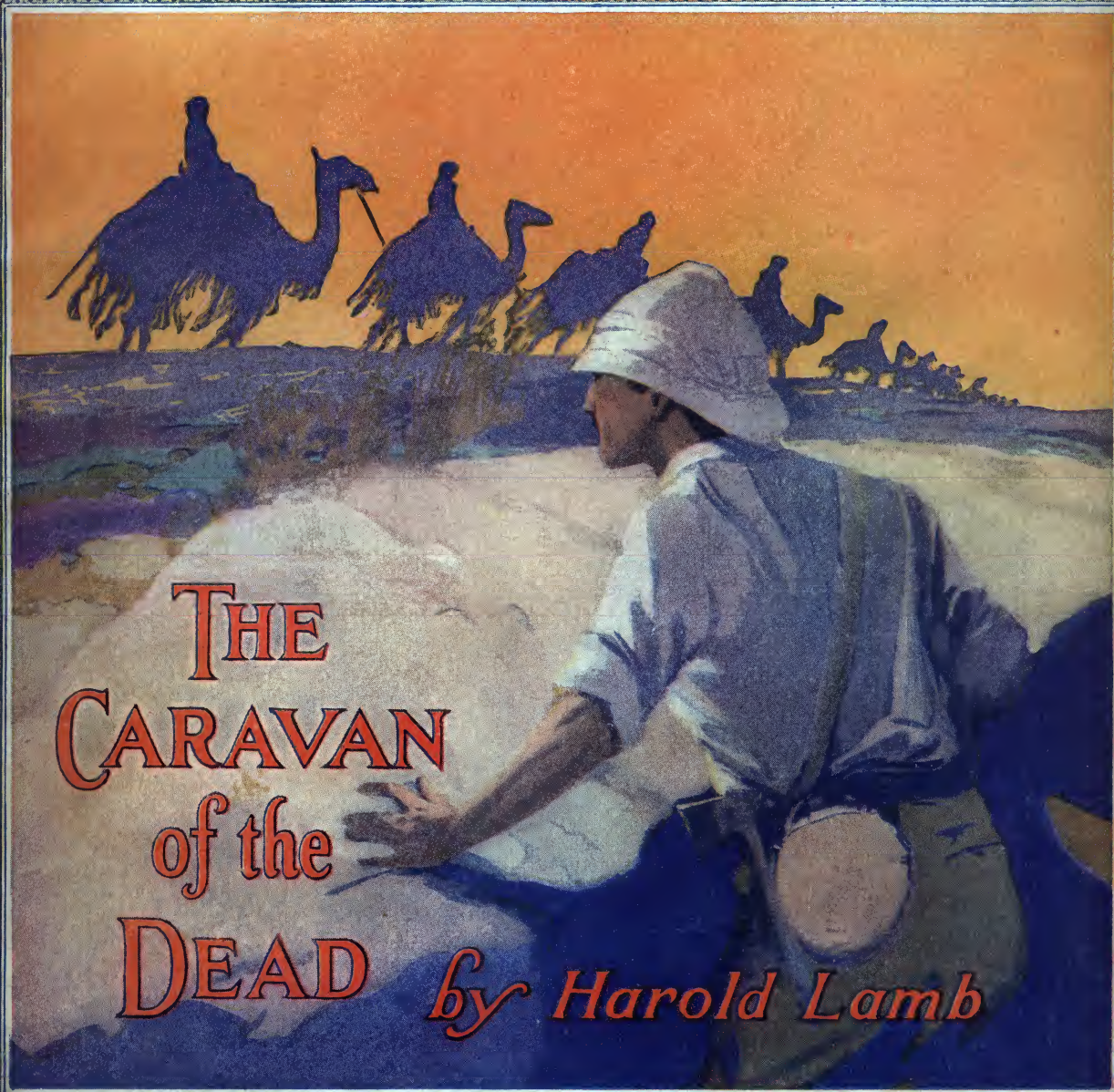


ARGOSY

Issued Weekly



THE
CARAVAN
of the
DEAD *by Harold Lamb*

10¢
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A YEAR

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THE ARGOSY

Vol. CXXII

ISSUED WEEKLY

Number 1

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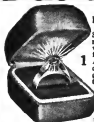
BEGINS NEXT WEEK

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Flat Belcher Ring
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To quickly introduce into every locality our beautiful TIFNITE GEMS, we will absolutely and positively send them out FREE and on trial for 10 days' wear. You simply pay only \$4.50 on arrival, balance \$3.00 per month if satisfactory. In appearance and by every test, these wonderful gems are so much like a diamond that even an expert can hardly tell the difference. But only 10,000 will be shipped on this plan. To take advantage of it, you must act quickly.

Solid Gold Mountings

Send the coupon NOW! Send no money. Tell us which ring you prefer. We'll send it at once. After you see the beautiful, dazzling gem and the handsome solid gold mounting—after you have carefully made an examination and decided that you have a wonderful bargain and want to keep it, you can pay for it in such small payments that you'll hardly miss the money. If you can tell a TIFNITE GEM from a genuine diamond, or if, for any reason at all, you do not wish to keep it, return it at our expense.

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Just send coupon. Send no reference, no money, no obligation to you in any way! You run no risk. The coupon brings you any of the exquisitely beautiful rings shown and described here for 10 days' wear free. Be sure to enclose strip of paper showing exact finger measurement as explained.

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The Tifnite Gem Co.

109 East 39th St.
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How to Order Rings To get the right size heavy paper so that the ends exactly meet when drawn lightly around the second joint of finger on which you want to wear the ring. Be careful that the measuring paper fits snugly without overlapping, and measure at the second joint. Send the strip of paper to us with other orders.

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Send me Ring No. on 10 days' approval. (In ordering ring, be sure to enclose size as described above.) I agree to pay \$4.50 on arrival, and balance at the rate of \$3.00 per month. If not satisfactory, I will return same within ten days at your expense.

Name.....

Address.....



Classified Advertising

The Purpose of this Department

is to put the reader in touch immediately with the newest needs for the home, office, farm, or person; to offer, or seek, an unusual business opportunity, or to suggest a service that may be performed satisfactorily through correspondence. It will pay a housewife or business man equally well to read these advertisements carefully.

Classified Advertising Rates in the Munsey Magazines:

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Munsey's Magazine	\$1.50
THE ARGOSY COMBINATION	
The Argosy	2.50
All-Story Weekly	2.50
Minimum space four lines.	

Combination Line Rate \$4.00 Less 2% cash discount

July 17th Argosy Combination Rates Close June 15th.

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Extraordinary Opportunity is offered ambitious men to become distributors for new product **ink** being marketed. No competition; demand everywhere. Exclusive sales rights given. Complete sales help and full co-operation assures success. Start small and grow. \$1000 automobile bike given free. Opportunity for 2000 large business selling \$10,000 yearly. Act immediately. Garfield Mfg. Co., Dept. A, Garfield Building, Brooklyn, N. Y.

SELL SOFT DRINKS—Make \$10 to \$50 a day. Just add cold water to our soft drink preparations and you have the most delicious drinks you ever tasted. You kinds, Orangeade, Grape-Julep, Cherry-Julep, etc. Thirty big glasses, 25¢; enough for 200 for \$1. Eighty-five cents clear profit on every dollar selling these delicious drinks by the glass at ball games, fairs, dances, picnics, etc. Big money selling the small packages to families, stores, etc. Send 10¢ for enough for 20 large glasses and particulars postpaid. Morley Company, A 4417-20 Madison St., Chicago.

DO YOU want to earn \$2,000 to \$5,000 a year? You can do it easily. See Anderson Steam Vulcanizer Display Ad in this issue.

AGENTS: \$100 WEEKLY possible introducing new winter automobile fuel. Specially adapted to cold weather. Starts new. Adds power, mileage and reduces operating expense. Endorsed by thousands. Territory going like wildfire. Act quick. \$28 sample outfit free. L. Baitly, Dept. 2, Louisville, Ky.

SELL What Millions Want. New, wonderful Liberty Portraits. Creates tremendous interest. Absolutely different; unique; enormous demand—39 hours' service. Liberal credit. Outfit and catalogue free. \$100 weekly profit easy. Consolidated Portrait Co., Dept. 22, 1658 W. Adams Street, Chicago.

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SEND 2¢ POSTAGE for free sample with particulars. No splashing water strikers. May seller. Returns big. Experience unnecessary. Seed Filter Co., N 73 Franklin St., New York.

Mexican Diamonds flash like genuine, fool experts, stand tests, sell for 1-10th the price. Few live Agents wanted to sell from handsome sample case. Big profits, pleasant work. Write today. Mexican Diamond Imp't. Co., Box 88, Las Cruces, N. Mexico.

PANTS \$1.00, SUIT \$2.75. MADE TO MEASURE. For even a better offer than this write and ask for free samples and new styles. Knickerbocker Tailoring Co., Dept. 540, Chicago, Ill.

Insays Tyres—Incar Armor for Auto Tyres. Doubles mileage, prevents 90% of all punctures and blowouts. Thousands in use. Tremendous demand. Big profits, pleasant work. Details free. American Automobile Accessories Co., Dept. 165, Cincinnati, O.

AGENTS \$40 A WEEK SELLING GUARANTEED HOSIERY, for men, women and children. Must wear twelve months or replaced free. Agents having wonderful success. Thomas Mfg. Co., 2207 North Street, Dayton, Ohio.

AGENTS—OUR SOAP AND TOILET ARTICLE PLAN IS A WONDER. Get our Free Sample Case Offer. Ho-Bo-Co, 137 Locust, St. Louis, Mo.

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LAND! LAND! Make big money in Michigan's best hardwood counties. No swamps or stones. 10 to 160 acres, at \$15 to \$35 per acre. Small down payment, 5% terms on balance. Good roads to near-by railroad, towns, schools, churches, etc. Over twenty years' experience in helping settlers. Warranty Deed and Abstract of Title with every purchase. Swartz Land Co., 11245 First Natl. Bk. Bldg., Chicago, Ill.

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AGENTS: SELL NEVERFAIL IRON RUST AND STAIN REMOVER. HUGE PROFITS. BIG LINE. SAMPLE. Write today. Sanford-Beal Co., Inc., Dept. A, Newark, N. Y.

WOULD YOU LIKE TO WEAR A BEAUTIFUL NEW SUIT made to your own measure. Free. 26 bottle makes 32 glasses; all flavors; just add water; lightning seller; small package; carry in pocket; outfit furnished free; send postal today. American Products Co., 2424 American Bldg., Cincinnati, Ohio.

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SALESMEN—Side or Main Line to sell low priced 6,000 mile guaranteed tires; 30x3 1/2 non-skid sells for \$12.95; other sizes in proportion. Good money-making proposition for live wires. Master Tire Co., 618 So. Michigan, Chicago.

AGENTS: WIRELESS UMBRELLA. I am paying \$2 an hour, taking orders for this newest invention. Send for 3-part outfit. Six-inch magnet demonstrator free. Parker Mfg. Company, 306 Dike Street, Dayton, Ohio.

AGENTS—YOU CAN GET A BEAUTIFUL FAST COLOR ALL WOOL "MADE-TO-MEASURE" SUIT without a cent of expense. Write Lincoln Woolen Mills Company, Dept. 25, Chicago, Ill., for their liberal suit offer.

SALES AGENTS WANTED IN EVERY COUNTY TO GIVE ALL OR SPARE TIME. Position worth \$750 to \$1500 yearly. We train the inexperienced. Novelty Cutlery Co., 77 Bar Street, Canton, Ohio.

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Classified Advertising continued on page 6.

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Free Trial

A New Plan. Wurlitzer will send you any musical instrument you wish for, of the finest quality, with a complete outfit of everything you need, for a full week's trial in your own home. No obligation to buy. If you decide to keep it pay in small monthly sums. Wurlitzer makes complete outfits cost little more than instrument alone.

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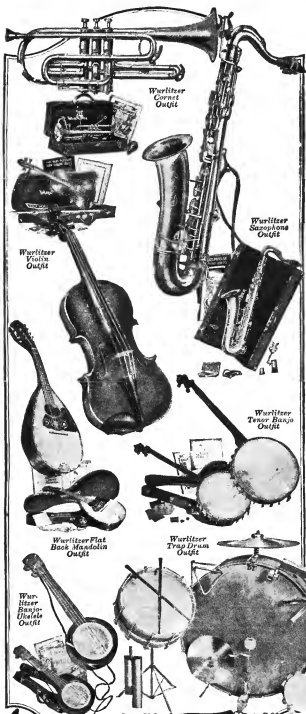
The Rudolph Wurlitzer Co., Dept. A107
117 E. 4th St., Cincinnati 329 S. Wabash Ave., Chicago

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117 E. 4th St., Cincinnati — 329 S. Wabash Ave., Chicago
Send me your new catalog with illustrations in color and full description of the Wurlitzer Complete Outfits and details of the free trial and easy payment offer.

Name

Address

(Musical instrument to which I am especially interested)



Reg. U.S. Pat. Off.
WURLITZER
200 YEARS OF MUSICAL INSTRUMENT MAKING

Classified Advertising continued from page 4.

Are YOU a Man or a Mannikin?



A man's happiness largely depends on his Vital Powers; his success in social, domestic and business life all centers around this. If he is not virile, he is not magnetic, forceful or attractive; neither is he sound after his very strength is the axis upon which all else revolves in him revives. Men become weak through overwork, worry, and bad habits, and gradually lose their strength and manhood. When they reach the stage when they find their strength on the wane, it is the forerunner of failure, and domestic happiness is then soon upset. Young men become lack-pulse of marriage, listless and purposeless; their brain power decreases, as their manhood fails. Strongfortism so strengthens the internal muscles, which are responsible for general health and physical strength, and the most obstinate and long standing cases give way, in a short time, to its internal action.

MAKE A MAN OUT OF YOURSELF

The only way to do it is to build up your body—all of it—through Nature's methods: NOT by hammering your feet, stomach, or giving it extra work to do. Don't be a pill-feeder. And don't think fate is making you a failure. The real REASON why you don't succeed doubtless lies in your poor, enervated body, in your half sickly condition, which shows in your face and your unhealthful skin. The world has no use for weak, sickly people; nobody wants to have them around.

BUILD UP YOUR BODY

You can do it, if you will only WILL to do it, and go about it in Nature's way. You can make your figure manly and symmetrical and at the same time strengthen your heart, lungs, stomach and every other vital organ, by developing the INTERNAL muscles on which their action depends, as well as your external muscles. You can get Constipation, Indigestion, Dropsy, Biliousness, or any other chronic ailment that is handicapping you and holding you back. WHEN YOU HAVE NATURE ON YOUR SIDE, get back your health, strength and a big store of reserve vitality by taking advantage of the tremendous revitalizing power which Nature has implanted in every human organism.

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SEND FOR MY FREE BOOK

"Promotion and Conservation of Health, Strength and Mental Energy" will PROVE to you that STRONGFORTISM can and will do for YOU what has done and is doing every day for other men and women who have TURNED TO NATURE for the restoration of their lost vitality. Heretofore there's no medicine of any kind in Strongfortism; no expensive apparatus required; no interference with the production of their best vitality. Heretofore or twenty minutes daily in the privacy of your own bedroom will work wonders for you.

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LIONEL STRONGFORT Physical and Health Specialist
1326 Strongfort Institute Newark, N. J.

CUT OUT AND MAIL THIS COUPON

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Dear Strongfort: Please send me your book, "Promotion and Conservation of Health, Strength and Mental Energy," for a receipt of which I enclose this 2c stamp to cover mailing expenses. I have marked X before the subject in which I am interested. (1326)

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| ... Catarrh | ... Short Wind | ... Falling Hair |
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STAMMERING

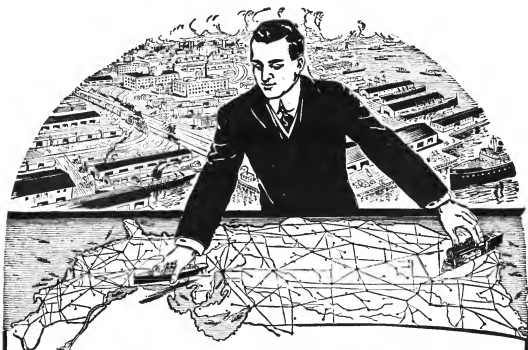
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Our course is recommended and endorsed by railroad executives and big business concerns throughout the country. Your training is under the supervision of a large corps of traffic experts among the most prominent in the country, headed by N. D. Chapin, until his present connection with us, Chief of Traffic

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"The Largest Business Training Institution in the World"

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Name.....

Position.....

Address.....

Don't Send a Penny

Just send the coupon stating size and width—that's all.

We want you to see these shoes at our risk. Examine them, try them on—and then decide as to whether or not you wish to keep them. Our special bargain price is only **\$4.69** per pair while they last. Season's greatest bargain. We send them to you, not a cent in advance, so that you can compare them with any \$7 or \$8 shoes. If you don't think this the biggest shoe bargain you can get anywhere, send the shoes back at our expense. You won't be out a cent.

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THE ARGOSY

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No. 1



The Caravan of the Dead by Harold Lamb

Author of "Marching Bands," "The Sunwise Turn," etc.

*"The stars are setting and the caravan
Starts for the dawn of Nothing. O make haste!"*

CHAPTER I.

THE ROOF OF THE WORLD.

THROUGH the dawn the figure of a man crept over the shore.

He moved slowly but with assurance, glancing up at rock spires and chasms picked out by the flooding light overhead. Almost concealed by the fog, his crawling body—the only thing stirring on the shore of the lake—resembled a powerful gnome emerging from a kind of misty inferno into the light.

On a sandstone shelf, somewhat above the thinning fog, the man paused. He had been carrying a bright, metallic object. In the half light of the ledge, this was revealed as a telescope. Carefully, he extended the instrument, focusing it to his satisfaction, and placed it on a makeshift stand, fashioned of small poplar branches.

This stand had quite evidently been erected before now. In fact, it was so constructed that the telescope, when resting upon it, could bear only on a single point.

At present it pointed into the mist, where wraithlike shapes, rising from the dark sheet of water, merged in the shadowy pools along the shore line.

The solitary watcher seated himself on a convenient stone and eyed the thinning wisps of fog silently. Miles behind and above him the crimson dawn flooded gigantic snow peaks. Great spaces of red rock and black, of yellow soil and brown, stretched toward him. Rays of light glistened on gneiss, and changed the masses of pine-forests from black to purple to dull green.

No birds crossed the expanse of the sky; the sudden breaths of air that whipped down from the upper ravines, were cold. Autumn had touched Lake Issyk Kul.

The harbingers of frost were creeping down from the white ones, the snow summits of the Kungei Altai Tagh—the sun-lighted peaks of the northern shore.

But the telescope was trained on the southern shore, still invisible in the mist. And the man was gazing steadily into the telescope.

He was a white man, taller than the average. His corduroy jacket and khaki riding breeches were worn to the same color as the leather leggins. Almost as dark was his face, covered with a brown growth of beard. The lines about mouth and eyes were deeply marked as scars—intensified by a kind of savage earnestness. Perhaps the blue eyes had once been merry; now they were cold, and hashly alight.

Bearing and face alike reflected a settled purpose. Only his eyes moved as he sat waiting passively. They marked the appearance of a solitary vulture circling over the southern shore of the lake. Although the bird must have been in the direct rays of the sun, it was black as night itself; somehow it seemed akin to the other black shadows of the Issyuk Kul ravines.

Expressionless, the man turned from the scrutiny of the vulture to his telescope. Then his figure became suddenly tense. His scarred hand turned the telescope slightly in its resting place.

A sudden puff of wind had cleared the mist and revealed the further shore of the lake—nearly two miles distant. Along this shore a series of black dots were moving.

Through the telescope they were magnified into the shape of animals, passing over sedge-land, and gray-brown stretches of sand. They were not, however, cattle or horses. Evenly spaced, the black dots moved—in single file.

By now the flame of sunrise had soared and merged into the blue of the sky, mirrored in the deeper blue of the lake. Level shafts of light struck the man and flickered on the brass of the telescope. For the first time the shadows of the southern shore drew back into the ravines. And the moving animals were clearly outlined.

"Camels," breathed the man, "five—twenty—more than threescore. Riders, too. Loads, of a fashion, I should say—" He broke off, to gaze more intently. "The leading camel has the usual pole and yak-tail flag up. Too far to listen for bells—"

Once more the mist had settled across his vision, as if a wisplike curtain had been drawn by an invisible hand to conceal the vista of the moving camels. The man resumed his patient waiting, his figure tense.

But when the rising sun had melted the fog on the lake surface, the further shore was bare. He could see the sedge grass clearly, and the waving tops of decaying rushes, against the black face of the rocks. Now, however, the only living object was the circling vulture.

Whereupon the man stood up impatiently, his gaze fixed on the bird.

"Oh," he muttered, "*you* can see behind the curtain. They say you can see death itself, before it comes. I wonder!"

In his blue eyes was a somber fire. Almost, the man glared at the distant bird of prey, as if challenging it. His face was flushed from some strong emotion. Abruptly he wheeled, and flung his voice down into the ravines by the lake shore.

"Jain Ali Beg!" he called. "Jain Ali Beg: come!"

His first words, spoken to himself, had been in English. His shout was in Turki, with which he was clearly familiar. A white and brown figure climbed nimbly from a nest of rocks in a pine grove and ran toward him.

"*Hai*— Excellency, I obey speedily."

"Now that *it* has passed, you don't think about hiding your shaven head in the tent," muttered the white man under his breath. "No, you are quite brave now, you liver-hearted son of a jackal."

The running form resolved itself into a turbaned Sart, of wiry build and bearded, crafty face. Panting, he stood before the white man, his sidelong gaze searching the distant shore of the lake the while.

"I have seen," said the white man, "the caravan."

The features of Jain Ali Beg's dark face twisted, and his brown eyes gleamed. He looked from his master to the telescope, and to the lake.

"*Aie*," he cried. "O Dono-van Khan, I, your servant, have also seen the caravan. But I would not see it again. It is a thing unblesed. In the path of the caravan, along the Terskei Ala-tau, are the white bones of men who have died long since."

"There were more than threescore camels, and on the camels—riders."

"Unholy!" echoed the Sart, his eyes widening.

"Perhaps, Jain Ali Beg."

The yellow teeth of the servant gleamed through his thin beard. In its stress of emotion, his face was even more satyrlike than usual.

"I have seen. What I have seen with my eyes, I know. Unholy is the caravan. My ears heard no bells as the camels went by—the time I watched in fear. Why were there no bells, Dono-van Khan? Nay, the Terskei Ala-tau is far from the routes of the trade caravans that go from Kashgar to Samarkand, or from Khami to Khokand. I have heard much talk of the caravan, excellency, and it is an evil thing. From nowhere it comes, and it goes—no man has seen whither it goes—"

The white man called Donovan by his servant smiled, but with his lips only. In his tired eyes the sullen purpose still smoldered. A physician would have looked at him carefully, noting certain indications of nervous exhaustion, and perhaps of fever.

"I shall see," he muttered. "Before the day is ended, I shall see."

At this Jain Ali Beg started, his eyes narrowed, and he licked dirty lips with his tongue. Then he tore at his turban with both lean hands.

"O Dono-van, excellency, forbear! The caravan is the caravan of the dead."

Donovan closed the telescope with a snap and thrust it into the servant's grasp.

"Many things, Jain Ali Beg," he said moodily, "have I seen within the last years, and you also have seen; for you rode bridle to bridle with me. I have seen men slain because of the faith in a god, in their hearts. Likewise, a *shaman* of the Kirei has plucked forth the devil of sickness before our eyes with the sound of his voice. I—and you also—have heard the great trumpets of Yakha Arik echo from invisible mountains in the sky, so that their noise reached the swift march of a day into the hills. Yet, I have not seen the dead ride."

Jain Ali Beg pressed the telescope to his breast and bent his head.

"But the white bones—these, assuredly, you have seen."

"The skulls?" Donovan shrugged his shoulders. "Washed, by chance from graveyards by the melting snows."

"Nay, excellency."

Donovan seemed not to have heard. His lined, weary face was turned toward the southern mountains into which the caravan had vanished. The fog, of course, had concealed its departure. There had been, however, something disquieting in the silence with which the moving caravan passed from sight.

Donovan was smiling.

"After all, it's fitting," he muttered to himself, not altogether clearly. "At the end of my rope. And here's that blessed caravan. Who knows—"

He turned to his servant abruptly. All his movements were swift, even as his voice was harsh.

"I shall follow the caravan, Jain Ali Beg."

The Sart bent his head. His half-closed eyes dwelt on the detail of a crawling beetle, seeking a crack in the rocks. Curiously mismated, his amber eyes glowed on the beetle, the while a hissing breath came through his lips.

"What is written is written," he cried sonorously. "No man may escape his fate, excellency."

Jain Ali Beg did not look his master in the face, because of the glow in his brown eyes. On his swarthy features there was an imprint as of unseen, demoniac fingers. Greed was stamped upon the likeness of the Sart. Plainly, the words of Donovan had aroused a lust within him.

"No man may escape?" The white man's brows went up quizzically. "What?" He caught the shoulder of Jain Ali Beg. The wry smile was still on his lips. "Jain Ali Beg, again I have the fever. Shall I follow the caravan?"

The Sart's look still consulted the beetle. Perhaps he did not care to meet the white man's scrutiny.

"Dono-van Khan," he said, and again his tongue touched his lips, "always you have followed the path of your choosing. I have seen you leave a dry bed to go forth into the rain when a tribesman summoned. That is your fate, of which I spoke. I have read a wish in your spirit to uncover the veil that makes of the caravan a hidden thing. Thus, you will go—and no words of

my speaking shall make it otherwise. What do you seek when you go with the tribesman where I am not permitted to go?"

"Once," remarked John Donovan to himself, "there was a better man than I. A saint he was, I think. And a servant. Also, there was a rooster that gave the lie to his words. Now, Jain Ali Beg will profit, if I shouldn't come back here—to the extent of a pony, a patched tent, and a fairly serviceable rifle. Well, he has coveted the rifle for a long time, and he didn't knife me." He relaxed his grip on the native. "So you think I should go, O sharer of my bread?"

Jain Ali Beg inclined his turbaned head, as if seeking for the beetle that had vanished by now.

"Even so, excellency."

"Well, then, saddle my pony. And take heed, Jain Ali Beg, of this precious pearl of wisdom: Wait here at the camp for me the space of twice ten days. If I come not by then—all that I have is yours. But—wait."

"I hear, and I obey, Dono-van Khan."

"If you do not wait, an evil thing will fasten on you, like to the shadow which follows your body—"

"Nay, I will wait."

The glimmer of real fear came momentarily into the keen eyes of the Sart. But greater than the fear was his greed. Without waiting for more, he ran off toward the small camp on the lake shore. There he filled a small saddle bag with food, and rolled a blanket.

In a very little while John Donovan mounted and, with a wave of his hand, rode away along the sheep path that led around the end of Lake Issyuk Kul to the Terskei Ala-tau—the southern shore where the caravan had passed. His tall figure sat easily erect on the shaggy pony. He guided his mount among the boulders until the grassy plain of the further shore was reached, and here he spurred into a long gallop.

In this fashion the rider had left his servant many times; now, Jain Ali Beg knew that his master would not return to find the tent waiting by the lake.

Squatted down before the empty tent,

Jain Ali Beg followed the course of his master until even his keen sight could no longer distinguish pony and rider. It was by now well past the hour of sunrise prayer for all followers of the prophet. But Jain Ali Beg did not wash; nor did he pray. Instead, he went into the tent and gazed admiringly upon the blued steel of the rifle that lay upon the extra blanket of John Donovan.

The sun mounted high in the clear sky above the motionless waters of Issyuk Kul. A comfortable warmth was reflected from the rock surfaces about the tent. The tracery of shadows moved slowly, very slowly under the pines of the mountain slopes, and a faint breeze stirred among dead poplar leaves on the brown earth. On a projecting crag the form of an ibex silhouetted its splendid head against the sky.

Jain Ali Beg took up the rifle, glancing meditatively at the ibex. Thinking better of the impulse, he put down the weapon and fell to opening cans of John Donovan's reserve supply of rations. He cooked and ate voraciously, after the manner of one satisfying a long hunger.

Then he looked at the sun and struck the tent. Packing every article of value skilfully, he loaded the pack-pony and mounted his own horse. Painstakingly, he went over the site of the camp, burning the scattered bits of paper and the wrappings of the cans, with cardboard cartridge-boxes and anything that might give an indication of the nature of the men who had quartered themselves there.

This done, he gave a grunt of satisfaction. He did not intend to wait at the lake as he had been ordered. Another hour, and the Sart was far from the camp, urging his beast along a trail apparently well known to him. By its halter, he led the reluctant pack-pony.

Horses and man passed from view within a ravine. The broad expanse of Issyuk Kul was empty of life. The ibex herd, grazing on the upper slopes, had moved elsewhere, following the whim of its leader. For some time the fire had been dwindling to embers, and to ashes.

Only, far overhead, the black speck that

was a vulture hovered, describing great circles on tireless wings that hardly seemed to move.

CHAPTER II.

THE TALE OF JAIN ALI BEG.

RAWUL SINGH, immaculate in the spotless green tunic that was his pride, poised his diminutive figure on the threshold of the bungalow of Major George Fraser-Carnie, and saluted.

"Speak!" The major's ordinarily kindly tones were sharpened by impatience. It was cold. Light from his desk-lamp was insufficient, and he had much work to do. Being a surgeon, of humane disposition, he prided himself on the fact that he did not stand so much on discipline where natives were concerned as perhaps did his brother officers of the line in the cantonments of British-India.

To Fraser-Carnie natives, ranging from his own Garhwali orderly, to the smiling Bhotias, and the morose, wandering Afghans and shoddy Taghliks of the hills, were a continuous source of professional interest. The major was past the age when native ailments aroused his zeal. He was gray-haired, ruddy, and—as he sometimes reflected, not without some degree of satisfaction—still made a presentable figure on a horse.

Moreover, he did not shun an occasional sally into the polo fields of the northern stations, more as a matter of self-discipline than of sporting interest. He had assembled material for a treatise concerning the influence of environment on tribal hereditary customs in Central Asia. For many years he had been looked upon as a dead loss by marriageable ladies of the cantonments.

For the rest, he was fond of grumbling, suffered somewhat from fever pains, and his ready humor was untouched by cynicism. He was very wise, with the wisdom bred of long years of active service, a childlike interest in everything that went on in his sphere.

So Rawul Singh did not consider himself rebuked as he might otherwise have done.

"With the Kashgar traders," he responded, "there came a sahib, a certain tribesman, well mounted—"

Among his hobbies, Fraser-Carnie numbered an intimate acquaintance with the varied dialects of the hills.

"Is not this, Rawul Singh," he asked, "a matter for the captain-sahib of the post?" He glanced reluctantly at the papers on his desk.

"One of the tribesmen," pursued the orderly, "wears the dress of a Mohammedan, of small worth"—Rawul Singh was a follower of a Hindu sect—"and he has a sickness seated in his stomach. It is not a sickness that may be let out by the little knives."

"Bring him."

The major sighed. The post he had chosen for his researches was a small one; being the most northern of the hill stations, beyond Gilghit. It was perhaps the farthest-most of the British line that had crept up into the Himalayas from India since the great war. For this reason, it boasted no other medical officer. Presently the ice and snow would shut it off from communication with Kashmir, to the south, except by a few hardly *jighits*.*

Rawul Singh returned, ushering in Jain Ali Beg.

The Sart's bearded countenance was complacent, and his small eyes twinkled shrewdly. Rawul Singh regarded him with vigilant interest. It was not often that a tribesman rode to the Gilghit Pass with the rifle and belongings of a white man affixed to his saddle.

After looking at the man's tongue and inquiring his symptoms in the Sart's native speech, Fraser-Carnie frowned.

"You have no sickness, Jain Ali Beg. Why, then, have you told a lie?"

Jain Ali Beg salaamed.

"It was true, excellency, that I had a pain, born of eating the food that is in the iron boxes of the white man. But I have also business with the *Daktar-efendi* whose name has come to the ears of his unworthy servant. It has been said that the master of wisdom is a gatherer of tales spoken by those who come down the moun-

* Mounted messengers.

tain passes. I also have a tale. Will the excellency be pleased to give some small pieces of silver—”

The truth of the matter was that Jain Ali Beg had been questioned closely by native non-commissioned officers as to his possession of the rifle and other goods. He realized that if he did not tell a plausible story, he might be held, even arrested. This did not suit him, as he had planned to visit the bazaars of Srinagar and dispose of the remaining articles of John Donovan at profit to himself. He had been driven to journey south from Kashgar by fear.

Jain Ali Beg had waited the two weeks. Not at the camp, as he promised John Donovan, but in a ravine some distance away, where he had watched patiently the site of the deserted camp through the telescope. If the white man had returned, the native would have fled with his spoil.

Because of fear of Dono-van Khan, Jain Ali Beg had lingered, feeling something of the impulse which leads criminals to seek again the scenes of their crimes. But when the white man did not reappear a greater fear had seized upon the Sart.

He had made his way swiftly south, through the Himalaya passes. Nor had he lingered at Kashgar.

Once free of the passes, however, and within the English lines, the Sart reflected upon his situation with satisfaction. He was wealthy now, and he had no remorse for the abandonment of his master. To the Mohammedan mind crime is a negative quality. When all human actions are determined by fate, how is one man to be held responsible for his actions?

Fraser-Carnie was too experienced to offer Jain Ali Beg any money, but the Sart, for reasons of his own connected with the freedom of his person and possession of Donovan's goods, was anxious to show a clean slate.

His master, a white man, he said, had disappeared. Fraser-Carnie was interested inasmuch as Rawul Singh had mentioned the rifle and other articles, and Jain Ali squatted on the floor of the bungalow to tell his story. He repeated, on the whole truthfully, what had taken place at the shore of Issyuk Kul; but added that he had

waited faithfully at the camp, as he had promised John Donovan, and laid great emphasis on the fact that his master had said that he was to keep the rifle and other things.

The surgeon scanned the Sart keenly by the insufficient light from the lamp. Blue eyes fathomed brown, and the native shifted his gaze. Fraser-Carnie leaned forward.

“This caravan that your master followed,” he said slowly, “you do not think it was an ordinary caravan?”

Jain Ali Beg shook his head and stretched wide the fingers of both hands.

“Excellency—who am I to judge?”

“Issyuk Kul is not one of the usual trade routes.”

“The words of the excellency are as the pure pearls of truth. Nay, it is not wonted. Among the ignorant tribes, and the low-caste Hindus who wander penniless thereby”—the Sart cast a vindictive glance at Rawul Singh who had not treated him with overconsideration—“it is said that the caravan is one of spirits.”

Fraser-Carnie snorted and shrugged his shoulders.

“Because, excellency,” persisted Jain Ali Beg, “the caravan comes from a place that is not, and no man has seen where it goes. It is in my mind that the caravan is a thing accursed. No dogs follow it. *Eh*—are there villages where the caravan goes? Nay, there are none. In the mists of dawn it is seen sometimes by the eastern end of Issyuk Kul.”

“Sort of a *Flying Dutchman*, what?” meditated the surgeon. “Well, no end of weird stories are told by the natives—

“But spirits cannot be seen,” he said aloud.

“Dono-van Khan saw them, and he followed. He did not come back.”

Fraser-Carnie frowned. “Who was your master?” he asked.

Jain Ali Beg considered, stroking his beard.

“In the bazaars of Bokhara, where *bhang* and opium are exchanged for Chinese silks, I met with Dono-van Khan. He was very drunk, and the *bhikras*—beggars—were clamorous, excellency. Dono-van Khan was alone and weaponless, but he

seemed unafraid. He thrust a handful of silver at me, saying to fling it to the beggars, since it was fitting that a dog should feed dogs. Whereupon I rose up and followed after him, for he had money. That was as many years ago as I have fingers on one hand. Since then I have served him, and we have gone from town to town, from hill village to hill village. Sometimes we rode for many nights, when there were those who pursued.

"Sometimes," he continued thoughtfully, "we were the pursuers. At such times there came men out of the *koi-yul*—the goat paths—who rode beside my master, and many times rifles spoke and men were slain. Dono-van Khan bore himself like one who hunted—in the hills. Yet he had no desire to slay beasts except to eat. And the riders who came to him called him Khan. Always danger and strife flung their shadows across his path. Now, he has entered the shadow of death itself."

The surgeon pursed his lips reflectively, as if in an effort of memory. He realized that Jain Ali Beg was concealing much; likewise, that the Sart could not be made to tell what he wished to conceal.

"Donovan?" he remarked. "That name seems somewhat familiar. So you think he is dead?"

"Assuredly," nodded Jain Ali Beg. "Has he not turned the reins of his horse after the dead?"

Rawul Singh stepped forward.

"Sahib," he observed, "I have heard of caravans that bore the bodies of the dead. They journey to the shrines of the Mussulman saints, for burial. Is not this such a one?"

"Nay," interposed the Sart scornfully. "O one-of-small-understanding, you speak of the burial caravans of the plains. This is another matter."

"Did you," asked the surgeon, "see the caravan after your master departed?"

Again came the flicker of apprehension into the tawny eyes of the servant of John Donovan.

"Does the lightning, after striking down a tree, remain to be seen?"

Fraser-Carnie shrugged. It was clear that nothing more was to be learned by

questioning the native. He suspected that Jain Ali Beg was perhaps not such a faithful servant as he claimed to be. As to Donovan, the surgeon had only the missing chord of memory that suggested he had once known a white man of that name in the hills—a powerful and shadowy figure.

He glanced from the bungalow window. The darkness outside was softened by a rush of snowflakes—the first of the season. Already the ground was white. Occasional lanterns bobbed past; the windows of the station huts glowed warmly.

Fraser-Carnie shivered, for it had grown steadily colder. On the Himalaya slopes above Gilghit, the world must be a frozen wilderness of white. He sent Rawul Singh for his storm-coat, and dismissed Jain Ali Beg, gathering up his papers into a portfolio.

He could do nothing for Donovan. Even if the region around Issyuk Kul had been within the English lines, it would be a matter of the utmost difficulty and danger to send a relief party north at that season.

Reflecting in this manner, he was waiting for the return of his orderly when a cry resounded from his doorstep. It was a sudden, strident cry that dwindled to a moan.

Fraser-Carnie started. Then, being a man of good nerves and accustomed to prompt action, he strode to the door and flung it open.

"Do you know," he repeated that evening at the small mess of the station, "I would hardly have thought twice of the Mohammedan's tale, if it had not been for the manner of his death. He was lying on my doorstep, knifed—poor beggar—by one who knew how to use a knife. I saw the man who did it, and the queer chap actually took the pains to explain it to me."

At this point the worthy surgeon paused, not without an eye to dramatic effect, and the officers looked up over their cigars.

"It was a fellow taller than the usual run of hillmen. He wore a sheepskin coat, or rather cloak, a gray wool cap, and his features were neither pure Chinese, Kirghiz, nor Sart. He spoke very broken Turki—as calm as I am now. He said: 'This is the reward of a faithless servant.' Then the murderer chap vanished into the darkness.

Perhaps he ran into the *nullah* behind my bungalow. Rawul Singh failed to trace him because of the falling snow, and of course he didn't show up again at the station. Queer—what?"

Yes, it was queer. Rawul Singh's sole comment was, grimly enough, the words of the Sart:

"The lightning strikes, and does not remain to be seen."

But neither he nor Major Fraser-Carnie knew the last speech of John Donovan to his servant. And Jain Ali Beg was past telling.

CHAPTER III.

TWO LETTERS.

"EDITH is late, as usual."

Miss Catherine Rand spoke in the manner of one who does not expect to be contradicted.

"Isn't she generally late, my dear?"

"But she may fall off and scar her face, or ruin her complexion in the snow!"

"I have noticed that when Edith falls, she manages to come off with a whole skin, and I reckon her complexion takes cares of itself."

Arthur Rand was speaking absently. Through the glass doors of the hotel tea-room he was admiring one of the finest vistas in the world, the snow covered banks of the St. Lawrence, seen from the height of Quebec. Scattered groups of people—tourists for the most part—were passing along the chateau terrace, laughing with the exhilaration of the afternoon's sport, riding, skating or tobogganing. It was to the fancied danger of this last that Miss Rand had referred. Now she sniffed, realizing that two things in her brother's speech were subject to correction.

"You said 'reckon,'" she whispered swiftly. The Rands were Kentuckians, although the brother's business and the sister's inclination to travel had kept them much way from their home. Especially now, when Catherine Rand had decided that Edith was fast reaching a marriageable age. Consequently the occasional lapses of Arthur Rand and his daughter into the com-

mon vernacular of the South irritated the aunt, who considered that she now occupied the position of Edith's mother, long since dead.

"Well, I guess, then," he amended, quietly. Catherine had always maintained that her brother was lazy, and that he gave in too much to Edith.

Now she raised horrified brows at the fresh Americanism embodied in "guess." It was so thoughtless of Arthur to betray himself in this fashion! And in the tea-room of the Chateau.

Tea, to Catherine, was a ceremonial of the day; to Arthur Rand it supplied an excuse for a toddy, obtainable—he thanked the gods—in Canada. He leaned back in the corner lounge, puffing at a cheroot.

Arthur Rand was a florid, kindly man, with an implicit belief in the Providence that watches over children, the United States of America, and the Commonwealth of Kentucky. An engineer of some promise, he had retired early, and in the words of the Pendennis Club, "managed his own affairs," always in rather a muddle.

Those who knew him well said that he had withdrawn too much into himself after the death of his wife. They believed that he had spoiled Edith. Of course, they admitted, Edith was a thoroughly spoilable person. Still—

"So many eligible young men at the Chateau," observed Catherine to her brother, "and Edith treats them like children."

"Eh? Well, my dear, perhaps that is why so many eligible young men are courtin' her."

"You don't seem to think she should ever have a husband!"

Arthur Rand ignored the challenge. His sister had taken upon her shoulders the task of marrying Edith. Catherine dreamed vaguely of some attractive Englishman, perhaps with a title in the background. She herself was more a subject of the king than many Britons. She had "improved" herself conscientiously, but the girl had not been a docile subject for improvement.

At the table nearest them a man arose. Catherine Rand noted that he had a very good figure, set off by riding clothes, and a

sunburned, rather saturnine face which she appraised as highly interesting. She admired the ease with which the man left the room, and the nonchalance with which he had worn spurs and norfolk jacket into the tea-room. His dark, keen eyes, and neat black mustache quite satisfied her. She noted that he had been alone at his table, and that the waiter had received a moderate tip respectfully.

She sighed. The romance of her life had recently taken by default the guise of easily digestible novels; but Catherine Rand flattered herself she was yet young in spirit. Her exact age had become, of late years, an uncertain quantity, known only to her brother, who was considerably discreet, and to Edith, who was not. She was tall, brown-haired—at some pains—and presentable. “Now, I wonder who he is?” she thought; aloud she added: “We have *been* here some time. When are we leaving?”

Arthur Rand came out of a brown study, to shake his head. At that very moment he was expecting an important business letter that might send him to Chile or Alaska or elsewhere. His affairs were more than usually tangled, owing to very heavy investment in a copper company with mines located in South America and the Klondike.

“Soon,” he responded. “I’d give a right smart lot of money to know where.”

Catherine Rand bridled, at the unfortunate choice of words, and rose. She did not care to discuss what she termed business. To her a copper mine was a hole in the ground that gave forth money. Her brother knew better. He had associated himself with a company endeavoring to combine several silver and copper enterprises. But at present, owing largely to the ignorance of those in control, the company was more productive of indebtedness than earnings.

Arthur Rand was more than a little worried, despite his easy-going nature. Not for the world, however, would he have allowed Edith to guess this.

He followed the imposing figure of his sister up-stairs to the small lobby. At the desk she called up Edith’s room, to learn that the girl had not yet come in. Also, she failed to discover the name of the man

in riding-clothes who had inquired fruitlessly at that moment for his mail. Being slightly hard of hearing, she heard it pronounced as “Money.”

“Money,” she thought, pursing her lips, “and good-looking—very. I always like the dark, self-possessed type. Now, I wonder—”

She went to her room thoughtfully. Catherine Rand was really devoted to Edith, and her matrimonial conjectures were well meant.

The Rands had gone to their rooms to change, and evening dress was making its appearance in the lobby when Edith entered.

She was glowing with the rush of cold air. Her short skirt and soft, blue sweater clung to the shape of a splendid figure, taller perhaps than that of the average woman. Under the silk tam, her hair was reckless of confinement.

Many feminine eyes scanned Edith’s hair and regretfully perceived that it was a natural color, in spite of the gleam of dull gold.

“A goddess,” murmured a new masculine arrival, staring. “A Greek goddess, on my word.”

“Dear chap,” uttered a friend, “mythology teaches us the Greeks were brunettes. Say a Scandinavian storm divinity and I’m with you—”

Edith had quick ears, but her gray eyes did not seek out the two men. She was accustomed to such remarks. She did not like them. She made her way quietly into the crowd around the desk, whereupon a clerk who had been explaining the mystery of Canadian-American exchange to a troubled tourist, hurried toward her and sought out her mail at the girl’s brief request.

Edith glanced idly about the lobby, and realized that she was late. Also hungry, decidedly so. She had been enjoying herself hugely, and her eyes still sparkled.

“Carries herself well,” meditated the advocate of the classics, “and has a haughty eye. Good family, I should say, and knows it—”

“More likely,” interposed the friend, “plays tennis and swims. Wager the dinner check on that.”

Speculatively, Edith glanced at him, the ghost of a smile trembling at the edge of red lips. She had an altogether human impulse to tell him he would win his bet. Edith was not a respecter of convention—embodied in the character of her aunt. Instead, she took the letters offered by the smiling clerk.

One was a legal size communication addressed to her father. She ran through a note from a chum casually, and tore open the third missive. Even in a hurry, Edith could never resist the temptation of the mail. Although, strictly speaking, the Southern girl was never in a hurry.

She drew a quick breath, and her brow puckered inquisitively. The blue sheet of paper in her hand was scribbled over in an extraordinary fashion. It looked somewhat as if a child had been amusing itself drawing meaningless characters. Except that the characters were neat and regular, after a fashion of their own. Pothooks, dashes and scrolls were carefully aligned, with dots above and below.

Edith wondered if it was shorthand and knew that it was not. She consulted the envelope for the first time, and gave an exclamation of dismay. The name on the envelope was E. H. Monsey. It was addressed to the Château, Quebec, Province of Quebec, Canada. In one corner was the legend, "To be held until called for."

Curiously, the girl noted that a foreign stamp was attached, and that the postmark was unreadable. Mechanically, she replaced the blue sheet in the torn envelope.

Evidently the mail clerk had made a mistake. The "M" files of the pigeonholes were directly above the "R's."

"Will you pardon me?" a drawing voice inquired. "My letter, I believe."

Edith looked up quickly. A pair of black eyes bored into hers, fleetingly. For a second the scrutiny was searching, caustic. Then it softened into another light, curious and approving.

The man wore a dinner-jacket. One hand was extended. Edith had not seen him when she entered the lobby. She felt herself flush, observing that he was smiling.

"I had no idea—" she began quickly. "The letter was given me—"

"Quite so; by those confounded clerks. I've been looking for it. Thank you."

He took the envelope from her quickly, authoritatively. She was angry at herself for being confused. The error was certainly not on her part, although of course she had opened it without looking at the name on the envelope.

"I beg your pardon," she said coldly.

"Not at all." The man's glance was on her, once more keenly appraising. This time it lingered. Edith noticed that he had concealed the face of the envelope with his hand. "A sheer stroke of luck that it came to you."

Perhaps the last word was accentuated a trifle. Monsey bowed easily, adding: "If I had not seen it in your hand it might have escaped me altogether."

Edith nodded, turning away. Really, the man had very good manners. She could not refrain from looking back when she was half-way up the carpeted stairs. She wanted to see how he looked when he saw the pothooks and curlicues. Did he really expect such an extraordinary missive?

Monsey was studying the blue sheet intently. Quite evidently, she thought, he was successful in reading it. At that instant he glanced up directly at her.

Over the intervening crowd, black eyes looked steadily into gray. Into the black crept an eagerness, almost wistful. She perceived that he had bowed again, readily—almost deferentially. Edith looked away, at the clock, and ran up the steps.

To be exact, she fled. Because of her quickened pulses she was provoked. Even angry, at the Monsey man, she reasoned. Quite possibly on that account she dressed swiftly with more than usual care in a delicate gray-blue evening gown that she knew to be becoming.

CHAPTER IV.

AN INTRODUCTION.

RAND was more than usually silent at dinner that evening. His letter had called for almost immediate departure. The situation of the copper company was critical.

Plans, overambitious in the framing, were miscarrying. Suitable markets for the Chilean copper and silver must be opened at once. Rand must attend to it. Production costs were mounting, and competition in the United States was very keen. An effort was planned to increase foreign sales—

Rand, never very quick of perception, sensed an undercurrent of danger tugging at the launching of the venture. And he had risked much; he had been too optimistic—

"Daddy," reproached Edith, "you're worrying again, in spite of this splendid music. You should have come tobogganing with me!"

Through the black-and-gold expanse of the Château dining-room the melody of a distant orchestra swept invitingly. Well-trained waiters laid an excellent dinner before the girl. The chatter of talk half drowned the music. Arthur Rand glanced at his daughter fondly. He did not want her to guess his thoughts.

"The celebrated divinity who weaves our destiny—the blind goddess—what was her name, Edith?" he began.

"The one with the shears, daddy?"

"Atrophy," announced Miss Rand suddenly. She prided herself on her reading, but her memory was sometimes at fault.

Edith giggled softly.

"Oh, auntie—Atropos!" She turned to her father. "When you talk like that, something is going to happen. Where are we going?"

"If it's Alaska, I won't," observed Miss Rand decisively. Alaska, to her, represented bears and dog-sleds and thrilling motion pictures. "Edith and I will stay in California and rest."

"I must go," said Rand, "to India."

He explained lightly that there were some matters of credits to be attended to. Edith was silent, her eyes serious. Her intuition fathomed the moods of her father swiftly, and she knew that something important was at issue, to impel him to make such a trip. Almost, the word had startled her. Miss Rand elevated her lorgnette.

"Did you see that man look at us?" she murmured. "The handsome fellow, Edith, alone at the table behind you."

The girl peered over her shoulder discreetly and recognized Monsey, the recipient of the blue letter. He had turned his back and was busied with coffee and a cigarette.

"I'm going, too, daddy!" she cried. "I've never been to India. You know you'd be right lonesome without me," she pleaded.

"I know that I should be bored with the trip," enunciated Miss Rand distinctly. She had carefully cured herself of the low Southern accent. Not so Edith.

Arthur Rand considered. He did not fancy the idea that his daughter should be carried about by the dictates of the fate to which he had alluded. Yet her companionship was a rare comfort to him, and he would miss her greatly.

"Better not, Edith. It's a real long journey, and the heat in late spring would be bad for you—"

"It can't be worse than Louisville, that summer you were sick and I stayed on to take care of you. Besides, aren't there some hills you can go to?"

"Dear," objected her father, "It's not like a pleasure trip. I shall have important matters to attend to."

"Really," remarked Miss Rand, "that man is looking at us again. He has one of those, those sardonic faces."

Neither father nor daughter smiled at the unusual rendering by Miss Rand of the word "sardonic." Edith begged to go, and Arthur Rand refused. Apparently Monsey did not glance around again. Very possibly he had heard what was said. The orchestra came to them more clearly as the diners began to depart.

Edith changed her line of attack by appealing to her aunt.

"You would have a lot of fun planning the tour, Aunt Kate," she suggested with a Machiavellian insight. She was accustomed to wheedle her father by fair means or foul. And next to solitaire, Miss Rand was devoted to conning the guide-books and travels of a noted tourist agency.

"I have no desire, Edith, to go into a country of natives and snakes and— and scorpions and fevers. I would have a headache, and I might be sick. The water would be certain to disagree with me."

Unnoticed by any one but Edith, Monsey rose and walked over to another table. Repulsed but not defeated, the girl whistled thoughtfully—a breach of good manners that shocked Miss Rand.

“You would make a lot on the foreign exchange during the tour, Aunt Kate.” Edith had read in a French newspaper in Quebec that the pound sterling was much depreciated in price, being at a low ebb after the great war. Realizing on the premium on American exchange in other countries had become the latest hobby of Miss Rand, who did not fail—as Edith pointed out—to profit by her disowned country in this respect.

“After all,” mused that lady, “India is British.”

“But, my dear—” Arthur Rand was silenced by his daughter, who caught his hand in both hers.

“Now, daddy! I’m going. Please!” Edith ransacked her brain swiftly. Wasn’t there some Englishman who visited you a few years ago, Aunt Kate? You entertained him at home—”

“Major Fraser-Carnie!” exclaimed Miss Rand. “Why, of all things! He wrote me a letter of thanks from India, and I reckon—I *think* perhaps he’s still living there.” She sat upright in her chair. “The army register would tell us where he lives—”

Edith listened to no more. She beamed upon her father. Her battle was won. He threw up his hands with a sympathetic smile, still troubled, however, by the prospect.

Before they left the table an acquaintance came up with Monsey in tow. The man of the blue letter—so the girl thought of him—was introduced to Edith. Miss Rand, in high good humor, bristled with approval. She even nodded agreeably when Monsey mentioned the ballroom and excellent music.

Edith danced, as she did everything else, very well. She passed among the moving throng on the polished floor with a kind of triumphant and unconscious grace. She had a trick of singing the air softly to herself, and she spoke little. Monsey, also, was silent.

Soon came a clamorous crowd of half-grown men to claim her, and Monsey bowed his thanks for the dance. Looking over the

shoulder of her new partner, the girl saw him standing in a doorway, watching her. His dark eyes were expressionless. He did not lounge or sit like most of the other men, but poised alertly. She knew that there was great physical strength in his tall frame, and that this strength was under iron control.

The girl hummed to herself happily. The spirit of joy welled up in her. Her light feet hardly touched the floor as she danced.

To Edith Rand the ballroom, the music, the homage of the men, was a stage set for her delight. It was for this setting she had been reared, taught, and sheltered—like some rare flower that blooms splendidly under certain conditions of light and heat.

This was her life. She knew nothing of the pains taken to provide the setting—nothing of the efforts and anxieties of her father. Dresses, parties and pleasant companions were all forthcoming at her wish.

All other aspects of life were vague to Edith Rand. Like a contented child, she had set her feet in the sunny path that had been opened for her. And the beauty and grace, matured into finer bloom than any flower, was the reward of Arthur Rand. The cloud that had settled over his affairs seemed to him to overshadow the gay face of his daughter.

“A thoroughbred,” said Edouard Monsey to himself, critically, “clean-limbed and unspoiled. A prize worth a handsome fight. It’s a chance worth taking, by all the gods, and—after all, I seldom come a cropper.”

Smiling, he descended to the lobby to write out a cablegram carefully. So carefully that it might well have been in code. He found Rand beside him at the desk, frowning over the wording of several cablegrams, a cold cheroot under his white mustache dyed yellow at the edge by tobacco.

“May I ask the pleasure of a walk over the ramparts to-morrow, Mr. Rand,” observed Monsey courteously, “with your daughter?”

He spoke with a very slight accent. His politeness touched an answering chord in the Southerner.

“Eh? By all means, sir, by all means.”

With a bow Monsey left the other to his cogitations. The music had ceased. Scat-

tered groups of guests left the card-tables. Upper windows in the great Château towers glowed and darkened. The twisted, snow-muffled streets of Quebec had long been silent.

The curtain had been drawn across the stage. Attendants and players alike slept, shielded from the outer cold. Only, somewhere in the old French city under the height, chimes echoed from a cathedral tower. Answering bells sent their note forth under the stars. A soft chorus of iron-tongued harmony welled from invisible sources.

Even though the pleasure stage was deserted in the hours between late night and day, the chimes of Quebec did not sleep.

Again, at dawn, came the many-tongued harmony. A faint, crimsoned glow crept into shuttered blinds. Sleigh bells rang out down the steep slope of a shadowy street. From the garrison barracks came an answering, musical note. Edith Rand slept quietly, being healthily tired. In one of the bedrooms overlooking the river a man in evening dress started up from a chair.

Monsey who had been dozing, dressed, in the chair, swore softly.

"Confound the bells!" he muttered, lifting clenched hands to his head.

In the confused moment of waking from heavy, troubled sleep, he had fancied the chimes were human voices. He had heard the distant, wailing cry of cloaked muezziins, summoning to prayer and shouting forth the ritual praises of a prophet.

He had been dreaming, and the effect was still strong upon him. He fancied that cries of anguish were ringing in his head—cries drowned by the clamor of huge trumpets lifted to the skies.

"Horns of Jericho!" he exclaimed. This time he did not speak in English.

Grotesquely, his fancy still retained the echo of the chimes, distorted into another sound—the summons of ten-foot iron trumpets, reverberating with the impulse of the lungs of powerful men, and reechoed from distant hill summits as if from cliffs in the sky. His memory pictured hooded heads raised to the dawn, and lips murmuring age-old prayers.

The sleigh bells had taken the semblance

of camel bells that jangled as long-haired beasts pad-padded over the snow, to the *hoa-hoa* of caravaneers.

Then he glanced from the window, out over the mist-shrouded channel of the river; laughed and stretched.

"Nerves, by Jove! Didn't know I had 'em."

Still smiling, he lit a strong cigarette, preparatory to undressing, for a cold shower and a change of clothes before breakfast.

CHAPTER V.

DIVIDED PATHS.

MONSEY was fresh and keen after his restless night. His eyes were bright, and his vitality seemed quickened by lack of sleep. Edith joined him, in sweater and walking-skirt, and together they sought the slippery paths of the fortifications.

The girl pressed ahead swiftly, untroubled by the climb and delighted by the view over the white hills.

"I'm so curious," she confided, "Aunt Kate says it's dreadful. And I really couldn't help seeing your letter, Mr. Monsey. Was—was it shorthand, or some code? I've been trying to guess, ever since."

"Neither," he smiled. "You are not acquainted with the Asiatic languages, Miss Rand?"

"Oh, I see! Then it was Turkish?"

In silence, he helped her up an ice-covered flight of steps.

"Are you a professor, Mr. Monsey?" she added lightly, seeing that he would not reply. "Or—or an expert?"

"I have not the honor," he responded, in his stilted English. "Business—yes. By the way, it was not Turki."

Somehow, she received the impression that he had not wanted her to believe that it was. The man did not seem to wish to talk about himself. He paid her many compliments, and his alert eyes sought hers.

They had entered the fortress, and were wandering alone about the bed of the old moat, having declined the services of a military guide. She paused to pat the muzzle of a breechloader cannon, of obsolete pattern.

"Poor fellow," she smiled, "he has seen his day, hasn't he? I wonder if he growled at enemies, in his time."

Monsey shrugged his shoulders.

"*Un fait accompli, mademoiselle.* Still, I have seen his brethren, and they still point at enemies. Ah, yes. Sometimes they bite."

"Where?" wondered Edith. "You have been in the army?"

Again his eyes went to her quickly. She saw a muscle in his brown cheek.

"Some service, I have seen," he admitted politely, adding: "In some native forts north of Kashmir there are the old cannon."

He leaned beside her on the massive weapon and fell to talking about India. He described the hills of the north, the scent of the pines.

"You have heard it called the garden of the earth, Miss Rand. Kashmir—but English words are cold. The natives call it the paradise of the elder gods. Soon, in spring, it will be in bloom. The jasmine, and honeysuckle—acacias and roses—such roses. Vines, clinging to sun slopes—"

Smiling, he spoke of Srinagar, the Sun City. Of perfumed winds of evening, and bamboo boats drifting along waterways in the heart of the city. He took her in imagination to the hill chalets nestling under crags that dwarfed description. He led her along valleys shadowed by the great *deodars*, with fern beds underfoot.

"They are places of sheer beauty," he said quietly, "and worthy of the ornament of your loveliness."

There was emotion in his voice, and homage in his eyes. Edith had been thrilled by his description of the hills. Now she looked away uncertainly. Monsey dwelt on her warmly, burning with a rising fire.

"I shall love your hills," she said thoughtfully.

"I prophesy it, Miss Rand." His gloved hand closed over hers firmly. "You must come to Kashmir, if you are ever in India. I think you will come!"

She wondered how much Monsey had heard of the conversation at dinner the night before. Strange, that he had not spoken of it directly.

"The vines of Kashmir cover forgotten temples in the forests. The Himalayas are the holy places of the natives. In their prayers they raise their eyes to the summits of what they call Himachal, believing that the hills are the abiding places of the gods. 'Those who die in Himachal are blessed,' they say. Ah, yes. There you will, perhaps, see a hidden corner of things."

Edith's imagination had been fired by his description. Almost, she had forgotten the man himself. "What is beyond Kashmir—above it?" she asked curiously.

Monsey checked himself and looked down. "The roof of the world. So the natives call it."

Edith laughed suddenly, contentedly. "I think you are so much nicer than Aunt Kate's guide-books. She would never think to call mountains 'the roof of the world.'" She drew a deep breath, thrusting some wandering hair—displaced by the cold wind—into place under her cap. "What is it like there?"

"Some people, Miss Rand, are born blind, and they never learn to see." Monsey eyed her curiously. "Once a Tatar emperor held his kingdom there. 'It is now dust and ruins. The empire of the Turk—that, too, is gone. Then a Czar and his Cossacks stretched out greedy hands for it. *Pouf!* The wind of Asia—they call it the *tenegri buran*, in the hills, the ghost wind—blew. And the Czar and his soldiers are dead. Now the English *Raj* reaches out into the hill passes."

He paused to strike a match upon the cannon and light a cigarette.

"But the great hills are now the stronghold of the tribes. Since the war, the white men have vanished from the roof of the world. Behold! Fate turns a leaf in the book you and I cannot read."

The girl was silent, wrapped in her thoughts.

"What do we know of the tribes, Miss Rand? They have their wars and their religions. Both are the breath of life to them. But we Europeans are no longer onlookers."

"You know more than you are telling me."

In another person this would have been

rude. Edith Rand's frankness, however, was part of herself. Monsey eyed his cigarette. The lines of his handsome face had hardened.

"Yes?" Once more he touched her hand. "I will tell you more. You will come to Kashmir—the garden of the earth. Your beauty will be like a jewel in a splendid diadem. I will talk to you there."

His face was near to hers. Edith withdrew her hand quietly and moved away. Monsey's personality, attractive while he had been describing the wonders of India, had become suddenly unpleasant to her. She had quick instincts. She felt the vitality of the man, and the vigor of his will. Unafraid, she was still disturbed.

"My aunt would be glad to see you," she responded coolly. "We are going to India."

Monsey laughed.

"It is *kismet*. I, also, am bound there."

"By England? Daddy is right anxious to get there, and we will cross from Quebec."

Momentarily, Monsey's brow clouded. Then he smiled agreeably.

"*Voilà*—see how fate divides us. I go by way of the tiresome C. P. R., and the steamers of that celebrated railway." He fell into step at her side. "You travel east—I west."

They had come to the edge of the bulwarks. Standing on the uncertain footing, the girl was staring down at the riverfront, watching the moving dots that were people five hundred feet below. Height had no terror for her.

The man braced himself against the wind puffs, watching her. Outlined against a cloud-flecked sky, her flushed face and flying hair were a study for the talented brush of an artist. She had moved away from his supporting arm.

"This wind is treacherous," he warned, but the girl did not draw back. "Still, do not forget. I have had a dance—one. I will have another at Srinagar. Will you promise? I will wait for your coming."

Edith wondered fleetingly what was the man's occupation in life, that he could await the travels of a woman.

"Give me your hand on it," he smiled.

She moved to take his hand. In that instant a fresh gust of wind swept the ramparts. It buffeted the girl, and she swayed, with a quick cry of dismay. One slender foot, high-heeled, slipped.

Edith fell to her knees on the very edge of the sheer drop to the rocks below.

The icy crust of the snow afforded her no grasp, and the weight of her body drew her downward. She slipped an inch farther, and her cry choked to silence. Her heart fluttered and paused, and every nerve in her body tingled into swift pain.

Then she felt a firm clutch on her outstretched hand. She was jerked violently back and upward.

Monsey had acted with the readiness of a man of quick wits. He had caught the girl's hand in his own, at the same time throwing himself back upon the rampart. His free hand swept behind him, to clutch the edge of the stone wall which lined the inner face of the fortification.

By exerting his strength he pulled the girl back swiftly while she still lay upon the snow. In doing this, he had run small risk himself. Still, he had acted promptly, daringly.

Edith felt herself caught around the waist and dropped through space. She closed her eyes, still feeling Monsey's grasp. When she opened them, she looked full into the man's face bent over hers.

Monsey's effort had caused him to lose his balance and jump down the two yards into the snow of the moat, on the side of the rampart away from the cliff. He held the girl's body pressed close to his. Into his eyes had leaped again the hot flame.

"*Kismet*," he laughed softly. For an instant his grasp tightened, and Edith felt his warm breath on her lips. Confused by her fall, she clung to him. Vaguely she wondered whether he had kissed her. Then she freed herself and stood upright. Monsey stepped back, his eyes triumphant.

"It is the will of the gods that I should be of service to you," he said. "You will not forget the dance at Srinagar now, Miss Rand."

Edith walked back along the moat silently beside him. She was grateful, yet provoked. She could still feel the impress

of his arms about her. Why had he held her like that?

"I shall not forget," she replied calmly. "Really, I cannot thank you—enough."

Inwardly, she wondered whether he had not been too ready to assert his claim for his service. Most men, she thought, would have minimized what they had done. Monsey seemed strangely pleased, as if her danger had accorded with his own will.

At the door of the Château he took her hand in farewell, and looked long into her eyes, with the burning intensity she had come to dislike.

"Between here and Srinagar," he whispered, will be a gap in my life. I shall not live until I see you again."

Edith found that she was trembling, not knowing that it was reaction from her fright at the cliff edge. For the second time in two days she had the sensation of wanting to run away from Monsey.

She did not see him again in Quebec. The Rands were busy with preparations in the short interval before the next steamer. Almost before Edith realized it they were driving down the cobbled streets to the water-front in the mists of a cold morning. The confusion of embarkation, with its hurrying stewards, hasty farewells, and the usual tangle of hand luggage, claimed them. Miss Rand was in her element.

Edith, still somewhat sleepy, stood in the lounge of the small steamer with an armful of wraps and watched the white summits of the fortifications reflect the rising sun. A siren blast reverberated warningly. Deck stewards hurried across her vision, placing chairs in position.

Quizzically she reflected that she had almost lost her life upon those white heights.

She was aware that Monsey had laid her under a certain debt. This troubled her. The man was domineering, self-willed. He was the type that would claim its debts. And his eyes had seemed to claim her.

The man had said that he would see her again. Others had said this, more lightly. She felt that he would keep his promise. Well, when they met again, she would thank him.

Memory of Monsey troubled her, vaguely. Something about him aroused her in-

stinctive distrust. Yet he interested her. She felt that he could not fail to interest most women—that he knew the art of doing so. She did not like this characteristic in a man. She liked to play with men—as chums. And receive their homage. It was part of her life.

Again the siren shattered the quiet of the river. Small sailing craft and the puffing Levis ferryboat—out on the St. Lawrence with the coming of early spring—veered from the path of the liner, the first to leave for Europe. Soon the Château, the church spires, and the docks of Quebec swung from her vision.

Edith drew a quick breath. Usually, she enjoyed sailing upon a fresh venture to the pleasure spots of other countries. Now her mood was different. She felt as if she was cutting loose from close-knit ties. And she experienced a pang of discomfort.

She thought of the Louisville home, under the great trees facing Central Park, the negro butler, sole caretaker with his wife of the closed house—of the Newfoundland puppy, full grown by now, monarch of the back yard. The vista of the quiet streets, the round of her friendships, her high school, flashed before her. Not four years ago, that same high school had been her world—until Aunt Kate hurried her off to a Northern finishing institute for young ladies and the resulting round of travel.

To tell the truth, Edith Rand was acutely homesick. Perhaps because, being a healthy young woman of some twenty years, she was acutely hungry.

At all events, breakfast and a chair on the breezy, sunny deck served to dispel the blues. Edith cuddled down in her steamer rug and gazed eagerly at the stately panorama of the hills of the passing Quebec coast, with its dark green islands set like jewels in the gray green of the river mouth, and its clusters of brightly painted villages.

"I only hope," remarked her aunt, "that they don't turn these ventilator hoods from the dining saloon in our direction. I tipped a steward person quite liberally for these chairs. But, then, one gets such excellent service on these boats. Quite different from the States!"

Edith thought of the faithful negro re-

tañner, but was silent. She noticed that Aunt Kate's cherished pail of medicines, camouflaged by a respectable black cloth, rested under the steamer chair, secured therein during the confusion of boarding.

Miss Rand was never divorced from this treasure chest of wonderful remedies. It contained her conception of every necessary cure for all the ills that flesh is heir to. Once Edith, during an attack of youthful *mal de mer*, had been subject to the ministrations of the pail, and the memory had served to keep her in good health ever since.

The girl fancied that Miss Rand had added a mysterious snake-bite remedy to the medicines, in preparation for India. She often thought that if her aunt should lose the pail the disaster would precipitate an immediate visitation of illness.

"By the way"—Miss Rand suddenly focused her eyeglasses on her niece—"the maid I tipped at the hotel said you were nearly maimed for life on the fortifications. Is that true?"

Edith had not mentioned her escape, for fear of worrying her father.

"You mustn't believe all you're told, Aunt Kate."

"Edith, I know you are telling a story! You did fall. It was the morning you went with Mr. Monsey. I think it should be Captain Monsey at least, he looks so like a soldier. The maid said a man saved you."

"He must have had a long arm, then, Aunt Kate, if he saved me after I fell from the heights."

Miss Rand was not to be denied.

"Really, that was romantic, Edith. Why didn't you tell me? You thanked him, of course." The girl made no response. "Mr. Monsey is well mannered and quite good-looking. He must have money. You might do worse."

Edith twisted uncomfortably in her chair.

"Aunt Kate, suppose I married a man who wasn't an Englishman, and had ever such bad manners and no money?"

"Impossible. You are too attractive. The money part, at least, is impossible. You have the Rand position in society at home to maintain."

Both women were silent. The girl, like

her aunt, had thought of this as a thing assured. She had been brought up to consider it as a matter of course. "I reckon y' all take a lot o' granted," she drawled wickedly, irritating her aunt.

"Edith! Well, of course your father has money enough." Miss Rand paused. Recently she had come to suspect that Arthur Rand was not so prosperous as formerly. "Dear me, you *must* think of marrying, some time. Don't you *like* Edouard Monsey?" She lowered her voice, inviting confidence.

"I don't know."

"It would be a romantic match."

Edith sucked her lip—a habit of hers when thinking. She was thinking just then of the man who had held her in his embrace. No other man had done that. But, then, no other man had kept her from falling off the heights of Quebec.

"Child, you must have an idea—one way or the other. I like Monsey!"

"I wonder," mused the girl, "if he is a gentleman."

"As if it could be doubted!"

Edith smiled vaguely. "Do you know who he is, Auntie Kate?" Miss Rand had made inquiries on that subject at the hotel.

"Not exactly. I think he has been traveling for pleasure since the war. Of course, he must have served during the war. All Englishmen—"

"Is he an Englishman?"

"Well, he has important business somewhere in India or Turkestan or some such place. But the hotel manager did say he was a Russian or Pole by birth."

"He is going to dance with me at Srinagar."

She fell silent, busied with her thoughts. Miss Rand could get no further response to probing, and looked around for her brother.

In a near-by cabin, Arthur Rand was seated before an array of papers spread on his berth. Through clouds of tobacco smoke he scanned letters of introduction, specification graphs, and order blanks. He leaned back in the chair, thumbs under his vest, in roseate contemplation of the future.

Arthur Rand was engrossed in the pleasant process of imaginary industry build-

ing. He visioned himself as a conqueror. He pictured success, and the prosperity of the company in which he had involved himself, not wisely, but too well.

He had no knowledge of the obstacles of import licenses, of trade agreements between India and its great mother country. Nor did he conceive that he was ill-equipped for his task. Or that those who sent him might have seized upon the chance as a final gamble, flung into the face of adversity.

He would have smiled at the notion that he was setting his spear against a windmill. An amiable gentleman of the old school, and a good father, he was not fitted with the weapons of the modern generation. He was untroubled by the thought that he had drawn all his available funds for the trip to India. Edith should have a good time, he reflected, and all would end well.

Journeying momentarily farther from his home and business with each throb of the liner's engines, he was content to cast his bread upon the waters and go forth on behalf of the friends and old associates who had sent him.

If the specter of failure appeared to him, he put it smilingly behind him. He believed in Providence and God, as a gentleman should.

CHAPTER VI.

THE SUMMONING VOICE.

DESPITE his optimism, Arthur Rand was disturbed by reports that reached him at London. He was further annoyed by the silence of his own company. He had expected letters, reports that did not reach him. This impelled him to hasten on his mission, and he reluctantly vetoed a stay in England, and even the jaunt to Paris and its shops upon which the two women had counted.

They transhipped as speedily as possible, and took a steamer direct to India. Edith was content, for she enjoyed the lazy beauty of the southern Mediterranean. The days passed pleasantly for her, and Miss Rand pored over guide books and travel schedules, resolved to "do" India in spite of the

disinclination of Edith for such an undertaking.

But both the dreams of Rand and the plans of his sister were due for a rude shock.

It was early June when they arrived on the Indian coast, and like an inexorable hand the heat of a tropical country descended upon them. Rand's mission took them by rail to Calcutta and the banks of that city. By the time they were quartered at a good hotel behind drawn blinds and in palm-sprinkled rooms where the only movement was of the perpetual swing of great fans, Miss Rand was exhausted. The medicine chest was called into full play.

It was still before the rainy season, and there was little relief even in the high-ceilinged chambers of the hotel. Rand went forth courageously, in white duck and sun helmet, but ill-success sapped his energy. He drank frequently at night. Although he kept well within his limit, this took toll of his strength.

Disappointment followed disappointment. He encountered the obstacles that face American industry in Asiatic markets—obstacles bred by ignorance of proper methods and of the men with whom he was dealing. He was met everywhere with courtesy—he had his own personality to thank for that—but the banking and commercial houses had no use for his proposals.

He was invading an old-world market, where precedent had ruled for a dozen generations. In the person of a gentleman traveler, every portal was open to him. But the door of trade was closed—and he had no entry key. Rand blamed his ill-success upon himself, when he should have blamed those who sent him. He stuck doggedly to his guns, receiving the while no answer to his cablegrams to his company.

But of this he said nothing to Edith. Determined to make a greater effort, however, he advised his sister and niece to take refuge in northern India, where they would be safe from the heat. Miss Rand thought of her acquaintance, Major Fraser-Carnie, hopefully. She was actually ill.

Edith was reluctant to leave her father, who was not overstrong. Only when he promised to follow them within a week did

she agree to go. She was worried about Arthur Rand. His florid face had grown almost purple in the stifling city. He did not sleep well.

To reassure her, he protested that he was quite well, and only waiting for an answer to his cables, to join her.

At this point, as usual, Miss Rand claimed the girl's ministrations. Nothing would suit her but they must visit Srinagar, which the guide-books described as "the Venice of India."

"But we came here on business—daddy's business," protested Edith.

"My dear, no one can do business in a Turkish bath. Least of all your father. He ought to rest in a cooler climate. Why couldn't they have sent another man?"

This disturbed the girl. Rand had spoken to her glowingly, on the steamer, of what he hoped to do. Now he was silent, and plainly worried. To Edith it seemed as if the destiny of which they had spoken lightly at the table in Quebec was hurrying her to Kashmir.

"Why couldn't we stop at Simla?" she objected. "We'd be nearer daddy."

"Edith, you are unreasonable. Everyone says Kashmir is the garden of India. We have friends there."

The girl did not want to leave her father, but both he and Miss Rand were urgent.

The days until the arrival at Rawul Pindi passed like an evil-omened dream in the night. The farewell to Arthur Rand at the compartment of the train—Edith had been strongly moved when she kissed him good-by, and the sight of his quiet figure on the platform as the Punjab Mail pulled out stirred her almost to tears—the heat-ridden vistas of cotton fields and flying villages had been a nightmare.

Miss Rand was acutely upset by the meals obtained at the stations, and Edith had had to care for her. Not until they had left the train and a hooded carriage had conveyed them to Murree and a sanatorium hotel overlooking the southern plains, did the girl begin to enjoy herself.

There her aunt revived sufficiently to join company with a group of ladies—officers' wives—who were making the pilgrimage to Kashmir and knew Major Fraser-Carnie.

Straightway the nightmare became a wonderful dream. They entered the gates of Kashmir, riding in a two-wheeled native cart that their new friends called a "tonga." Great mountain passes rose around them; cold winds swept upon them, bearing the scent of pines and blooming flowers. Turbaned native servants attended them. The narrow roads—none too smooth—twisted into fresh vistas of overhanging mountain slopes. They moved in the shadow of cliffs. Vines and wild flowers almost touched their hats as they passed by.

To Edith it seemed that she had truly entered a paradise. Once within the gateway of Kashmir, she had been under a spell. She became sleepy, and she was strangely happy. She wanted a horse to ride among the paths that opened into the post-road. She wanted to climb the frowning summits to the snow that she sometimes saw at their peaks—to run afoot among the ferns.

The women smiled at her indulgently. Edith was a beautiful girl. Being married, they talked wisely among themselves, wondering how she would fare in the life at Srinagar.

While the officers' wives were agreeable and talkative, they maintained a certain restraint toward Edith. After all, she was a stranger in their world. Quite plainly she did not belong in Kashmir. And—worst of all—she was far too attractive to escape the notice of the men. The married women saw that they would suffer by comparison.

Edith perhaps realized what was behind their attitude. She kept her own counsel, if she did. For one thing, she was enjoying herself too much to be troubled.

An incident on the last stage of the journey, however, increased the respect of her English traveling companions. It was at the Baramula station, where the tonga horses were changed for the last time. They had dismounted while the native drivers harnessed the fresh beasts.

Straightway the women were surrounded by a motley throng that seemed to arise out of the tall grass. A crowd of natives pressed about them, shouting, pushing, bowing. Bearded Afghans elbowed tattered Turkomans aside; slim Paharis gestured frantically beside squat Kashmiri traders;

handsome Central Asian Jews pleaded with great play of brown eyes for a hearing.

The turbaned gathering swayed around them, each native proclaiming the unequalled merits of goods he had for sale, or offering his services as servant, or protesting the desirability of his carriage. All deprecated any idea of reward, alleging their high integrity and the unbounded confidence the *mem-sahibs* might repose in them.

Noisy remonstrance on the part of the tonga drivers added to the confusion. The English women were indifferent, Miss Rand was somewhat alarmed, Edith was highly amused, until she chanced to notice a man standing slightly apart from the other natives.

He was as tall as the Afghans, but of more powerful build. His seamed, broad face was the hue of burned wood. Black, somewhat slant eyes rendered an ugly face almost likable.

Yet the man's whole aspect, shrouded as he was in a gray wool cloak, surmounted by a round, black velvet cap, was somber. He stood with folded arms, powerful legs poising easily the weight of a massive body. Probably he was past middle age.

The native was looking steadily at Edith. His fierce stare had something of gentleness in it, despite a scar that crossed one cheek to the eyebrow. Edith turned to ask one of her companions what manner of man he might be.

When she looked for him again, the native had gone. He had mingled his tall form in the throng. Edith was conscious of a queer feeling—that he was still watching her from some unseen quarter.

She shrugged her shoulders and was about to follow her aunt to the waiting tonga when a carriage drove up furiously, scattering the ranks of the beggars, and halted smartly in front of her. A diminutive, uniformed figure dropped instantaneously from the driver's box and confronted her.

"I am the orderly of Major Fraser-Carnie. Is this the American missy?"

Miss Rand was pleased to find that the major had sent his carriage for them. She had wired on ahead from Pindi. Especially was she glad when Rawul Singh drove away the troublesome natives unceremoni-

ously, and with the Afghan driver of the carriage redeemed her luggage from the hands of the—until then—somewhat condescending servants of the British women.

"It will follow by bullock cart," he declared in his good English. "Will the *mem-sahibs* be pleased to step into the carriage?"

Almost at once Rawul Singh leaped back on the box of the chaise, the smiling Afghan lifted his whip in salute, cracked it at a venturesome beggar, and they rolled away swiftly, in advance of the tongas.

In the care of the major's efficient orderly, Edith leaned back on the cushions with a sigh of content, and gazed eagerly at the twin lines of poplars that sprang to meet them along the Srinagar road. The horses maintained their spanking trot as the road wound beside the river-bank and a fresh breeze swirled the dust behind them.

"If daddy were only here," she thought. Her eyes wandered to the ever-changing slopes of scarlet rhododendron sprinkled with the white fragrance of wild thyme that faded into a dim blue in the valley underneath. "This is a gateway of paradise, and a blessed place!"

She lifted her flushed face to the gleam of sunlight and sighed from pure happiness. The cool wind seemed to have wafted away all her troubles. Those who have entered into the garden of Kashmir do not soon forget the gateway.

"I think it is going to rain," Miss Rand looked behind and frowned. "I know it is."

Rawul Singh glanced back at this and spoke to the driver sharply.

In the valley they had just left, gray clouds were twining among the mountain slopes. The edges of the clouds were tinged with fiery purple, from the rays of the concealed sun. As if an invisible hand had passed across the face of the sky, the sunlight was blotted from their path.

The horses quickened their pace at the touch of the Afghan's whip, and the carriage dashed forward in a kind of murky half light. A rumble of thunder sounded somewhere in the heights above them.

Straightway, the poplar trees moved restlessly, the leaves turning a paler green under the breath of the storm wind. In a

moment the temperature dropped many degrees.

"Haste," ordered Rawul Singh to the driver. "Would you discomfort these ladies who are guests of the major sahib?"

The horses were urged into a full gallop. Miss Rand uttered a faint cry, clutching the sides of the swaying carriage. Edith laughed joyously, tingling to the swift onrush and the challenge of the wind. Dust eddied around them. Mongrel dogs dashed forth, barking, from stray hamlets. Rawul Singh glanced back, to reassure the girl, and smiled at her keen pleasure.

"The *mem-sahib* need have no fear," he asserted. "These are good horses, and we will yet arrive before the rain." Aside, he added: "Drive, son of many fathers!"

At the first heavy drops of rain they swept into the central avenue of Srinagar, under spreading trees, in almost total darkness. Lightning flashes dazzled them, while the quickening peal of thunder brought a ready response from the apprehensive Miss Rand.

The carriage jerked to a halt just as the thunder-storm broke. Rawul Singh darted down and led them up a steep flight of steps in a grassy slope. With the orderly almost carrying the aunt and Edith running ahead, they gained the shelter of a wide veranda under the trees as the rain pelted down.

A white figure strode to meet them and the girl was assisted up the veranda steps. She was panting with the effort of the climb and her modish hat was in sad disarray. In the darkness of the veranda a voice spoke close to her ear.

"I said that we would meet in Srinagar, and it has come to pass."

A glimmer of lightning showed her the dark face of Edouard Monsey. Edith almost cried out in surprise. She had expected to see Major Fraser-Carnie. Blackness had closed in on them again. A terrific curtain of rain swept down on the bungalow and the road became at once a mass of mud on either side of which twin rivulets gathered swiftly. She heard her aunt stumble on the porch.

A second flash showed her the bearded countenance of the Afghan driver, who had come up with their hand luggage. Monsey

had left her side after a quick clasp of her hand.

"The major is detained at the residency," she heard him saying to Rawul Singh. "He has ordered that the *mem-sahibs* make themselves at home in his quarters."

By now the full force of the thunder-storm swept the city. The mat blinds of the bungalow rattled with the impact of the wind gusts. Lightning flickered incessantly, glittering on a myriad of shining drops. A spattering of rain that was almost a spray swept along the porch and Rawul Singh led them inside, lighting lamps that trembled in the currents of air.

Chilled by the sudden cold, the girl found that Monsey was offering her a glass of liquid.

"Slight dash of whisky," he smiled, "it will warm you." Bending closer, he whispered: "You have come to the garden, but a storm veils its beauty. Perhaps the gods are angry?"

She moved away a trifle, endeavoring to arrange her hat. Monsey's voice had been intimate, possessive. She saw that Rawul Singh looked at him curiously. And she was provoked.

But the white man left almost at once. A house boy showed them bedrooms on the second floor, opening into the upper porch. Rawul Singh had explained that they were to remain at the bungalow, and that his master had taken up quarters with the other sahibs near the residency. There was no good hotel, he said.

Edith changed from her damp clothes, glad of the comforts of European dressing-table and bath-room. She took up a shawl and descended to the drawing-room, anxious to thank the major for his hospitality. She regretted the inconvenience they must have occasioned him.

The storm was still driving down. Windows and blinds were closed. The drawing-room was empty. Edith gazed about her with the curiosity of a woman newly arrived in a strange house.

She saw neat disorder. Trophies—fine heads of mountain sheep and elk—hung from the walls. Twin collections—native and European—of weapons were ranged on

either side of the broad stone fireplace. Comfortable wicker chairs invited her, by a long table evidently used by Fraser-Carnie for his work.

Book-shelves occupied the corner around the table. A convenient window-seat partially curtained off with green baize contained various boxes and letter files. Altogether, it was a likable room; lacking, however, a woman's refining touch. Edith listened to the beat of rain on the roof, and pondered, chin on hand, the meeting with Monsey.

He had been as good as his word. She wondered what position he held in Srinagar, and what Rawul Singh thought of him. If it had been possible, she would have liked to ask the orderly.

During her meditation she had been turning over the books on the table. Now she glanced at the window-seat and stretched forth a tentative hand. One of the boxes—open—held an unusual assortment of things.

Some stained clothing met her eye, also a tarnished telescope. A volume of poetry projected from one corner. On the clothing was pinned a slip of paper. Edith could not help seeing the words written thereon. It was nothing out of the commonplace.

"John Donovan's belongings," she repeated.

The patter of rain was dwindling. Within the bungalow, the sky was clearing and light filtered freshly through the drawn blinds. Edith was still alone in the room. She glanced gratefully at the snapping fire in the hearth, that relieved the chill of the bungalow.

By now the glow of the lamp was dwarfed by daylight. The girl rose to go out upon the veranda. Then she gave a soft cry of surprise.

On the veranda she saw that the storm had broken. But a sea of mist was tinged a fiery blood color by the setting sun. Waves and billows of the crimson surf seemed moving toward the girl.

It was as if the breath of purgatory had been blown across the glittering green valley of Srinagar, set like a jewel in the circlet of the swelling mountain peaks. Ceaselessly, the red sea twisted upon itself, veiling the outlines of trees and plain. Above it the slate green of the hills rose to the snow summits which glittered red in the sunset.

On the street, somewhat down-hill from the bungalow, the erect figure of Rawul Singh strode into view out of the clouds of mist. She noticed how tightly his overcoat was buttoned, how exactly the miniature cap of the cavalry regiment sat on the side of his head. He walked with the grave alertness and the well-drilled air of the native trooper.

A few yards behind him a burly figure had become visible. Edith recognized with more than a little surprise the scarred native of Baramula. He was striding alone, head bent on his chest, hands tucked into the wide sleeves of his *khalat*.

But when Rawul Singh ascended the lawn to the bungalow and lifted his hand in a precise salute at sight of the handsome young *mem-sahib*, the native was no longer to be seen.

There was nothing unusual in the incident. Edith, however, could not help wondering how the man of Baramula had reached Srinagar so quickly, and why he was walking after Rawul Singh, and especially why he had chosen to turn back into the crimson curtain of mist when the orderly reached the house.


(To be continued NEXT WEEK.)

Complete in every sense

"A SEA OTTER POCKET"

BY RAYMOND S. SPEARS

JUNE 26



The Bank of Love

By Robert W. Sneddon

I HAVE at various times related certain passages in the life of my friend Charlot, erstwhile poet, now writer of popular songs, but there still remains much to be told of his early tribulations. I doubt whether in those days he would have spoken so gaily of his experiences, but since both body and pocket are to-day fortified against the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune, he appears to view his years of struggle through rosy spectacles.

Plump, and carefully dressed, according to Parisian idea, he is an advertisement for prosperity. Money jingles in his pocket, and living in the comfortable present, he can shed a tear over the past and not lose a night's rest thereby. All this has come to pass within the last year during which I have been away.

My first action on returning to Paris was to look for him. I found him in his old haunts. He is a confirmed Montparnassian now, though for a time he did dwell on the heights of Montmartre, and only a well planted blast of the most potent explosive could drive him from Paris; that Paris whose histories are part and parcel of his youth and approaching middle age.

We were sitting on the terrace of the Café d'Harcourt watching the life which flows up and down that main stream of the Latin Quartier, the Boul' Mich'.

"Same old boulevard, same old gentlemen going to play croquet in the Gardens, same old maids with dogs, same old ex-

princesses from the laundries, the factories and the stores, same types, same everything," I commented, sniffing the spring air with a feeling of infinite satisfaction.

"Same everything but the prices—Oh, my precious beer!" Charlot replied.

"That doesn't seem to bother you much," I told him, counting the absorbent mats which told of many glasses consumed, "Much you should worry, with a bank account to your credit. I have seen your name, as author of two separate revues, decorating the advertising kiosks."

"Pooh!" he said airily. "Pot-boilers. I am still working on my poems. Heavens! The taste of the public is deplorable. Still, I suppose I should be the last to bemoan it. Only, that does not prevent me having ideals. It is strange, though," he added with a faraway look, "strange that inspiration lurks much less in a dinner at twenty-five francs than it used to in a meal at one franc fifty. Nowadays when I have dined for an hour or so, I find I can not sit down and write so feelingly on twilight hours of melancholy."

"Changed days for you, you rascal. You look for all the world like a bloated pawnbroker."

"Don't!" he begged. "Many's the day I cursed the house of 'my aunt' because I had nothing to pawn with the old lady. You may believe it or not, but I have trembled on the threshold of death several times. You remember Balzac's poet Ru-

bempré and the advice his friend Lousteau gave him—"You have the stuff of three poets in you, but before you reach your public, you will have time to die of starvation six times over!" Six times! Heaven! I died once a week at least, then."

"That sounds like a story. Let me have it."

"A story? It is a dozen stories. Well, anyway half a dozen. Another beer, Aristide!" And the waiter having served us, Charlot wet his throat and unburdened himself.

Ten years ago Charlot was living close to the stars with his friend, Caparolle, a struggling etcher. They were at that stage when the sale of a poem to some mediocre publication or the purchase by some amateur collector of an etching meant all the difference between despair and delirious joy; between starvation and a banquet at some little hole-in-the-wall restaurant. These joys and sorrows were shared at intermittent intervals by two young ladies whose companionship was based upon an adoration inspired more by romance than by hope of monetary gain.

Of course it goes without saying that the profits of this brotherhood of two were appropriated to certain philanthropic objects, such as providing two estimable girls with costumes, shoes and gloves. In the painful intervals when editors and collectors were blind and deaf to art, Marcelle and Suzanne did not hesitate to prick their pretty fingers in the workroom of the millinery establishment of Mme. Renaud—a sacrifice which served to enhance their virtues in the eyes of the poet and the etcher. Then when the strain of feeding four mouths was cut in half, the mind gained that more courage to carry on the battle.

There came a period when the negligence, if not the insanity, of editors and purchasers of art reached its height. The exchequer was empty, and Marcelle and Suzanne as usual had transferred their ministrations to another and less-amusing field of endeavor. Unfortunately they would not be paid until the end of the week, and in order that they might not faint by the wayside and be found by a too-charitable Samaritan, the two friends had presented them with their last few francs.

Starvation came in as love flew out. Added to which the pair of Bohemians were disagreeably reminded that they were not living in Utopia. On the contrary, the attic which they occupied was leased to them by a M. Toquet, who dwelt on the first floor of the house and added to his crime of being a landlord that of being his own *concierge*. It will be seen what a stranglehold this gave him on the destiny of his tenants. None could go in or out without passing under the eagle eye, which peered at all hours of the day through the window of the *concierge's* lodge. Even letters and parcels passed under his inspection, and such was the keenness of his intuition that he could tell by looking at an envelope whether it contained money or a stern refusal to recognize the merits of genius.

He appeared to have a nose for money. There was no use trying to deceive him. The instant money came, with it came M. Toquet, insistent on his dues.

One day the old spider came up and Charlot received his visit with an air of cordiality which might have melted the heart of the most relentless creditor.

M. Toquet was not impressed. He stood looking about him, sniffing as though there still lingered in the air the delicious aroma of fifty franc notes.

"Has a letter come for me?" Charlot inquired, nervously apprehensive. "I am expecting a remittance from my publisher—quite a sum, M. Toquet."

"No letters," growled the landlord. "That is not my affair. I am not a letter-carrier. Let me remind you that I am your landlord and that your rent is due. I have the receipt here. Be good enough to pay me what you owe me."

"Ah, yes, the rent. Quite so. Naturally, my dear man. Render unto Cæsar what is Cæsar's, as the saying is. I wish Caparolle was here—he has always denied that you were an optimist, but this proves it," Charlot rambled on, racking his brain.

Heaven! The Hotel of Stars was cold at this time. In spring it would not be so bad, but in the depth of winter without a fur coat or blanket—brrrh!

M. Toquet rapidly appraised the miserable furnishings of the attic, then grunted.

"Bah! That will do. Money, not words, is what I want. Where is M. Caparolle?"

"Gone on a very important errand. No mistake about that, my dear M. Toquet. He is about to execute a piece of work for a very distinguished man—a member of the Academy, no less, and you may assure yourself that he will return laden with gold."

Charlot felt rather doubtful of the last phrase, but it slipped so glibly from his lips that he felt he could not take it back.

"Humph! To-morrow then, my fine gutter sparrow," said M. Toquet, and stumped out.

Charlot had just settled down with a weary sigh to recopy some of his verses which had suffered rough handling in their travels from one office to another when he was delightfully surprised.

Caparolle returned and, wonder of wonders, accompanying him was an agreeable stranger in the shape of good luck. He rushed in flourishing a hundred-franc note, while from his pocket he drew out five cart-wheels of silver, twenty-five francs of good solid coin.

"What! What!" faltered Charlot passing his hand over his eyes. "What has happened? Have you robbed a bank, miserable fellow?"

"Nothing like that. I have just seen M. Tropinet, the printer, who bought my etching 'Roof-tops,' and he has commissioned a piece of commercial work from me. I am to do a rough imitation of a hundred-franc note.

"*Mon dieu!*" cried Charlot aghast. "You are turning counterfeiter. Do you want to land us in jail?"

"Nonsense. Listen, will you, you camel. It is for a valentine card. I am to make a note with a border of cupids, and an inscription calling for a hundred kisses payable by the Bank of Love. I did a rough plate to show him the idea."

"Oh, I see."

Charlot breathed freely as the vision of New Caledonia receded from his vision. Nice place that would have been for a vacation, with the companionship of convicts.

"Meanwhile," suggested Caparolle, "let us go out and eat. We are safe. I saw old Toquet walking down the street."

The idea of food so far transcended that of rent that Charlot neglected to mention M. Toquet's call. Besides, the moment was not propitious. Why intrude a skeleton so grisly at the feast? Caparolle was happy, and it would be the act of a monster to rob him of a particle of his anticipated enjoyment. In fact, when Charlot sat down in front of a plate of soup, forerunner of other courses equally nourishing, he glowed with approval of his noble conduct. Comradeship came first. If there was any remorse to be borne, he would endure it in solitary stoicism.

Five francs vanished, but the two Bohemians had been fed. They had drunk wine and their hearts were glad. No vision of the future when five francs would look like one appeared to alarm them.

They ran into Marcelle and Suzanne, and beguiled them with no great need of argument into helping them spend another ten francs at the Bobino music-hall, with a bite of something to eat and a glass or two later on in the evening.

Next day Caparolle having gone out to get a copper plate, Charlot lay on his couch smoking and composing a tribute to the excellence of a certain delicatessen store, a commission no less which would bring him in payment a package of delectable eatables, when suddenly there stole into his consciousness the sound of heavy footsteps ascending the stairs.

Ten million furies! It was M. Toquet in search of his cursed rent.

Quick as a flash Charlot sprang from his bed, printed some words on a sheet of paper, and opening the door noiselessly stuck the legend thereon with a drawing pin, then as quickly shut the door and locked it.

He heard M. Toquet arrive, grunt, shake the door fiercely several times, then depart.

The ruse had worked. Charlot had printed:

"Gone to collect money due me. Let honesty prevail!"

The situation was saved for the moment. What was to be done next? The poet was deeply engaged in consideration of the

matter when he heard other footsteps coming up, but light ones and attended by a faint rustle of silk.

This was a visitor whose intrusion boded no ill surely, and Charlot quickly opened the door to Marcelle, who had much to say to him and he to her since twelve hours had passed since they parted.

In order that his mind might not dwell too much upon his change of abode, seemingly not far distant, Charlot spent some time in drawing for Marcelle the plan of a magnificent chateau which he proposed to share with her in the future, naturally, when the clouds had rolled by and money was plentiful as sunshine. They had agreed upon the number of salons, entrance halls and lounging-rooms, with a special studio for the production of non-commercial poetry, and had just reached consideration of the bedchamber of the proprietor and his consort, when unfortunately Caparolle chose to return with his copper plate and stopped them at the threshold over which they were preparing to step.

"Don't mind me," said Caparolle, setting himself down at his etching table. "I have promised this plate within twenty-four hours."

"We are just planning a castle," Charlot explained. "I had in mind a delightful studio for you in the left wing—servants' accommodation—private banking house—everything complete."

"The richest man in the world is he who can draw upon the Bank of Imagination," said Caparolle, who, to do him justice, was as sharp with his tongue as the acid with which he bit into his copper plates. "Only its notes do not stand very high at the Bourse. Heaven! The country must be spotted with your castles, Charlot. I had better get busy. Don't go, Marcelle."

But Marcelle saw that it was time for her to depart so that those two Titans of industry might settle down to their toil, and bestowing an embrace upon Charlot and an encouraging word of comfort to Caparolle, took her leave.

Caparolle set his hundred-frac note up in front of him to serve as model for his proposed note upon the Bank of Love, to-

gether with the first plate he had etched, and bent over the table.

Charlot returned from his country estate to his copying. Suddenly soft footsteps again approached. Marcelle had forgotten something. Once more she wanted to say farewell. The poet dashed to the door and flung it open, only to meet the little eyes of M. Toquet who stood there puffing and grinning. The old rascal had seen Marcelle go up, and come down after an interval long enough to lead him to believe that she had found Charlot at home. You can imagine Charlot's confusion.

"Well," demanded Toquet, "has honesty prevailed? Where is my rent. I suppose you flew from the window to get it and returned the same way. Riches have wings, as they say."

He thrust his way in and walked over to Caparolle.

"M. Caparolle, I trust you are ready to pay your rent. Otherwise, out into the street you go, you and your glib friend."

Caparolle looked up.

"Eh? Why, it is you, old spider. Can't you see I am busy? Run away."

Toquet's eyes opened wide and he leaned forward. Caparolle caught his claw in time.

"No, you don't."

"But you have a hundred-frac note there. A new note."

"Well, what about it?"

Toquet stared at the copper plate which Caparolle had already etched, then picked it up and held it to his short-sighted eyes.

"The devil! A bank-note!" he ejaculated.

"Yes, why not. Heaven! Will you get out and let me work?"

"And you made this money to-day?" said Toquet, blinking and screwing up his face.

"Certainly I made that money to-day; that very note, I make money sometimes, M. Toquet," said Caparolle innocently.

Toquet stood grimacing, then fumbled in his pocket and produced a tattered pocket-book from which he drew a bundle of notes.

"I want a clean bill for a present," he announced. "They are very hard to get, M. Caparolle. Suppose I take your bill

there, and give you another for it. As for the rent, a day or two will not matter."

Astonishment was written over the faces of Charlot and his friend. What had happened to soften the hard heart of the old skinflint?

Charlot was the first to recover his senses. He gave Caparolle a nudge and the etcher, still bewildered, exchanged his clean note for one which had seen more service.

Toquet carefully placed it in his pocket-book, and stood with his head cocked to one side, like a dissolute parrot.

"From a plate like that," he asked with an air of geniality, "you can make a number of copies, eh?"

"Yes," replied Caparolle, scratching away at his work. "Yes, indeed. Why?"

"A matter of curiosity. *Au revoir*, my young friends."

M. Toquet hurried away.

"There is mischief in the wind," said Charlot, shaking his head. "The day when geniality and Toquet enter our door in company is one of evil for me and, I fear, for you, too, my dear fellow."

"The old boy wanted a clean note. That was all."

"But for a present. That fishy story smells suspicious to me. He is not the sort of old miser to be making presents to any one. And why this sudden interest in your work?"

"Because his rent depends on my work and your verses, old man," Caparolle added hastily, seeing the poet's face fall.

Charlot sighed, and going to the window looked down into the street. All at once he started. M. Toquet was spending money. There he was seated at the café opposite behind a glass of beer—he drew out his pocketbook, selected a bank-note from it and laid it on the marble-topped table carelessly. The waiter picked it up and went inside. What excited Charlot's curiosity, however, was the nervousness which suddenly seemed to afflict his landlord. He was turning his head and peering into the interior of the bar where the *patron* was making change. His hands were trembling, and he wagged his old head to and fro as he squinted apprehensively up and down the narrow street.

When the waiter returned with the change, his evident relief was ludicrous. He stuffed the money into his pocketbook, drained his glass of beer, and shuffled quickly across the way.

A sudden light illumined the dark recesses of the poet's brain. So that was it. For a present, eh?

"I have it," he cried, turning to Caparolle. "Old Toquet has just given the *patron* of the *Café des Fleurs* your precious hundred-franc note."

"Well, what about it?" Caparolle snapped impatiently.

"Oh, thrice blind!" continued Charlot. "Don't you see? He wanted to make sure if the note was all right—if the *patron* would accept it."

"What are you raving about?" asked Caparolle, sitting upright. "Why shouldn't the *patron* take it? It was a perfectly good note."

"You made it to-day, so you should know," said Charlot, rolling on the floor in a fit of uncontrollable mirth. *Dieu!* The old scoundrel thought you made it—with your own hands—here—from that fool plate of yours—he is blind as a bat—he jumped at the idea that you had counterfeited it."

"Impossible!"

"Not a bit. Heaven! Why did we not see what he was hinting at? Here we have the explanation."

"The devil!" groaned Caparolle, overcome. "What is to prevent his running to the police station with his cock-and-bull story? We shall be in a fine mess if we are hauled off to interview the commissary. And here I have to get this plate done. He may be on his way there now."

"No!" Charlot reassured him. "I saw him come back to the house."

"He has some scheme up his sleeve. Why did he sing so softly about our rent? It is very mysterious." Caparolle was agitated. "I distrust the spider and his webs."

"It is something to make us shudder," Charlot agreed. "Oh, we shall sweat blood for this, that I am positive of. Let me think, now. Sapristi, Marcelle! He has cast an unholy eye on Marcelle."

"Or Suzanne," suggested the etcher jeal-

ously. "He is going to propose some diabolical bargain to us!"

"Oh, art," moaned the poet, "how many crimes are committed for thy sake. We shall lose this haven of happiness, we shall lose those who blessed it with their sweet presence, we shall—"

"Shut up!"

"Ah—brood in silence—stew in your own misery," said Charlot, and returned to his doleful task.

The wretches were not long left in doubt as to M. Toquet's intentions. That worthy extortioner puffed up-stairs again and came in with an amazing air of secrecy which would have gone very well at the Theater of Montparnesse, but was out of place in this attic setting.

He closed the door behind him and stood beaming with such an attempt at cordiality that the hearts of his tenants sank to their boots.

"Listen," he said softly to Caparolle, "you are a clever young man. Quite an artist, my lad. Can you make an exact copy of anything placed before you?"

"Yes, surely," Caparolle told him.

"Even of a thousand-franc note, eh?"

M. Toquet was trembling with eagerness.

"I suppose I could," answered Caparolle, perplexed beyond expression by this interrogation, "but I do not understand."

M. Toquet looked from one to the other.

"We three, eh—a little partnership. Nobody else."

As the two bohemians gaped at each other in bewilderment, their landlord, evidently assured that he was among comrades, drew out a bank-note and placed it on the desk before Caparolle."

"What do you think of that?" he asked with a chuckle. "That is a very pretty example of a thousand-franc note—very clean—very clear. It is yours."

"Mine!" said Caparolle, passing his hand before his eyes as if to dispel some surprising vision. "Mine?"

"Absolutely," said Toquet in a whisper.

"Ssh! Between ourselves, my boy, and you, my estimable M. Charlot. Only in return you will make me a plate like that."

He pointed to Caparolle's copper plate.

"But for a thousand—a thousand. It

is understood. Not a word more. You accept. Good. Now get to work, *mon brave*, and old Toquet will say nothing more about the rent."

He tiptoed out, leaving the dumfounded pair to their own topsy-turvy thoughts.

"I am dreaming," said Charlot drunkenly. "I am dreaming. Let me feel that note, Caparolle. The devil has come to us disguised as Toquet. This paper will change to a leaf in a second. No! It is a real thousand-franc note. We are men of wealth."

"Five hundred francs apiece," murmured Caparolle, breathing heavily like a man who has just escaped from drowning. "Let us go out, eat, and look for a lodging more fitted to our new station in life. This is all very well for rats, but for capitalists—no! *Allons!* If I am to do any work I must eat. Come along, Homer."

This excellent plan was carried into effect, and choosing a time when M. Toquet was absent from his post of observation the couple moved out their belongings.

I listened to this incredible tale in silence.

"*Eh bien!*" Charlot asked, "What is the matter? Is my account of how I was saved from starvation not amusing enough for you? I laugh myself now when I think of old Toquet."

"That is it? How could you possibly get away with it? In the first place, did Toquet not make a fuss and try to recover the money which you took from him?"

"Took? He gave it to us—unasked."

"But there was some agreement—onesided, perhaps—tacit—but still an agreement. Caparolle was to give him an etched plate for a thousand."

"He did."

"The devil! But he was guilty of counterfeiting. How did he get around that?"

"But you have missed the point, *mon vieux*. The plate on which Caparolle was working had nothing to do with the Bank of France—it was that to which Toquet pointed. I should have liked to see his face when he opened the package. He got his note for a thousand all right—but it was a thousand kisses on the Bank of Love, and assuredly there was no agreement that he was to collect them from us."



The Mad Planet

By Murray Leinster

Author of "The Runaway Skyscraper," etc.

COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE.

CHAPTER I.

A WORLD INSANE.

IN all his lifetime of perhaps twenty years, it had never occurred to Burl to wonder what his grandfather had thought about his surroundings. The grandfather had come to an untimely end in a rather unpleasant fashion which Burl remembered vaguely as a succession of screams coming more and more faintly to his ears while he was being carried away at the top speed of which his mother was capable.

Burl had rarely or never thought of the old gentleman since. Surely he had never wondered in the abstract of what his great-grandfather thought, and most surely of all, there never entered his head such a purely hypothetical question as the one of what his many-times-great-grandfather—say of the year 1920—would have thought of the scene in which Burl found himself.

He was treading cautiously over a brownish carpet of fungus growth, creeping furtively toward the stream which he knew by the generic title of "water." It was the only water he knew. Towering far above his head, three man-heights high, great toadstools hid the grayish sky from his sight. Clinging to the foot-thick stalks of the toadstools were still other fungi, parasites upon the growths that had once been parasites themselves.

Burl himself was a slender young man

wearing a single garment twisted about his waist, made from the wing-fabric of a great moth the members of his tribe had slain as it emerged from its cocoon. His skin was fair, without a trace of sunburn. In all his lifetime he had never seen the sun, though the sky was rarely hidden from view save by the giant fungi which, with monster cabbages, were the only growing things he knew. Clouds usually spread overhead, and when they did not, the perpetual haze made the sun but an indefinitely brighter part of the sky, never a sharply edged ball of fire. Fantastic mosses, misshapen fungus growths, colossal molds and yeasts, were the essential parts of the landscape through which he moved.

Once as he had dodged through the forest of huge toadstools, his shoulder touched a cream-colored stalk, giving the whole fungus a tiny shock. Instantly, from the umbrella-like mass of pulp overhead, a fine and impalpable powder fell upon him like snow. It was the season when the toadstools sent out their spores, or seeds, and they had been dropped upon him at the first sign of disturbance.

Furtive as he was, he paused to brush them from his head and hair. They were deadly poison, as he knew well.

Burl would have been a curious sight to a man of the twentieth century. His skin was pink like that of a child, and there was but little hair upon his body. Even that on

top of his head was soft and downy. His chest was larger than his forefathers' had been, and his ears seemed almost capable of independent movement, to catch threatening sounds from any direction. His eyes, large and blue, possessed pupils which could dilate to extreme size, allowing him to see in almost complete darkness.

He was the result of the thirty thousand years' attempt of the human race to adapt itself to the change that had begun in the latter half of the twentieth century.

At about that time, civilization had been high, and apparently secure. Mankind had reached a permanent agreement among itself, and all men had equal opportunities to education and leisure. Machinery did most of the labor of the world, and men were only required to supervise its operation. All men were well-fed, all men were well-educated, and it seemed that until the end of time the earth would be the abode of a community of comfortable human beings, pursuing their studies and diversions, their illusions and their truths. Peace, quietness, privacy, freedom were universal.

Then, just when men were congratulating themselves that the Golden Age had come again, it was observed that the planet seemed ill at ease. Fissures opened slowly in the crust, and carbonic acid gas—the carbon dioxide of chemists—began to pour out into the atmosphere. That gas had long been known to be present in the air, and was considered necessary to plant life. Most of the plants of the world took the gas and absorbed its carbon into themselves, releasing the oxygen for use again.

Scientists had calculated that a great deal of the earth's increased fertility was due to the larger quantities of carbon dioxide released by the activities of man in burning his coal and petroleum. Because of those views, for some years no great alarm was caused by the continuous exhalation from the world's interior.

Constantly, however, the volume increased. New fissures constantly opened, each one adding a new source of carbon dioxide, and each one pouring into the already laden atmosphere more of the gas—beneficent in small quantities, but as the world learned, deadly in large ones.

The percentage of the heavy, vapor-like gas increased. The whole body of the air became heavier through its admixture. It absorbed more moisture and became more humid. Rainfall increased. Climates grew warmer. Vegetation became more luxuriant—but the air gradually became less exhilarating.

Soon the health of mankind began to be affected. Accustomed through long ages to breath air rich in oxygen and poor in carbon dioxide, men suffered. Only those who lived on high plateaus or on tall mountain-tops remained unaffected. The plants of the earth, though nourished and increasing in size beyond those ever seen before, were unable to dispose of the continually increasing flood of carbon dioxide exhaled by the weary planet.

By the middle of the twenty-first century it was generally recognized that a new carboniferous period was about to take place, when the earth's atmosphere would be thick and humid, unbreathable by man, when giant grasses and ferns would form the only vegetation.

When the twenty-first century drew to a close the whole human race began to revert to conditions closely approximating savagery. The lowlands were unbearable. Thick jungles of rank growth covered the ground. The air was depressing and enervating. Men could live there, but it was a sickly, fever-ridden existence. The whole population of the earth desired the high lands, and as the low country became more unbearable, men forgot their two centuries of peace.

They fought destructively, each for a bit of land where he might live and breathe. Then men began to die, men who had persisted in remaining near sea-level. They could not live in the poisonous air. The danger zone crept up as the earth-fissures tirelessly poured out their steady streams of foul gas. Soon men could not live within five hundred feet of sea-level. The lowlands went uncultivated, and became jungles of a thickness comparable only to those of the first carboniferous period.

Then men died of sheer inanition at a thousand feet. The plateaus and mountain-tops were crowded with folk struggling for

a foothold and food beyond the invisible menace that crept up, and up—

These things did not take place in one year, or in ten. Not in one generation, but in several. Between the time when the chemists of the International Geophysical Institute announced that the proportion of carbon dioxide in the air had increased from .04 per cent to .1 per cent and the time when at sea-level six per cent of the atmosphere was the deadly gas, more than two hundred years intervened.

Coming gradually, as it did, the poisonous effects of the deadly stuff increased with insidious slowness. First the lassitude, then the heaviness of brain, then the weakness of body. Mankind ceased to grow in numbers. After a long period, the race had fallen to a fraction of its former size. There was room in plenty on the mountain-tops—but the danger-level continued to creep up.

There was but one solution. The human body would have to inure itself to the poison, or it was doomed to extinction. It finally developed a toleration for the gas that had wiped out race after race and nation after nation, but at a terrible cost. Lungs increased in size to secure the oxygen on which life depended, but the poison, inhaled at every breath, left the few survivors sickly and filled with a perpetual weariness. Their minds lacked the energy to cope with new problems or transmit the knowledge they possessed.

And after thirty thousand years, Burl, a direct descendant of the first president of the Universal Republic, crept through a forest of toadstools and fungus growths. He was ignorant of fire, of metals, of the uses of stone and wood. A single garment covered him. His language was a scanty group of a few hundred labial sounds, conveying no abstractions and few concrete things.

He was ignorant of the uses of wood. There was no wood in the scanty territory furtively inhabited by his tribe. With the increase in heat and humidity the trees had begun to die out. Those of northern climes went first, the oaks, the cedars, the maples. Then the pines—the beeches went early—the cypresses, and finally even the forests of the jungles vanished. Only grasses and

reeds, bamboos and their kin, were able to flourish in the new, steaming atmosphere. The thick jungles gave place to dense thickets of grasses and ferns, now become tree-ferns again.

And then the fungi took their place. Flourishing as never before, flourishing on a planet of torrid heat and perpetual miasma, on whose surface the sun never shone directly because of an ever-thickening bank of clouds that hung sullenly overhead, the fungi sprang up. About the dank pools that festered over the surface of the earth, fungus growths began to cluster. Of every imaginable shade and color, of all monstrous forms and malignant purposes, of huge size and flabby volume, they spread over the land.

The grasses and ferns gave place to them. Squat toadstools, flaking molds, evil-smelling yeasts, vast mounds of fungi inextricably mingled as to species, but growing, forever growing and exhaling an odor of dark places.

The strange growths now grouped themselves in forests, horrible travesties on the vegetation they had succeeded. They grew and grew with feverish intensity beneath a clouded or a haze-obsured sky, while above them fluttered gigantic butterflies and huge moths, sipping daintily of their corruption.

The insects alone of all the animal world above water, were able to endure the change. They multiplied exceedingly, and enlarged themselves in the thickened air. The solitary vegetation—as distinct from fungus growths—that had survived was now a degenerate form of the cabbages that had once fed peasants. On those rank, colossal masses of foliage, the stolid grubs and caterpillars ate themselves to maturity, then swung below in strong cocoons to sleep the sleep of metamorphosis from which they emerged to spread their wings and fly.

The tiniest butterflies of former days had increased their span until their gaily colored wings should be described in terms of feet, while the larger emperor moths extended their purple sails to a breadth of yards upon yards. Burl himself would have been dwarfed beneath the overshadowing fabric of their wings.

It was fortunate that they, the largest

flying creatures, were harmless or nearly so. Burl's fellow tribesmen sometimes came upon a cocoon just about to open, and waited patiently beside it until the beautiful creature within broke through its matted shell and came out into the sunlight.

Then, before it had gathered energy from the air, and before its wings had swelled to strength and firmness, the tribesmen fell upon it, tearing the filmy, delicate wings from its body and the limbs from its carcass. Then, when it lay helpless before them, they carried away the juicy, meat-filled limbs to be eaten, leaving the still living body to stare helplessly at this strange world through its many-faceted eyes and become a prey to the voracious ants who would soon clamber upon it, and carry it away in tiny fragments to their underground city.

Not all the insect world was so helpless or so unthreatening. Burl knew of wasps almost the length of his own body who possessed stings that were instantly fatal. To every species of wasp, however, some other insect is predestined prey, and the furtive members of Burl's tribe feared them but little, as they sought only the prey to which their instinct led them.

Bees were similarly aloof. They were hard put to it for existence, those bees. Few flowers bloomed, and they were reduced to expedients once considered signs of degeneracy in their race. Bubbling yeasts and fouler things, occasionally the nectarless blooms of the rank, giant cabbages. Burl knew the bees. They droned overhead, nearly as large as he was himself, their bulging eyes gazing at him with abstracted preoccupation. And crickets, and beetles, and spiders—

Burl knew spiders! His grandfather had been the prey of one of the hunting tarantulas, which had leaped with incredible ferocity from his excavated tunnel in the earth. A vertical pit in the ground, two feet in diameter, went down for twenty feet. At the bottom of that lair the black-bellied monster waited for the tiny sounds that would warn him of prey approaching his hiding-place. (*Lycosa fasciata*).

Burl's grandfather had been careless, and the terrible shrieks he uttered as the horrible

monster darted from the pit and seized him had lingered vaguely in Burl's mind ever since. Burl had seen, too, the monster webs of another species of spider, and watched from a safe distance as the misshapen body of the huge creature sucked the juices from a three-foot cricket that had become entangled in its trap.

Burl had remembered the strange stripes of yellow and black and silver that crossed upon its abdomen. (*Epiera fasciata*). He had been fascinated by the struggles of the imprisoned insect, coiled in a hopeless tangle of sticky, gummy ropes the thickness of Burl's finger, cast about its body before the spider made any attempt to approach.

Burl knew these dangers. They were a part of his life. It was his accustomedness to them, and that if his ancestors, that made his existence possible. He was able to evade them; so he survived. A moment of carelessness, an instant's relaxation of his habitual caution, and he would be one with his forebears, forgotten meals of long-dead, inhuman monsters.

Three days before, Burl had crouched behind a bulky, shapeless fungus growth while he watched a furious duel between two huge horned beetles. Their jaws, gaping wide, clicked and clashed upon each others' impenetrable armor. Their legs crashed like so many cymbals as their polished surfaces ground and struck against each other. They were fighting over some particularly attractive bit of carrion.

Burl had watched with all his eyes until a gaping orifice appeared in the armor of the smaller of the two. It uttered a shrill cry, or seemed to cry out. The noise was actually the tearing of the horny stuff beneath the victorious jaws of the adversary.

The wounded beetle struggled more and more feebly. At last it collapsed, and the conqueror placidly began to eat the conquered before life was extinct.

Burl waited until the meal was finished, and then approached the scene with caution. An ant—the forerunner of many—was already inspecting the carcass.

Burl usually ignored the ants. They were stupid, short-sighted insects, and not hunters. Save when attacked, they offered no injury. They were scavengers, on the look-

out for the dead and dying, but they would fight viciously if their prey were questioned, and they were dangerous opponents. They were from three inches, for the tiny black ants, to a foot for the large termites.

Burl was hasty when he heard the tiny clickings of their limbs as they approached. He seized the sharp-pointed snout of the victim, detached from the body, and fled from the scene.

Later, he inspected his find with curiosity. The smaller victim had been a Mino-taur beetle, with a sharp-pointed horn like that of a rhinoceros to reinforce his offensive armament, already dangerous because of his wide jaws. The jaws of a beetle work from side to side, instead of up and down, and this had made the protection complete in no less than three directions.

Burl inspected the sharp, danger-like instrument in his hand. He felt its point, and it pricked his finger. He flung it aside as he crept to the hiding-place of his tribe. There were only twenty of them, four or five men, six or seven women, and the rest girls and children.

Burl had been wondering at the strange feelings that came over him when he looked at one of the girls. She was younger than Burl—perhaps eighteen—and fletcher of foot than he. They talked together, sometimes, and once or twice Burl shared with her an especially succulent find of foodstuffs.

The next morning he found the horn where he had thrown it, sticking in the flabby side of a toadstool. He pulled it out, and gradually, far back in his mind, an idea began to take shape. He sat for some time with the thing in his hand, considering it with a far-away look in his eyes. From time to time he stabbed at a toadstool, awkwardly, but with gathering skill. His imagination began to work fitfully. He visualized himself stabbing food with it as the larger beetle had stabbed the former owner of the weapon in his hand.

Burl could not imagine himself coping with one of the fighting insects. He could only picture himself, dimly, stabbing something that was food with this death-dealing thing. It was longer than his arm and though clumsy to the hand, an effective and terribly sharp implement.

3 ARGOSY

He thought. Where was there food, food that lived, that would not fight back? Presently he rose and began to make his way toward the tiny river. Yellow-bellied newts swam in its waters. The swimming larvae of a thousand insects floated about its surface or crawled upon its bottom.

There were deadly things there, too. Giant crayfish snapped their horny claws at the unwary. Mosquitoes of four-inch wing-spread sometimes made their humming way above the river. The last survivors of their race, they were dying out for lack of the plant-juices on which the male of the species lived, but even so they were formidable. Burl had learned to crush them with fragments of fungus.

He crept slowly through the forest of toadstools. Brownish fungus was underfoot. Strange orange, red, and purple molds clustered about the bases of the creamy toadstool stalks. Once Burl paused to run his sharp-pointed weapon through a fleshy stalk and reassure himself that what he planned was practicable.

He made his way furtively through the forest of misshapen growths. Once he heard a tiny clicking, and froze into stillness. It was a troop of four or five ants, each some eight inches long, returning along their habitual pathway to their city. They moved sturdily, heavily laden, along the route marked with the black and odorous formic acid exuded from the bodies of their comrades. Burl waited until they had passed, then went on.

He came to the bank of the river. Green scum covered a great deal of its surface, scum occasionally broken by a slowly enlarging bubble of some gas released from decomposing matter on the bottom. In the center of the placid stream the current ran a little more swiftly, and the water itself was visible.

Over the shining current water-spiders ran swiftly. They had not shared in the general increase of size that had taken place in the insect world. Depending upon the capillary qualities of the water to support them, an increase in size and weight would have deprived them of the means of locomotion.

From the spot where Burl first peered

at the water the green scum spread out for many yards into the stream. He could not see what swam and wriggled and crawled beneath the evil-smelling covering. He peered up and down the banks.

Perhaps a hundred and fifty yards below, the current came near the shore. An outcropping of rock there made a steep descent to the river, from which yellow shelf-fungi stretched out. Dark-red and orange above, they were light-yellow below, and they formed a series of platforms above the smoothly flowing stream. Burl made his way cautiously toward them.

On his way he saw one of the edible mushrooms that formed so large a part of his diet, and paused to break from the flabby flesh an amount that would feed him for many days. It was too often the custom of his people to find a store of food, carry it to their hiding-place, and then gorge themselves for days, eating, sleeping, and waking only to eat again until the food was gone.

Absorbed as he was in his plan of trying his new weapon, Burl was tempted to return with his booty. He would give Saya of this food, and they would eat together. Saya was the maiden who roused unusual emotions in Burl. He felt strange impulses stirring within him when she was near, a desire to touch her, to caress her. He did not understand.

He went on, after hesitating. If he brought her food, Saya would be pleased, but if he brought her of the things that swam in the stream, she would be still more pleased. Degraded as his tribe had become, Burl was yet a little more intelligent than they. He was an atavism, a throwback to ancestors who had cultivated the earth and subjugated its animals. He had a vague idea of pride, unformed but potent.

No man within memory had hunted or slain for food. They knew of meat, yes, but it had been the fragments left by an insect-hunter, seized and carried away by the men before the perpetually alert ant-colonies had sent their foragers to the scene.

If Burl did what no man before him had done, if he brought a whole carcass to his tribe, they would envy him. They were

preoccupied solely with their stomachs, and after that with the preservation of their lives. The perpetuation of the race came third in their consideration.

They were herded together in a leaderless group, coming to the same hiding-place that they might share in the finds of the lucky and gather comfort from their numbers. Of weapons, they had none. They sometimes used stones to crack open the limbs of the huge insects they found partly devoured, cracking them open for the sweet meat to be found inside, but they sought safety from their enemies solely in flight and hiding.

Their enemies were not as numerous as might have been imagined. Most of the meat-eating insects have their allotted prey. The spheX—a hunting wasp—feeds solely upon grasshoppers. Other wasps eat flies only. The pirate-bee eats bumblebees only. Spiders were the principal enemies of man, as they devour with a terrifying impartiality all that falls into their clutches.

Burl reached the spot from which he might gaze down into the water. He lay prostrate, staring into the shallow depths. Once a huge crayfish, as long as Burl's body, moved leisurely across his vision. Small fishes and even the huge newts fled before the voracious creature.

After a long time the tide of underwater life resumed its activity. The wriggling grubs of the dragon-flies reappeared. Little flecks of silver swam into view—a school of tiny fish. A larger fish appeared, moving slowly through the water.

Burl's eyes glistened and his mouth watered. He reached down with his long weapon. It barely touched the water. Disappointment filled him, yet the nearness and the apparent practicability of his scheme spurred him on.

He considered the situation. There were the shelf-fungi below him. He rose and moved to a point just above them, then thrust his spear down. They resisted its point. Burl felt them tentatively with his foot, then dared to thrust his weight to them. They held him firmly. He clambered down and lay flat upon them, peering over the edge as before.

The large fish, as long as Burl's arm,

swam slowly to and fro below him. Burl had seen the former owner of his spear strive to thrust it into his opponents, and knew that a thrust was necessary. He had tried his weapon upon toadstools—had practised with it. When the fish swam below him, he thrust sharply downward. The spear seemed to bend when it entered the water, and missed its mark by inches, to Burl's astonishment. He tried again and again.

He grew angry with the fish below him for eluding his efforts to kill it. Repeated strokes had left it untouched, and it was unwary, and did not even try to run away.

Burl became furious. The big fish came to rest directly beneath his hand. Burl thrust downward with all his strength. This time the spear, entering vertically, did not seem to bend. It went straight down. Its point penetrated the scales of the swimmer below, transfixing that lazy fish completely.

An uproar began. The fish, struggling to escape, and Burl, trying to draw it up to his perch, made a huge commotion. In his excitement Burl did not observe a tiny ripple some distance away. The monster crayfish was attracted by the disturbance and was approaching.

The unequal combat continued. Burl hung on desperately to the end of his spear. Then there was a tremor in Burl's support, it gave way, and fell into the stream with a mighty splash. Burl went under, his eyes open, facing death. And as he sank, his wide-open eyes saw waved before him the gaping claws of the huge crayfish, large enough to sever a limb with a single stroke of their jagged jaws.

CHAPTER II.

THE BLACK-BELLIED SPIDER.

HE opened his mouth to scream, a replica of the terrible screams of his grandfather, seized by a black-bellied tarantula years before, but no sound came forth. Only bubbles floated to the surface of the water. He beat the unresisting fluid with his hands—he did not know how to swim. The colossal creature approached leisurely, while Burl struggled helplessly.

His arms struck a solid object, and grasped it convulsively. A second later he had swung it between himself and the huge crustacean. He felt a shock as the mighty jaws closed upon the corklike fungus, then felt himself drawn upward as the crayfish released his hold and the shelf-fungus floated to the surface. Having given way beneath him, it had been carried below him in his fall, only to rise within his reach just when most needed.

Burl's head popped above water and he saw a larger bit of the fungus floating near by. Less securely anchored to the rocks of the river-bank than the shelf to which Burl had trusted himself, it had been dislodged when the first shelf gave way. It was larger than the fragment to which Burl clung, and floated higher in the water.

Burl was cool with a terrible self-possession. He seized it and struggled to draw himself on top of it. It tilted as his weight came upon it, and nearly overturned, but he paid no heed. With desperate haste, he clawed with hands and feet until he could draw himself clear of the water, of which he would forever retain a slight fear.

As he pulled himself upon the furry, orange-brown upper surface, a sharp blow struck his foot. The crayfish, disgusted at finding only what was to it a tasteless morsel in the shelf-fungus, had made a languid stroke at Burl's wriggling foot in the water. Failing to grasp the fleshy member, the crayfish retreated, disgruntled and annoyed.

And Burl floated down-stream, perched, weaponless and alone, frightened and in constant danger, upon a flimsy raft composed of a degenerate fungus floating soggly in the water. He floated slowly down the stream of a river in whose waters death lurked unseen, upon whose banks was peril, and above whose reaches danger fluttered on golden wings.

It was a long time before he recovered his self-possession, and when he did he looked first for his spear. It was floating in the water, still transfixing the fish whose capture had endangered Burl's life. The fish now floated with its belly upward, all life gone.

So insistent was Burl's instinct for food that his predicament was forgotten when he

saw his prey just out of his reach. He gazed at it, and his mouth watered, while his cranky craft went down-stream, spinning slowly in the current. He lay flat on the floating fungoid, and strove to reach out and grasp the end of the spear.

The raft tilted and nearly flung him overboard again. A little later he discovered that it sank more readily on one side than on the other. That was due, of course, to the greater thickness—and consequently greater buoyancy—of the part which had grown next the rocks of the river-bank.

Burl found that if he lay with his head stretching above that side, it did not sink into the water. He wriggled into this new position, then, and waited until the slow revolution of his vessel brought the spear-shaft near him. He stretched his fingers and his arm, and touched, then grasped it.

A moment later he was tearing strips of flesh from the side of the fish and cramming the oily mess into his mouth with great enjoyment. He had lost his edible mushroom. That danced upon the waves several yards away, but Burl ate contentedly of what he possessed. He did not worry about what was before him. That lay in the future, but suddenly he realized that he was being carried farther and farther from Saya, the maiden of his tribe who caused strange bliss to steal over him when he contemplated her.

The thought came to him when he visualized the delight with which she would receive a gift of part of the fish he had caught. He was suddenly stricken with dumb sorrow. He lifted his head and looked longingly at the riverbanks.

A long, monotonous row of strangely colored fungus growths. No healthy green, but pallid, cream-colored toadstools, some bright orange, lavender, and purple molds, vivid carmine "rusts" and mildews, spreading up the banks from the turgid slime. The sun was not a ball of fire, but merely shone as a bright golden patch in the haze-filled sky, a patch whose limits could not be defined or marked.

In the faintly pinkish light that filtered down through the air a multitude of flying objects could be seen. Now and then a cricket or a grasshopper made its bullet-

like flight from one spot to another. Hugh butterflies fluttered gayly above the silent, seemingly lifeless world. Bees lumbered anxiously about, seeking the cross-shaped flowers of the monster cabbages. Now and then a slender-waisted, yellow-stomached wasp flew alertly through the air.

Burl watched them with a strange indifference. The wasps were as long as he himself. The bees, on end, could match his height. The butterflies ranged, from tiny creatures barely capable of shading his face, to colossal things in the folds of whose wings he could have been lost. And above him fluttered dragon-flies, whose long, spindle-like bodies were three times the length of his own.

Burl ignored them all. Sitting there, an incongruous creature of pink skin and soft brown hair upon an orange fungus floating in midstream, he was filled with despondency because the current carried him forever farther and farther from a certain slender-limbed maiden of his tiny tribe, whose dances caused an odd commotion in his breast.

The day went on. Once, Burl saw upon the blue-green mold that there spread upward from the river, a band of large, red, Amazon ants, marching in orderly array, to raid the city of a colony of black ants, and carry away the eggs they would find there. The eggs would be hatched, and the small black creatures made the slaves of the brigands who had stolen them.

The Amazon ants can live only by the labor of their slaves, and for that reason are mighty warriors in their world. Later, etched against the steaming mist that overhung everything as far as the eye could reach, Burl saw strangely shaped, swollen branches rearing themselves from the ground. He knew what they were. A hard-rinded fungus that grew upon itself in peculiar mockery of the vegetation that had vanished from the earth.

And again he saw pear-shaped objects above some of which floated little clouds of smoke. They, too, were fungus growths, puffballs, which when touched emit what seems a puff of vapor. These would have towered above Burl's head, had he stood beside them.

And then, as the day drew to an end, he saw in the distance what seemed a range of purple hills. They were tall hills to Burl, some sixty or seventy feet high, and they seemed to be the agglomeration of a formless growth, multiplying its organisms and forms upon itself until the whole formed an irregular, cone-shaped mound. Burl watched them apathetically.

Presently, he ate again of the oily fish. The taste was pleasant to him, accustomed to feed mostly upon insipid mushrooms. He stuffed himself, though the size of his prey left by far the larger part still uneaten.

He still held his spear firmly beside him. It had brought him into trouble, but Burl possessed a fund of obstinacy. Unlike most of his tribe, he associated the spear with the food it had secured, rather than the difficulty into which it had led him. When he had eaten his fill he picked it up and examined it again. The sharpness of its point was unimpaired.

Burl handled it meditatively, debating whether or not to attempt to fish again. The shakiness of his little raft dissuaded him, and he abandoned the idea. Presently he stripped a sinew from the garment about his middle and hung the fish about his neck with it. That would leave him both hands free. Then he sat cross-legged upon the soggily floating fungus, like a pink-skinned Buddha, and watched the shores go by.

Time had passed, and it was drawing near sunset. Burl, never having seen the sun save as a bright spot in the overhanging haze, did not think of the coming of night as "sunset." To him it was the letting down of darkness from the sky.

To-day happened to be an exceptionally bright day, and the haze was not as thick as usual. Far to the west, the thick mist turned to gold, while the thicker clouds above became blurred masses of dull-red. Their shadows seemed like lavender from the contrast of shades. Upon the still surface of the river, all the myriad tints and shadings were reflected with an incredible faithfulness, and the shining tops of the giant mushrooms by the river brim glowed faintly pink.

Dragonflies buzzed over his head in their swift and angular flight, the metallic luster

of their bodies glistening in the rosy light. Great yellow butterflies flew lightly above the stream. Here, there, and everywhere upon the water appeared the shell-formed boats of a thousand caddis flies, floating upon the surface while they might.

Burl could have thrust his hand down into their cavities and seized the white worms that inhabited the strange craft. The huge bulk of a tardy bee droned heavily overhead. Burl glanced upward and saw the long proboscis and the hairy hinder legs with their scanty load of pollen. He saw the great, multiple-lensed eyes with their expression of stupid preoccupation, and even the sting that would mean death alike for him and for the giant insect, should it be used.

The crimson radiance grew dim at the edge of the world. The purple hills had long been left behind. Now the slender stalks of ten thousand round-domed mushrooms lined the river-bank, and beneath them spread fungi of all colors, from the rawest red to palest blue, but all now fading slowly to a monochromatic background in the growing dusk.

The buzzing, fluttering, and the flapping of the insects of the day died slowly down, while from a million hiding-places there crept out into the deep night soft and furry bodies of great moths, who preened themselves and smoothed their feathery antennae before taking to the air. The strong-limbed crickets set up their thunderous noise—grown gravely bass with the increasing size of the organs by which the sound was made—and then there began to gather on the water those slender spirals of tenuous mist that would presently blanket the stream in a mantle of thin fog.

Night fell. The clouds above seemed to lower and grow dark. Gradually, now a drop and then a drop, now a drop and then a drop, the languid fall of large, warm rain-drops that would drip from the moisture-laden skies all through the night began. The edge of the stream became a place where great disks of coolly glowing flame appeared.

The mushrooms that bordered on the river were faintly phosphorescent (*Pleurotus phosphoreus*) and shone coldly upon the

"rusts" and flake-fungi beneath their feet. Here and there a ball of lambent flame appeared, drifting idly above the steaming, festering earth.

Thirty thousand years before, men had called them "will-o'-the-wisps," but Burl simply stared at them, accepting them as he accepted all that passed. Only a man attempting to advance in the scale of civilization tries to explain everything that he sees. The savage and the child is most often content to observe without comment, unless he repeats the legends told him by wise folk who are possessed by the itch of knowledge.

Burl watched for a long time. Great fireflies whose beacons lighted up their surroundings for many yards—fireflies Burl knew to be as long as his spear—great fireflies shed their intermittent glows upon the stream. Softly fluttering wings, in great beats that poured torrents of air upon him, passed above Burl.

The air was full of winged creatures. The night was broken by their cries, by the sound of their invisible wings, by their cries of anguish and their mating calls. Above him and on all sides the persistent, intense life of the insect world went on ceaselessly, but Burl rocked back and forth upon his frail mushroom boat and wished to weep because he was being carried from his tribe, and from Saya—Saya of the swift feet and white teeth, of the shy smile.

Burl may have been homesick, but his principal thoughts were of Saya. He had dared greatly to bring a gift of fresh meat to her, meat captured as meat had never been known to be taken by a member of the tribe. And now he was being carried from her!

He lay, disconsolate, upon his floating atom on the water for a great part of the night. It was long after midnight when the mushroom raft struck gently and remained grounded upon a shallow in the stream.

When the light came in the morning, Burl gazed about him keenly. He was some twenty yards from the shore, and the greenish scum surrounded his now disintegrating vessel. The river had widened out until the other bank was barely to be seen

through the haze above the surface of the river, but the nearer shore seemed firm and no more full of dangers than the territory his tribe inhabited. He felt the depth of the water with his spear, then was struck with the multiple uselessness of that weapon. The water would come but slightly above his ankles.

Shivering a little with fear, Burl stepped down into the water, then made for the bank at the top of his speed. He felt a soft something clinging to one of his bare feet. With an access of terror, he ran faster, and stumbled upon the shore in a panic. He stared down at his foot. A shapeless, flesh-colored pad clung to his heel, and as Burl watched, it began to swell slowly, while the pink of its wrinkled folds deepened.

It was no more than a leech, sharing in the enlargement nearly all the lower world had undergone, but Burl did not know that. He thrust at it with the side of his spear, then scraped frantically at it, and it fell off, leaving a blotch of blood upon the skin where it came away. It lay, writhing and pulsating, upon the ground, and Burl fled from it.

He found himself in one of the toadstool forests with which he was familiar, and finally paused, disconsolately. He knew the nature of the fungus growths about him, and presently fell to eating. In Burl the sight of food always produced hunger—a wise provision of nature to make up for the instinct to store food, which he lacked.

Burl's heart was small within him. He was far from his tribe, and far from Saya. In the parlance of this day, it is probable that no more than forty miles separated them, but Burl did not think of distances. He had come down the river. He was in a land he had never known or seen. And he was alone.

All about him was food. All the mushrooms that surrounded him were edible, and formed a store of sustenance Burl's whole tribe could not have eaten in many days, but that very fact brought Saya to his mind more forcibly. He squatted on the ground, wolfing down the insipid mushroom in great gulps, when an idea suddenly came to him with all the force of inspiration.

He would bring Saya here, where there

was food, food in great quantities, and she would be pleased. Burl had forgotten the large and oily fish that still hung down his back from the sinew about his neck, but now he rose, and its flapping against him reminded him again.

He took it and fingered it all over, getting his hands and himself thoroughly greasy in the process, but he could eat no more. The thought of Saya's pleasure at the sight of that, too, reinforced his determination.

With all the immediacy of a child or a savage he set off at once. He had come along the bank of the stream. He would retrace his steps along the bank of the stream.

Through the awkward aisles of the mushroom forest he made his way, eyes and ears open for possibilities of danger. Several times he heard the omnipresent clicking of ants on their multifarious businesses in the wood, but he could afford to ignore them. They were short-sighted at best, and at worst they were foragers rather than hunters. He only feared one kind of ant, the army-ant, which sometimes travels in hordes of millions, eating all that it comes upon. In ages past, when they were tiny creatures not an inch long, even the largest animals fled from them. Now that they measured a foot in length, not even the gorged spiders whose distended bellies were a yard in thickness, dared offer them battle.

The mushroom-forest came to an end. A cheerful grasshopper (*Ephigger*) munched delicately at some dainty it had found. Its hind legs were bunched beneath it in perpetual readiness for flight. A monster wasp appeared above—as long as Burl himself—poised an instant, dropped, and seized the luckless feaster.

There was a struggle, then the grasshopper became helpless, and the wasp's flexible abdomen curved delicately. Its sting entered the jointed armor of its prey, just beneath the head. The sting entered with all the deliberate precision of a surgeon's scalpel, and all struggle ceased.

The wasp grasped the paralyzed, not dead, insect and flew away. Burl grunted, and passed on. He had hidden when the wasp darted down from above.

The ground grew rough, and Burl's progress became painful. He clambered arduously up steep slopes and made his way cautiously down their farther sides. Once he had to climb through a tangled mass of mushrooms so closely placed, and so small, that he had to break them apart with blows of his spear before he could pass, when they shed upon him torrents of a fiery-red liquid that rolled off his greasy breast and sank into the ground (*Lactarius deliciosus*).

A strange self-confidence now took possession of Burl. He walked less cautiously and more boldly. The mere fact that he had struck something and destroyed it provided him with a curious fictitious courage.

He had climbed slowly to the top of a red-clay cliff, perhaps a hundred feet high, slowly eaten away by the river when it overflowed. Burl could see the river. At some past flood-time it had lapped at the base of the cliff on whose edge he walked, though now it came no nearer than a quarter-mile.

The cliffside was almost covered with shelf-fungi, large and small, white, yellow, orange, and green, in indescribable confusion and luxuriance. From a point halfway up the cliff the inch-thick cable of a spider's web stretched down to an anchorage on the ground, and the strangely geometrical pattern of the web glistened evilly.

Somewhere among the fungi of the cliffside the huge creature waited until some unfortunate prey should struggle helplessly in its monster snare. The spider waited in a motionless, implacable patience, invincibly certain of prey, utterly merciless to its victims.

Burl strutted on the edge of the cliff, a silly little pink-skinned creature with an oily fish slung about his neck and a draggled fragment of a moth's wing about his middle. In his hand he bore the long spear of a minotaur beetle. He strutted, and looked scornfully down upon the whitely shining trap below him. He struck mushrooms, and they had fallen before him. He feared nothing. He strode fearlessly along. He would go to Saya and bring her to this land where food grew in abundance.

Sixty paces before him, a shaft sank vertically in the sandy, clayey soil. It was a

carefully rounded shaft, and lined with silk. It went down for perhaps thirty feet or more, and there enlarged itself into a chamber where the owner and digger of the shaft might rest. The top of the hole was closed by a trap-door, stained with mud and earth to imitate with precision the surrounding soil. A keen eye would have been needed to perceive the opening. But a keen eye now peered out from a tiny crack, the eye of the engineer of the underground dwelling.

Eight hairy legs surrounded the body of the creature that hung motionless at the top of the silk-lined shaft. A huge misshapen globe formed its body, colored a dirty brown. Two pairs of ferocious mandibles stretched before its fierce mouthparts. Two eyes glittered evilly in the darkness of the burrow. And over the whole body spread a rough, mangy fur.

It was a thing of implacable malignance, of incredible ferocity. It was the brown hunting-spider, the American tarantula (*Mygale Hentzi*). Its body was two feet and more in diameter, and its legs, outstretched, would cover a circle three yards across. It watched Burl, its eyes glistening. Slaver welled up and dropped from its jaws.

And Burl strutted forward on the edge of the cliff, puffed up with a sense of his own importance. The white snare of the spinning spider below him impressed him as amusing. He knew the spider would not leave its web to attack him. He reached down and broke off a bit of fungus growing at his feet. Where he broke it, it was oozing a soupy liquid and was full of tiny maggots in a delirium of feasting, Burl flung it down into the web, and then laughed as the black bulk of the hidden spider swung down from its hiding-place to investigate.

The tarantula, peering from its burrow, quivered with impatience. Burl drew near, and nearer. He was using his spear as a lever, now, and prying off bits of fungus to fall down the cliffside into the colossal web. The spider, below, went leisurely from one place to another, investigating each new missile with its palpi, then leaving them as they appeared lifeless and undesirable prey. Burl laughed again as a particularly large lump of shelf-fungus narrowly missed the black-and-silver figure below. Then—

The trap-door fell into place with a faint click, and Burl whirled about. His laughter turned to a scream. Moving toward him with incredible rapidity, the monster tarantula opened its dripping jaws. Its mandibles gaped wide. The poison fangs were unsheathed. The creature was thirty paces away, twenty paces—ten. It leaped into the air, eyes glittering, all its eight legs extended to seize, fangs bared—

Burl screamed again, and thrust out his arms to ward off the impact of the leap. In his terror, his grasp upon his spear had become agonized. The spear-point shot out and the tarantula fell upon it. Nearly a quarter of the spear entered the body of the ferocious thing.

It stuck upon the spear, writhing horribly, still struggling to reach Burl, who was transfixed with horror. The mandibles clashed, strange sounds came from the beast. Then one of the attenuated, hairy legs rasped across Burl's forearm. He gasped in ultimate fear and stepped backward—and the edge of the cliff gave way beneath him.

He hurtled downward, still clutching the spear which held the writhing creature from him. Down through space, his eyes glassy with panic, the two creatures—the man and the giant tarantula—fell together. There was a strangely elastic crash and crackling. They had fallen into the web beneath them.

Burl had reached the end of terror. He could be no more fear-struck. Struggling madly in the gummy coils of an immense web, which ever bound him more tightly, with a wounded creature shuddering in agony not a yard from him—yet a wounded creature that still strove to reach him with its poison fangs—Burl had reached the limit of panic.

He fought like a madman to break the coils about him. His arms and breast were greasy from the oily fish, and the sticky web did not adhere to them, but his legs and body were inextricably fastened by the elastic threads spread for just such prey as he.

He paused a moment, in exhaustion. Then he saw, five yards away, the silvery and black monster waiting patiently for him

to weary himself. It judged the moment propitious. The tarantula and the man were one in its eyes, one struggling thing that had fallen opportunely into its snare. They were moving but feebly now. The spider advanced delicately, swinging its huge bulk nimbly along the web, paying out a cable after it as it came.

Burl's arms were free, because of the greasy coating they had received. He waved them wildly, shrieking at the pitiless monster that approached. The spider paused. Those moving arms suggested mandibles that might wound or slap.

Spiders take few hazards. This spider was no exception to the rule. It drew cautiously near, then stopped. Its spinnerets became busy, and with one of its six legs, used like an arm, it flung a sheet of gummy silk impartially over both the tarantula and the man.

Burl fought against the descending shroud. He strove to thrust it away, but in vain. In a matter of minutes he was completely covered in a silken cloth that hid even the light from his eyes. He and his enemy, the giant tarantula, were beneath the same covering, though the tarantula moved but weakly.

The shower ceased. The web-spider had decided that they were helpless. Then Burl felt the cables of the web give slightly, as the spider approached to sting and suck the sweet juices from its prey.

CHAPTER III.

THE ARMY ANTS.

THE web yielded gently as the added weight of the black-bellied spider approached. Burl froze into stillness under his enveloping covering. Beneath the same silken shroud the tarantula writhed in agony upon the point of Burl's spear. It clashed its jaws, shuddering upon the horny barb.

Burl was quiet in an ecstasy of terror. He waited for the poison-fangs to be thrust into him. He knew the process. He had seen the leisurely fashion in which the giant spiders delicately stung their prey, then withdrew to wait without impatience for the poison to do its work.

When their victim had ceased to struggle they drew near again, and sucked the sweet juices from the body, first from one point and then another, until what had so recently been a creature vibrant with life became a shrunken, withered husk—to be flung from the web at nightfall. Most spiders are tidy housekeepers, destroying their snares daily to spin anew.

The bloated, evil creature moved meditatively about the shining sheet of silk it had cast over the man and the giant tarantula when they fell from the cliff above. Now only the tarantula moved feebly. Its body was outlined by a bulge in the concealing shroud, throbbing faintly as it still struggled with the spear in its vitals. The irregularly rounded protuberance offered a point of attack for the web-spider. It moved quickly forward, and stung.

Galvanized into fresh torment by this new agony, the tarantula writhed in a very hell of pain. Its legs, clustered about the spear still fastened into its body, struck out purposelessly, in horrible gestures of delirious suffering. Burl screamed as one of them touched him and struggled himself.

His arms and head were free beneath the silken sheet because of the grease and oil that coated them. He clutched at the threads about him and strove to draw himself away from his deadly neighbor. The threads did not break, but they parted one from another, and a tiny opening appeared. One of the tarantula's attenuated limbs touched him again. With the strength of utter panic he hauled himself away, and the opening enlarged. Another struggle, and Burl's head emerged into the open air, and he stared down for twenty feet upon an open space almost carpeted with the chitinous remains of his present captor's former victims.

Burl's head was free, and his breast and arms. The fish slung over his shoulder had shed its oil upon him impartially. But the lower part of his body was held firm by the gummy snare of the web-spider, a snare far more tenacious than any bird-lime ever manufactured by man.

He hung in his tiny window for a moment, despairing. Then he saw, at a little distance, the bulk of the monster spider,

waiting patiently for its poison to take effect and the struggling of its prey to be stilled. The tarantula was no more than shuddering now. Soon it would be still, and the black-bellied creature waiting on the web would approach for its meal.

Burl withdrew his head and thrust desperately at the sticky stuff about his loins and legs. The oil upon his hands kept it from clinging to them, and it gave a little. In a flash of inspiration, Burl understood. He reached over his shoulder and grasped the greasy fish; tore it in a dozen places and smeared himself with the now rancid exudation, pushing the sticky threads from his limbs and oiling the surface from which he had thrust it away.

He felt the web tremble. To the spider, its poison seemed to have failed of effect. Another sting seemed to be necessary. This time it would not insert its fangs into the quiescent tarantula, but would sting where the disturbance was manifest—would send its deadly venom into Burl.

He gasped, and drew himself toward his window. It was as if he would have pulled his legs from his body. His head emerged, his shoulders, half his body was out of the hole.

The colossal spider surveyed him, and made ready to cast more of its silken sheet upon him. The spinnerets became active, and the sticky stuff about Burl's feet gave way! He shot out of the opening and fell sprawling, awkwardly and heavily, upon the earth below, crashing upon the shrunken shell of a flying beetle which had fallen into the snare and had not escaped as he had.

Burl rolled over and over, and then sat up. An angry, foot-long ant stood before him, its mandibles extended threateningly, while its antennæ waved wildly in the air. A shrill stridulation filled the air.

In ages past, when ants were tiny creatures of lengths to be measured in fractions of an inch, learned scientists debated gravely if their tribe possessed a cry. They believed that certain grooves upon the body of the insects, after the fashion of those upon the great legs of the cricket, might offer the means of uttering an infinitely high-pitched sound too shrill for man's ears to catch.

Burl knew that the stridulation was caused by the doubtful insect before him, though he had never wondered how it was produced. The cry was used to summon others of its city, to help it in its difficulty or good fortune.

Clickings sounded fifty or sixty feet away. Comrades were coming to aid the pioneer. Harmless save when interfered with—all save the army ant, that is—the whole ant tribe was formidable when aroused. Utterly fearless, they could pull down a man and slay him as so many infuriated fox-terriers might have done thirty thousand years before.

Burl fled, without debate, and nearly collided with one of the anchoring cables of the web from which he had barely escaped a moment before. He heard the shrill sound behind him suddenly subside. The ant, short-sighted as all ants were, no longer felt itself threatened and went peacefully about the business Burl had interrupted, that of finding among the grewsome relics beneath the spider's web some edible carrion which might feed the inhabitants of its city.

Burl sped on for a few hundred yards, and stopped. It behooved him to move carefully. He was in strange territory, and as even the most familiar territory was full of sudden and implacable dangers, unknown lands were doubly or trebly perilous.

Burl, too, found difficulty in moving. The glutinous stuff from the spider's shroud of silk still stuck to his feet and picked up small objects as he went along. Old ant-gnawed fragments of insect armour pricked him even through his toughened soles.

He looked about cautiously and removed them, took a dozen steps and had to stop again. Burl's brain had been uncommonly stimulated of late. It had gotten him into at least one predicament—due to his invention of a spear—but had no less readily led to his escape from another. But for the reasoning that had led him to use the grease from the fish upon his shoulder in oiling his body when he struggled out of the spider's snare, he would now be furnishing a meal for that monster.

Cautiously, Burl looked all about him. He seemed to be safe. Then, quite deliber-

ately, he sat down to think. It was the first time in his life that he had done such a thing. The people of his tribe were not given to meditation. But an idea had struck Burl with all the force of inspiration—an abstract idea.

When he was in difficulties, something within him seemed to suggest a way out. Would it suggest an inspiration now? He puzzled over the problem. Childlike—and savage-like—the instant the thought came to him he proceeded to test it out. He fixed his gaze upon his foot. The sharp edges of pebbles, of the remains of insect-armour, of a dozen things, hurt his feet when he walked. They had done so even since he had been born, but never before had his feet been sticky so that the irritation continued for more than a single step.

Now he gazed upon his foot, and waited for the thought within him to develop. Meanwhile he slowly removed the sharp-pointed fragments, one by one. Partly coated as they were with the half-liquid gum from his feet, they clung to his fingers as they had to his feet, except upon those portions where the oil was thick as before.

Burl's reasoning, before, was simple and of the primary order. Where oil covered him, the web did not. Therefore he would coat the rest of himself with oil. Had he been placed in the same predicament again, he would have used the same means of escape. But to apply a bit of knowledge gained in one predicament to another difficulty was something he had not yet done.

A dog may be taught that by pulling on the latch-string of a door he may open it, but the same dog coming to a high and close-barred gate with a latch-string attached will never think of pulling on this second latch-string. He associates a latch-string with the opening of the door. The opening of a gate is another matter entirely.

Burl had been stirred to one invention by imminent peril. That is not extraordinary. But to reason in cold blood, as he presently did, that oil on his feet would nullify the glue upon his feet and enable him again to walk in comfort—that was a triumph. The inventions of savages are essentially matters of life and death, of

food and safety. Comfort and luxury are only produced by intelligence of a high order.

Burl, in safety, had added to his comfort. That was truly a more important thing in his development than almost any other thing he could have done. He oiled his feet.

It was an almost infinitesimal problem, but Burl's struggles with the mental process of reasoning were actual. Thirty thousand years before him, a wise man had pointed out that education is simply training in thought, in efficient and effective thinking. Burl's tribe had been too much preoccupied with food and mere existence to think, and now Burl, sitting at the base of a squat toadstool that all but concealed him, re-exemplified Rodin's "Thinker" for the first time in many generations.

For Burl to reason, that oil upon the soles of his feet would guard him against sharp stones was as much a triumph of intellect as any masterpiece of art in the ages before him. Burl was learning how to think.

He stood up, walked, and crowed in sheer delight, then paused a moment in awe of his own intelligence. Thirty-five miles from his tribe, naked, unarmed, utterly ignorant of fire, of wood, of any weapons save a spear he had experimented with the day before, abysmally uninformed concerning the very existence of any art or science, Burl stopped to assure himself that he was very wonderful.

Pride came to him. He wished to display himself to Saya, these things upon his feet, and his spear. But his spear was gone.

With touching faith in the efficacy of this new pastime, Burl sat promptly down again and knitted his brows. Just as a superstitious person, once convinced that by appeal to a favorite talisman he will be guided aright, will inevitably apply to that talisman on all occasions, so Burl plumped himself down to think.

These questions were easily answered. Burl was naked. He would search out garments for himself. He was weaponless. He would find himself a spear. He was hungry—and would seek food, and he was

far from his tribe, so he would go to them. Puerile reasoning, of course, but valuable because it was consciously reasoning, consciously appealing to his mind for guidance in difficulty, deliberate progress from a mental desire to a mental resolution.

Even in the high civilization of ages before, few men had really used their brains. The great majority of people had depended upon machines and their leaders to think for them. Burl's tribe-folk depended on their stomachs. Burl, however, was gradually developing the habit of thinking which makes for leadership and which would be invaluable to his little tribe.

He stood up again and faced up-stream, moving slowly and cautiously, his eyes searching the ground before him keenly and his ears alert for the slightest sound of danger. Gigantic butterflies, riotous in coloring, fluttered overhead through the misty haze. Sometimes a grasshopper hurtled through the air like a projectile, its transparent wings beating the air frantically. Now and then a wasp sped by, intent upon its hunting, or a bee droned heavily along, anxious and worried, striving in a nearly flowerless world to gather the pollen that would feed the hive.

Here and there Burl saw flies of various sorts, some no larger than his thumb, but others the size of his whole hand. They fed upon the juices that dripped from the maggot-infested mushrooms, when filth more to their liking was not at hand.

Very far away a shrill roaring sounded faintly. It was like a multitude of clickings blended into a single sound, but was so far away that it did not impress itself upon Burl's attention. He had all the strictly localized vision of a child. What was near was important, and what was distant could be ignored. Only the imminent required attention, and Burl was preoccupied.

Had he listened, he would have realized that army ants were aboard in countless millions, spreading themselves out in a broad array and eating all they came upon far more destructively than so many locusts.

Locusts in past ages had eaten all green things. There were only giant cabbages

and a few such tenacious rank growths in the world that Burl knew. The locusts had vanished with civilization and knowledge and the greater part of mankind, but the army ants remained as an invincible enemy to men and insects, and the most of the fungus growths that covered the earth.

Burl did not notice the sound, however. He moved forward, briskly though cautiously, searching with his eyes for garments, food, and weapons. He confidently expected to find all of them within a short distance.

Surely enough, he found a thicket—if one might call it so—of edible fungi no more than half a mile beyond the spot where he had improvised his sandals to protect the soles of his feet.

Without especial elation, Burl tugged at the largest until he had broken off a food supply for several days. He went on, eating as he did so, past a broad plain a mile and more across, being broken into odd little hillocks by gradually ripening and suddenly developing mushrooms with which he was unfamiliar.

The earth seemed to be in process of being pushed aside by rounded protuberances of which only the tips showed. Blood-red hemispheres seemed to be forcing aside the earth so they might reach the outer air.

Burl looked at them curiously, and passed among them without touching them. They were strange, and to Burl most strange things meant danger. In any event, Burl was full of a new purpose now. He wished garments and weapons.

Above the plain a wasp hovered, a heavy object dangling beneath its black belly, ornamented by a single red band. It was a wasp—the hairy sand-wasp—and it was bringing a paralyzed gray caterpillar to its burrow.

Burl watched it drop down with the speed and sureness of an arrow, pull aside a heavy, flat stone, and descend into the ground. It had a vertical shaft dug down for forty feet or more.

It descended, evidently inspected the interior, reappeared, and vanished into the hole again, dragging the gray worm after it.

Burl, marching on over the broad plain that seemed stricken with some erupting disease from the number of red pimples making their appearance, did not know what passed below, but observed the wasp emerge again and busily scratch dirt and stones into the shaft until it was full.

The wasp had paralyzed a caterpillar, taken it to the already prepared burrow, laid an egg upon it, and filled up the entrance. In course of time the egg would hatch into a grub barely as long as Burl's forefinger, which would then feed upon the torpid caterpillar until it had waxed large and fat. Then it would weave itself a chrysalis and sleep a long sleep, only to wake as a wasp and dig its way to the open air.

Burl reached the farther side of the plain and found himself threading the aisles of one of the fungus forests in which the growths were hideous, misshapen travesties upon the trees they had supplanted. Bloated, yellow limbs branched off from rounded, swollen trunks. Here and there a pear-shaped puff-ball, Burl's height and half as much again, waited craftily until a chance touch should cause it to shoot upward a curling puff of infinitely fine dust.

Burl went cautiously. There were dangers here, but he moved forward steadily, none the less. A great mass of edible mushroom was slung under one of his arms, and from time to time he broke off a fragment and ate of it, while his large eyes searched this way and that for threats of harm.

Behind him, a high, shrill roaring had grown slightly in volume and nearness, but was still too far away to impress Burl. The army ants were working havoc in the distance. By thousands and millions, myriads upon myriads, they were foraging the country, clambering upon every eminence, descending into every depression, their antennae waving restlessly and their mandibles forever threateningly extended. The ground was black with them, and each was ten inches and more in length.

A single such creature would be formidable to an unarmed and naked man like Burl, whose wisest move would be flight, but in their thousands and millions they

presented a menace from which no escape seemed possible. They were advancing steadily and rapidly, shrill stridulations and a multitude of clickings marking their movements.

The great, helpless caterpillars upon the giant cabbages heard the sound of their coming, but were too stupid to flee. The black multitudes covered the rank vegetables, and tiny but voracious jaws began to tear at the flaccid masses of flesh.

Each creature had some futile means of struggling. The caterpillars strove to throw off their innumerable assailants by writhings and contortions, wholly ineffective. The bees fought their entrance to the gigantic hives with stings and wing-beats. The moths took to the air in helpless blindness when discovered by the relentless throngs of small black insects which reeked of fromic acid and left the ground behind them denuded in every living thing.

Before the oncoming horde was a world of teeming life, where mushrooms and fungi fought with thinning numbers of giant cabbages for foothold. Behind the black multitude was—nothing. Mushrooms, cabbages, bees, wasps, crickets. Every creeping and crawling thing that did not get aloft before the black tide reached it was lost, torn to bits by tiny mandibles. Even the hunting spiders and tarantulas fell before the host of insects, having killed many in their final struggles, but overwhelmed by sheer numbers. And the wounded and dying army ants made food for their sound comrades.

There is no mercy among insects. Only the web-spiders sat unmoved and immovable in their colossal snares, secure in the knowledge that their gummy webs would discourage attempts at invasion along the slender supporting cables.

Surging onward, flowing like a monstrous, murky tide over the yellow, steaming earth, the army ants advanced. Their vanguard reached the river, and recoiled. Burl was perhaps five miles distant when they changed their course, communicating the altered line of march to those behind them in some mysterious fashion of transmitting intelligence.

Thirty thousand years before, scientists

had debated gravely over the means of communication among ants. They had observed that a single ant finding a bit of booty too large for him to handle alone would return to the ant-city and return with others. From that one instance they deduced a language of gestures made with the antennae.

Burl had no wise theories. He merely knew facts, but he knew that the ants had some form of speech or transmission of ideas. Now, however, he was moving cautiously along toward the stamping-grounds of his tribe, in complete ignorance of the black blanket of living creatures creeping over the ground toward him.

A million tragedies marked the progress of the insect army. There was a tiny colony of mining bees—Zebra bees—a single mother, some four feet long, had dug a huge gallery with some ten cells, in which she laid her eggs and fed her grubs with hard-gathered pollen. The grubs had waxed fat and large, became bees, and laid eggs in their turn, within the gallery their mother had dug out for them.

Ten such bulky insects now foraged busily for grubs within the ancestral home, while the founder of the colony had grown dragged and wingless with the passing of time. Unable to forage, herself, the old bee became the guardian of the nest or hive, as is the custom among the mining bees. She closed the opening of the hive with her head, making a living barrier within the entrance, and withdrawing to give entrance and exit only to duly authenticated members of the colony.

The ancient and dragged concierge of the underground dwelling was at her post when the wave of army ants swept over her. Tiny, evil-smelling feet trampled upon her. She emerged to fight with mandible and sting for the sanctity of the hive. In a moment she was a shaggy mass of biting ants, repding and tearing at her chitinous armour. The old bee fought madly, viciously, sounding a buzzing alarm to the colonists yet within the hive. They emerged, fighting as they came, for the gallery leading down was a dark flood of small insects.

For a few moments a battle such as

would make an epic was in progress. Ten huge bees, each four to five feet long, fighting with legs and jaw, wing and mandible, with all the ferocity of as many tigers. The tiny, vicious ants covered them, snapping at their multiple eyes, biting at the tender joints in their armour—sometimes releasing the larger prey to leap upon an injured comrade wounded by the huge creature they battled in common.

The fight, however, could have but one ending. Struggle as the bees might, herculean as their efforts might be, they were powerless against the incredible numbers of their assailants, who tore them into tiny fragments and devoured them. Before the last shread of the hive's defenders had vanished, the hive itself was gutted alike of the grubs it had contained and the food brought to the grubs by such weary effort of the mature bees.

The army ants went on. Only an empty gallery remained, that and a few fragments of tough armour, unappetising even to the omniverous ants.

Burl was meditatively inspecting the scene of a recent tragedy, where rent and scraped fragments of a great beetle's shiny casing lay upon the ground. A greater beetle had come upon the first and slain him. Burl was looking upon the remains of the meal.

Three or four minims, little ants barely six inches long, foraged industriously among the bits. I new ant city was to be formed, and the queen-ant lay hidden a half-mile away. These were the first hatchlings, who would feed the larger ants on whom would fall the great work of the ant-city. Burl ignored them, searching with his eyes for a spear or weapon of some sort.

Behind him the clicking roar, the high-pitched stridulations of the horde of army ants, rose in volume. Burl turned disgustedly away. The best he could find in the way of a weapon was a fiercely toothed hind-leg. He picked it up, and an angry whine rose from the ground.

One of the black minims was working busily to detach a fragment of flesh from the joint of the leg, and Burl had snatched the morsel from him. The little creature was hardly half a foot in length, but it

advanced upon Burl, shrilling angrily. He struck it with the leg and crushed it. Two of the other minims appeared, attracted by the noise the first had made. Discovering the crushed body of their fellow, they unceremoniously dismembered it and bore it away in triumph.

Burl went on, swinging the toothed limb in his hand. It made a fair club, and Burl was accustomed to use stones to crush the juicy legs of such giant crickets as his tribe sometimes came upon. He formed a half-defined idea of a club. The sharp teeth of the thing in his hand made him realize that a sidewise blow was better than a spear-like thrust.

The sound behind him had become a distant whispering, high-pitched, and growing nearer. The army ants swept over a mushroom forest, and the yellow, umbrella-like growths swarmed with black creatures devouring the substance on which they found a foot-hold.

A great blue-bottle fly, shining with a metallic luster, reposed in an ecstasy of feasting, sipping through its long proboscis the dark-colored liquid that dripped slowly from a mushroom. Maggots filled the mushroom, and exuded a solvent pepsin that liquified the white firm "meat."

They fed upon this soup, this gruel, and a surplus dripped to the ground below, where the blue-bottle drank eagerly. Burl drew near, and struck. The fly collapsed into a writhing heap. Burl stood over it for an instant, pondering.

The army ants came nearer, down into a tiny valley, swarming into and through a little brook over which Burl had leaped. Ants can remain under water for a long time without drowning, so the small stream was but a minor obstacle, though the current of water swept many of them off their feet until they choked the brook-bed and their comrades passed over their struggling bodies dry-shod. They were no more than temporarily annoyed however, and crawled out to resume their march.

About a quarter of a mile to the left of Burl's line of march, and perhaps a mile behind the spot where he stood over the dead blue-bottle fly, there was a stretch of an acre or more where the giant, rank cab-

bage had so far resisted the encroachments of the ever-present mushrooms. The pale, cross-shaped flowers of the cabbages formed food for many bees, and the leaves fed numberless grubs and worms, and loud-voiced crickets which croached about on the ground, munching busily at the succulent green stuff. The army ants swept into the green area, ceaselessly devouring all they came upon.

A terrific din arose. The crickets hurtled away in rocket-like flight, in a dark cloud of wildly-beating-wings. They shot aimlessly in any direction, with the result that half, or more than half, fell in the midst of the black tide of devouring insects and were seized as they fell. They uttered terrible cries as they were being torn to bits. Horrible inhuman screams reached Burl's ears.

A single such cry of agony would not have attracted Burl's attention—he lived in the very atmosphere of tragedy—but the chorus of creatures in torment made him look up. This was no minor horror. Wholesale slaughter was going on. He peered anxiously in the direction of the sound.

A wild stretch of sickly yellow fungus, here and there interspersed with a squat toadstool or a splash of vivid color where one of the many "rusts" had found a foot-hold. To the left a group of awkward, misshapen fungoids clustered in silent mockery of a forest of trees. There a mass of faded green, where the giant cabbages stood.

With the true sun never shining upon them save through a blanket of thick haze or heavy clouds, they were pallid things, but they were the only green things Burl had seen. Their nodding white flowers with four petals in the form of a cross glowed against the yellowish-green leaves. But as Burl gazed toward them, the green became slowly black.

From where he stood, Burl could see two or three great grubs in lazy contentment, eating ceaselessly on the cabbages on which they rested. Suddenly first one and then the other began to jerk spasmodically. Burl saw that about each of them a tiny rim of black had clustered. Tiny black notes milled over the green surfaces of the cabbages. The grubs became black, the

cabbages became black. Horrible contortions of the writhing grubs told of the agonies they were enduring. Then a black wave appeared at the further edge of the stretch of sickly yellow fungus, a glistening, living wave, that moved forward rapidly with the roar of clickings and a persistent overtone of shrill stridulations.

The hair rose upon Burl's head. He knew what this was! He knew all to well the meaning of that tide of shining bodies. With a gasp of terror, all his intellectual preoccupations forgotten, he turned and fled in ultimate panic. And the tide came slowly on after him.

CHAPTER IV.

THE RED DEATH.

HE flung away the great mass of edible mushroom, but clung to his sharp-toothed club desperately, and darted through the tangled aisles of the little mushroom forest with a heedless disregard of the dangers that might await him there. Flies buzzed about him loudly, huge creatures, glittering with a metallic luster. Once he was struck upon the shoulder by the body of one of them, and his skin was torn by the swiftly vibrating wings of the insect, as long as Burl's hand.

Burl thrust it away and sped on. The oil with which he was partly covered had turned rancid, now, and the odor attracted them, connoisseurs of the fetid. They buzzed over his head, keeping pace even with his head-long flight.

A heavy weight settled upon his head, and in a moment was doubled. Two of the creatures had dropped upon his oily hair, to sip the rancid oil through their disgusting proboscises. Burl shook them off with his hand and ran madly on. His ears were keenly attuned to the sound of the army ants behind him, and it grew but little farther away.

The clicking roar continued, but began to be overshadowed by the buzzing of the flies. In Burl's time the flies had no great heaps of putrid matter in which to lay their eggs. The ants—busy scavengers—carted away the débris of the multitudinous trage-

dies of the insect world long before it could acquire the gamey flavor beloved by the fly maggots. Only in isolated spots were the flies really numerous, but there they clustered in clouds that darkened the sky.

Such a buzzing, whirling cloud surrounded the madly-running figure of Burl. It seemed as though a miniature whirlwind kept pace with the little pink-skinned man, a whirlwind composed of winged bodies and multi-faceted eyes. He twirled his club before him, and almost every stroke was interrupted by an impact against a thinly-armoured body which collapsed with a spurting of reddish liquid.

An agonizing pain as of a red-hot iron struck upon Burl's back. One of the stinging flies had thrust its sharp-tipped proboscis into Burl's flesh to suck the blood.

Burl uttered a cry and—ran full tilt into the thick stalk of a blackened and dragged toadstool. There was a curious crackling as of wet punk or brittle, rotten wood. The toadstool collapsed upon itself with a strange splashing sound. Many flies had laid their eggs in the fungoid, and it was a teeming mass of corruption and ill-smelling liquid.

With the crash of the toadstool's "head" upon the ground, it fell into a dozen pieces, and the earth for yards around was spattered with a stinking liquid in which tiny, headless maggots twitched convulsively.

The buzzing of the flies took on a note of satisfaction, and they settled by hundreds about the edges of the ill-smelling pools, becoming lost in the ecstasy of feasting while Burl staggered to his feet and darted off again. This time he was but a minor attraction to the flies, and but one or two came near him. From every direction they were hurrying to the toadstool feast, to the banquet of horrible, liquefied fungus that lay spread upon the ground.

Burl ran on. He passed beneath the wide-spreading leaves of a giant cabbage. A great grass-hopper crouched upon the ground, its tremendous jaws crunching the rank vegetation voraciously. Half a dozen great worms ate steadily from their resting-places among the leaves. One of them had slung itself beneath an over-hanging leaf—which would have thatched a dozen homes

for as many men—and was placidly anchoring itself in preparation for the spinning of a cocoon in which to sleep the sleep of metamorphosis.

A mile away, the great black tide of army ants was advancing relentlessly. The great cabbage, the huge grasshopper, and all the stupid caterpillars upon the wide leaves would soon be covered with the tiny, biting insects. The cabbage would be reduced to a chewed and destroyed stump, the colossal, furry grubs would be torn into a myriad mouthfuls and devoured by the black army ants, and the grasshopper would strike out with terrific, unguided strength, crushing its assailants by blows of its powerful hind-legs and bites of its great jaws. But it would die, making terrible sounds of torment as the vicious mandibles of the army ants found crevices in its armor.

The clicking roar of the ants' advance overshadowed all other sounds, now. Burl was running madly, his breath coming in great gasps, his eyes wide with panic. Alone of all the world about him, he knew the danger behind. The insects he passed were going about their business with that terrifying efficiency found only in the insect world.

There is something strangely daunting in the actions of an insect. It moves so directly, with such uncanny precision, with such utter indifference to anything but the end in view. Cannibalism is a rule, almost without exception. The paralysis of prey, so it may remain alive and fresh—though in agony—for weeks on end, is a common practice. The eating piecemeal of still-living victims is a matter of course.

Absolute mercilessness, utter callousness, incredible inhumanity beyond anything known in the animal world is the natural and commonplace practise of the insects. And these vast cruelties are performed by armored, machine-like creatures with an abstraction and a routine air that suggests a horrible Nature behind them all.

Burl nearly stumbled upon a tragedy. He passed within a dozen yards of a space where a female dung-beetle was devouring the mate whose honeymoon had begun that same day and ended in that gruesome

fashion. Hidden behind a clump of mushrooms, a great yellow-banded spider was coolly threatening a smaller male of her own species. He was discreetly ardent, but if he won the favor of the gruesome creature he was wooing, he would furnish an appetizing meal for her some time within twenty-four hours.

Burl's heart was pounding madly. The breath whistled in his nostrils,—and behind him, the wave of army ants was drawing nearer. They came upon the feasting flies. Some took to the air and escaped, but others were too engrossed in their delicious meal. The twitching little maggots, stranded upon the earth by the scattering of their soupy broth, were torn in pieces. The flies who were seized vanished into tiny maws. The serried ranks of black insects went on.

The tiny clickings of their limbs, the perpetual challenges and cross-challenges of crossed antennæ, the stridulations of the creatures, all combined to make a high-pitched but deafening din. Now and then another sound pierced the noises made by the ants themselves. A cricket, seized by a thousand tiny jaws, uttered cries of agony. The shrill note of the crickets had grown deeply bass with the increase in size of the organs that uttered it.

There was a strange contrast between the ground before the advancing horde and that immediately behind it. Before, a busy world, teeming with life. Butterflies floating overhead on lazy wings, grubs waxing fat and huge upon the giant cabbages, crickets eating, great spiders sitting quietly in their lairs waiting with invincible patience for prey to draw near their trap-doors or fall into their webs, colossal beetles lumbering heavily through the mushroom forests, seeking food, making love in monstrous, tragic fashion.

And behind the wide belt of army ants—chaos. The edible mushrooms gone. The giant cabbages left as mere stumps of unappetizing pulp, the busy life of the insect world completely wiped out save for the flying creatures that fluttered helplessly over an utter changed landscape. Here and there little hands of stragglers moved busily over the denuded earth, searching

for some fragment of food that might conceivably have been overlooked by the main body.

Burl was putting forth his last ounce of strength. His limbs trembled, his breathing was agony, sweat stood out upon his forehead. He ran, a little, naked man with the disjointed fragment of a huge insect's limb in his hand, running for his insignificant life, running as if his continued existence among the million tragedies of that single day were the purpose for which the universe had been created.

He sped across an open space a hundred yards across. A thicket of beautifully golden mushrooms (*Agaricus caesareus*) barred his way. Beyond the mushrooms a range of strangely colored hills began, purple and green and black and gold, melting into each other, branching off from each other, inextricably tangled.

They rose to a height of perhaps sixty or seventy feet, and above them a little grayish haze had gathered. There seemed to be a layer of tenuous vapor upon their surfaces, which slowly rose and coiled, and gathered into a tiny cloudlet above their tips.

The hills, themselves, were but masses of fungus, mushrooms and rusts, fungoids of every description, yeasts, "musts," and every form of fungus growth which had grown within itself and about itself until this great mass of strangely colored, spongy stuff had gathered in a mass that undulated unevenly across the level earth for miles.

Burl burst through the golden thicket and attacked the ascent. His feet sank into the spongy sides of the hillock. Panting, gasping, staggering from exhaustion, he made his way up the top. He plunged into a little valley on the farther side, up another slope. For perhaps ten minutes he forced himself on, then collapsed. He lay, unable to move further, in a little hollow, his sharp-toothed club still clasped in his hands. Above him, a bright yellow butterfly with a thirty-foot spread of wings fluttered lightly.

He lay motionless, breathing in great gasps, his limbs refusing to lift him.

The sound of the army ants continued to grow near. At last, above the crest of

the last hillock he had surmounted, two tiny antennæ appeared, then the black, glistening head of an army ant, the fore-runner of its horde. It moved deliberately forward, waving its antennæ ceaselessly. It made its way toward Burl, tiny clickings coming from the movements of its limbs.

A little wisp of tenuous vapor swirled toward the ant, a wisp of the same vapor that had gathered above the whole range of hills as a thin, low cloud. It enveloped the insect—and the ant seemed to be attacked by a strange convulsion. Its legs moved aimlessly. It threw itself desperately about. If it had been an animal, Burl would have watched with wondering eyes while it coughed and gasped, but it was an insect breathing through air-holes in its abdomen. It writhed upon the spongy fungus growth across which it had been moving.

Burl, lying in an exhausted, panting heap upon the purple mass of fungus, was conscious of a strange sensation. His body felt strangely warm. He knew nothing of fire or the heat of the sun, and the only sensation of warmth he had ever known was that caused when the members of his tribe had huddled together in their hiding-place when the damp chill of the night had touched their soft-skinned bodies. Then the heat of their breaths and their bodies had kept out the chill.

This heat that Burl now felt was a hotter, fiercer heat. He moved his body with a tremendous effort, and for a moment the fungus was cool and soft beneath him. Then, slowly, the sensation of heat began again, and increased until Burl's skin was red and inflamed from the irritation.

The thin and tenuous vapor, too, made Burl's lungs smart and his eyes water. He was breathing in great, choking gasps, but the period of rest—short as it was—had enabled him to rise and stagger on. He crawled painfully to the top of the slope, and looked back.

The hill-crest on which he stood was higher than any of those he had passed in his painful run, and he could see clearly the whole of the purple range. Where he was, he was near the farther edge of the range, which was here perhaps half a mile wide.

It was a ceaseless, undulating mass of hills and hollows, ridges and spurs, all of them colored, purple and brown and golden-yellow, deepest black and dingy white. And from the tips of most of the pointed hills little wisps of vapor rose up.

A thin, dark cloud had gathered overhead. Burl could look to the right and left and see the hills fading into the distance, growing fainter as the haze above them seemed to grow thicker. He saw, too, the advancing cohorts of the army ants, creeping over the tangled mass of fungus growth. They seemed to be feeding as they went, upon the fungus that had gathered into these incredible monstrosities.

The hills were living. They were not upheavals of the ground, they were festering heaps of insanely growing, festering mushrooms and fungus. Upon most of them a purple mould had spread itself so that they seemed a range of purple hills, but here and there patches of other vivid colors showed, and there was a large hill whose whole side was a brilliant golden hue. Another had tiny bright-red spots of a strange and malignant mushroom whose properties Burl did not know, scattered all over the purple with which it was covered.

Burl leaned heavily upon his club and watched dully. He could run no more. The army ants were spreading everywhere over the mass of fungus. They would reach him soon.

Far to the right the vapor thickened. A column of smoke arose. What Burl did not know and would never know was that far down in the interior of that compressed mass of fungus, slow oxidation had been going on. The temperature of the interior had been raised. In the darkness and the dampness deep down in the hills, spontaneous combustion had begun.

Just as the vast piles of coal the railroad companies of thirty thousand years before had gathered together sometimes began to burn fiercely in their interiors, and just as the farmers' piles of damp straw suddenly burst into fierce flames from no cause, so these huge piles of tinder-like mushrooms had been burning slowly within themselves.

There had been no flames, because the surface remained intact and nearly air-tight.

But when the army ants began to tear at the edible surfaces despite the heat they encountered, fresh air found its way to the smouldering masses of fungus. The slow combustion became rapid combustion. The dull heat became fierce flames. The slow trickle of thin smoke became a huge column of thick, choking, acrid stuff that set the army ants that breathed it into spasms of convulsive writhing.

From a dozen points the flames burst out. A dozen or more columns of blinding smoke rose to the heavens. A pall of fume-laden smoke gathered above the range of purple hills, while Burl watched apathetically. And the serried ranks of army ants marched on to the widening furnaces that awaited them.

They had recoiled from the river, because their instinct had warned them. Thirty thousand years without danger from fire, however, had let their racial fear of fire die out. They marched into the blazing orifices they had opened in the hills, snapping with their mandibles at the leaping flames, springing at the glowing tinder.

The blazing areas widened, as the purple surface was undermined and fell in. Burl watched the phenomenon without comprehension and even without thankfulness. He stood, panting more and more slowly, breathing more and more easily, until the glow from the approaching flames reddened his skin and the acrid smoke made tears flow from his eyes.

Then he retreated slowly, leaning on his club and looking back. The black wave of the army ants was sweeping into the fire, sweeping into the incredible heat of that carbonized material burning with an open flame. At last there were only the little bodies of stragglers from the great ant-army, scurrying here and there over the ground their comrades had denuded of all living things. The bodies of the main army had vanished—burnt to crisp ashes in the furnace of the hills.

There had been agony in that flame, dreadful agony such as no man would like to dwell upon. The insane courage of the ants, attacking with their horny jaws the burning masses of fungus, rolling over and over with a flaming missile clutched in their

mandibles, sounding their shrill war-cry while cries of agony came from them—blinded, their antennæ burnt off, their lidless eyes scorched by the licking flames, yet going madly forward on flaming feet to attack, ever attack this unknown and unknowable enemy.

Burl made his way slowly over the hills. Twice he saw small bodies of the army ants. They had passed between the widening surfaces their comrades had opened, and they were feeding voraciously upon the hills they trod on. Once Burl was spied, and a shrill war-cry was sounded, but he moved on, and the ants were busily eating. A single ant rushed toward him. Burl brought down his club and a writhing body remained, to be eaten later by its comrades when they came upon it.

Again night fell. The sky grew red in the west, though the sun did not shine through the ever-present cloud bank. Darkness spread across the sky. Utter blackness fell over the whole mad world, save where the luminous mushrooms shed their pale light upon the ground and fireflies the length of Burl's arm shed their fitful gleams upon an earth of fungus growths and monstrous insects.

Burl made his way across the range of mushroom hills, picking his path with his large blue eyes whose pupils expanded to great size. Slowly, from the sky, now a drop and then a drop, now a drop and then a drop, the nightly rain that would continue until daybreak began.

Burl found the ground hard beneath his feet. He listened keenly for sounds of danger. Something rustled heavily in a thicket of mushrooms a hundred yards away. There were sounds of preening, and of delicate feet placed lightly here and there upon the ground. Then the throbbing beat of huge wings began suddenly, and a body took to the air.

A fierce, down-coming current of air smote Burl, and he looked upward in time to catch the outline of a huge body—a moth—as it passed above him. He turned to watch the line of its flight, and saw a strange glow in the sky behind him. The mushroom hills were still burning.

He crouched beneath a squat toadstool

and waited for the dawn, his club held tightly in his hands, and his ears alert for any sound of danger. The slow-dropping, sodden rain kept on. It fell with irregular, drum-like beats upon the tough top of the toadstool under which he had taken refuge.

Slowly, slowly, the sodden rainfall continued. Drop by drop, all the night long, the warm pellets of liquid came from the sky. They boomed upon the hollow heads of the toadstools, and splashed into the steaming pools that lay festering all over the fungus-covered earth.

And all the night long the great fires grew and spread in the mass of already half-carbonized mushroom. The flare at the horizon grew brighter and nearer. Burl, naked and hiding beneath a huge mushroom, watched it grow near him with wide eyes, wondering what this thing was. He had never seen a flame before.

The overhanging clouds were brightened by the flames. Over a stretch at least a dozen miles in length and from half a mile to three miles across, seething furnaces sent columns of dense smoke up to the roof of clouds, luminous from the glow below them, and spreading out and forming an intermediate layer below the cloudbanks themselves.

It was like the glow of all the many lights of a vast city thrown against the sky—but the last great city had moulded into fungus-covered rubbish thirty thousand years before. Like the flitting of airplanes above a populous city, too, was the flitting of fascinated creatures above the glow.

Moths and great flying beetles, gigantic gnats and midges grown huge with the passing of time, they fluttered and danced the dance of death above the flames. As the fire grew nearer to Burl, he could see them.

Colossal, delicately-formed creatures swooped above the strange blaze. Moths with their riotously-colored wings of thirty-foot spread beat the air with mighty strokes, and their huge eyes glowed like carbuncles as they stared with the frenzied gaze of intoxicated devotees into the glowing flames below them.

Burl saw a great peacock moth soaring above the burning mushroom hills. Its

wings were all of forty feet across, and fluttered like gigantic sails as the moth gazed down at the flaming furnace below. The separate flames had united, now, and a single sheet of white-hot burning stuff spread across the country for miles, sending up its clouds of smoke, in which and through which the fascinated creatures flew.

Feathery antennæ of the finest lace spread out before the head of the peacock moth, and its body was softest, richest velvet. A ring of snow-white down marked where its head began, and the red glow from below smote on the maroon of its body with a strange effect.

For one instant it was outlined clearly. Its eyes glowed more redly than any ruby's fire, and the great, delicate wings were poised in flight. Burl caught the flash of the flames upon two great iridescent spots upon the wide-spread wings. Shining purple and vivid red, the glow of opal and the sheen of pearl, all the glory of chalcedony and of chrysoptase formed a single wonder in the red glare of burning fungus. White smoke compassed the great moth all about, dimming the radiance of its gorgeous dress.

Burl saw it dart straight into the thickest and brightest of the licking flames, flying madly, eagerly, into the searing, hellish heat as a willing, drunken sacrifice to the god of fire.

Monster flying beetles with their horny wing-cases stiffly stretched, blundered above the reeking, smoking pyre. In the red light from before them they shone like burnished metal, and their clumsy bodies with the spurred and fierce-toothed limbs darted like so many grotesque meteors through the luminous haze of ascending smoke.

Burl saw strange collisions and still stranger meetings. Male and female flying creatures circled and spun in the glare, dancing their dance of love and death in the wild radiance from the funeral pyre of the purple hills. They mounted higher than Burl could see, drunk with the ecstasy of living, then descended to plunge headlong to death in the roaring fires beneath them.

From every side the creatures came. Moths of brightest yellow with soft and

furry bodies palpitant with life flew madly into the column of light that reached to the overhanging clouds, then moths of deepest black with gruesome symbols upon their wings came swiftly to dance, like motes in sunlight, above the glow.

And Burl sat crouched beneath an overshadowing toadstool and watched. The perpetual, slow, sodden raindrops fell. A continual faint hissing penetrated the sound of the fire—the raindrops being turned to steam. The air was alive with flying things. From far away Burl heard a strange, deep bass muttering. He did not know the cause, but there was a vast swamp, of the existence of which he was ignorant, some ten or fifteen miles away, and the chorus of insect-eating giant frogs reached his ears even at that distance.

The night wore on, while the flying creatures above the fire danced and died, their numbers ever recruited by fresh arrivals. Burl sat tensely still, his wide eyes watching everything, his mind groping for an explanation of what he saw. At last the sky grew dimly gray, then brighter, and day came on. The flames of the burning hills grew faint as the fire died down, and after a long time Burl crept from his hiding-place and stood erect.

A hundred yards from where he was, a straight wall of smoke rose from the still smoldering fungus, and Burl could see it stretching for miles in either direction. He turned to continue on his way, and saw the remains of one of the tragedies of the night.

A huge moth had flown into the flames, been horribly scorched, and floundered out again. Had it been able to fly, it would have returned to its devouring deity, but now it lay immovable upon the ground, its antennæ seared hopelessly, one beautiful, delicate wing burned in gaping holes, its eyes dimmed by flame and its exquisitely tapering limbs broken and crushed by the force with which it had struck the ground. It lay helpless upon the earth, only the stumps of its antennæ moving restlessly, and its abdomen pulsating slowly as it drew pain-racked breaths.

Burl drew near and picked up a stone. He moved on presently, a velvet cloak cast

over his shoulders, gleaming with all the colors of the rainbow. A gorgeous mass of soft, blue moth fur was about his middle, and he had bound upon his forehead two yard-long, golden fragments of the moth's magnificent antennæ. He strode on, slowly, clad as no man had been clad in all the ages.

After a little he secured a spear and took up his journey to Saya, looking like a prince of Ind upon a bridal journey—though no mere prince ever wore such raiment in days of greatest glory.

CHAPTER V.

THE CONQUEROR.

FOR many long miles Burl threaded his way through a single forest of thin-stalked toadstools. They towered three man-heights high, and all about their bases were streaks and splashes of the rusts and molds that preyed upon them. Twice Burl came to open glades wherein open, bubbling pools of green slime festered in corruption, and once he hid himself fearfully as a monster scarabeus beetle lumbered within three yards of him, moving heavily onward with a clanking of limbs as of some mighty machine.

Burl saw the mighty armor and the inward-curving jaws of the creature, and envied him his weapons. The time was not yet come, however, when Burl would smile at the great insect and hunt him for the juicy flesh contained in those armored limbs.

Burl was still a savage, still ignorant, still timid. His principal advance had been that whereas he had fled without reasoning, he now paused to see if he need flee. In his hands he bore a long, sharp-pointed, chitinous spear. It had been the weapon of a huge, unnamed flying insect scorched to death in the burning of the purple hills, which had floundered out of the flames to die. Burl had worked for an hour before being able to detach the weapon he coveted. It was as long and longer than Burl himself.

He was a strange sight, moving slowly and cautiously through the shadowed lanes

of the mushroom forest. A cloak of delicate velvet in which all the colors of the rainbow played in iridescent beauty hung from his shoulders. A mass of soft and beautiful moth fur was about his middle, and in the strip of sinew about his waist the fiercely toothed limb of a fighting beetle was thrust carelessly. He had bound to his forehead twin stalks of a great moth's feathery golden antennæ.

Against the play of color that came from his borrowed plumage his pink skin showed in odd contrast. He looked like some proud knight walking slowly through the gardens of a goblin's castle. But he was still a fearful creature, no more than the monstrous creatures about him save in the possession of latent intelligence. He was weak—and therein lay his greatest promise. A hundred thousand years before him his ancestors had been forced by lack of claws and fangs to develop brains.

Burl was sunk as low as they had been, but he had to combat more horrifying enemies, more inexorable threatenings, and many times more crafty assailants. His ancestors had invented knives and spears and flying missiles. The creatures about Burl had knives and spears a thousand times more deadly than the weapons that had made his ancestors masters of the woods and forests.

Burl was in comparison vastly more weak than his forebears had been, and it was that weakness that in times to come would lead him and those who followed him to heights his ancestors had never known. But now—

He heard a discordant, deep bass bellow, coming from a spot not twenty yards away. In a flash of panic he darted behind a clump of the mushrooms and hid himself, panting in sheer terror. He waited for an instant in frozen fear, motionless and tense. His wide, blue eyes were glassy.

The bellow came again, but this time with a querulous note. Burl heard a crashing and plunging as of some creature caught in a snare. A mushroom fell with a brittle snapping, and the spongy thud as it fell to the ground was followed by a tremendous commotion. Something was fighting desperately against something else, but

Burl did not know what creature or creatures might be in combat.

He waited for a long time, and the noise gradually died away. Presently Burl's breath came more slowly, and his courage returned. He stole from his hiding-place, and would have made away, but something held him back. Instead of creeping from the scene, he crept cautiously over toward the source of the noise.

He peered between two cream-colored toadstool stalks and saw the cause of the noise. A wide, funnel-shaped snare of silk was spread out before him, some twenty yards across and as many deep. The individual threads could be plainly seen, but in the mass it seemed a fabric of sheerest, finest texture. Held up by the tall mushrooms, it was anchored to the ground below, and drew away to a tiny point through which a hole gave on some yet unknown recess. And all the space of the wide snare was hung with threads, fine, twisted threads no more than half the thickness of Burl's finger.

This was the trap of a labyrinth spider. Not one of the interlacing threads was strong enough to hold the feeblest of prey, but the threads were there by thousands. A great cricket had become entangled in the maze of sticky lines. Its limbs thrashed out, smashing the snare-lines at every stroke, but at every stroke meeting and becoming entangled with a dozen more. It thrashed about mightily, emitting at intervals the horrible, deep bass cry that the chirping voice of the cricket had become with its increase in size.

Burl breathed more easily, and watched with a fascinated curiosity. Mere death—even tragic death—as among insects held no great interest for him. It was a matter of such common and matter-of-fact occurrence that he was not greatly stirred. But a spider and his prey was another matter.

There were few insects that deliberately sought man. Most insects have their allotted victims, and will touch no others, but spiders have a terrifying impartiality. One great beetle devouring another was a matter of indifference to Burl. A spider devouring some luckless insect was but an example of what might happen to him.

He watched alertly, his gaze traveling from the enmeshed cricket to the strange orifice at the rear of the funnel-shaped snare.

The opening darkened. Two shining, glistening eyes had been watching from the rear of the funnel. It drew itself into a tunnel there, in which the spider had been waiting. Now it swung out lightly and came toward the cricket. It was a gray spider (*Agelena labyrinthica*), with twin black ribbons upon its thorax, next the head, and with two stripes of curiously speckled brown and white upon its abdomen. Burl saw, too, two curious appendages like a tail.

It came nimbly out of its tunnel-like hiding-place and approached the cricket. The cricket was struggling only feebly now, and the cries it uttered were but feeble, because of the confining threads that fettered its limbs. Burl saw the spider throw itself upon the cricket and saw the final, convulsive shudder of the insect as the spider's fangs pierced its tough armor. The sting lasted a long time, and finally Burl saw that the spider was really feeding. All the succulent juices of the now dead cricket were being sucked from its body by the spider. It had stung the cricket upon the haunch, and presently it went to the other leg and drained that, too, by means of its powerful internal suction-pump. When the second haunch had been sucked dry, the spider pawed the lifeless creature for a few moments and left it.

Food was plentiful, and the spider could afford to be dainty in its feeding. The two choicest titbits had been consumed. The remainder could be discarded.

A sudden thought came to Burl and quite took his breath away. For a second his knees knocked together in self-induced panic. He watched the gray spider carefully, with growing determination in his eyes. He, Burl, had killed a hunting-spider upon the red-clay cliff. True, the killing had been an accident, and had nearly cost him his own life a few minutes later in the web-spider's snare, but he had killed a spider, and of the most deadly kind.

Now, a great ambition was growing in Burl's heart. His tribe had always feared spiders too much to know much of their

habits, but they knew one or two things. The most important was that the snare-spiders never left their lairs to hunt—never! Burl was about to make a daring application of that knowledge.

He drew back from the white and shining snare and crept softly to the rear. The fabric gathered itself into a point and then continued for some twenty feet as a tunnel, in which the spider waited while dreaming of its last meal and waiting for the next victim to become entangled in the labyrinth in front. Burl made his way to a point where the tunnel was no more than ten feet away, and waited.

Presently, through the interstices of the silk, he saw the gray bulk of the spider. It had left the exhausted body of the cricket, and returned to its resting-place. It settled itself carefully upon the soft walls of the tunnel, with its shining eyes fixed upon the tortuous threads of its trap. Burl's hair was standing straight up upon his head from sheer fright, but he was the slave of an idea.

He drew near and poised his spear, his new and sharp spear, taken from the body of an unknown flying creature killed by the burning purple hills. Burl raised the spear and aimed its sharp and deadly point at the thick gray bulk he could see dimly through the threads of the tunnel. He thrust it home with all his strength—and ran away at the top of his speed, glassy-eyed from terror.

A long time later he ventured near again, his heart in his mouth, ready to flee at the slightest sound. All was still. Burl had missed the horrible convulsions of the wounded spider, had not heard the frightful gnashings of its fangs as it gnashed at the piercing weapon, had not seen the silken threads of the tunnel ripped and torn as the spider—hurt to death—had struggled with insane strength to free itself.

He came back beneath the overshadowing toadstools, stepping quietly and cautiously, to find a great rent in the silken tunnel, to find the great gray bulk lifeless and still, half-fallen through the opening the spear had first made. A little puddle of evil-smelling liquid lay upon the ground below the body, and from time to time a

droplet fell from the spear into the puddle with a curious splash.

Burl looked at what he had done, saw the dead body of the creature he had slain, saw the ferocious mandibles, and the keen and deadly fangs. The dead eyes of the creature still stared at him malignantly, and the hairy legs were still braced as if further to enlarge the gaping hole through which it had partly fallen.

Exultation filled Burl's heart. His tribe had been but furtive vermin for thousands of years, fleeing from the mighty insects, hiding from them, and if overtaken but waiting helplessly for death, screaming shrilly in terror.

He, Burl, had turned the tables. He had slain one of the enemies of his tribe. His breast expanded. Always his tribesmen went quietly and fearfully, making no sound. But a sudden, exultant yell burst from Burl's lips—the first hunting cry from the lips of a man in a hundred centuries!

The next second his pulse nearly stopped in sheer panic at having made such a noise. He listened fearfully, but there was no sound. He drew near his prey and carefully withdrew his spear. The viscid liquid made it slimy and slippery, and he had to wipe it dry against a leathery toadstool. Then Burl had to conquer his illogical fear again before daring to touch the creature he had slain.

He moved off presently, with the belly of the spider upon his back and two of the hairy legs over his shoulders. The other limbs of the monster hung limp, and trailed upon the ground. Burl was now a still more curious sight as a gayly colored object with a cloak shining in iridescent colors, the golden antennæ of a great moth rising from his forehead, and the hideous bulk of a gray spider for a burden.

He moved through the thin-stalked mushroom forest, and because of the thing he carried all creatures fled before him. They did not fear man—their instinct was slow-moving—but during all the millions of years that insects have existed, there have existed spiders to prey upon them. So Burl moved on in solemn state, a brightly clad man bent beneath the weight of a huge and horrible monster.

He came upon a valley full of torn and blackened mushrooms. There was not a single yellow top among them. Every one had been infested with tiny maggots which had liquefied the tough meat of the mushroom and caused it to drip to the ground below. And all the liquid had gathered in a golden pool in the center of the small depression. Burl heard a loud humming and buzzing before he topped the rise that opened the valley for his inspection. He stopped a moment and looked down.

A golden-red lake, its center reflecting the hazy sky overhead. All about, blackened mushrooms, seeming to have been charred and burned by a fierce flame. A slow-flowing golden brooklet trickled slowly over a rocky ledge, into the larger pool. And all about the edges of the golden lake, in ranks and rows, by hundreds, thousands, and by millions, were ranged the green-gold, shining bodies of great flies.

They were small as compared with the other insects. They had increased in size but a fraction of the amount that the bees, for example, had increased; but it was due to an imperative necessity of their race.

The flesh-flies laid their eggs by hundreds in decaying carcasses. The others laid their eggs by hundreds in the mushrooms. To feed the maggots that would hatch, a relatively great quantity of food was needed, therefore the flies must remain comparatively small, or the body of a single grasshopper, say, would furnish food for but two or three grubs instead of the hundreds it must support.

Burl stared down at the golden pool. Bluebottles, greenbottles, and all the flies of metallic luster were gathered at the Lucullan feast of corruption. Their buzzing as they darted above the odorous pool of golden liquid made the sound Burl had heard. Their bodies flashed and glittered as they darted back and forth, seeking a place to alight and join in the orgy.

Those which clustered about the banks of the pool were still as if carved from metal. Their huge, red eyes glowed, and their bodies shone with an obscene fatness. Flies are the most disgusting of all insects. Burl watched them a moment, watched the

interlacing streams of light as they buzzed eagerly above the pool, seeking a place at the festive board.

A drumming roar sounded in the air. A golden speck appeared in the sky, a slender, needlelike body with transparent, shining wings and two huge eyes. It grew nearer and became a dragon-fly twenty feet and more in length, its body shimmering, purest gold. It poised itself above the pool and then darted down. Its jaws snapped viciously and repeatedly, and at each snapping the glittering body of a fly vanished.

A second dragon-fly appeared, its body a vivid purple, and a third. They swooped and rushed above the golden pool, snapping in mid air, turning their abrupt, angular turns, creatures of incredible ferocity and beauty. At the moment they were nothing more or less than slaughtering-machines. They darted here and there, their many-faceted eyes burning with blood-lust. In that mass of buzzing flies even the most voracious appetite must be sated, but the dragon-flies kept on. Beautiful, slender, graceful creatures, they dashed here and there above the pond like avenging fiends or the mythical dragons for which they had been named.

And the loud, contented buzzing kept on as before. Their comrades were being slaughtered by hundreds not fifty feet above their heads, but the glittering rows of red-eyed flies gorging themselves upon the golden, evil-smelling liquid kept placidly on with their feasting. The dragon-flies could contain no more, even of their chosen prey, but they continued to swoop madly above the pool, striking down the buzzing flies even though the bodies must perforce drop uneaten. One or two of the dead flies—crushed to a pulp by the angry jaws of a great dragon-fly—dropped among its feasting brothers. They shook themselves.

Presently one of them placed its disgusting proboscis upon the mangled form and sipped daintily of the juices exuding from the broken armor. Another joined it, and another. In a little while a cluster of them elbowed and pushed each other for a chance to join in the cannibalistic feast.

Burl turned aside and went on, while

the slim forms of the dragon-flies still darted here and there above the pool, still striking down the droning flies with vengeful strokes of their great jaws, and while a rain of crushed bodies was falling to the contented, glistening horde below.

Only a few miles farther on Burl came upon a familiar landmark. He knew it well, but from a safe distance as always. A mass of rock had heaved itself up from the nearly level plain over which he was traveling, and formed an outjutting cliff. At one point the rock overhung a sheer drop, making an inverted ledge—a roof over nothingness—which had been pre-empted by a hairy creature and made into a fairylike dwelling. A white hemisphere clung tenaciously to the rock above, and long cables anchored it firmly.

Burl knew the place as one to be fearfully avoided. A Clotho spider—(*Clotho Durandi*, LATR), had built itself a nest there, from which it emerged to hunt the unwary. Within that half-globe there was a monster, resting upon a cushion of softest silk. But if one went too near, one of the little inverted arches, seemingly firmly closed by a wall of silk, would open and a creature out of a dream of hell emerge, to run with fiendish agility toward its prey.

Surely, Burl knew the place. Hung upon the outer walls of the silken palace were stones and tiny boulders, discarded fragments of former meals, and the gutted armor from limbs of ancient prey. But what caused Burl to know the place most surely and most terribly was another decoration that dangled from the castle of this insect ogre. This was the shrunken, dessicated figure of a man, all its juices extracted and the life gone.

The death of that man had saved Burl's life two years before. They had been together, seeking a new source of edible mushrooms for food. The Clotho spider was a hunter, not a spinner of snares. It sprang suddenly from behind a great puff-ball, and the two men froze in terror. Then it came swiftly forward and deliberately chose its victim. Burl had escaped when the other man was seized. Now he looked meditatively at the hiding-place of his ancient enemy. Some day—

But now he passed on. He went past the thicket in which the great moths hid during the day, and past the pool—a turgid thing of slime and yeast—in which a monster water-snake lurked. He penetrated the little wood of the shining mushrooms that gave out light at night, and the shadowed place where the truffle-hunting beetles went chirping thunderously during the dark hours.

And then he saw Saya. He caught a flash of pink skin vanishing behind the thick stalk of a squat toadstool, and ran forward, calling her name. She appeared, and saw the figure with the horrible bulk of the spider upon its back. She cried out in horror, and Burl understood. He let his burden fall and went swiftly toward her.

They met. Saya waited timidly until she saw who this man was, and then astonishment went over her face. Gorgeously attired, in an iridescent cloak from the whole wing of a great moth, with a strip of softest fur from a night-flying creature about his middle, with golden, feathery antennæ bound upon his forehead, and a fierce spear in his hands—this was not the Burl she had known.

But then he moved slowly toward her, filled with a fierce delight at seeing her again, thrilling with joy at the slender gracefulness of her form and the dark richness of her tangled hair. He held out his hands and touched her shyly. Then, manlike, he began to babble excitedly of the things that had happened to him, and dragged her toward his great victim, the gray-bellied spider.

Saya trembled when she saw the furry bulk lying upon the ground, and would have fled when Burl advanced and took it up upon his back. Then something of the pride that filled him came vicariously to her. She smiled a flashing smile, and Burl stopped short in his excited explanation. He was suddenly tongue-tied. His eyes became pleading and soft. He laid the huge spider at her feet and spread out his hands imploringly.

Thirty thousand years of savagery had not lessened the femininity in Saya. She became aware that Burl was her slave, that these wonderful things he wore and had

done were as nothing if she did not approve. She drew away—saw the misery in Burl's face—and abruptly ran into his arms and clung to him, laughing happily. And quite suddenly Burl saw with extreme clarity that all these things he had done, even the slaying of a great spider, were of no importance whatever beside this most wonderful thing that had just happened, and told Saya so quite humbly, but holding her very close to him as he did so.

And so Burl came back to his tribe. He had left it nearly naked, with but a wisp of moth-wing twisted about his middle, a timid, fearful, trembling creature. He re-

(The End.)

turned in triumph, walking slowly and fearlessly down a broad lane of golden mushrooms toward the hiding place of his people.

Upon his shoulders was draped a great and many-colored cloak made from the whole of a moth's wing. Soft fur was about his middle. A spear was in his hand and a fierce club at his waist. He and Saya bore between them the dead body of a huge spider—aforetime the dread of the pink-skinned, naked men. But to Burl the most important thing of all was that Saya walked beside him openly, acknowledging him before all the tribe.

Four Bits

by

Ferdinand Grahame



"NOW it won't be so very long, Collieboy; and you mustn't let yourself get too lonesome. I'll soon be back with you again."

With these good-by words, or nearabouts, the little old man always parted from his pal; from the old dog on the rug beside their attic window. At six o'clock every morning John Malcolm would take his corduroy cap down from its nail, six sharp, so as to be sure to reach the box factory by six thirty. Then he'd put on his cap and go to the door and look back and say:

"It won't be so very long to-day, Collieboy; and you mustn't let yourself get too lonesome. I'll soon be back with you again."

Collieboy always had the same reply; only a thump or two of his plumed tail on the rug. No voice was left him to give another answer; his silken ears had long

been merely beautiful ornaments. He was deaf and dumb.

The dog was a thoroughbred, glossy and shag-coated, slender legged, and his body a joyous mass of yellow and gold and tan, circled completely about the neck with a ruff of pure white—the "sacred ring," as it is often called, that infallible mark of high breeding. And while his colors and the shape of him still remained handsome to see, Collieboy was very, very thin now. He had passed the allotted span of a collie's life by several years; the old man's love had been keeping him alive.

Eggs had helped, too, according to the veterinarian's orders—strictly fresh eggs, soft boiled, a couple each day to feed the canine spark. Nearly fifteen years old was Collieboy; his powers of hearing and barking and growling and whining—no, he

hadn't been born a thoroughbred to whine; all the usual dog accomplishments had entirely vanished.

Only his eyes, curiously enough, had refused to grow old. His great and expressive agate-brown eyes had declined to dim; they still kept limpid to shine his affection up into the old man's heart every night, still must keep bright to watch the bottom of that door all day for his master's return.

John Malcolm found time for nothing but work, from six thirty in the morning till five thirty at night, and a half an hour more each way to go and come. And for many years now, summer and winter, Collieboy had been left to guard their attic room.

His must have been a tedious job, for often in leaving of mornings the old man would notice a deep wistfulness in the dog's big brown eyes, and then he would return to stroke that smooth and clean-cut head once again—to make sure there was plenty of water in the drinking-pan—and then at the door gently to repeat his good-morning order and promise:

"It won't be very long now, Collieboy; and mustn't get too lonesome. I'll soon be with you again."

And the white plume of a tail would thump acknowledgment, and the old dog would settle himself on his rug between window and stove for the day-long vigil.

Sometimes in the afternoons he would doze a little with age, but duty would awaken him quickly; his eyes must be true to the bottom of that door; and he could still listen, you know, even if he couldn't hear. Occasionally, and with a lot of difficulty, he would struggle up on his pipe-stem legs—only right that he should nose about the attic now and then and see that the old armchair was clear for his friend to sit in when he came back soon; and if there was a paper-sack, maybe, or some other bit of refuse on that chair, he must seize it in his mouth and gravely pull it off.

The gift of a wonderful scent must have persisted in Collieboy, for in the evening he would always start to rise, stiffly, at the very moment John Malcolm's foot touched the first bottom step of the four flights—and the dog would invariably be standing at the door to greet his master.

John Malcolm knew this to be a surety; he knew just how long it took those old paws to cross the room ordinarily, and how long he himself needed to climb the stairs, and these times tallied—both getting longer as both grew older. Nor would Collieboy ever be up when the man returned with coal from the basement, or from a Saturday shopping trip; only in the evening, when the day's work was done.

It was the same in summer, too; the lengthened days failing to disturb that fine sagacity; of course, Malcolm working overtime and arriving home a bit later in the warmer months, may perhaps have aided this a bit. John Malcolm, however, would have scoffed down any suggestion of coincidence touching on the wisdom of his pal.

Poets have sung of a dog's love for a man; and nobody, once he knew them both, had ever tried to sneer at this man's love for his dog. Collieboy was all the old actor had left, and there'd not been one evening in all these years a widower that the grip of an honest paw hadn't welcomed his return home.

"Puff" was what Malcolm's wife had called him first, when the ball of snowy and gold puppyism had been placed in her hands by an admirer. A few months afterward they, husband and wife, had been compelled to take separate theatrical jobs, and then that terrible railroad accident had bereft the man.

He had managed to reach her before she'd passed on; he had sat by the bed of the dead, childless and alone; not even a friend, he had almost thought, when the year-old thoroughbred's black muzzle thrust itself into his hand. It had been only a cold snuggle—dog-lovers know it well; John Malcolm felt it then.

And so began their fealty, one to the other. The man first loved the dog for the sake of the one who had gone; soon he learned to love him for his own stanch, canine self.

Soon he changed his name to Collieboy—so inadequate, calling a friend Puff. The dog quite appreciated this, for in those days when Collieboy could hear and talk he could naturally comprehend and answer everything. Oh, yes, he could talk, the

man would insist; the only trouble was that John Malcolm couldn't always understand what Collieboy tried to say as well as the dog understood him. But that was the man's fault, you see.

A husky fifty-pounder, and twenty inches high at his shoulder the collie had been, when in the heyday of his full growth. "Loyalty" would have been a good extra name for him—still, to be referred to as a "pal" was considerable, after adversity hit. There had been a time or two when they hadn't eaten so heartily, or so regularly, but Collieboy made no complaint. They had kept going higher and cheaper to sleep, always together, and the dog climbed extra stairs willingly—even eagerly, for he must be guard of this man now since the other dear one seemed to have gone away to stay.

That guarding instinct remained strong in him, despite his advanced age. Once the motherly old landlady had ventured up into their attic room to clean the windows while Malcolm was out. Collieboy on his rug had offered no objection to this; all perfectly right and proper, and he wondered she hadn't cleaned them before. But the landlady happened to touch Mrs. Malcolm's photograph on the shelf—an entirely different matter.

The dog came up stiffly from the rug. He tried to growl, and couldn't, but there was no mistaking the deep menace in his brown eyes. Motherly old landlady knew he was too old and feeble really to harm her, but those threatening eyes made her retreat just the same. And she made it a point to tell Malcolm on his return that evening that he'd have to clean his own windows whenever they needed it again, and goodness knew they could stand it pretty often.

The attic lodger and his motherly old landlady had enjoyed many quarrels—discussions, rather—over the old dog up-stairs. Their views on dogs, and on life in general for that matter, seemed so widely dissimilar.

"It's scandalous," she would invariably begin, "as old as you are, mornings, and as tired nights, to be always carrying that big, yellow thing down all them stairs and up again."

"But he must have his exercise," Mal-

colm would protest. "And remember, you must never bring him down in my absence; he can't hear a lick, and some confounded automobile might run over him.

She would promise solemnly, and then the old man's tone would change into another anxiety, making him ask:

"I—I trust you're not going to object to our continuing living here in your home?"

"Lord, no!" she'd assure him. "That two-dollar room's yours for life. Keep some cats in it, too, if you like—or a parrot. But I vow I can't see yet what good that old deaf-and-dumb dog is to you any more."

"He is my silent pal," the lodger would always explain to her patiently. "I often call him that, and I like to have him that way. Collieboy is much better society than noisy, two-legged upstarts who talk back too much. And I am company for him at the same time; he enjoys my talking to him, in his way."

John Malcolm's home-talk to his dog, had he but realized it, was gradually diminishing down into bare whispers with the years—as any one's speech will do when there never is an audible reply. And, contrariwise, the daily box-factory clatter in his ears was a worry to the old man; it made him fear that he himself might go deaf one of these days.

"You average up a dozen dogs," he would always continue to the motherly old landlady in their tiffs, "and then average up the dozen best human-being friends you've got, and see how you come out. Try it, madam, and you'll hurry and get yourself a collie."

"Well, I'd get one that could hear me and bark a bit if I did. But now, dear Mr. Malcolm, why don't you let the doctor—"

And right there the old man, suddenly horrified anew, would lift his hand in quick remonstrance. That standing offer of the veterinarian to put the dog out of the way, painlessly and kindly, was like a sacrilege to the master. Collieboy was his dog, was he not? And he wasn't dying yet a while. And when he got ready to, which was doubtful as long as strictly fresh eggs held out, then it was still their own business exclusively. And when the sad moment should arrive, who had a better right than

he, John Malcolm, to be at the death-bed, he'd ask the veterinary man to tell him that.

So about then the motherly old landlady would scold kindly a little more and send the old man up-stairs, and later on climb the four flights herself to bring some table-scrap that a toothless mouth couldn't eat; and occasionally she'd fetch along that morning's paper for the master, when she didn't forget it, and when it hadn't already been used to wrap up garbage for the can.

Malcolm was ever grateful for the newspaper; and although his old eyes could compass nothing but big head-lines now, he was careful never to mention it to her. He'd have liked to read aloud to Collieboy, but spectacles were so darned expensive.

She had brought him the morning paper this very day, on his unexpected return home at noon, and what the old eyes had peered out of it was the cause of this quite unusual going out in the evening, and his customary good-by at the door; for the second time he said it this time, you'll recall. He whispered it: "It won't be so very long to-night, Collieboy, and you mustn't let yourself get too lonesome. I'll soon be back with you again"—half unconsciously, for the words had become a habit.

A habit will grow perniciously in you, whether it be rubbing your tongue against that jagged tooth, or forgetting to return the borrowed postage-stamp. So were the old man's good-by words to his dog habitually the same, even when he was to be gone but ten minutes, to tramp down-stairs to the basement, and then back up again with the scuttle half-full of that high-priced coal.

Down the precipices of stairway he trudged now, and out into the dusk of an October evening—John Malcolm, a plaintively wizen little pretzel of a man. He was less than five feet tall. He was modernly dressed this evening, at a distance; close up his clothes were of a cut antedating our last two wars.

John Malcolm, an eccentric character-actor of the play-days gone by, but not a "legitimate" actor, as that class is known; far from it, he would have insisted, had he ever been so accursed.

No; he had been a general actor of the natural school. He was one still, he should

have said, and radically different from the kind who hem and haw and spout. "I cannot bri-hing you your hot sha-having water, because I have not goh-hot your sha-having water hot!"—together with a sustained shrug of the shoulder and an exaggerated walk on imaginary stilts.

No; Malcolm was not that sort. He had been an actor who acted without seeming to act—his delivery of text always crisp and to the point. He was no elocutionary mime.

Reaching the dim street, he felt he must again make sure of the date. As he moved into a main thoroughfare and mingled with the throng of pleasure-seekers, he drew the precious newspaper out of his inside-pocket. How lucky the landlady had thought of the paper at this particular time; yes, this was undoubtedly the very day and date.

MAJESTIC THEATER

Wonderful Revival of a Famous Play
Greatest British Actor

SIR SIDNEY BARBEE

And here even this print was a bit too fine to see. Wish he could afford that pair of glasses—

As

BILL SYKES

In the English Melodrama

"OLIVER TWIST"

One Week—Starting Monday, Oct. 27

Malcolm paused where there was always a calendar in the insurance office-window—getting so dark now he could only just manage to see it. Yes, this was beyond all doubt the twenty-seventh, Sir Sidney's opening night; and the old man was doubly sure it was Monday, for day before yesterday had been pay-day, and he'd had coming, let's see, six times a dollar and fifteen cents were— Pshaw! why must he count it up afresh every week? Why couldn't he remember? And to-morrow, Tuesday, was egg-day for Collieboy—he recalled feeling the string he'd tied to the door-knob to remind him; so to-day must be Monday.

The arc-light in the street sputtered and suddenly blazed up, and the insurance man's window had obligingly become a

mirror—quite convenient to arrange again his flowing black-silk necktie, wasn't it? How long had that looking-glass at home been so discolored? Um—never mind. He had experienced some little difficulty in the mending of that black-silk necktie; a fellow's fingers get so stubby and clumsy handling a hammer all day long.

He wished that he might have bought a new necktie for this great occasion, but from last week's pay he had remaining—let's look again—only four bits; he could distinctly feel the two silver quarters resting in his right-hand front trousers pocket.

That half-dollar must be saved to buy eggs for Collieboy in the morning; his own food-supply for the week, canned herring and bread and coffee and—other trifles—had all been bought as usual Saturday. The egg man always drove by early, and still let him have the dozen-and-two strictly fresh for four bits, although eggs had gone up alarmingly; otherwise this fifty cents weekly might have proved a little troublesome when one made only a dollar fifteen a day.

Once he had made a dollar forty regularly, but that was before his eyesight had weakened, and now those wooden shoe-boxes went together so slowly when you didn't always hit where you aimed. And when room-rent was two dollars a week, and more winter coal to be laid in because there was no gas in their attic room, and groceries so darned high, and even coal-oil advanced a cent. Bless the trusts, anyhow, and the war-brides, whatever they were; and—well, with all these things against a man he had to split pennies.

He had split a copper penny once, literally and with infinite patience. A fellow workman had said it couldn't be done with only a jack-knife, but he had shown him; a week later he had shown him the two wafer-thin halves. Malcolm was keeping the half-pennies to lessen funeral expenses some day, he whimsically said.

Ah, but now matters were due for a change. A big change. Now everything was going to be different, for Collieboy and for himself. To-night was to mark the end of their poverty.

And such a happy task it had been to dress that afternoon, as he'd once been used

to dress. Exasperating in the necessity for a bit of makeshift now and then; but a pleasure every moment of it. Pressing the wrinkles out of the musty dark-gray sack coat—so old and so shiny that the sleeves mirrored the buttons—had been slow work, but finally done; and gluing that piece of pasteboard inside his square-crown derby hat had pushed all the dents out almost; and that last stove-polish he and Collieboy had bought couldn't be told from shoe-polish, except by the label, of course.

His linen he had been washing out personally of late—his own choice entirely, since laundry rates had risen; not starched so stiffly as it might be, perhaps, but what of it? He fancied he could hear his shirt-bosom rattle every now and then, and as for the rest of it, why, everybody was wearing soft cuffs nowadays; collars, too, for that matter.

He had been bothered by the lack of a little face-powder after shaving; just a faint something to cover the factory dust persistently bottoming the many tiny furrows in his cheeks, in spite of all that hard water and castile soap might do. Flour, maybe—And then he had thought to work the corn-starch again; it had been bought months before, but not used much since milk for puddings went up, and the shirt-front hadn't exhausted it quite.

From his rug near the dormer window Collieboy had watched all the while, wonderingly, the big brown eyes following every move.

"Thinking it queer my going out, eh, pal?" Malcolm had whispered. "This is about the time for you to be looking for me home to stay, as a rule, isn't it?"

The plumed tail gave a thump.

"Don't worry; and mustn't let yourself get too lonesome; soon be with you again. You won't miss me so very much this one evening, eh, old Collie—"

Malcolm stopped abruptly, trying to choke back a word he had already said; he had called his comrade "old." That was bad.

"Must be careful in future not to call his attention to his great age," the man mused. "Perhaps Collieboy doesn't dream how old he is himself; and they say the

mind is liable to work disaster on nature if you give it half a chance."

Dressed and ready to go, even to the derby on his head, the old man had taken his corduroy-cap down from its nail—quite inadvertently—after he'd patted the dog and started for the door. He had laughed a bit at finding the mistake in his hand. Then he tossed the cap on the floor as he bade Collieboy the whispered good-by. Never would he have to wear that old cap again, he thought as he went down-stairs.

And now, above all things, he mustn't allow that fickle mind of his to slur over those eggs for his pal. Staying out late to-night might cause him to oversleep in the morning—just a minute or two, perhaps, but enough to miss the egg-wagon. And then if Collieboy should happen to get hungry unexpectedly—

But meanwhile how very satisfying it was to let his thoughts go back, over and over, to that recent hour of dressing up—so long since he'd dressed up—resulting in his present rehabilitation. H-m! He could still think in the English language, even if he were only a box-maker. And how extremely agreeable now to feel himself dressed, suitably attired, and with a purpose.

For this was the night, remember. The great Sir Sidney Barbee would give him an engagement to-night; perhaps at only thirty a week; maybe only twenty-five; but there could be no doubt of the position. One hasn't worked so faithfully—and so cleverly, 'twas said—in the days of yore, to be forgotten by his old manager now.

Twenty years ago, or thereabouts, it had been, Janie and he not long married then, and both of them with the English star on his first United States tour. An enjoyable engagement with the Britisher, although Malcolm himself was an American; yes, sir, entirely American. And Sidney Barbee had been only a plain "Mister" those days.

John Malcolm would have applied to his former manager long ago, when work had become so scarce, but Barbee had gone to Australia. That was in the time when younger men and that vaudeville stuff and a new kind of nickel entertainment had begun to encroach upon the older dramatic stage.

And thinking of nickel entertainment—why, it riled old Malcolm whenever he allowed himself to think of it. He had attended one of them once, only once, and long ago—a show in a storeroom. It was a single-reel picture-film, whose early-day incompleteness disgusted him without quite knowing why. But he had sworn to Collieboy when he got back to the attic that never again would he leave him to go to another infernal "movie," as they called 'em.

Those same movies had retaliated and played havoc with the old actor and steady engagements shortly after that. Why, on one occasion he, John Malcolm, had been obliged to put on a local talent play with some impossible amateurs; a little later on he'd been compelled to paint scenery, and also to do various things. But Sidney Barbee had remained in Australia for ten long years. Collieboy had never listened favorably to the idea of Australia, even when the money to go had been on hand.

How fine was that stroke of Providence in stalling the last shipment of shoe-box lumber in the freight-yards that morning, thus giving him the afternoon to prepare—though it had been at the cost of part of his dollar fifteen. Oh, yes, Providence was good—sometimes.

"Wonderful Revival!"

The big type in his open newspaper again caught his eyes as he meandered on. He meditated over that "Revival" detail. Sir Sidney Barbee must be—um, let's see—how old? He was eight years younger than I; I am now sixty-nine. Tut-tut! He's got no business trying to do *Bill Sykes* in "Oliver Twist" at sixty-one! But still why not? He could act it, even if he might no longer look the part, depend on that.

Now, on another page Malcolm happened to spy two group-pictures. In his hasty dressing he must have overlooked them. They were half-tone reproductions of—of flash-lights, he'd wager. The descriptive matter beneath was too fine to be read, but he knew the costumes and the scenes. Yes, that was Sidney Barbee. Well he remembered that particularly brutal pose. Who could ever forget Barbee, Sidney Barbee the magnificent actor of heavy villains, the

Sidney Barbee who always dominated everything, everywhere.

Why, years ago, when John Malcolm had done *Fagin* in that identical play of "Oliver Twist"—for he had been shriveled since forty and was often cast in those nearly-old-men parts—when he had been playing *Fagin*, the great Barbee had always insisted on a little eccentric jerk of the heel as the Jew turned to center-stage and away from *Nancy Sykes*. Wonder if he could do that turn on his heel now? Of course he could. Oh, a thousand pardons, lady. He'd no intention, he assured her, of stepping backward on her foot. But he wondered as he went on why she hadn't called him a crazy old idiot—people did that so frequently of late. Now, when he had been a younger man, the fairer sex— Ahem! He smiled.

Hold on! Perhaps she hadn't heard his apology; perhaps she was deaf, like Colli-boy; or maybe she *had* said something that he hadn't heard. Maybe he was getting a mite deaf himself. Yes, he agreed that he was.

Damn it, he'd forgotten his gloves! Until that instant he had really overlooked the fact that he no longer possessed a pair. Unpardonable, for Sidney Barbee always approved of gloves; but no matter, too late to mend that now. It usually was dark in the wings; he must contrive to meet the actor-star in the shadows of the wings, and those knots and callouses on his hands might not be seen. And if he should be invited to go to Barbee's dressing-room, and naturally he would be, he must then remember to keep his hands in his pockets, or behind him.

The cigar-maker, merely a chance acquaintance, happened to see the old man and called him down into his basement-shop to give him a smoke. John Malcolm returned polite, matter-of-fact thanks, lighted up, and went his way. He was sure that this gift, the first in months—and a cigar, too, his first smoke in years—could together be only another good omen.

But stay. What used to go with a cigar? Why, a nosegay, a *boutonniere*. He had to have one, just a simple flower would do. Providence still at his elbow, for here was a florist's-shop. Yes, he was obliged to

have a flower, for Sidney Barbee always declared it completed a man's dress. What! That rose the cheapest—and two bits? Oh, certainly, that would be all right, but how about the dozen-and-two eggs at the four-bit price next morning? Oh, nonsense. He would have more money within the hour, plenty of it. Barbee would force money on him when he reengaged him—he always did every season. And even if—pshaw! there wasn't any "if." But if—

Um-m—well, Colli-boy wouldn't care for an egg in the morning. He often refused to eat. Sometimes Malcolm had been forced to command him to eat, severely, but to no good whatever. And then he would have to pretend that he was going to eat that soft-boiled egg himself. Once he'd almost let himself think he'd like to—to trick his pal into taking the necessary daily nourishment.

But, anyway, it was sure to come out all right. He still had two bits left, and he could buy three or four individual eggs, if he had to, at the grocery.

As Malcolm swung around the theater corner, a sudden gust blew his silk necktie ends and flicked a hot cigar-ash into his eye. Hang it all, didn't his old eyes water enough as it was? And the wind had never blown with such annoying unexpectedness when he was a boy—never!

His old eyes were not needed here, however; a sixth sense found the door, "Stage Entrance." He hadn't known precisely where it was. Usually he had traveled that locality with lowered head, for such doors are memory breeders. But was nobody going in yet? He must be late. His watch. Damn it again, why couldn't his hand get out of that habit of reaching for what it knew wasn't there?

With stiffened shoulders now, tipped-up cigar, and jaunty carriage, and the derby hat at just a wee rakish angle, John Malcolm stepped to the stage door, opening it.

What the devil was the profession coming to? Shall a recognized performer of years experience and reputation be called a "bum old gink" so contemptuously, and be ordered to "beat it" when he's only inquired quite civilly for the star? The impudent young sprout! The verbal insult one might

have endured; but for the fellow to lay hands on him—violent hands, too! And he'd have shown the upstart what was what—the canaille—if that confounded spring-lock door hadn't been slammed in his face.

Ah, the right thought! He would go around in front. Yes, that was best—to see the performance first, and then he'd be prepared to criticize it intelligently and to tell Barbee just where he was bad in it. Sir Sidney had always liked honest comment, and abhorred flattery, when he had been a plain mister.

Malcom's card? There was that infernal reaching for nothing again. So hard to overcome old ways.

Entering the lobby, he halted in mute adoration before a full-length portrait of the star. Barbee—the only Sidney Barbee. Sir Sidney Barbee as *Bill Sykes*.

On the box-office card of information he saw large printed figures: "\$1.00," as the highest price. H-m! He'd never known Barbee to play for such a cheap top price. Should have been five dollars, the way other things had gone up. What'd you say—the house sold out? Good! Only seats in the gallery left, eh? Yes, he could make that do, but this would mean spending the last quarter. Pooh! What of it! In an hour or two or three he would be above the need of what measly two-bit pieces could buy. What was money, after all? And who had more right to a small self-given gift, he'd like to know. The old atmosphere in him and around him had enriched him. For the moment John Malcolm lived only in the past.

Yes, he would purchase a gallery seat, and he would go up into heaven—as he chuckingly remembered they used to call it. And when the last curtain should fall, he would again go to the stage door and wait outside. Perhaps he'd ensconce himself in Barbee's carriage, sure to be there by that time, or maybe an automobile in these noisy new-fangled days. And when the star climbed in he would greet him with a familiar clip on the back, he would ignore the "Sir" he had never learned, and call him "Sidney." The great man didn't mind being called by his first name after a sold-out house.

The great Barbee! The box-maker's old and tired heart fairly hungered for the sight of his idol.

He plodded very slowly up the gallery stairs—never'd been up here before, of course, though he'd been back of the curtain several times. He had played this same theater in—yes, and with Barbee himself—in, let's see—yes, it was in 1900; that was the season, his last with Sidney—season of 1899 and 1900. It had been called the Opera House then; only theater in town.

But why did these gallery stairs tire him so? No doubt because they circled so irritatingly, eh? The stairs at home had never fretted him so much, even with Collieboy in his arms, or carrying the scuttle half-full of coal up to their attic room.

Up in that attic room an old, old dog had struggled to his feet. He stood for a moment, wavering.

Collieboy was sorely puzzled. Those strange afternoon doings had started his worry. It couldn't be Sunday, for yesterday had been Sunday, the day he didn't need to watch the door. And now for his pal to go away—at night!

But of course his pal would be back. He said he'd soon be with him again, and he had never broken his word. So there was nothing to do but wait. Must try not to be too lonesome.

"Hullo, there!" the old fellow must have thought. "That cap! On the floor yonder, that cap belongs to my best friend. Must get over to it—get to it and guard it."

The dog staggered to the corduroy-cap, sinking down beside it, a guilty feeling in him because for an instant he'd been obliged to take his eyes from the door. It had seemed rather hard to walk. Again he watched and waited, and knew he waited long, even though animals are said to have no ken of the passage of hours.

But Collieboy had waited so many times, you see—and here was an absence he could not understand. He began to be afraid, too; all alone in the dark; loneliness in the dark was so new to his old age. And his gentle heart, worn down and thin-walled from years of fealty, broke with the strain of it.

Dear old Collieboy sighed, laid his glossy head over on the loved one's cap, and died.

John Malcolm welcomed the hard gallery seat, to rest till his breathing should get easier. He must compose himself at once, for no doubt Barbee would make him angry soon. That wonderful art often used to anger him, that vicious realism in Sidney's portrayal of *Bill Sykes*. And sometimes *Nancy* had made him cry. Suppose he should cry to-night? Well, suppose. It would only be a tribute for auld lang syne.

And how the great Barbee had always liked Janie's acting in *Nancy Sykes*! How he had always been in the wings after the curtain fell on the final scene, ready with a word of commendation for her—for his dear, bonny dead wife. A tear grooved the corn-starched cheeks; but what of it. There was no one else in the gallery to see.

No one else? Yes, the blinking eyes spied one more—two, three, four more. No, only three: two on one side and one on the other; that left eye of his had a trick of seeing double lately. But this slim crowd wasn't natural; the galleries used to be well filled for melodrama. Ah, the show business wasn't what it once had been. A program? Certainly not. Programs were never wasted on the gallery, he remembered.

Now the orchestra was coming in, fourteen; count 'em. Which was perfectly right. Sidney Barbee always made them augment the orchestras. And what was it they had started to play—"William Tell," "Northern Lights," "Poet and Peasant"? Fudge! why couldn't he remember. He wouldn't try. He would just sit still and enjoy the music and think of Collieboy.

But what was this? The confounded music seemed to be receding, going away and leaving him. Yes, he surely must be going deaf, for the fiddle-bows were still moving.

And now came the finale of the overture. He saw it, but failed to hear it. The curtain of the stage, a big velvet one, drew up noiselessly as the lights softly darkened, and there was a great white square, with figures moving and weaving across it and around it, and the old eyes in the gallery were narrowing, widening.

The scene of the play was quite familiar; so were the characters, of course. But what was the matter? *Bill Sykes* appeared and spoke, but when he opened his mouth nothing came out. John Malcolm could not hear a single sound. Was the whole world gone dumb? Or—no. He himself was deaf. That was it; that must be it; he was as deaf as his old pal.

Why, there'd be no use applying to Sir Sidney Barbee for a position in this "Oliver Twist" company now, when the cues given to *Fagin* could no longer be heard. A deaf man would be worse than useless on the stage; nothing left for him now but the box-factory. All he was good for.

He started to rise and go, but his three-score years and ten seemed so heavy all of a sudden on his trembling old legs. He kept erect for a moment, holding to the gallery-rail, and as he stood there, teetering, the truth dawned on John Malcolm at last. Shame be on him, he was not deaf, he had let himself be fooled by a damned moving-picture. And in the fearful disappointment his shriveled old form began to crumple. He slid down into his hard, wooden seat again, seeming to have withered all the more.

Still, he tried to look again at the film whose clever advertising had deluded him, but its shimmering glare stung his old eyes shut.

It was hard to be fooled at his age, he mused. He'd prefer to think himself really deaf, rather than give that stanch old heart of his one chance to break. Yes, he was deaf. He'd let the matter go at that; and there was the beauty of it. For what is finer than a physical body dying and the mentality strong enough to cross the border-line alive?

He started again to rise. He felt so tired. He would go back to his dog—his pal up in their attic room must be getting quite lonely by this time, and he'd talk the box-factory over with him. They'd got to arrange to earn that four bits somehow. But once more the little old man sank down. And as he slipped over the boundary into his Nirvana he was whispering:

"Don't—get too lonesome—Collieboy—soon with you—again."

Findings Is Keepings

by John Boyd Clarke

Author of "A Challenge to Romance," "Broodname Whispers," etc.

WHAT HAS ALREADY HAPPENED

COLONEL HARDY MAYWELL, at one time or another, had made three different wills: the first in favor of Allaine Maywell, his grandniece; the second benefitting Lawyer Andrew Maywell, his nephew; and the third favoring Allan Maywell, twin brother to Allaine.

Now, on a certain rainy evening, while the dead Colonel Maywell was lying in state in the darkened house at No. 97 Trevorth Street, there was a party in progress at No. 102, across the way, and Officer Harry Vale's meeting with a young man who professed to be waiting for a certain housemaid was practically coincidental with a meeting between Grif Pelley, old-time crook, and Lawyer Andrew Maywell, who, hiring the former that night to crack his deceased relative's safe, gave him an envelope to substitute for a certain other envelope in a certain pigeon-hole of the safe. Pelley's share was to be all the money therein—some fifteen hundred to two thousand dollars.

Next day's results began with Vale's discovery that the young man had lied about the housemaid; then, following Lawyer Wilmot's discovery that the will he was about to read to Allaine and Andrew Maywell left everything to Allan rather than to Allaine, as he had expected, came Andrew's assertion of Allan's guilt, the latter's alibi, his defiance to Andrew to produce *his* will, and the crafty lawyer's departure for Pelley's store, where he found that the latter had been taken to the hospital for a serious operation.

For he had seemed himself taken aback at the discovery of the will. Just previous to this Maywell had learned from Vale of the policeman's encounter with a young man who resembled Allan.

With the lawyer's departure there followed a discussion of his motives between Wilmot, Allan, and Allaine, Allan suggesting that Drew had substituted the will favoring Allan for the one favoring Allaine, knowing that he possessed still another favoring himself and invalidating the present one. Wilmot pointed out, however, that Drew need make no substitution when he could as easily have destroyed the will, waiting until the proper time to produce his own document, which he claimed had been given to him personally by Colonel Maywell.

Allan hesitated. His blazing countenance paled slowly.

"Yes," he muttered, "that is a little thing that I overlooked, it is true."

CHAPTER VII.

"ALL IN THE FAMILY."

UNCLE DAN MCKANE chanced to spend a part of one of his very few evenings off at his sister's supper-table. This was the second evening following the discovery of the burglary at 97 Trevorth Street and the funeral of Colonel Hardy Maywell.

"'Tis very true the Irish have all the luck in the world," quoth Uncle Dan, apropos of nothing but his widowed sister's hospi-

ality and his nephew's smile; "but other folks have most of the money. The way it will probably work out, that sharp chap, Andrew Maywell, will come in for something like half a million of the old colonel's estate."

"And how much will that pretty girl get that I saw coming out of the house the day of the funeral, Uncle Dan?" asked Harry Vale.

"Plaguey little, I hear. Old George Wilmot—you saw him that day, Harry—was in to see me about the safe robbery. If

This story began in *The Argosy* for June 5.

seems there was some hokus-pokus about the old man's will. The girl had expectations, anyway. But they've been dished."

He proceeded to retail clearly and briefly the mystery of Colonel Maywell's three wills. It made his nephew so thoughtful that he was inattentive to his supper, and it was not often he was at home for that meal now that he was attached to the Tenth Precinct Station.

"She's a beautiful girl, Allaine Maywell" the inspector concluded.

"Allaine?" murmured Harry.

"Aw, listen to the young calf bawl!" cried Uncle Dan scoffingly. "He bells the name like it was the most beauchious in the world. It's a poet, not a cop the boy ought to be, Mary."

"And why not both?" rejoined the widow proudly, smiling at her son across the supper-table.

"Huh! Poetry won't get him anywhere in our business," declared the inspector. "'Tis the strong arm la-ad with the quick eye and the schamin' brain that grows out of the flat-foot class into something better."

"Like yourself, Dan dear," rejoined his sister. "Surely Harry possesses *some* traits of the McKanes."

"Maybe," agreed the inspector, pursing his lips and eying his nephew reflectively. "But he'll get little chance to exercise his higher talents under old Buffalo Griggs," and he laughed shortly. "Buffalo sent your name, Harry, with that of Maddock, Guinness, and Blake to headquarters with the report on that Maywell crack. And his comment was that the four of you weren't worth the powder to blow you to—well, I *will* take some more of that Yorkshire pudding, Mary. It goes fine with the dish gravy."

"No, Harry, you are not considered a prodigy by Old Buffalo."

"Suppose I should bring in something about that Maywell case, Uncle Dan?" suggested the rookie doubtfully.

"Humph!"

"Should I give it to the skipper or pass it up to you?"

"What is it?" asked the inspector shrewdly.

"I'm supposing a case," replied Vale.

"Don't do it. 'Supposin's' won't get you anywhere. There is too much of that in the detective game now. I try to hammer it into my boys that it don't go. Canniff and Moore, who are on this Maywell case, sat down and tried to dope it out. I tell 'em *that* won't get us anywhere. You've got to get out and dig something up. That is the only way that I ever got a line on any crime.

"Take this very case," went on Inspector McKane reflectively. "After all, there really isn't much to help solve the muddle—not on the surface. No finger-prints on the box door, on the tools, or on the window bars. The tools *do* suggest the crack being made by an old-timer. But *that* may be a plant. Can't tell. Whoever got into that box didn't need modern tools, anyway. A real smart yegg could have picked the lock with a pair of scissors.

"No tracks outside the window. Nothing disturbed in the house but just the contents of that safe. Nothing left behind by the burglar but the tools.

"I can think of a dozen guns listed at headquarters who might have pulled it off. One who hasn't turned a trick to our knowledge in ten years—squared things and been living straight for all that time—lives right in the neighborhood of Trevorth Street. Looked him up through Canniff and Moore. The poor chap is in the hospital, taken there the evening the crack was made. So *he* comes clean.

"You see, it really looks," concluded the inspector, "as though the fellow who turned the trick might have gone there for something beside the money in the safe."

"But was anything else taken?" Harry asked.

"Not unless the old will was exchanged for the new. That is what is puzzling Mr. George Wilmot. He's a pretty shrewd old boy. He has a personal interest, too, in those Maywell twins. Known them since they were kids, and is fond of them."

"Twins?" repeated Vale, startled.

"That is what they are—Allaine and Allan. To probate either the new will or this first one that has been found would satisfy Mr. Wilmot, I take it. But as the thing stands, the will made in between—the

one making Andrew Maywell the legatee—is the one best bet.”

“So suspicion points two ways,” suggested Vale shrewdly.

“I see you are able to put two and two together and make four,” rejoined his uncle dryly.

Vale knew better than to ask a more pertinent question. Uncle Dan would go just so far in talking of a case, then his jaws shut like a beartrap on police information. The nephew did not wish to be mangled in that trap.

He was as curious, however, as he could be. The incidents that had come under his notice were so ephemeral that he scarcely saw how they linked up with the Maywell will mystery, and not at all with the burglary. At least, he did not propose putting such undigested matter before his uncle and being laughed at for his pains.

Yet intuitively he felt that he had got hold of the leading string of an important fact regarding the mystery. Nor was it a small matter that was at stake.

The estate that had been left by the dead man for his relatives to quarrel over amounted to more than half a million. At least one crime had been committed—that of burglary—whether it was actually connected with the peculiar mystery of the three wills or not.

And, as it stood, that awfully pretty girl—“Allaine” was, too, the very prettiest name he had ever heard—was going to get none of the fortune. That is, if Mr. Andrew Maywell produced the will making him chief heir.

Even in case Allaine’s brother was the principal legatee, the girl would only get what Allan was minded to give her. Not a very satisfactory settlement of property, in the opinion of Harry Vale.

And how about that brother, anyway? Was he the “Willy-boy,” as Vale termed him, the person whom the patrolman had spoken to outside the Maywell house the night the safe was robbed? Suppose Andrew Maywell should put it up to Vale to identify this same Allen?

It gave Harry Vale serious food for thought as he went around to the station to report for the eight-to-twelve tour. There

was somebody waiting for him in the captain’s room, and when the patrolman saw Mr. Andrew Maywell with the crotchety skipper he felt a distinct shiver in the region of his spinal column.

“Here’s Mr. Maywell says you know something about that crack over on Trevorth Street that you didn’t report, Officer Vale,” snarled Buffalo Griggs. “You are riding for a fall, young man.”

“Now, Captain Griggs,” urged the criminal lawyer, “I want you to blame me for any seeming error; not Harry here. It was only through questioning that I learned he might have seen a suspect in front of the house that night. I made him promise to say nothing to anybody else about it,” added Maywell glibly. “Family matters, you know, captain. We can’t be too careful. The whole business, when it is cleared up, may not amount to a hill of beans.”

“Well, I demand that my men shall report anything suspicious,” growled the skipper.

“But don’t you see, my dear Griggs, that this person did not become a suspect until I had made inquiry about him of Officer Vale? It is all my fault, I assure you, that the officer did not report to you.”

“Huh! These young cops feel their oats too much, anyway,” growled Captain Micah Griggs.

“And now,” Andrew Maywell went on suavely to say, “if you would allow Officer Vale to step over with me to a certain clubhouse on his way to his beat, I believe he may be able to clear up this mystery. I want him to identify the suspect in question, who will be there at this hour.”

“All right, Mr. Maywell,” said the skipper, swinging around to face his desk. “I can deny you nothing in reason. You’re excused from inspection, Officer Vale. Go with the gentleman.”

They went out of the station and walked in the direction of Trevorth Street. The lawyer had spoken of a club. Vale decided it must be the Idlers’ Club, a rather good institution of its kind. This Allan Maywell must have belonged to it before he had left his uncle’s house, two years before, to seek his fortune. Uncle Dan had related all this at the supper-table that evening.

Vale wondered as they strolled along what would be the outcome of this matter. If he identified Allan as the lurker in front of 97 Trevorth Street on the night of the robbery, how would such identification affect Allan's sister?

Allaine! A wonderfully sweet name, Harry Vale told himself—and a wonderfully sweet girl she was.

There was a venomous air about the criminal lawyer. He more than hinted that he expected Vale to identify the suspect in any case. It might be made worth his while for the patrolman to stretch a point in Andrew's favor and say: "Yes. That is the man!" Vale had not forgotten that fiver the lawyer had tentatively offered him in the beginning.

He knew—not from his own small experience, of course—that the easiest thing in the world for a policeman to do is to smirch his fingers with petty graft. Wisely he had determined that a cigar should be his limit for doing any man a favor.

They came to the Idlers' Club. They entered, to be met by a serious-faced servant, who evidently knew Andrew Maywell.

"Your cousin, Mr. Maywell?" said the man, eying the uniformed policeman askance. "Yes, sir. He is in the billiard-room, sir. Will you step this way, sir?"

"Tell him to come here," said the lawyer shortly.

"Yes, sir."

In a minute Allan appeared. He was in his shirt-sleeves and wore a shade over his eyes. He was brushing his fingers of chalk.

"You want to see me, do you, Drew?" he asked. Then he observed the police officer, and indignation chased the expression of sneering amusement out of his face. "What's the meaning of *this*?" he exclaimed.

"Take a look at this young man, Officer Vale," said Andrew Maywell harshly. "Is he the man?"

Allan's eyes narrowed. The upper part of his face was shadowed by the green shade he wore. Andrew suddenly reached and snatched the shade off.

"Damn you!" snarled his cousin. "What trick are you up to now?"

Yet, was there some fear in Allan's ex-

pression as he glared at Vale? The latter's searching look held that of the suspect for a moment. Black hair, black eyes, well defined brows, oval, colorless face; but just now there was a faint line of shaving visible. And—how closely he resembled his sister! "Is this the fellow?" croaked Andrew again.

"No," said Harry Vale quietly. "I do not think this is the man."

CHAPTER VIII.

IN THE COURSE OF DUTY.

"WHAT do you mean?" demanded the criminal lawyer, rage suddenly flushing his face. "You mean to say you cannot identify him?"

"That is exactly what I mean."

Allan laughed harshly, and with a certain relief.

"They say you are a great criminal lawyer, Drew," he said. "I don't doubt, if you get the chance, that you will hang something on me. But you won't do it honestly. And if you start something, you'd better finish it—or I'll get you!"

He turned on his heel and went back to his game. Vale followed the lawyer out upon the sidewalk. Andrew Maywell did not at first look at him.

"Is that all, sir?" the policeman asked.

Maywell at that gave him a look both malevolent and suspicious.

"I don't know whether you are stringing me or not," the lawyer said harshly. "If you are, so much the worse for you. You may find that your memory regarding that fellow improves on due consideration. If it does you would better communicate with me."

He swung away, and Vale, reflectively twirling his baton, strolled on toward his beat. He had got in wrong with Mr. Andrew Maywell. No doubt of that. The influential lawyer might be able, as he threatened, to make the policeman very sorry that he had allowed his curiosity in the first place to get him into this tangle.

"It promises to be a pretty family rukus," Vale muttered. "And I'm not one of the family. But if I were—"

He did not finish the thought aloud. In his mental mirror was again reflected a vision of Allaine Maywell. If he had identified her twin as the lurker before the house on Trevorth Street, their cousin would have sprung the jaws of the legal trap he had set for the young fellow. No doubt of that.

Vale wondered if Allaine would ever know how her brother's safety hinged upon his saying "yes" or "no"? Quite practical as he was, the policeman was a dreamer, too. Uncle Dan suspected him of this. Uncle Dan scoffed at imagination as being of any possible value in the business of detecting criminals.

But Vale's imaginings just now did not run in any criminal groove. He mused upon Allaine Maywell's personality—upon her beauty, the sweet expression of her countenance, and, as well, upon the misfortune that had overtaken her in the matter of the disappearance of the last will Colonel Hardy Maywell had executed.

He had seen something in Allan Maywell's face that he had not liked. He doubted even if the first will—that found by Mr. Wilmot in the safe—were probated, that Allan would be as generous as he should be to his sister.

Vale came to the house on Trevorth Street, which had become such a point of interest to him during these past few days. It still had a gloomy appearance. There was but a small light in the front hall. Vale reflectively tried the manhole cover with his foot. It was firmly held in place by its chain.

This certainly had been an odd affair—that fellow waiting by the tree-box and all. Vale swung his stick again and moved on. The whole matter puzzled him and piqued his interest. Uncle Dan might be a very smart detective, but he might overlook some little thing that Harry Vale had marked.

An hour later the patrolman was at the far end of his beat and had met his boss. There appeared a sudden red glow in the sky over a row of tall buildings in the direction of Barrows Place. He knew about where the fire was before he got the alarm and heard the fire department trucks coming.

Spannard had turned in the call. The fire was going up through a studio building in the middle of a cross block. The occupants of that and neighboring buildings were swarming like bees from a hive. The minute the machines were on the block the police lines were strung to keep back the throng.

Harry Vale guarded the rope at the crossing of Barrows Place and Vandam Street. The fire was on the latter thoroughfare. The flames rose like a geyser through the roof of the house, and made a beacon that drew a huge crowd to the scene. It was at an hour of the evening when all quarters of the city were astir, and a spectacular fire is always a drawing-card.

More than once Vale and his partner, Spannard, were obliged to chase out those who ducked under the rope and claimed to have business on the block of the fire. A police reporter who showed his card was let through. Then a doctor whose face was familiar to Vale. Then—

She forced her way through the crowd directly to the spot where the rookie cop stood inside the rope. That she had come hurriedly to the scene was shown both in her dress and her excitement. An automobile-veil was wound about her head. Her naturally pale cheeks were shot with crimson.

"Oh! Can I get through here? I must!" she gasped.

"I'm afraid not, Miss Maywell," Vale said, putting out a warning hand as she would have stooped to get under the rope.

She flashed him an identifying glance. Surely she knew him again.

"I must get through," she cried. "There is a studio in the house just this side of the fire. I—I live there."

"That house is afire, too, Miss Maywell," Vale told her. "The firemen would not let you in from the street."

"Then I must get in from the rear. There is an alley there. By the fire-escape. I can get into those rooms. There—there is something that must not be burned, I tell you!"

"Against the rules of the department, Miss Maywell," repeated the policeman.

"If I can get up Barrows Place a little way, there is an archway there leading to

the alley," she panted, gazing at him pleadingly and with clasped hands.

"I know," muttered Vale.

"Let me through. *Do* let me through. The fire is only at the front of the house—"

Like a flash she stooped beneath the rope and eluded him. Spannard uttered a raucous laugh. As the slight, stooping figure of the girl flashed diagonally across the intersection of the two streets, Vale suddenly felt that he must go with her. She would risk her life if she tried to enter that studio building from the rear.

He bawled a word to Spannard and started in pursuit. The next police rope and guard on Barrows Place was at the end of the block in this direction. The street was littered with hose and fire trucks. The girl dodged the several groups of hose-men without being halted. Vale pounded after her.

He was still yards behind when Allaine darted into the alley. He followed her, trying to overtake the flying girl. He saw her dash open the gate in the low fence behind the building she had indicated.

"Miss Maywell! Stop!" he shouted.

When he plunged into the yard she was not there. The lower door of the studio building was closed. He flung himself against it. The door was locked. He beat upon it with his night-stick in vain.

Falling back from the building, Vale gazed upward. Hanging over his head was the ladder to the lower balcony of the fire-escape. Swiftly mounting from the first balcony to the next was a skirted figure.

"Great Scott!" ejaculated Vale beneath his breath. "She's doing it! The plucky little jane!"

As he swung himself up the hanging ladder, he again glanced upward. Allaine had now reached the top-floor balcony of the fire-escape. A glare of stronger light suddenly burst from the windows of the floor below her. This fourth floor must be all ablaze!

"If she gets out of this without being scorched to a cinder she'll have more luck than a little," thought Vale, but he clambered recklessly in her wake.

He had not yet reached the fourth floor level when the tingle of glass above an-

nounced the breaking of a window, and that the girl had opened a way into the studio at the top of the house. He saw her slim figure slip under the raised sash and disappear within.

Vale clambered past the glowing windows of the fourth floor. Those broad panes seemed fairly to radiate the heat of the confined flames. He saw through them a churning mass of rose-hued smoke.

He reached the open window of the top floor. There was no light in the room Allaine had entered. But a certain reflection from the fire below lent some illumination to the place. He stepped over the window-sill and strode toward the front of the house.

There was a rear room, a middle room, and the main studio front, which was lit by a big skylight. Cotton sheeting stretched overhead graduated the light from without in daytime. Just now a flickering glow shone through the glass panel of a door opening into the hall. The stairway from the floor below was all afire.

Allaine Maywell stood before the tiled mantle. She was doing something to one of the ornate bits of tilework just above the shelf. She tugged at it—lifted it—shoved it endwise—and it came out in her hands!

Her hand darted into the shallow space left behind the tile. She drew forth a document-envelope and turned swiftly to retreat.

The whole building trembled. A crash followed, and that part of the floor near the hall door sagged perilously. A beam had burned through below and this floor promised to fall.

Allaine shrieked, and would have fallen had Vale not been there to catch her. The envelope fluttered from her grasp, but he secured this, too, as he upheld the girl. In the burst of fire-light that now illumined the room he read at a glance the docketing across the end of the envelope, written in a stiff, legal hand:

LAST WILL AND TESTAMENT OF
COLONEL HARDY MAYWELL, DICTAMEN.

Vale thrust the envelope into the inner pocket of his blouse. He picked the girl up bodily and started for the fire-escape.

"All o-o-out!" wailed a megaphone without. "Wall falling! All o-o-out!"

A heavy stream crashed in the front windows of the studio. The water-tower was at last in position. A flood poured into the top story of the building and drove the smoke and flames back upon the retreating policeman and his senseless burden.

CHAPTER IX.

WHAT BOBS UP.

VALE heard the breaking of glass below in the rear as he crossed the middle room of the studio suite. When he reached the window by which the girl and he had entered, and through which the draft now sucked the pungent smoke, the flames were roaring out of the floor beneath, licking their lambent tongues about the ladder of the fire-escape.

Descent to the ground was utterly cut off in this direction. Their only chance was over the roofs, and there was no fire-escape ladder above this floor. As far as Vale could see none of the fire-escapes on this row of houses extended to the roofs.

But the policeman was quick to think and quicker to act. Placing the senseless girl on the platform, he ran back into the studio. He tore down the cotton sheeting masking the skylight. Of this he made a rope, tying one end under Allaine's arms and across her bust. Despite her apparently boyish slenderness her figure under the loose gown she wore was maturely rounded.

Scrambling up the face of the house wall by aid of sill and window-frame, he managed to seize the overhanging eaves, and drew himself upon the roof. The end of the cotton rope he had brought with him. In a minute he drew the girl up after him.

Glaring down through a rift in the churning smoke, he beheld her slowly turning body. He heard, too, a moan wrenched from her parted lips. She had recovered consciousness. Her great, black eyes opened and sought his in terror as she realized her position. She was slowly turning in space over a blast of heat as from the mouth of the pit.

Tightly clutching the stretching rope with

his left hand, he reached for the noose which held her. With a single, mighty heave of biceps and shoulder-muscles, Vale lifted her over the edge of the roof.

"Oh! Oh!" she gasped. "What has happened? That fire—"

"We'll soon get out of this. Everything is all right, Miss Maywell. Don't be frightened," he told her.

"Oh, no! Oh, no!" she gasped. "Everything is *not* all right. I have lost it—lost it!"

A geyser of smoke limned with flame shot up through the roof of the building in which the conflagration had started. That house must soon be completely gutted.

Vale expected the roof under his feet to crumble into a similar volcano at almost any moment. He started with the girl in his arms for the next house. Her wide eyes were fixed on his face. The fear she had betrayed slowly faded from her countenance. She smiled. He saw the gleam of milk-white teeth behind her parting lips.

"Thank you!" she murmured. "You are very strong—and very brave. Of course, all policemen have to be, I suppose. Won't you tell me your name—and set me on my feet, please?"

He flushed, and instantly stood her erect. But there had been something beside gratitude in the tone of her voice. There was friendliness as well.

"My name is Harry Vale. I have the beat through Trevorth Street past your house, Miss Maywell."

"I remember you," she said quite composedly. "You mean the Maywell house, of course. It does not," she added in a lower tone, "seem to belong to me, after all."

She turned her face from him. Her wistfulness in speaking of the house which for a few brief minutes she had believed would be her property, impressed Vale. There was something very queer indeed about the mix-up of the three Maywell wills. Somebody was trying to cheat this girl out of what Vale believed was rightfully hers.

He had felt doubt regarding the girl's brother, even. There had been something actually *bad* in Allan Maywell's countenance when Vale had seen it earlier on this

evening. And that expression of evil might not have been altogether brought to the surface by the criminal lawyer's enmity.

The policeman stood, hesitating, with his hand at his breast. The girl seemed to have forgotten that she had obtained the envelope for which she had risked her life in climbing to the studio. Should he tell her that, when she had fainted and dropped the will, he had secured it?

Seconds only he wasted in this indecision. His caution told him two things: This was no place nor time for an explanation; and something more than curiosity urged him to examine this "last will and testament" of the dead Colonel Maywell before he gave it up to *anybody*. If the dead man had been so fond of making wills, this document might even be a fourth one!

"We would better get down to the street, Miss Maywell," was all Vale finally said. "We will find an unlocked scuttle perhaps."

"Oh, dear!" she murmured, giving him again her attention. "There will be a lot of talk about this. People will have to know, if we go down through their house to the street."

"I'll try to fix it so that there will be no inquiry to disturb you, Miss Maywell. Just wind that veil about your face so that whoever you meet will not recognize you."

"You will get into trouble with your superiors," she exclaimed.

"Hope not. We'll try it, anyway," he rejoined with one of his friendly grins that had already disarmed her.

"But—but you should be commended for this. You deserve a medal—or something," and she flashed him a smile in return. "Isn't that the way they do in the department? I saw the Commissioner pin medals for saving lives on several policemen at the parade last May. And you certainly *did* save mine, Mr. Vale."

"Why! This doesn't count as a rescue," he assured her. "I had to save myself, and just brought you along with me."

She smiled again as he led her with a hand cupping her elbow across the roof of this first house next to the studio building. That particular roof seemed to have no scuttle. But the second roof, which was

on a level with the first, had a clothes-drying platform and a covered stair-entrance.

But the heavy door was bolted, and the tattoo Vale beat with his stick upon it brought no response. All the people in this house had possibly descended into the street in fear of the fire.

The fire must now be under control; but the squealing of the engines for water, the tearing "swish" of the great hose-streams, the shouts of the firemen, and the whirl of the flames—like no other sound—made an almost deafening clamor. Vale and Allaine had to raise their voices to make each other hear.

"It may be that we will have no better luck on any of these roofs," he said to her. "Guess we might as well break in here."

"But that is burglary!" Allaine cried half fearfully.

"Sure, what's a little burglary between friends?" he demanded with a grin and drew his service automatic from his hip.

"Oh! A gun?" she gasped.

"Stand over there at one side, Miss Maywell. I've got to shoot out this lock and a flying bit of metal, or a rebounding bullet might do you some harm."

He pointed to the position he wished her to take. He stood some feet from the door himself, and at an angle, when he pressed the trigger of his gun. Three bullets in staccato time shattered the lock and the woodwork about it. He pressed in the end of his nightstick and forced the door open. It swung creakingly on its hinges.

"Here we are," said Vale, putting away his gun. "I suppose this may have to be explained."

"Then they *will* get my name? And in the papers?"

"I'll try to get you out and through the lines without anybody stopping you," Vale said cheerfully. "You haven't told me your name, and you can slip away before I spring my little note-book on you."

"I am afraid," she rejoined with more seriousness, "that you are going to take chances with your record for my sake."

"That is all right if I can put it over on old Buffalo."

"On whom?"

"On my skipper. Captain Micah Griggs, of the Tenth Precinct station. He's some martinet. It will be all right," said Vale, with much more confidence in his voice than in his mind.

They entered the stairway, and the policeman forced the door shut again. Descending stumbingly the first flight, they came to the carpeted hallway of the top floor of the house. They could see better here, for there was a gas-jet burning on the floor below.

Some doors were open, showing the rooms to have been left in confusion. They did not meet a person on the four flights; but there was a group at the street door.

"Come right along and say nothing," advised Vale.

"But—but they will see something is wrong from my disheveled appearance," she whispered. "And you are all wet."

"They are too much upset to bother about us," was Vale's practical reply. "Muffle your head in that veil. That's it. They'll never see your face now. And if anybody speaks to you while you are with me, say nothing."

They passed the excited tenants of the house, who were gathered in the doorway and on the steps, and descended to the sidewalk without interference. The fire was well under control. Hosemen sheeted in glistening slickers were dragging back the lengths of pipe. But the water-tower was still spurting streams into the upper stories of the two houses that had burned. Vale and the girl hurried along the wet walk toward Barrows Place.

"I have very much to thank you for, Mr. Vale," said Allaine in a low voice. "I—I was reckless to try to go to the studio. And it was all for nothing!"

She sighed. Temptation assailed him again—the temptation to hand her the envelope, presumably containing her great-uncle's will. But caution as well as curiosity stayed him.

"Good night, Mr. Vale," she said at last, giving him her hand. "I shall not forget what you have done for me."

They came to the police ropes. He could hold her hand for only a moment for Spannard hailed him with wonder.

"Did you get her? Ought to be sent to the station, she had! Who is she?"

Vale lifted the rope and Allaine darted under it. She was lost in the crowd of spectators almost at once.

"I didn't ask her name," Vale explained to his side-partner.

The fire-lines were soon withdrawn, and Vale was relieved at about the same time. Before returning to the station he slipped into a bakery where he was known and took off his coat to dry it, removing the document envelope from his pocket as he did so.

It, too, was more than a little damp. But both the envelope and the paper inside it were of a quality which water did not easily penetrate. He withdrew the document from the envelope and spread it open.

Was this the will that had been lost—the actual last will and testament of Colonel Hardy Maywell? The will which Uncle Dan McKane had said left the bulk of the half-million estate to Allaine?

If so, how had the girl obtained it from the library safe, and why had she hidden it? Or was this an entirely different document from either of the three of which Vale had heard?

He began to read as he held it over the top of the pot-stove in the baker's back room. From "In the name of God, Amen" he read on through the obsolete legal phraseology of the introduction—for Mr. George Wilmot was an old-fashioned practitioner—and through the list of small legacies.

Allan Maywell was left one hundred dollars. Allaine was given the same sum. Then:

"To my nephew, Andrew Maywell, I will and devise all the residue of my estate, both real and personal—"

This was the second will of Colonel Maywell—the one the criminal lawyer claimed was locked in his own office safe!

CHAPTER X.

A WHITE ELEPHANT ON HIS HANDS.

ALTHOUGH he had refrained from handing this document to Allaine, Vale really expected to do so in the end. He had even visualized himself—of course in

his citizen's clothes—mounting the steps of the Maywell house, asking to see Miss Allaine, and gladdening her heart by the presentation to her of the instrument which made her the chief legatee of her Uncle Hardy's estate.

But he could not give this document to the girl.

This particular will favored neither her nor her brother. If it were produced the will found in the safe would be invalidated. And then neither of the twins would benefit from the state.

Andrew Maywell had threatened to produce this very will in Vale's hand. So Mr. Wilmot had told Inspector McKane. If the criminal lawyer had not possessed this paper, why had he said he did? Harry Vale was too thoroughly convinced of Andrew Maywell's sharpness and legal acumen to believe that he would knowingly make an empty threat. He must have *thought* he had the will where he could put his hand on it.

That being the case, who had hidden it behind the tile in that studio on Vandam Street? Allaine had known where it was. She had claimed residence there. It might be the place where she had lived from the time of her separation from Colonel Maywell until the time of his death. How did this second will, making Andrew the chief legatee, come to be in the girl's possession—and evidently without Andrew's knowledge?

It was a puzzling affair. Vale folded the paper carefully and put it back in its soiled envelope, thrusting it for safe-keeping into the breast of his shirt. Then he shook out his uniform coat and put it on again.

Buttoned to his chin, he strode back to the station in a very brown study indeed. He had not the first idea as to what was the wisest course for him to take. Much as he admired Allaine, he quite knew that she had no right to the possession of this will. And certainly her brother must not get hold of it.

Vale was convinced that Allan would bear watching.

As for Mr. Andrew Maywell, the policeman's opinion of his honesty was negative. This will actually made the criminal lawyer

heir of the Maywell fortune. But did it express the last wishes and intention of the dead man? Should it be in existence at all?

Ordinarily, of course, Harry Vale would have decided at once that the whole affair of the three wills was none of his business! He would have seen clearly that the proper thing for him to do was to hand the document he had secured in a manner so amazing to Mr. George Wilmot, who at least represented the Maywell estate, and was an honest attorney.

But this will promised to ruin the hopes of both Allaine and her brother. With the probating of the instrument found in the safe, Allan would obtain the larger share of the estate. But it seemed probable that he would share it with his sister. If the last will Colonel Maywell had executed came to light, Allaine would be in control of the half-million.

It was of the girl Harry Vale thought. He wanted to secure her rights—or what he believed to be her rights—in her great uncle's property. He could not do this by producing the document in his possession, that was sure!

Every hour that he hesitated, keeping this will favoring Andrew in secret, he would be endangering his own comfort and peace of mind. Whoever he gave the paper to would demand an explanation as to how he had obtained it. Allaine's attempt to save the will from the burning studio must then be told. Vale had promised not to drag the girl's name into any publicity.

Another puzzling question in his mind: Why had the girl risked her life to save this document that gave the Maywell estate to her Cousin Andrew?

This fact seemed most unreasonable. Yet that is what she had done. Had Vale not followed her into that burning studio she would have never got out alive. And for the sake of this will that would invalidate her brother's claim to the Maywell fortune!

Did the girl wish to hold this document as a threat over her brother? If he refused to divide the fortune with her, she could have produced this document and wrecked Allan's hopes as well as her own.

Or she could have used it to hold up Cousin Andrew.

That the three Maywells—sister, brother, and cousin—were working at cross-purposes, he was sure. And Harry Vale was determined to throw the weight of his help in the scale beside Allaine.

His personal duty as a policeman did not so greatly disturb his mind. This was scarcely an official matter.

His oath of office defining his responsibility first to the national and State constitutions, then to the city and its laws, emphasizes the peace officer's unique position in that he is individually and personally responsible for his acts and omissions. In other words, despite the police rules, the policeman must first of all judge for himself and act accordingly.

And Harry Vale in this instance was judging for himself with a vengeance! It might be said that he had already overstepped the boundary of his strict duty.

What had first merely roused his curiosity and interest had now fanned to life within him the flame of an ambition for criminal investigation. It was beside the point that this ambition had become a very personal desire to know what it all meant for Allaine's sake!

He felt that in some way the girl was being cheated of her rights. If Colonel Hardy Maywell had intended an hour before he died to make his niece his chief legatee, it stood to reason that he had not changed his attitude toward her in so short a time.

But this second will—this now in his possession—that was the most puzzling circumstance of all, to Harry Vale's mind.

The next day he strolled through the block of Vandam Street where the fire had been. One house was completely gutted; but only the two upper stories of that in which Vale and Allaine had had their adventure were burned out.

"Some hot fire for a time, eh?" the policeman observed to the man leaning on the area gate and whom he rightly judged to be the janitor of the half-burned building.

"You said it, officer. I thought we'd all have to get out. Some of the tenants did drag out their trunks. And the water did a lot of damage."

"Nothing saved on the top floor, of course?" suggested Vale. "Let's see, didn't Miss Maywell have a studio there?"

"Mr. Maywell," said the janitor promptly. "He's back again."

"You don't mean Andrew Maywell?" gasped Vale.

"No, no. Allan is his name. He's a promising young artist—or was. He has been away from here for a couple of years, and just got back the other day."

"He kept his studio here all of that time?" asked Vale, still suspicious. Allaine *might* have occupied the rooms of late, after all.

"Oh, no. But the studio happened to be empty, so he leased it again. Nice lad. I'm sorry he was burned out. But they tell me he's fell heir to his uncle's property over on Trevorth Street, and will go there to live."

"So it was Allan who had this studio?" muttered Vale as he moved on.

The discovery turned a different light upon the adventure of the previous evening. It had been behind the tile in Allan's studio that the will favoring his Cousin Andrew was hidden. It seemed probable that Allan had hidden it, in spite of the fact that his sister tried to save the will from being burned.

Were the twins both guilty of seeking to keep Andrew Maywell out of the inheritance? And how had they obtained the document and hidden it, anyway? Again, what should Vale do with it? It certainly was a white elephant on *his* hands.

Suspicious born of these mysteries shuttled to and fro in his brain in a perfectly maddening way. At one moment he believed he was risking his career as an honest cop by holding the will and saying nothing. But if Allaine was the victim of some wicked plot to cheat her, Harry Vale was willing to take this risk.

He was not entirely undisturbed regarding what might befall him personally. Andrew Maywell's veiled-threat when Vale had refused to identify Allan as the suspect had made no light impression upon the policeman's mind.

The criminal lawyer had influence in many quarters. Especially among the men

"higher up" in police affairs. Unless Harry Vale was wanted for something special he was not likely to be looked up by any of the big fellows around headquarters. They did not pay much attention down there to rookie cops—not even to those who displayed ambition in the field of crime detection.

A "fresh" cop might be called down by his skipper. But ordinarily the men higher up would give him small notice. Vale did not propose if he could help it to give even Buffalo Griggs a chance to "get something on him." If he came clean on every point of duty he did not think Andrew Maywell would be able to make him much trouble.

But he had something to learn, had Harry Vale. Within a very few hours of his adventure at the fire on Vandam Street, the unexpected happened.

When he came off tour at six o'clock that night—the then working system of two platoons did not give a policeman much freedom—the skipper had left orders at the desk for Vale to come into his room.

Old Buffalo never showed elation, or satisfaction, or approval. He just roared at every culprit, or suspected culprit, who came before him. And if a fellow was fortunate enough to clear himself of any accusation, the skipper merely grunted.

He now favored Vale with a lowering glance as the latter entered and came smartly to attention before the desk. The skipper picked up a docketed paper, unfolded it, and glanced through its contents. Harry recognized the form as a headquarters complaint.

"Officer Vale!" rasped old Buffalo. "Last evening at the time of the fire on Vandam Street the lieutenant reported you off post at the fire-lines. Excuse given, that you followed a woman who dodged under the rope. It that a fact?"

"Yes, sir. It is," Vale replied instantly on guard.

"How long did it take you to get her?"

"A few minutes. I do not know just how long."

"You brought her back and put her out of the fire area?"

"I did, sir."

"Who was she and what was she after?"

snapped the skipper, still glowering at the patrolman.

"She wished to go into one of the buildings that was threatened by the fire. I brought her back."

"Who was she?" repeated the skipper in a tone that brooked no further dodging of that question.

"I did not ask her name," Harry confessed.

"Huh!" grunted Buffalo. "You didn't ask her name, eh? And you made no report on it. Now, see here, my fine fellow! I've a report here of a break at No. 284 Vandam Street. That is two doors this side of the second house that caught fire. The lock of the roof-hatch at that number was busted in last night. Shot to pieces. A bullet found imbedded in the wood is the same caliber as that of the police guns.

"You were seen coming out of No. 284 Vandam Street with a woman just before the fire was out. You must have got into the house through the roof door. The inference is you shot to pieces that lock to get into the house."

Skipper Griggs leaned forward suddenly, smote the desk with his hairy fist, and roared:

"What does this mean? How did you get on the roof of that house? Who is the woman? You tell me all about it or you go before the commissioner!"

CHAPTER XI.

PUZZLING DISCOVERIES.

HARRY VALE possessed one trait at least that Captain Micah Griggs did not take into consideration when he started to "jack up" that individual. The rookie cop was not physically afraid of any man, and morally he was as courageous as most.

Let old Buffalo roar his head off and Vale would not quiver an eyelash. If he "paled around the gills" it was not from fear. He resented being called "a young dog," and he knew the skipper had no right to address him in any such way.

Had it not been for a certain practical characteristic which he possessed, too, Vale

might have been easily embittered by this abuse. The policeman might be a dreamer—a poet in embryo, Uncle Dan McKane scoffingly said; but he owned the saving grace of a sense of humor.

And he suspected that, after all, his skipper was only a bag o' wind! The old man roared because he knew his own weakness. He was afraid to give the men under him a square deal for fear they might out-argue him.

"You tell me all about it, you young dog!" he repeated, glaring at the rookie as though his crime was the most heinous in the category of police offences. "Or you'll go before the commissioner. I'll get the truth out of you if I have to sweat it out. Those fellows down there at headquarters want to know what kind of simps I've got up here in this hoosegow, anyway. You want to ruin the good record of the precinct, that's what you want to do!"

"You tell me who that woman was, where you went with her, and all about it," he concluded, at last running down. "And did you shoot your way into that house?"

"I did not ask her name," Vale repeated.

"Why didn't you arrest her?"

"She was only a hysterical woman. She didn't do anything that I judged called for arrest."

"You judged!" snorted the skipper. "Whoever told you that you had any judgment, or the right to exercise it? You're a cop, not a magistrate. And you let the woman go! What did she do? How did she get onto the roof of that house?"

"She went up the fire-escape at the back of one of the houses before I could catch her. I followed. I couldn't very well carry her down the ladders in my arms. So I broke in that door and we walked down."

Absolutely the truth—as far as it went. No getting around *that*.

"What th—was she crazy?" demanded the skipper aghast.

"I don't think she was," replied the patrolman cautiously.

"But what did she climb up there for?"

"I didn't ask her that, either. I guessed she was just hysterical, or something. The fire excited her."

"Well!" snorted the skipper. "Of all the young asses—what the holy heck do you mean by 'thinking' and 'judging,' and all that?"

Vale remained patient under this extended vituperation. Besides, he saw he was going to "put it over" as far as Buffalo Griggs was concerned. He was determined in any event to shield Allaine Maywell from publicity.

"What did I tell you before? You rookies aren't supposed to addle what you call your brains by thinking. Do your work and leave your betters to do the thinking. That is what you're to do."

"There was that business about the fellow hanging around the Maywell house the night it was robbed, Officer Vale. I bet he was lookout for the gun who cracked the safe. And you let him get away! And not saying a word about it to me—say! Did you identify that suspect Mr. Andrew Maywell put up to you?"

"No, sir. It wasn't the party I saw that evening," was the mendacious reply. "Huh!" and the old man grew suddenly thoughtful as he eyed the patrolman. "That's it, is it? I wondered why Canniff was so sharp on your heels about this," and he tapped the headquarters report with his hairy finger.

"Look here! You take my advice, Officer Vale. Don't you get into Mr. Andrew Maywell's bad graces. He's an influential man—influential in politics. There are a lot of men in this town he can put the screws on."

"Humph! I'll see what I can do for you. But I reckon you might just as well make your will and kiss your friends good-by, for I have an idea that it is you for the commissioner's experience meeting at headquarters next Tuesday," and he dismissed the patrolman with a wave of his hand.

Without doubt the reason Mr. Andrew Maywell was so anxious to get something on Allan—so Vale decided—was because of the disappearance of the will which was now so strangely in the policeman's possession. The latter was convinced from Allan's manner that he had secured and hidden this second will favoring his cousin, in spite of the latter's claim that that particular writ-

ten instrument was deposited in his own office safe.

Andrew Maywell might have thought he had the document when he made his boast to Mr. Wilmot and his cousins, Allan and Allaine. But in some way Allan had overreached the criminal lawyer.

Vale had carefully examined the will that Allaine had dropped in the burning studio. He was confident that it was no forgery. It was a legally executed instrument and no copy. If it were produced it would supercede the one which Mr. Wilmot, the family attorney, now held, and which gave Allan possession of his great-uncle's estate.

After this interview with his skipper, Vale was again tempted to go to the Maywell family attorney and give up the paper he had by chance secured. He believed that Andrew Maywell had already set in motion machinery to "get" him because he had refused to identify Allan as the lurker in front of the Maywell house the night of the robbery.

It was not to be wondered at that Vale wished to protect himself. His job meant just as much to him as the next man's did. The threat of being sent up before the police commissioner for trial on the complain from headquarters had its effect on the policeman's mind.

Yet, while he held onto this strangely acquired will of Colonel Hardy Maywell, he actually had "the whip hand" in the mysterious affair. The other characters in the drama did not know his power over them. But, if he wished to use the paper, even Andrew Maywell must bow to his dictates.

Just how Allaine stood in the matter was the principal puzzle in Vale's mind after all. He desired very much to see and speak to the girl again. But it was Allan he met first. And to tell the truth, the attitude young Maywell assumed rather balked the policeman in his desire to learn the facts regarding the robbery of the safe at No. 97 Trevorth Street and the incidents connected therewith.

Vale was passing the Maywell house on tour when he chanced to run into Allan. The policeman was instantly convinced that Allan would have escaped an interview

with him could he have done so. He had no appearance of being grateful to Vale for what the latter had done for either his sister or himself!

He was about to pass Vale with a cold nod. But the latter wanted something, and he was not easily snubbed.

"Just a word with you, Mr. Maywell," he said rather grimly, stepping before the young man. "Just what were you doing hanging around here the other night when I passed a few cheerful remarks with you?"

Allan flushed, and he eyed Vale in a belligerent manner.

"I thought you told 'Drew you didn't see me?" he stammered. "Are you going back on your statement?"

"I don't know that I am," rejoined the policeman coolly. "But to satisfy my own curiosity I want to know what you were up to. One sure thing, you were *not* waiting for an interview with that housemaid across the street. She's not your color."

Allan grinned suddenly, with a flash of roguishness in his eye that reminded Vale of his sister. Then his face quickly assumed a sullen expression.

"Come now!" continued the policeman; "I don't believe you really had a thing to do with that safe robbery. Perhaps *that* is the reason I refused to help your cousin hang the job on you. But I want the facts for my own private satisfaction."

"I suppose that you consider you have a right to interrogate me because of that favor," grumbled Allan, turning away his countenance.

"I am not presuming on any favor you think I did you," rejoined Vale more sharply. "But this is not the end of the matter. It is only the beginning."

"I've got an alibi 'Drew can't break down," said Allan flatly.

"You only *think* that," said Vale patiently. "Your cousin is going to get you if he can. A blind man could see that. He may be at me again. Be open with me, and I may be able to do more for you."

"Well, I'll tell you," hesitated Allan again, and turning once more to look at the policeman. "If it comes to a test I shall deny having been here at all that night."

"Of course you will," agreed Vale promptly. "You've a good alibi, I understand."

"I mean, that if you should change your mind and testify against me in court," Allan hesitated to say, "I should stick to my denial. I've thought it over. It would be only your word against mine, and I've got Mr. Jim Dunbar to back me. That's all."

He started up the steps as he concluded; but Vale caught his sleeve and wheeled him around to face him again.

"Hey!" he said sternly. "None o' that! You can't put anything like that over on me, Mr. Maywell. I'm not interested in your alibi, nor will I make you trouble. Far from it! But I *do* want to know who cracked that safe and how it was done. And if you know, I want you to come clean."

"Is this official?" demanded Allan, scowling at him. "The police have already grilled my sister and me. What have *you* got to do with the police investigation? It is a small matter—losing that two thousand dollars. The sooner the police drop it, the better I shall be suited," and he said it haughtily.

"You don't know Uncle Dan McKane, lad," said Vale quietly. "He's like a bulldog. Once his teeth get set on this business, he's not likely to let go. They may grill you to some purpose if I add my information to what they already know. Don't forget that."

"I don't know what you mean!"

"Ah! And I suppose your sister wouldn't understand, either?" Vale asked, thumbs in belt and eyeing Allan narrowly.

"I don't understand you!" snapped Allan. "What has my sister to do with you?"

Vale caught the point instantly. It was an added bit of information that he was glad to obtain. He had suspected it already from Allan's manner; for unless the fellow was a cad he should have been more grateful to Vale for his sister's sake if not for his own.

But it was plain that Allaine had told her brother nothing about her adventure at the Vandam Street fire. The brother and sister were not on confidential terms.

Vale jumped to the conclusion that Allan had hidden the will favoring their Cousin Andrew, while his sister had tried to recover it all unknown to him. Now Allan felt complete surety that the document would never bob up to threaten his enjoyment of the Maywell fortune.

But how did Allaine feel? What had been her attitude in the matter of the concealment of the second will? And what was her attitude now? This was the principal puzzle in Vale's mind. But he betrayed none of this puzzlement to Allan.

"Come, Maywell," he said confidently. "Both you and your sister know more about that safe robbery than you have told to Inspector McKane or his men. That 'crack' is all that the police are interested in. Your family squabbles are another matter entirely and outside their bailiwick."

"I don't see why *you* should be butting in," complained Allan, suddenly losing a measure of his perkiness. "If you want to know more about that safe robbery, why don't you ask 'Drew'? That's what I told those detectives, too."

"Ask Mr. Andrew Maywell?" repeated Vale, seeing that the harassed young fellow was quite in earnest.

"Or his henchman—a fellow named Pelley," exclaimed Allan hotly. "They are the ones for you cops to cross-examine—not me and my sister!"

He got away then and angrily tramped into the house. And Harry Vale, as he privately confessed, went away with a flea in his ear!

Pelley? He knew who Grif Pelley was. Indeed, Uncle Dan McKane had referred to him as an old-time safe-blower who had "squared things" and whom the department had got nothing against for ten years.

Grif Pelley kept that cigar-store on the corner, into which Vale had seen Andrew Maywell go on the occasion of his first interview with the criminal lawyer.

The police officer possessed an excellent memory. He knew Grif Pelley had fallen ill and had been taken to the hospital for an operation on the very night the Maywell safe was robbed.

Why! There was no sense in what Allan had just said. How could a man suffering

from appendicitis and preparing for an operation have had anything to do personally with that crack at No. 97 Trevorth Street?

It did not sound reasonable. Allan's insinuation did not ring true. It bothered Harry Vale all during this tour, and he determined to satisfy himself before he was many hours older that Allan's suggestion was untenable.

CHAPTER XII.

"SMOOTH DICK" PRANDLE SITS IN.

IT was not much out of Vale's way to put his head in at the cigar-store the next morning and ask after Grif Pelley. The girl with the blond buns over her ears and chewing a lump of gum which gave her the appearance of suffering from an ulcerated tooth was behind the counter.

"Hello, Maizie! How's your boss?" the cop asked.

"Dunno, Harry," replied the gum-chewing damsel. "Guess he didn't have all the money them slaughter-house experts wanted, and they only extracted a part of his 'pendix. I was over to the hospital yesterday, and they wouldn't let nobody see him. Said he had a high temperature and low vitality. Poor Mr. Pelley! He's got the high and low, whilst the doctors have got jack and the game. Not a chance!"

"As bad as all that? You think he won't pull through?"

"I'll say so," declared Maizie. "I guess if a party gets this 'pendicitis he's got a one-way ticket 'most always."

"Has he any folks?"

"Grif Pelley? Why, he don't even own the picture of a second cousin!" declared the emphatic Maizie. "He's the loneliest guy I ever heard of—honest, Harry. Lived all alone in a back room upstairs and never had no visitors. Nice things in his room. I don't know what will become of this shop if he flutters over the river. Maybe I'll be looking for another job pretty soon."

"I'll bear that little thing in mind, Maizie," the policeman assured her. "I know you are some little sales booster."

"You've said it," rejoined Maizie, not too modest to boost her own perfections. "Want a bag of the makin's, Harry? You're welcome, I'm sure."

This brief interview gave Vale no slant on the connection of Grif Pelley with the Maywell safe robbery. It was positive that the ex-crook was in the hospital. What did Allan mean by his insinuation that Pelley and Andrew Maywell were "in cahoots"? Surely the hospital people would not lend themselves to any substitution of patients. And Maizie herself had been to inquire for the sick man. Andrew Maywell's influence could not compass trickery with the aid of both Maizie and the hospital physicians!

Pelley was an old-time safe-breaker, it was true. And Uncle Dan himself said that an old-timer had in all probability made that crack in the Maywell library. But here was an alibi that seemed perfect—quite as good as Allan Maywell's own.

Harry Vale believed he had seen Allan—or somebody wonderfully like him in appearance—standing outside the Maywell house on the evening of the robbery. Yet, Inspector McKane admitted that the young man had evidence that he could not possibly have been there at that time and got back to Hallingham in season to take the early morning train for home again. Mr. James Dunbar, a prominent broker and man of affairs, had ridden on that train from Hallingham with Allan.

Here was Pelley, accused by Allan of knowing all about the safe robbery, yet he was in a hospital bed at the hour the crack on Trevorth Street had been pulled off. Two perfect alibis! Yet, Harry Vale had an intuitive feeling that there was a flaw somewhere in both of the claims. But he had not the first idea as to how he should go about to prove his doubt.

At noon when he came off house reserve duty he had three or four hours he could call his own. He had shifted to his citizen's clothes. He was tempted to call on Allaine Maywell and try to sound her regarding the mystery of the second will—this one he now possessed. He felt that the will mystery, the safe robbery, and at least Allan's alibi dovetailed. Get "the dead-

wood" on one, and the explanation of the other mysteries would fall into line, he was sure.

Besides, he was anxious to see the girl again. It never crossed Harry Vale's mind that Allaine might be considered beyond his attainment, whether she were rich or poor. He had known a number of girls who socially were quite on a par with Allaine Maywell. The democracy of the city public school is a great breakdown of social barriers.

Allaine was the first girl, to tell the truth, that Vale had ever given much thought to. It did not appear to him that falling in love with her would be either a difficult or unreasonable matter. And he very well knew that his feet were set on slippery places if he renewed his association with the beautiful young woman.

As he came out of the station-house a slim, rat-faced fellow with the peak of his cap cocked over his eyes sidled up to him and out of one corner of his mouth whispered hoarsely:

"I say, fella, what's your monniker? Ain't it Vale?"

"That's what it is," replied the patrolman, eying the tough with disfavor.

"There's a party wants to see youse in the back room of Chirotti's coffee-house."

Vale eyed the fellow dubiously. "Who is it?" he asked. "I don't know *you*, do I?"

"You ain't got to know me, bo," sneered the other. "This is somebody you'd better keep your eye peeled for. It's Smooth Dick Prandle, if yuh wanta know. Get busy, fella. No harness bull can afford to give Smooth Dick the go-by—you oughta be hep to that."

The fellow swaggered away without further observation. Harry Vale knew his breed well enough. He was a stool-pigeon—one of those despised creatures who keep out of jail by furnishing information to the detective police of the movements of greater crooks. And this fellow ran errands for other people besides the police, it was evident.

Smooth Dick Prandle was the leader of the district on which a part of Vale's beat bordered. Prandle had been a notorious

gang-leader in his youth, had reformed—finding it easier and safer to make a living within the deadline of the law—and had finally become influential in ward politics of the party now in power. His connection with the worse side of police affairs was intimate now that he had risen in the world of politics.

Chirotti's coffee-house was in an old saloon corner at the end of Vale's beat, facing a wide avenue that teemed day and night with a foreign population. The side streets of the neighborhood were given over to warehouses, interspersed with foul tenements.

The coffee-house was the rendezvous for young toughs of the neighborhood—the Frog Holler gang, so called. But thus far Harry Vale had had no trouble whatsoever with the gangsters.

It was not danger from these corner bullies that the rookie cop considered as he meditated on the message that had come to him. He had never spoken to Dick Prandle; but he knew him by sight well enough, and he was aware of his power in the district. "Practical politics," so called, is always the bane of the honest policeman.

The headquarters complaint Vale had seen in the skipper's hand, and the knowledge that he was due for a "pounding" before the trial deputy commissioner assured him that he was already in wrong with the system that so frequently interfered in police affairs.

The appointment to meet Prandle—literally a command—dovetailed with the matter of the headquarters complaint. What was wanted of him he could easily guess.

He had crossed Mr. Andrew Maywell's determination. The criminal lawyer was too sharp to appear personally in this matter; but he was immediately bringing to bear on the rookie cop a pressure that the latter could not fail to recognize.

It was the part of wisdom to answer Prandle's summons, and at once. He went directly to the coffee-house and entered the back room.

The man sitting there alone was a hard-faced, well-fed man in the early forties, wearing a hard hat on the back of his

bullet-shaped head and an off-color diamond as big as a hazelnut in his purple tie. He fairly oozed prosperity in dress and a certain cordiality in his look and speech.

"Hello, Harry! Come here and sit down," said Prandle in a fatherly way. "What will you take?"

"Coffee in a cup," returned the patrolman.

He saw that there was a cup already before Prandle, the contents of which was nothing so innocuous as coffee. The man grinned at him—merely a facial grimace that was as shallow as his appearance of goodfellowship.

Prandle called the dirty-jacketed waiter and gave the order. When the man had come and gone, he leaned forward across the table and became at once confidential.

"Look here, Harry, I want you to do a friend of mine a favor. Will you?"

"Anything in reason, Mr. Prandle," said the policeman easily. "Whose your friend?"

"Oh, you know who I mean, well enough," said Prandle with a sly grin. "And let me tell you he is in a position to do you many a favor. He has a good memory, too. If you live to grow into a real cop, you will find that out. It is Mr. Andrew Maywell."

"I supposed that was who you meant," admitted Vale. "Just what does he want? Please be explicit."

"Oh, I'll be explicit enough," said the other, his brow lowering. He sensed the rookie cop's attitude. "He wants you to identify a certain party. You gave him to understand you could do so. Then you reniged."

"It was not the party he showed me," Vale said flatly.

"Ar-r!" growled Prandle. "Don't split hairs. What does it matter to you? He wants to get that young boob cousin of his—and he will get him. If you know what's best for you, you'll do it. Get me?"

Vale drank the coffee slowly; then he said:

"If I do this, and they get me foul at headquarters, where'll I be then?"

Prandle waved his hand with perfect as-

surance. "Nothing like that, Harry. Nothing like that. We look out for the boys that do the right thing by us. We'll take care of any little difficulty you may get into down-town."

"I don't know that, Mr. Prandle," said Vale steadily.

"Oh, you don't, eh? Ain't I telling you? All you got to do if you get into trouble is to come to me. See?"

"I am not going to get into trouble," declared Vale firmly.

"Oh, you're not, eh?" exclaimed Prandle, his eyes gleaming suddenly. "You're some smart rookie, ain't you? Don't you know that we can break you if we want to—and when? And you just starting in as a copper? Why, if we say the word, you'll find your way to promotion blocked for the next ten years to come! You'll never be anything but a flatty—and they tell me you've got ambish to be a dick. So Old Dan himself says. Huh! You come across with the information we want if you know what's best, young fella!"

Vale changed color no more before the district leader that he had before his skipper. But he held his tongue now.

"Be reasonable," urged Prandle with less acrimony. "Don't you see what's happening to you right now? You're going up before the trial deputy next Tuesday. You're already marked for punishment. You put your foot deep into it the other night at that fire on Vandam Street. Whoever that jane was you were chasing around with—"

"I'm not worrying over what I did at that fire," Vale interposed cheerfully.

"Huh! You're not, eh? Breaking into a house with a woman companion and making no report to your skipper about it? You'll have a fine time explaining that."

"Suppose I bring the lady to support my statement before the commissioner?" asked Vale, eyeing the angry countenance of the district leader with calculation.

"Huh! Some woman of the street, I reckon?" sneered the other.

"I wouldn't mention her in that way to Mr. Andrew Maywell, if I were you, Prandle," Vale said in a steady voice.

"Huh?"

"She was Mr. Maywell's cousin, Miss Allaine Maywell. I got her out of her brother's studio at No. 288 Vandam Street at the height of the fire. I have an idea that she feels grateful enough to me to testify—if I ask her—before the deputy commissioner."

Prandle glared at him in amazement and chagrin. He stuttered at last: "Is this straight? You giving me the right dope? For, if you ain't—"

"I'm not fool enough to try to put anything over on you, Mr. Prandle," interrupted Vale, which was of course complimentary to the district leader. "As for being dog enough to identify an innocent man to please you—or Andrew Maywell—you've got me wrong. It isn't being done this year—not in good society. Don't ask me to undertake such a job."

He got up leisurely. Prandle sat back in his chair again and shook an angry fist at the policeman.

"You young fool!" he hissed. "You're just as independent as a hog on ice—and you're due for the same kind of a fall. Get me? When I set out to do a thing, I put it through. I'll—get—you—yet! And you won't get by on any bluff. I'll have this thing looked up, and if you are trying to put over anything—well, there'll be hell to pay, and don't you forget it!"

CHAPTER XIII.

THE EDGE OF THE UNDERWORLD.

WITHOUT replying to the final tirade of the district leader, Vale walked out of the coffee-house. The empurpled countenance of Smooth Dick Prandle betrayed the rage that mastered him for the moment. But self-control was not lacking in his makeup. Otherwise he would never have arrived at his present bad eminence.

He heaved his bulky body out of the chair and went to the telephone booth in the corner. When the door was closed he dropped a nickel in the slot and asked central for a number.

"Tell Mr. Maywell it is Prandle talking." A short wait; then: "Yes, this is Dick Prandle. Yes. I just seen the cop."

"Yes?" came Andrew Maywell's suave voice over the wire. "Is he amenable to discipline?"

"He's flossy," replied Prandle bluntly. "He's got more than a streak of Old Dan in him, too."

"There are ways of influencing such people," suggested the lawyer brusquely.

"Yep. But we didn't hit on the right trail this time."

"What? How about Canniff's report about that fire?"

"Nothing doing," said Prandle firmly. "If we follow *that* lead we'll be pinning medals on the lad."

"What do you mean?"

Prandle explained with brevity. "Besides," he added, "the dame he saved from the fire was the sister of the lad you want identified. Get me? Yes! Your cousin, Miss Maywell. So he says. Ain't it hell how things come around? What—"

He halted to listen to several sentences emphatically put by the criminal lawyer, who concluded with:

"And remember, Dick! I want that fellow put in his place without fail. Make no mistake. Show him who's who and what's what. I don't want to hear from you again until that cop is ready to give his evidence. Understand?"

Prandle came out of the booth very warm, both physically and mentally. He bit off the end of a cigar and chewed it angrily for some minutes, slumped down in his favorite armchair behind the table. Then he tapped the bell for the waiter.

"I told Slim to hang around. Can you find him?"

"Sure, boss," rejoined the waiter, and, departing, soon sent in the rat-eyed individual who had accosted Harry Vale outside the Tenth Precinct station.

"Slim, here's a job for you," said Prandle briefly, "with a good piece of coin in it that only needs be divided three ways. Three can do it. Get me?"

"I'm wise, boss," said Slim, licking his lips like the hungry wolf he was, and slid into the chair that Vale had occupied.

Twenty minutes later, when he had listened to the setting forth of Prandle's instructions, he barked, "I'm wise, boss,"

again, nodded, and so slipped out of the room in his usual snaky way, on the mission assigned him.

Meanwhile, Harry Vale had headed for a more respectable part of town. If it was not entirely chance, at least his passing the Maywell house again was quite involuntary. A taxicab stopped before the door just as he reached it. Allaine stepped out of the cab, paid the chauffeur, and turned to mount the steps when she saw the cheerfully smiling policeman.

Her pale face glowed suddenly and she put out a cordial hand.

"Mr. Vale! I am so glad to see you again. You are quite all right?"

"I'd have to see a doctor if I felt any better," he replied with his whimsical smile. "And our adventure the other night had no ill effect on *you*, I can see."

"Oh! But when I had time to think it over—all that we went through—I was frightened half to death," she confessed with emphasis. Her luminous eyes held his admiring gaze; but she seemed quite unconscious of his attitude. "I am deeply grateful to you, Mr. Vale. And I know I ought to write the commissioner and tell him of it all. You deserve commendation."

"Better not, Miss Maywell," he said shaking his head. "That means publicity."

"Oh, I hope nobody will ever find it out!" she cried with sudden anxiety.

"Just what do you mean?" he asked, with a sudden sharp scrutiny of her face.

"That I went into that burning house. I depend upon you, after all, Mr. Vale, to help me hide it."

"From your brother, do you mean?" he shrewdly demanded.

"My—my brother, Mr. Vale?" she repeated, flushing.

"That was his studio we entered," Vale observed quietly. "And I guess he does not know that you went there?"

"Oh, Mr. Vale! You *won't* tell him? If you do, he will suspect my reason for going there."

"Yes?" The policeman waited, giving her an opportunity, if she would, of taking him into her confidence. But her eyes pleaded for generosity. "I give you my word," Vale said slowly, "that I will not

speak to your brother about it. In fact, Mr. Allan Maywell and I seem to look wheels when we meet."

She did not hear his final phrase. She smiled rather wanly on him as she repeated: "You will not tell a soul, will you, Mr. Vale?" and then tripped up the broad steps of the front door of the house.

It smote the policeman suddenly that he had just told Smooth Dick Prandle the name of the girl whom he had helped out of the burning studio. Yet this, he felt sure, would not occasion Allaine any publicity. Neither the district leader nor Andrew Maywell was likely to publish abroad the facts regarding his adventure.

That was what he had really promised Allaine—to save her from publicity. He shrugged his shoulders and passed on. Had he realized just what this apparently small matter was to lead to, he would have mounted the steps to the Maywell house after the girl and "had it out" with her, then and there.

When next he passed the house he was in uniform again, and it was his eight-to-midnight tour. No. 97 Trevorth Street seemed quite dark. He had not seen any light here in the evening since the funeral. He believed the twins were both living here under the advice of Mr. George Wilmot, the family attorney; but they certainly were not entertaining.

He had other matters to think of on this particular evening. As he reached the end of his beat the first time he marked the group of young fellows with their backs against the wall of Chirotti's coffee-shop on the corner of the noisy avenue.

He had often seen them before—and had studied their several countenances well. These were the budding gangsters of the neighborhood—fellows with whom he might expect trouble at almost any time. But thus far Harry Vale had not antagonized any of them, and they had only a good word for "the kid cop."

On his second round of the tour, after meeting his boss, he came along to the corner again and found the side street deserted. This was a quiet street at best. If there was ever any trouble, it was back in the alleys and courts.

Vale had never had to venture into any of the tenements along here, although he knew many of their inmates by sight. The well-schooled rookie is a trained observer already, when he is put on tour. He has learned to classify and strain through the sieve of his mind the wash of humanity that ebb and flow by him in the street.

"Things seem to be shutting down rather early," was Vale's thought as he turned back from Chirotti's corner, after rapping to his side partner, Spannard. There were no fixed posts in this part of town. "I wonder what has come of all the boys?"

He started through the side street toward the better thoroughfare. Half-way along the block he felt rather than heard somebody on his trail. He flashed a glance back over his shoulder. It was a dark block at best, for the only lights between the corners were certain gas-lamps on low posts. Several of them had been extinguished since he had passed along.

Behind him he could see plenty of shadows, but no moving ones. He well knew the quality of the gangsters' courage. Like

rats, they never would attack save when strong in numbers.

Yet he felt that he had no reason to fear the Frog Holler boys. They had absolutely nothing against him, save that he was a bull in harness.

But the thought of Smooth Dick Prandle's threatening words pricked Harry Vale's mind. He took another turn of the strap about his wrist and gripped his stick hard. He always carried his automatic in his left hip pocket and was well practised shooting with his left hand. He was as ready now to meet trouble as ever he was.

In glancing over his shoulder he had not broken step. He marched on steadily, his ears stretched to distinguish any sound from the rear. He was keenly alive for anything—no matter what—that might befall.

Then he distinguished a light, quick step upon the flagstones. A man was coming, almost on his toes—with a weapon poised, it was likely, to strike Vale down. The latter appeared unconscious of the threat. He did not turn to look behind him.

(To be continued NEXT WEEK.)

The Marriage of William Durrant



by Ray Cummings

MY marriage has been a failure. I am one of those unfortunate men with whom fate deals unjustly. I tried my best. I started with plenty of opportunity, with what I thought was every chance of success. I worked the whole

thing out carefully—I knew what was necessary for our happiness and I went after it, sanely and unswervingly. I lacked neither ambition nor purpose; I did not shirk hard work.

I did my best always—the best both for

her and for me. And I lost. The woman I loved and trusted—trusted too much, I know now—deceived me. My honor has been trampled under foot—my marriage wrecked in spite of the fact I did everything I could to make it a success.

I shall tell you about it plainly, just as it occurred.

My name is William Durrant; I was born in Philadelphia thirty-two years ago. My family was prominent in Philadelphia society; my mother a woman of superior culture and a very great social ambition.

I received a university education and then entered my father's business—wholesale neckwear. My mother died soon after this, and as I had no brothers or sisters—or in fact any near relatives—my father and I were drawn very close together.

It was then I learned for the first time the true state of my father's affairs. I can remember perfectly that evening when he had his first intimate talk with me; it was about two months after my mother died.

"Sit down, Will," he began. We were in the library of the old Durrant mansion on Arch Street. "I want to talk to you—seriously."

We drew our chairs together before the fire and I lighted a cigarette.

"You're not a child any more, Will," he went on. "You're nearly twenty-six—a man." He laid his hand on mine with more evidence of affection than I had ever had from him before. "We're all alone now—you and I. There are many things you don't understand—and I want you to—for we must be very close to each other now."

I waited, wondering.

"You think we're rich, don't you? Your mother did, and God knows I was not the one to deceive her." He laughed a little bitterly, glancing around the luxuriously furnished room.

"We have always had luxury. Your mother demanded it, Will—it was her life. The Philadelphia Durrants! Luxury—social prestige—I have maintained them, all these years—at what a cost!" He passed his hand across his eyes wearily.

"It's all a sham, Will—a sham. But

now it's over—there's only you and me to please. The bubble is broken. Only you and me—and the wreck of a business for us to save." He raised his hand to check my sharp exclamation.

"I have hidden this from you, Will. But we won't go into that now—it's unimportant.

"I want to talk of you. For twenty-six years you have been scarcely under my guidance. I cannot blame your mother—only myself. I've known the sort of life you've been leading away from home—the sort of friends you have—the women—" He raised his hand again, and his voice rose sharply.

"Did you think I didn't know about the money you lost at cards, and your mother gave you, time and time again? Do you think I'm ignorant of the fact that you—my son—are to-day in the way of becoming a wastrel? Do you think so?"

I laughed. "You're crazy."

His face softened; he put his hand again over mine. "I cannot blame you—only myself. It is the way you were brought up. But I want you to change, Will. I want you to see yourself and me as we are—I want you to love me. We will work together, you and I—work to find some of the good things in life—the real things. I know we'll find them if we try—if we really pull together."

Three weeks later he was dead.

This talk with my father, and one or two others we had subsequently, made a great impression on me. When he died of pneumonia, after an illness of only a few days, leaving me utterly alone in the world, I resolved to take his advice, for my own good, and act differently. The business he left me was indeed in a precarious condition. He had drawn from it heavily during the last ten years to meet my mother's demands—and more lately, mine—and handicapped thus by a depleted capital it was going down-hill rapidly.

I realized then that life was not worth living unless one were rich—really rich—for money held everything desirable. My father was right—the social prestige my mother had maintained was a sham. Without the solidity of real wealth it could never

be anything but a bubble that might burst at any moment. I resolved then to settle down: to work untiringly at this business that had been left me.

I found, when my father's affairs had been settled up, a truly astounding number of debts. It has never been my way to do things by halves; I sold the Arch Street house, settled the debts, and moved the business and myself to New York for a fresh start.

The two years that followed I devoted exclusively to work and saw myself in a fair way, ultimately, to succeed in my ambition. I lived for business during these two years—I did nothing else—I thought of nothing else. The pleasures of life that I had given up I did not begrudge. They were only postponed. This was my big chance—my only chance for wealth and happiness through life—and I was unwilling to do even the smallest thing to jeopardize it.

Then I met Ruth Wilson, and six months later we were married. She was five years younger than I—a girl with beauty, of a family nearly the equal of the Durrants, and with all the social graces—in a word, a girl of whom any man might be proud. I knew she would make me a good wife; it was a safe, satisfactory step for me to take. I was glad of this, for I was now as cautious of the things I did as formerly I had been careless.

We took an apartment on Riverside Drive, and were very happy. We had no children. I do not like children; I cannot stand their crying. And besides they are difficult and expensive to bring up properly—father's arraignment of me in my younger days showed me that—and it was obvious that no girl of the grace and beauty of Ruth should be so handicapped. That she disagreed with me did not alter my opinion, for I realized that she was hardly more than a child and could not understand things as I did.

Our life during these first years of marriage was very satisfactory. I worked all day at the office, and two or three nights a week played in a game of cards which we held regularly at the club. I did not introduce these men to Ruth—they were not her

kind—she would not have understood them. Indeed I should not have played in the game at all, except that I found the mental relaxation stimulating and helpful to me, for I was at this time working very hard, my luck, too, seemed to have changed permanently for the better. Whereas in Philadelphia I had frequently lost, I now won steadily—sums sufficiently large to justify in themselves, the amount of time I gave to the pursuit.

Once or twice a week Ruth and I would go to the theater—to musical shows generally, for I liked them best—and occasionally we would play cards with friends. This latter diversion interested me not at all. I was having enough of card playing outside, and the people to whom Ruth introduced me were particularly uninteresting. I had no time then for their chatter about art or music, or the books or plays or operas they seemed determined to discuss. The whole thing bored me immensely, and probably, because I do not believe in hypocrisy, I did not hesitate to let them see how I felt.

We did not leave New York for the summer months, except twice we spent a week or two at one of the big Atlantic City hotels. My business would have permitted me to leave for longer periods, but I did not feel that we should spend so much money.

One summer Ruth thoughtlessly suggested that we get away into the Maine woods and ramble, or to take a canoe trip somewhere. I explained to her how foolish that was—how she particularly, a girl of breeding, used to luxury, would not care for that in the way we could afford to do it. Camping was all right, if it were done properly. We Durrants once had a big camp in the Adirondacks—my grandfather had established it. *There, with the proper staff of servants and with guests of the right kind one might rough it comfortably. But my father had given up that camp, and such things were, as yet, quite beyond my means.

I pointed out all this to Ruth, showing her plainly how illogical she was. And so we stayed in town.

These years, as I have said, were working out very satisfactorily to Ruth and me. I was getting my business on its feet and the

time when we could enjoy some of the real luxuries of life did not now seem so very far distant. That Ruth should be so impatient at the delay had never occurred to me until one day, when we had been married about three years, she spoke of it.

"Are you going to keep on indefinitely this way, Will?" she asked quietly.

This was apropos of the fact that she wanted me to take her that evening to the opera. I disliked opera intensely—it seems to me an extremely morbid—not to say boring—form of amusement. And besides this was one of the nights our card game was on. I could not explain that to Ruth—she would not have realized how much more important to our ultimate good my evening's winnings would be than a mere evening at the opera—which in itself was expensive.

"I'm going to the club," I answered.

"Then I shall call up Gerald Rolf and ask him to take me," she said.

She still spoke quietly. That was one of Ruth's peculiarities, I was soon to discover; she concealed her feelings beneath a quiet, dignified reserve. I would rather a woman came right out plainly with what was in her mind. Then you can meet her with logic.

"That's agreeable to me," I rejoined, and went to the club.

I have not mentioned Gerald Rolf. He was a good-natured sort of boy—at least I considered him so at that time—a year or so older than Ruth. He was an artist, painted weird-looking landscapes, and to make his living, did magazine illustrating. When Ruth first introduced him to me I thought he was a nice enough boy, except that his interminable piano-playing was a nuisance.

I was soon undeceived about Gerald Rolf, soon made to realize how uncertain is happiness and how even the most innocent circumstances may become a menace to a married man so easy-going, so tolerant as I.

Ruth seemed to like Rolf immensely, although why I could not imagine. I had one or two long talks with him. He knew nothing about business—indeed even the simplest things seemed quite beyond his mental capacity.

I tried to get him to discuss poker—he said he played it a little. But the mathematical laws of chance that govern the game he did not grasp at all.

"I'm afraid you've got me out of my depth, Durrant," he said, and laughed.

Then he wanted me to play a game of chess, which I cannot conceive any rational-minded person being interested in.

Gerald Rolf came to our home frequently after that, often on the evenings I was out. I should have objected to this; but I did not. I admit this fault freely. I saw their intimacy growing, but I was so trustful, so confident of Ruth, I did nothing to prevent it.

He was teaching her chess, he said. And she sang a little to his piano accompaniment, weird sort of songs—nothing bright or lively of the kind I liked. And they went to the opera together sometimes—"in the gallery," as he laughingly told me, for like all artists he had no money. Then later, they took to horseback riding. But this was expensive, and they rode infrequently.

I saw all this going on, as I have said, and I did nothing to prevent it. I suppose because Ruth, curiously enough, seemed to enjoy such things, and her happiness was always uppermost in my mind. It was for the attainment of that I was working so hard—to be able, some day, to give her the things that really would make her happy.

Then, when this had been going on nearly a year, came the climax; and I learned, with a shock that was all the greater because of its suddenness, how unjust fate may be to a man who unreservedly trusts one he loves and who always tries to do the best he can in every way.

The morning of the particular day I have to tell of, I remember. I went to the office feeling miserably ill. I had taken a sudden chill the night before, and rose with a slight fever and the start of the grip or something of the kind.

About four o'clock in the afternoon I felt so badly, I left the office and went home. Ruth was out and I went into the library, planning to sleep for an hour or two before dinner. I sat down in a large easy-chair in a darkened corner of the

room, partly sheltered from the window-light by a screen which stood near by. I was feeling really very miserable and soon fell into a troubled slumber.

I was awakened by the sound of voices and realized that my wife and Gerald Rolf were in the room. Evidently they had not seen me. They were sitting over by the windows and Ruth was serving him tea; I could just see them from my chair, around the corner of the screen.

The first words that I heard, as soon as I was fully awake, electrified me. And yet I remained silent, did not make my presence known then. I do not know why, for I am not one who believes in eaves-dropping.

It was Rolf's voice.

"We must face it," he said. "There is no avoiding it now."

Ruth did not answer at once. I saw her face was very pale, and her hand trembled as she poured him a cup of tea.

"You should not have told me you loved me, too," he went on. "That would have made it easier. You should have rebuked me—sent me away."

Another silence.

"I'm going anyhow," he added.

"Gerald!" She put her hand on his arm.

"There's no other way, is there?" He met her eyes steadily. "I love you too much to do anything else but go away. You can understand that, can't you? After to-day—after what we've confessed to each other."

I held myself back with an effort. My brain was whirling. That this impudent boy should dare talk to Ruth—to my wife—like this!

There was another silence. Then I saw Ruth slide her hand down his forearm until her fingers touched his.

"Have you thought it all over carefully Gerald? Are you sure, quite sure, that for you to go away—alone—is the best thing—the right thing?"

She spoke quietly. Even now she seemed to maintain that reserve I disliked in her so intensely.

"Yes," he said; his voice sounded very tired. "It's the only thing to do now—with honor."

Honor! He could prate of honor, when by their very words, their thoughts, they were dragging *my* honor in the mire!

"I'm not sure." She spoke softly—so softly I could hardly hear the words. "I'm not sure, Gerald. I've thought about this, too. I've seen it coming—oh yes, I have—for a very long time. I've known what was in your heart—and in mine.

"For you to go away—never to see me again—that may be the best thing—the right thing for you. It will hurt you, of course—terribly—for a while. And then, inevitably you—you will find some one else—some other woman who will make you happy." Her voice trembled a little but she still spoke evenly.

"That is what the future holds for you, Gerald. Are you sure you are not thinking only of yourself when you say we must never see each other again? What about me?"

"You! Why, Ruth—"

"What does the future hold for me? You haven't thought of that, have you, Gerald? Not another love like ours—that is open to you—but not to me.

"You have known me now two years. You know Will—the sort of man he is—"

I took a new grip on myself at this mention of my name; I would hear them out.

"You know Will," she repeated; a new note of passion came into her voice. "You know how empty, how utterly devoid of everything that makes a life worth living mine was until you came into it. All that is in the past. But the future—have you thought what you are condemning me to in the future? Have you thought of that, Gerald?"

He avoided her eyes. "I love you," he said. "There will be no other love for me. I *have* thought it all over—I have faced it—and I cannot—will not—take our happiness in dishonor."

She leaned over the tea-tray and put both her hands on his shoulders, forcing him to look at her.

"I love you, Gerald," she said. "Look at me. I love you with all the love I once thought I felt for him—the love he did not—could not—understand. Do you realize that you have brought me with your

love? How you have filled that emptiness that was killing me? How you have—have made my dreams—all those vague little ideals that fill every girl's heart—do you realize how you have made them all come true?

"You have won my love, Gerald. Are you going to cast it away—and leave me nothing—because you say that to take it would be dishonorable?"

Dishonorable! They could talk thus of dishonor! They did not think of *my* honor—the honor of William Durrant—that they were dragging about in the slime of their words. I felt a sudden impulse to leap to my feet and confront them; but I held myself firm.

"We must think of him, too," he said. "We cannot build our happiness upon the wreck of his life. We cannot do that, Ruth—we would lose out in the end."

She dropped her hands from his shoulders.

"His life wrecked?" She laughed bitterly. "You do not understand him, Gerald. Do you think losing me would wreck his life? It would not be loss of me, but the loss of his wife that would hurt. His wife—his honor—the honor of William Durrant—that would be attacked. You do not understand him if you think that."

Again she put her hands on his shoulders.

"I'm fighting, Gerald," she went on softly. "Fighting for the only thing worth while that life holds for me. Are you going to let me go down beaten—a woman who has lost the only good things—real things—a woman ever can hope for. The love of a real man. And—and children. To have children—oh, Gerald, you don't understand—you don't understand!"

Her voice broke suddenly and she ended with a sob. I saw his arms go around her. I pushed my chair back violently and sprang to my feet.

How it must have surprised them to be so abruptly confronted by me, the one person in the world they had injured, I can imagine. They both started guiltily at my sudden appearance. Gerald Rolf rose to his feet; Ruth sat quiet with her eyes fixed upon my face.

I strode across the room. I made up my mind then that there would be no heroics—no melodrama. The Durrants did not have to descend to that to protect their honor.

"I have heard all you said," I began sternly; I looked at each of them in turn. "I could not help it—sitting there."

They met my eyes brazenly. There was a moment of silence; I wondered which of them would dare address me. Then Gerald Rolf spoke.

"What you have heard, Mr. Durrant, is all true—every word of it. Perhaps it is better that you did hear—for now you can see things as they really are." He spoke quite quietly, evidently suppressing with an effort his agitation and fear of the consequences of his folly.

"Yes, I think now I understand you as you really are—you two. Since that is so—what do you think you're going to do about it?" I permitted myself a veiled sneer with this question.

"You heard me say what I was going to do," Gerald Rolf answered.

Ruth gave a low exclamation and I turned on her sternly.

"Be quiet," I said. "We will settle this." I faced Gerald Rolf again.

"Your decision is very wise," I said sarcastically. "It is fortunate that—"

"I said I was going away," he broke in. "Neither of you will ever again see or hear of me."

Again I heard Ruth give a low exclamation.

"I'm leaving her happiness with you."

I took a menacing step toward him as he said this. He faced me with an assumption of bravery.

"I'm leaving her to you," he went on. "What has happened has been—unfortunate—" His voice faltered, but he drew his lips tightly together and continued.

"Perhaps it has been for the best—perhaps the future may hold more happiness for you both than the past gave you."

I could listen to no more of this.

"Go," I said sharply.

He picked up his hat and coat which were lying near by. Then, avoiding Ruth's eyes, he turned again to me.

"I will," he said. He hesitated. Then:

"For her sake I hope you will become a man," he added.

He met Ruth's tearful eyes in good-by and before I could answer this last insult, he had left the room.

I sent Ruth to her bedroom immediately; she was sobbing hysterically, in no fit mental condition for me to talk with then. Some hours later—after I had dined alone, I went in to see her.

I suffered greatly during those hours—how greatly no one but myself will ever know. The whole thing came so unexpectedly; I had always trusted Ruth so implicitly. The fact that a thing so unsavory, so sordid, should come to me, of all people, almost unnerved me. A marriage of one of the Durrants to be so besmirched! It was almost unbelievable.

Such things had happened to others. That I could understand. But when I had selected Ruth for my wife, I had been confident of her worth—her breeding, her very manner seemed to make such a catastrophe as this impossible. Yet it had come and I had to face it—make the best of it—hide it from the world as my mother would have done. Our marriage must go on, of course, but it would never be for me that it had been.

I found Ruth sitting on her bed staring blankly before her.

"Well?" I said; I felt that in justice to myself I should be harsh in this interview. "Well, what have you to say for yourself?"

She stared at me with a light in her eyes that made me doubt her sanity.

"Nothing," she said, in that irritating,

soft voice of hers. "I don't know—I cannot think—what to do."

I leaned against the wall just inside the doorway. I was quite calm; I even permitted myself to smile.

"Won't you go away now?" she added, almost in a whisper. "You must leave me alone—I must think—decide—"

She seemed to be still on the verge of hysteria and I concluded it would be useless for me to go on talking then.

"It is a great shock to me," I said deliberately, "to find that of all the women in the world I should have chosen one who was had."

With that I turned and left her.

I spent that evening at the club—trying to forget in the card-playing the trouble that had come upon me so abruptly.

The next morning when I went to see Ruth in her room, I found she had gone, taking with her only a few personal effects! I called up Gerald Rolf immediately after breakfast; they told me he had left the city.

That was six months ago. She did not come back and she has asked me now to divorce her. She says she has found happiness, and I suppose she thinks she has. I shall divorce her, of course. I have always tried to do the right thing. But the unavoidable publicity will hurt me terribly.

I have told you what occurred, plainly. I have nothing to add. I tried my best. Yet, in spite of that—and the injustice of it sometimes makes me very bitter—my marriage has been a failure.

TWO GLOVES—A ROMANCE

ONE is a glove so small, so softly white;
It nestles in a pocket out of sight—
A waistcoat-pocket just above the heart
Of one who'd scorned the pricks of Cupid's dart,
A perfume faint, as of crushed rose-leaves, lingers
Within the creases of this glove's small fingers.

The other is a well-worn riding-glove—
A thing that hardly seems a gift of love;
For curving palm of piqué, stitched and thick,
Still holds the imprint of a stout crop-stick,
Also the odor of tobacco mellow;
Yet this glove rests beneath my lady's pillow!

Beatrice E. Rice.

Vials of Hate

by George C. Shedd

Author of "The Red Road," "Cold Steel," etc.

WHAT HAS ALREADY HAPPENED

RESCUEING Louis Gaillard from a murderous attack, Jerry Moffat, penniless and starving, accepted a sort of temporary position with his new friend, the first duties of which included the shadowing of one Barbanera, friendly to the Zorrillas, hereditary enemies of the Gaillards. Jerry had previous encountered two lovely girls—Isabel and Felipa Zorrilla, and, later, rescuing his new employer from agents of Barbanera, to whom he had been decoyed by Anita Carley, a woman in Barbanera's pay, he brought Gaillard to the latter's rooms. There he acquainted him with the facts, at first fearful as to how he would take the news of the girl's perfidy—she had previously professed something more than friendship for Gaillard. But Gaillard appeared unperturbed, until, with the arrival of one Pacheteau from his plantation in the South, news came of the activity of the Zorrillas.

With Gaillard and Pacheteau, Moffat set out for New Orleans and the Gaillard plantation. Arriving there, Gaillard told him of the feud with the Zorrillas, who lived just across the bayou, and Jerry's impression of mystery, battle, and sudden death was not lessened by the vision of a dead face rising out of the black water. Later he learned that the face was that of one of the Zorrilla "retainers," and, employed as superintendent in place of Pierre Careval, mysteriously missing, Jerry, while fishing in the bayou, met suddenly none other than Anita Carley.

The girl asked his aid, telling him of the imprisonment of Careval, who was not dead. Then, in a heavy storm, while Jerry set out to find Careval's prison, Gaillard, saving both Isabel and Felipa, brought them to his house, where Isabel warned him against the other Barbanera, José, whose skill with a rapier was proverbial. But after a bantering talk on the part of Gaillard, Isabel grew furious at his easy gallantry, this being further aggravated when he said:

"I always did like a bit of temper in a woman."

Now she did not wish him killed by a sword; she wanted him to die slowly over a fire, or in boiling oil, or on a rack.

CHAPTER XI.

A PROPOSED TRYST.

A BLAST of the hurricane seemingly more furious than any that had gone before, brought Gaillard and the two girls to their feet, standing intent, alarmed, waiting. The roar of wind and rain was like the sound of a thousand bass pipes blending in one mighty, deafening diapason. Under the incessant pressure of the storm the house strained and trembled and creaked, as if the tortured ghosts of another world strove for release within its frame.

Even the toucan lost its sedateness momentarily. Now it ruffled its feathers and now turned its huge beak from one side to another, while an uneasy croaking came from its throat.

"There 'll be ships foundered and damage

done along the gulf coast to-night," said Gaillard.

"I shudder to think of us in the sail-boat in this," Felipa replied with face white.

"It's not pleasant to contemplate," said he. "Best not think of that, for you're here, not there. The worst should be about past, though it may take some hours for the wind wholly to go down. And in any case, ladies, I fear you will have to spend the night under my roof, for even should the storm cease soon, which is doubtful, the bayou will be running too high to cross to-night. I presume that all of our small boats have been flung somewhere ashore or driven up to the marshes, where they will have to be sought, which will cause delay."

Some further conversation followed, and as he saw that the experience through which they had passed earlier in the evening had

This story began in *The Argosy* for May 29.

tired them, he rang for the old French woman to conduct them to their chamber, bade them good night, and stood while they went from the room.

He did not at once resume his seat, but began to pace the floor with slow steps, absorbed in his thoughts and only now and again harkening to the howl of the tempest. Perhaps he reviewed the years of hatred lying between the two families, which though resulting in actual bloodshed merely at long intervals was yet sufficient to keep the enmity burning with a steady flame.

Perhaps he perceived the folly of it, its senselessness, its blight upon the lives of all, like a poisonous exhalation from the surrounding marsh. Perhaps he wished the original Gaillard and Zorrilla could have composed their quarrel and lived thereafter in amity. These, perhaps, were his secret reflections.

Then suddenly Isabel Zorrilla parted the portières and reentered the room.

"Your pardon, Louis Gaillard," said she. "I forgot my toucan."

He had let the presence of the bird pass from his mind. But now he observed that it still was in the room, perched on the back of the cane chair. He went to bring it to her. As he paused with the bird in his hands, he asked in a low voice:

"To-morrow you go across the bayou. When shall I see you again?"

"If you stand at the foot of your grounds by the water," she replied, "you can see me any time."

He fastened his eyes upon hers as if he would conquer them, and conquering them master her will.

"Seeing is not enough," he continued.

"We are enemies," said she. "Give me the bird, and I'll go." But she did not put forth a hand for it.

"Then let us meet as enemies," he stated. "We can talk of how the Zorrillas hate the Gaillards, and the Gaillards the Zorrillas."

"That, at any rate, would be true," said she, sweeping his face with her violet eyes.

"And then perhaps we should talk of other things."

"We? What else would there be for us to talk of?" she asked, with a hint of mockery.

Gaillard set the toucan upon the table by which they stood and considered her smilingly. Her lips were a little compressed, while the rose-color in her cheeks had increased, as if in her breast was beating an ill-contained excitement.

"Could we not find subjects—or seek them, at least—which might be even more interesting than an old hate?" he questioned. "Are our minds so empty, our lips so slow, we can speak of one thing, and of only one? I, I could speak an hour of violet eyes, and never tire. Let us hate each other cordially and forever, if you will, great heavens, we need not always be talking of it!"

Isabel started, listened, then appeared relieved.

"I thought I heard Felipa's step," said she. "I wouldn't have her hear this ridiculous speech of yours, which displeases me greatly and which if I were not a guest I should not even harken to for an instant."

"Felipa's not coming," said he, unperturbed. "And now, listen—there are trees south of your house; among them a great live-oak by the edge of the water. You know it?"

She nodded indifferently.

"Oh, yes."

"To-morrow night at nightfall I shall be there," he said.

Her breath came a trifle faster. Her blue eyes leaped up to his, then away.

"To-morrow evening; why such haste?" she ridiculed.

"And there I'll await you," he added.

"Yes, and wait in vain—if I don't choose to have men there to seize you. For your life, as you know, will be forfeit. When did ever a Zorrilla spare a man of your house?"

His soft laugh echoed her words.

"Whenever the Zorrilla was a woman and her fancy so ran. No, however passionate your hatred, however fierce your feeling, you're not one to betray me when I come placing my safety and life in your hands."

"You reckon too strongly on what I would not do."

"No, or then I'm deceived in all womankind. Even when your lips exclaim most forcibly, I don't believe."

The look she gave him was all at once full, searching.

"Why do you imagine all this?" she cried, in a repressed voice. "For what reason do you propose such a visit? I shall not meet you—I shall not! You think to amuse yourself by hoodwinking me, that you may afterward laugh and boast of it. I've told you I hate you, and your family, and your name."

"There you're wrong in your thought of me," he answered, with a peculiar, winning gentleness. "I'm honest—and of that I boast, but I boast of nothing else. When was a Gaillard ever disrespectful to women? And that includes those bearing your name."

"Then why should you wish to meet me thus?"

"It's the only way I can meet you at all."

"And why, under any circumstances, should you and I meet?"

"Nay, let us first meet, and if there be no reason we'll speedily learn it," said he, spreading his hands, "and if there be one it will make itself known without explanation."

In silence she considered his great, dark eyes, glowing now with a fervor that bespoke his admiration; and his face, exercising a magnetism she found it difficult to resist.

An unaccountable agitation took possession of her. She felt she must draw back, refuse to look at him, spurn his words.

"Give me my bird, please," said she, indistinctly.

Where was her pride? she asked herself. Where the haughtiness with which she always pictured herself in the past if circumstances cast them together?

Gaillard lifted and placed the toucan in her hands. Then one of her hands he drew free; he quickly bent, touched it lightly with his lips.

"To-morrow night," he whispered.

"I will not—I will not!"

"At nightfall."

"I'll have the Barbaneras meet and kill you if you dare!" she said between her teeth.

He still retained the fingers and felt them

tremble in his clasp. Her lips, too, were quivering.

"By the live-oak, remember," he said, smiling.

"You come at your own peril, Louis Gaillard."

"Peril to my heart alone," said he. "And so I come."

"Oh, will nothing stop you?"

"And will await you," said he.

"I'll not meet a Gaillard—never, never!" And she turned with flaming face to go. "Never, never, never!" she repeated, turning for a flashing look. Then she rushed out.

CHAPTER XII.

THE BROTHERS BARBANERA.

AS Jerry Moffat groped his way once more through the trees, he expected a wetting and nothing more. He judged the approaching clouds to be a thunder-storm, which would be of brief duration, for his knowledge of hurricanes was of the haziest, a notion they were tempests in remote seas and associated with shipwrecks, a belief fostered by pictures in books. So he calmly and confidently proceeded on his own private adventure with a sublime ignorance of what was impending.

For the time being he dismissed Gaillard and the two girls in the sailboat from his mind. Gaillard had started off in the motorboat; undoubtedly he had gone to get them, and certainly he would bring them home; and that was all there was to the matter. If the shower overtook the craft on its return, why, Gaillard and Zorillas, sworn enemies, would be drenched together just as if they were sworn friends.

He came out from the gloom of the trees upon the edge of the grounds, but this time nearer the house than when he had led Anita Carley back from their brief parley. He halted for a moment, in some wonderment at the agitated cries of the members of the household before the door, and guessed that the alarm shown was for Isabel and Felipa. Then he glanced at the sky.

The darkness was clapping down thickly, except when illuminated by lightning

flashes; what with these, and the noise of distant thunder-claps, and the appalling clouds racing overhead in the glare, and the oppressive, sultry atmosphere, he questioned if he might not have been mistaken about the moderate character of the imminent storm.

Of the cries and shouts before the house he could make nothing, as his Spanish was yet too limited to distinguish the utterances. The people there, however, were greatly excited, and since they were familiar with weather manifestations in this region he experienced an added uneasiness as to the step he had taken, consulted the sky anew, wondered if it would not be wiser to regain his skiff and row home, and could not make up his mind. For he was loath to abandon his enterprise so favorably entered upon.

Then the hurricane took decision out of his hands. With a stunning succession of rapid lightning flashes, of thunder-claps, of appalling cloud convulsions overhead, there came a roar like the sound of a railway train approaching at incredible speed.

That was Jerry's own comparison. He was standing quite still, marking the aspect of earth and sky in the diabolical, dancing light, taking it all in as if his brain were a moving-picture camera; and he felt his uneasiness change to anxiety, and his anxiety swell to something not far from fear. He wished exceedingly that he were home in his own cottage.

The Zorrilla party had vanished within behind shut windows and doors; he was alone. Even enemies in the face of a catastrophe—and he began to suspect something of that nature—would give a sense of companionship.

Jerry stole nearer the house; then, as the hurricane burst, made for a long gallery at its side, where he flung himself on the floor by the wall. How long he lay at the spot he could not tell, but the time seemed endless, like the protracted agony of a nightmare.

He was barely able to breathe; he was beaten and pounded and made sore by the wind, a wind so terrific it was beyond anything in his experience or imagination; he was stupefied by glares of light and submerged in sound as if a cataract were fall-

ing on his ear-drums; he anticipated every instant the fall of the house, flying timbers, his own death.

But gradually he regained control of his senses so that even if he could neither see nor hear anything clearly he could at least think with some calmness. His shelter had stood, and the hurricane had not sucked the life out of him, and presumably he would continue to exist if the trees were not plucked out by the roots and hurled against him.

When the sky opened and rain fell in a solid mass, he thought in truth that the end had come, but though drenched by its spray, he still lived.

At length he discovered a cessation in both the force of the wind and the quantity of rain. Two hours, perhaps, had passed by that time. He wondered if Gaillard had succeeded in rescuing the two girls, and if anything was left of his own cottage, and what would happen in the morning when his foes discovered him upon forbidden ground.

For he knew that his skiff long before had snapped its rope and vanished, as would be the case with all other boats on both banks of the bayou not secured in advance. The prospect of falling into the hands of the Zorrillas, of whose flintiness of heart he had heard so much, caused his spirits to descend still farther; and this, on top of his general dismay and bedraggled condition, made him altogether miserable.

More hours dragged themselves out until he judged the time near midnight. The rain now was coming in only fitful showers, while the fury of the hurricane had passed, though a considerable wind continued to blow, shifting into the west. After the previous turmoil, however, the dying efforts of the storm seemed mild in contrast, so that he took his arms from about his head, rose from his prostrate position, and cast his eyes about.

A short distance in front of him he perceived a light shining through a window out upon the veranda, and almost at the same moment a hand flung the window up as if for air. The sound of voices came to him through the murmur of the rain. He crept forward to take stock of the room and its occupants.

Placing an eye at the window-sill, he made a cautious observation of the speakers, whom he discovered to be the brothers Barbanera, one the little Emilio, who smoked a cigarette and twisted his mustache and nervously paced to and fro, talking; the other the tall, grave-visaged José; who also smoked, and who spoke but one word to Emilio's five.

This first close view of José Barbanera disclosed to Jerry that he had the gaunt frame and high-hunched shoulders of a vulture. His great mustache and close-cropped, pointed beard, his deep-set eyes, and hollow cheeks gave him the aspect of a man half-starved or recovering from an illness. But the youth perceived that his long, bony limbs, when he moved them, were neither awkward nor slow.

The two men were conversing in Spanish, which Moffat was unable to follow. On a stand rested a lamp, by the light of which he could see their faces, their eyes glistening like jet, and their gestures. Then finally they locked the door of the room and dragged forward a small but heavy trunk of an old, foreign pattern; this they unlocked, oddly enough, each unlocking one of the pair of locks with a key he carried.

The impression left upon Jerry was definite: the men did not trust each other; the trunk held something of common interest or value; neither could open the old leather chest without the assistance of his brother.

Emilio lifted forth a great paper wallet stuffed with documents. These they began to examine at a table, where they placed the light. Now José Barbanera opened a sheet and closely inspected it, now he passed it to Emilio, who examined its contents and seals through a large reading-glass. Then finally the smaller brother removed his coat, carefully rolled up his sleeves, dipped a pen in ink, and began to inscribe lines with great pains, glancing continually at another sheet spread by the other.

This was a matter which held no particular interest for the eavesdropper until at a knock on the chamber door the two men sprang up, stared at each other in alarm, then hastily blotted the writing, and concealed papers and wallet in the trunk, lowering the lid. While José stood by the table,

Emilio walked forward and unlocked the door, after which he swung it open.

An old man with a white mustache and beard was revealed. Though his years were many, yet his figure was erect and in his face, with its black, penetrating eyes, its imperious nose, its thin-lipped and somewhat intolerant mouth, was a look of power.

Jerry divined on the instant who this man was: the master of the domain north of the bayou, patriarch of the house, the last male representative of the Spanish line opposed to the Gaillard interests, Hernando Zorrilla.

He uttered a word or two, beckoned with a hand. The two Barbaneras stole a glance at each other and at their unlocked trunk, then went out of the room with a simulation of obsequiousness. On Zorrilla's countenance, Jerry had noticed, remained, despite a certain melancholy, the haughtiness that must have been habitual and that even the probable death of his granddaughter and a niece could not eradicate.

The lamp still burned upon the table, where also stood the ink-well Emilio Barbanera had been using. The guilty manner of the two men when Hernando Zorrilla's hand had sounded on the door gave the youthful watcher at the window a changed mind regarding the nature of the papers in the trunk. Men whose business is honest do not start at an interruption and conceal documents they may be examining. And so, since they were enemies, whether the contents of the trunk bore on Gaillard's affairs or on matters strictly personal to the Barbaneras, Jerry decided to examine them.

Removing his shoes and wet coat, he lifted himself through the window, crossed the floor in his stocking feet, and raised the lid of the trunk. On top of several shirts, white linen suits, and a pair of revolvers lay the large, square paper wallet. Many sheets, some filled with writing in Spanish, some partially inscribed and others blank, made up its contents, of which Jerry by a brief glance could judge nothing.

Suddenly the first humorous notion that had entered his head in hours popped into his brain. The Barbaneras were foemen, and he would fling them into confusion; therefore, tightly tying the big envelope

with the linen ribbon attached, he closed the trunk, then left the room by the window, carrying with him his spoil.

He had no more than gained the veranda when the little Emilio rushed in, thrust his key into the lock he controlled, turned the latter, and after extinguishing the light once more departed from the room. Clearly he had escaped for a moment on some pretext or other from Zorrilla in order to relieve his anxiety; but so short had been his absence that it never occurred to him to make sure of the trunk's contents, which in turn lifted a weight from Moffat's mind. Hours might pass before the two brothers would continue the inspection of the papers.

The next incident bearing upon Jerry's ticklish position was the sudden opening of a door and the appearance of a man scarcely twenty paces away on the veranda who bore a lantern. Moreover, the man walked toward him.

For the youth to dart across the veranda was to be discovered. Instead, therefore, holding the wallet in one hand and grasping his shoes with the other, he again put his leg over the window-sill of the Barbaneras's room and slid inside. If one of the brothers now should chance to return, Jerry indeed would find himself in a predicament—and that was a contingency he determined should not arise.

Stealing ahead, he found in the darkness the knob of the door, swung the latter open, stepped forth into a corridor. A dim light illumined this. The end, he perceived, gave upon a stair, so thither he went, praying that he might not encounter any servant. Somewhat he heard muffled voices in talk. What he desired above all else was an exit upon the grounds, but apparently none was in this part of the house.

He reached the stairway, halted to listen. Then a door was flung open and the volume of the voices he had heard swelled proportionately. They were the voices of Hernando Zorrilla and of the Barbaneras and of other men; they were advancing toward him from wherever they had been; and if he continued to stand stock-still he would be seen for a certainty.

Up the stair he flew in his stocking feet, three steps at a time. There also in the

upper hallway was a light, candles burning in a wall bracket. A short distance on a door was ajar. With his enemies moving about below and with the possibility of some other member of the household, where a very considerable activity yet seemed manifest, coming upon him, any hiding-place was a good hiding-place.

He slipped into the room, which was dark and silent, after which he began a groping around until he located a window. But the window was fast, nor could he discover its catch by feeling about. At last he lowered himself into a chair against which he had struck; and there, not in the least knowing whose chamber or what its furnishings this might be that he had entered, he sat harkening, waiting and trying to formulate some plan of action.

The darkness hid him, true. His presence was unsuspected, true. But he was in the very heart of the Zorrilla's stronghold, if such it might be called, and some places are easier to get into than out of.

Then footsteps sounded in the passage-way. A glow of light grew before the partly open door, stopped there.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE HEAD OF THE HOUSE.

EXCEPT to wrap the paper wallet in his wet coat that it might remain unseen, Jerry made no movement. A hand pushed open the door; the candle-flame came in sight; then the tall and proud-visaged old Spaniard whom the youth had glimpsed at the Barbaneras' room stepped within. He walked forward to a stand where he placed the candle in a holder; only when he faced partly about did he behold, since the light had been in his eyes, the unexpected visitor sitting motionless, damp of hair and clothes, and silent.

Hernando Zorrilla stared. Next he strode forward as if to inspect this intruder, so utterly unexpected and so like a creature cast here by the storm. Under the old man's fierce mien and ruthless black eyes Jerry felt his heart quake.

In answer to a sharp question in Spanish he replied: "I speak only English."

"We'll use that," said Zorrilla, changing to the latter tongue. "Now, who in the devil are you, and how did you get here in my bedchamber?"

"I'm working for Gaillard," said Jerry truthfully, suspecting that the other doubtless had heard of him before this and would guess his identity. "I was fishing, and was prevented by the storm from reaching the other side of the bayou. When the storm broke, I was blown under the lee of your house and crawled in and found myself here. I'm not a burglar; and I didn't care to wander about a strange dwelling lest I be mistaken for one, so I just sat down to wait until I could withdraw quietly. My intentions are perfectly harmless, sir."

A sardonic smile appeared on the old man's face. "I'll endeavor to see that you remain harmless, whatever your intentions may be," said he.

Then for a little the two gazed at each other without speaking. Jerry's regard was open, even somewhat curious, while the look of the descendant of the Zorrillas was inscrutable.

"Before the storm I observed your granddaughter and a companion, another young lady, sail down the bayou," the first remarked mildly.

Hernando Zorrilla's face hardened in a look of morose grimace.

"They are lost," said he.

"Beg your pardon, but I think not," said Jerry.

"What's that?"

The words came in a hoarse cry of hope.

"I think they're safe, sir. From shouts I heard about the house at the beginning of the hurricane I judged your people to be in despair for them. Well, Gaillard saw the danger they were in; the last I saw of him he was tearing down the bayou in his motor-boat; and I believe he was in time to rescue them. Probably they're with him somewhere on his estate, if not actually snug and dry in his house."

"If this be true, young man, then you shall return to Gaillard unharmed yourself," Zorrilla declared.

"You'll see the young ladies in the morning, or I'm greatly mistaken," Jerry asserted with confidence.

What gave him the conviction, unless a profound faith in his employer, he could not have said. Nevertheless, he was sure, quite sure, that disaster had not overtaken those on the bayou before the hurricane unleashed its harpies of wind; and this reliance of opinion was not without its effect upon the gray-bearded master of the house. The latter's countenance relaxed, his eye brightened, and the blood flushed his cheeks.

Crossing the room, he stood a while at a window, gazing forth, as if straining to penetrate the still stormy night without and remove his last doubt. Then at last, giving a shrug, he returned to his uninvited guest.

"I presume ignorance and not boldness brought you into my dwelling," he remarked, looking full at Jerry.

"Any port in a storm, you know."

"But if it should please me to keep you?"

"I already have your word I'm to go free—and even Gaillard, your enemy though he is, has always said that a Zorrilla never violates his word when once given."

A grimace shaped the old man's face unpleasantly.

"And damnably inconvenient we've found that fact on occasion," he remarked. "Still, you speak the truth; if the young ladies are safe, you shall go free."

"Thank you," said Jerry politely. And he slipped his feet into his shoes and laced the latter one after the other. Then he inquired: "Shall I depart now? The storm is dying down, and I can find cover somewhere outside until morning."

"Nay, not so fast. When my little Isabel and her cousin set foot on Zorrilla ground, you may go. But not before. Meanwhile, I'll have you securely taken care of until that time arrives. Follow me."

The man again obtained the candle, and with Moffat, who carried his coat under his arm and the wallet it concealed, went out of the chamber. Perhaps the idea the youth might attempt to escape at this moment was promptly dismissed from Zorrilla's mind, as both impracticable and futile. Perhaps in his hostage's appearance there was something so bedraggled, so acquiescent, that the possibility of flight did not enter his thoughts. But that now was Jerry's chief object.

He was secretly trembling lest the paper wallet be discovered in his possession, when he would be believed a thief. He had robbed the Barbanera brothers' trunk, no blinking that fact. Should the old Spanish hildago find what he carried, and examine its contents, Jerry's goose would immediately be cooked. Therefore, escape he must at the first chance.

Zorrilla led the way along the corridor and down the staircase and thence into a large room, still lighted by a huge chandelier with innumerable glass pendants, though the hour was late. Here stood José Barbanera, as if brooding on matters solemn and melancholy, his arms folded, his bearded chin upon his breast.

"Sit down, young man," Zorrilla commanded, pointing at a seat. And he began to speak rapidly in Spanish to the man with folded arms. When he had finished, he again addressed Moffat: "You'll be in this gentleman's charge. Make no effort to escape. I've explained to him the circumstances under which you are here and the conditions on which you will be released, but he has my instructions to take such measures as he deems necessary should you seek to violate the conditions. The Zorrilla hand can be heavy and its punishment swift."

With this threat the old Spaniard again went up to his bed. In his final words, in the flash of his black eyes, Jerry read the man's high pride and arrogant will that no weight of years could diminish or weaken. Where he ruled, he was determined to rule as he pleased, as his race had ruled before him.

Jerry looked at his keeper.

"Good evening," said he, smiling.

A slight inclination of the Barbanera's head acknowledged the greeting.

"Do you not speak English?" Jerry pursued.

"When I desire," came in that tongue.

"At this moment I have not the desire. Therefore, kindly remain silent."

"I thought possibly we might occupy the time by a little chat," said the young fellow. "However, if you're inclined to meditation, go straight ahead; I'll not interrupt you."

"No, you'll not interrupt me. No one interrupts José Barbanera except at his peril," came in grave tones.

"Never?"

"Never. And now silence."

"But you arouse my curiosity—"

"Silence!" the other ordered, harshly.

Jerry decided that this was not exactly the occasion to amuse himself with the man's idiosyncrasies, and therefore took a chair, not the one indicated by Zorrilla, but another placed nearer a window. Out of the corners of his eyes he gazed at that window longingly. He would have given much to be on the other side of it, with what he held wrapped in his coat.

If he had considered himself in a ticklish position with such evidence when in the company of the master of the house, his present situation was infinitely worse. Did the great cut-throat standing guard over him obtain but a glance at the wallet, the deuce would be to pay. Undoubtedly the fellow would forget all about instructions, and recognizing the property, would hurl himself at Jerry; which would bring about a struggle in which Moffat would never have a chance against the man's great talons.

They were big hands, those of this Barbanera. Each finger seemed enormous, with long joints and huge knuckles, covered on the backs with a growth of bristlelike hairs. With such hands one should be able to rend leather, break oak clubs, snap ropes, crush bones, bend steel. Once they closed on a man's throat, that man might then and there abandon hope.

And the fellow, to cap the matter, had a quick and watchful eye as well, notwithstanding his voice was heavy and his air grave. Jerry thought less and less favorably of making a break for liberty.

The minutes dragged by. At the end of a quarter of an hour Anita Carley on a sudden walked into the room; and it may be doubted if she were expecting to find any one there, for she gave a start, expecting least of all to find the youth whom she supposed safe at home. She stared at Jerry, then at José Barbanera. Then without a word passing, she disappeared again, while an odd expression flickered on the face of

Moffat's jailer, which the youth observed with interest.

Another fifteen minutes succeeded before a second visitor came to the door. This time it was the other Barbarera, the little Emilio, and in a state of great agitation; for ignoring the prisoner, if he indeed perceived him, he called José into consultation.

Jerry glanced desperately around. For that interruption presaged greater danger for him than ever, since Emilio's excitement could mean only that the absence of the paper portfolio had been discovered. With the wallet of documents missing and with Jerry here the two circumstances would inevitably be associated in the smaller brother's shrewd mind as effect and cause, which was the exact truth.

Then he beheld Anita Carley again, as if she had appeared through the wall. The explanation was, however, that she had noiselessly opened a door which he had noted but forgotten, and while remaining out of sight of the two men near the main entrance to the room, was beckoning to Jerry. Her intention was manifest. She desired to assist him out of the hands of his enemies, doubtless believing him an absolute prisoner.

Cautiously he stole from his seat to the spot where she stood, an escape facilitated by the attention the two brothers gave to the topic with which they were concerned. The girl closed the door.

"Oh, my Heavens!" she breathed; and Jerry could hear the hurried, suppressed gasps of relief issuing from her lips. "I nearly dropped dead with amazement, Mr. Jerry, when I first saw you seated there. And I knew you had been captured after you left me. Come, come quick! This way, down the passage."

She led him along a dim and narrow hallway, which after a turn led in a direction that the young man judged to be toward the rear of the house. Finally they stepped into a small room, utterly dark, across which she guided him by a hand. Then she opened a door and pushed him forth, stepping out after him.

"Much obliged," said Jerry.

"Oh, I couldn't have left you there! And what's more, I can't myself remain.

Those beasts of Barbareras! When I came into the house after seeing you by the river, first one and then the other annoyed me with hints and looks, until my heart turned to ice. The storm made no difference to them. Perhaps in its uproar they thought I should be so terrorized that I'd yield to anything they asked. It's dreadful. Take me with you now!"

"But we're still prisoners; we can't cross the bayou," Jerry exclaimed, appalled at this impetuous demand.

"Keep me with you, anyway, Mr. Jerry. I'll not go back into the power of the two men again, one a serpent and the other a wolf, never! I don't mind the rain and mud. The wind has dropped, so it matters no longer. Somehow and somewhere we'll cross the water to safety. If I don't go with you now, I'll never go; I know that as well as I know anything. For one or the other of those men will seize me, and bear me off alone, and that will be the end."

How much of this was truth and how much was acting was quite beyond one of Jerry's direct nature. He suspected that it was a mixture of both, for very likely she did desire to flee her persecutors, but on the other hand the case was not so bad as she pictured and in thus appealing to his chivalry she sought to use him as a tool in her game, whatever it was.

He remembered what he had told Gailard; she was a crook at heart. Whatever the circumstances, she never would be entirely open, entirely honest, but keep something in concealment. She was one who would bear watching continually.

"All right; come along with me," he said, suddenly.

He would enter the game himself.

CHAPTER XIV.

DAWN AND DUSK.

JERRY MOFFAT and Anita Carley crouching among bushes on the bank of the bayou beheld in the early morning light a negro launching a boat upon the opposite side, one that had been dragged high from the water. At Jerry's hail he gazed in sur-

prise and doubt, but finally recognizing the youth, began to row across the still-heaving inlet.

From the time the pair had left Zorrilla's house they had suffered nothing beyond the inconvenience and weariness caused by waiting in wet woods for break of day. No search apparently had been made for Jerry; at any rate, they heard no shouts, saw no moving lights in the darkness, observed no movements that indicated a hunt for the escaped prisoner. Nor was the night such as to favor pursuit.

The girl had made no complaint, only clasping Jerry's hand tightly and from time to time answering to a question from him that she was not cold, or sleepy. Her courage, whatever her other qualities or lack of them, was not to be gainsaid; she bore the discomforts of mud, of the blind gropings in darkness, of the blows of wet bushes, of the slow-dragging hours, with an unexpected fortitude and at moments almost with light-heartedness, which Jerry could account for only by a real satisfaction on her part in being relieved of a dread, the fear of her masters and persecutors.

He felt, moreover, a growing pity for this companion. That one so young and with so undeniable a charm should involve herself with men like the Barbaneras when she might have directed her course in another and safer direction, contained elements for a tragedy—the tragedy of a flawed character. Love of ease, love of money, perhaps, had led her to the first step; and now she was struggling against the net into which her own acts had brought her.

When they had been rowed across the bayou by the negro, and the latter had set off up the channel in search of other storm-borne craft, Jerry took counsel with himself. It was still dawn. Gaillard would yet be asleep. Anita Carley was exhausted. However much he might prefer another shift, the only expedient for the moment was to take charge of the girl until such a time as he could consult with his employer as to her disposition. The natural solution of the problem she created was to send her away.

Reaching his cottage, he found his old housekeeper already astir.

"This young lady was a guest of the Zorrillas, but she was out in the storm," he stated. "Let her rest in my room until she's refreshed, then I'll conduct her to Mr. Gaillard, with whom she's acquainted."

This sufficed to satisfy both the curiosity and the scruples of the Frenchwoman, who led Anita Carley away with sympathetic inquiries concerning her health, exclamations of dismay at her muddied shoes and skirt, and promises that her ward should be made comfortable.

Jerry flung himself into a chair. He absolutely was tired out; he had had enough of hurricanes and Barbaneras and girls, too, for some time; and he began to wonder with a vague sort of interest just what it was he had got from the little trunk over yonder, this paper wallet of papers which he had held all the night and now had here. Well, he would stow the loot away in a safe place, until he could go at the papers by aid of his Spanish dictionary.

Two hours later, washed, shaved, in clean clothes and after a hearty breakfast, he went while Anita Carley slept to relate his adventures to Gaillard. The latter he perceived standing by the little pier, from which a boat was just transporting Isabel and Felipa Zorrilla across the bayou to their own side.

"I thought you must have got them out of the marsh before the storm," said Jerry as Gaillard faced about. "Old Hernando and all his house were terribly wrought up over the ladies' absence; had given them up for lost, in fact, until I told the old gentleman you had gone to the rescue."

"Until you told him!"

Gaillard's amazement was complete.

"I chatted with him for a while last night in his own bedchamber," said Jerry. And he thereupon related his night experiences, omitting only mention of the wallet of papers.

Of his action in taking them he now was divided between two opinions, nor was he at all sure that Gaillard would not disapprove the seizure. Enemies though the men were, their personal effects might be considered to be sacred. For this reason, therefore, Jerry maintained a discreet silence concerning his booty.

"Well, you had best go and sleep," Gaillard stated, at the end. "As for the Carley girl, I leave her in your hands."

"The deuce you do! I don't want her."

"Neither do I. What would the good people across the bayou say if they beheld her about my door? Nothing good, be sure. But you and she, with your house-keeper to chaperon you, ought to have a very cheerful time."

"Yes; and everybody on the estate talking scandal," said Jerry.

Gaillard shrugged his shoulders and laughed.

"Then send her back to the Zorrillas."

"Those Barbanera devils are after her, she declares. I can't just push her away."

Gaillard continued to laugh, as if the matter were the greatest joke in the world. He announced that he had escaped from her snare once and shouldn't give her chance to set another for his feet in his own house. No, she was Jerry's charge. And a very nonplused, indignant youth returned to the cottage: Louis Gaillard had no more heart than old Hernando Zorrilla.

In the house he cast himself into a chair and brooded gloomily, until he fell asleep, sending a gentle snore throughout the room. He slept there, undisturbed by the aged Frenchwoman, until late afternoon, when he awoke and perceived Anita Carley entering a door.

"Well, how are you feeling?" he asked.

"Quite fresh and rested," she replied.

"And how do you like this cottage?"

"It's very comfortable, and the little flower-garden in front is very pretty."

"I'm glad you think so," said he, with a sickly grin. "For you're to reside here until something can be arranged. Mr. Gaillard says it wouldn't be proper for you to visit in his house unattended by a duenna."

"But what, then, of this?"

"This is quite proper, on the other hand."

"I don't see the difference," she exclaimed.

"Neither do I," said Jerry. "But you're to be my guest if you remain on his estate."

"How extraordinary!"

"Isn't it?"

She gave him an intent look.

"You don't appear overjoyed to have me."

"I'll try to bear with you," said he in feeble tones.

"The idea! Anyhow, I'm not going back to that house, nor into the hands of that terrible pair of Cubans. I'll have to think about this; I can't understand Mr. Gaillard's coolness."

"And meanwhile?"

"Meanwhile I'll stay here. What else is there for me to do? I can't live among the trees or subsist on roots."

"Clothes?"

"If the young ladies over there won't send me my trunk, why, Mr. Jerry, you'll have to find some more clothes for me. You can do it, I know. There's a village and a store with goods."

"Haven't you enough money to go back to New York?" he asked bluntly.

"No. Besides, now that I'm on the right side of the bayou, among friends, I don't know that I wish to return there just yet. If Mr. Gaillard instructed you to receive me as your guest, I don't see that you have any discretion in the matter. We've been good friends so far in our brief acquaintance; why shouldn't we continued to be? And this old Frenchwoman is a dear. Tomorrow I'll call and talk with Mr. Gaillard himself, who may have mistaken your words."

"Talk with him, by all means, Miss Anita."

"I shall. And, now, aren't you hungry?"

"As a wolf."

"I think a meal is awaiting us in your pretty little dining-room." She paused to consider him. "This is really the first good look I've had of you," she remarked. "I knew last night you were brave; now I know you're good-looking, too."

"You'll not be hard to sit across the table from yourself," said Jerry. "But please don't vamp me; and it would scarcely be worth your while, either. I'm but a clerk; small game."

"What makes you think I should?" she asked.

"I guess you could if you wanted to," said he carelessly. "Let's hunt this supper now."

"You're queer," said she.

"Maybe and maybe not." And they went into the little dining-room, where from time to time he found her eyes fixed on him with a curious, meditative look as they ate their meal.

To the Frenchwoman he gave instructions to prepare a room for the guest, who, by Mr. Gaillard's desire, would remain for a few days. After they had eaten, they sat on the little veranda and carried on a desultory conversation. The scent of flowers, the girl's musical tones, the peace of falling dusk made Anita Carley's presence seem pleasant to the youth after all.

"Maybe Gaillard will take it into his head to stroll here and see you this evening," Jerry remarked. "He frequently does the unexpected."

But Louis Gaillard at that instant was preparing for a departure from his house in another direction. He placed a loaded revolver in his pocket, his hat upon his head, and took a stout stick in his hand. Then he went to the pier and entered one of the recovered boats, sculling in it for some distance down the bayou.

Though a light breeze blew, the sky was clear, with stars already beginning to appear. So calm now was earth and air that one would never have known that but twenty-four before a hurricane had raged with indescribable fury. In the Zorrilla house lights were burning in the dusk, which the boatman noted with vigilant eye.

The mission on which he was bent was a rash one, he well knew. Did he fall into the hands of men there, either by accident or through Isabel Zorrilla's betrayal, death would certainly be his reward. But at thought of the risk his blood only sang the quicker. In all the generations of Gaillard's none stood back because of danger.

What had led him into this reckless act he could not exactly have said. In part Isabel Zorrilla's beauty, perhaps; the challenge of her violet eyes and bright face, perhaps; and perhaps in answer to the reckless mood which the two girls' presence in his house inspired. And whether this should be the last secret meeting, or whether it should lead to more, he neither knew nor asked. That would take care of itself.

But if Louis Gaillard went on a foolhardy errand, he did not go in foolish confidence. The pistol in his pocket was evidence of his preparation to make a hard fight if he were attacked; and he proposed to approach with every care the live-oak he had named to Isabel.

The tree stood near the water; he had chosen it for that reason. When he had rowed some distance along the bayou, he reversed his boat and propelled it noiselessly northward by the eastern bank. It was now quite dark, with but an afterglow in the western sky. Very cautiously he drew near the designated trysting-place, listened for a time, then pushed the bow against the sloping earth, and sprang out.

Again he remained, unmoving, for a time, while he strove to penetrate the gloom of the trees and to discover enemies if they were present. No sound except the whisper of leaves in the night breeze fell on his ear, nothing but the dim shapes of the huge old trees met his eye. Casting the painter of the best about a bush, he went swiftly up the slope to the live-oak designated, where, by its trunk, he posted himself.

Five minutes passed. Then he saw a vague figure move near to him. Even in the darkness he recognized her for the daughter of the Zorrillas. She had come, she had come to meet him!

He stepped forth. "Isabel!" he whispered.

"You're here?" was the answer as low.

"Ah, you knew I should be." He caught her hand in both of his. "You knew it, or you never would have come yourself. A Gaillard would visit hell to keep his word to a woman like you."

She sought to withdraw the hand he clasped, but he refused to let it go.

"I should never have come," she said anxiously.

"Ah, but you came, which is all that matters. You and I have ceased to hate each other, if indeed there ever was such in our hearts."

"I still hate you; a Zorrilla must hate a Gaillard," she said. "No, don't draw me closer."

"I will, because I love you. Even last night I didn't know it, though the prompt-

ings in my heart should have given me warning. But now—now I know.”

“Louis, Louis!” she said, gasping a little.

In the darkness his arm encircled her figure; she felt herself brought close against his breast; a tumult of feeling was loosed in her being.

“And you love me,” came his fierce whisper.

Her body began to tremble.

“Oh, I know not, I know not!” she replied.

“Let your heart speak, then.” She was drawn yet closer; his lips found hers; in a languor of passion, she was unable to resist, had no desire to resist; in truth, welcomed his lips.

Off in the gloom a stick snapped.

“Hark!” he breathed in her ear. Then: “Steal away. I’ll be here the third night from this, at the same hour. One kiss more. Oh, my Isabel, you carry my love and life and all that’s dear with you!”

Without a sound she vanished. Gaillard gripped his revolver. The next sound he heard was from the water; a swish of bushes and a slap of a wave on wood. And he knew his boat was gone.

CHAPTER XV.

BETRAYED.

LOUIS GAILLARD began to walk stealthily forward, for behind him now lay no road of escape unless he cast himself into the waters of the bayou to swim, and this he did not as yet choose to do. In truth, he was in a mood to strike a sharp and telling blow at his enemies. For he had experienced a sudden revulsion of feeling from the exalted state in which he had separated from Isabel Zorrilla.

When he heard some furtive hand draw his boat out of reach, he felt as if his brain had received a blow; his presence here had been anticipated, and his movements watched in spite of the darkness; and but one explanation was possible:

Isabel Zorrilla had been acting. Her hate for him and his house, though dissembled, was real, active, malevolent. She had betrayed him into the hands of her merci-

less old grandsire. Her kiss was a false kiss. Isabel? Better were she named Jezebel.

What made his anger the hotter was the knowledge that he should have counted on nothing less, that at bottom he had no one to blame but himself for the perilous position in which he found himself. She had merely played on his self-assurance.

All at once, as he moved ahead in the gloom, a pair of arms were flung about him. Struggle as he would, he was unable to break free from that powerful-hug in which his own arms were kept helpless at his sides, his revolver rendered impotent, the very breath crushed out of him. The great limbs encircling him were like those of a gorilla for strength; they yielded not a particle under his resistance; indeed, they but increased the tightness of their hold.

On his neck he felt the other’s warm breath. Then his captor uttered a low call, and a second man approached, snapping on an electric-torch.

“Ha! we’ve caught the bird,” exclaimed a voice Gaillard recognized as Emilio Barbanera’s, as the glare of the light was directed at his face. “Keep him fast, José, until I extract the revolver from his fingers and bind his wrists. This time, my dear Gaillard, you’ll not escape as you did from those clumsy scoundrels in New York.”

“I suppose it’s your intention to cut my throat,” Gaillard returned, cool enough now that he knew with whom he had to deal.

“In good time, in good time, my dear and charming young man. But first we propose to make use of you. Why should we send your spirit forth from this world before we’ve emptied your pockets and relieved you of your property? We, the Barbaneras, are, in addition to being poor, quite thrifty; and it’s our idea to correct our poverty by our virtue of thrift. Ah, now, you’ll not succeed in breaking or loosing those knots, I think.”

The prisoner was of a similar way of thinking. As the smaller Barbanera had talked, he had been busy tying Gaillard’s hands; and though the cord was fine, it was strong and was knotted by the little man with exceeding care and cunning. No, it was not likely that the captive would suc-

ceed in freeing his wrists. Yet the other's words, whatever obscure and sinister purpose lay behind them, opened springs of hope; he was not to be slain at once, and where there was delay there were always seeds of opportunity.

He had no intention that his enemies should find him dismayed or fearful.

"So this is your brother, is it, friend Emilio, who put his big bear limbs about me so affectionately?" he remarked.

"It is he, and he could have cracked your ribs had it been his wish."

"I haven't a doubt of it. His arms are very strong, but I presume his head's correspondingly weak. That's sometimes the case: all muscle and no brain."

"No Gaillard ever had more of the latter than he," Emilio Barbanera exclaimed. "Take warning if you would not suffer, and reserve your impudence."

"Ah, well. As you please. Now that you have me, I suppose no one on your side will be more delighted than your fair cousin, Isabel Zorrilla, especially since it was only last evening that she was forced to bear with my assistance in the face of the hurricane, a very annoying circumstance."

"Naturally she'll be delighted," said Emilio. "What person with Zorrilla blood in his or her veins would not be in removing the family's last enemy? All day she and Felipa have been mocking you in saving them in order that they should triumph over you."

"Indeed."

"It was very amusing to listen to their words and watch how they took you off, my conceited fellow. If you could have heard and beheld for yourself, it would have set your crest drooping. Wasn't it exceedingly comical, José?"

"Most comical, Emilio," said the other brother, who was still at Gaillard's back, in deliberate tones. "Cousin Isabel in particular never finished laughing at this clown's antics. And she was very witty."

"What was it she said of his feet?"

"That they were like a duck's, and that he waddled about like a duck. Yes, it was to a duck she compared him, though Felipa thought he had ears and a bray like an ass's. I myself prefer Felipa's description."

"You would," said Gaillard. "For asses would come first into the mind of a muleteer."

A blow on the side of his head was José Barbanera's answer.

"You dog of a Frenchman, guard your tongue when addressing a Spanish gentleman," said the Cuban in a growl, "or I shall take you in my two hands and break you apart. You may imagine you have wit, but it's not so. Therefore, silence."

The two brothers now exchanged a few words, after which they caught Gaillard by the arm and led him to the bank of the bayou. The beam of the electric-torch played upon the latter brought into view Gaillard's skiff, with a black-bearded, roughly dressed man seated in it, who at once began to row the craft back whence it had been seized.

Into this captors and captive entered. Then the oarsman began to pull southward, the light was extinguished, and the ride proceeded in silence. Gaillard recognized the futility of raising a cry for help; one of José Barbanera's great hands would instantly close on his throat, shutting off breath as well as sound. If an escape were to be made it must be by some exercise of cunning, and an appearance of docility, of yielding to the inevitable, might lull his foes vigilance so that it could be accomplished.

Gaillard's mind was in a sense partitioned between hot resentment, curiosity, and pre-occupation; resentment at the girl who had tricked him, and at himself, too, for being so easily tricked; curiosity to learn where these men were taking him, instead of conducting their prisoner to Hernando Zorrilla, their master, as was naturally to be expected; and a certain absorption in tentative lines of action and in a weighing of chances.

For Isabel Zorrilla he imagined himself possessed of a hatred, and with her all of her family, that never again would permit inaction on his part if he should slip free from this predicament. Henceforth it should be war—war in secret, but, nevertheless, war without mercy. He should devise some means by which to wipe out Hernando Zorrilla and the Barbaneras one after another, and so fill the heart of the beautiful

traitress with terror that she should tremble at mention of his name.

The Zorrillas were a nest of vipers. Like vipers let them die, the males, while the females—well, the pity of it was that Gaillard honor forbade their extinguishment.

The boat came to the little island in the bayou, so long in dispute between the two families. Here the prisoner was taken from the boat and marched through the woods by light of the torch to the old mansion where had lived the first Gaillard and the first Zorrilla, until that hour when jealousy of a woman divided them.

Gaillard knew the place well; the old dwelling still habitable, yet sound; and he needed not the Barbaneras' hands to guide him through its broad hallway or into its main room.

Though he knew that Hernando Zorrilla had seized the island and therefore must have maintained possession by a strong armed force, the prisoner saw no guards. Possibly they were stationed along the bayou, or perhaps they had been withdrawn altogether for the time to assist in labor on the estate in repairing damage wrought by the storm. Whatever the situation in that respect, this was a place of confinement—if confinement and not death was to be his lot, as suggested—that he infinitely preferred to one directly under old Zorrilla's eye. But why had he been brought here?

With more of the cord that Emilio produced from his pocket Gaillard's feet were secured, after which he was lowered to the floor so that his back rested against a wall. Then José Barbanera lighted a candle, set it on the mantle of the fireplace, and seated himself on a box, left here by some previous visitor to the dwelling.

The rays of the candle's flame but emphasized the emptiness and desolation of the room, whose windows yawned without panes and whose stained, musty walls breathed age, abandonment, slow decay. The floor was yet damp from rain of the night before that had penetrated the dwelling's roof and sides. From the eaves without came the faint squeaks and rustles of bats which there had lodgment. A wretched house, an insignificant island, one would have thought, over which to wrangle.

Emilio Barbanera paced thoughtfully to and fro for a time, twisting the points of his mustache with alternate movements of his hand.

"That girl, we must have her even if she crossed to this Gaillard's estate," he addressed his brother. "If she has the papers, as I believe, she must never be allowed to get away."

"It was that scoundrel who escaped that took them," answered the other.

"Nay, I think not. How should he know of them? And it was only a moment before I returned to lock the trunk. You saw him brought into the room, and he had them not then."

"That is true; he had but a wet coat. Besides, he was with the old man."

"Then absolutely it was she," said Emilio. "She has been some days in the house; she could have spied on us, seen them, and very likely was saying at the moment we were called forth. Ah, I shall wring her neck some day for this. Probably she darted into the room, found the trunk unlocked, seized the papers, vanished again."

"But where has she remained to-day?" José inquired, with a grave lift of his shaggy eyebrows. "No one has been seen here about the house or the grounds."

"I think she went off with that young fellow. That, at least, is the only reasonable explanation, unless she drowned herself in the bayou. Oh, the miserable creature, after all I've paid her. Let me but have my hands on her pretty white neck! If she had fled, Isabel must persuade her to return."

His gaunt, somber-faced brother waved a hand toward Gaillard, who had listened to this discussion with only partial understanding.

"That must wait till morning," said he. "But this fowl, he needs attention at once, for he has come into our hands more quickly than we had expected, thus saving us the trouble of going for him. The girl can't get away yet. Meanwhile, we should pluck what the gods have given us, as is the saying. Go, then, my little Emilio, and prepare such papers as are necessary for him to sign."

At that Louis Gaillard spoke:

"And what, may I ask, am I supposed to affix my name to?"

The smaller brother of the pair turned and regarded the questioner with a look full of insolence.

"To what we place before you," said he. "But no harm can be done in telling you, since it will make no difference in the result. You will sign deeds delivering your estate to my excellent brother, José." And the speaker made a mocking bow to the prisoner.

"What, are you so self-sacrificing?" Gaillard retorted. "Don't you share in the plunder, my fat little thief? Aren't you to dip your hand in the honey-pot also and lick your fingers while your grave-digger of a brother licks his? I swear I never saw such magnanimity."

"You fail to understand," Emilio remarked with a sneering smile.

"Then perhaps you'll make the matter clear to me."

Emilio grimaced.

"Well, it's scarcely necessary, but since it may make your joy in our happiness greater, I'll go so far as to grant your wish. The Barbanera brothers prosper. José, who receives the Gaillard estate, will marry Felipa Zorrilla; I marry Isabel, under favor of her respected grandparent, and also by her own wish, and obtain the Zorrilla property. You—presto—vanish. But it will be announced, however, that having grown weary of altercations on the one hand and of plantation life on the other, why, you sold your property and departed for a residence in, say, Paris."

"A most imaginative fable."

"Is it not, my dear, stupid Gaillard? Time gives counsel, you see. First, I thought it sufficient merely to be rid of you, but deliberation taught me how that riddance might be turned into gold for the purse of deserving José here. A very blessed thing for the community and the region, too. Strife will cease. The ancient quarrel of the Gaillards and the Zorrillas will be forgotten; and the joined banners of the brothers Barbanera, figuratively speaking, will float peacefully over the two properties. Is not that a charming picture?"

"Too charming to seem an actuality. Let me ask, does that old scoundrel who sits yonder in his house, pulling at his beard and hatching deviltry, approve of this Utopia as you draw it? Report has always said Hernando would demand that whoever married his granddaughter should adopt the name of Zorrilla. But I presume that wouldn't stick a little rogue like you."

"I shall marry Isabel Zorrilla, yet not change my name," Emilio smirked. "Old Hernando has assented. Henceforth the name of Barbanera shall be in the ascendant."

The vanity of the little beast would have been laughable had it not been so disgusting, or so like being justified by after results. As matters stood, it appeared very much as if the Barbaneras were in the ascendant, as if their schemes should come to fruition, as if their crime should give them wives and wealth.

Old Hernando might prefer to see one of his relations marry his granddaughter instead of another. But that the man, unless he had grown senile, however much he hated Gaillard, could lower his stiff pride to participate in a diabolical plot to secure his enemy's estate for a Barbanera, seemed utterly impossible, unbelievable.

Fight for what he claimed as his own, yes; take life in defense of it, yes; scheme and plan to outwit Gaillard in the matter of this little island, and continue to hate him, yes; but these were things that ran with what Hernando Zorrilla considered his rights and his honor.

But to engage in an out-and-out murder and theft for what had never belonged to him, nor to which he had never laid claim—that hardly fitted the character of even Gaillard's chief enemy.

Yet these Barbaneras, who, it was easy to see, would stop at nothing, might have insinuated themselves into the old Spaniard's confidence, poisoned his mind with false charges against Gaillard, persuaded him, worked on his ancient prejudice, and at length won his assent and assistance by deception. Or was that not needed? Did the spirit of a devil lurk in the old man's heart? After all these years, was this his enemy's true nature? Was even his pride

and honor a pretense? Was his soul utterly black?

"And after I've signed over my property to your handsome brother, José, what then?" Louis inquired of Emilio.

"Then," said the latter, "why, then you travel on the journey before mentioned, a journey to"—he paused, smiling evilly on the prisoner; and in that smile Louis Gaillard read his death-warrant—"to Paris," he concluded.

Now it was Gaillard's turn to smile.

"Not yet are the papers signed, so don't count too surely on a muleteer of a Barbanera sitting in the house of my fathers," said he.

"Ah, but you will pen your name."

"Not for any Barbanera or Zorrilla who ever lived."

"There are means to make you," said Emilio, lighting a cigarette and fastening his eyes on Gaillard's face as if to read every thought of the latter. "We could put a hot iron to your soles, for instance. But before coming to that, if strong measures are necessary, we'll lay you as you are in a boat and leave you for a few hours to the mercy of the mosquitoes. That will bend the most obstinate man, a period of reflection in the marsh yonder."

Gaillard's face disclosed nothing of the consternation he felt at this threat, for he had himself well in hand. But he knew the marsh; none better. He comprehended thoroughly just what he should suffer were his face and body submitted to the attacks of the ravenous insects haunting its grasses. And as he looked back into the little Barbanera's eyes, he perceived that the man would not hesitate for a instant to carry out his threat.

"Why trouble to force him?" said the larger brother, José, suddenly. "If he will not sign, then we shall kill him at once. Afterward you, Emilio, can write his name with the skill you have, making it so that no one can find a difference."

"It's best that he sign for himself," said Emilio, with a shake of his head. "Later, his relations might grow suspicious if they heard nothing from or of him, institute an investigation, then a lawsuit. There are such things as handwriting experts, my good

brother. They can distinguish the false from the true, even when the former is excellently done. No, the signature attached to the deeds must be Gaillard's own."

"As you say, then," was the reply. "You're more learned in such matters than I, having been trained in a seminary of law."

"Never fear, José. He will sign in good time."

"Very well; I'll stay and watch, while you go and prepare the papers. Leave your cigarettes with me."

Emilio emptied his cigarette-case into the other's outstretched hand, at the same time saying:

"Meditate, my stubborn-minded Gaillard, upon the matter of mosquitoes during my absence. Imagine the feeling of one mosquito-bill inserted in your flesh, then multiply that unpleasant sensation by a hundred, next by a thousand, last by a million. It will afford you an interesting subject for thought."

Louis Gaillard's look was both careless and contemptuous.

"Oh, it's not worth while," said he. Your plans this time will end about where those did you made in New York. A Cuban renegade can't keep me long."

"Dog!" hissed Emilio.

"Well, a Cuban dog, then, if you prefer that term," said Gaillard.

CHAPTER XVI.

ON THE USE OF SWORDS.

EMILIO BARBANERA, with a look of limitless hate, went from the room. To judge from his face he would have been only too willing to send his prisoner that instant to a lingering death in the marsh. But Gaillard had no apprehension for the immediate present, since the man's greed would temper and govern any other passion.

Of the two Barbanera brothers it was easy to perceive that the little Emilio possessed the brains, had devised the plot, and was the leader, though in the quality of courage one might suspect that he would fall far behind the tall and grave José.

The one was a fox, the other a wolf.

Both, however, were on a par in other respects; equally avaricious, equally lustful, equally ready to commit any crime that would promote their interests. The mixture of Barbanera with Zorrilla blood had produced a decidedly villainous strain.

Gaillard considered the man left to guard him. The bearded José appeared to be meditating matters of exceeding solemnity.

"It has come to my ears that you claim to be something more than a tyro with foils," Louis Gaillard remarked, in an effort to discover what this Barbanera's weakness might be.

"I'm expert both with foils and swords," the other answered with complacency.

"In your own opinion, or in that of other men?"

Barbanera bent his gloomy eyes upon the speaker with an expression of contempt.

"It's not necessary for me to boast of my skill," he stated, "but I'll say that on one or two occasions men have undertaken to question my ability with a naked blade, and they ceased to live. Yes, I'm a master of fence."

Gaillard permitted himself an incredulous laugh.

"Against much clumsy opponents as you've met, perhaps. I've heard there were no good swordsmen in Cuba, however. It's natural for one who has conquered a few amateurs to come to have an exaggerated opinion of one's own powers, until a real swordsman is encountered."

"What do you know of swords, you who live here?"

"Always enough and to spare in order to defeat a Zorrilla."

"I'm not a Zorrilla, though be it admitted Zorrilla blood flows in my veins; I'm a Barbanera, which is a different matter when it comes to fencing. You speak of my only having defeated amateurs. Know, sir, that I've bested some of the finest fencers of Spain when they came visiting to Havana, and these, as is generally recognized, are the choicest in Europe, which in turn means the best in the world. Therefore, I rank among the few superior swordsmen in the world to-day. I say so; my friends say so; all who know me say so. Hence, it is true."

Clearly the man's vanity centered in his skill at blades. Gaillard had suspected it; he trusted to play upon it and find in this possibly a door of escape.

It was most probable that the man was a swordsman and a good one; he possessed a quick eye, a great reach, and a hand and wrist of steel. Of his strength, enormous, animal-like, Louis had had convincing evidence when he found himself in the Cuban's grasp. Doubtless, too, he uttered the truth when he announced that he had summarily disposed of rivals in fights.

He was of the type of men who, two or three centuries before, were met with on the Continent—Frenchmen, Englishmen, Italians, Spaniards—and who, using this particular weapon with unusual proficiency, lived by the arm, sold their services to the highest bidder, rid their employers of enemies, and generally inspired fear.

But without underrating the man's possible dexterity at sword-play, Gaillard asked nothing more than to meet him in such a contest if he could gain his liberty.

For the Gaillards had ever taken to the sword. It was a tradition in the family, and an inheritance, so to speak. The race had a peculiar genius for fencing. When it went out of fashion, and, indeed, for most people became obsolete, the Gaillards continued to practise the art, from generation to generation, father teaching son, so that all the original love of the blade was preserved, and all the early skill, and with this an accumulation of three centuries' study of methods, of curious and obscure strokes, and of innumerable secret modes of attack.

Louis Gaillard had fenced in London, in Paris, in Rome, and in Vienna; and there had been few who could hold him even, and none to defeat him.

But this was not known. He made no boast of it, and, except one or two French *maitres de fence* in New York with whom he was wont to exercise when in the city, none was aware of his extraordinary mastery in this particular line, not even the Zorrillas, though they had knowledge in a degree of the common Gaillard *forte*.

By arousing in José Barbanera a jealousy for his skill the man might be inveigled into

a match, whereby the other brother's scheme might be set awry.

"I've fenced a little myself," Louis proceeded, "and of all swordsmen I've met, Spaniards, instead of being the best, as you say, were the poorest. They lack adroitness, *finesse*. They are heavy of hand, and a broad-sword would much better suit their style, as it would the Germans'. What they know, they have copied from the French or Italians—and copied it badly, I swear. But I presume that to you they appeared wonderful because of your inexperience."

"What, you doubt that I can fence?" Barbanera cried.

"No. I give you credit for knowing the rudiments, but my doubt extends, I confess, to your ability to go beyond that."

The cavernous-eyed José sprang to his feet.

"Had we swords here I should teach you proper respect for one who's your better, my fledgling," he thundered. "*Dios*, for a country rice-grower, to play judge and critic of the man who dazzled Havana, and Cuba, and all the western world with his magnificent prowess! I call upon Heaven to witness that never was there such ignorance and presumption. Bah! why should I, José Barbanera, a famous duelist, a swordsman without a peer, one before whom others grow pale when he bares his blade, harken to such childish words?"

He again sat down upon the box, and if he had had a cloak Gaillard imagined that he would have wrapped himself in it in true Spanish scorn.

"I would gladly meet you."

"You would fall dead at my first thrust," Barbanera responded contemptuously.

"I'd give you five thousand dollars if you so much as pricked my skin in an hour."

The Cuban flung back his head and burst into a great laugh, disclosing a wide mouth and long, fanglike teeth. His laughter lasted for quite a full minute, while the empty mansion answered with echoing sounds as if invisible, derisive spirits were joining in his mirth.

"You'll be the death of me with your silly talk, you," he exclaimed at last.

"I'd be the death of you if we were fighting."

"All Frenchmen are braggarts and cowards," said the other. "Ha, ha, ha! The idea of putting a sword in your hand and amusing myself with you begins to grow in my mind. Truly it does. As a cat plays with a mouse, so would I play with you, until at length when I was weary of the sport I would spit you on my point. There would be more satisfaction in that method than in my brother Emilio's plan of depositing you in the marsh to supply the mosquitoes with a meal.

"I, José Barbanera, should be the mosquito, and my sword should be the bill with which to penetrate your body and drink your blood. Ha! I'll propose it to Emilio." And he began to stroke his long mustache that in size would have stirred the admiration of Don Quixote.

"The notion is very agreeable to me also, friend José. Then I should learn whether in truth a Cuban has the making of a first-rate fencer. I agree to teach you, moreover, such important details of the art as you lack—if you survive."

"Survive, o-ho!" Again Barbanera laughed.

"If your brother would bring weapons here we could try our respective skills without delay. When there is a difference of opinion of this nature between two gentlemen, the quicker it's settled the better."

"An excellent idea. But first, my dear fellow, there are papers which you must sign." And the speaker regarded Gaillard with a crafty look.

"You're still determined on that?"

"Absolutely."

"I might agree to make the property a stake."

"In what way?"

"By wagering it on our contest. If you defeat me, then the property should be deeded over to you without condition—yes, I might even consider that. But there should be a provision also that I go free."

"But I should kill you. How then could you deed the property to me? A dead man can't write his name on a paper."

"Nay. But if you are what you claim, you should be able merely to wound me so as not to prevent me from writing, or, indeed, simply disarm me. Then you would

gain the property with a good title. And let me add, you and your brother will never succeed in forcing me to sign away my estate, however much you may resort to torture, not against my will; while if you murder me and forge my name, my relations will certainly bring the matter to the attention of the courts, and you will be apprehended and eventually hung.

"Law in this country lays a heavy hand on malefactors, my dear José Barbanera. You're a stranger to it, so be warned. But if we fight and you defeat me, then you secure the estate with my open acknowledgment. I don't say that I agree to this now, but I may consider it."

"There's a certain truth in your words," said the other thoughtfully. "Beyond question, I could disarm you if it pleased me to do so. I shall consult with my brother, Emilio, in regard to this suggestion. It amounts to this: we fight; I make you helpless; you buy your life with your estate. Have I heard correctly, sir?"

"You have. But I've not yet made up my mind. For you're a famous swordsman, while I'm but an obscure rice-grower, as you've said."

"Ho! you begin to tremble already," Barbanera cried.

"My estate is worth much; it's only reasonable that I should hesitate to risk it thus. If I lost, I should depart with only the shirt I wear on my back."

The other's black eyes began to burn with greed, as if already he had the Gaillard property within his grasp. The prisoner, narrowly observing him, felt that the suggestion implanted in his brain would continue to sprout; for to the Cuban, swollen with vanity, it appeared that he had only to extend his arm, to make one thrust of his blade in order to bring back all of Gaillard's possessions fixed from its point.

Whether his vanity contained a sufficient element of obstinacy to withstand his brother's scheme, and override it, was now the question. Time alone could answer that.

"Perhaps Hernando Zorrilla has a pair of swords," Gaillard remarked.

"Yes, several pair. I've tried them all. Two of Seville make are the best."

"I see you're a connoisseur as well as a fencer."

"Undoubtedly I, José Barbanera, know more of blades and their use than any living man," was the reply.

"There are a pair of old Milan blades, rapiers, in my house that would interest you."

Barbanera's large eyebrows arose.

"Aha! is it possible? I'm even more expert with the long than with the short sword. Some men there may be who can defend themselves with the latter from my attacks for a few minutes, but with rapiers there's not one man walking on two legs to-day, by all the saints, whom I can't skin and quarter and then cut into dice, all in the twinkling of an eye. As for your Milan rapiers," he concluded complacently, "I'll examine them and see if they are what you purport them to be, whether real or mere imitations, when I move into your house."

Egotism of such monumental proportion had never before come within Gaillard's ken. It was too vast for this world; it should have a freer range in another. And the bound man, smiling his thin-lipped smile, determined his should be the hand that would cut it loose.

"Well, I've rather a weakness for rapiers myself," he said. "If the choice rests with me, we'll use them when we fight."

"Then you agree to fight?"

"We'll cross blades sooner or later, I fancy," Gaillard replied.

(To be continued NEXT WEEK.)

One of the most powerful stories of psychic phenomena ever printed.

"SERAPION"

BY FRANCIS STEVENS

BEGINS NEXT WEEK

Breakfast, Dinner, and Supper

by

Charles B. Stilson



"RIGHT, Thirty! Hey! Get a move on you with them dishes!"

Clatter! Clink! Crash!

"Three turtles—Nineteen!" "Full order brown bread—Eleven!" "Half o' clams on the half—Fifteen!"

The air quivered with the vibration of vocal edible fragments, swirled in the swish of the electric fans. Big, steaming coffee urns sizzled and hissed. The cement flooring threw up into the din the slithering scuffle of shapeless, high-heeled shoes. Dishes rattled and crackled. In the front window the griddle spat viciously as cold batter met hot grease and hotter steel.

Outside, in Twenty-Third Street, surface-cars crunched and banged, motor wagons shrieked, and heavy drays pounded. Babel and Babylon of the Twentieth Century were rising to the demands of the day's business.

Through the inner vapor of racket Martha Anne Ellison walked uncertainly. She started at the sound of her own voice as she projected a meek little wireless message into the storm of sound:

"A well-browned baked apple—Six!"

Little chance for euphony in that order.

From between the barred shelves of his cage, the dark-skinned counter-man shot his sweating face at her, and cursed her under his breath with Oriental fluency.

"Coma-agin, you Seex-a-girl! Say heem louder!" he croaked.

Behind Martha Anne the raucous voice of the house-manager rose above the chaos:

"Hey, Six! Six, right! Six! You deaf? That ain't no way to set a gentleman up! Coffee to his left! And do you expect him to handle his knife by the blade? Experienced help, eh? *Huh!*"

The withering contempt injected into the last remark brought a pink flush to the tips of Martha Anne's pretty ears. Uncertainly she moved back again to her "station," and straightened out the prandial disarray with fingers which trembled. There was a close analogy between the temper within her and the steaming protest of the choking coffee urns.

But she forced herself to remember that she was getting a "chance"; that she was only Number Six at Giles's twenty-four-hour restaurant. She had to remember too what she was fast learning: that a "hash-house," in common with a factory, and a department store, is one of the last places in America where the combination of beauty and goodness receives its due consideration.

Beauty *without* may claim the insolent familiarity which passes for courtesy with floorwalker, foreman, and manager. Beauty *with* gets the "hook" every time.

Martha Anne Ellison was both beautiful and good—and she was feeling the hook.

It was all new to Martha Anne. There was all the difference in the world between Mrs. Colton's cool, quiet, well-ordered little boarding-house dining-room in Kingston-on-the-Hunson, and the culinary tornado which raged without cease at Giles's.

Martha Anne worked, not because of any

innate yearning for labor; but because the means of a livelihood which are possible for an indigent young female, without work, had not been taught in her Sunday School. She had come to New York to work, to keep the commandments, and to amass a small fortune, if such might be. She was dismayed at the prospects; but she hadn't a return ticket; and, since a fierce skirmish between Yanks and Huns in the Argonne, she was quite alone in the world.

So Martha Anne, still flushed and flustered, pitched girlfully into the labor that was hers, and which makes life in a quick-lunch establishment a round, red, red-hot period.

To begin with: the clerk in the employment bureau office had been decidedly fresh.

Secondly: the district manager who had come hunting girls for Giles's, and who finally had assigned her to "Number Ten, in Twenty-Third," that morning, had appraised her figure with the eye of a horse-trader, and had inquired pointedly if she cared for "*voody-veel*."

Thirdly: the floor manager at Number Ten had informed her confidentially that she was a "clever kid," and that there was a vacancy in his trunk for her shoes any old time.

Fourthly: on her first trip to the kitchen, the chef had hailed her as "Sweetness," and suggested that she stir the pudding with her finger, and so help to abate the sugar shortage.

Fifthly: the counter-man had squeezed her hand while she was reaching for a biscuit.

Sixthly: the "bus" had mistaken her for his opportunity when he met her in the kitchen-alley.

From sixthly up to somewhere near hundredthly, had been various sorts and conditions of customers: fishy-eyed specimens, with outrageous breaths; keen-eyed ones, with nervous hands; over-fed ones, with pouchy faces—all with the same conversational stock-in-trade.

Severally, they had named her. She was a "good kid," a "sly squab," a "cute chicken," according to the oblique angle of vision which they applied.

One word they all had in common. Not all the dates of Araby ever would tempt Martha Anne's palate again. The sweet fruit would be spoiled for her forever by its name's associations.

If you are a man, it is not expected that this form of persecution will impress you with the weight it has for the feminine. It did not appeal to Martha Anne. Continuation of it hour after hour, a steady keynote to the jangle of confusion that was her day's existence, deepened the peach of her cheeks to an angry cherry, and kindled the smoulder of righteous indignation in her eyes of blue.

But, though she was entirely oblivious to even the possibility of such a contingency, the Fairy Prince was hard on the trail of Martha Anne.

While she was tacking cautiously through the eddies of white bow-aprons and soft and nasty feminine profanity which edged the side-counter, striving like a good skipper to keep to rights her small cargo of brown slices and bowl of milk, the Fairy Prince was standing on the spending side of a counter in Riffany's big store. He was leaning his elbows on a glass-topped case and concentrating all his energies to the task of blowing into the third finger of an old white glove.

Presently, with the aid of the willing helper behind the counter, he confined enough of his breath in that discarded kid digit to fill out a gold circlet of approximately correct dimensions. They the Fairy Prince laughed, and the willing helper smiled discreetly.

The Fairy Prince purchased two rings. One of them flashed with a fragment of arctic brilliance; the other was perfectly plain—the sort which is wont to repose in the right-hand vest-pocket of the best man, along with the minister's fee.

That old kid glove was Martha Anne's. Unlike the prince who had the glass slipper, the prince who had the glove had never seen its wearer. He was none the less determined to find her; and, he was making his preparations.

For I am telling you—and I will proceed to the proof—that the spirit of true romance is not dead in the world.

Breakfast, which ordinarily is just breakfast, was extraordinarily breakfast in this place of Giles's. It was an all-day meal; and the restaurant hired more help and kept less of it than any other station in the Giles system.

Girls came on the "early" at 6 o'clock in the morning. More girls came on at 10:30. At 3 in the afternoon, the earliest were relieved, and rushed out to keep their dates, or to the movies. At 5:30 they came back again, to toil until 8. Every day at 3, certain girls drew their "time" at the cashier's desk, and came no more to Number Ten. They couldn't stand the game, got "in dutch" with the manager, didn't suit, or simply quit.

Male help was more stable. Manager and chef were fixtures. Counter-men, bus-boys, and dish-washers changed frequently, but were not so evanescent as the waitresses. The little, brown-eyed woman at the cash-desk, known only as "Cash," and heavy-lidded, red-haired Delphine, the head-waitress, called Number One, were old hands.

Martha Anne was an "early." At 3 o'clock, when the other girls on her trick gave place to the reliefs, she went with them to the counter, took her portion of cold rice and milk, bread and butter, and coffee, went to one of the rear tables, and swallowed as much of it as she could. Then, seeing customers still flocking to the tables which had been her "station," she re-adjusted her apron and bows, and went back to duty.

Because she was personable, and didn't wear a hair-net, and didn't talk to the rest of them as they talked to each other, the other girls on the trick did not tell her that she was "off the floor."

For nearly the same reason, Delphine of the auburn locks shrugged her shoulders and muttered:

"I should worry if she works her fool head off."

For stated causes, Martha Anne had forfeited title to consideration from the house-manager; and her tired back and aching feet were nothing to him. He grinned when he saw her go back to her station. The reliefs winked at one another and promptly

reapportioned the tables, leaving something more than a generous share of them to Martha Anne, and let her "go to it."

Unlovely of disposition she could never be; but by the time the hour was near which she understood to terminate her day's work, Martha Anne was in a frame of mind which was as nearly vicious as was possible to a sweet young person of her caliber.

Insinuation, innuendo, *double entendre*, and frank, brutish coarseness—all had been her lot from her "trade," with never a wholesome smile or an honest look to lighten the day. Martha Anne felt positively dirty under the brunt of it.

And then the insolent-eyed Delphine had drawled in her ear:

"Sa-ay, girlie, yuh must look pleasant to th' customers, yuh know. That face 'll spoil th' trade."

Never had Delphine's own stylishly-enameled countenance been in greater danger of decoration with a tomato-omelette. For Martha Anne had been informed of her two and one-half hours of gratuitous labor.

"Cat!" thought Martha Anne to herself, and "Dogs!" of the customers. And Martha Anne was like unto Caesar: She had burned her ships, and she could not turn back.

Jimmie Candee, the Candy Kid, of the Eighth Signal Corps, was out "on his own," looking for a broken ground wire. The spot where he had been sent to look had, twenty minutes previously, been one of the hottest corners in a particularly warm sector of the Argonne-Meuse fighting.

Fritz had come over for a visit, had stayed but briefly, and had gone back—quite a bit farther back than the place from which he had started. Yankee infantry had seen him home, and was busy returning the call.

It was in the course of the demonstration attendant upon Fritz's reception that the wire had been broken which the Candy Kid had been sent to find and repair.

Jimmie walked over a low hill. There were trenches at the crest of it; and there were more trenches down below in the valley, with a tangle of posts and barbed wire

beyond them. Between the two positions, the hillside had once been heavily forested, but was so no longer. Stumps, fallen timber, splinters, and large holes in the brown earth had replaced the groves.

Other débris there was, less pleasant to contemplate—I believe I mentioned that Fritz had been over—but the Candy Kid had seen so much of that sort of thing that he was past minding. Eyes on the ground, he trailed the crippled wire down the hillside toward the first line.

Occasionally a "Jack Johnson" screeched across the valley and plumped into the forest on a hill to the right, a few hundred yards across. Then the ground shook, and more trees fell. But Jimmie was used to that, too. So long as Fritzie wasn't shelling his particular hill, Jimmie wasn't worrying.

Half way down a slope an American infantryman sat upon a log. His rust colored steel helmet leaned tipsily over one ear, and he had slumped forward over his knees, as though he were sleeping. But his rifle lay across his lap, and his hands were moving. He was looking fixedly at something which he held in his fingers—held as though it were quite heavy, though it was not.

He saw Jimmie coming at about the time Jimmie saw him; and he let the object fall behind the log, and straightened clumsily on his seat. The Candy Kid turned aside from his pursuit of the wire, and went over.

"Lo, buddy," he greeted.

"Lo," responded the infantryman, meeting his gaze levelly.

Jimmie saw that the spiral on his right leg had been torn jaggedly at the calf, and below the tear it was a damp dark-brown down to his shoe-top. The back of the heavy tan marching-shoe was red. Jimmie's eyes, traveling upward, noticed a small, neat hole just below the right breast-pocket of the blouse; and there again the olive drab was dark and dank. There were wisps of pinkish foam at the corners of the infantryman's tightly-shut lips.

"God, buddy, you're all shot up!" ejaculated Jimmie. "I passed the ambulances a ways back there. They'll soon be along here and get you."

"Me!" said the infantryman, scowling. "They won't get me! Hell, I'm all right! I'm going on in a few minutes—over there."

He pointed across the valley ahead. Turning his head away, he spat; and Jimmie saw that the saliva was crimson.

"Guess you'll have to go back for repairs first, buddy," opined the Candy Kid.

"They got you pretty bad in that leg."

"Hell, I'm all right, I tell you!" retorted the infantryman, savagely. "They didn't get me. I'm going on in a few minutes and get some of them, though—and you can bet on that!"

He stretched out the wounded leg and looked at it, then bent and felt of it. His helmet fell and rolled along the ground. His hand came away red.

"They did get me a little, at that," he admitted, straightening up slowly. "But that's nothing. I'll be out again in a few days—and I'll get a Fritz to pay for that, by God!"

Jimmie retrieved the helmet and replaced it.

The sound of rifle volleys drifted back from the farther side of the rise beyond the valley. The infantryman heard it.

"Ain't it hell," he said querulously, "not to be over there?"

"Say, buddy, is there anything I can do for you?" asked Jimmie, who had been watching his eyes.

"Hell, there ain't—" began the other impatiently, then broke the sentence, and asked: "Got a cigarette?"

Three cigarettes were in the Candy Kid's packet. He shook out one of them, and was about to place it between the wounded man's lips; but the infantryman seized it pettishly with his reddened fingers, and rolled it between his palms.

"Thanks, buddy—that's good," said the infantryman, inhaling the smoke with gasps which drew the fire along the paper a quarter of an inch at a time.

Jimmie lighted one of the remaining cigarettes and squatted on his heels.

"This bird's just about all in," he thought. Aloud he said: "They'll fix you up all right in the hospital, buddy. Those ambulance fellows ought to be along here pretty soon now."

"I'm from Kingston, New York," said the infantryman. "Where you from?"

"McGill, Wyoming. Dad's a sheep man," answered the Candy Kid.

This information seemed to tickle the infantryman. Between chuckles and gasps, he remarked:

"Sheep, eh? Say, this—is—hellishly different—ain't—it?"

He spat again.

"Give me another cigarette, will—you—buddy?"

Jimmie took out his last cigarette. This time it was not taken from him.

"Stick it in my face—buddy," commanded the infantryman; "my—hands—are—tired."

He puffed at it for a moment or two in silence.

"Hell!—I'll—be—all—"

He rolled slowly from the log and lay face downward across his rifle.

Jimmie turned him over. The cigarette was still hanging from his lower lip. Jimmie detached it and threw it away.

"Can you beat it?" muttered the Candy Kid. "I wonder what he was lookin' at." He looked behind the log.

It was a little five-by-three photograph of a girl. Jimmie stared at it, then turned it over and read the inscription on the back.

"His sister."

Still considering the photograph, Jimmie went on down the hill. He found the break in the ground wire, thrust the picture in his pocket, and set to work. In the meantime Fritz opened fire with another battery, on a new range.

Jimmie had finished his splicing and winding when the ground swayed under him. He felt a blast of air, and seemed to be falling skyward.

Next day, in the hospital, he evinced little surprise, but considerable worry when he returned to realities.

"What is it?" asked the nurse.

"There was a picture," said Jimmie vaguely.

"Yes; we found it. Here it is."

She propped it against a fold of the blanket over Jimmie's chest, where he could look at it.

"She lives in Kingston, New York," said the Candy Kid, clearly and triumphantly—and he fainted again.

Five minutes to eight o'clock came at Giles's. The evening reliefs arose from their meal at the rear tables, donned aprons, belts and check-boxes, and prepared to go on the floor. Delphine seated herself at the table next to the cashier's desk and made ready to collect the check-boxes from the day girls, and help "Cash" balance the checks which had been paid at the desk.

"Hey, Number One—pipe what's coppin' Six!" exclaimed Lulu Annis, one of Delphine's favorites, as she passed by with a plate of dry toast. Delphine "piped."

"The nerve of her!" she muttered, and left her seat and stalked majestically down the aisle.

One minute before, a tall, brown-faced young man had entered the restaurant, after promenading back and forth on the Twenty-Third Street sidewalk before the Giles white-front a number of times, as though he found it difficult to screw up his courage. When he arrived at his decision, an embarrassed flush showed through the bronze on his cheeks; but he walked through the doorway without further hesitation, and went directly to Martha Anne's "station."

Martha Anne saw him coming, saw by the look in his eyes that he was going to speak to her, and turned angrily toward the kitchen alley. He was just "another." She had hoped that her trials of that day were over with. Poor Martha Anne!

She felt a light touch on her shoulder, and whirled resentfully. The tall youth stood before her, hat in hand, looking down into her face. Somehow he didn't look like the others. His cheeks were as flushed as her own.

"You are—Miss Ellison?" he queried hesitantly.

"Yes."

"You had a brother—Fred Ellison—in the—th Infantry?"

Martha Anne's blue eyes became suddenly moist. She nodded. She noticed the tan on the tall stranger's cheeks, and the square set of his shoulders.

"You knew Fred—over there?" she asked.

"I was with him when—"

"Nix on kiddin' with th' cust'mers, gir-
lie," cut in the insolent, full-throated voice
of Delphine, minded in this instance to en-
force a rule that usually was disregarded.
As she spoke, she tapped Martha Anne on
the shoulder with a yellow lead pencil. It
was the crack of the whip over the quaking
galley-slave. Only Martha Anne didn't
quake.

"Gee! how much prettier a pretty girl
looks when she's mad!" thought Jimmie
Candee. He had been using his eyes. He
was considerably flustered; but he was a
shrewd youth; and he thought that he un-
derstood.

Three strokes of the bell on the cashier's
desk pierced the other clamor. There was
an instant response of bustling, scuffling,
high-heeled shoes. Big bows and white
aprons started a parade toward the door
to the locker-room. Eight o'clock had ar-
rived.

Some time before—more than two years
—Jimmie had eaten a few meals in one of
these Giles places. He understood that
bell. He moved in toward the wall, hung
up his hat, and faced Delphine with a tan-
talizing smile.

"I'm going to have supper," he said.
"Please reserve another seat for a friend—
no—this one right across from me." He
turned to Martha Anne.

"You're off guard now. Go and get
your street togs on, an' stop here on your
way out."

Opposite him Delphine slammed the back
of a chair against the edge of the stone
table-top with emphasis.

"Thanks," said Jimmie sweetly, and be-
came absorbed in the menu.

Delphine, minus her usual aplomb,
moved off to consult the manager.

Ten minutes later, Martha Anne, still
flushed, and looking rather scared, hesitated
at the end of the table. She had removed
her badges of servitude, and a chic little
hat with a blue bow sat on her soft blond
hair. Jimmie surveyed the effect approv-
ingly.

"Sit down—right across there," he di-

rected. Now that he was meeting with op-
position, Jimmie was fast losing his timid-
ity. "I haven't ordered yet."

Henderson, the manager, warned by Del-
phine, had hung in the offing and watched
the course of events. He now interposed.

"It's against the house rules for the
waitresses to sit at these tables," he said
briskly. "Sorry, mister." The last was a
palpable lie.

Martha Anne started to draw back.

"Sit down!" commanded Jimmie.

"She's fired if she does," snarled Hen-
derson, triumphantly.

"Oh, very well; have her time ready for
her at the desk, and we'll collect it as we
go out," rejoined Jimmie coolly.

Martha Anne's chin had tilted suddenly
at that word "fired." She sat.

"Now you run along," said Jimmie to
Henderson. The manager moved away,
murmuring his opinion of "fresh guys";
but careful to keep his voice at a discreet
pitch. He, too, had noticed Jimmie's
square shoulders.

"Order something," Jimmie thrust a
menu across the table. One of the night
girls stood by, her features struggling be-
tween pretended scorn and real curiosity.

Martha Anne protested. Jimmie in-
sisted. "Toast and coffee," faltered Mar-
tha Anne.

"Here; I said order something! That's
nothing." Jimmie took the menu away
from her. "You look tired—and I'll bet
you're hungry." He turned to the waiting
girl. "Bring us a coupla sirloin steaks,
hash-browned potatoes, olives, celery,
string-beans, Boston brown bread and cof-
fee; with ice-cream and chocolate cake
afterwards," he ordered, with the glibness
of one who is no longer restricted to "ra-
tions."

He sat back and contemplated Martha
Anne with growing satisfaction.

"About my brother—Fred," she sug-
gested, timidly, when the waitress had de-
parted. Before the arrival of the steaks,
he had told her, gently as he could.

"And I gave him my last cigarette, an'
he went away west while he was smokin'
it," he ended. "That was nearly a year
ago."

Martha Anne quietly dried the tears, which had flowed afresh; for Jimmie's recital had brought the old grief suddenly near the poignant.

"But how did you ever find me?" she asked. "Did Fred—"

He drew the little five-by-three photograph from his pocket and handed it to her.

"He was lookin' at this when I first seen him," he said. "I kept it. I went to Kingston when I got back across. A nice old lady there told me you'd come to New York."

"Mrs. Colton," said Martha Anne.

Jimmie nodded.

"Well, I come back down here, an' sorta trailed you through the employment bureaux. It took me an awful long time, an' to-day I found out where to find you, an' I come here."

"That was awfully good of you—to spend all your time and money, just to find me and tell me about Fred," said Martha Anne, out of a full heart. She had made the discovery that there were still men in the world who were not black-hearted and nasty. "How can I ever thank you?"

Jimmie's hour had struck, and he knew it; but he had again become miserably afraid. He put it off cravenly.

"Let's eat," he said, and jabbed a fork into his sirloin as viciously as though he were bayoneting a boche. "Gee! this looks better a heap than old Micky McCue's stew!"

A middle-aged female customer, who had overheard portions of the conversation, and who, scenting a prospective romance, had lingered at her end of the table, got up with an audible sniff and started for the cash-desk. That left Jimmie and Martha Anne alone.

Martha Anne hadn't thought that she could eat after hearing about Fred. But she was young and healthy, and she was also tired and hungry. To her surprise, she made out remarkably well. Jimmie sauced the meal with rapid-fire humorous accounts of camp life, told desperately and without sequence, but interesting and comical, nevertheless.

Ice-cream and cake came and went. It was time to be going. Martha Anne grew suddenly sober, thinking of the round of employment agencies which must be begun all over again on the morrow. Perhaps her next job would be even worse than this one, which the woman manager of the agency had assured her was "first-class." Martha Anne shivered. Jimmie was silent for other reasons.

When he did speak it was with the frantic haste and the sensations of a rabbit breaking cover.

"Say, I didn't hunt you up just to tell—I mean I'd a done that anyway—but—well, you see, it was the picture."

He paused, as though that statement must have made matters perfectly clear. Martha Anne looked surprised, seeing which Jimmie groaned inwardly, and went on:

"You see, I toted that picture around with me for a long time. I kinda got to think about it as if it belonged to me, I guess. I—my name's Jim Candee. My gov'nor's got a sheep ranch out near McGill, Wyoming. My mother's dead for some years, an' there's only him an' me; so you see—"

Jimmie halted, gasping, and stared at his empty saucer. This wasn't the way he had meant to manage this affair at all. Why couldn't she say something? Slowly he raised his eyes until they looked into the blue ones of Martha Anne.

What he saw there untied his tongue. He leaned forward, and his brown fingers lay over her white ones.

"Say, we're going outta here an' go to the best show in New York," he announced masterfully. "Then I'm goin' to take you home. An' to-morrow we're goin' down to the old City Hall an' get a marriage license."

There the Candy Kid stopped and glared belligerently. But Martha Anne did not gainsay him. She withdrew her hand and began to fumble with trembling fingers in her pocketbook.

"Here; what you goin' to do?" inquired the Candy Kid, seizing the checks jealously.

"I'm going to tip the waitress," answered Martha Anne, firmly, and she laid a fifty cent piece beside her plate.

The House of Fraud

by Jack Bechdolt

Author of "Resurrection Day," "The Torch," etc.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE ONE WEAKNESS.

AT least to all outward appearance La Salle took his indictment and arrest without surprise or protest. The arrest itself was a mere formality, as Barr was able to arrange the matter of a liberal cash bail with slight loss of time.

There was one inconvenience to the business: La Salle had to curtail his promotions. Most of his sales force was on "vacation" now. Plans for Thawn Manor gathered dust. The newspaper advertising ceased.

For a few days he raged in secret at the prospect of a promising season which would find him unable to carry on business. Then came the certainty of a speedy trial, and his equanimity returned. Quietly he went ahead with his plans, refraining only from his advertising, lest that prejudice his case.

On an afternoon of early spring La Salle and Barr were in consultation about the coming trial. They talked in Barr's private office, and as an additional precaution toward privacy Barr chose Saturday afternoon, when there was none of his office force about to overhear them.

Watching these two as they talked, one would have got the idea that Barr was the accused man and La Salle the counselor, so different was their demeanor. The lawyer showed a flushed face, and his frequent, nervous glances would have passed easily as a good indication of a guilty conscience. He kept his voice low, and spoke with quick, erratic gestures.

But La Salle was even quieter than usual, and what few comments he had to make were spoken confidently. It would have been hard for an outsider to believe that his liberty and fortune were at stake.

Only Barr understood his actual state of mind and emotion—Barr, who had studied his client all these months, applying to the task no inconsiderable power of observation and deduction.

Barr read La Salle's black eyes. He had stumbled on the key to La Salle's composed manner. Barr had watched him closely from the moment of the news of indictment, and Barr understood how each fresh access of secret panic seemed to steady La Salle's outward demeanor. The closer danger loomed, the quieter La Salle grew. He was a superb gambler. Barr gave him that tribute freely.

"Only," thought Barr, thrilled by the notion, "if ever he does go to pieces! What a smash that will be!"

La Salle interrupted Barr's elaborate summing up of the case against him. "Never mind that stuff—all that death-sentence manner of yours. Question is, can you beat this case?"

"I'm trying to tell you, Frank, it's a tough proposition. They've got at least one count against you, the one they're trying, that looks bad. You know, I warned you, a lot of times, to look out for criminal law—"

"Maybe I should have had better legal advice," La Salle sneered.

This story began in *The Argosy* for May 15.

Barr refused to take offense. "No," he said seriously, "but you shouldn't have held out anything on me. You got careless. I've seen 'em all come and go—come and go—and the reason they slipped was because they wouldn't listen to a good lawyer. That's the only reason there's a market for man cages, Frank—the only reason the State runs a boarding-house up at Ossining—"

"You haven't answered my question!" In spite of his control the realty man showed irritability. He had gone through some hard days. "Damn it," he burst out, "can't you forget for a second you're a sharp lawyer, and answer a plain question? Can you beat the case or no?"

"Beat it? Sure, I can beat it. Frank, I can beat damn near any case they could bring against you—yes, by God, even if it was murder. Mind you, I don't say I can keep them from coming to trial, but I will guarantee you this—they'll never put you behind the bars!"

"That's big talk—"

"No, is it! Not when you know the law, my boy, not when you know the law like I do. Why, look here, even if this was a charge of murder, have you any idea how many unpunished murderers there are living to-day in the United States? No, of course not. Well, as far back as 1911 a conservative estimate showed one hundred thousand—one hundred thousand of 'em, Frank! And out of that hundred thousand, seventy-five thousand were *never even in prison*. Fact! Admitted by the best authorities. And what kept 'em out of jail? Smart lawyers, that's the answer, smart lawyers!"

"You hate yourself, don't you?"

"No. I'm merely trying to show you that you can beat this if you'll let me play your hand. But you've got to let me play it—you've got to give me your confidence."

"Barr, you have a plan? You're holding out something on me—"

"Yes, I have a plan—"

"What is it?"

"No," Barr smiled mysteriously, "can't tell you that. Trade secrets."

La Salle frowned uneasily. "I don't like that. I want to know—to be sure—"

"Nothing doing," Barr chuckled. "That's my business. D' you think I'm fool enough to tip my hand to you—or anybody? Huh! But I give you my word if you'll let me alone you'll never get closer to a prison than you are to-day."

"Your word be damned. That's not good enough."

"Ah, but you've got to trust your lawyer, my boy."

La Salle studied Barr shrewdly. He was annoyed by this mystery Barr enjoyed so gleefully. Quickly he reviewed his situation, anxious to see if by any chance Barr could gain through treachery. "Look here," he demanded suddenly, "can you swing this thing alone?"

"There's the point." Barr was suddenly earnest. "I've got to swing it alone—or not at all. That's flat. There's a risk in this, Frank—a risk for me. If I pull you out of the fire—and you're damn close to frying in your own fat, I can tell you—if I do it, you've got to keep hands off. No meddling, no extra counsel to gum up the works—"

La Salle started to shake his head.

"I mean it! I tell you, you're in deep—you don't know how deep yet. I can get you out. But absolutely you must let me play my lone hand. There's my proposition, Frank. Take it or leave it."

"Very well, you listen to me a minute. I've thrown a lot of business your way, Barr. You've got fat off me. That's all right, too. I'm not expecting gratitude. But what I've thrown your way isn't a marker to what I can do for you when this thing blows over. It will blow over. I'll beat these indictments if it takes every cent I own and all the lawyers in the United States.

"And when I do I'm going into big things! I'm going to swing a lot of money and a lot of power, Barr. If you're not dead sure of this case, if you want other help, get anybody you please and never mind the bill. Or play your lone hand, if you see it that way, but I'm warning you, Barr—I'm giving you your chance, because, if *you fail me*, don't ever look to me for a crust of bread. That plain?"

"Plain enough."

"Well, now, you can or you can't do it? Going in alone?"

"I'm going in alone. Mind, you trust me absolutely—*keep your hands off!*"

They eyed one another sharply. La Salle nodded. "I agree to that."

"All right. I'll beat the case. I'm risking a lot to do it, and I'm going to hold you to your word—about future business."

"That's understood."

"And it's going to cost you a fat price."

"I don't care what it costs me." La Salle stood up with an animation unusual in him. He clenched his fist and gestured with it, and the black eyes burned brightly against his dead-white face.

"All I ask is to win," he exclaimed, and his voice grated with suppressed emotion. "I've got to go on, you hear me, on and on! These dogs that are yelping at my heels—that yellow pack—they shall not pull me down! I've got bigger things to do, bigger than you ever dreamed of. Barr, if they ever get me it won't be for any petty larceny like this Saltmarsh business, I tell you that! You get me out of this and damn the expense. Take anything you like—"

"I will," Barr promised with sudden enthusiasm.

"And you can count on your share of the future. Show me that you can win, and you needn't worry. Show me—"

"Yes, I'll get you out of it, Frank. But, oh boy, when you see my bill!" Barr gloated over the idea. His chuckling greed roused his client's disdain.

"Your bill's the least of my worries," he promised.

Later in the afternoon, meeting Gloria by appointment in the quiet seclusion of the Coach-and-Four Teashop, Barr detailed his talk with La Salle.

"I've got him going at last," he gloated. "I've found his weak spot. Gloria, he's afraid—afraid of jail!"

"And you made him promise to trust you absolutely?" Gloria's eyes sparkled. "I see," she nodded, "I see now. Thurston, you are clever!" Their hands met across the table.

"Yes, I'm not so bad," Barr admitted.

"Of course. How simple!" Gloria began to laugh her tinkling, jangling chime. "You'll let them convict him—"

"Good God—*no!*"

Barr drew back, genuinely shocked.

The lawyer had a moral code—only the beasts are without one—and Gloria's cheerful assumption of this duplicity really hurt him.

"Why, he's my client!" Barr explained earnestly. "A lawyer's duty is to serve his client. I promised to get him off, and I will!"

Gloria looked decidedly puzzled.

"Besides," Barr hurried on, "what good is he to us if I don't get him off? No, no, that's not the idea at all! The point is to get him off—"

"But then, if you—if we—well, if I quit Frank for you, then he'll be able to raise the very devil with us. Thurston, I can't see—"

"Oh, he'll be sore—sure. He'll rave, probably. I expect that, but he'll come to terms. Don't you see, Gloria, I've convinced him *he can't do without me!* I've shown him he's got to depend on me. Frank is afraid of one thing—and one thing only—jail. Well, I can keep him out of jail. That's my hold on him. And no matter how far he goes, how big he gets, there's always that fear of his to play on.

"That's our grip on him. See? That's where we keep our hold. Remember I said we didn't want to kill any goose that lays golden eggs for us? Well, here's how we keep Frank in a cage—"

"Yes, yes! And we harvest the eggs? Oh, Thurston, that's a splendid notion. Thurston, you are a genius!"

"Yes," Barr agreed, "I'm not so bad."

CHAPTER XXIV.

IMPASSE.

ANNOUNCEMENT of the trial of Frank La Salle drew a great crowd. The day was a day of rain and tempestuous wind, a miserable, drenching, chilly day, and the wet garments of those who found seats in the court-room sent up a steam that thickened the air already heavy with the

odors of the law—smells of dust and varnish and leather-bound books, and the odoriferous ghosts of all who had ever gathered there, drawn by curiosity, or greed or tragic necessity.

The room was old and shabby with long service. Its hard seats and chairs were worn shiny, and shiny and scarred were its rails and baseboards and furniture; but the heavy, dull-red hangings that draped its windows were thick with dust and faded, and gave off a little odor of their own, a taint of dry rot.

The majesty of the law paraded in this room. It was ostentatious in the bailiffs, dull of face, curtly directing the general public to its place. It reflected from the formal dress of counsel, and shone in their frowning glances and hurried, nervous consultations. Even the younger men and boys, the messengers who hurried back and forth with bundles of papers and leather brief cases filled with more papers, showed it by their elaborate, stealthy bustling and their hushed voices.

A court stenographer pointing a half dozen pencils to needle fineness exhibited the face of a funeral mute, and even the minute clerk, who had entered, chubby and smiling, settled before his desk with sudden, incongruous severity.

Majesty of the law had affected the citizens called for jury duty, who sat waiting, ill at ease and most of them probably worrying about their own private interests neglected by peremptory command. The same majesty made the audience shuffling among the seats ill at ease so that they spoke in whispers and stopped, frightened in mid-sentence, and rolled uneasy eyes about them.

Largely this audience was made up of those who had dealt with Frank La Salle, to their sorrow. They were the humble, the shabby, and often the ignorant. In them the desire for home was as instinctive as with the mating birds, and their desire made them easy victims of La Salle's schemes.

Poor, bewildered dupes; they had traded their sweaty dollars for his glittering promises; promises that always danced on ahead until they wore themselves weary in pursuit. Now they were drawn by the novel

promise of seeing the despoiler spoiled; of witnessing justice done to the man who tricked them. They breathed hard with hope. Dull eyes were cruelly bright with expectation as they waited for the show to begin.

Only the early comers found seats. When the space set aside for the public was taken, others backed up in the tiled corridor beyond the big doors, and stood there patiently—waiting.

La Salle saw them when, with Barr, he came into the court, and he made no mistake in reading the meaning of the glance they turned on him. He pressed his lips in a firmer line, and pushed through with a slight exaggeration of his usual indifference. But the knowledge of that concentrated stare following him as he went, was not pleasant.

Devree, his hair ruffled, his eyes gleaming, earnestly behind the spectacles, was halted as he hustled through this crowd. He recognized Jean Temple and Diana, and hurriedly pulled them into a niche where they could talk together.

There was more color in Jean's face than he had ever seen. Her eyes sparkled, and she carried herself with a new confidence. Jean had come to a red-letter day, the culmination of her honest hatred of La Salle and all his works. With an intensity equal to that of her love for Harvey Temple she longed for La Salle's overthrow, and rejoiced in the prospect.

Diana's emotion was more complex. She was both hopeful and afraid of the issue, and the glance she gave Devree was evasive.

"Gordon," Jean exclaimed, "We can't find a seat. Isn't there some way—"

"Certainly there's some way," Devree sputtered. "Get you inside the rail—place set aside for witnesses. Fix you up. Of course!"

"You're going to win, Gordon. You're surely going to win?"

"Going to try, Jean! Looks like our case was a good one—" He paused and cleared his throat significantly. His eyes asked a favor of Jean and, understanding, she moved a little aside. He bent toward Diana, speaking low and hurriedly, his trembling hand on her arm:

"Look here, Diana, just got a second to talk in, and I'm going up against the biggest thing I ever tackled. Tried to see you before, to ask you this—too blamed busy. But, Diana, listen! If I get away with this to-day—if we win—there's going to be a chance for me. You know, in a way, this is my case. I've been working as a sort of volunteer assistant, and the prosecutor has half promised me, if we make good to-day, that there will be a place for me on his staff. Diana, you know what that means to me—"

"I'm glad," Diana exclaimed. "Very glad, Gordon!"

"Yes, but that's not it! It means, Diana, I can ask you something we talked about before. I'm asking it now. Girl, are you going to give me that promise so I can go in with something worth fighting for? Diana, you know I *need* your promise now!"

"Gordon, I—I don't know." Diana's gloved hands clasped in an agony of uncertainty. She stared miserably at the floor. She was pale and more beautiful in her pallor than ever before, so Devree thought.

"I wish I could promise," she whispered. "I wish I were sure. But, Gordon, it's very confusing—and I'm not sure. Oh, Gordon, is it fair to ask?"

"All right," he nodded briefly. His voice was heavy with disappointment. "All right, Diana—"

"But I do want you to win—"

"Yes—yes, thanks—good Lord, I'll be late! Court will be called. Come on—"

"But I do want you to win! And, Gordon, if you do win—I—you—we—" Her eyes told him the rest of it.

Devree's sudden shout attracted the stares of the crowd. "That's good enough for me! Now you've given me something worth fighting for. You bet we'll win. Come on, girl, we're going after 'em. We're going to give 'em hell!"

Seated within the railed enclosure where witnesses were accommodated, close to the tables of the counsel and directly beneath the dais of the court, Jean Temple could see all that went forward. She studied the

scene eagerly, greedy lest she miss one detail of this, her day of days.

Her high color and her bright eyes made her face more than usually attractive, but for all its color and sparkle it was less beautiful. There was a certain hardness about the eyes, a lack of the usual sympathy that was much of the charm of her expression; those things were lost in the unholy exaltation of revenge.

Jean was a woman—she had come to see vengeance done on the man who wronged Harvey Temple—and she could no more help the glint of cruelty in her bright gaze than she could help loving her husband.

Avid with curiosity, she tried to miss none of the detail of the picture. The panoply and parade of justice thrilled her. The room with its high ceilings, long windows, and the high dais suggested power and dignity. The uniforms of the court attendants spoke of authority and strength.

She studied La Salle, sitting beside Barr and talking to him, hand guarding his lips, and rejoiced to think he seemed uneasy. She studied the prosecutor and his several assistants, including Devree, and wondered that Barr could bear comparison of his own shallow, handsome, ruddy and nervous face to this array of sober dignity that represented the State. To her it seemed so patent which were the rogues and which the honest men!

The judge, a handsome, white-haired man in black robes, entered, and the court rose out of respect for the dignity of justice. Standing with the others while the judge took his seat and the bailiff cried the session, her eyes turned back over the audience, those bewildered but hopeful men and women who had dealt with La Salle and suffered because of it.

The stirring idea occurred to her that these plain folk there in the benches were the real power that turned the wheels of the ponderous legal machine; that they had brought this court into being; that it lived by their sufferance. Always a believer in the ultimate triumph of good over evil, in this moment Jean fancied she was witnessing a concrete illustration of that truth, and her heart swelled with a great happiness.

For Jean the one great moment had

passed. What followed seemed so commonplace, so trivial, so incongruous to the dignity of the business that her spirits sank with foreboding.

For the State the prosecutor reviewed the charge against Frank La Salle. He was a youngish man with good looks and a fighting jaw, but he spoke indifferently and without apparent interest. Jean saw Devree prompting his chief with notes scribbled on slips of paper and laid in range of his gaze on the table. When he had done she could have cried with vexation, so trivial did his effort seem.

Barr entered the usual motions on behalf of his client. He, too, seemed strangely indifferent to the nature of the business. Even the judge, ruling on the motions, appeared bored. The trial passed on to the examination of jurymen, and the long morning dragged in seemingly senseless cross-questioning of men who were made to appear more than usually stupid.

The audience breathed heavily, yawned, and blinked; even the judge seemed to doze behind his papers. The air was thick and over-warm with steam heat. The terrible curse of utter inanity seemed to blight everybody. Just before lunch the tally of the jury was completed, and Jean hoped for better things in the afternoon.

Court convened again with all the preliminary whirring and creaking of the ponderous mills of justice. The State opened its case and called a witness to the stand. Jean wondered that Barr paid so little heed to the examination. He seemed absorbed in whispering to La Salle, and glanced occasionally toward the rear of the court-room. He appeared to expect something. And something did happen, with dramatic suddenness.

One of Barr's assistants bustled into the room, late. His tiptoeing progress down the aisle attracted many eyes. He bent over his chief and whispered earnestly. Then Barr was on his feet, speaking to the court. What was it?

Jean craned forward, trying to catch the meaning of Barr's words. The judge made a reply, and Barr's arm rose, the finger pointing at a man in the jury-box.

"That man, your honor"—Barr de-

claimed in full voice. "In view of this new and astonishing information I demand that Juror Number Eleven answer certain questions by this court."

The trial had stopped dead. Counsel and court attendants exchanged astonished glances. A murmur ran through the audience, and several people in the rear rows of benches rose to crane their necks. A bailiff rapped testily for order.

At a word from the judge the witness chair was vacated, and the juror whom Barr had so dramatically accused quit the box and climbed to the chair.

He was an insignificant little man with a bristling, short-clipped blond pompadour, and huge blond mustache. His watery blue eyes blinked with fright. Counsel closed about him, and the judge addressed a few questions in a guarded tone. He nodded, and gulped anxiously. Abruptly, at the court's orders, a bailiff escorted him from the room.

"What is it—oh, what is it?" Jean whispered to Diana. "I can't hear them. What are they saying?"

Diana hushed her with a warning grip on her arm. "I don't know dear—listen!" The two women, clasping each other, craned forward. But they could not hear clearly. Talk of counsel was a confused murmur.

Barr's face was red with suppressed emotion. He seemed about to burst with triumph. Jean caught his phrase—"because of the statements of this juror the defense moves for a dismissal." The prosecutor entered sharp: "Objection," and the court ruled as sharply: "Objection overruled." Then a moment of silence.

Now the judge spoke, addressing the eleven staring jurymen. Through a haze of astonishment Jean caught the import of his words. He was dismissing the jury from duty. The trial had ended! Even as she gasped it the court rose. With adjournment a buzz of talk came. A word was bandied about from lip to lip—"Mistrial." Behind her Jean heard a comment: "A damned smooth trick. That Barr's a stem-winding wonder, I'll tell the world."

"Diana," she gasped, shaking Diana's arm, "we—we have lost—failed. Diana!"

But Diana did not heed her. Diana's

face had gone very white, and her blue eyes were almost black with emotion. She sat rigid, pressing a crumpled handkerchief to her white lips and staring before her. There was more than surprise in her attitude—it suggested a terrible apprehension—and fear.

Jean rose. She had a vague notion of finding Devree and demanding an explanation of this staggering turn of events. About Barr a knot of men clustered. His red face, wreathed in smiles, shone from the center of the group.

Jean heard the prosecutor's angry comment: "Barr, if I thought for a second this thing was planted—if this is a trick—" and Barr's answering chuckle: "Trick? If you can prove it's a trick you know what to do about it. Why don't you do it?"

Then an officious bailiff, intent on clearing the court, had her by the arm, and she was swallowed up in the crowd that shuffled slowly out of the place, surprised, bewildered, dumb.

They went tamely, herded by the bailiffs, not sure what it was all about; sure only of one thing—that in some way again La Salle had triumphed; sure that even the law had failed to hold Frank La Salle!

Jean went as stupidly as the others about her. So acute was her disappointment it left her little opportunity to question what happened in court. She knew only that the punishment of La Salle—a thing she had set her heart upon, believing its coming as inevitable as sun after storm—was deferred. The law had failed in its duty.

She did not know enough of the law to guess whether it could retrieve its mistake. She did not think at all about the future. The present was so black it excluded everything else.

Jean could only see that evil had triumphed and her faith was shattered.

CHAPTER XXV.

"PAID IN FULL."

WHEN Jean left Diana did not notice her absence. The sudden termination of the trial found her almost as stunned as Jean, but her thoughts were of

a different color. As earnestly as Jean, she had hoped for La Salle's overthrow, even though it cost the Thawns their prospect of financial independence.

She had hoped for this, but always she doubted that it would happen. She knew that Barr was shrewd, and she had heard too much about his methods to believe he would let La Salle come to punishment without a long-drawn fight.

Then she had given her promise to Devree, and giving it, she knew suddenly that she loved him, and nothing else mattered. His success in the trial meant their success in love. She followed the proceedings with a prayer on her lips—a prayer that Devree, by some miracle, might win.

The miracle had failed, and the failure was none the less bitter because common sense warned her to expect it. She became aware that somebody was speaking her name, and looking up, discovered Devree. When she saw his miserable face she could only remember that she loved him.

Devree drooped. His eyes avoided her glance. He looked, every inch of him, beaten.

"You heard?" he said huskily. "You heard what happened to us?"

"But I don't understand!"

"Well, we are licked. 'Is not that enough—"

"Gordon, sit down, here beside me. How did it happen? It was all so sudden, so confusing. I don't understand—"

"Does it matter very much, how it happened?" he groaned. "Barr beat us, that's the big thing. That smashes my chances. Oh, it was a clever trick! Nobody is to blame, nobody could guard against it—nobody can ever prove it was crooked. And it worked! It put a spoke in our wheels. It's tied up this case for so long there's little hope it will ever come to trial again—"

"A trick? You mean that Barr was dishonest?"

"Hush!" Devree warned her hurriedly.

"No, I can't say that. I don't know that he was dishonest. I don't know that even Barr would do the thing deliberately. But after the trial began Barr made the sudden discovery that one jurymen was preju-

diced. He charged that this man had once bought a lot from La Salle and afterwards quarreled with La Salle about the terms. He proved the man still holds a grudge against La Salle.

"This morning the man told a different story. The judge had no option but to dismiss the entire jury and call it a mistrial. And Barr is fairly drunk with triumph because he knows a delay now, a postponement, is as good as La Salle's acquittal—"

"You mean he will never be tried again?"

"Never is a long word—yet that's about the size of it. The court calendars are jammed. Only by rare luck did we get this case to trial so soon. Now it means waiting for months, and heaven knows where our witnesses will be by then. Worst of all, Diana, the prosecutor goes out of office soon. His successor may not be so keen about our case.

"So, you see, we're done for—licked. Got to get used to it, I guess—suppose that's part of the game, but it's tough, Diana. I—I'd counted a lot on putting this thing over. Well!" Devree rose. By a mighty effort he managed even to smile, but the smile was a crooked, sorry affair.

"Wait," whispered Diana, on her feet beside him. "Wait, Gordon. There's another thing to settle between us—"

"Another thing! Oh—I see what you mean. Of course, that's all off. I understood that your promise was conditional on my winning—"

"But, Gordon—suppose I were to care for somebody very much—oh, very much indeed. Do you think—that my promise—would have a string to it? Don't you suppose I might—want to keep it—anyway!"

"No," said Devree roughly. "I've no business listening to such talk—you've no business tempting me to listen. For your own sake, don't say it! Diana, I understand you—pretty well now. You're not the sort to tie yourself to a failure, and—here's one—failure—who won't let you do it—"

"Now, Gordon"—Diana spoke with a strangely brilliant smile—"I'm not very

used to—well, urging myself—where I'm not wanted. But, my dear—if you will take me—Gordon—"

"Don't say it." Devree's voice strangled with emotion. "If I let you say—that—you'd regret it bitterly. I know! Don't I make myself plain! I don't want—your promise." He turned his back on her.

Left alone, Diana watched him go with a queer, blank look. Then she flushed red, and her chin went into the air with a toss. She could forgive Devree a great deal, but not this jilting.

Of those about him—La Salle was the only one to show no particular surprise at the dramatic termination of his jeopardy. While Barr joked and laughed among the dozen or more men who congratulated him on his shrewdness, La Salle remained at the table, pale and thoughtful, drumming his fingers and waiting.

Presently he picked up his hat and coat, and moved slowly from the court-room, following the last of the crowd. Tall, slightly stooped, he moved with his usual unruffled calm, his head carried a little in advance of his body, the face perfectly wooden in its repose.

At the entrance to the building he waited until Barr joined him. They entered Barr's car, and were driven several moments in silence.

"Well," Barr chuckled, "satisfied?"

La Salle considered silently.

"Told you I'd do it alone."

"H-m!"

"I got you off; what you kicking about!"

"Ah, did you?"

"You know damn well I did! What d'you think it was, an accident? Think I passed that juror without knowing all about him? God, you're dense!"

"So, it was a frame-up? How about the juror? Likely to charge him with perjury, eh?"

"He should worry," Barr winked significantly. "I'm looking after him—"

"All right. I don't want to know the details."

"You don't look very grateful, strikes me. Hell, I pull a good thing like that,

get you out of a hole, and all you do is look down your nose!"

"Oh, you got me out—this time. How about next time? They'll bring another trial—"

"Will they?" Barr chuckled.

"Why not?"

"Because, Frank, the docket's too crowded right now. Furthermore, our friend the prosecutor hasn't a ghost of a show for reelection. And again, if you want to spend some money, make some big campaign contributions, and help elect the right man, what's to prevent his forgetting all about the case, eh? Any prosecutor has plenty to keep him busy without bothering his memory!"

La Salle straightened up with a jerk. His black eyes began to shine. "Is that straight?" he demanded eagerly.

"I'm telling you!"

"You mean to tell me this case is ended—that there's no danger they'll ever bring it again?"

"If you do what I say. Keep out of trouble, don't pull any raw stuff, be careful! Spend some money in politics. Get in touch with the right people and show them you're not averse to loosening up with the coin for the good of the party, see? I'll wise you to all that when the time comes—"

"And they'll lay off me?"

Barr shrugged, and smiled his wise smile. "I've known it to work plenty of times in the past—"

"And I'm free, free to go ahead with my plans!"

"Always providing you're careful not to attract any undesirable attention at first. Don't give anybody cause to accuse you of anything until this is forgotten."

Then La Salle smiled. Smiling, he expelled a great sigh of relief, and his shoulders straightened. "Barr," he declared, "you're a wonder!"

"Oh, I'm not so bad," Barr chuckled. "I told you they could never touch you—and they never will *if you stick to me*. I don't care how many times they might bring a trial, I'll beat them at their own game. They'll never get you. Frank—never. Not while you listen to my advice—"

"No fear. I'll listen! You've made good with me—"

"Aha! But don't forget this will cost you something!" Barr gave him a sly look and began to laugh to himself.

La Salle nodded indifferently. "Send me a bill whenever you're ready—and drop me at the office, will you? Want to go over some plans." He became preoccupied with pleasing visions.

The ending of a trial opened a door of La Salle's mind hitherto sealed. Of what lay behind that door he had occasional peeps, glimpses, visions, nothing more until this hour. His previous confidence had been, a good half of it, pose. His boldness was tempered by a shrewd mixture of fear.

Though he had given no indication, save to Barr's shrewd eye, his first encounter with criminal law had shaken his nerve. There had been legal trouble before, but always trouble within the jurisdiction of the civil courts, and usually he and Barr had settled their cases out of court. In these matters he had learned to place implicit confidence in Barr's shrewdness.

But the criminal law carried with it the unpleasant suggestion of the prison cage, a nightmare vision that had spoiled his rest. That day had been, to him, the supreme test of Thurston Barr—and Barr had proved his boldness and cunning again.

And now life opened newer and brighter vistas. Things he had only dreamed of began to draw into the focus of possibilities. His mental pictures took brighter colors, dazzling colors. A strange, new sensation of confidence flooded his veins and made him giddy. Scheme after scheme, picture after picture clamored for his attention as he paced jerkily back and forth among the rooms of his deserted offices.

All of the emotions he had suppressed for years by his cautious habit broke their old bonds and had their way with him until he became mad with ideas. His face flushed with a fever; his cold eyes blazed strangely; he began talking aloud to himself.

Unable to stand confinement longer, he telephoned hastily to have his roadster sent around from a nearby garage. He met the car at the curb, dismissed the chauffeur, and

leaping in, sent it grinding into the stream of lower Broadway traffic.

The roadster was a huge, yellow car with a flashing nickel trim—a great, underslung, over-powered beast of machinery, mounted on four tremendous, over-sized wheels, armored with fenders and guards, motivated by engines fit to hurl a giant airplane. Its crouching, sinuous body held but the one seat for its driver; the rest of it was power and arrogance. It was a car that expressed La Salle this day.

He drove daringly, hazarding the crossings, trying the patience of patrolmen to the limit of safety, scattering pedestrians, and followed by the curses of all other moving traffic. But he kept within the bounds of sanity while he was within the city.

Once across the ferry it was another matter. He roared through suburban traffic and sent humbler cars scattering toward the ditches. As country highways spread before him the great machine loosed all its giant power. It seemed almost to quit the earth. The gale of wind, bitter with stinging, cold rain, beat upon his face. His decorous hat blew away, and his dusty, brown hair rose in a wild mop. The roadster's electric siren uttered one long-drawn, raucous warning, rising from whine to snarl, sinking to a growl, and climbing again into a blood-curdling shriek.

And to its shriek La Salle would join his own voice in a wild whoop, and for hazardous seconds his hand would leave the wheel as if to dare the power demon he rode to run amuck. For one red half hour the man was deliriously drunk with power.

The roadster rocked over the decorous parkways of Renfrew Gardens, its siren bawling an obscene defiance of every convention in that conventional place. It rounded the broad curve into La Salle's own grounds on two wheels, and sped up a graveled drive. Before the broad entrance it stopped short with brakes shrieking and gravel flying.

La Salle sprang out and stumbled up the broad stairs. Of the servant who opened the door, his grave face showing faint surprise, he demanded: "Mrs. La Salle, tell her I want her."

"I'm sorry, sir; Mrs. La Salle is out—"

"What? Where the hell is she? Get her—telephone—do something—"

"Yes sir, but I—I'm afraid, sir, I can't reach her. I don't know just where—"

"Oh, you don't!" La Salle pushed the man aside roughly. "Hell of a lot of things you don't seem to know, Perkins," he snarled. Perkins hesitated, then coughed gently to attract attention.

"There are two letters, sir—Mrs. La Salle left one for you, and another one just came by special messenger."

"Why didn't you say so to begin with? Give 'em here." La Salle snatched the letters off a tray. The one addressed in Gloria's hand he tore open first. He read:

FRANK:—

You told me one time I had come a long way with you. I guess maybe I did, but I've found a man who can take me a lot farther than you ever dreamed. I guess we're both out for what we can get all right, so I'm going on with somebody who's no piker. Fix it up any way you like about a divorce. The sooner you do the sooner I can take the name of —

GLORIA BARR.

The second envelope bore the return address of Barr's offices. It contained Barr's bill for legal services in the defence of Frank La Salle, and the statement bore a rubber-stamped legend: "Paid in Full." Barr had added in his own handwriting:

DEAR FRANK: I guess Gloria squares the account.

Perkins, after handing his master the two letters, had retired discreetly toward the rear of the house. He was stopped in his tracks by a sound such as he had never before heard from Frank La Salle. He stood dumbfounded, unbelieving.

The great hall echoed with shouts—shouts of uncontrollable mirth.

Frank La Salle was laughing!

CHAPTER XXVI.

DIANA DECIDES.

THE siren of La Salle's roadster, indecently bawling, brought Geoffrey Thawn to his door. There was something tremulous in the haste of the faded aris-

tocrat. Since the day of La Salle's indictment the haggard look on his face had deepened. His hair seemed to have grown whiter. His corded hands looked old and uncertain.

"Glad to see you, glad to see you, La Salle!" Thawn's manner was a parody of hospitality. He linked his arm with La Salle's, urging him into the house. "Heard the good news," he chattered. "By gad, sir, I was glad, glad to get it. Splendid! But right will come out on top, yes, sir. There's still law in this land, I guess. Well, well, well—come into the library—here, take this chair, it's more comfortable. Well, sir, you showed up those pups, eh?"

La Salle made no comment. There was a grim little smile on his lips, and he watched Thawn with his new confidence, glorying in the discovery of his power to make Thawn talk.

"You had my best wishes, I can tell you," Diana's father began nervously, after that brief, unfruitful pause. "I'll venture the best people of this community, all of them, were behind you. This matter of attacking solid business—this attempt to tear down our institutions, has gone too far—too damn far. The better classes will not tolerate it—"

Another pause while Thawn blinked and rubbed his nose. Still La Salle made no comment.

"Well," he tried again, "that's past now—settled. You—you're free to go ahead with your splendid schemes again—free to continue business without interference. I—I suppose you—will—go ahead, eh? Not going to let a little disturbance like that interfere with development! Ha, ha, of course not! Eh?"

Behind his nervous laugh showed the grim fear that made him its puppet. La Salle knew what he feared, knew how close to disaster Thawn had come. It gave him a vicious satisfaction to see Thawn squirm. But finally he ended the torture.

"Yes, I'm going ahead," he nodded.

Thawn vented a deep and eloquent sigh that told of relief and thanksgiving. "Thank God," he added simply.

"Yes, Thawn, we'll go ahead with the Manor idea. I'll give the word in the

morning. Came to talk to you about that very thing." La Salle spoke confidently.

"That's news—fine news for me," Thawn babbled. "Yes, that's splendid news. Don't mind telling you it means a lot to me—fact is, I was running close, mighty close to the wind. Fact! By gad, sir, if—if they had—er—got you, I don't know what I'd have done. Had all my credit tied up, you see, been borrowing pretty heavily. It would have been—hell—plain hell—"

"No doubt of it, they'd have smashed you, Thawn," his visitor agreed, cheerfully cold-blooded. "You'd have gone down with the wreck—'sunk without a trace,' as the Germans used to say. Only—they didn't sink us! There wasn't any wreck, and, Thawn, there won't be any wrecks, not in my business!" He drew a deep breath, and his eyes gleamed.

"Well," Thawn confessed naively, "I'm mighty glad to know that. I—I suffered a good deal, worrying about what was going to happen to me. But now—"

"Ah, now! Just what I came to see you about. Listen, my friend, I'm going to do great things with this scheme of ours, bigger things than you or I ever dreamed of before. Thawn Manor! I'll show the world what a live man can do with suburban property. No, and that's not all. Bigger things still, in here." La Salle tapped his forehead significantly. "Want to talk to you about them, Thawn; that's why I dropped in. Listen, I'm going to travel fast and far—I'm going to make myself rich, and I want to make you rich—"

"Me!"

"Yes, you; why not? I can do it! I want you to tie up with me, Thawn. I want your partnership. I tell you plainly, I need a man like you, a man who knows the right sort of people—and how to approach them. A man with a good family-name like yours. And I want to put you in the way of making something big, something so big this Thawn Manor proposition will look to you like carfare. Now I want you to put yourself in a position so I can do this for you—"

"I—I don't think I understand you." Thawn began to look vaguely uneasy.

"You will. I'll make it plain." La Salle leaned forward, fixing the older man with his stare. He spoke with an unusual animation, rapidly, with conviction: "You know something about what I can do, don't you? You know I started from nothing and you've seen me make a fortune? Yes; I did it alone, too. Nobody coached me or stood behind me. I did it! But that's only the start. Before I'm through I'm going to be a—a—power, a power in big business! One reason I can do it is because I know where I'm weak. When I know that I look around and find what it is I need—then—I get that thing. Thawn, I *always* get the thing I need."

He illustrated the point with his powerful, outstretched hands, opening the fingers wide, closing them slowly in a death-grip on some intangible desire he saw before him.

"Now, Thawn, I find you have something I need in my business—"

"I have—something—"

"You have something I need. I'm going to make you an offer for it. I want your daughter—Diana."

Thawn, who had been leaning forward, tremulous with eagerness to hear La Salle's message, collapsed suddenly in his big chair, sagging back among its cushions, limp and old and a little frightened. For the moment he believed La Salle had lost his reason. He repeated feebly: "You want Diana! You!"

"Exactly. No need to stare that way, I'm not crazy. I find I lack one thing necessary to my plans—a woman of the right sort—in a word, your daughter. In exchange for her I'm offering you a fortune. Is there anything so shocking about that? Is there anything awful in my seeking an alliance with your family?"

"You are mad," Thawn whispered.

"Am I! You would be mad to refuse this offer. I want your daughter for my wife—"

"You have a wife!"

"I had one." La Salle smiled. "She is no more. The woman who called herself my wife was foolish enough to run off with a man who was a big enough fool to think her worth the taking. I found that out to-day—this afternoon. The rest of that

business is a mere legal formality. When I learned Gloria's news I came direct to you. Yes, I play fast while I have the luck—"

"Luck! You call—that—luck?"

"The best of luck. This woman—Gloria—I met her while I was young. There was some foolishness, a sentimental attachment. I married her while I was young and ignorant, and ever since she has been a drag upon me—a weight around my neck, a load on my back. She had nothing to give me, nothing. Now I'm done with her and thank God for my luck. But your daughter, Thawn—"

"No, no! The idea is monstrous!" Thawn said it with a flare of his old-time spirit. But even as he said it he was surprised at the insincerity of his voice. A month ago he would have meant it, with all his heart and soul. A month ago he would have broken with La Salle at a hint of such a thing.

But in that last month he had gone deep into despair. Bankruptcy and an old age of bitter dependence on charity had stared him, eye to eye. He felt old, too old to fight back. Even as he protested he knew a cowardly fear of angering La Salle.

"Is it monstrous? Indeed! Well—" La Salle shrugged. "Of course, without your partnership, I'll have to alter my plans. But there are other propositions, plenty better than Thawn Manor—"

"But Diana," Thawn protested shakily. "She'll never consent—"

"She will consent."

"No—no, La Salle. I tell you, never—No, my friend, she won't do it—"

"And I say she will—"

"Why not ask her?"

Diana's cool inquiry brought both men to their feet. She crossed the room toward them, a pale, statuesque figure.

"Yes, why not ask her?" she repeated and her dark-blue eyes met La Salle's without flinching. "You know," she continued, "if you insist on discussing these things with the doors open you can't blame me for overhearing you. I don't think I missed any of the details of Mr. La Salle's unusual proposal. Since it concerns me, I tried to hear it all—"

"Good!" La Salle exclaimed briskly. "All the better—saves trouble. You know just how the matter stands?"

"I understand you are offering me the —position—recently vacated by Mrs. La Salle—"

"Good. That's businesslike. But let me explain this a little farther. I want you to understand me thoroughly. Will you sit down?"

Diana shook her head with a curious brief smile. She moved a little closer to her father, and patted his arm reassuringly. La Salle stood facing them, and he seemed actually to have increased in height and girth with the increase of his self confidence. He radiated a sense of driving force that was very tangible—almost hypnotic.

"I want you to get a thorough grasp on this proposition, Diana," he began. "You both are entitled to know about me, since I'm proposing this—partnership. I am the son of nobody, I began nowhere, and to begin with, I had nothing. What I have made of myself I did by my own effort. What I shall make of myself in the future will be also my own work.

"A long time ago, when I began with nothing but desire, I found out that the way to get a thing is to go after it alone. That's my policy. What help I need in getting things, I buy and pay for. And those who deal with me know that I pay high.

"I don't claim I have gone far yet, but I have made money—probably more money than either of you guess. And I am going on! What's better, I know why I shall go on. Knowing what I want, I stick to the business of getting it, and forget everything else. I specialize. That, and the combination with luck—oh, yes, I give luck its share of credit! Only a fool overlooks the element of chance.

"Well, luck has been with me. To-day has proved that. And to-day is only the starter. I tell you, I'm going on—a long, long way on. To-day I've got money. Money! D'you think I'm a cheap money-grubber? Money doesn't mean that to me." He snapped his fingers, breathing hard. "But what money can get me—influence—power—ah! That's what I'm after. The

next step is to get myself known, known to the right people—'breaking into society,' to be vulgar. But do you think I care for society? D'you think I'm fool enough to *want* to dress up and smirk and bow—to care a damn what people say about me, or think about me? I don't.

"I want society because it's a step toward the bigger game—it puts me in touch with the big fellows, it helps on to power. Power, that's the big thing! I'm going to make myself felt. I'm going to make the name of La Salle count for something. Big men will mention it with respect. I tell you, that name will carry weight, stand for something—something big wherever men have heard of modern business.

"And to make that next step, Diana, I need you. I need you because you know the ropes, you can steer me straight. You can show me what people I must cultivate; you can see that I get to know them. I need your good looks and your common sense and your knowledge and the influence of your name. That's what I need—and I'm going to get it."

There was a silence. Father and daughter were under the spell of the man's amazing egotism. It was an egotism so great that it deserved the respect due to size. It made itself felt in that shabby room.

"Ah, yes, there's another thing I should mention." La Salle turned back to them with a trace of a smile. "I sha'n't insult your intelligence by any childlike assertions of love. I know better—you know better than to expect that. I have no use of such a sentiment. It has never helped me one step forward. Nor will I call it friendship. I have no friends—though no man can say I do not stand by those who stick by me. I am offering you both a partnership, Diana as my wife, since I must have a wife, and you, Thawn, as a sharer in my profits. Now there is my proposition. What do you think of it?"

Diana had no answer at all. Her hand remained affectionately on the sleeve of her father's coat. She stared at La Salle without a trace of emotion on her delicately oval face. And her father, thrilled at the offer of independence and position; ashamed of his own desires; cowardly in his fear

Diana might say or do something to drive La Salle away—and yet almost hoping she would give him the answer he deserved—her father stared miserably at the floor and rubbed his nose furiously.

"Well?" La Salle demanded.

"I am thinking over your extraordinary statements. I will answer you—"

"Then I know what your answer will be." He smiled.

"Indeed!"

"Yes, I know. Remember, Diana, how I first selected you to do my work? Picked you out of an office filled with women—picked you at first sight? I made no mistake then. I knew what I wanted. And, you will remember, we did not haggle over terms. I've seen it again to-day, that you are the woman I must have. You wonder why I'm so sure of you. I tell you it's because, to-day, nothing can beat me, nothing! Luck, that's it. I give luck credit. To-day is my day to win. First the trial, I beat that. Then Gloria, that empty-headed drag on me, she's gone. And now my way is clear to you—"

"You are very sure—"

"Why, it's common sense, nothing more. Accept, and I make you both rich—"

"And if I refuse, you ruin us?"

"Ah, well, if you refuse—of course I would scarcely feel called on to go ahead with the Manor business. You put it crudely, but—well—"

"Diana!" Thawn rolled fearful eyes toward her.

"She won't refuse it," La Salle chuckled. "I tell you I can't lose to-day. Not with my luck—"

"You must give me a little time." Diana's eyes wavered. For the first time they hesitated to meet La Salle's glance. "I must—think this over," she temporized.

"Certainly," he agreed promptly. "Think it over. Take until to-night. I'll be back then for my answer—though I know it now! I'm not superstitious, but I play my big hunches. This is one. To-day is my big day—I—can't—lose!"

He snatched up hat and coat. At the door he turned back a moment. "Remember, take me, and you travel with me, a long, long way. Refuse, and—" He

laughed significantly and slammed the door. They heard the indecent song of the motor siren dwindling to silence.

Thawn avoided his daughter's eye, but he miserably lingered by her side, hoping to know her mind. He had a desire to comfort her in some way—even to counsel her to refuse La Salle's brutally frank offer, and at the same time he feared she would do that very thing. He did not know how to act or what to say.

As for Diana, she was deeply concerned with her own problem. Finally she questioned her father thoughtfully: "He can ruin us, can't he?"

"He can," Thawn groaned. "He can smash us—flat—absolutely. There would be nothing left—except disgrace."

"Yes," she sighed, "you're right. After all, comfort, reputation, friends—those things mean a lot to us, don't they?"

"Well, I don't care for the—the other thing, that's flat." Thawn laughed hysterically. "Why should I?" he burst out with sudden irritation. "Why? I didn't wish myself into this world. I hadn't any say about the things I was taught to like. I didn't have anything to say about any of it—not one damned word. It was all wished onto me. Can I help it if I feel as I do? Since I'm here and I have to keep on living I'm going to want those things to make me happy! Is it my fault?"

Diana looked puzzled. "I don't know," she admitted. "All I can see is that we both care a lot for the things we have been used to. That's fact. The rest is—theory. We've got to face the facts—"

She turned away, starting up the stair.

"Diana!" Thawn could not help the question. "You—what are you going to— to answer him?"

She shook her head, managing a kindly smile. "I wish I knew!"

"But—but listen!" Thawn followed hastily after her. His trembling hand caught her sleeve. He raised his eyes to hers, a glance of apprehension. "He can smash us, I tell you! He's got the power. You—won't—surely you wouldn't let—that—happen?"

His daughter merely shook her head. "I'll have to think that out," she insisted.

But in her eyes as she went on alone, there grew a look of fright. They told the story. She had made up her mind already—she would accept.

Jean Temple went home from the trial. When her first astonishment passed, when she realized that La Salle had triumphed, she became very bitter in her condemnation of the law. So firmly had she believed in justice and its mysterious manner of righting all wrongs that she could not comprehend how an evil as gross as La Salle could escape it.

Discovering that the law was a man-made machine, and a bungling machine, she condemned it as wholly unworthy—hated it as something vile. But finally her sense of disappointment overwhelmed all else, and she knew she was close to tears.

She felt that at last she must go to Harvey with the whole story, that she must sob it out to him and deliver to him the burden she had carried so long alone.

Their fraud home greeted her return with a face more desolate than ever she remembered. The mud of the road was deep. The bare brown earth was sodden, and the gray sky dripped its chill mixture, half sleet, half water. Amid stark trees the house stood forlorn, a dead thing decaying. Its walls were stained and cracked. Its pillars leaned apart. Here and there a board was missing. Paint had scaled off, leaving bare sores.

Weary, dragged, cold, she eyed it through tears, and vowed it an inhuman monstrosity. For this Temple had spent his little fortune. This was the end of his rosy dream!

She groped toward its door, blind with tears. She could scarcely bear the seconds that separated her from her husband, from the revelation of all the bitter truth and the relief of confession.

Then, as she was entering, she had a glimpse through a window. Temple was standing near the door of the big living-room. He had not heard her step. He seemed rapt in contemplation of the room itself, and there was a smile of great content on his face.

One hand was raised against the pillar

beside him and she noted the sensitive fingers caressing its venerated surface. Almost she could hear his contented sigh: "Sound and honest, a lovely home, a lasting home—fit for Jean." It was then she realized she could never tell him; that she must go on, carrying the load alone.

She hurried to him. She satisfied his curiosity with evasions and loyal lies. They sat before the hearth in the gathering dusk, and she found again a rich content in his silent companionship—his companionship, and the inexplicable benediction of their home.

Steps on the porch roused them. "Why, it's Diana," Temple exclaimed eagerly. "Diana Thawn, in this weather!"

It was Diana. She had started into the rain without a destination. Instinct and habit had led her to them.

Diana had reached her decision. She understood now that it would be monstrous folly to refuse La Salle's offer. What things about La Salle repelled her—made her shudder with instinctive loathing—she put aside resolutely. Most of her life she had looked forward to marrying a man with means enough to redeem the Thawn finances. The opportunity had come, and she was ready to grasp it. Devree she banished from her heart and brain.

Diana did not come to Jean to share her problem. She was too proud to share her problems with anybody. But for all her firmness she was pathetically eager, just then, to feel herself among friends. Though she gave no hint of her perplexity or fears she stayed beside the Temples with something of the dumb, wistful desire for companionship that is the lot of the outcast.

Whether she realized it or not, deep down in her heart Diana was lonely—hopelessly, desperately lonely.

CHAPTER XXVII.

TRANSMUTATION.

GORDON DEVREE was drawn toward Temple's home as a cold man is drawn by fire-glow. His afternoon had passed in a queer sort of haze, one part of him attend-

ing to the details of the law business, the rest of him numb with despair.

He came home to the Garfields, and realized at once that he could not stay there. The sight of dad and mother was more than he could stand. Not that dad or mother dreamed of reproaching him for what had happened. But their puzzled faces, their comments and questions, their hurt surprise at the result of the trial was a never-ceasing irritant to Devree's raw wound. Above all things he wanted to forget, so he sought out the Temples.

He went by paths and muddy roads, cutting across lots through the dark and drench. Vines tripped him and branches slapped his face. "Man, you're out of breath!" cried Temple, when he greeted him at the door.

Diana Thawn rose hastily when they heard his step and his knock. "I don't want to see him now," she whispered, and Jean had taken her away. Temple had orders to say nothing of Diana's presence.

The two men sat down before the fire. Temple quickly understood that his visitor was not talkative, and respected his silence. Their chairs were close together, and there was a sense of companionship in the silence.

Staring at the glowing logs, Devree reviewed his failure. It had hit him hard—he took everything at an exaggerated value. Step by step, he went back through the case, reviewing his acts. Not once had he failed to do all that he could to insure success, that was plain. No human agency could foresee Barr's trickery.

He believed there was still plenty of good chance to redeem the case, to bring La Salle to justice, but his last interview with the prosecutor made him heart-sick. That official was content to regard the first failure as final. The injustice of it made the younger man furious.

Finally, out of his musings, came an unexpected consolation. He had done nothing shameful. In no way was he to blame. And, after all, perhaps there would be other cases. He had not quit—not yet! The tide of his natural optimism had passed the ebb; it began to turn.

There was that in the hour, the rich twilight and the fire, that soothed him. Tem-

ple's silent companionship gave him heart. The charm of that lovely, shabby home was like a potent medicine to cure his hurts. He was moved to appreciation.

"By George, Harvey, there's something about this house of yours—something that surely—gets you. It's a cure for whatever ails me!"

"I know," Temple nodded. "It works with me—always. Don't ever try to tell me houses have no personality! This one has. It's honest—and sound—built to last. Everything in it, every last joint and mortise and nail, built with a conscience—that's why it feels that way. No other place can ever be like it—never!"

"I believe that's it!" Devree agreed. "That must be it—it feels that way—honest and sound."

And so certain was his conviction that in the spell of the moment he forgot the truth.

La Salle thought of nothing but Diana Thawn and his future with her as a wife. He returned to his big home in Renfrew Gardens and spent hours in restless wandering from room to room. He could not sit still more than a couple of minutes in succession. His brain pulsed with blood, and the devil's own restlessness was in his feet and arms. The fever of his exultation fed on its own flames. His certainty of Diana made certain all the glittering visions he had so long kept under.

As he walked he pictured Diana beside him. He saw her greeting the guests who would come to them; he saw her the central figure of the opera and the ballroom, the most magnificent of all magnificent women—and his wife, Mrs. La Salle—made great by his own cunning. When men named her their praise would be involuntary tribute to himself!

He marveled at the luck that had come to him. His spirit bathed in it as if it were some magic pool, and came forth unconquerable.

"It's the big hunch," he whispered, addressing a great, empty room blazing with the light of many chandeliers and brackets. "It's the big hunch, and I play it! They can't beat me now—nobody can beat me. To-night I win. What I want—I—take."

He saw nothing incongruous in the splendid, empty rooms with their glittering lights as if for a fiesta. He saw nothing odd nor tragic in his tall, slightly stooped figure, and narrow, thoughtful face pictured in a hundred mirrors as he wandered alone.

In that house Gloria had left no trace of personality. Not one room in it could suggest, even faintly, that Gloria had dwelt there. And his mind was as bare of memories of Gloria as the house itself.

He wandered with lips moving, forming soundless words that fed his vanity. Sometimes he smiled and occasionally laughed to himself. Perkins, spying his master at this unholy game, was driven, shuddering, to the companionship of his fellow servants in their wing at the rear. He hurried back to them, shaking and wide-eyed, like a man who has seen the devil.

Then it was time for La Salle to take Diana's answer. He had the roadster sent to the door, and started with a laugh. This thing only remained to be done. A few more moments, and the last big question would be settled. Having Diana, he felt he held the unfailing talisman to all future success.

Diana was not at home. Geoffrey Thawn told him with a frightened quaver that his daughter had planned to stop a few minutes at the Temples. "Ought to have been back two hours ago," he explained eagerly. "Come in, La Salle—wait here. She won't be long now—"

"At Harvey Temple's, you say? I'll get her."

He jumped into the machine and whirled it about, clashing the gears and racing the engine. He roared away into the night.

Wait? Sit and wait! Not on this night. The slight checked roused an impatience that maddened him.

"Temple's," he murmured, and frowned. "I don't like that idea. Won't do. I must speak to Diana—but, of course, after she's my wife this Temple friendship will end fast enough!"

The roads were miserable. In the blackness, depending only on the landmarks of bush and tree, unfamiliar in the glare of the headlights, he lost his way more than once. Every delay added to his mad im-

patience. The powerful car floundered and wallowed in the mud, and he urged it on with shouted blasphemy. Once he came near to disaster on a strange turn. For a few seconds he was close to violent death. By the time he had reached Temple's home he was wet; mud-splattered, and wild with impatience.

Devree answered the peremptory snarl of the horn, throwing wide the door and peering into the dark with fire-dazzled eyes. Behind him Temple loomed. The blind man also peered into the night as naturally as if everything was not night to his eyes!

"Miss Thawn," La Salle ordered bluntly. "I've come to take her home."

At the sight of that pale, narrow face in the lamp glow Devree bristled. "Miss Thawn! Miss Thawn is not here—"

"She is here, and I've come to get her—"

"She's not here. And when did you get the notion Miss Thawn wanted your escort, La Salle?"

"Oh," exclaimed La Salle, peering, "why, it's young Devree, chap who tried to—"

But Temple broke in with a shout. "Frank. That's Frank La Salle! Can't fool me, I know that voice. Why, Frank, come in, come in, man! Diana's here; I'll send for her. Come in to the fire!"

Temple's hearty grasp drew La Salle within the door.

"Excuse me, Harvey," Devree muttered, white to the lips, "I'll be on my way—"

"No—nonsense," Temple insisted, boisterous in his happiness. "You stay—"

"No. Another time, Harvey—"

"Not much. To-night. You sha'n't get away now, Gordon—"

"But I tell you I must!" Devree spoke with a bitter impatience, intent only on avoiding an unpleasant scene. La Salle's smiling presence so close to him acted like a violent poison. There was a cold sweat on his face.

Temple moved with an uncanny quickness. Temple's big hand was on his shoulder as he tried to slip past, and Temple's powerful arm spun him about.

"Go?" Temple's voice rose in a jovial shout. "You go? Not much. Why, here's good old Frank—Frank La Salle. Come

in, both of you, in by the fire. You two have got to know each other."

"Harvey, I warn you," Devree choked, fighting against Temple's clutch. "Don't do it, Harvey. I—I'll say something—something we'll all be sorry for—"

"Perhaps," said La Salle smoothly, his voice mocking Devree's tragic face, "perhaps if you would send for Miss Thawn, I had better take her away and avoid all this argument—"

"No, sir. You can't do that, Frank La Salle! Lord, man, here's the first time you've been in my house since we took it, and you propose sneaking away like that. Come in here where we all can talk, you hear me? Why, Frank, good old Frank, don't you know you're welcome here!"

Devree's control was out of bounds. "You fool, you poor deluded fool!" he shouted. "Welcome? That man welcome here!"

"Here, what's this? Gordon!" Temple's voice was a growl of astonishment, and menace. "This is Frank La Salle, my friend, one of the finest pals a man ever had. Now just what the devil do you mean by this talk in my house? Out with it!"

He twisted a firmer hold in Devree's collar, and a look of surprise crossed his face. "Man, you're shaking all over—like the ague! Come, come, Gordon, tell me there's some mistake here. What's all this nonsense, anyhow?"

La Salle, watching them both with a cold smile of lofty amusement, drove Devree to a frenzy of rage.

"I'll say it!" he shouted. "I will say it! I—I told you, Harvey—I warned you. You wouldn't listen. By God, I can't stand it any longer. You've got to know the truth. That man your friend? La Salle! You poor, lovable innocent! Will you never see the lies you live among—lies, lies, lies!"

"I tell you, your precious friend La Salle is a crook—a lying, scheming swindler who fattens off the suffering of the poor and ignorant—yes, and fattens on the misery of such a loyal friend as you. He spares nobody. He stands there now, mocking your helplessness with his damned smile, sneering at you. He does that, La Salle, the man who tricked you—who sold you this home

you think so splendid—home? A dilapidated hovel in a swamp—"

"Stop!"

Jean Temple flashed across the room, vengeance incarnate. Her wide eyes blazed wrath as her hand flew to Devree's lips, gagging him. Behind her came Diana, and halted, staring, held in the spell of the tragedy.

"Gordon," Jean panted, desperate. "Tell him—tell him you were fooling him. Gordon, tell him it's all a joke—"

"I won't!" Devree pushed her aside. "Not even for you, Jean. I'll not do it! That crook sha'n't stand there sneering at him—sneering at the decent man he duped and tricked and robbed, calling himself a friend—"

"Harvey, dear, dear Harvey, don't listen to him," Jean pleaded, clinging to her husband's arm, trying vainly to shield him with her own embrace. "Harvey, it's all a joke—a miserable, ill-timed joke. I tell you, Gordon's fooling—yes, he's laughing now! It's a *joke*; ask La Salle—"

"I will ask him," said Temple, his voice stern. "Gordon, be still. La Salle, you've heard. You heard what Devree says, that you tricked and robbed me, that my home is a hovel in a swamp—is that true?"

La Salle had no answer. He was considering the situation deliberately. In his hands now lay the balance of power, and he lingered, savoring the pleasure that knowledge gave him. Jean's eyes were fixed on him. They besought him to lie with a humble eagerness that was pitiful. Devree gave him a bitter, scornful glance that dared him to speak the truth. Temple's blind face bent toward him, stern as a judge.

"Is that true?" Temple repeated.

Still La Salle dallied, smiling with triumph.

"You have no answer, Frank," Temple warned.

"He doesn't dare answer," snarled Devree.

"Then I must believe Devree! Frank, Frank La Salle, are you going to let me believe that? We've been pals, Frank. In the name of our old friendship will you go on letting me believe that? You have taken my gratitude—"

Now La Salle was stung to action. "Gratitude!" he snapped. "I'm sick of this talk of gratitude. What's gratitude got to do with it? This was business, business—can you understand that? It was business when I sold you this place—not friendship. I don't want your damn thanks—"

"Wait. Hold on, La Salle. Did Devree joke, or—"

"Harvey, Harvey, never mind that. Why doubt your friend!" In her desperation Jean tried to deafen him, her hands on his ears. Temple shook her free, gently.

"I'll answer that," La Salle declared. "Why shouldn't I? I made a profit out of you, Harvey—yes. I told you so at the time. I made a damned handsome profit, I don't deny it. And if I did you're to blame for being so soft—so easy. *Caveat emptor*, Temple, you know what that means? 'Let the buyer beware.' You were a fool—a fool with his money. Naturally I saw a good thing—and used it. If you bought a house in a swamp it's your own fault. I suggested a contract between us; you wouldn't have it. I warned you—you wouldn't listen!"

"Then you mean it's a fraud. This house is a fraud—my home? A miserable, cheap swindle! And your friendship, that's a swindle, like all the rest—"

"My friendship!" La Salle's lip lifted in a mirthless snarl. "I never professed any friendship. You chose to tax me with that sentimental regard—"

"Don't listen. Oh, please, please, don't listen," Jean moaned.

Temple answered with a strange, new pride. "Listen? I'm not afraid to listen. Go on, La Salle, tell it all. If this is the truth—"

"Truth! It's a lie—of a piece with all his lying, clumsy and inefficient."

Diana Thawn, only witness to the scene that engrossed them, became in a second its chief actor. Her beauty, colored by the emotion that blazed within, had taken a radiance that thrilled them. There was a new music in her clear, light voice, a music like the ring of steel. Pushing between Temple and La Salle, she dominated them all, slender, erect, regal.

"All of you, listen. Who is this man

that we should fear him? Are we children, to shiver when he boasts! I'm not afraid to speak the truth. Harvey, he calls your home a swindle; he laughs to think your home a fraud. Swindle? Fraud? I tell you, Harvey Temple, your home is the loveliest thing I know; a sanctuary. Your home is stronger than the greatest fortress, and nothing can corrupt it. Your home is neither house nor land, fraud deed, nor crumbling wall. That cracking pillar is not your home, nor that warped veneer. Your home is Jean and your baby, and the love they have brought you. For every lie and cheat this man has sold you it has gained in beauty a hundredfold. Every deceit he has practised and thought himself so cunning and powerful has brought from those who make your home a new sacrifice to build it stronger and finer. Are we fools to notice the boast of a common swindler—"

Finally La Salle was roused. "By God, my girl, you'll go too far," he warned.

Then Diana turned on him, and the fire in her wide, blue eyes made him gasp.

"I go too far?" she questioned. "I fear you? You think I do? I did fear you, La Salle. This afternoon I was afraid. I have been afraid a long time. I thought you had the power to make or break our happiness. Yes, I thought that! I tell you I believed so thoroughly that to-night I was ready to give myself up to you. I was ready to marry you.

"I did fear you, but not now. The very thing you've done to-night, the boasts you've made, opened my eyes to what you are. Power? You have no power at all. To-day you boasted to me that you started as nobody and have come a long, long way. A lie. You still are nobody—and you are going nowhere.

"What have you done? Show me one thing you have done—one lasting thing! You built this house of fraud, but in it is something strong and splendid that will last when you are forgotten. You covered this waste land with your swindling buildings. But those you swindled made of them homes. Trade in trickery all you please, never till the end of time will you have the money or the power to destroy the thing that builds homes out of hovels.

"But your own home, what is that? A crumbling shell of deceit. There is the swindle, on your own hearth. A great, empty house that mocks you—even the woman who tried to be your wife has quit that fraud.

"You are the failure, Frank La Salle, the outcast doomed to wander in the dark—the stranger who peeps through the lighted window at other men's happiness, alone, friendless, unclean!"

Diana paused with heaving breast. One blazing white moment the emotion of her awakening had swept her to a height few humans reach. Passion had exalted her until she spoke with an insight and a prescience more than mortal. Now the fire died and left her again a woman. Unsteadily she moved toward Devree. She touched his sleeve and spoke with a strange humility:

"Gordon, I—perhaps I seem very insistent—not even very ladylike, I'm afraid, but to-day I made a promise. I—still want to keep—that promise. Gordon!"

Devree's arms were about her, holding her fast. He could find no words to tell her, but she knew the eloquence of his embrace.

"Good God," La Salle gasped, "the girl's crazy!"

"The girl is sane," Diana declared proudly. "Sane—at last!"

"The Thawns will pay for this—I'll smash that business!"

"That price is cheap, La Salle. Smash it. Do you think we are afraid of you?"

Then, finally, La Salle knew he had lost. She was not afraid—and never would be afraid again. Something changed within him at that look. It was as if that curious composition of human elements that was Frank La Salle had been touched with the one potent chemical solvent that was its master and at the touch, precipitated into chemical chaos.

His pallid face burned a sudden red. He pushed them from his path, unseeing. Before he had reached the door he ran, and he went into the night bareheaded. The door slammed behind him, and they heard the roar of his powerful car—then silence.

With his going a new and more wonderful beauty enriched the house of fraud.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE REAPING.

THE four happy people before the fire had come to a pause in their talk that spoke more eloquently than all they had said. Life promised them much, and what troubles it might bring beside those promises they could face secure in the knowledge of their common courage. The fire glow in the fine, incongruously shabby room was never more rich nor beautiful. The house that was a lie—yet honest and fine from the truth that inspired it—glowed with a rosy content.

The hysteric clamor of running steps brought them to their feet. The door burst open, and a mud-soaked man stumbled in, dripping rain. It was Dad Garfield.

"Gordon," he wheezed, "Gordon—terrible thing—an awful accident—"

"Not mother?" Devree exclaimed, whitening.

"No, no; mother's all right, safe and sound, but—a man—an automobile. It was awful—"

"What? Dad, tell us!"

"Mother and I were sitting in the kitchen, Gordon, talking. We heard him coming, heard his motor horn whooping. Must have lost his way in the dark. Driving down that old road, the old road that used to go behind the house—where I was going to put the garden. I ran out to warn him. Shouted my head off as I ran. I tell you he was a lunatic, driving like a wild man. Before I could get to him he'd hit it—the hole they dug there for the new house—the foundation hole. Oh! Car turned over—clean over. He was underneath when I got to him—Frank La Salle—"

"Wait," Devree interrupted. "Telephone! A doctor—an ambulance—"

Dad shook his head. "No need, now," he said soberly. "It's no use—La Salle is dead. Must have died the minute the car spilled over—into the hole he had dug."



The Log-Book

By the Editor

BETWEEN eighty and a hundred manuscripts reach this office every day, nearly all of them from unsolicited sources, and most of them stories. These are all carefully examined by the various editors, and a scrupulous record is kept of their receipt and return. For most of them *are* returned. This house issues two weeklies and one monthly magazine, and supposing we were to accept, say, fifty contributions a day, which would mean three hundred a week instead of the thirty-five to forty, which is our average, you can readily see how speedily we should bankrupt ourselves by piling up matter we could not utilize for generations to come.

But there is never any fear that we shall be tempted to do this. Most of the offerings are so crude, so absolutely worthless, that there is nothing to stand in the way of the really meritorious manuscripts finding a market. In other words, I mean to say that the forty odd stories for which checks go to their various authors each week—this is an outside figure, remember, for sometimes we find but ten to fifteen worthy of purchase—represent the only worth-while material discoverable in the vast mass of slush which daily comes to this office.

Beyond this borderland of sight and sense, this familiar world of ours, there is—what? We walk in the sunlight, and it warms us, nor does it give us even a hint of the infinite bleakness of interstellar space—yet as to the limits of that borderland, who can say? And what possible explanation could there be for a “dead spirit”?

“SERAPION”

BY FRANCIS STEVENS

Author of “Citadel of Fear,” “Claimed,” “Avalon,” etc.

is a story unfinished, because not even the master of the weird who wrote it can foretell the end, which no man knoweth. For sheer power, for gripping dread, for supreme story-telling magic, it is a masterpiece greater even than “Citadel of Fear,” that serial unusual. And I would not advise you to read it at two in the morning, when, they say, the barrier is weakest between life as we know it and that death-in-life which is an eternal prison-house for rebel souls. This begins as a four-part serial in *THE ARGOSY* for June 19.

If you want to be shown—if you demand the eating of the pudding for proof of its excellence—if you want to begin a story that you will be sorry to finish—then

“SHOW ME!”

BY CHARLES WESLEY SANDERS

Author of “A Habit of Noticing Things,” etc.

is what you have been looking for. For from the entry of the Man from Missouri up to the exit of *Scranton*, the Benevolent, the story moves to its inevitable and

dramatic conclusion. This is published as a complete novelette in *THE ARGOSY* for June 19, and is by the man who wrote "Jerry the Spirited."

* * *

John D. Swain has written a remarkable story in "CLASS" which I am going to let you read next week. A Russian is the hero of it, but not at all the sort of Russian you or I have been in the habit of hearing about. He is only ten years old, for one thing, but the story for all that is as far removed from being a juvenile tale as it could possibly be. But read it in our June 19 issue, and I am sure you will agree with me as to its unusual strength. Another noteworthy contribution to next week's *ARGOSY* is "THE REDEMPTION OF PIZEN SNAKE," by Hapsburg Liebe, in which a parson, a daredevil, a bad man, and a girl in love are chiefly concerned. It's quite out of the ordinary run, and I feel sure you will like it.

THE ONLY TROUBLE WITH THE ARGOSY

Clarksburg, West Virginia.

Well, here is another reader who has been hoosting *THE ARGOSY* for a long time. Please, Miss Taylor, let us have another story like "Yellow Soap." It was fine. It would be very hard for me or my husband to say which author we liked best, for they are all good. The only trouble with *THE ARGOSY* is it should come twice a week instead of only once.

FERN FLOWERS.

HIS THREE SPECIALS

Grafton, Vermont.

THE ARGOSY magazines have arrived and are now arriving every week. I missed them a lot at the time of the printers' strike, and was mighty glad to see them again when they did come. I have not much patience with the kickers in the *Log-Book*. The stories are all good, and if I don't care for some of them I think that some one else will like them. I think "The Trail Horde," by Charles Alden Seltzer, is fine; also "The Big Boss in Bronze," by Holman Day, and "Fixed by George," by Edgar Franklin. Indeed, all the stories are all right. I have taken *THE ARGOSY* for many years, and intend to do so right along, as the magazine suits me just as it is now.

H. E. BATHRIC.

WONDERS AT THE CALL FOR WESTERN STORIES

Birmingham, Alabama.

I have just started to read *THE ARGOSY* again after having stopped for about three months. The *ARGOSYS* got so far ahead of me I had to stop for a while. My time was limited, but now I have plenty of time again. I wish you would publish some more stories by the authors of "No Questions Asked" (Edgar Franklin), "The Devil's Riddle" (Edwina Levin), and "The Finger of God" (John Boyd Clarke). Those were the three best stories I read; don't remember the authors, but would like to know. Maybe you have printed some while I was not reading *THE ARGOSY*.

I wonder why some people call for those tire-some old Western stories. Would think they would like a change. I wish some California *Log-Book* reader would say what is the best town

to go to in California, including climate, work, *et cetera*, for people who want to try it. Please publish the names of the authors and let us have a story soon by one of them, anyway.

M. KATHERYN HAMILTON.

"THE BOUND BOY" WAS BY G. W. OGDEN

Fowler, California.

You will find enclosed four dollars for a year's subscription to *THE ARGOSY*. We do not always get it on time at the news-agents. We have read a great number of magazines, but *THE ARGOSY* beats them all. I enjoy reading the *Log-Book*. Have not seen a letter from this part of California. I read a serial a few years ago called "The Bound Boy," and thought it was the best story I had ever read. I wonder who the author was. I don't remember at this time. When you feel downhearted, just pick up *THE ARGOSY* and you will get a new lease of life.

The serials I enjoyed are "In Quest of Yesterday," by J. B. Ryan; "Drag Harlan," by Charles Alden Seltzer; "Skack of the Everglades," "The Big Muskeg," "Tracing the Shadow," and "Which of These Two?" by Elizabeth York Miller. "The Song of the Swan" was a good one. *Dr. Benton's* character operations proved very effective.

The short stories which appealed to me were: "Ducks and Drakes," "Seven Seas and Cornelia," "A Limited Acquaintanceship," and many others too numerous to mention. Please give us more novelettes like "Alias Annie's Brother," by Nell Moran. Edwina Levin is my favorite writer, and Edgar Franklin.

(MRS.) RICHARD CARMICHAEL.

AN ARDENT ADMIRER OF SELTZER AND FRANKLIN

Jackson, Ohio.

I have been a reader of your splendid magazine for the past three years, but seldom get the time to read other than Edgar Franklin and Charles Alden Seltzer's stories, which I think cannot be beat.

I have just finished "The Trail Horde," which I think is the best one that has ever come out. I have no fault to find with any of the stories. I consider the name Edgar Franklin and Mr. Seltzer's on a story the trade-mark, and go ahead and read it. I thought "Drag Harlan" was *some*

story, but "The Trail Horde" left it 'way back in the shade. I do not quite agree with S. K. S. in the *Log* of April 24, who says Seltzer's stuff is the same old thing. It might be, but they sure are the best I have ever read, and each one is the best. Any one that don't like his work certainly is hard to suit. If Seltzer changes his method, it wouldn't be good to me. I am crazy about those kind of stories, and only hope for more to come right along.

I also like railroad stories, but I seldom see any more. Why not have Seltzer write some Western railroad stories? I am sure he would be just the man to do them, but as long as *THE ARGOSY* comes with the stories that have been coming, it will suit me exactly.

Yours for more of the same class stories of Mr. Seltzer's *without* any change whatever.

F. D. CHISM.

COULD NOT KICK IF ALL THE SHORTS WERE POOR

St. Joseph, Missouri.

I have just read the newspaperman's letter in *THE ARGOSY* for January 17, and wonder what sort of paper he works on, and if it could hold a light to the good old *ARGOSY*. I think his knock a very unjust one, as all the serials are good, and some the best I have ever read in any magazine. True, I did not especially care for "Between Worlds" at first, but it grew much more interesting as the story advanced, and I enjoyed it very much. My husband and I both enjoy *THE ARGOSY* more than any other magazine we have ever read, and were lost without it during the strike.

I don't know which of *THE ARGOSY* authors I like best, for they are all good. Of course, once in a while I find a story I don't care for, but some one else does, and we surely could not kick if all the short stories were poor, since the serials are almost without exception the best to be found anywhere. I cannot say I wish it was a daily, because I have my own work to do and could not possibly read them all if it came every day, so you see I am perfectly satisfied with *THE ARGOSY* as it is.

I often wonder when reading the *Log-Book* just what some folks expect for a dime. Certainly there is no other magazine that has half the good reading that the good old *Argosy* has, yet they all have a larger price per magazine attached to them. We are not subscribers to *THE ARGOSY*, but buy it at the news-stand. I think we will become regular subscribers if we ever get settled and don't move from place to place.

Mrs. LOUIS BOURGEOIS.

A STORY THAT CAUSED ENJOYABLE HEART THUMPS

Corning, California.

Well, I just finished my *ARGOSY*, and I felt that I must write. I have been reading *THE ARGOSY* for almost four years now, and it has always been fine. I just read what Paul Craig said about "Everything but the Truth," and I must say that I never have had my heart thumped so nicely reading about the heroine just ready to jump over the cliff as when I listened to the two of them string out the lies, each one bigger than the last. And the name!—"Everything but the

Truth." That covers a lot of territory, but there was a lot to be covered, and *how* they did do it!

I would like to say a word about that "now" stuff of good old Samuel G. Camp's. To be able to appreciate it one must know that the word "now," as Mr. Camp puts it, is merely used by the user to cover time to think of what the user wishes to say, as a tenant will stall around and kill time talking to the landlord when his rent is in arrears. Mr. Camp's stories and expressions were most amusing to me, as I was able to appreciate the gist of his stories.

THE ARGOSY fan who suggests that each writer to the *Log* name his best and least liked stories has the right idea, I believe, although I like them all.

Say, Mr. Editor, not to be kicking at all, but can't you get any railroad stories? They are the breath of life to me, as I am an old railroad man myself. I have noticed so many, many people asking for them I should think it would be to your and our interests to run a line of them once every other week, like the "Giles Detective Agency: Investigations quietly conducted. Rates reasonable." Aren't those grand stories? I get a rib tickler out of every word.

I know a good story when I see it, and unless I am greatly mistaken, "The Great Discovery" is going to be fine. Best wishes to *THE ARGOSY* and your splendid staff and contributors. J. S.

LOG-BOOK JOTTINGS

Melvin W. Lethbridge, 7 Perkins Street, Amsterdam, New York, writes that he can supply a complete set of "Square Deal Sanderson." Ort of print with us. Helene Anargyros, Denver, Colorado, wishes to assure Lieutenant A. Simmons, of Washington, that there is at least one person in Denver who appreciates *THE ARGOSY*, and she is certain there must be oodles of others. She likes all the stories and believes she never bought an *ARGOSY* without reading every one of them. Raymond F. Murch, Brooklyn, New York, who calls *THE ARGOSY* a real book from cover to cover, is reminded that it is not the policy of the magazine to encourage indiscriminate correspondence among its readers. Mrs. W. B., Auxvasse, Missouri, thinks *THE ARGOSY* is well named indeed, because it is a ship not attended by seasickness or storm—except when her copy fails to arrive—and which bears its passengers to enchanted lands far from their ordinary prosaic environment. V. J. Messina, New Orleans, Louisiana, a reader for eight years, finds *THE ARGOSY* the best magazine he has ever taken, prefers the Western stories, is interested in the *Log*, and mentions as his favorite authors Charles Alden Seltzer and Frederick Becholdt. Mrs. Ernest S. Neily, Aylesford, Nova Scotia, is fond of stories of the sea and of those about people of the glacial period, such as "The Son of the Red God." She also enjoys those by H. A. Lamb. Evelyn Stoker, KJondike, Texas, is another of the many ardent admirers of "Yellow Soap." A Chap from the Golden West, Eveleth, Minnesota, who sends his real name to the editor, reiterates, for the benefit of his critic, John Ellsworth, that any fellow who says the shorts are punk is worse than crazy, declares that all the stories are fine, and cites particularly "The Great Discovery," by Charles V. Barney, as being one of the best he has read in a long while.



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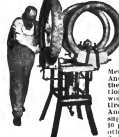
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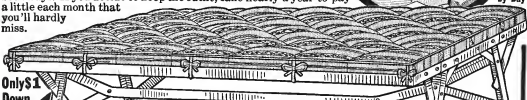
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