth of Hawaii!

"Robert! You don't think I am disloyal to the king, do you?" she cried. "You surely don't believe I would be a missionary spy?"

"An hour ago, Miss Comyns, I saw you ride from this house with John Arden," Williams replied coldly. "John Arden is minister of the interior. We now find you returned—for what purpose we do not know. We can only draw our own conclusions."

Lani turned in distress to the lady in the large chair.

"I appeal to her royal highness," she faltered. "She knows that I am loyal—"

"You will please remember that her royal highness is at Waialua, visiting her estates," interrupted Governor Lord, tartly. Kindly do not bring her into the discussion."

Lani sank into a chair, speechless. That the princess would come to her relief, she had confidently expected. For years she had been one of that lady's companions and ladies in waiting. This very house had been a second home to her. Now, her highness sat there in the back of the room, calmly fanning herself, while her husband proclaimed her absence in distant Waialua.

The council proceeded, as though there had been no interruption. It was evident that Robert Williams was the master spirit of the gathering. A born orator, he played skilfully upon the passions and the emotions of the others. More than once his hot words stirred them to murmurs of applause. Lani quickly found herself swept away with the others, in the enthusiasm of the cause he preached.

Finally, when they all rose about the table, while Williams breathed a last passionate invocation to Heaven for the cause of the king, Lani found herself on her feet with the rest, and at his side.

"Robert, you are splendid," she whispered. "You are going to win. I feel it. Can't I help—oh, can't I help in some way?"

Williams turned from her coldly.

"This young lady must be disposed of in some manner," he said to the others. "It will not do to allow her to return to her home to-night. She knows vastly too much to be permitted at large."

"I have reason to believe that the princess will return from the country this evening," suggested Governor Lord. "She will sleep at her Beretania Street residence. It would, perhaps, be wise that the young lady should spend the night there. Her people can be informed that such is her intention."

"Very well. I will leave the matter in your hands," said Williams. "Gentlemen, our plans are complete. If each of us does his duty, to-morrow his majesty will reign again."

"He will—Heaven save him—he will!" they murmured.

Brushing past Lani, without a word, Williams stepped to the chair of the lady in the background, raised her hand to his lips, and then departed swiftly, followed by the others.

Dazed and crushed, Lani suffered herself to be led to a hack, which awaited in a side street. Governor Lord seated himself in the carriage with her, and they were driven rapidly to the town house of the princess, near the palace. Here Lani was ushered to an upper chamber, and ignominiously locked in. Furious at her humiliation, she flung herself upon the bed in a torrent of tears.

IV.

She awoke to find the dawn peeping through the blinds. The door of her room was open, and there was food upon a table by the bed. Exhausted by the excitement and stress of the afternoon, she had slept the night through.

She sat up for a moment, dazed, not comprehending her whereabouts. Then, in a flood, the events of the day before swept back into her memory.

This was the morning of the revolution. Already, Robert Williams and his

allies must have seized the palace. She listened for sounds that might tell how affairs were going. The cool morning wind, blowing down from the mountains, rustled the shutters gently, but all was still outdoors. Doubtless the occupation of the palace had not been discovered.

If she could do something to help. If she could but prove her loyalty to Robert and the others. Their scorn of her, and the silent contempt of their treatment the evening before, made her cheeks burn, and she ached to vindicate herself.

A sudden plan came to her. She leaped from the bed and ran to a closet in the corner of the room. Within she found a wide-brimmed native hat and a long black *holoku*—the loose gown worn usually by Hawaiian women. Without troubling to remove her riding-dress, she slipped the gown over the rest of her attire. Then she donned the hat, and tied it tightly under her chin. Thus garbed, she flew from the room and tiptoed softly down the stairs.

The house was very familiar to her, and in its semidarkness she moved silently and assured. No one was astir, and she glided through the lower hall and to the rear. Here she found a basket, and, with this upon her arm, she was out of doors in a moment, speeding through the silent streets toward the palace grounds.

The day was coming quickly. Punchbowl Hill loomed above the sleeping city, black and frowning, but above it the cloud masses upon the higher peaks were rosy with the rays of the rising sun. At the little servants' gate—in the rear of the palace grounds—she found, to her dismay, a watchful and vigilant sentry.

In her black *holoku,* with her hat masking her face, and the basket upon her arm, she seemed nothing more dangerous than a slovenly kitchen-maid, and the man gave her but a casual glance.

Once within the great wall, Lani cast aside her basket and hastened to the palace. Forgetful of her incongruous garb, she ran up the broad steps to the main hallway and boldly entered.

Just within the arched doorway, hidden by potted plants, was an ugly-looking machine-gun, entrenched behind sandbags, piled one on another. A second gun, similarly placed, commanded the south gate. Stacks of rifles stood about the wide hall, and sleeping men sprawled everywhere.

A sentry challenged her sharply at the door, but she pushed back her hat from her face and pressed on, ignoring his threatening bayonet.

"I wish to see Mr. Williams at once," she said to the man imperiously.

Recognizing her in spite of her disfiguring hat and gown, the man allowed her to enter.

A group of officers stood by the field-piece at the southern door. As Lani entered, they turned, and Williams came toward her. He was clad in a resplendent white uniform, bedight with gold lace, and a dozen orders were on his breast. As he realized who it was, he whipped his cocked hat from his head; but his face was pale and showed great sternness.

"Miss Comyns! What are you doing here?" he said. "I thought you were with the princess."

"Robert, I had to come!" Lani said impulsively. "I want to help. I want to show you that your cruel insinuations last night were not justified. You wouldn't believe me then when I said I was loyal; now I am here to prove it. What can I do? Set me at something. Please let me stay and help you."

He gazed at her for a moment in doubt; and then, as he saw the eager light in her eyes, he came nearer and took her hand.

"Sweetheart," he said softly, bending over her. "My brave little girl. If for a moment yesterday I doubted you; if in my jealous rage at seeing you ride away with Arden I thought you a traitor, I am now convinced I was wrong. But you should not have come here at this time, dear. Within an hour the government will know of all this, and then there will be fighting. You must go back to the princess."

"No, no; I will not!" she protested. "I must stay and help. Surely, there is something that a woman can do. I am brave; I'll not be afraid. If there is fighting, there will be the injured to care for. Let me stay. Please, please let me stay."

Williams hesitated. Turning to his officers, he put the case to them. All about the hall the men were wakening.

In the spacious throne-room adjoining, the sounds of military preparation increased.

It was broad day outside. The sun was peeping over the eastern hills; and the birds chirped gaily in the trees, greeting the sparkling morning, all unmindful of the ominous preparations within the walls of the silent palace.

Lani waited in trepidation. The awakened soldiers eyed her curiously, and whispered among themselves.

Suddenly Williams whirled from the conference and came to Lani's side. There was a new light now shining in his eyes.

"The king is at his boat-house," he said to her. "An hour ago we sent a messenger to him, telling him that all was prepared, urging him to come at once to assume command of his troops. He is not come; he has sent no word. We are at a loss. We need his presence here. With him at our head, all his loyal subjects will flock to his standard. Without him, all will be lost.

"Lani, will you go to him? Will you tell him how his soldiers wait for him? Will you tell him that within an hour his palace will be besieged by his enemies, and unless he comes at once his cause will be lost?"

"Yes, yes!" cried Lani eagerly.

Williams strode to a cabinet upon the wall, where in glittering array hung a dozen magnificent swords, with jeweled hilts and gold-mounted scabbards. With the butt of his revolver he smashed the plate-glass door, and, reaching in, he plucked the most splendid of the weapons from its hook.

The crash of the falling glass aroused the whole company of drowsy soldiery.

They crowded into the hall from the throne-room, and gazed wonderingly at him as he stepped again to Lani's side, bearing the sword in his hand.

"Take this to his majesty," he cried loudly. "Tell him to gird it on and come to us to strike one last blow for the freedom of his crown and the confusion of his enemies."

The soldiers would have burst into enthusiastic cheers, but Williams stilled them with a gesture.

"Wait, my men," he commanded. "Wait until our fair messenger brings our king to us. She will not be long. Then I shall bid you cheer him, and her also."

V.

MEANWHILE, Lani had thrown off her hat and slipped from her long *holoku*, and stood forth in riding-dress. She wrapped the sword in the black gown. The soldiers crowded about her and wished her good luck and a speedy return.

In a moment she was upon the steps, and Williams had helped her upon a waiting horse. Through the opened gates she rode, followed by an orderly.

The streets were empty, for it was yet early; and she met scarcely a soul as she cantered down Punchbowl Street to the harbor. An old fisherman, spreading his nets upon a rack to dry, ducked his head to her as she dismounted near the king's boat-house. She tossed the bridle-rein to the orderly, sped to the door, and fearlessly entered.

Indoors it was quite dark, and she saw dimly a clutter of upturned boats and racks of oars, ropes, and tackle. For a moment she hesitated.

Presently there came a burst of laughter from up-stairs, and at the side of the boat-room she saw the stairway leading up. Quickly she mounted and, flinging open the door, paused a moment at the threshold.

It was a wide, low-ceiled room, open on all its seaward side, save for Venetian blinds—tight closed now, shutting out the day. Racing-prints hung upon the walls, interspersed with a huge silver cup here and there, testifying to the prowess of the king as yachtsman, oarsman, and horse-owner. The air was thick with tobacco-smoke and fetid with the odor of stale liquor.

In the center of the room was a large round table, over which hung a great lamp, still burning, and shedding now an unhealthy, yellow light upon the table and the men about it.

There were six of them; in shirt-sleeves, collarless, the *déshabelle* of an all-night session at cards. They looked sleepy and hollow-eyed—all save one. For at the back of the table, facing Lani as she stood in amazed silence in the doorway, sat the king.

His loose white shirt was open at the

throat, and his sleeves were rolled to his elbows; but his eye was clear, and his humorous mouth laughed as gaily under his mustache as though the night had just begun. He was in the midst of a funny story, and was shuffling the cards as he talked, his big brown hands mixing them deftly.

The pile of varicolored chips before him was tiny compared to the great stacks which the others possessed. It was evident that his companions had been enjoying the usual pastime of trimming his majesty.

It was a long moment before the king realized that an intruder had entered. Then he rose from his chair, a formidable figure of a man, broad-shouldered, thick-chested, enormous. All the others turned in their chairs; most of them were white men—business men of the city—but one or two were Hawaiians.

"Whom have we here?" cried the king in a loud voice. "A lady? Come forward, my dear, and let's have a look at you. It's so deuced dark back there that I can't make you out."

"Why," he added, as Lani slowly moved down the room, through the overturned bottles and débris of the night's debauch, "it's Miss Comyns—little Lani Comyns! What brings you here, pray?"

With the shining sword in her hands, Lani came swiftly forward and dropped upon one knee before the king, holding the weapon up to him and looking into his eyes with the light of enthusiastic adoration in her own soft brown ones.

"Your majesty, your soldiers await you," she said eagerly. "Your loyal army sleep upon their arms in the palace. They bid me tell you to hasten to them. At any moment the fighting may begin, and they need you at their head when the first shot is fired. Come, your majesty, take this sword, and ride quickly to the palace. The soldiers murmur at your absence. Dally no longer here! To the palace! A stroke for the freedom of Hawaii!"

"Not so fast; not so fast, my dear," the king replied. "Tell us what it's all about, first. What's this talk of soldiers and fighting and freedom? I'm free enough; so is Hawaii, so long as I am king. What nonsense is all this, anyway?"

"But your majesty—" Lani cried, aghast.

"Call him Rex, why don't you?" growled one of the card-players. "He's Rex when he's at his boat-house with his friends."

"Don't you understand, your majesty?" Lani went on, unheeding the interruption. "Don't you know that your troops have occupied the palace, and that to-day you come to your own again? That to-day the sway of the missionaries ends forever?"

"Pshaw! What are you talking about?" the king replied peevishly. "That's just the same kind of nonsense that Bob Williams is always pouring into my ears. I'm tired of it. Do you suppose that Arden and Thorsdale and Knight would be running the government if I didn't want 'em to? I'd fire 'em out in a holy minute. But they're good men, those chaps; they know how to run things, and I let 'em. Gives me lots more time. What's the use of Williams and the rest of them always growling and kicking about the missionaries. They're good people, I tell you, and they run the government first-rate. Don't they, boys?"

"Of course. You bet. You're a good fellow, Rex," chorused the others.

Lani had risen to her feet and shrunk back a bit from the group. Her eyes were wide with horror, and her breath came fast. Was this the king? This tipsy, jovial individual who maundered thus, dismissing with a careless word all that for which the earnest little body of men at the palace were prepared to lay down their very lives? It was grotesque! It was impossible!

"Your majesty, cannot I make you understand?" she pleaded. "Your palace is filled with armed men. In an hour there will be a battle; there will be bloodshed. Will you sit calmly here and let all this go on? Will you let these men die for you in vain? Rouse yourself, your majesty! The fate of Hawaii depends upon you. Robert Williams, at the head of a hundred men, only awaits your word to sweep away these interloping upstarts who have wrested your government from you. But lift your hand to help them and the scepter of power is yours again."

The king sank into his chair and began to shuffle the cards again.

"I thought it was one of Bob Williams's fool plans," he said with a laugh. "You tell him to go home. Tell 'em all to go home. Tell 'em if they don't go 'way and stop bothering me, I'll send word to Thorsdale, and he'll have 'em all sent over to the Reef for six months apiece. Six months in jail and one hundred dollars fine, that's what we give 'em here for treason. Other places, they hang 'em; but if I had hanged all my loyal subjects that had conspired against my royal person in the last ten years, I wouldn't have any loyal subjects left."

Lani hesitated, trying to frame words that would awaken the king to a sense of his responsibility. She touched his arm timidly, but he waved her away.

"Run along now, my dear," he said. "Go back to Bob Williams and tell him I don't want any of his revolutions. And tell him not to send any more messengers, for I'm busy. I filled up the last one with gin"—he pointed to the form of a snoring Kanaka in the corner—"and gin costs money. Run along now; run along."

Then he turned to the game, and as Lani crept from the room, she heard him say:

"Well, gentlemen, I seem to be 'most broke. But, now, here's this sword; I'll put that into the next jack-pot against all your piles. It's worth it. It was given to me by Prince—"

VI.

But she heard no more. The door closed, and slowly she made her way down the stairs, through the dark boat-room, and out into the daylight and fresh air. She took her horse from the wondering orderly, scarcely hearing his eager questions, and rode slowly back to the palace.

Solemn faces greeted her as she dismounted at the steps. Her return alone was ominous. Her bowed shoulders and dejected mien told the waiting soldiery that her errand had been futile. The news ran swiftly from lip to lip as she came into the crowded hallway. Discipline became lax, and there were ominous signs of discontent among the men.

Williams was in an anteroom, surrounded by his officers. To him she went at once, and flinging herself into a chair, she burst into tears.

"His majesty would not come?" asked Williams dully.

She shook her head, and through her tears she told her story.

"He was playing cards," she cried at last, in sudden anger, and her eyes flashed in indignant memory. "He would not leave his game to save his kingdom. He even bet the sword I brought him. He told me to send you home, and to stop bothering him!"

Just then there came a sharp challenge from the sentry at the south gate, followed instantly by a rifle-shot.

"Gentlemen, the fat is in the fire," said Williams. "It is too late to withdraw now. We must fight; there is nothing else for us; we have gone too far. And, since we must, let us fight to win. Let us put the enemies of our country to rout. If we win a throne to-day, shall we not be able to find a king to fill it?"

Some of the men started and exchanged glances at these audacious words; but they went to their stations, and quickly from all sides of the palace there was the sound of rifle-fire.

With buoyant step, Williams walked about from post to post of the palace-yard. From an upper window Lani watched him, and presently she found, to her own surprised and blushing dismay, that it was not of the king she thought, nor of the outcome of this mad adventure, but only of the safety of its leader.

At every rifle-shot she started and looked to see if he had fallen. But he made his way among the trees, conspicuous in his white uniform, and no bullet touched him. Presently they bore a wounded man indoors, and then another, and yet another; and her hands were full.

Hours passed, and the hot morning sun poured down into the walled enclosure. The men in the palace, crowded thick in the stifling rooms, began to chafe and murmur at the inactivity. Why did not the government forces attack? What were they doing outside the wall? The pickets in the sentry-boxes told of no assembling of troops; but from the tall tower of the judiciary building, and

from the roofs of adjacent houses commanding a view of the palace grounds, a desultory but continuous firing was kept up.

It was very wearing on the men, and presently Williams discovered that there had been many desertions. It was not difficult to slip from the palace into the shrubbery at the back; nor was the wall impossible of scaling. Sad to say, the discipline of his troops was not such that they would obey the orders he issued, to shoot down any one of their companions who sought safety in flight.

VII.

TOWARD noon there was a sudden cessation of the firing. Presently Lani heard the sound of wheels in the driveway. She left her patients and hastened to the entrance.

At the foot of the palace steps stood a hack, a public conveyance, drawn by a lean, dispirited horse, and driven by a Chinese. From it emerged the king!

Half way up the broad flight of steps, Williams, sword in hand, met the king.

"At last, your majesty, you have come," he said joyfully.

"Yes, I'm here, an' I'd like to know what all this row's about?" The king spoke thickly and he swayed slightly on his royal legs. "What d'ye mean, anyway — messin' up my palace like this? Why don't you go home? Didn't I tell you to go home an' stop this foolishness?"

He stumbled up the steps, brushed past Lani, pushed through a group of staring native soldiers, and disappeared in-doors. All the world had seen his open repudiation of Williams. Even the sharpshooters on the adjacent housetops had come forth from their shelters to get a better view of the scene.

Williams stood as the king had left him. His sword dropped from his nerveless fingers and clattered unheeded to the foot of the stone steps. Some one, unbidden, ran up a white flag to the top of the tall pole before the palace.

Williams watched it a moment as it floated in the sunlight. Then he turned and mounted the steps heavily. Lani awaited him with outstretched arms. There were tears in her eyes, but she smiled bravely through them. Unashamed, she kissed him before them all.

When John Arden came, an hour later, to accept the surrender of the palace, he found the two together.

He greeted Williams ceremoniously, but Lani he ignored.

Seated at a table in the disordered throne-room, he prepared the *mittimus* for the prisoners.

It may be that his pen wavered an instant as he wrote her name—but that was all. She went to jail with the others.

TWO AT ZERO.

BY FREDERICK STANFORD.

A SHORT STORY.

ANY one who knew Ike Ream in his college days would remember easily one fact at least—Ream had the largest collection of neckties of any man in the class. It could not be forgotten, also, that it was a struggle between him and Joe Bromley for first choice in Emmy Willard's regard. Then, again, Ream's class-day oration was considered great. It was on "Success in Life," and it made Emmy his devoted adorer for life. She honestly believed Ike was cut out for something like Daniel Webster or men who get themselves into Congress. She hung to the notion, too, like a saint. That, finally, was the making of Ream.

Bromley saw his own finish early, and retired.

There are always people, however, looking on. Bromley remained single. One day, ten years later—when he had grown rich—Ream dropped his last dollar. Still Bromley considered him the more lucky man, when he found out what had happened. He had Emmy, and that was everything. The two had been out of view three or four years, drifting from one locality to another. The road running to poverty has an easy descent. Sooner or later everybody has his troubles.

But it is not given to all men and women to know how it feels to be dispossessed by a landlord—put out on the street, minus any ceremony, with the household belongings. In that predicament a friend in need had appeared to the Reams in the character of a dealer in second-hand furniture. His name was Dawley—a small, red-faced, elderly man, who evidently was fond of his glass.

"You can put your traps in my place," he said in a friendly approach, "and I'll see if I can sell them for you. My commission is ten per cent. If I don't sell them, 'twon't be anything to you."

"I'm wondering where I shall find a lodging for my wife to-night," Ream returned, surveying his jumbled heap of chattels in an abstract way.

"Don't mind me," his wife put in. "Let's dispose of the things first, and think about the rest afterward."

"Why not go along with the things?" Mr. Dawley suggested. "I can fix you both up in the store, I guess—for one night, anyway."

That was how it happened Ream and his wife found themselves a part of the strange collection in Dawley's back shop at midnight, after the proprietor had locked the door and gone off. Mrs. Ream—she was called Emmy by Ream—shed a few tears, and then laughed. Life was full of freaks. She made a bed on their lounge, and fell asleep, worn-out by a strenuous day. Ream, however, only pretended to sleep, until he was sure Emmy was not likely to watch him. He had something on his mind besides trouble. His curiosity had been excited.

Mr. Dawley had not left any light, but Ream trusted to his sense of touch to discover what he sought in the dark. It was an old-fashioned hand-bag which Emmy had clung to after the break-up and brought with her to their haven of rest. What had she concealed in it?

When he had it in his possession he found it locked. For a moment he felt ugly enough to rip the faded leather with a knife, and he began to search in his pocket for that article. Then he hesitated. If by any chance he should be wrong in his guess, he realized he would feel sheepish in the morning.

He picked his way to a rear window, where some light filtered in from a glimmer in a tenement across the narrow yard, and examined the bag. There he remained on a broken chair half the night, his mind growing more and more morose with the darkest meditation. Finally he dozed, and the bag slipped to the floor with some noise.

"Ike! What was that?" asked Emmy, waking confused.

"Nothing," he answered. "Something fell down. That's all."

"Where are you?" she continued.

"In purgatory."

"Dear—don't say that!"

He heard her moving to come to him, and concealed the bag.

"Stay where you are. You will stumble over something," he reminded her.

She found her way to the window, however, in spite of his protest, and put her arm around his neck.

"Wait till to-morrow, and then we'll begin again," she said cheerfully. "We are still young, and we've both got health."

"A man who is thirty-two and a woman twenty-eight are no longer babes in the woods," he replied sullenly.

"No," she admitted. "We're castaways in the rubbish of a second-hand auction-room."

"I've been asking myself what Joe Bromley would say if he found you here," Ream continued, after a moment's gloomy pause.

"What put him in your mind?" she asked, surprised, drawing her arm away from him.

"Merely thinking of old times." He reached down for the grip pushed under his chair. "What have you got in this bag, Emmy?"

"Some reminders of old times," she answered, after a pause, in a voice scarce-

ly more than a whisper. Then she took the bag.

"I thought so," he said almost savagely.

"Well—what of it?" She was surprised.

He was sure she had a package of Bromley's youthful letters to her in the bag.

He had seen them in her possession back in the past.

"It was that grip which set me thinking of Joe Bromley," he declared.

"He never saw it in his life," she answered quickly. "But don't let's talk any more till you're in a better humor."

II.

When the daylight came Mrs. Ream made herself look as fresh as she could at an iron sink where the water dripped. As for mirrors, they were there in plenty, dirty and begrimed. She could see herself as others saw her; and she certainly was not an offense to the eye, even after a night in a dust-hole. The best she owned she wore, a dark drab dress that fitted her trim figure perfectly and a becoming picture-hat. Both the dress and the hat were her handiwork. The rest of her scanty wardrobe was in a trunk with the furniture they had not been able to sell or pawn. Ream did not fail to notice that old Dawley looked at her admiringly as soon as he let himself in and found them waiting to depart.

"Know where you're going?" he inquired tentatively.

"Oh, yes," she answered cheerily for both. "We thank you very much for our night's lodging."

"'Twas the best I could do," he apologized.

"I want to ask if I can raise a little loan from you on—" Ream halted, observing the hardening of Dawley's face.

"'Taint business," he replied. "It's against my rules."

"I thought perhaps you might let me have five dollars on the brass bedstead," Ream ventured to suggest.

"Once I might when I was fresh," Dawley acknowledged with a foxy smile. "I've been in business too long to do it nowadays. Friday's my auction day. Come in then."

They strolled away, Emmy clinging to the small grip which she had refused to leave with the two trunks. The immediate need was breakfast. Ream had twenty cents.

The arrangement between them for the day was, that Emmy would somehow pass the time till dark in the Astor Library, reading, and meet Ream in Madison Square after he had hunted for employment.

Just before noon, however, Ream entered the outer office of Bromley's suite, where a brokerage business was conducted, and heard his wife's voice in the private room, the door being open. It had taken him several days to make up his mind to ask Bromley's assistance. The desire took flight instantly. Two men were waiting in this outer room for an audience with Bromley, but Emmy was occupying his time. Ream listened while every nerve quivered—listened as he had never listened before. She was telling Bromley about their past.

"We've floated about considerably," she said in her mild, childish voice. "Ike has liked it."

"And you?" Bromley inquired.

"Oh, yes, I've liked it, too," she admitted. "While he was the Senator's secretary we had a good time in Washington; but it cost, of course, every cent Ike got as the clerk of the Senator's committee."

"I suppose so," Bromley added. "I've never had the chance to try Washington in the winter."

"It would have been much better for us both perhaps, if Ike had never had that sort of good fortune," Emmy explained. "I mean being taken up by the Senator as soon as he left college."

"We all thought that was great luck—the rest of the class," Bromley declared. "Some of us envied him."

"If it had only led to something else, but it didn't."

Ream wondered what she would tell next. Would she confess to Bromley—this old rival of his—that he had made capital of his Washington acquaintances as a tout for a New York hotel. He waited to hear that echo of the past; but Emmy skipped it.

"Ike's people wanted us to go back to Rockland last spring," she said after a pause.

"To practise law there?" Bromley asked.

"Yes."

"Ike preferred New York?"

"Most people would, wouldn't they?" she answered plaintively.

Bromley laughed. Ream saw in his mind's eye the flash of memory in respect to Rockland, and its main street with the town pump, that had probably moved his contemporary's mirth.

"Rockland isn't so bad," Bromley said consolingly.

"No, not before you've had Washington and New York," Emmy agreed.

"What's Ike doing now?" Bromley asked abruptly.

"Just now, he isn't doing much of anything," Emmy replied quickly, in a burst of confidence. "The firm of lawyers he has been with broke up three months ago and left him to pick up business for himself."

Bromley made no comment. He was silent. Ream imagined that Emmy was watching him, trying to read his thoughts—the thoughts of the successful man about the one not getting on. The air seemed too close.

Acting on impulse, he quietly left the room and retreated to the hall, where he saw the elevator ready to descend. He decided not to let Emmy know he had been near Bromley, but he wanted to be sure how long she remained there. So he waited below on the sidewalk, at a safe distance from the building, to see her come out.

III.

When she appeared, after a half-hour or more, Bromley came with her. Ream had not anticipated this, and his curiosity to see where they were going took full possession of him. He followed them until he saw them enter a restaurant. She had gone to luncheon with Bromley. Standing on the opposite side of the street, looking across at the front of that enticing place of refreshment, the gates of paradise seemed to have closed before him. But Emmy was inside. He was glad of that.

"Pardon me, friend," a stranger said at his elbow, "could you help a workingman to get a bite to eat?"

"Not to-day," Ream returned glumly. "Mebbe you think it'll do to wait till to-morrow?"

Ream looked at him. He was a man about his own age, and not a bad sort of fellow evidently. His face showed no indication of dissipation. He was decently dressed.

"I'm down on my luck," Ream explained. "I haven't got anything to give any one."

"Don't kid me," the man answered with an attempt at a smile. "Honest, I'm mighty hungry."

"I know how it is myself," Ream confessed.

"Say, a man might as well be shipwrecked on a desert island as stranded here on Broadway without money," this new acquaintance went on. "It's like being Robinson Crusoe on Juan Fernandez with not even a goat to milk."

"Crusoe ran up his signal to be taken away, you know," Ream answered, walking off.

When Ream eventually told Bromley the history of his day of tribulation, with all the particulars, he emphasized the meeting with this man as the one event of supreme importance. The fellow, it turned out, was a notorious thief. Because he was a potent reality, Ream discovered what Emmy had in her handbag. That discovery changed his life.

At dark he had achieved nothing. The people he had seen had no place to offer him. Some of them gave him advice. Two recommended the country as the more suitable place for a man out of employment and money. This did not seem self-evident, however. With the strongest desire to get out of the town, the chance was against him now. He sat down on a bench in Madison Square near the fountain and waited for Emmy. He was weary, half famished, and ripe to become an anarchist.

Next he began to hope Emmy wouldn't keep the appointment, wouldn't come. He had nothing to offer her—no dinner, no shelter, nothing — except his own wretched companionship. Perhaps she wouldn't come. She was already late. She was keeping him waiting. Why? Ream sprang up. Why? That was the question he put to himself. At that moment her trim little figure appeared at some distance away, in the shadow of the

trees. She was hunting for him. He hurried toward her.

"Oh, Ike," she said in a low tone, clinging to his arm, "I've got a dollar!"

"Hush!" he cautioned instinctively, looking around. "Not so loud."

"I've got a dollar," she whispered in ecstasy, pressing his arm.

"Where'd you get it?"

"I wrung it out of the second-hand Mr. Dawley. That's the reason I'm late in being here."

"He advanced it to you?"

"Yes. On the brass bedstead."

That dollar! It stimulated Ream's blood. The electric lights of the square seemed to glitter in joy. Life and pleasure pulsated in every direction. He drew Emmy's arm through his and hurried away with her.

"Dinner, Emmy, dinner—that's what we want," he said gaily.

"I don't think I need much myself, Ike," she answered.

"Yes, you do," he insisted. "We'll eat, drink, and be merry, though to-morrow we die."

She told him that she had already had one dinner since their meager breakfast. He heard the story of her visit to Bromley as they went on in the direction of Sixth Avenue and the small French restaurant he had in view.

"Joe was very cordial," she added.

"Why shouldn't he be?" Ream growled. "Did you tell him everything?"

"Certainly not!"

Emmy prevailed in her desire to economize with the dollar. Provision for the future had been Ike's chief fault. They temporized with hunger at an outlay of sixty cents for both. Ream filled in with all the bread in sight and two portions of cheese. Then he smoked a bad cigar an acquaintance had induced him to accept during the day's pilgrimage.

Under the spell of the tobacco, he thought out a scheme for the night. They could pass it successfully, he believed, on the Elevated Railroad, traveling between Harlem and the Battery, back and forth — eight miles, more or less, every trip—for the sacrifice of a dime.

"What do you say to the notion, Emmy?" he asked.

"It's better than sitting in the park with the policeman staring at us."

They began the undertaking at Forty-Second Street—after lingering in the neighboring park till eleven o'clock—by boarding a train for the Battery. There they shifted to the East Side road and passed north to the first station in the Bronx, where the platform does not divide the passengers. Emmy had fallen asleep in a corner. She came near forgetting her bag in the hustle to get out for the return trip; and this oversight begot the desire in Ream to lose that precious freight sooner or later. At the Battery they took the West Side train to One Hundred and Twenty-Fifth Street. From there they turned back again and journeyed to the Bronx. Nobody appeared to notice them, and one or the other slept much of the time.

During his wide-awake spells, Ream thought of Bromley. Next, by natural association, his mind wandered to the bag and the old love-letters from Bromley, which he believed to be treasured in it. The desire to get rid of it, with its hated contents, became fiendish in him. Emmy, however, clung to the bag now, awake or asleep. He meditated that he might find a chance to drop the thing in the river if they went out on the Brooklyn Bridge. They were returning south from the Bronx when this notion occurred to him.

He let Emmy sleep till the Bridge Terminal was reached, and then hurried her out. It was almost four o'clock in the morning by the illuminated City Hall clock.

"Time we were making a shift," he whispered to Emmy.

"Can we afford it?" she asked, somewhat bewildered by the sudden awaking.

The early workers had already begun to multiply in transit on the Bridge. The couple walked out to the benches around the first pier and sat down. No one was here resting. All the wayfarers were on the move.

"Now is the chance for you to get a nap, Ike," Emmy suggested. "I'll keep awake."

Ream had no intention of sleeping. He sat silent, looking at the dark harbor, glittering here and there with the lighted ferry-boats, at the great city spread out

as far as the eye could reach, where swarming, relentless millions fight a battle every day. But he grew drowsy. He was used up.

IV.

It was plain to Emmy that a man was watching them. She became more and more nervous while Ream slept. A flush of daylight illuminated the city back of her.

She would wait a few minutes. Ike needed all the sleep he could get. But the man stopped before them and stared at her without any pretense of disguising his purpose.

"Ike," she whispered, trembling, after the stranger had gone on a few yards and paused. "Ike, a man is watching us."

Ream awoke with a start. "Where is he?"

"There."

"Come," Ream said quickly, rising, "it's time we were leaving the Bridge."

Already the sense of having lost caste, of being outside the pale of respectability, had worked its insidious change. The desire to shrink, to disappear from observation, was uppermost. Ream heard the man's footsteps coming after them. The next moment his hand was on Ream's shoulder, halting him.

"Wait a minute," he said imperatively.

"Take your hand off me and clear out," Ream returned in a rage.

"Oh—that's your bluff, is it?" the man inquired coolly. "Take a look at this badge, and maybe you'll be more civil."

"Well—what do you want?"

He was an officer in plain clothes. They had excited his suspicion.

"I want to see what your woman has got in that bag."

"Why, nothing — merely nothing!" Emmy exclaimed, plainly scared as well as astonished.

"All right," the man replied, incredulous. "Then you'll have no objection to opening it."

"I can't open it. I've lost the key long ago."

"Say something better'n that, and don't take up my time."

"I've told you the truth," Emmy insisted. "The key is lost."

"Take your choice. Either open the bag, or I'll take you both in. See?"

Ream took out his pocket-knife. He knew now why Emmy was obstinate.

"You're going to insist?" he asked, taking the bag.

"What you going to do with that knife?" the man inquired, drawing back a step and letting his hand steal to his hip-pocket. "What you going to do?"

"Cut the leather," Ream answered, excited. "I'm going to cut it."

"No, Ike, don't do that," Emmy pleaded. "Don't do it for anybody."

"I'm not going to waste time with you two," the man put in, and paused.

Ream slit the top of the bag from end to end. Emmy reached out her hand for it. "The two men watched — but not with equal interest, perhaps—while she drew forth the contents.

She displayed her marriage certificate, the photograph of a child, a child's dress, shoes and stockings, and a folded, yellow manuscript tied with a red ribbon. Nothing more was in the bag.

The man studied her a moment. "I guess you're on the level," he said, evidently embarrassed. "Keep your man straight."

"What do you mean?" Ream flared at him.

"I remembered just now seeing you yesterday afternoon below the dead-line, chinning with Waddy Higgs. So I had a go at you here." He turned abruptly and walked away.

For the moment Ream forgot him—forgot everything except Emmy. He thanked his stars that he had not asked her, compelled her, to open the bag. He must discover some way to atone to her for the suspicion he had entertained. That yellow manuscript! He recognized it — his class-day oration, "Success in Life." What mockery, sarcasm!

"I hope he's satisfied," Emmy said, gazing after the retreating man with the shield, tears filling her eyes. "I hope he's satisfied."

V.

Ream put his arm around her and drew her away without risking any word. They walked in silence to the Brooklyn side of the span, where both halted again, weary. Standing at the side of the

Bridge facing east, watching the glow of the dawn, and then the water beneath, Ream's thoughts were of the darkest hue. It was for this he had lived. For this Emmy had lived.

If he had only let Joe Bromley have her! There was one way—only one he now thought of—that he could atone to her. He would let Bromley know the sort of woman he had lost. Perhaps Bromley might marry her yet, if he himself were out of the way!

The yellow, faded oration dropped from the slit in the bag at his feet, and Ream took it up disdainfully. The next moment he raised his arm to hurl it down to the river.

"No, no," Emmy cried, seizing his arm and getting possession of the coveted relic, "I want it—I want to keep it!"

"What for?" Ream asked, astonished by her earnestness. "The thing is a mockery."

"I meant to show it to him—when he grew up," she explained, caressing the picture of the child in her hand. "That's why I put it away."

"But he is dead—dead!" Ream returned bitterly.

"I still have you."

"I'm not worth keeping."

"Don't you remember, Ike, one of the things you said in this oration?"

"Something I cribbed from Emerson or Carlyle, I suppose."

"No, it was your own thought," she continued, the color coming to her cheeks. "I'm sure of it."

"What?"

"'To live is to will.'"

"You've remembered that all these years?"

"Yes—yes. That night after class-day, when you came to find me under the trees—"

"Don't let us think of that now—no, no!" he said in anguish, glaring at the view before them. "I've thought of you often enough lately as you appeared to me that night in your white dress. I was mad to have you for my own."

"I thought as I saw you coming toward me in the moonlight, 'To live is to will'; that is what he has said. Some day I shall see him prove it. I shall see him among those who will and do. I've always believed it. I still believe it, Ike."

Ream faced her. He did not trust himself to speak. Was there ever simplicity, faith, hope, love, like this, he asked himself. And it was she who had been his burden!

"Emmy"—he took both her hands—"Emmy!"

She saw he could not speak.

"Don't—don't mind what I've said," she ventured with a little gasp.

"You've said the dearest, bravest thing," he said hoarsely. "May Heaven hear me answer you! I love you. I'll prove it."

Neither spoke again during some moments. Neither could speak.

"Which way shall we go?" Emmy asked faintly.

"Choose," he answered.

"The voice of the city is growing louder with the light," she said with a smile, facing Manhattan. "I believe it will be a beautiful day."

It was.

Bromley put out his strong arm to old friends. Ream got a client. The tide had turned.

THE BALANCE.

I.

If the world were always gay,
Mirth to-morrow, jest to-day,
All delight without alloy—
What would be the use of joy?

II.

If the world were always sad,
Care and grief the meed we had,
Doubt and fear the only gain—
What would be the use of pain?

III.

If the world were always fair,
Ever in each street and square,
Bloom below and song above—
What would be the use of love?

Charlotte Becker.

BRAZENHEAD IN MILAN.*

BY MAURICE HEWLETT,

Author of "The Forest Lovers," "Richard Yea and Nay," "New Canterbury Tales," "The Fool Errant," "Half-Way House," Etc.

A SERIAL STORY.

CHAPTER IX.

HOW CAPTAIN BRAZENHEAD, FALLING INTO DISGRACE, READ HIS "DE REMEDIO."

"TYRANT of Milan"—thus ran his third murderer's report—"one wretch I seized by the ankles, as if he had been a three-legged stool, and whirling him over my head a few times, with him attacked those other two. As a flail I brought him thwacking down, as wheat from the chaff on the floor fled brain from husk. The time was not long before they lay before me like the must of trodden grapes; while as for him I wielded, he was as whip-thongs in my hand—strips of hide wherewith to trounce a truant, but no weapon for a man. Anon came my varlets to sweep up with a besom; and now your well of Santa Chiara is so sweet you could stable there your store pig."

Visconti, burning and shivering by turns in his fever, hugged his furs about him and spread out his thin hands to the sun.

He may have listened, but he did not heed; he may have been gratified, but he did not seem to be. Captain Brazenhead's invention, for lack of nourishment, wilted and faltered out. His eloquence, for that turn, was not ready at call; or, it may be, that his patron had heard it all before.

When the best is said, the variations you can play upon the death of a man are very few, at least in Europe. They say that the Chinese have contrived better, or perhaps they have greater vitality to work upon.

However that may be, Captain Brazenhead stopped, and there followed a painful pause.

Presently Visconti croaked out his doom.

"You have done very ill, on your own showing. To dispose of three men by knocking their heads together—what is this but insensate butchery? Get you to the knacker's, hire yourself in the shambles, but serve me no more.

"Yet, stay," he added, seeing that Brazenhead was preparing to obey him with suspicious alacrity, "I may have use for you yet. You are confined to quarters until my next orders, and you are disarmed."

Then and there the halberdiers deprived him of his weapons. He was led to the door and turned loose into the corridors of the castle, a disgraced man.

I must observe upon this that it is not given to the most generous to foresee the full scope of their magnanimity; or it may well be that our Brazenhead's circle of acquaintance was too wide, or his instincts too warm, to make him a tolerable murderer.

For if every murderer were to fight with the man he proposed to slay, the work would never be done; and if you are to add to a zest for combat a tenderness toward the nephews of ladies with whom you may have conversed, or are inclined to spare them who may have bested you as well as those whom you

 This story began in THE CAVALIER for October.

have bested, you narrow the field of your operations too severely. It is likely you will murder none.

Add the difficulty of explaining how you have slain persons who are alive at the moment of explanation, and you put a tax upon your invention which may easily make you bankrupt.

It was vexatious in every way, humiliating to his finer feelings and embarrassing to his political schemes. He had his garrison in Sant' Eustorgio to provide for; he had fixed the day for the shock of Pavia; and here he was, deprived of arms and confined to the precincts of the court, while his friends starved in a disused hermitage and Pavia remained inviolate.

This was trouble enough, but the hurt to his pride, his professional pride, was worse. To Camus and Gelsomino, his colleagues, was allotted the notable adventure of putting three hundred Anabaptists to the sword. Not only so, but on the day fixed the duke himself would attend the shambles in state. Milan would hold high festival, and so it did.

Fortified by proof armor, and a ring with prussic acid in the jewel of it, Duke Galeazzo set out. His duchess, his daughter, his great officers, suitably accompanied, took horse in the great court, and rode down to the piazza.

Captain Brazenhead saw them go from where he sat in an obscure corner of the buttery, and bit his nails to the quick. Occasionally he sipped a mug of small beer; very occasionally he tried to carry his misfortune with grace by humming an air. But he never got beyond the first bar. He had been thus pitifully engaged for more than a week, and was very glum.

A thin stream of persons of both sexes was maintained throughout the day, to and from the buttery. Mendicant friars came to fill their sleeves with broken victuals; widows and orphans, half-pay soldiers, murderers out of work and other unfortunates received their daily sustenance from the overflowings of the kitchens.

But for them the castle had been like a house of the dead, for the whole castle world was gone to see the slaying of the Anabaptists. Captain Brazenhead watched them now darkly from his corner, chewing a bitter cud, and reading to himself a soured judgment upon every comer.

Upon a rosy-gilled Franciscan he mused:

"Aye, thou scratching dog, filch the substance of the poor, and score the crime against thy god of Assisi. And yet I tell thee, that little beggar man had not been cold two-and-fifty weeks before thou and thy likes were like fed stallions. Shall I ask the good man of the house who confesses his wife? Or who talks with his handmaid in the dusk of the cloister garth, and barters his kisses for flagons? Get thee hence, thou cheek of brawn, and vex not the sight of the honest."

And with some such scathing words he was ready for every religious who came to get much for little.

By and by there came in a pretty young woman in a striped petticoat, leading by the hand a short-smocked child. She approached the buttery-hatch modestly, and not perceiving Captain Brazenhead in his corner, stumbled against him, and would have fallen had she not sat down upon his knee. The moment she perceived her error she begged his pardon.

Confusion once more became her; she was tinged like a flower. Captain Brazenhead, for all his dejection, knew her at once.

"Ah, gentle Liperata," said he, "you may well be ashamed of the seat you chose. A time was when these war-wasted knees would have become you better. No doubt you remember how we journeyed together the way of Milan, and with what hopes, odd's face, and what promise. But then fortune smiled upon me, though you did not."

"Sir," said the young woman, "at that time I should never have sat upon your knee, for then I was a wife. Now, alas—"

"How now?" cried the captain. "Has thy husband forsaken so lovely a partner? Bring me face to face with him, and I will embrace him."

The lady began to cry. She snatched up her child and clasped it to her bosom.

"Behold an orphan—behold the widow of a murdered man!" she wailed.

Captain Brazenhead was awake and vibrating with fire.

"Who is the murdered man? Confront me with his killer, and thou shalt have two murdered men," he cried. "I have a sword not yet rusty—and by this hand—"

He had forgotten that he was weaponless—and was to have good reason anon to remember it.

"Sir," said Liperata, "I will tell you my tale if you will be pleased to hear it. I was but yesterday the wife of a gentleman of position and talent, who had a court appointment which brought him honor, respect, and a handsome emolument. His name was Camus—"

"Camus!" the captain whispered hoarsely, "Camus! My colleague. Oh, Fate, thou avenger of wrong! Proceed, fair widow, I conjure thee."

"My husband," said Liperata, "had been entrusted with a responsible task which it is imperative he must fulfil this very day—"

"Aye," said the captain, "and so he must. Three hundred Anabaptists await him. But now—what may not come of this?"

"He felt the burden laid upon him as one which called for all his powers of head, heart, and sinew," she continued, "and devoted the whole of yesterday to the exercise of these parts of his. He spent the forenoon in the reading of theology; St. Thomas Aquinas equipped him here. His heart was in my care. I think I may say, without affectation, that I lavished upon it all the arts which a good and dutiful wife has at her command. At least, he praised me, and assured me by unmistakable tokens of appreciation that I had not worked in vain."

"I warrant that you did not, lady," said Captain Brazenhead warmly.

She thanked him with gentleness.

"In the evening of that unhappy yesterday my husband set out for the exercise of his muscular system. With our child upon one arm, and my hand upon the other, he took a walk about the streets of the city, conversing cheerfully with his acquaintance, visiting the shrines of certain saints who had always been propitious. All went well until we passed through the deserted cemetery of Sant' Eustorgio. But in that unhallowed spot—"

The captain's eyes seemed starting from his head.

"Which of them did it?" he said, and his voice was like the sea-sound in a shell. "Not Tranche-coupe? Not Squarcialupo? Not a long-armed man?"

"A dusky youth, lithe as a snake," said she, "sprang upon him from behind a grave, and crying: 'Here's for thee, braggart of England!' stabbed him in the neck. He could not have chosen a more fatal spot. It was the heel of my dear Achilles—my noble, diligent Achilles, of whom I am the poor Briseis of his arms. For my husband, whose profession exposed him to constant danger, wore chain mail upon his person, which unhappily ended at the shoulders. Need I say more?

"He sank, bathed in his own bright blood, and as I wrung my hands and cried upon my Camus by name, the villain slipped among the tombs and disappeared into the city. I am bereft of his love, and he, by failing of his tryst to-day has died dishonored. If my tears have earned your pity, sir, I am glad—for indeed I need the pity of the humane. Now, with no prospect before me but a life of beggary and want, I am come here for alms, that I may school myself at once for the bitter end of my days."

She covered her face with her hands, but Captain Brazenhead was moved to the very center of his being.

"But not so, by cock's wounds, not so," he said, and laid a well-chopped finger along his nose. "What if I can amend your griefs, my bird of the bough? What of bearded men, old in warfare? What of the ties of gratitude? Bonds of steel? No more—" and here he clasped the melting fair to his breast, while all the hangers about the buttery marveled and many wept.

"Come you with me, lady, come you out along with me! 'Twas to-morrow for Pavia, pity is, but now it must be later. Now I am Persia, and thou art my Andromedary. Now we summon the legionaries for chivalry and off we go, my chuck."

With no more words, but with hus-

banded breath and an arm crooked for her hand, he led her away to the cemetery of Sant' Eustorgio.

CHAPTER X.

HOW CAPTAIN BRAZENHEAD SLEW THREE HUNDRED ANABAPTISTS WITH THE THIGH-BONE OF A PHILOSOPHER.

THE tombs of Sant' Eustorgio stood or leaned at all angles, and stared like the bleached and derelict bones of a host long dead. Disconsolate kites, buzzards, ravens, and other reprobate birds flapped heavily above, or, perching on cross or pinnacle, voiced, after their fashion, their discontent with the world as it was.

The crazy *Hic Jacets* of the tombs coincided with these harsh-throated heralds of despair, and set Captain Brazenhead to stalk briskly about, himself like a long-necked bird of bad omen, if haply he might discover but one of his bondslaves.

Clinging to his arm was the now terrified Liperata, upon whose skirts dragged the child of slain Camus.

"I pin my faith to the Bilboan," said Brazenhead, "for he alone is fitted by his nature to inhabit so beastly a spot. His arm reaches to his knee-cap; he is, you may say, three-legged. No hyena could be more at home in a graveyard than this fellow, who is, moreover, endeared to me by many ties. He owes me for his life, I owe him for his aunt. Certainly, I pin my faith to him."

And he was justified.

Far within the shade of an empty vault they came upon a crouched figure. His head was not visible, so deeply was it sunk between his knees. But by his arm—by the absence of one, and the presence of one—he could be recognized for the Bilboan.

"Ho, Barbary, awake!" cried Brazenhead, and stirred him with a thigh-bone which he happened to have in his hand.

It was no ordinary thigh-bone, though its present possessor knew nothing of that. Being deprived of his sword, and missing the use of it, he had picked it up in his way through the cemetery. It had belonged to the philosopher Gnatho of Samothrace, who had devoted his life to demonstrating the indestructibility of matter, and had perished at the stake in the great days of St. Ambrose, to whom matter was so little that he considered the punishment a light one.

It was a curious circumstance that Captain Brazenhead was to be the instrument of Gnatho's vindication—if indeed those modern disciples of the sage are not nearer the mark when they affirm that he himself was his own instrument, and Captain Brazenhead the unconscious agent of his purpose.

But at the smart touch of the relic the Bilboan came leaping from the tomb, and humbled himself at the feet of his lord. His uncouth mops and mows touched Captain Brazenhead in a quick spot.

"My faithful vassal," said he tenderly, "how is it with thee, man? Art thou alone faithful to thy Brazenhead? Is gratitude, then, so dear? Are memories so short? Where is Squarcialupo, that prick-eared Roman?"

"Gone, master, gone," said the Bilboan. "A gamester came this way and did beguile him."

The captain was shocked. "How now? So sturdy a knave?"

"He promised him good wages," said the other. "Five sols Tournois per diem. I cried shame upon him, saying: 'Trust to our lord's honor'; but he said that your rate had been but three."

"It was four," cried the captain. "I pass you my word it was four."

The Bilboan shrugged in despair. "Even so, said Squarcialupo, five was above your figure; and he went the day after you had brought him here."

Captain Brazenhead had expected as much.

"He was a gallows knave, when all's said. But I hoped better things of Tranche-coupe. Now what of that Burgundian?"

"There came a funeral to this place," said the Bilboan, "on St. Milo's day. They buried a certain notary, a warm man, but not near so warm as that heathen is whose thigh-bone your honor now wears at your side—if all they tell me of his teaching is but half true. Now to commit our notary to earth came a

widow of his and ten children, if not more. Quite a company! Their lamentable cries did so move Tranche-coupe, our friend, that he brooded upon them day and night.

"The affair got upon his mind, and wrought upon the young man's brain; so presently, moved by pity, he borrowed a suit of clothes from the grave-digger, and is but this morning gone to pay court to the relict of the notary. If he succeeds, as I think he will, from what he tells me, he will be fourth husband to a lady of substance and merit. I cannot blame him neither; for a widow, d'ye see, has experience in the comforting of mankind, and that counts for much with a young man of Tranche-coupe's years. No, no, I cannot blame him."

"Nor I," said Captain Brazenhead, constricting the muscles of his arm, and looking benignantly down upon Liperata. "No, nor I, by cock. But I am vexed," he added, "and something put about—for I had reckoned upon his cross-bow arm for an adventure at Pavia before long. There shun me two men by whom I had hoped to win a score. Tush! And the Egyptian—"

"Master," said the Bilboan darkly, "come we now to the Egyptian, against whom I would have warned you before had I seen you here, or known how to come at you. That dark-skinned rogue, that snake-tongue, who got the better of your honor once in a horse-deal, has now done you the scurviest turn of all. For not content with the slaughter of Signior Camus, your colleague, he has dressed himself out in his livery, and with the murdered man's vizor to cover his own false face, is engaged at this hour in slaughtering three hundred Anabaptists in the presence of the duke's grace of Milan, and his consort, and his daughter, and all his court."

At this intelligence Captain Brazenhead smote himself on his forehead and said:

"It was very well."

Those who knew him would have read the oracle for a bad sign, because he really meant it. Its deep-mouthed tones rang the passing-bell for the Egyptian.

"Come," said Captain Brazenhead sternly to the Bilboan, "I shall need thee. Come."

So saying, he led the way back to the Castle of Milan.

Walking through a desert city into a desert stronghold, it came upon him as a providence of supernatural powers that all lay so snug—"at the mercy of any man of his hands."

A somber cheer illumined his burnt face; he put his arm round the waist of Liperata and pressed her to his heart. With the other arm free he flourished the thigh-bone of Gnatho the philosopher.

"All may yet be done. All may fall out still for the best. By the sacred places of Jerusalem, I see my way! Forward!"

It was very much the hero, it was *de son naturel,* to overlook the exiguity of his little force. True, the great Sforza was far away. That right hand of Milan, with the flower of the Lombard host, was warring in Umbria, it was believed, engaged just now in the leaguer of Perugia.

Even so, it needs a mind cast in a paladin's mold to compass the sack of Milan with a one-armed man, a young widow, and an unbreeched boy for attacking party.

But Captain Brazenhead would never perish of dry-rot in the brain. If great schemes, great enthusiasms, had been all, he might have realized that grandiose conception of Castruccio's, who, having Lucca under his hand, saw his way to the tyranny of all Italy.

More sanguine than Castruccio, the swelling thought held him in thrall as he led his band into the Hall of Audience, which was in the shape of a basilica of three aisles. These aisles were marked by columns of the Doric order, gray and serried. In the apse of the noble chamber, upon its degrees, stood the throne of Milan — empty. To stride forward, mount the steps, seat himself in that chair of state, place Liperata upon his left hand, made but short work for a man whose brain was on fire. He bade the child go up himself by a column, and then, in the clear voice of a man who has a vision, commanded the Bilboan to proclaim him Duke of Milan. We may call that burning your ships—or we may call it high treason—or both. The question is, had Captain Brazenhead, or had he not, the quick sprite of destiny by the tail? Now Captain Brazenhead thought he had.

"Salomon, by the grace of God, Duke of Milan, Marquis of Pavia, Lord of Monza, Como, Bergamo, and Brescia, Tyrant of Verona, Piacenza, and the Borrommean Isles," was called by the herald and acclaimed by the populace.

A reign, the shortest but most eventful in the annals of the Lombard State, was peacefully ushered in. Not trumpets pealed its opening, nor the clash of lifted swords, nor pikes tossing like reeds in a wind. The piping of an unbreeched child calling for its mother was all the acclamation, and the fevered agitation of his legs, as he pattered up and down on the pavement, all the commotion of a scene which needed perhaps but a little more bustle to have been made memorable by Corio and the other court historians of the houses of Visconti and Sforza, who, as things were, and for reasons of their own, passed it over.

I have no such reasons, and am proud to be the humble means of restoring a stirring page to the volume of Lombard story.

It would be my wish to enlarge upon the events of the twenty-five minutes following the proclamation—and its reception by the populace—which I have just related, and I am sure it would be the reader's; but materials are wanting. *Cætera desunt,* as the chroniclers say.

I believe that the civil list was established, provision made for the Duchess-elect Liperata, and the tax on beer, spruce, cider, perry, wine, mead, and all fermented liquors, abolished. The marriage laws were standardized, I gather. But for such high matters space fails me.

Now, the issuing of these important and far-reaching reforms took up the better part of twenty-five minutes; and immediately after, just as the new duke, feeling the vein leap within him, was about to deliver an apologue upon equity, a confused murmuring afar off—the noise of a great tumult without the house—made itself heard.

It was for all the world like the sound of a mighty flood, gathered in the mountains and sweeping its way irresistibly over the plain. All heard it; some shook. The duke paused in the act to speak. His mouth was open, his eyes were fixed; but no rhapsody came forth. Quite otherwise.

"Did I name equity?" he said. "Here cometh our little affair. Equity's bane this will be—a more ancient practise. Haste thee, Bilboan, and draw thy blade."

This was very well; but the Bilboan, no better than his master, had no blade.

Duke Brazenhead saw his penury, and was not long amending it. With his trusty bone in hand, he attacked the throne where the duchess yet sat, and was not long in knocking off a fluted column of marble and mosaic, of the kind known as *opus alexandrinum.* It was of the length of a man's forearm, as sharp at the angles as if it had just left the mason's yard.

"Arm thee, friend," he said, "with this emblem until thou hast a better for thy prowess." Descending then into the hall, he caught up the child, and returned and set him upon his mother's knee. "Stay you there, mother and son," he bade them. "I fight for hearth and home this day."

Accompanied by the Bilboan, he took the middle aisle of the basilica and stood there, a superb figure of a man, masked, hairy, bristling, his scarlet cloak thrown over his left arm, and in his restless right hand the avenging limb of Gnatho of Samothrace.

The Bilboan, true to his nature, crouched, peering forward. He bent himself at the knees as an athlete does at the starting-point—but so far that he could easily scratch his ankle with his forefinger; and he did so more than once.

The uproar in their hearing who waited, neared, swelled, and became a din—a riot of broken clamor. You could hear now and again the name of the late duke thrown up. "Visconti! Visconti!" you heard; but that cry was drowned in outland curses, and names unknown to Italy held the air.

Sooner than was convenient the noise of countless running feet blotted out all others. It became evident that a host was at hand.

"It is the Anabaptists," said the Bilboan, scratching his foot.

"Aye," said his master. "They drive back Milan. Now we have it in the nose. Be thou ready."

The doors were pushed open wide. A

few scared servants, varlets, and maids of the pantry and kitchen came first—old tirewomen, old bedeswomen, a priest, and a limping page whose ankle was bound up — running helter-skelter for protection. Regardless, in their terror, of the stern figures in mid-hall, they pelted by them, and, gaining the dais, crouched at the knees of the mother and child on the throne.

There was no marvel in their mistake. They saw a miracle—and felt it, when Monna Liperata, heavenly mildness beaming from her eyes, put out her hand and laid it upon the head of the nearest. The heart of Duke Brazenhead leaped in his body, and warm tears flooded his eyes as he witnessed this fair sight.

"As God liveth, I have that for which to fight this day."

Close upon these stragglers, however, came the halberdiers of Visconti, a mere handful of striped men backing into the hall, disputing the passage with them who pursued.

In their midst, white and slavering at the lips, tottered he who but that morning had been lord and tyrant of Milan; beside him his duchess walked, a goddess, though she was too portly to be fair; and with her came Bianca, her only daughter, *mater pulchra filia pulchrior.*

Royally these two advanced up the hall, and behind them, blocking up the great entry, was a thicket of pikes, staves, scythes, and bills, the snatched-up weapons of the wholly frantic and partially naked persons of the Anabaptists.

The battling of this shaggy host at the doors, where without order or judgment all tried to enter at once, gave a moment's respite to the pursuers.

Captain Brazenhead—to call him still by his familiar name—had pity upon the fallen and abject prince, and more than pity, high admiration indeed, for the persons of the two noble ladies of his household.

"Open ranks," he bade the Bilboan; "open ranks, messmate, and let in this jerking wretch. He was a king this morning," he added pitifully, "and shall sleep in a bed for aught I care."

The Bilboan dutifully stood aside, and the hunchback, blind with panic, crawled on all fours up the degrees of his ancient throne; and seeing there a fair woman seated, with a golden-headed child on her lap, stumbled forward with a cry to her feet, clutched at her knees, and buried his face in her striped petticoat.

There, throughout the carnage to ensue, he stayed.

But Captain Brazenhead bowed courtly to the duchess and her daughter.

"Ladies," he said, "suffer a soldier and trust in the clemency of a prince. By your leave, noble ladies, by your leave." So said, he turned to face the throne with them, and, taking a hand of each, escorted them with high-stepping gallantry up the steps of the throne. "Be seated, ladies, beside my family, and be sure that for you, no less than for them, I shall play the man this day."

The ladies, who may be pardoned for not knowing, nor caring, what all this might be about, sat beside Liperata on the throne, and saw Captain Brazenhead swoop into the fray like a sea-eagle into a school of mackerel in a shallow. He had poised on the edge of the dais but for a minute. That had sufficed him to see how matters stood. Visconti's guards were ranged before him; the Bilboan still crouched in mid-hall. Opposite to him raged and bayed the furious host. With a voice like the blast of a trumpet, he had signaled for the contest.

"Salt and water *en avant!*" he had cried. "The Anabaptists are at ye, hounds! Rally for the faith!" That bone which erstwhile had stood up stiffly for the indestructibility of matter, whistled above his head. "You that love order and good baptism, follow me."

The guard rallied and formed a wedge. Led by such a prince, they clove the Anabaptists' ranks, and men dropped like cornstalks heavy in the ear to right and left.

Such battle he had never yet dreamed of—even he, to whom long odds were as a draft of wine—as this, wherein he, the Bilboan, and ten of Visconti's body-guard faced three hundred fanatics stung by terror into frenzy. Hot-eyed, half-naked, giant men they were—Hungarians, Croats, and Serbs—red in the beard and flat in the bone, hairy-chested, crying uncouth shibboleths of their own, outraged in every sense, and bent upon out-

rage. They howled, wept, gnashed their teeth; they thrust and smote, clubbed at their oppressors; but to little purpose.

Cut into halves by the wedge of the Lombards, hampered by the pillars of the hall, they impeded each other. In sheaves they fell; or, backing in panic at each onrush of the foe, they trampled and tumbled over upon the other. Like the uneasy gleams of the sun upon broken water, here and there glided a red figure urging them to effort.

Where, then, was the Egyptian if not there? Whose was that evil-whispering spirit if not his? Captain Brazenhead, roaring in the press as he mowed, cried upon him:

"Come out, thou horse-coper, thou black thief of Lutterworth! Come out and meet me."

But there was no response, save some glancing of the red figure, and no means of getting at that save through the massed Anabaptists about the door. But that caitiff's hours were numbered. Marked down at last by his incensed adversary, where he stood egging on his dupes to their hopeless task, he was from that moment a doomed man.

For Captain Brazenhead, seizing a dead Anabaptist by neck and ankles, lifted him up on high and hurled him with all his force at the Egyptian. The two heads, that of the dead and that of the living, met in horrid shock. That of the Anabaptist stood the strain, but the Egyptian's was split open as when a man with his finger and fist smashes a walnut.

The rogue went down, and was trampled out of recognition by the feet of his flying friends.

CHAPTER XI.

HOW, AND FOR WHAT EXQUISITE REASONS, CAPTAIN BRAZENHEAD RENOUNCED THE THRONE OF MILAN.

HOLDING his ragged doublet about his bleeding breast, Captain Brazenhead turned his face toward the dais, where Liperata sat chaste and still, like some fair-haired Madonna of the north. Not upon her only must he look, but he must frown upon the huddled figure of Duke Visconti, and consider what was to be done with him and his.

Great and weighty thoughts contended within him as he stood, deep-breathing and deep-pondering, there. At his feet, very contentedly, sat the Bilboan, dabbing his wounds with a rag. Such of Visconti's body-guard as remained alive waited upon his words.

He was master; he ruled in Milan. At a word from him the writhen little tyrant would be extinguished, and that which he had greatly dreamed would come to pass. Power of life and limb over men, cities, armies, were his at a word. More than all these, as hinting at these and more, the waiting eyes of citizens, the waiting steps of legions, the held breath of neighboring states attendant upon his motions. To a man of great ideas and imagination winged the temptation to say that one word, *death,* was not, you would say, to have been desisted. *Death to Visconti!* and all Lombardy fell crumbling at his feet.

And yet not only did he not say it, but he knew that he could not. And why?

Because he was so made that he could not take life in cold blood. That was one reason. This pitiful, blood-gluttonous, writhen man — whom to kill were to honor above his deserts—must then go free. He might be chained, caged, hidden away within walls; but he could not be slain, because Brazenhead, with everything to gain, could not be angry with him.

He could deplore him, despise him, spurn, spit upon him; but treat him as hateworthy he could not, for all Milan and its subject cities.

Assume Visconti chained and put away, what was to hinder him then?

"By my soul," said he to himself, "when I am Duke of Milan I must wive; for I must get me a dynasty, d'ye see?" He eyed Visconti's tall daughter as he spoke, and could not deny her merits. "Thou and I at grapple, fair dame—thou and I! Oh, propitious Lucina!"

He flushed at the future revealed of the straight-backed Brazenheads his sons, at the deep-bosomed daughters he might send abroad to people the thrones of Europe.

And then he looked at Liperata where she chastely sat, a mild young goddess. By her side Bianca Visconti showed the termagant, revealed the shrew; yes, but

in every feature, in every mold, in carriage, gesture, and regard, there shone a duchess, the mother of dukes to come.

At this crisis in the affairs of Milan, Bianca, Liperata, and the subduer of them all, the Bilboan limped up to his master, plucked him by the sleeve, and, as the hero stooped to him, whispered hoarsely in his ear.

The hushed auditors could make little of the message, which was in the Spanish tongue; but at one word out of many two persons started. These were Bianca Visconti, and he who proposed to raise her to a throne. At that one word their looks encountered. Some say the word was *Sforza*.

Captain Brazenhead, at any rate, paused; for once in his life he showed timidity.

"She is nothing to me beside that mouse in the throne. A man must be snug, d'ye see? Give me cuddlesomeness, and I'll cry you quittance of your strapping ladies. See me at my ease, having well supped, slippers on my feet, plying the toothpick. What do I need then, ha? Why, a dove-eyed, ministering, kiss-me-quick lass to sit on my knee and work the whisk to keep the flies away, what time I sleep off my drink. 'Tis so, by cock; for men are so made that they carry a maid's heart by storm and waste the world until they have it; and after that they look to have done with the matter. All must be solace afterward; and the woman wooed before wedlock must thereafter woo until the end of days. Men are so made, there's no denying, and I more than most.

"But Mme. Bianca there—lo, you—where is my ease? Where would she hide my slippers? Would she flick away flies? Not so; but 'My lord, I pray you fan my face against this heat.' 'My lord, I would have you sing me lullaby.' 'Carry you the child, my lord, while my women tire my hair.' 'Get up, my lord; get up, and snuff the candle; I vow 'tis your turn.' Why, a pest upon it, how should a man find force to lead armies afield, or preside in council-chambers, or beard the envoys of foreign princes, if his rest is to be broken, his pride humbled, his courage frittered off him like cheese off a grater?

"Yet thus, and not otherwise, must that man suffer who has Mme. Bianca to wife. Yet it comports not with my honor to lead any less a lady to the throne of Milan. *Zounds,* but I'll none of your thrones, then, at such a price! And yet withal — and yet — oho, Mme. Bianca, I see thee the mother of the dukes, my sons!

"A proof—a proof!" he cried. "I'll put all to the proof. Mark you me, Bilboan, how I go a wooing in my own fashion."

Followed by the eyes of his crouching ally still busy with his sores, he trod impetuously forward to the dais.

There from below he accosted Bianca Visconti, daughter of dukes.

"Lady, I am master of Milan, and like you well enough. Come now, shall we make a match of it? Will you be a soldier's wife?"

The lady's eyes shone steely-blue. The lady's cheeks flushed high.

"Yes, sir. That is my fixed intention," she said.

Captain Brazenhead set his right foot upon the second degree of the dais.

"Well and good then, mistress," said he. "Gird me on that forepiece with your belt. It was torn in the fray, and you would not have your husband go barefoot."

Mme. Bianca recoiled as if a hornet had stung her.

"Hound," said she, "do you dare!"

But Liperata slipped from the throne, and ran and knelt by the great foot. She took her kerchief from her fair hair and bound the torn forepiece closely to the instep with that. Captain Brazenhead stooped and lifted her in his arms. High in air she swung, like a feather caught in a tree.

"Behold, behold the wife for a soldier!" cried her taker. He lowered her and kissed her twice. Mounting then the throne, he stirred the duke with his bound foot.

"Ho, there, Milan," he said, "take heart, if thou canst find it! Thy foes are all dead or fled; and as for thy throne, I renounce it with a flick of the finger, as I assumed it with the same. Fortune send thy state bolder tyrants than thee. As for you, mistress"—and he turned his face to Mme. Bianca—"if you will be a soldier's wife, disdain not to serve him who bleeds. For I care not who the

man may be, with him it will never be *'Leave to love thee is my hire.'* Did you never hear that tale of Alexander, the great emperor, and the Lady Roxana, his wife—how he said to her, 'Scratch my ear, wife, for I am aweary?' This he said on the marriage night; and she would not, but scorned him. What did he? Why, he left her alone for a week of nights; and there came an evening after supper when, unasked, she came to him where he sat in his golden chair, and, unasked, scratched his ear. That is a true tale, mistress, for I had it from a man who was by and saw it all. So fare you heartily well, mistress, and the soldier, your husband. As for me, I am suited here."

So said, he handed Liperata from the dais, and put the child upon his shoulder. Whistling to the Bilboan, he strode leisurely down the hall over the writhen bodies of the dead and dying, and was seen no more in Milan for that time.

Curiously enough, Sforza entered the city next day at the head of his victorious army, and shortly afterward married Visconti's daughter. History knows whose ear was scratched after that. His regrets at not meeting Captain Brazenhead must have been many and bitter. What were Captain Brazenhead's feelings we have no means of knowing; but I understand that he heard of the entry from a lodging he had in Cremona, where, under the name of Damœtas, a shepherd, he was then dwelling with the fair Liperata.

From these subsequent events, I assume, the curious legend must have arisen, that among the many Spanish words whispered in his ear by the Bilboan—while all Milan lay humble at his feet—was the Italian word *Sforza.*

(The end.)

FRIEDA.

BY ELISE WILLIAMSON.

SHORT STORY

"AH! The restfulness of the commonplace!" I thought as I stood in the doorway of the little German bakery. It was my daily custom to buy my muffins here. Each morning I nodded to the little round baker, Gustav Blumenheimer, received my muffins from ponderous Frau Blumenheimer, his wife, and with an occasional word for one or another of the small Blumenheimers, I departed as unruffled as when I entered.

I now advanced to the counter behind which Frau Blumenheimer stood, glacial in aspect. She always stood. She never presumed that I might desire muffins, although I had bought them from her for two years.

I made a formal request that she give me six English muffins, and as she slowly moved to fill the order, I glanced about, a vague sense of *difference* creeping upon me. I felt it before the thought actually occurred to me.

To be sure! The little baker! I had not seen him! But now my eyes fell upon him as he stepped from the half-light of the rear of the shop. He stood in the sunlight as fresh of face as a May morning—a red geranium in the lapel of his coat and about him a holiday air that cried shame to the workaday world. He smiled at me so joyously that my smile answered as instinctively as a flower the call of the spring.

"You must be off to a wedding," I said laughingly.

His face became foolishly, childishly shy. "Ya—I haf mine veddings soon yet," he responded.

"Ah! Your anniversary," I said smilingly to Frau Blumenheimer, but both faces answered me blankly.

"I meet mit der ship to-day und I see Frieda," he explained.

"Oh!" I said. "Who is Frieda—your daughter?"

"No, no! Frieda is mine bride. I haf veddings mit Frieda soon yet."

"With Frieda?" I gasped. "But I thought Frau Blumenheimer—"

I turned in perplexity to that rotund person, who regarded me quite placidly—indeed, with the placidity of a gentle cow knee-deep in the cool delight of a summer pond.

Involuntarily my eyes fell upon the half-grown girl and the three flaxen-haired youngsters at the rear of the shop. Could it be possible that a hint of romance—the vaguest touch of tragedy—lay hidden under such commonplace covers?

And Frau Blumenheimer, that mountain of complacency! Could it be possible? The situation was beyond me.

At this moment the little baker, who had disappeared into the mysterious region known as the rear apartment, again appeared with hat and gloves. A brown derby, a full size too small, sat stiffly on his shining bald head, with the air of some ill-mannered person who feels his position awkward but brazenly determines to hold his own.

The gloves which he drew on with exceeding care had once been a pearl gray, but long disuse had left them of a nondescript color. They also were much too small, refusing utterly to fasten at the wrist, but this fault was easily remedied by drawing each cuff down its entire length from out the coat-sleeve.

The back of the little baker's coat was as shiny as his shiny head, and the highly polished boots matched the gloss of his shirt-front. In fact, he seemed a study in high lights as he stood smiling gaily at us with that unconquerable child-look that some natures never lose. He seemed a part of the spring sunlight, one with the red geranium he wore so blithely.

"I will say goot mornings to you," he said, lifting the brown derby with comical grace.

I watched him until he rounded the corner and was lost to sight, then turned to find Frau Blumenheimer's eyes upon the spot where he had so lately stood.

Completely at a loss for a sensible remark, I reached silently for my muffins, when something in the woman's eyes arrested me. It was as if the ice of stolidity had broken. I caught a glimpse of moving waters beneath.

"She vill not come, dot Frieda," the woman said.

"No," I agreed mechanically.

"It is his head," she announced.

"His head," I repeated stupidly.

"Ya, he vas sick mit der fever, und his head vas tvisted sometimes. His head vas struck ten years pefore, und sometimes he t'inks Frieda will come mit der boat."

"Who is Frieda?" I asked, curiosity winning over delicacy.

"Frieda iss nobody," she said. Then, with a nervous laugh, she added: "Vat iss you say? In gone-pye times—twenty years before—Gus he dress yust like to-day, und he meet der boat on der lan', und wave und wave, und I cry like now. Such foolishnesses! It vas happy times ven Frieda comes."

"But who is Frieda?" I questioned—driven to the utmost verge of curiosity. The broken ice gathered again into a mass.

"Frieda iss nobody," she repeated stolidly.

Then her eyes sought mine for one brief moment with a certain fleeting wistfulness.

"Twenty years pefore," she said, "ven I vas young—I vas Frieda."

NATURE'S FIRES.

November, with its ruthless hand,
Quenches the fires on hill and plain;
While April, with its magic wand,
Rekindles them again!

Sennett Stephens.

THE MAN IN THE DARK.

BY ALBERT PAYSON TERHUNE,
Author of "The Shadow of the Sphinx," "For Henry of Navarre," etc.

A COMPLETE NOVEL.

CHAPTER I.

PRISONERS BOTH.

HOW was I to know my rough efforts at comfort would bring on such a storm of tears?

I stood looking awkwardly down at the pathetic little figure crouching at my feet, and watched the convulsive heave of the slight shoulders. Here was I, a rough giant of a fellow, with a lump in my throat for the first time in many a long year, and feeling horribly ill at ease. The cause of it all was one flower-faced girl, who at full height came scarce to my elbow.

I made shift to offer some sort of rude comfort, even as does a rough watch-dog who sees his master unhappy.

"There! There!" I muttered, patting her mass of shining hair with my big hand and striving vainly for the right word of consolation. "There, there! It's all right!"

To my amaze—yes, and to my discomfort, too—she lifted her head from between the white little hands that had hidden her face, and laughed — actually laughed—into my troubled countenance. The tears still sparkled in her blue eyes, and her face was like an April morning, after a spring shower.

"Is this the way all you Americans behave when beauty is in distress?" she laughed, with a sob in her voice. "Is it ever your custom to slap a maid on the head, as you might pat your hound; and growl at her? If such be your way with women, I wonder not that your roughness toward men scared King George's armies back over seas."

"I know so little of women," I defended myself. "Yet," I went on with a fragment of returning courage, "it seems my barbarous methods brought me victory. For your tears are gone."

"I seldom cry," she answered more soberly, "and I take shame that I should have broken down to-day like this. But 'tis hard to be gay always in a prison. When the doctor said my mother must soon die if she were not taken to the fresh air of the country—why, all my helplessness and our ill fortune seemed for a moment more than I could withstand. I am sorry. I—"

"I would give all I possess, which is nothing, if I might be of use to you," said I. "My own miserable lot makes me the more furious when I see you suffer. One-fourth of the modest store of money I brought here with me to England would lift all three of us clear from this wretched debtors' prison and set us on the road to happiness once more."

"Happiness?" she echoed. "I do not seek it. But I have my life-work to do. I am robbing not only myself, but those who rely on me, when I waste precious weeks here in the Marshalsea."

"Your life-work?" I queried. "It is not the first time you have spoken of it. Yet always you evade me when I ask what it may be. From your hands and bearing, you are no toiler. You are a gentlewoman of rank, as is your mother. Women of your quality do not have life-work that urgently calls them. Cannot you tell me—I have no wish to be impertinent—what this work may be?"

"I cannot," she returned. "The secret is not mine. Were it not for the paltry hundred-guinea debt that ties us

here, I should, even now, be fulfilling my great mission. I—"

"But just now you spoke of those who rely on you! Surely they could come to your aid? Or those who are associated with you in this mysterious mission."

"I cannot communicate openly with them," she made reply. "Yet, covertly, I have tried to do so throughout the five long weeks we have lain here. Yesterday Mrs. Comyns, the milliner, who shares our room, was set free by some lady of fashion, who needs her services for a trousseau. She is honest, and she likes me. So I entrusted a letter to her care for secret delivery. If that fails—"

"You are more fortunate than I," I mused, half to myself. "There is not a friend in all England who will pay the eighty pounds of my indebtedness. At home I am considered fairly well to do. Yet here—"

"But a letter to your solicitor, or to your kinsfolk in America?" she suggested. "Or an appeal to your ambassador here in London?"

I laughed ruefully.

"Such an expedient would toss me from frying-pan to fire," I answered.

"But I do not understand."

"Let me make the foolish tale as brief as maybe," said I. "I told you, when we first met here in the exercise-room—the day I was lucky enough to thrash the cockney bully who made mock of your mother's French accent—I told you how I came here. Of the lending of money to a stranded and starving family of fellow countrymen, and then of falling foul of this paltry tailor's debt before my next remittance from home could arrive. But I did not tell you the rest of the story; for it is not one that a true man boasts of to women. May I tell it now?"

"There is nothing shameful in it," she averred. "Of that I can be certain, Mr. Haden. No man who was a scoundrel could have proven so loyal and kind a friend as you have been to us during these dreary weeks. And—whatever concerns you must be of interest to me—to both my mother and myself," she went on hastily. "True friends are none too common here."

"I was at Almack's one night nearly six weeks ago," I began, thrilled in spite of myself by her words, "and the play ran high. I was there as an onlooker rather than as a player. Captain Bolles was at a table. He has some fame as a daredevil and as a heavy gambler. And—"

"I know him by repute," she intervened. "Go on."

"He was winning. I watched him somewhat closely, and all at once I saw him slip into his hand a card from some that lay loose on the table."

"Oh! An officer of the Household Troops? Impossible! Are you sure?"

"There could be no doubt; though the other players, from their positions at the table, could not see. As luck would have it, Bolles chanced to raise his eyes at the moment. At a glance he knew that I had seen his dirty trick. He laid down his cards, crossed to where I stood, and struck me across the face with his glove."

"No!"

"I understood. He feared I would expose him, and he wished to force a quarrel upon me, so that his sword could silence my tongue. His blow enraged me. Instead of challenging the man, I would have thrashed him, had not a dozen arms held me back. As they held me, he sneered at my country and at the memory of Washington himself. I lost control of my reason and shouted a challenge at him. We met at daylight, back of Vauxhall."

"Well?" eagerly.

"I ran him through," I answered quietly.

"But—he is rated as one of England's first swordsmen. It is said not five men in all Europe are his equals with the rapier."

"So I have heard," I made reply.

"You must use a sword with wizard's skill."

"I have spent some years in its mastery. But that does not concern my story. I had wounded—perhaps fatally—a captain in the Royal Household Troops. That was bad enough by itself for an American. We are none too well loved over here in England, just now. But Captain Bolles was also the nephew of Addington, the ex-prime minister of Great Britain. For an unknown American to slay, or even to wound, a man of

such influence meant nothing short of the gallows. There would be a score of his friends to swear I had forced the quarrel upon him, or used an unfair thrust in wounding him. Even had I told of his cheating at cards, who would have believed me?"

She nodded understandingly, her great blue eyes alight with excited sympathy.

"I hurried to my lodgings," said I, "to pack and be off. Three bailiffs were waiting for me. A tailor who had sent me his bill three times—and whom I had sought to stave off till my remittance should arrive—had secured a writ against me, and I was bundled off to the Marshalsea. I had but nine guineas left in my pockets. Five of these I gave the head bailiff to change the name on the papers from Guy Haden to Max Allen. To save his own skin, he will have had the same name placed on the register here. So I am committed under the name of Allen, and that alone keeps me from criminal arrest for my duel. I make no doubt London and the outgoing ships are diligently searched for me. I dare not send to America or to our ambassador for aid, lest my own name become known. So here I bid fair to lie for two or three years, until the matter be forgotten. Pleasant fate for a grown man, is it not?"

"Oh, if only I could aid you," she cried, "A year ago, Claire Delgarde or her mother could have raised twenty times the sum to set you free. But that was in France. Not in this smoky, gray London. To-day we are helpless."

"Don't speak of aiding me," I protested. "It is I who should be straining every nerve for your release and that of Mme. Delgarde."

"How alike our positions are," she murmured. "Both forced to hide here, both with friends in plenty, and both unable to make use of them. I know so little of English ways. When the mantua-maker begged leave to give us credit, I foolishly agreed. Then, when the war between France and England stopped the French mails, and our money did not arrive, she had us thrown into prison, before I could get word to those in London, who have our interests at heart—"

"'Our' interests," I repeated. "Yours and Mme. Delgarde's? You speak as if you referred to some society or cause."

"It does not matter," she interposed hastily.

Then, seeking to change what seemed a dangerous theme, she added:

"I did not know that swordsmanship was much practised in America. How did you gain your skill?"

"We have many good swordsmen among our soldiers," I answered, "though pistol duels are more common in my land than those with rapier or small-sword. 'Twas but lately that one of our greatest statesmen—Alexander Hamilton—fell in such an encounter. As to my swordsmanship, I learned it where I learned French—in France."

"You have lived in France?" she asked, all interest.

"For some years, I went to the military school at Brienne. My father, who was a veteran officer of our French-and-Indian wars, sent me there. He intended me for a soldier and thought Brienne the greatest of all military schools. So at ten I was packed off to—" I paused. I noted with chagrin that she was no longer heeding my words.

"At Brienne," she said at last, in a curious, rapt voice. "In what year did you go?"

"In 1780. We were then at the climax of our war with England. The war threatened to drag on for another decade. There was lack of cadet-school officers. My father sent me to Brienne so that I might one day be able to serve my country as—"

Again I paused with the same feeling of mortification. For, instead of listening to me, Mlle. Delgarde, was whispering under her breath as one who mentally adds up a sum in arithmetic.

"In 1780," she broke out, now, in excitement." "He was born in 1769. In November. And he went to Brienne at ten. That would be in 1779. If you were there for several years you must have—"

"Pardon," I interrupted, much puzzled, "you are mistaken. I was born in 1770. And in December, not November. And I did not go to Brienne in 1779 but the next year. I—"

"You don't understand," she said,

with a gentle impatience, "I was not referring to you, but to him. You must have seen him. Perhaps even spoken to him! Did you?"

"Him?" I echoed, utterly at sea, "Your brother? Or," with a twinge at my heart, "a fiancé perhaps?"

"To me—to every loyal French soul—there is but one him," she retorted.

"If it be a rebus or an enigma," I ventured, "I am not good at guessing. So—"

"I speak," she said—a sort of reverence creeping into her silvery voice—"of his imperial majesty, the emperor!"

"The emp—? Oh, I understand. Bonaparte."

"The Emperor Napoleon," she corrected, gravely.

"Quite so," I agreed. "I believe he has chosen to call himself Napoleon instead of Bonaparte, ever since the coronation, last December. What of him?"

"Why," she said, a note of displeasure at my flippant tone battling with her eagerness to hear more of her idol, "you must have been at school with him!"

She spoke as one might say: "You must have grasped the hand of Washington!"

Her manner amused me. And I was a trifle surprised as well, for this was my first real experience with the hero-worship which, just then, surrounded the wondrous Corsican.

In America the echo of his deeds reached us but faintly. In England I had heard him cursed under a thousand opprobrious titles, the mildest being "Boney," "The Upstart," "The Throne-Robber," etc.

"Yes," I replied. "I remember him well. We were at Brienne together for nearly five years."

"Oh!" she breathed in exalted wonder. "*Tell* me," she commanded, with a pretty, childlike imperiousness.

"Well," I began, whimsically, "Imagine a spindly, dwarfish body, capped by a huge head, and a lean, hungry face. A boy who was a dunce in some studies, mediocre in most, and excelling in nothing but geography and mathematics. A lad who spoke French so barbarously, that all his mates laughed aloud when he attempted to recite."

"Laughed?" she panted, in incredulous horror. "They dared?"

"You must not blame them. Schoolboys are a brutal lot. And, i' faith, 'twas amusing enough to hear little Bonaparte's harsh, cracked falsetto voice, and to see the fine rages he could summon up at every laugh. He would scream like any peacock, from sheer fury. Then he would sulk for days in one corner of the school-yard. Looking back, I can see it was cruel of the lads to—"

"Cruel!" she cried. "'Twas sacrilege!"

"Hardly that, I should say," I argued, good-naturedly. "He was a boy among boys and had to take his chances. He grew to hate us all. So he became something of a hermit. Only twice did he do anything to call public notice to him: "Once when he proffered a petition, begging to be sent home because he loathed the military school and his fellows there; and once when he presented a memorial, suggesting that all cadets be put on Spartan diet and discipline. He was not known as Napoleon in those days, I can tell you. Not even as Bonaparte. The name, as he himself pronounced it, in his Corsican *patois,* was Nabulione Buonapuerte."

She was losing interest. Now she queried:

"But you spoke to him? He has perhaps spoken to you? Tell me of that!"

"Only once we exchanged talk of any sort. The boys had set to baiting a dancing bear that a Piedmontese brought to the academy gates. The brute tore free from the chain, rushed into the school-yard and made for the one lad who had not scrambled out of reach. That was little Bonaparte. Bruin was towering over the chattering, panic-stricken child and about to seize him in a death-grip, when I was lucky enough to get hold of the gate sentry's musket and put a ball into the bear's thick skull."

"Oh, thank you! All France thanks you. And then—"

I felt vaguely resentful at such ardor, and went on sulkily.

"And then? Oh, then, as soon as he could make his chattering teeth obey him, Bonaparte mumbled at me in vile French: 'As bear-killing is a national

pastime in your barbaric America, I suppose I owe you no great thanks?" To which gracious speech I returned: 'Bear-slaying is common enough with us. But my shot to-day seems to have robbed Brienne of a first experience in cub killing. He grunted and walked away; his hands behind him, his head on his breast. That was ever his attitude when he was puzzled or meditating. There! Has the account of our one conversation filled you with pride in your emperor?"

"That is not fair!" she flashed. "Still," she caught herself up, "you saved his life, and for that I—"

"I have not boasted of the deed here in England. 'Faith! They would be like to mob me. But since its recital could bring so lovely a light to your face, I begin to take pride in the shot."

"I do not like compliments," said she gravely.

"Nor I," I agreed, with equal gravity, "I never make them. To tell the stars that they shine is surely not 'complimenting' them. Listen, *mademoiselle,*" I went on, swept by an odd, swift impulse I could not check, "I am to-day a penniless captive; and likely enough to remain one. But if some day the luck shifts, may I seek you out and—"

"Mlle. Claire Delgarde!" bawled a turnkey, from the farther door of the exercise-yard, where we two were pacing.

"Mlle. Claire Delgarde!" he repeated, mauling the pretty French name with his execrable accent. "A foreign gentleman to see you in the matron's room. He is in vast haste, he says."

A twinge of hot, reasonless jealousy shot through me; less at the announcement than from the sudden look that transformed the girl's face. In an instant she had left me.

And the dreary gray yard all at once seemed desolate.

CHAPTER II.

I ENTERTAIN A STRANGE GUEST.

FOR an hour I loitered about the exercise-yard, hoping she might return. But she did not. And, as the shadows were lengthening, I went into the grimy, ramshackle building, where so many men and women were herded away from God's sunlight and freedom for no greater sin than because they could not make both ends of the financial rope meet.

It has never been my fate to see the inside of a prison for criminals. But I doubt if the inmates of such a place could suffer worse for theft or arson than did we for the sin of debt.

Young girls, youths with all their years before them; graybeards, whose latter days should have been passed in peace at chimney-corner or cottage-door—all of us, in fact—wore an air of shame, of hopelessness that was hard to tell from a look of guilt. Oh, we were a sorry lot, we debtors!

I entered the prison and looked about me in vain for Mlle. Delgarde. I begged a few primroses from a woman to whom a great bunch of blossoms had that day been sent from a relative in the country; and I sought the corridor where my two friends lodged, to give the little bouquet to sick old Mme. Delgarde. For, as I was now wholly without money, I could no longer buy her the few cheap luxuries that were in reach of luckier prisoners.

The matron, to whom I sought to entrust the flowers, pushed them rudely back at me.

"Young woman and her mother left ten minutes ago," she said curtly, "and good riddance, say I, with their stuck-up foreign ways. They—"

"Left?" I echoed in blank amaze. "Do you mean they have been set free?"

"No other way of leaving that I know of," she retorted. "Foreign-looking man with coach and four came and paid their way out, and took 'em along with him. All these Frenchies ought to be kicked out of a decent country. What with Boney threatening to swoop down on us any night and murder us all in our beds, and the—"

I waited to hear no more; but turned away, sick at heart. She had meant so much to me, with her brave gaiety, her devotion to her sick old mother, her countless dainty, pretty ways.

And she was gone! Gone without bidding me a word of farewell—without so much as thanking me for the few poor services I had been able to render her mother.

Well, it was the way of the world! Yet, I had learned, day by day, to think the whole world revolved about the sunny head of this one girl. I knew so little of women! But she had seemed to feel at least a kindly interest in me. No matter what her haste, she could surely have found time to shake hands with me and say good-by.

The bird released from the cage does not turn back, in its joyous upward flight, to take leave of those that have loved it; so, thought I, why should I blame this mere child for forgetting, in the delight of freedom, to stop for a word to a chance prison acquaintance?

Nevertheless, it was with a sore heart that I threw myself down on my hard bed in the sweltering heat of the July night.

Nor, as I roused myself next morning to another day of gray monotony, had the ache lessened.

But the day, which promised to be endlessly long and lonely without Claire's bright companionship, was fated to hold more than one new experience of its own.

Scarce had I finished munching the stale bread and cheese, which formed my breakfast, when a message came for me to report at the warden's office. Wondering dully if my pseudonym had been discovered, and if I were to change prison for scaffold, I obeyed the summons.

The warden looked up from a sheaf of paper on his desk as I entered, and motioned me to go into his private parlor just beyond.

I did so. I had heard that visitors, who could pay well for the privileges, were permitted to hold interviews with prisoners in that room, instead of in the public exercise-yard or in one of the corridors.

I felt but slight relief that my identity had not been learned. Quick death is little worse, to an active man, than an indefinitely long term in prison.

Yet it was with a mild curiosity as to the personality of my visitor that I moved toward the threshold of the parlor. Then, all at once my step and my pulses both quickened. Of course it was Claire, come to bid me the belated farewell!

With beating heart I flung open the parlor door and halted, downcast and angry.

The sole occupant of the shabby little room was a tall, heavily built man.

He wore mud-splashed high boots, and spurs. His very well-cut clothes showed signs of travel. A caped cloak lay over the chair beside him. His back was to me as I opened the door, and he was examining one of the cheap sporting-prints that decked the grimy walls.

From this his look strayed to a pair of crossed foils that hung below a set of stained boxing-gloves, between the two windows. Then, apparently noting for the first time that I was there, he turned in leisurely fashion and looked me over.

There was something of insolent appraisal in his handsome, swarthy visage, as his shrewd eye ran over my face and figure. It was as though he were judging the points of a horse. I resented it, and my lips were parted to say so, when he spoke:

"Come in," said he, "and lock the door behind you. I have paid for this room in order to secure privacy. I do not wish to be disturbed."

He spoke as to a servant. Not domineeringly, but with the air of one who addresses an inferior and expects absolute obedience. This also nettled me. But his next words drove resentment from my mind, changing my displeasure in a thrice to utter surprise.

"Well, Mr. Haden," he said, as the key turned in the lock. "From first glance, I think you may do."

"My name is Allen," I muttered, uneasily. "What is your business with me?"

"Your name is Haden," he retorted, as one correcting a child's stupid blunder. "Guy Haden, of the United States. You choose to call yourself Allen, to avert a worse penalty than that of debt. You are a man of honor, I am told. A gentleman and well educated. Also you have courage. Is all that true?"

Despite my bewilderment, I laughed in his face. He had put the odd question as naturally as though he were asking my address.

"You seem to know much about me," said I, "too much, in fact. And I know too little about you. Since you have chosen to call upon me here and to pay for the use of this room, may I inquire your name and your errand?"

"You may call me Mr. Craig," he returned. "As to my errand, I will come to that in due time. I—"

"If your errand is no more genuine than your name," I interrupted, "I need not trouble to hear it. Your English is perfect. Almost too perfect, except for your pronunciation of the letter w, that proves so sure a pitfall for all Continentals. No one ever learned to pronounce w as you do, on this side of the English Channel. That disposes of the British name Craig, and of the Mr. as well. You may be *Monsieur,* or *Señor,* or *Don,* or *Herr,* or *Mynheer,* or any of a dozen other titles; but not Mr."

He smiled, seemingly well pleased.

"Discernment, too!" he murmured approvingly, half under his breath. Then, to me:

"Mr. Craig is as good a name as any. My right to it is as good as yours to the name of Allen. Do not be alarmed. I am not in the pay of the police, and I am not here to give you up to them for the affair with Captain Bolles. By the way, how did you manage to best him?"

I shrugged my shoulders. The subject did not interest me, and I was curious to know his errand.

"At times," he went on, as I did not answer, "a trained swordsman—and Bolles was one of the best—may fall before the blade of a novice. A matter of luck or of carelessness. Will you fence with me? I am called a judge of good sword-work."

As he spoke, he lifted the crossed foils from their rack. I had had no exercise in a month or more. To every born fencer, an invitation to a bout is welcome. Though I began to entertain strong doubts of my visitor's sanity, I nevertheless mechanically accepted the foil he held out to me.

Then, in protest, I said:

"You can hardly have come all the way across the Channel to find out whether I wounded Bolles by accident or by—"

I got no further. He had lunged fiercely at my breast, and I had difficulty in parrying the blow. He followed this by a lightning attack that left me no space for words.

He assailed me as furiously as though we were mortal foes with rapiers, instead of total strangers with a pair of blunted foils.

For the moment, his attack seemed about to break through my best guard, so fierce and brilliant was it. Mystified, amused, I defended myself as I could.

He was a skilled fencer, and master of both the French and the Italian methods. Moreover, he was in the pink of condition while I was a trifle soft from weeks of inaction. Yet I made shift, in time, to check his onrush by a *guard-feint-riposte-in quarte* that set the button of my foil square against his chest. He nodded, fell on the defensive, and, at the first exchange, I managed, by a trick of my own devising, to send his foil flying across the narrow room.

"It is enough!" he cried. "That thrust into Bolles's chest was no accident. I see it, now."

I crossed the room to pick up the fallen foil. As I turned, he was close behind me, and I found myself looking down the barrel of a short pistol he had whipped from under his waistcoat.

I was now perfectly certain I had to do with a madman, and a homicidal one at that. I halted in blank dismay.

Let the man who can look unflinching into the muzzle of a leveled pistol say he feels no fear, and I will proclaim him the world's foremost hero—or liar.

I confess I was utterly taken aback and that shivers chased each other down my spine. Yet I believed my life hung on my own coolness. So I forced a careless smile, as I drawled:

"Perhaps it might be as well to cock that toy before you try to fire it."

Now the pistol was not only cocked but primed. That I had seen at a glance. But my trick served.

Involuntarily the stranger shifted his gaze for a fraction of a second from me to the hammer of his weapon.

And in that instant I had struck the pistol from his hand and closed with him.

The Continental is often a crack shot and oftener a good swordsman. But I have yet to see one who understands rough-and-tumble fighting as do we Anglo-Saxons.

For half a minute we grappled fiercely, in utter silence. Then, by a twist and a back heel shift, I dropped him sprawl-

ing to the dusty door-matting, and threw myself upon him, pinioning both his wiry arms.

Our faces were not a foot apart. Then it was that I received another shock. For, lying, without a particle of effort at resistance, he was laughing quietly up at me.

"'Twill serve! 'Twill serve," he panted, between laughter and his late exertions. "You are such a man as we seek. A swordsman of the first order, a man who not only cannot be cowed by firearms, but meets trick for trick. Yes, and a giant for strength and skill, too; when it comes to grips. Let me up, lad! The test has proven you."

Half doubting, wholly puzzled, I reluctantly let him scramble to his feet. But before doing so, I took the precaution to reach out for the fallen pistol and slip it into my own pocket. A little nod of approbation showed he noted my covert act.

He was standing before me once more, rubbing his hands together in evident satisfaction.

"Well, Sir Stranger of the False Name!" I jeered, "if you have had enough exercise and excitement, perhaps I would better summon your keepers. It is amusing, for a strong man, to meet such lunatics as you. But you might do mischief to some weakling."

He laughed again, as if not ill-pleased with my words. Then, dusting his clothes with a cambric handkerchief, he seated himself in the room's easiest chair.

My eye is quick. And I noted a coronet embroidered in the corner of the handkerchief as it rested for a moment on his knee. The coronet bore seven points, and I said over to myself the old heraldic formula:

"Three points for a chevalier; five for a baron; seven for a count."

I was still at a loss to guess his nationality, for his precise English accent might mask any of a dozen national languages. But as French was the court speech of Europe, I addressed him now in that.

"Is it customary, M. le Comte," I queried, "for noblemen of your country to break in thus eccentrically on the pleasant daily life of imprisoned debtors? Or are you setting a fashion for unpleasant people?"

At the word count he had frowned slightly. Now, with some loss of his earlier calm assurance, he snapped:

"You recognize me, then?"

"I recognize that you are a count. Or else that you have stolen the handkerchief of one."

He glanced down at the square of cambric, frowned again, then smiled.

"You have good eyes, sir," he complimented me. "More and more do I realize that you are the man for us."

"Perhaps," I suggested. "You will deprive yourself for the time of the joy of speaking in riddles and come directly to the point. You may have paid for the use of this room as a scene for your pistol-and-sword play. But in my opinion you have not paid for my time or for my patience."

"I have come here prepared to pay well for both," he replied. "Before we begin business, may I ask for the return of my pistol? I cherish it because of a distinguished giver. Have no uneasiness. It is not loaded."

I drew forth the weapon, glanced at it more carefully, and saw he had spoken the truth. More than ever mystified, I handed the empty weapon across to him.

"Now, sit down," said he, "and I will state the affair as briefly as I may. I am not an Englishman, nor is my name Craig. As you guessed, I am in need of a man who can fight, either with sword or pistol; who has perfect courage, rare discretion, and who is, moreover, a gentleman of honor."

He paused. I did not help him on by a word.

"Such a man," he resumed, "for such a service as I require, is not as easy to come upon in this fog-bound island as may seem. In my own land I could pick up a thousand such. But the man I want must not be a foreigner. He must speak English as no foreigner can. He must also speak French. I dare not trust an Englishman in this instance; for reasons which I cannot now explain. So I sought out an American who would fill the requirements.

"Well?" I asked, interested in spite of myself. "When you find such a man—"

"I have found him," he retorted complacently. "All that remains is for me to tell him what I require and to come to terms."

"If I am that man," I countered, "it strikes me there is very much more that remains. I am not fond of mysteries, sir; and I have no longing to bind myself to service of any sort for a complete stranger. Shall we consider the interview at an end?"

"No," he said with calm authority, "we shall not. I am here, prepared to pay the bill of costs that holds you in prison, to pay your passage to America, and to give you such other funds as you may require for present needs. In return, I ask your service for two days—three at most."

"In what capacity?"

"I told you the sort of man I was seeking. I may need your wit, your loyalty, your strength, your skill, your courage. Any or all of these. I shall certainly need your discretion. For all these I am willing to pay well."

"Unluckily for you, sir," I returned, more and more irritated at his tone, "none of those qualities are on sale at present. I prefer to keep them for my own poor use."

"In debtors' prison?" he sneered.

"If need be."

"Unfortunately, even that will not long be possible," he answered, drawing a crumpled and marked newspaper-sheet from his pocket. "Have you chanced to see this morning's paper? No? Perhaps you would favor me by glancing at this passage."

I took the sheet, found the short item, and read:

> The unknown American who, by unfair stroke, so grievously wounded Captain B—, of the Household Troops, some five weeks ago, and who then vanished as if in air, is now rumored to be hiding under a pseudonym in one of the debtors' prisons. Sir J— J—, who acted as one of Captain B—'s seconds in the scandalous and melancholy affair, and who remembers the American's appearance to perfection, is to accompany the bailiffs to-day and to-morrow on a thorough round of these prisons, in the hope of identifying the scoundrel and of bringing him to speedy justice.

I eased my neck-cloth as I read. I seemed to feel a hempen rope tightening about my throat.

The stranger was eying me with cool, half-amused scrutiny.

CHAPTER III.

I START ON AN UNKNOWN MISSION.

I HANDED back the paper to Mr. Craig without comment. He seemed a trifle disappointed that my face did not change at the news I had read. Heaven knows, my heart was sick at thought of being tracked down like this and delivered helpless to the hangman.

"You Anglo-Saxons," he observed, "are a cold-blooded lot, but you have courage. May I ask if what you read in this sheet has changed your views about accepting my offer?"

"What is your offer?" I parried. "State it clearly."

"I desire your services for three days, in any capacity I may choose. You are to obey my orders implicitly, and those of the person or persons who may represent me."

"You have tested my strength and my fighting skill," I answered. "So I infer you want a man to do dirty work you fear to perform in person. Murder or otherwise. I am not a ruffian nor a mercenary. I do not hire myself blindly."

"Nor do I hire ruffians!" he exclaimed with an indignation that I felt was real. "If I have a man to slay, I can do it myself. This is no case of that sort. The most explicit thing I can say is, that I require you to act as a body-guard. If you are called upon to fight, or to use those Yankee wits of yours, it will be only in self-defense. Not to pick a quarrel. There! Does that satisfy your honor?"

"A body-guard!" I repeated. "For yourself?"

My question held, perhaps, a tinge of contempt. For he flushed and tugged angrily at one of the curly black side-whiskers that fringed his lean face. But he controlled himself at once and made answer:

"For myself, or for another. The cause is not dishonorable. Of that I pledge you my word. I can offer no other security."

"I have asked no better," I said. "To be frank with you, the affair does not appeal to me. If I have courage, strength, or skill, they are for my own use, and I dislike the idea of bartering them blindly. Nor am I fond of mysteries. All this business appears to be shrouded in the thickest of mystery. Were I free to choose, I would stay where I am. But it seems I am not free to make such choice. If I stay here, the bailiffs may have me by the heels in another hour. Then it will be a change of lodgings to Newgate, thence to Old Bailey, and finally to Tyburn; an itinerary that in no way appeals to me as desirable. To be brief, I accept."

"Good!" he ejaculated.

"But," I added in haste, "if you have pledged your word to a lie; if this affair smacks of dishonor or of such work as a gentleman—be he in never so desperate straits—cannot readily perform, then I swear I will cross the whole world, if need be, to find you out and kill you."

He drew himself up angrily, but I paid no heed.

"You have seen my fencing," I went on, "and—like many another American—I can use firearms even better than the sword. If you have duped me, I shall find you and make you pay. Be that understood!"

"So be it," he said at last. "Our bargain is sealed. Here is my hand on it."

I ignored the outstretched fingers.

"I am a servant," I said bitterly. "A servant forced into your employ through fear of death. That by itself is humiliation enough. While I am in such service, I do not care to become your equal by grasping your hand."

"As you wish," he shrugged. "You have spirit, at any rate. We have wasted enough time. The warden is making out your release-papers. You see, I was moderately sure of you. We would best be hurrying, unless we wish to meet the man who is to make the round of debtors' prisons to identify you."

In a daze, I went through such formalities as British bureaucracy prescribed. Ten minutes later the stranger and I were in a traveling-coach, rattling jerkily over the uneven paving-stones, between houses whose jutting eaves well-nigh met above our heads. Swarms of children clattered to safety from before our horses.

It was sweet to breathe free air again; even in that gray, tumble-down district of gray old London. As a turn in the narrow street brought us to even fields, the sun broke through a cloud. I began to get fresh grip on my overstrained faculties.

"By the way," I queried, turning to face my companion, who sat silent and absorbed, his long fingers still tugging at his whiskers. "By the way, is it fair to ask how you came to hear of me?"

"It is fair to ask anything," he returned carelessly. "But many things are not fair to answer."

His manner had resumed its earlier superior indifference.

"You have hired my services," I made bold to remind him, choking back my indignation, "but that does not give you the privilege of regarding me as a lackey. In my country, courtesy from one brave man to another is something that is taken for granted. If the same understanding does not prevail with you, pray order the coach to turn, and we will go back to the Marshalsea."

He stared at me in surprise; then grinned.

"You are a peppery fellow," he vouchsafed. "But I like you none the less for it. I had no interest to snub you, and I will strive to be more careful in future. There! Does that soothe your rumpled temper? As for your question—you will soon meet the person who recommended you. I can see no reason for withholding the name. Yet I was made to promise that I would. Be patient. We are even now on the first stage of our journey. Before the second stage is over, you will meet this mysterious sponsor. Indeed, it is to that sponsor you are to report for duty. Your orders will be more fully explained."

We were rolling out along rougher roads to westward, leaving the closer populated city behind us. So I turned with another question:

"The enterprise, then, is not to take place in London?"

"No," he said briefly.

"Where, then?"

"You will receive your full instructions in due time."

I was glad for various reasons that London was not to be the scene of action. For one thing, I feared recognition there; for another, I had grown to loathe the gray, gloomy city where I had suffered so.

"We are going toward Hampstead," I commented, glancing out of the coach-window.

"To the George Inn there," he replied.

A little later we drew up at a big, rambling tavern, set back amid its own grounds, on a byroad leading off from the King's Highway.

"You are expected here," said my companion. "Go into the bar, give your name to the landlord, and ask to be shown to your room. He will understand."

"You are not coming in?" I asked from the roadway, noting that he had not stirred from the coach.

"Not yet," he answered, with a nod toward the open door of the inn, where a waiter and a maid stood, waiting to receive us.

Obediently, I passed under the gaudy swinging sign-board, entered the inn, and turned into the bar. There, a short man in striped waistcoat and blue breeches bustled forward to accost me.

"You are the gentleman we were told to expect?" he asked.

"I suppose so," said I, again irritated at the petty mystery which involved tavern landlords as well as unknown foreigners. "My name is Haden."

"Quite so, sir," he returned. "And you desire to—"

"To be shown to my room." I finished, feeling rather silly as I carried out my orders in parrot-like fashion.

"To be sure, sir! To be sure!" he assented heartily. "At once, your worship. Boots!"

I followed an attendant up a creaky flight of stairs to a large front room. The sunshine poured in at the latticed window-panes. A faint scent of lavender permeated the place. From somewhere in the grove outside came a bird's song.

But I paid scant notice to all this. For on the floor beside the bed were piled three small battered trunks; and those trunks I recognized at a glance as the ones I had left with my London landlady, to be held until I could return to pay my bill. Here they were, piled neatly one on another, and atop of all a folded, double-sealed sheet of white paper.

How certain of me "Mr. Craig" must have been. A whimsical thought flashed into my mind.

"Boots," I called to the departing attendant, "have you a morning paper here?"

"Yes, sir. It came a half hour agone, sir."

"Fetch it up to me," I commanded.

While I waited I broke the seal on the folded paper that lay on my trunk and read:

To Guy Haden, Esquire:

Here are your belongings. Make such change of dress as is needful, and pack a portmanteau with whatever you may require in the next few days. A place has been booked for you on the Dover coach. It will pass the "George" at ten this morning. Take it to Shenstone, just this side of Dover. Then walk along the cliff-road until you come to the Heart and Hand Inn. Enter the inn-parlor and wait. The person who shall there greet you with the words, "America is free!" is to be obeyed by you in every detail. Craig.

I strode to the window that overlooked the road. It was as I had expected. The coach and its occupant were nowhere in sight.

I was left to play this crazy game of blind man's buff alone, and in the dark.

CHAPTER IV.

A NEW TRAIL.

AS I stood, staring blankly down the white empty road, the boy returned with the morning paper I had ordered.

I snatched at it, turned the damp pages and scanned every item on each, from "Court Intelligence" to "Cathay Silks on Sale." Then I glanced at the date—"25 July, 1805." My random guess had been correct. There was no account in all the paper such as Craig had shown me. The item—yes, and the sheet itself—had been a clever imitation of one of the paper's inner pages.

Oh, I had been finely tricked into this wild-goose chase! And—worst of all—I had given my word to go on with it. There was no search in progress, to find me in a debtor's prison. There was no effort to drag me to the gallows. I had been taken in like any bumpkin at a fair.

I had made a queer bargain; yet, with that knowledge, came an angry determination to play the game through. If my employers had tricked me, I would show them how an American—a man of honor—kept his word. I was free from prison, at least, and face to face with what might well prove a stirring adventure. I was still fairly young. I came of a family of fighters. I would get what excitement, what pleasant thrill I could, out of this leap into the dark.

In the meantime, it was good to divest myself of the plain suit I had worn so long, to enjoy the luxury of a bath, and to don better, fresher clothes; to feel my own belongings about me once more.

A packet lay in the top of my first trunk. It was inscribed, "For expenses, etc." It held fifty guineas in notes and gold. Also a line of introduction to a ship's captain, in Dover, with instructions to take me as passenger to Boston, when he should sail three days hence. It was signed with a cipher.

It was late afternoon as the stage-coach rolled over the downs toward Dover. The shadows lay long on the pale green turf, and from far beyond came the roll of surf. Like a blue-black ribbon, shimmered a distant line of Channel water, above the white chalk-cliffs.

Between us and the Channel the downs were dotted with tents, huts, and booths, like a vast fair-ground. Men—some in uniform, some in civilian garb—swarmed everywhere about the long, irregular encampment.

Here and there flags hung from poles, and once or twice the notes of a bugle cut the afternoon quiet. Battalions of troops were marching and counter-marching on the level spaces set aside as parade-grounds.

From the talk of my fellow coach-passengers, as well as from news-sheets that had found their way into the Marshalsea, I knew the cause of all this martial array. Let me set it forth in as few words as I may, for it has to do with my tale:

Napoleon Bonaparte, rising, like the Phœnix of old, out of the ruins of France's old régime, had swept the Continent with his armies—crushing haughty dynasties, changing the map of the world, making all Europe one huge armed camp.

He had forced his will upon the men who, after the Revolution, had sought to govern France. He had made himself first consul, then dictator, of the French republic. Now, less than a year agone, he had cast aside all pretense of republican beliefs and, "for the best good of the nation," had caused himself to be proclaimed Emperor of the French.

The awkward, shy, sulky lad who had been my schoolmate at Brienne—the Corsican lawyer's son—had conquered the souls of the fickle French people by his glamour and genius; had conquered Continental Europe, and now swayed such power as no man, since Cæsar, had known.

England alone—like a snarling bull-dog, stood between him and his dream of world-conquest. Now, having whipped the Continent into helpless submission, he was turning his mighty mind to the task of invading and crushing Great Britain.

Since early April he had mobilized a vast army on the French shores of the Channel, massed a fleet there, and beached hundreds of flotillas. Almost daily his troops were marched down shore and aboard of these flotillas, while his war-fleet gathered protectingly about them as escort.

Each time the watchful British thought he was about to start the threatened invasion. But each time he debarked his army and marched them back to their beach-camp. No one could tell on what day the flotilla and its escort would actually set forth across the Channel and make a dash for England's shore.

So, while a strong English fleet lay off Brest, waiting to oppose the crossing, every available man, soldier or civilian, was massed along Dover cliffs to repel the invasion. England was excited—almost panic-stricken, for the country was at that time but ill prepared for such defense. Yet yokel, shopkeeper, and regular soldier alike, stood stubbornly ready

to lay down life, rather than allow the first Frenchman to set foot on British soil.

There! My explanation is done, and I will back to my own adventures.

At Shenstone village I got down from the coach, swung my portmanteau across my back and set out southward along the dusty cliff road.

The first mile or two of my walk was by no means lonely; for I was passing the southern wing of the camp, and the road was everywhere dotted with soldiery, farm folk, and hangers-on of the army.

Soon I passed all these, and trudged along the lonely reaches that stretch away to southward, with scarce a cottage for miles to break the monotony. It was after an hour and a half of steady walking that I came to a clump of six or seven houses, from whose center rose the squat gray turret of a Norman church.

A few hundred yards farther on and I was at a low stone edifice, amid a group of outbuildings, and facing a weather-battered sign, representing a small fist clutching a very large plump heart. The board bore the half-defaced legend:

SIGNE OF YE HEART & HANDE, 1629.

Night was falling, and a scud of black clouds were gathering across the sky. The wind was freshening, too. It blew smartly across my face, and gave a louder note to the surf below the cliff.

I was not sorry to go into the snug inn parlor, with its cheery patch of sea-coal fire on the hearth and its sputtering candles. I threw down my portmanteau, with a sigh of relief, sank into a big chair, and stretched my feet out before the blaze.

The month was July, but the air had of a sudden grown chill and damp, as before a rain or a Channel fog.

I sat there for perhaps ten minutes, alone in the room. Despite my first keen curiosity, the warmth of the fire and the brisk six-mile walk I had taken, combined to make me drowsy. My head nodded on my breast, and I dozed.

I was roused by the voices of two women in the passageway. The flutter of skirts told me that one of the two had paused in the doorway, while the other, who was speaking, passed slowly on.

"Yes, miss," grumbled the speaker—evidently an inn servant—"'tis a pleasant tavern, no doubt, for its guests. But, for us who must toil and slave to make it so, there's little enough joy in life."

"If you find this work slavery," called the woman in the doorway, after the departing maid, "why not emigrate to the States? America is free."

I had been too drowsy to note, except mechanically, the brief talk. Even the voices themselves had come to me as from afar. The sleep mists were now all at once whipped from my brain. On the instant I had sprung to my feet.

There, facing me in the open doorway, her face alight in the flickering candle-flame, stood Claire Delgarde.

I stared at her in dumb amaze.

How came this flower-girl to be in so out-of-the-world place? And, how came she to use the password whereby I was to recognize my mysterious employer?

These queries rushed across my mind, only to be overwhelmed in the surge of surprised joy at meeting again, face to face, the girl whose departure had caused me so sore a heart. Oh, it was good to see her!

"So this is the quiet country place you choose for your mother's convalescence?" I cried, going forward to meet her with both hands outstretched. "How gloriously fortunate that chance should have led me to the same inn."

"Chance?" she echoed. "Was it chance that led you here?"

"Not wholly," I replied. "But let us talk about yourself—not of me nor of my affairs. I rejoiced so to learn that you were set free and—"

"Did you think I would go free without a word of farewell to you?" she interrupted. "If it were not that I should see you again almost at once! How abominable you must have thought me. After all your kindness to us, too!"

"I don't understand," I cried. "How could you have guessed we were to meet again so soon?"

"Did you really think we met to-night by chance?" she retorted. "And after I used the password, too? For so clever a man, you are most dense, Mr. Haden."

Then I knew. Any but a dolt would have known at once, would have guessed, hours earlier, how Craig came to know about me and of my duel with Bolles.

As I stared, the whole thing gradually grew quite clear. Had I possessed half the wit Craig attributed to me, I should have understood everything from the very first.

Yet it irked me that this girl, whom I had unconfessedly learned to love, should use me merely as a tool in some mysterious enterprise.

I think my face must have told her as much. For the light of welcome died in her big blue eyes. She quietly released her hands from my ardent grip.

"You think ill of me," she accused, "and I can scarce blame you. You think I have helped to dupe you. I have not. When the—the man who visited you in prison stopped here an hour ago with word to me of the way he had hired a London printer to devise that false news-sheet, I blamed him bitterly. Hear my side of this tale before you think hardly of me. My services are devoted to a great mission. That mission suddenly calls for the service of such a man as yourself. By employing you I can serve the cause, and can, at the same time, free from prison a gallant friend—free him, and eventually set him safely upon his homeward way. Am I blameworthy that I have acted as I did?"

My hands had caught hers again—eagerly, impulsively. Every atom of resentment—yes, and of common sense, too, I fear—was swept away before the look of her eyes and the sweet thrill in her voice. I was a fool, if you like; but I am glad I was.

"And now," I begged, as my gaze met the reassuring answer in hers, "tell me what it is all about. I am in the dark."

"And I must, by my promise, leave you so, for the moment," she said sadly. "Oh, don't think I have not every trust in you, nor that I would not confide to you my own most precious secrets, if need be! But this is not my secret. I am as much under orders as are you. And I am instructed to tell you nothing more than M. le Comte de—than the man you saw this morning—told you. I am only to point out to you your next step. I am forbidden to mention names, or to be more explicit, until the moment arrives. You see," she explained, "those who employ us cannot have the same knowledge of your trustworthiness that I have."

Her blue eyes sued mine for pardon so wistfully that I broke out on the impulse of their spell:

"I will trust you blindly to the end of the world, *mademoiselle,* and farther, if I may. You know that. For what you have done for me, I thank you from my heart. I will prove worthy the character you have given me. "But," I added, "when are my services to be required? And for how long?"

"A few hours at most. And—and I pray on my knees that I may have led you into no danger by thus choosing you for the mission. Whatever befall us, you must believe I meant all for the best—for your best."

"Hush!" I said, noting the break in her sweet voice. "Whatever happens, I thank you. Most of all, I thank you for bringing us together again. The man who called himself 'Craig' said I was to be body-guard for some one. I am also in the dark about that. Is it for you, by any happy chance?"

"No," she replied. "You say you are in the dark? Well, all I may tell you is that you are to be body-guard for another man in the dark."

"I do not understand. I—"

"Your work—when it comes—will be in the darkness of night. To help watch over and protect a man who will also be in darkness. That is all I can say. That moment may come to-night, or to-morrow night, or the next."

She gave orders to the maid, who was repassing the door, to bring us supper, and to lay the table in the bay window that overlooked the Channel.

Indeed, while we had been talking, she had ever shifted her gaze from me to that window.

"You are armed?" she asked.

"No," I said. "I have no weapons with me. I carry none. My strength is usually sufficient for any emergency.

She drew from a drawer a long parcel. Opening it, she disclosed a cut-and-thrust rapier, such as gentlemen sometimes still carried on lonely journeys, and a pair of silver-mounted pistols. I girded on the weapons at a sign from her, and we sat down to table as the maid brought in a tray of steaming dishes.

"Why do you look seaward so often?" I queried.

"For a signal," she replied briefly. "I have watched for it since sunset. I must watch until midnight. If it has not appeared before then, it will be useless to watch again until to-morrow night."

"And this signal—"

"Will mean that our task has begun. It will be a blue flare, such as Channel fishermen use. It will be lighted twice, and each time extinguished; then followed by a red flare. See, it has begun to rain. The night will be pitch-black."

A glimmer of distant lightning flashed across the wet panes.

"A vile night!" I commented.

"The best of nights for our purpose," she contradicted.

A shout of laughter from the bar outside made the dishes rattle.

"A company of revenue officers," she explained. "They have been here all day. There have been many successful smuggling cargoes landed lately south of Dover, and the 'gagers' are out in force. It is on such a night as this, I am told, that the smugglers most easily run their goods ashore."

"Surely you are not a smuggler?" I asked in disappointment. "That is not your mission, is it? For if it is—"

"I cannot tell you anything more," she checked me as one of the gagers in the tap-room started to sing.

I sat sulky, wondering. Smuggling was a great, if illicit, industry along the British coast in those days. Even persons of quality were now and again said to be financially interested in such enterprises.

If I were expected to guard some arch-smuggler from the gagers, I was already heartily sick of my bargain. The revenue officer's song reached its chorus, and a half-dozen of his fellows joined in the popular refrain:

> Perhaps some raw recruit
> May happen for to shoot
> Great General Bonaparty.

The inn-door was flung open, and spurred feet sounded in the passageway. Then came the sound of a high-pitched voice, such as British officers in those days were wont to affect.

"I tell you, fellows," it roared, "I and my comrades will share your tap-room with no beggarly crew of drunken gagers. Have ye no parlor where gentlemen and officers may sip their wine and dry their cloaks?"

A deprecating voice — apparently the landlord's—returned in a lower pitch:

"Your worship, we have but one parlor. That is engaged by a gentleman and lady. If your worships would deign to make use of our kitchen, I—"

"To the parlor, then!" cut in the first voice. "We'll e'en see if the lady cannot be made to look on his majesty's officers kindly enough to share the place for a time with them. Bring us some wine there, landlord, and a bite to eat."

Another hasty protest from the landlord—a scuffling sound as of some one pushed forcibly out of the way—and the parlor's doorway was blocked by a stout man muffled to the ears in a long military cloak. At his heels were two more officers in similar attire.

The ringleader, pausing on the threshold, blinked in dazzled admiration at Claire Delgarde's startled, lovely face.

Then, sweeping the floor with his plumed hat, he said:

"May Mars share the arbor of Venus for a brief hour? If Venus's civilian swain objects to our presence, 'twill entertain us vastly to bundle him, neck and crop, into the tap-room."

"This is a private parlor!" faltered Claire, glancing at me for protection.

But I was staring, open-mouthed, at the intruder. At first look, I had recognized him.

He was my old adversary, Captain Bolles, of the Household Troops.

CHAPTER V.

A NOCTURNAL ADVENTURE.

BOLLES had not wasted so much as a glance on me, his whole attention being taken up by Claire's beauty.

For this I was grateful. Yet I knew I could not long hope for immunity.

And when recognition should come—a file of soldiers, a night in the guard-house, and a trip to Newgate prison on the morrow's coach.

Can you blame me that I stood dumfounded?

"Get rid of him," whispered Claire, turning again to the window.

"It is Bolles," I answered her in the same tone.

She started as though I had struck her.

"Oh, he will ruin everything!" she groaned. "Do not quarrel with him. Remember you have pledged your word to us—remember that your life itself belongs to us just now."

Bolles had noticed with impatience our quick colloquy. Now he took a step into the room. His companions were in the doorway, grinning with anticipation at their comrade's prowess.

"I pray you," went on the captain, still addressing Claire, "do not waste precious speech with a civilian when there are three gallant officers who ask no better than to declare themselves your bond-slaves. We—"

My back was to the candelabra and little ornamental lantern on the table, which furnished light for the room. Stepping toward Bolles, I cut in on his speech by saying imperatively:

"This is a private room. Your presence here distresses this lady. Need I say more to an officer and a—gentleman?"

Perhaps the very slight emphasis I laid on the last word nettled him. At any rate, he turned on me with the air of contempt that officers of his time and country are wont to bestow upon mere civilians.

"The lady can speak for herself," he retorted, not recognizing me with my back to the light. "Unless you crave a caning, I suggest that you cease trying to act as her spokesman. What does a plain-coat like yourself mean by prating about an officer and a gentleman? If—"

"Perhaps," I said, losing control of myself, "a better term would have been 'officer and a card-sharp.'"

The man recoiled a step. Then his red face went livid. His sword was out of his scabbard, and he leaped at me.

His two companions threw themselves forward and seized him by the shoulders.

"Not here, Bolles!" one of them cried, aghast. "Not here, man! Have you forgot the general's orders against brawling? He is like to pass here on his rounds at any minute. Put up your sword, and we will hustle the fellow out with our bare hands."

He struggled in their friendly grip, cursing most horribly. I, sword in hand, awaited his release and the onset that was certain to follow.

By a mighty wrench, Bolles tore free, leaving his cloak in his friend's grasp. The gorgeous scarlet and gold of his uniform flashed like a meteor through the half light of the little room. His bared sword described an arc of light as it clashed against my waiting blade.

As the blades met—before the two officers could spring forward—a cry rang above the ring of steel.

"The signal!" called Claire Delgarde breathlessly from the window. "The signal! Come!"

There was a swish of skirts. The room was all at once pitch-black. There was a howl of wrath from Bolles, and an exclamation from one of his fellows.

I felt soft, strong little hands tugging at my sword-arm.

"Come!" whispered Claire in my ear. "The bay window! It is our one chance. I have the lantern here, wrapped in a napkin."

I suffered myself to be drawn back from the fray. A rush of wet air told me the window had been swung open; even before my light-accustomed eyes detected the patch of dark gray against the denser blackness.

The grayness was momentarily blurred, and I heard the fall of a light body on the narrow cliff path outside. I knew Claire had preceded me through the window. Still gripping my drawn sword, I vaulted after her. It was a drop of barely four feet to the path, that ran along the top of a hundred-foot fall to the Channel below.

She caught my hand, and we ran side by side in the darkness. From the instant my sword had crossed that of Bolles, to the time we found ourselves running there in the rain, was barely a space of five seconds.

Even as I vaulted out, I had heard the shouts of the officers calling to the landlord for a light.

"How did you arrange it?" I asked as we ran.

"I caught the lantern up in a napkin, and then threw the table-cloth over the candelabra," she panted. "Hurry!"

With no further words, we continued our race through the black night.

Thunder was growling along the western horizon. The rain beat stingingly into our faces. Lightning, far off, but coming nearer, now and then lighted the white, wet path ahead of us.

Once or twice I stumbled heavily against the thin guard-rail that protected the seaward side of the path from the sheer drop.

The recurrent lightning made the black night still blacker. The lights of the few fishing-boats at anchor off shore were scarcely visible.

"Who be ye?" challenged a voice in front of us. "Halt, in the name of the law!"

A bulky figure loomed up straight ahead of us through the murk. I could make out the dim contour of a gager's hat.

"We can't wait!" panted Claire.

As the gager, stubbornly blocking the path, opened his mouth to repeat his challenge, I brought down the hilt of my sword with full force on his head. He dropped in a heap in the way, and we scrambled over him.

"Oh, is he killed?" gasped Claire as we ran on.

"Not he," I returned, "but his stiff beaver hat will need some mending, and he will carry a sore head for a few days. You are tired! Must we keep up this pace much longer?"

"Only till we have distanced any pursuit," she whispered. "Then we can drop into a walk. We still have two miles to go."

"There has been no shouting, and I can see no lights behind us," I reported, after a glance over my shoulder.

I ceased running, and she followed my example. We fell into a brisk, steady walk.

The path was growing narrower and rougher as we left the village farther and farther behind. Claire took the cloth from the lantern, and its flickering rays served to point out our route.

Then it was that I noticed for the first time that the girl's light muslin dress was drenched, and that she wore no wrap.

"You will catch your death!" I warned. "Why didn't you get something to put over your shoulders, or one of those new-fangled umbrellas?"

"I had a tarpaulin cloak ready for wear to-night," she answered ruefully, "but no time to put it on. What are you doing? Hurry! We have no time to spare!"

For I had halted, sheathed my sword, and was relieving myself of my pale-blue broadcloth coat. Without reply, and disregarding her protests, I wrapped the big garment about her. Its skirts fell to her feet. We set off again—I in my shirt-sleeves, and she swathed from chin to ankles in my coat.

For twenty minutes longer we walked. At times the path diverged into two or three tracks. But each time she, in swerving, chose what was evidently the correct way. I marveled at her knowledge of the tangled by-roads.

At length, the path we chanced to be on dipped into a hollow, back of the cliff-tops. At the base of this shallow dip she paused and looked upward toward the ridge, just above us.

"What next?" I asked, as she shaded the lantern flare.

"Here we wait," she announced.

"For what?"

"For the Man in the Dark."

There was another interval of silence. The thunder was nearer now, and by the lightning gleams I could see the girl's eyes fixed on the ridge that separated us from the cliffs. A light of almost reverent expectancy was in their blue depths.

I drew out my watch and, at the next flash of lightning, glanced at it. Nine o'clock.

The rain poured in rivers from my hatless head and from my uncovered shoulders. Truly, this was a pleasant way to spend a July evening!

Then came a crash of thunder that shook the whole earth. At the same instant a flash of blue-white lightning made all the landscape brighter than day.

By that swift glare, I saw—standing motionless — alone — on the ridge just above our heads—the figure of a man.

"The Man in the Dark!"

A second flash, even as the girl cried out in relief and started running up the slope toward the newcomer. I followed her, dazed, incredulous.

For in the second blaze of light I had recognized the gray-coated, lonely man on the ridge.

It was Napoleon Bonaparte, Emperor of the French! Here, on English soil! The thing seemed impossible.

CHAPTER VI.

THE MAN OF DESTINY.

IT was unbelievable!

The Channel below us was alive with British vessels. The cliffs to north of us bristled with armed men.

No craft larger than a fishing-smack could have crossed the Channel unnoticed from France. No body of men twenty strong could have eluded the coast-guards, gagers, and sentries.

Yet here, on the little ridge just above our heads, stood Napoleon, Emperor of the French — the man who held Continental Europe by the throat, whose approach was feared in England as was never the approach of Judgment Day.

As I toiled up the steep slope, in wake of the hurrying girl, I told myself over and over that my eyes had played me false, that the lightning had tricked them.

The electric-storm had broken above us in all its force; the thunder boomed from sky to sea, and reechoed from the jagged cliffs like a roll of artillery.

The lightning's play was almost incessant. By its fitful glare, as I reached the summit, I caught a glimpse of Claire on her knees before the "Man in the Dark," her lips brushing his hand in reverent salute.

There could be no doubt. As he raised the girl to her feet and began to question her in rapid French, another flash illuminated the ridge, and I caught a better look at the newcomer's face. It had grown paler, fuller, far more mature, in the twenty years since last I had seen it at Brienne.

But it was the face of Napoleon Bonaparte.

Even had I never looked on it before, I should have known it from the countless pictures of the emperor that were everywhere exhibited.

My eyes sought to pierce the gloom to make out his hidden companions or guards.

I could clearly see, by the flashes, the steep, winding cliff-trail leading down to the water. Far below, I could descry faintly the outlines of a slender little sloop, whose crew of two men were at work furling her sails.

I was enough of a seaman to know that every line of the boat, and every inch of her absurdly huge sails, spoke of speed.

Then I began to understand.

The emperor had actually done a thing that even his most visionary foes had never expected of him.

He had crossed in person to England, by night—for what wild purpose I could not guess—under the very noses of the bulldog fighting ships and lesser craft that strewed the Channel.

The very daring of such a scheme was its sole hope of success. Who would look to see the Emperor of the French in a fishing-boat or on the Dover chalk-cliffs, miles away from his adoring army?

But why had he come? The British government would readily pay a million pounds for his capture. The coast farmers, if they laid hands on him, would tear him to pieces.

Why had he risked a career of world-empire on such a stake?

Claire turned toward me as I stood thus in a daze of incredulous bewilderment. She was saying something in French to the emperor. Its purpose I was too dumfounded to catch.

I got some sort of hold of myself as she uncovered the lantern, and the emperor faced me.

He glanced me over. Man of the world as I was, I had much ado to keep my self-possession as that cold, masterful glance gripped me. The man seemed to be reading me like a book. I saluted and stood at attention.

Then he spoke—in but slight modification of the rasping, high-pitched voice I so well remembered from schoolboy days, and in French that was still tinged by a strong Corsican accent.

"Monsieur Haden," he said abruptly, "you were one of many cadets who once made a lonely boy's life wretched. That is forgotten. You also were so fortunate once as to save me from death. For that I now take occasion, in France's name, to thank you. Do I understand you put yourself unreservedly at my service?"

"If that is the mission for which I am employed," I returned, glancing at Claire Delgarde for affirmation, "I am at your majesty's service. Perhaps that service may be more efficiently performed if I know what I am to do. I was told I should be needed as a sort of body-guard. But—to a man who can call on an army a million strong to do his will—that sounds a trifle unlikely."

"My armies," he answered dryly, "are in France. I am in England. I could not land any force here, as an escort, without exciting suspicion. I had to rely on some one who could pass as an Englishman, if need be. In an enterprise like mine, there is more safety in the wit and prowess of one man of the right caliber than in a guard of twenty who would excite suspicion."

"What does your majesty require of me?" I asked, still puzzled.

"To obey my orders," he returned.

Without another glance at me, he addressed Claire.

"You may lead me to the meeting-place, *mademoiselle,*" he said less harshly.

The girl caught up the lantern and began to move inland along a kind of sheep-track that twisted westward over the downs.

The emperor fell into step behind her and motioned me to follow. So we moved along through the storm without speaking.

Whither we might be going, or whom we might expect to find at the "meeting-place," I could not imagine. Claire, very evidently, knew her way, and had doubtless made herself familiar with the whole surrounding country.

Now I began to comprehend vaguely, at last, where my services might come in. A party of three was not likely to draw attention. If we were set upon by footpads or thievish camp-stragglers, my prowess as a fighter would suffice to defend us.

If, on the contrary, we should meet with police or soldiery, the fact that I—spokesman of the trip—was apparently an Englishman — would avert suspicion.

It did not promise to be a rôle of any special import that I was called upon to play. Indeed, I felt the growing disgust that an anticlimax always brings.

I noticed that the emperor wore a long, gray, civilian coat, a plain beaver hat pulled over his brow, and a muffling neckcloth that hid his lower features. There was nothing—beyond his nameless air of authority—to stamp him as anybody of more importance than an army contractor's clerk.

Midway in the path, he glanced over his shoulder at me.

"You realize, of course," he rasped, "that the destinies of Europe—of the world itself—are in your keeping this night?"

"I realize," I made blunt answer, for my nerves were still ruffled, "that I am paid for doing a certain bit of work. I mean to do it as best I can."

I know my sensible, boorish reply piqued him. The Continental is ever dramatic. Napoleon knew the value of such language. The Anglo-Saxon is not of that sort, nor does dramatic speech appeal to him.

For example: I am told that in Egypt, at the battle of the Pyramids, Napoleon shouted to his men:

"Forty centuries look down upon you!"

The words inspired his troops to mad courage. Yet, at Almack's I heard, one night, of a young English subaltern who, in paraphrase, signaled to Nelson from the summit of the Great Pyramid:

"Forty centuries salute you!"

The British admiral replied by signal:

"Shut up and go on with your work."

The emperor, at my surly reply, growled something under his breath. Its import I did not catch, but Claire did, for I heard her whisper appealingly:

"Bear with him, sire, I pray! He is not of us. But he is a gallant man and worthy to serve your majesty."

My ears burned, and I felt foolish at sound of her sweet praise. We kept on in silence, the rain soaking us to the skin.

It was perhaps fifteen minutes later that Claire came to a halt in front of a low building that seemed to rise up in our path.

"This is the place, sire," she breathed.

Then, checking him as he was about to step forward, she added:

"Would it not be well—in case of a trap—to let Mr. Haden go in first?"

Napoleon paused, then nodded to me.

The incessant lightning had shown me, by this time, that the building before us was one of the many single-roomed stone shepherd huts such as dot the Dover downs for many miles.

At the emperor's signal I started around the hut in search of a door. But he stayed me.

"Sword in hand!" he ordered, as if commanding a cavalry charge.

I had clean forgot, for the time, that I was supposed to be on guard. I drew the weapon as quietly as I could, crept around to the door and flung it open.

Within, all was dark. Yet, though the door had creaked rustily, I missed the damp musty smell so common to ill-ventilated rooms that have been long disused.

My senses were thrown upon the alert by this oddity. So, still holding my sword in my right hand, I dropped my left to the butt of my pistol at my belt.

Claire Delgarde, over my shoulder, lifted her muffled lantern, throwing a beam of yellow light into the hut's interior.

The place was empty. That I saw at once. But it was fitted up as was no other shepherd hut on all the downs.

A soft, shimmering carpet covered the earthen floor. Light lounging chairs, a table, a couch, were set in various places; and all were of excellent quality.

A sea-coal fire lay ready for lighting, on the grate, and a silver lamp hung from a smoke-blacked beam. Bottles of cordials, liquors, and the like, filled a chimney-piece cupboard, and a cold supper, under a napkin, was on a settle beside the chimney-piece.

Truly, a luxurious shepherd must have inhabited such an abode.

"There is no one here, sir," I reported, stepping back to allow the impatient emperor to precede me.

Claire followed him into the room, and with flint, steel, and tinder-box managed to light the hanging-lamp. As its rays dispelled the darkness, Napoleon looked critically about him.

Claire noticed his gaze and said:

"Sire, M. le Comte and I were at pains to make the place as meet for your majesty's reception as might be, at such short notice. I hope your majesty is pleased."

"It is more splendid than my tent at Boulogne, and as well furnished as my study at the Tuileries," he gave grudging answer. "Its appointment would have accoutered half a troop of cavalry. I sought a spot where an interview might be conducted in private; not a boudoir."

Claire flushed painfully at the reproof. My own cheeks grew hot, from a quite different cause.

"We are the first on the ground," went on the emperor, flinging himself into one of the wicker and velvet chairs. "Surely there has been no mistake as to the hour?"

He pulled a watch from his fob and glanced irritably at it.

"Twenty-five minutes to ten," he mused. "I should be at sea before midnight. The moon rises at twelve. What are you doing?" he asked me, as I struck flint to steel, caught a spark and blew upon my tinder.

"Lighting this fire," I answered.

"I did not order it," he returned.

"But," I made reply, "Mlle. Delgarde is drenched. She must be warm and dry, or she may take heavy cold."

He scowled uncertainly at me, but I went on unconcernedly with my work. When the fire began to crackle I rose to my feet.

"Does your majesty wish me to stand guard at the door?" I asked. "And will the person you expect need any password? If so, it may be as well that I know it beforehand."

He nodded.

"I am expecting an emissary from a certain person who shall be nameless, but who stands close to England's throne," said he. "I do not know who this emissary will be. But he will bear the password, *'Pro libertate.'* And"—he fumed—"he should have been here five minutes ago. Go and watch for him."

I obeyed. Standing in the lee of the thatched roof, just outside the door, I strained my eyes in the dark to see any one who might be approaching.

I fell to thinking, as I waited. That treachery, as well as incompetence, lurked in high places in the British court and admiralty was rumored too openly to be disregarded. Now—though it was no concern of mine—I had proof of it.

An intermediary was to bargain with

the emperor himself—and upon English soil—for the sale of Great Britain to the French.

It was monstrous. Yet little worse than charges that had already been made in the news-sheets. That the bargain was to be made in good faith was evident, or so keen a judge of men as Napoleon Bonaparte would scarce have risked his neck by coming in person to England.

Napoleon stepped out of the hut, closing the door behind him, that the light from within might not attract attention from passers-by, and stood beside me. With bared sword I saluted.

"'Tis stifling in there," he grumbled. "Between the fire and the shuttered windows the place is a furnace. I will share your watch."

I made no reply, but stood as before, waiting for the sound of approaching steps.

At last he spoke again, less to me it seemed than to himself:

"I have dreamed for years of setting foot on these shores," he murmured. "I knew my own eyes could tell me, even by night—better than a hundred maps—the best mode of approach and debarkation for an army. But"—he hesitated—"I wish I had not come."

"It was surely a risk," I suggested, for lack of anything better to say.

"It was needful," he contradicted. "In my camp, were the interview ever so private, there was danger of spies. In an affair like this, one breath of true suspicion would suffice to wreck all. Do you recall the Rumanian soothsayer we smuggled into the parade ground at Brienne?" he asked, with abrupt change of subject.

"Perfectly, sire," I laughed. "I received three black marks for my share in it."

"He was an impostor—a charlatan," he continued impatiently. "What man of sense can doubt it? And yet he told me many things that have since chanced to pass. And he foretold that I should die upon an island. Odd prophecy, was it not? The fellow's claptrap words kept saying themselves over to me as we sailed across the Channel to-night. Bah!"—he roused himself with a shake—"there be thousands of islands. England is but one. If there is a scintilla of truth in the prophecy the island will be Corsica, whither I may retire in my extreme old age. But much must come to pass before that day."

"Such has already come to pass," I made bold to answer. "Is it wise to risk all that for such a whim as has to-night brought you into the lion's jaws?"

"What is life," he retorted, "but risks—and ever more risks? In 1793 I stood a deserter from the French army and an exile from Corsica.

"If I had avoided risks I should be to-day eating out my heart as a colonel in the Sultan's body-guard. When the Assembly clamored for my execution two years later I took the risk of clearing the hall by force of arms. When at Lodi, my star trembled toward a fall, I took the risk of crossing the fire-swept bridge in front of my bravest grenadiers. To-night's negotiations may deliver England to me, bound and gagged. The observations I made, by lightning, from boat and cliffs, have already changed for the better my plans of invasion. *Risks!* I have risen from earth to heaven upon them."

"And one risk too many," I could not help saying, "may send your glittering structure of empire toppling to the dust."

In the darkness I had forgot, for the moment, that we were master and man. Night and our odd positions made us seem equals.

Nor did he rebuke me to silence. Instead, his high voice rising pettishly, he snarled:

"Spoken like a cautious Yankee, bred from a race of trade-folk. What can such as yourself know of sublime risks?"

"My nation of trade-folk risked all for freedom," I answered. "Against incredible odds we accomplished what all your majesty's genius has thus far failed to do—we whipped Great Britain."

"Bah!" he muttered. "A boast is not argument. But it is ever the same with you big men. Your brains all go into growth. It is the small man who rules the world. The giant is the pawn of such a man's plans."

"The greatest of all the great men I have known," I cried, nettled, "stood full two inches taller than I."

"So?" he sneered. "Some great giant at the fair, no doubt?"

"No," I retorted. "A giant among men—George Washington."

"A Virginia farmer," he scoffed, "who led a ragged rabble of Colonials."

"Led them to a crowning victory over the very nation which has beaten Napoleon Bonaparte at every turn," I made raging reply.

It was his tone of lofty contempt rather than his words that infuriated me.

"Whoever speaks of Washington as a—"

"You forget yourself," interrupted Napoleon, with a sudden lofty dignity that almost staggered me by its stern aloofness. "And—"

"I forget nothing," I said stubbornly. "In your own country a number of risks and a run of unparalleled luck have made you a demigod. I am an escaped jailbird. As such I am, for the hour, your servant. When you speak as you do of my nation's liberator, we stand man to man. No living man—be he emperor or peasant—can speak lightly, in my presence, of Washington. When—"

"Hush!" he commanded, dropping his voice and laying his hand quickly on my arm. "Some one is coming this way from the cliffs. I saw him by the flash of the lightning just now."

"Stand back in the angle of the hut, then," I whispered, at once alert and ready. "It may be some chance passer-by."

"No," he answered. "It is the man who is to meet me here, I think. He walks directly toward this hut, as one knowing his way."

Sword drawn, I took a step forward. The move carried me out of the thatched eaves' protection, into the deluge of driving rain.

The emperor took at least part of my suggestion. Instead of entering the hut he slipped farther back into the shadows of the angle, to one side of the door.

The lightning was less frequent now. In its absence all was pitch-black.

One flash had given me a glimpse of some one, cloaked to the eyes, tramping rapidly toward us. Then, for a space, I saw him no more. He carried a bull's-eye lantern, which from time to time he played for an instant on the path, then shut off again.

I unconsciously took another forward step. My pulses were beating fast. Here, toward me was coming the man—or his emissary—who was to sell England's hard won supremacy to her deadliest foe.

The thought fired me with excitement, and at the same time gave me a momentary pang of shame at my own share in such a transaction.

True, I had scant cause to love Great Britain. But treachery—and this was wholesale treachery—is not to the taste of a man who has tried to model his life on that of his father's friend, Washington.

In my eagerness, my second step evidently carried me some short distance off the tiny path, which approached the hut in a curve.

I could now hear the quick advancing footsteps. And, to my excited imagination, it seemed as though other, more muffled steps—many of them and in a confusion of sound—were following afar off.

Just when the man seemed close upon me—as I stepped back and opened my mouth to give the challenge—he moved past me, less than an arm's-reach away, and at another stride had reached the hut door.

I sprang at him; but in the gloom, miscalculated the distance. My outstretched hand barely grazed his cloak.

Before I could renew my grip, he had opened the door, slipped through, and closed it behind him.

It was the work of an instant for me to dash into the hut, after him, sword in hand.

I flung open the door upon a curious tableau.

CHAPTER VII.

A CHAIN OF SURPRISES.

THE fire and lamplight made the luxurious interior of the room warm and bright. Standing by the chimneypiece, her hand clasped spasmodically to her throat, her big eyes alight with dread, her whole body tense, was Claire Delgarde.

With his back to me, the water gurgling from his drenched cloak upon the rich carpet, the newcomer faced her in

what seemed equal amazement. As I entered, he spoke:

"The little Venus of the Heart and Hand Inn, or I'm a Yankee!" he exclaimed. "And in a bower fit for a queen! This is a delight past words. I came on dry political affairs, and I find instead the loveliest of goddesses awaiting me. From the bleak cold of a cursed wet night to the joy of the world! One kiss of welcome and—"

He stepped forward with a gay laugh, and made as though to catch her by the shoulder.

In a trice, I had forgotten my mission, the near proximity of the emperor—everything, save the white fear in Claire's face, and the little horrified cry with which she recoiled from his outstretched hand.

I was upon him, my sword clattering unheeded across the table, my fingers buried in his throat.

I shook him to and fro in fury, ere he was aware of my presence, then flung him heavily against the farther wall; caught up my sword and stood awaiting him.

At the first word I had recognized his voice. I knew him for my old foe, Captain Bolles, long before he turned on me a purple face, agape with fury; as he bounded back from his heavy impact with the wall.

I did not stop to wonder by what strange error he had blundered to the hut, where so different a meeting had been planned. All I knew was that he had, for a second time, insulted Claire, and that he had blanched her soft cheek with terror.

He wheeled, and caught sight of me standing there, sword in hand, glaring murderously at him. Saw and recognized me!

"The Yankee!" he gasped.

That was all. Fury did not blot from his mind the memory that I was the better swordsman of the two. For, instead of laying hand to his rapier, he whipped a pistol from his belt, leveled it at me and drew trigger.

Claire leaped at him as he fired, and threw herself upon his pistol-arm. So much I saw.

Then the report of the shot roared deafeningly through the little hut and filled the room with gray haze, and the acrid smell of powder-smoke. Through this cloud I saw Claire stagger and fall. Forgetful of aught else, I ran to her side and bent above her, wild with terror.

If the ball meant for me had struck her fair flesh, I was resolved to slay Bolles—with my bare hands if need be—before he should leave the spot. But my first care must be for her.

Seeing me kneel at her side, regardless of him, the man drew a second pistol. But before he could aim it, a stern, sharp voice spoke from the doorway.

"Halte! Que faites-vous là?" challenged the emperor. The quick, masterful authority in his tone caused the pistol-arm to drop to the captain's side.

I had forgotten Napoleon's existence. But as Claire opened her blue eyes, I glanced over my shoulder.

Bolles was staring keenly at the little man, whose figure scarce filled the narrow doorway, but whose presence seemed to fill the whole hut.

"Pro libertate!" spoke the captain slowly, as he drew himself up to the salute.

The emperor made a slight motion of assent, then striding into the room, inquired sharply in French:

"What does this mean?"

"It means, sire," I retorted, still at work over the reviving girl, "that this blackguard has shot Mlle. Delgarde. And—emissary or no emissary—his life shall pay for it."

"No, no!" murmured Claire. "I am not hurt. The—the fright—the noise of the pistol—your—your peril. It made me swoon, I suppose. I am not hurt. Forgive me, sire," she went on, making shift to rise with my aid, "Forgive me for disturbing you like this. I—"

Her voice trailed off weakly.

I helped her to a chair and made her swallow a mouthful of brandy from my flask. Meantime the emperor was eying us each in turn, from under lowered brows. His beautiful, masklike face was set in lines of cold rage.

"I am waiting," he rasped, "to learn the meaning of this."

"It is readily explained, sire," answered Bolles, easily. "I was a few minutes late to our appointment; owing

to a clash at the Heart and Hand Inn, and some trouble in throwing a party of gagers off my track. I entered this room, as your majesty's instructions had decreed. I had scarce set foot in the place when this fellow flung himself upon me. Recognizing him as a former convict and fearing for your majesty's safety—should he have come here spying—I shot at him."

"S—o!" snarled the emperor. Wheeling upon me, he went on. "What have you to say?"

"Two things," I returned, choking back my anger.

"First, that this man is a liar, a card-sharp and a traitor to his country. If such emissaries as he are chosen by your English confederate, your plans have scant prospect of success. Second, if you have business to transact with this cur, you would best be at it at once. For his crazy shot will attract any one within a half-mile."

"The shot!" echoed the emperor, his swift mind dismissing the abstract question of discipline for one of more instant import," you are right. I wonder such a hot-headed fool should have been sent on such an errand. But no more," he grumbled, "than I marvel at my own friends sending a Yankee blockhead like yourself to watch over me. Why did you attack him, fellow?"

"He insulted Mlle. Delgarde," I answered.

"I have seldom heard a poorer excuse," scolded his majesty. "Your life and hers, to-night, are devoted to the service of France; to the good of humanity. *I* am France. Your care should be of *me*. Not of a woman's petty fainting fit."

"When France and 'the good of humanity' allow a brute like this to insult a helpless woman," I retorted hotly, "then I thank Heaven I am only a 'Yankee blockhead.'"

"You are dismissed from my service!" roared the emperor. "I discharge you in disgrace. Whatever pledges my mistaken adherents may have made with you, I disavow. Go! You are free from my service, and I desire to be free from your presence. Go!"

His harsh voice had risen to a scream like that of an angry peacock. He pointed to the door, in an access of ungovernable temper.

I shrugged my shoulders and turned to leave the room. But Bolles was at the door before me.

"Sire!" he cried, his features working with an expression very like fear. "Is it wise—is it safe—to let this man escape? Think what one word of betrayal from him would mean to the cause—to France—to yourself!"

"And incidentally to your precious skin," added the emperor. "No, no! I read faces aright. He is a dolt. But he has the stupid sense of honor that impedes so many of his countrymen. He will not betray us. Let him go. Let us get at once to business. The time grows short."

"Still," pleaded Bolles, "by stupidity, if not by malice, he might betray us. A single shot will make sure."

He had drawn his second pistol and was covering me with it.

"That is true," mused the emperor thoughtfully. "A fool may make more trouble than ten wise men can undo. It might be as well—"

"Sire!" exclaimed Claire, starting from her chair in horror. "You will never permit this awful crime!"

"Silence!" ordered Napoleon quietly. "This is no affair for women to meddle in. Leave the room, if you are afraid, until it is over. This Englishman speaks wisely."

"You would sacrifice a brave man's life like this?" she panted. "You would destroy him like a disused pawn in chess?"

"I demand implicit obedience in those who serve me," said Napoleon in displeasure. "Either grant that obedience or—"

"I shall not grant it!" she blazed. "This thing shall not be. Sooner than allow him to be murdered in cold blood, I—"

"You are dismissed from my service," interrupted the emperor. "France has no use for a rebellious servant. From now on do not call yourself a Frenchwoman nor a subject of Napoleon—do you hear?"

To me it was cheap melodrama. But Claire buried her face in her hands and shrank back in mortal pain, as might a

devotee whom the Church should arbitrarily excommunicate.

The emperor looked coldly at her shuddering form for a moment, then turned to Bolles and nodded.

"Before you go on with this summary execution of a man whose chief fault is that he once saved your life," I observed, "let me mention that under my cloak I have Captain Bolles quite as effectively covered as he has me. And when he fires, I shall fire.

"I shall probably be killed, for the range is too short to admit of missing. But one thorough-paced scoundrel shall accompany me to the hereafter. I leave your majesty to judge what effect the sound, like that of a pistol gallery, will have.

"I fear 'France and the good of humanity' will wait long for sight of their emperor, if your majesty is called on to explain before a British magistrate the presence of two slain men in a shepherd hut that is furnished like a boudoir. Pardon my interruption."

With my left hand I drew aside my wet cloak. My right held at my hip a leveled pistol. 'Twas all like a show at Drury Lane.

The emperor scowled. Then a reluctant smile strangely beautified his pallid face.

"They were right," he vouchsafed in sardonic tones; "you are no fool, though not fit to serve me. Go—and take Mlle. Delgarde with you. All I ask from you both is a pledge of secrecy. Do you give it?"

I bowed assent. Claire, still weeping bitterly, as one bereft of all hope, sobbed a word of assent.

The emperor signaled to Bolles to move away from the threshold. With hate and dread distorting his red face, the captain stepped to one side as though his feet were weighted with lead.

I put an arm about Claire, half leading, half supporting her.

Together we moved toward the door.

Truly my diplomatic career had been brief and scarcely brilliant. Yet, the contact of the girl's shrinking body in the circle of my arm made me strangely happy. Then—

A surge of men rushed in, hurling us backward by their sheer numbers.

All at once the little room seemed full to the very walls with shouting, gesticulating humanity.

CHAPTER VIII.

FRYING-PAN AND FIRE.

FROM the hubbub, uproar, and confused din, I could grasp no details.

A man in some sort of uniform hurled himself at me. Instinctively I let drive my left fist at his jaw. I felt the impact, and saw a momentary gap in the throng.

A cry from Claire at my side, and I noted a fat man clutching at her hands. Him, too, I bowled over.

Then I was pinioned from behind by a couple of men who held back my arms so that my struggles and wild wriggling all went for nothing; and I had chance to look about me.

I said the room was crowded with intruders. It was. Yet barely a dozen men, all told, had burst in upon us.

Clearer vision showed me that these wore, not the uniform of regular troops, or even of police, but the dress of "gagers," or revenue officers.

My first thought, that news of Napoleon's presence had reached the authorities, was thus dispelled. For, with such prey as the emperor in view, the government would have sent no less a force than a regiment of cavalry to the capture.

The emperor, like myself, was held between two men. He did not struggle. His white face was like a death-mask. Bolles, too, was writhing helpless in the grip of several gagers, while another seized Claire by the arm as she ran toward the door.

Oh, we were finely caught, the four of us.

While we had stood there wrangling, scolding, threatening, rebelling, the gagers had made a sure job of it.

A fat fellow—evidently their captain—was wiping blood from his face, and howling gleefully to his men.

"Got 'em all, lads!" he chuckled in a mighty voice. "This'll mean promotion to the lot of us, I'm thinking. A fine stew there'll be at Dover to-morrow, and at the garrison, too, when 'tis known we

caught an officer of his majesty's Household Troops, red-handed, with a gang o' smugglers."

He glared upon Bolles with wide-eyed triumph.

"Thought yourself too fine, eh, to drink in the tap-room with a parcel of gagers," he jeered. "Made excuse to go to the parlor for a word with these pals o' yours, eh? Then, to throw us off, you made b'lieve to fight and stir up a rumpus; so as to get the two of 'em off scot free. Clever work! But not clever enough for Joe Kyle!"

Through all the confusion it did my heart good to watch Bolles's face. It was a study; a blend of terror, relief, amaze, utter bewilderment.

He knew not what to say; understanding that the noose was very near his neck. While the plight was less hopeless than if a squad of his own men had caught him, it was still precarious enough.

The doughty gager captain, recovering breath, and again wiping the blood from his face where my blow had crashed, was once more bellowing at the captive officer.

"We had the news that Blyth's gang of smugglers was getting ready for a raid, and we was told to be on the look-out for s'picious folk along the cliffs. This young woman here appears from nowheres, all of a sudden. She gets short visits on the sly from Frenchy lookin' folks. Then this afternoon, this fellow comes out of nowheres, and joins her at the Heart and Hand. So I gets my company together on the watch. Some of us in the tap-room and some along the cliff. One of them poor fellows on the cliff gets his head pretty near bashed in by one of the gang to-night. And then you comes on the scene, Mr. Officer. The minute you turned up your nose at the idee of sharin' the tap-room with us, I had my s'picions of you; as I made bold to tell you, after you'd tipped this couple off so they could escape. We followed you, you see, when you sneaked away, half an hour later. You gave your two fellow officers the slip; but you couldn't dodge Joey Kyle so easy."

"We lost track of ye once," put in another gager, "till you gave your gang a signal by firing a pistol. After that, we tracked ye easy enough. Got ye red-handed!"

"Red-handed!" laughed Bolles scornfully, trying to assume his domineering official manner. "Red-handed at what? What's your evidence? I was walking across the downs and saw a light here. I came in to get dry by the fire of these good people. Then you dashed in upon us and—"

"Tell it to the horse-marines!" chuckled Kyle. "Did this lad and the girl come in to get dry, too? Hey? Why couldn't the three of you keep dry enough at the Heart and Hand? Hey? Tell me that?"

"I am not on trial before you," asserted Bolles, "nor is there any law, forbidding people to seek peaceful shelter from rain in a shepherd's hut—"

"Shepherd's hut!" mocked Kyle. "Looks more like a blooming palace. W'at sort of shepherd furnishes his hut with fifty pound worth of fixings like these? Shall I tell you where all this finery comes from? It comes from France! From France!"

Bolles paled a little at this shot, but regained color as the gager bellowed on:

"Not a pennyworth of dooty was ever paid on a stick or a string of it, neither. Talk about your myster'ous smuggler caves! Why, this has 'em all beat. It's a clever idee to use one of these old shepherd huts as a place to hide 'run' goods. I'll grant that. But not clever enough to hoodwink Joey Kyle. You're here, waiting for the rest of the gang to bring the latest lot of goods ashore from your lugger. Then you four was going to get it inland. It's all easy enough to understand."

His eye fell upon the emperor. The latter had kept to one side of the room and was half hidden behind a clump of gagers. His beaver hat, during the scrimmage, had been pushed still farther down over his brows. His neckcloth swathed the lower face, almost to the lips.

Truly, with battered hat, coat awry, and between two beefy captors, he cut a figure that would scarce be termed imperial.

Yet I give him this much credit: His

face was as calm as destiny itself. His eye did not flinch.

Of us all, he was the most unconcerned. I began to see the man's greatness, as I never had done while he had sought to awe me by dramatic utterances and majestic reproof.

He knew not ten words of English—it was a tongue he could never master, so, naturally, he had no idea as to the conversation's meaning. Nor could he know that our captors' uniforms were those of simple gagers and not of some line regiment. He must have given himself up for lost. Yet no sign of fear showed on his placid, cold face. I felt a reluctant thrill of admiration.

Kyle was eying him askance.

"Who's the little chap in the gray coat?" he asked Bolles. "I've seen his face somewhere. I'll wager on that. Who are you, man? Speak up!"

All this was Greek to the emperor, save that he saw he was addressed. He raised one plump, white finger to his lips.

"A dummy, hey?" queried Kyle. "Ain't deef, too, are ye?"

The emperor repeated his former gesture.

"Who is he?" Kyle again demanded of Bolles.

"He is my servant," I broke in. "A deaf-mute. He is not a smuggler; and, as he is deaf and dumb, he can give no testimony of any sort. Let him go."

"Deef and dumb, hey? Then how do you make him understand you when you give him orders?"

"By signs," I said. "How did you suppose?"

"Make signs to him now," commanded Kyle, "and tell him to take off his hat in the presence of an officer of the law, or else we'll knock it off. Speak up!"

"He is Dutch by birth," said I, "and I always speak to him in Dutch. He reads my lips. That is, at close quarters. Otherwise, I use the sign-language with him."

Before the suspicious gager could prevent, I spoke rapidly in French:

"These men believe you a Dutch deaf-mute who reads my lips. They are revenue officers. Do not speak! If they—"

"That ain't Dutch!" yelled one of the gagers. "That's French! I can't make out the hang of all the words, but it's French; and he used the word *parlez,* and that means talk! There's something queer about this, cap'n. Let's take 'em to Dover before the rest of the gang gets here and tries to rescue 'em."

"Good!" assented Kyle. "Come along, lads. Eight of us'll take 'em to jail, and the rest can stay and rip up this place to see if there ain't a cellarful of brandy or laces hid underneath. Fall in! March!"

My captors closed in on either side of me. Kyle's eye swept the group approvingly. Then his jaw dropped.

"The girl!" he cried. "What's become of her? Giles"—addressing the gager who had volunteered the information that I was speaking French—"I gave her to you to hold. Where is she?"

Giles looked vacantly about him, then at a length of rope that dangled in his hand.

"I tied her wrists with this, cap'n," he faltered. "Then I got to watchin' the rest of 'em, an' listenin' to what you was sayin', an'—"

"And she untied herself and slipped out!" roared Kyle, glaring from his follower to the near-by open door. "You great clumsy oaf!"

The other gaped foolishly from his captain to the doorway, and then back to the cord in his hands, as if the futile bit of rope could offer some explanation.

Kyle ran to the door. A straight sheet of rain cut off all view of the black downs beyond. As well look for a fly in St. Paul's cathedral, as for a slip of a girl on that pitch dark expanse!

In my heart I rejoiced. For I could not doubt that the emperor must, sooner or later, be recognized. When he was, there would be short shrift for us, who had been his companions.

Treason in that day was a crime met with instant punishment. And I was glad, from my heart, that Claire Delgarde at least was free.

Yet, now that she was discharged from her "mission" by the emperor himself, and since I, too, had been absolved of my pledge—I had, for a brief instant, dreamed gloriously golden dreams that must now be forever shattered. The thought was more bitter to me than the mere death which awaited us.

"No use hunting for her on a night like this," decided Kyle. "To-morrow we'll scour the whole coast. No fear of our missing her then. Fall in, boys! Six of you take these scoundrels to the Heart and Hand. The landlord'll give you carts to carry 'em to Dover jail from there."

Our wrists were tied, with excruciating tightness. Each marching between two gagers, we made our way to the path. Napoleon was in front; then came Bolles; while I brought up the rear. The rest of the gagers, as we departed, were setting to work demolishing the hut's pretty interior in search of a smuggled goods cache.

Off we set on our dismal tramp; our feet splashing through puddles and stumbling over rocks. One of the emperor's two guards carried a lantern, whose weak rays served to misguide us almost as much as to light our way.

What a sorry, weird party of prisoners we were! Napoleon Bonaparte, emperor of the French, ruler of Europe's destinies, dragged along between two ignorant yokels; his mighty world-empire threatened with total eclipse by the mistaken zeal of one Joseph Kyle of Dover!

Bolles, officer, dandy, secret agent, man of fashion—bound for the scaffold. And I—American citizen, lover, young and intensely alive in every limb—marching to the same vile fate.

My only grain of comfort lay in Claire's momentary escape. In my misery I prayed that she might get clean away before the morrow's dawn should set the law-dogs on her track. Poor little fragile girl, to be alone, defenseless, on the downs, in so wild a night!

I heard Bolles whisper to his two guards:

"A hundred guineas apiece if you will cut me loose! You can say I broke away from you."

The two men looked at each other doubtfully over his shoulder. Then one of them whispered in reply:

"How do we know you'll pay us?"

"I've fifty pounds in the wallet that is in my inner coat-pocket," protested Bolles, a ray of hope tinging his lowered voice. "I'll give you that in advance, and send you the rest by post, if—"

One of the guards calmly thrust his hand into the prisoner's coat, extracted the wallet and dropped it into his own pocket. A loud laugh from the rest testified to full appreciation of their beloved comrade's wit.

Bolles swore long and brilliantly.

On we trudged. We reached the point under the ridge, where I had first seen the emperor and where the track from the downs runs into the wider path.

Up the little slope we toiled. The emperor and his two keepers reached the summit.

Then, all at once, several things happened, though I must describe each event as by itself.

The light borne by one of the emperor's guides was suddenly dashed, broken, from his hand. Something in the black darkness, whizzed past my head, and the guard to the right of me dropped.

The gager to my left was jerked away from beside me, as by magic; and I heard him roll, cursing and howling, to the base of the hillock.

All about me and in front of me came the sound of yells, and the stamp of feet. Faintly, against the sky-line, for an instant, I could see the dim figures of struggling men.

Some one seized me by the throat. I raised my bound hands before me in hopeless effort at self-defense.

The cords brushed my assailant's face. At touch of them, he suddenly released the throat grip, with a grunt that sounded almost apologetic.

Seizing my wrist he slashed with a knife at the rope, and my hands were free.

The mêlée was over as quickly as it had begun. I heard the sound of one man running, the groan of another, as he crawled to his feet.

Then, instead of the gagers, there were men of other dress and figure pressing close about us, and a voice called sharply to some one to bring a light.

CHAPTER IX.

A NAPOLEONIC VICTORY.

THERE we stood herded, we three; with a ring of unknowns about us. Some one was blowing upon tinder. Its dull glare showed a bronzed

face, crowned by a tasseled Jersey cap. Then a pine knot torch was ignited and a red gleam fell over the ridge.

We were surrounded by a group of hard-featured seamen, tanned and rugged, callous of hand, tarry of clothing. Sailors of the hardest, roughest sort; as any one could see at a glance.

One—a huge fellow with gold rings in his ears and a tricorne hat stuck far back over the red silk handkerchief that bound his head—strode forward, laughing, cutlas in hand, to greet us.

"A pretty brush with the dirty gagers!" he cried. "A good lesson to them not to be so quick another time in clapping hand on honest smugglers! There'll be broken heads to nurse at Dover to-morrow, unless I'm vastly—*Thunder and death!*" he broke off, his eye falling on the scarlet-gilt splendor of Bolles's uniform. "Who are you?"

"I can't answer for the rest," replied Bolles with really admirable presence of mind, as he stepped forward into the torch-glare so as to shut off the sight of us from the smuggler-captain. "I am an army officer in these parts on sick leave. I was on my way home to-night from a friend's house when I came upon a party of gagers dragging along two smugglers. I begged them to let the unlucky lads go free, and, in reply, they seized and bound me too, saying they would report me at headquarters as a friend of the freetraders. We had scarce gone a hundred yards farther when you fell upon us."

"Good lad! Good lad!" shouted the smuggler, smiting him a resounding blow on the shoulder with his open palm. "There's one decent man, it seems, in the red-coat service, after all! We—"

"And now," put in Bolles, "as I'm still weak from my illness, and as I was a bit knocked about in the scrimmage, I'll wish you all good luck and good night."

With a wave of the hand, he was off in the darkness; the little group of smugglers parting, with many expressions of rough good-will, to let him pass.

"Which of our fellows are you other two?" queried the chief, catching up the torch and flashing it on us. "And how did it happen you let a parcel of gagers lay you by the heels like this? Of—Zounds! There's been a pretty blunder hereabouts! These are no men of mine!"

"The misfortune is ours, captain," I said, stepping forward, "and we thank you from our hearts for your timely service. I and my friend here—"

"But what does it mean?" he interrupted fiercely. "I've been bamboozled! A lass comes running to the cliffs ten minutes agone and sees our little signal-fire in the cave below, where we're waiting for a cargo. She calls down to us that a dozen gagers have taken some of our men and are bringing them across the downs from the sheep huts. We clamber up just in time to rescue a—couple of strangers! What does it all—Stay! That redback officer said you were smugglers. Is he a liar, too?"

"One of the best and most proficient I ever met," I replied. "That is why he is now showing you a clean pair of heels, while we are left in the rain to answer your questions. If you are ready to accept our apology—and a five-pound note for drink money—we would like to be moving on."

"We'll all be moving on pretty quickly, if we're wise," growled the smuggler. "Those runaway gagers will bring their whole company about our ears, if we don't look sharp. That lying lobsterback is like enough to bring down the soldiers, too. But we'll clear this thing up, first. Who are you, and how did the gagers chance to be nabbing you? What meant the lass by screaming such a warning to us?"

"We were seeking refuge from the rain in a shepherd hut," said I, patiently as might be, yet itching to be safe out of this newest tangle, "when the gagers set upon us. That is all I can tell you. I am sure you will not detain us longer."

In the gloom outside the torch-flare I was peering for sight of Claire Delgarde. I knew none but she could have hit on so fine a scheme for our rescue. Her knowledge of the coast had, no doubt, taught her the whereabouts of the local smugglers' signal-fire; and she had summoned them to her aid by the one plea that could appeal to their lawless, loyal hearts.

"I'm still all in the dark over it," the smuggler captain was grumbling. "Except that I've risked the lives of my best

men for a brace of strangers and for a lying redcoat. Still, I can't hold you to blame, I suppose. Go your ways, the pair of you. If you're not eager, for any reason, to meet the law's men, I give you advice to make yourselves scarce with all speed, as shall we. The whole countryside will be buzzing five minutes after the first of those gagers reaches the nearest village. Our run is spoiled for the night. It would be as safe for a man to walk into a hornet's nest as for us to try to land a cargo after this, to-night."

"If this," said I, thrusting a ten-pound note into his hand, "will help compensate your delay and pay you for helping two innocent men—"

"You're a gentleman!" he announced. "Let them pass, lads; this gentleman and his—"

He paused, mouth wide open. I had moved forward, and had signaled the emperor to follow me.

Napoleon had stepped forward, in compliance to my gesture, from the knot among men whose greater stature had half hidden him.

His hat, during the struggle, had been knocked off, and the neckerchief had slipped down from his chin. His sparse hair was uncovered, one lock of it falling across his broad forehead.

Now he came into the full glow of the torchlight, and the smuggler-captain's eyes fell upon him. The chief halted midway in his speech, and looked as though he had seen a ghost.

For the briefest instant, smuggler, chief, and French emperor faced each other there in the sputtering lurid light on the cliff summit, the rain falling about them in torrents; the smugglers, looking in wonder at their leader's convulsed, blank visage. Then the momentary spell broke. From the chief's throat, hoarse with astonishment, burst the startled cry:

"Strike me paralytic, *but it's Boney!*"

The fat was in the fire with a vengeance!

The men caught up the last word in a dozen accents of surprise, unbelief, and eagerness. They formed a gaping, questioning ring about the silent, statue-like figure in their midst.

Not one of them but was a half-head or more taller than the emperor. Yet, in his speechless, passive dignity, he dominated the lot, as an eagle might a flock of fat ganders.

He, of course, understood nothing of what had been said, save the one word "Boney." He must often have heard of that contemptuous British nickname. Hearing it now, as well as from the expression on the face of the man who had spoken it, he saw that he was known.

Yet he relaxed not one atom of his cold, masterful dignity. I made an asinine effort to mend the hopelessly shattered incognito.

"So you notice the likeness, too, do you?" I put in lightly. "Many another has been startled by it. It is my servant who—"

The smuggler made an impatient gesture, as one who brushes aside a persistent fly. That was his sole tribute to my efforts at explanation.

"Boney!" he gasped again. "Boney—for ten thousand pounds!"

"Cap'n!" expostulated one of his men. "You're crazy—begging your pardon. What would Boney be doing here on the chalk cliffs? It would be sooicide for him to set foot on English ground; even if he could, which same he couldn't, on account of the network of war-ships. He's asleep in his camps over there acrost the Channel. This gentleman says—"

"Shut up!" snapped the chief. "Ain't I got eyes? Didn't I see him the day he was coronated? Didn't he pass within thirty feet of me as he walked in procession to the Tuileries? Didn't I see him a score of times before that in Paris? I—"

Napoleon's cold, fathomless eyes had never left those of the excited chief. Now, for the first time, the emperor spoke:

"*Vous me connaissez donc, mon brave?*" said he. "*Vous avez raison. Je suis Napoléon.*"

It was my turn to be astounded. For, in place of the haughty, rasping tones which I was accustomed to hear from those chiseled lips, the French words were spoken with a singular charm, a magnetism that struck a mysterious chord, even in my stolid Anglo-Saxon heart.

The beautiful mouth, too, curved into

one of the rarest and most memorable smiles I have ever seen.

Now, at last, I understood this man's almost supernatural power over men. To this smuggler, he was not posing as Napoleon the emperor. He was once more the peerless commander, for whose smile and word of encouragement brave soldiers were eager to throw away life.

Magnetic charm, power that held only good comradeship and no hint of arrogance, fairly radiated from him.

The smuggler's accusing, excited glare turned to the dazed look of the bird that is falling under the serpent's spell.

"You are right," repeated Napoleon slowly, in his strongly accented French. "I am Napoleon. What then?"

The smuggler shook himself, as if to gather his wandering wits.

"I am a cargo-runner, your majesty," he made answer in the French of the Channel ports, "and I am at odds with the law. But I'm an Englishman, and you're the man who is trying to destroy my country. The country I was born in, and love. With you out of the way, England can laugh at those silly armies of yours over there on t'other side of the water. You are my prisoner. I don't want to treat you with disrespect, but you'll go with us to the nearest garrison. Look sharp, lads! Fall in on each side of him. You'll come along, too," he added with sudden ferocity, wheeling about toward me. "You're an Englishman who was harboring him. That means you're a dirty traitor to king and country, and that you'll swing for it."

"One moment!" interposed the emperor, making no move to escape or resist, and eying the chief with that same air of fatherly friendliness.

"We are brothers, you and I," he said gently. "You fight the unjust revenue laws of your own land. I fight the tyranny and oppression of all lands. You are a smuggler. I am sneered at as the robber of thrones. Are our trades so different? When two brave men meet, there can be no talk of treachery. I have won, ever against great odds. You, too, have won a livelihood against the whole revenue power of England. Shall one brother, by force of numbers, crush down the other, *mon frère?*"

It is utterly impossible to put in writing his rather bald words, with any hope of conveying the wondrous charm that found its climax in that last phrase—"*mon frère!*"

So must he have appeared before the ragged, sulky, rebellious army of Italy; when, by a handful of words, he had turned a rabble of officer-slaying mutineers into an invincible, insanely devoted fighting-machine, ready to rush to certain death at his lightest word or look.

The smugglers—all of whom, of course, understood French after a fashion, as became men who daily dealt with the ports of France—murmured under their breaths. In that murmur the accent of hostile doubt was fast merging into applause.

The emperor, like every demagogue, was quick to take advantage of the first change of feeling on the part of his hearers. Turning suddenly, he faced them all with outstretched arms, his mask-like face alight.

"My brothers!" he cried, his voice athrob and vibrant. "I am in your hands. Do with me as you will. I am your captive. A brave man, captive of brave men. I speak to you, not as emperor of the French, but as Napoleon Bonaparte, who has lived and fought and suffered side by side with men like you, and who owes all to such men's comradeship and devotion. Your captain says you must lead me to shameful death. So be it! If here ends my career, at least I shall have the escort of such gallant fellows as I love best. *En avant!*"

Yes, it was acting. I knew it. So—at bottom of their hearts—did they. My poor skill as a scribe can give no notion of that acting's marvelous power.

Even I—who knew both sides of the man's character, and realized for what great stake he was playing—was swept away by it.

From the smugglers arose a confused shout. They surged upon him as by common consent. Yet no hand was raised to touch him.

It was the impulsive movement that will sometimes sway a crowd, large or small—a movement bred of excitement, and without definite motive.

"Who will be first to claim the honor of seizing and dragging to death Napoleon Bonaparte?" he demanded.

His eyes swept the circle with lightning glance, then focused upon the chief's flushed face.

"What is your verdict, my brother?" he asked, holding out his hand toward the smuggler, while again that rare smile flashed across his face.

The chief made no instant reply. He seemed to be battling confusedly for words. His stalwart body began to tremble.

Under the fixed regard of the emperor's eyes his own faltered.

Moving like a man in a dream, he stumbled forward, dropped awkwardly upon one knee, and raised Napoleon's hand to his bearded lips.

The cliffs rang to the hoarse, impetuous cheer that burst from his followers.

The victory was won! Perhaps, in its results, as mighty a triumph as any the Corsican had ever achieved.

The emperor's pallid cheek flushed ever so faintly, and a gleam shot through those unfathomable eyes of his. He was once more the commander.

"And now, *mes braves,*" he ordered, "I wish your escort to the boat that awaits me. My time is up, and I must be gone. If it will console your stanch British hearts to know it, you have my word that my mission on your shores tonight has come to naught. Lead with the torch. 'Tis but a few yards to the path that runs down from the cliff-top to where the boat awaits me. Forward!"

The smugglers, under the dominance of his voice and presence, fell into rude semimilitary formation behind us. Their captain, mumbling to himself some sort of apology for the unwonted burst of feeling that had lured him into kneeling at the feet of his nation's foe, caught the torch from the bearer and led the way.

For the first time in the history of the world, a French monarch was conducted by a guard of honor composed of loyal Englishmen.

Thus we traversed the slippery path at the summit of the abyss, marching two by two. The emperor was none too great to relish his victory.

He walked with gay step. Under his breath he hummed a fragment of the martial air that was ever his favorite—the two-thousand-year-old Oriental tune that we Anglo-Saxons sing to the irreverent words, "We Won't Go Home Till Morning."

It was "Malbrouck," the famous French version of the air that the emperor loved.

Between his teeth he sang now:

"Malbrouck s'en va-t-en guerre,
Mironton, mironton, mirontaine!"

He sang horribly. By no chance was he ever on the key. It set my teeth on edge.

"Ne sait quand reviendra—"

Then a white figure slipped into the path beside us. It was Claire Delgarde. The emperor greeted her arrival with scarce a look; but I found her warm little hand, as we plodded forward, and pressed it covertly in my own huge clasp.

At the side of his two "dishonorably discharged" servants, and surrounded by a corps of devoted men who till half an hour ago had been his logical enemies, this man of a thousand contradictions passed on in triumph.

We had come to within thirty yards of the steep, downward path, when a cry from the rearmost smuggler halted us.

CHAPTER X.

BOLLES TO THE FRONT!

"WHAT'S amiss?" demanded the chief, wheeling, and raising the torch.

"Douse the light, cap'n!" cried the man whose shout had warned us. "They're after us!"

Down shot the sputtering torch over the cliffside.

"After us?" echoed the captain excitedly. "Who? Where?"

"I heard them running," answered the man, "and I heard horses' hoofbeats, too. That means the military—besides the gagers. Run for it!"

Along the now ink-black way we hastened, stumbling, shuffling, scurrying in the dark. Even the densest of us could now hear the sound of pursuit. The lap and roll of the waves below had drowned it before, even as the ridge's shoulder had shut off the view of it.

"Curse my folly!" growled the chief as we hurried on. "'Tis my own fault, standing there, talking like a dolt, while the gagers and the lobsterback were raising the countryside. Nothing less than a Napoleon would have made me forget myself so. But emperors are not met every day. Here is the rock, at the turn. The path down to the shore lies just around it. I—"

Full in our faces, as we rounded the rock, flashed a half-dozen torches and the gleam of many weapons. Almost the same instant, around the curve of the ridge, far behind us, a scarlet-clad horseman galloped into view, waving a lantern. At his back thundered a score of other riders. We were finally caught, 'twixt gagers and cavalry!

I own I was totally at a loss. But the emperor, at a glance, caught the whole situation.

"Forward!" he cried in French. "Charge, *mes braves!* Clear the way to the path! It is but a yard or so, and those in front of you are your mortal foes, the thick-headed revenue men—not soldiers."

At the inspiration of his shouted command, the smugglers, still held by the grip of his personality, rushed forward pell-mell, sweeping us along with them. There, on the narrow cliff-top, we smashed into the unprepared gagers.

They were quite as surprised to come upon us so suddenly as we had been to meet them. But unlike ourselves, they had no master mind to direct and inspire their movements. There was a clashing of swords and cudgels; the firing of a stray musket-shot or two, as in compact mass we hurled ourselves upon them.

Then, by sheer onrush and surprise, we bore them back, around the curve of the great boulder. In the tumult of that few seconds the quaint, irrelevant thought flashed into my overwrought brain:

"I had never expected to be in the forefront of a Napoleonic charge, led by the emperor himself!"

Back the revenue men surged, shouting, bawling, firing at random, unable for the moment to cope with our impromptu assault.

In that brief space we won our way to the coveted path that led downward, along the perilously steep incline, to the tiny patch of beach below, where waited the emperor's fast-sailing sloop.

The gleam from the gagers' torches made the entrance to the path as light as day. Luckily we three—Claire, the emperor, and I—chanced to be on the seaward side.

By jostling sharply past two struggling men, I managed to shove Napoleon out of the press to the mouth of the path. One of my arms already held Claire close to my side, guarding her from the struggle and impact of the rush.

The three of us formed ourselves into a sort of backwater of the main fight, with none between us and that narrow way leading to safety.

"Careful, sire!" warned Claire, as Napoleon plunged heedlessly downward, catching precarious footing on the sea-wet surface of the steep, winding path, and clutching for balance at the tough little cliff-side shrubs.

If the emperor heard, he made no reply. He had already clambered down below the radius of torchlight, leaving us to follow as we might.

It was like the man, to make use of such brave hearts as these impetuous, ignorant smugglers, and then, having intoxicated them to suicide with his magnetism, to desert them without a thought.

They had served their turn. He had no further need of them. Let them battle hopelessly there on the cliffs above, between the closing lines of gagers and cavalry, until every man were dead or a prisoner. It mattered little enough to him.

Down the path we followed, Claire and I. She was wonderfully agile, and she knew her way. I did not. Yet I followed the glimmer of her white dress through the darkness of that endless descent, pressing my weight backward against the cliff-side and feeling cautiously for every new foothold.

Sometimes, in nightmares, I make that horrible descent once more, and wake gasping and shuddering. It was a nerve-tearing, wild progress—worse than an actual man-to-man fight. Yet, I am glad to recall that it was for Claire's safety rather than my own that I trembled.

Downward we went, at snail's pace. Now and then a stone, dislodged by the

feet of one of us, would bound from point to point along the incline and at last leap far out by its own momentum, and splash into the waters. It was not a pleasant sound.

Above, we could hear the cries and shots and stamping of the fight.

Only once did the emperor break silence. He called in that high, screaming voice of his to his sailors, far below, bidding them make haste in hoisting sail, and to stand ready to carry him out through the waves to their boat.

We were, perhaps, two-thirds down the cliff, when the sound of fighting above us abruptly ceased. Evidently, caught between the troops and the reenforced gagers, the handful of smugglers had at length been subdued. Then rose a babel of voices. Out of them I could distinguish a nasal domineering tone that I had learned to know and hate.

"The two have got away from you, fools!" shouted Bolles. "No—they're not among the prisoners or the dead. Hunt the downs, some of you. They can't be gone far."

Then I understood. I shook my fist upward, and, under my breath, I cursed the double traitor. Finding the game was up, and that the police and revenue men were swarming in from all sides in such numbers as to make the emperor's capture seem a certainty, Bolles had evidently resolved to reap such glory and profit as the enterprise could bring.

Rousing a troop of horse, he had led the soldiers to the pursuit.

Should he gain the personal honor of capturing Napoleon Bonaparte, his fame and fortune were made. It would be the most spectacular bit of patriotism known since the capture of Guy Fawkes and the disclosure of the Gunpowder Plot.

From the fact that he did not mention Napoleon by name in his bellowed orders, I gathered that he had not yet revealed to his followers the identity of the man they sought, thus reserving for himself the greater glory when the truth should become known.

Oh, he was clever, past all question, this Captain Bolles, of the Royal Household Troops.

While certain of the men scattered over the downs, in obedience to his order, I heard one soldier call out:

"Here is a path, captain, leading down the side of the cliff. It may be they've taken that way."

A torch was thrust over the ledge, far above us. But at that distance we were quite invisible from the summit. A second torch was thrust over, and I could see a group of men in scarlet uniforms peering down into the darkness.

"Hurry!" I whispered to Claire. "Pass the word on to the emperor. They'll be at our heels in another minute or two."

She transmitted my whisper, and we all three moved forward at a livelier rate, dislodging small stones, and grasping precarious shrubs as we went.

"I can't see anything down there, captain," reported one of the torch-bearers. "But I'm sure I heard some kind of a noise. No, sir, begging your pardon, sir, it wasn't the waves. More like pebbles rattling under some one's feet."

"Down, then!" roared Bolles. "Half a dozen of you."

The men hung back. It is no light test of courage to descend such a path by night; more especially if some hidden foe may lurk along its sharp turnings.

The British soldier of the time was an excellently well-trained machine. But, for any feat outside his carefully drilled routine, he was a broken reed.

The hesitancy of his men infuriated Bolles. I do not think, as a matter of truth, that he had the remotest idea we were down there at all. But the fact that his men faltered in their obedience drove him to blind rage.

"You slovenly cowards!" he cried. "Stay where you are, and I'll explore the road myself. Stand back from the path-head, Bruce! Give me that torch!"

I could see him clearly as he stepped downward from the cliff's brow, onto the first turn of the slipping descent.

Holding the torch high in his left hand, his naked sword tucked under his right armpit, he grasped the branches and jutting stones with his free hand to steady himself. The line of heads that watched him from over the ledge grew more and more indistinct.

There, a patch of moving flame marking his course, the man slowly descended the winding track.

"Hurry!" I whispered again to Claire. "If he gets within torchlight radius of us the whole troop will see us, and be swarming down in pursuit."

Napoleon had reached the end of the decline. I heard his booted heels crunch on the gravel of the little beach that ran out between two walls of cliff.

"The boat!" he called, in an imperious undertone.

"Your majesty," groaned a man from the darkness of the water, "the anchor-chain has caught between two rocks. We cannot get the sloop free."

CHAPTER XI.

'TWIXT DEVIL AND DEEP SEA.

THE emperor snarled like an angry cat. To have come thus far, from danger to danger; and at last, by the narrowest of margins, to apparent safety, only to find his escape balked by the clumsiness of his own picked French sailors! It was enough to sicken even the heart of a Napoleon.

"Etienne is filing the chain, sire," went on the sailor, splashing shoreward through the shallow water. "But it will not be parted for several minutes yet, I fear."

Claire was stepping down onto the beach, and I was at her heels.

In another two minutes at most Bolles's rapidly approaching torch must reveal us all to the waiting men above.

"Sire," I observed, all at once losing my excitement and growing cool, as a plan for our one desperate chance came to my mind, "when my friend and countryman, Robert Fulton, begged your majesty to adopt his plan for steam navigation, you scoffed at him, and said France needed no Yankee wit to aid her. I am going to try to show you how wrong you were."

"What are you doing?" queried Claire, in quick alarm, as, turning, I sprang up the path I had just quitted.

"Trying our last chance, dear heart," I replied. "If it fails, remember I did it for love of your sweet self. Not for France, nor for the stone-hearted man who rules there."

It is far easier by night for an agile man to climb such a path quickly than to descend it. Upward I went, as fast as I dared, my footfalls silent on the chalky surface.

Around bend after bend I hastened, clambering now on all fours, now half upright.

I had one spot in mind. Could I reach it before Bolles, I might yet hope to put my hazardous scheme into execution.

If not, his torch gleam would soon make me visible from the summit, and would bring a dozen musket-shots rattling about my ears.

My objective point was a thick, tall clump of furze, that protected the outward angle of one of the path's turns from the view of those above.

Had any one been able to see the cliff from the Channel, I doubt not we two would have afforded a rare spectacle—Bolles, bearing torch and sword, and cautiously creeping down the path; I, scrambling rapidly upward, like some weird four-footed monster, to meet him.

I was a powerful man in those days. I was putting all my great strength into a mighty effort to reach that furze-clump ahead of the scarlet-and-gold officer who was descending toward me.

Once my groping hand dislodged a lump of clay from the side of the path. It fell, rattling and bumping, down the cliff.

Bolles halted, listening, seeking to determine whether the noise he heard was an unusually heavy wave breaking on the strand below, or came from some human agency.

I crouched motionless as he waited. In that brief respite I recovered my breath and strength.

Soon he evidently decided that all was well, for he continued his descent.

Creeping stealthily and close to the ground, so that I might not betray my presence by an unwary move or sound—for his torch's radiance was almost upon me—I pressed onward. As a turn in the path momentarily hid him from me, I darted forward at full speed.

In another moment I had gained the shelter of the furze. He was scarce five paces distant, above me.

I feared that the sound of my labored breathing might reach him through the wash of the surf.

Around the corner of the furze-clump he came. The protecting bushes cut him off for the time from the view of those above.

It was my moment.

As he rounded the clump I was upon him. My left hand was clapped across his mouth, while my right arm I threw about his body.

I had no weapon. The gagers had disarmed us all at the hut, and Bolles must have borrowed the sword he carried from some brother officer; nor had I scope to use one, if I had possessed it.

At the impact of my assault the torch fell from my foe's uplifted hand, and the sword tumbled from under his arm. We were thus, in a way, equal.

I set my foot on the flaming brand as it rolled in the path before us. Then I threw all my power into maintaining the advantage my unexpected attack had given me.

I was hampered by the fact that I must use one of my hands to silence Bolles's efforts at shouting. He was a powerful man, and after that first shock of astonishment he battled for his very life.

To and fro we swayed on the slippery brink of the path; he, striking, wriggling, stamping, fighting like any wildcat to throw me off from his chest; I, hanging on like grim death.

"All right, captain?" bawled a query from the summit. "Is anything the matter?"

I got my left heel behind Bolles's left ankle, and by a sudden combined twist and thrust hurled him from his balance. Half on, half off the path, he fell, the breath knocked out of him. I was kneeling on his chest, and still gripping his throat.

My other hand chanced to touch his sword as it lay near us. I caught it up, still kneeling on his chest, and pressed the point to his heaving throat.

"All right, captain?" once more called the voice from above, this time with a note of anxiety in it. "Shall we come down?"

"Answer him!" I hissed into his face. "Answer—'all right'!"

He only struggled the harder.

I pressed the sword-point closer until it bit into his flesh.

"Answer—'all right'!" I ordered again.

"All right!" he mumbled.

"Louder!" I commanded.

"All right!" he called, at the top of his lungs, as I pricked him deeper with the sword-point.

"Repeat, now, after me," I said; "and if you miss a single word I shall drive this point through your throat. Say—'There's no one down here! I can see to the bottom.'"

He bellowed the words in doleful, steel-prompted accents:

"Say: 'Go back to the Heart and Hand, and wait for me there!'"

It took two more pricks of the point to elicit this response. But it was made at last, in a very creditable fashion.

I crouched still and waited. The voices and lights from above died away.

At first I could hear the troopers grumbling at their captain's strange alteration of plan, but soon there was silence.

Finally, when everything was still, I rose to my feet, lifting the breathless, cowed officer by the scruff of his neck.

"Pick up the torch and light it!" said I.

He obeyed. Propelling him before me down the path, by a hand still gripped in his collar, while I held the drawn sword in my other hand, we began our descent.

"Where are you taking me?" he panted, finding his breath, as after many slippings and slidings we at length neared the bottom.

"To the Man in the Dark!" I scoffed. "The man you came to the downs to meet to-night. To his imperial majesty, Napoleon, who awaits us just below, with a boatload of French sailors. I make no doubt he will be glad to arrange for your transportation to France in the same sloop with him. They say he has his own way of dealing with traitors. You will soon be able to find out whether the report is correct."

He collapsed at my words, as if fainting from stark terror. So sudden was his helpless lurch forward that my grip on his collar was torn loose. Then—

Before I could recover a hold, my apparently collapsing victim had wheeled, ducked under my sword-point, and caught me about the waist.

With a mighty lurch, he sought to heave me over the little ledge that rose some twenty feet or more above the beach.

He had the terrible "underhold," that terror to all wrestlers, and his grip well-nigh broke my back.

Barely I averted the effects of the twist that was meant to hurl me over the edge, and I strove vainly to tear free the grasp of his arms about my waist.

He had me practically helpless. All I could do was to rain down short-arm blows upon his half-hidden head. At each turn he was bringing me nearer and nearer the narrow edge.

A final heave, and I felt my heels slip over the crumbling chalkstone. The man sprang back, clear of me, as I reeled out to the fall.

By a mad effort—more chance than prowess—my outflung hand caught his wrist as I toppled outward, and I clung to it.

We both seemed falling, whirling, spinning together through rushing leagues of space.

Then something struck my head, and the black night burst into a flaming, crackling radiance of agonizing lights.

CHAPTER XII.

I LOSE MUCH AND FIND MORE.

SOME gigantic and unusually active blacksmith had crawled inside my skull and was pounding on its interior with a hammer.

Vaguely I wished he would desist, and I strove for a while to tell him so. But I had forgotten how to speak. Besides, I was very tired.

Finally the blacksmith went away.

But he had hammered so long and so fiercely that my skull had caught fire from inside and was burning merrily.

This also seemed to me quite out of accord with nature, and dully I wondered at the phenomenon. Then some one—who resolutely kept out of my range of vision, but whom I instinctively knew to be an angel of some sort — put cool, heavenly hands upon my flaming brain and quenched the raging fire.

And from the void beyond me I heard Napoleon's rasping voice giving orders.

I wanted to tell him he was Emperor of France, not of England, and that his commands were quite futile on British soil.

But again I found I had lost the power to speak. Nor, after a minute or so, did I wish to. For some one else was speaking, the music of her voice chiming like a silver bell, after the harsh tones of the emperor.

It was Claire. Though I could catch none of her words, I felt happy—blissfully content to lie there between heaven and earth and listen to her. Then I fell asleep.

Scarcely had I sank into the stupor that follows delirium when the sound of a cannon-shot rang through my head, well-nigh bursting my ear-drums, clearing away the pain-mists as if by magic.

I started to a sitting posture, and looked wildly about me.

The movement caused a horrible nauseating, racking pain in my skull, and I clapped both hands to my temples.

Then it was that I found my brow was swathed in a wet, cool cloth, soaked in brandy and water. The motion of rising to a sitting posture had also made me aware that I was sore and bruised in every joint.

I stared from side to side, seeking to collect my scattered wits and to guess where I might be. The thunder-storm had passed, and the late rising moon was well above the horizon. Under the rays of moonlight the whole scene before me was plainly visible in a ghostly sort of glow.

I was sitting on a tiny beach, at the cliff's foot. I was alone. So much I grasped, when a second cannon-shot shook fearful echoes from the cliff-side and the heights above.

The shot came from a ship in the Channel, a bare quarter-mile distant.

I could see the red belch of flame and hear the *splash, splash, splash* of the round shot as it ricocheted along the waves.

The ship was a revenue frigate, bumping along the choppy sea under full sail, her decks alive with busy sailors and with shouting, gesticulating gagers.

I gazed in astonishment on such a profanation of the night's holy quiet and charm. Then I saw the reason. Not

half a mile in front of the frigate—scudding along with lee gunwales awash, flying like a swallow before the hawk—ran a light-sailing sloop.

I have had much to do with the sea in my time, and to a good sailor the lines of a boat once seen are as familiar as the face of an acquaintance. So it needed no second glance to tell me that the sloop was the same light, racing-built craft I had seen so recently lying at anchor not fifty feet offshore—the boat wherein Napoleon, with a crew of two picked men, had trusted his fortunes for the dash from France to the Dover cliffs.

As I looked, the revenue frigate sent up a white "flare" from her masthead. By its light I could see three figures silhouetted against the sloop's mainsail. One of the trio sat in the stern-sheets, his face muffled in the collar of his gray coat. The other two were working like mad at sails and tackle.

It was a pretty race. The gunboats and other vessels of the fleet's outlying fringe took no part in it. From their decks the crew watched the pursuit as they might a stage-play.

Evidently they regarded it—as did the men on the pursuing frigate itself—as a mere smuggler chase. Had they dreamed the identity of the little gray-coated man in the sloop's stern, each mother's son on every vessel in the whole Channel would have joined in.

I judged that the frigate, warned by the commotion on the cliff, had been on sharp lookout for any arriving or departing vessel alongshore, and had given chase to this stranger, who could give no account of herself.

Strain my eyes as I would in the deceptive moonlight, I could get no glimpse of Claire Delgarde aboard the sloop.

But at a time like that she would, of course, be in the tiny cabin, not on deck, where she would only interfere with the men's activity.

Toward this cabin, therefore, instead of on the man of destiny, my gaze was riveted. If only a white shadow at the cabin door or the wave of draperies from within the blank little port-holes could have given me a glimpse of her visible presence!

She was sailing away, out of my life, for all time, and I could not see her!

My heart was heavy within me, and a mist for an instant clouded my eyes. Weakness and heartache came close to robbing me of my courage.

Despite threatening cannon-shots that flew wild, and equally futile commands to "lay to," the sloop continued on its dash for the French coast's line of warships.

Every line of her was built for speed; every stitch of her snow-white canvas was spread to the freshening breeze.

The chase assumed the ridiculous aspect of hopelessness. The frigate's blunt bow roughly bumped the waves that the razor prow of the sloop clove with absurd ease.

Shot after shot from the revenue boat's bow guns went far afield. As well try to hit a swallow on the wing with a horse-pistol as to send a round shot into the elusive, flashing sides of that racing sloop.

Crews of other ships roared sarcastic advice to the gagers, and the latter cursed with a volubility and volume that was plainly audible to me, where I sat, huddled behind a low rock on the shore.

Thus did the race pass beyond my vision. And I knew that once more fortune had saved her favorite son, the Corsican risk-gambler.

My work was over. I was cast adrift, left like a water-logged scow on the beach. I had served my turn—like the smugglers.

Like them, I was cast aside when useless. What mattered it to Bonaparte if the first shore patrol of gagers should catch me and lug me off to prison or the scaffold?

I made as though to rise. It was high time for me to be looking to my own scanty hope of safety. As I rose, I sought to steady my still shaky limbs by catching at the low, bunched rock beside which I had been crouching.

But, with an involuntary cry, I snatched back my hand.

The "rock" was a human body.

A body doubled into an inert, twisted heap, lying very still, there on the white beach of sand.

The contact of my hand caused the head to fall limply back. And the moon shone on the dead, distorted face of Captain Bolles.

It needed no surgeon to see that the man's neck was broken. I looked up at the sheer wall of rock down which he and I had pitched.

And bruised, aching, stiff as I was, I made a shift to kneel and thank God for my own escape from death.

I got shakily to my feet and moved across the little cove toward the path. Then I halted, rigid, glancing about me for some weapon.

For, down the steep, winding track some one was cautiously moving. The next moment the figure came into full view just above me.

"*Claire!*" I gasped doubtingly. "Claire Delgarde!"

She was at my side on the instant, her warm, strong little hands in mine, her dear face upraised to my own in anxious, infinitely pitying inquiry.

No word was spoken. Each of us, in that look and touch, read the other's soul.

Simply, half shyly, like two little children, we kissed each other. Then—

"I thought you had gone—that I had lost you forever!" I murmured.

"You thought that?" she exclaimed in sweet reproof. "You believed I could desert you, as you lay there, senseless, helpless? Of what stuff do you think we Frenchwomen are made?"

"Yet the idol of all the French—the emperor—he whom I saved—has left me to my fate, without a word or a thought," I answered, glancing out toward the now-vanished sloop.

"He has gone back to his destiny," she said sadly. "It is not for us to judge him. We were but pawns in his game, and he has cast us both off. I begged him to take you in the sloop. But he told me that every pound of extra weight might count against them in case of pursuit. And he refused."

"And deserted you as well? You, who were so long in his secret service—who rescued him to-night, and—"

"No, no!" she contradicted, still feebly seeking to defend her fallen idol. "He offered me passage to France with him."

"And you stayed here in peril?"

"I stayed here—with you," she made answer.

I caught her to my breast. Forgetful of my racking head and aching body, I covered her upturned face with kisses.

"Now, let come what will!" I cried, as I released her. "This moment is worth all the perils that may follow."

"It is worth all the world," she made reply softly. And again—

"But there need be no peril. I knew where the smugglers kept one of their lighter skiffs. As soon as I had bound your head and made sure you were coming to your senses, I went along the lower path to see if it was still there. It is waiting for us. Off Dover lies the ship that will weigh anchor in two days for Boston. Her captain is under heavy obligations to me and to the cause. Shall we row out there, beloved, before daylight catches us?"

"Daylight!" I echoed happily. "The sun has risen forever! There can be no more night for me, dear heart. Come! America waits for us, America and—love!"

(The end.)

LOVE.

THE love that will soonest decay,
The love that is surest to die,
The love that will soon fly away,
Is the love
That is told by a sigh.

The love that is surest to last,
The love that a woman's heart needs,
The love that will ever be fast,
Is the love
That is spoken in deeds.

Bessie O'Byrne.

What Position

Is there some position "higher up" that you have your eyes on, but which requires ***special training*** to secure and ***hold?*** Is there some line of work that appeals to you more strongly than the one in which you are now engaged, but which calls for ***expert knowledge?***

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Men Who Have Won

With the help of your Course in Chemistry, I was able to gain a sufficient knowledge of Sugar Chemistry while working as electrician, afterwards getting a position of Assistant Chemist, and have now advanced to the position of Assistant Chemical Superintendent in a Sugar House making 300,000 bags of sugar each crop.

HERBERT W. ANDEM,
Preston, Oriente, Cuba.

When enrolling in the I. C. S. I was engaged as a common laborer with no regular employment. Some time after enrolling I was offered a position as Fireman in the Union Utility Company, in which I am employed as 8th engineer, to which position I was promoted in six months. The Chief Engineer, 2nd Engineer and one of the two Foremen are I. C. S. students, and other I. C. S. students have gone from this plant to take up better jobs.

I can thank the I. C. S. for the advancement I have made and can heartily recommend it to anyone.

EUGENE C. BOWMAN, 33 Kingwood St., Morgantown, W. Va.

I took a Course with your Schools for about four months before taking an examination on May 11, 1908, and on Feb. 8, 1909, I commenced my work as Clerk to the Cashier of Customs with a salary of $1,000.00 a year.

I have a very pleasant position in contrast with my former position, which was a teacher in the Public Schools, with an increase of over 100 per cent in salary.

JOHN M. SNOOK,
Care of Custom House, Baltimore, Md.

A Course in the I. C. S. is well worth its study. I know the price of my Course has been returned to me many fold.

When I started this Course I was employed as wireman for the Pennsylvania Railroad Company, in Jersey City. In January, 1906, I was appointed Chief Electrician of Greenville Power Plant, with an additional $25.00 per month in pay. I am sure that it is only on account of I. C. S. training that I am able to fill this position satisfactorily. I am, therefore, glad I started to study and will recommend the Schools to any one.

J. P. APELDORN,
24 Garrison Ave., Jersey City, N. J.

I held the position of second-hand to overseer in a Cotton Mill when I first began with the International Correspondence Schools. I now hold the position of Superintendent in the Cotton Mills of The Courtenay Manufacturing Company.

The I. C. S. have been a great aid to me.

G. B. BYRD, Newry, Oconee Co., S. C.

At the beginning of my study for Architecture I was working as a Cow-Puncher, "Z-Y" Ranch. After receiving my diploma, I went into partnership with an Architect and was very successful, and later dissolved partnership and moved out here where I am running an office of my own.

I have good prospects ahead, and am already snowed under with work. It has increased my salary over 100 per cent since I enrolled with the I. C. S.

R. R. PAIGE, Blanca, Colorado.

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Your advancement rests with YOU. The first step forward is the marking of the coupon. The I. C. S. method is adapted to meet ***your*** particular needs and means. Read the following testimonials and mark the coupon NOW.

Positions "Higher Up"

When I first took up your Course I was a Machine Shop Clerk at Montreal Cotton Company, Valleyfield, P. Q., Canada. After finishing, I obtained a position of Draftsman there, opportunely just vacant, stayed there 18 months and then a change of management caused me to leave. I obtained a position as Draftsman in the engineering Department at Howard & Bullough's, Cotton Machinery Makers, Pawtucket, R. I. I kept my position all through the late time of depression and I know I am giving satisfaction.
CHARLES EDW. FOSTER, Chamber St., Valley Falls, R. I.

Within a few months after enrolling I started making show-cards for merchants. The business increased so much that a day did not have enough hours for the work I had on hand. When I was 16 years I was making regular card writer's wages on every card I made, and during the last two years my income increased to double. If my business continues to increase as it has in the last two months, I will be clearing $100 a month by the end of the year.
J. KING FORREST, 305 E. Ruby St., Argentine, Kans.

I think the International Correspondence Schools is the greatest institution of its kind, and I would not hesitate to recommend any of its Courses of study to anyone who might be interested in the same. When I started to study through you I was earning $9.25 per week, and in less than three years was earning almost three times that amount, and I hope to make still more in the near future.
I would also like to state that on May 1, 1909, another Architect and myself will open an office in New York City.
E. E. SEDILLE, 230 First St., Newark, N. J.

"Better Position" Coupon

International Correspondence Schools,
Box 837 D, SCRANTON, PA.

Please explain, without further obligation on my part, how I can qualify for the position before which I have marked X.

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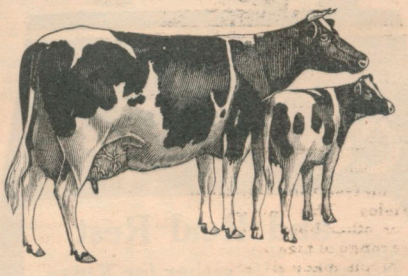

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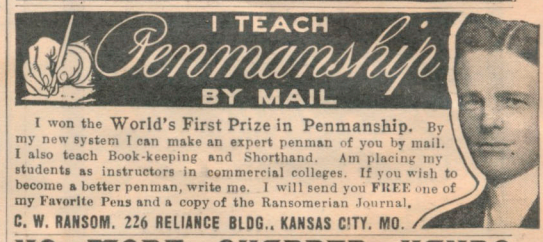

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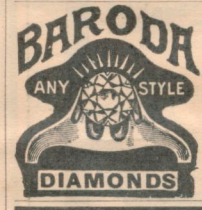

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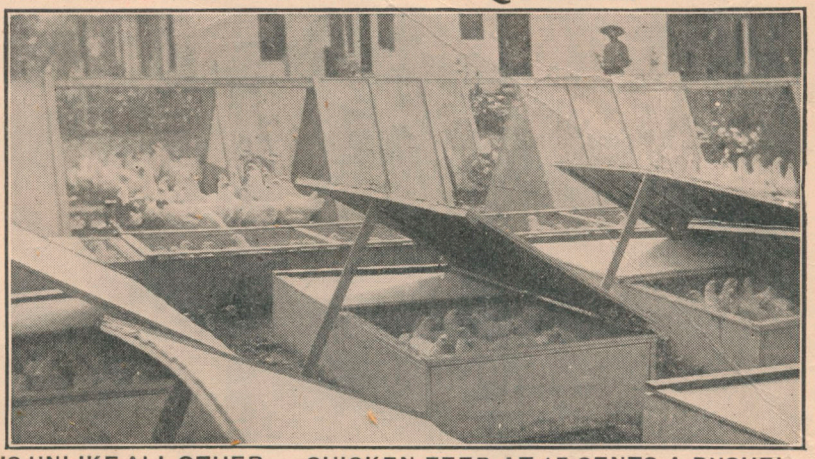

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TWO POUND BROILERS IN EIGHT WEEKS

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One of our secrets of success is to save all the chickens that are fully developed at hatching time, whether they can crack the shell or not. It is a simple trick and believed to be the secret of the ancient Egyptians and Chinese which enabled them to sell the chicks at 10 cents a dozen.

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TESTIMONIALS.

Bellefontaine, Ohio, June 7, 1909.

Mr. E. R. Philo, Elmira, N. Y.

Dear Sir:—I just want to tell you of the success I have had with the Philo system. In January, 1909, I purchased one of your Philo System books and I commenced to hatch chickens. On the third day of February, 1909, I succeeded in hatching ten chicks. I put them in one of your fireless brooders and we had zero weather. We succeeded in bringing through nine; one got killed by accident. On June 1, one of the pullets laid her first egg, and the most remarkable thing is she has laid every day since up to the present time.

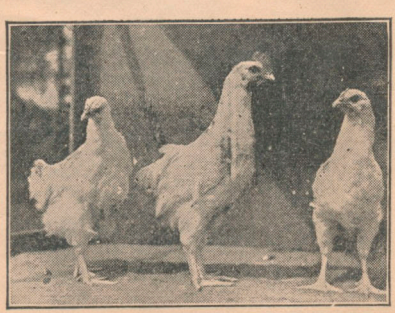
Yours truly, R. S. LaRue.

205 S. Clinton St., Baltimore, Md., May 28, 1909.

E. R. Philo, Publisher, Elmira, N. Y.

Dear Sir:—I have embarked in the poultry business on a small scale (Philo System) and am having the best of success so far, sixty-eight per cent of eggs hatched by hens, all chicks alive and healthy at this writing; they are now three weeks old. Mr. Philo is a public benefactor, and I don't believe his System can be improved upon, and so I am now looking for more yard room, having but 15x30 where I am now.

Yours truly, C. H. Leach.



THREE POUND ROASTERS TEN WEEKS OLD

South Britain, Conn., April 14, 1909.

Mr. E. R. Philo, Elmira, N. Y.

Dear Sir:—I have followed your system as close as I could; the result is a complete success. If there can be any improvement on nature, your brooder is it. The first experience I had with your System was last December. I hatched 17 chicks under two hens, put them as soon as hatched in one of your brooders out of doors and at the age of three months I sold them at 35c a pound. They then averaged 2 1-2 lbs. each, and the man I sold them to said they were the finest he ever saw, and he wants all I can spare this season.

Yours truly A. E. Nelson.

Osakis, Minn., June 7, 1909.

Mr. E. R. Philo, Elmira, N. Y.

Dear Sir:—You certainly have the greatest system the world h s ever known. I have had experience with poultry, but I know you have the system that brings the real profits. Yours

Jesse Underwood.

Brockport, N. Y., Sept. 12, 1908.

Mr. E. W. Philo, Elmira, N. Y.

Dear Sir:—I have had perfect success brooding chickens your way. I think your method will raise stronger, healthier chicks than the old way of using lamps and besides it saves so much work and risk.

Yours respectfully,

M. S. Gooding.

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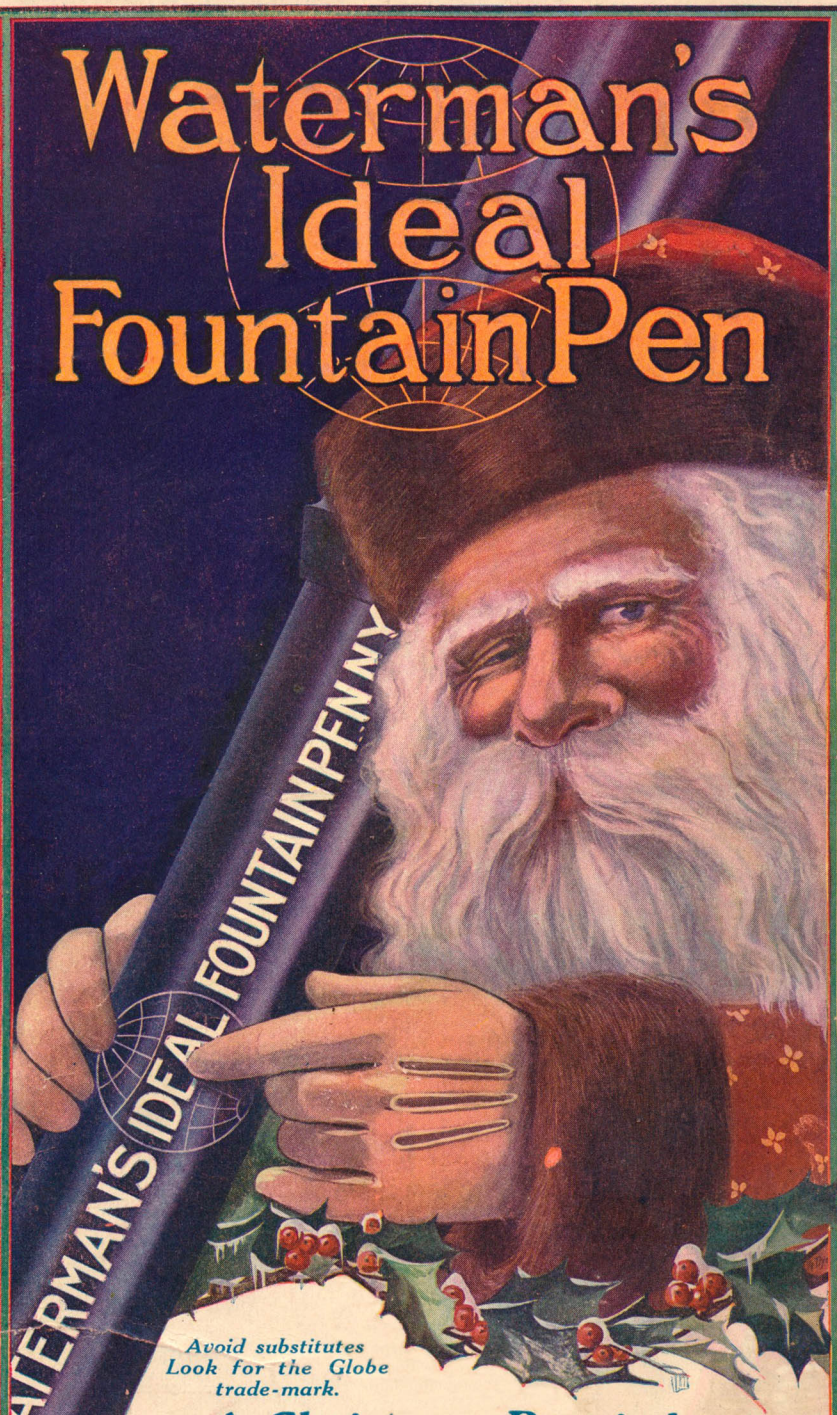

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