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The Popular Magazine

VOL. 53
NO. 3

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JULY TWENTIETH 1919

A BIG NOVEL

"UTOPIA"

by

HENRY C. ROWLAND

Complete in this Issue

Edgar Wallace will be represented in the next number by a great serial of mystery, "Green Rust." In the same magazine a complete novel by **Hugh S. Fullerton**

TWICE-A-MONTH

The Popular Magazine

Vol. LIII. No. 3 — July 20, 1919

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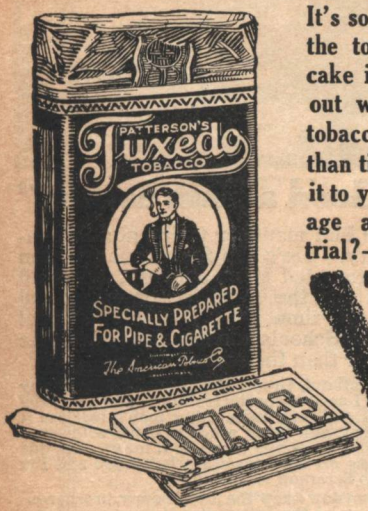

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THE POPULAR MAGAZINE

VOL. LIII. JULY 20, 1919. No. 3.

Utopia

By Henry C. Rowland

Author of "The Meddler," "The Arbiters," Etc.

Since the early sixteenth century, when Sir Thomas More wrote his "Utopia," men have dreamed and schemed of some such ideal commonwealth, where everybody would find happiness and sweet peace. That the word "utopia" means "no place" has never deterred lovers of equality and righteousness from planning a community of this sort. Now along comes Mr. Rowland with the most radical and startling Utopia yet presented to the world, entirely practicable and businesslike and at the same time glamorous as moonlight. No doubt our readers will be sharply divided over the idea of this latest Utopia, but we are certain that there will be little difference of opinion as to the power and interest of the novel. It is one of the best things that the writer has done.

(A Complete Novel)

CHAPTER I.

FIRST, a few words on the origin of Utopia, the place where most of it all happened and about which outrageous pleasure garden the civilized world is at such loggerheads. The twin-propeller love story is to show how very wrong perfectly right people may go when their methods are extreme.

If the truth were known the scheme actually originated in the fecund brain of Professor Michael Raikus, whose brilliant treatise, "The Reconstructed Mind," had won him the Nobel Prize. Perhaps the suggestions in his book were at that time merely in solution and needed the shrewd business mind of Baron Rosenthal to crystallize them. But this commercial genius of a big Czechian Jew, generally supposed to have been the *mauvaise génie* of the bizarre idea, which has so bitterly upset our promised post-bellum tranquillity, was actually no more than its promoter, while the brilliant Doctor Anatole Acajou of the Académie Française was no more than a useful figurehead chosen for the job by Rosenthal because of his descent and literary prominence.

Doctor Acajou though of French birth was a direct descendant of Jean Jacques Dessalines, first governor general and Dictator of Haiti, and as such had a sort of *baton sinistre* claim to the black republic which was sure to make its appeal to the African mind. As a distinguished poet and playwright the famous octoroon made an invaluable advertising agent.

It is doubtful if the idea was suggested in any way by Sir Thomas More's political romance "Utopia," by Wells' more recent reference to "pleasure cities" or even Blavatsky's "Secret Doctrine." Raikus' volume seems to indicate his insistence that "to every action there is an equal and opposite reaction" applies in a general sense to a moral as well as physical effort at equilibrium. He takes pains to demonstrate that, while devastating wars invariably follow epochs of great self-indulgence, so inversely must the pleasure instinct follow the sustained support of pain and durance, this reaction being immediate and its indulgence depending on the resources of the individual, nation or race. He points out the imprudence of continuing war-time discipline and

curtailment of personal conduct into the epoch of ensuing peace, and advises the restoration of many suppressed indulgences to which he ascribes what he calls a "therapeutic pleasure value." If not thus observed, he warns against civil discontent which might produce a sort of sulky lethargy on the part of the docile and law-abiding, and violent outbreaks or covert misdemeanor on the part of a faction whether turbulent or merely temperamentally full-natured. The professor does not go so far as counsel a national return to unlimited luxury and the rescindment of all war-time suppression of popular evils, but intimates that it might prove of social advantage to lift the clamped-down lid on many of them.

It took a Rosenthal to grab at the commercial possibilities suggested in this thesis. He knew America and Americans as well as he did Paris or Budapest or the Balkans or West Indies. To the astute brain behind the huge features of this ruthless old avatar of Phœnician merchant pirates, there was a stupendous future national unfilled want in sight. And his daring financial imagination saw where his already bursting coffers might yet be heaped tenfold in the supplying of it. As a veteran globe-trotter, keen observer, and student of national traits, he had often meditated on the American characteristic of voting for what one did not want but felt that for the good of the community should be ordained. Rosenthal laughed at Americans—and admired them. A shallower-brained man of his Oriental precepts would have laughed at them and held them in contempt. Not so the big Czech.

"T'ey are funny, t'ose Americans, and admirable," said he to himself, for speaking about all language with equally crude ease, he preferred to talk and think in that of the people concerned. "T'ey like to cut up, but not at home. A man from San Francisco votes for prohibition t'ere and goes to Chicago for a high ball, and a congressman votes der Mann law in Vashington and takes a dancer from Nice to Monte Carlo. T'ere are alvays two lines ohf traffic in der States; each going to der ot'er fellow's blace to plow off steam. And after der var t'ere vill no blace in der country to go, and many vill come ofer here and many sit at home and bust."

To Rosenthal's shrewd mind it was preordained that after the war America of all the nations would not revoke the prohibitions of her belligerent epoch. The women, rapidly gathering in the reins of authority, would look after this. And with no alcohol the whole country would present a continuous sabbatical calm. Merrymaking would be of the church-fair quality. Men would confine their kissing to their wives, their sisters, and their betrothed, and the only fun dependent on a wedding would be for the bride and groom. Funerals would no longer be shunned for their dreariness nor a dinner in a dry house be any more of a bore than at one's club. Most clubs, however, would follow the saloons into the soundless space between the worlds. There would be no high jinks, no carnival, nor tinsel, nor confetti. Satan would shun those shores or turn them over to his wife's cousin, who would curl up his tail and go to sleep.

But Rosenthal believed with Professor Raikus that, beneath this blue-ribboned legislation, there would be a great deal of sullen discontent. He had always used alcohol very sparingly himself and only in its purest and most mellowed combinations, and he did not consider its ingestion as such at all necessary to the human economy. He abominated drunkards as he did any other excessive self-indulgents, but he most thoroughly agreed with the eminent Russian psychologist that the "pleasure value" of certain principles, always required for the perfect balance of our systems, was going to be more demanded than ever by them after several years of strain and self-abnegation. He reasoned that the highly strung American nature was bound to seek them somewhere, and since he did not think they would be obtainable within the jurisdiction of the United States, Rosenthal proposed to supply them at some place adjacent to its shores and with enormous pecuniary profit to himself. It was not that he proposed merely to supply thirsty Americans with a depôt for their alcoholic affinities, but to provide a gorgeous and well-ordered playground where practically no form of normal physical or mental delight would be tabooed, but, on the contrary, furnished by the management on a magnificent scale, running all the way from poetry and music to the banquets of Lucullus.

Such a proposition, he argued, must be successful, and saved from censure and suppression by the civilized world, have as its basis Beauty on a stupendous range. Nature must be its foundation, Art its excuse, Pleas-

ure its purpose, and Wealth its support. There was nothing broadly social nor humanitarian in Rosenthal's design, nor would he advance any such claim in its favor. He purposed solely to create and develop to its *n*th degree a sort of Oriental paradise on earth for such as might be able to pay the price of a sojourn there.

This Elysian idea having crystallized in his brain, Rosenthal was at no loss to hit upon the spot for its establishment. The island of Haiti was the place par excellence for a number of very excellent reasons. Geographically and topographically it presented all the requisite features of tropical climate and luxuriant natural beauty. It had sea and mountains, swift streams, gorgeous forests, miniature plains and plateaus, broad snowy beaches, and even medicinal springs. It had also a population of about one hundred thousand pure-bred African negroes, but Rosenthal's fertile brain backed by an intimate knowledge of the island, where he had made his start in life, saw how this last might be a help rather than a hindrance. The big Czech had been in his time the private financial adviser of President Simon Sam and his successor, that strong and astute marabout negro, Nord Alexis, and he knew the ropes.

How Rosenthal managed to get control of Haiti with Doctor Acajou elected president belongs rather to the pages of history than romance, though it was all romantic enough. He had tried a good many years before to achieve the coronation of one Dessalines, a pure-blooded African and also a direct lineal descendant of the early dictator, but had failed through counting too much on the possibilities of the negro intelligence and the intrigues of one Madame Fouchère, the octoroon wife of a clever Haitian doctor. At that time his motive had been trade concessions, but it had not cost him much, Dessalines being rich, influential, and incidentally an Oxonian and financing the attempt from his own large personal fortune.

But this time he had not only no lack of funds but a clever coadjutor who, though nearly white, was popular and influential on the island. Besides, the proposition was an entirely different one. Had Rosenthal desired to exploit the rich natural resources of the place in a purely commercial enterprise he might have met with jealousy and opposition, but his grandiose project to capitalize only the promotion of its natural beauties to create a world-renowned pleasure paradise which should challenge the combined attractions of Monte Carlo, Palm Beach, San Sebastian, and Ostend, with all of the features of each and none of the limitations of any, met with immediate favor.

Knowing the Haitian jealousy of whites and unfriendly suspicion at their intrusion of the island, Rosenthal was secretly surprised at the ease with which he obtained his sweeping concessions. But he had pointed out to the negro legislators that their knowledge of visiting whites had been confined almost entirely to German traders, and that the whole civilized world had risen in the suppression of this nationality. The Haitians liked and admired the French whose language they spoke—for the most part in creole patois—and whom the wealthier of them tried to imitate, and they had always given a friendly reception to such few Americans as had seen fit to visit them.

Rosenthal, himself, although born in Budapest, had become a naturalized Frenchman at the close of the war between Turkey and the Balkan allies, during which struggle he had made an enormous fortune in his munition dealings with both sides, and been conferred his title, which oddly enough was a papal one and in recognition of his having saved a community of Bulgarian Christians from massacre at the hands of their Moslem confederates. The Jew was a big personality, no coward, and a man of heart, and had achieved this meritorious act at the cost of great personal danger and a painful wound. Once started on some enterprise there was no fear at all in Rosenthal, whether financial or physical or of personal discomfort. Between times he was something of a Sybarite, though not of the Gargantuan type, which many supposed him by reason of his tremendous physique. He was also liberal in his generosity and had given freely to war charities from his enormous war profits.

As this is not the story of the Pleasure Island which has been so violently assailed and defended, little more need here be said on the subject. Rosenthal went ahead with his project on the same magnificent scale with which he had conceived it. He employed the services of the most distinguished landscape gardeners and architects and painters and sculptors, though naturally he did not attempt to reclaim the whole island from savagery but merely the reservation about Assuei Lake, which he called Utopia,

and near which, at La Croix des Bouquets, he established his great aërodrome where the great dirigibles discharged their tourists from Palm Beach. He built also the great shell scenic viaduct to Jacmel which he converted into an enchanted port for his swift steamers and visiting yachts.

But Utopia! What adjective can one apply to it? Utopia the gorgeous, the superb, the exquisite, the outrageous, the transcendental, the sublime—it is all of these, and, by virtue of its celestial setting, more. Imagine, those of you who have not seen, yet rail at it: a primeval fairyland, not diminutive but grand and varied, in its larger features taken as a framework for the most extravagant embellishment of the world's leading artistic elaborators. There were the mountains with their deep, plushy foliage, in which was set the lake like an emerald half hid by their luxuriant folds, and over their shoulders distant glimpses of the sea, amethyst in the early morning, topaz at noon, a riot of soft colors at sunset and sapphire as the shadows fell.

About the shores of the lake were coral palaces with loggia and terraces and sunk and hanging gardens, dainty flying bridges of lace and gossamer over the gorge with its fleecy cataract; here and there a vine-covered pergola springing out into the lake and under which the gondolas might linger, there near the center a temple d'amour enshrining nymphs and nereids, swift, swallowlike electric launches flying up and down the sixteen-mile stretch of water, four miles across the snowy *pavillon de jeu,* the beautiful temple dedicated to the Goddess of Chance, roofed and columned, but unenclosed, with its wonderful Etruscan gardens.

Farther back were horse and motor-racing tracks, polo fields, and aërodromes, the latter with swift air planes driven by skilled pilots at the disposition of the guests for a day or moonlight flight over the pulsating isle. At the head of the lake were the spacious Roman baths, a favorite early morning retreat for riotous revelers. Music, flowers everywhere, seductive, winding paths through the tropical jungle, the perfume of jasmine and stephanotis, the multicolored dancing lights reflected from the lake, and nowhere one slightest accent of the coarse or vulgar.

Erotic as Cupid's bower the place unquestionably was; voluptuous, enticing, sensuous, demoralizing on every side, but not one false note had been struck. Every feature of art and beauty had been studiously weighed and measured and tried and removed, or left as found by the *arbiter elegantiarum.*

And with it all were no restrictions; no rules and regulations for the conduct of guests, barring only one. The management would tolerate no quarreling. This did not apply to high words being used in the heat of excitement, but let a blow be struck and the offender was politely banished for that season. Old Rosenthal would brook no strife in his pleasure preserve. Otherwise there was no ban on the pastimes of his guests. They might chase each other through the orange groves like nymphs and fauns or through the sparkling waters of the lake like nymphs and tritons for all he cared, and there was no censorship of the lyric muses, whether in poetry or drama or the choral or any other dance, but good nature must prevail.

It was this unbridled license which brought down upon the place the anathema which he had foreseen and cunningly desired. It had been no part of his project to promote a popular and respectable family winter resort. He did not purpose to corrupt youth nor shock dignified old age. No minors were admitted to his pleasure preserve; no youths under twenty-one, nor girls under eighteen. His ultimate ambition was to provide a joy ground for such natures as desired the beauty and gayety and freedom of restraint which Utopia had to offer, and he argued that he was a public benefactor in furnishing the world with such a safety valve, where wild and reckless spirits might blow off their steam without scandalizing their neighbors and taxing the efforts of the authorities.

And just as he had anticipated, the more the place was anathematized the more intense grew the curiosity of such as could afford it, to pay Utopia at least one visit, and this accomplished, the incredible beauty and absence of anything coarse or brutalizing lured them again and yet again. Many found nothing to startle or dismay them, because of the pervading atmosphere of art which extended to the clients themselves, most of whom were unquestionably vicious but rarely vulgar. The regular habitués were for the most part persons prominent socially, artistically, or commercially, who went there not only for pleasure, but freedom of restraint and in whom manners and morals were diametrically opposed.

And thus it came about that, while in many well-ordered households Utopia was a forbidden topic, there was scarcely an individual who did not cherish the secret ambition to see it for himself or herself. Its very mention was a disturbing factor. Young brides begged to be taken there on their honeymoons. Staid matrons suggested to their husbands that it might be well to pay the place a visit if only to warn their children against its iniquity, and the husbands usually found a way to manage it. Gilded youth liked to boast of a sojourn there and was not considered *diplomé* until it had made its sojourn. Rich and elderly roués whose fires burned low found them replenished in its tropic glamour. Tired and listless financiers of impeccable personal habits found their faculties refreshed by the vicarious pleasures of the place. But woe to the widow or divorcée or bachelor maid who was hardy enough to enter the great coral portals with their masterly but startling statuary and arabesques! Society, threefold more rigid in its censorship than of antebellum days, consigned her unanimously to the demi-monde.

How old Rosenthal must have chuckled in his sleeve. A declared hedonist or beauty lover, and a frank pagan at heart, the success of his daring scheme far exceeded his most sanguine dreams. And his revenues were princely though, strangely enough, the prices were far less exorbitant than those of many virtuous American resorts. But the island was very rich in agriculture, the black labor plentiful and cheap, and, according to his concessions, he got his imports duty free. He enriched himself and his Haitian associates beyond the dreams of avarice, and the populace loved the glitter and gayety brought to their dilapidated island. There were plenty of dark recesses left them for their own savage pastimes.

Rosenthal was virtually king of the country, and the joke of it was that, however much the place might be vituperated by the foreign *vox populi* or *ex cathedra* opinion, the very text of the great declaration of freedom of the world made it impossible for other nations to interfere. Haiti's chosen course fell within the Act of Liberty of Small Nations, and she could not be touched without the actual revokal of an all-important clause, or some amendment which would destroy the symmetry of the whole. Monaco still flourished, although its casino was a crap or fan-tan game compared to Rosenthal's; Ostend flourished, so why not Haiti? And it is doubtful if secretly the world actually desired it suppressed. As Rosenthal said, Haiti was entirely inoffensive to her neighbors, and there was no international law requiring anybody to visit her shores.

And so to the story.

CHAPTER II.

The close of the Great War found the Putney family better off in every respect than at its beginning, which is saying a good deal. This gratifying situation did not surprise the estimable family unit, which found therein no more than its just reward.

The Putneys, so far as their genealogy could be directly traced, had always been prosperous, well-ordered folk who had played their due part in the development and growth of the United States, feared God, obeyed the law, and conducted themselves as patriotic citizens, estimable neighbors and industrious builders of the nation's commerce. There was no record of any startlingly brilliant performance on the part of any immediate ancestor, but each had done his part to strengthen the wall of respectable prosperity.

They were, in fact, what might be justly considered a model American family, and the struggle which had brought tragedy to thousands of homes and poverty to many had, as if in recognition of their worth, left them honored and unscathed. It had even recompensed their patriotic efforts with added wealth and honors. The output of the manufacturing plant of which Mr. Potter Putney owned the controlling interest was increased threefold. Mrs. Putney, a highly capable woman, had played a prominent part in war work and charities, while the three children had shone brightly in the service of their country.

Ralph, at the outbreak of the war a captain in the national guard of his State, had been ordered to France with his regiment early in the hostilities and had proved himself a brave and efficient officer, serving until the end, and returning with three decorations, two French and one American, a wound stripe and the rank of colonel. Ruth, graduating from Smith College in 1916, had taken a course in trained nursing for the purpose of going later to France with a Red Cross unit, but had entered a military hospital in Virginia. Randall, just out of Harvard and an experienced yachtsman, had taken a three months' intensive course at

Annapolis and been assigned to a destroyer, finishing the war with the rank of lieutenant commander.

So here was a family very much to be envied. One which had given generously to the Allied cause and reaped its good sowing full-handedly. They were one of the few family units whose war account showed a big credit balance with no losses, and while they may have felt a becoming gratitude for having been thus blessed, they speedily accepted the dispensation as a due and proper reward of virtue, and were inclined to regard the misfortunes of less favored neighbors as likewise falling within the divine order of things.

Take, for instance, their old friends, the O'Connors, whose affairs were of particular interest to the Putneys, because a few weeks before his departure Ralph had become engaged to marry Arden, a lovely girl of eighteen. First, there had been the infantile paralysis which had stricken Timothy, her younger brother, who had just entered Harvard, and left him with a twisted ankle and semi-invalid. Then the father, Arthur O'Connor, an Irish gentleman of French birth, had lost practically the whole of his fortune through German perfidy in the destruction of the big velvet mills at Lille and Roubaix, after these had been ransomed for two and a half million francs. The elder brother Gerald, a year or two younger than Ralph Putney, had been studying at the Beaux Arts in Paris when the French were called to arms and had promptly enlisted in the Foreign Legion, and after a year's fighting, in which he had received the Croix de Guerre and Medaille Militaire, his right wrist had been shattered by a shrapnel, leaving his hand practically useless for sculpture, at which he had already shown brilliant promise. Being disqualified as a combatant, he had later entered the American field ambulance corps as a driver and had served in this capacity to the end of the war.

Arden O'Connor had not undertaken any national service whatever. The care of her immediate family had taken all of this girl's physical and mental efforts. After her father's financial disaster they had rented their handsome Boston house and moved into a small semisuburban cottage. Arden herself did most of the housework at first, though later they were able to afford a Filipino boy who proved an excellent general servant.

So here were two American families of the same social set whose circumstances were antipodal as the direct result of the war. The Putneys rich, respected for their patriotic activities, unscathed; the O'Connors, equally patriotic, now impoverished, the eldest son maimed in a manner which threatened to prevent the pursuit of his chosen art, and the younger crippled by what was generally believed to be the work of enemy kultur.

When Ralph Putney's regiment was ordered home from Germany months after the end of the war, Ralph had quietly resumed his position as superintendent and junior partner of his father's big plant. He found Arden, whom he had left a slenderly lovely girl, now a full-blown beauty of infinite domestic capabilities, rich of coloring, strong of body and with a grave but animated light in her changeful gray eyes which stirred him as the shy glances of the romp of eighteen had never done.

Ralph wanted to be married immediately and had urged his claim with characteristic military emphasis. But Arden smilingly refused.

"Father and Tim couldn't get along without me," said she.

"They can get along without you now as well as any time," Ralph insisted.

Arden shook her head. "Father is at the office all day and Tim gets morbid and depressed when he's left alone. If Jerry were here it would be different. Tim pines for him. He always worshiped Jerry."

"Write and tell him to come home. I'll give him a job of his own choosing in the plant. What is he staying over there for, anyhow?"

"He says that he has got work in Gérard's studio. He can model, though his wrist bothers him a good deal. Besides, he says that he is not coming home until he can come as a success. You know how Jerry is. And he writes that from what he hears of America, he doesn't think he could stand it over here."

"Another post-bellum expatriate," Ralph growled. "There are a hanged sight too many of them. That's what comes of turning the whole country into a Sunday school."

"Ruth thinks it's wonderful," said Arden.

"Ruth's a rampant bluestocking. Almost a Prussian blue in arbitrariness of methods. I must say I think it would have been better if they'd eased up a little after the war instead of using it as an argument to screw things down tighter."

"That's what father says. If things were as they were before the war, I'd feel differently about leaving him and Tim. But the men stay home now instead of getting together and having some fun. He's dropped his clubs and Timothy scarcely ever goes anywhere, so I have to be the entertainment committee. Think how dull it would be for them alone. And, besides, they neither of them have the slightest idea of the expense accounts."

"That need be the least of your cares, Arden. I'll settle half a million on you to use the interest as you like——"

Arden reached forward and laid her hand on his lips. It never occurred to Ralph to kiss her finger tips. In some ways he was strangely lacking in strategy for a soldier.

"Don't say things like that, Ralph, dear," said Arden. "You know what proud folk we Irish are."

"That's not pride. It's downright foolishness. This war has made me rich and ruined your father. Why can't we try to even things up a little? What are families for, anyhow? I've never wanted any woman but you, and never shall, and what is there ahead if you take this stand? There's nothing for your father in the Boston agency of this American velvet concern. When *can* we get married?" He sprang to his feet and began to pace impatiently back and forth. "Why don't they try to reorganize the Lille works? They've got the reputation and good will and trade relations and Germany pretty well shut out."

"Perhaps they may," Arden answered, "though father doesn't know just how he may stand if they do. We've nothing left but the town house, and that's mortgaged. We shall have to wait, Ralph. That's all there is about it. Timothy is getting slowly stronger and is trying to write. Some of his things are really very good, especially his verses."

Ralph drew down the corners of his firm mouth. Timothy's verses sounded about as hopeful to him as had German peace proposals at the beginning of the war. He had never known Timothy very well and was inclined to regard him askance as a precocious youth of uncertain rationality. Now, as he looked at Arden's fascinating Celtic face, and from that took rapid assay of the general intense desirability of the whole of her, his dominant personality was almost maddened that possession should be denied him through two such inconsiderable obstacles as a meningitis victim and a bankrupt manufacturer of velvet.

"Don't think such things as that, Ralph!" said Arden, with startling telepathy. "You can't have everything, you know."

"I don't ask everything," he answered, with no attempt to protest her insight of his mind. "All I ask is you. Nothing else matters. It's pretty tough, I think, after all I've been through."

"It's tough for me, too," Arden answered. "I want to marry you, Ralph. But I will *not* leave father and Tim when they need me so badly."

"There isn't much prospect of their needing you any less as time goes on," said Ralph bitterly.

"We shall have to wait and see," Arden answered, "or at least *I* shall. You are free to marry any other woman you may choose. I'm not sure but what that might be better for us both. You are not to consider yourself bound to me in any way, Ralph. I'm sorry, but I don't see any help for it."

"All right," Ralph answered shortly. "I'll wait."

CHAPTER III.

At the Putneys' country estate near Manchester a house party was in progress. This, like similar entertainments the country wide, was rather a sedate affair. The second summer after the war found most families if not outwardly in mourning still indisposed to gayety. But if there had never been a war it would have made no difference so far as the Putneys were concerned. Theirs was a family which had always taken its pleasures seriously since Colonial days when it had attended witch burnings in Salem hard by.

From childhood Arden O'Connor had rather dreaded the Putneys' parties, first because of their extreme formality, which had always an uncomfortable effect upon her natural high spirits, and later because of Ralph. His presence became oppressive when she was sixteen and he twenty-four, two years out of Harvard, where he had taken the technical course and already the capable assistant superintendent of the plant, where for a number of years he had spent his vacations. He had seemed an infinitely aged and austere person to Arden, and when she began to notice how he was always watching her it grew so that she hated to go near the place. Her brother Gerald, or

Jerry, as he was called by his friends, could not have been dragged to one of the Putneys' parties at the tail end of an automobile.

The knowledge that Ralph was in love with her had come as an astonishing revelation to Arden. This had come shortly before the war, and the surprise had swept her completely off her feet. She had always imagined that the tall, quiet young man with his stern, handsome features and piercing blue eyes regarded her with a mixture of curiosity and disapproval, and the startling discovery that he had admired and desired her for years and was waiting patiently for her to grow up to ask her to marry him, had filled her with a sort of grateful exultation, as if she had been awarded a prize most unexpectedly. All of her set of girl friends admired Ralph tremendously and stood rather in awe of him, as did most of his own men associates. Success had always attended his efforts at school and college, in his profession and social relations.

So, therefore, when judging the hour ripe and the moment propitious, he had moved forward to the attack, there was nothing for Arden to do but surrender. As the prettiest and most desirable girl of their set, she seemed the fair prize of its most admirable youth, and on examining the situation in her mind she decided that she was really in love with Ralph and wished to marry him. Marriage appealed to her as a very delightful and exciting adventure, and she did not see how she could have a better partner for it than Ralph. Her father was very pleased, her friends frankly envious, and the Putneys thoroughly satisfied with the engagement, as the O'Connors belonged to a distinguished branch of this large family, were related to certain members of Irish nobility and of sound social and financial position.

Arden had declined to spend the week of the house party at the Putneys' house, not wishing to leave her father and Timothy, but she ran over daily either in her own little car, which she had managed to save from the wreck, or was called for by one of the Putneys. She took Timothy with her always, for the boy was docile enough except on rare occasions when something particular occurred to disturb him. "Half-witted" or "semi-idiotic" do not at all describe Timothy's mental condition. The dread disease had by no means destroyed his intellect, but had given a peculiar slant to a mind which had been from childhood precocious and hyper-active. His perceptions seemed set at an entirely different angle to those of what are considered normal folk. At times he might impress the intelligent observer as out of his wits, but never lacking in them. His special senses were at certain periods abnormally acute, but when physically tired, apt to be dull and lethargic. His occasional flashes of what suggested a sixth sense would have led the Scotch to say that he was fey.

Timothy had a peculiar effect on people. To those who knew of his affliction, he was regarded with interest and compassion as a victim of German kultur. To strangers, he was apt to be an object of perplexity and receive a sort of guarded deference. Perhaps the boy's wild, uncanny beauty had something to do with this. He looked like an untamed, Gaelic princeling maimed in some foray. He was slightly above medium height, slenderly but gracefully built, with delicate but aquiline features and widely set eyes of a mystic, baffling expression which seemed, when in repose, to be looking through and beyond material things. His forehead was very smooth and broad, his cheek bones high and prominent with usually a tinge of color. His face did not at all resemble that of Arden, which was rounder with a slightly retrousée nose, wide, full-lipped mouth, and mirthful at the slightest excuse, but they both had the same fine, clear complexion and thick, wavy, blue-black hair, Arden's at times a trial from its profusion. Their misty gray eyes were also similar, though Timothy's were thoughtful rather than intense, and more limpid in quality.

On this July day Ralph taking a week's vacation from the plant had called for them in his touring car to take them over for the day and night. He and Arden were in the rear, Timothy, who rather avoided Ralph, sitting in front by the chauffeur, a Filipino. Immediately after the war thousands of these islanders had been imported, after a searching physical examination, and, so far as it went, the experiment had proved successful in solving the domestic and factory labor question, particularly the former, as they made excellent house servants and flourished under conditions of good hygiene though apt to go to pieces where this was lacking.

"We are going to have a guest next week," said Arden as they sped along. "Count de Guys is coming over to see what can be done

about the recapitalizing of the Roubaix usines. You know in the beginning of the war the Germans offered to ransom them for two and a half million francs. Father was opposed to paying it as he did not trust them, but the De Guys interests were in favor of taking the chance, so the money was paid and as soon as the Germans had received it they gutted the works of machinery and metals and shipped them back into Germany."

Ralph nodded. "I know," said he, "and later when we took the place the mills were a heap of smoking ruins. Well," he sighed, "I hope they manage it. That seems the only chance for you and me. You know I met the Vicomte de Guys over there. He was colonel of *génie;* engineers. The old count is going to stop at your house?"

Arden laughed. "I should have said 'vicomte.' Yes, and I am rather dreading it, though father wrote him not to expect any magnificence, and Francisco is a very good cook. We count on all of you to help entertain him, Ralph."

"Why, yes—of course," Ralph answered, and his face clouded a little. He remembered Colonel de Guys as a very attractive and distinguished young officer of about his own age, and the idea of Arden's being his hostess did not entirely please him. To be sure, Arden's maternal aunt, a Mrs. Ravanel, of Charleston, was visiting them for a few weeks, but even then the prospect of his fiancée being constantly in the society of an attractive and unmarried French officer was by no means to his taste. And yet, he reflected, the visit might prove the means of furthering his and Arden's interests.

"Were the De Guys cleaned out financially by the war?" he asked bluntly.

"I don't know," Arden answered. "Of course they lost heavily, but they were very rich, and the French usually keep something tucked away in the *bas de laine.*"

"All that I met had pretty well emptied it," said Ralph. "If he's coming over to raise money, I may be able to help him. The proposition ought to be a good one, and I might subscribe to some stock myself." He half turned and gave her an intense look from his masterful blue eyes. "I'd take all they let me have if you went with it, Arden."

"I'm not precisely a stock premium, Ralph," she answered, with a little shrug. "Speaking of France, I had a letter from Jerry this morning." Her low-pitched voice reached Timothy's ears, and he stirred slightly in his seat.

"Really? What is Jerry up to?" Ralph asked.

"I can't imagine. He writes that through Maître Gérard he has got in touch with what may prove a very big order, and one which will keep him busy for a number of years to come. He says that if he wins the competition we may soon hear from him in American waters. What can he mean by American 'waters?'"

Timothy turned and looked at Ralph with the mocking smile which often made people antipathetic to him intensely uncomfortable. "The new Palace of Peace where Coney Island used to roar and glitter," said he.

Ralph felt that this was mockery, but he chose to take it seriously. He knew that the boy classed him with Ruth as a stern dictator of public morals, which he was not, although often lending his support to Ruth's reform activities.

"Something of the sort, perhaps," said he. "Let's hope that he succeeds. It's a pity that we can't have at least a few American artists over here to do our national monuments."

"They're afraid of getting arrested for indecent exposure of the Muse," said Timothy, and turned in his seat again.

Presently they arrived at the Putneys' summer home, which was precisely such as one would have expected of the family, large, handsome, correct, and conventional in every detail and cheerful enough in its placid, reposeful way. Arden and Timothy never entered it without thinking of Jerry's commentary, that it looked like a good place to go when you die. They were welcomed by Mrs. Putney, a large, handsome, and contented-looking woman with beautiful hair which had changed from flaxen to silver with no perceptible transition, and her daughter, Ruth.

"So glad to see you, dear," said Mrs. Putney, kissing Arden, to whom she had been more than usually kind since learning of her refusal to fix even a prospective date for her wedding to Ralph. She felt secretly that Ralph could do very much better, and very probably might, if Arden were to exhaust his patience. "How splendidly Timothy is looking. What have you been giving him?"

"A letter from Jerry," Arden answered, with a laugh. "That's always Tim's best tonic."

"Really? And what is Jerry doing? Something terribly exciting, I am sure."

"Awfully," Timothy answered, watching Ruth under his long lashes, "he's coming over here."

Ruth did not disappoint him, and having got the reaction he was looking for, Timothy asked her if she had seen Doctor Acajou's new book of tropical verses, which guileless question brought a flame of color to her face. The boy knew perfectly well that the National Purity League, the Boston branch of which had recently elected Ruth its secretary, was working hard to prevent the sale in America of all the works of the poet president of Haiti. Mrs. Putney and Arden went into the house, but Ruth lingered, and, declining to be drawn into any discussion of the octoroon academician, asked Timothy point-blank why Jerry was coming to America, and when.

"We don't know," Timothy answered. "He writes about a competition for a big order 'in American waters,' as he says.

"In American waters," Ruth repeated thoughtfully. "I wonder what he means?" Her eyes met Timothy's, and she felt as though he were reading her inmost thoughts. A faint color shone through her very clear, white complexion. "Do you know?"

Timothy shook his head and smiled.

"I believe you guess, Tim," said Ruth. "Do you believe that he has won?"

"Yes," Timothy answered. "Or that he is pretty sure that he has won, otherwise I don't believe that he would tell us about it. Besides, Jerry is sure to win what he really wants."

"It hasn't got him much, so far," said Ruth.

"He hasn't wanted much. And people who can get what they want, often get what they don't want to begin with. Jerry's was a smashed wrist with his two decorations. But he helped win the war, and at a time when it needed a lot of helping, and that was what he wanted just then more than he did the Prix de Rome. Jerry didn't enlist for rank and honors. If he had wanted fame he'd have kept out and done patriotic statues."

"He always had a lot of talent," Ruth admitted.

"More than that," said Timothy. "He's got genius. Rodin once visited his studio and told Gérard that Jerry was *'un jeun homme qui doit devenir illustre.'* "

"Really? I didn't know that," said Ruth.

"There are a good many things about Jerry that you don't any of you know," said Timothy, with his enigmatical smile, "but you are going to learn some of them before very long."

The conversation was interrupted by Randall Putney, who took Timothy off to see Ralph's new hydroaëroplane. Ruth stood looking after them thoughtfully as they crossed the lawn. This girl was an enigma to a good many people, as, indeed, she was often to herself. A psychologist would have been quick to discover the dual natures she possessed. Ruth contained the dammed-back impulses of Puritan ancestors with all of their uncompromising principles of rectitude, and with this she was intensely temperamental and keenly sensuous without being sensual. She was positive in all her findings to the point of pugnacity, and without being in the least aware of it, as highly sexed as a queen bee.

War work had given her vital forces a needful outlet, but now that the war was over she suffered frequently some bad half hours. There seemed nothing for her to grip emotionally and stretch her tense nerves; nothing more to fight; nothing very stimulating to fight *for*. Disease was generally under scientific control, drunkenness abolished, vice banished or suppressed, poverty avoidable and regarded almost as a misdemeanor, female suffrage universal, politics as pure as possible, while most people were disinclined to ethical argument and sleepily submissive to religious direction. Unquestionably it was the life—but not for Ruth.

She thought now of Jerry's coming with a tingle of combative anticipation which was rather pleasant. Jerry, with his impudent Irish face and utter paralysis of veneration for anybody or anything, had been her feudal enemy from childhood. But her vivid detestation of him dated from the night before he sailed for France to study at the Beaux Arts, when he had decoyed her into the conservatory and there caught her in his arms and covered her outraged face with kisses. It seemed to Ruth that this shocking, brutal act had crystallized the solution of her abhorrence for the male animal in men.

Oddly enough, Jerry was one of the very few to appreciate Ruth's intense femininity and the physical beauty which contained it. This was perhaps because her manner and expression seemed to banish its contempla-

tion. She was a very fair blonde with a dazzlingly white skin and fine but heavy flaxen hair which reminded children of molasses candy in the last stages of pulling. Her eyes were a deep, clear blue with "bumps" over their outer corners, that fullness of brow which indicates ability of concentration, her nose short and straight and rather wide, though delicately formed. Her figure was superb, strong, but rounded in contour, and one of her secret vexations was its growing fulness of hip and bosom which she tried her best to conceal by the severely straight cut of her clothes.

Ruth was roused from her abstraction by luncheon being announced. People now ate and slept more and worked less than in the hectic period of money-getting prior to the war. There was less luxury and feverish pleasure seeking and no particular object in amassing surplus wealth. Just so much more income tax to pay. Recreations were more domestic and less expensive, and the baby crop was the largest the country produced. This, of course, kept the matrons occupied, but the men frequently found time hanging heavy on their hands. It took no great amount of effort to provide for a family, and polygamy had not been countenanced as in Germany. Most clubs had dropped out of existence, and such as existed were pervaded with the atmosphere of soldiers' homes. Sport with gun and rod, particularly the former was no longer popular. It seemed tame and rather German to kill defenseless creatures uselessly. The influence pervading the country was that of a perpetual New England Sabbath, and the most popular pastime furnished by a book or newspaper and the seat of a chair.

At luncheon one of the house party saw fit to comment on this. He was a Captain Somers, a friend and classmate of Ralph's, and had recently returned from France where since the war he had been occupied in reconstruction work. Mrs. Putney asked him how the great work was progressing.

"Very satisfactorily, from our point of view," he answered, "but I am not sure that I can say as much for that of the French."

"Why not?" Ruth asked.

"Well, you see, our ideas of the way things ought to be done are not the same. We are always ready to sacrifice ancient customs for modern inventions, and, while the French admit freely that we are perfectly right, they still cling to their old ideas. Houses out of plumb and crooked streets and the ancient horse pond and village pump are as dear to the French heart as the moldy little café with its rows of grimy bottles and the weird drinks they contain."

"No doubt the former is the result of the latter," Ruth suggested. Even though the serpent drink had writhed its last, she still could not refrain from twisting her square heel upon its lacerated head.

"No, I don't believe so," Somers answered. "They get a lot of pleasure out of their cafés and not much harm, I imagine."

"If they get any, it is sufficient reason why they should be abolished," Ruth declared. Somers smiled.

"Do you think so?" he asked.

"Of course I do," she answered. "That is what we have been doing over here, and you don't need to look around a great deal to see how much better off we are than we were before the war."

"Quite so," he admitted, "but don't you think the country has grown rather—well, dull? Or is it because I have just come from France where things are going on again as they did before the war in spite of the way the country has been bled?"

Mrs. Putney shook her head. "I am afraid the French are incorrigible," said she. "One might have thought the war would have taught them the true value of idle amusements."

"Perhaps it has," croaked Timothy.

"I don't know about their being incorrigible," said Ralph, "but even when I left everybody seemed to be having a pretty good time. At any rate, their former frivolity did not seem to have impaired their thrift and fighting qualities. I've seen them fighting for one-half of a farm and making hay on the other. Sometimes I think we are beginning to take ourselves too seriously. What do you call an idle amusement, anyhow?"

"Sleep," murmured Timothy, "especially when you are slept out."

Somers looked curiously at the boy. "Gad, but I believe you're right," said he. "I'm no racketer, but I must say when I first came back I felt as if I had got home and gone to bed."

"And how do you feel now?" Arden asked.

"As if I had awakened refreshed and ready to get back at my job again."

"In France?"

"Yes. I am taking back voluminous plans for the ruined area we are going to begin restoring." He turned to Timothy. "You saw them when I was showing them to Ralph."

The boy nodded. "They look like the plans for a model chicken farm," said he. "I did not have to shut my eyes to see the French poultry flying over the top. You had better take Ruth back with you to clip their wings."

This was a dangerous remark, it being suspected that the brave captain cherished some such ambition, though not precisely with the idea of her trimming the free pinions of the Gallic cock. To change the topic he suggested:

"You may have plenty of reform material in American waters before a great while when this big Haitian pleasure ground is opened for business. We have been hearing a lot about it in Paris."

Ralph shook his head. "That Utopia scheme is predestined to failure," said he. "It's too far away for European patronage which doesn't need that sort of thing, anyhow, and it's not the sort of proposition to entice Americans. We have given up that kind of thing."

"Because we had to," sighed Timothy, in a manner to bring a laugh.

"There's something in that," admitted Randall Putney who, like his brother, had resumed civilian life. "I know a lot of chaps who would up-stick-and-away for any place reasonably adjacent where they could whoop it up a little without breaking anything."

"From the rumors which reach us in Paris," said Somers, "all one can break in Utopia is good resolutions. We won't know much about the place until they start their advertising propaganda, which may be any day, now, as a French architect I know told me they intend to open this coming winter. He says there have been millions and millions spent, and that Conte di Romagna, the celebrated Italian landscape gardener, retained by the management from the beginning, claims that the world has never seen anything approaching it."

"Nevertheless," said Ralph, "it can't possibly succeed. Europe is impoverished, and if Americans wanted that sort of thing they would have it here at home."

"They might want it, but not at home," Randall suggested. "No American community would care to turn itself into a modern Babylon, but a good many might like to give the place a look over."

"That would be about all, I imagine," said Ralph, who began to find the topic distasteful. As one who had given his best efforts to help make the world a fit place to live in, it irritated him to think that the close of the war should see already afoot a great project to take commercial advantage of rigidly enforced American propriety by the gaudy exploitation of vicious amusements banned within the nation's boundaries. Vexing as the idea was, however, he did not for a moment believe that it could possibly be fraught with success, and reflected that the inevitable financial loss might teach a salutary lesson.

But the pernicious scheme lingered in the back of his brain throughout the day with a perverse insistency, and strolling down to the shore that evening with Arden he brought it up of his own accord.

"This Utopia business that Jack Somers was telling us about at luncheon rather worries me," said he. "Of course, the idea is extravagant and impossible, and can't possibly affect us Americans as a nation, but Haiti is not very far away, and it would be unquestionably demoralizing to have such a 'modern Babylon,' as Randall called it, so close to our shores. The worst of it is, I don't see what we could possibly do to suppress it."

"But if nobody went there it would soon go to smash," said Arden.

"Of course. But I'm not so dead sure that nobody would go there. Having such a place so near would be rather like the old days before the war, when a State went dry and the one next it was wet as sop; a constant source of temptation to a certain rich and idle class of rummies and profligates. Then it could always count on a certain South American clientèle, and that outfit fairly oozes money." He struck his stick impatiently against a stone. "Sometimes one gets almost disgusted with humanity. It's like this devilish war we've just finished. No sooner you get things tidied up a bit than some insubordinate scoundrel kicks over the garbage can. Here we've worked so hard to get this country on a clean, moral régime when this pestilential old Czech of a Rosenthal comes and plants his pleasure palaces at our side door. Pleasure! Zutt! Can you imagine any sane-minded human being getting pleasure out of debauchery?"

"You knew about it?" asked Arden, in surprise.

"I've known about it for a long while. A number of us have been trying to work out some plan to stall it, but we started too late. The government of Haiti is stable, such as it is, and there's been no revolutionary or high-handed work which would give us the excuse to take over the administration of the island. That old libertine has got things where he wants them. What infuriates me is that so many supposedly reputable people have given their support to the beastly plan, and the most distinguished artists and sculptors and architects and landscape gardeners have been at work there since the start. After all we've been through, can you imagine any individual with the least claim to the ideals of humanity we've been fighting for, in fact, of any moral sense or decency at all, lending their talents to corrupt society again? To my mind such a person is worse than a German spreader of disease microbes whose attack is directed against the bodies of his national enemies. These others are working to trap and degrade the souls of their own people——"

He went on in this strain for several minutes, Arden listening abstractedly at first, then scarcely heeding what he said in her contemplation of the beauty of the night. It was warm and still, with a great yellow moon melting into the midsummer haze, which seemed saturated in its nimbus. The tide was at its ebb, the air softly fragrant with the mingled odors of kelp and balsam from the pine grove which partially enveloped them. Hushed whisperings came from the festooned rocks as though the sea were making love to them.

It was a night set for love-making and Arden plastic to its seduction, but here was Ralph oblivious to his opportunity ruffling its glamour with his curt, military voice as he inveighed against the moral menace of a tropic island hundreds of miles away. Victory might have been his in that hour if he had dropped Haiti and concentrated his fire on Arden. The girl was in a sanguine mood, hopeful of great results from the promised visit of the Vicomte de Guys, and vastly encouraged in regard to Timothy whose mental tone seemed suddenly and miraculously improved on the receipt of good news from the big brother he adored. Not even Arden imagined how the boy had pined for Jerry, the rough and red.

But Ralph was no opportunist and continued his stern censure of the Utopia promotion and all concerned with it, which at that moment did not interest Arden in the least. If at that moment he urged her to marry him soon it is probable that she might have taken a chance on the future welfare of her family and fixed the day, in which case Ralph would have been spared much subsequent distress. But the propitious moment slipped by without so much as the exchange of a caress, and they walked slowly back to the house in the virtuous meditation of a Puritan couple returning from evening prayer.

CHAPTER IV.

The Vicomte de Guys arrived the following week and Arden found him charming. He was very soldierly, but with a military manner entirely unlike Ralph's, which was of a sort one could never quite forget. The long-sustained pressure of war had left no creases in his character and his handsome, mobile face was always animated and in conversation usually smiling. It was his first visit to America, and he showed a keen and almost boyish curiosity and interest in everything that was shown him.

Timothy formed one of his rare and immediate friendships for De Guys, who reciprocated it warmly. He kept the boy laughing whenever they were together, as Arden had not heard him laugh since Jerry's long previous departure. As for herself, instead of finding the distinguished French guest the embarrassing care and responsibility which she had anticipated, he seemed to have brought a sort of happy-go-lucky unconventionality into the little household which his cheerful presence permeated from top to bottom, even invading the pantry where he taught Arden how to make new and delicious relishes on the chafing dish.

To the girl's considerable surprise, the august Putney family failed utterly either to impress him with respectful admiration or suppress the ebullition of his high spirits. He joked his serious confrère on subjects which Arden knew Ralph held to be anything but joking matters, and extracted grim smiles from him, paid Ruth subtle compliments which brought a tinge of color to the cheeks of the self-contained and intolerant maiden, and frankly flattered Mrs. Putney, though so cleverly that only Arden, who was beginning to understand him, caught the un-

derlying boyish mischief in his remarks. He kept her hot and cold throughout their frequent visits; frightened one moment lest they should take offense and fighting back a threatened gush of ill-timed levity the next. At these times she could scarcely believe that he had ever been the brisk, efficient officer which she had heard him described. He impressed her more as an actor; comedian or satirist. She was partly amused, partly piqued at the ease with which he seemed to be exploiting the smug sedateness of her friends as though for his and her secret entertainment. But it must be confessed that this stripped away much of her inner awe of them.

"You will go a step too far and get yourself sat upon one of these days, mon colonel," she warned him, "and I will be in disgrace for aiding and abetting you."

De Guys shrugged. "No fear," said he in his broad, academic English, "I will manage to slip from under. They take themselves too seriously, these worthy Putneys. And they deceive themselves. They seem to think that because they have suffered no reverses from the war, like some of the rest of us, it must be by some special grace within themselves, and that they must 'old themselves accordingly. Monsieur is merely *gros papa* and madame *bonne bourgeoise,* but the daughter and your brave fiancé are still curiously undeveloped for persons of their age and experience."

"In what way?" Arden asked.

"In character and emotions and their capacity to extract the joy of living. They are not happy people. Miss Ruth appears to look upon life as a grim duty; a sort of perpetual warfare with the powers of evil. She would be very discontent in 'eaven where there is none to fight. But no doubt she would make the best of it and do there as she does 'ere."

"Fight herself?"

"Precisely. I see that you, too, understand. There is a young woman fashioned in the mold of Isis, who will not give the slightest freedom to her natural instincts, partly because she has been taught to believe that their indulgence is degrading and partly, per'aps, because she feels instinctively that once at liberty they might mutiny against her will. Besides, she is *maitresse femme.* She insists on being boss."

"And how about Ralph?"

"Ah, the brave colonel is quite different, though the result upon 'im is much the same, He is a perfectly proportioned individual of few, simple needs, but these are imperative. Such well-balanced natures are rare, but they do exist. They require the fullness of life, but no overflow. Excess is as ab'orrent to them as insufficiency. Pleasure, merely as such is superfluous, and they do not understand it. They are temperamental only when suffering from the vital need of some unfilled requirement of their cosmos."

"That seems to be the sort of American type the country is trying its best to standardize," Arden observed.

"*Sapristi!* But you have said it!" exclaimed De Guys. "Your confrère might be taken as the model American man—when his unfilled want is satisfied," and he shot a curious glance at her tempting profile, then struck into a lighter vein.

When Arden reached home she found Timothy, his big eyes dark with excitement, holding a fat letter from Jerry. It bore an unfamiliar stamp—the head of Doctor Anatole Acajou—and glancing at the postmark she received a shock of surprise.

"Why, he's in Haiti!" she cried.

"Of course," Timothy answered, "Utopia. I guessed long ago that Jerry had a job there."

Arden stared at him, aghast. "A job there——" She remembered Ralph's bitter invective of any who had to do with the infamous enterprise. "What made you think that?"

Timothy laughed happily, but his eyes were glistening. "What he said in his last letter about having found a good opening through a chum in the Beaux Arts and our soon hearing from him in American waters," said he. "When I heard Captain Somers talking about the place that day at the Putneys', I knew it would be just the sort of thing to attract Jerry, and I couldn't think of anything else in American waters that would, now that the women run them as well as the land. He's a sculptor and art critic and understands architecture and periods and all that sort of thing, so why shouldn't he get in on a thing like that?" His pale face positively glowed. "Just think of Jerry being so near us——" the tears welled up in his eyes. "Read it, Arden, and see what he is doing."

Arden ripped open the envelope, and the first thing to catch her eye was a check for

five hundred dollars, always an excellent preface to an epistle. She read the letter, which was a long one, aloud. Passages of it ran as follows:

"I came out here with several others whose designs for the Stair Fountains and Terraces Argenteés and Bartolomeo Pool and other features were approved by the great Guiseppe di Romagne, who is directeur en chef of the grounds. My contribution was for the Nereids' Grotto, and has been accepted practically as submitted. I thought it pretty bold, and almost lost my nerve about it at the last minute, but now that I have got here and seen and gaped at the daring splendor of the place it seems positively prim and modest in comparison.

"Utterly impossible to give you the faintest idea of the astonishing combination of grandeur and intimacy in the beauty of this place, all so carefully studied and achieved with such masterly art that one can scarcely detect where man's creation is welded into nature's. And though many parts of it are fairly emblazoned with lavish artificiality, they are made to merge with the wild, riotous glory of these tropic sunsets and moonlight effects and other gorgeous natural beauties of this enchanted isle. At first, the whole thing is almost overpowering. . . .

"I have no fear about my job being a permanent one as there seems no limit to the possibilities of the scheme nor the ambition of its promoters to make it unique in the whole wide world. This applies not only to its beauty, but its pleasure pursuits and indulgences for which, as I understand, there is to be no censorship whatever except as regards a coarseness or brutality which would be offensive to any cheerful revelers. But as long as the guests are not unpleasant about it, they are free to carouse or gamble or make love or otherwise merrily disport themselves without hindrance or restraint. There will be no court of delinquencies in Utopia; no chaperons but the indulgent moon and twinkling stars. . . .

"And consider myself mighty lucky, as I am told that I stand well with Di Romagna and Travers, the architect en chef, while Gérard was my maitre at the Beaux Arts, and regards me as his protégé, and Simon Dreyfus, the decorator, is an old friend. As for old Isidor I—er, the promoter of the whole blooming show, he is a prince and treats all of us artists like his princelings. We are well paid, with everything found, and cannot really spend a cent, nor will be able to, as our cards entitle us to requisition anything we want, and he has told us that we are not to gamble. . . .

"And when we are running full blast, you and father and Timothy must come down and pay me a visit. I can easily arrange for passes and transportation and accommodation and all that, as Rosenthal gives us carte blanche for the entertainment of our families. That is the scale on which the old boy does things. He is going to invite a thousand guests for our great opening in January; the world's leading artistic and other celebrities. Thereafter the place may get riotous, but, after all, you don't have to mix in, and, as Gérard says, the mere fact of people knowing that they can do absolutely as they please may inhibit the desire to behave extravagantly. Life was pretty free at Monte Carlo and Ostend in the old days, but there was never anything to offend a man or woman of the world——"

Arden finished the letter and stared at Timothy. The boy's face fairly shone with exultation.

"Hooray!" he cried. "I always said that Jerry had the 'spark' and was bound to arrive. Think of living and having your work in such a lovely place."

But Arden was not so jubilant. She was glad that Jerry had found such congenial and well-paid employment in recognition of his talent, and, so far as she personally was concerned, it did not in the least matter whether it happened to be embellishing Utopia or the grounds of the Y. W. C. A. But she dreaded what Ralph was sure to say. At the end of the war he had offered Jerry a good position in the drafting room of the works, for the maimed wrist did not prevent his drawing, although unable to support the weight of a mallet or other heavy tool. This Jerry had declined, saying that he could learn to chisel left-handedly in time.

Arden knew that for her brother to have refused this offer, later to accept employment in a scheme which her fiancé abominated, was bound to damn him everlastingly in the eyes of the latter, and she expressed this dread to Timothy, who laughed.

"Ralph be jiggered!" said he. "Just because Ralph happens to be a hide-bound Puritan is no reason why Jerry should be one, too. Besides, if Ralph is any way consistent he will realize that everybody is not blessed in being born a Putney. I wish you'd let me tell him, sister."

Arden did not answer. She was wondering if it might be just as well to say nothing of the matter until after Utopia had opened its gates to the world and visitors had been duly impressed by its artistic achievements. Brilliant success, she reflected, was always an excellent shock breaker, and taken merely as a recognition of ability in his chosen métier Jerry had every reason to be proud, and his friends and family in him, as there must have been enormous competition for the situation he had secured.

She was turning this in her mind when De Guys, who had run up to his room to change for dinner, came down. He had

heard a good deal about Utopia in Paris, and Arden now handed him Jerry's letter which he read with lively interest.

"But this is splendid!" said he warmly. "My heartiest congratulations! Your brother must have distinguished talent, as I understand they have engaged the services of only the best artists. To have had one's work approved by Di Romagna is to have arrived. It is like winning the Grand Prix de Rome. Greater, perhaps, as it is a business proposition with no politics about it. I am very glad for you."

Arden felt as if she could have flung her arms about his neck. There is probably nothing more grateful to the generous nature than praise bestowed upon a beloved member of the family who has been struggling courageously against undeserved misfortune. Her impulsive nature saw the matter immediately in a different light. Yet some of her doubt still lingered.

"Do you think Utopia is going to be as dreadful as they say?" she asked.

"Probably not. Things seldom are. But what difference does it make? Your brother is not *jeune fille*."

"I'm not worrying about Jerry," Arden answered, "but I do wish that he could have made his success in some other undertaking."

"It does all sound a bit wild and lawless for these virtuous shores," De Guys admitted, "but we must wait and see. Perhaps the license which they promise is mostly bluff for the sake of advertising the place. At any rate, if the Americans do not like it they need not patronize it, and then it will go broke."

"Do you think I had better tell the Putneys?" Arden asked.

"Of course. And do not tell them apologetically as though it were something to be ashamed of, but with pride in your brother's success. Myself, I think it is an excellent joke on precisely such people as they."

CHAPTER V.

Arden decided first to try the news upon her father. Mr. Arthur O'Connor was an Irish gentleman of French birth who had inherited his interest in the velvet mills at Roubaix and Lille, and at the age of twenty-seven had gone to America to direct the business there. He was at that time in receipt of a large income which he spent freely, a high liver prominent in social circles, and during his second year in the country married the beautiful Miss Ralston, of Baltimore.

The tragic death of his wife in a hunting-field accident had nearly broken O'Connor's heart, and only his devotion to the children had kept him from going to pieces. But he had held himself together by sheer moral force, withdrawn from social gayeties and devoted himself entirely to amassing a fortune for the little ones he adored with all the fervor of his warm, Celtic nature.

Then out of a clear sky came the war and financial ruin which he met with courage. But on the conclusion of peace he had been very bitter at what he considered the unwise and unnecessary continuation of many restrictions, especially as regarded national prohibition, no longer an economic necessity and from his point of view a bigoted curtailment of personal liberty.

O'Connor argued that no man could possibly have been more severely smelted in the drink-fed furnace than had he, and that the process had tempered and refined him, and that if others failed to support the test and were skimmed off with the slag, they would have been thrown upon the dump in any case. He claimed the same value in alcohol as a developer of character as the extremes of heat and cold, earthquake and tempest, love and passion, poverty and physical danger. He believed all of these quantities to be part of the great scheme and school of life through conflict with which the soul achieved its evolution.

On the other hand, he held the same views as Professor Raikus in regard to the "pleasure value" of many things which the post-bellum purists condemned. The full dinner pail with a pint of beer as vehicle for its contents was, he insisted, the bright spot in the laboring man's day, while a dash of spirits with a squirt of soda was the legitimate sedative of tired nerves. But aside from all hygienic and physiological findings, he protested the abrupt suppression by a body of male and female legislators of a form of indulgence which had been legitimate for ages. He maintained that mere majority was not enough for such a measure; that the vote must be unanimous.

"Just because my neighbor chooses to get drunk is no reason why I should be deprived of my bit of cheer," said he. "Why not forbid us to keep dogs because they sometimes bite, or guns because we might shoot some-

body, or canned goods because they often contain ptomaines, or to swim or skate or climb mountains or kiss a foolish woman, or any of those things which are by way of bein' dangerous, and that one can live without if one has to, though 'tis true they are all getting scarce with the passing o' the potheen. The bowwows are unsanitary and shootin' a cruel and wanton pastime, and we cannot eat what is in the garden, let alone cannin' it, and swimmin' must be done fully dressed, and we are gettin' too fat to skate and climb, and there are no more foolish women. The country is goin' to the dogs. And yet ye wonder that our young men after stoppin' here a bit and scratchin' their hides from force o' habit in the trinches go wanderin' back across the ocean to France with her sparklin' eyes and sparklin' wine. Why should they not?"

Knowing her father's views on these subjects, Arden naturally expected him to be rejoiced at Jerry's good fortune, but to her considerable surprise he was not. He ran the letter rapidly through and handed it back to her with a contracted brow and smooth-shaven lips compressed.

"Now what bad divil got the lad mixed up in such a divil's scheme as this?" he snorted angrily. "I have heard talk of this same Utopia, and want none of it for me or mine. 'Tis Satan's own trap for all protestin' these rigid laws of ours, and many who do not. I have been expectin' some such doin's, but did not look to find them on so grand a scale, nor on our shores. And the worst of the business is it will succeed. Folk will go there once if only through curiosity and again for the unlimited possibilities of lushin'. Old Isidor is not the man to put his millions in a commercial failure."

"You know this Baron de Rosenthal?" asked De Guys, in surprise.

"I know him well, and I will not deny that for all his bein' a Czechian Jew, he has his qualities. He is a dozen men baled up in the body of a big muscular Mephistopheles. He has the patience of a Chinaman and the imagination of a Pole and the nimble wit of a New Yorker and the courage of"—his eyes twinkled at De Guys—"a poilu. He is a man of big brain and big ideas, and of scruples, none at all. With Rosenthal tuggin' at the halter and pullin' by the tail the beastly scheme is bound to get on."

"But aren't you glad to know that Gerald's work has got such able recognition?" Arden asked.

"I am not. I would rather it had censure than know that he was workin' for the underminin' of morality," O'Connor answered emphatically. "Mind you, now, I am no puritan like Potter Putney, nor have I any use for these present laws of ours in restraint of personal behavior, but I have even less use for unlimited license. 'Tis always the one that provokes the other and keeps us all hoppin' back and forth over the fence. Teetotalism in anything is bad, but 'tis less painful and degradin' to die of the hump than from riotous livin'—and less wasteful of the substance for the rest of the family. This country is full of fine lads sufferin' from shell shock and post-bellum apathy that will dig out for this same Utopia if only to get away from their sympathizin' friends and relatives. And then what? All the upliftin' results of the struggle for humanity gone to naught in a few wild hours of debauchery."

"I think it will be more apt to disgust them," said De Guys.

O'Connor shook his grizzled, curly head. "Leave that to Rosenthal. He will take care there is nothin' disgustin' or offensive. At first, I grant you, they may merely look on in an aloof and detached way. But this will pass in surroundings such as Jerry describes. Youth is youth, and must be served, and if the service is sleepy here at home they will seek it down there below. And who to prevent?"

Later when alone Arden reflected that this unqualified disapproval of her father was, after all, what she might have been led to expect, for she knew that underneath his love of cheer and freedom of personal behavior, he was of a spiritual nature and a man who held strong principles of decency, especially in regard to women. A *bon vivant,* jolly good fellow and the cream of hospitality, he was also an idealist at heart and shortly before the war had frowned upon the wave of exravagant folly which had swept the country like a hectic fever.

If then, she reasoned, her convivial and liberal-minded parent so disapproved Jerry's association with Utopia, what could she expect from Ralph, an uncompromising utilitarian and purist? It was more than probable that his severe displeasure would be directed against Jerry himself for having hired his services to such an infamous enterprise,

and she felt if he were to express himself as he might feel it would be very apt to produce a rupture between them. Arden was not only proud of her brother, but she loved him devotedly and now felt that for the first time his talents were enjoying recognition. At any rate, if he chose to work at beautifying Utopia, it was his own affair and she proposed to support his decision. She resolved to tell Ralph immediately, come what might of it, and reflected that in the event of a quarrel she would be spared the unpleasantness of listening to the family criticism.

And here again, owing to the curious quirks of human nature, or perhaps due to her fuller understanding of it and Ralph's, she met with another surprise. Through no plan of hers the moment of her giving him Jerry's letter was particularly well chosen, as Ralph had dropped in on his way home from a meeting of the Boston branch of the National Purity League, of which Ruth was a very active member. The topic under discussion had been the passing of a law to prohibit mixed bathing at public beach resorts, which legal restriction Ralph found entirely superfluous, the censor having already ordained a costume for both sexes, which took most of the pleasure from the pastime. Ralph had affirmed that he saw no particular objection to fully dressed people getting their clothes wet together if they so desired, at which heresy his sister had been highly indignant and denounced him for an apostate. They had nearly quarreled about it, wherefore Ralph was feeling rather overfed with prudery.

Arden, knowing nothing of this and braced for the shock of his offensive, was therefore considerably astonished when on reading Jerry's letter he laid it down and remarked: "There was never any doubt in my mind but that Jerry had uncommon ability. I'm glad that it has got recognition from so high an authority as Di Romagna, though I wish that it had been applied in some other quarter. At any rate, it is bound to make his name known, as the place is exploiting its artists and engineers. I saw a magazine article the other day describing the viaduct called "The Olympian Way" from Utopia to Jacmel, and it gave the names and records of the engineer corps at work down there. When their prospectus comes out Jerry is sure to get some very valuable advertising."

This semicongratulatory reception of her news in a quarter from which she had expected stern criticism and angry protest so astonished Arden that she was speechless. The color rose to her face and Ralph mistaking this and her silence for resentment at his faint praise continued more warmly: "I am really very glad for Jerry's sake, Arden. He has never got what he deserves. He was with the first to fight, and in spite of his disabling wound saw the business through to the finish. He never looked for rank or honors and would have got plenty of both if it hadn't been for his Irish hotheadedness. Good for old Jerry."

Arden could scarcely believe her ears. Her eyes grew suddenly misty. Once again golden opportunity lay open to Ralph's hand, but because of the ingrained method of his nature and the lack of that telepathy which characterizes the impulsive one, he was unaware of it. This was the more regrettable because he had called on Arden with the fixed intention of urging her to delay their marriage no longer. He might have achieved his purpose then and there if he had seen his chance and chosen to act upon it. But because he had previously outlined his plan of attack, it no more occurred to his mind to deviate from it than if he had been conducting a two-kilometer advance on a ten-kilometer front.

At that moment Arden felt that she adored him; that she had done him grievous wrong for which her generous nature desired immediately to atone. His honest praise of Jerry, his pleasure at his success, even though it lay through the channels of a personally abhorrent enterprise, stirred her to the depths of her heart. She leaned forward and laid her hand on his wrist.

"That is sweet of you, dear," said she huskily. "I know how you hate the mere idea of Utopia."

Ralph nodded. "Yes," said he with a touch of impatience in his voice, for his mind was filled with something else, and he did not care to have the topic of this pleasure garden obtrude. "I'd like to turn a few field batteries at work on the rotten place. The only good thing I've heard about it is the fact of its giving Jerry an opening. What I said the other day about the people engaged in its promotion referred only to the chiefs. I suppose it's the métier of artists like Jerry to beautify where opportunity offers. An honest artist must live. Besides, I'm not so sure but what the scheme may

have certain points in its favor if only to demonstrate to some of the extreme purists in this country what a mortally aseptic atmosphere they've got and to let well enough alone for a while until we see how it works. But that isn't what I've come to talk about——"

He turned the full fire of his steady blue eyes on Arden, and she, reading the purpose which lay behind them, instinctively braced herself for the shock. A moment before she had been vibrantly receptive to whatever desire he might have wished to advance, but the subtle instant had passed with the changed inflection of his crisp, authoritative voice. He seemed deliberately to have shifted their relations from the social to the official; from the heart to the mind. And yet, oddly enough, the sudden pallor of his face showed that he was under strong emotion. He had failed to profit by hers and was now insisting upon his own.

"I had an interview with your father this morning," he said. "He wants me to put two hundred and fifty thousand in the reconstruction of the works destroyed at Lille and Roubaix."

"Well, why not?" Arden answered. "Father is putting in everything that he can raise, and a quarter of a million is not a great deal for you, is it, Ralph?"

"That is not the point," he answered. "A quarter of a million is a great deal of money to lock up for an indefinite period of time. One can never tell what may happen in the financial world. I think that the investment is safe and one by which my children might greatly profit, if there was a prospect of my having any. Otherwise, it would mean practically my setting aside a fortune for those of Ruth and Randall, which are equally visionary at this moment. Your father reasons that the twenty-five or thirty thousand he might raise by the sale of his Beacon Street house after paying up the mortgage might, if so invested, provide for you and Timothy in the course of a number of years, and that meantime you can manage to get along on what he is able to earn. Jerry can, of course, take care of himself."

"So can I, if it comes to that," said Arden. "I took a course in stenography last winter and could hold a position now, if it was necessary."

"There is no reason why it should be necessary," Ralph declared. "In fact, I can't see why you shouldn't marry me at once, if you ever intend to. Timothy is now quite right in his head and seems to be getting stronger every day. He seems to be ambitious to write and paint, so I should think that he and your father could manage very well here with a capable boy like Francisco to serve them. You could look in every day if you liked."

"Father is at his office all day," Arden answered, in a dull voice, "and Timothy gets nervous and depressed when left too long alone. But I don't quite see what this has got to do with your investing a quarter of a million in the new factories, Ralph."

"Well, you see, unless your father can put in a certain amount he will lose his interest when the concern is reorganized," Ralph explained. "What he might be able to raise is just about one-tenth of what he is required to raise in order to retain his holdings in the company."

Arden's broad forehead contracted. "But surely the De Guys would not shut him out after all that he has done to build up their American trade!" she exclaimed.

"Business is business, my dear," said Ralph, "and the De Guys are not the only ones. They have all got to find the same amounts to put the company back on its former basis. Their war indemnity will not begin to do this, especially as they made the mistake of paying two and a half millions of francs ransom to the Germans, which will be a dead loss."

"But father strongly opposed their doing that," Arden protested.

"Yes, very true, but it was voted by a majority of stockholders. As the case now stands they have either got to meet this assessment or lose all of their valuable connections and good will. That is to say, that those who cannot meet the assessment must lose. But the proposition is really a very good one from the viewpoint of a person wishing to invest for posterity. Here in America, though, it would not meet with much favor as we prefer quicker results and higher returns. In that respect I am afraid that De Guys is destined to disappointment. His object in coming was to confer with your father about placing large or small blocks of stock in the new company, but there does not appear to be much chance of that with so many good things offered daily right here at home."

"Then what father practically wanted was

for you to lend him the money to protect his former interest?" Arden asked.

"Not precisely that. He offers to me or my heirs a due amount of that interest for protecting, or 'carrying,' as we say, a certain proportion of his own. This is a perfectly good proposition for one who, as I have said, is willing to lock up a quarter of a million dollars for the ultimate benefit of his children. But in the case of a man of thirty-four whose needs are simple and old age amply provided for and who appears to enjoy no immediate prospect of having a wife, let alone children, there is no more object in it than the pleasure to be found in doing a very expensive friendly act. There is also a certain element of risk, as conditions are by no means yet established in the world of trade."

"I see," Arden murmured.

Ralph glanced sharply at her face, which was set and rather pale. He had never seen it wear the same expression, or to be more accurate, so little. It looked like a very lovely marble bust set with a pair of living gray eyes. He was puzzled and disturbed.

"You understand, don't you?" he asked, and even to his own ears his voice seemed to lack its habitual assurance.

"Perfectly," Arden answered. "As a sound and reasonable business man you do not care to make a large investment without knowing at least approximately what the chances are of your reaping a fair amount of profit from it. You are quite right. I admire your logic. Any sensible person must and most of them do. You are sane and thorough and efficient in whatever you attempt. You always have been and the chances are that you always will be——"

"Arden"—he interrupted—"what are you driving at?"

"I am paying you compliments. You ought to be used to them by this time, my dear Ralph. I see now why you were so pleased to hear of Jerry's success. One more obstacle between us removed. But I am afraid it really does not matter much, as I really am not yet for sale."

Ralph leaned quickly forward and gripped the arms of his chair. "What do you mean?" he demanded. "I don't believe you understand at all."

"You are not very flattering," said Arden. "It would take a very stupid person not to understand Colonel Ralph Putney. You believe that you love me, and whether you do or not, you must want me very badly to be willing to lock up indefinitely a quarter of a million dollars to get me—especially with no positive assurance of any direct heirs——"

"Arden, are you crazy?"

"No. We are none of us crazy," she retorted hotly. "One does not have to be an adding and subtracting and multiplying machine to be quite sane. You come to me with a perfectly fair business proposition which, however, I have the honor to decline. You are quite willing to carry my father and take a chance on posterity if I consent to marry you. Otherwise you can't see any advantage in the investment aside from, as you say, making a very expensive present to a friend. Well, then, let me tell you that father does not desire any handsome presents and neither do I. It's a pity you did not put it in that way to him. It would have saved you the trouble of coming here." She rose suddenly and stood facing him, her eyes like talc and her full bosom on which the war had pinned no medals rising and falling in a breathless way. "Now, tell me, please; have I understood, or have I not?"

It is doubtful if Ralph had ever been so spoken to in his life; certainly not of recent years when he had invariably been the one to state and interrogate. And it is equally certain that he had never so desired Arden as at that moment. He, too, had risen, and in the sudden rush of an almost irresistible impulse to take her in his arms he scarcely heard her question. It did not matter much, as he knew that she had spoken the truth and precisely stated his position though, of course, he had failed to see it in this cold and merciless searchlight. Perhaps this was principally the fault of his having presented it partly in a fiscal, partly in a military way. If he had said simply: "Arden, dear, your father has asked me to back his Roubaix holdings with a quarter of a million dollars, and I'm perfectly willing to do it if there's a chance of you and possibly our children profiting by it some day. What do you think?" all might have been quite different. The question would have appealed to her heart as a mutual problem and to her intelligence as a fair one. This was really what he had thought and what he had thought to say. In fact, until she spoke he thought it was what he had said.

But unfortunately for him Ralph was a

tactician without tact, and the direction of his fire on the repeated "I" had made a mess of what might have been a victory. He saw this too late, and, being a masterful man, was instantly tempted to try to take by storm the rich citadel which had rejected scornfully his calculated terms of surrender, and which, had it come a little sooner with the guard withdrawn, would have met with submission. But he was spared a second ignominious defeat by Arden's swift sally.

"You know it's true," said she contemptuously. "You wouldn't do for love of me what you are quite willing to do to marry me. I might have known. You have been urging me to marry you ever since you came back from France, but you haven't said to me one loving, disinterested word. I've been silly and romantic and expected too much for too little, like most American girls. How foolish you would have felt, though, if you'd advanced this money and then we hadn't married, after all. It's a lucky thing for both of us it happened, as we couldn't possibly have been happy very long. Please consider your engagement to me at an end and——"

She caught her hands together, stripped the great pearl with its two diamond satellites from her finger and placed it in his reluctant hand. "Don't think that I blame you," said she, "because I do not. I consider you to be an absolutely blameless person. There is really nothing more to be said, so please don't try to explain. Please don't try to say anything at all."

Ralph, white and grim of face, slipped the ring into his waistcoat pocket. "Very well," said he quietly, "I shall not bother you again. I have the honor to accept your release." He bowed, then turned to the door. A moment later Arden heard the crisp word "home" as his car moved silently away.

CHAPTER VI.

Nobody was surprised at the broken engagement as it quickly became known that Gerald O'Connor was employed by the anathematized Utopia syndicate, and it was assumed that there had been a disagreement on this account.

Her father received the news as though he had expected it. He knew that his daughter came honestly by her inheritance of pride. Timothy seemed rather pleased.

"You're well out of it, sister," said he. "Think of having to live up to Ralph all one's life, to say nothing of the rest of the family. Ma Putney would be forever exhorting you to be worthy of him and Ruth dragging you into purity slush and all of them continually deploring Jerry's infamy."

Ralph made no attempt to see her alone again and shortly returned to France where the plant was placing some extensive orders. De Guys had also returned, and Arden soon found her life desperately uneventful. She found it difficult to analyze her own sentiments about the rupture and so very wisely did not try to do so. The Putneys treated her more kindly than ever, almost as though they felt themselves in her debt, but she saw less and less of them as time wore on.

Present troubles occupied most of her thoughts. She knew that things were not going well with her father, for, although he made no complaint, she could see that he was much harassed, that he had less money to give her for current expenses. Then, in the autumn, he appeared to be suddenly in funds again and insisted that they all replenish their wardrobes, and took them to places of amusement a number of times in succession. But Arden's close observation detected the falsity of this apparent wave of renewed prosperity, and, seeing that his face lost none of its look of nervous strain and apprehension, rightly suspected that he had placed another mortgage on their old home.

Jerry wrote monthly, his letters full of buoyancy and enthusiasm over the marvels of Utopia, which was to open the middle of January in a grand carnival for which the management was inviting a thousand guests for the week, these mostly celebrities in the various arts, though there were also professional people, famous financiers, politicians and others. Two or three invitations each according to their rank had been allotted to the big staff of coworkers, these to cover transportation to and from Utopia with a week's sojourn there, and Jerry to his great delight had been awarded three as an especial mark of appreciation of his efforts. He urged them to accept, and, after a little deliberation, they decided to do so.

Early in the autumn Rosenthal had started his official campaign of prospectus, and the brochures spread broadcast were in themselves triumphs of art and literature, the colored illustrations from the hands of the world's leading artists, while the descriptive

text was compiled by a celebrated man of letters. This presented many of the arguments of early classic sages in support of such an institution as Utopia, backed by those of well-known modern writers with a preface by the famous Russian psychologist and socialist, Professor Michel Raikus, who, was to be the guest of honor. These advertisements de luxe, startling, original, masterly, aroused the furore which Rosenthal had anticipated, though in many households they were either cast into the flames immediately on perusal or suppressed for private examination by the master or mistress of the home. But they produced the desired effect of arousing intense curiosity and conjecture, especially as they had been proceeded by special illustrated articles in leading magazines and newspapers, even to the technical ones by reason of the engineering achievements. In addition were the more popular forms of widespread advertising; bill board, traffic, electrical and the like. In all of these the strictest attention to finished art and absence of vulgarity had been observed. They were attractive and enticing; they impressed the eye as less advertising than decorative. They became the talk of a thousand cities, their witty epigrams the pilfered catchwords of theater and music hall.

Comedies parodied the Utopian idea; ministers of the gospel denounced it from the pulpit; greedy politicians studied ways and means for blackmail; what now represented the gay set proposed making up parties to visit it. Those in receipt of the opening invitations were the envy of their circles. Everybody was possessed of an opinion for or against the idea of such a place. Many placed their taboo upon it even as a fit topic for discussion because of its flagrant insult to morality and the national uplift resulting from the war. Among these were the Putneys, particularly Ruth, who almost welcomed with feral satisfaction this raising of another hydra head.

Just as in killing wolves or tigers or lions or other man-destroying factors, some people content themselves with exterminating the menace where encountered, while others are ever ready to put themselves to any amount of personal danger and inconvenience to wage war against the human peril. Ruth was a huntress of the latter sort in regard to vice, especially when paraded in purple and fine linen. The idea of sumptuous vice roaming about with flagrant impunity excited her with the same restlessness that a big-game hunter might have felt on learning that a band of lions had taken undisputed possession of a community. Worse than that, the evil was on the very shores of a country which she and so many of her ilk had been at such pains to purify.

On receiving the daring prospectus of Utopia—for copies had been sent to all families socially prominent—Ruth spent half of a sleepless night in studying its contents from cover to cover. Many of its features did not affect her particularly, such as the gambling facilities, which had brought down such an avalanche of condemnation. If people were foolish enough to risk their money on games of chance where they knew the odds, however slight, to be against them in the long run, that was their own folly. The cafés and dancing pavilions and theaters and concerts and other promised amusements left her also comparatively unmoved. Europe had revived all of these since the war and appeared to be able to keep her population in order.

But that which agitated Ruth was the seductive beauty of the place as portrayed in the ornate prospectus and the covert assurance that within its domain there would exist no restraint on personal caprice or the social relations of its guests. The word "social" was apparently intended to be read as one chose, and Ruth saw fit to read it in its broadest sense. Here, in other words, was to be sort of a Mohammedan heaven where the moral law was negative and where men and women were perfectly free to conduct themselves as they desired with no limiting restrictions of convention or propriety. They might return to paganism as nymphs and fauns on the slopes of Mount Hymettus, or indulge in the orgies of Lucullus or Messaline.

Her breath came quickly and her face flamed at the bare thought of such possibilities and the contemplation of their demoralizing *mise en scène*. Of course, there would be no lack of wild spirits to profit by such license and no telling how many others well-ordered under firm restraint might succumb to its temptation. Her imagination, vivid in such matters, pictured scenes which set her heart aflame. And the infuriating reflection that there was no way of suppressing it all drove her nearly to distraction. Ralph had said that so long as

life and property and other personal rights were respected according to the reconstruction of international law, there seemed no way of imposing moral restrictions on a free republic whether it be large or small, black or white, Christian or pagan. The very essence and text of the great Peace Proclamation of the World protected it.

Checked by this impassable barrier, Ruth was tempted to let her imagination dwell on a reverie of what it might be like. Most of us indulge ourselves sometimes in fantasy of an Elysian land where all is sunshine and flowers and music and beauty, freedom from care and all restraint, with laughter and song and voluptuous delights, and most of us recognize this frankly as idle self-indulgence, unless we are poets or painters or dramatists or Rosenthals who do so with a definite and profitable purpose. But such exercises were so foreign to Ruth's strictly censored nature that she fell all unconsciously into the trap.

A monk or a nun trained to mental as well as physical orthodoxy would have recognized the pitfall and recoiled with a startled "Get thee behind me, Satan!" and a patter of ritual and sign of the cross. But Ruth was anything but orthodox; possibly hyper-orthodox in that she objected seriously to many scriptural passages delivered *ex cathedra* and would have advocated the deletion of certain verses of holy writ, especially those recording the misconduct of Ammon, the poetic license in the Song of Solomon, and the unfortunate lapse of Noah during the tedium of a sea voyage. So that now, while she recognized Rosenthal's prospectus as belonging to what Southey would have classified in his "Satanic School," and which, indeed, contained quotations from Byron, Moore, Shelley, Bulwer, Paul de Kock in support of his plea for the need of a pleasure garden, where everything is subordinate to joy, it would never have occurred to her that its perusal could react upon herself except in righteous wrath and protest.

But Ruth's temperament contained other qualities than those of the reformer. She was, in fact, as complex as the old-fashioned "shot-gun" prescription with its active principles, their correctives and vehicle. These active principles of hers were very potent ones; so potent, in fact, that she had come early to distrust them and had so neutralized their reactions by the correctives that the result upon her functions had been theirs rather than of the principles themselves. And the poor vehicle, her strong and splendid body, had suffered from the process and at times protested violently at this burden on its economy, demanding that nature be left to take its course.

This was one of those moments. Ruth had always been an unconscious hedonist, irresistibly attracted to beauty whether in art or nature, and in the pamphlet on her knee both were unquestionably embodied. Her eyes returned again and again to the full-page colored photogravure of the O'Connor Nereids' Grotto, Jerry's creation. She could easily imagine how entrancing it must be, giving directly on the lake and sunk into the precipitous rocky wall of the jungle-covered mountain. Ferns and orchids sprang from the crevices above; lianas interlaced in drooping garlands of swaying green moistened by the dissolving spray from a tiny rill which leaped from the overhanging brim, forming often—as the description read—a solar or lunar rainbow.

She examined a closer view of the sculptured figures, Nereids and Tritons in abandoned gambols, a daring frolic of reckless figures. Jerry might at least have tempered this wild group, she thought, while yet admitting that its composition was superb. To think that big, rough Jerry should have conceived and fashioned such a thing, going at it still jaded from the horrors and hardship of war. What lawless fancies could the mind of such a man contain? What unhallowed fancies must be rife there? What the impulses of an imagination which knew no leash?

And this was but a minor detail of Utopia's redundant glamours. How could natures loosely held expect to resist their infolding demoralization? Where sensuous nature ceased, sensual art took up the moral anarchy. Ruth could imagine the bowered arcades filtering the moonlight, swimming in the perfume of jasmine and stephanotis with soul-enticing music eddying from some invisible source. And all in the velvet softness of the tropic air. No superheated cabarets with their poisonous fumes and exhalations; no hectic, heavy congestion charged with evil impulses and close contact of disgusting revelers. Space, freedom, solitude *à deux,* with hidden nooks where the pulsing darkness was like a shroud for the soul——

Could that experienced feminist De Guys

have seen Ruth as she gave free rein to these imaginings, it would more than have confirmed his diagnosis of her hidden personality. If Jerry could have seen her he would have laughed and said: "I knew it all the time." Arden, that natural and impetuous girl, would have been shocked and asked if she were ill, suggesting a cold compress for the head and telephoning for a doctor. Perhaps for the hour she was ill, just as a child is feverish when teething. Latent impulses were struggling for recognition. The pleasure instincts suppressed not only in herself but in her ancestors were storming at their prison walls. They were prisoners of war and the war was over, and they wanted to get out and dance and sing. This little glimpse of liberty was maddening.

Ruth rose suddenly and glanced at herself in the mirror, a practice she indulged only for convenience of the toilet. The reflection startled her. She realized for the first time and with a shock of surprise that she was really a very pretty woman. She wondered why she had never looked like that before, then remembered with a gush of anger that she had indeed been struck by the same phenomenon when Jerry had grabbed her in his arms and kissed her the night before he sailed for France. But that was long ago, when she was a mere slip of a girl, and now she was a ripened woman of twenty-five. Very much ripened, she thought, as she examined with a sort of resentful interest her flushed face and full, rounded figure.

"You look like one of those shameless water huzzies of Jerry's," she said indignantly to herself and with more truth than she would have cared to believe. There was indeed a striking similarity between their faces at that moment. This was not altogether singular, as Ruth was of the physical type which the artist had always most admired. He had, in fact, once aroused her furious rage by telling her that in everything but principles she was the perfect female of his kind. The fight in her had an irresistible attraction for him, as did also her combative face with its defiant eyes, straight and rather low-bridged nose, with its rebellious tip, and her strong, wide mouth and everted upper lip.

"You look like a Hungarian peasant girl taken in a slave raid and waiting to smash in the skull of your new lord and master," he had teased her on another occasion.

It suddenly occurred to her with a hot flush of anger that he might, indeed, have had her features in the back of his mind when he had molded his abandoned water nymphs. There was unquestionably the same rather unusual width between the eyes, full outwardly everted lips and full, round neck. The idea once seized, obsessed her, and she wondered if Jerry, who had never written ever still gave her more than a passing thought. Not that it mattered, in the least, as the impossibility of there ever being anything between herself and a man who had been her girlhood's pet abomination was now cemented by his having lent his genius to this most abominable of schemes for the ensnaring of souls.

And yet she wondered if she had always hated him as much as she thought; if, perhaps, her hatred of what he seemed to represent had not tricked her into believing that it applied to the man himself. She had loathed his rough animal spirits and mocking contempt for ideals to her most sacred. His virile masculinity had been not only offensive but shocking to her, but she was forced to admit that she had never known him to do a brutal thing and that children and animals had seemed to adore him. His invalid brother Timothy worshiped the ground he walked on and had nearly died after his departure.

For the first time Ruth began to wonder if Jerry was actually as bad as she had always believed him. Surely there must be saving graces in a man who without waiting for his country's sanction had plunged into the struggle for humanity and after a partially disabling wound had served on under his own flag and the emblem she wore pinned upon her own devoted bosom—the Red Cross. He had given of his best and asked for nothing in return. Ralph, covered with honors, had admitted that there were many like Jerry who for actual fighting and personal danger deserved them far more than he. She could shut her eyes and visualize the terror of the enemy at sight of Jerry's flaming shock head, grim jaw, and dripping bayonet bearing down upon them.

And now he had produced this paragon of beauty from underneath that same red thatch. Pagan, riotous, licentious beauty, but beauty none the less. The creation as a whole was beautiful and the individual nymphs were beautiful, even if they did look profanely like herself. Surely he never

could have combined such creatures and Ruth Putney in the same thought, and, therefore, it must be that her image was still lurking somewhere in the back of his brain. The idea was intensely disturbing. She almost wished that she might meet him and ask bluntly why he had borrowed her physical traits for his unpardonable masterpiece.

Well, it was a flighty family she reflected. Mr. O'Connor was said never to have been quite normal since the loss of his wife; Arden must be lacking somewhere to have broken with such a man as Ralph; Timothy was unquestionably queer, looking into his crystal globe—for the boy liked to dabble with the occult—and at times delivering himself of strange and startling remarks. He had upset her shockingly at times by apparently reading her inner thoughts, though interpreting them perversely. Ruth scarcely knew whether he attracted or repelled her, but had decided he did both. There was something of Jerry about him, of Jerry's spiritual side, and a good deal of Jerry's disconcerting candor. Could she have guessed how soon she was to become the victim of the latter she would have been even more nerve shaken than her restless night had left her.

CHAPTER VII.

Arden had not the slightest difficulty in persuading her father to accept their invitations for the opening week of Utopia, O'Connor's clannish sentiments being far stronger than his general disapproval of the scheme. He was also secretly proud of his son's success though inclined to deprecate it, but he would have been ready to fight anybody else who did so.

"Jerry is in the business to the ears of him so we must stand by him, and not halfheartedly," said he. "He has made good in his line, and with the very cream of his fellow craftsmen. I see by the papers that a great many very celebrated people have accepted, and we will be in distinguished company. 'Twill do us good. We have been too serious of late, and the balmy breezes of the tropics may clear away my poor man's gout."

He had been uncommonly cheerful of late, and Arden had ascribed this to his having been promised a managerial position in the new French company. This would not begin to pay a salary until the looms were in operation and importations beginning to arrive, but it assured the future, and the mortgage on the Beacon Street property was quite sufficient to tide the little family over the next three or four years.

The Putneys were among the first to learn of their intention to accept the invitations for the opening of Utopia and received the news in stern disapprobation. Father Putney said that he would not have believed it of Arthur O'Connor who, although he had always liked his dram, was a man of high moral principle. Mother Putney expressed fervent thanks at Ralph's escape from forming an alliance which would have brought discredit on the family. Ruth said nothing, but her blue eyes shone hard with a militant gleam. Randall invited and received reproof by wishing that he had been invited, too. Ralph was still in Europe, so his mother wrote immediately to tell him of the O'Connor fall from grace.

Arden was writing to Jerry one afternoon when Ruth was announced. Timothy was reading in an alcove off the room, but after greeting Ruth went out. Arden had guessed the purport of the visit on hearing Ruth's voice in the vestibule, and the first glance at her visitor confirmed it. Ruth had recently been more than usually gracious, calling frequently to take her shopping or to see some mutual friend, but had always avoided any mention of Jerry.

But now there was no mistaking the expression of Ruth's war face, nor did she hesitate to come directly to the point. Ruth had always been direct and no waster of her few, well-chosen words.

"Arden," she demanded, "are you three really going to the opening of this wicked Utopia?"

"Yes," Arden answered, "but we don't know yet that it's so wicked, do we?"

"That is its candid declaration of purpose," Ruth retorted. "The prospectus states plainly enough that no restraint is to be placed upon its guests' pursuit of pleasure."

"But the guests might not need it," Arden observed. "They might not be wicked themselves—at least, but very few of them—and they would probably be wicked anywhere. I see from the list of those accepting, that there are two English and two American bishops and Rabbi Miskoloz and Father Ignatius and a lot other distinguished people whose reputations are very good."

Ruth frowned. "They are going for a definite purpose, of course," said she. "They have got to see the place in order to conduct a campaign against its evils."

"Then it's not very nice of them to go as invited guests," Arden retorted. "I should think that a very disgraceful way to return hospitality. It would be much more decent to pay their way."

Not finding any answer to this argument, Ruth ignored it. "All the same, Arden," said she, "you must admit that the whole idea of Utopia is degrading and dangerous."

"It might be for some people, but not for father and Timothy and me. If one is going to change their morals with their surroundings, any place but home might be dangerous."

"But other places do not offer the same temptations," Ruth urged. "The prime motive of Utopia is to promote vicious pleasures and it provides a demoralizing setting for them. It is no use to argue that to the pure all things are pure. They are not. We are all human and have our human frailties."

"Mine are not the Utopian kind you mean," Arden answered composedly. "If I were going to sin it would be in some place so stupid and dull that there was nothing else to do."

"Oh, dear, you are impossible, Arden," Ruth protested. "According to that line of reasoning you might claim that there was more wickedness in Boston than in Paris."

"There probably is," said Arden, "but it's bottled up."

"How can you say such a thing?" cried Ruth indignantly. "Our country has never been so clean in all its history, and now here comes this horrible Utopian thing."

"Perhaps that may help to keep it so," Arden suggested. "It is the same idea as Ralph's stepping outdoors to smoke."

Ruth's temper began to slip its cogs. She was not particularly quick-witted in argument and had seldom need to be, her audiences being invariably of the same professed conviction. It was, therefore, intensely irritating to be checked at every turn by a girl whom she had never given credit for a fraction of her own intellectuality.

"You are merely quoting that horridly clever prospectus, dear," she sighed. "I'll admit that it reads most convincingly in spots."

"I didn't get a chance to read it," Arden answered regretfully. "Father carried it off with him and somebody stole it. I wish you would lend me yours, Ruth."

"Father seems to have lost ours, too," Ruth admitted. "Nobody appears to have one. Most of our friends burned theirs, but that seems rather a stupid thing to do unless we can burn Utopia after it. I wish we could."

"Why not run down to Haiti and try?" asked a voice in the doorway, and Ruth looked up slightly startled to see Timothy standing there. "May I be admitted to the council?" he asked.

Ruth would much have preferred his absence, as she wished to talk about Jerry's association with her new bête noire and knew that this was a dangerous topic with Timothy. Besides, the boy had a curiously exciting effect upon her nerves, and when talking with him she could never be sure how much she had actually said and how much merely thought. But her errand was one which concerned the family, while her pride and pugnacity would not allow her to admit the fear of facing another combatant, so she said rather sharply:

"Yes, come in by all means. I called to urge Arden not to go to Utopia, and we were arguing about its menace."

Timothy draped himself over an armchair. "I suppose about a million people in America are arguing about the same thing," he murmured, "and every person so engaged is boosting its propaganda. That's what Rosenthal counted on."

Ruth looked rather startled. "But I'm censuring it," she protested.

Timothy nodded. "Quite so," said he. "If all of you people opposed had any sense, you would ignore it."

"But you can't ignore it any more than you can ignore cholera and smallpox," Ruth protested.

"Then keep quiet about it while you do your research work for the antidote, instead of chattering about it and sending a gang of people down there out of curiosity. If we had a pest house off our shores, or a Molokai, you wouldn't want to help exploit it, would you?"

Ruth stared at him, astonished. "But you speak as if you felt about it as I do, Tim," said she.

"So I do, so far as its being a menace to our moral equilibrium is concerned. Their

literature is just a tissue of sophistries and meretricious philosophy. The classic stuff is poison gas. You can argue yourself nutty on the abstract values of good and bad and award the palm to the more able chin musician who, in nine cases out of ten, won't believe what he proves. But the fact will still remain that good is good and bad is bad and every normal-minded person will always know the difference. There's no good at all in this Utopia scheme. It's bound to debauch a lot of people and ruin others and make people in this country more discontented than they are already, which is saying a lot. And it's all the fault of you reforming extremists."

"Our fault!" gasped Ruth, unconsciously acknowledging the impeachment.

"Of course. Such a proposition would not have been promotable if you hadn't gone and screwed down the lid so tight on every form of fun that not a bubble of froth could possibly leak out. The only possible means of saving the country from Utopia now would be suddenly to loosen up again and license everything suppressed since the beginning of the war. But you can't do it. The nuts are locked, and by the time you managed it Utopia would be running with the dampers as wide open as the Prussian department of the German hell. This big, costly propaganda will be the first and last that they will ever put out. Hereafter they will be overadvertised by their loving friends and clients. I'll bet they've been working double shifts to get going before anybody here waked up to the necessity of prophylaxis. And we're as ripe for infection as sterilized guinea pigs raised in a Pettenkofer's chamber, or an arctic expedition coming out of germ-free polar atmosphere into an epidemic of influenza."

Ruth sprang to her feet with a white face. It was not only what the boy said which shocked her but his way of saying it. His brother Jerry might have been speaking. Timothy's voice, habitually low and modulated, had taken the base timbre of Jerry's and his brusque figures of speech were the same. For the moment he actually looked like his brother, although the features of the two were about as different as it is possible to imagine. It was like an obsession.

And the conviction of his argument struck home to Ruth with shocking force. Instead of opposing her views, he appeared to have grabbed them by the scruff of the neck and rushed them far beyond the limits of their proposed advance.

"Oh, Timothy!" cried Ruth, "do you really believe it's as bad as that?"

"Worse," said Timothy sententiously. "It's a worse menace than that of the war when it first broke loose. It's worse than when you women took charge. It's even worse than when you locked up all the toys and jam and forgot where you put the key. You've done it now, Ruth. I hope you'll like the result."

The telephone bell rang at this moment, and Arden went to hold a lengthy wire consultation with her dressmaker. Timothy jerked his large head in the direction of the pantry whither she had disappeared.

"There's the start," said he, "new gowns for Utopia. Filmy, fuzzy, transparent tropic things, iridescent and diaphanous like a great moth. Jerry sent her a check and told her to spread herself; said that if her throat and arms and ankles and things had grown as true to form as when he saw her last, she needn't be afraid to parade 'em. And dad and I are rigging ourselves out without reference to taste or expense. Pongee silk and heliotrope undergarments in case of accident——"

"Tim!" Ruth cried, in a strangled voice. "Stop it! How can you let Arden go to that terrible place feeling as you do about it?"

"The place be damned—as, no doubt, it will be," Timothy answered. "We don't care a Prussian paper mark for the place, barring only Jerry's corner of it. We're not going to see Utopia. We're going to see Jerry. Don't you wish you were coming, too, Ruthie?"

The color blazed into her face. "No, I don't. And I don't see how your father can think of letting Arden go there."

"Oh, I guess the three of us will be able to keep her in order, though, of course, you can't tell how soon a person may spoil after being kept in cold storage for so long. It wouldn't do for you, though. You'd be drunk in no time, Ruth. Even the prospectus gave you a bad night."

"How do you——" she began. "What makes you think that?" she demanded hotly.

Timothy smiled maliciously and passed his hand across his brow with mock affectation. "I seem to see you poring over that pamphlet with feverish unrest," said he.

"Every noble instinct of your rich nature aroused—and some others."

"What others?"

"Oh, insurgent ones. The kind that most of us treat with a little humanity. We don't all bat them with the butt of an oar every time they rise to blow. What did you think of Jerry's group?"

"I thought that it was shameless—indecent!"

Timothy nodded. "So did I. It certainly wasn't quite decent of him to use his mental notes of you as a model, or, at least, it would not have been if he had realized it, which, of course, he did not."

"So you noticed the resemblance, too."

"The face—yes."

"Hush, you horrid—but why should he have used my face at all? What possible association could my face have with those—those——"

"Other sirens?" Timothy leaned back in the big chair and brought the tips of his slender fingers together, surveying her with his head at a critical slant. "Well, I should say that he has probably never seen any other which pleased him as much. It is apt to be that way with an artist unless he is very careful. But if Jerry had guessed what he was about, he would sooner have smashed his other wrist than slap it on those nereids. Let us hope that he may never discover it, as he would be quite capable of taking his mallet and doing them a damage."

"Why?"

"Because he is in love with you, and Jerry is anything but the man to share the face of the woman he loves with others, especially such others as are apt to admire his group——"

"That will do, Tim," said Ruth quietly. "I am sorry that I have excited you."

"On the contrary, you have refreshed me. I was feeling very stale when you came in. What I have just said is quite true. Jerry has never been in love with any woman but you. I knew it when he went away, and it did a lot to reconcile me for his going."

"What do you mean?" Ruth demanded, in spite of her determination to end the conversation.

"Just that. I was jealous of Jerry and did not want him to marry you or any other girl. But now I am not sure but what it might be a good thing. You will have more sense in another year, when Utopia is running full bore, and you and your colleagues appreciate the mess you have made of things. Like all beginning women drivers, when you want to turn to the right you jerk the horse into the ditch and dump the apple cart." He stared abstractedly at the globe of the electric lamp. "You will make another frenzied effort at reform—and then go to Jerry—probably in Utopia."

Ruth turned away. Her face was quite pale and her eyes cold with anger. But she managed to say gently:

"I see I *have* tired you, Tim. Will Arden never finish with that phone? I ought to be going."

"I'll go, myself," said Timothy. He rose and walked to the door where he turned and looked at her. Ruth could not seem to resist the magnetism of his lustrous eyes. They drew her own and held them.

"Well?" she asked, forcing the light, indifferent tone one might use to a child or capricious invalid.

"You will be in Utopia six months from now," said Timothy, and disappeared.

CHAPTER VIII.

The eve of departure arrived in cold, clear January weather, and found the O'Connors in a high state of excitement. The whole country was, in fact, excited, and the press at the railroad station whence the Utopian specials were to depart required strong cordons of police to enable the invited guests to depart.

This crowd had not assembled through idle curiosity. It was too cold for that. The people had come to see and cheer certain illustrious personalities who had chosen to accept Rosenthal's invitation and examine at first hand his costly experiment in eudæmonics. Among these were a French general whose brilliant strategy had disproved expert statements that strategy would not win the war; a Russian soldier, statesman and patriot who had redeemed his country from chaos; a British ex-premier who had drafted the proclamation of the world's peace, and many Americans of both sexes world-famous not only in war achievements, but the vast work of political and commercial and social reconstruction.

Rosenthal had announced in a series of interviews that his guests were to consider themselves free to criticise or censure as they might see fit; that their entertainment had no motive of advertisement or propitiation, and

that the management of Utopia stood ready to modify its direction if convinced of error. There was no doubt deep guile in these petards charged with a mixture of confetti and asphyxiating gas, but they met with a certain favor and gave to his grand opening the savor of a sociological synod. There were to be addresses by Professor Raikus and Di Romagna, and Doctor Acajou was to deliver a salutatory poem. No money was to be in circulation during this party. The guests might as well leave purse and check book at home. The Temple of Fortune was not to be in business operation. It was no part of Rosenthal's scheme that any of his guests should be financially depleted by their sojourn. All was carte blanche.

Another feature was to demonstrate the ease of access to Utopia. *"Facilus est decensus Averni,"* as a jovial lord bishop observed on arrival. Part of the day and a night on the fast, luxurious trains to Palm Beach where the big aircraft were waiting, then a marvelous five or six-hour flight—or half of that in a swift machine—over bank and shoal and waters, topaz or indigo, following the sweep of the Bahamas. No seasickness in this enthralling voyage and a minimum of danger, for the war had seen the near perfection of aircraft and in case of necessity one could plane down and make an easy landing on the beach of almost any island. Thirty hours from the crippling cold of New York to the ambrosial climate of Utopia.

The gayety of the unprecedented outing began in the railroad station itself. Whatever the findings of their mission might be, Utopia's guests seemed unanimous in their determination to have a good time while it lasted. Practically all were brilliant folk, who were acquainted either personally or by reputation, and nobody hesitated to plunge into cheery conversation with his neighbor, often presently to discover him or her to be one of the world's bright mentalities. There were scores of young and beautiful women, some shining by virtue of their own lights, others in the reflected ones of husbands or fathers, for it had been obvious that, whatever might develop later, there was nothing to be feared in such a gathering as this.

Arden recognized many celebrities from their published portraits. To infuse his party with sparkling color and effervescence, Rosenthal had issued invitations broadcast to stars of the dramatic world; singers, dancers, actresses, musicians, and artists of various kinds, many of whom he had engaged professionally. The place was like a hive of multicolored bees even to its fair sprinkling of drones, rich idlers of the upper social world who, whatever their war-time activities, had now returned to the pursuit of pleasure; yachtsmen of the air who in their beautiful fabrics would think nothing of a flight from their northern nests directly to Utopia. Many indeed had already visited the place to observe its progress and such had always been given a cordial welcome.

When the train drew out of the station the buzzing increased. Ordinary sleepers and drawing-room and observation cars had been used for the free mingling of the guests, which became immediately in the nature of a reception. The spirit of carnival appeared to have descended already on the party. A young man with a handsome face of peculiar pallor and a pair of large, dark eyes leaned across the aisle and said to Arden:

"Isn't it jolly. Look down there at his eminence, the Cardinal Guardabassi, spoofing my picture girls. I'd like to get that on a film."

Arden, who had been trying to place his well-known features, looked at him with a suddenly awakened interest. He read her thought and smiled. "Yes," said he, "I'm Campbell. But you'll hardly know it from my pictures, would you?"

"You are thinner," said Arden, "and more —more——"

"More ascetic? Trust a German prison fortress for that. You see, when the Boche advance surrounded us while making the picture some of us tried to fight our way back. I was bayoneted and taken prisoner. They were going to shoot me for a *franc-tireur,* but when they found out who I was they took precious good care of me, hoping to get my colored picture process, or a big ransom. Well, they got the ransom, a million marks indemnity, or fine, or whatever they chose to call it. The picture paid for that in no time, my camera man having got clear with the film. What sort of a celebrity are *you?* I don't seem to recall your face, though it's not one to see and forget."

"I'm not a celebrity," Arden answered. "Just plain girl."

"Just girl," he corrected. "That's distinc-

tion enough in this crowd. My own position here is partly social, partly professional. I've collared the exclusive picture rights for the first six months." He drew down the corners of his mouth a trifle as though reflecting on what this concession had cost him.

"Then you are going to stay there?" Arden asked.

"Yes. I'll probably have two or three separate troupes at work."

"You've already been there, of course," said Arden.

"Twice, but I won't waste breath trying to describe it. You need all five senses and then some more, to get Utopia. My photochrome screen is a mud pie to the real thing." His dark, intelligent eyes made a swift assay of Arden. "You're not an artist, then?"

"No, but my brother is. He did the Nereids' Grotto."

"Really? Then let me tell you, Miss O'Connor, that your big brother is a genius. For downright beauty and the blending of art and nature I'm not sure but that the Nereids' Grotto is the most attractive minor feature of the place. I'm going to use it in my first big picture. I wish that I could shoot you with it."

"Shoot *me!*"

"Yes. In a society piece all quite fittin' and proper for the States. You've got the ideal coloring and features for the screen. My new process would get even that delicate flush of excitement which you are wearing at this moment. Then your figure is full enough to project as slenderly rounded without being thin, and being Jerry O'Connor's sister you cannot help but possess the requisite artistic ability."

"You know Jerry?" Arden asked.

"Of course. We all know Jerry. And I suppose that Jerry would pitch me in among his water nymphs when he found out that I wanted to get his sister on the screen. All joking aside, though, why not give it a try?"

Arden's gray eyes brightened for a moment, then she shook her head. "I have my father and brother to keep house for," said she.

"The two who were with you just now?" Campbell asked. Mr. O'Connor had discovered an old Parisian friend with whom he and Timothy were chatting in the forward end of the car.

"Yes. I once suggested trying and father nearly had a fit."

"Your brother looks as if he had been ill, and I notice he limps. Wounded?"

"No. Pyelomyelitis. He is rapidly improving, though. He had it the summer before the war."

"Handsome youngster," Campbell observed. "You must pardon the suggestion, Miss O'Connor, but I'm always on the lookout for a real find. Something tells me that you would prove one, and perhaps your brother, too. I don't often go wrong. Partly a natural gift, and partly experience. You've got the perfect broadly oval face and big eyes and straight, tip-tilted nose, all features that are improved, if possible, on the screen which tends to lengthen them. You appear to have the body too, and I've got an idea that you are a family of artistic temperament. Well, I'm sorry. If you ever change your mind about it, let me know." He sighed. "Since the war it's getting harder and harder to find the real thing, and audiences are ten times more critical. Artists seem to be getting standardized, like everything else in this virtuous country, and it's very rarely that the divine fire flames out. When it does, friends and family usually manage to extinguish it."

"Perhaps it may find an outlet in Utopia," Arden suggested, little guessing at the prophetic nature of her words.

"Let's hope that it flames out somewhere. But I don't share the prevailing prognosis of Utopia. No management can give a place its *cachet*. That's in the hands of its clientèle, and people are so cussedly perverse. All of us big producers have discovered that. Just because they are told that it is intended to be a garden of sin and sunshine they are apt to turn it into a retreat for rich and elderly paralytics."

Arden laughed. "You are the first person I have heard complain of that possibility," said she.

"Well, I've made a study of the human mule. In most big productions you've got to turn him round and tug at his head to back him up to a thing. Then, health and beauty are not compatible with sensual excess. Vice, like disease, requires unwholesome surroundings. Bad air and crowds and noise, not music and sweating servants and vulgar personal display. I told Rosenthal so and he got awful glum. *'Sapristi!'* said he, 'you think dey vill make of it a healt' re-

sort?' I told him that was what I would make of it, and that it was all so beautiful and interesting, and so much fun to be had merely in being there, that the last thing of which one felt the need was to get drunk and misbehave. It would give you too much of a 'where every prospect pleases and only I am vile,' feeling."

"Perhaps that is because you are an artist, yourself," Arden suggested.

"I hope so, for Rosenthal's sake. Besides, I enjoy vicariously the atmosphere of misbehavior. It brings out interesting psychological studies. But I draw the line at misbehaving myself. It is too fatiguing and profitless."

"I can easily see," said Arden, much amused, "that if everybody felt about the place as you do, it is foredoomed to failure. Rosenthal would have to engage some people to come and act viciously for the entertainment of his virtuous guests."

"Precisely. Just as they used to in the old days for the slumming parties. And that would be fatal. Thereafter you might as well get out the wheel chairs and the hoops and roller skates and velocipedes. I believe old Rosenthal would dynamite the place first. And it would certainly be a very great pity, when he has made such elaborate accommodation for artistic and hygienic naughtiness."

"I believe you would be secretly glad," said Arden.

"Not for a second. In the first place, it might cost me a million or two, and in the second, we would all miss a lot of fun. It is amusing to see the devil prancing around in cap and bells and the reformers barking at him from afar. Besides, I hate the spectacle of a great people being washed spotless and ironed flat by its feminine constituent. It is interfering seriously with my business. I have had to suppress barroom and bathing scenes and midnight orgies from my American plays because they are no longer true to American life, but made in Utopia they might be presented as a great moral lesson."

"But there no longer seems to be any particular need of a great moral lesson," Arden objected.

"That is just the reason that it might succeed. People do not wish to be taught nor reminded of their iniquities. They would look on avidly and say: 'See what we have escaped. Behold what our efforts have suppressed.' They would go to gloat, and the gloating would not be entirely over the triumph of virtue. For your dyed-in-the-wool reformer vice has a secret and irresistible fascination. They get a vicarious pleasure from the contact of man-handling it."

"What a horrid idea," said Arden.

"Isn't it? On the contrary, many of us enjoy a little dash just to give a relish to its antithesis. For instance, it would be a pleasant change for me to go from the proposed Utopia to my baby farm in Switzerland."

"Your what?"

"I have founded and maintain a reservation for two hundred war babies at Lausanne. The motive was not philanthropy, nor uplift, and it would not disturb my serenity if some of the boys grew up to be expert cracksmen and the girls vampires. It is a sort of toy, just as other men of superfluous income amuse themselves with racing stables or fancy stock raising or model dairy farms. I like to go there and pose as the philanthropist which I know that I am not. I rub my hands and beam upon them benevolently and spatter them with toys. I concentrate as much upon their fun as upon their hygiene. The nurses are all young, pretty, and good-natured, and they are horribly afraid of me. The kiddies are fine. I won six prizes in last year's exposition; four firsts and two seconds at the Geneva Red Cross show. We have about a dozen entries for this year. I've got up about ten thousand francs in side bets."

Arden stared at him in astonishment. He laughed.

"Sounds funny, doesn't it," said he. "But there is nothing original about it. You would be surprised to know how many of us successful entertainers do the same. Old Rosenthal supports several similar institutions. We were comparing notes one day. If Utopia succeeds, a lot of wretched people are going to profit enormously. Theoretically it is all wrong, I suppose, but there are the results, and we get personally a lot of fun out of it. When I get fed up with Utopia I can go to my baby farm, and when I get fed up with the baby farm I can fly over to Utopia."

The conversation was interrupted by Mr. O'Connor and Timothy. Arden introduced her new acquaintance, saying that he knew Jerry and the talk became general. But

it had already opened new and exciting vistas of thought for Arden, and that night as the train sang its road song she was unable to sleep. In fact, it seemed to her that she had been sleeping for the last few years and was just beginning to waken. After all, what singular people the world contained! She knew that her own family was considered rather unusual by its limited and conventional circle, but it now impressed her that they were really most prosaic. The war had widened the useful activities of American girls and curtailed their extravagances and sophistication so that the younger ones whom the government had wisely forbidden to leave the country had grown up under many of the conditions of one hundred years before. No gadding about; few idle and frivolous amusements; scarcely any mingling between the daughters of rich and socially prominent families and the *jeunesse dorée,* or showy fortune hunters, whether of foreign or domestic production. There had been no lack of work for them all, whether in the home or farms or gardens or Red Cross or government service, and as a result they had arrived at womanhood very like the daughters of the post-bellum Revolutionary period. Those older ones who had served in the scenes of war came back sobered and serious-minded; far more so than the men to whose masculine natures war was after all a normal function.

At dinner Arden had learned a good deal about Campbell from her father and Timothy. He was an American of about thirty-six or thirty-seven, trained by one of the big pioneer cinematograph producers killed at the war. He was known to be very rich, single productions sometimes netting him large fortunes during an epoch when the screen was the principal form of popular amusement, and he was the inventor of the new color process which had so greatly enhanced the charm and actuality of motion pictures. He was unmarried, something of a social recluse, and a frankly acknowledged insurgent against the new restrictions of personal liberty. Little was known of his private life, but, although he had never figured in any public scandal, he was not a person with whom a parent would care to have a daughter form a friendship.

But Arden, like many another girl, had found him charming and sympathetic and her instinct rather than what little he had said to her pronounced him honest, manly, and kind. His boyish naïveté attracted and amused her while his direct invitation to try her talent under his direction was unquestionably a very great compliment, coming from such a source.

The idea, impossible as it was, stuck in her head with the insistence Campbell had intended that it should. He had assayed Arden immediately as a very uncommon find and had been frankly truthful in telling her so. She had precisely the type of beauty he required, the perfect screen face and figure, coloring and hair, and he was quick to discover her potentialities of art and temperament which he could develop to a degree impossible to estimate. He had quietly determined that she should work for him.

Getting the consent of his prospective raw material had always been the least of Campbell's difficulties. Natural human vanity, the desire for expression, the, in many cases, denied or unacknowledged craving for conspicuity, to stand out distinctly from the mass of one's fellow creatures not only in action or achievement, as one who is read and talked about, but whose image is seen and admired by millions; all of these factors had worked toward his ends. He seldom, if ever, failed. He had posed and put through their paces royalties and rulers, statesmen and generals, millionaires and philosophers. He had likewise succeeded with those who had every reason to seek social oblivion. There was always some excuse for consent. Art, patriotic publicity, need of money either for one's self or a charitable fund, duty of some sort.

Yet, oddly enough, he had found women in Arden's position the most difficult of all. It was easier to obtain the consent of a reigning queen or stately *femme du monde* than that of a dutiful and devoted daughter restrained by the mandate of an obstinate, uncompromising parent, especially a father. Campbell had struck such snags before and knew how tenaciously they were stuck in the mud of unreason. He feared that he might have a difficult time with Arden. She was evidently very well bred and belonged to an exclusive, strictly conventional social set, appeared modest with no ambition for fame, and was, no doubt, entirely submissive to her father, who impressed the producer as the managerial bête noire; a paternal set screw upon whom argument would have about as much effect as on the pyramid of Cheops. In such a case there was but one

course open; to carry on over the parental head. And this is what Campbell decided he would do.

One may ask why a man of such professional puissance should put himself to so much trouble with unlimited material to choose from. The reason is the same as that to which he owed his extraordinary success. It had always been his one fixed principle to find out precisely what he wanted and then, rejecting all possible substitutes, to procure it at any cost. And he had long since learned that in the end it paid.

CHAPTER IX.

The barometer favored Rosenthal's big party in remaining high and fixed, and the guests on being landed at the aërodrome terminus found the Utopian craft ready for flight. There were five of these, carrying about two hundred passengers each, and before she realized it Arden found herself looking down through the colloid flooring at the topaz water which looked singularly shallow and transparent at that height.

Then presently the sandy cays and islands began to flit beneath; the Great and Little Isaacs, Bemini, Gun Cay, Riding Rocks. They cut across the Andros group diagonally to pick up beyond a scattered archipelago of tiny islets which continued steadily. They looked like patches of water plants floating in an aquarium.

Arden had made a number of flights with Ralph in his hydroplane yacht over and about Massachusetts Bay and vicinity, but this was different. The avion was bigger and steady as a planet in the strong draft of the trade wind. The waters beneath were bluer and brighter, the sun more mellow and intense, and the crowd of fellow passengers gave it a gala atmosphere. Then, instead of Ralph's crisp and serious conversation, she was listening to the amusing chatter of her new acquaintance, Stephen Campbell.

"Could anything be more conducive to sobriety and propriety than this?" he complained. "The first year of the war I had a two-thousand-meter spill in one of these things and I have never since made a flight without a solemn *memento mori* emotion."

"How did you get out of it quick and whole?" Arden asked.

"The weird luck of the early movies man. I got out of it quick enough, though not entirely whole, as I lost a great deal of skin. Just before we crashed the perverse machine took a side spin and flicked me up on one of the wings, thus neutralizing my downward momentum and laying me gently on the broad bosom of Lake Geneva. The pilot also escaped, though it took an hour to resuscitate him from drowning. Of course, there is scarcely anybody now who has not made flights, but all the same, the feeling remains that on landing at Utopia one ought to repair to a chapel and offer thanks, which is not precisely the Utopian idea."

"Are there any chapels there?"

"Several, but they are not starred as features. I imagine they are more for the exigencies of sudden death, from excess or suicide or drowning, or other form of euthanasia. One might also wish to make a votive offering."

"What were you before you became a movies man?" Arden asked. She liked to hear him talk about himself, which he did with a sort of frank impersonality.

"After graduating from Yale I had ambitions to become a figure painter and went to Paris to study at Julien's paint school. But it was no good. My color sense was highly developed, but I couldn't draw. When one of my models ripped up a finished canvas because I had made her knock-kneed and splay-footed, I chucked it and came back to America where I went on the stage. Another failure. Couldn't get my voice across. Then the movies came along, and having been a rotten painter and a dumb actor, I immediately saw my chance. Look —there's the Mole St. Nicholas."

A few moments later they were high above the mole, then slanting slightly downward, skimmed over the Gulf of Gonaive and had the dense, rolling jungle about two thousand feet beneath them, a billowy carpet of dark, plushy green with the silver threads of swift watercourses weaving in and out. Then quickly came in sight the snowy band of the Artibonife River and beyond the lake, flashing like the facet of an emerald. And here below them was Utopia, any irregular cluster of zenias in soft and exquisite hues; rose and saffron and amber and amethyst and opal, for none of the many edifices was of a dazzling white, trying to the eye in the tropics. Rosenthal, or rather Di Romagna, had departed from the purely classic in color as in design, and followed the example of Curacao and other places, tinting all that was artificial in delicate tones. Even the white shell roads and alleys were softened of their glare.

They circled the reservation twice in descending, then came to rest like a great flamingo, of which was the name and color of their craft. One preceding them had already landed in the spacious aërodrome where there was room for all. Another, the black and white *Pelicana* came up as they were circling, and still a fourth, the yellow *Jacana,* was a growing golden speck in the blue ether.

But the three O'Connors had for the moment no eyes for aught but a broad-chested, stalwart figure striding through the throng with eager eyes and outstretched arms. It was Jerry; Jerry whom they had not seen for years, and who at one bitter epoch had sworn a big soldier-of-fortune oath not to return home until he could do so as a success and a credit to the family.

Free from his Stone-age hug, Arden stepped back to examine him with loving solicitude. She found him tremendously changed from the big, rough boy who had sailed away. He was still big, but in a different way, leaner, straighter, more trimly set, and finely cut and finished. And his face, she found to her astonishment, was actually handsome of feature and distinguished of expression. She had never thought it possible that Jerry ever could be handsome with his marked Hibernian facial structures, flaming hair and freckles. But the freckles had given way to an old ivory tan, and leanness of cheeks had given shape and chiseling to his nose which formerly looked short and broad. A crisp mustache and closely trimmed Vandyke shortened the long upper lip and modified and lengthened the squareness of his jaw. His red hair was rather darker, thick, and wavy, and his violet-blue eyes gleamed with power and intelligence instead of as formerly mischief or pugnacity.

Jerry was, in fact, Arden proudly told herself, become as distinguished looking a man of intensely virile type as she had ever seen. As for Timothy, the worship in his dark eyes as his demigod loosed him from his grip was like that of a child, a mother, or a dog.

Then followed a series of bewildering impressions in which Arden realized the truth of what Jerry and Campbell said, that any attempt to describe Utopia was scarcely worth the trouble. The guests were spared any official welcome. This was to be extended throughout their week's sojourn in such entertainment as they might care to enjoy. Rosenthal himself was to speak a few brief words in the opera that evening, but there was no individual handshaking except with such as he had already the honor of acquaintance. He submerged himself in that vague term, "management."

They stepped into a waiting car and started on the twenty-mile drive around the lower or western end of Lake Asshuei, the executive residences with many of the leading features being on the other side, almost opposite where they had landed in the big avion. Many of the guests were taken across the five-mile stretch of clear blue water in the swarm of swift gondola electric launches which could, if so required, be propelled in the Venetian way by the huge, grinning and artistically costumed gondoliers, native Haitians chosen for their magnificent physique.

"Utopia employs an easy half of the whole native population," Jerry told them as the car moved off, "and the black rascals are ready to work for next to nothing just to see the show and wear the costumes. You'd be amazed to know how comparatively little this end of the show has cost. This island is wonderfully rich, and we produce about everything we consume. So far we've scarcely more than scratched up the surface a little and thrown together a few pretty doll houses."

"Like that?" asked his father, pointing to a wonderful structure some distance away on the edge of the lake and of which the colonnades and terraces could be partly seen under the high foliage of the great trees surrounding it on three sides.

"It looked like a pink lotus from the air," said Arden.

Jerry nodded. "That's where you get your money changed from more to less, or the reverse. Sister's right. The ground plan is lotus-shaped. If you had come in a couple of thousand feet higher you would have seen a general floral scheme to the whole of Utopia."

"We noticed that the buildings had floral designs," said Timothy; "floral colors, too; eglantine and narcissus and asters, daffodil and fleur-de-lis and things."

"Yes," said Jerry. "That was Di Romagna's idea. Utopia is the first peaceful community built with a view to its beauty from the sky. It probably occurred to him through his having been an officer in the Italian aviation service during the war. He reasoned that as most of our guests would

come in avions, the approach must be striking and beautiful. We've got a lot of surprises up our sleeve. Everything wasn't published in the prospectus. It's been held back for a fresh attack," he laughed. "The conventional school of classic architecture will go crazy. Saltus argued that as Utopia was unlike anything described in history, if ought to have an architecture of its own, so he gave it one. Elliot was all for the Hellenic at first, but he finally came around to Saltus' way of thinking that in this day and age the appearance of a place should be considered as much from the bird's-eye view as from the hare's, though he did insist on a few purely classic gems such as the Temple d'Amour in the lake and the baths. From the air most of the houses have geometric plans; floral or after snow crystals, but you don't see this from the ground."

"What do you all think of it, yourselves; you artists, I mean?" asked Mr. O'Connor.

"That's a pretty big question," Jerry answered. "We scarcely know what to think. We gave up arguing about the ethical part of it long ago, and artistically there's nothing to compare it to. The best criticism of our success as to beauty would come from a child or some simple person having no orthodox ideas. What do you think of it, as much as you have seen, sis?"

"Am I the child or the simple person?" Arden asked. "Well, then, I think it is unspeakably lovely; like the illustrations for a grown-up fairy story."

Jerry looked pleased. "That's just what we tried to get," said he. "Commercially, I don't see how it can help be a success. It's so downright fascinating. It gets in your blood. The summer climate is bully, too. We've got altitude enough to keep it cool and fresh and the trades blow right across us. Personally, I'd want to spend most of my life here even if they turned the place into a blooming hydropathic cure. People will come here once if only out of curiosity, and then they're bound to come again. But the boss has been having goose-flesh ever since Alan Campbell talked to him about it when he was here a couple of months ago."

"We met Mr. Campbell coming down," said Arden. "I like him."

Jerry raised his eyebrows and shot his sister a quick, keen glance. "So do most women," he said dryly. "Campbell's all right and a good fellow, but he's not precisely the man for you to cultivate, sis."

"Why not?"

"Well, his views are—h'm—extreme, to say the least. He out-deviled old Rosenthal. Positively shocked the old pagan, and let me tell you that takes a bit of doing. I'd hate to tell you some of the things he proposed. We all thought we'd pretty well done it, but he seemed to find our program anæmic. Wanted to go the whole hog and turn the place into a blooming Atlantis or decadent Rome."

"He was probably trying to get a rise out of you," said Arden.

"Then he certainly succeeded. He had us all on the go and old Isidore cursing in seventeen different languages. According to Campbell we were in danger of falling between two stones. He said that there was too much Omar Khayyam stuff about it and that we'd never pay expenses on the loaf-of-bread-and-jug-of-wine business. He advised something in the nature of Nero's garden party in 'Quo Vadis.' But it has never been any part of Rosenthal's idea to crowd orgies on our guests. All he proposes is to let them do as they darn please and furnish them an ideal place to do it in. Then the rest of it is up to them."

The electric car glided swiftly along the hard, perfect drive and presently they rounded the lake and sped up the farther side. Every turning brought fresh beauties, and occasionally groups of black workmen in their picturesque uniforms waved and called out cheerful greeting in creole as they passed. They were naturally eager to see Jerry's contribution, which he told them was on their route. Arden could see that he was striving to hide his excitement, and as it seemed to her a sort of apprehension.

Then presently the road forked and they turned away from the lake, following the course of a small, turbulent stream, the banks of which grew rapidly precipitous and covered with such a wild, luxuriant tangle of tropic vegetation that the road was almost like a tunnel. Farther on this expanded slightly to furnish a turning place for vehicles and here Jerry stopped the car.

"Let's get out," said he. "It's only a step."

The path now became an actual tunnel, or, better, perhaps, a funnel, the jungle meeting overhead in a lustrous green matting of intertwining creepers and lianas. There were orchids and hibiscus and flamboyants, which blazed like torches in the subdued light, and

as they proceeded there came a drowsy, tinkling murmur, and a cool draft which was damp and sweet fanned in their faces.

They pushed forward expectantly. Some distance ahead was a small, domed opening through which came a pale-green light. When almost to this Jerry paused.

"Give a little trill," said he to Arden, "or laugh."

She raised her voice and ran a few notes, when instantly they were flung back from some invisible source, mocking and multiple. One would have sworn that the grotto was peopled by a score of mischievous nymphs.

"Pure accident," said Jerry. "There is a lot that is accidental about this place."

And then they pushed through the entrance and stood speechless. One goes up to this grotto instead of down, and the first sight of its water surface is on a level with the eyes. It is a hanging basin and the gush of water which feeds it is invisible behind a flying buttress of mossy rock around which one passes on what suggests a magnified spider's web. Then the hidden beauty is revealed with a sense of startled intrusion. The little rill from an overhanging lip of rock high above dissolves in mist before reaching the outrageous group of revelers beneath. And but for them there is scarcely a suggestion of human handicraft, so cunningly is this disguised and clothed in tropic nature's negligee. But the group—the nereids and their playmates!

"Well, Jerry, you've certainly done it," said Mr. O'Connor, as they returned to the car.

"Done what, dad?" Jerry asked bluntly.

"It," said his father. "Faith, what more can one say? You must have had some rare models for yon tinted beauties."

"I hadn't any," Jerry answered. "I molded those figures purely from imagination. And they just naturally had to be tinted that dull, saffron rose. Otherwise, they would have hit you in the eye."

"They are none so passive as it is," replied his father dryly. "Now what, I wonder, would Ruth Putney say?"

Jerry stopped short. "Why?" he asked sharply, and a swarthy color glowed suddenly under his tropic tan.

"Why?" echoed his father, and opened wide his eyes. "He asks me why. But no doubt 'twas a foolish question because the girl would not say anything at all. She would faint. No, she is not the faintin' sort. She would give one gurgle of rage and run to get a maul. Has she not been tryin' her best to stop mixed bathin'?" He gave a chuckle.

Jerry stared at him suspiciously. "Oh," he growled, "is that it? I thought perhaps you meant something else. Once or twice I've felt like running for the maul myself, but I wasn't sure——"

Timothy, of course, understood. But to Arden's association of ideas it never occurred that there might be any rapport between Jerry's beautiful, if startling, creation and a woman who was the relentless enemy to all such. The resemblance between Ruth's actual features and those of the nymphs was merely that of shape and proportion, but there it stopped. Mr. O'Connor had not seen it. His remark had been prompted as he explained. But Timothy knew that his brother had discovered the similarity which he had all unconsciously produced, and that it worried him. He thought it probable that Jerry had noticed it for the first time in examining the photogravure of the group in which feature predominated facial expression. Possibly he might have been struck by a likeness to some snapshot of Ruth still in his possession and which had portrayed her in one of her infrequent, reckless, laughing moods.

Jerry's abstracted expression as they walked back to the car convinced him of this and took his mind to some extent from his surroundings. But these were of secondary importance to Timothy, just as was the whole materialized Utopian idea, its existence, success or failure, with its general ethical idea and results. Timothy's whole religion was singularly simple. It was Jerry. Whether flocks of frail humanity went to hell or not via Utopia was a matter of the most profound indifference to Timothy so long as Jerry benefited.

He scarcely noticed the kaleidoscopic wonders through which they passed on the way to his brother's temporary residence, which was a charming little primrose cottage on the edge of the lake, rather Pompeian of interior, and built like the other structure of reënforced concrete and sawn slabs of coral stone. Tea was served by a smiling black Hebe, who seemed unable to take her fascinated eyes from Arden, and the long enforced drought of Mr. O'Connor's alcoholic affinity was slaked by a mint julep which

went far to mitigate the shock of first impressions.

"I'm here for the rest of my life if the place succeeds," Jerry told them, "and we are going ahead full bore on the assumption that it can't help but succeed. Old Isidore has got more in the back of his head than a mere tripper objective for highflyers. He claims that there are lots of people who would like to winter here, just as on the Riviera and he wants to colonize. Any of these cottages can be rented for the season, and there are all the necessities to be had at the stores and markets. You don't really have to racket if you don't want to, and the reservation is so big that you can have all the privacy you want. Look here, dad, why not stay on indefinitely? You're not doing anything to speak of, and actual living costs about half here that it does in the States. We of the family don't have to pay for the show."

Timothy's eyes glistened, and he looked at his father eagerly. Arden, too, was excited.

"If you could only find us something to do," said she.

"That might be managed, too," said Jerry. "Tim could help me in the studio. I told Maitre Gérard I needed an assistant some time ago, and he said to engage anybody I saw fit. He'd put Tim on the pay roll like a flash. As for you, sis——"

"I might get a job from Mr. Campbell," Arden murmured.

Jerry raised his bushy eyebrows, then shook his head. But his answer was not what Arden had expected.

" 'Fraid not," he answered. "He's about the hardest in the business to get next to. Picks all his people himself by a sort of intuition, then pays 'em top prices and works 'em like galley slaves. Never mixes the social and professional."

"Then he ought to be a safe man for a girl to work with," Arden observed.

"Oh, he's safe enough for any woman on his pay roll," Jerry answered. "That's one thing he's *réclamé* for. But then most big producers are. No girl working for Campbell ever had any ground for complaint about his getting friendly. Quite the reverse, I've heard. But unless he gets the idea that she's the real thing, he's about as approachable professionally as a porcupine."

"I might try," Arden suggested.

Jerry laughed.

"Go ahead and see what happens," said he. "If he bites you or even so much as barks at you, I'll drown him."

Timothy's dark eyes were dancing. Campbell had not only told him of his desire to test Arden's talent, but his own possibilities as well. "We might both try," said he.

"All right," Jerry answered. "How about you, dad? Why not get the whole family on the screen? Think of the change from poverty to affluence. Couldn't you do a Rory O'Connor turn and vindicate our ancestry?"

"Faith, when I used to spend my vacations with the Cork cousins we gave 'La Vie Parisienne' one Christmas for the benefit of the parish poor, and they all vowed the elder Coquelin could have done no better than myself. But jokin' aside, son, you would not listen to Arden's bein' a screen star."

"I'm not so sure, dad," Jerry answered, tugging at his short Vandyke. "It's a clean, wholesome sort of occupation, mostly outdoor work, with none of the dirt of the theater. It all depends who she was with. Then, we're all three of us, you and Tim and I, war sufferers in our different ways and can't do much for her. If she should have the spark and be able to earn a few thousands a year, I don't think we ought to prevent. But there, what's the use? She's got about as much chance of getting a leading job with Campbell as I have of getting an order to do the peace-signers' group for the Democracy Building in Washington."

Timothy turned as if to investigate the object of this brotherly lack of appreciation for potential talents, and the long, dark lashes of his left eye drooped slowly over that lustrous orb.

The topic was discontinued, but a little later Arden opened the door of her room and smote her palms softly together. Jessamine, the maid assigned her, glided in from the terrace like a wraith. Arden held up a note at which the girl nodded with a flash of her write teeth.

"Ou çà v'aller, mamselle?" she whispered, in her throaty creole.

Arden in her perfect French explained that it was for Monsieur Campbell, who was at the Hôtel d'Amethyste, and that she was to leave it at the desk with the request that it be delivered immediately. The girl took the note with a nod and the African chuckle which is accompanied by a closing of the soft palate followed by its sudden relief for the passage of air.

"J'y vé, mamselle," she sniggered, and the velvet darkness enveloped her purple draperies.

In another corner of the pretty house Jerry and Timothy were having a little chat before turning in. They were about to say good night when Jerry swung about and asked abruptly: "I say, Tim, did you see any resemblance in Ruth in the faces of my nymphs?"

Timothy had been patiently awaiting the question and was infinitely relieved that it had come in this form. If Jerry had asked if he saw a resemblance to any woman he knew he would have had to lie, and he did not want to lie to Jerry.

"The shape of the faces is rather similar, now you speak of it," he answered, "but nobody could accuse you of having Ruth in mind. She's a lot prettier."

"What!" Jerry's surprised inflection had nothing loverlike about it. "Don't you think they are pretty? Everybody else does."

"Not as pretty as Ruth," Timothy answered. "She's got to be quite a beauty since you saw her last."

"The deuce she has!" growled Jerry, most unflatteringly.

"It's true," Timothy insisted, "and her figure's better, too, though she tries her best to look plain."

"Same as ever," Jerry grunted, and looked rather thoughtful. "Not engaged or anything, is she? Any beaus?"

"Nary beau," said Timothy. "Nobody would dare. The men are all afraid of her, just as they always were."

"*I* was never afraid of her."

"You were never afraid of anything. But you're a lost soul now."

"On account of this stuff?" Jerry demanded, "or because I didn't come home hung with medals, like Ralph?"

"This stuff. They all hate it like an owl hates sunshine. Ralph will have a fit when he learns that Arden's down here."

"But it's none of his damned business. They've broken it off."

"All the same, he'll have a fit. If we should stay here he's apt to come down and try to lug her back. And Ruth will come with him to lug them both back, and incidentally give you a hauling over. She says that you had her in mind when you did those bathing ladies."

"She—holy pigs! She said that? Well, blister it, and so I did, though I never realized it. Her face has stuck in my mind all these years. Sort of an obsession. She must have sunk her teeth in the upholstery, and I don't blame her."

"No," said Timothy slowly, "I think she is saving them for you."

"Well," growled Jerry, "she has my permission to eat as much as she likes. Confound it, Tim, I believe I've always been crazy about that girl!"

"You're not so crazy as she is," said Timothy. Jerry stopped short in his impatient stride and swung about.

"You know how you feel about her. She thinks that she knows how she feels about you, but she thinks wrong. As a matter of fact, you each feel about the other precisely the same way, only Ruth feels it more."

"The devil you say! How?"

"You want each other. Ruth has managed to sidetrack her need so far by doing a lot of war and reform work, but now that this has let up it's beginning to get her. So she tries to put you outside the pale. She rates you as an enemy to society and would accept the news of your destruction with Christian fortitude."

"She would, hey? That's a nice sort of a sweetheart, my word! Well, I'll take jolly good care she doesn't get it. I tell you, Tim, I'd have had a try for Ruth long ago if it hadn't been that I was maimed and busted. But my wrist is getting more useful all the time. I can model perfectly well, now, and even if I were to chuck this job there'd be no trouble about my getting and filling orders. There's a tremendous demand for war memorials, and they'd give a wounded poilu first whack. But I must say I'd rather do fantasy. I'm fed up on war stuff."

"Then keep on doing fantasy and make Ruth swallow it. That might not be so hard as it looks. I've got an idea she's fed up on war stuff, too. Everybody has reactions in their lives. And let me tell you one thing, Jerry; you've got to force her to an unconditional surrender first, if you want a lasting peace."

CHAPTER X.

Alan Campbell was in the foyer of the Hôtel d'Amethyste talking to one of his leading men when Jessamine arrived with Arden's note. He glanced through it, then laughed.

"Some day when I retire I am going to write a book called 'The Lure of the Screen,' Dacre," said he. "Its potency is greater than that of love or gold, filial duty or social position. Babies toddle to it, youths and maidens rush at it, senile age hobbles to it on a crutch."

"Well, why shouldn't they?" asked young Lord Dacre. "Think of the fun we have."

"That, I admit, is unquestionably your motive," Campbell answered, "though why a peer of the realm with civic duties and a distinguished war record should leave his broad and heavily taxed acres——"

"Those are the very reasons, chief," Dacre drawled. "I'm that tender-hearted I can't bear to hear 'em groan. Besides, it helps to pay the shot."

He leaned back in his chair and lighted a fresh cigarette. At this, his twenty-eighth year, the noble earl resembled the Hermes of Praxiteles, the duties of which messenger of the gods he had to some extent rendered during the war as an officer of the signal corps. Later in life he would look like a humorous Jove, and, no doubt, enjoy the favorite recreations of the deity. He was lightly but beautifully proportioned, with fair, curly hair, violet-blue eyes, and features of classic Grecian purity when in repose, which was when asleep. At all other times they gave the impression of one under the joyous influence of ambrosia.

"Here is a note from a Boston maiden in whose heart I planted the seed of ambition coming down on the train," said Campbell. "I have never seen a prettier girl, and I think she is gifted with the requisite reflexes."

"If not, we shall do what we can for her by induction," said Dacre. "Professional?"

"No. Merely social, so far. She is the sister of Gerald O'Connor who did the Nereids' Grotto. Perfect type for the society-girl business. Just what I've been looking for. The post-bellum American daughter who comes down here to rescue her wayward sister-in-law and does a nose spin."

"Am I cast for the pilot?" asked Dacre hopefully.

"I think so. You contrast well. She's nearly as tall as you, dark, high of color and full built. The best of it is, she has always been a lady. It's easy enough to chop out a vampire or cowgirl, sweet lily of the slums, or Florence Nightingale, but there's no philosopher's stone for the transmutation of a lady from the basic material. That's been the stumblingblock of picture plays from their start. And the present standardizing methods have made it harder than ever. We're getting more mediocre every day; more bourgeois. To get a real, live lady you've got to go right to the kennels where they've bred 'em for generations and pick over the litter, then."

"Right-o. Same in England—only there you've got to mind your eye to see that she's not a gentleman."

"No danger here. She never shod a horse or rang a fare. Hasn't a ribbon or a medal. Stayed home and baked the beans."

"Better grab her quick before a museum makes her an offer, chief. You have my permission to carry on when you're ready."

"Well, then, you haven't mine, me lud." Campbell fixed his star with an eye from which frivolity had fled. "No tra-la-la with this girl, if you don't want to find yourself a mere speck in the northern sky."

"Signal read and acknowledged, chief."

Campbell nodded. As a rule, the last thing he bothered himself about was the social relations of his troupes, but there were exceptions. Dacre he considered one of the most dangerous disciples of Eros he had ever encountered, because of the irrepressible light-hearted gayety and love of frolic as disarming as the gambols of a lion cub, and it had happened more than once that he had kept some pretty playmate in laughter up to the moment that it was time for tears. There are countless schools for seduction and his lordship's was the mirthful. His conscience was entirely Olympian; that of the demigod who favors the earth-born. But he was not unkind. He was rather like a small boy who climbs up on the table to smell the flowers and ends by upsetting the vase.

Having hooked his fish, Campbell seemed in no hurry to reel it alongside. He wrote Arden a courteous note to the effect that he was glad to learn that she had seen her way to act on his suggestion and that he would be pleased to have her attend the rehearsals which he proposed to begin within a few days, which would give her an idea of his methods of work and an opportunity to make the acquaintance of his leading artists. The invitation was extended to her father and brothers.

Mr. O'Connor and Jerry thus outflanked made no great demur, first, because with

all of the male members of the family's customary discounting of a daughter's or sister's possible latent talent, they did not believe it would amount to anything, and second, because it had been decided that they were to remain the winter. The sheer delightfulness of the place had conquered the captious Irishman, and he did not believe in his heart that it was destined to become what had been prophesied for it and what he was inclined to regard as an initial advertising stratagem on the part of the management to bring Utopia quickly and conspicuously before the eyes of the gay world. He did not think that it would be any worse than Ostend or the Riviera.

Most of Rosenthal's guests shared the same view. All were enthusiastic, and scouted the idea that such a beauty spot on such broad and original lines could ever become a social menace. They asserted that the clever and in many ways defensive prospectus was a monumental bluff compiled to provoke attack and excited argument. There was too much space, too much open air and athletic diversion for vice. They told Rosenthal as much in a number of witty speeches, and the wily old Jew affected to be desolated. He warned them to wait and see, asserted them to be upon their good behavior, accused them of conspiracy to damn the place by giving it a good name, all with humorous vehemence in his roaring voice and polyglot accent. They departed finally with the warmest sentiments for Utopia and Rosenthal, and spread the glad tidings that the alleged gilded hell was in reality a garden of the benign gods.

For the moment the fate of the place hung actually in the balance. Rosenthal must really have been frightfully scared. But his reasoning turned out to be absolutely sound and based on a profound knowledge of society, for as a result there began to pour in gradually at first and then with an ever-increasing rush precisely the sort of clientèle that he had desired and anticipated; a crowd of mixed ethical ideas in which was a large element of those who secretly longed for what Utopia promised, but would not have dared to face the censure of their neighbors had it opened in a lawless saturnalia. The temperature had to be raised gradually to keep from cracking the vessel. Moreover, the bulk of its long-suppressed patrons had to be educated up to the Utopian idea.

In three months' time his stupendous scheme was all and more than Rosenthal had had dared to hope for in his most sanguine dreams. And what he had never presumed to count on was that the approach of summer saw neither exodus nor falling off of arrivals. It was cooler in Utopia, Haiti, than in Utopia, Kansas, which is not saying that furs were necessary, but the tropical zone has an easier summer climate than the temperate when one knows that one is in it. Utopia's altitude and nearness to the sea made it delicious, and as the holiday cruising weather by sea and sky became settled swarms of pleasure craft dropped daily from the high air or glided into the splendid landlocked port of Jacmel. Port au Prince was used only as a freight depôt.

It was full-blown summer when Utopia struck its full stride. This is not so odd as it might appear when one stops to think. It was vacation time, insufferably hot and sea bathing forbidden all along the coast, except in the shallow water inside the nets staked out as a protection against the swarms of small, ferocious sharks, which had increased with such alarming rapidity during the war. It was claimed that these scavengers had thus multiplied because of the sea fauna killed by the huge quantities of high explosive from mines, torpedoes, and depth bombs. Owing to the stringent laws passed in regard to bathing costumes and the universal prohibition of mixed bathing, practically nobody but the children found it amusing to splash about waist-deep in the tepid water. The taboo on wines and beer had closed the recreation caravansaries. It was dull pleasure to linger over a glass of grape juice or soda water, and there was nothing diverting to watch while so doing.

But a thirty-five-knot steamer or a big avion offered refreshment and exhilaration, and, as these required an objective, a forty-hour run over smooth summer seas took one to Jacmel by ship and fifteen hours by avion at the cooling altitude of ten thousand feet. The pleasure-seeking masses, most of whom were prosperous folk driven from their own country by lack of frivolous fun, began to rush pell-mell to Utopia.

But in spite of this, the O'Connor family found nothing offensive or unseemly in these gay revelers. For one thing, they were occupied in their work, Arden now playing minor rôles for Campbell, Timothy assisting Jerry, and Mr. O'Connor having been

given employment in the administration, and the reservation was so big that the undoubtedly reprehensible performances that went on were not thrust upon one. They were of the visitors' own seeking. But the rumors of them were carried back to the big, well-ordered neighbor on whose very doorstep Utopia skipped and pirouetted, and her name became anathema. To visit Utopia was a mark of the beast. For a married person going there alone, it was just cause for divorce.

How old Rosenthal must have rubbed his hands and chuckled in the loose sleeve of his pongee coat. He pervaded the place like a huge, *mauvaise génie,* radiating a sort of "bless you, my children, have a good time and don't get mad," expression.

Such was the state of affairs when Ralph returned from a year's sojourn in Europe, where he had been establishing new business agencies, and he had not been home twenty-four hours when Ruth took him to see a gorgeous Utopian production of which the screen imprint announced:

ALAN CAMPBELL PRESENTS ARDEN O'CONNOR IN "THE JOY OF LIVING."

CHAPTER XI.

Ralph would not stay the picture through. The play, of course, had passed the Massachusetts board of censors and was entirely proper in depiction and idea, the theme being based on the danger of denaturalizing pleasure and enforcing the sterilized result by legislation, a national topic at that moment.

"I feel as if I had been to Arden's social funeral," he said to Ruth as they went out.

"It is more than that, Ralph," she answered earnestly. "It is the funeral of her soul."

"Nonsense," Ralph retorted, "her soul's not got a scratch. Not so much as a sunburn. But nobody of her set would ever believe it. A motion-picture actress in Utopia! And her father and brother aiding and abetting it." He ignored Timothy as a responsible factor.

"Her father never was a man of any strong moral principle," Ruth remarked, "and Gerald always was a beast. Timothy was the only one of the family that ever gave any signs of spirituality. Arden never seemed to care particularly whether things were good or bad. She merely took them as they came."

"She didn't take me as I came," said Ralph bitterly.

"So much the better for you. The flaw would have shown itself sooner or later and might have wrecked your life."

"I'd rather have it that than derelict," Ralph answered savagely. "It's better to crack on and go to smash than to drift around dismasted. What is there for me to do but make a lot of money I don't need and hand it out to institutions I'm not interested in? No wife, no children, no hearthstone of my own. My time is spent in business meetings and solving trade questions and roosting around in clubs and hotels like a silly owl. What's the good of it all?"

"But it's your own fault, dear," said Ruth gently. "There are plenty of good sweet women——"

"That interest me about as much as the Columbia on a superfluous dollar," Ralph interrupted. "The war was more to my taste than this fat and prosperous peace. It was to yours, too!"

"What makes you think that?" Ruth asked.

"I don't know. You seemed more alive. More vital. Now you are beginning to look rather like a cloistered nun. You are getting thin and I'm getting fat. It ought not to be like that. There's something wrong, something the matter with the practical application of our theories. It's deadly flat over here. You notice it on coming from France. Everybody there seems to be having a good time, though they are taxed up to their ears, while over here where we are all so rotten rich it's like a universal rest cure. It's enough to drive one to drink, if such a thing were possible."

"Thank Heaven it's not," said Ruth. "No, dear, it is merely the reaction from the war when everything was so tense and feverish."

"Well, I must say I prefer the French reaction. It seems more normal. They haven't much left to go on, but they enjoy their lives. I got a certain amount of passive pleasure over there merely in looking on. Here there's nothing to look at but handsome residences and churches and things. It's all right to go to church to pray, but it's not much use when you've nothing to pray for. I might pray for Ar-

den, I suppose, but I'd a lot rather pray to her."

"Ralph!"

"Well, so I would. Don't you ever pray for the benighted Jerry?"

"What interest have I in Jerry?" Ruth demanded hotly.

"That's not the true Christian spirit, Ruth. Pray for his soul, or that he may be struck blind or crippled or something. It's all his fault, confound him. Arden is the only girl I ever wanted, or ever will want, and now she's gone and taken a header into that damned cesspool. I've a good notion to run down and try to fish her out."

Ruth had expected this. More than that, she had even hoped for it. The apparent complexities of most human minds are really not very occult when one stops to think. Here were a born soldier with no enemy to fight and a born reformer with nothing to reform. Ruth was actually far more militant by nature than her brother, for Ralph was neither pugnacious nor hot-tempered. His war success had been due to precisely the same faculties differently applied which had made him an excellent superintendent and business manager. He was a cool-headed strategist; Ruth a keen opportunist.

She had for some time been formulating a scheme of propaganda for the American boycott of Utopia; a national movement something like the infantile kickings of prohibition and woman suffrage, and she desired to visit the place in quest of first-hand data. But similar pretexts for doing this had been worked so threadbare that they had become a current joke, vulgarized in comic supplements and on the stage: "Jones is the most honest chap I know. He said he went to Utopia for a good time," and all that sort of thing.

But to go with one's brother in the effort to redeem to her proper sphere his former fiancée and her own girlhood's friend was irreproachable, so to Ralph's considerable astonishment she answered:

"I have been thinking for some time that perhaps it was our duty to make a personal effort to save Arden. Suppose we both go?"

Ralph stopped short and stared at her, a disconcerting habit he had. Seeing that she really meant it and was not merely trying to stall his own action, he gave a short laugh.

"Gad, you've got your nerve, Ruth. Well, I'm glad. Our reputations can stand it, I guess. Anyhow, the market's rather overburdened with them. When shall we go?"

"The sooner the better, I think. Every day of such a life serves to strengthen its attachments. If only it weren't for her father and Jerry! It has all got to depend on you, Ralph, but I may be able to help. Arden was never difficult to influence. What did you think of her acting?"

"Oh, it was just Arden. It was what anybody who knew her would expect. Sweet and natural and humanly appealing. I can see how she might easily become one of the most popular of all that crowd. If anything happened to arouse her temperamentally, she might develop actual genius for that sort of thing. She's got it in her." He frowned suddenly. "But that chap that played with her—that beauty man, Darcy; there's a type I detest. Can you imagine a peer of the realm playing the fool at this time in England?"

"No," Ruth answered. "It's disgusting, though, no doubt, they would rather have him here than there." Which was scarcely fair to the festive noble lord, the bulk of whose big salary had gone to post-bellum relief work in England and the redeeming of his ancestral acres.

They walked on some distance in silence, then Ralph said abruptly: "Let's go next week by air if the weather holds fine."

"Whatever you say, dear," his sister answered. "But do you want to be there for the Fourth?"

"Yes. Since we're going we might as well see it at its worst, and I've absolutely nothing to do here. Besides, I've heard enough guns go off to last me for a while."

CHAPTER XII.

It was high carnival in Utopia. Where every day is a holiday it takes some considerable effort properly to celebrate those of national or international importance, but Utopia was quite equal to the strain. With the great surplus of gunpowder left at the end of the war fireworks were inexpensive, and Rosenthal with the thorough foresight which was his genius had early invested in enough explosive to have fought the Battle of the Rhine.

And likewise flags! An American ensign of an acre's area had fluttered since sunrise in the strong draft of the trade wind a mile above the reservation and now glowed

against the velvet sky in the powerful beam of a projected light. From huge barges moored in the middle of the lake a pyrotechnic display of stupendous proportions was to continue uninterruptedly throughout the night, and reflected from the still surface, illumined the shores for miles around.

There was music everywhere, and dancing and feasting and bathing in the cool, clear waters which lapped the terrace of the Temple of Fortune. Electric lamps in translucent globes had been laid along the bottom and the swimmers seemed to float in some rare medium which was neither water nor air. And there were private bathing parties where the revelers listed, and much high play in the open-air salons under the leaping porticoes, and champagne flowing like tropic rain.

Ruth and Ralph had arrived at one o'clock that day, having left Montauk the previous night at ten on one of the big avions which made the voyage in about fifteen hours. These ships were fitted with colloid observation floors and windows and had folding bamboo couches. In case of necessity they could float buoyantly upon the water, detaching their wings by casting off the stays and automatic controls, then practically shooting them simultaneously from the compressed air cylinder in which they were stopped.

Ruth had decided not to let the O'Connors know of their arrival immediately, wishing first to look about the place. As their avion circled the great ensign dipping her Haitian colors as she passed, Ralph looked up from the amazing spectacle beneath and shook his head.

"What's one going to do about a place that looks like that from a mile high?" he asked. "It might be an aquarium with flowers laid in the moss around its brim, and that big lotus with the green stem is a quarter of a mile across at the least. And look at the mass of bright insects crawling about."

To Ruth, then, as later, it seemed impossible that they could still be on the planet Earth. Their soaring flight through the starry sky had seemed like a voyage to a different world, which was now spread out beneath them, its denizens bright and glittering folk who lived as much in air and water as on the land. They landed without shock or jar and were sped across the lake to their hotel where the smiling Swiss clerk seemed singularly earth-born and out of place with his brisk, businesslike manner. Rosenthal's great machine moved like a clock for all its bizarre and multiple parts.

The rest of the day was spent sight-seeing in one of the small phaëton electrics, and, although they encountered gayety on every side, Ruth could not honestly say that she had seen one single offensive sight. Even the Nereids' Grotto failed to shock her, though its daring beauty set her heart to pounding. She failed to discover the slightest resemblance between herself and the nymphs, and decided that it must have been due to some freak in the reproduction. Nor did Ralph comment on a likeness. And yet if Ruth had posed there in the same joyous abandon she might easily have passed for one of them.

"I feel as though I had been drugged; eating hashish or something of the sort," she said to Ralph. "My reason tells me that this is all just as bad as it can possibly be, and yet I can't seem to feel it."

Ralph nodded. "That's the trouble," said he. "It's so darned beautiful and different from anything that anybody ever thought or heard or dreamed of that we've got no scale to measure it by. I rather expected to see people drunk and misbehaving all over the place, but everybody seems to be having a perfectly harmless good time. It's when they get home that they'll feel the jolt. Did you ever see such costumes? Le Grand Prix at Auteuil before the war was a Trappist funeral in comparison." He glanced critically at his sister, then smiled. "Upon my word, I believe you like it!"

Ruth flushed. "It excites me," she admitted. "I suppose I have been in need of excitement without knowing it, and there hasn't been any since I left the hospital. Besides, I have an odd feeling of detachment from it all—as if I had landed on Mars or Venus and hadn't any concern about the place and might as well conform with its customs. To be perfectly frank, it rather overwhelms me."

"You can't be blamed for that," Ralph answered. "I can honestly say, though, that for my part it leaves me cold. With all of its magnificence, it doesn't contain a single thing that appeals to me, except Arden, and she doesn't really belong here. So far as the merely spectacular part is concerned, you really can't show much to a man that has watched big battles, and my bump of the

æsthetic is a hollow. But I must say I do enjoy seeing such a lot of people having such a lot of fun. It makes me feel that possibly we Americans have made one great big enormous mistake, and I don't want to feel that. It upsets everything."

Ruth turned and laid her small, strong hand upon his wrist. "Do you know, Ralph, what you have just said, the last of it, is precisely what I feel myself? All of this was absolutely unnecessary. People like ourselves have forced it on society. Timothy was right. We've got an awful lot to answer for. I'm frightened—positively frightened—and I've never been frightened by anything in my life."

"Well," said Ralph slowly, "what are we going to do about it?" He shook his head. "I'm sure I don't know."

"I do!" Ruth interrupted vehemently. "I'm going to disgust myself with it. I'm not going to let it dazzle and bewilder and overwhelm me as it has so many people. I know that it is all horribly wrong, but I want to be convinced. I want to leave it with loathing and abomination, which I certainly shall if I know it well enough."

"But you can't do that," said Ralph, rather startled.

"I can and I shall. This is worse for me than it is for you because, as you say, you are not æsthetic, while I am. I've been fighting that side of me all my life. I love beauty and color and music and art and all those emotional things that this place supplies, but I've always known that it was wrong to indulge them at the cost of serious things, so I haven't let myself indulge them at all. Well, to-night I am going to."

"But why?" asked her mystified brother.

"Because I want the experience. I want the reaction. You have told me yourself that the true reason of the Germans fighting so desperately was jealousy and hatred. I am jealous of this place and I want to hate it. I don't hate it now. It attracts me frightfully, and as I say, it excites me. I want to see its cloven hoof!"

Ralph stole a troubled look at her. Ruth's face held a high flush and her eyes were bright and feverish. There was an eager, unnatural intensity about her that worried him. At home he would have said that she was ill; on the edge of a nervous breakdown. As a matter of fact, she was suffering from a slight laryngitis, the result of a summer cold caught after addressing a large meeting for over an hour and coming out heated to ride home in an open car. This gave her voice a distorted resonance; a muffled huskiness unlike its habitual clear treble.

"Don't let it upset you, my dear," said he soothingly. "It's not your fault, at all. And it all may prove no more than a fad and blow up higher than the balloon that floats that ensign over it. You've caught a cold and ought to rest. We'll have a quiet little supper——"

"No, we shan't," Ruth contradicted, "and I'm not tired at all. I mean to get my level here. We'll go back and dress, and then you are to take me to the gayest restaurant and have a dinner that would have killed us three years ago; hors d'œuvre and fresh caviar and green turtle soup and filet of flying-fish and poulet casserole hôtel du Cerf Blanc—you see I've been reading the menus already—and a salad cœur de palmier and champagne and some old burgundy, moulin-à-vent or Fleury——"

"Champagne—burgundy—are you crazy, Ruth?"

"Not yet, but I'm going to be this one night. I'm ripe for any excess. Do you know what I thought about last night when we sliced through that thunderstorm off the mouth of the Delaware? That after all, if the Lord had intended man to fly he'd have given him wings? That's what I was. Especially before it broke and the electricity was spitting and sputtering on the ends of things.

"No, I thought to myself: 'What if this contraption should suddenly take a nose dive and never stop until it hit bottom about five hundred feet deep? You would expire precisely as you have lived, struggling feebly and impotently and without ever having one great, big, glorious emotion. You have spat and sputtered all your life, getting laws passed to forbid things that you have never felt and don't know anything about, and been either a smug pharisee or a wet blanket. In all of your active, interfering life you have never really lived. And now you are down here dead, just as you were up there living, milling around in your little cage like a tame white rat the family got tired of.'" She paused and looked at her brother with a heaving bosom and eyes that burned. "*Now* what do you think of me, Ralph?"

He placed his strong hand over hers and gave it a little reassuring squeeze. "If we were at the front I should say that you were suffering from shell-shock, my dear," he an-

swered. "As it is, I think that you are suffering from a different sort of shock, but a shock none the less. All this—and the fifteen-hour flight. But I don't, at least, approve the treatment you propose."

"But I *am* at the front, Ralph. The front of my own hidden feelings. And the treatment is precisely what I need. I must be convinced that it is all beastly and degrading, or, at least, I require to be so convinced, and the only way to do so is to feel beastly and degraded. If that happens I shall know where I really stand."

"Nonsense. If you really want to see some of the wild life of this place, wait a few days until you are rested."

Ruth shook her head. "You don't understand, Ralph, dear. I'm afraid I haven't been quite honest. Of course, I wanted to do what I could to get Arden away from this great perfumed monster with its gaudy spots and soft, drowsy pur, and I felt interested to study the habits of the beast, but those weren't my real deeper reasons for coming. I wanted to see if it had the power to make any personal appeal to me. And it has. It does. It upsets me."

"Nonsense——"

"It's true. I meant to give it a fair chance—to do what I have just proposed. I've gone about it in cold blood. This isn't the impulse of the moment. I have got some gowns in my trunk that will startle you, and all of my jewels and cosmetics and things I scarcely know the use of." She laughed at the expression of his face. "I intend to make my début in fast life on the national fête of the country I have worked so hard to purify, or sterilize, if you like. And *now* what do you think of me?"

"I think you ought to get married," said Ralph shortly.

Ruth made a gesture of impatience "Oh, dear, you don't understand at all, brother mine. That's the very last thing I want—to exchange one prison for another. *Please* don't think of me as a restless old maid. Think of me rather as a young tree that's been growing in a tub. I have a horrible suspicion that, unless the staves burst pretty soon, it's going pretty hard with me."

"When did you begin to have these doubts and fears?" Ralph asked.

"When I talked with Timothy one day about Utopia and I realized how we had smothered the fire at home only to have it break out in our neighbor's garage. Then, when I saw the first of Arden's plays, I began to wonder if it was really worth while merely to suppress things without first uprooting the desire for them."

"Don't know but what you're right," Ralph agreed. "It's rather like starting to plow a field in the battle area before you've got it clean of duds. But I'm afraid it will be a long time before this world is clean of duds, sister, dear."

"Of course it will, and we've been working away to smooth them over with a top dressing of nice white sand. But all the time they are waiting for the plow to explode. And I'm one of them. Or, at least, I'm afraid that I am. That's what I've come down here to find out."

"It seems to me that you have found out already," answered her brother grimly.

CHAPTER XIII.

Ralph was one of those men who never argue but achieve their purpose by a quiet application of *force majeur*. Failing this, he wasted no words but accepted defeat for the moment and proceeded to strengthen his position for a future attack.

So now he acceded to Ruth's demand and instructed the driver to return to the Hôtel d'Emeraud, where they went to their rooms, a corner suite overlooking the lake. It was the hottest part of the house, exposed to the full glare of the slanting sun rays, and yet Ruth found it actually cooler than at home, because of the high ceiling, tiled floors, and the thick coral blocks of which the hotel was built and which defied the penetration of the heat.

She bathed in the big, sunk basin, then slipped on a silk peignoir, lay down to rest, when soothed by the soft, fragrant breeze which had sprung up she presently dropped asleep. An hour later she was awakened by the entrance of the maid to help her dress. Like most of the house servants, the girl was a Dominican and spoke Spanish, though she understood a little creole French. The natives of Santo Domingo are a yellow-skinned people, many of them nearly white, and although separated from their black neighbors only by a range of low mountains, mingle scarcely at all and possess little of their primitive African attributes. Inez carried a tray on which was a glass pitcher of cracked ice filled with a rose-colored beverage having a delicate flavor of pomegranate

Ruth could detect no alcohol in its composition, though it undoubtedly contained a little, probably old, native sugar-cane rum, for after drinking a glass she felt pleasantly stimulated and refreshed.

True to her determination of having at least one gay night in Utopia, Ruth had Inez lay out one of her exquisite new gowns, a décolleté creation of sea-foam green Georgette crêpe with a pale-pink lining which, faintly tinted as it was, merged almost imperceptibly with her Parian marble skin. For the first time in her life she tinted her eyebrows, which were rather low, and applied a little rouge to her prettily shaped lips. Inez, already experienced in the art, dressed her thick hair, which was of the pale shade and sheen of new manila fiber, twisting it snugly about her broad, white forehead and secured by a narrow filet of sapphire-blue velvet with a single emerald brooch in the center.

Ruth was almost frightened at the result. She looked like an Aphrodite, or one of Jerry's nereids, though she was far prettier than the latter. Her waist had always been proportionately small, but her costume now elongated it and brought out the beautiful lines of hip and bust, while her full, snowy shoulders and long, round tapering arms with their dimpled elbows surpassed anything Utopia had to offer, which was saying a great deal. Arden's perhaps were as perfectly formed, but fuller, and with a ruddier skin. Arden was like a painting; Ruth like a sculptured figure intensely animated.

She summoned Ralph, who stared at her with a brotherly incredulity none too flattering in one who had hitherto expressed no particular appreciation of her physical charms.

"My word," he gasped, "but you've fulfilled your threat. What the dickens have you done to yourself? You're a whole beauty show and then some!"

"That's not what you are supposed to say," retorted Ruth, half turning to survey the hang of the full skirt in the mirror. "You should merely observe that my gown is extremely becoming to me, thus implying that you have always appreciated my salients, though hitherto unrevealed."

"Well, there's certainly no trouble about that now," growled Ralph. He jerked his head at the mask and domino thrown across a chair, and provided by the management for such as should care to take an active part in the carnival revels without disclosure of identity. "If you really mean to make a night of it, you'd better slip on the mask at least before you start. You might run into somebody you know. One never can tell in a place like this."

"Perhaps I may before the night is over," Ruth answered with a dangerous smile. Ralph's brows contracted slightly, and he glanced at the pitcher and empty glass. Ruth guessed his thought and laughed. She had an unconscious trick of raising her chin when she laughed, higher than do most people, and looking down her cheeks. Ordinarily on the rare occasions she indulged in mirth this was unnoticeable, but now with her bare throat and tinted lips it gave her a singularly seductive posture. "Did they bring you some, too?" she asked.

"Yes," Ralph answered. "I thought it very good and entirely harmless, but then I have never been a total abstainer except when so compelled."

"It's not that stuff," Ruth answered. "I've been excited ever since I made up my mind to come here. But cheer up, dear. I'll try to behave. If you want me to mask, though, you'd better do so yourself, as if anybody from Boston sees you fêting a blond masqué in a gown like this your thirty-five years of righteous living would never stand the strain. That's the trouble with a reputation for virtue. It takes years of step-watching to get it, and you can lose it in two minutes. Shall we mask?"

"No," growled Ralph. "Masks enough for me during the war. Besides, I don't care. I'm sick of the ivory tower. And so far as you are concerned, I doubt if mother herself would recognize her prim Minerva. And that husky, bacchanalian voice. Blessed, if you don't remind me of one of Jerry's sirens."

The flush brought to her cheeks by this careless remark was the last touch needed to make the resemblance unmistakable. Then, seized by an access of perversity, she flung her beautiful bare arms above her head, swayed backward and laughed at him, striking the pose of abandon in the foremost figure of the group.

But Ralph did not laugh. His stern blue eyes narrowed and he stared at her with a sudden, fierce intensity while his features set in rigid lines. His expression sobered Ruth, who straightened immediately, letting her arms fall at her sides. The color left

her face which assumed its habitual expression. But the damage had been wrought; the fierce suspicion aroused.

"Damnation!" swore Ralph savagely. "Could that brute have had you in mind when he molded those mopsies?" The rage of recent battlefields blazed suddenly from his piercing eyes. "I'll kill him if he did and——"

"Nonsense!" said Ruth sharply. "He hasn't seen me for years. You are not very complimentary, Ralph."

"And now that I think of it, he was always pretty keen about you. Mauled you twice to my positive knowledge."

"And the rest of the family's, thanks to you."

"Well, I won't tattle this time, by gad! If I really thought——"

Ruth slipped in front of him and laid her hand on his lips. "Ralph," she cried, "do you want to spoil the one gay evening I've ever had in my life? And do you want to put Arden out of your reach forever? She adores Jerry, and would never believe such a thing of him. Neither would I, for all his uncouthness. Besides, it's absurd. The faces of those huzzies are just the nymph type and lots of artists have used it—Gervex and Henri Tenre and Cabanel—the wide-faced, turned-up nose, mischievous sort. Do you think that I am like that?"

"You were just now," Ralph muttered, then gave a short laugh. "I guess this place is making me balmy, too. Of course it's impossible, but just for the moment—anyhow, I beg your pardon, Ruth."

"*Pas de quoi.* Come on, then. I'm hungry as a wolf thinking about that costly dinner I shall order."

The shadows were lengthening as they went out into the motley which thronged about the hotel. Many of the revelers were in costume, many merely in mask and domino, for night treads on the heels of sunset in the tropics. The carnival colors were naturally red, white, and blue in honor of the day, but there were myriad others weaving in and out. Ruth caught her breath at some of the flashing limbs and bodies, and wondered what it would be like later if this were only the beginning.

They stepped into a gondola electric and became one of the fleet of brilliant water insects flitting across the gleaming waters of the lake to the great amber-colored Pavilion Lucullus from which lights were already beginning to stream. Halfway across a floral shower fell from circling aircraft which had mounted to see the night spread on Utopia. Distant strains of music reached them, tremulous and sweet. Spicy, exotic odors of the jungle were borne to them on the waning breeze.

Ralph had recovered his amiability, and on arriving they were assigned a table next the parapet overhanging the lake. Many diners had already arrived, coming early to be in time for certain entertainments later, of which there were but single performances. There were to be grand opera, a revue, symphony concert, drama legitimate, and comedy, with continuous dancing and motion pictures and fireworks and feasting.

Ruth selected such a banquet as she had promised, and Ralph, gradually infected by the prevailing atmosphere of open-air gayety, let her have her way without demur. A Utopian apéritif, delicate of flavor, but pungent of effect, set her tingling in every fiber for the moment, and pleasurably so. Vintage champagne followed, though she took it sparingly, not wishing to dull her acute impressions in a vinous haze.

She desired to see it all, feel as much of it as her senses would accept, absorb as much of the reckless pleasure passion as her nature would permit. But she meant to do it gradually. Her object was to feel the weight of this insidious force which bore against society and herself, but she purposed to do so with caution, like a mariner weighing the wind against his billowing sails. Still, later, she was willing to risk a more violent encounter if that were necessary to fuller knowledge. Her combative nature was prepared to sustain shock and buffet and even violent subsequent reaction of a most unpleasant kind if that were necessary to reveal the relations of her enemy and herself.

If Ralph had to any extent realized the length to which Ruth meant to carry her experiment, he would have remonstrated strongly. But he was deceived by her unaffected gayety, which was not at all that of a serious-minded investigator, but a young and beautiful woman who was thoroughly enjoying herself for the first time in a way which had always been opposed to her most strongly rooted principles. To her brother's direct and masculine mind it was merely that the extraordinary features of the place had bolted with her at a moment when she

was weary and discouraged about her work. That happened to everybody, some time, and as she was no featherhead no doubt the best thing for her was just what she was doing; reversing the current through a jaded high-tension coil. If she had a headache the next morning that would convince her that she had always been right about the business.

So he gave her free rein, rather pleased at the admiration she excited and amused at the transformation from a rigid reformer, and after dinner took her to a revue which which would have been banned in Paris but brought shrieks of laughter and applause from the delirious Utopian audience, and then, having had his fill of what he regarded as maudlin, erotic insanity, Ralph asked if she had not enough of it and suggested that they return to the hotel, to which Ruth quietly agreed. He was astonished at her composure and that the wine she had drunk did not appear to have had the slightest effect.

So they spun back across the lake, Ralph rather sleepy and Ruth seething like a fireless cooker within, though outwardly as cool as this invention. She wished her brother good night, then going into her room drew a wicker to the long French window and sat for a long while staring at the display of fireworks in the middle of the lake and listening to the diapason of noise which sounded like the hum of myriad insects.

Her heart was throbbing like the motor of an avion. New senses were alert and quivering. Impulses hitherto suppressed clamored for expression. The idea of sleep was hideous. She felt instinctively that it would be fraught with frightful dreams. The feral qualities in her nature were gnawing at their leash. She felt like a cheetah which had coursed but failed to make its kill. So far her experiment had been a failure. She was unsatisfied; eager for more. The reaction expected and desired was not in sight.

Glancing at the clock, she saw that it was but one o'clock. Ruth rose and stepped out on the balcony. The windows of Ralph's room at its inner end were dark. She reentered her own and, going to her trunk, unlocked it and took out her opera bag which contained a roll of bills and some small change. Then, picking up the black, silken mask, she slipped it on, surveyed herself for a moment in the glass and went out, down the coral stairs and into the dazzling night.

CHAPTER XIV.

In a place where all days are fête days, more or less, and those of international significance continually celebrated, the workers go about their handicraft unmoved.

Jerry had spent a busy day in the studio and after dinner attended a meeting of his fellow artists, when plans for certain new features were presented and discussed. This was held in Rosenthal's villa near the Temple of Fortune, and despite the racket and hubbub from without, a council of war could have been no more dignified and sedate. Nothing in Utopia was done without due deliberation by the advisory board in full session, and this was composed of the world's leading artists, engineers, and architects.

The meeting adjourned a little after one and Jerry went out and strolled along the broad esplanade known as "The Bund" to the private landing where he had left his launch. This was the vortex of the wildest carnival gayety, now at its height, but Jerry, trim and correct in his white serge and small pith helmet, passed on his way as oblivious to the turmoil as a few years before he had gone about his business through bursting bombs and scattering machine-gun fire. Now, as then, it was all a part of the day's work.

Opposite the illuminated swimming baths he paused to roll a cigarette, and, leaning against the parapet, studied the curious effect of the flashing bodies weaving and gyrating in the brilliant water. This was a feature which Jerry had opposed as being garish and inartistic, and as a spectacle it had always displeased him. There was no lack of well-shaped forms, but the postures as they wriggled while thus suspended were grotesque and reminded him of a live frog impaled as bait on a bass hook.

He was watching them a bit disgustedly and wishing that the feature had not become so popular as to render its suppression difficult, when a woman in a pale-green evening gown and wearing a black mask stepped to the parapet at his side and stood for a moment beautifully poised, her finger tips on the coral slabs, looking down at the whirling figures. The light was brilliant, and Jerry glancing at her casually was struck by the beautiful modeling of her neck and shoulders. One hand was raised to the tulle at her bosom, the other barely touching the

parapet. She reminded him of the portrait of Princess Louise coming down the stairway.

She stood thus for a moment, then turned slowly to him, and he could feel the intensely examining scrutiny through the narrow eyelets of the mask. The eyes within looked black, in which case the wonderful chevelure must be either false or dyed. He decided that it was dyed. An actress, probably, thought Jerry, and possibly having recognized him desired him to speak. He flicked away his cigarette.

"Odd sight, isn't it?" said he, in his easy, informal manner. "Fun to do, I suppose, but disagreeable to watch."

"Then why do you watch it?" she asked, not unpleasantly, but as if curious, and her husky voice gave Jerry a peculiar shock.

"As a sculptor it is interesting to see what postures to avoid," he answered. "An indifferent swimmer strikes such distorted ones. One doesn't realize it in the water, but this light is merciless. Nothing pretty about it, do you think?"

"No, it's not pretty," she agreed. "They remind me of microbes in a drop of culture as one sees them through the microscope with a reflected light."

She turned slowly to resume her inspection of the swimmers, and at that moment Jerry recognized her as Ruth. Something in the slow, graceful movement, the curve of the beautiful neck and its set upon the splendid shoulders, the contour of the wrist betrayed her. Perhaps it was something deeper than this; some sixth sense or telepathic current. Whatever it was, there could be no doubt.

And yet of all the people in the world she was the very last he would have thought possible to find there. And she was alone, in daring décolleté, while the vivid light revealed the smear of rouge on her lips and the penciling applied to her eyebrows with an unaccustomed hand.

Jerry leaned against the parapet in a silent struggle for self-possession. Nothing in peace or war had ever so staggered him. Ruth in Utopia, on the Bund alone at such an hour and in such a crowd, masked, rouged, bare of throat and arms—what prodigy had happened? What catastrophe occurred? He grew suddenly cold, then pulled himself together, and to hide his agitation started to roll another cigarette with fingers which trembled.

While doing so he stole a look at her. She was staring down at the swimmers as though fascinated by them. Of course, she had recognized him, but, trusting to her mask and altered voice, had been unable to resist the temptation of a few words. She knew that his mind could never grasp the possibility of her being there. Could she possibly have suffered some inconceivable moral debâcle, the result of a nature too rigidly suppressed? Such things had happened to other women, and he had always felt that Ruth was temperamental in her depths. He drew a deep, silent breath, placed the cigarette between his lips and lighted it. Ruth was still staring at the swimmers. In the struggle for her own composure she had not perceived his own.

When she looked up Jerry was master of his shocked emotions. "You seem to find it amusing, yourself," said he, in a normal voice.

"I find it all amusing," she answered. "That and a good deal more. This is my first visit, but I think that I shall come here often. It seems to satisfy a long-filled want. Besides, it does not matter any longer what I do."

Jerry felt as if a long, sharp icicle had been run through his heart. "Why not, if I may ask?" he managed to say.

Ruth gave a hard little laugh. "Because I am a failure," she answered. "This is a good place to forget one's failing, as long as it is not pecuniary, and that is not my trouble." She turned her face to his, and as she faced the glare he saw her pupils contract. "You say you are a sculptor? I suppose you have come here to study some of these wonderful works of art."

"No," Jerry answered, his heart like a stone, "I came to create. I am one of the regular staff of artists here. I did the Nereids' Grotto."

"Really?" she exclaimed. "Then you must be O'Connor. I have seen the grotto. It is a masterpiece. You must have had a charming model for your pretty nymphs."

"I had," Jerry answered, "but I did not find it out until after I had finished them."

"That she was so charming?"

"No," he answered sternly, "that I had any model at all. I thought that I had modeled them from——"

"Memory?"

"No. Imagination."

"I doubt if there is any such thing," said

Ruth. "It is all memory, I think, either of something in this life or a previous existence. I seem to remember all of this——" she waved her arm in a graceful, encompassing gesture. "Perhaps I was a dancer of Babylon. But it was necessary to come here to imagine—I mean remember such a thing. Dancing disgusted me before my failure. But I should like to dance here—and now." The brilliant eyes flashed at him from behind the mask. "Will you dance with me?" she asked.

"If you wish," Jerry answered heavily, "though I gave up dancing long ago. But tell me, first, what was the cause of your failure?"

"Utopia," she answered. "The promoters of this place really have a lot to answer for, haven't they?"

"No more than the puritanical bigots whose 'thou shalt nots' forced it on the Western world," retorted Jerry hotly. "Oh, well, we're all failures more or less, though precious few of us admit it as long as our bank balance shows a credit. I've been a failure all my life and even in that regard until quite recently. Come on, let's dance, and afterward, if you like, I'll take you for a spin on the lake in my speed launch. We can run to the upper end and take in the view from the bluffs."

"How nice," she murmured, and try as she did, she could not keep the faint shade of mockery from her voice. For here was Jerry who, as Timothy claimed, had never heart for any woman but herself yielding to the invitation of a masked stranger. "But why am I so favored?"

"Oh, we failures ought to stick together," he answered brusquely, then offered his arm to lead her to the nearest dance pavilion.

CHAPTER XV.

They were both good dancers, strong and light upon their feet, and before they had been two minutes on the gleaming floor Ruth found her past history weirdly repeating itself.

In her girlhood it had always exhilarated her to dance with Jerry, because he was so strong yet light upon his feet, and their movements seemed naturally in such perfect rhythmic accord. At such times her feeling toward him had been singularly perverse; antipathy in her head and sympathy as to her feet. She would have died before admitting even to herself that she had not hated him from the feet up, or that the pressure of his powerful arm and clasp of his strong hand aroused any other emotion than a combative one.

But she admitted it now, even while telling herself that this hatred and contempt had increased tenfold with the passing years. It seemed to her that they had never been in such close physical coördination, and that any but a creature of mud such as he molded must have felt instinctively her true identity. Had Ruth been blindfolded and danced with a dozen different men, including Jerry, she would have known which was he before the first ten steps were paced. And here was her ancient enemy no doubt flattering himself that he had made a new and charming conquest.

Jerry for his part was reflecting what an animated lump of clay Ruth must take him for to believe that he had not recognized her from the first. His first shock past a widening doubt was wedging in. Your constitutional reformer, he remembered, would go to any length to gather evidence and impressions, and in many confirmed cases rather enjoy the justifiable experience. Ruth was no longer a young girl but a mature and ripened woman who felt quite capable of taking care of herself in any situation. Arden had told him of her unremitting efforts as president of the local purity league. It was impossible that anything disastrous could have happened her in her home circle and in so short a time. He began to think that he had been a fool. She was a spy. She had come to Utopia for purposes of espionage and hostile propaganda. Running upon himself, it had pleased her to pay him off for having stolen Arden from the fold. No doubt her proposed finale would be to reveal herself and heap him with ridicule and contempt.

This suspicion became a firm conviction when presently a tentative pressure of the hand brought a quick, reflex return. He slightly tightened the clasp of his arm and felt her yield to it. Jerry's Irish temperature began to rise, but not entirely from anger. Even while he felt that she was mockingly enticing him while scorning him as of old, it was still maddening to have her so close. She had always been the one woman of his dreams. He would have loved her tenderly as well as passionately if she had conceded him but just a little, and he

would have been faithful to her. As it was, he had never given her up in his heart.

So here were a man and a woman whom the high gods had fashioned for each other reluctant to leave each other's arms and ready to fly at each other's throats. No such stupid tragedy could occur to any other animal than the human.

They finished dancing and went out on the Bund again, two people as hostile to each other as it is possible to imagine. Both were actuated by the same intention; a final rupture so violent that it would blast to the very roots all lingering desire for contact with the other. With Ruth this was more sweeping, more complete. She wished to fling the attraction which she now acknowledged this man had always held for her on the refuse heap with all these other lewd deceptions. This done, she felt that she could return to her plow with a heart purged of doubts and dreads.

Jerry's purpose was a grimmer, harsher one. He had always accepted the fact that Ruth was a noncompromising pharisee of limited understanding and bigoted beliefs, but, considering her birth and circumstances, he had not blamed her for it. But he had thought her honest, and this trap which she now seemed setting for him roused his fury and disgust. Very well, he would walk into it, and then walk out again emancipated from all further tantalizing hunger for her. Thereafter he would be a heart-free, want-free man.

"Aren't you thirsty?" he asked abruptly. "Wouldn't you like something to drink before we start on our spin?"

"Yes," Ruth answered. "I should like some champagne. That seems to be the natural fluid here."

For a moment Jerry was staggered, knowing her as he did. The wine was really no necessity to her heartless plan, he thought. They seated themselves at a table near the parapet and he gave the order. Ruth drank thirstily, like one whose throat is parched and feverish. Jerry's own beverage was principally cracked ice.

The character of the night was gradually growing worse. Maudlin revelers were reeling past in groups and couples, half costumed, masks awry or torn from flushed or pallid faces. Many were singing, or trying to sing in toneless, alcoholic voices. Occasionally a small electric phaëton driven by a stalwart uniformed black picked its way cautiously through the swaying throng bearing to hotel or bungalow some unconscious victim of excess. Here and there loud voices arose for a moment in wrangling to die drunkenly away. And high above the great ensign stood steadily out in the rush of air not felt beneath, and higher still shone the low-hung stars against the deep indigo tropic sky.

"This is the time of night that Utopia becomes a great immoral lesson," said Jerry, "but those who understand her purpose better are already in bed. Those who are left would be fools most anywhere in one way or another. I'm afraid, though, it's the very devil of a place. Shall we go?"

"It is very nice of you to take me," Ruth answered. "Are you sure that you do not mind?"

"Very. You are sympathetic to me and I like your fearlessness. If we were really to know each other we might become exceedingly good pals. This is the first time I have entertained a lady alone in Utopia, and I am taking you to one of my favorite solitary haunts. Few people go there, especially at night. This is a most peculiar place. One has only to cross the boundary line to step into primitive savagery. No doubt, at this very moment, the blacks are holding a voodoo dance in some black valley not five miles from here as their ancestors did in Africa a thousand years ago."

"That could be no worse than this," said Ruth.

"Not so bad, as they have eliminated the human sacrifice. Both are now prohibited in the States, I believe, so the American darkies will have to hit on something worse. Here we are, to the right——"

He placed her in the launch, stepped in and seated himself on the cushioned chair beside her, threw in a switch, and they started off. The swift, gliding motion over the still, dark depths away from the blazing tumult of the Bund and toward the shrouded mysterious gulf ahead seemed to Ruth like a passage of the Styx. She felt that she had to pay the ferryman his fee and put behind her forever the vanities and temptations which had stormed up suddenly to threaten her peace. For the first time her experiment promised success.

The strains of delirious music grew fainter, the tuneless babel of voices died away. No other boats were near, for these like moths fluttered on the arc of the glaring orbit to be

drawn irresistibly into its vortex. They had slipped silently into stillness and shadow. The lake gleamed like an emerald in the dark, its steep confines looming with a profundity of texture felt rather than seen. An odor of exotic vegetation drenched in dew rested on its surface.

"A different phase of Utopia," said Jerry. "Its darker and more dangerous aspect. But one would scarcely bother to come here if it weren't for the other. Do you want to go on? Do you want to learn it all? Or shall we turn back?"

Ruth's eyes glowed at his from behind the mask. "I want to learn it all."

"Very well. I am an unlicensed guide. You are sure you are not afraid?"

"I shall never be afraid again," she answered.

"My compliments. That is one of the perquisites of failure. There is nothing more that matters to lose."

"What do you think that I have lost?" she asked.

"I don't know. Whatever it was you held most dear. It might have been your lover or it might have been your faith. After that, there is really no great choice in either. One is about as good to embrace as another, don't you think?"

"Yes," she answered, "or as bad."

Presently the opposite shores closed in and the swift launch skirted precipitous cliffs, so close that it seemed unsafe to Ruth in that plushy darkness. But Jerry, who had seen the sheet of water raised in level, knew that there was nothing to fear from rock or snag. They swerved slightly and dipped into a deeper recess of which the sides seemed closing in upon them. For a short space they sped on like an arrow driven into a fold of velvet, then the launch slowed, its humming ceased like an insect as it alights and it glided alongside a little jetty of moss-covered stone. They stepped out and Jerry tossed the tiny grapnel to the other side.

"Give me your hand," he said. "This will be the blind leading the blind, but I know the way."

Ruth obeyed, and together they picked their steps along the jetty to strike a narrow path which immediately pierced the jungle, an oval tunnel so narrow that a pair walking side by side brush the dense foliage with extended hand. Here the darkness was absolute, heavy, impenetrable, and saturated with the odor of stephanotis. With an instinctive motion Ruth pushed her mask up above her forehead. She had scarcely counted on this plunge in so dense and aromatic a stygian blackness, but she did not falter. It was for this that she had come.

Jerry passed her arm under his and still clasping her hand pressed it against his chest. Ruth could feel the pounding of his heart. The path wound upward at a steep incline, but a faint light now filtered through from overhead, and they were able to follow it. Neither spoke, and presently both were breathing rapidly. Jerry stopped but did not free her hand and Ruth made no effort to withdraw it.

"A steep climb," he said, "but it is worth it."

"I wonder if it really is," she answered.

"I think so. After that quagmire back there one craves the heights."

"Low heights, I am afraid," said Ruth.

"Would you rather go back?" Jerry asked.

"After coming this far? No. Would *you?*"

"No. I have always dreamed of visiting this place with such a companion as you. Heretofore I have always come alone."

"Word of honor?"

"Word of honor. And I do not think that I shall ever visit it with any other woman. It shall be sacred to the dear unknown."

He bowed his head and brushed the back of her hand with his lips. With a fearful effort Ruth held herself firm. It was working out as she had thought.

But it was not working out as Jerry had thought. Though convinced that it was her plan to give him line until she judged the moment come to reveal herself and strike in the barb, his rush of hot anger had passed. It was always so with Jerry. He could act ruthlessly in temper but not in cold blood. It was one thing to dance with her, to hold her close in that crowd of frantic revelers, and another to have her here to himself alone in this solitary, savage recess. There, the contact had maddened him. Here it brought a sudden surge of protective tenderness.

And if there was any one quality which the man possessed himself and honored in others, it was courage. Bigoted, Ruth might be, cruel and heartless and uncompromising she might be, but she was brave. Otherwise she would not have been there. She had always thought him rough and lawless;

she did not know how much more the war and Utopia might have brutalized him, and yet she was not afraid. Here she was in his power, as far removed from any human aid as though marooned with him upon a desert island, and at best in no position to denounce him, yet fearless and undismayed. He had always admired this trait in her, and now suddenly he found himself adoring it. Puritan though she might be, she was his proper mate.

Breathing heavily, he led her on and upward and soon they saw ahead a round, star-flecked patch of sky. On either side the jungle thinned, then gave way to a grove of conifers, great pines with plumy tassels, and the hothouse odors oppressive below were replaced by the cool, sweet scent of piny balsam. The carpet under their feet distilled these aromatic perfumes as they trod it. Out they came on a flat shelf of the mountain when the wonderful panorama burst upon them suddenly in all the marvelous beauty of its nocturnal glamour.

Below and beyond stretched the lake in the chalice of the high hills. A distant glow as from an active crater marked the dying pulsations of the Bund, but the fireworks had ceased and far beyond the mountain-tops were nebulous in the first faint promise of the dawn. At this hour and from this spot the savage majesty of the place came into its own, dwarfing Utopia in its splendor, pitifully soothing it as its hectic fever ebbed.

Ruth stood silently staring out before her. Jerry, still holding her unresisting hand, was staring, too. So great was her absorption in the splendor of the spectacle that she scarcely seemed to hear him speaking until startled into amazed attention by the sound of her own name. He was slightly in advance of her, sharply out against the paling sky while she, her cheek almost brushing his shoulder, stood in the darkness of the pines.

"Oh, Ruth, Ruth," said he, "why must we be such bitter enemies!"

Ruth snatched away her hand. "Are you talking to yourself?" she demanded, and slipped down her mask. She knew that he had not looked at her face.

Jerry turned slowly. "No," he answered, "to you. And you might as well take off your mask. The dawn that is coming might as well try to hide itself from me behind one of these trees."

She knew that he had not meant any poetic figure of speech. The boyish plaint in his voice assured its truth.

"But Jerry"—she gasped—"my voice, my clothes, my being here alone, the way I have acted——"

"Oh, you've caught a cold, I suppose, or strained your voice or something. And I guessed the reason for your being here. You came to see the thing in all its full horror, and try to devise some antidote if it were humanly possible, which it is not. It is too late."

"You thought that? Immediately?"

"Almost. For a second, though"—his voice was humbly apologetic—"my blood ran cold."

"You mean it occurred to you that I—that something terrible had happened me? And you were not glad?"

"Glad!" He drew a deep breath. "I felt as I did once when I got a Boche bayonet through my shoulder and thought that the next lunge was going through my heart. But that was only for a moment. As soon as I got time to think I knew that it could no more be, than that I could have cried 'Kamerad!'"

"But what did you think? Why did you dance with me and bring me here and hold my hand and—and kiss it?"

"I wanted to help you," he admitted penitently. "Help you get what you came here for; loathing and disgust of the whole rotten show, and I thought I might as well throw in myself for good measure. You seemed to want it. I guessed that it was your idea to scrap me with the rest and make the job complete. It seemed to me that, perhaps, that might be the best thing for both of us."

"Why for you?"

"So that for me you would cease to exist. I thought that I had pretty well managed to get you out of my mind. Then the family came down here and the old fever started up again. So I decided to finish it all, you can guess how. Don't make any mistake, Ruth; there was nothing noble and self-sacrificing about what I meant to do. It was to bring you here and give you a taste of the darker side of Utopia; to frighten you for once in your life, if such a thing were possible, and at any rate to shock and horrify you."

Ruth pushed back her mask and stared intently into his face. "Why didn't you, Jerry?" she asked.

"I couldn't. Back there on the Bund I might have managed it. But here, alone with me in this wild place"—he drew his breath deeply—"I felt for the first time in my life that I really loved you. I wanted to spare you all that. Not that I cared about myself, but for you. Besides, it wasn't necessary. You were feeling the reaction of this thing and didn't need that as well. Did you?"

Ruth raised her beautiful bare arms and pressed her hands against her throbbing temples. Failure seemed raising its stricken head. "You—kissed my hand——" she murmured, fighting hard against the rising tide that seemed to threaten everything.

"That was a little good-by kiss. I had made up my mind to tell you everything, just as I am doing. Of course, there can never be anything between us. We are like water and sulphuric acid. But at least we might part friends. I think that I have always loved you and that I shall always love you, but we are in enemy camps. I am anything but partisan of this one, but on the other hand I have no sympathy for yours. It has done incalculable harm."

He turned and stood for a moment looking toward the other end of the lake, where sixteen miles away the containing hills were beginning to lighten. The still water shone as if from some pale, diaphanous radiance far beneath their depths. Faint, luminous waves passed in slow vibration across the sky, rapidly changing from indigo to amethyst, the stars winked out and disappeared. Birds were testing their morning notes and high overhead a flock of flamingoes glowed like drifting embers, their roseate plumage reflecting the sun rays soon to bathe the earth. A little breeze flecked the surface of the lake and brought with it a freshness which seemed to wash away the heavy odors of the night.

Ruth felt her soul expand like the growing day. She flung down her mask and set her slippered foot upon it. The time for masks had passed. New impulses tingled through every cell and fiber. She had never felt so pulsingly alive. Her dark forebodings seemed to dissipate like the mist wreaths on the shores below.

She looked at Jerry's clean-cut profile and thought how strong and virile and tempered it had grown. She glanced at the broad, scarred wrist and hand when it flashed across her mind that this mutilation had been suffered in the great struggle against arbitrary, autocratic rule of which the motto was: "Our way is right because it is ours." Had not that been her own, though in an opposite extreme?

Jerry turned suddenly and their eyes met. The swift rising sun shot a band of flame to the zenith and found reflection in their faces. Ruth smiled.

"Another day, Jerry," she murmured.

"Ruth, why do you look at me like that?"

She raised her gleaming arms and her smiling lips quivered. The tears gushed into her eyes.

"Because I love you, Jerry. Can't you see, dear?"

Her lashes swept down and a tear which sparkled like a jewel detached itself and fell upon her bosom. Jerry gathered her in his crushing arms. Her face turned up to his with thirsty lips, while her hands caught his head and strained it even closer in a frenzy of possession. And when breath was gone she still clung to him, gasping broken words of endearment, the thought of which three days before would have shocked her to the core.

The world was a rosy, shimmering mist shot with great tongues of living flame. She seemed to be flying through an electrified space with a musical rush of wind and the substance of myriad cellular explosions, which brought the slaking of some intense affinity. Her entity became the sport of elemental forces each molding it joyously into something new and complete.

Thus recreated, she presently recovered to find herself at Jerry's side and principally in his arms, sitting on the fallen trunk of a big pine, her hair tumbled about her shoulders and her breath coming in spasmodic gasps. With the returning rush of consciousness came the curious sense of a different personality. It was another Ruth who sat there on that log staring at Utopia with misty, uncomprehending eyes.

CHAPTER XVI.

Life in Utopia was beginning to pall on Mr. O'Connor. There was nothing of the *dolce far niente* Southron in this energetic Irishman. He liked the rigors of a northern winter climate, the tang of cold air and brisk exercise.

In Utopia there was little of the soft do-nothing about his existence, as Jerry had

found him occupation in the auditing department directly under Rosenthal himself, for which big Mephistophelean Jew he had, oddly enough, come to conceive a lively friendship and esteem. But the Utopian idea had always been distasteful to him, and as its license steadily increased so did his discontent at being associated with it.

Timothy and Arden were a source of continual surprise to him. They were both acting for Campbell now and with almost equal success, Timothy's beautiful, spiritual face, lean, rangy body and unquestioned, artistic talent filling a constant demand for romantic rôles, and both photographed to perfection. At first O'Connor had watched them narrowly for some symptom of demoralization by the life and place, and when after some months of steady work this failed to show itself, he was more puzzled than relieved.

"Bless my soul," he said one day to Campbell whom he met frequently at the official club of the Utopians, "if the visitors to this place only took it as we do, it would be a most delightful resort."

"Until it failed for several billion dollars," Campbell answered. "But it is all up to the patrons. They have it in their power to make Utopia any sort of a place they choose. There is no pressure but their own inclinations put upon them to misbehave. Utopia does not maintain a single vicious person or establishment except the Temple of Fortune, and people can gamble anywhere."

"Right you are—and not know it at the time. I once did that with a velvet business in northern France. The late Kaiser Wilhelm II. was the gambler. But 'tis strange about how some people knowin' there is mischief afoot cannot rest easy until they are in it to the ears, while others, though livin' in its very broth, do not seem conscious it is there."

Campbell smiled. "You are thinking of your son and daughter," said he.

"Y' are a good guesser, Mr. Campbell. Now there is Arden full of red blood and the joy o' life, and Timothy an actor and the writer of poetry, which between us two I do not always approve, both of them young and impressionable, and neither seemingly aware that their surroundings are more sinful than Boston Common of a Sunday morning."

"They are not, to them," Campbell answered. "No doubt to Timothy they are much less dangerous because they are not so insufferably dull. Nine people out of ten are driven to cussedness out of sheer boredom. The tenth might have a natural leaning that way. This is a good place for the vicious tenth to come when it gets away with them."

"I believe y' are a champion of the scheme! But what d' ye think will be the effect of it all month in and month out on my two chicks?"

"Negative. Just absolutely none at all. And the chances are that all this sort of thing will never make any appeal to them afterward. Anyhow, you needn't worry. It hasn't hurt them so far, and they will not be here but three weeks longer if they decide to stick on with me. I've decided not to renew my contract for the exclusive motion-picture rights. I've licked the cream off this jug and am going to shift the whole outfit to Los Angeles. Another year will see us pouring a couple of million troops into Mexico, I believe, and I'm already starting some Mexican stuff to back the prophecy. Talk about gambles! But I've made my killing here."

This was after dinner the night of the Fourth, and if the honest Irishman could have seen his daughter at that moment he would have heartily indorsed the truth of Campbell's remarks. For with Utopia a seething mass of riotous pleasure fanatics spending their forces on every side with the lavish extravagance of the volcanic fireworks in the middle of the lake, Arden alone on the roof of the little cottage was peacefully darning her father's socks.

It is quite true. Arden, the beautiful and charming moving-picture star, the most promising of the Campbell débutantes, was under the roof awning busily plying her needle by the brilliant glare of Utopia at nearly midnight of the glorious Fourth. She was performing this housewifely task with pleasure and pride that she darned her father's socks better than anybody else who had ever performed the service.

Aside from the patriotic significance of the fête, the O'Connor family scarcely were conscious of it. After dinner Mr. O'Connor had gone as usual to the club for a game of billiards, his usual custom. Jerry was attending his meeting, and had said that if kept late he might sleep in the studio, while Timothy had been invited to dine informally at the executive mansion of the poet-president

of Haiti, Doctor Acajou, who had shown an interest in the boy's literary and dramatic efforts. Arden having had a long siesta on this holiday was not sleepy and had turned her attention to her father's wardrobe.

She had about finished her filial duty, and, though not at all sleepy, was thinking of bed when she heard the hum of an electric launch which appeared to stop under the porte cochère, or, to be more accurate, the porte aquatique which overhung the lake. Thinking that it was Jerry who had decided to return, she laid down her work, and, walking to the parapet, looked over. A long, slim electric speed launch was reversing its motor as it came to a stop and a man in white was standing ready to step out.

"Is that you, Jerry?" Arden called.

"No," came the answer in a familiar voice. "It's I—Dacre."

"What do you want, Fitz?" Arden asked. "I am just going to bed."

"No rest for the weary," answered Dacre's cheerful voice. "Campbell has sent me to fetch you. He's been looking over the orgies on the Bund and says it's the maddest jumble yet, and as the air has cleared he's going to shoot a few furlongs of film for the Deliria play. Same we did a couple of weeks ago at the last shindy. He wants you to slip on the most décolleté gown you've got and come right over."

"Bother," said Arden. "Very well, I'll be down in a few minutes."

She hurried to her room and took off her simple muslin dress, then spent a few minutes at her make-up. Her hair did not matter much, as it was naturally wavy, and in this picture tumbled and disordered. She selected the same gown she had worn before; an azalea-colored chiffon which reproduced well by Campbell's chromatic process, and a mass of ruffles to give it a billowy effect. It was daringly décolleté for a girl of her proportions, and Arden had been dreading its effect on her father and Jerry when they should see the picture, the more so as in this particular scene she was tossed about a good deal by the athletic Dacre.

It did not take her long to get ready, the wild romping of the scene making all nicety of detail superfluous, and twisting a tulle veil about her head to keep her artfully disordered hair from tumbling on her shoulders until the time came, she went down and got into the launch. They shoved off and headed for the blazing maelstrom opposite, Arden steering while Dacre lighted a cigarette.

"Thank the Lord, we're nearly through with this inferno," said he. "Never thought I could get fed up on joy wild and unrefined, but I am. Aren't you?"

"It really doesn't matter much to me," Arden answered. "That part of Utopia never interested me in the least. The only times I've seen anything of it have been when we were making a picture, and then I've been too busy to notice it."

Dacre laughed. "What were you doing up so late?" he asked.

"Darning father's socks."

Dacre leaned back and roared. "'Pon my word! Darning father's socks—with Utopia reeling around you like one of those giddy pin wheels on that barge! Darning father's socks by the light of flaming souls! You beat the French peasants plowing in a rain of shrapnel and dodging duds with the plowshare. An old Jacques Bonhomme groused to me one day about being unable to do a decently straight furrow. But we're all getting frightfully *pot-au-feu* in this screeching monotony! I was washing my whippet when Campbell rang me up. I asked if he could muster the rest of the crowd, and he said: 'Yes, they've all said their prayers and gone to bed.'"

"It will be rather nice to have some real excitement again," Arden observed. "Bronchos and floods and rock climbing and things like the Cosmos Company."

"Rath-*er!*" Dacre agreed. "For my part, though, I must say I could do with a good salmon stream or a big, rangy hunter and a pack in full cry on a keen morning in November. I'll have it one of these days by grace of the *deus ex machina*."

"The what?"

"The god in the picture box. The dear old cam. Just as soon as I get all paid up I mean to chuck this and go back. And then I shan't be happy!"

Arden did not answer. She knew what he meant. A month before he had urged her in his eager, enthusiastic way to become Lady Dacre, and had taken her refusal with no great apparent discouragement nor altering of their comradely relations.

"You'd be awfully keen about it all, Arden," he assured her, "and it would suit your father and Tim to a T. The dad could shoot and fish and hunt and Tim could perch out in the park and scribble sonnets and

madrigals and things. We'd have old Jerry over to stick statues all over the shop and make us a pocket edition Utopia for our guests to get drunk in. You and I——"

"You would get restless and I would get fat and stupid," Arden interrupted. *"Merci, m'sieu,* I would as soon think of marrying a pigeon."

"You might do worse, you know," Dacre retorted. "Pigeons have the most powerful homing instincts of anything that flies, barring only a Boche army air plane."

"They do too much strutting on the eaves for my taste, from the mate's point of view," said Arden. "Better take the wheel, my amorous youth, before I spike one of these gondolas and spoil the party. Mercy, did you ever see such a howling mob? They look like a lot of brilliant bugs."

"'Bug' is a good word, and aptly describes 'em. This island must jolly well itch. Makes me think of the trenches. Wonder the good Lord doesn't smear 'em with a sort of divine pommade d'Helmerich. They have their uses, though. They'll all be supeing gratuitously for Campbell in half an hour, and, thanks to the million and odd different kinds of lights, they'll never know it until some of 'em find themselves kicked out of their jobs or getting sued for divorce. There's Campbell now on the jetty looking hurried. Fancy we've kept 'em waiting, but father's socks had got to be darned. You *are* a darling, Arden dear. I'll try not to leave any black and blue spots on your pretty arms this time, but then you know there's something in that dress besides moonbeams and gossamer."

CHAPTER XVII.

After bidding Ruth good night, Ralph went immediately to bed but not to sleep. His room was cool, but his brain hot and feverish, and though he lay for some time motionless inviting repose, this removed itself further and further as the minutes passed.

What he had seen of Utopia disturbed him even more than it had his sister, though in a different way. He recognized in it a monumental evil made possible by the error of too rigid legislation restricting the liberty of popular and personal amusement, and the autocratic suppression of what was classified as profitless pleasure, and he fully realized the strength of its malignant existence.

Well, here was another great problem to face, and so far as he could imagine, no immediate solution for it. Silly, suffering humanity had always been burdened by devastating war or profligate peace and probbly always would be until God should have distilled from its substance such spiritual essence as divine purpose required, placed this apart and fused the rest.

Ralph did not feel himself under any orders to march against this new and unexpected enemy. He had fought to make the world safe and clean, and others by their stupid blunder had spoiled the victory. A preponderance of female theory had ruined the results of male achievement. If the women had been content to use their tremendous power in the controlling of minor social ills instead of trying to exterminate them, Utopia would never have come into existence.

It seemed now to Ralph that at this moment every man's fight against it was for the protection of his own, and that his individual own was Arden. His soul grew sick at the thought of her in the maw of that grinning monster. If its blandishments affected Ruth as he had just witnessed what could be the limit of their influence on Arden who was naturally pleasure-loving, impulsive, and with none of Ruth's rigid principles and strong self-control. Where was Arden to look for protection and restraint? Her father, an old sportsman, now probably himself demoralized, Jerry, a social outlaw, with the principles of a cave man, and Timothy, a weird, irresponsible youth, as Ralph esteemed him. And her profession one, as he considered, demoralizing in itself.

It was quiet about the hotel, everybody having departed for the Bund and its contiguous distractions. But he had left his blinds open and the vivid illumination from five miles across the lake increased his nervous tension and he got up to shut it out. Then, observing that the light still streamed from Ruth's windows, he decided that a little talk with her might soothe him, and crossing the salon between their rooms knocked at her door. There was no response. Ralph rapped again, then entered. Ruth was not there.

If Ralph had found her lying strangled on the bed he could scarcely have been more aghast. His mind leaped at once to a conclusion. The unaccustomed wine and spirits she had taken had reacted on a mind shocked from its well-ordered state by the

scenes which she had witnessed and impelled her to return to them alone. She had acted through irrational impulse, the insistent idea of alienists, Poe's Imp of the Perverse. That afternoon she had told him that the place excited her and begged that she might see it all, or, rather, pronounced her intention of doing so. This agitation coming at a moment when she was nervously tired and mentally discouraged, and fomented by the unprecedented alcohol, had momentarily unbalanced her.

His eyes fell upon the domino which she had flung upon the bed. He picked it up and saw that the mask was gone. Then, a crumpled scrap of yellow paper caught his attention. It was a twenty-dollar bill. Ralph remembered that after leaving the theater she had expressed a desire to visit the gambling saloons but that he had firmly objected. This might have been her motive. But whatever it might be, she had procured her money, masked herself and stolen out to return to the Bund.

The chances of his finding her there seemed to him about one in a thousand, but there seemed nothing to do but try, so he dressed hurriedly, and, going to the landing, boarded one of the swift gondolas which made the crossing in about twelve minutes, "double vitesse, double pourboire," he said to the black gondolier, as though he were the driver of a tired Paris cab horse. Perhaps it may have gained him a minute or two, but a racing hydroplane would have seemed sluggish to Ralph in his desperate anxiety.

"Curse this damnable hell pit!" he growled, as he stepped out onto the furious Bund with its whirling throng of fantastically attired men and barely attired women. He clove through them like a comet, leaving a wake of mocking and angry cries. Entering the vast Temple of Fortune, he found it filled with devotees, but the crowd was in no spot dense, the hundred tables affording room for all. Still, in his frenzy, he was charging in and out among them with a scant courtesy, which left a trail of shrill or muttered imprecations when a squarely built man in immaculate white serge touched his elbow.

"I must ask you not to be so rough, sir," said he politely, and, drawing back his coat, exhibited the burnished star of authority.

"You are just the man I want," said Ralph. "I am looking for my sister and think she is somewhere in this place. A hundred dollars for you if you find her in fifteen minutes."

"She shall be found in less if she is here, sir, but we are not allowed to accept gratuities," answered the man, one of Utopia's big battalion of detectives, many of whom were of the secret international police. "Her description, if you please, sir."

Ralph gave it minutely. "Don't be anxious, sir," said the agent. "If she is not in here, I shall send out a general call. If you will please to wait on the terrace in front of the southwest corner entrance, I shall report to you there."

This appearing the wisest and most effective course, Ralph thanked him and did as he suggested. There were a number of people on the terrace watching the antics of the revelers which at this part of the Bund were thickest because of the crashing orchestra on a huge stand opposite. No system nor order was evident in these gambols, which seemed a composite mass of human whirlpools, bare flashing limbs and bodies, often dripping from recent immersion in the lake, weaving and spinning in mad, chaotic confusion. Powerful projectors sprayed them with multicolored lights, often dazzling them into violent collisions which were taken as a feature of the outrageous fun. Many were in gossamer swimming suits and with others often costumed would occasionally engage in some sort of a crazy contest, and, surging to the low parapet, fling each other into the lake.

It seemed to Ralph that no phantasmagoria of drug or fever could ever conceive the like. It was incredible that these were cognate humans of his own race; actual folk at other times, with serious affairs, most of them Americans. Then as he watched there entered the more open space immediately below him a more specific cluster which moved forward gayly, but as though with some purposeful intent. From their clothes and general bearing he took them to be of the gay upper class; some yachting party perhaps who had come here for an uncensored spree; the most culpable of all, to his stern finding.

The women were young, beautiful, and richly gowned; rather too richly for that tropic temperature, and held themselves with a certain elegance. The men also had their claims to masculine beauty and distinction. One young fellow with yellow, wavy hair

and a classic patrician face seemed strangely familiar to Ralph. And the dark-haired beauty on his arm—she with the exquisite throat and shoulders——"

A devitalizing flame struck through him. It was Arden! Arden, the love of whom had brought him to this anathematized playground of hell! And the man with her was Lord Dacre, and the rest were no doubt other players of Campbell's troupe who had come in coterie to take part in these abominable frolics. Ralph leaned against the column sick and stunned. What satanic glamour invested the place? What dark powers were walking up and down to snare the souls of the unwary? Ruth and Arden, the two young and beautiful women upon whose inviolate modesty he would a year ago have staked his soul's salvation!

Petrified with a sort of fascinated horror, he watched Arden as the group pushed forward in a sort of definite formation, laughing and calling to each other gayly. Then of a sudden one of the many powerful electric projectors fastened them with its curious, unearthly light when, as if animated by the induction of some mysterious and diabolic force, they were galvanized into sudden action, violent and irresistible.

To Ralph it was horrifying, uncanny. It was not only the swift, startling change from the semblance of dignity to wild abandon but its simultaneity. It never occurred to him that they were acting their rôles; that the peculiar spotlight was their signal to put in motion gambols carefully rehearsed; that the unsuspecting patrons of the place were assisting at the spectacle. The camera was cunningly concealed in a big bass drum directly in front of the terrace, and Ralph himself was giving an excellent interpretation of a scandalized spectator of this extravaganza.

Faster and more furious it grew. This was the last scene to be "shot," the climax of the play where in an excess of drunken folly the truant girl heroine is flung into the lake by her suitor who is under the false impression that she is a swimming specialist in a moving-picture troupe. For a while she is supposedly drowned, et cetera, et cetera., *ad nauseam et vocem populorum.* Ralph, first horrified then seized by a sudden fit of fury, would have leaped down from the terrace to Arden's rescue but for the fact that she was shrieking with laughter and apparently enjoying the tossing about at the hands of Dacre and the others.

Her profuse black hair had tumbled about her rosy shoulders in a heavy, wavy mass. Her chiffon grown was torn down the back, and as Dacre swung her aloft in his powerful arms she kicked off one pink satin slipper which flew high in air to be scrambled for by the delighted crowd of unwitting supers. Then, laughing and struggling, she and Dacre whirled against the parapet in a sort of impromptu dance when suddenly he swung her high and over. The shrieking crowd surged to the spot, and at the same moment a crisp, military voice said in Ralph's ear:

"I have news of the lady, sir."

CHAPTER XVIII.

Ralph spun about, breathing in gasps, to find the agent standing stiffly at his shoulder. Like all of Rosenthal's military police, the man was a former noncom of the allied armies, as was evident from his military speech and bearing.

Ralph straightened on his feet. He knew that Arden was a splendid swimmer, and, besides, he could not have got anywhere near the spot if he had wished.

"What have you learned?" he asked.

"She was seen on the Bund about twenty minutes ago with a gentleman who is here a great deal and known to be of good character. They got into a launch at the landing and put off heading straight up the lake. That is the last we have seen of her, sir."

"Who was this man?" Ralph asked.

"I am not permitted to say, sir."

"You are quite sure of the lady's identity?"

"The description tallies exactly, sir. About five feet nine in height, full but well-proportioned figure, with small waist, very fair blonde, stylish low-cut dress of pale green with stockings and slippers to match, pearl necklace, small platinum wrist watch set in diamonds on black velvet ribbon, black velvet mask. Each of these details was verified, sir, by the agent on duty near the landing."

"You appear to have a vigilant police system," said Ralph.

"Guests wearing evidently valuable jewels are closely watched, sir, and we are always on the lookout for crooks. There is no danger in that respect about the gentleman the lady was with. He is an American of A-1

reputation; the lady being who she is, is no doubt a previous acquaintance."

"Is there any way in which I could be informed of his identity?" Ralph asked. "I am Colonel Ralph Putney, of Boston, and the lady is my sister. It is impossible that she could have gone on the lake with a stranger."

"The inquiry has been reported at headquarters, sir," said the agent. "The officer on duty now is Captain Scott. He might consent to give you the information."

Ralph thanked him and stepped into one of the small electric vehicles which presently deposited him in front of a one-storied, many-columned building, the ground plan of which was a five-pointed star. A sergeant-at-arms on guard took in his name and errand, and a moment later he was ushered into an office where an officer of military appearance was sitting at a desk. Ralph briefly stated his case, and the police captain, evidently an Englishman, nodded.

"Have you and Miss Putney any mutual friend employed here by the management, colonel?" he asked pleasantly.

"Yes," Ralph answered. "Gerald O'Connor, the sculptor, is an old family friend."

"That is the man," said the captain. "They probably met on the Bund when he was on his way home from a building directors' meeting, and he has probably taken her for a spin on the lake. You may set your mind at rest. The chances are that you will find her safely in her rooms at the hotel when you return. Our fair guests have a little *penchant* toward giving their chaperons the slip. We try to keep our eye on them as best we can, and I must say it takes a bit of doing."

Ralph was infinitely relieved. "I'm sure I don't know what possessed my sister to do such a thing," said he. "I brought her down here to bring one of her girl friends back to the fold; O'Connor's sister, by the way, who has been playing with the Campbell Company. But I am afraid the errand is a futile one. I saw Miss O'Connor on the Bund to-night with others of the troupe, and she was not behaving as though she hated the place."

Captain Scott leaned forward. "What?" he cried. "Oh, I say, colonel, you must have been mistaken. Arden O'Connor is the spirit and essence of all domestic virtues. She *never* goes on the Bund."

"She was on it to-night," said Ralph curtly, "until that young cub, Lord Dacre, threw her off it into the lake."

The captain flung himself back in his wicker chair and roared. Then, catching sight of Ralph's rigid face, he checked his mirth with difficulty. "My word, colonel," said he, "but you have had a pleasant evening of it. That was all film stuff—camera business. Campbell's contract expires shortly, and he's evidently trying to cram all he can into the time that's left. This is rather an uncommonly hectic night and, no doubt, he wanted the mob and the light, so he routed out his gang and put them through their stunts."

Ralph stared at him, amazed. "Good Lord!" he gasped, "I never thought of that. Now you've told me, I remember there was an intense, peculiar light thrown on the party. All the same, though, it was pretty stiff."

The captain nodded. "It's all pretty stiff down here," said he.

"'Stiff' is scarcely the word. What do you think of it, yourself, though considering your position I suppose I ought not ask you that."

"Why not? Police work is a world-wide service. We've collared more than one big criminal here. Frankly, I think it's hell. The worst kind of a rosy, perfumed hell. This island ought to be submarined or mined by a volcano like Atlantis. But it's all you Yankees' fault. You made it a possibility with your young girls' seminary rules and regulations. We managed it better in England, if I do say it myself. Once peace was signed, we promptly eased the lid instead of screwing it down tighter. You people did the latter, and this is the result."

Ralph sighed. "I guess you're right," said he. "Well, thank you, captain, and my compliments on your system. It's the only thing I've seen here to admire."

They parted with mutual esteem, for Ralph was himself the type of man whom the efficient officer himself admired. Ralph would have liked to prolong his call and went out rather wistfully, police headquarters with its military atmosphere being the only spot he had found in Utopia where the atmosphere was in any way congenial. But once outside the clean-cut military environment so dear to his soldier nature, he became intensely worried again.

Ruth might be quite safe with Jerry, he

reflected, and then again she might not. She had been in a disorganized state of mind, and he had always considered Jerry a sort of moral anarchist. He had never respected authority in any form, Ralph remembered, and, no doubt, there must have been something wrong with his war record or he would have come out of it with more rank. He was probably one of those brilliant daredevils who is promoted after every battle and reduced a week later in the camp. The sort of man to whom Napoleon is reported to have said: "For your valor and success in saving the day you shall receive the cross and the rank of general, and for your disobedience of orders you shall be shot at sunrise."

Such a cavalier was not the sort for a woman of Ruth's temperament and present mood in Utopia at two of the morning after a carnival night. For all of Jerry's early wildness, Ralph had never heard of his being guilty of a low or dishonorable act, but there was no telling what recent associations might have done to a character of no fixed principles. Captain Scott would naturally stand up for him as a friend and fellow Utopian. Thinking the situation over, it seemed to Ralph that the danger instead of being removed was merely specified.

Still, it might be as the officer had said, and, there being nothing else to do, Ralph drove to the nearest landing and took a gondola for the hotel, where on going to his sister's room he found it as he had left. Ralph was nearly demented. The thought of Ruth straying about Utopia with Jerry at that hour was insupportable. It was equally excruciating to sit there impotently and wait for her return. Action, even though futile, was imperative to his state of nerves, so he went out again and instructed a gondolier to scout back and forth across the lake working up to its western end and passing close to any launches which might fall within their scope. This plan did not promise much result, for, although most of the traffic was between the Bund and the Côte d'Azur, where the hotels were situated, there were scores of craft flitting variously about with guests endeavoring to blow away the fumes of dissipation in the fresh morning air. But Ralph, while realizing that this course might prolong his suspense, found it preferable to the nervous tension of waiting in his rooms.

The dawn came before long, but its beauties were lost on Ralph. No delicate vibrations of changing color stirred his æsthetic sense. He savagely bit off the end of a cigar and spat it into the lake, cursing that limpid medium and its containing country. But he persisted in his fruitless quest, grimly reflecting that Ruth herself might do a little worrying on her return. It was broad day when he reached his final objective point where he told his gondolier to go back to the hotel.

"If she's not back now," said Ralph to himself as he made for his rooms, "I shall go to police headquarters again and send out a general alarm."

He entered his room, then passed through the suite to Ruth's, where he halted with a gasp of dismay. Ruth was not there. But she had been, and very recently. Her discarded finery was flung across the divan and her jewels were strewn upon the dressing table, she having in her haste apparently forgotten to lock them up. Scattered bits of wearing apparel had been picked up and discarded in her choice of costume and her fitted traveling bag was gone.

It had happened to Ralph to run point-blank upon a hidden enemy machine gun, but such a slight surprise was pleasant compared to this. There burst from his lips a crashing objurgation which invoked Divine chastisement on Utopia, its works and operatives. Then, his horrified eyes were caught by an envelope pinned against the back of the door. He ripped it open and read the following:

BROTHER DEAREST: Forgive me what I am doing, as my only possible fault is precipitancy, perhaps selfishness, but I hope not. It is better this way for everybody, and will spare no end of bother and argument.

I could not sleep and wanted to see it all, so I went out again and entirely by chance met Jerry. Now I find that I have always loved him without knowing it, and he has always loved me tenderly and truly. He is another Jerry than the boy you may remember. He is a great big splendid man, and I adore him.

We are leaving to be married in a cleaner place than this. Jerry has secured a racing plane with a skilled military pilot, and we shall soon be far from Utopia, though not so very far in time. This seems to me to be the best. No tears and angry arguments, no protests and imploring supplications, none of the fuss and smug conventional indecency of a customary wedding.

My theories were all wrong, but my heart was right, and I am radiantly happy. So forgive me, brother dear, and don't be cross to us when we return, which may be to-morrow. Lovingly, RUTH.

CHAPTER XIX.

Arden slept late the morning of the fifth, Campbell having granted a holiday in consideration of their interrupted repose. He husbanded the forces and dictated the régime of his players as might the coach of an athletic team.

Timothy also was restoring his intellectual forces from an exciting evening spent in the discussion of lyric verse with the celebrated poet president of Haiti. He had read several of his latest poems to Doctor Acajou and been delighted by the commendation of that acknowledged master.

He and Arden lunched quietly together, Timothy telling her enthusiastically of his evening and a partly formed resolve to give up picture playing and devote himself entirely to literature. He had not confined his efforts to poetry, and some recent short stories had met with most encouraging success. Campbell also had accepted two of his scenarios and suggested that he should avail himself of his practical apprenticeship to concentrate on screen play writing.

"Oh, dear," sighed Arden, who loved her household gods, "since we have got to be scattered, I almost wish that I had married Ralph."

"Plenty of time yet," said Timothy. "Why not whistle him back? He'd come. Men like Ralph don't change."

Arden looked rather pensive. "Perhaps not in heart," said she, "but they do in mind. Ralph's mind rules his heart." She laughed a little tremulously and with no accent of mirth. "Can you imagine Ralph marrying a picture-play actress who had made her début in Utopia?"

"Yes," Timothy answered, "I can. That is precisely the sort of marriage that the Ralphs of this world desire and ought to make. They would get lopsided if they married their own strait-laced sort—and their children would be natural-born corespondents." He dipped into his avocado mayonnaise. "I can also imagine Jerry marrying Ruth," said he. "In fact, I count on it."

"Well, you have lost your bet," Arden answered. "You told her that she would be here within six months, and it is that today."

"Perhaps she is here," said Timothy, not looking up from his succulent alligator pear. "Ralph is."

"What!"

"It is true. I saw him last night, or, rather, this morning *à jeun*, holding up a column on the terrace of the Fools' Paradise watching Dacre waving you like a signal of distress. He looked upset. When you scaled off into the lake I thought he was going to jump over the railing and make a mess, but just then Sergeant Kenny came up and distracted him."

Arden stared at him with a face which had suddenly lost its fresh color. "Oh, Tim—are you sure?"

"Positive."

"Why didn't you tell me?"

"Didn't want to disturb your slumbers. What do you care? We're about to break up here. You're going to California and father's going to France and I may go to Harvard and take a special course in literature." His deep-set eyes twinkled at the corners. "If he is here for another try, you might as well take him on, Arden. You really ought to marry somebody before it is too late. Don't take chances like Ruth. First thing you know you'll be getting fat."

Arden was not listening. At Timothy's drawling announcement she felt as though Utopia had suddenly gained something to make it strong and clean; a presence; a stern master soul; a rush of crisp, cold invigorating air against its tropic fetor.

"Why do you think he came?" she asked, a little breathlessly.

"Well, I don't believe it was to drink or flirt or gamble. He probably came to look you over, and, if so, he had a jolly good chance. He got a sort of shooting-star effect——"

"Tim, don't!" Arden's face was crimson and distressed. "What must he have thought! Not even that horrid, sophisticated crowd guessed that we were making a picture. Could he have believed I was doing it for *fun?*"

"No compliment to your art if he thought you were getting mauled like that for money." His voice mimicked Campbell's dry, cutting rehearsal diction with its hint of involuntary mockery when directing something he disliked solely for its popular value. "Interpret joy, not fear, Miss O'Connor. Lord Dacre is strong and willin'. If you fall, you will be covered with glory and insurance. More glad abandon, please. Never mind the gown. Remember you are having a ripping time. Get set for the giant

swing, Dacre. *H'up* she goes *and* h'over again——'"

"How terrible!" breathed Arden. "Do you suppose that Ruth saw it?" She clasped her hands with all the anguish of a chorus débutante in tights playing for the first time in her native town. "Was I very dreadful, Tim?"

"Wait till you see the picture. To use a poetic term, the enjambment was pronounced as you went over the parapet. The adjective was noticeable when the substantive was suppressed. I did not see Ruth. Perhaps she had been struck by the resemblance of Jerry's nereids to herself and stolen over to the grotto with her little hatchet."

"Oh, dear," cried Arden, really distressed. "Ruth is quite capable of coming down here to study out some plan of attack on this place."

"A popular pastime of the restless reformer. Let us hope that Scott may catch her at it."

The color flooded Arden's face at mention of this efficient officer whom she had several times met and whose admiration for her was unconcealed. Arden liked him because he was all soldier, like Ralph. But unlike Ralph, he had a decided gleam of mischief in his eye which she did not entirely approve. A good many very attractive men had made tentative approaches to her in the past six months, but all had left her unmoved. There was scarcely any of the flirt in Arden, not enough, Campbell thought regretfully, for perfect artistic success.

"Are you still in love with Ralph?" Timothy asked with unhabitual bluntness.

"I—no, I—I don't think so, Tim. I doubt if I was ever really in love with him, but I have thought of him a good deal recently. Perhaps it is because I am rather tired of this place—and he is so unlike everything here. I think he is the cleanest-hearted man I ever knew. I always thought he would be quite perfect if he weren't so strict about some things. It was as if life was a big court-martial and he the presiding officer."

"He'd have given it a fair finding," said Timothy, "and that's more than can be said for Ruth.

"Yes, Ralph is fair. I'm afraid I wasn't. There's not a stingy cell in Ralph's make-up, but neither is there an inconsistent one, and it really wouldn't have been consistent to invest a quarter of a million for the benefit of his relatives' heirs. I see things differently since I've become a money maker myself."

"No," Timothy agreed, "you really can't blame him for that, though you can for his way of putting it."

"I'm not so sure, Tim. It was honest and straightforward, and rather an undeserved compliment to the common sense he gave me credit for. Not a man I know would have put himself in such an unbecoming light."

"He'd have been too clever."

"Precisely. Ralph isn't clever. He doesn't need to be, with his force and mind. A clever man would have told me that he had about decided to put his money in that new company and advance what father needed for living expenses against his interest, so that there was no longer any reason why we should not get married, and then if I had refused he could have changed his mind. Such a thing would never have occurred to Ralph, any more than it would to suggest that we all make our home together, and then after we were married have managed to alter the arrangement in one way or another."

Timothy nodded gravely, but his eyes twinkled more than ever at the corners. They left the table and went out on the veranda, where Arden picked up her mending. She loved to mend for these three male children of hers. At present she was engaged in changing the frayed cuffs of Jerry's shirts for new ones. Theading her needle, she returned to the interesting topic.

"It must be nice for a woman to feel her husband cannot change," said she musingly. "So unlike Utopia and our picture plays. There men are such roosters; always crowing and flapping and sidling around and always on the lookout for a new hen. Ralph is like an eagle with his fierce set face and bleak, steady eyes, and an eagle never mates but once, and with all of his haughtiness not too proud to keep the eggs warm while his wife stretches her wings."

"He looked as if he were going to peck somebody on the head last night," said Timothy. "Hadn't a plump argus-pheasant like you better hunt cover while he is here?"

Arden shook her dark head. "He is not hovering over me," she answered, "or he would have swooped immediately. He is here to chaperon Ruth. She insisted on coming, so he had to come, too. Poor Ralph,

how he must loathe it all. Do you know, Tim, he has always reminded me of an early Christian knight. Not a Galahad or Percival exactly, but rather a Crusader, who denied himself what most men want and took it out on the Saracens."

"He can't be any great shakes as a lover," Timothy ventured.

Arden flushed. "Men like Ralph——" she began impulsively, then checked herself, leaning over to bite her thread.

"Do their love-making after carrying their brides across their thresholds," Timothy finished. "I imagine you are a bit that way yourself, young lady."

"Now Ruth——" she looked up and knit her brows perplexedly, "I wonder what Ruth would do if a man kissed her, Tim?"

"If it were the wrong man," said Timothy, "she would kill him on the spot. If he were the right man, it might take a little longer——" He glanced over his shoulder. "What is it, Jessamine?" he asked in creole.

The sable sylph handed him a yellow envelope. Timothy glanced at the address, then tore it open. Arden, watching him with curiosity, could not tell whether the news was good or bad. His lean face turned very white, but his big, shadowy eyes glowed strangely. He swallowed once or twice, then began to laugh, at first with coughing barks, then more strongly and evenly and with increasing repetition of sound like one of the old-fashioned gasoline motors getting into its swing.

"For heaven's sake, what is it?" Arden demanded.

Timothy's cachinnations ceased as if somebody had turned off a switch. He stared at her owlishly. "Listen," he said. "A wireless from Jerry.

"San Juan, Porto Rico. 12 m. July 5. Ruth and I just married. If Ralph calls, render all aid, comfort, and condolence. Returning with wife to-morrow afternoon. Best love to all from Ruth and me. JERRY."

CHAPTER XX.

Ralph was a soldier and accustomed to shocks. Moreover, he was possessed of a certain grim, battlefield sense of humor, so after the first stunning jar of Ruth's bursting bomb had passed, he pulled himself together, reread her letter with a dry grin for his own merry night's entertainment, and proceeded to undress.

At any rate, he was relieved of further anxiety and responsibility, and after all, more tragic mishaps than matrimony might happen in Utopia. Perhaps it was all kismet and would have happened anyhow. Those rough, reckless, happy-go-lucky, and devil-may-care chaps seemed often to have a fatal fascination for hyperrefined and self-sufficient women. Ralph's conception of Ruth was that of a sort of militant angel, sexless like its species, but with feminine traits.

In powerful contrast, as he thought, was Arden, and his mind being now relieved from duty as sentinel over Ruth was assigned to Arden's precarious position. Theoretically, his last dissolving view of Arden followed by Ruth's *coup de théatre* might have been expected to rouse Ralph in bitterest censure of the O'Connor family, but actually it did nothing of the sort. He was a fair-minded man and acknowledged that he and his sister had played the aggressive part. The O'Connors had been forced to earn their living according to their talents and opportunities and had asked no social or other support of their old friends.

He and Ruth had gone deliberately to Utopia to interfere in their affairs, and here was the result. Ruth had literally flown with Jerry, and here was he forced to admit himself more desirous to marry Arden than he had ever been before. He had not taken her refusal as final, but even had he done so, the last year had proved to him that she was his vital necessity. He took no further interest in work or play. Life had become a mere mechanical routine. The society of other women annoyed him and the sight of happy family units filled him with lugubrious envy. His wealth was a nuisance and a mockery. Ralph was a natural husband and father, a hater of clubs and bachelor forgatherings, and though liked and respected by other men, cared for their contact only in some form of strife: war, business, or politics.

And now two other powerful and hitherto superfluous emotions were added to increase his want of Arden: jealousy and protection. It had driven him nearly frantic to see her in the clasp of another man, if only for a silly theatrical rôle. It aroused the savage instincts of the battlefield, not long quiescent. The war had left thousands of men like this, easily roused to sudden and ruthless violence, especially those whose lives were dull or womanless. Fortunately, there were but few of the latter.

Even stronger than Ralph's pardonable

jealousy was his intense desire to take Arden from a professional life so unsuited to her station. He knew her nature pretty well and did not believe that she really cared for it. The difficulty was less here than in how much she might still care for himself, and this being a totally unknown quantity, Ralph with his characteristic common sense did not try to ponder it, but went to bed and to sleep in the early sunshine of a very quiet Utopian morning.

He awoke at noon refreshed and ready for action. While taking déjeuner on the terrace a small black page who appeared to be mostly teeth brought him the radio which he had been expecting. This read simply:

> Jerry and I married in San Juan this morning. Returning to-morrow afternoon. Dearest love. RUTH.

Ralph finished his breakfast and going to the office sent in answer:

> Love and all best wishes for your happiness. Shall not scold. RALPH.

He could not quite bring himself to offer congratulations. He would have to talk to Jerry first.

And now for Arden. Having learned at the desk where the O'Connors' little villa was located, he stepped into a car and quickly reached the house, where, as he rolled up the shell drive, he discovered Arden leaning over the railing in conversation with Timothy, who was apparently about to leave in a launch. They saw him at the same time, when Arden came swiftly through a sort of peristyle to greet him while Timothy proceeded to attach his boat.

Arden, flushed and smiling, albeit looking rather scared, gave him both hands as he stepped out of the car with a curt "attendez" to the driver. One might have thought from her manner that they had parted uneventfully the night before.

"Oh, Ralph!" she exclaimed. "Have you heard?"

"Yes, Arden," he answered, pressing her hands and letting them fall. "I found a note from Ruth at the hotel after combing the place for her all night with the aid of the police, and a few minutes ago I got a radio."

"What do you think of them? Aren't you terribly upset?"

"Oh, no. They are both grown up. It was a bit precipitate, but as Ruth says, it saves a lot of bother." He glanced over her shoulder. "Hello, Tim. You're looking very fit. Must have gained twenty pounds. Utopia seems to agree with you and Arden. How is your father?"

"All right now, I imagine," answered Timothy, shaking hands, "but he is apt to have a stroke in about half an hour. I am just going over to break the news. You encourage me, Ralph. I'll be off if you'll excuse me, and get my nervous mission over with."

Arden led Ralph to the veranda over the lake and they seated themselves. Ralph's absolute lack of agitation acted as a grateful sedative to her own tingling nerves.

"Now tell me what you really think," said she. "Are you very much cut up?"

"I'm not cut up at all. I think they showed a lot of sense and avoided no end of nuisance and publicity. When the marriage notice appears to-morrow in the Boston papers, it will be thought that it was all prearranged and that she slipped quietly off to San Juan to meet Jerry there and be married."

Arden clasped her hands. "You are wonderful, Ralph. So kind and thoughtful and sure. You manage things so perfectly."

"Not my own," he answered, "nor yours."

"Do you think so, Ralph?" Her long lashes swept down to hide the light in her gray eyes. "I am not so sure. If you had asked me to marry you in an emotional, loverlike way, I would have consented, and then you would never have learned what a different girl I was from what you thought."

"How, different?" Ralph asked. "I haven't learned it yet. I always knew that you loved gayety and excitement, and it is no surprise to find that you have a lot of artistic talent. It's in your family. You are just the same as you were before, except you have probably gained in experience."

Arden could scarcely believe her ears. Either Ralph could not have recognized her on the Bund, or else his whole viewpoint had done a *volte face*. This last she could not and did not wish to believe.

"That is true," she said, "but lots of people would not believe it."

"Especially anybody that had happened to see you on the Bund about one o'clock this morning."

Arden leaned forward, hands so tightly clasped that her finger nails whitened. She

felt that this was to be the critical moment between them. "*You* saw me?" she asked.

"Yes."

"What did you think?"

"I thought that you had got mixed up with a bad crowd and lost your head for the moment. It was awful. I cursed Jerry for bringing you here and myself for ever having left you. I was nearly crazy and would have made a fool of myself if I could have got to you. Of course I knew that you were in no actual physical danger, but I wanted to slaughter Dacre."

"What did you do?" Arden murmured, her eyes on the grass mat under her feet.

"Nothing. There was no time. They would have had you out and on your way before I could have got a quarter way through that howling mob. Just then a detective came to tell me that he had got news of Ruth. He knew the man she had been seen with, but was not allowed to give me his name, so I went to headquarters to find out. There, Captain Scott told me that she had gone on the lake with Jerry. I mentioned having just seen you tossed into the lake by a drunken fool of the Campbell Company. He laughed and said that it was merely screen stuff, so I was relieved on that score. Then after hunting until broad daylight for Ruth, I went back to the hotel and found her note."

"Poor Ralph," said Arden, "you must have been nearly insane."

"On the contrary, when I thought it over a bit I was rather pleased. Ruth had never taken the slightest sentimental interest in any man to my knowledge and frightened off a lot of nice chaps that were attracted to her. Her note explained the reason. She is a one-man woman, just as I am a one-woman man——" He said this simply as one stating a fact. "And if she hadn't met Jerry just as she did, the chances are that she would have died an old maid, and there's no good in that."

Arden nodded without looking up. "What if you had not learned that I was—that we were making a picture?" she asked. "I suppose you would have cursed the O'Connor family root and branch."

"No," Ralph answered, "I've got past that sort of thing. It is that sort of spirit which has made this monstrous place a success for its promoters. It's the very intolerance idea. The taking of one's own personal views as a paragon, and then enforcing it on everybody else. On the way to headquarters I blamed myself for having lost you by taking it for granted that a girl of your full nature should look at things from the same point of view as a strait-laced, square-toed Puritan fool like myself, whose principal claim to matrimony was that he would be 'a good provider.'"

"But you would not have come here today," said Arden, raising her eyes.

"Of course I would! Before I learned that it was all camera stuff I swore to come here and put every last grain of whatever compelling force is in me to make you marry me, and at once! That was my entire and only motive for coming to Utopia, and seeing you as you were last night made it a thousand times stronger. It would have made no difference what this place had done to you. I wanted you. I felt that I couldn't live without you. There was no idea of rescue or reform about it. I was ready to make any concession you might ask; to live here for the rest of our lives, if you wished it. Anything to have you for my own darling, cherished wife. Nothing else mattered. Nothing else matters now——" He leaned forward and his blue eyes held a flame which she had never seen in them before. It was like the intense white focus of a burning-glass; the concentration of a clean, clear will with no flaw nor blemish in heart or surface.

Arden's eyes met it with a rush of exaltation. Here was the crusader of her dream; the warrior ascetic, master of himself even to the renunciation of principles rooted in the very fiber of him and which his love for her had weighed and found unfair. She knew that he spoke the truth; that it would have made no difference to what extent Utopia might have corrupted her. This was the Ralph of her dreams; the virile essence of manhood calcined of pride and prejudice.

The tears gushed into her eyes. Ralph's curt, boyish unconsciousness of any added grace gained by the ruthless stripping of the arrogant egoism, which had formerly been such a part of him, was infinitely touching to her. It seemed almost a literal obedience to the stern scriptural command: "If thine eye offend thee, pluck it out." He had torn the poisoned arrow of intolerance from his bosom, and the blood flowed after it.

Then, as their eyes clung together, Arden knew that the victory was complete. A year ago his would have been the coercing gaze,

her own submissive. But now the old compelling mastery was absent, or at least it was neither his nor hers. It was theirs. The look which passed between them was like a fusion of entities from which a new mutual soul was born. The burning concentration melted and diffused itself and became an enveloping glow, infintely tender and absorbful. It brought from Ralph a gush of tender words, the first really such that Arden had ever heard fall from his lips. They were halting and strange at first, not timid, but as though groping their way bewildered through those stern lips like pretty village children who are trying to find their way home through a camp of soldiers.

Then Arden went to meet them and gathered them rapturously in her embrace and they nestled where her lips and Ralph's clung and melted as a moment before their eyes had done. Grim prisons may give up joyous hearts when one has the key to their portals, and Arden had the key. Timothy, that adolescent sage, was not entirely right in saying that she and Ralph would begin their love-making after he had carried her across his threshold. But being a poet, perhaps he meant the threshold of the heart.

CHAPTER XXI.

Timothy, returning rather flattened out from his shock-breaking errand, felt the spring returning to his members on gliding up to see the top of a black head barely visible above the rail thrust at a slight angle against a supporting fair one.

"'*Arma virumque cano*——'" murmured Timothy to himself, "and likewise to quote the Haytian proverb: '*Derrière mornes, gagner mornes.*' *Sapristi!* I see where I must make another trip!"

The heads parted suddenly as he reversed his motor and glided up to the steps. Arden's rosy face peeped over the rail.

"How was he?" she asked, with a ripple of laughter.

"I left him weak but convalescent," Timothy answered, making fast the painter, "but this second bump is apt to produce a fatal relapse." He made fast the painter and came up on the veranda to find Ralph and Arden in much the same position they had occupied for the last hour. "What a pity that you couldn't have made a foursome of it," he said regretfully. "However, my warmest felicitations and all that sort of thing."

Arden sprang up and kissed him and he shook hands with Ralph, then glanced up at the sky and gave a weatherwise nod. "Fixed fair," said he, "you could get there by five o'clock."

"Get where?" Arden asked breathlessly.

"San Jan."

Arden gave a litle shriek. Ralph stared fixedly at Timothy.

"Think what a joke it would be on Jerry and—well, everybody but me. And save you the nuisance of thanking a lot of people you don't like for a lot of rubbish you don't want. All hands would be sore, of course, especially Campbell and Dacre and the society reporters and movie fans and Ralph's regiment and all the rest who would lose the chance of making a fuss over you. But think of the fun you'd have——"

"Tim, are you crazy?" cried Arden, and stared at Ralph. He stared back with a rather wild expression. Then both heads turned and stared at Timothy.

"Of course," said that youthful genius, "if Arden is going to keep on playing, you mustn't listen to my rash suggestion. Think of the mass of valuable gratuitous advertising. Campbell would be delighted. Interviews and pictures of your brief courtship or reconciliation in Utopia—my word, I'm sorry I spoke! It would be worth millions to Utopia. The old baron would probably give you a diamond tiara! There, put it out of your heads—scat the idea!"

Ralph looked extremely thoughtful. If there was anything he loathed it was being the center of a social fuss. But the contemplation of such an ordeal as Timothy outlined was unendurable to a man naturally reserved and diffident about his personal life. He agreed with Ruth about the "indecency of the conventional wedding." The idea of a modest man and woman making a spectacle of themselves before an ogling crowd on the very eve of entering into the most intimate relations offended his sense of the fastidious.

Arden felt this also and put it more frankly than Ralph would have cared to do. "I must say, I believe that Tim is right, Ralph," said she. "Jerry and Ruth showed good sense. Why should we make a free show of ourselves for a lot of smirking idiots? Once we're married we don't care because—well, we're married." The rich color poured into her face.

"Precisely," said Timothy with unction.

"Everybody grins at a bride-about-to-be, whereas a bride-who-is can grin at everybody. There is no impertinent speculation as to the immediate future. We can call up the aërodrome and get a chase four-seater which ought to land us in San Juan——"

"*We—us?*" Arden echoed.

"Of course. It is always preferable to have a brother to give away the bride when this is convenient. Ruth would probably have lugged Ralph along if he had been at the hotel instead of barking down the Bund. Besides, it is my idea. Having a double family wedding rather gives the thing a cachet and sounds less like an impromptu elopement made under the influence of Utopia——"

Ralph struck his thigh a ringing slap. "By gad, he's right, Arden. Instead of one notice in to-morrow's papers, there'll be two. It will appear to have been quietly arranged to avoid publicity. Of course, Tim's to come. I don't think we can ever do without him again. It's the best plan, Arden. A clandestine wedding at home would not do at all, but we are a long way from home, and, besides, it's not as though we had married on the spur of the moment. We've been engaged before." He rose to his feet. "Carry on, Tim. Telephone over for the fastest plane they've got in their shed and an ace pilot. I'll run back and get some things and call for Arden here."

CHAPTER XXII.

In the new Hôtel de la Paix at San Juan Ruth and Jerry were just sitting down to their wedding supper when they heard the voice of their waiter raised in expostulation with somebody just outside the little balcony which they had reserved. Then to Ruth's utter consternation came the crisp tones of a man, resonant and authoritative.

"It's Ralph!" she cried in dismay. "Oh, Jerry, why did we send that radio to-day?"

"My fault, sweetheart," Jerry growled. "It didn't seem possible that he would come on learning that we'd been married. God bless my soul—isn't that Arden's voice?"

"As sure as we're alive and married!" Ruth exclaimed. "Well, perhaps they haven't come to be disagreeable, but I must say I think that Ralph is carrying his fraternal duty rather far."

She rose to her feet and moved toward the door, Jerry at her elbow. Their waiter, still protesting, opened it. There in a row, stiff, straight, and soldierly like a squad of the provost guard receiving orders, stood Mr. O'Connor, Ralph, Arden, and Timothy. At the last moment Timothy's filial affection had triumphed. He could not leave his father out, and he knew that this kindly and loving parent's heart would have been broken had he done so.

Not one of the quartet cracked a smile. Their faces suggested instead their having just come from a hanging rather than a wedding. This was their revenge for the shock so recently sustained—Timothy's idea.

Arden was the first to weaken. Her lips began to twitch and with a joyous laugh she flung herself forward and caught her new sister in her arms. "Oh, Ruth," she cried, "we're all so glad!"

"All so glad——" Jerry echoed, staring at Ralph.

"Of course we are, old chap," said Ralph, gripping Jerry's hand. "But we really couldn't let you get away with it scot-free after the jolt you gave us, so we've run down to wish you joy."

Not a word about the actual object of their visit achieved two hours earlier. This was to be saved for the dénouement. Felicitations over, the maître d'hôtel was summoned by the recuperating Jerry and waiters wound up and set spinning.

"You see, Jerry," said Timothy, as they sat down, "if you two had bolted off to get married from any other place than Utopia we would have let you go your sweet way undisturbed. As it was, we were afraid people might think you had acted under Utopian influence and without giving the weighty step its due deliberation. But as a private family wedding it is vested with a certain dignity and elegance."

"I hope that Mr. and Mrs. Putney will think so," Jerry answered.

"Father and mother have formed the habit of thinking what I tell them," said Ralph. "That is my recompense for never having had any fun."

Ruth, sitting between Ralph and Jerry, gave her brother's hand a squeeze. "It was sweet of you, Ralph," said she. "You make me feel like that supreme egoist, the cat."

"My own fault for overplaying my watch-dog part," said Ralph. "We have been blown up by our own mines, my dear."

Ruth glanced across the table at Arden,

seated between Timothy and her father, then gave Ralph's hand another squeeze. "Oh, Ralph," she murmured, "if it could only happen to you! Arden is lovelier than ever. She seems to have found—what shall I say? Her soul?"

Ralph sighed deeply and turned away his head to hide the twitching of his lips. "Arden and I shall never marry," said he. "That is done with."

Later the talk became more generally serious, turning naturally on Utopia. Timothy alone defended the institution to which the present glad event owed its being, and this defense was in the nature of an apology for the sake of argument.

"Leaving out the art excuse," said he, "Utopia is a world monument and testament to the danger of extreme. It is better that this should happen in Haiti than in America, and that might possibly have one day occurred. You can no more suppress perpetually the liberty of pleasure than you can the liberty of thought. You may smother it for a while, but one day it will burst out in conflagration."

"That may be true, Tim," said his father, "and I will not deny but what the rotten place is to some extent a sort of national safety valve. But a safety valve that is always wide open is a sorry thing for the machine."

"Economically it's a parasite," said Ralph. "Look at the flood of American dollars pouring into the place, and to feed what?"

"Principally Rosenthal," said Jerry. "I ought not bite the hand that feeds me, but I must say the old boy is our national tapeworm. Fortunately he's philanthropic, but his successors may not be."

Ruth rested her elbows on the table and looked across at Timothy. She had always felt a certain respect for the mental machinery of this youth and this now had become almost deferential, since she had lost her bet.

"Have you ever thought of any solution for Utopia, Tim?" she asked.

Timothy smiled. "That is the first thing one *does* think of on going there, isn't it, sister dear?" he asked. "Unless one lets the place or some member of its colony get away with one——" His eyes twinkled. He had always enjoyed teasing Ruth.

"*Touché*, Tim. Well, what is the remedy?"

"It has two ingredients, both of which are natural abundant American products: money and intelligence. The first step would be to introduce the European café and pleasure-garden system throughout America; the second to use the excise revenue resulting from this to buy out Utopia."

There was a moment of silence, then Ralph remarked that the Utopia Company might not be willing to sell.

"I think they would," said Mr. O'Connor, "though naturally they would stand out for an enormous profit. I have heard Rosenthal, who owns the controlling interest, say as much. He is not the big arch-devil so many think."

"Merely introducing the continental café system as Tim suggests would hit the place hard," said Jerry. "Who knows but that it might be a knock-out blow. A good many men have told me that they came to Utopia merely because they were sore at not being able to get a drink at home. Of course they could go to Cuba or Jamaica, but Utopia is easier and quicker to get to, and they think that while they are about it they might as well see the show."

Ruth sighed. "It is terrible to think of letting drink in again after we have worked so hard to root it out," said she, "and it is sickening to know that the people who founded Utopia should make an enormous profit. Practically it amounts to paying blackmail."

"It would rather be paying for our own big blunder," Timothy said. "If through misjudgment or wrong reasoning you have contracted a wasting disease, it is better to pay a surgeon to operate on you than to have it go on poisoning your system and wasting your strength. Especially if you happen to be rich. That is what Utopia is doing to America, and it has got to be cut out. It is like a chigoe in a tender part of our anatomy."

"More like a cancer than a jigger," snorted Mr. O'Connor. "I'm fairly liberal, but I've had my fill of Utopia and am going to get out. Most of us there feel the same way about it; Scott and Mitchell and all the rest. I'm not quite sure but what the old baron is a little fed up on it himself."

"It's not normal," said Timothy, "nor is it precisely decadent. It's purely reactionary; a sort of counterweight to our own abnormal enforced virtue. As long as that continues, Utopia will flourish."

"What would the government do with it after buying it?" Arden asked.

"Better treat it like the Augean stables," growled Mr. O'Connor. "Raise the dam fifty feet and cover it up."

"No," said Jerry, "it might be turned into a big subsidized health resort. Lots of invalids would find benefit in the climate and baths. One of our doctors told me that the place would be ideal for patients with Bright's or rheumatism and asthma and diabetes and heart disease and throat and bronchial weaknesses. The warm dampness would bar it for lungers. It might possibly become a popular resort for the winter."

Ruth drew a deep breath. "Well," said she, "you all have my permission to do what you like with Utopia. My resignation as a reformer is on the table. I seem to be one of many who have made a mess of things and I shall leave the straightening out of them to others of wiser methods and less extreme." She looked at Jerry and smiled.

Mr. O'Connor rose. "Timothy and I must be getting back," said he. "We are still workers there, and have our duties to perform." Then, seeing a look of surprise on Jerry's face, he added: "We came in a separate plane."

"Yes," sighed Timothy, "father and I must return to the infected area. I have an unpleasant morning's interview with Campbell. Ralph and Arden have decided to stop here for the night."

Nobody spoke for an instant, then Jerry said dryly: "Such a joke is scarcely up to your brilliant wit, my boy."

"Nor to your intelligence, dear Benedick," retorted Timothy. "What do you think we really came for, anyhow, since you hadn't the decency to invite us to your wedding? Oh, the supreme egoism of love! Since when have you had an exclusive option on the clergy of this place?"

There was a breathless silence, then Ruth sprang to her feet with a little shriek and exclaimed:

"Timothy—what do you mean?"

Timothy smiled sweetly at his brother. "I think this little supper is on you, Jerry," said he. "Look at Arden's hand."

THE EFFICACY OF PRAYER

IN a mountain section of Tennessee there are two subjects which the natives are always willing to discuss: the efficacy of prayer and the right of any self-respecting adult man to make moonshine whisky and sell it—or drink it.

Tom Lacey was the principal religious expounder of the county, and the topic on which he was particularly loquacious was the value of prayer. At one time he had the neighbors praying for everything, from a good apple crop to a warm winter. His chief antagonist on the prayer issue was Sim Atkinson. Sim kept a list of all the prayers the people in the vicinity had offered to the Deity, and a second list of all the petitions which, to date, had not been answered.

Soon after the peace notes began to fly thick and fast between Washington and Berlin, Tom Lacey met Sim in a mountain road, and inquired:

"Sim, air you keepin' up your blas*phee*my?"

"I ain' sartin whut you means," responded Sim, "but I tell you hyuh an' naow, Tom Lacey, you bettuh drap this prayin' talk!"

"Why?"

"You allers talkin' 'bout how prayin' to Gawd shows a man is right with heaven. But how 'bout this hyuh kaiser? He done been prayin' an' prayin' all times 'cep'in when he been runnin' fum our boys. He done got hissef ez many callous places on his knees ez he has corns on his feet. An' look at 'im!"

"I done considered that thar fac', Sim," replied Tom. "An' Gawd has done gave me the answer. This hyuh kaiser has simply done over-prayed hisse'f."

Tourists Three for Tampa

By Clarence L. Cullen

Author of "The Last Straw," "A Sleeper on Second," Etc.

Once more bringing on Byron J. Bingley, the greatest of moving-picture directors, who says: "You forget that we picture people are not purveying to grown-ups. We're pandering, by compulsion, to Youth." And the story holds the very essence of Youth

DOWN here to do a Florida film story, eh? The usual rubbish, I presume?"

"Rubbish is right. Rubbish unspeakable. Rubbish surpassing the power of language to describe. A picture play compounded mainly of milky moonlight, marshmallows, muddle-headedness, and mush. Well?"

"Oh, nothing. Only, it's a wonder you movie people wouldn't occasionally show us on the screen a story with a little sense to it. A story, that is, with some sure-enough innards. A story, not to put too fine a point on it, that really grown-up folks could follow without gagging."

"You forget that we picture people are not purveying to grown-ups. We're pandering, by compulsion, to Youth. You don't give a kitten a Chinese-carved zodiacal ball of heavy ivory to play with. No. You give her—or him—a ball of yarn. Just so. Youth wouldn't have screen stuff with heft to it, for the simple reason that Youth doesn't savvy heft. Youth, itself being composed chiefly of fluff and fatuity, demands, for film provender, its equivalent qualities, meaning flubdub and folderol. Get me?"

The host, smoking his after-dinner cigar on the hibiscus-hedged greensward of his palm-swaddled and poinsettia-swathed winter home in Florida, nodded grimly. He could not fail to "get" his crony of other days when the latter, touched upon the raw of his favorite topic—which, if put forth in pamphlet form, would be called "An Apology for the All-around Asininity of the Average Screen Story"—began to strike from the shoulder on that subject.

The host's crony of a former period was Byron J. Bingley, that monolith among moving-picture directors, renowned as "Byron J. Bingley presents——" on the flicker film everywhere in the world from Ruritania to Rangoon. Mr. Bingley, as the colloquy already has disclosed, was just arrived in Florida, with his constellation of screen stars, for the film fabrication of a Florida picture the character of which is described above in Mr. Bingley's own words. The first man he had met immediately upon his arrival in the sun-swept Florida city was this somewhat saturnine possessor of a superb Florida home, a pal of an earlier epoch in a great city of the North. By him Mr. Bingley had been incontinently thrust into an automobile and carried for dinner to the Spanish-mission "bungalow"—of thirty-four rooms and six baths—overlooking a river that glistened in the slanting rays of the setting sun like a great sprawling serpent of sapphire-hued enamel inlaid with gold. And now, on the green-plush lawn, over the cigars, Mr. Bingley had been touched upon the raw of his favorite topic.

"By compulsion, permit me to repeat, we address ourselves to the adolescent, we analyze adolescence," dogmatized Mr. Bingley, skillfully hanging a smoke wreath around the plumy tip of a date-palm frond at his elbow. "You know, and I know, what Youth is. Youth is benightedness, bunkerino, blurbiness, billy-be-dangedness——"

"H'm," objected Mr. Bingley's host. "Outside of that, Youth is all right, I hope."

"And Youth, glorying in its mental opacity, glides forever in the rut of least resistance," orated Mr. Bingley, ignoring the interruption. "Youth, itself as old as the world, never does anything new. Youth, patternized to the final pinfeather, fettered by formulæ, lacks initiative, and therefore disdains innovation. Follow me?"

"Sort o'; but isn't the going a little lumpy?" said the host.

"So, in pandering to Youth, we perforce provide Youth with its patternized pabu-

lum," rumbled Mr. Bingley. "Youth won't have your 'story with sense to it' on the screen. Not on your silvery top-knot will it, shipmate! It clamors for the sirup of sentimentality; its sweetikins on the screen must be soaked in syllabub; She has got to be all sugar from stockinettes to side-combs, He has got to be one-hundred-proof saccharine on stilts. So there you are! 'Story with a little sense to it!' The bankruptcy court beckons with both hands to the bug who tries to feed 'em on film food that has a one-tenth-of-one-per-cent trace or tincture of what you call grown-up sense in it."

"Forgive me," feebly mumbled the host. "I knew not what I said."

"Far be it from me to flail the foolish occupation which I follow, flitter mouse that I am," continued Mr. Bingley, his tone now slightly tinged with self-pity, "but I am here to maintain that the movies are not for the mature-minded. They're built for easy assimilation by bob-veal brains. All of us know this. All of us—moving-picture people, I mean—take our regular turns in sobbing out our little hearts over it. But Youth must be served. And Youth scorns the sensible, hoots at highbrowism, pooh-poohs plausibility, and hankers solely for the old, old hoakum. So the old hoakum, Heaven help us, is what we have to give 'em!"

"Queer idea, that, of yours, that young people are patternized," murmured Mr. Bingley's host. "I hadn't noticed that. There's plenty of kick-over-the-traces originality—too durned much of it, if you're asking me, Bing—about the young people I see about me. About my own young people, when it comes to that."

"You imagine that," pronounced Mr. Bingley out of hand. "All adolescence is embedded in the amber of its own antiquity. Youth does the old, old things in the old, old way. If you could corral a million boys and girls, all under twenty-five, on an island, and prod them scientifically for new stuff, you wouldn't snag a single new story out of the whole set. They're liker, as to promptings and purposes, than peas in a pod. Youth, in short, is Old Stuff. Hence the deplorable state of the screen. Er—uh——"

Mr. Bingley, brought to a stop by the sudden appearance before him of the second butler, a young negro clad in white duck, bearing a trayful of bottles of mineral waters and glasses, made a slightly wry face. There was no Scotch on the tray. His host caught his expression.

"Dreary-looking layout, ain't it?" said the host, grinning. "But I've run plumb out of stuff. Shipment on the way from New York. Been on the way for a month—government-run railroads be hanged! And Florida, you know, is dustier than the desert—dead-and-gone bone-dry, save for one town, over on the west coast, where they make cigars, and that'll be dry, too, in a few days. Dickens of it is, I've a birthday day after to-morrow, and always, on my birthday, I have my old buddies here—I've been living in Florida for fourteen winters, you know—at the house for a little party; Scotch and champagne and sandwiches and the like. But this birthday I'll have to give 'em the painful fluids you're making the face over. Sorry, old mate. Can't be helped. You see how I'm fixed."

"You might, at any rate, invite me to your old birthday party," suggested Mr. Bingley with the air of a man striving to make the best of a bitter moment.

"You'll attend the party, of course, if I have to go out myself and rope you," replied his host. "But I'll promise you a sad occasion, with nothing on the sideboard to make the circulation circ."

"That shipment—at any rate, *a* shipment—might, by some chance, arrive in time," said Mr. Bingley, blinking reflectively. "From somewhere," he added after a slight pause.

"Don't figure on that—blast these government-mismanaged railroads!" chanted his host.

Mr. Bingley, doing the best he could by the mineral water, meaning that he sipped at it as if it had been a saturated solution of bichloride of mercury, presently took his departure for his hotel, after promising to attend his host's white-ribbon birthday party forty-eight hours later.

II.

Having jumped her job as a waitress in a Daytona hotel, Miss Daniella Diggs promptly reëntered public life as the driver of a car "For Hire." It may be that this is rather a crude way of stating her case, considering that there really were mitigating circumstances. The facts, therefore, will be briefly outlined.

Daniella, engaged in the North as a waitress for the winter season in this fashion-

able Daytona hotel, found herself in disfavor with the head waitress almost immediately upon her appearance for duty. The psycho-analyst probably would contend that the esoteric reason for the head waitress' hostility toward Daniella was that, while both women had red hair, Daniella's was of the true Titian tint, whereas the head waitress' was decidedly of the Carrot—as distinguished from the Corot—hue. If this theory is to prevail, it may as well be amplified by additional facts.

Whereas, then, the head waitress was so forty-ly robust as to be practically impervious to the craftiest efforts of the custom-made straight-front builders, Daniella was as twenty-ly lithe, though smoothly rounded in the sinuous style, as any single shaft in the great swaying stack of growing bamboo at the back of the hotel; whereas, again, the head waitress' facial freckles, aggressively bran-colored, had been bestowed upon her as liberally as the Dalmatian's spots are given unto or onto him, Daniella's entire repertoire of freckles consisted of an insignificant little golden-brown affair planted squarely on the bridge of a shapely, if slightly tilted, nose that manifestly had been made to order for the piquant exploitation of just that one freckle; and whereas—the final one, since this begins to read like a set of resolutions—the head waitress, though vindictively competent at her profession, was homelier than any hedge fence ever was or could be, Daniella was as pretty as a crimson azalea in full blossom on a sun-drenched porch.

Another point of contrast between them, though the head waitress had no knowledge of this, was that Daniella, having already taken the Bryn Mawr degree that she had gone after, was now, if the money for it could be earned, pointing for a post-graduate summer course in domestic science. Daniella's rooted purpose in this, it is humiliating to record, was to learn how to keep house systematically in case the occasion should arise; meaning, that is, in case she should get married. Candor compels, even if delicacy might suppress, the statement that Daniella expected to be married, sooner or later, to the right kind of a male. She did not, of course, publicly and boisterously say so; but she fully intended to marry the right somebody in due time. Beneath her wavy Titian aureole, nestling comfortably at the back of her mind, were all kinds of agreeable little visions of A Home of Her Own, with dotted Swiss curtains, and a riot of rose bushes in the front yard and a flourishing truck patch at the back, and plenty of large, encompassing bath towels, and a fireless cooker and an ice-cream freezer and a sure-enough electric toaster 'n' everything—not excluding babies.

All of this, of course, was for the future to mold. For the present, after having worked as a waitress, with other self-supporting college girls as mates, for two summers at a hotel in the Adirondacks to earn part of the money for her Bryn Mawr degree, she found herself "in Dutch," as she indecorously phrased it in her self-communings, under the tyrannizing disfavor of a Florida winter hotel head waitress who, on the very first day Daniella appeared, had announced to the assistant head waitress that she was goin' t 'git that stuck-up baggage or her name wasn't Bernice.

The initial clinch came when Daniella was ordered to do her hair, for dining-room duty, into a synthetic or imitation bob, with those far too well-known little blobs of hirsute pinned, or glued, or something, just forward of the ears. All of the other waitresses had supinely submitted to this ukase. But Daniella, whose simple, nonclamorous method of doing her hair was quite satisfactory to herself, ignored the edict, whereupon the head waitress, before all the other waitresses at their own dinner in the ordinary, had pounced, figuratively, upon Daniella like a somewhat asthmatic and slightly profane pantheress, only to be quizzically smiled at in her gold-capped front teeth by her composed victim. So round one, as the pugilistic chroniclers would phrase it, was about fifty-fifty.

The succeeding rounds, however, were undeniably the head waitress', owing to Daniella's lamentable lack of training for a grueling, full-distance affair, or, indeed, for the more pronounced forms of rough stuff of any kind. Daniella, at the end of a few days, discerned that Bernice, her dining-room superior, was bent upon nothing short of setting the skids under her job. This did not worry her, knowing, as she did, that Florida, all the way from Jacksonville to Miami, is in the tourist season the most help-bereft and, therefore, the most job-prolific commonwealth for competent white women in the entire American Union. But she liked Daytona, a city that flashes like a jewel on

the breast of a queen, and she hated the thought of being fired from any kind of a job. So Daniella had something to think about when, her day's work finished, she went of evenings to her teenchy room over a bake shop on the river front, to write her nightly letter to her only near relative, a letter-exacting aunt in the North, before turning in.

Destiny, however, did not design that Daniella should be juggled out of her job. Or, if Destiny entertained any such a purpose, Daniella beat Destiny to it by resigning.

A middle-aged man with porcine jowls and a roll of fat on the back of his neck and an interrogative eye and an oleaginous leer was the chosen instrument whereby she was enabled to put her resignation over. This porkish one, an individual of great wealth, as his dazzling investiture of diamonds clearly indicated, sat in splendor, by himself, at one of Daniella's tables. His waitress' studied disregard of his questioning eye and oily grin, far from extinguishing him, only incited him to further coquetry. He made his final effort when, Daniella being just then engaged in serving him his dessert, he plopped a large, new and gaudily gleaming twenty-dollar gold piece on the tablecloth right alongside Daniella's carefully kept right hand, where, according to his subtle calculation, it would be impossible for her not to see it.

Not the slightest twitching of a facial muscle nor even the symptom of a change of color, however, gave him to understand that Daniella had seen the glittering disk of gold. It was not, in fact, until his waitress failed to return to the dining room with the demitasse he had ordered that the larded Lothario felt convinced that she must have seen it.

Daniella, setting down her tray and calmly removing her pretty little ruffled apron, told the head waitress of the incident in a few incisive words, without any trace of excitement.

"Pretty soft for you," was Bernice's comment, her eyes envious. "That ol' papa John's got it to toss at the birdies. Ya grabbed th' twenty, o' course?"

Bernice knew differently, having seen the transaction, as she saw everything that happened in the dining room, with her eagle eye.

"You know that I didn't take it," said Daniella, neatly folding her apron. "I'm through here," she added, making for the waitress' exit.

"My Gawd, it's time ya went, ya poor fish!" was the head waitress' Parthian dart. "Floatin' aroun' Florida as a biscuit-shooter in the tourist season, tryin' t' pull that St. Cecilia stuff——"

Daniella, self-skidded out of a job and glad that it had happened that way instead of the other, started for her room, debating whether she should seek another place in Daytona or go farther South to Palm Beach or Miami and thereby get a more comprehensive view of Florida. Of course, she would immediately try for another job somewhere. She had to, in consideration of the very slight wad of small-sized bills reposing under her left stocking; in consideration, too, that she had come to Florida to work there during the entire winter, and meant to do just that, without writing to her aunt in the North for a penny, the aunt not being any too well fixed, at that.

On her way to her room Daniella, passing one of the two Beach Street corners where Daytona's large winter allotment of "For Hire" automobiles were, at this early-afternoon hour, lined up by the score as far back as Palmetto Street, caught the lamentation, to one of his mates on the line, of the good-natured-looking fat old proprietor of four of these cars for tourists.

"Here I am with two of my flivvers eatin' their heads off, and nobody to drive 'em, and the town all jammed up with coin-burnin' folks that'll ride in any old thing that's got wheels," wailed the white-mustached possessor of the four cars of a make so well known that the advertising department of a magazine couldn't think of having the make mentioned on any other terms except regular advertising rates. Daniella, walking slowly in order to listen, derived that the two regular drivers of the flivvers were down with influenza. Sudden thinking being one of this young woman's most marked traits, she turned in her tracks and walked back to the flu-bereft owner of two nonworking flivvers.

"I can drive that kind of a car," Daniella said to him.

Which, of course, was perfectly true. Her aunt in the North owned a car of that kind, and Daniella, home for vacations, had had the time of her life driving the second-hand old thing everywhere within a radius of a

hundred miles of her aunt's Pennsylvania farm.

"So can a lot o' folks, miss," said the old boy, studying her wonderingly, "but that don't help me none. People that *can* drive 'em ain't what I need. What I'm honin' for is somebody that *will* drive my two loafin' ones."

"I'll drive one of them," said Daniella.

The proprietor of flivvers, when he recovered from his astonishment, grabbed at her offer. The prettiest red-headed girl he'd ever seen in all his long life, chauffeuring one of his flivvers for hire! Daytona would fall for the novelty with a clatter! Anybody could see that she was a downright nice square girl, too, who would give the flirty lads short shrift. The more timid women tourists would be glad to have a tidy, quiet girl drive 'em, too, instead of some rough skate of a man. This was the line of calculation that shot through his mind.

"Fifty-fifty, miss, is the cut for you," said he to Daniella. "That is, you keep half of what you make with the bus. Or I'll pay you a salary, and a good one, if you prefer, though you'd do better splitting the rake-down with me."

Daniella, spending the rest of that afternoon driving the better of the two idle flivvers, to get the hang of its individual idiosyncrasies, over all the Daytona-surrounding roads from Tomoka Bridge to New Smyrna and from Ormonde to Ponce Park, appeared alongside her curb-parked car, ready for business, at eight the next morning, rigged in her neat dark-blue tailored suit and a regulation chauffeur's cap that, perched slightly to one side on her glossy mop of bronzy hair, produced an effect of studied rakishness somewhat beyond her expectation or desire. She was compelled to modify or neutralize this rakish effect by the assumption of a demeanor of marked austerity in order to ward off the attempts at all-too-friendly chirrupings on the part of the admiring male drivers on the "For Hire" line. Daniella was so successful as a neutralizer that these gay blades from the North, within fifteen minutes after her appearance among them, were herded together in little subdued-speaking groups, the subject of these symposia being the strange and unprecedented frostiness of a red-headed girl in a chauffeur's cap.

At exactly half-past eight, half an hour to the minute after Daniella had assumed the avocation of a flivver driver for hire, her first patron appeared. She had the least favorable position on the line, not yet, of course, having caught the knack of jockeying for the berths closest to the main river-front thoroughfare, her car being head-on to the curb not far from Palmetto Street. A blockily built man of middle age, red faced and somewhat pouchy as to jowls, but with a pair of keen and kindling eyes, bore down on her from the direction of Palmetto Street. Seeing that he was casting his kindling eyes along the long line of cars for hire, Daniella sized him for a prospective customer.

"Automobile, sir?" she said to him, stepping briskly toward him on the sidewalk.

The blocky man puckered his brows and scowled at her.

"Is that an automobile?" he growled at her, not loudly but certainly with a canine intonation, gazing at her flivver with an expression of extreme deprecation.

Daniella, instantly freezing solid, turned her back upon him.

"Pardon me. Bad joke. Out-of-date comedy. Yes, I want to engage a car."

Hearing him say these things in a quite human voice, with the canine sound now entirely absent from it, Daniella turned to him again. She melted slightly when she saw that the smile on his jowly countenance was rather an agreeable one.

"I want," said the thick-set man, still talking and smiling humanly, "to go to Tampa to-day and to come back here from Tampa to-morrow."

Daniella felt like gulping, but didn't. Tampa! Tampa, away over on the Gulf side of Florida! She had a hazy knowledge that there are no east-and-west railroads in Florida, all of its rail lines running north and south. But to catch, for her first attempt as a for-hire chauffeur, the job of driving a man—a strange man—all the way to Tampa and back, smack-dab through the State of Florida! Daniella showed considerable self-control in refraining from gulping; but it will have been noticed by this time, it is hoped, that Daniella was a remarkably self-possessed young woman.

"I am going to Tampa," went on the first applicant for a ride in her flivver, "to get a couple of phonographs. The phonographs will be packed in rather large boxes. There is room, I think, at the back of your car for them. Of course," he added with the pouchy smile of many creases that Daniella

somehow was beginning to like, "I'll ride in the seat alongside you."

Phonographs. Man going all the way to Tampa in a hired flivver for two phonographs. Weren't there any phonographs to be purchased or rented in Daytona, then? But that, of course, was the man's own business. He was entitled to go to Tampa, or to the north pole, for phonographs if he wanted to. These reflections sped cascade-wise through Daniella's mind. Atop of them was another thought, and a poser: Just how far was it to Tampa and back, and supposing she took it, how much should she charge the man for the job?

"Tampa," the blocky man went on, as if he had divined the character of this poser, "is, according to the road map, one hundred and sixty-five miles from Daytona. If we start now, we'll make it easily before sundown. We'll leave Tampa at this same hour to-morrow morning, and get back to Daytona before dark. I'll pay for your hotel outlay in Tampa, settle for the gas and oil you use, make good for any breakages you may incur, and pay you a hundred dollars for the job. That satisfactory?"

A hundred dollars for two days of fun, just fun—driving a delicious old flivver, that made exactly the same kind of a noise that her aunt's flivver that she'd played with up North did, for two delightful days through the heart of Florida, and getting one—hundred—dollars for it, and fifty dollars of this windfall her very own! Daniella's mind, well-controlled as it was, was in a whirl. But stay! Didn't all this sound too good to be true? Maybe this man—though certainly he looked reliable!—really was insolvent, or broke, or something, and merely wanted a free ride to Tampa, and wouldn't she be out of luck if, after being hauled to Tampa, he should decamp without paying her!

"Of course, you don't know me," Daniella, flushing over her first customer's skill as a mind reader, heard him say then, "and it wouldn't be square to ask you to take a chance on my honesty. So, if it's agreeable, I'll pay you the hundred now, in advance."

He had taken a bulky bill fold from his breast pocket and plucked a brittle new one-hundred-dollar note from it before Daniella, flushing some more, held up a staying hand.

"I don't know the Florida roads, but I've heard that some of them are pretty bad," said she, smiling rosily. "And I haven't got you to Tampa yet, sir—much less brought you back."

The stocky man replaced the bill in the folder when he saw that she would not take it until she had earned it.

"I'm willing to do a little gambling that you'll get me there and back," said he in his succinct way of speaking.

Daniella felt herself thrilling under the remark. This nice old man—he was about forty-eight, and, therefore, incredibly aged to a girl of twenty-one—had confidence in her! She had felt slightly whipped, so far, in "the land of sunshine and flowers." This was the first person she had met in Florida who really seemed to believe in her. Substantial-looking, well-spoken old thing, too—a gentleman; and what a sunny smile that was on his funny, crowsfooty old face! He would "do a little gambling" on her, would he? Then she'd drive him to Tampa, and drive him back from Tampa—and make good!

"We'd better be starting if we're to make Tampa by sundown," said Daniella, stepping into the car and settling herself in the driver's seat as unconcernedly as if she meant merely to run the old bus around the corner to the grocery to get a loaf of bread for lunch.

"Plucky young woman—you do your sex proud," briefly commented the blocky party as he got into the seat beside her.

Daniella headed the car south on the New Smyrna road. She had a very nebulous idea, barring the fact that New Smyrna was the turning-west point, of how she was going to get to Tampa, but she was on her way.

III.

Lieutenant Vincent de P. Mayhew—Distinguished Service Cross and French Croix de Guerre—felt that he was in kind of bad with his dad. He had no doubt that his dad sort o' liked him in a way, and he knew that he himself more than liked his dad. But they'd gone to the mat together two or three times lately, and the guvnor, the lieutenant was sure, had him figured for a mule head and a boob and an all-round N. G.; and the thought that this was his guvnor's opinion of him made the lieutenant feel distinctly measley.

The lieutenant, an aviator in the French service in 1916-'17, and in 1917-'18 a first-

line flyer under Pershing, had been messed up a little, as he expressed it, when his scout plane, flying low over the enemy lines in the St. Mihiel operation, had been brought down at a spot in No Man's Land from which he just could crawl to the safety of the American lines and no more. The damage wasn't of any permanent kind, but it was sufficient to cause him to be mustered out just before the armistice. By the time he reached the United States his folks were established in their winter home in Florida, and for Florida, of course, the young man streaked twenty-four hours after landing in New York. His mother and sister gave him a tremendous wet-eyed reception—"frightful pawing-over" was his way of phrasing it in letters to buddies still in France—and the old dad looked him over kind of blinkily, too, and blew his nose considerably and all like that.

But, a couple of weeks after the young man's arrival in Florida, the guvnor had begun tossing out hints with regard to his only son's future. The old dad entertained grisly ideas, the young man considered, of what his, the lieutenant's, life should be. The guvnor, having built up, practically from nothing, a publishing business in the North that was now worth about three million dollars at a conservative valuation, figured that the obvious and natural thing, now that his lad was through with college and finished with flying to make the world safe for democracy, and so on, and was now verging upon twenty-five years of age—the guvnor figured that son Vincent, after having a good rest in Florida, ought to jump right into this publishing business of his, and learn it from the bottom up, so that he'd know what to do with it when the time came for it to be passed along to him.

Son Vincent, flyer of France and America, looked upon the publishing business as a dull sort of a game, and all but said so. Publishing wasn't in his line a-tall. No flying whatever in publishing. No romping through the circumambient blue in a big buzzard of power, tuned to high C, and thereby getting something out of life. Just a dreary old grind, squatting at a desk and being bored to extinction by long-haired and crazy-in-the-dome writing people that the boy at the anteroom gate permitted to pass through. Not for him, son Vincent, if he could help himself!

Son Vincent's idea of a future for himself was something entirely different. It had to do with aviation—commercial aviation. He wanted to establish a light-express air-plane line between, say, New York and Chicago for a starter. Later, he could build up light-express air-plane routes right through from New York to San Francisco, Seattle, and Los Angeles, delivering parcels, of course, at way points in between; little places like Detroit and Omaha and Denver and so on. There'd be class to a business like that—the new-stuff thing; not the dreary, monotonous old-stuff game like the dry-as-dust publishing business. With a light-express air-plane line, or lines, of his own, he could keep in constant trim and fettle by doing a little flying himself right along; in fact, at the start he'd run one of the planes himself over his parcel route. And the light-express air-plane line between New York and Chicago wouldn't cost much to start; little matter of five hundred thousand or so; cigarette change for the old dad.

To all of which the guvnor had replied, each and every time son Vincent stated his commercial aviation plans, with just the one word:

"Shucks!"

Not only that, but his father had seemed quite peeved on these occasions, showing no imagination whatever. Son Vincent felt disappointed. He always had given the old dad credit for possessing a quite passable imagination. But now!

Son Vincent, on the night of his latest run-in with his father over this future thing, decided to make a litle jog somewhere in his car on the next day for the purpose of thinking matters out. Of course, the guvnor was all wrong—hopelessly and unimaginatively all wrong about everything—but, still, he, son Vincent, hated to have the only father he possessed look upon him as a fathead and a fizzgigger; so maybe it would be best for him to beat it away in his car for a couple of days and give the guvnor a chance to cool out and feel ashamed of his pitiable lack of imagination.

Where to go? He had already raced his car down from Daytona to the great army aviation camp in southern Florida at Arcadia, where he'd had the time of his life—incidentally nearly losing it twice—trying out new air planes to the profound admiration of the young army aviators, still anchored on this side when the armistice came, who

knew all about his record in France. So he wouldn't go to Arcadia again this trip. How about Tampa? That would make a neat little day's run. And he knew a feller over there, a young Floridian recently mustered out of the British air service, who had a pretty good buzzard of his own, a four-seated British plane. Tampa it would be! He'd get a little flying over there in the British air bus.

Vincent, in his aviator's uniform because his new civilian duds were not yet ready, started for Tampa at nine o'clock on a morning of soft amber sunshine, in his custom-made speedster, a sport car with a mauve body that had not been built to take the dust, on regular roads, of any other car whatever. He made the fifteen miles on the concrete road, which is part of the Dixie Highway, between Daytona and New Smyrna in something satisfactorily under fifteen minutes, slowing down to thirty miles an hour only when he had to, upon heading westward out of New Smyrna over the lumpy, badly eroded shell road to De Land, twenty-six miles away.

Breathing sulphurous remarks about some of the cross-State motor roads of Florida, which he knew by heart, he had bumped over about half of the distance between New Smyrna and Deland when, at a hairpin turn, he found himself in behind a flivver floundering along in the wheel ruts, which were pretty deep at this spot. He gave the flivver the horn to turn out so that he could pass around. The rattly old car turned all correct into the deep sand to the right, and Vincent, giving his speedster gas, was shooting around through his own deep mess of sand to the left, when, as he came opposite the flivver, he saw something that brought him to a stop practically in his car's own length. A slim, shapely and very white hand had fluttered out, signal-wise, from the driver's seat of the flivver. The owner of this hand, he saw, being an accomplished seer in some instances, was a singularly pretty girl, with a chauffeur's cap perched on her astonishingly perfect-colored auburn hair—and he a maniac over red hair! He braked his car, as this girl now was braking her flivver, and twisted around in his seat to ascertain her wishes.

"Am I headed for Tampa?" the girl in the flivver inquired of him in a contraltoish voice—and he a madman over the contralto voice!

Seeing that he himself was headed for Tampa, he came perilously near to ejaculating, "Gosh! I hope so!" But, being an exceedingly well-reared young man, he replied politely:

"Yes, miss. Aren't you acquaintned with the roads hereabouts?"

He noticed now that a middle-aged man sat beside the red-haired girl—probably her father, since his own hair was sort of sandy. And he wondered to himself why these buttinski fathers of pretty red-haired girls couldn't stay at home and read the papers or play checkers or something when their daughters went for a little tour.

"I haven't a rabbit's idea of the way to Tampa," the girl replied out of hand, her smile uncovering what the young man considered an amazingly faultless assortment of teeth. "But," she added with a slight toss of her head, "I am going to Tampa all the same, and I am going to get there by sundown."

"You can do that all right!" exclaimed this young aviator with rather excessive enthusiasm. "The road's rotten from here to the St. John's River. But, after you cross at Sanford, you hit the brick road, and the going's elegant from there to Orlando and most of the way on the shell road from Orlando to Tampa, except a few miles of bad stuff around Kissimmee. But stay! I'm on my way to Tampa. Since you don't know the road very well, why not follow my bus? I'll keep far enough ahead of you so as not to kick any dust back at you."

"Twenty miles an hour is all I can get, with safety, out of this car on roads like these," said the girl, looking dubious over this offer. "And you're speeding!"

"No, I am not, really—not a-tall," he protested, never batting an eye. "Twenty miles an hour is plenty fast enough for any car to shoot over these rutty roads. I'm not figuring on getting to Tampa much before sundown myself."

"The young gentleman's suggestion is very generous," put in the middle-aged party seated beside the girl, "and it might be wise to accept his guidance to Tampa, Miss Diggs."

Miss Diggs! Vincent, seeing that she was gazing reflectively out over the palmetto-studded scenery, took the opportunity to stare most pronouncedly at Miss Diggs' face, his own taking on an expression of wonder as he did so. Miss Diggs! Then this jowly,

elderly party beside her wasn't her father at all. If he was her father, of course he wouldn't be calling her Miss Diggs!

"I shall be glad to," said the girl, and without more ado the young gentleman in the mauve-bodied car released his brake and started forward at the extremely sedate pace, for him, of twenty miles per hour, the flivver, as he saw on looking back a minute later, following him at the same gait a few hundred yards back, out of range of his car's kick-up of dust.

The driver of the slowed speedster, steering with one hand, fell into a reverie the factors of which were woven into a medley of bronze-red hair, slim white hands, lively eyes of hazel, and a voice that reminded him of an ascending slur on the 'cello. Miss Diggs; that is to say, Dinny Diggs, christened Daniella: what oodles and slathers of enthusiastic talk he'd heard at home about Dinny Diggs almost from the day he'd reached Florida from France! And here she was, unbeknownst to his sister, Dinny Diggs' untiring booster, wearing a chauffeur's cap and driving a zinc Elizabeth over the rutty road to Tampa, and here *he* was, lucky hound! showing this wonderful Dinny Diggs the way! Life, after all, was pretty good, even if one did have to put up with a guvnor hopelessly devoid of imagination. He'd almost be willing to make the supreme sacrifice and take a crack at the old dad's publishing business if he could have at his side a girl like this Dinny Diggs to ameliorate the corroding monotony of a publisher's existence. And, as to his marrying Dinny Diggs out of hand, just like that—well, why not?

He had got this far in his agreeable pastime of mapping out his own immediate future and that of another when his trained ear caught, above the muffled lisp of his sedately ambling speedster, the pr-rr-rr-rr! that is made by but one kind of an engine. He had spent three years, by day and night, awake and asleep, listening for that sound, and, knowing that he could not be mistaken, he searched the far blue ahead of him, that being the direction from which the motor's monotone came, for the air plane. His keen young eyes found it after a few seconds of sky-groping—a big biplane, instantly recognized even at the great distance as of a famed British type, the only one of its kind, as he knew, in Florida. It was circling in descending curves, but still three thousand feet aloft, over the town of De Land, seven or eight miles away. The skies of Florida began to be flecked everywhere with the great gas birds soon after the United States "got in," and landing fields were scraped in or around most of the towns of the State for the accommodation of the aërial visitors, most of these being army aviators on practice cruises from the Arcadia aviation field. But the aviator in the jogging speedster knew that this huge British plane was not from Arcadia.

"It's Jack Bernays, the lucky whelp, taking a little hop around in his English bus," he murmured enviously, said Jack Bernays being the aviator he was on his way to see in Tampa. "I wonder if he's going to stick around inland for the day only—he's shinning down into De Land now—and if he'll be back in Tampa with his old buzzard when I get there?"

Then, with startling suddenness, he was brought back to earth and to swift study as to what he was going to do with his life during the next few seconds. A big car, that had just shot around a curve, was coming straight at him, only fifty feet away, holding the two ruts of a road that had mid-path room for but one car, and showing not a symptom of an intention to turn out. Vincent gripped his wheel. If the onrushing car were to smash into his relatively light sport car, he knew which of the two automobiles would be converted into kindling wood and piano wire. The car being steered straight at him, by a piggy-eyed road hog in an elaborately yoked Shantung suit, was one of those heavy, solid-silver-hooded affairs that expresses with perfect outward fidelity the twelve thousand dollars that it actually represents. The porcine person at the wheel, sitting in stuffed-shirt state in the car all by himself, manifestly expected Vincent to take to the deep sand beside the pair of ruts, or to the jungle itself alongside the trail for that matter, in order to give him an unbroken mid-path passage on the road for his twelve thousand dollars' worth of car.

And that, when the onrushing car was only fifteen feet away from him, was precisely what Vincent, having a natural desire to live a while longer, was forced to do. He gave his steering wheel a powerful wrench to the right. Something in his steering gear snapped as he did so, and the two right wheels, caught in a foot-deep gully of sand at the road's right, rolled the car over on its

right side. Vincent was tossed out of the steering seat against a road-lining mass of extremely prickly palmetto scrub. But he picked himself up instantly, being undamaged except as to his state of mind, and stopped his racing engine.

The incredible bitterness seething within him gave way, for the moment, to fear for what might happen to the flivver back of him. The car that had ditched him, far from halting, was, he saw, plunging at accelerated speed, still smack-dab in the middle of the road, toward the car, now only two hundred yards away, driven by the remarkable Dinny Diggs, his sister's Bryn Mawr chum and school heroine in chief. Vincent, helpless at his distance to do anything to prevent the impending accident to Dinny Diggs, stood in the middle of the road, his hands on his hips, and gave vent to language that on any ordinary occasion would have disgraced him but that now really helped him.

But he was helped more when he saw Dinny Diggs, with the road hog's big car still catapulting at her and only fifty feet away, deliberately draw her flivver squarely across the middle of the narrow road, broadside-on to the world in general and to road hogs in particular, leaving not enough room on either side of her car for even a toy express wagon to pass! The catapulter did the one thing in the world for him to do in these circumstances: he brought his car to a dead stop.

Vincent, his heart pounding with happiness, raced down the road at the leaping pace of a young man of twenty-five trained to the minute. When he got alongside the silver-hooded car he listened, for a very few brief seconds, to the expostulations of the Shantung-suited person with the roll of fat on his neck who, leaning forward in the steering seat and gesticulating at Daniella with heavily-bediamonded hands, was demanding passageway.

"Get out of my road, will you?" was the gist of his demand. "I have a date in Daytona at eleven o'clock. Why do you block my road? Get out of my way, will you?"

Daniella, sitting at ease with her hands resting on the top of her wheel, seemed not to hear. But she was gazing steadily, as if expecting something, at the young man in aviator's uniform—as yet unseen by the Shantung-swaddled one—who had loped up behind the silvered car. Vincent proceeded to live up to whatever she might be expecting. He sauntered around to the steering side of the big car, stepped on the running board, reached in with a pair of swift and sinewy hands, and grabbed the occupant of the car by the two lapels of his nice silky coat.

"Say, you," Vincent inquired in a matter-of-fact tone of this person, "are you aware that you ditched me back yonder a couple of minutes ago?"

The porkish one whose twenty-dollar gold piece Daniella had seemed not to see on the day before, looking panic-stricken, fluttered bejeweled hands wildly about his head, and all but screamed:

"I did not see. I am in a hurry. I have an appointment in Daytona at eleven. Take your hands off me, will you?"

"A hog," said Vincent, tightening his grip on the lapels, "is generally swabbed before he's got ready for smoking. And I can't remember, just at the moment, any hog that needed a little wetting-down more than you do."

With a sudden irresistible yank, he pulled the wailing pudgy one out of the car. A drainage trench, holding about two feet of almost-stagnant water overgrown with scummy-looking water hyacinth, paralleled one side of the road at this spot. Vincent, pulling the now veritably screaming one to his feet after getting him out of the car, turned him in the direction of this creek, set him going by the simple expedient of pressing a knee into the small of his back, hustled him to the verge of the canal, and incontinently thrust him into it. He hit the water, face and stomach down, with a splash, rolled around for a few seconds searching for footing, and emerged, spluttering horribly, on the bank, his hair and his Shangtung apparel so wreathed with entwining sprigs of water hyacinth that he looked like a bad caricature of a sort of clothed, twentieth-century Bacchus.

"Well done, ol' son," commented the blocky man in Daniella's flivver, fixing his keen and kindling eyes on Vincent. "I could go a little myself when I was your age, but I could never at any stage of my life have done that job so capably."

Daniella, her own eyes considerably a-kindle, drew her car ahead of the silver-wrapped one, and the road hog, pulling wet and weedy leaves from his hair and muttering terrible things in some tongue unfamiliar

to those present, got into his car, pulled her wide open, and sped eastward.

Daniella, bent upon utilizing her lowly flivver for Samaritan service, drew it up the road alongside the lordly high-powered car with the mauve body, now lying helplessly on its side. The latter car's owner found, after the briefest investigation, that an arm of a steering knuckle had snapped when he turned the car off the road. His car, therefore, was dead for the time; it would not steer under its own power, and could be guided only with difficulty if towed. Daniella undertook to pull the car back into the road and to tow it to De Land, where there are good repair garages. So Vincent rigged his ditched car to the flivver's rear axle by the hawser he found in his junk box, and Daniella, setting her car in low gear and giving it the whole throttleful of gas, tugged and tugged and tugged, the straining flivver uttering sounds upon that still subtropical landscape that sent the blue cranes and white herons screaming from the palmetto scrub for the next county. Vincent and the blocky passenger, while she tugged, succeeded in getting the overturned car on its wheels beside the road. But at the very instant they accomplished this, there was a riot of ripping and tearing from the flivver —a sound, on an enormously magnified scale, like that which ensues when a two-dollar watch is wound too tightly and all of the works thereof jangle together in a hideous, terrifying bust like the wreck of worlds. Daniella shut off the flivver's power and Vincent took a look to see what had happened. Nothing much had happened except that the rear-end spider gears of Daniella's car had been utterly stripped. The lowly car-for-hire, until repaired, was as useless as a bladeless jacknife.

So here were three well-meaning people, all bound for Tampa on different quests and purposes, who for their own respective reasons had been keen to get to Tampa on that day, standing somewhat bafflédly in the middle of the De Land road, and Tampa still a hundred and thirty-five miles away!

But, far back on the long level road from New Smyrna, Vincent, looking for it, soon saw the dust of the approaching Daytona-De Land big six-wheeled motor bus.

"We'll make Tampa by sundown all right," he remarked matter-of-factly. "Here comes the bus. It'll get us to De Land in half an hour. I'll hire a car in De Land and drive it, and we can shoot over to Tampa in no time at all."

The blocky man, Daniella's passenger for Tampa, murmured his approval. But Daniella dissented. There seemed no further reason for her to go to Tampa. A car that didn't belong to her, which she was chauffering for hire, lay disabled in the road. This was the ending of her first job as a chauffeur for hire. Now, of course, she would lose her job; not only that, but she would have to pay for the flivver's repairs. Therefore it behooved her to stand by her car until it was repaired, drive it back to Daytona, go through the motions of being fired from her job, and then proceed to look for another one. She pictured her duty in the situation with the appealing gravity of youth.

The two men, upon this presentation of Daniella's case, laughed with utter callousness and evident enjoyment. Seeing which, Daniella laughed with them.

"You forget," said her passenger, showing the crowsfooty smile which by this time she had learned decidedly to like, "that in engaging your car I undertook to make good for breakages. Your car can't be out of the De Land repair garage until some time to-morrow. You'll be back in De Land from Tampa to-morrow in time to drive your repaired car back to Daytona before dark, which conforms with the schedule we arranged. Better make the little journey to Tampa with this young officer and me. It'll relax you—take your mind off jobs and the like."

The young officer concurred eloquently with this view. But before Daniella, oscillating betwixt the two males' differing methods of persuasion, was forced to a decision, the big bus for De Land rumbled along, and they got aboard of it, Daniella and Vincent squeezing into the last crosswise seat and Daniella's passenger grabbing the one empty space directly in front of them in the seat ahead.

"Listen," said the young man to the girl after the bus had got under way; he had been grilled in the Gehenna of war for three years, but he spoke with a lad's impulsiveness and his face wore a lad's grin as he spoke. "Aren't you the girl my sister Edith calls Dinny Diggs—her Bryn Mawr buddy?"

Not a vestige of surprise was mingled with Daniella's responding smile.

"Edith Mayhew nicknamed me that," she

replied. "But I'm Dinny only at Bryn Mawr. My name in Florida, and other places where I work, is Daniella."

"Daniella—dandy name—never heard it before!" ejaculated the aërial veteran. "But listen: I heard all about you when I was over yonder. Edith wrote about you in most of her letters. She's bugs about you. Well, first thing I saw in Edith's room when I got here to Florida was your picture—photograph of you in tennis togs; it's in a filigree frame on Edie's dressing table. Good picture—except that the red hair doesn't show in the photograph, but she told me about that. Well, anyhow, listen: D'ye know, Daniella, what I said to Edie the minute I saw that picture of you?"

"I haven't the least idea," said Daniella.

"I told her I was going to marry you on sight," was the astounding remark of the brash youth in the aviator's uniform.

"Did you?" inquired Daniella, not seeming to find anything astounding in it. "Rather a reckless prophecy, wasn't it? But, of course, I've heard that you always were pretty reckless."

"Why, did you ever hear anything about me?" he inquired with the fatuous grin of a boyish egotism.

"None of us at Bryn Mawr heard much of anything else from Edith from the time you went abroad," said Daniella, entirely composed. "She had pictures of you—first in your French flying rig, and later in the American uniform you're wearing now—all over her rooms. The girls used to burn joss sticks before the pictures, by way of incense, every time your name was mentioned in the papers. I'll say for you, though, that you don't look quite so frightfully conceited in real life as you do in those photographs. It was, of course, because I'd become so familiar with all those pictures of you in Edith's rooms at Bryn Mawr that I knew, as soon as I saw you to-day, that you were Vincent Mayhew."

The bus had come to a stop to pick up another roadside passenger at the instant when Daniella mentioned, in the sudden silence, the young man's name. Daniella's flivver passenger, wedged in the seat directly in front of them, gave a slight start and squirmed around in his place to scrutinize with considerable intentness the young man's countenance. He turned this off into a good-natured smile of inquiry.

"Having a good time, young people?" he asked them.

"All out for Dee La-a-and!" the bus driver megaphoned through his funneled hands a few moments later. The three Tampa-bound passengers debarked from the rumbler and made for a near-by garage.

IV.

Vincent, before engaging a car for the drive to Tampa, was giving directions to the garage boss as to the towing-in and repairing of the two crippled cars lying back on the road, when a hurrying young man, all in flying leather, and with his goggles pushed back upon his aviator's helmet, jumped out of the automobile, with trailer attached, which he had just driven with reckless speed through the clutter of motor vehicles into the garage. When his falcon's eye fell upon the young man in the uniform of an aviation officer talking with the garage boss, he made in two pounces the spot where that youth was standing and, roughly grabbing Vincent by a shoulder, turned him half around.

"'Lo, Vince," said the leather-rigged one. "Just the buddy I want. Where you bound?"

"'Lo, Jack," said Vincent. 'What's the idee? I was bound for Tampa, to swap service lies with you, and plug around a little in your old buzzard. You've sailed her here, I see. How's she workin'?"

"Eleganter than ever," said this Jack Bernays person, a young man with a boyish, if not a really infantile, countenance and big round blue eyes, who, in the service of Britain, had piloted a scout plane during the two British battles of Ypres, afterward putting in some months bombing German Rhine cities from a huge Handley-Page—and still remained the invincible boy! "Say, listen, Vince," he rattled on with a lad's wheedling way of asking a favor, "do somethin' for me, will ya?"

"Shoot," said Vincent. "You know me Al."

"Well, it's this way, Vince," said Jack Bernays, this American lad now rated a British ace. "I've just lobbed over here from Tampa to see—er—you know—the one that was with the Red Cross at Saloniki." The boy flushed. "Miss Graham—she's just back from Saloniki. I'm going to marry her, and all like that—if she'll let me. She's visiting my uncle's folks at their orange

grove back of here. But she's going to Miami at five this afternoon. And, durn it, I want to be with her for a little while, don't I?"

"'Course," said Vincent. "Who's stopping you?"

"But listen, Vince," agonizedly went on the British ace. "When I land at the grove, what do I get but orders from my Uncle Ed for a return trip to Tampa? It's Lily, the black cook at the grove, in trouble. Her granddaughter—a year-old pickaninny—that she'd been keeping with her at the grove, died suddenly early this morning. Atop of that comes a telephone message from Tampa, about an hour ago, saying that Lily's son, this dead pickaninny's father, working in the shipyards at Tampa, had been badly messed up in an accident. Lily wants to be with her son right away, and, of course, she wants to bury the dead pickaninny with her mother in Tampa. So, to oblige Lily, who's been with his family for thirty years, my Uncle Ed orders me, as soon as I land, to turn around and head again for Tampa, and tote Lily and the dead baby with me. Savvy?"

"Sure," said Vincent. "And that'd rob you of your day at the grove with the Red Cross young lady just back from Saloniki that you're going to marry if she'll stand for it. I get you, bo. Sure I'll shoot your old buzzard to Tampa for you. Glad to, ol' scout."

"That's what I call bein' a reg'lar feller, Vince," delightedly exclaimed the boyish veteran of the air by the name of Bernays. "But how 'bout these folks with you?"

"They're going along," was Vincent's calm declaration.

He led young Bernays over to Daniella and Daniella's passenger and introduced him briefly.

"I'm going to do a little errand, to Tampa and back here, for Jack in his air bus," he said to them, "so that fixes everything. There's plenty of room—it's a four-seated plane—and you folks are going with me."

He told them, in a few words, what Bernays had told him about the troubles of black Lily, Daniella's eyes filling when the dead pickaninny was mentioned. Her blocky passenger blew his nose violently.

"Suits me," said the latter. "You're coming back here to De Land in the plane, you say? I'm afraid that lets me out for the return trip. I've got those two phonographs to haul from Tampa to Daytona."

"There'll be room in the fourth seat for them when we leave Lily at Tampa," Vincent promptly arranged that. "You ready for the ride, Miss Diggs?" She was "Miss Diggs," plainly, only because there were others present.

Daniella, it appeared, had been insanely eager to ride in an air plane ever since she had first seen one.

Bernays had brought the trailer to the garage to get gasoline for his air plane. The filled cans of fuel were loaded on the trailer, and the party, in the Bernays automobile, were taken to an orange grove, a few miles back of De Land, of principality proportions, with a modern manor house to match about a mile back from the entering road—a hard-packed shell road of double width that Bernays had found a perfect runway for his big British plane. Uncle Ed and his womenfolk, a quick-minded American family, caught the situation after the briefest explanation when Nephew Jack and his party drew up in the automobile, and all hands got busy helping with the preparations. Vincent disappeared with Bernays, and when he reappeared he was wearing the latter's leather clothes. The womenfolk took Daniella in hand, and when she came down from their apartments she was swaddled like an Eskimo woman, with a heavy knitted woolen shawl swathed around her head and face until only the automobile touring goggles over her eyes were visible. Uncle Ed hauled Daniella's flivver passenger off to his rooms, and when the blocky man returned to the front porch he was padded like a stage Falstaff. Then Lily, a very elderly black servitor naturally very stout, was escorted around from the kitchen, arrayed against the upper-ether cold like the others. Daniella took the dead black baby from the old negress' arms and carried it to the plane, two hundred yards down the grove road from the house. The black woman was not in the least afraid of the journey through the sky to Tampa. For years she had been hurtled hither and yon through Florida in motor cars by the desperado drivers, male and female, of her family of white folks, so that life could hold no further terrors for her.

Jack Bernays carefully strapped them all into their seats, gave Vincent some final directions about throttle management,

tugged at the propeller blades, and the big plane, gliding down the long shell road like a great dragon fly, took the air majestically a few hundred yards from the grove's main gate. The riders, for the ensuing hour and a quarter, were conscious of little else save the all but overpowering noise, which they had been accustomed to consider a mere pr-r-rr-rr, of the plane's motor, though Daniella's aërial mood was one of extreme exaltation, which she yearned to express by singing wildly, and she would have done that save for the presence, in the arms of the old black woman in the seat behind her, of the dead baby.

Vincent, holding the great plane at three thousand feet, steered it, straight as the flight of a frigate bird, and the motor under a slight pull at that, the one hundred and thirty-five miles to Tampa in an hour and a quarter, landing joltlessly in the Tampa Fair Grounds at two o'clock in the afternoon. Here, leaving the plane in charge of the fair-grounds watchman, Vincent and Daniella took a jitney, with Lily and the dead child in the back seat, for a colored folks' undertaking establishment, from which they carried Lily to the hospital where her injured son lay, Daniella's blocky passenger at the same time taking a separate jitney for the establishment where he was to get his precious phonographs. He brought the two big boxes back in the jitney with him an hour later, just as Vincent and Daniella, having carried Lily from the hospital to the home of her Tampa relatives, swung back into the fair grounds. The boxes were stowed and strapped in the seat Lily had vacated, and at half past three, all Tampa business having been disposed of, the car was headed back for De Land.

"D'ye mind a simple little stunt or two?" Vincent asked the other two just before the start. "I ain't had no fun in so long I'm lonesome! Maybe I'll feel like trying this ol' pelican out after I get her going good."

Daniella and her ex-passenger nodded in a manner that signified "Go to it!" as plainly as words—and were sorry they had done so about fifteen minutes later.

If they gave themselves up for lost when Vincent thrust the plane into a nose dive that was like the swoop of a meteor, they were convinced that they already had arrived in the world beyond when, a little later, he backed the machine into a prolonged tail spin. Having attained this state of ghostliness, they yearned for Nirvana and its complete cessation of consciousness when, with De Land two thousand feet below them, he looped the loop ten distinct and agonizing times above the distant tiny roofs of that lovely city of the palmetto plain.

They took dinner at the manor house in the orange grove, participated in the agreeable evening of music and talk in the drawing room, slept in Uncle Ned's remarkably comfortable beds, and, in mid-forenoon of the next day, started back for Daytona in their repaired cars, Daniella again possessed of her passenger, whose brace of boxes held down the rear seat of the flivver, and Vincent, slightly depressed over this unavoidable arrangement, leading the way in his mauve-bodied speedster. A brittle new one-hundred-dollar bill, folded lengthwise, lay neatly tucked under the sweat band of Daniella's chauffeur's cap. Her passenger had tucked it there when, on the last leg of the return trip from New Smyrna, Daniella had stoutly and sincerely demurred at accepting it for a service which she had been able to render only in part. His method of stifling her demurrer was to threaten to get out of the flivver and walk the rest of the way to Daytona, carrying a heavy box under each arm, unless she accepted the fee he had agreed to pay her.

The two cars, reaching Daytona soon after the hour of noon, drew up together in front of Daniella's passenger's hotel, the main hostelry on Ridgewood Avenue, the nearest thing on the mainland of North America to a magic thoroughfare in a fairy domain. Two negro porters raced down a flower-bordered walk to carry the pair of boxes into the hotel. The blocky man, debarking from the flivver, shook hands with Daniella and then, stepping over to the speedster, with Vincent, he rested his arms for a moment on the side of Vincent's car, and, smiling his crowsfootiest, said to that young man:

"Son, you drove that aërial horse right well. It surprised me somewhat to see you do so well, for at the age of five you gave little or no promise of ever becoming a good driver of anything. The last time I saw you, up to yesterday, was on a Christmas Day just twenty years ago. On that occasion you were trying to ride a white-maned, calico-dappled rocking horse that I'd given you for a Christmas gift. You were so unpromising at the business then that you fell off the rocking horse and skinned your nose

quite badly, and, you may believe me or not, my boy, but the bawls and bellers that you let out of your system after that mishap are ringing in my ears yet, after all these years."

Whereupon this astonishing individual with the smile of many creases, chuckling, turned away from Vincent's car and trotted with the greatest briskness, for a man of his heavy build, up the flower-bordered walk into the hotel.

Vincent gaped after him. Daniella, who had overheard the little reminiscence, stared inquiringly at Vincent.

"Gave me—kid five years old—a rocking horse," Vincent mumbled wonderingly. "Now I wonder who the dickens that dead-game old sport is?"

"Of course I've no more idea who he is than you have," murmured Daniella. "But I can tell you *what* he is."

"What's that?" asked Vincent.

"A duck," said Daniella.

V.

Vincent de P. Mayhew, senior, was apologizing ruefully to the old-boy guests of his birthday party, as they arrived, for the monotonous exhibit of mineral waters on his sideboard.

"Not a thing in the house but that infernal stuff," was the gist of these apologies. "I did my blamedest to have it otherwise, but I couldn't make the grade, fellers. Ordered oodles of stuff from the North more than a month ago. Stuff was shipped, too—I have letters and wires to that effect. But these gosh-hanged government-balled-up railroads——"

The arriving guests, tactful elderly lads of substance, did what they could to palliate their host's visible humiliation. But this is not saying that they were not, so to speak, slightly disappointed. They, too, had ordered shipments from the North that had not arrived. But they had hoped that Friend Mayhew's luck had been better. Despite all they could do to sprinkle the called-for cheer over the occasion, their protests of indifference as to what was on the sideboard rang with a certain hollowness; they wore the air of tactful old boys striving earnestly to make the best of something.

They had just seated themselves, the dozen and odd birthday guests, around the flower-embellished table, and were setting themselves to do the very best they could by a very choice collation that, nevertheless, lacked the accompanying liquids of Mr. Mayhew's birthday parties of other years, when the black butler—grinning with his foreknowledge of what was impending—opened the door leading into the great hall.

Two spick-and-span negro bell hops, wearing the uniform of Daytona's leading Ridgewood Avenue hotel, stood outside the door in the hall's blaze of light, one on either side of a handsome new ice box. The butler helped them roll the ice box into the dining room and place it alongside the sideboard. Vincent de P. Mayhew, senior, and his old-boy guests blinked wonderingly at the proceeding. The black butler, while the two hell hops went out to complete their errand, opened the lid of the ice box and drew something from it. The something was a quart bottle of a vintage champagne, wearing its fine misty perspiration that indicated perfect icing.

"Fo'ty-seven mo' lak dis heah one in de box, suh," the butler, with his ineradicable grin, said to his employer.

If there were any sedate people walking on Beach Street in front of the Mayhew residence just at that moment, they no doubt concluded, from the wild cheer that broke from the dry throats of the old boys, that there must be highly indecorous carryings-on in progress behind the doors of that splendid Spanish-mission bungalow.

The two bell hops from the Ridgewood Avenue hotel reëntered the room of festivity almost immediately, carrying between them a large box duly stamped with the trade name and device of one of the leading American manufactories of phonographs. The black butler, all ready with his shiny-bladed hatchet, made a swift job of knocking the top off this box, and, from its straw packing, he plucked one of the bottles and held it up for the inspection of his employer and his employer's guests. It was a sure-enough bottle of a brand of Scotch that has been all but extinct in the United States since the beginning of the war.

"Twenty-fo' bottles of dis heah Scotch medicine in de box, suh," announced the butler, his grin now extending literally from ear to ear.

In the midst of another cheer that might easily have been heard on the far side of the moon-silvered river, Mr. Byron J. Bingley,

Daniella's flivver passenger, appeared smiling at the hall door, a pretty tidy-looking middle-aged party in his well-fitting evening clothes.

The birthday party rose to Mr. Bingley, and two of the husky old boys lifted him clear of the ground and carried him to the table on their shoulders.

So a pleasant time was had by all at the fourteenth Florida birthday party of Vincent de P. Mayhew, senior.

When the party had dispersed, Mr. Mayhew and Mr. Bingley sat, old-cronylike, on the bungalow's second-story portico, smoking their cigars and looking out over the moon-drenched river. From the white motor yacht, moored to the Mayhew private landing that extended from the grassy, date-palm-shaded bluff, floated, in the stillness, the chattering voices of young people. The young people were Lieutenant Vincent de P. Mayhew, his sister Edith, and Daniella Diggs; the latter irrecoverably Dinny again in the presence of the schoolmate inventor of that nickname.

"Clean boy, that scamp of yours," said Mr. Bingley to Mayhew, senior. "And I'll bet you the best hundred cigars procurable for money that he'll marry the very nicest red-headed girl that I ever saw."

"Hope so," said Mayhew, senior, who had held considerable converse with Daniella late that afternoon, when Daniella, on Edith Mayhew's masterful insistence, became her schoolmate's house guest. "She'd settle the cub down; and when he's settled down maybe I could make a publisher of him."

A silence fell between them for a space, and then Mayhew, senior, began to chuckle. Mr. Bingley had told him at length of his adventures on his quest of the "phonographs;" of the gumption, the good nature, the ability to meet emergencies, the all-around dash and go that had been exhibited by his two youthful companions on this journey on the ground and in the air. So Mayhew, senior, his saturnine mind working back to Mr. Bingley's enthusiasm over these traits of the two young people, chuckled.

"'Adolescence is embedded in the amber of its own antiquity,'" he quoted softly.

Mr. Bingley pretended not to hear.

"'Youth, patternized to the last pin-feather, in the fetters of formulæ, lacks initiative and disdains innovation,'" the host, chuckling some more, went on quoting.

"Go ahead—rub it in," growled Mr. Bingley.

"'Youth, glorying in its mental opacity'—whatever that is!—'glides forever in the rut of least resistance.'"

"Enjoy yourself, old top!"

"'Youth does the old, old things in the old, old way.'"

"That's it—hit a feller when he's down."

"'Youth is benightedness; bunkerino; blurbiness——'"

"Great little game—soakin' a man below the belt."

"'Youth, if it's a She, has got to be all sugar from stockinettes to side combs, and, if a He, one-hundred-proof saccharine on stilts.'"

"Say, can't you see you've won this round already?"

"'Youth, scorning the sensible and pooh-poohing plausibility, hankers solely for the old, old hoakum. Youth——'"

"Aw, shut up, Mayhew!"

Mr. Bingley, taking the raking with a good-natured grin, tossed his cigar over the portico rail, and, rising, stretched his big arms.

"There's something in knowing how to make your mistakes work for you, Mayhew," said he. "Maybe you remember, with that too infernally good memory of yours, what I told you the picture play I came down here to film is composed of?"

"'Milky moonlight, marshmallows, muddle-headedness, and mush,'" promptly replied Mayhew, senior.

"Right-o," said Mr. Bingley. "Well, I'm going to can that, and write a movie myself, for immediate Florida filming, around your rogue of a son and the nice red-haired girl he's making love to at the present moment in the boat over yonder."

Stories by Cullen will appear in nearly every issue of the POPULAR.

Tainted and Marked

By J. Frank Davis

Author of "A Temporary Clean-up," Etc.

Dealing with the mayoral campaign between Kendall and Curtley in the city of Eddsfeld and revealing the clever "plant" arranged by the Democratic candidate

"A MAN who could get any particular encouragement out of these figures," remarked Alderman Orson Kendall, "would be one of these optimists who gets caught in a cloudburst without umbrella or rubbers and thanks Heaven the mud isn't but four feet deep. If estimates made ten days before election are any good —and ours usually are—somebody is going to be elected mayor of this town by a mighty narrow margin, and the chances are at least even that his name won't be Kendall."

The figures that brought forth this gloomy comment from the young alderman were a tabulation of confidential reports compiled by Web Judson, Republican leader in Eddsfield, whose opponents, when they felt temperate and tolerant, called him nothing worse than "boss." Kendall was sitting in Judson's inner office up near the top of the Mechanics' Trust Building, and his companions, beside Judson himself, were Merrill Hart and State Senator Lawrence Neal. The four constituted the inner committee of their party's affairs.

"It may change a lot in ten days," Neal hazarded hopefully.

"It may," Kendall agreed. "And it is as likely to change in Curtley's favor as in mine. Don't think I am getting cold feet and have any idea of slowing up in the campaign, but I can read figures, and sometimes I can tell what they mean. According to these estimates, which are as perfect as anybody could make at this stage of the game, Curtley ought to win by about a hundred. That means, when you consider how much is guesswork in estimating a vote as big as we have to deal with, that I might slip in by a small majority, but it also means that Curtley might win by three or four hundred."

"Perhaps Web has been too conservative in arriving at these figures," Hart encouraged. "Perhaps he has given Curtley too much benefit of the doubt in uncertain precincts."

"I don't think so. Take the eleventh ward. This estimate credits me with a hundred and seventy votes that ordinarily are sure Democratic."

"That's how many 'Bull' Burns controls," Judson reminded him. "Didn't he tell you, right after you closed up Steve Valentine, that he would deliver them in a block? Is he backing down on the promise?"

"No. He got me word not a week ago that I could depend on him. That young brother of his who had the gambling fever is turning out to be a halfway decent kid, I hear, since Steve went out of business, and Bull knows that if the mayor is reëlected Valentine or some other gambler will open up again, sooner or later. No. He intends to deliver a hundred and seventy votes, but it isn't at all likely that he can. Those henchmen of his are naturally Democratic, and they are naturally friends of Curtley's. Burns will influence a good many of them, but it won't be the total number of his gang. I would say a hundred and twenty-five was a fairer estimate of what he can do."

"Admit that. It isn't a big change, and I am likely to have made as great an error somewhere on the other side. As things stand to-day, it is anybody's fight."

"I don't agree with you. As things stood when the canvass was made that secured these figures, yes. But that was prior to yesterday. Things stand differently since that 'Good Government' advertisement appeared in yesterday's papers. That confounded thing has me guessing; I don't know what to do about it. Do you?" he challenged Judson.

"I do not," the leader replied promptly, "except that it has to be answered somehow. You and I know there isn't any 'citizens' good government committee,' but the public doesn't. We know that Curtley is

back of that ad, but what good would it do to say so? The public would answer, 'That's all right, but what is Kendall's answer to the question?'

"And I can't answer it honestly without hurting myself about as badly as by not answering it at all." Kendall's wry smile was a tribute to the strategy of his opponent. "He is hoping, of course, to get the ministerial association to come out against me. He isn't gunning principally for votes with that ad, although he will get some—a good many, if I don't reply to it—but he is after the Reverend Hector McNutt. If he can get McNutt jumping on me, he figures the ministerial association will follow, and then all the radical reformers will hit the trail like bull pups after a cat. We don't admire the Reverend Hector McNutt, gentlemen, but don't you forget for a moment that if he takes a notion to go after my scalp, Mr. Thomas Curtley will be reëlected mayor by from five hundred to a thousand majority, and I will take a quick and successful journey up Salt Creek."

"I can't understand how McNutt could support Curtley as against you," Hart fretted. "Curtley is a grafter, and McNutt knows it. Curtley is a good deal of a booze fighter, and McNutt is one of the most uncompromising prohibitionists in the State. Curtley is a liar and a trickster and a hypocrite——"

"And McNutt is perfectly aware of all that," Judson broke in. "He has attacked Curtley often enough to prove it. But he is a zealot. Honest as any man in town; we all know that—cuss him! An honest, narrow-minded, witch-burning Puritan. Old Jonathan Edwards' sermons would have delighted his heart. And I have always observed that it is a peculiarity of Puritans that they would rather get after a man who they think ought to be one of their own sort than jump on a fellow who never was their kind and never could be. McNutt knows Curtley—and doesn't expect anything of him, ever. He thinks you, being a more respectable sort of citizen and all that, ought not to be moderate and tolerant. He feels injured that you have your own ideas of what a decent community ought to be. He wants you to go the whole distance to where he stands. If you don't, he hates you worse than he does the natural-born crook."

"I hoped when I made this campaign against Curtley on the issue of decent government, law-enforcement and all that, I would get the vote of the radical reformers, even though I wasn't ready to travel the whole road with them," Kendall said. "I knew I would get the moderates who want good government, and that I would lose the fellows who like to have a city run pretty open. But, to win, I need the zealots—and I can't pay the price."

"The same being letting the Reverend McNutt tell you how to run the town," Neal commented sympathetically.

"I don't think there is a chance that McNutt and his association will actually support Curtley," Judson said, "but he might get it into his head to leave Curtley alone this year and attack you. That this would probably elect Curtley wouldn't interest him a bit. He is always preaching that a man has to do his duty in fighting everything evil without considering the outcome; providence may be trusted to attend to that. Of course, if he does start jumping on you, he might as well back Curtley, so far as the practical results are concerned. You will lose votes that otherwise you would get, and you can't afford it. If the people he influences vote for Curtley, you're licked, and if, as is more likely, they don't vote for either of you, you're licked just the same."

"Why do these ministers let McNutt control them so?" Hart complained. "They are men of sense, a lot of them. Men like Doctor Gurney, a big, broad, liberal-minded man with a real knowledge of human nature. And Doctor Gurney is president of the association, too. They don't approve in their hearts of McNutt's sensationalism. They don't admire him or his methods. How does he get away with it?"

"By sheer domination," Judson told him. "He is a fighter, and most of them are men of peace. He doesn't give a hoot how big a mess he stirs up or where it leads him, and they don't care to make as big a battle as would be necessary if they went to the mat with him. But he also gets them because a minister has to hold his job, the same as anybody else. There is a minority of narrow-gauged members in almost every church who will back McNutt against their own pastor if things come to a show-down, and the pastors know it. So does McNutt."

"Well," Kendall summed the thing up. "This campaign is just close enough so that almost any fairly big thing will decide it, and McNutt's association is big enough. If they

were to come out for me, I would win. If they keep on the fence, I have an even chance. If they line up against me, I'm defeated."

Judson nodded. "I guess that states it."

"And that advertisement in the papers is just the sort of thing that will stir McNutt up. That is why Curtley had it printed. If anybody knows a way to answer it, I wish he'd tell me. Have you the paper? Let's go over it again."

They read, together, the black-typed quarter-page, under the heading: "Political Advertising."

AN OPEN LETTER TO ALDERMAN ORSON KENDALL.

You say, Alderman Kendall, that if the citizens of Eddsfield elect you mayor, you will enforce the laws. You especially say you will enforce the laws against gambling.

When you were acting mayor for a few weeks, during the absence of Mayor Curtley from the city, you closed an alleged gambling place said to be conducted by one Stephen Valentine. It has been said by various people—we do not know whether or not it was true, and hence of course give you the benefit of the doubt—that you had a personal grudge against Valentine. It has been said that there were other places in Eddsfield where gambling was going on, but if you took any steps to close them we did not hear of it.

We do not know whether this charge that you had a personal reason for prosecuting Valentine is true or not. We do not know whether, if we elect you mayor, you really propose to stop all gambling in Eddsfield, or whether it is your idea to only stop SOME gambling, as you did during the mayor's absence. We do not know. But we would like to know.

So we ask you, Alderman Kendall.

If elected mayor, do you intend to raid and prosecute every place in which gambling goes on?

It is reported to us that games of cards for money are played nightly at the Eddsfield Club. You are a member of the Eddsfield Club. Mr. Webster C. Judson is a member of the Eddsfield Club.

It is reported that gambling goes on nightly at the rooms of the City Chess Club—not at chess. You are not a member of the City Chess Club, but Mr. Webster C. Judson is.

If you are elected mayor, and thereby are selected by the voters to assist Mr. Webster C. Judson in the management of the city of Eddsfield, will you and he have the Eddsfield Club and the City Chess Club raided?

We admit that the Eddsfield Club and the City Chess Club are composed of "leading citizens," principally rich men. Do you and Mr. Judson believe the laws ought to be enforced equally against the rich and the poor?

In other words, Alderman Kendall, when you say you propose not to allow gambling in Eddsfield, do you mean ALL gambling or SOME gambling?

Please reply to these questions publicly, Alderman Kendall, so the people may know exactly where you stand. You ought to be able to state where you stand in ten minutes, but perhaps you will want to consult with Mr. Webster C. Judson before deciding. To give you plenty of margin, we will be well satisfied if you answer within three days.

If you do not reply, can the people of Eddsfield be blamed if they believe your high-toned speeches have only referred to SOME gamblers?

(Signed)
CITIZENS' GOOD GOVERNMENT COMMITTEE.

"Is there any poker at the Chess Club?" Neal asked Judson.

"Never. Bridge, at a cent a point, is the strongest game I ever saw there."

"And at the Eddsfield Club," Kendall added, "the usual bridge game is half a cent. Members who live there have little friendly poker sessions in their rooms, once in a while, but bridge whist is the worst sin in the public card rooms. But should I stand before an audience—or write a letter to the papers—and say that? We know perfectly well what would happen. Curtley's made-for-the-moment 'Good Government Committee' would demand to know if gambling is gambling when the game is poker and not when it is the 'aristocratic' game of bridge, and ask us to quote the law that says the offense shall be determined by the size of the stakes."

"But you have to answer it," Judson insisted. "After three days, if you don't, they will begin to ask when you are going to. Then they will ask if you don't dare to. Sooner or later, you will have to say something, and you might as well do it now."

"Oh, I'm going to. To-night. I speak in the ninth this evening. It is an intelligent ward which ought to be for me, but a doubtful one because old Henry Gillette is still sore over that central police station contract his son-in-law didn't get. There is every indication it will be a big meeting, and I am going to talk straight from the shoulder about law and order. I have it in mind to refer to this advertisement, and to say that my answer is that anybody who runs or tries to run a gambling house in this city during my administration will be prosecuted to the full extent of the law, whether he is rich or poor, a leading citizen or another Steve Valentine. As to the paragraphs about the Eddsfield and the City Chess Clubs, I guess the best thing to say is that I have never seen any game of cards but cribbage,

rummy, and whist played in the Eddsfield, and that I am told no other games are played in the Chess. Then I think I will ask why the members of the 'Good Government Committee' do not sign their names to their ads."

"That will do, I guess," Judson approved thoughtfully, and the others nodded agreement. "You can't very well say less, or more."

So Kendall spoke along that line at the ninth-ward meeting, and felt his heart sink as a lean, stern-faced man in the body of the house rose and called out, in the carrying voice of one used to public speaking: "May I ask one question, Mr. Kendall?" For the face and voice were as hard and intolerant as the face and voice of an ancient inquisitor, and the interrupter was the Reverend Hector McNutt.

"Certainly," Kendall replied courteously, and the minister drove straight at the weak spot in his armor:

"I do not play cards. I know little about card-playing. So I ask for information. When you say 'whist' is played at these clubs, do you, perhaps, include the game that is known as 'bridge whist?'"

"Bridge whist is played, I think. Yes, sir."

"Is it not customary for bridge whist to be played for stakes? Is it not so played at these clubs?"

If he answered "yes," he placed both the clubs and himself in a false position; if he answered "no," he would be a liar. The rattle of applause which his enemies in the audience gave McNutt's question gained him a few seconds for thought. He knew it was not a reply that would stand strong analysis, but he said the best thing he could think of:

"There are things that are possible, Mr. McNutt, and things that are impossible. I do not intend to promise impossibilities. I am not willing to promise that I will stop the playing of whist, rummy, cribbage, chess, checkers, or old maid in this town, even though an occasional player might feel moved to wager the price of a cigar—or a box of cigars—upon the result. I do say I shall close all places resorted to for purposes of gambling, and as soon as I am inaugurated, which I shall be, on the first day of January, I shall carry out my pledge."

His friends applauded tumultuously and the Reverend Mr. McNutt resumed his seat, stiff-lipped, expressionless. Throughout the remainder of his speech, Kendall was always conscious of the preacher's cold, hostile eyes. He suffered no illusion as to his reply having satisfied the man. Curtley, with his advertisement, had set out to gain McNutt's attention and start his energies functioning against his opponent, and he had succeeded. From this moment, the minister was to be considered as an enemy.

The afternoon newspapers, next day, said that a secret meeting of the executive committee of the ministerial association had been held that forenoon, and that it was understood certain angles of the municipal campaign had come up for discussion, but that none of the members had been willing to speak afterward for publication.

Kendall discussed this anxiously with Web Judson. "I have one chance, as I see it, and only one, to keep them from taking action," he said. "Doctor Gurney is president of the association. He is a broad-gauged citizen. He *might* be strong enough, if he would, to hold McNutt off."

"I don't think so," Judson doubted. "But he might be willing to try."

"I am going to call on him this evening."

"It can't do any harm. And, if he can't do it, none of them can."

The Reverend Lyman Gurney, responding to a telephone call, told Alderman Kendall he would be very glad, indeed, to have him come to his house at eight-thirty that evening.

At eight, a wide, stocky man in clerical garb, whose almost snow-white hair fell thickly down upon his forehead above a pair of weary, kindly, tolerant eyes, climbed the steps to Doctor Gurney's parsonage and rang the bell. To where he waited in the study, a few moments later, came Doctor Gurney with outstretched hand and cordial words:

"Good evening, Father Quinlan. I'm glad to see you. That's the most comfortable chair. How are you?"

"Quite well, doctor," the priest replied. "Well, but worried. That's why I came." His eyes twinkled. "After dark. 'Twould be a scandal were I to be seen entering your house. I don't know who it would harm most, you or me."

Doctor Gurney smiled appreciation of the jest. "It's too bad we don't see more of one another," he said seriously. "There are so many things we agree on."

"Both trying to get humanity into the same heavenly city, even if we think per-

haps we won't all be living on the same street," Father Quinlan agreed whimsically. "But what I came to see you about hasn't anything to do with the hereafter—except indirectly. It concerns the present. We both want this town we live in to be a good town."

"Nobody has done more to make it so than you, Father Quinlan."

"And I can return the compliment without having my conscience ask me whether I'm telling the truth or not. Well—— This isn't my business, in a way, Doctor Gurney. What you Protestant ministers do is no concern of mine. But I heard something this afternoon that worried me. Is it true you are considering making an attack on young Mr. Kendall?"

"I'm not," Gurney replied, and the emphasis on the pronoun was noticeable.

"I didn't believe *you* were. But your association?"

"Why, please?"

The priest spoke earnestly, his hands on his wide-spread, black-clad knees:

"You and I aren't politicans, but that doesn't prevent our knowing something about politicians—and politics. Perhaps I hear things of that sort a little more than you do. I am convinced, doctor, that if your association insists on Kendall promising to raid the Eddsfield Club and the Chess Club, and all that, you will defeat him and reelect Mayor Curtley—and that means we shall have *real* gambling again in Eddsfield."

"I think you are right," Gurney agreed.

"I have a bare speaking acquaintance with Alderman Kendall," Father Quinlan went on. "I know Mayor Curtley—well, a little better than that. Did you know that that advertisement which was in the papers a day or two ago signed 'Good Government Committee' was put out by the Curtley campaign committee?"

"I'm not surprised to hear it."

"It was aimed to get your association interested, doctor. Now I hear it has succeeded. I don't know what you are planning to do, but I gather you are planning to do something. Anything you do—if it is against Kendall—will probably give us Thomas Curtley as mayor for another year —which Heaven forbid!"

To Gurney's curious and somewhat surprised glance, Father Quinlan replied:

"You wonder why I am so opposed to Curtley, and why, if I have such pronounced views, I don't get up in my own pulpit and oppose him. As to the latter, there are exactly three sound reasons why I can't—and two of them are good ones. As to why I want to see Curtley defeated—— Did you ever have mothers coming to you, when Curtley was letting that man Valentine run a gambling hell for workingmen, begging you to do something to get their boys out of his clutches?"

"No. But, of course, I know about the place."

"And I believe you had sons in your parish who were corrupted by it; you don't hear the sorrows of your people as quickly as I do. But if you hadn't, many another pastor had. There was a mother in my church—— How she begged her boy to keep away from Valentine! Every cent he made going over the roulette table. Careless about his job. Forgetful of his duty to his mother. Forgetful even of his duty to his church—because I pleaded with him to listen to his mother, and the only effect was that he stopped coming to mass and sneaked over to the other side when he met me on the street. That was one mother. There were others. Fathers, too. Curtley had to go away for his health and Kendall closed up Valentine. That boy I spoke of is a comfort to his mother, again, now. Three sins I try especially to keep my boys from, and it seems to me gambling is as bad as any of them."

Doctor Gurney thought a moment; it was not easy for him to confess to the priest that the association of which he was president might do a thing he believed to be wrong. Then he said:

"I'm going to be frank with you, Father Quinlan. There *is* a movement to demand that Alderman Kendall put himself on record more completely than he has. I am not in sympathy with it, personally. The pastor who demands the action——"

"Mr. McNutt?"

"Mr. McNutt. I will say to you, in confidence, that at to-day's meeting he tried to get a resolution carried that would declare Alderman Kendall to be no more entitled to confidence than Mayor Curtley, and to urge our church members not to vote for either of them."

"Which would elect Curtley."

"I am afraid so. I succeeded in defeating the resolution for the moment, but Mr. McNutt moved the appointment of a committee of three to look into the matter further, with

power to act. I urged that the committee ought not to have power to act, but should report to a later meeting of our executive committee, and succeeded in getting that concession. I had to appoint Brother McNutt chairman of the committee of three."

"And he will force it to——"

"Not all of it," Doctor Gurney smiled. "I put myself on the committee. The third member is Mr. Slayton. He is not as—er—positive in such matters as Mr. McNutt, but he is not as—shall I say conservative—as I."

"Say 'intelligent,' doctor."

"Not as conservative as I. However, no action will be taken that I do not know about."

Father Quinlan nodded.

"I guess that was the best you could do. It's a shame, doctor," he exclaimed, in an outburst of feeling, "with all the power for good that association of yours could exert in city politics, if it didn't alienate people by some of its ways, that it hasn't a majority of members as sensible and liberal-minded as you."

"I'm not sure all the members of my congregation would consider that a compliment," Doctor Gurney replied, a little ruefully. "Some of them think I am *too* liberal. However—— We all have to do the right as it is given us to see the right."

"That is true enough, but in my opinion, your friend McNutt sees through a bad pair of spectacles." The priest sighed humorously. "I think quite likely he has a very poor opinion of my spectacles, also, so I suppose we are even. I don't believe he will ever convert me to his way of thinking, and I certainly don't intend to try to change him; I haven't enough years left. I have known a great many people in a fairly long life, doctor, some of them with more good than bad in them and some of them with more bad than good. I haven't met any perfect men yet, and I don't expect to live to see a perfect world. Mr. McNutt seems to think it is possible to establish a council of perfection. I feel we have succeeded reasonably if we have helped to make the world only a little better. Our town won't be a perfect city with young Mr. Kendall as mayor, but it will be a better place for your young people and mine to grow up in than it has been under Mayor Curtley, and, as there are only two candidates, I can't see but one thing for us to work for."

"I agree with you, Father Quinlan, heartily. Be assured that whatever I can do will be——"

The priest rose to go. "I am doing what I can, quietly," he said. "But it will avail us nothing if your well-meaning Mr. McNutt cannot be cribbed, cabined, and confined." He hesitated, then spoke again. "There is something else I ought to mention. Be on your guard, doctor, that something deceptive isn't done to make *you* agree with McNutt—to make *him* even more anxious to attack Kendall. Keep your eyes open."

"Something of what nature?"

"I don't know, exactly. Only a faint echo came to me of some scheme involving a 'plant,' as the police call it. If you ministers do not act against Kendall immediately, I think something else will be done to try to make you. All I can advise is that you be on your guard."

Fifteen minutes later Orson Kendall came into the same room and took a seat in the same chair that had held Father Quinlan. He went at the heart of his problem speedily and honestly, outlined his ideas of decent good government and frankly declared the things he was not willing to do because he did not believe they needed to be done. He told the truth about the Eddsfield Club and the City Chess Club and the small social games of chance that their members played. In conclusion, he stated the political situation as his figures led him to judge it, and summed it up in eleven words:

"If your association comes out against me, doctor, Curtley is elected."

"That is what Father Quinlan thought," the minister replied, and explained: "He and I have been talking over the situation. Father Quinlan is a very fine man and a wise observer; I have a deep respect for him."

"And he is opposed to Curtley?"

"Perhaps I ought not to have mentioned him. He is for good government for the city, naturally. Especially, he is interested in seeing gambling suppressed."

"Do you believe me, doctor, when I say I shall suppress it?"

Doctor Gurney smiled ever so slightly. "At the Eddsfield and the Chess Clubs?"

"No. Nor in private homes. And I shall not enforce all the old Sunday blue laws that some good people think ought to be put into effect again. I am being honest with you, sir, even at the possible cost of losing your support."

"I also will be frank. I believe you will make a better mayor than Curtley, and I hope you will be elected. What I can do to prevent any radical action on the part of our association I shall do, gladly. But that is not to promise that I shall be successful. In the meantime—— The word 'plant,' as used by police and others, is familiar to you, I suppose."

"Politicians also use it," Kendall told him.

"Yes. I was under that impression. Be on your guard against one."

"What kind of a plant?"

"I don't know. I am passing on to you a bit of advice that Father Quinlan gave. You will please consider the source as confidential."

"Father Quinlan has access to many avenues of information," Kendall said thoughtfully. "Thank you, and him, for the warning. I shall try to keep my eyes open."

On the following afternoon, as the alderman sat in his inner business office, Doctor Gurney's voice, quivering a little with suppressed excitement, came over the telephone:

"Is there any one with you in your office?"

"No, doctor."

"They haven't arrived yet. You may have callers. A detective, I think. And some others. I don't know the details. Remember what Father Quinlan said."

"You mean——"

"I have to ring off. There is no time to lose. They are waiting for me."

Kendall wondered, as he stared at the desk transmitter, why Doctor Gurney was excited, and who "they" were. And why the detective and others were going to call, and what it meant. He returned to his affairs, still puzzling. A girl from his outer office, less than a half-hour later, opened the door. "Two gentlemen to see you," she said. "Mr. Burrell and Mr. Tate."

He had her show them in.

The man in advance was short, prosperous looking and cold-eyed, with face of a pinkness that bespoke frequent massage. His companion was extremely tall and slim, graceful but with some intangible quality that advertised him not to be as much a gentleman as he looked. There was something about the older, stouter man's face that was vaguely familiar, but Kendall could not place where he had seen him, if ever. The girl, after ushering them in, went out and closed the door.

"My name is Burrell," the stout man said. "W. Grenville Burrell. Mr. Tate and I have called to see you relative to an amusement enterprise which we are thinking of establishing here in Eddsfield. As president of the board of aldermen and a member of the committee on police and licenses——"

Kendall had not resumed the chair from which he had risen on their entrance, and the tall, slim man interrupted his companion to draw a card from his upper vest pocket with a flourish and present it. "James P. Tate," he announced. "Of Tate's Consolidated Amusement Companies." He stood very near Kendall and looked smilingly into his eyes. As the alderman, after taking the card, raised his own eyes to the taller man's, he was conscious that something brushed his waistcoat near the lower right-hand pocket. Tate, beginning a florid eulogy of the great chain of carnival shows which he represented, moved away to a place beside his companion.

"Take seats, gentlemen," Kendall said. He listened mechanically. Why had Tate made the excuse to come so close to him? What had been slipped into his right-hand waistcoat pocket? And why? He believed he knew the answer to all these questions.

"Just a moment," he interrupted pleasantly. "If you will excuse me, I have just one letter to sign, and then I will be at your service."

He sat at his roll-top desk, his back to his visitors, and drew forward a sheet of blank paper. His left elbow rested on the edge of the desk; his left hand was concealed from them. He slipped its forefinger into the right-hand vest pocket, which should have been empty, but was not.

He wrote, in about the time it would have taken to form his signature and while the fingers of his left hand were stealthily exploring the pocket: "Tainted, and probably marked." The fingers came out of the pocket and a bank note, folded small, its denomination not in evidence, went swiftly forward with the hand and became hidden in the paper as he creased it. He put the sheet into an envelope, addressed it, sealed it, and stepped to the door.

"Miss Greene," he called. "Stamp and mail this letter, please, at once." Closing the door again, he went back to his chair and spun it around to face them. "Now, gentlemen," he said, in his most amiable manner. "Excuse me for making you wait."

What Mr. W. Grenville Burrell thereupon told him regarding the vast amusement undertaking that he had in contemplation for Eddsfield is of no especial consequence, although it was an eloquent speech, convincingly delivered. Kendall sat with his eyes on the man's face, trying to recall where he had seen him before. It came to him suddenly. A friend at the State capital, some years before, had pointed the man out in a hotel lobby. "See that round chap with the pink face?" the friend had said. "That's Bill Burrell." And "Bill" Burrell had meant something to Kendall, where "W. Grenville" had not, for Bill Burrell was famous throughout the State as "the king of the gamblers."

Burrell had talked not less than ten minutes, with some skillful assistance from his friend, and Kendall had found himself called upon to say very little as yet, when there was a knock at the door and Miss Greene put her head in to say that Mr. Sinnard wanted to see Mr. Kendall, and that he wanted to come in right away. "Detective Sinnard, tell him," a voice growled behind the girl, and the owner of it edged her gently aside and came in through the door. Behind him Kendall saw others. In the foreground the harsh countenance of the Reverend Hector McNutt; behind him, hanging back a little, as if wishing he were not present, the distinguished figure of Doctor Gurney; hovering between them the pale, nervous, bewhiskered visage of another minister named Slayton.

"Hello, Sinnard," he said cheerfully. "What can I do for you?"

The detective ignored him and addressed Burrell.

"What's the game to-day, Bill?"

"I don't know what you mean," the gambler retorted, visibly nonplused. "I'm down here with Mr. Tate to talk about an amusement enterprise that we're thinking of starting in Eddsfield."

"The same old amusement enterprise, eh?" Sinnard sneered, and then, for the first time, seemed to identify the other. "And if here isn't our old friend 'Handy' Jim Tate. Seems to me I heard you had gone into amusement enterprises, too. You've been dealing faro for Bill, lately, haven't you?"

Tate stammered incoherently, obviously confused.

"These gentlemen seem to have made some error in introducing themselves," Kendall remarked. "Perhaps you can set me right, Sinnard."

The detective looked unpleasantly at Kendall. Clearly he was not at all sure any error had been made. "Bill Burrell, gambler," he identified that person curtly. "And Handy Jim Tate, all-around con man, swindler and leather lifter." He turned menacingly on Tate. "The last time you came to this town, didn't I tell you if you ever showed your face here again I'd send you over the road for that old railroad depot job?"

"Honest t' Gawd, I've been going straight lately," Tate protested. "That was so long ago I——"

"I said I'd put you away, and I'm going to," the detective declared positively. "What's your game here?"

"We came to ask Mr. Kendall whether an amusement license——" Burrell began, and the policeman snarled at him: "I'm not talking to you. Speak when you're spoken to. Come on, Handy! What's the game? Come clean."

"Won't you gentlemen come in and take seats?" Kendall called through the open door, to the ministers. "I take it you are with Mr. Sinnard."

"They ain't with me," the detective declared. "They followed me into the office. I don't know what their business is."

"Our business," Mr. McNutt told him calmly, "is to find out what this engagement between Mr. Kendall and these other—gentlemen—means. A friend let me know by telephone that you were coming here, and we waited in the corridor."

"Another leak somewhere at headquarters," the detective grumbled. "I get a long-distance phone telling me these birds are in town and to look out for 'em, and before I can pound up here, you're wise, too. Well, it isn't my office, you can go or stay, for all me, just as the alderman says."

"Stay, by all means," Kendall smiled. "I don't know what it is all about, but it starts out as if it might be entertaining. Won't you come in and be seated—as far as the chairs will go?"

They filed in and he closed the door.

"I asked you what your game was," Sinnard threatened Tate. "Now don't try to kid me, because I'm a wise old owl, and if you do, I'll put you over the jumps so you won't never forget me. I've got a tip what you're driving at—but let's hear you tell it."

"Honest, Mr. Sinnard——" Tate began,

but stopped and began to tremble as the officer dug into his waistband for handcuffs. "Say, put 'em up!" he whined. "We haven't done anything that we can be pinched for. Put 'em up and I'll tell."

"Shut up!" hissed Burrell, and: "That'll be all from you!" Sinnard warned the king gambler. "Go on, Handy. I'm listening."

"Well, we just came into town to see what we could do with Mr. Kendall about opening up some amusement enterprises here next year, if he's elected mayor."

"What kind of amusements?"

"You ain't expecting a guy to convict himself, are you? What kind do you think?"

"Faro? Roulette? Poker rooms on the side?"

"That can lay as a bet that's got a chance to win. We happen to hear that he's had a falling out with Steve Valentine and won't let Steve open up again, but that he's a good, liberal-minded sport that is willing to stand for a few square games, if the fellers behind 'em are right, so we—— Well, that's all, I guess."

"And I suppose you got it fixed."

"Fixed? Whaddya mean, fixed? We talked it over, that's all."

"I guess I gotta give you a ride in the wagon, Handy. Come on!"

"No! Wait! I'll come clean." He turned apologetically to Kendall, and cried: "I can't help this, mister. You can see that. Besides, it ain't accepting a bribe if you haven't delivered any goods for it, yet, and ain't in a position to, and you won't be until after you're elected. It ain't anything they can pinch us for."

"That's right! Spill it, you fool!" snapped Burrell in disgust.

"It wasn't anything, Sinnard, but a little —what you might call retainer. He didn't promise a thing for it—honest, Sinnard."

"How much?"

"What odds does that make? Oh, all right! Five hundred. But, say! I want to be on the level with this feller. It took an awful lot of arguing. We didn't get any satisfaction out of him at all until about a minute before you guys came in. And then it was only sort of half understood."

"This is nonsense!" Kendall broke in. "These men said they wanted to open an amusement park. I give you my word that gambling wasn't even mentioned between us. They didn't even tell me they were gamblers."

"I'd believe you before I'd believe either of them," the detective said magnanimously. "Of course if they didn't give you anything, you haven't got it in your pocket. What kind of bills were they, Handy?"

"One bill—a five-century."

Sinnard affected deep thought. "Of course a business man like the alderman might have five hundred on him and you might still be lying—although five-hundred-dollar bills ain't common. I don't suppose there was any way you could identify it?"

"How the blazes could I? Do you think I notice the numbers on all the bills I happen to handle?"

"Sometimes a guy looks kinda hard at an odd sort of bill like a five-hundred, that you don't often see. Look here, Tate! I'm going to prove you're right or wrong, and if you're wrong, I'm going to send you on a journey. You'd better think if there was anything funny about that bill."

"Well," Tate stammered, fear of prison again overcoming him. "I *did* look at it a little sharp. I've handled lots of hundreds in my life, and some thousands, but mighty few five-hundreds, so I gave it a pretty strong up-and-down. Seems to me there was a red mark on it—a little circle around the last figure in the number."

"A red-ink circle at the end of the serial number, eh? Well, we can soon find out whether you're lying or not, and I'm thinking the alderman will be glad to help." He turned to Kendall. "You don't mind my looking you over to prove this guy's a liar, do you?"

"Keep away from me!" the alderman warned. "Don't put your hands into my pockets!"

Mr. McNutt came to his feet and said stiffly: "We are really intruders here, Mr. Kendall. Perhaps we had better leave. So long as you are unwilling to be searched for——"

"Unwilling!" Kendall cried. "I *demand* to be searched. But not without some protection. I am perfectly willing to have this man Sinnard go through my pockets, but before he does so, I want him to take off his coat and roll up his shirtsleeves." He glowered at the detective. "I want to be sure there isn't anything in his hands to be afterward taken out of my pockets. That's how much confidence I've got in you, Sinnard."

The detective smiled sneeringly. "Fair

enough, alderman," he said, and tossed off his coat. He rolled his shirt sleeves to his shoulders and held up his hands, fingers spread, like a prestidigitateur. "Is it all right now?"

"Go ahead," Kendall agreed shortly. "If I've got a five-hundred-dollar bill in my pocket, either with or without a red-ink mark, these crooks are telling the truth."

The search was professional, deft, and thorough. Sinnard went through all Kendall's pockets and returned to the vest several times. Although his pose had been a certain lack of confidence in Tate's story, his face, when he finally stood erect with no more than forty dollars out of a trousers pocket as the gross result of his labors, registered as much surprise and chagrin as the faces of the gamblers.

"He was at the desk for a minute," Burrell exclaimed, forgetting he had objected to his partner's confession. "I bet he hid it in the desk."

"Search it," Kendall told Sinnard. "But you gentlemen"—to the ministers—"stand close to him, please, while he goes through it, and observe carefully that he doesn't put anything into the drawers to be taken out later."

After a time the detective straightened up, dusty, flushed, and baffled. "If there's a cent in that desk, I'll swallow it," he declared angrily, and went to searching the remainder of the room's furniture, and the floor under the rug, with the three ministers intently observing every move.

"I know!" Tate suddenly cried. "He sent a letter. He put it in a letter.' '

Kendall, laughing at their discomfiture, threw open the door to the outer room. "Miss Greene!" he called, and the girl came to the door. "I gave you a letter to mail, some time ago. Did you happen to notice the address?"

"Why—yes, sir."

"Who was it for?"

"The Reverend John J. Quinlan, St. Luke's Rectory."

Kendall turned to the others. "I suppose it will be claimed, next, that I am in the habit of dividing my graft with Father Quinlan."

"The girl's lying!" Burrell snarled. "It wasn't to Father Quinlan."

"The young lady is not lying," contradicted the Reverend Mr. Slayton, who had not previously spoken since the trio of pastors arrived. "Miss Greene is a member of my church. I know her very well. I vouch for her honesty."

"That's all, Miss Greene," Kendall told her, but McNutt spoke:

"One moment. May I ask the young lady two or three questions?"

"As many as you like."

"How many letters have you mailed, Miss Greene, during the past hour?"

"One. The letter Mr. Kendall gave me."

"You mailed it where?"

"In the chute, out by the elevator."

McNutt turned to his companions. "We saw her mail it," he said, and they nodded. "That is all, thank you," he told the girl, and the door closed behind her. "We have heard this man say," he went on harshly, "that Alderman Kendall did not take the money until about one minute before we came in. That letter was mailed within a minute or two after we arrived in the building—at least ten minutes before we came into this room, and perhaps fifteen."

Sinnard addressed Burrell and Tate collectively and bitterly: "You guys seem to be a fine pair!" His taunt seemed to contain a possibility of at least two meanings.

"A fine *trio*," Kendall amended. "I've let you go on with this little melodrama, Sinnard, because I've understood pretty well what you were driving at. You see, I know you, even though I am not so well acquainted with your two partners, here. You had a tip telephoned to these ministers to be here to hear that fake confession. It was easy enough for Curtley to get Burrell and Tate into it—a part of the price for letting them open up in town after election. And it was natural for him to get you into it. Curtley appointed you and you've done his personal dirty work on the force ever since."

"That'll be about all from you!" Sinnard began truculently, but Kendall snapped back at him:

"You aren't third-degreeing a prisoner in the back room of a police station, Sinnard. You are in my private office, without a search warrant or papers of any kind. I say you have done Curtley's crooked work on the force. He has saved you from being broken twice—once for whacking up loot with a third-rate fence, and once for trying a piece of petty blackmail on a prisoner with money in his clothes. If I'm elected, take a piece of advice and get your resignation in before I'm inaugurated. It will save you

being suspended the day after. How did you ever expect to get away with as coarse a plant as this, anyway? Did you think these ministers would be such idiots as to hear Tate's confession and then go away before I had a chance to disprove it? Or have you a marked five-hundred-dollar bill in your possession somewhere that you would have slipped into my pocket if we hadn't watched you?"

"You're a pretty wise guy!" was the best retort Sinnard could muster. "I *don't* think."

Glaring, but finding no words to express his emotions, the detective rolled down his sleeves, put on his coat, and turned heavily toward the door. Burrell, pink and impassive of face, and Tate, plainly suffering much mental turmoil, followed him silently.

The three ministers were on their feet and Mr. McNutt spoke with some embarrassment; making amends was not in his line. "Mr. Kendall," he said. "I was responsible for asking these others to come here. I think, sir, that I owe you an apology."

"I think I owe you thanks," the alderman replied. "If I hadn't had you gentlemen as witnesses, they might have succeeded in making me trouble."

While the trio stood in the corridor waiting for the elevator, Mr. McNutt addressed his colleagues: "We will call that meeting of the executive committee for eleven tomorrow."

"Do we need a meeting?" Doctor Gurney asked. "Doesn't this thing we have just seen demonstrate——"

"I insist upon a meeting," McNutt cried. "I shall demand immediate action. Do you not appreciate, Brother Gurney, that when this Curtley, whom we all know to be an evil man, tries to involve Kendall with criminal gamblers as we saw done just now, it tends to prove that if left to himself Kendall would have no dealings with them? I shall demand, to-morrow, that our association go on record as favoring the defeat of Curtley and the election of Kendall. I shall urge that every minister speak for Kendall in his pulpit next Sunday, and I shall do so whether the others do or not."

Doctor Gurney slyly added fuel to the fire. "It *does* look as though the mayor tried to make fools of us, doesn't it, Brother McNutt?" he said softly.

"Fules!" McNutt choked, his feelings overcoming him so that his tongue twisted to the burr of his childhood. "Fules! Brethren, I ha' never been so mor-rtified an' humeeliated in a' the days o' ma life!"

In the study at St. Luke's rectory, that evening, Kendall told the whole story to the Reverend John Quinlan.

"I had to think terribly fast," he concluded, "and the words that Doctor Gurney had just said over the telephone were fresh in my mind: 'Remember Father Quinlan,' or something like that. I don't know what to do with the money. I can't keep it, of course, and returning it would be foolish, if it weren't impossible; we don't even know where it came from, although Curtley's campaign committee wouldn't be a bad guess, and back of that it probably came from sources that wouldn't bear looking into. Is there any reason why it shouldn't have a good end? You have helped me very greatly, Father Quinlan. I don't happen to belong to your church, but isn't there some way you could use half of it and let Doctor Gurney have the other half, if he has use for it and will take it?"

"The poor we have always with us," the old man replied, "and too many of them are poor because of gamblers and their kind. I'll go over this minute and see Doctor Gurney. He has not many poor, I believe, but there are other good causes he is interested in—and I am in a hurry to tell him the details, anyway."

His face broke into whimsical wrinkles.

"Isn't it too bad," he exclaimed, "that the mayor can never know what honest use it will be put to? I suppose the misguided man will go through life embittered by the thought that his friends Burrell and Tate kept it. Ah, well, even the best-meaning are misjudged."

"You understand, if for any reason Doctor Gurney doesn't have use for his half, you are to dispose of it all."

"Changed into ones and twos and fives, either all of it or half of it will do a wonderful lot of good," the priest said. "The poor of the parish will thank Heaven for it without ever asking whether it was once either tainted or marked."

Mr. Davis has written this political series especially for POPULAR. More of the stories will follow.

A Primal Woman

By H. de Vere Stacpoole

Author of "The Beach of Dreams," Etc.

Something about the female of the species which most of us appreciate but seldom realize. It is a tragedy of first principles, but a tragedy that leaves us satisfied

UTARA lies northeast of Clermont Tonnerre, a high island out of trade tracks and the most lonely and beautiful in the Pacific.

Lygon sighted it first at dawn one clear, almost windless morning and from the deck of the *Sarah Dodsley,* a whaler, a year out from New Bedford.

They had taken the westward trail by Cape Verde round the Horn to New Zealand and up by the Kermadecs and then between the Gambiers and Low Achipelago. They were half full of oil, and an offense to the freshness of the morning, and Lygon, as he stood on the greasy deck with the perfumed land wind blowing on his face and the first rays of the sun touching the twin peaks of Utara, thought he saw paradise.

He was a gentleman, and whatever crime or foolishness had pursued him to New Bedford and chased him aboard the *Sarah Dodsley* had been paid for during the last year. The smoke of the try works, the hazing of the Yankee captain—no honest old whaling captain, but a slim, dried, sandy-haired east coaster—the clank of the cutting tackles, the very voices of his companions, had embittered his soul.

The *Sarah Dodsley* had run out of wood, that was why Captain Sellers had brought her up to Utara, but he had no intention of entering the lagoon. He hove to outside the reef and ordered three boats away, under the direction of the first mate.

Lygon was in the mate's boat.

They found the break in the reef and entered the lagoon on the swell of the incoming tide. The level rays of the newly risen sun lit the white beach down to which trooped the trees—breadfruit and pendanus, artus and cocoa palms—overshot with flights of colored birds and whispered to by the morning wind.

On the beach where ten-inch waves were falling, half a dozen natives stood watching the oncoming boats, and now from a frame house half hidden in the grove to the right came the figure of a tall old man, a European, dressed in white clothes and carrying a gun resting on the crook of his arm.

The people of the island showed no sign of welcome to the newcomers, and as the boats beached they drew off to the right and stood silent, observant, and without motion in the shade of the trees.

"Friendly crowd," said the mate. "Guess they don't like whalers. Now, boys, out with the axes and look lively. Follow me, and you, Brown, stick to the boats and see those Kanakas don't get handling the gear. If you have any trouble give a blow on this whistle."

He handed over the whistle and, leading the axmen, walked up the beach and vanished in the woods.

Brown was the name Lygon was known by on the *Sarah Dodsley.*

Lygon had made his plan even as they were crossing the lagoon. He had expected to be among the woodcutters and he had planned to escape the moment they were among the trees. The post of boat tender made the thing more difficult, for the island crowd, headed by the old man with the gun, were watching him and seemingly with no friendly eyes.

He was not a moment in making up his mind. Leaving the boats to look after themselves, he walked up the burning white beach toward the Kanakas. As he came he noticed that the old man shifted his hold on the gun.

Within speaking distance he halted.

"What is it you want?" asked the man with the gun. He spoke with a French accent and Lygon, close to him, now took heart. Here was a man of his own class,

a fine type of Frenchman, upstanding for all his years, and with a level, open gaze that compelled trust from all but the untrustworthy.

"I want to escape," said he, speaking in French. "That ship is a whaler. I have been on her a year, and it's either escape or death for me."

"You are English," said the other, "though you speak my language well, and a gentleman. What brought you on board her?"

"Foolishness," said Lygon.

The old man was silent for a moment, gazing at him as if he would read his very soul. Then he spoke.

"We have had two whalers here," said he, "and we want no more."

"I can well understand that," said Lygon.

"Those men are even now cutting down our trees without permission," said the other. "Let them go beyond that——" He slipped his hand on the gun stock. It was a Winchester repeater.

Lygon nodded.

"They take even the lives and liberty of men," said he, "just as they are taking your trees. You can understand why I want to escape."

"My name is Captain Charles Jourdain," said the old man, "and yours?"

"George Lygon—that is my real name—on board that ship of the infernal regions I was known by the name of Brown."

The old man looked at him again long and thoughtfully.

Then he turned on his heel. "Follow me," said he.

Lygon followed him among the trees toward the house. As they passed the house door a little girl came out, the prettiest child in the world, a half-caste, with a flower of the scarlet hibiscus showing in the dusk of her hair.

"My little daughter," said Captain Jourdain. Then to the child: "Kineia, the bad white men are still here. Listen, they are cutting our trees. Here is one we must hide from them. Should they come here you will say nothing of him."

"Nothing, father," said Kineia, gazing at the stranger with wide-pupiled eyes.

The captain led the way round to the storehouses. He was the sole trader on this island, working the business with his own schooner and through an agent in San Francisco. He passed the go-downs where copra was stored and led the way to a building behind them where he kept trade goods.

"You will be safe here," said the captain, unlocking the door, "and Kineia will bring you some food. You could, of course, hide in the woods, but it is safer here—with the key in my pocket."

Lygon went in and the captain turned the key on him.

Just at that moment the Yankee mate, coming out on the beach from among the trees, found Lygon gone. He was about to raise a hue and cry and call off the wood parties for a search, then he got command of himself. To search these woods would take a week, and if Lygon's escape were known it might set an example to the others and half a dozen men might be lost. So instead of making a fuss, he told the others that "Brown" had been sent off to try and get fruit.

They did not know the truth of the matter till the wood was aboard and the *Sarah Dodsley's* stern was turned to Utara, dark against a blazing sunset.

II.

Never did a man fall on his feet more surely than Lygon.

Captain Jourdain had lost his wife only the year before and he was in need of a friend. He had married a native woman fourteen years ago and being a straight, simple-minded man with an idea, somehow, that Kanakas have souls just the same as Christians, and that love once found is the only thing worth finding, and the only thing worth guarding, he had stuck to her faithfully as she to him.

Now when a white man marries an island woman he marries a woman with a past, a being with an ancestry as remote from his as Sirius from Rigel. Nalia, the wife of Captain Jourdain, and the mother of Kineia, a tender-eyed, gentle, soft-voiced woman, had exhibited this fact once in a flash. A ruffian named Havermuth, who had been fired off a ship and had become at once the beach comber and terror of the island, had gone for Jourdain with intent to kill. He had got the captain down and was trying to gouge when a tiger cat intervened. It was Nalia, and she was armed with Havermuth's knife that had been dropped in the struggle, and the feel of the

knife dividing his lumbar muscles and abdominal aorta was the last thing Havermuth knew.

Jourdain often thought of that and of how a European woman would have acted in the same situation—screamed, most likely, and run for help that would have been too late in coming. He had loved Nalia before, but after that he worshiped her, and when she died his worship was transferred in part to Kineia.

Kineia took after her mother, the same hair, the same eyes, the same soft voice, the same mysterious charm, heightened, in some curious way, by the touch of European in her. She had the direct gaze of her father, and she spoke French without any clipping of the words, and like her father she seemed to take to the newcomer from the first, so that in a few months they were like one family, Lygon helping in the work of superintending the copra getting and sharing Jourdain's house.

"It is good you have come," said the old man one evening, as they sat on the veranda watching a canoe putting out for fishing, "but the hard work will not begin till my ship comes in. Then we will all be busy—I do not know how you will like it, but you shall be paid."

"Oh, I'm not afraid of work," said Lygon, "and I'm not thinking of payment. It seems to me that I have a big debt to wipe off before I talk of payment."

"We will see," said Captain Jourdain.

In the long run payment was not talked of; the captain gave Lygon a fourth share in the business and Lygon earned it. There was plenty to do. The *Haliotis* was the name of Jourdain's schooner, and every time she called there was endless work writing letters to the San Francisco agent, taking tally of trade goods, going over accounts as to payments of crew, and so forth, to say nothing of the business of getting the copra on board.

At the end of a year Jourdain had proved Lygon and found him trustworthy, and he raised his position to an equal partnership with an equal share in the business.

"I have no relations," said Jourdain, "no one but Kineia and you. Captain Morris of my schooner is a good man, but he is almost a stranger to me, though I have known him some years—some men are like that; one never gets to know them beyond a certain point. You have become to me almost as a relation. When I am dead, if we go on as we are going, perhaps you will have the whole business."

"I hope that will never be," said Lygon, and he meant it.

One day at the end of the second year the old man took Lygon by the arm and walked him off into the woods till they reached a charming spot, where a seat had been placed under a breadfruit tree, and with a view of a little leaping cascade and a glen wonderful with ferns.

"I want to speak to you about Kineia," said the captain.

Lygon's color rose.

"You have made her love you."

"I love her," said Lygon.

"That goes without saying," replied the other. "What is on my mind is this—are you worthy of her? She is all to me, more than life, and I shall die soon. I have known you two years and I would trust you with my last sou. Can I trust you with Kineia? It is a father that is speaking, and I ask myself, are you worthy of her?"

"No," said Lygon, "I am not. But she is worthy of the love I have for her. For her I would let myself be cut in pieces."

Jourdain nodded as though to say, "I hear—and I believe."

Then Lygon went on.

"I want to tell you everything. You asked me the first day I met you what brought me on board that whaler, and I answered, 'Foolishness.' I did not lie, but my foolishness led me further than most men go. I killed a man in a fight in a gambling den of New York. He was a German Jew. The quarrel was about money, and I was excited with drink and he struck me, then I struck him. I am a powerful man, and the blow took him on the point of the chin and broke his neck. I can see him still as a man held him up on one knee. He was quite dead. Then before they could seize me I jumped from a window. It was a hot night and the window was open and the room on the ground floor. I reached a yard and then a street. It was on the East Side. I had luck and got clear away on board a ship bound for New Orleans. I kept to the sea for a year and then found myself in New Bedford, where I joined that whaler. I tell you this because I love Kineia. It is the only thing the world has against me."

Jourdain was silent for a moment. Then he spoke: "You did not mean to kill."

"I did not, but if they had caught me I might have paid the penalty, for that crowd would have sworn anything."

"Are you a gambler?"

"No. I have gambled, but I am not a gambler."

"And you do not drink?"

"No. I hate drink."

Again the old man was silent, his eyes resting on the little cascade and his thoughts far away.

"That was four years ago," said he at last.

"Yes."

"And in New York. They will not be looking for you now, and if they were they would not find you—the Pacific is wide, the islands are many. Ah, well, many a man has done worse, but I am glad you told me. I believe in you and I trust you. You shall marry Kineia. For the last year the thing has been growing in my mind. I have said to myself: 'Your end is approaching, and here is a man who will take care of Kineia if he only learns to love her and if he proves worthy of her.' That is what I have said. And I have said to myself: 'You will make a will and every sou you possess they shall possess—schooner and all.' I made that will last night. It was attested by Ramura and Tonga. It is in my bureau. Had this interview not been satisfactory, I would have torn it up and I would have said to you: 'Lygon, my friend, take half I possess, if you will, but leave this island.' There remains only one thing. You love Kineia, does she love you?"

"She does," said Lygon.

The *Haliotis* was due to call in a week's time, and when she put into the lagoon Captain Morris found some business awaiting him other than discharging cargo. He was called upon to officiate at the marriage of Lygon and Kineia.

A month later Jourdain, who had prophesied his own end, died. He died of no special disease. He had lived long enough and he wanted to rejoin Nalia and his mind was at ease about Kineia. His business in life was over. He lost clutch of things—and retired.

Had he not been happy and sure about Kineia's future, he might have gone on living for a considerable time just for her sake.

III.

One day, a year after his marriage, Lygon found himself alone out on the reef. He had paddled over in a canoe and, leaving her tied up, had taken his seat on a lump of coral. Pipe in mouth, he was watching the breakers coming in, great green rollers filled with the movement of life and the perfume of the heart of the sea.

In contrast with the quiet island beach here, there was uproarious life. The coral shook with the thunder of the breakers and the gulls cried and the wind blew, bringing the spindrift of the ocean, and mixing the voice of the undertow with the bourdon note of the waves.

Lygon who had landed on the island a penniless outcast was to-day rich. Jourdain's invested money came to nearly ten thousand pounds. There was, besides that, the schooner, the pitch, and a going business. He had for wife one of the most beautiful women in the world, and the island was a paradise.

Was he happy? He was happy, but not quite contented. The call of civilization had come to him. He had begun to hear the roar of streets in the roar of the reef, and to wish for a change. Just a few months' change. The *Haliotis* was due—overdue by some days—and he had determined to take Kineia with him when the schooner sailed next and, leaving the place in charge of Taro, make the run to San Francisco.

They would only be a few months away, so he told himself.

Kineia had agreed. She showed no enthusiasm over the business. At heart she disliked it, but his wish was her law.

Suddenly Lygon rose to his feet and shaded his eyes. Away, far away against the sky line lay a fleck, spar-white in the sun dazzle, now almost invisible, now clear. It was the top canvas of a ship. It was the *Haliotis*. He knew that instinctively and at once. He watched, but the speck did not change. He turned away and, walking along the coral, did not look again for five minutes, then when he looked it had grown larger. She was coming with the wind that was breezing up fresh from the nor'east, and leaving the reef he paddled over to the island beach in search of Kineia.

She was seated in the veranda of their house engaged in needlework, and telling

her that the schooner was in sight he went off to smarten himself.

He always put on his best clothes to receive the *Haliotis*. It was part of the ritual which included Californian champagne and palm salad at the dinner given to the captain.

It was after four when the *Haliotis* entered the lagoon, and spilling the wind from her sails dropped anchor a few cable lengths from the beach.

Then a boat put off.

Lygon, standing beside Kineia, shaded his eyes. He was looking at the man in the stern sheets of the boat.

"That's not Captain Morris," said he. "What on earth has happened to the cap?"

The man in the stern sheets was certainly not Morris. He showed a sick, white face under his sun helmet, and as the boat beached and he scrambled out, Kineia instinctively drew back a step. The appearance of the stranger did not please her.

As for Lygon, he stood as if turned to stone. The man before him was Packard, the one man in all the world he dreaded, the man with whom he had gone that night to the gambling house in New York.

He had often wondered what had become of Packard.

The recognition was mutual.

"Hello!" said Packard. "Why, it's *you*."

"This is a surprise," said Lygon.

Packard glanced round at the trees, at the beach, at Kineia. Then he laughed.

"Well, this is a start," said he. "I'm your new captain. Morris is down with a dropsy—won't be any more use for the sea, and I took on the job for one voyage. Never recognized you in the name, though it's not a common one. Your agents gave me the job. How on earth did you come here?"

"It's a long story," said Lygon. "I'll tell you some time. This is my wife. Kineia, this is Captain Packard."

Then Lygon led the way up to the house, where the two men sat in basket chairs and talked while Palu, the maid, served them with drinks and Kineia went off to see about preparations for dinner.

IV.

That night, as Kineia lay awake, she heard them talking in the room below and once or twice she heard her husband's voice raised sharply, as if in anger.

Then he came to bed, but not to sleep, and in the morning he was a different man from the man she had always known, heavy-eyed, depressed, and listless.

Packard, on the contrary, seemed more fresh of color and more bright of eye than when he had landed.

He got off immediately after breakfast to see about unloading and taking in cargo, and Lygon sat in the veranda smoking.

Kineia's heart was heavy. It seemed to her that some blight had come to the island with this stranger, but she said nothing, and for the three succeeding days she said nothing, watching her lord as she might have watched him wilting under the hand of some fatal disease.

Then on the fourth day, when they were alone in the veranda, Kineia, who was at work on some embroidery, suddenly put it aside, got up, and knelt down beside her husband.

"What has that man done to you that you should be like this?" asked Kineia.

Lygon was silent for a moment. Then he spoke.

"Kineia, I am ruined. All this around us is as a dream that must go. Kineia, I killed a man once, in anger. I escaped, but that man Packard was present, and now I have to give him everything or he will tell."

"Everything?" said Kineia.

"I offered him half I possess—as well offer the gray shark half your body when he can get the whole—no not everything. He will leave me a thousand dollars to begin the world again with."

Kineia was silent.

"He is going back to San Francisco on the schooner to tell—unless——"

"Unless?"

"Unless we go with him. In San Francisco I am to sell him everything, schooner and all, for the thousand dollars he will give me."

"And your money?"

"That, too, will be his."

"Truly," said Kineia, "his stomach is great."

"I am bound and helpless," said Lygon.

The weakness in his character, which prosperity had hidden, was beginning to appear, and Kineia seemed to see it as she brooded on him now long and fatefully.

He who had been everything was now nothing. The other man was all-powerful.

The other man was now the possessor of all.

"Tell me how you killed that man," said she.

Lygon told, going over the old, sordid story and emphasizing the fact that it was really an accident.

"You did not mean to kill?" said Kineia.

"Never. It was an accident."

"Where, then, is the harm?"

"His friends would swear that it was not, and I ran away, and even killing by accident is what they call manslaughter over there. I would be put in prison—for years, maybe."

"I will think about it," said Kineia. Her manner had grown distant and chill, as though her mind were repelled by the weakness of Lygon.

Next morning, Packard, the dominant man, thought he noticed a change in the manner of Kineia. Lygon's wife up to this had held aloof from him; her manner seemed more friendly and inviting this morning. Then he felt sure. He knew himself to be the better man, and Kineia had recognized the fact.

He almost forgot Lygon and all his plans about him in this new interest that had suddenly come into his life.

He had never seen any one so beautiful as Kineia, and his evil mind was not a whit less evil because of the æsthetic strain in it. He could admire beauty, this man, the beauty of a sunrise or the beauty of a woman —anything but the beauty of goodness.

He went off to his work that morning carrying the picture of Kineia with him, and it held him while he superintended the business of loading the copra on board.

Brown, the mate, who was helping in the work, wondered what had come to Packard making him so silent and abstracted, he who had been so full of life and energy the day before.

If you had told him that Packard was thinking of Kineia, he would have laughed with a certain amount of joy at the cold douche surely being prepared for him by that beauty.

But Brown knew nothing of the tangle of affairs or what native blood can do under certain temptations.

Packard returning next evening found Lygon incapable of coming to dinner. During the last few days Lygon had been taking gin to soothe his mind; to-night he was tipsy, and as he and Kineia dined opposite one another his snoring came distinctly from the room above.

"My husband is ill," said Kineia, with a little movement of disgust. They talked in low tones during the meal and when dinner was over, Packard, lighting a cigar in the veranda, saw Kineia in the lamplit room going to a box that stood on a little table by the lamp stand. She took something from it and placed whatever it was in her pocket. Then she came out in the veranda. There was in her face something reckless, crafty, and subtle, as though the evil spirit of the gin that had poisoned Lygon were poisoning her, too.

"What was that you put in your pocket?" asked Packard, for want of something better to say.

"A present for you," said Kineia tenderly and with a little laugh.

He took her hand and she let him hold it. Lygon, whose snoring had ceased for a moment, could be heard turning on his creaking bed, then the snores recommenced.

A little shudder of disgust ran through Kineia.

"Come," she whispered, "let us get away from that."

She led the way from the veranda amid the trees. A full moon was shining and the woods were full of light, a light green as the light of a sea cave.

He had released her hand, and now he turned to take it again, but she evaded him.

"I have come here to speak with you alone, not to hold your hand," said Kineia. "Follow me, for what I have to say must be said far away from men and in the place where my mother's people once worshiped their gods. You, who say that you love me, must obey me in this."

"Lead on," said Packard.

He followed as she went before him like a wraith through the green gloom. Now a shaft of moonlight struck her and now in a denser shadow she was almost invisible. Then came a break in the trees and Packard saw before him an amphitheater where, in the moonlight, great blocks of stone lay tumbled and where the steplike tiers of seats were burst apart by tree roots.

Here Kineia stopped and turned, where the ferns grew high amid the bowlders. This was the spot toward which she had been luring Packard for the last two days.

"Once," said she to Packard in a low voice, "you saw my husband kill a man."

Packard started. Then he laughed.

"So he has told you?" said he.

"Is it true?"

"As sure as he's lying there drunk in the house, now, it is true."

Kineia pondered for a moment.

"What brought you here across the sea to this island to tell me that?" said she mournfully.

"Luck," said Packard.

"No," said Kineia with a sudden laugh. "Death!" And she plunged the knife in his throat, the knife that had saved her father, in the hand of Nalia.

He did not die immediately and she waited to make sure, absolutely sure, and as she waited she wept for the man she loved lying there in the house in the grasp of gin. Then when all was over she came back, running like a mother to her child.

Lygon was sleeping peacefully now, with his face buried on his arm. She kissed his hair, left the room, and leaving the house sought the house of Taro.

"Taro," said Kineia, "the strange captain sat up at our house drinking gin. He wished to go on board his ship. I went to the beach with him and he said he would swim. He was drunk. I tried to stop him, but it was no use. He had not gone more than a few canoe lengths from the shore when a shark took him. He cried once and went down."

"Waugh," said Taro, rubbing his eyes. "When the belly of a shark has taken a man there is no use in searching for him late at night. He was a stranger, anyway."

It was a temperance story that explained a lot of things, among others the prohibition of alcohol on that island by order of Kineia. Lygon, returned to freedom and sobriety and happiness, never knew. Kineia, happy again like a joyous child, never told, and the ferns where the old gods of Utara once held their revels are safe to keep their secret forever.

Stacpoole, as you have noticed perhaps, writes for the POPULAR right along. We are assured of his best work. Watch for Stacpoole's stories.

IDENTIFYING THE STRANGER

PROFESSORS in this country are frequently poor at remembering faces and names, in spite of the fact that every twelve months they meet and have to address by name new classes of students. One of these learned men—he is now president of a university—got into a Capitol elevator in Washington. His entrance was from the third, or "gallery," floor. At the second floor the car stopped and four men stepped in.

One of them spoke with unusual heartiness to the professor and shook hands with him. The professor, not knowing him from Adam, began to put out diplomatic feelers, and asked:

"Well, well! How do you happen to be in Washington?"

"Oh," replied the stranger, evidently surprised, "I've been here for several months."

"I'm ashamed of myself; I really am," the "feeler" finally admitted, "but, for the life of me, I can't recall your name."

"Woodrow Wilson," the other informed him.

The professor told this story to a group of his friends when he reached home. One of them inquired:

"What did you do then?"

"I got out of the elevator right away. I was afraid, if I stayed in it, I'd ask him whether he'd been to the White House yet!"

The Ridin' Kid from Powder River

By Henry Herbert Knibbs

Author of "Waring of Sonoratown," Etc.

(A Six-Part Story—Part Six)

CHAPTER XLII.

ADIOS.

PETE stumbled out of the bank and down the steps to the sidewalk. He was rich—worth twenty-four thousand dollars! But why had the Spider left this money to him? Surely the Spider had had some other friend—or some relative——

"Step right in," said Sheriff Owen. "You look kind of white. Feeling shaky?"

"Some."

"We want to go to the General Hospital," said the sheriff.

Pete listened to the deliberate plunk-*plunk* —plunk-*plunk* of the white mare's large and capable feet as the cab whirled softly along the pavement.

"I suppose you'll be takin' me over to Sanborn right soon," he said finally.

"Well, I expect I ought to get back to my family," said the sheriff.

"I didn't kill Sam Brent," asserted Pete.

"I never thought you did," said the sheriff, much to Pete's surprise.

"Then what's the idea of doggin' me around like I was a blame coyote?"

"Because you have been traveling in bad company, son. And some one in that said company killed Sam Brent."

"And I got to stand for it?"

"Looks that way. I been all kinds of a fool at different times, but I'm not fool enough to ask you who killed Sam Brent. But I advise you to tell the judge and jury when the time comes."

"That the only way I kin square myself?"

"I don't say that. But it will help."

"Then I don't say."

"Thought you wouldn't. It's a case of circumstantial evidence. Brent was found in that cactus forest near the station. The same night two men rode into Sanborn and left their horses at the livery stable. These men took the train for El Paso, but jumped it at the crossing. Later they were trailed to a rooming house on Aliso Street. One of them—and this is the queer part of it—got away after shooting his pardner. The rubber heels in this town say these two men quarreled about money——"

"That's about all they know. Ed and me never——"

"You don't mean Ed Brevoort, do you?"

"There's more'n one Ed in this country."

"There sure is. Old E. H. Hodges—he's Ed; and there's Ed Smally on the force here, and Ed Cummings, the preacher over to Sanborn. Lots of Eds. See here, son. If you want to get out of a bad hole, the quickest way is for you to tell a straight story. Save us both time. Been visiting with you quite a spell."

"Guess we're here," said Pete as the cab stopped.

"And I guess you're glad of it. As I was saying, we been having quite a visit—getting acquainted. Now if you haven't done anything the law can hold you for, the more I know about what you have done the better it will be for you. Think that over. If you can prove you didn't kill Brent then it's up to me to find out who did. Get a good sleep. I'll drift round some time tomorrow."

Back in his room, Pete lay trying to grasp the full significance of the little bank book in his pocket. He wondered who would stop him if he were to walk out of the hospital that evening or the next morning, and leave town. He got up and strode nervously back and forth, fighting a recurrent temptation to make his escape. He happened to glance in the mirror above the washstand.

"That's the only fella that *kin* stop me," he told himself. And he thought of Ed Brevoort and wondered where Brevoort was, and if he were in need of money.

Doctor Andover, making his afternoon

rounds, stepped in briskly, glanced at Pete's flushed face, and sitting beside him on the cot, took his pulse and temperature with that professional celerity that marks the busy physician.

"A little temperature. Been out to-day?"

"For a couple of hours."

Andover nodded. "Well, young man, you get right into bed." The surgeon closed the door. Pete undressed grumblingly.

"Now turn over. I want to look at your back. M-mm! Thought so. A little feverish. Did you walk much? "

"Nope! We took a rig. I was with the sheriff."

"I see! Excitement was a little too much for you. You'll have to go slow for a few days."

"I'm feelin' all right," asserted Pete.

"You think you are. How's your appetite?"

"I ain't hungry."

Andover nodded. "You'd better keep off your feet to-morrow."

"Shucks, doc! I'm sick of this here place."

Andover smiled. "Well, just between ourselves, so am I. I've been here eight years. By the way, how would you like to take a ride with me, next Thursday? I expect to motor out to Sanborn."

"In that machine I seen you in the other day?"

"Yes. New car. I'd like to try her out on a good straightaway—and there's a pretty fair road up on this end of the mesa."

"I'd sure like to go! Say, doc, how much does one of them automobiles cost?"

"Oh, about three thousand, without extras."

"How fast can you go?"

"Depends on the road. My car is guaranteed to do seventy-five on the level."

"Some stepper! You could git to Sanborn and back in a couple of hours."

"Not quite. I figure it about a four-hour trip. I'd be glad to have you along. Friend of mine tells me there's a thoroughbred saddle horse there that is going to be sold at auction. I've been advertising for a horse for my daughter. You might look him over and tell me what you think of him."

"I reckon I know him already," said Pete.

"How's that?"

" 'Cause they's no thoroughbred stock around Sanborn. If it's the one I'm thinkin' about, it was left there by a friend of mine."

"Oh—I see! I remember, now. Sanborn is where you—er—took the train for El Paso?"

"We left our hosses there—same as the paper said."

"Hm-m! Well, I suppose the horse is to be sold for charges. Sheriff's sale, I understand."

"Oh, you're safe in buyin' *him* all right. And he sure is a good one."

"Well, I'll speak to the chief. I imagine he'll let you go with me."

Pete shook his head. "Nope. He wouldn't, even if he had the say. But the sheriff of Sanborn County has kind of invited me to go over there for a spell. I guess he figured on leavin' here in a couple of days."

"He can't take you till I certify that you're able to stand the journey," said Andover brusquely.

"Well, he's comin' to-morrow. I'm dead sick of stayin' here. Can't you tell him I kin travel?"

"We'll see how you feel to-morrow. Hello! Here's Miss Gray. What, six o'clock! I had no idea—— Yes, a little temperature, Miss Gray. Too much excitement. A little surface inflammation—nothing serious. A good night's rest and he'll be a new man. Good night!"

Pete was glad to see Doris. Her mere presence was restful. He sighed heavily, glanced up at her, and smiled. "A lit-tle soup, Miss Gray. It's awful excitin'. Slight surface inflammation on them boiled beets. Nothin' serious—they ain't scorched. A good night's rest and the cook'll be a new man to-morrow. Doc Andover is sure all right—but I always feel like he was wearin' kid gloves and was afraid of gettin' 'em dirty, every time he comes in."

Doris was not altogether pleased by Pete's levity and her face showed it. She did not smile, but rearranged the things on the tray in a preoccupied manner, and asked him if there was anything else he wanted.

"Lemme see." Pete frowned prodigiously. "Got salt and pepper and butter and sugar; but I reckon you forgot somethin' that I'm wantin' a whole lot."

"What is it?"

"You're forgettin' to smile."

"I read that letter from Mr. Bailey."

"I'm mighty glad you did, Miss Gray. I

wanted you to know what was in that letter. You'd sure like Ma Bailey, and Jim and Andy. Andy was my pardner—when—afore I had that trouble with Steve Gary. No use tryin' to step round it now. I reckon you know all about it."

"And you will be going back to them—to your friends on the ranch?"

"Well—I aim to. I got to go over to Sanborn first."

"Sanborn? Do you mean——"

"Jest what you're thinkin', Miss Gray. I seen a spell back how you was wonderin' that I could josh about my grub, and Doc Andover. Well, I got in bad, and I ain't blamin' nobody—and I ain't blamin' myself—and that's why I ain't hangin' my head about anything I done. And I ain't kickin' because I got started on the wrong foot. *I'm* figurin' how I kin git started on the other foot—and keep a-goin'."

"But why should you tell me about these things? I can't help you. And it seems terrible to think about them. If I were a man—like Doctor Andover——"

"I reckon you're right," said Pete. "I got no business loadin' you up with all my troubles. I'm goin' to quit it. Only you been kind of like a pardner—and it sure was lonesome, layin' here and thinkin' about everything, and not sayin' a word to nobody. But I jest want you to know that I didn't kill Sam Brent—but I sure would 'a' got him—if somebody hadn't been a flash quicker than me, that night. Brent was after the money we was packin', and he meant business."

"You mean that—some one killed him in self-defense?"

"That's the idea. It was him or us."

"Then why don't you tell the police that?"

"I sure aim to. But what they want to know is who the fella was that got Brent."

"But the papers say that the other man escaped."

"Which is right."

"And you won't tell who he is?"

"Nope."

"But why not—if it means your own freedom?"

"Mebby because they wouldn't believe me anyhow."

"I don't think that is your real reason. Oh, I forgot to return your letter. I'll bring it next time."

"I'll be goin' Thursday. Doc Andover, he's goin' over to Sanborn and he ast me to go along with him."

"You mean—to stay?"

"For a spell, anyhow. But I'm comin' back."

Doris glanced at her wrist watch and realized that it was long past the hour for the evening meal. "I'm going out to my sister's to-morrow, for the day. I may not see you before you leave."

Pete sat up. "Shucks! Well, I ain't sayin' thanks for what you done for me, Miss Gray. 'Thanks' sounds plumb starvin' poor and rattlin', 'side of what I want to tell you. I'd be a'most willin' to git shot ag'in——"

"Don't say that!" exclaimed Doris.

"I would be shakin' hands with you," said Pete. "But this here is just adios, for I'm sure comin' back."

CHAPTER XLIII.

"A LAND FAMILIAR."

The following day Pete had a long talk with Sheriff Owen, a talk which resulted in the sheriff's accompanying Andover and Pete on their desert journey to Sanborn.

Incidentally, Pete gave his word that he would not try to escape. It was significant, however, that the little sheriff expressed a preference for the back seat, even before Andover, who had invited him to make the journey, asked him if he cared to ride in front. The sheriff's choice was more a matter of habit than preference, for, alone upon the ample seat of the touring car, he was shuttled ignominiously from side to side and bounced and jolted until, during a stop for water, he informed Andover that "he sure would have to pull leather to stay with the car."

And the surgeon, a bit inclined to show off, did not hesitate to "step on her," when the going was at all good. And any one familiar with the road from El Paso to Sanborn is aware of just how good even the best going is. Any one unfamiliar with that road is to be congratulated.

Pete enjoyed the ride, as it brought him once more into the open country. The car whirred on and on. It seemed to him as though he were speeding from a nightmare of brick and stone and clamor, into the wide and sun-swept spaces of a land familiar and yet strange.

They reached Sanborn about noon, hav-

ing made about one hundred and fifty miles in something like four hours.

After a wash and a meal at the hotel, they strolled over to the livery stable to inspect the horse that Andover thought of buying. A small crowd had collected at the stables, as the auction was advertised to take place that afternoon. The sheriff himself started the bidding on the thoroughbred, followed by the liveryman, who knew about what he could get for the horse in El Paso. Andover raised his bid, which was quickly raised in turn by the sheriff. Pete realized that Andover really wanted the horse and told him quietly to drop out when the bidding reached two hundred, shrewdly estimating that neither the liveryman nor the sheriff would go beyond that figure, as neither of them really wanted the horse save as a speculation. "Then, if you want him, raise twenty-five and you get a mighty good horse for a hundred less than he's worth. I know him. He's no good workin' cattle—but he's one fine trail horse for straight goin'. And he's as gentle as your gran'mother."

The bidding ran to one hundred and seventy-five, when there was a pause. The sheriff had dropped out. The liveryman, conferring with his partner, was about to bid when Andover jumped the price to two hundred and fifty.

"I'm through," said the liveryman.

"Sold to—name, please—sold to Doctor John Andover for two hundred and fifty dollars," said the auctioneer. Then, after a facetious dissertation on thoroughbreds as against cow ponies, Blue Smoke was led out. Pete's face went red. Then he paled. He had not forgotten that Blue Smoke was to be sold, but he had taken it for granted that he would be allowed to reclaim him. Pete stepped over to the sheriff and was about to enter a protest—offer to pay the board bill against Blue Smoke, when the bidding began with an offer of twenty-five dollars. This was quckly run up to seventy-five, when Pete promptly bid one hundred, which was a fair auction price, although every man there knew that Blue Smoke was worth more.

"I'm bid one hundred twenty-five," cried the auctioneer, as a young, bow-legged cowboy raised Pete's bid.

"One-fifty," said Pete without hesitation.

The sheriff glanced at Pete, wondering if he would borrow the money from Andover to make good his bid. But Pete was watching the auctioneer's gavel—which happened to be a short piece of rubber garden hose. "Third and last chance!" said the auctioneer. "Nobody want that pony as a present? All right—goin', I say! Goin', I say *ag'in! Gone!* B'gosh! at one hundred an' fifty dollars, to that young gent over there that looks like he could ride him. What's the name?"

"Pete Annersley."

Several in the crowd turned and gazed curiously at Pete. But Pete's eyes were upon Blue Smoke—his horse—the horse that had carried him faithfully so many desert miles—a cow pony that could "follow a mountain trail all day and finish a-steppin' high."

"Much obliged for your advice about the thoroughbred," said Andover as he stepped close to Pete. "Is that the pony you used to ride?"

"He sure is. Say, doc, I got the money to pay for him, but would you mind writin' out a check. I ain't wise to this bankin' business yet."

"Why—no. I'll do that. I—er—of course—I'm a little short myself. New car—and this horse for my daughter. But I think I can manage. You want to borrow a hundred and fifty?"

"Say, doc, you got me wrong! I got the makin's all right, but I don't jest sabe rollin' 'em." Pete dug into his coat pocket and fetched up a check book. "Same as you paid for your hoss with."

"This is Stockmen's Security. You have an account there?"

"That's what the president was callin' it. I call it dough. I got the book." And Pete dug into his pocket again, watching Andover's face, as that astonished individual glanced at the deposit to Pete's credit.

"Well, you're the limit!" and the doctor whistled. What will you spring next?"

"Oh, it's *mine*, all right. A friend was leavin' it to me. He's crossed over."

"I s-e-e. Twenty-four thousand dollars! Young man, that's more money than I ever had at one time in my life."

"Same here," and Pete grinned. "But it don't worry me none."

"I'll make out the check for you," and Andover pulled out his fountain pen and stepped over to the auctioneer's stand. Pete signed the check and handed it to the auctioneer.

"Don't know this man," said the auctioneer, as he glanced at the signature.

"I'll indorse it," volunteered Andover quickly.

"All right, doc."

And Andover, whose account was as close to being overdrawn as it could be, and still remain an account, indorsed the check of a man worth twenty-four thousand-odd dollars, and his indorsement was satisfactory to the auctioneer. So much for professional egoism and six-cylinder prestige.

Sheriff Owen, who had kept a mild eye on Pete, had noted this transaction. After Blue Smoke had been returned to the stables he took occasion to ask Pete if he was still a partner to the understanding that he was on his honor not to attempt to escape.

"I figured that deal was good till I got here," said Pete bluntly.

"Just so, son. That's where my figuring stopped, likewise. Too much open country. If you once threw a leg over that blue roan, I can see where some of us would do some riding."

"If I'd been thinkin' of leavin' you, it would 'a' been afore we got here, sheriff."

"So it's 'sheriff' now, and not Jim, eh?"

"It sure is—if you're thinkin' of lockin' me up. You treated me white back there in El Paso—so I'm tellin' you that if you lock me up—and I git a chanct, I'll sure vamose."

Pete's assertion did not seem to displease the sheriff in the least. To the contrary, he smiled affably. "That's fair enough. And if I *don't* lock you up, but let you stay over to the hotel, you'll hang around town till this thing is settled, eh?"

"I sure will."

"Will you shake on that?"

Pete thrust out his hand. "That goes, Jim."

"Now you're talking sense, Pete. Guess you better run along and see what the doc wants. He's wavin' to you."

Andover sat in his car, drawing on his gloves. "I've arranged to have the horse shipped to me by express. If you don't mind, I wish you would see that he is loaded properly and that he has food and water before the car leaves—that is"—Andover cleared his throat—"if you're around town to-morrow. The sheriff seems to allow you a pretty free hand—possibly because I assured him that you were not physically fit to—er—ride a horse. Since I saw that bank book of yours, I've been thinking more about your case. If I were you I would hire the best legal talent in El Paso, and fight that case to a finish. You can pay for it."

"You mean for me to hire a lawyer to tell 'em I didn't kill Sam Brent?"

"Not exactly that—but hire a lawyer to *prove* to the judge and jury that you didn't kill him."

"Then a fella's got to pay to prove he didn't do somethin' that he's arrested for, and never done?"

"Often enough. And he's lucky if he has the money to do it. Think it over—and let me know how you are getting along. Miss Gray will be interested, also."

"All right. Thanks, doc. I ain't forgettin' you folks."

Andover waved his hand as he swung the car round and swept out of town. Pete watched him as he sped out across the mesa.

Sheriff Owen was standing in the livery-stable door across the street as Pete turned and started toward him. Midway across the street Pete felt a sharp pain shoot through his chest. It seemed as though the air had been suddenly shut from his lungs and that he could neither speak nor breathe. He heard an exclamation and saw Owen coming toward him. Owen, who had seen him stop and sway, was asking him a question. A dim blur of faces—an endless journey along a street and up a narrow stairway—and Pete lay staring at yellow wall-paper, heavily sprinkled with impossible blue roses. Owen was giving him whiskey—a sip at a time.

"How do you feel now?" queried the sheriff.

"I'm all right. Somethin' caught me quick—out there."

"Your lungs have been working overtime. Too much fresh air all at once. You'll feel better to-morrow."

"I guess you won't have to set up and watch the front door," said Pete, smiling faintly.

"Or the back door. You're in the Sanborn House—room eleven, second floor, and there's only one other floor and that's downstairs. If you want anything—just pound on the floor. They'll understand."

"About payin' for my board——"

"That's all right. I got your money—and your other stuff that I might need for evidence. Take it easy."

"Guess I'll git up," said Pete. "I'm all right now."

"Better wait till I come back from the office. Be back about six. Got to write some letters. Your case—called next Thursday." And Sheriff Owen departed, leaving Pete staring at the impossible blue roses.

CHAPTER XLIV.

"OH, SAY TWO THOUSAND."

Just one week from the day on which Pete arrived in Sanborn he was sitting in the witness chair, telling an interested judge and jury and a more than interested attorney for the defense, the story of his life —"Every hour of which," the attorney for the defense shrewdly observed in addressing the court, "has had a bearing upon the case."

Pete spoke quietly and at times with considerable unconscious humor. He held back nothing save the name of the man who had killed Brent, positively refusing to divulge Brevoort's name. His attitude was convincing—and his story straightforward and apparently without a flaw, despite a spirited cross-examination by the State. The trial was brief, brisk, and marked by no wrangling. Sheriff Owen's testimony, while impartial, rather favored the prisoner than otherwise.

In his address to the jury, Pete's attorney made no appeal in respect to the defendant's youth, his struggle for existence, nor the defendant's willingness to stand trial, for Pete had unwittingly made that appeal himself, in telling his story. The attorney for the defense summed up briefly, then suddenly whirled and pointed his finger at the sheriff.

"I ask you as sheriff of Sanborn County why you allowed the defendant his personal liberty, unguarded and unattended, pending this trial."

"Because he gave his word that he would not attempt to escape," said Sheriff Owen.

"That's it," cried the attorney. "The defendant *gave his word.* And if Sheriff Owen, accustomed as he is to reading character in a man, was willing to take this boy's word as a guarantee of his presence here, on trial for his life—is there a man among us who —having heard the defendant testify—is willing to stand up and say that he doubts the defendant's word? If there is I should like to look at that man! No?

"Gentlemen, I would ask you to recall the evidence contained in the letter written by former employers of the defendant, substantiating my assertion that this boy has been the victim of circumstances, and not the victim of perverse or vicious tendencies. Does he look like a criminal? Does he act like a criminal? I ask you to decide."

The jury was out but a few minutes, when they filed into court and returned a verdict of "Not guilty."

The attorney for the defense shook hands with Pete, and gathered up his papers.

Outside the courtroom several of the jury expressed a desire to make Pete's acquaintance, curiously anxious to meet the man who had known the notorious Spider personally. Pete was asked many questions. One juror, a big, bluff cattleman, even offered Pete a job—"in case he thought of punchin' cattle again, instead of studyin' law"—averring that Pete "was already a better lawyer than that shark from El Paso, at any turn of the trial."

Finally the crowd dwindled to Owen, the El Paso lawyer, two of Owen's deputies, and Pete, who suggested that they go over to the hotel until train time.

When Pete came to pay the attorney, whom Andover had secured, following a letter from Pete, the attorney asked Pete how much he could afford. Pete, too proud to express ignorance, and feeling mightily impressed by the other's ability, said he would leave that to him.

"Well, including expenses, say two thousand dollars," said the attorney.

Pete wrote the check and managed to conceal his surprise at the amount, which the attorney had mentioned in such an offhand way.

"I'm thankin' you for what you done," said Pete.

"Don't mention it. Now, I'm no longer your legal adviser, Annersley, and I guess you're glad of it. But if I were, I'd suggest that you go to some school and get an education. No matter what you intend to do later, you will find that an education will be extremely useful, to say the least. I worked my way through college —tended furnaces in winter and cut lawns in summer. And from what Andover tells me, you won't have to do that. Well, I think I'll step over to the station; train's due about now."

"You'll tell Doc Andover how it come out?"

"Of course. He'll want to know. Take care of yourself. Good-by!"

Owen and his deputies strolled over to the station with the El Paso attorney. Pete, standing out in front of the hotel, saw the train pull in and watched the attorney step aboard.

"First, Doc Andover says to hire a good lawyer, which I done, and good ones sure come high." Pete sighed heavily—then grinned. "'Well, say two thousand'—jest like that! Then the lawyer says to git an education. Wonder if I was to git a education what the professor would be tellin' me to do next. Most like he'd be tellin' me to learn preachin' or somethin'. Then if I was to git to be a preacher, I reckon all I could do next would be to go to heaven. Shucks! Arizona's good enough for me."

But Pete was not thinking of Arizona alone—of the desert, the hills, and the mesas, the cañons and arroyos, the illimitable vistas and the color and vigor of that land. Persistently there rose before his vision the trim young figure of a nurse who had wonderful gray eyes.

"I'm sure goin' loco," he told himself. "But I ain't so loco that she's goin' to know it."

"I suppose you'll be hitting the trail over the hill, right soon," said Owen as he returned from the station and seated himself in one of the ample chairs on the hotel veranda. "Have a cigar."

Pete shook his head.

"They're all right. That El Paso lawyer smokes 'em."

"They ought to be all right," asserted Pete.

"Did he touch you pretty hard?"

"'Oh, say two thousand'—jest like that!"

The sheriff whistled. "Shooting scrapes come high."

"Oh, I ain't sore at him. What makes me sore is this here law that sticks a fella up and takes his money—makin' him pay for somethin' he never did. A poor man would have a fine chance, fightin' a rich man in court, now, wouldn't he?"

"There's something in that. The *Law*, as it stands, is all right."

"Mebby. But she don't stand any too steady when a poor man wants to fork her and ride out of trouble. He's got to have a corral full of grain to git her to stand—and even then she's like to pitch him if she gits a chanct. I figure she's a broncho that never was broke right."

"Well," and Owen smiled, "we got pitched this time. We lost our case."

"You kind of stepped up on the wrong side," laughed Pete.

"I don't know about that. *Somebody* killed Sam Brent."

"I reckon they did. But supposin'—speakin' kind of offhand—that you had the fella—and say I was witness, and swore the fella killed Brent in self-defense—where would he git off?"

"That would depend entirely on his reputation—and yours."

"How about the reputation of the fella that was killed?"

"Well, it was Brent's reputation that got you off to-day, as much as your own. Brent was foreman for the Spider, which put him in bad from the start, and he was a much older man than you. He was the kind to do just what you said he did—try to hold you up and get the Spider's money. It was a mighty lucky thing for you that you managed to get that money to the bank before they got you. You were riding straight all right, only you were on the wrong side of the fence, and I guess you knew it."

"I sure did."

"Well, it ain't for me to tell you which way to head in. You know what you're doing. You've got what some folks call character, and plenty of it. But you're wearin' a reputation that don't fit."

"Same as clothes, eh?" and Pete grinned.

"Yes. And you can change *them*—if you want to change 'em."

"But that there character part stays jest the same, eh?"

"Yes. You can't change that."

"Don't know as I want to. But I'm sure goin' to git into my other clothes, and take the trail over the hill, that you was talkin' about."

"There are six ways to travel from here," and the sheriff's eyes twinkled.

"Six? Now I figured about four."

"Six. When it comes to direction, the old Hopis had us beat by a couple of trails. They figured east, west, north, and south, straight down, and straight up."

"I get you, Jim. Well, minin' never did interest me none—and as for flyin', I sure

been popped as high as I want to go. I reckon I'll jest let my hoss have his head. I guess him and me has got about the same idea of what looks good."

"That pony of yours has never been in El Paso, has he?" queried the sheriff.

"Nope. Reckon it would be mighty interestin' for him—and the folks that always figured a sidewalk was jest for folks and not for hosses—but I ain't lookin' for excitement, nohow."

"Guess that blue roan will give you all you want, any way you ride. He hasn't been ridden since you left him here."

"Yes—and it sure makes me sore. Doc Andover said I was to keep off a hoss for a week yet. Sanborn is all right—but settin' on that hotel porch lookin' at it ain't."

"Well, I'd do what the doc says, just the same. He ought to know."

"I see—he ought to. He sure prospected round inside me enough to know how things are."

"You might come over to my office, when you git tired of sitting around here. There's nothing much to do—but I've got a couple of old law books that might interest you—and a few novels—and if you want some real excitement I got an old dictionary——"

"That El Paso lawyer was tellin' me I ought to git an education. Don't know but what this is a good chanct. But I reckon I'll try one of them novels first. Mebby when I git that broke to gentle I can kind of ride over and fork one of them law books, without gittin' throwed afore I git my spurs hooked in good. But I sure don't aim to take no quick chances, even if you are ridin' herd for me."

"That lawyer was right, Pete. And if I had your chance, money, and no responsibilities—at your age, I wouldn't have waited to pack my war bag to go to college."

"Well, I figured *you* was educated, all right. Why, that there lawyer was sayin' right out in court about you bein' intelligent and well-informed, and readin' character."

"He was spreading it on thick, Pete. Regular stuff. What little I know I got from observation—and a little reading."

"Well, I aim to do some lookin' around myself. But when it comes to readin' books——"

"Guess I'll let you take 'Robinson Crusoe'—it's a bed-rock story. And if you finish that before you leave, I'll bet you a new Stetson that you'll ask for another."

"I could easy win that hat." And Pete grinned.

"Not half as easy as you could afford to lose it."

"Meanin' I could buy one most any time."

"No. I'll let you figure out what I meant." And the sturdy little sheriff heaved himself out of a most comfortable chair and waddled up the street, while Pete stared after him trying to reconcile bow legs and readin' books, finally arriving at the conclusion that education, which he had hitherto associated with high collars and helplessness, might perhaps be acquired without loss of self-respect. "It sure hadn't spoiled Jim Owen," who was "as much of a real man as any of 'em—and could handle talk a whole lot better than most men who boasted legs like his. Why, even that El Paso lawyer had complimented Owen on his 'concise and eloquent summary of his findings against the defendant.' " And Pete reflected that his lawyer had not thrown any bouquets at any one else in that courtroom.

Just how much a little gray-eyed nurse in El Paso had to do with Pete's determination to browse in those alien pastures is a matter for speculation—but a matter which did not trouble Pete in the least, because it never occurred to him; evident in his confession to Andy White, months later. "I sure went to it with my head down and my ears laid back, takin' the fences jest as they come, without stoppin' to look for no gate. I sure jagged myself on the top wire, frequent, but I never let that there Robinson Crusoe cuss git out of sight till I run him into his home corral along with that there man-eatin', nigger of his'n."

So it would seem that not even the rustle of skirts was heard in the land as Pete made his first wild ride across the pleasant pastures of Romance—for Doris had no share in this adventure—and, we are told, the dusky ladies of that carnivorous isle did not wear them.

CHAPTER XLV.

A NEW HAT. A NEW TRAIL.

The day before Pete left Sanborn, he strolled over to the sheriff's office and returned the old and battered volume of "Robinson Crusoe," which he had finished reading the night previous.

"I read her, clean through," asserted Pete, "but I'd never made the grade if you hadn't put me wise to that there dictionary. Gosh! I never knowed there was so many ornery words bedded down in that there book."

"What do you think of the story?" queried the sheriff.

"If that Robinson Crusoe guy had only had a hoss instead of a bunch of goats, he sure could have made them natives ramble. And he sure took a whole lot of time blamin' himself for his hard luck—always a-settin' back, kind of waiting for somethin'—instead of layin' out in the brush and poppin' at them niggers. He wan't any too handy at readin' a trail, neither. But he made the grade—and that there Friday was sure one white nigger."

"Want to tackle another story?" queried Owen, as he put the book back on the shelf.

"If it's all the same to you, I'd jest as soon read that one over ag'in. I was trailin' that old Carusoe hombre so clost I didn't git time to set up and take in the scenery."

In his eagerness to reread the story, Pete had forgotten about the wager. Owen's eyes twinkled as he studied Pete's face.

"We had a bet——" said Owen.

"That's right! I plumb forgot about that. You said you bet me a new hat that I'd ask you for another book. Well—what you grinnin' at, anyhow. 'Cause you done stuck me for a new lid? Oh, I git you! You said *another* book, and I'm wantin' to read the same one over again. Shucks! I ain't goin' to forefoot you jest because you rid into a loop layin' in the tall grass where neither of us seen it."

"I lose on a technicality. I ought to lose. Now if I had bet you a new hat that you would want to keep on reading instead of that you'd ask for *another* book——"

"But this ain't no law court, Jim. It was what you was meanin' that counts."

"Serves me right. I was preaching to you about education—and I'm game to back up the idea—even if I did let my foot slip. Come on over to Jennings' with me and I'll get that hat."

"All right!" And Pete rolled a smoke as the sheriff picked up several addressed letters and tucked them in his poocket. "I was going over to the post office, anyway."

They crossed to the shady side of the street, the short, ruddy little sheriff and the tall, dark cowboy, each more noticeable by contrast, yet neither consciously aware of the curious glances cast at them by occasional townsfolk, some of whom were small enough to suspect that Pete and the sheriff had collaborated in presenting the evidence which had made Pete a free man; and that they were still collaborating, as they seemed very friendly toward each other.

Pete tried on several hats and finally selected one. "Let's see how it looks on you," he said, handing it to the sheriff. "I don't know how she looks."

Owen tried the hat on, turning to look into the mirror at the end of the counter. Pete casually picked up the sheriff's old hat and glanced at the size.

"Guess I'll take it," said Pete, as Owen returned it. "This here one of mine never did fit too good. It was Andy's hat."

Certain male gossips who infested the groceries, pool halls and post office of Sanborn, shook their heads and talked gravely about bribery and corruption and politics and what not, when they learned that the sheriff had actually bought a hat for that young outlaw that he was so mighty thick with. "And it wern't no fairy story neither. Bill Jennings sold the hat hisself, and the sheriff paid for it, and that young Annersley walked out of the store with said hat on his *head*. Yes, sir! Things looked mighty queer."

"Things would 'a' looked a mighty sight queerer if he'd walked out with it on his foot," suggested a friend of Owen's, who had been buttonholed and told the alarming news.

Meanwhile, Pete tended to his own business, which was to get his few things together, pay his hotel bill, settle his account with the sheriff—which included cab hire in El Paso—and write a letter to Doris Gray—the latter about the most difficult task he had ever faced. He thought of making her some kind of present, but his innate good sense cautioned him to forego that pleasure for a while, for in making her a present he might also make a mistake, and Pete was becoming a bit cautious about making mistakes, even though he did think that that green velvet hat with a yellow feather, in the millinery store in Sanborn, was about the most high-toned ladies' skypiece that he had ever beheld. Pete contented himself with buying a new Stetson for Sheriff Owen—to be delivered after Pete had left town.

Next morning, long before the inhabitants of Sanborn had thrown back their blankets, Pete was saddling Blue Smoke, frankly amazed that the pony had shown no evidence of his erstwhile early morning activities. He wondered if the horse were sick. Blue Smoke looked a bit fat, and his eye was dull, but it was the dullness of resentment, rather than of poor physical condition. Well fed, and without exercise, Blue Smoke had become more or less logy, and he looked decidedly disinterested in life as Pete cautiously pulled up the front cinch.

"He's too dog-gone quiet to suit me," Pete told the stableman.

"He's thinkin'," suggested that worthy facetiously.

"So am I," asserted Pete, not at all facetiously.

Out in the street Pete "cheeked" Blue Smoke, and swung up quickly, expecting the pony to go to it, but Smoke merely turned his head and gazed at the livery with a sullen eye.

"He's sad to leave his boardin' house," and Pete touched Smoke with the spur. Smoke further surprised Pete by striking into a mild cow-trot, as they turned the corner and headed down the long road at the end of which glimmered the far brown spaces slowly changing in color as the morning light ran slanting toward the west.

"Nothin' to do but go," reflected Pete, still a trifle suspicious of Blue Smoke's gentlemanly behavior. The sun felt warm to Pete's back. The rein chains jing'ed softly. The saddle creaked a rhythmic complaint of recent disuse.

Pete, who had said good-by to the sheriff the night before, turned his face toward the open with a good, an almost too good, horse between his knees and a new outlook upon the old, familiar ranges and their devious trails.

Past a somber forest of cacti, shot with myriad angling shadows, desolate and forbidding, despite the open sky and the morning sun, Pete rode slowly, peering with eyes aslant at the dense growth close to the road, struggling to ignore the spot. Despite his determination, he could not pass without glancing fearsomely as though he half expected to see something there—somethink to identify the spot as that shadowy place where Brent had stood that night.

Blue Smoke, hitherto as amiably disposed to take his time as was Pete himself, shied suddenly. Through habit, Pete jabbed him with the spur, to straighten him back in the road again. Pete had barely time to mutter an audible "I thought so!" when Blue Smoke humped himself. Pete slackened to the first wild lunge, grabbed off his hat, and swung it as Blue Smoke struck at the air with his forefeet, as though trying to climb an invisible ladder. Pete swayed back as the horse came down in a mighty leap forward, and hooking his spurs in the cinch, rocked to each leap and lunge like a leaf caught up in a desert whirlwind. When Pete saw that Smoke's first fine frenzy had about evaporated, he urged him to further endeavors with the spurs, but Blue Smoke only grunted and dropped off into a most becoming and gentlemanly lope. And Pete was not altogether displeased. His back felt as though it had been seared with a branding iron and the range to the west was heaving most indecorously, cavorting around the horizon as though strangely excited by Blue Smoke's sudden and seemingly unaccountable behavior.

"I reckon we're both feelin' better!" Pete told the pony. "I needed jest that kind of a jolt to feel like I was livin' ag'in. But you needn't be in such a dog-gone hurry to go and tell your friends how good you're feelin'. Jest come down off that lope. We got all day to git there."

Blue Smoke shook his head as Pete pulled him to a trot. The cacti forest was behind them. Ahead lay the open—warm brown in the sun, and across it ran a dwindling grayish line, the road that ran east and west across the desert, a good enough road as desert roads go—but Pete, despite his satisfaction in being out in the open again, grew somewhat tired of its monotonously even wagon-rutted width, and longed for a trail—a faint, meandering trail that would swing from the road, dip into a sand arroyo, edge slanting up the farther bank, wriggle round a cluster of small hills, shoot out across a mesa, and climb slowly toward those hills to the west, to finally contort itself into serpentine switchbacks as it sought the crest—and once on the crest—which was in reality but the visible edge of another great mesa—there would be the grass for a horse and cedar wood for a fire, and water with which to make coffee.

Pete had planned that his first night should be spent in the open, with no other companions than the friendly stars. As for

Blue Smoke, well, a horse is the best kind of a pal for a man who wishes to be alone, a pal who takes care of himself, never complains of weariness, and eats what he finds to eat with soulful satisfaction.

Pete made his first night's camp as he had planned, hobbled Blue Smoke, and, having eaten, he lay resting, his head on his saddle and his gaze fixed upon the far glory of the descending sun. The sweet-acrid fragrance of cedar smoke, the feel of the wind upon his face, the contented munching of his pony, the white radiance of the stars that came quickly, and that indescribable sense of being at one with the silences, awakened memories of many an outland camp fire, when as a boy he had journeyed with the horse trader, or when Pop Annersley and he had hunted deer in the Blue Range. And it seemed to Pete that that had been but yesterday—— "With a pretty ornery kind of a dream in between," he told himself.

As the last faint light faded from the west and the stars came quickly, Pete thanked those same friendly stars that there would be a to-morrow—with sunlight, silence, and a lone trail to ride. Another day, and he would reach old Flores' place in the cañon —but Boca would not be there. Then he would ride to Showdown. Some one would be at the Spider's place. He could get feed for his horse. And the next day he would ride to the Blue, and camp at the old cabin. Another day and he would be at the Concho. Andy and Jim and Ma Bailey would be surprised. No, he hadn't come back to stay. Just dropped in to say "Hello!"

Pete smiled faintly as a coyote shrilled his eternal plaint. This was something like it! The trembling Pleiades grew blurred.

CHAPTER XLVI.

THE OLD TRAIL.

The following afternoon, Pete, stiff and weary from his two days' ride, entered the southern end of Flores' cañon and followed the trail along the stream bed—now dry and edged with crusted alkali—until he came within sight of the adobe. In the half light of the late afternoon he could not distinguish objects clearly, but he thought he could discern the posts of the pole corral and the roof of the meager stable. Nearer he saw that there was no smoke coming from the mud chimney of the adobe, and that the garden patch was overgrown with weeds.

No one answered his call as he rode up and dismounted. He found the place deserted, and he recalled the Mexican woman's prophecy.

He pushed open the sagging door and entered. There was the oilcloth-covered table and the chairs—a broken box in the middle of the room, an old installment-house catalogue, from which the colored prints had been torn, an empty bottle—and in the kitchen were the rusted stove and a few battered and useless cooking utensils. An odor of stale grease pervaded the place. In the narrow bedroom—Boca's room—was a colored fashion plate pinned on the wall.

Pete shrugged his shoulders and stepped out. Night was coming swiftly. He unsaddled Blue Smoke and hobbled him. The pony strayed off up the stream bed. Pete made a fire by the corral, ate some beans which he warmed in the can—drank a cup of coffee and raking together some coarse dried grass, turned in and slept until the sound of his pony's feet on the rocks of the stream bed awakened him. He smelt dawn in the air, although it was still dark in the cañon—and having in mind the arid stretch between the cañon and Showdown, he made breakfast. He caught up his horse and rode up the trail toward the desert. On the mesa edge he recinched his saddle and turned toward the north.

Flores, who with his wife was living at the Spider's place, recognized him at once and invited him in.

"What hit this here town, anyhow?" queried Pete. "I didn't see a soul as I come through."

Flores shrugged his shoulders. "The vaqueros from over there"—and he pointed toward the north—"they came—and now there is but this left——" and he indicated the saloon. "The others, they have gone."

"Cleaned out the town, eh? Reckon that was the T-Bar-T and the boys from the Blue and the Concho. How'd they come to miss you?"

"I am old—and my wife is old—and after they had drank the wine—leaving nothing for us—they laughed and said that we might stay and be dam': that we were too old to steal cattle."

"Uh-huh. Cleaned her out reg'lar! How's the señora?"

Flores touched his forehead. "She is

thinking of Boca—and no one else does she know."

"Gone loco, eh? Well, she ain't so bad off at that—seein' as *you're* livin' yet. No, I ain't comin' in. But you can sell me some tortillas, if you got any."

"It will be night soon. If the señor——"

"Go ask Señora Flores if she has got any tortillas to sell. I wouldn't bush in there on a bet. Don't you worry about my health."

"We are poor, señor! We have this place, and the things—but of the money I know nothing. My wife she has hidden it."

"She ain't so crazy as you think, if that's so. Do you run this place—or are you jest starvin' to death here?"

"There is still a little wine—and we buy what we may need of Mescalero. If you will come in——"

"So they missed old Mescalero! Well, he's lucky. No I don't come in. I tried boardin' at your house onct."

"Then I will get the tortillas." And Flores shuffled into the saloon. Presently he returned with a half dozen tortillas wrapped up in an old newspaper. Pete tossed him a dollar, and, packing the tortillas in his saddle pockets, gazed around at the town, the silent and deserted houses, the empty street, and finally at the Spider's place.

Old Flores stood in the doorway staring at Pete with drink-blurred eyes. Pete hesitated. He thought of dismounting and going in and speaking to Flores' wife. But no! It would do neither of them any good. Flores had intimated that she had gone crazy. And Pete did not want to talk of Boca—nor hear her name mentioned. "Boca's where she ain't worryin' about anybody," he reflected as he swung round and rode out of town.

Once before he had camped in the same draw, a few miles west of Showdown, and Blue Smoke seemed to know the place, for he had swung from the trail of his own accord, striding straight to the water hole.

"And if you keep on actin' polite," Pete told the pony as he hobbled him that evening, "you'll get a good reputation, like Jim Owen said; which is plumb necessary, if you an' me's goin' to be pals. But if gettin' a good reputation is goin' to spoil your wind, or legs any—why jest keep on bein' ornery—which Jim was tellin' me is called 'character.'"

As Pete hardened to the saddle and Blue Smoke hardened to the trail, they traveled faster and farther each day, until on the Blue Mesa, where the pony grazed and Pete squatted beside his night fire in the open, they were but a half day's journey from the Concho. Pete almost regretted that their journey must come to an end. But he could not go on meandering about the country, without a home and without an object in life: *that* was pure loafing.

Pete might have excused himself on the ground that he needed just this sort of thing after his serious operation—but he was honest with himself, admitting that he felt fit enough to tackle almost any kind of hard work, except perhaps writing letters—for he now thought well enough of himself to believe that Doris Gray would answer his letter to her from Sanborn. And, of course, he would answer her letter—and if he answered that, she would naturally answer. Shucks! Why should she write to him? All he had ever done for her was to make her a lot of bother and hard work. And what good was his money to him? He couldn't just walk into a store and buy an education and have it wrapped up in paper and take it to her and say: "Here, Miss Gray. I got a education—the best they had in the outfit. Now, if you'll take it as a kind of present—and me along with it——"

Pete was camping within fifty yards of the spot where old Pop Annersley had tried to teach him to read and write—and it seemed a long time ago—and Annersley himself seemed more vague in Pete's memory, as he tried to recall the kindly features and the slow, deliberate movements of the old man. It irritated Pete that he could not recall old man Annersley's face distinctly. He could remember his voice, and one or two characteristic gestures—but his face——

Pete stared into the camp fire, dreaming back along that trail over which he had struggled and fought and blundered; back to the time when he was a waif in Enright, his only companion a lean yellow dog. Pete nodded and his eyes closed. He turned lazily and leaned back against his saddle.

The mesa, carpeted with sod grass, gave no warning of the approaching horseman, who had seen the tiny fire and had ridden toward it. Just within the circle of firelight he reined in and was about to call out when that inexplicable sense inherent

in animals, the Indian, and some cases the white man, brought Pete to his feet. In that same lightning-swift, lithe movement he struck his gun from the holster and stood tense as a buck that scents danger on the wind.

Pete blinked the sleep from his eyes. "Keep your hands right where they be and step down off that hoss——"

The rider obeyed. Pete moved from the fire that his own shadow might not fall upon the other.

"Pete!" exclaimed the horseman in a sort of choking whisper.

The gun sagged in Pete's hand. "Andy! For God's sake!—I come close to killin' you!" And he leaped and caught Andy White's hand, shook it, flung his arm about his shoulders, stepped back and struck him playfully on the chest, grabbed him and shook him—and then suddenly he turned and walked back to the fire and sat down, blinking into the flames, and trying to swallow nothing, harder than he had ever tried to swallow anything in his life.

He heard Andy's step behind him, and heard his own name spoken again. "It was my fault, Pete. I ought to hollered. I saw your fire and rode over——" Pete felt Andy's hand on his shoulder, and that shoulder was shaking queerly. Andy drew back. "There goes that dam' cayuse," cried Andy. "I'll go catch him up, and let him drag a rope."

When Andy returned from putting an unnecessary rope on a decidedly tired horse that was quite willing to stand right where he was, Pete had pulled himself together and was rolling a cigarette.

"Well, you ole sun of a gun!" cried Pete, "want to swap hats? Say, how'll you swap?"

Andy grinned, but his grin faded to a boyish seriousness as he took off his own Stetson and handed it to Pete, who turned it round and tentatively poked his fingers through the two holes in the crown.

"You got my ole hat yet, eh? Dog-gone if it ain't my ole hat. And she's ventilated some, too. Well, I'm listenin'."

"And you sure are lookin' fine, Pete. Say, is it you? Or did my hoss pitch me—and I'm dreamin', back there on the flat? No. I reckon it's you all right. I ain't done shakin' yet from the way you come at me when I rode in. Say, did you git Jim's letter? Why didn't you write to a guy, and say you was comin'? Reg'lar ole Injun, same as ever. Quicker'n a singed bobcat gittin' off a stove lid. That Blue Smoke way over there? Thought I knowed him. When did they turn you loose down to El Paso? Ma Bailey was worryin' that they wasn't feedin' you good. When did you get here? Was you in the gunfight when the Spider got bumped off?"

Pete was still gazing at the little round holes in Andy's hat. "Andy, did you ever try to ride a hoss down the ole mesa trail backward?"

"Why, no, you sufferin' coyote. What you drivin' at?"

"Here's your hat. Now if you got anything under it, go ahead and talk up. Which way did you ride when we split over by the timber there?"

Andy reached over and put a stick of wood on the fire. "Well, seein' it's your hat, I reckon you got a right to know how them holes come in it." And he told Pete of his ride, and how he had misled the posse, and he spoke jestingly, as though it had been a little thing to do; hardly worth repeating. Then he told of a ride he had made to Showdown to let Pete know that Gary would live, and how the Spider had said that he knew nothing of Pete—had never seen him. And of how Ma Bailey upheld Pete, despite all local gossip and the lurid newspaper screeds. And that the boys would be mighty glad to see him again; concluding with an explanation of his own presence there—that he had been over to the T-Bar-T to see Houck about some of his stock that had strayed through some "down fence——" "She's all fenced now," he explained, and had run into a bunch of wild turkey, chased them to a rimrock and had managed to shoot one, but had had to climb down a cañon to recover the bird, which had set him back considerably on his home journey.

"And that there bird is hanging right on my saddle, now!" he concluded. "And I ain't et since mornin'."

"Then we eat," asserted Pete. "You go git that turkey, and I'll do the rest."

Wild turkey, spitted on a cedar limb and broiled over a wood fire, a bannock or two with hot coffee, in an empty bean can—Pete insisted on Andy using the one cup—tasted just a little better than anything else in the world, especially if one had ridden far in the

high country, and most folk do before they get the wild turkey.

It was three o'clock before they turned in, to share Pete's one blanket, and then Andy was too full of Pete's adventures to sleep, asking an occasional question which Pete answered until Andy, suddenly recalling that Pete had told him the Spider had left him his money, asked Pete, "if he had packed all that dough with him, or banked it in El Paso?" To which Pete had replied drowsily: "Sure thing, Miss Gray." Whereupon Andy straightway decided that he would wait till morning before asking any further questions of an intimate nature.

Pete was strangely quiet the next morning, in fact, almost taciturn, and Andy noticed that he went into the saddle a bit stiffly. "That—where you got hurt botherin' you, Pete?" he asked with real solicitude.

"Some." And realizing that he had scarcely spoken to his old chum since they awakened, he asked him many questions about the ranch, and the boys, as they drifted across the mesa and down the trail that led to the Concho.

But it was not the twinge of his old wound that made Pete so silent. He was suffering a disappointment. He had believed sincerely that what he had been through, in the past six months especially, had changed him—that he would have to have a mighty stern cause to pull a gun on a man again. And at the first hint of danger he had been ready to kill. He wondered if he would ever lose that hunted feeling that had brought him to his feet and all but crooked his trigger finger before he had actually realized what had startled him. But one thing was certain—Andy would never know just *how* close he had come to being killed; Andy, who had joked lightly about his own ride into the desert with an angry posse trailing him, as he wore Pete's black Stetson, "that he might give them a good run for their money," he had laughingly said.

"You're jest the same ornery, yella-headed, blue-eyed singin' bird, you always was," declared Pete as they slithered along down the trail.

Andy turned in the saddle and grinned at Pete. "Now that you've give the blessin', parson, will you please and go plumb to hell?"

Pete felt a lot better.

A loose rock slipped from the edge of the trail, and went bounding down the steep hillside, crashing through a thicket of aspens and landing with a dull clunk amid a pile of rock that slid a little, and grumbled sullenly. Blue Smoke had also slipped as his footing gave way unexpectedly. Pete felt still better. This was something like it!

CHAPTER XLVII.

HOME FOLKS.

Noon found them within sight of the ranch house. In an hour they were unsaddling at the corral, having ridden in the back way, at Andy's suggestion, that they might surprise the folks. But it did not take them long to discover that there were no folks to surprise. The bunk house was open, but the house across from it was locked, and Andy knew immediately that the Baileys had driven to town, because the pup was gone, and he always followed the buckboard.

Pete was not displeased, for he wanted to shave and "slick up a bit" after his long journey.

"They'll see my hoss and know that I'm back," said Andy, as he filled the kettle on the box stove in the bunk house. "But we can put Blue Smoke in a stall and keep him out of sight till you walk in right from nowhere. I can see Ma Bailey and Jim and the boys! 'Course ma's like to be back—in time to get supper, so mebby you'll have to hide out in the barn till you hear the bell."

"I ain't awful strong on that conquerin'-hero stuff, Andy. I jest as soon set right here and——"

"And spoil the whole darn show! Look here, Pete—you leave it to me and if we don't surprise Ma Bailey clean out of her—specs, why I'll quit and go to herdin' sheep."

"All right. I'm willin'. Only you might see if you kin get in the back way and lift a piece of pie, or somethin'." Which Andy managed to do while Pete shaved himself and put on a clean shirt.

They sat in the bunk house doorway chatting about the various happenings during Pete's absence until they saw the buckboard top the distant edge of the mesa. Pete immediately secluded himself in the barn, while Andy hazed Blue Smoke into a box stall and hid Pete's saddle.

Ma Bailey, alighting from the buckboard,

heard Andy's brief explanation of his absence with indifference most unusual in her, and glanced sharply at him when he mentioned having shot a wild turkey.

"I suppose you picked it and cleaned it and got it all ready to roast," she inquired. "Or have your just been loafing around waiting for me to do it?"

"I et it," asserted Andy.

Ma Bailey glared at him, shook her head and marched into the house while Andy helped Bailey put up the horses.

"Ma's upset about somethin'," explained Bailey. "Seems a letter came for Pete——"

"Letter from Pete! Why, he ain't comin' back, is he?"

"A letter *for* Pete. Ma says it looks like a lady's writin' on the envelope. She says she'd like to know what female is writin' to Pete, and him goodness knows where, and not a word to say whether he's sick or broke, or anything."

"I sure would like to see him," said Andy fervently.

"Well, if somebody's writin' to him here at the Concho, looks like he might drift in one of these days. I'd sure like to know how the kid's makin' it."

And Bailey strode to the house, while Andy led the team to the corral.

Later Andy appeared in the kitchen and asked Mrs. Bailey if he could not help her set the table, or peel potatoes, or something. Ma Bailey gazed at him suspiciously over her glasses.

"I don't know what's ailin' you, Andy, but you ain't actin' right. First you tell me that you had to camp at the Blue last night account of killing a turkey. Then you tell me that you et the whole of it. Was you scared you wouldn't get your share if you fetched it home? Then you want to help me get supper. You been up to something! You just keep me plumb wore out worrying about you. You ought to be ashamed of yourself."

"For why, ma? What have I done?"

"I don't know, but it'll come to top. There's the boys now—and me a-standing here—run along and set the table if you ain't so full of whatever is got into you that you can't count straight. Bill won't be in to-night. Leastwise, Jim don't expect him." And Ma Bailey flapped her apron at him and shooed him out as though he were a chicken that had dared to poke its inquisitive neck into the kitchen.

"Count straight!" chuckled Andy. "Mebby I know more about how many's here than ma does."

Meanwhile Ma Bailey busied herself preparing supper, and it was evident to the boys in the bunk house that ma had something on her mind, from the sounds which came from the kitchen. Ma scolded the potatoes as she tried them, rebuked the biscuits because they had browned a little too soon, censured the stove for its misbehavior in having scorched the biscuits, accused the wood of being a factor in the conspiracy, reprimanded the mammoth coffeepot that threatened to deluge the steak, and finally chased Andy from the premises when she discovered that he had laid the table with her best set of dishes.

"Ma's steamin' about somethin'," remarked Andy as he entered the bunk house.

This information was received with characteristic silence as each and every cowboy mentally straightened up, vowing silently that he "wasn't goin' to take any chance of ma b'ilin' over on *him*."

The clatter of the pack-horse bell brought the men to their feet and they filed across to the house, a preternaturally silent aggregation that confirmed Ma Bailey's suspicion that there was something afoot.

Andy, loitering behind them, saw Pete coming from the stables, tried to compose himself, but could not get rid of the boyish grin, which provoked Ma Bailey to mutter something which sounded like "idiot," to which the cowboys nodded in cheerful concurrence, without other comment.

Hank Barley, the silent, was gazing surreptitiously at ma's face when he saw her eyes widen, saw her rise and stand staring at the doorway as Andy clumped in, followed by Pete.

Ma Bailey sat down suddenly.

"It's all right, ma," laughed Andy, alarmed at the expression on her face. "It's just Pete."

"Just Pete!" echoed Ma Bailey faintly. And then: "Goodness alive, child, where you been?"

Pete's reply was lost in the shuffle of feet as the men rose and shook hands with him, asking him a dozen questions in as many seconds, asserting that he was looking fine, and generally behaving like a crowd of schoolboys, as they welcomed him to their midst again.

Pete sat in the absent Bill Haskins' place.

And: "You must 'a' knowed he was comin'," asserted Avery. "Bill is over to the line shack."

"I got a *letter,*" asserted Ma Bailey mysteriously.

"And you jest said nothin' and sprung him on us! Well, ma, you sure fooled me," said Andy grinning.

"You go 'long." Mrs. Bailey smiled at Andy, who had earned her forgiveness by crediting her—rather wisely—with having originated the surprise.

They were chatting and joking when Bill Haskins appeared in the doorway, his hand wrapped in a handkerchief.

Ma Bailey glared at him over her spectacles.

"Got any stickin' plaster?" he asked plaintively, as though he had committed some misdemeanor.

She rose and placed a plate and chair for him as he shook hands with Pete, led him to the kitchen and inspected and bandaged his hand, which he had jagged on a wire gate, and finally reinstated him at the table where he proved himself quite as efficient as most men are with two.

"Give Bill all the coffee he wants and plenty stickin' plaster, and I reckon he never would do no work," suggested Hank Barley.

Bill Haskins grinned good-naturedly. "I see Pete's got back," he ventured, as a sort of mild intimation that there were other subjects worth discussing. He accompanied this brilliant observation by a modest request for another cup of coffee, his fourth. The men rose, leaving Bill engaged in his favorite indoor pastime, and intimated that Pete should go with them. But Ma Bailey would not hear of it. Pete was going to help her with the dishes. Andy could go, however. And Bill Haskins, as soon as he was convinced that the coffeepot was empty. Ma Bailey's chief interest in life at the moment was to get the dishes put away, the men out of the way, and Pete in the most comfortable rocking-chair in the room, that she might hear, uninterrupted, his account of how it all happened.

And Pete told her—omitting no circumstance, albeit he did not accentuate that part of his recital having to do with Doris Gray, merely mentioning her as "That little gray-eyed nurse in El Paso——" and in such an offhand manner that Ma Bailey began to suspect that Pete was keeping something to himself. Finally, by a series of cross-questioning, comment and sympathetic concurrence, she arrived at the feminine conclusion that the little gray-eyed nurse in El Paso had set her cap for Pete—of course, Pete was innocent of any such adjustment of headgear—to substantiate which she rose and, stepping to the bedroom, returned with the letter which had caused her so much speculation as to who was writing to Pete, and why the letter had been directed to the Concho.

Pete glanced at the letter, and thanked Ma Bailey as he tucked it in his pocket.

"I don't mind if you open it, Pete," she told him. "Goodness knows how long it's been laying in the post office! And it mebby is important—from that doctor, or that lawyer, mebby. Oh, mebby it's from the bank. Sakes alive! To think of that man leaving you all that money! Mebby that bank has failed."

"Well, I'd be right where I started, when I first come here. Broke—lookin' for a job."

"And the boys'll worry you most to death if you try to read any letters in the bunk house to-night. They're waitin' to hear you talk."

"Guess it can wait. I ain't such a fast reader, anyhow."

"And you're like to lose it, carryin' it around."

"I—I—guess I better read it," stammered Pete helplessly. He felt somehow that ma would feel slighted if he did not. Ma Bailey watched his face as he read the rather brief note from Doris, thanking him for his letter to her and congratulating him on the outcome of his trial, and assuring him of her confidence in his ultimate success in life. Doris wrote also:

> Little Ruth cried bitterly when I told her that you had gone and would not come back. She said that when you said "good-by" to her you promised to come back—and, of course, I had to tell her that you would, just to make her happy. She has lost all interest in the puzzle game since you left, but that queer watch that you gave her, that has to be shaken before taken—and then not taken seriously—amuses her quite a bit. She gets me to wind it up—her fingers are not strong enough—and then she laughs as the hands race around. When they stop she puts her finger on the hour and says, "Pitty soon Pete come back." Little Ruth misses you very much.

Pete folded the letter and put it in his pocket. "From a friend of mine," he said.

Ma Bailey sighed, smiled and sighed again. "You're just itching to go see the boys. Well, run along, and tell Jim not to set up all night." And Ma Bailey rose, and, stepping to the bedroom, returned with some blankets. "You'll have your old bunk. And it's yours just as long as you want to stay, Pete. And—and I hope that girl in El Paso—is a—a nice—sensible——"

"Why, ma! What's the matter?" as Mrs. Bailey blinked and showed unmistakable signs of emotion.

"Nothing, Pete. I guess your coming back so sudden and all you been through, and that letter, kind of upset me. D-does she powder her face, Pete?"

"Who? You mean Miss Gray? Why, what would she do that for?"

"Does she wear clothes that—that cost lots of money?"

"Great snakes, ma! I dunno. I never seen her except in the hospital, dressed jest like all the nurses."

"Is—is she handsome?"

"Say, ma, you let me hold them blankets. They're gettin' you all sagged down. Why, she ain't what I'd say was *handsome,* but she sure got pretty eyes an' hair—an' complexion—an' the smoothest little hands—and she's built right neat. She steps easy—like a thoroughbred filly—and she's plumb sensible, just like you folks."

This latter assurance did not seem to comfort Ma Bailey as much as the implied compliment might intimate.

"And there's only one other woman I ever saw that made me feel right to home and kind of glad to have her around, like her. And she's got gray eyes and the same kind of hair, and——"

"Sakes alive, Pete Annersley! Another?"

"Uhuh. And I'm kissin' her good night—right now." And Pete grabbed the blankets and as much of Ma Bailey as could be included in that large armful, and kissed her heartily.

"He's changed," Ma Bailey confided to herself, after Pete had disappeared. "Actin' like a boy—to cheer me up. But it weren't no boy that set there readin' that letter. It was a growed man, and no wonder. Yes, Pete's changed, bless his heart!"

Ma Bailey did not bless Pete's heart because he had changed, however, nor because he had suffered—nor yet because he was unconsciously in love with a little nurse in El Paso, nor yet because he kissed her, but because she liked him: and because no amount of money, or misfortune, blame or praise, could really change him toward his friends. What Ma Bailey meant was that he had grown a little more serious, a little more gentle in his manner of addressing her—aside from saying good night—and a little more intense in a quiet way. To sum it all up, Pete had just begun to think—something that few people do on the verdant side of forty, and rather dread having to do on the other side of that mile post.

A week later, as they sat at table, asking one another "whether Ma Bailey had took to makin' pies ag'in just for practice or for Pete," and plaguing that good woman considerably with their good-natured banter, it occurred to Bill Haskins to ask Pete if he was going to become a permanent member of the family or if he was simply visiting, only Bill said, "Are you aimin' to throw in with us—or are you goin' to curl your tail and drift, when the snow flies?"

"I guess I'll drift," said Pete.

This was news. Andy White demurred forcibly. Bailey himself seemed surprised, and even old Hank Barley, the silent, expressed himself as mildly astonished.

"We figured you'd stay till after the round-up, anyhow," said Bailey.

"Reckon it's too tame for Pete here," growled Andy.

"That's no fault of yours, Andrew," observed Ma Bailey.

"You're always peckin' at me," grumbled Andy, who detested being called Andrew, quite as much as a robust individual known to his friends as Bill detests being called Willie—and Ma Bailey knew it.

"So you aim to leave us," said Haskins, quite unaware of Ma Bailey's eye which glared disapproval of the subject.

"Pete's going—next Tuesday—and just to set your mind at rest and give you a chance to eat your supper"—Bill had been doing scarcely anything else since he sat down—"Pete has a right good reason to go."

"Kin I have another cup of coffee?" queried Bill.

"Sakes alive, yes! I reckon that's what's ailing you."

"I only had three, ma."

"Pete is going away on *business,*" asserted Ma Bailey.

"Huh," snorted Andy.

Bailey glanced at his wife, who telegraphed to him to change the subject. And

that good man who had been married twenty-five years changed the subject immediately.

But Andy did not let it drop. After supper he cornered Pete in the bunk house, and after some wordy fencing, finally ascertained that Pete was going to Tucson for the winter to get an education. Pete blushingly admitted that that was his sole intent, swore Andy to secrecy, and told him that he had discussed the subject with Ma Bailey, who had advised him to go.

"So you're quittin' the game," mourned Andy.

"Nope, jest beginnin'."

"Well, you might 'a' said somethin', anyhow."

Pete put his hand on Andy's shoulder. "I wan't sure—till yesterday. I *was* goin' to tell you, Andy. Shucks! Didn't I tell you about the money and everything—and you didn't say a word to the boys. I ain't forgettin'."

"Oh, I knowed havin' money wouldn't swell you up. It ain't that. Only, I was wonderin'——"

"So was I, Andy. And I been wonderin' for quite a spell. Come on out and let's go set on the corral bars and smoke and—jest smoke."

But they did more than just smoke. The Arizona stars shot wondrous shafts of white fire through the nipping air, as the chums sensed the comfortable companionship of horses moving slowly about the corral; and they heard the far, faint call of the coyote as a drift of wind brought the keen tang of the distant timberlands. They talked together as only youth may talk with youth, when Romance lights the trail, when the heart speaks from itself to heart in sympathy. Yet their chat was not without humor or they would not have been Pete and Andy.

"You always was a wise one," asserted Andy, "pickin' out a professional nurse for *your* girl, ain't a bad idea."

"I had a whole lot to do with pickin' her out, didn't I?"

"Well, you can't make me believe that she did the pickin', for you was tellin' me she had good eyes."

"I guess it was the doc that did the pickin'," suggested Pete.

"Well, I suppose the next thing you'll be givin' the preacher a chanct."

"Nope. Next thing I'll be givin' Miss Gray a chanct to tell me I'm a dog-gone idiot—only she don't talk like that."

"Then it'll be because she don't know you like I do. But you're lucky—— No tellin'——" Andy climbed down from the bars.

"No tellin' what?" queried Pete.

"No tellin' you how much I sure want you to win, pardner—because you know it."

Pete leaped from the top rail, square onto Andy, who, taken off his guard, toppled and fell. They rolled over and over, not even trying to miss the puddle of water beside the drinking trough. Andy managed to get his free hand in the mud and thought of feeding some of it to Pete, but Pete was too quick for him, squirming loose and making for the bunk house at top speed.

Pete entrenched himself in the far corner of the room where Bill Haskins was reading a novel—exceedingly popular, if the debilitated condition of the pages and covers were any criterion—when Andy entered, holding one hand behind him in a suspicious manner. Pete wondered what was coming when it came. Andy swung his arm and plugged a fair sized mud ball at Pete, which missed him and hit the innocent and unsuspecting Bill on the ear, and stayed there. Bill Haskins, who was at the moment helping the hero hold a spirited pair of horses while the heroine climbed to a seat in the romantic buckboard, promptly pulled on the reins and shouted, "Whoa!" and the debilitated novel came apart in his hands with a soft, ripping sound. It took Bill several seconds to think of something to say, and several more to realize just what had happened. He opened his mouth—but Andy interrupted with: "Honest, Bill, I wasn't meanin' to hit you. I was pluggin' at Pete, there. It was his fault, he went and hid out behind you. Honest, Bill—wait and I'll help you dig that there mud out of your ear."

Bill shook his head and growled as he scraped the mud from his face and neck. Andy, gravely solicitous, helped to remove the mud and affectionately wiped his fingers in Bill's hair.

"Here—what in hell you doin'!" snorted Bill.

"That's right! I was forgettin!' Honest, Bill!"

"I'll honest you! I'll give you somethin' to forgit." But Andy did not wait.

A little later Bill appeared at the kitchen

door and plaintively asked Ma Bailey if she had any stickin'-plaster.

"Sakes alive! Now what you done to yourself, William?"

"Nothin' this time, Mis' Bailey. I—I done tore a book—and jest want to fix it."

When Bill returned to the bunk house with the "stickin'-plaster," Pete and Andy both said they were sorry for the occurrence, but Bill was mighty suspicious of their sincerity. They were silent while Bill laboriously patched up the book and settled himself to take up the reins where he had dropped them. The heroine had just taken her seat beside the driver—when——

"It's a darned shame!" said a voice, Pete's voice.

"It sure is—and Bill jest learnin' to read. He might 'a' spelled out a whole page afore mornin'."

"I wa'n't meanin' Bill," asserted Pete.

"Oh, you won't bother Bill none. He can't hear you. His off ear is full of mud. Go on and say anything you like about him."

Bill slowly laid down his book, stepped to his bunk, and drew his six-shooter from its holster. He marched back to the table and laid the gun quite handy to him, and resumed his chair.

Bill Haskins was long-suffering—but both Andy and Pete realized that it was high time to turn their bright particular talents in some other direction. So they undressed and turned in. They had been asleep an hour or two before Bill closed his book regretfully, picked up his gun, and walked to his bunk. He stood for a moment gazing at Andy, and then turned to gaze at Pete. Then he shook his head—and a slow smile lighted his weathered face. For despite defunct mountain lions, bent nails, and other sundries, Bill Haskins liked Andy and Pete —and he knew if it came to a test of friendship, that either of them would stand by to the last dollar or the last shot, even as he would have gladly done to help them.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

THE RIDIN' KID FROM POWDER RIVER.

The first thing Pete did when he arrived in Tucson was to purchase a suit as near like that which he had seen Andover wear as possible. Pete's Stetson was discarded for a soft felt of ordinary dimensions. He bought shoes, socks, and some underwear, which the storekeeper assured him was the latest thing, but which Pete said "looked more like chicken wire than honest-to-gosh cloth," and fortified by his new and inconspicuous apparel, he called on the principal of the high school and told him just why he had come to Tucson.

"And I'd sure look queer settin' in with all the kids," Pete concluded. "If there's any way of my ketchin' up to my size, why I reckon I kin pay."

The principal thought it might be arranged. For instance, he would be glad to give Pete—he said "Mr. Annersley"—an instructor, a young Eastern scholar, who could possibly spare three or four evenings a week for private lessons. Progress would depend entirely upon Pete's efforts. Many young men had studied that way—some of them even without instruction. Henry Clay, for instance, and Lincoln. And was Mr. Annersley thinking of continuing with his studies and entering college, or did he merely wish to become conversant with the fundamentals?

"If I kin git so I can throw and hog-tie some of them fundamentals without losin' my rope, I reckon I'll be doin' all I set out to do. No—I guess I'd never make a top-hand ridin' for you. But my rope is tied to the horn—and I sure aim to stay with whatever I git my loop on."

"I get your drift—and I admire your purpose. Incidentally and speaking from a distinctly impersonal—er—viewpoint"—no doubt a high-school principal may speak from a viewpoint, or even sit on one if he cares to—"your colloquialisms are delightful—and sufficiently forceful to leave no doubt as to your sincerity of purpose."

"Meanin' you sabe what I'm gettin' at, eh?"

The principal nodded and smiled.

"I thought that was what you was tryin' to say. Well, professor——"

"Doctor Wheeler, if you please."

"All right, doc. But I didn't know you was a doc, too."

"Doctor of letters, merely."

Pete suspected that he was being joked with, but the principal's manner was quite serious. "If you will give me your address, I will mail the list to you," said the principal.

Pete gave his name and address. As Principal Wheeler wrote them down in his notebook he glanced up at Pete curiously. "You

don't happen to be the young man—er—similarity of names—who was mixed up in that shooting affair in El Paso. Name seemed familiar. No doubt a coincidence."

"It wa'n't no coincidence—it was a forty-five," stated Pete.

The principal stared at Pete as though he half expected to see him pull a gun and demand an education instanter. But Pete's smile helped the principal to pull himself together. "Most extraordinary!" he exclaimed. "I believe the courts exonerated you."

"That ain't all they did to me," Pete assured him. "Nope. You got that wrong. But I reckon they would 'a' done it—if I hadn't 'a' hired that there lawyer from El Paso. He sure exonerated a couple of thousand out of me. And the judge turned me loose."

"Most extraordinary!"

"It was that lawyer that told me I ought to git a education," explained Pete.

"Of course! Of course! I had forgotten it for the moment. Well, I'll give you that address at once. And there is Mr. Forbes' house number. I think you will find him at his room almost any evening."

"I'll be there."

"Very good! I suppose you are aware that it is illegal to carry concealed weapons inside the city limits?"

"I get you, doc, but I ain't packin' a gun, nohow."

As the weeks went by and the winter sun swung farther south, Doctor Forbes, the young Eastern scholar, and Pete began to understand each other. Pete, who had at first considered the young Easterner affected, and rather effeminate, slowly realized his mistake. Forbes was a sincere and a manly fellow, who had taken his share of hard knocks, and who suffered ill-health uncomplainingly—an exile of his chosen environment, with little money and scarce a companion to share his loneliness.

As for Forbes, he envied Pete his abundant health and vigor and admired his unspoiled enthusiasm. Pete's humor, which somehow suggested to Forbes the startling and explicable antics of a healthy colt, melted Forbes' diffidence, and they became friends and, finally, chums. Pete really learned as much through his intimacy as he did from his books; perhaps more. It was at Pete's suggestion that Forbes took to riding a horse, and they went many afternoons on the desert, drifting slowly along while they discussed many different phases of life.

These discussions frequently led to argument, sincere on Pete's part, who never realized that Forbes' chief delight in life was to get Pete started that he might enjoy Pete's picturesque illustration of the point, which more often than not was shrewdly sharp and convincing. No amount of argument, no matter how fortified by theory and example, could make Pete change his attitude toward life—but he eventually came to see life from a different angle, his vision broadening to a wider perspective as they climbed together, Forbes loitering on familiar ground that Pete might not lose the trail and find himself entangled in some unessential thicket by the way.

Forbes was not looking well. His thin face was pinched; his eyes were listless. Pete thought that he stayed indoors too much.

"Why don't you go get a cayuse and ride?" he suggested.

"Never was on a horse in my life."

"Uhuh. Well, you been off one too long."

"I'd like to. But I can't afford it."

"I don't mean to buy a horse—just hire one, from the livery. I was thinkin' of gettin' out on the dry spot myself. I'm plumb sick of town."

"You would have to teach me."

"Shucks! There's nothin' to learn. All you got to do is to fork your cayuse and ride. I'd sure be glad to go with you."

"That's nice of you. Well, say to-morrow afternoon, then. But what about horses?"

"We got a session to-morrow. What's the matter with this afternoon? The sun's shinin', and there ain't much wind, and I can smell the ole desert, a sizzlin'. Come on!"

They were in Forbes' room. The Easterner laid his book aside and glanced down at his shoes. "I haven't a riding costume."

"Well, you can get one for a dollar and four bits—copper-riveted, and sure easy and comfortable. I'll lend you a pair of boots."

"All right. I'll try it once, at least."

Forbes felt rather conspicuous in the stiff new overalls, rolled up at the bottom, over Pete's tight high-heeled boots, but nobody paid any attention to him as he stumped along beside Pete, on the way to the livery.

Pete chose the horses and a saddle for

Forbes, to whom he gave a few brief pointers anent the art of swinging up and dismounting. They set out and headed for the open. Forbes was at first nervous; but as nothing happened, he forgot his nervousness and gave himself to gazing at the great, sunswept spaces until the horses broke into a trot, when he gave his entire attention to the saddle horn, clinging to it affectionately with his free hand.

Pete pulled up. "Say, amigo, it's ag'inst the rules to choke that there horn to death. Just let go and clamp your knees. We'll lope 'em a spell."

Forbes was about to protest when Pete's horse, to which he had apparently done nothing, broke into a lope. Forbes' horse followed. It was a rough experience for the Easterner, but he enjoyed it until Pete pulled up suddenly. Forbes' own animal stopped abruptly, but Forbes, grabbing wildly at the horn, continued, and descended in a graceful curve which left him sitting on the sand and blinking up at the astonished animal.

"Hurt you?" queried Pete.

"I think not—— But it was rather sudden. Now what do I do?"

"Well, when you git rested up, I'd say to fork him ag'in. He's sure tame."

"I—I thought he was rather wild," stammered Forbes, getting to his feet.

"Nope. It was you was wild. I reckon you like to scared him to death. Nope! Git on him from this side."

"He seems a rather intelligent animal," commented Forbes as he prepared for the worst.

"Well, we kin call him that, seein' there's nobody around to hear us. We'll walk 'em a spell."

Forbes felt relieved. And realizing that he was still alive and uninjured, he relaxed a bit. After they had turned and headed for town, he actually enjoyed himself.

Next day he was so stiff and sore that he could scarcely walk, but his eye was brighter. However, he begged off from their proposed ride the following afternoon. Pete said nothing; but when the next riding afternoon arrived, a week later, Forbes was surprised to see Pete, dressed in his range clothes. Standing near the curb were two horses, saddled and bridled.

"Git on your jeans and those ole boots of mine. I fetched along a extra pair of spurs."

"But Annersley——"

"I can't ride 'em both."

"It's nice of you—but really, I can't afford it."

"Look here, doc, what you can't afford is to set in that room a readin' all day. And the horse don't cost you a cent. I had a talk with the old-timer that runs the livery, and when he seen I was onto my job, he was plumb tickled to death for me to exercise the horses. One of 'em needs a little educatin'."

"That's all right. But how about my horse?"

"Why, I brought him along to keep the other horse company. I can't handle 'em both. Ain't you goin' to help me out?"

"Well, if you put it that way, I will this time."

"Now you're talkin' sense."

Several weeks later they were riding out on the desert and enjoying that refreshing and restful companionship which is best expressed in silence, when Pete, who had been gazing into the distance, pulled up his restive horse and sat watching a moving something that suddenly disappeared. Forbes glanced at Pete, who turned and nodded as if acknowledging the other's unspoken question. They rode on.

A half hour later, as they pulled up at the edge of the arroyo, Forbes was startled by Pete's "Hello neighbor!" to an apparently empty world.

"What's the joke?" queried Forbes.

The joke appeared suddenly around the bend in the arroyo—a big, weather-bitten joke astride of a powerful horse. Forbes uttered an exclamation as the joke whipped out a gun and told them to "Put 'em up!" in a tone which caused Forbes' hands to let go the reins and rise head-high without his having realized that he had made a movement. Pete was also picking invisible peaches from the air, which further confirmed Forbes' hasty conclusion that they were both doing the right thing.

"I ain't got a gun on me, Ed." Pete had spoken slowly and distinctly, and apparently without the least shadow of trepidation. Forbes, gazing at the grim, bronzed face of the strange horseman, nervously echoed Pete's statement. Before the Easterner could realize what had actually happened, Pete and the strange rider had dismounted and were shaking hands: a transition so astonishing that Forbes forgot to

lower his hands and sat with them nervously aloft as though imploring the Rain God not to forget his duty to mankind.

Pete and the stranger were talking. Forbes could catch an occasional word—such as "the Spider—El Paso—White Eye—Hospital—Sonora—Sanborn—Sam Brent——"

Pete turned and grinned. "I reckon you can let go the—your holt, doc. This here is a friend of mine."

Forbes sighed thankfully. He was introduced to the friend, whom Pete called Ed but whose name had been suddenly changed to Bill.

"We used to ride together," exclaimed Pete.

Forbes tactfully withdrew, realizing that, whatever they had to talk about, was more or less confidential.

Presently Pete approached Forbes and asked him if he had any money with him. Forbes had five dollars and some small change.

"I'm borrowin' this till to-morrow," said Pete, as he dug in his own pocket, and without counting the sum total, gave it to the stranger.

Brevoort stuffed the money in his pocket, and swung to his horse.

"You better ride in with us a ways," suggested Pete. "The young fella don't know anything about you—and he won't talk if I pass the word to him. Then I kin go on ahead and fetch back some grub and some more dineros."

Forbes found the stranger rather interesting as they rode back toward Tucson; for he spoke of Mexico and affairs below the line—amazing things to speak of in such an offhand manner—in an impersonal and interesting way. Within two miles of the town they drew up.

"Bill, here," explained Pete, "is short of grub. Now, if you don't mind keepin' him company, why I'll fan it in and git some. I'll be back right soon."

"Not at all! Go ahead!" Forbes wanted to hear more of first-hand experiences south of the line. Forbes, who knew something of Pete's history, shrewdly suspected that the stranger called "Bill" had a good reason to ride wide of Tucson—although the Easterner did not quite understand why Pete should ride into town alone. But that was merely incidental.

It was not until Pete had returned, and the stranger had departed, taking his way east across the desert, that Pete offered an explanation—a rather guarded explanation Forbes realized—of the recent happenings.

"Bill's keepin' out on desert for his health," said Pete. "And, if anybody should ask us, I reckon we ain't seen him."

"I think I understand," said Forbes.

And Forbes, recalling the event many months later, after Pete had left Tucson, thought none the less of Pete for having helped an old friend out of difficulties. Forbes was himself more than grateful to Pete—for with the riding three times a week and Pete's robust companionship, he had gained his health to an extent far beyond his hopes.

Pete rejected sixteen of the seventeen plans he had made that winter for his future, often guided by what he read in the occasional letters from Doris, wherein he found some rather practical suggestions—for he wrote frankly of his intent to better himself, but wisely refrained from saying anything that might be interpreted as more than friendship.

Pete had not planned to go to El Paso quite as soon as he did. And it was because of an unanswered letter that he went. He had written early in March and it was now May—and no reply.

If he had waited a few days longer, it is possible that he would not have gone at all—for passing him as he journeyed toward Texas was a letter from Doris Gray in which she intimated that she thought their correspondence had better cease—and for the reason, which she did not intimate, that she was a bit afraid that Pete would come to El Paso, and stay in El Paso until she had either refused to see him—it was significant that she thought of refusing to see him—for he was actually worth looking at—or until he had asked her a question to which there was but one answer—and that was "no." Just why Doris should have taken it for granted that he would ask her that question, is a matter which she never explained, even to herself. Pete had never made love to her in the accepted sense of the term. He had done much better than that, although he was entirely unconscious of it. But that psychological moment—whatever that may mean—in the affairs of Doris and Pete was rapidly approaching—a moment more often anticipated by the female of the species than by the male.

Just what kept Pete from immediately rushing to the hospital and proclaiming his presence, is another question that never can be answered. Pete wanted to do just that thing—but he did not. Instead, he took a modest room at a modest hotel, bought himself some presentable clothing, dropped in to see Hodges of the Stockmen's Security, and spent several days walking about the streets mentally preparing himself to explain just why he *had* come to El Paso, finally arriving at the conclusion that he had come to see little Ruth. Doris had said that Ruth had missed him. Well, he had a right to drop in and see the kid. And he guessed it was nobody's business if he did.

He had avoided going near the General Hospital in his strolls about town, viewing that building from a safe distance and imagining all sorts of things. Perhaps Miss Gray had left. Perhaps she was ill. Or she might have married! Still, she would have told him, he thought.

Doris never knew what a struggle it cost Pete—to say nothing of hard cash—to purchase that bottle of perfume. But he did it, marching into a drug store and asking for a bottle of "the best they had," and paying for it without a quiver. Back in his room he emptied about half of the bottle on his handkerchief, wedged the handkerchief into his pocket and marched to the street, determination in his eye, and the fumes of half a vial of frangipanni floating in his wake.

Perhaps the frangipanni stimulated him. Perhaps the overdose deadened his decision. In any event that afternoon he betook himself to the hospital, and was fortunate in finding Andover there, to whom he confided the obvious news that he was in town—and that he would like to see little Ruth for a minute, if it was all right.

Andover told him that little Ruth had been taken to her home a month ago—and Pete wondered how she could still miss him, as Miss Gray had intimated in her last letter. And as he wondered he saw a light—not a great light, but a faint ray which was reflected in his face as he asked Andover when Miss Gray would be relieved from duty, and if it would be possible to see her then.

Andover thought it might be possible—and suggested that he let Miss Gray know of Pete's presence, but some happy instinct caused Pete to veto that suggestion.

"It ain't important," he told Andover. "I jest mosey around about six, and step in for a minute. Don't you say I'm in town!"

Andover gazed curiously after Pete as the latter marched out. The surgeon shook his head. Mixed drinks were not new to Andover, but he could not for the life of him recognize what Pete had been drinking.

Doris, who had not been thinking of Pete at all—as she was not a spiritualist, and had always doubted that affinities were other than easy excuses for uneasy morals—came briskly down the hospital steps, gowned in a trim gray skirt and a jacket and a jaunty turban that hid just enough of her brown hair to make that which was visible the more alluring. She almost walked into Pete—for as it has been stated, she was not thinking of him at all, but of the cozy evening she would spend with her sister at the latter's apartments on High Street. Incidentally, Doris was thinking, just a little, of how well her gown and turban became her—for she had determined never to let herself become frowsy and slipshod—well—— She had not to look far for her antithesis.

"Why, Mr. Annersley!"

Pete flushed, the victim of several emotions. "Good evenin', Miss Gray. I—I thought I'd jest step in and say 'Hello' to that little kid."

"Oh! Ruth?" And Doris flushed just the least bit herself. "Why, little Ruth is not here now."

"Shucks! Well, I'm right glad you are! Was you goin' somewhere?"

"Yes. Out to my sister's on High Street."

"I only been in town two or three days, so I don't know jest where High Street is, but I reckon I could find my way back all right." And Pete so far forgot the perfume as to smile in his old, boyish way.

Doris did some rapid mental calculation and concluded that her latest—or rather her last letter had just about arrived in Tucson, and, of course, Pete had not read it. That made matters a little difficult. But there was no reason in the world why he should not walk with her to her sister's.

Pete saw no reason why he should not, either, but rather a very attractive reason why he should.

Without further word, they turned and walked down the street, Doris wondering what in the world had induced Pete to im-

merse himself in frangipanni, and Pete wondering if there were ever a prettier girl in the world than Doris Gray.

And because Pete wanted to talk about something entirely impersonal—he at once began to ask her what she thought of his latest plan, which was to purchase an interest in the Concho, spend his summers working with the men and his winters in Tucson, studying with Forbes, whom he had written to her about.

Doris thought it was a splendid plan. She was sure—quite impersonally—that he would make a success of anything he attempted.

Pete was not so sure, and he told her so. And she joked him for doubting himself. And he promptly told her that he didn't doubt himself for a moment, but that he did doubt the willingness of the person whom he hoped to make a partner in the venture.

"Not Mr. Forbes?" she queried, glancing quickly at Pete's serious face.

"Nope. It's you."

They walked another block without speaking. And then they walked still another. And they had begun to walk still another when Pete suddenly pulled his handkerchief from his pocket and threw it in the gutter.

"That dog-gone perfume is chokin' me to death!" he blurted.

And Doris, despite herself, smiled.

They were out where the streets were more open and quiet now, and the sun was close to the edge of the desert, far in the west. Doris' hand trembled just the least bit as she turned to say good night. They had stopped in front of a cottage, near the edge of town. Pete's face was a bit pale and his dark eyes were intense and gloomy.

Quite unconsciously of what he was doing, he pulled out his watch—a new watch that possessed no erratic tendencies. Suddenly Doris thought of Pete's old watch—and little Ruth's extreme delight in its irresponsible hands whirling madly around—and of that night when Pete had brought it to the hospital—and suddenly there were two tears trembling on her lashes, and her hand faltered—and then, being a sensible person, she laughed away her emotion for the time being, and invited Pete in to supper.

Pete thought Doris' sister a mighty nice girl, plumb sensible and not a bit stuck up. And later, when this "plumb sensible" person declared that she was rather tired and excused herself and disappeared, after bidding Pete good night, he *knew* that she was a sensible person. He couldn't see how she could help it, being the sister of Doris.

"So I'll be sayin' good night," stated Pete a few minutes later, as he stood by the door, proud and straight and as vital as a flame.

But he didn't say it, at least coherently. Doris' hand was on his sleeve. Pete thought she had a mighty pretty hand. And as for her eyes—they were gray and misty and warm. And not at all like he had ever seen them before. He laughed happily.

"You look plumb lonesome!" he said.

"I—I was."

Pete dropped his hat, but he did not know it until, well—several minutes later, when Doris gave it to him.

It was close to midnight when a solitary policeman, passing down a side street, heard a nocturnal singer inform dark and empty High Street that he was "The Ridin' Kid from Powder River," with other more or less interesting details.

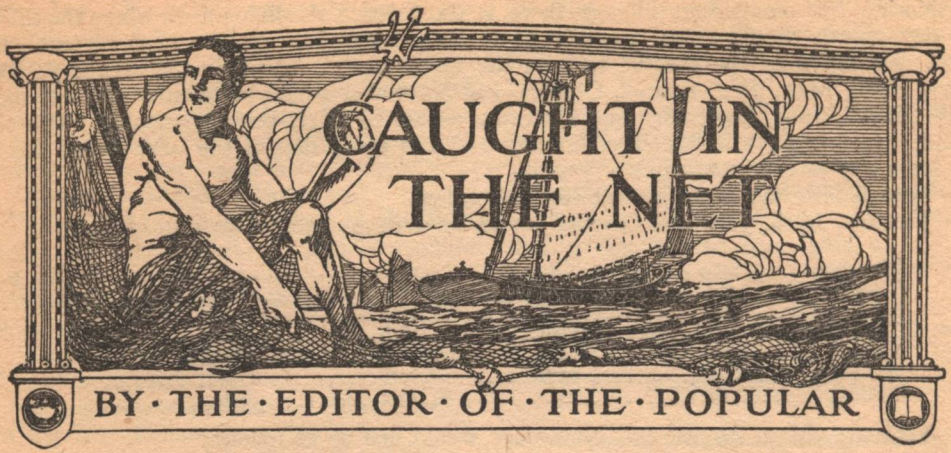
Pete felt a hand on his shoulder. "You better cut that out!" said a voice. Pete whirled and his hand flickered toward his hip.

"You go plumb to——" Pete hesitated. The officer sniffed suspiciously. Pete grinned and proffered his hand with irresistible enthusiasm.

"Shake! Sure I'll cut it out."

THE END.

There is a new series of Western stories by Knibbs which will start in an early issue of this magazine.



THE GOVERNMENT AS A MONEY LOANER

MOST of the governments of the world have been borrowing money of their peoples at a tremendous rate for the past several years. And now one important government has become a loaner of money. Canada, from whom the United States got the plan of war-risk insurance for its soldiers, has again set a pace which we may find worthy of following. It is an entirely new field of governmental action which is opened by the action of the Federal administration of Canada and the provincial administration of Ontario in lending money for the erection of houses for the working classes. It is primarily the result of conditions created by the war, but it also has significance as an indication of the new attitude of government toward social questions.

The Dominion parliament has authorized the loan of $25,000,000 at five per cent to be distributed on the basis of population, to promote the erection of small dwellings, and to enable working men and returned soldiers to buy them at cost. If the provincial authorities were to appropriate on the basis of $1 per capita, this would make available for the entire Dominion approximately $32,000,000 and permit of the erection of ten thousand homes at an average cost of $3,200. Fifty thousand inhabitants would be cared for in this way, and it is probable that other loans would follow. Under the terms of the loan the government loses about one per cent interest. "But so did we, when we loaned our country money at five per cent, the highest rate paid on any war loan," the people have a right to respond. The borrower from the government under the new law actually saves sixty to seventy dollars a year, the difference between governmental and private rates of interest.

The maximum loan will be for $4,500, and the funds are payable over a period of twenty to thirty years. Special legislation is being passed and directors of housing are being named to enable provisional governments to coöperate. The chief responsibility falls on the municipality. One of the striking features is the importance attached to town planning as a basis for housing schemes.

A NEW CALENDAR PROPOSED

NEITHER the Julian nor the Gregorian systems of measuring time is considered satisfactory to men of science, although they were an advance over prior methods. And without being learned in the ways of sidereal or solar movements, any of us know how hard it is to calculate what day of the week a particular date a few years ahead will fall upon.

The French Académie des Sciences intends to remedy the present cumbrous arrangement, and a plan has been submitted to it that promises to find favor. By this scheme, the year is divided into four quarters, each quarter containing one month of thirty-one days and two months of thirty days, respectively. Among the French savants who are

considering the momentous change there is a difference of opinion as to where the thirty-one-day month should come, whether at the beginning of the quarter or at its end. The latter disposition of the months appears the more likely. Accordingly, January, February, April, May, July, August, October and November would be months of thirty days, while March, June, September and December would be thirty-one-day months. The year would always begin with Monday, January 1st, and every day of the week would fall on the same day of the month in every year.

Here it is in tables for clearer comprehension.

January, April, July and October would have days arranged in this fashion:

Monday	1st	8th	15th	22nd	29th
Tuesday	2nd	9th	16th	23d	30th
Wednesday	3rd	10th	17th	24th	
Thursday	4th	11th	18th	25th	
Friday	5th	12th	19th	26th	
Saturday	6th	13th	20th	27th	
Sunday	7th	14th	21st	28th	

February, May, August and November would line up as follows:

Monday		6th	13th	20th	27th
Tuesday		7th	14th	21st	28th
Wednesday	1st	8th	15th	22nd	29th
Thursday	2nd	9th	16th	23rd	30th
Friday	3rd	10th	17th	24th	
Saturday	4th	11th	18th	25th	
Sunday	5th	12th	19th	26th	

March, June, September and December would register thusly:

Monday		4th	11th	18th	25th
Tuesday		5th	12th	19th	26th
Wednesday		6th	13th	20th	27th
Thursday		7th	14th	21st	28th
Friday	1st	8th	15th	22nd	29th
Saturady	2nd	9th	16th	23rd	30th
Sunday	3rd	10th	17th	24th	31st

Simple and effective, certainly, but adding them up we find that there are only three hundred and sixty-four days in the retabulation. What then? Well, Monsieur Deslandres, an ardent worker in the cause of calendar reform, suggests a day to follow June 31st which shall have no numeral or day-of-the-week name, but shall be known as the *Jour de Paix,* or Peace Day. It would be also necessary to intercalate another day every four years, because of leap year, and it is suggested that it shall follow December 31st, without name or number, except the designation of *Jour en Plus,* or Leap Day.

Recounted among the advantages of the scheme are that periodical payments would always fall on the same day of the week and month in every year, and astronomers and historians would not have to allow for changes in the calendar, and Easter might settle down to a given date.

Herein, change is literally the order of the day. Now that we have become used to daylight saving, perhaps the calendar metamorphosis won't bother us, but we grow apprehensive lest the men of science turn their attention to the clock and find that seconds, minutes and hours call for a new order.

PASSING OF THE BEARD

OF late years the tendency toward the clean-shaven face, or the close-clipped mustache only, among the men in cities has been rapidly spreading. As late as sixty-five years ago the popular taste for hirsute adornment of the male face was at its height. Then there was a variety of beard and whisker such as we would in any public meeting of men look in vain for now, at least in towns and cities, though there are many individual types of beard and whisker yet. There were the full beards, the mutton-chop whiskers, the waving Dundreary droopers, the chin beards of

men in rural populations, the "throat warmers" of sailors and men-of-war's men and many other kinds of hirsute appendages that mere words would be inadequate to describe. It is true that George Washington and some other famous men living in the early days of our republic wore no beards, but these were only isolated cases in their own time.

In the days of the ancient Israelites to have the beard removed was a great indignity. In the ceremonial section of the Mosaic Law one injunction was: "Ye shall not round the corners of your heads, neither shalt thou mar the corners of thy beard."

When King David sent messengers to Hanun, king of the Ammonites, to comfort him after the death of his father, the ungrateful Hanun among other indignities to them caused one-half of their beards to be shaved off. The messengers, we are told, were ashamed. When word of this was sent to King David he sent the following message to them:

"Tarry at Jericho until your beards be grown and then return."

Yet now, even in Jewish communities there is a tendency toward the close-clipped mustache or clean-shaven face among the younger men. In rural communities beards of some kind prevail, especially among the older men, but the younger element leans toward the clean-shaven face.

Anarchists are popularly supposed to be hairy men, but now there are many smooth-faced anarchists; and even stage villains with clean-shaven faces can be seen in our plays. There are still some well-known public men who wear full beards or whiskers. Former Supreme Court Judge Charles E. Hughes would not be easily recognized, probably, even by his friends if he sacrificed his beard. It seems the normal thing for him to wear it, just as it looks the normal thing for Chauncey M. Depew to continue wearing his side whiskers. They are exceptional cases, however.

The growth of cleanly and fastidious habits is looked on as the main reason for doing away by men of their hairy facial efflorescences. Ample mustaches and beards for instance, are more or less embarrassing to their possessors in taking soup at public dinners and, unless their wearers are given to frequent ablutions, would be likely receptacles for germs. At all events, the ranks of the clean shaven are still growing and, unless some unlooked-for ideas gain ground, will continue to grow.

EXAMINING CHARGES AGAINST THE "Y"

IN passing a too hasty judgment upon the work of the Y. M. C. A. abroad, based upon the criticisms of the returning soldier, we are in danger of doing a grave injustice to an organization that has done splendid work abroad. Before we pass judgment upon an organization, before we condemn it for inefficiency or worse, we should carefully weigh the charges brought against it and whether the mistakes that it may have made were avoidable.

The principal complaints against the "Y" were, lack of material and overcharge. Let us take up these two charges separately. The boys complained because it was frequently impossible for them to secure the luxuries which they desired at the Y. M. C. A. canteens. They claim to have been constantly greeted with the statements: "No more chocolate to-day," "Cigarettes out." What was the reason for this shortage? We are informed by the Y. M. C. A. that it was due to the lack of transportation facilities. When the Y. M. C. A. took over the canteen work at the request of the government, the government allotted one hundred tons per month for each unit of thirty-five thousand men overseas. The Y. M. C. A. had asked for two hundred tons, but due to the imperative need of getting the soldiers to France at once, the amount of space actually given to the "Y" was frequently reduced to fifty tons, varying from one-half to one-fourth the estimated amount of cargo space necessary with the amount of material desired and naturally limiting the amount that they could supply.

Second: they accused the "Y" of overcharging for the things they did supply. This ought to be carefully weighed. Has the "Y" profiteered upon the necessities of our boys overseas? The finanacial reports of the Y. M. C. A. show that the canteens have been operated at a distinct loss. Up to November 1, 1918 there had been a deficit of

$332,181.32 in the management of the fifteen hundred chain stores of the Y. M. C. A. abroad. This amount does not include rentals, clerk hire, or interest on the money invested in buildings for storerooms. In other words, the cost of the material plus the transportation has cost the "Y" roundly, one-third of a million dollars more than the selling price of the goods. The old charge of the "Y" having intentionally sold goods that were sent to France as donations to the boys, has been definitely refuted by the Quartermaster's department of the United States government, the explanation being given that the "Y," owing to lack of transportation, was forced to buy some of the supplies from the United States commissary, and that by mistake in the commissary, some packages that were gifts were sold to the "Y," packages becoming mixed. The "Y" unwittingly sold the goods that they had purchased and corrected the error when the mistakes were called to their attention.

The "Y" has made mistakes. It has sent some men unsuited by training or ability for the work. These men have deserved some just criticism, but the question to be determined is whether the good they have done, the homes that they have furnished the boys, the amusements and entertainments that they have put on, the athletic sports they have engineered, have overbalanced the charges of inefficiency that have been brought against them.

POPULAR TOPICS

WHAT is to take the place of the saloon? There are many theories about the substitute. It is said that the Y. M. C. A. and the Salvation Army will try their hands at creating non-alcoholic social centers where workingmen may forgather in fellowship and where amusement and recreation will be provided. We certainly wish them success in the venture. It is a difficult undertaking. The peculiar ego-expansion effected by alcohol will be hard to imitate in any other way, but in this day of psychological resource we would not say it was impossible. It is highly significant that already some of the trades unions are planning a theater for their members in which they hope to produce their own plays.

THE department of labor reminds us that on account of suspended building operations during the war, the United States now needs almost a million new homes. We are also reminded that building is a basic industry, and that if you build a home you make business for more than a hundred correlated and contributing industries: each building erected sends its wave of demand through the industrial organization of the country from the ditch-diggers to the bank presidents and back, by way of pay envelopes, to the ditch diggers again.

ACCORDING to the department of agriculture more than three hundred thousand motor tractors will be manufactured here this year. Of these, some ninety thousand will be shipped abroad to increase production of crops. Using a tractor, one man can do more work than six men and thirty horses. From this may be inferred how the motor tractor will offset the shortage in man power in Europe.

ARGENTINE expects to have about 160,000,000 bushels of wheat available for export this year, and the government has fixed $1.55 as the minimum rate of export price, so that the discrepancy in the British market between the cost of Argentine and American wheat will not be so great as had been supposed.

FUTURE trade development as seen through Japanese eyes appeared in a late number of the *Japan Chronicle*. Some of the shrewd observations were as follows:

It is clear that the commercial war in the Pacific will in the near future rage chiefly between Britain, the United States, and Japan—more especially it will be keen between Britain and the United States. And their competition will be chiefly for the acquisition of the markets on the shores of Central America, South America, and China. . . . Competition will be keenest on the shores of South America and China. . . . The only drawback for Japan is that, unlike the industrial countries of Europe and America, she cannot export sufficient quantities of machinery. This is a serious disadvantage in her competition with other powers, and largely reduces the value of her otherwise favorable position. . . . In Europe, however, prices will not go down for the time being, and wages, too, may go up, but will not fall; and a not inconsiderable time will have to elapse before the wounds of war are healed and things are restored to the condition before the war. During this period it will be difficult for them to devote their whole energy to overseas trade. This is the most desirable chance for Japanese business men to seize in order to exert themselves to the greatest advantage.

WHETHER we accept the mandate for Armenia or not, it is well to know before the decision is made what our principal duties would be. In brief they would comprise: (1) To aid the Armenians, in an advisory capacity, to establish a government on a permanent basis. (2) To send to Armenia possibly two or four regiments, to remain for a brief period, which would exert a steadying effect upon the native population. (3) To coöperate with the Armenian government in the repatriation into Armenia of 1,500,000 Armenians. (4) To make provision for the caring of 300,000 or more orphans. (5) To help Armenia, through technical commissions, in the construction of her transportation system, docks and harbors, and inaugurate modern improvements and means of sanitation in its towns and cities. (6) To help model a scheme of life on the American system of civilization. (7) To carry out this task shall require not less than five nor more than ten years.

DO you want a job as a flying photographer? Uncle Sam sends out a call for those young chaps interested enough in the new aërial science to give it their attention as a good means of livelihood. You will earn while you learn. The army is to have a school of aërial photography in a fine part of the country, with the best of living conditions promised. There is unlimited opportunity for adventure and travel in this profession.

UNDER the pressure of war taxation it is reported that large English estates are rapidly breaking up and the centuries-old landed gentry disappearing. Titled persons are offering at public auction great blocks of land. Here is the striking contrast between English and Russian methods of dealing with property ownership. One is autocratic chaos, the other democratic order.

THE New York State department of insurance reports new business of life companies during the first four months of 1919 to be nearly double that of the same period of 1918, the increase largely credited to the epidemic of influenza. At the present rate, business for 1919 is estimated at $10,000,000,000 as against $5,800,000,000 in 1918.

ONE of the recent echoes from over the sea aroused our envy in a fictional way, and we wished a POPULAR author had thought of the scheme first. It seems that homesick American soldier boys in Brest, France, seized an ocean tug in the harbor and steamed for their native land. But U. S. warships set after them and they were captured and brought back.

Stringing with Sid

By Raymond J. Brown

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A word from the hero, Sid Wix, puts us wise: "I'm the luckiest guy in the world. I'm the feller they named the horseshoes after. Every time the cards is dealt I get four aces. Every time I strike out I get a home run"

THE stout little manager of the Red Legs laughed derisively at the lanky, flashily attired youth with the huge beak, disappearing chin, and silly, grinning mouth who had halted him by main force as he had started through the players' entrance to the Red Legs' park. To Matt McCoy the other's yellow-banded straw hat, "snappy" checked suit, and gray spats, his freckled, characterless face and the slouching swagger with which he carried his loose-jointed length spelled "small-town sport" as certainly as though he had worn a sign around his neck.

As manager of a team which, during the course of an unexplainable slump of ten days had not scored enough runs to win two ordinary games and had plunged from second place in the league standing to fourth, McCoy's thoughts were on matters more important than those which might be offered for his consideration by any one who was so evidently a nut as this elongated youth.

"Yep," continued the fellow who called himself Sid Wix, "I'm the luckiest guy in the world. I'm the feller they named the horseshoes after. Every time the cards is dealt I get four aces. I invented the winnin' hundred-to-one shot. When I go into a gamblin' house they lock the bank roll in the safe. I beat the chinks playin' fan-tan and the wops playin' seven and a half. If I dropped my last two bits into the lake I'd find a thousand dollars on the shore. If I burned a dollar bill it would turn into a diamond. Every time I strike out I get a home run. As far as I know, the only number you can make with a pair of dice is seven. Dame Fortune is my godmother. I was born on Friday the thirteenth, I'm goin' to live to be a hundred and twenty, and I'll die a millionaire!"

As Sid spoke his green eyes glowed with a light which proclaimed his entire belief in his own words, and his comically homely face was most serious.

"That's all on the level, Matt!" he continued after pausing to take a breath. "If ever there was a favored child of fortune—I'm it! And everybody that strings with me gets in on my luck. Why, listen, Matt—the day before I was born my old man was busted and out of a job. Five hours after I came he got the best job he'd ever had in his life, and, within a year, he had his own business, owned his own home and was makin' money faster than the mint!

"Luck? I got enough of it to supply an army! Why, look here, Matt!" Sid peeped cautiously over his shoulder; then he plunged his hand into his trousers pocket and drew forth a roll of bills thick as the business end of a bat. "Do you know how much is here, Matt?" he asked. "Forty-eight hundred dollars! Yesterday I had twenty bucks. I took it into a pool room, and dropped ten of it on a nag I'd never even heard of before. He won—at twelve to one. I took the hundred and twenty over to the crap table, and this is what I carried out of the place. It's like stealin' it, I tell you—I simply *can't* lose! I got almost thirty thousand in the bank—and I ain't worked in three years. I'm tellin' you this just so's you won't think I'm a grafter tryin' to work you for a job. I don't want no money from you, Matt. I'm a Red Legs rooter, and I just want to haul the team out of its slump. I don't want you to pay me—even expenses. I don't want you to let me pitch. All I want to do is get into a uniform, hang around and bring the boys some luck. How about it, Matt—will you let me do it?"

There could be no doubting the sincerity of Sid's pleading. Moreover, despite the

handicap of his comic-paper face and get-up, his eloquence was moving. McCoy found himself forgiving Sid his empty countenance and rainbow clothes. He shook his head thoughtfully.

"It don't sound right somehow——" began Matt.

"Matt," broke in the voluble Sid, "you been listenin' to me, ain't you? You kind of half believe me, don't you? Well, that's the answer!" he declared. "Just you give me a chance to talk it up with the fellers of the team, and see if there ain't some change in their playin'! Remember—what I want to do don't put no pie on my plate! It won't cost you nothin' to give me a chance—and I can deliver the goods. Why, Matt, I got a little semi-pro team over on the West Side that I'll lay you a thousand dollars to a dime can beat the Red Legs! Why? Why, just because their manager—me, I mean—is a guy that can't lose! You——"

McCoy suddenly seized Sid's arm. Twenty-five years in baseball had made the manager of the Red Legs rather skeptical about the actual influence which mascots, charms, or encounters with wagonloads of barrels or white horses exert on future events. He did know, though, the value of self-confidence—whether born of a consciousness of superior ability or of faith in the efficacy of amulets—and he knew the superstitious group of young men who made up the Red Legs.

Besides this, McCoy was desperate. Bullying, cajolery, shifting his batting order, daring field strategy—all had failed to win a single game for his team in ten days, and Matt had reached the point where he was ready to "try anything."

Impulsively he hauled Sid into the park.

"I ain't sure," he said, "that this line of talk you've been handin' me ain't just plain bunk—but I'm goin' to give you a chance. From to-day on, you're a Red Leg. If you can convince the boys of my team that——"

"Say no more!" grinned Sid as they made their way to the clubhouse. "All you got to do, Matt, is lead me to a uniform; then duck and watch the fireworks!"

The surly, low-spirited band of athletes which occupied the Red Legs' dressing room greeted Sid Wix curiously, but without enthusiasm. Recruits were likely to appear at the ball park at any time during the playing season.

Sid seated himself on a bench, took the oddly assorted pieces of field equipment which McCoy gathered for him and prepared to dress for the diamond. As he drew off his trousers the compact roll of bank notes, the sight of which had caused Matt McCoy's eyes to bulge, shot from his pocket and rolled across the floor. Apparently Sid did not notice the money fall, but Joe Tooker, second baseman and field captain of the team, who sat next to Sid, grabbed the self-styled child of fortune by the arm.

"Hey!" he exclaimed, loudly enough to attract the attention of all. "Look there!" He pointed to the bills which were still traveling slowly across the dressing room. "That ain't no way to throw your dough around!" said Joe.

Sid carelessly finished removing a union suit of plaid silk.

"Huh!" he grunted. "Only five thou there. Lots more where that came from. I should worry if I lose it! Kick it over, somebody, will you?"

He held out his hand, and Al Blair, the Red Legs shortstop, picked up the roll and tossed it to its owner, not, however, until he had examined it with a glint in his eyes that can be described by no other word than hungry. Sid caught the money, and laid it carelessly beside him on the bench.

Tooker gazed at him in astonishment.

"Say, feller!" he exclaimed. "Put that kale away! You ain't goin' to leave it there, are you?"

"Why not?" asked Sid, as he thrust his head and thin neck through a jersey. "Nobody would steal it!"

"No?" queried Tooker. "I wouldn't trust the best guy here with two bucks of mine!"

Sid laughed.

"Oh, there's nothin' funny about it," Tooker asserted. "Pay day's two weeks off, and most of us is——"

"Oh!"

Sid had jumped suddenly to his feet.

"Is that right, fellers?" he asked. "Is some of you a little short? Because, if you are, all you got to do is to step up." He stooped down, picked up his roll, and stripped off the rubber band which held it. The greenbacks expanded like a sponge as the pressure of the rubber was taken away. Most of Sid's plethoric roll was in bills of comparatively small denomination, and you couldn't have convinced any of those players that it contained less than a million dollars.

"If any of you fellers need a few dollars to tide you over," suggested Sid, "I got lots of it. I ain't loan-sharkin' either. Just tell me how much, and you get it. Who wants a hundred?" he asked, holding a crinkly bill of that denomination aloft. "You guys have been playin' pretty rotten ball for the last week," he went on. "Maybe it's because you've been broke. A feller never can do his best when he's worryin' about money. Don't be bashful, now," he counseled. "You don't know me very good yet, but this is a good way to get acquainted. Come on; line forms on the left," he laughed. "Step right up, and don't crowd."

The Red Legs were gazing at Sid more convinced he was crazy than even Matt McCoy had been when the alleged carrier of good luck had first encountered him. Sid noticed their puzzled faces and laughed.

"Nobody want any dough?" he asked. "All too bashful, I guess. All right, boys; think it over, and see me after the game. Bank's closed now," he said, rolling the bills up tight again and inclosing them with the rubber band.

"Hey!" called out Curly Barrow, the big catcher. "What are you—a counterfeiter?"

Sid laughed.

"Almost," he said. "No, I'm just the luckiest guy in the world. I carry horseshoes with me wherever I go. You fellers will find that out. Wait till you see what happens to this slump you're in now, as soon as I get out on the field this afternoon! You're goin' to win to-day, fellers, and tomorrow, and the next day—and so on till you're toppin' the league. I'm the little boy that's goin' to bring you luck. Sid Wix is my name, fellers. Just string with Sid, and you're bound to be a winner. String with Sid!" he repeated. "That's the new motto for the Red Legs!"

The puzzled ball players looked at one another, and shook their heads in bewilderment.

Sid sat down, and resumed donning his uniform. Meanwhile, he chattered away like a parrot, addressing his remarks to nobody in particular, but naming most of the men on the team in the course of his outspoken soliloquy.

"Yep," he said. "String with Sid; that's your play. Hard luck runs for cover as soon as Sid shows up. Phil Morrow'd never have dropped that fly that lost yesterday's game if Sid had been around! Rube Finn never would have struck out in the eighth with the bases full, either! Lucky little Sid! All you boys got to do now is remember Sid's with you—after that it's a gallop! Joe Tooker's just about goin' to knock the cover off that old ball to-day, and you ain't had a hit in four days, have you, Joe? And Al Blair ain't goin' to let the Pirates score to-day by bootin' any easy chances! Not Al! He's got Sid behind him now! And Parson Hubbard ain't goin' to force in no more runs by hittin' guys he ought to strike out with his eyes shut. Well, fellers, let's go—Sid's all dressed! Just you folley him out to the old lot, and remember Hard Luck's funeral takes place this afternoon. Come on, old-timer, brace up!" He caught Joe Tooker, who was sitting on the bench with a scowl that would have soured milk, a stinging blow between the shoulder blades. "Come on, Joe!" ordered Sid. "You're the captain; just get the boys together, and forget you ever lost a game. Off we go now—everybody on the run, and what we won't do to them Pirates this afternoon! All right, now—one, two, three—everybody out together—*on the run!* Whee!"

With a war whoop that startled the Red Legs, nervous and irritable from their depressing experiences of the last ten days, Sid began to move among the players and shove them playfully toward the dressing-room door.

"Come on, fellers," he bade. "Wake up! Pep! That's what we want! Hard luck's gone; the slump's over—we're off on a winnin' streak. All out together now—*on the run!* Whee! Make some noise—let 'em know we're comin'!"

He herded the players toward the door, slipped lightly out to the van of them, and, with a screech that echoed all the way to the grand stand, started to trot up the field.

"Everybody after me!" he ordered. "Yell! Come on; all together—whe-e-e! That's the old pep!" he declared as one or two of the younger players, finding his enthusiasm contagious, ventured little, half hearted cheers. "Let 'em know we're comin', fellers! Once again, now—whe-e-e!"

This time it was considerable volume of sound that came from the throats of the Red Legs. The grand stand and bleachers, accustomed to the slow-footed, disheartened slouch with which the ordinarily peppery Red Legs had made their way to the playing field since their slump got well under

way, regarded this trotting, cheering band of ball players in astonishment.

"We got 'em goin', fellers!" Sid called back over his shoulder as he noticed the interest of the fans. "All together, now, in a good long yell—whe-e-e-e!"

A chorus of cheers and whistles and a spirited patter of hand-clapping came from the stands in answer to the lusty roar of the team.

"That's the old pep!" encouraged Sid. "We got the crowd with us again! Once more now—and scare the tar out of them Pirates. Let's lick 'em before we ever take the field! One, two, three—whe-e-e-e!"

This last yell was given in the very shadow of the grand stand. Unconsciously the Red Legs were paying remarkable tribute to the force of Sid Wix's personality—obeying without question his orders to cheer, trying to match his enthusiasm. And their actions were all the more astonishing because not one of them had received even a hint, from any one but Sid himself, that the reputed bearer of good fortune had any authority to give them orders and to insist, even though pleasantly, that they be obeyed.

The ardor of the Red Legs spread to the rooters. Those in the stands sensed somehow that these players were different from the downcast, discouraged team which had been performing so listlessly and mechanically for the last week. The fans arose as one man, and a tumult of cheers, such as ordinarily greets only so noteworthy an event as a ninth-inning rally, swept over the field. Led by the energetic Sid Wix, about whose identity fans and the reporters in the press box were beginning to show curiosity, the Red Legs acknowledged the plaudits by lifting their caps and waving their hands.

Matt McCoy, who had preceded his team to the field and was squatted in a corner of the players' bench, grinned with satisfaction.

"By George!" he muttered. "He's done it all right! It may be luck, or it may be just his show of pep, but I'll be blowed if he ain't got them guys woke up!"

He leaped to his feet and waddled out to the center of his group of players.

"All right now, fellers!" he called. "Everybody busy! Come on; don't stand there posin'! Start movin' around—get some of the lead out of your feet!"

Obedient to their leader's command, the Red Legs spread over the section of turf that lay in front of their bench, and, in a few seconds, a dozen balls were flying through the air, bats were swinging, and the thud of ball against glove mingled with the shouts of McCoy's warriors as they limbered up for their coming battle with the Pirates. Sid Wix was here, there, and everywhere, his nasal whine ringing loud over the cries of the other players—kidding this one, shouting encouragement to that one, fanning into full flame the fire of enthusiasm he had kindled in the Red Legs as he led them to the field.

His clumsy efforts to join in the games of catch and the bunting practice with which the Red Legs passed their time while waiting for their turn to take the diamond for fielding practice amused fans and players alike. And, when the Red Legs dashed out to the field to complete the limbering up process which they had begun in front of the bench, instead of the travesty on baseball which had been their fielding practice for the last week, they put up as remarkable an exhibition of fielding stunts, juggling tricks and circus catches as any one in the grounds had ever seen.

If the runs which the Red Legs piled up that afternoon had been spread over the ten previous days, Matt McCoy's team never would have dropped from second in the league to fourth, and, probably, Sid Wix never would have worn a big-league uniform. Fourteen was the number with which McCoy's rejuvenated team was credited on the big scoreboard at the end of the contest, and the Pirates, due to Parson Hubbard's masterly pitching and the perfect defensive play of his teammates, weren't able to get a runner even so far as second base.

Once again were the Red Legs back in the favor of the home-town fans; but, more important, once again were they back in their own good graces. They had regained their confidence in themselves. They had at last won another game—ended their slump—and in so decisive a way that everybody on the team, from Matt McCoy to the bat boy, was willing to bet that winning games thereafter was only a matter of playing them.

Sid Wix's jubilation knew no bounds.

"See!" he exclaimed, jumping to a chair in the dressing room in a picturesque costume consisting of one red stocking and a cap of the same color. "What did I tell you? String with Sid; that's all you have to do! Fourteen to nothin'! Guess that ain't kind of bad, eh? Lucky little Sid! he's the

boy that pulls 'em out of the slumps! All you need is Sid—and nothin' else!"

"Aw, sit down!" bellowed Parson Hubbard, whose good right arm was being scientifically manhandled by Jasper, the team's negro rubber. "Don't you think none of the rest of us done nothin'?"

"Positively, old chappie!" sang out Sid. "You put your trust in Sid—and he hauled you through!"

"Aw, we was due to win a game, anyways!" growled Hubbard, whose ordinary grouch not even a ten-day slump could make greater.

"Sure!" grinned Sid. "You was due to win a game more'n a week ago! Funny, though, you couldn't do it till Sid come along!"

"That's right!" chimed in Al Blair, who had been greatly impressed by some stories Sid had told him between innings about the way his vaunted luck held in various gambling operations. "This kid's *a* mascot! Don't let him talk you out of it, Sid; you're the boy that done it!"

"You sure are!" agreed Jack Barrett, the club's best left-handed twirler. "Ain't nobody goin' to deny you brought us luck today!"

"*I* ain't!" asserted Joe Tooker, who was gloating in remembrance of the four hits he had gathered in four trips to the rubber. "The boy told me I was goin' to wallop the ball to-day—and I done it!"

"Did you hear what he said about my fieldin'?" demanded Blair, whose work at shortstop had improved about five hundred per cent that afternoon.

"Same for me!" declared Phil Morrow. "Sid, old boy, I was thinkin' of what you told me about not droppin' no more flies when I went back to the fence after that baby in the fifth. You're the kiddo with the horseshoes, *I'll* whisper!"

"Right-o!" boomed Curly Barrow. "I wouldn't say you was much of a ball player, Sid, but, as a luck piece, you're a star!"

"Told you so!" nodded Sir Modesty. "Ain't nobody ever tied up to me yet that didn't knock hard luck for a goal! Nothin' to it now, fellers, but to cop that old pennant! Just string with Sid—and it's a romp!"

Now, scoff though you may at mascots, jinxes, or the other fetishes of ball players, probably the most superstitious class of men extant, the records of baseball prove that, beginning with the day Sid Wix forced his way into Matt McCoy's family, the Red Legs embarked on the most phenomenal and longest-continued string of consecutive wins ever known to the diamond.

No opposition which any other team in the league could offer seemed strong enough to give the Red Legs even stiff practice. No pitcher seemed able to last more than a few innings against the fierce bombardment of McCoy's heavy artillery; no team could withstand the daring, impetuous dash the Red Legs displayed on the bases; no attack seemed strong enough to make the smallest gap in the well-knit defensive organization which McCoy put on the field.

Added to which the luck of the Red Legs was uncanny. All the breaks fell their way. Even mistakes made by wearers of the ruby stockings seemed to work to the advantage of the team. It was discouraging, heart-breaking even, to the other clubs in the league.

And Sid Wix, of course, received full credit for it all. The Red Legs all but deified the lanky and talkative Sid. Within a fortnight after he joined the team he had almost as much influence with the men as Matt McCoy himself. His teammates hung on his every word; they showered him with presents; they sought his society outside of playing hours; they besought him to pick horses for them to play; to take their money and gamble for them. For, no matter what other good points Sid had, no matter what can be said for the beneficent influence he was credited with exerting on batting averages, box scores, and the general morale of the team, it must be admitted that Sid was an inveterate, shameless, incorrigible gambler.

Sid had spoken the unvarnished truth to Matt McCoy on the day he assured the manager he couldn't lose. He couldn't; that's all there is to be said about it. A week after he became an associate of Matt McCoy's warriors he had been barred from every game—even the friendly sessions at pinochle for ten cents a thousand, or some similarly absurd amount—in which the members of the Red Legs sat. That one week had convinced the ball players that indulging in any game of chance with Sid possessed all the pleasant features of throwing your money into a furnace. Poker, crap, bridge, rummy, matching coins—Sid played them all with almost as little skill as he did baseball, but with such weird, un-

natural luck that the ball players, while assuring their new comrade of their everlasting affection and regard, told him politely if he wanted to gamble he had better seek other fields.

Which advice Sid accepted with entire good nature, and he proceeded to satisfy his craving for speculation by winning what seemed to the Red Legs to be fabulous amounts in gambling houses and by playing the races.

Meanwhile, the team climbed upward, ever upward, in the league race. They overhauled the well-balanced Phillies and then, due to a clean sweep, they made in a four-game series with the team from the sleepy city, passed right by them and went after the Cubs. No sooner was McCoy's seemingly inspired team within shooting distance of the Chicago club than the Cubs cracked, dropped three games out of four to Boston —and then the Red Legs were in second place again, with nothing between them and the top of the heap but McGraw's Giants.

At which point of the race even the fast-traveling, sanguine Red Legs began to be obsessed with grave doubts. Their epochal string of victories seemed too good to last. Hopeful, and with pleasant thoughts of world-series money buzzing in their heads, they seized pencil and paper and computed whether final victory in the league race that year was even mathematically possible for them. Their calculations proved that it was possible for them to win the pennant—just possible. For to do so they would have to win every game in the half dozen series still remaining for them to play, finishing their season with four straight wins over the Giants in the final set-to of the year, while the Giants, secure in the possession of a commanding lead, might travel at merely normal speed, dropping a game here and there, and still retain their hold on the pennant which even then seemed in their grasp beyond the hope of any other team to snatch it from them.

Besides this, it was almost an unwritten law of baseball that the Red Legs should never occupy first place in the league. Five times in the twelve years the club had been under Matt McCoy's management had the Red Legs come within half a game of the top, only to be hurled back into the second position which seemed to be the very summit of achievement for them.

Sid Wix laughed when Matt McCoy told him this.

"Bunk!" he exclaimed. "You ain't never had Sid Wix with you before!"

"We ain't, that's true," assented McCoy, "but we've had teams that were fifty per cent better than the one we have now, and somethin's always happened just when we began——"

"Poof! Ain't I told you I *can't* lose? Ain't I *proved* it to you? Ain't I hauled the team up from fourth place to—well, close enough to the front to——"

"Go to it, Sid! Don't let me discourage you."

"Discourage *me!* Ha, ha! That's funny, that is. Nothin' could discourage me!"

"No? You mean nothin' has *yet*. Wait till you get a bum break some time."

"Can't be did!" said Sid, with a flip of his hand. "I'm the one guy that's goin' to be more successful than Rockefeller!"

So Sid, mostly by means of oratory and example, continued his work of implanting in the breasts of his teammates a hopefulness equal to his own. And his success was commensurate with the success of the team. Not once did the Red Legs give signs of faltering in their headlong dash pennantward. Were they leading the league, the regularity with which they chalked up victories soon would have banished all interest in the race for the championship. But, coming from behind the way they did, their triumphant march attracted nation-wide notice. Dyed-in-the-wool rooters for other teams were moved by the plucky fight which the Red Legs were putting up against what seemed to be hopeless odds to switch their allegiance to McCoy's team.

To tell how the Red Legs accomplished the impossible would be merely to repeat facts which any one who cares to take the trouble can find laid down succinctly in cold type in the baseball record books. Suffice it to say that, on a certain afternoon in early autumn, Matt McCoy's battlers emerged victorious by a score of two to one in a game with the Chicago Cubs, and that, on the following afternoon, the Giants were scheduled to appear for the first contest of the series to which the Red Legs had been looking forward with mingled hope and fear since a pennant for their club had become a subject even worthy of speculation.

Fate certainly had been kind to the McCoy clan, for the Giants had accommodatingly lost just enough games during the progress of the Red Legs' winning streak to

bring the McGraw team into town holding their lead by a scant three games. And if they failed to win at least one of the series of four contests which was to end the league season for both teams—it is not remarkable that even the clerical force in the Red Legs' business office complained of a sudden seizure of insomnia on the night preceding the coming of the New Yorkers!

The first game of the series established Sid Wix—if such a thing was necessary—as a mascot of wondrous parts. It was no decisive victory the Red Legs won. Anything but that, for it was only a sudden spasm of wild throwing by the Giants in the fourth inning which permitted Phil Morrow to cross the plate with the only run of the game. But it was a victory, and the manner of it pleased the Red Legs more than ever a one-sided win could have pleased them. For it was luck which won; Sid Wix's charm still was working—but two more similar victories, and they would share with the Giants the lead of the league.

To good fortune also, quite as much as to the air-tight, brainy brand of baseball they showed, must be attributed the success of the Red Legs in the second engagement. Four to three was the score of this contest. It was anybody's game up to the ninth inning, with both teams tied at three all; then an outfield error permitted Joe Tooker to score on a long fly that ought to have been an easy out for any player in the league.

And pure, dumb, unqualified luck, and nothing else, made the Red Legs victors over the Giants in the next afternoon's engagement, and brought the local team, for the first time in the history of baseball, into the van of the whole league. True, they merely shared the honor, but it appeared that the jinx which had previously prevented them from climbing higher than second place had at last been broken. The victory of the Red Legs was hollow—even the players admitted that their exhibition of baseball that afternoon was of the sloppiest, stupidest, most amateurish kind. The Giants hammered Jack Barrett's curves to the four points of the compass. Against Schupp's pitching, on the other hand, the Red Legs were helpless. Three scratch hits was the sum of their efforts with the bat. Moreover, eight glaring, inexcusable fielding errors were charged up against McCoy's lucky team and the home club also was guilty of at least half a dozen mistakes in judgment, which do not appear in the box score. And still they won the game—by a score of two to nothing! One of the Red Legs' three hits was a home run by Jack Barrett, who, according to his teammates, ordinarily couldn't hit a balloon with a bale stick. The other run came when Al Blair, who was on second base, came all the way home on a grounder which Rube Finn, the Red Legs' first sacker, drove directly at Fletcher, and which, but for a queer, high bound which the ball took, the clever Giant shortstop would have smothered easily.

It was a great day for every one connected with McCoy's team. Sid Wix celebrated in characteristic fashion by winning nine hundred dollars by means of three bets on the races, which a betting commissioner in the front row of the grand stand telephoned for him to a downtown poolroom.

"Can you beat my luck?" Sid asked Joe Tooker in the hotel that evening. "I knew we'd get the lead," he said, "and to-morrow we cop the flag! A big day for Sid, I'd call it! Well, Joe, a feller's got to take it all while it's comin'—to-night I'm goin' out for a clean up."

"A clean up? Where?"

"Downtown. I got a tip on a joint where the sky's the limit. Me for a whirl on the old wheel—and a steam yacht for the winter!"

"Better go to bed," advised Tooker. "To-morrow's goin' to be a hard day."

"Hard? Why?"

"Well," said Joe, "I don't know of but two cases where the pennant rested on a single game—and the team that was comin' from behind got left in both of them. Little things can happen, you know. Merkle forgot to touch second, and Jack Chesbro hurled a spitball over the grand stand. Those are the two cases I'm speakin' of," Joe explained.

"Bunk!" exclaimed Sid. "Sid Wix wasn't around then. Well, Joe, I'm off. If you want to borry a couple of hundred thoussand—see me in the mornin'!"

It was long after midnight that Joe was aroused from his sleep by an insistent pounding on the door of his room.

"Who—what—who's there?" demanded the Red Legs' captain, starting up from his pillow.

"Open up, Joe; it's Sid!" came the faint answer. "Open up—quick!"

Grumbling, Tooker stepped from his bed and threw open the door. In the faint light

of the corridor stood Sid Wix, his face pale and ghostly, his green eyes staring, his wide mouth open and his retreating chin hanging stupidly on his shirt front. He seemed more stooped and round-shouldered than ordinarily, and, as Tooker stepped aside, he staggered into the room with the weak, uncertain steps of a drunken man.

Instinctively, Tooker thrust out his arm to support his visitor.

"Wha—what's the matter?" gasped Joe. "You look like a——"

Sid lurched by him without a word. As he came to the center of the room his knees seemed to give way. He reached out, and seized the foot of the bed to support himself, swung back and forth drunkenly a few times and then flopped to the bed where he dropped his head in his hands and began weeping bitterly. Convulsive sobs shook his thin frame. His cries echoed loudly through the stillness of the night.

Quickly Tooker closed the door. He hurried across the room, and seized Sid roughly by the shoulder.

"What in blazes is the matter with you?" he demanded. "Cut out that damn squawlin'! You want to wake the whole floor up? Stop it, I say! Like a schoolgirl!" he exclaimed disgustedly.

Sid raised his head. For all his grief, he made a comical figure as he sat there, his green eyes red-lidded and filled with moisture, his freckled cheeks tear-stained, his cavernous mouth wide open and emitting weird howls.

"What's the matter with you?" Tooker asked again. "Brace up!" he ordered. "Be a man!"

"Oh, Joe, Joe!" sobbed Sid. "It's happened. It's happened!"

"Happened!" echoed Tooker. "What's happened?"

"Muh-my luh-luck's bub-broke!" Sid cried. "I'm bub-busted!"

"Busted!"

Sid nodded despairingly.

"Tuh-ten—th-thousand—duh-dollars!" he wailed. "They got it all!"

Tooker looked at him in disgust.

"Cripe!" he exclaimed. "Only ten thousand? What's ten thousand to a guy that gambles like you? I thought somethin' serious had happened. But ten thousand!" he scoffed. "You can afford to——"

"I know," wept Sid. "It ain't the kale that bothers me; I don't mind that at all. Buh-but mum-my luh-luck's bub-broke!"

"Broke—me eye!" growled Tooker. "Ain't broke no more'n you are! Every guy's got to take the worst of it sometimes. It's natural for——"

"But the team!" cried Sid. "That's what's worryin' me. When I lose the team will, too! I *know* it—and right on the eve of grabbin' the pennant! O-o-o-oh!"

He went into another paroxysm of weeping.

Tooker suddenly stiffened. Among the superstitious group of young men who made up the Red Legs, there was none who placed more credence in the symbols popularly supposed to be indicative of good luck or bad luck than Tooker. Passing loads of hay, touching hunchbacks, walking under ladders —Joe believed in all of them implicitly. And there was another aspect of the matter, which flashed quickly across Joe's mind. Even if Sid Wix's luck might be scoffed at as a factor in the remarkable winning streak of the club, his never-failing optimism and blind belief that all who followed him were to be blessed by fortune certainly had been of priceless value in fostering the combative spirit and irresistible verve which had carried the Red Legs on to their triumphs. And here was Sid announcing that his luck had deserted him and that, due to the sudden change in his fortunes, the succession of bitter, heart-breaking victories which the team had wrested from the stiffest opposition in the last month was to go for naught —the team was to be denied the pennant—and the slice of world-series money—which should have been its reward.

Joe dropped a heavy hand on Sid's shoulder.

"Shut up!' he commanded. "Are you goin' to give up the ship—just because you lose a few dollars! Nothin' doin', young feller! We ain't licked yet—not by a damsite! We'll cop that game to-morrow, as sure as you're a foot high! You can't scare *me!* You can't tell me that a winnin' streak like ours is goin' to be busted just because you lose a few miserable dollars on a crooked wheel That's it!" exclaimed the hopeful Tooker, suddenly grinning widely and clapping his hands together. "It was a crooked wheel! Your luck's as good as it ever was —but good luck can't beat a game that's rigged. Gee, you ought to have thought of that yourself! It's all right, kid; you're

still lucky, but you went up against a crooked game and got trimmed! Forget it! You'll get your dough back—bettin' on us in the world series. Run along now and get some sleep. To-morrow's goin' to be a hard day."

He lifted the shaking Sid to his feet, and gently pushed him toward the corridor.

"Our luck *ain't* broke—it *ain't!*" Tooker repeated to himself again and again after he had plunged into bed. It was as though he thought he could force the continuation of the Red Legs' good fortune by convincing himself of the truth of the words which, it must be confessed, he uttered rather half-heartedly.

Both Joe Tooker and Sid Wix have always sworn they never mentioned a word of Sid's disastrous experience in the gambling house, but every man on the Red Legs seemed to have the story, down to its last detail, long before breakfast time the following morning. And the realization that fortune suddenly had played a mean trick on their mascot seemed to have stunned them. When they went to the ball field that afternoon, they got into their uniforms in silence and strolled out to the field in a disheartened, spiritless way—just like the surly, discouraged Red Legs whom Sid had joined in the midst of their slump.

Matt McCoy vainly tried to talk some enthusiasm and spirit into his men. So did Joe Tooker, loudly proclaiming that the game in which Sid had lost his money was crooked. But their efforts were fruitless, especially since Sid himself, who always could be depended upon to talk his teammates out of any fits of despondency, was the glummest man among them. Sid was like a man who had been drugged. Gone was his pep, gone his trust in the supreme power of his luck. He stumbled out to the field half-stupefied, poked himself into a corner of the bench, and let his head drop to his hands.

"Look at him there!" Matt McCoy directed Joe Tooker. "The quitter! Just a mutt—that's what he is! I never seen such a yaller dog! The first time he's hurt, he throws up the sponge!"

"He's just kind of knocked insensible," Tooker apologized for the unhappy Sid. "Remember, chief, luck was *all* he had. He thinks he's lost it, and it's took the heart out——"

"It's took the heart out of every bird on the team!" snapped McCoy. "A lot of yaller, quittin' hounds! Yesterday they was ready to whip the world; to-day—bah! Like whipped curs!"

It was Parson Hubbard's turn to pitch for the Red Legs, which was the one piece of good luck McCoy had run into that day. For the veteran twirler disliked Sid Wix, and on that account never would admit having any faith in his efficacy as a mascot. Besides, the Parson's nature was such that it would have taken the explosion of a bombshell at his feet to stir him. He just strolled to the box with the nonchalance he might have displayed in an exhibition game, and proceeded to mow down the New York batters in a highly workmanlike manner. The Parson's easy, untroubled air contrived to steady his teammates somewhat, and they backed him up—in a mechanical, passive way, perhaps—but with a defense strong enough to hold McGraw's hard-hitting players scoreless. Neither were there any tallies rung up for the Red Legs in the first three sessions.

But to a man who knew baseball as Matt McCoy did, the difference between the two teams was apparent. He felt instinctively that it was only a question of time when the spirited, daring, rampant dash of the Giants would prevail over the stolid, uninspired playing of his own men. But he refused to give up hope. All the Red Legs needed, he knew, was spirit—the arrogant, overbearing confidence in themselves which had carried them through their winning streak. And if, in some way, he could only instill in them even a trace of the stout-hearted contempt of opposition they had had only the day before—he looked toward Sid Wix, and shook his head sadly. His one time dependable hurrah man was the most dispirited, downhearted person in the ball park.

Through five innings the teams battled on even terms. The tenseness of the situation was profound. It spread to the spectators, who sat in almost absolute silence, grim and strained, fearing to cheer, to talk among themselves; every man in the grounds oppressed by a realization of the titanic struggle that was in progress—all waiting for a break of some kind, for some sign of the way the tide was going to turn.

As the Red Legs, gloomy, silent, sullen, strode from the field in the fifth inning, Matt McCoy was seen to dart suddenly toward the

press box. He talked earnestly for a few seconds with a baseball writer; then he hurried to the players' bench.

"Sid," he said, addressing the gloomy Sid Wix, who had not moved from his seat at the end of the bench, "that guy who phones bets downtown for you—is he here to-day?"

"Dunno," said Sid. "Guess so."

"I just got a tip—Flyaway in the fifth race. It's a long shot. If you hurry you can get a bet down."

"I'm through bettin'," mumbled Sid. "My luck's gone."

"Bet fifty for me, will you?' said Matt. "I'm told he can't lose."

Sid suddenly was all awake. Matt McCoy betting fifty dollars on a horse race! He knew the Red Legs' leader ventured an occasional ten-spot on a sure thing that was guaranteed—but fifty dollars!

"You mean it?" he asked. "Fifty dollars?"

"Absolutely," smiled Matt. "It's soft money."

"How good is your tip?" asked Sid.

"It's the goods," Matt assured him. "Comes right from the owner."

Sid dashed away without waiting to hear more. He found his betting commissioner in his usual seat. As Sid approached, the man was just finishing what appeared to be a most interesting conversation with another man, who hurried up the grand-stand steps as Sid neared them.

"Flyaway," whispered Sid without preliminaries. "A—a hundred and fifty—to win!"

His betting commissioner hastily consulted his watch.

"Don't know whether I can get it down," he said, shaking his head doubtfully. "It's kind of late for that race."

"You'll never get it down sittin' there beefin'!' snapped Sid.

"Right you are!" exclaimed the man pleasantly, jumping to his feet and hurrying up the aisle toward a telephone.

Sid waited at the grand-stand railing until he saw his friend coming down the aisle again. When he saw Sid, the man smiled and nodded his head briskly, indicating that he had succeeded in getting the bet down.

Meanwhile Benton, who was pitching for the Giants, had succeeded in retiring the three Red Legs who faced him in the fifth inning in order, and McGraw's men were again wrestling with Parson Hubbard's pitching. But Sid Wix's mind was not on baseball. He stood by the railing until the man who took his bet had returned to his seat.

"Find out about that race—soon as you can," Sid directed.

"Can't do it for ten minutes," the man answered. "What's your hurry, anyhow?"

"Nothin'," Sid told him. "Go back to that phone, get an open wire to the pool room and flash me as soon as the result comes in."

"There's lots of time——" the man began.

"Go up," ordered Sid, "or I'm off you for life."

Now, since the commissions he received on play which came to him through Sid Wix formed no inconsiderable part of the man's income, he offered no further argument, but hurried back to the telephone.

Although it seemed like an hour to the anxious Sid, not more than three minutes elapsed before the betting commissioner was on his way down the steps again. He purposely avoided Sid's gaze until he had reached the grand-stand rail when he shoved out his hand, grabbed Sid by the shoulder, and shook his head as though in admiration.

"I got to hand it to *you!*" he exclaimed. "You *are* the luckiest guy I ever met up with!"

"You mean—I win?" breathed Sid, his green eyes staring, his big mouth widened in a hopeful smile.

"Win!" the man echoed. "Sure! You always do—here, wait a second!" he called as Sid started to dash away. "That ain't all! That nag of yours pays ten to one; another skate led him under the wire, but they handed your dog the race on a foul!"

Sid wrenched himself free. Five strides brought him to the Red Legs' bench. The men of the team, glumly regarding the futile efforts of Phil Morrow to do anything with Benton's pitching, failed to notice him.

"Fellers!" cried Sid, in a tone that brought every eye upon him. "It's—it's all right! My luck ain't broke! I just win a bet on a ten-to-one shot—on a disqualification! All right now!" he exclaimed, bringing his hands together with a resounding slap. "Everybody on his toes! Sid's himself again! String with Sid; the old motto still goes! You're up next, Al Blair—and you're goin'

to wallop that guy out of the grounds! No more gloom—everybody's happy again! The pennant's ours! We win! We win!"

He rushed from the bench down to third base, his accustomed stand when coaching. His penetrating voice drifted across the field, acting on his teammates like a lash. Phil Morrow, who batted left-handed, saw him out of the corner of his eye, and was inspired to smite the Giant pitcher's next offering for a clean single.

"Whe-e-e!" yelled Sid—his old, familiar call. "They're off! Right on the nose! Nothin' can stop us now! Oh, you Al!" he called to Al Blair, who came ambling up to the plate with a do-or-die expression in his eye. "Over the fence, Al! Hit it!" he cried as Benton served up the first ball.

And hit it Al did. His great bat met the ball with one of those solid cracks that bring the fans to their feet. Away the sphere sailed, high in the air, far over the heads of the outguards, on, on toward the low left-field fence which has always been the target for all heavy hitters at the Red Legs' park. Kauff and Burns were digging back in hopeless chase of the ball with all the speed of their swift legs.

Morrow and Blair, who had started around the base paths at a ten-second clip, saw that the ball was going over the fence and slowed up. While the fans yelled their very lungs out, the two Red Legs, grinning and foolish with joy, leisurely completed their circuit of the bases.

Sid Wix was behaving like a maniac. He was dancing, turning handsprings, throwing his hat in the air and yelling like an Indian. In utter defiance of the rules of the game he was deliberately inciting the fans to even more riotous demonstrations than Blair's unexpected blow had caused, to break out in all parts of the grounds. He rushed from the coaching line to the bench where the overjoyed Red Legs were hugging one another, slapping one another on the back, calling one another all kinds of profane but affectionate pet names, and behaving generally in a highly disorderly manner. Sid threw out what must be regarded as his chest, struck an almost heroic attitude, and proclaimed:

"Look me over, fellers! The greatest little two-fisted carrier of joy the world has ever seen! I ain't there—or nothin' like that! Oh, no! I may handle a baseball like a trained seal plays a pianner, but I guess any club in the world would can Walter Johnson, Ty Cobb, and Hal Chase to get me into its uniform!"

Joe Tooker, all but weeping with joy, threw both his wiry arms around the regenerated mascot.

"I told you, Sid!" he cried. "I knew your luck hadn't left you! Wow! Look at that!" he shouted suddenly, throwing Sid roughly aside and pointing to the diamond.

Rube Finn, who followed Blair on the batting order, had just tapped one of Benton's benders for a screaming two-bagger.

"Cripe! I'm up next!" exclaimed Tooker, suddenly recollecting himself.

He grabbed up his heavy war club, went to the plate on a jog trot, and slammed the first ball the Giant pitcher offered him for three bases. It was a mighty swipe, and, with just a little more beef behind it, might have traveled as far as Blair's hit.

From then on, it was a slaughter. The Red Legs, swaggeringly confident, proceeded to belabor Benton's pitching without mercy. Eight runs had been tallied by McCoy's suddenly rejuvenated warriors before their onslaught was stemmed. The parade of the Red Legs around the bases became almost monotonous, and the fans had quit cheering—probably from weariness—before Schupp, who was hustled to the aid of the helpless Benton, was able to offer some pitching that the Red Legs could not mistreat.

Why tell more? The Red Legs scored thrice in the innings that remained, while the Giants, try as they might, failed to register even a scratch hit against the deadly hurling of Parson Hubbard.

The Red Legs had won the pennant! The luck of Sid Wix had prevailed over the jinx which for years had beset the club, and Sid, forgetful quite of the chicken-hearted way he had been ready to leave the team to its fate earlier in the day, was permitting the players, who also had in their happiness forgotten Sid's temporary delinquency, to shower him with praise and give him full credit for their victory.

"Ain't it just what I predicted?" Sid asked them. "Ain't I always told you to string with Sid? You done it—now see where you are!"

A roar of laughter came from a remote corner of the dressing room. Turning, Sid faced Matt McCoy. Shaking with merriment, the fat little manager was waving his hand at the self-sufficient mascot in a mocking way.

"Ain't that right, Matt?" called Sid. "Ain't I the——"

"Aw, shut up!" commanded McCoy, the severity of his tone in odd contrast with his smiling face and twinkling eye. "You've had the floor long enough," said Matt. "Now, *I'm* goin' to make a speech. You fellers," he went on, "win a ball game to-day because you went crazy when you heard a long-legged, gawky loon, who ain't got brains enough to know what date of the month it is, or sand enough to tackle a ten-year-old kid in a scrap—because you heard that clown there"—he pointed to Sid Wix with a gesture of contempt—"because you heard he win a bet on a horse. Now, listen, men—you're all old enough to vote, and you ought to have sense enough to know that that blitherin' lunatic didn't have nothin' to do with you winnin'. You win, because you're a good ball team. This 'string with Sid' bunk, this mascot hokum has got to be cut out! We're goin' into the world series to win—but to win *on our merits!* We ain't goin' to depend no more on what a crack-brained idiot like——"

"But, Matt," objected Joe Tooker, "Sid certainly done it to-day. When he won that bet, ye just——"

"Won—your eyebrow!" interrupted McCoy. "He didn't win nothin'!"

"Didn't win nothin'! Why, I thought that——"

"Flyaway?" queried Matt. "The horse that won at ten to one on a disqualification? There ain't no such animal! A filly named Pretty Girlie win the fifth race to-day. I *know*—I had ten dollars on her!"

Sid Wix looked like a wraith. His face was green. His eyes were staring and glassy. He was reeling around like a man who has been struck with a club.

"B-but Matt——" he stammered.

"*I* invented Flyaway!" announced McCoy. "I framed up that little bettin' comedy to get a little pep into that worthless carcass of yours—enough to pull the team together and win to-day's game. It worked," added Matt shortly.

"Well, what——" began Sid.

"Oh, you'll get the thousand you thought you won!" promised McCoy. "I'll give you that. Take it, and get to blazes out of here! If you'll take some advice with it, you'll quit trustin' to your luck—and go to work! And now," said Matt, addressing the team at large, "which are you goin' to trust in for the future—luck, or brains?"

Nobody answered him in words, but the way the Red Legs romped through that world series was a more eloquent reply than any they could have given him then.

FLUENT BUT NOT FLATTERING

MAJOR RAYMOND PULLMAN, chief of the District of Columbia police, at one time taught a Sunday-school class, and put into his lessons many subjects not closely related to religion. Any of his scholars, all boys, who wanted to ask questions on general topics were at liberty to do so, thereby getting from the major much food, pabulum, and provender for thought.

When circulation of the blood was mentioned one Sunday, Pullman was on the job with information and explanation.

"Get this, boys," he started off: "the blood flows, all the time, throughout the body. For instance, if I stood on my head for a few moments, the blood would rush into it, and I'd get red in the face. You see that?"

"Yes, sir!" The reply was emphatic, unanimous and enthusiastic. That sort of stuff was easy!

"All right, then. Now, why is it that, when I stand in my ordinary position, upright, the blood doesn't rush into my feet?"

Easy again!

" 'Cause your feet ain't empty," shouted the prize scholar.

Seven Blue Doves

By W. A. Fraser

Author of "Bulldog Carney's Alibi," Etc.

SYNOPSIS OF FIRST INSTALLMENT

After a game of cards in the Mounted Police shack at Bucking Horse, in the Canadian Rockies, Seth Long, a somewhat wayward young man, is killed. Bulldog Carney noticed in the course of the game that the cards, on the reverse side of which were colored pictures of seven blue doves, were made in such a way that, by careful study, a player could tell from looking at the backs of some of them what cards were held by an opponent. Among the others in the game were Cranford, a mining engineer; Shipley, a bird of passage, and Hadley, a New Yorker. Carney, awakened by the fatal shot, makes discoveries indicating that the shot was fired from outside the shack, and he starts out in pursuit of the slayer.

(A Two-Part Story—Part Two)

IT was within an hour of daybreak when Carney, astride his buckskin, slipped quietly out of Bucking Horse, and took the trail that skirted the tortuous stream toward the south. He had had no sleep, but that didn't matter; for two or three days and nights at a stretch he could go without sleep when necessary. Perhaps when he spelled for breakfast, as the buckskin fed on the now drying autumn grass, he would snatch a brief half hour of slumber, and again at noon; that would be quite enough.

When the light became strong he examined the trail. There were several tracks, cayuse tracks, the larger footprints of what were called bronchos; the track of pack mules; they were coming and going. But they were cold trails, seemingly not one fresh. Little cobwebs, like gossamer wings, stretched across the sunken, bowllike indentations, and dew sparkled on the silver mesh like jewels in the morning sun.

It was quite ten o'clock when Carney discovered the footprints of a pony that were evidently fresh; here and there the outcupped black earth where the cayuse had cantered glistened fresh in the sunlight.

Carney could not say just where the cayuse had struck the trail he was on. It gave him a depressed feeling. Perhaps the rider carried the loot, and had circled to escape interception. But when Carney came to the cross trail that ran from Fort Steel to Kootenay the cayuse tracks turned to the right toward Kootenay, and he felt a conviction that the rider was not associated with the murder. With that start, he would be heading for across the border; he would not make for a Canadian town where he would be in touch with the wires.

Along the border trail there were no fresh tracks.

It was toward evening when Carney passed through the Valley of the Grizzley's Bridge—past the gruesome place where Fourteen-foot Johnson had been killed by Jack the Wolf; past where he himself had been caught in the bear trap.

The buckskin remembered it all; he was in a hurry to get beyond it: he clattered over the narrow, winding, up-and-down foothpath with the eager, hasty steps of a fleeing goat, his head swinging nervously, his big lop-ears waving back and forth in apprehension.

Well beyond the Valley of the Grizzley's Bridge, past the dark maw of the cave in which Jack the Wolf had hidden the stolen gold, Carney went, camping in the valley, that had now broadened out, when its holding walls of mountain sides had blanketed the light so that he traveled along an obliterated trail, obliterated to all but the buckskin's finer sense of perception.

At the first graying of the eastern sky he was up, and after a snatch of breakfast for himself and the buckskin, hurrying south again. No one had passed in the night, for Carney had slept on one side of the trail

while the horse fed or rested on the other, with a picket line stretched between them: and there were no fresh tracks.

At two o'clock he came to the little log shack just this side of the U. S. border where Oregon kept his solitary ward. Nobody had passed, Oregon advised, and Carney gave the old man his instructions, which were to search any passer, and if he had the fifty-dollar bills, or the marked cards, hobble him and bring him back to Bucking Horse.

Over a pan of bacon and a pot of strong tea Oregon reported to his superior all the details of their own endeavor, which, in truth, was opium running. That was his office, to drift across the line casually, back and forth, as a prospector, and keep posted as to customs officers; who they were, where the kind-hearted ones were, and where the fanatical ones were; for once Carney had been ambushed, practically illegally, five miles within Canadian territory, and had had to fight his way out, leaving twenty thousand dollars' worth of opium in the hands of a tyrannical customs department.

At four o'clock Carney sat the buckskin, and reached down to grasp the hand of his lieutenant.

"I'll tell you, Bulldog," the latter said, swinging his eyes down the valley toward the southwest, "there's somethin' brewin' in the way of weather. My hip is pickin' a quarrel with that flat-nosed bit of lead that's been nestin' in a j'int, until I just natural feel as if somebody'd fresh plugged me."

Carney laughed, for the day was glorious. The valley bed through which wandered, now sluggishly, a green-tinged stream, lay like a glorious Oriental rug, its colors rich tinted by the warm flood of golden light that hung in the cedar and pine-perfumed air. The lower reaches of the hills on either side were crimson and gold and pink and purple and emerald green, all softened into a gentle maze like tapestry where the gaillardias and monkshood and wolf-willow and salmonberry and saskatoon bushes caressed each other in luxurious profusion, their floral bloom preserved in autumn's tawny richness by the dry mountain air.

And this splendor of God's artistry, this wondrous great tapestry, was hung against the somber green wall of a pine and fir forest that zigzagged, and stood in blocks, all up the mountainside like the design of some giant cubist.

Carney laughed and swung his gloved hand in a semicircle of derision.

"It's purty," Oregon said, "it's purty, but I've seen a purty woman, all smilin', too, break out in a hell of a temper afore you could say 'hands up.' My hip don't never make no mistakes, 'cause it ain't got no fancies. It's a-comin'. You ride like hell, Carney, it's a-comin'. Say, Bulldog, look at that!" and Oregon's long, lean, not overclean finger pointed to the buckskin's head; "he knows as well as I do that the Old Man of the Mountains is cookin' up somethin'. See 'em mule lugs of his—see the white of that eye? And he ain't takin' in no purty scenery, he's lookin' over his shoulder, down off there," and Oregon stretched a long arm toward the west, toward the home of the blue-green mountains of ice, the glaciers.

"It's too early for a blizzard," Carney contended.

"It might be, if they run on schedule time like the trains, but they don't. I froze to death once in one in September. I come back to life again, 'cause I'd been good always; and perhaps, Bulldog, your record mightn't let you out if you got caught between here and Buckin' Horse in a real he-game of snow hell'ry. The trail runs mostly up narrow valleys that would pile twenty feet deep, and I reckon, though you don't care overmuch yourself what gener'ly happens, you don't want to give the buckskin a raw deal by gettin' him into any fool finish. He knows; he wants to get to a nice little silk-lined sleepin' box afore this snoozer hits the mountains. Good-by, Bulldog, and ride like hell—the buckskin won't mind; let him run the show—he knows, the clever little cuss."

Carney's slim fingers, though steel, were almost welded together in the heat of the squeeze they got in Oregon's bear trap of a paw.

The trail here was like a prairie road, for the valley was flat, and the buckskin accentuated his apprehensive eagerness by whisking away at a sharp canter. Carney could hear, from over his shoulder, the croaking bellow of Oregon, who had noticed this:

"He knows, Bulldog. Leave him alone. Let him run things hisself!"

Though Carney had laughed at Oregon's gloomy forecast, he knew the old man was weather-wise, that a lifetime spent in the hills and the wide places of earth had tu-

tored him to the varying moods of the elements; that his supersense was akin to the subtle understanding of animals. So he rode late into the night, sometimes sleeping in the saddle, as the buckskin, with loose rein, picked his way up hill and down dale and along the brink of gorges with the surefootedness of a big-horn. He camped beneath a giant pine whose fallen cones and neddles had spread a luxurious mattress, and whose balsam, all unstoppered, floated in the air, a perfume that was like a balm of life.

Almost across the trail Carney slept, lest the bearer of the loot might slip by in the night.

He had lain down with one gray blanket over him; he had gone to sleep with a delicious sense of warmth and coziness; he woke shivering. His eyes opened to a gray light, a faint gray, the steeliness that filtered down into the gloomed valley from a paling sky. A day was being born; the night was dying.

An appalling hush was in the air; the valley was as devoid of sound as though the very trees had died in the night; as if the air itself had been sucked out from between the hills, leaving a void.

The buckskin was up and picking at the tender shoots of a young birch. It had been a half-whinnying snort from the horse that had wakened Carney, for now he repeated it, and threw his head up, the lop-ears cocked, as though he listened for some break in the horrible stillness, watched for something that was creeping stealthily over the mountains from the west.

Carney wet the palm of his hand and held it up. It chilled as though it had been dipped in evaporating spirits. Looking at the buckskin, Oregon's croak came back:

"He knows: ride like hell, Bulldog!"

Carney rose, and poured a little feed of oats from his bag on a corner of his blanket for the horse. He built a fire and brewed in a copper pot his tea. Once the shaft of smoke that spiraled lazily upward flickered and swished flat like a streaming wisp of hair; and above, high up in the giant pine harp, a minor string wailed a thin, tremulous note. The gray of the morning that had been growing bright now gloomed again as though night had fled backward before the thing that was in the mountains to the west.

The buckskin shivered; the hairs of his coat stood on end like fur in a bitter cold day; he snapped at the oats as though he bit at the neck of a stallion; he crushed them in his strong jaws as though he were famished, or ate to save them from a thief.

In five minutes the strings of the giant harp above Carney's head were playing a dirge; the smoke of his fire swirled, and the blaze darted here and there angrily, like the tongue of a serpent. From far across the valley, from somewhere in the rocky caverns of the mighty hills, came the heavy moans of jinn. It was hardly a noise, it was a great oppression, a manifestation of turmoil, of the turmoil of God's majesty, his creation in travail.

Carney quaffed the scalding tea, and raced with the buckskin in the eating of his food. He became a living thermometer; his chilling blood told him that the temperature was going down, down, down. The day before he had ridden with his coat hung to the horn of his saddle; now a vagrant thought flashed to his buffalo coat in his room at the Gold Nugget.

He saddled the buckskin, and the horse, at the pinch of the cinch, turned from his oats that were only half eaten, and held up his head for the bit.

Carney strapped his dunnage to the back of the saddle, mounted, and the buckskin, with a snort of relief, took the trail with eager steps. It wound down to the valley here toward the west, and little needles stabbed at the rider's eyes and cheeks as though the air were filled with indiscernible diamond dust. It stung; it burned his nostrils; it seemed to penetrate the horse's lungs, for he gave a snorting cough.

And now the full orchestra of the hills was filling the valleys and the cañons with an overture, as if perched on the snowed slope of Squaw Mountain was the hydraulicon of Vitruvius, a torrent raging its many throats into unearthly dirge.

Carney's brain vibrated with this presage of the something that had thrilled his horse. In his ears the wailing, sighing, reverberating music seemed to carry as refrain the words of Oregon: "Ride like hell, Carney! Ride like hell!"

And, as if the command were within the buckskin's knowing, he raced where the path was good and where it was bad he scrambled over the stones and shelving rocks and projecting roots with catlike haste.

In Carney's mind was the cave, the

worked-out mine tunnel that drove into the mountainside; the cave that Jack the Wolf had homed in when he murdered the men on the trail; it was two hours beyond. If he could make that he and the buckskin would be safe, for the horse could enter it too.

In the thought of saving his life the buckskin occupied a dual place; that's what Oregon had said; he had no right to jeopardize the gallant little steed that had saved him more than once with fleet heel and stout heart.

He patted the eager, straining neck in front of him, and, though he spoke aloud, his voice was little more in that valley of echo and reverberation than a whisper: "Good Patsy boy, we'll make it. Don't fret yourself tired, old sport; we'll make it—the cave."

The horse seemed to swing his head reassuringly, as though he, too, had in his heart the undying courage that nothing daunted.

Now the invisible cutting dust that had scorched Carney's face had taken visible form; it was like fierce-driven flour. Across the valley the towering hills were blurred shapes. Carney's eyelashes were frozen ridges above his eyes; his breath floated away in little clouds of ice; the buckskin coat of the horse had turned to gray.

Sometimes at the turn of a cliff was a false lull as if the storm had been stayed, and then in twenty yards the doors of the frozen North swung again and icy fingers of death gripped man and beast.

And all the time the white prisms were growing larger; closer objects were being blotted out; the prison walls of ice were coming closer; it was more difficult to breathe; his life blood was growing sluggish; a chill was suggesting indifference—why fight?

The horse's feet were muffled by the ghastly white rug the blizzard was spreading over the earth that the day before had been a cloth of gold; it was like a winding sheet.

Carney could feel the brave little beast falter and lurch as the merciless snow clutched at his legs where it had swirled into billows.

To the man, direction was lost—it was like being above the clouds; but the buckskin held on his way straight and true, fighting, fighting, making the glorious fight that is without fear. To stop, to falter, meant death; the buckskin knew it; but he was tiring.

Carney unslung his picket line, put the loop around his chest below his arms, fastened it to the saddle horn, leaving a play of eight feet, and slipping to the ground, clutched the horse's tail, and patted him on the rump. The buckskin knew; he had checked for five seconds; now he went on again, the weight off his back being a relief.

The change was good; Carney had felt the chill of death creeping over him in the saddle; the deadly chill, the palpitating of the chest that preluded a false warmth that meant the end, the sleep of death. Now the exertion wined his blood; it brought the battling back.

Time, too, like direction, was a haze in the man's mind. Two hours away the cave had been, and surely they had struggled on hour after hour. It scarce mattered; to draw forth his watch and look was a waste of energy, the vital energy that weighed against his death; an ounce of it wasted was folly; just on through the enveloping curtain of that white wall.

Carney had meant to remount the horse when he was warmer, when he himself was tiring; but it would be murder—murder of the little hero that had fought his battles ever since they had been together. The buckskin's flanks were pumping spasmodically, like the sides of a bellows; his withers drooped; his head was low hung; he looked lean and small—scarce mightier than a jack rabbit, knee-deep in the shifting sea of snow.

But the cave must be near. Carney found himself repeating these words: "The cave is near, the cave is near, Patsy; oh, boy—the cave is near." His mind dwelt on the wood that he had left in the cave when he took Jack the Wolf to Bucking Horse; of how cosy it would be with a bright fire going, and the baffled blizzard howling without. Yes, he would make it. Was his life, so full of the wild adventures that he had always won out on, to be blotted by just a snowstorm, just cold?

He took a lofty stand against this. He was possessed of a feeling that it was a combat between the crude elements and his vital force of mental stamina. If he kept up his courage he would win out, as he

always had. It was just Excelsior and Success, just——

There was a swirl of oblivion; he had flown through space and collided with another world; there had been some sort of a gross shock; he was alone, floating through space, and passing through snow-laden clouds. There was a restful exhilaration, such as he had felt once when passing under an anæsthetic—Nirvana.

Then the cold snout of some abnormal creature in these regions of the beyond pressed against his face. Gradually, as though waking from a dream—it was the muzzle of the buckskin nosing him back to consciousness. He struggled painfully to his feet. How heavy his legs were ;at the bottom of them were leaden-soled diver's boots. His brain, not more than half clearing at that, he realized that he and the buckskin had slid from a treacherous shelf of rock, and fallen a dozen feet; the snow, unwittingly kind, catching them in a lap of feathery softness. But for the gallant horse he would have lain there never to rise again of his own volition.

They scrambled back to the trail, he and the little horse, and they were going forward. Oregon's command was working out—"Let the buckskin have his own way."

If they had been out on the prairie undoubtedly they would have gone around in a circle—in fact, Carney once had done so—and the cold would have been more intense, the sweep of the wind more life-sapping; but here in the valleys in places the snow piled deeper; it was like surf rolling up in billows; it took the life force out of man and horse.

Carney was so wearied by the sustained struggle that was like a man battling the waves, half the time beneath the waters, that his flagged senses became atrophied, numbed, scarce tabulating anything but the fact that they still held on toward the cave.

Then he heard a bell. Curious, that. Was it all a dream—or was this the real thing: that he was in a merry party, a sleighing party—that they were going to a ball in a stone palace? He could hear a sleigh bell.

Then he was nice and warm. He stretched himself lazily. It was a dream—he was waking.

When he opened his eyes he saw a fire, and the flickering firelight played on stone walls. Beside the fire was sitting a man; behind him something stamped on the stone floor.

He turned his head and saw the buckskin asleep on his feet with low-hung head.

"How d'you feel, stranger?" the man at the fire asked, rising up and coming to his side.

Carney stared; he was supposed to be back there fighting a blizzard. And now, remembrance coursing with languorous speed through his mind, he was in the cave where he had held Jack the Wolf a prisoner.

He sat up and pondered this with groggy slowness.

"Some horse that, stranger." The man's voice that had sounded thinly sinister had a humanized tone as he said this.

Carney's tongue was dry, puckered from the lowered vitality. He tried to answer, and the man, noting this, said:

"Take your time, mister. You're makin' the grade all right, all right. I knowed you was just asleep. Try this dope."

He poured some hot tea into a tin cup. It braced the tired Carney: it was like oil on the dry bearings of a delicate machine.

"Some April shower," the man said, piling wood on the fire. "I heerd a horse neigh—it was kind of a squeal, and my bronc havin' drifted out to sea ahead of this damn' gale, I thinks he's come back. I heerd his bell, and I makes a fight with ol' white whiskers—'twan't more'n 'bout ten yards at that—and there's that danged rat of yours, and he won't come in to the warm 'cause you'd got pinned agin' a bowlder and snow; he seemed to know that if he pulled too hard he'd break your danged neck. Then we got you in—that's all. Some horse!"

This and the warmth and the tonic tea brought Carney up to date. He held out his hand.

But a curious metamorphosis in the man startled Carney. He turned surlily to shake up the fire, throwing over his shoulder:

"I ain't done nothin'; you've got to thank that little jack rabbit fer pullin' you through. I went out after my own bronc."

"But ain't I all right, stranger?" Carney asked gently, for he had met many men in the waste places with just this curious antipathy to an unknown. Oregon was like that. Men living in the wide outside became like outcast buffalo bulls, in their su-

persensitiveness—every man was an enemy till he proved himself.

The man straightened up, and his eyes that were set too close together each side of the finlike nose, rested on Carney in a squinting look of distrust.

"I ain't never knowed but one man was *all right,* and the Mounted Police hounded him till he give up." The cave man turned the stem of the pipe he had been smoking toward the horse. "That buckskin with the mule ears belongs to Bulldog Carney. Are you him, or are you a hawse thief?"

"How do you know the horse?"

"I got reason a-plenty to know him. He cleaned me out in Walla-Walla when he beat Clatawa; and I guess you're the racin' shark that cold decked us boys with this ringer."

Now Bulldog knew the why of the aversion.

"I'm Carney," he admitted; "but it was the gamblers put up the job; I just beat them out."

"Where d'you come from now?" the cave man asked.

"Bailey's Ferry," Carney answered in oblique precaution. He noticed that the other hung with peculiar intensity on his answer.

"How long was you fightin' that blizzard?"

"Since daylight—when I broke camp." Carney looked at his watch; it was three o'clock. "How long have I been here?"

"A couple of hours. Was you runnin' booze or hop, Bulldog?"

Carney started. Perhaps the cave man was conveying a covert threat, an intimation that he might inform on him.

"Don't let's talk shop," he answered.

"I ain't got no sore spots on my hide," the other sneered; "I'm an ord'nary damn fool of a gold chaser, and I've been up in the Eagle Hills trailin' a ledge of auriferous quartz that's buck-jumpin' acrost the mountains so damn' fast I never got a chanct to rope it. I'd 'a' stuck her out if the chuck hadn't petered. When I'd just got enough sour belly to see me to the outside I pulled my freight. That's me, Goldbug Dave."

The other's statement flashed into Carney's mind a sudden disturbing thought—*food!* He himself had about one day's supply—had he it? He turned to his dunnage and saddle that lay where they had been tossed by the cave man when he had stripped them from the horse. His bacon and bannock were gone!

Wheeling, he asked: "Did you see anything of my grub?"

"All that was on your bronc is there, Bulldog. I don't rob no man's cache. And all I got's here." He held up in one hand a slab of bacon, about four pounds in weight, and in the other a drill bag, in its bottom a round bulge of flour the size of a cocoanut. "That's got to get me to Bailey's Ferry," he added as he dropped them back at the head of his blankets.

A subconscious presentiment of trouble caused Carney, through force of habit, to caress the place where his gun should have been—the pigskin pocket was empty.

The other man bared his teeth; it was like the quiver of a wolf's lip. "Your gat must've kicked out back there in the snow; I see it was gone."

Bulldog knew this was a lie; he knew the cave man had taken his gun. He ran his eye over his host's physical exhibit—when the time came he would get his gun back or appropriate the one so in evidence in the other's belt. He went back to his dunnage, a thought of the buckskin in his mind; to his joy, he found the horse's oats safe in the bag. This fastened the idea he had that the other had stolen his food, for his bacon and bannock had been in the same bag; they could hardly have worked out and the oats remain.

He sat down again, and mentally arranged the situation. He could hear outside the blizzard still raging; he could see in the opening the swirling snow that indeed had gradually raised a barrier, a white gate to their chamber. This kept the intense cold out, a cold that was at least fifty below zero. The snow would lie in the valleys through which the trail wound twenty feet deep in places. They had no snowshoes; he had no food; and Goldbug Dave's store was only sufficient for a week, with two men eating it.

He knew that there was something in Dave's mind; either a bargain, or a fight for the food. They might be imprisoned for a month; a chinook wind might come up the next day, or the day following, that would melt the snow with its soft, warm kiss like rain washes a street.

Carney was not hungry; the strain had left him fagged—he was hungry only for

rest; and the buckskin, he knew, felt the same desire.

He lay down, and had slept two hours when he was wakened by the sweet perfume of frying pork.

Casually he noticed that but one slice of bacon lay in the pan. He watched the cook turn it over and over with the point of his hunting knife, cooking it slowly, economically, hoarding every drop of its vital fat. When the bacon was cooked the chef lifted it out on the point of his knife and stirred some flour into the gravy, adding water, preparing that delicacy of the trail known as slumgullion.

Dave withdrew the pan and let it rest on the stone floor just beside the fire; then he looked across at Carney, and, catching the gray of his opened eyes, worded the foreboding thought that had been in Carney's mind before he fell asleep.

"I ain't got no call to give you a showdown on this, Bulldog, but I'm goin' to. When I snaked you in here, that didn't cost me nothin'; anyways, you was down and out for the count. Now you've come back, it ain't up to me to throw my chanct away by declarin' you in on this grub: I'd be a damn fool to do it—I'd be just playin' agin' myself."

Then he spat in the fire and held the pan over its blaze to warm the slimy mixture.

Carney remained silent, and his host, as if making out a case for himself, continued: "We may be bottled up here for a week or a month. Two men ain't got no chanct on that grub pile, no chanct."

"Why don't you eat it then?" And Carney sat up.

"I could, 'cause it's mine; but I got a proposition to make—you can take it or leave it."

"Spit it out."

"It's just this"—the fox eyes shifted uneasily to the little buckskin, and then back to Carney's face—"I'll share this grub if, when it's gone, you cut in with the bronc."

Carney shivered at this, inwardly; facially, he didn't twitch an eye; his features were as immobile as though he had just filled a royal flush. The proposition sounded as cold-blooded as if the other man had asked him to slit the throat of a brother for a cannibalistic orgy.

"It's only ord'nary hawse sense," Dave added when Carney did not speak. "Kept in the snow, that heat'd last us a month. Feelin's don't count when a man's playin' fer his life, and that's what we're doin'."

"I dont dispute the sense of your proposition, my kind friend," Carney said in a well-mastered voice: "I'm not hungry just now, and I'll think it over. I've got a sneaking regard for the little buckskin, but, of course, if I don't get out he'd starve to death anyway."

"Take your time," and the owner of the pan pulled it between his legs, ate the slab of bacon, and with a tin spoon lapped up the glutinous mess.

Carney watched this performance, smothering the anger and hunger that were now battling in him. It was a one-sided argument; the other man had a gun, and Carney knew that he would use it the minute his store of provisions were gone—perhaps before that. And Carney was determined to make the discussion more equitable. Once he could put a hand on the dictator, the lop-sided argument would true itself up. As to killing the little buckskin that had saved his life—bah! The very idea of it made his fingers twitch for a grasp of the other's windpipe.

For a long time Carney sat moodily turning over in his mind something; and the other man, having lighted his pipe, sat back against the wall of the cave smoking.

At last Carney spoke. "There's a way out of this."

"Yes, if a chinook blows up Kettlebelly Valley—there ain't no other way. The manna days is all gone by."

"There's another way. This is an old worked-out mine we're in, the Lost Ledge Mine."

"She's worked out, right enough. There never was nothin' but a few stringers of gold—they soon petered out."

"When the men who were working this mine pulled out they left a lot of heavy truck behind," Carney continued. "There's a forge, coal, tools, and, what I'm thinking of, half a dozen sets of horse snowshoes back there. I could put a set of those snowshoes on the buckskin and make Bucking Horse in three or four days. He wore them down in the Cœur d'Alenes."

"If you had the grub," Dave snapped. "Where're you goin' to get that?"

"Half of what you've got would keep me up that long on short rations."

"And what about me—where do I come in on givin' you half my grub?"

"The other half would keep you alive till I could bring a rescue party on snowshoes and dog train."

Dave sucked at his pipe, pondering this proposition in silence; then he said, as if having made up his mind to do a generous act: "I'll cut the cards with you—your bronc agin' half my chuck. If you win you can try this fool trick; if I win the bronc is mine to do the same thing, or use him to keep us both alive till a chinook blows up."

From an inside pocket of his coat he brought forth a pack of cards, and slid them apart, fan-shaped, on the corner of his blanket.

Carney was almost startled into a betrayal. On the backs of the cards winged *seven blue doves*. It was the pack that had been stolen from Seth Long's pocket, and the man that sat behind them was the murderer of Seth Long, Carney knew. Yes, it was the same pack; there was the same slight variation of the wings. In a second Carney had mastered himself.

"I guess it's fair," he said hesitatingly: "let me think it over—I'm fond of that little cuss, but I guess a man's life comes first."

He sat looking into the fire thinking, and if Dave had been a mind reader the gun in his belt would have covered Carney, for the latter was thinking: "There are three aces in that pack and the fourth is in my pocket."

Then he spoke, shifting closer to the blanket on which the other sat:

"I'll cut!"

"Draw a card, then," Dave commanded, touching the strung-out pack.

Carney could see the acute-angled wings of the middle dove on a card; he turned it up—it was the ace of diamonds.

"Some draw!" Dave declared. Then he deftly flipped over the ace of spades, adding: "Horse and horse, Bulldog. Draw again."

"Shuffle and spread-eagle them again, for luck," Carney suggested.

Dave gathered the cards, gave them a riffle, and swept them along the blanket in a tenuous stream.

Carney edged closer to the ribbon of blue-dove cards; and the owner of them, a sneer on his lips, craned his head and shoulders forward in a gambler's eagerness.

Intensity, too, seemed to claim Bulldog; he rested his elbows on his knees and scanned the cards as if he hesitated over the risk. There, a little to the right, he discovered the third ace, the only one in the pack. If he turned that Dave could not tie him again. He knew that the minute he turned over that card the cave man would know that he had been double-crossed in his sure thing; his gun would be thrust into Carney's face; perhaps—once a killer always a killer—he would not hesitate, but would kill.

So Carney let his right hand hover carelessly a little beyond the ace, while his left crept closer to Dave's right wrist.

"Why don't you draw your card?" Dave snarled. "What're you——"

Carney's right hand flopped over the ace of clubs, and in the same split second his left closed like the jaws of a vise on Dave's wrist.

"Turn over a card with your left hand, quick!" he commanded.

Dave, as if in the act of obeying, reached for his gun with the left hand, but a twist of the imprisoned wrist, almost tearing his arm from the shoulder socket, turned him on his back, and his gun was whisked from its pigskin pocket by Carney.

Then Bulldog released the wrist and commanded: "Draw that card, quick, or I'll plug you; then we'll talk!"

Sullenly the other turned the card: as if in mockery, it was a jack.

"You lose," Carney declared. "Now sit back there against the wall."

Cursing Bulldog for a cold-deck sharp, the other sullenly obeyed.

Then Carney turned up the end of Dave's blanket, and found, as he knew he should, Hadley's plethoric wallet, and his own six-gun. This proceeding had hushed the other man's profane denunciation. His eyes held a foreboding look.

Carney stepped back to the fire, saying: "You're Tacoma Jack—you're the man that staked Seth Long to this marked pack." He drew from his pocket the ace of hearts and held it up to Tacoma's astonished view. "Here's the missing ace."

He put it back in his pocket and resumed: "That was to rob Hadley, when you found he was leaving the money in Seth's strong-box while he went with you up into the hills to look at a mine that

didn't exist. If he had taken the money with him he would have been killed instead of Seth. When the game was over that night, Seth signaled you with a lamp in the window, and when you went in to settle with him the sight of the money was too much, and you plugged him."

"It's a damn' lie! I was up in the mountains and don't know nothin' about it."

"You were standing at that back window of the police shack when Seth and Hadley were playing alone, and when you shot Seth you were smooth enough not to open the front door for fear some one might be coming and see you, but jumped from the back window."

Carney took from his pocket the paper templet he had made of the tracks in the mud.

"I see from the soles of your gum-shoe packs that this gets you." He held it up.

"It's all a damned pack of lies, Bulldog; you've been chewin' your own hop. Who's goin' to swaller that guff?"

Carney had expected this. He knew Tacoma was of the determined, one-idea type; lacking absolute eye-witness evidence, he would deny complicity even with a rope around his neck. He realized that with the valley lying twenty feet deep in snow he couldn't take Tacoma to Bucking Horse; in fact, with him that was not the real desired point. If Carney had been a Mounted Policeman, the honor of the force would have demanded that he give up his life trying to land his prisoner; but he was a private individual, trying to keep clean the name of a woman he had a high regard for —Jeanette Holt. He wanted a written confession from this man. Bringing in the stolen money and the cards wouldn't be enough: it might be said that he himself had taken these two things and returned them.

Even the punishment of Tacoma didn't interest him vitally. Two thieves had combined to rob a stranger, and over a division of the spoil one had been killed—it was not, vitally, Carney's funeral. Now to gain the confession he stretched a point, saying:

"They believe Seth Long. He says you shot him."

Startled out of his cunning, Tacoma blundered: "That's a damn' lie—Seth's as dead's a herrin'!"

"How do you know, Tacoma?" And Carney smiled.

The other, stunned by his foolish break, spluttered sullenly: "You said so yourself."

"Seth's dead now, Tacoma, but you were in too much of a hurry to make your getaway. Doctor Anderson and I found him alive, and he said that you, Tacoma Jack, shot him. That's why I pulled out on this trail."

The two men sat in silence for a little. Tacoma knew that Carney was driving at something; he knew that Carney could not take him to Bucking Horse with the trail as it was; the buckskin would have all he could do to carry one man, and without huge moose-hunting snowshoes no man could make half a mile of that trail.

Carney broke the silence: "You made a one-sided proposition, Tacoma, when you had the drop on me; now I'm going to deal. I'd take you in if I didn't value the little buckskin more than your carcass; I don't give a damn whether you're hanged or die here. I'm going to cut from that slab of bacon six slices. That'll keep you alive for six days with a little flour I'll leave you. I can make Bucking Horse in three days, at most, with snowshoes on the buckskin; then I'll come back for you with a dog train and a couple of men on snowshoes. You've got a gambling chance; it's like filling a bob-tailed flush—but I'm going to let you draw. If the chinook comes up the valley, kissing this snow, before I get back, you'll get away; I'd give even a wolf a fighting chance. But I've got to clear a good woman's name—get that, Tacoma!" and Carney tapped the cards with a forefinger in emphasis. "You've got to sign a confession here in my notebook that you killed Seth Long."

"I'll see you in hell first! It's a damn' trap—I didn't kill him!"

"As you like. Then you lose your bet on the chinook right now; for I take the money, your gun, your boots, and *all the grub.*"

As Carney with slow deliberation stated the terms Tacoma's heart sank lower and lower as each article of life saving was specified.

"Take your choice, quick!" Carney resumed: "a grub stake for you, and you bet on the chinook if you sign the confession; if you refuse I make a clean-up. You starve to death here, or die on the trail, even if the chinook comes in two or three days."

There was an ominous silence. Carney broke it, saying, a sharp determination in his voice: "Decide quick, for I'm going to hobble you."

Tacoma knew Bulldog's reputation; he knew he was up against it. If Carney took the food—and he would—he had no chance. The alternative was his only hope.

"I'll sign—I got to!" he said surlily; "you write and I'll tell just how it happened."

"You write it yourself—I won't take a chance on you: you'd swear I forged your signature, but a man can't forge a whole letter."

He tossed his notebook and pencil over to the other.

When Tacoma tossed it back with a snarling oath, Carney, keeping one eye on the other man, read it. It was a statement that Seth Long and Tacoma Jack had quarreled over the money; that Seth, being half drunk, had pulled his gun; that Tacoma had seized Seth's hand across the table, and in the struggle Seth had been shot with his own gun.

Carney closed the notebook, and put it in his pocket, saying: "This may be true, Tacoma, or it may not. Personally, I've got what I want. If you're laughing down in your chest that you've put one over on Bulldog Carney, forget it. To keep you from making any fool play that might make me plug you, I'm going to hobble you. When I pull out in the morning I'll turn you loose."

Carney was an artist at twisting a rope securely about a man, and Tacoma, placed in the helpless condition of a swathed babe, Carney proceeded to cook himself a nice little dinner off the latter's bacon. Then he rubbed down the buckskin, melted some snow for a drink for the horse, gave him a feed of oats, and stretched himself on the opposite side of the fire from Tacoma, saying: "You're on your good behavior, for the minute you start anything you lose your bet on the chinook."

In the morning when Carney opened his eyes daylight was streaming in through the cave mouth. He blinked wonderingly; the snow wall that had all but closed the entrance had sagged down like a weary man that had huddled to sleep; and the air that swept in through the opening was soft and balmly, like the gentle breeze of a May day.

Carney rose and pushed his way through the little mound of wet, soggy snow and gazed down the valley. The giant pines that had drooped beneath the weight of their white mantles were now dropping to earth huge masses of snow; the sky above was blue and suffused with gold from a climbing sun. Rocks on the hillside thrust through the white sheet, black, wet, gnarled faces, and in the bottom of the valley the stream was gorged with snow water.

A hundred yards down the trail, where a huge snow bank leaned against a cliff, the head and neck of a horse stood stiff and rigid out of the white mass. About the neck was a leather strap from which hung a cow bell. It was Tacoma's cayuse, frozen stiff, and the bell was the bell that Carney had heard as he was slipping off into dreamland behind the little buckskin.

Carney turned back to where the other man lay, his furtive eyes peeping out from above his blanket—they were like rat eyes.

"You win your bet, Tacoma," Carney said, "the chinook is here."

Tacoma had known; he had smelt it; but he had lain there, fear in his heart that now, when it was possible, Bulldog would take him in to Bucking Horse.

"The bargain stands, don't it, Bulldog?" he asked. "I win on the chinook, don't I?"

"You do, Tacoma. Bulldog Carney's stock in trade is that he keeps his word."

"Yes, I've heerd you was some man, Bulldog. If I'd knew you'd pulled into Buckin' Horse that day, and was in the game, I guess I'd 'a' played my hand dif'rent—p'raps it's kind of lucky for you I didn't know all that when I drug you in out of the blizzard."

Carney waited a day for the snow to melt before the hot chinook. It was just before he left that Tacoma asked, like a boy begging for a bite from an apple:

"Will you give me back them cards, Bulldog—I'd be kind of lost without them when I'm alone if I didn't have 'em to riffle."

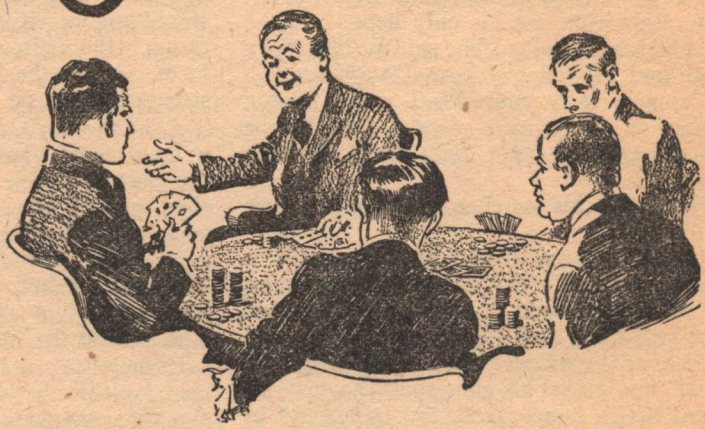
"If I gave you the cards, Tacoma, you'd never make the border; Oregon is waiting down at Bighorn to rope a man with a pack of cards in his pocket that's got seven blue doves on the back; and I'm not going to cold-deck you. After you pass Oregon you take your chances of them getting you."

THE END.

Passing the Buck

by

Lieutenant
Preston
Gibson



BISHOP POTTER told the story of walking along Broadway one evening when a drunken man lurched out of a saloon into his arms. He clutched Bishop Potter and looking into his face exclaimed: "Where in hell have I seen you!"

Potter looked at the man inquisitively and said: "Where in hell do you come from?"

ONE of the men in Colonel Hayward's returned Fifteenth Regiment tells a story of Sergeant Johnson.

The night before they were to make their attack Johnson said to his captain: "Captain, I would like to know if I could take my razor with me over de top in de morning." The captain smiled and replied: "You can take anything over with you that you think will do you any good."

Johnson spent a good part of the evening, so the story goes, sharpening his razor and in the morning, over they went. He had not gone very far when he encountered a huge German who lunged at him with his bayonet. Johnson stepped to one side and slashed the German with his small blade. The German fell from the effect of the blow and saw the small knife in Johnson's hand. He smiled and said: "You don't expect to hurt anybody with that little penknife, do you?" Johnson looked at him wisely and replied: "Man, you jest try to turn yo' head."

MRS. DALY had one of the few hospitals which was attached to a division, hers being attached to the twenty-first division of the French army. The rules are quite strict about girls coming out to see men who are wounded, so that wives and sweethearts constantly use every means to get out to the front to see their loved ones.

On this particular day a very pretty and attractive girl had arranged to come through the army zone into the war zone and was up near the lines. She approached the quietly constructed hospital which Mrs. Daly and her unit were in, and, opening the door, she met Mrs. Daly, who said: "Young lady, where are you going?" She replied: "I am going in to see Lieutenant Smith who is wounded." Whereupon Mrs. Daly said: "Don't you know we do not allow people in the hospital unless they have a very good reason?" "I have a perfectly good reason," replied the girl," smilingly. "I want to see Lieutenant Smith because I am his sister." "I am delighted to meet you," said Mrs. Daly, extending her hand, "I am his mother."

SAMUEL BLYTHE, one of the best-known journalists in America, was seated at a table in a certain club, when a man who always wanted to meet him strolled in, in somewhat of a daze and sat down at the table where Blythe and a few other men were seated, opposite Blythe. Each one knew the other perfectly but the man who had come in. He leaned across the table and said: "Your name is Blythe, isn't it?" Whereupon Blythe said: "Yes." "I have heard and read a good deal about you," said the man, "and the only thing I don't like about you are your ears." "What's the matter with them?" asked Mr. Blythe indifferently. "They stick out too far from your head," replied the newcomer, "they are kind of horizontal." Blythe leaned forward and said: "Your name is Mr. Smith, isn't it?" The man nodded. "Yes." "Well, I have heard a lot about you, said Mr. Blythe, "but there is only one thing I really ever liked about you." "What is that?" asked the other. "Your ears," said the genial Sam. "Why do you like them?" asked Mr. Smith. "Because," said Mr. Blythe, "they are perpendicular just like any other donkey's."

IN Savannah two negroes were caught in the draft and one was promptly sent off to camp. The other, however, was enabled to stay around Atlanta and enjoy himself. A month or so later, the first colored gentleman came to Atlanta and was promptly arrested for killing the other man, who was his best friend. The judge asked him what the trouble was. "Well, your honor, it was dis way. I introduced Jim Johnson to my gal and he began to go around with her. Well, I didn't mind that so much, and I didn't mind his dancing with her at the party, but, judge, you see I was caught in the draft and last night at a dance I just could not stand seeing that nigger fannin' my gal with his exemption card."

PRESTON GIBSON was speaking for the marines in Pittsburgh when a man called out from the crowd, and said: "Who is the kaiser, is he William the First, William the Second, or William the Third?"

Whereupon Gibson replied: "I don't know whether he is William the First, William the Second, or William the Third, but I am perfectly positive that he is William the last."

THE secretary of the navy at New Haven, a short while ago, told a story in connection with the sale of Liberty Bonds. He said that an old negro preacher had been requested to ask his congregation to buy bonds. He spoke as follows to them: "Brethern, there am three kinds of bonds, first the bond of slavery, from which we were emancipated, second, the bond of matrimony, which we have to endure, and third, Liberty Bonds, which we must buy."

COLONEL HENRY McDOWELL was very much amused by a journalistic episode which occurred in Lexington, Ky. A certain Charles Turner, a man of some distinction, died. He was the deacon of a church and was often called Deacon Turner, a man regarded as saintly in that community.

He was taken ill and one of the newspapers, being quite up to date, decided to run bulletins concerning his illness. They ran as follows:

10 A. M.—Deacon Turner taken ill.
12 Noon—Deacon Turner very ill.
1 o'Clock—Deacon Turner is dead and has gone to heaven.

About five o'clock in the evening a traveling salesman came along and posted the following sign:

5 P. M.—Great excitement in heaven. Deacon Turner has not yet arrived.

ROBERT HOWARD RUSSELL was looking over some manuscripts with John Fox, Jr. Among the manuscripts received by Mr. Russell was one from Robert Burns Wilson. Mr. Russell read it over and finally threw it into the fire, when John Fox naïvely remarked: "Robert Burns Wilson."

Annulled by Marriage

By Hugh Kennedy

Author of "The Plute and Z-23," Etc.

The title of this tale is no more curious than the events set forth in it

THE parties to the appointment had arrived at the same time. Holman had taken the chair which my office boy had placed for him. Manning, ignoring the adjoining chair, had selected a seat for himself at the opposite side of the room, where Rhoda, with the engaging confidence of twelve, had placed herself between his knees.

Offering but a brief comment on the weather—the sparkling winter weather of southern Alberta—I took from the office vault the file of the Warbin estate, filmed with the dust of time. From it I drew a sealed envelope, broke the seal, and began to read:

"This is the last will and testament of me, Sarah Warbin, spinster, of the town of——"

Spinster? It gave me a start. Sarah Warbin was no spinster. Well I remembered not only her sudden marriage, which had occurred within a month of my own coming to Elbow, but also the ferment of comment and criticism which that unheralded step of the prosaic woman of forty had occasioned—the ferment of indignant sympathy for the long faithful but at last rejected Manning, of amazement at Sarah's acceptance of the derelict Holman, of distrust and suspicion of that returned wanderer himself, who, now her relict, sat before me listening to the reading of her will—listening with a furtive air of unconcern which his greedy, shifting eyes belied.

A probable explanation flashed on me: there would, of course, be a codicil, made after the marriage and confirming the will. I turned quickly to the last page. No; there was no codicil.

Holman, behind his habitual mask of specious friendliness, watched me with greedy, vulpine eyes. Manning, huge, grave, impassive, merely waited. The hand which rested on the arm of his chair gave a little involuntary movement as though to encircle the girl protectingly. No word was spoken by either.

I read on. The will appointed Roger Manning, the lifelong friend and trusted adviser of the testatrix, its executor. All her property, real and personal, it devised to Rhoda Warbin, her only surviving relative and adopted daughter, of whom, for the period of her nonage, it also appointed Manning guardian.

The instrument was drawn in the precise, if slightly redundant, legal phraseology of J. Gordon Illsworth, my predecessor in the only law practice that the small town of Elbow had so far been able to support. As the will of Sarah Warbin, spinster, it was good for probate; but as the will of Sarah Holman, wife of Hector Holman——

I laid the paper down to look again in the envelope. It contained no other writing. The thing was beyond belief. Sarah Warbin had inherited from her father one of the best ranch properties in southern Alberta. She had been known as a prudent manager who had always had the advice of her neighbor and still more prudent manager, Roger Manning. Yet here at the last was the will she had left—a will that the veriest fool might have signed.

"Nothing wrong, is there, cap?"

Coming from Holman, the familiarity angered me. My connection with the One Hundred and Seventh Mid-western Fusiliers made me "cap" to my intimates; but not the three years of my acquaintance with Holman, nor thirty more, could have made him one of them.

"Wrong?" I answered tartly. "The thing is waste paper."

Manning spoke no word, changed no feature. Only, his encircling arm drew the girl closer. She responded to his pressure by a little caress with the hand that lay on his shoulder, while she looked, a little mystified, from one to the other of us.

Holman stirred uneasily in his chair. He still maintained an air of unconcern, but a gleam that I caught in his narrowed eye had the effect of a flash of triumph.

"How so?" he asked, with a blandness that unreasonably increased my irritation.

"An unmarried person's will," I explained curtly, "is rendered void by marriage."

For the first time Manning spoke: "That is a fact which is well known to me. It should be much better known to Hector Holman." He was addressing me directly, as though we were alone. "Before he left Elbow to seek his fortune in larger places he studied law in this office under old Mr. Illsworth."

It was a barbed speech, but Manning delivered it without a trace of heat. He spoke as one who merely wanted to get on with the business in hand.

The shaft took effect. Holman squirmed in his chair. "That was years and years ago," he defended, also addressing me solely. "Besides"—he laughed the little sniggering, propitiatory nasal laugh that was habitual with him—"I read a good deal more romance and adventure than law in this office."

I came between them. "It is possible," I suggested, "that a later will may be found. Had I been consulted——"

Manning shook his head. "It is my belief that no other will was ever made."

I glanced inquiringly at Holman.

"Search me." He shuffled. "It was a point of honor with me never to interfere nor take any interest in my wife's business. You'd think that alone would have silenced the tongues of slanderers and backbiters."

"As to consulting you"—Manning was again addressing me—"it was once her intention to do so. She told me so; for, as you well know, I was in her confidence in all matters of business and property. She had it in mind to alter her will to make provision for her—for the man she married."

"Excellent," I approved. "There could have been no ground for objection to a course so reasonable as that."

"I advised her to that effect," continued Manning. "It is my belief that she was overpersuaded against it."

Holman sprang to his own defense: "If that's a slam at me, it's away off. I told her then, as I told her before I married her, that I wanted no share whatever in her property. I married her"—he laughed again his hateful nasal laugh—"for old times' sake, for what was between us as youth and maid before I left Elbow. Pure sentiment—that was all that was back of it. Property? We neither of us considered that."

For the first time Manning faced him directly. "And she believed you in that, Hector Holman, as she believed your other fair speeches. And I will do you this credit, that it made her happy to believe them. Yet it stands that she left her will unchanged, and left it so at your entreaty and against her own judgment and intention."

A trace of defiance stiffened the other's demeanor. "I don't admit it—not for a minute; but if so, what of it? What would there be in that for me?" He looked to me for his answer.

"Everything," I answered, conscious of an effort to suppress a sneer. "Everything. You get the whole estate."

The man's unwholesome pallor deepened. For a moment I feared he was about to swoon. He forced an incredulous grin. "No—no-o; that can't be right." Involuntarily, he broke out with his nervous giggle. "You're trying to josh me, cap. The girl gets the property, of course. Doesn't the will say so?"

"Under the laws of Alberta," I assured him coldly, "in the case of a married woman dying intestate and childless, her husband, surviving her, takes all. The girl"—I glanced regretfully at the slim, brown-haired creature leaning bewildered and rather awed in the crook of Manning's arm—"the girl, therefore, gets nothing."

Holman fidgeted in his chair. His eye roved toward the door as though he would willingly be gone.

"Well, what do you know about that?" he tittered. "Whadda you know?"

His manner was that of a caged animal, shifty, ravenous, chafing against its bars in the prospect of release to an abundant meal. The man was barely middle-aged, yet he had that shrinking of the tissues which indulgence brings on as surely as do advancing years. He was slight and rather tall, with the figure of one who might have been a graceful dancer in his youth. A general effect of cheapness was emanant from him—an effect to which certain lingering touches of dandyism about his person unpleasantly contributed.

His face was older than his body, with lines that might have been drawn by suffering rebelliously borne, or by appetites too

willingly indulged. A drooping mustache covered an irregular mouth in which a number of gold-crowned teeth flashed disagreeably. The eyes were weak, low-lidded, restless. The confidence and dash of youth might once have made such a man attractive; his only present claim to charm was a habitual air of ingratiating suavity that was exquisitely distasteful to me; and, I believe, to most other men.

Manning took Rhoda's hand in his own. "It appears that you will be a wealthy man, Holman. Your aged mother being gone, you have no one looking to you for support. You say you wanted nothing for yourself. Now that you are to have everything, what will you do for this little girl who was so dear to your wife that she wished her to be her heir? I ask it as one who will still be her guardian, if the court will so order. How much do you think it incumbent on you to do for her?"

Holman had risen. He lifted his arms as though about to yawn, but thought better of the rudeness. "That's something," he evaded, "that we needn't go into now. We're taking up the time of cap here. Go ahead and straighten things out, cap. I'll drop in in a day or two to see how matters are shaping up." He picked up the costly muskrat-lined coat which he had laid on the chair beside him.

The situation was distinctly unpleasant, but without unpleasant situations there would be small work for lawyers. I bowed and rose to open the door for Holman to depart, when Manning again spoke.

"Rhoda, girl," he directed gently, "just run along to Mrs. Marshall's and play with Rita there until I come for you. Wrap yourself up well, child, before you step out into the cold."

When he had closed the door on the departing girl he set his broad back against it. His bulk, his vitality, his air of purpose and resource would have arrested a man of much more resolute character than Holman.

"Lawyer Parkson, wrong has been done." His voice was ringing, but controlled. "If it is not to be undone, at least let you and me be no parties to it. That girl was as dear to Sarah Warbin as ever was child to mother. She died in the belief that Rhoda was her sole heir, well knowing that in that case provision would be made for this man whom she had married—married in middle life for some quality she thought she remembered in him, or out of pity for the distress he had fallen into, or for such other reason as is known only to the heart of a good woman. Her intention has been defeated."

He turned abruptly toward his adversary. "Holman, the voice of your dead wife is calling on you to do right by the child she loved. Come, what do you say? Instruct the lawyer here to draw up the papers."

He spoke simply, but behind his words lay the whole tremendous compelling force of the man. I turned to Holman, confident that he could not resist so just an appeal.

"No service I could render you would give me greater pleasure than that, Mr. Holman," I assured him.

The man shuffled nervously. His eye ran about the room. A trapped rat seeking an opening for escape might have looked so.

"Oh, shucks!" he burst out suddenly. "I'm tired. I've had enough for to-day." He laughed his hateful little nervous laugh again. "I'm going to beat it."

He took an uncertain step toward the door. Manning promptly stepped aside, leaving the way clear.

"You are not going," he said. Quietly, evenly spoken, the words were like an iron bar laid across the exit.

Holman stood. "Not going?" he blustered. "Not going? Well, I like that!"

Ignoring him, Manning turned deliberately to me. "I hope you will excuse me, Mr. Parkson, for taking this liberty in your office. My reason for it I shall try to make clear to you presently."

I had no inkling of his intention. Neither, apparently, had Holman, who still stood, half defiant, half cowering, near the door.

"A cruel wrong has been done," Manning went on, "and if it please God it shall be righted before we leave this place to-day. Sarah Warbin was robbed of the things that were dearest to her heart—the making of a home and the rearing of children—because in her youth her fancy was taken by a light man, and it was not in her nature to turn to another when once her heart had been given."

The simple words, I knew, were the brief compend of his own heart's long destitution; yet his voice did not tremble. It was not of his own hurt that he was thinking. He kept himself well in hand.

I forced my mind to the present issue. "The law is clear, Mr. Manning," I warned him. "If Mr. Holman persists in standing on his legal rights, I know of nothing to prevent him."

"I do.

"Here are papers," he said, "to prevent him. In my opinion, subject to your correction, Lawyer Parkson, they make the will of Sarah Warbin, spinster, a sound and valid will."

I put out my hand for them. "In that case," I began.

"One moment," he interrupted. "You will witness, Mr. Parkson, that I have given Hector Holman his chance. If he had met me in a spirit of concession, not to speak of liberality, it was in my mind to burn these papers. Now he shall drink of his own filthy medicine; and may he relish the dregs."

He made choice of some documents from his envelope. "I believe it is generally supposed in Elbow that I spent the greater part of last winter, like any other prairie tourist, in idleness on the Pacific coast. That is the impression I wished to give. Here is the record of the cities I actually did visit, and of the business I transacted in them."

He proceeded to lay on my desk one folded typewritten document after another. As he put each one down he distinguished it by pronouncing the name of a well-known city: "Victoria — Vancouver — Seattle — Butte —San Francisco." Each name might have been a bomb hurled with improving aim at Holman crouching behind a crumbling shelter. "Confidential reports," concluded Manning, "by the Occidental Detective Agency on Hector Holman, gambler, profligate, consorter with lewd women"—after a pause—"bigamist!"

Manning fingered his papers, selected one, and handed it to me. "Marriage Certificate," it was endorsed, "of Hector Holman and Luella Ruby Spence; Duplicate."

"What now," he asked, "is your opinion, Lawyer Parkson, of the will of Sarah Warbin, spinster?"

I considered how best to rob my answer of its sting. "It is a delicate thing to say of our good and respected townswoman; but if, as it appears, her marriage was no real marriage, and she, however blameless, was no real wife, the law is clear: the will must stand, and Rhoda Warbin will still inherit."

"I am glad to have you confirm what I had already worked out in my own mind. And what"—he turned toward Holman with a browbeating manner—"what is the penalty of the law for a bigamist?"

Holman came back with a snarl. "Aw, forget that, you big stiff. D'you think I hadn't got all that worked out before I risked it? You've got the goods on me and the will stands. That's what you wanted all along, so you can wheedle the money out of the girl when you get her under your thumb. But don't try to bluff me that you will drag Sarah Warbin's memory through the dirt of a bigamy trial."

"Evil has been done," Manning said obstinately; "the guilty must be punished. Shame has been brought to an honorable house; the miscreant must not go free."

It was a surprising attitude for him to take. I was disappointed in him. Perhaps I had overestimated his bigness and breadth.

"It will be mightily unpleasant," I counseled him. "Is there no other way, nothing that would satisfy you, short of criminal proceedings?"

"Nothing!" He raised his clenched hand in a gesture that in him, ordinarily so controlled, had a touch of insincerity, of theatricalism. "Absolutely nothing. Unless"—he paused in a seeming struggle with some concession that had presented itself to him —"unless—— No; the evil shadow of this man has been on Sarah Warbin's whole life, and, God help me, on mine. I could not trust him to let her sleep in peace if I were gone. He must renounce, here and now, all his rights, present or future, in her property, or I will press him"—again the raised fist—"to the extremity of the law. That is my last word."

I cast about in my mind for some argument to move him. This threatened scandal must be averted. In vain. His tight-pressed lips and outthrust jaw were beyond my powers of persuasion.

I turned to Holman as to more pliable material. "It doesn't seem much to give up, Holman," I advised, "seeing that the law is already against you on every count. You have every right to consult your own solicitor before agreeing, but I am afraid that there is nothing he can do for you. What do you say?"

He laid down the great-coat which he had been carrying on his arm and drew up a chair to my desk. A gleam of cunning,

of avarice, of returning confidence, lit up his pallid face.

"What do I want to go and do that for?" he demanded. "If he's got me, he's got me. If he wants to go the limit, I can't hinder him, I suppose. But if I do this thing he asks—and mind, I don't say I'm going to do it—there's got to be something in it for me. What do I get out of it?"

It took the matter out of my hands. I waited for Manning. He had turned to the window, before the frosted double panes of which he seemed to ponder. He was slow to respond.

"The man," he said guardedly at last, "whom Sarah Warbin esteemed her husband shall not go needy. Provided he will go away and never return again to this place, I will allow him one thousand dollars a year. The girl, when she comes of age, will willingly repay me from her estate. It is a weak and yielding thing to do, but I will do it."

My stenographer was in the outer office, but I felt that the matter was not one for the eyes of a fourth party. I drew a sheet toward me and commenced to prepare an instrument of renunciation. While my pen scratched over the paper the two men sat wordless, Manning again impassive, Holman shifting and restless, according to his nervous habit. A hint of rebellion hardened his irresolute mouth when the moment came for him to sign.

"What if I don't do this?" he asked truculently. "A thousand a year ain't crap money for a newsboy. It wasn't for any punk hand-out like that I burrowed for three years in this forsaken gopher hole of an Elbow. If it's blackmail you're after, you jay-walking property sharks, theres' two can play at that game. If you——"

He had time to work up his rage no further. Suddenly Manning stood over him, his mighty frame swelling with a passion of contempt.

"Sign!" he thundered, pointing an imperative finger. "Sign there!"

They faced each other for a tense moment. After all, the thing had reduced itself to a primitive clash of their opposed wills. They glared at each other, speaking no further word; none was needed. But the advantage lay all with Manning—health, vitality, the habit of command, the confidence of rectitude.

The weaker yielded. "You think you're a hell of a man, Rodge Manning," and as he signed he sniggered again his fatuous nasal laugh. "How soon do I get the money?"

"How soon," countered Manning, "can you go?"

"To-night, if that's soon enough."

"To-night, then, be it."

"Poor, broken devil!' I could not help saying when I had closed the door on the departed Holman.

"Yes," sighed Manning, as he returned to their envelope the papers he had laid on my desk. His voice had lost its ring. He seemed weary. The interview had taxed even strength so vast as his. "Yes; poor, and broken, and—a devil! You have not yet taken the full measure of his baseness." He thumbed his documents. "I have one other paper here, Lawyer Parkson, which I wish you to see. I value your good opinion, and this may explain such of my actions as may have seemed harsh or unaccountable to you here this day."

I read the document that he proffered. I reread it. It was the death certificate of Luella Ruby Holman, wife of Hector Holman. It was dated at Butte, Montana; and the date was four years old—one year earlier than the marriage of Holman and Sarah.

I gasped on it. "Then the marriage certificate—then you were bluffing about bigamy!"

"It is against my nature to pretend, but I did my duty as I saw it."

"And so Holman was actually free!" I was still breathless with the marvel of it. "The marriage was legal after all. The will is void. Rhoda does not inherit under it."

"All true," he agreed, "except that Rhoda does inherit. As sole surviving next of kin, now that Holman has renounced, where would you say she stands under the laws of intestacy?"

Then I saw it. Helpless to protect the woman he loved during her life, threatened with the defeat of her wishes after her death, he had yet found a way to twist even the law to his purpose and to arrive at justice to the living while obeying the behests of the dead. I held out my hand.

He grasped it, crushed it, his face averted. "I'll be going," he said thickly. "Little Rhoda—she'll be waiting."

Burned Bridges

By Bertrand W. Sinclair

Author of "North of Fifty-three," "Big Timber," Etc.

(*A Four-Part Story—Part Four*)

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE FUSE——

IT was in this period that certain phases of the war began to shake the foundation of things. I do not recall who said that an army marches on its stomach, but it is true, and it is no less a verity that nations function primarily on food. The submarine was waxing to its zenith now, and Europe saw the gaunt wolf at its door. Men cried for more ships. Cost became secondary. A vessel paid for herself if she landed but two cargoes in an Allied port.

Every demand in the economic field produces a supply. On this side of the Atlantic great shipbuilding plants arose by some superior magic of construction in ports where the building of ships had been a minor industry. In this Vancouver did not lag. Wooden ships could be built quickly. Virgin forests of fir and cedar stood at Vancouver's very door. Wherefore yards, capable of turning out a three-thousand-ton wooden schooner in ninety days, rose on tidewater and an army of labor sawed and hammered and shaped to the ultimate confusion of the Hun.

Thompson had seen these yards in the distance. He read newspapers, and he knew that local shipbuilding was playing the dual purpose of confounding the enemy and adding a huge pay roll to Vancouver's other material advantages. Both of which were highly desirable.

But few details of this came personally to his attention until an evening when he happened to forgather with Tommy Ashe and two or three others at Carr's home—upon one of those rare evenings when Sophie was free of her self-imposed duties and in a mood to play the hostess.

They had dined, and were gathered upon a wide veranda watching the sun sink behind the rampart of Vancouver Island in a futuristic riot of yellow and red that died at last to an afterglow which lingered on the mountaintops like a benediction. A bit of the gulf opened to them, steel-gray, mirror-smooth, more like a placid, hill-ringed lake than the troubled sea.

But there was more in the eye's cast than beauty of sea and sky and setting sun. From their seats they could look down on the curious jumble of long sheds and giant scaffolding that was the great Coughlan steel shipyard in False Creek. Farther distant, on the North Shore, there was the yellowish smudge of what a keen vision discerned to be six wooden schooners in a row, sister ships in varying stages of construction.

Some one said something about wooden shipbuilding.

"There's another big yard starting on the North Shore," Sophie said. "One of our committee was telling me to-day. Her husband has something to do with it."

"Yes. I can verify that," Tommy Ashe smiled. "That's my contribution—the Vancouver Construction Company. I organized it. We have contracted to supply the imperial munitions board with ten auxiliary schooners, three thousand tons burden each."

The fourth man of the party, the lean, suave, enterprising head of a local trust company, nodded approval, eying Tommy with new interest.

"Good business," he commented. "We've got to beat those U-boats."

"Yes," Tommy agreed, "and until the admiralty devises some effectual method of coping with them, the only way we can beat the subs is to build ships faster than they can sink them. It's quite some undertaking, but it has to be done. If we fail to keep supplies pouring into England and France, well——"

He spread his hands in an expressive gesture. Tommy was that type of Englishman in which rugged health and some genera-

tions of breeding and education have combined to produce what Europe calls a "gentleman." He was above middle height, very stoutly and squarely built, ruddy faced—the sort of man one may safely prophecy will acquire a paunch and double chin with middle age. But Tommy was young and vigorous yet. He looked very capable, almost aggressive, as he sat there speaking with the surety of patriotic conviction.

"We're all in it now," he said simply. "It's no longer our army and navy against their army and navy and the rest of us looking on from the side lines. It's our complete material resources and man-power against their complete resources and man-power. If *they* win, the world won't be worth living in for the Anglo-Saxon. So we've got to beat them. Every man's job from now on is going to be either fighting or working. We've got to have ships. I'm organizing that yard to work top speed. I'm trying to set a pace. Watch us on the North Shore. The man in the trenches won't say we didn't back him up."

It sounded well. To Thompson it gave a feeling of dissatisfaction, which was nowise lessened by the momentary gleam in Sophie's eyes as they rested briefly on Tommy and passed casually to him—and beyond.

He was growing slowly to understand that the war had somehow—in a fashion beyond his comprehension—bitten deep into Sophie Carr's soul. She thought about it, if she seldom talked. What was perhaps more vital, she *felt* about it with an intensity Thompson could not fathom, because he had not experienced such feeling himself. He only divined this. Sophie never paraded either her thoughts or her feelings. And divining this uneasily, he foresaw a shortening of his stature in her eyes by comparison with Tommy Ashe—who had become a doer, a creator in the common need, while *he* remained a gleaner in the field of self-interest. Thompson rather resented that imputation. Privately, he considered Tommy's speech a trifle grandiloquent. He began to think he had underestimated Tommy, in more ways than one.

Nor did he fail to wonder at the dry smile that hovered about Sam Carr's lips until that worthy old gentleman put his hand over his mouth to hide it, while his shrewd old eyes twinkled with inner amusement. There was something more than amusement, too. If Wes Thompson had not known that Sam Carr liked Tommy, rather admired his push and ability to hold his own in the general scramble, he would have said Carr's smile and eyes tinged the amusement with something like contempt.

That puzzled Thompson. The Dominion, as well as the Empire, was slowly formulating the war doctrine that men must either fight or work. Tommy, with his executive ability, his enthusiasm, was plunging into a needed work. Tommy had a right to feel that he was doing a big thing. Thompson granted him that. Why, then, should Carr look at him like that?"

He was still recurring to that when he drove downtown with Tommy later in the evening. He was not surprised that Tommy sauntered into his rooms after putting up his machine. He had been in the habit of doing that until lately, and Thompson knew now that Tommy must have been very busy on that shipyard organization. It had been easy for them to drop into the old intimacy which had grown up between them on that hard, long trail between Lone Moose and the Stikine. They had a lot of common ground to meet on besides that.

This night Tommy had something on his mind besides casual conversation. He wasted little time in preliminaries.

"Would you be interested in taking over my car agencies on a percentage basis, Wes?" he asked point-blank, when he had settled himself in a chair with a cigar in his mouth. "I have worked up a good business with the Standard and the Petit Six. I don't like to let it go altogether. I shall have to devote all my time to the ship plant. That looms biggest on the horizon. But I want to hold these agencies as an anchor to windward. You could run both places without either suffering, I'm confident. I'll make you a good proposition."

Thompson reflected a minute.

"What is your proposition?" he asked at length. "I dare say I could handle it. But I can't commit myself offhand."

"Of course not," Tommy agreed. "You can go over my books from the beginning, and see for yourself what the business amounts to. I'd be willing to allow you seventy-five per cent of the net. Based on last year's business, you should clear twelve thousand per annum. Sales are on the up. You might double that. I would hold an

option of taking over the business on ninety days' notice."

"It sounds all right," Thompson admitted. "I'll look into it."

"I want quick action," Tommy declared. "Say, to-morrow you arrange for some certified accountant to go over my books and make out a balance sheet. I'll pay his fee. I'm anxious to be free to work on the ship end."

"All right. I'll do that. We can arrange the details later if I decide to take you up," Thompson said.

Tommy stretched his arms and yawned.

"By Jove," said he, "I'm going to be the busiest thing on wheels for a while. It's no joke running a big show."

"I didn't know you were a shipbuilder," Thompson commented.

"I'm not," Tommy admited, stifling another yawn. "But I can hire 'em—both brains and labor. The main thing is I've got the contracts. That's the chief item in this war business. The rest is chiefly a matter of business judgment. It's something of a jump, I'll admit, but I can negotiate it, all right."

"As a matter of fact," he continued presently, and with a highly self-satisfied note in his voice, "apart from the executive work, it's what the Americans call a lead-pipe cinch. We can't lose. I've been fishing for this quite a while, and I put it over by getting in touch with the right people. It's wonderful what you can do in the proper quarter. The Vancouver Construction Company consists of Joe Hedley and myself. Joe is a very clever chap. Has influential people, too. We have contracts with the I. M. B. calling for ten schooners estimated to cost three hundred thousand dollars per. We finance the construction, but we don't really risk a penny. The contracts are on a basis of cost, plus ten per cent. You see? If we go above or under the estimate it doesn't matter much. Our profit is fixed. The main consideration is speed. The only thing we can be penalized for is failure to launch and deliver within specified dates."

Thompson did a rough bit of mental figuring.

"I should say it was a cinch," he remarked dryly. "Nobody can accuse you of profiteering. Yet your undertaking will be both patriotic and profitable. I suppose you had no trouble financing a thing like that?"

"I should say not. The banks," Tommy replied with cynical emphasis, "would fall over themselves to get their finger in our pie. But they won't. Hedley and I have some money. Sam Carr is letting us have fifty thousand dollars at seven per cent. No bank is going to charge like the Old Guard at Waterloo on overdrafts and advances—and dictate to us besides. I'm too wise for that. I'm not in the game for my health. I see a big lump of money, and I'm after it."

"I suppose we all are," Thompson reflected absently.

"Certainly," Tommy responded promptly. "And we'd be suckers if we weren't."

He took a puff or two at his cigar, and rose.

"Run over to the plant on the North Shore with me to-morrow if you have the time. We'll give it the once over, and take a look at the Wallace yard, too. They're starting on steel tramps there now. I'm going over about two o'clock. Will you?"

"Sure. I'll take time," Thompson agreed.

"Come down to MacFee's wharf and go over with me on the *Alert*," Tommy went on. "That's the quickest and easiest way to cross the Inlet. Two o'clock. Well, I'm off to bed. Good night, old man."

"Good night."

The hall door clicked behind Ashe. Thompson sat deep in thought for a long time. Then he fished a note pad out of a drawer and began penciling figures.

Ten times three hundred thousand was three million. Ten per cent on three million was three hundred thousand dollars. And no chance to lose. The ten per cent on construction cost was guaranteed by the imperial munitions board, behind which stood the British Empire.

Didn't Tommy say the ten schooners were to be completed in eight months? Then in eight months Tommy Ashe was going to be approximately one hundred and fifty thousand dollars richer.

Thompson wondered if that was why Sam Carr looked at Tommy with that ambiguous expression when Tommy was chanting his work-or-fight philosophy. Carr knew the ins and outs of the deal if he were loaning money on it.

And Thompson did not like to think he had read Carr's look aright, because he was uncomfortably aware that he, Wes Thomp-

son, was following pretty much in Ashe's footsteps, only on a smaller scale.

He tore the figured sheet into little strips, and went to bed.

CHAPTER XXIV.

—AND THE MATCH THAT LIT THE FUSE—

At a minute or two of ten the next morning Thompson stopped his car before the Canadian Bank of Commerce. The bolt-studded doors were still closed, and so he kept his seat behind the steering column, glancing idly along Hastings at the traffic that flowed about the gray stone pile of the post office, while he waited the bank's opening for business.

A tall young man, a bit paler-faced, perhaps, than a normal young fellow should be, but otherwise a fine-looking specimen of manhood, sauntered slowly around the corner of the bank, and came to a stop on the curb just abreast the fore end of Thompson's motor. He took out a cigarette and lighted it with slow, deliberate motions. And as he stood there gazing with a detached, impersonal air at the front of the Summit roadster there approached him a recruiting sergeant.

"How about joining up this morning?" he inquired briskly.

"Oh, I don't know," the young man responded casually. "I hadn't thought about it."

"Every man should be thinking about it," the sergeant declared. "The army needs men. Now, a well-set-up young fellow like you would get on capitally at soldiering. It's a great life. When we get the Germans whipped every man will be proud to say he had a hand in it. If a man struck you, you wouldn't stand back and let some other fellow do your fighting for you, now would you? More than that, between you and me, it won't be long before an able-bodied man can't walk these streets in civvies, without the girls hooting him. It's a man's duty to get into this war. Better walk along with me to headquarters and sign on."

The young man gazed across the street with the same immobility of expression.

"What's the inducement?" he asked presently.

The sergeant, taking his cue from this, launched forth upon a glowing description of army life, the pay, the glory, the manifold advantages that would certainly accrue. He painted a rosy picture, a gallant picture. One gathered from his talk that a private in khaki was greater than a captain of industry in civilian clothes. He swelt upon the brotherhood, the democracy of arms. He spilled forth a lot of the buncombe that is swallowed by those who do not know from bitter experience that war, at best, is a ghastly job in its modern phases, a thing that the common man may be constrained to undertake if need arises, but which brings him little pleasure and less glory—beyond the consciousness that he has played his part as a man should.

The young man heard the recruiting sergeant to an end. And when that worthy had finished he found fixed steadily upon him a pair of coldly speculative gray-green eyes.

"How long have you been in the army?" he asked.

"About eighteen months," the sergeant stated.

"Have you been over there?"

"No," the sergeant admitted. "I expect to go soon, but for the present I'm detailed to recruiting."

The young man had a flower in the lapel of his coat. He removed it, the flower, and thrust the lapel in the sergeant's face. The flower had concealed a bronze button.

"I've been over there," the young man said calmly. "There's my button, and my discharge is in my pocket—with the names of places on it that you'll likely never see. I was in the Princess Pats—you know what happened to the Pats. You have hinted I was a slacker, that every man not in uniform is a slacker. Let me tell you something. I know your gabby kind. The country's full of such as you. So's England. The war's gone two years and you're still here, going around telling other men to go to the front. Go there yourself, and get a taste of it. When you've put in fourteen months in hell like I did you won't go around peddling the brand of hot air you've shot into me, just now."

"I didn't know you were a returned man," the sergeant said placatingly. A pointed barb of resentment had crept into the other's tone as he spoke.

"Well, I am," the other snapped. "And I'd advise you to get a new line of talk. Don't talk to me, anyway. Beat it. I've done my bit."

The sergeant moved on without another

word, and the other man likewise went his way, with just the merest suggestion of a limp. And simultaneously the great doors of the bank swung open. Thompson looked first after one man then after the other, and passed into the bank with a thoughtful look on his face.

He finished his business there. Other things occupied his attention until noon. He lunched. After that he drove to Coal Harbor where the yachts lie and motor boats find mooring, and, having a little time to spare before Tommy's arrival, walked about the slips looking over the pleasure craft berthed thereat. Boats appealed to Thompson. He had taken some pleasant cruises with friends along the coast. Some day, he intended to have a cruising launch. Tommy had already attained that distinction. He owned a trim forty-footer, the *Alert*. Thompson's wanderings presently brought him to this packet.

A man sat under the awning over the after deck. Thompson recognized in him the same individual upon whom the recruiting sergeant's eloquence had been wasted that morning. He was in clean overalls, a seaman's peaked cap on his head. Thompson had felt an impulse to speak to the man that morning. If any legitimate excuse had offered he would have done so. To find the man apparently at home on the boat in which he himself was taking brief passage was a coincidence of which Thompson proceeded to take immediate advantage. He climbed into the cockpit. The man looked at him questioningly.

"I'm going across the Inlet with Mr. Ashe," Thompson explained. "Are you on the *Alert?*"

"Engineer, skipper, and bos'n, too," the man responded whimsically. "Cook, captain, and the whole damn crew."

They fell into talk. The man was intelligent, but there was a queer abstraction sometimes in his manner. Once the motor of a near-by craft fired with a staccato roar, and he jumped violently. He looked at Thompson unsmiling.

"I'm pretty jumpy yet," he said—but he did not explain why. He did not say he had been overseas. He did not mention the war. He talked of the coast, and timber, and fishing, and the adjacent islands, all of which he seemed to be fairly familiar with.

"I heard that recruiting sergeant tackle you this morning," Thompson said at last. "You were standing almost beside my machine. What was it like over there?"

"What was it like?" The man repeated. He shook his head. "That's a big order. I couldn't tell you in six months. It wasn't nice."

He seemed to reflect a second or two.

"I suppose some one has to do it. It has to be done. But it's a tough game. You don't know where you're going nor what you're up against most of the time. The racket gets a man, as well as seeing fellows you know getting bumped off now and then. Some of the boys got hardened to it. I never did. I try to forget it now, mostly. But I dream things sometimes, and any sudden noise makes me jump. A fellow had better finish over there than come home crippled. I'm lucky to hold down a job like this, lucky that I happen to know gas engines and boats. I look all right, but I'm not much good. All chewed up with shrapnel. And my nerve's gone. I wouldn't have got my discharge if they could have used me any more. Aw, hell, if you haven't been in it you can't imagine what it's like. I couldn't tell you."

"Tell me one thing," Thompson asked quickly, spurred by an impulse for light upon certain matters which had troubled him. He wanted the word of an eyewitness. "Did you ever see, personally, any of those atrocities that have been laid to the Germans in Belgium."

"Well, I don't know," the man replied. "The papers have printed a lot of stuff. Mind you, over there you hear about a lot of things you never see. The only thing *I* saw was children with their hands hacked off at the wrist."

"Good God!" Thompson uttered. "You actually saw that with your own eyes."

"Sure," the man responded. "Nine of 'em in one village."

"Why in the name of God would men do such a thing?" Thompson demanded. "Was any reason ever given?"

"No. I suppose they were drunk or something. Fritz was pretty bad in spots, all right. Maybe they just wanted to put the fear of God in their hearts. A pal of mine in Flanders told me of a woman—in a place they took by a night raid—she had her breast slashed open. She said a Boche officer did it with his sword."

The man spoke of these things in a detached, impersonal manner, as one who

states commonplace facts. He had not particularly desired to speak of them. For him those gruesome incidents of war and invasion held no special horror. They might have rested heavily enough on his mind once. But he had come apparently to accept them as the grim collateral of war, without reacting emotionally to their terrible significance. And when Thompson ceased to question him he ceased to talk.

But in Thompson these calmly recounted horrors worked profound distress. His imagination became immediately shot with sinister pictures. All these things which he had read and doubted, which had left him unmoved, now took on a terrible reality. He could see these things about which the returned soldier spoke, and, seeing them, believed. Believing, there rose within him a protest that choked him with its force as he sat in the cockpit beside this veteran of Flanders.

The man had fallen silent, staring into the green depths overside. Thompson sat silent beside him. But there was in Thompson none of the other's passivity. Unlike the returned soldier, who had seen blood and death until he was surfeited with it, until he wanted nothing but peace and quietness, and a chance to rest his shrapnel-torn body and shell-shocked nerves, Thompson quivered with a swift, hot desire to kill and destroy, to inflict vengeance. He burned for reprisal. For a passionate moment he felt as if he could rend with his bare hands a man, or men, who could wantonly mutilate women and children. He could find no fit name for such deeds.

And, responding so surely to that unexpected stimuli, he had no stomach for crossing the Inlet as Tommy's guest, to view the scene of Tommy's industrial triumph-to-be. He wasn't interested in that now.

Sitting under the awning brooding over these things, he remembered how Sophie Carr had reacted to the story of the Belgian refugee that afternoon a year and a half ago. He understood at last. He divined how Sophie felt that day. And he had blandly discounted those things. He had gone about his individual concerns insulated against any call to right wrongs, to fight oppression, to abolish that terror which loomed over Europe—and which might very well lay its sinister hand on America. If the Germans were capable of these things, and if the German's military power prevailed over France and England? When he envisaged Canada as another Belgium his teeth came together with a little click.

He clambered out of the *Alert's* cockpit to the float.

"Tell Mr. Ashe I changed my mind about going over with him," he said abruptly, and walked off the float, up the sloping bank to the street, got in his car, and drove away.

As he drove he somehow felt that he had failed to keep faith with something or other. He felt bewildered. Those little children, shorn of their hands—so that they could never lift a sword against Germany—cried aloud to him. They held up their bloody stumps for him to see.

CHAPTER XXV.

——AND THE BOMB THE FUSE FIRED.

It took Thompson approximately forty-eight hours to arrange his affairs. He managed things with a precipitancy that would have shocked a sound, practical business man, for he put out no anchors to windward nor troubled himself about the future. He paid his bills, transferred the Summit agency to his head salesman—who had amassed sufficient capital to purchase the stock of cars and parts at cost. Thus, having deliberately sacrificed a number of sound assets for the sake of being free of them without delay, Thompson found himself upon the morning of the third day without a tie to bind him to Vancouver, and a cash balance of twenty thousand dollars to his credit in the bank.

He did not know how, or in what capacity he was going to the front, but he was going, and the manner of his going did not concern him greatly. It mattered little how he went, so long as he went in the service of his country. A little of his haste was born of the sudden realization that he had a country which needed his services—and that he desired to serve. It had passed an emotional phase with him. He saw it very clearly as a duty. He did not foresee or anticipate either pleasure or glory in the undertaking. He had no illusions about war. It was quite on the cards that he might never come back. But he had to go.

So then he had only to determine how he should go.

That problem, which was less a problem than a matter of making choice, was solved that very day at luncheon. As he sat at a

table in a downtown café there came to him a figure in khaki, wearing a short, close-fitting jacket with an odd emblem on the left sleeve—a young fellow who hailed Thompson with a hearty grip and a friendly grin. He sat himself in a chair vis-à-vis, laying his funny, wedge-shaped cap on the table.

"I've been wondering what had become of you, Jimmie," Thompson said. "I see now. Where have you been keeping yourself?"

"East," the other returned tersely. "Training. Got my wings. Off to England day after to-morrow. How's everything with you, these days?"

Thompson looked his man over thoroughly. Jimmie Wells was the youngest of the four sons of a wealthy man. The other three were at the front, one of them already taking his long rest under a white, wooden cross somewhere in France. Jimmie looked brown and fit. A momentary pang of regret stung Thompson. He wished he, too, was standing in uniform, ready for overseas.

"I've just wound up my business," he said. "I'm going to the front myself, Jimmie."

"Good," Wells approved. "What branch?"

"I don't know yet," Thompson replied. "I made up my mind in a hurry. I'm just setting out to find where I'll fit in best."

"Why don't you try aviation?" Jimmie Wells suggested. "You ought to make good in that. There are a lot of good fellows flying. If you want action the R. F. C. is the sportiest lot of all."

"I might. I didn't think of that," Thompson returned slowly. "Yes, I believe I could fly."

"If you can fly like you drive, you'll be the goods," Jimmie asserted cheerfully. "Tell you what, Thompson. Come on around to the flying corps headquarters with me. I know a fellow there rather well, and I'll introduce you. Not that that will get you anything, only Holmes will give you a lot of unofficial information."

Thompson rose from the table.

"Lead me to it," said he. "I'm your man."

Getting accepted as a cadet in the Royal Flying Corps was not so simple a matter as enlisting in the infantry. The requirements were infinitely more rigid. The R. F. C. took only the cream of the country's manhood. They told Thompson his age was against him—and he was only twenty-eight. It was true. Ninety per cent of the winged men averaged five years less. But he passed all their tests by grace of a magnificent body that housed an active brain and steady nerves.

All this did not transpire overnight. It took days. He told no one of his plans in the meantime; no one but Tommy Ashe, who was a trifle disappointed when Thompson declined to handle Tommy's exceedingly profitable motor business. Tommy seemed hurt. To make it clear that he had a vital reason, Thompson explained tersely:

"I can't do it because I'm going to the front."

"Eh? What the devil!"

Tommy looked all the astonishment his tone expressed.

"Well, *what* the devil?" Thompson returned tartly. "Is there anything strange about that? A good many men have gone. A good many more will have to go before this thing is settled. Why not?"

"Oh, if a man feels that he *should,*" Tommy began. He seemed at a loss for words, and ended lamely: "There's plenty of cannon fodder in the country without men of your caliber wasting themselves in the trenches. You haven't the military training nor the pull to get a commission."

Thompson's lips opened to retort with a sentence he knew would sting like a whiplash. But he thought better of it. He would not try plucking the mote out of another man's eye, when he had so recently got clear of the beam in his own.

Tommy did not tarry long after that. He wished Thompson good luck, but he left behind him the impression that he privately considered it a poor move. Thompson was willing to concede that from a purely material standpoint it was a poor move. But he could no longer adopt the purely materialistic view. It had suddenly become clear to him that he must go—and *why* he must go. Just as the citizen whose house gets on fire knows beyond peradventure that he must quench the flames if it lies in his power.

The Royal Flying Corps arrives at its ends slowly. Perhaps not too slowly for the niceness of choice that must be made. Presently there came to Wesley Thompson a brief order to report at a training camp in eastern Canada.

When he held this paper in his hand and knew himself committed irrevocably to the greatest game of all, he felt a queer, inner glow, a quiet satisfaction such as must come to a man who succeeds in some high enterprise. Thompson felt this in spite of desperate facts. He had no illusions as to what he had set about. He knew very well that in the R. F. C. it was a short life and not always a merry one. Of course, a man might be lucky. He might survive by superior skill. In any case, it had to be done.

But he was moved likewise by a strange loneliness, and with his orders in his hand he understood at last the source of that peculiar regret which latterly had assailed him in stray moments. There were a few friends to bid good-by. And chief, if she came last on his round of calls that last day, was Sophie Carr.

He found Sophie at home about four in the afternoon, sitting in the big living room making Red Cross bandages. She did not stop her work when he was ushered in. Beside her on a table stood a flat box and in this from time to time she put a finished roll. It occurred to Thompson that some time one of those white bandages fabricated by her hands might be used on him.

He smiled a bit sardonically, for the thought arose also that in the flying corps the man who lost in aërial combat needed little besides a coffin—and sometimes not even that.

"Stop a bit," he said, "and talk to me."

Sophie looked at him almost somberly.

"I'm working, don't you see," she said curtly.

He had never seen her in quite that unapproachable mood. He wanted her to forget the Red Cross and the war for a little while, to look and speak with the old lightness. He wasn't a sentimental man, but he did want to go away with a picture of her smiling. He had not told her he was going. He did not mean to tell her till he was leaving, and then only to say casually: "Well, good-by. I'm off for a training camp tonight." He had always suspected there was something of the Spartan in Sophie Carr's make-up. Even if he had not divined that, he had no intention of making a fuss about his going, of trying to pose as a hero. But he was a normal man, and he wanted his last recollection—if it *should* be his last—of her to be a pleasant one.

And Sophie was looking at him now, fixedly, a frosty gleam in her gray eyes. She looked a moment, and her breast heaved. She swept the work off her lap with a sudden, swift gesture.

"What is the matter with you—and dozens of men like you that I know?" she demanded, in a choked voice. "You stay at home living easy and getting rich in the security that other men are buying with their blood and their lives, over there. Fighting against odds and dying like dogs in a dirty ditch so that we can live here in peace and comfort. You don't even do anything useful here. There doesn't seem to be anything that can make you work or fight. They can sink passenger ships and bomb undefended towns and shell hospitals and you don't seem to resent it. I've heard you prate about service—when you thought you walked with God and had a mission from God to show other men the way. Why don't you serve now? What is the matter with you? Is your skin so precious? If you can't fight, can't you make ammunition or help to build ships? Are you a man, or just a rabbit? I wish to God *I* were a man."

Thompson rose to his feet. The lash of her tongue had not lost its power to sting since those far-off Lone Moose days. Yet, though it stabbed like a spear, he was more conscious of a passionate craving to gather her into his arms than of anger and resentment. There were tears in Sophie's eyes—but there was no softness in her tone. Her red lips curled as Thompson looked at her in dazed silence. There did not seem to be anything he could say—not with Sophie looking at him like that.

"If you feel that way about it——"

He broke off in the middle of the muttered sentence, turned on his heel, walked out of the room. And he went down the street suffering from a species of shock, saying desperately to himself that it did not matter, nothing mattered.

But he knew that was a lie, a lie he told himself to keep his soul from growing sick.

He went back to his rooms for the last time, and tried with pen and paper to set down some justification of himself for Sophie's eyes. But he could not satisfy himself with that. His pride revolted against it. Why should he plead? Or rather what was the use of pleading? Why should he explain? He had a case for the defense, but defense avails nothing after sentence has been pronounced. He had waited too long.

He tore the letter into strips, and having sent his things to the station long before, put on his hat now and walked slowly there himself, for it lacked but an hour of train time.

At the corner of Pender and Hastings he met Sam Carr.

"Welcome, youthful stranger!" Carr greeted heartily. "I haven't seen you for a long time. Walk down to the Strand with me and have a drink. I've been looking over the Vancouver Construction Company's yard, and it's a very dry place."

Thompson assented. He had time and it was on his way. He reacted willingly to the suggestion. He needed something to revive his spirit, but he had not thought of the stimulus of John Barleycorn until Carr spoke.

In the Strand bar he poured half a glass of Scotch whisky. Carr regarded him meditatively over port wine.

"That's the first time I ever saw you touch the hard stuff," he observed.

"It will probably be the last," Thompson replied.

"Why?"

"I'm off," Thompson explained. "I have sold out my business and have been accepted for the Royal Flying Corps. I'm taking the train at six to report at Eastern headquarters.'

Carr fingered the stem of his empty glass a second.

"I hate to see you go, and still I'm glad you're going," he said with an odd, wistful note in his voice. "I'd go, too, Thompson, if I weren't too old to be any use over there."

"Eh?" Thompson loked at him keenly. "Have you been revising your philosophy of life?"

"No. Merely bringing it up to date," Carr replied soberly. "We have what we have in the way of government, economic practice, principles of justice, morality—so forth and so on. I'm opposed to a lot of it. Too much that's obsolete. A lot that's downright bad. But bad as it is in spots, it is not a circumstance to what we should have to endure if the Germans win this war. I believe in my people and my country. I don't believe in the German system of dominating by sheer force and planned terror. The militarists and the market hunters have brought us to this. But we have to destroy the bogy they have raised before we can deal with them. And a man can't escape nationalism. It's bred in us. What the tribe thinks, the individual thinks. This thing is in the air. We are getting unanimous. Whether or not we approve the cause, we are too proud to consider getting whipped in a war that was forced on us. One way and another, no matter what we privately think of our politicians and industrial barons and our institutions generally, it is becoming unthinkable to the Anglo-Saxon that the German shall stalk rough-shod over us. We are beginning—us common people—to hate him and his works. Look at you and me. We were aloof at first. We are intelligent. We have learned to saddle feeling with logic. We have not been stampeded by military bands and oratory. Yet there is something in the air. I wish I could fight. You are going to fight. Not because you like fighting, but because you see something to fight for. And before long those who cannot see will be very few. Isn't that about right?"

"I think so," Thompson replied.

"There you are," Carr went on. "Myself, I have put philosophic consideration in abeyance for the time. I've got primitive again. Damn the central powers! If I had seven sons I'd send them all to the front."

They had another drink.

"Did you go and say good-by to Sophie?" Carr demanded suddenly.

"I saw her, but I don't think I said good-by," Thompson said absently. He was thinking about Carr's surprising outburst. He agreed precisely with what the old man said. But he had not suspected the old radical of such intensity. "I didn't tell her I was going."

"You didn't tell her," Carr persisted. "Why not?"

"For a variety of reasons." He found it hard to assume lightness with those shrewd old eyes searchingly upon him. "You can tell her good-by for me. Well, let's have a last one. It'll be a good many moons before you and I look over a glass at each other again. If I don't come back I'll be in honorable company. And I'll give them hell while I last."

Carr walked with him down to the train.

"When the war broke out," he said to Thompson at the coach steps, "if you had proposed to go I should privately have considered you a damned idealistic fool. Now I envy you. You will never have to make

apologies to yourself for yourself, nor to your fellows. If I strike a blow that a free people may remain free to work out their destiny in their own fashion, I must do it by proxy. I wish you all the luck there is, Wes Thompson. I hope you come back safe to us again."

They shook hands. A voice warned all and sundry that the train was about to leave, and over the voice rose the strident notes of a gong. Thompson climbed the steps, passed within, thrust his head through an open window as the Imperial Limited gathered way. His last glimpse of a familiar face was of Carr standing bareheaded, looking wistfully after the gliding coaches.

The grandfather clock in the hall was striking nine when Sam Carr came home. He hung his hat on the hall tree and passed with rather unsteady steps into the living room. He moved circumspectly, with the peculiar caution of the man who knows that he is intoxicated and governs his movements accordingly. Carr's legs were very drunk and he was aware of this, but his head was perfectly clear. He managed to negotiate passage to a seat near his daughter.

Sophie was sitting in a big chair, engulfed therein one might say. A reading lamp stood on the table at her elbow. A book lay in her lap. But she was staring at the wall absently, and beyond a casual glance at her father she neither moved nor spoke, nor gave any sign of being stirred out of this profound abstraction.

Carr sank into his chair with a sigh of relief.

"I am just about pickled, I do believe," he observed to the room at large.

"So I see," Sophie commented impersonally. "Is there anything uncommon about that? I am beginning to think prohibition will be rather a blessing to you, dad, when it comes."

"Huh!" Carr grunted. "I suppose one drink does lead to another. But I don't need to be legally safeguarded yet, thank you. My bibulosity is occasional. When it becomes chronic I shall take to the woods."

"Sometimes I find myself wishing we had never come out of the woods," Sophie murmured.

"What?" Carr exclaimed. Then: "That's rich. You with a sure income beyond your needs, in your own right, with youth and health and beauty, with all your life before you, wishing to revert to what you used to say was a living burial? That's equivalent to holding that the ostrich philosophy is the true one—what you cannot see does not exist. That ignorance is better than knowledge—that—that—— Hang it, my dear, are you going to turn reactionary? But that's a woman. Now why should——"

"Oh, don't begin one of your interminable, hair-splitting elucidations," Sophie protested. "I know it's showing weakness to desire to run away from trouble. I don't know that I have any trouble to run from. I'm not sure I should dodge trouble if I could. I was just voicing a stray thought. We *were* happy at Lone Moose, weren't we, dad?"

"After a fashion," Carr replied promptly. "As the animal is happy with a full belly and a comfortable place to sleep. But we both craved a great deal more than that of life."

"And we are not getting more," Sophie retorted. "When you come right down to fundamentals, we eat a greater variety of food, wear better clothes, live on a scale that by our former standards is the height of luxury. But not one of my dreams has come true. And you find solace in a wineglass where you used to find it in books. Over in Europe men are destroying each other like mad beasts. At home, while part of the nation plays the game square, there's another part that grafts and corrupts and profiteers and slacks to no end. It's a rotten world."

"By gad, you have got the blue glasses on to-night, and no mistake," Carr mused. "That's unmitigated pessimism, Sophie. What you need is a vacation. Let somebody else run this women's win-the-war show for a while, and you take a rest. That's nerves."

"I can't. There is too much to do," Sophie said shortly. "I don't want to. If I sat down and folded my hands these days I'd go crazy."

Carr grunted. For a minute neither spoke. Sophie lay back in her chair, eyes half closed, fingers beating a slow rat-a-tat on the chair arm.

"Have you seen Wes Thompson lately?" Carr inquired at last.

"I saw him this afternoon," Sophie replied.

"Did he tell you he was going overseas?"

"No." Sophie's interest seemed languid, judged by her tone.

"You saw him this afternoon, eh?" Carr drawled. "That's queer."

"What's queer?" Sophie demanded.

"That he would see you and not tell you where he was off to," Carr went on. "I saw him away on the Limited at six o'clock. He told me to tell you good-by. He's gone to the front."

Sophie sat upright.

"How could he do that?" she said impatiently. "A man can't get into uniform and leave for France on two hours' notice. He called here about four. Don't be absurd."

"I don't see anything absurd except your incredulous way of taking it," Carr defended stoutly. "I tell you he's gone. I saw him take the train. Who said anything about two hours' notice? I should imagine he has been getting ready for some time. You know Wes Thompson well enough to know that he doesn't chatter about what he's going to do. He sold out his business two weeks ago, and has been waiting to be passed in his tests. He has finally been accepted and ordered to report east for training in aviation. He joined the Royal Flying Corps."

Carr did not know that in the circle of war workers where Sophie moved so much the R. F. C. was spoken of as the "Legion of Death." No one knew the percentage of casualties in that gallant service. Such figures were never published. All that these women knew was that their sons and brothers and lovers, clean-limbed children of the well-to-do, joined the flying corps, and that their lives, if glorious, were all too brief once they reached the western front. Only the supermen, the favored of God, survived a dozen aërial combats. To have a son or a brother flying in France meant mourning soon or late. So they spoke sometimes, in bitter pride, of their birdmen as the "Legion of Death," a gruesome phrase and apt.

Carr knew the heavy casualties of aërial fighting. But he had never seen a proud woman break down before the ominous cablegram, he had never seen a girl sit dry-eyed and ashy-white, staring dumbly at a slip of yellow paper. And Sophie had—many a time. To her, a commission in the Royal Flying Corps had come to mean little short of a death warrant.

She sat now staring blankly at her father.

"He closed up his business and joined the flying corps two weeks ago." She repeated this stupidly, as if she found it almost impossible to comprehend.

"That's what I said," Carr replied testily. "What the devil did you do to him that he didn't tell you, if he was here only two hours before he left? Why, he must have come to say good-by."

"What did I do?" Sophie whispered. "My God, how was I to know what I was doing?"

She sat staring at her father. But she did not see him, and Carr knew she did not see him. Some other vision filled those wide-pupiled eyes. Something that she saw or felt sent a shudder through her. Her mouth quivered. And suddenly she gave a little, stifled gasp, and covered her face with her hands.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE LAST BRIDGE.

Thompson received his preliminary training in a camp not greatly distant from his birthplace and the suburban Toronto home where the spinster aunts still lived. He did not go to see them at first, for two reasons. Primarily, because he had written them a full and frank account of himself when he got out of the ruck and achieved success in San Francisco. Their reply had breathed an open disappointment, almost hostility, at his departure from the chosen path. They made it clear that in their eyes he was a prodigal son for whom there would never be any fatted calf. Secondly, he did not go because there was seldom anything but short leave for a promising aviator.

Thompson speedily proved himself to belong in that category. There resided in him those peculiar, indefinable qualities imperative for mastery of the air. Under able instruction he got on fast, just as he had got on fast in the Henderson shops. And by the time the first fall snows whitened the ground he was ready for England and the finishing stages of aërial work antecedent to piloting a fighting plane. He had practically won his official wings.

With his orders to report overseas he received ten days' final leave. And a sense of duty spurred him to look up the maiden aunts, to brave their displeasure for the sake of knowing how they fared. There was little other use to make of his time. The Pacific coast was too far away. The only person he cared to see there had no wish to see him, he was bitterly aware. And nearer at hand circumstances had shot him clear out of the orbit of all those he had

known as he grew to manhood. Recalling them, he had no more in common with them now than any forthright man of action has in common with narrow visionaries. It was not their fault, he knew. They were creatures of their environment, just as he had been. But he had outgrown all faith in creeds and forms before a quickening sympathy with man, a clearer understanding of human complexities. And as he recalled them, his associates had been slaves to creed and form, worshipers of the letter of Christianity while unconsciously they violated the spirit of Christ. Thompson had no wish to renew those old friendships, not even any curiosity about them. So he passed them by and went to see his aunts, who had fed and clothed him, to whom he felt a vague sort of allegiance if no particular affection.

It seemed to Thompson like reliving a very vivid sort of dream to get off a street car at a certain corner, to walk four blocks south and turn into the yard before a small brick cottage with a leafless birch rising out of the tiny grass plot and the bleached vines of sweet peas draping the fence palings.

The woman who opened the door at his knock stood before him a living link with that dreamlike past, unchanged except in minor details, a little more spare, perhaps, and grayer for the years he had been gone, but dressed in the same dull black, with the same spotless apron, the same bit of a white lace cap over her thin hair, the same pince-nez astride a high, bony nose.

Aunt Lavina did not know him in his uniform. He made himself known. The old lady gazed at him searchingly. Her lips worked. She threw her arms about his neck, laughing and sobbing in the same breath.

"Surely, it's myself," Thompson patted her shoulder. "I'm off to the front in a few days, and I thought I'd better look you up. How's Aunt Hattie?"

Aunt Lavina disengaged herself from his arms, her glasses askew, her faded old eyes wet, yet smiling as Thompson could not recall ever seeing her smile.

"What a spectacle for the neighbors," she said breathlessly. "Me, at my time of life, hugging and kissing a soldier on the front step. Do come in Wesley. Harriet will be so pleased. My dear boy, you don't know how we have worried about you. How well you look."

She drew him into the parlor. A minute later Aunt Harriet, with less fervor than her sister, perhaps, made it clear that she was unequivocally glad to see him, that any past rancor for his departure from grace was dead and buried.

They were beyond the sweeping current of everyday life, living their days in a back eddy, so to speak. But they were aware of events, of the common enemy, of the straining effort of war, and they were proud of their nephew in the king's uniform. They twittered over him like fond birds. He must stay his leave out with them.

At this pronunciamento of Aunt Lavina's a swift glance passed between the two old women. Thompson caught it, measured the doubt and uneasiness of the mutual look, and was puzzled thereby.

But he did not fathom its source for a day or two, and only then by a process of deduction. They treated him handsomely, they demonstrated an affection which moved him deeply because he had never suspected its existence. They had always been so precise, almost harsh with him as a youngster. But their living was intolerably meager. Disguise it with every artifice, a paucity of resource—or plain niggardliness—betrayed itself at every meal. Thompson discarded the theory of niggardliness. And proceeding thence on the first conclusion stood his two aunts in a corner—figuratively, of course—and wrung from them a statement of their financial status.

They were proud and reluctant, but Thompson had not moved among and dealt with men of the world to be baffled by two old women. So presently he was in possession of certain facts.

They had not been able to support themselves, to rear and educate him, on their income alone, and gradually their small capital had been consumed. They were about to negotiate the sale of their home, the proceeds of which would keep them from want—if they did not live too long. They tried to make light of it, but Thompson sensed the tragedy. They had been born in that brick cottage with the silver birch before the door.

"Well," he said at length, "I don't want to preëmpt the Lord's prerogative of providing. But I can't permit this state of affairs. I wish you had taken me into your confidence, aunties, when I was a youngster. However, that doesn't matter now. Can you live comfortably on eleven hundred a year?"

Aunt Harriet held up her hands.

"My dear boy," she said, "such a sum would give us luxuries, us two old women. But that is out of the question. If we get five thousand for the place we shall have to live on a great deal less than that."

"Forget that nonsense about selling this place," Thompson said roughly. That grated on him. He felt a sense of guilt, of responsibility too long neglected. "Where I'm going I shall be supplied by the government with all I need. I've made some money. I own war bonds sufficient to give you eleven hundred a year in interest. I'll turn them over to you. If I come back with a whole skin when the war's over I'll be able to use the capital in a way to provide for all of us. If I don't come back, you'll be secure against want as long as you live."

He made good his word before his leave was up. He had very nearly lost faith in the value of money, of any material thing. He had struggled for money and power for a purpose, to demonstrate that he was a man equal to any man's struggle. He had signally failed in his purpose, for reasons that were still a little obscure to him. Failure had made him a little bitter, bred a pessimism it took the plight of his aunts to cure. Even if he had failed to achieve his heart's desire, he had acquired power to make two lives content. Save that it ministered to his self respect to know that he could win in that fierce struggle of the market place, money had lost its high value for him. Money was only a means, not an end. But to have it, to be able to bestow it where it was sadly needed, was worth while, after all. If he 'crashed' over there, it was something to have banished the grim specter of want from these two who were old and helpless.

He was thinking of this along with a jumble of other thoughts as he leaned on the rail of a transport slipping with lights doused out of the port of Halifax. There was a lump in his throat because of those two old women who had cried over him and clung to him when he left them. There was another woman on the other side of the continent to whom his going meant nothing, he supposed, save a duty laggardly performed. And he would have sold his soul to feel *her* arms around his neck and her lips on his before he went.

"Oh, well," he muttered to himself as he watched the few harbor lights falling astern, yellow pin points on the velvety black of the shore, "this is likely to be the finish of *that*. I think I've burned my last bridge. And I have learned to stand on my own feet, whether she believes so or not."

CHAPTER XXVII.

Anon we return, being gathered again
Across the sad valleys all drabbled with rain.

On an evening near the first of September, 1918, a Canadian Pacific train rumbled into Vancouver over tracks flanked on one side by wharves and on the other by rows of drab warehouses. It rolled, bell clanging imperiously, with decreasing momentum until it came to a shuddering halt beside a long, shed-roofed platform before the depot that rises like a great, brown mausoleum at the foot of a hill on which the city sits looking over the harbor waters below.

Upon the platform was gathered the fortunate few whose men were on that train. Behind these waited committees of welcome for stray dogs of war who had no kin. The environs of the depot proper and a great overhead bridge which led traffic of foot and wheel from the streets to the docks, high over the railway yards, was cluttered with humanity that cheered loudly at the first dribble of khaki from the train below.

It was not a troop train, merely the regular express from the East. But it bore a hundred returned men, and news of their coming had been widely heralded. So the wives and sweethearts, the committees, and the curious, facile-minded crowd were there to greet these veterans who were mostly the unfortunates of war, armless, legless men, halt and lame, gassed and shrapnel-scarred —and some who bore no visible sign only the white face and burning eyes of men who had met horror and walked with it and suffered yet from the sight.

From one coach there alighted a youngish man in the uniform of the Royal Flying Corps. He carried a black bag. He walked a little stiffly. Beyond that he bore no outward trace of disablement. His step and manner suggested no weakness. One had to look close to discern pallor and a peculiar roving habit of the eyes, a queer tensity of the body. A neurologist, versed in the by-products of war, could have made a fair guess at this man's medical-history sheet. But the folk on the platform that night were not specialists in subtle diagnosis of the

nervous system. Nor the committees. They were male and female of those who had done their bit at home, were doing it now, welcoming their broken heroes. The sight of a man with a scarred face, a mutilated limb, elicited their superficial sympathy, while the hidden sickness of racked nerves in an unmaimed body they simply could not grasp.

So this man with the black bag and the wings on his left arm walked the length of the platform, gained the steel stairway which led to the main floor of the depot, and when he had climbed halfway stopped to rest and to look down over the rail.

Below, the mass of humanity was gravitating into little groups here and there about a khaki center. There was laughter and shrill voices, with an occasional hysterical note. There were men surrounded by women and children, and there were others by twos and threes and singly who looked enviously at these little groups of the reunited, men who moved haltingly on their way to the city above, perfunctorily greeted, perfunctorily handshaken and perfunctorily smiled upon by the official welcomers.

He looked at this a while, with a speculative, pitying air, and continued his climb, passing at last through great doors into a waiting room, a place of high, vaulted ceilings, marble pillars, beautiful tiled floors. He evaded welcoming matrons on the watch for unattached officers, to hale them into an anteroom reserved for such, to feed them sandwiches and doubtful coffee, and to elicit tales of their part in the grim business overseas. This man avoided the cordial clutches of the socially elect by the simple expedient of saying that his people expected him. He did not want to talk or be fed. He was sick of noise, weary of voices, irritated by raucous sounds. All he desired was a quiet place away from all the confusion of which he had been a part for many days, to get speedily beyond range of the medley of voices and people that reminded him of nothing so much as a great flock of sea gulls swooping and crying over a school of herring.

He passed on to the outer door which gave on the street where taxi drivers and hotel runners bawled their wares, and here in the entrance met the first face he knew. A man about his own age, somewhat shorter, a great deal thicker through the waist, impeccably dressed, shouldered his way through a group at the exit.

Their eyes met. Into the faces of both leaped instant recognition. The soldier pressed forward eagerly. The other stood his ground. There was a look which approached unbelief on his round, rather florid features. But he grasped the extended hand readily enough.

"By Jove, it *is* you, Wes," he said. "I couldn't believe my eyes. So you're back alive, eh? You were reported killed, you know. Shot down behind the German lines. You made quite a record, didn't you? How's everything over there?"

There was a peculiar quality in Tommy Ashe's tone, a something that was neither aloofness nor friendliness, nor anything that Wes Thompson could immediately classify. But it was there, a something Tommy tried to suppress and still failed to suppress. His words were hearty, but his manner was not. And this he confirmed by his actions. Thompson said that things over there were going well, and let it go at that. He was more vitally concerned just then with over here. But before he could fairly ask a question Tommy seized his hand and wrung it in farewell.

"Pardon my rush, old man," he said. "I've got an appointment I can't afford to pass up, and I'm late already. Look me up to-morrow, will you?"

Two years is long for some things, overbrief for others. In Thompson those twenty-four months had softened certain perspectives. He had quickened at sight of Tommy's familiar face, albeit that face was a trifle grosser, more smugly complacent than he had ever expected to behold it. He could mark the change more surely for the gap in time. But Tommy had not been glad to see him. Thompson felt that under the outward cordiality.

He took up his bag and went out on the street, hailed the least vociferous of the taxi pirates and had himself driven to the Granada Hotel. His brows were still knitting in abstracted thought when a bell boy had transported the black bag and himself to a room on the sixth floor, received his gratuity and departed. Thompson was high above the rumble of street cars, facing a thoroughfare given largely to motor traffic, with a window which overlooked the lower town and harbor, and the great hills across the Inlet looming duskily massive against the paler sky.

He stood by the window looking over roofs

and traffic and the glowworm lights of shipping in the stream. He could smell the sea, the brown kelp bared on rocky beaches by a falling tide. And he fancied that even at that distance he could get a whiff of the fir and cedar that clothed the mountain flank.

"By God," he whispered, "it's good to be back."

He said it much as a man might breathe a prayer. All this that he saw now had lingered in his memory, had risen up to confront him as something beautiful and desirable, many times when he never expected to see it again. For it was not logical, he held, that he should survive where so many perished. It was just a whimsy of Fate. And he was duly and honestly grateful that it had been permitted him to outlive many gallant comrades in the perilous service of the air.

Three days and nights on a train close upon long months in hospital had left him very tired. Rest, both his body and uneasy nerves craved insistently. Although it lacked some minutes of eight, he threw off his clothes and went to bed.

In the morning he rose refreshed, eager to be about, to look up men he knew, to talk of things beyond the scope of war.

But when he went out into Vancouver's highways and met people, his uniform gave them a conversational cue. And he found that here, six thousand miles from the guns, even less than among his fellows in the hangars behind the fighting line could he escape that topic. He did not want to talk about fighting and killing. He had lived those things and that was enough. So he came back to the Granada and read the papers and had his lunch and decided to look up Tommy Ashe.

He had learned casually that morning that Tommy's company had more than made good Tommy's prophecy of swift work. Tommy Ashe and Joe Hedley were rising young men.

"Oh, yes, they've got a mint," a broker he knew said to Thompson, with an unconcealed note of envy. "By gad it's a marvel how a pair of young cubs like that can start on a shoestring and make a quarter of a million apiece in two years."

"How did they both manage to escape the draft?" Thompson asked. "I'm sure Ashe is a Class A man."

"Huh!" the broker snorted. "Necessary government undertakings. Necessary hell! All they had to do with the shipbuilding was to bank their rake-off. I tell you, Thompson, this country has supported the war in great style—but there's been a lot of raw stuff in places where you wouldn't suspect it. I'm not knocking, y' understand. This is no time to knock. But when the war's over, we've got to do some housecleaning."

Thompson called the shipyard first. In the glow of a sunny September morning he felt that he must have imagined Tommy's attitude. He was a fair-minded man, and he gave Tommy the benefit of the doubt.

But he failed to get in touch with Tommy. A voice informed him politely that Mr. Ashe had left town that morning and would be gone several days.

Thompson hung up the receiver. For at least five minutes he sat debating with himself. Then he took it down again.

"Give me Seymour 365L," he said to Central.

"Hello."

"Is Mr. Carr at home?"

"You have the wrong number," he was answered, and he heard the connection break.

He tried again, and once more the same voice, this time impatiently, said: "Wrong number."

"Wait," Thompson said quickly. "Is this Seymour 365L, corner of Larch and First?"

"Yes."

"I beg pardon for bothering you. I'm just back from overseas and I'm rather anxious to locate Mr. Carr—Samuel A. Carr. This was his home two years ago."

"Just a minute," the feminine voice had recovered its original sweetness. "Perhaps I can help you. Hold the line."

Thompson waited. Presently he was being addressed again.

"My husband believes Mr. Carr still owns this place. We lease through an agent, however. Lyng & Salmon, Credit Foncier Building. Probably they will be able to give you the required information."

"Thanks," Thompson said.

He found Lyng & Salmon's number in the telephone book. But the lady was mistaken. Carr had sold the place. Nor did Lyng & Salmon know his whereabouts.

Tommy would know. But Tommy was out of town. Still there were other sources of information. A man like Carr could not make his home in a place no larger than Vancouver and drop out of sight without a ripple. Thompson stuck doggedly to the

telephone, sought out numbers and called them up. In the course of an hour he was in possession of several facts. Sam Carr was up the coast, operating a timber and land undertaking for returned soldiers. The precise location he could not discover, beyond the general one of Toba Inlet.

They still maintained a residence in town, an apartment suite. From the caretaker of that he learned that Sophie spent most of her time with her father, and that their coming and going was uncertain and unheralded.

The latter facts were purely incidental, save one. Tommy Ashe had that morning cleared the *Alert* for a coastwise voyage.

Sam Carr and Sophie were up the coast. Tommy was up the coast. Thompson sat for a time in deep study. Very well, then. He, too, would journey up coast. He had not come six thousand miles to loaf in a hotel lobby and wear out shoe leather on concrete walks.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

FAIR WINDS.

Within a gunshot of the heart of Vancouver lies a snug tidal basin where yachts swing to their moorings, where a mosquito fleet of motor craft lies along narrow slips, with the green woods of Stanley Park for a background. Thompson knew Coal Harbor well. He knew the slips and the boats and many of the men who owned them. He had gone on many a week-end cruise out of that basin with young fellows who looked their last on the sea when they crossed the English Channel. So he had picked up a working fund of nautical practice, a first-hand knowledge of the sea and the manner of handling small sail.

From the Granada he went straight to Coal Harbor. While the afternoon was yet young he had chartered a yawl, a true one-man craft, carrying plenty of canvas for her inches, but not too much. She had a small, snug cabin, was well-found as to gear, and was equipped with a sturdy single-cylinder gas engine to kick her along through calm and tideway.

Before six he had her ready for sea, his dunnage bag aboard, grub in the lockers, gas in the tanks, clearance from the custom-house. He slept aboard in a bunk softer than many a sleeping place that had fallen to his lot in France. And at sunrise the outgoing tide bore him swiftly through the Narrows and spewed him out on the broad bosom of the Gulf of Georgia, all ruffled by a stiff breeze that heeled the little yawl and sent her scudding like a gray gull when Thompson laid her west, a half north, to clear Roger Curtis Point.

He blew through Welcome Pass at noon on the forefront of a rising gale, with the sun peeping furtively through cracks in a gathering cloud bank. As the wind freshened the manes of the white horses curled higher and whiter. Thompson tied in his last reef in the lee of a point midway of the Pass. Once clear of it the marching surges lifted the yawl and bore her racing forward, and when the crest passed she would drop into green hollows like a bird to its nest, to lift and race and sink deep in the trough again.

But she made merry weather of it. And Thompson rode the tiller, an eye to his sheets, glorying in his mastery of the sea. It was good to be there with a clean wind whistling through taut stays, no sound but the ripple of water streaming under his lee, and the swoosh of breaking seas that had no power to harm him. Peace rode with him. His body rested, and the tension left his nerves which for months had been strung like the gut on a violin.

Between Welcome Pass and Cape Coburn the southeaster loosed its full fury on him. The seas rose steeper at the turn of the tide, broke with a wicked curl. He put the cape on his lee after a wild fifteen minutes among dangerous tide rips, and then prudence drove him to shelter.

He put into a bottle-necked cove gained by a passage scarce twenty feet wide which opened to a quiet lagoon where no wind could come and where the swell was broken into a foamy jumble at the narrow entrance.

He cooked his supper, ate, watched the sun drop behind the encircling rim of firs. Then he lay on a cushion in the cockpit until dark came and the green shore of the little bay grew dim and then black and the dusky waters under the yawl's counter was split with the phosphorescent flashes of darting fish.

Across a peninsula, on the weather side of the cape, he could hear the seas thud and the surf growl like the distant booming of heavy batteries. Over his head the wind whistled and whined in the firs with a whistle and a whine like machine-gun bullets that have missed their mark. But neither of these sounds held the menace of the sounds

of which they reminded him. He listened to those diapasons and thin trebles and was strangely soothed. And at last he grew sleepy and turned into his bunk.

He rose with the sun. Beside him lay a sturdily built motor tug. A man leaned on the towing bitts aft, smoking a pipe, gazing at the yawl. Twenty feet would have spanned the distance between them.

Thompson emerged into the cockpit. The air was cool and he was fully dressed. At sight of the uniform with its insignia on sleeve and collar the man straightened up, came to attention, lifted his hand smartly in the military salute—the formality tempered by a friendly grin. Thompson saw then that the man had a steel hook where his left hand should have been. Also a livid scar across his cheek where a bullet or sharpnel had plowed.

"It's a fine morning after a wild night," Thompson broke the conversational ice.

"It was a wild night outside and no mistake," the man replied. "We took cover about midnight—got tired of plowing into it, and wasn't too keen for wallowing through them rips off the cape. Say, are you back long from over there?"

"Not long," Thompson replied. "I left England two weeks ago."

"How's it going?"

"We're over the hump," Thompson told him. "They're outgunned now. The Americans are there in force. And we have them beaten in the air at last. You know what that means if you've been across."

"Don't I know it," the man responded feelingly. "By the Lord, it's me that does know it. I was there when the shoe was on the other foot. I was a gunner in the sixty-eighth battery, and you can believe me there was times when it made us sick to see German planes overhead. Well, I hope they give Fritz hell. He gave it to us."

"They will," Thompson answered simply, and on that word their talk of the war ended. They spoke of Vancouver, and of the coast generally.

"By the way, do you happen to know whereabouts in Toba Inlet a man named Carr is located?" Thompson bethought him of his quest. "Sam Carr. He is operating some sort of settlement for returned men, I've been told."

"Sam Carr? Sure. The *Squalla* here belongs to him—or to the company, and Carr is just about the company himself."

A voice from the interior abaft the wheel house bellowed "Grub-pi-l-e."

"That's breakfast," the man said. "I see you ain't lighted your fire yet. Come and have a bite with us. Here, make this line fast and lay alongside."

The wind had died with the dawn, and the sea was abating. The *Squalla* went her way within the hour, and so did Thompson. There was still a small air out of the southeast, sufficient to give him steerageway in the swell that ran for hours after the storm. Between sail and power he made the Redonda Islands and passed between them far up the narrow gut of Waddington Channel, lying in a nook near the northern end of that deep pass when night came on. And by late afternoon the following day he had traversed the mountain-walled length of Toba Inlet and moored his yawl beside a great boom of new-cut logs at the mouth of Toba River.

Thanks to meeting the *Squalla* he knew his ground. Also he knew something of Sam Carr's undertaking. The main camp was four miles up the stream. The deep fin-keel of the yawl barred him from crossing the shoals at the river mouth except on a twelve-foot tide. So he lay at the boom, planning to go up the river next morning in the canoe he towed astern in lieu of a dinghy.

He was conscious, too, of a queer, impersonal manner of thinking about things and people, now that he was back. He wondered about himself. What particular motive, for instance, had driven him up here? To be sure there was the very plausible one of obeying a physician's order about living in the open, of keeping decent hours, of avoiding crowds and excitement until he was quite himself again. But he could have done that without coming to Toba Inlet.

Of course he wanted to see Sam Carr again. Also he wanted to see Sophie. *Why* he wished to see her was not so readily answered. He wanted to see her again, that was all—just as he had wanted to see Canada and his aunts, and the green slopes of the Pacific again. Because all these things and people were links with a past that was good and kindly by comparison with the too vivid recent days. Yes, surely, he would be glad to see Sam Carr—and Sophie. When he recalled the last time he spoke with her he could smile a little wryly. It had been almost a tragedy then. It did not seem much now. The man who had piloted a bat-

tle plane over swaying armies in France could smile reminiscently at being called a rabbit by an angry girl.

It was queer Sophie had never married. His thought took that turn presently. She was—he checked the years on his fingers—oh, well, she was only twenty-four. Still, she was no frail, bloodless creature, but a woman destined by nature for mating, a beautiful woman well fit to mother beautiful daughters and strong sons, to fill a lover with joy and a husband with pride.

A queer warmth flushed Thompson's cheek when he thought of Sophie this wise. A jealous feeling stabbed at him. The virus was still in his blood, he became suddenly aware. And then he laughed out loud, at his own camouflaging. He had known it all the time. And this trip it would be kill or cure, he said to himself whimsically.

Still it *was* odd, now he came to think of it, that Sophie had never in those years found a man quite to her liking. She had had choice enough Thompson knew. But it was no more strange, after all, than for himself never to have looked with tender eyes on any one of the women he had known. He had liked them, but he hadn't ever got past the stage of comparing them with Sophie Carr. She had always been the standard he set to judge the others. Thompson realized that he was quite a hopeless case in this respect.

"I must be a sort of a freak," he muttered to himself when he was stowed away in his blankets. "I wonder if I *could* like another woman as well, if I tried? Well, we'll see, we'll see."

CHAPTER XXIX.

TWO MEN AND A WOMAN.

Thompson drove his canoe around a jutting point and came upon a white cruiser swinging at anchor in an eddy. Her lines were familiar, though he had not seen her in two years. In any case the name *Alert* in gold leaf on her bows would have enlightened him. He was not particularly surprised to find Tommy's motor boat there. He had half expected to find Tommy Ashe hereabouts.

A man's head rose above the after companion hatch as the canoe glided breast.

"Is Mr. Ashe aboard?" Thompson asked.

The man shook his head.

"Went up to Carr's camp a while ago."

"When did you get in?" Thompson inquired further.

"Last night. Lost a day laying up at Blind Bay for a southeaster. Gee, she did blow!"

Three hundred yards past the *Alert* he came to a landing stage which fitted the description given by the skipper of the *Squalla*. Thompson hauled his canoe out on the float, gained the shore, and found a path bordering the bank. He followed this. Not greatly distant he could hear the blows of chopping, the shrill blasts of a donkey-engine whistle, and the whir of the engine itself as it shuddered and strained on its anchored skids, reeling up half a mile, more or less, of inch and a quarter steel cable, snaking a forty-foot log out of the woods as a child would haul a toothpick on the end of a string.

Before long the brush-floored forest opened on a small area of parked wood. In this pleasant space stood a square block of a house. From a tall staff fluttered the Union Jack. As Thompson came near this the door opened and a group of youngsters tumbled out pell-mell and began to frolic. Thompson looked at his watch. He had stumbled on a school in the hour of morning recess.

"Where does Mr. Carr live?" he asked one of these urchins when he got near enough to have speech with him.

"First house you come to," he said. "White house with shingles painted green. Say, mister, have you just come from the war? My dad was over there. Do you know my dad, mister?"

The boy stood gazing at him, apparently hopeful of paternal acquaintance, until he discovered that Thompson did not know his "dad." Then he darted back to his fellows at their game.

Thompson walked on. The white house with green shingles loomed up near at hand, with a clump of flaming maples beside it. Past that stood other houses in an orderly row facing the river, and back of them were sheds and barns, and beyond the group of buildings spread a wide area of cleared land with charred stumps still dotting many an acre.

He had to enter the place he took to be Sam Carr's by the back yard, so to speak. That is, he came up from the rear, passed alongside the house—and halted abruptly, with his foot on the first of three steps rising to a roomy veranda.

Sophie was sitting on the rail, looking soberly down on the glacial gray of Toba River. There was a queer expression on her face, a mixture of protest and resignation. Tommy Ashe stood beside her. He had imprisoned one of her hands between his own and he was speaking rapidly, eagerly, passionately.

Thompson had heard without meaning to hear. And what he heard, just a detached sentence or two, shot him through with a sudden blaze of anger. He stepped up on the floor, took quickly the three strides that separated him from Tommy.

"You are nothing but a common liar," he challenged bluntly. "You know you are, when you speak of me as being dead. Is that why you scuttled out of Vancouver and hurried here as soon as you saw me back?"

Ashe shrank back a step. His naturally florid face grew purple. Thompson matched him glance for glance, wondering as the moments ticked off why Tommy glared and did not strike.

"Your heart has grown as flabby as your principles," he said at last contemptuously.

For the instant, in anger at a lie, in that fighting mood which puts other considerations into abeyance when it grips a man, Thompson gave no heed to Sophie—until he felt her hand on his arm and looked down into her upturned face, white and troubled, into gray eyes that glowed with some peculiar fire.

"It is really, truly you?" she said, in a choked voice.

"Of course," he answered—and he could not help a little fling. "You see I am no longer a rabbit. I don't like your friend here. He has tried to sneak a march on me, and I suspect it is not the first. I feel like hurting him."

She paid not the least heed to that.

"You were officially reported dead," she went on. "Reported shot down behind the German lines a year ago."

"I know I was reported dead, and so were many other men who still live," he said gently. "I was shot down, but I escaped and flew again, and was shot down a second time and still am here not so much the worse."

Sophie slipped her hand into his and turned on Tommy Ashe.

"And you knew this?" she said slowly. "Yet you came here to me this morning—and—and——"

She stopped with a break in her voice.

"I didn't believe you were capable of a thing like that, Tommy," she continued sadly.. "I'm ashamed of you. You'd better go away at once."

Ashe looked at her and then at Thompson, and his face fell. Thompson, watching him as a man watches his antagonist, saw Tommy's lips tremble, a suspicious blur creep into his eyes. Even in his anger he felt sorry for Tommy.

The next instant the two of them stood alone, Sophie's hand caught fast in his. She tried to withdraw it. The red leaped into her cheeks. But there was still that queer glow in her eyes.

Thompson looked down at the imprisoned hand.

"You'll never get that away from me again," he said whimsically. "You see, I am not a rabbit but a man, no matter what you thought once. And when a man really wants a thing, he takes it if he can. And I want you—so—you see?"

For answer Sophie hid her hot face against his breast.

"Ah, I'm ashamed of myself, too," he heard a muffled whisper. "I sent you away into that hell over there with a sneer instead of a blessing. And I was too ashamed, and a little afraid, to write and tell you what a fool I was, that I'd made a mistake and was sorry. I couldn't do anything only wait, and hope you'd come back. Didn't you hate me for my miserable holier-than-thou preachment that day, Wes?"

"Why, no," he said honestly. "It hurt like the devil, of course. You see it was partly true. I *was* going along, making money, playing my own little hand for all it was worth. I couldn't rush off to the front just to demonstrate to all and sundry—even to you—that I was a brave man and a patriot. You understand, don't you? It took me quite a while to feel, to really and truly feel, that I *ought* to go—which I suppose you felt right at the beginning. When I did see it that way—well, I didn't advertise. I just got ready and went. If you had not been out of sorts that day, I might have gone away with a kiss instead of your contempt. But I didn't blame you. Besides, that's neither here nor there, now. You're a prisoner. You can only be paroled on condition."

Sophie smiled up at him, and was kissed for her pains.

"Name the condition."

"That you love me. I've waited a long time for that."

"I've always loved you," she said gravely. "Sometimes more, sometimes less. I haven't always believed we could be happy together. Sometimes I have been positive we couldn't. But I've always measured other men by you, and none of them quite measured up. That was why it stung me so to see you so indifferent about the war. Probably if you had talked about it to me, if I had known you were thinking of going, I should have been afraid you would go, I should have been afraid for you. But you seemed always so unconcerned. It maddened me to think I cared so much for one who cared nothing about wrongs and injustices, who could sit contentedly at home while other men sacrificed themselves. My dear, I'm afraid I'm an erratic person, a woman whose heart and head are nearly always at odds."

Thompson laughed, looking down at her with an air of pride.

"That is to say you would always rather be sure than sorry," he remarked. "Well, you can be sure of one thing, Sophie. You can't admit that you really do care for me and then run away, as you did at Lone Moose. I have managed to stand on my own feet at last, and your penalty for liking me and managing to conceal the fact these many moons is that you must stand with me."

She drew his face down to her and kissed it. Thompson held her fast.

"I can stand a lot of that," he said happily.

"You may have to," she murmured. "I am a woman, not a bisque doll. And I've waited a long time for the right man."

CHAPTER XXX.

A MARK TO SHOOT AT.

An hour or so later Sam Carr came trudging home with a rod in his hand and a creel slung from his shoulder, in which creel reposed a half dozen silver-sided trout on a bed of grass.

"Well, well, well," he said, at sight of Thompson, and looked earnestly at the two of them, until at last a slow smile began to play about his thin lips. "Now, like the ancient Roman, I can wrap my toga about me and die in peace."

"Oh, dad, what a thing to say," Sophie protested.

"Figuratively, my dear, figuratively," he assured her. "Merely my way of saying that I am glad your man has come home from the war, and that you can smile again."

He tweaked her ear playfully, when Sophie blushed. They went into the house, and the trout disappeared kitchenward in charge of a bland Chinaman, to reappear later on the luncheon table in a state of delicious, brown crispness. After that Carr smoked a cigar and Thompson a cigarette, and Sophie sat between them with the old, quizzical twinkle in her eyes and a smile hovering about the corners of her mouth.

"Come out and let's make the round of the works, you two," Carr suggested at last.

"You go, Wes," Sophie said. "I have promised to help a struggling young housewife with some sewing this afternoon."

So they set forth, Carr and Thompson, on a path through the woods toward where the donkey engines filled the valley with their shrill tootings and the shudder of their mighty labor. And as they went Carr talked.

"For eighteen months' work you have made an astonishing amount of headway," Thompson observed. "This is hard land to clear."

"Yes," Carr admitted. "But it's rich land—all alluvial, this whole valley. Anything that can be grown in this latitude will grow like a village scandal here."

He lighted his pipe.

"I tried high living and it didn't agree with me," Carr said abruptly. "I have tried a variety of things since I left the North, and none of them has seemed worth while. I'm not a philanthropist. I hate charitable projects. They're so damned unscientific—don't you think so?"

Thompson nodded.

"You know that about the time you left discharged soldiers were beginning to drift back," Carr continued. "Drift is about the word. The cripples of war will be taken care of. Their case is obvious, too obvious to be overlooked or evaded. But there are returned men who are not cripples, and still are unfit for military duty. They came back to civilian existence, and a lot of them didn't fit in. The jobs they could get were not the jobs they could do. As more and more of them came home the problem grew more and more acute. It is still acute, and I rather think it will grow more acute until the crisis comes with the end of the war, and God

knows how many thousands of men will be chucked into civil life, which cannot possibly absorb them as things are going at present. It's a problem. Public-spirited men have taken it up. The government took the problem of the returned soldier into consideration. So far as I know they are still considering it. The provincial legislature talked—and has done nothing. The Dominion government has talked a lot, but nothing more than temporary measures has come out of it. Nothing practical. You can't feed men with promises of after-the-war reconstruction.

"I formed a joint stock company. We secured all the timber limits in this valley. We got together a little group for a start. They were returned men, some physically handicapped, but eager to do something for themselves. A man with that spirit always makes good if he gets a chance. We put in machinery and gear, put up a small sawmill for ourselves, tore into the logging business, cleared land, built houses. You see we are quite a community. And we are a self-supporting community. Some of these men own stock in the company. Any returned man can find a place for himself here. There is room and work and security and ultimate independence here for any man willing to cooperate for the common welfare. This valley runs for miles. As fast as the land is logged off it is open for soldier entry. There is room here for five hundred families. So you see there is a lot of scope.

"It was in the nature of an experiment. There were people who sneered. And it is working out well. There is not the slightest taint of charity in it. If I used a lot of money that may be a long time coming back to me, that is my own business. Everybody here pays his own way. All these men needed was backing and direction."

Carr looked away across the clearing. His glance swept the houses, and fields, and the distant woods where the logging crews labored.

"And there are valleys and valleys," he said thoughtfully. "When they are cleared and cultivated there is endless room in them for people who want elbowroom, who want to live without riding on the other fellow's back.

"Better get in with us, Wes," he said abruptly. "I'm getting old. It won't be long before I have to quit. This thing will need a pilot for a long time yet. Men will always have to have a leader. You can do good here. Big oaks, you know, from little acorns. I mean, if this project continues to achieve success, it might blaze the way for a national undertaking. We said that a country that was worth living in was worth fighting for. We are liars and cheats if we do not make it so for those who did our fighting."

"I wouldn't mind taking a hand in this game," Thompson said. "But the war is still on. If that were over—well, yes, Toba Valley looks good to me."

"You aren't out of it for good, then?"

Carr put his hand on Thompson's shoulder. "Ah, well," he said. "It won't be long now. You'll be back. You can put on an aërial mail service for us, as your first undertaking."

He chuckled, and they left their log and strolled back toward the house.

"Come and I'll show you what the valley looks like, Wes," Sophie said to him, when they had finished dinner, and Carr had his nose buried in mail just that evening arrived.

She led him a hundred yards upstream to where a footbridge slung upon steel cables spanned the Toba, crossed that and a little flat on the north side, and climbed up the flank of a slide-scarred hill until she came out on a little plateau.

"Look," she waved her hand, panting a little from the steepness of the climb.

Five hundred feet below the valley of the Toba spread its timbered greenness, through which looped in sweeping curves the steel gray of the river. In a great bend immediately beneath them lay the houses of the settlement, facing upon the stream. Farther along were isolated homesteads which he had not seen. Back of these spread little gardens, and the green square of cultivated fields, and beyond in greater expanse the stump-dotted land that was still in the making.

The smoke of the donkey engines was vanished, fires grown cold with the end of the day's work. But upriver and down the spoil of ax and saw lay in red booms along the bank. He could mark the place where he had stood that afternoon and watched a puffing yarder bunt a string of forty-foot logs into the booming ground. He could see figures about in the gardens, and the shrill voices and laughter of children echoed up to them on the hill.

"It is a great view, and there is more in it than meets the eye," Thompson said. "Eh, little woman? The greatest war of all, the biggest struggle. One that never ends. Man struggling to subdue his environment to his needs."

Sophie smiled understandingly. She looked over the valley with a wistful air.

"Did you ever read 'The Sons of Martha?' " she asked. "Do you remember these lines:

"Not as a ladder to reach high heaven,
Not as an altar to any creed,
But simple service simply given
To his own kind in their common need."

"It is a noble mark to shoot at," Thompson said.

She waved her hand again over the valley. Thompson's eyes gleamed. It was good to look at, good to think of. It was good to be there. He remembered, with uncanny, disturbing clearness of vision, things he had looked down upon from a greater height over bloody stretches in France. And he shuddered a little.

Sophie felt the small tremor run through him.

"What is it?" she whispered anxiously.

"It is beautiful, and I can appreciate its beauty all the more from seeing it with you. I'd like to take a hand in this," he said quietly. "I was just comparing it with other things—and wondering."

"Wondering what?"

"If I'll get back to this—and you," he said with his arms around her. "Oh, well, I've got three months' leave. That's a lot."

Sophie looked at him out of troubled eyes. Her voice shook.

"You will be ordered to the front again?"

He nodded. "Very likely."

"I don't want you to go," she broke out passionately. "You mustn't. Oh, Wes, Wes!"

"Do you think I like the prospect?" he said tenderly. "But I am an officer in the Royal Flying Corps, and the war is not over yet. Buck up, sweetheart. I had six months' training, a year in fighting planes, six months in hospital, and barring an occasional spell of uncertain nerves, I am still as good as ever. Don't worry. I was silly to say what I thought, I suppose."

"Nevertheless, it is true," she said. "You may go again and never come back. But I suppose one must face that. Thousands of women have had to face it. Why should I be exempt?"

She wiped her eyes and smiled uncertainly.

"We shall simply have to keep that in the background. I want to forget everything but that you are here and that I'm happy," she whispered, with her arms about his neck. "I want to forget everything else—until it's time for you to go."

"Amen," Thompson replied, and kissed her, and then they went silently, hand in hand, down to the swinging bridge, with the sun gone to rest below the western sky line, and dusk creeping softly up over the valley floor.

There will be those who, having followed so far, will desire further light. They will ask naïvely: Did Wes Thompson go back to the front and get killed? Did they marry and find lasting happiness?

To these curious folk who seek explicit detail, I can only point out that Wes Thompson had three months' leave which ran into November, and that to Sophie that ninety days loomed like a stay of execution. I would ask them further to recall the eleventh of November, 1918—and so the first question is duly answered.

As for the second—I am no soothsayer. I cannot foretell the future. Most certainly they married. At once—with a haste prudery and lovers of formalism might term indecent.

Whether they live happily, who can say? Somewhere between the day he first looked on Sophie Carr at Lone Moose and the day he fell five thousand feet to earth in a flaming battle plane, keeping his life by one of war's miracles, Wes Thompson lived and loved and suffered perhaps a little more than falls to the common lot. He sloughed off prejudices and cant and ignorance and narrowness in those six years as a tree sheds its foliage in autumn.

He married a woman whom he loved dearly, who loved him, was proud of him, who saw life as he did—through tolerant, comprehending eyes. So if you ask whether they found real and lasting happiness I can only cite you bald facts. I cannot prophesy. But I wish my chances were as good.

THE END.

The Beckoning Finger

By L. J. Beeston

Author of "The Master Touch," Etc.

How could such a thing be credible—an enemy leaving all his wealth to a man he hated above all others? Yet it was a fact

HALF-STUNNED by the splendor of this thing, half-dazed by this shock of happiness which resembled a burst of steaming tropic heat into a polar night, which was already soaking into his chilled bones, sucking up his wretchedness like a miasmic fog, wrapping him in an ecstatic, a delicious warm caress, Truslove gripped the arms of the leather-padded chair and listened to the lawyer telling him of the thousands of pounds bequeathed to him.

Thousands of pounds!

He kept saying "Yes," and "I see," and "I perfectly understand," to the solicitor's observations and advice; but he understood very little, really, and did not try to exert his intellect, nor to swim in a sea of figures and legal waters. This might be the place, but he felt that it was not the time. And, indeed, he was incapable of the effort, for this transition from the sordid to the splendid, from years of want to a golden plenty, worked in his brain like the heady fumes of wine, and a sob kept floating up from his heart as a bubble from a still depth.

Thousands of pounds!

With intense deliberation the lawyer had read the will to him: Edward Ingars' last will and testament. Was it possible? Was it credible? Why, when he saw Edward Ingars for the last time, he—Truslove—had shaken a clenched fist in the other's face, had almost dashed it into that pale and sneering face. In hate had they parted, in a cold hate finishing that storm of fury between them, engendered by a business deal with ha'-pence on the one side and kicks on the other. Since that long time ago it appeared that Ingars had accumulated money. That held no amazement for Truslove, who had discovered the razor edge of Ingars' lust for riches, who had cut himself upon that edge. But what did amaze him, what stupefied him, was this legacy from one who never forgave, who was pitiless in his wrath as a tiger, voracious in his greed as a shark.

And he had left him everything he had! No—not quite everything. Truslove had heard the lawyer speak of some trifling bequest in another direction. He roused himself to have this recapitulated.

"A small casket," answered the other with professional urbanity. "Just a box of some rare Japanese wood, inlaid with ivory. Mr. Louis Grennill—the late Mr. Ingars' friend of some years' standing, had expressed admiration for the trinket, being a collector—and exhibitor, I believe, of Eastern carved ivories. Just a souvenir of their mutual esteem."

Truslove nodded absently. "He might have left him a good deal more than that," he murmured.

To this reflection the other replied by a discreet and unsentimental silence.

Truslove cast his eyes down and caught sight of his boots. Heavens, how shabby they were! One might have said they were in a state of decay. Furtively he edged his feet under cover of the big desk. He essayed, with a feeling that he ought to get it off his chest:

"I don't know if you are aware that Ingars and I parted, years back, on the worst possible terms."

"Indeed?" The legal brows attempted the crescent form.

"He hated me like poison."

"Come, Mr. Truslove, you must not say that—now."

"So that you see this piece of news has sort of knocked me on the throat."

"I can understand that, indeed."

"Yes," said Truslove, getting up and reaching for his hat. Flushing, he noticed that its nap had departed, was spread about

the earth somewhere in innumerable particles. "What do I do now?" he demanded.

"Come and see me, at this hour, the day after to-morrow, if you will be so good. I shall then be quite ready to go deeper into this pleasant business with you. I need not say that I am happy to have found you, my dear sir. It took me nearly three months. We have both excellent reason to congratulate ourselves on the success of that lucky newspaper advertisement. In the meantime—er—as a little ready cash—hum—may be of service to you pending these formalities, I beg that you will—er, hum—draw upon me for your immediate needs."

Truslove accepted twenty pounds and a cordial handshake.

Not until he found himself on one of the public benches in Lincoln Inn Fields did he awake to complete realization of his surroundings, to a perfect grip of his ideas. Mechanically his feet had turned toward this green oasis, where quiet was. He needed to rest a while; to sit down and be still; to bask in this golden radiance of fortune; to gloat. Yes, that was it: to gloat and do nothing else.

From the very mire and sweat of poverty, from a one-room existence in a sordid street, from the nip of cold winds and the soak of the rains, from the pinch of hunger, from the killing uncertainty of every to-morrow—to this! Yesterday he was a slave; to-day—a king.

Waves of exaltation kept lifting him into mysterious heights; he wanted to laugh, to break loose into some wild, vociferous state of feeling. He regarded with a bold, almost insolent expression, the people who passed his seat, and who were of the crowd, the masses; for he felt himself raised above this sheeplike swarm. He sat on a throne; his seat was in the sun.

There kept surging through him the ecstacies of a boy who sits by a big fire on a winter eve and reads the Arabian Nights; who fixes his shining eyes on wonderful stories of Calendars—First, Second and Third; who descends with princesses glimmering in silks and diamonds into vaults where burn mysterious fires, and odoriferous essences swim like summer hazes round hanging lamps of silver. And he *was* a boy again; a child in possession of a magnificent toy who shrieks with pure delight, who longs to run and tell every one what he has got. But not yet! Just for the minute, for the hour, for the rest of that day and night, perhaps, he wanted only to think of what he could do, to brood and gloat over this mighty change.

A nursemaid with two tiny children approached his seat, cast a glance at him, and continued down the path to the next, evidently not relishing his needy appearance. Idiot! Had she but known! An hour or two ago this avoidance would have hurt him; now it sent a chuckle to his lips.

A pang of hunger made itself felt. He had twenty pounds in his pocket. An instant vision of a big juicy steak with a bottle of wine floated into the field of mental vision. Ah, not yet! He stuck his hands into his trousers pockets; he hugged himself at the prospect of first-class food served in a first-class way, which was coming, which would remain with him for the rest of his life; deliberately he restrained himself; he reveled in a delicious contemplation.

And he owed everything to Ingars. That was the queerest fact in his experience. Only one explanation was possible: Ingars had changed; had developed compassion; had closed his life by an act of pity extraordinary. Or perhaps he—Truslove—had wronged Ingars in his estimation of his character; perhaps below an uncharming, sunless surface of disposition the other had concealed a heart of sterling worth.

"It must be so," reflected Truslove. "I have heard and read of men being like that. But who would have dreamed it? Certainly not I. I thought him malicious, revengeful, a snake in the grass. I was amazingly mistaken."

Dusk was creeping through the gardens; a chill wind commenced to whistle through the evergreens; drops of rain began to fall.

Truslove got up, then, stiff with the cold. He walked to Old Compton Street, and he had his big juicy steak, with two portions of sirup roll and a bottle of claret. He put his first sovereign upon the table for payment to be extracted from it. His first. Even from that there was a goodly pile of silver as change. And there were thousands of others to come. Oh, glory!

He had the best cigar the place boasted of. That is not saying a great deal. He leaned back and watched the smoke rings float and break. Never was tobacco so delicious. He thought of opium fumes inhaled by the degenerate, which give them new

senses for old, so he had heard; which make the unreal a golden substance, which transmute the squalid into streets of gold with gates of jasper and iridescent opal, which call long-dead hopes out from their graves and make them resplendent and eternal presences. Well, it seemed to him that he was getting all that from a six-penny cigar.

And suddenly he remembered Ingars' friend Louis Grennill, who had to be satisfied with an antique Japanese box inlaid with ivory. That did not seem much. It seemed devilish little. Why had Ingars left his friend only a bauble like that? Truly, Edward Ingars had acted with eccentricity in disposing of his treasures. Doubtless Louis Grennill felt a trifle sore about it.

"Bah!" chuckled Truslove, getting up, "that is his trouble. Trouble? I have done with the word."

When he quitted the restaurant the rain was pelting down smartly. For a moment he paused in indecision, watching the perturbed puddles in the roadway.

"I know," said he, with a sharp snap of finger and thumb. "I'll treat myself to an outside view of part of my property—the house in Brackinton Street; number twenty-two."

This property had been touched upon in the interview with the solicitor. It was situate between Bedford Square and New Oxford Street, and Truslove could take in that region on his way home to Maple Street, at the north end of the Tottenham Court Road.

He knew Brackinton Street, which abutted on a square at one end, and which contained four-story houses of freestone, with big fanlights over their wide mahogany doors. Number twenty-two was at the square corner, he found. It was a very solid, ample, comfortable-seeming residence, with a wrought-iron balcony, a highly polished brass handrail up the front steps, linen blinds drawn over the tall windows.

Truslove stood on the opposite side of the street and permitted his eyes to feast their fill.

"Mine! Mine!"

He rubbed his hands which were red with the cold, wet with the rain. Yesterday he had owned, by paying five shillings a week, that terrible top back room in Maple Street, which insulted his eyes whenever he entered it. To-day this fine structure called him lord. He might live in it himself, fill it with the choicest woods and silver and crystal.

Truslove laughed deep down in his throat and continued his route northward. He had made up his mind to go back to his single room—just for this one, remaining night. Contrast! He was going to fill himself with appreciation of it, and what it meant. Deliberately he was going to remain in the shadow for another night and look across at the blaze of sun into which he would step to-morrow. He would hear the family below him—those five who drank like fishes—quarrel as they nearly always did. He would hear, in the street, the melancholy cry of the hot-potato salesman calling the merits of his baked tubers—"All hot and floury!" And then, with a dying cadence—"All hot—hot!" He would lie in bed and watch the light from the street lamp opposite glimmer on his shockingly grimed ceiling. He would fall asleep in that room, in that den; and when he awoke—ah, then, what a delicious shock of realization would whip the red blood through his veins! If there was a suspicion of a touch of morbidness in this gloating he repressed it. The situation fascinated him through and through.

He reached the house in Maple Street, let himself in and climbed the many flights of stairs. It was then almost quite dark. The instant he turned the handle of his door instinct told him that some one was in the room. He paused, staring into the gloomy interior.

"Is that Mr. Truslove?" called a well-bred, kindly voice.

When he heard this voice, which was quite strange to him, for some mysterious and inexplicable reason Truslove had a sensation of something dragging at his heart.

"Yes," he answered, irritated at finding a stranger admitted to his room. "Who is it?"

"One who asks pardon for infringing the privacy of your apartment," the voice hastened to add. "My name is Grennill—Louis Grennill. I called three times at the house, but you were not in. Your landlady took pity on me, said you would be sure to arrive soon, and showed me into this room, rightly or wrongly. I beg you will pardon my intrusion, Mr. Truslove."

For a moment or two Truslove remained motionless and unresponsive, a deep frown entrenching his forehead.

"I'll light the lamp," he said abruptly.

As the match flared he sought a glimpse of his visitor and saw a tall and rather stooping figure, with the face of a scholar, with grave eyes not altogether devoid of a shrewd sense of humor. Truslove forced himself to light the lamp very slowly. He was agitated without quite knowing why. He placed one of his two chairs for the visitor, and he himself remained standing. He said apologetically:

"Excuse these surroundings, which are somewhat less than humble. Frankly, I never receive guests here. May I ask how you obtained my address?"

"I am anxious to explain that. Yesterday I saw your solicitor, who told me he had an appointment to-day with you. He was good enough to furnish me with your address. You criticize it with a strong disfavor? But this lowly environment is already part of a past which compares badly indeed with your more fortunate present."

"Yes," said Truslove absently. "That, of course, is so." He was conscious of being a trifle short-breathed. Why should this cultured man call upon him?

The visitor crossed his knees and laid a delicate white hand upon the table. He went on, gravely, courteously:

"Mr. Truslove, I have come on somewhat unusual business. I must first confess that it was this business which caused my visit to your solicitor, but at the last moment I repressed it on impulse. It seemed to me that, after all, I should act with fairness by calling upon you first. This business concerns the will of my deceased friend Mr. Ingars."

No word escaped from Truslove's lips. Instead, a burning rush of blood streamed over his face. Instinctively he clenched his fists, and a blaze of light swept across his eyes. What! had this man come to deprive him of his immeasureable happiness? Were his envious fingers reached out to snatch from his lips his cup of perfect joy? No! By heaven and hell, he would strangle him first!

The shock of frenzied rage tore like a tempest through his brain. It passed to to some extent, and Truslove steadied himself.

"Well," said he thickly, "you have seen it?"

"Why, certainly. I congratulate you. I have no quarrel with my dead friend's last wishes. I am not so foolish. I have seen too much—and you also, doubtless—of misery set up by strife over legacies, to wish to add to it."

He paused upon the expression of sympathy. "That document contains no word to hurt me," he continued sadly. "There is no opportunity for quibble so far as *that* document is concerned; but I cannot help suspecting that it may have been superseded by another. On the other hand, I may be quite wrong. As you know, my friend Ingars did not absolutely forget me in his bequest. He left me a small casket of choice Eastern workmanship. Here it is." The speaker drew it from the capacious side pocket of his waterproof. "It is charming of its kind. Quite recently I examined it carefully—as Ingars knew perfectly well I should. I discovered that it has a double bottom—the second released by a minute spring on this side—so. But that was not all. There is an inclosure in the hidden receptacle—this inclosure, as you see; a stout envelope containing some paper. I thought it best to open it in the presence of the solicitor, to whom I went; but on learning that you had been found I kept silent, as I stated. And now you know as much as I do, Mr. Truslove. It remains to be seen if the same inference will suggest itself to you."

Truslove took the inclosure held out to him. He saw a thick sealed envelope, bearing the words—"To my friend, Louis Grennill." In a corner, heavily underscored, was the word *"Important."*

In a dazed, dumb fashion Truslove turned it over and over. His eyes, which burned as with fever, regarded the massive and unbroken seal bearing the initials "E. I." He pressed the envelope between his fingers and noted that it held a thick paper of some sort. He knew absolutely what that paper was. It was *the* last will and testament of the man who had hated him, who had played this savage, this fiendish trick upon him. It was just the kind of thing Ingars would have done. He had reached up an arm out of his grave and struck Truslove this foul and mortal blow.

Truslove returned the packet, sat down and pressed a hand to his forehead. He had the sensations of a wrecked sailor in a drifting boat, at whose vitals thirst and hunger raven, who sees a ship pass after apparently seeing his signals of distress. He

felt as a condemned felon who dreams that he is pardoned and freed, and who wakes at a terrible touch upon his shoulder and sees the ghastly breaking dawn and the beckoning finger of horror.

"Courage!" he heard Grennill's voice exhorting. "We may be quite wrong in our inference—for I see that the same idea has occurred to you. And it was bound to come to both of us. I was aware of the bad terms existing between you and Edward, and his will astonished me. But we are not yet certain that he has done you a very grievous wrong. For one thing, if we have to deal with a later will, it must be one bearing the needful signatures of witnesses. We have not heard from them. They have not come forward, though it is possible that they were persons in some humble condition of life who did not realize the importance of the matter. Courage, I say! And do not hate me—yet. You see, I was bound to produce this packet addressed to myself. Who would have done otherwise? Who, in my position, would have destroyed it? Yet it may hold a document quite other than what we are thinking about."

"Bah! What do I care?" burst out Truslove, looking round with a face white as milk. "Open it, and be damned to the whole dirty, rotten business!"

"Tut, tut. You shout, but you are not yet hurt. However, I agree that it may be best to get it over and settled. Though the situation may benefit me, yet it is one which I find far from pleasing. Open the packet yourself; I prefer you so to do."

Truslove, whose heart was quaking with agitation, made a gesture of dissent.

"Pray investigate the contents yourself," insisted his interlocutor warmly. "I have no wish to crow over you. I assure you I find my position the reverse of comfortable."

Truslove snatched at the stout envelope and tore off one end with a savage jerk. He pressed in the sides of the wrapper, making it gape, and he peered into that small interior as he might have looked into his own grave. He said, huskily:

"I think it is a will form."

"That is my impression. It has all the appearance and the fiber of such a parchment. Yet before you draw it out I should like to say one word."

Truslove rolled haggard eyes upon the speaker.

"It is this," continued Grennill. "I have little doubt that we have to do with Edward Ingars' latest will. Against that supposition put this: it may not be a will at all. But we will assume that it is. In that case it almost certainly annuls the former will—would be written with that spiteful intent. On the other hand it may not give me all, but may be making me a cosharer with you. Let us weigh these hypotheses in our minds. We cannot know for certain unless we read. You may be crushed; I may be disappointed. But is it necessary? Why not come to some arrangement? You regard this mysterious communication with something like hate in your eyes. I myself am not in love with it, for it may not deepen my esteem for my friend. Suppose we destroy it, therefore? One must not destroy a will, but then we know not that it *is* a will. Suppose we burn it here, in this room, unread?"

Like a flash Truslove understood the terms of the gamble. He was thrilled by it to the soul. He leaned toward Louis Grennill, gripping the table's edge in a convulsive clutch.

"Done!" he rapped out, and it was more like a snarl than a word.

The other nodded pleasantly. "You understand me, I perceive. So much the better. I am genuinely pleased."

"How can we arrange it?" demanded Truslove hoarsely. "I foresee difficulties."

"Surely not. I agree that it is not matter to submit to legal machinery. And of course the thing must be executed now, for that document must not be carried about by either of us, making an intolerable situation for the other. We must necessarily have recourse to methods of simplicity. I will accept your I O U, which, later on, can be converted into a more complete written obligation. And we will turn this mysterious communication into harmless carbon on the spot."

"Done!" cried Truslove again.

He grabbed pen and paper. "We must agree upon a figure," he muttered abstractedly. "What——"

"I beg to leave all that to you," was the courteous response. "You, not I, are aware of the value of the property. If your decision is a reasonable one I accept it unreservedly."

Truslove leaned over the paper. What ought he to put down?

In spite of his relief he was seized by a twinge of regret that hurt. How many thousands was he about to sign away? For it had to be thousands, of course. It was hard—hard; but better half a loaf than no——

As he raised his eyes swiftly, involuntarily, to the other's face he was startled to see an astonishing change there. Grinnell was leaning forward, his left hand gripping his chin, and his eyes, fixed intently upon the blank sheet in front of Truslove, were aglare with a light of triumph and cupidity.

A shock like an electric discharge passed over Truslove's nerves. He sprang up, sending his chair flying.

"You damned villain!" he roared.

Grennill leaped up also, abruptly bloodless. "What do you mean?" he forced himself to say, after a silence during which their glances darted like rapier blades.

"Mean?" shouted the other. "Why, you put that false bottom to the casket yourself! And you put in it some worthless——"

He could get no further. Three movements took off his coat and sent it in a heap to a corner. Slight as the delay was, it saved Grennill considerable unpleasantness, for that gentleman rushed to the door as if death snapped at his heels. There came the sound of a man taking flights of stairs in single jumps.

"Phew!" gasped Truslove, like one who rises from a deep pool after thirty seconds below the surface. He drew the back of his right hand across his damp forehead. He felt abruptly limp, enervated, until the ecstasy of an hour ago ran again like wine through his blood. Good old Ingars! Splendid sport! He had died a great friend, after all.

Truslove moved mechanically to his window and looked down into the gulf of the sordid street. Near to the lamp opposite, revealed in its flickering gleam, a man was standing—Louis Grennill. He had a paper in his hands; and he suddenly tore it across and across and across again, vehemently tore it, furiously; and with a savage gesture tossed the fragments to the wind and rain.

In the next issue of the POPULAR, dated August 7, there will be a complete novel by Hugh S. Fullerton, "Twisted Trails," the first part of a mystery serial by Edgar Wallace, "The Green Rust," and other fine stories.

PRAISE FOR BURLESON

ALBERT S. BURLESON, who looks like the pictures of Sir Walter Scott, and is now postmaster general, is not held in particular veneration and esteem by many of the newspaper and magazine publishers throughout the country. Even if they like him, they manage to keep their affection within bounds. They are not ardently demonstrative of their tenderness of feeling. They do not make fools of themselves by advertising their fondness for him. They are certainly less abandoned, less emotional, less impetuous and less loquacious than a love-sick youth in evincing their adoration of him.

In fact, it may be said that he is unpopular with them. His idea of when periodicals should be barred from the mails does not meet with their undivided and enthusiastic approval.

Vance McCormick was discussing all this with a publisher, who spoke freely his uncloaked mind, using his unchecked utterance to state his belief that the president's cabinet, without Burleson, would be a more popular body of men than it is now.

"At least," McCormick said, "he's a good Democrat. You can't deny his record in that regard. He's all right. He's sound, and party soundness is a great thing in politics. He's sound, thoroughly sound."

"Absolutely," agreed the editor; "all sound."

A Chat With You

DOCTOR FRANK CRANE says that there are four interesting things, to wit: Love, Money, Danger, and Goodness. Observe that the doctor forbears from saying that these are the only interesting things, or the most interesting things. He is far too wise to lay himself open to argument in that fashion. True, he does give the impression in some subtle way that these are the most interesting things, and, for all we know, he is right. Superlatives are hard things to be sure about.

A little later he becomes more definite. He says that Danger literature includes War, Crime, and Adventure stories, and that the greatest of these is Crime. Do we agree with him? We don't know. We have read too many good war stories, too many good adventure stories, too many good detective stories to be sure which is the greatest. At present, we are out of sorts with war stories. We've had too many. We are always strong for adventure stories. And as for detective stories, only the author of detective stories knows how good a market there is here for them, and how eager we are to get them.

A GOOD detective story is one of the hardest things in the world to write. It must be comparatively easy to write an indifferent one, there are so many written and published, and there is no doubt that the motive of the apparently insoluble mystery, the daring criminal, and the detective who runs him to earth, is one of the strongest in its general human appeal. We sympathize with those who would rather have a comparatively poor detective story than no detective story at all. With every new detective story the problem of being original becomes harder and harder. Conan Doyle found that Watson and Sherlock wouldn't last for ever, and laid them aside. Since then, there have been hundreds of Sherlocks and Watsons under so many various names that an author must be a brave man indeed to start a new story told in the classic formula of Poe and Doyle, by the rather dull and inquisitive character who happens to be a friend of the great detective and who sees the whole drama unfolding before his eyes. It is a great scheme in the way of story-telling, almost the only instance, we think, in which the first-person tale is a better medium than the third person—but it is wearing out and getting hackneyed. That's one of the reasons why it is so hard to write a good mystery story. The best way of telling it has been used too often.

SOME gifted man will come along some day—we hope soon—and give a new twist to this type of tale and make it seem real and true once more. In the meantime, the regular third person in which the author tells the story himself seems the best. The new detective serial which starts in the next issue of this magazine is told in the third person. We guarantee that the detective is an absolutely new and original type.

Also, he is the most human and likable detective of the last ten or twenty years. More than that, the mystery is one that neither you nor any one else will solve until the author intends you to, and the story is one that no one will want to lay aside till he or she finishes it. The story is called "The Green Rust." It is written by Edgar Wallace. We published a series of aëroplane stories by Wallace in recent numbers of the magazine, but his best work has been done in the way of detective fiction. We read a book of his, "The Cue of the Twisted Candle," which had never appeared in any magazine, and we at once became interested in Wallace. That was nearly a year ago. "The Green Rust" is his next big book. Wallace as a writer of detective stories is probably unequaled in the world to-day. You will read all his stories first in THE POPULAR.

THE complete novel which opens the next issue of the magazine is a good mystery story, as well as a tale of adventure. The scene is laid in Michigan, and you actually feel the atmosphere and color of the place. It is called "Twisted Trails," and is by Hugh Fullerton, with whose work you are already familiar. It has incident, action, human nature, and punch. It is a good dollar-and-a-half novel, a tale of to-day, and the best thing that Fullerton has ever written.

WE wonder if you have been reading THE POPULAR long enough to remember the series of Syrian stories that Albert Payson Terhune wrote for us. If you read them, you remember them. They were absolutely in a class by themselves as samples of the best type of humor, and we have been wanting Terhune to do more of them for years. Terhune, who a short time ago completed a wonderful book called "Lad, a Dog," has come back to THE POPULAR once more. If you have read the earlier tales you will be rejoiced to hear that the old antimony mine is still operating in Syria, that the country is just as strange and adventurous, as full of the spirit of the immemorial Orient as it ever was, and that Najib, the Syrian, who used to work at Coney Island, and so learned to speak something he calls English, is even funnier than ever. Najib as a comic character is worthy of being ranked with the great comedians of literature. He is the best in years. The first story of the new series is called "I'll Say So," and appears in the next issue of the magazine. Other stories will be published in later issues.

WE want you to be sure when you get your next issue of THE POPULAR to read "Luella," by H. H. Knibbs, author of "The Ridin' Kid from Powder River." It is the beginning of a new series of Western stories. Also, we want you to read the story by Roy Hinds. We are curious to know what you think of this author. Then there is another story, "Tiger Weather," by a man named Matteson, that you can't afford to miss. You'll hear a lot about Matteson. Of course, you'll read the Cullen story, "The Unmasking of Gerald," and the new story of the Northwest by Fraser. Also, there is the first of a new series, "The Last of the Plantagenets," by George Bronson-Howard.

MISS MABEL NORMAND — the famous Goldwyn comedienne, says — *"I consider Adams California Fruit Chewing Gum the most delightful flavor and prefer it to all others."*

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