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No. 4 Vol. 38

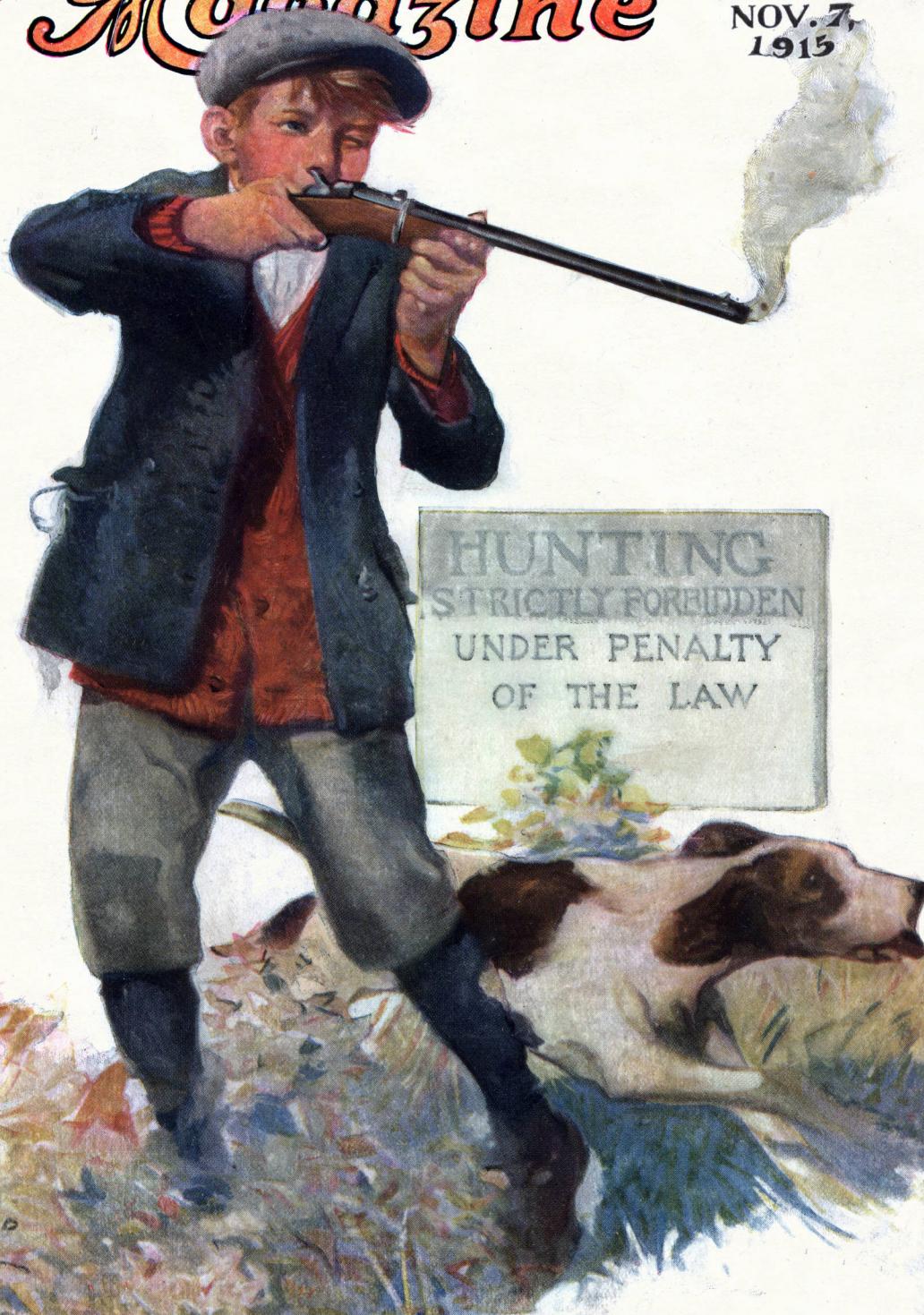
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The Popular Magazine

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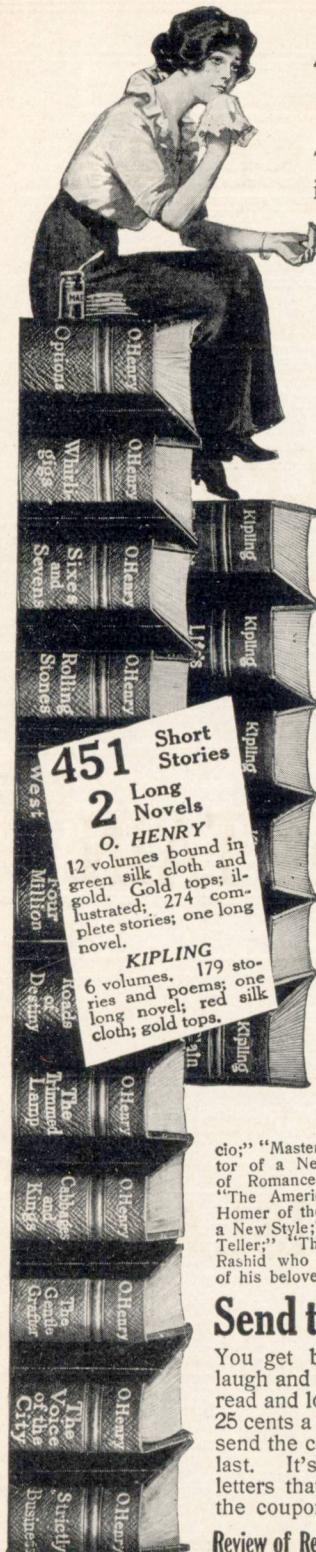
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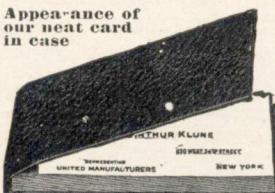
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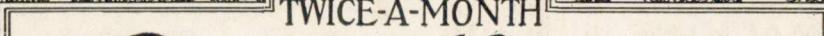
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TWICE-A-MONTH



The Popular Magazine

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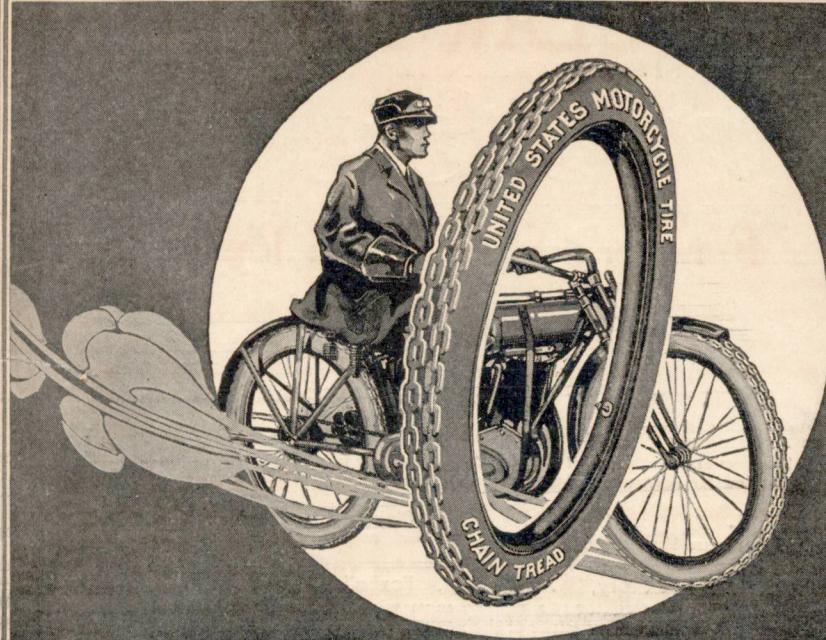


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No. 4.

Fraser's Folly

By W. E. Scutt

Author of "When Thieves Fall Out," "Kings of the Mighty," Etc.

This is a story of rogues rampant; a "plotty" story with action crowded on action. The characters are uncommon, and all the more interesting for that. Frazer, whose folly you will understand when you read of his blindness where his beneficiaries—and the Girl—are concerned, is a man who takes another's crime on his shoulders and suffers exile for it.

(A Book-Length Novel—Complete)

CHAPTER I.

AN ELEVEN YEARS' MYSTERY.

FRASER had lived too long with old man Nolan to be blind to the fact that the latter had something momentous on his mind. Under ordinary circumstances, Nolan lived by habit, but here he had broken every visible habit that Fraser had learned so long to look for. Nolan, back from a three-day trip to Buenaventura for supplies, had fallen in with the ore pack train on its twilight return up trail from the crushing mills, and Fraser, looking down from the workings to the point where the burro trail swung round a shoulder of the mountain half a mile below, saw Nolan mooning along at the rear of the slothful train, his chin on his chest, his wiry little Peruvian pinto chafing at the unusual curb.

Fraser watched for the customary greeting, a wide, flourishing wave of

the hat. Nolan, on the contrary, did not so much as raise his eyes, although he knew that his partner would be watching for him at this point, and Nolan would put himself out to do what anybody expected. Nor did Nolan push past the train at this point where the trail widened, to clatter on up the stony bridle path in his impatience for Fraser's welcome.

Fraser watched him out of sight around the rocky precipice, and turned back to his task with deep wrinkles of speculation between his eyes. Nolan had been to the nearest outposts of civilization; he had returned with something momentous on his mind; news—what else? And news from civilization means much to two men who have merged their identities in the rocks and crags and barren stretches of the Andes to escape the far-reaching tentacles of the law; two of the countless involuntary expatriates, fugitives from

the law, who drag out existence south of the Rio Grande, to whom news from home might mean anything—certainly enough to furrow vertical wrinkles in a man's forehead, and make him for a crowded moment contemplate dropping his task before he drew another breath, and putting a mountain range between himself and the news by the time the sun rose again.

After such a moment, however, Fraser grunted, poked the ashes into his pipe with a brown and calloused forefinger, and set out to see if the day's blasts were ready to be fired.

At least Fraser assumed that old Nolan, like himself, was such an expatriate. The question had never passed his lips, nor had Nolan vouchsafed the information throughout the eleven years that the pair had wandered up and down the western watershed of the Andes, from the nitrate desert to the Panama line. Fraser had reason enough to assume it, as will appear later. But the direct question—never; an unwritten law between them forbade it.

The nearest he had come to it was when he, thirty years younger than Nolan, and with relatively the more vitality, had recovered consciousness first, found himself bruised and battered and brine-bedrenched upon the shelving shingle of some land or other, a few paces from the still-unconscious graybeard whom he remembered lashing to a stateroom door. As the fog cleared out of his brain, Fraser had tried to orient himself while he lay there immobile in the hot sand. He had taken passage in the steerage of a Pacific mail boat out of Panama for west-coast ports; off Palina Point she had struck an uncharted rock and foundered before the lifeboats were away. He remembered fastening this weak graybeard to a piece of floating wreckage—a man presumably of the first class, for he had never seen him before, and after

that a grueling grind that ended in a complete befogging of the memory.

What a fool he had been, it occurred to him as he lay there, to have saved this man—if, indeed, the old fellow were still alive. For if the detectives had by any chance tracked him to Panama, and to this ship that had been lost presumably with most of its passengers, then these same detectives would be more than likely to give him up as dead and stop the pursuit. Thus he could live his own life untrammeled and unafraid. But this man, this old graybeard whom he had managed to get ashore—he was the fly in that comforting ointment; he would know that a young and vigorous American of twenty had been saved from the wreck; he would report it as soon as he got to civilization; and the chase would go on relentlessly to the end. If only he had let the graybeard go, if only he had strength to kill him now—

By this time Fraser had managed to crawl along the beach to the still form, just as the tired eyes flickered and opened.

"I ought to kill you," Fraser had muttered, with his brine-parched throat.

The other stared and said nothing; Fraser repeated his statement.

"Wait," the other managed to whisper, closing his eyes again after his exertion.

Fraser waited, gathering strength while the other did. There was nothing to be gained by hurrying, and Fraser felt too weak to strike a blow that would kill a chicken. The two of them laughed about it afterward; it was funny.

"I ought to kill you," Fraser had repeated when Nolan gave signs of being stronger.

"I saved you," whispered the graybeard. "You would have gone down if I had not reached over and held you up."

Which was disconcerting news to

Fraser; now he owed the man something and must pay it. Nevertheless: "I am dead—I went down with the ship. Understand? When you get home you never saw me—understand? Or I kill you now. Which?"

"I understand," whispered the old man. "I, too; I am dead. I went down. We keep together."

Thus the partnership had been made eleven years before. But *the* question had never been asked by one or the other. The graybeard gave his name as Philip Nolan. Fraser never speculated upon whether this was his real name or an assumed one—never, at least, until he chanced to see an old battered book that Nolan had picked up in Quito a full two years later, a book that he guarded jealously, read and dreamed over as he might have over a Bible, and treasured above all his other belongings. Fraser looked at the book one time when Nolan was down with a fever. It was a Spanish translation of Hale's "Man Without a Country"; the name of the hero was Philip Nolan. And as Fraser read it through he understood why Nolan studied it and dreamed over it with a far-away look in his gentle brown eyes, and reread it until he must have known it by heart.

Then it was that Fraser gave a thought to the old man's name, and suspected that it was an assumed one. It was plain that old Nolan was a man without a country, a man who loved his country, a man with whom homesickness was a chronic disease fraught with the sharpest agony, never to be cured in but one way, and that way closed. And yet they never spoke of the States except in a casual manner, or when business made it indispensable.

Another one of the old man's keepsakes was a water-stained and faded photograph, cut round, which he had saved from the wreck in the back of

his expensive watch. And it was this that—but of that later.

Was the news that Nolan was bringing up the trail, behind the pack train, of interest to Fraser, or to the old man himself? After that fleeting moment of hesitation, Fraser refused to speculate upon it. He would know soon enough. Already the sun was well below the Cordilleras upon its plunge into the Pacific, leaving in its wake a far-flung curtain of shell pink to serve as a background for the evolutions of two majestic condors, like flitting dots in the tenuous atmosphere miles above. Already the deep-slashed gorges and rugged valleys were painted primrose and purple where the rays of the sun shot through them, and the gaunt snow peaks of the mountains were thrown into shadowed relief upon the broad, luxuriant plains of the Rio Cauca thousands of feet below. Already the damp mists were rising from the tropical river to congeal in the frigid zones of the heights, making indispensable the protection of four walls and a cheerful fire.

Fraser clenched his pipe in his teeth, pulled his fleece-lined collar up about his ears, and set off to clear the workings of the mestizo laborers and fire the blasts. After that the fire in the stone house, a simple supper, old man Nolan and his news.

It was hardly a mine that Fraser and Nolan worked. It was an auriferous quartz ledge overhanging a brawling quebrada, or mountain stream, feeding the Cauca. A job on the Cali-Buenaventura Railway had attracted them to this vicinity—foreman of construction gang for Fraser and timekeeper for Nolan; the contractors preferred white men to natives for these responsible posts, regardless of the white men's past. Nolan had found small alluvial deposits in this little stream; but, like all streams in that vicinity, not enough to pay decently for washing by hand.

Fraser, following the stream up, had found the outcropping vein in the quartz massif. The two of them had filed each a pertenencia, or claim, with the departmental government, and had decided to risk certain wages in gold from the railroad-construction company for very uncertain wages in gold from Mother Earth.

And wages was about all they did get out of it. The quartz ran fairly well. But by the time they had paid well over a dollar per ton mile for packing the ore on burros down to the crushing mill by the big mine at Tocota, and had paid their half-caste laborers for blasting the quartz into pieces small enough to be handled, they got no more returns for themselves from Mother Earth than they had been getting from the railroad company. And, being outlaws of civilization, they could not go to the centers of capital to get the wherewithal to work their claims properly; and, being always sanguine of striking it rich sooner or later, they refused to sell out to the Tocota Mining Company, a concern composed of Colombians that owned the crushing mill and freed their gold for a percentage. The Tocota Company managed to give Fraser and Nolan enough gold to keep them interested; how much they really got out of Fraser's ore was entirely a matter of conjecture.

Nolan met Fraser at the door of the hut they made their headquarters; a square hut of stone culled from the profusion lying about them, laid in mud and mortar, thatched thick with palm leaves packed up from the valley below. The very solidity of the hut was symbolic of their determination to wrest a competence at least from the rocky ledge; they had built to stay there the rest of their lives if need be—or if the law's tentacles did not tear them away. There were earthquakes, of course, and revolutions and equatorial storms and mountain freshets and

deadly disease; but the law was the one thing they feared and never spoke of.

Fraser scanned old Nolan's features keenly as their hands gripped, his thoughts, in view of what he felt sure was coming, sweeping back over the panorama of the eleven years of their partnership. Old Nolan had been somebody back in the States. Fraser remembered how soft and delicate his hands were; how his slight frame had been unmuscled and inclined to the stoutness that a sedentary life gives to a man of fifty. But more than mere physical characteristics—and of this Fraser was every day reminded—old Nolan had a cultured brain, and it was his influence in speech and manners and thought that had kept the younger man up to the mark his boyhood training had set for him, and prevented him from retrograding, from carelessness or sheer recklessness, to the level of a mere beach comber and the average of the fugitive criminal. In spite of the very savagery of their existence, old Nolan had always talked and acted as if he were dining in full dress in a company of decent breeding generations old. At times Fraser had silently rebelled against this, but in the long run he was grateful for it.

Nevertheless, Nolan had plugged in and done his share as a younger and heartier man would have done. Now he was strong and rugged in spite of his slight frame and his sixty years. Neither hair nor eyebrows had whitened during the space of eleven years. He had shaved his beard and kept it shaved, revealing cheeks that had become rugged and lined and weather-beaten with the buffetings of time and fate and storms; and jaws once sleek and rounded had grown grim and corded like Fraser's own. The only thing about Nolan that had not changed was the eyes—deep brown, gentle, dreaming, sad yet not melancholy, resigned

yet not hopeless; they were eyes that saw in retrospect more than Fraser could imagine, and in prospect nothing but dreams of the unattainable. Old Nolan failed of being an enigma only because Fraser never thought of him as such.

Fraser gave Nolan the ordinary hearty greeting, asked the ordinary questions about his trip, and waited. He was more than ever convinced that the old man had news, but the news was his own to tell or conceal as he willed. Fraser felt that if the news was of interest to him, the old man would use his own judgment about telling it; on the other hand, the news might affect Nolan, and in such a case a direct question upon the point might put Nolan in a disagreeable position.

Nolan finally approached the subject; it was after their supper of goat cheese and goat meat and potatoes and coffee; after the old Indian woman who cooked for them had gone to her husband in the laborers' huts; after they had pulled up before the fire and lighted their pipes.

"I dropped into the consul's office down in Buenaventura, Andy."

Fraser grunted. That was a risk that Nolan could not help taking when he was within reach of a consul's office; probably because of some idea in the back of old Nolan's brain that the office of a consul was in a way American soil; possibly out of homesickness for American surroundings; possibly merely to look over the file of month-old newspapers and trade journals. It was a risk that Fraser never took, and so Fraser never knew what Nolan haunted the offices for.

"There was a notice hung on the bulletin board," Nolan went on presently, "a notice sent out to all the consular officers the world over, the consul told me—that a firm of lawyers in New York was looking for a man named Andrew Fraser, who left New

York in 1904 and would now be thirty-one years old."

Old Nolan paused for a moment and shot a keen glance toward Fraser, who sat unmoved as a Orinoco Indian; then he went on: "It appears that Fraser has an inheritance of something like seventy thousand dollars coming to him from his grandfather's estate—one Hiram Carver, of Kenniway, Ohio. What they want, the circular says, is news of his death or of his whereabouts, in order to settle up the estate."

"News of the one as gratefully received as of the other," Fraser chuckled dryly, his eyes upon the fire.

But to the watchful Nolan, Fraser had betrayed himself in spite of his excellent control. "What do you think about it, Andy?" he ventured after a space.

"Fraser's a lucky guy, whoever he is. Don't know that I envy him any, though, if he's got to go back to New York to collect."

Followed ten minutes of silence, unbroken save by an occasional puff at a pipe. Both watched the fire as they had done for nights unnumbered, but with this difference: now there was a sensible restraint between them; old Nolan expected Andy to say something, and Fraser knew that Nolan would pursue the subject sooner or later, for Fraser knew that Nolan had seen through his impassivity.

Then Nolan spoke: "How much did we calculate it would cost, Andy, to put a cableway in from the ledge down to the mills?"

"Fifty or sixty thousand," said Fraser.

"And that would save us a good six dollars on every ton of ore we handled. And, besides that, we could put in more men, and deliver twenty times as much ore." Nolan was speaking dreamily now, as if he might be talking more to himself than to Fraser.

Fraser grunted inarticulate assent.

"In fact," Nolan went on, "we'd be sharing thousands where we share dollars now, if only we had capital enough to build the cableway."

There was something of an appeal in old Nolan's voice that stirred Fraser. Yet he submerged his sympathy and kicked with undue violence at a quebrachos log that had partially fallen out of the fireplace and was smoldering on the earth floor. Fraser was himself plain spoken, and liked plain speakers. Why couldn't Nolan ask the question and have it done with, instead of beating about the bush? But that question was answered as soon as he had thought of it; Nolan was merely obeying an unwritten law between them. That being so, why did Nolan keep on when he might have perceived that Fraser was unwilling to confess?

Nolan himself answered the last question. "If I had money enough I could go back to the States, Andy." It was a simple statement that might not have had any connection with what had gone before, but it was voiced with a depth of longing that vanquished Fraser's stubborn and rebellious mood.

"I'm the fellow they want, Nolan, if you want to know." The speech was short and sharp, with a note of censure.

"Don't be angry with me, Andy," Nolan returned instantly and with sincere apology. "I thought possibly you might be. Of course, I ought to have shut up about it when I saw you didn't like to go on. But money means life to me again, and—and—you can't half realize—but no matter."

"That's all right, Nolan. No apology necessary." Fraser thought his own words seemed unnecessarily brutal, though not as brutal as his silence was.

"You didn't change your name, then, when you—when you came down here?"

"No, I didn't. My father made it a good name, and it's good enough for

me. It's the one thing I made up my mind to stick by when I threw everything else over. I've never done anything to—this is a confession, Nolan, now that you've got me started thinking—I've never done anything to make anybody ashamed of the name Fraser, myself least of all; no matter what they think back in the States about me."

"Do you mean that?" Nolan eyed Fraser sharply—sharply, at least, for old Nolan.

"Of course, or I wouldn't say it. If I were a criminal I'd tell you so, now that I've known you for eleven years."

"Yet you can't go back?"

"I could, but the law would nab me. I could free myself even then, but it'd be against my principles. So I reckon I'll stay here where I won't have to free myself, where I can stick to my principles."

"So you don't think you'll go back?" Nolan's voice was suddenly hopeless for the first time in Fraser's memory.

"I don't think so, Nolan," rejoined Fraser, tempering his usual bluntness out of sympathy. "I'll tell you how it is. I shouldered another man's rottenness—embezzlement; not out of any love for him, but because I figured then that I could stand it better than he and certain folks dependent upon him. In other words, I was a fool—just a plain, downright, senseless fool, and he, though he was old enough to know better, he let me be one. Of course I wouldn't be so foolish now; I was young then—not twenty."

"But you could free yourself," Nolan insisted apologetically.

"Yes. I've got proof of my innocence and his guilt. But it appears to me that it'd be a dog's trick to spring it on him now. I've made my bed and I'll lie in it, and it's not such an uncomfortable bed at that. Where'd his folks be if I showed up now? Any better off than if I'd let him take his medicine then? I've done it. It's past and

gone, and I've lived through it. What's the use of raking up old sores? As far as my name is concerned, the only person on the face of the earth who ever cared a whoop about me—with one exception—knows that I am innocent. I wrote Grandfather Carter—the man you said the poster mentioned—and told him what I'd done. So I reckon I'll let matters stand the way they are. It's against my principles to start a whine about something I've done of my own free will—whether it's foolish or not. I think it would be a scurvy trick to turn up in New York now and let this other fellow and his folks in for it, just so I could get my fingers on a few thousand dollars. Don't you think so yourself, Nolan?"

"I always knew you weren't a criminal, Andy," was Nolan's only reply. "Any one who had lived with you could see that."

The subject was not touched upon again that evening. They smoked another pipe together in silence. Fraser got out some reports that the manager of the crushing mill had sent up, and after he had read them through began some desultory calculating upon some scrap paper. He noticed that Nolan got out his old battered book for the first time in months, and fell to dreaming over it. And Fraser lay awake for a long time that night, thinking.

CHAPTER II.

MONEY IN SIGHT.

Mr. Jackson Graves was the last person in the world whom one would have connected in any way with the theatrical profession, and to have called him a sport would have seemed an impossible exaggeration of a vivid imagination. From his appearance one must have assumed his calling to be that of model for a caricaturist's undertaker. But appearances were misleading. His was a familiar figure along Broadway

from Herald Square north; his card, or the mere verbal announcement of his name, was open sesame to any one of the second-rate vaudeville booking and producing agencies that abound in that vicinity. "Skinny" Graves' retentive memory was a roster of half the acts that have booked out of New York on the cheaper circuits since the movie houses put in vaudeville. On the present occasion Graves is introduced aboard the ship *Orotava*, bound from Colón north to New York. He had made what he considered a wad of money by getting it down early on Willard at Havana; had crossed the Pearl of the Antilles to Santiago, and had dropped down to Kingston, Colón, and Panama, both to drum up bookings for a new vaudeville circuit and for certain other private-business of his own. Now he had found his man, and was safely on the ship with him.

Graves was thirty-five or thereabouts. To call him tall and dark and thin is a deplorable understatement of fact; rather, he was cadaverous and dyspeptic and funereal. His color was jaundiced; his eye black and piercing and cavernous in location; his features thin and angular; his hair thin at best and entirely absent upon his bony temples; his mouth was a mere bluish slit across his sallow, black-bearded face. His voice was the deepest of basses, thrust out upon the world by the visible activity of a prominent Adam's apple. He was entirely devoid of humor; always grave and serious and lugubrious. To give the impression of congeniality in spite of these temperamental defects, he had a way of seizing by the arm a man with whom he happened to be talking, calling the man "bo," or "brother," speaking with a deferential confidence that seemed to grant a favor upon his listener, while at the same time expecting a return favor. From his appearance, and his earnest, mournful manner, he might have been an ascetic

prophet of some out-of-the-ordinary religious sect. But if Graves had ever felt the need of worship, his homage would have been to Mercury, the guardian of those who live by their wits, or else to some tenth muse which the ancient Greeks, not foreseeing the movies and vaudeville, had never named.

Graves' origin was unknown and un-specified upon. Education had never dulled his native shrewdness; nor had the lack of it destroyed his poise and his supreme self-confidence.

His taste in dress was simple, save for an immense diamond pin in the tie that was invariably red. On alternate days he wore a blue serge suit and a gray-and-black suit in small check. No one of his acquaintances ever knew when he got a new suit, because he never changed. On the ship he wore tan shoes with rubber soles, and replaced his summer panama and winter velour hat with a small steamer cap of gray silk.

Such was the man who struck up an acquaintance with Fraser before the ship was half an hour out of Colón harbor, and stuck to him like a hungry leech. To return, then, to Fraser:

There was never any doubt back there in the stone cabin on the Cauto slope of the Cordilleras, about what Fraser would do. The result of old Nolan's news was inevitable. Fraser's heart was neither ice nor steel. Old Nolan was the nearest soul on earth to him; had been for the eleven barriest years of his life, and old Nolan was starving for America. Nolan was living in the grave there in the desolation of the Andes. The collection of the inheritance would certainly enhance the value of their claims from a mere grinding, wage-paying business to the romantic fortune of a gold mine. Nolan could go back home, he had said, if he had money enough. Fraser had in his hands life itself for Nolan. To refuse to go

to New York would be consigning Nolan to a living grave while the breath remained in his body. Fraser could not do that.

On the other hand, as far as concerned Curtis Dupont—the man Fraser had saved eleven years before in New York—the Fates might be kind. Fraser concluded that he himself had been given up for lost when the ship went down, and the crime forgotten; or the crime might be outlawed by this time for all he knew; or he might even slip into New York and out again without running foul of the law; all that would be the best of luck. But if luck was against him—well, Fraser's principles were as ironbound as his heart was kind; so there was no telling what might not happen.

And thus it was that Fraser, fully outfitted by an American tailor in Panama, stepped aboard the *Orotava*. Thanks to old Nolan's training and careful methods of life in the wilds, he could hold his place with the best of passengers in the first cabin. Not in appearance nor speech nor manners could the most finical of them suspect that Mr. Andrew Fraser had been for eleven years a fugitive from the law, lurking in the high and the low places of the earth, living a life that so diligently avoided civilization that it was little better than a savage's.

What those thought who came in contact with him was generally this: that he was a close-mouthed, plain-spoken commercial soldier of fortune in the vast battlefield of South America, pitted against fever and revolutions and Nature at her worst in the struggle for value out of concessions that at best were gigantic gambles. So much the few who talked with him had gathered, themselves furnishing the romance of it, from his conversation in dining saloon and smoking cabin. For if there was one subject that Fraser could talk of with absorbing interest and exact

knowledge and vivid compendium of fact, it was the partnership—or, in most cases, the strife—of man and nature in mountain and desert and jungle south of the Canal. Fraser never told these men that he eked out an existence as sordid and dreary and monotonous as a ditch digger's, blasting quartz and loading pack trains for a mere wage, and had built his house in the expectation of having to do that for the rest of his life. Fraser understood that these men would look upon gold mining through the rosiest glasses of their imagination; whereas none knew better than he how little of romance there is in working even a good claim in South America without capital.

These few men who talked with him found him a man who sought no acquaintances, but who was amply worth cultivating; a man reserved, none too easy of approach, but affable and likable in a quiet, dignified way—this due to Nolan's companionship—once the barrier of restraint was overcome. In a way Fraser was the dominant figure of the smoking room. When he was not about, men discussed him and speculated upon him and his work with an undercurrent of romance and envy; and this not because of his calling, but rather on account of his personality. And whenever his sturdy, capable figure darkened the doorway, and his bronzed, rugged face smiled a greeting to an acquaintance, and his keen blue eyes glanced about for a comfortable retreat, he found a welcome and an unspoken invitation to make himself one of any knot of men who chanced to be gathered in the smoking cabin.

It was Mr. Jackson Graves, as has been said, who assumed the rôle of Fraser's most assiduous entertainer. Fraser was unwilling to have the appearance of avoiding any man with deliberate intent, unless that man had actually done something to warrant it and was aware of his wrongdoing. Mere

repugnance, not based on specific speech or deed, such as Fraser felt for Graves, was not a sufficient pretext for insulting his somber shadow; otherwise Fraser would have left by one door as Skinny Graves entered by the other.

Therefore, Fraser endured the man's lugubrious garrulity, paced the deck with him because Graves hung on tight and there was no sufficient excuse for dismissing him, drank his drinks and bought in return because hints of unwillingness and refusals all but blunt made no impressions, answered questions without end upon South American affairs—all questions but one. As they entered the glassy harbor of Kingston, Graves asked Fraser, point-blank, what his business was and what he was going to New York for. This was after the shrewd Skinny had failed to elicit the desired information by round-about yet obvious tactics.

"My business is my own," Fraser told him definitely, but without sharpness.

"Don't think I'm buttin' into your affairs, bo," Graves hastened to redeem himself after the rebuff. "Just my natural curiosity. O' course I'm interested in you or I wouldn't be takin' you up like I'm doin' now. It hain't everybody I take up with like this."

"That's all right," Fraser rejoined colorlessly, more engrossed in the low buildings of Spanish Town, as the ship glided into the harbor.

Skinny Graves was, in reality, very much interested in Fraser and his business. He mooned about by himself most of the afternoon, while the rest of the passengers went ashore, and finally went below deck and rapped at the door of a certain stateroom. It was not the first time he had knocked at this door; but it was the first time he had ever come there with more than a mere inquiry on his lips. Skinny was as much in love as his cold, dispassionate nature could be, and Estelle

Harcourt was one of the reasons he had dropped on down from Havana to Panama. He had not then foreseen that she would be confined to her cabin with seasickness during the first days of the voyage.

"It's Skinny Graves," he announced himself in a low tone. "Can I come in, Stell?"

"In just a minute, Skinny," came back to him in a musical but weary voice.

There was a noise of rustling draperies, and presently the lock snapped and the door swung back. Graves stepped into the cabin, started to shut the door after him, but changed his mind at a warning glance from her. He got out a cigarette, and tapped its end upon the cover of the pasteboard box while he looked the girl over.

The faded kimono draped a slight but well-rounded figure of a girl of eighteen, while the oval face and tired blue eyes were those of a woman of thirty. She was in reality just turned twenty-three. Her velvety skin was pale, and there were dark circles under the eyes. Skinny had evidently interrupted her toilet, for she had a hair-brush in her hand, and her thick hair, which she had "touched up" in a moment of sheer folly, hung in two great ropes down her back. She sat down upon the edge of her berth, crossed one knee above the other, and swung a silk-clad foot. Skinny lit his cigarette, snapped the match out of the porthole, and leaned back against the wall of the stateroom, his silk steamer cap a trifle askew, his elbows resting behind him upon the ledge below the porthole.

"How you feelin', Stell?" he asked.

"Much better, thanks. I was just going ashore. The stewardess thought I'd better. She says we stay here till midnight."

"Wise idea. You come along with me. I know a joint where we can get pretty fair grub. Funny you should

be seasick, though. She's been smooth as an old mill pond."

"It isn't all seasickness."

Even the cold-blooded Graves experienced a strange if feeble thrill at the peculiar quality of her voice. "What's the trouble, Stell? I hain't had a chance to talk with you yet. Act no go?"

"A perfect frost, Skinny. They hissed me the first night and mobbed me the second, and the last night the manager thought I'd better not go on at all."

"The dirty dagos!"

"Oh, I'm getting used to it. I got the same thing up State. The turn's played out. It's no good. I don't know what I'm going to do. Looks as if I was down and out, now that's failed."

It must be explained that Estelle Harcourt was but a stage name, and that her act consisted in singing solos from the operas and classical music generally. She had managed to get it across with a mediocre voice by the expedient of singing under a mask and announcing herself as an operatic star who had fallen from the highest firmament of music—a fiction to which she had sacrificed her principles only after a long struggle with her conscience, the final argument being the imperious necessity of earning a living at her profession. But now that was a trick hoary with age, with imitators innumerable, and the voice without the trick was not good enough.

"I told you six months ago you'd ought to change," said Graves. "I've been watchin' you, Stell; you know that. And I seen six months ago what you was comin' to. In fact, it's always been a mystery to me how you ever got this bookin' down here. I thought some one must be puttin' up for you." Skinny said this as if it were a most natural state of affairs.

Estelle flushed. "That's certainly not true," she said sharply. "I don't know

myself how I happened to get it. If there was any one behind it, I'm sure I'm not aware of it. I admit it's rather queer, such a sudden jump from the three-a-day."

"I s'pose maybe you thought you was improvin'," said Skinny, quite as a matter of fact, with neither sarcasm nor censure.

"No, I wasn't fooled to that extent. I thought I must be just a stop-gap; that some act Lawler had booked for that week in Panama had gone back on him, and he had to fill his booking some way, and put me in. I don't know what other reason there is. But as far as anybody's putting up for me——"

"No harm meant when I said that, Stell," Skinny half apologized. "That's only part of the game, you know. You're lucky to have a ticket back to the States."

"I looked out for that, and got a round trip when I left. But I'll have just three dollars when I get there, and no chance of a booking. Do you wonder that I'm seasick, Skinny?"

"Of course, if I could help any——"

"You can't."

"You got to change your act, Stell," Graves repeated, with thoughtful obstinacy.

"What'll I do, then?"

"A singin'-and-dancin' act," suggested Graves. "You've got a high-class figure, and I could get you a good partner, and——"

"No, thanks, not for mine. If I can't draw with my voice, I won't with my figure. I might as well take a turn at the living statues or the drapery dances or trapeze. Not for mine, Skinny."

"Well," returned Skinny resignedly, to whom this ultimatum was an old story, "I've got money enough for two to get along on comfortably. Chuck this game. I've been nutty about you ever since I first seen you in Izzy Street-er's office three years ago. I'd be tickled to death to marry you any time you

say the word. And I'm not such an all-around rotten guy as I might be. You know that, Stell. You could do a whole lot worse."

"You ought to know the answer to that by heart by this time," replied the girl, with a trace of impatience. "You're all right in your place, Skinny. I like you as a friend, but——" She broke off and got up with a great show of bustling. "You get out now, Skinny, and let me dress. I'm going ashore."

"Don't be in such a hustle," rejoined Graves. "I hain't had a chance of a word with you yet, and I come down to Panama on purpose to see you and come North with you. I'm up against a proposition that——"

"You came down especially to see me," repeated Estelle, turning round with a sharp note of question.

"Well, partly, anyhow. I did have other business, I'll admit. And that's what I wanted to see you about. You say you hain't got any money. I'm givin' you a chance to split ten thousand fifty-fifty with me before we sight Coney."

Estelle sat down abruptly upon the berth. "How?"

"You've got a conscience that makes you an awful lot of trouble sometimes," Graves warned her.

"I know, but it's my own conscience. I'd do anything under heaven—almost—for five thousand dollars, the way I feel this minute. It would give me three years without any worry, and I could go on with my voice—let's hear about it, Skinny."

"It's like this: Up to the fight in Havana, I run across a guy from somewhere down in South America. He's got an awful wad. Got a gold mine at a place called Tocota, and has been workin' the ore for a couple of Yanks who have located a claim up in the mountains above where his mine is. O' course he clears a good thing out of it:

it means money to him; honest money, too, because he only charges the Yanks for what he actually delivers to 'em.

"But the young fellow—there's two of 'em, as I told you, a young guy and an old one—he's got a hunch that he can get capital to put in a mill at his own place. At least that's what this dago Estabal thinks, because all of a sudden the young fellow pulls up stakes and starts for New York. O'course, if the young guy does get the capital, and builds his own works, it'll take a lot of custom millin', or whatever they call it, away from my friend Estabal, and Estabal wants to keep that money in his own camp. You can't blame him, either. So Estabal wants to keep him from gettin' the dough. Fraser—that's the young fellow's name—won't lose anything by it; in fact he'll probably get more out of his claim by lettin' Estabal keep on reducin' his ore than he would by runnin' up against a gang of New York capitalists and gettin' his eyeteeth robbed away from him. Fraser's sure of the money he gets now, and just as like as not a bunch o' New York sharps'll trim him to a fare ye well. So we're really doin' him a favor by steerin' him away from Wall Street."

"That may be," commented the girl thoughtfully, and without conviction. "Let me get this straight. You met this South American at the fight?"

"Ye-uh. There was more rich South Americans there than there was from the States. I was makin' a little book, and I got him down for a thousand. He got a telegram from his mine manager while he was in Havana. Something like this, it was: 'Fraser gone to New York, probably for capital to put in a mill. Sails from Colón on *Orotava*. Your chance now.' I seen the telegram myself, though Estabal translated it for me. That's all there is to it. Estabal told me he'd let me draw on him for ten thousand the day that Fraser sailed from New York back south with-

out his capital. It's worth it to him to keep Fraser's millin' custom, and it's easy money for me, and honest enough, considerin' that Fraser would probably come out of it better than if Wall Street robbed him. So I drops on down to Colón to look up Fraser and come north with him. He's ashore now. You see how it is, Stell. I can't do nothin' much till I find out what Fraser is goin' to do. And Fraser is tight-mouthed as a clam. I tried to get the info out of him by beatin' around the bush, but that wasn't no go. And I even asked him right out what he was after, and he told me it wasn't any of my business. So I'm dished for the present, and this is where I want you to come in on it. It'll be a fifty-fifty split for the two of us, and since you're broke, I'll advance what you need on account till we get the whole business. It'll be a cinch to work if we only go about it right. The money's as good as ours already."

"What do you want me to do, Skinny?" asked the girl listlessly.

"Well, it's like this: A guy straight out of the jungle like he is will fall for the first decent white girl he sees. All you've got to do is to make up to him. You know how—the sweet-and-simple stuff. Give him plenty of bait. He'll swallow it and ask for more. And when he's fell for you good and proper, then you want to work out of him what his plans are. Why, a girl like you ought to get out of him anything you want to know, from his grandmother's maiden name to the size of his socks. And when we know what he's goin' to do, we'll know how to put a crimp in his game. That's all. Are you hep?"

"I'll think it over, at any rate. You'll have to keep in the dark, though. If he sees us together to amount to anything, he's certain to suspect something. Do you mind that?"

"I reckon I can trust you, Stell, so long as you don't fall in love with him

yourself. You won't do that, will you?"
Skinny laughed sepulchrally.

"No chance. You get out now, Skinny, and let me get dressed. I'll be ready in half an hour if you want to take me ashore."

CHAPTER III.

BEGINNING THE CAMPAIGN.

Skinny Graves had not actually lied to Estelle. He had concealed nothing from her that Estabal had divulged to him. But he had not dared confess to her what he himself knew of Estabal's plot—that which he had wormed unwittingly out of the South American by apt questions and shrewd deductions; for he knew well enough that if he told outright all he knew or surmised, she would not come in with him on the deal. Skinny knew that Estabal's desire was to get hold of the Fraser and Nolan claim, and he knew that the partners would not sell out. He knew that Estabal figured that if Fraser failed to get the necessary capital and returned to work the claims in the old way, the returns from the Estabal mills would be gradually cut down until Nolan and Fraser would desert their claims through sheer discouragement or inability to meet expenses from the revenue.

This quest of Fraser's for capital—which Estabal confidently believed was the motive for Fraser's sudden trip north—was a development which Estabal had not foreseen. Skinny shrewdly concluded that Estabal was too afraid of Fraser and of the local law to make any too sudden and too violent reduction in the returns from Fraser's ore; that would have been rough work, and would lay him open at once to suspicion. On the other hand, a gradual diminution of returns to the point of vanished profits would not furnish any sure ground for suspicion; so that ultimately Fraser and Nolan must desert their claim, and Estabal's company

could come into it by the simple method of resiling in their own names. Moreover, by that time the two partners would have accomplished a lot of the necessary and expensive work of opening up the auriferous ledge so that the ore could be handled in bigger quantities: just so much more money saved to Estabal and his Tocota Company.

Fraser's trip north was, to the South American, a sure indication that the partners were growing discouraged. He could not prevent the trip save by out-and-out methods. If Fraser did manage to get the capital, the plot he had nurtured so carefully for a year would come to nothing, and he would be the gainer only by so much gold as he had managed to reserve for himself out of their ore. Therefore Fraser's attempt to get capital must be frustrated.

The South American, of course, did not tell all this to Graves, so that Skinny did not feel called upon to explain it to Estelle. But Skinny had not discussed the matter for two whole days with Estabal in Havana and on the train across the island to Santiago without finding out much more than Estabal suspected; and Skinny saw the whole plot as clearly, with as much certainty, as if Estabal had put it down for him in black and white with accompanying diagrams and illustrations.

And as for the point of honor concerned, that was negligible. Graves would keep safely within the law; he calculated no farther than that. He had always been forced to look out for himself, and if ever he had had one put over on him, he considered it his own fault; let Fraser do the same! Estelle, of course, would not look at it that way, but no matter. By skillful argument and explanation and statements that concealed as much as they revealed, he won her over to his side before they returned to the ship. Even with his deftness, however, he knew that he would not have succeeded had it not

been for her desperate need of money; this was his ablest ally.

It was the next morning, as Jamaica was fast dropping astern, that Estelle began her campaign. With book and sunshade, she came up to the promenade deck after her late breakfast. She had put on a simple gown of tan pongee, with trim white shoes and a leghorn sun hat, the broad mauve ribbon of which was the only touch of color about her.

Graves and his victim were somewhere about; she could hear Graves' deep voice talking, and their footsteps on the deck, approaching her. When they turned the corner and came upon her, she had managed to assume a natural pose by the rail, her pretty Grecian chin cupped in her hand, gazing pensively out over the sunlit reaches of the Caribbean. She did not look up as they passed, but she saw from the corner of her eye that Fraser had studied her profile.

As they disappeared, she turned and strolled the opposite way around the deck, so that she could not fail to meet them face to face. This time her blue eyes read Fraser in the briefest glance, and fell upon Graves in silent query. Skinny bowed slightly, touched his cap with awkward formality, and walked on without a second's interruption of what he had been saying to Fraser.

But Fraser, he noticed, was nibbling at the bait. Two or three times before they reached the corner, Fraser had deliberately turned to look back at her, a movement which Graves saw while feigning not to notice, and saw with pleasure. Fraser couldn't help it, he told himself; any one would turn to look at Estelle, especially the way she looked this morning. But Fraser took it with a violence that caught Skinny unprepared. They had barely got out of sight around the corner when Fraser stopped abruptly and caught Skinny's arm in a grip of steel.

"Do you know that young lady?" de-

manded the younger man, in an indescribable tone that certainly was prompted by something more than passing curiosity.

Taken quite aback for a moment, Graves could only stare.

"I noticed you spoke to her," Fraser helped him out.

"Why, sure thing, bo," stammered Skinny, after which speech he regained his composure. "I know her slightly, just as any passenger gets an idea of who he's sailin' with. You act as if she was your long-lost sister."

"Haven't got any such. What's her name?"

"Name is on the list as Estelle Harcourt. That's all I know about her. She's supposed to sit next to me at the doctor's table, but I hain't laid eyes on her once since the chief steward assigned her place. Want to know her? She's not such a bad chicken at that."

"Yes, I'd like to know her. She puts me in mind of some one—in fact—well, never mind. Do me a favor, Graves, if you know her, and introduce me."

"Surest thing you know, bo. I'd better see her first and find out if it's all right. You stay here a minute. I'll go and meet her and fix it up."

Skinny hurried off before Fraser could speak, and met Estelle sauntering down the lee deck. Graves looked about him quickly. It was too early for the deck to be crowded.

"Say, Stell," he said, in a half whisper, out of one corner of his mouth, "do you know that guy? Have you ever seen him before?"

"Never. Why?"

"He's got a bug in his head that he's seen you before somewhere. I was just wonderin'. If he has, you want to be careful. You ought to know." Skinny's piercing eyes questioned hers.

"I've certainly never seen him to know him. Maybe he's seen my act."

"It can't be that. He tells me he hain't been out o' South America for

years, and he didn't get to Panama till three days after you was finished. Well, it don't matter one way or the other, only you'd better step careful and find out what he knows about you before you start anything. It's goin' to be a cinch, Stell. He's reachin' for the bait already. Now don't play him too long, and don't be in too big a hurry to land him, either. There's plenty of time before we sight Coney."

"I'm there with the bells on, Skinny. Lead me to it. How do I look, anyway?" She stepped back a pace and assumed a self-conscious pose.

"You're a bird, Stell. If you only had a chance, Mary Pickford wouldn't be in it. Come on. The guy'll be gettin' anxious soon, and I'll come buttin' in on our teet-a-teet."

The pair of them strolled down the deck to the corner where Fraser was waiting. Graves introduced them and effaced himself.

"Mr. Graves tells me," began Estelle, "that you've met me before. I'm really sorry, but I don't remember you at all, I'm frank enough to admit, and I have an unusually good memory for faces."

"I'm afraid Graves misquoted me. What I said was that you reminded me of some one I'd seen. Let's find a couple of chairs somewhere and thrash it out—that is, if you don't mind."

As a matter of fact, Fraser was only beginning to see where his impulsive statement bade fair to lead him. He regretted that he had even mentioned to Graves that this girl reminded him of some one from the past. This was one of the threads that might be woven into a net about him before he got away from civilization again; and this in spite of his firm resolutions to be discreet and eternally vigilant. True, the sight of the girl had astounded him into the unwitting disclosure; true, he was tremendously curious about her. But how was he going to establish her identity and ask the questions he wanted to ask

without betraying himself and at the same time establishing his own identity? It was worse than that. Her curiosity had been aroused now. She would be unlikely to rest easy until she had ferreted out the truth one way or another. How could he evade her inquiries, and explain himself, without creating suspicion?

"I'm absolutely positive now," said Fraser, when the deck hand had arranged the chairs to his liking, "that I've never seen you before."

"What a disillusionment! I'd hoped to discover something really exciting about myself."

"All the same," Fraser went on, picking his way carefully through the maze he was reading, "I can't get the idea out of my head that our paths have crossed somewhere or somehow. Can't you tell me something of your life, where you've been and what you have done? Perhaps I can place you then."

"Beginning where?"

"Anywhere you like. Say at the time you—you left school. I suppose you have."

"Have what? Left school?"

"Yes," said Fraser, meeting her smile with his own.

"There's not so much to tell," she rejoined, after a moment's thought. "I thought I had a voice, and mother took me to Paris to train it. It cost a lot, and she wasn't a very good business woman; and when she died I found there wasn't anything left. So I went on the stage, singing classical music. Have the paths crossed yet?"

"The details are a trifle too meager so far for me to locate myself. Where was your father all this time?"

"Father died when I was a little girl ten or eleven years old."

Fraser held himself carefully in check, his face averted lest she see some emotion depicted upon it. He was treading on very dangerous ground.

Just one question, and—but that must not be; he must bide his time.

"Where did you live?"

"In New York. Father was in business there. He wasn't much of a business man, though; too dreamy and kind-hearted, poor man. He inherited a good business from his father—coffee importing—and when his affairs were settled up we found he was nearly bankrupt."

"Perhaps," hazarded Fraser, "perhaps he was ill and out of touch with his affairs for some time before his death."

"Oh, no; he died very suddenly. Lost at sea, in fact. He went down off the coast of Peru on one of his South American trips."

"I see," Fraser managed to get out, with an even voice. "How long ago, did you say?"

"I didn't say," she replied, with a roguish smile. "If I did, you could put two and two together and find out to a year how old I am, now that I've told you how old I was when he died."

"But you don't mind my guessing?"

"Not in the slightest. I was only joking, anyway. I'll tell you if you hit the mark."

"Eleven years ago," said Fraser, looking straight out over the sea.

"You know! You knew father?"

"What was his name?" Fraser countered.

"Giles Manning. Harcourt is only my stage name, my mother's maiden name. My real name is Stella Manning."

"I never knew any one by the name of Giles Manning," said Fraser soberly.

"Then how did you guess so exactly?"

"Simple reasoning. From what you have told me, it must have happened ten or a dozen years ago. I know the *Antofagasta* foundered off Peru eleven years ago, and was, so far as I know, the only big passenger steamer wrecked

during that period. Nothing easier, you see."

"Yes, I see," she returned, with a trace of disappointment. "I was beginning to hope that you knew father, or had met him on his last trip. But every one was lost, so that could not be."

"I believe it was reported that every one was lost."

"Oh, yes; not even a sailor got ashore. No one ever knew she was lost until she was weeks and weeks overdue. And then ships began to pick up pieces of wreckage—but there, you probably know more about it than I do."

"Possibly." And then it was that Fraser thanked fortune for the urgent necessity of a fire back there on that barren coast, eleven years ago, that had forced him to break up the stateroom door upon which he had brought Giles Manning ashore. He had left no clew then, though it was fate and not foresight that had actuated him.

Now, by a strange vagary of fate, the mystery of that little round photograph which old Nolan cherished had been solved. Fraser was morally sure of it when he first saw Estelle; but without positive proof he was afraid to believe it. The story of the shipwreck was corroboration aplenty.

Already Fraser was beginning to dream of the time when he could confess to this very agreeable young lady—Skinny Graves' estimate of Fraser's vulnerability to Estelle's wiles was coming true, and she had not even extended herself yet—that her father was alive, and was his partner, and had been his closest companion and only friend for eleven long years. It was an unbelievable piece of good luck.

For the present, of course, he could say nothing. He owed that to old Nolan. He couldn't speak without Nolan's permission, for he did not know why the old man had elected to disappear from civilization. He would write to him at once, break the astounding news

to him, and then tell the girl that already they lacked little of being brother and sister. But wait! Could he ever confess all this to her? How could he explain himself, and his presence on the wrecked ship, and his consequent skulking in the dark corners of the earth? Fraser was just beginning to realize the tremendous onus of the burden he was carrying, and its weight crushed his ebullient spirits.

"Have the paths crossed yet?" The girl's merry voice broke in upon his reverie.

"No," said Fraser gravely. "I'm sure I've never seen you before. I'm afraid they'll never cross, after all. I can't—can't get things worked out yet to my own satisfaction. Later on, perhaps. The idea isn't as persistent as it was at first."

"I understand. That sort of thing often happens. I'm not enough of a psychologist to explain it. It's some fantasy, some mental illusion. Let's let it go at that, and accept each other as we are."

"Yes," Fraser agreed gladly. "The present is too good and too short to waste in digging up the past."

Which statement recalled Estelle to her business, a matter that she had quite forgotten for the moment. Fraser's past—his immediate past, at least—was precisely what she wanted to know. It had seemed a simple thing as she dressed that morning, and thought out her campaign. That was before she knew Fraser. Now she dreaded it, and was half inclined to back out; it would have been so much more enjoyable to finish the trip with a clear conscience and the ability to meet his eyes squarely; so much more desirable to while away the pleasant moments with him, without the ogre of treason and double-dealing constantly before her when she talked with him or thought of him.

But, after all, she had arrived at the point where she must look out for her

practical interests. If she didn't, no one else would. She had to have money, for she was at the end of her rope. And five thousand dollars was too valuable to her, meant too much to her just now, to be tossed aside for the whim of a puritanical conscience or for the greater pleasure of a few days with a casual acquaintance who would most likely go out of her life as he had come into it. No, be Fraser never so agreeable to her, she must sacrifice him to her own exigent needs. Money was everything to her now, and Fraser was never likely to be anything to her. A conscience—too much conscience—was a troublesome thing when one is down and out. Skinny Graves had managed to drum that into her during their afternoon ashore at Kingston; and Skinny had managed to present this matter to her in its most favorable light, so that even she was in doubt as to whether that same conscience of hers was not one of the superman kind.

In any case, she had herself to look out for; let Fraser do the same. He was young and strong and sanguine, and was more able to stand the disappointment of not finding capital for his mine than she was to endure starvation. He would still have the mine, even if he didn't find capital to develop it; and such privations as she faced meant the end of everything for her. Thus she reasoned, and thus she sealed the doom of Fraser, Nolan & Co., or whatever name their partnership went under.

To Fraser's desire to let his past lie buried she interposed an objection, concealing her definite purpose beneath an air of levity. "Still," she said, "we must peep back into the past before we face the future. Otherwise how shall we know what ideas and what likes and dislikes we have in common? I've told you every blessed thing about myself that's worth telling. I know you've got a lot more to tell about yourself than I had. You really ought to be as

frank with me as I was with you. Then we can face the future with a clean slate."

And as Fraser met her laughing blue eyes, he would have given much to be able to be frank with her. He dared not. He had so shaped his life that such a pleasure was denied him forever. He could tell his past to no one. Civilization and all that it entailed became suddenly a terrible thing to him.

CHAPTER IV.

CROSSING THE RUBICON.

Skinny Graves was exceedingly irritated; and, like most men of his somber, morose type, he gave evidence of his wrath not in violent outbursts with the consequent amelioration of temper, but rather in a lowering brow, a sullen, lonely brooding, and a baleful, ferocious gleam in his shifty eyes. The cause of his rage was not far to seek: there remained but one more night in their voyage; Estelle had found out nothing from Fraser, and Graves found it next to impossible to swallow the loss of the reward that Estabal had offered him, on what he then considered ridiculously easy terms. Then there was a secondary cause, as appeared in the conversation he had with Estelle up on the boat deck toward four o'clock of the afternoon just preceding their last night out.

It was practically the first chance Graves had had for an undisturbed talk with the girl since he had introduced her to Fraser. The two young people had been almost constantly together during the hours they were on deck, and Skinny, for the success of his plot, had not dared risk the discovery of an intimacy with Estelle such as another visit to her stateroom must establish. But upon this afternoon, Fraser had excused himself upon the plea of settling up some urgent business that must be attended to before they landed, and had

gone to his cabin; the business being that which he had persistently neglected as a disagreeable duty—the mapping out of his plan of action after he had arrived in New York.

Skinny found a secluded corner where Fraser would be unlikely to come upon them unawares even if he should decide suddenly to come out on deck; and, moreover, Skinny surveyed the spot furtively to guard against possible chance eavesdroppers. He stood with his hands in his pockets, leaning against a stanchion, his cap askew, his cheap cigarette in the corner of his wide mouth as he would have held a cigar, glaring down at Estelle, who sat upon the overhang of a raised skylight, her eyes anywhere but upon her companion.

"What you doin', Stell—double-crossin' me?" were his first words relative to the affair in hand.

"Certainly not!" she told him indignantly.

"Looks mighty like it."

"I can't help that, Skinny."

"If it hain't the truth, you gotta show me."

"How can I prove it, I'd like to know? I've done everything I can. If Mr. Fraser won't tell me his business, how can I make him? What do you mean by 'double-crossing' you, anyway?"

"Looks to me like you'd gone nutty about him, and was puttin' one over on me on the sly, so's to pull him through it all right. That's how it looks." Skinny's black eyes glowed like smoldering coals.

For the first time she met his eyes. "Look at it that way if you choose to. You know it isn't true. You know that if it were true I'd have come to you long ago and told you so. I won't double cross you. If I wanted to take Mr. Fraser's part, you'd be the first to hear it, just as soon as I'd made up my mind to do it. You know that, Skinny."

Knowing that she spoke the truth,

Graves was mollified. "I didn't say it was true, Stell; I only said it looked that way. You can't blame me. It does. Here's this guy nutty about you, crazy about you; anybody can see that. And it looks to me as if you were more'n half gone on him. You've been with him every minute for three days now, and you're different, somehow, from what you was back there at Kingston. You've got more life about you, more expression, and your eyes are brighter'n I've seen 'em—that is, when you're with him."

Estelle flushed. "Well, and what if I am?" she declared defiantly. "What difference does that make to you? What business is it of yours?"

"We'll see about that," returned Graves, with evident restraint.

"Except in a business way," Estelle corrected herself. "I can't help it if I like the man. I'm not to be blamed for that. And I do like him. I'll tell you that squarely, Skinny. But it's no good. Liking him won't get me anywhere. He's just a casual acquaintance, who finds it pleasant to be with me on the ship, and'll forget all about me two hours after he lands. I realize that. So what's the use of letting my liking him stand in my way? I'm only telling you this to prove that I'm acting square with you on this other proposition, regardless of what I think of the man. I've got to have money the minute I get to New York—got to have it or starve. That's the way I've got to look at it whether I want to or not; there's no other way for me to look at it. If I thought there was any chance of seeing him again and being friends with him after we get off the ship, I'd turn you down flat, Skinny, and tell you so. I'd take the risk and be glad to. But it's a hundred to one against it. He's got his own business and no time for me. He'll be going back to South America before we could really get to know each other. I've thought it all out, you

see; before I'd known him twenty-four hours I realized what I was up against, and I had to sit down and have it out with myself. It's hard, but I can't dodge it. I've got to face it. I've got to forget about him and get that five thousand. If I've failed, it isn't my fault—certainly not crookedness on my part, or any lack of effort. Now do you believe me?"

"Then what is the trouble?" Graves persisted, with sullen stubbornness. "If you hain't double-crossin' me, there hain't nothin' else to it but that you hain't big enough for your job. You hain't half the woman I thought you was. Seems to me, on a simple little job like this, a woman with half the brains you've got could have pulled the trick the first day."

"How would she have done it if the fellow refuses to tell?"

"Take it from me, if you make up to a guy the right way, and jolly him along, and make him think you're game for anything, he couldn't hold back on you."

"That's just what I did, Skinny—as far as—as I could. I can't be too brazen—I just can't."

"That's the point, then. You're too darned much of a prude. You've fell down on your job. A woman with any get-up to her could get around him as easy as pie; but you—why, you're so blamed afraid that somebody'll think you hain't quite on the square that you'd blush and faint away if he looked sideways at you. You'll never get anywhere till you cut out that innocence stunt of yours."

"I'm decent, anyway."

"That's all right. Of course you are. I know that. But that's no reason you shouldn't let a fellow think you was game, whether you was or not; and especially when there's a cool five thousand in it for you. That's the trouble—you've got stuck on this guy and you want to keep a halo around your head as long as he's around. I see through it,

right enough. But we won't discuss it any more. It don't get us anywheres. It don't matter now what the trouble is; the trouble's there, and we've got to get around it somehow or other. I hain't goin' to let easy money slip through my fingers like that. You say you've asked him right out what he's goin' to New York for."

"Yes, I have. And all he does is to put me off with some joke or other. I haven't succeeded in getting one word of fact out of him."

"What's he doin' now?" asked Skinny when he had digested this information.

"He said he had to get his affairs in shape, now we're so near home, so he wouldn't have anything to bother about on the last day."

"So he could have more time with you," supplemented Skinny scornfully. And then, after another reflective pause: "By good rights, Stell, I ought to turn you down. There's no reason that I can see for divvyin' up with you now that you've lost out on account of your fool innocence stunt. But all the same I feel sorry for you, and I'll give you another chance. I'm goin' to pull this off anyhow—with you or without you. You might as well be in on it. You keep this guy on deck till midnight to-night. I'll do all the dirty work, and if I do pull it off as I ought to, I'll still split fifty-fifty. Only you've got to keep him with you till midnight, and no shenanigan about it, or no warnin' him to look about. You can do that much without losin' your halo, can't you?"

"What are you going to do? Rob his trunks?" she demanded uneasily.

"Rob nuthin'. I won't take a thing. I'll be square with you as I expect you to be with me. I'll tell you what I'm goin' to do, and see that you keep it to yourself, or I'll blacklist you with every bookin' agency in New York. If this guy's down in his cabin gettin' his business straightened up, his papers'll all be in shape to-night. That's reasonable.

Well, all I'm goin' to do is to sneak in when the ship quiets down about eleven and go through his papers. No harm in that, is there? I'll leave everything just as I find it or better, and he'll never guess that somebody's wise to all this business of his. All you've got to do is to sit tight and keep him on deck till midnight. If you can't do that, you hain't worth your salt, and you might as well give up right here. Are you hep, or do I pull it alone?"

"It's a rotten trick, Skinny."

"And I guess five thousand is a rotten lot of money to have in your pocket-book, especially when this guy gives you the big laugh as soon as he gets out of your sight in West Street. What about it, eh? It won't be precisely handsome to land in New York with your three dollars and not a bookin' in sight. What'll you do then—go to Fraser? Tell him you're broke and probably will be the rest of your life? Ask him to take pity on you and help you out? Lovely proposition, eh? What else you got to look forward to? Is it that, or five thousand iron men to do what you want to with? A wad of money, or the merry laugh from a guy who'll most likely make out that he don't remember you when you ask him to give you a hand-out? Which is it, Stell? I want to know now, so's I can figure out how I'm goin' to go about it."

"Of course there are no two ways about it, and never were, when you look at it from a common-sense point of view," she replied presently. "I've realized that ever since you talked to me that night in Kingston. Only—I reckon I haven't got any too much common sense." And Skinny Graves was satisfied with that—satisfied and pleased, where a man of finer sensibilities would have read in her peculiar tone a despair that would have made him either compassionate or uneasy as to the future.

"That's the girl, Stell. I knew you

had the stuff in you when it comes to the scratch. Soon as you forget that there's anybody but you to be considered in this world, the sooner you'll get on and make good. So I'll bank on you to keep him on deck till midnight."

He sought further guarantees of her implied promise, and went below satisfied that the arrangement would be carried out; this in spite of her averted eyes and the half-heartedness of her nod.

She sat there in a brown study until the dinner bugle sounded. She had cowered before her future, and that had made her cower before Skinny Graves. She was aghast at the half promise she had given; yet she dared not regret it too much, for fear she must run straightway to Fraser and make a clean breast of it; and she was still telling herself, with desperate emphasis, that she owed it to herself to do as Skinny told her to do, and let Fraser look out for himself. True enough, under almost any other circumstances, she would have met Skinny's advances with the scornful refusal they deserved. She was no moral weakling; since the time she had been forced to earn her own precarious existence, her character had been strong enough to tide her over more than ordinary temptations.

But she was human, after all; little enough, perhaps, of the heroine. Despair had sapped her will and blurred her moral perspective. The future was black. Skinny Graves had managed to light one feeble flicker of hope. She had this one chance of getting money enough to live on when she got to New York. Otherwise she was face to face with the grim specter of destitution and no professional engagement—no way to earn even the pittance she required until she could get a situation as salesgirl or something like that.

And again she was human. Had Fraser shown by the slightest sign that he found more than a passing pleasure

in her companionship; had he even intimated that he cared to see more of her after they landed, she felt that she could have got through the crisis some other way. If there was something to live for on the other side of the slough she had to cross, she felt that she could have got through it by sheer grit. Hope breeds courage; the lack of it, cowardice. The sign from Fraser would have pulled her through safely, but that sign did not appear.

Fraser guarded himself strictly if unwillingly against giving that sign. For it was unfair to the girl to give her any encouragement until his own standing in civilization was established and made as honorable as it should be. And it was the solution of that very problem that busied Fraser down in his cabin that afternoon. He found himself in an impasse—or, rather, at the fork of a dilemma. He had resolved, on coming north to civilization again, to let sleeping dogs lie, to let Curtis Dupont and his cheery little wife and young daughter live on as he had hoped they would live when he shouldered Dupont's crime. But this affair with Estelle was a consideration he had not foreseen. How could he regain his honorable position in the world? How bring it about that he could tell this girl the story of his life and stand by her side unafraid of the law? Only by forcing Curtis Dupont to take from his shoulders the burden of crime that never belonged there. Should his stubborn determination defeat the attainment of his desires? Did this girl really mean enough to him to warrant him, from selfish motives, in forcing a readjustment upon the Duponts, his principles and resolutions to the contrary notwithstanding?

Fraser had long ago eradicated that trait that had involved him with Dupont—the acting upon hasty, ill-considered decisions. His years of hardship had taught him caution, prudence, restraint. He would not yet decide what to do in

this particular case. He must see more of Estelle; he must look up Dupont in a prudent way, and see whether he and his family still deserved the consideration he had resolved to show them; after that he could make his decision.

He must know the truth from old Nolan, of course, as soon as he could. He drew up a draft of a cablegram which he intended to send the moment he got ashore:

Met girl on ship whose father, Giles Manning, was lost on *Antofagasta*. Exactly like that small picture of yours. Are my natural conjectures right? Cable care estate attorneys.

FRASER.

Next Fraser set about writing a note to Dupont, to be dispatched as soon as he could find his address, so that if Dupont were still in New York he could have that business over with without delay:

MY DEAR DUPONT: I have returned to New York for a short time on business. It is necessary that I see you at the earliest opportunity. I still have in my possession the exculpation you gave me that night. This is not a threat. Be good enough to make an immediate appointment, and address me,

ANDREW FRASER,

Care of Brennan & Clark, Attorneys,
655 William Street.

Fraser picked up an old, stained bill fold that lay in front of him, opened it, and drew from it a piece of paper so old that it had fallen to pieces in the creases where it was folded, age-yellowed, and water-stained. He unfolded it, and placed the pieces in juxtaposition so that he could read the blurred and faded writing. It was a sheet of the official paper of the Wheat Exchange Bank, dated—it is doubtful if Fraser could have read this, so indistinct was it, had he not known by heart what it said—in October, 1903. There was only a line or two:

I hereby certify that it was I, and not Andrew Fraser, who took eleven thousand dollars from the One Hundred and Twenty-fifth Street branch of the Wheat Exchange Bank.

CURTIS DUPONT.

Fraser smiled as he recalled how the weak, spineless, shifting Curtis Dupont, in a moment of tearful gratitude, had forced that document upon him when Fraser left New York.

"For Heaven's sake, Andy," Dupont had said, "I couldn't bear to see you go to jail for this. Use it if you have to; promise me that."

"I won't have to," Fraser had said, certain, as he looked at Dupont, that if ever he did try to use it Dupont would do his best to repudiate it.

But now Dupont might have his chance, after all, Fraser mused, as he put it carefully back into the bill fold, together with the draft of the cablegram and the note to Dupont, and put the bill fold in his coat pocket.

To his surprise, the dinner bugle sounded as he opened the door to go on deck; he had not realized that it was so late. And this was the last night of the voyage, when the more formal of the passengers dressed for dinner. After a second's hesitation, he turned back into his cabin, hastily donned the brand-new dinner jacket which the Panama tailor had managed to get out for him just in time for Fraser to catch the train across to Colón, and made a grimace of dissatisfaction with himself in the mirror. This formal dress might be all right on some men, but it appeared to him that his brown, sinewy hands, and his weather-beaten face was rather incongruous with the rest of it. Then he knew that his change was due to a foolish, boyish desire to preen himself before Estelle that night at dinner, and afterward on the deck. He had half a mind to change back, but the rattle of cutlery against china came down to him from the dining saloon and decided him against such a procedure, as the dinner was already well under way. And, feeling no end awkward and uncomfortable in his unaccustomed finery, he hurried up to dinner.

CHAPTER V.

THE THUNDERBOLT.

Fraser's plans to dress were wasted. Estelle was not down. He bolted his food, passed up the knickknacks at the end of the dinner, and started for the deck on the chance of finding her there. She was pacing the deck slowly, opposite the door into the main companionway, when he appeared.

"Hello, here you are. I missed you at dinner," he said.

"I'm not feeling very well," she rejoined, without looking at him.

Fraser studied her for a moment. She certainly was not well; there was a strange air about her that might mean anything. "But we can soon fix that," he asserted confidently. "We'll get hold of the deck steward and have a couple of chairs stuck together up on the boat deck and have a trayful of the best served up there. How about it?"

"I'd like to, really. But—I don't think I'm equal to it. I think I'll go below. If I feel hungry later, I can have the stewardess bring me something."

"But this is the last night out. I'd hoped to have a good talk," Fraser objected, with obvious disappointment.

"And I, too. It's too bad, but it can't be helped. I must be fit for the landing to-morrow. I want to see the harbor as we enter. And if we stay on deck we're likely to stay late and find it hard to get up in time. You'd better turn in early, too; I'll see you on deck to-morrow morning—if you're up early enough."

"No appeal to that, eh?"

"No, I'm afraid not. The longer I put it off—Good night, Mr. Fraser." Before Fraser could conjure up further arguments to win her over, she had disappeared down the companionway.

On the way to her own cabin, she knocked tentatively at Skinny Graves' door. The odds were against his being

there; if he weren't, she would write a note and dispatch it by a steward. She was more than half surprised to hear Skinny's gruff "Who's there?" Skinny was busy with something; she could hear the rustling of papers inside the cabin.

"It's Estelle," she told him. "I want to see you a minute." She waited resolutely.

Skinny finally opened the door a crack. "What do you want?"

"I just wanted to tell you that I'm not going to do what I said I would—what you told me to. I can't; that's all."

"You're a fool, Stell," Skinny ejaculated. "What you goin' to do about it when you land with your three dollars? Did you think any about that?"

"I'll get along somehow. It's none of your affair, anyway, so long as I don't ask you to help me, and I certainly shan't do that."

"Come on in a minute, Stell," Skinny said, after a moment, holding the door back. "Let's talk this over. What made you go back on me?"

"No, I won't come in. There's nothing to talk over. I went back on you because it's a dirty trick, though it took me till now to see it."

"I suppose you put the guy wise to me," commented Skinny, with some scorn.

"No, I didn't—not in so many words. I *did* tell him he'd better go to his cabin early, though. And I'm going to give the bedroom steward half a dollar to watch his cabin to see that no one goes in there. You've always been a decent sort of a friend to me, Skinny, and I wouldn't put you in bad if I could help it. But I certainly don't intend to let you go through Mr. Fraser's papers. So you'd better keep away."

"You might better save your half dollar," Skinny told her. "That'd buy you two meals, and you may need 'em bad before you're done."

"What difference would two meals more or less make?" she returned defiantly. "You keep away from him, Skinny; that's all I ask of you."

"To-morrow night at this time you'll wish you had this to do over again, take it from me. But it's too late now. I want to see you on deck in the morning early, without fail, Stell. I may have something important to tell you. I'm busy now, so run along."

Skinny almost slammed the door in her face, and turned back to complete the wireless message he was drawing up. Minutes later he left his cabin, went up to the wireless house, and filed his message for immediate transmission.

"What time'll we get to quarantine?" he asked the operator.

"Daylight or thereabouts," was the reply.

"All right. That message'll go right away, won't it?"

"Certainly, sir. At once."

Skinny found his way back down to the smoking cabin. Fraser was there, sitting moodily over a glass of beer. Skinny stepped up to him confidently.

"Skirt's turned you down, eh?" he laughed.

"Not that anybody knows of," Fraser returned sharply. "And not that it's anybody's business if she has."

"No harm meant, old sport," Skinny laughed it off, laying his parchmentlike hand familiarly on Fraser's shoulder. "I couldn't help but notice it, though; it got so a guy couldn't pry you loose from her for more than a how-de-do since I knocked her down to you. Believe I'll have the same. Steward!"

"You can have this chair, if you want it," Fraser replied. "I'm through." He finished his glass at a draft and arose to go.

"No, don't be in such a rush," protested Graves. "I just wanted to put you wise to her for your own good.

Of course I don't know anything about her, but I take it she's a bit fly and pretty much on the lookout for herself."

"What do you mean by that?" Fraser, now on his feet to go, met Skinny's shifty eye across the table.

"Well, to start with, I hear she's one of these here vodeville artists, and the best of 'em hain't any too good. You know what I mean—that is, if you've been around 'em. They'll do anything for the dough—anything—any of 'em will. And I don't see, from what I know of her, that she's any better than the rest of 'em. That class of women never have any too good a name, and I guess most likely they don't deserve any better one than they've got. You want to look out for her. If you've got anything in your stateroom that's any account and she knows about it——"

"What the devil are you driving at, Graves?" Fraser interrupted. "Either come down to business or shut up about her."

"Give a man time, can't you? Don't get huffy about it. Maybe there's nothin' in it, after all; but I thought it wouldn't do any hurt to tip you off, and it might do some good. When I was comin' through the passageway by your cabin after dinner, I heard her talkin' confidential to the steward—something about your cabin. And I seen her slip him some money. Maybe it don't mean nothin', but thinks I to myself, it won't do any hurt for me to pass the news on to a pal and let him do as he thinks best about it. We was sort o' pals at first, of course, and I hain't the kind that sticks around and lets a skirt put one over on a pal of mine without givin' some warnin'—and especially when it was me that introduced you two. O' course I don't say she meant anything. I'm only tellin' you what I seen and heard. And, after all, as I says at first, it hain't as if she was a school-teacher or a lady missionary or a right-down decent girl. She's a cheap-skate ac-

tress, after all; and you know what they are—or ought to know, if you don't."

"I reckon I know what she is, all right," said Fraser, turning on his heel and leaving the smoking cabin.

Fraser had curbed a just temper because it wasn't worth while getting angry with Graves and in order to avoid a smoking-room brawl for the girl's sake. Then, too, Graves might have been convinced that he was right and was doing the proper thing by a friend; Fraser couldn't expect Graves to know Estelle as he himself knew her; and he admitted to himself that before he knew her he shared, out of ignorance, Skinny's opinion of theatrical ladies. Graves had acted in bad taste, had been positively insulting; but it was quite possible that he had done it from the best of motives. Fraser refused to believe, of course, that there was a shred of truth in Skinny's indictment of the girl.

With Graves in the smoking cabin, there wasn't much for him to do except to lounge about on deck or go below to his own cabin. And after half a dozen aimless turns about the promenade, he went below to finish up his packing so that the next morning might be entirely free. His bedroom steward stood in the corridor near his cabin, watching him rather queerly. Fraser hesitated, gave the man a second sharp glance.

"What's biting you?" asked Fraser wonderingly.

"Nothing, sir. I 'ave been lookin' out, and nobody 'as been near your cabin, sir."

"Thanks," Fraser returned dryly, "but why play the watchdog with my cabin so particularly?"

"Why, sir, because a young lady—Miss Harcourt, I think 'er name is—asked me to. I thought you knew."

Fraser stared at him for a moment. Then there was something in what the cadaverous Graves had told him! The steward looked perplexed and a trifle

abashed. "Oh, yes, I remember now," Fraser said presently. "But it was only by way of a joke." Surprised and puzzled, he passed on and locked the state-room door behind him.

Was there, by the remotest chance, anything in what Graves had told him? He stood by the door and passed a quick glance over the confusion of the room; it appeared to be precisely as he had left it after dressing for dinner. And what did he have that any one could possibly want? His watch was in his pocket; his money—most of it—was in double eagles in a belt he wore constantly. He had had some of it changed by the purser into American bills, and that was in his old bill fold, which again was in his pocket. Instinctively he put his hands to his pocket to corroborate that belief, and drew it away empty. In his haste he had neglected to change it from his sack suit to his dinner jacket. But no matter. What little cash was in it the thief was welcome to. He picked up the coat from the berth upon which he had thrown it, and found the bill fold there. He found in it a ten-dollar bill and four ones, exactly what he remembered should have been in it. The draft of the cablegram was there, the letter to Curtis Dupont, the—no, that was gone.

It came as a shock to him, this discovery. He sat down upon the lounge opposite the berth and looked through the bill fold with all the care necessary to search into its smallest corners. No doubt of it; the torn and faded paper that Curtis Dupont had given him eleven years ago had been stolen. The sole bit of evidence that stood between him and a prison sentence for embezzlement had been stolen from him. By whom, and for what purpose? Who could suspect he had it? Who could want it? And that person who took it, why hadn't he—or was it she?—taken the money as well; taken that which was of value and left that which was

worthless to any one but him? It was fairly evident that the marauder had looted the cabin for that particular piece of paper and for nothing else. Almost instinctively he caught himself reviewing the conversations he had had with Estelle, in search of a clew, some word he had let slip that would have given her an inkling of the truth. He found none, and kicked himself mentally for entertaining the suspicion. It couldn't have been Estelle; she wasn't that kind, in spite of what Skinny Graves had said. And yet why had she been dallying with the steward, and giving him orders that were inexplicable?

Fraser threw the bill fold aside, knit his brows, and reached absently for a pipe. And thus his eye fell upon the glove. It was lying just underneath the edge of the berth, as if the person who had carried the pair had laid them upon the berth while she busied her hands with the coat, and when she picked them up to go had not noticed that one had fallen upon the floor. Fraser picked it up gingerly.

It was for the left hand, a tan chamois glove that had seen considerable wear. There was the tiny rip at the tip of the middle finger; there was the hole in the fabric where part of one of the clasps had been torn out; these marks Fraser had noticed before. Hardly crediting his eyes, he put it for a second to his nose; there was the same delicate, inoffensive perfume which he knew only too well, but to which he, little used to such things, could not have given a name. The glove was Estelle's.

He put the glove upon the wash-stand at his side, lay back upon the lounge, and smoked two pipes through in silence. Then he rang for the bedroom steward.

"Come in, and shut the door!" he commanded the servant from his reclining position.

With a furtive, apprehensive glance, the steward did as he was told.

"You say that Miss Harcourt asked you to keep watch of my cabin?" Fraser began.

"Yes, sir."

"When was that?"

"About seven o'clock, sir."

"Are you quite sure that no one entered my cabin after that time?"

"Absolutely, sir. 'Ave you missed anything?"

"Nothing to speak of." Fraser half smiled at his own joke, harassed though he was. For what he had missed was most assuredly not to be spoken of.

The steward was not quite convinced. "The thing might be reported to the captain, sir," he suggested.

"Not on your life! There's nothing to report. Keep your mind fast to that, will you? I merely wanted to ask you this: Did Miss Harcourt give you any reason for watching my cabin?"

"No reason at all, sir."

"Didn't you think it was queer?"

"She gave me arf a dollar and arsked me to do it; and I did it. If I might suggest, sir, if anything 'as 'appened, you should report it."

Fraser sat up suddenly. "Now listen here, George," he said, "this thing isn't going to be reported, not for any amount of money. Get that? I have lost something, but nothing of any value to any one but me. Just a slip of paper with a little writing on it. Cudgel your brains and see if you can remember any one's coming near my cabin."

"I certainly cannot, sir. But if I might suggest, this Miss Harcourt, as you may know, is a hactress, and she might bear looking after. You know the kind, Mr. Fraser. It struck me, just now that you speak of it, that there *was* something queer about 'er arsking me to look after your stateroom. I wouldn't put it against 'er to be blinding me by some trick or other; maybe to cover up what she'd already done, or maybe to help on a partner of 'ers to turn the trick. I'm only suggesting

that, sir; you never can tell about these stage ladies."

"Shut up, and get out!" cried Fraser. "You make me sick! And if I hear of your reporting this, not one red cent do you get out of me this trip."

What made Fraser angry was that two men in an hour had gone out of their way to express a personal opinion unfavorable to women of Estelle's calling; and this, coming from the lips of the steward, was particularly insulting. But that was a minor point now, one to be dealt with later. The main issue was that he could not see any reason for failing to believe that Estelle had actually looted his bill fold, while at the same time he tried to force himself to a contrary opinion. Everything pointed unmistakably to her guilt—everything but her character as he knew it.

"After all," he concluded, "just as Graves said, she is an actress."

And it was with partial disgust at the injustice of that thought, which came unconsciously into his head, that Fraser resolutely gave up theorizing. "Hang it all," he told himself, "I'm as rotten as the rest of 'em, to be accusing the girl without giving her a chance. She can't get off the ship before to-morrow morning, anyway. I'm going to cut out this sleuthing game right here, and give the glove back to her to-morrow. That ought to bring the truth out."

Fraser went busily about his packing, finished it up, smoked a couple of pipes over the last chapters of that old standby, Bentham's "Mines and Mining," and turned in with an easy mind. For the morrow must bring out the truth of the robbery.

CHAPTER VI.

SKINNY SOLILOQUIZES

Skinny Graves was up betimes. Oddly enough, it was an unusual quiet that awakened him. After one has been for days on an ocean liner, the throb

of the engines and the motion of the ship becomes a matter of course, a part of existence; and the lack of the noise and vibration, first sensed by the half consciousness of that light sleep that precedes waking, becomes as efficient an alarm as the peal of a bell. Skinny drew back the curtains and looked out through the porthole. The first rays of the rising sun glinted on the green hills of Staten Island, and struck fire from the windows of the houses grouped by the water's edge at what appeared to be but a stone's throw away. It was only the pygmy size of the early risers walking along the streets, and of the trolley car crawling up along the breast of the hill, that restored the proper perspective.

The ship was in quarantine, Skinny conjectured; or possibly she had arrived at anchorage earlier than the officers had anticipated, and was now waiting to be boarded by the port authorities. Whichever the case, he had no time to lose, for there was much to be done that day.

With a glint in his eye and an unusual activity of his thin body, he jumped from his berth, dressed himself hastily in his gray-checked suit, and hurried up on deck. Estelle was there. He thought she would be. He calculated that she would find it difficult to sleep and would be glad to get out on deck as soon as day broke. There were half a dozen stragglers about, but he saw at a glance that none of these counted.

"Some little early bird, Stell!" he exclaimed. "What are you doin' up as early as this?"

"Making plans."

"Do they get you anywhere?"

"I don't know yet."

"The usual thing, I s'pose: hock your trunks and your costumes and your rhinestone jewelry for about four dollars and live on that till it's gone, and then—then what, Stell?"

The girl flushed, more at the insolent

tone of his than at what he said; but she made no reply.

"You hain't figurin' on a bookin', are you?" Skinny insisted, lounging carelessly against the rail.

"You haven't got the vaudeville business cornered, Skinny."

"Maybe not," Skinny drawled. "But all the same I've got a healthy drag with a lot of 'em. And you needn't figure any on bookin' your act without changin' it. You know that as well as I do. That act of yours is old, frazzled out, done for. Every flag station has seen it, or a turn like it. Ten to one if some skirt didn't try to put it over on the skipper of the ark. And you can't get up a new one and rehearse it and put it over in less than a month or six weeks, and even that would be a miracle. What you goin' to live on in the meantime? Have you figured on that?"

"I know this game as well as you do. What business is it of yours, anyway?"

"That's just what I'm comin' to—what business it is of mine. I know you've treated me rotten, and made a big boob out of me. But all the same we've been friends for quite a spell. I know what you're up against, so I just can't stand back and let you go up against it. Tell me straight, Stell, how are you fixed for money—resources, I mean, not cash on hand? Didn't your father leave you anything?"

"Father!" she ejaculated, looking at him in wonderment. Although he knew something of her struggles and her family history, it was the first time he had ever approached the subject directly. And an incredible flash of intuition bridged the gap between Fraser's question earlier in the voyage and this one of Skinny Graves'. "What in the world makes you think of him?" she wanted to know.

"I'm just tryin' to get at what you've got to rely on," Skinny replied easily. "I had a hunch that he, or some of your

folks, must have left a little something. Of course it's plain as the nose on a man's face that you have had something once on a time, and I was wonderin' what had become of it."

It was more her belief in Fraser's integrity than in Skinny's glib explanation that made her stifle the suspicion engendered by what must have been a mere coincidence. If Fraser had known anything he would have told her long ago; and since he knew nothing, Skinny Graves' question could not have been prompted by anything more than a desire to help.

"The truth of the matter is this," she told Skinny: "Father had a good business, but wasn't much of a business man. And when he was lost at sea, his affairs were in such shape that the estate would have been bankrupt if it hadn't been for a big life insurance he carried."

"How much was that?" asked Skinny, turning his face away to hide a sudden light in his eyes.

"Fifty thousand dollars. After the estate was straightened up and the debts paid, there was about eighteen thousand left, and mother lost that trying to make out of it an income equal to what she had been accustomed to. I don't know that it's any of your affair, but there you have it, at any rate."

"What about friends of the family?" Skinny continued, after a moment's thought.

"There aren't any that I've—that I've kept up with since I went on the stage."

"Your pride or their turned-up noses?" asked Skinny.

"First one and then the other."

"So you won't go near 'em," Skinny concluded.

"No. I wouldn't want to, and it probably wouldn't do me much good if I did."

Skinny made a pretense of digesting this. "Now look here, Stell," he said presently, with a more confidential tone, "you don't want to do nothin' desperate

that you're goin' to regret. You'll pull out of this. I know it hain't any good offerin' you money, but I will offer you a little advice. Of course you've got to change your act before you can get into this game again—that's understood. What you want to do is to go to a cheap room somewhere around Times Square so you won't have to waste any car fare, and rest up first for two or three days before you tackle anything. Meantime I'll be lookin' around to see what I can do for you. If you keep your nerve and don't wear yourself out the first thing, I wouldn't be surprised if I could put you up against something pretty soon. If you want to hock your stuff, go ahead and do it; you would, anyway. But I'd just as soon slip you a ten-spot now and then if you'd take it, and you wouldn't have to go to a hock shop. I wouldn't be at all surprised if I could fix it up in a week or two. Register with Izzy Streeter as soon as you get settled; there's no tellin' what might turn up, you understand, and I'll put in a good word for you with him. And for Gawd's sake, Stell, if you get to feelin' too desperate, as if you couldn't stand it any longer, telephone me and let me come around and cheer you up. There's something good comin' your way yet."

"Thanks," she said, in a colorless tone.

Meantime the ship had weighed anchor, and was thrashing her way at half speed up the bay. In an hour or less they would be at the pier. Skinny left Estelle with an excuse of packing to complete, crossed through the smoking cabin, and went up to the wireless house.

"Anything doin' yet?" he asked the operator.

"Yes, sir. The police boat came alongside and took him off just before dawn. Quick work, sir."

"I figured it would be quick work," Skinny replied amiably. "I knew the

bonding company wouldn't take any chances on his losin' himself in New York, even if the bank wasn't on the job from the crack of the gun." In a sudden, if unaccustomed, access of munificence, Skinny slipped the operator a quarter as largess and hurried below to his stateroom.

And in this haven, his strength seemed to desert him. He sat down, or rather dropped, because his legs would no longer support him, upon the edge of his berth, lighted one of his cheap cigarettes with trembling fingers, and tried to make a calm estimate of the fortune that was his for the asking.

Lucky thing for him he had changed his mind at the last moment, through fear of Estelle's treachery, and made his surreptitious visit to Fraser's cabin during the dinner hour, when the stateroom decks were deserted. Lucky thing, too, that he had gone there prepared to throw the blame upon Estelle, for now the little affair between her and Fraser was finished, and Fraser would never get evidence against him. And finally—luck unbelievable—he had gone there hoping to net a few thousand dollars from his visit, and found what might be millions!

For if it was worth ten thousand dollars to the prudent Don Estabal merely to keep Fraser from getting capital to develop the claim, what might not the Fraser and Nolan claim be worth? Hundreds of thousands certainly—perhaps millions. A gold mine, a colossal fortune such as he had never dared dream of—now in his hands, his for the asking.

Those three sheets of paper in Fraser's bill fold had told him the whole story, pointed out plainly the course he was to follow. He had already got Fraser arrested for embezzlement, and in his own pocket was probably the sole piece of evidence that would clear Fraser. And incidentally this man Curtis Dupont, whom he did not know from

Adam, might be willing and able to pay a few thousand dollars for that scrap of paper penned by him eleven years ago. Anyway, Fraser was out of the running; he would be lucky to get off with a ten years' sentence for embezzlement, and in the meantime his claim in Colombia must lapse for lack of the statutory demands upon claim holders.

Fraser's partner was the only fly remaining in this balmy ointment. His name was Nolan, and he was a fugitive from the law; so much Skinny Graves gathered from the cablegram Fraser had drafted. Skinny gathered more than that: that Nolan's name was most likely Manning, and that by some freak of coincidence old Nolan was Stella Manning's father. Well and good. If old Nolan was a fugitive from the law, why should not the law drag him in and put him where he belonged? It remained only to learn why the law wanted him; and at least one of Nolan's crimes he had pumped out of Estelle that very morning—Nolan had defrauded a life-insurance company to the tune of fifty thousand. Life-insurance companies cannot afford to deal mercifully with such tricksters; they can't afford to, and don't. On that charge alone he could get old Nolan put away as he had already got Fraser put away; and the Lord only knew how many other charges might not be made against Nolan when his record was looked up.

So, then, all that Skinny had to do to come into his fortune was to report the case to the life-insurance company, get Nolan dragged back to the States, and beat Don Estabal to refiling the deserted claim.

And as for Estelle, or Stella, she could not help being eternally grateful for restoring to her a long-lost father; for Skinny, of course, could not be expected—by Estelle, at least—to know that her father was sought by the law, or to be guilty of any duplicity in his laudable effort to bring them together.

Estelle, he foresaw, was going to be very useful to him in his campaign; and for that reason, if for no other, it stood him in good stead to keep a watchful eye on her. Hence his new-found solicitude for her welfare.

The bedroom steward, knocking at the door to inquire if his hand luggage was ready to be carried out, put an end to reflection and to dreaming, and girt Skinny for immediate action; there was no time to be wasted in idle speculation when there was so much to be done.

Skinny wanted to avoid Estelle until he got off the pier. He feared that she might have inquired for Fraser aboard the ship, learned the truth, and intuitively connected the arrest with his own malevolent activities. Their initial letters being consecutive, he realized that their baggage would be in adjoining piles. His only hope to dodge seeing her lay in his getting his trunk examined and off the pier before she had corralled her own trunks in their proper place.

When the gangplank was run out, he grabbed a steward, made him shoulder his steamer trunk, carried his own suit case, and saw both pieces deposited on the platform under the letter G before a third of the passengers were off the ship. He shouldered his way through the maelstrom of hurrying passengers and swearing porters and rumbling trucks, back to the high desk, where he presented his declaration and obtained an inspector for immediate examination. All was going well. In five minutes he would be off the pier, most likely before Estelle was off the ship. But fate was against him; there was one thing he had not counted upon.

As he approached the G section, where his trunk had been put down, he caught sight of Estelle looking over the baggage on the platform adjoining. There was no use trying to avoid her now; she certainly must see him before he could get away. He must bra-

zen it out. As he stepped up to her, he noticed that she was under the letter F instead of H, which was on the other side of his own baggage.

"You're in the wrong place, Stell," he told her, raising his voice to make it audible in the bedlam that seems to be a necessary adjunct of a ship's unloading. "This is F; your stuff'll be two places down, on the other side of mine."

She looked up as if she were startled, and her cheeks mantled. "Oh, it's you!" she greeted him a trifle shamefacedly, turning as if she meant to walk on.

Then her intent flashed upon Skinny. "Oh, I'm wise now," he laughed. "You're lookin' for Fraser, and thought sure you couldn't fail to find him where his stuff must be examined. Wasn't the guy decent enough to see you to say good-by?"

"Did you see him?" she countered.

"No, I didn't put myself out to see him. He's nothin' to me now. Did you send down to inquire about him?"

"I'd hardly go as far as that."

"Well, it's just what I told you, Stell: I knew he only hung around you on the ship for what fun he could get out of it, and I told you he'd turn you down flat as soon as he got in sight of West Street. You might better have gone on and cinched your five thousand and let him look out for himself. I knew you'd regret it; I told you so."

"I don't regret it, and never will," she turned on him defiantly. "It doesn't really matter whether I ever see him again or not; I'm glad I didn't do what you wanted me to, for my own sake. That's the end of it; your 'I told you sos' don't count for anything, because you don't understand and never can. It's utterly beyond your comprehension how I feel about it." And with that she went on to the growing pile of trunks under H, without so much as a backward glance at Skinny.

"Want any help with your stuff?" he called after her.

"No, thanks, I can manage all right."

Skinny jangled his keys meditatively as his eyes followed her for a moment; then he knelt unhesitatingly, unlocked his trunk, and threw back the cover. He was more than cold-blooded; he was absolutely emotionless. No man in whose veins ran blood above the freezing point could have seen this sign of loyalty and devotion to Fraser without feeling sympathy and regret for what he had done. But not Skinny Graves. He had enough of an imagination to picture Estelle standing on guard at the F platform again as soon as his own back was turned, and waiting there until the pier was cleared. "It'll be some wait," Skinny told himself, with a wry smile, as he snapped open the suit case and thrust the keys back into his pocket. And that brief soliloquy ended the affair as far as he was concerned.

CHAPTER VII.

FRASER'S EYES ARE OPENED.

Skinny Graves' wireless message to the president of the Wheat Exchange Bank the night before had worked wonders. The president informed the police at once, making formal complaint; he informed likewise the bonding company who had been forced to make good the amount of Fraser's—or Dupont's—defalcation, with the result that Skinny had foreseen—the bonding company took no chances on Fraser's landing in New York and losing himself. And it was as a result of their urgent demand that a lieutenant of police dropped down the harbor before dawn that morning and forced Fraser's stateroom door.

It is an understatement of fact to say that Fraser was dumfounded at this interruption of his slumber. He expected it ultimately; but he most certainly did not expect it until he had had an opportunity to restore to Estelle the glove and see how she took it; from the restoration of the glove he was sure of find-

ing out who had looted his cabin, and, knowing that, it would doubtless be an easy matter to force the return of the exculpating document. For if Estelle had not dropped the glove herself, she was reasonably sure to know who had her glove; and she could not herself have dropped it without betraying it to Fraser's keen eyes, however self-possessed she might be.

But the merciless speed with which the information set forth in that old declaration had been used against him proved conclusively to Fraser that his betrayer had been actuated either by personal animosity or else that his betrayer was a detective on his trail, actuated by duty. And as he knew no one on the ship who had reason to hate him, he concluded that the latter theory was the correct one.

Confronted by the police before his reasoning powers were thoroughly awakened, he instinctively demanded the right to speak with a certain person aboard the ship before they arrested him, after which, he assured the lieutenant, the grievous mistake would be rectified and they would not have made fools of themselves by arresting the wrong person. This boon was gruffly denied him. But now that he was thoroughly awakened, and saw that it was useless to reason with the police or expect any leniency from them, he resigned himself, got his belongings together, and accompanied them in thoughtful silence to headquarters.

Here his pedigree was taken, and he was locked up to await arraignment. He asked permission to send for counsel, and wrote a note explaining his predicament to Brennan & Clark, the firm of lawyers whose advertisement had brought him North. It did not occur to him to doubt whether Brennan & Clark would put themselves out to such a degree for a total stranger to them; he took it for granted that if they had been charged with the admin-

istration of his grandfather's estate they must at least see him, the sole heir, out of his trouble.

But it was near eleven o'clock, after five hours of harassing doubt, that Fraser finally got a reply to his urgent appeal. The answer came in the shape of Clark himself, the junior partner of the firm, and Fraser was taken in tow by a keeper and led out to the consultation room to meet him.

Fraser liked Clark at first sight. He was a young man, probably no older than Fraser himself, although his application to indoor work had robbed face and figure of that appearance of vigorous strength that marked Fraser. He was of Fraser's height, a trifle stooping of shoulder, just beginning to show the flabbiness that a sedentary life gives the middle-aged man. His wiry, blond hair was already shot here and there with gray. His mouth was firm, and his jaw forceful, so that he inspired Fraser with confidence from the first. And his gray eyes, meeting Fraser's squarely as they clasped hands, glowed with the friendliest of congenial smiles. Fraser liked him because he evinced neither a hypocritical pity nor unsought sympathy, and because he raised no pharisaical barrier between them over which he, the honest man, could look down with frigid aloofness upon the suspected criminal. Clark, on the contrary, treated him exactly as an equal, and seemed to look upon his predicament with a whimsical air of amusement.

Clark motioned him to one of the heavy chairs beside the long oak table, and sat himself upon the edge of it, swinging one leg in the most carefree fashion possible.

"Well, Fraser," he said, "you escaped the customs examination, anyway. That's one thing to be thankful for."

"You act as if you expected something like this," Fraser returned wonderingly.

"We did, in a way, though we don't

know much about it. One of the stipulations in your grandfather's will was that you must clear your name of a criminal charge hanging over your head before you could inherit. Of course we didn't know what that was, but——"

"Good Lord!" Fraser interrupted, with something very like a groan, as the full purport of this struck home.

"Exactly," Clark assured him. "Now you want to make a clean breast of it to me. Nothing you say here will be used against you, and a lawyer can't be expected to defend a man unless he knows the truth, the whole truth, and a lot of things besides the truth. I understand the charge against you is embezzlement of eleven thousand dollars or thereabouts from the Wheat Exchange Bank some time ago. Are you guilty or not? I want to know that first, and the truth."

"No, I'm not guilty."

"Well, then, tell us about it."

"I don't know yet," Fraser replied thoughtfully, "whether or not I want to tell all the facts. There are a lot of circumstances to be considered. When I started North, I decided to take my medicine and shut up if I was caught. I sort of hoped they'd have forgotten about me, or that I could collect my money and get away again without being discovered. Of course I didn't know anything about that stipulation you speak of."

"Naturally we wouldn't advertise the fact," returned Clark, more soberly. "Of course no one can force you to clear your name if you don't want to. You know best about what you want to do. I thought that was what you had in mind when you wrote the note."

"No, it wasn't that precisely," Fraser told him. "What I really wanted was to get a lawyer to arrange for my being let out on bail, so I could do a little sleuthing on my own hook and confidentially, and see how the land lies about here. What about bail, anyway?"

Any chance of collecting part of the estate to be deposited for bail?"

"I don't know about that," Clark replied gravely. "The bail would probably be pretty heavy—most likely ten thousand dollars—and by rights you couldn't touch a cent of the Carter estate, even for bail bond, until after you'd met the conditions of the will. I'd do it gladly if I could, but I don't possess a tenth part of that sum; and as for Brennan personally—the senior partner, you understand—he *could* do it, but he's—well, he's an awfully careful man about financial matters."

"I see," Fraser remarked ruminatively. "I see what you mean."

"I would advise you," Clark went on, "to tell me all about it. If there's anything that you want to be kept secret, I give you my word that it will be. Two heads are sometimes better than one. Of course I don't know what these delicate considerations of yours are, but you can take it from me that whatever you tell me will be in absolute confidence, and we may be able to pull this job off without going counter to your—your principles."

Fraser thought it over for a moment. "I guess I might just as well make a clean breast of it," he said at last. "But only with the understanding that you make use of such information as I give you explicit permission to use. I suppose you'll agree to that."

"Certainly."

"It's a long story. How much time have you got?"

"All there is."

"Well, then, here goes: I got a job in the Wheat Exchange Bank as messenger boy when I was about fifteen—more or less a charity job, because I was an orphan, and my father had been friendly with Curtis Dupont, who was at that time one of the assistant tellers. I made good, went to night school, and got a strangle hold on all the stuff a man needs to get ahead in the banking

game. Dupont was a kind-hearted sort of a man, bright as a new dollar. The officers of the bank thought a lot of him, and so it helped me a lot when he took me under his wing.

"About four years later, the bank opened a branch away uptown, and put Dupont in charge as manager. He took me along as assistant cashier—just routine work, you understand—no responsibility, because I was too young. Well, the raise went to Dupont's head. He thought he was the coming Colossus of finance, and he had a salary that hardly paid his expenses. Of course I didn't realize that till after the crash.

"Dupont had the nicest wife that ever a man had—and the finest little girl of seven or eight that you ever laid eyes on. I was all alone, and Mrs. Dupont used to play the mother to me—used to have me up to her house to eat about three times a week, and look after my mending, and keep me from getting too lonesome and look after my morals generally, but without any appearance of butting in—just in a nice way, you understand, till it got so that if I was straight at all it was only because I thought it would hurt her feelings if I did anything I ought not to do. And never a Sunday afternoon passed but what she'd have me up to their house, or we'd go off for a picnic in the country or something like that, and I used to spoil my clothes playing with Gloria—that was her little girl, and she taught Gloria to call me uncle—in short, I can't plaster it on too thick about how nice Mrs. Dupont was to me, and how nice she was herself. You know that famous picture of Madame le Brun and her daughter, don't you, Clark?"

Clark nodded, and Fraser laughed a real laugh before he went on. "Well," he said, "I used to think that was a perfect picture of Mrs. Dupont and her daughter Gloria. I didn't dare ask her for a real photograph, so I got a small engraving of the painting and hung it

over my desk, and it got so I said good night to it and good morning, and the picture would sort of help me stop smoking for a week or so at a time when she would tell me I was smoking too much. In fact, I'd sort of drifted into a combination of son-and-mother love, and what you'd call a calf love for her. She was altogether the nicest and the most decent woman I had ever known, and, though I can laugh about it when I look back on it, yet I was pretty well justified in thinking what I did of her.

"It was in 1903—panic year—that the crash came. I hadn't noticed that Dupont was looking especially worried, but his wife had, and one day she spoke to me confidentially about it. I promised her I'd look out for Dupont and not let him overwork, because we'd both decided that the strain of the panic in banking affairs was worrying him. And one rainy night in October she telephoned to me not to let her husband get away alone that night, but to see to it that he got home all right. She was very worried about something, though she wouldn't tell me definitely what it was; probably she didn't know herself.

"I'd have done anything in the world for her then, and so I promised her. I hung around the building after hours, when Dupont thought every one had gone home, and along about six o'clock he slammed his account books shut, opened a drawer in his desk, drew out a revolver, and began looking at it, scaredlike. I knew in a flash what was up, and we had the very devil of a scrap before I got the gun away from him. He was smaller than I was, and that discounted the ten years in age that I gave him. I'll never forget that scene, Clark. It was twilight on a foggy day. The arc light on the corner had just come on, and the fog made the light shine a sort of ghostly yellow on things in Dupont's office. I had him on the floor, a leg on either side of him, sit-

ting on his chest. And from the color of him, I thought sure I'd killed him. But he could talk, right enough.

"I got the truth out of him. He'd been playing the market with the bank's funds, so's to get money enough to start him on the road to millions that he thought led straight before him from the managership of this branch bank. I don't know that Dupont was actually dishonest; but then no one is who does that sort of thing. The panic had nipped him. His brokers demanded more margin by ten o'clock the next day, or they must sell him out; and the bank's auditor was due the next day to check up books and cash. He hadn't taken much—a matter of eleven thousand dollars—but he might just as well have taken a million as far as being able to restore it by the next morning was concerned. He didn't have five hundred dollars to his name, and no place to borrow it to make good a defalcation. A man's credit may be good enough for most anything, but when it comes to borrowing to pay back a sum he has stolen—then good night everybody."

"Some truth in that," Clark admitted, in an undertone.

"It actually looked to me as if I might better have left him alone to do as he intended. I couldn't see any better solution than a bullet in the brain. I sat there on his chest and blinked at the arc light, and he lay on the floor and blinked up at me. And then I got to thinking of Mrs. Dupont and Gloria, and what it would mean to them; and I also got to thinking that there wasn't chick nor child dependent on me, and no one in the world but Grandfather Carter who cared a tinker's cuss what became of me. I might, or might not, be able to fix it with him; but as for Mrs. Dupont, if her husband were caught—I thought it would kill her.

"Dupont," I said at last, "we've got to fix this up some way."

"There isn't a ghost of a chance,

Andy," he said, and his voice sort of shivered.

"There is a chance, confound you!" I shot back at him, for I was certainly sore on him. "I'll be the goat. I'm not going to do it for your sake, because you're a scoundrel and ought to get all that's coming to you. But, rather than have your wife and Gloria suffer for this, I'll do anything—even murder, I reckon. And if I ever hear of your getting into such a position again, I'll squeal on you. So you'd better be straight from now on, for their sakes." Imagine me, a stripling of twenty, lecturing the manager of a bank!"

Fraser laughed again in reminiscence, but Clark was too engrossed to join him. Fraser went on: "Like the coward he was, he snapped at it. If he'd been a man, of course, he'd have realized that I wasn't at a proper age of discretion, and wouldn't have taken advantage of my foolishness. But he was glad enough to wiggle out of it. He was too much beside himself to be able to arrange it, and I even had to do that. I didn't have access to the vaults, but I was responsible for about fifteen thousand in currency that we kept in a small safe to cover an ordinary day's payments on checks presented. I took enough of that to cover up his thefts, and we arranged the bank's books together so as to cover up everything else but the loss of what cash I was responsible for. I cleaned the safe out because it would have looked like a frame-up if I had left anything there at all, gave Dupont his money, sent four one-thousand-dollar bills to my Grandfather Carter with an explanation of what I had done, and with the definite order to remit that sum to the bank after a day or two, so as to put the detectives on a false trail. What small change there was I kept for my own use.

"When Dupont got his fingers on the money, he broke down and got foolish. He declared he wouldn't let me sacri-

fice myself, and by that time I wouldn't have gone back on the proposition if the electric chair faced me. I don't believe I ever felt so good in my life as I did that night, when I realized what I was doing for Mrs. Dupont and Gloria. You know, Clark, how confoundedly righteous a man feels when he's made some great self-sacrifice for another person. I felt so fine about it that I'd almost begun to be glad I'd done it for Dupont's sake alone. And finally, just as I was ready to leave the bank and make my get-away, he forced me to take a little note that he signed, declaring my innocence and his guilt.

"And if you ever do get caught, Andy," he blubbered, "and don't show this confession and clear yourself, I'll never forgive you."

"But of course I never meant to use it, and told him so. All the same I kept it."

"Have you got it now?" Clark interrupted hastily.

"No; I'll come to that later. I made my get-away. It was ridiculously easy. I crossed over to the Jersey side, got lost in a crowd of commuters, got out at some little dump real-estate suburban development, and began to walk. I got work on farms, making believe that I was a student out walking and working for my health, and beat my way south to Savannah. That was pretty near a year later. From Savannah I shipped to Colón, crossed over, and took a ship down the west coast as far as she went. I've been in South America, batting around from one thing to another, till my partner saw your advertisement. And in all that time I've never even had a fear that any one was on my track. The get-away was easier than I'd ever anticipated."

"What about that paper you speak of?" Clark prompted.

And at some length, with so much insistence upon his belief in Estelle's innocence that Clark could see the

motives that actuated him, Fraser recounted the events leading up to his arrest.

"And now you see," Fraser concluded, "why I'm not any too anxious to clear myself. If Curtis Dupont has been straight from that time on, and his wife and Gloria are happy and still look up to him as they used to, it would be a dirty shame for me, who don't amount to a row of pins to anybody, to throw the Duponts down into the mire just to save myself. I sort of thought that if I could collect this estate and make up the amount that Dupont took they'd let me off without a sentence. But I see now that is out of the question, because that wouldn't clear my name, and I can't get the money until I am cleared."

"Obviously out of the question," Clark agreed ruminatively, "according to the terms of the will. You don't happen to know what became of the man Dupont, do you?"

"No, I've never had a word from him or about him since that night I left the bank. I thought you might happen to have heard of him."

"I never heard the name before. It's very likely the bank will know what's become of him. I'll inquire. And of course this arrest of yours will likely be in the newspapers. If he's at all a decent sort of man, and sees an account of this, he ought to come forward and assert himself. But to get back to this paper he gave you. You say you don't suspect the girl of being guilty, or even of being an accomplice. You say you think there must have been an officer of the law on the ship looking especially for you. Now I may as well tell you that there isn't a chance in the world, it seems to me, that there was a detective on that ship for you especially. On the other hand, you say yourself that this girl was a vaudeville actress, and that stamps her at once as of uncertain character."

"No, it doesn't," Fraser returned resolutely. "I might have thought so myself once upon a time, before I really knew her. But a man can't think so after he's known her."

Clark waved aside Fraser's defense of the girl. "I grant that you may think so," he said. "But you must remember that you are straight out of the wilds, and haven't seen a decent white girl for years. On the other hand, acting is her profession, and if she had any idea that you were possessed of anything of value it would be worth her while to play a part with you. And since you don't—since you can't know women any too well, she'd find it easy as anything to pull the wool over your eyes. Doesn't it sound reasonable?"

Fraser felt his faith slipping. What Clark said was true—in so far as his statement included Fraser's ignorance of the ways and wiles of white women. And Clark was merely repeating what two men had told him before—Skinny Graves and the bedroom steward on the liner, both of whom were better acquainted with civilization than he was. And Clark, at any rate, had no ax to grind. Still Fraser tried to cling to his ideal of the girl.

"But why should she make up to me?" he asked irritably. "What could she think she would get out of it? What you say may be all right as a general theory, Clark, but when you come right down to this particular case I fail to see any good reason why she should pick me out as her prey."

"That part's easy enough to theorize on, and perhaps easy enough to particularize on. In the first place, you look as if you had money, or, at any rate, controlled it. You look prosperous, and you have the air of being involved in big things. More than likely you let out that you were interested in a gold mine. That alone would attract the attention of these commercial wolves that use the liners for their

stampeding ground. You don't half understand how clever and how subtle they are. All they have to do is to smell money, and then they go after it in any way that suggests itself. The money may be there or not; that's for them to find out after they've landed what they believe is going to be rich prey."

At that suggestion, Fraser's mind reverted to some of those very pleasant conversations he had had with Stella. He dwelt with disturbing insistence upon the many occasions she had deliberately overlooked his blunt evasions about his business in South America, had deliberately brushed aside his plain hints of unwillingness to tell her anything about his business, and had finally put the question to him point-blank, so that he had been forced to risk offending her with a point-blank refusal.

Then here was Clark, an experienced man of the world, who was supposed to know about such things, insistent upon his suspicion of the girl; not alone Clark, but the two others on the ship. And as against their better based opinion, he could pit only his own meager knowledge of such things, his own meager knowledge of women's character. If his business hadn't been of prime importance to Stella, why should she have been so exigent about knowing it, even to the point of risking a breach of their friendship? That question was a poser. Slowly Fraser's eyes began to open. It was folly for him to blind himself any further, when the clear light of circumstances revealed the truth.

"To come right down to cases," said Clark, "did you have anything in your stateroom that would give away your history to any one who might possibly run across it—for example, letters or documents or the like of that?"

"Yes, I did. I still have them here." Fraser got the note he had written to Curtis Dupont and passed it across to

Clark. "That would explain a lot of things, taken in conjunction with the note she—the note that was stolen."

And while Clark read over the letter to Dupont, Fraser tore the draft of the cablegram to Nolan into small pieces and let them filter through his fingers. If Estelle were really guilty, she must have read it, and therefore could not fail to conjecture the truth. She could do as she liked about communication with Nolan; Fraser certainly wouldn't take it upon himself to tell old Nolan that he had found a daughter who might better remain undisclosed. And, likewise, if by any infinitesimal chance she were innocent, Fraser wanted to establish that fact beyond a doubt for Nolan's sake before he broke the news to his partner.

"Easy enough to reconstruct the case," Clark said as he handed the note back. "She went in there to see what she could find. She found these two, if nothing else. She didn't want her trouble to be in vain. She saw that if Curtis Dupont were worth anything, he would part with a large share of it to get his hands on his old confession. She may, or may not, know Curtis Dupont. He's nobody very big, at any rate. But there was a chance; that was the only thing of value, most likely, in your cabin. So she took it, and her game with the bedroom steward was either a blind or a bribe. It's all plain as day, Fraser. Doesn't it stand to reason?"

There was still plenty of doubt in Fraser's assent.

Clark laughed a trifle. "Now, Fraser," he said confidently, "don't get ratty with me if I'm too personal. I mean it for the best. I see now why you're up in the air, and why you don't quite know whether to clear yourself or not. In the first place, you sort of think you're in love with the girl, and you want to have a try at getting this paper she's got without making her run

foul of the law. Forget it. She's no sort of a girl for you to get keen on; you'll realize that as soon as you've butted around New York a little while. I don't ask you to take my word as final on the proposition; I only ask you to protect yourself and look around a little before you make any further concessions to her. And as for this man Dupont and his wife and daughter, let them look out for themselves. Ten to one if they ever remember you—the wife and daughter, at any rate, and if they knew you, they're as like as not to cut you in the street. Your duty is to look out for yourself, not for any one else. But, take it from me, the sooner you forget about this girl, the better off you'll be."

Fraser broke in: "What do you propose doing, then?"

"First place, I'll see if I can fix up bail for you some way or another, and, if not, you'll simply have to stay here. Next place, we'll have to get hold of this girl, have her up for examination, and get this paper away from her before your man Dupont gets hold of it. Did she give you any address?"

"No; I meant to have got it this morning, but—"

"Just what I thought," cut in Clark. "But, all the same, it won't be hard to find her. She's sure to be known at some of the booking agencies, and I can get to all the more important ones by telephone in an hour's time. I doubt if she'll have the nerve to tackle Dupont before that time. When I get her I'll bring her here for you to talk to, and you can threaten her with what you know and tell her you'll make a formal complaint against her for robbing your cabin if she doesn't come across with that confession of Dupont's. That'll fix her, Fraser; these vaudeville actresses'll do anything to escape running foul of the law. It's dollars to doughnuts if I don't have my hands

on her before noon. I'll have to hustle. Good-by, Fraser; see you later."

Clark wrung Fraser's hand with the most reassuring of smiles and hurried out busily, leaving Fraser more dejected than he had been earlier in the morning. He could scarcely repress a groan as the full realization of the coming ordeal dawned upon him. How, he thought, was it going to be humanly possible for him, after what had passed between them on shipboard, to accuse Estelle openly of the theft, and, what was more, to force her to a confession and a restoration of the document under threat of legal—and that meant criminal—action?

But when the keeper appeared at the door of the consultation room, he brought with him a thunderbolt, figuratively speaking, that jarred every other consideration from Fraser's mind.

"Goil to see you," the keeper announced.

"A girl!" Fraser exclaimed. "Who—Miss Harcourt?"

"Naw; here's her card." The keeper threw the square of pasteboard on the table in front of Fraser.

"Miss Gloria Dupont," read Fraser, scarcely able to see plainly. "Well, I'm—"

But Fraser never managed to complete his ejaculation, for, framed in the door behind the keeper, appeared what he instantly conceded to be the most beautiful girl he had ever seen.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE DUPONTS.

In order properly to account for Miss Gloria Dupont's opportune visit to Fraser it is necessary to go back an hour or so in time.

Skinny Graves, when he left Estelle looking hopelessly for Fraser at the pier, anticipated quick action by Fraser; anticipated for the most part what actually happened between Clark and

Fraser two hours later. If that piece of paper signed by one Curtis Dupont was going to be worth any money, he wanted to realize on it before the law was put on its track, and before Estelle, through whom alone the whereabouts of the paper might be traced, was made fully aware of his own duplicity. Likewise, Skinny felt the need of dependable legal advice and professional approval of his plan for getting control of Fraser's mine.

He expressed his meager baggage to the third-rate hotel—"Furnished rooms for gentlemen only"—which he made his home, threaded his way through the rumbling traffic of West Street to a saloon on the corner, and ordered a glass of beer at the bar. As he sipped this, he ran over the list of his lawyer friends to sift out precisely the man he wanted, one whose professional knowledge and whose discretion alike he could trust, one to whom he could tell a straightforward tale of his past actions and his aspirations without beating about the bush and without cloaking the true nature of his project; one, in short, who would exert his professional skill to smooth the path for a frankly nefarious enterprise. Skinny found the man he sought in the person of "Roxy" Quinn, openly a lieutenant of the boss of a lower West Side ward, secretly the chief adviser of the leader of a notorious gang. Skinny moved silently over to the telephone, learned that Roxy was in his office and would see him, hurried back to finish his beer like the careful spender he was, and took the Ninth Avenue elevated down to Canal Street.

Quinn's office was dingy, fitted up with cheap, secondhand furniture—desk, stenographer's table, two or three chairs of what might have been of a vintage before the war. Such modern appliances as filing cabinets there were none; Quinn's long head was the safest filing cabinet for such memoranda as

he ought to keep; while documents absolutely necessary were better in a safe-deposit vault far removed from his office.

Quinn was forty, tall and straight and thin, with a face which, for inordinate length and narrowness and peculiarity of feature, reminded one of a horse's face. He was manifestly intelligent, manifestly prudent, manifestly dishonest when it served his purpose.

Skinny dropped into the designated seat, passed up all unnecessary persiflage and introduction because Quinn's green eyes were fixed upon him in cold question, and told in the fewest possible words what he had come for.

"Can't be done," Quinn pronounced in a dreary monotone, in reference to Skinny's plan to set the law on old Nolan.

"Why not?" Skinny wanted to know, his tone as hard as Quinn's own.

"No treaty of extradition with Colombia covering such a case," Quinn informed him.

Roxy knew, or he wouldn't have said so. Skinny tried another tack. "But what if I get him up here of his own accord and then have a cop nab him; put the insurance company wise, maybe, and have their detectives layin' for him."

"If you can manage that," Quinn admitted, "you're all right. But how are you going to do it? If this man got fifty thousand for dying he's going to stay dead."

"Oh, I reckon I can fix that part all right. I'll get his daughter to write him a letter that'll bring him up here hotfoot. I know his daughter. Have his daughter go down to the ship to meet him, and have the detectives waitin' around on the sly to nab him. And when she throws her arms around his neck and gives him the long-lost kiss then she's identified him, and in steps the cops and pulls him right under her nose. How's that, Roxy?"

"Fine, if you can pull it off. No hitch as far as I can see."

"All right. Next thing, is there any way I can find out what insurance company he defrauded—any way short of asking the girl? I hate to do that if I can help it because she might begin to smell a rat."

"That's easy. I'll have the record of his estate looked up in the surrogate's court; that'll tell what company it was. I'll get that done right away, Skinny, and let you know by noon."

"Then how about this guy Fraser? He's safe for a while, hain't he?"

"Seems to be. I'll keep watch of the case. If there's any chance of his getting out I can fix it, I guess."

Finally Skinny dived into his pocket and brought out Curtis Dupont's confession. "Any danger of my gettin' hauled up for blackmail if I sell this to the guy that wrote it?"

"Depends on who the man is," Quinn said as he reached for the torn paper. He looked it over. "No chance in the world, Skinny," he said, handing it back.

"You know him?" Skinny conjectured.

"Know of him. Promoter downtown. Crooked; contributes his little pile to the boss. Let's see." Quinn reached for a telephone directory and ran down its columns. "No. 167 Broadway's his address."

Skinny made mental note of it. "What's he good for on a deal like this?"

"Ten thousand—maybe. Depends on how broke he is."

"Then me for it before he gets tipped off. So long, Roxy; much obliged."

Twenty minutes later, Skinny Graves pushed open the door in the big office building, the door proclaimed by gilded lettering to lead the way to the sanctum of Curtis Dupont, Investment Broker.

With his quick, keen eye for telling detail, Skinny scanned the anteroom.

He had some firsthand acquaintance with those would-be financiers who call themselves investment brokers, who keep one eye on their sucker lists and the other peeled for the post-office inspectors; whose stationery closet is filled with stack on stack of beautiful, flourishing prospectuses advising immediate and unlimited investment in gold mines and oil wells and other like magnets to lure life savings from the old stockings of the unwary, and beautifully engraved stock certificates of a cerulean hue to be exchanged for such remittances as their impassioned circulars brought in. Skinny knew the type, and found this office at one with the rest of them.

In the space into which he stepped, fenced off from the rest of the room by a mahogany rail, he saw a mahogany settee, a hatrack of the same wood, and underneath his feet a genuine Oriental rug; and on the other side of the rail a very attractive young lady sat at a mahogany typewriter desk, her fingers flying over the machine with a speed and concentration unbelievable. Skinny felt subconsciously the cool luxury of the surroundings, passed up the room-wide row of mahogany filing cabinets and the larger Oriental rug inside the inclosure, and fixed his roving black eyes upon the young lady.

An A No. 1 show girl for some Broadway review was the way he classed her, and she was all of that. Stately, imperious, queenly, a romantically minded youth might have called her, and she was all of that. At least she was tall, exceedingly well built, and manifestly aware of it, as her up-to-the-minute garb proclaimed, blessed with beautifully pink and satiny cheeks, luscious red lips, deep and dreamy brown eyes, and a skillfully arranged profusion of hair the color of chestnuts just from the bur. She arose from her chair and bore down upon the undaunted Skinny with an alluring smile

and the grace of a Greek dancer at amateur theatricals.

"Yes?" she said in a voice that would have set the blood to racing in any masculine veins but Skinny Graves'.

"Dupont in?" queried Skinny coolly.

"Your name and business, please," she came back at him, with a trifle more of the voice and the smile. "I will see, sir."

"Graves is my name—Frederick T. Graves. I've come to see him on a little business. I—I want to raise a little money."

"Capital for some project?" she ventured.

"That's it."

"If you'll be good enough to sit down just a minute I'll take your name in. Mr. Dupont is a very busy man, but he may be able to give you a few minutes."

Skinny knew it was a waste of time to sit down, and passed up the invitation. The modern Juno disappeared into the next room, and, as Skinny anticipated, was back in ten seconds with news that Dupont would see him.

The inner room was like the anteroom in the taste and exquisite luxury of its appointments. The deep pile of the Daghestan muffled his footsteps as Skinny crossed the room to the leather chair beside the massive, carved desk. The fine perfume of half a dozen long-stemmed roses in the tall, crystal vase on the desk was in his nostrils as he clasped Dupont's outstretched hand and accepted the invitation to sit down. And in the space of a second he had read Curtis Dupont as surely as Dupont had read him. Dupont's smile faded as Skinny's broadened.

Curtis Dupont had not changed perceptibly since Fraser had known him eleven years before, neither in appearance nor in morals. He was still following the highroad to financial power, though his bona-fide banking days had been cut short years before as a result

of certain irregularities that the officials of the bank had found in his work—irregularities not precisely criminal, but none the less too shady to overlook. But Dupont knew that he was born to a financial career, and a little thing like being thrown out of legitimate banking business for dishonesty could not deter him from following out his destined life work.

Dupont was still as short as he had been in Fraser's time, and thinner, if anything, so that Skinny Graves, seeking a comprehensive description, mentally catalogued him as a little shrimp of a man. His head, bald and pink save for a graying fringe on the outskirts, was large out of all proportion to his body, and this disproportion, combined with his air of self-importance, made of him a man ridiculously pompous. His features, again, were out of keeping with his big, round head; they were small and sharply chiseled, most readily comparable to those of a fox. His eyes were keen as gimlets when no one was looking at them, and shifty as quicksilver when one tried to fix them with an inquiring stare. His voice was woodeny, and he had a peculiar trick of making a smacking noise with tongue and lips when he was listening to another, or when he found his own words come haltingly.

Curtis Dupont knew Graves for what he was, and trembled inwardly in anticipation, without any sure knowledge of what was coming. Graves realized this, and gathered from it that Roxy Quinn had not been far wrong in his three-word estimate of Dupont; therefore, Skinny plunged into his business without preamble or disarming preface.

"Ever hear of a guy called Andrew Fraser, that used to work in the Wheat Exchange Bank eleven years ago?" said Skinny carelessly.

Dupont smacked four separate times; his face worked nervously in spite of himself. "No," he managed to say.

Skinny laughed him in the face; it wasn't worth while to give him the lie. "Reason I asked you," Skinny went on confidently, "is because Fraser was taken off the *Orotava* early this morning as we was comin' in from South America and charged with embezzlement from the bank. He's in the Tombs now." Skinny paused to let this sink in.

Dupont, whose forces had been utterly routed by the suddenness and violence of the attack, was trying desperately to regain control of himself. "What is all that to me?" he asked, after more smacking of his thin lips.

"More net profit to me than it is to you," Skinny returned. "I've got the paper you give him when you stalled on takin' your medicine and let him take it for you."

"*You've* got the paper!" gasped Dupont, with immense relief.

"You got it straight the first time," said Skinny, with as near an approach to a smile as he could summon.

"Well," ejaculated Dupont, still gasping; and there he stopped and smacked innumerable times. Skinny let him reflect. It was plain that Dupont didn't quite know where he stood, but it was his next move. "How did you get it?" he asked finally.

"Now you're stallin' again," Skinny accused him. "It don't matter to you how I got it, and you know it don't. The main thing is that I've got it, and that you want it. Are you goin' to give me what I ask for it, or shall I let Fraser have it? He's rich. He's got a gold mine down there, and can afford to pay my figure if you don't."

"What do you want for it?"

"Ten thousand dollars, paid down in small bills."

Dupont smacked some more. If only he could get control of himself he might managed to put up a fight and bluff this cheap sport out of his position, but Skinny had knocked him clean

off his balance at the first blow, and his mind refused to work with that confidence without which an attempt at bluffing is sure to avail nothing. Nevertheless, out of sheer desperation, he essayed it. "Why, you poor, simple boob," he cried, "what are you trying to put over on me? This is blackmail, the rankest kind of blackmail. If you aren't out of here in just two minutes I'll turn you over to the police. You can't bluff me that way." Dupont pulled out his watch and studied the face of it, his stubby forefinger poised above the bell push.

"What's the use of wastin' two minutes?" Skinny laughed. "If you want the police send the young lady out now for 'em. That'd suit me down to the ground; anyhow, it'd suit me better than it would you. We'll show 'em this confession of yours as soon as they come, and I'll put Fraser wise, and then where are you? Eh? Where'd you be then? And besides this business, I'd lay forty to one that you'd run if a cop looked twice at you. Maybe they'd take me for blackmail, and maybe I've got friends enough to get me out of it; anyhow, they'd take you, and what could you net from actin' the fool about ten thousand dollars?"

Dupont tried again. "Why don't you go to Fraser, instead of coming to me?"

"Simple enough, bo. Fraser hain't the coward you are. I might—I don't say I would, but I might—run into a hornet's nest if I tried that. Fraser hain't got the same fear of the police that you've got, and he's ten times more a man than you are, and it's just possible he'd put the sprouts to me. No, siree, I don't try Fraser till I've tried you to a standstill. But, let me tell you right now, I'm broke, and need the money, and I'd be almost willin' to shoot somebody for ten thousand dollars. If I don't get it out of you before—before noon I'm goin' straight to Fraser with

it, and there won't be any more chances of a deal between us."

"Before noon, eh?" Dupont mused.

"Yes, I'll give you till then to get the cash. You guys have to salt it down in one way and another to protect yourselves, and nobody realizes better than I do that it's no easy matter to get ten thousand together in one lump, when you've got it distributed like you have. I'll give you till noon."

"Well, then, you go away and come back at noon. I don't give you any promises, but I'll think it over. And if I decide to accept your proposition I'll have the cash ready for you."

"All right, Dupont. I'll be here on the dot." Skinny was just as glad to get away in a hurry, now that he had opened the bargaining, and he wanted to find Estelle without undue loss of time, both to approach her on the subject of sending for her father and to protect her for the present from being questioned by Fraser's attorneys.

The door had barely closed behind him when the stenographer, who had followed him out with one of the most gracious of her smiles, arose with a frown on her face and noiselessly opened the door leading into the inner room. Dupont sat at his desk, his elbows on the blotter, his chin in his hands, staring thoughtfully at nothing.

"Dad," she ventured almost tenderly.

"Yes, my dear," said Dupont, without turning his head.

"What was that cheap sport after?"

"Didn't you hear?"

"Sure, I heard," she said, her face perplexed. "I heard the whole line of guff he was giving you, but I didn't get wise to what it was all about. What was that he was saying about Andrew Fraser?"

"Sit down, Gloria. So you remember Fraser?"

"Sure thing; I remember him. A tall, ungainly sort of a gawk that used to

be hanging around the house half the time before mother died. I remember I used to call him uncle because she told me to."

"Yes," Dupont conceded, "that's the fellow. I guess he was stuck on your mother. I always thought so. I don't know what else made him do the fool trick he did."

"What fool trick was that? Did he really run off with some of the bank's money as this piker was just saying?"

Dupont did not hesitate; he knew his daughter well enough to perceive that it was useless to dissemble in the face of her keen intuition; also that it was better for him to make a clean breast of the whole thing. If any one could advise him what to do in this predicament, it was Gloria. She was shrewd, intelligent, with a better business head on her shoulders than he himself had; moreover, she was never troubled by the scruples of a meticulous conscience, knew enough to look out for herself, and was amply able to do so, was absolutely self-centered and selfish, except as regards her father; but to further his individual interests, or their common interests, she would put herself in any position, sacrifice herself to any degree, do anything in the world, regardless of right and wrong. Dupont could not do better than to confide in his daughter in this crisis.

"No, Fraser didn't steal," he told her. "I might as well tell you the truth. I took the money, and he took the blame for it and flew the coop. They never got him, and of course they never got me, because they never suspected me. I never knew what became of him, and naturally I never told your mother but what he was guilty of embezzlement. You were too young then to understand such things, and it passed completely out of my mind. And here he bobs up at this late date and sticks his head—"

"Come to the point," Gloria broke

in. "How does this tall, cold drink come to be trying to blackmail you?"

"That's where I was foolish." Dupont told her of the confession he had written, winced at her strongly expressed contempt of his soft-heartedness in his younger days, and was glad when she congratulated him on having outgrown it. "The question is," Dupont went on, "shall I pay the ten thousand or not?"

"You can't afford to take any chances, dad," Gloria told him firmly, "till after we put through this rubber-plantation deal. If it ever gets out to our investors that you were mixed up in an embezzlement ten years ago, it's all up with us in this deal; and if you can manage to keep it quiet till after we make our clean-up there ought to be a hundred thousand in it for us. Ten thousand isn't so much by comparison. I'd pay it, if I were you, and shut this piker up."

Dupont digested this. "You're a first-class business woman, Gloria, and I'd back you generally against any man I ever saw. But you're apt to make one little mistake; you've got too much imagination, and you look on things a little too hopefully. I admit we might clean up a hundred thousand, but again we might not. What have we got our suit cases there in that closet already packed for, and a good twenty thousand in cash right there in that safe for, if it isn't because we may have to light out of here any minute? No, my dear girl, you can't bank on the hundred thousand we're going to get, but you certainly can bank on the few thousands we've got."

Gloria pouted her full red lips. "But—"

"And, what's more," Dupont hurried on, "what if I do get hold of that paper? Of course, Fraser couldn't prove anything in court without it, but he could try just the same; he could tell the truth on oath in his defense, and

ring me in that way, and it would give me pretty near as much publicity with the investors as if I was actually convicted. Then our ten thousand would be thrown away."

Gloria ruminated upon this. "Say," she asked presently, "what sort of a proposition is this man Fraser? I don't remember enough of him to know."

"Why, I haven't seen him since he went away, and he was only a kid then; but he was a pretty decent sort of a kid, I must admit."

"Seems to me," said Gloria, "that he must have been sort of a mushy fool to take the blame for your embezzlement and stay away all this time just to save your reputation for mother's sake. Do I come anywhere near it?"

"That's what I always thought," Dupont admitted musingly.

And, after another second's thought, Gloria arose with sudden determination. "Say, dad, you listen to me this time. You keep out of sight when that piker comes in at noon for his ten thousand and let me dicker with him. I can bluff the eyes out of him, take it from me. And either I get hold of that paper without coming across with a red cent, or else I can stall him off and make him afraid to show his head around here for a month. I'll tend to him all right."

"Yes, but what about Fraser's sworn evidence in court?" objected Dupont.

"You leave that to me, too," she commanded him. "I'm going down to the Tombs and renew my acquaintance with Mr. Andrew Fraser for old time's sake. If he's the sort of fellow I think he is, you can take it straight from me that he'll never mention your name in court when he comes up for trial."

Dupont looked up at her with hopeful pride. "How are you going to manage it, Gloria?" he asked.

"You leave it to me, and do as I say," was all she told him as she left the room. "A woman has got a whole

lot of ways of dealing with men that a man hasn't got."

CHAPTER IX.

A WOMAN'S WAY.

It did not occur to Gloria Dupont to attempt any posing in order to win Fraser's love, which is what she deliberately set out to do. She was too confident in the efficacy of her enticing physical charms, too sure that all men liked the type of girl she was, to think of appearing other than what she was. Whatever dissembling she decided to practice was of fact and not of foible.

To Fraser's eyes she appeared a truly radiant vision; a colorful symphony of blue and rose, a rose parasol, a wide-brimmed, rakish hat of lace, a turquoise necklace resting upon a wide and rather low expanse of white throat, a flash of red lips and white teeth, brown eyes that dared and invited. Fraser, momentarily bewildered to the point of staring, managed to struggle to his feet.

"Gloria Dupont!" he gasped, advancing with outstretched hand.

"Uncle Andy," she laughed back at him.

"Good gracious!" was all he could say as he looked her over.

"I remember you used to kiss me. You may now if you want to. Just forget I've grown up."

Rather bashfully Fraser kissed her on the forehead, and then he stood back a pace. "I thought I'd be able to forget you'd grown up," he said, "but I can't. And what a stunner you've grown into!"

"Do you really think so?" she asked archly, as she put her parasol upon the big oak table and sat in the chair Fraser had left.

"I certainly do." And then Fraser became suddenly grave. "This is a fine place to find me in. How on earth—why—"

"How did I know it? And why did

I come?" she helped him out of his embarrassment. "Well, it's not a long story. I saw about it in the paper not twenty minutes ago, and came right down. Mother made me promise faithfully to look you up some time, but I never knew where to start."

"You shouldn't have come here," Fraser chided her.

"I had to—my promise, you know. This was my first chance, and I simply had to redeem my last promise to her."

"Then she—your mother is—"

"She died," replied Gloria soberly. "Died two years after you went away. She was always asking and wondering about you. She regretted it frightfully; used to moon about it something awful. Oh, Uncle Andy, how could you? And it made her suffer so!"

Fraser made no reply.

"Was it really true?" she insisted. "Did you actually take the money?"

"I—I—my lawyer won't let me talk, Gloria. I'd tell you right out if it wasn't for that. We'll see how the trial comes out."

"When'll that be?"

"I don't know, I'm sure."

"And have you got to stay in this horrid place till then? Can't you ever come up and see us?"

"I'm afraid I'll have to stay here. There's just a chance of my getting bailed out, but it's a very small one, and they're likely to demand big bail."

"How much, for example?"

"Ten thousand probably, the lawyer says."

"Oh, I ought to be able to fix that with father. He certainly wouldn't let you stay here if he could get you out by paying that much."

"How is your father? What's he doing? Is he with the bank still?"

"No, he left the bank before mother died. They wouldn't pay what he was worth. He opened a brokerage office, and is doing fairly well at that; nothing brilliant, but fair. I shall certainly

see to it that he gets you out of here. He's so good and kind-hearted, Uncle Andy; he wouldn't think of letting you stay here if he could help you any. I just adore him, Andy; I think I should die if anything happened to him, really. And I'm sure you'll like him, too, when you get to know him again."

Fraser was silent for a moment. "Does he know about me—about my being arrested?"

"I don't believe so, or he'd have been here to see you. He often speaks of you even yet. But he went out of town early this morning, and I don't expect him back till afternoon. I'll meet him at the train and bring him right down here. Trust me."

"What if he won't come?"

"He'll come, right enough. He'll do anything I ask him to. He's been father and mother both to me since mother died. You can't think how really nice he is, Uncle Andy, or you wouldn't doubt for a second but what he'd come to see you."

"Yes, but—"

"But what?" she demanded rather sharply.

"But he might not want to have anything to do with me. I'm—I'm a criminal, you see, after all."

"Now you stop that kind of talk. It doesn't make any sort of difference to us what you have done. You were young and foolish, but you were one of our friends, and have always been, and are still going to be. Take it from me, dad will be here before night, and do all he can for you. Don't act nasty, Uncle Andy. Forget all about this trouble of yours and just be a friend to us like you used to be. You mustn't worry about it; dad will get you out of it somehow, I feel sure."

"Maybe," mumbled Fraser, unable to take his eyes off her.

"And now I must rush off," she said, jumping up with determined alacrity. "I'm going to telegraph dad this min-

ute and ask him to hurry right back and help you. He will; I know he will."

"I'd rather you didn't ask him, Gloria."

"Why?" once more sharply, with a sudden hardening of the eyes.

Fraser was too blind to see the change on her expression, and his wits too obfuscated to make anything out of it if he had noticed it. "Oh—because," he stammered out.

"Oh, because," she laughed merrily. "That's just the sort of answer I'd give if I didn't want to give another person the trouble of doing me a favor and couldn't think of any other answer. So I know that's how you feel about it. But, believe me, dad'll be really tickled to death to see you again, and will be glad to help you all he can. I must hurry. Make believe just once more that I'm still little Gloria, and you can kiss me; but after this—remember—I've grown up. Next time I see you I'll be the young lady Gloria."

Fraser kissed her on the cheek. "And quite the most charming young lady I've ever seen," he said. "Your father ought to be proud of you, Gloria."

"He is, very. I help him a lot. Good-by, Uncle Andy, till this afternoon."

"Good-by, and thanks for coming. You've cheered me up wonderfully."

With a pretty wave of the hand and a flirtatious smile, she left him standing there, and went back to Dupont's office. Dupont was still sitting at his desk doing nothing. He looked round with a mild curiosity as she entered. "Well?" he queried.

"Easy money, dad," she announced, sitting upon the edge of the desk. "It's going to be the softest snap you were ever up against. He'll fall for anything after I've seen him a couple of more times. But it may take a little while to pull the wool over his eyes completely."

"What did he say about me—anything?"

"Not a word—not a squeal out of him, and I cornered him square on the proposition two or three times at that. I'd lay a good deal that I've got him fixed right now, but we'd better make sure, and this is where you come in. He's scouting around for bail—ten thousand. You go see him, give him the glad hand, and bail him out—cash. Insist on it. If he starts a squeal with you, throw it into him about me, and how much I look up to you and adore you, and how I'd be left alone if you were sent up, and how you've tried your best to live straight—oh, you know the line of stuff to give him. Then we have him up to the house when he's out on bail and we take him around and show him the sights and act as if he was a long-lost brother. Before his case comes up to the grand jury I'll have him so wound up that he'd confess to killing his grandmother. Get the idea, dad?"

"I get it, but—"

"No buts about it. The idea's all right if you can play your part right. Either you get the idea or you don't; if you don't, I'll go over it again. If you do, go ahead and do as I say. The idea's all right."

"But ten thousand bail—what if he skips out, Gloria?"

"He won't; he's not that kind. It's like putting money in the savings bank. He'd be Johnny on the spot if his bail wasn't but five cents."

"He always was that kind," Dupont admitted reflectively.

"I know him like a book. Now listen! You went out to some hick town in Jersey early this morning; I telegraph you and you come rushing back to town; I meet you at the train and we hurry down to the Tombs with the ten thousand in a package. That'll be about three o'clock—no, let's make it a little earlier. I've got a reason. Say

a little after one. Then we take him home with us and—keep him there. I'll see to that part of it. I'll have to pass up the office for a while, because I want to keep him from knowing what you're doing. Do you get me? You're supposed to be an *honest* stockbroker."

"It won't be an easy job living with him under the same roof, when I know that I'm—"

"If that isn't exactly like you, dad. If you can't bluff it out, you don't deserve anything but what you'll get. That's all I've got to say."

"Well, we'll try it, anyway, Gloria. Maybe it'll work out right."

"No maybes about it. It will. Now you want to make yourself scarce around here. That long, cold drink that calls itself Freddy Graves will be in any time now, and I want to get the stage set right to make him hate himself. That won't be any easy job from what I've seen of him. Now you listen sharp, and do exactly as I tell you."

Gloria mapped out her campaign, with explicit instructions and careful repetition of important points. And when she had finished, Dupont left the office, bidding his daughter a hopeful "so long."

Meantime, Skinny Graves had not been wasting time. Upon leaving Dupont's office, he called up Izzy Streeter, the booking agent whose silent partner he was, and asked if Stella had registered there yet. The reply was negative. He jumped on a car, taking care to get a transfer which, by careful manipulation, would permit him a short stop-over and then carry him on up to Times Square without paying an extra fare, and dismounted at the pier where the *Orotava* had arrived. By this time the dock was cleared of passengers. Scattered trunks, temporarily lost, lay here and there, but there was no sign of Stella nor of baggage belonging to

her. It was a mistake, he realized now, to let her get out of his sight, relying upon the assurance that she would follow to the letter his experienced advice. He wanted to keep her away from Fraser's attorneys, and, what was even more important, he wanted to get old Nolan started for New York at the earliest possible moment. And for this he depended upon Estelle. He rode on up to Times Square, and began to thread the throng of theatrical folk, on the bare chance of running across her there; and as he walked aimlessly along an idea came to him that might possibly hasten Nolan's sailing in case that plot he had conceived with Estelle as its pivoting point should be delayed in execution. He stepped into a cable office and inquired the rate to Buenaventura. The reply was a figure that cast a wet blanket upon his latest hopeful plan; Skinny couldn't bear to spend so much money for a mere cablegram; it was rank robbery, this telegraph business.

Again he joined the noonday throng outside, but the idea of the cablegram, and the hope of a few days saved in the attainment of his fortune, would not be downed, even by the crushing weight of what seemed to be reckless expenditure. As he strolled up and down, his eyes alert for Estelle's small, familiar figure, he found himself mentally drawing up the cablegram, crossing out words here and there, boiling it down to the least possible number to be efficacious. What, too, if Estelle should be tipped off in some way or another, and would refuse point-blank to fall into the net he intended to spread for her father's undoing? Then the cablegram would have to be sent anyway. It was a good risk to take.

And finally he stepped back into the telegraph office, picked up a blank, and wrote:

NOLAN, *Tocota, Buenaventura.*

Arrested embezzlement. Exculpation stolen. Your evidence necessary to acquittal.

Your immunity guaranteed by promised restitution. Love Stella Manning. Sail immediately.

FRASER.

Skinny read it over and was satisfied. Nolan knew the address of Fraser's lawyers; that was evident from Fraser's draft of the message to Nolan. If Nolan was any kind of a man at all he could scarcely fail to make for New York at once, especially when he was fortified with that promise of immunity; and the little touch of romance was a work of art. It was a good risk, Skinny thought. If it did work it would bring Nolan to New York at least three weeks before a letter would—the letter he intended that Estelle would write.

Skinny slipped the cablegram across the counter, together with a twenty-dollar bill. He felt a twinge of regret as the clerk whipped the bill into the cash drawer out of sight, and the amount of change he got back was so small that the regret was drowned in a deep sense of personal outrage at the nerve of the cable companies. A gold mine wasn't in it with a submarine cable for clear profit.

It was nearly noon when he got back into Broadway, toying with the silver that represented his twenty, but it was nearly time to redeem his wild extravagance and make a good clean-up on the day's transactions. Cheered up at the thought, he took the subway downtown to Dupont's office. The stenographer was there, and rose to intercept him. Her gracious smile was wanting; perhaps Dupont had tipped her off. Skinny made a bee line past her to the door of the private office.

"What do you think you're doing, you?" Gloria wanted to know.

"Date with Dupont," Skinny called back over his shoulder as he opened the door to the private office.

"Hot chance you've got of keeping it," said Gloria, waiting for his disillusionment.

Skinny saw that the room was empty, and turned back, unabashed.

"He ain't back yet, eh?" he remarked nonchalantly.

"No, and he isn't likely to be back for a good while yet," said Gloria. "But he left a message for you."

"Come across with it, then. I'm in a hustle."

"Mr. Dupont told me I was to do the bargaining with you when you came in."

"Oh, he did, eh? Well, miss, there ain't goin' to be any bargainin'. Either he buys or he don't—no hagglin' about it." Skinny sat down on the railing, his mouth a straight blue line.

"You rang a bull's-eye that time, mister," said Gloria, sitting down again at her typewriter desk. "There won't be any bargaining whatever. I mispoke the first time."

"What's the big idea?" snapped Skinny. "Do you know what you're talkin' about, or are you only pullin' a big bluff?"

"The big idea is that ten thousand looks better to Mr. Dupont than that paper does you want to blackmail him with. And, what's more, you keep out of here, and stay kept. Do you get that?"

"All right, then. If that's the way he looks at it, good-by. I'm goin' to see Fraser."

Gloria hadn't expected this crisis quite so soon. She had to delay matters until Fraser could get bail, and come under her own protecting wing.

"Go ahead, if you can find him."

"If I can find him," repeated Skinny in astonishment. "Why, that's too easy."

"Maybe, and maybe not. He's out on bail."

Skinny straightened up. "Who went his bond?"

"Dupont. That's where Dupont is this minute, helping out an old friend.

You made a big mistake when you came to Dupont with any such dirty proposition as that."

Skinny looked at her shrewdly. "I believe you're lyin', miss," he said. "You can't stuff that down me."

"You're very polite, I'm sure. But then I couldn't expect anything more from the like of you."

"You mean to tell me straight that Dupont has put up bail for Fraser?" Skinny questioned, his bewilderment getting the better of his cynicism.

"You don't have to take it from me. You can find out easy enough. I tell you, mister, you got in wrong when you tried to put one over on Mr. Dupont. The minute you left here he hustled down to the Tombs to see Fraser; it was the first he'd heard of the arrest, and he wasn't the sort of man to wait around and see Fraser stung for what he'd done himself. Maybe Fraser'll give you ten thousand for that paper of Dupont's; but you won't get it from here. I guess that's Dupont ringing now." She put her hand out to pick up the telephone which was ringing lustily.

Skinny reached over the railing with lightning swiftness and took the instrument out of her fingers. "Rest easy a minute on that," he said harshly. "Let it ring. What do you expect Dupont to be callin' up for?"

"I don't know for sure. He said if you came in to keep you talking till he rang up and told me what to do. He and Fraser had something to talk over with the district attorney as soon as Fraser got out. He's ringing up from there. Give me that phone, you; I can't keep him waiting all day."

"Just a minute," begged Skinny, holding the phone farther away. "D'you s'pose he and Fraser are framin' up something against me?"

"Don't know anything about what they're doing," replied Gloria demurely. "All I know is what I've told you.

Give me that phone, and you'll soon find out."

"Let me listen in?" asked Skinny, making to relinquish the instrument.

"Certainly not." Gloria rose and walked round her desk to the railing where Skinny sat holding the phone. He gave it up without a word. She stood quite close to him as she lifted the receiver. "Hello. . . . Oh, Mr. Dupont. . . . Yes, he's here now." And then she listened, her deep brown eyes meeting Skinny's scared ones over the mouthpiece. Skinny edged up closer to her and listened to such fragments of the conversation as he could catch. Now and then he got a word—"district attorney—warrant for burglary on ship—attempted blackmail—Fraser sworn"—and much more like it. It was enough to make Skinny shiver and stare at Gloria as she brought the conversation to a temporary end.

She put her pink and pretty hand over the mouthpiece and looked up ingeniously at Skinny. "Mr. Dupont says if you will wait just about ten minutes he will be glad to talk business with you. He says he's changed his mind, and that the message I gave you wasn't to be delivered. I guess maybe he wants that paper, after all."

"Young lady, you lie!"

Gloria tossed her head. "I ought to slap your face for that," she told him, "only insults don't count coming from a cheap piker like you."

"Are you stringin' me or not?" Skinny demanded, his sharp, beady eyes boring into hers.

"If you don't believe what I'm telling you, wait around and see for yourself. Sit down there. This is my busy day." Gloria, still holding the line, awaiting Skinny's decision, made as if to speak again to Dupont.

Skinny checked her. "Listen," he said. "I would wait, but I've got an important date. I've wasted too much

time here as it is. I'll be back in—an hour."

"Like fun you'll be back in an hour," she called after him on his way to the door. "You won't dare show up here inside of a year."

The last part of her prophecy was lost to Skinny's ears; he was already on his way to take counsel with Roxy Quinn and see where he stood now. Skinny believed in playing safe or not playing at all.

As soon as the door was shut behind him, Gloria took up the phone again: "Hello, dad. He just went. It worked first class. He listened in, just as I thought he would, and heard about all you said. He's so scared he'd run from his own shadow if he wasn't too thin to make one. No, no, it isn't all over yet, not by a good deal. I've only stalled him off till we can get Fraser bailed out and under our wing, where we can dictate Mr. Man's calling list.

"No, Graves may be scared now, but that sort of a piker doesn't lay down so easy as all that when he sees something good coming to him. He'll make a bee line for some bum lawyer and see where he stands. And they'll put their heads together and find out from the district attorney and from the Tombs that I've been lying to him, and then he'll be after you hotter than ever. All I've done is to give us a little time to get Fraser salted away. Now listen; you round up Carson or some other lawyer right away, quick. I'll bring what money we've got in the safe, and you meet me by the front door of the Criminal Courts Building. We'll get Mr. Man out on bail and eating lunch with us at Hanley's before this low-browed villain gets through trembling.

"Eh, what's that? You scared to see Fraser? Aw, forget it. Just pull yourself together and give him the glad hand. Tip him off that you're going to speak with him later in private, if that will make it any easier for you.

Fraser isn't anything to be scared of. If you had half my gumption you'd see fun and not trouble in a little thing like that. . . . Now you just make your legs and your tongue fly, and be there by the time I get there. I'll bolster you up if I think you need it. Watch for my cues. . . . Yes, all right. Good-by."

CHAPTER X.

STELLA HEARS SOME NEWS.

In the hope of seeing Fraser again, Estelle actually waited at the pier until most of the passengers had cleared their luggage and gone their separate ways; until some of the inspectors, anxious to finish their tasks and get away, began to eye her askance; until she was really ashamed to wait any longer without some plausible pretext. She could not imagine what had become of Fraser. She had no clew; not even the slightest hint on which to base any conjectures as to his inexplicable disappearance. She wanted to ask a steward or one of the officers, and three or four times plucked up her courage almost to the speaking point; but at the last moment her courage failed her. It was too barefaced, too brazen. She simply could not bring herself to do it; could not endure the knowing leer with which she felt she must be answered. But whatever wild imaginings she may have had upon the subject, the actual fact far eclipsed them. And finally, without abandoning hope, but only because she did not have the nerve to wait any longer, she had her trunks cleared, and resolutely faced the future.

It is doubtful if any person could have been more odious to her at that moment than Skinny Graves. His brazen nerve in keeping after her when she had definitely turned him down, his insistence in advising her, in presuming to map out for her the campaign against starvation which she must wage—all this, it will be remembered, for Skinny's

own ends—increased her intense dislike for him and thus defeated temporarily the purpose that had actuated Skinny to play the good Samaritan. For she decided to do none of those things that Skinny had suggested. Rather, she resolved to keep away from him at all costs, to frequent none of those places where he would be likely to find her, where he would probably wait for her. If ever she chanced to find Fraser again, she would be ashamed to have him know of her old-time familiarity with such a man as Skinny Graves had proved himself to be in these last few days. And if she never saw Fraser again, she felt that Skinny's "I told you sos" would be more unendurable than ever.

She managed to elude her stewardess and table steward, who were hovering about for their customary tip, checked her trunks with the express company, to be held until she gave explicit delivery directions, and set out on foot to find a cheap room in the vicinity. She cast up her assets, wondering whether she must take her things to a pawnshop at once, or whether she could put off that disagreeable undertaking before which she shrank. She had had four dollars when she got on the ship at Colón; fifty cents she had tipped the steward for watching Fraser's cabin; it would cost her a dollar and twenty cents to get her trunks taken anywhere; which left her two dollars and thirty cents to go on with. At all costs, she must keep a roof over her head. That was more important than food at present. For she could stint herself on food, eat when and what she pleased if she had the privacy of a room; just one loaf of bread a day must keep her from starvation for a time, whereas she could not possibly manage without shelter.

It was no hard task to find a cheap room. She headed at once for Twenty-second Street, which she knew as a

rooming-house section, and had not looked two blocks along it before she found what she could make shift with; shelter and a bed of sorts for a dollar a week. It was as cheap as she could hope to get, and for that reason did not look too scrupulously to its tiny size, its utter darkness except for the grimy skylight twenty feet above, nor its lack of furniture. It was not a question of whether she could endure it; she simply had to endure it.

She paid a week in advance and walked back to the pier for her trunks, and when they were delivered she found she had to pile them one on top of the other, three high, in order to get them into the room at all. And thus settled, she lay back on the bed and tried to make her plans.

She knew that Skinny spoke the truth when he told her it would be useless to try to book her act; likewise the truth when he said she could not get up a new one and put it over in less than a month or six weeks. Therefore, she had to discard the idea of pursuing her proper profession, and had to look elsewhere for a temporary position. She was glad of it, because if she frequented the booking offices at all, Skinny was sure, sooner or later, to cross her trail. But as to what she could do to earn a living—there was the puzzle, or, rather, a blank wall.

But luck was with her, or, rather, her own common sense landed for her what she sought. As theatrical life was what she knew best, her mind turned naturally to possible openings there. And after she was rested, or, at any rate, was tired of lying on the ragged squilt staring up at the blue sky through the dirty skylight, she set out upon her quest with a definite object in view. She dropped the Estelle Harcourt of her profession, and became thenceforth simply Stella Manning. Upon the back of an envelope she made a list of the legitimate theaters—Skinny Graves

never frequented those—and set out to call upon them in turn. And at the sixth one of her list she landed a position as usher at a dollar the performance, beginning the next night. There was only one drawback; she had to have a uniform. But now that fate had smiled upon her so readily she could afford to stifle her pride.

She returned to her room, opened one of her trunks, and took what Skinny had called her rhinestone jewelry around the corner in Seventh Avenue to a little shop bearing three gilt balls over the door, and she emerged from it minus the jewelry, but with a rosy blush, a pasteboard ticket, and money enough to furnish her with what she needed. At the end of the week, with her week's wages in her pocket, she moved her belongings from the unbearable little oven she had rented at first to a larger room in the same street, one that had windows opening direct to the open air, a boon that in itself was worth the increase in rent. And with a few pictures from her trunks, a book or two, and some bric-a-brac she cherished for one reason and another, she managed, by dint of her knack for home-making, to fix herself up cozily.

At the theater she proved herself efficient. She was naturally intelligent and adaptable; she had a good knowledge of the requirements of her new position; so that, an extraordinary thing for a new girl, there was never a complaint lodged against her. Furthermore, she began to make friends among the girls who worked with her, and thus banished the demon of loneliness which she feared would prey upon her. Altogether, she was fairly well pleased with her new mode of life, which she found less tiresome, less vexing, less chance-ridden than her old life had been.

She began to wonder why she had ever yielded so supinely to despair of

the future on the trip north from Colón, and thanked Providence more than once for having been endowed with courage enough—even if it had not come until the last moment—to make a firm stand for her principles. There was one disturbing element—the mystery surrounding Fraser. No day passed—hardly an hour passed—but what she was haunted by the memory of his face or of something he had said, and her speculation concerning his mysterious disappearance was never-ending. But for that she could have been supremely happy.

And then the crash came.

Stella was assigned to the center section of the orchestra seats upon the third Monday night of her service. The box office had not done a rushing business for that performance, and demands upon her attention were none too frequent. When the curtain went up she crossed over and fell to chatting with Sadie Hartman, a largish, motherly sort of a girl, who was in charge of the next section.

"Good gracious," suddenly cried Sadie, who was looking past Stella toward the entrance, "but hain't she the stunner, though!"

"Who?" Stella turned carelessly.

"The one just comin' in—with that handsome-looking fella. See, Irene has shoved 'em on this way. They're either for you or me. Hain't he the dandy looker, though?" The effusive Sadie moved forward a step or two as if to attract the couple her way.

But Stella, rooted to the floor, could only stare. Fraser had not seen her yet. He was all eyes for the girl he was with, and Stella read her in a glance; a large girl of obviously studied grace of movement; pretty for her type, with red cheeks, full red lips, brown eyes, and deftly arranged hair; dressed expensively, too loudly for the best of taste, yet with undeniable attractive-

ness. And how she was flirting with Fraser! And how Fraser adored her!

Sadie was in front of them now. Fraser looked up. Stella clenched a tiny fist in sheer panic, and tried to efface herself behind the high back of the first row. She was too late. Fraser's eyes, over Sadie's shoulders, fell full upon her. He recognized her, for his eyes hardened suddenly, and he looked away with a determined stare at nothing. Sadie had turned and was leading them back. Stella hoped against hope that their tickets called for the next section. But no! Her friend, out of loyalty or laziness, read the tickets and motioned to her. She had to obey the summons, or—or have a complaint entered.

How Stella got through the ordeal she could not have told. Fraser's own embarrassment helped her to a degree, and a sharp glance of question from his companion—for nothing escaped Gloria's eyes—goaded her on out of sheer rivalry not to capitulate by word or sign. She took the tickets, led the way down the aisle, pointed out the designated seats, and stood aside for them to enter. She felt the girl's big brown eyes constantly upon her; but Fraser, whether from embarrassment pure and simple, or from dislike of her, looked fixedly anywhere but at her, his jaws set grimly and white lines about his mouth, until he was finally forced to see where she was pointing. Their fingers touched as she gave him the checks, and she saw a hot flush mount to his cheeks.

"Did you get a program, sir?" she managed to say in the pursuit of duty.

"No—yes, I—yes, I have one, thanks," Fraser stammered, as he looked sheepishly at the program he held in his hand.

Then Stella saw his other hand reach hesitatingly for his pocket, and avoided having to refuse a tip only by speeding back up the aisle faster than decency

permitted. Once out of his sight, she fell into a panic again. It was quite beyond human endurance for her to carry ice water up that aisle between the acts and meet his eyes and perhaps his fingers as he took a glass of water from her to give to his companion; manifestly she could not endure it without betraying herself and him worse than she had done.

Fighting for self-possession to brave it out, she leaned up against the barricade for a moment. Sadie came hurrying up to her.

"What on earth's the matter, dearie?" she wanted to know.

"Nothing much."

"Now don't try to stuff me. Honest now, you know that fella, don't you? None of my business, o' course, but I'm worried, the way you act."

"I—I've seen him before," Stella admitted desperately.

"I thought so, as much from the way he acted as the way you did. But that peach he's with—believe me, she was taking it all in, and if it's any consolation to you she's eating her heart out with guessing right about now."

"She needn't trouble," said Stella.

Sadie looked her over with a motherly sort of compassion; Stella was certainly in a bad way. "Come, spruce up, dearie," she counseled. "This hain't so bad. It hain't the first time one of us girls has had to stand for that. Take it from me, it fusses the men worse'n it does us. That's the way you want to look at it."

"Oh, Sadie," Stella burst out suddenly, "I just can't stand it to go down that aisle again."

Sadie studied her for a minute. "Maybe you'd better see the boss and tell him you're sick or something. Or you could change with me to-night."

"No, that would be as bad as it is now, if I had to go down in front where they could see me. I believe I'll—I'm going, Sadie; I just can't stand it."

"You certainly look sick enough," Sadie admitted. "It's a big risk, though, running away right here in the middle of a performance."

"I can't help it. 'Most everybody's in by this time, and the manager can double up some way or another. Or he might give me the balcony and bring one of those girls down. I'm going to see, anyway. So long, Sadie."

But whatever reception Stella anticipated at the hands of the manager, the realization was far beyond her imagination. She voiced her request rather haltingly, only to have it interrupted before the manager could have found out what she wanted.

"You Miss Manning?" he asked.

"Yes, sir."

"Well, you're fired." He turned away.

"But—what? I don't understand why—" Stella began in stammering expostulation.

"You're fired, I said. And no back talk, either. We don't want you here any more. Do you get that? You're fired." All this in a crescendo that must have resounded to the foyer.

Stella quailed before the look he gave her, and found her way back toward the locker room; argument would avail her nothing. Her eyes were almost unseeing, what with bewilderment and despair and fear of the future; her brain benumbed with the echoing reiteration of two questions—Why? and What next?

This was the deliberate work of an enemy, she reasoned, of some one actuated either by intense dislike of her or by a desire to keep her head beneath the surface of the tide of life. And, being the work of enemies, what chance did she have of getting another position or of keeping one if she got it? She was better off really the day she landed from the steamer and found a temporary refuge in that dark, hot, noisome room she had taken first.

Who was trying to wear down her last defense? Who was responsible for this? Had Skinny Graves found her at last? Or was it Fraser? No, that was impossible. Or perhaps that girl he was with; she certainly was not above it, but what was her motive? She puzzled her brain over this more than over plans for the future. But when she had got her hat and raincoat from the lockers and had found her way back to the employees' door, the little door through which she had found hope and courage for the past three weeks, then it was that the full realization of her position plunged her into the depths of misery, and then it was, too, that she found the answer to her puzzle. For as she closed the door behind her, and stood for a moment on the threshold seeking courage to venture out into the rain-swept alley, a figure swathed in a long raincoat, his features partially disguised in the dim light by the low-turned brim of his second best velour hat, stepped out to meet her.

"Hello, Stell," was his deep-toned greeting.

"Skinny Graves!" she exclaimed, drawing back unconsciously into the shadows.

A chronicle of Skinny's activities during these three weeks would be a chronicle of disappointments enough to sicken a man of trying to earn a living and a modest competence, but his shrewdly planned discovery of Stella would soon put an end to all that, he confidently expected.

Skinny, it will be remembered, had three irons in the fire—picking up a paltry ten thousand from Curtis DuPont in return for the old confession, obtaining for Fraser a prison sentence, getting old man Nolan, or Manning, or whatever his name was, back to the States, so that the insurance company could pounce upon him and imprison

him for fraud, the success of the last two schemes bidding fair to net Skinny a fortune in the shape of the Fraser and Nolan gold mine.

The first iron was smallest and least important. He had learned from Roxy Quinn, not an hour after their first encounter, that Gloria Dupont had bluffed him nicely. The bluff was still working, for he had not been able to get hold of Fraser alone. Dupont was laughing him in the face, but Skinny could stand that. In one way and another, Skinny had been able to keep track of how things were going between Fraser and the Duponts, and it was now fairly evident that Fraser was willing to take what was coming to him and sacrifice himself for the Duponts. In such a case, he could hardly hope to get anything out of Dupont, but he was willing to endure the loss of the ten thousand if Fraser got his sentence and the gold-mine scheme worked out successfully.

But the chief difficulty was fixing old Nolan. For a time he feared that the nice yellowback he had spent for the cablegram to Nolan had been wasted. But on the Saturday preceding his discovery of Stella one of Brennan & Clark's office boys, whom Skinny had ingeniously urged to report to him the receipt of any word for Fraser from South America, informed him that Nolan had arrived in person, had consulted at some length with Clark about Fraser's case, and had gone his way. Skinny had immediately set Roxy Quinn to dickering with the life-insurance company, and learned that the company must be pretty sure of the identity of Giles Manning before they arrested any one under that name; more than once had they been stung by making arrests on information that later turned out to be groundless or spiteful.

This dictum put Skinny in another impasse. There were probably plenty

of people who had known Manning and who could identify him, but the difficulty was in finding them without tipping Nolan off in advance. If only he could find Stella and engineer their first meeting under the eyes of detectives, then all would be well. That appeared to him to be the only solution. But where was Stella? He had been looking for her for three weeks now, and she might have disappeared from the face of the earth for all he knew to the contrary.

And Nolan, too, he had to find. That task was not so difficult. Sooner or later Nolan was sure to go to see Fraser. Skinny knew where to find the younger man, and by the simple method of keeping a careful eye upon him he must find the older man. This obvious plan worked better than he thought. True, it had not yet brought him Nolan, but it had brought him Stella, for Skinny had followed Fraser to the theater that night and had ducked back out of sight the moment his eyes fell upon Stella.

From now on his path was easy. So long as Stella was earning a living and was independent, she might not listen to him, but if she were once more made to face starvation she might be induced to enter the trap he had to set for her. With the help of Roxy Quinn, whom he got on the telephone at his house, he very soon established to the satisfaction of the manager of the theater the fact that Stella was not a proper person for an usher because she was a thief. This done, he was ready to see her. And Stella, for whom he had looked high and low and inquired times out of mind, opened the employees' door and stood beside him.

"Hello, Stell," Skinny repeated softly, as unconcerned as if he had left her but minutes before.

"So you're the one that did this!" she charged him, with bitter anger.

"Did what?"

"Got me thrown out of my position."

"What, you hain't leavin' here, are you, just as I've found you?" exclaimed Skinny.

"That bluff won't work. I know it was you."

"You'll find out different some day," Skinny asserted, "but just now I hain't got any way of provin' it one way or the other, and I'll let you say anything you want to. Come along and le's have a little talk. I hain't seen you in a dog's age."

"How did you find me?" she demanded, still without moving from the threshold of the door.

"Easy enough. I figured Fraser must be seein' something of you now and then, else how was you makin' a livin' without he was helpin' you now and then. I've been sort of followin' him around on the chance of gettin' an eye on you. But I couldn't connect till to-night."

Now, whereas Stella had been debating whether to run for it to get away from him or to call an officer if Skinny insisted upon annoying her, with this mention of Fraser's name she was all ears to hear more, for if Skinny had been keeping in with Fraser he could tell her volumes that she wanted to know. "Who was that with Mr. Fraser to-night?" she asked.

"Say, she was a bird, wasn't she, Stell?" Skinny laughed.

"You haven't the slightest idea who she was," Stella charged him.

"I know her whole history, from the time Fraser first set eyes on her, and that was fourteen or fifteen years ago. You come along with me and I'll tell you about her."

"Where to?"

"Oh, just walk. Toward your place, if you want to. Where you livin', Stell?"

"We'll walk," Stella agreed almost eagerly. And she led the way out into

Broadway and north, away from her home. "Tell me about it, Skinny."

Skinny looked straight ahead of him, up the rain-splashed, deserted Broadway, which looked anything but brilliant in spite of all its famous lights; for the mist and the fog had tempered the white lights to a murky, yellow glare. Skinny knew that he must be careful of the way he broached his errand, for Stella would be quick to jump at suspicion even where there was no real ground for suspicion. "So you're out of a job again," he commented nonchalantly, disregarding her request.

"That hasn't got anything to do with you. I came along with you to hear about Mr. Fraser, and if you aren't going to tell me I'll relieve you of my company with the greatest of pleasure."

"Aw, forget about Fraser. He's stuck on that dame he's with to-night. She's the daughter of a rich stock-broker, and he's known her all her life. You've got about as much chance to cut her out with Fraser as the devil has of eatin' ice cream on his front piazza. I told you so once; I told you Fraser would pass you up as soon as he got out of sight of you. What you'd ought to have done was to look out for yourself, and you'd have five thousand bucks comin' to you right now, so you wouldn't have to go sneakin' around lookin' for a six-dollar-a-week job for the rest of your life and starvin' to death or the next thing to it when you get kicked out of it. Hain't you sorry now you was so foolish?"

Stella knew the utter uselessness of making a direct reply to that question, and ignored it. "Did you earn your ten thousand?" she asked presently, thankful for the darkness of the night, so that Skinny could not see her face. "Did you keep Mr. Fraser from getting his capital?"

"Not yet, but I will by to-morrow. Deal's all cinched. Fraser, of course,

has been out of the runnin' ever since he got tied up with that skirt he's chasin' around with. But his partner come on north to jack him up, and it's his partner we're goin' to do business with. I've got a date with him in Izzy Streeter's office at noon to-morrow. He thinks we're goin' to furnish him the capital then." Skinny guffawed quite naturally and looked around suddenly at the display in a tailor's window, thus ingeniously catching a clandestine glimpse of Stella's face.

Stella caught her lower lip in her white teeth, and thought hard. She even lowered her umbrella a trifle, though too late to keep Skinny from seeing the emotion she knew she must be showing. So that was Skinny's game, was it? A tremor of exaltation passed through her as she realized how much lay in her hands—checkmating Skinny and saving the mine for Fraser and his partner, if only she could get word to one or the other of them before the designated appointment and warn them to be on their guard. She must do it somehow, and, if in no other way, then she must beard the lions in their den—appear bodily at the conference in Streeter's office and denounce Skinny and his crony with all the invective she was master of.

But the latter plan took more courage than the former. She feared she might fail at the last moment, and, besides, Skinny might have lied to her about the proposed rendezvous with Fraser's partner. If only she could manage to get hold of one or the other of them beforehand! Pride kept her from going to Fraser direct, even if she knew where he lived. He might refuse to see her if she called in person, even if she knew where these Dupont people lived. Then, too, that girl would probably see her and ask Fraser embarrassing questions. The same thing would be true if she called over the telephone, and a letter might not

get there in time. But as to Fraser's partner—

"How on earth," she asked, with well-feigned, natural curiosity, "did you get hold of his partner?"

Skinny laughed in his sleeve. She was falling for it. This was going to be too easy. He wouldn't have to manage to steer old Nolan to Streeter's office, after all. Stella would get into communication with Nolan at once, or as soon as she could, and by the simple method of following Nolan he would be sure to find the two of them together. And he was so positive of finding them together that he could have the insurance company's detective along with him all the time.

"How did I get hold of him?" Skinny repeated, with a laugh. "Simplest thing in the world. Had an office boy in Brennan & Clark's tip me off about Fraser's mail, and he put me wise to Fraser's partner."

"Who are Brennan & Clark?" Stella asked ingenuously.

"Fraser's lawyers."

"Oh!"

They walked on in silence for a space. "What do you figure on doin' now, Stell?" Skinny asked presently.

"I don't know. I hadn't given it a thought. But I do know one thing—I'm going straight home. I'm getting soaked through parading up and down in this storm."

"Well, we're on our way, hain't we? I intended to see you home when we started."

Stella stopped short and faced him. "You've gone as far as you're going," she told him sharply. "And if you try to follow me I'll call an officer."

"Aw, come now, Stell," objected Skinny, with a wheedling whine. "You don't mind—"

"I certainly do. I won't have you following me, so you'd better not try it." She cut through a cross-town street, looking backward over her shoul-

der to see if Skinny had heeded her warning.

Evidently he had. He stood watching her for a few seconds, and then, with a shrug of his thin shoulders, he turned south along Broadway and out of sight.

Stella dropped into the first public call station she came across and looked up Brennan & Clark in the telephone directory. There they were, sure enough; Skinny had not lied to her on that point. She started to put through a call, but then she reflected that there was no chance of finding any one in an office at this hour, and that she might better save her nickel. She jotted the number down, however, so that she could call up the first thing in the morning. They would assuredly tell her where to find Fraser's partner, and then she could either go to him to give her warning or he could come to her place. One way or the other, Fraser's partner would be warned before noon.

CHAPTER XI.

NONE SO BLIND.

Much happened to Fraser during those three weeks since his arrest; too much for his own good. From the time Curtis Dupont had surprised him beyond amazement by coming forward and posting ten thousand cash bail, Fraser had been shackled hand and foot to Dupont and his daughter. They had taken him at once to their home—they had a house away uptown in a district none too élite, but none the less a little paradise for Fraser fresh from the wilds—and had fairly submerged him with their benevolence and hospitality. Dupont managed to get his baggage sent up; they assigned him to the best room in the house; they pressed him beyond possibility of refusal to make his home with them until after his trial.

Fraser accepted. It was a queer position for him, a queer procedure for them, one not at all ingenuous had Fraser only stopped to think of it. But he never did think of it, and never wanted to think of it; and, if he had wanted, Gloria Dupont kept him too busy and too blinded to arrive at seeing clearly.

Thus Fraser lived while he awaited his trial, on the calendar for three months hence. It was a dream life, a rosy-colored phantasy; and Fraser, purblind and gullible, mistook the shadow for the substance. He wouldn't have admitted that he was being fooled. He knew that the father had an ax to grind and that the daughter was ignorant of that fact; but Fraser felt that he had started turning the grindstone, and so was willing to finish the job. The keystone that locked the arch of sham and hypocrisy was Fraser's desire to keep the admirable Gloria in ignorance of her father's shame. And, under the circumstances, a wiser head than his might have been turned.

In the first place, this beautiful example of love between father and daughter was exactly as he had seen it in visions of eleven years, and if either Gloria or Dupont by mischance dropped their masks or ruffled the placidity of this deep pool of affection, Fraser, blinded by his idyllic visions, never saw a misplay. One could not wantonly destroy so beautiful a thing. Was it not his duty to sacrifice himself, upon whom no one depended, rather than permit the ruthless destruction of this happy family; rather than shatter the love and respect that Gloria had for her father; rather than let the heavy hand of the law tear the father from the clinging embrace of the daughter, brand him before her eyes as a felon, and leave his daughter alone and inconsolable and eternally disgraced? No! His duty was plain.

In the second place, Dupont had

shown himself a man. He had furnished the bail, had opened his house to him, and treated him royally. He had hastened, at their first opportunity—artfully arranged by Gloria—to admit to Fraser his guilt, and to insist upon clearing Fraser at his own expense, upon making a public confession. That insistence was purely voluntary, made without a hint from Fraser, and rather surprising in its vehemence and sincerity. Dupont had accompanied it with a great deal of talk about his efforts to keep in the straight path after that one lapse of his; much more talk about Gloria's love and respect for him, and the crushing blow that must kill her as a result of his condemnation.

That was all true; none knew it better than Fraser. Dupont was not stretching it any to create sympathy. Fraser couldn't accept his offer, of course; it was all the more impossible for him to shift the burden of crime when he saw how really decent the other man had grown to be. Dupont never mentioned a word of the written confession, chiefly because he lacked the nerve to do it, and Fraser, thinking that Dupont had either forgotten its existence or else concluded that it was lost, thought it would be very tactless to mention it at this time. Fraser would likely have burned it had he possessed it. Dupont might have made one mistake. Fraser had given him a chance to mend, and he had mended. Far be it from Fraser deliberately to undo his own work, to rend again the patched fabric of Dupont's life, especially when that life meant so much to Gloria.

And, in the third place, Fraser's usually clear foresight was blinded by the very radiance of Gloria herself. She was the sun in his eyes, a sun that never set during his waking hours. Except when he manifestly desired the privacy of his room, she was with him pretty much all the time he was in the

house. If ever he went out alone, it was because her ingenuity failed to evolve a passable pretext to accompany him. She stayed away from Dupont's office, not alone to prevent Fraser's going down there and finding out the truth, but as well to keep a constant eye upon him. Nor did Fraser find this irksome; after a day or two she did not find it necessary to search for excuses to accompany him.

Her assiduity in this respect was a part of that bluff which kept ten thousand dollars in Curtis Dupont's safe, and the old confession in Skinny Graves' hungry pockets. Dupont had reported in secret to Gloria about it when he came home from his office the very night they had rescued Fraser.

"That man Graves was in about three this afternoon," he told Gloria, "and sore as a pup. Seems he went straight from you to see a lawyer, and they looked it up and put two and two together, and found out that you'd put one over on him. Said he was through now with all the monkey work, and wanted the ten thousand right off the reel or he'd take the confession to Fraser."

"And what did you tell him?" queried Gloria, with that occasional sharp glance of hers.

"Told him to go to Fraser—if he could." Dupont laughed.

"What did he say to that?" insisted Gloria.

"Said he blankety-blank well would."

"I'd like to see that big stiff get his peepers on Unky Andy for one waking minute when I'm not around," declared Gloria, with some gusto. "If he gets a word in edgewise with Fraser during the next two weeks he can have his ten thousand, and welcome."

And thus they got rid of Graves—for a time.

Fraser's days were so full that he never seemed to have time to orient himself, think about the future—his

trial. If ever he mentioned the fact of his being out on bail, Gloria turned it off with a grimace or a pettish plaint. "Any man makes one mistake in his life," she told him once, "and what you did once upon a time don't cut any ice with me now, Andy. Of course you're wiser now, and wouldn't do it again. You'll have to take your medicine. I realize that, and I'm not the kind to cry over spilled milk. I'll be the same to you when you've finished your sentence as I've always been. So let's not think about it."

Fraser was conscious of a shiver at the cold-blooded way she had spoken of his sentence, but he supposed she was right about it. It was plain that she did not like to talk about it or even think of it, and Fraser soon gave up mentioning it.

The two of them did the town as thoroughly as two healthy young people can do it. At first Gloria took Fraser to the galleries and museums—she had to study a guidebook secretly to find out where they were—but these trips soon palled on her. Even at the cost of losing Fraser's regard she had to give them up. But Fraser was more subjugated soon, and she cast about her for diversions more in accord with her proclivities. One morning she put some dance records on the phonograph, and found Fraser a willing and efficient pupil at the new dance steps. From that time forth their daily program was a round of visits to the brilliant restaurants—to one for lunch and dancing, to another for tea and dancing, to another for dinner and dancing, with an occasional matinée and now and then a theater thrown in by way of variation, due to Gloria's half-willing deference to Fraser's half-hinted desires.

Thus Fraser tripped along the rose-strewn path. Sometimes, when he got to his room after the midnight dancing, Fraser tried to think; tried to tell himself that he wished Gloria was just a

little different—less disposed, for example, to preen herself and pose and point out to him with pride that other men were staring at her or saying things behind their hands about her. There was a great deal of this, for Gloria's magnificent appearance and the grace of her dancing attracted many eyes. But for some reason, Fraser could not bring himself to look upon these things as he knew he should. It was the witchery of the girl and the fumes of the hot, smoke-laden air of the restaurants that beclouded his brain. And invariably on the next morning he would arise full of fervor for the day's revels, more than ever bewitched by Gloria, more than ever heedless of the future.

With two exceptions, he gave never a thought to Estelle, had almost forgotten her existence. The firm of lawyers had stopped looking for her when Fraser told them he did not intend to clear himself. He ran across the glove one day when he sent his dinner jacket to the tailor's, studied over it a moment, and tossed it into the wastebasket. Ten minutes later, however, he picked it out again, folded it, and laid it away in the flap of his suit case. He could not have told himself just why he changed his mind. And that finished Estelle as far as he was concerned—until that eventful night when he chanced to run across her in the theater.

"Who was that girl?" Gloria wanted to know, as soon as Stella had sped up the aisle.

"What girl?" Fraser parried uselessly.

"The usher. She knew you, and you knew her. Isn't that so, Andy?"

Fraser thought a moment. "Yes, it's quite true," he whispered. "I have seen her before."

"More than seen her, Andy," giggled Gloria. "You can't fool me; it was written all over both of you. Won't you 'fess up now?"

"There's nothing to confess," said Fraser, with the first trace of irritability he had ever evinced toward Gloria. "Perhaps I was startled when I saw her, but it was only because I never expected to see her here. I understood she was a vaudeville actress, and I certainly didn't expect to see her on this side of the footlights. Don't you think I had reason enough to be astonished?"

"But where on earth would you be meeting an actress?" Gloria inquired, with wide eyes.

"On the ship, coming to New York."

"Oh, I see." Gloria said no more, but fell to musing. Her sharp eyes had not overlooked a single detail of the little drama; nor seen without understanding. Then, too, there was that glove in Fraser's suit case. She couldn't ask Fraser about that, because Fraser never dreamed that she had been prying through his things. There was the glove, and here was the girl. And this girl was in love with Fraser, dangerously so for her own peace of mind. Gloria's feminine instinct, combined with her shrewd observation, told her that plainly enough. Just now Fraser was ashamed of his acquaintance with her, and in that she found comfort; but on the other hand he was rather more embarrassed than he would have been without sweet memories. There was no telling when such a combination of circumstances might not prove disastrous to her plans. It would be well to watch this demure little usher, and see to it that Fraser did not renew his acquaintance with her until he was out of harm's way.

Fraser saw the play through without any haunting dreams. If he thought at all of Stella, it was with a certain elation that he had done right in following the advice of three separate men and leaving her alone; she had doubtless been bluffing about being on the stage, or she would scarcely be here now in this position; and, since she was that

type of girl, it was a ten-to-one shot if she hadn't stolen the old confession from his pocketbook. But as long as she didn't trouble the Duponts about it, she was welcome to it. He was grateful that Gloria accepted his explanation, and dropped the subject there without further comment.

What with the late supper and dancing, Fraser slept long the next morning. It was after ten when the maid aroused him by determined knocking at the door.

"Somebody downstairs to see you, sir," she announced, in response to his drowsy query.

His mind reverted instantly to Stella. "Who?" he demanded, with vexation.

"Mr. Philip Nolan, sir."

Fraser's sleepy eyes flew open. "Nolan, did you say?" he called out, in a louder tone.

"Yes, sir. Philip Nolan, he gave his name."

"Somebody playing a joke on me. Tell him I'm not up yet, and to come around later. I don't know anybody by the name of Philip Nolan—not in New York, anyhow." Fraser rolled over to catch another nap.

"But this gentleman says it's very important," the maid insisted. "He says he's come 'way from South America—"

This time Fraser jumped up. "He has, eh? Say, what sort of man is he?" It seemed so utterly ridiculous for old man Nolan to be here in the flesh that Fraser found it impossible to believe.

"Old gentleman, sixty, gray-haired, rough hands like a laborer, and a tan like a—"

"You tell him to wait just ten minutes, and I'll be down." Fraser threw the clothes back and struck the floor in a bound. He dashed some cold water on his face, and, towel in hand as a second idea struck him, tore open the door and shouted down the stairs: "Marie,

bring Nolan up here right away." And with the maid's acquiescence in his ears, he hurried into his clothes. He didn't know what to make of this visit, and didn't try to figure it out; he was so eager for the sight of Nolan that he couldn't think of anything else.

Came heavy footsteps up the stairs. Fraser, in shirt and trousers and slippers, strode to the door and threw it open before Nolan had reached it. Nolan caught sight of him, cleared the last two steps in a bound, and ran to the door. Their hands met.

"You old sinner!" cried Fraser ecstatically, pumping his hand up and down, and finally pulling him into the room.

"Somewhat surprised, eh, Andy?" Nolan said soberly, in his modulated tones.

Fraser did not at once reply. From Nolan's grave demeanor, he sensed trouble, and busied himself with shutting and locking the door, while Nolan stood off a pace and watched him. "Have a seat, if you can find one, Nolan," Fraser invited, with forced joviality. "Sure is a hodgepodge, this room, but you know how it is."

"Yes, I understand, Andy."

"Out late nights, doing the town," Fraser went on rapidly, as he divested an easy-chair of his evening clothes, threw them on the bed in a heap, and sent the chair Nolan's way with a kick; "and in the morning a fellow feels like sleeping a little longer," he ended up, rather lamely.

Nolan pulled the chair around and dropped into it. "Not much like you used to be down—down there." There was mild censure in his voice. "You always used to be hard as nails."

Fraser reached for a cigarette while he looked Nolan over. Judged by his recently formed standards, the old man certainly did look a rough character. Fraser had often wondered in the past what Nolan would be like if he once

got back to civilization, and, judging from his studious care of speech and manners and personal cleanliness, he imagined that Nolan would be extremely meticulous as regards dress, perhaps even a fop. But Nolan wore a ready-made blue suit that hunched up around the neck and bulged every way about the cheap black shoes, a collar too large for him, and a tie that looked like a blue shoe string, and a broad-brimmed slouch hat such as he had never seen in New York. Fraser found himself looking at the nut-brown, calloused hands, with their thick and stubby nails; Nolan saw his glance, and stuffed his hands uneasily into his coat pockets as he leaned back in the chair. Fraser had changed wonderfully in two months; Fraser didn't realize it, but Nolan did.

Fraser lighted his cigarette, snapped the match anywhere, and studied the blue smoke as he exhaled it.

"I got your cablegram, Andy," Nolan said, to break the embarrassing silence.

"What cablegram?" Fraser looked at him with wide eyes.

"This." Nolan pulled from his pocket the cablegram that Skinny Graves had sent, fumbled over unfolding it, and handed it to Fraser, who read it through oblivious to Nolan's keen scrutiny.

"Never saw it before in my life," said Fraser, handing it back.

"I reckoned so, after what that young lawyer told me." He replaced the cablegram in his pocket.

"So you've seen Clark?"

"Yes, I've heard the whole thing from him. I went there as soon as I landed, of course. And from what he told me, I concluded you hadn't sent this."

"Who do you suppose did? Clark himself?"

"No, I don't know who did. That's what I want to find out. The person that sent it don't mean any good."

"How do you figure that out?"

"I'm just coming to that. I've been looking about some already, but——"

"When did you blow in?" Fraser asked, with an air of carelessness.

"Saturday, on the *Magdalena*. Shipped as a stoker so—so folks wouldn't be on the lookout for me when I got here."

"Is there some one on the lookout for you, then?"

"Yes; they want me here—the law does. I don't know how I've managed to dodge 'em so far, but I have. If I can only get this straightened out first why——"

"Hold on a minute, Nolan," said Fraser, letting the blue smoke drift unseen up through his fingers. "You let me get this straight first. You knew you were putting your head into a noose as soon as you got to New York. Yet the minute you get that—that fake cablegram you jump on the first ship out and make a bee line for whatever's waiting for you here."

"I didn't know it was a fake cablegram. I thought you meant it. I knew about that confession it mentions, Andy. To tell you the truth, I'd looked your things through that time I thought you were gone with yellow fever in Popayan, and I wanted to see whom to notify. So I perceived that if your confession was stolen I might clear you after all by swearing that I had seen it and read it. That's why I came hurrying up here. But now that we have proved it to be a fake, it makes it all the more necessary to clear your name. And Clark says that my oath to having seen it wouldn't clear you; therefore we must get hold of the paper some way or another."

Fraser looked out of the window, inhaled deeply, threw his cigarette away, and turned round to face Nolan. "That paper can stay where it is. I'm not going to try to clear myself," he said, with a determination that was almost rude.

"So Clark tells me. You're making a big mistake, though, and I don't think I'll have much difficulty in proving it to you—that is, if you're the same man I've always known you to be. I've been looking around a lot since Saturday—since I saw Clark, before I came here, and I've run onto a lot of things I don't believe you know."

"That'll do, Nolan," Fraser interrupted. "I appreciate what you've done for me by coming north, and I appreciate your good intentions in my interest. But I certainly don't thank you for a lot of gratuitous butting in like you appear to have been doing, and I'd be most awfully grateful to you if you'd stop it. You haven't been found yet; I imagine you can get out of here safely without being discovered, and I'd advise you to do it before it's too late."

"I'll stay here till I see you safe, Andy."

So much decision, tempered though it was with a quiet dignity, was something Fraser had not anticipated from Nolan. He sized the old man up keenly, and then an idea came to him; it was more than likely that Nolan had run across Stella somewhere, and she had—— But no, she wasn't the sort to care what became of him. He opened his lips to frame the question, and closed them again over it. If old Nolan knew her already, he would not gouge deeper into what must be a sore wound at the discovery of what she was; and if Nolan did not know her, he was not going to put himself deliberately into the position of discovering her to him. He really liked old Nolan too well to give him the pain of discovering to him what his daughter was. Queer, he thought, that Nolan had not spoken of the Stella Manning in the cablegram; doubtless he had his reasons, and therefore Fraser had no mind to force him to disclose them.

"If you stay here till I'm safe, Nolan," said Fraser, with a dry laugh,

"you'll stay here till I've served whatever sentence they're going to give me. That's final."

"Andy, there's somebody trying to get our mine away from us."

"How do you make that out?"

"With you doing your sentence, all that remained was to get me up here to do what's coming to me. Our claim expires, and they can refile it. That's what that cablegram was sent to me for—that and nothing else."

"Who'd do that?"

"Do you know what this man Curtis Dupont is?"

"A stockbroker—a decent, upright citizen, and a man that I'm going to see keep his good name."

"A man," returned Nolan, in even tones, "who was kicked out of the bank for crooked work not two years after you left, who is running a crooked promoter's office at this very day, with the very able assistance of his daughter, and who will do well—both of them, in fact—if they get through the year without having the post-office authorities arrest them. I've been investigating, Andy, when I heard how they'd been pulling the wool over your eyes, and that's what I've found out."

Fraser laughed. "Somebody's been pulling the wool over your eyes, Nolan. If it didn't sound like a joke, I'd kick you out of this house for that. This is their house, remember."

"It's the truth—the solemn truth. You'd find out the same thing if you'd only investigate. I'm of the opinion that it is these very people who are trying to get hold of our mine. And that's why they're so nice to you, and why the girl makes up to you so much, and why you're made absolutely blind to everything you ought to see. That's the kind of folks you're sacrificing yourself for."

"I guess I'd have got wise to it by this time if the Duponts were that sort of folks. And if you weren't as old

as you are, Nolan, I wouldn't sit here and let you insult my best friends like that. All I ask of you is to get out, and keep out, and stop bothering me with your old-woman tales. The thing for you to do is to get out of New York while you've got a chance; and take it from me, you won't have a chance much longer." There was a decided threat in Fraser's voice.

Nolan studied him quizzically; his close-cropped gray mustache seemed to bristle, and the lines around the corners of his grim mouth grew deeper. "Is that a threat?"

"I won't have you butting in on my business any longer, at any rate," Fraser told him. Fraser would not have betrayed the old man, but he was angry now, with what he considered a just wrath, and he did not much care what he said.

"Andy," said Nolan presently, "don't your common sense tell you that I'm speaking the truth when I say that these people aren't worth your consideration? If they were, I'd let you go your own way. But they aren't. Think back, now, and try to forget about this fine, handsome young lady you've been selling yourself for. Is she the sort of girl you'd want to marry—the sort of girl you'd want to be mother to your children?"

"Nolan, if you don't shut up I'll—I'll pitch you out of here on your neck."

"No, you won't, Andy," continued Nolan, unruffled. "You wouldn't do that to me after what we've been through together. I'm willing to take the risk, anyway. You're just blind, and I'm trying to make you see. Think over about the girl. You think she doesn't know anything about what her father did to you. I don't know about that. If she does, what is she but a low-down hypocrite, out for her own good; and if she doesn't know that her father was guilty, do you think she acts toward you like a decent girl would

act toward a man would who had stolen money, been arrested, and was out on bail? Does she act toward you the way she ought to act toward such a man?"

"She's too decent to act any other way," Fraser said hotly, but not until after a moment of studious reflection.

"And take her father. Has he offered to come up and take the blame that he ought to?"

"Yes, he certainly has," cried Fraser promptly.

"But as a man ought to—like you would, for example, without sniveling about it, without a lot of ifs and buts, just as if he meant what he was talking about?"

"Well—" began Fraser dubiously.

"And has he even offered to make restitution of the money, in the hope that your sentence might be lightened? Has he done that?"

"He put up bail for me."

"That's not the same thing at all. He knows he'll get it back. He knows it's as safe as bail as it would be in the bank. But the money he stole—has he ever offered to pay it back outright? Even when he ought to know from his own experience that restitution of the sum would reduce your sentence? Has he, Andy?"

"That never occurred to me. Perhaps he hasn't got it to spare."

"It's not a case of what he's got to *spare*, if he's got it at all. And he's got it—he deposited it for bail, or most of it. You think it over, Andy. I won't say any more just now about that. Try to look at these things as you ought to. See if you're treating yourself right. See if you're treating me right, when you know what I'm risking for you. And I tell you right now that I'm not going to stir from New York till I *have* opened your eyes for you and made you see things as you ought to. Now I'm going to try to get hold of that paper you need to clear yourself with. I know you say you won't use it, but you may

change your mind. And if you want it at all, you'll want it pretty badly. Clark tells me that an actress on the ship stole it from you. Is that true?"

Fraser nodded. Now old Nolan was getting on dangerous ground.

"What was her name?" Nolan insisted.

"You'd better leave her alone, Nolan. I don't want that thing, and won't use it if I get it. And you're likely to get your fingers burned if you keep after it."

Nolan rose from his chair and paced the room, his rugged hands behind his squat, broad back. "Was her name—Manning?" he said at last, coming to a stop and looking out of the window.

"Her name was Harcourt," Fraser said.

"Oh!" The relief was unmistakable; Nolan turned suddenly and set to pacing the room again. And Fraser, seeing the old man's shoulders squared back, felt repaid for keeping to the letter of the truth.

"Where can I find her?" Nolan asked, after a space.

"I don't know."

"You mean you won't tell."

"I mean I don't know where you'll find her now; also I wouldn't tell you, Nolan, if I did know. This has gone far enough. You mean well, but you can't see things as I do. So please let the matter rest, and we'll part friends."

Nolan, close by the door in his pacing, stopped again and looked at Fraser. "Andy, you aren't the man you used to be. Time was when I valued your judgment and foresight more than any other man's I ever knew. This confounded carousing of nights that you've got trapped in like a gullible fool has eaten the stuff all out of you. I half begin to believe that you aren't worth saving, after all."

"You'd do better not to meddle," Fraser persisted stubbornly.

"Perhaps. I think you'll change your

mind. Andy, I didn't mean to tell you this when I came here to see you, but I'm afraid I've got to. While I was waiting for you downstairs this morning, I was talking with the young lady you've been running around with for the past three weeks. She seemed very curious about my business with you, or it might not have occurred to me to engage her upon any such subterfuge as I employed to learn just how the land lies here. Now be quiet and let me finish this once. After this I won't bother you."

Fraser denoted his impatient resignation with a gesture, and Nolan proceeded: "I told her that I was a rich mine owner, your partner, and that I'd come north to clear your name at any cost; I told her I thought her father had the confession he had made so long ago, that had been stolen from you; I asked her what sum she would take to hand that confession over to me, upon my solemn promise not to make it public until her father had had an opportunity to get away beyond the reach of the law, thus enabling me to clear you without involving him. What do you suppose she said?"

"You had the gall of the devil—that's all I know."

"She said she'd telephone her father. She ran at once to do so. I followed, unknown to her, and overheard most of what she said. Her father has gone now to pay some one ten thousand dollars for the little slip of paper, and they expect to receive for it from me the neat little sum of two hundred thousand. Not a bad deal for their morning's work, is it?"

"It's all a scoundrelly lie!" cried Fraser.

"Well, if you don't believe it"—here Nolan turned with the quickness of a striking snake, shot back the bolt, flung open the door, and darted through it. Fraser saw a shadow, heard the rustling of skirts, and a woman's cry of

pain and anger. In a stride he was at the door, only to meet Nolan returning, dragging after him Gloria Dupont, his hard-handed grip tight upon her slender wrists. "If you don't believe it," Nolan cried, "ask the girl. Here she is. She's been outside the door ever since I got in here, listening to everything I've been saying. I knew she'd listen. I heard her when she came to the door. That's the kind of a girl you're selling yourself for. There she is. Ask her."

CHAPTER XII.

NOLAN GETS A SURPRISE.

At this rapid and surprising dénouement, Fraser was for the moment stricken dumb and immobile; he could only stare at Gloria, whose eyes met his squarely. Nolan had loosed her as soon as he got her into the room, had sidled round behind her to shut the door and stand against it. Gloria kept both her head and her nerve. This was not difficult for her, the way things were turning out. With old Nolan's two hundred thousand she and her father could buy the confession from Skinny Graves, make a complete restitution of the embezzlement on the condition that the sentence be suspended or at worst a short one; and thus they would clean the slate and have a comfortable fortune left to start again with. Therefore it was no longer necessary to keep up the sham with Fraser, and he could think what he wanted to about her.

"Ask her, ask her, Andy," implored the excited Nolan.

"It's not true, is it, Gloria?" asked Fraser, who got hope from the level fearlessness of her eyes.

"Of course not," she said, with a nervous giggle.

"Which are you going to believe, Andy—me or the girl?" Nolan supplicated, in despair.

"You lied to her," said Fraser. "Why shouldn't you lie to me?"

"He lied to me," cried Gloria, turning on him. "How?"

"If I lied, it was in a good cause," Nolan defended himself. "I had to open your eyes one way or another. And I didn't lie. I told her if she'd give me the confession I'd give her two hundred thousand. But she hasn't given it to me, and never will."

"You—you mean to say that—that the deal is off—that your offer don't hold?" Gloria cried shrilly.

"Not till I get hold of that paper, at any rate," said Nolan, unruffled.

"Don't believe him for a minute, Gloria," Fraser counseled her. "He's no friend of mine. I'm through with him after such a dirty deal. He hasn't got a tenth of that sum, and couldn't raise it in a century. Two hundred thousand dollars—good Lord!" Fraser burst into scornful laughter.

"Oh, you scoundrel!" she exclaimed, clenching her fist as if she might beat him with it. And thus did her house of sand come tumbling about her ears; thus did her rosy dream of a competent fortune and a truce to all disturbances disappear in thin air. She bit her lip and tried to think. Where exactly was she now? A few seconds before, she had thrown Fraser into the discard as useless; and now everything depended upon him. Had Nolan ruined her in Fraser's regard, or did her influence still dominate the younger man? Could she possibly vindicate herself in Fraser's eyes? Had not her treatment of Nolan already betrayed her beyond all chance of vindication? One good thing—her father had set off hotfoot to find the man Graves and get possession of the old confession. That would very soon be safe, out of Fraser's reach. Without it Fraser could prove nothing; without it he could do no more than stigmatize her father's name without throwing the actual guilt upon him. And she might yet guard against that. But she must get rid of this old man before

she tried to excuse herself to Fraser and win back his esteem. She glared at him a moment with baleful eyes.

Nolan shrugged his heavy shoulders nonchalantly both at her exclamation and at her offensive stare. He looked past her at Fraser, tried to fathom Fraser's manifest perplexity and find in it signs of Fraser's awakening. That was all he cared for. The girl, his own reputation were as nothing compared to jolting the younger man out of his stubborn blindness. Would the lad never waken? Had the girl completely dominated both his heart and his usually keen mind?

"You get out of here! We're through with you, and this is my house!" Gloria's sharp commands drew Nolan's attention again.

Once more he shrugged his shoulders. "I'll stay here till I'm put out, or till Fraser tells me where that actress Harcourt woman is," he declared stubbornly.

"If that's all you want to know," Gloria flashed at him, "you'll find her at the Vendome Theater, usher in the center section of the orchestra."

"Gloria!" Fraser expostulated too late, unable to decide sooner whether or not he should save Nolan from that disagreeable scene.

"Is that true, Andy?" Nolan demanded.

Fraser's silence lent assent, and Nolan wrenched open the door behind him. "See you again before night, Andy. Think this business over. So long." With that brief farewell he was gone, leaving Fraser and Gloria alone, the one mired in bewilderment at the rapidity of developments, the other busy formulating plausible explanations.

"What a perfectly detestable old codger!" Gloria exclaimed, with one of her old-time, flashing smiles.

"No names, please, Gloria," cautioned Fraser gravely. "He's really one of the finest old men that ever lived, if he was

a trifle overzealous in the line of what he considered his duty."

"But you don't believe what he says, do you, Andy?"

"You were eavesdropping, at any rate," Fraser accused her, in a tone that told plainly enough his opinion of that offense.

"Oh, but that's nothing. I didn't mean any harm by it. I've done it ever since I was a kiddie so high. It's just a habit I can't break, or you might say a temptation I can't resist. Really I didn't mean any harm by it, Andy. Say you forgive me." She made a pretty little moue by drooping the corners of her mouth, a gesture that had never yet failed to bring him out of a grouch.

"There are other things, too, Gloria. Somehow I'm all mixed up. I can't seem to get this quite straight. Leave me alone for a little while. I want to think it over and see where I'm at."

"But, Andy," pouted Gloria, "what thinking over have you got to do? You wouldn't take that man's word against mine, would you? Not when you've known me all my life practically, and especially when he's confessed to lying to me?"

"Perhaps not his word alone, Gloria," Fraser replied dubiously. "Now run along. There's a dear girl. I'll be downstairs pretty soon. See, I haven't even got a collar on yet."

Gloria had nothing to do but obey, especially since Fraser had pushed her gently out of the room and had tempered the offense of shutting the door in her face only by smiling at her as the door swung shut. She went slowly down the stairs, living again the scene she had just been through, with a view to marshaling the points of her defense to Fraser. But she did not have long to dwell upon it. Her descent was accelerated by the shrill clangor of the telephone in the library.

"Your father, Miss Gloria," announced Marie, coming out into the

hall just as Gloria reached the ground floor.

She flung herself upon the instrument. "Hello, hello, dad!" she called. "Did you get hold of him—of that man Graves?"

"No. I went straight to the address he gave me and found he'd been out since early this morning, and they didn't know where I could find him. All I could do was to leave word to call me up or come to my office right away quick. So all we can do is to wait. S'pose you can fix it up with the old codger? You could explain—"

"Explain nothing!" Gloria interrupted, lowering her voice so that it would not carry upstairs to Fraser. "Listen, dad! For once in my life I've had it put over me good and proper. I'm the goat. All that hick was after when he made me the offer was just to find out where we stood with Andy—where we really stood, you understand? And, believe me, he found out. Had something awful of a scene here ten minutes ago, and I must have given myself away for fair. Now we're up against it."

"So the deal's all off, eh? So I haven't got to see Graves?"

"Sure you've got to—now more than ever. Now we've simply got to part with that ten thousand."

"Why?"

"Well, this old rube's been filling Andy's ear with a lot of stuff—the real dope about us. He's got Andy on the fence so he don't know where he's at, and I don't, either. If Andy comes down on our side of the fence, it's all to the merry, and we skate along like we have been doing. But if Andy comes down on the other side of the fence—and I'm afraid he will now, the way things look—believe me, he'll be sore on us! He won't be able to do us dirt enough. And he'll certainly try to plaster it all over you when he comes up for trial. If he manages to get hold

of that confession of yours before his trial's on, it's good-by you; he'll be that sore on us that he'll clear himself and see that you get yours. If he gets hold of the confession, you can't dodge it; and this old duffer, Nolan, is hotfoot after the paper now. The only way you can save yourself now is to beat him to it—get that fool confession of yours and light a match to it before Nolan gets his fingers on it. Once that's out of the way, they haven't got anything on you, and the worst Fraser can do is to try to ring you in on his sole testimony. Do you get me? Do you follow me?"

"Sure, I follow. Looks like there had to be some hustling done. You ought to have been more careful, Gloria."

"Well, don't lecture me about it now. It looked like a good thing, and I snapped it up; you'd have lectured me just the same if I'd seen the chance and passed it up. So lay off the jawing and get after Graves. I can't gas here any longer. I've got troubles of my own, it's just struck me—another simp trick I pulled just now. What's Graves' address, anyway? I may want to see him myself if I get a chance."

"For Lord's sake, what next, Gloria?" groaned Dupont anxiously.

"Never you mind. I can fix it while I'd be telling you about it. What's that address?"

"Mobb's Hotel, West Forty-first Street. But, say—"

"Say nothing. Good-by, dad; shake your feet, now. Call me up here now and then to keep in touch with me. Something might happen."

Gloria hung up the receiver and reached for the telephone book. It had just occurred to her that, in her anxiety to get old Nolan out of the house, she had had recourse to a plan that might prove disastrous. For now she knew that it was Fraser's actress friend who had stolen the confession from him

on shipboard; whereas it was Skinny Graves who had presented it to her father for sale—or blackmail. Thus the two of them were obviously in league. Old Nolan was after the actress at this very minute, and old Nolan had a way with him. He might bamboozle her into giving up the paper, and then the fat *would* be in the fire. She had to manage somehow to keep Nolan away from the actress until her father had closed the bargain with Skinny Graves. She found her number and sent in the call.

"Vendome Theater," announced the man who answered her call.

"I would like to speak," she ventured, "with the girl—the usher who was in charge of the center section, orchestra, last night."

"What's the trouble—lost something?"

"No. This is personal, but very important."

"Well, she hain't here any more. She's been fired."

Gloria's heart gained a beat at this tidings, and then dropped back to normal. Nolan was such a pertinacious, shrewd old duffer; he might get her address—

"Could you tell me her address, please? Hate to trouble you, but this is very important."

"Just a minute." While she waited, she heard the voice at the other end of the line: "Sam, did you get Miss Manning's address for that hick this morning?" This she found disquieting. Nolan was already well along on the trail. There was no time to waste if she overtook him. She could not hear the man Sam's reply, but it was immediately repeated to her:

"No. 662 West Twenty-second is all we've got."

"Thanks." Gloria jammed up the receiver and darted off toward the stairs to get ready for the street.

At the door of the library she ran

face to face with Fraser, and recoiled before him, pale and angry and defiant. What if he had overheard the whole conversation!

"How long have you been standing there?" she demanded hotly.

Fraser looked at her in some surprise. "I just this minute got here. What are you so fussed up about?"

"Then you didn't hear—" she began, and stopped there.

Fraser did not find it difficult to supply the rest of her query. "No, I didn't hear what you were saying over the telephone, if that's what you mean."

Her look of relief at this information betrayed her yet more. Fraser could not fail to note it. "I suppose you didn't want me to hear it," he commented. "What is it—some more of this monkey work behind my back?"

Gloria found refuge in her old tactics. "Andy," she said, with a pout, "you know I'd just as soon you'd hear anything I said over the phone. Why are you so nasty about it?"

"I didn't mean to be," said Fraser, rather stiffly. "I've been thinking this business over. Come on into the library a minute. Let's discuss it."

She drew back and tried to pass him. "No, I can't just now," she said, with more anxiety in her voice than would have been there under ordinary circumstances. "I can't; I'm just going out." For she felt that she dared not risk putting her urgent errand off by so much as a minute. Old Nolan might be doing irretrievable harm in the meantime.

"Can't your trip wait a few minutes?" Fraser insisted stubbornly.

"No, it can't. I've got to go, Andy."

"If you have any desire at all to see this thing straightened out with me, I should think it would be the most important matter on your mind; I should think you'd want to get it fixed up before anything else."

"I do. This is important, but it can wait. I'm only going to be gone a very

few minutes, and I'll see you at lunch surely." With that she ran past him and up the stairs.

Fraser looked after her without a word, and when she had disappeared he strolled rather aimlessly into the library. Conviction was growing strong; now, indeed, he must be blind not to credit it. Still he clung stubbornly to his old ideals of Dupont and his daughter, and refused to give them up without giving the Duponts every last chance. The advances should really come from Gloria and not from him; nevertheless he had made them first, and seen them willfully spurned by her. Should he give her another chance or not? He would at least wait there in the library until she came down again, and meet her with a determined request for an explanation. Then if she refused—but she couldn't very well. He picked up the morning paper, dropped into an alcove seat that commanded a view of the stairway, and turned the pages desultorily, his mind upon anything but the news.

Gloria, meantime, fearful lest Fraser might follow her clandestinely when she went out upon her important errand, had hurried down the back stairs and out the area gate in a desperate effort to forestall old Nolan in reaching Stella. And, speaking literally, she succeeded.

Nolan's inquiry at the theater had sufficed to betray Fraser's evasion, and to identify Estelle Harcourt, the actress who had robbed Fraser, as Stella Manning, the "pussykins" of his earlier life. For reasons best known to him, it was what he had expected from the first. Yet the shock of the proof, after the comforting doubt Fraser had managed to raise in his mind, penciled vertical wrinkles in his forehead and compressed his lips to a grim, straight line beneath his grizzly mustache. If Stella had turned out to be that sort of a girl, might she not betray him, or at least threaten him with betrayal if he did not leave her alone? And he was not ready

to face the future until he had saved Fraser. He decided that he must proceed with care; that he must not reveal himself in person to Stella until he was practically sure of getting what he wanted. With Fraser safe, he was willing to take what the Fates sent him, and consider himself most blameworthy for his lot; he had reconciled himself to that ever since he had received the cablegram.

Therefore he telephoned Stella, finding the number through information by giving the street address, and waited with tingling nerves until Stella was summoned. Stella was in. She had been trying all the morning to take advantage of Skinny's confidence of the night before—had been trying to get hold of Fraser's lawyers to pass the warning on. She was waiting impatiently for a telephone call from their office.

"Is this Miss Manning—or Miss Harcourt?" Nolan asked, in a voice that trembled in spite of his iron nerve, his every sense focused upon that first sound of her voice.

"This is Miss Manning. I have used the other name on the stage. Who is talking, please?"

"You wouldn't know me if I told you my name. I believe you came north on the ship with Mr. Andrew Fraser."

"Yes, yes, of course. Why? Who are you? What do you want? What about Mr. Fraser? I'm here, listening."

"Well, you won't be able to hear much if you don't give me a chance to talk," said Nolan, not knowing quite what to make out of her excitement. "I'm his partner in South America. Nolan's my name; maybe he told you about me, though I doubt it."

"Thank Heaven! You're just the man I wanted to see. No, he didn't tell me anything about you. Why did you call me up? What has happened?" Stella wanted to make sure of the identity of the person on the other end of

the wire before she gave away the strength of her position. For this might possibly be one of Skinny's ruses to obviate the disastrous effects of his ill-advised admission.

"I'm coming to it as soon as I can. I'm here to clear his name of the charges against him. I want your price for that—"

The mention of charges quite banished from Stella's mind for the nonce the business that had been uppermost in her mind. "Charges!" she exclaimed. "What charges? What has happened to Mr. Fraser? Tell me! I hadn't heard a word of him nor seen him until last night."

"That's a pretty tall bluff, young lady," Nolan accused her.

"What's a bluff? I don't know what you're talking about. I'm not trying to bluff any one. Come to business, Mr. Nolan. What has happened to Mr. Fraser?"

Nolan, half regretting his gullibility in doubting her complicity at first, from the blank sincerity of her tone, decided to waste no more time in being bluffed. "That'll do," he said. "I'll come to the point. How much do you want for that paper of Dupont's? I'm prepared to do business, and I want to do it quick."

"Mr. Nolan, upon my soul, I haven't an idea of what you're talking about. What paper? Who is Dupont? What has happened to Mr. Fraser?"

"Say, young lady, how much longer are you going to keep this game up? Don't you realize yet that Fraser knows you stole the paper from his cabin? Don't you realize yet that your game was up as soon as Fraser found your glove there, not twenty minutes after you left?"

Utterly perplexed, wondering whether or not she had to do with a madman, Stella stared at the telephone as if she might visualize through it this extraordinary character at the other end of the line. And then light suddenly

dawned upon her. "Skinny Graves!" she cried out, as her memory carried her back in a long leap to certain scenes of her trip north. "It was Skinny Graves!" she repeated, relief and hatred and victory all blended in her voice.

"Eh? What's that you said?" demanded Nolan, still suspiciously.

"Did you say some one stole something from Mr. Fraser?" she asked, determined now to get to the bottom of it.

"Did you say you didn't know it?" Nolan taunted her.

"Yes, I say it, and I'd swear it with my last breath. What was it Mr. Fraser lost? Tell me."

"That paper—the confession signed by Curtis Dupont, the only thing that will clear Fraser. I've got to have it, and I think we can come to satisfactory—"

"Clear him of what? What's he charged with? Look here, Mr. Nolan, I declare to you this is the first time I have heard of all this. I think I know where I can get that paper you speak of, and I'll tell you why later. I haven't got it and never had it. But if you want to get it, you'll have to tell me what all this is about, for I can't see head nor tail to it. Now you tell me what's happened, and I'll tell you—I'll help you get the paper."

Nolan hesitated a moment. Stella certainly acted less and less as if she were guilty. But Clark, the lawyer, had been so impressively certain about her guilt when Nolan went over the case with him that Nolan found it hard to dismiss his suspicions of her; and harder still because he was constantly on his guard against being betrayed for no gain. But, after all, what hurt would it do to tell Stella what she seemed to want to know? If she were only bluffing, if she knew it already, then assuredly there was no harm in repeating it to her; and if she were really in ignorance of Fraser's predicament through some extraordinary combination of

facts, then it was only fair for her to know what had happened.

"Well, then," he said, "here goes: Fraser assumed the guilt for the embezzlement of one Curtis Dupont eleven years ago, and got away safely to South America; Dupont insisted upon his taking with him a confession to use in case he were caught. Fraser returned to New York on the ship with you. Some one on the ship stole that confession, and the Duponts, to save themselves, have taken Fraser up and treated him like he was a king, just so that he would not blab. And Dupont's girl has simply tied him around her little finger, and is ridiculing him behind his back. I've come here to save Fraser, who refuses to save himself. I thought at first the Duponts had got the confession themselves from you, but this morning I found out—"

"From me? Why from me?" interrupted Stella.

"Because Fraser told his lawyers, before he got tied up with these Duponts, that you went through his stuff on the ship and stole the paper. Seems he found one of your gloves there, and a lot of other things had happened to make him look to you as the guilty one. Now if you have got your paper, name your price, and, if it hits me, we can get together right away. And if you—"

"Is he in love with this Dupont girl? Is she the one who was at the theater with him last night?"

"Yes—to both questions."

"Oh!" And after an unappreciable pause, Stella hurried on. "I know who stole the paper," she said indignantly. "A man I knew on the ship wanted me to help him cheat Mr. Fraser in some way about a mine in South America. I—I needed the money, and promised to at first, but backed out at the last moment. Now I see that Skinny must have done the trick before I warned him not to, and left in the cabin a glove that I know I lost in Kingston that after-

noon. It's Skinny that's got the paper, Mr. Nolan; or it's Skinny who had it, and knows where it is now. Wait! What can I do? How can I go about it? Oh, Mr. Nolan, is there such a great hurry? I'm that upset and excited about it all that I can't think clearly!"

"So they are after the mine, eh?" Nolan asked, more to make conversation than to get the information which he already possessed. For this proof of Stella's innocence, after what he had suspected and feared, had so affected him that he could barely restrain himself from blurting out the great secret between them. That, however, would not do; for if Stella surmised what Nolan really was to her, it is doubtful if she could continue in her zeal in Fraser's behalf.

"The mine, yes. But no matter about that now. Is there a great hurry about this paper which Mr. Fraser must have?"

"The Duponts are after it hotfoot this very minute. If they get it first, you see where Fraser will be."

"Yes, I see," said Stella thoughtfully. "We mustn't let them get it."

"Maybe you know how we can prevent it."

"The only way I know is to go to this man's apartment and look through his things and——"

"That's burglary, isn't it?"

"Perhaps, but if Mr. Fraser has to have that paper—or I might see this man personally and threaten him——No, that wouldn't do. He'd just laugh at me. Oh, Mr. Nolan, I can't possibly think how to go about it. But, look here, where are you now?"

"Around the corner from the Vendome Theater."

"Good! I'll come right up there, and maybe I can think up some plan on my way up. Mr. Graves, the man we're after, lives at Mobb's Hotel, in Forty-first Street. I'll meet you there. We've

got to start work there, and we might as well meet on the spot. You be thinking it over, and I will, too, and perhaps we can hit upon something. We must get that paper, if we have to break into his rooms. I'll see you as soon as possible. I'm awfully anxious to know you. Good-by."

"I wonder," muttered Nolan, as he hung up the receiver, "if she'd be so anxious if she really knew." And, with a dry chuckle, and with shoulders more erect after the loss of the weight they had carried when he entered the telephone booth, he crossed over toward the rendezvous.

CHAPTER XIII.

GLORIA GETS TWISTED.

Here Stella had the truth at last, here the clearing up of all that had mystified her since Fraser's inexplicable disappearance from the ship. And she had it in her hands to save Fraser from his folly, and guard him against being despoiled of what was his. As she ran up the stairs two at a time to get her hat, she cast up the possibilities of her getting hold of that very necessary document before Curtis Dupont should destroy it. And it must be admitted that she took a grim pleasure in the thought that the consequences of her activities—granted that they were successful—would redound upon that large and confident young lady who had eyed her with suspicious scorn in the theater, who had flirted desperately with Fraser, while she was deliberately double-crossing him.

As she put her hat on with some care, and poked two loose tendrils up under the brim, she was debating whether she should go direct to Streeter's office, where she knew Skinny would be, and try by sheer force of argument and threat to gain possession of the paper, or whether she should take advantage of his known absence, get into his room

somehow or other, and turn his things upside down until she had found what she wanted. Whether or not the act were right in itself she did not consider; she told herself, with conviction, that the end justified any means. Nor did the possible consequences of her burlarious intent deter her; if only she could get the paper into Fraser's hands, or Nolan's, she did not much care what price she had to pay for it. But when she left her room to go uptown, she was as far from a decision between the two methods as she had been at first.

Fortunately for her, as it turned out, the landlady met her on the stairs to announce a caller: "Miss Gloria Dupont to see you."

"To see me?" ejaculated Stella, surprised and incredulous.

"So she said."

"Send her up," requested Stella, after a second's hesitation, as she turned back toward her room. Almost instinctively, in the desire to keep secret her intentions, she threw off her hat and jacket, got them out of sight, and threw a kimono about her. And when Gloria reached the door, Stella was carelessly arranging her hair in the mirror.

Gloria was flushed and hot and almost panting. Stella saw at a glance that she was much perturbed over something, and this knowledge helped her to keep her wits about her, and her nerves under cool control. But what on earth could this Dupont girl want?

"Is this Miss Harcourt?" inquired Gloria, breathing hard.

"Yes—at least that's my stage name. Come in and sit down, won't you?" Her invitation lacked in cordiality what it had in calmness. She was reading Gloria through and through.

"Thanks, but I can't stay. I came to see you about—Has a man named Nolan been to see you?" Gloria blurted out, for she had been too worried, in too much of a hurry to have formulated a discreet plan of action;

then, too, she was too sure of the relationship between Stella and Skinny Graves to lay much stress upon the importance of being discreet.

"What an extraordinary question, Miss Dupont! Certainly not. I don't know any one of that name, to my knowledge. Why do you ask?"

"Well, because he's coming here. He'll be here sooner or later. He wants to see you about that paper you stole from Andrew Fraser. There's no time to waste in beating about the bush, so I won't mince matters with you. He wants that paper, and I was most scared to death to think he might have got here first and made you give it up to him some way or another."

"So you want it, too?" commented Stella, throwing off her reserve and beginning to play the game as she saw it.

"Sure we do, so long as you don't raise your price on us."

"It seems queer to me," hazarded Stella, "that you haven't got it already. You've had chances enough." Now Stella saw clearly both past and future: she saw Skinny trying to blackmail the Duponts, saw Dupont and his daughter holding up the payment to him in the hope that they might so influence Fraser as to make the paper unnecessary, saw Nolan come on the scene and frighten the Duponts by the threat of getting the paper at any cost and clearing Fraser; and, what is more, she saw here, if she could only succeed in playing her part convincingly, a method practically certain of getting the paper away from Skinny without trouble.

"Don't rub it in," begged Gloria. "We thought we could get along without it."

"But you couldn't, after all, eh? Fraser was too—well, he began to see through your game, I suppose. You weren't quite smooth enough to hold him. Is that it?"

"Now you're getting personal, Miss Harcourt. I came here to talk busi-

ness, and not to listen to slams. This duffer Nolan is a shrewd one, and he'll start talking big about paying you money for it. But, as a matter of fact, he hasn't got a cent of real money. So Fraser tells me, and he ought to know. And he'll try some foxy game to do you out of the paper without you getting a cent."

"You don't think he's got any money?" asked Stella reflectively.

"Not a red cent. You could tell that by the way he acts."

"Then you think it would be a waste of our time to bargain with him at all."

"No more chance getting a nickel out of him than you have of getting it out of the mint. But we've got the coin, and we're ready to do business. I just wanted to warn you."

"Then why don't you do business?" demanded Stella.

"We're trying to get hold of your friend Graves now, but it seems we can't connect. You don't know where a person could find him, do you?"

"Sure, I know. Have you got the cash with you?"

"Not here. Dad's got it. All I've got to do is to send in a still alarm for him."

"Well, then, let's get busy. Skinny won't be home all day, most likely. But I know where to catch him." Stella thought a moment. If she had the meeting at Skinny's hotel, she was sure to run into old Nolan, whom she had asked to wait there. She had to avoid a *rendezvous* with him. For, unless she got an opportunity to speak to him in private, which would at once create suspicion, the old man would not understand what was going on, would intrude himself where he was not wanted, and would ruin her whole plan. Therefore she had to have the *rendezvous* elsewhere. "You get hold of your father," she said, "and have him bring the cash up to Isidore Streeter's office, in the Longacre Building. I think Skinny's there; but if he isn't, I'll get hold

of him and we'll push this through right away."

Gloria's relief was manifest. "I figured," she said, "that you wouldn't be foolish enough to throw us down. Can I use the phone in the house here?"

"It'll cost you a nickel. It would be charged up to me, and I don't see any reason why I should pay it."

"Oh, that's all right. A nickel won't break *me*. Here you are." Gloria fished a nickel out of her purse and laid it on the dressing table.

"Wait just a minute, and I'll be with you."

Gloria waited while Stella threw on her hat and jacket.

Downstairs, Gloria sat at the telephone and called up first Dupont's office. Dupont was not there, but had left word that he would call Gloria up at the house at regular intervals as he prosecuted his search. Gloria fished up another nickel and called the house. Fraser, still sitting dreaming over the morning paper in the library, waiting for Gloria to come down from her room, answered the phone. And it is putting it mildly to say that the sound of his voice disconcerted Gloria. She recovered her composure by an effort of will, and tried her best to talk as if nothing out of the ordinary had happened.

"Gloria, where on earth are you? I didn't think you had gone out yet," Fraser exclaimed.

"Why, how perfectly funny," she cried. "I went out not ten minutes after I left you. I looked for you and couldn't find you. I guess you must have gone back to sleep." She laughed nervously.

Fraser said nothing, but thought much. "Did you want to speak with me?" he asked coldly.

"No, I—I wanted to speak with Marie. I—I left—I wanted—" Gloria, stumbling around in a vain search for a plausible excuse, finally gave it up and offered none. Fraser must think what he would. "I want to speak with

Marie, if you'll be good enough to call her, Andy."

"Certainly."

Marie was not far to seek. She had run to the library when she heard the telephone ring, and had started away again when she heard Fraser answering it. Fraser called her back, surrendered the telephone to her, and walked over by the windows at the opposite side of the room.

Fearful that Fraser might be eavesdropping, Gloria lowered her voice to a whisper. "Can Mr. Fraser hear what I say?" she asked the maid.

"Speak louder, please, Miss Gloria. I can't hear what you say."

Gloria repeated her question in a louder tone, with a sidelong glance at Stella, who was standing by.

Marie heard this time. She turned to look at Fraser, who stood peering out of the window. "No, he can't hear," she told Gloria.

"Well, then," said Gloria, with relief, "father will be calling up soon. You stay right there by the telephone so that Mr. Fraser can't beat you to it when he rings up. And you tell father to meet me—well, it can't be helped if Mr. Fraser does hear it—to meet me right away at the office of Isidore Streeter, Longacre Building. Get all that?"

"Yes," said Marie. "To meet you right away—"

"For Heaven's sake, don't repeat it!" Gloria broke in, with a sharp exclamation. "If you've got it, all right. Don't forget it. But don't shout it all over the house."

Gloria rang off, and Stella took her turn at the telephone, putting in a call for Streeter's office. Skinny was there, and came speedily to the phone.

"This is Stella speaking. Miss Dupont is here with me. She has got the cash coming, and wants to put through that deal you started with her. She's in a hurry. Can I bring her right up?"

Skinny was astounded. "What's your game, Stella?"

"I said Miss Dupont came to me to find out where you were. She wants that paper, after all. I'm going to bring her right up to see you. You have the paper ready, and she'll have the cash, and it'll be finished in no time. She's right here now, by my side. Of course I expect my share. What did you think?"

Skinny groped for ideas. Was it possible that Stella had finally learned how to take care of herself? Was it possible that she had turned over a new leaf, and had decided to make something out of life? "What's the trouble, Stella? Job huntin' gettin' sort o' tiresome?" laughed Skinny.

"Yes, you hit it the first time, Skinny. We'll talk about the split later. Miss Dupont's in a great hurry now, and I won't hold up the game. I know you'll treat me square. Shall I bring her along?"

"I knew you'd come around after a while," Skinny rejoined. "You hain't such a fool but what you'd see sooner or later which side your bread was buttered on. Bring the dame right along. The sooner the better. I'll be here waitin' for you. But you don't get no split out of this. You hain't done nothin' to deserve it."

"We won't quarrel about that, Skinny. You won't turn me down altogether; I know that much. We'll be right up."

Skinny, much pleased with his success at making Stella come to her senses, left word with Streeter that he would be back at once, and requested the private office for himself for a few minutes when he did get back. Stella, he calculated, had found it hard enough to find her first position, and had therefore been disheartened at the task of finding a second one, and, being daunted, had adopted the path of least resistance and turned back to him for

assistance and encouragement. He was so sure of her, and of her conversion, that it did not occur to him to mistrust her. Even if he had doubted her single-mindedness, the suspicion would not have deterred him from pursuing the path she pointed out to him; for he was too constantly on his guard to be double-crossed by a woman. And so he hurried across Times Square to his hotel to get the old confession of Du-pont's.

Mobb's Hotel was only a saloon, to give it its proper name. The hotel part consisted merely of furnished rooms for men only, and entrance to the room was gained either through a busy bar-room or else by means of a side door, through a dark and dingy sitting room cluttered with dirty tables, where patrons known personally to the proprietor might sit and guzzle in secret defiance of the Sunday-closing laws. Skinny chose to enter through the side door, but stopped short at the sight of a man sitting at one of the tables in the corner of the sitting room. The man was obviously waiting for some one. Straining his eyes to peer through the half darkness of the little room, Skinny recognized him as the man whom the office boy in Brennan & Clark's law office had pointed out to him as Philip Nolan, Fraser's partner in South America. And as the importance of dodging Mr. Nolan for the present dawned upon Skinny, he backed out quietly and went round the corner to the public entrance to the bar.

"Say, Zach," he asked the bartender, "what's that guy want that's sittin' in the corner there in the next room?"

"Dunno, Skinny. Come in ten minutes ago, asked for a drink and a place to sit down and wait. I asked him what's he waitin' for, and he says to pass the time. So I let him sit there out o' sight. Looks like he'd been on an all-night bat and was afraid to go home. Why? Know him, do you?"

"Ye-uh. Do me a favor, Zach. Let me go up to my room the back way. He's waitin' for me, and I want to dodge him for a while yet. And in half an hour from now, at half past eleven prompt, you go shake him up and ask him what's he waitin' for. If he don't want to tell you, you find out if he hain't waitin' for me. You can say I expected him, if you want to. And when he says yes, as he's certain to do, you tell him he can find me over in Izzy Streeter's office. You know the address. Get all that, Zach?"

"I hain't no fool, Skinny. I don't need no map to see my way home." The bartender swabbed the bar with a dirty rag and looked wise.

Skinny was satisfied. He crossed over to the telephone, dropped his nickel into the slot, and called up Roxy Quinn.

"Roxy," he said, "we've got that guy Nolan where we want him now. He's here at Mobb's place, waitin' for me, and Stell's over at Izzy's. I want to put through a little deal with her over there before I ring her old man in on her. I've left word with Zach to send Nolan over there to see me at eleven-thirty prompt. You get hold of the insurance company and have 'em send their lawyer and a detective up to Izzy's office at eleven-thirty, and we'll introduce Stell to her dad. Get me?"

Having but a block to go, Skinny was back in his office before the girls got there. Streeter gave him the use of the private office, a typical room with a green rug, golden-oak business furniture, and huge autographed photos of vaudeville stars stuck up in confusion on the walls. Skinny cocked his feet up on the desk, lighted one of his cigarettes, and waited. He had smoked it perhaps half through when he heard the outer door open, and Stella's voice asking boldly for him. Skinny got up in a hurry and went to the door.

"Hello, girls!" he said, with as near an approach to cordiality as was pos-

sible for him. "Ready to do business?" He fixed his keen black eyes upon Stella as he awaited their answer.

Stella met his inquisitive stare with the utmost composure. "Not just yet, Skinny," she said. "Miss Dupont, here, has got to wait for her father, who's bringing the money. I guess we can afford to wait, though, can't we?" She laughed knowingly.

"I reckon we can if they can," Skinny replied lugubriously. "Come on in a minute, Stell. I want to see you." He stood back and made an imperative gesture toward the private room.

Stella was instantly on her guard. What that meant she could not imagine, but she had gone too far already to give up the ship now. Perhaps Skinny had seen through her quick change of purpose, and had divined a subterfuge. "What do you want?" she demanded.

"I want to talk over some things with you while we're waitin'," was all Skinny would tell her.

"All right." She arose and took a step toward the door. Skinny disappeared into the private office. Stella came back to Gloria and whispered: "Let me tell you for your own good, you want to look out for him or he'll try something foxy with you."

"Trust me," said Gloria, in a whisper.

Stella hurried in to see Skinny. "What do you want?" she demanded again.

"Most I wanted," said Skinny, "was to tell you that if you'll hang around for a little while after these folks go, we'll talk about a split on this deal. I s'pose you expect something, though I don't see how you can claim it."

"I'm going to need all the money I can get," Stella replied, with a sudden sense of relief at this statement of Skinny's desires. "It's no easy matter to find a job in this town."

"No," Skinny replied smugly, "it hain't. I thought a second dose of it would just about cure you. You hang

around with me from now on, and you won't have to worry about a job any more. Say, how did this Dupont peach come to call on you?"

"Fraser's got tired of her, so far as I can make out, and she's afraid their bluff has been called. And, rather than let him have it, she's willing to pay good money for the confession. Fraser told her I stole the paper, and she came to me for it naturally. That was sort of a dirty trick, Skinny, saddling it on me. When she first told me what she was after, I couldn't see head nor tail to it, and I pretty near gave myself away. But I managed to draw her out without her knowing it, and so I got wise to the whole deal. But what is this confession, Skinny? I couldn't quite make out what it was, and I didn't dare ask her for fear of giving my game away. What is it, anyway?"

Skinny laughed in approbation. "You certainly are a smooth one, Stell. You and me ought to make a pretty good team. So you put it over on her without her gettin' wise to you, eh?" Skinny laughed again.

"You haven't answered my question yet, Skinny," Stella reminded him. "What is that paper? Let's see it a minute, will you?"

Skinny, still smiling, put his hand toward his pocket, and suddenly drew it away again, and the smile faded from his face as he bent a keen glance upon Stella. There was something a trace too eager about her request, an anxious and betraying twitch of the hand she had held out for the paper, an indescribable air of triumph about her as her sharp eyes caught his hand going pocketward. Stella might bear watching, after all; yet he must handle her with gloves if he wanted to keep her in the office till Nolan arrived, and Roxy Quinn with the detectives. "That paper means too much to me just at this minute to let go of it even to my best friend, Stell," he said decisively. "You know

if a man don't look out for himself, nobody else will. You pass up the sight of it, and take my word for what it is."

Stella could hardly keep from biting her lip in chagrin and dismay. Victory had been in her hands, only to be dashed out again by her own nervous tremor. Had that momentary loss of her perfect self-control betrayed her to Skinny? Or was he actuated solely by his instinctive shrewdness? "Do as you like about that," she told him. "I was only anxious to know what this deal is I've stumbled across."

"Well, I'll tell you about it."

But Skinny's recital was interrupted at the moment by the arrival of Curtis Dupont, who had been prowling around Times Square looking for Skinny, and had just called up his house on chance, to be informed by Marie of the rendezvous set by Gloria. And with Dupont's presence there was no further need of waiting. Skinny called them into the private office and took the offensive at once.

"Now don't you folks think," he said impressively, "that you can fool me with any more bluffs. I've fiddled around with you long enough, and it don't go any longer. Unless you've got the cash ready to put right down on this desk, we'll call this little meeting off now, because I hain't got any time to waste."

Dupont, sinking into a chair near the door, sought Gloria's eye for his cue, tapped his breast pocket, and nodded at her. Then he drew out a handkerchief and wiped his forehead nervously. Gloria saw that her father had lost his nerve completely. She stepped up to the desk behind which Skinny sat tilted back, leaned her elbow on the top of it, and said: "We've got the cash, Mr. Graves, and I'm going to do the business. Count dad out of it. The question is, have you got what we want, and are you going to give it to us in return for our money?"

Stella, pale-faced in spite of herself,

and quivering inside with apprehension and excitement, left the window where she had been standing when Gloria and her father entered, and flitted back to Skinny, standing watchfully between him and Gloria. Skinny gave her a baleful glance.

"Let's see your money first," he requested Gloria.

Gloria walked back to her father, got the oblong package from him, broke it open, and gave it to Skinny. "Count it," she said.

"Back up out of my light, Stell," he commanded. "I can't see." And he accompanied his request with a stare that brooked no disobedience. Stella backed up while he counted over the notes, and announced the sum as correct. And her nails gouged into her palms as Skinny thrust the notes into one pocket and pulled a leather wallet from the other.

"There," he said, "is what you want." With a motion too quick for Stella to intercept, he had drawn the old confession from the wallet and put it into Gloria's hand. "Look out!" he cried, at the same time, for Stella had sprung forward, her eyes aflame, her face and lips like chalk. "Look out!" he repeated, rising in his chair and facing Stella.

Stella stopped short. Gloria, her hand closed over the old, torn paper, drew back a pace and looked from Skinny to Stella, hardly knowing what to make of this sudden change from calm to impending storm. "What's the trouble now?" she inquired.

Stella grasped her last chance. "Look out yourself, Miss Dupont," she cried to Gloria, taking her by the arm. "Just what I told you! Skinny's trying tricks. That isn't the paper I stole. It isn't. I know it isn't. I've never had my eyes on that paper before."

Skinny laughed scornfully, and wondered what Stella's next move would be.

"You robber!" Gloria cried wrathfully. "If you've tried any funny work now——"

"Look at it and see," Skinny counseled.

"Fine advice," Stella flung in Skinny's face, "when you know she's never seen it before, and wouldn't know it if she saw it. You're trying to do either her or me, Skinny Graves, and I know it."

Gloria, much perplexed, unfolded the old note, and started to look it over. Stella caught her by the arm. "Let's see," she begged, "whether that's the one I got for him or not. He's trying to do me. Don't let him! It isn't fair."

Gloria looked down at her pathetic, pleading face, and started in her bewilderment to hand the paper over to her. Dupont, from his corner, and Skinny, from his position by the desk, uttered cries of warning simultaneously, and leaped forward toward the girls. But they were too late. For Stella, having tied Gloria's wits up in a veritable tangle of puzzlement and suspicions, had snatched the paper from her and darted toward the door, leaving Gloria staring stupidly at her empty hand. Skinny leaped for her and missed. She was safe away.

But no! She had forgotten Dupont by the door. She swerved out to dodge him as she passed. He was old and not active. But the room was small and the door narrow. As she circled round him to dash through the door, he thrust out his foot. She stumbled over it and fell headlong on the floor.

CHAPTER XIV.

FRASER MAKES A BARGAIN.

If Fraser had been disposed to have any belief in old Nolan's impassioned denunciation of Dupont and his daughter, it was because he had faith in the old man's probity of purpose, and not because Nolan had destroyed his faith

in the Duponts. And if Nolan had influenced him to the point of demanding explanations from Dupont and Gloria, instead of wiping out the charges with a contemptuous incredulity, as would have been the case had any other man made the charges, it was because he owed Nolan so much consideration in return for the heroic and voluntary sacrifice Nolan had made for him; and not because he thought the charges were worth investigating. Nolan's cool and deliberate sacrifice had moved him to the quick, but had not really touched his deep-rooted concern for Gloria and her father. Such was the spirit in which Fraser had descended from his room that morning and asked Gloria for her immediate attention; at that time, Fraser was ready to accept almost any plausible explanation.

But from that time on, Gloria's careless procedure was incontrovertible evidence against her, evidence that Fraser could not possibly overlook. Her unwillingness to listen to him then, when she should have been anxious to clear matters up; her eagerness to be off about some mysterious errand, and her embarrassed insistence upon its importance, and finally her secret exit from the house, showing her mistrust of him, and the ensuing business at the telephone as he waited in the library—all this was evidence that no sane-minded man could view without complete change of faith.

Dupont and Gloria would still have their chance to explain things; but the explanation, to be acceptable to him now, must be letter perfect, without loopholes or evasions, capable of being proven to the last statement. Moreover, Fraser felt that he could no longer stay as a friend in this house where his hosts were working constantly behind his back for his undoing. They might or might not be actively engaged in trying to do him out of his mine; at any rate, they were assuredly not the sin-

cere, upright, single-minded people he had thought them; at best, they were hypocrites and backbiters, so far below the level upon which his idealistic vision had seen them that he regretted having given them any consideration. And the pique he felt at having been thus grievously hoodwinked by them made him more bitter at them than if they had persistently neglected him from the start.

Fraser told himself, there in the library, that he had been a fool. Nolan had discovered it and proved it to him, but at what a cost to Nolan! And Fraser told himself, with a savage accent, that Nolan's sacrifice would not be in vain, and that if he could possibly bring it about, he must save Nolan from completing his sacrifice and get him securely out of New York before the law's heavy hand fell upon him. The longer Fraser persisted in his foolishness, so much the longer would Nolan dally about New York, showing himself freely, thrusting himself heedlessly into danger, in the effort to waken what little wits Fraser had left. Nolan must be found and warned before it was too late. But where to find him?

Fraser tried to deduce, from what Nolan had said, where the old man would be most likely to go. To the theater, of course, to see Stella. Stella would not be there at this hour. Nolan must have left the theater some time before. He would have obtained Stella's address. Fraser started across to the phone to call up the theater, but the phone rang before he was halfway there. The maid, hovering about the room and the hall outside, in obedience to Gloria's command that she answer the phone instead of Fraser, ran past Fraser and caught up the instrument to answer it. Fraser stood back in mild astonishment and watched her, as she cast a furtive eye toward him.

What Fraser heard was this: "Yes, Mr. Dupont, this is Marie. She is out. She left word for you to go to meet

her at——" The maid turned to Fraser with a despairing glance; Fraser stood his ground and deliberately listened. Dupont was growing imperative in his demands for the rest of the message. Finally Marie yielded unwillingly to her master's importunate request. "Meet you at Mr. Streeter's office, Longacre Building," she said. She hung up the receiver and looked round appealingly at Fraser. "Please don't let on——" she began.

But Fraser turned on his heel without a word and left the room. He owed it to himself and to Nolan to have a look-in on this mysterious meeting. If they were after the mine, they would take Nolan's share as well; and if it wasn't the mine they were after, then Fraser owed it to himself to cease giving them any more honorable consideration. And most likely Nolan himself would show up there sooner or later.

Thus it happened that Fraser opened the outer door of the office at the very moment that Skinny was engaged in counting over the money given him by Gloria. "Waiting for Mr. Dupont," he informed the office boy, who had stepped forward. Without awaiting the invitation, he sat down upon the hard settee upon which Gloria and Stella had waited minutes before, and instinctively cast a suspicious glance at the closed door leading to the private office. "Instinctively" is the word, for at that moment the occupants of the room were watching Skinny's count, and Fraser could not have heard the sound of a full breath had the door been wide open.

Then a hysterical pandemonium broke loose. "Look out!" he heard a gruff voice shout, a voice that was vaguely familiar to him, although he could not exactly identify it. Then Gloria's voice, in troubled query; then the voice of Stella Manning: "That isn't the paper I stole"; and a lot more that Fraser couldn't quite understand, for his mind was occupied with the assimilation of

that fact; then indiscriminate shouting, ending with the rush of many feet, the thud of a heavily falling body, Stella's shrill cry for help. The whole scene, from that period of silence to Stella's last cry, could not have taken over ten seconds.

Fraser leaped for the door and pushed it open. It struck Stella's prone body before it had opened far enough to admit him.

"You keep out, Izzy!" that same familiar deep voice shouted. "We'll attend to this."

Fraser twisted his arm around the edge of the door, gripped Stella by the shoulder, lifted her out of the way, and set her on her feet as he pushed his way into the room. Skinny stopped his rush at the sight of Fraser. Gloria had not yet recovered from her bewilderment. Dupont was standing back to permit Skinny to deal with Stella. And Stella, the moment she saw Fraser, thrust the confession toward him with a frenzied appeal to "take it before they get it again."

Fraser looked at her, at the paper she held, and his glance circled in mute question around the group standing before him. He did not lift his hand to take the paper.

Skinny saw his hesitation, put it down to cowardice on his part, or at any rate a disinclination to mingle in a little mius with the odds so heavily against him; Skinny, rendered desperate at the thought of the enormous loss to him if Fraser escaped, and relying confidently upon Dupont's immediate intercession to rescue the paper, made a determined leap for Fraser's throat, or for any part of Fraser's anatomy that his hands chanced to reach. "Wade into him, you, Dupont," he implored.

Dupont backed up two paces. Gloria followed Skinny's rush with an energy born of desperation, so that the lathlike Skinny, catapulted from Fraser's fist, which came up from his hip

in the nick of time, caromed into her and knocked them both flat.

Thus temporarily relieved of his assailants from in front, Fraser slammed the door shut behind him, and threw the catch down to lock it, thus guarding effectually against a rear attack. Stella came up close beside him, as if to lend her assistance. Gloria scrambled to her feet with more haste than grace, and charged down upon Stella again. Fraser stepped between them.

"Hold your horses a minute, Gloria!" he told her sternly. "Let's get some little idea of what's going on here."

"You keep out of this!" she flashed at him. "That paper's mine. She stole it out of my hand by a dirty trick."

"The paper's yours?" Fraser echoed grimly. "How did it come to be yours?"

"Because—because—" Gloria stumbled over the impossible explanation.

Stella was quick to see the reason for her embarrassment. "Because she just let Skinny Graves blackmail her out of ten thousand for it," she exclaimed, with a pardonable note of triumph.

"Is that true, Gloria?" Fraser demanded.

Gloria's only reply was a furious renewal of her rush at Stella. A second time Fraser had to intervene by physical force. "Better give me that for the present, Miss—Miss Harcourt," he said coldly. "Till we see how we stand. So you knew this man Graves all the time, eh? You were in league with him from the first day you saw me?" he charged her.

Her eyes met his squarely as she gave him the paper. "I never knew before what he really was. I made a mistake at first, but—"

Fraser, revealing not the slightest interest in her anxious attempt at self-vindication, interrupted her by turning deliberately away to face Dupont himself. "So you and your precious daughter," he exclaimed, with manifest scorn,

"let yourselves be blackmailed by these sharpers, eh? Thought you'd make sure at any cost of being able to escape law? Refused to put any trust in me as a friend, refused to have any faith in my friendship, and have been working behind my back from the first minute I saw you. Well, what did Graves took you for this?"

"Ten thousand, Andy," Dupont burst out, with a shaking voice. "And we can't afford to lose it. Can't you make him give it back? If I've got to stand trial for this, I must have it to make restitution and get a lighter sentence. Andy, don't you see what a position I'm in?"

Fraser laughed. "You never spoke of helping me to make restitution when you thought I was going to suffer for it, did you?"

"We were going to," Gloria spoke up quickly, while her father sought for words. "We intended to all the time."

"Yet you make plans to pay out ten thousand to get hold of this. Your stories don't quite jibe, Gloria. If you get your ten thousand, you'll have to fish for it. That's your affair and not mine."

"Well, then," snapped Gloria spitefully, "that woman has got to give me the paper or I'll have her arrested for theft and blackmail."

"I won't give it up," Stella declared vigorously. "Do anything you want to with me."

The case of the Duponts being settled to his satisfaction, Fraser was able to turn his attention to Stella. "So, after you've got your money out of these people," he said, "you steal the paper from them so as to get further payments. Is that your game? It's a shrewd one if it is."

"Would I have given it to you if that was my game?" Stella asked him, almost defiantly. "If I was still in league with Skinny Graves, would I have snatched the paper and tried to run for

it? And would I have given it to you the first thing I saw you? Can't you see that I did it only to save you?"

Fraser looked at her in perplexity. There was something not quite clear about her actions, something that no theory of his could explain; yet, in view of that exclamation of hers that he had overheard, he could not possibly believe in her innocence. "I don't know," he said, turning away from her. "You may be too deep for me. There's something about it I don't understand."

Skinny Graves had been following all these passages with a keen eye and a resourceful brain. So long as Fraser believed in Stella's guilt, and so long as Stella still had the paper, there was a chance that he could keep his ship off the rocks and pull her through in safety. But now Fraser had the paper, and was beginning to be doubtful about his opinion of Stella. It was time for him to intervene if he meant to get Fraser out of the way. For if Fraser kept the paper, he would have in it evidence enough to clear him of the charge of embezzlement, and Skinny's dream of coming into the gold mine must end in a rude awakening.

"Cut out the gabfest!" he bawled out, in his deep tones. "Let's get down to business. That paper belongs to Dupont, and I'm goin' to see that he gets it. If he wanted to pay me ten thousand for his autograph, I'm goin' to sell to him, and it hain't nobody's business. But I hain't crooked enough to stand by and see him done out of it by a dirty trick."

"What are you going to do about it?" Fraser asked, with a twinkle of amusement.

"Well, I don't s'pose I can take it off of you, so I'm goin' to buy it off you," said Skinny shrewdly.

"What's offered?" Fraser laughed at the idea.

"There's a guy named Nolan comin' here at eleven-thirty, exact. There's a

lawyer and a cop goin' to be here at eleven-thirty, exact, to nab him when he comes in. Nolan don't know anything about that. You hand that paper back to Dupont, and I'll tip Nolan off not to show up."

It was a sure shot, and the deadlier because it caught Fraser quite off his guard. Instinctively he looked at Stella. And she, perceiving his dilemma, spoke up quickly: "Don't you take him up on that, Mr. Fraser. He'll make you promises and break them the next minute. The minute you give up that paper he'll do exactly as he intended doing with Mr. Nolan."

Skinny shot her a venomous glance as she thus directly betrayed what had been in his mind. She met his glance defiantly.

"Do you know Nolan?" Fraser gasped, astounded at Stella's glib use of the name.

"Yes, I was talking with him over the telephone not half an hour ago."

"Good Lord!" exclaimed Fraser. "Did he tell you—tell you— What did he say, anyway?"

"Did he tell me what?" demanded Stella.

"That he was your father?" broke in Skinny, who was as surprised as Fraser at this information.

"My father!" cried Stella, looking from one to the other.

Fraser nodded. "Ye-uh," said Skinny, intent upon her.

"Of course not. My father's dead," she said wonderingly.

Skinny laughed. "Well, I reckon he might better be than be what he is now. If Fraser don't come across with the paper inside two minutes, he'll be pulled for defraudin' a life-insurance company to get his insurance. It's up to Fraser."

Fraser looked at her once and quickly turned away. Even the imperturbable and unemotional Skinny found it hard to meet her eyes.

"I don't believe a word of it," she

said, in a faint tone. "How do you know, Mr. Fraser?"

Fraser told her exactly what he knew about old Nolan. Skinny broke in upon the narrative. "You're wastin' valuable time," he reminded him. "Nolan'll be here any minute now."

"What guarantee have you got to give me that I can save Nolan if I surrender the paper?"

Skinny cogitated upon this. He was afraid of Gloria Dupont. That is, it was safe enough to sell her the paper, and he had no consequences to fear from the simple deed as long as she got what she bargained for; but Gloria done out of the bargain, robbed both of the money and the confession, was likely to go to the limit to get her vengeance, and especially if her father suffered by her loss. Unless he could restore to her the confession, she would be likely to go to the district attorney with a full account of his deal—blackmail, pure and simple. A gold mine was of small use to him if he were in jail, or even if he were prevented, by fear of the law, from living in New York. Moreover, half the claim was better than none at all, and he had just as soon have Fraser's half with freedom from worry about Gloria's vengeance as Nolan's half and a harpy on his trail. "I'll give you any guarantee you like," he told Fraser, and meant it. "Only you've got to act quick."

"You can't give any guarantee," said Fraser, almost regretfully. "It isn't you to say whether or not Nolan shall be arrested."

"Nobody else has got anything to say about it—yet," said Skinny cheerfully. "Nobody but me and my lawyer and this bunch here knows about Nolan. I was just goin' to put a grand-stand finish on this deal by havin' Nolan meet the insurance company's detectives here for the first time. If I pass the word to Nolan, he'll fight shy of the place, and nobody'll know where to find him."

So I guess I hain't got anything to say about it, eh?"

Fraser glanced again at Stella. She stood quite calm, but pale, waiting upon Fraser's next word. And, though she said nothing, the appeal in the depths of her brown eyes touched Fraser to the quick, and that even though he knew her to be a crook, a thief, a black-mailer. And a second time he looked away hastily, lest he be urged to sacrifice himself again for an unworthy woman. The sole consideration upon which he must base his decision was old Nolan; no one else counted.

But Nolan, who had recklessly plunged into this predicament with no thought of self, when he knew the result must be inevitable, but actuated only by a desire to save Fraser from his folly—Nolan must be saved. It was Fraser's folly, Fraser's weakness, that had brought him north. Fraser was the culprit in the last analysis; let Fraser take the blame. Nolan must be saved if there was a possibility of doing it. Thus Fraser reflected. And his thoughts were interrupted by the tramp of feet in the outer room.

"There's Roxy and the cops," said Skinny, anxious in spite of his assumed bravado.

"All right, Graves," Fraser said. "You get hold of Nolan and steer him away from here. All I ask is half an hour's leeway, and I'll get him out of sight. But if you don't give me that I'll—I'll shoot you at sight, you hound dog!"

In spite of himself, Skinny, whose nerves were no less on edge than the nerves of the others, winced at Fraser's threat and mumbled a promise to give him all day if he wanted it. The office boy relieved the strain by announcing Quinn and his companions, Fraser unlocking the door at his knock. "Have 'em wait outside," Skinny bellowed at the terrified lad.

"Who gets the paper—you or Du-

pont?" asked Fraser, with a whimsical smile, as he pulled it from his pocket and read it over curiously.

"Dupont," said Skinny.

"Dupont doesn't get the paper," cried Stella, catching Fraser's arm. "You keep it yourself. Keep it, I tell you, and let me look out for myself."

Fraser knew that he had made no mistake in reading that look of mute appeal in her eyes but a few seconds before; wherefore this last outburst astounded him. She was the most inconsistent creature he had ever known. He stared at her incredulously at first, and then angrily. "For a woman," he said, "you're the limit of anything I ever saw. Why, girl alive, you don't understand what you're up against. You can't. It's your father—"

"You keep the paper," she repeated doggedly. "I understand everything. If father is a fraud, he's the one to suffer, not you. Let Skinny do anything he wants to. You keep the paper."

"But—" began Fraser in bewilderment at her logic.

"But nothing! Keep that in your pocket."

Here Gloria saw her opportunity. "You're the lowest of the low," she cried spitefully to Stella. "You'd sell your own father for a man who calls you a thief."

Stella merely raised her chin a trifle higher. And at that moment the outer door opened, and Nolan's heavy voice was heard inquiring for Skinny. The situation was tense beyond description. Dupont had long since ceased to be a factor in it. Gloria, vexed and desperate, was on the point of tears. Skinny's snapping black eyes alternated between Stella and Fraser, as if he were trying to hypnotize them both. Fraser's mind, usually quick at decisions, was dominated just now by the very vehemence of Stella's commands, was bewildered and wavering; due to his to-

tally false opinion of Stella's past activities, the situation was really beyond him. Stella, a trifle pale, but calm enough, kept her eyes fixed upon Fraser, her body poised to prevent by force his surrender of the document.

Skinny broke the silence with a harsh and nervous voice: "You're too late now; it's all up with Nolan."

"No, it isn't," cried Fraser, his hand leaping to his pocket. "Send your men away. Here's what you want, Dupont."

Stella caught him by the arm. "Keep it! Keep it!" she commanded him. "You're a fool to give it up now."

Fraser shook her off, but not without a struggle. And then he felt his arms pinioned from behind by a grip compared with which Stella's was infantile. He managed to squirm around, and found himself face to face with old Nolan. A policeman and two men in plain clothes were framed in the door just behind him. Now there was no help for it. "All right, Nolan," he said. "Let go. It's your funeral, not mine."

All eyes were fixed upon Stella and Nolan. Nolan had turned toward her and was looking at her with an eager, questioning, almost an inviting, scrutiny; yet he said no word. Stella glanced at him questioningly, carelessly, but absolutely without recognition. Fraser was dumfounded; there could be no mistake about their relationship, for now that they were together their similarity of facial expression was too obvious. Yet neither recognized the other or seemed to. Could they have forgotten each other?

"Is this Mr. Nolan?" Stella asked, after what seemed an age of silence.

"Sure it is," cried Skinny nervously, glad of the opportunity of speaking.

"I'm glad to know you, I'm sure, Mr. Nolan," she said, extending her hand to greet him.

"Which is the man I want?" cried the second of the men in plain clothes,

evidently the lawyer for the insurance company. "Which is Giles Manning?"

"Yes, which one, Skinny?" demanded Roxy Quinn, quick to turn the blame for the fiasco away from himself.

"That one there. The old moss-back," cried Skinny irritably. "For Heaven's sake, Stell, don't you know your own father?"

"Of course I'd know my father if I saw him. This isn't my father."

Nolan turned savagely upon the lawyers and the officer. "What's all this about? Whom do you want? Who do you take me to be?"

"Are you Giles Manning or not?" demanded the strange lawyer sharply.

"I certainly am not."

"Then what the devil——" began Skinny in disgust, turning upon Fraser, whom he blamed for this awkward situation.

"Shut your mouth!" said Fraser, for he was far from convinced that this scene before him was real. There was something queer about it; some one was acting, but acting marvelously well.

"Well, I'm not going to have all this trouble for nothing," said the lawyer sourly. "If you're not Giles Manning, you're going to have a chance to prove it. You'll have to come along and identify yourself."

"I shall, if it can't be avoided," said Nolan. "There are any amount of credible witnesses here in New York who can identify me. Lead the way."

"Just one minute," cried Gloria. "Just a minute, officer!" She faced Skinny, her arms akimbo and her hands resting on her hips. "I'll give you this one chance. Do I get that package back or does the cop get you?"

Skinny hesitated, wavered, sought some avenue of escape.

"Hustle!" Gloria prodded him.

Without a word, but with an expression that indicated his state of mind better than words could have done, he pulled the package of bills out of the

pigeonhole where he had stuck them, and handed them over to Gloria.

"Come on, dad," she said, catching Dupont by the arm and dropping the package of bills into his coat pocket. "Let's get out of this bunch of crooks. If it wasn't for me you'd have the gold robbed out of your back teeth. It's no place for us." They led the procession from the little office, followed by the company's lawyer, the policeman, and old Nolan, with Fraser and Stella bringing up the rear, Stella quite happy and demure, Nolan walking confidently, Fraser's forehead wrinkled with reasoning that brought him nowhere save to a determination to see it through. Roxy Quinn stayed behind to commiserate with the disconsolate Skinny.

CHAPTER XV.

AN IMPORTANT APPOINTMENT.

The representative of the insurance company piloted Nolan to the car that panted by the curb outside the Long-acre Building. Stella pressed up close to it as if she expected to go along, and Fraser came along behind her. Nolan saw her eagerness.

"Andy," he said, deliberately looking over her, "I want you to take this young lady to the grillroom of the Metropolitan Hotel for lunch. I'll be there to meet you both in less than an hour's time, and if I don't find the two of you lunching amicably together and anxious to see me I'll—well, I'll regret having lifted a finger to help you."

"But I want to get my things out of—" Fraser began to object, for he was by no means sure yet exactly what Stella was, and he preferred to gratify his curiosity from Nolan's account.

Stella's face was turned away from him, so that he would have seen nothing had he looked. But Nolan must have seen something depicted there, for when his glance shifted from Stella to Fraser, anger smoldered in his eyes for

the first time since Fraser had known him. "If that's what you want to do, go ahead and do it," he said. "I suppose it doesn't make any difference to you what I want you to do."

Fraser was instantly apologetic. "Sorry, Nolan, but you didn't understand. I don't want to force myself on—on Miss Manning."

"Well, you can look after her till I get back, can't you? I'll be there inside of an hour."

"Nothing I'd like better if she doesn't object."

"Take my word for it, she won't object. See you later." The car drove off hastily. Nolan turned and waved his hand at the pair standing on the curb watching him. Then the car dodged behind a cross-town trolley and disappeared.

"Really, Mr. Fraser," said Stella, as their eyes met, "it isn't at all necessary for you to come with me. I can look out for myself perfectly well."

"Nothing I'd like better," said Fraser, none too enthusiastically. "I really spoke before I thought. I've lost what little mind I ever had, I guess. It occurred to me that the best thing I could do was to get back to Dupont's house and make sure of my things before they chuck 'em out into the street." They started down Broadway to the hotel Nolan had named as a rendezvous.

"Naturally."

Fraser was disconcerted, even a trifle piqued, at the coolness of her tone. He changed the subject, resolving to let it rest there even if she didn't willingly accept his apology. "What's poor Nolan up against? Have you any idea?"

"Not the slightest."

"But you know him, don't you?"

"I have nothing at all to say. You must get all that from—from Mr. Nolan himself. I can't imagine why you thought he was my father, though."

Fraser told her.

"It seems strange," she said stiffly, "that you couldn't have told me that when I first met you on the ship. You were fishing around enough about him."

Fraser explained that it was because he feared that Nolan might not want his identity established. Stella had no protest to make. They walked on a full block in silence.

"I've been trying to figure out," Fraser blurted out suddenly, "why you acted as you did about this paper I've got. I've looked at it from all possible points of view, and I can't see any explanation whatever."

"There isn't any explanation I can give you. I suppose it was just pure folly."

"Funny," grunted Fraser, looking at her in perplexity.

"It must seem so," Stella agreed.

"And are you quite sure that you haven't got anything more to say on the subject?"

"Not a thing."

They arrived at the hotel, found their way to the grillroom, where Fraser, schooled by his daily experience with Gloria in the past, ordered a most appetizing luncheon. At first their conversation was desultory and commonplace. Then a simple question of Stella's, concerning Fraser's life with Nolan in Colombia, thawed their restraint, and Fraser found himself talking freely of their mine.

"You know, of course," said Stella, "that some South Americans who own the mine next to you are trying to get control of yours."

"Nolan told me as much. But he didn't say who, nor what authority he had for it."

"I suppose you'll be going back down there as soon as you are cleared."

"Only too glad to get there, if only Nolan comes along with me. I'd hate to go alone. Now that there's nothing for me to do but clear myself, I'll have money enough to start things down

there on a proper commercial basis, and Estabal and his gang can whistle for our claim. They've robbed us long enough. Who told you about Estabal, by the way?"

"That man Graves. Estabal had hired him to stop your getting the money."

"And that's how you got mixed up in it," Fraser assumed. "You were helping him."

"Yes."

"How did you come to break away from him?" asked Fraser.

"Because he's a crook."

Fraser speculated upon this. "I suppose he tried to do you out of your share," he ventured. "He did you dirt and that made you turn on him. Is that it?"

"That's as good a reason as any."

"Seems to me," said Fraser, "that it was to his advantage to be straight with you after he'd got you into it."

"Doesn't it?" Stella averted her eyes. Would Fraser never see the truth? Would he never stop assuming that she was one of a class with Skinny? Was he utterly blind regarding women? Her pride forbade her volunteering an explanation of what Fraser must see if he had any perception at all; such a course would only cheapen her in his eyes. She could not put herself in the position of seeking reinstatement in his favor by correcting his allusions; that would give her the appearance of being forward, of deliberately running after him. He must see by himself or not at all; then would he be most assuredly convinced.

Conversation lagged after that. Ten minutes later, just as the waiter brought coffee, Nolan came in, his face beaming. At the sight of him, Stella sprang to her feet with a cry of joy, ran to meet him, threw her arms around his neck, and showered his face with kisses. Tears welled from old Nolan's eyes as he held her at arm's length, studied

her fondly, and drew her to him again, all regardless of the curious glances of the patrons of the crowded restaurant; all regardless, too, of Fraser, who, in view of what had transpired in the little office, found this touching meeting inexplicable.

"There, there, my dear," Nolan said finally in a broken voice, "that must do for the present. I ought to have arranged our meeting in a less crowded place, but I honestly thought you didn't know me. See, everybody's looking at us, including Andy; and Andy'll be jealous if—"

"I don't care how many people see us," Stella interrupted hastily, her voice choked with tears of happiness.

"And Bertha—" queried Nolan soberly.

"She—can't be here?"

"Dead?" Nolan's tenderness robbed the word of its ugliness.

Stella nodded.

For a moment, Nolan was silent. "We'll have a long afternoon to hear about everything, my dear," he said gravely. "Here's Andy waiting for us, and I'm hungry. I hope you two have succeeded in—" He caught a warning from Stella's eyes, and stopped there. And, with a sober mien, he seated himself in a chair the waiter brought up.

"How's everything, Nolan?" Fraser broke the silence uneasily.

"With me? Oh, fine! I didn't have any trouble." Nolan gave himself to the bill of fare.

"I can't yet get out of my head," Fraser went on, "that you aren't Giles Manning. That photo you always carried about with you, your likeness to Miss Manning here—everything. It's beyond me."

Nolan glanced at Stella. "Didn't you tell him?" he asked.

"No. I didn't know what was the trouble nor why they wanted you. I didn't know what you'd done that you

must disappear too. I didn't want to take the risk of putting you in bad until I knew."

"You could have trusted Andy."

"I don't think we understand each other well enough."

Fraser flushed under Nolan's inquiring stare, and looked away.

"Is that why you refused to recognize me in the office?" Nolan asked her.

"Not entirely. The real reason then was because I saw plainly enough from what Skinny Graves had told me before that he depended upon my identification of you, and I made up my mind that it was safest not to show any sign of recognition. I thought you had my cue the way you acted."

"I thought you didn't recognize me at all," said Nolan, "and just at that moment I didn't want to introduce myself."

"Why not, if you weren't Giles Manning?" Fraser asked.

"For very good reasons, Andy."

Fraser was uneasy. There was something in the way Nolan looked from him to Stella that seemed to make him out at fault, and surely he wasn't at fault, though he couldn't explain to Nolan. Nolan must find out for himself what Stella was or remain in blissful ignorance. He wondered if Nolan surmised already what the trouble was, and decided that he didn't, or the old man couldn't act so graciously to her, whatever bonds bound them, nor yet be so evidently accusatory toward him. He wanted a good talk with Nolan, but he preferred to wait for it until he was alone with him. There was a sensible restraint between them with Stella present that had never existed when they were alone. And this, above all others, was an occasion when the utmost freedom of intercourse between them was to be desired. Better to wait and to stifle his curiosity for the present than to be the interloper.

"If you'll excuse me, I think I shall be going now. I want to make sure of getting my things from the Dupont house. And I suppose that he'll now be after the bail he posted, so I'd better surrender myself out of justice to him."

"Does that mean you'll have to go to prison again?" Stella asked, with a catch of the breath.

"Unless my lawyers manage somehow to get me out of it. I don't know the precise technical procedure."

"But can't it be avoided?" she asked Nolan.

Nolan's eyes hardened. "Not very well, if Andy's going to do the right thing. And he does—usually. But it will only be temporary, so don't you go and upset yourself over it, pussikins. See, I haven't forgotten the name, after all." Nolan laughed. "You run along, Andy, and get what's coming to you. I'll keep in touch with you through your attorneys."

Fraser searched Nolan's face for some sign of friendliness in this abrupt dismissal, but found none. With a good-by to Nolan and a more formal leave-taking to Stella, he picked his way through the scurrying waiters and the chattering diners, and left the grill-room.

Nolan's face was stern when he turned back to Stella. "Do you mean to say, my dear young lady, that you and he haven't come to a proper understanding yet?"

"But appearances are really so much against me, Jimmy," Stella said, with a regretful note.

"But what are appearances after what he's seen of you?" Nolan demanded truculently.

"He can't get it out of his head that I'm not one of a kind with the rest he's seen me with. It's my fault, I suppose, for being with them, but, Jimmy, you can't imagine what a life I've had of it since mamma died."

"No, and I won't try—not yet," said Nolan tenderly. "Later on this afternoon, when we get to your room, I'll hear the whole thing. But this Andy, the disagreeable young puppy! I ought to drive a little sense into his head with a maul. Do you really love him very much, pussikins?"

"I thought," she faltered in evasion, "that he was fond of me on the ship."

"He was," Nolan pronounced stoutly. "I know he was. I've seen it in a dozen different ways. But that darned, practical, logical head of his is so confoundedly used to judging by appearances, and so cluttered up with his own wisdom, that he can't receive any perceptions he doesn't choose to, the young puppy!"

"Oh, Jimmy, I don't think you're fair with him at all. I never got that impression of him. I can't really blame him—"

"Well, no, I'm not entirely fair," Nolan admitted. "I was a bit wrathful at him when I spoke. I'm emotional, and I haven't any patience with a body who isn't, especially when being emotional means being happy. I've known Andy every blessed minute for eleven long years, and I must say that I've found him to be the squarest, stanchest, best-hearted man I ever knew. But this business has bereft him of his senses. I'll knock some common understanding into him if I have to use a diamond drill and a tamping bar. Wait till I get a chance at him!"

"Oh, Jimmy, please don't go butting in on this. I don't want you to at all."

"Don't go butting in! Don't interfere!" cried Nolan in amazement. "Why not, I should like to know? Don't you want to marry him?"

"Certainly not! You aren't serious, are you?"

"Never more serious in my life. I've been planning for this ever since I heard that Andy was coming north."

I suppose you think it was a coincidence that you met him on the ship."

"What else?" asked Stella, with widened eyes.

"It just happens that I arranged it, and with that very end in view. I thought Andy must recognize you if he saw you, and I thought he couldn't help falling in love with you if you were anything at all like the little girl in short dresses that I used to know. I wanted to see you; I wanted you to come down there where I'm living, so that I could have you near me. And the most logical way—it struck me the very night that Andy gave me his decision to come north, when I was lying awake, thinking how lonely I was going to be with him away—the most logical way was for Andy to fall in love with you and bring you back there. And, what's more, I calculated that if Andy really fell in love with some nice girl like you, he'd value his own future a good bit higher than he did, and think twice or several times before he persisted in sacrificing himself for the Duponts. And so I engineered it."

"How?" very incredulously.

"I don't know yet how it was done. I haven't had time to ask. But I had a friend here in New York for whom I did a good turn once, and he promised me that if ever the occasion should arise that would enable him to return it, I should command him. He's the very man, by the way, who just identified me as me, and who has helped me no end in this business of Fraser's. You'd know him if I mentioned his name. He was a good friend of Bertha's. He's got scads of money now, but he was poor as a church mouse then. I cabled him that if it was humanly possible he should arrange to have you in Colón, and to sail on the same ship as Andy. It was the first time he has heard from me in eleven years, but he hadn't forgotten his promise. He arranged it somehow. I don't know how. But it

must have cost him a small fortune in cable tolls. And you refuse to let me 'butt in,' as you call it, and try to straighten this thing up so—well, so that money won't be lost." Nolan laughed whimsically.

"No, I couldn't," said Stella, after a reflective pause. "Don't you see I couldn't, Jimmy?"

"Don't I see *you* couldn't!" Nolan exclaimed. "Do you mean to say *you* didn't try?"

"Of course not. How could I? Don't you see that would look as if I were running after him? Wouldn't that make me out a shameless, forward sort of an individual, nearly as bad as what he thinks I am now? Wouldn't it look as if I were crazy about him?"

"Well, you are, aren't you? After what I saw an hour ago—"

"Oh, Jimmy," she cried in mock exasperation, "you don't understand."

"Maybe I don't," Nolan admitted. "But now I've found you I certainly don't intend to go back to South America and leave you here. So Andy's got to be made to understand. He doesn't need but just one word. You can forbid me all you want to, but, by George, pussikins, I'm going to explain this to him before the day is over. You don't forbid me, do you?"

"Not—exactly," she said, with a blush, her eyes engrossed with the pattern of the tablecloth. "But don't tell him I said so. And, of all things, don't tell him about that foolish plot of yours to get me down there to Colón. I could never look him in the eyes again if I thought he knew that."

"You needn't worry any about my telling him that," Nolan chuckled. "That's one of my choicest secrets. Fraser's like an unbroken colt—soon as he realizes that there's a rein on him guiding him, whoopee! it's all off; it would take a regiment to handle him."

"Which happens to be one of the reasons why I preferred not to tell

him the truth myself; it would look as if I were trying to make him believe what he didn't choose to."

"It's not a woman's province to break colts, after all. Watch me bring him to time. Let's get out of here where we can talk in peace for an hour or two."

To which proposition Stella agreed gladly, for there were volumes to be said that could not be spoken in the publicity of a hotel grillroom. They took a taxi down to Stella's room in Twenty-second Street, where they exchanged a résumé of the eleven years that had passed. It was after four when Nolan bethought himself of calling up to inquire about Fraser, and was informed that Fraser was at the Criminal Courts Building with his counsel. Nolan decided forthwith to run down and see what was happening to him, and Stella, in spite of her unwillingness to let the old man out of her sight, urged him to go.

Nolan finally found Fraser in one of the myriad rooms. Clark was conferring with the judge before whom Fraser's case was scheduled for trial, and Fraser was waiting outside the judge's chambers, waiting for Clark to finish the affair. Thanks to Clark's energy, Fraser found himself once more free to come and go. Dupont had withdrawn his bond, but Brennan, Clark's senior partner, had been induced to post cash bail in its place. Brennan ran no risk this time, for Fraser was kept in custody only to satisfy certain technicalities. For it appeared that Dupont had thought best to surrender. He had made restitution to the bank of the defalcation, had been arrested for the offense, and intended to plead guilty at his arraignment and throw himself upon the mercy of the court, with the assurance that his sentence would be a light one. All things considered, it was Dupont's best way out of it.

All that stood between Fraser and his absolute acquittal was the legal quashing of the indictment; that, too, would destroy the last objection to his qualifying as his grandfather's heir and his receiving the inheritance. Fraser, with a sober mien, related all this to Nolan as they awaited Clark's reappearance.

"Then what are you wearing such a long face for, Andy?" asked Nolan. "A person would think you were still changing places with Dupont, or, at any rate, regretting that you weren't in his place. You can't regret it, can you, Andy, after the proof you've had?"

"Lord, no!" cried Fraser heartily. "The pair of 'em deserve what's coming to 'em. It isn't that that's biting me. I can't stand it to think of how long I've got to stay around this place till everything's finished up. I'm anxious to get back there where I'm not going to make a fool of myself every time I turn around. I'm all right when I've only got fever and earthquakes and revolutions and a gang of savage half-castes to look out for, but up here with a bunch of human, civilized crooks a man like me hasn't got much chance. I need half a dozen guardians, seems to me, as long as I stay around here. A man can figure in advance on what I've been up against down there, but here—good Lord, Nolan!—a man can't trust his own senses. If everything looks as if he ought to believe one thing that seems to be a sure sign that he ought to believe just the opposite. Civilization is the most inconsistent proposition I ever ran across."

"Don't blame yourself too much, Andy," Nolan counseled, with some amusement. "No one could find much fault with you for being bamboozled by a smooth one like Dupont, and especially that charming daughter of his."

"It wasn't so much Gloria and her father that I'm kicking myself about," Fraser admitted. "It's principally the

way I've acted toward Miss Manning—and the way I've thought about her. Say, Nolan, what is she to you, anyway?"

"Niece, daughter of my only sister Bertha; only person on earth I ever thought I could trust. Why, what about Stella?" inquired Nolan, with as much nonchalance as he could feign.

"I've treated her like a thief and a crook and a blackmailer just because some men told me I ought to. And I refused to think decently of her when the blindest man in the world could have seen she was acting in my interests. I want to get out of New York before I have to see her again."

"Why?" demanded Nolan sharply.

"Because I'm ashamed to look her in the face."

"You've lost a lot of nerve since you came up here," Nolan chided him. "Time was when you'd right a wrong no matter what it cost you in self-respect or bravery or anything."

"I'll fix it all right by letter," Fraser told him rather sulkily.

Nolan changed his tactics temporarily. "What put you right regarding her?" he wanted to know.

"This lawyer of mine, Clark, has been warning me against her again. Says she'd been calling them up at the office all the morning, and he knew she was up to something crooked. I asked him what she said she wanted, and she said she wanted to get hold of you before you went to Streeter's office, so as to warn you against Graves and his bunch. When he said that I saw the whole thing plain as daylight—the reason for her acting the way she did with me in that office. I told Clark she was straight with me, and had been from the start, in spite of appearances. Clark laughed at me, and warned me again to look out for her. And that only convinced me the more that I was right. I know I was right. Wasn't I, Nolan?"

"You were, Andy," Nolan admitted

quietly. "She's been very anxious to explain things to you, but you never gave her a chance."

"She had chances enough. Why didn't she explain?"

"Did you ask her for an explanation?"

"No, I didn't, to tell you the truth," said Fraser humbly for him. "I was too darned certain of what my senses told me."

"You're man enough to offer an apology when you know you're wrong, aren't you, Andy?" suggested Nolan.

"Most cases, yes," said Fraser after a moment of reflection. "In this case—I don't know. This seems different from any other case. If she was just an ordinary woman that I didn't care a hang about I could do it easily enough. But what if she's soured on me? What if she won't accept my apology? I was mighty fond of her once upon a time, Nolan. What's the use of renewing all that if she hasn't got any use for me now? If she's through with me, why wouldn't it be better for me to drop her a line and clear out without running the danger of seeing her again. It would probably be dangerous for me, Nolan, and I'm afraid of myself after what I've been through."

"If she is soured on you now," said Nolan, with one of his whimsical smiles, "she's likely to have a long time to get over it, and accept your apology in person."

"How's that?" asked Fraser.

"She's sailing for Colón with me on the next boat."

"Oh!" Fraser ruminated upon that for several minutes. When he spoke it was with another change of subject. "So you're going back, eh?"

"Yes."

"I mean you can go back if you want to. There's nothing to hold you here—the law, for example."

"No, nothing."

"I always thought, Nolan, that you

were wanted here. You as much as told me so."

"The law might have wanted me had it known the truth. Now it's too late."

"How's that?" asked Fraser in perplexity.

"The reason I kept away," Nolan explained, "was because I was afraid to come back. I'll tell you how it was, Andy. When Stella's father sailed for South America on that last trip of his in an attempt to escape bankruptcy I was afraid to let him go alone. I was a useless sort of an individual, a dreamer, an under clerk in his offices. I knew how his affairs were running, and, when he sailed, I went with him. Just before he sailed he took out an insurance policy for fifty thousand dollars. And two days after we had left Panama down the west coast, he committed suicide. By the terms of the insurance policy his insurance was not collectible if he did commit suicide within a year after insurance. That meant, I realized, that my sister and her daughter would be left without a cent. And when I recovered after you had helped me ashore from the wreck, the first thought that occurred to me was that it was an act of Providence to conceal the fact of suicide, so that Bertha and Stella could have enough left to live on comfortably. If we were the sole survivors, as appeared to be the case, all I had to do was to keep quiet and the insurance would be paid without question. I dared not show myself in New York, however, without raising questions as to the end of Giles Manning, and I was thoroughly incapable of taking care of Bertha and Stella. I always was a useless sort of an individual, Andy. And so I stayed away."

"There was nothing criminal in that."

"Perhaps not. But it was crooked. I know it was for the simple reason that I wouldn't have Stella know it for anything, and I want your promise

not to tell her. It got to preying on my mind until it seemed the most horrible crime a man could commit; many and many's the time I was on the point of returning and giving myself up. All that kept me away was the fear of facing Stella and the knowledge that if the insurance company found out the facts they would claim compensation and leave Bertha and Stella destitute. And so I made up my mind to stay there until I had got enough together to make it right with the insurance company. I thought our mine would do it sooner or later. I tell you, Andy, it was mighty hard for me at times. And when I heard of your opportunity, I couldn't help urging you to take advantage of it for my own purely selfish reasons. And it was perhaps the realization of the motives that had taken you north that made me all the more determined to save you, no matter what price I paid. Now I'm going back to the jungle and work the claim, and, sooner or later, I shall be able to make restitution to the insurance people. And after that—well, who knows? If Stella likes South America I may stay on there."

"She's really going down there with you?" asked Fraser thoughtfully.

"The next ship."

"I'll be with you, Nolan," Fraser said presently. "They can call it a jungle if they like, but it's got nothing on this place. I'd rather be turned loose alone forty miles from Iquitos than within sight of Broadway and Forty-second; I'd have a darned sight better chance of pulling out of that jungle like a man ought to than I'd have here. No more of this civilization business for mine. Down there a man at least knows who his enemies are; up here he can't trust his own senses in that respect." Fraser fell to brooding.

"So you think you'll be contented to go back, eh?" old Nolan suggested presently.

When Fraser lifted his head there was a new light in his eyes. He rose suddenly with his old-time vigor. "Tickled to death, Nolan, if my apology works. Let's get that over with, and then we can talk more about it." Fraser crossed the waiting room to the door of the judge's private chambers, knocked, and pushed open the door before he got the summons.

"Excuse me, your honor," Nolan heard him say with his old-time incisiveness, "but I wanted to leave word with Mr. Clark that I can't possibly wait for him any longer. I've got an appointment that I can't put off even for this."

Fraser closed the door and turned to Nolan. "Lead on," he said.

This time Nolan held back, with deep scheming. "I reckon one of us had better wait here for your lawyer, Andy. Something might come up that—well, it would be better for some one to be right here on the ground in case of eventualities. I'll stay here till Clark gets finished with the judge. You go on up to Stella's house in Twenty-second Street. I'll be along in a couple of minutes most likely."

Fraser grinned. "You're a deep one, Nolan," he said, and then he wrung Nolan's hand and hurried away, Nolan looking after him with a whimsical sort of tenderness that was characteristic of the old man.

A taxi made short work of the distance; it drew up at the curb in front of the number Nolan had given him before Fraser had made up his mind what to say, and all memory of the opening he had planned departed from him as he gave his name to the disreputable-looking maid who opened the door to him and led him into the dingy reception room to wait for Miss Manning.

If her eyes were distinctly red when she appeared, her manner was distinctly formal to offset it. Fraser crossed the

room to her with his hand extended, his eyes fathoming hers. Her greeting was neither distant nor familiar; Fraser thought, with a wince, that she would have greeted any casual caller in the same way. He waited for her to speak because his own wits were routed for the time.

"I thought——" she began, meeting his eyes level, "that my uncle—nothing has happened to him, has there?"

"No, nothing." Fraser's hand dropped to his side.

"Won't you sit down, Mr. Fraser?" She indicated a chair.

Fraser looked at the chair, but made no movement toward it; meantime, Stella had seated herself.

"I've plumb forgotten everything I had to say," Fraser blurted out suddenly, with an embarrassed laugh.

"Was it—something important? Some message from uncle?"

Fraser caught at her cue. "Something important, yes. Something frightfully important! I had it all thought up as I came along in the taxi, and the minute I saw you it went clean out of my head." He dropped into a chair near hers.

"How queer." Fraser was too confused to note the tremor in her voice.

"It was the phrasing and not the subject I forgot," Fraser hurried on, his voice lowered. "I wouldn't be likely to forget the subject. I've been an awful fool. Honestly I'm ashamed to look you in the face." Nevertheless his earnest gaze belied his statement. "It's a wonder you even tolerate me."

"But if you came to see me—something important—how could I help seeing you? I—I don't know any reason why I shouldn't see you."

"After the way I've treated you? After what I've believed about you? After—after—" Fraser stumbled.

"But you were probably right about it. I mean to say, you had good reason. The circumstances—after all, I couldn't

blame you, considering the circumstances."

"But I blame myself, and always will. I got to know you—well—on the ship coming up. Circumstances—appearances—ought not to have made any difference with me. But they did. I let them—in spite of my better judgment at first; and—and later on, when I lost what little judgment I had—I deliberately chose to mistrust you. That's the truth, the shameful, barefaced truth; and that's why I'm ashamed to come near you. I haven't any one else to blame for it. I accepted the net blindfold the minute it was offered to me, and, the tighter it became, the more I danced and capered. Oh, I had a lovely time of it." Fraser made this last remark with bitter sarcasm.

"But how could you tell? You'd had no experience. There was excuse enough——"

"Excuse enough! I should say not! Maybe I did have the wool pulled over my eyes a little, but the point is I let them pull it. A man ought not to need experience to enable him to tell a bunch of fakers from—from the only decent girl he knows—the only decent human being in a—in a blamed jungle of crooks. It didn't occur to me at the time why it was that I was so fussed and embarrassed that night I ran across you in the theater; now I see. If I'd really believed, deep down and with conviction, that you were what I let myself think you were, do you suppose for a minute that I'd have been as confused as a kid at his first party? I thought then it was only natural; now I see it wasn't. If I'd really believed it I'd have passed you up without another thought. I see now that I couldn't have believed it—that—that I've been—head over heels in love with you from the very minute I saw you. Do you wonder that I felt like sneaking out and—and——"

"Sh-h!" cautioned Stella. "This is

a boarding-house parlor, remember. Besides, what about—Miss Dupont?"

"I've certainly never told her that," asserted Fraser emphatically. "I never wanted to. I never even thought of it, except to think how—how ludicrous it would be for me even to approach the subject with her. She's not the kind a man would want to tell—what I've just told you."

Which pleased Stella exceedingly. Fraser could not have made a more convincing disavowal. Yet she could not withhold another gentle upbraiding. "Then why——" she began.

"I'm sure I don't know myself," Fraser interrupted her. "I guess it was because—well, people used to look at us when we were out, and it sort of—sort of flattered me to be with her—to have folks look at us. I don't know any other reason. I had the blindfold on then, of course."

"And yet they say that men aren't vain," Stella laughed gayly.

Fraser changed the subject. "But the chief thing is whether or not you're going to overlook my caddishness; whether you're going to forgive me. It—it means everything to me, Stella, and always has, even though I didn't realize it for a while."

With an impulsive gesture, she put her hand out toward his. "Of course I forgive you," she said in a low tone. "At least, I never had anything to forgive. I always blamed the others. I never could blame you—for anything, I guess." The last words ran over themselves, as if she had said them against her will; she caught her hand away from his, and buried her face in both hands in a vain attempt to conceal a vivid blush.

Fraser, instantly on his feet and leaning beside her, caught her hands away and held her eyes. "Then—you love me—after all," he whispered tensely.

"After all—and always." And she gave him her lips.

A Hunch on Hydrangea

By Clarence L. Cullen

Author of "War: Personally Conducted," "The Blight," Etc.

You'd have put your money on Hydrangea yourself if you'd had a horse prancing through your brain the night before the big race—a horse with a wreath of flowers "like pinkish snowballs" dangling around his neck

JIMMY CONROY, the lesser half of the Conroy and Conroy sketch—billed in vaudeville as "The Dervish Duo"—was the first to awaken. He reached for a cigarette from the table beside the bed, took three deep inhales that might easily have nicotinized his vermiform appendix, and addressed his sketch partner and spouse, who had begun to stir and yawn.

"Had a queer dream runnin' through my bean all night," said Jimmy.

His wife, a pretty woman of sorts, even with her sleep-tousled hair and left-over make-up, stretched her arms luxuriously and viewed Jimmy out of the corners of her eyes.

"About money, I s'pose," she commented, at the end of an unscreened yawn. "You're the money-dreamin' kid, Jimmy. But your dreams don't get us any bookin', I notice."

"No, it was about a horse—but that ain't sayin' there mayn't be money in it," warily remarked Jimmy.

"Oh, a horse—good night!" was his wife's swift, staccato remark. "Don't you try to unravel any of those horse dreams of yours on me so early in the mornin', Mister Jonah's twin," she added warningly—it was nearly noon. "If you're goin' to do that, we'll eat first, anyhow."

"It was a kinky old dream, all right," reflectively remarked Jimmy.

"It may have been all o' that," said his wife, sitting up in bed and screwing

her back hair into a knot, "but I'm goin' to have my cup of Java before I hear it. Because, if I don't, I'm liable never to get it. I've noticed that whenever you work off one of your horse trances on me, either the house burns down or I break a leg—you're such a lucky shrimp!"

Jimmy leaped alertly out of bed and touched the button for coffee and rolls. His face, thus averted from her, was illumined by an expression of mingled craft and encouragement. The fact that his wife had listened at all, instead of sternly reprimanding him, when he had mentioned "horse," was a promising sign. For "horse" had for long been the Conroy and Conroy tragedy. The tracks had taken heavy tribute from the sketch bank roll. "The ponies" had been taboo as a subject of conversation between them since the day, a fortnight before, when Jimmy, responding to the wild internal clamor of one of his hunches, had dropped the last of their savings on a horse that had finished absolutely last. Now they were not only flat broke, with their nearest booking still two months ahead, but they were "three weeks in" at the theatrical boarding house, the landlady of which, becoming more peevish day by day, had begun to throw out allusions to the high price of eggs and to folks "in the business" who apparently had abandoned all idea of "ever workin' again."

When the coffee was brought, Jimmy,

pouring out a cup for his wife and handing it to her in bed, cunningly waited for her to drink and get the stimulating glow of it before reverting to the subject of his horse dream.

"Pretty punk Jav'," she said, handing him the empty cup. "My idea of nothin' to drink is the coffee that you get in a troupers' beanery. Give me another cup, kid."

Jimmy saw and seized his chance—for when his wife uttered sarcasms he knew her to be in a good humor.

"It 'u'd be funny if there's a horse in to-day's entries like the one I kep' dreamin' about all night," he said, in a detached tone, as if the matter interested him only vaguely.

"Oh, that dream of yours again," she replied boredly. "I was hopin' you'd forget it. Well, pull your dream, Jimmy—I s'pose I'll have to pretend to listen."

"Well," he began, carefully repressing any display of the fanatic enthusiasm inhering to his hunch, "I kep' right on dreamin' all night long about a big, black horse with a wreath of flowers—"

"That sounds like the dead ones you usually bet on," she interrupted him. "Were the flowers immortelles, and did it say on the wreath, 'Last but not least'? And was the black plug hitched to a hearse, like the ones you generally play?"

"Quit your hammerin', hon," said Jimmy, with a wheedling grin. "This wasn't any plug. Every time I seen him, dreamin'—"

"Who dreamin'? You or the horse?"

"Every time I lamped him in my dream, and that was about a dozen times, he was winning by open daylight—winnin' easy, on the bit, pulled to a walk, sittin' in the boy's lap. And every time that big wreath of flowers was danglin' around his neck. They were big flowers in the wreath—like snowballs or chrysanth'ums, only they were sort o' pinkish."

"Yes, yes, yes—go on! Maybe they were dogwood blossoms of jimson-weed flowers—but go on!"

"Well, that's all—but it's a queer gag that I should have had a horse diked out in flowers prancin' through my dome all night. Ain't it?"

"No, Jimmy," she replied, with her customary candor, "there's nothin' queer about anythin' that prances through your dome, because you've got one of those queer domes. Especially when it comes to pickin' horses."

"It 'u'd look like a copper-riveted hunch to me if there happened to be a nag in to-day's entries that's got a name that sounds like flowers," warily proceeded Jimmy.

"I s'pose," she put in sardonically, "if there was a flowery mutt in the entries to-day, you'd have some idea of playin' it, wouldn't you? What with? Milk tickets, rain checks, or tin tags? Because, outside of a couple of jitneys that I'm goin' to keep for the dog's milk, that's about where we stand."

Jimmy, forbearing to reply to this, touched the button and had the slavey bring him the morning racing paper. He turned swiftly to the day's entries at the Aqueduct track, and, running down the list of horses' names with a nervous forefinger, mumbled them over as he proceeded.

When he came to the second race, he gave a well-acted start.

"Hydrang-gea!" he broke out, with a fine simulation of surprise. "Say, Gert, ain't there a flower called a hydrang-gea?"

"Hydrangea—the 'g' as in 'junk,' you poor simp," she replied. "Yes, there's a flower called a hydrangea. I s'pose you're goin' to try to hand it to me that you didn't know from last night's paper that this Hydrangea skate was goin' to run to-day, that you never heard of a flower by that name, and that readin' the nag's name in the entries last night

didn't make you dream about him when you went to sleep—is that it?"

Jimmy, with fingers crossed, solemnly crossed his heart that she was wronging him grievously. But, with her usual penetration, based upon her knowledge of her James, the wiser half of Conroy and Conroy had hit upon exactly what had happened. Jimmy *had* seen Hydrangea's name among the entries on the night before, and the odd name had clung to his dreams. He really had dreamed of seeing a horse with a wreath of flowers about his neck winning a race; and this, for a confirmed cherisher of such things, was a strong enough hunch for him. Moreover, some race-track tout, a long time before, had told him, he now remembered, that Hydrangea "would do" the first time he ran on a New York track—and this was the horse's first time out.

"Why, it looks like money from home!" exclaimed Jimmy, now skillfully seeking to inoculate her with his own hunch enthusiasm. "What more could anybody ast by way of a cinch? I jes' remember now that a wise gook down at the track told me a long time ago that this Hydang-gea—well, then, Hydrangea—that he was a big weight carrier from the Western tracks, and that he was so good that he'd cop his first out—that he could win carryin' a member of the fat man's club and a bale o' hay. And here he is chucked in to-day with on'y ninety-two pounds up and a lot o' crabs to beat! And here, after I've even forgot the skate's name—forgot even that there was such a nag—I'm dreamin' all night long about a horse winnin' in a canter with a wreath of flowers danglin' around his neck and slappin' against his forelegs as he eases past the judges' stand! Why, hon, it's gettin' coin in a letter!"

"Ye-eh, I know about the kind of coin you get in letters," was her sententious reply. "Brazilian shinplasters, good when Ireland's free."

But, all the same, her eyes had begun to kindle. She had not visited the race tracks for years with her husband without having herself been severely bitten by the "horse bug." She had been embittered of late months by the severe trouncing they had received at the tracks atop of their skimpily booked season in vaudeville. But she had not lost her amenability to the tugging persuasion of that queer manifestation of periodic insanity which is called a hunch.

"What other horses are in that second race with this Hydrangea trick, kid?" she asked him, a finger at her lip, her eyes contemplative.

Jimmy knew that she had "fallen for it." He quickly named the horses over:

"Sallust, Dim Star, Diver, Blakely, Old Top, High Ranger—"

"High Ranger?" she interrupted him. "That one's name sounds, when you talk it fast, too much like Hydrangea. If I'd let you go to the track, you'd be sure to make a mess of it, being up in the air, as usual, and get the money down on High Ranger instead of Hydrangea. I know you, you poor simp shrimp."

"Not on your natural, doll!" earnestly protested Jimmy. "Who—me play a goat like High Ranger, that ain't worth two dollars, and never was? Not me!"

Finger still at lip, she mused for a while in silence. Jimmy, covertly watching the hunch virus sink in, kept his peace. Finally she slid out of bed, went to the bureau, unlocked the top drawer, and brought out a bracelet with a single diamond set in its top center. It was their sole remaining bit of jewelry not "in." It had been pawned many a time before for the races. On redeeming it, after huge difficulty, on the last previous occasion of that sort, Mrs. Gertrude Conroy had made a mighty and decidedly audible vow, for her husband's hearing, that the bracelet would

never go "in" for the ponies. But Jimmy, being almost as good an actor as he was a husband, had adroitly succeeded in capturing her imagination with his argument in favor of the Hydrangea hunch.

"Here it is," she said, handing him the bracelet. "I'm a bonehead for letting you have it, but never mind that, if I don't. Take it to Ike's. He'll let you have fifty on it, and the others won't stretch it over forty. No, I won't go down to the track with you. I can't stand the idea of explodin'—and that's what I'd do if I saw you play some other horse than this Hydrangea hunch of yours—which, of course, you'll do. You never play the one you go down to play. But, hi-hum! I'll have to take a chance. Here, you'll have to hurry to make that second race—it's nearly one o'clock now, and you've got to hock the bracelet first."

He hustled into his clothes, and was ready in fifteen minutes. She kissed him good-by as he tucked the bracelet into a pocket.

"Good luck, you poor old boob!" she said to him fondly, as he made for the door. "I'll be rootin' for Hydrangea. Of course you'll wabble on the way down and play some other plug in the race. But I'll try to believe that you'll stick to a hunch for once. Good-by, and bring the kale home to mommy—we need it in our business, for the land-woman's borin' holes in me with her glares."

Jimmy, aglow with the fever of his hunch, gave her another hug and bounded down the steps and out of the house.

II.

"Ike's" pawnshop, on Eighth Avenue, was two long blocks from the theatrical boarding house close to Broadway, but Jimmy, under the propulsion of his mighty hunch and the need for speed to make the train for the race track,

used a ground-eating "rag" step, which he employed in his dancing "turn," to cover the distance. The gambler's heart in him leaped when he rounded the Eighth Avenue corner and saw, swinging familiarly over the squat, dingy shop in the middle of the block, the three gilded balls symbolizing quick money.

His jaw fell suddenly, and hung loose when, reaching Ike's pawnshop, he saw a big padlock on the front door, a heavy steel screen barring the way to the entrance, and a large, fearsome placard in the window notifying all and sundry that Ike's burglar alarm was set and in good working order.

Jimmy peered at the doorknob, wondering why the crape wasn't hanging therefrom—for it was simply inconceivable that Ike's pawnshop would ever be closed for any other reason except the death of Ike himself or of some member of his family.

But closed it was, tight as a drum, and time was running away. He'd have to "soak" the bracelet at one of the other pawnshops, where he'd only be able to get forty dollars instead of the fifty that Ike always had let him have on it. Jimmy felt chilled and sad when he reflected upon what that difference of a mere ten dollars would mean when, in case the price against Hydrangea would be as good as, say, a hundred to one—why, it meant a clean loss of a thousand dollars to Jimmy, this unforeseen closing of Ike's place!

But he was spurred into renewed activity by the gladsome thought of what the rake-down on Hydrangea would be even with the forty "down." He glanced swiftly up and down the avenue. Another three-ball sign in the middle of the next block up the thoroughfare caught his practiced eye. He crossed over to this pawnshop in less than a minute. He rubbed his eyes when here, too, he was confronted by a heavily barred door, a steel screen in-

closing the whole front of the establishment, and again the challenging burglar-alarm notice.

"Maybe the man runnin' this place was the relative of Ike's that died, makin' 'em both close for the day," thought Jimmy. His eye caught the time from a clock in a little grocery next door to the closed pawnshop. One-thirty! And the last train left for the track at one-fifty!

He raced, bumping into people, for a three-balls sign which he espied swinging over a shop three squares down. He concluded that he must still be dreaming when, reaching this place, he found that it, too, was padlocked, screen-protected, and burglar-alarm-placarded.

"They're tryin' to jinx me because I got a good thing!" he babbled fiercely, standing staring at the barrier to this third quick-money establishment. "The kid was right. My Jonah is twins, all straight enough, but I'm goin' to hock this arm ring and get the coin down on Hydrangea if I have to——"

"What seems to be the idea, bo—standin' there gnawin' the blanket to yerself?" he heard a good-natured voice behind him. Jimmy wheeled. The speaker was a large policeman with smiling but shrewd eyes.

"Why," promptly replied Jimmy, "the idea is that I've been to three hock dumps to pawn a gilt handcuff, and every dad-binged one of 'em's got a fort built around it, so that——"

"Well, it's a wonder you wouldn't ha' woke up by this time, then," cut in the policeman, "seein' that you're a purty cagy-lookin' prune. Ain't you wised up to it yet that to-day is Yom Kippur?"

Yom Kippur! The Jewish religious day, when every Jewish place of business in New York and the United States and the world in general is always locked up—"dark," in stage parlance!

Jimmy probably did not know the meaning of maledictions; but, from the sound of the things he uttered under his breath, he understood how to use them.

"Well, if my hoodoo ain't a litter," he broke out, with a wan grin at the policeman, "then I never ate hotel hash. Here I go and pick out, to have one o' them can't-lose hunches, the one day in the year when you couldn't hock the crown jools of the Bhiff-Bhaff of Bhilly-Bedhing for the price of a crock of cookies——"

"Stop drooling, bo," interrupted the officer quickly, catching the nub of the agonizing situation. "The Irish don't kape Yom Kippur. Why don't ye dig down to McGlone's spout on Sixth Avenue?"

Jimmy, tapping the side of his head with his knuckles to indicate pantomimically that it was of reënforced concrete, confessed that he hadn't ever considered it possible that anybody but a Jew, much less an Irishman, would know how to conduct a pawnshop. The officer gave him the number of the crosstown street at the corner of which McGlone's bazaar of the three balls was located. Jimmy gazed longingly at the flock of taxicabs whirling in that general direction. But he had no money for taxicabs, and so, with glances of anguish at the clocks he caught sight of on the way, he legged it over the many squares to McGlone's like a man doing a solitary Marathon. But it was close upon fifteen minutes to two when, breathing hard and in a perspiry lather of frenzied anxiety, he dashed into McGlone's pawnshop. It looked good to him to see *any* pawnshop with its doors unpadlocked. But with only five minutes to have the bracelet appraised by a pawnbroker with whom he never before had done business, to get the money and the ticket, and to gallop two squares to the railroad station and then through the long station to make the last train for the track, which last train

would arrive only in time for the second race, his hunch race—could it be done?

"It's goin' to be done—it's gotta be done!" Jimmy muttered through clenched teeth.

A big, bulldog-jawed young man, who had loped into the pawnshop about ten jumps ahead of Jimmy, was engrossing the pawnbroker's attention when Jimmy pushed up to the counter.

"A hundred on this rock—and, say, pal, I've only got a matter of minutes to make the track train!" the bulldog-jawed man, pulling a diamond ring from his finger and tossing it on the counter, was saying to the pawnbroker when Jimmy swung along, panting.

"That's me, too, Mac—less'n five minutes to hop the track roller," gasped Jimmy, throwing down the bracelet. "Forty on the cuff, and quick—this is one day when, if I get left at the post, I wouldn't dare go back to my stall."

The pawnbroker knew the heavy-jawed young man's ring. So he grabbed the bracelet and made a swift examination of it.

"Hundred on a diamond ring—forty on a diamond bracelet—two tickets!" he called out to the young man in the rear office. Jimmy gave his name and address, and in less than a minute he and the other man bound for the track, with their tickets and money clutched in their hands, were shooting out of the pawnshop door.

Regardless of the traffic policemen and of a traffic jam, they weaved their way, galloping like volunteer firemen, through the Broadway clutter of automobiles and trucks, and then, seeing a fairly clear path ahead, took the middle of the crosstown street on the dead run for the railroad station. They shot into the station and down the long corridor and flights of steps like pickpockets making a get-away from a pursuing crowd at a circus in a country town. The last leg of their race was a two-hundred-foot dash across the great ro-

tunda from which the gates opened upon flights of steps to the train platforms below. When, neck and neck and still going strong, they were halfway across the rotunda, they saw the gate-man at the race-track train push the last belated man through and briskly begin to close the gate.

"Hey!" they bawled hoarsely to the gate-man, still running. "Give us a show, won't you?"

The gate-man shook his head at them and banged the gate to. They plunged against the bars, and, looking down, saw the race train slowly beginning to move out. They turned and faced each other, mopping their dripping brows to the obbligato of grinding teeth.

"I'm a fine fathead!" growled the young man with the undershot jaw, who was wallowing, it appeared, in an abyss of self-loathing.

"That goes double for me, and with a side bet," dismally echoed J. Conroy.

Now, of course, when he had missed by a nose the last train for the track—now Hydrangea simply wouldn't be able to lose if he tried. Jimmy was as convinced of that as he was that he was alive. The hunch had been a certainty before. Now Hydrangea was absolutely "in," his winning number hung out, the confirming red board down, the lucky bets on that one as good as paid. And all this because the joy-killing jinx that pursued him had made him miss the train!

"Maybe a taxi could scoot down to the track in time for the second race," the hard-jawed young man cast a blaze of hope into J. Conroy's shriveled soul by saying. "I'll cut fifty-fifty with you for the ride if it can be done."

"You're on!" panted Jimmy. "I've got a good thing in the second race that I wouldn't miss gettin' a bet on if the bus ride down took half my wad!"

"Same here," gasped the heavy-jawed one.

Ah, ha! thought Jimmy. So here was

another wise one who knew that Hydrangea was a lead-pipe cinch! For, of course, Hydrangea was the horse his companion had in mind. Was there, in fact, any other horse in the race? When it came to that, was not the race, in truth, as good as a walk-over for Hydrangea?

They sped to the taxi stand beside the station. But it happened that several trains had arrived but a few moments before, and thus they saw the last of the station's large flock of taxicabs just shooting up the incline on the way out with a passenger. So they darted, leg-weary by now, up the steep incline, where they stood on the Seventh Avenue curb, waiting for an empty taxi to whiz by. It seemed to be a remarkably good day for the taxicab business. All of the herds of them that shot by were occupied.

"If it was anybody else but me standin' here, every one o' those nine thousand taxis that've just greased by would ha' been empty!" groaned Jimmy, from the depths of his pit of woe.

After five minutes—priceless minutes!—their arm-wavings and shoutings caught the eye and ear of the driver of a dilapidated empty taxi, and the driver pulled alongside the curb.

"Can you skid down to the Aqueduct track in fifty minutes?" they asked him in one breath. The driver rubbed his chin.

"If youse guys'll dig up in case of a pinch, I kin," he replied.

They clambered into the rattletybang car—"the first taxi that was ever made," the bulldog-jawed young man pronounced it—and the driver started with a jerk that brought their heads together with a bang.

"He's going to give us action, anyhow," consolingly mumbled Jimmy, rubbing the rapidly swelling lump on his forehead.

"I don't mind a bump on the bean if I can make the track in time to bet

the works on that skinch in the second race," hoarsely replied the heavy-jawed one, caressing the lump rising above his temple.

"Which horse is that?" inquired Jimmy.

He put the question as a mere matter of form, to make a little time-passing talk. Of course there could be but one answer—Hydrangea!

"Why, Dim Star, of course," was the prompt reply of the hard-faced young man. "Hottest baby that ever wore hoofs, and only the inside coots know about it, so there'll be a price. Where'd you hear of it, bo?"

"Oh, it jes' trickled along to me," replied Jimmy, in a matter-of-fact tone. "But, say, ain't this Hydrangea bird the one Dim Star's got to beat?"

"Hydrangea!" Jimmy's chance companion hooted. "That goat! Why, say, that tub o' glue couldn't beat me old aunt in Syracuse limpin' to a quittin' bee. Where'd you get that Hydrangea stuff?"

"I heard a railbird say that he'd been doin' some pretty fast works," was Jimmy's dogged reply. He was disappointed. But he still was for his dream hunch on Hydrangea. He brought his teeth together with a click as he made a mighty resolution that he wasn't going to let himself be touted off the one he had dreamed the flowery dream about and that his wife had let him have the bracelet to back.

The taxi driver, a desperado to the core, took all of the turns on two wheels when they struck into the open Long Island country, and the taxi was making up in speed what it lacked in looks when, about midway of the trip, which was accomplished within the time allowance, it stopped with a suddenness that all but shot its two passengers through the front windows.

"Ye're under arrest, consarn yer buttons, fer goin' eighty mile an hour!" they heard the village constable's voice,

and, peering out, they saw that, to make sure that his man would halt, the constable had stretched a businesslike rope across the road.

"Hey, pop, c'mere, will you?" the heavy-jawed young man said, sticking his head out of a side window of the taxi and beckoning to the goateed officer of the law. The constable trudged to the window.

"Look-a-here, pop, it means a loss o' four hundred thousand bucks and eighty-five cents if we're stuck up here, and if you could—" He pressed a five-dollar bill into the constable's horny palm.

"All right," the toothlessly grinning constable replied, removing the obstructing rope, "but don't you boys let that driver o' yours make more'n seventy-nine mile and a half an hour till ye—"

The taxi shot ahead, and reeled off ten more swift minutes of miles, when it came to a sudden, grinding halt. It was a quarter to three. The horses would go to the post for the second race at three o'clock. If the taxi had kept on at its wild rate, they would just about have made the track in time. The driver leaped from his seat, yanked off the machine's hood, pawed around the engine, and threw up his hands. His two passengers stepped out.

"What's the matter?" they asked him —of course.

"Ast me an easy one," the driver replied. "They ain't nothin' that ain't the matter. The old pile o' junk's been kitin' around on its nerve for a month now, and it's layin' down and rollin' over. It'll be about two hours' work for me to tinker it up so's I can coax it home."

Jimmy and his companion exchanged perfect replicas of the looks they had given each other at the station when the gateman had shut them out of their chance to make the race train.

"Now we're ditched for keeps,"

gloomily mumbled the bulldog-jawed young man. "We can't even figure on a pick-up. All of the gas boats bound for the track got there long ago, and now—"

"Hey, you rag-dancin' shrimp, what's the trouble?" a cheerful voice behind them called out.

"Shrimp" always meant Jimmy, as he had come to know, and he spun around. There was justification for the glad new hope that the voice had brought to his eye. The goggled driver of the big car that had halted beside the stalled taxi was the manager of a Harlem vaudeville house and an old friend of Jimmy's. With a mere motion of his head he invited them to climb into the car, empty save for himself. Each of them stripped five dollars from his roll for the taxi driver before the big car bounded forward.

"I'm going to push'er a little to make the track for that second race," Jimmy's managerial friend remarked, as he turned the car to racing speed. "I know something about one in that race."

"That so?" said Jimmy. His heart was thumping happily. Here was a wise one, this manager friend, who would have the right dope for sure—Hydrangea, of course! "Which one d'ye like?"

"Why, there's nothing to it but that Sallust trick," was the manager's prompt and amazingly confident reply. "You'd better go to it, Jimmy, with the kitchen stove and the oilcloth, for it's in. They've been getting that bird ready for months now, and it's going to be a hog slaughtering. But, say, don't tell anybody I chirped it to you, for they made me promise not to say a word about it, see? Only a few know about it, and there'll be all kinds of a price."

"Well, Sallust has got Dim Star to beat, and if he beats him he'll know he's been to the races," resolutely put in the heavy-jawed young man.

"Dim Star? Ha, ha! Don't make me laugh; I've got a hollow tooth!" merrily observed the manager. "Say, if my fox-terrier pup couldn't beat Dim Star doing anything from a jump to four miles, I'd have him made into frankfurters and peddle 'em from house to house. Dim Star! Phooey!"

"How about Hydrangea?" huskily asked Jimmy.

"Hydrangea?" The manager pronounced the name as if it meant something peculiarly vile and loathsome. "Now you're talking about spoiled crab meat! Git-ap, car!" putting on another burst of speed. "I want to get all the price there is on that soft Sallust bacon."

About two minutes later, the car shot into the motor inclosure of the Aque-duct track. It was three minutes past three o'clock, and the horses had paraded by the stand and already were lined up at the mile barrier. Jimmy, for once in his career at the race tracks, had come through unscathed and untouted. He still was for Hydrangea, and he was going to play Hydrangea!

He bounded out of the car the instant it came to a halt.

"Much obliged for the lift, old top—goin' to get a bet down—see you later!" he called back to the manager over his shoulder, and sped alone through the inclosure and the paddock to make the betting ring before the horses should get away from the barrier.

III.

As he neared the betting ring, a great fear which clutched him gave momentum to his natural nimbleness. Running, he could see out of the tail of his eye that the horses at the webbing, which for a moment or two had been plunging and weaving nervously, now were pretty well lined up. At any instant the barrier might be sprung—and his bet on Hydrangea not yet "down"!

Sprinting through the gate to the jammed betting ring, with his thirty-five dollars—the five dollars he had given the taxi driver out of his forty had been hard money to surrender—in his hand, he gazed around wildly for some bookmaker whom he knew. Not now, as in the old days, could the bookmakers be found on stools at their regular, easily identifiable stations. The new law kept the "layers" and their bet registerers—once called "sheet writers"—on the steady move. To dodge the law, the bookmaker insisted upon having at least a nodding acquaintance with the man from whom he accepted a bet, and even so the money had to be passed furtively from hand to hand.

The betting ring, packed with thousands of elbowing, jostling, shouting men, was the bedlam which it always is just before the horses get away from the barrier. Men had to scream at each other through funneled hands to make themselves understood. There was no way to find out the prices quoted against horses in the race except by a shouted inquiry as to each horse.

Jimmy had no time to make inquiries. Half a minute after reaching the betting ring, his keen eye espied, struggling in the midst of a crowd of would-be last-minute bettors, a bookmaker with whom he had "done business" on several previous occasions—the identical bookmaker, in fact, who had got the last goodly slice of the Conroy and Conroy savings when Jimmy had yielded to the wheedling whisper of one of his hunches only a fortnight before.

Jimmy, with head and shoulders thrust forward, gathered himself into a sort of catapult and darted for that bookmaker. He squirmed determinedly through the cordon of excited, red-faced men who, without having the honor of the bookmaker's acquaintance, were beseeching him to take their money. He was overjoyed when finally he stood face to face with the book-

maker and saw, from the slight bob of the latter's head, that he was recognized. Jimmy had no idea what price was being quoted against his dream-hunch horse. Nor did he care. What he wanted was to get his bet down before the barrier went up. The price could take care of itself. He never doubted, anyhow, that the price against Hydrangea would be a big one.

He slipped his thirty-five dollars into the bookmaker's hand, and the latter, screening the money under the hollow of his arm, counted the bills.

"What horse?" shouted the bookmaker. The noise of the betting ring was so terrific that Jimmy, whose hearing was perfect, had to catch the meaning of the question by the movements of the bookmaker's lips.

"Hydrangea, to win!" screamed Jimmy.

The bookmaker, watching Jimmy's lips, nevertheless failed to catch the name. He placed a hand behind his ear. Jimmy remembered that the "layer" was slightly deaf.

"Which one?" asked the bookmaker.

Jimmy, funneling his mouth with his hands, bawled the name again. The bookmaker nodded. Jimmy found himself yanked back to the outer circle by the strong hands of a man who was determined to get his bet down or perish in the attempt. But he didn't mind. His bet was down. He would have liked to know what price he was getting against Hydrangea, but that was a detail. Winnings were winnings, no matter what the price.

"They're off!"

Jimmy, electrified by that ancient, spine-chilling cry, stood his ground in the betting ring. It would be too difficult to worm his way to the lawn to watch the race. Anyhow, he wanted to keep near the bookmaker, so that when Hydrangea won he would not have to go searching all over the ring to collect his winnings from the layer.

"Hydrangea away in front, on his toes—oh, you baby hawss Hydrangea!"

Jimmy, when his ears were greeted by those beautiful words, felt the very marrow of him melting with happiness. He was right at last! His hunch was going through! And he had not been touted off the hunch, but had played it! His coin was down!

"Hydrangea's towroping his field—oh, you Hydrangea hawss, bring home the spinach to papa!" he heard a great, rooting voice boom on the edge of the betting ring.

The tingling blood swirled joyously through Jimmy's veins. He was on a live one at last—Hydrangea was spread-eagling his field!

Then he experienced a sudden chill. A man whom he recognized as a bookmaker, standing close to him, was saying to another man:

"It'll put some dent in me if that Hydrangea dog cops. I opened that at ten to one, and they played him down to even money on my sheet."

"Why, Hydrangea closed the rankest kind of a favorite at three to five in most of the books," the other man replied.

Hydrangea the favorite! Jimmy's temples throbbed with sheer anguish. He had never doubted that the price would be at least thirty or forty to one against the comparatively unknown Hydrangea, a horse from the Western tracks that had not yet raced around New York. And now he was hearing that the brute was an odds-on favorite! He had picked out a good thing in a dream, and now, when Hydrangea won—as, of course, he would—he would be lucky to get as good as even money for his thirty-five dollars—and he had been confidently expecting to clean up a large chunk of "regular money" on the hunch! His mental misery was beyond words.

"Hydrangea's comin' back—he's shot his bolt, the cur!" shouted a shrill voice

from the edge of the betting ring. "He ain't no Hydrangea—he's a morning-glory!"

Jimmy's nails dug into his palms. His hunch horse was "curling up," then, rank a favorite as he was! He wouldn't even get his thirty-five back, much less haul down an odds-on bet! He thought of his landlady's glares, of the bracelet "in" to no avail, with the board bill piling up, and no booking in vaudeville for two months ahead. J. Conroy, hovering near the bookmaker who had taken his bet and the bookmaker's red-haired, cheerful-eyed helper who had registered the bet, floundered in an abyss of gloom.

"Why, say, that rank outsider, High Ranger, is comin' through the bunch like a wild cat, and he's goin' to walk in!" a man with a pair of field glasses leveled on the flying bunch of horses shouted to his neighbor.

"Come on, you High Ranger hawss—I got two bucks on you, and you gotta win!" a hoarse rooter on the lawn bawled.

The ten-deep crowd lining the edge of the betting ring suddenly broke.

"High Ranger romps in!" they shouted, in a mighty chorus.

Jimmy, his hands thrust deep in his trousers pockets, was staring at the ground like a man stunned.

"/Pretty soft for you, bo!" he heard a voice behind him, and at the same time he felt a clutch on his arm. The speaker was the red-haired bet registerer of the bookmaker with whom Jimmy had made his bet. Jimmy grinned wanly. He didn't know of anything just then that was "soft for him," but he wanted to be game. So he grinned—very dentally.

"Pretty soft!" the red-haired one repeated. "I'll bet a cooky you're the on'y zob on the grounds that bet on that High Ranger dog. Sixty to one for your thirty-five seeds—twenty-one hundred bones to snake down on that

High Ranger tub o' lard that's on'y worth about nine dollars for his hoofs, hide, and hair! You sure put a dent in the old man," nodding over his shoulder at the bookmaker, "with that bone-headed bet! How'd you happen to go to that plug, anyhow?"

J. Conroy, who had not been born on the previous Tuesday, caught the drift instantly. The slightly deaf bookmaker had mistaken his, Jimmy's, twice-shouted "Hydrangea" for "High Ranger," and had so registered the bet, calmly confident, of course, as all the rest of the bookmaker's were, that High Ranger had no chance.

Jimmy yawned, stretched his arms, and grinned a wise, wise grin.

"Oh," he replied matter-of-factly to the red-haired one, as if the winning of twenty-one hundred dollars was an inconsequential, everyday matter for him, "I heard that High Ranger had been turnin' off some pretty good early-mornin' works by lantern light lately, and I thought I'd sift in a little change on him."

"Well, that was some siftin', pal, if you're askin' me," was the bet registerer's admiring remark.

The confirming red board was down three minutes later, and Jimmy, after collecting his twenty-one hundred and thirty-five dollars from the heavily scowling, slightly deaf bookmaker, picked out the largest and gaudiest-looking automobile for hire that he could find in the motor-car inclosure for a swift ride back to "Gert."

His wife, nicely freshened up and very wholesome and pretty in a neat wash dress, was darning socks when Jimmy, his shoulders hunched forward and his whole appearance extremely dejected, slouched in.

"Hydrangea didn't cop, kid," he said sepulchrally to her.

"I know it, hon," she replied sympathetically. She loved her little man,

and she hated to see him looking so dismal. "I sent out to the ticker and found out. High Ranger won—the very one I was afraid you might play! But never mind, dearie. Don't take it to heart. We'll wriggle out of the mess somehow." She patted him on the shoulder.

Jimmy had intended to act the dismal part a little longer, but the shoulder pats broke down his resolution. He suddenly yanked the immense, rubber-banded roll of bills from his trousers pocket and banged it down on the bureau with a howl of joy.

"Twenty-one hundred iron men, kiddo, is what I copped on High Ranger," he shouted, "and there's the wad for you to go as far as you like with."

Ensued five minutes given over to wild exclamations of joy and wet eyes.

Then, wiping her eyes, and making a prodigious bulge on one of her shapely legs where she deposited the roll under the stocking, the eternal feminine of her had to have its moment.

"You dear old boob," she said to him, "didn't I tell you you wouldn't play your hunch?"

Jimmy looked judicial.

"Well, kid," he said, with a finely acted air of owlish wisdom, "a hunch and horse-bettin' sense are two things that don't mix. I knew somethin' about this High Ranger baby all the time, but I didn't know he was ripe yet. When I found out that he was ready for the race of his life, why, there was nothin' else for me to do but forget the hunch and play the inside dope that was handed me and handed me straight, was there?"



CREATING A BIG SENSATION

THOMAS WATT GREGORY, attorney general for the United States, has a tremendous mentality which he polished up in his youth by attending a flock of colleges and universities. Moreover, he has a sense of humor which works every hour of the day. Consequently, he only laughed when an old friend of his arrived in Washington not long ago, and sprang this story on him:

Soon after Gregory was appointed attorney general, he went back to a little town in Mississippi, where he had spent part of his life. There were neither cheering citizens nor brass bands to welcome the new cabinet officer when he stepped off the train. Apparently his new greatness had not stirred the inhabitants tremendously.

He went out to the side of the station and stepped into a groaning hack drawn by a wheezy horse and driven by an antediluvian colored man. Gregory and Uncle Ben recognized each other, and exchanged warm greetings.

"Ben," inquired Gregory, "do the people here know I have been appointed attorney general for the United States?"

"Yas, suh," answered Ben.

There followed a silence broken only by the plod-plod of the horse's reluctant feet.

"Well," pursued Gregory, unable to restrain his curiosity, "what happened when they heard the news?"

"Nothin'," replied the colored man.

"But what did they say?" insisted Gregory.

"Dey ain't said nothin'," answered Ben. "Dey jes' laughed."

The Varsity Letter

By Foxhall Williams

Author of "Bat Shy," "It Can Be Done," Etc.

Here is your chance to enter into the sensations of a football player who gains the coveted initial on his sweater but is responsible for the loss of the game

EVERY year at Gale the athletic association meets, on the evening of the first Monday of December, and, in conjunction with other routine business, awards the football insignia won in the season that has just ended. And the next day the *Gale Record* prints the names of the men so honored. But this is pure routine, the merest formality. For every one knows, after the final whistle has blown in the Pendleton game, what men have won the right to wear a big white G on deep blue sweaters. The athletic association could withhold his G from a man who has played against Pendleton. But it has never been done yet. So there is little interest, each year, in these awards, and no one stops to read them when they are printed in the *Record*. They just help to fill up space in the dull season between the end of football and the beginning of the winter sports.

The exception, as always, proves the rule. Marsden, of the junior class, going along toward the post office with hanging head, had forgotten about the meeting of the athletic association the night before. He had half nods for the men who greeted him, and these—some of them—paused to look after him and shake their heads regretfully. He was repulsing them by his manner, avoiding the suggestion of friendship, and that is an attitude always hard to meet. He went on into the

post office, and found only his copy of the *Record* in his box. As he turned away, Grantham, newly elected captain of next year's football team, and a classmate, came in. With him was Hooper, the All-American tackle and Graham's chief rival for the captaincy in the election the week before.

"Hello, Marsden," said Grantham. His tone was friendly; his eyes were full of concern.

"Hello," said Marsden ungraciously. He nodded to Hooper, whose salutation was curt and brief. And then he took refuge in the *Record*—having no letter to read—and pretended an absorbed interest in its columns. In a moment he started, went back a line, and, seeing that he had read aright, flushed a bright scarlet. For his name was there in the list of those who had won the G in the Pendleton game.

"Marsden, J. C., arts."

There wasn't any mistake. His name was there—with Grantham's and Hooper's and the names of the sixteen others who had got into the game. He stood, the color coming and going in his cheeks, staring at the paragraph, at his own name. The monstrous irony of the thing overwhelmed him, and he laughed shortly, bitterly—and so deep down in his throat that he never dreamed he could be heard. But he was. Hooper's voice, sneering, taunting, sounded beside him.

"Pretty good joke, isn't it?" he said.

"Afraid you wouldn't find your name there? Well, it's all right now, isn't it? You'll get your sweater, with its nice big G, and you can swell around in it and give the girls a treat. They'll never know how you won it——"

"Shut up, Hooper!" said Grantham quietly. "Get out!"

Hooper, half angry, but half laughing, too, passed out. And Marsden was left staring wretchedly at Grantham.

"They needn't have rubbed it in," said Marsden bitterly.

"I don't quite get that," said Grantham. His manner had changed in a moment; there was something in his eyes now that made it easy to see why he had been chosen as football captain. "What's the idea, Jack?"

"Giving me a G for—for that horrible minute against Pendleton!" said Marsden. "I lost the game while I was in."

"We all had our part in losing it, Jack," said Grantham slowly. "But we're all glad to get our letters. You know the rule—every man who goes into a Pendleton game, even if it's only for one scrimmage, gets his G."

"I didn't earn it," said Marsden. "Hooper's right—you saw what he thought about it——"

"I don't know that what he thinks matters such a lot," said Grantham judicially. "And if you think any one was trying to rub it in the way you fell down by giving you your G you're mistaken. I'm on the committee—and I can tell you there wasn't even any discussion. You got your letter with the rest of us, according to the routine."

"I don't want it; I won't wear it!" said Marsden.

"That's up to you, of course. But—don't forget what it means, Jack. A man who's won a G is supposed to live up to it. The business isn't over when he's got it. He's got to keep right on deserving it. Do you know

what's the matter with you? You're thinking too much about the past and too little about the future. You've got another year coming, you know."

"Another year!" said Marsden bitterly. "A lot of good that'll do me. Oh, well——"

He went out, and got away, to be by himself.

It is hardly necessary to say that most men at Gale did not take the news that they had won their G as Marsden did. But the circumstances in his case were out of the ordinary and will bear a little examination.

In the beginning, it had been years since any man had come up to Gale who gave so much promise and was so eagerly welcomed as Marsden. As a freshman he brought with him from prep school an altogether remarkable reputation as a back. Every football college in the East of any importance had tried to get him. But he had been destined for Gale from the cradle. His father was a Gale man, the whole tradition of his family made it inevitable that he, too, should enter Gale in due season.

He had shaped well in the beginning, too. His reputation hadn't increased the size of his head, so far as any one could see. Being more or less prominent, he got a little more than his share of the pounding that is the freshman's lot. The whole sophomore class seemed to have gone into committee to keep him from getting an undue sense of his own importance. But he had been pretty nearly a model freshman, and his manner won merit for him in the eyes of his elders. He didn't make the name for himself on the freshman class football team that his prep-school record warranted, but that was the fault of a bad case of water on the knee, acquired, unluckily enough, in the first week of practice. He wasn't to blame for that, of course, and when the next year's team was talked of it was taken

for granted that he would fill in handily for one of the back-field vacancies.

But his sophomore year seemed to prove that he was one of the unlucky players that all coaches dread. One trifling accident after another kept him out of the line-up; he played in only one game, and that an unimportant practice match with a minor college that turned up with an unusually weak team. Every game can furnish examples of men with the sort of luck that pursued Marsden. Baseball is full of them. Some men with that sort of luck are real stars. But nothing will break the right way for them. They get hurt constantly; when they make an error it is always at a critical moment.

And so, instead of winning his G, and perhaps a place on the All-American team in his sophomore year, and thus being in line for the captaincy in his senior year, which would have fulfilled expectations, Marsden ended his second year at Gale as a substitute. No one blamed him; he was as popular as he had been as a freshman, and men still spoke confidently of what he would do "next year." But—the coaches ceased to rely upon him. Star he might be, but for the stern business of beating Pendleton a man who was at once less brilliant and less brittle was more to be desired.

In his junior year he was out again, of course, and for the first three weeks or so he seemed as unlucky as ever. Then he seemed to escape from his hoodoo, whatever it was, and for the first time he was used on the varsity as a regular. But something, some indefinable quality by now, had deserted him. He wasn't the star he had been in school. The trouble, of course, was that he hadn't had his chance to develop in two years of college play and coaching like the others. Probably he was as good as ever, but when men had counted on him as a coming Gale star they had counted, too, however,

subconsciously on his steady improvement. So it wasn't long before he lost his place to Blaney. And he wasn't even first substitute; that honor went to Cruger, a hard-working senior who had learned all his football at Gale and seemed likely at last to come into his reward after three thankless years on the scrub.

Then the Pendleton game had come. Gale, expecting a rather easy victory, had found itself opposed by a Pendleton team that had come to life amazingly in one week; a team that proved itself, in the first quarter, at least as good as Gale. From the instant that Gale understood that there was no longer any question of a walk-over, that victory, if it came at all, could come only after the bitterest sort of fight, the psychology of the situation was at work. There had to be, at the critical moment, a complete readjustment of Gale's mental attitude. And the first half had ended with Pendleton well in the lead and Gale battered, sore, amazed, and only just beginning to rally.

There was no question of quitting; the Gale team had done nothing like that. It had simply been swept off its feet. Between the halves there was much talk in plain Anglo-Saxon. Things were said that brought the blood hot into the cheeks of those who listened and set the pulses in their temples pounding hard. Marsden had had no part in the rout. But he took every word to himself. Nervous, high strung, wrought up like all of them by the long weeks of preparation for this climactical hour or so, impending defeat took the black hue of tragedy as he looked upon it.

And those stinging words did come home to him, too! Every sharp thrust at Blaney or Cruger—both had been in the game—cut him. For he knew, deep down, that he was better than either of them. He had had every

chance to prove it, and he hadn't been able to do so. It was his own fault. He didn't think about bad luck in that moment. He didn't really think about himself at all. In those grim minutes in the steaming locker room, with despair and fury lashing every man to a grim determination to turn the tide after the whistle blew again, all his emotions, all his thoughts, were fused into an insistent recognition of what Gale meant. Gale needed him now—and she couldn't call upon him! He could serve her better than Blaney or Cruger, and, through his own fault, she didn't know it.

That was the mood in which he went back. The team ran out; he and the other substitutes followed. He looked up at the great roar that crashed out from the eastern stands, at the waving sea of blue as thousands of flags danced in the soft November light, beginning to fade now as the sun dipped down behind the delirious Pendleton crowd in the west stand.

And then, in the third quarter, he saw the effect of the grim interlude between the halves. For now the Gale team fought and played as it was in it to do. The psychological balance was on Gale's side now; it was Pendleton that had to face suddenly the fact that its winning lead was not so great, after all. Gale fought grimly, desperately, with an utter recklessness, an utter heedlessness of effort, of risk. Once and again the big blue team fought its way the length of the field, once and again it crossed the final chalk line. The score was tied as the third quarter ended. Within a dozen feet of Marsden lay Blaney, utterly spent, on his back, his eyes closed, covered with blankets. He had played his part in the first savage, wonderful attack, and had lasted long enough to carry the ball over for Gale's first touchdown. Now Cruger was in.

And out on the field now, in the

minute of rest that was allowed, the Gale team seemed to be straining, waiting for the chance to push home to victory. Only victory would do. Some might hold that there was glory enough in having averted defeat, in that superb fight against odds that had already tied the score. But that was not the spirit of Gale. And on the side lines, Marsden, his nails biting into the palms of his hands, his whole body on edge, looked at Cruger with all his soul in his eyes. Could the man last? Was there no chance for him to be called upon, to go out there and play his part?

Gale had to kick at the opening of the last quarter. And now it was Pendleton's turn to rally. Grimly, magnificently, the ball was carried down the field, to the very shadow of the Gale goal posts. But there Gale braced. Pendleton's bolt was shot. From the towering stands above him Marsden heard the primitive, animal roar of joy as the enemy had to yield the ball—a roar of joy that no cheer leader could order or control.

Marsden was slow to realize what had happened. Even when he saw Cruger limping toward him, protesting, struggling, he didn't understand. Then he heard his own name called, it seemed, from a great distance. He was going in! It came over him all at once. He leaped up, flung his blanket away, raced out, adjusting his headgear. Frantically he sought the referee, reported himself in. And then—

He was crouching behind the line, tense, eager. It was Grantham's signal that the quarter back called. Marsden knew his part. As the ball was snapped he must get over, ahead of Grantham, to lead the interference. The play was an end run. The Gale end would look out for the Pendleton wing man; the rush-line half, coming in fast to break up the play, was his quarry. It was for him to protect Grantham, with the precious ball, from that assault. He

was off. In a curious daze he moved. He saw Hazeltine spill the Pendleton end; then he was tearing around, his eyes fixed on a figure with orange and black stripes about his sleeves. He headed for him; realized, a moment too late, that he was going to lose the play. But he couldn't stop. The Pendleton half slipped by him; the next moment the whole play was piled up behind him, and he heard the quarter back's voice assailing him.

"You, Marsden! Where in blazes were you?" shrilled the quarter. And then, forgetting the past: "Signal! Line up there—quick! Signal! Eighty-one, forty-three, a hundred and seventeen, twenty-nine—"

The play was in motion before Marsden had really found himself. A curious vertigo seemed to possess him. He got going slowly, with the quarter yap-ping at him unintelligently as the ball was jammed hard into his stomach. The play was off tackle, and a part of his brain comprehended at once that Hooper had opened a great hole for him—that all he had to do was to go straight through, behind Grantham, to find a clear path for a huge gain—perhaps for a clear field.

He lunged for the opening, shook off a flying, despairing tackle, held his feet, staggering along, low to the ground, and straightened up, with only the Pendleton back-field man, thirty yards away, before him. It was his great chance. He began to run slowly, uncertainly. And then his legs were swept from under him, and he fell forward. The ball shot away, bounding on the hard ground. When he got up he heard a steady roar, deafening, appalling. He saw the Pendleton team dancing madly about. The loose ball had been recovered; Pendleton had scored again. And then he saw Blaney, his face white, swaying as he walked, making his way toward the referee. There was no need of the captain's

order: "Get off the field, Marsden!" He knew. He had lost the game, and Blaney, crippled, exhausted, had been sent for to play it out.

And for that they had given him his G!

He found a package waiting when he got back to his room. He flushed again when he opened it and saw that it was the blue sweater with its great white G that the athletic association presented every year to the men who won the football letter. For a minute he was tempted to destroy it. Wear it he could not. But he changed his mind. He folded it, wrapped it again, and put it in the bottom of his trunk.

The college, on the whole, had been merciful to him. There were few who, like Hooper, believed, or, at least, let him see that they believed, that he had quit—that it was a yellow streak, covered until that disastrous moment, that had led to his horrible fiasco. Few, indeed, did believe that. They attributed the disaster to temperament, to nerves, to anything but cowardice. And they were right. Too vivid an imagination, perhaps, was what had done the mischief. Marsden had lived over that culminating moment so many times. He had dreamed of being called upon suddenly, and he had thought again and again, of all the mistakes it was possible for him to make—of a fumble, a mistake in signals, a missed tackle. And then, when it had come, the big moment had taken him, after all, utterly by surprise, had gripped him, giving him no time to adjust himself. Exactly what had caused that paralysis of thought and action on the field he himself could never hope to know.

At all events, however it was to be explained, it was. It was a part of his life, a part of himself. It would influence him inevitably till the end of the chapter. And—he had his G, that no one would take away from him, to remind him. He would be listed among

the wearers of the G. When he came back for reunions, if he did, he would see his name where those records were kept. Others might forget—but he wouldn't.

For a time it seemed to him that he couldn't stay at Gale. He intended, first, to leave at once. Then he put off going until the mid-years. As well to leave with a clean slate, at least. It was Grantham who first introduced the thought into his mind that he might perhaps have no right to leave Gale. It was after that encounter in the post office, at least, that a new idea took possession of him—the idea that it was his duty to stay, that he might make some sort of atonement by doing so. And that was his final decision. He stayed, knowing that every reference to the game he had lost brought up a thought of him, that every sight of him probably summoned up a thought of the defeat. And always there were the occasional encounters with the sneering eyes of Hooper and those who thought as Hooper thought.

It wasn't an easy thing for him to determine to stay. It wasn't easy to have people during the summer talk to him of football—people who, incredible as it seemed at first, really didn't know what had happened. There was a girl who had heard somehow that he had won his G, and asked him, in naïve and innocent surprise, why he wore a plain white sweater.

For two years there had come to him, early in September, a letter from the football management calling on him to report at Gale two weeks before college opened for football practice. This time he didn't expect the summons, and yet it was a shock to have the time pass without getting it. He set his teeth and went back, like the main body of men who didn't play the game, a day ahead of time. He got to Gale early in the morning, after an all-night trip from the Maine woods. He at-

tended to his room and to the other necessary business. And then he went to Gale Field. He found Grantham getting into his suit.

"Hello!" said the captain cheerfully. "Just get in?"

"Yes," said Marsden. "Grantham, I'd like to play on the scrub, if there's a chance of my being any use."

Grantham was startled for a moment. Then his eyes showed his concern.

"Well—" he said doubtfully.

"It's the only thing I can do for Gale," said Marsden. "I know as well as you do that there isn't any question of even considering me for the varsity. I had my chance and—but I might be some use on the scrub. I'd like a try-out, anyhow. If I don't make good I can be dropped like any other new candidate. You see—I sort of want to make a fresh start."

"All right," said Grantham. "I guess you're right, Jack. I guess it's the best way. You know—I've never blamed you for what happened last year. I figure it was just one of those things that might have happened to any one. But—"

"You needn't say it," said Marsden, interrupting. "I can't ever be trusted again. I know that, of course. There's no reason why I should be. I'll get a suit then and report to Morton."

"I didn't say you couldn't be trusted, Jack," said Grantham quietly. "Still—yes, I guess you've got the right idea. And—I think you're doing something that shows pretty good nerve, Jack."

"Don't fool yourself," said Marsden rather bitterly. "I wanted to quit hard enough—Lord, how I wanted to quit! But I guess I didn't have nerve enough to do that, either."

He turned away then, and got his suit from the surprised manager, who leaned rather to Hooper's views. And then he went to Morton, the scrub coach, who was one of the little group that had harangued the varsity between

the halves of the Pendleton game. Morton didn't get his picture in the paper very often, and he wasn't thought of, as a rule, when honors were being apportioned after a championship team had beaten Pendleton. But he and the scrub he trained, year after year, to give the varsity all it cared to do five afternoons a week, played a mighty big part, just the same, in the building of Gale teams. He liked Marsden—and had a pretty fair idea of just how good Marsden might be under favorable conditions. He understood now, too, and didn't complicate matters by words.

"Glad you're out," was all he said. "You'll get all the work you're looking for, too."

Which was a true saying. Gale *had* to have a good team that year. There was a defeat to be avenged, which made a difference. There was about a week more of limbering-up work, and then the real business of scrimmaging began. And after that the members of the scrub ceased to be men and became tools.

A good scrub at a place like Gale is a team that the varsity can beat by about one touchdown if it is at the top of its form. It doesn't get any particular glory, and the newspaper wise men don't see it in action as a rule. About all it does is to work. Varsity men nowadays get a good deal of coddling. Substitutes go in when they show signs of tiring; a muscle bruise is good for a couple of days of rest. But there isn't any reason for coddling a man on the scrub. If he is hurt some one else can take his place. He doesn't have to be saved for some particular occasion. He is driven every afternoon just as hard as a varsity man is in the last game of the season. If he complains of aches and pains he isn't sent in for an extra rubdown and an examination by the team physician. He is advised to get in there and work

the pain out. And it is surprising to see how well that system works out. A really earnest scrub player doesn't lose two days a season as a general rule. But he frequently plays with strained tendons and aching muscles, and learns to estimate such things at their true importance, which is not great.

Marsden had the reputation of being brittle, of being easily hurt. And, on the scrub, he suffered injuries that were fully as severe as those that had earned him his reputation. Only, since there was no one to notice them, he kept right on playing, which he would have been perfectly willing to do, had he been allowed to do so, in the old days. So he got hard and tough, and he played like a man inspired. He really was out of his class, of course. That is, he was a good deal better than his scrub team. And Morton, remembering that Pendleton this year had just such a player, the famous Heffernan, rejoiced, and built up an attack for the scrub that was as much like the Pendleton attack as he could contrive. Every Saturday, when the scrub, of course, was idle, Morton used to go to Pendleton to watch the rival team play, and sometimes he took Marsden along. They would take notes, and then they would spring the Pendleton formations on the varsity in the next week's practice.

Marsden was happier than he had ever expected to be again. He was so busy that he didn't have time to worry, of course. And he knew, too, that he was doing something for Gale. His delight in that was purely unselfish. It didn't occur to him that he was, at the same time, proving that the people who had said he was a coming star were right. But he was. Morton and some others could have told him, had the telling of such things been in order, that he was the best back Gale had seen since Dutch Mayer, of happy memory.

That was what was at the bottom of

his renewed interest in life, his restored self-respect, though—the fact that he was making good. He didn't actually work it out like that. But there must, of course, have been some mental process, even if it was subconscious, recording his satisfaction with his playing. It took an accident to make him see it—the accident of overhearing a conversation about himself.

In the Gale locker room, the lockers, tall affairs of steel, divided the room into corridors. Marsden sat on the bench before his own, changing, and suddenly he heard Hooper's voice on the other side of that section.

"Play!" he heard. "Of course Marsden can play! That's just what makes his yellow streak show up so darned plain. Gee—do you mean you can't see through this business of playing on the scrub?"

The other man said something—Marsden couldn't hear.

"Plain enough!" said Hooper. "Martyr stuff! Goes out there—when nothing really matters, remember—and plays his head off. Gives him a chance to say he didn't have a square deal—that he deserved another chance or something like that. But if he ever did get into a big game again it'd be the same old story, believe me!"

Marsden didn't rush around and confront Hooper. He didn't even get angry. It was no surprise to learn that Hooper felt that way. He just wondered how much truth there was in what Hooper said. Part of it, of course, he knew was untrue. Hooper didn't have his motive right. But—would he fail again if he got another chance? Not that it mattered much, of course—because he had had his chance, and there wouldn't be another one.

The season came to its end at last. On the Thursday before the penultimate game with Harmouth the scrub lined up against the varsity for the last time.

In the next week the varsity would take things very easy, resting up for the struggle at Pendleton. There would be one or two signal drills, some kicking, and such light work. But the scrub's part was done. And after that final practice the scrub gathered in the darkness for the annual ceremony of burning the battered tackling dummy. Marsden hung back. He had no heart for that sort of fun somehow. The varsity stayed, looking on. And suddenly, in the dusk, Grantham detached himself, talked for a minute with Mercer, head coach, and then came straight to Marsden.

"Don't break training to-night, Jack," he said quietly. "Here—learn these signals."

Dazed, unable to understand, Marsden stared at the captain, at the piece of paper in his hand.

"You'll almost certainly start against Pendleton," said Grantham still quietly. "It's not quite sure, of course, but that's the dope now, though Mercer and I are the only ones who know it. I want you to think about it. Understand?"

"You can't mean it!" cried Marsden. "Why—last year—"

"Isn't this!" snapped Grantham. "Do you want me to think Hooper's right—that you really are a quitter? You don't need me to tell you that you're the best back we've got to-day. We've got to use you! And if we keep quiet about it it'll be because we don't want you bothered by Hooper and some others. It's all up to you. I'm backing a hunch that you had some sort of spell last year—and that this time you'll play like the very devil to make up for it."

He turned away abruptly then. This was just as well, for Marsden might have tried to say something, and there was nothing to be said. All sorts of conflicting emotions ran riot in Marsden's mind for a minute. But they were all driven out by one supreme,

overpowering thought. Gale had called upon him again! And this time——

And then, after all, he did not start the game. His mere presence with the team, the knowledge that he had been taken from the scrub, that there was a possibility that he might play, had turned Hooper savage and affected even some men on the team who had continued to like him. And something of this, just before the game, Grantham explained.

"Mercer's decided it would be too risky to start you, Jack," he said. "It isn't that I don't trust you—it's the team I'm afraid of. But, so far as I can tell, you're going to get your chance. So—be ready."

And so once more he sat on the side lines, swathed in his blanket. This time there was no overconfidence on either side. What betting odds there were favored Pendleton, but only by a shade. Each team knew it was in for a fight, that it faced an eleven emphatically in its own class. And from the start they went at it hammer and tongs. The football, in that first half, was spectacular enough, but if it delighted the crowd it set the teeth of the rival coaches on edge. Neither team could get a sustained attack going. The ball stayed in mid-field; there was constant punting, back and forth. And at half time there was no score.

But when play was resumed, chance favored Pendleton at the outset. A muffed punt gave her the ball in Gale territory, and the great Heffernan began to justify his reputation for the first time in the game. Steadily, remorselessly Pendleton pushed its way down the field. And the ball was on the twenty-yard line, with first down for Pendleton, when Marsden's summons came. Again it took him by surprise; he had almost given up hope of getting in. Grantham just spoke to him.

"Watch Heffernan!" he said. "He's

mixed up in their scoring play, whatever it is."

Grantham himself hung back almost on the goal line, the last line of defense. Right behind the line ranged the quarter, Hobson, as secondary defense, ready to plug whatever hole the Pendleton forwards might open. And behind the ends, to stop any swinging play, Marsden and Veach, the full back, playing the rush-line halves, crouched, tense, eager. It was the very crisis of the game. If Pendleton had a scoring punch, it would be driven home now. Marsden heard the drone of the signals from the Pendleton quarter. Then the line before him heaved forward. He hung, waiting, searching for the ball. Heffernan had it—was coming toward his wing. His end did his part—the Pendleton interferer was out! His part now to elude the man between him and Heffernan and get to the man with the ball.

And suddenly that old, ghastly, well-remembered impotence swept over him. He hesitated a moment, lunged, stopped—and had lost his chance. Heffernan was past him. But Grantham, tearing up, stopped him for a five-yard gain. Fifteen yards for a touchdown as they lined up—five yards for first down! Hooper turned and glared at him. But there was no spoken word. A smash at center was stopped. Then Hooper shot through and caught the next play before it got started, and even in the wild exhilaration of that moment Marsden heard the roar from the Gale stands as the big tackle dropped Heffernan for a two-yard loss. Fourth down—seven yards to go!

Pendleton must make those seven yards or relinquish the ball. The angle was too wide for a trial at a field goal—they were at one side of the field. It must be a running play—that was sure. Nothing was the matter with Marsden now. Every nerve, every atom of his brain was alert, ready. He

crouched within two feet of the side line. The ball went back on a long, direct pass. He straightened up—saw the pack move to his left, following out a long, sweeping run across the field. He started to follow—and then his football instinct awoke. It was that, after all, that had made him shine on the scrub. And he saw the Pendleton end, who had dashed in on Hooper, pick himself up—saw it out of the tail of his eye.

Like a flash Marsden turned—just in time. He lunged backward, to one side—sprang up just as the ball hurtled over his head, and grasped it.

And then he was off, scooting along the side line, running as he had never run before. He had divined the Pendleton play just in the nick of time—the forward pass that had drawn the whole Gale team, except himself, off to the left, following the feint. Gale's ball—his ball!

He held his pace for thirty yards. Then two Pendleton tacklers struck him

together, pushing him out of bounds. But this time he held the ball, and Pendleton lined up in mid-field, with the whole complexion of the game changed by that one play. And, as he picked himself up, Grantham slapped him on the back.

"Good boy!" he cried. And Hooper turned to grin as they lined up. "Fine work!" he said.

There wasn't much more to the game. Pendleton had had its chance and lost it. Pendleton fought hard, fought pluckily. But nothing could stop Gale now. Marsden played as he had been expected to play from the first days of his career at Gale, and it was he who scored the second and last touchdown through a great hole that Hooper opened for him, with a ten-yard run.

And so there was no reason why he shouldn't, on Monday morning, get out the blue sweater, with the big white G, that had lain for a year, almost, in the bottom of his trunk. For now he had earned it.

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ALL you have to do is leave the door open!"

It was "Slim" Evans talking—he leaned closer to his companion across the table. "Just forget to throw the lock over—that's easy, ain't it?"

The man on the other side of the table swallowed nervously. He was little more than a boy—clean looking, respectably if not fashionably attired. He sighed wearily.

"I tell you it's no use, Evans." His determination was almost humorously feeble. "I—why, they'd suspect me right away! I—I wouldn't have a chance. Everybody knows I'm the last one to leave the store at night, even the cop on the beat. Why——"

Evans interrupted impatiently.

"Listen to me, will you?" The contempt in his eyes was but thinly veiled. "I'll go over it again." He spoke slowly now, and carefully, selecting each word as if to burn it indelibly upon the other's brain. "When you close up the store at nine o'clock, I'm inside, behind the counter. You lock the outside door, put the trays and money in the safe, shut the door—but don't lock it, understand me? You throw the combination over, all right, but the door ain't shut—see? Then you get your hat and coat and go outside. The copper sees you as usual. You and him stand talking in front of the store, like you always do—keep him there about twenty minutes—see?"

That's all you have to do, and your bit will be about five thousand."

The mention of the sum of money seemed to revive the boy's flagging interest—he leaned forward now in turn, his eyes sparkling.

"Yes, but suppose——"

"Wait a minute!" Evans again broke in. He had read the expression on the boy's eager face rightly, and, with victory within his grasp, he put every effort at his command into his final attempt.

"When you go outside," he began, his thin, predatory face assuming an expression of careless indifference, "I start to work—work!" he laughed, repeating the word contemptuously. "Why, this will be so easy that I hate to do it—on the level! I'll have the stuff in twenty minutes. By that time you and the copper are away from the door. Now here's where the classy work comes in. I got a dynamite cartridge and a fuse. I stick it in the lock of the safe, light the fuse, and beat it. That'll be easy, because I open the door from the inside with your key. In about fifteen minutes, bing! goes the old dynamite—off goes the lock. When they get there, they'll think that's how I cracked the safe—see?"

"Why don't you open the safe that way?" broke in the boy.

"Heh?" The other looked at him sharply for an instant. "Why, it—it mightn't be—be strong enough, if the

safe was locked." He stumbled for words. "Besides, you couldn't expect anything if I did all the work, could you? No, do it my way; it's easier and safer. I've pulled this one a dozen times and got away with it every time."

"How will you get out of the store?" asked the boy, after a pause.

"Cinch!" replied the other confidently. "I'll wait until no one is passing, and then ease myself out with your key. Don't worry about me. If by any chance they would nail me, I'll never squeal. Nobody will ever know you had anything to do with it."

The pause lengthened, and Evans, after a tentative clearing of his throat, pulled out his watch ostentatiously.

"Let's have one more little drink, and then——"

The other arose, shaking his head slowly.

"No, I don't want any more—I've had enough now—I'm going home." His eyes—they were clear enough yet—roved around the dingy room uneasily.

Evans rose with him, holding out his hand.

"Well, what do you say? Are you on?" It took quite an effort to mask the eagerness in his voice.

"I—I'll take a chance," responded the boy. Evans had to stoop to hear him. "When will I get mine?"

"One week from to-morrow—right here!" There was a sparkle in the cold, wolfish eyes. "This will be the softest money you ever made."

The boy took the proffered hand gingerly, clasped it mechanically, and then turned and walked out through the swinging door into the night.

It was not particularly warm, yet Evans mopped his perspiring brow with a trembling hand.

"Hey, waiter!" he yelled. There was a strange crack in his voice. "What's the matter—can't you get waited on here? Gimme some whisky!"

Simpson, head clerk in the Barroux Jewelry, Limited, store, toiled wearily up the five flights to his flat. Although it was nearly midnight, he knew Mrs. Simpson would be waiting up for him. Not as the comic sections would have you believe, with an acidy tongue and a rolling pin—no, Mrs. Simpson would be waiting to take off his overcoat, find his slippers and pajamas, ruffle his hair, and tell him that the baby said two whole words that afternoon as distinctly as you or I. Maybe, if it was particularly late and Simpson's speech was just the slightest bit unsteady, she might add that he shouldn't stay so late at the store even if they *were* rushed, because his health was far more valuable than a few extra dollars, and wouldn't he like a hot cup of coffee and maybe a sandwich—there was cold chicken on the ice box—and Simpson would mumble something shamefacedly—with his arms around her and his head turned away so that his breath would escape her. It never did.

She was at the door as Simpson's key turned in the latch, and when she kissed him she drew back a little with just the barest semblance of a frown.

"John," she said, the slight reproof tempered by the softness of her tone, "you've not kept your promise."

"Heh?" answered Simpson, turning to close the door. "Oh, I—I just had a little drink with the boss before I came home. You know how it is. I couldn't refuse him. How's the kid?"

Simpson's excuses never varied. If he had said that he walked into a saloon of his own accord and boldly called for a drink, his wife would have been astounded. He always intimated that he had been lured in somewhere, as in the present instance; and his wife's indulgent smile covered the inward sigh. Of course he could not be expected to see or feel that little gripping at her heart.

When each had recounted the gossip

of their little world, Simpson lit the gas in the living room, and, as usual, sat down to wallow in the evening papers. But had Mrs. Simpson not retired, she would have been astonished, to say the least, at Simpson's actions on this particular evening. The papers lay rolled up as he had taken them from his pocket. Whether Warsaw had fallen or the Giants had triumphed was of slight moment to Simpson, because he was engaged in covering half a dozen sheets of perfectly good white paper with a sketchy outline of what he would do with five thousand dollars—not a fortune in these modern days, but quite a little more than the sum that tempted Judas Iscariot, the original bribee, and, roughly speaking, Simpson's salary for three years.

It was about three o'clock that morning that Simpson's diminutive son and heir commenced to assert himself in a plaintive wail. Mrs. Simpson, half awake, reached out a trained hand for the side of the crib. In doing so, she did not encounter Simpson's head, causing him to growl incoherently in his sleep, and this phenomenon awoke her fully. She rose and walked into the living room. Simpson was still taking trial balances of the five thousand dollars.

"John!" she called softly.

Simpson turned as slowly as if he had been touched with a hot iron.

"What are you doing up?" he inquired inanely, when he had somewhat recovered.

"I might well ask you that, John," returned Mrs. Simpson. There was a quickening interest in her steady gaze. She came over to him. "Why are you sitting up so late? And you have your slippers off! You'll catch your death of cold."

"Sure!" agreed Simpson. Then: "I mean, certainly not!" he corrected himself hastily. "I never catch cold——" His voice trailed off.

Mrs. Simpson knew all the symptoms—these were indeed interesting. She sat down opposite her husband and fixed her cool brown eyes on his flushed face.

"What is it, John?" she asked.

"Why, nothing—that is, I'm figuring the express rate on a big shipment of pearls—to—Alaska." He thought the latter a brilliant idea, and his pulse stopped jumping somewhat.

To say that Simpson was a poor liar would be almost commending his mendacity. The art of lying had never been natural to him, and he had never studied the science of plausible retorts in tight corners. Mrs. Simpson knew, and loved him for it. She had raised the plumbing of Simpson's shallow depths to an exact science. No wild denunciations; no hysterical "scenes," so foolish and often fatal. Her method held a finer touch. It was technique—art. A ready belief, then soft insinuation, a semi-pathetic drawing together of the corners of a remarkably pretty mouth; moist eyes, drooping lashes—and Simpson unfailingly told how many aces the other fellow had or what horse found it impossible to win under the handicap of Simpson's ten-dollar bet.

So now Mrs. Simpson called all her forces together, the picture she presented in her soft, clinging night robe, her rippling, jet hair falling over her shoulders acting as heavy artillery. She came around the table and laid her arm caressingly on his.

"What is it, John?" she repeated.

"Why, Margaret," began Simpson, his eyes showing his appreciation of his wife's beauty, "I've told you." He rose and yawned elaborately. "W-e-l-l, great Scott! It's after three! I've got to get to bed!"

"Has anything happened at the store?" Mrs. Simpson asked, glancing curiously at the scribblings Simpson had left on the table.

"Eh? Why, certainly not!" Simp-

son's indignation clinched his wife's suspicions—she brought her full battle line to bear on his wavering will.

"Tell me, John—I'll help you—I always have."

She put her arms around his neck and drew him close.

A wild thought was born in Simpson's brain. Why not? No, that would certainly finish it. Still, five thousand—maybe—He would feel his way carefully.

"Margaret," he said abruptly, "five thousand dollars is a lot of money, isn't it?"

His wife laughed softly.

"My poor, tired boy——"

"No, wait! Listen to me!" he went on. "It would be a lot to us, wouldn't it?"

The quick glance Mrs. Simpson shot at him did not escape Simpson—nor did his answering one escape her.

"It is a lot—yes, John," she answered slowly—quite serious now.

"Well," said Simpson suddenly, "I'm going to bed—I have to get up at six, and——"

"But what were you saying about this five thousand, dear?" reminded his wife softly.

"Eh? Oh, that's what those pearls are worth. I'll tell you about it in the morning. Come on, it's getting late!"

He turned off the gas with a quick movement, and temporarily Mrs. Simpson lost. As Simpson crawled into bed he told himself that it had been a very close shave—very close.

When Simpson had been unmarried and called a hall room home, unkind fellow boarders had assured him that the only thing he did well was sleep. His becoming married had not altered to a degree his proficiency at this pastime—once Simpson buried his head in the pillow, he would make an unconscious person seem awake and sprightly by comparison. A hand-to-hand con-

flict in the adjoining room between fighters armed with dynamite bombs would have to be told Simpson the next morning, because he would never have heard it. He ran true to form this night; and Mrs. Simpson, after tossing about for an hour in an endeavor to find a solution for her husband's unusual actions before he retired, sat up suddenly in the bed—watched his moving lips for a moment—caught at a mumbled word—and then, with accelerated pulse, bent shamelessly over him and listened!

At ten minutes to nine, the next evening, Simpson swore as the fifth tray of precious stones fell from his trembling hands and hurled its glistening contents on the floor behind the counter. He stooped over and gathered them up, glancing covertly at the shadow at the other end of the narrow passageway. The shadow moved slightly, bent forward, and Simpson dropped four stones and a watch.

"Hurry up!" It was a hoarse whisper from the shadow. "Never mind them—I'll pick 'em up!"

The grim humor was lost on Simpson. He was thinking of other things. He could hear the stern-visaged judge—their pictures in the newspapers had always chilled him—saying: "I sentence you——" That was as far as he wanted to think. He groped around behind the counter, picking up the stones, swearing softly, but with great intensity, as he bumped his head on some projecting corner. Some one was entering the store—Simpson paled at the sound of the tread. He straightened up suddenly and—looked full into the face of his wife.

His face changed color like a chameleon, absent-mindedly he thrust the tray of stones into his pocket, then pulled them out confusedly.

"I thought I'd come down and walk home with you, dear," explained his

wife, not a detail of his actions escaping her.

"What made you think that?" asked Simpson, speaking quickly, and, as usual, unthinkingly, while he strove to collect himself. The surprise in his wife's face helped him. "I mean—that's funny, isn't it?" he went on. "I'll be right out; wait—wait at the corner for me."

"Surely, John, you wouldn't have me stand on a corner at this hour—alone." Mrs. Simpson drew the words out with shocked indignation.

"No, of course—wait a minute!" Simpson blurted the last out, and, with a sudden resolve, stooped under the counter again. He wormed his way swiftly to the other end, locating the shadow from the sibilant oath that came out of the darkness.

"It's all off!" he whispered. "You'll have to get out of here—we can't do it now."

The voice from the shadow trembled—not with fear:

"Why not? You're crazy! It's too late to quit now. Get rid of that skirt!"

Slim Evans' good fairy was not on the job that evening, or Slim would never have uttered the last. Simpson, shallow and meek, had one saving grace—he loved his wife with a devotion that would have made a dog seem faithless. When their baby had been born, Simpson had died a thousand deaths—sitting in the next room. His face paled, he bent farther into the darkness, thin lips drawn slightly back from his teeth.

"That's my wife!" He didn't seem to speak the words—it was as if they were ejected from within him. "Get out of here!"

Evans smiled, confidently contemptuous.

"That's what they all say!" he said. The inflection was ugly. "This is no time to chew the rag. Get the dame

out quick, and let me work. Buy her a drink or something, and—"

He stopped suddenly, because one of his front teeth got caught in his throat. Simpson drew back his torn fist and shot out the other one. The unexpectedness of the attack helped him, and then he was not exactly a physical weakling. They fought silently, silent save for their panting breath and the slue of their bodies against the wall. Then, when flying fists and feet found their marks, caution was thrown to the winds. There, in the dark and narrow space, raged a fight of man animals—guttural sounds, thudding blows, quick-changing grips.

Mrs. Simpson, dazed for a moment, recovered at the sound of her husband's gasping voice. She did not faint—she did not stand wringing her hands—she ran to the door, and, in a beautiful soprano, though somewhat hysterical, voice, she shouted:

"Help! Police!"

The result was gratifying. Two policemen, three women, a newsboy, and a score of assorted citizenry responded on the run. The policemen rushed inside the store, the others crowded about Mrs. Simpson to admire her bewitching distress and get details of the crime.

In a very short time the policemen came out—leading Simpson, dragging Evans. Neither was pleasant to look upon. The principals walked to the police station, four blocks away, followed by the crowd, which gathered recruits at every crossing. Simpson cleared his throat several times and nodded cheerfully to the policeman who chatted with him every night right after he closed the store. As he started to speak, Mrs. Simpson stepped forward.

"I am this gentleman's wife," she began, turning to the desk lieutenant, and if that worthy didn't murmur "He's lucky," he looked it. "I came into the Barroux store, where he is employed, to wait until he closed up—then we

were going home together. This man"—she nodded to Evans, disregarding his evil snarl—"this man came in and attempted to rob the store. My husband grappled with him, while I called the police."

"She's a liar!" yelled Evans. "This boob——"

"Shut that face o' yours, or I'll close it, me bye!" roared the lieutenant.

The policeman who knew Simpson seemed anxious to have the fact known, perhaps after a glance at Mrs. Simpson. He stepped forward.

"I know Mr. Simpson, sor," he said. "I've known the bye every day now for three years, and a fine lad he is. I——"

"All right, Flanagan," interrupted the lieutenant. He turned to Mrs. Simpson, smiling pleasantly.

"The two of ye will come down to the fifth-precinct court in the mornin' at tin——" He waved his hand grandly. "Lock that wan up!"

They took Slim Evans away ungently.

Simpson said nothing all the way home, and his wife did not encourage him to break the silence. It was when they had reached their flat and Mrs.

Simpson had tiptoed in to assure herself that the baby was all right, that Simpson's brain cleared. He disrobed slowly and thoughtfully. He noted that his shirt was torn in several places, and put it where Mrs. Simpson would see it in the morning. He went out to the bathroom and dashed some water over his bruised face and arms. He was still thinking deeply.

His wife stirred as he slid into bed and settled himself tenderly in the pillows—his limbs ached from the contact with Evans' heavy shoes. Bracing himself, he said, after three attempts:

"It was a good thing you happened to come in to-night, honey—wasn't it?"

"Yes, dear, it was," answered Mrs. Simpson fervently.

"Must have been fate, eh?" essayed Simpson again.

"I guess it was," returned his wife. She turned her face away, although the darkness of the room would have hidden her smile.

"Well, good night, honey," said Simpson sleepily.

"Good night, dear," Mrs. Simpson yawned. "It's—it's his word against both of ours, dear—so don't worry."



KEEPING A ROMANCE ALIVE

SHE was a widow, highly intellectual, in every way pleasing, and versed in the art of entertaining. For twenty years he had been in love with her. Six evenings out of every week he called on her or took her to the theater. That is about the record mark for romance—six evenings out of every week for twenty years—twenty years that reached from young womanhood and young manhood to advanced middle age.

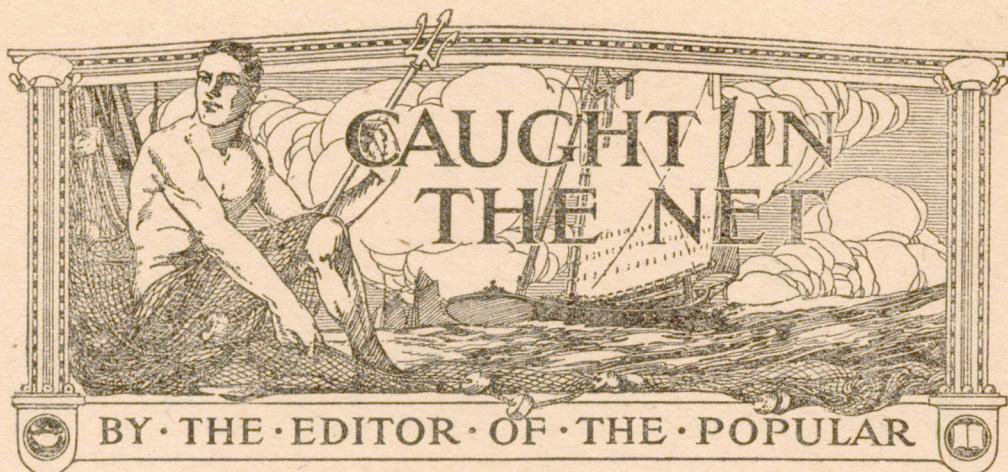
Their devotion was ideal. No word of reproach was in their vocabulary. No disagreement ever marked the course of their sweet communion. It was not only a love affair—it was an ideal romance.

Since it was so ideal, their friends wondered why they did not marry. Obviously, such a perfect love must result in a supremely happy marriage.

Finally, a friend of his asked him:

"Why don't you marry her?"

"Because," he replied frankly, "if I did, I wouldn't have anywhere to spend my evenings."



TREMENDOUS COST OF DELIVERY

WHENEVER the American people desire to do so, they can reduce the cost of living by at least \$250,000,000 a year. The cost of delivery is a tremendous item in housekeeping. W. A. Hoskey, a grocer of a Middle West city, threw some light on this subject at a recent convention of the Retail Grocers' Association. He estimates that in his city, which has a population of about 500,000, the cost of delivery to the grocery trade amounts to \$3,000,000 a year.

Mr. Hoskey formerly had one store, extended credit to customers, and made deliveries. He succeeded, but it was very hard, with the mass of detail connected with the many accounts and the deliveries. He studied his affairs closely, and saw a way to larger business and better business. He discovered that for soliciting trade, making deliveries, and extending credit the expense was \$6,000 a year, and that only forty per cent of his customers had their purchases delivered.

He closed his place, went West, thought the whole thing out, then returned home and opened a new store. There was to be no credit, no deliveries, unless especially paid for, no trading stamps, and nothing but equal service to all and fair prices. The first day he did only eleven dollars of business, and it was a month before he paid expenses. Now he has three stores. He is able to compete with the great chain stores that have enormous capital, and he has few worries. He says if grocers are going to hold their own in the business world they will have to change their system. Ninety per cent of them, he declares, are not making money.

That the present system of delivery is all wrong he has no doubt. How quickly customers will abandon the habit of having the grocer deliver if there is a charge for delivery he shows by the following: He charges ten cents for deliveries. In a year one of his stores had twenty-four orders to deliver—two in a month. In another year it had forty-nine—less than one a week.

Department stores extend credit to any one who has a house, a steady position, or a fair amount of furniture. They will deliver anything, even to a paper of pins. In New York, the delivery system embraces a territory bigger than

some of the States. It is estimated that the delivery service makes up nine per cent of the cost of the department-store business.

It is a regrettable fact that to-day the people who buy and take their goods home pay in part for the delivery of the purchases of other people. It is a fact, too, that people who pay their bills are taxed for those who do not pay.

The delivery system is largely waste. The credit system works injustice. Good merchandising is necessary to the prosperity of a country. Mr. Hoskey's estimate that ninety per cent of the retail grocers fail is not so high as that of authorities on the subject.

SOCIAL LIFE AT THE FRONT

THE writer of this paragraph has been with the Belgian army since early September. He was a member of a Red Cross ambulance corps. Life at the front has none of the glamour of a motion picture. It falls into a routine of its own, very much like that of a factory or business office. There are regular hours for set tasks. There are cliques and gossip. Men dislike each other cordially in the same old petty way, as if there were no menace of death just over the hill. They are jealous of another's glory, scornful of personal mannerisms. All that the romantic notion of war would have us think we had escaped in a salvo of artillery and a blare of music is out there on the battle line waiting for us. Our secret littleness is as lively for trouble there as in an East Side flat.

But modern methods of transportation, in short, motor cars with petrol, have brought the two worlds together—the peace world of London and Paris and the war world of trench and dressing station. The result is a social life as brisk and changing as a season at Atlantic City. Strange and gifted persons came fluttering about our fringes from day to day. We happened to be at the center of action, with an overwhelming pull, so we had plenty of friends. We became a social center like Hull House. "I want to see a shell explode," said one sweet-faced woman. What visitors we had—journalists, photographers, and moving-picture men, who had dared Kitchener's frown for a peep in at the storm center. They all were always ordered twenty miles back, some of them were imprisoned. Our corps entertained Ramsay MacDonald, leader—till the war—of the English labor party, the Queen of the Belgians, a famous London banker, society women, an African explorer, English, Belgian, and French officers, and Prince Alexander of Teck. Excellent surgeons, Quakers, prose artists, came and went. The warm-hearted female partner of a picturesque fiction firm visited us, and wrote kindly hectic columns concerning our life.

KEEPING THE FAITH

AGREAT many excellent, well-meaning people are mightily distressed because we have not the same beliefs as did our grandfathers and great-grandfathers. We have a different view of religion and politics and brotherhood. We have cast aside a great many beliefs that to them were sacred faiths. On the other hand, we believe a great many things they did not.

Those who cling to the old standards of belief are inclined to belabor us for the loss of faith; and are given to profess a little self-righteously that they alone

"have fought a good fight and kept the faith." What they really mean by that is they have kept their grandfathers' faith, and fought those who would not accept it. It would be more accurate if they should say they have clung to it, or refused to deny it. Really, they have not kept it. No one can keep any one else's faith. Faith is not a thing that can be put down in print and remain fixed for eternity, nor boxed up like furniture and preserved as an heirloom.

Keeping the faith does not mean keeping the rending hands of the heathen from grandfather's faith, or preserving unpunctuated great-grandfather's scrawled dogmas.

Faith in any form is an individual matter. If it is real, it is peculiar to that individual. One may cloak himself in ready-made faiths, and profess to established standards. But they are not real. A faith that is real in a man's heart is as different from every other man's faith as his thoughts and feelings are.

Keeping the faith is not waging war on every man that questions our ancestor's sermons or prayers or politics or education. It is renewing within us day by day that instinctive, peculiar individual belief in our own destiny and the value of life.

Somewhere, somehow, to each of us was given a vision, a belief, an intuition that is to shape our life work. It is the ideal of what we would accomplish if our weakness and circumstances did not interfere. It is the thing that makes life sweet, and work glorious, and ill fortune endurable. It is belief in our ultimate value in the scheme of things, a confidence that what we want to do is worthy to be done. It is a feeling that people will somehow appreciate what we will to do; that suns and seasons and winds and flowers will all somehow later play a good part in our plan of things. It is an abiding confidence that neither misfortune nor disease, enemies nor time can crush or blight us into nothingness.

That is the essential faith in all men. It takes separate forms in every man. It is worshipful in some, grim in others, questing in many. It changes with every day, it takes form like mist in the sunlight or clouds in gloom.

But always, so long as a man is true to it to the best of his abilities—so long as he does not barter it for lust of the unripe fruit of daily greed—he is keeping the faith.

CELIBACY DECREASING AMONG WOMEN

THREE is a widespread belief that the greater independence that has come to woman in the last quarter of a century has had a tendency to lessen the number of marriages. The belief is wrong. In 1890, 68 1-10 per cent of the women more than fifteen years old in the United States either were married, widowed, or divorced. In 1910 the percentage was 70 3-10.

This shows that despite the suffrage agitation, the tremendous increase in the number of women teachers—there are 400,000 spinsters among them—the entrance of women into business employments, and the multitude of other causes that are supposed to tend to celibacy, the American woman is less inclined to go through life alone than ever before in our history.

In two Northern States—Massachusetts and Maryland—there are more women of marriageable age than men, and the same is true of one Southern State—South Carolina.

Various theories have been advanced in explanation of the increase in American marriages. One of the most plausible is that a generation ago a girl might

hope to find a desirable mate among a dozen acquaintances. Now, with the greater freedom and license she enjoys, she can look over a hundred men to find her one. It is just as true to-day, as when the statement was first expressed, that man proposes, but it is the woman who chooses.

The bachelor girl is all very well for girls to talk or think about, but it is a sham in the light of the facts. Maybe it was but another of the allurements of the daughters of Eve.

RIGHTEOUS WRATH

WE hear a great deal about "righteous wrath." There is no such thing. A man engaged in a righteous fight may become angry; but his anger is neither righteous nor intelligent.

Anger is never a good thing. It may be better sometimes for a man to be angry than not; merely because any sort of an impulse is better than listless inaction. But anger is a poor sort of stimulant, poor in the same way as whisky, or dope is for a race horse. It may force him to do something, stir him into action, but rarely intelligent or efficient action. And the reaction is often worse than the former state.

Anger clouds the mind and makes the hand unsteady. It prejudices the feelings, and throws things out of the right perspective. To an angry man a thing, that in a sane moment would seem laughably insignificant, looms large and vital. And things that really count are hurled aside as insignificant.

No well-balanced, purposeful, forceful man needs the stimulant of anger to make him act decisively and vigorously. One's courage and vim should be stirred by the need and importance of the task, and not by a flare of internal wrath.

There are times in the lives of men and nations when swift and even terrible action is demanded. There are times when issues of such great moment are at stake that no material or physical consideration should deter us from throwing every ounce of our strength and character into the contest.

But this should not be done in anger. It should be done in the clearest light of fair, honest judgment.

Of course, many men will not fight even when they should unless they are angry; and others cannot fight without becoming angry. A sort of blind fury overtakes most of us engaged in a struggle. But so far as within us lies, the harder the struggle, the cooler we should keep.

ACTION

MODERN living is altogether better when it deals with the outer world than with the inner. A rush of challenging color and swaying treetops drain away our restlessness. To live in action is the proper way of satisfying our inflamed nerve centers. Give them clean, swift event. Pack the whole tribe of moderns off, walking, swimming, riding. Pull them out of their interiors.

So with our fiction. The story of overheated sensibility is a goad to our delirium. An adventure story is quite another thing, and a very good thing, with its thirteen gunshots, its racing motors, and hovering aëroplanes.

Wings of the Wind

By Robert Welles Ritchie

Author of "The Sandlotter," "Wung," Etc.

There is romance enough for a hundred novels in the exploits of the German cruisers who roamed about the oceans destroying enemy merchantmen while pursued by the British fleet. Ritchie introduces the daring crew of the *Karlsruhe* and tells what happened to a little party of seagoers who were put ashore on an island after their steamer had been sunk by the raiders.

(A Two-part Novel—Part One)

CHAPTER I.

IT was the clatter of boot heels—some one running madly on the deck over my head—that hurled me into the broad awake. For a full minute I sat up in my berth counting the pumpings of my heart and bathed in that clammy fear which comes only to seagoers wrenched out of a sound sleep by some untoward incident. Then came the blasts of the whistle—one—two—three hoarse roars. The old *Castle Drummoch* kicked up behind under the sudden reversal of her screws, and every bolt and stanchion in her ancient hull yelled protest.

I stepped fair on the head of Señor Ramielles, my peppery Spanish bunkie, as I clambered madly down from my topside shelf. He squeaked a crisp Spanish oath, but I did not pause to apologize.

"Something doing!" I yelled, and made the couch against the opposite wall in a single bound. The open port was above it. Its round brass framed a startling picture. The dark of the water world was sliced by a broad band of white-hot light which stretched away

to a distant point; under it the waves seemed to boil and give off a smoke. The *Castle Drummoch* lay in the full glare. With my curtain of sleep not entirely lifted, but only slit, at first the significance of this prodigy did not strike me; it was just something unworldly and altogether a part of disordered sleep. Then, of a sudden, I got it.

Searchlight!

The trampling of running feet; the three blasts of the siren; this white eye boring through the night on the bucking ship; what—

War! We were caught by the war; nothing else!

A competent volunteer fireman was lost to the world when I decided to go into the engineering business. I proved this fact by my dressing in the next two minutes. Not many clothes, but enough, and I was smoking out of the stateroom and down the alleyway to the saloon as my Spanish roomie chirped: "Wa'at ees? Wa'at ees?" I made the grand staircase like Yon Yonsen—in two yumps an' a halluf—and catapulted into the midriff of the

second officer just outside the saloon door on the forward deck.

"Hold hard, there! Have an eye, man!"

"'Scuse me; what's doing?" I gasped from the sitting position on the deck, where the collision had sent me.

"Keep your hair on!" he growled. "Nothing; but we're held up by a German blighter."

I took the news sitting. It was hot news—wonderful news. After that long first week of the war—filled with mournful regrets that, away down in the waist of South America, I was not to get a flicker of the big things doing on the other side of the water—to plump into even the edge of things was great business.

"What—what are they going to do with us?" I chirped delightedly.

"Arsk us over to take coffee and frankfurters, a-course," said the second officer, with great disgust, and climbed the ladder to the bridge. All R. N. R.'s are crusty and snappish, I find.

I picked myself up and went to lean on the rail, tickling myself with the sight of the unwinking searchlight that made the waves smoke. What lay just behind that far point of radiance; what sort of ship and men were there, and what were they doing at this moment to back up the command implied in that impudent blast of white light? My speculations carried all the magic thrill of the closed flap of a circus tent, before which an impatient youngster stands, quarter close-gripped in fist. Of course, as I look back on it all now, had I been suddenly gifted with the power of a seer there by the rail, I might not have been so kiddishly exultant. What a power of adventure we mortals would dodge if allowed to read the Beyond!

Some ghost in a flapping bath robe came and stood by my side. I seized the moment to vaunt my information.

"It's a German," I explained. "We're

held up, you see. Didn't you hear that gun they fired across our bows?"

I was sure, then, I had heard the gun. Guns are always being fired across bows in time of war—at least in story-books.

"*Gott sie dank!*" said the ghost prayerfully, and I turned and gave him a look. It was Himmelman, the fat little trader who had such curious table manners. I had marked him the first meal out of Rio.

"Why *dank?*" I asked, quite casually.

"A brize der *Castle Trummoch* will be, then," he answered. "Der kaiser gets him a fat brize now. Ten thousand Prittish bounds by dis ship there is, *hein?*"

"Quite right; but what'll they do with us—with the passengers?" I asked.

"Us? Ho, we all go by der *kaiser-kreutzer* to some blace." He waved one flapping sleeve of his bath robe expansively. "Und der *Castle Trummoch*, she go—plumpf!" Both hands went down in a suggestive gesture.

"I guess I'll be packing up a few things," I murmured, and went down to my stateroom. Perhaps I embroidered fact and conjecture for the sake of the nervous little Señor Ramilles, whom I found kneeling on the couch, his head in the open porthole. When I explained to him that without doubt the *Castle Drummoch* would be wet all over in a very few hours, he flopped off his perch like a wounded toucan and talked rapidly with his hands. As for me, I went about shaving with elaborate calm. "This is the time," I said to myself, "to give a perfect demonstration of Anglo-Saxon coolness and sang-froid. Set an example for this Ramilles person."

I could not desist from peeking through the port occasionally to scan that steady streak of light. Once I thought I saw a black spot bobbing up and down away off yonder, where the two sharp lines of radiance narrowed

to a point. I watched it carefully for a minute. It was a boat, unmistakably. Of course, a boat coming over to demand the surrender of the *Castle Drummoch*—perfectly natural. “Wonder if they’ll give us a chance for breakfast”—my watch said four o’clock—“before they send the old hooker to the bottom?”

By the time I got back to the deck, primly and fully garbed, even to my money belt, the rail on the searchlight side was lined with a motley lot of passengers, all in a state of high excitement, and none fit to pass inspection in an Easter parade down Fifth Avenue. Captain Hanover, the red-faced, pudgy skipper, trundled heavily down the deck, repeating monotonously: “No danger—no danger. Everybody keep quiet. Just a mere incident.” Had he said nothing, it would have been better, for he gave his reassurances in the sepulchral tone of an undertaker’s assistant comforting a bereaved family. Captain Hanover must have corralled the championship for hurling the wet blanket early in youth and defended it against all comers.

Still I blessed him for his gloom. For out of the huddle of crazily garbed shapes near the smoke-room door a figure detached itself as I approached, and, coming close to me with an eager rush, laid a hand on my arm.

“Oh, Mr. Cawthorne, isn’t this just bully!”

It was little Winifred Bowles, my table mate and boon companion of three days at sea—companionships ripen like golden fruit between the rails of a ship bound on a long voyage. The girl, gripping the edges of a raincoat about her white throat, stood where light from the smoke room splashed down on her piquant, upturned face and made the tumbled hair a fine haze, color of Christmas-tree tinsel, about her head.

“Isn’t this bully!” That’s the sort of a girl Winifred Bowles was. She

showed her mettle by that one speech, just as a high-blooded racer sets himself for the get-away the minute you take him up to the gate. Other women—there were six in the first cabin—were clinging to their men and sobbing in hysteria.

“You’re right,” I chuckled. “Lots of people I know—in Big Bend, Indiana, for instance—would pay real money to be in our shoes right now. It isn’t every day a body can be waked up out of a sound sleep to find himself a prisoner of war.”

“Oh, ‘prisoner of war’! Doesn’t that sound real novelly and romantic?” Winifred cut a pigeon wing in her flopping sandals. “Only”—this with a mock flash of gravity flitting over her smile—“I’m really afraid Pops will not appreciate the situation as he should. He’s such a stickler for a *regular* existence.”

I was constrained to agree with the girl’s doubts. “Pops” was a pursy, elderly gentleman who had been torn away from the ticker and sent to Rio and the south countries for the sake of his strained nerves; Amalgamated Copper had done it, so I gathered from one or two wheezy confidences in the smoke room. His daughter chaperoned him as if he were a composite young lady’s seminary.

At this juncture, two incidents served to interrupt our unconventional tête-à-tête. Pops himself, gathering the shreds of his dignity and a bath robe about his portly self with a clutching hand, trundled up. Reproof struggled with curiosity on his pink and chubby face.

“Winnie, do you realize how you are dressed?” he began; then the second officer came hurriedly down the deck from the bridge ladder.

“Everybody back to the saloon!” he commanded. “Clear the deck!”

Reluctantly the scarecrows at the rail gave way just as a snorty little launch, painted a war gray and with the tips of

rifles pushing out through its hood, came churning alongside the lowered gangway. The single clear-cut figure of a sailor in blue standing at the cutter's bow with a fending boat hook showed in the searchlight glare as a cut-out picture pasted on a white dead wall.

I lost Winifred in the general milling about the saloon door, though the trailing red bath robe departing through the port-stateroom passageway indicated that Pops was conducting her to a more complete toilet. A few others among the disheveled crew in the stuffy saloon bethought themselves of a like improvement; the majority fluttered aimlessly among the green baize tables, chattering, gesticulating, weeping hysterically. Not until this moment had I reflected upon how motley a collection of saloon passengers the *Castle Drummoch* carried. Thirty-two of us—a minimum forced by war time—six of these women, we were typical of the mixed blood in the South American metropolis. Four Germans there were, about a dozen Englishmen, a Swedish naval attaché returning from service for his government at Buenos Aires, the rest Portuguese and Spaniards. Winifred Bowles, her father, and I were the only Americans on the ship.

The *Castle Drummoch*, Southampton bound, had cleared Rio just eight days after the war lord hurled his ultimatum into the inflammable armed camp of Europe, the first steamer flying the British ensign to venture thence onto the sea lanes in the face of wild report and the kiting figures of war risks at Lloyds. Four skittish nights the *Castle Drummoch* had pounded along under the Southern Cross with all lights out and ports battened with bath towels, like a timorous, elderly lady making for home through the gas-house district after nightfall. Now she had plumped squarely into the hands of the strong-arm men—with no policeman within call. She carried in her reticule, as the

little German on deck had gloatingly said, ten thousand pounds from the reserve of a British bank in Rio—a tidy sum for a German cruiser to commandeer.

It was exasperating to be cooped up there in that stuffy saloon when somewhere on the deck outside a German boarding officer was telling Captain Hanover what was going to happen to the ship and to us. I was impatient to share the adventure to the full, since I was now squarely in it. The boyish spirit of exultation over the swift turn of fate that had thrown me into the perimeter of big things—that same spirit that had brought Winifred Bowles' exclamation of "Bully!" bubbling to her lips—was impatient of this Star Chamber proceedings beyond the closed saloon doors. Perhaps half an hour passed, when the doors suddenly opened, and Captain Hanover, followed by a sleek young German officer in a trim-fitting coat, lumbered down through an aisle between tables to the little dais at the far end of the saloon where the library cases stood. The skipper's face was a mahogany red, and the drooping ends of his straw-colored mustache quivered. He held up a hand.

"Passengers of the *Castle Drummoch*," he began, in a hoarse roar; "as the captain of this ship, I regret to be forced to tell you that the *Castle Drummoch* has been overhauled and made a prize by the German cruiser *Karlsruhe*, whose second in command"—here the dapper German officer bent at the middle, a smile spiking his blond mustache ends fiercely upward—"has just come aboard to accept the surrender of the vessel. I have no choice but to surrender, and have just done so. I—ah—"

Poor old Hanover boggled and chewed his words. The smiling German whispered something in his ear. Hanover began again bravely:

"I am—ah— informed by this gentleman that under the rules of war the

commander of the *Karlsruhe* is bound to land all of the passengers and crew of this ship who are noncombatants at the nearest neutral port. No harm can come to any of you, and I ask you to be calm and to assist the officers of the *Castle Drummoch* in their work of moving you to the cruiser *Karlsruhe*."

A murmur of surprise—a gasp—sped around the tables where the passengers sat as in a church, eyes glued on the two standing figures.

"Yes, the commander of the *Karlsruhe* is going to sink the *Castle Drummoch* as soon as her passengers and the gold in her strong room are transferred." Captain Hanover snapped this out bitterly. The German officer by his side again bowed in corroboration. A heavy Spanish woman in a gaudy wrapper stood up in her seat and shrieked shrilly. Others jumped to their feet, clamoring. Panic swept the saloon. I suppose I caught it, too, for as a matter of fact Hanover's blunt announcement fell on us like a cold spray. The amenities of war were so fresh with us we were not prepared to understand them immediately.

"You will go by small boats to the *Karlsruhe*—all very comfortable," the German officer put in, with careful enunciation. "You will each be allowed to carry one hand bag; for trunks unfortunately we have no room aboard our cruiser. Please bring only your most necessary and valuable possessions with you so your minds may be at peace. Your excellent captain informs me breakfast will be served as soon as possible. Quite soon, then, the *Karlsruhe*'s boats will call to transport you. Please consider the sailors of my boarding party at your service to assist you in the moving of your hand bags."

He bowed for the final time, and walked stiffly down through the saloon and out on deck. We poor sheep sat there dumbly for several minutes, not knowing what was the first proper

move. I think the spell of the ghostly hour of half dawn, the white eye of the searchlight spawning that trim and trig mouthpiece of an unseen command out somewhere in the void had us all under hypnotism. A few short hours before, we had music on the after deck, bridge and pinochle in the smoke room—all the ordered and customary régime of shipboard laziness; now a doomed ship and all of its passengers and crew ordained to be waifs of war on a broad ocean. The change was abrupt to the point of cataclysm.

I felt a tug at my sleeve and turned about. Winifred Bowles was looking up at me with eyes great with a childish wonder.

"Do they have toilet tables and mirrors—especially mirrors—aboard cruisers?" she asked. "For, if they don't, I am not going to enjoy this adventure as much as I would like to. Aside from the question of these necessities, though, it looks wonderful."

"Judging from that perfectly groomed little officer who's just made us prisoners," I laughed back, "the *Karlsruhe* must have swinging mirrors on her port and starboard revolving storm doors and a suit presser for every six-inch gun. And how does Miss Bowles like the prospect of being a fair prisoner of war on a good dancing deck?"

"Hush! Here comes Pops to take the joy out of life," she warned, with a swift finger to her lips. "We must take this thing terribly seriously in his presence. He's in a state of mind!"

Pops was; no doubt of that. Also he was wearing his silk hat of ceremony, carried a black alligator-skin bag in one hand and a silk umbrella under the other arm. His pompous cutaway and elephant-gray trousers—the same he had worn the day he came aboard—had replaced the more informal bath robe of his earlier deck appearance. He boiled up to where we were standing, dropped his bag, thrust his tile back to

a fighting angle over his bald spot, and exploded:

"What d'ye think of this, Cawthorne! What d'ye think of it! I've just been to the wireless man to send a protest to the secretary of state at Washington and—and ran into a bowing, smiling German person who said I couldn't send any kind of a wireless anywhere. Get that, Cawthorne! Me, an American citizen and member of the New York Stock Exchange—he tells *me* I can't use the wireless to demand protection! Somebody'll sweat for this, or—or my congressman'll lose his seat next election!"

"Fortunes of war," I laughed. "We're not half as badly off as the owners of the *Castle Drummoch* will be in a few hours from now. The Germans no doubt will try to make it easy for us."

"But they're not making it any the easier for me," Pops shouted, his two pudgy fists waving madly before his face, "when they hold me up on this trip and take me skyhooting off somewhere on their pickle boat. Every day I'm away from No. 20 Wall Street after next Sunday means a loss of a sweet three thousand to me. Who'll pay it? Kaiser Bill? Huh!"

"The kaiser will pay any just claims presented by noncombatants on this ship."

The voice came from behind Winifred's elbow. The German boarding officer bowed very ceremoniously when the aggrieved Mr. Bowles whirled and fixed him with a heavy stare. Winifred caught her breath, a little startled, looked quickly up to the smiling, ruddy face with the uptwisted mustaches, then dropped her eyes.

"Permit me, sir!" The German drew a card from a morocco case and handed it to Bowles with a flourish. "Lieutenant Commander Fritz von Helwich, of the imperial navy."

He turned and took the tips of Winifred's fingers in his, bowing low. There

was something so assured, yet so gallantly respectful, in his salutation that Winifred's father could find no resentment, and as for the girl herself—well, brass buttons below a winning smile go far. I must say that in this instance I was forced to admit this truth with a stab of impatience.

"Why, Pops, this isn't war; this is Newport." Winifred flashed a smile up at her father, and rewarded the lieutenant commander for his gallantry with another. "I believe that—that Herr von Helwich is about to ask me for the next fox trot."

Pops thought the time for a ready acceptance of the lieutenant commander's attention not apropos, and he cleared his throat with an air of reproof.

"Will you be so good, sir, as to tell me what you propose to do with the helpless passengers of this ship after she's sunk, and why you should sink her at all? We haven't the least interest in your war."

Von Helwich, though still smiling, flushed a bit at the brusqueness in the older man's tone. He groped an instant for proper speech.

"Believe me, my dear sir, it grieves my commander to be forced to bring inconvenience to any passenger on this ship, particularly to one so distinguished as I take you and your—daughter it is, yes—to be. But we are at war with Britain, and our business is to hurt the enemy by capturing his ships. There is no German port on this side of the Atlantic where a prize may be taken, so we must sink the prize to hurt our enemy. As for the unfortunate passengers, I can only say that they will be made comfortable on the *Karlsruhe* and taken to some neutral port—possibly Curacao or Paramaribo. We keep you on the *Karlsruhe* just as short a time as possible."

"How fortunate for your commander that he happened to stumble on the

Castle Drummoch in the dark," Winifred put in. "I suppose the kaiser will give him an iron cross or something for that."

Von Helwich threw back his slim shoulders with an air of pride.

"We did not—ah—'stumble,' as you say. We have been waiting for your ship for these three days. Nothing is done in the imperial navy by stumbling. We knew within ten minutes the time you left the harbor at Rio."

"Oh!" gasped Winifred.

"So we just strolled along and you put out your hand?" I ventured.

"Your British captain kept a true course," the lieutenant commander answered. He was on the point of addressing Winifred again when a German noncommissioned officer wedged his way through a group of passengers at the saloon door and drew up before his superior with his hand at the salute. He delivered some brief message in German.

"Your pardon"—Von Helwich bowed stiffly first to the father, then, with a shade more deference, to the daughter. "I must consult with your captain as to certain matters. At the embarking from this ship, I may give myself the honor to serve you, Miss—Miss—"

Winifred supplied the name under Pops' darkening scowl. Again Von Helwich bowed and took himself off.

"Pops, dear," the girl cooed mischievously, "this adventure is not going to be very terrible, I can see that. The lieutenant commander will probably find time for a game of pinochle with you, and as to Mr. Cawthorne, here, why he—"

"He'll doubtless be glad to teach me how to make proper bows," I said shortly and went out on the deck.

Why, you ask, did I deliver myself of a perfectly caddish and freshmanly speech just because a German person in a blue coat had been rewarded for his elaborate politeness by a pair of pretty

eyes? Well, you see, for a bit more than a year I had been back in the Llanos country, where the saddle-colored type of beauty, adorned by a dirty camisa and sometimes not that, is all a bounteous nature bestows upon the white man for his adoration. A girl who wore *shoes*—such a crisp and sparkling bit of silk as Winifred Bowles—was so wonderful a creation to my starved soul that—honestly she had me; yes, had me lashed with a log chain from the first minute our eyes met on the day the *Castle Drummoch* put out of Rio! And I am the original Massachusetts Protectionist in matters concerning special feminine interests; I want a wall around the object of my industry, and no competition—especially foreign. A man of my type wins out gloriously—until he strikes a free-trade girl.

Little opportunity offered in the ensuing hours for me to nurse my infant jealousy. Things moved aboard the old *Castle Drummoch*. Dawn came, revealing the gray menace of the *Karlsruhe* lying off to starboard about half a mile—a lusty fighting ship, all trim lines and long, lean guns spiking out from her turrets and barbettes. The wind of dawn caught the black Maltese cross of the Hohenzollerns drooping from her staff and straightened it out for our British skipper to enjoy. The breakfast our stewards scrambled together was a crazy affair. People took it standing about the tables, turning their heads between sips of coffee to gaze out of the ports at what was forward on the oily swells between the cruiser and ourselves. Strings of boats, drawn by launches, had put out from the *Karlsruhe*, and were headed for us; two gangways were being lowered over the German's side; a big crane amid her top-hamper was swinging restlessly back and forth as if testing its biceps for lifting. Preparations for our reception evidently were being hurried.

I had a bite, went below to pack my bag with an emergency kit from my steamer trunk, then out on deck for a cigar—the last cigar aboard the *Castle Drummoch*. Down on the main deck, everything was brisk movement. The donkey engine, presided over by a round-faced Teuton, was chug-chugging like a boy at a woodpile, and out of the hold came neat wooden boxes, iron-bound, to be swung overside into a longboat. The *Castle Drummoch*'s gold was changing hands. A German petty officer stood at the rail with a notebook, gravely checking each box that swung over the side, as if they were so many bundles of hides the old lime-juicer was discharging. Ford, the *Castle Drummoch*'s wireless man, came up and leaned his elbows on the rail by my side, yearning for conversation to hide the chagrin which, as a true Britisher, he had boiling within him. Ford was a fine figure of an English boy, tubbed and ruddy and clear-eyed. I had struck up an acquaintance with him as soon as I came aboard; because I was an engineer and "knew static," as Ford put it, his wireless room had been a favorite smoke corner for me during the four days out from port.

"Looks as though the blighters have us fair on the solar plexus," he opened, by way of turning present adventure to conversational account.

"Yes," I assented. "Ocean's pretty lonely around here, and I guess there's nobody to tell John Bull what's happening."

He laughed softly.

"Never fear," he said, sotto voce. "John's been jolly well told already."

I looked at the boy quizzically. His eyes were drawn into crafty twinkles.

"Come across!" I ordered.

Ford cast a quick look around to see that no superior officer was within earshot, then he brought his lips close to my ear and whispered hoarsely:

"Don't let th' 'Old Man' know I told

you. But this morning, when the searchlight flashed on us, and before the Dutchman, over there, ordered us to back up, I sent out the call: 'Willyum's got th' appendicitis,' I tapped out; and then, 'C. D.' That's the ship's sign. Just as I got this into the air, bang! came the Dutchman's orders.

"Another tap on your wireless," says 'e, 'an' we'll put a solid shot through your boilers.' So I stopped, because I was through."

"Yes, but, 'William's got the appendicitis'—what balderdash is that?" I asked.

"Code," Ford answered succinctly. "It's the code the admiralty sent out to all British merchantmen the day war was declared. 'Willyum's got th' appendicitis'—that means, 'Our old hooker's held up by the Dutch; lend a hand.' The royal naval reserve's got it the world over by this time."

"Yes, that may be," I argued. "But what's the use of telling the lonely ocean off Brazil that you're held up by the Germans? Nobody's around here to help."

"Never fear!" Ford's eyes were more crafty than ever. "The day we left Rio, the British consul told the Old Man a British cruiser, the *Lancaster*, had put out from Kingston, headed south, on the lookout for our sporty Dutch friend over there. Our wireless carries a good four hundred miles. Strong chance the *Lancaster's* caught our yell; she knows we're headed up from Rio, and can figure our location fairly close. I'd 'a' given her the 'lat' and 'long' only that Dutchman cut in with his sweet promise about a shot in the insides."

Ford grinned at me in broad delight when he saw I had caught on to his little trick. Here was paprika for our adventure: the delicious possibility that the old *Castle Drummoch*'s cry for aid had been heard and a British sea terrier might at this very minute be turn-

ing the seas over with her screws somewhere below the horizon up north there to get to us. But—

"A-course," Ford put in, racing neck and neck with my thoughts, "a-course it'd be a game go if the *Lancaster* caught up with the *Karlsruhe* after we're aboard her!"

"Of course the Germans wouldn't fight if they had a whole shipload of noncombatants below decks," I hazarded.

"O' course *not!*" the wireless man answered, with blunt sarcasm. "They'd just surrender their first-class cruiser with a 'Thank you, sir,' and send in a bill for the board of her innocent passengers. Oh, yes!"

Ford jumped to answer a hail from the bridge, and I was left alone with speculations none too agreeable.

I was distracted at this juncture by an incident which served to introduce a character destined to play a "heavy part" in the bewildering drama stage-set for all of us helpless sea orphans down below the horizon. Many times subsequently I reflected bitterly upon the neglected chance which that day brought the unprotected head of Swivel-eye Hoskins a fair ten feet below me and with the quoit peg—a convenient thing for a downward swipe—right at hand. Still, divination would make murderers of us all, I suppose.

The narrow alleyway between deck house and rail on the hurricane deck was mine alone, and I was just turning to go back to the busy part of the ship when a clatter of feet on the metal slabs of the main deck below caused me to look over the rail. Out from the caverns of the galley and storeroom came trooping ten or a dozen stewards, each staggering under a square wooden case or brandy cask. A spidery half-portion man in his undershirt and with heelless slippers flapping on his bare feet pranced ahead of the burden bearers,

waving his arms and conjuring speed in a squeaky treble:

"Look alive, there! 'Ustle these 'ere spirits overside afore these Dutch blighters peels their peepers to us!"

The little man lifted his eyes with a weazel twist of his head and saw me. It was a particularly villainous face I looked down upon, pinched and hard-bitten by slums craft—the face of a London alley rat. One watery blue eye was pulled all askew, giving to his countenance a peculiar made-over appearance. The head was egg bald, with the merest fringe of oakum-colored fuzz running from ear to ear around the nape of the neck.

"Keep your bleedin' eyes to yourself, you ighfalutin' toff!" the cock-eyed one snarled up at me. "We're just providin' ag'inst a sickness, that's wot we're doin'."

I grinned amicably and folded my arms on the rail to indicate a continued observation. Under the direction of the bald rat, the stewards dropped their cases of wine and whisky at the rail. One disappeared over the side, lowering himself by a rope to the boat that must have been tethered there. One by one the cases of liquor were swung down to the hidden receiver. Then mattresses from the crew's quarters in the fo'c'sle were dropped over to screen the boat's freight.

"Now, w'en we gets orders to clear ship, you beggars be on 'and to pull the spirits over to their nutty cruiser," was the Rat's final injunction. "Just wrap the booze boxes up in mattresses w'en you comes to h'ist aboard, an' not a Dutch blighter'll be th' wiser. Now w'en I gives—"

He stopped abruptly. Out from the purser's alley directly beneath my feet strolled the prim Von Helwich, alone. Without a word, he stalked through the group of stewards, who fell away from him hurriedly to the side of the ship. One small keg of spirits still lay

in the scuppers. Von Helwich stopped, read the brand label burned in the head of the cask, then peered over the side to the boat rocking at the end of its painter there. I could see his shoulders lift ever so slightly; it was a silent inward smile that raised them, I could have sworn. The egg-headed cockney leader of the ill-favored crew stepped a pace toward the German officer, pulled an imaginary forelock over his skewed eyes, and began a nasal whine:

"Hi don' know if you twists your tongue to king's English, left'nant, sir. But understan' me—that's just some o' the boys' proper beddin', left'nant, sir, wot they're tykin' over to your neat little cruiser, thinkin' as 'ow you Dutch—beg pardon, left'nant, sir—you German gent'mun wouldn't 'ave enough ticks for to go round. Thank you kin'ly, sir."

The suave lieutenant commander flipped a small gold whistle from his breast pocket and blew a short trill. Within a minute half a dozen husky sailors came trotting out to the main deck, guns slung over their shoulders.

Von Helwich cast a quick eye around the deck, pointed to the heavy water butt that was lashed to the rail on the opposite side, and spoke something in German. The sailors leaped to obey. While they cast off the lashings, the stewards shifted feet awkwardly, staring and vainly trying to associate what was moving forward with their own private adventure. The huge barrel was loosed, tipped over on its side, and quickly rolled across to where Von Helwich stood by the rail over the hidden boat below. Strong German backs were bent to the burden, and the butt was hoisted to the top of the rail.

"Hi say, you scaldin' blighter, wot's your gyme?"

The little steward in the flapping slippers—he whom hereafter I will call by his proper name, Swivel-eye Hoskins—jumped to the rail and tried to throw

his arms around the tottering water butt. His red-blotched face, as it turned to Von Helwich, was twisting in rage.

The German gave a sharp order, and the butt disappeared overside. Crash! Splash! A bit of wood from the smashed boat was tossed over the rail. Swivel-eye Hoskins' precious cargo disappeared forthwith.

Another order from Von Helwich, and two of the sailors grasped Swivel Eye by the shoulders and the slack of his trousers, lifting him off the deck with a single heave. A scream; a curse. Twice the blue arms swung, pendulum fashion, the writhing shape of the cockney; each time his bare heels lifted over the rail.

"You—you wouldn't murder me, left'nant, sir? Sharks! Sharks out there, sir!"

"Hup!" grunted the sailors, and Swivel Eye shot out over the rail. His dismal scream stopped in a gurgle and the "plank!" of smitten water. Von Helwich turned his back and coolly disappeared into the purser's alley, his men following.

Instinctively I looked about for a life preserver. But the clatter of the stewards below, warning the unfortunate Swivel Eye to get a grip, diverted me. Then I saw the rope overside, which had been used to lower away the whisky cases, tighten. A wet and glistening head came flush with the rail. And the salty profanity that broke against my retreating ears as I walked down the deck, chuckling, was a postgraduate's valedictory.

CHAPTER II.

It was near nine o'clock when the Germans were ready for their first boat-loads of passengers. The earlier hours had been spent in ferrying across to the cruiser bundles of mattresses from the staterooms, hundreds of pounds of ship's stores, fresh meat from the re-

frigerators, and fruits and vegetables by the crate. I imagine that the capture of the *Castle Drummoch* was a windfall for the officers and crew of the kaiser's rover, separated as she was from the nearest home port by several thousand miles of water, with hostile English ships converging down on her from the North Atlantic and every South American port of revictualing closed against her by the neutrality laws. War had caught the *Karlsruhe* orphaned from all her family of steel sisters in the Baltic, and the doughty cruiser had turned highwayman perforce.

The big ship had moved closer during the course of the lightering, and she now lay not more than three hundred yards away from the *Castle Drummoch*. Von Helwich had the *Castle Drummoch*'s stewards marshal all of us cattle on the starboard deck about the gangway. There we stood, a ridiculous double line, each lugging a hand bag or a bundle. White, yellow, brown; Saxon, Teuton, and Latin; helpless wards of war ready for the overseer to pilot us to our asylum.

Two Spanish women, accompanied by their negro maid, were the first to go chattering and protesting down the gangway to the boat, which a couple of husky sailors were steadyng against the fender. Then Himmelman and his three German brethren—their faces were beatific. A tall, stoop-shouldered Englishman—name was Hetherington, and he was a nitrate man in Chile—fixed the German bos'n on duty at the head of the gangway with a concentrated British stare as he stalked past.

Beautiful!

I lingered, hungry-eyed, for sight of Winifred, and determined to go over in the same boat with her. But the astute Von Helwich played his cards first, and they were all high ones. The second boat was nearly filled, and I was on the point of instituting a search for Winifred and peppery Pops when I

saw Von Helwich come out of the saloon door and stand aside like a carriage opener to let the girl and her father pass out. What a strategist that daughter of New York was! Tailored to the minute in a tricky little suit of blue, cut to a military swagger, and with a pert little contraption of feather and velvet crowning her shimmering hair, she was rigged for a landing at North River piers and a limousine dash to a big home on upper Fifth Avenue rather than to cross salt water to a cruiser refuge in the South Atlantic. I did not fool myself. That chic and snappy note in Winifred Bowles' toilet was designed for the eyes of somebody besides a fool engineer from the Llanos wilderness. Old Pops Bowles wore his tie with a conscious air of severe dignity, as if it were a Stock Exchange crown. Behind the two a sailor staggered under the weight of two suit cases, big as ship chandler's sample cases.

There was New York for you! Father and daughter meeting adventure away off the beaten tracks and with an outcome beyond the power of a champion seer to predict, yet yielding not a bit of their innate conservatism to suit the unexpected. New York is delicious when it crosses the Hudson or passes the Hook; defies the leagued powers of mischance to catch it in any condition than assured.

I started forward to join the girl at the gangway, but caught a message—just a curt shrug of one shoulder and a toss of the head which said, plainer than words: "Standing room only; take next car." Fairly paid I was for that hasty flash of pettishness I had shown in the saloon an hour before. It brought me up standing, this neat little slam; I let that boat go without me.

It was now near noon when the last of the barges which had been plundering the *Castle Drummoch*'s coal bunkers discharged over the *Karlsruhe*'s side and was pulled aboard. We, the

refugees, had been an hour herded down on the cruiser's after gun deck in the acme of discomfort; the *Castle Drummoch*'s crew and handful of black and tan steerage passengers were stored some place forward in the *Karlsruhe*'s fo'c's'l. The smart German sailors—round-faced, smiling boys with tow heads and silky beards—were all too busy to heed us; the officers, though deferential at our boarding, had tactfully indicated that when they were finished with more important business they would undertake to look out for our comfort.

A few hundred yards away, the black hull of the doomed *Castle Drummoch* floated high in the slow wave sweep. Smoke drifted lazily away from her two funnels. The red British ensign flapped fitfully at her staff. A curious aspect of death in life rode the ship awaiting the blow of the executioner.

A shrill whistle piped somewhere back in the steel-beamed cavern of the gun decks, and at the same moment the *Karlsruhe* quivered under the propulsion of her engines. Sailors ran past and through the huddle of the outlanders, taking stations in answer to the whistled order. Faster and faster the big fighting ship slipped through the waves, leaving the *Castle Drummoch* in the rear. This was a surprise to me, as well as to most of those from the liner who stood about me. We had thought to see some spectacular explosion, the rending of the ship by a charge in the hold; yet here was the *Karlsruhe* leaving her a derelict to drift intact where wind and current chose to carry her. I spied Ford leaning dejectedly against a bulkhead, his boyish face the picture of woe unutterable.

"How's this?" I hailed him. "They're leaving the old ship to drift where it will."

"Never fear," he growled. "It's only cat an' mouse they're playing. These blighters want to do a little fancy alley

shooting on the poor old hooker. Stand by to see a bit of target practice, Mr. Cawthorne."

Ford's prophecy soon was fulfilled. At about three miles away, the *Karlsruhe* turned on her heel and began to rush back on the derelict, keeping a course some two miles to windward. Another shrill whistle on the gun decks, and breechblocks closed with a *clip*, like a safe door shutting. Then—whang! A jar, the jetting of acrid smoke outward. Whang! Whang!

We could not see the operation of the guns forward and aft of where we stood in the waist of the ship. But results we could see. First a geyser of water alongside the black hull of the *Castle Drummoch*. Then a tremendous upheaval of splinters and shattered deck house caused by the shell exploding in her vitals. Another burst of smoke and flame just abaft her rearmost funnel, and down it came.

The vicious barks of German guns continued. Before the eyes of her land-lubberly ex-passengers, the *Castle Drummoch* dissolved second by second. Flames leaped up from her battered superstructure in four places. Her masts canted in a sharp list to port—like experts at a county fair bouncing baseballs off a coon's head, the *Karlsruhe*'s gunners drove home their deadly shells as the cruiser rushed by. In ten minutes the liner was seething, and billows of smoke whirled from her. At about four miles beyond the target, the *Karlsruhe* turned about and waited, engines stilled.

The wait was not long. The swirling nest of flame sank lower and lower. Suddenly the stern lifted high out of water, rose up and up like a great pointer against the dial of the sky. The red bit of bunting at the staff over the stern fluttered once—twice. Then the *Castle Drummoch* was gone. Naught but a thinning cloud of smoke, tinged white from the steam of her burst boil-

ers, hung over the spot where she had been to mark her passing.

CHAPTER III.

As I watched the ship sinking, I felt something drop-dropping on my brain, and could not name it. All of a sudden I knew what it was: a shower of fear. Yes, fear falls in a shower; real, heart-shriveling fear drops straight on you like the rain on the pampas. You feel it strike your neck and go down your spine in swift trickles. In all my life I had not suffered such a fear as this. The terror of things as we faced them was all laid out in a picture of red and black.

Here we were on a ship built for battering and being battered by explosive steel. At any hour another such ship, but flying the same flag that went down fluttering from the *Castle Drummoch's* stern, might pop up over the horizon; then what? Nothing human—nothing under blue heaven could stop the *whang-bang* of shells right among us. They would smash and tear and splinter, and we—that little girl tailored for a Fifth Avenue parade, whose eyes had turned my mind into a junk heap—we would then be flies on a wheel. Death—and a very unpleasant death at that!

If I say I have my full share of what men call "sand," I will be thought boastful. Nevertheless every man who has reached thirty knows in his heart of hearts whether he has the stamina to stand up under the fear of death and take it with eyes to the front. Yet there on the *Karlsruhe's* gun deck I found it hard to do this. It seemed to me that all the world of common experience—the world of things we can touch and see—had been wiped out of existence, and that we refugees stood in a new creation of hard steel and flame, where death was the rule and life an accident. As I look back on that bad moment of stress, I think I can

truthfully say I was not so much concerned for myself as for Winifred Bowles.

Maybe I would have fought it out along that line all summer if a little German lieutenant hadn't come down the deck, calling tunefully: "All to the quarter-deck, please!" We foundlings, every one of us still under the spell of the *Castle Drummoch's* sinking, blundered through steel passageways under the guidance of a petty officer until we came to the wide deck, under awnings, at the stern of the cruiser.

There stood a group of serious-looking officers surrounding one who, by the braid on his cuffs, must have been the commander. He was a round little man with long whiskers, a genial eye, and the general appearance of a Santa Claus in a store window at Christmas time.

I was quick to note that Winifred, already a privileged person on the quarter-deck, had a screen of young chaps in blue about her and the faithful Von Helwich at her elbow. Her father's black tile was almost obscured by their shoulders. Of course she did not see me; I was in the immigrant class. Indeed, we were ranked up before the commander very much like immigrants before the Ellis Island inspectors. The Spaniards among us scowled heavily; the Englishmen, including Captain Hanover and his officers, tried to look as if they were enjoying a funeral. The commander stepped out before us, looked us over with his little, laughing eyes, and then addressed us in a rich, Weber-Fieldian dialect I could not hope to reproduce without training:

"Friends—ladies and gentlemen of the *Castle Drummoch's* passengers and officers: It becomes necessary for me your minds to set at rest as to your future. You are temporarily the guests of his majesty's cruiser the *Karlsruhe*, but I know you have no desire to accept our simple sailor hospitality long." Here the Santa Claus whiskers parted

in a most engaging smile. "The nearest neutral port is Paramaribo, but unfortunately the presence of two ships of the enemy near that port would put you to needless risk should I attempt to go there. I have, therefore, decided to make for Charlotte Amalie, the port of Danish St. Thomas. There you will find ship to Europe, if not to America. We will be three days making Charlotte Amalie, and I fear you will be put to some discomfort. But so far as duties and discipline permit, command me and my officers. My officers will consider it an honor to have the ladies occupy their quarters; as for you gentlemen, perhaps we may even find comfort of a sort for you. Now, if you please, ladies, my officers will dispose you in your quarters."

The cruiser's commander finished with a bow. I saw Winifred and her father move off in the direction of the wardroom—if that's what they call the officers' playroom aboard a ship of war. Both were sufficiently escorted by a bevy of young Germans, Von Helwich assuming the rôle of personal guide for the girl. The little minx! She was as coolly and confidently at her ease as on a Palm Beach piazza; nothing in the surprising situation had shaken her poise—that seventh sense of security which is the heritage of blood. In the tilt of her head, the silver of her sudden laughter, there was that thing which makes a woman queen over men. A whole lot of poets have juggled words to measure this proposition, but put a poet down in the Llanos barrens for a year, then let him see such a tidy little diamond point as Winifred Bowles glinting out of reach, and he'd write a tragedy that would put the melancholy Dane on the end seat of Billy Rice's minstrels. Consider that line as a gauge of the foot pounds of my gloom there on the *Karlsruhe's* quarter-deck.

In course of time I was assigned to my hammock on the gun deck: a cozy

steel tomb about a hundred feet long, all neatly decorated with the breeches of rapid-fire guns. Reminded me of sleeping quarters I once had in Mexico—in a jail—only cleaner. These big, blond sailor boys, with their nifty blue blouses and white pancake caps, trod on one another's feet in their efforts to make us feel all comfy and at home. The one who swung my hammock for me told me he once was a waiter at Meyer's Hotel, in Hoboken, and asked me how the Giants stood in the pennant race. This little breeze from the home country drew me to the smiling, blue-eyed chap, and we were chums in no time. Eagerly he asked for news of the war—what had happened in France and Belgium; how did America feel about the kaiser? In return for the poor scraps of news I could give him, Heinie revealed unconsciously the tragedy of the *Karlsruhe's* men.

"We are by Vera Cruz, everyding quiet und peaceful. Comes der vireless: 'War iss making; get outd!' So we get outd, undt we look for der British ships to sink. Vy war iss making—who standts dat troubles we dond't know. Only we know we got to fight somebody and some day—sure it is certain some day we all gets killed."

I've met many sorts of men under many conditions, but none with more simple bravery than Heinie, the ex-waiter's.

The rest of the day passed dully. Though as a cabin passenger of the *Castle Drummoch* I had the freedom of the wardroom, I did not go there. A silly sense of restraint, the feeling that I was, after all, not sufficiently parlor broken to compete with the easy graces of these German gentlemen in front of Winifred, kept me away from the places she was likely to be.

Night came, and with it a shock that sent the blood from the hearts of every soul aboard the *Karlsruhe*.

It must have been about ten o'clock, and I had just climbed into my hammock, when suddenly little alarm bells began to clamor all up and down the steel galley of the gun decks; the whole ship seemed to be a hive of singing bells. Just for a half minute, that clatter, then the pounding of many running feet on steel everywhere. Sailors sleeping in their hammocks on either side of me were out and speeding away before I could lift my head. I heard, somewhere forward, a guttural barking of orders and the clang of steel doors. Quicker than the telling of this, the incandescents set among the steel beams overhead snapped out, and the cave of the gun deck was in darkness. No, not total darkness; at each shining rifle breech a little, hooded lamp glowed like the body of one of those big Amazon fireflies; in its cone of light hands moved—just swiftly working, detached hands. Breechblocks swung back, all round and shining like blunt acorns; and slim, steel-pointed shells were slipped into the shadow holes behind them. All this ghostily and in the space of a minute.

In a blundering way my mind grasped this as some sort of a drill—like the fire drill of children in school. But comprehension followed swiftly, and with comprehension a suffocating recurrence of my terror of the afternoon. A fight coming!

A sailor came stumbling toward me in the gloom, seized my hand without a word, and started me on a trot down past the line of lighted gun butts. Others of us refugees were similarly piloted. After many twists and turns, we were ushered into what I afterward found to be the wardroom, a big room in the stern of the ship. A squad of sailors there was busy taking up wooden settees—stripping the officers' clubroom down to the steel. Gun crews were standing in position by the shining flanks of two long rifles, one on either

side of the room. Behind each crew a double rank of shells stood in cases, their cruel steel noses pointing upward. The men standing rigidly at their posts, the brass and steel cylinders behind them in ranks—both seemed cast in the same mold, both precise killers.

Before many minutes, all of the *Castle Drummoch*'s saloon passengers were huddled in the gloom at the far end of the wardroom, away from the two shotted guns. The steerage passengers and the British crew, including the luckless Captain Hanover and his officers, had been locked away somewhere in the forward part of the ship, so we heard. The *Karlsruhe*'s commander couldn't risk having one of the Britons show a light from the deck. We dumb landsmen huddled there in the wardroom, clumsy supercargo on this fighting ship; like cattle in an opera box we were, so out of place in this business of hurling hundredweights of steel. I remember how a Spanish woman at my elbow kept muttering some sort of prayer, in which the Latin "nobis" was reiterated with a whistling sound. Another sniffed noisily and crooned broken Portuguese to her baby. So dark it was I could not see the faces about me—only white blurs.

So minutes dragged. What was transpiring on the decks above us, in the conning tower over all; what moved in that black sea beyond the gun ports—foolish speculations! We were prisoners behind steel, as far from the imminent event as Peary at the pole. A heavy silence was on the ship. No longer the clang of compartment doors, the chuck-chuck of ammunition hoists. Only the strong vibration of the *Karlsruhe*'s screws, which somehow seemed transformed from motion into noise.

"Did you think to take your aspirin tablets at nine o'clock, Pops, dear?"

My heart gave a jump at these words, coming to me strong and steady through the dark. Aspirin tablets—at this mo-

ment! Oh, the fine nerve of that daughter of Manhattan! I pushed through the crowd in the direction of the voice, and found Winifred standing by her father at the far end of the huddle of refugees.

"Miss Bowles?" I hazarded in the dark.

"Why, it's the gentleman from the Llanos!" she cried, with a sudden clapping together of her hands. "Pops, Mr. Cawthorne has come to help us sing: 'Oh, say, can you see—'"

I found her hand laid suddenly in mine, and an excited whisper came to my ear: "Adventure's gone up a hundred points since morning—adventure preferred!"

"Certainly not common, Miss Bowles," I rallied, with as good a bluff at the sang-froid stuff as I could muster on the minute. "Perhaps we can think of something else that would be preferred before the end of the hour."

"You really don't mean—" the girl began, but Pops broke in brusquely:

"Is it when you're in front of a gun being fired, or behind it, that you want to open your mouth, Cawthorne? I've read somewhere something about opening the mouth when a cannon goes off, but I can't remember."

"In front, of course, foolish Pops!" Winifred broke in. "You open your mouth to say good-by, but you never say it."

Pops snorted at this, and grumbled that "Winnie never can take things seriously."

"And you, Mr. Dam Builder," Winifred accused, "you are no carpet knight, I'm afraid. You only appear when excitement threatens. Where have you been all day, when you might have had tea in this very room with those delightful German officers?"

"I've forgotten my tea-table manners," I began. "When I've been longer in civilization—"

A sharp exclamation from across

the wardroom, where the gunners stood. Some of them stooped and peered out over the tops of their pieces. We were standing directly behind one of the guns. I lowered my head and looked between the top of the long steel tube and the frame of the barbette.

A searchlight far across the sea was cutting pie slices out of the dark from horizon to zenith. I caught my breath sharply, and at the sound Winifred thrust her head in front of mine and looked.

"And that means—that means—" she questioned, in a pinched voice.

"That means an English warship," I said.

"But there's two!" she whispered. "Oh, see! Three!"

I looked through the embrasure again. True! Beyond and behind that thick club of light were two others. I could not say how many miles away from the first or from us. All three were great white antennæ, feeling, groping. No doubt the English suspected the *Karlsruhe's* proximity, else they would not thus boldly reveal themselves.

The other refugees, who could not see but sensed what was doing by the alert attitudes of the gunners, were hushed now. Not a break in the silence for minute on minute. I felt a little hand laid on my arm, and tightened it against my side—not in boldness; just because those minutes were what they were—terrifying.

Then came action. One of the searchlights fell on us in a great sweep, so that just for an instant a band of white light shot through the embrasure and illumined the steel-walled space and the chalky faces of the people there. Though the searching ray sped, it was instantly back—pounced back like some tiger of light leaping from the heavens. Not more than twenty seconds it burned through the gun slits when—

A jar, two thudding blows like one,

and those shining breeches of the rifles kicked back with mighty thrusts. Instantly hands twirled the block levers, the round breechblocks swung backward, two empty shells clanged on the steel floor, and two projectile ones leaped from the floor to the chambers.

Acid smoke blown back from the opened breeches filled the room.

"Dios!" screamed a woman somewhere in the dark.

"Click! click!" said the breechblocks, and a slim young officer with a telephone clamped to his ear calmly called the range to the gunners. Under the hooded lights detached hands, cut out of the dark, swung wheel and lever; the long, gray barrels rose, veered, rose again—

"This is—" Winifred's voice came to me shrill and clear. "This is—"

Again the thuds and the kick back of the rapid-firers. The red flash from the muzzles stabbed back through the embrasures and illumined the wardroom with hot light. More smoke. Empty shells clanged. I felt a woman's arms encircle my knees; it was the Spanish woman, prayers forgotten and daffy with fear.

"I find—I don't have to—keep my mouth—open," was the strangling comment of Mr. Bowles—brave old Pops. "Fellow who—wrote that—'bout keeping mouth open—lied!"

"I think Pops'll have something to talk about at his club," Winifred shouted in my ear. "Awful stuffy—that club! Not at all like this!"

Over the jumbled noises in the wardroom rose the clear call of the slim young officer giving range. He, his men, were parts of the guns they served. Bare arms worked smoothly as pistons when they lifted shells to the opened breeches and drove them home. The hands that swung the gun to range moved like the steel hands of the linotype.

Six empty shells lay at the foot of

each gun, and the gun crews stood tensely at their weapons waiting the word of the firing officer to shoot again. One minute passed—two—and still they waited the command.

He spoke a single word, and they relaxed, called from gun to gun, laughed. Once more the thrust of the *Karlsruhe's* screws became the dominant undertone of the wardroom. The firing officer turned with the telephone receiver still strapped to his head and made a stiff bow in the direction of the refugees.

"The commander's compliments," he said, in precise English. "And he requests me to tell you there is no more danger. The enemy is left behind."

"I don't believe I like that decision, Mr. Dam Builder," Winifred instantly took up the report. "Tie games are so unsatisfactory."

CHAPTER IV.

Take the boy hero in the tank drama, strap him under the stamp of the pile driver, turn on the shivery music from the orchestra, let the villain in riding breeches and two-quart hat emit his low, grating laugh—then smite that helpless hero with a powder puff. Considerable anticlimax, the critics would say. Well, something like that was what we felt there in that smoke-filled wardroom after the young lieutenant had announced that the bing-bang business was all over. Somehow it didn't seem right. We were all keyed up to receive a ten-inch shell in our midst—were each counting the seconds that separated us from eternity, and what we got was a pretty exhibition of stage business. Had we refugees been sitting in an open-air film show at Coney Island, watching this action on a screen, the sense of reality would have been no less. That's one of the little jokes of human nature as I've found it; the moments of stress when you can feel

bony fingers laid on your elbow saying: "Come!" pass like the shadows on a movie screen; when they are gone you have to grope to reconstruct completely the event as it happened.

We learned the truth of what had passed around us in that firelit section of the black Atlantic after the wardroom doors had been thrown open and we were told we were free to return to our hammocks. A little matter of mere knots—the extra turns of the *Karlsruhe's* screws in given units of time—this had saved us. Of the three British cruisers that had discovered the *Karlsruhe*, only the nearest one had been able to get into the fight, and the difference between her twenty-four and our twenty-six knots had been the salvation of the kaiser's fighting ship. For just thirteen minutes the *Karlsruhe's* guns had chirped the battle song, then the song was finished and we were plowing through the night—a death factory in a hurry.

It was not until dawn came that we landlubbers saw the *Karlsruhe's* little souvenir of the night's encounter. Back of the funnels, where the steel cranes folded over the superstructure, was a stump of steel, splintered like a blasted tree. A shot had carried away one of the cranes two feet above its base and then gone skyhooting over the side. Just that single wallop the kaiser's boat had received; not a man hurt nor a foot of paint scratched. We poor fools of spectators had imagined that half the boat would be shot away—I know I had a flash picture during the firing of lifting Winifred onto the last square foot of space on a life raft while I gallantly drowned—yet here we were, speeding away in the dark on a perfectly sound and husky cruiser with only the stale smell of powder to remind us we had passed through the fire.

Of course there was no sleep the rest of the night. While the sailors busied themselves swabbing down and polish-

ing the smoke-smudged breeches of their guns, I seized the opportune moment to detach Winifred from the side of her doting dad, who was absorbed in watching the brushes go in and out of the six-inch rapid-fire bores. We walked through a dimly lit alleyway of steel, and came out on the forward deck where the winches clustered about the foot of the mast. Nobody seemed to be stirring there; a thicket of ventilator hoods and covered donkey engines cluttered the deck. There were no rails—they're taken in, I believe, when a warship goes into action; the deck simply drooped off into the sea. The absence of the rails and the occasional mysterious lifting of a wave's head flush with the steel we stood on gave a strange feeling of insecurity to our tête-à-tête. I think the downright freakiness of our strolling out there on that naked deck, with the electric moments of the fight just sped, struck us both at once. Winifred laughed—a bit hysterically.

"Is this a conservatory stroll between dances?" she challenged roguishly. "For if it is, I think my chaperon had better know where I am."

"I don't know anything about dances," was my clumsy answer. "Dances and chatter under potted palms are all beyond me; I—I don't know the trails in your country. But I do know a real, high-assay girl when I meet one, and you're that."

"What? Compliments when the pound-pound of those guns is still in our ears?" She looked up at me and laughed a little wildly; a thin stream of light from some half-veiled port behind cut across her cheek, and I could see that it was rosy red. "Mr. Cawthorne, I've met a good many men—dancing men we call them—who would hardly think to turn a pretty compliment so soon after an experience such as we've just had. I cannot accept your statement that you 'don't know

the trails.' Now what is 'high assay,' please? I am vain enough to want to understand, you see."

"It's when gold runs high percentage in the quartz," I answered. "And quartz is a rock that stands pressure without crumbling—greater pressure than almost any other kind of rock. I think, Miss Bowles, that you've stood a milling test which would have had any other girl in hysterics."

She was silent for a minute. I watched the play of light in her eyes.

"I will not take credit where credit is not due," she said finally. "One is brave only when one forces himself to stand up under great fear. If you feel no fear you show no bravery by not flinching. Now—"

"But I was afraid—mortally afraid," I confessed.

"No; I think you only were afraid that you would show fear," she corrected. "That's a man's first instinct—to keep a grip on himself. And because a real man always does this a woman—all women—find such a man—wonderful!"

Here was a neat turn. I had started a compliment, and it had boomeranged back on me. That tied my tongue, and I grew suddenly uncomfortable. The girl was silent for a moment, then she suddenly laid a hand on my arm.

"Come," she said, "Pops will be raging."

So I took her to the wardroom, where Pops was indeed raging over his daughter's disappearance, and under his frown I did not have opportunity for a simple "Good night."

Back to my hammock in the steel dungeon of the gun deck to lie with eyes to the gray deck plates overhead, hard as the path of my sworn resolve to triumph in conquest of my Great Adventure.

Dawn ushered in a day of new doubts and fresh surprises. Landsman as I was, I did not need to be told that the

sun came up on the wrong side of the cruiser. Nor that the *Karlsruhe* was legging it at top speed down the hidden waterways of the South Atlantic; the smoke that boiled out of her three funnels and was whipped straight back under the propulsion of the ship's cut through the wind told of forced draft. We were unreeling twenty-eight knots due south—not north in the direction of Charlotte Amalie, our promised refuge.

Ford, the wireless man, who, with Captain Hanover and the rest of the *Castle Drummock*'s officers, had been released from the temporary restraint imposed during the brush with the British, was the first to explain the mystery of the misplaced sun and the shivers of forced draft.

"Fair game it is of fox an' 'ounds," he groaned when I met him out on the clear space of the after deck. "An' us runnin' with the fox when our hearts's with the 'ounds."

"Yes, but the commander promised to put us off in St. Thomas," I urged. "He can't trail us all over the South Atlantic with him."

"Give the Dutchman credit," Ford broke in pettishly. "After bangin' up against three English fighters last night you don't think he's balmy enough to go crashin' through a steel fence to the north, do you? No, sir! He's makin' a run for it, an' with nothin' to stop him this side o' the Antarctic. Little bird up there"—Ford jerked his head upward to the slender hammock of the wireless—"little bird's been cheep-cheepin' half the night, throwin' out code for other Dutch lighters to 'ware the English cruisers to the north."

"Then he'll drop us at Rio," I suggested. "Ought to be there in two days."

"Never fear!" the blond wireless lad muttered lugubriously. "Cruiser *Good Hope*'s supposed to be comin' up to Rio from the Straits. 'Is Whiskers 's got

a neat hedge o' hostile steel fore an' aft. 'Fore we know it we'll be dropped off at St. Helena, where the Emperor Bonaparty cooled his toes—or at some Dahomey village on the African West Coast."

I left Ford to grumble over the chances of fate, and wandered aimlessly through the steel corridors, seeking some distraction in my restlessness. At every turn I was struck by the anomaly of conditions aboard the emperor's ship of war— laughable if they did not represent discomfort and the depression of ever-present peril. The *Castle Drummoch*'s orphans were anything but at ease in their asylum. I have since been told there are no deck chairs aboard a warship—much less on a boat stripped for action and with every bit of wood stowed or long since thrown overboard. Conceive of thirty-two hopeless landsmen, not to mention the hundred and more idle men of the *Castle Drummoch*'s crew and steerage, spilled on the decks of a skyhooting war machine with no place to sit down! Neither on the sun-flooded decks nor in the steel honeycomb of the *Karlsruhe*'s interior so much as a box or a bale to squat upon; a positive tragedy that!

Hetherington, the English nitrate man from Chile, I found standing stiffly against a stanchion on the far side of the quarter-deck, raptly playing chess with himself on a folding pocket board with leather dibs for chessmen. He merely glared an answer to my hail. Himmelmann, the German with the primitive table manners, I hardly recognized when I stumbled onto him, curled up on his heels at the base of a machine-gun carriage and scrubbing brasswork. A blue blouse, miles too short about his equatorial zone, and blue trousers that fitted him like the skin of a sausage had almost disguised him. He turned a radiant and perspiring face up to me at my "Good morning."

"Me—I work for der kaiser!" Himmelmann chuckled exultantly. "Not for nods do I make me a naval reserve from Cuxhaven fifteen year ago."

The day dragged in infinite weariness for all the noncombatants—and I dare say for the officers and men of the *Karlsruhe*, who found us underfoot everywhere. All day the *Karlsruhe* trembled to the forced draft under her boilers. Hour by hour she plunged southward through a hot sea and under a brass sun.

It was near three o'clock in the afternoon when the tedium was broken by the cry of "Land" in four tongues and the crowding of passengers to the starboard side of the cruiser. There, a few points off the *Karlsruhe*'s course, and far down on the horizon, a blue splinter of rock speared up through the water like the betraying finger of a giant hand laid to grip us. Almost at the moment the distant spire appeared busy little bos'n's began herding the *Castle Drummoch*'s wards down to the quarter-deck as on the occasion of our reception by the commander the day before.

"Another bloomin' sermon by 'Is Whiskers," Ford muttered as we passed together down the aisle of the shining gun breeches. I paid no heed to him, for I saw Winifred step out of a frame of steel in the side of the superstructure with Von Helwich at her elbow, and hot jealousy danced a riot in my brain. All the ragtag crew of us lined up three deep before the turret on the quarter-deck, and Commander von Santa Claus took his place before us. He was smiling and kindly as before.

"Ladies and gentlemen of the *Castle Drummoch*'s passengers, and officers," he began, "it will not be a daily custom for me to address you. As difficult as it is for me to do so as for you to listen. This is the last time, I promise from my heart."

He bowed stiffly toward Winifred

Bowles, gallantly making her his champion and defender.

"It is my regret that we will soon part. It is my deep regret that I cannot place you all in the neutral port of Charlotte Amalie as I have promised. But—last night—you comprehend that further progress to the north would be dangerous both for you, my hostages of war, and for his majesty's cruiser *Karlsruhe*. Indeed, very great danger threatens even now—so great I do not dare expose you to it further. I have reason to believe I may engage the enemy at any hour."

We, dumb cattle, stirred restlessly, feeling portent in the commander's words. The Spanish and Portuguese-speaking ones among us listened with knotted brows to catch the meaning of his speech.

"We are approaching the island of Trinidad," the commander continued; "not the English Trinidad, but another and smaller island of that name off the Brazilian coast. It is said to be a very nice island, though unfortunately nobody lives on it. On this island I will, therefore, land you this afternoon with food supplies for a month and every comfort in my power. And you have my promise that at once I shall send by my wireless a message to the Brazilian government telling of your presence on Trinidad and asking that a ship of government be sent at once to your relief.

"Again I ask pardon for this act, which is for your safety alone."

The commander finished with a low bow and lifting of his cap. I think we who understood were stunned absolutely; the South Americans were buzzing among themselves, piecing out limping translations. Interruption came suddenly when Captain Hanover stepped out from his group of officers, his face almost mahogany color with angry blood, and his eyes sparkling.

"You mean you're going to maroon

helpless passengers on a desert island?" he blurted out. "I warn you, sir, that's little short of piracy."

Santa Claus favored the angry British captain with a benign smile.

"You call it that, Captain Hanover?" he asked, with urbanity. "What would you say if I engaged with three British cruisers and all these helpless innocents on my ship? Murder, hey?"

"You could easily send a wireless to the British squadron and tell them you've got noncombatants aboard—ask the vice admiral for a truce and a transfer of passengers to one of his ships," Captain Hanover snarled. "He'd give you fair chance to get away again before he sank you."

"Ah, and so you speak for the honor of the British navy, Captain Hanover?" The *Karlsruhe*'s commander was purring like a happy Thomas pussy now. "Unfortunate that I have not the faith in your British vice admiral you have. Please prepare your crew to assist in the landing. The surf is said to be bad on Trinidad."

The commander turned, and began giving orders to his subordinates without further ado. Captain Hanover strode down toward the gun deck in a black rage, followed by his officers and engineers. As for the rest of us, there was nothing to do but gaze ahead at the rapidly sharpening outlines of the slender finger of rock ten miles or so ahead. Two hundred years of history and custom were rolled back for us, and we were about to be marooned on an island in the Spanish Main; the only apparatus of pirate romance missing being the plank overside to be walked.

"When I see Flossie and Marie in New York," said a voice at my elbow, "that little naval battle will only be the first chirp to my chanticleer tale. I really believe I'll hire Carnegie Hall and—and—lecture!"

Winifred Bowles was skipping off to

her beckoning dad before I could answer.

"Come and see me some time when we are settled down," she called back. "Our address will be No. 23 Center Island West. Ring once and take the elevator to the top of the cocoa tree."

Two hours later began the debarkation.

The *Karlsruhe* had swung around the north end of the island, a fearsome spike of rock rising straight out of the sea fully fifteen hundred feet, and coasted down the west side perhaps five miles. As it developed, Trinidad Island presented all the sweet prospect of Lost Souls' Land—mountains sheering straight up from the waves to lose themselves in a nebulous cloud cap three thousand feet aloft, flanks bald and bleak, surf ripping and tearing at the cliffs' feet. In a word, the island looked like a great cathedral after a bombardment, with tower tops splintered and ribbed walls blasted by heaven's shrapnel—a ruin for the ghosts of ancient dead to play in.

The cruiser crept cautiously down the wall of jagged cliffs to the southern end of the island, where, as we rounded a point, the hills fell away to flats and a narrow crescent beach of white sand bounded the shore side of a shallow bay. There, back of the beach line, we saw the first green on the dreadful place—low trees and shrubs which hung like the hem of a mantle from the flanks of the mountains beyond. The *Karlsruhe*'s commander put his boat in as near the beach as he dared, groping with the lead until he dropped anchor about a half mile away from the surf line. By this time casks and bales of stores, mattresses, tents, blankets, and what not, the most of it prize stuff taken from the *Castle Drummoch*, had been swung out of the hold, and lay in readiness for dropping overside into the boats. The cruiser's barges, unearthed from somewhere below, where

they had been stored in stripping the ship for action, were lowered on the davits, and a pioneer barge, with Von Helwich in the stern sheets, put out to spy a way through the white fence of surf.

Aboard the *Karlsruhe* every emotion in the human card index was in play. Some of the more excitable South Americans were praying and passing farewell kisses all around. The German sailors were working themselves into a fine lather of excitement, bawling excitedly over the stowing of duffle in the boats. The stewards and coal passers of the *Castle Drummoch* sat on their ditty-boxes, stolidly awaiting the next throw of the dice. Hetherington, the chess fiend, balanced his board airily on one hand, while with the other he tried to throw the hasps on his over-packed Gladstone bag. As for myself, I experienced all the sensations of the prisoner who looks out of the train windows and sees the walls of Sing Sing rise above the river.

For two hours the boats carrying supplies passed back and forth between the *Karlsruhe*'s side and the beach. Each came back with water swashing around in its bottom and the men's blouses clinging to their backs with wet. The surf was running high, and we were all in for a ducking; no doubt of that. The crew of the *Castle Drummoch* went next, five boatloads of them and our steerage passengers. Finally, just as the sun dropped, a red-hot stove lid, into the sea, the first installment of the saloon passengers went down the gangway and bouncing over the long, lazy waves to the white fluff of the surf. Through glasses we watched them skitter through the combers and take the long drive up the slope of sand.

I elected to go in the second boat because the charming daughter of Pops Bowles, as well as Pops necessarily, were to be passengers. Even the fact that Von Helwich gallantly hurried

down the gangway to hand Winifred into the rocking boat and sat beside her with a tarpaulin ready to throw over her shoulders did not deter me; I, entering on a term of island imprisonment with the girl, could afford to be magnanimous. The father of the fair Winifred fussed all the way from the gangway to the surf lines because the ivory-handled umbrella he had brought to cover himself from the spray had developed a balky rib and would not open. He did not want to get his hat wet—his imperial Stock Exchange tile.

In we went, some fifteen of us, with our bags between our feet, to the measured sweep of oars. Now the surf line loomed up ahead like a boiling snowdrift—such a drift as shoots away from the blade of a giant snowplow. Now a wave came *slap!* over the backs

of six of us forward, the bow of the barge bucked and climbed and—

I was on my hands and knees in six inches of racing water, coughing and spluttering. All around me, like seals come out to sun, were wallowing shapes fighting the undertow. Pungent remarks in German, Portuguese, and English—yes, English, from Winifred's papa. *Splash—wallow—splash*, and somehow we were all on dry sand, our baggage salved; the boat, bottom side up, lay like a stranded porpoise ten feet away from the water line.

"Pops, put your hat on this minute!" I heard a voice choking with laughter. "You know you'll catch cold if you get your bald spot damp and with no hat on."

"Hat! Hat! Why—why—the darned thing's gone!"

So came we to Trinidad Island.

TO BE CONCLUDED IN NEXT ISSUE.



MILLIONS IN WASTE STRAW

OLIVER L. GARDNER, of New York, a young old man of eighty-two or eighty-three years, is the inventor of a process to manufacture a material which is called artificial lumber. It is made from straw or other waste vegetable fiber. It is a substitute for lath and plaster, steel and wood, for interior finish of buildings, and at a saving of fifty per cent. As a matter of fact, the material has no end of possibilities, for it can be used for auto bodies, steamships, gunboats, or railroad cars, as it is free from warping, shrinking, or cracking, and will not splinter. It will last a lifetime and longer, and improve with age.

But the most interesting part, to us, is the claim made for this new material that it will reduce the cost of living by more than one-half. Foodstuffs, bread, meat, cheese, and milk will all come down in price. A large loaf of bread will cost two cents. All this will come about by buying the waste straw from the farmers. This straw is usually burned up, the farmer getting good pay for the wheat kernel, and if the farmers alone in the United States had been able to sell the wheat-straw waste of 1910 it would have yielded an increased profit of \$588,000,000.

This sounds like a dream, but as Mr. Gardner has devoted some twenty years of his life to this invention, one has to give it serious consideration.

The Heart of a Sand Dweller

By Charles Kroth Moser

Author of "The Game and the Lady," Etc.

A true-to-life story of a young college man and a sand dweller—both in love with the same girl, and both strangely flung together on a terrible hundred-mile hike across the desert to the Amargosa

IN all the time I knew Buck Dalton—and I was his "bunkie" for as long as ten years—I never saw him so much as peek at a woman until the time we put up at Olancha, when we were prospecting the Coso Valley country for the Madera Gold Mining people. He wasn't what anybody'd call a ladies' man; the fact is he'd go out of his way to steer clear of them. He didn't seem to hate women any, and he wasn't shy; simply seemed not to care anything about them. It's true that the most of that ten years we put in knocking about the desert country, smashing open rocks and ripping up the earth generally for the "yellow stuff." And it's true that in the desert country there aren't any very alluring specimens of the gentler sex to be met up with, being mostly greaser girls with oily skins and Cohuilla squaws that are for the most part uglier than horned toads. Perhaps Buck might have been different if he'd had more chance of meeting some of the women in God's country.

But when we struck Olancha and went to board at old Pico Ternanez's little Spanish hotel, Buck just gave one look at Reseda, old Pico's daughter, and tumbled over in his tracks. It was all off. He was taken down with the worst case of love fever I ever saw.

"Joe," he said to me about the third day, "I'd rather marry that little girl

than go to heaven. I ain't never bothered with love an' wimmenfolks none, an' I ain't never thought I would. But that little girl! Why—why, God bless her!—I love her from them black eyes of hers clear down to her little feet. She's th'—” Doc Burns and I laughed. “Oh, you fellows get out!”

It was a mighty long speech for Buck Dalton to make, for he was a man who never talked much about anything; but Doc and I knew he meant it. He started in courting her just like he did everything else—serious, straight at it, and working hard enough to strain himself. He wasn't so handsome to look at, being close on to forty and his skin tanned as brown as a siwash's by the desert sun, but Reseda seemed to take to his love-making right cute. It sure looked to me as though she was going to be Mrs. Dalton some day. Doc Burns, who was watching them—and Doc had spent half his life making up to women in all parts of the world—wasn't so sure.

“Buck's too derned in earnest to play the game right,” he says to me. “I tell you, Kelly, he'd oughta took some lessons 'fore he started in playin' for th' grand prize of matrimony. There's many a better man could come along an' take it away from him.”

But Doc and I thought too much of Buck to “cut in” on our own hook; besides, he shaped up like a prize

fighter and could knock off a lizard's head at forty yards with his gun. So he just about had things his own way.

Olancha lies off the tail end of Owens Lake in the most God-forsaken part of Inyo County, and its population ordinarily consists of about forty Mex, as many Indians, a hundred dogs, and perhaps a dozen souls all told. But it's the nearest town to the Coso country, and, as I said before, we were prospecting Coso for the godless corporation of Madera which had grub-staked us. Most of our time we spent right out on the desert, but once every so often we'd put into Olancha for grub and mail and tobacco and refreshments—and for Buck's love-making. All three of us were just plain everyday prospectors what had learned all we knew about mining from the rocks and the dry watercourses themselves. And we tore up that Coso country right considerable without finding anything like pay dirt until at last the Madera big bugs got to kicking.

One night when we hit Olancha, tired and dirty and a lot soured on the job, we found a letter from the "Old Man" of the corporation waiting for us. It said that we were to wait for the next stage, which would bring down to us a young college chap what knew the mining business down to X, Y, Z, and so forth. Then we were to hike out across the desert for about a hundred miles and try our luck in the Amargosa Creek country. The young college fellow, Laurister was his name, was to be in charge, but we were to stock up with burros and grub and a fresh kit against the time he came.

Buck swore a lot under his breath when we'd read the letter—but it wasn't a little bit to what he swore when Laurister climbed out of the stage from Independence the next evening. We hadn't had time to get things together, but that wasn't what made Buck mad. As Laurister climbed out of the stage

he saw Reseda standing in the patio. She smiled at him, and the young chap fairly doubled himself up when he took his sombrero off and bowed.

"Curtains fer Buck," Doc said to me. "She'll throw the hooks into him sure."

She did. In two days "Kid" Laurister, who was a laughing, yellow-haired young devil, had shoved Buck clean off the perch. The funny thing was he went in serious, too—fell dead in love with this pretty daughter of a rascally old Mexican innkeeper. He did. Only he took it differently from Buck; sort of played and pranked and laughed with her until she was ready to fall in his arms. After all, neither of the men was to blame, anyway, for Reseda was good and sweet and charming enough for anybody.

Dalton saw the way things were going right at once, and it nearly drove him crazy. As I've said, he never did talk much, but now he wouldn't hardly open his mouth except to swear.

Buck worked like the devil to get out of Olancha in a hurry before Laurister got to the girl *too* much his own way, but the Kid being boss kept delaying things while he made love until we were more than two weeks getting away. And then the morning we left, Kid Laurister and Reseda took a long walk off by themselves, and we couldn't find out where they'd gone. Buck was wild when they showed up at last smiling and looking very happylike at each other. I think he'd have shot the Kid right then and there if his sweetheart hadn't been standing by.

That hundred-mile hike across the desert to the Amargosa was awful—nothing but sagebush and sand, cactus and hot, gray rocks, toads, lizards, and rattlesnakes all the way. We had to veer off southward a good deal to avoid Death Valley, which even a buzzard wouldn't fly across without carrying his rations. As it was, we cut into the toe of it and nearly died in a sandstorm.

And the heat and the silence and the alkali dust were terrible. From the time we left Olancha, Buck walked in front with the lead burro and wouldn't say a word. But his black, bushy brows were screwed down till you couldn't see his eyes, and his big feet went *crunch! crunch!* into the sand with such a pitiless, *hard* tread that they got on my nerves. Doc Burns said it got to him, too. Of course we both knew what it was, for before we'd started Buck had gone into the casa to have a parting word with Reseda. He didn't say anything when he came out, but we could tell by his face that he'd got the sack. He was hit bad.

But the Kid didn't seem to notice it at all, and no matter how hot the sun burned down or the alkali whipped peels of skin off his face he kept cracking jokes, as playful as a kitten. He trailed along in the rear most of the time, and Doc and I kept busy answering his joshes so that he wouldn't run up against Buck's ugly mood. But of course that couldn't last long. About camping time the first day out, Laurister savvied that Buck was sore.

"What's eating you, old man?" he asked, kind of chipperlike. "You're as solemncholy as an undertaker."

Dalton turned on him as if he'd like to chew *him*, and he gritted his teeth together nasty.

"Look here, Mr. Laurister," he said, coldlike, holding himself in. "You're th' boss here, an' in all th' minin' operations of this here expedition into th' devil's kingdom I'm willin' to listen to you an' obey you. But as fer social intercourse between us—well, I don't want any of your lip, savvy! Just cut me out of yer talk—an' save yerself a lot of trouble. That *goes*, from this on!"

Well, Laurister got red in the face, and then his lips went white. We expected him to rear up and make trouble right there, but he didn't. Doc and I

thought he was scared then; afterward, when we come to know him better, we knew different. He just walked off and threw his guns down by his roll of blankets, and after we'd eaten our coffee and bacon and beans he lay down and went to sleep. But all the joking went out of him that night.

That expedition got started bad, and it seemed bound to keep on that way. Before we reached the big wash forty miles short of the Amargosa country our six burros had dwindled to four, and their bones were nearly as clean picked of meat as the ones we'd left lying beside the trail. Two or three times we'd reach water holes only to find a soggy, wet scum lying at the bottom of them and the mesquite bushes shriveled and burned all around them instead of being green, as they ought. Then Laurister and Dalton had more than a few clashes, for the Kid wasn't afraid to boss Buck when it was necessary, and Buck's temper was more touchy and mean than ever. He'd always been a good sort of a chap before, quiet and peaceablelike, but now he acted like a white-eyed devil of a horse what lams out with his forefeet every time anybody comes to feed him. Twice when the Kid was ordering him Buck's hand dropped on the butt of his gun. But he didn't pull it; he hadn't got that far—yet.

"It don't look good to me," Doc said the last time when he saw Buck's eyes blazing murder. "Somebody's goin' to get hurt this time out sure. One of them chaps ain't ever goin' to get back to that gal." That night Doc sneaked Dalton's guns and soaked the cartridges in a water hole till near morning. When Buck tried to blow a rattlesnake's head off the next day the wet powder wouldn't do a thing.

"Some blankety blank's been monkeyin' with my weapons," he yelled, looking savagely at us.

Doc didn't wink an eye whisker, and

Laurister acted as though he didn't care a darn; so Buck said no more. But I reckon he took the hint, for he didn't make any fool gun play after that.

We camped along Amargosa Creek for a couple of weeks, tapping every likely-looking rock in the country and gradually working farther and higher and higher into the hills. We struck some good ore, but none rich enough to pay for all the work and trouble of getting it to market, and then we left the creek—or, rather, it left us, for it just suddenly sank into the sand and nobody could tell where it would come out next, probably in China. Anyhow, we went on higher up into the hills, prospecting for gold and looking for water. We thought we had plenty of grub.

Those Amargosa hills are fearfully rough and wild; I don't think any white man had ever been where we went. Sometimes the boulders were so big and bare and steep and the precipices so deep and treacherous that even the sure-footed burros lost heart and quit. But Laurister was a daring miner for all his greenness, seeing that all he knew he'd got out of books, and Buck was for going on and on—to perdition, if need be—until we struck pay dirt. So on we went.

Then one day as we were crawling along a ledge of slippery black basalt, looking for a quartz vein, Doc Burns' foot turned under him, and he went down. The big gun at his belt got caught somehow, and it went off. It tore a hole through him.

"Good-by, fellers," he sings out. "Good luck to you!" And that was all. We picked him out a grave on the hillside and made a little cairn of boulders over it. I saw tears in Laurister's eyes while we were doing it, and even old Buck sort of mellowed up. For a couple of days afterward he didn't look so ugly nor act so savage. He'd always liked Doc a whole lot.

But after Doc was gone things soon

got worse. He'd always been able to kind of "keep the peace" between them, but now Buck had nobody but himself to help check the murder lust that sometimes took him. I'm no good as a peacemaker.

One night, after we'd finished grub and were lying in our blankets, smoking and watching the stars come out, I saw the Kid take something out of his bosom, very shylike, and look at it in his hands. He turned his head away then, but I saw him put it to his lips and kiss it. When he was putting it back in his breast I caught a gleam of starlight on it, and the idea came over me all at once that it was that little silver crucifix I'd seen Reseda Ternanez wear around her neck. I shot a glance at Buck; he was just staring out into the growing dusk, but there was something queer in the set of his face that made me turn cold all over.

Laurister got up out of his blankets and started walking away; he wanted to be alone with his thoughts, I guess. But he'd hardly gotten a dozen feet from the fire before Buck suddenly grabbed his gun out of his belt and threw its muzzle square on the Kid's back. He could have hit a button with his eyes shut.

"Buck! For God's sake!" I yelled. It was all I could do, being so far away from him and it all being so quick. But the Kid—he didn't so much as turn his head, though he must have heard me yell and have known why. Buck dropped the gun when I hollered, and then he let his head fall over on his breast, and I could see by the firelight that his hands were hanging between his knees and shaking. I didn't say anything, but after a minute he did:

"Did you see him? My God, *did* you see *it*? It was her little crucifix, an' I've went down on my knees an' prayed her *fer* it! I know—sneakin' coward—but— Yes, I wish he'd die! I wish he'd fall off th' rocks or shoot

hissell like poor Doc done! I'd like to see him starve—right out here in this hell's land! Starve till his black tongue 'u'd swell outen his mouth an' th' red ants crawl through his eyeholes! Yes, by God, I do! An' if he don't die—I'll kill him!" He roared it so loud, that last, I knew Laurister could hear him if he wasn't more'n a mile away—and he wasn't.

"No, you won't, Buck," I said, soothinglylike, and brave because I had my hand on my gun and his weapon was lying between his feet. "No. Not with me here you won't."

He gave me a scornful look, and laughed.

"You!" he said. "You! What's to prevent me from killing you, too? Don't worry. If I've got to kill anybody I'll make crow's bait of you both. He's taken her from me; she won't never have me."

He picked up his gun and put it in his belt. I watched him closely. Then he rolled into his blankets, but he never slept any that night. Laurister came back to camp soon and turned in, too. Nothing was said about it; it wasn't a subject to talk about. But the next morning, when we broke camp, I noticed Buck didn't wear his shooting irons; he'd rolled them up in his pack, not daring to trust himself, I reckon. And Laurister, who was always in the lead after we struck the Amargosa, didn't even so much as give us a backward glance.

And then we struck pay dirt. Down in a crevasse in a cañon, where Buck and I never would have thought of looking for gold, the Kid struck a vein. We went to work, picking and drilling and panning so hard that I thought Buck would be too tired to nurse his grudge. He wasn't. If he needed anything to fix it deeper on him the sight of that little silver crucifix that night was enough. But the Kid took care never to show it up again. Sometimes when

he'd lope off in the twilight by himself, though, Buck's eyes would blaze, and I'd see the rims get red; we both knew the boy was kissing his cross and whispering soft things out there in the night, alone. And Buck looked so dangerous that I slept with my guns in both hands and tried to keep one eye open. You see, I remembered that night, too. A funny thing about Laurister was that when he saw Buck wasn't wearing his weapons he rolled his own guns up in his pack, too; I had to do the shooting for the whole gang.

We worked on for a while, breaking out the rottenest rock, crushing it, and sacking it to carry away—though of course we located the mine properly and meant to come back some day and develop it. But right in the midst of our work one day there came one of those sudden, terrific torrents of rain that occasionally deluge the Amargosas, and before we could get it to shelter half our grub was soaked, ruined. That was sure trouble in a big bunch!

"We gotta hike out fer home, pronto," Buck said, "or stay here an' rot in th' sun fer th' next fifty thousand years." And, as he knew what he was talking about, Laurister gave orders to move. We piled the ore and the rest of the grub on our four burros and hit the trail. But if it had been rough and steep and treacherous coming up, it was Satan's own passage going down again. And there was no other way.

We were crawling along the comb of a craggy, broken cliff about noon the next day when the burro ahead of me lost his footing and shot over the edge so quick he didn't have time to hee-haw. About a minute later we heard him hit bottom. Most of our grub hit with him.

"Thunder, boys, we don't dare lose it all," Laurister said, when we'd gotten over the shock. "What infernal fools we were anyhow not to pack part of it on each mule. One of us has got

to find a trail down there some way and see if we can't get a little of it, anyhow. Every bite's worth its weight in gold and more."

It looked like a fool's errand, and it was, but I went. I took the back trail, clambered down the sides of rocks, and in some places slid down, feet first. I worked this way for near two hours, and had come pretty close to the bottom—when a loose boulder rolled under me, and down I went.

I came to, lying on my right arm, and a million needles with poisoned points were sticking into that arm. It was broken in two places, and it was only luck that my neck wasn't broken. And the pain—but I'm not saying anything about that.

It was sundown when I got back to Buck and the Kid; they'd been waiting for me, but I'd lost my guns and couldn't shoot, as we'd agreed. I told them I hadn't found anything where the burro struck except a battered mule hide with some pieces of bone sticking through—which was true—and the Kid splinted and bandaged up my arm pretty well. I think if I hadn't turned up when I did one of them would have been a dead man soon, though; they were both wearing their guns and looking murder at each other when I got up. But my broken arm and the loss of our grub took their minds off of fight for that time.

Before we got out of the hills we lost another burro and part of the ore.

The second day after we left Amargosa Creek and while we were skirting the toe of Death Valley we ran into the worst sandstorm I've ever seen. The sand shot up from the dead-gray waste of the desert in great black volumes, swirling, screaming in the mad wind, and falling like hot cinders out of hell over the whole face of the earth. The air was so thick with it we couldn't see our hands, and the blast of bitter alkali cut our skin and clothes to rib-

bons. When it was over we didn't know each other—and we didn't know the country around us. Even the two burros were lost; and hung their disconsolate heads, as if to say they knew they were not long for this world.

We made a sorry camp that night, and in the morning we buried the sacks of gold ore in the sand and built up a pyramid of stones over them to mark the spot. The next day we butchered one of the burros.

The other animal now carried what coffee we had left, the few beans, and some canned vegetables; also the remains of his late comrade—which was less and less after each camp. I carried the canteen of whisky we kept saving—for sudden death and things—and Buck and the Kid split our kit and the water kegs between them. Buck took to wearing his guns again, too—and the way he would look at the Kid sometimes made my stomach turn sick. I was too helpless to do anything.

"If that fellow'd die once—there wouldn't be his mouth to feed," Buck said one time, licking his lips like a hungry wolf. And Laurister was wise to what he was thinking, for he wore his guns, too; only he always walked straight on ahead and kept his mouth shut. Even Buck owned up that he was game.

We kept on going, going—trying to reach that low, blue-gray sky line that was always just as far away. We'd got to hurry, we knew that; an hour's long enough time to die in. We didn't dare waste one. We hadn't lacked much for water yet—but food! Food—and God's land of plenty ten thousand miles away, it seemed.

We got to where we were chewing yucca roots and cactus stems when it happened. There was only the one mule left now—and the whisky and water and a few coffee grains. I knew Buck was going to kill Laurister before the next sun broke. And I couldn't

prevent it! I hadn't any gun—and my right arm smashed in two places!

Then as we were filing down the side of a blistered, wind-torn little arroyo we came to a kind of close thicket of mesquite, and Laurister, in the lead, shoved his foot into it kind of carelessly. There was just the sharp, shrill "Zhu-r-r-r-r-rh!" of a rattlesnake, and before the Kid could spring back a dull, yellow, lightning streak hit him below the knee.

He didn't even groan, but he put his foot on the snake and ground its big, flat head under his heel before Buck got a chance to shoot it. Then he ripped out his knife and began to cut away his pants leg. I took a glance at Buck's face, and it's God's truth he looked happy. If I'd had two good hands I'd 'a' choked him.

"That's a bad bite," he said, with a nasty smile. "Want any help?"

"No, thanks," the Kid answered, with a curious little stiffening of his throat. "You couldn't do anything if you'd a mind to—and I reckon you ain't much minded to. I'm a goner—you'd ought to be happy."

"I am," says Buck, picking up the burro's tether and walking on. I had unslung the whisky canteen, and the Kid was pouring it into his throat as fast as he could swallow.

"Darn nonsense, though," he said. "I can't go on; fool to prolong the agony in this place." He couldn't hold any more, so he handed the canteen back to me and flopped down on the ground, his leg swelling already so that he couldn't stand.

There wasn't any talk of our staying with him—that meant our death, too, and would have been foolish—and he couldn't go on. He just had to lie there and die and he knew it. But he had his guns in case he got tired—waiting. The whisky was working slower than the poison, and he began to gasp, jerkylke. Something got into

my eyes so I couldn't see him any more, and I couldn't talk, either; I dropped the canteen, sort of waved my hand at him, and was following after Buck when he called me back.

"Say, Joe." I think he was trying to smile. "If you—if you should—should see *her*—you know—just say—say 'Adios' for me, will you? So long, Joe."

I came up to Buck, who was sitting down behind a sand butte, the poor old burro nosing at his knees. Buck's face didn't look happy now, but it was set *hard*. He didn't talk for about a minute; then he said:

"I s'pose he might as well 'a' had what's left of th' coffee. Where's th' canteen? Durn you, what'd you leave it for? We've got need o' that fer ourselves."

"You damn' mean snake!" I shouted at him. I wasn't sure he wouldn't put his knife into me.

"Huh! 'Twa'n't me!" Then he got up, gave the burro a kick for nothing, and started away. "I'm goin' back after that canteen," he said. My arm ached so I couldn't swear like I wanted to.

I'd left the Kid trying to smile and taking it game, but when Buck got back to him Laurister was lying with his face against the sand; he was shaking and crying.

"What you sniveling for?" Buck said, picking up the canteen. "If th' rattler hadn't got you I would." The Kid didn't try to raise up.

"It isn't me, you black hound! It isn't me! I wouldn't care. It's my—it's my wife!"

"What!" yelled Buck, dropping the whisky. "Your what?"

"My wife—Reseda. The priest married us the morning we left."

I don't know what Buck did then; I don't know how he figured it out.

But I waited behind the sand butte with the burro until the mesquite bushes were sending long, purple shadows over the gray desert and the sun hung low down near the sky line. I thought Buck must have put the Kid out of his misery and was a-burying him. So I stepped round the butte to look. There was Buck coming, his big feet crunching deep into the sand; he was carrying the Kid on his back.

For three days we staggered round through that infernal wilderness. The first day the burro carried the Kid, and Buck carried the kit and water. Buck cut away the flesh around the Kid's wound and sucked the poison out; he burned it out with hot pebbles and rubbed the swelling down with hot water. The second day we killed the burro and ate what we could. I carried the rest and the water and the kit. Buck toted Laurister on his back. And the sun beat down on us those two days like the red-hot wrath of God. Buck never made a holler—and he wouldn't speak a word to the Kid. All

he ever said to me was—the night of the second day, when his feet were all covered with blood boils and so stiff he couldn't stand still on them:

"She's his wife."

Near sundown of the third day we spotted a little wreath of smoke curling up in the sky away off to the west, and just about dark we hit the camp of a surveying party what had a doctor with them. They took us in, and young Sawbones took a peek at the Kid.

"Sure, he'll pull through," Sawbones said.

Laurister wanted to shake hands with Buck, but Buck wouldn't do it. He wouldn't talk to him. But he took me by the arm and led me out back of the tent.

"Joe," he said, very solemnlike and shaking all over. "I jes' want you to tell her—that I brung him back—for her! It wa'n't—I couldn't—he was her—oh, hell!"

He turned and struck right out across the sand hills toward Ballarat, and neither one of us has ever set eyes on Buck from that day to this.



TAKING ON ALL COMERS

FOR picturesque, undersized, wabbly, crisscross fighting, the Mexicans are the star performers. And the starriest of the stars are the men led by that true and trusty warrior, General Zapata.

The first day his brave but rather hungry followers occupied Mexico City, they took on a new foe. In the matter of meeting all comers, the Zapatistas are the zippiest lot in those parts.

They were marching down both sides of the street when a fire alarm was turned in and a fire engine came rushing toward them, the horses being urged to top speed by the yelling driver. Then and there the Zapatistas cut another notch in their zippy guns.

The thing was a new engine of war which had been sprung on them by the treacherous enemy! *Caramba!* But not a coward was in their midst. Determined to do or die, they opened fire on the death-dealing apparatus, and killed the driver and one horse.

The Finals

By W. B. M. Ferguson

Author of "The Prodigal," "The Silver Cross," Etc.

The game finish of a lightweight champion who for twenty-three rounds fought the fight of his life. What happened in that twenty-third round is still talked of by the boxing fans

THE nex' an' las' bout will be between two members of this club—"Young Johnny Boins"—waving a flabby, comprehensive hand to the round-headed youth—"Young Johnny Boins an' th' undisputed lightweight champeen—Blink McGloin. Blink McGloin!" Another comprehensive sweep of the bejeweled, pulpy hand.

The stereotyped announcement—a stentorian, droning, metallic monotone—was received with the usual indifference and the lighting of fresh tobacco. At last the finals were on.

The articles called for straight rules, the men to protect themselves at all times, and, coming out of the first clinch, McGloin connected with a wallop that, without hesitation, upended him on the canvas. It was a hard, clean punch that, delivered a fraction lower, would have given him the gate then and there. This he realized, and his numbed brain made a note of the fact that Burns packed a wallop not to be despised. But, of course, it was a lucky blow, one he would guarantee could not be duplicated. He, McGloin, had been careless, overconfident.

His head had cleared somewhat, but he remained on his back watching "Charley" Martin's forked fingers in their measured downward sweep beat off five seconds. Then he rolled over on a supporting arm, and from squinting, sardonic eyes took a slant at Burns.

Contrary to his expectations, the latter was quite cool and composed; tense, expectant, crouched, but by no means excited. Martin wasn't called upon to even motion him away. And for the first time, a vague, fugitive doubt gnawed at the vitals of Blink McGloin. For a second-rater, Burns had undoubtedly two championship assets—a kick and absolute self-control. And the lightweight champion decided it would be just as well to be careful how he rushed to the necessary clinch, for here evidently was a man who wouldn't indulge in an avalanche of wild blows born of inexperience, a nervous temperament, or the desire to put over the insomnia cure before the bell gave the patient a minute in which to recuperate.

Another youngster would have gone insane at seeing the champion taking the count, and McGloin, the crafty, in many a bygone battle, had faked a knock-down only to nonchalantly arise and assassinate his excited and over-eager victim. But Burns appeared as if he might be apt to take his time and measure his man. Perhaps he was phlegmatic, sluggish of thought and action. Such a temperament has its good points, but it doesn't make champions unless one has abnormal stamina.

Meanwhile, the "members" were displaying considerable emotion, each according to the composition of his soul stuff and whether he had given or taken odds. For McGloin had entered the

ring at six to one. Though he had faked many a knock-down, there was no doubt as to the genuineness of the present one. It was plainly seen he was in distress—the first time he had known such a condition since graduating from the semifinal class.

Availing himself of the full quota of rest, he waited until the count of nine, then arose and rushed; head drawn in like a frightened turtle's, elbows in the pit of his crumpled stomach; gloves framing his face. He refused to be feinted out, and clinched desperately, pressing experienced thumbs against Burns' biceps. He was still groggy, but his brain was clearing fast. He stalled out the rest of the round, and, as the bell clanged, rocked Burns' round head with an uppercut that brought blood. He went to his corner with the vague, fugitive doubt dispelled. He would feel Burns out, play with him to give the members a run for their money, and then send him over the knock-out route.

But when he was given the bell at the end of the next round, McGloin had a rather serious look in his eyes and a split lip. By the end of the third, the vague doubt had returned. At the end of the fourth, it had become a certainty. Burns *wasn't* a second rater. He had the class. McGloin had found him fully as strong and clever as himself. All he lacked was consummate ring generalship.

"That's a pretty tough mutt," said Ony McGuigan, McGloin's principal second, as he rubbed the other's legs. "Get to him, Blink, th' nex' roun'. Mix it up."

Blink mixed it; mixed it hard, but Burns was there all the way, and the bell came as a relief to McGloin, though he would not acknowledge it even to himself.

"I'll kill him! I ain't half tryin'," he reiterated savagely through puffed lips. "He's a big mutt."

"Mix it, but keep away from that right flipper," warned McGuigan. "Don't youse take no chantses. That mutt's th' class, Blink."

"Aw, bullets!" said Mr. McGloin. "Class nothin'! Watch me when I get on th' high gear."

They watched him. Burns took a terrible lacing and a count of five, but when the seismic disturbance was over he emerged from his cyclone cellar and industriously raised a lump the size of a walnut over the McGloin right eye. He was strong as a young bull elephant while McGloin was blowing. It was the end of the fifth, with twenty to go.

McGloin lay back on his stool, relaxed arms draped over the ropes, while his army of handlers worked over him. With gratitude he sucked in the forced draft of the McGuigan towel while he looked out through the ropes; through the blue haze of shifting tobacco smoke; past the ringside boxes. The old transformed skating rink was packed to capacity; the bleachers great gobs of humanity; members usurped every available inch of the sawdust floor. The blinding white glare of the many arc lights reached the uttermost corner of the vast building, and he recognized countless friends and acquaintances, but his mind was busy elsewhere, centered on an incident which had occurred that morning. He wondered why he thought of it instead of planning his fight. Coming up from his Allenhurst training quarters, he had sat behind two men who, evidently ignorant of his calling and identity, discussed pugilism in all its phases. They had employed words and phrases whose exact meaning eluded him, yet from the context he was enabled to assimilate the essence. And this is the gist of what one of the men had said:

"The great mistake of all these fighters is, they don't know when to retire. They never realize until too late when their bolt is shot. Naturally a man has

just so many fights in him, but no doctor could make a pugilist apply that truth to himself. It has to be hammered into him. With them it's 'Just one more; and then I'll quit.' But that 'one more' ends in their losing the title. Of course it's only a question of time until every champion beats himself, for after a certain age every passing hour hurts him in ratio to the help it gives the inevitable adversary who, with youth on his side, will some day rise up to conquer him. They are lured to the downfall by vanity, necessity, or the rapacity of their managers."

McGloin owned a retentive memory, and somehow the words had imbedded themselves in it; and as he looked out over the sea of ringside faces the phrases took on new force and meaning, although he had always acknowledged their obvious truth.

How true were they when applied to these scarred brothers of the squared circle who had not known when to retire! There was "Young" this and "Kid" that; "Battling" and "Fighting" Tom, Dick, and Harry representing every division—bantams, feathers, up through welters to heavies. Of them all—not only those present, but every player of the "game"—how many had known when to quit? Not one!

Yes, there was one: that seltzer-bottle-nosed, middle-aged man in the "moonlight" clothes—McCafferty, former lightweight champion of the world, and at present manager and part owner of the club. He had quit when his reputation was worth something, and he had capitalized it. He had owned the wisdom and fortitude—unlike poor old Jeff—to refuse to be decoyed into the ring and slaughtered for the sake of the shekels. Yes, he had been the one wise man among fools, and long, long ago McGloin had determined to profit by his example. He also would know when to quit, and his wouldn't be any Patti farewell, either. He would

quit the game for good in a year or so. It would be good news to Sadie, for at heart she had never fancied the game.

During the minute's rest between the succeeding rounds, McGloin still thought of his retirement the following year. He had given his reluctant promise to Sadie, for, aside from the pecuniary returns, he liked the game itself for itself. He had been champion five years, and before meeting with Sadie his life had not been any too circumspect, though he had lived cleanly. His earnings had been large—by no means according to press reports—but gambling, multifarious training expenses, and parasites had greatly depleted it.

The advent of Sadie had changed all that, and he had begun to save. As he always "brought home the bacon," he had of late made a practice of betting on himself, and to-night had ten thousand—practically his entire savings—up at six to one on the dead-sure thing. Formerly he had never bet on his chances of winning, but his promise to Sadie meant he had only a year in which to make big money, and he saw no reason why he shouldn't double it.

He would retire with a sizable fortune, and Sadie's father—employed by Messrs. Bernheimer & Schmid—and he were to open a café. McGloin's reputation would be a material asset. The title: "Undefeated lightweight champion of the world" would mean much. Nobody goes to see a has-been or never-was; and a retired, undefeated champion is a rare bird. His father-in-law and he had doped it all out, and the former had his eye riveted on the site of the prospective café, but it would require the McGloin capital to consummate the deal and float the enterprise. Success was assured.

It was not until the end of the twelfth round that McGloin fully realized he had a fight on his hands; not only a fight, but the one of his career, for

Young Johnny Burns was certainly proving a "tough mutt."

"Quit dreamin', kid; quit dreamin'," urged McGuigan. "Are y' meanin' t' let her go th' limit, an' youse wit' ten thousand bucks up an' me stakin' th' rent? W'y, that mutt's earnin' a rep every roun' he stays. Cut loose an' smear him. We ain't runnin' no charity bazaar. W'y, th' house's beginnin' t' think youse can't, or is stallin' for a return match. Yeh don't have to keep a mutt like that on ice."

"I'll show him, all right," spat McGloin, glaring at the round-headed young man in the opposite corner. "But he's better than yeh think, Ony. That's straight. He's th' goods."

"Wot—him?" sneered Ony, with twisted lip. "Wot's th' matter wit' youse, kid? He's got nuttin' but that right wing. I could blow him over wit' me breath. Yeh can lick a dozen like him wit' one hand. Yeh ain't half tryin'. Bump th' floor off'n his conk nex' roun'. See?"

The succeeding minute's rest found McGloin very tired but supremely confident. The "conk" bumping process had proved arduous and for the moment futile, but Burns had developed an unexpected vulnerability; a weak spot through which the knock-out could travel. McGloin, after patient and searching analysis, had discovered that his opponent would "fall" for the right shift, a blow that was the champion's favorite.

He had been diffident about employing it, for seasoned opponents had provided a reliable defense and dangerous counter; but Burns, perhaps owing to inexperience, had displayed gratifying ignorance when felt out. And McGloin determined to use it for all it was worth in the very next round, end the contest at once.

Perhaps, he told himself, he hadn't entirely recuperated from that initial blow which had so nearly cost him his

laurels. Somehow he wasn't quite himself. He couldn't explain nor actually feel it; yet he knew something was wrong, though he wouldn't admit the impairment of stamina or vitality. He had trained faithfully, too, as he always did whether or not he expected a grueling battle; and, though he had underestimated Burns, he could not in justice plead the old excuse of "caught out of condition." In fact, he was in the pink of condition; one couldn't pinch a thumbful of fat on his entire carcass. He was trained to the hour, to the minute.

Nor would he admit the supremacy of Burns. Ony McGuigan was right; there was nothing showy about this tow-headed young man; nothing wonderful but a heartbreaking appetite for punishment: a strength that seemed to increase rather than diminish; stamina inexhaustible. He absorbed punches like a sponge sucking water, and then returned them with disheartening promptitude and interest. His kidneys had been pounded religiously until his back was a smother of red; his features altered, and yet he persisted in coming in for more. And with each rush, despite the McGloin skill, the tow-headed battler unbuttoned a wallop that sooner or later landed with shattering force.

In his heart McGloin knew he would never last the twenty-five rounds. Burns was forcing the pace, with no let-up in sight; profligate of speed and strength, yet in no danger of overdrawing the account. It was he, McGloin, who, despite stalling tactics and all the energy-saving tricks of an old ring general, was finding his strength slowly waning. Something was wrong. He couldn't stand the gaff like the McGloin of old. It must be that initial knock-down. Yet he still had the wallop, and in the next round would get a fair crack at Burns' chin. Then—curtains.

His chance came, as fair a one as ever man asked. He faked a stampede to

the ropes, side-stepped, and worked his shift. For a moment Burns' chin was a shining mark, and even as McGloin lashed out with all his strength and weight he felt intuitively that his knuckles had gone true as a die. The smack of the glove could be heard throughout the building; its sharp staccato rose supreme above the thunderstorm capping the warm September night.

Such a blow of old had been productive of instant and prolonged oblivion, and McGloin mechanically turned away, knowing there would be no call for further punishment.

A confused roar punctuated by Ony McGuigan's locomotive voice electrified him, and he turned in time to meet the bull-like rush of Young Johnny Burns. And Burns was grinning.

"Why didn't yeh hit me?" he asked.

McGloin made no reply, no effort to break the clinch. Head on Burns' shoulder, he stared fixedly at the other's broad back and writhing, turgid muscles. At the bell he walked in the same dazed manner to his corner, his mouth drawn like a taut wire. He felt nauseated. The horrific truth had crashed home. It was the end of the sixteenth round.

"What's th' matter wit' youse?" shrilly demanded McGuigan. "W'y didn't youse hit him when youse had th' chanst?"

"Button up your face, Ony," said McGloin. "Talkin' ain't goin' to win this scrap."

He lay against the ropes, watching, with curious concentration, the water cascade from his heaving torso. Why didn't he hit him? The biting irony of the query was pulsing in his brain. He had hit with all the strength of his being; he would never hit harder, and the blow had landed true. Burns had grinned and asked: "Why didn't yeh hit me?" The query was no stall to hide distress, to garner McGloin's nanny. Burns hadn't been fazed.

In the old days that punch would have disposed of a middleweight, yet Burns had grinned and sincerely asked for more. And it wasn't due to the fact that Burns possessed a chin of cast iron, nor that he *couldn't* be knocked out. He could—but never, never by him, McGloin.

The truth was that McGloin had lost his greatest asset—the wallop. He had gone back. That he now realized. His career as a champion was virtually over; it would end to-night, in this very ring. Burns had taken the champion's best, all the goods he had in stock; he now knew McGloin couldn't hurt him, and in the succeeding nine rounds would wade in regardless of consequences. His confidence and aggressiveness would be augmented a thousandfold.

The downfall of those scarred slam artists who now were critically watching his crisis appeared to McGloin in a new light. Perhaps they, like him, had carefully appointed a certain day for retirement; perhaps their doom had come like sudden death, unheralded, without warning. He thought of Sadie, of his life savings wrung by the sweat of his brow, by pain of the flesh, from the "game." He thought of the prospective café. He would emerge from to-night's work a pauper, a has-been, and he saw himself in the future sliding the scale until a "benefit" landed him in the scrap heap with the other discards. He could never come back. No one ever came back—except Enoch Arden, and even he had to go away again. He had seen too many travel the same hopeless road to be ignorant of the inevitable finish of the "ex-champ." The title for which he had slugged through fifteen grinding years, which he counted on capitalizing, would be torn from him.

Why hadn't he let well enough alone? Why hadn't he heeded Sadie's supplications? Why hadn't he *known* that he had gone back? Why hadn't he

been warned? He was only thirty, and felt physically fit. Yet these bitter questions answered themselves. He was not paying the price of dissipation, but the inevitable toll of age and experience. He had been fighting for fifteen years. He had worked up from the bantam class, through a horde of remarkably tough opponents, never drawing the color line, never refusing any aspirant a chance. He had beaten them by sheer youth, stamina, and strength—the pristine qualities he now confronted in Burns. In those days of his novitiate he was but learning the game; he was a natural fighter, and had but little skill with which to protect himself; in fact, he courted rather than avoided punishment. And now every one of those blows so carelessly taken had come home to roost; every grueling battle was rising up to demand its toll; his poor, battered body could receive no more. His wonderful stamina had vanished, never to return. No doubt he had lost it months ago, but had remained in ignorance because he had not been tested to the limit. But now he was meeting a man worthy of a champion. Of late his battles had been with second-raters, scared stiff before entering the ring. It had been easy money—rightful perquisites of the champion. Of late his name had won him victories, not his ability upon which that name had been founded.

Blink McGloin faced his crisis with the philosophy and fortitude that he had learned in a hard school. He wouldn't squeal nor resort to any of the dirty tricks known to every master and mucker in the game. He had always fought fairly, contesting every bout strictly on its merits. To quit was not in his nature; nor the historic excuse of a fractured ulna bone. Neither would he have recourse to a foul. Lose his title and fortune he must if need be, but he would go down to

defeat as he had achieved every victory—"strictly on the dead level."

He must pit his ring generalship and skill against Burns' youth, strength, and cleverness; these were the only weapons left him, now that his Hammer of Thor was out of business. Henceforth his fight must be essentially defensive. He must husband every ounce of strength—if he could.

The fatal weakness in this plan of campaign—as McGloin well knew—was that it takes two to ratify such an agreement. Before the voice of the gong had ceased, Burns had shot out of his corner, and was on top of McGloin. In vain to husband strength, for one must draw on that precious hoard to side-step, duck, clinch, and counter, or else be overwhelmed. Burns no longer feared anything, and he piled in, bulling the other to his corner, shaking off the merciless rain of uppercuts and counters, ripping through all guards and finally nailing his man with a haymaker that bounced McGloin off the ropes. It was hard, tough milling; the triumph of youth, with Burns growing stronger, more confident, and irresistible, waxing to ascendancy; with McGloin battling doggedly, dourly, and brilliantly—slowly waning to inevitable eclipse.

Two more of such sessions followed, with the tide of battle surging ever stronger in Burns' favor; craft and experience still stubbornly contesting dominion with youth, strength, and skill. But of the inevitable outcome there could be no doubt—at least to the principals. Handlers and members might believe McGloin to be playing a foxy game; even Burns might think him caught out of training, but to the champion the truth was not shaded.

It was now the end of the nineteenth round, with six to go, and McGloin was living by seconds, content if for the moment he could elude that implacable knock-out which, it seemed, had been

hunting him for æons. Twice its breath had whistled past his sweating cheek, and he knew its next coming would be unheralded.

Up to and including the sixteenth round, when for the first time he had realized his true condition, he had out-fought, outpointed Burns; and if by any conceivable chance he could stave off defeat until the final bell, a draw would be the worst and best he could expect. That would mean the saving of the title, the saving of his "roll," the realization of the prospective café, and a practically assured competence for Sadie. Then, his lesson well learned, he would promptly retire, never re-enter the squared circle, and hand his title over to Burns. To the securing of that draw he now bent every effort, though knowing the chance of lasting the next six rounds was practically nil.

It was at the beginning of the twenty-third round that McGloin, at his last resources, received the blow labeled knock-out which he had long been expecting and eluding. His vitality had been drawn upon to the breaking point, and, coming out of the inevitable clinch to which he had incessant recourse, Burns broke through his guard and planted a wicked right flush on the chin. McGloin saw the blow coming—it had seemed ages before it landed—and yet he had been unable to duck or interpose a glove. At the impact he whirled about and sprawled prone, the packed house coming to its feet as one man and emitting a roar that sounded like the protest of a surf-lashed coast.

McGloin rolled, and lay on his back on the resined canvas, staring wide-eyed at the strata of smoke clouds eddying under the high, arched ceiling. He could hear Charley Martin's voice tolling the fatal seconds, and it seemed afar off and unreal. Everything seemed unreal, and his first sensation was one of complete contentment and peace. It had come at last, and now he could slide

off into unconsciousness, his bursting lungs drawing the first full measure of relief. This was the insomnia cure he had successfully prescribed for so many. This was his first trip over the knock-out route, and he rather wondered at its lack of discomfort, for he was conscious of no pain. Nor did he hold any personal grudge against his conqueror, for Burns had fought an eminently fair, clean fight. The kid was worthy of being a champion, and nothing but age and experience would beat him as it had beaten him, McGloin. It was tough, though, to lose his roll as well as the title, and he rather wondered how he would break the news to his father-in-law. Sadie wouldn't mind so much. The right kind of women never do.

After these vague thoughts, McGloin's fighting spirit awoke and surged back on the tide of returning vitality. He turned over and raised himself on quivering arm. Everything was a whirling blur, and from an immeasurable distance he heard Charley Martin drone out: "Five." Five seconds! It had seemed as many years. Then it wasn't a knock-out, and he was lying there like a quitter!

McGloin, one hand on the ropes, slowly dragged himself to his knees. Burns was waiting patiently—cool, calculating, fairly offering his opponent every chance to arise. McGloin knew the bell would not come to his relief, for the round wasn't half over. His arms seemed to weigh tons; his legs to be fettered to the floor. He felt like one in a feverish nightmare. All judgment of distance, coherency of thought, had vanished. Yet it must be knock-out or nothing, and with a supreme effort of the will, impelled onward by instinct, he arose, one joint at a time, to face his inevitable doom. He forced his lips to smile; forced his tongue to echo the bantering words: "Why didn't yeh hit me?"

Then Burns rushed. McGloin's nerveless hands strove to clinch; then, in a twinkling, everything went black.

McGloin believed the inevitable knock-out had come, this time beyond the possibility of doubt, and it was not until a general cry of "Lights, lights!" went up that he realized the universal darkness was not produced by a numbed brain. Nor could he believe that he was standing upright and that Burns had not even hit him.

The absolute darkness continued; members struck matches, their murmur swelling to a roar. Cries of "Fake" and "Put-up job" were heard—the latter from Burns' adherents. A stampede and general fight was imminent when at length McCafferty's voice suddenly arose supreme, demanding silence.

"Gentlemen," he began, his metallic tones carrying to every quarter of the vast building's pitch-black interior, "there's been an accident and this bout must be called off. I hope you'll all

realize," he continued, stilling the swelling murmur of protest, "that what's happened ain't the fault of the management, and no club has ever been up against such a thing before. This thunderstorm has put every light out of business—not only in the building, but in the neighborhood. Look out of the window and see for yourselves. A bolt has struck a feed wire or something in the power house and I've just phoned the company. They say it'll be a good two hours before the lights are back on the job. Under the circumstances the bout must be postponed; it's a draw and all bets are declared off by order of the referee. It's hard luck, boys, but it ain't no use kicking, for it ain't anybody's fault. Best we can do is have a return match."

"Nix on that return stuff over this long route," thought McGloin, offering a mute prayer of thanksgiving. "Hard luck? Well, not so you'd notice it, bo!"



THE ACCOMMODATING BAILIFF

JUDGE GILBERT McNUTT, a lawyer of conspicuous ability and an honest man, was arguing a case before the circuit court of Indiana. In the midst of McNutt's powerful speech, the court fell softly and soundly asleep.

An embarrassing, not to say peevish, silence followed.
The court bailiff came to the rescue.

"Judge McNutt," he said, "go ahead. I'll wake him up if you make a point."



FEASTING IN THE COLD

WILLIAM D. HASSETT, of the State of Vermont at large, is fanatical in his admiration of all New England literary productions. Because of his devotion to the writing geniuses of his particular section of the country, he has run across many striking sentiments, their variety going all the way from epigrams to epitaphs.

He gives this as being at the same time the most eloquent, the most entertaining, and the most commanding epitaph ever inscribed on a piece of New England marble:

"Many a cold wind o'er my body shall roll,
While in Abraham's bosom I'm feasting my soul."

Whom the Glove Fits

By G. W. Johnston

Author of "The Girl From Nowhere," "The Ordeal," Etc.

The story of a robbery committed in the dark. The only clew a pair of white hands, seen for a moment; the rest of the figure a black blot. An ingenious bit of detective work done by an amateur

IAWOKE, shuddering and breathless, and leaped out of bed. What was it I had heard—the scream of a woman, or the cry of some dream creature in the nightmare which had been tormenting me? Bewildered, my pulses throbbing, I listened intently. The hushed voices of the summer's night floated in through the opened windows, but nothing else was audible save the ticking of my watch. It lay on a table at my bedside. Near it stood a lamp; and I had scarcely switched on the light and absently observed that it was two minutes past two o'clock, when I heard again the sound which had startled me. This time there was no doubt as to its nature. It was a woman's shriek, sustained, and vibrant with alarm.

The first person I saw when I had flung on my dressing gown and thrown wide my bedroom door was young Blythewood. He, Julie Jesseret, the famous beauty, her mother, and myself were all of Bullard's week-end guests who yet remained at his superb country seat, Deepdene; the rest had returned to town that afternoon.

Blythewood was standing at the head of the great stairway that led to the floor below. In the light which streamed through my open door and fell upon him, I instantly recognized his tall, slim figure and handsome, care-worn face.

"You!" I exclaimed. "What's wrong? Do you know?"

It had surprised me to find him here, so far from his own rooms. It astonished me the more to note that, except for a loose black house coat, he still wore evening dress; for nearly two hours had elapsed since he had left me in the smoking room, saying he was going upstairs to bed.

"Wrong?" he queried. "What do you mean?"

"Didn't you hear somebody scream?"

"No. When? Who was it?"

I shook my head, and, peering this way and that, we both waited, irresolute, expectant.

In another moment, I heard the distant slamming of a door; then, the hurried tread of slippers feet, and at the far end of the long hallway—where it turned sharp to the right to traverse the western wing of the house—a woman appeared, clad in white, vague, ghostlike, and, until she spoke, unrecognizable in the surrounding darkness. We, in the light, must, however, have been dimly visible to her.

"Is that you, Doctor Dannart—and Mr. Blythewood?" she called excitedly. "Come here! Something's happened!" It was Mrs. Jesseret.

Thereupon, she turned and sped down the transverse corridor. Following on the run, I caught up with her at the door of her daughter's bedroom, and we entered it together.

My first glance fell upon Julie's maid—the austere, sallow, imperturbable

Hedge. Moving softly about, she was methodically ordering the chamber, discreetly closing closet doors, screening from sight all possibly traces of a woman's tenancy. Like Mrs. Jesseret—both evidently abruptly roused from sleep and huddled in such garments as had first come to hand—she made a weird figure. But Julie!—though I knew her well, and had seen her scores of times, and in a bewildering variety of costumes, I had never thought her half so lovely as at this trying moment, when, bundled in a shapeless dressing gown, her hair falling loose and disordered about her, she crouched, pale and trembling, on the edge of her bed.

"Some one has been in my room, doctor!" she cried. "I've been robbed! My pearls are gone!" Then she saw Blythewood, standing in the doorway behind me, hesitating to enter. "Oh, Blythe!" she begged. "Come in! I want you. Stay with me—please—please! I'm *so* frightened!" With that, she ran to him and flung herself into his arms.

"Julie! Mr. Blythewood!" protested Mrs. Jesseret. "What does this mean?"

Hedge, who posed as an inexorable guardian of the proprieties, seemed no less amazed than Mrs. Jesseret at this frank exhibition of affection; and, casting down her eyes, sniffed audibly. Julie, however, said nothing, but merely raised her left hand and displayed on the third finger an old-fashioned ring which I had often seen Blythewood wear. That explained things. Their engagement, which since our stay together at Deepdene I had regarded as among the possibilities, was now obviously an accomplished fact—a fact evidently far from pleasing to Mrs. Jesseret. At sight of the ring, her look of astonishment had given place to one of disappointment and chagrin; and, knowing Bullard as I did, I could guess what expression his face would wear when he heard the news.

"Julie, tell me—" the young fellow was beginning, when I cut him short:

"Hold on, Blythewood! No time for explanations, now. Rout out the servants! Hustle downstairs! Search the house and grounds! I'll go after Bullard—I'll bet he's sleeping like a horse. And you, Hedge, touch nothing more; you've meddled too much already!"

Our host's apartments were in the eastern wing of the great rambling house, far removed from the guest chambers, and the servants lived somewhere upstairs; so that none of them, in my opinion, even if awake and attentive, could well have heard Julie's shrieks.

My surmise—so far, at least, as concerned Bullard—seemed justified, for when I opened the door of his sleeping room, silence and darkness confronted me. I called his name, but got no answer. I fumbled about until I found a table. My groping hands first touched the base of an electric lamp standing upon it, next the carved standard of the lamp, and finally the bulb surmounting it. When I found the chain, pulled it, and the light flashed on, disclosing Bullard's big head and fat neck resting on the pillow of a near-by bed, his deep chest rising and falling rhythmically, his great red hands spread out on the coverlet, and his heavy jaws clenched as firmly as though he were engaged in crushing a rival in the Street, or were bidding at auction for some art object he was bound to have. This human steam roller—whose passion it was to possess the best of everything of its kind, whether pictures, porcelains, houses, yachts, or what not, and who desired even more than Mrs. Jesseret to add the beautiful Julie, as wife, to his collection—looked formidable even in his sleep.

I shook him, and he bounced up in bed, swung his legs over the side, and stared at me with blinking eyes.

"You—doctor!" he exclaimed.

"Whew! You scared me; I was sound asleep. What's the matter? Anybody sick?"

"No. Miss Jesseret's been robbed."

"What?" he thundered. "Robbed? In my house? What of? When? Who did it? Have you got him? Wake up, man! Answer me, can't you?"

I had no time. Before I could reply to one red-hot inquiry he had fired off another; and all the while he was careering about the room, struggling into his clothes, rummaging everywhere for his eyeglasses, which he could not find. Then he shot out of the door, raced along the endless corridors, shouting confused orders to the servants whom Blythewood had awakened and who were running aimlessly about, and finally swept into Julie's bedroom like a cyclone.

"Miss Julie, I wouldn't have had this happen for the world!" he began vehemently. "But what actually did happen? Dannart, here, doesn't seem to know any of the particulars."

Miss Jesseret was calmer now. "I scarcely know myself," she declared. "Something woke me; I looked up; there was somebody at my dressing table—just a black shadow. I've no idea whether it was a man or a woman."

"And then you screamed?" I asked.

"No; not then. I was too terrified to utter a sound, to move, to do anything. I lay there, tongue-tied, petrified; how long, I can't imagine. Then, something rattled—tinkled like falling glass—and the figure glided out through the hall door and closed it. I didn't dare cry out even then—I don't know when I did."

"Poor thing! You must have got a fright," muttered Bullard sympathetically. "Never mind; we'll catch the rascal!"

"Was there *nothing* about this person that you saw clearly, Miss Jesseret?" I

inquired. "No peculiarity in the dress, in the movements, in the walk?"

"No—yes—the hands. I'm not sure that they were the hands. But I think so—they must have been, they flitted about so much. I noticed them because they were light in color, almost white; while the rest of the figure and the dressing table made one big black blot."

During this colloquy, I hastily examined the dressing table in question. As I did so, I was strangely conscious of my own hands. There was about them a curious sensation of warmth which I could not account for.

"Hedge, have you disturbed anything here?" I had asked before beginning.

"No, sir; not a thing."

The upper drawer was partly open. Within it lay a few gloves, veils, handkerchiefs, and so forth, in more or less disorder, and two leather jewel cases containing rings and other ornaments. The top of the table was covered with a wonderful specimen of Russian peasant openwork embroidery—grotesque animals and birds in dull pink on a dove-gray linen—and on this rested an array of toilet articles and utensils in solid silver, elaborately chased and bearing Julie's monogram, and another jewel case, in this instance open and empty. Lastly some toilet powder was sprinkled about; and a tiny cut-glass perfume flask, as well as a pharmacist's vial, labeled "Tinct. Iodine," had been overturned, the contents of the latter staining a part of the gray cover a dirty yellowish-brown.

My inspection finished, I once more addressed Miss Jesseret: "You say your pearls were stolen? You mean the necklace you wore last night, don't you?"

She nodded.

"Was anything else taken?"

"No; but unfortunately that was the most valuable piece of jewelry I brought from town. I don't know what I could

have been thinking of to keep it in the drawer of a flimsy dressing table."

"Where's the key?" inquired Bullard, from across the room. "The drawer doesn't seem to have been broken open."

"Here it is; the only one I have," Julie answered, producing a small brass key from under her pillow and holding it out to me. It fitted the lock of the top drawer from which the now empty jewel case had been taken. But it seemed incredible that it could have been first removed from, and then restored to, its place under the head of the sleeping girl without disturbing her. It was far more likely that a duplicate key was in existence and had been used. If so, where was it now?

"Who handled the necklace last, Miss Jesseret?" I went on. "Who put it away and locked it up when you took it off?"

There was a moment of silence, and then Hedge answered sourly: "I did, sir."

"You!" I retorted, looking sharply at her. "And you were the first person to enter this room after Miss Jesseret screamed, weren't you?"

Though she made no reply, I was sure I had guessed right; for, whereas, the apartments occupied by Mrs. Jesseret lay across the hall, Hedge slept in a dressing room adjoining her mistress' bedchamber, and would naturally have been the first to hear her outcry. Then, struck by the color of the heterogeneous garments the maid wore, I added: "And talking about black shadows, you are the only person here dressed in black."

"Mr. Blythewood was in black," Hedge remarked.

"What!" cried Julie, jumping to her feet. "Do you dare hint that it was Mr. Blythewood who came into this room to steal my pearls? You must be crazy!"

Hedge made no reply, no comment. Slowly, stolidly, she picked up a pair

of Julie's dainty slippers which she had just discovered peeping out from underneath a chair and hid them away in a closet, as if fearful that the sensibilities of Bullard and myself—though as a matter of fact he was a widower, and I a middle-aged married man—would be shocked beyond recovery by the sight of articles so intrinsically feminine as they. With a smile, I followed her movements, but I was only half aware of them; for again and without assignable reason, I was experiencing that odd sensation in my hands—a feeling of warmth in the palms and about the finger tips.

"Where was Blythewood, by the way, when all this was going on?" inquired Bullard. Then, peering everywhere about him: "Where is he now?"

"He's here!" answered that young man himself, who a moment before had stepped into the room. "We searched with lanterns, doctor," Blythewood added, turning to me; "but we couldn't find a footprint near the outside of the house, and every door and window on the lower floor was fast. Besides, I should have heard if any one had tried to break in."

"You would have heard? Why would you have heard?" Bullard interposed.

"Because I was downstairs when Miss Jesseret called for help."

"Downstairs! And did you see nobody, meet nobody, in the halls, on the stairway—anywhere?" Mrs. Jesseret inquired.

"No; not until I ran across Dannart at the head of the steps, on the way back to my quarters."

"Then you seem to have been the only one up and about at the time of the robbery, Mr. Blythewood," she remarked casually.

"Very likely I was—except, of course, the thief," he smiled.

"Were you long away from your rooms?" Mrs. Jesseret pursued.

"Oh, no; not very long—a matter of ten minutes, maybe," the young man observed negligently. "I'd been writing letters. Merely went down to the library to telephone to the telegraph office at Tillerton—a night wire for town; that was all."

"It was a trifle late, or, rather, early, for sending an ordinary telegram, don't you think?" she went on. "This one must have been rather urgent, I fancy. Pardon a woman's curiosity, Mr. Blythewood, but would you mind telling me what the message was about?"

As Mrs. Jesseret put this question, her glance grew sharp and suspicious, her voice incisive and harsh, and instantly the atmosphere of the room became sultry, the situation tense. Bullard, his boisterousness evaporated, sank into a chair by the window and fixed a keen, watchful eye on Mrs. Jesseret; while Julie—who, after a few moments with Hedge in the adjacent room, had reappeared, dressed somewhat more conventionally than before—immediately sensed trouble, and paused in the doorway, her gaze shifting rapidly between her mother and Blythewood.

The latter scrutinized his questioner between half-closed lids, and the muscles of his weary-looking face tautened. "See here, Mrs. Jesseret," he protested. "I don't understand all this. I don't like this sort of catechism. What are you after, anyhow, if I may ask?"

"For the present, I'm after this: I should like to know exactly *when* you were in the library, *why* you went, and *what*, precisely, you did there?"

"And if I decline to tell more than I've already done—"

Mrs. Jesseret shrugged her shoulders. "Of course, you were the only person awake and about the house at the critical time, and, as Hedge noticed, you are all in black. Your message may have been about the pearls, in which case—"

"You may as well out with it at once! You call me a thief, do you?" The young fellow was on his feet instantly, and Mrs. Jesseret rose and stood facing him.

"I call you nothing. But appearances are against you, you must admit. Besides, Mr. Bullard has told me that the market has not been going your way, that you were hard up, were on the edge of ruin. I may be wrong about you. I hope I am. But remember, Mr. Blythewood, I am not alone the Bertha Jesseret you meet at dinners and week-ends, and, doubtless, think hard and shallow. I am a woman, a mother, protecting her child, trying to prevent her from making what may turn out to be a terrible mistake. I will be frank with you: I had other ambitions for her, but now that she has promised to marry you—"

"Woman!" Bullard burst out. "What in tophet are you talking about? Promised? To marry?"

"Hold on! hold on!" I broke in. "We are going too fast, and we're getting away from the point." Then, turning to Blythewood: "Look here, young man; if the name you've given yourself doesn't fit, check it! Mrs. Jesseret has told you how to do it."

"I will!"

"That's right! Now let's all take a few minutes to cool off. I should like to dress a bit, and Mrs. Jesseret probably wishes to do the same. Suppose the rest of you go down to the library; we'll follow, and we'll soon settle this telegram business."

When I entered the library about five minutes later, I found Blythewood pacing the floor, Julie sitting in one corner, and Bullard in another—all speechless, all staring moodily before them. Within another five minutes, perhaps, Mrs. Jesseret joined us. She was very pale, and her still handsome features looked rigid and drawn. She sat down at the table, and without a

word Blythewood snatched up the telephone. Before he spoke, however, Julie stepped to his side and laid a hand upon his shoulder. He pressed it in his own, and then, after a brief period of waiting, he called into the instrument:

"Is that you, Tillerton? My name's Blythewood—at Deepdene. Say, I phoned you a while ago—a message, to be sent by night wire to the city. Get me? Good! Now, I'll put a lady on the phone. Repeat my call to her, will you?"

He handed the receiver to Mrs. Jesseret, and, first, we heard her say: "Go ahead! I'm ready;" then, "Yes; I understand," and finally, "You've forgotten something: When did you get this call from Mr. Blythewood? Hour and minute, please!"

At last, Mrs. Jesseret said, "Thank you; that's all," and hung up the receiver. "The message reached Tillerton at one minute before two," she remarked. Then she turned to me. "Doctor, do you happen to know when you met Mr. Blythewood at the top of the stairs?"

"About two minutes past two. I'm sure of the time."

"Hum!"

I could not guess what she meant by this exclamation. But to me it was clear that if Blythewood *had* telephoned from the library at one-fifty-nine, he must have left Julie's room with his booty not later than one-fifty-seven; for he could not have covered the distance between the two rooms in less than two minutes. Yet, if the robbery had been committed at one-fifty-seven, then nearly five minutes must have passed before Julie screamed—an interval unreasonably, almost inconceivably, long. As I was wondering whether the young man could have had an accomplice, I heard Mrs. Jesseret again speaking:

"As repeated to me, Mr. Blythe-

wood's message was: 'Brazzard & Knapp, Brokers, No. 27 Bond Street. Buy one thousand shares—'"

"Stop!" commanded Blythewood. "That ought to satisfy you. The nature of the securities makes no difference. Please keep that to yourself."

"It makes all the difference in the world!" exclaimed Bullard. "It was V. M. & I., I'll bet a hat. Here, I'll show you quick enough where the difference comes in!"

Nearsighted, and without his glasses, he fumbled about the table until he had found a pencil and a piece of paper. "Here's the nigger in that woodpile!" he declared, after figuring rapidly. "V. M. & I., common, is the stock Blythewood's loaded up with. It's been hammered. It's still being hammered, and he's got to support it, or bust. At today's market, what would a thousand shares be worth, do you suppose? Why, just about as much as that necklace would bring. You can't fool me; I know pearls, and I know the market—see!"

"I've suspected for some time who's been after me in the Street," Blythewood retorted. "Now I'm sure. Maybe you can understand, Mrs. Jesseret, why I wanted that telegram kept dark. But say, Bullard," he laughed ironically; "you don't call that stuff you've been getting off proof of anything, do you?"

"What would you call this, Mr. Blythewood?" asked Mrs. Jesseret, as she tossed something onto the table in front of him. "I found it just now in the grate in your room."

It was a brass key, the counterpart, seemingly, of that which Julie had taken from under her pillow and handed to me.

"Where's the other one?" I queried.

"Here!" Mrs. Jesseret drew it from her folded handkerchief and laid it beside the first.

"Do both fit the lock?"

"Perfectly! I tried them with my own hands."

"Hands!" I echoed. "*Hands?* You tried them with your own hands?" I grinned. I felt like shouting. There was magic in that word, and no mistake. It had run through all our talk, through all my thoughts, like the basic theme in the complex structure of a symphonic movement. And now, for the third time since Julie had spoken of those white hands hovering over her dressing table, my own seemed warm. Why was it? At last, *I knew!* At last, a subconscious impression made upon me through the medium of touch had been translated into terms of consciousness! In other and plainer words, I finally understood why my own hands had felt as they did, and where and when this sensation of gentle heat had been imparted. It was a clew, slender, it must be confessed, but unique and invaluable; and I discerned that not a moment should be lost in following it up.

Without a word to any one, I dashed out of the library; I flew upstairs, I raced through rooms and corridors; I did twenty things in twenty seconds, and at length I tapped at the door of Julie's bedchamber. Hedge, reluctant, bristling, stood guard over the now empty room as though it were the inner shrine of Propriety itself. Eventually, however, she admitted me; and when I had finished my business there, I said to her: "Go downstairs, please, and ask your mistress and the others in the library if they will be kind enough to join me immediately in Mr. Blythewood's rooms. And you—come with them; I shall need you!"

As we gathered in the young man's sitting room—soft and dim with low-toned rugs and hangings, mysterious with carved screens and curtained alcoves, rich with Oriental ornament—I received a shock. At the very start, my

fine-spun theories threatened to collapse.

"Miss Jesseret," I whispered, leading her to one side; "it's here—in this room!"

"What is?"

"The necklace!"

She winced and shot a quick glance at Blythewood. Then, her eyes roaming: "Where? I don't see it!"

I was not surprised at this. It had been most cunningly hidden—thrust so patently upon the sight as to be next to invisible. And I had discovered it only because it had become my habit, as it were, to look for my glasses upon my nose before tearing down the house to find them.

"If I show you where the necklace is, Miss Jesseret," I continued, "will you promise to say nothing to the rest? For the present, at least, I——"

At this, I stopped speaking. It was useless to go on. She was paying no heed; and though our eyes met, it was plain that she did not even see me. I could readily conjecture why. It was because she was facing a crisis—a problem that dwarfed all else; so vital and pressing in its nature that upon the manner of its solution, by herself, unaided, and within the next ten seconds, her entire future life depended. What would she do, I wondered? Was her love for Blythewood deep enough, was her faith in him strong enough to survive this final blow—her jewels discovered in his room, the goods found on him, so to speak?

Before the ten seconds I had mentally allowed her were up, she had decided. She walked swiftly across the floor, took Blythewood's hand in hers, and said: "Blythe, I won't believe, I can't believe, that you would do anything to hurt me. They may say what they please—it makes no difference. I trust you absolutely! Nothing will ever change me!" Then she fixed her eyes, in turn, on me, on her mother, on

Bullard, and lastly on her maid. "Hedge, did you do it?" she asked peremptorily. "Did you steal my necklace and hide it where, if it were found, the blame would fall on Mr. Blythewood, and, if it were not found, you could come secretly later on and get it? You said he was dressed in black. You hinted—"

"Wait a moment, Miss Jesseret!" I interrupted. "Let me see if I can make out whether you are right or wrong. Hedge, come here, please!"

The maid gazed at me stonily, yet made no remonstrance, as I placed her at a point in the room between the door through which we had entered and a cabinet against the opposite wall, but much nearer the former than the latter.

"Now, look! What do you see on top of the cabinet, there?" I asked her.

Hedge, obeying orders, as she had been doing all her life, named the various articles that were visible from where she stood, and did so correctly.

Next, I begged Julie to stand in the doorway opening into the hall.

"Hedge, who is that?" I then inquired, pointing to her mistress.

"Miss Jesseret, sir."

"Right, again!" I affirmed.

Before I had begun asking these questions, however, I had switched on an electric reading lamp. Now, noting the precise time, I turned off the current and told the maid to touch the glass bulb of the lamp, first, with the tip of an index finger, then, in slow succession, with the ends of the middle, ring, and little fingers of the same hand.

"As soon as the bulb feels cool—as cool as this glass paper weight beside the lamp—say, 'Now!'" I warned her.

The tests of vision to which she had been subjected had left Hedge entirely unmoved. But she seemed to fear that some black magic lay concealed in this new experiment, for her usually impassive voice trembled slightly when at last she stammered out the designated

word. I immediately looked at my watch. The lamp had been burning for about five minutes, and a trifle over a minute had elapsed since I had pulled the chain and quenched the light.

"Another question, Hedge!" I continued. "When you go to bed at night, do you turn off the lamp in your room *before*, or *after*, you fall asleep?"

She did not answer. Instead, she stared at me with an expression so hopelessly befuddled that Mrs. Jesseret and her daughter laughed aloud. At this, Bullard, who had been growing restive for some little time, blurted out, "Are you going crazy, Dannart, or am I? What are you trying to get at with all this tomfool kindergarten stuff, anyhow?"

"I am merely endeavoring to show how a person acts and reacts normally under certain conditions—conditions, for example, such as those which accompanied the theft of Miss Jesseret's pearls. Hedge just now recognized her mistress standing near her in the doorway quite as plainly as she had done the numerous small objects lying on top of the more distant cabinet. Further, though she did not tell us so, I feel positive she switches off the light in her bedchamber *before* she goes to sleep."

"I do, sir; I remember, now."

When the laughter which followed this remark had subsided—laughter, like that which had gone before, with more nervousness than amusement in it, I continued:

"So much for Hedge! It's clear that she may be relied upon to do the natural, the expected, the normal, thing. But how about a person who acts in a manner precisely the reverse of this—a person, for instance, who says, in effect, 'Hello; there isn't any key in the lock of that little drawer I observe over there at the far end of this big room, and it shows no signs of having been forced,' and yet, who, a few minutes

later, fails to see a great tall fellow like Blythewood, or, at least, is unable to identify him, though, at the time, he's looking straight at him, and they are only a few paces apart? To my mind, there's something abnormal about a person with vision like that—abnormal, and, therefore, suspicious."

I waited for the explosion that I felt was bound to come; but, to my astonishment, all the occupants of the room remained silent, motionless, intent, and I found myself forced to give the screw another and more decided turn.

"But here is a still more striking circumstance connected with the man I am talking of," I therefore went on. "He lies in bed. He is apparently asleep. When I shake him, he starts up and says, in fact, that he has been sound asleep. But it so happens that in trying to light the lamp at his bedside, I accidentally touch the glass bulb belonging to it. I find it hot. What, exactly, does that mean? Let's see. Experiments I've made—just now crudely repeated by Hedge—have taught me that if I turn the current into a reading lamp of the kind and candle power used in this house, it will take from ten to twelve minutes in a draft-free room on a warm night like this to raise the temperature of the outside surface of the bulb to one hundred and forty-one degrees Fahrenheit, which is as hot as it will ever become. That's important. But more significant still, in the present case, is the further fact that within *two minutes*, or less, after the current is switched off, the temperature of the outside of the bulb will have fallen seventy or more degrees, and will be found to be no higher than that of the air of the surrounding room.

"I wish my conscious mind had been awake when I touched the particular bulb I've just referred to; it would have prevented a lot of misunderstanding and trouble. But from its condition in the matter of heat, as I recalled it after-

ward, one inference may be clearly drawn: The man in question did not put out his lamp after he had gone to sleep; even Hedge does not claim to be able to do that. No, he simply pretended to be asleep when he wasn't, and lied to me in saying that he had been. He did not switch off his light until he heard me at his door. He had been too busy before that. He had been 'planting' the key and the necklace in another person's room. He had just been trying to disgrace that person morally and ruin his reputation, as he had long been trying to ruin him financially, because—well, because he stood in his way, because he feared he would win and carry off Miss Jesseret, whom he had made up his stubborn mind to add to his collection of priceless and exquisite things. He—

"By Jove!" I cried, abruptly interrupting myself. "Where's the necklace? It's disappeared!"

Out of the tail of my eye I watched Bullard. For a long time he had been frantically striving to control himself. Now, while the others stared in every direction but the right one, *his* glance shot swiftly and unerringly to the pearls. He saw they were precisely where they had been all along, and in a twinkling he looked another way. But it was too late. He had betrayed himself, and knew it. He realized he had fallen into my trap, and had demonstrated to me that he was the only person in the room beside myself who knew their location. This was bad enough. But when he caught me laughing at him for his stupidity, he was up out of his chair in a flash, purple in the face, desperate, raging.

"You raving lunatic!" he shouted; "do you mean *me*? Do you say *I* stole the necklace? I'll break your neck—"

He rushed furiously at me, but I dodged him, and, as he dashed past me, I whipped a glove out of my pocket,

and with it struck him a stinging blow across the eyes. As he turned, I rolled it into a ball and flung it in his face.

"There, you thief!" I cried; "there is the proof against you—that glove! Pick it up! It belongs to you. I got it out of a drawer in your room; and besides, it's a mile too big for anybody here but you. Oh, you're a smart one! No finger prints for yours. It's white—grabbed up in a hurry; but the color wouldn't have made a particle of difference. Look at it! Do you see that blue spot on it? Do you know what it is—how it came there? I'll tell you, so you'll know what sent you to jail. You never thought that brown and white make blue, did you? But they do—sometimes. They did this time. Just a little bit of the iodine you upset in Miss Jesseret's room, and just a little bit of the rice powder you scattered about in the dark—they got together

on that glove, stained it blue, and fixed you for good. The starch and iodine test—why, it's as easy as rolling off a log!

"Miss Jesseret," I continued, "I see that Blythewood is itching to settle with Bullard personally; but it is you who were robbed, and it is for you to make complaint. Shall I send for the sheriff?"

"No! no! Let me get out of this house! That's all I want!"

"Shall I wait for the necklace, ma'am?" asked Hedge, the imperturbable. "The doctor says it's gone again."

"But not far," I smiled. In the doorway communicating with the bedroom hung a screen composed of rows of Oriental beads, red, yellow, and white, alternating with each other. Fastened by its tiny clasp among the last, and almost indistinguishable from them, was the necklace.



THE SIZE OF IT

WARD BLAISDELL is well known as an illustrator, his specialty being the depicting of comic animals. Once, when summering in Tarrytown, Blaisdell and a friend waiting for the train saw John D. Rockefeller coming to the station to journey to New York. Under the millionaire's arm was a huge, unusual-looking package.

"What do you suppose that is he's carrying?" asked the artist's friend.

"Looks like his pocketbook to me!" answered Blaisdell.



JUSTICE HOT OFF THE BAT

THE Southern justice of the peace looked exceedingly, not to say excessively, wise and well informed. A young negro was up before him on a charge of disorderly conduct.

After hearing all the evidence, and imitating all the members of the United States Supreme Court at once, the J. P. passed sentence as follows:

"Ten dollars."

"Dat's easy," said the young negro superciliously, and, thrusting his hand into his right trousers pocket, produced the ten.

The J. P., incensed and greatly put out, smoothly extended his remarks thusly:

"And thirty days—now get that out of your other pocket."

Homeward Bound

By Ralph D. Paine

Author of "The Wall Between," "Jane Hardy, Shipmaster," Etc.

SYNOPSIS OF OPENING CHAPTERS

On board the *Columbian*, bound for a Southern port, are two passengers, brother and sister, who are large stockholders in the navigation company. Stella and Ashley Corbin are alike only in name, and it is not strange that their preference should differ in regard to Captain Pope and his chief officer, Edward Barrington. To Stella, the captain is a self-satisfied snob, while her brother finds him a congenial spirit. Oppositely, Ashley dislikes Barrington while his sister finds the chief officer a charming gentleman. Between Captain Pope and Barrington there is strained feeling, and when the chief officer, on watch, calls the captain to verify Temple Rock light, Pope is furious at such foolish conduct. But there is something puzzling about the light to Barrington, and he is insistent. Captain Pope arrogantly orders him to steer according to the signal. Soon the *Columbian* is piled up on a reef, and the crew and passengers take to the boats. Ashore the captain meets with an engineer who is troubled about the wreck, fearing that his broken headlight, which had flared most peculiarly, might have put the ship off her course. Pope experiences dread at learning this, but assures the engineer that his theory is nonsense. At the official investigation the captain manages to throw all the blame upon the chief officer, and he is abetted by Ashley Corbin, who uses his influence to ruin Barrington. Stella had requested Ashley to stay out of it, and when she questions him as to what he has heard of the trial he dissembles and reports retailed information, telling her that the chief officer has been found guilty and disgraced. Barrington accepts the offer of his former skipper, Captain Moses, to take the berth of mate aboard the old sailing schooner, *Henrietta*, bound for his home town, Eppingham. Meanwhile, Stella Corbin has learned the facts in the case of Barrington's dismissal from an honest seafarer who comes to her for help for a destitute family. Her sympathies aroused, Miss Corbin decides to take the poor family into the country, and selects a farmhouse in Eppingham. Also, she compels her brother Ashley to give up his high living and rusticate with her, much to his disgust. In Eppingham Stella makes it her business to hunt up the Barrington family, and learns that Susan Barrington, the widowed mother of the disgraced chief officer, lives in retirement. The generous-hearted girl plans to visit her.

(A Four-Part Serial—Part Three)

CHAPTER IX.—(Continued.)

NOT so pensive, but even more thoughtful, the girl returned to the main street, where her horse and buggy had been left. Her other errands were forgotten. Her hope had been to find in Eppingham some confirmation of her own opinion of Barrington's integrity, to justify her more strongly in seeking somehow to right his wrongs. But now she felt oppressed by the fear that there had been an aftermath more tragic, whose import she could not even conjecture. Harriet Page had not divulged it, but

she had spoken of Susan Barrington as one who mourns as only mothers mourn when death is in the house. The verdict of the *Columbian* investigation seemed not enough to account for the shadow.

Gravely perturbed, Stella drove across the bridge by the mill and turned to look at the rotting wharves which crept into the tidal water below the dam. No vessels were moored beside them, and the hoisting winches lifted idle arms as though appealing for the cargoes that came no more to fill the holds. This melancholy little basin, so

untenanted, yet so eloquent of other, braver days, gave Stella a feeling of personal sadness, vague and inexplicable. She associated it with Barrington and the *Henrietta*, although he had not sailed out from here in many years.

The river road offered brighter scenes, and Stella wove more cheerful fancies as she sought glimpses of the distant sea. What haunted her like a dream was the picture of a schooner, with all sails set, threading this winding channel, and on the deck a sturdy, square-jawed lad of fourteen who had fared forth to battle for the prize called success. Drawing rein, she gazed across a meadow, and saw the small gray house among the apple trees. She felt that Susan Barrington had chosen this place in order that she, too, might look toward the river and the sea.

A table daintily laid for two stood upon the porch, and Susan explained, as she offered her hand:

"Harriet telephoned again that you had started down, and it was so near noon that I hoped to persuade you to stay for a cozy little luncheon before driving on to East Eppingham."

Stella was wholesomely hungry, and said so, but she inferred that this gracious hospitality had been Harriet's suggestion, an artful way of encouraging intimacy. Stella needed no encouragement. She was instantly captivated, but Susan was not ready to surrender, for jealousy pricked her, and she must first know who this girl was and why she should concern herself with Edward Barrington.

"I am rather puzzling," said Stella, with her frank smile, while they candidly studied each other, "but I come with the best excuse in the world."

"Pardon me," replied Susan, a little absently, and her lips were tremulous. "I couldn't seem to catch your name over the phone. When Harriet is excited she is hard to understand. It sounds so rude of me——"

"Stella Corbin, and I am a sojourner in East Eppingham, Mrs. Barrington, and I fairly dote on the simple life."

"Corbin?" wonderingly echoed Susan. "Why, how remarkable! And how fortunate for me. You are Miss Corbin? Then it must have been your brother who was here this morning. A charming man with such agreeable manners, and quite brilliantly courageous."

"Oh, I'm sure it couldn't have been my brother Ashley," unhesitatingly declared Stella. "Charming and courageous? The description doesn't fit him at all. That is perfectly horrid of me, I know, but—but I am bewildered. Did he really say his name was Corbin?"

"Ashley Corbin," firmly replied Susan, who was ruffled. "A large man, the blond type, extremely well dressed."

"That is very much what he looks like," gasped his sister. "May I ask how he displayed his courage?"

"By marching straight up to an infuriated cow which had taken possession of my yard. You must congratulate him, Miss Corbin."

"But did he fall out of the sky, Mrs. Barrington?"

"He was on the river," answered Susan, at a loss to understand the sister's incredulity. "I am glad to have you know how favorably he impressed me."

Stella made a mighty effort to conceal her emotions, and murmured in uncertain accents:

"And did he learn who you were? Did you tell him your name?"

"I did not think it necessary," formally replied Susan, "but of course I shall call on you at East Eppingham and become really acquainted with your attractive brother."

To Stella, the portraiture of Ashley as heroic was sublimely ridiculous, but the situation, with its inner significance, was far otherwise. The fantastic irony of it, that Edward Barrington's mother should be calmly praising Ashley Cor-

bin seemed shocking. The immediate result was a slight barrier of constraint between the two women, not so much a disagreement as a failure to understand each other when sympathetic comprehension was most needed. Without this complication, Stella's mission, to make her motive clear and win the confidence of this proud and sorrowing woman, was difficult enough. At length the girl impulsively exclaimed:

"Can't we be friends? I am really and truly a much nicer person than my brother and quite as brave or I shouldn't have come to see you. You must not suspect me of trying to steal your son away from you. Falling in love with his mother is my most serious symptom at present."

"He must have admired you, Miss Corbin. I am surprised that he did not mention you in his letters."

"Oh, he had more important things to write about. And ours was scarcely more than a casual acquaintance," said Stella, speaking with rapid animation now that the ice was broken. "I was a passenger on the last voyage of the *Columbian*, you see, and that is why I remember Mr. Barrington so distinctly. He was far more efficient than the captain, and there might have been great loss of life without him. I might have been one of the victims—and, don't you see, I have every reason to be grateful to him—"

"You were with him in the *Columbian*?" cried Susan, and the barrier was broken down. "And was your brother on board, too? Oh, there are so many things I wish to find out. Perhaps you can tell me some of them. Edward promised to explain it all when he reached home."

"He asked a favor of me," said Stella, "when we parted on the little island where we went ashore from the boats. If things should go wrong for him, would I take his word that he did not put the steamer on the reef?

I assured him that I should always have absolute faith in him."

"He must have thought a great deal of your opinion," Susan replied, now more affectionate than jealous.

"I like to think so," said Stella, with a fine simplicity.

"Why, then, was he found guilty by the men who employed him and trusted him?" came the solemn question. "He had been tested for years. It was only a few months before that I found him in a New York hospital, blistered and bandaged from his neck to his waist. He had saved a burning ship and her people for this same company."

"The captain of the *Columbian* was weak and cowardly," sighed Stella, her heart wrung with pity. "He lied to save himself, and Mr. Barrington was sacrificed. This was what I heard from an unofficial source."

"But there must have been other influences at work," suggested the mother, "some sinister and powerful agency. Edward had a foreboding or he would not have asked you to believe in him, Miss Corbin. A captain is presumed to be guilty unless he proves his innocence."

"There will surely be another and a fairer judgment some day," earnestly declared Stella. "The scheme of things cannot be so sorry and twisted as all this."

"It is too late," and the words tolled like a bell. "It is too late. I still pray, and nothing dies harder than hope, but I know it is too late."

"It is too late?" breathed the girl, her eyes wide, her lips parted, her hand clasping Susan's across the table. The shadow encompassed them. There was a long moment's silence, broken only by the mating song of a robin in the lilacs and the lap-lap of the ebbing tide among the rocks at the foot of the lawn. What this Stella Corbin had been to Edward was beyond the mother's ken;

but, by virtue of her faith in him, she had earned the right to hear his requiem.

"It is too late," was the measured repetition, and Stella felt as though she must cry out if it were spoken again. "He sailed from New York in the *Henrietta*, and she has foundered with all hands, gone to the port of missing ships. There was enough of the blessed boy in him to want to come home to me when he was in trouble and Captain Moses Carpenter found him, and he agreed to come as mate. He could get nothing else to do. And this is the home I made ready for him."

"But why are you so certain that the schooner is lost, or that the crew has not been picked up by a passing vessel?" demanded Stella, with the bright optimism of youth.

"Because I should have had some news by now. The schooner was very old, too old to be caught in a heavy blow. And Lucy Carpenter, the skipper's wife, heard him calling her just before she died."

"But that sounds very fanciful, don't you think?" was Stella's common-sense reply.

"I tried to convince myself that it was foolish, Miss Corbin, but there has been no mention of the *Henrietta* in the shipping news since she left Vineyard Haven. Captain Carpenter had lived his life, but Edward——"

"I simply refuse to believe it," impetuously cried Stella. "A man so strong and young and fine! He is one of the unbeatable kind. Why, he hasn't had a fair chance. What if one career was spoiled? He was bound to make another for himself."

"He planned to make it here in Eppingham," replied Susan.

"Please don't use the past tense, Mrs. Barrington. What are his plans and what did he write you from New York?"

"It was no more than a hint. Cap-

tain Carpenter had more to say in his last letter to his wife. Perhaps I shall feel like telling you more some day. Were you together much on the ship? Did your brother like him?"

"Ashley knew him very slightly," and Stella blushed for her duplicity. "I am sorry now that I didn't coax him to talk to me oftener. He was always the chief officer to the passengers. Captain Pope did the entertaining."

The mention of the shipmaster's name was unfortunate. The brooding, embittered mother, who no longer lived her sunny gospel of thanksgiving for benefits received, was a very flame of hatred as she exclaimed:

"I am a very wicked woman, and God may not forgive me, but how can I love my enemies? I wish I could meet this Captain McCready Pope face to face and tell him that I have prayed on my knees for sorrow and disgrace to strike him down. It was he who made Edward go to sea in this wretched little schooner, Captain Pope and the Tropical Navigation Company. They killed my boy. It was a small thing to wreck an honest man's reputation. They didn't care what became of him after they kicked him out. It will make no difference to them if they learn that he has been lost at sea, lost in a poor, worn-out craft which they drove him into."

"You have reason to hate the Tropical Navigation Company," murmured Stella, stunned by this denunciation. Susan had not raised her voice. It could not be called a tirade, and this self-controlled intensity was more impressive than furious anger. Thus had her Puritan forefathers invoked the vengeance of the God of Israel against those who despitefully used them. Stella became absorbed in her own reflections, and her demeanor was subdued. Their acquaintance had led them into a blind alley, and she wondered how to find a way out. It was im-

possible that Mrs. Barrington and Ashley Corbin should be permitted to meet again. In farewell, Stella said, with winning tenderness:

"We are not strangers now? There is a bond between us?"

Susan kissed her cheek, and the touch of her hand was a caress as she replied:

"You are a dear, unselfish girl, and the summer will not be so hard for me if you are in East Eppingham. Ah, if he could have made port in the *Henrietta* and found you here! Did you know this was his home?"

"I hoped so, and I wanted to see him again," was Stella's brave confession. She felt in no haste to finish the journey to her cottage, and the gait of the horse was sleepily sedate as she sought the river road. Realization eluded her grasp. Barrington drowned? Could fate jest as wantonly as this? She herself might have thwarted it but for prudent second thought. Her earlier impulse had been, while in New York, to increase her investment in the Tropical Navigation Company and gain control, thereby eliminating the influence of the general manager and Captain Pope, and placing Barrington in command of a ship. This, however, had seemed quixotic, premature, and she had laid the plan aside until after the visit to East Eppingham. But now she accused herself of breaking faith with Barrington. His word should have been enough, and she had told him that it was. The Corbin estate? What about Ashley? Her own blameworthiness was merely fancied, but he had borrowed the power, stolen it, which rightfully belonged to her in order to crush this man. It was Ashley whom Susan Barrington, unknowing, had condemned as a murderer. Illogical, perhaps, but to a mother's logic the links of cause and effect were strongly forged.

For the moment Stella's wrathful

mood was changed to grieving perplexity. Was this lost seafarer dearer to her than she had been aware, and was she, too, bereft? Although absent, he had been speaking through the voices of others, making himself so intimately felt that Stella, comprehending what manner of man he was, had her own burden of unavailing regret to bear. Altruism was, in truth, a cold and shadowy name to call it.

When she reached her cottage, Ashley was industriously plying an ax, and he limped out to meet her with a jaunty flourish of his bucolic straw hat. Conscious of well-doing, primed with good intentions, sure of her approval, he viewed his cause as won and the future golden. A second glance at his sister and the jovial smile was frozen. In a flurry of alarm he fanned himself with the hat, and vainly tried to guess what the deuce could be the matter now. He had seen Stella in a temper more than once, but this was different.

"Welcome to our vine-covered cot," he ventured. "Chores all done and ready for inspection. I cry for more."

"Go into the house and pack your trunks, Ashley!" was the implacable mandate.

"What? Tired of the bosky dells so soon, Stella? Where do we go from here? Why is a woman's mind?"

"Hamlin Eaton will carry you to the station in his wagon. There is an afternoon train, Ashley." And her voice was so hard that he faltered:

"This looks like my finish. Do you mind telling me what for?"

"Yes. You ought to know. The woman you met this morning was Edward Barrington's mother. I have just come from there."

"Whew, that is one on me, Stella!" he drawled, but his hands were shaking. "She is a friend of mine. She has an awfully fine influence over me already. She doesn't have to know who we were in New York. We are incog, what?"

It really makes no difference, does it, so long as Barrington doesn't turn up and get rough with me? Is he in the neighborhood?"

"His mother believes him dead, and you are responsible. Oh, I feel as if I never wanted to see you again," cried his sister, passionately resolved to make him suffer.

Ashley appeared absurdly helpless and amazed. The straw hat fell from his hand, and he tugged at the straps of his blue overalls.

"Sending me away isn't such bad medicine," said he, "but, by Jove! You don't seem to care what becomes of me."

"I don't care very much. I have lost all interest in you."

"But you don't know what I am up against, if you mean to chuck me out," was his agitated outburst. "You think I have two thousand a year of my own to live on. The fact is, Stella, I'm in debt rotten bad, and they will all be after me if you throw me over. It is worse than that. I took a flyer on a couple of investments in the spring, inside tips, and put up some securities. The bank still has them. I'm no better than a pauper, afraid to show my face in New York. An only son, too, and you are rich. And I never earned a dollar in my life. I don't know how. Where can I get a job? From my friends? Pah! Ashley Corbin is broke. Forget him. I don't deserve it, Stella, old girl. Here I am, playing the game your way, taking it like a little man."

"It is too late, Ashley," said she, and the words were like an echo. "It is too late. If you are so sure that you don't deserve it, go and tell Mrs. Barrington who you are and what you did to her son. She called you a hero! I shall not undeceive her, if that is any comfort to you. One woman in the world respects you."

"Barrington dead, did you say?" he

muttered in a frightened voice. "And she called me responsible? More of your high tragedy, Stella?"

"He was forced to go in an unseaworthy vessel because every man's hand was against him. Take that with you, and pass it on to your dashing chum, Captain McCready Pope. Perhaps he will befriend you."

"Your own brother! There are only two of us left," he brokenly exclaimed. "Dad never dreamed of anything like this or he wouldn't have given it all to you."

Stella left him standing there, the image of abject woe in overalls.

CHAPTER X.

It was off the end of Cape Cod that the deep-laden *Henrietta* met the spring gale which came racing out of the north. The barometer foretold no serious weather, but the skipper, scanning a cloudy sunset, declared he could feel it in his bones, and ordered the mate to make all snug and stand well out to sea. Barrington smiled at this excess of caution, but dutifully shortened sail, saw that the hatches were tight, and secured such objects on deck as might break adrift. In recent years he had forgotten to worry when the wind blew or a shore was under the lee. Old Moses Carpenter read his thoughts, and remarked, as the dusk closed down:

"It's a bigger ocean and not so tame, Ed, when you're in this kind of a craft, and a man's more apt to say his prayers every night before he crawls into his bunk."

"Yes, you feel closer to it, sir, and there is better seamanship shown in a coastwise voyage than in ramming a liner across the Atlantic."

"Well, I don't brag as a rule," chuckled the patriarch, "but in forty years I've beached this packet only once, and that was on account of a fog so thick you could punch holes in it with a mar-

linespike. There's an uneasy swell on to-night. I'm surprised you ain't sea-sick. She's tumblin' round considerable."

"I do feel a bit squeamish. After a big ship this is like riding a seesaw."

"Sorry I can't tuck you in and feed you cracked ice and lemon juice," guffawed Captain Moses, "but you'll have something else to think about 'tween now and morning. It's fixin' for a shift of wind, says my rheumatics. I wish we could double the cape and beat into Provincetown, but it's liable to ketch us too soon. I guess we'll both stay on deck, Ed. Better tell the cook to have some coffee and sandwiches ready. You've coddled me till I get sleepy and peevish if I'm kept up after midnight."

"Your wife will thank me when she takes a look at you," said Barrington. "Doing two men's work, with a worthless mate and a lazy crew, was wearing you out."

"Ginger is what you're full of, Ed, and it's ketchin', like measles. Wait till Lucy Carpenter sees the schooner from her window," and the skipper proudly straightened himself, "all spick and span like a brand-new vessel right off the stocks. You're a dreadful extravagant young man with paint, but it's worth it, just to please Lucy. It's kind of hard for her to realize that me and the *Henrietta* are growin' old together and can't help showin' our age."

A drizzle of rain, and they put on oilskins, the boy Frank taking the wheel, and Barrington standing beside him. The ancient schooner swallowed more heavily as the wind increased, and the cargo of coal diminished her buoyancy. It was so much dead weight, and she could not rise quickly enough to clear the deck of the water which tumbled over the low bulwarks. Wearily grumbling, but not alarmed, the cook and the able seaman set the pump to clanking as a routine duty. Captain Carpenter was in excellent spirits, but

it seemed well to heave to before the sea should rise higher. Again Barrington furled and reefed, leaving no more canvas than was needed to keep her headed into the wind. Rummaging in the lockers, he discovered one stout piece of duck which he bent as a storm trysail. Nothing more could be done by way of preparation.

As the night wore on, black, spray-swept, clamorous, the *Henrietta* battled nobly as though animated by the will to live and justify her master's faith. The odds were great, but victory seemed possible. Several feet of water washed in the hold, and the coal had shifted, but these five exhausted men swore to stay afloat and make the nearest port of refuge. Barrington was glad to fight through such a night as this, for the sheer love of the fighting. Earlier in the voyage he had begun to rid himself of the obsession of failure, and this was like a final cleansing. To help snatch this forlorn coaster from oblivion was an achievement whose merit only a seaman could appraise. Barrington knew he had done nothing finer in his sixteen years afloat.

Without disaster, they weathered it until some time after dawn. Barrington was urging Captain Carpenter to go below and rest when the sound of cracking timber startled all hands. The deck planks quivered and were ripped asunder as the tall mainmast swayed for a moment, lurched, and fell crashing over the schooner's side like an uprooted tree. With it went a wild tangle of shrouds and stays and cordage. In the heart of the fair round stick of pine was the hidden rot which could no longer withstand this night's strain and stress.

The crippled *Henrietta* fell off into the trough of the sea, and one wave, black and huge, swept across the deck and tried to stamp her under. Sluggishly she rose, and was still afloat, but the cook and the sailor were gone from

their labor at the pump, gone without even a cry to those who were left. It was instinct that saved Captain Carpenter, who dived for the cabin companion-way and shoved back the hatch. Colliding with the boy Frank, he delayed to thrust him, head foremost, down the stairs. Then a hissing cataract poured in and washed them against the table and chairs.

When the mainmast went, Barrington was hit on the head by a flying pulley block. The blow felled him in his tracks, and as the schooner rolled he slid, inert, and his body was caught and held fast under the lee rail of the poop. The masterless schooner, not much more than a sinking hulk, somehow survived a series of tremendous assaults, one gray-backed comber following another, and there came a respite as the wind veered into the west. It made the sea confused and broken, permitting the *Henrietta* to exist a little longer, like the beaten swimmer in the surf who struggles for a chance to draw breath.

Barrington remembered nothing until the skipper had pulled him from the rail and lashed him in a sitting posture against the binnacle. The brightness of morning was belated by a cloudy mist. It was possible to discern the outline of the schooner, to gain a blurred impression of the havoc wrought. Vanished was the galley, and the dory, which had been stowed amidships, was a bundle of broken boards jammed in a disorder of trailing ropes. There was no other boat for the three survivors to launch.

With reviving consciousness, Barrington held his hands to his head and discovered a ragged gash which had cut to the bone. The salt water had cleansed and stanched it, but the touch of his fingers was excessively painful and helped to arouse him. He looked at the schooner and then at the gaunt, stooping figure of the skipper, who

stood idly by. There was a recurring jar and a dull, thumping sound which perplexed Barrington, his senses still befogged, and he tried to ask a question. Captain Carpenter heard him mutter, and bent over to listen.

"It's the butt of the mainmast overside, Ed," he explained, "a-pounding her to pieces like a batterin'-ram. The rigging holds it from driftin' away, and I ain't been able to climb down and chop it clear. Too hefty a job. Not much use, either. She is sinkin' under our feet, my poor old vessel."

The mate tried to rise, fumbling with the rope that bound him to the binnacle. He had fancied the thumping noise might be in his head, which ached and throbbed. His vision was curiously uncertain. The shape of the skipper came and went like smoke, and the lone foremast, draped with rags of canvas and ropes' ends, was multiplied against the eastern sky. The profound desolation of the scene left his mind indifferent, as though he were no part of it. Not alert impulse, but the mechanical prompting of habit, caused him to say in a flat voice:

"Find an ax and I'll cut that mainmast free. Sinking, is she? Not much chance of sighting anything. We must have drifted to the outer edge of the coastwise track. Where are the men?"

"There's nobody else left but Frank," replied the captain. "I'm kind of sorry you cussed the cook so frequent and hearty. That last batch of biscuits was real encouragin', I thought. Frank is pokin' around to find grub. We lost all the fresh water. You're hurt bad, Ed. Better set still and let me tie your head up."

"Oh, never mind that," was the pettish exclamation. "Give me a hand, if you please. We might as well be doing something."

Captain Moses put an arm around his waist and supported him a few steps,

begging him to lie down upon the cabin roof.

"No use takin' you below, Ed. Everything is all afloat. I'm terrible sorry it had to happen this way. Who would ha' thought it now, when we run across each other in that hotel in New York and it was turnin' out to be such a happy kind of a reunion voyage, that our home folks had seen the last of us?"

It was well enough for the skipper to speak with the resignation of old age, but Barrington felt annoyance that he should be included in the funeral sermon. He shook off his stupor, and raised himself to scan the horizon in search of steam or sail.

"There is brandy in the medicine chest, if Frank can find it," said he. "A nip will put heart into us. Whatever it was that hit me did something funny to my head. I ought to feel a lot more interested in this performance."

"It's pretty serious, seems to me, this predicament of ours," mildly commented Captain Carpenter as he went to look for Frank. After an effort, the mate laid hold of an idea and dizzily moved to the rail. The broken mainmast was still hammering the schooner's side. This great spar, the boom and gaff attached to it, was the nearest thing to a raft they had when the last moment should come. Presently Frank appeared with a jar of pickles and a can of beef, and Barrington, with a touch of his old peremptory manner, sent him back for an ax.

Deaf to the skipper's protests, the mate crawled into the waist, where the frothing seas were playing, and hauled himself to a gap in the bulwark. Frank followed him, an eager volunteer, but Barrington roughly ordered the boy away. This was a man's job, the mate's duty. He watched for the opportunity, between the battering floods of water, and let the ax fly at one stout rope after another, striving to detach the

mainmast lest it be pulled down with the schooner when she sank. The wire stays baffled him, and he hacked again and again, careless of his own safety, until once a breaker sent him spinning to the other side of the deck. His strong arms were shorn of their accustomed force, and his eye was no longer true, but he doggedly persisted.

It became evident, at length, that he was in sore need of help, and the others tried to make their way to him. Representing this, he swung the ax at the twisted shrouds like a madman, yelling at the old man and the boy to stand clear. They stretched a line, clinging to it and, entreating him to tie one end in his leather belt, but he refused to delay. There were only two more entanglements to sever, one of them the knotted mainsheet, which had wound itself around the mast. Precariously balancing himself, he aimed a blow which fell short, and he was compelled to swing out over the side, grasping the broken bulwark with one hand while he made another effort. This time the sheet parted, and his work was done. The remaining rope he proposed to cut when they were ready to abandon the schooner and cling to the floating spars. With doors and hatch covers they might possibly convert them into something more like a raft.

At the moment when he pulled himself inward and regained the deck, a wave rushed across from the other side and caught him from behind. Captain Carpenter, again trying to reach him with a line, groaned as he saw him pitch forward and topple into the sea. It was not so much the danger of drowning as of being crushed between the schooner and the lunging mainmast. Barrington's head bobbed up in the yeasty foam just as the huge timber swung back to menace him. He dived and escaped for the moment, but the tangle of broken ropes and torn canvas barred the way and almost trapped him,

as in a net. He came up, swimming feebly and well-nigh spent as the mast swayed out and left a few feet of intervening water.

Comprehending his plight, unable to save him otherwise, Captain Moses Carpenter had jerked Frank's heavy knife from the sheath on his hip, and was sawing at the one rope which still attached the mast to the vessel. The strands were already frayed, and the strain snapped them at the touch of the blade. Released, and no longer feeling the violent drag as the schooner rolled, the mast began slowly to drift to leeward, carrying Barrington with it. He had striven desperately to regain the schooner, but his hands slipped as he clawed the wet sides, and the next swell, green and swollen, bore him away as it broke. Flung against the mast, he clutched one of the wooden hoops and groped for the trailing bight of a halyard which brushed his face. Sliding it under his arms, he somehow tied himself fast and was not washed off the buoyant spar to which he clung.

It was not vouchsafed to him to know that Captain Carpenter had made the choice and accepted the sacrifice, for he had not seen the old man whip out the knife and cut the rope which held the mast alongside. With it went the hope of rescue for the twain who were left behind. In the small space of time before the *Henrietta* should founder they could fashion nothing else that was likely to keep them long afloat. They could not even try, for the ax had gone overboard with the mate.

At the last gasp, Barrington endeavored to shout to them, but his voice was scarcely more than a whisper, and he raised one arm in a beckoning gesture. The skipper's reply came down the wind, deep and unshaken, aye, with the timbre of youth:

"I can't swim a stroke, Ed. Ridiculous, ain't it? It's good-by and fare you well. Hang on and you're liable

to be picked up. Sorry I got you into such a mess. Tell my wife, but never mind; she'll know——"

The old man turned to speak to Frank, the boy in his teens who had left home to follow the sea because he loved it and dreamed of great things. Dimly Barrington beheld them standing together near the wheel, the skipper's hand upon Frank's shoulder, while they argued. The lad shook his head. Perhaps he was afraid he could not swim so far in rough water and overtake the drifting mast, and perhaps he beheld a vision, an ideal, the gift of the immortal gods, which forbade it that he should leave his captain to die alone. He had greatly desired to become such a man and a sailor as Barrington. It was so fated that while yet an untutored boy in the forecastle he should attain the goal.

This he made manifest as Barrington distantly descried him in these last moments. Frank stood erect and shook hands with the aged skipper, as though sealing a compact. Then, without bravado, but like one cheerily waving good-by from the end of a pier, he flourished his cap at the vanishing mate and the tossing spars. This was almost the final glimpse. Not long after, the penciled foremast and the thin, black line of the hull were erased from the horizon.

With the obliteration of the *Henrietta*, Barrington's thoughts dimly returned to his own condition as he lolled forward upon the mast. No exertion was required to keep his face above the water, and, with the falling wind, the spray no longer choked him. The sea had an icy chill, which slowly numbed him, but the sensation was not unpleasant. It eased the torturing pain in his head. Spells of stupor made it difficult to remember what had befallen him, and the threads were so confused that now he was on the bridge of the *Columbian* with Captain McCready

Pope, and again on the water-logged schooner's deck.

The sun emerged from the clouds and mist, and the somber ocean brilliantly changed its aspect. Blue and white it sparkled, and the warm breeze from the west invited skippers bound coastwise to make sail and away. A distant smudge of smoke marked a passing steamer, and there was a white gleam or two like a bit of cloud or the wing of a gull, but Barrington saw them not, and was spared the delusion of false hope. The intervals of consciousness became briefer and hazier. There was no more fight in him, but nevertheless the fiber of his being was immensely tenacious, and he held fast to life while the sea cradled his limp body and the splintered mast drifted on its aimless course.

CHAPTER XI.

The Italian bark, *San Vincenzo*, laden with lumber, had sailed from Boston in time to be caught in the gale which gave her a lively shaking up and carried away several thousand feet of pine boards that were stacked on deck. This did not sweeten the temper of Captain Alessandro Tornita, who considered the mishap an ill omen for the long voyage to Montevideo. He was a fiery bantam of a man who fancied himself master of the bark; but the amiable brigands in the forecastle were much more afraid of his wife, the Signora Maria, mighty of bulk, who sat enthroned beneath an awning in fair weather and did marvelous embroidery in the gayest of colors.

She adored this little Alessandro of hers, and she ruled him, for the most part, with a kind of serene, Olympian forbearance.

The volcanic Captain Tornita was briskly pacing his quarter-deck, halting before he turned to scowl at the sea. His boots were of the shiniest, the white shirt of silk with a low, rolling collar,

the panama hat of the costliest weave, and the loosely knotted crimson tie made a brave splotch of color. It gratified the signora to behold him as she plied her needle. Her own wants were few, but she desired him to be decked in fine raiment. He was her one extravagance, his pulchritude beyond compare.

There was no excitement in her limpid eyes when Alessandro suddenly forgot to be statuesque and indulged himself in frenzied gesticulation. The sailors had forsaken their tasks and were gazing at something which rose and fell beyond the bow of the bark. It was a bit of wreckage, a mast and other spars, which could not have been long in the water. They were yellow and newly scraped, torn from some vessel which had been well cared for, presumably a victim of the same gale that had buffeted the *San Vincenzo*. What appeared at a distance to be a bundle of sodden canvas was presently revealed as the body of a man. Captain Tornita, moved to pity, dramatically bared his head, crossed himself, muttered a prayer for the soul of the unfortunate one.

The wreckage slid past, and it was noticed that the face of the drowned seaman was unsubmerged. He had bound himself fast with a rope. The chatter was hushed until the mellow voice of the signora floated from her chair beneath the awning:

"Alessandro, mine, do you not intend to stop the ship and lower a boat? It is my opinion that you should do so. The man may not be dead. It is a black crime to leave him there."

Alessandro danced over to her, twirling his small mustache, his eyes glittering as he ejaculated:

"My sugarplum, it is evil fortune to see a floating corpse when one is leaving port. I weep for the poor man, but it is better not to touch him. Alive? You are deceived. The figurehead of the *San Vincenzo* is no deader."

"Turn the ship about at once. I looked closely. It was not the face of a dead man."

Many orders were shouted, and there was a great running to and fro by swarthy sailors with gold rings in their ears. It was a helter-skelter school of discipline, and when something was to be done on the moment the only calm soul on board was the signora. Even the steward's terrier pup barked and ran in circles. Slowly the yards were braced, and the *San Vincenzo* lost headway while a yawl was dropped from its davits at the stern. Now as eager as he had been obstinate, Captain Tornita leaped in and grasped the steering oar. Frantically he exhorted the men to show him that they were not mere worthless lumps, unable to pull their own weight. Balancing himself with the ease of an acrobat, he blew a kiss to the signora, who sent him a flashing smile of approval.

Sympathetic were the exclamations from bow to stern as the yawl danced closer to the drifting spars, but there was small inclination to lay hold of the body of the hapless sailor until Alessandro threatened punishments of a bloodcurdling nature and brandished the boat hook as the handiest weapon. A knife cut the lashings, and wiry arms rolled the castaway over the side, letting him sprawl against an after thwart, where Captain Tornita leaned over him.

The man's face was waxen, the eyes closed, and the scar of a fresh wound extended from the forehead into the dripping hair. The shirt had been torn from the powerful chest, and Alessandro laid his cheek against it, but was unable to detect the heart's faint pulsation. A sailor passed him a pocket mirror, and it was fancied that a breath slightly clouded it, but this might have been the dampness from the sea, and there was animated argument until the captain screamed, shaking his fist at them:

"Do we wait all day and talk like so many parrots while this man dies? Is it a punchinello show for your amusement? Body of Bacchus, I blush for you, inhuman animals!"

Unabashed, they shot the oars into the tholepins and heartily pulled for the bark. The signora met them as they swarmed aboard and laid the inanimate sailor on deck. Alessandro was about to order him carried into the forecastle, but she ordained otherwise. He was to be placed in the cabin, where she could attend to him. The steward was to remove his wet clothing, wrap him in blankets, apply hot-water bottles, and force a drink of spirits between his teeth. Truly a man of such strength as this one could not be easily parted from life. Alessandro grumbled, for the after quarters were crowded and he was jealous of his own comfort, but his Maria ignored him and returned no more to her embroidery.

All day long she fought to gain the upper hand of death until Alessandro, gazing down through the open skylight or darting in for brief visits, implored her to desist. The soul of the man had fled, he declared, and there was no calling it back. But she continued to rub his hands, his arms, his feet, to bathe the wounded head, to try all manner of restoratives, for a tinge of color was discernible in the blanched lips, and the chilled heart fluttered. She felt him to be her own salvage, rescued because of her protestations, and she nursed him with a vast maternal tenderness. At length she announced that the victory was won, but doubtless the blow on the head had benumbed his mind. He lived and breathed and had not been drowned, yet there might be a serious illness to follow, wherefore he must be moved into the room of the second mate, who could find a bunk in the middle deck house with the boatswain.

The next day found Barrington delirious and babbling incessantly of epi-

sodes and voyages remote. English was an unfamiliar tongue aboard the *San Vincenzo*, which, until now, had traded between Mediterranean and South American ports, and the signora knew no more than a few words picked up in Boston. Her husband boasted of a more fluent vocabulary, but inasmuch as it had been acquired among the wharves and quays of his wanderings, his efforts to make himself understood consisted mostly of rude Anglo-Saxon profanity which detonated like a packet of firecrackers.

They were unable to learn from the sick man's disjointed mutterings who he was or whence he had come. Much of the time he seemed to be trying to tell others what to do, and Alessandro admitted that he must have been an officer of some sort.

"Perhaps a wife or sweetheart waits for him, my Alessandro," said the signora. "Such thoughts make me weep. He will have to stay in our ship until he is well. It is impossible to send him home in a steamer if we meet one at sea, for he cannot be moved. It is a long illness, this affliction of the head, and it may be necessary to carry him with us to Montevideo."

For a fortnight Barrington lay comatose between intervals of delirium which were never violent, but rather a mental incoherence with a low fever that wasted him pitifully. He often complained of his head, and Alessandro ventured the offhand diagnosis that the man's skull had been cracked, letting in enough salt water to spoil his brain, as a steamer's machinery is made useless by rust.

There came one night a torrential wind from a windless sky. It beat on the decks like a thousand drums and boomed in cataracts from the scuppers. Barrington turned over, opened his eyes, yawned, and lay, listening. Rain upon the roof! He was at home in Eppingham, home from a voyage

coastwise with Captain Moses Carpenter. He must get up and save his mother the trouble of closing the windows. No, this was a ship's cabin, and he was in a bunk, not a four-posted bed. He stared at the painted ceiling of deck beams and planking, and then at the brassbound port with the bull's-eye glass. His nose was troubled by a smell compounded of garlic and bilge water, a flavor made richer and more pervasive by the fact that the skylights were closed. This sense of smell, more quickly alert than the others, led him to perceive that he was in strange surroundings, in a vessel hitherto unknown to him. By a sort of slow, focusing process his mind became aware of a sequence of events instead of a jumbled disorder, and memory was granted him to recall the last moments of the *Henrietta* and his survival adrift.

He was Edward Barrington. His own identity was clear, but the rest of it was like gazing through a mist, which, while it did not wholly obscure, yet conveyed an impression of unreality. A tiny lamp swayed in a socket against the wall, and he watched the shadows dance as the bark heaved to the long ground swell. Shadows! That was it. All the people and the ships he had ever known were like these shadows from the lamp. He felt neither sorrow nor anxiety nor anger, only a vague curiosity to learn where he was and whither bound. Some one shouted on deck, in a foreign tongue, and there was a tramp of feet and a singsong musical chorus. This was no Yankee merchantman, then, but a deep-water craft, presumably square-rigged.

A steward in a dingy duck jacket entered the room, glanced carelessly at the invalid, saw that he was quiet, and was about to resume his watch when a whisper amazed him. He unhooked the lamp, held it above the bunk, caught the look of questioning intelligence, and ran to summon the signora. She dal-

lied not for ceremony, but came in a nightgown voluminously chaste and wonderfully embroidered, the tears rolling down her brown cheeks. She seemed to fill the room and to billow beyond the doorway. Barrington smiled a welcome, and his fingers returned the pressure of her hand. Loudly she called Alessandro, who flew in, dripping wet, to peer over her shoulder, kiss it worshipfully, and then hop up and down like a delighted child.

"He speaks to us," blubbered the signora. "Can you not hear? It is no more the nonsense of the insane. He desires to know."

"What devil was it that invented this English language?" heatedly replied her husband. "Do you understand anything, my birdling?"

"No, but I had the presence of mind to say instantly: 'Will—you—have—a—the—drr—rink?' I swear to you, Alessandro, beloved, he winked with one of his eyes."

"A flask, then, of the wine which my brother-in-law gave us. Of his most precious vintage, which we have saved for feast days," cried Captain Tornita as he hastened the steward with a vigorous touch of his boot. "A miracle! There shall burn at the shrine of the blessed San Vincenzo a candle as tall as yourself, my Maria; no, as tall as my height."

"You are thrifty," laughed the signora, who overtopped him by a foot. "Yes, we will drink a glass of wine to our guest. He will tell us his name."

Stray scraps of Latin from random reading enabled the invalid to comprehend what was desired, and as she knelt by the bunk he murmured, and she joyfully repeated:

"Eduardo Barintona—so musical, so like the divine Italian. You will address him, Alessandro, in English."

"Mia sheep—go Montevideo—how you do—jumpa lively, all aboarda," la-

boriously declaimed Captain Tornita. "Your nut all right? Come Boston?"

"Bravo!" cried the signora, clapping her hands. "Soon the signor will talk the Italian."

At a suggestion from Alessandro she vacated the stateroom, and he took the center of the stage. The spoken word was needless when he began to describe in pantomime astonishingly eloquent the rescue in the yawl. He was superb. One was to suppose that he had been the sole actor, that Barrington owed his life to him. The signora chuckled and held her peace. There should be no discordant note in this celebration. Very anxious to have the nautical rank of his guest established, Captain Tornita fetched pictures of various kinds of ships, holding them, one by one, to the lamplight until Barrington nodded assent.

"A great passenger steamer," solemnly quoth the master of the *San Vincenzo*, "a steamer of ten thousand tons. He was an officer. See, he is pointing his finger at the bridge when I hold the picture near. Too young to be the commander, but one of the officers, no doubt. But it was not the mast of a great steamer which was floating in the water, my Maria. A collision, perhaps, and he was cast overboard to cling to the wreckage of the small sailing vessel which was struck."

"Did I not tell you the truth, stupid?" snapped Maria.

The story of the *Henrietta* was too difficult to explain, and Barrington was compelled to retain the halo of glory brought from the *Columbian*, an honor instead of a disgrace. These friends left him to sleep dreamlessly until the sun streamed into the port and the steward appeared with coffee. His wits were clearer, but the feeling of indifference persisted, and he laid it to bodily weakness. Give him sufficient strength to crawl on deck and breathe the wind again, and his normal interest must

surely revive. To speed his convalescence the signora evicted the cook from his galley and cooked special dishes herself, after ransacking the storeroom for delicacies. The hencoop was raided, and the treasured fowls sacrificed for broth, their squawks echoed by the loud lamentations of Alessandro, while the crew offered cigarettes and sweetmeats from their sea chests.

A few days and Barrington was carried on a mattress to the after deck, where the signora sat beside him under the awning. The *San Vincenzo* and the way things were done, with so much noise and wasted energy, quarrels which threatened bloodshed and ended in laughter, the maledictions and the foppishness of the strutting Captain Tornita furnished continual entertainment. And when he tired of it there was the majestic, affectionate presence of Signora Maria to soothe him. He was like a spectator in a theater, however, detached and isolated, and not even his professional zeal was kindled by this first experience aboard a square-rigged vessel, where there was an immense amount for him to learn.

There was no more pain in his head, and the wound had healed, leaving a long, red mark and a curious nick, as though the bone had been slightly furrowed. He had heard of similar accidents which resulted in loss of memory or insanity, one case that of a third mate who had fallen from a derrick boom, but he himself was spared an aftermath so calamitous. He remembered without effort, but also without emotion, and nothing surprised or touched him. As lazily placid as a lotus-eater, he cared not how many months the voyage might last or what awaited him at the end of it. His mind was still retentive, and it was no more than a pastime to learn a smattering of Italian. The signora made rapid progress with her English, but Alessandro was too impatient to apply himself, and

from his lips flowed liquid curses upon a method of speech so harsh, so perplexing, so incredibly barbarous.

The *San Vincenzo* crossed the equator and followed her solitary course into southern latitudes. No ship passed within signaling distance to carry back the message that Edward Barrington had been saved from the wreck of the *Henrietta*. She had gone down in the month of May, and the summer would be almost over before he should come to port at Montevideo. During this long passage he regained something of his health and vigor, though there was no inclination toward the old robust activity.

He was still much thinner than before, and the process of physical recuperation seemed to be at a standstill. The fine solidity of his shoulders had not returned, and he stooped a little, like an older man who had lost his keen-edged efficiency. His face was changed, partly because of loss of flesh, the cheek bones more prominent, the eyes larger, the chin hidden by a small beard which the signora had carefully trimmed, and the red scar creeping down on his forehead. There were other differences more vital and of which he was unconscious, and the sum of them all made an Edward Barrington whom the friends of other days would not readily have recognized.

He stepped ashore at Montevideo still somewhat dazed, but more like himself than he had been since his rescue from an ocean grave. He bade good-by to his friends of the *San Vincenzo* with real regret, and began his search for a ship bound home.

The Lampton & Rolfe steamer *Pembroke* was sailing in a day or two, and he promptly signed on, to work his way to New York.

In the back of his brain was the thought that he must take vengeance on the two men he hated—Captain McCready Pope and Ashley Corbin; but

this impulse he fought against with all the forces of his nature. He felt that if he should meet Pope again he would take the law into his own hands; yet he knew that he could never return home with blood on his soul. So he fought his battle with himself.

"Vengeance is not mine," he told himself over and over again till the black thoughts fled and the menace of the homicidal mania disappeared. But not enough for him that he should put the past behind him. He would test himself so as to be sure of the future; stand face to face with Captain Pope; sail in the same ship with him, if possible, and prove that he had conquered.

The test was simple enough to devise. It impressed him as profoundly reasonable, even necessary, and he accepted it without wavering as a thing decreed. By way of preparation he suffered his beard to grow again, and when, a fortnight later, he studied himself in a mirror, he concluded that this thin-faced, melancholy specter of a man could not be easily recognizable, nor was the resonance any longer in his voice.

CHAPTER XII.

When the *Pembroke* reached New York, Barrington went to a sailors' boarding house in which he had formerly recruited men. The landlord found him poring over a sailing list in the dingy lounging room, and inquired:

"Lookin' for a ship, Jack? What was you in last?"

"I was sick for several months. Coastwise steamers before that. I lost my discharges," Barrington replied, without looking up.

"Never mind your papers. You look sober. I'm needin' men bad, and the shipping agents will give me no rest."

"I see that the *Hesperian* is in port, Paddy. And so Captain McCready Pope has her now! I was in the ship

once. Can you get me signed on as a seaman?"

The boarding-house keeper grinned as he answered: "Like a shot. A runner was out scrapin' Front Street this very morning for five men to go in the *Hesperian*. She ain't as popular as she was."

"Has Captain Pope anything to do with it?"

"So I hear tell. They call him a Jonah. You will hear them settin' about and cursin' him by way of diversion."

"Because he was unlucky enough to lose the *Columbian*?" asked Barrington, holding himself steady with an effort.

"Oh, that might happen to any man. But they say worse misfortune is bound to come to Handsome Mac, sailors bein' full of queer notions. I dunno the facts, but the yarn is that he double-crossed his mate that's never been heard of since. What did you say your name was? You remind me of him a bit, though he was a fine, strappin', two-fisted man."

"Edwards. Jack Edwards is my name," murmured Barrington. "I shall be much obliged to you, Paddy, if you can put me in the *Hesperian*. I'm not afraid to sail with Handsome Mac. It's my first chance to get a berth, and I am tired of loafing."

"Nine o'clock to-morrow mornin', then. I'll take you to the marine superintendent's office to sign the roll. Old Ridpath is there no more."

"The steamer sails at noon on Wednesday. I know," said Barrington. "Who took Captain Ridpath's place?"

"It's filled temporary by a jumpin'-jack out of Allen Hersey's office, a cousin to him that learned his seafarin' in one of them correspondence schools, so the officers say. I have no use for the snipe. Old Ridpath would damn your eyes if you tried to slip one over on him, but you didn't mind, for he knew his business."

"And so this mate of the *Columbian* was never heard of again, Paddy?"

"Not after the company give him the bounce. Barrington was the name of him. I saw him a couple of times when he was in a hurry for sailors. There was no palmin' off on him the drunken rakin's of hell that miscall themselves able seamen nowadays. He might ha' took you, Jack, for all you're a broken-down sort of an apology, for he liked 'em clean and decent. Well, it's the way of the world. We're here to-day, and to-morrow we may not be anywhere at all."

"But Captain McCready Pope still flourishes," said Barrington, and his show of feeling made Paddy cock his head and observe:

"I have prejudiced you agin' him? Maybe there's nothin' in it."

"I will look him over for myself. I have sailed with all kinds. I'm curious to find out what this Handsome Mac is like."

At noon next day a seaman who had signed himself as Edwards stood on the foredeck of the *Hesperian*, waiting to lay hold of a hawser and stow it away as soon as the steam capstan should begin to clank. A cloth cap was pulled over his eyes. His clothing had been picked up in a South Street slop-shop—blue shirt, dungaree breeches, leather belt. On the lofty bridge, Captain McCready Pope walked to and fro, straight, ruddy, immaculate in white uniform, for the September day was like midsummer. With a graceful flourish of his gold-braided cap he bade farewell to friends on the wharf and gave the order to cast off.

The *Hesperian* slowly moved away, her rail lined with passengers. After a forecastle dinner, Seaman Jack Edwards was assigned to a watch and told to scrub paint. The chief officer of the *Hesperian* had been an acquaintance in the old days, but they had never sailed together. He bestowed no more

than a careless, impersonal glance upon the quiet, slouching sailor with the stubbled beard who saluted respectfully and went to the promenade deck with his pail, soap, and brushes.

Barrington's nerves were unstrung, and the blood raced through his veins. Already the test had brought him near the breaking strain. He could not be indifferent to the presence of Captain McCready Pope; it was almost impossible to beat down the insensate desire to kill him with whatever weapon came to hand. But he tried not to see him, he struggled to think of himself as elsewhere, and put the past from him as an unhappy dream.

On the second day of the voyage he was again cleaning paintwork when Captain Pope, strolling affably among the passengers, halted at a group of chairs and made himself agreeable to the ladies. He paid no heed to the sailor who plied a brush on the side of the white deck house near by, and the sailor who was careful to turn his back to him. One of the ladies had saved a newspaper clipping to show the captain. She had made several voyages in his ships, conceiving an admiration for him.

"I happened to read this not long ago," she prattled, "and I put it carefully away for you, Captain Pope, although you may have seen it yourself. But it was published in a Boston paper, and possibly it escaped your notice."

The commander scanned it hastily, made no comment, and appeared to read it a second time. Absently he replied:

"I had not seen it, Mrs. Doane. I wonder if it is true."

"Oh, I hope not, but it sounds so, doesn't it? So circumstantial, and dated from the town in which the poor man lived. It even quotes his mother, Mrs. Susan Barrington. She has given him up."

"This says that he went out from

New York in a small schooner called the *Henrietta*, one of the oldest in the coastwise trade," mechanically repeated Captain Pope. "And she was lost with all hands in a gale off Cape Cod, in May?"

"Yes, and it seems so sad and strange that the news should be given out after all these months. Why wasn't it known that he was on board when the schooner was wrecked? What is your explanation, Captain Pope?"

"I am sure I can't answer that, Mrs. Doane. He was mate of her, according to this dispatch. His name should have appeared in the list of those on board. This is the first I have heard of it."

"Perhaps he took another name," suggested another woman of the group. "We were discussing it this morning. Mrs. Doane got us very much interested. She had seen this Mr. Barrington several years ago in one of the older steamers when he was a junior officer. But why should he hide the fact that he was the mate of this little schooner?"

"You have not heard, then, the reason why he left the service of the Tropical Navigation Company?" said Captain Pope, feigning reluctance.

"Not a word," cried Mrs. Doane, "Do tell us the story."

The sailor called Jack Edwards laid down his pail and brush, and walked to the rail to stand gripping an awning stanchion like a man seized with vertigo. His knees knocked together, and he swayed from side to side. An officer noticed him in passing, and gruffly asked if he were ill or getting over a big drunk.

"Ill, if you please, sir," was the half-whispered reply. "If you will let me go below this watch I can pull myself together."

"Turn in, then, and take a dose of quinine. It looks like chills to me."

As the sailor slowly made his way

forward, his step uncertain, his figure stooped, Captain McCready Pope glanced in his direction. The man's voice had been unlike Barrington's, but something had startled the dashing commander. He could not have defined it. Barrington had died at sea, and yet he felt afraid of Barrington, as though he were living and hostile and very near. The story which he was about to tell the ladies died on his lips. Against his will he was restrained from telling it. The audience noticed his sudden pre-occupation, and were at a loss to understand it. His usual manner conveyed the most flattering attention. When he spoke it was to repeat, this time in accents no more than audible:

"He was lost at sea, in an old coasting schooner. She went down with all hands, in May? That would be shortly after he left the service."

"I am so sorry to have grieved you," exclaimed Mrs. Doane. "I had no idea you were so fond of him. I should have remembered that he was your chief officer."

"He went in that wretched little schooner because he could find nothing else to do," faltered Captain Pope, still speaking to himself. "Pardon me, Mrs. Doane. It did bowl me over for a moment. Most of us sailors have mothers waiting at home. And when such a thing as this comes to one of your own shipmates—"

"There is something so noble in men's friendships," sighed Mrs. Doane. "I sometimes wonder if we women are capable of such devoted affection for other women."

"If you will be good enough to excuse me—I am needed for'ard," said the captain. "May I keep the newspaper clipping?"

He went to his room to sit alone until the dinner gong sounded a cheerful alarm. When a weak man does a wicked deed to win some great advantage for himself he risks incurring cer-

tain penalties which the sinner of a tougher fiber is able to escape. There is the matter of consequences. It angered Captain Pope that Barrington should have been so inconsiderate as to get himself drowned as a consequence of the *Columbian* investigation. He should have had a more decent regard for the feelings of others. And it was even more tactless of him to leave a mourning mother who paraded herself and her affliction in print.

It was Barrington's own fault, this blundering off to sea in one of the oldest schooners afloat instead of chucking it up and looking for some sort of a sensible position ashore. Captain Pope had been almost able to persuade himself of his own innocence until this annoying revelation. Out of sight was out of mind with a man of his kind. He had become aware that officers and sailors shunned his ship, and he knew the reason why, but his armor of self-conceit was hard to dent, and so long as he held the favor of the general manager he cared not what the underlings thought of him.

Nevertheless, the published tidings of Barrington's tragic death were awkward, excessively so. It would make talk among those who had followed the course of the *Columbian* affair, and might swing a lot of sympathy. If Barrington had fallen downstairs and broken his cursed neck, nobody would have given it a second thought. But he had managed to make a melodramatic finish of it, confound him!

Beneath the shallow surface of these selfish musings there ran a darker, stronger current of feeling. It was not yet fear, but something akin, an intense uneasiness that defied explanation, a disquieting apprehension which made him say to himself, with a nervous laugh:

"I never took much stock in ghosts or in yarns of haunted ships, but—pshaw, that sounds like the old boy

that shot the albatross. The sea gives men queer notions. When I was a youngster I believed that Mother Carey's chickens were the souls of drowned sailors."

After dinner he joined his chief officer, Mr. Blair, on the bridge, and stayed there with him until midnight for the sake of companionship. He felt averse to entertaining the ladies and even more reluctant to be alone. And he could not rid himself of the perturbing restlessness which became tinged with melancholy because he was a sentimental-ist. He lived over again the episodes of the temptation which had persuaded him to barter his honor in order to save his skin. They presented themselves with extraordinary insistence and in panoramic detail. At the time he had not much concerned himself with what might happen to Barrington as the result of the proceedings in Captain Ridpath's office. He had disliked the dead man from the start, had been secretly afraid of his stronger personality and greater ability, and would have tripped him, if possible, in the course of their association at sea. But this would have been merely to drive him out of the company into some other line of steamers. There would have been none of this damnably uncomfortable sensation of responsibility for his death and the far stranger notion that his soul had followed in the wake of the *Hesperian* along the old familiar track southbound.

In the forecastle the seaman who was more like Barrington's wraith than his ghost strove with what strength he had to think of anything else in the world than Captain McCready Pope. He dared not trust himself again to be near him, to hear his voice, his mellow laugh. However, he was not utterly discouraged, for in the first encounter his better self had gained the mastery. But the effort had been so exhausting that his faculties demanded a respite, and he asked permission of his watch

officer to shift to night duty, pleading South American service and a touch of sun as an excuse. For the remainder of the run to New Orleans he was able to avoid the provocation of seeing Captain Pope, but this was to evade the issue and flinch from the test.

At times he was of a mind to desert the ship and confess himself beaten, condemned to wander in obliteration for the rest of his days, but the homing instinct fed the flickering flame of hope, and he stayed in the *Hesperian* for the round voyage. Northward her course sought the favoring Gulf Stream and the Florida coast, just as the *Columbian* had traversed it to find the reef that trapped her.

Captain Pope was on the bridge more than usual, and his meals were sent up to his room, although the weather was singularly clear and untroubled. His jocund laugh was silenced, and his manner unaccountably irritable. The routine of navigation he took into his own hands, checking up every item of data, examining the dial of the patient log, making his own allowances for current and slip, pricking off distances on the chart with rule and compasses, fidgeting with his binoculars as though eager to be the first to discern the coastwise landmarks.

The chief officer, a man of his own selection, said to the second as they met in the messroom:

"It's natural enough for the old man to be a trifle fussy in these waters. He can't help remembering the *Columbian*. But I never saw him act like this."

"He has been up in the air for the last week, and growing worse," was the reply. "I put it down to loss of sleep—he is moving about in his room at all hours. I had an uncle, a big, hearty cuss, too, who ran afoul of a streak of insomnia and it played the dickens with him. He cured himself by working with a pick and shovel ten hours a day and eating three raw turnips at

bedtime. Here's this skipper of ours, full-blooded, plenty of rich grub, and nothing to do."

"He takes good care of himself for all that," retorted the other. "Wait till he asks you to put on the gloves with him. I'd sooner be hit by a captain bar."

"Well, he is losing his punch, you can take it from me. Step up behind him suddenly in the dark, say, and he whirls on you like a flash. Jumpy nerves! Something or other has got his goat."

"Then feed the goat on raw turnips," scoffed the first officer. "Why don't you suggest it to him?"

"Because it's as much as my job is worth to suggest anything at all, even in the line of duty. He scolds like an old woman."

"It may be a woman at that. A lot of them lose their heads over him. You ought to thank God you're not a handsome man. It saves trouble."

"That mug of yours will never land you in trouble," was the frank reply, and they said no more about Captain McCready Pope.

That night the seaman known as Jack Edwards was stationed as the lookout in the bows of the steamer, walking his beat in the small, roped inclosure beyond the two great anchors. His mood was passive. For the moment the fret and fever of his dual, warring existence had ebbed, and in the lull he tried to see himself as he had been when last he passed up this same coast and watched the familiar lights rise from the velvet horizon.

In reverie he lost himself until another light lifted like a spar, winked, and brightened. Unconsciously he timed the periods of illumination and eclipse, standing like a man in a trance. His voice carried strongly, and the tones were like those of Edward Barrington as he shouted to the bridge:

"Temple Rock, sir, on the port bow."

The voice and the words were borne to Captain McCready Pope, and they seemed to thunder in his ears. They struck at him out of the darkness. It did not occur to him to associate them with the seaman in the bows of the ship. It was Barrington who had shouted, but Barrington was dead, and his bones were fathom deep. The captain waited on tiptoe, clutching the rail of the bridge. The voice had not sounded as deep and virile as of old, rather as though distance had weakened it, as though it had come from somewhere above or beyond the ship, but its identity was unmistakable.

"Did you hear that, Mr. Blair?" entreated McCready Pope of his chief officer. "What did it say?"

"Temple Rock, sir, off the port bow." Nothing wrong, is there? He is supposed to report the lights as he picks them up."

"He is, is he? Who do you think you are talking about? How long has he been doing that?"

"The man who sang out just then? Oh, he has been with us only for this voyage."

"And you mean to say you've heard him before?" shakily demanded the captain. "This ship is haunted, and you knew it?"

"I know nothing about that, sir. Shall I investigate?" was the soothing response.

"No, stay where you are and listen. Look at that light yonder. Can you swear it is Temple Rock?"

"Of course. You ran down the course yourself, Captain Pope. Shall I count the flash by the clock?"

Out of the gloom came the voice for the second time:

"Four bells and all's well. Temple Rock bears dead ahead and burning bright."

McCready Pope sprang to the engine-room indicator and sent the signal to stand by. His dumfounded first officer

begged him to explain, but his only answer was:

"He is too damn sure of Temple Rock this time. I know his game. That is a false light, I tell you. I've been afraid of something like that."

"A false light, sir? Why, that was what poor Barrington claimed that you saw before. You are dreaming. We are all right."

"Barrington?" cried the captain in accents of horror. "Who said anything about Barrington? Do you know his voice?"

"No, I can't say I recall it. We met casually ashore once or twice in a crowd. But what's wrong with you, Captain Pope?"

"Everything! We won't steer by that light! If Barrington says it's Temple Rock he is trying to decoy me among the reefs and make me lose another ship. He couldn't forget a grudge; no, not even when he is dead. It's like him, the stubborn, ugly swine! I have known he was after me for days, and I had to keep mum. You would have thought me dotty. I guess I am, but we stand straight out to sea tonight."

"Out to sea, when we are on our proper course, sir?"

"You heard me, Mr. Blair. Another word and I'll knock you down. Half speed it is, and a double lookout. Heave a lead. We may be in trouble already. If you find bottom I shall drop an anchor and wait for daylight. That is what he told me to do that other time, just before he said, with a nasty chuckle, 'Here goes your ship and your job, sir.'"

Amazed and bewildered, Mr. Blair protested:

"But you had better talk it over with me. Let me call the other officers."

Captain McCready Pope paid no heed, but babbled things which had far better been left unsaid. The *Hesperian* swung wide and crept cautiously away

from the coast, the quartermaster swearing to himself as he spun the wheel. Mr. Blair gave no order to swing the sounding lead, but held a hasty conference with his fellow officers. The captain was in the wheelhouse by now, talking into the engine-room speaking tube.

"It's a new situation for me to handle," the chief officer anxiously informed the others. "It may be drugs. Anyhow, the old man isn't fit to carry this ship to New York. He may take it into his fool head to run clear across the Atlantic to get away from this spook that aimed to put him on the rocks. What do you say?"

"It was the lookout that upset him?" queried the second mate. "Who's on watch, anyhow? Have you been forward to see?"

"No, not yet. I couldn't leave the old man. Did any of you know Ed Barrington well? Could you recognize his voice if you heard it?"

"I might," said the third mate, "but he was in the freight service until they shoved him into the *Columbian*, and we berthed at different wharves. It was like sailing for separate companies."

"That's the trouble with all of us," slowly observed Mr. Blair. "At any rate, Captain McCready Pope had no doubt about it to-night. Ed Barrington is dead, I suppose you've heard. Foundered in a blighted little fore-and-aft last May."

"Tough luck for him. But what are we going to do about his ghost? It is nonsense, of course, but the delusion is mighty serious to this mad skipper of ours."

"Give him a chance to get over it during the night," came from the boyish fourth officer. "If he doesn't, lock him in his room and you take the ship to port, Mr. Blair, the same as you'd do if he were badly hurt or washed overboard."

From his station forward, Barrington had overheard the commotion on the bridge. Such a scheme of vengeance as this had never been his intention. It was too subtle and indirect to occur to a man of his temperament.

It astonished him, this discovery that unwittingly and with an invisible weapon he had struck his enemy down. It was a manifestation, not of vengeance, but of inexorable justice which had sought and used its own instrument. It was for this, then, that he had been saved and brought home; nor was it for him to interfere and disclose himself to Captain Pope as in the flesh and not disembodied. The sea ahead was clear, and he moved nearer the bridge, not to gloat but to listen to what might be said concerning one Edward Barrington now departed this life.

He forgot that a forward cargo hatch had been left open to lower a wind sail into the hold while the tropic heat prevailed. Intent on his errand, he took a careless step, stumbled, and fell through the cavernous opening, vanishing without sound. He struck once during the descent, a glancing collision with an iron ladder which was sufficient to stun him, and lay outsprawled upon a tier of cotton bales. Presently the boatswain, spying a bank of clouds in the west, told the deck watch to close the hatch and secure it. An officer halted to ask him if he had seen the seaman on lookout duty. From the bridge, Captain Pope called down in strained, impatient accents:

"What's that? There is no man in the bow? He wasn't there at all?"

"It is a trifle mysterious, sir. No doubt about his being there an hour ago."

"There was nobody there," came the angry exclamation. "You know what I mean; there was nobody there when I heard the voice sing out that Temple Rock bore ahead. It wasn't the lookout that said it. I knew better all the

time. There never was a night's work like this."

Mr. Blair sternly interposed. The night's work had gone far enough. He dared not temporize and wait for daylight. Mystery or not, the steamer had a schedule to make, and the captain was more irresponsible than ever. Ed Barrington might have been a first-class navigator when alive, but there was no sane reason why his ghost should be permitted to command the *Hesperian*. Placing a hand upon the captain's shoulder, the chief officer said:

"You had better turn in, sir. It is my watch, you know. If I need you I will send word to your room."

"You think you can take this vessel past Temple Rock Light, Mr. Blair?"

"Certainly. There it is in plain sight."

"Then you can't take charge. It would mean disaster. Mind your own business," cried the commander.

Mr. Blair sorrowfully shook his head. Captain Pope had treated him as a favorite.

"This same Temple Rock has surely played the mischief with you," was his sympathetic comment before he blew a summons on his silver whistle. The junior officers answered it with reluctance, for theirs was a painful duty. A scuffle and Captain McCready Pope no longer commanded the *Hesperian*.

CHAPTER XIII.

The *Hesperian* made a record run from the Florida straits to Sandy Hook, and the weary Mr. Blair was thankful when the tugs took hold to nudge her alongside the wharf. He had briefly informed the general manager by wireless that the serious disability of the captain had compelled him to take over the ship while passing Temple Rock. Mr. Hersey promptly reserved a private room in a hospital for the most popular master of the fleet, and he was

therefore surprised when Captain Pope walked into the office, smiling and debonair.

"Good morning," said the latter. "I reported at once to talk the thing over."

"Where is your chief officer?" was the quick interrogation. "What did he mean by sending me this bulletin that you were seriously ill? There is nothing the matter with you, is there? You don't look it."

"I don't feel it," smoothly replied Captain Pope, adding, with the first trace of embarrassment: "The mate waited aboard to get the routine reports and papers together. He wouldn't let me fetch them to the office. It was absurd, taking all the business out of my hands."

"You never before found any fault with Mr. Blair," rapped out the manager. "Come, what's it all about? You don't get drunk and you are as strong as an ox. 'Serious disability'?"

"I hardly know how to begin," faltered Captain Pope, whose assurance was oozing. He had been trusting to luck and the inspiration of the moment to forestall his chief officer.

"Then supposing we wait for Mr. Blair. Temple Rock seems to be your hoodoo. I thought one investigation would be enough."

"There was no accident this time, Mr. Hersey. I prevented it. The mate mistook another light for Temple Rock, and the rest of the officers sided with him. I knew better, but they turned on me. It was plain mutiny."

The florid general manager removed his glasses, tapped the desk with them, seized his telephone, laid it down, and blurted:

"No use sending a hurry call for the mate. He will be here as soon as he can. Great Scott, Captain Pope, is this a coincidence or a fairy story? Do you honestly realize what you are saying? It is the Barrington case all over again. The mate mistook another

light for Temple Rock? That cleared you once, but it couldn't happen again. Is this light bewitched or are you?"

"It's God's truth, fantastic as it may sound to you," the captain muttered in a half-hearted manner.

"Thank Heaven, here comes Mr. Blair," cried the relieved Allen Hersey as the door flew open. "You had better wait in the other room, Captain Pope. I don't mean it unkindly, but Mr. Blair being the acting master of the vessel——"

There was no jauntiness in the demeanor of McCready Pope as he retreated to sit in solitary dejection as a certain Edward Barrington had once waited in these same offices. Mr. Blair laid down his bundle of ship's papers, hesitated, and bit his lip. He was a slender, unassuming man whose career had been rather colorless until now. This was his first interview with Allen P. Hersey, who perceived that nothing was to be gained by bullying him. It was more inexplicable than ever that an officer of this type should have dared depose Captain Pope at sea.

"Have you prepared your story in writing, Mr. Blair?" kindly asked the manager, offering a box of cigars.

"I can tell it in three minutes," firmly answered the mate. "As for witnesses, you may call every deck officer and a dozen passengers who heard the racket on the bridge. He made an awful spectacle of himself while it lasted."

"Why? What for? Out with it!"

"It was Barrington's ghost, that's all," said the other, with admirable brevity. He waited to enjoy the effect. It was something of an achievement to flabbergast Allen P. Hersey.

"He saw Barrington's ghost? But that's pure poppycock. Who said Barrington was dead?"

"Lost at sea, months ago," Mr. Blair impressively informed him.

"And he, or it, and whatever you

call it, paid Captain Pope a visit? Talk common sense, Mr. Blair."

"I didn't say the ghost was there, Mr. Hersey. The old man heard it calling to him."

"And what did it say, may I ask?"

"It reported Temple Rock Light. Then the circus began. Captain Pope put out to sea and spouted nonsense to make your hair curl. It wasn't Temple Rock at all, said he. The ghost was trying to put up a job on him."

"Were you able to explain it in any way?"

"It was the seaman on lookout that reported the light, but when we came to look for him he wasn't there at all," was the confusing admission. "Nor could we find hide or hair of him. For all I know he went overboard. Perhaps he was frightened out of his wits, if you accept the theory that Barrington's ghost was waiting for a chance to get Captain Pope dead to rights when he passed Temple Rock."

"But there was no ghost, Mr. Blair. You know better than that. The fact is that Captain Pope was incapable of navigating the ship because of this silly hallucination."

"You can't get away from that, Mr. Hersey. Ask the other witnesses."

"I shall have to believe you. Your own conduct is proof enough. Have you told the other officers to come to the office?"

"I held them on the ship to wait for word from you."

"Let them meet me here an hour from now. Meanwhile, I will have another chat with Captain Pope."

"Steam has not knocked all the superstition out of our trade," was the mate's comment.

"There is no place for it in the management of the Tropical Navigation Company," Allen P. Hersey vigorously asserted.

The chief officer departed a few minutes later, and Captain Pope reentered

with a diffidence as unusual as it was significant. He stood expectant, finding nothing to say while the manager scrutinized him curiously. The silence becoming unendurable, the shipmaster blurted:

"Did you take his word against mine?"

"I am afraid you can't bluff it, Captain Pope. We took your word against a mate's on another occasion. It won't go this time. Ghosts are positively barred. If you can't be trusted to carry a ship past Temple Rock, it looks like an insurmountable obstacle, doesn't it?"

"I don't want to take a ship past Temple Rock again; no, not for all the money her cargo would fetch," vehemently declared the captain. "That finishes me for sea service, I presume, but my experience ought to qualify me for a post ashore. And there must be room for me somewhere in the company."

"I am afraid not. The ghost story is a serious handicap. I shall have to suspend you until further notice. You may wait to hear what the other officers have to say, if you like, but I hold out no false hopes. I should advise you to look for something else to do."

"I shall have a hard time, Mr. Hersey, with this—this story at my heels."

"Barrington's story followed him, I imagine, Captain Pope, but you were not sorry to see him thrown out. I think you enjoyed it. Too bad you have to take a dose of the same medicine, but it sometimes happens that way. We are extremely sorry to lose you, but ghosts—and you don't even deny it!"

"I wish to Heaven I could!" murmured the luckless commander. "I had a premonition, a warning, call it whatever you like, from the moment we left New Orleans, even before that. It almost drove me frantic, this feeling that Barrington was waiting for me at

Temple Rock. I was determined to eucher him, to be absolutely sure of the light when I saw it. He called out to me twice."

"Very extraordinary," said Mr. Hersey. "Your salary will be paid to the end of the month. Good morning, Captain Pope."

"Kicked out—kicked out like a drunken stoker!" muttered the master of the *Hesperian*, his demeanor pitifully dazed. "By the way, do you know where I can find Mr. Ashley Corbin? He is a good friend of mine."

"You fancy his pull may help you with the company? I will give you his address with pleasure," and the manager's smile was odd as he turned to the desk. "I received a letter from him only the other day. Here it is. He is at Avon Heights, a little place on the Jersey coast."

"Is his sister with him? She didn't seem particularly fond of me aboard the *Columbian*."

"He doesn't mention her, but I imagine he is alone, Captain Pope."

"Thank you. I may run down to see him to-day. This is a very painful situation for me, Mr. Hersey. This man Barrington hated me when he was alive. Was I to let him wreck another ship for me?"

"I am sorry for you, as sorry as you were for Chief Officer Barrington," was the manager's final opinion.

There was no answer to this, and McCready Pope wandered out of the building. As his last straw there remained the powerful influence of the Corbin estate. Ashley Corbin ought to feel a certain amount of gratitude, it could be construed as an obligation, for the stand he had taken against Barrington. There had been a tacit co-operation, Ashley eager to gratify a personal animosity, the gallant commander no less anxious to save himself.

CHAPTER XIV.

The small coast resort of Avon Heights was almost deserted in September, and most of the hotels had been closed. Captain Pope's inquiry at the post office uncovered the desired information. A young gentleman by the name of Corbin was living at the Seaview House. The town appeared as scarcely up to the requirements of a millionaire whose tastes were luxurious, and the Seaview turned out to be no more than a cottage boarding house in need of paint. Doubtless Mr. Corbin had come hither for purposes of recuperation and to escape his friends.

Rounding a corner of the piazza, the captain came upon Mr. Corbin himself. He filled a chair as though he had been dumped into it and lacked energy to detach himself. His pale face seemed larger and more flaccid than ever and indicated a settled dissatisfaction with the scheme of things. He looked very carelessly put together, in need of grooming, a man about town no longer in bloom, but somewhat gone to seed. This was unperceived, however, by Captain McCready Pope, who beheld the young man through a golden mist. Without rising, but with what passed for heartiness in his languid school of manners, Ashley extended a hand and exclaimed:

"Glad to see you, old chap. How did you manage to run me to cover?"

"Mr. Hersey gave me your address," said the visitor, drawing up a chair. "And how is your health, Mr. Corbin? A quiet place this."

"I am feeling poorly, thank you. So Hersey told you where I was? That's funny. I wrote him the other day. He didn't tell you what it was about? Never mind. We'll come to that later. How goes the wild, wet sea? I'm beastly sick of sitting here and looking at it."

Captain Pope was more at his ease

than he had been with the general manager. This was a different man to deal with, no more brains than the law allowed and susceptible to flattery.

"I should like your advice, Mr. Corbin," said he. "You are a man of affairs, and it is generally believed that you are more active in the Tropical Navigation Company than you let the public know. I saw one example of it in my own case, when you insisted upon a just verdict."

"In trouble again, are you?" calmly remarked Mr. Corbin, in his eyes a flicker of tired amusement.

"Going to sea doesn't agree with me. I know when to quit. I could be more useful to the company in some capacity ashore. A good many things get by Mr. Hersey because he is a landsman."

"Want his job, do you?" drawled Ashley. "Modesty never did stand in your way. And a word from me will fix it for you."

"You are joking, of course," patiently smiled Captain Pope. "The new marine superintendent is not a competent man. His training was at a desk, not on the deck of a ship."

"Ah, I see. What's the matter with your health? Why do you want to chuck it up?"

"Thanks to you, Mr. Corbin, the company gave me another ship after my hard luck. But the disaster must have been a bigger nervous shock than I realized at the time. It still bothers me."

"So that is it!" exclaimed Ashley, almost animated. "What's the use of stringing you along? In the same boat, are we? The *Columbian* affair raised seventeen kinds of merry Hades with me."

"But how in the world could it affect you, Mr. Corbin?" and the shipmaster was genuinely amazed.

"And so Hersey gave you my address!" was the irrelevant reply. "He was shrewd enough to guess why you

wanted it. Ha, ha! It is to laugh. Some joker is Hersey. Now I'll tell you why I wrote him. It was a touch for a hundred, and he turned me down. That man has a heart of stone. Did I need the money? Look at the sty I'm living in."

"But I don't understand," cried McCready Pope, who appeared more chagrined than grieved. "What could have happened to you?"

"Too much Barrington," was the brief but startling response.

"Too much Barrington!" unsteadily repeated Captain Pope. "Did his ghost square accounts with you before it came my turn?"

"His ghost? So that is what put the skids under you?" And Ashley laughed aloud. "You have been seeing things? Come, that's too rich! No, Barrington didn't have to haunt me. That sister of mine did the trick without any supernatural aid. I conceal nothing from you, my dear Captain Pope. You are barking up the wrong tree. She was vexed with me. All the money belongs to her. Here I am. And there you have it."

"Miss Corbin owns the estate?" regretfully, sadly spoke the shipmaster.

"Yes, most emphatically so. As handsome a man as yourself—if you had played your cards right—but it is too late now. You might have been willing to divide the pot with me."

This brutal candor staggered the captain, who was the more polished rascal of the two. Waiving this delicate topic, he inquired:

"But where and how did Barrington come into this? Is there no getting away from him anywhere?"

"Apparently not. The ghost belongs to you. My game is easier to elucidate. I bungled it—oh, frightfully—when I butted into that investigation. She found it out. And when Barrington was lost in that silly old schooner—what an ass he was to sail in it—why,

she threw me out. I am waiting for her to relent, an only brother; it was a perfectly abominable thing for her to do. You never can tell how an emotional streak will affect a woman. I have written her some heartbreaking letters, and she has loosened up a bit—small remittances, enough to keep me buried alive down here. I may try to borrow from you, Captain Pope, for I give you my word that I am so desperate that I have actually thought of going to work."

"It might be the sensible course," advised the captain, overlooking the question of a loan. "I can't fathom it, how Barrington ruined you, too."

"For one thing, my sister believed that you and I had deliberately tried to get him. And she was more or less in love with him, I imagine, but there was more to the explosion than this. She has a tremendously keen sense of justice, a sort of chronic sympathy for the under dog. Now try to look pleasant, Captain Pope, while I tell you the truth. I had reason to detest this Barrington. He knocked me down and hurt my feelings worse. And I felt a lot of admiration for you. But during that investigation I began to suspect that you had weakened, that Barrington was honest and you were the liar. It was no more than an impression. I stood by you, for I had to get even with the fellow for the lump on my jaw."

"You can speak for yourself, Mr. Corbin," was the highly indignant reply. "I have the official record to vindicate me."

"Bosh! What's the use of pretending any longer?" disgustedly retorted Ashley. "Confound your perjured soul, you and I are tarred with the same brush. If your hands were clean would you come whining to me with this balderdash about Barrington's ghost? I am a pretty poor imitation of a man, but it was no ghost that put

me down and out. Barrington called you a counterfeit to your face. He was quite right."

"I am trying to forget him and his ghost," murmured the captain, strangely ignoring the insults. "I hoped you would feel sorry for me."

"I am entirely too busy feeling sorry for myself these days," ejaculated Ashley. "Don't stalk off in a huff. Spend the day with me. It's foolish for us to quarrel and misery loves company."

"I am poor company," said the popular commander, with a plaintive sigh. "It was only this morning that I came ashore and had the interview with Mr. Hersey. He was very hasty and abrupt. I deserved better treatment. He suspended me indefinitely."

"You are a busted balloon," was the unfeeling comment, and Ashley laughed heartily.

CHAPTER XV.

When the cargo ports of the *Hesperian* were opened at the wharf, and the stevedore's gang swarmed into the holds to break out the cotton and naval stores, Barrington, the involuntary stowaway, mingled with them and left the ship unnoticed. He had not suffered greatly from hunger and thirst during his imprisonment below, for he had slept and drowsed in a kind of healing oblivion that wrought its work in the darkness and solitude. Although conscious of physical weakness, he was sustained by the realization that the blight had been mercifully removed, the evil weed uprooted, and that, in truth, he had returned from the dead. He was homesick, and the first desire was to send a telegram to his mother in Eppingham. Toward Captain McCready Pope he felt pity, the compassion of a brave man for a beaten foe. It seemed no longer ago than yesterday that he had been tramping the water front and steering for home in the Hen-

rietta, and the adventures intervening were blurred.

He returned to the sailors' boarding house as the nearest haven of refuge and ate and drank eagerly but sparingly. The landlord asked, with marked curiosity:

"How was it, Jack? You look even thinner than when you sailed. Sick again, were you? There's something different—the look of your eye puzzles me."

"A bit weak in the knees, Paddy, but all well again, thank God!" And the robust note was in his voice. "I am Mr. Barrington. Lend me a razor and you will have no doubt of it."

"Holy mackerel! No wonder I didn't guess you before. Where did you lose so much weight, and who handed you the welt on the lid—and, for the love of Mike, I can't explain it at all, but if a man could ha' swapped souls with somebody else—"

"That is it precisely," said Barrington, with his frank smile, as he looked Paddy straight in the eye. "Even Captain Pope didn't know me. There will be no more trouble aboard the *Hesperian*, and the sailors need not shun her."

"Only one thing could do that, Mr. Barrington. McCready Pope must have come to the end of his rope. But I must not pester you now. It's too big for my comprehension. The best room in the house is yours. Have you the clothes for a gentleman officer? Can you use some cash? Dear, dear, 'twas one night last week that Clesstrom sat at the table yonder, weepin' into a mug of beer and lamentin' for you and wonderin' where you had gone, and proudly exhibitin' the nose of him which you poked to one side when he was quartermaster in the *Columbian*. He called it his 'in memoriam.'"

"I may call on you for a few dollars, Paddy, for I am homeward bound."

"Strange things have you seen and

done, Mr. Barrington. No need to tell me that. The mark of them is on you."

No longer a derelict, the wanderer tarried to shave and bathe and shift into respectable clothing. Later in the day he walked, without haste, for he was easily fatigued, as far as the offices of the Tropical Navigation Company and asked to see Mr. Allen P. Hersey on a matter of some importance. He omitted to give his name. There had been changes in the clerical staff, and he was not recognized until the general manager strode out to see who this persistent stranger might be. He halted abruptly, stared in a bewildered manner, uttered a far from pious ejaculation, and solemnly shook his head. Barrington had begun to hold himself erect again, the slouching carriage was gone, and the very set of his shoulders recalled the alert, resolute chief officer of the *Columbian*, nor was it possible to mistake that mouth and chin now that he was clean shaven. Mr. Hersey was heard to whisper to himself:

"I don't believe in 'em. Never did. And they don't wear ready-made blue serge clothes. A sheet is the proper thing."

"Not for lower Broadway," suggested Barrington. "May I come in? A few minutes of your time will be a great favor."

"By all means," said the astounded Allen P. Hersey as he cautiously backed away. "This appears to be one of my busy days. Shall I open the door for you or do you prefer to sift through the keyhole? Captain Pope had a certain method in his madness. I may have been a trifle hasty with him."

"About that ghost of mine," observed Barrington as he entered the inner room. "I have decided to disown it."

"Thank you. I am delighted," was the enthusiastic reply. "I was about to try to strike some kind of a bargain with you. As a business proposition

you can see how it is yourself. I can't afford to keep a haunted ship in the service. But this is joking, of course. You are alive, Mr. Barrington. You were in the *Hesperian*, then, during this last voyage?"

"I was, and I wasn't," came the truthful statement. "It was more like the poor ghost of myself with a head full of addled notions that went as a seaman in the *Hesperian*, Mr. Hersey. They were finally knocked out of me when I fell through a hatch or I whipped them to a standstill myself, I hardly know which."

"That accounts for the case of Captain Pope," said the manager, after a reflective pause. "You will be pleased to know, I'm sure, that he will sail no more for the company."

"I can't feel sorry to hear it," gravely replied Barrington, "although I did not really plan it that way. It was somehow planned for me."

"His collapse amounts to a confession. This is my inference," exclaimed Mr. Hersey.

"Yes, it was a confession, and it ought to make you feel rotten," said Barrington straight from the shoulder. "But I didn't come here to discuss my own misfortune. I want to find Captain Pope. Do you expect him in?"

"Not again to-day," frowned the manager. "Why should I feel rotten? What do you mean?"

"Ask yourself, sir. Ask the officers of the fleet or old Captain Ridpath. You were afraid of Ashley Corbin and his money."

"Er—that's nonsense, Mr. Barrington, but if a mistake was made is it too late to mend it?"

"You can never mend it for me, Mr. Hersey. Serve under you again! No, thank you. Do you think I came here to beg for a job?"

"But why bear a grudge against the company if I should be willing to let bygones be bygones?"

"A grudge, Mr. Hersey? It is a matter of self-respect. Now where can I find Captain Pope, if you please?"

"He spoke of running down to Avon Heights to-day. You had better look for him there if you are in a hurry."

"Thank you," said Barrington. "It isn't every day that you have a call from a ghost."

"And a remarkably plain-spoken one," returned the manager, whose pompous demeanor was notably chastened. After Barrington's departure he found it difficult to focus his attention upon the business in hand. His emotions had been unusually stirred. This man who had come back from the dead caused him to say to himself:

"Ghosts? We all have them, but we are precious careful to keep them to ourselves. I am glad to shove this one off on Captain Pope."

In Avon Heights there was a restaurant, with a bar adjacent, which lived on native patronage between the summer seasons. In former days Ashley Corbin would have scorned to darken its doors, but now it was his club, the one place of diversion. Here he found a flattering deference, a tribute to fallen greatness such as the peasantry is wont to pay to kings in exile. Whenever a remittance from Stella arrived he scattered largess for a night in the form of drinks for his personal court, which included the bartender, a convivial druggist, and a briefless lawyer who earnestly played billiards.

It was to this friendly retreat that he convoyed Captain McCready Pope and they cast anchor for the afternoon. Not mutual fondness, but the desire of each to unbosom his own woes held them together in a lugubrious companionship. Ashley's humor was heavily sardonic at the captain's expense, but the latter showed no great resentment. A sense of dumb wonderment made him appear patiently resigned to his fate.

He had been thrown out of his position, exposed as a knave, and jeered at as a fool all in one morning's work, but even thus his cup was not quite full. Was Barrington willing to call it quits or did he propose to haunt him again? Had he heard the last of Temple Rock?

In such reflections as these was the captain darkly absorbed when a stranger to Avon Heights halted in the main street to get his bearings. A restaurant signboard caught his eye, and it occurred to him that he was hungry enough to enjoy a sandwich or two before trying to find Captain Pope. The lunch counter was near the wall, which partitioned off the bar, and as Barrington climbed aboard a tall stool in front of the nickeled coffee boiler he perceived through the doorway two persons at a small table in a recessed window. Their heads were close together, and the stouter one of the pair was delivering himself of a rambling monologue, of a nature so affecting that his accents became husky, almost indistinct.

Before making his presence known, Barrington played the eavesdropper, and was untroubled by scruples. This was the privilege of a phantom. It was surprising to happen upon Ashley Corbin in this random fashion, but there he was—he and McCready Pope, birds of a feather.

What astounded Barrington was the maudling talk of Corbin, who confided to his comrade in distress:

"She actually called me a hero. Can you imagine it, old man? I don't know but what I saved her life at that. It was a frightful risk, but I never hesitated—went to her rescue as fast as I could; it was even braver than it looked, for my heart is deucedly weak; you remember, don't you, I was almost knocked out when the *Columbian* struck the reef. But I didn't care; a woman in danger and all that; there is such

a thing as chivalry—you always professed it, Captain Pope, although I began to suspect it was no more than skin-deep. You ought to sit up and listen to this, really. It is a story with a special punch for you, right in the solar plexus."

"Punch away. I can believe anything impossible," grumbled the sad-eyed mariner. "You were a hero. Don't say it again. And what then?"

"Then we got acquainted. I was badly hurt, but I never let on—I was as plucky as they make 'em. That made a hit with her, too. And I liked her a lot. Nothing silly, you know. A fine-looking woman—I know a thoroughbred when I see one—and I was so dead tired of the other kind. An older woman can do a chap any amount of good if she catches him at the psychological moment, and I needed somebody like her. You know how it is, and you know it jolly well, a man likes to be respected."

"I was the most popular master in the company's service," was the mournful reflection.

"Oh, the devil take your popularity!" testily cried Ashley. "I was popular, too, but there was a reason. On the other hand, there were people who respected neither of us. You are now getting wise to the difference. This was a corker of a joke on me, wasn't it?"

"That she mistook you for a hero?"

"Hardly that. Her name happened to be Mrs. Susan Barrington. She had a son, chief officer in a big steamer. I knew you would find my story entertaining. Isn't it choice? I wonder what she would have thought of you?"

Barrington climbed down from his stool at the lunch counter and beckoned to attract the bartender's notice. The latter was a discreet young man who answered the summons and asked no questions. Comprehending that this was to be a confidential interview, he

escorted Barrington behind a screen and whispered, with a jerk of his thumb:

"Does our fat friend belong to you? I seen you rubber at him. He is lost, strayed, or stolen, that guy. I like him, but it would be a kindness to lead him away."

"I want to know what he is doing here," demanded Barrington.

"Say, I can repeat it backward and forward," the bartender exclaimed. "You know the kind. They don't tell their troubles, they spill 'em at you. He had all kinds of money, not bundles, but bales of kale, till his sister gets sore on him. She sounds like some kind of her own, that dame. It was all off. He wanders into Avon Heights in the summertime and stays because he can't move on."

This was news indeed, but it seemed improper to discuss it further and drag in the name of Stella Corbin. As for meeting Ashley and demanding to know more of the puzzling tale of heroism, this could serve no purpose at present. It was sufficient to have learned that, in some inscrutable manner, his punishment had overtaken him, and that, as was true of Captain Pope, there could be no satisfaction in hitting a man when he was down.

"I don't care to see Mr. Corbin," said Barrington, "and I am very sure he doesn't want to see me. But I am anxious to get hold of the other man. His name is Captain Pope. I will wait for him outside. Please tell him that some one has come for him."

"What name?" briskly asked the bartender. "It looks to me as if something was coming off."

"There will be no trouble. If he hesitates all you have to say is 'The man from Temple Rock!' That will fetch him out all standing. He won't dare refuse."

"The man from Temple Rock?"

grinned the other. "Sure I'll slip the word in his ear."

Barrington went into the street. There was no commotion inside, but a silence which held more significance. It lasted for several minutes. Then a chair scraped, very slowly, as if the occupant moved with reluctance, and the voice of Ashley Corbin was heard to implore:

"If he has come for me, too, old chap, please tell him I am not at home."

McCready Pope walked out under compulsion, like one hauled at the end of a towline, nor did he display much emotion when Barrington confronted him. Side by side, without speech, they passed down the street, at the end of which gleamed the ocean and a thin line of surf. The stalwart captain resembled an automaton. At the beach they came to a halt, and Barrington said, with a touch of irony:

"Perhaps you thought I meant to take you out yonder and drown you this time."

"You look real, and I brushed your coat just now, but I don't know," was the quiet reply. "That's the truth; I don't know. It's the same voice I heard the other night aboard the *Hesperian*, and everybody says that wasn't real. I mean that it wasn't your voice at all. I am in a bad way. You can't make things any worse for me, whether you are dead or alive, Barrington."

"You made your own ghost, Captain Pope. It will trouble you no more. That is what I came to tell you. Mr. Hersey gave you a short shrift, I understand. That ends it as far as I am concerned. It is true, in one way, that I have haunted you, not as a silly spook, but as the result of what you did to me. It was forged link by link, like a chain cable, and sooner or later it was bound to be hung around your neck and drag you under."

"And you worked out this clever trick of disguising yourself and sneak-

ing aboard the *Hesperian*?" said McCready Pope dully.

"Disguised?" Barrington vehemently exclaimed. "I should say I was. I didn't even know myself. I am coming to, getting back the grip I had lost, but do I look much like the mate that sailed with you in the *Columbian*? I worked out no clever trick, I tell you. I was led to your ship, as sure as a course is steered by chart and compass."

"There was a locomotive engineer by the name of John Mannigan," murmured Captain Pope, staring at the sea. "I met him on that Florida key, where we beached our boats. That was where my bad luck began. He spouted some nonsense about things being arranged beforehand, one fitting into another, and so on. There may be something in it, after all. You say you didn't haunt me purposely, to frighten me out of my wits?"

"My mind was not quite right at the time," Barrington explained. "I had sent no word home after I was wrecked in the schooner and carried to Montevideo. That is why you were so sure I was dead. It does seem to fit together, as you say. This doesn't give you back your ship, Captain Pope, but it lays the ghost."

"And you thought I had been hit hard enough? You did not want me to go crazy thrashing it over and wondering if I had heard a dead man's voice?"

"That is my reason for coming here to find you. I was willing to lift you out of this hell of your own making. You had put me in one, so I know all about it."

"Well, I am done for as a shipmaster, Barrington, but it had to be, I suppose. What about yourself? Did Hersey offer you anything?"

"I am going home." And the wanderer added, with weighty sincerity: "Don't mistake me, Captain Pope, and assume that my misfortunes have

turned me soft. You and I can never be friends. In one way, I am sorry for you, but not because you got what you deserved. You had your choice, and you made it deliberately. Go back to your Ashley Corbin and tell him I shall let him alone."

CHAPTER XVI.

In the early summer, Susan Barrington had ceased to hope, although she hid her grief from the village. Stella Corbin had established the Carney family in the camp by the river, and Mrs. Carney took hold of her own destiny with so much stout-hearted zeal that there was little more to be done for them. Ashley had been sent into exile, and no longer served his sister as an excuse for tarrying in East Eppingham, but she seemed contented and made no other plans. She was oftenest seen with Susan Barrington, an intimacy which caused speculation and confirmed the suspicions of the postmaster's wife. Edward had deserted the girl and left her in poor circumstances. Anybody could see that, for she wore the plainest kind of clothes and was tucked away in a little house in the woods, somewhere down the river. It was a pity Susan couldn't take her in under her own roof. The girl wasn't aristocratic enough, most likely.

Some hint of this may have come to Stella's ears, for she summoned her resolution and said to Susan:

"You are living all alone, which is not good for you, and I am rattling around with an excellent cook in an otherwise empty cottage. Now if I should bring Martha up here with me, she could take care of you, too. I shall stay through the summer, and perhaps longer."

"But I am wretched company, my dear," protested Susan. "Won't you be happier where you are, with a chance to get away from me?"

"No, I should like to be with you, if you are willing. Would it make the summer any more endurable to you? You can talk freely to me."

"And your brother is not coming back, Stella?"

"Ashley will not be here again," was the positive declaration. "He loathes the country. It was an experiment."

"And yet he seemed quite reconciled to his fate when I met him," regretfully observed Susan, who had vainly pursued the same topic on other occasions. Invariably Stella dismissed him with brief mention, determined that he should not be permitted to come between her and Edward Barrington's mother. A little more coaxing, and Susan's consent was won. Stella's motives eluded her own analysis. She had been motherless for years, and craved such a relationship as this with a woman who inspired affection and gave it in return. What Stella could not so easily define was her feeling for Edward Barrington, with whom she could claim no more than an acquaintance. Every chance was against his return, and he seemed to her to have left his finest deeds undone, the greater usefulness unaccomplished. It pleased her fancy to picture him as rallying from defeat and setting his shoulder to new endeavors, here in Eppingham, where there were in reality larger opportunities and difficulties more arduous than upon a steamer's deck. This had been his purpose. What could he have achieved at home?

The question interested Stella more and more as she learned to know him through his mother and grew more familiar with his native town. She saw reflected the character of a man whose very simplicity of thought and conduct left nothing to be distorted or concealed. Incidents of his boyhood harmonized with her own impressions of him. Susan told them artlessly, and the girl fitted them together like bits

of mosaic and found the pattern admirable. But must the pattern be left unfinished? Dare she try her hand at adding something more? This was in her mind when she said to Susan, now that they were living in the same house:

"Supposing we talked about him as though he were really here. What would he do? Isn't it easier if you try to speak of him as living? He is alive to me."

"If he had come home in the *Henrietta*, do you mean?"

"Yes. I told him I should always believe in him, you know. And that promise appeals to me as a sort of pledge. Faith is an empty word unless one tries to prove it. I feel it very strongly as a sense of duty."

"But you are doing all you can, Stella, to make a lonely house seem brighter. Your faith shines in every corner of it."

"It ought to shine farther than that," was the eager reply. "You have told me of some of the things he hoped to do when he came home. He loved the old wharves and the river, and he dreamed of reviving the shipping of the little town. And he had made a stand for decency in public affairs and he was interested in the village boys. The place needs him. I am wondering how I can help to bring him back."

"But what can one woman do?" sighed Susan. "It is a man's work."

"One woman might be able to do more than you imagine, if she had sufficient faith," replied Stella, and she went on to say, charmed with her own ingenuity: "What I mean is that perhaps I could find some one who had capital looking for investment. I have any amount of energy going to waste, and I should like to be a promoter."

"But Eppingham is the last place in the world to interest people with money," exclaimed the doubting Susan. "It shows a lovely spirit, Stella, to talk of Edward as if we were expecting

him every day and wanted to have the village ready for him, just as I have put my house in order."

Stella pressed the matter no farther, but privately wrote a letter to Mr. Bayne, the second officer of the *Columbian*, asking him to come to Eppingham. He responded promptly, poor man, for he was still waiting for a berth, and the Tropical Navigation Company had offered him nothing better than a place as night watchman. Stella warned him that her business was confidential, and they met, as by chance, in the main street of Eppingham, and walked down the river road. The girl's estimate of him was sound. His integrity was absolute, and his ability first class, but disappointment had dulled his aggressiveness. She therefore appealed to his loyalty, and kindled his enthusiasm by explaining:

"You are presumed to have money of your own, Mr. Bayne, and I must not be discovered. Mrs. Barrington will welcome you as a shipmate of her son, and you learned of Eppingham through him, of course. You are really representing him, so far as the village is concerned, and later you may use his name. It has not been given out that he was in the *Henrietta* with Captain Moses Carpenter. So to the town he is still alive, as he is to me. He is presumed to be at sea. You are to do as you think he would have done. I expect you to fight for him, as though he were the captain and you the chief officer."

"He had no use for a man who couldn't hold his end up," said Mr. Bayne.

"In the first place," resumed Stella, "I wish you to investigate his idea of establishing a line of small vessels to handle trade from this port."

"He once mentioned it to me, Miss Corbin. He was a true-blue American mariner, and it broke his heart to see our boys turn away from seafaring.

Power schooners, with gasoline motors, I think he had in mind."

"He discussed it with Captain Carpenter," said Stella, "when they were homeward bound. Their last letters were full of it. They had almost no capital, but their courage was splendid."

Mr. Bayne began his inquiries cautiously, for he had learned many kinds of wisdom in dealing with men. He never showed his hand until compelled to. Drifting from the Eagle Hotel to the several stores and the post office, he made himself known as interested in coastwise shipping in a small way. Was there possible profit in running a schooner out of Eppingham now that Captain Moses Carpenter had dropped out of the trade? The suggestion was received as more or less of a joke, and this puzzled the thoughtful Mr. Bayne. There was evidently more to this than appeared on the surface. Before reporting to Miss Corbin, he resolved to dive a little deeper.

The wharves and the river front, from the dam to the lower edge of the village, were owned partly by John Markle, who was regarded as the local plutocrat and reputed to be worth as much as fifty thousand dollars, and partly by the town of Eppingham as public property. The community might reasonably be expected to encourage the development of this neglected, unsightly area. It should be merely a matter of purchase and lease at a fair valuation.

Mr. Bayne also discovered that John Markle, as chairman of the board of selectmen, carried the town government in his vest pocket. He was the man, then, to be approached at the proper time, but Mr. Bayne waived this while he turned statistician and sought to learn how the inhabitants earned a livelihood, not only in Eppingham but also in the other towns within a radius of twenty miles. Unobtrusively he jotted down facts which surprised him. The

production of the region was extraordinarily diversified. It was famous for potatoes, but there were also lime, lumber, and granite, with well-kept apple orchards and many small shoe factories. During the summer the resorts of the Maine and New Hampshire coasts offered a golden market for vegetables, dairy products, and poultry.

"Either these people are stupid, or there is a nigger in the woodpile," meditatively reflected Mr. Bayne as he studied his little notebook.

It was Mrs. Henry Mitchell, squinting at him through the delivery window of the post office, who suggested, with unwonted kindliness:

"I heard you were seen lookin' at the old wharves, and there's some talk that you own a vessel and think of doing business here. Now don't you go near John Markle. You'll get nothin' whatever out of him except soft soap and palaver. He can talk more and say less than any man in Eppingham County, and that includes my husband."

"Thank you, madam. Can you offer me any sailing directions?" said the grateful Mr. Bayne.

"Lawyer Nickerson is the man for you to see," she snapped at him. "And you can tell him for me that he's a rat. I'm surprised nobody told you about him. That's like Eppingham folks, though—if they look wise and say nothin', maybe strangers will give 'em credit for intelligence."

"And what interests does Lawyer Nickerson represent? The town? John Markle? Some heirs or other?"

"Ask him. If he tries to wriggle, pin him down. You look to me like a plain-spoken man that has seen and done things."

The office of Leander Nickerson, attorney at law, was in the brick building of which Mr. Markle's general store occupied the ground floor. Thither proceeded the inquisitive mari-

ner, and toiled up the stairs in his deliberate fashion to find the human rodent. The characterization seemed unfair, for the gentleman who opened the door resembled a terrier—wiry, bustling, assertive. The desk and chairs were dusty, but he had the air of one chronically busy, always with several pressing engagements ahead. He glanced at his watch while greeting Mr. Bayne, but the latter, having known this type on shipboard, smiled to himself and could not be hurried.

It was not so easy for the lawyer to appraise Mr. Bayne, who was habitually reserved. Bronzed, neatly dressed, he might have been taken for a well-to-do farmer or lumberman in town for a holiday.

"I think I have seen you at the hotel," briskly exclaimed Leander Nickerson. "Business or pleasure?"

"Business, but I am making slow headway," replied the visitor. "I was recommended to come to you for advice."

"Of a legal nature? I shall be glad to accept a retaining fee, my dear sir. Consider me at your service."

"Not quite so fast," quoth Mr. Bayne. "Perhaps you are already hitched to the other side of the case. I am sea lawyer enough to know that you can't play both ends against the middle. Let me state a fact or two before you crack on sail."

"A seafaring man?" chirruped the lawyer, unrebuffed. "A rarity in Eppingham! We have recently lost one of our most esteemed fellow townsmen, Captain Moses Carpenter, the last of his kind. Another man from here is at sea, after a most unfortunate experience, somewhat discreditable, I fear. His name is Barrington, a headstrong, meddlesome fellow as we knew him."

"Indeed? If he meddled with this town of yours, maybe it was because he couldn't keep his hands off," dryly

observed Mr. Bayne. "Now, all I ask for myself is a square deal. Why has every one discouraged me from trying to get hold of a little wharf property and putting a vessel or two on this river of yours, with its eleven-foot channel to the sea? And where do you come in?"

The lawyer forgot to look at his watch, and discarded the bustling manner. He endeavored to measure his man with more care, and concluded that he was easy to dispose of. There was no necessity for strategy or concealment. There was insolence in Leander's voice as he answered:

"Where I come in is where you get off, I am afraid, Mr. Bayne. If you have a little money to invest, and a couple of old schooners like the *Henrietta*, Eppingham is a poor place to locate in. It's a dead business; nothing to it for a sensible man."

"But the river is here, and so is the trade," persisted the stranger.

"Captain Carpenter had to go to other ports to find cargoes, and he was tolerated here as a sort of tradition," the lawyer carelessly replied, and he went on to say, with vicious emphasis: "Incidentally, I am the local attorney for the railroad. Does that convey anything to you?"

"It sounds to me like ridiculous nonsense," disgustedly declared Mr. Bayne. "A great railroad corporation go gunning for an insignificant little river port?"

"A railroad wants all the business it can get," the lawyer condescended to explain. "Traffic diverted is revenue lost. Eppingham is one of—well, we'll say a dozen little coastwise ports in this territory that have forgotten they ever had all the water transportation they could use. Is the railroad anxious to have 'em wake up to it again? You are a hard-headed business man, Mr. Bayne. Supposing you did break in here and make a success of it with mod-

ern methods, and educate these people into shipping by water because it's cheaper?"

"I might be able to show them that they had been a crew of fools to let shysters like you lead them by the nose," returned Mr. Bayne, whose temperature was rising.

Leander Nickerson accepted the challenge, and his accents were shrill as he declaimed:

"You can't get a foot of water front in this town. I'll lay my cards on the table right now and call your bluff. It won't do you a mite of good to talk this scheme in the village and call me hard names. It's no secret. The whole town knows, and the town don't care. The railroad isn't going to take any trouble to fight you. I can take care of you myself, without any extra help."

"Politics?" was the query. "Strange waters for me, but I am not too old to learn."

"Politics! Now you're getting wise," vaingloriously answered Leander, openly contemptuous. "I am chairman of the county committee, and we run a nice, tight little party machine, if I do say so."

"And this important John Markle is at the helm of the town government and you work together and swap favors?" suggested Mr. Bayne, who showed himself an apt learner. "I begin to see through the hole in the mill-stone. The town will refuse to lease me a frontage for new wharves. That is John Markle's edict. But why isn't he willing to sell me his own property? Is it to oblige you and the railroad?"

"He hopes to go to the State senate, and he can't get the county vote unless I deliver it," boasted Leander.

"Which leads it back to the railroad. A very pretty combination, Mr. Nickerson. You are quite right. It is a poor business for an honest seafaring man. It will do me no good, then, to

see Mr. John Markle? If the town were to vote on this proposition of mine, a lease of the public water front, it would be turned down?"

"Better call a special town meeting and try it, Mr. Bayne," scoffed Leander. "Eppingham votes as it is told to vote."

"You are a frank man, Mr. Nickerson; unusually frank. No beating about the bush. I understand you perfectly."

"I can afford to be frank with you, Mr. Bayne. You are up against a game you can't beat. Don't try to resurrect a dead trade. Eppingham is all right. It doesn't need you."

"A sheer waste of time?" said the mariner, plausibly meek.

"For a stranger with a few dollars to risk, I should call it a waste of time," agreed Leander, again reminded of numerous engagements. "I presume you will be leaving town to-day."

"Not before to-morrow, anyhow. I have taken a great fancy to Eppingham."

"Better buy a farm, then. It's a safer investment," said the lawyer as he darted for the door.

Undismayed by this interview, the industrious Mr. Bayne began to garner for his notebook the railroad rates on the products shipped out of the region and on the merchandise brought in from Boston and beyond. He had served his time in the coasting trade and knew, to a dollar, the cost of operating a schooner. The added expense of gasoline power would be saved by reason of the quicker voyages. And during many months of the year freight would be no longer in transit than by the leisurely methods of the railroad.

Mr. Bayne also knew something of warehousing. Given these people storage facilities, as Edward Barrington had suggested, and their exports could be held for better prices and sent at the right time, instead of rushing them

off by rail to glutted markets. This was a benefit which the railroad had not dreamed of undertaking.

"That is the trick," soliloquized Mr. Bayne, who had become enamored of the vision. "Why, you couldn't drive them away if they once got it through their heads."

He went to see the impatient Stella, and was handsomely scolded for delaying to report. She had expected him to take possession of the town without ceremony and mold it to her desire. Susan interposed to defend the methodical mariner, gently suggesting that Eppingham folks were easier to coax than to drive. Stella was eager to know how public opinion could be aroused in behalf of Mr. Bayne's project.

"It can't be done in a day," said Susan. "It might have meant the labor of a lifetime for Edward. And our people are slow and suspicious when it comes to changing the established order of things."

"There is more than one way to skin an eel," hopefully remarked Mr. Bayne.

"I hope you are not discouraged," exclaimed Stella.

"Not a bit of it. I shall appeal to the common sense of the community and pound away at it all summer if I have to."

As soon as the opportunity offered, a few days after this, he sought a private interview with Stella, his employer, and persuaded her that the use of Edward Barrington's name would be advantageous.

"He is presumed to be alive, Miss Corbin. And he is a native of this place. It will make a difference."

"His mother can't persuade herself to announce his death. She says she will not wear mourning until the summer is gone," explained the girl. "In the bottom of my heart I can't help expecting to see him again. What you are trying to do, Mr. Bayne, is not

yet a memorial." Her voice was wonderfully soft as she continued: "I should like to have his name used, if it will help conquer the obstacles. I wanted to wait until we had won the fight. He is not a man to be associated with defeat."

"We need him to win," affirmed Mr. Bayne. "And his mother doesn't suspect that you are backing me?"

"Oh, no, she hasn't a doubt that you are a genuine capitalist in a small way."

Permission granted, he casually mentioned it in the post office that his partner, Mr. Edward Barrington, was the moving spirit of his shipping enterprise. No sooner had this news reached the ears of Mrs. Henry Mitchell than it traveled faster than the Eppingham *Weekly Gazette* could have carried it. Ed had made some money, or found it, and was turning out a good deal better than folks expected. The report that he had been in trouble was a mistake. He was interested in his home town, which showed the proper spirit, and had sent this Mr. Bayne to set things going.

As reflected in the gossip of the street, there was a slow but perceptible change of opinion. But why hadn't he used Ed Barrington's name in the first place? Come to think of it, nobody had given him a chance. It was mostly Leander Nickerson's fault for abusing him and trying to drive him out of town. In a friendly way it was suggested to John Markle:

"Even if you don't like him personally, Ed Barrington is a pretty solid, level-headed man. What's the use of standing in your own way and shutting him off from the river?"

"Me do him any favors? Not on your life!" grunted the magnate. "If he wants my property he will have to pay my price. And if he expects to get town property I guess I'll have something to say about that, too."

As the summer wore on, the attempt of a native son to revive the coastwise merchant marine of his own port attracted attention beyond Eppingham, and several newspapers found it a romantic theme for discussion. The railroad was none too popular throughout the State, and the knowledge that it opposed the enterprise inspired caustic comment. Mr. Bayne discovered that ten thousand barrels of apples, as one item of commerce, would be marketed from Eppingham in the autumn, and it made him melancholy to think of losing them. The impetuous Stella told him to go find a schooner and refit it, whereupon he vanished for a few days, vastly admiring her confidence in ultimate victory.

The inconsistent village, which had hitherto turned a cold shoulder to Edward Barrington because his energy and courage were uncomfortable, now began to regard him in the light of a benefactor. There was no impulsive indorsement, for matters had to be talked over with the utmost deliberation, but a few hardy souls dared to circulate a petition requesting the selectmen to call a special town meeting to consider a lease of the public wharfage. This was rebellion, and John Markle was righteously indignant, letting it be known that he thought the petition hasty and unwise.

However, the document was signed by the lawful number of voters, and, by order of the selectmen, a meeting was called for a day in the second week of July. Every farmer and laborer that could be hired was prodigiously busy in the hayfields, and nothing short of dire calamity could have induced them to drive in to the town hall. The meeting lacked a quorum, and was adjourned without action. John Markle kept a straight face, and announced that Eppingham took no real interest in Ed Barrington's scheme and that it therefore died by default.

Leander Nickerson was not so easily satisfied. Like an industrious terrier of a mongrel breed, he had been trotting hither and yon, barking no longer, but seeking a chance to bite. There was the Corbin girl, who boarded with Susan Barrington. Her name had been linked with Ed's, but the lawyer feared to concoct a scandal lest it might be traced to him. Ed Barrington had an awkward habit of taking justice into his own hands. Leander bided his time until Mr. Bayne returned from a mysterious trip to New York and sauntered down the river road in the twilight. Leander followed him at a discreet distance as far as the lane that led into Susan Barrington's place. There he coyly seated himself upon a stone wall among the alder growth and waited until the damp air from the sea caused the party to retreat indoors from the piazza.

Leander hoped to overhear something to his advantage; he scarcely knew what, but he had been puzzled to guess where Ed Barrington's money could have come from, and he particularly desired to know how much there was of it. Was his scheme worth the energetic opposition of the railroad? Mr. Bayne might have met him in New York during this recent absence.

It was not at all hazardous for the wily Leander to steal to an ambush behind the lilacs, and within a few feet of an open window. The results were at first disappointing, but the listener pricked up his ears when Mr. Bayne described, with unusual ardor, the handsome schooner which he had been able to purchase at a bargain price.

"The tide has turned," cried Stella. "And it is so much finer and more satisfactory to fight for a victory than to buy it. It is Edward's name that counts. There will be another town meeting before long, I am sure, and John Markle will be unable to smother public sentiment."

"To think that my son is a part of it, and yet apart from it," murmured Susan. "I am keeping up a deception, but I can't bear to tell the truth, not quite yet."

"Not until his work is solidly begun, the foundations laid," declared Stella. "And then you need not say that he was in the *Henrietta* with Captain Moses Carpenter."

"No, you could not make them understand why I had kept it to myself all summer. It will be enough for me to announce that he has been lost at sea."

Out from the shelter of the lilacs moved, with stealth, the slim figure of Leander Nickerson. He fetched a circuit of the lawn, flitted among the apple trees, and so gained the road along which he proceeded at a jog trot. Ed Barrington was dead, at the bottom of the sea. This was enough for him to know.

"A flimflam game," he said to himself, his sharp features now suggesting the rat. "They tried to put one over on the village. I can't figger it out, but I don't have to. That's plenty for the village to chew over. Bayne is Ed's partner, is he? It's all Ed Barrington that aims to benefit the village and asks favors of 'em, is it? Calling

a special town meeting to ask the selectmen to lease town property to a dead man."

His reason for haste was that the *Gazette*, which was friendly to him and controlled by John Markle, appeared on Wednesday, and this was Tuesday night. If it had already gone to press, the forms could be opened and a new edition printed. Leander would write the article himself, merely the facts, and let the sensation speak for itself. Eppingham might draw its own inferences, the most obvious of which was that Bayne was a crook who had employed a dead townsman's reputation to further some shady interest of his own. Possibly he expected to sell stock in his shipping company a little later and leave Eppingham to whistle for its money.

There were discrepancies which Leander was unable to reconcile to himself, but they could be avoided in print. In his heart he knew that Mrs. Susan Barrington would never lend herself to a dishonorable transaction nor to a deception whose motives were base. He proposed to explode his bombshell and hope for damaging results. Susan Barrington could not deny that Ed had been lost in the *Henrietta*, and there you were.

TO BE CONCLUDED.

The final installment of this novel will appear in the next issue of the POPULAR, on sale November 20th.

DE VERE STACPOOLE

who wrote "THE PEARL FISHERS"

will begin a series of stories under the general title:

"The Luck of Capt. Slocum"

in the next issue of POPULAR on sale November 20th

Letters of a Cowboy to a Friend

By Robert V. Carr

Author of "Love Letters of a Cowboy," Etc.

FRIEND BART: You may see something about me in the papers Bart but you dont want to beleave everything you read in the papers. You can gamble on me telling you the truth. You see I come to town and right away called on Miss McKim. Me and her have been corrsponding for some time as you know.

As you know Bart I have saved some money and have not been professionally drunk for going on three years. Now and then a simple horn for old sakes' sake but nothing serious.

Me and Miss McKim was corrsponding backwards and forwards. Now and then I would call when in town but never could get her to go to a dance or nothing with me. Nice girl but high-headed in some respecks. For her sake I steered clear of the sheep dip or the conversation juice as they say. Wrote her right along Bart but she said nothing bout no loving or marrying. I thought no woman could write a man unless she was gone on him and figered on marrying him. A woman has no right to say or write a word to a man unless she intends to marry. A woman Bart ought to think a little but not too much for I dont beelieve in no woman knowing more than I do or as much. I want her to look up to me because I am a sooperior. So I saved up my money and come to town to talk serious to Miss McKim as I thought it was getting time for me to marry somebody as there is no life worth living unless you are married once in a while. You know I had \$276

saved up for I showed it to you the day I left the ranch. And isnt that more than enough to get married on?

Well I goes right straight to Miss McKim and I dont stop even to pass the time of day with the fellers I know in town. She is kind enough to me but her style lacks what the high-toned ones call cordjality. I never could take no pleasure in asking a woman to marry me unless she seemed sort of interested. But there I was and with all that money saved up and so I said. But wait Bart. There was some friend of hers visiting there from the east. He was a college professor or some such thing and he was a light weight if there ever was one. He had all gone to head. She introduced us and I gave him back his hand and I guess he went away and buried it. He just give his paw to me and I shuck it and handed back what was left. Well after I got rid of him she and me drifted out on the porch and set down in a swinging sofy and I said—

Now Miss McKim there is no use for me to beat around the bush. You and me have been corrsponding for going on three years and I have saved up \$276 and have behayed myself like a gentleman for going on three years. Now while we have not never writ no loving letters I see no reason why I should not tell you that I am here to ask you to marry me. I know I am only making forty a month but you make good money as a musick teacher and we could make a combination hard to beat. What say that we get married?

She is a pretty woman Bart but with a queer look in her eye. Her eye seems to look you over for brands and ear-marks. As you know she is edgecated to a feather edge. I will give exact words she threw at me.

She said—You have been laboring under a great delusion. Because I have been kind and considerate— Well I have no desire to listen to such talk from you.

I said—Then you just wrote me them letters to fool me?

She said—No. I have a foolish habit of thinking I can be of some benefit to men and women. I have helped many women but an ignorant man of your stripe always misunderstands me. If I am kind to him and appear interested in his welfare he thinks it is a tribute to his wonderful masculinity. As a matter of fact I am or was merely sorry for you and wanted to help you up out of the mud. But I fear you are impossible.

I said—Then you did not mean nothing by writing me them letters?

She said—Nothing but the usual desire to help. I write other men and attempt to encourage them.

I said—So that is the kind of a woman you are. You write to me and some other feller too. I might have known there was something wrong.

I talked straight to her Bart but somehow she could not see me. She just looked at me with a queer smile. I felt kind of queer. But I could not see how a woman can write a man without not loving him. To my notion a woman is just as a woman. I have met a few in my time and they are all alike.

Then I said to Miss McKim—So you have give me the turn-down? Well I have got your letters to show and you want to remember that you cant say that you turned me down for nothing because I have your letters to show.

She got up and looked me up and

down and then said—And I thought it a man.

That was all she said Bart but I did not care for the way she said it.

So I left her place and come down town. As she had turned me down there was nothing to do but take my \$276 and buy a trouble forgettery. I begin buying and first thing I knew I was back to her house. I suppose I had had too many drinks but I was back there hoping that she would change her mind about marrying me. She came out and spoke to me.

She said—You have been a great lesson to me. The woman who treats such as you with anything but contempt is foolish.

Just then her brother who has been studying for an army officer or something come up and shoved in.

Said he—Mildred is this one of your reforms? Why, the fool is drunk.

Said I—You dont need to be shoving your beak in just because you are her brother.

He said—Would you kindly inform me exactly how many drinks you have poured down your neck? Also, do you feel fairly sober?

I said—That is none of your business, but I would just as soon tell you that I have been drinking but that I am just as good as ever I was and a whole lot better than you, slickhead.

With that he danced up on his toes, balanced and swung. I got what he sent and I thought it was the world on the end of a wagon tongue. But he did not knock me down.

He said to his sister Miss McKim— Mildred you had better go to the house. I will trim this up shortly.

Miss McKim went on back in the house.

He then said to me—Where do you want the next one?

Said I—On the nose if you're man enough to put it there.

I be dogged Bart if he did not step

back and shake himself and then *kah-spong* he lands where directions said he would.

Then he said—Where do you want the next one delivered—on the point of the jaw?

I did not say nothing and I guess he thought I meant yes, for he began placing himself. When he got all fixed he sent through what he had and I received it C. O. D.—Certain of Death. Then the last I remember was that I was throwed out some place.

When I come to I see there was nothing to live for and so I went down and started to scattering what was left of my \$276. I was telling the bartender the kind of treatment I had been getting from Miss McKim and her brother when in walked her brother. He took me by the arm and led me out on the street.

Said he—if you mention my sister's name in a saloon I will hunt you up and beat you into a thin puree. I will not leave anything of you that remotely resembles a human being.

I said—Is that so?

With that he swung on me and lifted me back through the swinging doors of the saloon. I never did see a man who could hit harder than that brother of Miss McKim's. There was a lift to his fist that beat anything. As I said before his fist was like the world stuck on the end of a wagon pole and traveling a mile a second.

This is all I can write for this time Bart but will get more to you later on.

Your friend, CHARLIE.

FRIEND BART: As I said in my first letter I was drifting around and trying to get a square deal but this brother of Miss McKim would not let me mention no names. But I am not the kind to let no feller like him run over me and you know when I get hot there is something got to give.

So I said to her brother after he

called me down about mentioning her name in a drink shop—You do not need to think you own the earth or that your sister is the only woman in the world.

He said—The more I look at you the more I realize that I cannot tolerate your even thinking of the name McKim. I shall therefore render it a total impossibility for you to think.

Bart he was a shifter. Like a shad-der he drifted. First he tapped me on the nose to get his distance and then he began as fancy a lot of work as I was ever in the center of.

He would hit me on the jaw and then drift around back of me and knock me into possition again. He hated to lose me. He seemed afraid I would fall. He worked around me that way until I knew just as much with the front of my head as the back and that was less than nothing.

Then he said in a faraway voice—Now comes the last act. I am going to drive my fist into your face clear to the wrist. *Good-bye.*

Then he danced back, got himself all shaped up, got his distance, and then took a running jump and swung at the same time. I must say that he got me as good as ever I was got. He hit me on the last day of the year and I did not come to so as to know anything till New Year's night. When I did come to I found I had been jailed and was in for 30 days for fighting.

I will leave it to you Bart if I did any fighting. I never did no fighting. But here I am in jail and no bail money.

If you would pass the hat around to the outfit and raise my bail money I would certainly appreacite the kindness. Still I suppose there is no rush. I am broke and if I get out of jail that brother of Miss McKim's will only get hot about something. But I wrote her a letter and said—

Dear Miss McKim: I am in jail because your brother and me fought on account of him taking exceptions to my

speaking your name. I am writing you to let you know that I think you have not treated me right. You should never have written me no letters unless you meant to marry me. A woman and a man cannot write no letters nor be friends unless they get married and when they get married the woman's place is in the home unless she can earn money and if she earns money that money belongs to her husband by law. But had you married me I would have let you kept enough of your own money to buy clothes.

Your brother has hit me several times without cause and I want to say that I am glad I did not marry into your family as they are all crooked and want to be murderers. Yours truly,

CHAS. BLUNK.

You can see that I write straight when I mean business Bart, and after she got my letter that brother of hers come down and got me out of jail.

He said—I have secured your freedom that I might have the opportunity to work you over once more.

We was in a quiet place and I made a pass at him but missed.

He laughed like a man who had something he wanted to save to look at.

Said he—Do that again and maybe I can work up some real interest.

I made another pass at him. I missed.

Then he went to work. First he tapped me in the old way on the nose to get his distance and then he worked around even on all sides like a woman working a pie crust. Then when he was thoroughly satisfied that he had everything all shaped up he shook himself, gathered, rose and come down on a slant with his fist in front of him.

The last I remember was that he said—Never again mention, think, breathe or inhale the name of McKim.

I will tell you what happened in my next letter. Yours as a friend,

CHARLIE.

DEAR FRIEND BART: When I come to after my second fight with her brother I was in a hospital and I found later that he was paying all expense. As soon as I begun to get better he called and brought me some cigarettes.

Said he—Aside from your ideas concerning women which are those of a mere animal—an animal with hooves—I am beginning to like you. True, you are a little doughy, but I like to hit you just the same. You represent to me total ignorance. You will never know when to do the right thing, you will never know when to say the right thing, you will never realize that you are a fool. Therefore it is a pleasure to hit you.

I said—I am glad you feel that way about it, but I do not figger on changing my ways to suit you or your sister.

He said—That is it. Keep on talking about my sister. All you have to do is mention her. What hurts me is that you are in no condition now to be whipped. I should have saved you. The trouble with me is that I go to extremes. There was no necessity for me whipping you entirely. I should have saved some of you for to-day. But you will soon be well. That is something to be thankful for.

I did not say nothing, as I was beginning to get kind of tired of him. You know how it is Bart. After a while you get tired of a feller. But enough for this time. Your true friend,

CHARLIE.

DEAR FRIEND BART: When I got out of the hospital, Miss McKim's brother was right there to pay all expenses and give me some money besides. So I went down into a saloon and had a drink or two and told the bartender what kind of a deal Miss McKim had give me and that I had letters to prove it.

The bartender said—The less you say about the McKim girl the better, for

that brother of hers is the kind that will get you and no mistake. He has one of them cold blue eyes that brother of hers has and you can take it from me ther is death in one of them cold blue eyes. Besides if a man had whipped me into jail and the hospital I would have sense enough to know it was time to quit working my jaw.

I said—But that Miss McKim—

Just then in come her brother.

He walked back to a pool table and laid off his coat and vest. Then he rolled up his shirt sleeves and come up to me and looked at me. I could see that the bartender was right about them cold blue eyes. Her brother's eye was as cold as the barrel of a new gun. I see there was no use to make a pass at him and so I stood.

Said her brother—Being an idiot you cannot help talking. But perhaps I can dent your memory so that you will not mention a certain name in a saloon. This is the third time, and I shall use the twisting blows. Heretofore I have used straight blows. I shall now strike and twist. With each twist please remember that you are not to remotely consider a proposition that approaches within miles of the name of McKim.

Then as usual he tapped me on the nose to get his distance, but he did not twist that first one.

Then he shifted to the right of me and slung in one and twisted it and he reached me. I never had anything hurt me so much in my life. I felt my memory get the words down about never again saying anything concerning a McKim or anything that had McKim in it. About that time he shifted to the left, struck and twisted. Memory got busy that trip. Then he danced around in front and twisted in one just left of the corner of my mouth. Then he faded back, placed himself and hit me on the right vest pocket. Right then I made a promise to myself to never again think of anything that had the name McKim

in it. I could not breath and I could not stop breathing. He looked at me and said—

I could put you out but I guess I will let you think it over.

He went and put on his coat and vest and left me with two men holding me up.

Bart I could not go forwards or backwards. I was done.

I thought I would say something but up come memory and I did not say nothing concerning anything that had passed between me and the near relation of a certain man I have been writing you about.

When I get so I can be about I will come back to the ranch. I am not a man that some town folks can understand. Your true friend,

CHARLIE.

DEAR BART: A certain man who you may know by me writing about him in my last letter took me to the edge of town yesterday morning and asked me if my memory was in working order.

Said he—It is a terrible thing to have a poor memory. The reason that some men are gentlemen and others are monkeys is that a monkey has a poor memory. You are not a monkey. You may be the missing link but you are not a monkey for you can vote. But how about your memory?

I said—Mister, my memory is in first-class shape. I remember all you told me and I see no call for any more lessons in remembering things.

He come up close and hung over me and said—Just try some of your old forgetful ways so that I can have some excuse for going over you again. I have never met an alleged man I loved to knock out better than you. If you were a snare drum I would take lessons in beating you. Give me some excuse. You are going away and I shall doubtless never have another chance to knock the everlasting daylights out of you.

Say something that will give me an excuse.

With that I looked him right in the eye and said—I will not say nothing for *I know what you are after* and you are not going to get no chance. I will not say nothing.

With that he walked away as disappointed a man as I ever see. He had got himself all fixed to enjoy giving me a licking for old times' sake and I fooled him.

After all is said and done your old friend Charlie is a smart one.

But I am coming back to the ranch where I will be understood and you can

look for me any day now as I am headed toward the Half-way house. But Bart dont never have nothing to do with no woman who wants to reform you or who has a brother with one of them cold blue eyes, for them fellers with a cold blue eye would rather fight than eat a meal of vittles.

I know. I have fought one of them kind I mention. I know. It takes a fighter like me to know and you bet I know. Your friend, CHARLIE.

P. S.—I cannot call no names, but when I meet you and come to her or her brother's name I will whistle it. He had not ought to care if I whistle it.



LARRY PUTS ONE OVER

THERE is in the national capital a brilliant and distinguished journalist who once or twice a year takes a little too much to drink. In this story he will be known as Larry. One morning, shortly after midnight, George Edmunds, also a distinguished journalist, and, moreover, a tall and intelligent man, was in the National Press Club when Larry called him on the telephone, and said, in a thick and muffled voice:

"The capitol has been blown up. I wish you'd get the story and rush it to the wire for my paper. The building was blown to pieces by a bomb—big story—rush it!"

This was too much for George's sense of humor. He went back to a group of his friends and told the story, making the comment:

"Another one of Larry's drunken tips."

Parker R. Anderson, who represents the Greensboro, North Carolina, *News* in a most distinguished manner, had hysterics to such an extent that two of his friends had to help him from the floor, to which he had fallen, laughing helplessly. When he had wiped the tears from his eyes and caressed his aching sides, he said to George:

"I'm going home. If you'll ride up with me, I'll take you along in my car." George refused the offer.

The next morning, Anderson came down to breakfast in his boarding house. As he entered the dining room, one of the dear old ladies who populated the place commented to him:

"Big news in the paper this morning."

"It's interesting to you," chimed in another, "because it was discovered by a North Carolinian. It will make a good story for you."

"Well, what is it?" asked Anderson.

"The capitol was blown up last night by a bomb," said the dear old lady.

Anderson had neither hysterics nor breakfast that morning.

A Chat With You

LOOK around you on all sides, and you will see all sorts and conditions of people hard at work at the same game—making money. Many of us are such poor players at this game that we affect to be working for something else—for art, for fame, or just to do the world some good. Some few are sincere in this. Others affect to despise the winners at the game, but give them a chance to make a million, and see what happens. Ministers who preach the religion of poverty and self-denial become the victim of get-rich-quick schemers. Sweet old ladies are drawn into wild speculation. Statesmen who denounce the pursuit of wealth grab it whenever they can. One man in New York has been denouncing Wall Street speculation far and wide for years, yet when the list of stockholders in a concern which has been the biggest gamble in years is published, he turns out to be a big stockholder, and one of the greatest beneficiaries of the thing he denounced. No doubt he was sincere in his speeches, but he is like almost anybody else. Few, indeed, will commit a crime for money, but it is astonishing what changes of heart and opinion will occur in those before whom the money bag is dangled. Men pile up more than they or their descendants will ever use, and yet when one such decides to share some of his profits with his employees his case is so

unprecedented that he is hailed by some as a madman and by others as a saint.

• •

IT is a depressing thing, and yet perhaps some day a historian looking back will explain to others its causes, and show the part that it played in the evolution of mankind. Doubtless an ingrained fear of poverty and starvation has been bred in the bone and blood of humanity for many years, and is still lurking, a hidden but potent agent, under the conscious thought of many of us. Then, too, of course, money is a great help in all sorts of ways. Some people think we could get along without it, but there is no chance at present. Money is really crystallized or stored-up labor, which can be liberated for us when we want to use it. A bank is a storage battery charged with the energy of many human dynamos. If you have a bank deposit of five hundred dollars, you have at your beck and call, to be used when and how you will, the labor of one unskilled able-bodied man for a whole year. You can make him do foolish things for you. You can change that deposit for the energy of fifty-two men for one week if you want. You can have it transmuted into any form you please. You remember Aladdin and his lamp, and how the enchanter, knowing its power, was so anxious to get his hands

A CHAT WITH YOU—Continued.

on it that he offered new lamps for old through all the streets of Cathay. The modern enchanter knows that the power of the genii is stored up in the yellow bank notes, and the more you have of them the greater army you have to perform your miracles. People won't be so crazy about it some day. Some day they will be more philosophical, and realize that the power to perform miracles is not desirable for the individual. But that day is not yet come, and we, living in the world to-day, are a part of it, and can't help it, so the game of getting money still remains as the greatest of all our indoor and outdoor sports.

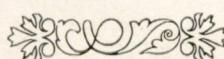


THE biographies of millionaires are disappointing. They never really tell you how it's done. In one chapter he was a poor boy working in a grocery store for seven dollars a week, and in the next he suddenly appears as the owner of an oil well or the president of a bank. How does it happen? Is it that they won't tell, or that they really don't know themselves? The complete novel which opens the next issue of *THE POPULAR* is a sporting story, all about the great sport of piling up a fortune. The title is "Behind the Screen," and it takes you behind the screen in a double sense, for the fortune in this case is made in the moving-picture business. There are no gaps in this story, no un-

explained things. You have the satisfaction of seeing just how he does it, and how hard the others try to "do" him. This young man loses one fortune, and then on a shoe string starts in on an entirely new business to win another. You have read of the great fortunes in the moving-picture business, and perhaps you have seen advertisements of stock for sale in various companies. In this story you will learn something about the business from the inside. It isn't the romance of the actor or actress, but the keener, faster game of the man behind who hires them. It was written by Foxhall Williams, and is the best thing he has yet done for *THE POPULAR*.



ALSO the next issue sees the opening of a new series of short stories, more or less connected, by H. de Vere Stacpoole, who wrote "The Pearl Fishers." That ought to be enough, but we cannot help saying that these are wonderful stories. There are also a collection of the best short stories you have ever read. Wilbur Hall, Ritchie, Niven, Inglis, Cullen, Paine, and Witwer all helped to make the next number a really notable one. Speaking of money, for fifteen cents you can get a whole lot of stored-up energy, sunshine, and romance two weeks from now at any news stand. You know what to ask for, and it's better always to order in advance. So do it now.



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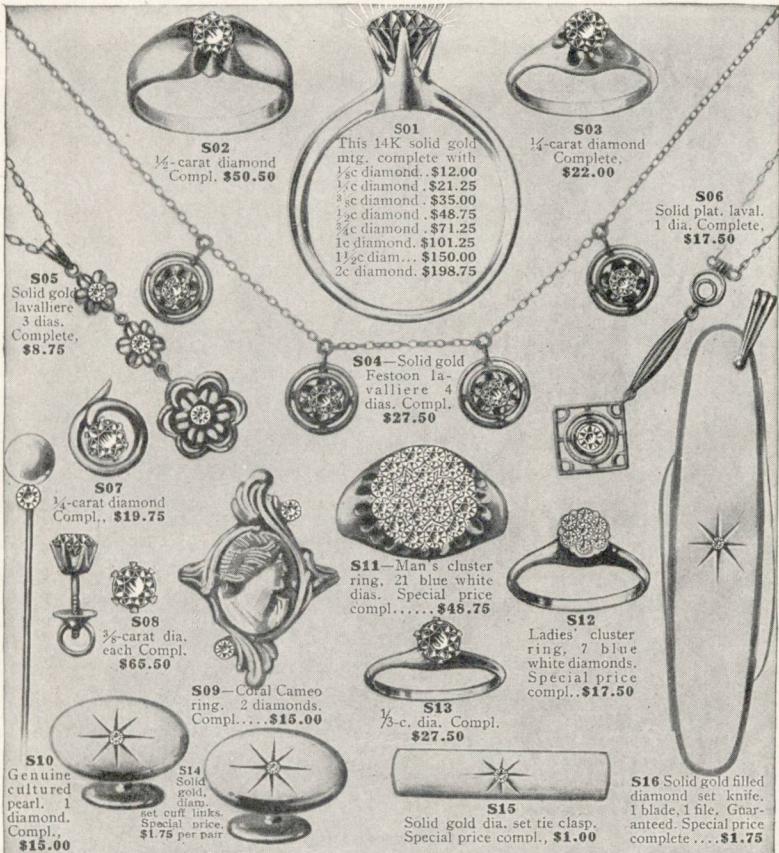
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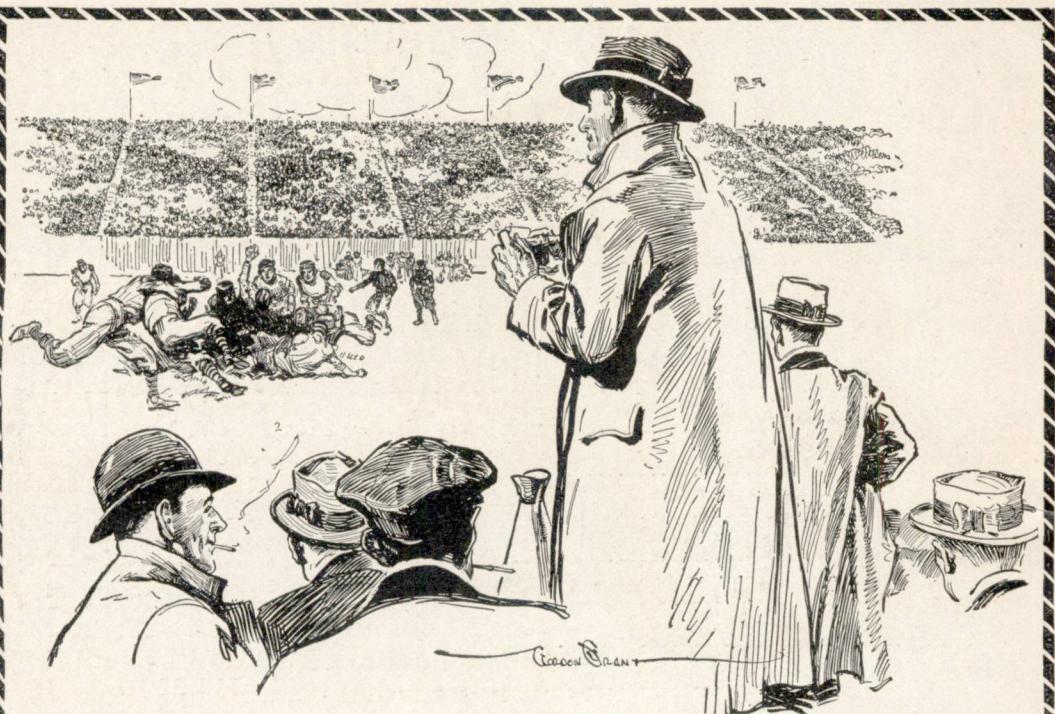


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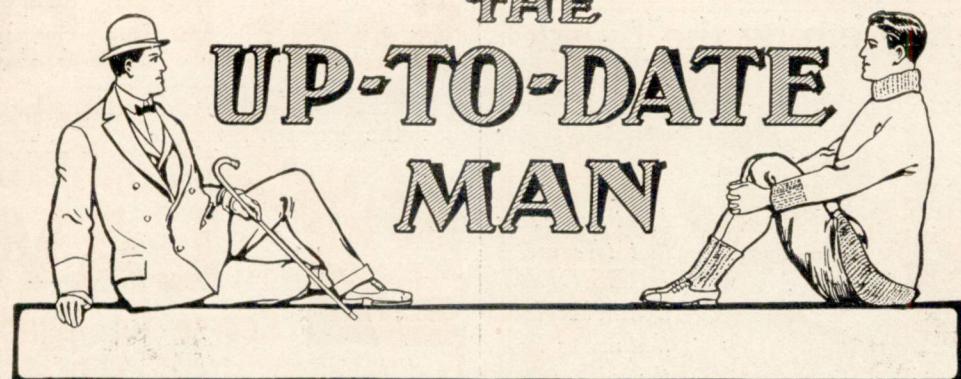
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THE UP-TO-DATE MAN



The readers of the magazine may write to this department about any problem of dress. Every question will be promptly answered, provided that a stamped, self-addressed envelope is enclosed.

PERHAPS you are one of those cynics, who yawn like the Grand Cañon of Arizona, when the purely style side of dress is ding-donged at them every month by fashion tipsters. Therefore, let us turn this month from a consideration of strictly style to the simple little habits and practices which contribute to make a man spruce and well turned out, even though he may not care a snap o' the finger about "the latest thing."

The corner stone of dressing well is to pay a fair price for your clothes. The coping stone is to take the best care of them. No matter if your clothes are good quality, they won't look well if you neglect them. No matter if you treat your clothes kindly, they won't look well if they are not good quality.

It pays, and pays well, to have several changes of suits and overcoats, so that you need not wear garments two days in succession, but can give them time to rebound from their creases and reshape themselves on hangers.

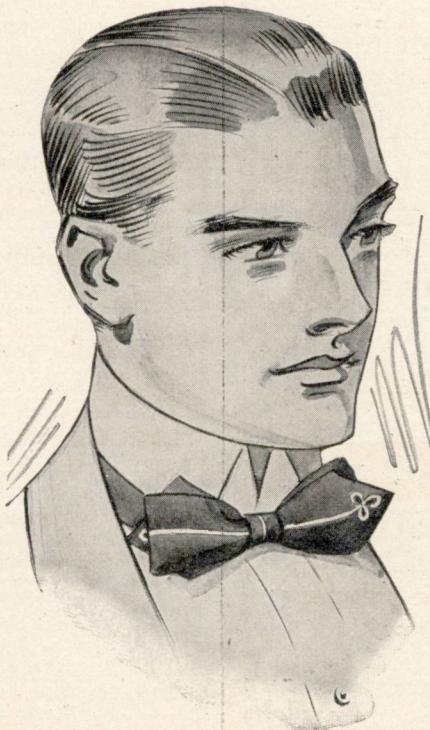
The most practi-

cal wardrobe for a man is a spacious closet containing one central wooden rod or pole that stretches crosswise the top. This rod may be oak, mahogany, nickel, or brass, as you prefer. It is nailed or screwed tight at each end, so that it is firm and can bear considerable weight.

Now, get half a dozen coat forms or hangers of wood or nickel, and suspend them by their hooks from this central pole. By pushing the forms closely together you can accommodate as many suits and overcoats as you wish, and each is within instant reach without disarranging its neighbors.

The moment your coat and waistcoat come off, drape them upon one of these forms, waistcoat underneath and coat over it. Don't toss garments across chairs or leave them crumpled up around the room even for five minutes. Form the unbugding habit of putting your clothes away right away, until it becomes second nature, like brushing your teeth.

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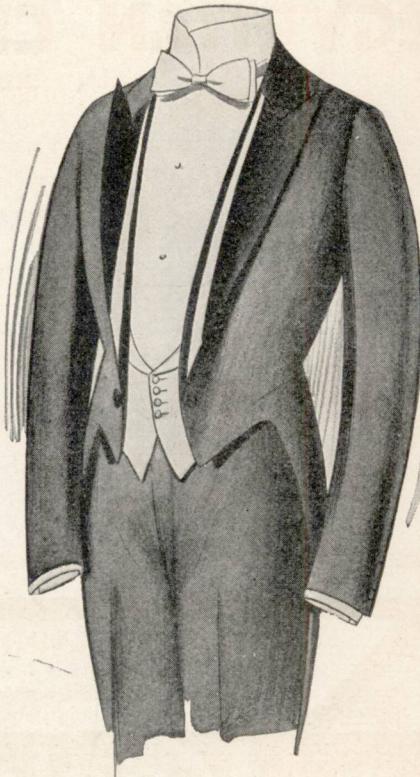
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coats do, and merely folding them in the center creases, and laying them in a drawer may suffice. However, it is better to get wooden clips which grip the trousers, bottoms up. The weight of the garment, top hanging down-



*Correct Evening Dress for 1915—16.
(Reproduced by request.)*

ward, straightens the wrinkles out of the cloth and saves many a pressing.

Evening (full dress) clothes, which are worn less often, should not be hung with the others, but enveloped in air-tight tar-paper bags, procurable for a few cents, which cover them completely, and keep out insect pests. It is advisable to take out and examine your evening clothes once a week to make sure that no moth has got past the guard.

Some men have special bags made to fit their evening suits out of cheap, rough white cloth with a draw string at the top. These, with moth balls dropped into the bottom, are perhaps the best of all. In the morning of the day you intend to wear your evening suit, take it out of its bag and let it

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air in the open or near a window. That blows off the odor from being shut up, which is mortifying to you and amusing to others.

Have a bureau or clothespress or chiffonier all to yourself. Into each drawer put certain articles, as shirts in the first; collars, cravats, and gloves in the second; underwear, handkerchiefs, and hosiery in the third, and so on. Thus, you avoid that Tower of Babel confusion of one belonging of dress with another, with its inevitable rasping of the most saintly temper. Moreover, this orderliness and compactness save space and time, for you don't have to pull out every blessed drawer to find one article.

While you may keep cravats acceptably in a drawer, experience has taught me an even better way. Get a nickel screw rod, just like a towel rack, and fasten it crossways to the inside of your clothes-closet door. Then, simply hang your cravats one by one over the rod, and there they are, in plain sight, ready to choose from in three blinks of an eyelid. No need of pawing through a dark drawer and hauling out the whole kit and caboodle merely to get a particular scarf. Just pick out the one you want, and whip it off the rod by the end.

The floor of the clothes closet should hold your shoes, all treed on wooden forms, and set along in a row, black on one side and tan on the other.

The upper part of your clothes closet should contain a shelf for hats. While a derby does not suffer from being hung on an ordinary clothes tree, a soft hat is of tender stock, and may lose its shape. It is better to keep the cardboard box your soft hat was delivered in, put it back each time, crown down, in the hollow paper cylinder, and place the box out of harm's way up on the shelf. Silk hats should always be put back in the original box, never hung upon a peg, as one tumble may ruin the delicate beaver.

To sum up, buy the best to be had, and then, give it a mother's care. Brush your hat before you lay it aside. Tree your boots before you put them away. Drape your coat before you walk off. Fold your trousers before you forget it. But do it BEFORE—after is only a stop-gap.

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We had tried everything we heard of without success. Finally, we took Marjorie to the McLain Sanitarium, where six months' treatment fully corrected the deformity. We探red the foot so that she could move it something she had never done before) and gave the limb better circulation and color. We watch for opportunities to tell others what you did for Marjorie. Yours gratefully, HENRY W. IRVIN, Flora, Ill.



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DEFORMITIES

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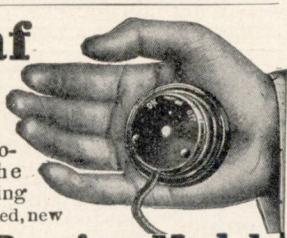
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We are diamond bankers. We loaned money to the former owners of the fine diamonds we now offer. The loans have not been paid. So we must sell the diamonds at a fraction of their proper value. You get the benefit.

Diamonds of the finest grade—beautiful, scintillating blue white gems—fully 50% below the normal figure. And fully guaranteed. Don't miss these great bargains. Write—write today for the latest bulletin.

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17 or 21 jewels, thin model 16 size

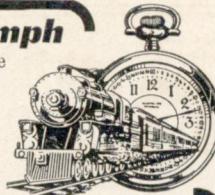
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The "SANTA FE SPECIAL" is the only watch in the world that is

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WrinklesThousands have successfully used this formula to remove traces of age,
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completely and quickly vanish. Face becomes firm, smooth,
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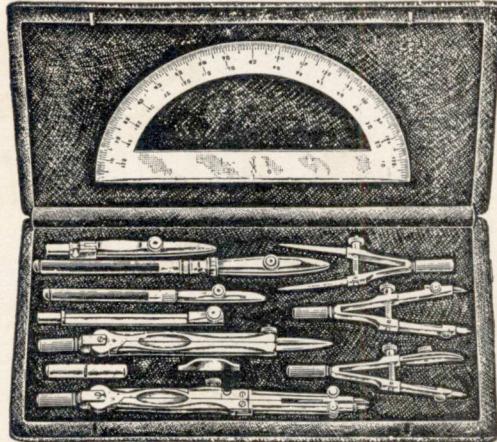
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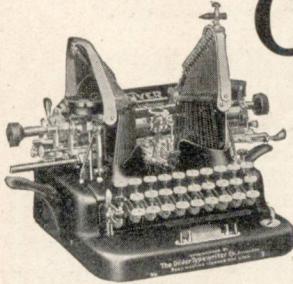
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DEAF

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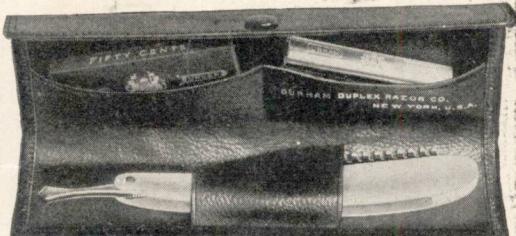
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