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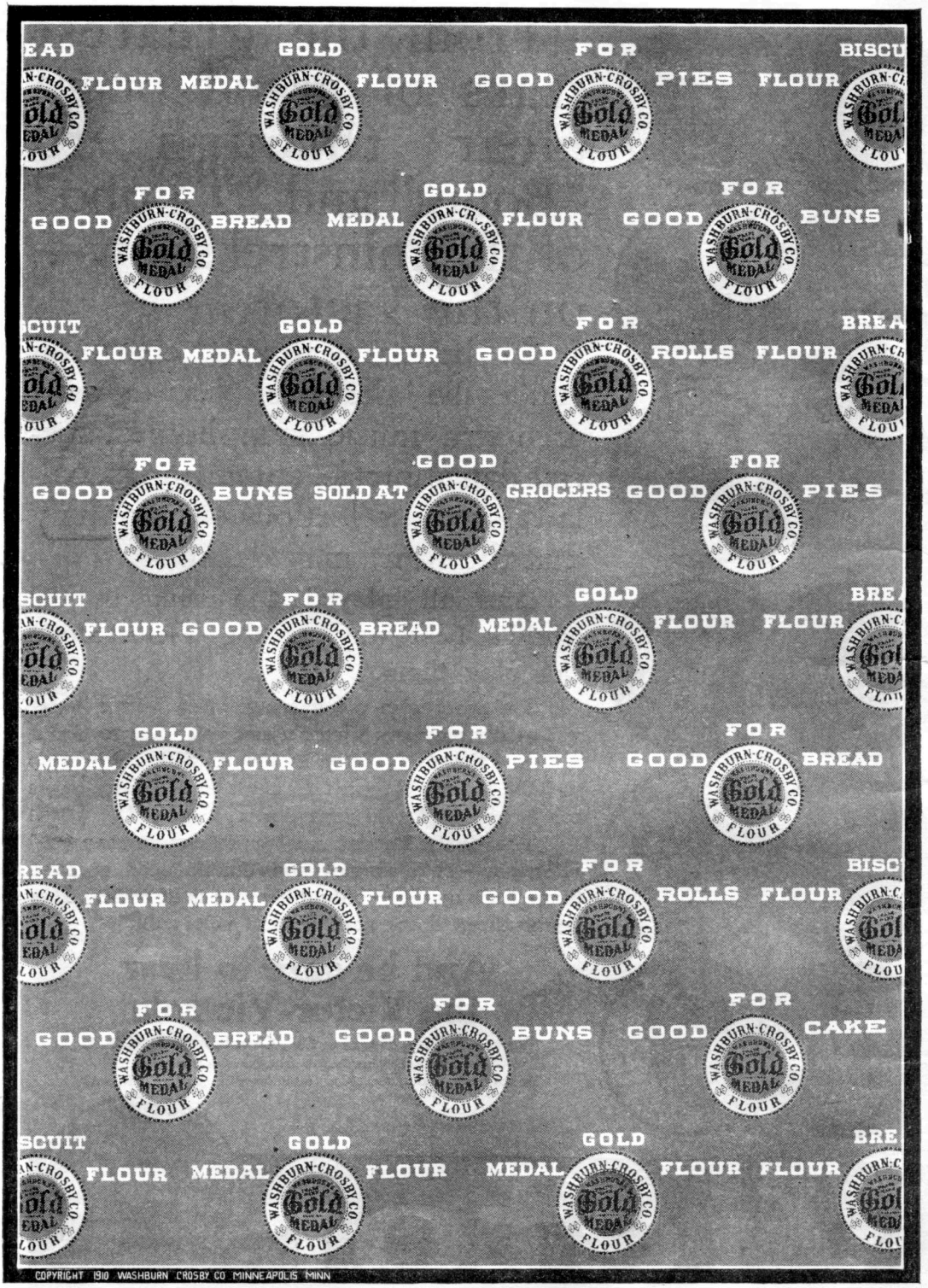

THE FOUNDATION OF SUCCESSFUL BAKING

THE CAVALIER

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By Forrest Halsey,

is a corking good short story scheduled for this October issue, which will have for its two Complete Novels

"THE TOWNSEND PROTÉGÉS," By Joseph Ivers Lawrence, and "AS MAN TO MAN," By E. V. Preston.

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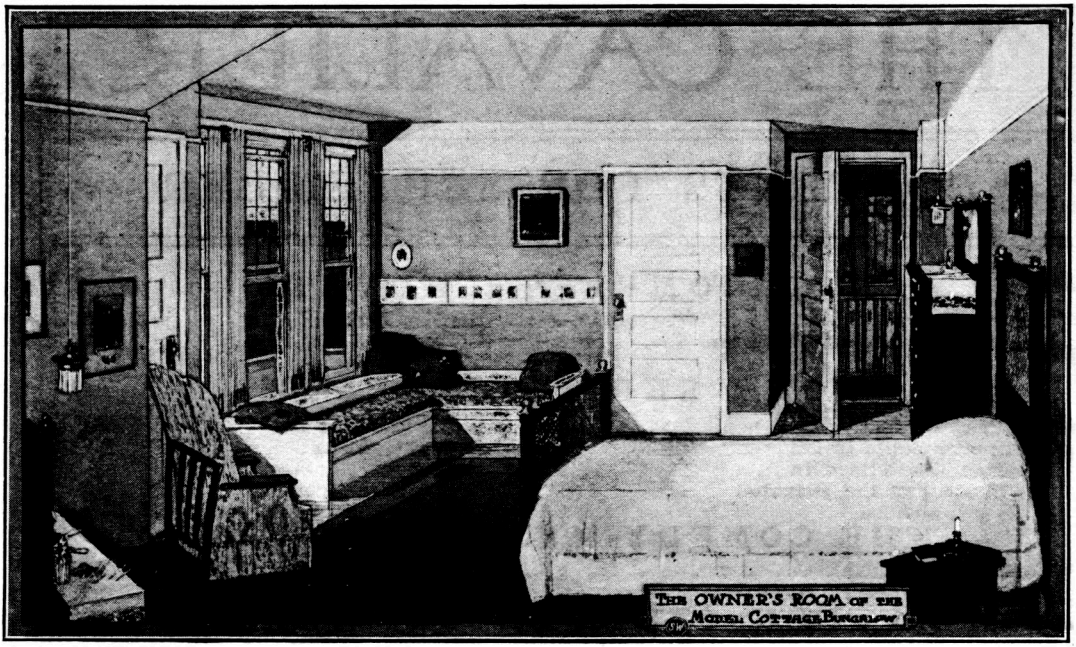

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THE CAVALIER

Vol. VI. SEPTEMBER, 1910. No. 4.

Tainted Money.

BY BERTRAM LEBHAR,

Author of "The Man Who Ran Away," "The Isle of Mysteries," "His Handicap Mate," etc.

Going To Show That, Regardless of Where Charity Begins, It May End in a Home for the Poor, or a Penal Institution.

(Complete in This Number.)

CHAPTER I.

HICKS GOES TO CHURCH.

WEN HICKS looked through his collection of neckties three times, trying to find one which was not hopelessly frayed in a part which was bound to show, no matter how much ingenuity he might display in the tying of it. His search was in vain. Every cravat in the drawer had been tied and retied so many times that there was not an inch of silk in any one of them which did not show signs of wear.

With a sigh, Hicks realized that none of them would do.

"I ought to have bought a new one last night when I drew my pay, before I lost every darned cent of it in that confounded poker-game," he muttered remorsefully.

Closing the bureau drawer with a vicious push, he stepped out of his little top-floor bedroom, and knocked on the door of the room adjoining.

"Say, old fellow," he said to the young man who, half dressed, responded to his knock, "I'm sorry to bother you; but could you let me have one of your neckties for to-day? I promise to return it to-morrow in good condition."

"Well, of all the nerve," growled the other. "Really, Hicks, you're the limit. You'll be trying to borrow my shoes next."

"Now, don't be ugly about it, old man," pleaded Hicks. "You can be sure that I wouldn't make such a request unless it was a case of dire necessity. The fact is, my own neckties are not fit to wear. I didn't realize that they were in such a poor condition. And I can't go out and buy one, because it's Sunday, and all the stores are closed. I know that you're well supplied. Surely you won't be mean enough to refuse to help me out."

"Well, I don't know about that," retorted the other. "How about that five dollars I loaned you two weeks ago? You were to pay it back last Saturday without fail, and you didn't keep your word."

"I meant to pay you—honestly I did," declared Hicks earnestly. "The fact is, I've been pretty hard pressed financially lately. But I'll pay back that five next week, Saunders, without fail. You can rely upon that. Now, hurry up, and let me have one of your neckties, like a good fellow. Pick me out a

good one, too. I've got an appointment this morning with a young lady, and I want to make as good a showing as possible."

"Huh! An appointment with a young lady!" snorted Saunders. "You're a fine fellow to be making appointments with young ladies, when you haven't even the price of a necktie in your pocket."

"Well, fortunately for me, I won't have to spend any money, in this case, so my impecuniosity won't prove embarrassing," replied Hicks, with a grin. "It's an appointment to escort a young lady to church, you see. Luckily they don't charge admission at churches, and the lady lives within easy walking distance, so I won't have to pay car fare, even."

Saunders regarded him with great surprise.

"Do you mean to tell me that you're really going to church, Hicks?"

"Sure! Why shouldn't I?" Hicks demanded with dignity.

"There's no reason why you shouldn't; on the contrary, there's every reason why you should. But I had an idea that wild horses couldn't drag you to a place of worship," said Saunders gravely.

He himself was a very serious-minded young man, and he had always been disposed to regard Hicks with disapproval because of the latter's gay and frivolous disposition. Now his attitude toward his fellow boarder underwent a sudden change.

"Come inside, and look over my neckties, and make your own selection," was his generous invitation; "and, as for that five dollars, Hicks, you can take your time about repaying it. I'm in no great hurry."

As Hicks was carefully selecting a cravat from his benefactor's well-stocked drawer, Saunders asked:

"What church are you going to, old fellow?"

He had never addressed Hicks as "old fellow" before; but he felt friendly toward the young man, now that he had discovered that he was not as unregenerate as he had supposed.

"The Park Avenue Baptist," answered Hicks.

"Good! That's my own church. I'm going there myself this morning. I attend the service every Sunday."

"In that case I'll probably see you there," said Hicks. "If I do, I'll introduce you to the girl, Saunders. I'd like you to meet her. She's the finest little girl that ever came over the pike. I don't mind admitting that it's her influence which has made me a churchgoer and caused me to resolve to cut out cards and liquor and cigarettes."

"Are you really going to do that, Hicks?" exclaimed Saunders eagerly.

"I certainly am. I intend to turn over a new leaf from now on," declared the other. "I'm afraid I've been a little wild in the past. I've never done anything really vicious, to be sure. I guess I've been no worse than the average young man who is all alone in this city; but I want to be much better—since I've met that girl."

"She must be a fine young woman, to make you feel that way," declared Saunders. "Are you in love with her?"

"I should say I was. I'm absolutely daffy about her. I realize, of course, that she's much too good for me. Nevertheless, I intend to ask her to be Mrs. Hicks, just as soon as I'm in a position to support a wife."

Saunders shook hands with him heartily.

"I wish you luck, old man," he said. "I feel confident that you are going to win out."

Hicks went back to his room to finish dressing, and, as he was adjusting his borrowed necktie an alarming thought occurred to him.

He knocked on the door of his friend's room once more.

"Say, old man, I'm sorry to bother you again; but I've just thought of something. When I said before that I should not need any money this morning, I was mistaken. I was forgetting all about the church collection. I haven't got a red cent to drop into the plate when it's passed round. I don't want to look like a piker in the eyes of the girl. Won't you lend me a quarter?"

"Sure I will," replied Saunders, diving into his pocket and producing the coin. "I'll be glad to accommodate you for such a worthy purpose. You can pay me this back with the five, Hicks."

After breakfast, Hicks walked from his boarding-house to the home of Miss Carolyn Walters.

His step was springy and he held his head high. He wore his Sunday suit, which was of good material and cut, and he carried a smart-looking cane.

Altogether, he was such a handsome, dashing-looking young man that several persons glanced at him admiringly as he passed by.

Carolyn Walters was waiting for him when he rang the bell and greeted him cordially.

She wore a white dress and a large black picture-hat, which showed her blond beauty

to advantage. Hicks thought she was the most bewitching creature his eyes had ever feasted upon.

As they walked to church, he carrying her hymn-book and her little hand resting on his arm, Hicks was thoroughly happy—until they encountered an Italian flower-vender, who blocked their path, holding up a bunch of violets, entreatingly.

"Oh, aren't they bee-u-ti-ful," exclaimed Carolyn enthusiastically. "I simply adore violets, don't you Mr. Hicks?"

Hicks found it difficult to repress a groan.

"How much?" he demanded with a murderous glare at the Italian.

"Fifta cent, boss," replied the vender, with an expectant grin which displayed all his white teeth.

Fifty cents! And all the money Hicks had in his pocket was the quarter which he had borrowed to drop into the collection-plate.

Fortunately, the girl came to his rescue.

She was quite unaware of his embarrassment, but the love of driving a bargain, which is inherent in most women, caused her to exclaim: "Fifty cents is too much. Why they're selling bunches like these all over for twenty-five cents. Don't pay him fifty cents, Mr. Hicks."

"I won't," declared Hicks firmly.

The Italian shrugged his shoulders deprecatingly, "Take them for twenty-five, lady," he said, thrusting the violets into Carolyn's hand.

Hicks produced his quarter and handed it to the flower-vender with a sigh of relief. This transaction, to be sure, left him without a cent to put into the collection plate; but Hicks was so glad to have got out of his present predicament that he scarcely gave that a thought just then.

Later on, however, when they were seated in the church and the choir was singing the anthem which preceded the taking of the collection, Hicks began to worry about what he was going to do when the plate reached him.

Carolyn was already taking a twenty-five-cent piece—her usual weekly offering—from her glove, so as to have it in readiness. Hicks knew that she would watch him out of the corner of her eye when his turn came, and that if he allowed the plate to pass without dropping in his contribution her opinion of him would be very unfavorable.

To add to his misery, Carolyn's father and mother sat on the other side of her.

Papa Walters was a stern-visaged old gentleman with a propensity for prying into other people's affairs. Hicks felt sure that if he allowed the plate to pass without dropping in his contribution the fact would not escape Mr. Walters's sharp eyes.

The worst of it was that Hicks had always posed in the eyes of the girl and her family as being in affluent circumstances. Knowing that her father was fairly wealthy, he had deemed it inadvisable to let the old gentleman suspect that he was chronically hard up.

Consequently, it would not occur to Carolyn, nor to her parents, now, that his reason for not contributing was that he did not have any money. They would think that he was too stingy to give.

Hicks was desperate. He wished heartily that he had not consented to accompany Carolyn to church.

As the anthem came to an end he drew from his pocket a detached trousers-button, and wondered anxiously whether he could not drop that unnegotiable article into the plate and "get away with it."

He had heard of such things being done. He did not doubt that a trousers-button thrown into the plate would make a noise just like real money.

There was a fair chance that he might be able to deceive the ears of Carolyn and perhaps even her eyes—for the button bore some resemblance to a dime—but he realized that the lynx eyes of Carolyn's father would immediately detect the imposture.

He knew that all hope of winning the girl would be at an end if he was caught perpetrating such an ignominious trick, and he decided that he had better not try it.

Then, fortune seemed to favor him in a most unexpected manner—the minister announced that the passing of the collection-plate would be dispensed with that day.

When he heard this surprising announcement Hicks was inclined to believe, first of all, that his ears must have deceived him. It looked like a miracle, performed for his especial benefit.

The minister did not stop, there, however. He went on to say something which caused the grin of relief which had come to Hicks's face, to vanish instantly.

CHAPTER II.

AN UNPLEASANT SURPRISE.

"YES, my friends," declared the good pastor, smiling upon his astonished flock, "I am not going to ask you to contribute to the regular collection, this

morning—for the reason that I expect much more from each and every one of you, to-day.

"As, I presume you all know, we need a new church building to replace the present inadequate structure. For that purpose twenty thousand dollars is required, the rest having been donated by a wealthy member of the congregation.

"I expect to obtain that sum without difficulty. I expect to get it from you to-day. I want every man, woman and child who is here, this morning, to contribute as much as he or she can possibly afford toward this worthy cause."

At these startling words Hicks turned very pale. His predicament, instead of being at an end had increased tenfold. He would be expected now to contribute dollars instead of cents.

If it had not been that he realized that such a step would be fatal to his hopes of winning Carolyn Walters, he would have got up from his seat, there and then, and taken refuge in flight.

The pastor's next words, however, were reassuring.

"The ushers will now pass from pew to pew," he said, "and hand to each of you a printed pledge card on which you will write your names and addresses and the sum you are prepared to give—the largest amount that you can afford."

Hicks breathed much easier when he heard this and he smiled at his own recent perturbation. The passing round of the little pledge cards meant, of course, that no money would be collected that day.

The members of the congregation would be expected to send their checks or cash during the week, for the various amounts they had promised to give.

Hicks thought that this was a very sensible arrangement. He was so pleased with it that he felt like hugging that pastor. Instead of expressing his delight and gratitude in that manner, however, he made up his mind that he would pledge himself for a liberal contribution toward the new church.

He decided that he would put himself down on the card for five dollars. He felt sure that that amount would be equal to, if not above, the average contribution.

True, he had no definite idea where that five dollars was coming from. He was heavily in debt and his next week's salary was already mortgaged up to the last cent. In addition, his landlady had threatened to put him out, unless he paid something on account on his long overdue board-bill.

Hicks did not allow these details to worry him, however. He felt sure that he would be able to raise the money somehow. Perhaps Saunders would be willing to lend him another fiver, inasmuch as it was for such a worthy cause.

An usher approached their pew and handed a little square card to himself, Carolyn, and her parents. Other ushers were busy distributing the cards throughout the congregation. Soft, sweet strains issued from the organ.

Hicks took out a fountain pen and wrote on the card his name and address and his promise to give five dollars.

Out of the corner of his eye he saw that Carolyn had also written five dollars on her card, and he was glad that he had not made his own contribution any less. Although her father was wealthy, Hicks would not have cared to give a smaller amount than the girl.

The ushers collected the cards and took them to the pulpit. The minister began to read the pledges aloud to his flock.

Hicks was disagreeably surprised to find that he had underestimated the liberality of that congregation. Many of the pledges were for amounts varying from ten to a hundred dollars. His own contribution was decidedly below the average.

There were quite a few offerings of five dollars and less, to be sure; but these were mostly from women and children. He keenly regretted, then, that he had not pledged himself for a much larger amount. Hicks hated to be classed as a "piker."

The minister announced that Horatio Saunders, Hicks's fellow boarder, had written himself down for fifty dollars.

"Good old Saunders," muttered Hicks to himself. "What a decent fellow he is. Wish that I'd made my contribution fifty, too, instead of that miserable five."

Carolyn's father had pledged himself to give a hundred dollars. The old gentleman sat with his head raised proudly as the minister communicated that fact.

Carolyn's mother was down on the list for twenty dollars. Then Carolyn's contribution of five dollars was announced, and Hicks squirmed in his seat, realizing that his turn was next.

"Mr. Owen Hicks," rang out the pastor's voice, and then the good man paused and a smile wreathed his round, clean-shaven face.

Hicks resented that smile. He believed that the reverend gentleman was amused by the smallness of his contribution. The humiliated young man scowled morosely.

The scowl upon his face immediately gave way, however, to an expression of blank amazement and horror.

"Brethren and sisters," cried the minister joyously, "it gives me great pleasure to announce the largest contribution thus far received. Mr. Owen Hicks, a stranger in our midst, generously pledges himself to give five hundred dollars toward the good cause."

There was a buzz of voices as the congregation whisperingly commented upon this announcement. Hicks had turned very pale. He leaned forward in his seat and gazed searchingly at the pastor's face.

His first thought, when he had recovered sufficiently from his astonishment to be able to think at all, was that he had been victimized—that the minister had wilfully multiplied the amount of his humble offering by a hundred. He was filled with indignation that such a knavish game should be worked on him in a church and by a man of the cloth.

One look at the serene, guileless countenance of the good man, however, was sufficient to convince him that his suspicion was unfounded. A man with such a face, whether clergyman or layman, could not be guilty of such a shabby, dishonest trick.

Then a great light came to Hicks—smote him forcibly between the eyes, as it were. He suddenly realized what was the matter. In writing down five dollars on the pledge-card he had neglected to put a period between the five and the two ciphers.

As a result the minister had naturally read the figures as five hundred dollars.

Before he could decide upon the best means of rectifying this blunder without embarrassment to himself, the girl at his side had turned to him enthusiastically, joy and admiration glowing in her beautiful eyes.

"Oh, Mr. Hicks," she whispered, "I think it is just grand of you. You have indeed given me a pleasant surprise. I am proud to be sitting next to you. I always knew that you were generous; but I did not believe that even you were capable of such splendid liberality."

Hicks was gasping like a fish out of water; but before he could say anything Carolyn's father leaned over and grabbed him by the hand effusively.

"Young man," he whispered, "I am proud to shake hands with you. In these days, when young men are so frivolous and irreligious, it is very gratifying to find one who is so devoted to the church."

Carolyn's mother beamed her approval at Hicks, and was about to say something when she was halted by the minister's voice.

"My friends," cried the good man, "I rejoice exceedingly at this generous contribution, not only because of its magnitude, but because it comes from one who is not a regular member of this congregation.

"I have not the honor of knowing Mr. Hicks, and I believe I am correct in assuming that he is a stranger to the majority of you. Therefore, I am going to ask him to rise to his feet in order that all of us may have an opportunity to gaze upon our good friend."

Poor Hicks was not at all disposed to comply with this request; but Carolyn playfully, but firmly, insisted, and, flushing painfully to the roots of his hair, he rose and immediately became the focal point of three hundred pairs of admiring eyes.

As he stood up his gaze wandered dazedly over the congregation, and at length settled upon the face of Saunders, his fellow boarder, who had loaned him the necktie he was now wearing.

Saunders was sitting about ten rows ahead, but he had turned in his seat and was staring at Hicks, his face petrified with astonishment.

"Mr. Hicks," said the pastor, "I am glad to see that you are a young man. Your youth makes your generosity so much the more praiseworthy. I hope to have the pleasure of shaking hands with you after the service."

Then Hicks sat down, and the announcement of pledges went on. He was still trying to think of a satisfactory method of rectifying the minister's blunder, when the service came to an end.

As the congregation filed out of the church many men and women thronged round Hicks and shook him warmly by the hand, congratulating him upon his noble generosity, and inviting him to visit them at their homes.

Carolyn stood at his side as these honors were heaped upon him, and her beautiful face was aglow with pride and joy.

The minister pushed his way through the crowd and advanced toward Hicks with his hand outstretched.

"My dear young friend," he exclaimed tremulously, "let me express my appreciation of what you have done. It was magnificent. I hope that we shall see you here regularly in future. This church needs such young men as you. Er—by the way, Mr. Hicks, will you send me your check for the five hundred dollars, or shall I call on you during the week?"

Now, if ever, was Hicks's chance to notify

the reverend gentleman of his blunder—to inform him that his contribution was a paltry five dollars and not a hundred times that amount.

But, with Carolyn at his side, and her parents and a score of members of the congregation within earshot, his nerve failed him.

"I—I'll send you a—a check, sir," he stammered, and as soon as the words were out of his mouth he realized that his fate was sealed. It was too late, after that, to attempt to get out of paying the five hundred.

Carolyn's father and mother smiled at him approvingly.

"We shall expect you to dinner, one night this week, without fail, young man," exclaimed Mr. Walters cordially, as he and his wife went out, leaving their daughter and Hicks to follow at their leisure.

As he said good-by to the girl, at her doorstep, she squeezed his hand and said softly: "Mr. Hicks, I have never enjoyed myself as much as this morning."

"Don't you call me Mr. Hicks," he said, summoning all his courage. "Won't you please call me Owen?"

"I will—if you'll call me Carolyn," she purred, and he fairly trembled with delight.

On his way home to his boarding-house his step was so springy that he looked like a walking advertisement for somebody's rubber heels, and he swung his cane so jauntily that it was a miracle that at least three persons didn't have their eyes poked out.

But after he had gone a few blocks his mood underwent a sudden change, as a distressing thought came to him.

"Where in Hades am I going to raise five hundred dollars," he muttered moodily.

CHAPTER III.

THE TRIALS OF A PHILANTHROPIST.

WHEN Hicks reached his boarding-house he was greeted by Saunders, who seized both his hands impulsively and poured into his ear words of praise.

"My dear friend," he cried, "it was simply splendid of you. I never gave you credit for being that sort of a fellow. Why, do you know, old man, I actually took you seriously, this morning, when you told me that you were financially embarrassed.

"Did you?" exclaimed Hicks, with a hollow laugh. "That's pretty good. I should think that you would have seen that I was only joking."

"No, I assure you, I never suspected it," replied the other earnestly. "When I heard the minister announce that you had promised to give five hundred dollars—"

"Hush," entreated Hicks, noting apprehensively that his landlady and several of the boarders had entered the room. "Not so loud, please. I don't want these people to know."

"Your modesty does you credit, old fellow," declared Saunders admiringly. "But if you expect to hide your light under a bushel, as the saying goes, I am afraid you are going to be disappointed. I have already told Mrs. Witherspoon and the boarders all about it."

Hicks looked at him in dismay.

"What did they say?" he inquired nervously.

"They were all very much surprised," replied Saunders candidly. None of them suspected that you were a man of wealth, my dear friend. On the contrary, they believed, as I did, that you were chronically hard up. They were very glad to find that they were mistaken—especially Mrs. Witherspoon."

Hicks shuddered.

"By the way, old man," went on Saunders, "would you mind letting me have that five dollars and twenty-five cents I loaned you? Inasmuch as I have pledged myself to give fifty dollars toward the new church-building, I am going to be pretty short of cash for the next few weeks. It won't inconvenience you, of course, to repay that small loan."

"I'm afraid I can't let you have it at present," stammered Hicks. "I'm pretty hard up—er—that is to say, I haven't any small bills with me just now. I'll give it to you later on—when I can get a big bill changed."

"That will be all right," Saunders assured him. "I won't need the money before to-morrow morning."

Mrs. Witherspoon, their landlady, approached them at this juncture.

"What is this I hear about you, Mr. Hicks?" she inquired, a vinegary expression upon her sharp features. "Have you really gone and given five hundred dollars to the Park Avenue Baptist Church?"

"Tut, tut, my dear Mrs. Witherspoon," protested Hicks, with the air of one who hates to be reminded of his good deeds. "I beg of you not to mention it."

"But I will mention it," she persisted with considerable heat. "It's a true sayin' that charity begins at home—likewise in

boardin'-houses. Since you can afford to give away five hundred dollars to build churches, I'll trouble you to pay me immediately the twenty-four dollars and four cents which you owe me. The twenty-four dollars bein' for three weeks' board and lodgin', and the four cents for the real china soap-dish which you broke last week, when you was tryin' to cook a Welsh rabbit in it."

"Don't talk to me about such trifles to-day, Mrs. Witherspoon," said Hicks loftily. "You appear to forget that it is Sunday. I never transact business on the Sabbath. I'll discuss the matter with you later on in the week."

"You'll pay me first thing to-morrow morning," hissed the landlady. "If you don't, I'll see that clergyman and demand that he pay me what's coming to me out of the five hundred you give him. I don't think he'll want to have his new church built with money which rightly belongs to a poor, hard-working woman."

Saunders turned upon her indignantly.

"I'm surprised to hear you talk like this, Mrs. Witherspoon," he said. "Mr. Hicks has only big bills in his pocket just now; so it is quite impossible for him to settle with you. Besides, what he says about the iniquity of transacting business on the Sabbath is very true.

"You need not worry about your money. I'll vouch for it that Mr. Hicks will pay you. I think you owe him an apology for speaking so roughly, especially in view of the fact that he has done so nobly this morning."

Mrs. Witherspoon went away somewhat reassured by these words, and Hicks heaved a sigh of relief and flashed a look of gratitude at his ingenuous friend.

His troubles were by no means over, however. In fact, they were only just beginning.

Several of his fellow boarders now clustered around him and fought with each other to shake hands with him.

"Good old Hicks," they chorused. "We did not think it was in you. Saunders has told us all about it. We are proud to have such a philanthropist in our midst. Your presence here gives tone to our humble boarding-house."

"By the way, Hicks," said one, whispering in his ear, "could you let me have that dollar I loaned you three weeks ago to enable you to pay your laundry bill?"

"That seventy-five cents which I loaned you last week to get your shoes soled and heeled," whispered another in his other ear. "I'd like to have it back right now, if you please."

"How about that ten cents you borrowed from me yesterday?" demanded a third. "I know it's only a trifle to a man who can afford to give five hundred dollars toward the building of a new church; but every dime looks like real money to me, Hicks."

The moisture was beginning to gather on Hicks's brow, but he met the unpleasant situation with dignity.

"I must ask all of you to talk to me about these petty matters later on in the week," he said impatiently.

"He has only big bills in his pocket just now," Saunders whispered to the persistent creditors in an awesome tone. The simple fellow believed that he spoke the truth, too.

There was a ring at the front door-bell, and a man's voice was heard inquiring for Mr. Owen Hicks.

The unhappy owner of that name turned pale with a vague dread when the servant girl ushered a young man into the parlor and pointed out Hicks to him.

"Mr. Hicks," began the visitor, "I have come from the Park Avenue Baptist Church regarding that five hundred dollars which you pledged yourself to give this morning."

"Already?" exclaimed Hicks faintly.

Everything seemed to swim before his eyes. Then he rallied, by a mighty effort, and turned upon the young man indignantly.

"Really," he protested, "this haste is most unseemly. You have no right to bother me to-day. It is an outrage. I promised your pastor that I would send him my check during the week. Does he doubt my word? I consider your call an insult, sir, and—I have a good mind to withdraw my contribution."

Hicks delivered himself of these words impulsively without stopping to think what he was saying. But immediately after he had uttered them it dawned upon him that he had thereby created an opportunity to get out of having to pay that five hundred dollars—an opportunity to extricate himself from his painful predicament without disgrace.

"Yes," he declared, with a great show of righteous indignation, "I consider myself quite justified, under the circumstances, in canceling my pledge. I am quite sure that every unprejudiced person who hears the circumstances of the case will indorse my attitude."

"Don't be hasty, Hicks," pleaded Saunders. "Please don't. I am sure that there must be some mistake. The Rev. Dr. Baker is one of the most courteous gentlemen I have

ever met. I am quite positive that he would not offend you in this way."

"Saunders," said Hicks with quiet dignity, "I appreciate your motive in trying to smooth things over. But I am not to be dissuaded from taking the course which my self-respect demands.

"Painful as it is for me to have to do so, I shall be compelled to express my resentment of this gratuitous insult by withdrawing my contribution entirely—yes, every cent of it. I shall give the money to some other worthy cause."

"Good Heavens," groaned Hicks, "what a calamity!"

He turned anxiously to the visitor.

"Are you quite sure that Dr. Baker sent you here on such an errand?" he demanded.

"No," replied the young man, with a deprecating smile. "I am afraid that Mr. Hicks is needlessly exciting himself. I have not come here to collect any money."

Hicks, who had been inwardly congratulating himself upon his unexpected good luck, almost had heart-failure at these words.

"You haven't!" he gasped. "Then why have you come here?"

"To have a little talk with you, Mr. Hicks," replied the young man. "When I said that I had come from the Park Avenue Baptist Church, I did not mean that I had been sent here by the minister.

"I am a reporter on the *Standard,* and I was assigned to cover the service at the Park Avenue Baptist this morning. As you were the largest contributor toward the fund for the new church, I thought I would come here and get your photograph and some information about yourself."

"Ah!" exclaimed Saunders with a smile of relief. "I knew there must be some mistake. Hicks, old fellow, let me congratulate you. It must be a great load off your mind to learn that everything is all right after all."

"Y-e-e-s," replied Hicks with a mirthless laugh. "It is a great load off my mind, of course. I am very glad."

He looked as happy as a condemned murderer who had just been informed that the governor has refused to sign his pardon.

CHAPTER IV.

THE TRIALS CONTINUE.

THE generalship which Hicks exercised, the next morning, in order to sneak out of his boarding-house without encountering his landlady and his fellow boarders, to whom he owed money, was really a brilliant performance.

In order to effect his escape he had to go without breakfast, to be sure; but he was content to make that sacrifice rather than undergo the ordeal of telling the acrid Mrs. Witherspoon that he was not prepared to settle his indebtedness to her.

If it had not been for that unfortunate five-hundred-dollar contribution to the Park Avenue Baptist Church, he might have gone on owing his landlady for several weeks to come; for Mrs. Witherspoon, although a grasping woman, preferred to keep on trusting her delinquent boarders, on the chance that they might pay her later on, rather than lose what was already due her by putting them out of her house.

But now that she had reason to believe that he had money, the old shrew would be like an enraged lioness, Hicks realized, unless he paid his long-overdue bill. Probably she would turn him out on the street, and also, no doubt, she would carry out her threat to go to the minister of the Park Avenue Baptist Church with her claim.

The minister's suspicions would be roused. He would investigate and learn the truth about Hicks's financial status, and there would be a scandal. It would be sure to reach the ears of Carolyn and her parents, and his romance would come to an abrupt and painful end.

Hicks was determined to prevent that, if possible. He sneaked out of the house with the determination to return that evening with enough money in his pocket to pay his landlady. He hoped, too, to be able to raise the five hundred dollars for the church before the close of that day.

He did not have the remotest idea of how he was going to get hold of such a large amount of money; but, nevertheless, he was optimistic.

The trouble with Hicks, as the reader may already have discerned, was that there was altogether too much optimism in his make-up. He never bothered about the distant future. The problem of the present was all that ever worried him.

To extricate himself from a temporary embarrassment he was always willing to pile up the agony for some future day, trusting to luck to see him through when that day arrived.

It was this failing which was directly responsible for his present predicament. If he had acquainted Carolyn Walters with the real state of his finances, in the first place,

the chances are that she would have thought none the worse of him for it, and, at all events, he would not have had to carry out the dangerous pretense of having plenty of money.

And if, when the minister of the Park Avenue Baptist Church had innocently mistaken the five dollars which he had written on the pledge card for five hundred dollars, Hicks had boldly called attention to the good man's error, the rash young man would not now have found himself in this unpleasant situation.

But, not having pursued this wise course, Hicks was now going down-town to his eighteen-dollar-a-week job in the banking-house of Granger & Co. with a gnawing sensation in his stomach to remind him that he had had no breakfast, and facing the painful prospect that he would get no supper unless he could beg or borrow enough money to pay Mrs. Witherspoon during the day, for he would not care to meet that irate lady without it.

The thought flashed through his mind that he might square himself with his landlady by confessing to her that that five-hundred-dollar contribution to the church was all a mistake; but, after carefully considering this plan, he decided that it would not do at all.

Mrs. Witherspoon was of a spiteful disposition, and, if he told her the truth, she would surely notify the pastor of the church that he had been imposed upon by Hicks, and then the fat would be in the fire.

"No," he said to himself; "I'll carry this thing through somehow. I won't be a welcher. I'll manage to get that five hundred, and I'll get enough to pay that confounded woman, too. I don't know how I'm going to do it, but I'll find a way. If only my luck at poker hadn't been so rotten lately!"

It was fortunate for Hicks that he had a Subway ticket in his pocket, otherwise he would not have been able to get down-town to his work. He did not have even a nickel.

When he reached the office he was told by one of the office-boys that Mr. Granger, the president, wished to see him immediately.

As he entered the private office of the head of the firm, that dignitary—a stout, pompous man, with whiskers of the mutton-chop pattern—smiled at him genially.

"Good morning, Hicks. I have sent for you because I wish to extend to you my hearty congratulations."

"Your congratulations?" stammered the young man, completely at a loss. "What for, sir?"

"I read in this morning's paper something which gave me great pleasure," declared Mr. Granger. "It is very gratifying to learn that this firm has in its employ a young man who has such a strong sense of duty toward his church."

"Oh," gasped Hicks, "is it in the paper?"

He had quite forgotten about the visit of the *Standard* representative until now, and the discovery that the thing had got into print did not please him.

"I am pleased to learn, too," went on Mr. Granger "that you have been so frugal that you can afford to give five hundred dollars toward your church building-fund out of your savings. Thrift is a fine quality in a young man. I congratulate you, Hicks, upon the possession of it."

"Thank you, sir," stammered Hicks, his face crimsoning.

"The other day," went on the banker, "you were speaking to me on the subject of—er—a slight increase in your salary, I believe, my dear Hicks?"

"Yes, sir, I was," said the young man eagerly.

"You told me, if I remember correctly, that on account of the present high cost of living, you found it impossible to get along on your present wages, and I actually believed you, you young rascal."

He shook his finger playfully at Hicks.

"Yes," he went on, "I took what you said seriously, and I was thinking of passing favorably upon your application."

"I—I hope you haven't changed your mind, sir," exclaimed Hicks nervously.

"I certainly have," replied Granger with a bland smile. "I see no reason why we should give you more money, my dear young man, when it appears that you are able to get along so splendidly on what you are now receiving."

As Hicks walked out of the president's private office he said to himself, with a sigh: "Being a philanthropist isn't all that it's cracked up to be."

When he reached his desk in the big main office he was immediately surrounded by a score of his fellow clerks, who had read about the contribution in the *Standard*.

Some of the more serious-minded congratulated him with sincerity, and informed him that he was a credit to the office, others bantered him unmercifully, and a half-dozen to whom Hicks was indebted for small sums ranging from a dollar to a dime, clamored for payment.

To add to this embarrassment, his tailor, his barber, his tobacconist, and two restaurant-keepers called at the office during the day to present bills of long standing.

Having read in the *Standard* about Hicks's liberal contribution to the church they were in hopes that he had come into an unexpected fortune. They went away very much disappointed.

Hicks had figured on being able to borrow at least the price of his luncheon from one of the office staff, for he had not expected that anybody down-town would know anything about that unfortunate church contribution; but now he realized that it was out of the question to appeal to anybody in the employ of Granger & Co. for help.

Therefore he went luncheonless as well as breakfastless, and by the end of the day he was so weak that he almost fainted at the distressing thought that he would have to walk all the way home because he did not have the price of a Subway ticket.

Fortunately, he was spared this ordeal, however. One of the office boys, who lived up-town, walked with him to the Subway station and swelled with pride when Hicks permitted him to pay his fare.

The youngster's joy at being allowed to stand treat for a man who could afford to give five hundred dollars toward the building of a church was so manifest that Hicks was strongly tempted to add to the boy's pleasure by borrowing a half-dollar from him; but when he broached the subject, he discovered that the youngster had spent his last ten cents for the two Subway tickets.

When Hicks arrived at the front door of his boarding-house, the thought of having to face the fiery Mrs. Witherspoon and his other creditors at the house without being able to satisfy their demands, made him falter at the threshold.

Hunger gave him courage, however.

He was determined to get his dinner, no matter what unpleasantness might be in store for him, so he inserted his key in the lock and hurried up-stairs to his bedroom to seek seclusion and safety there until the ringing of the dinner-bell.

CHAPTER V.

A GREAT TEMPTATION.

HICKS was just congratulating himself upon the fact that he had managed to reach his room without encountering his landlady in the hallway (for he wished, if possible, to postpone the painful interview until after dinner), when there came a sharp rapping at his door.

"Who's there?" he demanded nervously.

"It's me, sorr," replied the Hibernian voice of Bridget, the maid of all work.

Hicks was greatly relieved to find that it was not Mrs. Witherspoon come to tell him that he could have no dinner unless he paid his bill.

"What is it you want, Bridget?" he inquired, opening the door.

"There's a gent to see you, Mr. Hicks. He's waiting in the parlor."

"What's his name, Bridget?" he asked apprehensively.

"He says he's the Rev. Dr. Baker, of the Park Avenue Baptist Church, sorr."

"Good Heavens!" gasped Hicks, turning very pale. "I guess he's come for his money. He's probably disappointed that he didn't receive my check in to-day's mail, as I promised.

"Tell him that I'm not at home, Bridget," he said wildly to the maid.

She shook her head.

"Sure, I couldn't do that, Mr. Hicks. It would be tellin' lies, 'cause you are at home —and I couldn't tell lies to a praste or a minister."

"Please be a good girl and do as I tell you," pleaded Hicks. "Tell him I'm not at home, and I'll—I'll give you a dollar."

"Where's the dollar?" she demanded, holding out her hand.

"I'll—I'll owe it to you, Bridget."

"No, sorr," she declared firmly. "You'll give it to me now, or I'll go down-stairs and till the riverend gentleman that you're in your room and rayfuse to see him."

She was a good-natured girl, and finally Hicks managed to dissuade her from carrying out this threat.

She went down-stairs to inform the Rev. Dr. Baker that Hicks was not at home, and she came right up again, a broad grin on her face.

"Has he gone?" inquired Hicks very eagerly.

"No, sorr; he has not," she giggled. "'I told him you wasn't in, and he said he guessed he'd wait. He said he was in no hurry, and he's still s'ated in the parlor waiting for you to come home."

"Ye gods!" groaned Hicks, as the sound of the dinner-bell came to his ears. "What am I going to do?"

He could hear the boarders trooping noisily into the dining-room in response to the wel-

come summons of the bell; but, though he was almost fainting from starvation, he dare not go down-stairs.

In order to get to the dining-room he would have to pass the room in which the minister of the Park Avenue Baptist Church sat waiting for his five hundred dollars. There was no other way of reaching the food he craved.

For an hour he sat imprisoned in his room, waiting in a frenzy of impatience for the Rev. Dr. Baker to depart.

Down-stairs he could hear the tantalizing sound of knives and forks scraping against plates, and the savory odor of hamburger steak came to his nostrils and almost maddened him.

Then a terrible sound smote upon his ear and caused him to groan with despair.

It was the sound of the boarders coming up-stairs from the dining-room, laughing and chattering with the gaiety of people who have dined well.

That meant, of course, that dinner was over, and Hicks knew that it was one of Mrs. Witherspoon's most inflexible rules that none of her boarders could be served with even a slice of bread once the regular dining-hour had passed.

Ten minutes later the Rev. Dr. Baker got tired of waiting for Hicks and went away, informing Bridget that he would call some other time.

Hicks heard the front door close behind him and realized that the embargo was over at last; but the discovery failed to give him joy.

The siege had been raised just ten minutes too late. He might as well stay up in his bedroom for the rest of the night now. It would do him no good to go down-stairs to the dining-room; he would find nothing on the table but a soiled table-cloth, and, hungry though he was, he could not very well eat that.

As he sat on the edge of his bed, brooding over his ill-luck, tears of self-pity came to his eyes.

He had counted so confidently upon that dinner. The thought of it had buoyed him up all day when he had been driven well-nigh frantic with hunger by his enforced abstinence from breakfast and luncheon.

Now, he began to doubt whether he would ever eat again. He pictured himself lying stretched upon the bed — lying there dead of starvation.

He seriously thought of writing a farewell message to Carolyn Walters while there was still enough strength in his body to enable him to grasp a pen. It would be terrible to pass away without letting Carolyn know how much he loved her.

Suddenly his gaze rested upon his silver-handled walking-cane which stood in a corner of the room.

His heart beat wildly with joy and hope. That cane represented a square meal. He ought to be able to raise at least twenty-five cents on it in a pawn-shop. Twenty-five cents would buy him a five-course dinner in a cheap restaurant. What an idiot he was not to have thought of that before!

There was his best Sunday suit, too, and various other articles of attire, such as shirts and collars. These ought to bring him a few dollars. The situation was not so desperate after all.

Once more his optimism came to the surface, and all thoughts of dying of starvation were driven away.

He was just gathering all his negotiable effects together with the intention of going straight out and converting them into currency, when a clock in the tower of a near-by building struck seven.

That sound paralyzed him. He remembered that the pawn-shops throughout the city closed promptly at seven in the evening.

It was no use. The inspiration had come to him too late. There would be no food for him that night.

Then another idea occurred to him. He could go and make a call on Carolyn. He recollected that the Walters family always dined late. Perhaps, if he hurried round there as fast as his tottering legs would take him, he could manage to arrive before their meal was finished.

Even if he got there in time for dessert, it would be worth while. A plate of rice pudding or a piece of home-made apple pie would be better than nothing at all.

And even if the family had finished dining when he reached there, he could surely count on refreshments some time during the evening.

Carolyn always served ice-cream or fruit or something of the sort when he called on her. The thought of ice-cream to a man as hungry as he was not exactly alluring, but it would at least keep him from starving.

Hurriedly he changed from his business suit to his best clothes and, seizing his cane, staggered down the stairs.

Fortunately he reached the front door without encountering Mrs. Witherspoon or any of the boarders and, with a sigh of relief, he

left the house and started toward the home of Carolyn, which, luckily for him, was within easy walking distance.

He was half-way there, when his foot kicked something lying on the sidewalk, and he discovered, greatly to his astonishment, that the object which lay in his path was a bulky leather wallet.

When he had picked it up and removed the stout rubber band which was around it, his eyes almost bulged out of his head as he caught sight of the edges of several yellow bills.

He hastily thrust the wallet into his coat-pocket, and looked round him anxiously in all directions to ascertain whether anybody had seen him pick it up.

Though he was satisfied that he had not been observed, he nevertheless took the precaution of walking on several blocks before he took the wallet from his pocket to inspect its contents.

When he did venture to examine his find, his eyes dilated and his hands shook as he found it contained eight one-hundred-dollar bills.

"Eight hundred dollars!" he gasped. "What a lot of money, and what luck that I should have found it. Now, at last, I can eat."

Across the street was a big restaurant, brilliantly lighted and looking exceedingly tempting to a hungry man.

Hicks was just starting toward it with the intention of ending his long fast without delay, when suddenly he stopped short, a look of self-disgust on his face.

"What am I thinking of?" he muttered. "This money isn't mine. I can't touch a cent of it. I may be pretty rotten; but I guess I'm not a thief."

He looked yearningly across the street at the lighted window of the restaurant and then, with a sad shake of his head, turned on his heel and walked firmly and resolutely away.

"If only this eight hundred dollars were mine," he said to himself wistfully, "what a meal I would order! It makes my mouth water to think of it."

He examined every inch of the wallet in search of some clue which would reveal the identity of the owner. There was none—not even an initial on the outside of the leather. There was nothing inside the wallet except those eight one-hundred-dollar bills.

"I suppose I'll have to hand it over to the police," he replied. "I've no right to keep it—not even a dollar of it.

"It's a mighty big temptation, though," he added with a sigh. "Gee whiz! but I'm hungry!"

CHAPTER VI.

A WAY OUT.

CAROLYN WALTERS was delighted to see Hicks; her parents, too, greeted him most cordially.

"How is our young philanthropist, this evening?" inquired Mr. Walters with his most pleasant smile.

"It's too bad that you didn't come a little earlier and have dinner with us," said Mrs. Walters. "We've just this instant finished. You ought to have tasted the cottage pudding Carolyn made, Mr. Hicks. I am sure you would have enjoyed it. Carolyn is taking a course at cooking-school, you know, and if I do say so myself, she displays great culinary talent."

Hicks looked at the girl adoringly. If he had loved her before, he worshiped her now. In his present state of mind he deemed cooking the greatest and most charming accomplishment a girl could have.

"Yes, sir," chimed in Mr. Walters, smacking his lips, "that certainly was a great pudding our little girl turned out. I had three helpings of it—and it is very rarely that I eat dessert."

Three helpings of pudding! Hicks looked at him enviously. He felt that he would cheerfully have laid down his life for three portions of cottage pudding.

"I am very sorry that I missed it," he said. "Perhaps it is not too late for me to sample it now. I should very much like to test Carolyn's ability as a cook."

He attempted to speak jocosely; but there was a note of eagerness in his voice that was pathetic.

"I'm sorry to say that there isn't a morsel of it left," laughed Mrs. Walters.

"Come to dinner to-morrow night," said Carolyn with a smile, "and I'll make another one, Mr. Hicks—er—I mean—Owen."

Under other circumstances Hicks would have been thrilled by her use of his Christian name which sounded so charming on her pretty lips; but now he scarcely noticed it. It was the first part of her utterance which occupied his attention.

"I'll surely be here," he declared very earnestly.

After all, although to-morrow night was a very long way off, it was some relief to know

that he would be sure of a good meal then, even if he did not succeed in breaking his terrible fast in the meantime.

Then, a happy thought occurred to him. Suppose he should now explain to the Walters that he had been detained down-town on business and had not yet dined—that he had come straight from the office to the house this evening with the expectation of arriving in time for dinner.

Surely such a declaration would not be resented. They would be glad to find that he felt so much at home there that he did not stand on ceremony. Hospitable Mrs. Walters would insist upon going right down to the kitchen to order the cook to prepare him an impromptu dinner. Perhaps, even, Carolyn, eager to show him what she could do, would cook him something with her own fair hands.

It seemed like a good plan and he decided to put it into immediate execution.

He was just starting to broach the subject when he was interrupted by a ring at the front-door bell followed by the entrance of the maid to announce a visitor.

"The Rev. Dr. Baker, ma'am," she said to Mrs. Walters.

"Dr. Baker," cried Mr. Walters, Mrs. Walters, and Carolyn in a joyous chorus. "Ask him in here, Mary."

Poor Hicks's face turned livid as the pastor of the Park Avenue Baptist Church, a smile upon his round, good-natured face, entered the room.

"Good evening, my dear friends," exclaimed the good man, shaking hands cordially with everybody. "Miss Carolyn, you grow more beautiful every time I see you, if you will permit me to say so. And bless me, if this isn't our generous young friend Mr. Hicks."

He shook hands with the wretched young man most heartily.

"My dear boy, I am very glad to see you. Do you know that I called on you at your boarding-house, this evening?"

"I—I am sorry that I was not at home," stammered Hicks.

"So was I; but, after all, it's no matter," said the clergyman, with a smile. "I can deliver my message just as well now, since I am so fortunate as to find you here.

"The object of my visit, my dear Mr. Hicks, was to request you to lead our young men's Bible class, next Thursday evening.

"We have discussions every week, you know, on interesting current topics. Our subject for next Thursday will be 'Philanthropy,' and I would like you to honor our class by delivering a short address on the subject."

Hicks gasped and looked at the minister incredulously:

"Do you mean to say that was all you wanted of me?" he could not help exclaiming.

He regretted the incautious words as soon as he had uttered them; but no harm was done, for the minister evidently misinterpreted his question.

"My dear fellow," exclaimed the good man, beaming upon Hicks, "it is very nice of you to speak in that manner. I was afraid that you would decline to do us this great favor. We can surely count on you, then, for next Thursday night?"

Hicks did not answer him; did not hear the question in fact, for his thoughts were far away just then.

He was thinking of the hamburger steak which Mrs. Witherspoon had served to her boarders that evening. The memory of its delicious aroma was acute torture to him.

Oh, if only he had known the object of the Rev. Dr. Baker's visit. If only he had guessed that the reverend gentleman had not come to collect that five hundred dollars. It maddened him to think that he had missed that dinner—simply to dodge an invitation to address a meeting of a young men's Bible class.

"I say we can surely count on you for next Thursday night, eh, Mr. Hicks?" repeated the clergyman.

"Yes," replied Hicks, scarcely realizing what he was saying.

"Oh, I am so glad," exclaimed Carolyn enthusiastically. "I have never heard you deliver an address, Owen. I did not know that oratory was one of your accomplishments. You must take me with you on Thursday night. I won't be in the way, Dr. Baker, I hope?"

"Not at all, my dear," replied the clergyman. "We shall be delighted to have you present, and I am sure you will enjoy Mr. Hicks's address."

After that, the conversation drifted to various topics connected with the church. The pastor described in detail and with great enthusiasm the plans for the new structure. Mrs. Walters told of the crazy-quilt which she was making for the annual bazaar, and Carolyn played and sang for the entertainment of the guests.

Finally, Doctor Baker rose to take his leave and was shaking hands with every-

body when Carolyn's father said: "One minute, doctor. As long as you are here I might as well give you my contribution toward the new church. A hundred dollars was the amount of my pledge, I believe. Just wait a few seconds, please, while I make you out a check for that amount."

"Oh, thank you," exclaimed the minister, as Mr. Walters handed the check to him. "I assure you, my dear sir, that I did not come here with the slightest intention of dunning you."

"Of course not," laughed Mr. Walters. "We know you too well, doctor, to suspect you of that. There is nothing like being prompt in paying one's debts, however—especially when the debt is to one's church.

"By the way, Hicks," went on Carolyn's father, turning with a smile to that wretched young man, who had turned very pale and who was squirming nervously in his chair in a manner which suggested an imminent attack of St. Vitus dance, "have you paid your contribution yet?"

"No—er—not yet," replied Hicks, with a sickly smile.

"Then, why not do it right now?" suggested Mr. Walters cheerfully. "You remember the old saying 'Never put off until to-morrow that which you can do to-day'?"

"I—I'm afraid that I'll have to put it off until to-morrow," stammered Hicks. "I—I haven't my check-book with me."

"That will be all right, Mr. Hicks," the minister assured him. "There is no hurry. You can mail me your check at your convenience."

"No—no," protested Carolyn's father with playful insistence. "There is no time like the present. Who knows what may happen before to-morrow dawns. Mr. Hicks may die or his bank may fail, and then our church would not get the money. Better pay it right now, my dear boy."

"But I tell you that I haven't my check-book with me," cried Hicks, his desperation goading him into a display of temper.

"That difficulty is easily overcome," retorted Carolyn's father, with a smile which filled Hicks with a desire to strangle him. "I happen to have some blank checks in the house—the kind that have no printing on them at all. I will go get you one."

"I couldn't dream of putting you to so much trouble," protested Hicks desperately.

"It's no trouble at all," replied the accommodating old gentleman. "On the contrary, it will be a pleasure to oblige you, my boy."

Hicks was at his wit's end when a blank check and a fountain pen were thrust into his trembling hand. He glanced round him wildly. Carolyn, her parents, and the Rev. Dr. Baker were looking at him expectantly, a slight expression of surprise on their faces, which showed that they were at a loss to understand his perturbation.

Then Hicks began to make out the check. He wrote at the top the name of the first bank which occurred to him—a bank in which he did not have a dollar.

He filled in the amount—five hundred dollars—and added his signature.

He shuddered as he thought what would happen when that worthless piece of paper reached the clearing-house. He realized that disgrace and perhaps imprisonment stared him in the face.

All that he was accomplishing by going through this farce was the postponement for a few hours of the unmasking which would take Carolyn Walters out of his life forever.

Most men, in such a situation, would have decided that the game was up and that there was only one thing to do—confess the whole truth and walk out of that house, dishonored and disdained, but at least in no danger of imprisonment for the criminal act of wilfully passing a worthless check.

But, as has been previously pointed out, Hicks was different from most men. He was always willing to rely upon "luck" to help him out of future difficulties if only he could escape from a predicament that actually confronted him.

His lively imagination pictured what would happen if he should confess then and there that he was penniless.

He could see the look of horror and scorn that would appear on the beautiful face of the girl he loved. He could see the shocked expression which would come to the face of the good minister.

He could hear the angry voice of Carolyn's father denouncing him as a scoundrel and ordering him out of the house before he was kicked out.

Rather than go through his harrowing ordeal he preferred to face the consequences of uttering and passing a worthless check. That, at least, would give him a few hours' grace—and a whole lot of things might happen within a few hours. While there was time there was hope.

Therefore, he filled in the check, and was just handing it to the Rev. Dr. Baker when, suddenly, he remembered something, and tore up the paper into small pieces.

Everybody present regarded this act with wide-eyed astonishment until Hicks explained, with a strained laugh: "I've changed my mind. I won't give a check, after all. I'll pay cash."

He drew from his pocket a bulky wallet, and tremblingly counted five one-hundred-dollar bills, which he placed in the hand of the minister.

"What a lot of money for a young man to carry round," exclaimed Mr. Walters, noting with amazement that there were still some yellow-backs left in the wallet, which the young man hastily thrust back into his pocket. "Do you always carry as much as that, Mr. Hicks?"

"Not always," answered the unhappy young man with a laugh that was half a sob.

CHAPTER VII.

A SAD AWAKENING.

IT took Hicks three-quarters of an hour to say good night to Carolyn Walters.

The girl's parents were quite content to have her linger in the darkened hallway with such an estimable young man. They scented a budding romance, and they were pleased.

"I wish he'd propose to her," said Mrs. Walters to her husband, as the old couple sat in the parlor, waiting to hear the front door slam. "He's just the kind of a husband I would wish for our girl."

"Yes, he seems a nice young man," declared Mr. Walters, puffing thoughtfully at his cigar.

"Quite above the average," went on Mrs. Walters enthusiastically. "One rarely finds so much character in a man of his age. There isn't one young man in a hundred generous and pious enough to contribute five hundred dollars toward the building of a new church. He is so refreshingly modest about it, too.

"And in addition to these good qualities," she went on, "he is handsome and accomplished. Our Carolyn and he would make a splendid pair."

She sighed wistfully.

"He seems to be well off, too," commented her husband, stroking his beard. "I noticed that he had three one-hundred-dollar bills left in his wallet after he'd paid Dr. Baker that five hundred. Eight hundred dollars is a lot of money for a young man to carry in his pocket."

"Do you think that he cares for Carolyn?" inquired Mrs. Walters eagerly.

"I shouldn't be surprised. I noticed that he looked pretty pale this evening. That's generally one of the symptoms of a man in love, I believe."

"Yes," declared Carolyn's mother, "and there was a certain peculiar hungry sort of look in his face to-night, too. I noticed it particularly. He may be hungering for our girl."

"Talking about hunger," remarked her husband with a chuckle, "did you notice the way he ate up that cake which Carolyn served? He finished nine pieces. I counted them. That fellow must have a terrible appetite."

"That was love—nothing but love," declared Mrs. Walters confidently. "As soon as he heard that Carolyn baked that cake herself, he couldn't eat enough of it. I don't believe he really wanted the cake at all—he just ate it because she made it."

"They're an awfully long while saying good night to each other," remarked the old gentleman, consulting his watch. "That looks promising."

From the direction of the front door there came suddenly to their ears a certain faint but unmistakable sound, which was followed by their daughter's voice protesting:

"Oh, Mr. Hicks—Owen—aren't you perfectly awful? You must not do that again."

Then they heard the young man's voice reply contritely:

"I didn't mean to do it, Carolyn; I just couldn't help myself."

Carolyn's mother glanced at Carolyn's father, and that gentleman's left eye closed in an expressive wink.

"I guess you're going to have a son-in-law pretty soon, old lady," he chuckled.

As the front door closed upon Hicks, and he walked toward his boarding-house, there was an ecstatic smile upon his face. The taste of that kiss was still on his lips, and he was so happy that, for the time being, he forgot all about his troubles—forgot even that he was still very hungry, despite those nine pieces of angel-cake which he had devoured.

"Dear little girl," he murmured tenderly. "She's as pretty as a picture and as good as an angel—and she certainly can bake cake. I'm going to get up my nerve and propose to her to-morrow evening."

Then his face clouded, and he said to himself, with a groan:

"It can never be. I can't ask her to be my wife. I was forgetting. I'm a thief—a dirty, low-down, mean, contemptible thief.

I've given away five hundred dollars that didn't belong to me. I've put a stain on my character that can't be wiped away. I can never marry Carolyn now."

This self-accusing mood did not last long, however. He began to frame excuses for himself—to argue with himself that any man would have done the same as he under the same circumstances.

"If I hadn't been so terribly weak from hunger," he told himself, "it might have been different. I might have possessed enough moral courage to have resisted the temptation then.

"But when a man is starving, his moral stamina is weakened. Why, I've read that the police break down the will of the most stubborn prisoners by depriving them of food. That was it, of course—I was so hungry that I scarcely realized what I was doing.

"And, besides," he went on, reasoning with himself, "it wasn't exactly stealing. That is really altogether too harsh a word for it. I was merely borrowing the money. I intend to pay back every cent of the five hundred dollars, of course. I don't know just how and when I am going to get the money; but I'll get it somehow, and I'll restore every dollar of it to its rightful owner.

"If I can ascertain the name and address of the owner of that wallet, I'll send him the money anonymously later on. I can't send him it all in a lump sum. I'll send him five dollars regularly every week out of my salary for the next two years, and I'll pay him the regular rate of interest in addition. Surely no man could act more honorably than that."

He was so pleased with this idea that he began to feel quite virtuous, and Carolyn Walters did not seem so far beyond his reach.

By the time he reached his boarding-house he was entirely at peace with his conscience, and he was feeling so happy that he whistled a gay air from the latest musical comedy as he fitted his key in the front door.

His whistling came to an abrupt end, however, when the door opened, for he found himself confronting Mrs. Witherspoon, his landlady, whose acrid features wore a scowl terrible enough to have daunted the bravest of men.

"Mr. Hicks," she hissed, "I have been waiting up for you. I was determined not to retire until you arrived, even though I had to stay up all night."

"This is most kind of you, my dear Mrs. Witherspoon," said Hicks, pretending not to grasp the deadly significance of her words. "I assure you that I am much touched by this little evidence of your interest in me. It reminds me of my poor mother. She always used to wait up for me when I stayed out late, to make sure that I was all right, and to kiss me good night. You have always been like a mother to me, my dear, dear Mrs. Witherspoon."

He brushed his hand across his eyes as though to wipe away the liquid evidence of his emotion; but his irate landlady was not at all softened by these touching words.

"Fiddlesticks, Mr. Hicks!" she snorted. "Likewise, stuff and nonsense! I want my twenty-four dollars and four cents from you—and I want it right now."

"Oh," exclaimed Hicks in a shocked tone, "so that is why you have waited up for me? It is a bitter disappointment to me, Mrs. Witherspoon, to learn that your motive is merely mercenary."

"It is a bitter disappointment to me, Mr. Hicks, to find that you are not a man of your word," retorted his landlady viciously. "You promised yesterday that you would pay me what you owe this morning. Instead of that, you have deliberately kept out of my way to-day. My patience is at an end. I want my money."

"I regret, my dear Mrs. Witherspoon, that I cannot let you have it just now. Let us talk about it later in the week."

He made an effort to dodge past her and gain the security of his bedroom, but she determinedly blocked his path.

"No, you don't," she hissed. "You're not going up-stairs to bed until I'm paid in full. I'm tired of being made a fool of by you, Mr. Hicks. If you can give five hundred dollars to your church like a fine gentleman, you can afford to pay a poor widow woman what is due her. Either you give me my money right now or you'll sleep somewhere else to-night than in this house."

"I'll pay you in the morning," said Hicks desperately. "I can't give it to you now—honestly I can't, Mrs. Witherspoon. I've nothing but big bills in my pocket."

To reassure her, and induce her to let him go up-stairs to his bed, he pulled the wallet from his pocket and showed her the three one-hundred-dollar bills inside.

At sight of the money her little eyes glistened greedily, and the scowl disappeared from her face.

"Three hundred dollars, Mr. Hicks," she gasped. "What a lot of money!"

"You see," said Hicks loftily, "that I was telling you the truth. I have nothing but these big bills in my pocket, and therefor

it is impossible for me to settle my little account to-night. You must wait until to-morrow, when I can get change."

"I can make change for you right now," she exclaimed eagerly. "Give me one of those bills, Mr. Hicks, and I'll give you seventy-five dollars and ninety-six cents. I've that much money in the house."

Hicks hesitated. He did not exactly like the idea of spending any more of the money which was not his. But, after all, he reflected, since he had already taken the liberty of borrowing five hundred dollars from the unknown owner of that wallet, he might as well borrow an additional twenty-four dollars and four cents.

Surely a few dollars more or less could make no serious difference.

"I guess I'll let her have it," he said to himself. "It will be a great relief to me to have her confounded claim settled."

He handed her one of the hundred-dollar bills, and she slowly counted out the change, her vinegary features cracking into a smile as she pocketed his money.

"Thank you, Mr. Hicks. You are a gentleman," she said. "I knew that you wouldn't disappoint me."

Her attitude toward him was now so genial that Hicks decided he would take advantage of the agreeable change by asking her to serve him a little supper.

Although such a request was without precedent in her establishment, Mrs. Witherspoon graciously consented to go down to the kitchen and fix him up some sandwiches and a cup of cold tea as a token of her renewed good-will.

Hicks went to bed thoroughly happy. All his troubles seemed to him to be at an end. He had settled with the minister of the Park Avenue Baptist Church, settled with his landlady, satisfied the cravings of his stomach, and—what was the most blessed thought of all—he had every reason to believe that Carolyn Walters reciprocated his love and would not reject his proposal of marriage.

"I'll ask her to marry me to-morrow evening," he said to himself as he climbed into bed. "It will be impossible, of course, to support a wife on my present salary—especially as I'll have to pay the owner of that wallet five dollars a week for the next hundred and five weeks—but we can have a long engagement, and, in the meantime, I am bound to better my position.

"Perhaps a year from now old Granger will make me a partner in the firm, or perhaps Carolyn's father will take me into his business. Some such opportunity is bound to turn up. I'll propose to her to-morrow evening."

All night long he dreamed of Carolyn Walters and he was still dreaming of her in the morning, when he was rudely awakened by a knocking on his door.

It was Saunders. That young man entered his room apologetically when Hicks had opened the door.

"Say, old man," he said, "I'm sorry to bother you; but could you let me have that five dollars and twenty-five cents you owe me. I'm awfully short, and you know you promised to let me have the money as soon as you got one of those big bills changed into smaller ones.

"Saunders," said Hicks severely, "you're a terrible nuisance. I don't think I shall ever permit you to lend me any money again. You make too much fuss about it. Here's the trifling sum I owe you."

He handed his grateful creditor a five-dollar bill and a quarter, from the change of the hundred-dollar bill, which he had received from Mrs. Witherspoon.

"I guess the owner of that wallet won't mind if I borrow another five dollars," he said to himself. "Come to think of it, I guess I'll use a little more of his money and pay off all my various small debts."

He finished dressing just as the breakfast-bell rang, and, whistling a merry air, he descended to the dining-room.

At the bottom of the stairs stood his landlady. Hicks greeted her pleasantly, happy to think that there was no longer any necessity to dodge her.

"Good morning, my dear Mrs. Witherspoon," he said. "I hope that you slept well."

Greatly to his surprise she sprang upon him like an enraged lioness and clawed his face with her sharp finger-nails.

"Wretch! Scoundrel! Swindler!" she screamed. "Give me back my money!"

"Why, my good woman," he gasped, turning pale with astonishment and alarm, "what is the meaning of this?"

"I'll show you the meaning of it," she shouted. "I'll show you pretty quick. I'm going to send for a policeman and have you arrested. I'll teach you that you can't work such a contemptible trick on me."

"But what have I done?" he protested.

"What have you done?" she screamed. "As though you didn't know, you base deceiver. Look at this—just look at it."

She held the hundred-dollar bill which he

had given her close enough to his eyes to enable him to read the following legend engraved on its back:

CHEW CHUGGLE'S CHOICE CHEWING TOBACCO.
ONE HUNDRED DELICIOUS CHEWS FOR TEN CENTS.

CHAPTER VIII.

UP AGAINST IT.

WITH trembling fingers, Hicks took the wallet from his pocket and examined the yellow backs which remained inside the purse he had found.

His worst fears were confirmed. The bills were perfect fac-similes of a hundred-dollar note on one side; but on the reverse there was no attempt to carry out the deception; amid a mass of scroll-work was engraved on each bill the advertisement of "Chuggle's Choice Chewing Tobacco."

And then he shuddered, and his lower jaw dropped as a horrible thought came to him. He had given the minister of the Park Avenue Baptist Church five of those bills.

It was vain to hope that the money which he had handed to the pastor was genuine, when these bills were not. Even Hicks's abundant supply of optimism would not permit him to believe that there was any difference between the five other yellow-backs and those which he now held in his hand.

No, he had paid his debt to the church in five worthless pieces of paper—five advertisements for Chuggle's Choice Chewing Tobacco! And the worst of it was that the reverend gentleman would surely think that he had worked this deception on him wilfully. He could never be made to believe that he had been the victim of an honest mistake.

The good man probably had discovered the imposition by this time, and was burning with righteous indignation.

No doubt, he would denounce Hicks to the congregation. Perhaps, even, he would go to the length of having him arrested for fraud. At all events, it was certain that he would inform the Waltrses of what had occurred, and Carolyn and her parents would never forgive the perpetrator of the outrage.

In the midst of these distressing reflections, Hicks was roused by the raucous voice of Mrs. Witherspoon, who spoke with a forced calmness that was terrible to behold.

"Now, Mr. Hicks, I'll give you one chance—just one, before I send for the police. Hand me over that seventy-four dollars and ninety-six cents which you swindled me out of last night plus the twenty-four dollars and four cents which you owe me, and I'll overlook your villainy this once and let the matter drop."

"I can't settle your bill right now, Mrs. Witherspoon," said Hicks, "but I'll give you back your change with pleasure, and I'll pay you what I owe—to-morrow. Surely, you'll be satisfied with that, like a good woman. I assure you that I didn't mean to deceive you. This is all an unfortunate mistake."

"I don't believe you," she snapped. "I am satisfied that you did it on purpose, and if it wasn't for the notoriety, I'd have you arrested, as you richly deserve."

"As for your promise to settle my bill to-morrow," she went on scornfully, "I'm sure that you won't keep it. However, you can hand me over the money you swindled me out of last night, and then we'll talk about that twenty-four dollars and four cents."

She held out her hand expectantly, and Hicks started to produce the change she had given him.

His pale face turned a shade paler as he suddenly recollected that he could not give her all he had received from her. He was five dollars and twenty-five cents short.

"Well," demanded his landlady sharply, "what are you hesitating about? Hurry up and give me my money."

"Wait—wait a minute, please, until I see Saunders," he stammered.

"You can't see Mr. Saunders," she said. "He's gone out. He had an early business appointment and left without breakfast; and, anyway, what's he got to do with my change, Mr. Hicks?"

"He's got five dollars and twenty-five cents of it," replied the miserable young man. "I gave it to him this morning. If I can't get it back from him, I'm afraid I'll have to ask you to trust me to that amount, Mrs. Witherspoon."

At these words his landlady uttered a shriek of fury, and again flew at Hicks like a wildcat, clawing his face with her sharp finger-nails.

"Bridget," she screamed to the maid in the kitchen, "run right out and get a policeman. My patience is at an end. I'm going to show this thieving scoundrel no mercy."

Hicks, struggling desperately, managed to free himself from her frenzied grasp.

Quick as a flash, he grabbed a hat from

the hall-stand—the first hat that came to his hand—and darting to the front door, he flung it open and fled to the street.

It was not until he had run like the wind for several blocks and, glancing behind him, satisfied himself that there was no pursuer at his heels, that he ventured to slacken his pace.

Then, with a shudder, he reviewed the malancholy situation.

"I guess I'm in pretty bad, now," he groaned. "I've saved myself from immediate arrest by running away; but that woman is sure to go to court and swear out a warrant for me.

"And even if I manage to square matters with her in some way, I've still got that pastor to reckon with. I guess I'm done for. The boss will be sure to hear of this and I'll lose my job.

"Carolyn will hear of it and I'll lose my girl. The police will get me and I'll lose my liberty. I guess I'm at the very end of my rope. I might as well give up."

It was not in the nature of Hicks, however, to give up while there was the faintest ray of hope.

He began to wreck his brain for a way out of the serious predicament in which he found himself and, at length, he fancied that he had hit upon a feasible plan, albeit a daring one.

He decided that he would go right away to the Rev. Dr. Baker and make a full confession to that good man.

The minister, he reflected, had a kind and sympathetic countenance and, being of the cloth, he doubtless would be apt to regard the failings of his fellow men with leniency and charity.

When he had heard the entire sad story, the reverend gentleman might be disposed to forget and forgive.

Hicks devoutly hoped so, anyway. He hoped, too, to be able to persuade Dr. Baker to refrain from exposing him to Carolyn and her parents. He also thought that it was quite within the bounds of possibility that the clergyman could be induced to lend him enough money to settle the claim of Mrs. Witherspoon in full.

Hicks's astounding and abiding optimism was beginning to have full sway again.

He could already see the sunlight breaking through his cloud of troubles. The more he thought of the plan the better it seemed and the more likely to succeed.

He made up his mind, that he would make a plain, businesslike proposition to the Rev. Dr. Baker. He would offer to pay his five-hundred-dollar indebtedness to the church in weekly instalments of five dollars.

Surely, he argued, the clergyman would be struck by the manliness and straightforwardness of this proposition and would not hesitate to accept it. On the contrary, the good man probably would wring his hand and compliment him upon his honesty of purpose and his self-sacrifice.

With a much lighter heart, Hicks entered a drug-store and consulted a directory for the address of the pastor of the Park Avenue Baptist Church.

Half an hour later he was being ushered into the Rev. Dr. Baker's front parlor by a servant, who informed him that the pastor was at present busy with another caller, but would be at leisure in a little while.

As Hicks sat awaiting the fateful interview, his ear caught a conversation in the next room which was separated from the room in which he sat, by a glass sliding-door.

"You say, doctor, that there were five one-hundred-dollar bills," said a deep, masculine voice.

"Yes, captain," replied a voice which Hicks recognized as belonging to the clergyman. "That is right. Five one-hundred-dollar bills. Oh, I do hope that you are successful in arresting the scoundrel."

"We'll get him, all right, sir," replied the deep bass voice. "But are you sure that you will care to prosecute, doctor, when we do get him."

"I most certainly shall," declared the other, with an emphasis which made Hicks tremble. "You can rest assured that there will be no let-up on my part, captain."

"Well, I know that you ministers are tender-hearted, and that you generally hesitate to send men to prison," remarked the man addressed as captain. "I want to make sure, doctor, that if we arrest this fellow, we shall not have our trouble for nothing."

"You can be quite sure of that," replied the clergyman. "I hope that I am not hard-hearted nor vindictive, but I am not disposed to show any mercy in this case. I shall consider it my duty to prosecute.

"This rascal's offense is particularly atrocious. Any man who would perpetrate such a base outrage upon a minister of the Gospel is not deserving of mercy. Prison is the proper place for such an abandoned wretch, and I shall do my best to send him there."

Hicks waited to hear no more. He was

convinced now, that it would not be wise to put into execution the plan he had made.

Rising stealthily from his chair, he walked on tiptoe out of the parlor, gained the front door, closed it softly behind him, and hurried up the street.

"Gee whiz!" he gasped. "What a narrow escape. I certainly am up against it."

CHAPTER IX.

THE MAN IN THE PAWN-SHOP.

IT seemed to Hicks that there was only one thing left for him to do. He had in his pocket, over seventy dollars of the cash which Mrs. Witherspoon had handed to him in exchange for that bogus hundred-dollar bill. With that amount of money he could buy a steamship-ticket to some foreign port and get safely away before the police could find him.

He was convinced that this was his only chance of avoiding a long term in prison.

It was quite evident that he would be placed under arrest, if he remained in the city another day; and with Mrs. Witherspoon and the Rev. Dr. Baker as complainants against him, he would be shown no mercy by the court.

Hicks was bitterly disappointed in the Rev. Dr. Baker. He had not expected such hardness of heart from a man who wore the cloth. He thought the clergyman should have given him a chance to explain before putting the matter in the hands of the police.

"What good will it do him to have me arrested and sent to prison?" he muttered. "He'll never get that five hundred dollars now, whereas, if he had given me a chance to make good, I would faithfully have kept my promise to pay five dollars a week out of my salary until the entire debt was paid off.

"However, since he has seen fit to take this harsh course, there is nothing for me to do but to run away. I suppose I haven't any right to use Mrs. Witherspoon's money for the purchase of a steamship-ticket; but self-preservation is the first law of nature, and I can't afford to be conscientious when I'm in such danger. I'll send her back every cent I owe her, later on, when I've made my fortune in some foreign land."

Then his thoughts turned to Carolyn Walters, and he groaned as he realized that there was no chance of making her his wife, now—no chance of ever seeing her again, even.

"I'd like to go to her and say good-by, before I sail," he said to himself wistfully. "But I dare not do it. It would be too dangerous.

"She and her parents have probably heard all about those five fake bills by this time, and if I went to the house they'd no doubt summon the police and have me placed under arrest. I don't know whether Carolyn would do anything as harsh as that; but I am quite sure that her folks would."

He decided that he would wait until he had crossed the ocean and was beyond the reach of the law, and then he would write a long letter to Carolyn, explaining everything from the very beginning, and begging her not to be too severe in her judgment of him.

He would beseech her to give him another chance—to consent to wait for him for a few years until, by hard and honest labor, he had acquired wealth in some foreign land, and could return home in a position to make good his indebtedness to everybody, and, with his good name restored, ask her to be his wife.

This idea appealed to Hicks, and afforded him some comfort in the midst of his gloom. He began to turn over in his mind some effective phrases which he would use in his appeal to Carolyn.

He thought out such a touching and convincing letter that he was almost moved to tears by his own eloquence, and this led him to believe that it would produce the desired effect upon Carolyn.

Surely, when she had read his earnest and soul-stirring appeal her tender heart would be touched, and she would forgive him and consent to wait for him any length of time.

Hicks began to feel quite himself again. He decided that he would put those eloquent phrases on paper before he forgot them. He would write that letter to Carolyn, mail it before he sailed, and be on the high seas by the time it was in her hands.

He stepped into the lobby of a hotel with the intention of using the writing-room and the hotel's stationery. But that letter was never written.

As he passed the news-stand in the lobby his glance fell upon a large scare-head spread across the page of an evening newspaper on the counter.

The head-line read:

PASTOR HELD UP AND ROBBED.

Bold Highwayman Gets Five Hundred Dollars and Gold Watch from Rev. Dr. Baker, of Park Avenue Baptist Church.

With a gasp of amazement, Hicks pro-

ceeded to read the startling account printed under these head-lines.

It told how the minister had been accosted by a rough-looking man, who had held a revolver at his head and demanded everything that he had on him.

The paper stated that Dr. Baker was just returning from the home of Mr. H. Walters, a member of his church, where he had been to collect money for the proposed new church-building, and that he had in his pocket Mr. Walters's check for a hundred dollars and five one-hundred-dollar bills.

The highwayman had taken the bills and the minister's gold watch, leaving him the check and some small change.

Dr. Baker, the newspaper went on to say, had reported this outrage to the police, who were now scouring the city for the bold robber.

A great light had come to Hicks, and he uttered a joyous exclamation.

He perceived, now, that the conversation which he had overheard in the minister's house had not referred to himself at all, but to this daring hold-up.

The minister did not seek his arrest. There was no longer any reason for him to run away. He could go back to Dr. Baker's house and carry out his original intention of confessing everything to the good man, and beseeching his help.

And then, suddenly, the full significance of that piece of news in the evening paper dawned upon him.

There was no need for him to confess at all, now. The highwayman had saved him. Those five bills had been stolen before the Rev. Dr. Baker had had a chance to discover that they were bogus.

Unless the thief was captured the minister would never know that Hicks had handed him five advertisements of Chuggle's Choice Chewing Tobacco instead of five hundred dollars in real money. Where ignorance was bliss, Hicks reflected, it would be folly to put him wise.

Thanks to his unknown friend the highwayman, Hicks was delivered from his most serious predicament. Except from the moral aspect, his debt to the church was as good as settled now, and Carolyn and her parents would never know that he had not paid the money.

There remained only his trouble with Mrs. Witherspoon to be disposed of, and Hicks was so encouraged by his success in getting out of the other predicament that he felt confident that he would be able to square matters with his irate landlady in some manner.

It seemed to be his lucky day, indeed, for, as he was leaving the hotel, he encountered an old friend whom he had not seen for a long time.

"Hicks, old fellow," exclaimed this man, wringing his hand heartily, "I am mighty glad to see you."

"Not nearly as glad as I am to see you," retorted Hicks. "You've arrived just at the right moment. Lend me thirty dollars for a few days."

"Sorry," replied the other. "I'd be glad to let you have it, but I'm dead broke."

"Don't turn me down," pleaded Hicks. "I've got to have the money. It's a matter of life or death."

"Is that so?" said his friend. "Well, if it's as bad as that, old pal, I guess I can help you out. I am telling the truth about not having any dough. I played the races yesterday and got stung for my entire roll; but I've got a diamond in my necktie which ought to produce a couple of hundred. I was thinking of pawning it, anyway, to keep myself going until next pay-day. Let's go hunt a hock-shop and I'll fix you up."

Joyfully Hicks accompanied his jovial benefactor to the nearest sign of the three brass balls.

As they entered the pawn-shop Hicks heard a familiar voice saying to the man behind the counter:

"Will you extend me a loan of five hundred dollars on these, please?"

Hicks uttered a cry of astonishment.

If he had caught the President of the United States pawning his watch, he could not have been more amazed and shocked.

For the man standing in front of the counter offering some articles of jewelry for the pawnbroker's inspection was the Rev. Dr. Baker, pastor of the Park Avenue Baptist Church.

CHAPTER X.

A GOOD IMPULSE.

THE Rev. Dr. Baker was plainly very ill at ease.

He turned first very red and then very white when he recognized Hicks; but he speedily recovered his composure.

"Mr. Hicks," he said, "I would not for worlds have had you discover me here. It is most embarrassing, and yet, after all, I have no reason to feel ashamed.

"Despite the prejudice that exists against pawn-shops, I consider the transaction of obtaining a temporary money loan on one's personal possessions a perfectly honorable proceeding. In my opinion it is much better to obtain money in this manner than to borrow from one's friends.

"I will frankly confess that I have come here with the intention of pawning my wife's jewels."

"But why?" protested Hicks in a shocked tone. "Surely a man in your position, my dear doctor, has no reason to be in financial difficulties?"

"I presume you have read in the papers that I was robbed last night, on my way home from the Walters's," replied the minister with a sad smile.

"That five hundred dollars what you gave me, Mr. Hicks, was stolen by the unscrupulous miscreant who held me up.

"I consider myself personally responsible for that money. It belonged to our dear church, and it was entrusted to my keeping. I should have sacrificed my life, if need be, rather than give it up.

"I am ashamed to say that I was so startled by the revolver in that wretch's hand that I made no outcry. I allowed him to take the money—the church's money—without even attempting to call for assistance.

"Therefore I deem it my duty to replace the five hundred dollars that was stolen, and, as I am very short of funds just now, and my annual salary is some months off, my good wife has consented to my placing her jewelry in pawn."

"But couldn't you have borrowed the money from one of your congregation?" inquired Hicks in a choking tone.

"I suppose I could," replied the good man, with a smile, "but I think this is a much more satisfactory way. I would rather not be under obligations to any of my friends.

"And, besides, I want to punish myself for my cowardice last night, and I think this humiliation is something of a punishment. It is the first time I have ever been in a pawnshop in all my life."

There was a lump in Hicks's throat, and a good impulse was stirring in his heart.

"Dr. Baker," he said huskily, "you are a saint. You're the best man I have ever met, and I'm not going to let you be deceived. No, sir; I'm not going to let you pawn your wife's jewelry on my account. I am going to tell you the truth. It is I who owe the five hundred dollars to the church, not you."

"My dear young friend," exclaimed the reverend gentleman, "your heart is in the right place; but your logic is very poor, I'm afraid. You do not owe the money. Your indebtedness to the church ended last night when you handed me those five one-hundred-dollar bills."

"I didn't hand you five one-hundred-dollar bills," cried Hicks. "I handed you five advertisements of Chuggle's Choice Chewing Tobacco. They were worth no more than the paper they were printed on.

"Your noble example, sir, has caused me to decide to tell you the whole truth. I am not going to keep silent any longer, no matter what the consequences to me may be."

He proceeded to tell the astonished minister everything that had happened since his arrival at the church that fatal Sunday morning.

"My young friend," said the minister sadly, when he had finished, "I am very much grieved to hear all this, and very disappointed in you. You have shown yourself to be lamentably weak at every stage of this regrettable affair.

"Your generous action in confessing everything now, however, when you might have kept silent and got out of your predicament entirely, shows that you are honest at heart.

"I thank you for having saved me from the necessity of placing my wife's jewelry in pawn. There is no longer any necessity for me to do so, of course, since there is no five hundred dollars missing.

"I shall change my list, and put down your contribution as five dollars—the amount you originally pledged—instead of five hundred dollars."

"Won't you let the five hundred stand?" pleaded Hicks. "I'll pay it to you in weekly instalments of five dollars. Please let me do it."

The minister shook his head.

"No, my boy. Since you are in such financial straits, I do not think that you have any right to make such a large contribution, and you have no right to contract such a debt.

"Take my advice, my young friend, and try to live within your means in future. Believe me, it is the only way to be happy—and honest."

Very sadly Hicks walked back to his boarding-house. Even the fact that, thanks to the thirty dollars his friend loaned him, he was able to pay Mrs. Witherspoon all that he owed her, and thereby appeased her wrath, did not tend to lift his gloom.

"The minister is right, however," he said to himself grimly. "After I've paid back that thirty dollars and the five dollars I still owe the church, I'll never get into debt again. I'm going to live as straight as a ramrod in future. This has been a good lesson to me."

It was not until the next morning, when he received a letter from Carolyn Walters, that his heart grew light again.

Carolyn's letter was very short. It read as follows:

DEAR OWEN:

Dr. Baker was here to-night and told us everything.

Papa was very angry, first of all, and swore that you should never enter this house again.

But good Dr. Baker succeeded in persuading him that you have suffered enough and deserve another chance.

Come to dinner to-morrow evening. I am going to make another cottage pudding.

I was very disappointed that you did not come this evening, as you promised; but, of course, I understand the reason why you stayed away.

Expecting to see you this evening without fail,

Your friend,

CAROLYN.

P. S.: Do you chew Chuggle's Choice Chewing Tobacco?

(The end.)

A Matchless Picnic.

BY FRANK WILLIAMS.

A Question of a Lot of Smoke, but No Fire at All.

NAT IVINS rushed into the sitting-room, heated, flushed, and very much in a hurry.

"Have you finished mending my coat, mother?" he asked breathlessly of the gray-haired little woman who sat by the window with the garment across her knees. "You know you didn't call me early, mother, so I can't very well be Queen of the May, but I can be on my way to take one canoeing, if that pocket is mended."

His mother looked up and smiled.

"All ready, Nat," she said, giving a final stitch and smoothing out the coat. She snipped the thread, took off her thimble and held the coat up for his inspection.

"Good for another decade," he exclaimed banteringly. "It saw the beginning of the present century, and it ought to be in at the finish, if I know anything of the mending."

All of which was rank exaggeration, to be sure.

"Who are you taking out this day?" she asked, smiling. "I almost lose track, there are so many."

"The same one I have paddled up the Lehigh with the last four times," he replied, and his face became serious for the minute. "Mother, she is a pretty good sort and I like her more than any one I have ever met here. As long as I am the provider for this family," he added mischievously, "I shall feel it my duty, some time, to provide you with a daughter-in-law."

"I shall live happily, if that is to be the worst of my troubles," the mother replied, and lifted her face to be kissed as her son struggled into the coat and made preparations for a rapid departure.

"As to-day is a holiday, Belle Stacey and I are going to paddle up to Old Mill Island, where they had the fair last summer, and take our supper with us. We expect to make our own coffee over a camp-fire and paddle back in the moonlight at a discreet and reasonable hour. You can expect me about ten o'clock. Good-by."

"Good-by," replied his mother, and Nat hurried out of the door.

"Ought to have the time of my life, to-day," he thought to himself as he hurried down Northampton Street, in the warm sunlight of the bright September day. "There's nowhere to go but away, and nowhere to come but back again; nothing to work at but

enjoyment, and nobody to work with but Belle.

"It looks to me like an enjoyable menu from soup to nuts, so to speak, and if she is as game for a good time as I am, there won't be anything to kick about but the flight of time."

He took a car out Northampton Street to Fifteenth, then turned east to Newcombe, and finally arrived at the hedge fence and white-pillared gateway of the Stacey residence. He looked across the broad, green lawn, shaded with its big elms, to the cool porch. There he saw the alluring figure of Belle, rocking lazily in a big chair.

"Ahoy, matey," he called informally as he entered the gate.

"Ahoy, captain," she called back, rising from the chair and standing at the head of the steps waiting his approach.

"Splinter me gun'les," he returned, slapping his white hat rakishly over one ear, "it looks like a fair wind, so' by nor', and we should be clearing port. Are the stores ready?"

"Aye, aye, sir," she replied, laughing. "Bless me barnacles, if the captain isn't in a rare good humor to-day."

Whereat they both laughed and shook hands cordially, as Nat arrived at the top step. He sat down to cool off for a minute before starting out in the hot sun again, and she brought him a glass of lemonade to assist in the process. Next she appeared through the screen-door with two huge boxes, one under each arm. He sprang to relieve her of the burden.

"Here are the stores, captain," she smiled. "Sandwiches, deviled eggs, olives, pickles, salt and pepper, bananas, peaches, cake, pie, and the materials for making coffee."

"Who else is joining the party?" he asked after reckoning up the lunch.

"No one," she replied, perplexed. "Why?"

"Judging by the supplies, I thought you had in mind starting a bread-line."

"That's not at all necessary when you're along," she replied in mock scorn. "When shall we start?"

"Right now, an it please you, matey."

"Aye, aye, sir," and she ran in to get her hat and summer coat.

Nat Ivins had to admit to himself that he had, to speak nautically, received several telling broadsides from the frigate "Love," and he had also to admit that his replies were for the most part rather weak and ineffective. He was fast veering into the wind in a more or less helpless condition, and was debating very seriously with himself whether or not there was enough resistance left in his craft to repel boarders.

He was quite frank to admit that, after all, he didn't feel very strongly about repelling them anyway, and quite possibly might strike his flag graciously to a delicate enemy, as all his forefathers had done before him. It was a decidedly un-American thing to do, but the appalling frequency with which Americans did it gave him plenty of precedent.

His marine reflections were interrupted by the reappearance of the mate.

"Prepare to board," he said instantly, and blushed at the inanity.

"Where is the ship?" asked Belle, and he realized that, after all, she wasn't cognizant of his thoughts, although he intended she should be at some future time.

"Down at the foot of the hill by the boat-house," he replied, and regained his composure before she noticed he had lost it.

Tucking the bundles under his arm, he led the way. They went through the back garden and down a steep, winding path to the railroad tracks. These they crossed, descended the embankment, and were soon at the boat-house. He pushed the canoe out over the wooden rollers, and, with her help, let it down gently into the river, after which they stowed the lunch-boxes on the floor amidships.

"All aboard, matey," he laughed. "You mind the bow, and I'll take a trick at the wheel."

All of which meant for her to take the forward paddle, while he took the one aft and did the steering.

He helped her into the wabbly craft, and then got in scientifically himself.

"Cast off your bowlines," was the final command, and the next moment they were headed out into the stream.

"What land do we explore to-day?" she called back over her shoulder.

"Old Mill Island—the only ten-acre lot in Pennsylvania that has a real old Dutch windmill in captivity. I haven't been up there since the fair last year, and I think it will be interesting to look over the place, particularly as they ran the old mill steadily for several months during the summer, and I should like to see what condition it is in now."

"Oh, that's splendid!" she returned enthusiastically. "I have wanted to go there for ever so long, but haven't had the chance until now."

The water purled under the prow, and they swept along with firm, even strokes. All about them were other canoes with their occupants, and the trip developed into a battle of the wits, for every one knew every one else, as is always the case in a small town, and nearly every one was bent on the same pleasure as Nat and Belle.

There was also considerable rivalry in the matter of securing favorite camping-spots, and very soon the greater part of the excursionists participated in a regular 'varsity race for the various points along the river.

"Guess we won't let any steam off that way," was Nat's comment as he watched the heated exertions of the others. "Our island is so far beyond where most of these people are going that we need to develop staying powers instead of speed. It's a good five-mile pull, but you mustn't do any more of it than makes you feel absolutely comfortable. Hear, matey?"

"Yes, captain," she replied, showing a flushed smile, as she half turned. The warm wind blew wet strands of hair around her neck, which was singularly white, considering the rich copper-brown of her arms. "I'll take a rest now, if you don't mind."

He threw the cushions to her end of the canoe, and sat down in the bottom of it to keep the weight as low as possible and prevent treacherous pitching when she turned, which she proceeded to do in a thoroughly seamanly manner.

With her facing him, Nat found that the whole face of nature along the river had taken on added beauty. The tall green trees never seemed so deliciously cool and restful, nor did he remember that he had ever before noticed the delicate tracery of wind gusts along the water as he did this afternoon. The sky seemed almost an azure bowl, and the girl seated before him seemed the fairy queen who was responsible for it all.

"I see the pontoon bridge up ahead," announced Nat. "When we get there I guess I'll have a little rest and a smoke. That is the three-mile post, and the fires must be fed or the engine will break down."

Fifteen minutes easy paddling brought them to the bridge, under which they could just pass, and Nat swung the canoe round broadside to one of the pontoons and let the gentle currents keep it there while he wiped his perspiring forehead and sat down upon a cushion in the bottom. Then he pulled out the "makin's" and began to roll a cigarette with the skill of a connoisseur and the appetite of a starving man.

"I reckon that will taste good," remarked the lazy mate, slapping the water with her hands as she lay idly back, watching him.

"Well, I should rather hasten to remark it would," replied the captain emphatically, and reached for a match.

His reach wasn't long enough. None of his trousers-pockets contained as much as a splinter. He reached behind him and picked up his coat. There was a slightly anxious look on his brown face, also one of consuming desire. He reached into the little match-pocket first and fingered it carefully in growing excitement.

Then his hand slipped down into the large pocket on that side and wandered nervously about.

Not a match was to be found. He slapped the coat over in considerable impatience, sucking on the empty cigarette that hung in his mouth, and waxing more perplexed and concerned every moment. A careful search of this side of the coat seemed fruitless at first.

Then Nat gave an exulting shout and dragged forth—a toothpick.

Belle, who had been watching the feverish hunt, did not blame him for what he said, and told him so frankly.

Madly the hunt went on. He turned the garment this way and that way, inside out and hindside foremost, but it failed to make any difference in the sum total of matches discovered. That was both a negative quantity and a constant one.

As Nat said in the midst of his investigations:

"We had better work this out by algebra. We will let x, the unknown quantity, equal the matches we haven't got."

It was a hopeless and a fruitless search, and Nat finally admitted that he hadn't a match to his name. Belle looked carefully through the lunch-boxes, although she knew she had had no idea of putting such smelly things as sulfur matches with any respectable edibles. Nat liked her all the better for looking, anyway.

"Well, I guess we'll have to ask the people we meet from now on up to the Old Mill Island," said Captain Nat cheerfully, although his very vitals were itching for the long, luxurious drag of the smooth tobacco down his throat, and the gentle, fragrant exhale that followed. Violent or prolonged exercise stimulates the appetite for this weed that helps to soften some of the sharper realities of life, and Nat was very much subject to the pangs of his desire.

"Think you can give the good ship a lift, matey?" he asked, and extended her paddle to her.

"Yes; you're right, I can," replied Belle. "The commissary department forgot the matches, and the commissary department will now help locate some. You poor boy, you are in a terrible fix without a light. I can see it."

Again they headed up-stream. In sight there were but few canoes, which luckily were all drifting down with the current and would soon be met. The first one approached, and in it sat a young man lighting a pipe. Nat took a joyous imaginary inhale from his cigarette, and paddled madly toward the newcomer.

But, horror of horrors! Not only did he throw the match, but the box, too!

Nat stifled his momentary chagrin, and hailed:

"Hallo-o-o, Jack, will you give me a light? Haven't had a smoke in so long I am nearly half dead. I'll be right over."

They drew alongside, where Jack was sucking frantically.

"Awful sorry, old man," he said as the canoes joined. "I had twist in this pipe, and only one match to light it with. Consequently the stuff didn't get any kind of a draft going before the match went out, and I am just as badly off as you are, except I've had about three whiffs."

Nat groaned audibly. This was becoming torture. His mind, already disturbed over the matter, made keener the longing for the one thing in the world he didn't have—a puff of cheap tobacco.

"Much obliged," he said, and switched the bow of the canoe savagely up-stream again to meet the one or two others. As he straightened himself to the task of paddling, a thought struck him fair between the brain-lobes that almost made him frame a prayer.

"Great deviled eggs!" he thought. "If we don't get any matches, we are decidedly up the stump as a set of picnickers. This whole filibustering expedition will go to pieces for lack of a sliver of wood with a red sulfur end on it. We can't have a camp-fire, we can't have hot coffee, we can't have any smokes to comfort ourselves, and you can bet at long and safe odds that we won't have any fun!

"The very existence of this afternoon's and evening's pleasure depends upon a match or matches, and if I am going to get buncoed this way after the beautiful start of things, I may as well order the coroner's wagon, as far as my making any headway with her ladyship goes. Things are looking decidedly bad for yours ever."

He wondered if Belle had fathomed his thoughts, or if the contingency that confronted him had risen in her mind. He sincerely hoped not and believed not, for the reason that the conversation which she was keeping up nobly during his rather rude and stunned silence was as cheerful as ever before.

He tried to enter into the banter of it, but made considerable of a mess of things, and when he essayed to be funny, felt like an elephant looks sitting in a dining-room chair.

The next canoests they encountered were frank to admit that they hadn't any matches. The man was one of Nat's old friends who had become engaged to a Puritan, though of rather Parisian tastes himself, and had agreed to cut out smoking, if she would cut out Sunday-school. Both were suffering from the deprivations thus imposed, and Nat's predicament caused them much amusement and some comfort.

"It's a good thing to begin practising early," called Bert to Nat, "because then it won't be so hard when you really do become engaged."

He looked meaningly at the pair.

They proceeded up the stream, and Nat forgot all about wanting tobacco watching the color surge up into Belle's neck and ears.

"Ah, there's a whole flotilla coming down at once right near the end of the island," cried the mate exultingly. "The canoes are all tied together, and there are fully six of them. They will help us out surely."

"I'm working all the drag I have with the powers that they do," replied the wretched captain of the ill-starred craft, who had long before thrown his cigarette away, and stood ready at any minute to make another when occasion arose.

The flotilla swept abreast, and Nat gave one long howl of anguish.

"They're all Theological Seminary students," he wailed, whereat the mate ceased paddling entirely and joined with his lamentations some decidedly delicious laughter.

"Let's try them, anyway, captain," she suggested, and they paddled over.

"Hallo, got a match aboard there?" he hailed, and the answer came back almost unanimously: "No, I don't use them," from all six of the students, who were tuning up for another hymn.

"Matey," said Nat Ivins seriously, "there's just one more chance." He looked

earnestly and scrutinizingly ahead, and then continued: "That little boat you see coming is Mayor Masters's launch, and if the judge can't give us a light, no one on the earth can, for he has a cigar in his mouth from morning till night, and is forever lighting one, over and over again."

The launch approached rapidly, cutting up a swath of foam and chugging noisily.

"He must be making nearly ten miles an hour, if he's making a foot," said Nat, and as he spoke he waved his arms and shouted.

At the same instant the launch veered toward the canoe and the engine stopped.

"Hallo there in the canoe," came the bellow of Judge Masters across the water, "have you got a match with you?" And then, as he approached nearer: "Oh, is that you, Ivins? Well, I've been thirty miles up the river, and haven't had a smoke for three hours. For goodness' sake, give me a match. I'm about all in for a taste of the weed, and have been driving the boat at top notch to get into civilization where I could connect with a little divine fire."

The situation was too much, and Nat burst out laughing.

"Judge," he said, "I've been trying to borrow a match on this river for the same purpose for over an hour, and I was stopping you as a last resort. I'd give fifty cents right now for ten of them."

"Say, this is terrible," exclaimed Judge Masters, and reached for the crank-handle. "Can I give you a tow to town?"

"No, thanks, judge," replied Nat, "we came up here to eat supper on Old Mill Island, and eat it we shall."

"All right," panted the judge, cranking his hardest. "Good-by."

"Good-by," replied Nat, and the launch sputtered down the river.

"Matey," continued Nat, turning to his companion, "we may as well be frank with each other. We came up here to boil coffee over a camp-fire, and have the very best kind of a time. And now because of this business of having no matches, the whole little picnic is on the verge of destruction. I don't know what you want to do, but to my mind it seems rather foolish not to carry out our plans now that we have had a five-mile paddle, and it is drawing toward supper-time. What do you want to do?"

"Well, Nat," Belle said after a pause, "I think your plan is the best. We can inspect the old mill, and then eat our supper without fire or the coffee, and drift down to town again, as we had first agreed. I know I'm not going to let a little bother like a fire interfere with a whole evening's pleasure. I suggest that we go ashore now and look over the mill, so that we can eat in the twilight, and start drifting down when the moon rises."

"What a sensible person you are!" replied Nat gratefully.

He headed the canoe toward the little wooded island, in the center of which rose the great sail-like arms of the Dutch windmill. After beaching and hauling the boat well up on shore, the two hid the lunch-boxes under a thick bush, and proceeded inland.

There was nothing very unusual about the old mill except that it had seen a century and a half of time, and had been used only last year at the county fair to grind corn-meal for the edification and education of visitors.

The two adventurers rambled through it, inspecting the huge stones and rummaging about in the loft where the mill-dust lay thick. Because of the heat and drougth this almost stifled them when it was disturbed and flew around in the air. A brief tour about the island in the faint hope of finding some other party which might possibly have a match proved vain, and the two returned to their camping place.

"I have an inspiration," suddenly bubbled Belle. "Can't you rub two sticks together like the Indians used to, and make a fire? Or, if you can't do that, perhaps you could strike a spark from two stones into some dry moss—goodness knows, it's dry enough."

"Well," replied Nat, "the nearest I come to redskin lore is that I pass the wooden Indian outside of Jackson's cigar-store about twice a day. However, your striking-spark suggestion is a good one, and I shall immediately put it into execution. How would it be if you laid out the supper while I pretended to be the first cave-man in the process of discovering flame?"

"Splendid," said Belle, and both immediately set to work.

It were better that a veil of silence be drawn over the unscientific efforts of the cave-man to evoke fire from the soft bits of slate and shale the island afforded. Suffice it to say they were unsuccessful though energetic enough, and the said cave-man was glad enough to rest his weary arms at the call of supper.

The moon was just climbing the tree-tops when they slipped the canoe again into the river and pointed homeward with the stream. The supper had been pleasant enough, but

Nat felt there was a great deal that had been lacking. The cheery coziness that is the first rule of a camp, and is produced only with a camp-fire, was missing, and Nat somehow realized that he was to blame for it.

"If I had only brought those matches," he said to himself ruefully, "what a splendid time we both would have had. I know I had them somewhere, and was probably so sure of myself that I didn't pay any attention to whether I had them or not.

"I have practically ruined my whole holiday, ruined Belle's, and, worse than either one, have got myself in wrong to such an extent with her ladyship that there will be no getting out of it for one long while. It's a strange thing how the smallest and most trivial things will upset one's whole existence for a time."

Nat's feelings about Belle Stacey's feelings seemed to be supported by her attitude. She was not the same jolly, happy girl who had paddled up to the island as first and only mate of the wabbly canoe. She seemed out of humor and was silent for the greater part of the trip.

Neither one mentioned the incident of the matches as the cause of their uncomfortable feelings, though both might have acknowledged it freely.

Nat was in despair until he found that the wonderful beauty of the night appealed to them both, and after that things were smoother, though obviously different from what they had been on the outward journey.

They were drifting with the current and Belle, ensconced among the cushions in the bow, was facing him. Just as they passed the pontoon bridge there was a muffled roar from somewhere up the river. Shortly afterward Belle sat up cautiously and said:

"Just look at that red glow in the sky back there. I wonder if there could have been a terrible explosion in the steel works at Ironville a couple of miles beyond the island.

"Nat, I believe there has and that the buildings are on fire. That is a terrible thing, for it may mean the loss of a great many lives. We must ask as soon as we get home."

The incident did not impress them.

An hour later, as they approached the boathouse from which they had started Nat uttered an exclamation of surprise.

"I wonder what's going on there," he said. "I've never seen such excitement as all that at the Paxinosa Yacht Club. They must be looking for some one."

The little dock which ran out into the water was brilliantly lighted with gasoline flares and torches, and from the water a large crowd of men was visible running back and forth on the bank, apparently in a state of great agitation.

"We must learn what all this is about," said Nat, and paddled strongly toward the landing.

When they were within fifty feet those along the water's edge set up a great shouting. "Here they come," "That's him," and "Now we've got him," rang over the water.

"For goodness' sake, they can't mean us, can they, Nat?" asked Belle excitedly, and he reassured her as best he could though very doubtful himself.

As they drew alongside there fears became convictions. Many hands seized the canoe and a man whose uniform proclaimed him to be a policeman leaned over and took Nat by the arm.

"Guess you'll have to come along with me, Ivins," he said. "You're the fellow we're looking for."

Nat's jaw dropped in amazement. Even as he helped Belle out of the canoe his mind was working with lightning rapidity trying to remember some misdemeanor he had committed. His efforts were vain.

"Look here," he said, turning to the officer, "what's the matter with you, anyway? I've done nothing. This young lady, who, by the way, you are embarrassing very much, and I have merely been out for a canoe ride since early this afternoon. I guess you'll have to look for some one else."

"Where did you go?" asked the officer, and the surrounding crowd edged closer.

"It's none of your business, but to make things quicker I'll tell you. We were up to Old Mill Island and had supper there."

Exclamations of triumph broke out in the crowd and the cop said:

"That's just what I thought. Now you come along with me without any more fuss. The young lady will be taken home by another officer. Get a start now."

"But what for?" cried Nat, furious and desperate. "I've done nothing."

"Perhaps you don't know that the old mill burned down an hour or so ago? Perhaps you don't realize that you two were the only ones on it? We got a telephone from up that way telling all about it, and more than that, your friends who have just come in say that you spent most of the afternoon collecting matches.

"Young feller, you've got to do some tall

talking to convince Judge Masters, if I know anything about him."

Nat's mind again worked quickly. He said a hasty and shamefaced good-by to Belle, who had rallied to his defense and was telling the true account of their doings to the interested bystanders, and then marched off with the policeman.

"Let me see the judge," he said. "He's an old friend of mine, and I guess we'll manage to arrange things satisfactorily before long."

"Oh, been in often this way, have you?" asked the cop, and Nat had to use all his self-control to restrain a series of most unpleasant remarks he had on his mind. "The judge is usually round the court-room until half past nine or ten and I guess we can get him yet," added the policeman. "But you'll have to go on the station-house blotter first."

Nat groaned, but aided the process as much as he could in order to facilitate it.

They found the judge in his room and he looked inquiringly over his spectacles at the pair as they entered.

"Hallo, what's this?" asked his honor, suddenly sitting up and throwing down the book he was reading. "You don't mean to say, Nat Ivins, that you're arrested and being brought before me for some crime or misdemeanor? Officer, state the charges."

At the end of the recital the judge looked grave. He then heard Nat's side of the story, beginning with the time they had met on the river and asked each other for matches. Finally he said:

"Nat, there is no doubt in my mind, but what you are innocent, but the evidence is hard against you. You will have to be clearly proven guiltless before this thing is done with, and in order to help you I want to make a few suggestions. You have, of course, searched him for matches?" he asked, turning to the officer, who nodded assent.

"Now, Ivins," the judge continued, "I advise you to see Cottrel and Murdock, the insurance men who hold the policies on the old mill. I shall, of course, parole you on your word, and you will have entire liberty to work up your defense. I shall set the case for a week from to-morrow morning."

For seven days Nat Ivins walked among his fellow men as one who had been branded with the iron of shame. He did not go near Belle, and he hated to walk the streets because people gathered in knots as he passed and talked over his chances of vindication.

But he was not idle. With the aid of his lawyer he subpœnaed as witnesses every one whom he had met on the river that fateful afternoon, even Judge Masters. He had long talks with the insurance agents, and his lawyer hunted up farmers who lived near the old mill and who had seen the whole thing. Through them it was learned that the explosion which Nat and Belle had heard had in reality occurred in the mill itself, and as this generally became known Nat was accused of having blown up the mill for some purpose which, as yet, had not been discovered.

The day of the trial was almost a holiday in town. The court-room was crowded, and when Nat entered it he saw Belle in one corner and received such a glance and smile from her as to make his heart leap with hope, and encourage him with the certainty of victory where he sat with his mother.

The prosecution was short. The circumstantial evidence was produced and seemed complete. Things looked decidedly dark for Nat Ivins, and whispers of concern ran around the court-room in his behalf.

The defense called its witnesses, all of whom testified that the accused had endeavored vainly to procure matches from them. This, though in itself a strong point, did not prove that Ivins did not have matches at the time, nor that he might not have been deceiving those to whom he applied.

At the last moment Nat's lawyer played his strong point. He called to the witness stand a Mr. James, an insurance expert from New York, who had examined the scene of the fire thoroughly, and had made himself acquainted with all the circumstances.

"Your honor," said Mr. James, "after a careful investigation of the premises on which the old mill stood and the position in which the unburned portions lay it is my expert opinion that the conflagration was due entirely to an explosion of mill dust, and not in any way to incendiarism.

"This explosion was induced by the very dry, hot weather which has been destroying crops in this vicinity for the last two months, and which acted as it often does in such cases upon the accumulations of dust in the cracks and corners in the upper story of the mill.

"I found window-frames and other portions of woodwork as far away as a hundred feet from the scene of the actual fire, and these proved, from their peculiar condition, and from the fact that they were parts of the upper story where the dust lay, that the explosion was due to mill dust and to mill dust only.

"I have notified the insurance agents of

the mill to this effect and they will collect their indemnity on that ground. There is no reason to suppose that Mr. Ivins was guilty of arson."

A storm of applause greeted the close of Mr. James's speech, and in a very few moments Nat walked out of the court-room a free and a happy man. Just outside the door he found Belle waiting.

Rushing to her he seized both of her hands and looked into her flushed face.

"Oh, isn't it splendid!" she cried happily. "I knew there would be no trouble about it from the first, though the whole trial has been as ridiculous as anything could be."

Nat laughed.

"Do you know, Belle," he said, "we were both pretty disgruntled about having no coffee and no camp-fire that night, but right now I am more glad that we didn't than anything else in the world. That very fact has been the means of clearing us both from even a suspicion, and has doubtless kept me from something worse that I hate to even think about. Oh, I am so glad!"

"So am I, Nat," she replied, and Nat, looking earnestly into her eyes, saw something there that swept from his mind such trivialities as matches, camp-fires, and legal and other trials.

The Price of the Past.

BY EDGAR FRANKLIN,

Author of "The White Streak of Disaster," "The Peril of the Paladin," "Washington or—Worse," etc.

Of a Man Who Has Lived Only to Place Burdens on Others, and Who Finds That His Middle-Aged Shoulders Are None Too Strong.

CHAPTER I.

FIFTY THOUSAND A YEAR.

"AND that covers everything," said Stanton in his hard, conclusive business tone. "You have all the basic principles now; the individual propositions will in time work out their own details."

Young Willis nodded, bunched his papers neatly, and arose with a hurriedly stifled yawn. Young Willis's keen brain was rather stiff and weary; a two-hour lesson is no light thing, when the lesson concerns such affairs as are to be handled by the prospective assistant general manager of so vast a concern as the General Products Company.

To be sure, it was all clear to Willis now; but it was fiendishly complicated. Even after his five years of other work in the General Products office, Willis felt that he had entered a new atmosphere during these concise, flinty lessons in the past management of the company's affairs; and yet Stanton alone had devised every infallible system, every kink and turn of his heavy duties.

And Willis stared at Stanton, general manager, and—ceased to wonder how he had accomplished it all.

One had no need to study Stanton's big, brawny frame to gain that queer impression of immense, merciless power; the face was all sufficient. Just on the verge of fifty, Stanton looked hardly more than forty.

The set, square jaw might have been solid rock; the short mustache emphasized rather than concealed the thin line of lips; the eyes were narrow and hard and stern, and completed the picture of a man set on earth to do big things—a man who was doing them daily with utter preassurance of complete success.

Years of hard labor with the General Products Company had not worn upon Stanton; rather, they had brought him merely to a point of perfect training.

Mr. Willis came out of his momentary meditation abruptly.

"There is nothing I have overlooked, Willis!" Stanton stated.

"There—no!" The younger man smiled as he made toward the door. "Thank you, Mr. Stanton."

"You start in here at the beginning of the quarter-year, don't you?"

"I—imagine so."

"Don't imagine things—know them," said Stanton evenly. "If you don't know them, find them out. Find out whether you're going to have the office on the northeast corner or the one next to this. Say that I prefer to have you next to me."

"Very well, sir," said Mr. Willis as he caught his breath slightly—and escaped.

The faintest hint of a smile came into Stanton's eyes as he looked after his assistant-to-be. There was good stuff in Willis; he might be a trifle raw, under the discipline of the rest of the Products Company; he'd come up soon enough to the forged-steel régime of Stanton's end; he'd learn that, whatever might be going on in other departments and branches, in the general manager's office one thought of nonsense, one irrelevant word, was grounds for reprimand and a neglect of the interests of the company.

The interests of the company!

Alone, Stanton actually smiled as he looked over his extensive private office, with its superb rug, its expensive display of mahogany and leather upholstering, its broad windows, with their panorama of the harbor across the foreground of little roofs below.

Well, he'd kept the interests of the company pretty well at heart for twenty-two years now—and the company had rewarded him fittingly. A salary of fifty thousand dollars a year for the last twelve years was good enough pay for even a capable man.

It matched the President's, to be sure, without the responsibility of heading a nation! But he'd earned it, every penny of it!

Yes, and perhaps more! Stanton swung round and took to contemplating the high blue sky. That was rather a rare phenomenon. Most business afternoons at half-past two found him bound tight to the desk, but to-day—

His mind seemed to be taking a backward trip to-day.

It was running along now to the days when Miller and Munroe had combined their two small factories, incorporated in a small way and called themselves the General Products Company.

It passed to the days when he had been a hard-working youngster in the little office; to the days when the General Products Company absorbed its fourth factory, killed competition in the States, and began to reach out for competition in other States. He had managed things then, as he managed them now, with a hard, heavy hand.

Memory ran on—to the time twelve years ago, when the whirlwind campaign of murdering opposition had been put into his own hands and his already big salary had been doubled. He'd taken charge of that campaign. He had come forth absolutely victorious. To-day there was barely a single manufacturing firm in their line in all the world that was not wholly owned by the General Products Company. They were a "trust" if ever one existed!

And he was the smasher of competition! With some curiosity, he found himself reflecting gravely that, during the last fifteen or twenty years, he'd caused some suffering in the name of the General Products Company.

Firms and individuals he had killed off without the slightest thought of mercy. Little fellows who had shown fight—foolish little fellows who had declined angrily to take the Products Company's price of next-to-nothing—well, they had been snuffed out like so many small candles, and he himself had attended swifty and surely to the snuffing.

And somehow or other, until to-day, it had all been a matter of cold-blooded, matter-of-fact business to Stanton; the weakest had played their little parts, contributed their mites to the combine, and gone to the wall.

It was their own fault, of course! Stanton scowled at the sky. Why—more particularly years ago—the Products people had offered some mighty fine propositions in the way of benevolent assimilation to some of the bigger people. The very little ones, to be sure, he hadn't bothered with very much, but—

Stanton ceased his sky-gazing with a grunt, and swung back to face his desk. What on earth had ever set his wits wandering in this mawkish fashion? Any of their late competitors would have knifed him just as cheerfully as he had knifed them; and now competition was wiped out and the whole job done—and because his own solitary brain has bested them all!

He laughed a little to himself, and his hard eyes softened suddenly. Stanton's thoughts were taking a new trend now, and—

The door opened a crack.

Fiske, the elderly vice-president of the company, after a peep, walked in slowly.

He was a small, thin man of sixty, kindly and weary of countenance. Once upon a time he had been intent upon breaking the General Products Company; for the last ten years he had been drawing his salary from them, and thankfully gathering from them five per cent on his old capital.

He smiled quizzically at Stanton as he paused, half-way across the office, and asked:

"Idle, John?"

"I—yes!" Stanton pushed away the papers before him and found a cigar. "I believe I've quit work for once, Peter."

"Um-um."

The small man strolled over and examined Stanton's engravings. It was perhaps the fiftieth time he had looked them over carefully, but to-day his inspection was prolonged and minute. Stanton watched him, with an absent little smile; until at last he turned back and made his slow way to a chair, and there he sat down with a sigh and asked:

"Going to leave early?"

"In a few minutes," the general manager said. "It will be the first time in eleven years that I've left this place before six!"

"Um-um." Fiske twiddled his thumbs and blinked at the rug. "John, how the dickens does it feel to know that your elder daughter is going to marry a title to-night?"

A little sigh escaped Stanton.

"She's not."

"Eh?"

"Von Lotz isn't a nobleman just yet," smiled the younger man. "Little Vera won't be wearing a title very soon."

Fiske nodded absently.

"Um. That's right. It's his father, isn't it." The gray head wagged on for a little. "And wealthier than sin, isn't he?"

"I believe that Franz's noble papa is a very rich man," Stanton said evenly, though with a faint note of irritation. Fiske and he were old friends, to be sure, but this kind of catechism—

"Boy's got money, too, hasn't he?" Fiske asked pointedly.

"Certainly! But—"

"Darned good thing!" said old Mr. Fiske as he leaned back, thrust his hands in his pockets, and stared at the ceiling.

Stanton regarded him with more than a little curiosity.

"Why the sudden interest in Von Lotz's income, Peter?"

Fiske looked at him in innocent surprise.

"Hey? Isn't it always even better to have your daughter marry the right man with money than the right man without it?"

"I—suppose it is," Stanton smiled. "We'll see you at the house?"

"I don't know." Fiske scratched his head. "Director's meeting this afternoon is going to keep everybody here pretty late. You're not going to attend, I take it?"

Stanton laughed outright.

"My one little share of stock hasn't attended a meeting in its official capacity for years, Peter. I've got my own end of the business here, and the board of directors is perfectly willing to let it stand as it is."

"Um-um." Mr. Fiske stood up and contemplated the assimilator. "John, you've got a queer job, haven't you?"

"Eh?"

"I mean, it isn't every day that a plain employee of a company draws twelve thousand five hundred dollars salary in advance every three months."

"Miller paid me fifteen dollars a week when I was earning it. The company he left behind is paying me fifty thousand because I'm earning it. Why?" said Stanton sharply.

"Only that I've wondered why you've never made yourself something of a money power in the concern itself, John." Fiske looked at him rather gravely. "A man that could invest thirty thousand dollars a year without starving anybody, and put it right in his own company—"

"What I have saved has been invested as I saw fit!" said Mr. Stanton, with an abruptness that admitted of no misconstruction.

Fiske pursed his lips and blinked a trifle.

"I didn't mean to offend you, John," he said.

Stanton nodded. The other turned and made slowly for the door again; and as he laid a hand on the knob he turned and looked straight at Stanton for many seconds, with lips parted and a very puzzled expression upon his wrinkled face.

"I was only—thinking!" he muttered.

And then he was gone, and Stanton rose briskly.

For one day at least he was done with dollars. Now a radically different task lay before him—the task of watching his Vera, his grown youngster, being snatched away from father and mother, brother and sister, by a tow-headed German upstart who'd own a title some day or other!

Stanton smiled rather ruefully at his hat, when he had found it. Well, it had to happen, some day, somehow.

Vera might have waited until she'd passed into her twenties, instead of spreading her wings at nineteen; but—Vera, like her father,

seemed to know her own mind perfectly, and young Franz von Lotz was the most desirable sort of citizen, even if he did hail from abroad and carry around the very essence of the devil's own mirthful mischief in his blue eyes.

He'd settle in the West—when both of them were thoroughly ready to settle down—and get down to the money-making business with all the force that every line of him bespoke.

Stanton made slow passage to the Subway and slow passage from it, farther up-town.

There was his big home on the corner, a block distant now. He approached it almost with a shuffle. Of course, it had all been impending for months, but now—well, now, its impending was limited to hours, and very few of them! To-night, there'd be one member less in the home.

Vera was going—Vera, the stately young society bud, the long-legged youngster of yesterday, the round, pugnacious toddler of day before! Stanton scowled impressively and—swallowed several times.

Why, even the canopy was in place! He looked at it as if it were some wholly new phenomenon; he did not wonder at the knot of children who gaped at it and under it and up it; he wondered that there wasn't a crowd.

And there were the two florists' wagons, glittering in their plate-glass and shining enamel! One of them was just clattering away, empty, the driver holding the reins high as he shaded a match for his cigarette, in as matter of fact a way as if he had been busy at a plain, every-day job! And—as Stanton passed under the canopy and up the steps—these other two who had emerged and were climbing on the second wagon were oblivious to everything save their own heated discussion of something concerning "Yankees" and "Giants."

Feeling something of a stranger in his own home, Stanton entered and silently surrendered his hat to his butler. He'd head for his study at the rear of the house, he thought, and sort of accustom himself to the all-pervading fresh flower odor, and all that it implied.

Or—he turned and entered the darkened drawing-room, scene of the florists' labors; and as the curtain fell behind him he stood, chin almost upon his chest, and surveyed the whole unusual scene, the perfect bower of roses, the rose altar, the mass of flower and green leaf, here and there and everywhere.

A slow, tremulous little smile came over his lips. It was all quite as it should be. It was all a trifle different from the setting of his own wedding to Martha Vane in the little Methodist parsonage; it was the wedding they were able to give their big girl, and—

"It is—perfect!" said a voice behind him. "Everything!"

Stanton turned.

Von Lotz was standing there, on the verge of leaving, evidently, for his motor-cap was in his hand and his duster over his arm.

Now his intent blue eyes were almost child-like as he took in the scene, and Stanton smiled more broadly.

"Yes," he said very softly. "Everything is perfect!"

CHAPTER II.

FUTURES ASSURED.

IT was all over!

The last carriage had long since rolled away; the last motor had puffed itself to distant silence in the night. The blaze of lights in the big central hall had dwindled to three or four incandescents now; there was no crush of people now, no vast, subdued chattering of low voices, no sound of music—nothing, indeed, save silent emptiness.

In the midst of it stood Stanton, silent as all the rest of it.

Vera was gone now—gone with her husband on a Western honeymoon aboard Tilling's magnificent private car—and a big emptiness remained in Stanton's heart.

And the swift-moving, silent picture before him now, as he stood in the rear doorway of his drawing-room, had nothing to offer in the way of enlivenment. There were men there, to be sure—his butler and his second man and three or four busy workers from the florist's shop.

They were only mere shadows, though—men who had no concern that night with marrying and giving in marriage, save in their paid capacity. The clock had tinkled out the half-hour past midnight, too, and comfortable beds were yawning for them somewhere.

The bower was gone. The floral altar came to pieces magically, bit by bit, in a matter almost of seconds, and was whisked swiftly out of sight. Festoons followed as astonishingly; and outdoors, distantly, came the low talk of workmen, as the canvas canopy came down and vanished.

Dole, butler, was following the workers carefully and silently about the floor with the

long tube of his vacuum-cleaner. The little motor hummed vainly for a space, now and then, as he laid aside the tube to help Janes, the second man, in the replacing of a bit of furniture.

At last the final bit of disarrangement had vanished utterly, and all that remained of the Cinderella change back to ordinary existence was the heavy odor of stale roses, dissipating slowly through the open windows, and the form of Dole, snapping out superfluous lights as his assistant lugged away the silent, shining vacuum apparatus.

And Stanton caught himself up with a jerk. He was not feeling madly cheerful; but, in all probability, a few million other fathers had passed through the same odd set of emotions and survived; and—

"I'll have some letters for you to mail in an hour, Dole," he said abruptly, as he walked heavily back to his study.

At his own desk, Stanton was his own man again!

There was the same implacable system in the management of his household affairs that obtained in the office. Every routine bill was clipped to its check on Friday evening and mailed; every unusual expenditure of any sort found instant cash payment. It was a system overdone, perhaps, but it was Stanton's—and it was law!

He laughed a little. Going at the business side of a wedding and clearing it away completely within half a dozen hours of the ceremony might be a slightly unusual proceeding for the average new father-in-law; but subordinates understood Mr. Stanton very thoroughly by now, and a little pile of prosaic, itemized bills was stacked neatly at his elbow.

Whistling gently, he drew out his checkbook and found his pen and went to work.

Minutes ticked on and on and on, as he ran swiftly down columns and wrote rapid lines on his blanks. Envelopes appeared and were manipulated swiftly; and, as the clock struck one, Stanton rang for his butler, and the man departed for the mail-box.

He returned within some five or ten minutes, and as the door closed Stanton heard a new voice. A quick smile came to his lips; Vera was gone, but—the boy remained. And when he saw the light from the study-door, he'd came in for a good night chat, and—

Young Robert Stanton sauntered in.

He hardly looked his twenty-one years; he had been reared in the manner denied Stanton, care-free and all-boy fashion; and the result was all Stanton had hoped. Bob was budding into strong, healthy manhood, unworn by premature worries and struggles.

There was a grin of exceeding happy self-satisfaction at his father, as Bob dropped his cap and duster on a chair and stood revealed, rather surprisingly, in his evening clothes.

"Hallo, dad!" remarked the younger Stanton, as he distributed his six feet of length more or less gracefully on the couch and regarded the elder with all the affection of a life-long chum.

"Hallo, sonny," chuckled the father.

"Writing more checks?" Robert queried, as he squinted at the open book.

"Um-um." Stanton dropped the book into a drawer and lighted a cigar. "What have you been doing, driving your car at this hour of the morning?"

"I—who? Me?" The son started.

"You, Bob!"

"Why—I—had the car waiting, anyway, you know. I took Glad—I took Miss Kilburn home!"

And a delicate, brilliant red crept over his cheeks and out to the points of his ears! The younger Mr. Stanton looked defiantly at his father—and his father laughed long and heartily.

"Well, that isn't a crime, is it?"

"No! It isn't!" stated the son, with great force. "She—no!"

So there's more matrimony in the air, is there?" Stanton asked.

"Well, if you know any finer girl than—"

"I don't!" protested his father, chuckling anew. "There's no cause for excitement, Bob. Only—well, sort of remember that you're only a kid yet, just out of college, you know—"

"I know!"

Stanton looked absently at the ceiling, and there was no trace of smile now.

"Have you decided whether you're going back for a post-graduate course or going to work down in the office, Bob?"

"I am going to work!"

"Ah." Stanton's finger tips met thoughtfully. "A thousand a year isn't a mighty income."

"It's not going to stay at one thousand many years!"

Stanton nodded. His son sprawled back and grinned happily at the ceiling.

"No, dad, I'm going to take one last, ripping vacation, and then buckle down to hard work. Oh—by the way!"

"Well?"

"Dick Standing wants me to go up with him to that fishing club in Canada, to-mor-

row or next day. May I have a couple of hundred?"

Stanton's eyebrows rose in a little smile.

"My son," he said, "I've just been figuring up. The total cash capital of this family at the present moment is precisely five hundred and fifty dollars and one cent!"

"What!"

Stanton laughed gently.

"That's the figure, Bob."

"But—my Lord! Dad! How under the sun—what—"

"Be calm," smiled his father. "Weddings are expensive luxuries. Furthermore, we needn't lapse into hysteria, because three days more will see my quarterly wages deposited, so to speak."

"And that's a fortune in itself—isn't it?" murmured young Robert, rather confusedly. "Dad, do you suppose I'll ever be drawing fifty thousand a year?"

"There is nothing to prevent it, Robert," replied Stanton, with the tinge of profound self-satisfaction which cropped out occasionally. "You'll have a great sight better start toward it than I had."

"I know it. I—dad, how did money ever get so low, anyway?"

"Because, my boy," said Stanton, explicitly, "if you remember, I paid ten thousand dollars, two months back, into our Kilgo River land pool. Remember?"

Robert nodded and his face brightened suddenly.

"When's that going to turn over and make us all first-magnitude millionaires?"

"Within the year, I hope." Stanton was grave again. "They've begun actual work on the new road now; Lang and Keller and I and the rest of us own every inch of the land in the whole Kilgo River district; and I don't believe three dozen persons know anything of the real inside of the Kilgo River Land Company!"

"And it can't fall through!" Robert exclaimed, ecstatically.

Stanton turned on him.

"When I put the solid savings of eighteen years into one deal, you can wager that it can't fall through!" he cried, almost angrily.

For a long time, the old grin of adoring admiration beamed from son to father.

"Dad! You're the greatest man that ever happened!"

"Thank you!" laughed Stanton.

Robert rose slowly.

"Well—I'm going to bed. Where's mother?"

"Asleep, I hope, by this time."

"Bee gone to bed, too?"

Stanton glanced at him for a moment.

"I don't think that your sister Beatrice is quite in good shape, Bob," he said.

"She looked dead beat out to-night," Robert observed thoughtfully.

"She's been looking very much off color for several days," said Stanton. "We'll have Rankin in to-morrow if she isn't better."

Robert considered for a moment; then:

"Bee's too much of a kid to be up late, Seventeen isn't any age to be keeping some of the hours we've had lately."

Stanton smiled; the gap of four years in ages was certainly a vast one.

"Well—" began the son.

And he stopped, for the distant tinkle of the front-door bell became audible somewhere below.

"Did you hear it, dad?"

"The bell? I thought so."

The sound was repeated, and Stanton half rose.

"Dole's asleep by this time. Who on earth can—"

"I'll answer it, dad." Robert yawned. "Somebody's lost their diamond tiara or something."

He walked out, and Stanton waited and strained his ears. Of course, while it was hardly a nightly occurrence, there was nothing very amazing in a ring at two in the morning; but—how the deuce was he going to tear things up and look for lost articles when Dole and Janes knew more about the house than he did himself, and certainly more about the odds and ends of the festivities. Well, Robert would have to get them up and—

And just here Robert reappeared, with a puzzled smile.

"It's—Mr. Fiske, dad!" he said.

CHAPTER III.

THE DECISION OF THE BOARD.

"MR.—who?" asked Stanton, in amazement.

"Fiske—your vice-president from the office down-town."

"Well, what in the name of common sense—"

"He's here, anyway, and he wants to see you." The son hesitated and looked absently at Stanton. "Say, dad, I suppose it's all up with that Canada business?"

"It is, if it depends on any of our pres-

ent cash," said Stanton shortly. "Send Mr. Fiske in here, Bob."

There was a last, rather rueful glance from Robert.

"All right, dad. I'll go to bed. Good night."

He departed once more, and Stanton sat frowning for a few seconds.

What strange freak had ever sent Fiske, of all people, to him at two in the morning?

Certainly, there was nothing of importance going on down-town that needed his immediate personal attention; and Fiske, while a friend of years' standing, had never shown any eccentricities in the way of calling uninvited for an early breakfast! He was a man who hated formal gatherings, to be sure; it might possibly be that he'd taken a notion to drop in alone after it was all over, and—

Stanton stared very hard and very suddenly at the man who had entered his study!

Fiske to be sure, had never run to elegance of dress or impressiveness of carriage. Yet, now he seemed merely a limp, rather tousled little old man, whose shifting eyes glanced at Stanton for an instant and took to roaming again.

"Good evening—John!" he said, thickly, as he dropped Stanton's hand.

Stanton stared on, for a little space incapable of speech. Fiske hadn't been drinking—no. But his collar was rather wilted, and his tie askew, and there was dust on his shoes, and the thin gray hair was moist and frowsy. Yes, and there were little beads of perspiration, too, and—

"What the dickens is the matter with you, Peter?" Stanton gasped.

"Me?" Fiske faced him with eyes that were almost frightened. And he branched off quickly with: "I—hate like sin to call on you at this hour of the night."

Stanton's brows contracted.

"Oh—you weren't here for the ceremony, were you?"

No, I—wasn't here for the ceremony. I—wasn't here, John." Fiske muttered.

"Well, why not?" Stanton smiled. "Too much Directors' Meeting?"

"Too—"

One flashed glance, and Fiske looked straight at the little statuette in the corner. And in a way, Stanton grew more astonished than ever. The man seemed to be going through a positive spasm! The lips were working and the eyes were blinking, and the old man's muscles seemed actually to be straining!

And then—whatever it was—he seemed to conquer it, for he turned calmly back to Stanton, albeit the little drops on his forehead were more numerous than ever.

"I—just dropped in," he said, huskily. "You don't mind?"

"Well, man—"

"See here, John, did you ever have a yearly contract—for your services, I mean—with the company?"

"What? Yes, for eight or nine years. It sort of dropped out, three or four years ago. It was only a formality, you know, anyway. They didn't bother with it, and I didn't bother with it!"

"You should have bothered with it!" asserted Mr. Fiske.

"Well—is it worrying you?" Stanton inquired blankly.

Fiske was watching his dusty shoes.

"John, when did you begin to draw your salary in advance?"

"Eh?"

The visitor repeated the question. Stanton stiffened—stared—and spoke with a very decided crispness:

"As a matter of fact, twelve years ago. You may not remember, but I stood between staying with the General Products or going over to the growing opposition. I was drawing twenty thousand then, and when the Products bid me up to fifty thousand and I accepted it, I took on a great deal extra personal expense.

"I had to get into bigger quarters here at home, and I drew my first three months' salary after the raise, in advance. A good many big matters have been closed advantageously right in this room, Peter. I've been drawing it ever since. Can I furnish you with any information as to my private affairs, Peter?" concluded Mr. Stanton.

With a jerk, Fiske faced him wildly and sprang to his feet. He was looking at Stanton now in good earnest.

"You think I'm prying, John, do you? You think I'm an impertinent old fool?" he demanded hoarsely.

"I—"

"Do you know what I've been doing since ten o'clock this night?" The elder man hurried on, as his arm went up and a shaking finger pointed indefinitely at the end of it. "Do you know—"

"Peter! You're—"

"Well, I've been standing over on that corner, John! I've been standing there, looking at this house and looking at the people leaving and all the excitement and

the carriages and the rest of it. I've been standing there, knowing everybody here was happy—knowing that you—"

Stanton rose with decision.

"Hold on, Peter," he said firmly. "You're not—yourself, by any means. What was the necessity of your standing—"

"Because I didn't have the spunk to come over here and—and—tell you that—"

"What?"

"Tell you that—that the Products people had—*fired you!*" concluded Fiske in a thick whisper.

For the moment a galvanic shock went through Stanton. Then, almost instantly, a smile came to his lips. He steered Fiske to a chair and returned to his own with:

"Where did you get that notion, Peter?"

Fiske said nothing. His handkerchief was out now and he was mopping the damp forehead.

"Come!" Stanton continued. "I'll have the boy telephone for his car and take you home, Peter, eh? You've been overworking all winter and all spring, and now you're taking to notions and—"

Fiske's pale eyes faced his own now, steadily and sanely, and with a queer quality of genuine pity in them that sent sudden little shivers up and down Stanton's spine.

"It isn't any notion, John. It's plain, cold fact!" said the visitor.

"That—I—"

"Listen! You know your own end of the business, John. You've built the Products people from the bottom—and you've earned more, rather than less, of what they paid you. But you've been too busy, too assured, too absorbed—whatever you like—to take the yellow streak in human nature into account!"

"Eh?"

"It's nothing new. There's been talk about it for a year, in one way or another. Don't you understand it? You've done your work for them; you've perfected an organization that a battle-ship couldn't dent. Now it is perfected. Therefore, what's the use of paying you any such enormous sum—when the job's done?"

"But I—"

"Molden's been sour on that big salary for two or three years—and he's the biggest stockholder, in addition to being president. He didn't dare dispense with you. Carter hasn't been enthusiastic over that fifty thousand, either.

"It all came to a head this afternoon at the full board meeting. Carter was the man who brought up the subject. He told 'em that the company had everything whipped into perfect shape now; that there was not the slightest need of a fifty-thousand-dollar man, when there was an eight-thousand-dollar man, equally competent and right at hand!"

"And who—who—" Stanton managed to choke out.

"Young Willis!" Fiske sighed heavily. "Well—there are the bare facts. They voted to dispense with you, John, and Molden even stated that it was a particularly convenient time; your quarter year was up and—there needn't be another! And they delegated me to notify you!"

For many minutes, Stanton said no word. Stunned at the first full realization, red anger began to rise slowly and sear his brain into activity again. He thought of his years of work—slavery—his crushings and grindings of little men — his — and here the thoughts seemed to roll and pile on one another into a mass of billowing black smoke and roaring, livid streaks of fire. Until:

"And now we've seen the worst side of it, John!" said the thin, old voice, and Fiske was standing beside him, with a thin hand on his shoulder.

"Is there—anything but a worst side to it?" Stanton asked dazedly.

"It's bad, of course. It's just another example of what we can collect in the way of gratitude from any one who has ceased to need us." Fiske essayed a somewhat uncanny smile. "But, better now than ten years ago, John?"

"What?"

"Of course, fifty thousand dollars would make a big gap in the biggest income going," Fiske said, with an attempt at lightness, as he found his chair again. "But better now than ten years ago, eh, John?" he repeated.

"I don't see—"

"Well, in the last ten years, you've collected half a million dollars more salary than if you'd ceased to collect it ten years ago," said Fiske. "You haven't spent quiet all of that—eh?"

Stanton caught himself suddenly. Indeed, by now, he had all but regained his powerful calm, for he managed to smile slightly.

"No!" he said. "Not quite."

"And your folks have never rushed after the fool society game, or anything of that sort, you know. That costs like sin! Fifty thousand dollars, of course, is—"

His voice trailed away. Fiske had talked out his painful subject and arisen uncer-

tainly. Stanton rose with him rather promptly.

"It's a big loss of income, of course," he said with amazing steadiness. "It was a pretty hard blow, for a minue or two, Fiske, but—I'll hope not to join the bread-line just yet. I suppose the idea is that all connections are severed at once?"

"That is—very much the idea, Stanton," Fiske muttered. "You were relieved from active duty when that board adjourned!"

"Well—don't worry about the board, or about me," said Stanton, as he held out his hand. "Thank you for coming up, Peter!"

"You're—well, you're not welcome to the job I've had to do," said Fiske sadly, as the other piloted him gently toward the hall.

A minute or two, and Stanton was alone again, standing at one of the front windows and staring stupidly after the little form of Fiske as it shuffled away.

He was discharged!

He was dispensed with! He'd been fired, like an office-boy!

And, why? For one thing, he'd been too neglectful; certainly, a year or two back, at the most, he could have had any sort of written, binding contract he demanded. He simply hadn't thought it worth while. The General Products Company could not do without him; he had always known that for a serene certainty. Every dollar they paid him meant fifty in their own pockets!

Now that his big work was done completely—now they could put Willis in charge of his vast system of management, and never miss Stanton!

Mechanically, he switched out the lights in his study. Mechanically, he locked the heavy doors, and leaned for a time on the knobs, looking out. Black, big houses confronted him, houses like his own, homes of the decidedly prosperous. He winced a little.

There was a considerable question in his mind as to how much longer this particular house would be his home. If he had only bought the place when they first came to it, as the owner had suggested. It would have been free and clear and all their own long ago! Now he was merely leasing it, as he had done at first.

Indeed, it seemed to Stanton, as he watched a lonely policeman stroll slowly past, he had neglected a great many vital points of his own well-being in the long devotion to General Products interests. He had—

He turned to the dark stairs, dull and impatient. Slowly he plodded upward in the thick stillness of the dim hallway. He reached the top and stopped, gripping the banister, turn and—staring at his wife's door.

As he listened to the distant, whispering ticking of the tall clock below, an overwhelming impulse came over him, an echo of years ago, to steal in and waken her and tell her of the bad news. Heaven alone knew how many troubles and joys they had shared equally, in the happy old time quarter of a century back, when old Miller was awakening to the possibilities of his underpaid clerk, when young John Stanton and his pretty little Martha were making a tiny heaven of their own in a tiny second floor. He choked as the old days returned—days when he went to her for comfort that never failed to send him forth stronger than ever.

Things had not changed! He'd steal in now and tell her. His hand was upon the knob and—

The door opened soundlessly, and the trimmest of maids slipped into the corridor and held up a warning finger.

"Mrs. Stanton has just fallen asleep!" she whispered. "She was very, very tired and nervous, sir."

And her own small hand remained upon the knob as she faced Stanton respectfully and—waited firmly for him to go.

He seemed to understand vaguely, and his heart sank suddenly. That lady's maid was the very essence of the newer order of things that had no concern with low-ceilinged second floors!

Stanton stared at her for a moment. She did not move.

Then, with a nod, he turned and walked drearily to his own rooms, very much alone.

CHAPTER IV.

A. FINAL VISIT.

HALF-PAST seven is rather an early rising hour for a man who has found his pillow at three in the morning.

Stanton, however, appeared in his breakfast-room on the stroke of the clock, and thereby considerably startled Mr. Dole, who was shuffling sleepily about in the sweet certainty that none of the family were due downstairs before nine that morning.

It was a light enough breakfast the master of the house needed—a cup of coffee, an egg, and a bit of toast. As he ate mechanically, his far-away gaze was directed unseeingly at the sugar-bowl, and Stanton planned slowly.

The shock was over completely. His

nerves were steady as a rock now, and all his old power had returned. Something was wrong somewhere. The General Products Company couldn't do without him. Or if they fancied they could at the moment, they would discover their mistake later.

As a matter of fact, he believed that it was all an absurd misunderstanding somewhere. He'd make an early entrance to the offices and learn just what it was all about.

Leaving word for the others, he departed quietly—and headed for the Subway—and as quietly turned back toward the park.

There was no particular reason for that early entrance. Ten o'clock, sharp, had been the hour at which, for ten years at least, people could do business with the general manager. There was no occasion to vary the custom now; and a little calm thought among the trees might be beneficial.

Secluded and empty benches were plentiful at that hour; he found one, and settled comfortably to a cigar.

After all, wasn't there a strong chance of the whole thing's being Fiske's imagination—or part of it, anyway? Not that Fiske was lacking mentally; but he was a prematurely old man, disappointed at the rather complimentary position in which his declining years were to be passed.

Unquestionably, of course, Stanton had been discussed at yesterday's meeting of the board; probably he'd been discussed at a good many other meetings, for an item of fifty thousand dollars is worthy of consideration; but they knew as well as Stanton did that he was part and parcel of the Products Company; that they could no more dispense with him than—bosh!

He laughed as he rose at last and strolled out at the lower end of the park. He knew his own value! And he even chuckled at chancing upon his regular Subway guard. Things were going very much as usual this morning, despite the nightmare of earlier hours.

And yet—as he walked casually into the offices—he seemed to feel a strangeness in the air. It was an indefinable something; perhaps it hailed from the fact that hurrying employees, without exception, stared at him as they said good-morning; perhaps—

Stanton snorted impatiently. He turned from his own offices and made straight for those of Molden, president of the company in cold fact as well as in name. Molden, son-in-law of the original Miller, at least meant exactly what he said and said exactly what he meant.

Molden, it chanced, was busy—busy even to Mr. Stanton; and for a full ten minutes that gentleman was allowed to cool his heels in the anteroom, as he had amusedly watched so many other people cool theirs in former days.

It was not exactly sweetening to temper, and when Molden's stenographer hurried out and informed him with a fleeting, pale, apologetic smile that he might enter, a dull red was burning in Stanton's cheeks.

Molden greeted him with an even, unruffled "Good morning."

Further, he went to the formality of placing a chair for Stanton near his desk, and inviting the visitor to be seated. And Stanton sat down with a fierce:

"Well?"

He had intended it for a solitary, cold word of opening; it came more like a pistol-shot.

"Well, Mr. Stanton?" asked Molden.

"Mr. Fiske called upon me last night."

"We—er—asked him to do so, Mr. Stanton. Yes?"

"And he informed me that I was no longer needed here!"

"That is entirely correct," said Molden coolly.

Stanton's breath stopped for the moment! Incredible as it might seem to him, it was all a matter of very cold business to Molden—plain, simple, ordinary business, worthy of not the slightest excitement!

He settled back rather limply.

"I suppose it is permissible to ask *why* I have become unnecessary overnight?"

"The board of directors, at their meeting yesterday, voted that you be dismissed.

"So—I understood!" came through Stanton's teeth.

Molden leaned forward a trifle, with his wholly genial, meaningless business smile.

"I comprehend, Mr. Stanton, that this may be something of a shock to you."

"Thank you."

"At the same time you will readily realize that fifty thousand dollars is a very large salary to pay one man."

"Haven't I been worth five times that to you?" Stanton demanded.

"Um—possibly not quite *five* times, Mr. Stanton," Molden smiled calmly. "However, let us leave that part out of consideration for the moment. The board has considered the matter several times. Yesterday it was brought up again, and inasmuch as it seemed perfectly clear that a far less expensive man could take your place perfectly, we concluded to—do as we did."

"And without warning!"

"The—er—matter came up at — well, a convenient time, perhaps," said the president.

Stanton's eyes were flaming. His throat was dry and hot; his tongue seemed welded to the roof of his mouth. He could have taken Molden and choked out that smug grimace forever.

"You know, of course, that there is absolutely no personal dissatisfaction or animosity on my part or on the part of any of the others. But you know our invariable policy, Mr. Stanton. In fact, you have been the greatest factor in shaping it and establishing it.

"Our company exists solely for the purpose of making money. We cannot, therefore, consider the individual in the slightest degree, when the individual stands between us and our legitimate profits."

He leaned back with cool self-satisfaction —and an icy shudder went through Stanton for an instant. It was indeed his own maxim, his own policy, the very groundwork of the whole system he had perfected for building the Products Company.

And now, when he himself stood between the company and larger dividends—

"I'm sorry for it, Stanton," said Molden more humanly. "I'm sorry as the devil, but —you know we've no business paying any such salary to a man whose job's completed."

Stanton's speech was coming at last.

"Then that—is all there is to be said?" he asked hoarsely.

"Why—except to thank you for all your hard work and faithful devotion to the company—all that sort of thing, you know," Molden smiled placidly. "You'll have no trouble making other connections, you know."

Stanton's teeth shut with a click.

"Very well. You're done with me, and I'm done with you, Molden."

Molden did not deny it.

"I suppose there is no objection to my taking my papers from my—the safe in what was my private office?"

"None," smiled the president.

"And I'll sell you my one share of your stock," said Stanton savagely. "It stands at four hundred and sixty-five to-day, you know. I'll turn it in to Dickson."

"Oh—bosh!" said Molden impatiently. "We don't want to buy your one share of stock, Stanton. Keep it as a souvenir, and—"

And Stanton was walking out!

Mr. Molden heaved a vast sigh of relief. Stanton was a big man, in the full sense of the term; but Molden reflected that he had never quite realized Stanton's bigness. He'd been expecting an explosion somewhat like the opening of Hades itself—and now it was over without a harsh word! Molden whistled a lively, happy tune as he rang for his stenographer once more!

Steadily, with outward unconcern, Stanton made for his own late domain and, entering the little corridor, walked unannounced through the private office door.

Willis was seated at the big desk now! With a start, he came to his feet—and his face grew crimson.

Stanton laughed grimly.

"Sit still, Willis!" he said. "It's your chair now."

The younger man came forward hastily.

"Mr. Stanton, I want you to know that— I had no idea whatever, when you were coaching me—"

"That you were being put in trim for my job?"

"That—er—things were going to happen as they have," said Willis, looking across the room.

"Aha? Sorry, are you?"

"It means a substantial raise for me, you know, but—"

"But knowing that, after building this concern to the very top of the steeple, I was to be kicked from the weather-vane, you were too much afraid of your own pelt to warn me in time to resign, eh?" observed Mr. Stanton, as he walked to the safe.

Willis, more vividly red than before, was silent. Stanton bent over the combination and twirled at the knob; something seemed to have gone wrong; he tried again—and Willis was stammering:

"The—safe men just left, sir. They— changed the combination!"

Stanton smiled bitterly as he stood erect and Willis bent down in his place.

"Quick funeral, eh?" he remarked.

Willis stood aside as the door opened. Silently Stanton brought forth his mass of papers and carried them to his old desk and sat down. Silently he began to assort them carefully.

An hour, and Willis was still standing near him. He tiptoed lightly out of the office; Stanton was going over the last details of his General Products connection, and with the same utter aloofness to the rest of the world, the same old habit of humming a tune that had no beginning and no end.

At two, Stanton was still at work.

At four, he was running over masses of jotted figures.

And at six, when Willis made his last amazed visit, Stanton was standing and stretching himself.

"You'll find everything in order here," he said. "This bundle that I'm taking contains only personal papers. I'll leave this one, lonely share of stock here for a time. You can buy it from me, if they wish you to become a stockholder. Good-by, Willis."

And, with an almost uninterested nod, Stanton turned and left the offices of the company—for the last time.

It was over—all over!

And now that it was over, Stanton had regained his iron calm.

He had sustained a tremendous loss. Indeed, for the moment, he was wholly without income. Undoubtedly, he would have to borrow a little, from one or another of his friends, on his Kilgo River holdings. He'd make the next best business connection possible until the time came when the Kilgo River land took its inevitable, enormous rise—and that was all.

To be sure, there was a lurking, biting sense of retribution about the whole General Products affair.

He himself had never shown mercy to the small man without recourse; now his own system had turned on him and squared accounts! Surely, in taking away his big salary, it had done the squaring most effectively.

He'd take his medicine with a grin; and with a grin he entered his home and nodded to the butler, who murmured:

"They're at dinner, sir — except Miss Beatrice. And — and there's a gentleman been waiting in your study since five, sir."

Stanton stared for a second.

"Tell him I'll—oh, don't tell him anything. I'll see him after dinner," said Stanton, carelessly, as he made for the stairs.

CHAPTER V.

TIDINGS FROM DORKING.

IN the upper corridor, Stanton met the maid of the night before. Queerly, her abrupt appearance seemed to annoy him.

She was bearing a tray now, taking it below with several dainty little dishes plainly untouched—and he stopped her and frowned at the thing with:

"Anybody ill?"

"Miss Beatrice isn't at all well, sir?"

Stanton's brain left the business world with a rush.

"Is she—really sick?" he asked, rather helplessly.

"We persuaded her to go to bed this afternoon, sir."

"Hasn't the doctor—"

"Dr. Rankin left an hour ago, Mr. Stanton."

"Well, what did he say?" Stanton demanded in a violent undertone. "Miss Beatrice—there's nothing really the matter?"

"I think he said she must remain in bed for a bit, sir. She—she's awake."

Stanton turned on his heel and hurried up the next broad flight. He listened a moment at the door; then he opened it quietly and walked in swiftly.

Beatrice, the tyrannical seventeen-year old baby of the family, was smiling toward the door; and in an instant, Stanton's heart began to pound. Where were the bright red cheeks and the snapping eyes, and the absurd coiffure of the night before?

Perhaps—it struck him suddenly—those cheeks had been a little too red, the eyes a little too anxious in their effort at vivacity, but—

Why, now Beatrice was white! And there seemed to be an oddly brilliant, feverish glaze over the eyes and—even that thick braid upon the pillow seemed, somehow to add a sick-room touch that sent a little chill through the father.

He hurried across the room and seated himself upon the edge of the bed, and as he bent over to kiss the girl, he winced! That reassuring hug of welcome was too strong to carry any reassuring quality, and the lips were hot and dry.

"What's wrong, kitten?" Stanton choked amazedly.

The girl laughed up at him.

"Nothing at all, dad."

"Did Rankin say that?" Stanton asked suspiciously.

"He said that I was—all bunged up, I believe."

"But—"

"He called it nerves. I haven't any nerves. I'm just tired."

"Perhaps it's too much wedding," Stanton muttered.

"I think so, too," smiled the girl, as her eyes closed for a moment.

"But—" the father floundered.

"Why, it isn't anything, daddy. I've got a fiendish headache—and I'm going to sleep. Go down and have your dinner."

A small, hot hand clapsed his big one, and squeezed hard.

Stanton, the cast-steel man of business, bent over and clasped the slender body in his arms; snuggled his hard cheek against the delicate one for a little; and rose slowly with a kiss and a heavy sigh.

And the baby of the family laughed at him again with:

"You know, I'll promise not to die before you have your dinner, dad. Go down."

Stanton went, shuffling.

Devoted to business, he might have been; but when the desk closed, his only interest was his family—the plump little mother and the three big children, the eternal joy of providing the things and the conditions he himself had longed for vainly in earlier years.

Disease seemed to have refrained mercifully from crossing his path. He knew nothing of it and wished to know less. His ideas of medicine were vague in the extreme.

If Rankin carried his little black bag, when he dropped in occasionally for an evening cigar, it meant that somebody had a headache or a slight cold. Within a very few minutes, Rankin always came down, settled his jolly little person in the biggest leather chair in the study, announced that everything was all right, and looked for the matches. And that was all.

But Beatrice, to-night, was—anything but Beatrice! Stanton frowned heavily as he made his way to the dining-room.

His wife, just rising, caught the expression and understood it thoroughly in an instant; and she smiled as he asked abruptly:

"What's happened to Beatrice, Martha?"

"Nothing serious," said the light voice.

"What did Rankin have to say?"

"Very little, dear. Don't worry." She smiled at him for an instant, and turned to Robert, rather gloomily engaged at the table in balancing a match on the edge of his little coffee-cup. "Coming with me, Robby?"

The son looked up.

"I'll stay here with dad, mother," he all but sighed.

"Then I'll run up to the little girl."

She was gone — and Stanton took his place and, with pursed lips, studied the linen for a long space, as Dole served him.

Dead silence seemed to have stricken the son, too, as his father ate and he himself devoted great care and thought to the investigation of organic crystalline formation, as found upon the surface of a bit of cut sugar. Plainly, it was an absorbing bit of research work, for he examined the little chunk over and over and over; and yet it did not seem quite to monopolize Robert's faculties.

There were occasional quick glances at his father's plates, that denoted a thought here and there diverted from the strict pursuit of science so necessary to perfect results.

The diverting thought seemed to take the upper hand suddenly, as Dole finally left the room, and smoke was rising from Stanton's cigar, for young Robert sat erect abruptly and lighted one of his own amazingly mild cigarettes and looked squarely at the elder man.

"Er—dad!"

"Well, sonny?" Stanton sent a wreath of smoke into the air. "Have you come out of the dream?"

"I wasn't dreaming, dad. I was—just thinking."

"Ah?"

"Are you—are you really as hard up for ready cash as you figured last night?" Robert inquired lucidly, but with eyes in another direction.

Stanton started violently! He was considerably "harder up" than he had been last night—and as yet none of them knew it! And, what was more, none of them should know it until he had decided upon the gentlest way of breaking the news.

"Well—yes, Bob," he said. "Why?"

"What, sir?" The son looked at him for a moment and reddened. "Well—I'm broke, dad! I don't like to tell you. I'm getting too confounded old to—beg money."

"You'll have to earn it soon enough now, my boy."

"I know it! I wish I was earning it right now. But Harry Lawrence and Fred Devoe are in the city. They came down from college with me, you know, and they're going back to California next week. They expect me to give 'em some kind of a time while they're here."

Stanton drew a long breath.

"And I managed to smash the car to-day," Robert confessed. "I'll have to take them out to Van Learford's blowout to-morrow—away out on the Island—and I've got two men working all night on the motor."

"And it will cost?" Stanton asked evenly.

"The blamed thing's going to cost about a hundred dollars, and you always insist on my paying—"

Robert stopped.

His father leaned nearer to him.

"I'm sorry, boy, but I'm afraid the car will have to stay where it is."

"But they'll expect me to—"

"I know it's embarrassing, but—you'll have to make excuses, Bob!"

The red deepened in the younger man.

"Thunder!" he said almost sulkily. "I don't know how I'm going to do it. And Cortland's coming to the city, too—he may land to-morrow—and he expects to put up here, and I'll have to take him round, too! A fellow has to have some change, dad, and —they know I own the car!"

He consulted the lump of sugar again. Stanton, watching him, said nothing; but he found himself turning rather chilly. Perhaps, all things considered, he'd kept Robert too much of a boy. Perhaps, when he knew and understood what had happened during Fiske's call the night before—

"You know I had to give up that fishing stunt in Canada, dad," the son suggested. "That was bad enough, and—oh, you know I'd promised Dick I'd go before I spoke to you about it! I—had to lie to him to-day—"

"Before you die, Bob," Stanton was saying, "there will be a good many things you'll have to give up, and it will not be necessary to lie about them. These matters are as little as they can be, son. Why, you're actually pouting!" he laughed. "Eh? Well, the expression was very much of that order. Bosh, boy! Even if—"

He ceased, and looked up at Dole.

"The gentleman in the library, sir—"

"Lord! I'd forgotten all about him!" exclaimed the master of the house, as he rose hastily. "Who is it, Dole?"

"It is—" The butler's forehead wrinkled. "His name's slipped my mind for the minute. The short, thin gentleman with the reddish hair. Mrs. Stanton knew him, sir."

"Dorking?"

"That's the name, sir. He sent word—"

But Stanton was on his way to the door.

Dorking! The live little citizen, the smallest investor in their Kilgo River pool—and the most active in its promotion!

What on earth had struck Dorking, to remain concealed in Stanton's study since five? Why under the sun hadn't he dined? Had some sudden spasm of bashfulness come over Dorking and—

Stanton entered his study with some speed and an outstretched hand.

And he stopped short in amazement.

There was Dorking, surely enough, but not the Dorking he had known for several years. There was no immaculately clothed figure now; no lithe, strong little man to hurry forward and wring his hand; no spic and span sign of the perfect barber and valet; no quick laugh of greeting with a torrent of brisk, sharp speech racing after it!

Yet it was Dorking, unquestionably—Dorking, dull-eyed and rumpled, dusty and unshaven, with linen whose fair, white past was long forgotten—huddled limply in one of the armchairs!

Stanton all but bounded forward.

"What the dickens has happened, man? Haven't you had dinner? Haven't—"

Dorking straightened up slowly and pulled himself back to something like activity.

"I—don't want dinner, thanks," he said. "Mrs. Stanton was good enough to ask me, but—"

"Let me get you some wine, then—"

Stanton's hand went toward the button. Dorking's weak digits stayed the hand.

"No wine, either, thank you, Stanton."

"But you're done up—"

Dorking laughed forlornly.

"What little wits I have left aren't worth losing or brightening!" he said wearily.

And then, as Stanton went slowly to his desk, Dorking seemed busy gathering his forces. He hitched to a more erect position, and something of the normal light came into his eyes; until finally, when he leaned forward, and, peering at Stanton, said:

"Then you haven't heard?"

"Heard what?"

"Hasn't Meeker communicated with you to-day? I saw him early this morning."

"I—haven't seen Meeker for weeks," said Stanton. "What in the name of common sense—"

"The Kilgo River business!" cried Dorking.

Stanton shot to his feet.

"The—Kilgo River? The—what about the Kilgo River? What—"

Dorking, too, rose and came toward him, eyes glittering.

"It's busted! Smashed! They've turned on us!"

"They? Who? What?"

"Keller and Styles and Graham, I tell you! They've sold us out! Somebody's started in to wreck us, and they're succeeding man! It's all done for, I tell you!

"For all the chance that you and I and Meeker stand of getting money out of Kilgo River, Kilgo River might as well run through Hades!" shouted Dorking.

(To be continued.)

His Wonder Plant.

BY BURKE JENKINS.

Tadbury Wimple Takes a Shot at the Increased Cost of Living, and Comes Within an Ace of Killing Off the Race.

IT just happened that, on the very day of my return to the delusive glitter of Broadway, *The Planet* offered a prize of fifty dollars for the biggest lie sent in before 9 P.M. of the following Thursday.

For three wild weeks after I had won the prize I lived the life of gorged and loose-belted opulence. Indeed, it was not till the twenty-third day that I found myself on my park bench in company with the old, familiar gnawing in the midriff.

Somehow, thus I caught myself thinking of Tadbury Wimple.

I bore keen recollection of that shelf of his that never had so far failed to produce a rather creditable feed, especially to one who was so far gone as I generally was when I tackled Tadbury.

So I unlimbered my cramped legs, put as much swagger into my gait as I could muster, and tramped westward to the little old inventor's shop. I mounted the five flights and rapped royally.

I could have sworn I heard some one moving about inside when I accomplished the last flight; but my knock was answered by the stoniest silence. I thrummed the harder. No answer.

Then I squinted through the keyhole, and Tadbury's polished pate was directly in line of vision.

His head was bent over his crossed forearms, which were resting in woful attitude on the table before him.

"Hi, Tad!" I cried, "it's me — Dick! Lemme in, will you?"

Recognition of my voice showed on him, and he rose and clattered his slippered way toward the door, which he opened but enough to permit me a sidewise entrance. I slid in, and he once more bolted the door.

Such unusual conduct on behalf of Tadbury prompted query.

"What's up, Tad? You seem all out of kilter."

"I am," replied he slowly.

"Blue?"

"Yes."

"Tut, tut, my friend," I voiced cheerily. "Why, this ain't like you a little bit. Come, now. I lay odds that what you've been doing is forgetting to eat. A good square meal will put you to rights again in less than a jiffy."

I knew it would do the trick for me.

"I don't doubt it would," answered Tadbury reminiscently, "but the fact is—well—how do you usually say it, Dick?"

"What?" I could not believe my realization. "You don't mean to tell me you are broke, too, Tad?"

Never had I known the little old boy without chink in his jeans. There are some people you simply can't place as ever being without some money. Tad was one such.

"There are softer ways of wording the condition I find myself in, my friend," said Tad in soft dignity. "But your expression has hit the substance. I find myself without funds. And more—"

"Well?"

"I find it not always well to answer my door-bell."

"Bills?"

"Exactly."

There was such a genuineness of real wo in his tone that I immediately forgot my own disappointment. One sure thing — going "stony" never had yet gotten in under the skin with me. But natures differ. So I tried the usual tactics.

"Oh, come, Tad. Things maybe aren't as bad as they might be. I bet my hat you can borrow a thousand within an hour. You've

got friends galore, any one of whom would be Johnny-on-the-spot, and I'd just like—"

"Stop, Dick!" he cried in real pain. "I—I, Tadbury Wimple, borrow money simply to sustain his own life? I, whose sole aim in life is to make for mankind easier and better life—I to confess that I can't even provide for the gnawing of my own stomach? Never! But were the conditions otherwise—were it for—"

"Well? Well?" I cried hastily, for I saw a hint of the old glow of enthusiasm in his eyes.

"Did I require financial assistance in the furtherance of some invention, some benefit to mankind, something that would lift care from struggling humanity — why, then the thing would be different.

"Fact is, I should consider that I was conferring a favor in borrowing from some one to bring the thing about; for would it not thus be allowing another to share in the glory? But as it is— No, Dick, I can't think of such a thing."

"But, my dear Tadbury," said I, "don't you see that by thus helping yourself out of a hole you would be simply anticip—"

"Sssh!" sibilated Tad suddenly, finger to lip.

I sssh-ed instantly, for I had had experience in like case.

And so we listened breathlessly while the stairs outside groaned complainingly underneath the tread of many pounds. The steps finally stopped outside the door, and Tad and I tiptoed softly from out the field of key-hole vision.

A ponderous thumping assailed the panel. Then another. A third.

Then a wheezing breath as of a fat man stooping; this followed by that peculiar swish of a missive flicked smartly underneath a door. One more wheeze was followed close by retreating steps down the stairs.

The caller well gone, Tad caught up the missive and started to throw it among others on his littered table.

"Hold on a minute, Tad," said I; "that don't look like an ordinary bill to me; and I'm some qualified to judge such. Fact is, I believe I can smell 'em. Here, let's see it."

He passed it to me with a listless hand, and I slit the envelope. Two bits of pasteboard fell from an inner paper, which I forthwith read:

MINE FR'END:

Die frau iss sick—*wir kann nicht* use these here the tickets inclosed. Perhaps is it that you yourself and a friend would to use dem like. So? A favor it to me would, should you do me the honor the same to enjoy. I have writ this, so because you in might not be. *Immer,*

OSCAR DINKLEFELD.

"And who the nethermost shades is Dinklefeld?" I asked, looking up from my reading.

"Why, the nicest kind of a friend," replied Tadbury. "He has never once asked me for his money."

Then I stooped and picked up the tickets. Each read:

ADMIT ONE.

Annual Outing and Picnic of

UNITED DELICATESSEN DEALERS' FEDERATION

To Glen Island . . Palatial Steamer Patroclus.

Games - Shows - Menagerie.

"Very kind of him to think of me, anyway," said Tad in sweet friendship, "even if the affair is hardly in line at the present crisis."

"What? You mean to say you don't intend to go?"

"Well, it scarcely seems a time to go on a pleasure excursion. I doubt if my nature would permit of enjoyment. In fact, my morose countenance might mar somebody else's merriment."

"Fear not, oh, Tad!" I cried. "Come, change those slippers for shoes."

Then I snatched his old slouch-hat from its peg.

"Tadbury"—I strove to be as impressive as possible as I drew the tickets across my nose—"Tadbury," said I, "I smell eats."

II.

BUT not a dog-goned thing passed our lips except anathema as we snaked our perilous way up through Hell Gate to the discordant, groaning machinery of the old hooker Patroclus.

I never did have such a time making friends. Couldn't even land so much as a cheese sandwich. What made it worse, there were plenty in process of mastication about us, too.

As for Tadbury, he simply planted himself firmly by the flagpost at the taffrail, and gazed moodily into the soapsudsy waters of the wake.

It wasn't invigorating.

In such order we arrived at the island and tied up to the tune of raucous cries.

Tad and I were the last to debark; and there was a listlessness in Tad that told he didn't care much whether school kept or not.

"Now for something to eat!" I cried in feigned hilarity, for the salt air had twisted that gnawing of mine into a yell.

"Well," said Tadbury resignedly, "I'll just drift about. You'll find me hereabout when you want me."

But I didn't. For, after the most disheartening search for a friend with a sandwich, I had an awful time in locating my little, wizened philosopher.

I did find him finally, though.

There were certain open-air shows in progress all about us on the lawns—clowns, acrobats, yodelers, dancers, and what not.

The Germans like all such things.

And it was in the front rank of a particularly congested crowd of onlookers that I at last recognized the peculiar stoop to the shoulder of Tadbury.

I stepped up to him, and then it was I saw that distended eye as of old; saw that peculiar biting of his lip when he was doping out something; felt that radiating glow of his keenest enthusiasm.

Of course, I immediately turned to see what had so interested him. I saw, and, more, I recognized.

For, before the crowd, and using for his purpose a small clearing separated by a rope, was a brown figure, surmounted by a top-heavy turban. That chap was the concentrated essence, the genus itself, of the Hindu fakir. And no three guesses did I need as to the particular trick he was that moment performing.

I had seen it many times on its own heath, that time I was fool enough to try an Indian campaign. And a closer look showed me something else.

Drat me, if there, right before me on Glen Island, wasn't the selfsame, greasy, knock-kneed Oriental whom I had downed with a thigh wound out on the plain of Kunpoom.

And the cuss recognized me, too; but his grin of delight bore no hint of malice. I could fairly feel his friendship wafting itself toward me. And, as he progressed with his trick, I believe I caught a wink. And more, a nod toward Tadbury.

The trick was the old one—making a mango grow from the very seed, right before your very eyes, into a veritable shrub—and all this within a period of a few minutes. I knew how it was done.

I nudged Tadbury, who looked round quickly, recognized me with a short grunt, then turned his attention once more toward the fakir.

First, the fellow extended a seed, which we all examined; then he made a few magic passes in the air. This tomfoolery he followed by sticking his pudgy forefinger into the soil and planting the seed.

He mysteriously wafted a variegated cloth over the spot, spoke a few more asinine words, lifted the cloth, and behold, a tender sprout was seen issuing from the ground. Once more he covered this speck of green with the waving rag, withdrew it, and it was revealed as quite a shrub.

Tadbury turned to me in the wildest excitement.

"Oh, Dick, Dick, don't you see," he cried; "don't you realize what it means to man? Don't you comprehend what would be the scope of development if the principle involved in making that plant grow thus rapidly could be extended?"

"What're you driving at, Tad?" said I.

"But think what it would mean to struggling mankind if this intensive and hastened production could be effected generally?"

Then the little fellow caught sight of my bewilderment as to what he meant. He changed his tone to the quietest as he asked me:

"Dick, what is the direst menace to mankind at this moment?"

"Booze!" I cried determinedly.

"Booze, nothing!" he snapped. "Why, the newspapers are simply full of it. And surely you and I are caught in its meshes right now. I mean the high cost of living.

"Those soaring prices for necessities; foodstuffs—foodstuffs, mind you; mere eatables to keep the physical man alive; and in this age of advance and miracles! Why, it's humiliating!"

"Eggs are seventy-five per doz.," I admitted. "Meat's gold, and bread's going up."

"Exactly!" cried Tad delightedly, now that he had me going. "But they'll soar no longer, Dick; they'll soar no longer. I can lower prices, Dick; think of it!"

"I am thinking of it, Tad," said I, rubbing my third button, "but you've certainly got to show me how."

"And that I will," he answered cheerily. "This wonderful Hindu here has opened up for me a door that may lead, *will* lead, to the saving of the race. He can grow a plant thus in a day. I will extend his principle. Think of being able to plant and reap the same day, Dick.

"Every man his own bread-raiser. Grows his own wheat. Picks his own day as to weather; no more crops spoiled. Think of it, Dick. Think of it!"

"Dog-gone it, Tadbury, I am thinking of it, or trying to; but you've got to be a little more explicit if I'm to get your drift absolutely. What's the lay?"

"Well, Dick, simply stated, it's this: I am going to extend, by strictly scientific means, the underlying principle of that Hindu's native gift, which I doubt if he really understands himself."

"Really understands himself!" I growled. "Tad, you seem to forget that I served a campaign in India as special correspondent for the London *Look*. I know every one of their fakes."

"Fakes? *Fakes?*" yelled Tadbury almost in anger.

"Yes, fakes. Do you mean to tell me that, just because that naked-limbed heathen hasn't got sleeves to conceal things in, that he hasn't got a place to hide those growing shrubs of different heights? Why, look at that turban; look at that breech-clout—yards and yards of cloth—even though it is dirty."

"Dick, you're wrong," said Tad quietly.

"Wrong, am I?" I replied in some heat. "Don't I know what I've seen? Why, the dub simply slits the seed and inserts his shortest twig before he ever plants it.

"This he does by the simplest sleight-of-hand. The next size he furtively slides from his middle wrappings while he's doing that funny business with the rag-waving; the third height he gets by—"

"Dick!" cried the little inventor, mounting almost to fury. "I'll hear no more. It is just that intolerant spirit of yours which has hampered struggling science in her every advance. There have been doubters always."

As a matter of fact, it really pleased me to see Tad thus. It fairly warmed the cockles of my heart that he was restored from so melancholy a frame of mind as had held him the entire day to his usual ebullient, enthusiastic self.

And then again, I suddenly recollected what Tad had said about his willingness to borrow money "to further science." I have heard that hunger knows no conscience. I am sure of it, for prior to this I was a most moral young man.

I knew what a fraud that trick was; but I reasoned that I had raised enough remonstrances. So I let Tadbury go on, for I scented food—real, tooth-working food.

"I am sorry to have questioned your deductions, Tad," said I contritely. "I'll free my mind from all clouding thought. Now, just how do you mean—"

"Wait a minute," he interrupted; for the Hindu had finished his stunts and was withdrawing to a sort of tent he evidently lived in. "Do you suppose that man can speak English?"

"Probably better—that is, with more London accent—than either of us. He's an English Hindu."

"Come, then," and Tadbury straddled with his stumpy little legs the intervening rope, and made directly for the tent. I followed closely.

The grin of that Indian was dazzling in its welcome. He was enjoying Tadbury immensely.

"My man," began Tad deliberately, "are your engagements so pressing—that is, is your contract so binding as to forbid your giving me some information?"

"Not at all, sir," answered the fakir in excellent English. "What can I do for you?"

"I should like to hear you describe your physiological sensations while you are effecting the rapid growth of the plant."

How that heathen suppressed a chuckle, I fail to realize; but he did. He even almost wept in his earnestness.

"Why, sir, I am conscious of the greatest mental strain; but, more particularly am I fatigued by reaction in the region of here."

He clapped his paw dramatically over his middle. I had a middle, too, an aching, void middle, and I began to think the cuss was telling the truth for once. But Tadbury glowed.

"Exactly, exactly!" he cried delightedly. "The diaphragm! I knew it. I knew I was on the right trail. My theory'll hold. Pulsating radio-activity, stimulated by cerebro-mental impulses of electrical nature. Those people are not so wrong who hold as to the sphere of mind over matter. They simply fail to construe further, and see how mind can be supplemented and strengthened by mechanical contrivance. Now it further develops that—"

"Just a minute, Tad," I broke in, for the admiring and grinning score of urchins who had gathered about us, along with the tickled Hindu at this free advertisement, was getting a bit too much for me. "Wouldn't it be well for us to remove a bit out of ear-shot? You don't want the idea to leak out broadcast, do you?"

"Of course not; of course not," he agreed, much to my relief. "Let's go back to the city. I'm going to start at perfecting the process right away."

"But, Tad," I interposed, as we made our way up the gangplank of one of the steamers

that was just returning to New York, think-of the money such experiments will take."

Tad was really grand at that moment.

"Bah, Dick! So paltry a matter's hardly worth thought. I have already decided to give our friend Dinklefeld the honor of financing the thing. You see, it rightfully belongs to him, since he happened, however accidentally, to lead us toward this greatest of all endeavors, this most stupendous of all discoveries, the device I'm already in a fair way of perfecting, a device that will forever remove that curse which fell upon Adam so long ago of earning his bread by the sweat of his brow."

"A device?" I questioned, a bit thick at the moment.

"Certainly, a device; my greatest. Come —good—" He ruminated a bit, finger to temple. "I have it."

"What?"

"*Wimple's food producer!*" he cried triumphantly.

III.

We stopped that night at Dinklefeld's delicatessen-store, where Tadbury quietly borrowed five thousand dollars.

We ate.

I slept at Tad's. Then the next morning Tad began to get busy. Never have I known the little fellow to be so engrossed, so silent, and so energetic.

He left me at home to receive things. Then he hustled down-town, and there began to arrive coils upon coils of wire, horseshoe-magnets, thin plates of copper and zinc, felt pads, straps of leather, bottles of acids, dry chemicals, and several little sacks.

When Tad returned that afternoon his brow was knotted in introspection; but this did not prevent him from disposing of me very effectually.

"Dick," said he, "do you know of any tract of land, reasonably near the city, that can be purchased for not too high a price?"

"All I know of is about five acres north of Coney Island that my friend Ted Macgregor is exploiting. He's got a lemon on his hands, and I think he'd quit cheap," I replied.

"Go, buy two acres of it," said Tad deliberately. "And I say, Dick—"

"Yes?"

"Stay a week doing it, will you, like a good fellow?"

"Sure," I replied, for I was not at all hurt. I knew the hatching period was on, and that he had to be alone.

So I posted right off and bought the tract that very day. The rest of the stipulated week I spent eating. Tad had furnished me with ample funds; for was I not again his "assistant"?

My day having arrived, it was with some interest I approached the place. But the shop was empty.

A glance down into the decrepit old back yard behind the house, however, revealed the little inventor, and he saw me about as soon as I did him. A hasty beckon brought me down the flights again, and into the yard beside him.

Tadbury emitted a shout of triumph. He held in his hand a broad, straplike arrangement that fairly dazzled one with its glitter in the sun.

"Wow! I've got it, Dick. I've got it!" he fairly yelled.

"Got what?"

"Wimple's food producer!"

"Yes?"

"Yes, and yes, dead emphatic! Back there at Glen Island I tumbled to the possibility. Don't you see, Dick, that Hindu was simply using a force that he had in him inherently? He knew almost nothing about what forces he was really using.

"But I tumbled. Said I to myself: 'If this diaphragmatic, intenso-mental, electro-magnetic pulsation can be intensified by mechanical means, there is no limit to the production.' See?"

"Why, of course," said I; but I lied.

"And so you understand why I made the thing in belt form; the diaphragm, understand? It's electrical—here are pad batteries! But even these would not avail were it not for the intense concentration I have learned to put myself to when I grow the plants."

"When you grow the plants?" I cried incredulously.

"Why, of course. You just watch my future movements!"

Whereupon Tadbury flashed that broad, straplike thing a bit more; then he fitted it snugly about his round little paunch; drew some buckles tight; tapped it here and there tenderly; and finally closed a switch sewed to it with fine wire.

"Now, look you, Richard!"

Here Tad melodramatically fished into his jeans and drew out a seed.

Stepping to a well-cleared bit of bare soil, he dug his thumb firmly therein. Into the hole thus acquired he thrust the seed; then tamped the ground a bit; and, finally, stood

off and set himself into a regular breathing, his forehead corrugated intensely.

Shades of unsullied truth!

Up shot a twig of sweet and tender green from that thumb-hole of Tadbury Wimple!

It heightened, shot out branches, took leaf, spread, began to tower.

I fell back in genuine, jaw-hanging amazement.

Finally Tad reached up—up, mind you—into a branch of his tree and plucked a fruit. He gave it to me and I did eat.

"What is it?" I inquired with a smack.

"It's a mango."

"Um!"

"How do you like it?"

"Fine," I replied as I munched away; "but can you grow anything this way, Tad?"

"O incredulity, thy name is Richard!" wailed Tadbury. "Isn't it wonderful enough that I have gone thus far? The rest will be easy, for isn't the principle the same? That was why I bought all those different little bags of seeds."

"Oh, that was what was in those bags, then?"

"Of course. But look you, Dick, already have I accomplished that which will alleviate the first sufferings of those who are most pinched by the cost of living. I have perfected the belt as far as mangos are concerned. And mangoes are a delicious, edible fruit, well capable of sustaining life. Think of the poor on the lower East Side? What a boon, eh?"

"But how do you propose to go about it, Tad?" I inquired.

He assumed a wise-guy expression.

"What do you suppose I sent you to buy that tract of land for? By the way, I hope you got it O. K."

"Right as a trivet," I replied. "Friend Ted was only too glad to unload his lemon. I got the two acres."

"Good! And, Dick, that two acres is destined to go down into history—that two acres will form the nucleus, the starting-point of man's salvation from grind."

"Just how do you mean?"

"Why, to-night I propose to grow a grove of mangoes on that tract of land. To-morrow's paper will inform the starving thousands of the free food to be had for the plucking."

"Do you mean to tell me—"

"I mean just what I say!" broke out Tad. "Come up to the shop. I've got a copy of the advertisement I want you to put into every sheet of to-morrow's issue."

I followed him dumbly up the stairs, where he handed me a slip of paper.

ARE YOU HUNGRY?

Are you nipped in the present prohibitive and robbing price of bare necessities—foodstuffs?

You need be so no longer. Food is yours for the taking. An unknown benefactor will have a grove of fruit-bearing mangoes ready for you by the time you read this.

How this will be accomplished is, as yet, a secret. But the discoverer cannot wait to declare himself before he lets his fellow man avail himself of the boon.

His process is not perfected.

The grove will be situated about a mile north of that wonderland of graft, Coney Island.

Come one—come all—pluck and eat.

"Don't you think that'll bring 'em?" queried Tad.

"Will it bring 'em?" I yelled. "Can the web-footed navigate?"

Then I thought a moment.

"But you are not getting any credit by this?" I exclaimed.

"I don't want any yet!" he replied. "I'll not let my name out until I am able to grow all the life-sustaining grains. But, come now, Dick, you post off and insert those ads. And just as soon as you've done so, come back here. For, you see, we've got to hustle on down to that tract north of Coney and grow that grove to-night."

And that's just exactly what we did.

Never will I forget the weird, uncanny sight of Tadbury Wimple, girded with his magic electric belt, pacing up and down in the moonlight, sticking his pudgy forefinger in the ground at four foot intervals in rows, while behind him there shot up and began pointing to the stars that grove of mangoes!

IV.

THE next morning Tad treated me to another surprise.

I found the shop the scene of pandemonium.

Boxes and cases, old trunks and grips strewed the place. Everything looked like a quick move.

"What's up now, Tad?" I cried.

"We're going down to my old farm near Hohokus, New Jersey. It is there I have decided to perfect my contrivance. Here I have neither the quiet, nor the ground space. Besides, it is just possible some over-astute reporter might find out who I was before I am willing to declare myself. I first intend to experiment on wheat."

"But what of the mango-grove; aren't

you going to wait to see how the people take to that?"

"Oh, mangoes are but minor; but the starter. No, I'll not wait; we'll have to be content to read the papers for the news. And, accordingly, I have subscribed to them all, and have directed them to forward them to us on the farm."

So, down to the dismalness of Hohokus we hiked. But, take it from me, we were not bored. Or, at least, I was not.

Those papers would have keyed Lucullus to fever heat in his most blasé period.

Did that grove of mangoes make a stir? Well, rather.

First, the papers were full of queries. Then they took it all as a hoax. But, by the time five tent cities had camped about that two acres, they awoke to the fact that there was truth in the thing somewhere. From time to time there would be accounts of some hold-up at night on the outskirts of the grove by thugs who were too lazy to pick their own mangoes; but for the most part, the day of manna was reopened.

Then the papers turned to trying to find out who the "mysterious benefactor" was. But a week's search proved that Tadbury had managed to bury his trail right well.

This failing of result, the papers began to offer prizes for the best recipes for serving mangoes in several hundred toothsome forms. One sheet even instituted a mango department of "queries."

Then the humorists got busy. One joke I remember particularly. It ran: "Wherever girl goes mangoes," or something like that.

Kids formed a habit of yelling to passers-by: "Oh, you mango!"

Fact is, the thing caught on remarkably.

But Tadbury? Why, you'd thought he was the last man interested in all this.

Hours and hours he would spend out there in the open, on a little bit of soil we had cleared and harrowed.

Funny thing, too, how the trouble came in.

He would plant a lot of wheat seeds. Up would come a mango.

Then he tried sweet potatoes. Up would come mangoes.

Squash followed. Up mangoes.

Pumpkins. Mango up.

It certainly was disheartening, and I would have long ago given it up. But Tad stuck, and one day something did come up that didn't look, at first, like a mango.

Of course, it was a mango; but the incident was encouraging.

Then came the thirteenth of April. It was a Friday, I remember. As usual I rode down on my wheel to the post-office to get our mail and the whole stack of papers we received every day.

On the front porch I began to slit open the wrappers and open out the sheets.

My eyes froze to the crimson head-lines. I yelled to Tad, who was "concentrating" over another species of squash.

He resented the interruption, but came to my side. We read from the *Clarion:*

THE WHOLE WEST AFFECTED.

Certain indefinable rumors that have been coming to us from the West farming sections have put on greater strength.

The fact is that all the farmers are rising in their might against mangoes. They are joined, in even greater violence, by the United Fertilizers' Association.

Indeed, every one whose business is connected with the providing of foodstuffs is rising in wrath.

It is no longer a guess that an army of thousands of irate Westerners, armed at that, is forming to march East with the avowed intention of digging up, root and branch, our mango-grove that has grown fruit by the minute, enough for us all.

The whole country is in turmoil. Certain of the Senators have expressed themselves as of the opinion, etc.

I looked at Tad. Tad looked at me. I laid open the *Planet.*

STOP! STOP! STOP!

EAT NO MORE MANGOES ON YOUR LIFE!

The board of health, in the person of its most distinguished physicians, has at last discovered the cause of that curious malady that has made its appearance, particularly in the regions of the tent cities. Its nature, they declare, is something of a cross between pellagra and hookworm — dire things both, as we all so well know.

And the cause?

THE OVERINDULGENCE IN AN UNVARIED DIET OF THAT PARTICULAR SPECIES OF MANGO WHICH OUR "*BELOVED* UNKNOWN BENEFACTOR" HAS FOISTED UPON US.

"Good Lord!" groaned Tadbury in a tone of death.

I was speechless.

I simply looked at him.

Slowly, and with measured movement, he unbuckled the belt from his middle. At arm's length he carried it, as one would a snake.

Out he strode to the old oaken well, and I could hear the splash from where I sat.

We caught the milk-train in, next morning.

The Bates's Household Furniture.

BY GEORGE M. A. CAIN,

Author of "His Stolen Fortune," "His Risen Past," "Over the Partition," etc.

Showing that a Fortune Is Not so Much Dependable Upon Dollars and Cents as It Is Upon Accompanying Circumstances.

(Complete in This Number.)

CHAPTER I.

A SUDDEN DROP.

HEAVEN help the majority of the young people who got married in the summer of 1907! Wasn't it terrible? All those pretty June brides and the others that came trailing behind in July and August and September—all smiling and happy and cheerful with the bright future open before them! Of course, they were ready to follow John, and Charlie, and Tom, Dick, and Harry to the end of the world.

But, down deep in their sensible little hearts was just a trace of satisfaction and comfort in the knowledge that John, Charlie, etc., etc., had good-paying jobs that would keep a house going nicely and leave a little margin for saving or pleasure, or both.

And then—crash!

Think I don't know anything about it, eh?

But, pshaw! What if we did wonder where the next meal was coming from so often that we got used to the idea, and felt queer when we had enough to keep us a week ahead?

Didn't I get started on my present line of business, and haven't I the finest pair of babies that ever grew? Don't we just laugh about those days now? And aren't we the thankfulest ever that we didn't wait another day about splicing up?

What do you care about me, anyhow? I'd like to bet you didn't even notice the name of the humble author before you began this chapter. The other day I went into a shop. I was introduced to a man, and was talking with him for a while before I told him I sometimes inflicted a story on the inoffensive public.

"You don't ever write for *The Argosy,* do you?" he asked.

I pleaded guilty.

"Is that so?" he spoke enthusiastically. "Why, that's my favorite magazine. I always read it from cover to cover. What name do you write under?"

But, to get down to the Bateses.

Mr. Thomas Bates is about the best salesman I ever met.

In the summer of 1907 he was getting some twenty-five hundred dollars a year from the American Glass Novelty Company, and they weren't worrying a bit about the side-bills for "expenses," either. He was traveling from Maine to southern California, and from Key West to Seattle, the main thing in clenching orders for the aforesaid novelty crowd.

He and Dorothy had been married in July.

They had not settled down at all. They were still enjoying each other's society so well that they went together from town to town, and put up at the best hotels. It was in November that he came to New York, to get in touch with the biggest retail company handling the sort of thing he had for sale.

It took him the better part of a week to get through to the big man at the top of the big concern. On Saturday morning he was sitting in a chair outside the office door with Mr. Green's name printed in small letters and "Private" painted in big letters on its ground-glass panel.

He had been sitting there for two hours, and he was beginning to feel about as dis-

agreeable as a man usually feels after waiting that long for anything. It was twenty minutes after eleven, and he wanted to get to a bank and cash a check before twelve.

But there was no knowing how long it might take to get this far again, so he held himself down to the chair and waited on. A dapper young man stepped to the door of the office and then stepped clear inside. A moment later he came back with the card Bates had given him two hours before.

"My time's worth a dollar a minute today," Mr. Green had scrawled on the back of it. "Can you assure me it's worth my while to see you?"

Taking another card from his case, Tom scratched down the words:

"My time is always worth ninety dollars a week. I've spent a week getting here. Wouldn't have done it if it hadn't been worth both our whiles."

He got in. He was used to busy men, and knew how to state his errand quickly. In ten minutes he came out again. His face was beaming as he quietly stored a bit of paper in his wallet.

There were more reasons than one for the joy on his countenance. The order had been much larger than he had dared hope in the panicky season. It was of sufficient consequence to make a real difference in the annual business of the American Glass Novelty Company. The best of it was that the securing of it had put beyond peradventure the raise of salary he wanted to ask for the next year.

In his joy he nearly forgot to go to the bank, and had walked a dozen blocks past it before he remembered that he needed cash wherewith to get over Sunday. A glance at his watch showed him that he had only five minutes in which to make the return.

Five minutes was not long enough for the run. He got there just in time to hear the stroke of the clock and the distant blasts of whistles. Two people were ahead of him at the window.

The first of these received his cash; but the second was evidently not so desirable a customer of the institution.

"Sorry, Mr. Jones," the paying-teller spoke genially. "The bank is closed for the day."

In view of the fact that Bates was barely known to the teller, and had no account in that bank at all, he saw that it was of no use for him to try his luck. He counted over the money in his pockets. There were fifteen dollars left of the last check he had cashed.

"Oh, well, I guess I can get through on that," he said to himself, and went on up to the hotel where he and Dorothy were staying. He was still too cheerful over the size of the order to worry about the fact that they might have to give up the automobile ride wherewith they had planned to while away to-morrow afternoon.

"Hey, Dollikins, look at this," he shouted as he kissed her.

"Did you get the order?" she cried happily.

"Did I? Well, rather! Only five thousand dollars' worth of it a month for a year."

"Oh, splendid!"

The girl danced round the room in exuberance of joy at her husband's success.

"I guess there won't be much question of that extra five hundred now," Tom laughed at her delight. "I reckon we'll be able to put up at a little better hotels after this," he added, glancing disapprovingly at the furnishings of a room for which they were paying five dollars a day.

"Now, Tom, don't get extravagant. We ought to save up a little bit after this. Pretty soon we'll have to settle down somewhere. You know I won't be able to chase all over the country forever."

The smile on his face gained something of tenderness.

"I know, dear. We'll have to be looking for an apartment sooner or later. And then we'll want some furniture. But, remember, we've already got six hundred in the bank."

Suddenly she looked up at him with a sly twinkle in her eyes.

"Say," she half whispered, "I wasn't going to say anything about it; but, yesterday afternoon, while you were out, I went over to Fifth Avenue, and I saw the loveliest hat—all covered with ostrich plumes. And it's just marked down to fifty-four dollars. I know it's awfully extravagant—but— Oh, of course we couldn't afford it. Did you know that to-morrow is my birthday?"

To have told the truth, Tom Bates would have had to admit that he had completely forgotten the matter. Of course, he didn't tell the truth.

"I've been trying all week to find something," he assured her. "We will just walk down and see that wonderful hat this afternoon."

"Oh, Tom, you are a darling," Dorothy cooed ecstatically.

She proceeded then and there to hug him and bestow on him enough kisses to have lasted some couples a month.

"Oh, dear," she suddenly cried, "I almost forgot. There's a boy down-stairs waiting to know if there's an answer to this telegram. He must have been there almost an hour."

She ran over to the tiny desk which was included in the furniture of the suite. Tom took the yellow envelope and tore it open.

Suddenly his face went pale, and he gripped at the little table by which he stood. It creaked beneath the weight he threw upon it.

"Why, what's the matter, Tom?" Dorothy asked in dismay.

Eager to spare her, he hesitated a moment before he spoke.

"Oh, I guess it won't be very serious," he forced himself to say cheerfully. "Only, this order I've taken won't do us much good, I'm afraid."

"But, what is it, Tom? You look sick. Do tell me! Do you want me to ring for some brandy?"

"No, no; I'm all right. It just took me a little by surprise. Of course, I won't have any trouble getting another position."

"Another position?" his wife echoed. "Why, Tom—Tom, what do you mean?"

"The American Glass Novelty Company has gone into the hands of receivers. They have suspended the business indefinitely."

CHAPTER II.

JOHN GRANT.

IF you were one of the lucky few who kept their positions through the winter after the last little financial flurry, you had friends who were not so fortunate. It is quite unnecessary to remark on the difficulties of getting a position during that winter.

Tom Bates wrote a dozen letters to houses who knew enough of him to appreciate his value as a salesman. When the last answer came, he and Dorothy moved out of their present accommodations, and went to live at a cheaper hotel.

When he had written twenty more letters, and received six discouraging replies to these —the rest did not bring any responses at all —they went to a boarding-house. Meanwhile, Tom had visited personally the managers of some forty concerns where he was more or less known, and about a hundred who knew nothing of him.

Everywhere he got about the same results. The manners of the managers differed. Some of them were cordially friendly; others were surly and short.

But they all agreed, so far as offering him a position was concerned.

He tried the effect of demanding such a salary as he had been getting, in the hope that this would advertise his desirability. He tried offering his services for the lowest kinds of salaries. He eventually told a managing salesman that he would be willing to sell on commisssions alone.

"It wouldn't be worth your while," this one told him. "There's absolutely nothing doing. Times are getting worse and worse. The only business that has the least thing to hope for in the next year is real estate.

"People have drawn all their money out of the banks. Some of them will be willing to invest in land now, believing that it can be had at bargain rates. If you could get in with some good real-estate concern—you might do a little."

It took Bates four weeks to make up his mind to go into the real-estate business. He had always disliked the idea of it. He greatly preferred to deal with the heads of big business houses. Selling properties to small buyers, to tradesmen who did so little with money as to be suspicious of everything, to women who might turn down a fine proposition to take up with a poor one because they happened to fancy the agent—did not appeal to him.

But, eventually, he came to it. He spent another month in visiting all sorts and conditions of real-estate concerns. The good ones were conservative about adding to their forces. Those who tried to persuade him that he could make a fortune out of their commissions were houses of a character with which he did not care to deal.

In sheer desperation, he tried one of these about the time his bank account had been reduced to twenty dollars. But he himself did not believe in the value of the lots he tried to sell, and he could not make any one else believe in them.

After he had failed to convince a single member of the first Sunday's excursion that a lot in Villanova was worth its price, the Austin Land and Improvement Company gently informed him that it could not afford to be responsible for his expenses.

It had not been much of a position to lose —work in which he had no heart and from which he could not make any money. But the notice of his discharge seemed almost the last straw to his waning courage.

On that blue Monday morning he walked back from the gaudily furnished office with his head down, his hat over his eyes, his

worn shoes dragging listlessly over the damp pavement.

Once he glanced upward. He saw, coming toward him in the opposite direction, John Grant, head buyer for the novelty department of the Wanacooper stores. Bates ducked his head and turned as far aside as he could, ashamed to meet one of those who had known him in his days of prosperity.

But he dodged in the wrong direction. Grant, turning at the same time, almost ran into him.

"Beg your pardon," he said mechanically. Then: "Why, Tom Bates, I didn't know you were in town."

There was nothing to do then but acknowledge the greeting. Bates mendaciously informed Grant that he was delighted to see him again.

"And, how are you?" the buyer went on cordially. "And Mrs. Bates? I don't believe I've had a chance to congratulate you since the wedding."

Tom assured him that they were both very well.

"What are you doing now?" was Grant's next question. "It was a pity the American Glass people went under. I—I beg your pardon, Tom," he finished awkwardly, seeing the evident embarrassment on Bates's face.

Somehow Tom had always liked Grant. For the exceedingly small amount of intercourse they had had, a very considerable intimacy had sprung up between the two.

"Why, Heavens, man, you oughtn't to have any trouble getting something to do," John spoke reassuringly to relieve the momentary strain. "I remember, the very last time you were in my office, I said to myself after you were gone: 'There's the slickest salesman I ever saw.' What have you been trying lately?"

Reluctantly Bates admitted that he had been trying to sell real estate. Grant frowned as though the thought were as distasteful to him as if he himself were concerned.

"Well," he said whimsically, as though the acknowledgment were a trifle painful, "I guess there's about as nearly something doing in real estate as any line these days. But there are real-estate concerns and—What company are you working for?"

"I just parted from the Austin Land and Improvement Company. I couldn't sell their lots for them. To tell the truth I don't think they were worth buying at any price."

"I don't know them. It wasn't one of these crowds like the one that's booming that swamp on Long Island under the name of Villanova, was it?"

"I tried to sell some of Villanova yesterday," Tom sighed. "I'm glad I haven't it on my conscience that I sold any of it, though."

John Grant grinned appreciatively. Then his brows knit thoughtfully.

"Why, it's an infernal shame for a man like you to be down to anything like that," he said. "I wish I knew of something. But, you know even better than I do, that it is a lot easier to get to Heaven now than to get anything to do on earth."

"I hope it is," Tom said fervently.

Again Grant drew his brows together in thought. They only half relaxed when he spoke:

"Where're you stopping now?"

Bates gave him the address.

"Well, you and Mrs. Bates come up to my place for dinner to-night. You'll have to take pot-luck; but it will be a change from boarding-house anyhow. And, between now and then, I'll work my think-tank a bit and see if I can't get an idea of something."

Tom started in to thank him.

"Oh, wait till we see," Grant laughed. "Don't waste your gratitude till you can look at a result."

"Well, thanks awfully for the invitation anyhow," Tom insisted.

"Better wait about that, too. Can't tell what sort of hash we may get for dinner yet," Grant laughed again in his hearty, good-natured way. "Don't forget the number. Mrs. Grant always gives me umpte-bumpte-addy if I'm late."

Somehow things did not look so gloomy the rest of that Monday. Tom and Dorothy talked the thing over most of the afternoon as though they were at last certain of something. Again and again they had been promised the help of somebody; but John Grant carried an atmosphere about him that convinced people he meant what he said.

At ten minutes of seven they entered the marble-decorated hall of the big apartment-house. Five months before they had been quite accustomed to hotel entrances vastly more gorgeous than that hall, but now it seemed to them the acme of luxury.

The red-uniformed, dusky-skinned youth who condescended to telephone their names up to Grant's rooms appeared the embodiment of opulence. The plush-cushioned seat in the elevator looked positively extravagant after the worn carpet on the stairs of the boarding-house.

Grant himself met them at the door of his apartment.

"Here they are," he shouted over his shoulder, and, from the other end of the private hall, his wife appeared.

There was that in the whole-souled manner with which he managed the simple matter of the introductions of the ladies that made one feel instantly at home. The room into which the guests were led, half library, half den, half sitting-room—that's three halves, but you know what I mean—fairly radiated comfort. Even though the logs on the grate were of asbestos and the blue and red flames came from a pipe at the side, the fire added the last touch of cheerfulness and invitation to make oneself at utter ease.

"You'll have to excuse me for a minute," Grant said as his wife had just done. "I forgot about its being the girl's night off."

"Oh," he stopped the regrets Dorothy started to express at putting them to extra trouble, "we're always glad when she is off on company nights. She takes an extra plate at the table so seriously it throws us all into gloom."

"Isn't it all lovely?" Dorothy exclaimed to her husband when John Grant was gone out of the room.

"Do you suppose we will ever be able again to afford something like this?" Tom asked as he sank a little farther into the depths of a leather-cushioned chair.

"You foolish boy—of course we will. It won't always stay hard times. Some day—"

She was interrupted by the ring of the telephone in the hall. Grant hurried through the room in his shirt-sleeves to answer the call.

"It's Giddings and his wife," he explained, coming back into the large room while he waited for the new guests to arrive from the elevator. "We'll have a fine party with you two added to the bunch."

He hurried out to the door, and they heard his hearty voice saying: "Hallo, Billy—hallo, Claire! *Wie geht's?*"

He brought the newcomers into the room and introduced them with merry informality.

"And, look out, Billy, for Bates," he warned. "I don't know as he has anything to sell to-night; but, if he has, he'll have you hocking your overcoat to buy it. He's the greatest salesman that ever struck New York."

Mrs. Grant came in at that moment to greet the Giddingses, and simultaneously to announce that the dinner was on the table.

And such a dinner as it was! Dainty enough for a king, and generous enough for a farmer's table at thrashing-time.

"Grant," Bates exclaimed when he tasted the delicious coffee at the end, "unless that girl of yours is a wonder, I'm mighty glad it's her night off!"

Mrs. Grant appreciated the compliment, smiling radiantly from behind the big samovar.

"To tell the truth," John grinned, "I always feel like celebrating when Irene does the cooking."

"And the cooking gives you the celebration," Giddings put in.

Claire Giddings insisted on going to the kitchen to help with the dishes, and, of course, Dorothy joined them. It left the men together.

Instantly Grant got down to business.

"Tom," he said, "I don't know whether I've got much done or not. I got to thinking after I saw you this morning. And I couldn't seem to get it out of my head that real estate is about the only thing there is at present. Then I remembered that Billy here had an uncle who is in that line.

"So Billy and I got together and went over to see Mr. Burton. That's Billy's uncle's name. He's the head of the Burton Real Estate Brokerage Company.

"But we couldn't seem to do much with him so far as salary goes. I told him there wasn't another salesman to beat you in New York, and that you had some experience with real estate. I thought I was making it pretty strong.

"Billy had told me his uncle was about to open a branch office up in the Bronx; so I put it up to Mr. Burton that you were the very man to manage that office. I guess I made a little impression, for he finally told me to send you around. He said that, if you looked as good as I made you out, he'd let you take the office at fifteen dollars a week and one per cent commission.

"I told him you would never consider such a salary; that you had been getting around ten times that much. But he insisted that, if you were any good, you'd be able to make two or three hundred a week after things really got started. I left him, saying that if you could be persuaded to think of such a proposition, I would send you over in the morning.

"Now, it's a good, solid house, but pretty old-fashioned. I myself believe that you'd make money out of the job after the first few months. And the salary will keep the

wolf away while you're getting started. I wish it were a bigger thing—but it's the only thing I can think of now. Why, what's the matter?"

Grant had suddenly noticed the tears of gratitude in Tom's eyes.

Fifteen dollars of sure salary, with a possible commission once in a while, looked like a gold-mine to Tom Bates at that moment.

He was ready to go on his knees to thank the man who had got it for him.

CHAPTER III.

LOOKING UP.

SIX months later—it was almost a year from the day when the American Glass Novelty Company went bankrupt—Tom Bates ran up the stairs of a certain cheap apartment-house up in the Bronx. He skipped every other step and the top two of each flight till he came to the third.

The walls of the entrance to that apartment-house were not veneered with marble slabs. Instead of a heavy plush carpet, a rather frayed strip of coarse mat led from the door to the foot of the stairs.

These were covered with oilcloth, through which the bare boards peeped in the middle of some of the steps. He wasn't sure whether the odor of boiling sauerkraut on the second floor or that of frying onions on the third was more masterful.

He hated the whole house. Most particularly he hated the four rooms on the top floor which had sheltered his wife's first attempts at housekeeping. The gaudy paper on the walls of those rooms was an eyesore to him.

He had never been able to overcome the loathing he felt for the furniture, which took each month about twice what he could spare to pay the instalment collector.

He could not help comparing it to-night with John Grant's place. It always seemed a little worse for a week after a visit to Grant's. And he had been there the previous Sunday, with Dorothy and the baby, for the first time.

Yes, there was a little Tom Bates, Jr., now. That was why, in spite of his distaste for the rooms, he always hurried so to get up to them. A whole day away from Dorothy had seemed long. But a day away from Dorothy and the baby was almost an eternal punishment.

Yet on this particular evening he made better time up the three flights than usual. For his own reasons, because he had never lost heart so entirely as to give up the habit of occasionally teasing his wife, he stopped his mad run as he neared the top of the last stair and finished the climb in a very fair imitation of a man weighed down by utter dejection.

"Hallo, Dollikins; how's the boy?" he greeted the little woman who stood in the open door.

He felt that he was taking off the trying-to-bear-up-bravely tone to perfection.

"You're late, you naughty daddy!" Mrs. Bates spoke with mock severity, when she had been dutifully kissed and Tom was on his way to the little bedroom to pay respects to his son and heir. "Give an account of yourself."

Tom printed a kiss on the tiny forehead as though he were bound to do his duty by his home, come what might. Then he sank into a chair with an assumption of the air of one who has no spirit for pleasure or jest.

"What's the matter, Tom?" Dorothy asked in a tone of concern.

The tone of concern may have been real, or it may have been due to the fact that she suspected he was putting on and determined to humor him. She had had time to get well acquainted with her husband by now.

"Dolly, I guess we'll have to give up this flat," he spoke at last, with a fine imitation catch in his throat.

"Give up the flat!" she echoed with what certainly seemed like genuine alarm. "Why, what has happened?"

"I just saw Sternberg down-stairs, and he says we are to go the first of the month. I think he's going to raise the rent," Tom sighed dismally.

"The first of the month!" Dorothy's voice carried the exclamation point again. "Why, that's only two weeks off. What right has he to send us off like that? Haven't you paid the rent?"

"Yes—to the end of this month. But we can't afford to do it another month. I told him so."

Tom's tone had reached the very quintessence of perfect mournfulness by now.

"But, Tom, we can't move in two weeks. I couldn't get the things together—with a baby on my hands. It took you almost a month to find this place. Surely you aren't going to take anything any worse?"

"I know it's an awful hole," Tom spoke with genuine fervor now. "I never think of you and the baby up here without saying

something bad. But—we get a month's rent free, if we move to another house, you know."

"And pay as much to get moved—and all the work of tearing up and getting settled again—all the damage to the furniture, such as it is. Why, Tom, what has happened? You surely wouldn't have done it unless—You haven't lost your position, have you?"

"No-o," Tom groaned again. "No—not exactly lost it."

He was enjoying this prelude to his real announcement immensely. He had always been an inordinate tease. Besides, he felt that, by getting his wife somewhere near the depths of despair, he would bring her to the greater enjoyment of the good news.

"Well, Tom, what is it, anyhow?"

A suspicious moisture began to gather in her eyes, and he realized that the joke had gone far enough. Slowly he drew from his pocket a long envelope.

"Read this," he bade her, still unable entirely to give up his doleful manner.

She glanced dubiously at the name of the Burton Real Estate Company. Then, slowly, she drew forth the legal-looking, engraved parchment inside the envelope. She stared hard at the high-sounding words, which might as well have been a Greek treatise on the extinction of the ichthyosaurus for all it meant to her.

"Oh, tell me what it means," she demanded. "I can't understand all this stuff about the party of the first part and the party of the second part. What is it? Don't be afraid to tell me."

"Well, it's a sale agreement," Tom explained lucidly.

"Oh, stop your nonsense. What do I know about a sale agreement?"

It is quite possible that she saw through the attempt to put her on the rack by this time. At all events, her words of impatience suddenly lost the "tell-me-the-worst" tone.

This fact did not escape her husband's notice. It started him on a new line of teasing.

"You remember," he asked, "that place called Harrisville, where we went to the free Sunday excursion last May?"

"Where all those Italians and Poles were buying? Did you sell one of those houses?"

"The company sold a house—I bought it," he corrected, smiling guilelessly.

"You bought one of those houses? You? Where on earth did you get the money? You don't suppose I'm going to live in it, do you? Isn't this bad enough? How in the world are you going to get to the office? Why, there isn't a house in the lot that my father would have kept chickens in," Dorothy finished without waiting any answer to all the questions she had hurled in one indignant breath.

"Oh, they're not all so bad." Tom assumed an argumentative manner. "Don't you remember that cute little four-room cottage with the yellow front and the red trimmings that I pointed out to you?"

"Tom Bates, I won't go there. I won't live in a house with red blinds and a yellow front. I won't have my neighbors keeping goats and chickens and broken-down horses under my windows. I won't—I won't. You can just go live there yourself, if you want to."

At last she had attained exactly the frame of mind and the tone of voice for which Tom had been working. As she flounced out into the kitchenette with her head in the air, he followed her.

"Why, don't you think you'll like it?" he urged. "You could have a little garden in the rear, and sonny could sit out there in the fresh air all day. And, think of the rent we'll save. It was only fifty dollars down. I got a little more than that on a commission this morning. And some of the eighteen dollars a month will be going toward paying for it. Then, if we get really rich some day, we can get out of it most of what we have put in."

But Dorothy was too wrought up with the idea of speech. She bustled back and forth, putting the things on the table, with her nose so high in the air it was much more expressive than mere words could have been.

"Let's have dinner," she announced at length, and stood with an air of martyrdom while Tom said the brief grace which constituted one of his heritages from a bringing up in a clergyman's family.

The short ceremony lost most of its solemnity through the difficulty he had in controlling his features.

"I've always felt toward this place as though we could stand it for a little bit longer. But—to go and tie ourselves up with something worse!" she spoke with more indignation than sorrow in her voice.

"I suppose, maybe, you'd be better satisfied if I'd bought a house in Terrace Manor," he suggested ironically.

"Oh, Tom, please don't talk about it," she cut him off. "I'm sorry I said what I did. Of course, I'll go live wherever you take me, I suppose. I know we couldn't af-

ford Terrace Manor even if you were getting what you used to get. But I did think we ought to wait about buying until we could get hold of something like—well, like Westview.

"Here, I could get a trolley to take me somewhere. It's pretty hard to think of going where there are no cars, no associates, no anything that we like. But, perhaps it's all for the best. It will take out any remaining sparks of foolish pride I may possess."

In mentioning Westview, Dorothy had hinted at what Tom knew was the great longing of her heart. Every Sunday afternoon during the preceding summer, she had begged him to take her to Westview if he could get away from his work with the free excursions. She had preferred it to all the resorts to which he had offered to take her.

And, somehow, on all those occasions, they had drifted down a certain shady street, past a certain little cottage with a sign on it which proclaimed that it was for sale. Of evenings, after these trips to the suburb, she would talk for hours of the joys of living in that house. On the last of their journeys, he had taken the key and let her inspect the interior. The result had been that she became more infatuated with it than ever.

He was nearly at the end of his teasing. He kept on only long enough for one more question—

"You didn't really think that we could afford to take a house in Westview, did you?"

"Of course, not now," she replied. "But I would rather have laid aside a little when we could spare it until we could get what we want, instead of fastening ourselves up in Harrisville."

"Well," Tom spoke softly now, "that paper there is a sale agreement for No. 95 Arlington Avenue, Westview. I just paid down four hundred dollars on the house, less my commission on the sale to myself. It's made out in your name."

For an instant she regarded him suspiciously. There was no doubting the smile of pleasure that shone in his eyes.

"I sold that big Eaton estate this afternoon. My commission was six hundred and fifty," he added in the same gentle tone.

Suddenly tears glistened in her eyes. A glad little cry escaped her lips. She dropped her spoon into her soup so quickly that it splashed the clean table-cloth. With a leap she was at Tom's side and contrived to land upon his knee, almost upsetting the table to perform the feat.

"Oh, you darling—you darling!" she managed to gurgle between her kisses.

The little demonstration was interrupted by the jangle of the bell from below. Dorothy got up and pressed the button to release the hall door's latch. Then she came back to kiss her husband again while the visitor should climb the stairs.

Evidently the ringing of the bell had reminded Tom of other unpleasant occasions when it had rung thus.

"To my mind the best of it is that now we can pay up for this furniture and stop the visits of the instalment man," he said.

"Thank Heaven for that!" Dorothy said.

Then there was a knock on the door, and the now familiar figure of Billy Giddings appeared in the doorway. Instantly their exuberance turned to quiet sympathy.

For Giddings's wife had died only a month after their first meeting. He himself had gone down-hill rather badly since. For three months he had done no work, and had only pretended to try to sell mining stocks. Long ago they had learned that he had never been capable of really good positions, that Grant's hospitality to him had been almost in the way of charity.

But they had all stood by him as best they could, in spite of his failings. If for nothing else, the Bateses were grateful to him for the reminder his lot had been of their own comparative good fortune.

Over and over they had roused themselves to thankfulness from the depths of gloom at their hardships, as one or the other would remark:

"But, thank Heaven, neither of us has lost the other, like poor Billy Giddings."

To-night he seemed roused from the lethargy into which his loss had plunged him. He was deeply agitated and his voice trembled as he bade them good evening.

Then, in a tone of real emotion, he asked:

"Have you heard about John Grant?"

"Why—what has happened to him?" both cried at once.

"The doctors have ordered him to clear out for Denver. He's got consumption," was the startling reply.

CHAPTER IV.

A FRIEND IN NEED.

BILLY GIDDINGS was too irresponsible a man for any one to confide deeply in. The two families which had been doing all they could to keep him going since

his loss had destroyed what little ambition he ever had possessed, were yet inclined to leave him out of important discussions.

Tom and Dorothy waited until he was out of the room before they began to do more than express their sympathy for John Grant and his wife.

"I'm afraid," said Bates, "that this is going to be harder on the Grants financially than any other way. Of course we know plenty of consumptives who have recovered entirely by getting into proper climate and taking care of themselves before the disease had gone too far. But—it costs a lot of money to do all that."

"But John Grant must have money," Dorothy put in. "How can they live as they do without it?"

"That's just it. It takes all they've made to live as they do. Only the other day I heard John saying he could never get his savings-bank account up to a hundred dollars. And Heaven only knows what he will be able to live on in an entirely strange city."

They sat silent for several moments, each pretending to eat the dinner for which the news had destroyed their appetites. Their silence was broken by both at once.

"Dorothy—" said Tom.

"Tom—" Dorothy said at the same instant.

"What were you going to say?" Bates left off what he had intended saying.

"We must help them out with some of the money you got to-day."

"That is just what I was going to say."

"How much of it is there left—or did you pay for the house?" Dorothy asked.

"I paid four hundred. We've two hundred and fifty left. Of course, there's the butcher and grocer bill—I guess the week's salary will nearly cover that. Then there'll be the moving—I'm afraid that will cost us about forty dollars. But, we ought to be able to spare two hundred of it. I'm glad of a chance to pay back Grant for what he did for me."

"It is too bad we won't be able to finish paying for the furniture now," Dorothy sighed.

But it was a sigh of resignation. She had no more thought than had her husband of holding back a cent that they could spare.

"Well"—he spoke resolutely—"we've managed to pay the instalments so far, and I guess we'll be able to keep them going now. I may get some more big deals to handle, now that I have succeeded with this."

He went and got his hat and coat. It was not necessary for him to tell her where he was going.

"Wake me up and tell me just how they are situated when you come back," she bade him as he kissed her good-by.

John Grant received him with the same cordial, cheerful hospitality as ever. But Tom could not quite restrain the tears as he realized that he was going to lose one of the best friends he had ever had.

"Lord!" Grant groaned. "Don't go to weeping about me. I'm not dead yet by a long shot. The doctor says that I ought to be as good as new in three or four months. I'll be back to give you a licking for this, if I don't like it so well out there that I want to stay."

It was like him to do all he could to prevent any one bearing any of his troubles. It required some rather careful questioning on Tom's part to get an admission from John that he was really worried about the financial end of the journey.

"I guess we'll manage somehow," he said. "I've got some letters of introduction to business houses out there. And, as soon as I am able to do anything, I'll look up a job of some sort."

"But," Tom asked him, "have you got enough to move you out there?"

"Well—of course I'll have to sell out the most of this furniture. Naturally, I'll lose a good deal on it, but you have to expect that under these circumstances."

He spoke the words cheerfully enough. But Tom could not help feel more keenly sympathetic than ever as he realized how much such a home as John had made for himself must mean.

"You aren't going to give it all up?" he asked in pained astonishment.

"Don't see any other way. If we don't stay out there, we wouldn't want to move it. If we do stay, we'll just have to buy more when we can afford it. For the present we'll be boarding, anyhow."

"But, Heavens, man—it's your home. It's taken you three or four years to get it all together. John, don't do it. I took in over six hundred dollars to-day. I made a payment on a house, or you would be welcome to all of it. But I can spare two hundred of it without hurting me a bit."

It was the turn of John Grant's eyes to get moist.

"It's awfully good of you, old man," he spoke fervently, "but I couldn't do it. I don't know when I'd ever be able to pay it back."

"You don't have to—not till you're good and ready."

"No," John said firmly. "I don't dare get into debt. We haven't saved as we ought to have done. But we've kept clear. I wouldn't be willing to do it. It would be different if I knew just what I am going to do—how I'll come out. But I can't quite know that now. I can't tell you how much I appreciate it—but it wouldn't be right."

Tom argued at great length, but in vain. Finally John offered a suggestion.

"If you want my furniture for two hundred dollars, I'll do business with you. But I'm not in the market for loans of money."

"Your furniture for two hundred dollars," Tom echoed. "You turn down my offer of a loan and then invite me to rob you. What do you mean?"

John laughed a little mirthlessly.

"Tom Bates, I'm not letting you rob me. I'm trying to skin you out of your eyes. Of course, this furniture has cost me nearly a thousand dollars. But it was new then. It's second-hand now. I had a dealer in here this afternoon, and he offered me exactly one hundred and forty-five for it."

"But another dealer—"

"It would be just the same. If I had time to sell it off piece by piece, I might get something out of it. As it is, you'd be helping me a whole lot by paying me two hundred for it. That doesn't include the piano. I sold that this afternoon for a hundred and fifty. I paid four-fifty for it two years ago."

In spite of his sorrow for Grant's plight, Tom could not prevent his eyes from sparkling as he thought of putting the really charming furnishings into his new house at Westview.

"I'll take it, John," he said, "on condition that you make it three hundred and let me send you the extra hundred when I can get it."

There took place an odd bargaining in which the seller tried to get the buyer's price down. Finally they compromised on two hundred and fifty. Tom knew that he was getting a splendid bargain at that. And John was quite aware that he was not by any means overcharging.

"Tom's bought the furniture," John announced with real gratitude in his voice as the two men went back to the room where Mrs. Grant was being assisted by Billy Giddings in the packing of books.

"Oh, I'm so glad," she smiled happily. "It won't seem near so hard to think that the things have stayed in our crowd."

The remark added both joy and pain to Tom's own feelings. It gave him the sense of bringing some cheer to the gloom of his friends. But it also showed him the attachment which they had felt for the things they were sacrificing.

When he returned home late, after helping with the packing himself, and told Dorothy what he had done, she too expressed the sentiment which he felt.

"Of course it will be lovely to have all those nice things in our new home. But I shall always feel a little sad, when I think of the way we got them."

CHAPTER V.

THE MOVING.

"TOM," said Dorothy as they sat at breakfast the next morning, "I don't see how we can ever stand these things round with the Grants' furniture, do you?"

"I was thinking about the same thing. I wish we were rid of this confounded stuff."

Tom never referred to the furniture they possessed without applying some epithet of distaste. That Dorothy never used quite the same words was solely due to the fact that she was of a gentler sex.

"How much have we got to pay on it yet?" Dorothy asked.

"Sixty-five dollars," Tom growled. "I've half a mind to let Einstein & Co. take them for non-payment of the rest."

"I wonder," Dorothy hesitated, after a few moments of thought, "if we couldn't sell it."

"If we got for it proportionately with what the dealer offered John, we'd lose money by it. I should say myself that this stuff would be a good present for such an enemy as I haven't just now."

"Well, we could try it. If we find we can't get enough for it to more than pay what we owe, we could still turn it back to Einstein's. It really seems to me as though it would be a shame to pay for moving these things that we really have no further use for."

The cheap furniture had been purchased when they first determined that housekeeping would be their cheapest way to live. It had been the only sort of thing they could get. They had had to have something. Such furniture as they wanted could be bought second-hand only for cash. New, it had been entirely beyond their purse.

"We can probably do better by advertising it and selling it in pieces than any other way," they decided. Wherefore, Tom inserted a three-line advertisement in one of the more sensational evening papers.

Meanwhile, he arranged to have John's furniture moved out of town to his new house in Westview, on the day when the Grants started for Denver. It cost him forty dollars to send the things, and he felt rather poor the night after he paid the bill.

The advertisement had brought but few interested in buying, and the bedroom suite was all that had been sold. This had brought only twenty-five dollars, but it had seemed better than they could hope to do with a dealer.

The few books that they possessed, he managed to get packed, together with the kitchen utensils, bedding, clothes, and the half dozen pictures they owned. It cost him five dollars to express these to Westview.

They went the day before the final moving. What things were absolutely essential for the passing of the night, they kept to pack in trunks the next morning.

On that same day, discouraged with the slowness of private buyers, Tom crossed the bridge into Manhattan, called on a small Third Avenue dealer, and invited him to come round and see the furniture he had.

He was beginning to worry about the possibility of getting enough to pay off the remainder of the instalments. All of his extra money was gone, and he had a feeling that there were going to be a good many extra expenses in settling.

With some trepidation he brought Feinburg, the dealer, to the house. The attempt to sell the furniture had brought to his attention many defects and scratches that he had never noticed before. That Feinburg would certainly make the most of these and the least of any value there might be in the things was practically certain.

But Feinburg seemed a man of sufficient gentleness of disposition to pass over unimportant defects. Hurrying through the rooms, he omitted to remark even upon the crack in one of the leaves of the dining-table. When, at the end of his inspection, he calmly offered eighty dollars for the lot, Tom was so surprised he felt dizzy.

That Feinburg had a shifty eye and a crooked nose and a rough growth of black whiskers on his chin, that he appeared a man who would resort to any trickery to gain his ends, Tom was inclined to forgive and forget. He then and there accepted the dealer's promise to send for the things the next afternoon and pay for them in cash at his store when they reached it.

He and Dorothy did a little dance upon the rough, bare floor at thought of their success in the disposal of the furniture which had been an eyesore and constant misery to them from the beginning of their possession of it.

"Thank Heaven, we're done with that stuff. And we're forty dollars ahead of what we owe on it, too," he shouted gleefully.

Bright and early next morning, they were up. Little Thomas Bates, Jr., had had his bath and his breakfast a full hour before he ordinarily opened his big, baby eyes. His parents made such a meal as they might from the things that remained in the rooms.

For once in history, the expressman arrived on schedule time and took their trunks and grips to the station. Tom and Dorothy decided that they would best go out to Westview together in the morning, in order that he might help her in moving the baby. Then Tom could come back and attend to the things that Feinburg had bought.

"Good-by old house," Dorothy cried gaily, as she stood in the door of the flat, while Tom seized his son and heir to carry him down the three flights of stairs.

Then a suspicious mist gathered in her eyes. Her husband looked at her in surprise. "I can't help feeling a little tender toward the place where our baby was born," she apologized, half tearfully, half laughing.

So they started for their new home in Westview.

Tom had been there when the men had brought Grant's things, and had seen to it that most of them were somewhere near the places they should finally occupy. The rugs were on the floor. Bates himself had arranged the chairs and tables in the living and dining rooms.

Thomas, Jr., had gone to sleep by the time they arrived. His father took him up to the new crib which he had ordered without telling Dorothy, and which seemed more of a surprise to his mother than to the baby, who did not even wake up to study his new surroundings.

"Oh, isn't this a real home?" Mrs. Bates cried happily, as she dropped into one of the comfortable chairs after removing her wraps and those of Thomas, Jr. "I must sit down for a minute just to see how it feels."

"And I'll have to take the next car right back to the house—the flat, I mean," said Bates. "The men from Feinburg's will be

there right after noon, and I want to get them through as quickly as possible. I want to get the money from him and take it to Einstein, and get back here as soon as I can."

"And then, thank Heaven! that chapter of our existence will be over," Dorothy spoke fervently enough.

"Here, I'll leave what money I've got left with you. I ordered some things from the butcher and grocer. There's only six dollars left, anyhow. I think you'll have to have almost all of it. It's lucky to-morrow is Saturday and pay-day."

As he handed her the bills, he counted the change he had left in his pocket.

"Well," he said, "fifteen cents will see me there. I'll have the extra fifteen dollars after paying Einstein up. I guess we'll need that, too."

But such very temporary embarrassments are not serious, and he kissed her gaily as he started for the corner where the cars ran. To ascertain how much time he must allow each morning, he glanced at his watch as he boarded the trolley.

The short run to the Fort Lee ferry, the trip across, and the ride on the Subway to the station nearest his office used up three-quarters of an hour. He nodded with satisfaction as he observed the time. He was ready to tell the first neighbor he should meet about it. Which goes to show that he had become a full-fledged commuter.

Feinburg's men had not come, and he searched about the house for some remnants of food, wishing that he had brought a little more money with him. Then he waited two hours longer, in which his half-satisfied appetite increased his desire for more money.

At length a van, decorated with the name of Donnelin instead of that of Feinberg, backed to the door. Four stalwart negroes made short work of getting the things aboard it, having assured themselves that this was the furniture for Feinburg.

The flat had never seemed a charming place to Tom Bates. But, as he hurried through in one final search for anything that might be left, it appeared desolate. The hollow sound of his footsteps on the bare boards caused his heart to sink.

"I believe I feel some sentiment for the miserable place myself," he grinned sheepishly at the glass over the imitation mantel.

Then he turned the key in the lock and went down to leave it with the housekeeper. Already he noticed the signboard, "Apartment to Let," had been hung before the door. A man stood gazing at it a moment, and went in as Bates went out.

"It's good-by forever to the house where the boy was born," Tom mourned foolishly.

Then he laughed at himself, and started toward the office, which he had left in charge of his stenographer for the day. He intended to see that all was well there while giving the van time to get the things to Feinburg's place.

"Oh," exclaimed Miss Tracy, the stenographer, "I'm so glad you got here. Mr. Burton called up this morning to say he was advertising the factory on the corner of One Hundred and Forty-Ninth Street to be sold from this office. He wanted you to call him up for the details, if you came in. And there have been two men in to see about it already."

Tom's heart leaped. A long, joyous whistle escaped his lips. The firm was turning big business into his hands. Already he was reaping results other than the commission from his disposal of the Eaton estate.

"The men are coming back any minute now. I told them you expected to be in around half past three," Miss Tracy added, as Tom took down the receiver of the private phone to the Burton Real Estate Brokerage Company's down-town office.

When he had learned that the deal in prospect involved a little over a hundred thousand dollars, and had heard the complimentary remarks of his employer with regard to his handling of the Eaton place, he felt better yet. The entrance of a solid-looking business man at the same moment brought the thousand dollars commission right into view.

He lost all thought of time while he went personally with Mr. Morrison, the prospective buyer, to show him the factory. It was not until the gentleman had been gone ten minutes that he stopped doing a hornpipe over the empty floor of the deserted building, and consulted his watch.

"Great Scott!" he exclaimed. "Half past five. I'll have to do some hustling. Guess I will have to wait till to-morrow to pay Einstein now."

Fifteen minutes brought him over the bridge to the ramshackle building in which Feinburg conducted his business in second-hand furniture. As he entered the musty place, he saw the things from his flat piled up at one side. He had to wait ten minutes more for the proprietor of the place to come out and see him. The ugly little man looked at him malignantly as he approached.

"What you done to that furniture since I told you I take it?" he snapped.

"Why—why—" Tom gasped, utterly taken aback. "What's the matter?"

"It looks like you take it a knife and scrape the varnish off. And one of the table-leaves is split. It was good furniture when I seen it. Now it ain't nothin' but junk.

"Look at this here—and this," he growled on, turning the full glare of a hanging electric-light upon the articles. "How you think I sell it such stuff as that?"

As Tom followed the pointing finger of the dealer he suddenly grasped the significance of the game. The defects were old ones. They had been there when Feinburg had seen the things the day before.

"And what you done it to this here?" the squat, swart man snarled on, pointing to an ugly bruise on a corner of the small table that had been in their living-room.

This damage was new. For an instant it puzzled Tom. Then the print of a hammer where the corner had been struck a purposeful blow revealed to him that the dealer had not been quite satisfied to leave things as bad as they were.

"You must think it I'm a fool if I buy that stuff," Feinburg ended, glaring fiercely upon Bates. "You will do me a favor to get it out of here as quick as you can."

It dawned upon Tom Bates that he was in something of a predicament. He could not have the things taken back to the flat. He had no money wherewith to ship them to Westview. He had little hope that he could get much more out of another dealer, should he take time to hunt for one and bring him here.

"I'll give you just twenty-five dollars for them as they are," Feinburg suddenly broke into his reverie.

"You infernal scoundrel," Tom cried, his temper getting the best of him. "I've half a mind to bump your head against them."

Coolly the dealer shrugged his shoulders.

"What do you want to do? Be quick about it. I ain't got no more time," he snapped.

Still Tom hesitated, wondering how he could even reach Dorothy that evening if he did not take what Feinberg offered. While he debated whether to call a policeman and have the contemptible swindler arrested on the spot, the front door of the place burst open and in rushed—the instalment collector from Einstein's.

Behind the collector stalked a heavily built, flat-footed individual whom Tom instantly sized up for a plain-clothes officer of the law.

"So this is your game, is it?" the collector shouted across the space that he rapidly shortened. "You're trying to sell our furniture and get out."

For a moment, Tom thought he saw a way out of most of his trouble. He could yet borrow a quarter of Billy Giddings to see him to Westview. He would turn the things over to Einstein in default of payment.

"Well, there it is." He pointed to the pile of his late belongings.

"This man promised to pay me eighty dollars for it, and I was coming round to pay you. Now he has dropped to twenty-five. I don't want the stuff any more. You can take it."

The policeman grinned a little at this. Evidently he had small liking for the task of settling this sort of a dispute for this sort of a furniture dealer. The collector looked a little nonplused, and glared angrily at Tom for a silent moment.

"I guess you'd rather I didn't manage to arrest your man," the officer spoke calmly to Einstein's man.

"You wait a minute till I see whether it is all here," the collector demanded.

Suddenly Tom felt his knees wabbling beneath him as the ugly man hurried from article to article, scanning meanwhile a list in his hand. The collector lost little time in discovering what was the cause of Bates's terror.

"The bedroom suite," he shouted, waving the paper at Tom's face. "Where is it?"

Before Tom could formulate any sort of reply, the collector turned again to the plain-clothes man.

"Go on and take him."

"Is your name Thomas Bates?" the officer asked, still evidently willing to give his prisoner a chance to escape.

"Oh, that's his name, all right. If he's still keepin' the name what he bought the stuff with," the collector put in.

"It's my name," Tom agreed. "But I've already paid one hundred and twenty-five dollars on this furniture. There's sixty-five yet to pay. That bedroom outfit was originally listed at forty-eight on the bills. He ought to be satisfied to take the rest for the sixty-five."

"But, see here," the policeman demanded, "wasn't you trying to do him on this? Didn't you bring the whole lot up here to sell?"

"I did. Naturally I wanted to get back

a little of what I had paid for them. I was going—"

"You just remember it what he says, Mr. Policeman," the collector shouted. "He was trying to sell the stuff, ain't it? He says so himself, don't he? What you waitin' for?"

"I guess you'd better come with me," the policeman grunted. "I thought mebbe this guy would rather I'd let you go. I've got a warrant for you."

On the way to the station-house, Tom Bates spoke but once—

"What's the crime I'm accused of, officer?" he asked.

"Grand larceny, curse 'em," the policeman muttered.

CHAPTER VI.

A PENNILESS PRISONER.

TOM BATES was torn with about fifty-seven varieties of emotion.

He was in a mood to do violence to the collector from Einstein's, to Einstein himself, to all the representatives of the firm. He could have slain Feinburg without feeling deep remorse until afterward.

It seemed hardly possible that a magistrate would hold him on such a charge under the circumstances. But, together with his anger, came a tremendous anxiety lest the impossible should occur.

The thought of Dorothy alone in the new house with the baby, waiting in vain for his return, her frightened imagination conjuring up new horrors to account for his delay—caused him untold misery.

The knowledge that he had not five cents on his person wherewith even to send out for a friend to go on his bail and secure his release helped to make him miserable. Besides, he had not the slightest idea as to whom he might call on for such aid.

He had not specially cultivated the acquaintance of his old days with the American Glass Novelty Company. He had been held back from them by a certain foolish pride which was unwilling to let them see his poverty. John Grant was already in Denver by this time. Billy Giddings, down on his uppers, could hardly be of assistance.

There remained only Mr. Burton, the head of the real-estate brokerage of which Tom was the representative. Somehow, he had never felt that he had gained his employer's confidence sufficiently to warrant letting him know about his present difficulty.

Mr. Burton had been slow in letting him take charge of a large deal. His praise for the handling of the Eaton estate had seemed rather grudgingly given, as though by a man who felt it was good policy to praise, but hard work.

And this brought him to a new phase of his misfortune. Unless he could get free by to-morrow, he would be unable to see Mr. Morrison, the man who had almost promised to buy the factory.

Inevitably Mr. Burton must find out about his absence from his work. He did not doubt that information as to his whereabouts would cause the head of the concern to discharge him from its employ.

At the station-house, when he was halted at the lieutenant's desk for the purpose of having his name entered on the police blotter, he started to plead for some arrangement by which he could secure his liberty.

"Sure," said the lieutenant, "just give the keeper a quarter and he'll telephone for some one to see the magistrate and get you out on bail. Probably these guys will be glad to let you off in the morning, anyhow."

"But—but," Tom faltered, his face growing red, "I haven't got a quarter. I gave all the cash I had to my wife this morning, except my car fare into town. I expected to pay this man and have some left from what Feinburg had promised to pay me."

Instantly the lieutenant's manner changed. Before, he had seemed distinctly partial to the prisoner, and had glowered at the accuser as the charge was noted down. Now, he turned with a sneer on poor Bates.

"That's a pretty fair yarn. But it don't go here. It's the cash or nothing with us." Turning to the officer who had brought Tom in, he added indifferently: "Lock him up."

Promptly a guiding hand was laid on Tom's shoulder. It pushed as well as guided. Two turns in a dim passageway, the clang of a heavy iron door, and Tom Bates was in a cell.

Groping about until his eyes became accustomed to the half light from a turned down gas-jet, he found a bench and sat down upon it to think. There was every indication that he could do little else than think. There was plenty to think about.

Round and round the cycle of miseries he went.

Dorothy, alone with the baby in the new house, worrying herself sick for him; his want of means wherewith to telephone her that he was, at least, alive; his inability to communicate with any one; his fear of communicating with any one who might be of as-

sistance; the probable loss of a big commission to-morrow; the no less probable loss of his position when word of his absence should lead to Mr. Burton's discovering where he was; the possibility that he would be finally sentenced to serve out actual time as a criminal.

All these wretched reflections followed each other, mingled with one another, until his brain seemed whirling round and round a panorama of horrors.

He realized that he was in the eyes of the law a criminal. He recalled, now that it was too late, the terms of the agreement of the purchase of his articles of furniture. He had attempted to sell what did not at all belong to him. By the contract of sale, he acquired possession of those articles only when they were entirely paid for.

If Feinburg had fulfilled his promise, there would probably have been no trouble. He would have had the money to pay the collector, and that would have quite satisfied Einstein.

Feinburg had not lived up to his agreement. There was no way by which Tom, a penniless prisoner, could make Feinburg come to terms. In all likelihood the man would simply refuse to take the furniture at the stipulated price, and it would be no easy matter to compel him to do so.

In that case, Tom would have it on his hands. Einstein would not take it as payment, since the bedroom things were missing from the lot.

Like a wild beast newly caged, Bates's mind raced from one point to another, vainly seeking some loophole through which he might hope for relief. There was apparently none.

The only sign of promise he had conjured up—the thought that Dorothy would probably telephone until she located him, and would then set about doing what she could—ended in darkness like the rest. She could not leave the baby. There was nothing she could do were she here.

Suddenly he realized that he had a visitor. With a shudder, he raised his hand from the bench and brushed away the insect he had felt running swiftly across his cheek.

He glanced round the cell with eyes better accustomed now to the dimness.

Water-bugs galore rushed about the floor and over the bench on which he sat.

He got up, and thrust his face against the bars of his door, seeking with the fetid air of the passage to overcome the nausea his discovery had brought on.

Here he must spend the long night. In the morning he would be taken before a magistrate. There would be a "hearing."

He wondered whether that would be his trial, whether it would settle everything for good or ill, whether it would be the final determining of his sentence. He tried to recall what he had happened to read of criminal cases.

As nearly as he could remember, the magistrate's hearing was a very small affair, and could result, with him, only in the fixing of a bail he could not provide and his consequent return to the prison to await further trial.

Should that be the case—he would certainly try to communicate with Mr. Burton. Since his discovery of the other inhabitants of the cell, he was quite ready to do almost anything for the purpose of getting away from the noisome place.

Occasionally his meditations were interrupted by the opening of the outer door to admit some new prisioner. Tom had never supposed that so many people could get drunk in a single night. In the small hours after midnight, the cell-doors clanged more and more frequently.

About three o'clock, Bates noticed with horror that two prisoners had been put into the cell opposite him. The thought that he might have to share his miserable room with one of the wretched beasts who were being so steadily added to the numbers already in the prison aroused within him a dread which was nothing short of terror.

The dread was speedily realized. Two policemen came, dragging one more derelict into the port of squalor. The iron door was opened. With a final push the officers of the law sent the staggering figure sprawling across the floor.

Tom leaped away in the farthermost corner. The figure gradually drew itself up into a sitting posture, with its face toward the door and away from Bates. Tom could see the shaking hand raised to wipe imaginary cobwebs from the brow.

He caught the gleam of a smooth gold ring upon the third finger as it crossed the narrow shaft of dim light showing from the gas-jet.

"Poor Billy Giddings," Tom muttered half aloud. His mind had leaped to the thought of the hand on which he had oftenest seen the shining token of widower's sorrow.

"Who—said p-poor Bil-ly Giddingsh," replied a voice which Bates recognized in

spite of its thickness. "I ain't poor—I—I've got money to burn and throw away."

CHAPTER VII.

THE FORLORN HOPE.

FOR a little while Tom's feelings of sorrow at seeing his friend in such a condition overcame his own personal worries. He had known that Billy was drinking somewhat heavily since the death of his wife. He had not dreamed that things had come to such a pass that he could be arrested for beastly intoxication.

"Billy," he spoke in a tone of deep pain, "what is the matter with you?"

"Why—h'llo, Tom. Glad t' see you," Billy grunted, making a futile attempt to rise. "Come on out an' have a drink."

Tom helped the poor fellow up to the bench and sat him there. "This place don't seem t' shuit me. Wha's matter with the light?" Billy groaned.

Bates pondered for a moment as to the best means for dealing with his inebriate friend. Before he had thought of anything to say, Giddings began again:

"Hey—waiter—waiter! Turn on th' lights, will you?"

This seemed to amuse such of the other prisoners as were sober enough to hear it. There was loud guffawing from several of the cells. Tom's gorge began to rise.

"Shut up," he growled impatiently. "Don't you know that you're in jail?"

"Jail? Jail?" Billy repeated huskily. "Who said I was in jail?"

It took Tom some time to convince Giddings that he was a prisoner, that the statement of that fact was not an insult, and that there was no occasion for thrashing any one who made that statement.

After these things had been sufficiently demonstrated, Billy reiterated that Tom was a gentleman, until Bates earnestly desired to gag him. Eventually the hopelessly intoxicated young man went to sleep and left Bates to renew his melancholy reflections about his own condition, with the added sorrow of Billy's.

The longest night ends some time. Tom Bates's night in prison dissolved at last into a dull semblance of dawn. The feeble gas-jets turned yellow as streaks of daylight filtered across the room through barred windows. Billy Giddings awoke from his stupor, sufficiently sobered to take cognizance of the situation.

For a time his whole mind centered upon shamed remorse. He seemed entirely oblivious to every other fact than his own disgrace.

"I didn't mean to take so much, Tom," he almost wept. "I wanted just enough to—forget a little. I got some money yesterday—sold some mining shares. And I got to thinking how it wasn't any good to me any more, how Claire wasn't here to enjoy it—and I—I went too far."

Gradually he seemed to awaken to interest in the immediate future. He talked of his probable fate at the hands of the magistrate.

"I'll be fined ten dollars, I suppose," he mourned. "That's what all the drunks get. Gee, I hope they didn't get my right name."

At length he came to show some interest in his friend.

"What are you doing here?" he asked.

Tom told the story of his misfortune. Giddings instantly forgot the impending fine and the night's disgrace.

"I guess it's lucky I did get a jag on," he exclaimed. "I'd never have known where you were, and you wouldn't have known that I could help you out."

"You help me out?" Tom queried a little dubiously.

"Sure, I'll help you out. I got a thousand dollars yesterday. They won't put bail at more than three times what you owed. As soon as I'm through paying my fine, I'll put up your bail. Then you can get back on your job and make enough to settle this thing up—or I'll lend you the money, and shut the whole thing up right off. That will be better yet."

Billy reached his hand into his pocket. Then he dived into another pocket. He got up and began a thorough search of his clothes. A look of consternation spread over his face. Then a light of understanding came into his eyes.

"Oh, of course," he exclaimed. "The coppers took it off me when they brought me in here. They'll give it back as soon as I go up before the judge."

This seemed fairly probable. At all events, both the men chose to believe it. They waited impatiently for the police to take them before the magistrate. Neither of them could eat the breakfast that was set before them.

At about half past eight they were both led away, Billy Giddings in charge of the officer who had arrested him, Tom with one of the house police. An unusually long line

of prisoners stood along the rail. The magistrate came in, looking as though he had dined rather too well the previous evening.

One after another he disposed of the cases before him. Some of them he held in bail for Special or General Sessions. A burglar he kept for the grand jury.

The much more numerous drunks he regularly fined ten dollars, adding a lecture calculated to drive from them all future desire for drink. Most of them had not the money and were sent to serve out the time on Blackwell's Island.

"Thomas Bates," the clerk spoke solemnly when the clock already indicated half past eleven.

Tom was led forward. At the same instant, from somewhere in the room, the collector from Einstein's pressed up to the front, followed by his employer and Mr. Feinburg. Bates noted that the last gentleman had shaved since the previous evening, and presented a half-way respectable appearance.

"He is a thief, Mr. Judge—he stole my furniture," Einstein shouted vehemently, as he shifted his eyes from the magistrate to Bates and back again.

"Not quite so fast, sir, or I'll fine you for contempt," the judge snapped shortly. "I'll hear what you have to say when the time comes."

Einstein subsided promptly, whispering: "Eggscuse me," very softly, as he wiped his face with a yellow-silk handkerchief.

"Now," the magistrate resumed. "I issued the warrant for the prisoner's arrest upon the complaint of Mr. Louis Einstein, I believe. The charge is grand larceny. Is Mr. Einstein in the court-room?"

"I am Mr. Einstein," that individual confessed meekly.

"Oh, you are Einstein, eh? Yes, I remember your face now. Well, just explain to me the exact nature of the prisoner's offense, will you?"

"You want it I should speak now?" the furniture dealer asked to make sure there was no further danger of being punished for talking.

"Yes, that's what I said. What did this man do?"

"Well, in the first place, he buy it a fine lot of furniture off me. One hundred and ninety dollars' worth he buy it. He pay it on instalments, twenty-five dollars down and ten dollars a month. He owes me yet sixty-five dollars on that furniture."

"When did he buy the furniture?" the judge demanded.

"Last January—the fifteenth," Einstein stated precisely.

"He has paid all instalments to date?"

"Yes—he has paid. But now he don't pay. He takes that furniture by Feinburg here and try to sell it for twenty-five dollars. The policeman, he knows it that this thief tries to sell that furniture last night. It is all by Feinburg already.

"Only, he has sold it a bedroom set what was worth seventy-five dollars. I don't know where that is. It ain't with the stuff by Feinburg. I have it a list here what he signed—it says a bedroom suite—one dresser, one wash-stand, one bed, two chairs. There was a fine mattress to that bed, judge."

"All right, Mr. Einstein," the magistrate stopped the flow of evidence. "Now, prisoner, what have you to say about this? Remember that anything you say may be used against you in a trial."

Tom felt that his case stood best upon the exact truth. As briefly as possible, he stated the circumstances under which he had purchased the furniture in the first place. He said that he could produce receipts for one hundred and twenty-five dollars, the amount of the instalments to date.

"I still owe sixty-five dollars on that furniture. I fully intend to pay for it."

"Yet you attempted to sell it before it was paid for?" the judge spoke sharply.

"I intended to pay for it as soon as I could get something for it. A friend of mine was ordered to Denver for his health a few days ago. I have just begun payments on a house in Westview, New Jersey. I bought my friend's furniture to put in my new house. I didn't want the stuff I bought from Einstein any more. I hoped to get enough for it to pay what I owe and a little of what I have already paid.

"This man here—Feinburg—agreed to pay me eighty dollars for what I had left. I was to have received the money upon the delivery of the things at his store yesterday. I expected to go direct from there to Einstein's to settle up.

"Feinburg refused to pay me what he had promised, and offered me twenty-five dollars for the lot after taking them to his store. It was while we were disputing about this sudden drop in his price that the officer, with this man from Einstein's, came and placed me under arrest."

The magistrate paused for a moment's consideration. Then:

"Where is the contract for the original sale of these articles?" he asked.

Einstein lost no time in producing this. The judge scanned it for a moment.

"Well," he spoke with the sort of irritation one may show when he finds he cannot help another, "didn't you know that you couldn't sell these things until they were paid for?"

"I didn't think about it. I thought that, so long as I kept up the payments, or paid the whole amount immediately, the transaction was perfectly just," Tom explained.

The magistrate showed regret in his face.

"I'm inclined to think that you're speaking the truth," he said. "But the actual facts, as you yourself have stated them, make it a plain case of larceny. You sold a bedroom suite which did not belong to you. You tried to sell other things that did not belong to you.

"Unless this gentleman wishes to withdraw the charge and give you a chance to pay for the goods, I shall have to hold you. I suppose, Mr. Einstein, you would drop the case if the prisoner paid you the sixty-five dollars?"

"*Ach,* yes—sure I would drop it. If he pays me what he owes me, I will not make it a complaint," Einstein agreed.

"How about that?" the judge asked Tom.

"I don't happen to have the money here and now. But a friend of mine was so unfortunate as to be arrested last night and is here, ready to lend me the amount. Mr.—That man over there," he finished, remembering that Billy still hoped his name had not been given.

At a command from the court, Billy Giddings was led to the bar.

"Are you ready to lend this gentleman enough to square this account?" the judge asked Billy.

"I will be in a few minutes, your honor," Giddings replied. "I guess the lieutenant at the station has been taking care of my money for me since I was arrested last night."

"Where is this man's money?" the magistrate questioned the officer who had Billy in charge.

"Money?" the policeman echoed. "He didn't have any money. I picked him up on Second Avenue, in front of McGuirk's place. The lieutenant didn't have him searched or nothing. He was just plain drunk."

As the officer spoke, Billy Giddings's face grew white. Again he began a hurried search through his clothes. He missed his watch as well as any other valuables for which he was looking. His right hand went up to his necktie and felt about for a pin which should have been there.

"My Lord!" he exclaimed in a tragic whisper. "I've been robbed of everything."

Tom, who had been hardly able to wait the end of this trial to borrow further from Billy the little needed to telephone to Dorothy and then hurry up to the office in a half hope of catching Mr. Morrison, now listened dully while the magistrate announced:

"I'll have to hold you for trial by the Court of General Sessions. I will admit you to bail in the amount of two hundred and fifty dollars."

CHAPTER VIII.

POWER OF ATTORNEY.

PERHAPS Tom Bates should have felt more sorry for Billy Giddings than for himself. As a matter of fact, he didn't. Without any cant about it, he had a feeling that Billy needed the lesson he was getting.

It was even more of Dorothy that he thought than of himself. All night he had worried about her; all morning she had been uppermost in his mind. How was she standing it? What would she do? When could he let her know that he was, at least, alive and well?

He had hoped that this morning's hearing would enable him to put an end to his wife's worries. He had thought to tell her to lie down and get some of the sleep she must have lost during the previous night.

Now he could tell her nothing. He could not raise the bail himself. He could not even show the necessary money that would enable him to call up Mr. Burton by telephone. Besides, Mr. Burton had, by this time, started for his country home. He might as well be at the north pole for all the possibilities he possessed of communicating with his friends or family.

A sudden hope that Billy Giddings could, at any rate, find some one to bail him out, or, failing that, could get word to Dorothy as to where Tom was, went out as he considered that Billy would not be free. Having no money wherewith to pay his fine, Giddings would have to go to Blackwell's Island.

No, there was no way out of the difficulty, there was no possibility of mitigating any of its evil sides. He must go back to jail for an indefinite period.

Dorothy must continue to worry about him until her nerves broke down, and she and the

baby were left to starve. It seemed quite impossible that such a situation could arise. The fact that it could was demonstrated by the fact that it had arisen.

Almost a century had gone by since imprisonment for debt had been abolished. Yet here he was, a prisoner because he owed money, and without any means of securing his release. Theoretically, of course, it was not as a debtor, but as a thief, that he was going to jail. And this despite the fact that his intentions from the first had been as honest as truth itself.

But Dorothy—again and again his mind fairly cried out the name of his wife. The miseries of prison life were as nothing compared to the thoughts of her situation.

Over and over he tried to screw his courage up to the point of asking the officer on the back of the patrol-wagon for enough money to pay for a message to her. The grim, forbidding face of the policeman checked him each time.

Away down-town the wagon went with its load of promiscuous criminals. At last it stopped before that grim building which is the terror of all evil-doers, whose name suggests the last of human woes—the Tombs. He shuddered as he looked up at its cold, gray walls, at the "Bridge of Sighs" to the Criminal Courts Building.

He hung his head and drew his hat far down over his eyes as the gate of the wagon was opened. He felt that he should never again be able to look any one in the face.

"It's hard luck, old man."

Tom raised his eyes despite his feelings. It was the officer he had so greatly feared to speak to who was now speaking to him.

"Is there any one I could send a message to for you?" the policeman asked further.

"I haven't a cent to pay you," Tom spoke bitterly. "I left all the money I had with my wife yesterday morning, expecting to get money in the afternoon."

"I know—I was in court. But I'd stake you to half a dollar, and you could pay me back when you were ready."

"You would?" Bates spoke with an eagerness entirely out of proportion to the amount offered.

A year ago fifteen dollars a week had seemed the acme of comfortable prosperity; now fifty cents looked like a fortune.

"Sure, I know you're all right. You'd ought to get some one to come and bail you out," the policeman spoke cheerfully. "I'd like to do it for you myself if I could."

"I'm not so well acquainted in town that I could very well get bail right off. But, if you'd telephone to my wife in Westview and let her know where I am, so that she won't think I'm killed—I'd gladly give you the first ten dollars I can lay hands on when I get out of here."

"Got a telephone in your house?"

"No, but there's one in the next house—two—three—naught—four, Westview, Mrs. Newton. She'll take the message, or get my wife over. The houses are only separated by a lot. Wait a minute—let me have your address, so that I can have her pay you."

"Oh, I'll come back and let you know what she says."

As the door of his cell was closed upon him, Tom felt lighter of heart than at any time since the previous evening. His worry for Dorothy was over. Of course, she would be horrified to learn where he was; but he knew even that knowledge would be better than the suspense under which she must have labored through the night.

With his mind lightened of this burden, he was prepared to notice that the cell in which he had been placed was infinitely better than the one at the police-station. It was high up in a sort of iron gallery. There was light and air and comparative cleanliness.

The officer soon came back. Tom looked up eagerly into his face. He did not appear as cheerful as Bates had hoped.

"Mrs. Newton says your wife went away early this morning," the policeman reported. "I left word that she should send any message or come to 176 Center Street to see you in case she came back to your house."

Once more Tom Bates was plunged into the depths of despair. The last state seemed worse than the first. Where was Dorothy? The answer might be: almost anywhere in New York. Somewhere she was hurrying about, seeking among hospitals and prisons—perhaps she was even visiting the morgue.

And where was little Thomas Bates, Jr.? Was she carrying the poor baby about in her anxious quest? Or, had she risked the infant in the hands of some neighbor, who might forget when or how to feed him?

Back and forth he paced the short length of his narrow cell. His feet staggered from sheer weariness, but he kept on, unable to sit still or lie down, his mind being tortured with ever-blackening images. At last he tottered over, and barely managed to save himself from falling upon the floor.

Utter exhaustion had overcome him, and he fell asleep lying half across the hard bench. In his dreams he saw his wife and

baby taken away to a hospital, after she, too, had dropped from complete fatigue.

The keeper awakened him to eat his supper. Tom tried to swallow a little of the untasty food. Then he resumed his meaningless beat up and down the floor of his cell. He was tortured now with drowsiness; yet felt that to sleep would be unfair to the wife who must still be searching for him in sleeplessness.

Suddenly he heard voices at the end of the gallery.

"Number thirty-nine," some one was saying.

Tom remembered having seen that number on his own cell door as he had been brought in.

With a leaping heart, he thought that Dorothy must have succeeded in locating him and had come to see him or sent some message. A pang of regret took away most of the joy at the prospect, as he realized what the sight of him in prison must seem to her if she had come.

"Magistrate Weston wants you," the keeper spoke briefly. "Come this way."

The joy departed entirely. He wondered only what new depth of misery was to receive him. He did not know who Magistrate Weston might be, but he could not imagine that a judicial officer should want him for the purpose of doing him a favor.

Upon entering the room in which the magistrate awaited him, he instantly recognized the judge who had heard his case in the morning. His honor held out his hand in greeting. Tom took it in silence, waiting to hear the worst.

"Mr. Bates," the judge began, "I was convinced, this morning, that you were an honest man who had made a mistake. Your own testimony, however, made it necessary for me to hold you in bail. In putting that bail at two hundred and fifty dollars, I supposed you would be able to give it in a little time. I have decided to reduce the bail to one hundred."

Magistrate Weston's manner had encouraged Tom to hope for something real. The prisoner's heart sank again. One hundred dollars, or, under the circumstances, one hundred cents, was as unattainable as a million. In a vague way he realized that he should thank the judge for his clemency, and he started to do so.

"Wait a moment," the magistrate interrupted. "I have come to take you out myself. I don't want you ever to tell any one that I put up the bail for a prisoner.

"It would never do for me to let that get out. I should have every man I have to hold begging me to do the same for him. But I am convinced in this case that I need not fear your attempting to leave the county. Moreover, an equity in a piece of property has been given me as security for the amount of your bond."

"You giving bail yourself? An equity in a piece of property!" Tom echoed in amazement. "I'm afraid I don't quite understand."

The judge smiled.

"Perhaps your wife can explain it to you. She is waiting to see you outside in the hall. I may say that she is a most estimable young woman, and I hope you are worthy of her."

"My wife? And I can go see her? I am free to go?" Tom cried.

"You are free to go anywhere in Manhattan Island. I hope you will be able to settle up your little affair with your furniture-dealer friends, and then I shall arrange for your immediate discharge."

Tom Bates paused only long enough to thank the judge once more. In another instant he was holding his baby in his arms and trying to kiss mother and child at the same time.

CHAPTER IX.

THE LODGINGS THAT MOVED.

"BUT we can't stay with you," Dorothy mourned, when she had explained how she had spent the night in searching for him by telephone until she had only enough money left to come on to the city and pay car fares about town; how she had, at last, reached the proper station-house, to learn that he had been taken to the court; how she had waited for hours there to see him, and had, at closing time, gone to ask the magistrate what had become of her husband; and how, by promising him the equity in the house at Westview and exercising her most persuasive smiles, she had prevailed on the judge to lower the bail and, finally, himself to provide it.

"No, we must hurry out to Westview and let this little fellow get to bed," Tom spoke eagerly.

The thought of a night at home seemed to him about the best thing he could imagine.

"But you can't go to Westview," Dorothy said with a sorrowful shake of her head. "You can't leave Manhattan Island. If you

do, you'll be locked up for trying to 'jump bail,' whatever that is."

Tom suddenly ceased bouncing the baby up and down on his knee. His face fell.

"Can't leave Manhattan Island," he repeated with a gasp of consternation.

"No, you'll have to stay here until we can pay Einstein—or till you are tried."

As the full force of this limitation sank into his brain, Tom arose and began again to pace the floor.

"I might as well be in prison," he sighed. "I can't go to the Bronx to attend to business, or get my check to pay a hotel-bill. I can't go home. What can I do?"

"I thought maybe you could go and stay with Billy Giddings. He needs some one to stay with him anyhow," Dorothy suggested.

"Billy can't entertain me. He's— I happen to know he couldn't take me into his room."

Tom did not wish to tell even his wife what he had last seen of Billy Giddings.

"I—I've got ten cents over my car fare home," Dorothy faltered hopelessly.

Tom shook his head.

"I couldn't sleep in a ten-cent lodging. It would be worse than the cell I had last night."

For several minutes the two sat staring at each other, each striving for the answer to an insoluble problem—that of making ten cents do the work of ten dollars.

"I'll tell you," Dorothy suddenly grinned. "You might spend the night at the Grand Central Station. My brother once went to sleep in a railroad station and stayed there all night. There might be worse places."

"And I know of a better place. I'll get on an Elevated train. I'd have to pay car fare to get to the station anyhow. I can ride down to South Ferry and then up Sixth Avenue. At One Hundred and Fifty-Fifth Street station, I'll get out and then turn around and take the train back again. Then I can change again and go up Third Avenue to One Hundred and Twenty-Ninth Street.

"About four such trips will use up the whole night. And it can be done with one fare if one is a little careful about the guards at the ends of the line. I did it for a stunt when I first struck New York years ago. I never thought I should have to do it for a sleeping-place, though."

"And we can go together to One Hundred and Twenty-Fifth Street," Dorothy spoke eagerly.

It was not such a charming prospect for a night, but just now it seemed much better than nothing.

"But, what will you do to-morrow?" the wife asked, as they boarded the train at Chatham Square.

"To-morrow?" Tom echoed vaguely. "Why, I can pawn my watch."

"You silly boy! Why don't you do that to-night and get a decent night's sleep when you can?"

"Oh, this will do for to-night. If I get too tired of it, I'll strike the hock-shop. But I'll try to stick it out. I'll need all I can get before Monday. Then I'm going to telephone to Miss Tracy to send me my check for the week's salary that's coming to me. I'll forward all I dare of that to you."

All too quickly they reached the up-town station nearest where Dorothy must leave the city by the ferry for Jersey. Tom got off the train to spend a little longer in the farewell. When she was gone, he caught another train and went to the One Hundred and Fifty-Fifth Street end of the line. There he had no difficulty in eluding the guards, who pay little attention to the passengers on the platforms.

He stretched himself out comfortably over two of the middle benches which face each other and run crosswise like the seats of a railroad train. On the way to the South Ferry station, he slept soundly.

He was awakened by a guard, and made his way to the platform for the trains up the East Side.

"I mustn't sleep so soundly this trip," he muttered to himself. "I might miss the One Hundred and Twenty-Ninth Street station."

Once more he made himself comfortable across two seats. He was thankful that the train would pass Forty-Second Street long enough after the breaking up of the theater crowds to avoid the throngs on the trains half an hour earlier.

Barely awake enough to get aboard the train, he was sound asleep again before the second station was reached. The next thing he knew a guard was shaking him and shouting in his ear:

"All out! One Hundred and Eighty-Third Street!"

"W-what?" Tom grunted sleepily.

"Where'd you wanter get off at?" the guard questioned in turn.

"One Hundred and Twenty-Ninth Street," replied Tom, a little more articulately than he had spoken before.

"Well, this is One Hundred and Eighty-

Third Street. This train don't go back. Hurry up and get out of here, or you'll be stalled on the switch."

"Good Lord!" Bates exclaimed, dashing for the door of the car. "I'm away up in the Bronx!"

CHAPTER X.

OUT OF BOUNDS.

IN the Bronx!

He thought again as he reached the platform and looked for the approach of the returning train. He had broken the bounds of his bail!

He glanced hastily over his shoulder, expecting to see an officer of the law in the act of laying hold of him. Then he realized that there was no officer there. He had come away without getting caught!

Perhaps he could get back without being caught in the act of doing so. Why, of course he could. They wouldn't arrest him for coming back anyhow.

Another thought flashed into his brain. Now that he was here, why not go to his office? He knew that, under the roll-top of his desk, lay the envelope containing Mr. Burton's check for fifteen dollars. He had his key in his pocket. He knew the night-watchman. He knew that the keeper of the little drug-store on the corner next their late flat would cash the check. It was too strong a temptation to resist.

In ten minutes he was standing at the outer door of the building in which the branch office of the Burton Real Estate Brokerage Company was located. The night-watchman opened the door with some caution. Then he opened it wider when he saw who was before it.

"I couldn't get to the office to-day," Tom explained. "I want to get my mail."

Eagerly he crossed the room to his desk and threw up the top. There lay the envelope, with the picture of a handsome cottage in one corner and the Burton Company's seal on its back.

He tore it open and drew out the check. Three times he looked at it before he could quite be sure that he read the figures aright. Then he drew out the letter which accompanied the check and read it.

Please accept the extra amount of this check as a token of our appreciation of the manner in which you have handled the business of the past few weeks.

Hoping that you will be back in your office by Monday, we are,

Very truly yours,

THE BURTON REAL ESTATE BROKERAGE CO.,
J. M. BURTON, Pres. and Treas.

"One hundred dollars," Tom gasped as he studied the check once more—"enough to straighten things out, and then some. And," he added as a mournful and disconcerting afterthought, "I'll bet half of it that the druggist can't cash it."

He turned about and started for the door. His eye fell upon an envelope which lay on the floor under the mail-slot in the door.

"Hallo," he exclaimed, "this must have come after Miss Tracy locked up. A special delivery stamp on it, too. Guess I'd better take a look."

He tore down the end of the envelope which was marked with the name of a large hotel. A glance at the letter made his eyes bulge—

MR. THOMAS BATES, THE BURTON REAL ESTATE BROKERAGE CO., NEW YORK:

DEAR SIR—I regret that I was unable to call at your office to-day. But, if the factory property about which we spoke yesterday is still for sale, I should be glad to take it upon the terms you mentioned.

A sudden call to Europe will, however, make it necessary for you to come to see me by nine o'clock at my hotel if I am to do anything definite at the present time. In case you do not arrive or reach me by telephone before that hour, I shall be obliged to give up your property in favor of another which I have under consideration.

Hoping you may be able to see me, I am,

Very truly yours,

WILLIS R. MORRISON.

P. S.—Will give you especial extra commission of two hundred dollars if you will make it convenient to call by time above appointed.

"Phe-ew!" Tom whistled. "If I hadn't been arrested last night—if I hadn't gone to sleep on that train—if— Good Heavens! How near I came to missing it.

"And, thank the Lord, that hotel is in Manhattan," he spoke fervently when he had glanced once more at the heading of the letter.

He dashed down the steps of the building with as much energy as if he had slept twenty hours in the last forty, instead of two. His pace, for the sheer exuberance of his gladness, was almost a run as he covered the six blocks to the store of the druggist who would cash his check if possible.

"Even if he can't cash it," Tom spoke

joyfully to himself, "I can stand a couple of bad nights now."

The last four blocks were on a deserted side street. When he had covered three of them, he saw two policemen approaching from the opposite direction. It did not occur to him to be afraid of them until they suddenly brought him to a stand, blocking his way.

"Where you goin'?" one of them demanded.

"To the drug-store," Tom replied simply.

"Where do you live?" the other officer queried.

"Why—my home is in Westview, New Jersey, now."

"Well, what are you doing here at this time of night?"

"My office is in the Marlingford Building—I just left it," Tom explained.

"And you're trying to take in this drug-store on the way home, eh? What's your objection to the drug-store on the corner next the Marlingford Building and on the street where the cars run? I guess you'd better come along with us."

Tom suddenly recalled that he had very strenuous objections to being arrested on that particular night in the Bronx. For a moment he felt the ground rocking under his feet. Then—

"If you'll just come with me to the drug-store, I'll prove that I am all right," he urged.

The two officers consulted for a moment.

"All right, come along," one of them said. They walked the block, one on each side of him. Tom stepped boldly up the steps and into the door. Then he almost fainted. The individual who arose sleepily from behind the counter and stared at the intruders was not Mr. Stainer, the proprietor, but a sleepy lad some sixteen years of age, whom Tom had never seen before.

"Is—isn't Mr. Stainer in?" Bates gasped.

"Do you know this man?" the officers asked at the same time.

"No, I don't know him," the boy answered first the majesty of the law, and forgot to answer the private citizen at all.

"Of course he doesn't," Tom tried to speak boldly. "But Mr. Stainer knows me well enough. Where is he?" The query was directed again to the boy.

"Here I am," came a yawning voice from behind the prescription-room partition. "What do you want?"

Tom Bates wondered if he were really disloyal to his wife in feeling happier at sight of Mr. Stainer than he had ever felt on seeing any one before.

"Sure I know him. He's Mr. Bates, the manager of the Burton Real Estate office up here," Mr. Stainer responded to the policemen's inquiry. "What's the matter?"

"Oh—it's all right, if you know him. Much obliged. Good night," both officers murmured hastily, and took their departure.

"Is there anything I can do for you?" the druggist asked, when he saw that Bates did not follow the officers.

"I'm afraid there isn't—unless you can oblige me by cashing a hundred-dollar check," Tom replied.

He drew forth the purse into which he had slipped the check as he spoke.

"I guess I can cash it, if you'll just put your name on it," Mr. Stainer spoke easily. "I'm kind o' glad to get rid of so much cash as I get in on Saturday night."

An hour and a half later a guest of a quiet hotel complained to the clerk that the man over his head was snoring so loudly as to disturb his repose. The clerk glanced over his list of lodgers to see who might be the noisy sleeper. As his finger came to the name of Tom Bates and he recalled a certain dollar-bill snugly tucked in his vest-pocket, he spoke gently to the complainant.

"That's No. 389. He came in only a little bit ago. He looked tired out. Couldn't I give you another room?"

Yet, despite his weariness, seven o'clock found Bates in a telephone booth, joyously talking out his fourth call with the new neighbor of Mrs. Newton, whose address, as you already know, is the house next door to No. 95 Arlington Avenue, Westview, New Jersey.

(The end.)

ON A GENERAL LOVER.

We know not why you for the fair
So many billet-doux prepare;
But this we know, a billet-doux
No fair one ever penned for you.

Anonymous.

A Matter of Proofs.

BY LILLIAN BENNET-THOMPSON.

About a Case of Ophthalmia, Wherein the Victim Was Unable Either to Be Seen or Believed.

HARGRAVE & HARGRAVE.
PUBLISHERS.
NEW YORK. LONDON.

NEW YORK, April 23, 190—.

MISS FLORA GRAY, SAVANNAH, GEORGIA:

DEAR MADAM—We are enclosing you our check for one hundred fifty dollars ($150.00) in payment for manuscript and copyright of your story entitled "Slaves." We hope to use it in an early number of *Hargrave's Magazine*.

Referring to your inquiry in regard to the possibility of securing employment in New York, there is at present an opening in our own office which you might be willing to consider.

We require the services of an assistant in our literary department, to revise and rewrite the manuscript of a series of volumes we are bringing out.

We are willing to pay a salary of twenty-five dollars per week. The work will take several months, and if it proves saisfactory, the position will be made a permanent one.

If you would care to come to us in this capacity, kindly telegraph us your decision and be prepared to follow immediately, as we should like you to begin your duties on Monday next.

Very truly yours,
HARGRAVE & HARGRAVE.
JOHN CARTWRIGHT, Manager.

AS Flora Gray stood on the steps of the Martha Washington Hotel at half past eight the following Monday morning, she could hardly realize that she was at last in the great city of her hopes and ambitions, and about to enter upon a career which seemed to open up vast possibilities of success and independence.

It was only two months earlier that the death of her father, an apparently prosperous cotton operator in Savannah, had revealed the little suspected fact that for the past year he had been persistently on the wrong side of the market, and that his sudden taking off had left his orphan daughter practically destitute.

His house, his furniture even, had been mortgaged to supply the money needed for daily expenses; and when the first burst of her grief was over, Flora found herself without a home, without money, with nothing, in fact, but her clothes and a few personal belongings.

Friends she had in plenty; but above all, a proud spirit that rebelled against becoming dependent upon the bounty so freely offered to her.

Her pride and self-respect she considered to be the best, as they were the chief, inheritance from her father, who might have tided over his losses, had he been willing to appeal to those who would have been only too glad to help him had he gone to them in his trouble.

But what could she do to support herself? Brought up as the petted child of a man of abundant means, surrounded by old family servants who relieved her of almost every care, and with only the fancy education received at a fashionable boarding-school, she was, and she knew it, but ill-fitted to fight the battle of life alone.

She had, to be sure, some little literary taste.

An occasional story and poem of hers had been printed in the holiday issues of one of the local papers, and she took a desultory interest in one of the woman's literary clubs, where her infrequent contributions were received with enthusiastic acclaim.

This taste, too, was an inheritance from her father, a man of wide reading and sound literary judgment, who found relief from the cares and worries of business in his books and in occasional compositions.

The idea of posing as an author, however,

or of selling his "brain children," had never occurred to Florian Gray, who, if the suggestion had ever come into his mind, would have put it aside as inconsistent with his career as a man of affairs.

Among his papers, Flora had found a story, dealing with the subject of cotton growing and the race problem, which, in view of a lively discussion going on in the public prints, she felt would be of timely interest. She needed money for her immediate expenses and to tide her over until, in some way, somehow, she could find employment.

Accordingly, she copied the manuscript of "Slaves" and sent it to the publishers of the magazine which had taken the lead in the agitation, signing to it her father's name, "F. L. Gray," the initials of which were the same as her own.

In writing the letter accompanying the manuscript, she had not explained the authorship of the story, having a curious fancy that the fact that the author was dead might mitigate against its acceptance. She had, however, inserted an inquiry as to the possibility of her getting work in New York, stating at the same time that her inclinations and what little experience she had lay in the direction of writing.

Almost immediately she had been surprised and delighted by getting the letter from the publishers which had brought her to the great metropolis.

In her inexperience, it never occurred to her that the place might have been offered on the strength of the story written by her father, and consequently she made no manner of hesitation in telegraphing her acceptance.

With the prospect of remunerative work from the start, she had saved from the check only enough money to pay her railroad fare to New York and to cover her first week's board and expenses in the city. The balance she had spent in paying the overdue wages of her faithful servants.

And so she made her way down to the spacious offices of the publishers, with a heart full of hope and brilliant anticipations of the new life in store for her, on that bright morning in spring.

What sort of an idea John Cartwright had formed of his new assistant it is, of course, impossible to say; but it is safe to assume that his preconceived notion was far different from the reality that stood before his desk on that April morning, and announced her readiness to begin work.

It was with some difficulty that he readjusted his impressions, received from the letter and the story, to the personality of this slender, attractive girl, clad simply but effectively in black, whose soft, dark eyes gazed frankly into his own.

However strongly Flora Gray appealed to John Cartwright as a man, when he first looked upon her sweet face and graceful figure, he, as the responsible manager of Hargrave & Hargrave, Publishers, New York and London, felt in his heart a distrust of her ability to accomplish the task she was so confidently ready to undertake.

But deep in that same heart he registered a vow that she should have every opportunity and aid that it lay in his power to give her to enable her to accomplish the work for which he had selected her.

With a courtesy that was innate, and with a consideration that her breeding and her obvious inexperience alike commanded, he conducted her to a desk and explained to her the nature of her duties.

The house had accepted from a practical Southern planter the manuscript of an extended work in several volumes, covering the whole subject of the growth, marketing, and manufacture of cotton.

Admirable for the facts which it contained, it was written with little regard for style or grammar, and required the most careful and painstaking revision in order to make it a creditable literary production. The intimate knowledge of the same subject shown by the author of "Slaves" had induced Mr. Cartwright to believe that in F. L. Gray he had found just the person to whom to entrust the responsible commission.

It was little wonder, therefore, that he found it difficult to associate the delicate girl, before whom he now spread the pages of the manuscript, with the literary and technical expertness which had been manifest in the story the editors had been so prompt to purchase.

As he explained to her what would be required of her, he told her to bring the result of her first day's labor to him at closing time, in order that he might make any suggestions that occurred to him, and so be able to guide and direct her in her task.

He felt, as he returned to his own desk, that, if he had made a mistake, if he had been too hasty to judge her qualifications adequate, the fault was entirely his and not his new assistant's, and that he owed it to her to give her every assistance and encouragement in his power.

And when he glanced, from time to time

during the day, to where her head bent in troubled beauty over the typewritten leaves, he realized more and more that to help and to sustain her would be as much of a pleasure as it was a duty.

Flora found the task on which she was engaged to be far from the simple matter it had seemed to her in anticipation.

Born and brought up in the city, and spending most of her summers in the North, she had little practical knowledge of the subject on which the work she was to revise was written. The long, technical descriptions and masses of statistics did not interest her; and the style required was quite different from the one she had employed in her amateur flights of fancy for the holiday numbers of the Savannah newspapers.

Moreover, the language used by the author was often involved and obscure, and necessitated an entire reconstruction of sentences and a constant reference to the dictionary. Her progress was necessarily slow, and she came more and more to distrust her ability.

Nevertheless, she persevered conscientiously, and with a brave determination to succeed.

And so the slow hours crept on until, at five o'clock, the movement of the other persons in the office, as they closed their desks and took their hats and went out, notified her that for her, too, the day's work was over.

She gathered up the manuscript and that part of it which she had revised, and, taking it to Cartwright's desk, gave it to him with a few words of apology, and went back to her little room in the hotel with an uncomfortable sinking of heart. Fortunately, she was so tired after the long-continued and unusual strain upon both her mind and body, that she went quickly to bed and fell immediately to sleep.

She woke next morning refreshed and invigorated, and made her way to the office with renewed courage, which was a little dampened by the criticisms that her chief passed upon her first day's work.

Cartwright's manner, however, was kindly and considerate, as he pointed out her errors, and cautioned her about the general method of procedure, and Flora felt that it would be very pleasant to work in a place where the people were so good to her and lenient with her mistakes.

So matters went on for several days, and, by the end of the first week, she was gratified by the realization that Cartwright had less to say in the way of criticism, and by the receipt of the little brown envelope which contained her first week's salary.

During the next two weeks, Cartwright scarcely criticized her work at all, although he still required her to bring it to him at the end of each day; and at the end of every week she received the little brown envelope, with its gratifying contents.

In the absence of any direct praise or commendation, she was glad to accept these evidences that she was satisfactorily filling the position for which she had been engaged.

The only thing which disturbed her was a change which she began to detect in Cartwright's personal attitude toward her.

His manner was always courteous, but there was something in it which seemed to her sensitive nature to be more demonstrative than mere business relations warranted.

She had read of and had been warned against the pitfalls that surround unprotected young women in New York, and of the too-friendly interest taken in them by unscrupulous employers.

Several times, while her eyes wandered from her work as she sought for a word or a phrase, she had caught Cartwright gazing at her in a manner which seemed to betoken a personal interest that filled her with no little alarm and that caused her to assume an air of dignity and aloofness in the short daily interviews which she was forced to have with him in relation to her work.

Three or four times he had shown an inclination to extend their talks into intimate channels; to ask her about her past life and her present circumstances and ambitions.

There was nothing in his way of doing this at which she could definitely take offense, but she instinctively began to avoid him whenever she could well do so.

It was not easy for her to take this attitude, for, apart from her feeling of gratitude to Cartwright for affording her the means of supporting herself, there was much in his personality that appealed to her, and it seemed to her that, had circumstances been different, had he stood to her in other relation than that of an employer, she could have accepted with pride and pleasure the attentions his gratitude seemed to betoken a desire to bestow.

For she could not help perceiving that he spoke to her in a way quite different from that in which he addressed the other young women in the office, and, inexperienced though she was in business etiquette, she resented it and was alarmed lest it should be remarked by others and commented upon

by those in the other departments of the concern.

Matters at last reached a climax during the fourth week.

She had stayed a little later on Thursday afternoon in order to finish a chapter of the book which was required for the printer, and she and Cartwright were left alone in the office.

The morning had been cool and rainy, and she had worn her jacket down-town. As she stood putting it on, after handing her manuscript to Cartwright, her hand caught in the sleeve, and he jumped to assist her.

She moved to prevent him, with a determined effort to get the coat on before he could reach her. In doing so, her ankle turned, and she would have fallen, had he not caught her in his arms.

The hot blood mounted to her face as it rested for an instant on his shoulder, and she felt the pressure of his embrace, which seemed more ardent than the circumstances actually warranted.

"Oh, how careless!" she stammered, as she strove to disenagage herself.

"Ah, if you'd only let me care for you!" murmured Cartwright, as he looked down into her frightened eyes, with a strange and tense expression in his own.

With a violent push she thrust him from her, and stood trembling, her face gone white at this sudden outburst. That he should presume to so speak to her, should presume to hold her so tightly, was intolerable.

"How dare you!" she cried, her voice seeming to her startled ears to come from far away.

"Am I too daring?" he asked. "It is not a matter of daring, dear, for I cannot help caring for you, whether you want me to or not, whether you will let me love you as I wish, or continue to hold me at arm's length, as you have the past two weeks."

He would have said more, but she stopped him with a gesture.

"Never speak to me like this again!" she commanded. "If you ever presume to do so, I shall have to go away and never come back here."

He took a step toward her, as if to offer some explanation or excuse, but she waved him back and walked to the door.

With her hand on the knob, she turned.

"You have covered me with shame and humiliation," she said, the angry tears standing in her eyes. "There is nothing more to say; I do not wish to discuss it further, now nor at any other time."

"Flora!" he cried; but she was gone.

Poor Flora passed a sleepless night, her soul torn with conflicting emotions.

She dreaded to return to the office and to meet again the man who had so disturbed her peace of mind. She dreaded also not to go, for if she gave up this work, what else could she do?

How could she support herself?

She had been long enough in the city to understand what an exceptional opportunity had been opened up for her at Hargrave & Hargrave's. Other girls, whom she knew to be far more clever and competent than herself, were struggling along on a half, a quarter, a third of what she was receiving. What could she do if she resigned?

She had no friends in New York, and, she was forced to confess, no experience.

The work she had been doing for the publishing firm had not fitted her for any other position; and it was extremely unlikely that, even if a similar position were open in the city, she would be chosen for it.

Since she was incapable of keeping books or clerical work of a like nature, she would have small chance of securing anything to do at anything like her present salary.

She determined, then, to make a further trial, and hoped by encasing herself in an icy reserve to prevent any recurrence of the unpleasant scene of the evening before.

Still, it was with reluctant feet and a beating heart that she entered the office on Friday morning, and a feeling of relief swept over her when, as her eyes sought Cartwright's desk, she saw that it was closed.

As she glanced round the room with a look of inquiry, Mr. Hargrave, the senior partner, came to the door of his private office and beckoned her to come in.

"Mr. Cartwright has suddenly been called away for a few days, and in his absence you will please bring your work to me," he said, as he handed her the manuscript of the treatise on the cotton industry.

With a heart full of thankfulness that she would be relieved for a time, at least, from the unwelcome presence and attentions of the young manager, and hoping in that time to be able to readjust herself to the conditions that had been so unpleasantly thrust upon her, she went to her desk and resumed her task with a feeling almost of elation.

She worked rapidly and confidently, and at the close of the day handed what she had done to Mr. Hargrave and walked up-town with a sense of satisfaction and enthusiasm that she had not before experienced.

She was sure that Cartwright would make no further advances, after the rebuff she had administered to him; he was a gentleman, and would understand that she had meant what she had told him. The office had seemed strange without him, too; seemed as if something were lacking.

She spent the evening after dinner reading a book, but the young manager's face would keep obtruding itself upon her. At last, with a determined effort, she put him from her mind, resolving to give no further thought to one who was so little worth it.

On Saturday morning, Mr. Hargrave greeted her with a frown.

"Were you feeling ill yesterday?" he asked, as he glanced over the manuscript which he held in his hand, without offering to return it to her.

"No, not at all. Why do you ask?" she inquired, in a tone of surprise.

"Simply because this stuff of yours is impossible!" he said gruffly. "It is worse than the original. I don't understand it at all.

"What I have so far seen in type has been extremely satisfactory," he added, "but this is out of the question, and must be done all over again.

"Take it back to your desk now, and let me see what you can do with it by twelve o'clock. I could account for it only on the supposition that you were not yourself. That's all."

To Flora this comment came like a blow between the eyes. Her mind failed to grasp its full significance. With a strange, uneasy feeling in her heart, she went to her desk and read over again the work which had just been returned to her. It seemed to her to be just as good, if not better, than all that she had done before.

When she tried to do it over again, she failed to see how she could improve it. She made a feeble effort here and there, substituted a few words, rewrote a few sentences, and was far from pleased with the result of her work.

At twelve o'clock, she took the manuscript back to Mr. Hargrave, showed him what she had done, and said that, so far as she could see, it differed in no respect from the work she had been doing every day.

"Strange! Extraordinary! Incomprehensible!" murmured the senior partner, as he ran his eye over the pages.

"If you can't do any better than this, Miss Gray," he said, as he turned to her, "some one else must—and at once! This work has being going very slowly from the first. I expected that you would have completed at least the first volume by this time," he continued.

"You are not keeping far enough ahead of the printer. If this is the best you can do, it won't do at all. I am sorry to say it, but it is apparent that you have undertaken a task for which you are not competent. We shall not require your services after to-day, Miss Gray. The cashier will give you your envelope. Good morning."

Flora never knew how she got back to her room that afternoon. All that happened to her, until she found herself sitting by the window, looking out at the electric lights which began to glimmer in the darkening streets, was a blank. Then, with a brave effort, she forced herself to face the problem that confronted her.

She put from her mind the contempt she felt for the cowardly action of Cartwright, in taking so unmanly a revenge upon her for her repulse of the previous day. She would, she believed, have time enough in the future to think over what she deemed his despicable conduct.

At the present moment, it was necessary for her to constitute herself a committee of ways and means.

She had, she knew full well, been spending altogether too much money, but she had stayed on at the hotel because it was comfortable and she felt in a way protected there. She had, however, been able to put no money aside, and the twenty-five dollars in her pocket was now her sole reserve for the future.

It was evident that she must at once seek cheaper accommodations, and her first act on Sunday morning was eagerly to scan the advertising columns of the *Herald*.

In making a memorandum of a few addresses that seemed to offer what she wanted, she laid the paper on the table, and then noticed for the first time a large envelope from the photographer, which contained the proofs of some pictures for which she had sat the week before.

It had been the earnest request of some of her friends in Savannah that she should give them photographs of herself before she left; but as she had none of recent date, she had decided to wait until she got to the city to have them taken.

Now she realized that she had indulged in a luxury that she could not afford, and that she should have to postpone indefinitely the ordering of the finished prints.

But as she looked at the proofs which had been sent for her selection, it seemed a shame to waste them, and she determined, being an enthusiastic amateur photographer, to fix them herself, and to send one to each of the three faithful old servants to whom the breaking up of the home where they had lived for so long had been almost as much of a blow as it had been to Flora herself.

Placing the proofs between the leaves of a book to keep them from fading, she put on her hat and gloves, and went out on her search for a new and cheaper home.

In a spacious building given over largely to students, pretentious and otherwise, she found at last a small bedroom on the top floor, which, unfurnished, she could engage at an extremely low rent.

The apartments on the lower floors were large and attractive, with rentals in proportion; but under the roof, the rooms, poorly lighted and small, were more or less undesirable, and were rented accordingly.

Flora had no furniture, but the janitor explained to her how the few pieces she would need could be procured on the instalment plan from a firm the address of which he gave her.

And so, by Monday night, the girl found herself ensconced in her new quarters and facing the problem of making a livelihood. Her simple meals she cooked over a gas stove, and she spent the days, until she was ready to drop, in a vain search for employment.

The long, lonely evenings she occupied in writing stories and poems, which she took in person to the offices of the different periodicals, in order to save the expense of postage.

Disappointment met her at every turn. No one seemed to want her services; no one seemed to want her writings. All too fast her little hoard was swept away.

One Sunday, as she sat disconsolate, wondering how it would all end, she took up a volume of Shelley's poems, seeking relief from the haunting fears that oppressed her; and, as the book opened, she saw the proofs of the photographs which she had placed there and forgotten.

The sight of them suggested an occupation which would, for a while at least, give her something absorbing to do; and getting her little box of chemicals from her trunk, she proceeded to place the prints in the toning solution.

When they were sufficiently toned, she pinned them to the lower sash of the open window to dry, and went to church, where she hoped that the words of a distinguished preacher would, for an hour or so, distract her anxious mind.

On her return, she set about preparing the little luncheon which formed her principal meal for the day, and, as she sat down to eat it from the window-sill her only dining-table, she noticed that one of the three prints was missing.

She felt sure that she had pinned it as securely as the others, and wondered how it could have disappeared.

A careful search revealed no trace of it, and then she remembered that when she had gone out, she had forgotten to lock the door, as was her usual custom—a fact that had not become apparent to her until she tried to unlock it upon her return and found that it opened on the latch.

Was it possible, she wondered, that anyone could have entered the room while she was out? If so, would a photograph of herself be likely to be the only object taken?

She made a hasty inspection of her few remaining belongings, to see if anything else were missing. It did not take her long, for already almost all her possessions of any value had found their way to the pawnbroker's.

Everything was in its place, exactly as she had left it. Indeed, there was little to tempt any one; and she acknowledged to herself, with a half humorous sigh as she glanced at her reflection in the crooked little "instalment" mirror, that the thief, whoever he was, had probably taken the most attractive object in the room.

Some two weeks afterward, late one afternoon, Flora climbed with faltering steps the steep stairs to her little sky parlor. She was weak from want of food, her money was all gone, she was in arrears in her rent and behind in payments to the furniture company.

For two days, a dispossess notice had been tacked upon her door. All her manuscripts had come back to her from the publishers, and she could find no work to do. She had come to the end of everything; even hope was gone, and she was too weak and dispirited even to wonder what would happen next.

So little strength had she, that she was compelled to pause and rest upon the second landing. As she stood clinging to the banister rail, the janitor's wife came out of a room directly before her, dustpan and brush in hand, and went down the hall, leaving the door open.

The interior revealed was one in violent

contrast to Flora's own bare little cubby-hole. Soft rugs lay upon the floor, pictures hung in tasteful profusion on the walls; a luxurious divan, piled with cushions, occupied a corner; there was a large desk, an arm-chair, and other evidences of bachelor comfort abounded.

The desk, piled with manuscripts and proof-sheets, however, showed that the occupant of the room was no idler, despite his comfortable and ease-inducing environment.

As her eyes roamed enviously about the apartment, she was suddenly galvanized into action by the sight of her photograph, the very one she had missed from her window that Sunday morning, but now neatly mounted and framed, standing on a corner of the desk!

Who, she wondered, could have presumed to take such a liberty?

Without waiting to find an answer, thrilled with indignation, she walked into the room and, seizing the picture, tore it from the frame.

"May I inquire what are you doing in my room?" said a cool voice behind her.

Turning quickly, with flushing eyes, she beheld, standing in the doorway—John Cartwright!

"I came to recover my property," she answered, holding the photograph before his astonished eyes.

"You—*you*—YOU!" he cried. "At last—and here! Oh, if you only knew how I have been seeking for you!"

He stepped forward into the room, closing the door behind him.

"Enough of that! Am I to have no rest, no peace, from your persecutions? Open that door at once and let me go! Coward!"

"Miss Gray—Flora—listen to me," he began.

"Not a word!" she interrupted. "Was it not enough for you to have me discharged from the office, because I refused to listen to your odious advances?

"You have had your mean revenge; must you also follow me here and break into my room to steal—yes, steal—my picture, and set it out in plain sight, that you might lure me in while you lurked outside to trap me? Oh, you brute, you coward! If you have any manhood left in you, open that door and let me go!"

In her agitation and desperation, she spoke wildly, unthinkingly, without considering the absurdity of some of her accusations.

The color went from her face, she took a step forward, put out her hands blindly, and, with a little, gasping cry, fell forward upon the floor, striking her head against the corner of the desk.

Cartwright sprang toward her and, finding her quite unconscious, lifted her gently in his arms and laid her upon the divan. He chafed her hands and wrists, and bathed her forehead with ice-water, but failed to get any response to all his efforts.

Alarmed at the ghastly pallor of her face, he rushed into the hall to summon assistance, and met the janitress, returning to finish her belated work in his room.

"Get me a doctor as quickly as you can!" he said, striving to control the agitation in his voice. "A—a friend of mine has been taken ill in my rooms."

The few minutes that elapsed before the appearance of the physician seemed hours to Cartwright. The medical man made a hasty examination, and raised a grave face.

"The young woman is not seriously hurt," he said, after Cartwright had explained the circumstances; "but she fainted because she was too weak to keep upon her feet. She is starving, Mr. Cartwright, literally starving.

"The best thing that you can do is to go out at once and procure some simple and nourishing food, and a bottle of port wine, and I will remain here and endeavor to restore her to consciousness.

"Then all she requires is absolute rest and enough to eat. If you lose no time, we shall both doubtless accomplish our respective tasks simultaneously."

Cartwright hurried from the room to carry out the doctor's orders, and upon his return found Flora fully conscious, but very weak and unable to talk. The physician, glancing at his watch, pleaded another engagement, and resigned his patient to Cartwright's care, saying that he would return later if the young lady's condition seemed to require his further attention.

As Flora gradually came to realize where she was, she was filled with dismay; and, distasteful as it was to her to receive Cartwright's ministrations, she nerved herself with what little strength of will she could command, to accept the food and wine which he offered her, knowing that in her terrible weakness she was helpless and in his power, unless she could so far recover her strength as to enable her to stand upon her feet.

Tears of rage and shame rolled down her cheeks, as she strove to restrain the eagerness with which she longed to fall upon the food he placed before her.

At first, indeed, he was compelled to feed her, and she shrank from the touch of his hands as though it would defile her. But she was too weak to resist him, and there was at least the consolation that in nonresistance lay her only hope of safety.

As her strength gradually revived under the stimulating influence of the delicacies which Cartwright had provided, Flora began to cast about her for some means of effecting her escape from the apartment.

She felt that she had been basely trapped by this masterful man, who now seemed all-attentive to her needs, and she shuddered as she thought of the persistent, patient deviltry that must lurk behind this solicitude.

Thus, she mused, were the prospective victims of human sacrifice in olden days fed and strengthened by their captors to prepare them for their approaching doom. Not so, she resolved, would it be in her case.

She determined, with a craftiness that came to aid her in her desperate need, to give no sign of the returning vigor that she sensed in the quickened pulsations of her heart, in the thrill of the hot current of her blood, that she seemed to feel penetrating to her numbed extremities.

No. She would feign the weakness that a half-hour before had been so real, and devise some excuse to make Cartwright leave her alone for a while, for a few moments only —that would be enough.

Then she would quickly slip up-stairs to her own room, lock herself in and be safe for the night at least. In the morning she would go away—she would have to in any event, she remembered, as she thought of her unpaid rent and the threats of the agent, conveyed to her by the janitor.

Where she would go, she knew not. Only this she knew—that she would be free, free, free! Yet, with a sense of overwhelming shame, she realized that, in spite of her fear of him, her contempt for his cowardly course of action, her horror at his words to her, she had been glad to see John Cartwright—that her heart had leaped at the sound of his voice—that she longed to feel his arms about her again.

She was frightened at the strength of her own feeling. Was her own heart a traitor to her? No! She would put such unworthy thoughts from her — would be brave and show this man how she despised him.

Suddenly Cartwright broke in upon her ponderings. Unwittingly, he seemed to offer to her the very opportunity she had been hoping to contrive.

"I am going to leave you for a few minutes," he said, "while I call a cab; and then I shall see you safely home, if you will tell me where you live. I fear that you would prefer to go alone, but in your weakened condition I should be more unkind to you than I seem if I allowed it.

"But first, let me assure you that you are mistaken in imagining that I followed you here, or, indeed, that I had any idea that I should find you here. How could I? Nor did I steal your picture.

"Some time, perhaps, you will allow me to tell you how it came fluttering down to me, apparently out of the sky, on my return to the city a few weeks ago. It seemed a miracle, a happy augury—may I say to both of us?

"Then I went to the office and found that you had gone, under circumstances which I can, unfortunately, understand, but which I none the less profoundly regret.

"It is true enough that I sought you out at your former address; that I even wrote to you at your old home in the South, but it was with no design of forcing upon you any attentions that might be unwelcome to you; but merely to offer you some explanation and, if possible, some reparation for an insult for which I feel that I was, in a measure, if all unintentionally, to blame.

"But you had told no one where you had gone; my letter to you was returned to me. You could not have been more surprised than I was when I saw you here—here in my own room."

"That is not true!" retorted Flora, stung to indignation at Cartwright's words, which struck her as the studied sophistries of a heartless profligate.

Forgetting her intended rôle, she raised herself upon the divan, and cried:

"If you did not follow me, how did you know that I lived in this building?"

Instantly she saw her mistake, and bitterly repented it. Cartwright had spoken of calling a cab. It might, of course, have been a "blind"; but, on the other hand, it was perhaps barely possible that he did not know how near neighbors they really were.

If so, her hot speech had all too surely betrayed her. There was no help for it now, though she could have bitten her tongue out for its heedless confidence.

Cartwright's next words showed that he was, indeed, taken by surprise, or else he proved himself a consummate actor.

"What!" he exclaimed, "is it possible that we have been living all these weeks un-

der the same roof? That helps to explain the mystery of the photograph. Believe me, if I had known you were so near, or where you were, however far away, I should not have presumed to appropriate it."

Flora's lip curled.

"I do not believe you," she said deliberately.

"That is, of course, your privilege," Cartwright answered; "Yet I cannot add that the exercise of it gives me pleasure or does me justice. I have told you only the truth.

"As I am an old resident here, like most of the other tenants, I suppose that you live on the upper story and in front—the falling of the photograph from your window is evidence of that. Then, instead of calling a cab, I shall only have to summon the janitress to prepare your room. It is growing late, and you will doubtless feel more at ease in your own apartment."

Flora could find no words to say to him, as he left the room and closed the door. She could hear him, as he mounted the stairs; she had but a few minutes to decide what to do.

Should she wait for his return, and allow him to assist her to her room, or should she flee at once down-stairs and into the night?

Either prospect filled her with dismay. But the latter seemed the preferable alternative. She would but anticipate the inevitable by a few hours.

Perhaps a policeman could direct her to some refuge where she could rest until the morning; if not, the night was warm and clear and a bench in the park—but it would not do to think.

Now or never was the time to act. She made a movement as if to arise from the divan. At that instant a knock sounded on the door.

Startled, Flora sank back upon the cushions, but made no answer. In another moment, the knob turned, the door opened and revealed a stranger, a pompous-looking person, with side-whiskers and an air of importance.

"I beg your pardon," he began, as he caught sight of the unexpected figure, now struggling to her feet from the couch. "I came to see Mr. Cartwright," he added, "and"—raising his eyebrows in an unpleasant manner—"was unaware that he was entertaining. You will, I trust, pardon my intrusion."

"Pray do not apologize, Mr. Abercrombie."

It was Cartwright's voice that broke the momentary but strained silence that followed the stranger's remark.

"I am afraid, however," he continued, "that I shall have to ask you to postpone our little confab until to-morrow. Mrs. Cartwright, in whose honor the suggested alterations and decorations are intended, is not feeling well this evening, and is hardly equal to discussing wall-papers and repairs."

"Ah! Yes, of course! Don't mention it!" stammered the astonished agent. "In fact, you know, you didn't mention it! Ha, ha! Took me quite by surprise. Pleasure, I'm sure, to have another lady in the building — trust the indisposition is only temporary.

"Will call again and hope to make Mrs. Cartwright's acquaintance under more suitable circumstances—shall have to throw in some new electroliers in honor of the event."

With smiles and apologies, the embarrassed man bowed his way out into the hall.

"Miss Gray," said Cartwright, as he closed the door, "I have taken what must seem an unwarrantable liberty; but it was forced upon me by untoward circumstances, and was solely in your interest. For I fear you must spend the night in this room. The one that you have occupied has been rented during your absence to-day, and the furniture has been taken away."

Flora caught her breath in horror. This, then, was his complete revenge.

"Never!" she cried, her eyes flashing dangerously. "Not if I have to walk the streets or sleep in the park."

She rose unsteadily to her feet, but sank back helplessly on the divan. She had greatly overestimated her physical powers.

But her mind was all alert, and she clenched her hands in impotent rage, as she strove to conquer her weakness.

"You see," said Cartwright, "it would be quite impossible for you to do anything so foolish and needless. I shall leave you now, and trust that your good sense will prevail upon you to make the best of a disagreeable situation."

"Where are you going? What new misery are you planning for me now? Here I am, helpless, at your mercy. You have succeeded absolutely in your plans, even to the extent of blinding the eyes of the agent of the building. You have done it very thoroughly."

She laughed, mirthlessly, ironically.

"Such perfection can only come from abundant practise," she observed caustically.

Cartwright took up his hat.

"I do not quite understand you," he pro-

ested, as he stood at the door, his hand upon he latch. "Or perhaps it is you who do ıot quite understand me.

"What I said to Mr. Abercrombie was nerely to enable you to remain here without nolestation until you are fit to leave. I shall ıot return until you have done so, and then ɔnly to remove my effects.

"I shall, of course, have to invent some pretext for giving up the rooms, so that the agent shall never have reason to suspect that everything is not as I implied.

"If you require anything, you have only to ring for the janitress. Flora," he appealed to her passionately, breaking through his studied reserve, "I cannot leave you like this —with this misunderstanding between us. Why will you persist in taking this cruel, this unjust attitude toward me? Don't you see that I really want to help you?

"You are alone and friendless, weak and suffering. Why won't you let me take care of you? I love you, Flora, Heaven knows how much. I want you so, dear. Won't you try to bear with me—to love me—a little?"

Flora had risen, and was supporting herself by the mantel.

"Go!" she cried. "Your very presence is an insult! Don't add to it by words!"

Cartwright opened the door.

"Good-by," he said, suddenly calm again under her frenzied outburst. "I see that you are determined to balk all my efforts to bring about an understanding between us. Very well; I'll go. But I fail to comprehend why it should be considered an insult for a man to ask a woman to be his wife."

The door closed behind him.

Flora tottered for an instant, then sank back upon the pillows of the divan.

His wife!

Did he really mean it? Had she, then, been putting a false construction on his words and actions from the first? She could not believe that she had so misjudged him. But, how inconsistent it all seemed, now that she reviewed the past!

Could any one have been more considerate and thoughtful?

And yet, there was the damning fact of his leaving her to be discharged, after her repulse of his first advances that day in the office.

Then she remembered how he had tried to explain that, and she had refused to listen to him. And now the opportunity was gone. She was convinced of his honesty, nevertheless.

His wife! How those words transformed his conduct in her eyes! And she—she had been the one to pile insult upon insult; not he. He had been all courtesy and kindness, and she had repaid him with unworthy suspicions and with bitter gibes.

What must he think of her? Oh, if she could only see him and tell him how ashamed and sorry she felt! But he had gone, and had said that he would not return.

She had actually driven him from his home. Now she longed to beg his forgiveness.

Alas! Enlightenment and repentance had come too late. Now, more than ever, in her self-humiliation, she felt that she could no longer be a trespasser on the hospitality she had so ill requited.

She forced herself to rise and take a few steps, and managed to walk as far as the desk.

As she paused to steady herself against it for a moment, her eyes fell upon a pile of manuscript that seemed to have a familiar look.

A second glance showed her that it was the book on the cotton industry upon which she had been engaged; and there, facing her, was the very chapter she had been rewriting when she had been so summarily dismissed. Beside the manuscript was a bunch of galley-proofs of the first chapter.

Half unconsciously she started to read them.

Suddenly a great light broke upon her mind. This was the work she had done, to be sure—her work, but so changed and corrected that she was scarcely able to recognize it. It had been gone over again by a master hand.

Whose hand? Whose but Cartwright's?

This, then, was the reason that he had asked her to give him her copy every day—so that he could revise and alter it, and make it readable, as she should have done, but now too clearly perceived how utterly she had failed to do!

This explained why, so long as Cartwright had been able to handle the manuscript after her, her work had appeared to be satisfactory, and why, when he had been unexpectedly called away, it had failed to satisfy.

She saw it all in a flash of inspiration.

Cartwright had been doing her work for her—had been watching over, protecting her. And what return had she made? Oh, why had she been so ready to believe evil of him?

Why had she stifled the voice in her heart that told her she was wrong in putting such a construction on his words, his attitude, to-

ward her? Why had she not waited to find out for herself, instead of believing all she had heard and read?

She sank into the big chair by the desk, and buried her face in her arms.

There was a knock at the door, and, at her faint "Come in," it opened to admit—Cartwright himself.

"I must apologize for seeming to force my unwelcome presence upon you again," he explained; "but, in my preoccupation, I neglected to provide myself with money or my check-book, and, as I shall be leaving the city again to-morrow morning early, it was necessary for me to return for a moment."

He unlocked a drawer in the desk, and took out a check-book and a package of bills.

Flora glanced up shyly at him. How different, how transfigured, he seemed in the light of the new knowledge that had come to her! But there was a grave, even a stern, expression upon his face as he bent over the desk, studiously avoiding her eyes. It was not a look that invited confidences or explanations.

Several times Flora tried to speak to him, but her lips refused to utter the words that rose to her tongue.

Cartwright, still refusing even to look at her, closed and locked the drawer, threw into a valise a few things which he took from a closet, took up his hat, and turned to go.

"Mr. Cartwright!" Her timid voice at last found utterance.

He turned.

"I want to thank you," she went on desperately, "for all that you have done for me—the—the manuscript—your kindness to-day. Until—until a moment ago I never dreamed how much I owed you."

Cartwright bowed.

"It was nothing," he said. "Whatever small things I have done for you were done because I love you—because it has been a pleasure for me to do them. But I shall not intrude further. Good night."

"Wait!" she begged. "I—I—"

"Please do not worry about thanking me," he said. "It is all right. I am only sorry that some one else could not have done the same for you, and thus made it easier for you to accept it. Good-by."

He had opened the door—he was going—he was almost gone.

What she had said was so inadequate—sounded so futile. She must hold him for a moment until she could express in fitter terms her feeling of grief and humiliation—her gratitude.

Now that her eyes were opened at last, she realized that he meant a great deal to her—that his good opinion mattered much. She could not let him go thinking her an ingrate.

She tried to speak—she must speak. Already he was passing forever from her sight.

"Stay!" The cry was wrung from her involuntarily by the pressure of her emotions. "Come back!"

Cartwright turned like a flash, his face alight with love and longing, yet as if incredulous of his ears.

One glance was sufficient.

She was standing by the desk, one hand outstretched toward him—to call him back.

"Flora!"

He shut the door behind him, and took a step into the room.

"Wait! I must speak to you before you go," she panted.

"I want to tell you that—that at last I understand. A little while ago I said that you had covered me with shame and humiliation. It is quite true.

"I am ashamed, I am humiliated—but it is because I have persistently and wilfully misjudged you. I have ascribed to you the worst possible motives—have distorted every word and act of yours—painted you to myself in the blackest colors.

"And all the while you were trying to shield me—trying to help me, to make me understand.

"You offered me your love, and I rejected it. You offered me your devotion, and I scorned it. And I want to tell you that I am not worthy of your love—of any love. I have been a fool—been blind and wicked—but I see now quite clearly.

"You must hate me. I do not blame you."

Her voice broke, but she controlled herself with an effort, and went on:

"I understand all now—how it happened that my work was accepted when you were at the office, how it was worthless when you were away.

"Oh, I have been so cruel, so unjust! I have done everything to make you miserable; and now, to crown it all, you say you must leave your home here, where you have been so long. And it is all my fault that it is impossible for you to stay. You are going on my account—to spare me shame."

She sank back in her chair, and buried her face in her hands.

"Flora—Flora, dear!"

Cartwright's voice was low and tender.

"I would do anything—make any sacrifice—to spare you a moment's pain. But

you can make it possible for me to stay here—make it possible by letting the story I told the agent come true—at once.

"I have never done anything for you—could do nothing for you, if I strove all my life, that you could not repay a thousand-fold in just four little words.

"Will you say them, dear? Ah, I want you so! I love you so! Can't you care for me a little?"

Flora raised her head; her eyes met his for an instant, then fell before his gaze, and a flush stole over her cheeks.

Cartwright dropped on one knee beside her chair, and took her hands.

"If you can," he went on, "if you will marry me to-night, you will make me happier than I thought possible. I will try to make you happy, too, dear—Heaven knows I want to. Speak, dear. Say 'Jack, I love you.'"

Flora's lips moved; but the words that came were so low that Cartwright had to lean very close to hear them.

And then suddenly his arms went about her; and this time she did not draw away.

A Slippery Battle in Oil.*

BY GEORGE C. JENKS.

The Story of an Inheritance, and of Riches and Hatreds That Were Hidden.

SYNOPSIS OF PRECEDING CHAPTERS.

DUNN CITY, in the oil district, is wakened from industrial lethargy by sudden news that a "gusher" has been struck and that oil is pouring into the big refinery owned by young George Rowton. The long-idle men go to work, and all looks promising, when Calton Sarner, a comparatively well-to-do man, tells George that unless he (George) allows Sarner an open field to win the hand of Eleanor Rowton, and also nominates him for mayor of the town, he, knowing from just where the oil is coming, will turn off the stream at the well, and again plunge the little city into hard times, coincidentally laying all the blame on Rowton, who, as it is, is not too popular in town.

George is aware that Sarner is not strictly honest, so agrees to nothing. Sarner allows him five days in which to decide.

During this time George makes daily and nightly trips of exploration in the surrounding oil-fields, to discover, if possible, whether or not the oil is coming from a well on his property or on another's. He is, however, unsuccessful in his attempts, and, moreover, unknown to him, is spied upon by his own treacherous servant, Simmons, obviously in the employ of Sarner. Saturday—the sixth day—comes round, and Sarner makes good his threat, turning off the oil and throwing the little city into temporary idleness and disorder.

CHAPTER XI.

THE FIGHT IN THE RETORT.

THERE was something tragic in the sudden cessation of the torrent of oil which had been dashing from the mouths of the pipes for nearly a week.

The splashing of the oil into the tanks as it broke from the pipes had become a familiar sound, and when it stopped all at once it seemed like a premonition of some great calamity—mysterious, inexplicable, awful.

Everybody in the iron sheds, as well as in the spacious yard, stopped his occupation as abruptly as if stricken by paralysis, and looked blankly at the nozzles of the pipes.

There, where oil had been bounding forth day and night ever since the refinery had sprung into life a week before, the stream had shrunk to tiny, trickling rivulets. Then it merely dripped, and at last there was nothing at all.

Soon there would be only dry rust where had been a fountain of petroleum.

Like every one else about the great works, George Rowton was stunned by the un-

* This story began in The Cavalier for July.

looked-for catastrophe. He could not understand how the shutting off the oil had been managed. It seemed impossible.

Yet here it was.

Notwithstanding that he had hammered every valve controlling the pipe-lines in the big reservoir in the valley, as well as those in the six tanks near the engine-shed, so that the stream of petroleum could not be shut off without much hard work — work which he believed would occupy many hours— here was the oil stopping entirely on the last stroke of the hour of twelve, just as Sarner had said it would unless Rowton gave his pledge to help him win the mayoralty of Dunn City.

How had it been accomplished?

Who had manipulated the valves? How had Calton Sarner learned that Rowton had tampered with them?

The only person who could have told him was Simmons, and Simmons had been carefully kept away from Sarner by George Rowton and Howard Gray.

Even now the swarthy man-of-all-work could be seen in the distance, near the big gates, arguing excitedly with Mike Donovan, evidently trying to persuade Mike to let him go out.

Rowton was startled from his speculations by a sudden shout of terror in the next shed, where through the wide-open doorways he saw a knot of struggling men, surging to and fro in a seemingly meaningless combat, with the gigantic John Bornson in the center.

The mighty Scandinavian was fighting desperately to get away from the restraining hands of a dozen of his fellow laborers, and was throwing them right and left with vigorous sweeps of his great arms, while his grimy face, glistening with oil, might have been that of some enraged demon seeking revenge for an irreparable wrong.

"What's the matter with that fellow, George?" cried Howard Gray.

Rowton did not stop to answer; but, bounding into the other shed, hurled himself into the thick of the fray, and, grasping John Bornson by the wrist, thundered:

"What's all this about? What do you mean by this silly performance, John Bornson?"

"Silly, is it?" growled Bornson, in thick, unnatural accents. "Wait, and I'll show you!"

He shook off the other men who had been clinging to him as if they had been children, but could not release himself from the wiry fingers of George Rowton, which tightened about his wrist.

Bornson turned his sooty, greasy countenance toward Rowton; and as the latter looked into the red-rimmed, vacant eyes of the giant, he knew at once that the heavy petroleum fumes of the empty retort by his side were responsible for at least some of the unreasoning fury of this big, blond warrior from the North Sea.

"You want to know what it's all about, do you?" came, in a deep, curious rumble, from John Bornson's dry, cracked lips, as he tossed back the mane of yellow hair that had fallen over his forehead. "Well, it means that you've fooled us about the oil. You told us it would keep on coming, and you lied! That's what you did—you lied!"

He tried again to drag his hand out of Rowton's grip, and the young refinery-owner, after holding the wrist for a few seconds longer—just to convince his captive that he could not get away until it suited Rowton to release him — calmly loosened his fingers, so that the other could slip from him.

John Bornson held up his arm to contemplate the better the red marks on his wrist where Rowton had held it; and then, in those slow, thick tones from the back of his throat which had supplied the place of his usual speech from the first, he continued:

"When I talked to you at your house on Tuesday, I told you we had to have work— me and the other men working for you. I said our kids were starving and dying, that our wives had nothing to eat and only old rags to wear, that we could not pay the rent of the rotten shanties where we lived, and that we had got to where we just had to have work, and steady at that."

"I know you did, John; and you can't say that I didn't sympathize with you."

"Sympathize! Ho-ho! Sympathize!"

John Bornson laughed ferociously — a loud, mirthless laugh that made Rowton shudder—as he went on:

"As if you didn't know it was all brought about because the refinery had been shut up for months. We came to tell you the oil had stopped coming in again, and you put us off by saying you'd see about it, or something like that.

"We came down here and found the oil running, and you said we were crazy. Maybe we were. So'd you be if you were in our fix. Now, the oil has been shut off again, and we don't mean to be fooled any more."

Bornson shouted these final words at the

top of his unnatural voice. Then, with a maniacal howl, he flew at Rowton, and before the young man knew what he was going to do, or any one else could interfere, he found himself forced backward, up a slanting plank which led to an opening at the top of the retort, and hurled into the gas-filled caldron, Bornson falling upon him with all his ponderous weight.

It was the act of an insane man, and Rowton was fully aware that the suffocating fumes from the petroleum, in which Bornson had been working for some time before the oil stopped, were responsible—to a large extent, at least—for this violent and uncalled-for attack.

The man had been in the retort, cleaning it out, and was thinking of coming out for fresh air when somebody shouted that the pipes had gone dry. He had jumped out of the retort without further hesitation, and had begun a wild harangue against the owner of the refinery, which was working up his comrades to frenzy, when Rowton was attracted by the disturbance.

He had just threatened to kill the young man, and the other men—not under the influence of the petroleum fumes—were holding him back. It was then that Rowton had rushed up and seized him by the wrist.

Now, as the two fell together into the bottom of the retort, where the reek of the petroleum was so pungent that it fairly stung his nostrils, George Rowton knew he was in a situation where he must battle for his life with all the strength and courage he possessed.

The cone-shaped cover of the retort, with its pipes connecting with a neighboring gas-chamber, had been opened at one side to permit of its being entered for cleaning and repair purposes; and it was through this doorway, or trap, that Rowton had been thrust backward by the oil-drunken, murder-eager descendant of the fighting Norsemen of long ago.

The same merciless blood-lust which had made the old Vikings who may have been his forefathers such implacable foes a thousand years ago, filled the veins of John Bornson now, stimulated by the gaseous poison which arose from the sediment at the bottom and exhaled from the petroleum-caked sides of the kiln-like tank.

He had been in the retort, with its temperature of some ninety degrees, longer than was safe, even before the ceasing of the oil run brought him out so hurriedly. He was not entirely in his senses then. Every moment he remained in the foul atmosphere now made him many degrees worse.

He had caught George Rowton by the throat as they tumbled in together, and, try as he would, the young man could not release himself.

The long, lean, powerful fingers had become entangled in Rowton's collar, and the knuckles were pressing against his throat so hard that he could hardly breathe.

What made it more difficult for him was that he had fallen on his back in the bottom of the retort, with one leg doubled under him; and, as his assailant's knee pressed heavily on one of his arms, he was for the time being absolutely helpless.

Rowton felt as if his senses were leaving him in a horrible nightmare.

With a convulsive effort, he tore himself away from the lean fingers at last, and stood up. He could just reach the hole so as to get a grip on the edge.

His brain was beginning to reel in the gas; and he knew that if he did not escape soon, he would fall to the bottom and probably die there before he could be saved by those outside.

John Bornson began to sing a strange Norwegian folk-song, punctuating the strains with insane hysterical laughter, the whole making a din that echoed awfully and almost deafened Rowton in the confined space.

It had all happened so quickly that not till now did the frightened faces of two of the other workmen appear at the opening, as they looked to see what had become of the two inside the retort.

These two had hardly shown themselves when they vanished as if they had been suddenly pulled away from below, and the countenances of Howard Gray and Mike Donovan took their places.

"Howly shmoke! Misther George!" ejaculated Mike. "Guv me yer hond."

Mike's big, honest hand came down through the hole and took hold of his employer's, when Bornson, with a yell, fell in an insensible heap on the bottom of the retort.

"Wait a minute, Mike!" gasped Rowton, as he stooped, and, with a tremendous gathering up of the little strength he had left, contrived to raise the burly Scandinavian in his arms.

"Git th' shpalpeen a little higher," directed Mike.

George Rowton just understood what was said to him, and that was all, for the petro-

leum fumes were clogging his brain-cells more and more every instant.

As Mike Donovan and Howard Gray dragged the cumbersome form of John Bornson out of the retort and dropped it to the men below them, Rowton caught the edge of the opening and hung there.

"Out wid ye, Misther George!"

The next moment George Rowton was outside in the comparatively fresh atmosphere of the iron shed, which, though redolent of petroleum, was at least breathable, and staggering down the sloping plank, his two rescuers keeping him on his feet somehow.

"Is the oil coming in?" asked Rowton faintly, his mind still on the calamity which had befallen the workmen round him, whose very lives depended on the refinery.

"Not yet, Mr. Rowton," replied the mocking voice of Calton Sarner, as the figure of the hotel-keeper loomed up before the still half unconscious refinery-owner. "But it will come in, plenty of it, as soon as you come to an understanding with me."

CHAPTER XII.

A COMPACT.

THE self-satisfied drawl in which Calton Sarner spoke brought Rowton to himself quicker than anything else could have done.

"Look here, Sarner," said Rowton, in low, tense tones, as he staggered away from Howard Gray's supporting arm. "If you think you can come here and manage this refinery in your own way, regardless of what I may see fit to do, you are making the mistake of your life. I'll tell these men that it is you who are taking their living from them—that you will not let the oil come in—and you can imagine what will follow."

"I can," sneered Sarner. "They'd say you are lying."

"No, they wouldn't."

"Oh, yes, they would," persisted Sarner. "I have already spoken to them."

"When?"

"This morning. I took the liberty of coming down and making a speech to them. You don't think I'm fool enough to let myself be put in a false light before my fellow citizens in the Rowton refinery, do you?"

Sarner had raised his voice as he referred to his "fellow citizens," for the benefit of the men whom he saw clustering about him to hear what he was saying. The hotel-keeper was cunning enough to avail himself of every accidental circumstance which might give him popularity with these rather impulsive refinery-workers. He went on, ostensibly addressing Rowton, but really meaning his words for the men:

"These men, who are the foundation of Dunn City's prosperity, when there is any, and are at all times the moving spirit of its progress, know full well that the continuance of work in this refinery depends on your keeping a solemn promise you have made to me."

"That's so, Mr. Rowton," broke in John Bornson, who had nearly recovered from the effects of the gas, although he was still weak enough to be glad to sit on the edge of the sloping plank leading to the floor from the door of the retort. "We know all about it. It's politics that is making you shut off the oil, and we don't mean to be starved to death to suit any man's politics. Ain't that so, boys?"

"That's right, Bornson!" and "Bully for Bornson!" was shouted by a dozen of the oil-smeared laborers around him.

To many men—especially to those who are so much occupied with their own immediate occupations that they pay little attention to public affairs—the very word "politics" has a sinister sound, and in this refinery the hint that "politics" was at the bottom of the trouble meant an unreasoning rebellion which might lead to violence at any moment.

"You'd better say 'Yes' to me, Rowton," whispered Sarner, "and I'll tell them they can all go to work on Monday morning."

For a second or two George Rowton hesitated. Then, as he saw no alternative, he answered, also in a whisper:

"I'll tell them."

"They won't listen to you now," declared the hotel-keeper. "They've lost confidence in you. Let me speak to them."

"What?" stormed Rowton. "Do you mean to say—"

"I mean to say that they'll take notice of what I say, because they believe I'm their friend—as of course I am. I told them this morning that, if the oil stopped at any time, they could depend on my doing everything possible to set the works going again. I also told them I believed you were a square man, and that I was sure you would keep your word to me to support me for the mayoralty."

"Do they want you for mayor?"

"They want their work to keep on. If I guarantee that to them, they'd rather have me for mayor than any one else in America,"

grinned Sarner. "They are practical in their politics."

John Bornson, his brain nearly cleared of the petroleum fumes, looked suspiciously at Sarner and Rowton in secret conference, and now called out roughly:

"What's going to be done about this oil? Is it going to run into the tanks any more?"

Sarner advanced a step, and, holding up his hand for attention, prepared to address the crowd of men crowding round them, and which now numbered nearly the entire three hundred employed in the various departments of the refinery.

"Men," began Sarner, with as near an approach to a genial smile as he could force his forbidding countenance to wear, "I have the pleasure to tell you that, at eight o'clock on Monday morning, the Rowton petroleum refinery will resume operations on full time, and will not close down again. The present shutting off of the oil does not mean anything.

"This is Saturday afternoon, and the works would have stopped at five o'clock and remained idle all day Sunday, anyhow. You will not lose anything by the refinery closing at twelve to-day, because Mr. Rowton has already paid you for your time up to five o'clock. He authorizes me to say that you can put everything in shape to be left till Monday, and go home."

There was a cheer from some of the men, and even John Bornson's sullen expression relaxed slightly, while George Rowton observed, with a sort of contemptuous bitterness, how easily a gathering of average men could be convinced by a plausible story which seemed to favor them even when it came from one neither whose appearance nor record was calculated to inspire confidence.

The refinery hands had all received their week's wages earlier in the day, and, now that they were assured of steady employment, there was a general air of contentment, very different from the angry anxiety which had prevailed immediately after the oil had ceased to run.

"Will you walk up to the hotel with me, George?" asked Sarner.

Rowton felt inclined to resent the friendly tone in which this was said, but reflected that it would do no good to quarrel openly just then, and he nodded assent.

"Howard, you come, too, won't you?" added Sarner. "Your father will be there, and we have to talk over a matter in which you will be naturally interested."

"Do you want me any more now?" asked Simmons, in a surly tone, as he slouched up to Rowton.

"No. Go home and look after the horses," was Rowton's brief reply.

As Mike Donovan heard this permission, he did not interfere with Simmons's passing out of the gateway, and the dark-visaged man-of-all-work departed hurriedly, without looking in the direction of Sarner at all.

Rowton, Sarner, and Howard Gray followed him soon afterward and went up to the hotel, the first named turning over in his mind the circumstances attending the shutting off of the oil and wondering how it had been accomplished without Calton Sarner being away from the city.

It was a puzzle.

The valves had all been bent out of shape by repeated blows of Rowton's hammer, and it was reasonable to suppose they could not be straightened again quickly enough to stop the oil at twelve o'clock.

Even if a skilful mechanic, with all the necessary tools, had applied himself to the task as soon as Rowton, Howard Gray, and Simmons left the tanks, he would have had to work rapidly to get the valves into working order so that they could be closed at noon.

It was past nine o'clock when Rowton and his companions deserted the big tank in the valley, so that the aforesaid skilful mechanic—if there was one—would have had not more than two hours' actual time in which to undo Rowton's work in the two places, some distance apart—on the big tank and then on the six tanks near the engine-shed.

That some one had accomplished the task was proved by the fact that the run of oil had stopped, but who he was neither George Rowton nor Howard Gray could conceive.

It was obvious that Calton Sarner had not had time to send any one out to the oil fields, even if he had discovered that his valves had been spoiled, and Rowton was sure there had been no eavesdroppers about while he was at work on the tanks.

It seemed as if Sarner suspected what was passing in the mind of George Rowton as they walked up to the hotel, for he remarked, in an oily tone, just before they reached it:

"You may have noticed, Rowton, that I generally make things go the way that suits me, and that the harder the other side fights, the more sure I am to win."

"It may not always come out that way," rejoined Rowton dryly.

"It did in the matter of oil-stopping, as you see. But, never mind that. Here's Mayor

Marshall Gray waiting for us. Come into my private room and we'll talk things over."

George Rowton, Marshall Gray, Calton Sarner, and Howard Gray went into the room indicated, and Sarner locked the door.

They remained there for more than an hour, and loungers in the hotel-office caught the sound of angry voices from time to time.

Then there was a lull, and after that nothing was to be heard save a subdued murmuring, as if the conference had settled down to a quiet adjustment of terms, too businesslike to permit of loud ebullitions of bad temper.

"They are fixing up the deal in there, all right, Jarvis," remarked "Doc" Walters, a delegate to the forthcoming Republican convention, to Ed Jarvis, of Jarvis Brothers, the grocers, who was also a delegate.

"Sure!" was Jarvis's response. "When they come out we shall know who is to be the next mayor of Dunn City. I'm betting on Sarner."

The two delegates tilted back in the wooden armchairs which were the chief furniture of the office, and smoked their cigars contemplatively, while waiting for the door of the conference chamber to open.

It was flung open at last, and the four men who had been in close confab—Sarner, Rowton, Marshall Gray, and his son Howard—all with flushed, serious faces, came out and tried to look unconcerned.

None of them had anything to say just then, but it was not long before the two delegates, who had been discussing the mayoralty between puffs of their cigars, understood that they were to vote for Calton Sarner through thick and thin at Tuesday's convention.

The "deal" had gone through.

CHAPTER XIII.

WHAT THE LEAK SUGGESTED.

QUICKLY the news spread throughout Dunn City that there had been a new understanding reached among the political leaders, and that Marshall Gray would not succeed himself as mayor.

It was not generally known at first what was contemplated by the men who controlled the public destinies of Dunn City so far as choosing its municipal officials was concerned, because the "bosses" held that it would not be wise to let the people at large know too much.

But soon it leaked out that Calton Sarner, proprietor and manager of the Keystone Hotel, and owner of the mysterious oil-well which was pouring its five hundred barrels a day into the Rowton refinery, had been slated as the next mayor, and that the convention on Tuesday, following its usual cut-and-dried methods of procedure, would—after some more or less warm debate for decency's sake—vote unanimously for the man whose name had been privately given to the delegates.

Tuesday came in due course, and the convention did its work according to program. The names of two candidates for mayor were presented to the delegates. One was that of Marshall Gray, present incumbent, and the other Calton Sarner.

At the end of a two-hours' session, mostly occupied in routine business, such as calling the roll, examining credentials, and other necessary proceedings, which Ed Jarvis irreverently referred to as "flubdub," Calton Sarner was announced as the Republican candidate for mayor of Dunn City, and two delegates, Fenn Morgan and "Doc" Walters, were appointed a committee to notify Mr. Sarner that he had been nominated.

So Mr. Sarner, who had been waiting outside the court-house, in which the convention was held, went inside and made a highly moral, patriotic speech, in the course of which he said that, while the honor was entirely unexpected and had come to him with such a shock that he was unable to express himself as clearly and forcefully as he might have done had he had time for preparation, still he would promise that, if elected mayor of "our fair and progressive city," he would give the best that was in him to his fellow-citizens, and would solemnly pledge himself to a pure, energetic, honest, and true American administration.

In conclusion, he thanked the convention from his heart, and, placing his left hand, with all fingers outspread, impressively on that part of his waistcoat where he believed that organ to lie, he bowed himself to the rear of the platform, close to the chairman's elbow.

Then there were shouts for Marshall Gray, and the mayor—somewhat chagrined at the thought of being supplemented in an office to which, up to the week before, he had hoped to be reelected, but a little tired of its cares, too—stepped to the rostrum and took Sarner's hand in congraulation.

This brought forth roars of applause, as such an act always does everywhere, and when the mayor said that, as it was the will of the convention that he should leave the chair of the chief executive of Dunn City, he was glad

it was to be taken by such an able, upright, and public-spirited man as their well-known and admired fellow citizen, Calton Sarner, etc., etc., the cheering became so loud that it could be heard almost down to the refinery.

Marshall Gray had been known to say, on other days, when annoyed by some sharp trick of Sarner's, that he regarded that gentleman as little better than a crook, and that it would be a good thing for Dunn City if Calton Sarner were out of it for good.

And yet his speech before the convention eulogizing the hotel-keeper may not have been wholly insincere.

There is a species of intoxication which seizes orators at political gatherings, public dinners, Fourth of July celebrations, and kindred public occasions, which makes them view the virtues of their fellow man through magnifying glasses, while their faults and evil qualities are absolutely forgotten.

No doubt Marshall Gray believed, at the time, all the kind things he said to the convention about Calton Sarner. But they did not bind him not to form a different opinion afterward. Marshall Gray was simply a victim of platform dementia, in which state of mind all other men whose names loom up otherwise than in the criminal calendar appear to be Admirable Crichtons or demigods of public and private virtue.

George Rowton was at his home among the poplars, with his sister and Howard Gray, when Calton Sarner was nominated for mayor. All three were keeping in touch with the proceedings in the court-house, however.

There were evidences that Rowton intended to go somewhere as soon as word came to him of the result of the convention, for near the stable the brown horse with which we are already acquainted was hitched up to the shabby runabout generally used by the refinery owner in his travels about the oil-fields.

"There's the telephone, Howard," cried Eleanor suddenly. "Will you answer it?"

Howard Gray already had the receiver at his ear, and after listening a moment, said "Uh-huh!" and "Good-by!" and came away from the telephone with a nod of assent to the questioning gaze of Eleanor and George Rowton.

"Sarner's nominated, and of course he'll be elected in November. That's what a Republican nomination means in Dunn City. Guess we'd better go—eh, George?"

"Yes. Come on."

With a careless "Good-by, Eleanor!" Rowton stalked out to the stable-yard.

He was already in the runabout, with the reins in his hand, when Howard Gray, who had lingered for a rather longer farewell to Eleanor than her brother had thought requisite in his own case, climbed in beside him.

"Don't go away from the house till we come back, Sim," ordered Rowton, as he set the brown horse moving. "Get that?"

"All right, Mr. George," replied Simmons sulkily.

"You are sure you found the right pipe, are you, Howard?" asked Rowton, as the brown horse trotted along a rough road within sight of the rambling old house on the Penton farm in which Silas Penton lived with his charming sister Amanda.

"You'll see for yourself when we get there. There is a leak in the pipe, and the oil is seeping through."

They had reached a wood where not many trees had been cut down except to make a path to a deep hollow near the edge of the thicket. Down this path they drove, and then the roof of a long, low building—smelling, like everything else in that region, strongly of petroleum—came into view in the rocky hollow.

The building was a tumble-down, wooden structure of considerable size, with big doors in the middle of one of the long walls, closed and fastened with a clumsy, rusty padlock.

Rowton produced a large key, also clumsy and rusty, and unlocked the doors.

Inside the rambling shed were hundreds of the blue barrels used for petroleum which are so familiar in the oil regions. They were stacked up in orderly rows, with narrow aisles among them here and there.

Rusty iron pipes, about six inches in diameter, ran along the earthen floor between the rows of barrels, and, as Rowton lighted a lantern which hung on the wall, and which he seemed to know just where to find, it could be seen that the pipes left the shed in various directions through holes in the wooden walls, evidently made expressly for their exit.

"I haven't been in this old warehouse for months," remarked Rowton. "But, if the refinery keeps busy, as seems likely, now that Sarner has got the nomination, we shall need all these barrels. We have used up nearly all we have down there. Now, where's this pipe, Howard?"

"Over there, behind that pile of barrels, George," replied Howard Gray, leading the way.

"By Jove, you're right!" was Rowton's excited exclamation as he knelt down in front of a pipe which came through the wall in a

dark corner and passed two of his fingers along its greasy surface. "There's live oil here."

His fingers were wet, and the pungent odor of petroleum was strong upon them.

"Look at the ground," said Howard. "There's been a puddle of oil over here, though it's been sinking into the soil right along. What do you think of it?"

"What do I think of it?" repeated Rowton fiercely. "I think that rascal Sarner is pumping my oil into his tanks and making me pay for it. Come outside."

They went out of the warehouse and walked round it until they came to the place where they knew the leaking pipe must be. Sure enough, it emerged from the wall of the building, and, running a little way along the ground, entered the side of the hill.

Rowton examined the pipe carefully at the point where it entered the hill, while he made some hasty mental calculations. Then he got up, and, pointing to the pipe, said emphatically:

"I have it. You know that pipe leading into the bottom of the big tank owned by Sarner comes directly from the ground, straight up. Well, some distance below the surface it must turn at right angles, travel along the hill, and come out at this hollow. Why, it is as plain to me as if I could actually see it."

"It does look like it," acquiesced Howard. "But don't you know how all your pipes run?"

"No. My father laid them all, and if he ever had a chart of them I never saw it, so that I have to depend on guesswork in tracing them. Now, the thing is to find the well. We have followed one end of the pipe into the hill. What we have to determine is which way the other end goes."

They went back into the warehouse, and found that the pipe sank about the middle of the floor, but to a depth of only a few inches, so that they were able to follow it until it left the building on the other side. It continued a little way underground most of the way, showing itself occasionally where there was a depression between two hillocks.

"It goes toward that new well of ours," observed Howard. "It can't be coming from the other well that went dry a year ago, surely."

The same thought struck them both simultaneously, and, without attempting to use the runabout over such rough country, they struck off through the woods until they got to the overturned derrick, where they found Dave Turner hard at work making repairs which would eventually enable them to shoot the well and find out whether it was to be a producer or only another "duster," like so many others in the neighborhood.

In feverish haste Rowton told Dave Turner about the leaking pipe in the warehouse—a pipe through which it seemed oil must be pouring, and which pipe had led them directly to him.

Dave looked at the pipe where it showed itself above the ground, and, lying down, placed his face against its rusty surface.

"Well?" asked Rowton anxiously, as Dave got up.

Dave Turner shook his head with a dubious expression.

"There may be oil running through that pipe, Mr. Rowton; but if it is, it is going through without pumping. There is not a jar or sound to be made out on it. I should have heard it as soon as I had my ear to it if there was an engine working on it anywhere?"

"Where does the pipe lead, do you think, Dave?" put in Howard Gray.

"Come over with me to the creek," said Dave Turner, walking, with a thoughtful face, toward Dunn Creek, which, in the course of its many wanderings, passed within a few hundred yards of where they stood. "Maybe I can show you something about the oil in that pipe."

Rowton and Howard followed without a word, but in a decided state of bewilderment.

CHAPTER XIV.

CUTTING A CLUE.

"I WAS down here the other day," said Dave Turner in an easy, conversational way, as he slipped over the high bank of Dunn Creek and, standing on the narrow strip of ground at the edge of the water, looked up at Rowton and Howard. "I noticed something then that may be an answer to your question about that pipe."

"What is it?" demanded Rowton.

"Come down here."

Rowton and Howard dropped over the bank by the side of Turner.

The latter pointed to the end of a rusty pipe, which protruded some two feet from the bank, partly concealed by rushes and coarse grass, yellowed and rusted by petroleum, like the pipe itself.

"What's that?" queried Rowton.

"Your pipe."

Dave Turner smiled as he said this, and then, putting his fingers into the mouth of the pipe, he showed that they were wet with oil.

"When you first asked me about that pipe, I'd forgotten that I ever knew anything about it," he went on. "Then it came to me that your father once showed it to me."

"Well?"

"It's a waste-pipe; that's all."

"I don't understand."

"It isn't hard to understand," returned Dave Turner. "There are about twenty wells right round that warehouse of yours, and the pipes mostly go through the building. When the wells dried out, your father drained them all into this pipe, and saved what oil he could from them by taking it out at the end of the pipe down here on the edge of the creek."

"Yes?"

"When the oil ran so small it wasn't worth saving, he just let it run away into the creek."

George Rowton found it hard to give up his belief that he had found the pipe which was taking the oil from the unknown well to the big tank, and thence by way of the six tanks to his refinery.

But Dave Turner was sure of his facts, and there was the mouth of the pipe, still dripping oil, to prove that it was merely a drain-off, after all.

"You have pickaxes and shovels among your tools over by the well, Dave, haven't you?" asked Rowton calmly, as he vaulted to the top of the bank and prepared to walk away.

"Yes."

"Then, lend me two of each."

Dave Turner was not the man to ask a lot of questions, and, as his employer did not volunteer to tell him what he wanted the tools for, he made no remark as he got the things wanted from the engine-house near the overturned derrick and handed them to Rowton and Howard Gray.

Two hours later the two partners were in the hollow where stood Sarner's big tank, digging under it with pick and shovel, in a determined effort to find which way the pipe supplying the oil to the tank went after it—the pipe—had disappeared underground.

The oil was still rushing into and out of the tank as freely as it had when Rowton looked at it a week before. The valves had been straightened neatly, and though they still bore marks of the hammer with which, a few days previously, he had crushed them out of shape, in the hope of preventing their being turned off, they were in as good condition as ever, so far as their operation was concerned.

That the valves of the six tanks near the engine-shed were all right was evidenced by the steady flow of oil at the refinery.

"George," said Howard Gray abruptly, as they shoveled away at the ground near the pipe and brought more and more of it into view, "I don't know whether father has ever said much to you about this mayoralty business, but I can tell you that it is breaking his heart not to get the nomination at this time."

"I know that, Howard; that's why I am so determined to find out whether my suspicions are true about this oil. If I can show that it comes from somewhere on my property I will make it so hot for Calton Sarner that he won't want to be mayor, even if he could be elected."

"He wouldn't have any hold over you then, of course."

"I should say not. The hold would be the other way. If he kept out of jail, it would be only because I didn't press the charge of stealing this oil."

"Still, I can't understand how the well can be anywhere on your property without your finding it," said Howard, swinging his pick industriously.

"Can you understand how it can be on his property, either, without our finding it?" was Rowton's rejoinder. "We have been all over it, and not an active well have we found. You know that."

"Yes; that's so," admitted Howard in a puzzled tone. "Well, here goes for another shovelful."

Steadily they worked until the sun sank so low that they could hardly see each other.

Suddenly Rowton, who was in the deep hole they had made by the side of the pipe, under the tank, while Howard remained above, gave a frantic yell.

"What's the matter, George?"

"Howard! I've got it!"

"Got it? Got what?"

"The direction of the pipe—the way it runs underground! The thing we've been digging for!"

"Glory!" ejaculated Howard. "How is it?"

"There is a joint and a twist in the pipe, and it runs horizontally toward the dividing line. This oil comes from a well on my property!"

"Are you sure?"

"I am sure unless the pipe takes another turn underground and swings off another

way. But there's not one chance in a thousand of that."

"What are you going to do now?"

"I'm going to follow the pipe-line until it leads us to the well."

"Suppose it doesn't lead us there?"

"It *must* take us somewhere," replied Rowton impatiently. "Now, the line of the pipe is straight toward that white fence-post over to the right. Keep that in mind, and it will be easy to go right ahead."

Howard Gray, like Rowton, was familiar with the ordinary rules of surveying, and it was not long before he had laid out an imaginary line to work on by placing large stones at intervals from the hole under the tank to the white fence-post.

"That's good, Howard. Now, help me to fill in the hole, and we'll follow the line to wherever it may lead. Calton Sarner is not mayor of Dunn City yet."

Howard took Rowton's hand impulsively.

"George, do you mean that if we can find this well on your land you will work to have father reelected mayor?"

"Of course, I mean just that. What else do you suppose I would do? Calton Sarner bludgeoned me into supporting him by threatening to starve out those poor refinery hands. I haven't said much about it, but it makes me feel like a traitor to your father."

George Rowton was not demonstrative, as a rule, but he returned the pressure of his friend's hand with a fierce grip which told Howard how thoroughly in earnest he was.

They set to work to throw the earth back into the hole and tamp it down. By the time the job was finished it was very dark, and, as the moon had not yet come up, they had to feel their way toward the place where they had left the horse and runabout.

Suddenly the horse began to kick violently.

"Look out, George! There's something the matter with the horse."

"There surely is. He'll kick the buggy to pieces in a minute. Where is he, anyhow?"

With these disjointed exclamations, George Rowton got to the spot near the white fence-post where the horse and vehicle had been left. As was with his custom with the brown horse, Rowton had left him untied.

Horse, runabout, and all had vanished, although the stamping and hard breathing of the animal could be heard near by.

Rowton followed the sound, and at last made out the shape of the runabout against the starlit sky as it bounded away down the rough road.

"Here! Howard!" shouted Rowton. "Some one is stealing the rig!"

A short swift run, and Rowton contrived to reach the runabout, and, seizing the top rail of the seat, swung himself upon the step with one foot, as the brown horse—usually a very self-possessed, well-behaved animal, who had never been known to run away in his life—increased his already hurried progress to a frenzied gallop.

It was difficult for Rowton to hold on as the runabout bumped and swayed, seeming to hit the ground only now and then, but he managed to keep his one foot on the small iron step, while the other swung loose, long enough to see that a big woman, in a long cloak and a hat covered by an automobile veil, was driving, while a roughly dressed man by her side was plying the whip on the horse with brutal persistence.

Suddenly the woman, taking the reins in her right hand, leaned over in front of the man with the whip, and, taking Rowton entirely by surprise, gave him such a fierce push with her left, that he fell backward into the road, stunned, and, for the moment, helpless.

"George! Are you hurt?" cried Howard, horrified, as he came up just in time to see Rowton fall from the buggy-step.

"No. I am all right!" replied Rowton, staggering to his feet. "Where's the runabout?"

"Gone! We can't catch it now," replied Howard. "And the worst of it is that all those big stones I laid out to mark the line of the pipe are gone, too."

"They are, eh? Then, it's just what I thought. That man and woman are some of Sarner's heelers. They've been watching us."

"Yes, and by the Lord Harry, when they took those stones, they cut our clue to pieces."

"Well, it won't take long to put it together again," said Rowton confidently, as he brushed the dust from his elbows and stretched his limbs to assure him that he was not seriously hurt.

CHAPTER XV.

AN UNLOOKED-FOR ALLY.

ROWTON and Howard could hear the horse's hoofs and the wheels of the runabout rattling over the hard road, the sounds gradually diminished by distance.

"They can't get away altogether, Howard," declared Rowton. "That brown horse

and runabout are too well known all over the county. Let's go to the white fence-post and trace the line of the pipe back to the tank."

"The stones are scattered every which way. How can we tell where the pipe is?" objected Howard.

"I can do it pretty nearly," was Rowton's reply. "If we come within a few hundred yards of the well, we ought to be able to spot it."

He looked carefully over the ground between the tank and the fence-post, and by concentrating his mind on the position in which he had stood while in the hole, directing Howard how to place the stones, he was able to say with fair accuracy how the line ran.

"We won't trust any more to loose stones, Howard," he said. "Walk from where I am now, at the tank, to the fence-post, and keep on until you get to a tree in line with me and the post."

"And 'blaze' the tree?"

"Exactly. Cut a few nicks in it with your pocket-knife. It doesn't matter how small they are so long as you will know them again."

Howard did as his partner had directed, finding a pine about twenty yards beyond the post in an exact line.

Then Rowton went to the fence-post, while Howard walked ahead, keeping the tree he had already "blazed" between himself and the post, until he reached another suitable tree, which he marked like the first.

"I reckon that will do, Howard," said Rowton, when this had been done. "With the post and the two trees, we have a guide that will take us straight to the well. Now let us look after our rig."

Howard vaulted over the fence to the road, and the two hurried in the direction taken by the man and the woman with the runabout.

"Strange we don't hear it, George. On a still night like this you'd think the racket of a galloping horse with that ramshackle old go-cart of yours would be heard for miles."

"You would think so," returned Rowton absently, as he quickened his steps.

"Listen!" whispered Howard, when they had walked rapidly along the road for about half a mile. "Don't you hear it?"

"I hear a horse pawing, but no wheels. They must have stopped for something."

A hundred yards farther they went, and Rowton made out the runabout, straight across the road, with the form of a man at the horse's head, leading him round.

"They've had a smash!" whispered Howard.

Rowton did not answer, but gliding forward swiftly, and as noiselessly as possible, he flew at the throat of the man holding the horse.

So sudden and fierce had been Rowton's onslaught, that the man went to the ground, with the refinery-owner on top of him.

"You infernal horse-thief!" hissed Rowton. "I've got you this time!"

The startled horse had dashed backward, and would undoubtedly have bolted had not Howard sprung to his head.

Meanwhile, Rowton and the strange man were rolling over each other on the ground, the stranger trying to get away, while Rowton held to him desperately to prevent his rising.

"Let go!" gasped the man. "Let me tell you something."

"Go ahead and tell it, but you won't get up till I'm ready," replied Rowton, as he contrived to get his knee on the other's chest.

It was at that instant, when the stranger's face was upturned to the sky, that Rowton thought there was something familiar in his features, although it was too dark to make them out clearly.

"Get a light, Howard!" he called out.

Howard Gray, having quieted the horse, struck a match, and, at Rowton's further request, held it down so that its light fell full upon the face of the man lying on his back.

"Why, it's Bornson!" shouted Howard.

It was, indeed, the big Scandinavian who had been so active in all the complaints of the refinery laborers, and who had so nearly caused the death of George Rowton in the gas-filled resort a few days before.

"I knew, from the smell of him, he was an oil man of some kind, but I never suspected who he was," said Rowton, taking a firmer hold on the giant. "What were you doing with my horse, Bornson?" he demanded of his prisoner sternly.

"I took it away from those other people," came from John Bornson, in a sullen growl. "They'd pinched it, and I knowed it. I wouldn't stand for nothing like that, and I made 'em give up."

"Who were they?"

"I'll tell you, if you'll let me up."

"Were they men or women?" persisted Rowton.

"Both."

"Did you know them?"

"I knowed one of 'em—the man. Not the woman. Ain't you going to let me up? I'm yer friend, Mr. Rowton. You might know that, or I wouldn't be out here to help you, after a hard day's work, when I might be at home, resting myself."

"You might be out here for mischief," interjected Howard.

"Yes, I might be," growled Bornson. "But I ain't. That guy, Sarner, is beating you out of your oil, Mr. Rowton. I only found it out the day we had that scrap in the retort, and it's been in my nut ever since that I ought to do something about it."

There was a rough sincerity in the man's tone which appealed to Rowton, and almost involuntarily he took his knee from Bornson's chest and permitted him to get to his feet.

The grimy, blond giant shook himself very much in the manner of a big dog who had been chained, and then, with his hands hanging loosely at his sides, in token of his peaceful intentions, he said, slowly:

"I don't blame yer, Mr. Rowton, for being suspicious of me, after what I done to you in the refinery on Saturday, but I tell yer you can trust me. I didn't rightly know what I was doing that day, for I was boozy with oil.

"But I'd been thinking so much about my wife and kids, and how they'd been hungry so many times when I couldn't get grub for 'em, that it didn't take much to make me break loose."

"I understand," murmured Rowton.

"And when the oil stopped, and that Sarner made me and all the others believe it was your fault, everything went red before my eyes. I wanted to get you in that retort and hold you down while the gas filled you and I would see your eyes go up under the lids, and your mouth stretch wide open, and the gurgle what would mean the gas had got yer life come up in your throat, and—"

"That will do," interrupted Rowton. "Tell me why you are here."

"It's because I heard something between Sarner and your man Simmons—"

"Ah! What did you hear?"

"It was Saturday night. Sarner had promised the oil would run again on Monday, but we men wanted to be sure, if we could, and we hung about the Keystone Hotel, hoping we'd hear something more about it. I went into the hotel office, and the door of that room where Sarner keeps himself opened, and Simmons came out."

"The scoundrel! Go on."

"I heard Sarner say to Simmons: 'Whenever he goes up to the fields, you always go, too, and tell me if he does anything round that big tank.' That set me thinking. I knowed he was talking about you, and it come to me that Sarner was giving you a dirty deal about the oil."

"And I guess you're right, Bornson," remarked Howard Gray.

"Well, when I was going home from work this afternoon I saw Simmons hustling away up the road from your house to the oil-fields. Somehow I *had* to follow him. It took us over an hour to get to the oil-fields, and I was tired from my day's work.

"But I kept on. You know, if Sarner was going to beat you over the oil, it might stop running into the refinery, and that would mean we'd be out of work again."

"Probably."

"So I followed him to them six tanks where the oil comes to the refinery, and then he went around to the engine-shed. I lost sight of him there, but I remembered what Sarner had said about the big tank, and I was going down that way when I saw Simmons in your buggy, with a woman driving.

"I called out 'Hallo, Sim!' and he swore at me. That made me mad, and I jumped into the buggy behind and shoved them both out—Simmons and the woman. They fell in the road. Then I grabbed the reins, and when I came to look for Simmons and the woman, they were both gone."

"You missed Simmons near the engine-shed by the six big tanks, you say?"

"Yes."

"Do you know Amanda Penton?"

"I've heard of her, but I never seen her."

"Then you don't know whether this woman with Simmons was Amanda Penton or not?"

"No."

"You don't suspect Amanda, do you, George?" asked Howard.

"We'll just ride over to the engine-shed," said Rowton, without replying to his partner's query.

The brown horse soon took them to the engine-shed, and Rowton, jumping down from the runabout almost before it had stopped, pushed open the door.

He was confronted by Amanda Penton, shovel in hand, who began angrily:

"Look here, Silas Penton! What made you so long? I'm—" Then, seeing who it was, she broke off, and resumed, in a milder tone: "I beg your pardon, Mr. George. I thought it was Silas. He had to go down to

the city for some things for Dave Turner for the well, and I can't go till he gets back."

"Been working all day, Amanda?" asked Rowton sympathetically.

"Yes, and half the night, too. Do you want to see Silas?"

"Yes, I want to talk to him about that well where Turner is."

"Well, he'll have to be back soon. If he isn't, I'll smash his head with the shovel when he does show up," snapped Amanda.

"George!" called Howard from without.

Rowton went outside the shed, and Bornson whispered to him, cautiously but positively:

"That ain't the woman I saw in the buggy."

"Are you quite sure?"

"I can swear to it," was John Bornson's emphatic reply.

CHAPTER XVI.

THAT WOMAN AGAIN.

GEORGE ROWTON went back to the engine-shed in a decided state of perplexity, and, as he glanced at Amanda he could not help thinking that the ancient mummy-like contortion of her leathery face indicated a malicious satisfaction.

The fair Amanda was of taciturn habit. Whatever her opinions on things in general, and the doings of those about her in particular, she kept them to herself.

She performed faithfully such tasks as were set for her, but only in a machinelike way. If ever she took pride in her work, it was not apparent.

She may have wondered why Howard Gray called Rowton out of the shed, but she said nothing when he came back until he told her he wanted to leave his horse and buggy in her care for a little while.

"All right, Mr. Rowton. I'll see it doesn't get away. When will you be back?"

"In about an hour, probably. Tell Silas to wait for me here."

"He'll have to do that," she croaked. "He'll go to work as soon as he comes, and he'll stay all night, as usual."

"Very well. There are some oats in a bag in the buggy. Give the horse some when he's cooled off, and a drink of water, will you?"

"All right."

George Rowton, Howard Gray, and John Bornson strode away together into the darkness, leaving Amanda busy with her furnace and boiler-gages.

"We'll start from our fence-post, Howard, and see if we can't find that well to-night," remarked Rowton.

"Keeping an eye out for Simmons and the lady who was with him in the runabout," added Howard.

"As for Simmons, I'll wring his neck when I get hold of him," was Rowton's savage response. "I don't know about the woman. I can't make her out."

"Mr. Sarner could tell you who she is, maybe," suggested John Bornson gruffly.

"No doubt. I'll ask him if we don't find out meanwhile," said Rowton. "By the way, Howard, how did you find that leaky pipe in the warehouse?"

"I was in there yesterday, looking over the barrels we'll need at the refinery this week, when I happened to come across the pipe. The significance of the oil coming through the crack did not strike me till afterward. Then, all at once, it occurred to me that the secret of the gusher we are looking for might lie there."

"But it didn't, you see," said his partner, with a hard laugh. "Never mind. We'll get to that well yet. Here we are at the hollow again. Here's the big tank, and over there is our white fence-post. Get your bearings, Howard, and we'll walk fast."

"I don't think we shall get back to the engine-shed in an hour, no matter how fast we walk," returned Howard.

"It won't matter. Silas will stay there all night. We'll find him there when we get back, no matter what time it is."

They soon picked out the "blazed" trees, and, notwithstanding that all three had had a hard day, they forgot their fatigue in the ardor of their hunt for the well at the end of the pipe-line they were following.

Rowton looked questioningly at John Bornson from time to time, but the eagerness with which the giant marched along, helping to keep the straight line of the pipe, convinced both of his companions that he was indeed, as he had said he was, to be trusted.

That Bornson was remorseful, and that he was anxious to make amends for his rough language to Rowton at the house among the poplars, as well as for his murderous attack in the retort, was not to be doubted.

Bornson firmly believed that Calton Sarner had stolen the big oil-well from Rowton, and he would keep with his employer in the search to the very end.

On through the woods, over fences, across ditches, through hollows and over hills they went, in a straight line from the white fence-

post, verifying their course occasionally by going back some little distance to see, by the light of the slowly rising moon, that they were even with their previous guide-marks.

Overhead the shackle-rods stretched straggglingly in all directions, but they were not active. The well supplying the refinery might be operated by Sarner's engine, but apparently the rods in the locality now traversed by the three searchers were not connected with it.

"We are getting near the creek," remarked Howard, after nearly half an hour's wearisome tramping.

"So I see."

"There are a few wells on the other side of the creek, owned by the Jarvis Brothers. Surely the gusher can't be one of theirs."

"No fear of that. I know all of the Jarvis wells. They are hopelessly dry. No, the well we are looking for must be somewhere about here," declared Rowton confidently.

They had reached a rugged plateau, high above the surrounding country, which, while level in a general way, had many ups and downs in the ground, which was garnished by scores of decaying tree-stumps that looked like dwarf ghosts in the flickering moonlight.

Here and there a rickety derrick reared itself like a monster gibbet, in each of which a person of fantastic fancy could imagine there hung in chains the incarnation of a dead hope. The rotting derrick is a sad feature of many an abandoned oil-field.

"The well ought to be just about under our feet," said Rowton. "If it is, we have the explanation of the shackle-rods not working hereabouts. This ground is very high, and the oil would run by gravity down to the hollow where the big tank is, so that pumping would be unnecessary."

"That's so," assented Howard. "By gracious! I believe we are on the right track."

"Here's the line of the pipe, right across the rise and down the other side," went on Rowton, in musing accents as he looked about him.

Suddenly, with more excitement than he had permitted himself to show heretofore, he pointed straight ahead, and ran as fast as he could over the uneven ground toward a tumble-down derrick right on the line they had been tracing ever since leaving the white fence-post near Calton Sarner's large oil-tank in the distant hollow.

Howard Gray and John Bornson hastened after him. All three felt that their search had led them to the well they had been seeking so diligently, and each experienced a glow of fierce delight that Sarner was to be shown up at last in his true colors as a thief and liar.

When Howard and Bornson reached the derrick, George Rowton had already squeezed between the crumbling timbers, and was on his hands and knees over the small hole in which still hung the wire rope, with several heavy drills at the end of it, the lowermost one perhaps a thousand feet down in the earth.

"How is it, George?" shouted Howard as he ran up.

But it was needless for Rowton to answer. Howard Gray's experienced eye took in the general aspect of the well and derrick at one sweeping glance, while his sense of smell helped him to a quick conclusion.

There was no odor of petroleum, and the rusty wire rope in the bore, the dismantled bull-wheel, and the general air of neglect, told too surely that there had been no oil for years from this well, and probably never would be again.

They had not yet found the gusher.

"Well, Howard," said Rowton as he came out from the interior of the derrick and straightened up, "we'll have to try further."

"Yes, but we'll find it yet, don't you think?"

"We've got to find it," was the resolute answer. "I'm going to see this thing to the and if it takes me to the bottomless pit and into a rough-and-tumble with old Satan himself."

"Wow!" ejaculated Howard Gray.

Over the oil-smudged features of John Bornson spread a grim smile. He liked Rowton's determination not to be beaten, and especially the suggestion that the hunt might lead to the lower regions. Bornson, like his employer, was a fighter.

"We'll have to follow the pipe-line down the hill toward the creek," were Rowton's next words. "There can be nothing more up here. The pipe must go by the side of this old well. We can't be sure of its direction within a few feet either way."

This was obvious, and the three men, disappointed, walked to the end of the plateau and down its steep side, till they found themselves not more than twenty yards from the shore of Dunn Creek.

"It goes to the creek, like the other one," said Howard in a bewildered tone.

"Seems so," assented Rowton; "but we know this isn't a drain-pipe."

He broke into a run, and when he reached the creek he slid down to the edge of the

water, closely examining the bank where the pipe must come out if it followed the course it had taken all along.

There was no pipe there!

Not far away they found the other pipe, which communicated with the warehouse, and it was still lazily dripping crude oil.

"There's only one explanation," muttered Rowton at last, when his two companions had looked along the bank without finding any sign of the pipe from the big tank.

"The pipe-line takes a twist somewhere on the road. The twist may be a few yards from the tank, or near the creek, or anywhere between here and where it sinks into the ground under the tank. Anyhow, we're as far from finding that well as ever."

He climbed up the bank again, and, for the first time since he had begun the search, felt his heart sink.

"Surely we haven't got to let Calton Sarner have his own way, after all," said Howard Gray dolefully.

Rowton was about to say something in reply, when a deep oath from John Bornson made him turn his head quickly.

On top of the high ground from which they had just descended was silhouetted against the moonlit sky the form of a woman who looked gigantic as she stood there on the very brow of the hill, with her loose skirts and a shawl she wore fluttering in the night breeze.

"It's that woman who stole the runabout!" thundered Rowton as he dashed up the hill toward her.

(To be continued.)

Hands and the Man.

BY ARTHUR W. SULLIVAN.

Ten Fingers of Suspicion Point Dreadfully to Foul Play and Spoil the Boarders' Appetites.

IF your palm reads that on a Monday afternoon a short, dark man is to deliver a poorly wrapped bundle to your door, pick out the nearest exit and vanish through it for a more or less indefinite period.

It was on a dark Monday afternoon that the maid at Mrs. Hamm's boarding-house responded to a savage jerk of the door-bell in an equally savage humor.

Before her stood a small, black-haired individual with a medium-sized package under his arm.

The package was wrapped in brown paper, very similar to the meat-paper your butcher uses when he sends around an especially juicy steak.

"What d'ye want?" snapped the maid.

"Does Mr. James live here?"

"Yes."

"If he comes in, will you give this to him, please?" The man held out the package.

When the maid took it he turned, without another word, ran down the steps and walked rapidly down the street.

The maid shut the door and started upstairs to the little hall-room occupied by Kenneth James.

"Gee, this feels funny!" she commented, squeezing the bundle between her red hands.

At the second floor she took it to a window and examined it closely, after the way housemaids have. One look sufficed to send her up the next two flights at a much accelerated pace.

"If them ain't blood-stains, I don't know what they are," she said.

She took the last flight on the run. Two steps from the top she stumbled and sprawled flat. The bundle, hurled from her grasp, hit the wall with a sharp thud.

The string round it broke, and, as it fell to the floor, the paper unrolled, spilling the contents within six inches of her face as she lay prone.

A terrific shriek broke from her lips as she half ran, half fell down the stairs.

"Here, Mesilande, what's the matter?" demanded Mrs. Hamm impatiently, emerging from the kitchen, her hands white with flour.

"Oh, Heaven, oh, Heaven, them hands!" wailed the maid, covering her eyes and sobbing hysterically.

"What hands? What ails ye, woman? What are you talking about?"

"On the top floor. Package for Mr. James. I dropped it. Hands fell out. Maybe they're his. Oh-h-h-h!" and Mesilande sank into a chair, shuddering in her horror.

Before Mrs. Hamm could glean any further information from this source she was interrupted by the stentorian bellow of a man's voice, half angry, half fearful.

"Mrs. Hamm! Mrs. Hamm! Come up here! What does this mean?"

The landlady, now thoroughly excited, hastily wiped her hands on her apron, removed the apron and pounded heavily up to the top floor.

As she reached the end of her climb she heard the same masculine voice say:

"Don't come by now, Miss Clermont. Please don't."

But the warning was unheeded. Miss Clermont, the old maid of the top floor, came, saw, and fainted, after giving vent to a blood-curdling cry.

The man carried her back to her room.

At this moment Mrs. Hamm reached the scene.

She also saw and started at once to voice her fright, but her dignity as head of the house restrained her. She grasped the stair-railing with one hand and her heart with the other, and stood gasping, her face twitching with fright and her eyes popping out of her head.

Before her on the carpet at the head of the stairs lay two human hands.

They stared up at her from the dark carpet, chalky white by contrast. She could see that they had been severed from the arms half-way up to the elbow.

Even now the blood was oozing from the wrists and making a small but steadily spreading blotch on the new carpet.

"Mr. Ritchie," faltered the landlady.

"Coming," answered that gentleman, who, having revived Miss Clermont, was making his way down the illy lighted hall.

He struck a match and lit the gas-jet. A wavering light now illuminated the scene, making the hands more ghastly than ever as they lay motionless on the floor.

"What did you see?" queried Mrs. Hamm of the star boarder.

"I was coming down the hall, just going out on some business, when I almost stumbled over those—" He indicated the hands with his head, but not with his eyes.

"How did they get here at all?" he asked nervously.

Mrs. Hamm turned round, leaned over the banister, and called for the maid.

"Yes, ma'am," she answered right behind the back of her employer.

"Oh!" exclaimed Mrs. Hamm, jumping about a foot. "Don't you ever startle me that way again. I thought you were down in the kitchen, blubbering. Now, tell us what you know about these—these things."

"I answered the door, and saw a little, evil-looking man standing there with this package under his arm. He never looked me in the eye. He just asked me if Mr. James lived here, an' I says yes. Then he handed me this bundle, and asks me to give it to Mr. James if he comes in. Then he disappeared just as fast as he could go.

"Looked to me as if he were afraid some one was after him. He kep' lookin' round. And he was travelin' as if he was sent for. Ugh! but he was a rum card."

Miss Clermont appeared down the hall.

"I won't come very near," she said fearsomely. "I just want to say that I saw the man go down the street, and he was just as awful-looking as Mesilande has made out."

"You say these hands were to be delivered to Mr. James?" asked Mr. Ritchie, turning to the maid.

She nodded.

"Is he in?"

"No, Mr. Ritchie," interrupted Mrs. Hamm. "He ain't in. And I don't know when he will be."

"Oh, I'm afraid he won't never be here again!" cried Mesilande, sobbing afresh.

"I'll make sure he isn't here," said Ritchie. He reached down, slid the paper under the hands, and pulled the corners together. Then he rose and walked with his burden to the door of the room occupied by Kenneth James.

As he did so a slip of white paper fluttered from the package and fell to the floor.

This Mrs. Hamm picked up gingerly and held by the tips of her fingers.

Bang! Bang!

There was no answer from James's room. Ritchie tried again with the same result.

"Hallo, James," he yelled, "are you there?"

Deathlike silence ensued.

"I guess he's not here, after all," Ritchie finally admitted.

"Here, Mr. Ritchie, I just found this," said Mrs. Hamm, holding the slip of white paper at arm's length. "It fell out of the bundle when you picked it up."

The star boarder held the paper to the flickering gas-jet.

Then he uttered an exclamation.

"What does it say?" inquired Mrs. Hamm, Miss Clermont, and Mesilande, all in one breath.

Ritchie read:

I guess this about evens matters.

Then he puzzled over the paper again.

"It's signed," he went on, "with three symbols, the like of which I never met before."

He submitted the paper to the white-faced group before him.

"See if you can make out what they mean."

Each one studied the marks carefully, but all had the same answer. They had no idea what the symbols stood for.

"Well," said Ritchie decisively, "it looks to me as if there had been foul play here. In fact, I don't see any other reasonable supposition. This is a matter for the police to investigate. I will go down now and call them up."

"Oh, this is terrible!" cried the landlady. "To think that such a thing should happen to any one in my house. I've never had any trouble before. And now the police must come. But I suppose it's best."

"Poor Mr. James!" sighed Miss Clermont. "He was such a nice young man. I can't believe that he has been murdered."

At these words Mesilande set up a doleful wail.

"Heaven rest his soul! He was always so generous with me at the end of the week. A young man like that couldn't deserve such treatment from nobody."

Five minutes later Ritchie came up-stairs again to the waiting group.

"An officer will be right over," he said.

Then he took up the package that he had left by James's door, brought it back to the head of the stairs, opened it, and arranged the hands as they had been when he had first discovered them.

"What are you doing that for?" asked Mrs. Hamm, shuddering.

"The police told me to leave them in their original positions, so that the detectives and coroner could work from correct premises in building up a theory."

"I don't want those ruffians working all over my premises," said Mrs. Hamm sharply. She was rapidly gaining composure and her usual vinegar outlook on life in general.

Ritchie did not stop to explain.

"Now, all of you go to your rooms until the police arrive," he said. "I'll stay here to see that this evidence is not disturbed."

In a few moments the door-bell rang, and immediately he heard Mesilande coming up-stairs, talking excitedly, and answering questions propounded by a gruff voice.

"Right up here, officer," said Ritchie when the two reached the third floor.

Mesilande hung back and let the policeman take the last flight alone.

He almost walked on the white hands that lay on the floor at the head of the stairs before he saw them.

He started back quickly. Then he cleared his throat pompously.

"H-mm! What does this mean?"

Ritchie called Mrs. Hamm, Mesilande, and Miss Clermont.

"These people and myself are the only ones that have seen these hands," he announced. "Mesilande, tell the officer your story."

Mesilande did so, bringing out all the details with added vividness.

Then the three other witnesses narrated their experiences.

When they had finished the officer took all the names.

"This is a more important case than I had imagined," he said chewing his mustache savagely. "I want to get a couple of detectives here. While I am calling up bring the remains down into a well-lighted room."

He clumped heavily down the stairs. Ritchie gathered up the two pieces of paper that had come with the hands, wrapped the two members in them and went down to the parlor, where he laid them out on the table.

At his request the three women followed and took chairs in the room.

Shortly after these arrangements had been made the detectives arrived.

The officer told what he knew of the mystery, and then, at the request of the sleuths, the various stories were rehearsed again.

"Now we have a general idea of the occurrence," said the elder one, an alert, active man of middle age. "I want to ask a few questions."

He turned to the maid.

"You say the man who delivered the package was evil looking. What nationality did he appear to be?"

"He looked to me like an Eyetalian," answered Mesilande nervously.

"He appeared anxious to go as soon as he delivered the bundle?"

"Yes, sir."

The detective reflected a moment.

"Was there anything besides the hands in the package?"

Ritchie produced the slip of paper, which, in the excitement, had not been mentioned in the former stories.

He passed it to the man, who seized it eagerly and scanned it closely.

"Ah. This is fine evidence," he cried. "It looks very much like secret society work. But I have never come across those symbols before. Have you?" He indicated to his companion the three signs at the bottom of the writing.

"Don't know them at all," was the reply.

The elder sleuth addressed Mrs. Hamm.

"What kind of a man is James?"

"He's a very quiet young chap what always paid his room and board right on time."

"Where did he come from?"

"I don't know."

"What was his business?"

"I don't know."

"Why not?"

"It's this way," said the landlady, beginning to fidget under the volley of questions. "He come here two months ago and asked if he could have a quiet room where he wouldn't be disturbed—"

"Evidently afraid of pursuit of some kind," interrupted the younger detective. His companion nodded.

"So I gave him the top floor back," went on Mrs. Hamm, unmindful of this remark. "He paid me a month's rent and board in advance, so I never asked any questions of him. He always comes in quietly and goes out the same."

"Does he keep very late hours?"

"He isn't always in when I lock up, if that's what you mean," said the landlady acidly, "and I don't stay up losing sleep to see when he arrives. I don't run a kindergarten, you know."

There was no answer to this sally, so Mrs. Hamm continued,

"Mr. James is here to every meal. He eats his vittles without no comment, which is more than some of 'em do," and she glanced significantly round the little group.

"Hasn't he mentioned his occupation to any of you?"

The little group shook its head collectively.

"I remember one night, though," said Ritchie a second later, "when I asked him to get in on a little game of bridge. He declined, saying that he had to attend a secret meeting of something or other."

"Ah!" said the young detective, brightening; "did he mention the name of the society?"

"Yes. I remember now it was in some foreign language, but I don't recollect it now."

The detectives and the policeman discussed this fact among themselves for a moment or two. Finally, with much nodding of heads, they seemed to agree.

"Did James seem happy, or was he worried and apprehensious?" said the officer as the trio came back to the group of boarders.

"He seemed satisfied with what he got," replied Mrs. Hamm.

"I think I can speak for us all, officer," interrupted Ritchie, "when I say that he seemed always quiet, but happy and unworried."

He looked at Miss Clermont and Mesilande. They nodded their approval.

"May I ask a question?" suggested Miss Clermont timidly.

"Certainly," answered the detectives together.

"The inference so far has been that these hands belong to Mr. James. What makes you all think they are *his* hands?"

The little circle was silent.

Here was a little slip of a woman that staggered them all.

"Why," went on Miss Clermont, "would any body deliver his own hands to him?"

"Well," said the officer loudly, "you see that note, don't you? That spells revenge, doesn't it? Isn't it possible that after mangling him the fiendish men took this means of reminding him that he was not forgotten by them even yet?"

"Yes—I suppose that would be it," admitted Miss Clermont.

Suddenly Mesilande uttered a shriek.

"What's the matter, girl?" cried Ritchie excitedly.

"Oh, oh! Them's his hands. Look at 'em. Don't you remember the ring he used to wear?"

"Yes—well—"

"They've taken the ring offen his finger, but the mark is still there."

All eyes were immediately focused on the hands which, during all the interrogation, had lain practically unnoticed on the table. Only Mesilande had been gazing at them, as if fascinated by their stillness and whiteness.

"By George, I'm afraid the girl is right," said Ritchie, bending over the table. In a moment all the heads were clustered above the cold objects that were assuming such importance in the Hamm household.

Round the little finger of the left hand was a furrow that indicated plainly the former presence of a ring that had fitted so closely as to leave an indelible mark.

"That might not be the kind of a ring that James wore," said the officer.

"But it is," insisted Mesilande. "Do you see that on the top of the finger the mark has become broader? His ring was made just that way."

"That's so," assented Mrs. Hamm. Ritchie agreed, and Miss Clermont after a shrinking examination finally admitted that the impression was just such a one as would have been made by the ring James always wore.

Here was the situation as presented so far.

James had disappeared the preceding Saturday morning. He had not been heard from since. No one had the remotest idea where he had gone, and no more of an idea when he would return.

He was practically unknown to every one in the boarding-house.

He had made no friends. The other boarders would hardly have called themselves acquaintances. James had confided in none of them.

His family was unknown. His past was shrouded in mystery, and his present doings were no better known.

None of the men boarders had ever been invited into his room at any time. The nights he stayed in he went up-stairs directly from the supper table and shut himself in. The evenings that he spent out he departed with his customary silence, locking his door securely behind him.

He was always courteous but never familiar.

As the group talked him over they were surprised to realize how really little they knew about their fellow boarder.

Immediately all kinds of conjectures began to flood the already overexcited minds. The unfortunate James was made the victim of a Black Hand plot, the instigator of some nefarious nocturnal traffic, and about half a dozen other things that were possible if not probable deductions from the knowledge at hand.

That he had met with foul play was evident. The hands were his beyond a doubt. That much had been almost certainly proven.

The detectives were at a loss. Their half-baked theories were practically worthless from the point of view of building up a motive for the crime that had been committed.

Mesilande, the only one who had ever entered James's room, was closely questioned.

"When you have gone in to sweep up, haven't you seen anything that would give a clue to this man's occupation?" queried the elder detective impatiently.

"No, sir. I have seen nothing," answered the maid with spirit, "and if I had, I am not one to be prying about. I goes in and I cleans the room and I goes out without any nosing."

"That's the way I trained you," supplemented Mrs. Hamm. "I do not have any other kind of help." This to the detective.

"Can you get into his room?" was the next inquiry.

"Yes, I have a pass key."

"Well, give it to us. We must go through the room to try and get additional evidence. The rest of you may be excused now. But be ready to answer any summons we may make."

"I've got the key, and I'll go through the room with you," announced Mrs. Hamm. "You fellers ain't going to have the free run of this house, not if I know it."

She led the way up-stairs, the officer and the two detectives following in her train.

Ritchie and Miss Clermont remained in the parlor talking over the startling events of the afternoon.

Mesilande went down to the kitchen to help prepare dinner. The afternoon had worn away and it was almost time to eat.

In about fifteen minutes the minions of the law preceded the landlady down-stairs. Gloom, thick and heavy, was written on all the faces.

The detectives stopped long enough to take the pallid hands and the slip of white paper and wrap them up in the original package.

"We're going to take this evidence down to the Central Office. We will measure the hands and see if we have any Bertillon record to compare with them. If we have we may be able to establish an identity. We want this slip of paper, too. We may possibly have secret symbols that will agree with those on the paper.

"Meantime, if you hear any word, directly or indirectly, of James, be sure to let us know at once. Good-day."

The door slammed a moment later on three disgruntled representatives of the law.

"Did they find anything in his room?" asked Ritchie breathlessly as Mrs. Hamm entered the parlor.

"I should say not," she snorted contemptuously. "They pawed over everything poor James owned, went through his closet, turned the bed upside down, and did half a dozen other fool antics, and didn't find so much evidence as would make you say boo."

Ritchie shook his head perplexedly.

"It is certainly a mighty strange occurrence," he said to himself.

About five minutes later the rest of the boarders began to arrive. The news of what had happened spread rapidly, and they were soon in scattered groups talking excitedly, and speculating as to what could possibly have happened to their fellow sufferer at the Hamm house.

Dinner was not an overcheerful meal that night.

Those who had been witnesses of the proceedings of the past few hours had very little appetite, but even if they had there would have been small chance to appease it, so eager were the new arrivals for details.

Then, across from Ritchie, almost eloquent in its silence, was James's empty chair. No matter how they tried, every eye would rest again and again on that chair. Never before had it assumed such importance to them all.

It seemed to hypnotize them. Mrs. Hamm, perceiving its effect, ordered Mesilande to take the chair away.

She did so, but almost broke down as she carried it with trembling hands to another room.

This move on the part of the landlady left a void on one side of the table like the hole made by the absence of one front tooth in an otherwise perfect set.

It was worse than ever now. Finally Ritchie pleaded to have the chair put back.

"It isn't quite so empty that way," he said.

"No, it isn't," added Miss Clermont.

So the chair was brought back.

"What's this!" suddenly exclaimed a man at the far end of the table as Mesilande was bringing in dessert.

He folded over the paper he had been reading to throw better light on it.

"What is the matter?" chorused the table, electrified.

"Here's an account that may throw some light on the mystery we are all interested in."

"Read it," said Ritchie.

The boarder adjusted his glasses, cleared his throat, and read aloud the following:

> The body of an unidentified man was found this morning on the Elevated tracks at the terminal of the Tenth Avenue line. The head was gone from the body, and the *hands were severed from the arms* about half-way to the elbows. The clothing was searched, but no clue as to the identity of the victim was obtained.

There was silence after the reading of this. In every mind the same thought was working. There was a great possibility, not to say probability, that this victim of the Elevated was the missing Mr. James.

The fact that the arms were cut off below the elbows fitted exactly the hands that Mesilande had started to deliver to the top floor, rear.

"That's very likely Mr. James," volunteered Mesilande, setting down Ritchie's pudding. Her mistress looked at her warningly, but the girl was too engrossed with her own thoughts to pay any attention.

"I've seen him a ridin' on the Tenth Avenue line several times on Sunday. Maybe he was coming home when the band of cutthroats got him."

The rest of the table was silent, considering these remarks. They seemed to hit very close — to the particular idea that was circulating in every brain at that moment. Yet no one cared to go on with the idea. Finally the man who read the paragraph said:

"I don't see that we can escape the conclusion that our Mr. James has disappeared. Of that we are sure. We receive a pair of hands identified by sveral of you as his, both by the appearance and the mark of the ring on the little finger.

"It is noticed that the hands have been severed from the arms slightly above the wrists. To-day we hear of a man killed on the Elevated structure, whether by accident or with intent we know not. His head is gone. His arms have been run over at practically the same point indicated on the hands left at this house.

"We have every reason to think that our friend met foul play at the hands of some of his enemies. Isn't it a reasonable inference to draw that the victim on the Elevated structure may be our Mr. James?"

"I think you're quite right," said Ritchie after carefully considering these remarks. "This much is certain: with the evidence

we have had, and with the things we can draw from them, it seems to me that it is our duty to investigate the body found on the Elevated tracks.

"If we can find anything that way that will have bearing on James, it may help us to locate friends of his, or relatives. It is certainly up to us to either advertise for his relations or try to hunt them up ourselves."

"I think advertising is best," remarked Miss Clermont. "It is quicker; that's the point."

"I'm not particularly in favor of having a lot of bums come around here on the pretext of being relatives of Mr. James, and go through my house," barked Mrs. Hamm.

"Oh, we'll take care of that," replied Ritchie, reassuringly.

"Before we go any further," interrupted the man who had read the clipping from the paper, "let's do a little thinking on this matter."

"A new *Sherlock Holmes* come to judgment," said Mrs. Hamm, who never had liked the sarcastic boarder very well, inasmuch as he generally delivered a few shafts whenever he paid his board, referring to the faults of the preceding two weeks.

This procedure made it difficult for Mrs. Hamm to reply in kind—you can't be nasty when you're taking money, you know. So she took her vengeance during the lean season between pay-times.

"What's your dope?" inquired Ritchie.

"Well," was the answer, "I thought at first that our friend on the Elevated structure was Mr. James, just as you all do. But I have changed my mind.

"In the first place, the police would know about this victim of the Elevated railroad. That's surely where the reporter got his story."

"Yes," interrupted Miss Clermont, "but didn't the article say the body was unidentified? And if that were the case, would the police know anything more about it than we?"

"You always have such bully suggestions," declared Ritchie with admiration in his eye.

"I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll call up police headquarters on the matter, and see what they have to say. They may, as Miss Clermont says, be up a tree as badly as we are; but it will do no harm to see."

Supper was adjourned at this point, and all the boarders went into the parlor while Ritchie was upstairs telephoning.

"I hope he finds out that it is James," remarked the landlady, folding her hands. "This house is rapidly becoming demoralized with this excitement."

What she said was true.

All the investigations so far had led to nothing but conjecture and theory. There had been really nothing tangible to back up the only real evidence—the hands.

Everybody in the house was tingling with the gruesomeness of it all, aside from the mystery of the afternoon's happenings. Those who had been under the morbid influence from the first were nervous. The mental image of the hands as they had first appeared to each one could not be driven from the nervously excited brains.

The other boarders, with their pestiferous questions, had only aggravated and revivified the mystery until it had permeated the whole house thoroughly.

Every one devoutly hoped that Ritchie would find out something definite.

He did.

His entrance ten minutes later was greeted with an expectant hush. But his looks promised very little.

He sat down heavily, in kind of a despair.

"The theory that the victim of the Elevated road might be Mr. James is all wrong. The police have just told me that the man run over was identified within an hour after the finding of his body.

"It seems that he was a worker on the structure and was driving spikes, when an up-town express swung suddenly over on the track where he was working. He saw it only as it was towering above him.

"He threw his sledge-hammer down between the rails and leaped desperately for the little runway alongside. He almost made it.

"The first car caught him as he fell, pinning him by his head and hands—"

A shudder of horror ran through the assembled boarders.

"Oh, don't tell any more," cried Miss Clermont. "I can't stand it."

Her face was as white as a sheet and she was trembling violently.

"I beg your pardon," said Ritchie humbly. "I did not mean to frighten you."

There was silence again over the assemblage.

Mrs. Hamm was the first to break it. She addressed the company with great finality, as if she had been debating a question of great moment and had finally solved the whole thing.

"We certainly must find the body of this boy somehow. The police have disposed of the only hopes we had—"

"Oh, hopes—hopes!" squealed the women. "How can you say such a thing, Mrs. Hamm?"

"You know what I meant," returned that lady imperturbably. "I meant that our only clue, if you will, has been destroyed by the activity of the police. But that doesn't take the obligation off our hands."

"No," chimed in the cynic of the dinner-table; "we ought to find the body and ship it to his folks, properly cared for."

"Yes, but where do his folks live?" said Ritchie.

There was no answer forthcoming to this sally.

Mrs. Hamm turned sourly to the cynic.

"The idea is to ask intelligent questions, you know."

"Well," interrupted Miss Clermont, "suppose we can't even find the body. What will we do under those circumstances?"

No one seemed to have an answer ready for this shaft, either.

Then the cynic thought he saw a means of retrieving his blunder of a moment before.

"I have it!" he exclaimed. "We'll get the hands from the police, and if we can't find the body, we'll send them carefully—after we find where to send them," he added hastily.

Mrs. Hamm fairly withered him with a glance.

"Do you suppose," she snapped, "that we're going to do any fool stunt like that? I'm not going to be a party to sending any mother pieces of her son. If we can't find the whole body we won't do nothing but notify the parents that he's dead."

"Poor boy," sighed Ritchie. "He was only a young fellow, and he seemed to me to have lots of promise. I'm afraid, almost, to notify his mother."

"Think what agony it must be to raise a boy to the vigor of his manhood, only to have the labor of years torn down in the flicker of an eyelash—or the gleam of a knife—or the flash of electricity."

"It does seem as if it were too hard a judgment to wreak upon a woman," said Miss Clermont quietly, "but I guess it is a woman's province to suffer—especially a mother."

Ritchie looked at her keenly. He had never seen this side of Miss Clermont before. It was a revelation to him.

"I knew a case very like this once. The young man was killed by a steam-roller, and his mother—"

"Yes?"

"She went insane."

"For Heaven's sake," said Ritchie angrily, "what kind of a story do you call that to tell a lot of nervous people? Haven't we enough of the harrowing without any choice additions like that?"

Ritchie looked about at the various faces. This last incident had made its deep impression.

It was a sad company. To the eye of an impartial observer it was manifest that uneasiness of no small proportion was invading each mind.

Ritchie saw at once that the situation needed brightening or hysteria would seize the women.

He tried to switch the conversation into more cheerful channels. He talked of the ball-games, the latest newspaper scandal, the theaters and finally the weather. But he found his efforts unavailing.

The darkness of the mystery and its gruesome details hung over every one like a somber pall. Each person seemed sunk lethargically into moody reflection from which it was hard to rouse him.

The conversation finally languished. Then it died out altogether.

No one cared to make the first move to go to bed, but finally Mrs. Hamm, noticing the expenditure of gas, got up, yawned and remarked:

"Well, I guess I'll lock up. I guess there won't be no one else come in."

She closed the shutters and barred them. Then she went to the front door, secured the catch and turned down the gas in the hall.

Her remark, far from creating ease in the minds of her guests, turned all minds again to James. There was no one else to come in but him.

Finally one of the men made an excuse to go up-stairs. At once the women decided to go. There was some protection in being near him while ascending the dark stairs and traversing the illy lighted halls.

By ten o'clock the house of Hamm was dark. Every one had gone to bed and, seemingly, to sleep.

But sleep was a tardy visitor.

To the tense imaginations it seemed as if there were noises all over the place. There were scratchings as of finger-nails. In the intervals of silence ghostly hands felt along the walls, stopped at doors and then tapped. They were not healthy taps. They seemed soft and fantom-like.

The sighing of the wind outside seemed to have an unearthly echo along the deserted corridors, as if a human being were panting as he labored up the endless flight of steps.

Suddenly every inhabitant of the boarding-house of Mrs. Sophronia Hamm grabbed the bed-clothes in an ecstasy of terror, hid his head and lay quaking.

The front door had slammed violently shut.

Every ear was alert with an almost superhuman keenness.

Then hearts began to pound like trip-hammers.

There were heavy steps upon the stairs. Some one was slowly but surely mounting them.

The tread reached the second flight, and slowly felt along the floor. Hands could be heard rubbing on the wall paper.

At the first step of the next flight the feet stumbled, stopped, and then began mounting again.

The dread march continued up to the third floor.

There was more stumbling and then the steps began their way up to the top story.

Miss Clermont got out of bed, put on her bath-robe and slippers with trembling hands, and opened her door.

As she appeared at the head of the stairs, an apparition in white, the steps ceased sounding.

Miss Clermont looked down into the half darkness and gave one blood-curdling shriek. Then she fell in a dead faint.

In a second the hall was populated with scantily clothed boarders half crying with fear.

Down the stairs, silhouetted against the wavering light of the floor below was the figure of Kenneth James.

His coat-sleeves hung down crookedly.

But there were no hands.

"It's his ghost," whined the cynic of the dinner-table, shrinking back against the wall.

Mrs. Hamm dropped to her knees in an ecstasy of terror.

"He's come back to haunt me for the things I said about him," she cried, beating her hands together frantically. "Oh, please, Mr. Ghost, don't hurt me."

The apparition on the stairs remained perfectly still.

Mesilande ran out of her room, laughing hysterically.

"Oh! You're back again. I'm so glad, so glad!"

She reached the head of the stairs and started down.

The cynic reached out and grabbed her by the arm.

"Shh!" he whispered fiercely. "Keep still. The thing will come up here if you don't."

Mesilande shrank against the wall half sobbing.

Ritchie was the only individual who was not bereft of his senses. Yet he, too, was alarmed. The blood congealed in his veins and cold chills coursed up and down his spine.

He had never faced a situation just like this before.

Below him was the apparition of the murdered James. Ritchie had heard of the spirits of the dead appearing to the living, but he had always been a skeptic. The suddenness of this demonstration of spiritualism took his breath away and well-nigh unnerved him.

What should he do?

He wanted to go down the stairs and see how tangible was this ghost, but at the thought his flesh crept and his hair rose on end.

Suddenly the ghost took the initiative.

It began to advance up the stairs with the same measured tread that had distinguished its previous progress.

Everybody but Ritchie fled in terror, leaving the body of Miss Clermont prone upon the floor.

Ritchie held his ground a short distance back of the stairs.

The ghost reached the top step, stood irresolute under the flickering gas-jet and looked around. Then the ghost spoke—in the voice of Kenneth James.

"What's all the fuss?" it said.

Startled shrieks from the various rooms greeted this remark.

Then white-clad figures gradually appeared from the doorways.

"Don't all of you stand there like a bunch of ninnies," cried James, exasperated. "You all look as scared as if you had seen a ghost."

"Is—is—is it really you?" faltered the cynic.

"Are you alive?" whispered Mesilande.

"Tell me if you can eat real food," cried Mrs. Hamm, still in the grip of her fear, but willing to test the ghost with the old-fashioned question about food.

"Where are your hands?" was Ritchie's question. He asked it quaking inwardly.

Mr. Kenneth James laughed out loud, a real, hearty, wholesome laugh.

Then he reached up and turned the gas up to its full height.

At the end of his right arm was a perfectly good hand.

His left hand was stuck in his pocket.

Kenneth James looked round him curiously.

"Well, what does all this mean?" he queried impatiently.

Getting no response he stooped over, picked up the limp form of Miss Clermont and said:

"Some of you women restore her. Hold smelling-salts to her nostrils and bathe her face with cold water. If she doesn't come round at once tell me."

While the women tremblingly hastened to obey, James turned to Ritchie.

"You're a pretty sane sort of individual. For Heaven's sake, explain all this open-mouthed terror."

And Ritchie did.

He gave James a detailed account of everything that had transpired since the time the strange package had been delivered to Mesilande at the front door. He told of the breaking of the bundle, the panic that had ensued, the calling of the police, the investigation of the dead man on the Elevated structure, and all the incidents in the strange afternoon.

"Now," he concluded, "please explain this, if you can. We have been nearly crazy with apprehension for you. We were sure you had met with foul play of some kind."

James looked round the circle of his hearers, saw the abject terror still written on their faces and started to laugh. Then he checked himself.

"It is so ridiculously simple that I am almost afraid to tell you all about it. But here goes, for the sake of your peace of mind.

"As you know, I have never been communicative. That is my nature. I have never talked about myself, because I don't believe in being a bore. There are too many of them.

"I am a medical student. I have to work hard, especially lately, as examinations are coming on. I knew I was going out of town over this week-end to visit some friends, so I tried to prepare to be able to study late to-night when I got back.

"I have an examination to-morrow on the anatomy of the hands, with a special subject on the carpels and metacarpels.

"So I arranged with a friend of mine, a fellow student, to leave a couple of hands here to-day so I could work to-night. He evidently did his duty, if I may judge from the story you tell."

"Yes, but what does the note on the white piece of paper mean, saying that he is even with you, or some such words?"

"Oh," laughed James, "a week ago I had a particularly good specimen of heart that this fellow needed for his work. I gave it to him—sort of a loan between friends, you know—and he evidently thinks that his delivering the hands to my house discharges the obligation."

"What were the strange symbols at the bottom of that note?" asked Ritchie.

"Those were simply the initials of the medical fraternity to which this man and I belong. He evidently put them on to show that he had delivered the specimens to me."

"The mark of the ring on the little finger of the left hand must have been a very unusual coincidence," said Ritchie still almost unconvinced that James's story was to be accepted as true.

"Yes, that feature was unusual," said James; "but we frequently come across specimens that have marks of various kinds on them, so I am not especially surprised even at that."

Half an hour later the house of Hamm, greatly relieved, was pounding its ears in healthful sleep.

But, if on a Monday afternoon a short, dark man delivers a package to your door, look for the nearest exit and then head for climes unknown until the excitement attendant upon the delivery of that package shall have subsided.

COQUETTE.

THOUGH I do love her ardently,
I dare not speak, I must demur;
For Ellen flouts and laughs at me
Because I've lost my heart to her.

And yet, though I am suffering,
'Tis well her smiles she doth refuse—
Coquette, she lacks a priceless thing:
She has no heart to give or lose!

Nathan M. Levy.

The Man Who Mixed In.*

BY SEWARD W. HOPKINS,

Author of "Trouble in Bunches," "By Bullet Persuasion," "The Hoodoo Ranch," etc.

Wherein a Young Man Learns that the Golden Rule May Seem to Belie Itself and the Reward of Virtue Appear Doubtful.

SYNOPSIS OF PRECEDING CHAPTERS.

BOB READE, the quixotic son of a millionaire, rescues from a drunken father a beautiful girl and her little brother. The girl he takes to a hospital, where, giving an assumed name, he has her provided for as his sister. The boy he has taken care of by Mrs. Cullom, the landlady of his best friend, Center Solitor, who is in love with Bob's sister, Cynthia. In the Reade family there is a good deal of discussion, because the elder daughter, Arabella, and Mrs. Reade have much higher social ambitions than Cynthia or Bob. Especially is there much trouble when Solitor learns that his concern has failed and that he is out of a job.

All over the country the financial situation becomes worse and worse. Reade's father breaks down and has to go to the country. Solitor and Reade take charge of the business. Denko, the father of the rescued girl, puts in an appearance and demands to know the whereabouts of his daughter. Upon Reade's refusal to divulge this, he has the young man arrested, charging him with abduction. Reade undertakes to plead his own defense, dispensing with a lawyer.

CHAPTER XIV.

NO BAIL.

"NOW, Robert Reade," said the magistrate, not without a little sternness in his manner, "against my advice you preferred to do without counsel. You do not appear to be a poor man. Were you in straitened circumstances, I would insist on appointing counsel to protect your interest.

"But you are able to employ a lawyer and for some reason will not. Now, I want a truthful statement from you. If you do not, under oath, tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, it will go hard with you."

"I will tell the truth, your honor; but you have forbidden the testimony that would make my position clear."

"What testimony is that?"

"Concerning the boy."

"How will testimony concerning the boy make your position clear?"

"It leads up to my discovery of the girl."

"If it be necessary to a complete recital, go ahead about the boy. What about the boy?"

"Your honor, I am a member of the Whereaway Yacht Club. On the tenth of the month, the day before the club started on its annual cruise, I was working on board my yawl Cynthia, getting her in shape for the next day's run.

"I was about seventy yards from the club float. I saw a little boy run along the pier, out on the float, and then topple into the water. The water at the float is about twelve feet deep at low water. I leaped overboard from my yacht, and got the little fellow out.

"The stewardess of the clubhouse took him in charge. He could not give his name distinctly, but we got as near to it as possible, and I started in my hired automobile to find his parents and restore him. To show your honor that I was sincere in this, I went first to the captain of police at Corona, and then to the captain of police at Flushing. At Flushing I learned of Cubbletown, and that a man there with a name something

* This story began in The Cavalier for July.

like what the boy had tried to say had once been arrested.

"I found the house. It is not a house. It is scarcely fit for a pigsty. The girl Elsie had done her best, but she is only seventeen, and her advantages in life have been limited.

"Denko was not at home. I found the girl lying on the floor unconscious, with a bandage round her head covering one eye. I called in the chauffeur as a witness. I presume this is the witness who will tell for the other side where I took her. It will not be necessary, for I will tell myself.

"I picked up the girl and laid her on a sofa. I saw that her eye was discolored from a blow. She must have had strength and consciousness enough to bind it up, and then fainted.

"I thought she had a broken rib. She had two. When I had got some wine down her throat, she told me her father knocked her down and then kicked her in the side.

"While I was there the father came in. He was beastly, crazy drunk. I accused him of breaking her rib. He threatened to kill her for telling me. He also threatened me. I hurled him into a corner, and took the girl away."

"What did you do with the boy?"

The magistrate was leaning forward, listening eagerly.

"I took the boy along, too."

"Did you take them to the same place?"

"No, your honor. The boy was well and needed motherly care. The girl was injured and needed surgical care. I placed the boy in the care of a woman who had been the nurse of my present business partner, and took the girl to St. Anne's Hospital, Manhattan, where she is now, doing very well.

"It is true, as Denko says, that when he saw me a few days ago I refused to tell him where his daughter was."

"Why? Has a father not the right to know?"

"He was in no condition to know, and I feared the result. To avoid difficulty with him and my own family, I introduced the girl as my sister under the name of Annie Morton, and assumed the name of David Morton myself. I knew if I told Denko where she was, he would go there and raise a disturbance and spoil everything."

When I had finished the judge spent several minutes thinking.

"Your story," he said finally, "bears the stamp of truth. Your actions speak much better for your heart, however, than your head. But you are young, and much may be forgiven in the young when their motives are good. There seems, however, to be something in this that requires further investigation. I have no doubt as to that part touching on the cruelty of the father. His face stamps him a drunkard and a brute.

"Nevertheless, the fact remains that, with all your good intentions, you have broken the law. There are legal ways in which a girl seventeen years old can be removed from cruel and degrading parents. If the law condoned all such acts as yours, however chivalrous you personally might be, it would establish a precedent that might make the law helpless in case a rascal abducted under the cloak of such an excuse.

"I am going to this length to explain to you that I am fully convinced that your motives were manly, honorable, and noble. Yet, there is my duty as a magistrate and exponent of the law. And it becomes my duty to have this matter more fully and thoroughly investigated. To that end, I am compelled to hold you in one thousand dollars bail for further investigation."

I gasped. Solitor was the only one who came into my mind then.

"Very well, your honor," I said. "If I may be permitted, I will write to my partner, Center Solitor, who will furnish cash bail."

I was taken back to my cell, and supplied with paper, pen, and ink. I wrote as follows:

MY DEAR SOLITOR:

I am locked up in Queens County jail over that Denko case. I am arrested on the charge of abduction. I never told all the story for fear of making a row, and now I've made it, anyway.

I am held for a thousand dollars bail. Draw it out of the bank. The magistrate will accept cash bail. I am in deeper than I thought, and must get out to fight.

Don't fail me. Hurry up. A cell in a jail is not like a drawing-room on Madison Avenue.

This letter I sealed and gave it to a keeper to mail.

Then began a season of waiting that tortured my soul almost beyond endurance. I knew it would take hours for the letter to reach Solitor.

Yet there was time for him to get it before banking hours came to an end. I would be free that night. The previous night was still vivid in my mind, and I was glad to think I would not have to spend another in the cell.

But the dreary hours rolled on, and no Solitor came to see me. I had my dinner, again paying for what I wanted, and then some more hours went by.

The shadows were falling across the barred window of my cell, and I knew that banking hours had closed.

Solitor would soon be here.

But he did not come. Supper was brought to me, but I had little appetite. The world seemed slipping from beneath my feet. All the friends I had seemed to have turned against me in a crisis when I needed them most. I had not been in trouble before, and did not know that this was characteristic of friends.

I waited till it was bedtime, still hoping for Solitor. But no Solitor came.

With what heartache I lay down on the steel bed again nobody can understand unless he has been in the same position. The night was one prolonged nightmare. I rolled and tossed. If I dropped off into a doze, it was only to spring up again to fight some hideous monster that sought to devour me.

Breakfast was a farce. I ate a little, however, to keep up my strength, and then asked for the morning papers. These were brought me, because I was not yet a convict. I might just as well be, as far as freedom was concerned, until Solitor came.

But Solitor didn't come. The hours of the morning went by, and then dinner. The hours of the afternoon went by, and my heart was becoming more and more downcast, and a rankling anger toward Solitor was growing.

The evening passed, and another night. I spent hours of the night cursing Solitor. Then I fell to cursing myself for a fool, and at last, worn out, I went to sleep.

CHAPTER XV.

SOLITOR AND THE CASH.

IT was about one o'clock the next day when, sitting on the edge of my cot after my dinner, I heard the sound of several people walking in the hall outside. Whoever was in the corridor stopped in front of my cell. I stood up, my heart beating fast, for here at last was Solitor with my bail.

The door was opened and I stood silent—speechless.

It was not Solitor. There stood my two sisters, Arabella and Cynthia, and—the last man I expected to see—Gerald Braithe.

Notwithstanding the fact that Braithe was engaged to be married to Arabella, I was not very well acquainted with him. He was a rich man, and belonged to an older crowd than mine.

If I went yachting, it was in a sailing yacht like the Cynthia, where I could haul on ropes, get myself daubed with tar and mud, fish up the anchor, and do my own work in general. If Braithe went yachting, it was on the deck of a steam-yacht, where he sat in immaculate yachting suit, chatting and drinking wine.

He was an aristocrat from the ground up.

"Robert!" exclaimed my sister Arabella.

"Bob! What's all this about?" asked Cynthia.

"It's about a girl," I said.

"Sit down here, Reade," said Braithe. "You are excited now. Calm yourself. We must have a talk."

"But why didn't Solitor come when I wrote him?"

"Where is Solitor?"

"Why—why—isn't he at the office?"

"No. Jobbins, the head bookkeeper, says he hasn't been there since day before yesterday."

"Solitor gone away? There's nothing wrong, is there?"

"There seems to be something most decidedly wrong. Solitor drew, on Wednesday, all the balance from the United States and Colonies Bank, which Jobbins says amounted to over a hundred thousand dollars, and neither he nor the money has been seen since."

I stared at Braithe and looked in a childish, helpless fashion at my two sisters.

"Solitor!" I said. "Solitor a thief? That ruins the business completely."

"Bob," said Cynthia—and I heard a sob gulped down—"you know that Center Solitor is no thief. Why should he steal, when he was just on the upward road to prosperity? And I know he wouldn't steal from my father, anyway."

My head began to hurt. Things were crowding me more than my inexperienced brain could stand.

"I should think, Bob," said Cynthia, "that no matter what trouble you were in, girl or no girl, you might have told me all about it in confidence so I could stop papa's anger."

"How did he know?"

"How did he know? Why, Jobbins telegraphed. You know you can't say much in a telegram. He just wired this: 'Robert in Queens County jail, and Solitor missing with all funds from bank, and bank closed.'"

"Has the United States and Colonies closed its doors?" I asked in amazement.

"Yes."

"Then—Solitor knew what he was doing. But, good Lord, where can he be? Has foul play come to him, do you think?"

"It is impossible to say now."

Things began to swim black before me. Truly, the proud Reade family had trouble enough to spare some.

"How did Jobbins know I was in Queens County jail?"

"It was in yesterday's papers."

"But you didn't get the papers at Norland so soon. How— Oh, I remember—Jobbins telegraphed. I'm getting dizzy. I can't think."

"Get back to something you can think about," said Braithe. "Tell us the whole story about this trouble."

I told them all about it, even with more detail than I had given the magistrate.

"What kind of boy is Eddie?" asked Cynthia.

"A fine little fellow. Mrs. Cullom says he is full of mischief. One expects that in a boy."

"And what sort of girl is Elsie?"

"Pretty—lovely."

"How old is she?"

"About seventeen."

"And now at St. Anne's she is known as Annie Morton and you as David Morton?"

"Yes. I had to assume the relationship to protect her."

"I can't understand, even then, how they accepted her at the hospital. She must be an ignorant girl, Reade," said Braithe.

"She is."

"And there must have been a vast difference between her appearance and yours."

"There was. I offered no explanation of that. But now it is almost time for her to leave, and she had to have decent clothes to go as my sister. Mrs. Cullom is to get them."

"Tell me this, Reade, although it is none of my business. Have you—is there anything like love between you?"

"I asked her to be my wife."

"You did! And of course she accepted you."

"Equally of course she refused me point-blank."

"Say why?"

"Oh, she said something about inequality—I don't remember."

"Well, she showed she had sense and wasn't a leech. Better than her father. But I am surprised at you. Didn't you realize that such a marriage was impossible?"

"Unwise, perhaps, but not impossible."

"Well, let's see what we can do about this bail. I read your letter to Solitor. I haven't a thousand dollars in cash with me, but I own the Braithe Building on Jackson Avenue, Long Island City, and I guess that will do."

Braithe managed it all. We went before the magistrate, where Braithe qualified as my bondsman and gave the Braithe Building as security.

They had Braithe's automobile outside, and we all got into it. We hurried back to the office.

"The situation is simply this," said Braithe. "There is a lot to be done. A great deal of work now devolves on you. Solitor is gone with your money. I'll attend to the business of tracing him, and you knock that girl out of your head and get right down to business, or you ll see your whole family ruined.

"When your father received the telegram from Jobbins he had another stroke, and Dr. Bream is attending him, and I have sent Cripps up to take charge. We've got to pull this thing through, and I'll stand by you to help. If you want money, call on me.

"Don't worry about the outcome of the trial, if it comes to trial. The testimony of the girl herself will clear you. I doubt if Denko will have any standing in court."

"Are you girls going to remain in town?" I asked.

"Yes," said Arabella, and her face turned red. "With all this trouble and excitement, Gerald and I have decided to be married quietly and take up the regular régime at home in the old house, and leave mama free as long as papa needs her. Cynthia will remain with us. I shall leave Cossie, the cook, with mama, and get another. You, of course, will resume your old ways at home."

"I'm glad of that. I am glad there is one ray of sunshine in the darkness," I said.

I plunged to the work and they left me.

I found a letter from my father to Solitor, written before the telegram from Jobbins had reached him.

But, even so, while it was filled with sentences showing the trust my father felt in Solitor, and advice concerning the business, there was not a word from beginning to end concerning me.

I felt sore—hurt. My father, I thought, was unreasonable. But—he was a sick man.

Yet—there was I, the despised son, work-

ing like a horse to bring order out of chaos, and Solitor, the trusted, had disappeared with the cash.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE RED HEEL.

THE office was quiet. My mind was easy so far as Denko was concerned, and there were few interruptions. I was working steadily on the accumulated correspondence when the door burst suddenly open and Mrs. Cullom swept in like a hurricane.

I swung round in my swivel-chair to greet her. Her condition alarmed me. Her face was deadly white. Her eyes were staring. Her hands twitched nervously. Instead of taking a chair, she began pacing up and down the office.

"Mrs. Cullom!" I exclaimed. "What on earth is the matter with you? Has anything happened to Eddie?"

"No!" she said hoarsely and excitedly. "The boy's all right, thanks be to God!"

"Well, then? Has the house burned down?"

"No, no. The house is all right. But where is Center? Where is he, I say? He hasn't been home in two nights? Where is he, oh, Mr. Robert; where is he?"

She was wringing her hands now in most violent agitation.

"I don't know where he is, Mrs. Cullom. But you must not get so excited. Solitor will show up again all right. I am sure of that."

"Oh, but I must find him. Now, I want him. Now! And his father! I want his father, too. Where is his father?"

I knew that Solitor had received a letter from his father a short time before. It was previous to our entrance into the business world together, and therefore would not be among the personal letters in his desk.

But he had spoken to me about the letter and was overjoyed at its contents.

I had not read the letter, but he had told me all he wished me to know, and perhaps there was nothing in the letter he wished to conceal. Neither of us was given to prying into the secrets of the other; yet, on the other hand, we had no secrets hidden from each other till I had burdened myself with the secret of Elsie Denko.

The letter Solitor had received had said that his father had been far up on the Tanana River above Fort Yukon, in Alaska, where new gold-fields had been discovered, and he had joined the rush of eager seekers after wealth.

The place was bleak and cold in the winter and scarcely warm in the summer. There were people coming all the time, but nobody went away except by the universal route—death.

Communication with the world was impossible. But, after two years of toil, danger, hunger, and cold, Mr. Solitor had had enough.

He had not said whether his quest for gold had been successful or not. But he was on his way home. The letter, I recalled, had been written at Sitka, and from there Mr. Solitor was to go to Seattle. He hinted at some new business enterprise there in which he expected to have an interest, and probably he was at Seattle at the time Solitor disappeared.

"Sit down, Mrs. Cullom, and calm yourself. I believe Mr. Solitor is now in Seattle. Center received a letter from him a short time ago from Sitka saying that he was on his way to New York to see Center, but would stop for a time at Seattle."

"And where is this—this Seattle? Is it a place that can be got at at all, at all?"

"Oh, yes, Seattle is a large and flourishing city in the State of Washington, on the Pacific coast."

"Then send word to him at once to come here."

I looked at the old nurse with some misgivings. Her manner and looks indicated that she was going out of her mind.

"I will, Mrs. Cullom," I said, "if it is really necessary. But, as I told you, he is already on his way to see Center."

"There'll be two to see."

The woman was getting on my nerves. I'll admit that this was not a very difficult thing to do. I had put in enough in the past few days to destroy whatever nerve I had had.

"What do you mean?" I asked.

"Ach! What a day this is!" she said, rocking back and forth and rubbing her withered old hands together. "What a day! What a day!"

The crescendo ended with a screech.

"What about the day? Did you get Elsie Denko's clothes?"

"Did I? Did I get Elsie Denko's clothes? No!"

"Why not?" I asked, compelling myself to remain outwardly calm.

"Because there is no Elsie Denko."

I gasped. Surely the woman was insane.

"There was an Elsie Denko the day I gave you money to buy her clothes," I said.

"Aye, and I bought the clothes. Will ye listen to the story of an old woman? Will ye listen, and not intherrupt?"

"I will listen," I said, creepy chills going up and down my spinal column. I braced myself for anything that might come. I knew when Mrs. Cullom relapsed into her brogue she was very much excited.

"Did ye ever hear Center Solitor spake of the red heel?" she asked.

"Red heel? No. I have heard of tar-heel tobacco."

"'Tis no jokin' I'll have. Listen. 'Twas meself that was nurse to Mrs. Solitor when Center was born, and 'twas meself was retained as Center's nurse when he was the broth of a boy like Eddie.

"Thin 'twas meself was the nurse to Mrs. Solitor again whin the little girl was born. And 'twas meself was retained as nurse when the little girl needed one and her mother was well.

"Well, bad cess to me for a clumsy fool! An' yet—an' yet—'twor for the best, I'm thinkin' now. Ye see, Mr. Solitor lived thin in a little house away up in Harlem, where there was no gas an' we used lamps for to see at night.

"An' next dure to the house where we lived was a big lot filled wid rock. An' the conthractors was blastin' this rock for a big flat-house.

"Well, ye know like enough the conthractors lave those little chists, or big wans, whichever ye like, wid the sticks av dynamite in, and the words 'Dynamite, Danger,' in big letthers on them. Well, somehow some divils of boys got at that box one night.

"Mr. Solitor and Mrs. Solitor had gone to a fri'nd's house an' taken little Center wid them. I was alone wid the baby.

"'Twas early in the avenin' an' the baby wasn't slapy, an' I was playing wid the darlin' on the flure, when there came a blast and boom like a million cannon all to once. An' a piece of wood came bangin' through the windy, and knocked the lamp from the table, right at the feet of the baby.

"She had no shoes on. And the oil ran burnin' from the lamp. An' the baby, in glee, bless the innocent, clapped her hands, an' before I could snatch her away she had rolled her right foot square into the blazing oil.

"I cud smell the burnin' flesh of her. An' when I got her away an' smothered the fire wid a quilt from a bed, she was scramin' wid the pain of the burn.

"Me alone, what cud I do? I rubbed swate oil on the burn an' put flour on. Well, whin they came home, Mr. Solitor wint for a docther, an' he said, barrin' a scar, there would be no evil results. An' the scar was left sure enough, but not the kind we thought.

"On the back of the right heel there was left a small red picture like a red heart, wid a red crown above it. Sure, 'tis the only one possible in the whole wide world.

"Mind what I'm tellin' ye. A bright red heart wid a bright red crown above it. 'Tis not perfect, mind ye. But it looks like that."

She paused for breath. I sat looking stupidly at her.

"Well, Mrs. Cullom," I said, "that's a very thrilling story, but, seeing that the little girl was lost at sea with her mother, I don't understand what it's got to do with sending for Mr. Solitor."

"Don't ye, indade! Thin ye have paid little attintion. Whin I tuk the money ye gave me an' bought clothes for the girl in the hospital, I bought stockings, of course. An' whin I thried thim on in her room in the hospital, there, glory be to God, was the red heart an' the red crown on her heel as plain as the nose on your face."

I sat stunned. For a moment I could not speak.

"But," I said, recovering but partially, "there may be two such marks. There seemed, from what Center has told me, no hope that the little girl could have been saved. Mr. Solitor found no trace of her."

"'Tis she!" exclaimed the old nurse fiercely. "'Tis she! She has her mother's own swate face. Don't I know it well?"

"What was the little girl's name?"

"Elsie."

"What was the name of the ship Mr. Solitor and his wife and baby sailed in? The one that was lost?"

"The Savilla."

"Good Lord!" I cried. "And Denko said that was the last ship he sailed in. Mrs. Cullom, I think you are right. I will telegraph to Mr. Solitor to-day."

CHAPTER XVII.

SOLITOR FOUND.

THE full significance of this discovery of Mrs. Cullom's swept over me with the force of a cyclone.

What might it not mean for me?

Not mean? I knew what it did mean. I recalled what my father had said concerning Solitor and Cynthia. He had declared Solitor worthy to aspire to his daughter's hand.

If Mrs. Cullom's idea was correct, and Elsie was in reality Center Solitor's sister, it swept away all possible objections to the marriage of Elsie and me. Of course, there was still the lack of education. But at seventeen that is a misfortune easily overcome.

She was too young to marry, and I was too deeply immersed in the work of reclaiming my father's business. A few years at a good school and Elsie Solitor—if she was Elsie Solitor—would be as eligible a wife as any proud mother and father could wish for any son.

"Mrs. Cullom," I asked, "did you say anything to Elsie about this?"

"No, sir, I did not that. I wanted to tell Center first. There—"

"You felt that after all there might be a mistake?"

"There is no mistake. I thought 'twas better, that's all."

"You did well. Now we'll get busy. You got a complete outfit for Elsie, did you?"

"I did, sir. An' the fine lady she looks in the same."

"I'll see her soon. Now I'll telegraph to Mr. Solitor, and I hope Center will be found soon."

"An' I'll go home to Eddie."

The good old soul bustled away, still flustered, but proud of the discovery she had made. There was a telegraph-office in the building, and I sent this to Mr. Thomas Solitor, Seattle, Washington:

Important discovery concerning victims of Savilla wreck. Center in trouble. Come to New York at once.

ROBERT READE.

Again I plunged into work, and late in the afternoon Braithe came in, accompanied by a detective.

"This is Detective Corey, of the Central Office," said Braithe. "Robert, show him the office."

"I don't see what the office has to do with it," I answered. "Here it is. Do anything you like."

The detective looked round carefully. He noted the safe, the position of the desks, everything.

"I understand that you were in Queens County Jail when your partner Solitor disappeared."

"I was."

"Who was the first person to enter this room, presumably, after Solitor had left it?"

"I should suppose Jobbins, the head bookkeeper."

"Call him in."

I called Jobbins. The head bookkeeper for my father was a quiet man of middle age against whom anybody would be crazy to place a charge of wrong-doing. He came in quietly, as he always did.

"Mr. Jobbins," began the detective, "when did you see Solitor last?"

"About two o'clock on Wednesday."

"Did he say anything as he went out?"

"No, but he seemed excited."

"Who was the first to enter the room Thursday morning?"

"I was."

"Was anything disturbed? Did you see any signs of a struggle?"

"I did not. Everything was as usual."

"There's nothing to be learned here," said the detective. "The paying teller of the bank says he was agitated when he drew out the full balance. There are but two lines of search. One is along the theory that Solitor has absconded with something over a hundred thousand dollars, and we've got to find *him*. The other is along the idea of foul play, and we've got to find the man who dared attack Solitor in broad daylight to rob him, and then make way with his body."

He wasted no more time on me or the office. Of course, no suspicion of guilt could possibly attach to me, for I was locked in Queens County Jail.

I was tempted to go to the hospital and see Elsie. I was anxious to see how she looked in her new rig-out. But I had been there often enough now to know the rules and the visiting days, and this wasn't one of them.

I went home. I found Arabella and Cynthia there. The new cook had been installed, dragged from obscurity by Arabella in that mysterious way women have of doing some things a man can't do, and we sat down to a good dinner, well served, but eaten with little relish.

"I don't suppose there is any news," said Cynthia.

"About Solitor? Not yet, Cynth. A detective was at the office with Gerald. He said there was nothing to be learned there."

Braithe did not appear that evening. I knew he was with the detective scouring New York.

The following morning passed uneventfully till about eleven o'clock, when the office telephone rang.

"Well?" I said.

"This you, Reade? Bob?"

"Yes. This is Braithe. I know your voice."

"Come up to Bellevue Hospital right away."

"Is Solitor there?".

"I think so. I am not sure. I didn't know him very well."

I told Jobbins where I was going, and hurried away.

Lying on a cot in the accident ward was a still form.

"Is he dead?" I asked the white-clad doctor.

"No, but he has had a close call. He is unconscious. Is that your friend Solitor?"

"Yes, that is Solitor."

"We suspected as much."

"You see," added Braithe, "the hospital officials were all in the dark, because when Solitor was found he was unconscious, and there was nothing on his person by which he could be identified. His pockets had been cleaned out."

"Where was he found?"

"Under the William Street arch of Brooklyn Bridge."

"What could he have been doing there?"

"Well, isn't that a short cut from the bank to the office?"

"Yes."

"He was probably in a hurry to get the money to the office and locked in the safe."

"What are the prospects of his recovery?" I asked the doctor.

"It is hard to say now. We did think at first there was no hope. But now he seems to be breathing more freely, and we think in a day or two he may be able to talk. There is no need to keep running here. Just as soon as he can talk and is able to stand an interview I will telephone you. Leave me your number."

Braithe and I left together, and in Braithe's automobile went to lunch together.

"This eliminates, at least," said Gerald, "all suspicion of Solitor."

"Yes. And I am glad. Glad for more than one reason. I have wired his father to come to New York at once."

"What did you do that for?" he asked quickly. "At least, until we knew more."

"It wasn't altogether on Center's account."

"What else would bring his father here?"

"Look here, Braithe, you've stood by me, and I suppose in a few days you'll be my brother-in-law."

"To-morrow night—Sunday."

"I can afford to trust you with a secret. You remember I told you I gave Mrs. Cullom money to buy Elsie some clothes?"

"Yes."

"Well, the old woman, when she was trying on some things, discovered a peculiar mark of a burn sustained in babyhood that she swears will prove Elsie to be Solitor's baby sister, supposed to be lost at sea."

Braithe was a man not easily stirred out of his composure. But now he lurched forward against the table and stared at me.

"Impossible! Does she depend entirely on a scar?"

"She does. I don't. At the hearing before the magistrate Denko testified that his former occupation was that of sailor. And the last ship he was on was the Savilla, which was wrecked at sea. And the name of the ship from which Mrs. Solitor and the little girl were lost was the Savilla."

"This must be looked into at once. Of course you are interested?"

"I should say I was. But that wouldn't make any difference. I'd marry her anyway."

"When will you see her next?"

"To-morrow afternoon."

"Does she know?"

"No. Mrs. Cullom showed wisdom there."

"Don't tell her till we are sure. It would be a shame to build up her hopes and dash them to the ground again."

"I had already decided that."

After a cigar together, he went his way and I returned to the office to finish up the Saturday afternoon's work. After that I went to the club till it was time for dinner.

CHAPTER XVIII.

ELSIE MISSING.

MY work, accompanied by the excitement I had been through, the anxiety, the humiliation of arrest, the loss of the money, and my father's anger, had so exhausted my vitality that I slept till almost noon Sunday.

But it was a more refreshing sleep than I had enjoyed in some time. Solitor was innocent of crime. My own innocence was practically established, for Denko would have nothing to say in law about me taking another man's daughter to a hospital.

Moreover, there would now be no barrier between Elsie and me—provided old Mrs. Cullom had made no mistake.

After a bath and a complete change of

clothing, I felt like a new man, and sat down to dinner with my two sisters in a happier mood than I had had since the family went to Norland. Even the loss of the money could not detract from my happiness. With Braithe's help, I felt I could overcome that.

"What are you going to do this afternoon, Bob?" asked Arabella. "Will you want the automobile?"

"You may take it if you like."

"Possibly Gerald will come for us in his. But he is so interested in Center's case that he may not be at liberty."

"But Center is found," said Cynthia. "Oh, I wish I could see him."

"You'd better let Braithe and me see him first," I said. "You would get him all upset, and then we could get no information out of him."

"Well, what are your plans?" asked Arabella. "You know Gerald and I are to be married at the parsonage to-night."

"Yes, I know. Gerald told me yesterday. It seems queer, that kind of a wedding for you. I imagined it would be sort of a brass-band affair."

"Why, you didn't think I was a heartless fool, did you, to have a big wedding with all this trouble on our hands? And what does it all amount to? It is forgotten in a month."

"Sure thing."

"But you haven't told us your plans. Will you be at the parsonage at half past seven?"

"Sure thing."

"And this afternoon?"

"Ladies, this afternoon is visiting day at St. Anne's Hospital. I expect to call on a young lady I have asked to be my wife and who has turned me down like a flapjack."

They both laughed.

"You can have the car. If Gerald doesn't show up I'll drive down with my bay."

It was two o'clock to the minute when I stepped into the main entrance of the hospital. The doorkeeper knew me by that time.

"Good afternoon, sir. Come to see your sister?"

"Yes."

A puzzled look came over his face.

"Better go into the office, sir."

Wondering what was up now, I went to the office.

"I would like to see my sister, Miss Morton," I said.

The man at the desk—I believe he was the assistant superintendent—looked at me with no very friendly glance.

"There is not, and there never was, a Miss Morton here," he said. "You played a trick on us. But as it was merely a matter of broken ribs, there is no great harm done."

"Suppose I tell you the whole story. You will see that I was justified."

"I will listen."

I told him all the circumstances. It was no secret now.

"Yes," he said, "I believe, under those conditions, you did the best you could. Anyway, it makes little difference now. She's gone."

"Gone!" I exclaimed.

"Yes. An old woman came here with some fine clothes for her. We had spoken of the vast difference between the way you dressed and the clothing she wore when she came here. But it was none of our business. The girl needed attention at once. Well, she was able to leave, and did leave, Friday night. She left a sealed letter for you.

"The address you gave as David Morton was not far, and I sent a messenger round there with the letter yesterday. He returned, saying there was no person by the name of Morton living there."

"Have you the letter?" I asked.

"Certainly. Not being able to deliver it, I kept it. I didn't know whether you would see her before to-day or not. From her manner—she was rather nervous—I fancied she was—"

"Running away from me?" I added to finish out his sentence.

"That's what I meant, but I didn't like to say it."

"But that was just what she was doing. I had asked her to be my wife, and because of the difference in our positions she refused."

"Most girls of that element would have jumped at you."

"I know it. Now, how do we stand financially?"

"Her account is clear."

"Then put this in the charity-box."

I gave him the amount of one week's board.

Taking the letter outside, I drove slowly homeward, and read the letter while going through a private street. It follows, with all its imperfections except the cramped little writing, which I cannot reproduce:

DERE BROTHER:

I am going to leve the hospitle to-day. I am going away where you cant find me. I am going because if I stay I will be a trouble to you.

I am going because I love you too well to let you love me. You no what a father I've got.

You ast me to marry you. I told you the truth,

It could not be. I no one of us would be sorry. You would be ashame of me. That would kill your love. Then that would kill me.

Your peepul would not look at me or speak to me. I would not no how to ack in their fine house. It would be like a lion and a pig. I dont no where I am going. I took the nice clothes, because, if I didn't, it would look queer for your sister to go from the hospitle looking like a tramp.

If I get work I will send them back to you. Dont try to find me please. But always remember how I thank you, and that if I was your equal I would love you like nobody else ever could.

Good-by,
ELSIE.

I almost cried. There was such a depth of love trying to hide itself, but cropping up at times. And the pathetic evidences of a struggle to make the letter nearly perfect.

With all its misspelled words, I loved that letter. And I loved the girl who wrote it more than ever. I could even realize the sacrifice she had made when, as the assistant superintendent had said, most girls of her degree would have jumped at the chance of such a marriage, love or no love.

My heart was sore. I knew the girl would not go to Cubbletown in the fine clothing Mrs. Cullom had brought for her. She would be mobbed and the clothes torn from her.

But I couldn't imagine where she could go. She had no money that I knew of.

What to do I didn't know. I couldn't begin a search then. I had to be home to dinner and then dress to accompany Cynthia to the parsonage to see Arabella married.

With a lump of lead in my breast instead of a heart, I turned my horse over to a groom.

When I went in the house, Wicks stepped to me quickly.

"There was a telephone, sir, from Mr. Braithe. He says come to Bellevue at once, sir."

"Did my sisters go out in the automobile?"

"No, sir. It being a fine day, they thought they would take a walk on the avenue."

"Good enough."

In a very few minutes I was speeding toward Bellevue.

CHAPTER XIX.

WHAT HAPPENED TO SOLITOR.

I FOUND Braithe and the same young doctor at Solitor's bedside.

"Is he conscious? Has he spoken?" I asked.

"He is conscious," said Braithe, "and spoke to me—just a word. I didn't let him talk about the assault and robbery. I wanted him to wait till you came. There was no use making him go over the story twice."

We were standing. The doctor placed chairs for us. I took Solitor's hand in mine.

"Center?" I said quietly, though my heart was by no means quiet.

He opened his eyes and looked up into mine.

"Hallo, Bob," he said. "How did you get out without bail?"

His memory was all there; his mind was clear.

"Braithe went bail for me."

"Braithe? Gerald?" he asked wonderingly.

"Yes. He was at Norland. Jobbins sent a telegram to my father, and Braithe and the girls came down."

"Did Cynthia come?"

"Yes. She is at our house. We are all going to stay there. Those two—Gerald and Arabella—get married to-night."

"Good. I wish Cynthia and I—but I'm a sweet pill to talk about getting married. I'll be lucky if I ever walk again."

"Oh, the doctor says you will."

"Doctors don't always guess right. I've got seven thousand different pains shooting all round inside me."

"How did it happen, Solitor? Who hit you?"

"Wait. Did you get any of the money?"

"No, not a cent. We may, though, if we know who took it."

"Well—I got your letter from Queens County jail a few minutes before two o'clock. That was yesterday, wasn't it?"

"N—no, that was Wednesday."

"And what day is this?"

"This is Sunday."

"Sunday? Have I been asleep all that time?"

"Yes. Nice quiet sleep, wasn't it?"

"I didn't know anything. Well—I got your letter. I was all broke up when I read it.

"I told Jobbins I was going to the bank. I didn't tell him what for. But I left the letter on my desk. He could have read it."

"I read it. Jobbins didn't," said Braithe.

"Well, when I stepped out of the building there was a mean-looking shrimp of a man standing in the hall, and I noticed he looked sharp at me. Then Markham, of the United States Tile Company, passed and said: 'Hallo, Solitor.' I saw the little shrimp's

eyes blink and then shine. I didn't like that fellow."

"Was he short and bull-necked, with a black mustache and a wizeny face?"

"Yes, yes, that's the fellow."

"That was Denko. Go on, Sol."

"Well, I went to the bank merely to draw the thousand dollars for your bail. But while I was standing in line waiting my turn at the paying-teller's window I heard a low conversation inside.

"I couldn't catch all the words, but there was enough in what I did catch to alarm me. So many banks have failed lately that there seemed to be a reason to suspect the United States and Colonies.

"A quick thought came to me. I knew our safe was a good, strong one, and there was a watchman on duty all night in the building. It occurred to me that the money would be more secure in our own safe than in a shaky bank. So, instead of drawing a thousand I made out the check for the withdrawal of the entire balance.

The paying-teller looked at it and seemed about to faint. He took it away and I saw three or four in consultation. But he gave me the money.

"And such a clumsy lot of swag. He had only a few big bills. He got one of those bags they keep gold and silver in, and that was full of greenbacks, yellow-backs, gold eagles, everything. It was a load to carry.

"In my excitement at overhearing what I believed to be an expression of fear for the bank, I had forgotten the man with the black mustache. When I received the bag of money I looked around for him, but he was nowhere to be seen.

"In my hurry to get to the office and stow the stuff in the safe, and reach you in time to bail you out that day, I took a short cut through the arch of the Brooklyn Bridge at William Street.

"You know even in daylight it's gloomy there. I was a fool to go that way with a bag of money, especially when I had been followed. Anyway—something hit me on the head.

"I fell. I was beaten all over and then lost consciousness. It couldn't have taken more than a quarter of a minute. I don't know any more till a short time ago I woke up and spoke to the doctor."

"And now you've talked enough," said the doctor. "Still, Mr Reade, if there is any really important question—one—"

"No. He makes it all clear enough. This man Denko, who is a rascal if ever there was one, heard the judge hold me in a thousand dollars bail for further investigation. I told the judge I would at once send word to my partner to bring cash bail.

"There is no doubt that Denko, who knew where our office was located, came across the East River and went to the building to follow Solitor, expecting to obtain only one thousand dollars. He did not know what a splendid haul he was going to make."

"We've got to get right at the detective force," said Braithe. "Think of the start the fellow has had! With a hundred thousand dollars, he can get anywhere in the world."

"Well, you know the police ropes better than I do," I said. "You attend to that. I've got some work to do, and then we've got to get a move on or you'll never get married to-night."

"What have you got on? St. Anne's Hospital?"

"No. Elsie has gone."

"Gone! Gone where?"

"I don't know. I've got a letter from her. Want to read it?"

Solitor had dropped off to sleep from exhaustion. I gave Braithe the letter and drew the surgeon aside.

"When do you think he can be moved? I'd like to take him home."

"I wouldn't now," said the doctor. "In fact, you couldn't do it now. But I wouldn't think of it till he is able to walk. You see, he is suffering from a severe concussion. Brain fever may set in at any time.

"I assure you he will have the best of care. And if he rallies from this exhaustion, which I have no doubt he will, you can see him any afternoon. Has he any relatives?"

"I believe his father is on the way from Seattle now."

"And friends?"

"My own sisters, Braithe, and perhaps an old nurse, will be all who are likely to visit him."

"Well, unless fever sets in he can see them. Your friend Braithe is waiting."

Braithe returned the letter. There was a peculiar look in his eyes.

"Find that girl," he said. "Find that girl, if it costs a million and I have to lend you the million. Give her an education and marry her.

"Even if she isn't Solitor's sister. You'll never find another like her in this world."

We went out, and each in his automobile went his way.

(To be continued.)

A Horrible Hour.

BY ORLANDO MOORE.

To This Young Bridegroom Late Didn't Appear To Be Any Better Than Never.

"CONFOUND the thing! It won't fasten!"

Hillyer gave a vicious yank at his neck, tore off the offending collar and threw it on the floor.

"Why is it that a poke-collar is always half an inch too small for the shirt it is intended to fit?" he complained, pawing through the confusion of the top bureau drawer, and tossing out a miscellaneous collection of scarfs, cuffs, collars and gloves. "If I once got my hands on the man who invented 'em— Stop your grinning, Knowles, before you get hurt."

The man on the bed laughed aloud, while Hillyer consigned the unfortunate inventor of poke-collars, his forebears for several generations back and all possible future progeny to everlasting perdition.

Finally, Knowles was moved to protest.

"If you'd swear less and dress more, Bob, you'd stand a better chance of getting married to-night," he suggested.

"What time is it, anyway?" demanded Hillyer, as, having at last discovered a collar to his taste, he struggled with a dress tie.

"Just half past eight," answered Knowles, glancing at his watch. Then, with a shrug of his shoulders:

"But she'll wait for you, Bob, of course. People always do, somehow. No one would expect you to be on time, even at your own wedding. Were you ever on time in your life?"

"Never," said Hillyer gloomily, seizing his vest. "Not once that I can remember. But nobody minds any more. I used to get into all sorts of trouble; but now people just shrug; and if any one wants to know why dinner is half an hour late, some one says, "Oh, we're waiting for Hillyer, that's all!

"Don't you remember, Will, the year book at the university—how they surrounded my picture with a funeral wreath and labeled it 'The Late Mr. Hillyer'?

"I really meant to be half an hour early to-night, just to show 'em what I could do," he continued; "but that blasted Coppell case came up at the last moment, and I couldn't get away. And then there was that tie-up in the Subway, and when I got home I found I had lost my key and had to chase round after the janitor for a good half-hour. But now, thank Heaven—I'm ready!"

He grabbed his hat and coat, switched off the electric lights and dashed from the room, Knowles at his heels.

The elevator, of course, was on the ground floor; and it seemed to the impatient young man as if he would never start upward.

Finally, however, he and Knowles were in the motor and speeding toward the church.

"Five minutes to nine!" groaned the prospective bridegroom as they whizzed past a jeweler's with an illuminated clock in the window.

Good Lord! I don't know what people will say this time! Nan particularly cautioned me not to be a minute late. I promised faithfully to be on the dot—and here I am—half an hour late already."

"She'll probably decide you're not going to show up at all, and marry some one else," Knowles told him consolingly. "There are plenty of men who'd like to be in your shoes, my boy; and it would be just like Nan, as I remember her."

Hillyer frowned.

"It would be just like my confounded luck, you mean," he said. "She threatened to, all right."

Indeed, his *fiancée* had told him the night before that, should he fail to put in an ap-

pearance at the appointed time, it would be altogether likely that she would pick out some more punctual person.

Of course, such a step on her part would be absurd; but Hillyer was quite aware that, had the affair been anything less important than a wedding, she would certainly have taught him a lesson.

However, there was no help for it. He was going to be late, in spite of all his good resolutions and her cautioning; and that was all there was to it. But even if life were short, he would have plenty of time to square himself with Nan for keeping her waiting —and no one else mattered.

"I wish I'd known you were going to be in town, Will," he said presently. "I'd have liked to have you for my best man. Clifford is cast for that rôle, you know."

"Didn't know myself I could get away until this morning," responded Knowles. "But as soon as things rounded into shape, I packed my toothbrush and beat it for the train. Ah, here we are!"

The motor purred to a halt at the curbstone, and Hillyer sprang out, and darted under the canopy and up the steps.

In the vestibule, he paused and glanced about him with a puzzled air. No one was there. It was very strange. Where were the ushers? And the place was strangely silent. He listened intently. No, there was not a sound. That vague, indefinite hum that arises from a waiting assemblage was absent.

For a moment, Hillyer stood still. Then he went forward to the door, walking slowly, hesitatingly, as if afraid of what lay upon the other side. He put out one hand and softly turned the knob. Then a little strangled cry broke from his lips.

For the church was empty. Rows of silent, tenantless pews yawned before him. The aisle was strewn with drooping, withering flowers. Ribbons swung from the ends of the pews, or lay in heaps where they had been carelessly thrown. For the first time Hillyer became conscious that there had been no carriages or motors in the street.

"What does it mean, Bob?" Knowles asked in an awed tone.

"I—I don't know," muttered Hillyer. "I don't know, Will. Wait—here comes some one."

The sexton, broom in hand, was coming down the aisle.

"Little late, gents?" he asked genially. "Show's over—everybody's gone."

He waved a hand about the empty church.

"Why—what—how," stammered Knowles.

"Yes. They was some late gettin' started, too. Somebody didn't show up—bride, maybe—I dunno. But it come off all right, finally."

"She—she was married?" Hillyer managed to articulate.

"Sure. Got off all right—lots of rice and con—con—what d'ye call it? Why, what's the matter?"

For Hillyer had reeled and grasped the edge of a pew for support.

"Nothing—I'm all right," he choked. "I —I—have a headache, I guess. Come, Will, let's go. We can't do anything here. I—I'm too late."

Knowles slipped an arm around his friend's shoulders and led him down the steps.

On the sidewalk, Hillyer turned a white, miserable face toward his companion.

"Will, she's done it—she's married somebody else," he whispered hoarsely. "She said she would if I were late—but I never dreamed she meant it. I thought she was just joking. Nan—Nan's married to some other man, Will!"

Deeply concerned, Knowles could only press his arm.

"Brace up, old man," he said as encouragingly as he could. "It wasn't your fault. You couldn't help it. By Jove! I wouldn't have believed it of her, though. A girl that would do a thing like that! Why—"

But Hillyer turned on him like a tiger.

"Don't blame her!" he commanded harshly. "She said she would. I ought to have known. She's been waiting for me ever since I can remember. She told me sometime she wouldn't wait any longer. It was all my own fault. But—oh, Nan—how could you—how could you do it?"

He turned abruptly away, and with unsteady steps walked down the street.

Knowles kept close by his side, cudgeling his brains for something to say that would soften the weight of the blow. But one can offer small consolation to a man when the woman he loves has married some one else on the very night he expected to claim her as his wife.

Block after block they walked in silence, Hillyer making no effort to direct his steps, turning corners aimlessly, now up, now down. Knowles kept faithful step with him.

The stricken man said no word after his first frenzied outburst. Only his haggard face, with set lips and glittering eyes, showed how he was suffering.

"Don't you think you'd better go home, Bob?" Knowles asked presently.

Hillyer shook his head.

"It's better for me to walk," he said. "I'd go mad if I stopped and went back to my room to think. I've got to keep moving."

After a moment he went on again, speaking rapidly, in a low, unsteady voice.

"Time after time I kept her waiting, Will. At first she used to get angry.

"Then finally she'd get somebody else to take her where she wanted to go. There were always a lot of chaps ready enough to do it. She told me she'd teach me a lesson some day that I'd remember for the rest of my life.

"Well, she has. I'm not likely to forget this. I know she loved me, Will—and she knew I loved her. Loved her! Why, she was the dearest, sweetest woman God ever made. And I've lost her through my own cursed fault!"

He stopped abruptly, and swung around a corner—then halted and made as if to retrace his steps.

Carriages and motors lined the thoroughfare from one end to the other. Half-way down the block a striped canopy stretched from the door of a church to the curb. On both sides knots of curious people peered and peeped to catch a passing glimpse of the guests.

Hillyer's fists clenched and a groan burst from him. The hideous mockery of it all—to come upon such a scene!

"Well, here you are at last!" exclaimed a voice, and his arm was seized by a tall man in evening clothes. "Where the deuce have you been?"

"You, Clifford?" muttered Hillyer. "I—I—"

"What's the matter? Are you drunk or crazy?" demanded the newcomer, taking a tight grip of Hillyer's arm and hurrying him along. "We've been waiting an hour for you. Nan got tired of sitting round, and sent me out to look you up."

"Nan sent you? Why—"

And then Hillyer subsided into dazed silence and suffered himself to be led along, up the church steps, and into the vestry-room, which was full of people, all talking and gesticulating.

A group of excited young women fluttered about a tall, white-gowned figure with orange blossoms in her hair, who seemed the only composed person in the room, and who rose as Hillyer and Clifford entered.

"Get lost, Bob?" she inquired calmly. "You look as if you'd been through the wars. We've been waiting quite a while."

Hillyer regarded her stupidly for a moment, unable to say a word. Then:

"You—you haven't gone, Nan?" he whispered.

"Gone? Oh, no. I was prepared to wait until morning. I thought you'd probably arrive by then, unless the whole affair had slipped your mind completely."

"And—and you're not married?"

"Not yet, Bob," she replied in a matter-of-fact tone. "But I hope to be, as soon as you straighten your tie and make yourself look more like a civilized human being. Why?"

"That chauffeur!" burst out Knowles excitedly.

"He took us to the wrong church!" chimed in Hillyer. "Some one had just been married there. And I thought, Nan—I thought—"

"You can tell me all about it presently, then," interrupted the girl. "Those people in there have been waiting just one hour to see this gown.

"And, if you'll please hurry and make yourself presentable, I'll gratify their curiosity.

"You poor dear!" she added impulsively. "You've had a bad time. I can see that. But you'll have me to look after, you now, and see that you arrive on time."

She spoke lightly, but her eyes were wonderful, as she threw him one radiant glance and turned to take her father's arm.

A moment later the strains of Mendelssohn's "Wedding March" pealed through the church.

KATE AND BELLE.

KATE's teeth are black,
White lately Belle's are grown.
Belle buys her teeth,
And Kate still keeps her own.

By Dr. Hodgson.

The Mystery of Fra Diavolo.*

BY FREDERICK F. SCHRADER.

A Road-Agent Mystery That Thickens Till it is Almost as Impenetrable as the Mountains in Which it Originated.

CHAPTER XX.

NO. 93100 AGAIN.

THREE days had elapsed, and nothing had been heard of the missing man.

Everything had been done that lay in the power of Senator Terbush, with his great personal and official influence, to discover some trace of Dick, without success. The Washington police reported daily new clues which turned out valueless.

Private detectives were put on the track at Kate's expense, and were examining every available scrap of evidence on which to form a theory. No one had seen Fanshaw after the party, and he had disappeared as completely as if the earth had swallowed him up.

Kate was a victim of distracting emotions. She could not explain De Chatras's strange words and actions.

He had cautioned her not to speak of what had taken place after the party. He had almost appealed to her to shield him. Yet he was right in the reasons he assigned for her keeping her secret.

If she told how the two men had quarreled during the night, she would have to tell of her visit to Dick's room, and her name would be dragged into the case, just as she had feared.

Yet, what right had she to baffle justice by concealing important facts There was the significant, if inexplicable, evidence of Dick's strange conduct before the mirror.

In the hands of a shrewd detective, this circumstance might lead to important results.

Poor Kate was but too well aware that she hesitated only for fear of compromising the man she loved.

Yet this man, if he should indeed prove to be the highwayman, had perhaps—how could she doubt it?—put Dick out of the way, had been a common robber, had taken one hundred thousand dollars of bullion belonging to the Birdsong mine.

That he was accomplished and endowed with all the attributes of a gentleman made him all the more despicable.

These thoughts drove her almost to distraction. She lost her cheerfulness. She was no longer the gay, romantic young girl of former times. To avoid De Chatras during repeated calls she remained in her room, and had her meals served by the maid.

By degrees Mrs. Terbush and Lotty became alarmed over the girl's condition, and when Kate, on the third day, insisted on staying in bed all day, they announced that they would summon a physician.

But Kate objected strenuously to his plan, and late that afternoon dressed herself and came down-stairs to convince her friends that she was in no need of medical attention.

That same day Senator Terbush had made a call at the Post-Office Department, and had gained some interesting information.

"We have been cooperating with the Secret Service Department of the Treasury," said the chief inspector to him, referring to the Colorado case, "and we have heard from 93100."

The Senator was all attention.

"Anything important?" he asked.

"Nothing very, but interesting. You may remember that a mysterious message figured in the coroner's trial of the dead road-agent at Dexter. For the life of us we couldn't make out the meaning of the scrawl."

He went to a file-case and drew out a small piece of paper. It was a copy of the order

* This story began in The Cavalier for June.

signed "F. D." He laid it before the Senator on the desk at which he sat.

It read:

W. Red rock 16 fr. P 4 fr. B to-night. F aboard. Mind orders. F. D.

"Well?" asked the Senator.

"For the life of us, none of our men could get at the meaning. So we sent it to the Treasury Department, where it was submitted to No. 93100, and here's his translation:

Walker: Red Rock, sixteen miles from Parker, four miles from Boyd's to-night. Fanshaw will be aboard. Mind orders.

FRA DIAVOLO.

"You see," continued the chief, "later developments established the fact that the dead road-agent was a man named Walker. We surmise that the note was not written by Fra Diavolo himself, but by one of his confederates at the order of the bandit.

"We are very quietly closing in on parties we suspect. If No. 93100 had not dropped the case, we should have had the criminals in our hands long ago, for he has few equals in the world in the detective line."

"Why did this man drop the case?" asked the Senator in astonishment.

"He's a very erratic genius. He's in the business for the love of it; doesn't have to work, like the rest of us, I suppose, and goes into a case only when he feels like it."

"Do you know him?"

"Never saw him, and at the Treasury Department they respect him so highly that they meet every wish he expresses; so, as he wishes to remain unidentified, they profess absolute ignorance of his personality. He is never mentioned except by the number, 93100."

"That, then, accounts for his sudden silence," said the Senator. "I used to hear from him. But my opinion of his acumen, I fear, doesn't correspond with yours."

"Why?"

"His mysterious messages to me were nothing but a mass of nonsense which a romantic boy might have concocted for my amusement."

The chief smiled.

"Don't be too sure of that, Senator," he said; "the chances are that he was right, and you may find everything he told you confirmed."

"I doubt it. In the meantime, I wish he would try to discover what has become of Mr. Fanshaw."

"I have been reading of the case in the papers," said the chief. "It might not be a bad idea to ring up the Treasury and suggest No. 93100."

And without further ado the chief had his office telephone connected with the Secret Service division of Uncle Sam's big banking institution.

"One of the best men on the force is a particular friend of mine," said the chief, as he waited for the connection. "Hallo!" he exclaimed, taking down the receiver and holding it to his ear; "is this the Secret Service division?" The reply was affirmative.

"Is Mr. Hattras there?" asked the chief. "Yes; please tell him this is Holland, Post-Office Department."

In a few moments the person desired by Mr. Holland was at the phone.

"Hallo, Hattras. Senator Terbush, of Colorado, is here. You've heard of the strange disappearance of Mr. Fanshaw from the Senator's summer home? Yes, of course.

"He suggests that if No. 93100 hasn't anything better to do and is looking for a bright, particular case to distinguish himself, he might tackle this proposition. Eh, what's that?" He listened to the other a while. Then he said: "Good; do, please. Good-by."

The chief hung up the receiver, and, turning to the Senator, said:

"Hattras says he'll submit the matter, and I'll wager No. 93100 will find Mr. Fanshaw if he is alive."

This was the tenor of Senator Terbush's report on his return home on the third day after the mysterious disappearance of Dick.

Kate felt that she could stand the suspense no longer. If De Chatras was not what he appeared, he had no right to expect immunity on the strength of a girl's forbearance; in that case he was but trifling with her in a heartless, cruel manner.

If he was innocent of wrong, it was time to explain. At least she would go so far as to admit having had an interview with Dick in his room on the night of his disappearance, and she would tell her story to the Senator, and rely upon him for further advice.

CHAPTER XXI.

DE CHATRAS'S CONFESSION.

UNFORTUNATELY for Kate's plan, before she could effect an interview with the Senator, De Chatras surprised her in the act of taking the air in the garden.

He had called as was his daily wont to inquire after the state of her health.

She could not withdraw in time to escape his eye. He came straight toward her with outstretched hand and a vague look of inquiry, as if wondering how she would receive him.

But Kate gave no outward token of her feelings, and greeted him politely.

Baxter had arrived an hour before and made himself agreeable to both the young ladies while Mrs. Terbush was picking some late flowers in the garden for the house. The little group was sitting on the veranda when De Chatras arrived.

He had come by street car and walked the short distance from the country road to the house.

Kate was touched by the pleasure which the sight of her seemed to afford him. His whole manner showed that he had been grieved by her failure to see him.

Secretly she sympathized with this man of mystery, for she felt certain that, whatever he might be, he loved her beyond any other being on earth.

He took a chair beside Kate and expressed his delight at seeing her out again. After a while Baxter and Lotty excused themselves to join Mrs. Terbush, and they were alone.

"I'm glad you came," began Kate after they had chatted about Dick and exhausted other topics. "The fact is, I have made up my mind to tell Senator Terbush what I know."

De Chatras gave a visible start and tried to speak, but Kate continued abruptly:

"I am only following the dictates of my conscience. This secret is making me ill."

"Have you carefully considered the consequences?" he asked. "I have tried to point them out to you."

"You mean that I shall be compromised?"

"People will place the worst construction on your acts," he said. "I know that you are as innocent as an angel, but the tongue of slander will tarnish the cleanest reputation, and the higher you are placed the greater will be the fall. The press will take up the case and tell of our quarrel, your presence on the veranda and later, your presence in his room—"

He paused, but it was too late. Kate started as if touched by an electric wire.

"How do you know that I was in his room?" she asked breathlessly.

De Chatras saw that he had been tripped. He was silent for a moment, a moment of terrible suspense to the young girl. Then, he said:

"Miss Birdsong, if you have the slightest regard for me do not press me for an explanation. I have been more frank with you than any other being in the world. I realize that you can never be anything to me but a friend. I want to cherish that friendship and bear the memories of it through life.

"It is true that I am not what I have represented myself to be. I am not the agent of a French cattle syndicate in Wyoming; I have not even a right to the name by which you have known me. I am nothing but an adventurer."

He spoke in a low, serious voice that was intended for her ears alone.

"I am going away," he continued, "and I ask you to promise me but one thing before I say farewell forever. It is to wait a week before you make your statement. After that you are free to speak, if you still feel the necessity of yielding to your conscience.

"Perhaps you will not. But promise me that. Some day you will perhaps feel a little charity for me which you do not now entertain."

He paused. Kate was weeping silently.

"Why did you make me love you?" she asked, her heart melting with sympathy at the frankness of his tone.

"No, you must not love me," he said. "The words that make me the happiest man alive make me realize what I am giving up—giving up because I cannot help myself—and they make me a coward. But by that love, promise me that you will do what I ask."

"I promise," she said.

"Thank you," he replied. "Within a week you are free to act as you please, according to circumstances."

"And you?" she asked.

"You will know who and what I am. The mystery that hangs over Fra Diavolo will be explained, and many things that are now secrets that have mystified you will be made clear. I will not stay.

"Heaven bless you, Miss Birdsong—Kate," he said, rising and taking her hand in his. "Look upon our meeting as merely a dream and forget me. Good-by."

She restrained him by detaining his hand as he was about to turn away.

"Is it true that we shall never meet again?" she asked.

"That remains with Providence," he said.

He released his hand gently and was gone. She watched him as he passed out of the great gate and his strong athletic figure melted into the shadows that were gathering over the scene.

When Baxter and the two ladies returned to the veranda, Kate was no longer there; the maid said she had gone up to her room.

By the next morning's mail Senator Terbush received a mysterious message from the Secret Service, as follows:

I have been asked to look into the strange disappearance of Mr. Richard Fanshaw from your residence, but I find that everything has been done that can be done.

Developments will follow in rapid succession within the next few days unless I am greatly out of my reckoning.

The identity of Fra Diavolo will cease to be a mystery.

Everything will be explained.

93100.

"This gentleman missed his calling when he didn't open a shop for telling fortunes and casting horoscopes for credulous people," grunted the Senator to his private secretary, as he laid the letter aside. "I'm surprised that the government takes any stock in this humbug.

"He pretends all along to a superhuman intelligence, but nobody is arrested, and I shouldn't be surprised if stage robbery became more of an industry than ever in Colorado, if they depend on such people to catch thieves."

Yet no one, except Kate, watched with keener interest for the promised developments than Senator Terbush, and day after day he scanned his mail with unusual eagerness for any evidence to clear up the mystery of Fra Diavolo, while Kate kept to her room most of the time and her friends saw her fade away like a flower under the terrible strain of suspense and disappointment, of which she could not tell any one the reason.

De Chatras sent his regrets to the Senator by mail and announced that he had been suddenly called West on important business.

Kate alone possessed, as she thought, the clue to this letter, and it only added to her melancholy.

CHAPTER XXII.

WHAT DICK SAW IN THE MIRROR.

THE violent state of Dick's agitation that night, in his room, when Kate had made their friendship conditional upon his apologizing to De Chatras for his accusation, had indeed been produced by a look into the mirror over the mantel.

That casual glance upward as he was about to reply hotly to his ward had revealed to him the hand and face of a man concealed in the closet.

The intruder, whoever he was, had been a witness of all that had taken place during the brief interview. But for that indiscreet movement, which at the moment that the hand was drawing the door shut caused the eavesdropper to yield to an impulse of curiosity which made him expose his face, his presence in the room might not have been suspected until its occupant had gone to bed.

To a man of Dick's familiarity with personal danger in the West this in itself could not account for the complete transformation of manner which Kate had witnessed as she took her departure from the room, the look of ghastly terror that distorted his pale countenance and made his eyes stare like a madman's, his disheveled hair and strained posture as he leaned on the back of the chair, deaf to her last words and indifferent to her going.

The strange behavior of the Coloradoan could be accounted for only on the theory that he had recognized the individual secreted in the closet, and that the latter had the power of inspiring him with profound fear.

The transition in Dick's manner was only for a moment, however. The next instant he had recovered from the shock of his discovery, and he looked toward the door through which Kate had just passed.

He heard her light footsteps in the hall and enter her room. He was alone, save for the presence of the uncanny witness in the closet, who gave no sign of life. Evidently he regarded himself safe so long as the Coloradoan did not open the door.

Dick had rather the better of the situation, and was not slow in taking advantage of it.

Without permitting the intruder to suspect that his presence was discovered, the Coloradoan, with outward calmness, picked up a leather traveling-bag at one side of the room, and placed it on a chair.

With his back to the closet door, he unlocked a drawer in a small secretary, and, taking out a wallet, he opened it and hurriedly examined its contents.

It contained a large amount of bank-notes and certified checks. His hurried examination evidently satisfied him that the bills had not been tampered with, and he thrust the wallet into his coat-pocket.

He next opened the bag, and, with his back still to the closet, he took out a forty-four-caliber Colt's revolver.

His next movement was one of lightning

rapidity. Turning where he stood in the center of the room, he abruptly faced the closet, his revolver pointed to the door.

"Come out of there!" he said in a suppressed tone, but with an unmistakable menace in his voice. "I mean you there in the closet. Quick!"

The door was opened, and De Chatras stood on the threshold, erect and calm. He had not removed his evening clothes, and he looked elegant, even distinguished, in his neatly fitting suit and expanse of white shirt-front.

The two men stood regarding each other for a moment like two athletes about to grapple for the championship.

"You thief!" muttered the Coloradoan. "So I find you in my room in the night, hiding like the cowardly sneak that you are in a clothes-closet to murder me in my sleep?"

De Chatras did not move, but his expression changed to a deep frown.

"Suppose we drop compliments and come to terms?" he said.

"Terms?" sneered the other. "Terms? The only terms on which you will leave this room are as the subject for an undertaker. Do you know what I'm going to do with you, now that I've got you in my power?"

De Chatras shrugged his shoulders to indicate his inability to divine the other's purpose.

"Kill you!"

"Come," said the other, "let us reason a moment and perhaps you will think better of it."

"I tell you I'm going to kill you!"

Every word was uttered with studied emphasis, expressive of implacable hate and relentless bitterness.

"To-morrow they will all be looking at the dead body of the man who sneaked into my room and was shot dead as a burglar. But first I'm going to speak my mind. I know who you are, and what you've come for. I knew as soon as I reached Washington. You played the game, and now you've got to pay."

De Chatras raised his hand to restrain the other's threatening movement of the hand that held the revolver.

"Before you open fire, Mr. Fanshaw," he said, "let me tell you that my death would only make matters worse for you, for outside of that room door stands a man whose eyes are glued on the keyhole, who is watching every move you make, and who hasn't any more compunction of shooting you than he has of eating rice-pudding. Barnes!" he called aloud.

"Aye, aye, sir," came the muffled reply from the hall in a man's voice.

"Barnes," continued De Chatras, "is the butler whom you know under the name of Batiste in this house. He is my man. But if you were inclined to shoot me dead, as you say, you would find it the most difficult task you ever undertook.

"I was careful to remove the cartridges from your revolver before I took the liberty of entering your room, for Sheriff Tucker once told me that you could pink the ace of hearts at a hundred paces with a hammerless, and I thought it advisable to make your guns useless before we had our interview."

The Coloradoan stared at De Chatras with the dazed look of a drunken man.

"Pull the trigger, and see," continued De Chatras. "I assure you I'm not deceiving you."

"I know by the weight of the gun you're telling the truth," said the Coloradoan. "I pass. What have you got to propose?"

He lowered the pistol and leaned against the table in the attitude of a man who waits to hear his doom with the indifference of despair.

"Let us sit down and talk matters over."

Dick raised his head and looked up in surprise.

"What do you mean?" he asked. "You know you've got the drop on me. What can you have to say to me, except one thing?"

"Hush — don't speak so loud. Barnes might hear you, and what we have to say to each other may as well remain a secret between us. Barnes as good as belongs to me; he'd kill you, if I told him to do so—he'd steal for me, do anything. But, for your sake, it's just as well he shouldn't know the purport of our conversation."

The Coloradoan stared into De Chatras's face with a puzzled look. The other's forbearance was beyond his comprehension.

"Go on," he said. "Whatever you say is all right."

De Chatras, for the first time, moved out of his position. He crossed the room, took a chair, and motioned Dick to sit opposite him.

The latter mechanically obeyed.

De Chatras looked straight into the face of the man whom he held in his mysterious power as he began to speak.

"Fanshaw," he said in a tone of studied deliberateness, "I know what drove you to the highway and put on the black mask of

Fra Diavolo. It wasn't a naturally corrupt heart and depraved nature—no. It was your love for the gaming-table.

"You couldn't stand prosperity. With all the money you were making out of the Birdsong Mine, you couldn't satisfy the enormous sums swallowed up by your mania for cards.

"You committed embezzlement, and to cover up your crime and recoup the money belonging to the Birdsong property, you could think of nothing better than to hold up the stage which was carrying one hundred thousand dollars of its bullion."

CHAPTER XXIII.

IMPORTANT FACTS IN THE CASE.

"IT'S kind of you to make excuses for me," retorted the other; "but you might as well come to the point. I'm ready to hear the worst."

"Don't be impatient," replied De Chatras calmly. "We have some hours to talk things over, and it will be better for you to listen to me and take my advice, for I'm going to do the best for you that I can."

Dick for a moment dropped his sullen demeanor and looked at De Chatras in surprise.

"Tell me," he said, "why you say all this and offer to give me good advice when I know very well that it is your business to arrest me?"

De Chatras waited a moment before he replied. Then he said:

"I will tell you.

"To begin at the beginning, I was sent out by the Secret Service to strike the trail of Fra Diavolo and effect his arrest, after others, including the State officials, had failed. You see, they did me the honor of imputing extraordinary ability to me.

"It was not long before I began to suspect that all was not right with the management of the Birdsong Mine. I heard that you were gambling and losing a great deal of money, and some of the other parties interested in the mine with you and Miss Birdsong were complaining of the way in which the property was handled.

"I communicated my suspicions to Sheriff Tucker, and we put a spy on your trail. We discovered that you made visits to O'Leary's place, and there met two or three disreputable characters, including a man named Walker. Each of these men was employed by you in some capacity about the mine.

"I disguised myself and spent many an evening at O'Leary's place, drinking and gambling, and I discovered that his French wife was in the habit of singing a song from the opera of 'Fra Diavolo,' which gave you the cue for the name you assumed, for she told you that Fra Diavolo had been a noted bandit."

The Coloradoan regarded De Chatras with a look of profound astonishment, but he did not interrupt him.

"I had not been on the case a month before I was sure who was holding up the stage on the Barlow and Sanderson line, but I had no proof against you that would have made the grand jury indict you. Tucker and I were always in touch, hand and glove.

"It may surprise you that he and I were lying behind a large boulder and overheard pretty nearly everything you and Miss Birdsong said that day the stage broke down near Parker, and you and she wandered off to have a talk. She asked you to capture the highwayman as a condition upon which she would listen to your proposal. Surely you must have known that she was making an impossible condition."

The Coloradoan shifted his position uneasily in his chair.

"That very day I informed Senator Terbush, who had asked Washington to be kept fully advised of everything done in the case, that I had talked with Fra Diavolo, though he had no suspicion who was communicating with him. But I just decided on a new course.

"I had left the Colorado end of the case in Tucker's hands, and resolved to arrest you in Washington. I sent you an anonymous communication to Dexter, urging you to come here to look after your ward's interests."

The other started excitedly.

"So *you* sent that letter, did you?" he demanded.

De Chatras smiled.

"Yes," he replied. "I knew your motive for wanting to marry Miss Birdsong—it was to get her interests in your hands and thereby hush up all chance of an investigation of your management of the mining property. And I knew you'd come. I am telling the plain facts as they exist. I don't ask you to admit them.

"Now, as to the hold-up of our stage on the Dexter trail," continued De Chatras. "You arranged that with your man Walker. Between the time you had your conversation with Miss Birdsong, seated on the rock by the roadside and the starting of the coach for

Belmont, you found an opportunity to send verbal orders post-haste to one of your confederates to hold up the stage at Red Rock point.

"This person transmitted your order in writing to Walker, on whose body it was afterward discovered. Your plan was to appear a hero in Miss Birdsong's eyes by seeming to beat off single-handed an attack of the road-agent, for you thought that this would make up for the impossible condition of capturing Fra Diavolo, from which you could not easily release yourself otherwise."

"All right," interrupted the other, "have it your way. You seem to know everything. What do you propose?"

"Oh, you must let me tell my story to the end!" replied De Chatras with imperturbable good nature. "Otherwise you will hardly understand my reasons for not making you my prisoner this very moment and packing you off to Colorado for trial and conviction.

"You see," he continued, "everything has been discovered. All your irregularities are known. The property is involved, but with good management Miss Birdsong's fortune can be saved. They have no conclusive proof of your being Fra Diavolo in Colorado —I alone possess that—but you can be indicted for embezzlement.

"I am going to make you a proposition, but before I do that it may interest you to know that I shot Walker, whose dead body was afterward found in the hills."

"You?" gasped Dick Fanshaw, and he looked at his captor with an expression of superstitious awe.

"I saw that the whole thing was a farce, and that you were only playing a part," resumed the other. "I had my thirty-eight-caliber in my outside coat, and in the *mêlée* I took a shot at him, holding my hand in my pocket all the time.

"I'm sure nobody noticed it — except Walker. Your acting carried you too far, and you fell down a ravine and were hurt. I know it was purely an accident."

Dick stared at De Chatras in open-mouthed wonderment.

"What sort of man are you, anyway?" he gasped.

"I'll tell you," was the reply. "I am in this business for the sport of it. I love adventures. But sometimes my heart runs away with my head, and I sacrifice self-interest, reputation, and glory to others.

"This is a case in point. I know that Miss Birdsong regards you as a brother, and that your disgrace would almost break her heart.

"I couldn't see her made unhappy for life through me, and, rather than bring you to the bar of justice for being the road-agent Fra Diavolo, I insisted on being relieved of the case. My only interest now is to protect her, to save her property, and, if possible, keep her in ignorance of the fact that you are—"

He paused, not liking to repeat the name in view of the remorse plainly written on his adversary's face.

"Yes," murmured Dick, for the first time showing a trace of tender emotion, "I've been a worthless dog. All you say is true. She's a bully good girl, and I never deserved her. I reckon I know now how it is.

"She's in love with you. Well, you deserve her more than any other man. Tell me what you want me to do. I don't want her to know the worst, and if it's in my power to make amends I'm ready."

"Thank you," said De Chatras. "I knew you'd understand. But don't think that I have any hopes of marrying Miss Birdsong. I have no interest except to be her friend.

"You have nothing to fear from me. If you can keep out of the hands of Tucker and the others, you are free—on this condition: that you sign over your entire interest in the mining property to Miss Birdsong and never see her again."

He paused to note the effect of his words.

Dick did not speak.

"Do you agree to that?"

"Yes," came the answer, after a moment of hesitation.

"We will draw up the necessary papers at once," said De Chatras, rising and clearing the table, and gathering some loose sheets of writing-paper which lay scattered about, and reaching for pen and ink.

"My law studies will come in handy here," he continued, seating himself at the table and writing rapidly, while Dick sat apart, supporting his head in his hand in moody silence.

At last De Chatras finished and handed the paper to the other, who read it, and without a word attached his name to the transfer.

De Chatras had meanwhile scribbled an address on another sheet of paper, which he now handed to Dick.

"This is the address of a notary in town on whose silence we can depend absolutely," he said. "Meet me there at nine o'clock tomorrow evening. It will be dark, and no-

body will see us enter his office. We will there complete the matter in legal form.

"You will make a mysterious disappearance. In a week you can be safely out of the way. Give me your solemn promise that within a week you will write either to the Senator or to Kate that you have not met with foul play, and make what excuse you think best for acting as you have."

And so ended the interview.

CHAPTER XXIV.

NO. 93100 REVEALS HIMSELF.

THE week dragged slowly along for Kate, distracted with anxiety and alarm. The promised explanation with which De Chatras had induced her to ward off what she believed to be his exposure had not come, and she nerved herself for the effort she determined to make of disclosing what she knew of the mystery to the Senator.

Closeted with him in his study, she told him everything, the quarrel of the two men in the smoking-room, the scene on the veranda, her visit to Dick's room and the Coloradoan's strange action before the mirror.

She needed all the courage of which she was possessed for the ordeal, for she felt that she was betraying De Chatras. But she had faithfully waited for the expiration of the time he himself had fixed, and her conscience had told her to do her duty to Dick.

She broke down at the end of the interview and shed tears and sobbed bitterly.

"You have done the right thing," said the Senator, "and have nothing to reproach yourself with. Leave everything to me and think no more about it."

Kate left the room, her mind greatly relieved but her heart heavier than ever.

The Senator at once began to put all the facts together and concluded that De Chatras was a very bad man.

"No wonder he left in such a hurry. He has done away with Fanshaw in some mysterious manner," said the Senator to himself. "He is Fra Diavolo, and the whole search which the government has been making is ridiculous nonsense. We have been entertaining him, and he might have murdered us all."

He resolved not to tell the women what his suspicions were, as he dreaded the effect upon them, but immediately called up the Secret Service and asked that the friend of the chief of the post-office inspectors, Mr. Hattras, be sent to his residence, intending to give him the facts and at the same time express his indignation at the farcical manner in which the mysterious No. 93100 had handled the case.

Several hours later a servant entered and handed him a card. The card bore the following inscription:

MR. D. C. HATTRAS.

"Admit him at once," said the Senator.

A moment later the servant admitted De Chatras.

The Senator bounded out of his chair.

"What, you?" he exclaimed.

De Chatras smiled.

"Yes, Senator," he said. "I believe you sent for me?"

"Yes, but I don't understand this. What does it mean?"

"It means that there is an end of mystery. I am not De Chatras, but D. C. Hattras, which is only the difference of a t; I am also number ninety-three thousand one hundred of the Secret Service."

"Who the deuce is Fra Diavolo then?"

Whereupon Hattras told him everything, down to the interview between him and the Coloradoan in the latter's room.

"But you have been derelict in your duty, sir, a duty you solemnly pledged the government to perform. You allowed the highwayman to escape!" thundered the Senator.

"Pardon me," said Hattras, "I have not been officially connected with the government for some time, having resigned. I have only been consulted. I wrote you that I had gone West, but I had not got farther than Cincinnati when I was requested by wire to return as a special favor.

"I meant to give Fanshaw time to notify you that he had not met with foul play before I turned over to Miss Birdsong this important paper, which I now place in your keeping."

"Why not give it to her yourself?"

"Because I would have to tell her all about him."

"Pshaw!" exclaimed the Senator; "she'll have to learn it anyway."

"Not from me," said the other.

"Then she shall from me!"

"First let me take my departure," pleaded Hattras.

"See here," exclaimed the Senator, "why do you hesitate to tell her the truth? She will

think all the better of you. Do you want her to rest under the false impression that you are the highwayman?"

Hattras saw no outlet but to take the Senator into his confidence about his regard for Kate. When he finished he said:

"You see, Senator, Miss Birdsong is still a very rich young woman, while I am—well, an adventurer. If she were poor, I'd have no hesitancy in asking her to become my wife."

"Suppose you let her decide for herself. From what my daughter has told me she would never forgive you if you decided that question from your point of view; and, by Jove! I think she might go further and fare worse."

And the Senator chuckled.

"Pardon me, Senator," said the other, "I have said good-by to Miss Birdsong forever. I meant what I said, and I shall not be diverted from my purpose. I feel confident that you will soon hear from Fanshaw, and the case is closed so far as I am concerned. Good day."

And he was gone.

A few days later Kate received a letter. She gave an exclamation of joy when she read the signature. It said:

When you receive this I shall be in the wilds of Mexico where no one will ever find me again.

Don't tell any one but De Chatras. I promised him. He's a brick.

I'm out of the Birdsong, and am going to make a fortune in Mexico. D. C. will give you the bill of sale. DICK.

It was from the Senator's lips that Kate heard the story, and by the next mail she sent a letter to Mr. D. C. Hattras inviting that gentleman to call at his earliest convenience.

In six months there was a double wedding at the Senator's town house, by which Kate became Mrs. Hattras and Lotty Mrs. Baxter.

The former pair spent their honeymoon in the mountains of Colorado and settled in Denver to be near their important mining interests.

Bill was still driving his coach over the Dexter trail, when Kate and her husband paid a visit to the town, and he was proud of having them among his passengers.

Through Kate's influence he was given a lucrative position at the mine.

The true Fra Diavolo was never heard of again.

(The end.)

Sam Bender and the Bull Calf.

BY FRITZ KROG.

The Old Missouri Family Get Pretty Well Disheveled by Being Tossed About in the Sea of Disaster and Maltreated on Life's Railway.

WHEN Sam started out to buy a mule, it will be remembered, he bought, instead, a set of harness, a gun, a goat, and sixty yards of black silk goods which Mrs. Bender had been wanting for a long time for a dress. She had not made the dress, because, not possessing a sewing-machine, still a luxury in the backwoods of Missouri, she had had no time for this long labor by hand.

"Sam," she said one night after she had hustled all the children to bed, "I got sumpin to say."

Sam stirred uneasily in his chair and cast a frightened look at the door to see if a quick exit was possible. But Mrs. Bender remained quietly seated, and assumed a genuine look of amiability.

"Sam," she went on, "I jes' been a thinkin'; I'm kinder glad I got that black silk."

"Sho, maw," said Sam, grinning and rubbing his shins in astonished delight. "I knowed you'd say that some time."

"Yep," Mrs. Bender continued, "and I been a thinkin' as how I'll make that dress now."

"All right, Hanner," Sam replied.

"And, Sam," said Mrs. Bender, "I want a sewin'-machine. Mariar Cole has one, and I got a right to git one, too."

It was not often that Sam had an opportunity to chide Mrs. Bender for extravagance, or anything else, and when this opportunity came he rose right up from his chair.

"Hanner!" he shouted. "Are you crazy? Do you know what one o' them things costs?"

"I need one," Mrs. Bender replied. "I orter have one. I could git it fer forty dollars, I reckon."

"Forty dollars!" Sam repeated. "Where are we a goin' to git forty dollars, that's what I want to know."

"There's the bull calf as could be sold," Mrs. Bender suggested.

"Bull calf!" Sam cried, and began prancing around in the kitchen. "It ain't time yit to sell him. We orter wait, least a year. Besides, he belongs to the kids."

"I know we give him to the kids when he was born," Mrs. Bender replied, "but why should they have forty dollars, if I can't have 'em? What can they do with forty dollars? Anyways, I'm goin' to make clothes for them with the machine, ain't I?"

"You ain't a goin' to git the bull calf fer no sech foolishness," said Sam. "And that's the end o' this argyment."

"It is? Huh?" snorted Mrs. Bender.

Sam saw at once that he had not been quite diplomatic enough, and fell back in alarm when the indignant wife of his bosom waltzed herself out of her chair.

"Talk to me 'bout foolishness!" she cried. "You come along with your danged old guns and shoot good money away all over the hull county, and then talk to me 'bout spendin' money as it had orter be spent fer the whole fam'ly. I'm a goin' to start early to-morrer mornin' fer town with that bull calf, and git a sewin'-machine, so I am."

"He is sech a pet o' the kids," said Sam meekly.

"We kin start 'fore they're up," Mrs. Bender replied, "and they won't know nuthin' till the machine is here to home."

"Wal," said Sam wisely, "all right. I'll go 'long, and if there's any money left, I'll lay in a new lot o' shells."

Mrs. Bender glared, opened her mouth, and then closed it tightly. Thereupon the loving couple joined the rest of the family in the loft.

Very early the next morning Sam and Mrs. Bender stole very quietly out to the barn-yard and made for the cow-shed. Mrs. Bender was just preparing to assault the sleeping bull calf when Sam suddenly grabbed her and kissed her. That is, he tried to kiss her, but not being accustomed to much osculation, he slipped in the performance, and bit her instead.

"You dod-gasted fool!" cried Mrs. Bender.

"It's your birthday, Hanner," said Sam. "Don't you recollect?"

"I reckon it is," Mrs. Bender replied after some thought. "But the nex' time you try to do any smackin', you wipe your whiskers and lemme know beforehand that it's comin'."

After the bull calf had been jumped on a few times he woke up and allowed a rope to be tied round his neck. The bull calf was about three-quarters full-grown, and he had his habits.

"Now," said Sam, "we'll have to hitch Moll to the spring-wagon. I don't want no Hec in this business. The bull calf is enough, but Hec and the bull calf and we'd never git no sewin'-machine here."

When Moll had been hitched to the wagon, the bull calf was tied to the rear springs. The Benders climbed into the seat, and the outfit started. Sam lit his pipe at once, and Mrs. Bender reached over to take it away from him.

"Not this time, Hanner," said Sam, and hauled a second pipe out of his pocket. It was apparent that Sam was growing wise in his old days.

It was a very peaceful sunrise in late summer. When the sun began looking over the hills, the birds woke up and sang their morning songs. The Benders smoked in silence, and Moll plodded faithfully over the clay road.

But out on the county road the bull calf began to evolve a few tricks. He began by stubbornly planting all four feet on the ground and trying his best to tear the rear springs from under the wagon-box.

"Whoa!" Sam shouted when he beheld the calf threatening to choke itself. "Now, what are we a goin' to do?"

"Mebbe," Mrs. Bender suggested, "if I sit in the back the critter will follow more peaceable."

So she climbed over the seat and sat down in the wagon-box, holding her hand out to the calf and cooing at him.

Sam hit Moll with a stick, especially cut for that purpose; Moll started quickly, and the calf said:

"*Moo-o-o!*"

"Stop!" cried Mrs. Bender. "He's a

chokin' hisself! I'll fix him," she went on, as Moll was brought to a halt again.

She leaped out of the wagon, took Sam's stick, and laid a shower of blows on the calf's back.

But when Sam drove on, the calf calmly began to choke itself again.

"We don't want to drag no dead calf to town," said Sam to his wife. "You better lead him a while."

Mrs. Bender gave silent consent, and, untying the rope from the springs, tried out the new plan. This proved successful and satisfactory until they had covered about a mile and a half, when Mrs. Bender thought she had walked enough.

"Sam," she yelled, "git outen the wagon and lemme drive a spell. I'm gittin' tired."

"Now, Hanner," Sam replied, "don't start nuthin'. I aint sellin' the calf, ner buyin' the machine, and I ain't goin' to walk fer no calf."

"You ain't, huh?" shouted Mrs. Bender.

She made for her spouse with the rope in her hand, and when she had overtaken him she tried to hit him with the stick, but failed to reach him.

Foiled, but not discouraged, she climbed on the moving wagon, and, seizing Sam by the scruff of the neck, slung him into the road.

"It ain't right, maw," Sam complained; "but I ain't sayin' no more."

"You bet you ain't," Mrs. Bender retorted.

Sam led the calf along in mournful silence, and Mrs. Bender glared at him from the wagon. The bull calf probably sympathized with Sam, because in a short time it flatly refused to be led by his hand any longer.

"Hanner," said Sam, "you better tie the reins to the seat and git behind this animal with a stick."

"I won't fool much with him," Mrs. Bender remarked as she executed Sam's suggestion and advanced on the calf's haunches with her stick upraised.

The calf stood, stiff-legged and apparently immovable, while Sam, with both heels braced on the ground, pulled at the rope with all his strength. Under these conditions Mrs. Bender brought the stick on the calf's back, and almost simultaneously kicked it in the ribs, true marvels of quick attack.

The result was altogether too successful. The calf leaped forward like a shot out of a gun. Its head struck Sam in the chest, and both hind legs stepped on him in passing.

Also, Sam let go of the rope, and the calf went on.

"There you go," said Sam, sitting dolefully in the dust. "A hurtin' me ag'in, and I ain't done nuthin'."

"Shet up!" snapped Mrs. Bender. "Git up and help ketch that dinged critter. You ain't hurt."

There was no doubt about the advisability of pursuing the calf, because it was tearing along the road at a great rate.

"We best foller with Moll," said Sam.

They did this, and by patient application of the stick managed to thrash the old mare into a gallop. Even so, they would not have overtaken the calf if it had not stopped to graze at the roadside.

Catching up with the fugitive and catching him were two different propositions.

Every time either of the Benders came near enough to just miss grabbing the rope, the calf would execute some extraordinary maneuver that set it free and at the same time threatened the life and limb of the nearest human.

"Dog-gone that ding-busted critter!" Mrs. Bender cried at last, and threw her stick at the calf.

When the stick landed on the calf's head, it grew frightened, and, with one wild leap, cleared the fence at the roadside. In a few seconds it had dashed out of sight in the woods.

"Now you done it," said Sam. "We never will ketch him now, and I reckon we'll be arrested for trespass to boot."

"I don't care," Mrs. Bender retorted. "This is Zeke Cole's place, and he won't arrest us."

"Mebbe Zeke and his boys'll help us git the beast back," Sam suggested.

Mrs. Bender thought that was a good idea, so the Benders left the scene of action, and in a short time were telling the Cole family about their troubles.

"I reckon as how we can ketch the critter," said Zeke Cole. "I'll call the kids."

With five of the boys and Zeke, the Benders returned to the woods. Mrs. Cole wanted Mrs. Bender to wait for results at the house.

"Naw," Mrs. Bender replied. "I don't trust no men. I got a hunch I'll have to ketch that animal myself, anyway."

The pursuing gang made directly for the woods, where there was much beating about in the bush before any one caught sight of the bull calf.

Finally it was spied near the fence which separated the woods from the Coles pasture.

"There he is!" yelled Walter Cole, and

the whole party swept down on the runaway with the intention of making a speedy capture.

The bull calf, seeing himself cornered, cast a frightened look at the crowd, and then leaped over the fence into the pasture, with a loud snort.

"He shore is a good jumper," Zeke Cole remarked as everybody followed the calf.

The pasture was rather large, and there was a great deal of futile running round and yelling and throwing sticks and clods of dirt. But there was no capture.

"That's the ornerest critter I ever seen," said Zeke Cole, wiping the sweat off his brow. "We better shoot him."

By and by everybody thought the calf would surely be caught when he allowed Sam to get within arm's reach of his head. But when Sam grabbed at the rope the calf dashed into the pond which was near by, and, taking up a position almost in the exact center, snorted a loud defiance.

"You won't ketch him at all now," Zeke declared. "There ain't nobody goin' to fool with no bull calf in a pond."

"Ain't, huh?" gasped Mrs. Bender, red in the face, hot under the collar, tired of foot, very angry, and very belligerent. "I'll git that contrary beast or die, so I will."

She began picking up her skirts when Sam stopped her.

"There's men lookin' on, Hanner," he said.

"I don't care who's a lookin' on," cried Mrs. Bender. "I'm goin' in!"

And in she went, while the others formed a cordon round the pond. The pool was not over two feet deep, but very muddy, and as Mrs. Bender floundered toward the calf her skirt dragged behind her over the surface like the train of a *grande dame*. But there was blood in Mrs. Bender's eye and a club in her hand.

She bore down on the bovine center of trouble like a pirate barge, and when she slushed alongside she let go a broadside with the club. The calf, his hoofs buried in the mud, tried to escape, and the air filled with flying mud and dirty water.

When things cleared a little, the onlookers on shore beheld the calf staggering and splashing toward them, with Mrs. Bender hanging on to the rope and being dragged after almost on her face.

Before the calf reached shore she had rammed her head in the mud a few times and swallowed a few gallons of unsavory water. But she came out triumphant, wet, muddy, coughing and spitting, and clinging grimly to the rope.

"Now, that's the kind o' ole woman to have," said Zeke Cole.

"Yep," Sam replied with a proud swelling of the chest, "and sometimes she goes fer me jes' like that."

Mrs. Bender did not release her grip on the rope until she could see out of both eyes that Zeke Cole had a good hold on it. Then she washed her face in the pond, and, pushing Zeke aside, took the rope out of his hand and a fresh grip on her club.

"I don't trust nobody to hold the critter," she cried grimly, and the men fell back in respect.

At the Cole house Mrs. Bender refused to borrow a clean dress from Mrs. Cole, but contented herself with scraping the mud off her own and washing her shoes before the journey was continued. But everybody had dinner first and a pipe afterward.

When movement to the town was finally resumed, Mrs. Bender led the bull calf in person. And the calf behaved, probably from the mere sight of Mrs. Bender, who looked like a bad one in her disarray and with a heavy stick clutched in one hand.

About a mile from town the Bear Mountain Railroad tracks crossed the road. Sam was driving ahead when they reached the crossing, and, as he got safely across, he saw a locomotive rushing round a near-by curve.

"Hanner! Hanner!" he yelled. "Go back!"

But he yelled too late. He had barely called his warning when Mrs. Bender and the calf arrived on the track. Mrs. Bender escaped, but the calf grew obstinate under the stress of fright, stood stockstill, and in a second was not even a good beef for the butcher.

The Benders were too dazed to think until the shriek of the locomotive whistle, the roar of the train, and the cloud of smoke and flying cinders had passed away. Mrs. Bender, unyielding to the last, still held the rope.

"Gosh a'mighty holy jumpin' Jerusalem whiskers!" Sam exclaimed. "That was a close call!"

Mrs. Bender climbed painfully up beside Sam and sat down with a prolonged groan. Then she heaved a sigh from the depths of her being, and threw her stick away.

"Turn Moll round and git fer home," she said in a lifeless voice.

"Sho, now, maw," said Sam after a while, "lots o' wuss things could happen."

"I'd jes' as soon it was you as was hit," Mrs. Bender replied.

"It ain't right to say sech things," Sam retorted. "So it ain't."

"And I wisht I wuz dead," declared Mrs. Bender.

"It's a jedgment," said Sam, "'cause we took the bull calf away from the kids."

When Sam brought forth this bit of philosophy the partner of his joys and sorrows promptly smacked him in the jaw. After Sam's loud yell of surprise and pain, she felt well enough to light a pipe, and Sam sulked in silence.

"Sam," said Mrs. Bender when in the late afternoon they drove into the barn-yard, "don't say nuthin' to the kids till to-morrer. They might make sech a racket, I'd have to wallop a few, and I don't feel like it."

Sam thought about the backhander he had gotten in the jaw, and decided that his spouse was using bad logic, but he did not say so.

The Benders were climbing out of the wagon when Alexander caught sight of them, and came up, staring at the sad appearance of his disheveled mother.

"Where you-all been?" he asked.

"None o' your business," snapped Mrs. Bender.

Suddenly Alexander seemed to think of something and dashed off to the house with a loud whoop.

"What's eatin' the boy?" Sam demanded.

When Mrs. Bender, closely followed by Sam, entered the kitchen, all the children were assembled and began a genuine Bender hullabaloo. Some began to sing and dance, some yelled, some talked, and most of them got in each other's way and were pushed and stepped on.

By and by the youngest broke forth into bawling, and when Sam stepped on the cat's tail the uproar reached its zenith.

"Shet up!" Mrs. Bender roared. "Ding bust ye, what's a eatin' you?"

"Your birthday, maw!" Alexander shouted.

"Look, maw!" Annie cried, pointing to one corner.

There stood a brand new sewing-machine, all glittering with bright steel and veneer.

Mrs. Bender, filled with a rush of emotion, fell back into the rocking-chair and Sam achieved two jumps and a whoop at the peril of three small Benders.

"For your birthday, maw! A birthday present!" cried the children.

"And you run away this morning," said Annie.

"Where did you git it?" gasped Mrs. Bender.

"Bought it," said Alexander proudly.

"What with?" asked Sam.

"You see," Annie, the oldest daughter explained, "we wanted to git a sewing-machine fer maw, and not havin' the money we sold the bull calf to Amos Caldwell. He give us forty dollars last week, and promised not to call for the bull calf until this evening, so as you wouldn't find out we sold him and we could surprise you!"

Sam sat right down on the kitchen floor and groaned, while Mrs. Bender choked and could utter no sound for two minutes.

"And ain't it a dandy?" said Alexander.

"Maw," said Sam at last, "you tell 'em."

"Oh," cried Mrs. Bender, jumping up and beginning one of her best lamentations. "Wow! Oh! Yawp! Oh! Oh! Wow!"

"What's up?" asked Nicodemus.

"There ain't no more bull calf," Sam exclaimed. "He was killed by a train when we tried ter lead him to town!"

Annie was the first to grasp the full meaning of that and joined in her mother's grief.

The other little Benders understood and also began to bawl, and those who did not understand bawled because no one would tell them what was wrong. In a few minutes everybody was bawling.

Even Sam did not shirk his duty and groaned and said, "Sho, now," alternately.

Into the midst of this general, all-around grief stepped Amos Caldwell.

"I come for the bull calf," he said. "I see you got the machine."

"Yep," Sam groaned, "but the bull calf ain't here. He's dead."

When Sam had explained the whole business to Amos, a fresh deluge of sorrow threatened to break forth, but Amos raised his hand for silence.

"That's all right," he said. "You ain't lost nuthin'."

Everybody gathered around Amos, who seemed to have a saving message, and it was so quiet that the cat's licking her paw sounded like firecrackers.

"You ain't the first as has lost a cow on that railroad," Amos went on, "and all the others has got good damages from the railroad company. All you gotter do is tell Squire Jones about the accident over to town, and he'll git money fer that bull calf from the company."

"Is that shore?" Sam demanded.

"So shore," Amos declared, "that I'm willin' to take a chanst on it and let you pay me back when you git the money outen the railroad company."

"Hooray!" yelled Sam, Alexander, and Nicodemus in one breath.

Then there was as much rejoicing in the Bender kitchen as there had been grief before. Even the baby, who had howled steadily through the whole business, swallowed his tears and began to coo.

Amos Caldwell was right, because a few weeks later a check for one hundred dollars duly arrived from the offices of the Bear Mountain Railroad.

"What gits me," said Sam when the money came, "is why that company pays a hunderd dollars fer a dead bull calf as ain't no good to nobody."

"Never mind, Sam," Mrs. Bender replied, "there is so many things you don't know, it would turn anybody crazy to think about 'em all."

Sam said—nothing.

Where the Heart Is.

BY FRANCES CHAPMAN.

Wherein One Looks Back from the Whirligig of Modern City Life and Sees How Slowly the Village Merry-Go-Round Moved.

BROOKMOUNT sprawled over a square mile of flat, monotonous country. Its very name was a misnomer, as no embosoming hills or mountains surrounded it protectingly; no brook or river gave character to its dreary sameness. It was like a face without features—expressionless, and yet alive.

It was old, one of the oldest towns in the Middle West, but there was no stirring history or haunting traditions connected with its colorless past. I never met a soul who knew the origin of its settlement.

Probably it was one of those lonely, little trading-posts that dotted the Western country, where movers halted for rest or provisions before pressing on across the arid desert in quest of California's gold.

Doubtless some few souls were stranded and left behind, and there they clung like the barnacles on a ship until, without intention or purpose, a town struggled into existence.

The real founders of the place must have had some sense of its lack of physical charm, for it centered round a tiny park thickly shaded with maple and oak trees; but here imagination had rested, for the diverging streets straggled out in commonplace regularity; those running east and west were named for the different States; those north and south for the Presidents.

In later days a wonderful cast-iron fountain was erected in the center of the park, and many a birth or death was definitely recorded in the minds of old ladies by "the year the fountain was set up."

The walks through the park ran a straight, undeviating course from corner to corner and from side to side, forming a brick star, which we regarded as something unique and far more beautiful and cleanly than curving, unpaved paths.

The stores and shops formed a square about this tiny bit of forest, and from its green heart spread out the arteries of its streets and avenues.

In those early days Brookmount houses were built to live in, and with no sense of harmony or architectural beauty. If a porch were put on, it was there to sit on and not to look at.

If there were a certain number in a family, a certain number of rooms were necessary and closets.

One's geographical origin was traced by the closets. The natives had wardrobes and hooks behind doors; those who came from "back East" had special closets for special purposes; the farther East, the more closets. Our parents came from Indiana; but we always spoke of ourselves as "Easterners."

The one really beautiful spot in Brookmount was the Catholic church, on the south side of which spread a large garden where the monks cultivated flowers and vegetables. We made no distinction between priest or

acolyte, and I never heard them called anything but monks.

The garden was surrounded by a high board-fence, and we liked to walk up there with a shivery sense of misdoing. If we found a convenient knot-hole we peeped inside, but if the flutter of a brown robe met our limited view, how we ran—frightened, excited, breathless, we knew not why. We had a sense of touching a world other than our own.

Strange stories were rife about these same gentle brothers, and I remember old Mrs. Grafton sitting on our porch one night telling of the awful power of popery. I can still recall the chill that ran up my spine as she told in a hushed, furtive whisper that she'd "heerd that the hull basement of their church was filled with guns and annymition!" for what purpose I never knew, but it was none the less thrilling and mysterious.

In those days there were no women's clubs, no society of jolly Elks or a country club, all of which Brookmount now boasts; we had church gild Eastern Star, and an occasional picnic or festival. Very few of us went away in the summer, and our biggest outing was in the fall when we went out to "the timber" to gather nuts.

The house was in a turmoil for a day or two before. Mother baked enough to provision a camping party for a week, although our outing lasted but a single day.

We got up before daybreak filled with the shivery excitement of the unusual. We all piled into a big, jolting farm-wagon, and grandfather drove. It was only five or six miles from town, but to us it seemed a long journey into the world, full of interest and unexpected surprises. When we reached a certain place on the way, grandfather would pull up the horses and turn to mother and ask: "Shall we go straight, or take the cross-road?"

"Oh, not that horrid cross-road," mother would say, and we went straight.

As soon as we got to "the timber" father and grandfather built a fire, and we ran shrieking through the woods, pelting each other with the fallen leaves, climbing scrub oaks and discovering unexpected wonders. After a time we settled down to the business of gathering nuts and eating.

We didn't go home until after dark, and when we were well on our way, grandfather would say: "Now, let's hear you children sing."

Mother started us with her sweet, clear soprano; grandmother quavered an uncertain alto, and even father rumbled a deep bass, off key. The only song he knew was something about

> The lady I love will soon be a bride,
> With laurel on her brow,

and we always sang that for his benefit.

During the pauses between songs mother would say:

"My hands feel all puffed up. I knew I'd get poison ivy. Well, this is my last picnic."

I used to think impatiently, "I believe she just does it on purpose," for she was never mistaken, and I think she was laid up every November for years with poisoned hands or face.

We thought she had compensations for her suffering, as father brought her white grapes and canned oysters, and the neighbors sent in blanc-mange and jellied chicken, all of which we sampled and tasted. Once Mrs. Grafton brought over a plump, freshly dressed quail for mother's supper.

My brother and I watched the cooking of that quail with passionate interest. The savors brought us pleasing anticipations of the juicy morsels and tender bits that would fall to our share.

We were sorry mother was ill, but we were thankful that she had no appetite. Alas! under the urging of father and the nurse she ate every scrap of the bird, and as little brother and I sadly regarded the denuded bones, we thought bitterly: "No wonder she poisons herself every fall!"

The two most exciting events I can remember were the attempted robbery of McMillan's Bank and Lizzie Rufand's operation. Of course I don't really remember the attempted robbery, as it happened before I was born, but we never tired of hearing about it and we always thought of it in capitals.

"What was the name of the man who tried to rob McMillan's bank, mother?" we would say coaxingly.

Mother loved to spin a yarn, and she never tired of telling this one; and although she knew perfectly well that we knew it was old Farragut who planned the robbery, she would mention his name as though confessing a knowledge she had never before divulged. Each time new and more daring particulars were added, giving zest and color to the story, while we sat in round-eyed horror, clamoring for more.

Legs and arms had been cut off; a finger or toe sacrificed; old Bob Slatters even had a mutilated ear removed, but within the

memory of man no person in Brookmount had ever been cut open until Lizzie Rufand's operation.

For months Lizzie was the topic of conversation over back fences, at church gild and when two or three were gathered together; and when it was known that a surgeon from Kansas City had made a diagnosis of her case, excitement reached fever heat.

Mrs. Grafton came over to tell us what the surgeon said. I remember she pronounced it "toom-moor," and I, in some misty way, associated it with graveyard sculpture, and I wept bitterly for poor Lizzie, although I had always thought her a cross old maid.

The worst was predicted, and I think deep within her heart nearly every woman in town envied Lizzie the dramatic possibilities of her condition.

It was again Mrs. Grafton who brought us the news that they were going to operate.

"The thing's ripe fer it," she announced, and I had to readjust my ideas.

Before, I had imagined something adamantine and unyielding; now I must try to realize something passing through the stages of bud, bloom and ripened maturity.

The surgeon came down from Kansas City, bringing a nurse with him. How necks were craned from windows, and how eyes peeped, or plainly stared. Mrs. Grafton went over and offered her services, which to her indignation the young doctor kindly but firmly declined.

"I helped bring Lizzie Rufand into this world," she told him severely, as though reproaching him with the fact that he was preventing her assisting Lizzie out of it.

She ever afterward sniffed and sneered at "young whipper-snappers tryin' to teach their betters, and scaldin' and disinfectin' things as though they were pizen, when everybody knew Lizzie Rufand was as neat as wax."

Old Dr. Barfume had done all of the simple surgery in our part of the country, and many of his patients resented Lizzie's lack of loyalty in not giving him a chance at this unusual operation. However he was there to administer the anesthetic and assist.

To this day they tell of the young surgeon ordering him to wash his hands. Bash Barton never tired of telling the story, slapping his knee and roaring with laughter.

"Here was doc, and here was young city feller. He turns to old doc and looks um over and then sez he: 'Washed yer hands, doctor?'

"Old doc looks kinda fussed, and then sez he: 'No, I ain't washed my hands. Why?'

"'Then wash 'em!' snaps young city feller, like a shot out of a gun. 'Wash 'em, sir!'

"And old doc he got kinda red, but by gum he went and done it all right."

If Bash's intimate knowledge of the conversation was ever questioned, it didn't affect any one's relish of the story.

Mrs. Grafton came over at tea time to tell us the particulars. Father looked dignified and disgusted and tried to divert us children, but we listened greedily to all the gruesome details.

"In spite of that young feller refusin' my help, I went over and sat in the kitchen. In the fust place it wa'n't decent, Lizzie a unmarried woman and all; and then I knew if worst come to worst, somebody with a head on their shoulders would be needed, and—buz—buz—" Here we lost some exciting particulars. "I was determined I'd see the thing, and—buz—buz—buz— We strained our eager ears. "It weighed—and it looked like—and it filled a wash-bowl!"

I thought she said wash-tub, and I fell back in my chair in horrified astonishment, only to be straightened by the stern voice of my father bidding me leave the table.

I realized that in my excitement I had licked my knife, but I had an outraged feeling that my father was not honest with me.

The offending knife was not the cause of my banishment; he only took pleasure in depriving me of hearing about Lizzie.

I sat on the back porch, my eyes filling with tears, more in pity for myself than for poor Lizzie's suffering.

Mother was a generous soul, and her idea of showing sympathy or joy was by offerings of food.

The next morning she bustled round making a batch of doughnuts. She used four eggs instead of three; extra shortening was measured carefully, and she got out the pulverized sugar to roll them in after frying. We usually had them plain, so I knew they were being made to give away.

I suspected they were for Lizzie, and I hung around hoping she would send me with them. Mother had a way of divining the foolish little things that make up a child's joy and pleasure, and finally she looked at my eager face and said: "Yes, you may take them, but mind you're careful."

I grabbed the plate and flew.

No one ever went to Rufand's front door,

but I wondered whether, on such a special occasion, I shouldn't make an exception. However, a fit of shyness overcame me, and I took my accustomed path around the house.

On the side porch sat the young surgeon and the nurse. I halted in awkward confusion, but finally stammered out that my mother had fried Lizzie some doughnuts.

The nurse took the plate from my hands, and both she and the doctor burst out laughing.

I stood drooping, shamed, and mortified. My bare feet! Why, oh, why hadn't I thought of this possibility, and put on my new strapped slippers.

How long and brown my legs! My feet were dirty!

I wanted to run, and I didn't know how to go or stay, but stood digging a dusty toe into the soft earth, while they continued to laugh, and, before my astonished eyes, they sat and ate every doughnut on the plate.

"They never left Lizzie even a little teeny one," I told my mother, as I ran home, tears of mortification dimming my eyes. "And they laughed at me because I had bare feet."

I remember mother grew rather red and told me shortly that she thought it was high time for a great big girl eight years old to stop running round barefooted like a tomboy. Thereafter my feet knew the bondage of leather and yarn.

Lizzie recovered from the operation, but she always seemed tired and sad, and she succumbed to typhoid fever a year later. Mrs. Grafton sympathetically remarked that "as Lizzie had to die so soon, anyway, it seemed a pity she couldn't have gone when she had all that cuttin' done. It would have saved Mr. Rufand a sight of expense, for beside the cost of the operation, Lizzie had her teeth fixed, and had taken a trip to Kansas City, and all fer nothin'."

I think we all tacitly agreed that Lizzie might as well have endured the toothache and foregone her trip, if it could have been foreseen that she would so soon take the longer journey.

The young surgeon came down from Kansas City to the funeral, and some imaginative minds thought they were now able to account for the tired, sad look that had dimmed poor Lizzie's eyes.

Years after, on an idle day, this little incident leaped through the chasm of forgotten things, and stood before my memory with photographic distinctness.

"Why," I cried, in sudden pleased discovery, "it wasn't my bare feet that made them laugh; it was mother's doughnuts!"

The years change, but Brookmount, in its main essentials, changes not.

The younger generations show a reprehensible desire to wander. Sometimes two men, who were lads together, come face to face in a crowded city street, and they stop and speak of old times and the old town.

Perhaps they call it, half contemptuously, "little old Brookmount," but deep within the warm recesses of their hearts they think of it as "Home."

Mr. Pilkington's Record.

BY HARRY KING TOOTLE.

In Spite of All Exhortations to the Past to Inter Its Defunct, We Find It Continually Interested in Exhumation.

EVEN those few persons who enjoyed the confidence of Mr. Pilkington—Mr. Charles Algernon Pilkington, of Chicago—did not know that just two desires had welled up tumultuously in his youthful breast when he had deserted his old home for the metropolis of the great State of Illinois.

One was to come back to Vincennes the owner of two suits of clothes. In the checked suit he would swagger down to the post-office in the morning. In the striped suit he would swagger down to the post-office in the after-

noon. He would show Vincennes how Chicago appreciated and rewarded his abilities.

The other wish was to come back to the town of his birth, the quiet little town that would one day be so proud of him, and marry Augusta Houck.

Fortune so smiled upon him, at the same time frowning upon a trusting merchant tailor, that a year or so later he did return to Vincennes to strut down to the post-office in the morning in a brown suit, and to stroll down to the post-office in the afternoon in a gray suit.

This to the intense edification of sundry feminine admirers, the while the young gentlemen with whom he had played one-old-cat so long ago, young gentlemen who were content—no, constrained—to wear the same suit seven days in the week, sneered openly.

It would be difficult to detect which the callow Mr. Pilkington enjoyed the more, the feminine approval or the masculine discomfiture. He showed Vincennes all right.

But he didn't marry Augusta Houck. That those were his callow days, he was quite willing to admit when several years later he returned to Vincennes with four suits of clothes, each part and parcel of a well-defined color scheme.

The only reason Mr. Pilkington admitted that they had been his salad days was because he fell straw hat over patent-leather pumps in love with little Lucy Lyon, and Lucy suspected the affair with Augusta.

Had you asked Charles Algernon about that little affair with Augusta, in all probability he would have gazed meditatively at the distant landscape for a moment, just long enough for you to see that it took some time to bring that trifling episode to mind, and then would have answered in an offhand manner:

"Heigh-ho! Boy and girl affairs are amusing, aren't they? Yes, I remember Augusta well. Just a case of puppy-love, you know. Why, she's happily married now, and I dare say never thinks of me."

Which manner of speaking was the subtlest way of conveying the impression that after being decidedly unhappy Miss Houck had married another, but still no doubt often thought of Charles Algernon Pilkington, who had gone to Chicago, and who, in the big city, had at last forgotten her.

Truth to tell, they had communicated after he had migrated to Chicago to enjoy the delights of living on sixteen dollars a week and spending the evenings looking in the shop windows on State Street. Then the inevitable happened, and Augusta thought no more of Charles Algernon, who by this time was making twenty dollars a week and figuring on how much furniture he could purchase at one time on the instalment plan.

Augusta married an automobile, a house with three bath-rooms (which is going some for Vincennes), and a man who had gone to college to escape work.

Upon learning that the inevitable was about to take place, Charles Algernon poured out his soul in one last lament in which he vowed his love would outlast the stars as his life of single unhappiness would prove.

Time passed.

Back to Vincennes at last came Mr. Pilkington, and there condescendingly looked over the bevy of beauties groomed by proud mamas for the matrimonial handicap.

"Time to marry and settle down, Pilky, my boy," all the men would say.

Whereat Mr. Pilkington would wink knowingly. He was too wise to be caught, was Mr. Pilkington.

His friends received the impression that it was not because of financial reasons. Oh, dear, no. He had been very successful in Chicago. But although he enjoyed coming home, and liked all the girls immensely, you know, his old stamping ground after all was Chicago.

It was a likelier place, and he was more at home there. You understand, don't you? Whereupon Mr. Pilkington would saunter down toward the post-office in his English walking suit to give the girls a treat.

That was before he had looked upon Miss Lucy Lyon and realized that he had met his fate.

He met his fate at intervals. When he had come home in the old days he had called her "young un" and pinched her ear. But that didn't go now, not by a long shot. She was Miss Lyon now, and you had to fight your way up to her and beg her to let you have the last half of the third extra.

And as for having two dances with her in one evening, that was enough to make all the other men hate you. Yes, indeed, Lucy Lyon was a ravishing beauty and difficult of approach. But then Mr. Pilkington recalled with pleasure that he was from Chicago.

There was certainly one advantage in being from Chicago, and Mr. Pilkington did not allow it to escape him. Trust him to improve the shining hour.

When you are from Chicago you have the daytime without competition, for the home men are clerking in the shoe-store or adding

up figures in the bank or patiently explaining the merits of the new fireless cooker. Competition may be the life of trade, but Mr. Pilkington did not welcome it in affairs of the heart; that is, not until he had made himself solid, then he reveled in it.

"And it's me you've really cared for all along?" Lucy asked, looking up at him with her big soulful eyes.

Truly this was a wonderful, beautiful world.

Had Charles Algernon been detailing the scene to a novelist he would have remarked that at this instant he strained her to his heart. Such was indeed the case, but he would have omitted to state that at the same time he surreptitiously glanced toward the library and also toward the stairway.

He had a well-grounded suspicion that her mother was moving about. If she came into the drawing-room at that moment, she might not understand, you know. Things hadn't long passed the "just very, very good friends" stage.

"Yes, just you, little girl," he replied grandly.

"Then you didn't care for that Augusta Houck?" Lucy had yet to learn that a woman must content herself with a man's last love, and ask no questions about the flames that flickered and failed in the past.

Mr. Pilkington looked down at her with an amused, superior smile.

"Why, of course not, you little goose."

With his hands he pressed her cheeks until she could not have said anything but "prunes" or "prisms" had her life depended upon it. Then he kissed her. He was a fascinating devil, was Mr. Pilkington.

"All the other girls taught me that I was not in love, because it was you I had in my heart all the time, just you. You remember how I used to pinch your ear and call you 'little un'? Well, I was in love with you then, only I couldn't tell you so. I had to wait until you grew up and could understand. So each time I went away it was just to wait and to work for you."

"Oh, Charles dear!" she cried, hiding her face on his shoulder and trembling with joy. "And to think I didn't know! I was a silly little goose, wasn't I? And you knew all along, and came back to get me!"

That last remark carried a meaning that jarred upon Mr. Pilkington. As yet he had not announced to her that he had come back to get her. When you play the game according to rule you mustn't say that too soon after passing the "just good friends" stage.

But he was no quitter, was Mr. Pilkington. Again he strained her to his heart grandly, very grandly indeed, in a manner that would have added dollars to the salary of any stock-company leading man in America.

"Did you ever write Augusta Houck letters you wouldn't want me to see?"

"No, little goose, I didn't," he replied fervently.

It does one good to tell the truth occasionally. There was no one who admired the creation of a fanciful fiction more than did Mr. Pilkington, but, true artist that he was, he knew that the truth was a most agreeable peg at times upon which to hang the fabric of his fancy.

In this case he could speak truly, no letters could ever come back to give the lie to his direct statement to Lucy that he had never written anything to Augusta that could not be published broadcast. Thank Heavens, no records of their burning vows now existed.

"You're quite sure, dear?" she insisted.

"As sure as I am that I never cared for any one but you," he replied grandly. With this affirmation Lucy was forced to be content.

The beauty of it all was that Mr. Pilkington so inoculated himself with the virus of any point of view which he soulfully assumed that he really came to believe it himself. So, without any great misgivings on his part, in a few days they came to consider themselves engaged.

Now the one who suffered most from this state of affairs was not Charles Algernon, although he sometimes had twinges when he tried to deflate the high cost of living and inflate his salary so that the two would come within hailing distance; no, his twinges were as nothing compared to the tortures of one Mr. Robert Houck.

Young Mr. Houck had several claims to fame. One was that he was the brother of Augusta, and as such had never been particularly fond of Mr. Pilkington. Another was that he was smitten with Lucy Lyon as only a youth could be, and, being so smitten, he hated Mr. Pilkington with a cordial, unalloyed, twenty-four-carat hatred. He and Lucy were of an age, and had been boy and girl sweethearts.

Lucy broke the news to him gently, and Bob couldn't have felt worse had he been a college professor of English watching Eddie Foy play "Hamlet."

When she told Charles Algernon about it that evening the little minx admitted that he

took on something terrible, and had said some unpleasant things about her Charles that would have hurt awfully had they been true. Whereat Mr. Pilkington strained her to his heart grandly and kissed her.

Strange to relate, young Mr. Houck refused to wear his heart on his sleeve. If any one tried to joke him about having been cut out he would laughingly admit that he had had his sentence commuted for bad behavior, and hint at his interest in Effie Weaver.

Effie, being a sweet little girl who hadn't had much attention as yet, was not old enough to realize that something was being "put over on her," and consequently was in the seventh heaven.

Vincennes is like every other town—the men are afraid of any high-brow movement.

They let the women speak with bated breath of Rostand, and elucidate to their entire satisfaction the subtle mysteries of Ibsen. As for the men, they are quite content to sit round the Elks' Club and discuss with bated breath the possibilities of a failure of the mint crop, and elucidate to their entire satisfaction the subtle mysteries of drawing to three kings when you are sitting next the dealer.

So when the Browning Society decided to give an "open evening" to get the men to come, notices were duly posted that there would be no discussion of "The Flight of the Duchess" or anything like that.

If you'd talked to any of the men about the "Duchess" they would probably ask, desiring to show the Browning Club that they were not so far behind on literature, thank you — they would probably ask what the Duchess had published recently.

The club announced that you were going to have a good time, singing, and recitations, and phonograph selections, and piano music, and a few parlor stunts, and then "eats" in the dining-room, where you tried to keep a plate with a lettuce sandwich, a cup of coffee, and a starched napkin all in the air at one time.

Would Mr. Pilkington be present? Mr. Pilkington would. What was more, he would bring Miss Lyon.

No matter what the events were to be, high-brow or rough-house, he would have been there.

For one thing, he had a new plaited shirt he wished to introduce to Vincennes. Then he wished to display his latest acquisition, the toast of the town, Miss Lyon. How the boys would squirm to think he had beaten them out! But he was from Chicago!

And the girls! There'd be a little touch of sadness, you know, when they saw that they were hopelessly out of it.

"Are you sure there is nothing in the past that could come between us?" Lucy asked, hugging his arm as they walked to the entertainment.

"Nothing, dearest. I've always lived with just you in my heart. It's a hard struggle, making a home for you in Chicago; but I'll do it, and come back and marry you. With your image in my heart, all things are possible."

She looked up at him so radiant with happiness that he made no attempt to resist the temptation to lean over and kiss her. Whereupon she said: "Don't, dear, somebody might see you," and looked about guiltily.

It was a very successful evening. Bob Houck was there, and Mr. Pilkington thought he could see him squirm. With him was Effie Weaver.

Lucy never had cared for her, but to-night she was condescendingly kind when they met, which showed that she cared less than ever. Bob was a brute not to have taken his dismissal to heart.

Every one contributed something to make the evening enjoyable. Bob Houck was magnanimous enough to suggest that Mr. Pilkington had some capital recitations that showed his rich voice to good advantage.

Mr. Pilkington acquitted himself creditably, giving an imitation of a man telephoning his wife that he had to sit up with a sick friend. His voice was one you did not easily forget. He had a right to be proud of it.

Then Tom Filkens, who had been asked to manage the informal program for the club, announced that he had a surprise in store for them. Mr. Pilkington always thought Filkens was a smart-Alecky fellow, and to-night he was particularly egregious. All the women laughed at his rambling rigmarole, however, and the men seemed to enjoy it as much.

Vincennes was satisfied with a cheap sort of wit, thought Charles Algernon. He didn't know what Mr. Filkens was leading up to, but he did know that he could have done it much better himself.

"The next number, ladies and gentlemen," concluded Mr. Filkens, "was secured at great expense, at gre-ate expense. I may say that these are the only ones in captivity. Others roam their native heath, and are cast upon the ambient air like rich pearls dissolved in vinegar, so exquisite and rare are they.

"The Browning Club accounts itself fortunate, particularly fortunate, to be able to present this number. I am authorized to say that never before has this entertainment—I use the word advisedly—this entertainment been given save for the delectation of individuals.

"And now, think of it, men! Here before all assembled you are to have the colossal pleasure collectively, not hugging it to your hearts in the privacy of your homes, but enjoying it with your friends and neighbors. An educational treat for all, elevating and entertaining.

"And now, a word to the young whose smiling faces are turned up to me expectantly. My dear young friends, what need have I to point out the moral to you—for moral there is in this most unusual contribution offered by a patriotic young townsman—when I know that the sermon about to be preached you will discourage any of your own endeavors along the same line?

"Remember, there is no extra charge for this attraction. We don't even ask you to pay a trifling admission fee for the concert in the animal tent where you can also witness the feeding of the carnivora. If you are ready we will continue with the performance."

Mr. Filkens's glance rested lovingly on Bob Houck for an instant while two youths dragged a phonograph to a place of prominence.

Mr. Houck was supremely unconscious, however, absorbed in listening to Effie's pretty exclamations of wonderment as to what was about to happen. A record was carefully produced, while the machine was wound up with much ostentation.

Mr. Pilkington and Miss Lyon were all attention, as was every one else.

The first words of the record were not thoroughly appreciated. The voice was familiar, the words plainly spoken, but their import was vague.

The first person to recognize the voice was Mr. Pilkington.

It was his own. Yes, those words of endearment were his.

The next to recognize it was Lucy. Soon every one there knew that Mr. Pilkington was speaking from the machine.

It was a most unusual soliloquy.

"My darling," the record was saying in Mr. Pilkington's richest and grandest tones, "here I am in Chicago, working for you, for you winning a home and a place in the world. I told you before I went away that it was you, just you, little girl, I loved. I live every minute of the day and night for you.

"It'll be a hard struggle, making a home for you in Chicago, but I'll do it and come back and marry you. With your sweet self in my heart all things are possible. Here are kisses I send you, my angel face."

Smack! smack! smack! went the machine.

There were roars of laughter.

Much of the rest of the record, words and smacks of the same tenor, was lost in the laughter of the audience.

Lucy Lyon did not laugh. She was thrilled with a thrill that the angels might envy. She could see the whole wonderful and delicate compliment he was paying her. Their engagement was still a secret, yet her dear Charles had taken this means publicly to declare his love.

Of course, he had been too discreet to mention her name, but the compliment, the delicate public expression of his love, was grand. She thrilled with joy and pressed his cold hand to hers.

If Lucy could be called the positive pole of happiness, the title of the negative pole could be claimed without dispute by Charles Algernon Pilkington.

He knew that record well, it was built of such warm heart-throbs that he had thought its wax had melted long ago in its own heat. He had been told all had been destroyed, yet this it seemed had escaped. Well, it didn't compromise him. He was willing to acknowledge it as his.

He would even go farther, he would punch that Houck boy's face until it resembled a Chicago packing plant on a busy morning.

Hush. The performance is not over.

Mr. Filkens is speaking while a new record is being put on the machine.

"While some think that we here have our hero at his best," he declared in the didactic tone of the professional lyceum lecturer, "many hold to the belief that the next one shows more of that fidelity to nature which so characterizes him. I belong to the latter school of critics, seeing in this second record a depth of feeling, a sustained exaltation of spirit, a continuity of passion quite without a parallel.

"The period of life is different, as you can gather from the *tempo,* discerning at once that the crescendo movement of fate has carried the protagonist up to and through that compelling crisis from which he falls back baffled for the time being. As we sit here this evening I think you will agree with me

that we have here the best modern example of that Greek idea of Nemesis of which the classic dramatists were so fond."

Some one snickered. Mr. Pilkington thought it was Bob Houck.

"These records are to be interpreted as being part of a series passing between a young man in Chicago and a young woman of whom he was enamored," explained the lecturer, "but who cared nothing for him. It was his idea that they exchange original phonograph records, and in this she acquiesced until the fervency of his appeals caused her to desist."

Miss Lucy Lyon sat bolt upright and withdrew her hand. At that moment the machine started and all hung breathlessly on Mr. Pilkington's words.

"I haven't heard from you for a long time, Augusta," Mr. Pilkington was pleading. At the mention of Miss Houck's name Miss Lyon turned red, then white.

"I don't know what to make of it. What does it mean? And then that last record you sent was cracked, just as my heart is."

In the laugh that followed much was lost.

"I've never cared for any one else, Augusta, and I never will—no, never! You know I've always loved you devotedly and am coming back to marry you some day, no matter whether you want me to or not. I love you—love you—love you!

"Oh, Augusta, you can make me so happy and you are making me so miserable. No matter what happens, it's you I'll love always! always! always! till the stars in the heavens grow old and cold.

"Are you mad because I wrote to Agnes James? Why, I don't think any more of her than I do of that snub-nosed, freckle-faced little Lucy Lyon, and you know I laugh at her because she is just a kid and her ankles wobble when she walks."

A shout went up that shook the chandelier.

Mr. Pilkington made a leap for the machine, Filkens and Bob Houck trying to prevent him.

Down the three went, knocking over the instrument in their fall.

Mr. Pilkington heard the record crack when it hit the hard-wood floor, and, his purpose accomplished, was happy.

Yet the happiness of Charles Algernon was not all wool and a yard wide.

When he rose with the good grace to laugh at the matter as a joke, not wishing to kill Bob Houck before the ladies, he looked in vain for Lucy.

At last he found her in the hall where her cousin was helping her put on her wraps.

"Lucy!" he exclaimed, holding out both arms grandly and supplicatingly.

"Go away, I hate you!" she cried

At ten minutes of eleven Mr. Pilkington sat in a dark corner of the depot waiting for a train for Chicago.

His Sofa Seat.

BY HELEN A. HOLDEN.

In Which the Matrimonial Broth Is in a Good Way to Become Quite Spoiled by the Suspicious Head of the House

THE people, the streets, the whole city, looked hot and weary. Many of the houses had been closed for the summer, while many others appeared to be on the point of desertion.

It's all very well to look pleasant,
When life flows along like a song.
But the man worth while
Is the man who can smile,
When everything goes dead wrong.

"If I only keep on saying that over enough times, I may be able to adopt the attitude," muttered a young man who, in spite of heat and dust, was hurrying along. The task before him was enough to discourage any one. He would, doubtless, have realized its futility if he had had time to think it over.

But there had been no time. On the instant of hearing the news he had started out.

Given a person to be found in a city the size of Boston, the answer is very uncertain. He had a course to follow, but the field to be

covered was discouragingly indefinite. A beginning, however, must be made. So, choosing the nearest, most popular newspaper building, he hurried in.

Being suddenly confronted with the question of what he wanted, he realized that he had plunged headlong without taking time to form any definite plan of action.

"Has there been a lady here this morning —medium height, straight black hair, rather oldish, eye-glasses with black frame and heavy black cord?" he was beginning incoherently.

The clerk laughed good-naturedly.

It brought the young man to a realization of the absurdity of his position.

"I'll tell you how it is." The laugh had caused a sudden bond of sympathy to spring up between them. "You know the announcement was made in your paper last night in regard to Miss Patricia Stanhope's engagement to Harlan Holbrook?"

The clerk nodded. It had been one of the most important pieces of news the paper had received for many days.

Miss Patricia Stanhope, direct from one of England's most exclusive and illustrious families, had been the most conspicuous figure during the past social season. Her surrender had been sudden as it had been surprising.

The victor had been a Westerner; unknown, but reported as having unlimited wealth. Her retinue of suitors had been left breathless by the abruptness of the affair.

"I have reason to suspect," continued the young man, "that a person calling herself Mrs. Stanhope is going about, contradicting the report. I must get hold of her and stop the nonsense."

"Just wait a minute, and I'll see what I can find out," replied the clerk.

After what seemed an interminable time, he returned, explaining:

"No news contradicting the engagement has yet been received."

"Good." The young man sighed a deep sigh of relief. "Now, let me ask you, if such a report comes in during the day to ignore it."

"But if it comes from Mrs. Stanhope, we can hardly do that," replied the clerk.

"You evidently don't recognize me," the young man broke in. "I am Harlan Holbrook."

"Rather a complicated state of affairs," said the clerk. "But if the other newspapers get hold of the affair—you know, we'd hardly like to be behind them."

"Take my advice," Holbrook spoke convincingly, "and keep out of this. I can't explain the matter now, but I am willing to warn you. If you publish any contradictory report to-night, you'll have to back water to-morrow."

"It would never do"—the honor of his paper was at stake—"to have something come out in the other papers that did not appear in ours. We pride ourselves in taking the lead in everything of interest."

"If I get the other papers to withhold any mention of the subject till to-morrow—just over to-night—will you agree?"

"Under those conditions, yes," replied the clerk. "But how will I know whether you succeed or not?"

"I give you my word, that if a single paper refuses to agree I will phone you before your paper goes to print. But they won't," he added confidently.

"There's nothing like a bold front," he thought as he made his way down the street. "It sounds convincing. If I were even one-quarter as sure as I made out, I'd be serenely happy.

"I'm sure," his thoughts ran on, "that newspaper man never had an inkling of how really down and out I feel over this whole miserable affair. If he'd had the ghost of an idea of my positive shakiness over the thing, he never would have given me twenty-four hours' grace.

"I must someway manage to meet that interfering, meddlesome old Lady Stanhope"—his thoughts turned to the cause of his dilemma—"and bring her to terms. If necessary I'll visit every last newspaper office on this particular space of the earth's surface. She must be somewhere. Indefinite but not entirely hopeless."

He entered the office of the second newspaper on his list.

He learned that they had just heard from Mrs. Stanhope. She had phoned and contradicted the engagement not five minutes before.

It was with difficulty he identified himself as Harlan Holbrook to the satisfaction of the newspaper man who listened to his story. Before he finally succeeded, he almost despaired of persuading him to delay Mrs. Stanhope's message the necessary twenty-four hours.

When he left the building, he leaned for a moment against a near-by iron railing. Using his soft Panama, he tried to fan himself into a less exhausted state of mind.

"The hardest day's work I ever put in,"

he muttered savagely to himself. "When I finally catch up with that future mother-in-law of mine, I'll make her sorry for giving me this chase."

So through the hot forenoon Holbrook visited building after building, and office after office.

Why they were persuaded, or how he did it, he never could tell. But in the end he had gained a promise from each of the leading papers. All others agreeing, each would postpone publishing the news denying the engagement for the next twenty-four hours.

It showed the force of the Westerner's personality. For any news regarding Miss Patricia Stanhope had been eagerly sought and published at length.

At last, triumphant, but footsore and weary, Holbrook turned his steps toward the station. It would feel good to be home again. The resort he had left in the early morning hours, he thought of as unusually cool and pleasant.

On reaching the station there was not a second to spare. He hastily grabbed his railroad and chair-car tickets, and swung himself on the last car of the train as it pulled out of the station.

When he finally identified his chair-ticket with the only unoccupied seat in the car, he groaned in spirit.

"If they only knew what I had been through to-day," he gasped, "they never would have had the heart to try to tuck my six feet one into that abbreviated, withered, shrunken end sofa.

"However, being too far gone to stand, I'll have to fit myself as gracefully as possible into the limited space. In the process I'll try to do as little damage as I can to my *vis-à-vis*.

With a muttered apology to his neighbor, he adjusted himself as carefully as possible in the narrow space.

"It's as bad as trying to fit together one of those jig-saw puzzles," he remarked genially, looking up.

To his utter astonishment, but unbounded delight, he encountered the stony glare of the one person he had been tramping the hot and sunny streets to meet.

"To think," he murmured to himself, as he generously tried to shift his feet an impossible two inches, "that my democratic shoes have dared to crowd the august boots of the Hon. Lady Constance Stanhope."

Aloud he said: "Mrs. Stanhope, you are just the person I wanted to see."

Mrs. Stanhope, ignoring his hand, tried to ignore his presence. But in the limited space between her chair and his sofa it was impossible. All that she was able to turn was her head.

She glanced to the right and encountered her own haughty stare in the mirror between the windows. It was not to be endured.

"If you were a gentleman"—the proper attitude of disdain was somewhat lost by reason of the close proximity of the object of her scorn—"if you were an English gentleman," she corrected, "you would not stay when you perceive you are crowding and not convincing a lady."

"I regret being the cause of your inconvenience"—mentally Holbrook made the reservation that it was no more than she deserved after what she had put him through that morning; "but if you will only explain this sudden and mysterious action on your part, I would be everlastingly grateful."

"I am not used to having my actions questioned by any one." Mrs. Stanhope again made an ineffectual move to shut Holbrook out from such a disconcertingly close range of vision.

"You're cornered all right," he gleefully remarked to himself. "But, just to make you feel more amiable, I'll give you a few minutes' respite."

"I'll hunt up a porter," he remarked aloud, "and see what he can do about getting me another chair."

A porter was found at the lower end of the car.

"Train pretty full?" Holbrook inquired anxiously.

"'Deed it is," replied the porter. "Sorry, sir, but I'll see what can be found."

"That's all right," and Holbrook slipped the man a bill. "Here's a dollar, to lead you to me at the end sofa in about five minutes. Don't look very hard in the meantime. Then come to me and explain that the train is so crowded there is not a ghost of a seat anywhere. Understand?"

A broad grin on the porter's face was sufficient answer. Why the gentleman wanted to crowd himself in such an uncomfortable place was none of his business.

On his return Holbrook explained to Mrs. Stanhope that the porter would let him know immediately if there was any vacant seat. Silence fell between them, and lasted until the man arrived.

"Sorry, sir," he explained, "but there doesn't seem to be a single empty chair."

"As I am forced to intrude myself on you"—Holbrook turned to Mrs. Stanhope

as soon as the porter had gone—"you don't know what a relief it would be to talk things over. You must admit that if I have done something to annoy you, it is only fair to tell me and give me a chance to explain.

"Only yesterday," he hurried on, "everything was all right. Patricia and I were happily engaged. You seemed perfectly satisfied with me as your daughter's choice. Everything was all right, and we were accordingly happy.

"We had such a perfect day on the yacht yesterday. I counted on a whole summer of just such days. Then came Patricia's note this morning, saying it was all off—everything at an end."

"Please remember she is now Miss Stanhope," interrupted the mother frigidly.

"Miss Stanhope," Holbrook corrected, "would not even see me. She merely said that you, for good and sufficient reasons, had decided that the engagement must end. That you had already started for town to see to having the papers deny the report. Did I do something unpardonable yesterday? If I did, my only excuse is that, being so particularly happy, I was not quite accountable."

Mrs. Stanhope remained silent.

But Holbrook thought he detected a softening of her previous hard, stern expression.

"If it is something I am unable to explain," he continued, "I will say I am sorry and go away and not bother you any more. But if I can, don't you think, Mrs. Stanhope, you owe me the chance to explain?"

"The trouble is," Mrs. Stanhope said at last, "there is no explanation possible. It is just something that cannot be altered and has to be endured. I realize we went into the engagement too precipitately. I ought to have taken time to find out, before it was so late. Believe me," she broke off, "I have thought it over. I would have given you the chance to explain if I had seen any possible loophole for you."

"But you must realize that I can't"—Holbrook added to himself, "and won't"—"give up Pat—Miss Stanhope, without knowing why I am doing it. There would be a certain satisfaction in knowing, even if I can't explain, you know."

"If you feel that way about it," replied Mrs. Stanhope, "I will tell you. But I warn you it will probably hurt your feelings."

"Not half as much as not knowing."

Holbrook held his breath while the dread secret was revealed.

"When we landed yesterday for our shore dinner"—Mrs. Stanhope spoke rapidly, as if she would be glad to put an end to the unpleasant subject—"the cook suggested something—flapjacks, I think he called them. You replied: 'By all means, and I will turn them.' Then you said to me that, coming from a long and illustrious line of cooks, you were an expert at making—er—flapjacks. You did seem to do it with a practised hand."

Holbrook put back his head and laughed and laughed. The people sitting nearest in the car smiled in sympathy.

"It's all very well for you Americans to be democratic," Mrs. Stanhope continued; "but it would hardly do in England to introduce the son of a former cook as the husband of one's daughter."

"What did Patricia say"—Holbrook was grateful not to be corrected as the name slipped out—"when you told her?"

"I do not propose being subjected to any examination on the subject," replied Mrs. Stanhope frigidly.

"I know what she said." Holbrook was very much excited. "She said she didn't care what my ancestors were. She was marrying me—not them. But you made her give in. Oh, I know she never willingly wrote what was in that note."

"In England the daughters have respect for their mothers' wishes." Mrs. Stanhope spoke as if the conversation were at an end.

"The very possible explanation is that I am an utter idiot," Holbrook began. "That remark was meant to be funny. As you see, it was not. My mother's maiden name was Cook. It is an excellent old family name in New England. If you will only look it up, I should be proud and happy to have you."

"But I don't understand." Mrs. Stanhope was still puzzled. "Why should it help you to make flapjacks because your mother's name was Cook?"

"It didn't." Holbrook quickly gave up trying to explain the pun he had unwittingly made. "It was just a stupid remark. I humbly beg your pardon for it, and ask you to reinstate me in my former exalted position."

When Mrs. Stanhope suddenly bethought her of her morning's work, she exclaimed:

"What about the report I sent to the various papers, contradicting the engagement?"

"I'll arrange all that," replied her future son-in-law confidently.

"But it is too late now," persisted Mrs. Stanhope, "and it will be absurd to have the engagement announced in one paper, con-

tradicted in the next, and reported again in the third."

"Of course, it would have been better if you had spoken to me about it in the beginning." Holbrook hoped this would be a warning for the future. "But just leave it to me."

He did not think it necessary to tell his future mother-in-law that the matter had already been settled.

As he sat back, tired mentally and physically, he looked at her through half-closed lids.

"There is something else that it is not necessary to tell you," he was saying to himself, "but some day in the future, when I have Patricia safe from under your cast-iron thumb, I may feel like making you wriggle, my proud and haughty dame. I may feel obliged to change the Holbrook coat of arms from its present fictitious form. I'll adopt a skillet and saucepan crossed. I should like to do honor to Grandfather Holbrook, who made honestly every penny of the pile I am now enjoying, not as a cook, but as a restaurant-keeper."

Mrs. Scales Takes a Flier.

BY C. LANGTON CLARKE.

The Independent Lady Is Foolish Enough to Trust Herself to Wall Street's Bulls and Bears, and Leads a Couple of Lambs to Slaughter.

MR. SCALES, with a cigar between his lips and the evening paper neglected on his knees, watched his wife with an air of ill-concealed impatience, as she sat at his desk engaged in some apparently abstruse calculations.

"What on earth are you doing?" he demanded at last. "Working out the orbit of Halley's comet?"

Mrs. Scales, enjoining silence with a wave of her pencil and a deepening of the frown upon her brow, continued to add and subtract until she had completed her task, and then turned to her husband.

"I am trying," she said at last, "to work out how much you owe me."

"Owe you?" shouted Mr. Scales. "Owe you? What on earth do you mean? Didn't I give you your allowance only three days ago?"

"Certainly," responded Mrs. Scales cheerfully, "but this is something altogether different. What is twenty per cent of a thousand dollars?"

"Two hundred dollars," said Mr. Scales in grudging accents. "What do you want to know for?"

"Because," replied his wife, "that is exactly the amount you owe me. I have worked it out in two or three different ways."

Mr. Scales, half rising from his chair, allowed his paper to slide from his knee.

"What on earth are you talking about?" he demanded sternly. "Two hundred dollars? I don't owe you a cent?"

"Oh, yes, you do, George," responded Mrs. Scales, settling herself comfortably back in her chair. "Please don't think that I am so easily fooled as all that. You remember our bargain."

"Bargain?" echoed the harassed husband.

"You remember it well enough, George," replied Mrs. Scales coolly. "It's no use pretending you don't. When I objected to your going in for speculation in stocks you promised me that, if I would not bother you about it, you would give me twenty per cent of all you made."

"And how do you know," demanded Mr. Scales witheringly, "that I have made a thousand dollars? Have you had a private detective looking up the books of all the brokers in town?"

"No, I haven't," replied the wife; "but a few days ago I overheard you and Mr. Butterworth talking about a deal you had been in. I'm not much good at arithmetic, but I can

put two and two together. This morning I met Mr. Butterworth down-town, and pretended to know all about it.

"I told him how pleased I was that you had been so lucky. I couldn't say clever, because I don't believe you know any more about the stock market than a baby, George; and in a very short time I got out of him that you had made a thousand dollars on Amalgamated Bakeries. What is Amalgamated Bakeries, George? Can we get our bread any cheaper?"

Mr. Scales, after a wordless soliloquy, in the course of which he consigned his old friend Mr. Butterworth to a fate which his worst enemies had never contemplated for him, admitted that he had made a fortunate speculation.

"But that twenty per cent jolly was all nonsense," he insisted.

"It wasn't nonsense at all," replied Mrs. Scales in decided accents. "A bargain is a bargain, and I want my share."

In vain did Mr. Scales advance a succession of arguments to prove that this particular deal was exempt from the terms of the bargain which he asserted was never intended to be carried out. Mrs. Scales was adamant, and after her husband had exhausted himself in unavailing protests, he finally produced his check-book and wrote a check for the stipulated amount.

"And now," he said sneeringly, as Mrs. Scales, folding the check with great precision, tucked it away in the bosom of her dress, "I suppose you will be rushing down-town first thing to-morrow and blowing that in on hats and dresses."

Mrs. Scales shook her head.

"I'm not going to do anything of the kind," she said. "I made up my mind that when I got this money I would buy some stocks myself. If you can make money, George, I'm sure I don't see why I can't."

"Oh, indeed?" replied the husband. "And may I inquire whether you have selected any particular stock to bull or bear with that two hundred? Or perhaps you have got a private tip from some millionaire friend?"

"You don't need to show your nasty temper, George, just because I wouldn't let you wriggle out of a fair bargain," replied Mrs. Scales. "I don't know what you mean about bulls and bears. I suppose that is some stock-market slang, but I do know that I am going to look through the list in that paper you have there, and pick one out."

Mrs. Scales held out her hand for the paper, and, Mr. Scales having yielded it up with a very bad grace, she proceeded to scan the stock lists. Commencing at the top she laboriously followed the first half-dozen securities along the columns of opening, high, low, and closing quotations, tracing the lines with the end of her forefinger, and finally desisted.

"I can't make head or tail of this," she said petulantly. "What are you grinning at, George?"

Mr. Scales, hastily composing his countenance, recommended a perusal of the half-column of expert advice which introduced the Wall Street news to the readers, and Mrs. Scales complied.

"This is as bad as the other, George," she said, after wading through several paragraphs. "I never saw such jargon as this man writes. Oh—" she paused to mark a line with the point of a hairpin and looked brightly at her husband—"here is one! Listen.

"'Evening Star looks good for an upturn.' What on earth is Evening Star?"

"Evening Star," replied Mr. Scales, not sorry to be able to air his knowledge, "is the brokers' name for 'Eversley, Vermont, and Grand Southern Terminals Railway.'"

"I never thought stock-brokers had such poetical minds," replied Mrs. Scales. "Evening Star! It's a perfectly lovely name. I'm going to buy some of that."

"Surely," cried Mr. Scales aghast, "you're not going to buy a stock because it has a pretty name?"

"Partly," replied the wife, "and partly because this man says it is good for an upturn. I suppose that means that it will be worth more in a short time. I may be very stupid, George, but I can gather that much."

"Good Heavens!" cried Mr. Scales, "do you mean to say that you are going to chuck away my money—oh, all right, your money, if you prefer it—on a security which has nothing to recommend it but a fancy name, and a tip from some hireling in an evening newspaper?"

"What do you know about Evening Star yourself, George?" demanded Mrs. Scales.

"Nothing," replied Mr. Scales loudly. "Nothing at all. I don't want to—"

"I thought you didn't, George," interrupted Mrs. Scales acidly. "I am glad to hear you admit once in a way that you don't know anything about something. Well this man does know—that's his business, and if he says Evening Star is going up I choose to believe him.

"I have some faith in human nature, George, if you haven't. I don't think everybody is trying to deceive, though sometimes,"

and she rather ostentatiously extracted the check and glanced at it, "I am tempted to think so."

"But don't you understand," expostulated Mr. Scales, "that in the stock-market no one can be sure of anything? Don't you—?"

"It's no use your talking any more, George," retorted Mrs. Scales with an air of finality. "I have made up my mind—I am going to buy Evening Star. How much can I buy?"

Mr. Scales, taking the paper from his wife's hand with a demeanor bordering on the sulky, scanned the stock list and handed it back.

"The stock is at sixty," he said. "You can't buy on less than a ten-point margin. That means that you can buy twenty shares."

"What do you mean by a ten-point margin?" demanded his wife, and for the next half hour Mr. Scales was engaged in explaining the system of speculation on margin on the stock exchange.

"Now do you understand?" he demanded at the conclusion of his lecture. "You give the broker ten dollars on each of the twenty shares you buy. Every time the stock goes up a point you make twenty dollars. If it goes down to fifty your two hundred dollars is wiped out unless in the meantime you have put up more margin to cover. Is that plain?" Mrs. Scales, who had followed her husband's somewhat obscure explanations with fascinated interest, nodded.

"I think so," she replied in a somewhat dubious tone, "but you know, George, you are not very illuminative. However," she added brightly, "the broker will explain it to me a good deal better to-morrow."

"It's not very often," retorted Mr. Scales, "that you can find a broker with a whole day at his disposal. May I inquire who the fortunate man is?"

Mrs. Scales, ignoring the sarcasm, replied that she knew a broker who would be very glad to help her, and that she was quite capable of attending to her own affairs.

To Mr. Scales's argumentative attempts to controvert this proposition she turned a deaf ear, and finally cut his remarks short by walking out of the room.

II.

"WELL," said Mr. Scales as he and his wife faced each other across the dinner-table the following evening, "did you put through that deal of yours on Evening Star?"

"Certainly I did," replied Mrs. Scales. "I'm not like you. When I say I will do a thing I do it."

"I've noticed that," replied Mr. Scales, "particularly when it's something you shouldn't do. I suppose you are prepared to say good-by to your two hundred."

"My five hundred," corrected Mrs. Scales coolly.

"Five hundred?" cried Mr. Scales. "Are you crazy?"

"Not at all," replied Mrs. Scales. "But two hundred dollars seemed such a miserable little sum to speculate with. You know I had four hundred in the savings bank, so I just took three hundred out, and added it to that two hundred that you tried to cheat me out of."

"Well, of all the imbecile transactions—" Mr. Scales was beginning, when Mrs. Scales cut him short.

"George," she said severely, "you will oblige me very much by dropping the subject. You may be very clever and very talented—I've heard people say so and tried to believe them—but I don't want any lectures or criticisms. The money was my own, and if I lose it, well and good. In the meanwhile it might be as well to wait and see before prophesying all kinds of disasters."

Mr. Scales subsided with a mutinous scowl, and for the remainder of the meal conversation languished.

"By the way, George," said Mrs. Scales, as they settled themselves comfortably in the study after dinner. "Mr. Butterworth telephoned his afternoon that he would drop in to-night."

"Did he?" replied Mr. Scales. "I'm glad of that. I want a few minutes with Butterworth to tell him what I think of him. If it hadn't been for his disposition to blab everything he knows, that two hundred dollars would have been still safe in my bank instead of a crazy investment, and your three hundred would have been still in your bank. I'm glad he's coming in."

Mrs. Scales was about to enter on a defense of Mr. Butterworth, when the door-bell rang, and a minute later a stout, middle-sized, jovial man of middle age, immaculately dressed, entered the room.

Mrs. Scales greeted the newcomer with great cordiality, but Mr. Scales regarded him with a look of great severity.

"Well," he said, "what have you to say for yourself?"

"I usually," replied Mr. Butterworth, "have plenty to say for myself. Kindly condescend to particularize."

"Why," demanded Mr. Scales with laborious distinctness, "why did you tell Mrs. Scales that I had made a thousand dollars on Amalgamated Bakeries?"

"Why shouldn't I?" replied Mr. Butterworth hardily. "I hope, Scales, you are not one of those husbands who hide things from their wives that they ought to know? Besides," and he turned a reproachful gaze on Mrs. Scales, "I was led to believe that your wife knew all about it."

"You shouldn't have allowed yourself to be fooled," said Mr. Scales sharply. "It seems to me, Butterworth, that when a woman takes you in hand to pump you, you are about the easiest proposition in this State."

"That," responded Mr. Butterworth good-naturedly, "comes of my susceptible, ease-loving nature. And, anyway, what difference does it make?"

"It makes this difference," replied Mr. Scales morosely, "that I am just two hundred dollars out by your blabbing."

"Explain," said Mr. Butterworth.

"I will explain, Mr. Butterworth," interrupted Mrs. Scales. "A short time ago Mr. Scales promised me twenty per cent of all he made by stock speculation. He wanted to cheat me out of it, and now he is angry because I found it out, and made him give me the money he promised."

"And this," said Mr. Butterworth, raising his hands in pious horror, "is the man whom I have hitherto looked on as the *beau idéal* of chivalry and honor."

"That's all very well," replied Mr. Scales resentfully. "It's not so much the money I mind, as the use which it has been put to."

"I am quite sure," declared Mr. Butterworth gallantly, "that any use Mrs. Scales has put the money to is a good one."

Mrs. Scales laughed.

"I'll leave you to try to convince Mr. Scales of that," she said brightly. "He's like a bear with a sore head about it."

With a nod to the two men she left the room.

"What's it all about, Scales?" demanded Mr. Butterworth as he lighted a cigar. "Come, now, unbosom yourself to a true friend."

"True friend!" snorted Mr. Scales. "If you had only kept your confounded mouth shut, this wouldn't have happened."

"Mentioning incidentally," hinted the other, "what this particular calamity may be."

"Well, it's this way," explained Mr. Scales grudgingly. "I had to give up two hundred of the thousand I made by that stock deal, and as soon as Mrs. Scales had the check she decided that she would take a little flier in the market herself. She looked through the stock list and picked out Evening Star—you know that Eversley Vermont, one of the most stagnant securities on the list — because she took a fancy to the name.

"Then she drew out three hundred of her own this morning and went and bought fifty shares on a ten-point margin. What do you think of that for a gamble? Isn't it like a woman?"

"Humph!" grunted Mr. Butterworth, meditatively caressing his cigar.

"Is that all you've got to say?" snapped his host.

"That's not a bad kind of tip," said Mr. Butterworth at last.

Mr. Scales regarded him wide-eyed.

"What do you mean? he demanded.

"I mean this," replied the other. "You know it is an old gambler's maxim that a beginner usually pulls it off the first time. I noticed in the evening paper last night that Evening Star was tipped for a rise. I don't know but what, all things considered, I won't follow Mrs. Scales's lead this time."

This was such an entirely novel view-point to Mr. Scales that for some moments he was unable to comment on this unexpected development.

"You don't mean to say," he said at last, "that you would buy a stock on any such superstitious notion as that?"

"Why not?" responded Mr. Butterworth. "I have always entertained a sneaking admiration for the ladies at race-meetings who shut their eyes, prick their card with a pin, and back the horse whose name they happen to perforate. They win just as often as the knowing ones who figure on the dope. It's just the same in the stock market."

"Humph!" said Mr. Scales, who had a considerable admiration for the opinions of his friend. "There is something in that. I don't know but what, if you are thinking of trying your luck, I might take a little flier in Evening Star myself."

"What do you say," queried Mr. Butterworth, "to a thousand apiece on margin? I've got that much which is doing nothing just now but pulling in three per cent in the bank. How are you fixed?"

"I'll go you," replied Mr. Scales, after some deep thinking. "We'll buy some to-morrow; only," and he fixed a severe glance on his friend, "no blabbing this time.

"If the stock goes up my wife will make

quite as much as is good for her, and I don't want any more twenty-per-cent inroads on my winnings. You keep your mouth shut, please."

Mr. Butterworth had just concluded a solemn pledge to preserve the strictest secrecy, when Mrs. Scales returned.

"Well," she said brightly, "have you two made up your quarrel?"

"We have," replied Mr. Butterworth. "Mr. Scales has told me all about it, and we shall watch, with greater interest than you are perhaps aware of, the progress of your stock in the market."

"Thank you," responded Mrs. Scales. "You are indeed kind."

III.

For several days Evening Star kept up its reputation as one of the most inactive stocks in the market, but on the fourth day Mrs. Scales was surprised at the breakfast-table by an ejaculation of disgust and dismay from the lips of her husband.

"Good gracious, George!" she cried. "What on earth is the matter?"

"Matter?" growled her husband. "Look at this. Break of five and a fraction in Evening Star. Down to fifty-four and seven-eighths! What have you got to say to that, now?"

"I'm sure I don't know," replied Mrs. Scales placidly. "It's not my fault."

"Your fault!" howled Mr. Scales. "Who said it was? Do you know what it means? It means a loss of over two hundred and fifty dollars on that fifty shares of yours. And your broker will be calling on you for more margins. You needn't think I am going to put them up for you."

"It will be time enough, George," replied Mrs. Scales with dignity, "to refuse when I ask you. I don't see why you should get so excited. It's not your money."

Mr. Scales growled an inarticulate response, and for the remainder of the meal inveighed strongly on the folly of the inexperienced in venturing into stock speculation, to which Mrs. Scales listened with exasperating calmness.

Mr. Butterworth called to accompany Mr. Scales down-town, and to him Mr. Scales unburdened himself.

"Did you look at the quotation of Evening Star this morning?" he demanded with some fierceness.

"I did," replied Mr. Butterworth, "but there's nothing to get excited about. It will pick up again."

"I'm sure I hope so," replied the other gloomily.

"Isn't it charming, Mr. Butterworth," said Mrs. Scales with a laugh, "to see a husband taking so much interest in his wife's financial affairs? And do you know, when I told Mr. Scales I was going to buy the stock, he said he hoped I would lose my money as a lesson. I know now you didn't mean it, George."

Mr. Scales vouchsafed no reply, but hurried his departure, and during the walk down-town proved such an uncongenial companion that Mr. Butterworth seized the first opportunity which presented itself of ridding himself of his society.

On his arrival at his office he found a polite request from his broker that an additional five per cent margin would be acceptable, and, after a hurried consultation with Mr. Butterworth over the telephone, he despatched his office-boy with a check for the required amount.

Three times that day did Mr. Scales drop into his broker's office, and every time he found that Evening Star had suffered a still further break.

"What are we to do about it?" he demanded of Mr. Butterworth, whom he encountered on his third visit. "This is what comes of your ridiculous superstitions."

"Do?" responded his friend. "Why—put up more margins. The stock is bound to go up again. I don't purpose to lose my money without a fight for it."

"But suppose it takes a still further slump?" demanded Mr. Scales feverishly. "I'm no millionaire!"

"Keep up your margins," replied the other airily, "and try not to look as if the world was coming to an end. I never saw such a faint-hearted fellow."

He interrupted Mr. Scales's indignant disclaimer by turning to greet a local financier, who had at that moment entered the office.

"What do you think of Evening Star, Mr. Sallers?" he inquired.

"I think," responded the newcomer, a tall man with a sallow complexion, a hard eye and a bristly black chin-whisker, "that before long you'll have to reach up to touch bottom."

Mr. Scales, listening eagerly for the reply, gasped audibly.

"What have you got to say now?" he demanded, as Mr. Sallers turned away.

"Sallers doesn't know everything," replied Mr. Butterworth, whose confidence was somewhat weakened.

"And after that are you going to hang on?"

"I certainly am," replied Mr. Butterworth, "and I would advise you to do the same. I'm sorry for Mrs. Scales, though. I guess this will wipe her out."

"A good lesson for her," snarled Mr. Scales. "All this comes from her foolishness, and your nonsensical superstition and garrulousness."

With a muttered imprecation he turned on his heel, and flung out of the office.

IV.

DURING the next few days Evening Star dropped down the toboggan slide with a celerity which surprised the market generally, and drove Mr. Scales in particular to the verge of distraction.

"I don't see what you are making such a fuss about, George," said Mrs. Scales when for the twentieth time her husband concluded a scathing arraignment of the iniquities of the stock exchange. "Suppose I have lost my money?" It was upon that ground that Mr. Scales based his denunciations. "You are not losing anything by it."

"I'm not, eh?" responded Mr. Scales. "I suppose you think hundred-dollar bills are growing on the bushes?"

"They're not your hundred-dollar bills anyway," retorted Mrs. Scales. "And you take my word for it, things will turn out all right."

"You don't mean to say," howled Mr. Scales," that you are still in that Evening Star deal?"

"Why not?" demanded Mrs. Scales with exasperating simplicity.

"Why not?" shouted her husband. "Don't you know that at the price you went in you are about two thousand dollars shy? The stock has dropped to twenty. You don't mean to tell me that you have been putting up more margins?"

An enigmatical smile was the only reply vouchsafed to his outburst.

On the following day Evening Star took another slide, and Mr. Scales, gasping for breath in his broker's office, saw it marked up at ten on the quotation-board.

"This," he said, turning to Mr. Butterworth, who stood at his elbow, "is what comes of listening to your fool advice. Now I am five thousand dollars in the hole. Why didn't you let me get out when I wanted to?"

"The stock will go up again," replied Mr. Butterworth dully.

"That's what you have been saying ever since we went into this fool speculation," said Mr. Scales in a rasping voice. "You're just like a parrot, and"—he laughed bitterly—"I don't believe you've got more brains than a parrot."

To this aspersion on his mental equipment Mr. Butterworth responded with considerable acerbity, and a breach of a lifelong friendship was imminent when the office-boy created a diversion by chalking up Evening Star at eleven.

"What did I tell you?" demanded Mr. Butterworth. "Didn't I say it was sure to go up again?"

"One point!" snorted Mr. Scales derisively.

But when, in the course of the next hour, the stock had recovered four points, he began to take a more hopeful view, and tendered a grudging apology to his friend, supplementing it with an invitation to dinner.

V.

MRS. SCALES, who appeared to be in the very best of spirits, welcomed her husband and his friend with effusion.

"Well," she said as she met them in the hall, "and what, by the latest report, is Evening Star doing?"

"I'm awfully sorry for you, Mrs. Scales," said Mr. Butterworth, as Mr. Scales appeared incapable of a reply, "but it dropped to ten this afternoon. However, we look for the best. It recovered five points in the last hour."

"That's good," said Mrs. Scales brightly. "I don't mean the recovery, but the drop to ten."

Mr. Scales and Mr. Butterworth regarded her open-mouthed.

"Good!" they echoed in unison. "What is there good about that?"

"Because," replied Mrs. Scales, laughing, "I told my broker to close out at ten. He advised it, and I believe in taking the advice of people who know."

"Do you mean to tell me," said Mr. Scales in an awful voice, "that you hung on till the stock dropped from sixty to ten, and then let go?"

"That," replied Mrs. Scales, "is exactly what I did."

"And how much," continued her husband in the same sepulchral tone, "do you reckon that you are out on this little stock-market flier of yours?"

"Out?" replied Mrs. Scales, with a look of surprise. "Why, nothing!"

Mr. Scales looked at Mr. Butterworth, and waved his hands feebly in the air.

"Isn't that a woman all over?" he demanded with a rasping laugh. "She buys stock at sixty, it drops to ten, and she says she isn't out."

"That's all right, George," said Mrs. Scales. "I could quite understand that; only you have made one little mistake. I didn't buy."

"What?" shouted Mr. Scales and Mr. Butterworth together. "Didn't buy?"

"No," responded Mrs. Scales. "You always do jump to conclusions so, George. When I went down that day to see Mr. Altringham, the broker — you know he is an old schoolmate of mine — he advised me strongly against buying Evening Star. He said he had private advices that there was likely to be a considerable drop in the stock, and he advised me to sell.

"Of course, I didn't know exactly what it meant, but I left it to him to decide, and he sold fifty shares short. I knew that every point the stock went down meant fifty dollars profit; and so, when you were pulling a long face every morning, George, I was having a good laugh in my sleeve. This afternoon I was down at his office, and he advised me to close out when the stock touched ten. Naturally, I took his advice."

Mr. Scales and Mr. Butterworth gazed speechlessly at each other.

"And," continued Mrs. Scales, with a delighted little laugh, "Mr. Altringham wrote me out a check for my winnings. Twenty-five hundred dollars! Think of that, George! And here it is."

She produced the check from a remote depository in her dress, and flourished it in front of her husband's eyes.

"Twenty-five — hundred — dollars," she repeated. "Aren't you just delighted?"

"And you mean to tell me," said Mr. Scales at last, in a voice to which emotion imparted a decided croak, "that all the time I was worrying about that confounded stock going down you were making money? Why didn't you tell me?"

"Because," replied Mrs. Scales coolly, "it was none of your business. And, besides, I wanted to give you a surprise. And I have, haven't I, George?"

"Surprise?" Mr. Scales could say no more, and wheeled sharply on Mr. Butterworth, who still stood open-mouthed and wide-eyed, staring at Mrs. Scales, as if he had seen a ghost.

"And this," said Mr. Scales bitterly, "is what comes of your old woman's fancies and superstitions, Butterworth—you ought to be knitting socks and reading fortunes in a tea-cup."

Mr. Scales's recriminations, trying to a sensitive nature, acted like a cold douche on the disordered faculties of Mr. Butterworth, and he drew himself up haughtily.

"If," he said, "you would try to bring what little reasoning powers you possess to bear on the subject, you would see that I was right."

"Right!" shouted the other. "Right—and us—"

Mr. Butterworth stayed the outburst with a gesture.

"I said," he continued, "that beginners in any gambling game usually pulled it off the first time. Mrs. Scales has pulled it off, and if we failed, it was because Mrs. Scales, doubtless with the best intentions, misled us."

"What on earth are you talking about?" demanded Mr. Scales, looking from one to the other.

"Oh, George!" for a light began suddenly to dawn upon her. "You surely don't mean to tell me that you were a bull on Evening Star?"

"You seem to have caught on to the market jargon pretty quickly," replied the husband bitterly. "Yes, I was a bull; Butterworth and I were both bulls—lambs I suppose you will call us now, for you seem to be posted in the slang. And we hung on till we had to buy outright."

"And how much did you lose, George?" demanded the wife.

Mr. Scales hesitated; and then, being unwilling to admit the full extent of the calamity, replied: "Five hundred dollars."

"Is that all?" cried Mrs. Scales, visibly relieved. "I was afraid it was serious, and I made up my mind that, as you gave me twenty per cent of your winnings, I would reciprocate by giving you twenty per cent of your loss. What is twenty per cent of five hundred dollars?"

"A hundred dollars," replied Mr. Scales bitterly, cursing his lack of truthfulness.

"All right," said Mrs. Scales with a protecting air. "I'll give you a check for it right away. And now, George, you must admit that I am a much better judge of the stock market than either you or Mr. Butterworth."

But to this proposition, both gentlemen were too crushed to make any intelligible reply.

That Affair at Spraycliff.

BY R. K. THOMPSON.

Being a Chain of Catastrophes, With Two Wedding Guests, a Detective, and a Burglar for a Few of the Links.

I'VE met with adventures a plenty in my time as a private detective, but I reckon more than half the number of thrills I've received to date came to me in a bunch, on one of the first cases I ever handled.

I was nothing but a green cub of a boy then—barely twenty-one.

Yet I remember the whole thing as though it happened just the day before yesterday.

On the eve of the Grillson-Vanderlupe wedding a long-distance call came into the office for a man to go out to the suburban residence of the Vanderlupes and do guard duty over the fortune in wedding presents there.

The man who'd been holding down that job for almost a week was suddenly laid up with an attack of acute indigestion.

It was only twenty-four hours longer that a watchman was needed for the display of gifts. The wedding was set for ten o'clock; the stuff was going to a city deposit vault the next morning; and almost any sort of a second-rate detective would do to play the part of a long-shot precaution against burglary overnight.

So they sent me.

Round six in the evening I landed at the great, rambling, red brick mansion, set back a couple of hundred yards from a bay which, breaking at high tide against a sheer wall of rock, gave the suburb its name: "Spraycliff."

The household was in a state of mild uproar due to the nearness of the big event, and I was taken to the servants' quarters and there deserted, without being introduced to the guests or the Vanderlupe family, either.

I was an abandoned stranger in the house. Naturally, the way I was received made me feel cheap.

Finding out that my brother sleuth was put to bed in a room up-stairs, I went to get from him a tip on what my duties were supposed to be. Smarting from the slight of having my arrival at the place treated as a matter of no importance (and afraid, boy-like, that he would suspect something of it), I put on an air of bluster when I entered the sick-room.

"I'm the man the office has sent to relieve you," I said. "Sorry you're sick. And now, to business! Everything, I suppose, is all right here in the house?"

The detective in bed rolled his slightly-gray head quickly round on the pillow and looked up at me. For a minute of silence his keen eyes took me in from head to foot.

And then his first words literally took my breath.

"Everything's not all right!" he declared. "This pain here in my side. The doctor calls it indigestion—but I've got my doubts about that. My doubts. You understand?"

I stared blankly down at him.

"Just what do you mean?"

"I mean that I think I'm poisoned. My food's been doped to put me out of the way. And, perhaps, you can tell what for?"

"It's a plot to steal the wedding presents!" I blurted.

"Shh!" he warned. "Not so loud!"

Beckoning me to bend over him, he went on:

"You've got the idea. There's a scheme afoot to make a raid on all that silver and jewelry down-stairs. And I'll tell you something else. The thieves are right here in this very house!"

"In the house?" I whispered, incredulous.

"Sure thing. How else could my food be tampered with, if it wasn't done from the inside? Now, I'm going to give you the names and descriptions of the two people I

suspect. They're guests here. And you want to spy on 'em, dog 'em every minute, and not give 'em a second's peace all the time you're here."

"Who are they?" I asked eagerly.

"One's name is Cromwell Peters, a long, lanky dude, eternally smoking cigarettes, who doesn't look as if he had the brains or ambition to figure out a way to harm a fly. The other goes by the cute little label of Percy Ashcroft. He's short and runs to fat, and he doesn't look any more dangerous than his buddy.

"But, you mark my words, they're a slick pair of crooks. I've been leary of 'em for the last few days, the way they've been chinning together in odd corners round this place. You want to ride hard on 'em, now, like I tell you; don't let 'em out of your sight once; keep—"

"When," I fairly panted in my excitement, "when are they likely to attempt the robbery?"

"To-night. It's the last chance they'll have. They both know the swag leaves the house to-morrow morning."

I straightened up suddenly.

"Then I'll get out of here right away and mount guard over those presents. Every minute is precious. Which way is the room the things are stored in?"

Taking the directions, I rushed away to the apartment on the second floor where the endangered treasures were on exhibition. I pushed open the door, which, luckily, was on the jar.

The room was occupied. Uninterrupted by my noiseless appearance on the threshold, two men in evening dress, their backs toward me, were engaged in surreptitious conversation over a table loaded down with a dazzling array of silverware, bejeweled ornaments, and the like.

One was tall and thin, and a curl of cigarette-smoke floated over his shoulder. The other was short and stout, and saying just then:

"In less than three hours, old man, we'll have turned the trick!"

"Unless we make a fizzle of it!" And Mr. Cromwell Peters threw away his cigarette. "How could we ever face our friends if we fell down on this?"

"Nonsense—don't think of failure!" cried Percy Ashcroft. "Come, it won't do for us to be found hanging about the scene of our soon-to-be crime. Let's join the others below!"

I whisked away from the door-sill, soundlessly pulling the door itself back in the position I had found it.

Out of sight around a bend in the hall, I watched the two gentlemen come out of the room arm in arm and go down-stairs.

I scratched my ear. What should I do? Go to the Vanderlupes with what I had heard, or wait till later and catch that pair of thieves in guests' clothing red-handed?

The latter course I decided upon as best. There would be no chance of escape for my prey if I nabbed them in the act of what they planned. And there would be more glory in that for me.

From then until the strains of the wedding march down-stairs announced that the marriage ceremony was under way, I never left the room in which the wedding gifts were laid out.

Then, reasoning that the two crooks must be below, and that watching them was the same as keeping my eye on the valuables they meant to steal, I went down to take a peep at the first fashionable wedding I had ever been near enough to see.

It wasn't more than five minutes all told that I stood behind the open drawing-room door watching the service. All that time I kept Mr. Cromwell Peters and his fat friend plainly in sight.

But when I returned to the room upstairs after a few moments' delay in finding it, due to my ignorance of how the house was laid out, I got the shock of my life.

The lights that I had left lit were turned out. Peering into the dark apartment, by a bar of moonlight that fell through the window, I could see the table on which I had last looked at the collection of presents.

And that table was stripped bare as a bone!

The silver, jewelry, everything, had been stolen. But, great Heavens—how? How on earth could the two gentlemen thieves, who, since I left the room, had not been out of my sight for more than the scant minute or two in which I had groped my way back to it—how, in the face of such impossible conditions, had they got away with every last gewgaw of that display of presents?

I stepped into the room and reached out my hand to snap on the lights from the switch within the doorway.

My hand was caught and bent behind me, the other joined it at the small of my back, and both my wrists were bound on the instant. A gag was clapped into my mouth. Then a black silk bag slipped over my head, and was tightly tied in place.

A voice—the voice of Mr. Percy Ashcroft—whispered on my left:

"We've got him!"

The easily recognizable tones of Cromwell Peters answered:

"Then let's get him away!"

Whereupon I was spun round and pushed out of the door, hurried down-stairs, past the closed rooms along the front hall, from which sounded the light laughter of the wedding party, and dragged through the outer door—into the cool night air.

II.

Two pairs of firm hands guided me across the veranda, down to the lawn, and swiftly over it in an unknown direction. My senses dulled by shock beyond resistance, I allowed myself to be drawn limply along by my captors in whatever course they were taking.

"Mind your step!" hissed Mr. Cromwell Peters.

We began the descent of a steep flight of many wooden stairs. The sound of water a ripple grew nearer and nearer. And I guessed that I was being taken down a rustic stairway that led, through a cut in the cliff-wall, to the bay.

Why was I being led thence? Why, indeed, was I a prisoner? The robbers who held me captive had made their haul, stolen the valuables they were after. It seemed as foolish, then, as locking the stable after the mare had gone, to capture me, who they perhaps suspected was on their trail.

But wait. Perhaps this explained it.

Maybe they understood how valuable it would be to their pursuers to have me, a detective, on the ground. And possibly they meant to put me out of the way, figuring on a delay in a chase after them if a fresh man had to be sent down from the detective agency in the city.

"Here's the pier!" said the man who had me by the left arm. "And there's Robbins, waiting in the motor-boat."

We came out, at the bottom of the steps, on a little dock. At its end I could see through the fine silk bag over my face the outline of a long, rakish-looking craft, in whose bow sat a dark figure.

"Ahoy, there, Robbins!" called Cromwell Peters. "We're here at last, ready to get off!"

There was no response—not even a movement—from the figure in the boat.

"What ails you, man?" cried Ashcroft impatiently. "Are you asleep? Look alive, will you, and let us come aboard."

The man called "Robbins" stirred.

"Well, come aboard," he growled, "if ye're goin' to!"

Peters gave an exclamation of displeasure at the rude retort. But all he said was:

"Get into the boat. We've no time to lose!"

I was lifted and set down in the stern of the low craft. My captors followed, one dropping on each of the seats in front of us.

My foot encountered a bulky something in the bottom of the boat. Contact with my toe produced from the "something" a light, metallic chink, and instantly I knew what it was.

A sack loaded with the looted wedding presents lay at my feet. The man addressed as "Robbins," who had been waiting for the gentlemen crooks with the treasure in the boat, was evidently their confederate.

I judged that he had been given the swag on a rope-end out the window of the room where I was caught, taken the bagful of valuables down to the pier, and left his "pals" to stay behind and take me prisoner.

"Now let her cut!" Peters was directing.

"Where d'ye want to go?" demanded the figure in the bow.

"Why, you've had your orders!" The gentleman was apparently surprised. "Steer down the bay and run in at Elmsport, as I told you this afternoon!"

The moorings were loosened, the engine emitted a series of asthmatic chug-chuggings, and I felt the boat tremble under me. We were off.

Where to? I hadn't the faintest idea. As helpless to guide my brain to a solving of the problem of my destination as I was to free my hands, ungag and unblindfold myself, I could only sit in rigid apprehension on my stern seat, and hope that I was going to escape from my predicament with my life.

The little pier having slipped away, Cromwell Peters turned round to face me.

"Don't be alarmed," he said, "about this mysterious journey you're embarked upon, Jerry!"

Jerry? Why was he calling me by that name?

"Take the bag off his head and the gag out of his mouth," suggested Percy Ashcroft, "and let's hear what he has to say!"

"First," said his friend to me, "let me tell you that it won't do you a bit of good to kick up a fuss. I'm going to keep your fists tied behind you, and you're out in the middle of the bay, where a row won't gain you anything."

He bent forward and began untying the bag around my shoulders.

"This is a little joke that Perce and I have planned. We've separated you from your blushing bride of twenty minutes, and we're taking you down the bay to Elmsport, where you're going to be left to get back the best way you can. Now"—pulling the bag off over my head and removing the gag with it—"tell us exactly what you think of the arrangements!"

I couldn't speak! I was too dumfounded by amazement. This was a joke!

Instead of being two thieves, bent on stealing several thousands dollars' worth of wedding presents from the home of their hosts, I had been kidnaped by mistake at the hands of a pair of practical jokers, who wanted the bridegroom instead.

"Suffering cats!" shouted Peters, getting a good look at my uncovered face. "This isn't Jerry Grillson at all!"

"Good Lord!" gasped Percy Ashcroft. "Jerry didn't get our note which we sent to decoy him up into the room with the wedding presents, and—and we've got the wrong man! This is awful!"

"Who are you, sir?" asked the other anxiously. "We owe you an apology, a very sincere one—"

"Then you took me for another man?" I blurted. "You shanghaied me for a joke—and you aren't a couple of thieves?"

"Thieves?" cried both in chorus. "What on earth put that idea into your head?"

I told them who I was, and repeated the story my fellow sleuth had given me.

"That's rich!" laughed the lean one of the two. "Why, that old detective has been a regular chum of ours since he came down to the house. We've been playing billiards with him the last few nights. Won a little money from him, too.

"And this is how he takes his revenge—sicks you onto us, tells you to keep snooping round us, figuring that you'd make our lives miserable by spying on our every move."

I remembered how I had come blustering into the fellow's sick-room. I saw now that he had taken me for the green youth that I was, that he had wanted to take me down a peg or two, and that he had told me the yarn he did just to hoax me.

My foot at that minute encountered again the bag of loot at the bottom of the boat.

"What is this bag doing here?" I asked sharply.

"Bag?" repeated Ashcroft. "What bag?"

"This one!" and I kicked it again.

Both the fat man and his friend bent forward and looked down at the thing.

"What the deuce is it?" asked Peters.

"I'll tell you what it is!" I answered. "It's every blessed wedding present that was on display back there at the house we've just left!"

"Impossible!"

"You must be crazy!"

"Lend me your knife, old man!" said Peters, sliding off the seat to go down on his knees in front of me. "I'll look into this thing right away!"

Before his companion could comply with the request, there was an interruption.

"Git away from that sack!" called the man in the bow, "and git away—quick!"

At the same time he gave the engine-lever a violent jerk, and the chugging of the motor abruptly ceased.

"What's the matter with you, Robbins?" demanded Peters, preparing to turn around.

"Quit callin' me 'Robbins'!" growled the man at the wheel of the now drifting boat. "That ain't me name, see; an' I'm tired o' bein' called it."

"Who—who are you?" faltered Ashcroft. "What have you got to do with this bag here?"

"What have I got to do wid it?" was the response. "Why, I own it. All I got to say to youse guys is that you've made more'n one mistake to-night. Youse took me fer the feller that was to be waitin' fer ye in this boat, didn't ye? Well, I fixed him. He's tied up an' hid away back on the sand next the pier.

"I come out o' that house just a second before youse. Runnin' away, I beat it down the cliff steps, out on the dock, an' found a man sittin' all alone in this here boat. Wantin' the craft fer me own personal use, I snaked the feller out of it an' put him out o' the way.

"Then I'd no sooner get on board than youse guys come runnin' up. I hadn't no more'n time to sit still an' make no noise, before youse was down on me an' gabbin' about comin' on board yerselfs. So I let ye. That's all!"

"Then you," gasped Cromwell Peters, "are a—"

"Burglar!" supplied the other. "That's right, friends; you've called the turn. That bag there belongs to me, 'cause inside it is them weddin' presents that I stole all by meself!"

We were in a nice dilemma now—the two practical jokers and I, their victim.

All three of us were afloat in a motor-boat in command of a genuine crook.

The latter held in one of his hands, trained on our trio huddled before him, a shiny pistol, too.

And it was plain that the burglar was the master of the situation.

III.

"Now," said he, "all of youse sit where ye are, an' I'll run youse in at Elmsport an' shake ye. There won't be no trouble if one o' ye don't start it. But somethin's goin' to drop on the first man that gets funny in this boat. Now we'll git under way again!"

The robber attempted to start the motor, but the thing refused to work.

"Gee, that's queer!" he muttered. "What's wrong wid this engine? I ain't used to motor-boats, though once I used to be a chauffeur; but I don't git wise why this thing won't start!"

He bent over the engine. I saw Cromwell Peters flash a glance at Percy Ashcroft. The latter gave a slight nod.

And the next minute both of them leaped together from their seats and were on the burglar's back.

One wrenched the gun out of his hands. The other lifted him by the collar and threw him down on one of the seats in front of me.

"Now!" Percy Ashcroft panted. "Now you find the tables turned, don't you? We're in command of this little boating party, my friend. And you'll obey our orders!"

He leveled the pistol at the burglar's head.

"Since you used to be the driver of an automobile, and know how to run this craft, as we don't, come back here and take the wheel. Run us straight back to the pier we came from, or I'll shoot you!"

The crook gave a short laugh.

"I'll run this boat again if you gimme back me gun!" he said. "Otherwise, I won't lift me finger to set it goin'!"

"I'll give you three!" said the fat gentleman. "Remember, I'll shoot if you don't do as I say!"

"Look here, Willie boy!" growled the other, "I'm onto youse. You couldn't shoot me if you wanted to. Know why? Because a nice gent like youse wouldn't want to run the risk o' murder—the sight o' blood, even. So, just quit bluffin' an' hand over me iron!"

"And put you in charge of this boat again?" asked Ashcroft, biting his lips over the truth of the burglar's assertion that he did not dare shoot. "No, sir; we'll drift rather than do that!"

"Well, drift, then!" growled the crook. "That's what ye'll do, all right. Fer that engine's broke, an' ye can't fix it without me!"

I saw the fellow reach one arm down in the bottom of the boat, returning his hand like a flash to his pocket.

"We can't drift out here like this, Perce!" exclaimed Cromwell Peters. "This bay empties into the ocean, and we may be washed out to sea, for all we know!"

"Can you run the boat?" asked his friend.

"No."

"Neither can I. Can you?" turning on me.

"I don't know the first thing about it!" I replied.

"Then what are we going to do but drift and trust to luck that we'll be picked up out here?" demanded Ashcroft. "Unless we do that, we'll have to give this thug back his gun. That will put us completely in his power, and we'll be perhaps worse off than we are now!"

Followed five minutes of silence from us all. Percy Ashcroft had seated himself in the bow, the burglar had been ordered to move back one seat nearer me, where he sat in a sulking mood, and Cromwell Peters occupied his previous place.

The moon had gone behind a clump of storm clouds long since, and now the growling of the wind over the tops of the angry waves that lapped the low sides of our helmsmanless craft was a disturbing sound at best.

"Gad, I believe we are bound seaward!" ejaculated Peters at length. "The waves appear to be larger, don't you think?"

Out of the surrounding blackness came a sharp gust of wind, and with it the rain—sheets of it, that drenched all of us to the skin in a twinkling.

"Somebody come up and untie my hands!" I called through chattering teeth. "If this boat should capsize, I'd never have a chance between her and the bottom of the bay!"

Peters moved toward me with cautious slowness and released my arms. He apologized for not thinking of it before.

"Look out!" screamed Ashcroft suddenly.

His warning threw us all into a panic.

"We're about to be run down!" he shouted. "Look—look!"

There was nothing I could see in the pitch blackness before me. I turned my head, and my heart leaped into my mouth.

A dimly-seen bulk was towering above

the stern of the motor-boat. Whatever it was, it rushed upon us with a sickening speed.

I prepared a small prayer and started its recital. And then the thing struck us—and proved to be a pier, with a cliff wall rearing above it, into which we had drifted on the tide which was coming in, not going out to sea.

"Catch hold there, sir!" Peters cried to me, realizing our good fortune at once. "That's it!" as I snatched at the end of the dock and held the boat fast. "Now we'll be all right in a minute more!"

He clambered over me and stood upon the pier. A rope was found, with which the craft was safely moored. And then we three who remained on board followed the lanky gentleman and gained solid footing on the dock-head.

"What amazing luck!" exclaimed Ashcroft. "Here we've drifted right straight back to where we started. This is the Vanderlupes' pier!"

"I believe you're right!" said his friend. "Well, this is luck! Now we'll go up to the house, leading this burglar by the hand, and deliver up the bag of wedding presents safe and sound. Won't they think we're heroes, though, instead of blundering practical jokers?"

Reaching down into the boat, he lifted out the sack of loot.

"You go right ahead of me up these cliff stairs!" ordered Ashcroft, flourishing the gun before the crook's nose. "And let me tell you this: if you start to run I will shoot you this time. You'll be out of the immediate range of my delicate vision, you know, and so the sight of blood won't annoy me!"

Without a word—believing, perhaps, that this gentleman meant just what he said—the burglar started up the wooden staircase toward the top of the cliff.

The two gentlemen and I followed close at his heels. In two or three minutes we came out on the lawn in back of the house, and discovered the mansion itself, dark from roof to ground.

"Funny!" said Peters, looking at his watch. "It's just midnight. I can't understand why everybody should have gone to bed so soon!"

"We won't ring, then!" announced his friend. "We'll surprise them all by going in through a window, and then waking them up when we're inside with the stolen presents. Come on. Our burglarious companion here will exert a little of his skill, I'm sure, and open a window for us."

Around the side of the house we stopped. The thief obediently set to work on a sash. And soon we had an opening through which first he himself crawled, then Ashcroft with the pistol, after him Peters, and last of all myself.

"No sound, now," began the fat gentleman.

And just then a door opened into the room we had entered by such unusual means. There was the flashing of several lamps and lanterns in the hands of a number of servants and one gentlemen in a dressing-gown.

"Good evening, my friends!" said the latter. "I saw you come across the lawn, and I hastened to receive you. Welcome to Bagley Mansion!"

"Good Lord!" Cromwell Peters whispered. "We're in the wrong house—this isn't the Vanderlupes' place at all!"

"Our mistake!" murmured Percy Ashcroft. "The third to-night!"

"Hagget," said the man in the dressing-gown, "remove the pistol from this gentleman, who appears to be the leader of this party of midnight marauders!"

IV.

"We aren't burglars, sir!" said Ashcroft, perforce surrendering the weapon to the servant—armed, as were all the others—who stepped toward him. "We haven't come here with the intention of robbing you—"

"We didn't want to come here at all!" put in Peters eagerly. "It was a mistake—"

"I see!" interrupted our unwonted host. "That bag you have there in your hands, I suppose that is—not a set of burglar-tools, for instance?"

He motioned forward two or more of his servants. They took the bag from Peters's hands and opened it quickly.

"Bless me!" ejaculated the master of the house, seeing the silver and jewelry the bag contained. "You really are telling the truth, I do believe. Perhaps you didn't come here to rob me—since you had already robbed somebody else. Now, where did you get all this stuff—"

He broke off with a gasp.

"This piece of silver," he said, turning a plate over in his hands, "is part of a set I gave to Gwendolyn Vanderlupe for a wedding present. I'll swear I'm not mistaken. So that's where you got this bagful of loot—you've robbed my neighbor down at the other end of the bay, have you?"

"No, we have not!" answered Peters hotly. "If you'll let us explain—"

"There's nothing for you to explain!" the other cut him off.

"But you're mistaking us for thieves," expostulated Ashcroft, "and we're two gentlemen—"

"Admirably disguised, then!" cut in the man in the dressing-gown, evidently referring to the appearance of all of us, rain-soaked and bedraggled. "Really, I'm sorry that this storm has damaged my electric wires! I'd like to have a better light on you than these feeble lamps afford. Gentlemen, indeed!"

"If you'll give me a chance to say ten words to you," declared Peters wildly, "I can convince you that you're laboring under a misapprehension—"

"That will do!" said the other. "I won't hear a word from any of you. You came into my house through a window in the dead of night; you're carrying a bagful of wedding presents from my neighbor's house, which you must have robbed to get the things; and then you want me to stand around listening to you talk!"

He turned on his heel.

"Williams, Hagget, Rodgers!" he called to three of his servants. "Take these men down in the cellar and lock them up. They'll be safe there, I'll warrant.

"I'm going to put this silver and stuff into my safe up-stairs, and then telephone to the Vanderlupes that I have their belongings. After which we'll go back to bed and leave our prisoners to cool their heels in my steel-doored basement till morning!"

Before another protest was possible, we were carted off and shoved down cellar. The door—a foot thick, and made of metal, by some fad of the owner of the house, I suppose—was closed and barred upon us. And we were prisoners.

"Let the three of them stay down there till we send for the police in the morning!" the gentleman into whose abode we had blundered was heard to order from outside the door. "There's nothing to keep us up now—to bed, all of you!"

Striking a match, Percy Ashcroft found a candle-end on the floor, which he lighted. By its flicker Peters, the burglar, and I looked around at our surroundings.

"Well, we're in for it!" said the fat gentleman. "Here we're booked to stay till somebody unlocks that door, all right. There's no other way out."

"Well, it's a nice mess that we're in now, for a fact!" grumbled his friend. "I don't relish losing my bed for a bare cellar floor!"

Then followed a quarter-hour's discussion between the two gentlemen and myself—the real thief among us maintaining a sullen silence—over what was best to be done about our present predicament, the consensus of opinion being that the only thing we could do was make the best of things until morning brought the Vanderlupe party over to find us, we lay down to sleep.

Perhaps it was a half-hour later when I woke up. It couldn't have been longer, for the candle-end had not yet burned out. And by the flare of what remained of the end of the wick I made an astonishing discovery.

The burglar was gone!

I got up and ransacked the cellar from end to end. No use; he was not there. But I found the way he had gone—a narrow window at the other end of the basement, that had probably been forgotten by our jailers up-stairs, and that now stood wide open.

Rousing my companions, I apprised them of the loss of one-quarter of our original company.

"Heavens above!" cried Cromwell Peters, scrambling to his feet. "Do you realize what it means, now that the crook has escaped? Did you hear the owner of this house say, 'Let the three of them stay down there?' By the light of the lamps, and in the general confusion, I don't believe he saw the burglar with us at all.

"Think of that! When the Vanderlupes come over here in the morning, they will only find us here. We'll tell our story about capturing that thief. 'What thief!' will say our genial host at present sleeping. 'When these men came into my house, carrying your stolen wedding presents, there were only three of them!'

"Then what shall we do? What can we do to convince our friends that we aren't really crooks, turned so, perhaps, by the sight of all the wealth we saw represented in the gifts at the house in which we were guests?

"We can't do anything to prove our innocence of the charge of having stolen the stuff. We were caught with it in our possession, after running away from the house, weren't we? The circumstantial evidence is all against us!"

I saw the truth of that. And I, too, would be in a hole. Unknown to the Vanderlupes, when they arrived next morning they might not believe my statement that I was a detective—might think, even if I showed them my badge, that I had stolen it.

"There's only one thing to do!" I said. "Without that burglar, we're in an awful mess!"

"What's the one thing to be done?" cried Peters.

"Go after that thief and bring him back!"

They dashed to the window through which our quarry had gone, I after them. Swiftly Ashcroft was boosted up and his fat body pushed through and to freedom. Then Peters went through, and I followed.

On impulse, not knowing, of course, which way the robber had gone, we three ran around the side of the house to the front lawn. And no sooner had we got there than we halted.

Somebody was coming out of the front door. The figure slunk across the veranda. Then it was revealed on the lawn before us for a moment in full view.

It was the burglar. Over his shoulder he had the bag of presents. After leaving the cellar, he must have gone back into the house and cracked the safe he heard the owner say he meant to lock the stuff in.

"Well, you have to hand it to that robber for persistency!" whispered Percy Ashcroft. "This is the second time in one night that he's stolen the same thing!"

"After him!" added Peters, breaking into a run.

We followed. Evidently the burglar heard us, for he tore away through the darkness like a flash.

"He's running down the steps through the cliff wall to the bay—hear him?" shouted the lean gentleman in the lead of us. "Why do you suppose he's going down to the water?"

It suddenly flashed over me that I had seen the fellow bend down and put something from the bottom of the disabled motor-boat into his pocket. What it was I guessed.

When he turned off the power in the middle of the bay, he had done it so vigorously that the controller of the engine dropped off. Now he had that in his possession, he could board the boat and run off with it—if he got there in time.

I panted out all this to the two gentlemen as we ran down the steps in pursuit of the burglar.

Sure enough, I was right. We had barely got to the edge of the pier when we saw the figure ahead throw his bag down into the moored motor-boat. In he jumped after it, untied the rope, and the next second the coughing of the engine sounded.

With a triumphant yell, our quarry spurted out onto the water and disappeared.

"Here's another boat!" shouted Peters. "We'll chase him!"

"Another motor-boat?" asked Ashcroft.

"A duplicate of that other. Jump in—we're off!"

"Wait! None of us knows how to run the thing!"

"To the deuce with that! We can learn. Jump!"

On the word, the stout man and I landed in a heap in the craft which Peters had just then succeeded in waking to explosive action. With a breath-taking sweep, we cleared the end of the dock and headed out into the bay.

And the crazy pursuit of the burglar we had to have as a guarantee of our honesty was on.

V.

How we ever did it, I don't know.

But luck favored us, and our whole bundle of troubles was over in less than five minutes more.

The boat that we were in was a faster craft than that in which the crook had made his get-away. Peters simply kept the throttle wide open, the bow pointing in the general direction our prey had taken, and over the tips of the waves we skimmed.

Before we quite realized it, the black hulk of the other boat flashed back at us out of the darkness. We were overhauling it.

Just then another craft came dashing along from the direction in which we were headed. Voices sounded on board—

"It's a party from the Vanderlupes!" shouted Percy Ashcroft, recognizing a familiar tone of some one. "Ahoy, there!"

"Ahoy! What's wanted?"

"Stop that boat we're chasing! There's a burglar aboard who's got all your wedding presents. We're after him. You close in on the other side and head him off!"

The robber's boat slowed down and came to a full stop.

"I'll give up, folks!" his voice floated over the water plaintively. "There's too many of youse against me!"

By a miracle, Peters touched the right thing, and our own boat stopped. The Vanderlupes' second motor-boat picked up the one in which was the thief, and then bore down on us.

"We wondered where you two fellows had gone!" said Mr. Vanderlupe, at the wheel. "So you chased after the burglar we heard just now had robbed us? Well, well! I can't ever repay you for your service, Peters;

or you, either, Ashcroft! And who's that with you?"

Peter Ashcroft kicked me gently.

"This is a private detective who came down to the house this evening!" he answered for me. "You want to thank him, too, for the brave part he's played in pursuing the robber from the time that person first broke into your mansion!"

"Indeed, I do thank him!" said Mr. Vanderlupe heartily. "He'll be rewarded, all right. But, say—Bagley phoned to me a while ago. Said he had caught the thieves who had my children's wedding gifts; that he was going to lock the stuff up in his safe; and that there were three burglars down cellar, locked up, at his place. Do you know where this thief's two confederates are?"

Peters struggled to keep from laughing.

"We didn't see anything of them, sir!" replied Ashcroft. "But maybe they're still down in the cellar from which this one escaped!"

"Well, we'll go over to Bagley's to-morrow," said Vanderlupe, "and find out about that!"

"All right!" said Percy Ashcroft, adding under his breath, "I guess there's no chance of friend Bagley recognizing any of us for his recent guests when he sees us again in decent clothes that are dry!"

"I'm coming aboard you!" said the helmsman of the other boat. "I'll run you back to our house myself. I want to hear the story of what you did to capture this crook!"

Peters leaned forward and whispered to his chum:

"Do you think we can bribe Robbins when we get back to say nothing of our plan to kidnap the bridegroom?"

"Yes."

"And will—will our friend the detective keep quiet about this affair?" He addressed me directly. "Will you promise not to tell that we really caught the burglar by a fluke while we were plotting something entirely different?"

"You bet I will!" I answered in an undertone. "I've got that reward of Mr. Vanderlupe at stake. It would never do for me to give away the fact that I started out on another errand than the capture of that thief myself!"

Peters sat back with a sigh of relief.

"Call Vanderlupe over, then!" he said to Ashcroft, "and tell him the whole story. Don't leave out a single one of the hairbreadth chances we had to take to effect the wonderful bagging of that burglar! Go to it!"

Ashcroft laughed. Calling out to his host an invitation to board our boat, he cleared his throat.

"Watch me," he murmured, "go to it!"

The Worshipful Waiter.

BY JOHN WILSTACH.

A Kind-Hearted Youth Does a Lot of Good to Strange People and a Lot of Harm to Himself.

THAT waiter was a mystery to me, all right.

He played his part so well that I think I'll invite him to take part in a new sketch I am writing for presentation in a vaudeville house.

I don't know whether he can hand the goods across the footlights as easily as he touched the tender portion of my pocketbook—but it's easy to see why I'd take a chance.

After paying to see him act, I am not backward on applause.

I had started walking down Broadway from the point where the golden twinkle-lights begin, when I remembered that the stars were also out, and I had not yet dined.

It was curious that I had forgotten, for this time I could afford to partake of food in an atmosphere that soothed my soul as well as my hunger.

Perhaps you don't know Bill Darley, but

I bet you've had occasion to help pay for the rich velvet curtains that shroud the windows of his restaurant, and the lighted grapes hanging from the ceiling.

Feeling in a rash mood, I took resolution by the hand, sauntered through the open portal, and gave myself into the hands of my enemies—the bell-boys and waiters.

I hesitated and was lost!

A moment afterward I was relieved of my hat and cane, and given a numbered slip I must at a future time present at my peril without a shining coin which will be deftly pocketed.

It is always wise to avoid the head-waiter—if possible—as it is the duty of that personage to lead you to an assistant in the conspiracy whose smile in itself is a threat. So I waved him away.

Up in the gallery poor imprisoned musicians, wearing long locks as a sign of captivity, played mournfully on their instruments. As the music changed to a popular air I steered toward an empty table.

After I had seated myself, and had the menu thrust before me, I started to take a peep round.

At that table before me sat a beauteous creature whose beauty would have foiled the pen of a romantic novelist. Below the spreading brim of a creation that deserves a more imposing name than hat, bowed down as it was with both a flower-garden and ferns, I beheld a face that an artist might paint—not describe.

I know that she had wonderful auburn hair which had borrowed light from the vanished sunset, eyes that were unexplored pools of mystery, and a little crimson mouth. The information may also be supplied that she wore a green gown, and that the slender hands that had discarded gloves played with the menu. I was sure that I had seen and met her before, but possibly this thought was engendered by my loneliness.

At a little distance stood a waiter who might have served for a model of despair trying to make a bluff at bravery. Oh, yes, he tried to conceal that he was frightened, but I saw behind the mask.

I ordered an appetizer with an olive, and continued to study him.

The woman toward whom I had already directed admiring glances motioned to the flurried waiter, and his expression of fear changed. With an air of quiet submission he bowed over her table, and made suggestions as regards her order; she was plainly at a loss, like a being whose appetite was a thing of the past and needed coaxing to come to life. I felt that I would like to help bring it back by the power of hypnotic conversation, but went only as far as being eloquent with my eyes.

Before my astonished eyes he gestured frantically in his endeavor to persuade her to his way of thinking. He tapped with his finger several spots on the menu, while she shook her head, and smiled—I believed—at me!

With a motion of his fingers that tamed the menu-card the waiter laid it before her and stood with folded arms, ready to take her commands. I saw that he had done his utmost to help her make up her mind to ask for certain dishes, and, failing, his professional pride hurt, he now silently remained in an attitude of dejection.

For the first time I appreciated one of the disadvantages of being a waiter, and pitied the fellow heartily.

Unable to please this regal beauty, though he did his utmost, he had no opportunity to do the quick-disappearing act—as would an ordinary mortal—but was obliged to tarry near with part of his life-work unaccomplished.

In the eyes of his fellow waiters he was a failure; there was no doubt about that. Suddenly it occurred to me that I might help this distressed mortal, and at the same time round out a pleasant evening; for she surely seemed to need help in her loneliness.

I determined to dine with the lady myself, and see if I could make the course of dishes—and maybe, a thought suggested, the course of true amiability—run smoothly.

I wondered what should be the second move in the game of flirtation.

The first had been made when we looked at each other; she must have read admiration in my eyes, and I was sure I had seen a signal of interest in hers.

So I called the waiter.

He must have read my mind, because he was at my place before I'd decided on a plan of action. He stood attentively, with his weak, watery eyes fixed on me. I took out my card-case, extracted a card, and on it scribbled with a fountain pen the old formula: "Do you remember me?"

"Waiter," said I, "take this card to the lady at that table. You needn't ask for an answer."

She was giving me a full measure of attention as the waiter presented my card with a beaming look of comprehension on his face. The poor varlet hoped that his troubles would soon be at an end. They were!

I had asked if she remembered me—and she nodded! Everything would be plain sailing. I arose and strolled over to the vacant seat opposite her, excused myself, and carelessly made myself comfortable.

We greeted each other politely, as old friends will who have communicated for a long time by telegraph, and I mumbled some name under my breath so low that even my conscience couldn't hear it.

"You recall we met in the box of a mutual friend at the opera?" I ventured.

"Yes," though vaguely. She smiled maliciously to show me that she understood the old subterfuge. "Yet your face seems familiar to me."

"I have seen yours in dreams."

It was apparent that neither of us had yet started dinner. I called the waiter, and ordered—er—elaborately.

The appetite of my *vis-à-vis* suddenly showed signs of a present existence, and the courses came and went to a merry accompaniment of laughter. It was only in a hidden recess of my being that I feared the bill!

Lo! what a transformation in the waiter, who had flashed looks that varied from fright to dismay.

Now he was perfectly at his ease, and his demeanor when he presented me the bill—a horribly large one — was a calm one. I wrenched myself to imitate a similar manner of serenity, and parted with my wealth.

After I had tipped him, I saw Bill Darley, the proprietor of the place, who was a friend of mine, and excused myself to speak to him.

As I sauntered toward him I chanced to look back, and saw my companion chatting with the waiter, whose face had a rapt look of joy.

Darley greeted me with a grin.

"Hallo, old man!" said he. "Who is your friend?"

I stammered something, and he laughed uproariously.

"Helping out the waiter, eh, and enjoying yourself at the same time?"

"How do you know?" I replied. "Were you watching me?"

"As you're a good fellow, Dick, I'll let you in on the secret. Do you know who that woman is?"

"No. I suppose some wealthy widow, who wanders without a chaperon or companion."

"She always ends up with the latter. You know, we haven't been doing very good business lately, so we've called in some local talent to help us out on good, imposing bills."

I admitted ruefully I'd just paid one.

"Well, you're not the first. She aids us more than all the rest put together, and we pay her a good salary.

"Stung!" I howled. "But where does the waiter come in? That's what I don't understand."

Darley laughed again.

"The joke is on you both ways. They work together and divide the profits from the salary we give her and the money he makes on commissions and tips.

"Then, who is he?"

"Her husband."

A ROMANCE.

A CALM, delightful autumn night;
A moon's mysterious, misty light;
A maiden at her window height,
In proper robe of fleecy white.

The little wicket gate ajar;
A lover tripping from afar,
With tuneful voice and light guitar,
To woo his radiant guiding-star.

The lute gave forth a plaintive twang—
Oh, how that doting lover sang!
A bulldog with invidious fang—
A nip, a grip, and then a pang!

A maiden swooning in affright,
A lover in a piteous plight,
A canine quivering with delight—
A wild, delirious autumn night!

Eugene Field.

Guilt Circumstantial.

BY HARRIET LUMMIS SMITH.

One Woman's False Step Compels Another's Indiscretion, and Illustrates Once Again the Blindness of Man.

THE horses had covered the last half mile at a gallop. "Ten dollars if you make it," the fare had said, watch in hand. Later the cabman reflected with regret that, if he had hesitated, she would have said twenty.

He watched with shrewd gaze her flight down the grimy steps of the station, nor were his the only eyes that followed her. She was a handsome woman, and her well-fitting gown did justice to the fine lines of her supple figure. At the same time she was not dressed for traveling. And to take the ten-seventeen train without baggage, without so much as a hand satchel, was in itself sufficient to attract attention.

"Something doing," was the cabman's verdict, as the crisp bills crackled in his greedy clutch.

The woman in the lavender gown was hauled unceremoniously aboard the moving train, like a piece of belated baggage. She followed the porter to a seat, breathing fast. The lace on her bosom rose and fell tumultuously, and she looked about her uneasily, as if vaguely searching for some wrap to conceal the obvious unfitness of her costume. Then, with a slight shrug of her shoulders expressive of enforced resignation, she lapsed into thought, her eyes large and brilliant, rather than dreamy, her fingers interlaced, the laces stirring, as her breath came and went.

She paid a cash fare to the Junction, and as the conductor passed on, recalled him by a question.

"We get in at eleven-forty, I believe?"

His feet apart, for better balancing, he looked back over his shoulder. "At eleven-forty—if we're on time," he said with professional caution.

"On time!"

The simple words seemed to have drained the uplifted face of blood. The eyes widened as they stared. The gray lips dropped apart, and with the flight of her courageous self-sufficiency, the woman looked a frightened child.

"If we're on time," she said again. "But how can we lose time in so short a run?"

The fat conductor smiled upon her with a fatherly kindliness, for which her air of being very young and very much afraid was largely responsible.

"There's nothing sure but death and taxes, you know," he reminded her with reassuring jocularity. "But we try to make our trains a close third. Yes, I think we're pretty certain to be in on time."

The woman in lavender made an unsuccessful effort to return his smile. Beads of perspiration broke out on her forehead. She leaned back in her chair like one exhausted, and closed her eyes.

The south-bound train did not lose time on that run. When the lights of the Junction showed mistily orange, through the dark, the passenger in lavender had her watch in her hand. She drew a deep, exultant breath, and stood up, as if she could not wait for the iron wheels to cease their revolutions. Her color had come back. She no longer looked a frightened child. She was more than a handsome woman, inappropriately dressed for traveling—a creature on fire with eagerness for contest, already jubilant over victory.

She stepped off into the darkness blithely, not noticing the hand the fat conductor offered to aid her descent. It was a forlorn place, the Junction, its only excuse for existence the crossing of two railway lines, dingy and sordid by day, dreary and forbidding by night.

A solitary cabman lifted a raucous voice to draw her attention. A man in shirt-sleeves passed her, carrying a lantern. A

dog, a nondescript mongrel, sniffed inquisitively at her garments, and cast upward the shrewd glance of one who appraises his world.

But the woman was oblivious to all things but one—the tall figure of a man, standing apart in the shadows, like one who waits. She went directly to him, but he was not aware of her presence till she touched his arm. Then he recoiled.

"Mrs. Sinclair!" The welcome was hardly what would be expected from a man still young to a lovely woman. There was consternation in his tone. One guessed that he would have gone far to have avoided the encounter. After he had gasped her name, his returning self-possession lent the semblance of cordiality to his tone as he said: "This is certainly a surprise. Where's Sinclair?"

"I am alone," said the woman composedly. After an instant she added, "I take the midnight train west."

He stared at her aghast. The unexpectedness of her attack left him at her mercy. Against the murky gloom of the night, his face was a pallid blur.

"Let us go where we can sit down," suggested Mrs. Sinclair, "and where we can see each other."

He might have replied that she already had sufficient advantage without that which light afforded; but, unprotesting, he let her lead the way to the waiting-room. He noted that her color was high and that she carried herself with something more than her usual air of distinction. In reluctant admiration, he acknowledged to himself that he, in his uncertainty, cut a poor figure beside her.

"We might as well come to the point," said Mrs. Sinclair. "I know everything."

He looked at her with lips compressed, intensely on his guard. She leaned toward him a little; though except for themselves, the waiting-room was empty.

"Didn't you have a letter from Edith today, an incomplete letter, the first sheet missing?"

His start told her she had scored.

"What of it?" he said when he had waited to be sure of speaking steadily. But after all his pains, he had not waited quite long enough.

"Only this. She sent it to me."

Her eyes were full on his face. The light was an advantage, and she meant to use this and every other advantage that fate had thrust into her hands. Without giving him time to rally, she continued:

"She sent me a little note. One of Edith's dear, affectionate little notes, you know, telling me how much my friendship had been to her, and begging me always to think kindly of her, whatever happened. I should have thought that she was merely morbid and rather unlike herself, except for one thing: She enclosed the first sheet of the letter she intended for you."

The man moistened his dry lips and made an effort to lift his eyes. As they encountered her fixed gaze, they lowered unwillingly.

"In that sheet she outlined the plan," Margaret Sinclair explained. "She was so anxious to avoid any chance of mistake, that she went over every step. When I found that you were to join her here, and that I had time to intercept you, I said to myself that I should never again doubt that there was a God."

The man raised his eyebrows. The conclusion seemed to him irrelevant.

"Your discovery seems unfortunate from every standpoint," he said dryly. "You can hardly suppose that, coming at this time, it will make any difference."

She smiled upon him brightly. "All the difference in the world, Mr. Cathcart. And the first change is, that you are going quietly home and I'm going to take the western train to join Edith."

He laughed aloud. The realization that his amusement was involuntary, and not assumed, made her grave.

"Go quietly home?" he mocked. "Hardly, Mrs. Sinclair."

Now that he knew the extent of her information and he need no longer watch himself for fear of self-betrayal, he was more at ease. His words came easily enough, nor did his eyes waver before hers.

"I love Edith and she loves me. She's unhappy—wretchedly unhappy with a husband absolutely uncongenial. She's been wasting her life, trying to do what she calls her duty; smothering the cravings of her nature; denying herself what every human creature has a right to—'life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness,'" he quoted. "She's not living. She's not free. She's not happy. I can give her all she lacks."

It was the woman's turn to smile. And there was something more pitying than contemptuous in the curve of her lips.

"And you know Edith so little as to think that she would be content under the stigma of the world's disapproval? There are women who can be happy in defi-

ance. Edith needs approbation, more of it than any mortal need expect. She can do without your love. Any woman can do without the love of a man; but she can't do without the considerate esteem of the world she lives in. It's the breath in her lungs, the blood in her veins. That's why I'm going to save her from herself and from you, till this passing madness is over. Go back," she pleaded, her hand upon his arm. "It will make things so much easier. If you don't listen to me, Edith will. I know her too well. If it comes to pitting my strength against yours, I shall win."

There was no relenting in the smile he gave her, but there was admiration.

"You're a good friend, Mrs. Sinclair," he exclaimed, "and a good woman. I think no less of you because we can't see things alike. But your pleadings can't alter me, and they will not change Edith. I should advise you—" His gaze wandered irresolutely to the clock. "Well—you are the one that had better go home. An expedition like this for a woman—" She felt that he was eying her dress, and the defensive color rose in her cheeks.

"I had been out to dinner. When I came in, Edith's letter was waiting for me. I read it and looked at the clock. I had barely time to make the train. Fortunately I had plenty of money. I just ran into the street and hailed the first cab."

"Without leaving any message?" Cathcart asked.

"Without leaving any message."

"Get home as soon as you can," he urged with friendly solicitude, "and tell Sinclair exactly what happened. By that time Edith and I will be beyond harm by exposure. Show him the letter. He'll understand. He ought to be proud of you, by Jove!" cried Cathcart with enthusiasm.

She gave him an inscrutable glance and, as the window of the ticket office was raised, she rose and crossed the room. "A ticket to Chicago," Cathcart heard her say, and a wave of admiration swept over him.

Heavens! What a splendid creature she was, with her resolute will, her loyalty and daring! With a pang of self-reproach he shut away the thought that the personality of the gentle, clinging, yielding Edith seemed dwarfed beside that of the woman who was defying him.

II.

THE Chicago train was fifteen minutes late. They waited almost in silence through the interval that seemed interminable. When the scream of a whistle pierced through the hush of the night, each gave a convulsive start. Then they rose and faced each other with challenging eyes.

Margaret Sinclair was the first to speak. "Oh, go back, go back," she whispered. "It would save so much."

His voice was hoarse as he answered: "I'm advising you as a friend. Believe me, I am disinterested. Take the next train back, and tell Sinclair the whole story."

She made no reply. Silently she stepped aboard the Chicago sleeper, Cathcart following. The momentary softness had faded from his face. It was grimly determined. His admiration was not to cheat his love.

The porter who had taken Cathcart's grip was listening to Mrs. Sinclair's questionings, shaking his head at intervals. Cathcart saw her frown and drew nearer. But his interrogations did not shake the porter's confidence on the vital point. No passenger answering to Edith's description was on the coach.

"She must be in the next sleeper," Margaret said, looking at Cathcart appealingly.

In her momentary discomfiture she forgot that they were antagonists, each bent on securing a victory which would cost the other dear. She addressed him as a comrade bound to her by a common interest. Cathcart nodded and followed her into the next coach. The porter, still carrying Cathcart's suit-case, brought up the rear.

The train swayed as it rounded a curve, and Cathcart caught his companion's arm to steady her. At that moment a man came out of the smoking-room and stood aside to let them pass. Then he swore below his breath, but with such an effect of concentrated amazement that Cathcart turned upon him savagely. Margaret, too, glanced back over her shoulder, and her companion felt her shiver. He forgot his temporary wonder over a surprise that cut deeper. Edith was not on the train.

The two antagonists, the lover and the friend, stared each at the other, like discomfited conspirators.

"Something has happened," said the man, torn with distracting doubt.

"She has changed her mind," said the woman. "Thank God."

She dropped into a seat, paling and shrinking under his eyes. Again she seemed more of a frightened child than a triumphant heroine. An odd pity for her made him momentarily forgetful of his own pang.

"I must send a telegram," Margaret said, addressing him. "At the first stop. Tell the porter it's important."

He did not reply, except to ring for a telegraph blank, and looked away, his heart contracting, as he saw how her hand was shaking over the words:

> Will be home for dinner and explain everything. MARGARET.

Turning away with the slip of paper in his hand, Cathcart halted. "Did you know that man?" he demanded abruptly.

"What man?" she fenced.

"The fellow who swore at us as we passed the smoking-room."

"His name—I believe his name is Frazier."

Her manner alarmed him, and his fear was to his credit. "You believe! Don't you know?"

She laughed without merriment. "Yes. His name is Frazier, Harrison Frazier. He is my husband's dearest friend."

Cathcart stood aghast. "Then you should make some sort of explanation. I'll bring him to you."

She made a gesture of negation. "He is my husband's friend, not mine. He has never liked me, never trusted me, for some inexplicable reason." She was still smiling gallantly, although with white lips. "Probably he feels that all his suspicions have been justified. To explain to him," she added with an air of finality, "would be a useless humiliation."

She fell into a brief reverie, from which she roused herself to find Cathcart standing before her, miserable and dumb.

"You had better go," she said, "and leave me to find out from the conductor about return trains." She held out her hand, smiling. "We cannot triumph over each other, Mr. Cathcart. From present indications we are both losers. Good-by."

It was noon the next day when Cathcart walked into his room, and saw upon his desk a letter addressed in a familiar hand. He pounced upon it and read it at a glance. Catching sight of his haggard face in a mirror, he stared at himself incredulously for a moment, then laughed aloud.

"Curse it," he said with deliberation. "She was right. She did know her better than I."

He looked down at the sheet of paper wonderingly. To hate the woman was as impossible as it was to forgive her. She had failed him, and his love was dead. Inexplicable as it seemed, the passion, which yesterday was irresistible, had winked out in an instant, like a candle in the wind, leaving his life empty.

He stared at the blotted, tremulous words, straggling uncertainly one after another, each making its mute appeal to his pity, and his lips curled as his eye went down the page:

> Burn all my letters. I can't do it, after all. I must have been mad to think I could. We must not see each other again, even though at heart I must be always yours.

There was no signature. Her courage had failed unreservedly. Cathcart took the letter to the grate, touched a match to it, and watched it blacken and shrivel into nothingness. Then he rang for the morning paper and looked up the sailings of the European steamers.

III.

CATHCART came home two years later, looking five years younger than on his departure. He had seen much to amuse him, though nothing more so, perhaps, than the contemplation of his former self. Nothing mattered very much, Cathcart had decided. Love, grief, longing, and disappointment were not to be taken seriously. He sauntered on his way, smiling and undisturbed by premonition or by memory, till the day he encountered Margaret Sinclair.

It was at the summer home of some people whose acquaintance he had made in Egypt. Cathcart had discussed with his hostess their dahabiyeh days, and by good luck remembered to inquire after the health of the two small daughters of whom she had boasted so frequently in the leisurely intimacy of their travels.

"Oh, they're grown wonderfully," their mother said with pride, "and improved beyond belief." She tapped Cathcart with her fan as he raised his eyebrows and laughed, understandingly. "I'm afraid I left you under the impression that there was no room for improvement. I'm really very fortunate in having a model governess."

Cathcart congratulated her with a lazy smile, which seemed to express more than congratulation, for Mrs. Ollison laughed consciously.

"Oh, I know you are always making fun of my enthusiasms, but really I am envied by all the mothers of my acquaintance. There's not a fault to be found with her,"

the pretty matron babbled on, "except that she's strikingly handsome, and that's hardly a fault—"

"Merely a misfortune, perhaps," interrupted Cathcart, weary of the subject.

"Hardly a fault," persisted Mrs. Ollison, ignoring the suggestion, "considering that she is very retiring and a model of discretion." She looked up, her expression changing. "You shall see for yourself. Miss Falconer!"

A slight young woman, flanked by two diminutive figures in pinafores, halted irresolutely at the summons. Mrs. Ollison spoke over the veranda railing.

"Bring the children here for a moment, Miss Falconer."

Her head was lowered as she came toward him, and Cathcart did not see her face, but something in her swinging walk was poignantly familiar. He drew his breath sharply, wondering at the stabbing memories that crowded in upon him. Then she looked up, and Cathcart sprang to his feet.

She was paler than he had ever seen her, though, even as he stared, the color leaped to her white forehead. The outline of her cheek had lost its curve. Her eyes were big and lustrous, looking out on the world with a certain proud wonder. Cathcart realized with amazement that something within him, something he had thought dead, stirred and clamored at the sight of her and the traces suffering had left upon her.

Mrs. Ollison looked in surprise from the flushing woman to the pallid man. "Then you know each other?" she said, a challenge in her tone.

It was Cathcart who answered. "I have the honor to be an old friend of—of Miss Falconer."

He held out his hand, and she gave him hers, looking him full in the face. A very cold hand it was, but it did not tremble. As for the two small Ollisons, with their bare brown legs and big eyes, it is to be feared they came in for perfunctory notice from their mother's friend.

It was nearly twenty-four hours before Cathcart found opportunity for the talk with Margaret which seemed of such tremendous importance. When his chance arrived he waived preliminaries.

"What does this mean?" he demanded roughly—"this—this masquerade?"

"You mean my name?" asked Margaret wearily. "I was Miss Falconer, you know, before my marriage."

"That and all the rest. Why are you here? What has happened? What is Sinclair about?" He broke off at the sight of her face. "Tell me," he pleaded, leaning toward her. "Was your husband angry over the part you took in our affair—Edith's and mine?"

She looked about her wildly, as if for a desperate instant she meditated flight. Then she answered coldly: "I have never seen my husband since."

"What!" He halted abruptly, almost shouting the monosyllable. She added her explanation, with the air of one whose wells of emotion have gone dry. "No! Frazier saw him first."

"But you should have insisted on an explanation, and with Edith's assurance to back you up—" He checked himself, looking at her keenly. "Of course, Edith would stop at nothing to make matters right."

She did not reply at once, and when she spoke it was in a tone almost pleading.

"Edith was very ill for a time, at death's door. When she came back to life again, a poor hollow-eyed creature, with shattered nerves and her beauty gone, she began to appreciate the quality of her husband's love, unwearied, unchanging, adoring." Margaret's voice broke slightly. "With her new understanding, she began to prize it, and to dread losing it."

His face was convulsed by an anger to which words gave scanty relief. "So she has let you suffer to screen herself. He could not trust himself to go on. He was glad of Margaret's eager interruption.

"She never understood it all. She was distressed when she knew I had left my husband. She would have been glad to have had me with her only—"

She had made a false step, and she caught herself up, with the instinct of recoil. He pounced upon the significant word over which she had stumbled.

"'Only'— Well, go on."

Margaret was dumb.

"You don't mean—don't tell me her husband objected to the intimacy?"

"Who could blame him?" cried Margaret, on the defensive. "A woman with her reputation besmirched! Why shouldn't he object?"

"Good Heavens!" gasped Cathcart, and broke into bitter laughter. She looked away from him, waiting quite calmly for the paroxysm to pass. He checked himself with surprising suddenness. "Will you marry me, Margaret?" he said.

She recoiled. He continued, speaking with a composure in striking contrast to his previous excitement.

"I'm not saying that I love you. I had thought I was beyond that, though I was mistaken. That's neither here nor there. You're one of the women that make life seem worth while. You make a man believe in something, in spite of himself." His voice grew suddenly tender. "Poor little girl. Brave girl! I wonder if you've any idea how magnificent you are?"

She held up a shaking hand. "Please, hush! You are speaking under a misapprehension. I—I am still Mrs. Sinclair."

His manner did not suggest dismay. "I took it for granted that—"

"No. My husband did not divorce me. I took my maiden name, the better to conceal my identity. As I make no acquaintances, it can harm no one."

"Then divorce him and marry me," said Cathcart.

He was not certain whether her silence was due to shock or to hesitancy. He hurried on.

"I want to be honest with you. I have made no protestations; but, Margaret, you could make me love you. Even that night two years ago—forgive me for speaking of it," he interrupted tenderly, as he saw her wince. "Even when I was the slave of another woman, I felt myself almost carried off my feet when you pleaded with me. You dazzled me. You opened my eyes to what a woman might be."

She interrupted him. Her voice did not suggest that she was shocked, still less that she was in doubt.

"Your point of view is so essentially masculine," said Mrs. Sinclair, with her grave, charming smile, "that it would be quite useless for us to attempt to reach an understanding. There is one thing, however, which you will understand, and which you have failed to take into account. I love my husband."

Cathcart's face was blank. "Love him! After he has condemned you to this?"

"He was ready to provide for me, but of course I would not allow that. If I could have seen him, he would have listened to me, and if he had heard me he would have believed me. But he went away, and my letters—I wrote in care of his lawyers—were returned."

"The brute!" choked Cathcart. "The blind, obstinate brute!"

"No," said Mrs. Sinclair a little coldly. "Only a man. A headstrong, mistaken, very unhappy man, I am afraid. My husband—and my dear love."

IV.

On the whole Cathcart's visit to the Ollisons could not be counted a success. Cathcart himself had become the prey of restless desires. Margaret's hard-won peace had been rudely disturbed, and Mrs. Ollison was no longer blissfully boastful over the possession of a model governess.

"I felt all the time that something was queer," Mrs. Ollison told her husband. "A woman in her circumstances, as handsome as that, and with that air and all, generally has something to hide."

Her husband yawned. "Well, as long as she hides it successfully," he suggested, "why not let her alone?"

"Charles!" gasped Mrs. Ollison. "And the children growing up and imbibing Heaven knows what, from association with her! Besides, whatever is wrong with her, it is not hidden from Jimmy Cathcart. You should have seen his face when she came up the steps."

Yet, despite her protest, Mrs. Ollison seemed to have decided to act upon her husband's advice. The weeks passed in a monotony which might well have lulled Margaret into a sense of security. Then one morning after she had been listening to Mrs. Ollison's announcement of her plans for the winter, she turned to leave the room. Her hand was on the door when Mrs. Ollison spoke her name.

"Mrs. Sinclair."

"Yes?" Margaret turned inquiringly.

Not till she caught sight of her employer's face did she realize how she had been trapped. Smiling with something of disdain, but nothing of fear, she faced the other woman.

The cruelty which the charitable lay at the doors of a savage ancestry was for the moment uppermost in Mrs. Ollison.

"Under the circumstances, Mrs. Sinclair, you will of course understand—"

"I understand perfectly," Margaret said with composure. "I will go up stairs and pack my trunk."

"Your salary," Mrs. Ollison continued, pulling a check-book toward her. "I will pay to the end of the quarter."

"I must decline," Margaret replied, "to accept any money I have not earned."

Mrs. Ollison sighed virtuously. "I regret this exceedingly, Mrs. Sinclair, but you will

appreciate my position as the mother of daughters—"

"I think we need not discuss the matter further."

Margaret went up the stairs, wondering at her own serenity. The future was a blank. She began to fold her dresses with painstaking care, as if unconcerned by any more vital problem than to keep them from wrinkling.

"There's a gentleman to see you, Miss Falconer."

Margaret heard her heart's thumping. She was afraid! Cathcart had come back. He would find her homeless, friendless, almost penniless—a creature again discredited. She shuddered at the thought that these allies should join forces with his compelling masculine strength.

"Tell him I am very busy," she said. "Tell him that I cannot see any one." She listened to the maid's retreating footsteps, and tried to go on with her work, but her nerves were shaken. "I'm frightened," she said to herself. "Oh, I'm frightened beyond all reason!"

Dumbly she prayed that he might not learn that she was leaving. He was capable of lying in wait for her.

The maid's footsteps sounded again on the polished floor. "Miss Falconer, the gentleman says he will wait till you are at leisure."

"Very well."

Margaret rose to her feet and her shrinking mood fell from her like a garment. Poor, discredited, she might be; but a free woman, nevertheless, with a right to give her love as she would, and to hold fast to her loyalty. The blood in her veins leaped in eagerness for a conflict, which must this time be decisive. Flushed, angry, conscious of strange powers, she ran down the stairs.

It was not Cathcart waiting for her. A man with a haggard face and whitening hair rose as she entered the room. After one glance, his eyes fell.

"Margie—I can't hope you'll forgive me. I haven't the face to ask it. But if you'd let me try to make amends. I've seen Cathcart," he stammered. "He's told me—everything. If my life—my whole life—"

Sobs rose in his throat, choking him. A whisper that sounded far away made answer.

"We've wasted two years already. Don't waste another minute talking of forgiveness. Tell me that you love me."

Her voice rose on the last words to an impatient cry. She grudged even the instant that it took him to cross the room and take her in his arms.

The Fortune-Teller's Sign.

BY VALENTINE FREDERICKS.

The Part Accident Played in the Experience of a Man Who Lost His Job Quite Unfairly.

"BROWN, I've no further use for you. You may leave now!"

The clerk stared at his employer in amazement, unable fully to realize that he had been discharged.

"You mean—" he gasped.

"That you are no longer needed here," Masterson interrupted.

"But why—" Brown faltered. "Why am I discharged?"

"You know my rule about my clerks speculating," the broker retorted in an impatient manner.

"But I never—"

"Perhaps not," the other broke in sarcastically. "But that doesn't prove you never will." Then he added angrily, as he swung about to his desk, "I'll not argue the matter further."

But Brown was not one to be put off so easily, and the flash of fire in his eyes as he advanced a step nearer his employer proved it.

"Mr. Masterson," he began in a voice

that shook with suppressed indignation, "you have discharged me, and I have a right to know why you have done so."

"Very well, I'll tell you," the other announced as he swung about angrily. "Then you'll get out, and get out quickly."

"I will, sir," Brown assured him.

"You bet you will," the other declared. "Last evening I was going through Forty-Third Street in my car, and saw you enter a house in the front windows of which was displayed the sign of a clairvoyant." He paused a second, and searched the other's face as he added: "You went to this person, I suppose, to find out about the future of the market. What stock are you playing?"

So sudden was the question that it took Brown completely by surprise, and he stammered: "I—I didn't—"

"I say I saw you!" Masterson affirmed. "And now that I've told you, get out. I'll have no one in my employ who speculates."

"But I want to tell you—"

"And I want to tell *you* to leave this office!" the broker burst in, now thoroughly enraged. "Go, I say!"

For a second Brown hesitated; then he turned toward the door, his head poised high with indignation.

The very fact that he had been so unjustly accused of breaking one of his employer's strict rules was enough to arouse his anger. His call at the clairvoyant's had been merely to see his old friend, Ned Hastings, out of a job, and who, to economize, had taken one of the cheap rooms the fortune-teller rented.

"What's the use?" Brown mumbled. "Masterson was too mad to let me explain. But he'll get over it in a day or two, and then I'll go back and show him his mistake." His voice softened as he added: "And I need that job, all right."

Determined to get what consolation he could from his friend, he wended his way to the house in Forty-Third Street, in the front window of which hung the glaring sign that had been his undoing. An unkempt woman opened the door, and, in reply to his question, informed him that "Mr. Hastings ain't in."

"Then I'll go to his room and wait," Brown told her.

He ascended the four flights to the little chamber under the roof, and threw himself into the one chair, murmuring: "Confound fortune-tellers, Masterson, and Hastings anyway!"

Some minutes later he was brought out of his reverie by the sound of hurried footsteps. Hastings dashed into the room excitedly, to stop abruptly as his eyes rested upon Brown.

"Why, for Heaven's sake—" he began.

"No, for your sake," the other interrupted bitterly. "That's why I'm here."

"What do you mean?" Hastings asked blankly.

Brown quietly recited his troubles.

"Well," said Hastings, "I'm sorry I was the cause of getting you in bad; but—"

He paused, and his face lighted up.

"But *I've* got a job, though," he added. "Just landed it."

"Have you?" Brown retorted listlessly.

"Yes, and, I wish I'd known *you* wanted one. The broker who hired me said he needed another clerk, and asked me if I knew of any one I could recommend."

"He did?" Brown exclaimed, now all excited. "Why, I'll—"

"It pays thirty dollars a week—"

"Five more than I got with Masterson."

"But I'm afraid it's filled," Hastings added quickly. "A man came in as I went out, and I think he was after it."

Brown's hopes sank with each word, and, as his friend ended his speech, he faced him with: "Why *couldn't* you have known I was out of a job?"

"It *may* not be too late," Hastings ventured, but his tone brought no hope with it. "You might find out, anyway."

"I'll do it!" Brown declared, and, hurriedly making a note of the name and address, he started off.

He entered the office of the brokerage firm in question a short time later, and, upon inquiring for the man Hastings had mentioned, he was conducted into his office, which was separated from the large customers' room by a thin wooden and glass partition.

Brown stated the object of his call, and the broker shook his head as he replied: "I'm sorry, but that position was filled soon after I engaged Hastings."

The applicant's face plainly showed his disappointment, and, with a bow and a mumbled, "I'm sorry I disturbed you," he shambled from the room and to the street, very much dejected.

For a moment Brown stood on the curb, undecided what to do or where to go next; and, while revolving the matter in his mind, his thoughts unconsciously reverted to the stock-market, and he wondered how a certain stock he had been watching for some time was going.

Then with the thought came a strange de-

sire to learn whether it had gone up or down that morning; and, recalling the customers' room of the firm he had just left, with its ticker and quotation board, he retraced his steps, and soon stood with the tape in his hand, studying it intently.

The sudden ringing of a telephone-bell on the other side of the thin partition caused him to glance quickly in that direction, and to realize that the sound came from the private office in which he had been only a few minutes before.

Brown had already turned to the tape again, when the words that came audibly from the other room made him listen breathlessly.

"That's too bad," he heard the broker say. "I'm sorry you can't take it, after all, and particularly so because a man was just here in regard to the position, and I told him it was filled."

Brown waited to hear no more. With one leap he was at the door of the private office, and, throwing it open, he entered just as the broker hung up the receiver.

"I happened to hear—" he began breathlessly—"I was out there, studying the ticker, and thought—"

"I'm glad you were," the other interrupted. "I just received a phone from the fellow I engaged for the vacancy about which you called. He has received a telegram offering him a better position in the West, and he's going to take it."

"Then, won't you take me?" Brown asked eagerly.

The details were quickly gone over and arranged, with the result that Brown was to start in the following morning at five dollars more a week than he had received from Masterson. He hurried back to acquaint Hastings with the good news.

"Isn't it queer?" he mused, as he strode up the street. "An alleged interest in stocks lost me one job, while a real interest in them got me another."

A Personal Shipwreck.

BY GEORGE MARIANE.

A Matter Largely of Figures, Somewhat Concerned With Personal Equations and Minus Quantities.

WHEN Mrs. Margaret Reeder passed Mrs. Selena Simpson on the steamship pier the two ladies sniffed at each other.

"Who's that, aunt?" asked Dick West of Mrs. Reeder, "She seems to know you."

"She may know me, but I don't know her," was the scornful reply.

"Oh! Does she come from Butte?"

"Yes. I'm sorry to say she does."

"Why?"

"Because that city is my home — that's why. I'm ashamed to confess that I live in the same place as that brazen female."

"Wow!" ejaculated Dick, *sotto voce.*

"Her husband made a lot of money in copper mining," Mrs. Reeder continued. "Then he died. He was a lucky man. I've no doubt he was glad to go. She led him an awful life, people say."

"Too bad! This way, aunt. Here we are! Right up this gangplank."

"Wait a moment, Dick. I don't want to go on the ship with that woman."

Mrs. Selena Simpson, gorgeously attired, and attended by a maid, had just begun to walk up the portable stairs which communicated with the gangway of the big steamship Passavant.

"I could forgive her vulgar display of wealth," said Mrs. Reeder, "if she were not always throwing herself at men's heads."

"Is that what she does?"

"Yes. Everybody in Butte has remarked it."

"Is she after any particular man?" asked Dick, with a wise smile that his aunt did not see.

"Yes. Poor Senator Lorel is actually obliged to run away from her. He left Butte a week ago to go to Europe. It was just to escape that woman, I know. Now, here she is following him. It's scandalous!"

"Well, she's a widow, isn't she?" said Dick mischievously.

"What of that? I'm a widow. What has that to do with it? Come on. She's gone now."

Aunt and nephew were soon on the ship, looking down from the deck on the bustle of the pier.

Mrs. Selena Simpson had gone directly to her stateroom. The shore-bell rang for those who were not sailing, and there was a general scuffle of final good-bys.

In a few minutes up went the gangways, lines were cast off, and the immense bulk of the vessel began to move.

While Mrs. Reeder, Dick West, and nearly everybody else was watching on one side the always interesting operation of starting a big liner, there was something close to a tragedy on the other.

"There goes a trunk overboard!"

The steward from whose grasp it had slipped looked helplessly over the side of the steamer at the widening circles in the water.

"Where is it, Bill?"

"I dunno. It sunk like a bloomin' 'arf a brick!"

"That's funny. A trunk'll generally float a little before it goes down. I've seen 'em do it."

"Not this one. It was just a hord'nary steamer-trunk. But it was hawful 'eavy. That's 'ow I come to drop it."

"Whose was it?"

"It was to go to No. 44. I dunno who's in there. But it's a moral I'll find out afore we gits to Sandy 'ook."

The chief steward suddenly appeared among his white-jacketed subordinates, who were hustling the passengers' baggage from the deck to the various staterooms.

"Hurry, you fellows, with this luggage! Don't stand there talking."

The men slammed the trunks about, and Bill was glad the boss hadn't noticed his mishap. It would give him breathing time. There was bound to be a terrific row, but the unfortunate steward wanted to put it off as long as he could.

The Passavant swung clear of her slip and backed out in the North River. Most of the passengers were waving farewells to the pier. None of them had seen the trunk go over.

"Dick, can't I go down to my cabin?"

"All right, aunt. I'll take you. It's No. 44." The broad-shouldered young man's reply was in strong contrast with the querulous tones of the lady.

"Good land! There's Senator Lorel. I thought he'd sailed a week ago. Take me down, quick!"

"Why? Don't you want to speak to the Senator? You know him, don't you?"

"Of course I do! But you don't suppose I want him to see me looking like this? And that woman here, too! I'd wager a thousand dollars she knew he was on the Passavant!"

"She may not have known, aunt."

"But I know she did. And to think that I'm such a fright. Get me away, Dick, I tell you."

Mrs. Margaret Reeder did not look very chic, it must be confessed.

She had come down to the pier from the New York home of her sister, Dick West's mother, in a taxicab. For convenience, and because it was early in the morning (the steamer sailed at nine o'clock), she wore no hat, but had tied a voluminous motor-veil over her head.

The remainder of her visible costume was a long gray coat. It was decidedly shabby, but she had considered it good enough to wear in the cab.

If only she had had an inkling that Senator Lorel would be her fellow passenger! He had shown a marked liking for her of late, in spite of the machinations of Mrs. Simpson. The tender possibilities on shipboard are proverbial.

Why should she jeopardize them at the outset by appearing before him in the guise of a scarecrow? And with her rival arrayed like a middle-aged bird of Paradise!

"This way, aunt!"

Dick West took her by the arm and steadied her steps down the companionway. They traversed a long, narrow corridor, dimly illuminated by intermittent incandescent lights. A row of small doorways gaped on either side.

"Forty-four! Here we are, auntie!"

"Mercy! How am I to sleep in this little cupboard?"

"It won't feel so small when you get out to sea," said Dick. "Anyhow, you have it all to yourself."

"I should think so. Where's my trunk?"

"It doesn't seem to have come down yet. Sit here a minute, and I'll go and see about it."

Dick left Mrs. Reeder in her little cabin, dolefully gazing through the port-hole at the

Manhattan skyline as the ship glided down the river. She had never been to sea before.

The only reason for her going now was that she had been chosen as a delegate from Montana to the International Convention of Women's Geological Societies, to be held in London. In her trunk were a number of mineral specimens from her native State. She was to read a paper on them before the convention.

Her nephew ran against the chief steward in the main saloon.

"The lady in forty-four hasn't got her trunk yet. Will it soon be there?"

Dick asked the question rather deferentially. The chief steward on a liner is an important man in his way. This one looked troubled at the young man's query.

"Well, sir," he answered hesitatingly, "I'm sorry to say there's been an accident."

"Eh?"

"One of my men, who was carrying the trunk, stumbled over a coil of rope on deck, and—and—"

"Yes, yes?" put in Dick impatiently.

"And the trunk—"

"Well?"

"The trunk went overboard."

"What? Do you mean to say it's lost?"

"Yes, sir. It sunk at once, my man says. It was very heavy."

"Those rocks would make it do that," muttered Dick.

"I beg your pardon, sir? Were there rocks in the trunk? I thought there must be something besides clothes. If it had floated a little while, we might have saved it with a grappling-iron."

Dick West waved all that away.

"The question is, what's to be done about it?" he demanded.

"I'll report it to the purser, and the lady will recover the full value of the trunk from the company. There'll be no trouble about that. The man who dropped it overboard is the only one who'll suffer."

"Well, I'll go and tell her. I don't agree with you that the only person to suffer will be your man."

His aunt was looking for him at the door of her cabin.

"I'm glad you've come back, Dick. I want to get my hat and things, and go upstairs. How long will my trunk be?"

Dick hadn't the courage to tell her the whole truth.

"You may have to wait some little time for it," he said, trying to be cheerful. "It's always the way on steamers. Sometimes passengers don't get their trunks for two or three days."

The dismay in Mrs. Reeder's eyes warned him that this excuse wouldn't do. But he stuck to his guns.

"It's a nuisance, of course," he continued. "But no one troubles about such things on board ship. It's all in the game, don't you see? Ha, ha!"

His hollow laugh was not convincing. Mrs. Reeder's face, in the tightly drawn gray veil, became longer.

"But I must have my trunk. I have nothing to wear. I haven't even a hat. Come inside."

She closed the door. Then she took off the veil.

"Now, do you see why I can't go out of this wretched little room till I have my trunk?"

Dick did see.

Nature had given his respected aunt very little hair. What she had was drawn tightly over her head, ending in a diminutive braided tail at the back. When she appeared in public, it was her custom to wear a combination of "rats," braids and switches that gave her a most imposing coiffure. All these things were in her trunk.

But Dick would not give in.

"You look very well as you are, aunt!" he declared valiantly.

"Nonsense! I don't look like myself at all. I must stay here till you get my baggage. And I'm hungry, too. I had hardly any breakfast."

"I'll send our steward to you. He'll get you anything you want."

"Very well," sighed Mrs. Reeder. "It's a strange thing about my trunk. I see things going into every cabin but mine."

Dick went out without answering. Too well he knew that his aunt was the only passenger bereft of her belongings. Stewards are never long getting baggage to the staterooms. They like to stow things out of the way.

Dick found his way to the smoking-room. He wanted to get into a cheerful place to think things over.

"How do you do?" cried a pleasant voice. "I'm Senator Lorel, of Butte. Your name is West, isn't it? I saw it on the passenger-list. I think I used to know your father."

"He lived in Butte at one time, when I was very young," replied Dick.

"I know he did. I was acquainted with

your mother, too, and I know her sister, Mrs. Reeder, very well. By the way, I saw her name on the list. She's with you, I suppose?"

"Yes."

"I thought so, but I haven't seen her since I came on board."

"She's in her cabin."

"Yes? Well, I suppose she will be up after a while. There's my niece out there, on deck. Come on. I'll introduce you."

Dick had no objection at all. He had noticed the young lady already, and had formed a favorable opinion of her.

"Mr. West—my niece, Miss Ada Lorel."

The three walked up and down the deck together, and it was not long before Dick was convinced that the Senator had more than a passing interest in his aunt. And to think she was prisoner in her cabin! It was awful. What was he to do? Meanwhile, he found that Ada Lorel was as bright mentally as she was pretty.

"Mr. West, the lady in forty-four would like to see you."

It was the unhappy "Bill," who had dropped the trunk into the water. He was the steward attached to Mrs. Reeder's cabin.

"Very well," responded Dick. Then, as the steward turned away, he said to the Senator: "It's my aunt. Will you excuse me?"

"Of course. Will you tell Mrs. Reeder I hope we shall see her at luncheon?"

"Yes, Senator," adding to himself, "but I don't think she'll be there, all the same."

He found his aunt in sore distress. She had disposed of a cup of coffee and some sandwiches brought to her by Bill, and now was standing before the mirror, trying to do something with her hair. She turned a sad face to her nephew.

"Oh, Dick, our steward is afraid my trunk won't be found till we get to London!"

"Where does he suppose it is?"

"He said it might be in the hold."

"Ah, yes! Probably. In that case, of course, you won't be able to get it till the end of the voyage."

"Oh, dear! Isn't it dreadful? They must be very careless on this ship. I pasted two labels, with the word 'Wanted' in big letters, on the trunk so that there shouldn't be any mistake."

"Well, auntie, the only thing we can do is to make the best of it."

"But there is no best. I have nothing to wear. And I'm nearly stifled in this cabin. I'd give anything for a little fresh air."

"All right! I'll take you on deck for a promenade."

"What?" she almost shrieked. "With nothing on my head, and in this old gray cloak? And that woman flaunting her finery in my face? No. I'll stay down here till the ship sinks rather than give her a chance to talk about me. Why, I'd never hear the last of it in Butte. What are you thinking of, Richard West?"

"I met Senator Lorel and his niece, Miss Ada Lorel, just now," observed Dick, after a dismal pause. "The Senator would like to see you. He said he hoped to do so at luncheon."

Mrs. Reeder did not try to keep back the tears. Her nephew looked at her pityingly, while he tried hard to devise some means of relief. Suddenly an idea occurred to him.

"Wait a minute, auntie, while I go to my cabin."

He disappeared, but soon returned with an armful of clothing. He threw the things on the bed and closed the door. Mrs. Reeder looked at him in bewilderment.

"What's all this?" she asked.

"I'm going to take you on deck, and you're going to wear these things."

"But—"

"Let me explain. In the first place, here's a cloth cap. It's one of mine, but it's the kind all young ladies wear on a ship."

"But I'm not so very young," she protested feebly.

"Aren't you? Well, you look it," her nephew assured her, as he held out the cap. "Put that on, with a couple of pins stuck through it, and there you are."

"I ought to have a long hatpin."

"Not at all. Small pins are always used with these caps."

Dick West didn't know anything about it. But he was a diplomatist. His aunt pinned on the cloth cap, and she did not look at all bad in it—from the front. The effect behind was rather bald. Dick saw this, but he was equal to the occasion.

"Wear the gray veil round your neck," he suggested. "Let it come high behind. But, before you do that, put on this."

"This" was a blue woolen garment, with a large white "Y" in front.

"Good gracious! What's that thing, Dick?"

"It's my Yale sweater. I was half-back on the football team in my two last years. When you have that on, you can put this linen automobile-coat of mine over it. Then you'll be in perfect trim for a promenade."

"I shall look like a freak," she declared.

She yielded to her nephew, nevertheless. He helped her into the sweater, and stood back to gaze at her admiringly.

"You look like a co-ed, auntie. It seems a pity to cover you up in the coat."

"Stop your nonsense! Don't you see I'm shapeless? I'm the same size all the way down. When I dressed this morning I was in such a hurry, I didn't put on any—"

"What?"

"Never mind. You wouldn't understand." Then she murmured sadly: "If I only had my trunk! There's a new pair of straight-front—"

She did not finish the sentence. Dick held up the linen coat for her, and she placed her arms in the sleeves.

"Feel comfortable?" he asked, as he fastened the linen belt.

"Let's go up-stairs."

This was answer enough. They went "up-stairs," as she called it, and the first person they saw as they stepped on deck was Senator Lorel!

He fairly ran toward them. There could be no doubt that he was delighted to see Mrs. Reeder.

"This is an unexpected pleasure," he said. "I knew you were going to the Geological Convention in London, but had no idea you were on this ship till I saw your name on the passenger-list."

Mrs. Reeder smiled almost vivaciously.

Dick had assured her she was quite the correct thing in the cap and linen coat, and she had forgotten, temporarily, the loss of her trunk. Then Senator Lorel was complimentary, and she liked him. Better than all, she had perceived, like a flash, that Mrs. Selena Simpson had been talking to him, and that he had turned his back on her on her own (Mrs. Reeder's) advent.

Mrs. Simpson was now ostentatiously giggling and chatting with a very attractive young girl.

"Here, Ada!" called the Senator. "My niece, Miss Lorel—Mrs. Reeder."

Mrs. Simpson was studying the Statue of Liberty across the harbor.

Mrs. Reeder bowed graciously to Miss Lorel. Then she turned to respond to some remark by the Senator.

"Goo' Lord!" groaned Dick, below his breath.

His aunt had forgotten to put the big veil round her neck. The sterile waste under the back of the cap was revealed in all its ugliness.

Ada Lorel was too well-bred to smile. But Dick knew that, with the instinct of her sex, she had noted the scarcity of hair and the fact that there was not a "rat" or a "puff" to relieve the situation. He feared that Mrs. Simpson also had noticed it.

"Shall we play a game of deck billiards?" suggested the Senator.

"I don't know how," protested Mrs. Reeder coyly.

"I'll show you. Mrs. Simpson, won't you join us?"

"Thank you, Senator. I don't care for it."

Then, with an icy glare at Mrs. Reeder, the lady stalked to the companionway and disappeared.

"It's just as well," observed the Senator to Mrs. Reeder. "Five would be an awkward number in the game. You and I will play against my niece and Mr. West."

That suited Dick. He got the wooden disks and distributed the cues to the players. The deck was already marked off for the game, and they all plunged into it with a will. There was conversation as well as play. The Senator carefully instructed Mrs. Reeder, while Dick and Ada held frequent consultations as to the best way to proceed at critical stages of the contest.

"I think your aunt is so sweet, Mr. West," declared Ada, once when the two younger people were a little apart from the others.

"I'm glad you do. I'm very fond of her," said Dick.

"Like most brilliant women, she has a touch of unconventionality. It makes her all the more charming, I think."

"Yes," assented Dick somewhat dubiously. She is unconventional, in a way."

Mrs. Reeder was bending over one of the wooden disks on the deck, with her feet apart. As she presented to them a rear elevation, her attitude was decidedly spread-eagle, not to say froglike. She was so interested in the game that she had forgotten all about her dress. The cloth cap was thrust forward over her nose, to shade her eyes, and she seemed to have no back hair at all.

The game came to an end only when the striking of "seven bells" gave notice that it was half past eleven, and that luncheon would be ready in about an hour.

"I suppose we'd better stop," suggested the Senator. "You ladies will want to dress for luncheon, perhaps."

Mrs. Reeder gasped. Like a splash of cold water, the full force of her predicament overwhelmed her again.

She felt so faint that, involuntarily, she

opened the front of the linen coat. She saw the Senator look at her and start. In an instant she understood. He was looking at the white "Y" on the blue sweater.

"What must he think of me?" she wailed.

She had always maintained before the Senator an air of studiousness, the antithesis of all frivolity. And now, here she was, parading before him in the regalia of a football player. That was not all of it, either. There was her utter lack of feminine symmetry! Of course he would observe that. Who wouldn't?

"Dick!"

"Yes, aunt!"

"I'm going down to my cabin. Good morning, Senator."

She said this with a stately dignity which she hoped would offset in some degree the defects in her appearance.

"*Au revoir!*" returned Senator Lorel. "We shall see you at luncheon?"

"I'm afraid not, Senator. I don't feel very well."

Before the Senator could express his deep concern and sympathy, as obviously was his intention, Mrs. Reeder had dived into the companionway on her way to the cabin. The last glimpse Ada Lorel had of her included a wisp of hair sticking out from the back of the cloth cap over a dreary plain of bare neck.

"Be ready for luncheon, Ada," said the Senator shortly, as, with a serious face, he strutted toward the smoking-room.

Dick followed his aunt below with a parting smile for Ada, which he was glad to see she returned.

"Did you see that woman hanging about the Senator when we went up?" was Mrs. Reeder's first remark when they reached the privacy of her cabin. "And wasn't she angry when the Senator asked me to play that game?"

"She didn't seem overjoyed, for a fact. It would have been a deuce of a job if she had come into the game. She might, you know, just for a bluff."

"I wouldn't speak to her if I had to jump off the ship to avoid it," declared Mrs. Reeder energetically.

"Well, never mind. You're going up to lunch, aren't you?"

Mrs. Reeder gave vent to a melodramatic laugh.

"Shouldn't I look a pretty figure at the table, with this woolen thing on? Don't you realize yet, Dick, that I have absolutely nothing to wear? It was bad enough to go on deck with your things on—and I won't do it again. But to think of sitting at the table in the dining-room, with that wretched bedizened woman facing me! Oh, Dick, what shall I do? Can't you find my trunk somehow? Pay the men, give them anything! But get me my things!"

The poor lady's grief was pitiable, but Dick West did not see how he could help her out of her difficulty.

"I'll have some luncheon brought in here for you, if you really won't go to the saloon," he said desperately.

"Don't say 'I won't,' Dick, please. I can't. You can see that. And I don't want anything to eat, either."

"Oh, yes, you do," said Dick, trying to be cheerful as he went out.

At luncheon Mrs. Simpson contrived to be seated opposite Senator Lorel. Ada was next to her uncle, and Dick, by a judicious tip to the chief steward, made certain that he was placed by Ada's side. There was a vacant seat for his aunt.

The Senator was decidedly grumpy. He answered Mrs. Simpson when she spoke to him, but did not attempt to make conversation. Dick saw him glance toward the empty seat more than once.

"Uncle is afraid he's offended Mrs. Reeder," remarked Ada, looking after him.

"Because she went below so suddenly?" asked Dick.

"Yes."

"Well, he's mistaken. In the first place he hasn't done anything, and in the second, I know why my aunt remains in her cabin. It is for purely personal reasons."

"She isn't sick, is she?" put in Senator Lorel.

Dick was surprised that the Senator had overheard him, for he had spoken rather softly.

"No, Senator, it isn't that."

"I don't see how it could be. There is no sea on. Even if there were, we shouldn't feel it on this ship. She's one of the steadiest that goes out of New York."

"Some people like to be exclusive," remarked Mrs. Simpson, in a saw-filing tone.

After luncheon, Dick found himself standing on deck with Ada Lorel. The Senator had taken himself off to the smoking-room. Mrs. Simpson was in her cabin.

"You said your aunt was kept in her cabin for personal reasons. I know she's in trouble of some kind. Are you sure I couldn't be of any assistance to her, Mr. West?" asked the girl.

Something in the sympathetic tones, coupled with a certain comprehension in her expressive eyes, tempted him to confide in her.

"I believe you could," he answered.

They were off Sandy Hook now, and, having put off the pilot, were headed for the open sea. The ship rolled and Dick involuntarily put his arm around Ada's waist. That touch of her slim form decided him.

"My aunt is in distress. She has lost her baggage."

"Just what I feared," she returned. "In fact, I heard some of the stewards say something about a trunk having gone overboard. Was it Mrs. Reeder's?"

"Yes. But she doesn't know that. She thinks it is in the hold. I don't want her to know the truth."

"Certainly not! And, of course, everything she meant to wear on the voyage is gone?"

"Yes, she hasn't anything. And, I, not being a woman, haven't things she can use."

She laughed mischievously, but with unmistakable sympathy and admiration, as she said:

"But you did the best you could. Your Yale sweater was simply an inspiration."

"And the motor-coat, eh? It doesn't look bad, does it?"

"Indeed, it is splendid! Is that your cap, too?"

Dick nodded, but his look of distress deepened. He thought of the back of his aunt's head, without the customary puffs and pads. There was the rub, after all.

Whenever Dick West had a particularly bad dream, verging on a nightmare, it generally took the form of his being cast away somewhere without clothing.

Sometimes the vision was of himself on a sleeping-car or aboard ship, in the midst of well-dressed people, and he with not even a fig-leaf. Now here he was in that very situation. Only by proxy, it is true. But since he was responsible for his aunt, it was practically his dilemma. He suffered almost as much as she.

"Do you think Mrs. Reeder would let me lend her some things that she needs?" asked Ada, after a pause.

Dick brightened up. What a thoroughbred this girl was!

"Would you?" he cried. "How kind that is! I don't think she wants very much. But—er—I don't think she can—er—do her hair properly without some—er—articles that were in her trunk. That's the worst of it, I imagine."

"Yes. Then she may want another dress. She and I are about the same height and figure. I have two trunks, and they're both full. We could find something that would do."

She stopped, for Dick was looking far away over the tumbling waves, while his face showed some new misgivings. He turned toward her when she ceased speaking.

"I—I—hardly know how it could be managed," he stammered. "I hadn't thought of that."

"What?"

"Why, you know, my aunt has peculiar notions. She might not want Senator Lorel to know that she was in such a predicament."

"But I shouldn't tell him," rejoined the girl quickly. "And he would never recognize my things on her. He couldn't tell the color or general appearance of any frock I have if his life depended on it."

"You think not?"

"I am sure of it."

"Will you come down and see her?"

"With pleasure."

He led the young girl to his aunt's room, and left her there. Then he went back to the deck with a light heart.

"Whew! This has been a tough experience," he said to himself. "If it hadn't been for that girl, I don't know what we should have done. I'm glad I warned her not to tell aunt her trunk is at the bottom of the North River. She'll find that out soon enough when we land."

He had been walking up and down for perhaps twenty minutes, when Ada joined him. One look at her face told Dick there was a hitch somewhere."

"What's the trouble? Won't your things fit her?"

"Oh, yes. It was not that. My gown is exactly her size, and her hair is dressed beautifully."

"Wasn't that all the trouble? Isn't everything fixed up?"

"Not altogether. She wants—er—certain articles of dress that I haven't got. If she only had them, there would be nothing to worry about."

"What are these articles? Couldn't she do without them?"

"Not very well. At least, she won't. And I can't blame her. Because—because—well, no gown can set properly unless it is put on over a—form, don't you see?"

"By Jove! I understand!"

"Well, what's to be done?"

"Has she everything else she wants except —them?"

"Yes."

"Will you pardon me while I go down to see her?"

"Of course. Here's uncle coming."

Senator Lorel walked toward them, looking behind Dick as if he thought the young man were hiding some one.

"How is Mrs. Reeder now?" he asked. "Is she coming up?"

"I hope she will—very soon."

"If she doesn't feel well, she shouldn't stay below," said the Senator sagely. "This bracing sea air is what she needs."

"I agree with you."

"Of course. Why, doctors prescribe ocean voyages for their patients. Not that Mrs. Reeder seems to need a prescription of any kind. I thought I'd never seen her look better than she did this morning. Won't you try to persuade her to come up?"

"All right, Senator. I'll go down to her now."

Dick was glad of the excuse. He wanted to tackle the problem that was holding his aunt a prisoner.

Surely it could be solved somehow!

He hurried to Mrs. Reeder's room and knocked at the door.

"May I come in, aunt?"

"Yes."

Her voice suggested the deepest distress.

Her appearance, as she sat in the one chair in the little cabin, corresponded with her tones. She had removed the Yale sweater, but wore the motor-coat. Her coiffure was a marvel. It had been built up, with material supplied by Ada Lorel, so that it looked as if the wearer had almost more hair than she knew what to do with. The effect, as Dick declared in a burst of enthusiasm, was "nothing less than queenly."

Mrs. Reeder gave him a wan smile. She was gratified that her hair was all right, at least. But her grief over the absence of the articles which Ada Lorel had referred to delicately as a "form" would not down.

The smile gave way to a long-drawn sigh.

"My hair may be queenly, as you call it, Dick, but I cannot dress so that I can leave this room."

"Why not?"

"Well, because Miss Lorel—who is a lovely girl—"

"I agree with you, aunt," interrupted Dick.

"Yes. She's a lovely girl, and she has lent me everything I need except—"

"I know what you mean. Is there no way you could dress without them? A good belt, for instance—"

"Nonsense! A woman looks like a sack of meal without them."

"You don't."

Mrs. Reeder smiled. Compliments are sweet, even from one's nephew. But she shook her head decidedly.

"My dear Dick, you don't know anything about it."

"I don't know much, of course. Because men don't wear such things, as a rule. But it is a pity for you to have to remain down here while Mrs. Simpson—"

"I suppose that woman is up-stairs annoying Senator Lorel!" broke in Mrs. Reeder, with a glittering eye.

"No. It isn't that. But her stateroom door was wide open as I came past just now. I didn't see Mrs. Simpson. But her maid was laying out her dresses—for dinner, probably—and at that particular moment she had in her hands two of—of—the—er—accessories you need."

"Humph! Two?"

"Yes, and so far as I could judge, they were new."

Mrs. Reeder stared reflectively through the port-hole for at least five minutes. Dick did not interrupt her. He, too, was thinking busily.

"And to think of that woman having all those things that she doesn't need, while I have none," she said at last, without turning around.

"Yes. It's tough, isn't it? Say, aunt, You know this Mrs. Simpson, and she knews you. Of course, you don't like her. But—under the circumstances—I should think that—er— They say no one but a woman can truly sympathize with another woman. I shouldn't wonder if she'd—er—lend you—"

"Richard West!"

The awful tones in which Mrs. Reeder pronounced his name told Dick that that wouldn't do, even before his aunt went on slowly, distinctly, and emphatically:

"I wouldn't be beholden to that woman for a cup of water if I were dying of thirst in a desert! Leave me alone. I'm astonished and grieved that my nephew would make such a humiliating suggestion!" She burst into tears. "Haven't I suffered enough?"

With her face turned from him, she waved her hand to him to leave the cabin.

He looked at her an instant in commiseration. Then, choking back a sigh, he went out and closed the door.

"By George! This is too bad!" he muttered as he walked slowly along the corridor.

As he got to the open door of Mrs. Simpson's stateroom the maid was still arranging the wardrobe of her employer. A wild resolve seized Dick.

He took an English sovereign from his pocket and held it up for the girl to see.

"Vat iss?"

"For you," he said, pressing the coin into her hand.

"Vy you geef eet me?"

"I will give you another as well, if you will lend this to me."

He placed his hand on one of the coveted articles, which hung over a chair just inside the cabin.

She snatched it away hurriedly.

"Go vay. Vat for gentlemans dot vant? Eeet not for them. Vas you crazy?"

It took Dick several minutes to knock it into her head that he wanted the article for a lady who had lost her baggage, and that he would pay her two more sovereigns for the use of it till they reached London. The girl grinned knowingly.

"*Nein!* Eet ees for Mrs. Reeder, don't eet? Mrs. Simpson she would be so mad if I did it. She knows the trunk eet fall overboard. I not dare. *Nein!*"

"I beg your pardon! Will you permit me to enter my room?" said a dignified voice behind him.

Dick started back. Mrs. Selena Simpson glowered at him from the gloom of the corridor. Then she swept into her cabin and faced her maid.

"What does this mean, Gretchen? What were you talking about? Never mind. You needn't tell me. I heard some of it. You may tell this gentleman I have nothing to lend any one. Even if I had, I should decline any dealings with this person who has lost her baggage. A *lady* never would travel with only one trunk. She would have several, containing duplicates of everything she might require to present a decent appearance."

Bang! She shut the door in Dick West's face.

"The old catamaran!" growled Dick. "Well, she isn't going to get the best of my aunt. I *must* fix it, somehow."

He went farther along the corridor, thinking. Before he realized it, he was in the saloon. Ada sat at the piano. She saw him enter, and stopped playing.

"Oh, I've been waiting for you," she said. "Mrs. Reeder will come to dinner, won't she?"

"I don't think so. I wish she would."

"So do I. That Mrs. Simpson has told uncle that the reason Mrs. Reeder won't come to dinner is that she doesn't want to meet him again. She says he offended her when we were playing deck billiards."

"How?"

"She wouldn't say. But she has a smooth tongue. I don't know whether uncle believes her or not. He's anxious to see how your aunt behaves to him."

"Say, that Mrs. Simpson is a wonder, isn't she? Well, whether my aunt is at dinner or not, I guess I'll be there. So will you, won't you?"

"Most likely," she smiled.

As soon as Dick could tear himself away he went back to his aunt's room. He found her sadder than ever. She was the picture of misery. It was then her nephew decided on a desperate measure.

"Aunt, that old cat has been talking about you."

Mrs. Reeder raised her head with a jerk, and the fire of battle flashed from her eyes. It was not necessary to ask whom her nephew meant by the "old cat."

"What has she been saying?"

"She has told Senator Lorel that you are very angry with him, and that you are keeping in your cabin to avoid him."

"Why, what a vile falsehood!"

"Yes, but he doesn't know it's a lie. Mrs. Simpson pretends to pity you, knowing that that will make the Senator listen to her. I tell you, aunt," went on Dick solemnly, "Mrs. Simpson means to hook Senator Lorel before we get across the Atlantic."

"I can quite believe it."

"Of course you can. You know what she is."

"Indeed I do."

"While you are down here she can say anything she likes. There's a saying that hearts are caught on the rebound. That means that when a man can't get the woman he wants, the next one he sees fascinates him, doesn't it?"

"Yes," murmured Mrs. Reeder sentimentally.

"Very well, then. It's up to you to be doing something."

"What can I do?"

"Fix yourself up as well as you can—without those things you want—and come with me to dinner."

"Impossible!"

"Not at all. I've heard my mother say that, unless a woman is stout, she looks as well without those things as with them.

You're not stout. You have a beautiful figure."

"Don't be stupid, Dick."

"I'm not stupid. I'm telling the truth. Will you do it?"

"I suppose Mrs. Simpson will be there, all tricked out?"

"Of course she will. She's going to spring a new game on him."

This was Dick's trump card, and he played it for all it was worth.

It won the game.

"Dick, will you ask the stewardess to come and help me dress?"

"Yes, aunt."

When Mrs. Reeder appeared at dinner that evening, Senator Lorel told himself that he had never known how stylish Mrs. Reeder could look.

"And what a magnificent figure she has, Ada!" he whispered to his niece.

The Senator was right. And it was her own figure in the true sense of the word. The corsetiere had nothing to do with it.

Mrs. Simpson was squelched. The Senator hardly spoke to her all through the dinner.

For the remainder of the voyage he and Mrs. Reeder were constantly together. She was so happy when she got to London that she did not worry much over the loss of her trunk, even when at last she found it was gone irretrievably.

When she read her paper at the convention in London she was obliged to apologize for the absence of the minerals with which she had meant to illustrate her address.

But the ladies were very tolerant. They admitted it was not her fault that the steward had thrown her trunk overboard.

The Senator and Mrs. Simpson are not on speaking terms.

Ada Lorel and Dick West are to be bridesmaid and groomsman at the wedding.

The Bill That Disappeared.

BY INEZ BARON.

Showing How a Missing Twenty-Dollar Bill Can Equal the Difference Between Twenty-Eight Thousand and Thirty Thousand Dollars.

I HAD just finished my dinner and gone up to my room when Muriel called me up and told me she had changed her mind and wanted to go to the fair.

Early in the afternoon she had asserted positively that nothing on earth would induce her to get into such a squash; and I was just as well pleased, because I had an important meeting with Muchmore & Co. at nine the following morning, and I felt that I should need all the sleep I could get.

My brother and I had been in partnership ever since we left college; and we had built up a business in Chicago, with a branch house in New York. The Chicago end, of which my brother had charge, was growing steadily; but for a year or two, the New York end, which was my bailiwick, had not been doing so well. In fact, for some little time, we had been losing money on it.

Without undue conceit, however, I can assert that it was through no fault of mine. Competition in our particular line was far keener in the East than in the West; and it was a case of cut, cut, cut, until there seemed no possible way to further reduce costs and selling prices. One concern in particular, Muchmore & Co. continued to beat down prices and undersell us at every turn.

So when the Chicago office began to get a little too big for my brother Will to handle alone, we decided that the best thing would be for me to sell out the New York business—office fixtures, machinery, good-will and so forth—making the most favorable arrangements I could, and come on West.

This I was quite ready, even anxious to do. Muriel's home was in Chicago, and she was tickled to death at the prospect of being able to live in the same city with her own people, of whom she was very fond.

We expected to be married in a very short time, and she had been staying in New York with an aunt for a few weeks, getting her

finery together. She expected to return home a week from the Monday following the fair, which was on a Thursday night.

Of course, I wanted to go back with her; and if my business Friday morning panned out according to my hopes and expectations, I intended doing so.

It had not been an easy matter to close up my affairs in New York. No one seemed wildly anxious to compete with Muchmore & Co., which was a wealthy concern with practically unlimited resources.

Old Sam Muchmore had the reputation of being a pretty hard customer and a bad man to fight; and Sam, Jr., was following in father's footsteps to the best of his ability, which was not inconsiderable.

The firm had been consistently gunning for us; and I was not a little surprised and pleased when the old man wrote me that they had heard Darrell Brothers wanted to sell out, and offered twenty thousand dollars for the business outright.

On Will's advice, I held off for a while, trying to make better terms. We felt that we ought to get at least twenty-eight thousand; but Muchmore had evidently scared off any prospective investors; for no one else offered as much as twenty thousand cents. So I dickered along with Muchmore, trying to make him raise his bid; but, except for the fact that he had withdrawn the original offer and consented to see me and go into the matter at greater length, I got no satisfaction.

It riled me, because he wouldn't interview me or let me interview him—just wrote letters that didn't commit anybody to anything.

As long as we couldn't get another offer, of course, we should have to take Muchmore up; but I had high hopes of being able to get another thousand or two out of him, if I could make him see things in the right light. And this was the deal I was to close up the morning after Muriel telephoned she wanted to go to the fair.

Of course, I could have explained the situation to her and remained at home. And equally of course it never occurred to me to do anything of the kind.

If she had said she wanted me to take her to the north pole, and I could have had a guarantee of returning to New York at one minute before nine the next morning, I should certainly have gone.

The fair was far enough away from the house of Muriel's aunt to make a taxicab an expensive luxury, and Muriel insisted that the Subway was quite good enough. She said she could ride in a taxi when she got back to Chicago, now the Subway would do. It was a warm, clear night when we started; but by the time we arrived at the building where the fair was being held the sky had clouded over and it had begun to rain a little. We had no umbrella of course.

A long line of people stretched from the ticket window out upon the sidewalk and half-way down the block. I took my place at the end, Muriel at my side; but it wasn't more than two minutes before I realized that before we could hope to get inside we should be soaked through and through.

The rain was falling faster every minute, and Muriel had on a thin dress and only a light summer silk coat.

I didn't mind so much for myself; but I did not want to ask her to wait in the lobby for me, because the crowd was so great I feared I might not be able to find her readily, and, anyway, I disliked the idea of her standing about alone.

"Hadn't we better go home, Joe?" she suggested, while I was wondering what was the best thing to do.

"Not much!" said I. "We came downtown to go to the fair, and go we shall. That is," I added, "if you still want to."

"Why, yes, I want to," she answered. "I thought it would be nice to get some little things to take home to mother and the girls; but if we stand out here in the rain much longer, we'll get colds for ourselves as well."

"I think we'd better go inside and wait until the crowd thins out a little," I said. "It may take some time, but if you don't mind standing a bit, the end of the line will get under shelter after a while, and then I can get tickets." I had begun to enter into the spirit of the thing by this time, and was determined to see it through.

Accordingly, inside we went. But apparently, a number of other people had been impelled to do the same thing; for the lobby was filled from side to side with a throng that was augmented every minute by new arrivals. It was very disagreeable to have to stand packed into a small space, jostled right and left; and it occurred to me that I might know some one of the men in line and get him to purchase my tickets with his own.

And just at this moment, I saw Tom Holly, not more than a dozen paces away from the window.

With a hasty word of explanation to Muriel, I pushed my way over to his side and touched him on the arm.

"I say, Tom, will you get me two admissions?" said I.

"Tom" turned—and it wasn't he at all, but a total stranger, whose face did not resemble Tom's in the least, but whose build and general appearance were sufficiently alike to render my mistake excusable.

"I beg your pardon," I apologized, as I saw his look of polite surprise. "I mistook you for a friend of mine."

"Not at all, sir," replied the man courteously. "And I shall be most happy to get your tickets for you, if you care to have me do so. It is most trying to have to wait for an hour or more in line."

"Especially in the rain," I said; and forthwith accepted his offer.

He was the next but one to the ticket window by this time; so I hastily pulled out my bill folder and handed him a bank-note. In another moment, I was back at Muriel's side, my tickets in my hand; and we passed into the auditorium.

The place was a perfect babel of sound, a riot of color. Never have I seen finer decorations—or prettier girls. The affair was for a charity for which I had a great deal of sympathy and approval (that it was for charity accounted for the outrageous price of admission charged), and I was glad to see that its success was assured.

Celebrities were as thick as poor relations, and it seemed to me that every one in the city who could beg, borrow, or steal a dollar had flocked to see them.

Every one was good-natured and smiling, even the man who had just been charged a quarter for a chance in a box of cigarettes he could have purchased at any cigar store for fifteen cents. Charming women in attractive costumes besought one to buy their wares, and every other second some one would run up and beg me prettily to take a chance on some ridiculous thing—"Only a dollar, you know."

Muriel was as excited and pleased as a child. She flitted about from one booth to another, exclaiming with delight at the many rare and beautiful things displayed. Around and around we went, until I thought she had probably missed very little in the whole place.

Finally, however, we paused for a breathing spell in a corner where the crowd was a little dense, although the place was jammed to such an extent that there seemed but scant choice.

"Do you know, Joe, I think I'd like to buy that jade carving for father," Muriel said after a moment. "It seems to me to be very reasonable indeed, considering the work on it. What do you think?"

"Why, how much is it?" I asked.

"Twenty-five dollars. It would please father immensely. You know he loves those odd things."

"I don't think you'd make a mistake, if that is the price," I said. "It looks like a pretty good bit to me."

"Then I'll get it," decided Muriel. "Will you loan me the money, Joe? I haven't that much with me."

"Certainly," I said; and took out my bill-folder.

I was quite proud of that folder. It was of black walrus leather, with my name lettered on it in gold, and had been a birthday gift from Muriel the year before.

When opened at full length, it was the size of a bank-note, and at one end a leather socket, about two inches deep, served to hold the end of the bills firmly in place. In the center, a loose flap crossed over, and the whole thing, when folded three times, made a very neat and compact receptacle.

I liked it particularly, because one could tell at a glance just how much money was in it; and, by pulling the end of whatever bill one desired to take out, one could remove it without disturbing the others or running any risk of scattering them over the floor.

"Twenty will be enough," Muriel assured me; "I've got the five."

"I took out a twenty-dollar bill and passed it to her, and, as I did so, I ruffled over the ends of the others. When I started out, I had had two twenty-dollar bills, and I certainly had not changed one—yet there was none left in the folder.

I was positive that I had had two, because I wanted to be quite sure of taking enough money with me. Yes—I recalled perfectly—there had been two twenties, a ten, a five, two twos, and four ones. After giving Muriel the twenty, there remained the five, a two, and three ones.

I didn't attempt to account for the smaller bills, for there would have been no use. I had bought a few entirely useless things, and taken several chances in articles which there was not the slightest danger of my getting, and which I should not know what to do with if there had been.

But I certainly had not spent that twenty.

"Did I give you one twenty or two, Muriel?" I asked. It occurred to me that the two bills, being new and crisp, might have stuck together.

"One," she replied instantly. "Here it is." She handed it back to me. I slipped it through and through my fingers several times, but I couldn't make two bills out of one.

"What's the matter?" Muriel wanted to know, as she saw my troubled expression. "Have you lost some money?"

"Yes—no—I don't know," I said. "I had another twenty-dollar bill when I came out; but it seems to have taken unto itself wings, for I can't find it."

"Why, that's too bad!" she said sympathetically. "Here—take this—never mind the jade piece. I don't need it, you know, and it won't make a bit of difference."

She was pushing the bill into my hand.

"Nonsense!" I said, drawing back. "I don't want it—I've got plenty of money with me for anything I need or want. But for the life of me I can't imagine where that other twenty went to. It's a case of 'now you see it—and now you don't.' I didn't spend it or give it away, but it's gone."

"Could you have dropped it?" she suggested.

I shook my head.

"Hardly. You see, it wouldn't come out unless it was pulled out. Of course, I suppose I might have given it in payment for something that I bought, and then walked off without waiting for change. In that case, whoever I gave it to would naturally suppose I intended it as a contribution to the good cause.

"But I don't see how I could have mistaken a twenty for a smaller bill. In the first place, it had a yellow back, and the only other bill with a yellow back was the ten. I changed that when I bought that little bronze for five dollars, and I got five ones back.

"The chances I took were all a dollar, and I couldn't have tendered the twenty for any of those—I'd have noticed the numeral two, anyway, even if I missed the zero and the yellow back. And I got nothing that cost two dollars—except—"

"Except what?" asked Muriel, as I paused.

"Except the tickets," I said slowly. "They were two dollars. I thought I gave the man a two-dollar bill to pay for them—but—it's just barely possible—I was in such a hurry that I didn't pay much attention."

"But you knew the man, didn't you?"

"No. I thought at first it was Tom Holly, but it turned out to be a perfect stranger. He offered to get them for me, and I was glad to let him. I wonder—"

"You don't suppose that he deliberately kept the change when he saw that you did not realize you had handed him a twenty instead of a two?"

I shook my head again.

"I don't know," I said. "I just took the tickets, thanked him, and hurried him off, before he had a chance to say anything but 'Not at all, sir.' I'll swear he never offered me any change, though.

"Perhaps he had it in his hand, and then decided to keep it, as long as I was careless enough to hand him the bill without knowing the denomination.

"And, now that I come to think of it, while he was pleasant and courteous enough, there was something in his face that I didn't like—a sort of sneaky, snaky look about the eyes, if you know what I mean. The sort of face that goes with cunning and craft and sharp practise."

"Can't you find him and ask him about it?" Muriel questioned.

"Hardly," I said. "It would be just about as easy as finding the clams in a boarding-house chowder. Besides, even if I could locate him in this mob, I couldn't walk up to him and accuse him of appropriating my change. He'd only deny it. And I can't be certain that he did get it, although it does look that way.

"Never mind; don't let's think of it any more. It's gone, and all the speculating we can do as to its present whereabouts won't bring it back."

I put my bill-folder back into my pocket. I couldn't stand around, like the king in his counting-house, all the evening, and there were far too many people around to render it quite safe to display money promiscuously. I had no desire to be gently separated from the little that I had left.

We walked over to the booth where Muriel had seen the jade carving, and from there to the soda-fountain, to get some mineral water. The air was pretty warm, and we were both thirsty.

I had quite determined to dismiss the matter of the twenty-dollar bill altogether; but, some way or other, it obstinately refused to be put from my mind. I kept thinking of it; and the more I thought, the more certain I became that the obliging stranger had done me out of my eighteen dollars change. There was no other hypothesis that fitted the case.

I had not spent it, nor dropped it, nor had it changed; and there was nowhere else for it to go.

I began to feel thoroughly exasperated. It

was not so much the money itself, although eighteen dollars meant as much to me as to the next man; but it was the idea that I had allowed myself to be victimized in such a cool, daring way.

Probably the man had immediately realized that I had failed to see the denomination of the bill I had given him, and had resolved to appropriate the change. It made me mad.

If there is one thing in the world I hate above all others, it is to lose anything. I had far rather have given the money away, either as a contribution or as plain charity, or spent it on myself or Muriel.

To just have it disappear, leaving absolutely no trace, bothered me considerably; and I told myself that if I could once get my eyes on that suave stranger I should lose no time in accusing him to his face.

As we left the soda-fountain, Muriel gave a little cry.

"Why, there he is!" she said.

I turned and saw the man making his way toward us through the crush.

"I beg your pardon," he said as he came up, "but I noticed when you took out your bill-folder—"

"Oh," I interrupted, "I was wondering if I could find you. I didn't notice that I gave you twenty dollars instead of two, and I was asking myself how I was going to get my change. I am much obliged to you."

The man raised his eyebrows.

"Your change?" he said with a cold stare. "You gave me a two-dollar bill, with which to buy two tickets at a dollar each. There was no change."

He was certainly carrying it off rather well, but it was a fool thing for him to speak to me if he did not intend to return the money. He might have known that I should eventually find it out.

I admired his nerve, however, and perhaps should have been content to let the matter rest, had I not noticed how he kept his eyes fixed on Muriel with a bold, admiring stare that brought a faint flush to her cheeks. In a moment his motive for seeking my society was evident; and my anger boiled up again. The fellow was intolerable.

"Come," I said impatiently, "that doesn't go down. I gave you twenty dollars, and you kept the eighteen dollars change. I'm waiting for you to return it; and I'll excuse you then. If you hand it over at once, you'll save trouble."

The man's eyes narrowed to mere slits in his head; his face turned brick-red, and his fists clenched. For a moment I thought he was going to strike me. Then his right hand went slowly to his breast-pocket and brought out a wallet.

I was glad to see that he was going to be reasonable. I had no desire to have any fistic argument in a public place, especially since Muriel was with me; but I confessed to myself that I did not like his looks, and should have welcomed an opportunity of spoiling them had circumstances been different.

He stood for a moment fingering the wallet, and then slowly opened it.

"Your claim," he said in a low, quiet voice, "seems to me to savor of blackmail. There is, of course, no way for me to prove that you did not give me a twenty-dollar bill, as you claim, any more than there is for you to substantiate your statement. However, I believe that my word in this matter is as good—or better—than yours.

"I am not in much pressing need of money that I should resort to such means to obtain it. Whether or not you require eighteen dollars and thought me an easy victim is a question in which I am not interested.

"However, I do not desire any controversy. I sought you out, not, as you evidently wished me to think you believed, to return eighteen dollars change for a mythical twenty-dollar bill, but to make your personal acquaintance. When, as I started to say when you interrupted me, you took out your folder, I noticed your name on it.

"I would have spoken to you then, but you hurried away; and when I saw you a moment ago, I thought I would improve the opportunity. But"—with a sudden disagreeable change of tone that somehow sent a shiver of apprehension down my spine—"since I have been unexpectedly favored with an insight into your character and methods, I am obliged to state that I do not care to know you nor have any further dealings with you whatever. My card, sir."

He thrust the pasteboard into my hand.

"And," he continued, "I shall have great pleasure in crushing you, sir—like that!"

He shut his hand viciously, his thin lips drawn back from his teeth, his whole attitude expressive of contempt and anger. Then he turned quickly on his heel, and before I could say a word was lost in the crowd, leaving me staring stupidly at the card in my hand.

"What is it, Joe?" whispered Muriel fearfully, clinging to my arm.

"For answer, I held the card out to her.

"'Mr. Samuel Muchmore, Jr.,'" she read aloud. "Why, Joe, he's the man who was going to buy you out, isn't he?"

I nodded.

"Shall we go now?" I asked.

Muriel said she was quite ready, and I certainly was. I had had enough of the fair. Plenty. It seemed to me that it had been a pretty expensive pleasuring. I had lost eighteen dollars and the chance of selling out to Muchmore & Co. For that they would refuse to buy now was certain. Young Sam would be just vindictive enough to carry out his threat.

With his own and his father's millions back of him, he could, in a very short time, depreciate the value of Darrell Brothers' New York branch to such an extent that we should be glad if the crash did not carry down the main house. It would be a little more trouble for him to do that than to buy us out—but I was sure he would enjoy taking it.

I didn't know what Will would say when he heard, and I didn't care to speculate. It would be quite impossible for me to leave New York now for months.

We couldn't find a purchaser, and even as matters stood we were losing money every day. Yet, if we simply closed, it would mean a dead loss which we could not afford to shoulder. But I didn't like to think of the slaughter that would take place when Muchmore & Co. got after us in earnest.

Muriel was very sweet and sympathetic, although she felt almost as badly about it as I did myself. Of course, it knocked all our plans higher than a kite; but she assured me that she would come to New York to live as soon as we were married, and stay without murmuring until I could wind things up.

And she wanted me to understand that she didn't care whether or not I had a penny.

All this was very gratifying to me, and I felt a little better. But after I had left her at her aunt's, and gone back to my rooms, I was in pretty low spirits. There is quite a bit of difference between having a perfectly good check for twenty thousand dollars and a perfectly useless and expensive business in one's possession. I wanted the check—and I didn't want the business.

I did not believe that an apology to young Sam would do any good; but it would do no harm to try. The matter could not be worse, and I might perhaps make it a little better. Of course, he had not taken my twenty-dollar bill—that was absurd.

But as long as he hadn't, what had become of it? I was back at my original problem, which the shock of learning what would shortly happen to Darrell Brothers had put out of my mind. Where had that bill gone?

I took out my folder again and ruffled over the ends of the notes. No—it was certainly not there. And then, as I realized that that plaguy yellow-back would probably cost the firm just one thousand times its value, I exclaimed:

"The deuce take it, anyway!" and flung the folder from me. It struck the edge of the dresser, the end of the socket caught on the key of the top drawer, and it hung there, swaying gently to and fro; while the bills, loosened by the force of the impact, fluttered lightly to the floor.

With a muttered exclamation, I stooped and gathered them up, and started to replace them. And then I said something more forcible than elegant.

For there under the socket, tucked out of sight until only a thin edge showed, was the missing twenty-dollar bill! Being new and crisp, it had folded into a very small compass, and must have worked in under the ends of the others until it was entirely hidden in the socket.

I could not possibly have seen it unless I had pulled out all the others and looked underneath—something it would never occur to me to do.

I did not get much sleep that night. In fact, I spent the greater part of it trying to frame a suitable explanation for Mr. Samuel Muchmore, Jr., without any gratifying degree of success.

The next morning I had an early breakfast, and left the house at half past seven. I walked about the park for an hour, trying to compose myself for the ordeal to come; but I was as nervous as a schoolboy speaking his first piece when I presented myself at the office of Muchmore & Co.

Mr. Muchmore, Sr., was not in; but his son would see me, the clerk said, and led the way into the magnificently appointed private office of the junior partner. The latter did not rise as I entered, but looked up from his writing with a covert sneer curling his lips.

"I want to apologize, Mr. Muchmore," I began haltingly; and then the sneer became a disagreeable laugh.

"I guess you do," he said. "Yes—I guess you do. But you needn't. It won't do you any good. Muchmore & Co. do not care to buy out Darrell Brothers.

"We prefer to use other methods to remove them from our field. The agreements

are there"—he pointed to the waste-paper basket—"and that is an end to the matter. That's all I have to say."

"But, Mr. Muchmore," I stammered, "I made a deplorable mistake last night, and I—"

"You did," he interrupted. "Most deplorable—for you. To accuse me—me—of stealing your miserable eighteen dollars, is going to cost you every cent you possess. It won't bother us at all to put you where you belong—in the bankruptcy court."

He reached out his hand and touched a bell; the clerk entered.

"Show this man out," directed Mr. Samuel Muchmore, Jr., and I went. The interview was at an end.

I walked slowly back to my office. Here was a pretty mess. My stenographer rose from her chair with a cry of relief.

"Oh, here you are!" she exclaimed. "I've been trying to reach you all the morning. I telephoned to your rooms, but the operator said you had left the house at half past seven. I rang up Muchmore & Co., too, but they said you weren't there, and the girl promised to have you call me up the minute you came in."

"I received no message," I said. "What did you want me for?"

"Mr. Will telephoned from Chicago this morning at half past eight," she answered. "He was wild to get you—said to have you call him the instant I located you—that it was most imperative."

"All right," I said dispiritedly. "I'll go and call him right away."

I went into my private office and shut the door. Then I gave the operator Will's number, and waited for long distance to call me.

It was not long before the bell rang, and I took off the receiver and called:

"Hallo—you, Will?"

"Yes. Have you closed with Muchmore's offer yet?"

"No. I—"

"Thank Heaven!" There was glad relief in his voice. "Stop all negotiations at once."

"Why?"

"Morris Sturtevant will give thirty thousand for the business. He didn't know we were in the market until yesterday, when he approached me with an offer. I told him about Muchmore, and he raised his bid.

"It seems he wants to use the concern as a basis to operate against Muchmore & Co. He's got it in for the old man, for some reason. And after what they did to us, it'll serve 'em jolly well right. Sturtevant's got two millions to Muchmore's one, and he'll fix 'em."

"All right," I said; "I'll do as you say. Deal with Muchmore is off. Anything else?"

"No. Good-by.'

"Good-by."

I hung up the receiver, and let out a gleeful warwhoop. Yes—the deal with Muchmore was off—but Will didn't hear the particulars until Muriel and I arrived in Chicago the next week but one.

He was best man at my wedding the following month.

And that twenty-dollar bill, neatly framed, hangs over the desk in my private office in Chicago this very minute.

A Telepathic Proposal.

BY GEORGE MALONE.

Even Though Obstacles Arise, Family Traditions May Be Continued from Generation to Generation.

HORACE WENDEL read the brief note again. Then he muttered:

"Well, I'm jiggered."

The damsel who served the meals to Mrs. Stover's boarders appeared at that moment. He quickly folded in the written side of the notepaper so as to hide it. When she had disappeared, after carelessly depositing a leathery fried egg before him, Wendel opened the note and read it once more:

MR. H. WENDEL, CARE MRS. STOVER, EDEN, PENNSYLVANIA:

DEAR SIR—It is quite beyond me to imagine what

should have led you to suppose that I could accept a proposal of marriage from any one on so brief an acquaintance as ours. I deeply regret it if the occasion of your mistake was any act or manner of mine.

That you could fall into such an error with regard to me is quite sufficient evidence that there could not exist any mutual interest between us—were I able to think of such a thing under any possible circumstances. I must, therefore, ask you to refrain from any further attempt to see me or try to win from me an affection I could never bestow upon you.

Trusting that your recovery from this attack may be as speedy as its development, I remain,

EVELYN MARIE FENTON.

"What does it mean? Am I drunk, crazy, or just seeing things? Was I a raving maniac Wednesday night? Did I do or say something of which I have not the slightest recollection? Have I written a letter that I know nothing about? How did she know?"

He put these interrogations to himself, slowly pausing between them as if making an examination of his conscience. Mrs. Stover's maid of all work appeared again to ask if he would have another cup of coffee. He blushed violently, as though caught in an unintended self-revelation.

There was no answer to the questions. At all events, he had found none when he put on his hat and walked out of the somewhat dingy building and started for the place where Eden's waterworks were having their foundations planted. It was his first big job, and he was proud of it and, ordinarily, intensely interested in it.

But this morning his inspection of the work was careless. It was fortunate that the whole business was being carried on with a precision which really needed no inspection anyhow. He went back to his desk in the little shack which had been erected as a temporary office, and sat gazing out at the river.

The letter was unquestionably mysterious. It presented a problem quite beyond the depth of Horace Wendel's mind, accustomed to engineering problems of no mean profundity. For an example of crossing bridges before coming to them, of falling out before the push—Miss Evelyn Marie Fenton's note outdid anything known to Wendel's experience.

As a newcomer in the village, he had, on Wednesday evening, accepted an invitation to attend a church sociable, the most exciting diversion in sight. At the sociable, as was to be expected, he had met a number of young people, some of whom, as was also to be expected, were young ladies.

Only one aroused any interest within him. She had, however, aroused sufficient to make up for all the rest.

After meeting her he spent the evening trying to see more of her. Had she been in charge of one of the booths, he would have bought its wares out, one piece at a time. Had she been serving the ice-cream, he would have made himself sick eating the cold sweetness. Had she poured the coffee, he would have wrecked his nerves. But she hadn't a booth; she had served neither coffee nor ice-cream, nor anything else.

And, whether she had intended it or not, she had managed to keep most effectually out of reach of her sudden admirer. The truth of the matter was that she had been very popular with his two assistant engineers and his bookkeeper, who, like himself, had attended the fête.

A dozen times he had thought to have the pleasure of a moment's chat or a dance with the fair one; each time to see her borne away by Thompkins, Moore, or Pendelton. He had had to content himself, so far as possible, with but two smiles from her eyes and two phrases from her lips, given when he and she had been introduced, and when she expressed polite regret that she had no more dances left. She had got away and gone home without his having opportunity to bid her good night.

He had not seen her since. But "her bright smile had haunted" him through the two nights and the one day which had passed. When he was alone he had apostrophized the image of her face which seemed fixed in his memory, had spoken things to it which had startled him with their sentimentality—things he would not have dreamed of presuming to speak to her real self.

He had determined to see her again, to win her at any cost. In his imagination he had even got far enough to try vaguely to formulate the sort of proposal which might win her. He had begun poetically enough with the phrase which never grows trite—"I love you." He had ended just where he began, unable to get away from the melody of those words.

He had admitted sheepishly to himself that he was quite out of his head about the young lady. He had been amazed that he could become so infatuated upon the first sight of a human being. But he still believed that he had not been sufficiently demented or infatuated to have spoken or written what was in his heart without the slightest consciousness of having done so.

No, he had not made love to her; he certainly had not offered her his love, or asked her to marry him. Just twice had he spoken to her. The occasions were sufficiently clear to his memory. And yet—

Here was her letter, calmly rejecting his proposal of marriage, reproving its unseemly haste, even poking a little fun at him for his sudden infatuation. It was what he might have expected had he been guilty of proposing upon so short an acquaintance; it was most decidedly what he did not expect, since he had not proposed at all.

It suddenly flashed into his mind that the letter was not intended for him. He recalled instances of people putting notes into wrong envelopes. Perhaps she had been sending out invitations to some other church affair—there could be no other reason for her writing to him.

Brightening at this thought, he drew the envelope from the pocket into which he had dropped it. He pulled the note from within. His hope died a sudden and violent death. Inside, as well as outside, the letter had been addressed to Mr. H. Wendel, care Mrs. Stover, Eden, Pennsylvania.

"It's for me, all right," he groaned. But what made her write it? Who told her I loved her? When did I ever propose to her or any one else?"

The answer was the mocking splash of a little brook which tumbled into the river a few yards from his open window.

"I wonder," he murmured, after a long mental effort, "if there can be anything in telepathy. I wonder if all the things I said to myself really reached her in some way?"

He arose and paced the floor. It was not big enough for his mind to work upon. He glanced guiltily at his neglected papers. To Pendelton, the bookkeeper, who seemed to be dreaming over his work, he gave some brief orders and an admonition to "wake up." Then he put on his hat and sauntered forth into the woods above the village.

"Yes, it must have been telepathy—or, maybe she's some sort of clairvoyant. It's all the same—it can't make any difference. She knew—and she has refused—refused me for good and always."

In blind misery, he paced heedlessly forward, recking not whither he went. He halted suddenly, at the brink of a small creek. Looking about for some crossing, his eyes met those of—Evelyn Marie Fenton. The girl was stooping over the opposite bank, one hand in the water, which she had succeeded in stirring up considerably.

His first impulse was to fly from the sight of those eyes. He resisted the impulse, discovering that the eyes were smiling cheerfully into his.

"Good morning," she spoke pleasantly enough.

He promptly lifted his hat. "It's a pleasant day, isn't it?" he stammered tremulously.

"Lovely," she said, somewhat less encouragingly, then began again to stir up the mud of the creek with her pretty hand, her eyes concealed from Wendel by their drooping lids as they fell to studying the murky water.

"Er—have you lost something?" Horace ventured, marveling at her gracious manner, hastily resolving to make the most of any possible chance to redeem himself.

"My bracelet fell into the water," she replied, looking up again and nearly causing Wendel to lose his balance.

"Would you let me help you search?" he asked eagerly.

"Why, thank you. It's awfully good of you. There's a plank across just below here," she said, promptly accepting his proffered assistance.

Wendel lost no time in finding the plank and reaching her side. If she would deign to receive his assistance, it was hers. For ten minutes he helped her stir up the mud. Had the bracelet floated he would not have seen it. His eyes were dazzled with the gold of her hair.

"Dear me," she sighed, "I wished I believed in clairvoyance. I'd be almost tempted to get one of those mediums to help me find the bracelet. My grandfather gave it to my grandmother at their wedding. My father handed it to mother when they were married. It's like—a family tradition."

Clairvoyance reminded him of a thought which the immediate joy had momentarily banished. Without realizing where it would bring him, he banteringly exclaimed:

"Why, I rather thought you were something of a clairvoyant or mind-reader yourself."

"You thought *I* was?" she laughed. "What in the world made you think so?"

"Oh, because"—he answered a woman according to her womanishness, wishing he had not spoken of the matter. He greatly preferred to avoid spoiling the interview with any mention of his telepathic lovemaking.

"Because what?" she insisted mischievously.

"I hardly think I need tell you," he

spoke more painfully, as he realized that he was in for the unpleasant topic.

"Now, Mr. Pendelton," she teased, "that's not fair. It's mean to arouse a woman's curiosity and then—why, what's the matter?"

Wendel was gazing at her in utter amazement. He wondered if he could be dealing with an unbalanced mind behind so beautiful a mask. That a girl should refuse a man's hand in marriage, should write his name correctly and his address in sending the refusal—and should then call him by another's name!

"I am not Mr. Pendelton," his lips spoke, while his mind worked on the problem of the girl's sanity. "My name is Wendel."

It was her turn to gaze at him. Had he told her that he was the original man-ape, the wild man from Borneo, or Satan himself, he could hardly have wrought more obvious consternation. At first she sank back in a huddled heap. Her lips parted as if she were about to speak, but she said nothing.

Still questioning her sanity, he thought she was going to have some sort of fit, and sprang toward her to help her. Before he could touch her arm, she leaped up of her own strength, and dashed away from him in a terrified run.

"Miss Fenton—Miss Fenton," he shouted, starting after her as best he could over the rough and, to him, unfamiliar, ground, "what have I done?"

She halted. The look of terror had turned to one of deep distress.

"Oh," she cried, "it isn't what you've done—it's what I've done. What must you think of me? How can I explain?"

"You don't have to explain if you don't want to. I'll just take it for granted, whatever it is," Wendel tried to reassure her.

"I was sure his name was Wendel—and yours Pendelton. You were both introduced to me at once. I suppose he didn't notice what I called him. He urged me to call him Harry. He signed his first name to his letter—and I wrote—to you. Oh, dear, what an awful mess!" she wailed.

"Thank Heaven!" Horace ejaculated with such fervor that her mourning was turned to astonishment.

"Thank Heaven?" she echoed. "I should think it was mighty little cause for thankfulness."

"But—you didn't mean that letter for me!" he fairly shouted.

"Of course I didn't. You know that."

"And—you wouldn't have written it to me?"

"Certainly not—why should I?"

"Not even if I had written as Pendelton did?" he said with joy at finding himself still possessed of a chance, and hurrying to destroy it.

At length she seemed to get the drift of his conversation. An arch smile overspread her fair face. Her eyes danced with fun.

"Now, Mr. Pend—Wendel, I think you are in a position to know my opinion of such sudden questions," she laughed.

But he had plunged into his Rubicon, and was not minded to turn back.

"The best of opinions should have some reservations," he smiled, though his eyes were too much in earnest for the smile to reach up to them.

"Besides," he went on, a little mischief coming into his own countenance, "I haven't proposed. I only asked you if you would have written to me as you did to Pendelton if I had proposed. Please say you wouldn't."

"Well," she spoke thoughtfully, looking into his face, then dropping her gaze, "I don't believe I would—even if you had proposed to me ten minutes after we met."

"Then I'm mighty sorry I didn't," he shot back. "And I'm going to make up by proposing right now."

By the time they thought of it again, the mud by the bank of the creek had had plenty of chance to clear. He picked up the bracelet, which now showed plainly upon the bottom, and quietly placed it in his pocket.

"What are you doing with my bracelet?" she asked in surprise.

"I'm going to give it back on the wedding day—to keep up the family tradition," he said.

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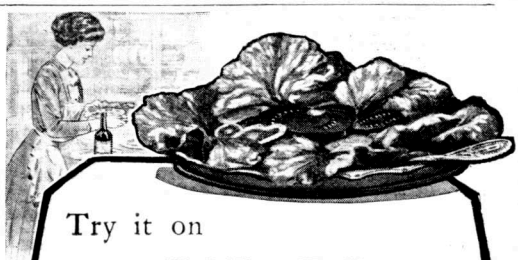

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WE BUY COINS AND STAMPS AND PAY PREMIUMS on many dates and varieties. Send for Free Booklet A. ROYAL MONEY & STAMP CO., 150 Nassau St., New York.

$7.75 Paid For Rare Date 1853 Quarters; $20 for a $1/2. Keep all money dated before 1880, and send 10c at once for New Illustrated Coin Value Book, 4x7. It may mean your fortune. CLARKE & Co., Coin Dealers, Le Roy, N. Y.

TELEGRAPHY

TELEGRAPHY, both Morse and Wireless, taught quickly. R. R. train wire and complete wireless station in school. Big demand for operators. Living expenses earned. Correspondence courses if desired. Catalogs *free*. DODGE'S INSTITUTE, 9th St., Valparaiso, Ind. Established 1874.

TRAINING SCHOOL established 1907 by S. P. Railroad Co. Train Dispatchers in active service instruct students. Practical Shorthand Course by Mail—$20. S. P. Telegraph & Shorthand School, 543 Central Ave., Los Angeles, Calif.

TYPEWRITERS

GENUINE TYPEWRITER BARGAINS. No matter what make, will quote you lower prices and easiest terms. Write for big bargain list and illustrated catalogue. L. J. PEABODY, 63 Minot Bldg., Boston, Mass.

The Argosy for September

will contain another Hawkins story, in which the amateur inventor takes to the water, impressing the long-suffering Griggs as an unwilling companion. You cannot afford to miss

"Hawkins's Improved Diving-Bell"

Two complete novels:

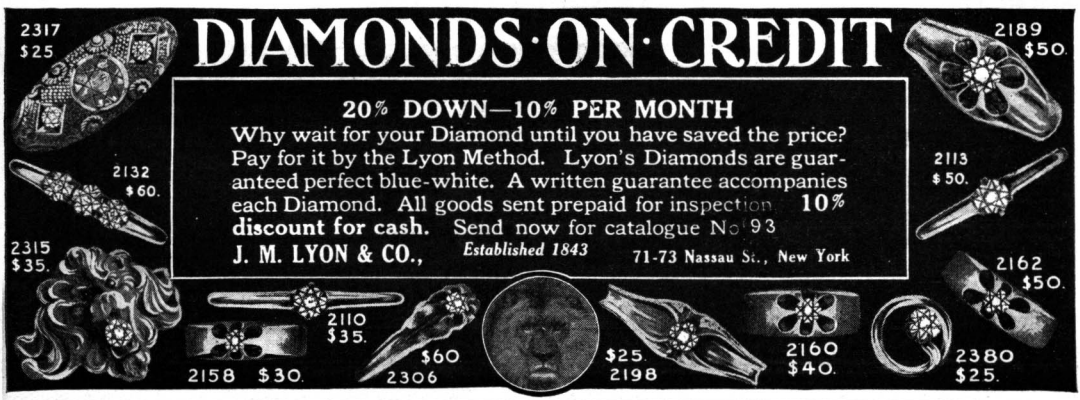
"Because of the Green House," by Seward Hopkins

"The Remittance Man," by E. V. Preston

Also the usual number of live serials and short stories.

For sale now on all news-stands

The Frank A. Munsey Company — 175 Fifth Avenue, New York



In answering any advertisement on this page it is desirable that you mention THE CAVALIER.

Straight as an Arrow to the Homes of the People, through MUNSEY'S Magazine

Classified Advertising Headings

(*Note*—Additional headings are added whenever circumstances warrant it.)

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Pianos
Patent Attorneys
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The Classified Advertisement makes it possible for every merchant or manufacturer with something to sell to advertise it nationally.

Nobody is too small to use the Classified Advertising pages of MUNSEY'S MAGAZINE.

It is possible to reach half a million homes at from $10 to $30 a month.

If you wanted to send a circular to these homes the postage alone would cost at least $5000, and you would have to send it to names selected at random.

MUNSEY'S MAGAZINE goes to alert, wide-awake, progressive homes—the kind that are worth reaching with your advertising.

Write us to-day for "A New Force in Business," a booklet full of valuable advertising information.

The Frank A. Munsey Company
175 Fifth Avenue, New York

This Inch Advertisement in *Munsey's Magazine* Produced a Profit of $290.99

An advertisement of this size in Munsey's Magazine would cost you $29.69. In the six Munsey Magazines, reaching 1,708,000 magazine reading homes monthly, $85.55. For further information and booklet address

The Frank A. Munsey Company
175 Fifth Avenue New York

WE inserted this one-inch advertisement in the April issue of MUNSEY'S MAGAZINE. It filled an inconspicuous place on a page of small advertisements. We charged our advertising department with $29.69—just what the space would cost any other advertiser.

There is nothing particularly clever about this announcement. It is a bare statement of our rates, but doubtless its plainness recommended it—for up to this date we have made a profit of $290.99 on the business received from this insertion.

If we demanded any concrete demonstration of the "pulling power" of space in MUNSEY'S MAGAZINE, this instance would convince ***us.***

Certainly, it is pretty conclusive evidence of the ***productiveness*** of space in THE MUNSEY MAGAZINES.

Write for rates and literature

THE FRANK A. MUNSEY COMPANY
175 Fifth Avenue, New York

Will Old Age Find YOU Still Drudging Along?

What is life going to mean to you? Is it going to mean comfort and prosperity, or is lack of training going to condemn you to hard labor for the rest of your days?

You are facing a serious problem—one that affords absolutely no compromise. To ***earn enough*** to command the ***comforts*** of life you must have ***special training,*** or else be content to fall in line with the huge army of the untrained, the poorly-paid, the dissatisfied, the ***crowd in the rut.***

For ***you,*** there ***is*** a way to success—a true way—an easy way—a short way. Are you willing to have the International Correspondence Schools of Scranton ***make you an expert in your chosen line of work,*** in your spare time, without your having to leave home or stop work? ***That*** is the way. It is the way that meets ***your*** special case. The ***terms*** are made to suit ***your*** means. The ***time*** is arranged to suit ***your*** convenience. The ***training*** is adapted to fill ***your*** needs. If you are willing, ***mark the attached coupon*** to learn all about it.

FREE YOURSELF

That the I. C. S. can help you is shown by the 300 or so letters received every month from successful students who VOLUNTARILY report ***better positions and salaries as the direct result of I. C. S. Help.*** During June the number was 285. Mark the coupon.

Next month, next week, tomorrow, ***even an hour hence*** may be too late. Mark the coupon ***now*** and so take the first step to escape life-long servitude. Marking it entails no obligation—it brings you full information and advice regarding the way to ***your*** success.

Mark the coupon NOW.

International Correspondence Schools,
Box 837 SCRANTON, PA.

Please explain, without further obligation on my part, how I can qualify for the position, trade or profession before which I have marked X.

Bookkeeper	Electric Wireman
Stenographer	Elec. Lighting Supt.
Advertising Man	Electrical Engineer
Show Card Writing	Mechanical Draftsman
Window Trimming	Mechan. Engineer
Commercial Illustrating	Telephone Expert
Industrial Designing	Stationary Engineer
Architectural Draftsman	Textile Manufacturing
Building Contractor	Civil Engineer
Architect	Concrete Construction
Chemist	Plumbing, Steam Fitting
Languages— (Spanish, French, German, Italian)	Mine Foreman
Banking	Mine Superintendent
Civil Service	Automobile Running

Name_____

Street and No._____

City_____ State_____

Compare Fairy with Other White Soaps

You will find that Fairy Soap is white and stays white, while the other so-called white soaps will turn yellow with age. Fairy has a delicate, refreshing smell, while all other white soaps have a greasy, soapy odor. Fairy is made in the handy, oval cake which just fits the hand, while the others cling with old-fogy tenacity to the awkward, oblong, out-of-date bar which has to be cut in two to be handled at all.

And when it comes to quality and price—Fairy is just as good as it looks and costs but 5c.

THE N. K. FAIRBANK COMPANY
CHICAGO

"Have You a little 'Fairy' in Your Home?"

"Oh! Look Who's Here"

MADE FROM SELECTED WHITE CORN. NONE GENUINE WITHOUT THIS SIGNATURE

W. K. Kellogg

KELLOGG TOASTED CORN FLAKE CO., Battle Creek, Mich.

Canadian Trade Supplied by the Battle Creek Toasted Corn Flake Co., Ltd., London, Ont.

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