


PRICE 15 CENTS

OCTOBER 1917

THE
BLUE BOOK
MAGAZINE



A
Novelette
by
the
author
of
"WEE
MACGREGOR"

"The Roaring' U.P. Trail"
by ZANE GREY

"Pleasure Island"
by FRANK R. ADAMS

THE BLUE BOOK MAGAZINE

OCTOBER 1917

VOL. XXV NO. VI



*So tanned, so colorless—
What shall she do?*

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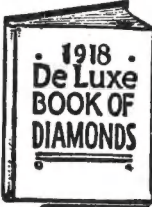
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THE BLUE BOOK

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The Roaring U. P. Trail. By Zane Grey 1030

This fascinating novel of the great West, by the author of "Riders of the Purple Sage," "The Border Legion" and "The Lone Star Ranger" is arousing the wide spread enthusiasm it deserves.

Twelve Striking Short Stories

Billy Fortune and the Busted Flush
By William R. Lighton 961

Percy tried to dodge when they made ready in Wyoming for the war; but Billy Fortune made a man of him.

Free Lances in Diplomacy By Clarence Herbert New 969

Would you kill the Kaiser if you had a chance? The Free Lance didn't, because it would help more to overhear what he said—"In the Kaiser's Council-Chamber."

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The story of a Western horse which had eaten the strange "loco" weed—and which went mad on a French battle-field.

The Water-Boy By Wilbur Hall 1004

Wherein a demon football-player called "The Pirate King" is spurred to do his derndest by a wild water-boy.

He Didn't Believe in Fairies By William Almon Wolff 1010

He didn't believe romance had anything to do with business, either, but the girl in the case taught him better.

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MAGAZINE OCTOBER 1917

DONALD KENNICOTT, Associate Editor.

HEADINGS: Drawn by HERBERT MORTON STOOPS

The Girl in the Crowd By Albert Payson Terhune 1021

She was just plain girl, the telephone-operator in an apartment hotel; but she became involved in an exceedingly tense little drama.

The Passing Partner By Elliott Flower 1049

They double-crossed old Matthew Breck in a business deal, but Grace Hammond and young Breck turned the tables very neatly.

A Killing on Sunrise By Arthur E. McFarlane 1060

A joyous story of a wild Irishman and a diabolic coyote, by the author of "Redney McGaw" and other memorable stories.

A Deep-Water Dude By Captain A. E. Dingle 1069

Fine feathers and seamanship didn't mix, declared the first mate; but later he changed his mind.

The Professional Affinity By Octavus Roy Cohen 1079

She was some flirtatious female, that girl from the "Ziegfeld Follies;" and what she did to that baseball team was a caution.

The Crucible By John Barton Oxford 1085

A forest-fire tried the souls as well as the bodies of three people in this vivid drama of New England.

Rubber Heels By Marion McCrea 1091

The ways of womankind were past Pennerton's understanding; indeed, he never did learn the whole truth in this interesting affair of love and business.

A Complete Novelette

Joan's Enemies By J. J. Bell 1100

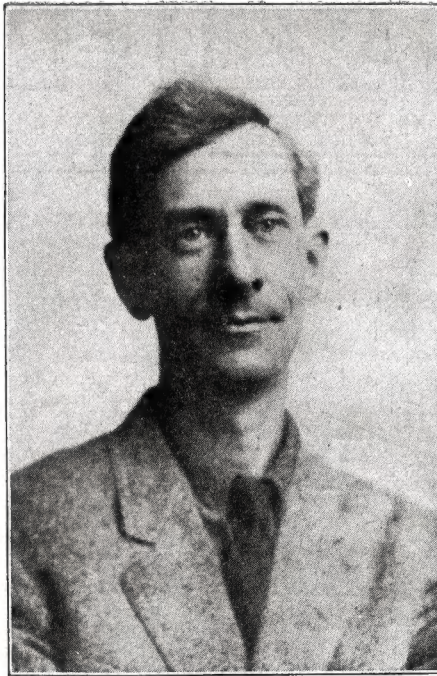
A torn strip of paper held the clue to vast wealth; and Joan and her lover knew many trials before it was found: an alluring mystery-story by the author of "Wee Macgregor."

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R.
Bechdolt



Who wrote
"Sindbad
of Oakland
Creek"

Coming—A New Series of Stories By Frederick R. Bechdolt

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I sighted the whalers dead ahead, black-hulled, their naked yards crisscrossed against the rainy sky, . . . a grim, dark fleet, whose empty stacks had belched their sooty clouds against Kamchatka's lowering skies and hung with drifting palls the floe-lanes east of Mackenzie's log-strewn delta. . . . To one of these I called "*Grampus* ahoy!" and Captain Dan, port admiral of this sleeping fleet, came to the bulwarks to drop a line.

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ON SALE OCTOBER 1st

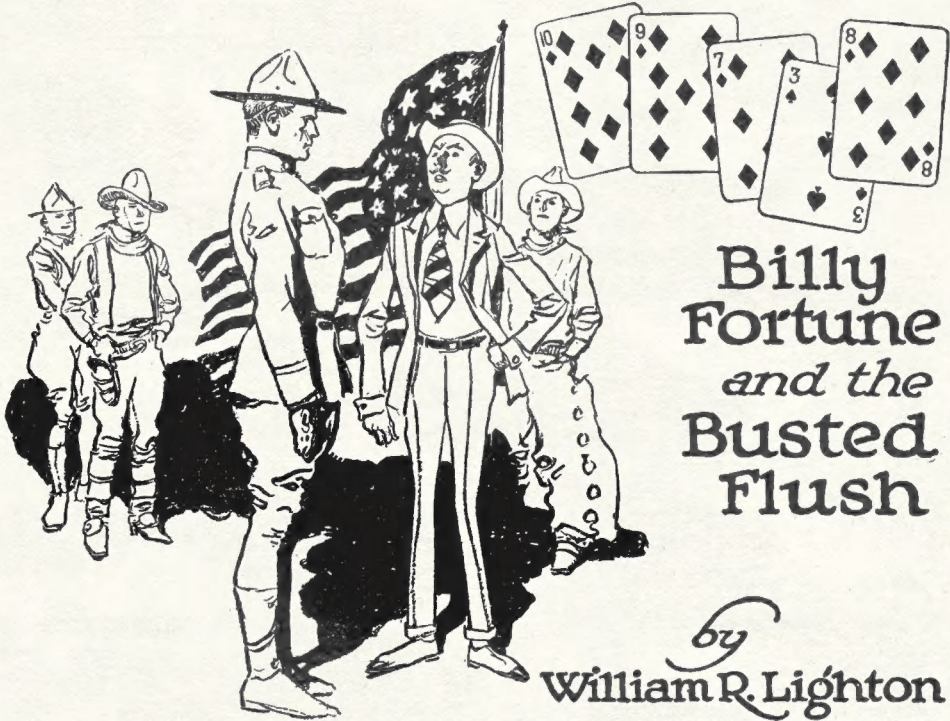
October

1917

THE
BLUE BOOK
MAGAZINE

Vol. XXV

No. 6



Billy Fortune *and the* Busted Flush

by
William R. Lighton

ARE you willin' to take a person's word for it when he commences proclaimin' that he's better than the rest of folks? Well, I aint. That's one of the things a man can't prove to me with just his mouth. If he aims to make the claim stick, he ought to be willin' to back it up with all he's got. His voice aint near enough. What he tells you with his voice aint anything more than just a white-chip ante. It don't open any pots—does it?

No sir! If I'm goin' to take any stock in a man, I want him to be plumb shy about announcin' himself at the start. You take Percy Brian Boru Wilkes, now. You let me tell you about Percy. Percy shows you what I'm meanin'. If you hunted all over Wyoming, you couldn't hardly find anybody that would show it any better than Percy does.

I wasn't thinkin' about Percy at all that day when I blew into Redstone off the range. I wasn't thinkin' about anybody but me. I'd come thirty miles with the sun blazin' on me and the sand grittin' in my teeth and a wishful sort of a notion workin' in my mind. There wasn't but one place in Redstone where my wishfulness could be cured; and so as soon as I hit town I sifted into Pete Elderberry's. And there was Steve Brainard settin' at one of the little card-tables back beyond the end of the bar, humped up over a newspaper with his elbows spraddled out on it. It seemed as if he was real absorbed, because he didn't look up to see who it was comin' in.

"Hello, Steve!" I says. "Say, stand up here with me—quick!"

He didn't notice me a bit.

"Oh, come on, Steve!" I says. "I

want you to be my bridesmaid. I'm goin' to marry one of Pete's bottles."

I guess he didn't even hear me, because he didn't make a move only to scuffle his feet a little on the floor.

"For pity's sake!" I says to Pete. "What's ailin' him?"

"You aint heard yet?" says he. "It's war."

"What?" I says. "The war? Oh, that's old. Has anybody been lickin' anybody?"

"This here one aint old," says Pete. "This here one's a new one. We're in this one."

"We?" I says. "Who? You mean us? Well, for the love of Christmas! Who's it with?"

"Germany," Pete says. "There it is in the paper."

Well, there it was, all right, strung out all the way across the top of the page, big and black.

"Judas Priest!" I says. "Let me see. Get your arms out of the way a little, Steve."

He roused up then and took a look at me.

"Hello, Billy!" says he. "Take it. I'm through with it."

I got all I wanted in a little while, and put the paper down. You know how the papers had it at the beginnin', when the thing was just gettin' to look real grim. They didn't have so terrible many facts, but what they had seemed sort of powder-dry and just right for startin' a brisk fire in a man's mind.

"Sufferin' Peter, Steve!" I says. "Who'd ever have thought that? I knew they'd been fussin' some; but who'd have thought they'd want to fight? Do you reckon we're goin' to get into it for sure?"

HE didn't answer me. He'd fished up a stub of a pencil and an old letter out of his pocket and was writin' somethin' on the back of the envelope. I couldn't prod him into payin' attention to me by talkin' at him, not till I leaned over to see what he was up to.

"What's that you're doin', Steve?" I says.

"Figurin'," says he. "Countin' up them we can count on from here. The cow-country'll want to be in on this,

wont it? They'll be needin' men. Looky here, who I've got—you and me, and Pete, and Red McGee—"

He had a considerable string of names. The names looked all right, as far as I could see.

"Yes; but Steve," I says, "what's the sense of that? We had a militia-company once. Everybody was in it. Don't you remember?"

"Oh, shoot!" says Steve. "That one! That one's dead. It was too dead to resurrect when they wanted to send the militia to the Border. It never was organized right, anyway. You know who got it up, and what for. It was Perce Wilkes, just to let him put on a mess of gold braid and a little sword up at the State fair."

"That don't make any difference," I says. "It'll save a heap of time, mebbe, if we use the company we had. We can sift out the trash if we want to. Let's go find out about it. Beck McGillicuddy used to keep the books over in his bank. Come on!"

We run right into Percy on the street, strollin' down to the post office after his mail. Goin' after the mail, along in the middle of the afternoon, was just about the best thing Percy did. He'd have tickled you. I'll never tell you where he'd picked up the notion; he'd never got it in Wyoming; but it was a real solemn thing with him to come out of the house after the up-train was gone and stroll down the hill to town and back again. Goin' to get the mail was his day's work, except for swingin' in the hammock on the porch with a cigarette. He didn't even roll his own; he had 'em made for him. If you get right down to it, Percy was a real useless man.

I guess you might say he'd come by that honest, from his mother. His daddy hadn't done it. His daddy had been one of these plain, friendly-seemin' men, but real subdued, just tendin' to his sheep-business and rollin' up some money at it for his wife and Percy to spend. He'd lived plain, and he'd died plain, and that had been all of him. I expect he couldn't help it. An aristocratic woman is mostly too much for such a man as him.

Nobody in the Redstone country

rightly knew how she'd got to be such an aristocrat. It's like I'm tellin' you: she'd just proclaimed it when Sam Wilkes had married her and fetched her there, and then she'd just kept right on proclaimin' it. That's all she'd needed to do, because the women had let her get by with it. A man couldn't have run that kind of a whizzer on the men-folks. A man wouldn't hardly have tried it. He'd have knew his bubble would bust before he could make a fair start at blowin' it up. Don't you reckon the women must sort of admire bubbles? Anyway, they'd let Mrs. S. Forbes Wilkes blow hers.

She'd got to be Mrs. S. Forbes Wilkes as soon as old Sam was dead and she'd moved to town from the ranch. Then was when she commenced really livin' up to herself and patronizin' the rest of the country. *Patronizin'*! She was real strong for that word. She didn't just trade at the store; she patronized it. And she patronized the church that her and Percy went to. And after a while she was patronizin' charity. She didn't do it by givin' away her own money—she was terrible tight with her money; but she begged old clothes from the folks round town, and then whenever a tramp would come along, she'd make him do half a day's work in her yard and pay him with a pair of somebody else's old breeches or shoes—and then it would be in *The Herald* next week about Mrs. S. Forbes Wilkes relievin' another case of distress.

She patronized *The Herald* more than anything else, gettin' her name in it—hers and Percy's. It seemed as if she pretty near lived on seein' their names in print. Every blessed week the town page in the paper would be mostly Mrs. S. Forbes Wilkes and Percy Brian Boru Wilkes—and neither one of 'em ever doin' a blessed thing that counted. She never made a move without writin' it up herself for *The Herald*; and when Percy went to sleep once in his hammock and rolled out and skinned his face on the porch floor so bad that he was ashamed to show himself for a couple of days, she put it in the paper that Percy Brian Boru Wilkes had met with a painful accident but was recovering. That's the kind she was.

Percy Brian Boru Wilkes! Yes sir, that was his real name. She'd named him that because she'd give it out that she'd come down from some of them old Irish lads back yonder, and she was keepin' the name alive in the family, along with the blood of kings.

And the women let her get by with it! Can you understand the women? I expect they'd got so used to it by this time that it wasn't even seemin' funny to 'em any more.

WELL, and there was Percy strollin' down after his mail in his creased white pants and his pink-striped shirt and his little straw hat, and his weak little mouth hangin' open and showin' his couple of white rabbit-teeth in front. He was givin' a far-off kind of a look clear past me and Steve on the sidewalk, but Steve stopped him.

"Perce," says Steve, "you've saw what's in the papers. This country's in it right. Some of us'll be waitin' to take a hand. We've been talkin' about it, Billy and me. We aint willin' to wait till they come huntin' for us. We're goin' to beat 'em to it. There's that old militia-company, Perce. We want a meetin'. When'll there be one?"

Percy give us an uneasy flicker of a look with his pale eyes and then looked on past us again.

"I don't know, I'm sure—really," says he.

"You don't?" says Steve. "Why don't you? The company was your doin'. You was head of it. Why don't you know?"

"Aw, yes!" says Percy. "But I have nothing to do with it now, really. I've—aw—I've resigned, you know."

"Oh!" says Steve. "Resigned! I hadn't heard. When did you?"

Percy didn't answer that. He give another flick of his eyes from one to the other of us, liftin' his lip a little higher and suckin' his breath in through his teeth. That was a way he had when he was feelin' real superior. I never had noticed him with his mouth clear shut.

"Really," says he, "the matter doesn't interest me. You'll excuse me, wont you?" And then he went ahead with his stroll.

Well, we found the old books in Beck

McGillicuddy's bank, where he'd been keepin' 'em. We opened 'em up on the counter and began to run through 'em, with Beck standin' beside us, teeterin' on his long legs and grinnin' his wide grin.

"It's only a fair-to-middlin' outfit, take it altogether," says Steve, when we'd sized up the names. "It aint what you might call a fightin' outfit. We can make some of 'em do; and we can let the no-good ones quit, along with Percy. Say, Beck, Percy says he's resigned. When did he?"

Beck gave a quiet little chuckle.

"Ah, yes—Percy!" says he. "Percy showed up right early this morning, within a quarter of an hour after the Cheyenne papers were in, and gave me his resignation. He must have written it in a hurry."

"It's the first time in his life, then," I says, "that he ever did anything in a hurry. Good riddance! He'd make a whiz of a soldier!"

"Yes," says Beck. "Just so! You're going to let the resignation go, then?"

"Let it go?" I says. "Why wouldn't we? How could we help it if we wanted to? And who'd want to?"

"Oh, I don't know," says Beck. "It looks to me like a fair sort of sporting proposition, somehow. He's too eager. And just think what an air of distinction he'd give you. A descendant of Irish kings!"

"Distinction!" I says. "Oh, murder! What's an Irish king, anyway? What's the use of 'em? They aint even any good to draw to. If you filled, you couldn't win nothin' with 'em, not if you held all there are in the deck."

"Oh, I don't know," Beck says again. "Look what they've won for Percy. 'A life of proud ease, for one thing—"

"No such a thing!" I says. "It was old Sam and his sheep that won the ease for him. Percy and his Irish kings! If I was goin' to claim relations with kings, I'd want to pick live ones. I wouldn't want to pick on a bunch that's too dead to deny it."

Steve was gettin' impatient.

"Oh, let up on that!" says he. "What's the good? We're shut of Percy. Let's see who we've got left here that's fit for somethin'."

BUT the notion of Percy seemed to kind of rankle in my mind. By and by when we'd gone out of the bank and started round to spring the proposition on some of the others, I spoke to Steve.

"Steve," I says, "this Percy boy, now. He's quit. And we're right willin'. But it don't seem just complete, the way it is. It's too easy for him this way. It don't just suit me to have it this way."

Steve give me a scowlin' kind of a sideways look.

"You can't help actin' the fool, can you?" says he. "We aint got any time for foolishness."

"That aint it at all," I says. "It would be real funny, mebbe, but it wouldn't be all foolishness. If there's a war, it's goin' to do more than give some of us a chance to fight. It's goin' to call a lot of cheap bluffs. Why can't we let it call Percy's? If it wasn't for this, Percy could keep right on tootin' his little horn till Kingdom Come, and we'd let him. We've got so used to the sound of it that we wouldn't mind it any more at all. Mebbe there's some that would get to believin' in it. You know that's the way things happen. You know mighty well that's the only way these aristocrats can ever make it go—just by nobody takin' the trouble to call their bluff. Don't you reckon this thing might help to call Percy's? War's goin' to show the difference between bein' a man and just havin' a pedigree. If there's any good in pedigree, it wont hurt us to find it out; and if there aint, why, that's what we want to know too. It could be a show-down, more ways than one. Fightin' aint all there is to war."

I had to argue a heap with him; but after a while I got him to sort of see the righteousness of it. Steve and me, we kept it to ourselves, just us two, till we got ready. We let it alone till we'd got the company kind of freshened up a little and put Steve at the head of it and had opened up a place for an armory. Nobody claimed it was regular solderin'. Nobody knew if there'd ever be any use of us. We was doin' it on our own hook, just to keep from gettin' too restless. And then when we had it lined out, one day we sent word to Percy to show up that afternoon for drillin'.

He didn't come. He didn't pay any attention at all till we sent a man up to the house to roust him out of his hammock. Then he come. He wasn't scared—not yet; he was just wrathy—all flushed up pink with it.

"What do you mean, sir?" he says to Steve. "What do you mean by sending such orders to me? No more of this, if you please. I have nothing whatever to do with the company. I told you myself that I had resigned my captaincy."

"I remember," says Steve. "That part's all right. You resigned the gilt braid and the filigree, and now we're goin' to let you pack a gun. Get into your clothes, quick. You're keepin' us waitin'."

"What, sir!" says Percy. He was tryin' to be stern with it, but his voice went up to a thin little shrill squeal. "You! Giving me such orders? You forget yourself!"

"Get into your clothes, quick!" Steve says again. "This is business. Don't argue, now. Change your clothes!"

The trouble with the likes of Percy is that their strong-mindedness peters out too quick. Percy couldn't keep it up. The wrathful pink all went out of his face, and his moist little lips started tremblin'.

"But, Captain," he says, plumb meek, "surely you can't be serious. Surely you know this is a mistake. Why, I sent in a written resignation."

"I saw it," says Steve. "You wasn't thorough enough with it, just puttin' it in the bank with Beck McGillicuddy. It aint hardly likely that's goin' to let you out. There's a fightin' chance it wont, and we're takin' that chance. I wouldn't wonder if you'd be stayin' with the company."

Percy was shakin' so he had to lean against the table to steady himself.

"But," he stutters, "—but maybe you're going to—to war! I can't go to war. I can't! Why, Captain, it would break my mother's heart."

"Oh, for the love of country!" says Steve. "Tell that to the old maids, Perce. Don't go round tellin' it to the women that'll be sendin' their boys with this bunch. You'll be gettin' unpopular if you do. Now go get your clothes changed."

HE drilled with us, all in a daze, and then he must have gone right straight home and told his mother, because here come Mrs. S. Forbes Wilkes right straight back. She wasn't afraid; I've got to say that much for her. She was hot—just boilin' over with it. Do you reckon there's anything in the world any more comical than a mad woman who's tryin' to act haughty too? It must be horrible hard to make 'em go together. Haughtiness had got to be a habit with the Wilkes woman till she was hard and stiff with it; but the madness was crackin' it open and breakin' through it in spots and pretty near spoilin' it. It was Steve she went after first.

"What absurdity is this?" says she. "My son tells me that you have actually forced him to—to drill to-day with these—these men!"

"Why, yes ma'am," says Steve. "Perce drilled with the rest."

"My son!" says she. "And he tells me that you are insisting that he must remain with you."

"Yes ma'am," says Steve. "'Insisting' is right."

"And Percy tells me that he was not even permitted to dress as an officer. He tells me that he was made to dress as a common soldier."

"Yes ma'am," says Steve. "'Common soldier' is right."

"And with common ruffians as his superiors!" says she. "It is incredible!"

"We had Perce pretty near believin' it, toward the last," says Steve. "Another couple of days will fix that part of it all right."

She begun to breathe hard through her haughty nose, glarin' down at Steve across the table.

"Insolent!" says she. And then she happened to get sight of me, settin' with my chair tipped back against the wall, rollin' me a cigarette. "My son!" says she. "Compelled to associate on an equality with such—such persons! Can you be aware that my son has the blood of three kings in his veins?"

I expect I hadn't ought to have said it, not to a woman; but she was real provokin'.

"Three kings?" I says. "Wouldn't it seem, now, as if three kings ought to

have been able to breed somethin' better than just a little busted flush?"

I guess she didn't rightly understand me. I reckon I'd ought to have spoke the euchre language to her. Anyway, she didn't have any come-back.

"I expect I'd better talk right plain to you, Mrs. Wilkes," says Steve. "And I expect mebbe you'd better listen, so as to get it straight. Perce was in this company when there was some struttin' to do. That's what he went in it for. That didn't do any hurt, particular. But now there's goin' to be some fightin', and we've been figurin' that Perce ought to have a chance to be in on that too. His aristocracy aint goin' to make us think any different. The way we see it, there aint any aristocracy in this country right now except what makes a man want to act responsible. The way I look at it, there's a sight more aristocracy right now in bein' a responsible American than there is in just claimin' to be blood-kin to men that mebbe used to amount to somethin'. That's what I'm aimin' to say to you. If Perce's kings' blood that you say he's got in him is goin' to hinder him from bein' a responsible American, then it's no good."

The woman wasn't takin' any stock at all in that, not a mite.

"Preposterous!" says she. "Who may you be, pray tell me, to presume to instruct me in matters of breeding? I shall absolutely forbid my son's having anything further to do with the company. I shall absolutely forbid it!"

"I wouldn't go too far with it, if I was you," says Steve. "Mebbe there's a way out. I aint quite sure myself. But till you've found it, Perce had better come right along and work with the rest. We aint goin' to be the ones to let him off. I'm tellin' you the solemn truth about that."

She gave one last snort, haughtier than ever.

"I shall appeal to the Governor at once!" says she. "I shall see him at once, personally. Such intolerable insolence!"

AFTER she'd gone, I had to laugh. "My sinful soul!" I says. "Aint she takin' it rough? But shucks, Steve! What's the use of runnin' a joke in the

ground? We've had our fun with it. Let's let it go."

Steve didn't laugh any. He was squintin' at me real hostile.

"Joke?" he says. "This aint any joke now, Billy. It's got clear past jokin'. We're goin' on through with it—right on through to the finish. I'm learnin' somethin' myself—somethin' I hadn't even thought about till now. I'm goin' to find out all there is to it."

I don't know what happened when she went to see the Governor, but it couldn't have consoled her much. They tell me he aint the kind of a man for that. Anyway, as soon as she got back from Cheyenne, she took Percy to the doctor. That didn't help her any, either. Anybody that thought old Doc Giddings was easy would be makin' a bad mistake. I'd knew more than one that had misjudged him, on account of his funny little side-whiskers and his purrin' little voice. Besides, me and Steve had been sort of conversin' with Doc about Percy before Percy went to see him. Doc told us about it at supper.

"Quite sound!" says he. "No flaw at all in him, save an accelerated heart-action, due purely to nervousness. Precisely!" He give a short little laugh. "His worthy mother was inclined to insist that he must necessarily have inherited from his distinguished ancestry some grave physical defect. It was really quite surprising, the catalogue she was able to give of serious imperfections inhering in her family. They must have been a rather indifferent lot. But Percy's inherited weaknesses are hardly disqualifying. A flabby intellect is hardly a disqualification, is it? No offense, gentlemen! Precisely!"

Well, and then the next day here she come with Percy. I was pretty near sorry for Percy. It aint such an awful amusin' thing to look at a man when he's up against somethin' he aint big enough to match himself with. Percy wasn't near big enough for this. It had been makin' him fair sick, seein' it loomin' up ahead of him and broodin' over it. The pretty, fresh pinkness was all gone, and he had haggard little hollow places under his eyes. No, it wasn't funny any more. He was a real pitiful-lookin' man.

His mother wasn't the same as she had been, either. She didn't come stewin' and stormin', not that time. She was right quiet, standin' there at the table, with Percy beside her. She wasn't makin' any try to hide her humbleness; she was twistin' her handkerchief in her shakin' hands, and her voice hadn't any aristocracy in it, nor nothin' else but just the woman of her.

"Captain Brainard," she says to Steve, "is there no way of getting Percy free of this dreadful thing? I can't bear it! Is there no way out for him?"

THAT Steve man sure surprised me. Steve is mostly plumb gentle with women when they're sufferin' with distress. What I looked for was to see him lay down to her and tell her to take her little Percy and go on home with him. But he didn't. That man had changed a whole lot in a few days. He just set lookin' at her, straight and steady.

"A way out?" says he. "Yes ma'am, there's a way, if you and Perce are willin' to take it."

"Anything!" says she. "Oh, anything—anything!"

"I'll tell it to you plain, like I did the other," says Steve. "It's like I told you that other time: if Perce gets out of this by us lettin' him go, it aint goin' to be because you and him claim he's too good for soldierin'. It'll be because you and him are both willin' to own up that he aint anywhere near good enough for it. Wait, now, ma'am! You don't need to say nothin' yet, not till I've got through. Here's what I'm meanin'. I've figured it all out in my mind, and I aint sayin' a blessed word I don't mean.

"Perce, he's been stickin' out his little chest and makin' his little claims, here in Redstone, with you backin' him up. Well, a man can do that, most times, when nobody else is carin'. When a person's playin' solitaire, he can deal the cards any way he wants to, if they don't fall to suit him. He don't cheat anybody but himself then. But when he starts playin' a real game with other folks, he'd better quit stackin' the cards or tryin' to deal 'em off the bottom of the deck. And that's just what Perce has been doin' with Redstone, this long while."

She wasn't likin' it a bit. She wasn't used to bein' talked to like that, Mrs. S. Forbes Wilkes wasn't. She went white clear to her lips, and her eyes was blazin'; but she had the judgment to keep still.

"Perce aint ever showed anything in Redstone but his pedigree," says Steve. "I aint sayin' anything against pedigree. If Perce's pedigree is facts, like you've told it, why, that's all right with me. But if a pedigree can't produce a man, then I'd hate to be livin' on one. I'd hate to own up to it. I guess you know what I mean by a man: I mean one that's willin' to stand up with the rest of men and do his share of what's likely got to be done to-day. What's past aint enough for to-day—and a pedigree is plumb past, aint it? What's past aint any use at all unless it's led up to somethin' we can use to-day. The past is all done with, and to-day's a brand-new deal. That's just exactly the way I'm thinkin' about it now."

She couldn't hold in any longer.

"You—you are insultin'!" says she.

"I aint aimin' to insult you," says Steve. "I'm just aimin' to lay my cards all out, face up, so we can see what we're playin' with. And now I'm goin' to tell you what I've been thinkin' about Perce.

"If Perce wants to slip out of this so bad, I wouldn't wonder if we could let him. There's somethin' he'd have to do first, though. He'd have to do it for the good of the boys that's stickin', and for the good of them that's goin' to send their boys when the time comes. He'd have to stand up in front of the company, right out there in the public road, and tell 'em plain that he wants to stay home with you because he's afraid to go. He'd have to say it right out that he's too much of a coward for what we may be havin' to do. When you sift it out, that's all the honest reason he's got. And he'd have to own up to 'em that the front he's been puttin' on here has been nothin' but a poor counterfeit that he's been usin' to try to hide what he is. He'd have to explain to 'em that this pedigree of his aint done anything for him, to put courage into him for bearin' his part. That would all have to come out, just the way I'm tellin' you."

"Oh!" says the woman. She was scared, then, drawin' back from the table with her eyes openin' wide. She'd never thought about it like that—had she? You know she hadn't, not in all her life. "Oh!" says she. "You make it impossible! Why must you humiliate me so?"

"No ma'am," says Steve. "It aint that. I aint a mean man. It wouldn't be to humiliate Perce nor you, but just to put decent pride in them that's goin' to act so different from Perce. I'd want 'em to understand what it comes to. If there's any good in war, it aint just in goin' out to lick them that's against us. It's in clearin' up our own ideas about things. We want to be findin' out what manliness is like, and how much of it there is in us, and how far it's willin' to go when it gets a chance to do somethin' more than just play safe. I don't know any better way of showin' that to these boys than by havin' Perce speak his little piece to 'em."

SHE was commencin' to cry. What do you suppose made her? It wasn't hardly sorrow, was it? What she was feelin' was somethin' a heap more complicated than plain sorrow. She must have been beginnin' to see what Steve was drivin' at. When a woman has been livin' all her life with a notion like that one of hers, and then sees it all of a sudden shrinkin' up and pullin' apart and crumblin' to pieces, it's apt to make her awful disappointed—aint it? I guess it must have been disappointment she was cryin' with, as much as anything. Whatever it was, the sight of her cryin' didn't stop Steve. He had somethin' else to say to her, and he said it.

"I guess it's a right good thing for Perce that his father aint livin' yet," says he. "I guess Perce's father wouldn't hardly relish standin' for this. I used to know him real well. I never heard him claimin' aristocracy, but he had some pretty strict notions about bein' a man. If Perce's father was livin'—"

Then was when Steve quit. It was Percy that made him, slammin' his

bunched fist down on the table till he made it crack.

"Stop that—damn you!" says Percy. No, I know it don't sound a bit like him; but that's just exactly what he said. He wasn't lookin' like himself either. The scared whiteness had clean gone out of his face! nor it wasn't pink; it was flushed all up with dark red, clear to the edge of his little straw hat. His foolish little mouth wasn't hangin' open; for the first time in his life he'd got it shut in a tight, straight line. And there he was, leanin' across the table and shakin' his finger under Steve's hooked nose.

"Not another word of that out of you—damn you!" he says. "You think I'm like that, do you? I'll show you! A common coward, am I? I'll show you! Try kicking me out of this company—just try it! I'll show you! I'll—I'll—" But he couldn't finish it.

"Come, Mother!" he says to the woman. And then there he went, marchin' off up the sidewalk with his foolish head up and his shoulders stiff. It was certainly comical.

Steve squinted after him a minute, and then he laughed.

"Billy," says he, "I'd have been pretty near disappointed in Perce if he'd let me go on with that last part. I'd sort of ciphered it out that he'd be interruptin' me plumb rude just about then."

"Well, gee whiz!" I says. "Did you ever see the like? Little old Percy! Why, Steve, mebbe there's somethin' in that king business, after all."

"Sugar!" says Steve. "That wasn't his mother's pedigree he was showin' us; it was just his daddy's plain American spunk. Percy has chucked them kings in the discard. But he aint figurin' on droppin' out—is he? He's goin' to stay and call for cards. He aint holdin' up nothin' better than a lone deuce, mebbe; but I'll bet you he helps on the draw. I'll just bet you he does!"

"No!" I says. "Not me!" I wasn't goin' to bet with him. Didn't I know who was doin' the dealin'? And that Steve lad is a real smooth dealer when he wants to be.

SINDBAD is coming— "The Sindbad of Oakland Creek," Frederick R. Bechdolt's captivating stories of Crow's-nest Dan and his wild sea-adventures. The first appearance of old Sindbad will be in our next issue.

Free Lances *in* Diplomacy

By
Clarence
Herbert
New



In the Kaiser's Council- Chamber

GENERAL VON BREMMER ranked as division commander—was known by sight to practically every staff officer in upper Bavaria and the neighboring parts of Austria. It was also known that, after being wounded in Alsace, he had been transferred by Crown Prince Rupprecht to depot-detail in Munich while he was recuperating. Consequently his high-powered touring-car—in which three officers with hand-luggage accompanied him—was nowhere stopped by any of the military patrols along the mountain roads as it raced eastward through the foothills of the Tyrolean Alps. They had started from Munich just before sunrise, when the streets were practically deserted. At six that evening the car stopped before a handsome villa in the Hietzing suburb of Vienna, near the Schönbrunn—having covered the two hundred and fifty miles without being once held up for examination. After introducing the supposed officers to his friend

the Graf von Racoczy, and seeing them installed as his guests for an indefinite stay, Von Bremmer returned to Munich next morning. Hence the disappearance from the Bavarian capital of the Honorable Aloysius McMurtagh (a wealthy Irish-American), Major Michael Brady (formerly of the Boer army) and Selim Abdullah Pasha (a Turkish colonel of engineers), remained a mystery which repeated inquiries from Berlin failed to solve.

The three men had come from Russia, where it was known that they had been doing valuable work for the Camarilla as German propagandists, and had been given *carte blanche* by the Wilhelmstrasse to gain the confidence of Bavarian Socialists with the

view of using their influence with the Socialists of Russia when they returned. Apparently their activities in Munich had been more or less effective, and in six weeks they had made themselves very popular with the Bavarians. But it seemed to some of the Prussian officers that they were

WOULD you kill the Kaiser if you got the chance? The Free Lance had the chance to allow a man to shoot the Kaiser—and he stopped the fellow. Why? That's the story—just about the most exciting and informative story of the war ever published.

meddling considerably more in German politics than their credentials warranted, creating an influence that was threatening to get out of hand; letters had gone down to Berlin concerning them. Explanations had been demanded of the Wilhelmstrasse, where Herr Zimmermann gave a detailed account of their services in Russia and expressed the utmost confidence that their influence in Bavaria would prove valuable to the imperial government. But Zimmermann himself was no longer in favor with the dominant party in the Reichstag. The Honorable Aloysius instinctively sensed an early arrest upon one charge or another—with almost inevitable consequences. So they apparently vanished into the atmosphere—with the connivance of Von Bremmer, who had become a revolutionist like thousands of his fellow Bavarians.

When appearing as their own actual selves, they were George Llangolen Trevor,—Earl of Dyvnaint,—Baron Lammerford of St. Ives and Sir Abdool Mohammed Khan, G. C. S. I.—British peers, holding army and navy commissions. But for more than ten years their secret diplomatic activities had gone further toward preserving the British Empire and averting political catastrophes than any other influence at the disposal of that government.

IT had been over a year since any of them had been in the Austrian capital. During a walk about the city, the morning after their arrival, they were conscious of subtle changes—there were more sleeves with mourning-bands upon them; but the life of the concert gardens and the Ring appeared to be in full swing. Always a gay city under normal conditions, Vienna seemed to be making a rather successful effort to shake off the depression of her losses and short rations, with a perceptible diminution of the German army element. Where, a year before, there had been a large number of German troops in evidence, there were now fewer of them about the city—and a larger percentage of Austrians and Hungarians, with an occasional showing of Turks or Bulgars. In the earlier months of the

war, for reasons of state, more than half the Austro-Hungarian forces had been sent to the Alsatian and Galician fronts, with an exchange force of Germans in eastern Hungary and Serbia. But the Italian offensive had drawn more of the Austrian troops back inside their own borders; and upon one pretext or another the young emperor had managed to have a number of his brigades on foreign service replaced with Prussians and Brandenburgers.

Count Racoczy had been described to the English diplomats (whose identity, of course, was entirely unknown to him or anyone in Vienna) as a Nationalist devoted to the establishment of an independent Hungary at the end of the war—preferring a monarchy, because he was used to that sort of government, but since the Russian revolution, willing to consider the advantages of a democracy. Formerly an intimate of the young emperor and an admirer of his Bourbon Parmese empress, he nevertheless considered it impossible for so inexperienced a ruler successfully to harmonize the many conflicting interests of the dual monarchy. Liking Charles personally, he was quite willing to see him ruler of a much curtailed Austria alone—or dethroned if necessary. During the last few months, however, Charles had shown so much inclination to struggle against the German yoke that the Count was beginning to revise his estimate of the younger man, and wonder if he were really big enough to prove a leader who could hold Austro-Hungary together as tactfully as his great-uncle Francis Joseph.

McMurtagh and his companions found the Count a most interesting personality; his household was marked by a total absence of that stiff-necked egoism which has made Austrian aristocracy the laughingstock of an enlightened civilization; and they had a sameness of secret interests which made them feel perfectly secure under his roof. General von Bremmer's introductions had convinced each of them that the others were heart and soul devoted to the same political objects in spite of any attitude they might be compelled to assume before others.

The Graf's villa in the extreme

southwestern corner of the city—upon ground sufficiently higher to overlook a good part of it—was almost pure Spanish in its architecture, built around a central court, and with flat roofs which were used by the family as a lounging place during the warm season. In the evening, they went up to one of these roofs for coffee and cigars. The place was so far removed from any possibility of their being overheard that they began to discuss the Austrian situation with their host.

"You think, then, Herr Graf, that Charles is really determined to pull out of the German entanglement if he can?"

"He would make peace with Russia and Italy in a week if it were not for the German regiments in the country and the certainty of Bulgarian and Turkish troops backing them up. You see, the withdrawal of Austria would mean cutting the Oriental Railway—severing communication between Germany, the Balkans and Turkey; and Germany will not consider that for a moment. Other complications are Serbia, Bosnia and the Trentino. A peace at the expense of partial dismemberment would cost Charles his throne, and it would be impossible to arrange terms with the Allies, at present, which didn't include something of the sort."

"What would be the probable effect if Charles were assassinated?"

THE Count looked around at McMurtagh with a startled expression. "Why do you ask that question, *mein Herr*? Have you heard anything which makes such a catastrophe at all likely?"

"Francis Ferdinand and his duchess were shot. It would have meant a revolution if Francis Joseph hadn't been alive at the time. What happened once, at the instigation of certain men in Berlin, can happen again. With its consequences, it was the most momentous *coup* ever recorded in history. So I'm asking your opinion as to what this other one would be?"

"Chaos! There would be no strong leader in sight, no man of sufficient force to hold the Empire together. It would probably split into a Hungary,

Bohemia and Dalmatia, in a chaotic state of reorganization. With an army like Falkenhayn's, Germany would stamp out all resistance and establish a sort of protectorate for the duration of the war. With all of the conflicting elements here, I doubt very much if successful resistance could be made—though of course, Germany has her hands more than full without that. But it would be an opportunity for Turkey and Bulgaria to acquire territory that would spur them on to renewed co-operation with her. It's really impossible to say just what the final outcome would be. From the German viewpoint, however, anything of that sort would be better than having us conclude a separate peace. They are sending out news-reports to the Entente that the bare suggestion of such a thing is being laughed at even in Vienna—but it isn't altogether a joke in Berlin. They know it is at least a possibility."

"And you may be quite sure that ultimate possibility has been dealt with—measures already taken to block it! There are probably Wilhelmstrasse agents now in Vienna with instructions to—er—eliminate Charles if the break between the two countries appears imminent."

"If I thought—"

"Assume it to be a certainty. Have you noticed any men or women about the city, of late, for whom your Hungarian secret service is unable to account?"

"There are two men who arrived a few weeks ago—on affairs of the Imperial Reichsbank, as we suppose. They're rather dissolute for men of responsibility—*might* be Wilhelmstrasse agents, though they've been conferring with our bankers every day."

"Staying at one of the hotels, I suppose?"

"No—they're not. They're guests of Herr Untermeyer, a wealthy German who exports Bohemian glass and porcelains to the United States. Now that you've directed my attention to them, I recall that I've seen them in restaurants, once or twice, with Socialist members of parliament who are known to hold extreme views—almost anarchistic."

"Hmph! If you had them watched, you'd probably trace 'em to a secret rendezvous somewhere about the city where they meet other men who are out-and-out anarchists. The supposed banking connection, being diametrically opposed to anything of the sort, is an excellent blind. Would it be possible, Herr Graf, to have those two men shadowed for a while?"

"Easily! We have a pretty capable organization. We Hungarians, you know, have been preparing ourselves for almost anything which is likely to happen,—national independence or civil war,—though we've lost much of our military strength in the last two years of fighting."

RACOCZY got out of his chair and strolled over to the parapet which ran around the roof, waist-high—looking across the housetops at the imperial chateau and its French park, softly beautiful in the moonlight. Then he turned and went on: "This city has seen many changes, gentlemen; its history has been strangely interwoven with the destinies of Europe. It was here that the Turk was finally turned back from his conquest of the Continent. Austrian emperors have ruled half the world from Vienna. In the Schönbrunn, over there, Napoleon lived for several months with his Austrian empress. In 1832 his son—the Duke of Reichstadt—died in one of the imperial chambers. And the Congress of Vienna settled for half a century the international adjustments of Europe. It is here that the future destiny of Hungary will be settled, not in Budapest—which reminds me, by the way, that there is to be a conference here between Charles and the Prussian. As a matter of policy, he is to pay our young emperor the compliment of a journey to his capital; the Empress will probably accompany him."

"Hmph! A conference at which the Prussian will do the dictating! If Charles doesn't agree with him fully, promise continued cooperation—well, it may be bad for Charles. But I say Racoczy—have you any idea where this conference will be held?"

"Probably over there in the Schön-

brunn. It is the Emperor's private residence, where an imperial visitor might arrive quietly after dark without attracting attention, where chancellors and diplomats are more easily dispensed with."

"It would be worth a good deal to the Socialists and reform party—to the chances for an early peace—if we could overhear what is actually said at that conference!"

"You may be quite sure anything of that sort will be most carefully guarded against! Still—"

"Exactly! The men who *try* impossible things often succeed when every chance is apparently against them. Er—how well do you know the lay-out of that chateau—the way the various rooms and passages are arranged?"

"So well that I could go through them blindfolded. I held a minor court-office during the old emperor's lifetime—and two of our organization have official berths there now."

"Then it seems to me that the proposition is worth spending considerable thought over. Of course, there'll be no question as to the personal risk involved—but we three are entirely willing to assume that risk."

NEXT morning, in the Volksgarten, the Graf pointed out Schufeldt and Heimwasser—the two bankers who might not be altogether what they seemed. After covertly watching them for a while, Baron Lammerford (as the pseudo Major Brady) leaned across the table and whispered:

"Don't look their way again—pay no further attention to them! Their profiles are quite familiar to me; I shall place them presently—at a time when they wore no beards. I'll leave you as if I had an appointment elsewhere, and see if I can't track them to some rendezvous."

Walking off toward the Amalienhof, he loitered in the Ballhausplatz until he saw the two men coming in the same direction—as some instinct had told him they would. Without being noticed, he followed them until they entered a small café halfway up the Kohlmarkt—and was close enough upon their heels to notice through the

open doorway the look of interrogation upon Heimwasser's face as he glanced at the woman in the *bureau* and motioned toward a door at the rear of the room. At a slight negative shake of the head they sat down at one of the little tables and called for bocks.

Lammerford did some rapid calculating as he stopped outside to light a cigarette. If the place were a Wilhelmstrasse rendezvous, as he inferred from the little byplay and the appearance of the woman in charge, the commonest of the recognition-signs would enable him to pass through that door at the rear without question—and probably establish his footing without much difficulty in whatever situation he found himself on the other side. But if the place were a resort of the various breeds of anarchists who swarmed in the underworld of Vienna,—Russian, Hungarian, Serbian, Polish,—he stood an excellent chance of losing his life. Among his widely varied experiences, however, Lammerford had once concealed himself in a Belgrade cellar, worming his way down a chimney when the place was unoccupied; and during the forty hours in which he had lain concealed there, he had managed to pick up a good many of the anarchist signs and passwords. Before he tossed his match-end into the gutter, he had decided that his chances were something more than even for coming through the adventure alive.

In a leisurely manner he stepped into the café with a smiling nod toward the woman in the *bureau*. Removing the cigarette from his lips, the little finger of his right hand rested for an instant on the cleft in his chin—after which he stopped just long enough to pick a piece of lint from the knee of his trousers. Then proceeding across the room to the little door, he opened it without the slightest hesitation and gently closed it behind him.

FOR a second, the thought occurred to Lammerford that he would cut a ridiculous figure if he found himself in the busy little kitchen of the place—but one always has a plausible explanation for that sort of mistake. The region beyond the door, however, proved

to be a dark, narrow passage at the end of which a turn at right angles brought him to a flight of steps leading downward. Instead of the twenty steps that would have indicated a cellar under the café, he counted forty-two—at the bottom of which started another passage two hundred paces long.

As nearly as he could judge from the turns he had made, this tunnel led under the Kohlmarkt to the rear of a building on the other side; and a heavy oak door, upon which he rapped with one of the commoner anarchist signals, swung open apparently without human agency, admitting him to a large and none too clean subcellar which seemed to have no connection with the one over it or with the building to which it belonged. There was at one end, however, an oubliette which doubtless communicated with one of the sewers leading into the Wiener Kanal. A number of tables stood about the cellar, and it was evident that whatever refreshments were served there must come down from the café he had passed through.

As there was nobody in sight when he came in, he touched a push-button on the wall—ordering coffee and cakes when a waiter appeared from the passage. For nearly an hour he waited, imperturbably sipping his coffee and reading his newspaper, though he had little doubt that he was watched from some unseen peephole. Then Schufeldt and Heimwasser appeared, selecting a table near him. As they sat down, their profiles sharpened in his mental picture of them without beards—and the recognition almost took his breath away. Unless he were entirely mistaken, they had been two of the most notorious young men in Berlin ten years before—well-born but dissolute fellows who, after having been dismissed from their regiment for cheating at cards, had undertaken Wilhelmstrasse work that other agents were squeamish about attempting. Both were supposed to have been killed before the war began—sent on a service where they were sure to be killed, as most of their acquaintances thought. Waiting until he was sure they had observed his recognition-sign, Lammerford decided upon

taking a rather high hand with them, as probably his most successful course.

"Herren, this is quite a surprise!" he exclaimed. "I had supposed Karl von Lohr and Heinrich von Gratz were no longer living. If the Wilhelmstrasse is aware of the fact, I hadn't heard of it!"

AS they had reëntered the service entirely changed in appearance, after six years' exile in South America, the Wilhelmstrasse had not recognized them. It sent a shiver of cold fear down their backs to stumble upon a man who did. There was murder in the first glance they exchanged, but they instantly saw that this stranger was presumably some one high in authority whom the waiters had seen and for whom there would have to be an accounting if he were last seen alive in their company; so they decided to brazen it out.

"Some mistake, Excellency! I am Schufeldt; my friend is Heimwasser, of the Imperial Reichsbank in Berlin!"

"Exactly! Two bankers who have come to Wien for the purpose of eliminating a certain exalted personage if orders are received to that effect—an ordinary occurrence in the banking business, but one which many of those connected with the Wilhelmstrasse might refuse to undertake!" (The sarcasm wasn't lost upon them.) "Of course Herr Zimmermann doesn't know who you really are, but he could scarcely have picked better men for the job, if you permit me to flatter you. And as this particular affair is in no way connected with my own work, you need have no fear of my repeating the names of two ghosts from the long ago. Only—if you *don't* happen to be the agents picked for it, you'd better give me a hint as to what you *are* working on—so that our plans may not conflict."

It nauseated Lammerford to see that they took his compliment seriously, as a tribute to their former reputation for brutal outrage. Both were Prussians. And his statement that he had no intention of betraying them was apparently convincing; there was no reason why

he should, they argued, inasmuch as the proposed job was not one for men troubled with mawkish sentiment in their make-up. So, quite easily and with some braggadocio, they outlined the details of a foul assassination as they had perfected them. There were three Hungarian anarchists whose eager offers to assist them had been accepted. Altogether it looked as though the plan had been too carefully thought out to fail.

Before they left the big cellar, two of the anarchists came in and were introduced to Lammerford as one of the inner circle of the Imperial secret service who might have further use for them at some future time.

MEANWHILE, Earl Trevor (as the wealthy American politician, Aloysius McMurtagh) had strolled with Racoczy through the Hofburg to the Graben. (Sir Abdool, as the Turkish colonel of engineers, had disappeared into that part of the city where fellow Asiatics were to be found and bits of Mohammedan political gossip picked up over a cup or two of *mastic*.) Stopping to look in a shop window, they noticed two men inside with some ladies—in one of whom His Lordship recognized the Gräfin von Kessel, a young and fascinating agent of the Wilhelmstrasse who had started to arrest him as a spy in Munich, but had become converted to revolutionary ideas as their acquaintance progressed, without being able to decide whether he was really the patriotic German of high rank she suspected, or an American working to bring about an end to the war. In either case her interest and confidence had reached a point where she would have acted upon a hint from him even if it appeared squarely against the Berlin government. Knowing nothing of their former acquaintance or her connection with the Wilhelmstrasse, Racoczy nudged the Earl's arm and directed his attention to the group inside.

"There are some people I think you had better know, my friend. The short man, Prince Kesterzechy, is one of us and will go to any lengths necessary. The lively brunette is Baroness von Zernwitz—devoted heart and soul to

liberating Hungary, very wealthy, willing to give her entire fortune if necessary. The other man and woman I don't know, but a glance from the Prince will tell whether they are to be trusted. Come! Let us go inside!"

The introductions were made, but Racoczy understood from the Prince's manner that all reference to revolutionary subjects were better avoided, and a warning pressure of the elbow passed along the hint to McMurtagh. The Gräfin was introduced as merely the Fraülein von Kessel, who had arrived from Munich that morning with letters from prominent Bavarians to the Baroness.

AS the party strolled along the Graben to other shops, Trevor paired off with the Fraülein, and she found opportunity to ask:

"Am I supposed to have met you in Munich as the Herr McMurtagh, my friend? Or were we strangers up to this morning?"

"Depends upon where or to whom you admit the acquaintance, Gräfin. With the Prince and Count Racoczy, do so by all means. Somebody will very likely turn up from Munich who knows of our acquaintance there. But you would better not mention our names to anyone who is corresponding with people in Berlin. Zimmermann understands what we are trying to accomplish down here—or thinks he does, which amounts to the same thing in the matter of backing. But Zimmermann himself is suddenly in disfavor with the General Staff and will be forced out with the Chancellor. The next man will be disposed entirely to misconstrue some of the things we were obliged to do in Munich, and will undoubtedly order our arrest the moment he locates us. Of course, we should have little difficulty in avoiding arrest here in Vienna, because there are more people working for the same objects—stronger influences to protect us. But there are too serious matters brewing for us to waste time looking out for our own heads. As soon as I'm quite sure as to just where *you* stand, Gräfin, I'll give you a chance to play the game."

She gave him a peculiar glance, in

which personal admiration was mixed with doubt as to just where her previous convictions must give way to something dimly sensed as better.

"Listen—bend your ear down!" she said. "Do you know that His Imperial Majesty is to be here to-morrow?" (He nodded.) "Do you also know that a certain anarchist is now practicing in the shooting-galleries with the intention of killing him—and that he has perfected a plan for getting so near that he may actually do it?"

"No! That's news to me! What action are you taking?"

"Personally, I shall do nothing, beyond giving you facts enough to put the situation entirely in your hands—after which I'm going to stand aside and watch you do exactly as you think best."

"Even to permitting the assassination?"

"If you think the future welfare of the Empire demands it!"

"H'm-m! Are you quite certain your anarchist isn't after Charles?"

"Positive. Three different places were described to me as being available—depending upon His Majesty's movements after reaching Vienna. You may invite me to motor with you this afternoon, if you wish; the Baroness has another engagement which leaves me free. I'll point them out to you."

"What sort of a looking bounder is your anarchist? Where is he doing his practicing?"

"You know the section around the Prater Stern is a popular resort for the masses on public holidays—particularly, the amusement place known as 'Venice in Vienna'? Well, there are numerous rifle-galleries in that locality, but one of them is fitted up for weapons of regular army caliber. It is frequented by noncommissioned officers and men who have occasion to go armed. My informant didn't dare give me the man's name, but described him minutely, and said he was usually in that gallery about half-past eleven, when practically all the other men had left for the night."

"Hmph! I'll drop in this evening and look him over. Should be able to recognize him instantly, you know."

AFTER lunching in one of the Graben cafés, the party separated. Late that afternoon Baron Lammerford returned to the Racoczy villa in the Hietzing suburb, taking the Count and Earl Trevor up to the awning-covered roof for a private talk concerning what he had discovered. Upon comparing notes they became convinced that the plot to assassinate the Prussian was being worked out by an entirely different set and nationality of anarchists from those assisting Schufeldt and Heimwasser—and that neither group knew anything whatever of the others' intentions.

At eleven that evening they found the shooting-gallery near the Prater Stern occupied only by the attendant and a consumptive black-haired man of medium height, with feverish eyes and a restless, nervous manner. The man in charge addressed him as Herr Polba. Apparently he had not been showing very good form; the shooting was distinctly erratic—so much so, that the supposed McMurtagh was moved to offer a suggestion or two.

"You take too careful an aim, *mein Herr*; the nerves of the hand and wrist become tired, so that it is impossible to hold the weapon steady. In battle one doesn't shoot that way—the trigger is pulled the instant the 'drop' covers its object. Permit me!—Will you start one of those little glass balls on the jet of water, sir? Ah! . . . There it comes! Now watch!"

McMurtagh's arm swept up from his side with a heavy-calibered automatic as he spoke. There was an explosion—and the pistol was lying on the counter again before his arm had apparently ceased moving. The glass ball had disappeared. Seven more balls were shattered into misty fragments as rapidly as the attendant could pull the string which released them—and the balls were little more than an inch in diameter. Even the attendant looked at the well-dressed stranger in wonder; he had seen plenty of good shooting, but nothing in that class. As for Polba, he doggedly attempted to profit by the instruction, but he was not an intuitive marksman and never could become one, though he placed his bullets near enough

the bull's-eye to make it unhealthy for anyone he happened to be firing at.

Next day, it was known about the city that imperial visitors from the north would arrive in the afternoon for a stay of at least a week, the object being a general discussion of the war situation, between the two monarchs. It was known that Charles, with the kings of Württemberg and Bavaria, favored a peace without annexations or indemnities—that they were all strongly opposed to the submarine warfare because of its future effect upon other nations, to say nothing of its brutal inhumanity. Ferdinand of Bulgaria and the Sultan were also greatly desirous of peace. It was beginning to dawn upon them that possible ruin and disintegration lay ahead if they kept on. On the other hand, the crown prince of Germany and the General Staff were confident of winning the war with submarines—and were beginning to speculate upon what might be in store for German autocracy if they didn't.

WHEN the imperial train rolled into the Franz Josef Bahnhof, Trevor, the Count and Lammerford were standing in the Lichtensteinstrasse just below the Prince's gardens, at a point where a large second-floor bay-window jutted out over the sidewalk. Its position was such that a carriage approaching down the street must pass within twenty-five feet of it, and mounted guards riding at either side would not obstruct the view of those inside the vehicle. Apparently that particular building was unoccupied.

They had been there but a few moments when a squadron of cavalry came galloping down the street, followed by regiments of infantry which were strung out along the curbs. Then another squadron of cavalry came trotting along in double column, with four motor-cars between. Just as the head of this escort reached the corner below the building with the bay-window, an army-car with four officers turned in from a side-street and was proceeding ahead of the troops when its motor suddenly balked—slowing down the cavalry and escorted machines behind it until they were forced to stop, with the leading

car almost abreast of the window. In less than a minute the frantically working officers in the stalled car had managed to get their motor going again, permitting the procession to resume its progress. But in that moment the cadaverous anarchist Polba had thrown up one of the bay-window sashes and leveled an automatic pistol straight at the autocratic personage in glittering helmet and gray cloak who sat in the tonneau of the first car twenty feet away.

McMurtagh, behind the infantrymen on the sidewalk, had watched the man closely as he opened the window. Polba was apparently almost beside himself with excitement and nervous terror. His hands were noticeably trembling as he shoved out his pistol and took aim.

With a motion so quick that those near him couldn't have sworn to it, McMurtagh's hand came up to the level of his shoulders—and dropped again. There was a spit of flame. Two reports came so near together that they almost blended; but one was a second ahead of the other. As a scream of pain came from the window and a shattered hand dropped a pistol upon the sidewalk underneath, the personage in the car involuntarily ducked from a bullet which sang within a foot of his head. His face turned a pasty white. Like some other imperial murderers who have preferred not to lead their troops in battle, the idea of personal sudden death was frightful—paralyzing to him. As it happened, McMurtagh's face among those on the sidewalk had caught the autocrat's glance a second before the shots were fired—it seemed vaguely familiar. Then had come the quick gesture and the amazing shot which presumably saved His Majesty's life—clearly photographed upon the imperial mind.

In the sudden confusion one of the infantrymen whirled on his heel and was about to lay violent hands upon McMurtagh when a sharp command from the car stopped him. "That is the gentleman who shot the assassin, fool! Ask him if he will call at the Hofburg within the next hour or two?"

McMURTAGH'S action had been the result of considerable study that afternoon, and had been as carefully worked out in detail as had that of the anarchists with their purposely stalled car. He had concentrated upon drawing the imperial glance toward him while the autocrat was still half a block away, because it was essential for the plan he had formed that his crippling of the assassin should be seen and remembered. He nodded a brief acceptance of the imperial request and walked away down a side-street with Racoczy, while Polba was being taken off and the cars of the visitors were rapidly progressing toward the Burg.

The Count's motor was awaiting them a few blocks away. Knowing that he would scarcely be expected at the palace for two hours at least, McMurtagh suggested running out to the villa in order that he might change into another suit. When he had done this, he joined his friends on the roof, where they were awaiting with intense curiosity his explanation of what he had done.

"Why the devil didn't you let that fellow complete his work, my friend? A better opportunity will never occur!"

"For a number of reasons, Herr Graf—some of which I thought over pretty carefully this morning, though I didn't make a final decision until I saw the condition he was in. He was so nervous that it is doubtful if even his second shot would have reached the mark! Before he could have fired a third,—with that silly habit of deliberate aiming,—the cavalymen would have shot *him*, and there would have been no possibility of my obtaining this interview—which I mean to use, somehow, to insure overhearing that conference in case our other arrangements are discovered and you gentlemen have to disappear suddenly if you wish to live. The chance to know what is passing through that man's brain, just at this time, is worth immeasurably more to the civilized world than his death!"

AS McMurtagh had foreseen and intended, he was received at the palace with marked respect. The autocrat was too busy with other matters,

at the moment, to grant him a personal interview, even if such a thing had been in his mind; but he conferred, through one of his aides, the Iron Cross upon his preserver and wished to know if it would be possible for him to so arrange his affairs that he could join the imperial suite during their stay in Vienna and be constantly within a few feet of His Majesty. No detail of that phenomenal marksmanship and instant readiness had been lost upon the prematurely aging monarch, whose nervous system was fast getting to be a thing of shreds and patches.

After a few moments' consideration, McMurtagh told the aide that he could return by nine o'clock and would place himself at the autocrat's disposal for the duration of his stay in Vienna, but that it would be impossible for him to serve for a longer time. As he was leaving, the aide suggested that he had better report at the Schönbrunn.

During the day the four gentlemen of the household at the Schönbrunn who were members of Count Racoczy's revolutionary organization, had managed to have wires installed in some of the walls while a gang of electricians were repairing the lighting circuits—it had been an opportunity promptly recognized by Earl Trevor when the Count had told him that such work was being done under the supervision of a gentleman-in-waiting who was one of them, and it had been a simple matter to have two other men of their organization report to him disguised as electricians.

It was almost certain that any serious discussion of affairs between the two monarchs would take place in a room known as the Metternich Chamber, in which there was a large, flat-topped desk which Charles used in the mornings while transacting his routine work. A topographic map of Europe covered the entire wall back of his chair, and there were five desk-telephones—connected, through the chateau switchboard, with every long-distance wire on the Continent.

Another room, the Rudolfkammer, was also provided with telephones and adjoined a suite being made ready for the imperial visitor, but it had more of the ceremonious and less of the efficient

business atmosphere. So, to make their preparations more complete, Count Racoczy's men had installed wire connections on the under side of the desk in the one, and under a massive table which corresponded in use, in the other. There was also a loose connection behind a picture in the bedchamber that was being prepared.

AT two in the afternoon Lammerford had called upon the manager of the Deutsches Reichspressbund in the Kärntnerstrasse—a news-syndicate secretly connected with a greater one in London and used as a diplomatic information-feeder quite as much as for the gathering of news items. From this gentleman he obtained four of the latest model dictaphone transmitters and receivers, which he stowed in a leather suit-case and turned over to one of Racoczy's electricians when he returned to the villa. So, by the time McMurtagh reported to the imperial aide for duty at the Schönbrunn,—and he made a point of being in the chateau before the autocrat's arrival from the Burg,—the dictaphones had been installed without discovery or even suspicion upon the part of the Emperor's household, and the receiver concealed in a little anteroom closet used for the storage of stationery, office supplies, etc.—a closet invariably kept locked, but a natural enough place for the secret-service officers in attendance to conceal one of their number if the idea happened to occur to them.

The first banquet to the visiting monarchs had been given at the Hofburg; consequently, it was nearly ten o'clock when they arrived at the Schönbrunn.

UPON arriving, the visiting autocrat retired for half an hour to the private suite which had been prepared for him, and sent his personal aide in search of McMurtagh. When that gentleman had been fetched before His Majesty, he seemed to be a man thoroughly accustomed to aristocratic society in spite of his claim to being merely a wealthy Irish-American. A few curt questions brought out as brief admissions of his work for the Camarilla in Petrograd and his mission from the

Russian Socialists to those in Germany and Austria. The autocrat obtained exactly the same impression as had been given Herr Zimmermann in the Wilhelmstrasse six weeks before: that the three men who had been given credentials to proceed through the Teutonic empires were really of much higher rank than they appeared, and that they had been doing work of the greatest possible value to the German government in spite of any action or incident which might give a contrary appearance to their activities.

McMurtagh's prompt interference with the anarchist, that afternoon, seemed to clinch the matter beyond any possible doubt. And there was, it seemed, a haunting familiarity about the man's face—a suggestion of some other service in bygone years. It obsessed the autocrat to the point of annoyance. In a moment he asked with his habitual curtness:

"Have you ever been presented to me before, *mein Herr*?"

"More than once, Majestät. We also met upon another occasion—in another country. But that had better remain forgotten."

"Hmph!" The autocrat was intrigued by the mystery; he was positive that he had talked with the man several times before, but there was no hint which set his mind upon the right track. It was possible, of course, to arrest him,—have the mustache shaved off, have his body searched for marks and his clothes for evidence,—but he had sense enough to see that he would be the loser by any such action. So he dismissed McMurtagh with the request that he remain somewhere in sight until morning and keep as close as possible during alternate four-hour watches until the imperial visitors left Vienna—other confidential men relieving him during the off watches.

UNTIL the autocrat retired, about half-past two in the morning, McMurtagh was constantly in sight of him from one vantage-point or another—sometimes from an anteroom, at others from a hallway, but always from a spot where he could probably intercept anyone who attempted to open the closet

in which he knew Lammerford and Sir Abdool were concealed. (Racoczy and one of his brother Hungarians were listening at another receiver in one of the attic rooms of the chateau, not caring to risk discovery in the nearer location.)

In the morning, however, while the two monarchs were breakfasting, came an insistent telephone communication from Berlin concerning the crisis in the Reichstag—the return of the Crown Prince, his frequent conferences with the military clique, the demand for the Chancellor's resignation. Instead of remaining a week or more as they had planned, a special train was at once prepared, and the visitors left for the north before they had been in Vienna much over twenty-four hours. Racoczy's electricians—with the determination to make a thorough job of it—had also tapped the Schönbrunn telephone-wires, so that he and Sir Abdool overheard from the attic room the entire communication.

When the imperial guests had left the city, McMurtagh obtained permission from the young Austrian Emperor—who had personally thanked him for his prompt action with the anarchist—to be excused from further service at the chateau.

THAT evening Racoczy, Prince Kesterzechy and the three English diplomats adjourned to the roof after dinner for a discussion of the conference of the Emperors and its far-reaching significance. The Prince, who had only seen the Prussian at the Hofburg banquet, was inclined to sympathize with him as a man whose intentions were of the best, but who had been harrassed beyond his strength by the mad determination of the Crown Prince and the military caste.

"The impression one gets from recent Berlin rumors, gentlemen, is that His Majesty may not be as entirely responsible as we've supposed. It is said that he was suddenly called home from a yachting trip in the Baltic to a war already launched by the Crown Prince and the General Staff. A year ago he was opposed to using the submarine but was overruled—asked to abdicate if he

persisted in his opposition to it. In May his family again suggested his abdicating—”

“Trying to whitewash Lucifer, eh?” commented Mr. McMurtagh. “Apologies to Lucifer! I think, Your Highness, it would be better if you left that job to God Almighty. Of course, I can readily see how you have drawn certain deductions from our disconnected comments on that conference; but had you been actually listening to it as we were, with fairly complete knowledge of what he expected to accomplish by this visit to Vienna, you could scarcely have missed the grisly facts under the surface.”

“Still, you say he has the appearance of a sick man—keeping up on the last vestige of his strength, forced to settle bickerings among his family and military chiefs at a time when Germany is defending her very existence.”

“He had much the same appearance years ago, at the time of the Moroccan affair. Any opposition to his will makes him temporarily insane—and seems to leave him limp. Your Highness, at the very time when he was making just that same impression upon Charles, two Wilhelmstrasse men and three anarchists were perfecting their arrangements to assassinate your emperor if he did not entirely agree to this man’s suggestions—which really amount to orders! Even supposing that plot to have been instigated by the military clique, the fact that it appears to be made dependent upon the result of this interview implies rather pointedly that your ‘sick man’ must know of it—must have it in the back of his mind as an alternative! Just imagine the point of view, the sort of human brain, which can make a bid for personal sympathy with that kind of knowledge in reserve!”

“Do I understand, *mein Herr*, that you actually accuse him of treachery as black as that?”

“I make no accusations whatever! I merely state the fact that five men were shot an hour ago, at the Heumarkt Barracks, for conspiring to assassinate your emperor. Four of them admitted the details to Major Brady here—at a secret rendezvous frequented by anarchists in the subcellar of a building on

the Kohlmarkt—and said they were to act upon receipt of orders from Berlin which would not reach them until after this visit of the Kaiser. We didn’t consider it safe to wait until we found out whether they actually received those orders or not, so we turned them over to your secret service with the evidence, and they made ‘good Indians’ of them. Now, if you choose to doubt any knowledge of that plot, you’ll be merely taking the view that thousands of other people would take. Very good! We’ll merely leave the inference without any accusation whatever. But the proceedings blocked out during that conference as a possible line of action in the immediate future are of the utmost seriousness to the Entente—to the entire civilized world—to Austria, Bavaria, Hungary and Württemberg.”

“I don’t think you made that clear in your somewhat brief account of that interview, *mein Herr*. I grasped the fact that you didn’t believe the internal dissensions in the Imperial family and German government quite as serious as the outside reports imply, but I didn’t get the conclusions you drew from that fact.”

“POSSIBLY,” rejoined Mr. McMurtagh, “we forgot to state some of the things actually said, Your Highness. The idea—the crux of the Kaiser’s visit to Vienna—is this: The Entente has plainly stated, in reply to Germany’s demand for peace terms, that the Allies will consider no terms whatever with the present dynasty—that until a representative democratic government is established in Germany, there will be no discussion of peace. This was naturally blasphemous to the war lord; he didn’t take any stock in it at all. The Entente would see! would sue for peace on its knees! Well, a good bit of water has run under the bridge since then. Practically the whole civilized world has united to keep the Allies on their feet and increasingly effective. The man is at last beginning to fear that it may not be possible to retain Belgium, northern France, Poland, Serbia and Turkey. He doesn’t admit it to himself, even yet, but he’s beginning to see visions at night—visions of

exile, a dismembered empire, failure, oblivion. And he is determined with every ounce of his will that such an outcome shall be impossible—that while apparently yielding, Germany shall come out of the struggle a little stronger than when she went in. The thing still seems feasible to him—under certain reorganized conditions.

"The Allies will make no peace with him or any of his family? Very well! The Allies—poor stupid fools—must be outwitted by his superior intelligence: that's all. German *Kultur* cannot fail in the end, even though the means employed seem very distasteful to a stiff-necked anointed one. Reports must be spread of dissensions in the German government. The thing must be well done, with German efficiency, so that the outside fools cannot doubt what they see and hear—for months, a year if necessary. There must be rumors of abdications in favor of a younger, more popular, prince—crises in the Reichstag. Then is to come the abdication of the young prince in favor of a popular demand for representative government. Next will come a general election—a president and cabinet, who would prove to be of the aristocracy, on a majority vote. But—*underlying all this—the secret pledge of the Bundesrat, already given, to support another reorganization of the Government one year after the declaration of peace—a reorganization which should restore the monarchy and succession to practically the identical position it now occupies.*

"By means of this scheme, it was certain that the demands of the Allies would be much less severe—on the supposition that they were dealing with a democracy anxious to rehabilitate itself, a people who, for reasons of world politics, must not be crushed. There would be no talk of dismembering Germany, no demands for impossible indemnities—considerable bartering of conquered territory, with Germany emerging in possession of more Continental area than she had in 1914 and probably some of her colonial possessions restored."

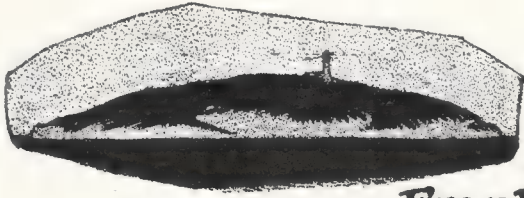
"BUT," asked Racoczy, "how does that sort of scheme affect Austria? What does she gain by it? What is her position throughout?"

"That of the cat's-paw! Just that! And while Charles appeared to be momentarily hypnotized by the statement that he would be territorially a gainer in remaining as Germany's ally to the end, but giving the world an impression that he was really withdrawing Austrian troops from the German fronts, I fancy he saw through the whole scheme—saw that Austria had everything to gain by a separate peace, even with loss of territory—saw increasing disaster if he continues to fight. Gentlemen, our job for the next few weeks is right here in Vienna, even if Charles goes up to the Galician front in a little while as he intends! The underground battles of the war will be fought in this city—and in Munich and in Washington—during the coming months!"

"Then, if his abdication were an accomplished fact, if the Reichstag actually declares for a democracy or a more constitutional monarchy, you would not place full reliance upon the existing conditions, *mein Herr?*"

"Not while the man or his brood remain anywhere out of exile! For three long and bloody years we have seen the autocratic domination of Germany as the most indisputable fact of the whole world. And when the Entente finally makes peace, it must be on terms which make the future existence of military autocracy impossible! If the Allies are hoodwinked, bluffed into dangerous leniency, by the snares of this man and his military clique, there will be many more bloody years ahead of us—world-wide annihilation! Does anyone suppose for one moment that the Allies will consent to a draw with Germany? It would mean German domination of the world inside of ten years,—every other nation a vassal state, administered from Berlin,—with the crushing out of individual liberty and humanity. We have been shown the character of those who started this thing. We've been warned! God knows we've been warned!"

What has been happening in Vienna? Read the answer in the next fascinating and timely story of the *Free Lances in Diplomacy*, in the November BLUE BOOK MAGAZINE, on sale October 1st.



Pleasure Island

by
Frank R. Adams

(What Has Already Happened to Me:)

A NERVOUS breakdown drove me into a sanitarium; and the sanitarium drove me to a nervous break-away—by means of a rope made of sheets, via my bedroom window one foggy night. And then so much happened that I didn't have a chance to think about my nerves for some time—though as a successful novelist and playwright, I had been accustomed to coddling myself a great deal.

For as I made my way along the beach,—the sanitarium was on the seashore,—I stumbled upon a man lying motionless with a chloroform-saturated towel tied across his face. I removed this latter and found that he was by no means dead, although well under the influence of the anesthetic. And then I did a thing I have since deeply regretted; but the temptation was strong.

You see, I'd left the sanitarium clad only in bathrobe and pajamas; and I'd lost one slipper, so that walking had become very painful. Now, my problem was to get as far away from that infernal sanitarium as possible; and I couldn't do that successfully in a bathrobe and one slipper. Well—well, I borrowed my sleeping friend's clothes and his shoes; and instead of giving the alarm,—and getting myself hauled back to the sanitarium!—I left the sleeper, commandeered a deserted motor-boat I found drawn up on the beach and went away from there.

THEN in the darkness I heard the siren of another boat; next, from close by, I heard voices; and what they were saying was sufficiently astonishing.

"Do you, Victor, take this woman to be your lawfully wedded wife?"

A man's voice answered: "I do."

"Do you, Rosalind, take this man to be your lawfully wedded husband?"

"No! No! No!"

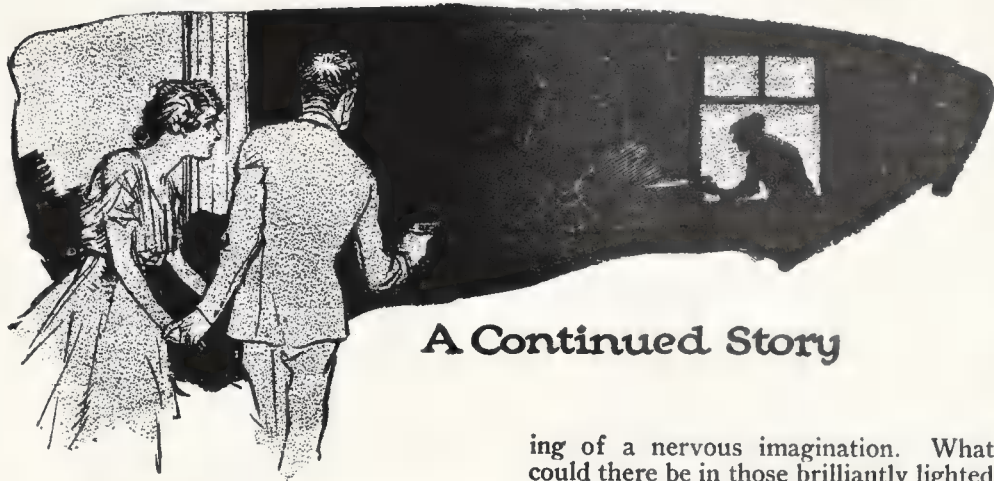
There followed the sound of a dispute, of a scuffle—and of a heavy splash in the water. And a moment afterward the dripping figure of a woman clambered over the stern of the boat I was in.

At her command I started the boat full speed ahead and so escaped from the other. And presently the girl vouchsafed an explanation of the amazing situation:

She had come to the mainland on a shopping expedition in the company of Sommers, one of the servants at Pleasure Island, where she lived with her stepfather. In the town she had met her uncle, one Spring-Gilbert and a Mr. King. Her uncle had invited her to visit his yacht in the harbor; she had done so—and they had detained her and tried to force her to marry King. Her refusal and escape had followed. The chloroformed man whose clothing I had stolen was the servant Sommers.

WHILE she told me of this, we sped through the darkness in the course she directed, and eventually we came to an island with a lighthouse on it. Meanwhile Rosalind had fallen asleep—I fancy her precious uncle had drugged her. So I picked her up in my arms and carried her ashore and to a lighted house close by. No one answered my ring or my shout, however; and so I kicked open the screen door and carried the sleeping Rosalind inside.

(My Story Follows in Detail:)



A Continued Story

CHAPTER V

OF course you do not believe in premonitions any more than I do, but if I had been at all superstitious about such things, I would have obeyed an indescribable and nearly irresistible impulse which I had at the moment I entered. That impulse was to back out hastily through that screen door which I had closed behind me. There was nothing tangible, you know, not a sound or a movement of any sort to disturb my equanimity—just a sort of an indescribable “hunch” to stay out in the open. If a brick or something like that had fallen on my head as I stepped in, I would not have been half so much inclined to think that the great white house was inimical to me.

If I received any physical sensation at all, it was one of atmospheric depression. The air seemed a little heavier than it was outside. I stood with my back to the door a minute, trying to define my sensations. Chiefly they seemed to be a sort of a crinkly feeling along my spine.

“Hello!” I said, intending to shout, but ending up with a hoarse whisper.

That would never do, I decided. Was I a medieval savage to let an invisible barrier stand between me and the secret of that silent house? Nonsense! The warning which seemed to come from nowhere to the effect that I would do well not to investigate was the prompt-

ing of a nervous imagination. What could there be in those brilliantly lighted rooms to hurt me?

Silencing the premonitory voices within, I broke away from my safe anchorage by the door and crossed the rather barren hall to the drawing-room, which was connected with the hall by double doors. As I moved away from the outside air, something seemed to close in behind me. I looked around. There was nothing. The outside door was still invitingly open.

“You fool!” I whispered to myself, and started when I thought I heard the phrase echoed behind me. My nerves must be in a terrible state indeed.

The drawing-room, or more properly the living-room, was furnished heavily in dark mahogany inlaid with dull brass. The furniture was gorgeous, and I had never seen anything like it, but it struck me that it was unexpected. It would have been more in keeping with the stronghold of a pirate chief of the West Indies.

The chairs were set exactly in what was evidently their prearranged places, and a huge settee occupied the mathematical center of the room, facing a bricked fireplace equipped with dull brass fire-irons and dogs. A flagging of carpet-brick extended out for ten feet as an apron.

ON that tremendous and softly padded divan I placed Rosalind. Her wet clothing draped not ungracefully about her slim body, and one arm, the one which had recently circled my neck, was pillowed under her cheek.

The picture, all but Sommers' coat, which she still wore, was a very pretty one, and I mentally resolved to stage the girl and the setting in my next theatrical production.

I was loath to leave her there alone, but it seemed impossible that harm could come to her in her own house, and I wanted to hunt up her father to announce her arrival and then get away myself to some region remote from the Saskatchewan Health Resort.

Therefore, with a last look to make sure that she was sleeping soundly, I went into the next room, which proved to be the dining-hall. This apartment was no less unusual than the one I had just left. It was severely furnished with a monkish table, long and squat, with benches on either side instead of chairs. The walls were paneled in smoky oak, and the windows were long and narrow with leaded panes at the top and iron bars across the lower openings. But peeping in saucily between those bars were the faces of tiny clambering roses that apparently had intruded out of an impudent curiosity which matched my own.

But there was no sign of a human being except the lighted electric lamp, not a disarranged chair nor a hastily dropped bit of embroidery or a book that some one might have just laid down.

And in the kitchen the same uncanny order prevailed. All cooking utensils were put away; there were no crumbs around the sink, and the Dutch tile walls were guiltless of stain or cobweb. But the lights were on.

There being no further outlet from the kitchen save to the open air, I retraced my steps once more to the living-room, with its savage magnificence of mahogany and brass. There was a closed door from that room, leading to another wing of the house.

Rosalind still lay on the couch, and the tawny splendor of the room was none too gorgeous a setting for the complacent, wistful beauty that was hers in repose. Just as she lay there on that magnificent couch, she somehow reminded me of one of the superb, splendid heroines of H. Rider-Haggard. If she had been consumed before my eyes

in a whirling flame like the immortal *She*, I would hardly have been surprised; nor would the fabulous jewels of *King Solomon's* mines have been out of place upon her breast.

I drew myself up with a jerk. My mind was running riot in that vacuum stillness. I was becoming drugged with the silence—I who prided myself upon my lack of susceptibility to mere appeals to the emotions. I tore myself away from the contemplation of the sleeping Rosalind Joy and opened tentatively the closed door, a heavy mahogany solid panel, hinged and decorated with brass. I confronted a corridor brilliantly lighted like the rest of the house.

As I stepped into the hallway, the heavy door closed noiselessly behind me. By opening it once more, I reassured myself that it was not fastened—as I did so, laughing at myself for my sudden excess of caution. Surely I had no reason to suspect a trap. No one could possibly have anything against me here. It was just that uncanny silence and the senseless glare of the many lights getting on my nerves.

THERE were two doors leading from this corridor, one on either side. The one on the left, as I discovered upon a hasty investigation, opened upon an empty suite consisting of a tremendous library, a bedroom and bath.

The library was done in California redwood, which gave it a warm and vivid coloring. To my taste, it was a little too bright, and I would have preferred it toned down to a browner hue. Still, the grain and natural color of the wood were glorious, and I suppose it would have been a shame to spoil them. A redwood desk stood at one end of the room, as if it were on a lecture platform before a hall where students were wont to assemble. But if there ever were students, they had to stand up, for there was only one chair in the room, the one back of the desk. Aside from the redwood bookshelves, there was no other furniture in the room. What on earth the idea of so much unused space was, I could not imagine.

The bedroom was furnished in masculine style with a simplicity of taste that indicated to me a masculine occupant.

There were no frills on the curtains, nor any fancy gewgaws on the dresser. That and the other furniture was of Circassian walnut of a beautiful curly grain. I noticed, too, that the mirror was not placed with any particular reference to the light. Evidently the person who dressed in that room did not often have to refer to it for help. Obviously it could not be a woman. There was nothing very mysterious about that apartment, and so I crossed the hallway to the other one.

This room was more curious than any of the others. So far as I could see, it had little reason for existence in that out-of-the-way place, for it was a perfectly equipped chemical laboratory—perfectly equipped, that is, as far as the eye of a layman could tell. The walls were lined with glass cases containing delicate weighing machines and finely made apparatus of glass and brass, the uses of which I did not understand. Several large, long tables occupied the center of the room, and in each was a leaden sink with water and sewer attachments. The tables themselves were variously strewn with instruments, test-tube racks, retorts and the like. One cabinet contained several hundred square glass-stoppered bottles, some with enameled labels and others carefully pasted with the memoranda of their contents. The entire floor of the room was in tile, a conventional pattern in large squares of white and green, alternating.

This room was lighted with individual green-shaded globes suspended from the ceiling on cords. These globes hung at intervals of four or five feet over the tables, affording a strong light where it would be most needed by anyone conducting experiments. I noted that the illumination was furnished in the daytime by long skylights running parallel with the tables and over them. It was obviously an ideal arrangement for scientific work.

I suppose I appreciated it less than a person would who had had more experience in that sort of thing, but even I recognized the perfection of the equipment. I remembered that Rosalind had spoken of her father as a chemist. If she had not mentioned it directly, at

least she had said that he expected some chemicals which she was bringing back.

Probably Mr. Joy was some hermit genius who chose to bury himself in this out-of-the-way place to conduct experiments in abstruse chemical problems. Presumably he was a shriveled-up, scholarly person with magnifying lenses over his eyes for spectacles, brown-stained fingers, a trembling voice and an absent-minded disregard of dress.

IT was while I was thus picturing the owner of the house on Pleasure Island that he appeared before me. I say "appeared" advisedly, because it was just as sudden and unexpected as that. I was standing not far from the center of the room, absorbed in this unmannerly speculation about the habits and appearance of my host, when suddenly just at my feet one of the squares of green tiling slid away and there rose slowly through the opening thus made a middle-aged gentleman of heavy, flaccid figure and an apoplectic spot on either cheek, which was otherwise quite colorless.

To say that we were both astonished is putting it mildly. In a long and varied career in connection with the stage, I have seen many elevator traps, but I scarcely expected to find one in a private house. Neither did I expect to have it project before me so suddenly, out of the bowels of the earth, so to speak, so unhappy-looking a devil. Usually the fellows who come out of traps wear red tights and chuckle fiendishly when not engaged in singing interminably in deep bass. But this man was no *Mephistopheles*. The lean grace of the devil was not his. He bulged at the equator considerably, and I mentally congratulated him on getting through the trap without scraping off a vest-button or two.

My *vis-à-vis* stood the surprise better than I did. Perhaps life had already revealed all its climaxes to him. His face looked old enough—not with real age, understand, but with experience and possibly suffering. Real age he denied, as was evinced by the fact that he wore a single long lock of dyed hair plastered carefully clear across an other-

wise bald cranium. But his face was a sick face, either from study, dissipation, drugs or disease, I could not tell which. All the other pale features stood back, so to speak, to emphasize a prominent Roman nose. In startling incongruity his mouth smiled. His face was not intended for merriment, and the effect was somewhat ghastly. I felt then and many times afterward that evening as if I wanted to reach over and erase that meaningless smirk from his countenance.

AFTER our moment of mutual inspection he stepped from the trap and confronted me with a questioning glance.

"If you're Mr. Joy," I said at last in response to that unspoken inquiry, "I've got to admit that the members of your family have a knack of turning up unexpectedly."

"The members of my family?" he queried politely, but with a note of bewilderment in his voice. "I am Mr. Joy, certainly, but—"

"I referred to your stepdaughter Rosalind. The reason I am intruding in your house is because I brought her home."

"Brought her home?" he repeated incredulously. "Why, to my knowledge she has been home and in bed for several hours. You're mistaken, sir." Not only was he positive in his manner of speech, but there was in his voice a latent suspicion of the sincerity of my own statement. Why was I always being placed in the embarrassing position of a liar when I told the simple truth? But Rosalind had not been home and in bed for several hours. Of that I was certain. And I had proof.

"If you will come to the living-room—" I suggested.

"Certainly," he agreed, and with old-fashioned courtesy he opened the door for me to precede him.

I almost feared that Rosalind would not be there. Perhaps the floor had opened and swallowed her up just as it had disgorged her stepfather. But my fears were groundless. The girl was still sleeping placidly where I had placed her.

He eyed her with evident astonishment. "What's this?" he ejaculated.

"She's only sleeping," I explained.

"Thank God!" he exclaimed fervently. "She must not die—not until after to-morrow, anyway."

That struck me as being a curious speech even for a stepfather to make. And Mr. Joy did not go to his stepdaughter's side as I expected that he would. Instead, he stepped to the wall and near the door found an electric push-button, which he pressed.

That done, he sank unsteadily into a chair. "It's my heart," he explained, "—the shock and everything. Be all right in a minute."

His breathing became a matter of less difficulty shortly, but I forbore to ask the questions which rose to my lips. Plenty of time for those when he had quite recovered!

PRESENTLY there came into the living-room by way of the dining-hall a gracefully moving woman who was evidently answering the summons from the bell. She must have come from outside the house somewhere, because I was positive there had been no one there when I had first inspected the place.

Her glance rested first on Mr. Joy with a moment's apprehension; then her gaze shifted to take in myself and the sleeping Rosalind.

"Not dead!" she exclaimed in startled dismay. "Not to-day!"

The same sentiment that Mr. Joy had expressed! And I felt sure that neither of them felt so much concern for the girl as for some unexplained circumstances which might follow her demise. What was her uncle's desire to marry her off and her stepfather's manifest anxiety to keep her alive one more day at any cost? Poor Rosalind seemed the unconscious pivot on which destiny revolved.

"She isn't dead," I explained.

"I told Sommers not to—" she began.

"You said that Rosalind came home before dark." Mr. Joy interrupted her with the sharp accusation. "Why?"

The woman looked at him thoughtfully for a moment with her searching

black eyes. His tone apparently did not intimidate her.

"I was afraid you might worry," she began.

"So you lied to me?"

"I have for years," she replied simply.

I looked curiously to see what sort of a woman it was who so serenely flouted her employer. For I felt sure that he was her employer; and further, I was quite certain from Rosalind's description of the household that this was Mrs. Strang, the housekeeper.

A handsome woman she was, of that type which reaches the highest point of perfection in mature years. There was nothing of the faded rose about her, despite the fact that she was probably forty. (I guess her age; perhaps I was wrong her.) Dark hair in profusion,—very dark, almost a Spanish blue-black,—and the great, passionate eyes that go with it, a smooth, olive-tinted skin and a perfectly molded body that, under perfect control, still managed to convey the impression of languor—all were hers, together with a thinly veiled expression of contempt for the world that rather well became her sensitive features—that is, if she were not looking at you. Then it became positively uncomfortable.

Just now she wore what I believe the ladies fashion-magazines call a traveling or walking costume. I am aided in my diagnosis by the fact that she also wore a hat. By the same token I can always tell a dancing-frock when I see a girl at a party dancing inside one of them.

It struck me as rather odd that she should be thus dressed for the street in a place where there were no streets, but I forbore to comment. Mr. Joy took no notice of her costume; or if he did notice, it was apparently what he expected, because he expressed no surprise.

"This is Mr. —" He started to introduce me to the housekeeper, but stopped as he realized I had not given my name.

"Fritz James," I supplied thoughtlessly, and then regretted immediately that I had not kept my identity to myself. When the sanitarium authorities

began searching for me, it would be easier to mislead them under some name less well known than my own.

BUT my fears were groundless. My name seemed absolutely unfamiliar to both of them. That I should be unknown anywhere in the United States seemed impossible, but it was true. What's the use of writing successful plays? No one notices the name of the author. The public remembers the star and sometimes the manager, especially if it is David Belasco or George Cohan, but the author—never. If you do not believe it, ask yourself quickly who wrote "Shenandoah," "An Enemy to the King," "In Old Kentucky" or "Bought and Paid For"? Do you know the names of one of those authors? If you do, you are better informed than ninety-nine persons out of a hundred. And yet those plays are four of the best known that have ever been produced in America.

Confound it, I might as well have been John Smith the barber as Fritz James the playwright. At that time I was full of pride and cared. Now I'm full of contentment and quite indifferent whether anyone knows the name James or not. At home I am called—but I'll be darned if I'll tell you. It isn't so much the name, anyway, as the way she says it as I pick her up out of her crib in the nursery when I come home from an afternoon rehearsal. I suppose that to you it would sound as if she said "Gurroo-gurroo," but I assure you that you do not understand the original Anglo-Saxon when it is perfectly spoken.

Leaving the fascinating subject mentioned above and returning to Mrs. Strang, also quite fascinating but in a more mature way, it may be said that to all intents and purposes the secret of my name was safe with her. It did not arouse the flicker of an eyelash when I mentioned it.

Mr. Joy completed the introduction, which the lady and myself acknowledged perfunctorily.

"You will put Rosalind to bed," Mr. Joy suggested.

Mrs. Strang went to the side of the couch to waken her. The girl stirred

faintly under her touch and then curled up more comfortably on her improvised bed.

I laughed. "She's terribly tired. If you like, I'll carry her to her room, and possibly you could undress her without waking her up."

Mr. Joy started to protest, but Mrs. Strang silenced him with a look and a sentence. "It will be just as well if she should not wake up until to-morrow."

Mr. Joy assented. "Then if you can carry her, Mr. James?"

If I could carry her! I was on the point of telling about the magic strength that came to me when I had Rosalind in my arms, but upon reflection I decided that it would sound improbable to a man of science. Doubtless he would attribute it to some sentimental cause which I was positive was nonsense. I did not have any sentiment in my being.

But Rosalind was a welcome burden when I picked her up once more. Why, she just fitted into the crook of my arm. I suppose that's the reason it was so easy to carry her. An engineer could doubtless figure it out on the basis of strains and adjustment and balance of load.

As I picked her up and looked to Mrs. Strang to lead the way, I found that she was gazing at Mr. Joy.

"Which apartment?" she asked.

"Why, her own, of course," Mr. Joy returned without hesitation.

"I would suggest," the lady went on evenly with apparent meaning in her voice, "that she sleep in one of the other cottages, especially for to-night."

Rosalind's father considered the significance of this for a moment and finally agreed. "Then put her in La Petite Trianon."

Later I was to learn that each one of the cottages surrounding the main house was a separate sleeping-apartment, and that they were all named after famous houses of history.

MRS. STRANG led the way outdoors around the veranda and down a short graveled walk to the tiny bungalow which was to be Rosalind's quarters for the night. It was exceedingly attractive, consisting of four small rooms, a tiny parlor, dressing-room, bedroom

and a comfortable bath. I approved of it strongly as a method of housing guests. Here were combined privacy and comfort in the highest degree.

I deposited Rosalind on the bed and left Mrs. Strang to the task of removing the damp clothes. Retracing my steps to the main house, I there found Mr. Joy still seated in the living-room. He was evidently recovering from his heart-attack, for his color was slightly better and his breathing more even.

"Sit down, Mr. James," he invited, indicating one of the heavy chairs near himself. "I haven't had time as yet to thank you for bringing Rosalind home. At the same time, I trust you will not mind my mentioning that I am consumed with curiosity to know why she did not return earlier and what has become of Sommers, who left the island dressed in the very suit you now have on."

All things considered, it was not going to be an easy story to tell with any hope of having it believed, but I could think of no yarn to spin in place of the truth. Ordinarily not without powers of invention, I found myself now for the first time without a tellable plot in my system.

So I blurted out the truth. Imagine my surprise when he believed me. Even the incident of the near-marriage on the boat, which struck me as being especially incredible, he swallowed without comment, save to repeat the name of Rosalind's uncle, Spring-Gilbert, with a curse.

"He nearly tricked me," Mr. Joy muttered, bringing his fist down on the arm of his chair. "I might have known that he would try something before to-morrow. I suppose he has kept quiet so long just so that I would feel that much more secure and leave a weak spot open for attack just as I did."

Once more a reference to to-morrow!

"Why to-morrow?" I said, not quite intending to be impertinently curious, but nevertheless impelled to utter the question that was teasing my mind.

"Because to-morrow is Rosalind's birthday."

"She will be twenty-five."

Mr. Joy jumped as if he had been

shot. "How do you know? Are you one of Spring-Gilbert's spies?"

I laughed. "Haven't I told you that I have never even set eyes on him."

"But how did you know about tomorrow?"

"I didn't. You have mentioned it yourself. So has Mrs. Strang. As far as her age is concerned, Rosalind told me that on the way here. You see, there is no mystery whatever about my knowledge of her age. I am free to admit that I personally am completely in the dark as to the significance of Miss Joy's being detained on the yacht by her uncle, but there is no particular obscurity about the way she left it. It was merely a lucky coincidence."

"Do you think Spring-Gilbert knows that you picked Rosalind up?"

"I don't see how he could. The *Lady Leslie* is a very quiet motor-boat, as you know. Besides, there was enough noise and confusion on the yacht to cover any ordinary racket. I am positive he could not see us, because I could not make them out at all, and on account of having heard her fog-horn, I was looking for the yacht."

MR. JOY chuckled. "Then Spring-Gilbert will undoubtedly think she is drowned. That's rich. I'd like to see his face when he finds out she isn't." He laughed more heartily.

"You speak as if he would be disappointed to find her alive," I suggested with a tentative question in the inflection of my voice.

"And you wouldn't mind knowing why," he interrupted my inflection correctly. "I can't blame you a bit, and I don't see any reason why you should not know. The time will be up tomorrow, and as you will not leave here until then, you could do no harm even if you wished."

I looked him over appraisingly and ticketed him correctly as a man who wanted to talk. There was small wonder in that. Having been bottled up for a long period of time on this island with only women and servants for companions, it was quite natural that he should be aching for a male confidant. Some men are more that way than others. Plainly Mr. Joy was a raconteur.

But his suggestion that I stay on the island until the next day did not meet with my unqualified approval.

"But I can't stay here," I protested.

"How would you leave?"

"I thought that possibly some one could set me ashore in the *Lady Leslie*."

He dismissed that suggestion abruptly. "Impossible, my boy. Didn't you understand that our only servants are away, the cook on board Mr. King's yacht, and Sommers, God only knows where, perhaps dead by this time. You see, you have to stay."

No, I did not have to stay, but I did not tell him so. I still had Rosalind's automatic in my pocket, or rather in Sommers' pocket, and I felt confident that I could board the *Lady Leslie* and make my way to shore in spite of any protest of the owner. But I wasn't sure that I was quite prepared to do that.

Besides, I really wanted to hear the reason for the mysterious conduct of Mr. Spring-Gilbert and his matrimonially inclined friend Mr. King. I admit that I am human and have a natural curiosity. Further than that, I am in the business of building plots myself, and it annoyed me to have a problem like that turn up for which I could not, by the use of my imagination, supply an adequate motive. I had been trying for hours to figure out the reason that made Mr. Spring-Gilbert take such a vital interest in Rosalind's marriage, and my usually fertile mind had failed me at all points.

Mr. Joy noticed my mental struggle with myself, and he chuckled thereat.

"Well," he inquired, "do you care to stay and hear 'The Fascinating Adventure of the Girl Who Was Not Allowed to Die'?"

I pondered only a moment. The man had a dime-novelist's faculty for selecting a tantalizing title.

"I'll stay," I decided. "Go on with your story."

CHAPTER VI

EVER since I was a boy," confessed Mr. Joy modestly, "I have been more than ordinarily successful with women."

Mentally, I desired to kick Mr. Joy once around the room. There is no type of man that I really dislike more instantly than one who admits that he is a hit with the ladies. I have found in my short life that there are a number of other men who feel as I do about this. However, our disapproval does not seem to have any appreciable effect upon the conceit of those who toy with women's heartstrings and admit it. They go on Don Juaning and then telling us less fortunate mortals about their luck.

"I have not gone out of my way," Mr. Joy went on, "to seek the fair sex. On the contrary! Possibly it was my very reticence that charmed them. Even when I was fifteen, the teacher of the school where I went was in love with me. Fortunately, I had a fairly level head for a youngster, or I would have been married a dozen times before I was of age. As it was, I lived a moderately pleasant life free from chains, plucking the blossoms here and there but not settling down to the cultivation of a rose-garden of my own. What was the use? All the flowers were mine for the asking, and I was spared all the labor of making them grow. I was a vagabond of love, passing from door to door regaled with emotional hand-outs." He sighed.

"I was biding my time. I would not marry until the right woman came along, a woman who had charm, beauty and money. I was thirty when I found her. She was a widow with one daughter, Rosalind, who was then a baby. Like all the others, she was attracted to me when we first met. We were married. Her money brought to me the leisure which I had always desired in which to make original research in the field of chemistry, and her charm and beauty were a lasting pleasure to a connoisseur like myself. I knew how to make the most of her, to bring each blossom to the full bloom.

"But there was one drawback. Mrs. Joy was extremely jealous. It was hard to explain to her why other women were still interested in me after I was married. I couldn't help being civil to them, of course, and there was something about me they could not resist. Of course, a man is a man, and I admit that I did not try to make myself repulsive

to them. Maybe you know yourself how hard it is to explain to one woman why another one is interested in you. I tried it, but Mrs. Joy failed to grasp the guiltlessness of my conduct in the matter. Why, she actually thought that I was going out of my way to win their love, when all the time I was telling them that it could not be.

"As a consequence of this insane jealousy, my wife made a will to prevent me from marrying again if she should die. She said it was because she was afraid I would not take care of her daughter Rosalind, but her real reason was simply to tie me up so that I could never get any more pleasure out of my life. She had always been delicate, and we had only been married three years before she passed away.

"There I was, tied up for the rest of my natural life. I had known about the will in a vague sort of way, but had not heard the full particulars until her attorney read them to me after the funeral. The conditions were peculiarly irksome to one of my gregarious and social instincts. They were something like this: I was to enjoy the full income from my wife's fortune, but only for so long a period of time as I should remain unmarried. In the event of my marriage, the guardianship of the girl and the use of the fortune was to go immediately to my wife's brother, Homer Spring-Gilbert. If Rosalind died or was married before the age of twenty-five, the money was also to go to this cursed brother of my wife.

"Her attorney said she put that in because she did not want her daughter to make the mistake of marrying before she was old enough to judge for herself, and she thought the surest way to accomplish that was to make it to my interest to keep her single. Rather humiliating to me, wasn't it? But I forgave her. It was only because she loved me and was jealous. The rest of the will stated that if the conditions of the will were lived up to until Rosalind's twenty-fifth birthday, the estate was to be divided between myself and her, with the understanding that it was all to go to her at my death.

"Neat little scheme, wasn't it? If ever a man was tied up with red tape

and bound hand and foot, I was that man. It forced me to watch over Rosalind as carefully as if she were a million-dollar egg. If she scratched her finger, I had a specialist from New York to examine it and treat her for it. And when she had the measles once, I nearly went insane for fear she might die. And then when she began to grow up and I saw how attractive she was, I had to keep her on the island constantly for fear some headstrong youth would fall in love with her and marry her.

"The worst of it was that my wife had told her brother about the will, and I had a vision of him always watching me, waiting for me to make the first false step. He took various means to bring about my downfall. Several beautiful women who made it a point to meet me I am sure were sent by him. But I was cautious. I repressed my love of pleasure and society. I became a hermit, a recluse on this island. I devoted my energies to study.

"Spring-Gilbert tried other things, of course. Twice he attempted to kidnap Rosalind, but I fooled him there. I hired Sommers to be her bodyguard, and for ten years Spring-Gilbert let us alone. I rather supposed he had given up entirely, but apparently he had one last trick up his sleeve. I can never thank you enough for being there in time to spoil it. You surely have my everlasting gratitude."

HE rose and formally shook hands with me. "There, sir," he declared, resuming his seat, "I have told you what no other being knows. To-morrow Rosalind is twenty-five. She becomes the mistress of her own destiny, and I cease to be a nursemaid. I am not an old man yet, and the world is my oyster." He kissed his hand as if in greeting to the admiring universe. "Think, my boy, how I shall make up for the score of years I have spent in prison on this island. I am *Monte Cristo*. There is only one fly in the ointment, and I shall soon rid myself of that. Mrs. Strang loves me. Poor woman, she couldn't help it. Being here alone on the island for so many years with me, I suppose it is perfectly natural. I have even promised to marry

her when my time is up, but"—he placed a finger roguishly upon his smirking lips—"I am too old a dog to be caught again. I know a trick or two yet."

I gazed in fascinated abhorrence at this walking death of a man. With disease gripping his heart and tearing him down, he was still strutting boldly before the world, declaring his youthful strength. It was like an ancient courtesan proclaiming to her departing admirers that she was beautiful. I shuddered to think of Rosalind's having existed so long in that atmosphere, and I rejoiced that the morrow would set her free. On her twenty-fifth birthday she too would begin to live, but for her, life would start fresh, all clean and sweet, and would not consist in thumbing over the soiled pages of a grimy past.

"When Mr. James is ready, I will show him to his sleeping quarters."

BOTH Mr. Joy and myself jumped guiltily at the sound of Mrs. Strang's voice. She stood in the doorway from the dining-room, having entered noiselessly from the rear. I wondered how much of our conversation she had heard. She certainly showed no signs of it in her face. It was calm and competent-looking. I sensed by her manner of saying it that her speech meant that I was to retire at once. The woman undoubtedly had an air of authority which it seemed unwise to dispute. Quite obviously Mr. Joy had no desire to do so, and I had no choice in the matter. Without argument I decided that I was in for the night.

"I will retire at once," I told her.

"Very well. You will follow me."

She led the way out around the veranda once more, to another of the tiny cottages which had been illuminated in advance against my arrival.

"What do you call this cottage?" I asked, remembering that the other one had been named.

"This is 'The Little House with the Green Door,'" Mrs. Strang vouchsafed pleasantly.

And sure enough, it did have a solid green door set in a spotless white frame. Inside, it was even more attractive than the one to which I had carried Rosalind.

Everything about it was dainty and bright, and it made me feel big and clumsy to be set amid such tenuous surroundings.

"I have laid out extra linen for you," Mrs. Strang said, indicating the articles on the back of a chair. "Mr. Sommers' things appear to suit you admirably," she added with a tinge of sarcasm in her voice; "so I have taken the liberty of supplying you with apparel from his wardrobe."

I inclined my head in acknowledgment of her thoughtfulness. I certainly was not going to take umbrage at her veiled suggestion that I was a thief and a pirate.

When she had gone, I examined the bedroom more carefully. It certainly was not intended for a man. All around were fancy lacy things and dainty bits of bric-a-brac which would have been smashed up once a month, anyway, if a masculine person were in the habit of dressing there. But it was not my place to quarrel with my surroundings under the conditions. I was lucky not to be in jail somewhere for stealing the motor-boat. If they had chosen to give me their fanciest room, it was not my place to object.

I took off my clothes and crawled into bed, chuckling at my mental image of Dr. Canfield and Nurse Mallory hunting for me all night in the woods and returning home in the morning tired and cross. I hoped the fat doctor would get wet feet and catch such a cold that he would have to take a quart of his own nastiest pills. It was a pleasant picture, and I fell asleep contemplating it.

CHAPTER VIII

THERE'S nothing in this sanitarium idea that you have to be bathed and massaged within an inch of your life in order to make you sleep. Why, I never slumbered half so soundly during all my stay at Saskatchewan as I did for the first few hours after I struck that bed in "The Little House with the Green Door." There was not a dream or a nightmare that dared invade the sacred and heavy-barred doors of that sleep. I was

muffled away from the ordinary curses of the night, and my mind was gently cradled in downy oblivion.

All the more startling, therefore, was the sound that awakened me. I do not believe I should have noticed it at all save for the fact that it was right in the room with me, by the very side of my bed, in fact.

It was a woman's gasp of astonishment and dismay.

In response, I sat bolt upright in bed.

"What's that? Who's there? What's the matter?" I asked in rapid succession. I tried to see, but it was too dark.

There was no response, but in a second I heard the click of a door. Whoever it was had moved across the room when I awakened.

"Wait!"

I bounded from the bed and leaped toward the door, barking my shins unmercifully on a chair in the dark as I did so. The door was just closing, but I caught it in time, and as I yanked it open once more, I grabbed the hand which was on the outside knob.

"Rosalind!" I exclaimed.

The hand which had struggled like mad to escape my clutch now became passive.

"How did you know who it was, Mr. James?" her voice asked with a little laugh that had a remnant of fright in it.

How did I know? I could not say. I just did know the instant my fingers touched hers. I even knew it a little before that. I cannot explain it.

"You can't see me?" she went on.

"No."

"Thank heaven for that."

"What were you doing here?" I demanded, my faculties gradually awakening to the unconventionality of the situation.

"Why were you sleeping in my bed?" she countered. "This is my room. I woke up in one of the other cottages and felt strange, and so I decided to return to my own room. I don't think I quite understand yet why you are here."

I almost laughed out loud. "First you find me in your boat, and now I've taken

possession of your room. I assure you of my innocence in both cases, however much appearances are against me. Mrs. Strang brought me to this cottage after she had put you to bed in the other one."

"I wonder why?"

WE had been talking in subdued whispers for some occult reason connected with the fact that we stood in the dark, but now at her question a new sound invaded the deathlike quiet.

It was the clicking of a latch!

"Did you hear that?"

"Sh!" I drew her to me and threw an arm around her protectingly.

We stood close together, tense with listening.

Nothing happened for a full minute. But there was some one else in the room, some one who had opened the shutters which covered the window. I could see a little oblong of less opaque darkness in the side of the wall.

But whoever had opened the shutters was listening too, listening to hear if the noise had disturbed anyone.

I put the palm of my hand over Rosalind's mouth for fear she might cry out. I nearly did myself—the touch of her warm lips was so startling.

Suddenly from the window sprang a small shaft of light. Where it struck the wall across the room it made a spot no larger than a saucer. It wavered a moment and then traveled across the wall and down until it rested on the bed I had just left.

The bedclothes were crumpled in a ridge down the middle of the bed just as I had shoved them aside when I sprang up half-awake. By a not unusual freak, they looked as if some one were still lying there, some one who had pulled the covers with him as he turned toward the wall.

The light wavered a moment—then moved toward the pillow; and as it did so, a jet of flame came from the window, followed instantly by a crashing explosion. Rosalind screamed once in spite of my muffling hand. Maybe I was so startled myself that I had relaxed my vigilance. At any rate, I stopped her before she could do it again, and her cry ended in a stifled shriek.

Instantly there was another shot, then another and then another, until six had been fired in rapid succession. Then the light was snapped off.

We stood in trembling silence. It was a narrow squeak, and I'm willing to admit that I was frightened.

With my hand over Rosalind's mouth, I listened intently for a long time. I felt that the person who had fired those shots had left, but I was not sure, and I waited for some sign of his presence. It's difficult to judge time, especially under stress of emotion. You usually overestimate the passage of seconds.

I waited what I judged to be two minutes before I removed my hand from the girl's mouth, first warning her in a whisper not to cry out.

"Do you see now why you were not allowed to sleep in your own bed?"

"Yes, maybe; but why were you allowed to sleep in it?"

That was a rather disquieting question. Why was I selected to receive that lead reception which had been intended for Rosalind? Mrs. Strang had put me in that room herself. Could it be that I was such a hit with her that she could not bear to have me live any longer? I intended to find out.

"Thank heaven I came to waken you," whispered Rosalind fervently.

That was an aspect of the matter I had not considered yet. If Rosalind had not wakened to find herself in a strange bed, and if she had not returned to her own room, I would certainly have received about half a dozen punctures up and down my spine. There must be something in this Providence thing, after all.

THIS, however, was no time to consider theology. There were one or two tangible things to be attended to first. The most important of these, to my way of thinking, was to make my way over to the window cautiously and be sure there was no one there.

Acting on that idea, I flattened myself against the wall and dragging Rosalind after me, crept stealthily toward that oblong of semilight where my would-be murderer had stood. The girl followed me without question.

The window proved to be vacant.

The miscreant, sure that his mission had been accomplished, had left without inspecting the job.

When we reached the window, we discovered the source of the dim light which had come in when the shutters were opened. The fog had settled down once more outside, but the Pleasure Island light, high above us, still managed to send a few feeble rays as far as the "Little House with the Green Door."

It seemed an influence for good up there struggling interminably with the mists of hate and evil that rolled in murky billows around it. Sometimes the fog thickened, and it almost disappeared; then a ray would struggle through—then another; and the yellow murk would roll back for an instant defeated.

All at once, while we were watching that silent struggle, a new sound broke the stillness of the muffled night. At first I thought it was a revolver again, although it was far away and deadened by the damp mist. But it kept up for more than a dozen times and then settled down to a clatter like a machine-gun.

"What do you suppose it is?" Rosalind asked.

"I can't imagine."

We both peered out the window as if we might pierce the darkness.

The sound grew less a little.

Then, as if snuffed by a giant hand, the Pleasure Island light, high in its tower, suddenly went out.

"Who put that light out, I wonder?" I exclaimed. "It seems strange to turn it off before morning."

"No one ever turns it out," Rosalind told me. "It is a Government pilot-light, and it's kept burning all the time. The electricity for it comes on the cable from the mainland, and the light is connected up direct, so we can't turn it off or on from here at all."

"Do you get your house-lights from the same cable?"

"Yes, I think so."

"Then probably—" I stopped.

"Probably what?"

I had started to say that probably every light on the island was out of commission too, but I decided not to tell her. Plenty of time after I made sure that such was the case.

"Probably I'd better see what happened," I concluded lamely in place of the sentence that was on the tip of my tongue.

"Not go out there with all that noise going on?" Rosalind protested, clinging to my arm.

"The noise is getting less," I reassured her. We both listened. Sure enough, what had been a clatter was now a steady hum, diminishing gradually as we listened.

I tried to indentify the sound, to couple it up with something I had heard before, but it baffled me. It grew fainter and fainter like distant drumming, and finally our ears could detect it no longer.

Absolute silence blanketed us, and the fog, the last outpost of light vanquished, rolled sullenly over the island and blotted it down to the dead level of the sea. It even reached a damp hand in at the window where we stood and stroked the thin garments we were wearing until they clung to our shivering bodies like limp shrouds.

CHAPTER IX

"DO you think you can dress in the dark?" I asked. The idea was to give Rosalind something to do and at the same time not to let her find out yet that my suspicions about the lighting system were true.

"Surely," she answered promptly. "I've a heavy skirt in the closet I can slip on over my pajamas."

"Oh!" I had not known that she was wearing them.

"We're going out to see what made that noise?" she questioned eagerly.

"Well, I'm going out, anyway," I began.

"You couldn't leave me here," she interrupted decisively. "I refuse to stay alone any more to-night."

"Very well. Then I'll turn you over to your stepfather's care."

"I'd rather go investigating with you."

I made no reply to that expressed preference. I was busy hunting up elusive items of my, or rather Sommers', wardrobe. I made a mental resolution upon the spot always thereafter to put

all my clothing in order upon an easily located chair, and never to hide one shoe under the bed. Firemen have the right idea.

A feminine rustling from across the room indicated that my partner in the night's adventure, and incidentally the saviour of my worthless life, was also getting more or less presentable against the coming of the light.

"All the noise must have wakened Mrs. Strang and your stepfather," I said, making conversation to fill in the rather embarrassing interlude.

"It's funny they haven't rushed over here to see if anyone was hurt," she mused. "Wouldn't they be surprised to find us here together?"

"They certainly would," I admitted, largely to myself, making at the same time a mental resolution that they never would get that surprise if I could find my other shoe and get out of there.

AT last I had on enough clothing to do. Rosalind was ready before me.

"Give me your hand," I commanded, groping my way in the general direction from which I had last heard her voice.

It seemed no trouble at all to find the fingers she extended toward me. I fancied that they closed around mine with unsimulated relief. I had not thought before that she was frightened, but I could tell from the way her clasp steadied in mine that she had been trembling. No wonder! The reaction from the excitement must have been tremendous for a high-strung woman.

I rather wondered at my own steadiness of nerves. At the sanitarium, if anyone had dropped a ruler on the floor in my room, or if a window-shade had gone up with a bang, I should have screamed; but here I was, after being shot at six times, as steady as a rock. It was very confusing. For a moment I wished that the doctor were there to take my temperature or put a stethoscope on my heart—there must be something wrong with me that I did not understand.

Then I laughed silently at myself. Why worry about nerves if they did not bother me? With a perfectly equipped and careless assassin lurking around the corner to fill me full of lead,

how silly to think about one's health! I might not have any to fret about inside of five minutes.

"There's only one door?" I hazarded, thinking that our enemy would doubtless be waiting just outside that green panel waiting for us to open it.

"That's all," Rosalind informed me. "There are plenty of windows, though."

"No," I decided, "I'd rather face the music standing up than climbing out a window backward. Come on."

SO we proceeded cautiously across the bedroom and through the tiny parlor to that single exit which made it so easy for a person outside to trap anyone in the little house.

"Wait here," I ordered, stationing Rosalind at one side. If there was going to be any more shooting, there was no reason why she should stand in a direct line with the target.

Having placed her in reasonable safety, I cautiously opened the door. It swung in, thank heaven, and for that reason would attract less attention.

Nothing happened—nothing, that is, unless you count the wet billow of mist that rolled in and struck me in the face. For once the fog was a protection. I could see nothing outside, and doubtless anyone awaiting my exit was in the same fix. We had even chances. I had a gun as well as he; if anyone fired, I would shoot back.

So, automatic in hand, I stepped boldly out upon the veranda. Once outside, I stood tense, listening. A board creaked. I stepped back involuntarily; something struck me from the rear. I turned and grappled with it, but knew the moment my arms closed over it that it was Rosalind. There was no mistaking the way she fitted.

"Oh, at first you frightened me," she cried, throwing an arm around my neck and clinging close.

"Nothing like the way you frightened me," I growled, intentionally overlooking the way she had grabbed me. "At first, I thought you were still inside."

"Alone?" she queried, so piteously that I had to laugh.

"It's all right now, anyway," I admitted. "We've made enough racket to

attract the attention of everybody in the country. If we haven't been shot at, it's because no one is watching us." I gently and regretfully detached myself from this girl who evidently looked upon me as her sole protector in a dark and danger-infested world.

It was lucky it was so dark. And yet it made no difference. Why, I had not seen her face since the adventure began; and yet I knew how lovely she was. I wonder if an unattractive girl would have caused the same curious thrill in the dark. I could not see Rosalind, and yet a tendril of her hair against my cheek rebuilt for my imagination the glorious dark frame it was for her face, and her faint, sweet breath there in the dark recalled vividly the bow of the slightly parted lips from whence it came.

My goodness, I certainly was having reactions like a sophomore at college! I wondered vaguely if I did not belong in a sanitarium after all. Confound such self-consciousness! It made me push her away at arm's-length while I regained my much-vaunted *sang-froid*.

"Mr. Joy sleeps in the main building?" I suggested, filling in time with conversation.

"Yes."

I was sure that the master of the house was the occupant of that suite off the living-room, which was also so handy to the chemical laboratory.

"Which way in the main building?" I questioned. "Left or right? I can't remember which, and I can't see a thing."

"Left, down the gravel walk." She took my hand. "I'll lead you."

AT that, it was fortunate that we kept hold of hands. Otherwise we might have been separated. It was like being guided by a being from another world. Nothing of Rosalind seemed real except the tiny warm hand that held mine. Once or twice I was tempted to stop and draw her back just to reassure myself that the girl had not been dissolved into the fog, leaving me nothing of flesh and blood but her fingers.

We proceeded slowly and in silence, save for the occasional crunch of a bit of loose gravel under our feet. I would have preferred to go ahead, but Rosa-

lind knew the way better than I and could therefore walk faster; so in spite of my attempt at least to keep her at my side, she preceded me. I stood ready, if she bumped into anything, to draw her back and grapple with it myself—not that I am any *matinée* hero to jump in and insist upon fighting the villain of the piece, but it seemed as if it were up to me to protect this girl who apparently had no one else who would disinterestedly fight her battles for her. I felt positive that Mrs. Strang was no active ally of Rosalind's and her stepfather's attitude toward her welfare was most certainly a utilitarian one. I surmised that he would try to keep her alive until her mother's fortune was divided, and that then his active interest would cease.

We met nothing sinister save the silence and the fog. I think, however, that I would have preferred the noise of popping firearms and the flash of explosions. Lacking sound and light, all the senses were keyed up to intense speculation as to where disaster would break out first. It seemed as if something sinister were brooding over us in the dark, trying to select the best time and place to strike.

WHEN we reached the veranda of the house, I felt sure that my worst suspicions were verified, because there wasn't a sign of a light anywhere. The entire system must be out of order, because otherwise Mr. Joy and Mrs. Strang, who surely must have been aroused by the shooting, would certainly have turned on the lights. We crossed the veranda stealthily and entered the front door, which stood open save for the screen. Rosalind went directly to the wall-switch and turned it. I could hear it click, but that was all. There was no light forthcoming.

"Why," she whispered in sudden fright, "the lights don't work."

"Sh!" I admonished in a low tone, pressing her fingers reassuringly.

We listened for some sound to indicate that our entrance had been detected. All was still. "It's all right, I guess," I decided. "But we can't go on without a light."

"There should be a flash-lamp here

in the hall," she said. "Wait—I will get it."

Reluctant to lose contact with her, I followed, hanging on to her left hand. She seemed absolutely familiar with the lay-out of the room and went directly to the place she sought. It seemed to be a window-seat with a hinged cover. She stooped and rummaged.

"It isn't here," she said at last. "Oh, I remember I took it with me on the boat for fear we would be late getting in. You didn't bring it up, did you?"

"No," I told her. As a matter of fact, I hadn't even seen it. "But I have seven or eight matches."

"And there is a big yellow candle in a brass candlestick on the mantel in the living-room," she whispered. "We will get that and light it."

"We will get it," I corrected, "but we won't light it. A candle doesn't make enough light to illuminate a whole room, but it certainly makes a swell target for a person who wishes to take a pot-shot at the holder."

So we found the candlestick, which proved to be too heavy to carry, and removed the candle from it. I allowed Rosalind to carry it, as I wished to have my hands free to use her automatic, which I had kept ready for action ever since we started.

"It's strange that Father is so quiet," said Rosalind.

THE damp mist permeated everything, and where your hand touched metal, as in the candlestick, it was clammy with drops of moisture.

"Probably he is asleep," I told Rosalind in a voice that I tried to make reassuring, but which failed dismally. "I suppose we had better go to his room first and wake him up."

Rosalind agreed silently with the pressure of a hand, and led me unerringly to her stepfather's room.

The door was shut, and I rapped cautiously. There was no response. I don't know why, but I scarcely expected any.

"Stay outside," I instructed Rosalind briefly. "Stand at the right of the door, where I can find you."

Reluctantly I let go of her hand as I turned the knob and entered cau-

tiously—reluctantly for two reasons; one of them was that I hated to leave her alone, and the other was that I hated to be alone myself.

But I did enter Mr. Joy's room alone. My knees shook, and my heart kept telling me I was a sick man, but still I made good. And nobody shot me. I waited for some one to do it, almost wished some one would, after thirty seconds of waiting, but I was apparently alone.

"Mr. Joy!" I called quaveringly. "Mr. Joy, are you awake?"

Either he was not, or else he was not there. I shifted the pistol to my left hand and felt in my pocket for a match. I had to see what was there in the darkness.

I scratched it on my trouser-leg, and it sputtered into life. It was pretty slight illumination for a room so large as that library, but it sufficed to show me a scene of such complete disorder as I have seldom looked upon. In the brief photographic glance which my eye recorded before the flame flickered out, there was included a picture of the huge redwood desk overturned and all the drawers removed and their contents strewn on the floor, the doors of nearly all the built-in bookcases torn from their hinges, and all the books dumped unceremoniously wherever they happened to fall. To all appearances a whirlwind had struck the place.

Filled with apprehension, I lighted another match and made the same sort of inspection of the bedroom adjoining. I was unaccountably relieved to discover no one there. The bed had not been occupied, although the closets and dresser had apparently been thoroughly and hastily ransacked. It looked to me as if some one had been looking for something in those rooms and had only a short time in which to do it.

When I rejoined Rosalind outside, I did not tell her in what condition I had found her stepfather's rooms. There was no necessity, that I could see, of alarming her. Later I most earnestly wished I had told her about it, that I had even asked to go and look at the way things had been pawed over. Heaven knows, my intentions were good, and I surely had no idea of the

way fate was going to twist us up into bowknots within twenty-four hours.

"He's not there," was all the report that I made. "We'll try the laboratory."

ROSALIND made no comment, but I knew from the way that she gripped my fingers that she too had been frightened.

I knew about where the laboratory was myself, and felt my way along the opposite wall until I found the door. It stood open, and a draught of cold air struck me in the face.

"That's funny!" I muttered to myself. "Wait outside again."

This last was to Rosalind, as I let go her hand and stepped inside. There was too much air-current for me to light a match right there in the doorway, and so I stepped to one side.

There I found a match and struck it, but it broke in my nervous fingers. I had to use up two before I finally got a light. When the third match did sputter into flame, I held it high in front of me and surveyed the room.

Overhead one of the skylights was broken. It was through there that the draught was coming. But my gaze only lingered above for a second. A shadow that moved grotesquely in the flickering light drew my attention to the leaden sink below. Directly across it, face down, was Mr. Joy, fully and scrupulously dressed, but in a curious twisted attitude that I somehow knew meant that he was dead.

My heart stood still while the match in my fingers flared suddenly in a gust of wind and then blew out. Then out of the dark before me came a resounding crash, followed by a groan. Then there was another crash preceded by a spurting burst of flame.

I backed out of the room, and as I did so, a bluish-green light sprang up in the laboratory. By that illumination I looked down stupidly at the automatic pistol in my hand.

It was smoking. I had inadvertently pressed the trigger.

Rosalind and her friends continue to have a very lively time. Don't miss the exciting episodes of "Pleasure Island" in our next issue—on sale October 1st.

"LOCO"

by Edwin L. Sabin

IT had been a good winter for Brown Buster. They had turned him out early into the higher country, to rustle for himself among the cattle and the other horses. The cedars and pines gave shelter; in the draws, the grasses underneath the snow were long and nutritious, and there was satisfying picking on the south slopes bared by the sun; he missed the loco-weed of the fatal pasture—missed it with the poignant yearning of the drug fiend—but he found none, and the hardy, simple routine by day and night invigorated him wonderfully.

In the spring he was shaggy, tough, and even plump. His significant emaciation had vanished; his peculiar hesitant step—similar to that step in locomotor ataxia of humans—had become strong and sure; his eyes had lost much of that telltale wild glassiness—only an expert in loco symptoms could read anything suspicious there. The clean forage and the natural life had purged him. He felt fine.

WHEN the snow lay in wet patches, and the evergreen tips were brightening, Brown Buster was rounded up with a number of his fellows and brought down to the ranch corrals.

The boss himself surveyed them, as they jostled and snorted in their narrow, ominous confines. The girl whom Buster loved also peered in.

"How many, Joe?" asked the boss.

"Sixteen. We missed a couple. They may have crossed the divide, some way, and joined Roberts' bunch," answered the rider Joe, nonchalantly unsaddling.

"He'll find 'em." The boss chewed on a straw. "Well, they look tip-top. We might rub 'em down a little—but I dunno."

"Yes sir; they wintered nice. Never



saw stock in better shape than they are this spring."

"There's Brown Buster!" exclaimed the girl. "Why, he looks all right. Are you going to sell *him*, Dad?"

"If I get the chance. A locoed hawss is always a locoed hawss."

"And he certainly was plumb loco," commented Joe, gravely. "But you wouldn't think it, would you! Pity—a good hawss, too."

"Yes, he *is* a good horse," warmly praised the girl. "Don't you sell him, Dad. I'm going to ride him again. He's mine, you know. I'm not a bit afraid. Maybe he's cured. Aren't you, Buster?"

Buster heard the hail and pricked his ears. He had memory of this clear voice, those gay gallops and the resultant pats, sugar and apple-slices. He had been a pet. But the rancher slowly shook his head, slightly smiled, and spoke emphatically.

"Nope. Now's the time to sell him, if ever. A locoed hawss is always a locoed hawss. You can't trust him. He's liable to break loose any minute."

"But ought you to sell him, then?" challenged the girl.

"I should rather say so." Her father was a man of decision, in his own market. "He's likely to last. The average life of a hawss over there at the front is less than three days, they say. And

he'll be put right through. This buyer wont take any but saddle-broken animals."

"Oh, Dad!" she sighed.

THE next morning was full of business for the corral. A stranger had appeared—a stout, red-faced man in khaki blouse, riding breeches, and puttees which he constantly slapped with his short whip. There were the two cowboys, in their overalls, with rope and saddle and bridle ready; and the boss—his straw in his mouth. The women-folk did not come out.

"These are the horses, are they?" queried the red-faced man, as all stood gazing in from the corral bars.

"Yes sir."

"And what is your price?"

"A hundred and forty dollars each, take 'em as they come."

"Too much for range stock. It's more than I'm authorized by my government to pay."

"You've been paying it," retorted the boss. "Hawsses are hawsses, these days. Take 'em or leave 'em. If I don't sell 'em to you, I'll sell 'em to somebody else."

"Um," grumbled the red-faced man. "It'll do no harm to trot one or two out, so I can look them over."

"Which one first, Mister?" invited the alert Joe.

"That white-face bay with his head up."

"Snake Major out, Joe," bade the boss.

Joe maneuvered along the rails; the horses within swerved and scuttled; the noose swung, intimidating; the white-face wheeled, with toss of head—and on the instant, the rope hissed for him, and the opening loop whipped about his neck.

"You would, would yuh?" challenged Joe, tightening the slack as he clambered in. "Come on, you!"

The bars were let down; the other horses were kept back, and Joe led out Major.

The stout buyer stood to size him up; critically sidled around him; approached to pass a rapid but firm hand over the back and legs; looked into his eyes and mouth; again scrutinized his

outlines—rear view, front view and from right and left. Then he directed, brusquely:

"Saddle him."

"Bridle, too, Mister?"

"Yes."

On went bridle; on went saddle. "Ride him about a bit," said the buyer. On went the cowboy, Joe's fellow. The stout buyer watched, for a minute.

"All right. That will do. Er—hold him out, and I'll look over some others. He's got a little more white on him than I fancy, but—er—hold him out."

"Put him in the cow-yard, Frank," ordered the boss.

Business proceeded with energy. Horse after horse was roped, some by direction, some at convenience; led forth, examined—perhaps curtly dismissed with the accusation: "Camel nose" or "Bad teeth" or "Knee sprung;" or after saddled and ridden, were turned in to join Major. Several acted up: side-stepped, danced, pitched a little—and Frank, the rider, laughed gleefully.

"We're uncorkin' 'em for you, anyway, Mister," he cheered.

"Of course, when first saddled in the spring, a hawss is bound to make a bluff," explained the boss to the stout buyer. "They soon get over it. Every hawss in the lot is well broken."

"We uncork them, fast enough, ourselves," remarked the buyer, grimly. "Too fast, sometimes." And he ordered, suddenly: "Rope me that bay with the under-bit, next, will you? That light bay in the far corner."

"Oh, you top cuttin'-hawss," chanted Joe; and he roped Brown Buster.

BROWN BUSTER was led out. He was feeling normal—a little nervous, maybe, for his last summer's illness had left his system frayed and taut; but no horrid visions were clouding his senses. He blew defiantly from his nostrils, and slightly cringed under the swift passages of the strange hands. The man opened his mouth, and peered keenly into his eyes.

"Oh!" uttered the girl, in the house, witnessing through the kitchen window. "They're looking at Buster!"

"Yes," answered her mother; "he

goes too, I suppose. But we'll make your father give you the money."

Stepping around, with an unexpected movement, the stout buyer clapped Brown Buster smartly on the tense haunch. Startled, Buster sprang and whirled. But there was no resentment in him. He did not run to the end of the rope; he only trembled a little as the buyer again peered into his eyes. The buyer seemed somewhat puzzled. The boss and the two cowboys proffered no comment.

"What's the matter with his eyes?"

"His eyes are good. He sees as well as you or I, doesn't he?" defended the boss. "He's a young hawss."

"Yes; four-year-old. Did you raise this horse, sir?"

"No sir. I bought him as a yearling."

"What's been his business?"

"Cow-hawss. As soon as we found how easy he was on the rein, we used him for a cutting-hawss. Gentle as a kitten and willing as a dog—the best cutting-hawss in this section. You can ask the boys. Last year my daughter rode him, mostly."

"There's something off in that animal's eye," asserted the buyer. "I'd think he'd been abused."

"You see, yourself, he's gentle. And I tell you my daughter uses him as a saddle-animal."

"You warrant him sound, do you?"

"Warrant nothing," blurted the boss. "He's sound at this moment. That's as far as I'll go with any hawss. There he is. You're as good a judge as I am. He looks to me like an A No. 1 animal—the top of the bunch."

"Earmarked," murmured the buyer.

"Yes sir. But I can't help that under-bit. He's no less a hawss on that account."

"Um," mused the buyer. "If it wasn't for that earmark and one or two other things, I'd rather pay one hundred fifty for him than one hundred for the rest of the lot." And—"All right," he said. "Saddle him."

Brown Buster was bridled and saddled.

"Hold on, my man," quoth the buyer.

"I'll ride him myself."

Brown Buster submitted to the

strange seat and hand, and to being put through his paces.

"Nice gaited and easy on the reins, isn't he?" called the boss.

"Nervous."

"He's been made a pet. Likes to show off, I reckon," retorted the boss.

The buyer dismounted heavily.

"Turn him into that other yard," he ordered. And he followed with his eyes as Brown Buster was led away.

Thus Brown Buster was accepted for the cavalry service of the British army—"over there."

At the kitchen window, the girl drew a quick breath.

"They've taken him," she exclaimed passionately. "Oh, I hope he goes loco before ever they get him to the train. I *hope* he does."

"Never you mind," soothed her mother. "He wouldn't be any account on the place. Nobody'd feel safe, riding him. I should think you'd rather have the money."

The girl said no more. Only, after the bill of sale had been made out, and the buyer had departed, in the interim before the purchased stock were driven to the shipping station, she stole out to the yard; called Buster to the fence; tendered him sugar; stroked his sleek nose; kissed it—and with a little sob fled for the house.

"If you're sick, that's all the more reason why we ought to keep you," she wailed, self-reproachful.

Brown Buster, his ears pricked, gazed after her. He loved that girl.

IT was weeks later, when, as the outcome of a cowering, tortuous journey, Brown Buster arrived in the French port. First, there had been the rough, blind railroad trip, when to them, packed standing, the landscape had flitted by in a dazing dance beyond the confining bars. At last they had been poked out, stiff and car-sick and bewildered, and forced into a pen thronged with other horses from Iowa, Montana, Texas, Colorado, Oklahoma, Missouri—horses of all degrees, of all brands and experiences. Across the pens, the air wafted salty and fresh. Then, amidst shouts and jostlings and imperative commands, and raucous,

shrill whistles, they were seized, one by one, strapped about the middle and raised in the air—up, up, in dizzy flight—and then lowered through a hole, into semidarkness and deafening clatter and new smells.

Brown Buster was as fit as any, in his appearance. Here at this crowded, bustling mart, horse was scarcely to be differentiated from horse, save by outward signs. In some of the animals, the long, miserable journey by rail and ship had developed the best; in some, the worst. Some, weak and shaken and lackluster, were as eager and docile as field-dogs; some, affrighted and on edge, bawled and bucked and fought with teeth and heels. During the hard, nauseous siege below deck, in the monotony of days and nights, Brown Buster's brain occasionally had faltered; he had seen old visions, and new; and when he was landed, he was thinner, his gait was more unsteady, and his eyes were a little more peculiar in their glassiness. But horses must be fed to the front—fed, with the hundred other kinds of munitions, steel and iron, flesh and blood, hopes and fears, into the hopper of war. Shod afresh, his shoulder smarting with the British army-brand, from this pandemonium through still another pandemonium of shoutings, shufflings, rumblings, he was herded on with the common lot down a muddy, rutted road.

In the final apportionment of remounts, he met with sudden favor at the crucial test of officers' choice.

"'Ere's a likely-lookin' 'oss, sir," declared the stocky round-faced corporal who held him by the halter.

The boyish, downy-lipped subaltern surveyed him with a nervous, if professional air.

"You think he's all right, do you, Johnson?"

"Yes sir. Thank you, sir. 'E's got good bone and barrel, sir. A bit wild in the h'eye, sir, but 'is 'ead can't be beat. The h'other h'officers passed 'im by to pick no better, I'm thinkin', sir."

"An American horse, isn't he, Johnson?"

"Yes, sir. From the Western States, I judge, sir."

“What’s the matter with his ear?”

“That’s a h’owner’s mark, sir. I think they call it a h’under-bit, sir. You’ll find that on lots of H’American ’osses, sir.”

“All right, Johnson. Ride him around and I’ll see his action.”

Corporal Johnson boldly vaulted aboard, and sitting on the bare back with the secure seat of the English stable-boy, and with sundry “So-ho’s” and “Steady, lad’s,” tried Brown Buster out.

“That will do, Johnson.”

“’E’s easy as a cradle, sir. ’E’s a little of an ’igh stepper, but ’is legs are sound, sir.” And Corporal Johnson, slightly flushed, dismounted.

“Very well, Johnson. You can save him out for me. Mind you don’t let the colonel or the major or the captain or any other of those beggars steal him.”

“Very good, sir. H’I’ll watch sharp, sir.” Thereupon the corporal saluted and took Brown Buster into his keeping for the lieutenant.

THE young lieutenant importantly strolled away. He rather fancied that he had a good eye as to horses, himself. For a subaltern he was in luck, and that night at mess amidst his fellows and the exchange of complaints and commiserations, he might becomingly brag. The battle-fields were impartial; officers became, and remained, scarcer than horses; so, again, luck for the young lieutenant, now within touch of his seniority.

Nagged by the cavalry curb and snaffle, and the new system of reining; well fed, but hard ridden in mud and rain and sun and night; his frayed nerves frayed further by smoke and dust and thunder and sharp command, Brown Buster had worked his best, according to his lights. But here was a world gone mad, and he was not sure of himself. Little there was to humor a horse’s eccentricities—even a locoed horse’s! The old poison gnawed at him; weaved its spell around him; betimes fettered his legs; dimmed his vision; careened him stepping at random and tottering, while his rider reined him cruelly and savagely cursed. And for another period he was

fairly all right, except in his inner consciousness. There, something told him that some day, or some night, he also would go mad—stark, staring mad. He had strange memories.

As said, luck came again to the young lieutenant; great, good luck, and soldier’s luck. The world long ago read, with vague appreciation, of that attempted vast enveloping movement, yonder in France, when flank out-flanked would stem flank out-flanking, and centers wavered; and every arm of the service strained back and forth, giants grappling with giants, fiends with fiends, while the earth burst and from the skies a thousand infuriated Joves rained their slaughtering thunderbolts. Here waged their war a multitude of units. Thus it happened (as has happened before in history), that, loosed from a hurly-burly so rapid as almost to outstrip the plans of a headquarters twenty miles to rear, forth swooped to hold by their advance a battered village, the remnants of a British cavalry troop led by an English boy.

Bearing him, Brown Buster pounded along, an automaton. The springs that actuated him were at the breaking-point. The night and the following morning had been a horse-hell of incessant jarring thunders, of erupting volcanoes, of huge, fearsome implements rushed hither-thither, of gigantic birds rising, landing, sometimes almost brushing him with their pinions; of smoke and dust and acrid smells—powder, sweat and blood; of human beings apparently crazed; of red sky, red earth, red forms; a world red, red, all red, while amidst it, he and his fellows waited. Then, at the sudden stir, and the first urgent prick of the rowel, he knew that he was loco—bad!

As they raced down the road, he could not see; he could not hear; he scarcely could feel. Whether he or the earth was moving, he could not tell. His hoofs were miles beneath him; the legs were not his legs. Grotesque obstacles confronted him, were surmounted only to confront again. Stepping high, he strove onward. In the field plowed by agents demonic, all the horses were stepping high, plunging and stumbling. And when the shrapnel

began to find them, some fell. But Brown Buster did not fall—yet.

NO Balaklava, this; nobody had blundered. It was only another methodical pin-prick on the map of battle where pins were constantly advancing and receding. Nevertheless, it embraced an issue from which, as would seem, might depend a dynasty. The shrapnel burst faster. An aeroplane hastened to hover over. From a shredded copse beyond the village ruins, a machine-gun unseen, unheard, spewed venomous pellets; its drumming challenge was announced by the hiss of lead. To the rear, a big gun wakened—and another, their shells tearing across, above—searching for the copse. In the sky, the one aeroplane was fighting two. Now big gun was answering big gun; staccato and roar merged into a steady diapason. The plowed turnip field was hazed by the shrapnel. Supports were rallying for the copse beyond the ruined village; supports were launching to seize village and copse, too. The curtain of fire thickened. No, not a curtain, but a shroud of fire. The galloping, stumbling hoofs of the few horses had aroused an inferno.

Little of all this impinged upon the senses of Brown Buster. If the world was crazy, he was crazy with it, in a world of his own. His hide was red from shrapnel, but he did not know it. His mouth was red from the curb, but he did not know it. His master still sat in his saddle, but he did not know it. Unfeeling, unhearing, seeing naught earthly, with the legs of a sheep and the tenacity of a brain-shot cat, he went staggering, reeling, plunging onward, past the village, for the copse; and through the storm pressed after him the laboring, cheering few.

The curtain of fire had shifted; the machine-gun had been silenced; but there were rifles, bayonets, grenades—an interval of fierce fighting—the sergeant had fallen; round-faced Corporal Johnson had fallen; dozens had fallen, ere this; others were falling; and down from his seat pitched at last the boyish subaltern.

Uncoerced, Brown Buster might still go staggering, reeling, plunging at a tangent along the battle-line; while from that rear, yonder, rushed forward the British infantry, across the turnip field, over the bodies of the sergeant, and the corporal, and the privates, and at last over the form—weakly struggling—of the boyish subaltern, and into the shredded copse.

Wet reins dragging, empty stirrups flopping, crimsoned hide streaming, hoofs sprawling, legs stiffening, head weaving, Brown Buster ran, in that drunken fashion, for a surprising distance down the zone of fire—and instantaneously was wiped away by a magical cotton-puff. But even before this, the British infantry were “digging in” and first aid had been administered to the young subaltern.

THE home papers announced:

Wounded in Action

CECIL: the Honorable, lieutenant of Third Sussex Horse, only surviving son of Lord and Lady Woods-Hapley, Great Bannonton, Sussex. The action in which Lieutenant Woods-Hapley was wounded, and for which he has been Gazetted, is reported as a particularly brilliant piece of work, he having led a cavalry charge through the open against a machine-gun trench, under heavy fire, and so disorganized the enemy that the infantry support following easily occupied the ground. The lieutenant himself fell only at the edge of the trench. He is recovering from his wound.

From the hospital the Honorable Cecil wrote to his mother:

Please don't you and the pater make such a silly fuss about me. I really didn't do anything creditable at all. The truth is, I exceeded orders; but I was mounted on a horse that went crazy, and as I couldn't manage the bally brute, he ran away with me, straight for the Boche trench. Of course, my men followed. After I fell off, the creature continued by himself, they say, till shrapnel shot him into little pieces. I'm jolly well glad to be rid of him. Something was the matter with his brain, I think.

And thus dismissed, the astonished shade of Brown Buster might interpret, if granted such prescience, that this seething, bellowing world of which he had been a brief inmate was forsooth a sane world, amidst which his own craziness was viewed as only discord!



The Water Boy & Wilbur Hall

He was all that the name implies. I don't know why they didn't send him to Harvard, where he would have been appreciated, but they sent him to us. Personally I think we could have struggled along without him for months. He was one of these child-prodigy things: read the Bible through at four, was doing integral calculus at seven, advanced a theory about the fourth dimension at twelve, and at fourteen was an ornament to a struggling little college that could have used two or three thousand dollars in endowment to much better purpose. Egbert claimed, after two weeks among us, that he could have taken the freshman and sophomore years in one, and as far as I am concerned, no one would have stopped him. I should have felt no personal loss if he had gorged himself with collegiate learning and taken his master's degree in thirty days. And I'll tell you why. When a guy is six feet two in his homemade socks, weighs two hundred and ten and has to depend on his cuffs for class-room information about Economics, it galls him to have an infant phenomenon that he could put in his vest pocket with his matches, pop up two seats away and rattle off a chapter after glancing at the index. And then offering to help you afterward! That's why—jealousy!

Because, as it turned out, Egbert was a right nice little lad. He was good-natured and accommodating, and he just oozed college spirit. He yearned to be a half-back, although he weighed at least eighty pounds, including what he knew, and he always had tonsillitis after a football rally, from overstraining his throat with the yells. They couldn't

THE name was Watt or Watts or something like that. When he was a boy, he was watching the teakettle on the kitchen stove one day when the cover fell off. Mother's lad put it back on. It fell off once more. Watt or Watts or whichever it was, examined the recalcitrant lid, found nothing wrong with it and began to speculate. Purely by accident he discovered that steam was a power: he went out to the woodshed and invented the steam-engine, and now we have him to thank for tourists and steamed oysters and commercial travelers and their stories.

As I say, it was an accidental discovery that gave us steam. The same goes for Egbert the water-boy, and our winning of the State football championship last year. Pure accident—and the Pirate King's corns! You are getting this straight, and for the first time in public print. The college thought it was the team; the team thought it was Hempfield the coach, and Hempfield is convinced that it was a dream he had, in which he worked out a new fake kick. But I'm giving you the low-down—it was Egbert.

The Water Boy

By Wilbur Hall

suppress his college spirit—I never saw so small a person with so much of anything; and because they were afraid he'd go into a decline if he couldn't do something for the football team, he was officially designated head water-boy. I claim that's a new football position. But you should have seen Egbert play it!

THERE'S another place where the child-wonder annoyed me: he could get more attention out of the stands when he was playing head water-boy than I got in four years because I was at center. I want to be fair—as a bucket-handler Egbert was immense. But on the other hand, why should he divide honors with the dean of the college, the back-field, and the yell-leaders, and leave some of the rest of us nowhere? Did you ever know a center to have his name in the papers? Did you ever see the picture of one? Did you ever hear the rooters cheer for one? Did you ever know one of these magazine-writers to weave a tale about a center or a guard? Not any! Except in the annual Walter Camp hall of fame, no one but the initiated ever notices that a football team has such things as a center and two guards, right and left. Some day I'm going to play my position in a pair of red pajamas, and then we'll see.

Oh, yes, there was the Pirate King, right guard. The Pirate King was the human mountain with the corns, the weak and humble tool Egbert and Accident used to win the State championship. His real name was Bolland, Charley Bolland, and he was fairly human, but he hated to be joked. There was one thing Bolland couldn't stand, and that was what Kipling called the gentle jape. Egbert discovered this early in the year. Because Bolland was big and black and picturesque, the boy dubbed him the Pirate King. I've forgotten which door it was Bolland pitched Egbert through, but I think it was the one to the math' room, because that was drafty all the rest of that year. The Pirate King had a temper hot enough to dry a raincoat at, provided you could have hung the raincoat up and gone away and left it. Otherwise it wouldn't

have been possible, for the safest place to be when the Pirate King was in one of his moods was a mile and a half away in a cyclone-cellar. Imagine stepping on the corns of a man like that!

Egbert discovered them, as Watts-his-name discovered steam. It was in the gym', a few nights before the State championship game. Our zealous little water-boy was listening in while Coach Hempfield paid his last respects to some of the linemen for being slow, and his remarks had wounded the sensibilities of the Pirate King. It didn't exactly require any activity on the part of Egbert to make things worse, but he had to do the wrong thing. He kicked over a long bench, and the bench came down on the Pirate King's feet!

I notice that real authors do that in critical moments when they don't think their lines would get by the editor. No real author ever had language to conceal that compares with what I have—the above dots should be printed in purple and burnt-orange! The Pirate King went up and hit the rafters, came down and broke two locker-doors off the hinges—and then started for Egbert.

"You four-eyed runt!" he roared, making a grab. "You did that on purpose! Ow-wie! Ouch! Oh, Lord! Oh, my corns! Oh, my toes! Oh, my feet! If I get my hands on you, you shriveled peanut-butcher, I'll—oh, great suffering martyrs! Ouch, ouch, ouch!"

The Pirate King sat down suddenly and picked up first one foot and then the other, and rocked it back and forth, moaning. Egbert, scared dumb, stood across the room with his hands out, measuring the distance to the nearest window. The rest of us were holding on to each other, weak from laughing, and the Pirate King took a shy at the nearest with a handy broom. But he couldn't get up. He had to sit there and nurse his feet.

Coach Hempfield came to first. "Lay off, Bolland," he said. "The boy didn't know you had chilblains."

"They're not; they're corns!" Bolland bellowed.

"All right—corns. But you leave the boy alone. If you bother him, I'll take you on myself."

The Pirate King turned. "Well, go ahead, then. Pitch in, if you think you can last! I don't care if you are the coach; nobody can drop things on my toes and get away with it!"

"Oh, forget it, big fellow! You'll live till morning if your fever doesn't go any higher."

"But it hurts, hang it all!"

"I suppose so. What I want to know is, how can you play football if you care so much for your little pink toes?"

"I don't care for 'em—not on the field. But in here—and that kid did it to ruin me! Oh, merciful providence, pass me the arnica!"

He began moaning again, and Egbert, seeing his chance, took a four-foot dive and made a window without losing anything but part of one trouser-leg. Peace was restored to our midst then, and we had the rest of Hempfield's ideas of the subject of animal density in college football lines. Personally, I would rather have had Egbert drop a piano on my corns!

THAT year it was highly important that we beat the rival team. We always found that highly important, not because we had anything against the institution it hailed from, but because its student-body is made up of large-footed hicks from the grain-and-hay belts and of rough-necks from small up-State towns. There is a natural antipathy between college men of standing and refinement and family, and a lot of ham-handed yaps who don't know enough to wear dinner-jackets. So we felt it incumbent on us to beat these rivals of ours at football and baseball and oratory and tennis and cross-country runs—and occasionally, when it could be arranged, to beat them at a fair, open street-fight after a game. Sometimes we succeeded; more often we didn't. Last year we had to, because they had won four straight seasons and we had a superstition against being beaten by the same outfit five times running. You can understand how that would be.

It is probable that even the Pirate King himself forgot about the corn-incident before morning, for Hempfield was driving us; and when Hempfield puts his hands in his pockets and begins to

drive, I am willing to back him against that famous exponent of the driving game, *Simon Legree*, or that other famous plantation foreman, *Hurry-up Yost*. You don't have time nor energy for thinking of anything but football in the afternoons and a soft bed at night, and you forget your early piety very, very quickly. That was the sort of week we had before Thanksgiving. On the last day we rested. We thought we needed it, but looking back on it, I have a hunch that the coach had us timed to the minute and that we really went out on the national turkey-day about as fit as we could be.

In the two quarters we walked all over 'em. It was sixteen to seven at the beginning of the third quarter. All I had to do was to pass the ball and then lie down, because the other center was built for grace and beauty instead of for charging, and he didn't worry me. But at this stage they put in a new guard and tackle opposite the Pirate King, and we hadn't had the ball more than a minute before Wedge, our right half, started playing in closer on defense and backing the Pirate King. He needed backing. His hands were full.

Our up-State rivals were locally famous for coming up strong in the last part of a game. Their coach believed in letting the other fellow use his ammunition in the first periods, and then in bringing up his own heavy artillery. We were still good, but we had to be. And the Pirate King, among other things, had taken a nasty kick on the head. I lay it to that.

EARLY in the quarter the up-Staters got away from their own thirty-yard line with a forward pass, and two of their backs ran the length of the field for a touchdown.

Five minutes later their quarter dropped a goal. With the score seventeen to sixteen against us, things were changed in our camp, all of a sudden. Little Egbert was almost crying when he came running out about that time, with his big pail slopping water.

"It's the line," he mumbled to me when I grabbed for the sponge. "It's you wooden Indians in the line. Hempfield says so. He says we're going to

get licked. And the Pirate King is showing yellow as jaundice!"

"You shut your yap and get back where you belong before your family loses its baby boy!" the King growled. He had been down, with his wind knocked out, but he was so mad that he could stagger to his feet. "Call me yellow—"

"Thirty—fourteen—nine—come on, you slackers, line up!" Captain Trader called; and little Egbert ran, with his class cap over one ear.

We were playing straight football now; we had to score, or we were gone. The Pirate King was still grunting about the water-boy in the next down or two, and he made those scrimmages painful sessions for the new lineman opposite him.

"Yellow, am I?" he bellowed, when the insult came back into his mind. "I'll yellow somebody!"

But down he went a minute later, and Egbert had to be summoned with his trusty pail. "Oh, it's the Pirate King again, eh?" he said. "Let me at him!"

This time poor old Bolland was out for a while. But Egbert was as cold-blooded as a police-surgeon. He wiped the guard's face off and gave the big fellow a gouge in the eye that must have penetrated even as far as the subconscious ego. Bolland woke up.

"Better let me stay out here and hold your hand while you play, King," the water-boy sneered.

"When I get up, I'll break your neck for you, you pigeon!" the Pirate King replied.

"Oh, you could, I suppose," Egbert answered, speaking low to avoid trouble with the officials. "You could if you had enough rest between rounds."

Bolland made a swipe at him and knocked little Egbert's glasses off. Egbert only grinned at him and trotted back to the side-lines.

"I'm going to murder that little piece of fish-bait," Bolland panted to me as we crouched.

"Fair enough," I said; "but you might practice on that opposing guard of yours now."

He did, too. I could hear the man's back snap when the Pirate King hit him.

WE went down the field. On their ten-yard line we were held. We lost the ball and they kicked out of danger. So we had to do it over again. We did it over again twice. It was the sort of football that takes the zip out of a man and makes him wish he had gone into business instead of to college. I was having it pretty easy myself, but the rest of the line was in tatters, and the backs couldn't get up when they were downed—not until they'd sorted out their arms and legs and gotten the feeling back into them! The other side couldn't score again, short of a miracle, but they would win with one point just as well as they could with nine or ten thousand. And it was up to us to go over for another touchdown.

"Oh, you big bags of cotton, you!" little Egbert whimpered when he came out again. It was Randolph, right half, this time. "Oh, you flat-footed slugs! From the side-lines you seem to be playing cribbage—Hempfield wants me to ask you what you *are* playing."

He was giving Randolph water, but only mechanically. I could see he was looking for some one else. It was the Pirate King.

"Oh, there you are!" he cried. "I brought you out a drink of milk, Pirate King, in case you should want it."

"Don't talk to me, shrimp," Bolland snarled. "After the game I'm going to spank you till you're crippled for life!"

"Oh, after the game," the shrimp said, cocking his eye, "you're to be sent to the Old Ladies' Home. The rooters are raising a subscription for you now."

"Come on there, you with the water," the referee called. "If there's any more stalling, I'll penalize somebody."

"You see, Pirate!" Egbert cried, ducking and throwing a dipperful of water at Bolland as he ran. "Now I guess you'll play up!"

By this time Bolland was boiling. The quarter called for a straight buck through the right side of the line, and Bolland gave them a hole you could have lost a bale of hay in. The two men who had been jamming him got up mad—which made three of them.

"All right, you," their left guard growled at Bolland. "I'm going to get you for that!"

"Come on in and get," the Pirate King snapped. "You'll find more than you can carry away."

That's nice, along toward the end of a close football game, to get family feuds started going merrily here and there in the two lines! I couldn't help seeing part of it. In the next few downs those two guards were at each other's throats. We made twelve yards and were back under their goal again, fighting to go over, when the pile got up and left Bolland stretched out on the ground cold.

HE scared me. He was whiter than I like to see them, and had his legs twisted up and his arms spread out limp, and I thought we'd need the doctor and a stretcher, and some long-legged sophomore substitute in the Pirate King's head-harness. Captain Trader tried to turn him over, thinking it was his back; the guard's face frightened him too.

"We'll have to have our trainer, Mr. Waddell," he said to the referee.

"Trainer, your eye! I'll train the big hulk!" It was little Egbert. His voice was almost gone. His cap was in his pocket, and his long hair hung down in his eyes. His spectacles were so dirty I don't believe he could see through them, and he had torn his hand somewhere so that it looked like a beefsteak that has been the cause of a dog-fight. "Don't bother about the trainer, Captain. Bolland's not hurt!"

"Who's running this team, kid?" the captain said. But he didn't call for help, because in about two motions Egbert had the Pirate King blinking his eyes and groaning.

"Come on, Pirate," Egbert said in his ear. "Get up and pay for your bed. I'll bring you an egg-chocolate next time you're down. What are you pretending is the matter this time?"

But the Pirate King was really hurt. He could still get mad, but he couldn't fight. For the time being, all the fight had been taken out of him.

"It's my stomach," he gasped, "—or my heart. Easy, kid! Oh, Lord!"

"It's the pit of your stomach," Egbert said brutally. "You've caught cold in it. Get up and fight, you big cheese!"

I couldn't stand that myself, and I

cuffed Egbert over the ear. "Lay off, there," I said. "The man's hurt."

"Feelings," Egbert said.

"You're a liar!" the Pirate King moaned. "I'll crucify you for this, you young devil."

"Why don't you get murderous when you're playing?" Egbert snapped.

"Just let me up," moans the Pirate King.

"Get up, ox!" Egbert retorted. "Do you need a derrick?"

Bolland rolled over on his side, and two or three of them helped him to his feet. Egbert jumped over to me and held out the sponge.

"Don't want it," I said, and turned to where Knight, the left guard, was sitting on the ball.

"Wait, Chuck!" Egbert whispered, catching my arm. "We've got two minutes to win. Make Bolland mad. Kick his shins. Insult him. Make him fight." He looked over his shoulder at the referee. "Yes sir—I was only giving Schuyler a drink. His head hurts."

The referee grunted. "This is an awful talky game," he growled. "I don't want any more of it."

"No sir," Egbert said politely. Then he swung toward the Pirate King. Nobody could have seen what he was going to do. The Pirate was still groggy. The child-wonder heaved his heavy bucket out, and with precision and a perfect aim dropped its twenty-five pounds square across the big guard's toes—and then ran!

BOLLAND screamed. But Captain Trader was already calling signals. It was for a quarter-back buck,—our man Finch could squirm through for a touchdown if it could be done at all,—and we all knew that the crisis was on us. *Crisis* seems a good word.

Meantime Bolland was having his agony all to himself. I could hear him whimpering with pain as he crouched against me.

"Oh, damn, damn, damn!" he sobbed. "Oh, it hurts!"

I was sorry for him, but I began to wonder whether little Egbert hadn't had a rush of ideas to the head, after all. Just as I saw the quarter's fingers spread for the long pass, I shifted my

weight and came down on Bolland's sore left foot. He thought it was the opposing guard, I suppose—for he screamed and started for his man.

You never played football next to a mad bull or a raving lunatic, perhaps, and I wish I could tell you about it. But I can only try. The Pirate King began to roar when I eased half my two hundred pounds on his corns, and they were still sensitive from the massaging Egbert had given them with the water-bucket. He roared straight through that play. And it wasn't a steady, sustained roar, either; it was a sort of siren effect, up and down, swelling and dying away, like a steam-boat-whistle when the pressure's low. It was blood-curdling, if there is such a thing. But it was nothing in sound compared to what the Pirate King was in action!

He hit that opposite guard with his two fists,—I'm sure of that,—and the man didn't come to that evening. The second line of defense closed up and checked Bolland, and so he backed out a step or two. This brought our halves and little Finch up with the ball, and they crowded into the squirming mass ahead to do what could be done. Bolland was rocking with the struggle around him, but he kept his feet. Then some one stepped on his toes again; his roar swelled up, and he hit the wriggling, fighting teams with his head and shoulders! Hit them? He smashed them! It was the irresistible force turned loose at last. It was two hundred and twenty pounds of muscle multiplied by a wrath that would make that of the gods seem like the gentle rain of mercy!

Little Finch took the brunt of the blow. It heaved him out of the ruck like pulling violets up by the roots, and it sent him careening over the heads of the other line as if shot from a catapult. He struck the goal-post about eight feet up, glanced, went on into the ground, plowed a furrow eight inches deep in it, and stopped, end over end, five yards away, on his stomach. But he held on to the ball.

Bolland was the first man up. "Now," he shouted, frothing at the mouth, "I've

got an engagement with Egbert. Get out of the way for a murderer!"

HE started, fists clenched and eyes rolling, but he didn't go far. What men of us were near enough to reach him were crying on his neck. He shook us off, and more climbed on. We danced him out for the goal-try, hugging him and calling him soft names. Trader kicked—a perfect goal. We swarmed around Bolland, begging him to let us get down and be walked on. None of them knew what he was cussing about, nor cared, except me, and I was too busy celebrating to tell. Bolland was lost in a fine daze of red rage; I don't think he had an idea that the game was over. He limped, and he limped, and he cursed Egbert and promised what he would do to him.

A minute later the whistle blew.

"Now," the Pirate King said with tears running down his face, "now I'm going to catch that damned cub and take him apart to trample on his internal organs!"

He started the second time, but again he was stopped. The rooters were on the field, and they met him. In another shake they were all around him, on top of him, then under him, and he was on their shoulders, and the serpentine began and they wouldn't let him go. They wouldn't even listen to him. If they saw that he was crying, they must have thought it was hysteria.

It wasn't. I knew. He was doubling up his toes in his heavy shoes, and the sweat of agony was running down his neck. It was his corns!

Then, just behind the men who were carrying him, I saw Egbert, the boy phenomenon, who could recite original Chaldean and who knew Kant's "Critique of Pure Reason" from cover to cover—now using his dipper for a stick and his empty bucket for a drum, one glass out of his spectacles, his clothes torn and dusty.

"Bolland! Bolland!" he croaked painfully. "I knew you could do it! I knew you had it in you, you big stiff! You dear old stiff! You darling old elephant! You lovely old Pirate King!"

He Didn't Believe in Fairies

by William Almon Wolff



THE time was late April, and the place was a country road in the wooded hills that rise from the banks of the Hudson opposite West Point. More specifically, the time was afternoon, and the shadows were lengthening. Bill Tempest was walking with Barbara Morgan, and he was, pardonably enough, paying more attention to her than to their surroundings. Yet there were sights spread out before his eyes that were not unworthy of their notice.

The road was soft beneath their feet, yet firm; motors did not care to climb so high. Not yet were all the trees in leaf, but everywhere a faint green overlay branch and twig, and here and there a dogwood blazed in all the riotous beauty of its blossoms. Through the wet loam ferns were springing up, and sometimes early flowers were nodding. The song of birds was in the air; squirrels chattered at them from the trees and ran in front of them unafraid.

They walked along slowly, talking. The girl was taken up with the sheer beauty of the spring, as it was all about them; her eyes were never still. They lighted up at this and that; she caught her breath, from time to time, in little gasps of pure delight. And sometimes she would stop and leave the road, bending to pluck a violet, perhaps, or

some other flower, to add to the little bunch that she carried.

Bill would stop to wait for her, when she did that, and to smile, tolerantly. It was as if he approved, largely, a mood he could not altogether share. One must have been insensate, indeed, not to approve of Barbara that day. She wore no hat; the sun picked out ruddy tints in her hair, lighted it up, burnished it. A tall girl, she was full of a lithe grace. Her movements were all in flowing lines; there was something oddly pagan about her, flinging herself down recklessly to lean over a bank and reach a blossom far below. She was like a flower herself then, and as she rose and held her booty out for him to see, standing flushed, her hair blowing a little in the wind, her white skirt wrapped about her, the pale green of her sweater blending with the other green of tree and bush.

THEY walked along and came to a turn in the road—rounded it and stopped to stand and stare at a tiny waterfall where a stream came tumbling down the rocky hillside, flinging white spray across the road, catching the sun, so that there was an iridescent sheen in air and water.

"Oh!" said Barbara, and she looked spellbound upon the tumbling water.

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And: "Gee!" said he. "We never came this way before, did we?"

She cried out at that, and there was a sort of mocking triumph in her laugh.

"You!" she said. "Even you, Bill! Even practical, utilitarian you! Isn't it the loveliest spot you ever saw?"

"Oh—I suppose so—yes," he said. "But—I wasn't just thinking about that, Babs. It's the power-site. You could light a house—you could get power for everything from that fall."

For just a moment she seemed to wilt. And then she laughed at him, bravely.

"Oh—Bill!" she said reproachfully. "But I might have known! Bill, has everything got to be useful before it means anything to you? Doesn't—doesn't just beauty—appeal to you at all?"

"Why—I—yes, I guess so," he said dubiously. And his face, his square, determined face, that had grown sober at the change in her, was lighted up by a smile, boyish, engaging. "You, now—why, you're not so awfully useful, Babs. And, well—you—I—I'm awfully strong for you."

"You're rather a dear, sometimes, Bill," she said inconsequently. "But—oh, you never did believe in fairies! Poor Bill! Come on—I'll race you to that dogwood!"

She was off, a flying flash of green and white; and he, grinning, bewildered and yet somehow happy, lumbered after her. At the dogwood she was waiting for him, more flushed than ever, more elusive too. . . . And they went on sedately, with little to say to one another, until suddenly, with one of those swift, lithe movements of hers, Barbara turned aside, stooped and held out, smiling, a shoe a horse had cast in the road.

"Look!" she said. "This is a lucky day, Bill! See how worn it is—how smooth and bright!"

He frowned faintly as he considered her trophy.

"Luck!" he said. "I—do you take stock in luck, Barbara? I never did."

"Oh!" she said, and for a moment was speechless. "How—how can you, Bill? How can you be so—so—material? Here—and now."

He looked contrite—but unconvinced.

And the hard lines about his mouth stood out, somehow; the squareness of his jaw seemed to be underlined. She sighed.

"You—you make me think of a place I went to once, where they took care of children," she said. "They were so proud of it. They showed me how clean it was, and how careful they were about germs, and everything, and they explained about the scientific way they fed the children and gave them just as many calories and proteins and starches and things as they ought to have. And then—they punished a little girl because she'd put a ribbon in her hair, and they disapproved of me most awfully because I didn't like it, and when I wanted to send out for ice-cream—why, Bill, you'd have thought I was trying to poison those kids!"

"Well—" he began obstinately, and then he stopped, because after all he was not stupid. And he sighed too, and he wondered how it was and why it was that he and Barbara, who had been so close to one another so short a time before, had drifted so far apart. But it seemed to him that there was nothing for him to do, and they walked on and so came to her home, in the dusk, with all the things that he had meant to say to Barbara unsaid.

HE was disappointed, and he was angry at himself and, a little, at Barbara. He had had such hopes when he had come up for the week-end. He had been so resolute, so determined. He had so carefully rehearsed the questions he meant to put to Barbara; he had laid his plans with such guile. Not that he had been sure of her! He hadn't been, for a minute. He was humble enough, and conscious enough of his audacity in wanting her, to have pleased any stickler for Victorian romance. And yet he did feel that he was entitled to his day in court; that it was his right to plead his case and get his answer. And somehow that right had been denied. This was Sunday; he had had her alone for the last time, he knew, before his going, on a late train. And he wasn't going to see her again for weeks—weeks in which anything might happen.

Bill was pretty dull and stupid at tea. Mrs. Morgan, a smile in her eyes, tried to cheer him up, and failed. Helen Cameron teased him, and he didn't even know she was doing it—though Barbara did, and scowled, to the confusion of young Westcott, who was paying her a hopeless sort of court. He was glad when Mr. Morgan waylaid him, later, for a talk about business conditions; he was on his own ground there. He really was interested in the things he and Morgan had to talk about; for though Morgan was a financial giant, their orbits did touch. And he was immeasurably gratified by Morgan's manner—encouraged to ask a question.

"If you're going away, sir," he said, "I suppose it means that the new port-terminal scheme is off?"

"Draw your own conclusions," said Morgan. "The new port would save a day on the transatlantic voyage—but you can figure costs as well as I can."

"They've kept me awake nights for a year," said Bill.

But even though the talk came to nothing, it kept him going until it was time to dress for dinner—kept him, too, from thinking about his wrongs.

He brooded rather sullenly, though, while he dressed. In the confusion of his thoughts he put a sock on wrong side out—or in; which should one say? And he swore whole-heartedly as he ripped it off and repaired the blunder.

"Horseshoes!" he said to himself. "I suppose Barbara'd say I ought to leave it as it was! Bad luck to change a thing you've put on wrong side to! All right!"

He was honestly at sea about Barbara and himself. Here it was, as nearly as he could come at it: He was a business man; being young, he had to be a hard, driving worker, practical, an opportunist, within limits. And Barbara didn't like it because he saw a power-site where she saw a waterfall that should be painted, because he thought of waste and a careless driver at the sight of a cast shoe when she saw a gracious omen of good luck. It seemed to him that she was unfair, and a good deal less than kind. But immediately, of course, he repented, and hurried with his tie, because she might have dressed quickly,

and if he were down a minute or two early, he might have a minute with her in the great hall, where logs would be burning on the hearth to banish the faint chill of the spring night.

He got his minute—but much good it did him! She had her horseshoe, and she made him nail it up for her, and he did the task ungraciously, and she felt his disapproval and gathered herself, somehow, to defend herself against it.

"Poor Bill!" she said. "You miss so much—so many little thrills. Oh, I know it's silly to be superstitious. And I don't suppose I am, really. But Bill, so many, many things I love are silly—little foolish things that just make life more gay and easier, somehow. Superstitions, fancies—they—I think they help to keep life young, somehow!"

"I wish I could understand, Babs," he said, rather wretchedly, so that she was sorry for him.

"Oh, you will!" she said. And then her eyes seemed to search him, and her voice was so low that he could scarcely hear. "Only—I hope it won't be when it's too late."

"Babs—" he said, taking a step toward her. But some one came down the stairs, and his minute was over.

HE went back to the city and his work that night. And the next day, he knew, she would be off, with her father and mother, on the yachting trip that would keep her out of touch with him for weeks. It was a young man extremely sorry for himself, almost amusing in his patent bewilderment, who sat gloomily in the smoker all the way down the river.

When it came to Barbara, Bill showed up pretty badly. He blundered; he made ludicrous mistakes; he was inept, awkward, given to choosing the wrong moment. In his business he was amazingly different. Business was for him the great game—the game that *Kim* played and that all men play in whom the creative spark has leaped to life. Here Barbara—and others—had misjudged him grotesquely. They saw him absorbed in routine, in dull, drab things, and never saw that for him these things were not drab, that they were veiled for his eyes with all the colors of romance.

It had always been so with him. In college he had failed to emerge from the ruck of his class until luck had thrust him into the management of some enterprise always theretofore conducted at a loss. That had been the beginning. He had gone on from triumph to triumph. He had set the musical clubs upon their financial feet; he had reorganized a dying college paper, and filled its treasury. So it had gone.

And Bill's success after he had taken his degree had been meteoric. He was vice-president, now, of the Standard Construction Company; for three months he had been its sole head, in the enforced absence of Newberry, the president, who had worked himself to the verge of collapse and was likely to be gone for three months more, chafing under his doctor's orders. It was only a question of time, could be only that, before Bill should fill Newberry's place permanently. And he was just thirty-two, with all the world before him. Only, of course, he did not think about it in just that way.

BILL was restless in the morning; he sharply resented the irritability that gripped him during a conference with three of his directors, men who on principle distrusted him because of his youth. For a long hour they nagged him; again and again he explained, from one new point of view after another, the imperative need of the expansion upon which he had resolved. They challenged him querulously, pointed out what seemed to them the dangerous increase of overhead expense, objected to expansion at a moment when all industry was crying out retrenchment, suggested waiting. He closed his teeth on that, stood up and faced them, grim, resolute.

"Wait!" he said. "That's the one thing we can't do! We've got to decide, and decide now. If this chance goes, it goes for good. And now—I'm sorry, but I have some pretty important work that must be done. If you have any more questions—"

They had. They hemmed and hawed; in the end he could get nothing more definite from them than a promise to lay the matter, without prejudice, be-

fore the entire board. He went out to lunch in a futile rage that was almost childish. The fact was that he was feeling the strain Newberry's absence had involved; three months before, he would have been able to laugh at the solemn caution of his directors—men who, lacking exact knowledge, followed their instinct to distrust the man who had it and was impatient because they lacked it. He vaguely felt that he had not been tactful, that Newberry would have brought them around easily, and that he ought to have been able to do it, too.

But after lunch, on his way back to the office, he obeyed an impulse and telephoned that he would not return at all. He went instead to the yacht-club, in the southernmost wilds of Brooklyn, where he kept his motor-boat, and took her out on the Bay. All afternoon he waited, being tossed about, drifting with the tide, under the Staten Island shore, to pick out the *Vishnu*.

He smiled at the sheer futility, the gorgeous pointlessness, of what he was doing. It suddenly struck him that this was just the sort of thing Barbara would like, just the sort of thing she would never believe he would do. She had forbidden him to see her off; she hated leave-takings. And so he didn't want her to see him, and yet he wished, illogically, that he could draw her eyes when the *Vishnu* came, and make her wave to him, at least.

But when she came, and he caught just a glimpse of Barbara leaning over the taffrail, looking back at the receding towers of the city, he made no effort to be seen. He only looked, and wondered what she was thinking of, and whom.

He was tired enough to feel better, relaxed, perhaps, when he went ashore. And when he got home, the first thing his eyes fell upon was a package, addressed to him in Barbara's hand. He rather caught his breath when he saw that; for a minute he just held it, weighing it, staring at it. She had never sent him anything before. And then he tore off the paper wrapping and disclosed a book—a book old and weatherbeaten, a sort of relic, it seemed to him. He curiosity grew as he opened it. And then

he smiled. The book was an old one that dealt with pirates and their ways—with the romance of the brave days when buccaneers had sailed the Spanish Main. And on the flyleaf Barbara had written a few words:

Read it for my sake. And—read it between the lines!

There was no mirth in his smile. Indeed, in a moment, for a moment, he frowned. Barbara and her eternal playing upon romance! But after all, it was the thought that had brought the book that counted; it was that that softened his mood, gave him, probably, a better night's sleep than he should have had with the knowledge that the *Vishnu* was steaming steadily southward, reeling off her twelve knots every hour, to plague him.

It was the next morning that the curious sequence of events that was to sweep him on to the incredible and impossible climax began.

HE was shaving when he turned, suddenly, at some noise, and swept his shaving mirror to the floor, where it was shattered. Perhaps, if he hadn't been thinking so constantly of Barbara, the first thought that flashed into his mind would not have been one about the superstition of the seven years of bad luck that follow a broken mirror. But it was. He laughed it down, denied to himself that he had harbored it. But that, as Dr. Freud could have told him, was not the way to get rid of a disturbing idea!

He thought again of the broken mirror later, when he walked rather defiantly under a ladder that leaned against a wall. He had a way of doing that, anyhow; he scoffed just as loudly at practical men who talked about the possibility of becoming the target for a pot of paint as he did at those who, like Barbara, frankly avoided the shadows of ladders just because of superstition. But this time he paid up! Some one—thinking, probably, that no one would walk under the ladder—had left a coil of rope on the sidewalks. Bill tripped upon it and went down sprawling. He rose, brushed himself off, was conscious of a pain in his knee, and more than

conscious of the great triangular rip that had ruined his trousers. Fuming, he went home, bathed his cut knee and changed his clothes. He was half an hour late at the office; the delay, coming on top of his wanton truancy the previous afternoon, had piled his desk sky high with urgent matter requiring his instant and undivided attention.

All morning, as he tried to work, one thing after another went wrong. As he struck a match, its head flew off into a tray of letters ready for his signature and set them afire; before he could abolish the blaze, half of them were ruined and must be typed again. A file containing papers it was essential for him to have was missing—only misplaced, of course, but that contributed to his nervousness. From the West came the report of a flood that had wrought untellable mischief on a big job already far behind its schedule; he saw profits wiped out at a single blow there. And there were other things—a querulous letter from Newberry, complaining of the impossibility of keeping track of what was going on from his, Bill's, reports. He grimly tossed that letter over to his secretary.

"Save that, Miss Sherman," he said. "I'm trying to obey the doctor—as you know! And I get that for thanks!"

Miss Sherman smiled tolerantly, without letting him see her do it. She could have told Barbara many things about the essential boyishness of a great business executive as he appears in certain moments. . . . She knew extremely well the sulky drooping of the corners of his mouth. And she wished that Mr. Armstrong and Mr. Dorgan and Mr. Hammarskold, the three directors who had made such unqualified nuisances of themselves the day before, would stop telephoning to Bill at frequent intervals—because he wasn't smiling, half wearily, half tolerantly, this morning as he got rid of them and hung up the receiver, and she knew that for a bad sign. She was afraid of what might happen when the board met that afternoon.

STILL, even Miss Sherman, concerned though she was, never anticipated what really did happen. It was a highly

confidential meeting, so that she did not attend it. She knew that it wasn't going smoothly; once or twice, when she passed the board-room, she heard angry voices coming through the door. And then, just before five o'clock, when she was in Bill's room sorting out some papers, its door was flung open and she saw Bill, his back turned, gesticulating angrily.

"No—you can't come in!" he said. "There's nothing to talk over! I've said my piece. And I want to be let alone now! I've work to do."

He slammed the door, but not before she caught a glimpse of Armstrong, one fat protest, beyond it. Bill turned and came toward her and his desk, two spots of color high on his cheek-bones, his eyes blazing. When he saw her, he calmed down a little and grinned in the friendliest way. But he grew sober at once.

"Well—I've done it now, Miss Sherman!" he said. "I've resigned."

"I was afraid you were having a trying time," she said diplomatically.

"You don't get me," he said. "I've honest to goodness resigned! It isn't one of those bluff resignations that the chief's always pulling off. I—well, I guess I saw red, in there, after they'd been ragging me awhile."

"But—I don't see—how can you resign?" she asked, really concerned, all at once.

"I don't know," he said. "I just did! It's the lowest down trick I ever played, and the biggest break I ever made, too, I guess—because, after all, the tail can't wag the dog! This dog may be annoyed about losing its tail for a while, but it will keep right on doing business at the old stand. But a tail without a dog isn't much use—and that's me!"

She heard it all, in incoherent, jerky sentences.

"I can't crawl now—or I wont!" he said finally. "I'm right enough, you know—but after all, I ought to have remembered that it's up to them about spending the money. I delivered an ultimatum. If I back down now, they'll never have any use for me—and if they back down, they'll never have any use for themselves. Oh, it's a pretty mess!"

There wasn't much for her to say, of

course. She made tentative suggestions—reconsideration, thinking it over, wouldn't he, and the others too, feel differently in the morning? He shook his head.

"You didn't hear me," he said. "Oh, I'm not trying to defend myself, Miss Sherman! I put myself in the wrong, absolutely. I'd like to apologize—but it wouldn't do."

"I don't know what's the matter with me!" he broke out. "I've been getting snappier every day for the last two weeks; and to-day I haven't been fit to live with. And now I forget about the chief and cut up like this—just because I happen to know I'm in the right."

He knew he couldn't make the way he felt about that sound convincing, but he knew, too, absolutely, that here was a case in which, even if two wrongs wouldn't make a right, a wrong and a right would be even worse.

"Here's what I'll do, Miss Sherman," he said. "It's a low-down trick again, but I don't see anything else for it. I'll disappear for a week—longer, maybe. I need a rest, anyhow—ought to go to Bloomingdale, probably, if you come down to it! And there's just a chance that they may come around, if I'm not here to make three or four more sorts of an idiot of myself talking to them. Preston will have to run things—with your help. I'm sorry for you, but—"

She nodded.

"It'll be all right," she said. "It probably is the best thing for you to do, too. Can you leave me an address?"

"I'll try to, before I go," he said. "And anyhow, I'll keep in touch with you. Something for me to sign?"

He dropped into his chair and the routine of the job. Use and habit kept him going. But he loathed himself as he sat there working. To act like that! To let a lot of directors goad him into putting himself in the wrong when all he had needed to do was to wait behind the impregnable defense of his conviction that he was right! But:

"Oh, well—I don't give a hang, anyhow!" he said as he went out.

BILL might have done anything in his present mood; but what he did do was to go to his rooms and hunt up the

book Barbara had sent him, just because it was so eloquent of her, somehow.

He found himself interested in the book for its own sake, before long. It was oddly worded; there was something quaint about the old phrases, something intriguing about the matter-of-fact way in which it dealt with battle and murder and sudden death, with violence and rapine. Before he knew what he was doing he had let the book carry him along. And then suddenly he came to a check. He turned a page, and what he read didn't connect with what had been on the previous page. He thought a leaf was missing—and then he saw that two pages had stuck together. A moment's scrutiny showed him, too, that it was not by accident, but by design, that they were so attached. He was piqued; his curiosity was aroused.

Yet he was half angry with himself as he steamed the pages to separate them; he laughed incredulously when between them, after he had carefully pried them apart, he found, securely hidden, a loose sheet of old, yellowed paper—older even than the book, he thought.

But what a piece of paper! All creased and stained it was, and curling at the edges. It laid a sort of spell upon him, and he laughed nervously as he saw that lines were drawn upon it, and that there was writing.

There was a map, rudely, roughly, drawn in faded ink. Such ink, it seemed to be, as children are allowed to play with sometimes, much diluted. It showed a cove; a sandy beach was marked, and ground rising up gradually to a ridge where stood a group of trees. From one of them an arrow pointed. There were marks of latitude and longitude. There was a date—a date incredible, absurd, a date in the eighteenth century. Bill laughed again at that. But still he read the queer, sprawling words that had been written carefully below the map:

From ye arrow walk a hundred paces along the line of ye shadow that is cast at noon precisely by ye tree ye arrow marks. The treasure-chest lies there.

Bill stared at the words. They were oddly formed; some of the letters were

archaic. "Ye arrow," it was, not "the." The oddest feeling seemed to steal over Bill, take hold of him. He wanted to laugh. And yet somehow he couldn't. He jotted down, absently, the position that was given for the cove, and he rose, to go to his mantel and find and fill a pipe. Somewhere about the room were a lot of charts, Government charts, that he used for motor-boat trips. But of course he wasn't going to look up the spot that was marked on that map. . . . And then he found himself bending low, reaching into the drawer under his bookcase, bringing out the proper chart, taking it back to the light, poising his pencil over the exact spot where met the lines of latitude and longitude that were named on the old map.

He roused himself before the lead could mark the chart. He sprang up, shaking his head angrily. What a fool he was! This was some hoax, of course. Was he a romantic idiot, to let it fool him even for a moment? He remembered what Barbara had said—something about believing in fairies! Well—a man would have to believe in fairies before he could take a thing like this seriously! He folded the map and put it away. He wouldn't throw it out, though that had been his first instinct; he'd save it, to show to Barbara when she came home. After all, she was concerned with it, in a way. And it was the sort of thing that might amuse her.

THE little devils of ill luck that had been dogging Bill were active that night. He had to dine alone, and he didn't want to be alone. And he found it utterly impossible to buy, at any price, tickets for the only play in town he cared to see that night. It was a new musical comedy, and its opening night. His wanderings in search of seats brought him face to face with Armstrong, the director he hated most violently; they had more words, and Armstrong, his face purple, really settled matters.

"You can't bluff us!" he stormed. "We were going to refuse to accept your resignation. Now I shall insist on its immediate acceptance."

Bill was a good deal depressed. He couldn't understand himself. It seemed to him that he had been swept abruptly

from all the moorings of his life. All his rules, all the principles that had guided him, had brought him to this—mess! He thought of Barbara, of course. And he wandered about gloomily. Some special providence must have protected him from taxicabs and other menaces.

He didn't want to go home, but he had nowhere else to go. So he wandered rather aimlessly; at Twenty-third Street some bookshops, where he sometimes picked up a bargain, attracted him.

But in the shop into which he turned, the first display that struck his eyes was one of picaresque books. There was an extraordinary collection—"Gil Blas" and all the rest. He picked up a history, thumbed its pages, was caught by a phrase, sat down to finish a page—and was lost. An hour later, shamefaced, he slunk out of the shop and homeward, carrying half a dozen books that the bookseller had recommended.

AND at three o'clock next morning Bill was applying himself, soberly and in good earnest, to an analysis of the evidence for and against the belief that certain buccaneers had buried part of their booty hereabout—along the coast of Long Island, of New Jersey, of Maine, up the Hudson, even. And he had his map out and was comparing it curiously with figures given in some of his books, and staring at it with scowling, troubled eyes.

"Oh, rot!" he said to himself. "But—"

After all, here he was! All his life, since it had counted for anything, he had been sober, materialistic, industrious, practical. And what had it all come to? A smash that any fool would have had sense enough to avert! He had laughed at superstitions, bogies, signs of ill luck. He had broken a mirror—and what, in heaven's name, had gone right for him since that moment?

"I'll do it!" he vowed. "I'll dig out for that cove! I'll follow the shadow of that tree for a hundred paces at high noon, and then I'll dig! I need some exercise, anyhow!"

But, be it understood, he didn't be-

lieve in fairies, or, to avoid symbolism, in the good faith of the map. He had to go away somewhere. He didn't know where the *Vishnu* had gone; Barbara had refused to tell him. So his only logical destination, for the trip he had to take, wasn't available. None of the usual resorts one goes to in the spring appealed to him. And so—

He borrowed a cruiser—his own boat was too small and uncomfortable for the trip. But he had no trouble in getting a boat that was just what he wanted. He laid in provisions and shovels and tobacco and books, and took a tent along, in case he wanted to camp on shore. And then he set out for—"Somewhere on the Atlantic coast." There are reasons for vagueness as to his actual destination.

He couldn't keep his promise to keep in touch with Miss Sherman, but he decided that that was just as well. If the directors backed down, it wouldn't hurt them to worry for a few days; if they didn't, his absence wouldn't matter anyhow. All things being considered, he was reasonably care-free and happy as he steered his boat through the heavy traffic of the East River and toward the freer waters of the Sound. (So much of a hint as to his direction it is safe to give. But the censor deletes his running-time to that cove.)

HE picked up the ridge, with its sentinel trees, early in a morning made to order for such a quest as his. And it seemed to him that the spot, too, was made to order. His skepticism had a shock as he made out the two small jutting headlands that sheltered the cove; he hadn't really expected to find any such spot as had been marked on the map. Yet there it was before him, exactly as it had been on the map. There were the trees; the sight of them shook him most of all, somehow. They ought not to have survived; he would have been content had he found their rotted stumps.

He looked about him. It seemed to him that he ought to know this spot, and yet he didn't. The sun was hot already; the day was going to be warm;

there was scarcely a cloud in the sky. And for witnesses of his digging there would be gulls; there wasn't a human habitation, or a sign that there had ever been one, anywhere about. The isolation, the solitude of that sandy waste, with the dunes rising endlessly, and just the one solid ridge that was his particular concern, were queerly impressive. So much he had to admit—a pirate, seeking a safe hiding-place, could hardly have chosen better!

He made his landing—an easy matter, on the sloping beach. He took his tent ashore and pitched it, and amused himself by gathering wood and making a fire. There was any amount of driftwood for his purpose, and it pleased him to cook his breakfast over a real fire instead of by the alcohol-flame that he used on the boat. It wasn't so bad—all of it. It was a change, and a welcome one, from the city and the driven life he had been living for months. He could relax and let himself go utterly, and he did. After his breakfast he stretched out on the sand and let the sun beat down upon him while he smoked.

He made sure of noon—chronometer was confirmed by an observation in good sea-fashion. And on the instant he walked along the shadow of the tree until he came to the spot where he was to dig. He stared curiously down at the sand—he had left the ridge and come to sand again. It looked as if it had never been disturbed. But that meant nothing. Sand blows; men might have been digging here within the week, and he would never know.

SO he set to work digging. He went at his task slowly, steadily. It would be long, he was sure; a heavy chest would sink; moreover much sand might have been deposited since it had been buried.

"As if I expected to find anything!" he said aloud in a tone of infinite contempt. "I'm doing this for exercise—instead of golf or tennis."

Straight down he dug, for half an hour; then he rested. And so it went, while the sun slipped down in the west and the gulls circled about above him, screaming. Straight down

he dug, until he was sure he had dug too deep—then extended the circle of his digging, lest he might have missed that clash of shovel against wood or iron that, somehow, despite his skepticism, he had from the first moment been listening for. And still, when it was quite dark, and the flames of the fire that he had from time to time stopped to replenish were casting weird shadows across the sand, he had found nothing.

He stopped at last and straightened up, the sweat pouring down into his eyes, every muscle sore and aching from his unwonted labor. He had to climb out of the great pit he had dug, over the ramparts of wet sand that he had thrown up; in the bottom of his pit there was a pool of water in which he had been standing while he dug. His hands were blistered; he was dripping wet from head to foot.

Slowly, wearily, he went down to his fire and his tent. He stripped off his reeking clothes and, with a bucket, bathed. Shivering, then, he dressed and crouched over the fire to get warm. The reaction was not long delayed; a delicious sense of well-being stole over him. And tired as he was, his hunger asserted itself too, and he had to fry bacon and potatoes, and make coffee, of which he drank cup after cup. Not until he had finished, and was smoking his pipe, would he admit to himself that his disappointment had fairly sickened him. He knew, then, that he had expected to find something—not a treasure-chest perhaps, but something. And he was as disappointed as a boy could have been.

He might have lain awake had he not been so utterly tired. But as it was, he built up his fire and turned in and slept like a log.

HE awoke to a startled realization that he was lying on the ground with a rubber sheet beneath him, with canvas walls instead of those of his own room about him. And then his lip curled as he remembered. Even before he cooked his breakfast he went and looked down into his pit. It was deep enough—he had been foolish enough. He would dig no more, as

he had for the last hour the night before, with the thought that the next shovelful of sand might reveal the quarry. He turned away bitterly and went back to his fire, hating himself. He thought of Barbara. If she knew, she would laugh, probably. Well—a man ought to stick to his own game! He would, hereafter. He began to think of ways of retrieving his glorious blundering at the office.

After breakfast he climbed the ridge again and did what he had not taken the pains to do the day before—surveyed the ground all around from that vantage-point. And suddenly something startled him and brought his eyes close together in a puzzled frown.

He could see a row of stakes, stretching west, as far as, farther, indeed, than his eyes could follow. They bent, those stakes, as they neared him, and swung around the northern headland of the two that sheltered his cove. He stared at them—then whistled and went back very thoughtfully to his boat. He carried a map with him when he walked along the beach and passed beyond the headland. And then he saw that another and a larger cove stretched beyond—the shore, indeed, of what was almost a natural harbor. A glance showed him that there was shallow water outside—but showed him something else too, and set him to studying his map. And on shore here, there were more stakes, in oddly symmetrical arrangement. They puzzled him, but they set his eyes to blazing too.

THOSE stakes didn't puzzle him for long. They could have just one meaning. He had never known, definitely, the location of that new port of which he had tried to talk to Morgan. But he had known that it must be somewhere near here. And now his map made it all clear. The tunnels under New York—the great bridge at Hell Gate—all fitted in. Here could be such a modern harbor as would eliminate lighterage, transshipment. To the clear day's saving of the ocean-trip would be added half a day, at least, by reason of direct railroad handling.

And he could see that the very reasons that would have made his own directors scoff at such a time for such a project would compel the decision of a man like Morgan, a man with real vision. The war? It had come down to a matter of ocean-transport. Save a day's time for a hundred ships, and you add just so many ships to your total! He grinned at his own wisdom. And then he spun around, and stared out to sea, startled by a sudden sound.

What he had heard had been the running-out of the anchor chains of the *Vishnu*. There she was—the yacht he had last seen as she carried Barbara to the West Indies, as he had supposed. For a moment he couldn't believe his eyes. And then, somehow, everything ran together. Richard Morgan—those stakes he had seen! And he knew, he it remembered, where he was. In his mind's eye there was a map of the whole Atlantic coast, with certain lines of railroad spreading over it, coming to a point. . . . He grinned, and then he frowned. He raced back to his tent.

When the *Vishnu's* launch scraped along the beach, he was waiting to greet those who landed: Morgan, Stephen Trask, another malefactor of great wealth, with Morgan intimately associated in many great affairs, and Cobden, of the Thirtieth National Bank. And of course Barbara—a Barbara who caught her breath at the sight of him, and then smiled, radiant, incredibly transformed—a Barbara who blushed and laughed and tried to hide her eyes from him all in the same moment.

The sight of Barbara gave him his first clue. His jaw fell. He stood and stared at her, incredulous, angry, bewildered, hurt somehow. The book she had sent him was in his hand; he saw how she was looking at it, and how she was all afire with excitement and delight—a delight mocking, mischievous and yet tempered with a tenderness that her eyes had never held for him before.

MORGAN was upon him before he could speak. It takes so much longer to describe some things than it takes for them to happen!

"What's the meaning of this?" he

He Didn't Believe in Fairies

By William Almon Wolff

asked savagely. "What are you doing here, Tempest?"

"Taking observations," said Bill genially. He flashed one steely look at Barbara, and she turned away at that and stood apart for a time, with eloquent shoulders that moved strangely.

"Taking observations," Bill repeated. Barbara would have to wait; he would get around to her later. Just at present he meant to spoil the Egyptians. "I'm surprised at you, Mr. Morgan—the way you took advantage of my confidence in you! I took you at your word when you said the transatlantic terminal plans were going over a year. And now I find this—and you and Mr. Trask and Mr. Cobden pussy-footing around here!"

"Spy!" said Cobden furiously.

"Please!" said Bill. "Be nice! Let's keep this discussion on a high plane!"

"Huh!" said Trask. He grinned faintly. "Well—you seem to have us, young man! What are the terms of surrender?"

"To you—they're easy," said Bill. "I get nothing. And I'm not greedy for my company, even. You needn't give us the contracts for *all* your construction. We don't want the dredging, for example. How about this? You're to take me into your confidence as to your plans, so that we can make preparations and begin assembling our material before the news of this job leaks out and disorganizes prices. Then, instead of a flat bid, we'll do our share at cost plus fifteen per cent. Say yes to that, and you needn't worry about any premature publicity."

Morgan and Trask exchanged glances. Cobden scowled.

"Talk it over," Bill suggested. "There's no hurry." He turned to Barbara. "Would you like a little walk? I've something I'd like to show you."

SHE went with him without a word. He took her arm to guide her. And they walked in silence until they came to the great hole he had dug in the sand.

"I suppose it was a pretty good joke," he said dourly. "You're entitled to the satisfaction of seeing how successfully you hoaxed me."

"Oh!" she said. For a moment she seemed to be speechless. "Oh, Bill! Is that all you've seen?"

"It's a good deal, I should say," he said thoughtfully. "I—well, there were various things. It was clever of you to hide the map the way you did! I never thought about you—that you had done it—until I saw you coming ashore! Romance—"

"Romance!" She snatched the word from him. "Bill, can't you see? Oh, I wanted you to come! I wanted to know that you *could* do a mad, wild, boyish thing—that you *could* believe in fairies, just for once! And—and—you followed the rainbow, and you found the crock of gold at its end, didn't you? Didn't you?"

"Babs!" he said, his voice uncertain. "You—why—Babs—you worked it all out! You meant me to find out what they were doing!"

"Of course I did!" she cried. "I wanted you to have your reward if you would only play my game, Bill! I knew—oh, you see, I knew so well that I could trust you—that you'd do nothing mean."

It was a little time before he could find words again. Meanwhile, somehow, she was in his arms, and everything had come right—just how, he didn't know. Nor did he care. He was supremely content.

"And now, of course," he said scornfully, "I can make them eat crow! They'll have to admit my plans for expansion were right. Oh, you've given me all the cards to play, my dear!"

"There's just one thing," he said a little later. "Any time things look bad for me, after this, I'm going after the nearest mirror with an ax! I'll pick up pins and stick them in something above my head! I'll knock wood when I boast! And I'll play every other superstition you hold to—except the one about mirrors!"

She laughed at him mockingly until he stopped her in the way that had so newly become possible. And then they got up and went back, rather gravely, hand in hand, to find Mr. Morgan and explain a lot of things to him.

William Almon Wolff's next story deals with football and another great game. Watch for it in the November BLUE BOOK MAGAZINE—on sale October 1st.



The Girl in the Crowd

By Albert Payson Terhune

STRETCH an invisible cord knee-high across the sidewalk at Broadway and Forty-second Street, and in five minutes a hundred prettier girls than Daisy Reynolds will stumble over it. (A hundred homelier girls too, for that matter!)

Daisy was just the Girl in the Crowd. Look down the aisle of your subway- or surface- or L-car on the way home to-night, and you will see her. You will see her by the dozen.

But you will not observe her, unless you look hard. She is not the type of girl to make you murmur fatuously: "Gee, but I wish she was *my* stenographer!" Nor is she the sort that excites pity for her plainness. She is—yes, my term "the Girl in the Crowd" best fits her.

For three years, after she left high school, Daisy occupied twenty-eight inches of space along one of the two sides of a room whose walls were wainscoted in honeycombed metal. At shelves in front of the honeycombing sat double lines of girls with ugly steel appliances over their frizzed or lanky hair. Their hands were ever flitting from spot to spot in the perforated wainscoting, deftly shifting plugs from hole to hole.

An excrescence, like a misshapen

black-rubber lily, jutted forth from the wall facing each girl. Into these lily-mouths the damsels were wont to croon such airy sentiments as these:

"Schuyler 9051 don't answer. —Yes, I'm ringing Aud'bon 2973. —Beekman 4000 is busy. —I'll give you Inf'mation. —'Xcuse it, please. —No'm, I didn't cut you off. What number was you talking to? —Schuyler 4789 is still busy. —It's just twelve-forty-two, by the c'rect time. —Number, please."

Up and down the double rank marched a horribly efficient woman who discouraged repartee and inter-desk conversation. The long room buzzed with the rhythmic droning of fifty voices and with the purring of countless plugs clicked into innumerable sockets.

To end, once and for all, the killing suspense, the room wherein Daisy Reynolds toiled for the first three years of her business career was a telephone-exchange.

And at the three years' end, she was assigned to the job of day-operator at the Clavichord Arms.

THE pay at the hotel was no larger than at the exchange; but there was always the possibility of tips, and the certainty of Christmas-money. Besides, there were chances to rest or to read between calls. On the whole, Daisy rejoiced at the change—as might a private who is made corporal.

The Clavichord Arms is a glorious monument to New York's efforts at boosting the high cost of living. The building occupies nearly a third of a city block, in length and depth, and it towers to the height of nine stories. Its façade and main entrance and cathedral-like lobby are rare samples of an architecture whose sacred motto is, "Put all your goods in the show-window."

When the high cost of living first menaced our suffering land, scores of such apartment-houses sprang into life, in order that New Yorkers might do their bit toward the upkeep of high prices. Here, at a rental ranging from fifteen hundred to five thousand dollars a year, one may live in quarters almost as commodious as those for which a suburbanite or smaller city's dweller pays fifty dollars a month.

And nobly did New York rally to the aid of the men who sought thus to get its coin. So quickly did the new apartments fill with tenants that more and yet more and more such buildings were run up.

Men who grumbled right piteously at the advance of bread from five to six cents a loaf eagerly paid three thousand dollars a year for the privilege of living in the garish-fronted abodes, and they sneered at humbler friends who, for the same sum, rented thirty-room mansions in the suburbs.

And this, by prosy degrees, brings us back to Daisy Reynolds.

THE CLAVICHORD ARMS' interior decorator had used up all his ingenuity and his appropriation before he came to the cubby-hole behind the gilded elevators—the cubby-hole that served as the telephone-operator's quarters. The cubby-hole was airless, windowless, low and sloped of ceiling, calcimined of wall, and equipped with no furniture at all except the switchboard-desk, a single kitchen chair, one eight-candle-power electric light and an iron clothes-hook.

Here, for eight hours a day, sat Daisy Reynolds. Here, with stolid conscientiousness, she manipulated the plugs, that the building's seventy tenants might waste their own and their friends' time in endless phone-chats.

It was dull and uninspiring and lonely in the dark cubby-hole, after the lights and the constant work and companionship of the Exchange. There was much more leisure, too, than at the Exchange.

Daisy at first tried to enliven this leisure by reading. She loved to read; book or magazine—it was all the same to Daisy, so long as the hero and heroine at last outwitted the villain and came together at the altar.

But there are drawbacks to reading all day—even to reading union-made love stories, by eight-candle-power light and with everlasting interruption from the switchboard. So Daisy, by way of amusement, began to "listen in."

"Listening in" is a plug-shifting process whereby the telephone-operator may hear any conversation over the wire. In some States, I understand, it is a misdemeanor. But perhaps there is no living operator who has not done it. In some private exchanges it is so common a custom that the cry of "Fish!" warns every other operator in the room that a particularly listenable talk is going on. This same cry of "Fish" is an invitation for all present to listen in.

(Yes, your telephonic love-talk, your fierce love-spats and your sacredest love-secrets have been avidly heard—and possibly repeated—again and again, by Central. Remember that, next time. When you hear a faint click on the wire during your conversation,—and sometimes when you don't,—an operator is pretty certain to be listening in.)

At first Daisy was amused by what she heard. The parsimonious butcher-order of the house's richest woman, the hiccoughed excuses of a husband whom business detained downtown, the vapid chatter of lad and lass, the scolding of slow dressmakers, the spicy anecdotes told by half-hour phone-gabblers—all these were a pleasant variation on the day's routine. But at last, they began to pall. And just as they waxed tiresome—romance began.

THE voice in Apartment 60—a clear voice, girlish and vibrant—called up 9999-Z Worth. And Worth 9999-Z replied in a tone that fairly throbbed with eager longing. That was the beginning.

Shamelessly—soon rapturously—Daisy Reynolds listened in.

The voice in Apartment 60 belonged to a girl named Madeline. And Worth 9999-Z (whose first name, by the way, was Karl) spoke that foreign-sounding name *Madeline* as though it were a phrase of hauntingly sweet church-music. He and Madeline had known each other, it appeared, for some months; but only recently had they made the divine discovery of their mutual love. It was then that the phone-talks had begun—the talks that varied in number from three to seven a day, and in length from three to thirty minutes.

Always, now, promptly at nine o'clock in the morning, Karl called up his sweetheart. And always, an hour or so later, she called him up for a return-dialogue. Their talk was not mushy; it was beautiful. It thrilled with a love as deathless as the stars, a love through whose longing ran a current of unhappiness that Daisy could not understand.

Daisy grew to live for those talks. They became part of her very life—the loveliest part. She was curt, almost snappish, when other calls interfered with the bliss of listening-in. More than once she shamelessly broke off the connection when Madeline chanced to be talking to some old bore at a time when Karl sought to speak to her.

Karl, it seemed, was a downtown business man. As scientists reconstruct an entire fossil animal from a single bone of its left hind leg, so Daisy Reynolds built up a vision of Karl from his deep and powerful voice. He was tall, slender, graceful, yet broad of shoulder and deep of chest. Brown curls crisped above his white Greek forehead. His eyes were somber yet glowing. His age was from twenty-eight to thirty. He dressed like a collar advertisement.

Madeline was still easier to reconstruct, from her voice. She too was tall. She was willowy and infinitely graceful—gold-brown of hair, dark blue of eye, with soft-molded little features and long jetty lashes. With such a voice, she could not have been otherwise.

Daisy gathered from their earlier talks that Madeline's family disap-

proved the match. She even learned, from something Karl said, that there was another suitor—one Phil—on whom the family smiled and whom Madeline cordially detested. Once or twice, too, Phil called up Apartment 60. He had a husky voice and spoke brief commonplaces. Madeline answered him listlessly and still more briefly. But he seldom phoned to her. And she never, by any chance, phoned to him.

SO the ardent, tenderly melancholy love-story wore on. The lovers would make appointments for clandestine meetings—would speak in joyous retrospect of luncheons or motor-drives of the preceding day. Evidently, Madeline's cruel family kept stern watch upon her movements. Daisy used to smile in joyous approval at the girl's dainty cleverness in outmaneuvering them and meeting her sweetheart.

Ever through the glory of their love ran that black thread of melancholy. Apparently all the glad secret meetings and the adoring phone-talks could not make up to them for the family's opposition. Daisy had to bite her lips, sometimes, to keep from breaking in on the conversation and demanding:

"Why don't you two run off and get married? They'd have to come around, then. And if they didn't, why should you care?"

To a girl cooped up alone all day in a stuffy cubby-hole, imagination is ten times stronger than to the girl whose thoughts can be distracted by outside things. To Daisy, immured in her dim-lighted cupboard behind the elevators, this romance of Karl and Madeline was fast becoming the very biggest thing in her drab life.

These two lovers were as romantic, as poetical, as yearningly adoring as *Romeo* and *Juliet*. Karl was as desperately jealous as *Othello* or as the hero of one of Laura Jean Libbey's greatest books. Madeline was *the Captive Maid* come to life again. Oh, it was all very, very wonderful!

Then came the day of jarring disillusionment, a day which Daisy followed by sobbing until midnight on her none-too-soft boarding-house bed, three blocks to westward.

PROMPTLY at nine that morning, as usual, Karl called up Apartment 60.

"Sweetheart," he joyfully hailed Madeline, "I've just bought the new car. It's a beauty. And you're going to be the very first person to ride in it—to consecrate it."

"That's darling of you!" replied Madeline in evident delight. "I'd rather ride in a wheelbarrow with you than in a Rolls-Royce with—with—"

"With Phil?" asked Karl almost savagely.

"With anybody," she evaded. "Tell me more about the car. Is it—"

"I'm not going to tell you," he refused. "I'm going to show it to you instead. Here's my idea: I'll knock off work at noon and bring the car uptown. I'll meet you at the subway kiosk at half-after twelve; we can run up to the Arrowhead to lunch, and then on up to the Tumble Inn for—"

"But I can't, dear—I *can't!*" expostulated Madeline. "Don't you remember? I told you I have to lunch with Phil and those people from Buffalo, at the Knickerbocker, at one o'clock. Oh, dear! I wish I didn't have to. But I—"

"Phone him you're sick," urged Karl. "I've set my heart on christening the new car this way."

"I could get away to-morrow—" she began.

"But I can't," he said. "I've a directors' meeting at three. Oh, come along to-day, Beautiful! Tell Phil you're sick and—"

"And have him come rushing up here, in a fidget, for fear I'm going to die?" she suggested. "That is just what Phil would do. No, dear, I—"

"Then tell him you don't *want* to lunch with him," urged Karl, losing patience as a man will when some babyishly cherished woman-plan of his is upset. "Tell him you have to go to your sister's or—"

"I can't, Karl!" she declared; and she added, beseechingly: "Don't be unreasonable, dear boy. Please don't. And don't be cross; it makes me so unhappy when you are. You know how hard I try to do everything you want me to—and how glad I am to. But I *can't* get out of this luncheon. Phil

especially wants me to be there. These Buffalo people are old friends of his."

"Why should you have to go there, just because he wants you to?" demanded Karl, far more crankily than ever Daisy had heard him speak. "Why do you? You aren't his slave."

"No," returned Madeline, her own temper beginning to fray, "but I am his *wife*. You seem to forget that."

"I don't forget it half as often as *you* do!" flashed Karl.

At which brutally truthful reply, the receiver of Apartment 60's wire clanked down upon its hook. Nor could all of Karl's repeated efforts bring Madeline back to the telephone.

DAISY REYNOLDS slumped forward upon the switchboard desk, her face in her hands, her slim body a-shake. She felt as though her every nerve had been wrenched. She was sick all over. This, then, was the wondrous romance in which she had reveled. This was the melancholy, beauteous love-story which had become part of her own colorless life! A vulgar intrigue between a married woman (not a wife, but a married woman—Daisy now realized the difference between the two) and a man not her husband!

The iridescent bubbles of romance burst into thinnest air. Daisy was numb with the horror and disgust of it all. Even of old she had fastidiously refused to listen in when another girl's merry cry of "Fish!" had told that some such illicit dialogue was on the wire. And now, for weeks, she had been raptly listening to just such talks.

She loathed herself for the silly bubbles she had blown. Their lovely sheen was miasmatic slime. They were filled with foul gases. A great shame possessed Daisy Reynolds.

Next morning Daisy came to work swollen-eyed from futile crying over the death of her dreams, and dull-headed from too little sleep. Half an hour later, promptly at nine, Karl called up Apartment 60.

Daisy's hand trembled as she made the connection. She hated herself for listening in. Yet from morbid fascination she did it.

"Darling!" was Karl's remorsefully

passionate greeting as Madeline answered the phone-bell's summons. "I'm so sorry! So horribly sorry! I spoke rottenly to you yesterday. Wont you forgive me? *Please* do!"

"Please don't let us speak about it," began Madeline stiffly.

Then her shell of offendedness collapsed, and she went on with a break in her sweet voice.

"Oh, I'm so glad you called up! I was so afraid you wouldn't. And I was going to try so hard not to phone to you. But I knew I'd do it—I *knew* I would—if you didn't call me first. I've been terribly unhappy, dear."

"You've had nothing on me, in that," he made answer. "I haven't slept all night, thinking how I spoke to you. It was our first quarrel. And it was all my fault."

"It wasn't," she contradicted chokily. "It was all mine. I shouldn't have been hurt by what you said about my forgetting so often that—"

"Don't, dear," he begged. "Don't! It was a rotten thing for me to say."

"It was—it was true," she replied, her voice quavering as she fought back the tears. "But you told me yourself that you don't blame me. You know what my life with him has been, from the very beginning. And till I met you I used to wish I were dead. Oh, you *can't* blame me for forgetting him, for—for *you!*"

"You're an angel!" he declared. "I'm not fit to touch your hand. But my love for you is the only thing there is in my life. And it's brought me the only happiness I ever knew. I used to think I'd like to kill myself if it weren't for my mother. And now you've given me something—everything—to live for. I love you so, Madeline! Are you sure you've forgiven me?"

"*Forgiven* you?" she echoed. "Why, Karl, I *love* you."

Yes, the reply was banal enough. But the tone was not, nor was the wordless exclamation of worship with which Karl received it. And to her own self-disgust Daisy felt a stir of answering emotion in her own breast.

Just then she was required to connect Apartment 42 with the market, and at once afterward to put through a long-

distance call for the building's superintendent. And when next she sought to listen in, Karl and Madeline were finishing their talk. All Daisy could catch was Madeline's childish query:

"Can't we please try out the new car to-morrow, if the directors' meeting is going to keep you this afternoon?"

And he answered gayly:

"To blue blazes with the directors! We're going to Tumble Inn to-day, you and I, sweetheart—even if New York doesn't get a stroke of business done south of Canal Street all afternoon. Good-by. You'll be sure to call me up later, wont you?"

DAISY sat back in her wabby chair to take mental account of stock. She was amazed at herself—amazed, and a bit displeased, though not as much so as she could have wished. All her ideas and ideals seemed to be as wabby as the kitchen chair she sat in. Woman-like, she straightway began to justify herself. True, an hour earlier, she had been filled with contempt for these two. Equally true, she was now irresistibly drawn to them again—which most certainly called for a reason; so she supplied the reason:

Madeline had been forced into a marriage, in mere childhood, with a man she did not love. And had she not said, "You know what my life with him has been, from the very beginning?" That alone told the story—the heartbreaking story of neglected wifehood, of ill-treatment, of a starved soul.

Who was Daisy to blame this pathetic young wife if she had at last let love into her heart after years of bondage to a brute? Daisy recalled Phil's husky voice. From it she built up a physique that was a blend of *Simon Legree's* and *Falstaff's*, with a tinge of *Bill Sikes*. And, her moral sense deserting her, she realized that right or wrong she was steadfastly on the side of the lovers.

During the days that followed, she listened in again, with all her old-time hero-and-heroine-worship. Now she understood the strain of melancholy in these two people's love. It was the hopelessness of that love which made them so sad, in the midst of their stolen happiness.

Once, in a free moment, Daisy slipped from her cubby-hole and into the superintendent's office, to ask for a stronger light-bulb. There on the wall hung a typed list of the house's tenants. Stealing a glance at it while the superintendent's back was turned, Daisy ran her eye down the list until she came to the number she wanted:

Apartment 60—Mr. and Mrs. Philip Caleb Vanbrugh.

Caleb! Yes, that was the sort of middle name her ugly-tempered clod of a husband would have been likely to own. The names *Madeline* and *Caleb* could no more blend than could violets and prunes. Doubly, now, Daisy's heart was with the lovers.

One qualm, only, marred her sympathy. From the fact that Karl always spoke of Vanbrugh by his first name, the men apparently were friends. And to woo one's friend's wife is black villainess. Even Daisy knew that. So she readjusted matters in her elastic mind, and decided the men were merely close business acquaintances, and that friendship did not enter into their relations. Daisy felt better about it, after that—much better.

ONE morning when Daisy connected the wire for the lovers and prepared for her daily feast of listening in, a sharp whir from another apartment in the house drew her back to earth. In her nervous haste to make the new connection and get back to her listening, she awkwardly knocked out a plug or two. Absent-mindedly she readjusted them, trying meantime to catch what the second caller was trying to say to her.

This caller was a fussy woman in Apartment 12, who first wanted to know the correct time and then asked for a wire to Philadelphia. A full minute elapsed before Daisy could get back to the lovers. And as she turned again to their talk, she realized with a guilty start that in the mix-up of the various plugs she had left the switch open.

Have you ever called up a telephone-number and been let in on a conversation already going on between the person you called up and somebody else? It gives one an absurdly guilty feeling.

[And it means the switch has carelessly been left open, so that anybody calling up can tap the wire. That is the condition in which Daisy had chanced to leave the switch to Apartment 60. Eagerly she stretched forth her hand to repair the error. As she did so, three sentences struck her ear. They were spoken in quick succession by three people—as follows:

"Good-by, darling," said Karl. "I'll be there at one."

"Good-by, boy dear," answered Madeline. "I'll call you up again before then."

"Who in hell are *you?*?" bellowed a third and huskier voice. "And what do you mean by calling my wife darling?"

Click! All three wires were shut off by one lightning swirl of Daisy's fingers.

SHE sat aghast. The third voice had most assuredly been Phil's—Philip Caleb Vanbrugh's. What had she done? What *hadn't* she done? Then she became aware of a buzzing call.

"Clavichord Arms," she said primly in reply as she sought to rally her shaky nerves.

"That the house operator?" harshly demanded the husky voice. "I called up my apartment—Apartment 60—a minute ago, and my wife was talking over the phone. What number was she talking to?"

"What apartment did you say?" asked Daisy.

"Sixty!"

"Apartment 60 hasn't had a call this morning," solemnly answered Daisy, her throat tightening under the grip of outraged conscience. "Nor it hasn't sent in one, either."

"I'd swear that was my wife's voice," growled the man. "I couldn't place the man's. But it was my wife's, all right. And—"

"It may 'a' been Sarah Bernhardt's voice, for all I know," snapped Daisy. "But it didn't come from Apartment 60. Not any calls have been turned in from there since I came on."

"You're sure?" he asked in sour doubt.

"You can look at my slip here on the

desk," pertly retorted Daisy. "All the calls are marked on that."

"No," said the man slowly, "I won't do that—because, if you've lied, you wouldn't be past altering the slip. What I'm going to do is to ask the building's superintendent for an itemized list of all the calls from my apartment for the past month or two. He's obliged to furnish it on demand. That ought to tell me something."

HE hung up. Daisy sat gasping. Before her mental gaze ranged the memory of forty-odd calls a month to Worth 9999-Z. Then she came to a decision. Out into the marble-lined hallway she went. There she corralled the second elevator-boy and bribed him with twenty-five cents to take charge of the switchboard for a few minutes. A moment or so later, a colored maid was ushering her into Apartment 60.

In the middle of a garish living-room stood Daisy, trying desperately to think straight. The curtains parted, and a woman came into the room. Daisy blinked at her in bewilderment—then said:

"I should like to speak to Mrs. Vanbrugh, please. It's very important."

"I'm Mrs. Vanbrugh," answered the woman, eying the girl with curiosity.

"I—I mean Mrs. Madeline Vanbrugh," faltered the girl.

"I am Mrs. Madeline Vanbrugh," was the answer, and now Daisy recognized the voice, "—Mrs. Philip C. Vanbrugh. What can I do for you?"

Daisy could not answer at once. Around her dumfounded head the bubbles were bursting like a myriad Roman-candle balls.

This woman framed in the doorway was Madeline—*her* Madeline? This woman whose dumpy figure was swathed in a bedraggled negligee that had once been clean! This woman whose scalp was haloed by a crescent of kid-curlers that held in hard lumps her brass-hued front hair! This woman with the hard, light eyes and sagging mouth-lines and beaklike nose—this woman whose face was sallow and coarse, because it had not yet received its daily dress of make-up! This—*this* was Madeline!

"What can I do for you?" the woman was saying for the second time, her early air of curiosity merging into one of dawning hostility.

"I am the switchboard operator downstairs," said Daisy faintly.

A LOOK of terror that had all along lurked in the hard eyes now sprang to new light.

"What do you want of me?"

"I want to tell you your husband heard the last part of your phone-talk just now," returned Daisy conscientiously, though her heart was no longer in her mission of rescue. "He called me up about it. I—"

"You told him?" blithered the woman in panic.

"I told him your apartment hadn't had a call all morning."

"You *did*?" cried the woman, her sweet voice sharpening to a peacock-screech of relief. "Good for you! Good for *you*! And you were perfectly right to come directly up here for your pay. What do you think would be fair reward? Don't be afraid to say. You've done me a great service, and—"

"I don't understand you," stammered Daisy. "I don't understand you at all. If you think I did this for money—"

"My dear," laughed the woman nervously, "we do everything for money. So you needn't be ashamed. We don't always *say* it's for money. But it is. That's why I got into this scrape. My husband is the stingiest man in New York. He pretends his business is on such a ragged edge that he can't give me any extra cash. But I know better. That's why I let myself get interested in Mr. Schreiner. He is a widower, and he has more money than he can—"

"Oh!" cried Daisy in sick horror.

"So he'll make it good to you for all that you've done for us," prattled on the woman, without noticing. "He'll—"

"That isn't why I came up here!" broke in Daisy angrily. "And I don't want your filthy money, either. I won't touch it. I came up here to warn you that your husband is going to—"

THE buzz of the flat's front-door bell interrupted her. The woman, too, turned nervously to look. They heard

the maid fumble with the knob. Then some one brushed past the servant and into the living-room.

The intruder was a chunky and yellowish man, of late middle years—incredibly bald of head and suspiciously black of eyebrows. He caught sight of Mrs. Vanbrugh, who chanced to be standing between him and Daisy. And he exclaimed:

"I jumped into a taxi and hustled here, as soon as I left the phone. I didn't dare call up again. Do you suppose he recognized me?"

Yes, the voice was indubitably the voice of Karl. But the fat and elderly swain was in anything but a lovely mood. He was a-quake with terror. Beads of sweat trickled down on his brows and mustache. His yellowish complexion was blotchy from fear. He was not a pretty sight.

Daisy by this time should have been past surprise. Yet her preconceived vision of Karl—of young, athletic, hero-featured Karl—died hard and in much and sudden pain. Poor Daisy! Until he spoke, she had mistaken him for the husband.

"If he knew my voice," babbled the man, "we're up against it. I'd better get out of town for a while, I suppose. Maybe he—"

"Don't worry!" interposed Madeline acidly. "You won't have to run away from town and leave me to face it all. This girl has gotten us out of it. She is the operator downstairs. Phil called up and asked her all sorts of questions. And she told him the apartment hadn't had a call all morning. Isn't she a brick?"

A sound like the exhaust of an empty soda-siphon broke from between Karl's puffy lips—a sound of pure if porcine reaction from dread.

"Good girl!" he croaked, still hoarse with recent fright. "Dandy girl!"

He sought to pat Daisy approvingly on the shoulder with one pudgy hand. She recoiled.

"How much?" he asked jovially, not observing the stark repulsion in her face and gesture as she shrank away. "How much, little girl? You've done a mighty big stroke of business this day. What do you say I owe you? Or will you

leave it to me to do the right thing by you?"

He juggled a bloated wad of bills from his trousers pocket as he spoke. And at his motion something in Daisy's taut brain seemed to snap.

THE girl did not "see red." She saw only two fat and greasy creatures who thought she was as vile as they—who took it for granted that she had done this thing to extort a rich tip from them, for covering up their sin. And wrath gave her back her momentarily lost power of speech.

"Oh!" she cried in utter loathing, "you'd dare pay me for trying to help you? If I'd known what you both are, all the money in New York wouldn't have gotten me to lift a finger for you. You horrible—"

"There, there, my dear!" oilily soothed Karl. "You're a little bit excited. Calm down and tell us how much—"

"If you don't want pay," shrilled Madeline, "what did you come here for?"

"What did I come here for?" echoed Daisy, white with rage. "To make a fool of myself, of course. To warn you that your husband is going to get the call-lists for the past month from the super, and find out from them what numbers you've been calling up. That's—"

"Good Lord!" gabbled the woman in crass horror.

Karl's fat jaw dropped upon his fatter throat. He tried to speak. He could only gargle.

"That's why I came here!" finished Daisy, striding past them toward the door. "To warn you. And now I've done it. Your husband's liable to be streaking back home any minute now. And I'm going. And if either of you says any more about money, I'll—"

She was making for the outer door. But for all her start, Karl reached it three lengths ahead of her. He banged it shut after him as he darted out. Through the panel Daisy could hear him ringing frantically for the elevator.

Daisy was following, when a choking sound made her turn back. The woman still stood in the middle of the living-

room. Her hard, light eyes were dark and dilated. Her sallow face was haggard and ghastly. Yet her features were unmoved. There was about her bearing and expression a certain hopeless courage that lent dignity to the squat figure.

DAISY hesitated—then turned back into the room. The woman stared dully past her toward the doorway through which Karl had vanished. She acknowledged the girl's presence by muttering, in a curiously dead voice, more to herself than to Daisy:

"Men are queer animals, aren't they? He has sworn to me, time and again, that he'd stand by me to the end."

"Yes," assented Daisy in perfect simplicity, "I've heard him say it to you myself—twice."

"He's gone," went on the woman in that same dead voice so unlike her own. "He's gone. And I'm left to hold the bag. I—I think I'm cured. There are worse things than a husband who loves you—even if he can't give you all the money you want to spend. Phil would never have run away like that, from *anything*—not that the lesson is likely to do me any good, now."

"Here!" exclaimed the girl, shaking the dazed Madeline roughly by the shoulder. "I'm going to get you out of this. I don't know why, but I am. Maybe I've a bill of my own to pay, as well as you have. We've all done some learning to-day, I guess. And learning isn't on the free-list."

"But—"

"Go to the phone right away," commanded Daisy, "and call up the super. Tell him you've got to see him, up here, in a hurry. Act scared. Tell him it can't wait a single minute. Get him up here. That's the main thing. Then—then tell him you want new faucets in the bathroom. Or tell him anything at all. Do as I say. Jump! There isn't much time to waste. Hubby's sure to be hotfooting it home. And when hubby comes, deny everything. *Deny!* And keep on denying. He wont have any proof, remember that. *He'll have no proof.* Pay for the lie by being a

whole lot decenter to him, forever-after-amen."

MOVING away from the dumfounded woman, Daisy bolted out of the flat and was lucky enough to catch a down-going elevator. She reached the ground floor just as the building's perplexed superintendent came to the shaft on his way to answer Madeline's urgent summons.

Into the superintendent's deserted office sped Daisy. Going directly to his unlocked desk, she rummaged feverishly amid its drawers until she found what she wanted.

Crumpling and pocketing the telephone-sheets for the past two months, she crossed to the file cabinet, hunted through a stack of dusty papers and drew forth the sheaf of penciled telephone-slips for the preceding year.

Selecting from these the slips for the two corresponding months, she put back the rest of the sheaf. Then, changing with eraser and pencil the date of the year on the two slips she had abstracted from the cabinet, she put them in the drawer. After which, feeling oddly weak about the knees, she started out of the office.

At the door she almost collided with the returning superintendent. Vexed at having been called upstairs in such haste on an utterly trivial errand, he very naturally wreaked his ill-temper on the first subordinate he chanced to meet—which was Daisy.

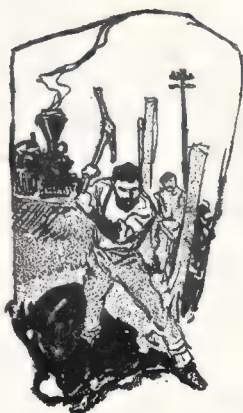
"What are you doing away from your switchboard?" he snarled. "I wont stand for any loafing. Get that into your mind, once and for all. What did you want in here, anyhow?"

"I came in to see you, sir," was the girl's demure reply.

"What do you want of me?" he rasped.

"I wanted to tell you I'm leaving here to-morrow," said Daisy. "I'm going back to work at the Exchange. I'm lonesome on this job. There aren't enough things happening at the Clavichord Arms. It's too slow—not enough excitement for a live wire like me. That's all, sir."

There will be another story by Mr. Terhune in an early issue.



The Roaring U. P. Trail

by Zane Grey

(Events of the previous installments:)

AT dusk one night in 1865, just after the Civil War, an old trapper named Slingerland rode into the camp of some engineers who were at work in the Black Hills on a hazardous survey—the laying out of the Union Pacific Railroad. Slingerland reported that a little party of eastbound travelers was threatened by Sioux near by, and asked help of the soldiers who accompanied the surveying party. The soldiers immediately went to the rescue, and with them rode an adventurous young engineer named Warren Neale and his cowboy friend Larry King.

Meanwhile the travelers under the leadership of a man named Horn had made a fort of their wagons; and Horn had buried a treasure of gold he was bringing back from California.

Among the travelers were two women—Mrs. Durade and her daughter Allie, a girl of sixteen; and before the Indian attack, Mrs. Durade made a confession to her daughter.

"I ran off with Durade before you were born," Mrs. Durade told her daughter. "Durade is not your father! Your name is Lee. Your father is Allison Lee. I've heard he's a rich man now. Oh! I want to get back—to give you to him—to beg forgiveness.

"We were married in New Orleans in 1847. My father made me marry him. I never loved Allison Lee. I met Durade, a Spaniard—a blue-blooded adventurer. I ran off with him to California. You were born out there in

1850. He was a crooked gambler. He made me share in his guilt. My face lured miners to his dens! Thank God I left him—before it was too late—for you!"

And then the yells of the attacking Sioux cut short Mrs. Durade's story.

WHEN Warren Neale and the soldiers came upon the scene it seemed at first that they were too late, for they found only charred ashes and mutilated bodies.

Neale, King and Slingerland lingered after the soldiers had left, however; and under a ledge of rock they came on a young girl, unconscious but still alive, sole survivor of the massacre.

They took the girl to Slingerland's cabin, and there she gradually came to herself. Neale was detailed to pass the winter in this vicinity in order to take observations of the snowfall. He lived at Slingerland's cabin, and the time passed happily, for Allie blossomed into new health and beauty; when in the spring Neale went back to his work with the construction survey, he left Allie engaged to him.

A busy summer followed, in the course of which Larry and Neale each saved the other's life in exciting adventures. Fall brought a bitter disappointment, for Neale was ordered to Omaha and was unable to visit Allie at Slingerland's.

In the Omaha office Neale came into collision with the forces of graft. One of his surveys was declared faulty and the construction work ordered done over again—simply for the additional profits of the repeated construction. Neale protested, but in vain.

When spring came, Neale threw up his work in Omaha and left for the



A Novel of the Great West

frontier again. With Larry he journeyed to Slingerland's cabin—and found only an abandoned heap of charred embers.

MUCH had happened to Allie. Slingerland had left her alone one day, and four outlaws had come to the cabin, robbed it of the trapper's furs, set it afire and carried Allie off. The girl had escaped from them, however, only to be captured by Indians. Destined for a young chief, Allie was liberated and helped to escape by the chief's jealous wife. For days Allie made her way alone across the wilderness; and when at last she found succor, it was from a party of travelers led by the gambler Durade, Allie's foster-father. Durade took her to Benton, where he opened a gambling-house.

Meanwhile Neale, heartbroken at Allie's loss, gave up his job, and seeking distraction, came also, with Larry, to Benton. There he met Slingerland, who told him how Allie was lost; and then, eventually, he found Allie herself; for she had escaped from Durade and had taken refuge with General Lodge, leader of the engineering party.

Fearful that Durade would again abduct Allie, Neale arranged that she

should go on with the engineers in company with two or three other women, wives of the officers. So it happened that Allie was with the party when it was attacked by a large force of Sioux accompanied by border ruffians. And when, after the cabins had been burned and many of the party killed, reinforcements at last arrived and drove off the redskins, Neale found that his sweetheart had again disappeared.

(The story follows in detail:)

CHAPTER XIX

NEALE took up lodgings with his friend Larry. He did not at first tell the cowboy about his recovery of Allie Lee and then her loss; and when finally he could not hold the revelation any longer, he regretted that he had been compelled to tell.

Larry took the news hard. He inclined to the idea that she had run out of town only to fall again into the hands of the Indians. Nevertheless he grew at once terribly bitter against men of the Fresno stamp, and in fact against

all the outlaw, ruffianly desperado class so numerous in Benton. Neale begged Larry to be cautious, to go slow, to ferret out things, and so help him, instead of making it harder to locate Allie. But Larry said gloomily:

"Pard, I reckon Allie's done for."

"No—no! Larry, I feel she's alive—well. If she were dead or—~~or~~—wouldn't I know?" protested Neale.

But Larry was not convinced. He had seen the hard side of border life; he knew the odds against Allie.

"Reckon I'll look fer that Fresno," he said. Deeper than before, Larry plunged into Benton's wild life. And—the dance-halls got him.

One evening Neale, on returning from work to his lodgings, found the cowboy there. In the dim light Larry looked strange. He had his gun-belt in his hands. Neale turned up the lamp.

"Hello, Red—what's the matter? You look pale and sick," said Neale.

"They wanted to throw me out of thet dance-hall," said Larry.

"Which one?"

"Stanton's."

"Well, *did* they?" inquired Neale.

"Wal, I reckon not. I walked. An' some night I'll shore clean out thet hall."

NEALE did not know what to make of Larry's appearance. The cowboy seemed to be relaxing. His lips, which had been tight, began to quiver, and his hands shook. Then he swung the heavy gun-belt with somber and serious air, as if he were undecided about leaving it off even when he went to bed.

"Red, you've thrown a gun!" exclaimed Neale.

Larry glanced at him, and Neale sustained a shock.

"Shore!" drawled Larry.

"By George, I knew you would!" declared Neale excitedly, and he clenched his fist. "Did you—you kill some one?"

"Pard, I reckon he's daid," mused the cowboy. "I didn't look to see. . . . Fust gun I've throwed fer long. . . . It'll come back now, shorer'n blazes!"

"What'll come back?" queried Neale.

Larry did not answer this.

"Who'd you shoot?" Neale went on.

"Pard, I reckon it aint my way to gab a lot," replied Larry.

"But you'll tell *me*," insisted Neale passionately. He jerked the gun and belt from Larry and threw them on the bed.

"All right," drawled Larry, taking a deep breath. "I went into Stanton's hall the other night an' a pretty girl made eyes at me. Wal, I shore asked her to dance. I reckon we'd been good pards if we'd been let alone. But there's a heap of fellers runnin' after her, an' some of them didn't cotton to me. One they called Cordy—he shore did get offensive. He's the four-flush loud kind. I didn't want to make any trouble fer Ruby—thet's her name; so I was mighty good-natured.

"I dropped in Stanton's to-day. Ruby spotted me fust off, an' *she* asked me to dance. Shore, I'm no dandy dancer, but I tried to learn. We was gettin' along powerful nice when in comes Cordy, hoppin' mad. He had a feller with him, an' both had been triffin' with red liquor. You oughter seen the crowd get back. Made me think Cordy an' his pard had blowed a lot round heah, an' got a rep'. Wal, I knowed they was bluff—jest mean, ugly four-flushes. Shore, they didn't an' couldn't know nothin' of me. I reckon I was only thet long-legged red-headed galoot from Texas. Anyhow, I was made to understand it might get hot sudden-like, if I didn't clear out.

"I left it to the girl. 'An' some of them girls is full of hell. Ruby jest stood there scornful an' sassy, with her haid leanin' to one side, her eyes half shut an' a little smile on her face. I'd call her more'n hell—a nice girl gone wrong. Them kind shore is the dangerest. . . . Wal, she says: 'Reddy, are you goin' to let them run you out of heah? They haven't any strings on me.' So I slapped Cordy's face an' told him to shut up. He let out a roar an' got wild with his hands, like them four-flush fellers do who wants to look real bad. I says, pretty sharp-like: 'Don't make any moves now!' An' the darned fool went fer his gun!

"Wal, I caught his hand, twisted the

gun away from him, poked him in the ribs with it an' then shoved it back in his belt. He was crazy—but pretty pale an' surprised. Shore, I acted sudden-like. Then I says: 'My festive gent, if you *think* of thet move again, you'll be stiff before you start it!' Guess he believed me."

LARRY paused in his narrative and wiped his face and moistened his lips. Evidently he was considerably shaken.

"Well, go on," said Neale impatiently.

"Thet was all right so far as it went," resumed Larry. "But that pard of Cordy's—he was half drunk an' a big brag, anyhow. He took up Cordy's quarrel. He hollered so he stopped the music an' drove most everybody out of the hall. They was peepin' in at the door. But Ruby stayed. There's a game kid, an' I'm goin' to see her tomorrow."

"You are not," declared Neale. "Hurry up. Finish your story."

"Wal, the big bloke swaggered all over me, an' I seen right off thet he didn't have sense enough to be turned. Then I got cold. I always used to. . . . He says: 'Are you goin' to keep away from Ruby?'"

"An' I says very polite: 'I reckon not.'"

"Then he throws hisself in shape, like he meant to leap over a hoss, an' hollers: 'Pull yer gun!'"

"I asks very innocent: 'What for, mister?'"

"An' he bawls fer the crowd: "'Cause I'm a-goin' to bore you, an' I never kill a man till he goes fer his gun!'"

"To thet I replies more considerate: 'But it aint fair. You'd better get thet fust shot.'"

"Then the fool hollers: 'Redhead!'"

"Thet settled him. I jumps over *quick*, slugged him one—left-handed. He staggered, but he didn't fall. . . . Then he straightens up an' goes fer his gun."

Larry halted again. He looked as if he had been insulted, and a bitter irony sat upon his lips.

"I seen, when he dropped, thet he never got his hand to his gun at all.

. . . . Jest as I'd reckoned! Wal, what made me sick was—my bullet went through him an' then some of them thin walls—an' hit a girl in another house. She's bad hurt. . . . They ought to have walls thet'd stop a bullet."

NEALE heard the same narrative from the lips of Ancliffe, and it differed only in the essential details of the cowboy's consummate coolness. Ancliffe, who was an eyewitness of the encounter, declared that drink or passion or bravado had no part in determining Larry's conduct. Ancliffe talked at length about the cowboy. Evidently he had been struck with Larry's singular manner and look and action. Ancliffe had all an Englishman's intelligent and phlegmatic observing powers, and the conclusion he drew was that Larry had reacted to a situation familiar to him.

That night Hough and then many other acquaintances halted Neale to gossip about Larry Red King. The cowboy had been recognized by Texans visiting Benton. They were cattle barons, and they did not speak freely of King until ready to depart from the town. Larry's right name was Fisher. He had a brother—a famous Texas outlaw called King Fisher. Larry had always been Red Fisher, and when he left Texas, he was on the way to become as famous as his brother. Texas had never been too hot for Red until he killed a sheriff. Red was a born gun-fighter, and was well known on all the ranches from the Panhandle to the Rio Grande. He had many friends; he was a great horseman, and he knew the cattle business. He had never been remarkable for bad habits or ugly temper, but he had an itch to throw a gun, and he was unlucky in always running into trouble. Trouble gravitated to him. His red head was a target for abuse, and he was sensitive and dangerous because of that. Texas, the land of gun-fighters, had seen few who were equal in cool nerve and keen eye and swift hand.

Neale did not tell Larry what he had heard. The cowboy changed subtly, not in his attitude toward Neale,

but toward all else. Benton and its wildness might have been his proper setting. So many rough and bad men, inspired by the time and place, essayed to be equal to Benton. But they lasted a day and were forgotten. The great compliment paid to Larry King was the change in the attitude of this wild camp. He had been one among many—a stranger. The time came when the dance-halls grew quiet as he entered, and the gambling-hells suspended their games. His fame increased, as from lip to lip his story passed, always gaining something. Jealousy, hatred and fear grew with his fame. It was hinted that he was always seeking some man or men from California. He had been known to question new arrivals: "Might you-all happen to be from California? Have you ever heard of an outfit that made off with a girl out heah in the Black Hills?"

NEALE, not altogether in the interest of his search for Allie, became a friend and companion of Place Hough. Ancliffe sought Neale also, and he was often in the haunts of these men. They did not take so readily to Larry King. The cowboy had become a sort of nervous factor in any community. His presence was not conducive to a comfortable hour. For Larry, though he still drawled his talk and sauntered around, looked the name the Texas visitors had left him. His flashing blue eyes, cold and intent, and hard in his flaming red face, his blazing red hair, his stalking form and his gun swinging low—these were so striking as to make his presence always felt. Beauty Stanton claimed the cowboy had ruined her business and that she had a terror of him. But Neale doubted the former statement. All business, good and bad, grew in Benton.

It was strange that as this attractive and notorious woman conceived a terror of Larry she formed an infatuation for Neale. He would have been blind to it but for the dry humor of Place Hough and the amiable indifference of Ancliffe, who had anticipated a rival in Neale. Their talk, like most talk, drifted through Neale's ears. What did he care? Both Hough and Ancliffe

began to loom large to Neale. They wasted every day, every hour; and yet underneath the one's cold, passionless pursuit of gold, and the other's serene and gentle quest for effacement, there was something finer left of other years.

Benton was full of gamblers and broken men who had once been gentlemen. Neale met them often—gambled with them, watched them. He measured them all. They had given life up, but within him there was a continual struggle. He swore to himself, as he had to Larry, that life was hopeless without Allie Lee; yet there was never a sleeping or a waking hour that he gave up hope. The excitement and allurements of the dance-halls, though he admitted their power, were impossible for him, and he frequented them, as he went everywhere else, only in search of a possible clue.

Gambling, then, seemed the only excuse open to him for his presence in Benton's sordid halls. And he had to bear as best he could the baseness that attached itself to him there. Women had free run of all the places in Benton.

AT first Neale was flirted with and importuned. Then he was scorned. Then he was let alone. Finally, as he was always courteous, even considerate of the women who happened in his way, but blind and cold to the meaning of their presence there, he was at last respected and admired.

There was always a game in the big gambling-place, and in fact the greatest stakes were played for by gamblers like Hough, pitted against each other. But most of the time was reserved for the fleecing of the builders of the U. P. R., the wage-earners whose gold was the lure and the magnet. Neale won money in those games in which he played with Place Hough. His winnings he scattered or lost in games where he was outpointed or cheated.

One day a number of Eastern capitalists visited Benton. The fame of the town drew crowds of the curious and greedy, and many of these transient visitors seemed to want to have their fling at the gambling-hells and dance-halls. There was a contagion in the

wildness that affected even the selfish. It would be something to remember and boast of when Benton with its life was a thing of the past.

Place Hough met old acquaintances among some St. Louis visitors who were out to see the road and Benton, and perhaps to find investments and he blandly assured them that their visit would not be memorable unless he relieved them of surplus cash. So a game with big stakes was begun. Neale, with Hough and five of the visitors, made up the table.

Eastern visitors worked upon Neale's mood, but he did not betray it. He was always afraid he would come face to face with some of the directors, whom he did not care to meet there. That was why, while gambling, he seldom looked up from his cards. The crowd came and went, but he never saw it.

This big game attracted watchers. The visitors were noisy; they drank a good deal; they lost with an equanimity that excited interest even in Benton. The luck for Neale seesawed back and forth. Then he lost steadily until he had to borrow from Hough.

ABOUT this time Beauty Stanton, with Ruby and another woman, entered, and they were at once attracted by the game, to the evident pleasure of the visitors. And then, unexpectedly, Larry Red King stalked in and lounged forward, cool, easy, careless, his cigarette half smoked, his blue eyes keen.

"Hey, is that *him*?" whispered one of the visitors, indicating Larry.

"That's Red!" replied Hough. "I hope he's not looking for one of you gentlemen."

They laughed, but not spontaneously. "I've seen his like in Dodge City," said one.

"Ask him to sit in the game," said another.

"No. Red's a card-shark," replied Hough. "And I'd hate to see him catch one of you pulling a crooked deal."

They lapsed back into the intricacies and fascination of poker.

Neale, however, found the game unable to hold his undivided attention. Larry was there, looking and watching;

and he made Neale's blood run cold. The girl Ruby was there across from him, with her half-closed eyes, mysterious and sweet, upon him. And Beauty Stanton was there, behind him, as she had often stood to watch a game.

"Neale, I'll bring you luck," she said, and she put her hand on his shoulder.

Neale's luck did change. Fortune faced about abruptly with its fickle inconsistency, and Neale had a run of cards that piled the gold and bills before him and brought a crowd three deep around the table. When the game broke up, Neale had won three thousand dollars.

"See! I brought you luck!" whispered Beauty Stanton in his ear. And across the table Ruby smiled hauntingly and mockingly.

Neale waved the crowd toward the bar. Only the women and Larry refused the invitation. Ruby gravitated irresistibly toward the cowboy.

"Aren't you connected with the road?" inquired one of the visitors, drinking next to Neale.

"Yes," replied Neale.

"Saw you in Omaha at the office of the company. My name's Blair. I sell supplies to Commissioner Lee. He has growing interests along the road."

NEALE'S lips closed, and he set down his empty glass. Excusing himself, he went back to the group he had left. Larry sat on the edge of the table; Ruby stood close to him, and she was talking; Stanton and the other woman had taken chairs.

"Wal, I reckon you made a rake-off," drawled Larry as Neale came up. "Lend me some money, pard."

Neale glanced at Larry, and from him to the girl. She dropped her eyes.

"Ruby, do you like Larry?" he queried.

"Sure do," replied the girl.

"Reddy, do you like Ruby?" went on Neale.

Beauty Stanton smiled her interest. The other woman came back from nowhere to watch Neale. Larry regarded his friend in mild surprise.

"I reckon it was a turrible case of love at fust sight," he drawled.

"I'll call your bluff!" flashed Neale.

"I've just won three thousand dollars. I'll give it to you. . . . Will you take it and leave Benton—go back—no! go on West—begin life over again?"

"Together, you mean!" exclaimed Beauty Stanton, as she rose with a glow on her faded face. No need to wonder why she had been named Beauty!

"Yes, together," replied Neale in swift steadiness. "You've started bad. But you're young. It's never too late. With this money you can buy a ranch—begin all over again."

"Pard, haven't you seen too much red liquor?" drawled Larry.

The girl shook her head.

"Too late!" she said softly.

"Why?"

"Larry is bad, but he's honest. I'm both bad and dishonest."

"Ruby, I wouldn't call you dishonest," returned Neale bluntly. "Bad? Yes—and wild. But if you had a chance—"

"No," she said.

"You're both slated for hell. What's the sense of it?"

"I don't see that you're slated for heaven," retorted Ruby.

"Wal, I shore say echo," drawled Larry as he rolled a cigarette. "Pard, you're drunk this heah minute!"

"I'm not drunk. I appeal to you Miss Stanton," protested Neale.

"You certainly are not drunk," she replied. "You're just—"

"Crazy!" interrupted Ruby.

They laughed.

"Maybe I do have queer impulses," replied Neale, and he felt his face grow white. "Every once in a while I see a flash of—of I don't know what. I could do something big—even now—if my heart wasn't dead."

"Mine's in its grave," said Ruby bitterly. "Come, Stanton, let's get out of this."

BUT Neale deliberately reached out and stopped her as she turned away. He faced her.

"You're no four-flush," he said. "You're game. You mean to play this out to a finish. . . . But you're no—no maggot like most of—of them here. You can think. You're afraid to talk to me."

"I'm afraid of no man. But you—you're a fool, a sky-pilot. You're—"

"The thing is—it's not too late."

"It is too late!" she cried with trembling lips.

Neale saw and felt his dominance over her.

"It is *never* too late!" he responded with all his force. "I can prove that."

She looked at him mutely. The ghost of another girl stood there instead of the wild Ruby of Benton.

"Pard, you're drunk, shore!" ejaculated Larry, as he towered over them and gave his belt a hitch. The cowboy sensed events.

"I've annoyed you more than once," said Neale. "This's the last time. . . . So tell me the truth: could I take you away from this life?"

"Take me? How, man?"

"I—I don't know. But somehow. I'd hold it—as worthy—to save a girl like you, *any* girl, from hell."

"But how?" she faltered. The bitterness, the iron, the wrong done her by life, was not manifest now.

"You refused my plan—with Larry. . . . Come, let me take you somewhere—find a home for you—with good people."

"My God—he's not in earnest!" gasped the girl, to her women friends. How cruel must have been the thought forced upon her, to rise by it, to lose some of her hate of men, to feel softened once more—all in vain! She could not believe. She received no help from her friends.

"I am in earnest," said Neale.

Then the tension of the girl relaxed. Her face showed a rebirth of soul.

"I can't accept," she replied. If she thanked him, it was with a look. Assuredly her eyes had never before held that gaze for Neale. Then she left the room, and presently Stanton's companion followed her. But Beauty Stanton remained. She appeared amazed at something, in dismay with something.

LARRY lighted his cigarette. "Shore, I'd call that a square kid," he said. "Neale, if you get any drunker, you'll lose all thet money."

"I'll lose it anyhow," replied Neale absent-mindedly.

"Wal, stake me right heah an' now."

At that, Neale generously and still absent-mindedly delivered to Larry gold and notes that he did not count.

"I aint no bank!" protested the cowboy.

Hough and Ancliffe joined them and with amazement watched Larry try to find pockets enough for his small fortune.

"Easy come, easy go, in Benton," said the gambler with a smile. Then his glance, alighting upon the quiet Stanton, grew a little puzzled. "Beauty, what ails you?"

She was pale, and her expressive eyes were fixed upon Neale. Hough's words startled her.

"What ails me? Place, I've had a forgetful moment—a happy one; and I'm deathly sick!"

Ancliffe stared in surprise. He took her literally.

Beauty Stanton looked at Neale again.

"Will you come to see me?" she asked with sweet directness.

"Thank you—no," replied Neale. He was annoyed. She had asked him that before, and he had coldly but courteously repelled what he thought were her advances. This time he was scarcely courteous.

The woman flushed. She appeared about to make a quick and passionate reply, in anger and wounded pride, but she controlled the impulse. She left the room with Ancliffe.

"Neale, do you know Stanton is infatuated with you?" asked Hough thoughtfully.

"Nonsense!" replied Neale.

"She is, though. These women can't fool me. I told you days ago I suspected that. Now I'll gamble on it. And you know how I play my cards!"

"She saw me win a pile of money," said Neale with scorn.

"I'll bet you can't make her take a dollar of it—any amount you want, and any odds."

OF course, Neale would not accept the wager. What was he talking about, anyway? What was this drift of things? His mind did not seem

right. Perhaps he had drunk too much. The eyes of both Ruby and Beauty Stanton troubled him. What had he done to these women?

"Neale, you're more than usually excited to-day," observed Hough. "It probably was the run of luck. And then you spouted to the women."

Neale confessed his offer to Ruby and Larry, and then his own impulse.

"Ruby called me a fool—crazy—a sky-pilot. Maybe—"

"Sky-pilot! Well, the little devil!" laughed Hough. "I'll gamble she called you that before you declared yourself."

"Before, yes. I tell you, Hough, I have crazy impulses. They've grown on me out here. They burst like lightning out of a clear sky. I would have done just that thing for Ruby. . . . Mad, you say? Why, man, she's not hopeless. There was something deep behind that impulse—strange, not understandable! I'm at the mercy of every hour here. Benton has got into my blood. And I see how Benton is a product of this great advance of progress—of civilization—the U. P. R. We're only atoms in a force no one can understand.

"Look at Reddy King. That cowboy was set—fixed like stone, in his character. But Benton has called to the worst and wildest in him. He'll do something terrible. Mark what I say: we'll all do something terrible—even you, Place Hough, with all your cold, implacable control! The moment will come, born out of this abnormal time. I can't explain, but I feel.

"How few of the real workers here dream of the spirit that is working on them! That Irishman Shane—think of him! He fought while his brains oozed from a hole in his head. I saw, but I didn't know, then. I wanted to take his place. He said no—he wasn't hurt—and Casey would laugh at him. And Casey would have laughed! They are men. There are thousands of them. The railroad goes on! It can't be stopped. It has the momentum of a great nation rolling on from behind. And I who have lost all I care for, and you who are a drone among the bees, and Ruby and Stanton with their kind, and the mob of leeches—why, we

all are so stung by that nameless spirit that we are stirred beyond ourselves and dare both height and depth of impossible things."

The gambler showed strong response to Neale's passion.

"You must be drunk," he said gravely, "and yet what you say hits me hard. I'm a gambler. But sometimes—there are moments when I might be less or more. There's mystery in the air. This Benton is a chaos. Those hairy workmen at the rails! I've watched them hammer and lift and dig and fight. By day they sweat and bleed and sing and joke and quarrel—and go on with the work. By night they are seized by the furies. They fight among themselves while being plundered and murdered by Benton's wolves. Heroic by day—hellish by night! . . . And so, spirit or what—they set the pace!"

NEXT afternoon, when parasite Benton awoke, it found the girl Ruby dead in her bed.

Her door had to be forced. She had not been murdered. She had destroyed much of the contents of a trunk. She had dressed herself in simple garments no one in Benton had ever seen. It did not appear what means she had employed to take her life. She was only one of many. More than one girl of Benton's throng had sought the same short road, and so had cheated life of further pain.

When Neale heard about it, upon his return to Benton late that afternoon, Ruby was in her grave. It suited him to walk out in the twilight and stand awhile in the silence beside the bare sandy mound. No stone—no mark! Another nameless grave! She had been a child once, with dancing eyes and smiles, loved by some one, surely, and perhaps mourned by some one living. The low hum of Benton's awakening night-life was borne faintly on the wind. The sand seeped; the coyotes wailed; and yet there was silence. Twilight lingered. Out on the desert the shadows deepened.

By some chance the grave of the scarlet woman adjoined that of a laborer who had been killed by a blast. Neale remembered the spot. He had walked

out there before. A morbid fascination often drew him to view that ever-increasing row of nameless graves. As the workman had given his life to the road, so had the woman. Neale saw a significance in the parallel.

Neale returned to the town troubled in mind. He remembered the last look Ruby had given him. Had he awakened conscience in her? Upon questioning Hough, he learned that Ruby had absented herself from the dancing-hall and had denied herself to all on that last night of her life.

THERE was to be one more incident relating to this poor girl, before Benton in its mad rush should forget her. Neale divined it before it came to pass, and he was present, and as powerless to prevent it as any other spectator in Beauty Stanton's hall.

Larry King reacted in his own peculiar way to the news of Ruby's suicide and the rumored cause. He stalked into that dancing-hall, where his voice stopped the music and the dancers.

"Come out heah!" he shouted to the pale Cordy.

And King spun the man into the center of the hall, where he called him every vile name known to the camp, scorned and slapped and insulted him, shamed him before that breathless crowd, goaded him at last into a desperate reaching for his gun—and killed him as he drew it.

CHAPTER XX

BENTON slowed and quieted down a few days before pay-day to get ready for the great rush. Only the saloons and dance-halls and gambling-hells were active, and even here the difference was manifest. The railroad-yard was the busiest place in the town, for every train brought huge loads of food, merchandise and liquor, the transporting of which taxed the teamsters to their utmost.

The day just before pay-day saw the beginning of a singular cycle of change. Gangs of laborers rode in on the work-trains from the grading-camps and the camps at the head of the rails, now miles

west of Benton. A rest of several days inevitably followed the visit of the pay-car. It was difficult to keep enough men at work to feed and water the teams; and there would have been sorry protection from the Indians had not the troops been on duty. Pay-days were not off-days for the soldiers. Steady streams of men flowed toward Benton from east and west; and that night the hum of Benton was merry, subdued, waiting.

Bright and early the town with its added thousands awoke. The morning was clear, rosy, fresh. On the desert the colors changed from soft gray to red, and the whirls of dust, riding the wind, resembled little clouds with sunset hues. Silence and solitude and unbroken level reigned outside, in infinite contrast to the seething town. Benton resembled an ant-heap at break of day. A thousand songs arose, crude and coarse and loud, but full of joy. Pay-day and vacation were at hand!

Then drill, my paddies, drill,
Drill, my heroes, drill,
Drill all day,
No sugar in your tay,
Workin' on the U. P. Railway—

Casey was one Irish trooper of thousands who varied the song and tune to suit his taste. The content alone they all held. Drill! They were laborers who were able to turn into regiments at a word. They shaved their stubby beards and donned their best—a bronzed, sturdy, cheery army of wild boys. The curse rested but lightly upon their broad shoulders.

Strangely, the morning began without the gusty wind so common to that latitude; and the six inches of powdery white dust did not rise. The powers of heaven smiled in the clear, quiet morning, but the powers of hell waited—for the hours to come, the night and darkness.

At nine o'clock a mob of five thousand men had congregated around the station, most of them out in the open, on the desert side of the track. They were waiting for the pay-train to arrive. This hour was the only orderly one that Benton ever saw. There was laughter, profanity, play—a continuous hum, but compared to Benton's usual turmoil it

was pleasant. The workmen talked in groups, and like all crowds of men sober and unexcited, were given mostly to badinage and idle talk.

"Wat was ut I owed ye, Moike?" asked a strapping grader.

Moike scratched his head. "Wor it thorty dollars this toime?"

"It wor. Moike, yez hev a mimory," replied the other. . . .

A big negro pushed out his huge jaw and blustered at his fellows.

"I's a-gwine to bust that yaller nigger's haid," he declared.

"Bill, he's your frien'. Cool down, man," replied a comrade. . . .

A teamster was writing a letter in pencil, using a board over his knees.

"Jim, you goin' to send money home?" queried a fellow-laborer.

"I am that, an' first thing when I get my pay," was the reply.

"Reminds me I owe for this suit I'm wearin'. I'll drop in an' settle," announced the laborer hopefully. . . .

A group of spikers held forth on a little bank above the railroad track, at a joint where a few weeks before they had fastened those very rails with lusty blows.

"Well, boys, I think I see the smoke of our pay-dirt—way down the line," said one.

"Bandy, your eyes are po'r," replied another.

"Yep, she's comin'," said another. "'Bout time, for I haven't two bits to my name."

"Boys, no buckin' the tiger for me, to-day," declared Bandy.

He was laughed at by all, except one quiet comrade who gazed thoughtfully eastward, back over the vast and rolling country. He was thinking of home, of wife and little girl, of what pay-day meant for them.

Bandy gave him a friendly slap on the shoulder.

"Frank, you got drunk an' laid out all night, last pay-day."

Frank remembered, but he did not say what he had forgotten that last pay-day.

A LONG and gradual slope led from Benton down across the barren desert toward Medicine Bow. The

railroad track split it and narrowed to a mere thread upon the horizon. The crowd of watching, waiting men saw smoke rise over that horizon-line and a dark, flat, creeping object. Through the big throng ran a restless murmur. The train was in sight. It might have been a harbinger of evil, for a subtle change, nervous, impatient, brooding, visited that multitude. A slow movement closed the disintegrated crowd, and a current of men worked forward to encounter resistance and like currents. They had begun to crowd for advantageous positions closer to the pay-car, to be the first in line.

A fight started somewhere, and loud curses and dull blows; and then a jostling mass tried the temper of the slow-marching men. Some boss yelled an order from a box-car, and he was hooted. There was no order. When the train whistled for Benton, a hoarse and sustained shout ran through the mob, not from all lips, nor from any massed group, but taken up from man to man—a strange sound, the first note of calling Benton.

The train arrived. Troops alighting preserved order near the pay-car; and out of the dense mob a slow stream of men flowed into the car at one end and out at the other.

Bates, a giant digger and a bully, was the first man in the line, the first to get his little share of the fortunes in gold that were passing out of the car that day.

Long before half of that mob had received its pay, Bates lay dead upon a sanded floor, killed in a drunken brawl.

And the Irishman Mike had received his thirty dollars.

And the big negro had broken the head of his friend.

And the teamster had forgotten to send money home.

And his comrade had neglected to settle for the suit of clothes he was wearing.

And Bandy, for all his vows, had gone straight for bucking the tiger.

And Frank, who had gotten drunk last pay-day, had been mindful of wife and little girl far away and had done his duty—which Benton that day made his last!

AS the spirit of the gangs changed with the coming of gold so did that of the day.

The wind began to blow; the dust began to fly; the sun began to burn—and the freshness and serenity of the morning passed.

Main Street in Benton became black-streaked with men, white-sheeted with dust. There was a whining whistle in the wind as it swooped down. It complained; it threatened; it strengthened; and from the heating desert it blew in hot. A steady *tramp-tramp-tramp* rattled the loose boards as the army marched down upon Benton. It moved slowly, the first heave of a great mass getting under way, with an increasing momentum. Stores and shops, restaurants and hotels and saloons, took toll from these first comers. Benton swallowed up the builders as fast as they marched from the pay-train. It had an insatiable maw. The bands played martial airs; and soldiers who had lived through the rebellion felt the thrill and the quickstep and the call of other days.

Toward afternoon Benton began to hurry. The hour was approaching when crowded halls and tents must make room for fresh and unspent gangs. The swarms of men still marched up the street. Benton was gay and noisy and busy then. White shirts, and blue and red and plaid, held their brightness despite the dust. Gaudily dressed women passed in and out of the halls. All was excitement, movement, color, merriment, and dust and wind and heat. The crowds moved on, because they were pushed on. Music, laughter, shuffling feet and clinking glass, a steady tramp, voices low and voices loud, the hoarse brawl of the barker—all merged into a roar, a roar that started merry and wore strangely different and swelled to nameless din.

THE sun set, the twilight fell, the wind went down, the dust settled—and night mantled Benton. The roar of the day became subdued. It resembled the purr of the gorged cat. The yellow and glaring torches, the bright lamps, the dim, pale lights behind tent-walls, all accentuated the blackness

of the night and filled space with shadows like specters. Benton's streets were full of drunken men, staggering back along the way they had marched in. No woman showed herself. The darkness seemed a cloak, cruel yet pitiful. It hid the flight of a man, running from fear; it softened the sounds of brawling and deadened the pistol-shot. Under its cover soldiers slunk away sobered and ashamed, and murderous bandits waited in ambush, and brawny porters dragged men by the heels, and young gamblers in the flush of success hurried to new games, and broken wanderers sought some place to rest.

Life indoors that night in Benton was monstrous, wonderful and hideous. Every saloon was packed, and every dive and room, with a hoarse, violent mob of furious men. The big gambling-hell had extra lights, extra attendants, extra tables; around the great, glittering mirror-blazing bar struggled and laughed and shouted a drink-beset mass of humanity. And all through the rest of the big room groups and knots of men stood and bent and sat round tables, intent, absorbed, obsessed, listening with strained ears, watching with wild eyes, reaching with shaking hands—only to gasp and throw down cards and push rolls of gold toward cold-faced gamblers and lurch up with a curse and glare. This was the night of golden harvest for the black-garbed, steel-nerved, cold-eyed card sharps. They knew the brevity of time and hour and life.

In the dancing-halls there was a maddening whirl, an immense and incredible hilarity, a wild fling of unleashed burly men. That was the last pay-day Beauty Stanton's dancing-hall ever saw. Likewise it was to be the last she was ever to see. In the madness of that night, which produced sights no sober eye could recall, there was written finality—the end.

Benton seemed breathing hard, laboring under its load of evil, dancing toward its close.

NIGHT wore on, and the hour of dawn approached.

The lamps were dead; the tents were dark; the music was stilled; and the low,

soft roar was a hollow mockery of its earlier strength.

Like specters, men staggered slowly and wonderingly through the gray streets. Gray ghosts! All was gray. A vacant laugh pealed out, and a strident curse, and then again the low murmur prevailed. Benton was going to rest. Weary, drunken, spent nature sought oblivion—on disordered beds, hard floors and in dusty corners. An immense and hovering shadow held the tents and halls and streets in obscurity. Through this opaque gloom the silent and the numerous revelers reeled along. Louder voices broke the spell only for an instant. Death lay in the middle of the main street, in the dust—and no passing man halted. It lay as well down the side-streets, in sandy ditches and on tent floors, behind the bar of the gambling-hell and in a corner of Beauty Stanton's parlor. Likewise death had his counterpart in hundreds of prostrate men, who lay in drunken stupor, asleep, insensible to the dust in their faces.

The gray lifted out of the streets; the shadows lightened; the east kindled; and the sweet, soft freshness of a desert dawn came in on the gentle breeze. And when the sun arose, splendid and golden, with its promise and beauty, it shone upon a ghastly, silent, motionless Benton asleep.

CHAPTER XXI

TO Allie Lee, again a prisoner in the clutches of Durade, the days in Benton had been mysterious, the nights dreadful. In fear and trembling she listened with throbbing ears to footsteps and low voices, ceaseless, as of a passing army—and a strange muffled roar, rising and swelling and dying.

Durade's caravan had entered Benton in the dark. Allie had gotten an impression of wind and dust, lights and many noisy hurried men, and a crowded jumble of tents. She had lived in a back room of a canvas house. A door opened out into a little yard fenced high with many planks, over or through which she could not see. Here she had been allowed to walk. She had seen

Durade once, the morning after Fresno and his gang had brought her to Benton, when he had said meals would be sent her and she must stay there until he had secured better quarters. He threatened to kill her if he caught her in another attempt to escape. Allie might have scaled the high fence, but she was more afraid of the unknown peril outside than she was of him.

She listened to the mysterious life of Benton, wondering and fearful; and through the hours there came to her a nameless certainty of something tremendous and terrible that was to happen to her. But spirit and hope were unquenchable. Not prayer or reason or ignorance was the source of her sustained and inexplicable courage. A star shone over her destiny, or a good angel hovered near. She sensed in a vague and perplexing way that she must be the center of a mysterious cycle of events. The hours were fraught with strain and suspense; yet they passed fleetingly. A glorious and saving moment was coming—a meeting that would be as terrible as sweet. Benton held her lover Neale and her friend Larry. They were searching for her; she felt their nearness.

It was that which kept her alive, she knew with her heart. And while she thrilled at the sound of every step, she also shuddered. For there was Durade with his desperadoes! Blood would be spilled. Somewhere, somehow, that meeting would come. Neale would rush to her. And the cowboy! Allie remembered the red blaze of his face—the singular piercing blue of his eye, his cool, easy, careless air, his drawling speech—and underneath all his lazy gentleness a deadliness of blood and iron.

So Allie Lee listened to all sounds, particularly to all footsteps, waiting for that which was to make her heart stand still.

SOME one had entered the room adjoining hers—was now fumbling at the rude door which had always been barred from the other side. It opened. Stitt, the mute who attended and guarded her, appeared, carrying bundles. Entering, he deposited these upon Allie's bed. Then he made signs for her

to change the buckskin garb she wore to what evidently was in the bundles. Further, he gave her to understand she was to hurry—that she was to be taken away. With that he went out, shutting and barring the door after him.

Allie's hands shook as she opened the packages. The very hour might bring her freedom! She was surprised to find a complete outfit of woman's apparel, well made and of fine material. Benton, then, had stores, and women! Hurriedly she made the change, which was very welcome. The dress did not fit her as well as it might have, but the bonnet and cloak were satisfactory, as were the little boots. She found a long, dark veil and wondered if she was expected to put that on.

A knocking at the door preceded a call: "Allie, are you ready?"

"Yes," she replied.

The door opened; Durade entered. He appeared thinner than she had ever seen him, with more white in or beneath his olive complexion, and there were strain and passion on his face. Allie knew he labored under some strong suppressed excitement. More and more he seemed to lose something of his old character—of the Spanish manner.

"Put that veil on," he said. "I'm not ready for Benton to see you."

"Are you—taking me away?"

"Only down the street. I've a new place," he replied. "Come. Stitt will bring your things."

Allie could not see very well through the heavy veil, and she stumbled over the rude thresholds. Durade took hold of her arm and presently led her out into the light. The air was hot, windy, dusty. The street was full of hurrying and lounging men. Allie heard different snatches of speech as she and Durade went on. Some stared and leered at her, at which times Durade's hold tightened on her arm, and his step quickened. She was certain no one looked at Durade. Some man jostled her; another pinched her arm. Her ears tingled with unfamiliar and coarse speech.

THEY walked through heavy sand and dust, then along a board walk, to turn aside before what was apparently a new brick structure. But a

closer view proved it to be painted wood. The place rang hollow with a sound of hammers. It looked good but did not feel stable under foot. Durade led her through two large hall-like rooms into a small one, light and newly furnished.

"The best Benton afforded," said Durade, waving his hand. "You'll be comfortable. There are books—news-papers. Here's a door opening into a little room. It's dark, but there's water, towels, soap. And you've a mirror. . . . Allie, this is luxury to what you've had to put up with."

"It is indeed," she replied, removing her veil and then the cloak and bonnet. "But—am I to be shut up here?"

"Yes. Sometimes at night, early, I'll take you out to walk. But Benton is—"

"What?" she asked as he paused.

"Benton will not last long," he finished with a shrug of his shoulders. "There'll be another one of these towns out along the line. We'll go there. And then—to Omaha."

More than once he had hinted at going on eastward.

"I'll find your mother—some day!" he added darkly. "If I didn't believe that, I'd do differently by you."

"Why?"

"I want her to see you as good as she left you. Then! Are you ever going to tell me how she gave me the slip?"

"She's dead, I told you."

"Allie, that's a lie. She's hiding in some trapper's cabin or among the Indians. I should have hunted all over that country where you met my caravan. But the scouts feared the Sioux. The Sioux! We had to run. And so I never got the truth of your strange appearance on that trail."

Allie had learned that reiteration of the fact of her mother's death only convinced Durade the more that she was living. While he had this hope, she was safe—as long as she obeyed him. A dark and sinister meaning lay covert in his words. She doubted not that he had the nature and the power to use her to be revenged upon her mother. That and gambling appeared to be all for which he lived.

Suddenly he seized her fiercely in his arms.

"You're the picture of *her*!"

Then slowly he released her, and the corded red of his neck subsided. His action had been that of a man robbed of all he loved, who remembered in a fury of violent longing, hate and despair, who found that the mother's daughter did not suffice.

ALLIE was left alone.

She gazed around the room that she expected to be her prison for an indefinite time. Walls and ceilings were sections, locking together; and in some places she could see through the cracks between. One side opened upon a tent wall, the other into another room, the small glass windows upon a house of canvas. When Allie put her hand against any part of her room, she found that it swayed and creaked. She grasped then that this house had been made in sections, transported to Benton by train and hurriedly thrown together.

She looked next at the newspapers. How strange to read news of the building of the U. P. R.! The name of General Lodge, chief engineer, made Allie tremble. He had predicted a fine future for Warren Neale. She read that General Lodge now had a special train and contemplated an inspection-trip out as far as the rails were laid. She read that the Pacific construction company was reputed to be crossing the Sierra Nevadas—that there were ten thousand Chinamen at work on the road—and that the day when East and West were to meet was sure to come.

Eagerly she searched, her heart thumping, for the name of Neale, but she did not find it. She read in one paper that the Sioux were active along the line between Medicine Bow and Kearney. Every day the workmen would sight a band of Indians, and growing accustomed to the sight, they would become careless; thus many lost their lives. A massacre had occurred out on the western end of the road where the construction-gangs were working. Day after day the Sioux had prowled around, without attacking, until the hardy and reckless laborers lost fear and caution. Then one day a grading gang working a mile from the troops was set upon by a band of swiftly rid-

ing Sioux and before they could raise a gun in defense, were killed and scalped in their tracks.

Allie read on. She devoured the news. Manifestly the world was awakening to the reality of the great railroad. How glad Neale must be! Always he had believed in the greatness and the reality of the U. P. R. Somewhere along that line he was working; perhaps every night he rode into Benton! Her emotions overwhelmed her as she thought of him so near, and for a moment she could not see the print. Neale would never again believe she was dead. Strangest of all was that she did live! She breathed—she was well, strong, palpitating, right there in Benton, reading about the building of the railroad. It was terrible. She wondered with a pang what her disappearance meant to Neale. He had said his life would be over if he lost her again. She shivered. What might happen to him there in Benton if he no longer had her to think of?

SUDDENLY her eye rested on printed letters, familiar somehow, startling her. Allison Lee!

"Allison Lee!" she breathed, very low. "*My father!*"

And she read that Allison Lee, commissioner of the U. P. R., and contractor for big jobs along the line, would shortly leave his home in Council Bluffs, to meet some of the directors in New York City in the interests of the railroad.

"If Durade and he ever meet!" she whispered.

And in that portent she saw loom on the gambler's horizon another cloud. In his egotism and passion and despair he was risking more than he knew. He could not hope to keep her a prisoner this way for very long. Allie felt again the gathering surety of an approaching climax in this dire situation.

"My danger is—that he may harm me—use me for his gambling lure, or kill me!" she murmured. And her prevision of salvation contended with the dark menace of the hour. But as always she rose beyond hopelessness.

Her thought here was interrupted by the entrance of the mute Stitt, who brought her a few effects left at the

former place, and then a tray holding her dinner.

That day passed swiftly.

Darkness came, bringing a strange augmentation of the sound with which Allie had become familiar. She did not use her lamp, for she had become accustomed to being without one, and she seemed to be afraid of a light. Only a dim, pale glow came in at her window. But the sound of Benton—that grew as night fell. She had heard something similar in the gold-camps of California and in the grading-camp where Durade had lingered; this was at once the same and yet vastly different. She lay listening and thinking. The low roar was that of human beings, and any one of its many constituents seemed difficult to distinguish. Voices, footsteps, movement, music, mirth, dancing, clink of gold and glasses, the high, shrill laugh of a woman, the loud, vacant laugh of a man, sudden gust of dust-laden wind sweeping overhead—all these blended in the mysterious sound that seemed the strife and agony of Benton. For hours it kept her awake; and when she did fall asleep, it was so late in the night that when she awakened next day, she thought it must be noon or later.

THAT day passed and another night came. It brought a change, in that the house she was in became alive and roaring. Durade had gotten his establishment under way. Allie lay in sleepless suspense. Rough, noisy, thick-voiced men appeared to be close to her, in one of the rooms adjoining hers, and outside in the tents. The room, however, into which hers opened was not entered. Dawn had come before Allie fell asleep.

Thus days passed during which she saw only the attendant Stitt; and Allie began to feel a strain that she believed would be harder on her than direct contact with Benton life. While she was shut up there, what chance had she of ever seeing Neale or Larry if they were in Benton? Durade had said he would take her outdoors occasionally, but she had not seen him. Restlessness and gloom began to weigh upon her, and she was in continual conflict with herself.

She began to think of disobeying

Durade. Something would happen to him sooner or later, and in that event she would be no better off than if she tried to escape. Whatever the evil of Benton, it was possible that she might not fall into evil hands. Anything would be better than her confinement here, with no sight of the sun, no one to speak to, nothing to do but brood and fight her fancies and doubts and listen to that ceaseless, soft, mysterious din. Allie believed she could not long bear that. Now and then occurred a change in her mind which frightened her. It was a regurgitation of the old tide of somber horror which had been her madness after the murder of her mother.

She was working herself into a frenzied state when unexpectedly Durade came to her room. At first glance she hardly knew him. He looked thin and worn; his eyes glittered; his hands shook; and the strange radiance that emanated from him when his passion for gambling had been crowned with success shone stronger than Allie had ever seen it.

"Allie, the time's come," he said. He seemed to be looking back into the past.

"What time?" she asked.

"For you to do for me—as your mother did before you."

"I—I—don't understand."

"Make yourself beautiful!"

"Beautiful! How?" Allie had an inkling of what he meant, but all her mind repudiated the thought.

DURADE laughed. He had indeed changed. He seemed a weaker man. Benton was acting powerfully upon him.

"How little vanity you have! Allie, you are beautiful now—any time. You'll be so when you're old or dead. I mean for you to show more of your beauty. . . . Let down your hair. Braid it a little. Put on a white waist. Open it at the neck. . . . You remember how your mother did."

Allie stared at him, slowly paling. She could not speak. It had come—what she had dreaded.

"You look like a ghost!" Durade exclaimed. "Like she did—years ago when I told her this—the first time!"

"You mean to use me—as you used her?" faltered Allie.

"Yes. But you needn't be afraid or sick. I'll pick the men who are to see you. You'll only be looked at. I'll always be with you."

"What am I to do?"

"Be ready in the afternoon when I call you."

"I know now why my mother hated you," burst out Allie. For the first time she too hated him, and felt the stronger for it.

"She'll pay for that hate, and so will you," he replied passionately. His physical action seemed involuntary—a shrinking as if from a stab. Then followed swift violence. He struck Allie across the mouth with his open hand, a hard blow, almost upsetting her.

"Don't let me hear that from you again!" he continued furiously.

With that he left the room, closing but not barring the door.

ALLIE put her hand to her lips.

They were bleeding. She tasted her own warm and salty blood. Then there was born in her something that burned and throbbed and swelled, and drove out all that had been pitying toward this man, and all her vacillations. That blow was what she had needed. There was a certainty now as to her peril, just as there was imperious call for her to help herself and save herself.

"Neale or Larry will visit Durade's," she soliloquized, with her pulses beating fast. "And if they do not come, some one will come—some man I can trust!"

Therefore she welcomed Durade's intention. She paid more heed to the brushing and arranging of her hair, and to her appearance, than ever before in her life. The white of her throat and neck mantled red with a blush of shame as she exposed them, intentionally, for the gaze of men. Her beauty was to be used as her mother's had been. And she prayed that if she must submit to bold gaze and indignity from many roisterers there might be one, attracted as the others, who would see through her beauty to her soul, and know that she was not what she seemed.

She had not long to meditate. She heard the heavy steps and voices of men

entering the room next hers. Presently Durade called her. With a beating heart Allie rose and pushed open the door. From that moment there never would be any more monotony for her—neither peace nor safety. Yet she was glad, and faced the room bravely, for Neale or Larry might be there.

Durade had furnished this larger place luxuriously, and evidently intended to use it for a private gambling-den, where he would bring picked gamesters. Allie saw about eight or ten men who resembled miners or laborers.

Durade led her to a table that had been placed under some shelves littered with bottles and glasses. He gave her instructions what to do when called upon, saying that Stitt would help her; and then motioning her to a chair, he went back to the men. It was difficult for her to raise her eyes, and she could not at once do so.

"Durade, who's the girl?" asked a man.

The gambler vouchsafed for reply only a mysterious smile.

"Bet she's from California," said another. "They bloom like that out there."

"Now, aint she your daughter?" queried a third.

But Durade chose to be mysterious. In that he left his guests license for covert glances without the certainty which would permit boldness.

THEY gathered around a table to play faro. Then Durade called for drinks. This startled Allie, and she hastened to comply with his demand. When she lifted her eyes and met the glances of these men, she had a strange feeling that somehow recalled the California days. Her legs were weak under her; a hot anger labored under her breast; she had to drag her reluctant feet across the room. Her spirit sank, and then leaped. It whispered that looks and words and touches could only hurt and shame her for this hour of her evil plight. They must rouse her resistance and cunning wit. It was a fact that she was there, helpless for the present. But she lived, and her love was infinite; and through these facts she trusted herself to her fate.

Fresno was there, throwing dice with two soldiers. To his ugliness had been added something that robbed his face of bronze and health, the tinge of outdoor life, and gave it red and swollen lines and shades, and beastly greed. Benton had made a bad man worse.

Mull was there, heavier than when he had ruled the grading-camp, sodden with drink, thick-lipped and red-cheeked, burly, brutal and still showing in every action and loud word the bully. He was whirling a wheel and rolling a ball and calling out in his heavy voice. With him was a little sallow-faced man, like a wolf, with sneaky, downcast eyes and restless hands. He answered to the name of Andy. These two were engaged in fleecing several blue-shirted, half-drunken spikers.

Durade was playing faro with four other men—or, at least, there were that number seated with him. One, whose back was turned toward Allie, wore black, and looked and seemed different from the others. He did not talk nor drink. Evidently his winning aggravated Durade. Presently Durade called the man Jones.

Then there were several other standing around, dividing their attention between Allie and the gamblers. The door opened occasionally, and each time a different man entered to hold a moment's whispered conversation with Durade, and to go out again. These men were of the same villainous aspect that characterized Fresno. Durade had surrounded himself with lieutenants and comrades who might be counted upon to do anything.

Allie was not long in gathering this fact, nor that there were subtle signs of suspicion among the gamesters. Most of them had gotten under the influence of the drink, that Durade kept ordering. Evidently he furnished this liquor free and with a purpose.

PRESENTLY the afternoon's play ended. As far as Allie could see, Jones, the man in black, a pale, thin-lipped, cold-eyed gambler, was the only guest to win. Durade's manner was not pleasant while he paid over evident debts. Durade always had been a poor loser.

"Jones, you'll sit in to-morrow?" asked Durade.

"Maybe," replied the other.

"Why not? You're winner," retorted Durade, hot-headed in an instant.

"Winners are choosers," returned Jones with an enigmatic smile. His hard, cold eyes shifted to Allie and seemed to pierce her; then they went back to Durade and Mull and Fresno. Plain it was to Allie, with her woman's intuition, that if Jones returned, it would not be because he trusted that trio. Durade apparently made an effort to swallow his resentment or whatever irritated him. The gambling pallor of his face had never been more marked. He went out with Jones, and the others slowly followed.

Fresno approached Allie.

"Hullo, girly! You sure look purtier then in that buckskin outfit," he leered.

Allie got up, ready for flight or defense, anything. Durade had forgotten her.

Fresno saw her glance toward the door.

"He's goin' to the bad," he went on, his big hand indicating the door. "Benton's too hot fer his kind. He'll not git up some fine mornin'. . . . An' you'd better cotton to me! You aint his kin—an' he hates you, an' you hate him. I seen that. I'm no fool. I'm sorta gone on you! I wish I hadn't fetched you back to him!"

"Fresno, I'll tell Durade," replied Allie, forcing her lips to be firm. But if she expected to intimidate him, she was disappointed. Fresno leered wisely.

"You'd better not. Fer I'll kill him, an' then you'll be a sweet little chunk of meat among a lot of wolves!"

He laughed and lurched his huge frame up. He wore a heavy gun and a knife in his belt. Also there protruded the butt of a pistol from the inside of his open vest. Allie felt the heat from his huge body, and she smelled the whisky upon him and sensed the base, faithless animalism of the desperado. Assuredly, if he had any fear, it was not of Durade.

"I'm sorta gone on you myself," repeated Fresno. "An' Durade's a greaser. He's runnin' a crooked game.

All these games are crooked. But Benton wont stand for a polite greaser who talks sweet an' gambles crooked. Mebbe no one's told you what this place Benton is."

"I haven't heard. Tell me," replied Allie. She might learn from anyone.

Fresno appeared at fault for speech.

"Benton's a beehive," he replied presently. "An' when the bees come home with their honey, why, the red ants an' scorpions an' centipedes an' rattlesnakes git busy: I've seen some places in my time, but Benton beats 'em all. . . . Say, I'll sneak you out at nights to see what's goin' on. An' I'll treat you handsome. I'm sorta—"

The entrance of Durade cut short Fresno's further speech.

"What are you saying to her?" demanded Durade, in anger.

"I was jest tellin' her about what a place Benton is," replied Fresno.

"Allie, is that true?" queried Durade sharply.

"Yes," she replied.

"Fresno, I did not like your looks."

"Boss, if you don't like 'em, you know what you can do," rejoined Fresno impudently, and he lounged out of the room.

"Allie, these men are all bad," said Durade. "You must avoid them when my back's turned. I cannot run my place without them—so I am compelled to endure much."

Allie's attendant came in then with her supper, and she went to her room.

THUS began Allie Lee's life as an unwilling and innocent accomplice of Durade in his retrogression from a gambler to a criminal. In California he had played the game diamond-cut-diamond. But he had broken. His hope, spirit, luck, nerve, were gone. The bottle and Benton had magnifying and terrible influence upon his passion for gambling.

The days passed swiftly. Every afternoon Durade introduced a new company to his private den. Few ever came twice. This was sickening, although it had a grain of hope, for if all the men in Benton or out on the road could only pass through Durade's hall, the time would come when she would

The Roaring U. P. Trail

By Zane Grey

meet Neale or Larry. She lived for that. She was constantly on the lookout for a man she could trust with her story. Honest-faced laborers were not wanting in the stream of visitors Durade ushered into her presence, but either they were drunk or obsessed by gambling, or no opportunity afforded to give a hint to one that might bring him back again. Durade did not want any visitors of this kind to return. Many who had been there tried but failed to gain admittance. Durade and his dealers worked deliberately.

These afternoons grew to be hideous for Allie. She had been subjected to every possible attention, annoyance, indignity and insult, except direct violence. She could only shut her eyes and ears and lips. Fresno found many opportunities to approach her, sometimes with Durade there, blind to all but the cards and gold. At such times Allie wished she were sightless and deaf and feelingless. But after she was safely in her room again, she told herself nothing had happened. She was still the same as she had always been. And a sleep obliterated what she had suffered. Every day was one nearer to that fateful and approaching moment. And when that moment did come, what would all this horror amount to? It would fade—be as nothing. She would not let words and eyes harm her. They were not tangible; they had no substance for her. They made her sick with rage and revolt at the moment, but they had no power, no taint, no endurance. They were evil passing winds.

AS Allie saw Durade's retrogression, so she saw the changes in all about him. His winnings were large, and his strange passion for play increased with them. The free

gold that enriched Fresno and Mull and Andy augmented the wildness that claimed them. There were Durade's other helpers: Black, his swarthy doorkeeper; a pallid fellow called Davis, who always glanced behind him; and Grist—a short, lame, bullet-headed, silent man, all of them subtly changed till the change was great. Their usefulness to Durade was not in gambling among themselves, but they would do it. He could not control them. Violence threatened many times to be enacted in the private den; yet it always held off until the second visit of the gambler Jones. With Durade's success had come the craze for bigger stakes, and these could only be played for with other gamblers. So the black-frocked, cold-faced sharps became frequent visitors at Durade's. Jones won on that second visit—a fatal winning for him. Allie saw the giant Fresno suddenly fling himself upon Jones and bear him to the floor. Then Allie fled to her room. But she heard curses—a shot, a groan, Durade's loud voice proclaiming that the gambler had cheated—and then the scraping of a heavy body being dragged out.

This murder horrified Allie; yet it sharpened her senses. She had seen the life of the days. Providence had protected her. Durade had grown rich,—wild, vain, mad to pit himself against the coolest and most skillful gamblers in Benton,—and therefore his end was imminent. Allie lay in the dark, listening to Benton's strange wailing roar, sad yet hideous, and out of what she had seen and heard, and from the mournful message on the night wind, she realized how closely associated were gold and evil and men, and how inevitably they must wear to wildness and to blood and to death.

NEALE and Allie Lee encounter even more stirring adventures in the next installment of this widely and enthusiastically read novel. Be sure to order your BLUE BOOK MAGAZINE early; it will be on sale October 1st.

The Passing Partner

by
Elliott
Flower



WHEN Matthew Breck, of the firm of Glynn, Breck & McKey, picture-frame manufacturers, returned to the office after his long illness, he found that the shop had readjusted itself during his absence and that he seemed to be no longer necessary. Another sat at his desk in his private office and dictated to his stenographer. This other was Arthur Glynn, son of Peter Glynn, the senior partner.

"You were away so long," explained Arthur uneasily, "that Dad thought somebody ought to step in and take charge of things."

"Unnecessary," asserted Breck irritably, for he was still weak and nervous, and it annoyed him to find some one else in his chair. "Miss Hammond could have done everything needful. Miss Hammond knows as much about this business as I do."

"Very likely," agreed Arthur dryly. "Miss Hammond has been very helpful to me in routine matters, but the larger questions arising could not be left to the judgment of a stenographer, and neither Dad nor McKey has any time to give to the business."

"Well, no matter," rejoined Breck. "No harm done, I guess, and I'll be coming back in a few days—just as quick as the doctor will let me. He says I'm not strong enough to take hold yet."

"Better see Dad first," advised Arthur significantly.

Breck did not like either the words or the tone, but he said nothing more then. He was in no condition for a controversy, and he felt that there was no

need of one, anyway. He would resume his old position in a few days, and that would settle everything.

On his way out, he paused a moment at Miss Grace Hammond's desk. Miss Hammond had been his personal stenographer, and her desk had been in a corner of his private office, where he could consult with her freely, but now she was in the main office with the other clerks and stenographers. He did not like that. Miss Hammond was a wonderfully capable and efficient young woman, with an intimate knowledge of the firm's affairs that would make her invaluable to a new manager, and the fact that she was thus apparently banished troubled him.

"How's the business, Miss Hammond?" he asked with a smile.

She looked up at him and shook her head, but what she said was: "Oh, we've been getting along nicely."

He realized that the shake of the head was for him, and the verbal reply for the others in the office, and it confused him.

"Well, I'll be taking hold again in a few days," he said.

Again she shook her head, this time turning her eyes with quick significance toward the door to the private office; but what she said was: "We'll be glad to see you back, Mr. Breck."

He hesitated a moment, as if uncertain what to say or do, and then, with the help of his cane, ambled out to the automobile that was awaiting him. But he was worried and perplexed—worried about himself rather than about the business, although it was the fact that he found the business situation so perplexing that worried him about himself.

"I can't concentrate," he complained to himself querulously as he was being driven home. "It must be the result of my illness, and no doubt the trouble will pass away, but I can't concentrate, and my memory is worse than before—just when I need a clear head, too."

BRECK had reason to be worried by the situation disclosed at the office, and he also had reason to resent it. He had not been told that Arthur Glynn was in charge. As the managing partner and the man upon whose ideas and work the partnership and business were based, he should have been advised of any important change in the office. He could have been consulted at any time during his convalescence, and Peter Glynn should have come to see him, but Peter Glynn had done no more than telephone an occasional perfunctory inquiry as to his condition. Neither had McKey. Both of them had allowed him to come back, unwarned, to find another man sitting at his desk; and the other man, Glynn's son, had had the effrontery to tell him to "see Dad" when he spoke of resuming his place in the office. It was incomprehensible. Something was wrong, but his bewildered brain refused to grapple with the problem.

Except for the money put in by the others, Breck had been the whole firm from the day it was organized. The adjustable picture-frame, upon which the business was based, was his idea, and it was he who had interested Glynn and McKey in it when he found that he lacked sufficient money to handle it alone. The proposition looked good to them, and they had idle money to put into it, but no time to give to it; so it was finally arranged that the idea was to count for one-sixth of the capital, that Breck was to put in an additional one-sixth in cash, taking a third interest in

the firm, and that each of the others was to take a third, paying cash for it. In addition, Breck was to manage the business on a salary, giving his entire time to it.

Glynn, the most aggressive and prominent of the three, insisted upon having precedence in the firm name, and this was reluctantly conceded by Breck, who thought himself entitled to it but did not deem it wise to urge his claim too strongly. McKey did not care where his name appeared on the letterheads, so long as he got his share of the profits.

A wood-working plant, on the verge of bankruptcy, had been acquired and remodeled to meet the requirements of the new business, and a strong advertising campaign had given the new concern so good a start that it had made money from the beginning. The profit, although small at first, had increased slowly during the five years of the firm's existence, and the outlook for the future was so good that there already was talk of a larger plant.

All this had been done under the personal management of Breck, with the assistance of Grace Hammond. For Miss Hammond, as already mentioned, was very much more than a mere stenographer. If given her due, she would have had the title of Assistant Manager, at least. Breck had organized shop and office so that they almost ran themselves, but for the most part, Miss Hammond supplied what direction was necessary to keep them running smoothly. She had to, for it had become apparent to her during the last year that Breck was losing his grip. Others in the office suspected something of the sort, but she alone *knew*. Breck's mind was slipping. His memory was faulty, and little things excited and confused him. Unconsciously he more and more relied upon her, not only to fill the gaps in his memory but also to suggest the solution of any business problem that arose.

She was loyal, was Grace Hammond, and Breck himself did not realize how dependent he was upon her. He knew that she was very helpful to him, and he had no doubt that in an emergency she could run the business alone for a time; but what he did not know was

that she actually was running the business; although through him, when illness took him from his desk for three months. The decisions were hers; he merely voiced them.

"SOMETHING'S wrong at the office," Breck told his wife fretfully when he returned home. "I don't know what it is, but something's wrong. Miss Hammond tried to tell me, but I couldn't seem to understand. It just confused me."

"No wonder," soothed Mrs. Breck. "You shouldn't be even thinking of business for at least another month."

"I can't concentrate," complained Breck. "I can't focus my thoughts on anything; they ramble."

Mrs. Breck told him that was the most natural thing in the world after such an illness, and no doubt she believed it. She had noticed earlier that his memory was not good and that trivial things confused and irritated him, but she had attached no importance to this. He had overworked himself, she reasoned then, and would be all right after a rest; but he had refused to take the rest, and the illness that followed had naturally made matters worse. However, she reasoned now, he would be all right as soon as he regained his strength. Mrs. Breck was not a woman to give more than passing attention to anything outside of her housekeeping problems, and she had no knowledge at all of either business or mental disorders.

"Young Arthur's at my desk," Breck went on, "and he told me to see his father when I spoke of coming back. Then Miss Hammond tried to signal me something, but I couldn't get it—my thoughts scattered. But why should I see Peter about taking my own chair at my own desk in my own office? Why shouldn't he see me? And why should Arthur—"

"That's it!" exclaimed Mrs. Breck indignantly. "Why shouldn't he see you? You're the one that's been sick, and he hasn't been here once in all that time. Don't you go near him, Matthew!"

"I don't mean to!" declared Breck with a rather feeble effort at determination. "He can come to see me. I shall

go back to my desk when I'm strong enough, and he can come to me. That's all there is to that!"

Mrs. Breck approved of this determination, but she urged her husband to dismiss the whole subject from his mind until the doctor permitted him to return to his desk. Then, as soon as he had things in satisfactory shape, he must take a vacation to recuperate.

But Breck could not thus dismiss the vexing problem. However advisable,—and the doctor also urged it,—Breck could not do it. He worried about the business situation, fretfully seeking to reason out what was wrong with it, and then worried about himself because he could reach no satisfactory conclusion. After two days of this, he called a taxi, disregarding the doctor's orders and his wife's protests and went to the office again. He could at least settle one phase of the problem, he reasoned.

HE found Arthur Glynn still in possession of the private office, and Arthur seemed to have no thought of vacating. He was easier and more confident than in the previous interview.

"I'm ready to take hold again," announced Breck. "I'll have to go a bit slow at first, but—"

"Have you seen Dad?" interrupted Arthur.

"No," replied Breck. "Why should I?"

"Well, you'd better see him," advised Arthur. "He has something to say to you."

"If Peter has anything to say to me," returned Breck, holding tight to the idea that had brought him there, "let him come to me and say it. I don't know why I should go to him."

"Why, that's all right, too," agreed Arthur. "Perhaps this is the best place to say it. I'll telephone him."

He got his father on the wire and informed him of Breck's presence at the office.

"He'll be over as soon as he can get hold of McKey," he reported. "Better take a chair," he added with a grin.

Asked to have a chair in his own office!

There was something ridiculous about that, but it also added to his confusion

of ideas, and he was sorry now that he had come. He should have waited until he was stronger, for it was evident from Arthur's tone and manner that he faced some sort of unfriendly encounter with Peter, and he was in no condition for that.

Peter and McKey arrived soon. Peter was a big, brusque, brutal man—that is, he was big always, brusque usually, and brutal whenever occasion required. None but a brutal man could have failed to be touched by the evident helplessness of Breck, and even Peter found it necessary to make some excuse for what he was doing. McKey, a little man, was merely a passive participant, tacitly sanctioning Peter's course by his presence, but aside from that doing no more than to offer his hand to Breck much as he might have offered it to the chief mourner at a funeral. Peter's greeting was a curt nod.

"I'm sorry you're forcing this on us at this time, Breck," said Peter, while his son grinned exultingly. "I should have preferred to wait until you were stronger and better able to stand the shock, but you would not have it so."

"Shock?" repeated Breck. "What shock? Why should there be any shock? I've merely come back to my desk—"

"It isn't your desk any more," asserted Peter bluntly.

"Isn't my desk!"

BRECK looked at Peter in bewilderment. So this was the trouble he couldn't understand! No wonder! Even now that it was put in plain words, it was incomprehensible. How could the manager's desk belong to anyone else?

"You're in no condition to handle the business," Peter continued, "and you haven't been in shape to do it for some time; so McKey and I have put Arthur in as manager."

Breck seemed to shrivel up in his chair. This was verification of what he himself had feared—that his mind was slipping. A blow in the face would have disturbed him less.

"We had to do it," Peter went on. "Trouble developed, and the concern simply had to have a head."

"There was no trouble when I left!"

flared Breck, tortured into a show of spirit.

"Labor trouble," explained Peter.

"My men were contented," returned Breck.

"No doubt," rejoined Peter dryly. "You made the trouble by encouraging their rapacity, and Arthur had to check it. He found a very bad state of affairs here. The trouble is not over yet."

Breck subsided, more bewildered than ever. "I can't understand it," he muttered. "Everything was all right when I left."

"You can't understand anything," asserted Peter. "That's how things got in such shape."

Breck, his confidence in himself utterly gone, wondered if this could be true.

"We're paying Arthur twenty thousand a year to put the business on a proper basis," explained Peter, thus adding another blow, "and then we mean to spread out."

"Twenty thousand!" cried Breck. "Why, I only drew five thousand. Twenty thousand will wipe out most of the profit."

"Different men are worth different prices," remarked Peter, "and we expect to eat up all the profit for a time in putting the business on a basis to pay more later. Of course, if this policy does not appeal to you," he added significantly, "there's nothing to prevent you from selling your interest."

"To whom?" asked Breck.

"Why, if you want to get out," responded Peter indifferently, "I might take it for Arthur—at a reasonable price."

AND Peter got it, of course, at something less than half its value on the basis of the profit the firm was then making. He argued, however, that the firm, under its new policy, would derive no profit at all from the business for some time to come, and of course there was a possibility that the new policy would not work out satisfactorily. Breck did not think it would, especially with an inexperienced youth and a twenty-thousand-dollar salary saddled on it, and labor trouble in the background. As for the price, it seemed the best he could

get, for Peter thoughtfully explained that he would have to advise any prospective purchaser of the new policy and its immediate effect. So Breck sold his third interest. The deeper he went into the matter, the more confused he became, and there really seemed nothing else to do.

He paused at Miss Hammond's desk as he was leaving.

"I'm out," he told her wearily.

She nodded understandingly. "But perhaps it's just as well," she encouraged.

"No," he said, "it isn't. You don't know what it means to me. I *made* this business, and now I'm out."

"Still, it may be better so," she insisted.

He shook his head, shuffled weakly out to his taxi, went home, fainted on the doorstep, was put to bed, and a hurry-call was sent in for the doctor.

Also, but through different channels and for a different purpose, a hurry-call went to his son. Miss Hammond sent that. Miss Hammond did not know of Breck's relapse, but she did know more of what happened in the private office than he did, and the meaning of it was very much clearer to her. Her desk was nearest to the door of the private office, and a door ajar may disclose much to one with an intimate knowledge of office affairs, especially when it is supplemented by the letters she takes from dictation. Miss Hammond had known in a general way what was going to happen before it happened, but she had not expected action to be so quick or so drastic. The brutality of the method added to the indignation aroused by the injustice of the purpose and, to her mind, relieved her of any obligation of office loyalty. Her feeling of loyalty, now strengthened by sympathy, was to her former chief, anyway, and it was only through his son that she could help him.

HOWARD BRECK was holding a salaried position in Toledo—a position that paid little except in promise for the future. She had met him two years before, when he was paying his parents a vacation visit, and she had liked him. He was not a brilliant man, but there

was a sturdiness about him that inspired one with confidence.

In this case, Howard Breck, securing a leave of absence, responded promptly to the suggestion that his presence was needed to straighten out his father's business affairs. He had known of his father's illness, of course, but while severe and protracted, the doctor had not considered it serious enough to call him from his work, and he had known nothing of the mental trouble. So the summons was a surprise; and even more surprising and disquieting was Miss Hammond's very urgent request that he see her before seeing anyone else.

However, she made the situation quickly clear to him when he called upon her at her home, and he was deeply impressed by her loyalty to his father. Also he was deeply impressed by her clear-headed business reasoning.

His father was, and had been, failing mentally, she told him frankly, and his removal as manager was justified. The way it was done was so inexcusably brutal that it stirred her to wrath, and it was not unlikely that the shock of it would still further unsettle his mind; but as a business matter, the act itself was defensible.

"But the business prospered under his management," argued Howard.

She acknowledged that it had. "But," she explained with modest reluctance, "he didn't manage as much as he thought he did."

Howard gave her a sharp glance, and immediately dismissed the suspicion that had flashed to his mind. He could not doubt her sincerity. "I see," he mused. "Well, what else?"

"They were justified in deposing him as manager," she repeated, "but they were not justified in cheating him out of his interest in the firm."

"What!" cried Howard. "I hadn't heard of that!"

"They gave him, I believe, about forty per cent of the value of his third interest," she said, "and young Glynn has been gloating over it ever since. I happen to know, because he dictates his letters to me, and he simply had to tell some of his friends how successful he had been in his clash with a back-number."

"But how did they do it?" demanded Howard.

SHE explained at some length the arguments used.

"And all that," she added, "was so low and mean and dishonest that it simply enraged me. I knew beforehand that they meant to get your father out, and I tried to warn him; but they'd have got him another time if they hadn't this time, and later I decided that we could do better with him out than we could with him in. That's what I meant when I told him that perhaps it was just as well that he had sold."

"I don't see why," objected Howard.

"That's because you don't know anything about the inside of this business," she replied; "and neither does Arthur Glynn."

"Oh!" murmured Howard. "Now I begin to get you."

"Arthur," she went on, "is even more helpless than your father, because he knows less and thinks he knows more, and I'm afraid I'm not going to be able to help him very much."

"Now I *do* get you!" cried Howard.

"Not yet," returned Miss Hammond. "There are other points to be considered, and you can't stand behind me, as you will have to do, until you fully grasp the situation. First, there never was any intention of giving Arthur a twenty-thousand-dollar salary. That was merely to discourage your father. If it had failed in that, Arthur might have been allowed to draw it, to reduce the profit, but fifteen thousand of it would have gone to his father and McKey. That would have given them fifteen thousand clear before there was anything for your father. Do you get the idea?"

"A barefaced swindle!" exclaimed Howard.

"If you could prove it!" she reminded him. "With your father in, they simply use this salary to cover the profit; with your father out, they simply change their mind about the salary, as they have a right to do, and the fifteen thousand goes openly into the profit-account. Either way, they get the money."

"How about the business-expansion plans?" asked Howard. "Is that the same story?"

"Very much the same," she replied. "It was intended to discourage your father, as it did; but with him out, they can drop the idea and continue along more conservative lines."

"I presume the labor-trouble is a bluff too," he remarked gloomily.

"No, that's real," she told him, "but it wouldn't be real under your father's management."

"That is," he suggested, "under your management."

She shook her head. "So far as the men were concerned," she explained, "I simply continued his policy. He was fair with the men, and they liked him. Put him back at his old desk, and there will be no trouble; but Arthur Glynn, if left to himself, will have a strike on his hands mighty soon."

"And he's being left to himself?" smiled Howard.

"Well, he hasn't asked for any advice, and I haven't volunteered any," she responded, returning his smile. "Possibly I might be able to tell him some things about the labor situation that he doesn't know, but he has such abiding confidence in himself that one hesitates. I suspect, however, that Arthur is going to be such a costly experiment that they will be crazy to reduce the cost."

HOWARD nodded soberly. "I think I see what you're driving at," he said, "but it's a pretty big job under the complicated conditions, and I'm not sure it can be put through. For my part, I'll go the limit—"

"Then that's all right!" she broke in cheerfully. "Now—"

"I'll go the limit," he repeated, "but I don't see why you should become involved in something that may be hurtful to you in a business way. I'm thankful for the information—"

"Then that's all right!" she said again, ignoring the interruption. "With you behind me—"

"But I tell you," he insisted, "I must do this myself."

"You!" she bantered, the raillery softened by a smile. "Why, you don't even know where to begin, and there are some points yet to be worked out. Besides, I want to do this for my own satisfaction."

Her impulsiveness was too much for his slower wit, and he surrendered. After all, she was the only one with any sort of comprehensive grasp of the situation.

"But you'll be needed," she assured him, "badly needed. You may have to raise quite a bit of money in a hurry. How much do you suppose you can borrow on your father's third?"

"But Father hasn't any third," he objected.

"I know," she returned, "but his partnership gives him a credit that he lacks without it, and you must arrange with him for the use of that credit."

Howard spoke rather impatiently then. "I'll go as far as you like at my own risk," he said, "but I'll not involve my father in anything I do not fully understand."

"Of course not," she agreed. "You will simply arrange so that you can act promptly when you do understand. It will be all up to you, Mr. Breck, when the time comes, but you'll have to let me choose the time."

With a gesture of resignation, he again surrendered. He would go with her up to the point of involving his father, and then decide.

She was really an amazing young woman—just about his own age, but mentally and physically nimbler, and he admired that. On the other hand, he, while slow, had the persistence to go through with anything he started, and she admired that. For what she was undertaking now, his steadying influence was what she needed; for what lay ahead of him, her quickening influence was what he needed.

"No doubt you know best," he conceded, "but I'd rather face the Glynnns, father and son, and have it out with them."

"Rather stupid, don't you think, to face them without weapons?" she returned. "I mean to arm you first."

That not only satisfied him, but the idea pleased him, and he made the preparations that she had suggested.

HE had no trouble in arranging matters with his father. The elder Breck was again confined to his bed, worrying more than ever, and he agreed

to his son's proposition before it was fairly made.

"I'm no good any more," he said wearily. "You talk it over with your mother, and I'll do anything you say."

"But I want to explain the purpose," insisted Howard. "We mean to go after Glynn and McKey—"

"Who's 'we'?" asked Matthew Breck.

"Why—er—Miss Hammond and I," replied Howard.

"Oh!" murmured Matthew. "You've been talking to her, have you?"

"Yes."

"Well," said Matthew, after pondering this a moment, "before my brain gets to drifting again, I'd like to tell you something."

"Yes?"—inquiringly.

"You tie up to Miss Hammond, and you wont make any very bad mistake. She knows what she's doing all the time."

"She's a very capable young woman," agreed Howard.

"If that's all you see in her," grumbled Matthew, "I'll match my brain against yours any time, and beat you out on eyesight, too. However, that isn't business, and we— What were we talking about, Howard?" The young man told him, and he nodded. "Go ahead!" he instructed; "and I'll help you any way I can—you and Miss Hammond. I've a lot of confidence in Miss Hammond."

Howard reported back to Miss Hammond the following day at luncheon, that being his first opportunity to see her again outside the office. But he did not report all that his father had said. He was afraid that the suggestion that he "tie up" to her might be misconstrued, to the confusion of a purely business proposition. He did tell her, however, that his father had great confidence in her, and she seemed to find that quite satisfying.

"It comes down to this," he explained: "Mother knows and cares nothing about the business, and leaves everything to me, while Father knows and cares a great deal about the business, and leaves everything to you. Between us, we can do about as we please, and I find that several of Father's friends still think well enough of the business to let us

have what money we may need on the third interest in it that we haven't got, any time we get it. I hope that's clear to you?"

"Perfectly," she assured him with a smile.

"Well, it isn't very clear to me," he confessed, "and if you've been putting problems like that up to Father, I don't blame him for getting confused. Anyhow, that's as far as I can go blindfold."

"That's as far as you'll have to go blindfold," she returned. "We have only to await the opportune moment now."

"I can't wait long," he objected. "There's my job in Toledo."

"Why not give it up?" she suggested.

THE meaning of that was clear, and it startled him. "Are you planning to put me in Father's former place?"

"The men are very restless," she remarked. "I suspect a new manager is going to be needed."

"But not me!" he cried. "That's preposterous!"

"I thought you might feel that way about it, if you knew too much too soon," she commented, "but—well, Arthur has been tactless and arrogant, and your father's son stands well with the men, because he is your father's son."

"That's your work," he charged.

"They have somehow got the idea," she pursued, "that you would continue your father's policies, and I suspect that somebody who will do that will be needed."

"That would be you," he asserted.

"Me!" she scoffed. "Why, I'm only a stenographer."

"And the rest of us are puppets!" he retorted; and then another point claimed his attention. "Why all the extra money?" he asked. "It must be almost time to explain that."

"Almost," she agreed. "It's a precaution that may not be needed, but we can't be sure of that until we see what the men do."

"You're treating me like a child," he complained.

"Wait," she cautioned, "and you'll see that I'm simply fashioning weapons for your use."

He waited, with growing impatience, a week—two weeks—and then he resigned his Toledo job. He had to do that or return. But he insisted, before he resigned, that she disclose the nature of the weapons she was fashioning for him, and she had progressed so far with them then that she was willing. After that, she was the impatient and he the cautious one.

"Fact is," she confessed, "I'd have gone ahead regardless, if I hadn't found in you a sort of subconscious restraint; and now that the responsibility is yours, I'm in a hurry."

"Now that the responsibility is mine," he returned, "I'm not."

AGAIN two weeks passed—irksome weeks, in one way, and yet pleasurable in another. Waiting for an uncertain something to happen was decidedly irksome, but it gave young Breck excuse and opportunity to see Miss Hammond daily, and there was at least nothing irksome about that. Also it gave him much time to spend with his father, who was improving physically, if not mentally, and who derived much comfort from his presence and the feeling that his affairs were in competent hands.

Until the last one, Miss Hammond's reports during this time were all alike: the exasperation of the men over irritating shop-rules and a changing wage-system was steadily increasing. The last one, however, told him that the time for action had arrived: the men had reached the limit of their patience, and a committee had been appointed to wait upon Peter Glynn the following day. They had refused to treat with Arthur Glynn. Peter, scenting trouble when he heard of this, had offered to meet them in the shop at ten o'clock the next morning, and he would undoubtedly bring McKey with him.

"It wont be a long session," she predicted, "but it will be fairly startling, I think. If you drop in about an hour later, you'll be pretty sure to find Glynn and McKey in Arthur's office talking it over, and then you can do the rest."

"I'll be there," he promised.

It was not a long session, and it was fairly startling. Peter brought McKey

with him; and Arthur, of course, was also present when they met the men in the shop. McKey, as usual, remained in the background, saying nothing. He was never a loquacious man, but it was a wise thing to listen when he did speak. Arthur found the situation too amazing for words, and Peter himself was seriously perturbed.

The men boldly demanded a new manager; and men do not make that sort of demand lightly: they must win when they do make it, or conditions will be more intolerable than before. In this case, they recited their grievances, but made it clear that the mere redress of these would not satisfy them: the man responsible must go. They had complained to him before, and it had merely made matters worse.

Peter did not bluster now; it was no time to bluster. He gave his son a disgusted look and then asked for time to consider the matter.

The men agreed to this, but they insisted that they must have his decision by five o'clock that afternoon, so that they could know before going home whether they would be coming back the next morning, and Peter had to agree to that. Then he and his son and McKey retired to Arthur's office for a conference.

PETER made no effort to conceal his disgust. "Been nagging the men, have you?" he snarled.

"Things were too lax under Breck," complained Arthur sullenly. "I had to establish and maintain discipline, and the new wage-system would have saved quite a bit of money, too."

"I am afraid," put in McKey, speaking for the first time, "that Arthur will have to go."

But Peter was not ready to concede that. However disappointed and disgusted he might be, he did not want his son forced out.

He was expressing his views on this point when an office-boy brought word that Mr. Howard Breck wished to see them.

"Tell him we're busy," instructed Arthur, glad to find some way that he could exercise his authority without getting into trouble.

Peter impatiently backed Arthur's decision; they had no time to bother with a Breck just then; but McKey demurred. McKey thought it might be well for them to know what Matthew Breck's son wanted, and Peter's impatience did not blind him to the wisdom of that. So Howard was admitted.

Arthur, feeling that he should take the lead in his own office, opened with a curt demand to know what Howard wanted, to which Howard retorted, with equal curtness, that he had come to reclaim his father's interest in the firm.

The Glynn's, father and son, laughed then, but McKey was as impassive as usual. Miss Hammond, her desk close to the door that Howard had purposely left ajar, listened while she pretended to correct some typewritten sheets. Eavesdropping was not a habit with Miss Hammond, but in this matter she would have put her ear to a keyhole, if necessary.

"On what terms and on what grounds?" asked Peter.

"On the same terms that you gave when you took the interest from him," replied Howard, "and on the ground that you deliberately tricked him in that transaction."

"Better be careful what you say!" cautioned Peter menacingly.

"I'm saying nothing that I can't back up," rejoined Howard. Then he recounted briefly the arguments used to induce his father to sell. "Arthur never has drawn that salary," he concluded, "and you never have and never will spread out in a way to jeopardize or even lessen the immediate profit. The whole transaction was based on lies told a sick man."

"We simply changed our minds and plans, as we had a right to do," argued Arthur. "There's no justification for any such inference as you draw, and we'll make you mighty sick—"

"Shut up, Arthur!" ordered Peter, for he saw deeper into the matter than his son.

"It looks bad, very bad," pursued Howard, "in dealing with a man in Father's condition."

"I haven't heard of any conservator being appointed," remarked Peter dryly.

"Not yet," returned Howard.

McKEY gave Howard a quick, searching glance, but made no comment.

"Knowing his physical and mental condition," pursued Howard, "you deliberately took advantage of it."

"That," declared Peter, "is a lie!"

Howard shrugged his shoulders indifferently at this charge. "Ask your son," he advised. "In letters to three different people he not only admitted it but gloated over it. I happen to have the names and addresses of the three."

"I am afraid," remarked McKey for the second time, "that Arthur will have to go." And now Peter raised no objection. "That disposes of the strike," added McKey. "What next?"

"The cancellation of my father's sale of his interest in the business," replied Howard.

"Nothing doing!" blustered Peter, his disgust with his son and the humiliation of one defeat making him the more determined to concede nothing else. "We don't mean to be blackmailed on the fool letters of a boy."

"You'd have a lovely time explaining them in court," suggested Howard. "But let that pass, for the moment. You may have forgotten that you deposed my father as manager *on the ground that he was mentally incompetent* the very day that you got him to sell you his interest in the business for less than half its value. It took a little time to get satisfactory legal proof of your reason for deposing him, but we got it, and aside from the many corroborating and unsavory details mentioned—"

"I am afraid," put in McKey in his quiet way, "that Arthur will have to give up his interest in the firm. It seems rather necessary."

"And while we're buying," added Howard, "we'd like to buy enough more to give us control—"

"No!" thundered Peter.

"Think it over," advised Howard. "We're willing to pay a fair price for what we need, but experience has taught us that we really must have control. I don't think anybody would blame us for insisting—if the facts were disclosed as a result of any squabble over the question. Do you?"

"You haven't the money to buy it!" asserted Peter.

"We have what you paid Father for his interest to redeem that interest," explained Howard pleasantly, "and that will give us what else we need."

"By what authority are you acting?" demanded Peter. "Matthew Breck can't be sane for you and crazy for us."

"If our authority is questioned," replied Howard, "we'll have a conservator appointed, and as matters stand, a conscientious conservator could stir up an awful rumpus—with the facts we've uncovered. Think it over!"

PETER did think it over, to such purpose that he had no immediate response to make. It was McKey who spoke first.

"Meanwhile," suggested McKey, "we are in control and can name the new manager."

Both Peter and Howard were instantly alert. Each saw some purpose in this, but neither could quite grasp its significance. Howard frowned, and Peter smiled.

"I would suggest to my associate in this little affair," pursued McKey, "that we give the position to Miss Grace Hammond."

Peter, puzzled, nevertheless nodded his acquiescence, taking it for granted that McKey had some good reason for the suggestion. Howard, however, was completely dumfounded. Never a quick man at readjusting himself to new conditions, he found the situation eluding him for a moment. The whole plan was upset. The purpose had been to put him in as the representative of his father, but this blocked it. It was confusing in its unexpectedness—a possibility so far unconsidered; and as a matter of sheer gratitude he could not oppose her appointment.

"Dropped a brick in the works, didn't it?" remarked McKey with a smile.

"Why, yes," confessed Howard, "you did rather mess things up. What's the idea?"

"I was just wondering," replied McKey, "and I'm beginning to find out."

"Well," reflected Howard, who had now managed to pull himself together, "the idea is good, anyhow. I favor it, and I am sure it will meet Father's approval. She's been running the business

for a year anyway, and she knows more about it—”

“I thought so,” murmured McKey.

“Thought what?” demanded Peter. “Where’s all this taking us?”

Howard and McKey ignored him. “If you’re in earnest,” said Howard, his bewilderment giving place to enthusiasm, “we’ll arrange the matter right now. There couldn’t be a better manager for the business.”

“I thought so,” repeated McKey, nodding his head.

Miss Hammond, excited and indignant, flashed into the room before he could say more.

“I wont be manager!” cried Miss Hammond. “I don’t want to be manager! Do you think I’m going to be a business woman all my life? Well, I guess not. And you ought to be ashamed of yourself, Howard Breck, to spoil everything at the last moment! Can’t you see he’s tricking you into letting control remain where it is? I wont have it!”

“I thought so,” murmured McKey again.

“Thought what?” demanded Peter.

“With the dangerously false start we made, this combination is too strong for us,” explained McKey. “I was just wondering whether it was all brain or part heart.” Miss Hammond became confused and troubled then, especially when she encountered Howard’s eyes. “No one to be bought off here,” concluded McKey. “We’ll have to give them what they want, Glynn.”

“I wont!” declared Peter angrily.

“In that case,” returned McKey, “it seems to me the part of wisdom to drop out entirely. I have no stomach for trouble as matters stand. I don’t like to be convicted on my own evidence. The game never appealed to me, anyhow. I can see that it looked to you like a good chance to do something nice for Arthur, with a neat little profit for yourself, at somebody else’s expense, and I went along with you; but I was never keen for it, and this looks like the time to duck. . . . Breck, you can have my interest, all or none, for just what I put into the business.”

“I’ll take it all,” responded Howard promptly.

“And mine,” offered Peter in haste as he realized the hopelessness of his position.

Howard shook his head. “Your interest isn’t a necessity to us now,” he explained, “and I couldn’t pay so much for it—not nearly so much.”

MATTHEW BRECK was still confined to the house, but not to his bed, and Howard insisted that Miss Hammond accompany him when he went to make his report.

“It isn’t very clear to me,” complained Matthew, after listening to his son’s explanation, “but somehow or other you’ve got the whole business. Is that it?”

“Grace got it,” replied Howard, “but it seems to be yours and mine—if I can swing the rest of the deal. We’re getting more than we planned, you know, and it takes more ready cash.”

“One thing at a time,” warned Matthew, “or you’ll be getting me mixed up. Did I hear you calling her ‘Grace’?”

“Why—er—yes.”

“Well,” mused Matthew, “I guess Grace and the business is a combination that’s good for all you need with the men I can send you to. We can fix that up; and then— There goes my mind— wool-gathering again. I had something else to tell you, too.” He rapped his head with his knuckles impatiently, and it seemed to bring results. “Oh, yes!” he exclaimed. “Yes, of course! You ought to be awfully sure of Grace.”

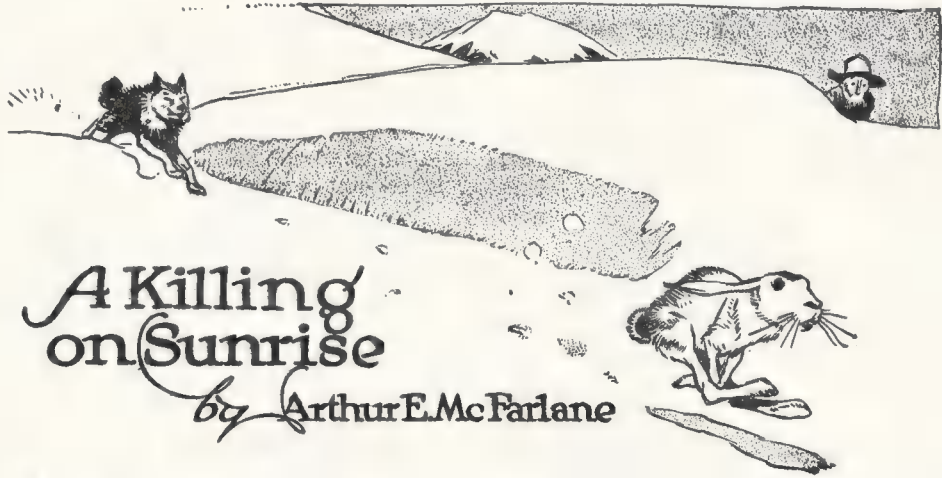
Howard turned to her with a whimsical smile, and their eyes met in an exchange of something deeper and more momentous than smiles. It was a long moment before he turned again to his father.

“Awfully sure of Grace,” repeated Matthew.

Howard was whimsical again now. “Everybody seems to feel that way about it,” he remarked, finding verification of what her eyes had told him in the fact that they now avoided his eyes, “but marriage—”

“Why, yes,” interrupted Matthew; “yes, that will do very nicely.”

And then— But why intrude? Even Matthew had the sense to amble away to another room.



"THAT ould pot-hole!" he said, and waved it behind him with contempt. "That was nawthin', nawthin'. Ye might say I was only thryin' things out there, for cur'osity, wid me pick. An' I might av gone clane through to Mesa, an' niver got a color."

Where I keep store a "color," whether in the assay-office or in the pan, means gold.

He put back his lank brush of gray-red hair, and with his good eye he gleamed at me mysteriously and confidentially. "I'll just go down wid ye inty the powther-room," he said, "where we can talk alone."

And then I knew for certain that old Jimmy, otherwise Mr. James Ignatius McGeary, had found one more bonanza. In the five years I had been in Bullion he had found twelve at least, which took no count of all he must have discovered in his beginnings, in Australia and the Transvaal.

My powder-room is at the end of a tunnel off the back of the basement; and no one could possibly have heard us. But as always he told the story in a voice lowered confidentially to a hoarse whisper.

"Firrst, an' be chancet, I noticed the float. Thin, tracin' it back up the slope, begobs, I had the outcroppin'! An' in another minute, wid one cast av me eye, I could see the dip an' inclination av the intire ledge!"

It was a story I knew by heart. And to get away from it, I told him that I'd

heard the Crothers people were taking it out rich over on the Horned Toad.

"Sure!" he said with another wave of his hand. "Sure! An' wasn't it me that tould thim to thry it there? But ye might say that I had to *make* thim!"

But very soon he had gone back to his own new Comstock and was giving me further details. His present strike had undoubtedly one advantage: it was up on Mount Sunrise itself, above Indian Ravine, not three miles back of town. He would be able to come in, whenever necessary, and by a week's work with the Company, make what money he needed to carry himself along.

But he was not admitting any such prospect himself.

"For the firrst months, av coorse," he explained, "I'll do on'y general divil-opmint worrk. I'll take out an' mill no more than I nade for the winter, an' to give me a bit av a run down to Los Angeles. I've a sither there, an' some little nayces—grrand little gurrls! There's wan, she writes me, can play on the piano so you couldn't belave it!"

I had also heard before of that visit to Los Angeles. For more than five years he had been going to make it. But when you have the instincts of a real uncle, you don't make such visits till you can go with dignity and bearing lavish gifts.

"Well, I'll annyways be able to take thim a few things for the Christmas," he ended. "I'd have gone long since, but I've niver had the time. I've sane the day, too, whin I hadn't the money!"

If he ever had had it, he had probably

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given the most of it away next day to some one who seemed to want it more.

But he had his powder now. And I followed him up the cellar-stairs to the back door and his borrowed cayuse. The bony old wreck still carried the ancient express-sack and the two big rusty milk-cans that served him as saddlebags. Milk-cans may be ungainly, but with their lids on they are at any rate absolutely waterproof. And when he had headed for his new El Dorado, I went back to my next customers.

THEY were the Miller boys, and Tilly Macey and Wilson Adamson, some of our sheep-men.

When we look uphill, and try to count the prospect-holes, with their apron dumps of grayish-yellow andesite, we say that ours is a mining town. But when we look down and see the thirty miles of drained tule bottoms of Cañon Valley, we have to acknowledge that a good part of our real money comes from wool.

This year, though, there would be less of it. For, during the last month, the Valley had had a "killer."

A "killer"—and thank heaven, they are rare—is a coyote that has developed a mania for running sheep to death. Ordinarily, of course, the coyote is simply a sorry, scavenging yellow dog, and it must have been only out of fool compliment that he was ever grouped among the wolves. But when, in a fool-country, a big dog coyote goes crazy-horse in a way that leads him to destroy sometimes a quarter of a flock in a single night, that's different again. And the killer does most of his killing, as herders put it, "by just plain scarin' them to death." It's in the nature of a sheep to be pretty nearly the timidest animal on earth. Any kind of bad fright will knock him right out. The killer would seem to know that. And he goes after those big, wholesale results that you can get only by a study of psychology.

He doesn't make any stupid, tooth-and-fang attack upon the flock. He *surrounds* it. Choosing a thick night, he slips down on it, gives it a long flash of his phosphorescent green eyes and begins to gallop a swift, silent circle around it. Whenever he meets a sheep

off by itself, one snap of the killer's is enough to drive it panting and shaking to burrow for shelter in the main bunch. But he doesn't follow it. He keeps on around. And when at first the cry of "Wolf!" was coming only from the north side, presently it is coming from the east and west and south as well. That one killer, making that quiet, diabolical round-up in the black of the night, has become ten, twenty, any number. He is in front, behind, everywhere. And he is putting as much pure, heart-choking terror into his victims as if he were a whole pack of great gray timberwolves. In fact, soon enough, the sheep begin to go crazy-horse in *their* own way.

They make just the same sort of blind, stampeding panic-rushes that a mob of humans do in a theater-fire. Only, instead of trying to get away to anywhere, they gasp and struggle and fight, so far as a sheep can fight, for those sheltered center places.

It is there, too, right in the center of the flock, that the first deaths take place. As the killer makes his second and third rounds, and the panic increases and the pressure doubles, some of the weak sisters will get their heads down. And when they do, the odds are all against their ever getting them up again. They suffocate, or they go down altogether and are trampled to death. But such deaths are generally the small end of the casualty list. To say it again, for the most part the killer does his killing "by scarin' them to death."

FIGHT as they may for the inside places, a certain number of sheep must always be left on the outside, when the killer gets in his work. Once the flock has jammed itself together solidly enough, they can't get even a turn in cover. And then those outside sheep begin to go crazy-horse in *their* way. Feeling the killer always at their heels, they start a desperate, never-ending race round and round and round the outskirts of the flock. They make no sound, any more than does the killer. They can't—they're too sick—and he knows too much. But in time *they* begin to go down.

Some of them die right then and

there. They may, but the killer is not interested in them. It is not food he is after, but a night of solid enjoyment. And he simply lets them lie, draws in a little closer, gives the rest of the flock another green glint of his eyes and sets the pace still harder. Any coyote runs as easily as a wind-blown tumbleweed. And if he wants, he can keep it up for a week. But in general half a night will be enough for the killer, or even two or three hours. And when, from cool, sheer devilry, he has dropped sheep enough to feed him for a month, in the end he may slip away at dawn without picking up so much as a lamb.

That was the sort of killer ours was.

"That's right," Norbert Miller told me again, "that's gol-danged right! When he ran mine, he didn't touch a thing. And afterwards, by gee, we found where he'd killed and et most of a young jack!"

A "jack" is a jack-rabbit.

"Sure! The son of a gun!" said Tilly Macey. "An' if he's crazy-horse, he's wise enough, at that, to keep you from ever gettin' any real chance at him!"

THAT was true, too. That killer wasn't taking any chances. And a week later he was able to make another killing on the Macey range.

Didn't those sheep-men watch? Of course they watched. But there were only so many of them. They couldn't watch every flock every night. They had to sleep occasionally. And always, after the lapse of a week or so, the killer would find a flock that wasn't being guarded.

He'd been seen several times, and the morning after the second Macey slaughter Harry Adamson had managed to get a shot at him with his rifle. But sheep-men can't shoot, as a rule, and the best Harry had been able to do was "crease" him across the crupper, and bring back some wisps of singed hair as proof. But at the same time he had been able to get a good close-up, daylight look at him. He was a lot bigger, Harry said, than an average coyote. He was longer-bodied, heavier-furred and more brindled. In fact, you could easily take him for a wolf.

Whatever you might take him *for*, there didn't seem to be anything you could take him *with*. He was as wise to every sort of trap as a wolverene. He wouldn't go near dead-falls or poison. And there were no dogs in the Valley capable of following him by nose. They say that in the prairie country a man on a good pony—or anyway, two men on ponies—can run down a coyote and rope him. But you can't get a coyote that way in bottoms that are surrounded on all sides by slopes thick with sagebrush and rock and jack-pine. And three days after he had been creased, he was back again, having another fine, murderous time with a Miller flock.

NEXT day a deputation of sheep-men came into town to post a description and offer a hundred-dollar reward. As it happened, too, that day Jimmy came down again from Sunrise.

I asked him about his new bonanza. And—another familiar stage in the discovery of bonanzas—he seemed to want to say less about it now.

"How's she coming?" I asked again.

"Fine! Fine! But, as I tould ye, I don't look to start takin' the big stuff out till spring. . . . Well, I'll be goin' on down to the post office."

It was a mail day. The stage that brought the mail-sack had just come in. And after a time I followed Jimmy.

The sheep-men were posting their reward. Everyone was talking killer. And as I might have expected, two minutes after Jimmy had pushed his way into the crowd, he had taken the center of the floor.

"Fooh!" his voice came out to me high and jeeringly. He had always thought poorly of sheep-men, if only because they are "Johnny-come-lately's." His scrawny neck craned itself toward them in his scorn. "An' all av it over wan little keeoty!"

But the sheep-men, knowing Jimmy, were kind. None of them answered.

He waited a little. But being unable, on the minute, to think up any other form of challenge, he went on to the wicket. There he learned that there was nothing from Los Angeles,—there had been nothing for some time,—and he came back again.

By then, too, he was reëquipped for argument.

"An' they tell me," he said with humor, "that—gobs!—he *surrounds* yer flocks!"

"That's what," said Tilly Macey. "That's what he does, all right."

"Well, thin," demanded Jimmy, "why don't ye catch him in a thrap?"

Those sheep-men looked at one another ruefully. But they still were kind, and they grinned.

"I bet we'd soon have him, all right," said Elbert Miller, "if we had one of them traps like they make in Ireland."

"We'd be bringing him alive, Jimmy," said the other Miller, "in one of your old milk-cans. And they say he holes up somewhere behind that new bonanza of yours, at that."

Then an outsider entered into it, and asked Jimmy if he had ever caught any coyotes himself.

"Have I ivver caught anny keeoties mesilf!" he repeated. "Have I ivver caught anny mesilf! Whin I suppose I've caught keeoties in ivvery civilized cuntry in this worrld!"

Meanwhile the sheep-men had moved out to the sidewalk again. But he still followed them.

"If ye were offerin' rale money, now, rale money—"

Norbert Miller pointed back to their reward. "There's a hundred for you."

"A hoonderd! An' who'd rust his pick for that?"

"All right, seeing as it's you,"—Elbert came into it again,—"*we'll* sure have to raise it. Would five hundred be any object to you, now?"

Now, ten minutes before, of course, Jimmy had had no more thought of going after that killer than of starting in search of the dinosaurs and mylodons that left the footprints down at Carson. Besides, he still had his new bonanza to develop. But when it is right up beside you that the killer holes!

"Ye mane that?" he demanded, his eyes aglitter. "Ye're talkin' business?"

"We sure are," said Elbert. "But understand, gentlemen, that's a special price, made only to Mr. McGeary."

"All right! *Done*, thin, *done!*" And Mr. McGeary called us all to witness it. "Begobs, an' I'll just take ye up on ut!"

Within an hour he had bought a twelve-bit trap at Frederick's, and he had got some bones and trimmings from Johnny Hanly—to whom he promised the killer's hide. And with his new bonanza absolutely forgotten, he was on his way back up Sunrise to begin.

"I'll have um by the wake-ind!" he told Jim Malloy.

THAT was a Monday, about the end of October. Jimmy was in town again the following Thursday. Not, as might be supposed, to bring in that killer's pelt even before he had promised it, but to go to Hanly's for more bones and trimmings—which, however, seemed at least to prove that the bait had been taken.

"An' it's all of it gone?" Johnny asked him.

"As I planned it shud go," Jimmy answered.

Johnny told him that he didn't quite get him.

"Why, as annyone knows, the on'y way to catch annything is to begin by decoyin' it awn. . . . Foooh, ye might say that I've got him alriddy!"

"Good work," said Johnny.

"It's five hoonderd that'll come in handy, too," said Jimmy as he took up his parcel. "I'll be takin' a little thrip this Christmas."

"Los Angeles?" Johnny asked.

"The same. An'—an' I cudn't tell ye which av thim little gurrils is the smarrest. There's wan av thim that's gettin' to draw so it's a woonder. I'll likely be sendin' her to a speshil school for it."

Yet next Tuesday Jimmy made another visit to town. Evidently his trapping was still in the decoying stage, for he had to buy more bones and trimmings.

"Well!" said Johnny, "he's *sure* takin' them, all right! And you think there's a good chance it's the killer?"

"Do I think there's a good *chancet* it is?" Plainly Jimmy had never insulted his intelligence by doubting it. There might be several score of the beast's brothers and cousins on the range; but no matter for that. "Gobs, whin he was around the firrst night I started after him—an' whin it's well known that it's

right on top o' me that he has his den!"

Indeed, if Johnny wanted any further proof, he was given it by the end of that week. For the killer really seemed to have left the Valley. At any rate, the sheep-men reported that it was now more than a fortnight since there had been any sign of him down there.

Again, though, by that week-end, Jimmy had to buy more bait. And that day he seemed, somehow, to be showing his age.

"Have you seen him yet?" Johnny asked him.

"He wont face me," Jimmy replied. "But no nade to say, I'd be surprised if he would."

HE was not discouraged at all. But there was this about it: his returnings from Sunrise had, by now, begun to be looked for more and more by our local order of mail-day wits.

By mail-day wits I mean, of course, that they mostly gathered in around the post office on the days and at the hours when the mail came in. With us no one thinks of coming to town on any but a mail-day. At least, Jimmy didn't. And so he found it almost impossible to avoid them.

At first the sheep-men were still too deeply concerned to take any part. It was only miners and cattlemen who did. But they did very well alone. And on his next appearance Jimmy offered them a new occasion. Our post office is an annex of our drug-store; and this time, having come from buying still more trap-bait, he stopped at the drug-counter, and in a voice of sudden venom he asked for half a pound of strychnine.

Joe and Stuff Reilly and Bert Perkins all began to protest at once.

"Aw, say, now! Aw, play the game square."

"An' just when you'd got him believin' that this is a civilized country!"

"When you might say, too, that you were really gettin' his confidence."

"I'll get more nor his confidence," said Jimmy. "If he thinks I'm goin' to bust mesilf buyin' him butcher's mate!"

But he had to buy more. And to add to it, that week the brute got some that

had not been bought for him. Jimmy was what is sometimes called a "mine bunker." That is, when he had driven his first level prospect-hole far enough into the mountain-side, he would hang up an old blanket as a door and wind-break, and sleep and eat inside. And the night he laid out his first bones and trimmings spiced Borgia style, they went wholly untouched—while his own stock of bacon was grabbed from his very kitchen!

He fixed up two more strychnine offerings. He planted one between the ravine and the trap, the other in the trap itself. In that way, by every calculation, death ought to get that killer both going and coming. But the beast touched neither.

The night following, Jimmy gave the killer still another chance, at a short rib without Borgia sauce, on the trap-plate. And—this is all truth—the brute got away with it cleanly!

NEXT day Jimmy came down for arsenic. He narrated the facts to Schmitty, the drug-clerk.

And by then the sheep-men were also beginning to be mail-day wits.

For after three weeks the killer had not yet returned to the Valley, and they had now begun to get their flocks into the safety of the winter folds. True, there is an old herder's saying, "Once a killer, always a killer;" and therefore the brute might be back again in the spring. But they preferred not to think so. It was a lot pleasanter to join in with the rest and have some fun with Jimmy.

And that day, when he entered the post office, a strong argument had begun. It was about the killer's hide. Wilson Adamson was maintaining that when it went to Johnny Hanly, a half of bounty money would go with it. But Elbert Miller said that as decided in the famous case of Terwillinger versus Gillinsky, Supreme Court Statutes 41144, Jimmy would get it all—on condition that he now and immediately blew the town to drinks.

But it was Tilly Macey, with a question entirely without malice, who really drew his fire.

"Jimmy," he said, "what I want to

know is this: if your trap's any good, how can the son of a gun possibly get your bait and not spring it?"

"Gobs," answered Jimmy, "anyone would think ye were the firrst to want to know that. Tell me, why couldn't youse lads get him yersilves, now? Why couldn't youse avin run him down?"

"Why," said Tilly, "if we were on flat land, down there, if we were on the level—"

"Sure!" cried Jimmy. "If ye were! An' all's the matter with ye is that ye nivver were an' nivver will be!"

Not that Jimmy was getting nasty in his temper! But there are some things that would put acid into anyone's repartee. And once more he took his way up the mountain.

IF Jimmy had caught anything at all, that would at least have eased the tension. But the killer—whatever the beast might be, we had got into the way of calling him that—had no greater fancy for arsenic than he had had for strychnine. Moreover, those of us who knew Jimmy best wondered how long his money could still hold out. For he was now doing no work whatever on his bonanza. He had to feed himself as well as his killer. And that week his trap was stolen, probably by some wandering Piute, and he had to replace it.

But he was managing some way. He gave the arsenic a long and elaborate trial—with no results. And then, Schmitty again advising him, he turned doggedly to "Rough on Rats."

Meanwhile, November was gone. From the divide the first chill whiffs of snow were already blowing. Soon the first real snow must come—when, with us, all lone miners and coyote-catchers must willy-nilly make the long winter move to town. And well was Jimmy aware of that.

The "Rough on Rats" having no taker, he began, and feverishly, to try his poisons mixed, to try them with and without the trap, in permutations and combinations. And toward the last, he let Schmitty know, he was watching most of the night, with an old army revolver.

"Night after night!" he told

Schmitty, "settin' on a rock so cowl'd it'd fraze the ears off a brass monkey! I'll just tell ye now, I'm gettin' anigh an' anear the place where I'll of had enough av um!"

And when he made his next call for mail,—there was still nothing from Los Angeles,—he would not even acknowledge greetings.

It was only at the post-office snubbing-post that Elbert Miller, who was rapidly becoming the sheep-men's leading, top-liner humorist, managed to head him.

"Jimmy," he said, "there's something I want to ask you. When you lay out your bones and trimmings do you remember to say grace?"

"Do I what?" demanded Jimmy with instant suspicion.

"Do you remember to ask the blessing?"

"The divvle bliss um!" Jimmy burst out furiously. "The divvle bliss um! An' he's drained me dry av coosh too! I'll be afther havin' to stay in an' do a wake's hoistin' for the Company to get a twinty to go on wid!"

ONCE Jimmy had returned to town for a week, that might well have seemed the end—which no doubt it would have been, but for this:

On Friday of that week there *was* a letter for him from Los Angeles. And it was one of those letters for which a man might well wait many months. With a countenance that gradually mellowed and broadened and softened, he read it first to himself; and then, privately and confidentially, he showed it to Schmitty, behind the prescription-screen.

It was an invitation, apparently a renewal, with all the warmth and affection of an annual invitation. But this year it didn't come merely from his sister. With a pick-flattened finger he pointed to the first lines of at least four different grades and styles of penmanship.

"It's from ivvery wan av thim," he said, "from all thim dom little gurrlls as well!"

And then—all possible methods of getting that killer had not *yet* been exhausted!—his face set with a new resolve.

"Schmitty," he asked, "do ye know annything about spring-goons?"

He got his spring-gun, or the makings of it, in an old rifle that I had kicking around in the loft. And a cattleman, just in from Elcho, remembered opportunely that the one and only coyote-bait was calf's liver. After that, Jimmy had merely to borrow his cayuse again, to refill the ancient milk-cans with supplies for both man and beast and once again, and with new confidence, to take the road up Sunrise.

We had gathered from him, too, that by a device of peculiar and devilish ingenuity, he intended to attach the trigger of the spring-gun to the spring of the trap, so that now, and within the same instant, the killer would swallow the poisoned liver, the fatal jaws would flash to upon him, and the charge of buckshot would drill him, to and fro, stem and stern.

No doubt of it—the thing was self-evident! But on Wednesday Jimmy came down again, to borrow Johnny Hanly's double-barrel.

"I want it for me watchin'," he explained. "I'm dith wid a goon, espishully a dooble barr'l. I shud av had it before. But this night, now, or the nixt, will sittle ut!"

IT would. The weather alone guaranteed that. For it was beginning to blow from the southwest. The *pogonnip* had lifted, and almost certainly we would have snow and lots of it by morning. In fact, the end of that struggle on Sunrise was thus so plainly brought in sight that the two Millers, who were riding over the mountain that night anyway, to Irrigation Dam, decided to climb off below Indian and sneak up the ravine on the chance of being able to see something of it for themselves.

In the icy starlight, it spread itself out before them as if under the full moon. Above yawned Jimmy's prospect-hole, with his old blanket hanging across it; the cayuse seemed to be inside. Below, and beneath his dump, lay all the customary litter of his camp—even the famous milk-cans. The trap and spring-gun were evidently behind a little boulder on the left; Norbert Miller swore he could see the gun-butt. And behind an-

other boulder crouched Jimmy. He must have been visible to any coyote within a mile—but he leaned intensely over the freezing double-barrel! His eyes were glued immovably upon that rock which concealed his trap. And his every fixed and hungry feature said clearly that even in those final hours he still hoped for the miracle.

As has been said, Elbert Miller had become the sheep-men's real, Big Time humorist. And it was an opportunity that could never occur again. He whispered to Norbert to get ready to beat it, and beat it quick. Then he curved his palms into a megaphone and let out a "Woof!" that might have come from a Big Range grizzly.

With one upheaving, soul-convulsed leap, Jimmy jumped his own length, started to run, and then, twisting his neck about to make sure he was running in the right direction, he saw them.

He fired his first barrel at once.

"Stop!" he cried. "On'y stand an' face me!"

Then he threw himself after them, in the hope of being able to make sure with his second barrel.

But both Millers were leggy, and they felt there was every reason for increasing their lead.

"Stop!" Jimmy panted again. "Stop an' I'll make ye an offer. Stand an' fight me, an' I'll give ye first belt! I'll take the two av yez at wance—an' wid one hand bound!" Then, as they still kept on, "Run, thin," he yelled, between shots. "Run! Run! Ye haven't got the courage av the killer himsilf!"

It snowed that night—not in town, but next morning we could see that up on Sunrise there had been a small blizzard. If we hadn't known that a southwest wind always swept the ravine trail clear, we'd have had visions of having to go up the mountain and dig Jimmy out.

But he got down a little after noon with his first cayuse-load. It included the trap and the guns.

"Excipit for thim smartt Miller lads," he told me bitterly, when returning my rifle, "likely I'd av had um last night, at that!"

Then he went back, to sleep one more night in his prospect, and come down

next day with his blankets and the rest of his belongings.

A GAIN it snowed on the mountain before morning. But it didn't keep Jimmy. He got in earlier than he had the day before. And even as it had begun, so it ended, on a mail-day.

The Millers were back from the dam, too. They met him at the post-office door.

"Hard luck," said Norbert, "hard luck! But anyways, you had him comin'."

Jimmy paid no heed to them. His face was the face of a man who, now that he is through with it, is glad.

"An' dang it," said Elbert, "it's like we said. With him just eatin' out of your hand, that way, you'd have been doin' a wrong thing to kill him."

"An' I didn't kill um," said Jimmy—which, somehow, was a queer thing to say. His tone was queer too.

"Sure! Sure you didn't!"

"Sure!" And he went and came from the delivery-wicket. "I thought better to take suggistions given, an' bring him down alive," he said then calmly.

"You *what?*" At least three sheepmen said that at once.

"He's back av the ould tailin's wid me other milk-can—not *in* ut, but part way. I had to leave him there at last, because av the cayuse. But we can go get him now."

It was the killer. The Millers themselves were the first to acknowledge it. But for that matter the "crease" left by a rifle-bullet still seared his ugly crupper; and his size and coloring would have been enough alone.

If he was not actually in the can, his head was. And at first look, one would have said that no power on earth would ever get it out again. Moreover, he was alive. In fact, he was now infuriately clashing his jaws, and now—in a voice that told how immeasurably less he enjoyed his present position than he had enjoyed the doing to death of Cañon Valley sheep and lambs—producing such yammering, booming, rain-barrel hollerings as were rapidly bringing out the remainder of the town.

"Heh," said one of the Millers

weakly, "so you put some of your liver in there, did you?"

"I did not," Jimmy floored him. "I put nawthin' in there. But had I, would that make anny difference, accordin' to the Shupreme Coort case av Terwilliger versus Gillinsky? An' now, gintlemin, ye can come acrosst wid that five hoonderd."

"Nuff said," gloomed the other Miller. "Nuff said."

And two days later, amid the tumultuous acclamations of assembled Bullion, Jimmy started for Los Angeles.

WE didn't get the whole story till he came back again. But we didn't have to wait till then for the essential part of it. The uncorking of that milk-can told all that was necessary. And early in January, Jimmy told me the rest.

"Ye mind," he said, "how heavy it snowed that sicond night, whin I'd fixed up to finish me movin' nixt day? Gobs, an' if I hadn't, I'd av soon decided to, after me an' the cayuse had had our firrst look out av the hole that mornin'! For it had drifted till ye cudn't see the dump!"

"So I made me fire an' got brikfast, an' lavin' the cayuse where he was, I climbed up the mountain to make sure, befure goin', that me north stakes was standin' solid. For there's gould aneath there, an' *millions* likely. Nivver doubt it! An' I'd hardly started down ag'in whin I sane thim!"

"Sane what? Why, that jack-rabbit, av coorse, an' the killer after him like he hadn't tasted mate since midsummer! Ye know how some jacks will run too—round an' round in a big circle. Well, jack an' killer were throwin' their circle right round me camp!"

"I knowed the big divvle from the firrst, if it was no more nor by instinct. But naught cud I do but stand there in me tracks. An'—the jack gettin' such cover as he cud from the rocks an' sage-broosh, an' the killer tryin' to win up on him by great le'ps—around they come the firrst time.

"Five hoonderd—to say nawthin' of all me bones and trimmin's an' p'ison—five hoonderd leggin' it there befure me very eyes! If I'd av had the goon, av

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By Arthur E. McFarlane

coorse, I cud av shot um like that. But—an' well he knowed it—I had nawthin', nawthin'! An' they made it the sicond time around. So far as the killer was consarned, me prospict-hole might av been another flock av shape.

"For a minut, too, I had the thought: 'Maybe now the jack'll make for the mine-hole, an' betune thim they'll upsit the powther inty the fire, an' git it *that* way!' The cayuse? The hill wid the cayuse! An', gobs, wudn't he of been *worth* it? An', wance the hole was in front av thim ag'in, for a jiff I thought that jack had starrted for it!

"He did take the firrst three joomps, at that! But no, just there the hillside was too stape for him. It wud av been all for the killer. An' off an' around the jack put ag'in! An' thin, nixt minute, I onderstud what he'd rayly got his eye on.

"It wasn't me mine-hole at all. I remimbered that widin fifty rod av me dump there was a whole range av sure-enough *jack*-holes! An' it'd be a woonder if wan av thim wasn't still open, snow an' all. That's what he'd sane. An' the nixt time he'd make it.

"But no mather. I had wan satisfaction, too, knowin' what was ahid for that killer. An' I laughed at um. I laughed. 'Yiss, le'p on, I sez, 'le'p on, ye dom big polthron *sassenach*! But this day I wont be alone in it. Ye'll have yer worrk for nawthin', too!

"An' wid that, they were around wance more, an' the jack had spied that hole ag'in; an' straightenin' out, he'd streaked for it! Half a yard av mar-

gin he had, maybe, but enough. An' as he wint in, *whutt!* The head av that killer wint in after him, like he'd folly, body an' all!

"Flyin' drifts!

"An' yet for the firrst siconds I didn't get it. I didn't know what manner av jack-hole that was. Not till, wid his hinders jerkin', an' tearin' an' throwin' frozen gravel, that killer was tryin' to win away ag'in. Thin, nixt thing, he had that ould milk-can hauled clane out av the snowbank, an' they were rollin' down the slope thegither. The jack was snug inside too—though I soon found that the surprise av it had been enough to finish *him!*

"But that killer, wance I cud be sure an' *sure* he cudn't get away, wance I cud let him go on summersettin' at his aise—say, now, on'y to set an' watch um! Gobs, I hurt me stummick laughin'. An' half the time I cudn't see him for me tears. It wud av made a saint laugh!

"But l've me tell you about thim little gurrlls. The littlest av thim can cook alriddy, an' as good as her mother. They have classes in ut. In me bag, here, I've a piece av cake she made, an' ye'll say ye niver tasted annything like ut!"

It was only by chance that, later, our talk came back to those sheep-men.

"An' they were good sports now, too, at that," he said. "Not to lay it up ag'in' me for the way I decoy'd an' carried thim along like you sane I did, an' let thim belave I was niver goin' to get um, right up to the ind!"

"THE SINDBAD OF OAKLAND CREEK"

"**C**ROW'S-NEST DAN" will reach harbor next month—and the old sea-dog will tell us of his adventures. Frederick R. Bechdolt, who wrote those Lighthouse Tom stories that were so popular, will introduce Dan to you; and you may count upon one of the pleasantest hours you've ever spent when you follow the wild sea-saga of "The Sindbad of Oakland Creek"—in the November BLUE BOOK MAGAZINE, to be had everywhere for fifteen cents on the first day of October.



A Deep Water Dude

by
Captain A.E. Dingle

NEW crews usually fell into the error of judging Mr. Hopkins by outward appearance. He certainly showed none of the earmarks of an efficient chief mate. But a new crew always awoke abruptly to a sense of error within twenty-four hours of picking watches.

Captain Bruce, the new skipper of the full-rigged ship *Hankau*, was not very favorably impressed with Mr. Hopkins at first; his doubts had given place to a comfortable feeling of implicit confidence, at the precise moment when the illusions of the crew also vanished. At the end of the first week at sea, Captain Bruce had to admit that never before had he seen so perfectly exemplified the old sea saw: a place for everything, and everything in its place. And the fo'c'stle crowd, not yet realizing the why of it, grumblingly conceded: "That perishin' rag-bag uv a mate shorely does get a ruddy pile uv work outa the hands wit'out croakin' nobody!"

And the crew's concession was right—both ends of it. The mate did get an amazing amount of work done; and he was a rag-bag. Mr. Hopkins' personal slovenliness, contrasting so startlingly with his rigid rule of neatness and precision about the vessel's gear, contrasted yet more jarringly with the personal habits of Captain Bruce—to such an extent, in fact, that, in spite of the sailorly qualities of the mate, and the equally patient navigating ability of the skipper, a barrier of mutual contempt was raised between them—until the scurvy came and revealed both in a truer light.

THE comparison between Captain Bruce and his chief officer may best be made as they stand on the poop, ten paces apart, ogling the sun a moment before noon to get a meridian altitude. And the keen observer will not wonder at the grin of relish on the face of the man at the wheel.

Mr. Hopkins stood on widely spread legs, as is the old seat style, his shoulders hunched, a gnarled fist clutching the sextant index as it might a marlin-spike, his face puckered painfully, his body swaying clumsily to the list of the deck. His disreputable old cheese-cutter cap was jammed down upon his head with the peak behind, and a wisp, or rope-yarn, of hay-colored hair that looked as if it had never known a brush hung straight down from the band of his cap to the junction of his ragged eyebrows. His rusty old Cardigan jacket met at the waist-line a pair of greasy, tarry, shapeless trousers, which in turn almost met a pair of faded carpet-slippers. The intervening inches served to display to more or less advantage a pair of bony ankles, as ugly, and as powerful, as twin camel-legs.

Captain Bruce certainly looked as though he had dropped out of the clouds into the wrong ship. Slim, handsome of features, with almost boyish grace of figure, he was dressed with the exactness of a battle-ship's commander receiving a visit from the Secretary of the Navy. His sextant glittered with every new attachment known to nautical science; he handled it with the delicacy of an old-time watchmaker ad-

justing the striking mechanism of a five-hundred-dollar repeater.

His uniform cap lay on the skylight; one glove lay inside the upturned rim, and its fellow still adorned the Captain's right hand; one immaculately shod foot rested easily on the lower bar of the poop-rail, and his body responded to the ship's motion as if an intimate part of the fabric. In one sleeve was tucked a spotless white linen handkerchief; from the breast pocket of his smart jacket protruded a goodly corner of another kerchief of tastefully colored silk, with which, in the intervals of his occupation, he fastidiously flicked wholly imaginary specks of dust from his glossy patent-leather shoes.

"MAKE eight bells, Mr. Hopkins," desired the skipper, as the sun commenced to dip, and both sextants registered the fact simultaneously. The mate motioned to an apprentice, who replied by banging out four double strokes on the poop bell and promptly scuttling down the ladder and into the half-deck where his dinner awaited him. The Captain carefully clamped fast the index of his instrument, placed his cap as carefully upon his head, picked up his glove and moved toward the cabin companionway. The second mate appeared as the last stroke of the bell died away, and Mr. Hopkins gave him the course and prepared to follow his commander below. Captain Bruce waited until the two mates were together, then remarked softly:

"Mr. Hopkins—and you too, Mr. Jones—I wish you to understand that discipline is most desirable, even in a sailing vessel. You have men enough; the ship's work is carried out satisfactorily; but—there is no reason that I know for the boys' leaving the deck before they are relieved, and no reason why the fore-castle bell should not be struck immediately the poop bell sounds the time. Please see to these things, gentlemen."

He disappeared down the stairs, and Mr. Jones' chubby visage swelled like a big red apple, bursting with restrained merriment. Mr. Hopkins slowly laid his sextant down, plucked off his cap, and dashed it on the deck. Then he

stuck both hands into his trousers pockets, and swore in utter disgust.

"Thirty year, man an' boy, I been a-sailin' in deep water, and not never, by no means wuz I ever spoke to that fashion! I come aboard by the hawse-pipe, I did, Mr. Jones, and 'ammered me way aft on me own 'ook, and I knows how to make this old hooker sail, no matter whether 'er bloomin' fo'c'stle bell's struck proper or not! What in thunder do that siggify!"

"It does sound sort of funny, just now," replied Mr. Jones, who well knew the rugged worth of his senior as a seaman. "But I suppose skippers like Captain Bruce will be plentiful enough presently, now the great clipper-ship firms have turned their vessels into training-ships for officers. When we salt-horse disciples get used to it, a bit more order aboard wont hurt. Already you can see some result from the skipper's ideas, in polished brass-work and things like that; and the notion of giving the men Saturday afternoon to make and mend and wash clothes, navy-style, hasn't damaged the ship's appearance at all, that I can see."

Mr. Jones had profited by his commander's example more than he was aware of. As he concluded, he brushed an invisible atom from the sleeve of his jacket, and his eyes roved unconsciously over the untidy form of the mate. That worthy picked up his sextant again and slouched off below to get his dinner, growling sullenly:

"Silk 'ankercher and shiny shoes! Brass buttons, and gloves, and please strike the bloomin' fo'c'stle bell prompt, Mr. 'Opkins! And when we gets a 'owlin' teaser, strike me blue if I don't think as Captain Bloomin' Bruce'll bend a humbereller! Trainin' sailors! And polishin' brass-work in a bloomin' deep-water heart-breaker!"

AT the dinner-table in the comfortable little cuddy, the revolutionary ideas of the new skipper were still more apparent. The steward's sallow face shone with soap; a symmetrical curl of hair was carefully plastered to his forehead with more soap; he wore a neat black alpaca jacket and black shoes; his hands were clean.

The Captain too had performed a complete toilet before taking his seat at the head of the table; he used a napkin without embarrassment, and appeared to experience no trouble in avoiding the use of his knife as a shovel for provender. And though he cast a disapproving glance at the mate's soiled and tumbled ensemble, he studiously refrained from remarking upon either that or the mate's more intimate professional duties. Instead, he conducted a chatty discussion, almost a monologue, on star navigation, great-circle sailing, compass-error, and the like.

Only when Mr. Hopkins entered the Captain's room with his worked-up observation for comparison, after dinner, did Captain Bruce touch on a subject very near his heart. He offered his cigar-box, and reaching over to his bunk, pulled out a new Cardigan jacket.

"I wish you would take this, Mr. Hopkins," he said, proffering the jacket. "It's a new one—one of half a dozen I bought when I joined my last ship as mate—and I've never used it. You may find it useful."

"Much obliged, sir, but I aint in want o' noo clo'es," growled the mate, declining to touch the offering. "The mate of a windjammer aint got no time to be a dude, not if he looks arter his work as he oughter. Give it to Jones, sir. He's beginnin' to take more interest in the set uv his pants than he do in the set uv a tawps'l."

FOR a fleeting instant the Captain's face clouded, a red patch appeared at each cheek-bone, and his lips parted slightly over clenched teeth. Then he raised his eyes to the mate's face, and saw there the same thing that every new crew saw, sooner or later, mostly sooner: the eyes, pin-points of steely fire, set in a mesh of weather-wrinkles, that hinted at volcanic power and also told of a supreme self-confidence that rarely had to rely on a display of that power. Captain Bruce's face slowly melted in a smile; he folded the jacket very exactly, laid it carefully on the bed and began to compare the mate's calculation of the ship's position with his own, remarking quietly:

"Yes; the younger generation of offi-

cers are beginning to see the possibilities of their profession, Mr. Hopkins. They, as a rule in these fast-moving days, look forward to something better than life in these old sailing ships, excellent schools though they undoubtedly are.

"I don't hold the opinion that a smart uniform makes a smart seaman; but neither will I believe that it is necessary for a man to neglect his personal appearance in order to be a good officer. I've always found that a man can handle an emergency as well in a clean collar as without."

The skipper picked up a handsome pair of binoculars, and pointed to an inscription thereon, which expressed the appreciation of a foreign government to Captain Bruce for his courage and resource in saving the crew of a gale-battered ship.

"Huh!" snorted Mr. Hopkins, picking up his calculations and making for the door. "I got three o' them in my cabin, right now, and I never wore a collar at sea in me life, sir!" Then he vanished, muttering beneath his breath.

It was no idle boast of the mate's. He did possess those tributes to his seamanship; and though he did not admit, or, indeed, know it, only his slovenliness of person had made it impossible for admirers of his qualities to establish him well on the road to the top of his profession. After quitting the Captain's cabin, he shut himself up in his own berth and prayed for dirty weather, which he heartily hated, in order that he might show this gingerbread skipper that other things went into the make-up of a seaman besides brass buttons and shiny shoes and yellow gloves.

THE foul weather was long in coming, but when it came, it came all of a heap, as seamen say. After several days of calms and baffling zephyrs, and a sultriness of atmosphere that pressed upon the body like too much air in a diving-suit, a fresh breeze blew out of the north, bringing with it a haze that blotted out the moon. Along with the breeze, too, rolled up a heavy swell from the eastward, combining with the fore-running heave brought by the wind to tumble the sea into hideous confusion.

By night the breeze had veered to east, and was blowing a gale. Through two watches, in which all hands plunged at the heels of the mates from task to task, Mr. Hopkins reveled in his opportunity. From single-reefing the top-sails, he drove the harried crew to the harder job of close-reefing them—thence, without a let-up, as the gale increased with truly awful swiftness, to the herculean labor of furling the main- and mizzen-courses, and reefing the foresail. And still further, up to the point where the old *Hankau* lay to under a goose-winged main-topsail, with a vicious cross sea breaking aboard and giving a precarious tenure on life to every man, the mate's disheveled figure was to be seen, leading the way to every rope that required a pull. His ancient oilskins flapped in the wind, unrestrained by buttons, the makeshift rope-yarns long carried away; disdaining a sou'wester, he bound his old cheese-cutter cap down to his chin by half a fathom of flat sennit; jets of water squirted from his rusty old sea-boots at every squelching step. Yet through it all his eyes shone with the enthusiasm of a true salt; he knew exactly what was to be done, without waiting for any specific orders; when the last man dropped from aloft, and the last rope was coiled and securely made up on the pin, clear of the weltering deck, Mr. Hopkins knew that he had done well. He cast a last glance around before bidding the watch go below, and clawed his way aft, muttering with grim satisfaction:

"Now let's see what Shiny Shoes has to say! I bet his bloomin' humbreller's blowed hinside out—if he aint curled up in his bunk!"

AS the ship plunged bows under, lifting her stern high on the crown of a thundering surge, he caught one glimpse of a figure aft that made him dash a grimy fist across brine-rheumed eyes in blank unbelief. It was a solitary figure. When the gale struck down, two men had been needed at the kicking wheel: now there was none. Clad in faultless black oilskin coat, glistening with wet, buttoned close around the neck and meeting the flaps of a snug sou'wester that fitted like a made-

to-measure silk hat, his sure, firm legs incased in shapely rubber boots, Captain Bruce stood at perfect ease, peering fair into the eyes of the storm, his face as void of anxiety as when he would shake out the folds of a clean table-napkin at dinner.

A forty-ton gray-back slopped over the rail, making the ship quiver right down to the keelson, and the mate leaped up the ladder as the hissing crest licked at his boots. He expected to see the skipper dash madly to the unattended wheel; he himself darted aft, fearful that the ship would be cast on her beam-ends. Neither of his expectations was fulfilled. Instead, the ship came up handsomely, shook herself like a great sea-dog, and fell to bowing the seas again. Captain Bruce advanced to meet the mate, with a hand extended, and a smile of honest approbation on his face.

"Good work, Mr. Hopkins," he shouted, gripping the mate's fist. "Never saw a ship snugged down in smarter style, or quicker. Is it your watch below, or Mr. Jones'?"

"Don't matter much, do it?" bawled the mate, still gazing in amaze at the untended wheel. "Wont be no watch below for either of us till this blows out, I s'pose. And, beggin' yer pardin, sir, she aint a-goin' to stay on top long if she's left to herself. I knows this old cow!"

This was the moment to show this theoretical, training-ship, brass-bound, deep-water dude that seaman's sense outweighed in actual test all the new-fangled schoolroom nonsense ever brought to sea in the noddle of a dreamer. But if Mr. Hopkins hoped to shake this queer skipper's sublime confidence in himself, his hope was shattered. Captain Bruce smiled indulgently and waved a hand backward toward the steering-gear, in mute invitation to the mate to satisfy himself as to the ship's safety.

It required but a glance of his keen seaman's eye to convince Mr. Hopkins that in this case, at least, theory put into practice left little to be desired. He also realized, with something of a shock, the length of time the job of snugging down had taken, for the skipper must

have rigged his elaborate relieving-tackle single-handed in order to spare both helmsmen to assist in the heavier work. And, since he knew that the small, powerful bronze blocks, and the fine, flexible wire ropes had formed no part of the ship's equipment, it was evident that the strange apparatus belonged to the Captain, and doubtless was rigged according to some new idea of his own.

And as he noted how the tiller was allowed just so much play on either side, how easily the tackles rove through the blocks, with what infallibility a heavier swing of the ship's bows to windward was met by an extra half-foot of tiller-sweep, given with stubborn resistance by two twelve-inch cylinders, no bigger than pieces sawed from a handspike, which connected the tackle hooks with the ringbolts, he felt some of the admiration that an honest man feels for another man's achievement.

"WELL, what d'you think of it, Mr. Hopkins?" smiled the skipper as the mate rose from his scrutiny. "Successful—eh? Just watch that now!"

"That" was a mile-long sea that seemingly had traveled ten miles out of its way for the express purpose of breaking right under the *Hankau's* laboring bilge. Its crest roared aboard, tearing away all three sheer-poles to windward, and filling the streaming decks waist-deep; the body of the sea passed under the ship, giving her a tilt over to leeward that sent the deck water thundering in the same direction, burying the lee rail in a smother of whirling fury.

The *Hankau* shivered and lay down. The thrill of her stress quivered along her length from stem-head to sternpost as she fought to come up to the wind. The mate looked along the waist, then at Captain Bruce, whose attitude remained unruffled. Presently the fabric of the ship shuddered more violently; her bows struggled up to windward with a slow, rhythmic sweep, until the main-topsail shook, she lost way and steadily fell off again into her old steady motion.

"Well, what d'you think of it?"

Mr. Hopkins resumed his old atti-

tude of antagonism at the query. That pretty invention might do very well until something parted; but in such a hell-broth of elements as now beset the ship he preferred to rely on the old-fashioned notions.

"Huh!" he snorted ungraciously. "She'd do just as well with a becket over the wheel, an' me or Mr. Jones a-watchin' of 'er. That gadget of shiny blocks and dinky wires is only fit for a model yacht on a park pond. It's my watch, and, by yer leave, sir, I'll call a hand to the wheel!"

THE breeze lasted three days; three howling days in which black seas rolled up like mad battalions under a sky of steely gray; when hissing foam-crests were picked up in lumps, not spray, and volleyed against the ship's stout sides with a noise like sand upon iron. And during the whole anxious spell, that astounding skipper kept the deck, growing, perhaps, a trifle grayer under the eyes as watch succeeded watch; a trifle haggard, maybe, about the pink cheeks of him; but alert, smiling, utterly at ease.

The mates relieved each other, as did the watches, at the Captain's peremptory command: he would not hear of all hands being kept about the decks—uselessly, he said—when the ship was snug, and doing well. Mr. Jones made no secret of his admiration for this new-school commander; its expression in words was only limited by his vocabulary. And, in spite of himself, the surly mate found himself warming too, until he happened to come out of his berth into the main cabin just at the moment when Captain Bruce was donning a new, glossy oilskin coat, to replace his first one, which had received a small rent by flirting with a brass belaying-pin.

All the old contempt surged back into the mate's soul, in such volume as to completely overwhelm such grudging appreciation as had found lodgment there. And it was increased, watch after watch, by Mr. Jones, perhaps unconsciously, trying to follow the skipper's example. But, far from feeling the force of the added example, Mr. Hopkins only experienced a deeper de-

gree of bitterness. He still held stubbornly to the opinion that, clothes or rags, uniform or dungarees, he was worth the two of them when it came to a question of real seamanship. It remained for the climax of the gale to show unmistakably that Captain Bruce was a real two-handed sailor, and not a poop-ornament, clever in theory alone.

The third day of the storm found the decks roped fore-and-aft and athwartships, with life-lines, without holding to which no man could venture a fathom either way. Everything movable had long ago parted company with the ship and gone cruising on its own account. The galley and the booby-hatch alone, of objects that might be shifted, were yet held fast by double lashings to the ringbolts, and it seemed inconceivable that any force of water and wind could move those.

BUT the climax of the storm revealed a new resource of the elements; something as strange and terrifying to the hard-bitten mate as to his less experienced skipper. Broad to windward, the horizon lay glinting evilly under a pall of rolling, smoky clouds. Behind that pall the sun held sway. Its only effect upon the raging sea was to rule out a gleaming streak of blinding light that gave the impression of grinning teeth in the lipless mouth of some sardonic Imp of Hate.

Suddenly the brightness was obliterated as by a deluge of ink. A solid black wall seemed to detach itself from the tumbling ocean, and, reinforced by screaming cohorts from the wracked sky, swept down across the surges, straight toward the *Hankau*. And, as by magic, all the noises and shock of the straining vessel were silenced in one awful moment of anticipation. Mournful clank of scupper-ports, sullen crash of blocks upon spars, the distressed squeal of sturdy, overtaxed chain-sheets confining the fighting clews of the goose-winged main-topsail, the myriad tiny, protesting voices of the wood and steel structure, ceased with an abruptness that jarred. All giddy motion, too, was suspended; the *Hankau* came to an even keel and poised on the summit of

a foamless breast of black-shining water that subtly rose, and rose, until she appeared to be leaving her element for good.

And, as that black wall advanced, other noises replaced those that were stilled. First was heard a dull, low moan, as of a beast in agony. Above it presently shrilled a chorus of rising shrieks, which blended with, but did not smother, a whirling, hissing, thrashing slap and whip of tormented sea. And now, within fifty fathoms of the ship, a milky head of boiling foam rushed forward at the base of the threatening black wall.

Captain Bruce gazed curiously at the weird sight, as at something he had long wished to experience. One of the watch on deck had come out of the lee galley-door, where his mates were huddled to escape the flying wet. He sensed the imminent danger, took one scared look to windward and bolted back into the galley; and the clang of the iron door as he crashed it shut resounded like a signal gun. Mr. Hopkins alone appeared to realize the absolute peril in that charging wall.

He flew to the wheel, cast off the turns of the skipper's fancy apparatus, and hove up the helm with all the power of his well-seasoned arms.

"Loose the fore-topmast-stays'!" he bawled. "Show a corner of it! Round in weather-main-tops'l-brace! Shake a leg there! Hey! You—"

He turned toward the place where the Captain had stood, respecting no persons in the emergency, intent only upon the safety of the ship. The skipper had vanished. Mr. Hopkins noticed the skipper's absence with a shiver of disgust. The brass-bound training-ship sailor had dived below, doubtless, to escape the catastrophe that might be met only by seamanship.

THEN came the crisis. That black wall of threat rushed over the last ten fathoms of watery waste like the coming of ultimate disaster. The whine and hiss and moan of it rose to a roar that made its previous efforts sound as a whisper of consolation to a dying man. And, in an avalanche of murderous malignity the sea poured aboard,

filling the decks to the rails, above which the masts alone spiked skyward to show that the ship still floated.

For two heartbreaking moments the mate fought with the stubborn wheel, to bring the ship's head away from the black death that threatened. In his heart he cursed the skipper, and all his works, to the ultimate degree of perdition, for educating a deep-water crew to uselessness. Sweat poured from him as he strove at that wheel; as far as he was able, he prayed that she would fall off under the sail she carried. No hope had place in his breast that his orders would be obeyed.

Then, as he fought, far forward in the enveloping murk he heard a crashing, and slatting, and volleying, that told a reassuring tale to his sailor's sense. Sail was loosed! Some one had ventured into the swirling hell of the fore-castle-head, and loosed the only sail that could aid the ship.

Then, above all other sounds, he heard the rattle of hanks upon an iron stay; and a black cloud of canvas rose above the bows, tearing at its fastenings with vicious straining, to which the thrashing and hammering of sheet-blocks lent its note.

But the wheel was eased. The ship's head fell off before the blast, and the second mate dashed forward from his berth into the hurly-burly of the main-deck, and hauled men to the braces to square away the goose-winged topsail as the fore-topmast-staysail blew away in threads of useless cloth to leeward.

The next instant the decks were full of black fury. Sliding down the declivity of that terrific sea, the ship rolled over, and over, until it seemed that she was bent upon spiking her masts into the ocean bed. But as she paid off, and pieces of the bulwarks tore from her, the decks were eased. She lightened herself from the overwhelming burden, and swept to the top of the next surge like the splendid old ship she was.

Now out of the welter forward a figure clawed its way, and came straight aft to where the mate fought at the wheel. Mr. Hopkins knew instinctively that this man was the one who had given the ship that corner of headsail, the only thing that could have saved

her. But his jaw set grimly; his eyes hardened again, as he saw that figure halt at the top of the poop-ladder, draw the skirt of his oilskin coat around in front, and shake his head over a ragged tear in the hem of it.

"And if the bloomin' 'ooker drownd's 'erself," he muttered, "I bet 'e'll arsk to 'ave 'is perishin' pyjarmers pressed afore she goes!"

But, as he confided to Mr. Jones, that evening, when the ship was out of danger, and the mates resumed regular watches with no fear of interrupted sleep:

"'E aint ezactly a sailor, Jones. Damfino wot to call it. But I can't say as 'e's useless, altogether. 'E loosed that bloomin' stays'l, and halfway set it, just when I wanted it; but I bet 'twas only from fright 'e done it. 'E can't a-done it out a seamanship!"

WHEN the gale had passed, as so often happens at sea, the *Hankau* had a respite in which her damages might be made good. Further than that, the winds became breezes, the breezes airs, the airs calms, and within five days of the height of her trial she swam idly on a glassy sea of running oil, under a copper sun, as if such a thing as wind only existed in the imaginations of fabulous navigators and ancient geographers.

For ten days she sat motionless upon the watery plain: ten days in which Captain Bruce put into practice all his newfangled ideas of shining brass-work, scouring paint, pipeclaying manropes, and rubbing down bright-work until even the fo'c'stle hands grew weary of it. Ten days ensued of light, baffling airs, that dragged the arms out of the men hauling on braces to every shift of direction. This period the skipper thought propitious to install bo's'n's calls; every maneuver must be done, not shipshape and Bristol-fashion, but strict navy-style, to the shrill of the pipes. Through it all, too, Captain Bruce's personal appearance was immaculate. He changed his uniform religiously once a day; never was he seen on deck, or indeed below, without a jacket, and that jacket always met at the throat a spotless linen collar.

Mr. Jones followed his commander in these things, until dour Mr. Hopkins was charged to bursting with righteous indignation. He alone, of all the after-guard, looked the part of a storybook deep-water sailorman. His old Cardigan jacket grew more dilapidated, day by day; his ancient, greasy cheese-cutter cap acquired more grease, and an added droop of peak, in corresponding degrees as the Captain's ensemble attained higher brilliance.

Ten days of baffling airs were succeeded by two weeks more of stagnant calms. The ship was well to the westward, now, and the last spell of light breezes had carried her into that expanse of ocean bordering on the Caribbean Sea where calms or hurricanes attain their highest pitch of damnableness.

LONG before the two weeks were out, trouble came upon the *Hankau* that brought a shade even into the face of Captain Bruce. Two of the hands came aft, one broiling noon, and reported unfit for duty. Mr. Hopkins said, "Sojerin'!" But the skipper looked at the men, felt their arms, their legs, which responded like dough to the touch; glanced at their gums, which were swollen, parting from the teeth and bleeding, and uttered one word:

"Scurvy!"

By the first dog-watch, four more men showed the symptoms of the dreadful scourge of the sea, and the boys were turned out of the half-deck and sent into the fore-castle, to leave their own quarters free for use as a hospital.

Here was yet another newfangled notion, which deepened the growl in Mr. Hopkins' throat. In all his years at sea, he had seen fo'c'stle scurvy cases treated as such: given the prescribed doses out of the medicine-chest, and permitted to recover or die in the squalid surroundings that were plenty good enough for the likes of them, in the opinion of most windjammer skippers.

And shock was piled upon shock. By morning, half the crew were down, and the mate waited in vain for a relief at eight bells in the middle watch. When relief at last came, it was the skipper

himself who came on deck, quietly imparting the news that Mr. Jones had developed scurvy spots. But the shock that really staggered Mr. Hopkins was the skipper's appearance.

The mate had almost become used to seeing Captain Bruce flick dust that wasn't there from clothes that shone from brushing. After that experience with the staysail in the gale, he had almost admitted the skipper's value as a real sailorman; in his inner consciousness, be it said, Mr. Hopkins was all but ready to grovel at his commander's feet and cry him best, if only, for once, he could detect some untidiness that proclaimed him human.

But now, with half the crew not only out of business, but in dire straits, with the second mate gone under, too, and the hourly expectation of a booming breeze that would bring a call for full watches of men—this amazing man calmly relieved the deck, not only immaculately attired, but attired in a long white linen coat such as the mate had only seen when, years ago, he had been an inmate in some seaman's hospital.

"We must do the best we can, Mr. Hopkins," the skipper said, and a sad sort of smile accompanied the words. "I've made Mr. Jones as comfortable as possible; sent the cook into the port watch, to help out; told off the steward to handle both jobs—cook, y'know—and between us, you and I will keep watch and watch, and also keep an eye on the patients.

"This unfortunate visitation is in a measure my fault. I've been so intent upon establishing a new régime in the ship, that I clean forgot to order the steward to commence issuing lime-juice, and nobody reminded me. But we'll manage. Go below, now, Mr. Hopkins; and as you pass my room, take a dose of the medicine you'll find in a bottle in my glass-rack. We mustn't take any more chances."

MR. HOPKINS went below. The more he allowed himself to think, the greater his anger became. He poked his head inside the door of the Captain's room for an instant, then popped out again and opened the door of the second mate's cabin. He had no intention

of permitting his stomach to become an experimental tank for a crazy skipper's weird notions; the bottle of medicine was left undisturbed.

Through the whole watch, when he should have slept, the mate heard at regular intervals the skipper's step as he visited Mr. Jones. During the last wakeful hour before breakfast, when sleep had fled utterly, and he ranged his small cabin, smoking his vile pipe, he stood frequently with his face glued to the little square window opening on to the main-deck. And, as seven bells were struck, he saw the skipper, in his long, surgeon's coat, enter the half-deck to minister to the needs of the stricken seamen.

The mate walked the poop with nervous steps, muttering through set teeth at what even so tough a sailor as he must call rank foolishness. But he saw that, in the rush of wearisome pulley-hauling incident to trimming the ship to her course, the skipper respected his own hands no more than those of Mr. Hopkins or the men. A rope must be swung upon—the skipper's weight was the first applied; a brace or sheet needed to be sweated in—Captain Bruce's hands were at the head of the pull.

And through it all, the scurvy patients lacked not a thing that might aid their cases. The steward was excused from attending them; it would help nothing at all to have him laid up with the scourge. Mr. Hopkins flatly refused to play nurse. To the skipper's hint that he might give an eye to the half-deck, while on watch, he had said:

"I'm a sailorman, Captain Bruce, and no sick-nurse, with respect to you, sir. I'm willin' to stand double watches, and leave you free to play doctor. But I aint no hand at coddlin' sick sailors. They'd get well quicker, I say, if they wasn't treated like payin' patients."

CAPTAIN BRUCE shook his head, and the old soft smile flitted across his lined face. But he did not press his request. Mr. Hopkins found that watches were relieved with religious punctuality; the bell had never ceased to vibrate before the skipper was on deck to take his spell of deck duty. Further,—and it came upon him slowly, but

none the less irresistibly,—the mate saw watch after watch of the Captain's rest time spent in arduous attentions upon whining, grumbling, sick sailors.

Yet, with the pitifully short-handed working force, it was but rarely that all hands were called.

Insidiously, and hard fought against, the suspicion crept into the mate's breast that he was playing a mean part. As watch followed watch, and the skipper grew more haggard, more gray and lined and fiery-eyed, and the ship sped to the south'ard under a press of sail that would lift the sticks out of her at the least increase of wind, Mr. Hopkins found himself nursing a feeling of resentment against himself. At every change of watches he was on the point of going up to Captain Bruce and blurt-ing out a rough but sincere apology for his bearish behavior, and offering to take his turn in the hospital.

Each time the good resolution was half formed, it was killed at sight of some new neatness in the skipper. In spite of his worries, his sleepless days and nights, Captain Bruce's linen coats remained as spotless as had been his ordinary uniforms. And that point was truly the last obstacle to the mate's conversion to the gospel of personal pride.

"If 'e'd only wear aprons and frilly caps, an' bend on a little chain to his belt wi' scissors, and a lookin'-glass, and a powder-rag, and say to me, 'Mister 'Opkins, you're the sailorman in command—I'm in charge o' the 'orsepital,' damme if I don't think I'd admire 'im!" growled the mate, for the twentieth time. But his growl was lacking in sincerity now—and he knew it. He couldn't watch that new-school commander, going uncomplainingly about a task brought about partly by his own forgetfulness, and sharing, too, in full degree, the hard toil of a short-handed ship, without seeing the man beneath the dude.

FINALLY there came the day when the second mate was able to stagger on deck for an hour's sunning; the day when the good, wholesome wind, besides blowing out of the ship the steamy dampness acquired in those days of stagnant calm, threatened to blow the

The Deep-Water Dude

By Captain A. E. Dingle

t'gallant-masts into Brazil if the light sails were not speedily stowed.

With the appearance of Mr. Jones, in a fair way toward complete recovery, a little of the deathly weariness left the skipper's drawn face, and he rubbed his hands in satisfaction. Then his eye flashed aloft, and he unbuttoned his long white coat. It was the mate's watch, and as Captain Bruce carefully folded the linen garment, and laid it on the skylight, the second mate's pain-shot eyes followed his every movement.

"Have the royal halyards let go, Mr. Hopkins," said the skipper briskly. "We'll furl all three of them, now."

"Better take charge, sir," growled the mate, stepping toward the poop-ladder. "I'll bear a hand to stow 'em."

"No, no," replied the skipper, rolling up his trousers. "It's your watch. Let's have things shipshape, Mr. Hopkins. It'll wake me up to take a run aloft again."

With a queer expression on his dour face, the mate bawled his orders, and the royal-yards settled slowly, with the sails billowing beyond and above the slender spars. The lee-sheets were started, and the clews hauled up; one after the other the weather clews rattled to the yard-arms, and one man took the fore-rigging, another the main, to furl the sails. Captain Bruce, with a little laugh, lurched to the mizzen-rigging and caught a grip on the sheer-pole to help himself into the ratlines.

Mr. Hopkins took the wheel, to allow the helmsman to get forward and help his mates, and his mind was in a tumult at this new trick of the inexplicable skipper. Mr. Jones' voice brought him to the right-about in a flash.

"Hopkins! Catch him! Jump, man!"

The mate swung about in time to see Captain Bruce loose his grip on the shrouds, and sway dizzily. His eyes were closed; his face was ashen; his head sagged limply forward; and his hands, white-fingered and gripless, hung down at his sides.

Mr. Hopkins sprang to the rigging, saw the second mate crawl painfully to the wheel, then jumped onto the rail and seized the Captain's arm as he collapsed into a helpless heap and plunged from the rigging.

The helmsman had been arrested by the second mate's cry, and ran aft again to lend a hand. Between them, he and Mr. Hopkins got the skipper aboard and carried him down to his berth. Calling the steward to attend him, the mate hurried back on deck, where he found Mr. Jones hanging onto the wheel with a grip of desperation.

"Hey, Mr. Hopkins," gritted the second mate, "you get me a stool, or something to sit on. I can keep a trick now. I aint going to skulk in my bunk while a man like that shows the way to a man's work!"

"He must 'a' got giddy," remarked the mate, keenly inspecting his junior, to assure himself as to his fitness for duty. "He had no right to start up there. 'Nother of his new ideas, I s'pose."

"New ideas — giddiness — nothing! Hopkins, that man's spent every minute of his watch below for the past two days, watching over me! He's just plumb dead o' weariness, that's what! And you aint going to be any the worse a man if you get hold of some of his new ideas, as you call 'em!"

MR. HOPKINS went below, saw that the steward was doing all that was possible for the skipper, then slipped into his own cabin. Fifteen minutes later, the steward knocked at his door, and told him that Captain Bruce had recovered consciousness and wished to see him. And as he concluded his message, the steward looked harder at Mr. Hopkins, put a hand over his mouth and snickered audibly.

The mate's face was purple; his neck threatened to burst, as he struggled violently to bring together the points of a stiff collar that had lain in the tray of his chest since leaving port. The two ends of a flaming tie drooped artistically over either shoulder, and his breath came from his chest in stertorous blasts. But he showed no anger at the steward; rather his eyes twinkled unwontedly, as he growled:

"You git to blazes outa 'ere, you grin-nin' hape! Go git me a wad o' fat; I want to black my bloomin' boots. Then please hinform Cap'n Bruce I'm hat 'is sarvice, with my compliments, stooard!"



The Professional Affinity

By Octavus Roy Cohen

IN the first place a ball-player hasn't any business falling in love—at least not unless he contemplates an immediate marriage. Me, for instance, and women have always gotten along about as well as pickles and ice cream. Whenever I see one of these here females who sets my psychic current buzzing, I steer my course as carefully as a neutral skipper who has sighted a submarine.

My beliefs are mine. Unfortunately they weren't Tommy Carlton's, the best pal I ever had. We met in the Cincy training-camp one spring when scouts had been working under orders to harvest the country's ivory crop. Neither of us knew just how we got there, and we knew it was too good to last, so when we were farmed out, as a battery, to a Class C league, we didn't shed any sad salt tears.

But we'd earned the right to call ourselves ex-major-leaguers, and Mary Pickford didn't have nothing on us with this self-advertising stuff. We bummed around for a couple of summers playing semipro ball, and then one winter Tommy escaped from me. Along about

April, when the baseball fever was beginning to fluctuate the thermometers, I got a prepaid wire from Tommy—sent from Rosedale, South Carolina. Being prepaid, I knew it wasn't a request for money—which same he wouldn't have got, anyway. It was orders to come on down there, which same I did. Hired a room at the hotel, flopped on the bed and was reading, when in walks Tommy, looking like one of these here bloated democrats with a two-bits-straight shoved in his face.

"**W**HAT'S up?" I asks.

"Price o' wheat," he comes back, thinking he's a Ring Lardner on this humorous stuff. I didn't deign to say anything, knowing Tommy had to rid himself of his little joke before he'd talk serious: with Tommy it's like taking off your clothes before hitting the hay.

"George," he says, calling me by my given name, "I've fell in with an old geezer who aint any crazier about baseball than you are about your morning sleep. He's around sixty years, being old enough to have more sense, which

same he hasn't; and he's itching to shell out some good, ripe spondulix for a ball-team. I've let him hear that I and you is ex-major-leaguers, and he's wearing out his best Sunday trousers crawling around begging us to take charge of his team."

"What's his Bertillon?"

"Baldwin's his monniker. An old bach' who lives only for baseball and money. I'm to be the manager—"

"And me the team, huh?"

"No, you big stiff! It's lucky we both got brains, because otherwise, George, we'd be begging the superintendent of the almshouse if we couldn't have pie on Wednesday night.

"All this Baldwin guy wants us to do is pitch and catch and win the pennant—"

"Sure that's all?"

"This town is in a ham-and league down here with five other Sticksvilles. They aint there with major-league stuff at all, but as for enthusiasm, well, there aint an insurance company would write an umpire this season. Four of the towns have appropriated paving funds for the winning of the pennant, and Baldwin, who owns this team, is ready to go 'em one better. Furthermore, he's going to start by paying to each one of us two hundred and twenty-five smackies a month."

"Where'd you get it Tommy?"

"What?"

"The red-eye?"

"Red-eye nothing! This State is prohibition with a big Pro. I'm handing it to you straight."

"Yes, you are— Since when has Class L bush-leagues been handing out two-twenty-five a month per each? What about the salary limit?"

"Forget it. That's what Baldwin told me to do, and I'm telling you the same."

THE town was as sensitive about baseball as a sweet-eighteen debutante is about her false hair. I suppose that's because most of the ball-players had grown up right in Rosedale, and there was a personal interest in the thing. The way they played it, it wasn't baseball at all—it was a sport.

Tommy and me knew that something was wrong, and we watched. They

played rotten ball, and yet they handled the thing like they knew how. Tommy and me scratched our heads in chorus and tried to dope out the trouble, which wasn't any harder than figuring when the war'll end. It wasn't until we was preparing for the six-o'clock eats that Tommy hit on it.

"I got it!" he chortles. "Those guys are real ball-players. But they haven't any pep!"

"You've hit it!" I says. "Their spirit is nix. They get around like a bunch of plow-horses. They look like they was training for the glee-club."

"If they really can play," insists Tommy, "it's up to me to make 'em do it. And it'll be harder than teaching 'em the game. On the level, those guys this afternoon would pray a ball would miss 'em by six inches so's they could yell for the next feller to take it." He pauses. "It's hell!"

"Plus," I consoles him. "But maybe they wont be that way in a game."

"They wont. They'll be worse."

And believe me or not: they were. In practice-games they refused to run out hits; they lazed around the field, and as for teamwork—they didn't pull together any worse than Germany and England. And things didn't get any better. The night before the opening game, Tommy talks to me about it disconsolately after he'd shaved his neck three times instead of his whiskers.

"It looks bad, George," he says, calling me by my given name. "I don't know how bad Riverview is, but they got to be awful rotten for us to win a game. And I'd as lief lose an ear as the opening game."

"Me too, Tommy."

SAY, did you ever get an inspiration?

It's a funny feeling: comes all of a sudden an' leaves you wondering where you got such a swell idea from and all alone. I grabs Tommy by the arms and says: "Tommy, you've hit it. Or I've hit it. This here team needs pep. The way to do is to introduce a flossy dame from the city down here. Get 'em all crazy about her. And *then* they'll play ball!"

"A professional affinity!" gasps Tommy. "Holy mackerel! You sure

did spill a mouthful that time! George," he says, "I apologize for all the things I used to think about you. Why, dog-gone it," he smiled,—for the first time in three weeks,—"I'll make Baldwin bring some Broadway chick down here, tune her up for the killing and if in two weeks she can't have this bunch of hick ball-players crabbing at each other and playing the snappiest ball that's in their systems, then I'll eat the—the City Hall!"

There aint any use in being unjust or trying to shirk responsibility. It was my fault, but Gawd knows I paid for it with what I suffered that summer.

Because most of us were born under lucky stars, and also because of Tommy's pitching, we won the opening game and a couple of others after it, but after the fellows got over the surprise of winning a game or two, we played true to form: losing about nine out of every ten.

Tommy'd been right, too. It wasn't that these boobs couldn't play ball well enough—they just didn't have any pep. They played like a lot of deaf mutes, and all of them seemed afraid of getting their uniforms soiled, so there wasn't any sliding for bases. Tommy and me agreed that it was another case of the little birdie that could sing and wouldn't—they had to be made to sing.

ABOUT a month after the season opened, and we were trailing the league, old man Baldwin sends us flossed-up invitations to a dinner and dance in honor of the team. That's the way it was written, although what anybody wanted to honor that team for was miles beyond me. I was all for calling it off, but Tommy says it's all right.

"Dance!" I snarled. "That bunch of rube ball-players aint got energy enough to squeeze the prettiest girl that ever lived."

"A lot you know about human masculine nature. There's a reason for these here festivities, and it's up to us to trot along and see it."

Of course Tommy had his way. That's a habit he's got. I was embarrassed. While I'm right stuck on myself, as ball-players go, I'm here to admit that I aint no social bear-cat.

Ditto, Tommy—only more so. But anyway, Tommy cribs a couple of soup-and-fish outfits from two fans who were out of town that night on business, and we dolled up. Foolish! Man alive, I felt as silly as a chorus girl with clothes on! Those dress-suits are the limit! I don't see how head waiters can stand it night after night.

It was certainly a humdinger of a racket, though, with the Country Club decorated as much as some of the ladies wasn't, and Japanese lanterns all over everything. After we'd been there awhile, I pulled Tommy aside. It was a cool night, but I was perspiring like a home-run on a hot day.

"Lemme get away from this, Tommy," I begs. "I'm having a helluv-a-rotten time. I got through the dinner by starvin' myself, because I was scared of pulling a bone."

"Cheese!" he whispers. "Come along and meet the reason."

SHADES of Annette Kellermann!

How that dame ever got away without marrying a Yurropean king, beats me! Later I discover that old man Baldwin has hired her to come down and play affinity—and where d'you think he hired her? The Ziegfeld Follies!

Baldwin was introducing her as his second cousin from up North. How he ever got away with it is more'n I can figure! That dame shrieked Broadway. Class! Oh, boy! If Tommy ever had curves like her, he could make Walter Johnson retire to the bushes for life and drag his record in after him.

Maybe you aint wise to small-town stuff; and if you aint, maybe you wont understand that there's nothing in the world to rouse the ambition of a hick boy like a city girl. Within fifteen minutes the hypodermic is working and the whole Rosedale ball-team is hanging around that Follies' queen, with their tongues hanging out, begging for one sweet smile. Tommy finds me gasping for wind on the porch.

"It's working!" he piped. "By tomorrow's game they'll be cutting each other's throats to get at the ball. She'll be at every game and if she don't inject a little pep, then I'll eat it."

"Where'd you get her?"

"Old Baldwin vamped to New York and landed her, somehow. Took her out of the Follies, after first making sure that she really knows something about baseball. The whole infield is trying to make a date with her for to-morrow night. How do you like her looks?"

"Too good," I gloomed. "That kind always raises trouble."

"That's what she's here for," he says and trots back into the dance-hall to see if her program is all filled. His sad face tells me five minutes afterward that it is.

When we're getting ready to turn in that night, Tommy looks sort of pensive. Finally—

"When a guy gets along about thirty, George, he begins to think of settling down, eh?"

"Nope. He begins to remember that he's got to settle up."

"What's the big idea?" he snarls. "You think you're a regular Frank Tinney."

"You big ham," I retorts cheerfully, "you're a doc' giving medicine to sick ball-players, and you've slipped a dose over on yourself. One breath of she-male Broadway has driven you off your nut. May Gawd have mercy on your soul!"

He didn't have a come-back! And when Tommy gets tongue-tied in the face of sarcasm—*good night!*

INSIDE of a week that dame—Dollye (yep! she spelled it that way)—had the whole team roped and thrown and kicking—all except me. The only effect she had on me was to smile from the grandstand when I'd go back after a foul, and then, dog-gone it, I was as liable to drop it as not! Tommy's prescription was working like the Giant infield.

As for the team—scrap? Say, you never saw so much pep outside a hotel table in your life. We had three fights the first week because some of the players claimed others had taken balls which should have been theirs. All they thought about on the field was pulling grandstand stuff so as to get a smile from Dollye. One-handed stops, catches

standing on their heads with their feet hanging over the fence, stealing second, third and home—all those were mere incidents in every game. And after a guy would pull one of those things, he'd strut into the bench with his chest stuck out a foot and his eyes glued on Dollye Lemaire. When she'd smile and applaud and nod at him, he'd bat 1,000 for a week while all the others would grouch and crab and work their shirts off, trying to swipe the limelight from him.

Old Baldwin had gone plumb nutty. Of course we dropped a game every now and then, but the 1914 drive of the Boston Braves wasn't one-two-twenty with the fight we put up. The town went wild, and Baldwin even wanted me and Tommy to come up to his big house on the hill and live with him and Dollye and his nice, respectable house-keeper. Tommy was all for it, but I put the quietus on the idea. I'm a woman-hater, but I wasn't taking no chances with that Ziegfeld blue-ribbon chick.

By the time the season drew to a close Tommy and me was kings of Rosedale. We could of started at the upper end of Elm Street and walked down to the Union Depot, charging each person a jit for the honor of being seen in our company. We called everybody by their first names, and even the stores wouldn't let us pay for ordinary purchases. My salary was piling up, and I was fair dripping dollars—which is where I differed from Tommy. That boob was doing what all his players were: spending all his money on Dollye Lemaire.

THE whole team went so crazy about her that she had to work rotation on them. Tuesday was set apart for the three outfielders to call; she split the infield into Mondays and Thursdays, first- and second-base calling on Monday nights, and short and third on Thursdays. The pitchers and catchers were slated for Fridays, and me being the only catcher, the receiving end of the team wasn't represented.

I went once just to see how she handled things. And believe me, that dame was a sure-nuff actress, willing to earn her money. She'd gas baseball by the square hour, telling them how much

she loved brilliant plays and how it almost busted her heart to see anybody make an error! And did those goops fall for it? Oh, blooie!

Less than a month before the season ended Tommy sidles into the room, weighted down with another of his inspirations.

"George, old man, me and Baldwin have been talking things over, and we've decided that we're winning too many games. The attendance is dropping off. Baldwin knows we've got the rag cinched, but next to that he loves a dollar. The big idea is to throw a few games, enough to let the race get close. Then the fans'll pack the park again, and we'll all be happy. I want your help, George."

"My help? How?"

"You, being the catcher, have got to throw the games."

"Thanks," I says, sarcastic. "I get a pop-bottle in the ear for a bum heave, huh? What's the matter with you throwing a few games?"

"Dollye likes me because she thinks I'm a great pitcher. If they begin slamming me all over the field, she'll get sore."

"So much the better for you. This dame'll ruin you yet."

"Gwan, George. Be a sport. Some day you'll fall in love, and then you'll understand."

"Some day, Tommy, I'll die; and then I'll go to either heaven or hell. But I aint taking no chances now just out of curiosity."

I STUCK to it until old man Baldwin comes along and tickles my palm with greenbacks; then I should worry. It was his team, and he was the boss. I threw a game young Steele was pitching, by heaving the ball to the center-field fence, with the bases full, and managed to boot away Smith's game next day. Tommy was to pitch the day after, and he begged me not to queer him with Dollye. After all, Tommy's my pal, and I couldn't do him a dirty trick, so I let him win.

That's the way we went along: losing and winning about fifty-fifty. Tommy copping his games because of chances he took with his salary whip,

and Riverview, having a new phenom' twirler, beginning to press us so close that the race got interesting again, and fans started filling the box-office once more.

Then, two weeks before the very end of the season, old man Baldwin tipped me the high sign to win all the remaining games, and we started off to do it. But that's like all these swell schemes: they work as long as you don't care about 'em. But let the right time come along—

We lost three straight games, and believe me, it wasn't our fault. The team played great ball, but they crabbed so much that they didn't pull together. And Riverview was staging a Brooklyn finish. To make a long story short, when we started in winning again, Rosedale and Riverview were tied for the lead with one week left. Baldwin started offering bonuses, and we won three straight. So did Riverview. And we moved over to Riverview for the final three-game series that was to decide the pennant.

Excitement! There couldn't of been more if a circus lion would of bust loose in the big top. Riverview is connected with Rosedale by an inter-urban trolley, and our burg just simply moved over there. The rest of the clubs canceled their remaining games, and—well, it was small-time baseball done to a frazzle, which is the only baseball in the world worth while, to my way of thinking!

We spent the night before the opening game in Rosedale, and at odd times every man-jack on the team hiked down to see Dollye and get encouragement from her. The series opened with Tommy twirling, and we won, three to two. The next game went eleven innings with young Steele in the box, and Riverview won with a homer in the twelfth inning. The final game was to decide things, and the night before the battle, Tommy took the trolley for Rosedale.

"**W**HERE you going?" I says. "You got to pitch to-morrow."

"**I—I**—can't stand this suspense any longer, George. I—I'm going to—propose!"

The Professional Affinity

By Octavus Roy Cohen

"I hope she beans you with a rocking-chair."

"Thanks," he says and beats it.

At one A. M., while I'm dreaming that a beauty chorus has found out I'm a Mormon and wed me all at once, I'm hit on the head by a hotel pillow, which is about as soft as flint. It's Tommy, and he has a grin on his face like a Cheeseshire cat.

"I've won, Tommy; I've won. She's accepted me! And she says if I love her truly, I'll win to-morrow."

"You poor simp! And if you lose the game?"

His face fell.

"Don't talk about nothing so awful as that."

"You mean she says she'll can you if you don't win?"

"My Gawd! George—you *mustn't* talk about not winning. I've *got* to win. It means my whole future happiness!"

"Right you are!" I says, knowing he'd get me like I didn't mean to be got. Then I turned over and went to sleep again, and so help me Pete, I wasn't able to finish that dream!

I'll never forget that last game. I believe when the parson is telling them what a swell guy I was,—me being the dear departed,—I'll come to life in the coffin and yell: "Slide! you sonovagun, *slide!*"

Noise? Oh, Lemuel! A deaf man would have fell on his knees and offered up prayers of thanksgiving for having his hearing restored so miraculously.

As for our bunch, they played ball like fiends. Tommy started it by talking to the shortstop.

"Get 'em all!" he pleads. "You don't know what this means to me!"

"Huh!" says the shortstop, "I'll get 'em. You don't know what it means to me, either."

THE crabbing was all gone. Every man was out to win the game. When Conover, on first, dropped a high heave from second on a close play, Simpson, who'd fought it out with him in the clubhouse a few days before, strolls over, claps him on the back and says: "Don't let that worry you, old man. You'll not make another

error. You've got to hold 'em. You don't know what this means to me!"

"I'll latch onto 'em," sobs Conover. "That was a boob error. But I'll not make another. This game means too much to me."

Tommy pitched the game of his life. One hit they got off him in nine innings. But Riverview wasn't letting that rag get away from them without considerable scrap. We touched up their new port-side phenom' for exactly one scratch hit. Looked like darkness was going to stop the festivities. And up in the grandstand sat Dollye and old man Baldwin.

But when men are playing under the strain we were, there's bound to be a break sooner or later. This one came in the eleventh and Riverview got the benefit of it. With one man down, the Riverview third-baseman laid a nasty little grounder between short and second. The two players made a dive for it, collided, and the man was safe on first. He stole second on a robber's decision and was sacrificed to third. A weak hitter is next at bat, and of course the Riverview manager, knowing that a hit means a run, substitutes a pinch-clouter. And right away Tommy, with the do-or-die look on his phiz, gets the batter in a hole with two strikes and no balls.

Maybe I was wrong in what I done. And maybe not. But all my loyalty to Rosedale wasn't nothing to my loyalty for Tommy. I and him had been pals since we met in the Cincy camp, and I knew if we won that game, Dollye was going to marry him. I tell you, it's 'ell to see a good man go wrong.

With two strikes and no balls on the batter and a man on third with two down and one run needed to win. I knew the Riverview manager was going to take a chanst. I knew as well as I knew my own given name that the guy was going to try to steal home. He had a big lead off third.

I pegged to third. And I deliberately threw wild! There was a yell, a cloud of dust and a wreath of profanity in my general vicinity.

The man had scored, and Riverview had won the pennant!

But even as the fifth pop-bottle

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beaned me, I smiled, because I knew I'd saved my pal from an awful fate!

WITH the game and the pennant lost, a sudden good feeling seemed to spring up among the players. They gathered in my room that night and asked me did my head still hurt and saying that they knew it wasn't my fault that ball went wild. They all seemed kind of self-contained and uneasy: like good pals in misery.

"It meant more than the game to me," mourns Tommy.

"And me," seconds Steele.

"And me," glooms Browne.

"Ditto," sobs Richardson.

I didn't have such a headache that I couldn't see through a hole in a millstone.

"What's the answer?" I asks. "There's something here that needs explaining."

"Dollye promised—" started Steele when in comes a messenger boy with a telegram sent from Rosedale. It was

addressed to Tommy, and after he'd read it, fainted and been resuscitated, we all grabbed. Here it is:

Thank goodness my job is finished. Mr. Baldwin and I have just been married. Luck to all of you.

DOLLYE BALDWIN.

"My Gawd!" howls Tommy, "the duplicity of the woman. She promised to marry me!"

"And me," seconds Steele.

"And me," raves Browne.

"And me too," from Richardson. And so the chorus went around.

"Clam down," I counseled. "Clam down! After all, she was paid to put pep in this team, and she done it. She wasn't hired to be a wife-in-chief. Besides, we lost and all bets were off. It strikes me that she's hit on a dandy compromise!"

But even my sound logic didn't seem to make them very happy! Men is funny things where women is concerned!



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OLD SAM CRUMMET, making heavy weather of it out of Northboro in a general direction of Robbins Mills, knocked the ashes out of his pipe against one of the big boulders that come poking out to the very edge of the road at Peaslee's Hollow. Sam should have remembered

that there had not been a drop of rain since the 15th of May. But Sam, at that particular moment, was too much occupied in steering a course that would keep him out of the ditch at either side of the road to bother his head about such minor matters as lack of rain.

The strong southwest breeze sent the

trail of live sparks whirling through the late June darkness into the sun-baked underbrush on the other side of the road. Sam wobbled on his way, caroling joyously, if somewhat raucously, a ballad about peachblow time in Delaware that he had heard at one of the movie houses in Northboro that evening.

Back in the thick woods at Peaslee's Hollow a dead juniper bush showed a little spurt of flame at its edges; the southwest wind fanned it into more respectable proportions; a tangle of fallen pine limbs near by began to snap and crackle; the trunk of a big spruce began to smoke. By the time Sam had reached Wiley's Run, a merry conflagration was roaring its way through the woods. An hour later the whole southern horizon was ruddy with the glare of it. Then the wind shifted, with all the variableness of a summer blow—to southeast, to east, to northeast. The ruddy glare in the sky spread out and took new direction with the shifts of the wind. And by morning the wind had backed into the northwest.

So it happened that on the closing day of school in the little white schoolhouse in Robbins Mills, the woods in all directions were a ring of roaring flames. Black swirls of smoke drove across the clearing in the woods which marked the site of the village, and so the closing-day declamations were delivered in a stifling atmosphere, because all the windows were closed to keep out the choking smoke.

The fire, however, was not without certain compensations. For once the twenty-odd buzzing, whining sawmills which gave the place its name were silent. Every last man of their crews was out in the woods fighting the fire—that is, every last man save one. René Bouchard, his black hair plastered down very smoothly, a rosebud in the lapel of his coat, sat with his knees jammed under one of the desks in the back of the room, listening gravely to young William McDevitt—William's eyes on the ceiling and his fingers clutching desperately the seams of his trousers—heartening the patriots on the eve of Bunker Hill, and to Lena Hyllested's ear-splitting rendition of "The Mocking

Bird" on a very shiny cornet which seemed now and again not any too thoroughly under Lena's control.

THE town itself being in no danger, it had occurred to René that he might as well attend these closing exercises at the school before joining the force of fire-fighters who were trying to save what timbered acreage they could of the Robbins holdings. To all appearances there would be opportunities enough the next few days to do all the fire-fighting he wanted. Besides, after what this school had done for him this past year, he somehow felt the least he could do was to attend the closing exercises.

So he sat there at the desk he had occupied every school-day since early November, listening to the declamations and the last-day compositions, joining with a heavy voice in the chorus-singing and now and again stroking his heavy black mustache.

Ostensibly his eyes were fixed upon the children, who, one after another, stumbled up to the worn and hollowed little platform to do each his turn. In reality he did not see the children at all. He saw only Alice Langdon's smooth cheeks, her gray eyes, the masses of brown hair on her head, as she sat there smiling at each small performer from the chair behind the teacher's desk.

The smoke outside filled the room with a strange half-light like the twilight under the pines when the sun had gone down behind Knob Hill. The distant roar of flames now grew louder, now died away. But the smoke-cloud shut down momentarily thicker, and the stifling air of the schoolroom became more and more oppressive. The children moved about uneasily. Some of the younger ones were frankly frightened. So the exercises were cut short, and school was dismissed for the year.

RENÉ BOUCHARD waited at his wholly inadequate desk until the last youngster had skipped through the door. Then he arose ponderously and went down the aisle between the desks to the platform. He was very tall, very straight, very broad of shoulder and slim of hip. The floor-boards squeaked

and squealed beneath his footsteps as he made his way down that aisle. His head was thrown back; his lips, slightly parted in a smile, showed the even white teeth behind them. All in all, René Bouchard was good to look upon in the smoky yellow light of the late June afternoon.

At the teacher's desk his smile became more pronounced and at the same time rather embarrassed. He stood with one big foot on the platform, the other on the floor. His right elbow rested on the edge of the desk, and the fingers of his right hand nervously caressed his freshly shaven chin.

"Have you guessed why I came here and sat among the children all the year to learn the English—to read it and to speak it correctly as you have taught me to do?" he asked. "Have you? It was because Mr. Robbins offered me a good job in the city office if I would learn English. Yesterday he told me the job was mine. It is a splendid job, and chances to go up the line in the selling end of the business. But I like it here in Robbins Mills. I like the woods. The city? He has offered me the same job before; many times he has offered it if I would learn to read and write English. But I have always turned it down until—"

He paused. He began toying with some flowers in a slim vase on the desk-corner. His broad, rather handsome face reddened.

"Until—" Alice Langdon prompted him, and even as she spoke, saw the lay of the land in a flash of intuition.

"Until you came," said René. "It was all different then. I was not satisfied with this place or with myself. I was all at once ashamed of myself. I saw myself as I was, awkward, uncouth, ignorant. So I came here and sat among the children, because in the English I was but the little child myself, and I worked hard and learned. And only yesterday Mr. Robbins offered me the place at once—a good place it is, with chances to go up the line."

He was leaning across the desk, his eyes suddenly aglow. Even a duller mind than hers would have known what was coming. Any woman would have known it under the circumstances: Her

one thought at the moment was to forestall it before it did come.

"Oh, René," she said a little breathlessly, "I'm dreadfully sorry. Really, if I'd known—"

HE suddenly drew himself up. His chin came out of his palm. The smile did not leave his face, but he was looking at her keenly. Her face at the moment spoke volumes to him.

"There is then another man?" he asked quietly.

"Yes," she said, flushing.

She lifted the cover of her desk, rummaged among the papers within, found what she sought and silently handed it to him. René opened the gray cardboard covers and beheld the sepia-tinted likeness of a very trim young man.

"To-morrow," she said, half under her breath.

René did not seem to understand. He looked up inquiringly from the picture. Still he was smiling.

"We are to be married then," said she.

"Oh!" said he musingly. Then he looked out the streaked windows at the pall of smoke. It was thicker than ever. The yellow light of the earlier afternoon was gone. It was quite dark now, although it was not yet four o'clock. Already the corners of the room were places of indistinct shadows.

"I congratulate you," said René with a stiff and jerky bow. "I am sorry I started to say what I did. I too did not realize. Forgive me! Only,"—again he looked out the windows,—"I'm afraid now it won't be to-morrow nor the next day nor yet the day after that, unless it rains," he added.

"The trains—they're not running on the branch, you mean?" she asked in alarm.

"The last one went down as far as Little River this noon. It had to come back," he told her.

"And the road to Northboro—can't they get through that way?"

He shook his head.

"For a mile the other side of Peaslee's Hollow it is a furnace where no living thing could breathe," he said.

"Isn't there any way out?"

"On every side there is the fire now,"

he said. "We are cut off until it rains or until it burns itself out. Fighting it amounts to very little now. It's got beyond that. You see there has been no rain for over a month. Everything is so dry."

"But it's dreadfully bad luck to postpone a wedding," she said, aghast at the prospect. "I've always been superstitious about that. If there was any way,—any way at all,—I'd try it. I'm not afraid."

RENÉ handed back the photograph. He stood looking at her thoughtfully for a time.

"There might be one way out of it," he said slowly at length. "Some one who knew every inch of the ground might possibly get through it by following Bent Creek. I don't say they could. I just say they might. And if they could get through that way, then they could bring this young man back with them here, and the wedding could come off on time. Is he far from here? Where does he live?"

"In my home place—in Grantville," said she.

"There is no time like the present, if it is to be tried," said he. "I'll start right away, and if I can get through, I'll bring him back by the same route tomorrow night."

"No!" she cried. "You mustn't. I can't let you, René. It's foolish. It may rain; and if it doesn't, I shall have to wait until the fire dies out of itself."

"That might not be for a week or more," said he.

"Then I should have to wait the week."

There was a certain straightforwardness, a certain simplicity, about René Bouchard that she had always liked. She had liked it that first day he had tapped at the schoolhouse door and told her he had come to learn "the English." She had liked it when he took his place at the desk in the back of the room, unmindful of the stares and open titters of the children. She had liked it afterward as he sat there day after day, haltingly reading the lessons with the first-reader class, painfully following the script headings in the pages of the copy-books. She liked it in him now as

he looked at her steadily and said quietly:

"But you have said it is bad luck to postpone a wedding. You must not be disappointed. I will go—or, at least, I will try to make it. His name is?" he suggested.

She gave him the name, and he turned away. But she sped to the door as it closed behind him.

"René," she called, "no, don't go. Really, I'd rather wait until doomsday than have you try it. A postponement? What does it matter, compared to running a risk like that? Don't try it. It's plain foolhardiness."

He stood there a dim figure in the drifting smoke. His head was slightly tilted as he listened to the distant roar of flames.

"I think I can bring him back tomorrow night, or maybe before," he said. "Every last inch of Bent Creek I know. And if there is any way through, that is the way."

He waved his hand, smiled and turned away. The dingy brown smoke hid him from view.

"Wait!" she called. "René."

She ran toward the spot where he had disappeared. But her only answer was the sound of footsteps running down the road.

SHORTLY after noon the next day a grimy, disheveled figure turned in at the McDevitts' gate, where the Robbins Mills school-teachers always boarded. His mustache and eyebrows were gone; his face was blistered and peeling; his clothes were scorched, tattered and dripping with slimy mud.

Alice Langdon ran down the gravel path.

"I got through," said René simply.

"And he came back with you?" she asked. "Where is he?"

René shook his head.

"He didn't come with me," he said.

He looked at the girl and then suddenly became interested in the toe of one sodden, muddy shoe.

"I got into Northboro at about nine last night," he explained. "I telephoned him at once. He came there this morning. But he was ill. I wouldn't risk letting him come back with me, he was

so ill. So I left him there at the Eagle House and came back to tell you."

"Ill?" said the girl blankly. "Too ill to come back with you after all you'd done?"

"He wanted to come. I wouldn't have it," said he. "He begged and pleaded, but I wouldn't listen to him."

"Ill?" she said again in the same blank tones. Then she gripped his arm.

"René, I *am* dreadfully superstitious about putting off a wedding," she said; "and I'm more disappointed than I can tell you that he didn't come back with you. If he's too ill to come, wont you take me to him—take me out the way you went. I'm strong, and I'm not afraid."

"Take you through that?" he said hoarsely. "Through *that*? Look at me!"

"I'm not afraid," she said, her gray eyes never wavering.

"No," he said, as if arguing with himself. "No! That's out of the question."

"I'd run any risk rather than have it postponed," she said. "I'd take any chance. If he's so near, at Northboro—"

She was clinging to one torn sleeve of his coat. Her face was very near to his in the choking smoke. He leaned wearily against a gatepost.

"Don't look at me like that," he said sharply, "or, heaven help me, I'll be fool enough to take you."

"What shall I need?" she asked as if the matter were all settled.

"A thick coat," he muttered, "one that you can wrap about your head, and a heavier dress, and the stoutest boots you've got."

She sped into the house.

THERE was a long tramp over hot, blackened ground, which burned her feet even through the heavy soles of her shoes. Then stifling rushes of hot air in her face and the roar of flames and the crash of falling trees. Suddenly René stooped and gathered her in his arms. Stumblingly, with lowered head, he made a wild rush through a puff of ovenlike heat. It blistered the skin and seared the lungs. She saw tongues of flame darting at them from all sides, be-

fore he pulled the coat about her head. There was a great splashing and the grateful coolness of water soaking through her clothes. She knew they were at last in Bent Creek.

"Down!" said René, his hand on her shoulder forcing her into the water. "Down, close to the water—so! Now uncover your head enough to breathe freely for a minute. Better not look!"

But she did look, and caught her breath in a great gasping sigh. Ahead of them the creek was lost in what seemed a solid wall of flame.

"There's nearly half a mile of it," he shouted in her ear above the roar. "Are you afraid?"

"Not with you," she said.

"Still want to try it?"

"Yes!"

He splashed water over the coat, over her shoulders, onto her face.

"Get down on your hands and knees, like this," he told her. "Only keep your head out of water. Crawl along beside me in the mud. Keep your head covered with the coat, and every little while take a long breath and duck your head and the coat under water. Are you ready?"

"Yes!"

"Keep your shoulder against mine!"

They set off, crawling through the water, their hands and knees sinking far into the slimy mud of the creek bottom. Every few seconds she felt him splashing water over her; every other half-minute it was: "Now! Long breath! Duck!"

Once he ordered a halt oversharply. "Wait, here," he commanded. "There's a blazing tree across the way just ahead. I've got to see what's beyond it and what the chances are of getting by it."

She heard him splashing ahead, and presently splashing back again. She uncovered her eyes. The rush of the heat made her cry out with the pain of it. But in that brief minute she had seen René, his face blackened, the skin hanging in strips from his chin.

"Don't do that again," he said irritably. "Don't so much as lift a corner of that coat over your head."

"But you!" she cried from the muffling depths of the water-sodden coat. "Your head isn't covered at all."

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"One of us has got to see," he said simply. "Come on!"

DURING one of their brief halts for breath she risked another covert look at that blackened, blistered face beside her.

"I oughtn't to have driven you into coming through this again," she said contritely. "I didn't know what it was."

"Afraid?" he asked succinctly. "Too much for you?"

"No."

"Then it doesn't matter about me."

The roar of the fire began to lessen. Through the stifling heat came now and again a puff of cool, soothing air. René splashed toward the bank, guiding her thither.

"We're through," he said. "You can take the coat off your head now."

They crawled from the water into a soggy, wooded swamp. Without a word he lifted her again in his arms and waded through it, now and again sinking to his knees in the black muck. So they reached the beginning of higher and firmer ground. He set her on her feet and, his arm through hers, guided her through the underbrush to an old logging road.

"This'll take us to the outskirts of Northboro," he told her. "It's five miles, maybe. Can you stand it?"

"Yes, but let's rest here first. And let me tear some strips out of my skirt and bandage your face."

Gingerly he fingered his blackened cheeks.

"That's nothing," he said.

The wavering light of the flames behind them made strange, jumpy shadows under the pines.

THE EAGLE HOUSE is on Northboro's main street. The two disheveled figures reached it just as dusk was coming on. The wind being from the southwest again, the smoke-pall over

Northboro had cleared. The wide windows of the Eagle House office were open. Lights were aglow, and at a table near one of the open windows they saw five men playing pitch. There was a burst of laughter as one of them made a tremendously lucky "smudge."

The girl suddenly gripped René's arm. "She was looking at the man who had just made the smudge—the man who was laughing the loudest of all the group. Every bit of color had gone from her face. She was trembling, but it was not the drenched clothes clinging clammy to her that made her shiver.

"You said, René—you said he was ill," she said chokingly.

René hung his head.

"Was he—was he afraid?" she asked, her grip on the big man's arm growing more tense.

Still René said nothing. He shifted uneasily from one foot to the other.

"You have been through it twice; and I, a woman, have been through it, and he didn't dare!"

She stood there in the darkness outside, staring at the man at the table.

"Oh, come away!" she said.

Without a word they walked up the street.

"Did he get as far as the creek?" she asked at last.

"Yes," René admitted.

"Did he turn back when he saw the fire across it, as I saw it first this afternoon?"

"Yes," he said simply again.

Her teeth came together with a sharp click. She began walking faster. But suddenly she stopped short. She stepped in front of René Bouchard, her gray eyes shining.

"This was to be my wedding-day, René," she said. "It's dreadfully bad luck to put off your wedding-day. I'm terribly superstitious about that. You're a brave man, René Bouchard, and a good man. And isn't that the Baptist parsonage just across the street?"

WILLIAM ALMON WOLFF has written just about the best football story you ever read, for our next issue. Watch for it in the November BLUE BOOK MAGAZINE—on sale October 1st.



PENNERTON and I belong to that class of public discourses which addresses audiences far more huge than those of Billy Sunday, the entire theatrical profession and all the "best-seller" novelists combined. We talk from magazine pages in the homy light of the evening lamp; we shout to our audience as it joy-tours through the billboarded countryside; we burn our messages across the black sky of city night; we make galamooded theater-goers forget music, perfume, romance and each other, while we chat of shoes and ships and sealing-wax. "Udelova Cracker!" we say; "Good Evening, Have You Used Plum's Dope?" and "Chew Yucamint Gum!" Heaven pity us, we write advertisements!

We write them in a crowded, noisy room, called the "Torture Chamber" by us, and the "copy-department of the Quaife Advertising Agency" by outsiders. We write in shirt-sleeves and in agony of spirit. We write to please ourselves, our keen-brained boss and the vendors of wares with whom our boss contracts to handle their advertising. When we have pleased all of these, the real test comes. That is to please you.

If you, Mr., Mrs., Miss or Master Anyreader, are made to stop, look and

read by means of one of our inspired announcements, be it printed or painted or electric-bulbed, and if your eyes do not stray till they have telegraphed a new idea to your brain, and if that idea sometime, somehow, helps to make you form a new buying habit or strengthen an old one,—helps to make you send for a sample, or a salesman, or a catalogue, or a trial order, or a "reorder" of the goods we told you about in that announcement,—then we have succeeded. Then we are satisfied and the keen-brained boss is satisfied; and the vendors who purchased the boss' expert advice are satisfied enough to pay him a stiff fee just as joyously as a client pays the lawyer who wins his case. When all are satisfied, Pennerton and I are clapped on the back and told we are "crack copy-writers." That's what they call us—"copy-writers." We privately believe we should be known as trumpeters of commerce, uplifters of public taste, stimulators of national ambition. But instead, they pay us school-teachers' salaries for making fortunes for the boss' clients—any of us will admit that—and call us merely "copy-writers."

YOU probably have forgotten when and why you bought your first pair of Wearlong Rubber Heels. Try to re-

member. It was the first summer of the colored-shoe fad that you got into the habit of asking for "Wearlongs," wasn't it? Doesn't that bring back to your mind the picture of the two pairs of feet and ankles that for months marched down half the billboards and magazine back-covers that you looked at? One pair was straight, even-heeled and springy-looking, you remember, with a bit of tailored skirt above; the other pair crookedly clumped down on uneven heels in a way that almost made you hear the blows they were giving the concrete sidewalk. Then there were a few crisp sentences, you know, about Wearlong heels improving the carriage, the eight thousand "spine-clouts" in an average day's walking, the claim that "Wearlong heels live up to their name," and the extremely low price. Remember, now? Well, Pennerton designed that advertisement.

This is how that ankle advertisement happened:

The crookedest pair of feminine ankles Pennerton had ever seen labored along on uneven heels just a few paces ahead of him as he took his lunch-hour constitutional one spring day. "Your ankles would be straight as a die, child," he murmured to himself, "if you only kept yourself well heeled with Wearlongs." That gave him an idea. His eyes still on the heels, he jerked out a stiff-backed notebook and scribbled: "Wearlong Heels Keep Ankles Straight."

He jostled another noon-furloughed office-slave hurrying in the opposite direction, with such force as to shake out a burst of acid sarcasm. But he did not hear.

ALL morning at the office he had been cudgeling his brain to get an idea for a back-cover illustration for women's magazines here. The back view of that girl's tilted feet and ankles would be just the thing, he was thinking, his eyes fastened upon them, when suddenly he stopped short, and his notebook dropped to the ground.

A second pair of feet—trim, even-heeled, straight-ankled—had come trippingly from out a doorway and joined the crooked-heeled pair. Even before

Pennerton had raised his eyes, he knew by the thrill those slender, white-spatted ankles communicated to him that they could support no other figure in the world than the dainty one of Amy Dell.

Mechanically he picked up the notebook, and the feel of it in his hand reminded him of something. Now, consider what ad-writing does to the mind of man: There, a few paces ahead of Pennerton, tripped the exquisite little lady of his dreams, whom he had neither seen, nor once ceased to think of, for five long weeks; his hands grew clammy; a little muscle that he never before knew he possessed was jerking in his temple. And, at a time like that, the sight of her trim ankles gave birth in his gyrating brain to an idea for the illustration of a back-cover advertisement!

"Cover illustration: backs of one neat pair and one crooked pair heels and ankles walking together," he scrawled in his notebook.

That done, Pennerton took himself in hand; he commanded himself to go up to Amy, speak to her in the friendly manner in which any chap would speak to any nice girl with whom he'd worked in the same office for more than a year. How was she to know, he mentally inquired, that he was kept awake nights by the little blond image of her; that he spent miserable half-hours gazing into mirrors and scornfully telling himself how insignificant his small, spare figure and plain, nervous-looking countenance must look to her? He hastened his steps and got his hand halfway to his hat-brim, when—

"Oh, no ye don't, me gay bird!" boomed a grim voice, coming from far above Pennerton's head. He felt himself jerked about by one arm; his nose was grazed by a policeman's star.

"O've been watchin' ye, ye poor, half-portion masher! Ye've been followin' up wan o' thim girruls fer the last fifteen minutes. Come along now, or—"

"Miss Dell!" called Pennerton desperately.

THE owners of the contrasting heels wheeled about on them. She of the even pair came to him with outstretched hand.

"Mr. Pen, hello!" She smiled with amazement. "What on earth—"

The officer of the law let go of Pennerton's collar and moved rapidly away.

"You see, he thought I was trying to—to flirt with you young ladies," stammered Pennerton.

"Wish I'd pretended not to know you," declared Miss Dell severely. "I hardly *do*; it's so long since I've seen you. Oh—Miss Brownell, I'd like you to know Mr. Pennerton—he used to be advertising manager at the office. Miss Brownell's taken Polly's place at the switch-board since you left, Mr. Pen."

The maiden of the crooked heels acknowledged the introduction in a way that necessitated no interruption of the rhythmic chewing action of her jaws, mentioned the fact that she must turn off at the corner they had just reached, and passed down the street and out of Pennerton's life.

His panic returned. Business, he confusedly decided, was the safest subject.

"That girl's crooked heels gave me a first-rate idea for a Wearlong Rubber Heel ad," he began.

"Oh, you writing ads for some hated competitor of ours, Mr. Pen?" asked the girl with a deepening of incongruously unbusinesslike dimples.

Pennerton's eyes blazed through his horn-rimmed spectacles.

"An hour after I'd told Anderson I was through working for him," said Pennerton in a dour voice, "I applied for a job with the Quaife Advertising Agency and got it."

"The Quaife? That little concern!" exclaimed the girl, crumpling her pretty forehead. "Why, they can't afford—that is—"

"No, they can't pay much," interrupted Pennerton grimly; "I'm working for a third of what my salary was at Anderson's ad-shop. But they handle the advertising for the new Wearlong Rubber Heel—used to be called the No-Jar Heel, you know. First thing I did on the new job was to change the name to 'Wearlong'; that's the name I'd suggested for Anderson's heels when his lawyer told him he'd have to give up the old 'Softread' name, you remember.

Hope he's satisfied now that he's got his unique monicker hung on the heels. 'Anderson Rubber Heels!' Did you ever in your life, Miss Dell, hear a punker trade name? That name was what started Anderson and me on our final battle—remember?"

"YES, I remember, Mr. Pen—all about it," she replied in a low voice.

"Then you also remember, don't you," went on Pennerton savagely, "that he said I was an 'insignificant, starvation-waged old maid of a pencil-pusher,' and that I'd undoubtedly remain such to the end of my 'fussy little life'?"

"Yes—you both lost your tempers horribly," she replied accusingly. "But you know how the other men in the office have always deferred to Monty Anderson's opinion since his father died; you really ought to excuse Monty a bit, don't you think?"

"I wish," answered Pennerton in a thick voice, "that you'd tell the charming son of the late Anderson, Senior, for me, please, that I'm now with the Quaife Advertising Agency, on the job of writing all the advertising copy for the Wearlong Rubber Heel. The Wearlong is the only heel on the market which retails at the same price as his. If Wearlong sales go up, Anderson sales go down. Well, I'm going to send them down, all right. Tell Anderson—"

"Tell him yourself, please," interrupted the girl wickedly. "He's waiting for me just inside the door of this hotel."

Pennerton's sallow face whitened, and he stopped short. Then to the girl's astonishment, he stalked beside her into the hotel. A superbly tailored Adonis rose from one of the lobby chairs, wearing a smile of amazed geniality. Pennerton went directly to him.

"As I like a fair fight, Anderson," he began, "and as I know what slight pains you take to keep yourself posted on what your competitors are doing, I want to take advantage of this chance to tell you that I am now handling the Wearlong Rubber Heel advertising account. I'm doing it for the Quaife Advertising Agency, and I took a low-salaried position with them for the sole purpose of boosting Wearlong heels until your busi-

ness is completely and permanently smashed."

Anderson's smile had changed to the ugly look of a big bully.

"Oh, have a heart, man," he sneered down at Pennerton. "You know my little business is capitalized at only about a hundred thousand. How much longer are you going to let me live, you poor, clock-punching—"

"'Pencil-pusher,'" supplied Pennerton with an obliging air and a purple face. "'Poor, insignificant, starvation-waged old maid of a pencil-pusher' is what you called me near the end of our last interview. You said I'd remain one all the rest of my 'fussy little life.' I sincerely hope I will—even you will understand why, when I've pencil-pushed Anderson's Rubber Heels completely off the business map. Good afternoon."

ANYONE in the land who wasn't blind or unconscious during that spring can realize why Pennerton's crooked-ankle advertising "brought home the bacon." Nash, the agency artist, made a wonderfully striking sketch from Pennerton's idea, and those two contrasting pairs of heels briskly stepping down the back-covers of April magazines, caught the eyes and the interest of readers of both sexes; they got themselves talked about, used in cartoons and imitated by other advertisers. Inquiries and trial orders began to pour in from every part of the country. Pennerton asked the Wearlong company for an increased appropriation for advertising and got it. He worked eleven hours a day, preparing copy and weeding out and drilling the Wearlong company's salesmen. The Wearlong factory began working a night shift.

What maddened Pennerton as the strenuous weeks went by, was the fact that he was taking just as much business away from other heel manufacturers as he was from Anderson. He realized that the Anderson company was holding its own because it was putting out some excellent advertising—in which he recognized the clever little hand of his former assistant, Amy Bell. One inspired afternoon he thought of a sure way of putting a stop to it, and he dictated the following note:

Mr. M. S. Anderson: I beg to suggest that hereafter you write all of your own advertising matter absolutely unassisted. I make this suggestion because I know you are asininely conceited enough to act upon it immediately, and the worthless rot you will write will be of the greatest possible assistance to me in my work of putting you out of business.

Pennerton knew his man. Anderson must have written and sent copy for an advertisement to the newspapers within an hour after he received the note, for all of the afternoon papers for the following afternoon day contained a half-page Anderson Rubber Heel advertisement of unmistakable authorship. Not a bit of the white space purchased for it had been wasted by being left uncovered with printers' ink. In the center was a cut of the Anderson Rubber Heel office and factory building.

The text opened with "Back in 1871, when the late Montgomery Stilwell Anderson, of the celebrated Anderson family of Ohio, entered the rubber-goods business—" and ended with a facsimile reproduction of Anderson's signature. In the single glance that any normal newspaper reader would give to it, the thing looked like an advertisement for factory property.

PENNERTON almost shed tears of joy upon that advertisement.

"What must *she* think of it?" he gloated. *She*, business-wise maiden that she was, held saner, more practical views on advertising than many of the "publicity experts" he knew. "I can't small-talk, and I can't flirt, and I can't—look, but, by George, I can think straight. And I could make Amy Dell happy," he added wistfully.

Nash, the artist, tapped the back of Pennerton's head with a T-square.

"D'you realize you've been talking aloud to yourself, Pen?" he demanded with anxiety. "Last time I found myself thinking audibly, I quit calling on the girl and tried out the safety-in-numbers idea. But that rubberheelomania of yours seems different; it'll land you in a little soft-walled room if you don't let up on it."

Pennerton contemplated the artist's breezy figure with morose admiration.

"You could quit!" he marveled. "My trouble is that I can't even get the courage to begin calling on the girl!"

"Girl!" shouted the youth; "why, you are human!" He plumped himself down on Pennerton's desk, with a smile so wide and sudden that his sympathetically moving ears dislodged the two camel's-hair brushes he habitually carried over them. "What's the trouble—quarrel, mother, rival—"

"That's it—rival," interrupted Pennerton, responding pathetically to the youngster's air of expert knowledge. "Six feet two, Nash, Darrow-collar ad face; four-figure monthly income—for a while yet."

"Any sense?"

"Enough to keep the brainiest girl in Chicago amused," answered Pennerton bitterly. "But—well, he wrote this Anderson Rubber Heel ad, Nash."

THE artist gave the advertisement one look.

"Pen," he wailed, "you darn likable, criminally modest old imbecile, you can beat the time of a nit-wit like that if you only half try. For heaven's sake, man, don't let him get her! He mightn't starve her or beat her or disgrace her—he'd do worse; he'd bore her to hysterics. You wouldn't, old man. And she probably knows it. But how's the girl going to give you any evidence of knowing that or anything else, if she never sees you? I ask you."

Pennerton stared at the youth, his face working; then he banged his littered desk-top a mighty blow and reached for the telephone.

"What's the idea?" queried Nash quickly.

"The idea is that you're right, Nash. I've been an imbecile. I've got to see her—to-night. I'm going to ask her to go to dinner with me."

"Holy cow—don't do that, Pen!" warned Nash. "It's after six o'clock now. A bid like that would make her mad—take it from me. Quit jiggling that receiver. Maisie's killed the switch-board and gone home."

Pennerton hung up the receiver.

"I've changed my mind, anyway," he said. "I'm going to send a note by Buddy. A writing job's the only propo-

sition I can handle with any sort of class."

With his experienced eyes full of misgiving, Nash watched Pennerton as he closed his eyes and went into one of the "copy trances" which always preceded his important tasks of composition; then he went resignedly to the door and shouted down the corridor to Buddy that there would probably be a quarter in it for any bright boy who would wait overtime to deliver a note for Mr. Pennerton and bring back a reply.

At any time for months previous, thought Nash, Pennerton would have used the time of waiting for the return of Buddy, in combing the magazines for good rubber-heel advertisements; he now consumed it in a totally unnecessary visit to that beauty-parlor of the male of the species—the barber-shop. On his return, Buddy approached Pennerton with new respect.

"Sa-ay, she was a peach-melber!" he enthused.

A MOMENT later Pennerton had silently tossed Buddy a quarter and Nash the dainty note of reply and stalked gloomily to the window. The note was as follows:

So sorry, but I already have a delightful engagement for dinner—for which I'm late. But I must take time to congratulate you on that wonderful advertisement in this week's *Neopolitan Magazine*. Why, it would almost make me put Wearlongs on my new blue suede pumps—if I could get blue ones!

"She needn't have taken the trouble to say she had a *delightful* engagement," complained Pennerton miserably.

Nobly restraining his "I told you so," Nash handed the note back to Pennerton, who tore it slowly into shreds, without giving it another glance.

"Huh—guess you'd say 'delightful' too," scoffed Buddy, "if you wuz a girl, and there wuz a silk-lined matinée-idol guy with a pound of ice on his little finger, tellin' yuh to please hurry—and a big baby of a Tierce-Sparrow limo waiting outside!"

Pennerton glared at the innocent youngster; then he ripped off his coat, got out his big steel agate rule, about

ten pencils and a folder marked "Wearlong Heels—Miscellaneous Data."

"Going to put in some overtime?" inquired Nash superfluously.

"I am. To-night and every night from now on, until the last existing pair of Anderson Rubber Heels is crumbled to dust on the shelf of some jay store-keeper. Anderson'd better enjoy his 'limo' and his 'ice' and his winsome raiment while he has 'em. I've been only half trying to smash his business, up to now. From now on, just watch me!"

IT is not easy to smash a well-established business that has been intelligently advertised for years. Pennerton demonstrated the fact that one good man, by devoting from twelve to sixteen hours a day to the work of advertising a twenty-thousand-dollar corporation, like the Wearlong Rubber Heel Company, can put it into the hundred-thousand-dollar class in a few months. But Anderson remained unsmashed.

Then, one torrid July morning, while he moiled over the color-proof of a street-car advertisement depicting a woman wearing yellow-and-white sport-shoes, a mysterious something connected up with the rubber-heel obsession in his brain, and in a flash his Big Idea was whirring in full operation. It pulled him to his feet; to the silent company of scribes, he ringingly announced:

"Colored rubber heels!"

They all jerked up their heads and roared.

"Good little thought, Pen—go to it," they encouraged.

"Go to it," he immediately did, and he kept at it in a way that broke all his previous records for ad-shop slavery.

One August night while Nash worked unusually late, Pennerton came into the shop and showed him the results—a few proofs for striking colored magazine insets and newspaper pages, and a salesman's sample case filled with rubber heels. There were heels of every color that Nash had seen in a shoe since the colored-footwear craze began, and of a good many colors that he had not seen—heels in dull and glossy finished edge; heels in all sizes, from the dress-shoe to the sport-shoe—for men's shoes as well as women's.

"D'you mean to say you expect any sane man to fall for these?" gasped Nash, holding up a man's-size pair of rubber heels, brightest emerald in hue.

"Surest thing you know!" replied Pennerton wearily. "This season's fad for men's colored sport-shoes will make these heels a riot. Just you watchfully wait and see."

TWO weeks later a delegation of cheerily garbed, grinning males descended upon the offices of the Quaife agency the Friday afternoon before the short Labor-Day vacation, demanding to see Pennerton. While waiting for him, they made the reception-room their home and topped each other's selling yarns in a baritone chorus which made work impossible throughout the offices, as only a company of road-salesmen can. When Pennerton appeared, the rotund Ratty, Wearlong's star roadman, leaped up and silenced his companions with a cheer-master's gesture.

"What's the matter with Pennerton?" he demanded.

"He's all right!" they boomed, crowding around Pennerton, wringing his hands, smiting his back.

"What the—why the love-feast?" he gasped.

The slangy babel rose again.

"We could kiss you—you darned young wizard, you—you're making us rich. Wearlong's going to be a man-eating, law-busting rubber-heel trust—wait till you see my sales since those colored-heel ads hit the nation—sizzling skyrockets! Why, boy—"

Ratty's brogue triumphed above the leather-lunged roar.

"Oh, dry up, boys—Pennerton here doesn't know whether we're strikin' or crazy with the heat," he bellowed happily. "The meat of the story is this, Pen: That Wearlong campaign o' yours has made the whole bloomin' country forget that there ever was any other brand of rubber heel made. In the last two weeks dealers have ordered about three times as many Wearlong heels as they have of Wingwalk, Acme, Velvetstep, Anderson's and all the others combined. And we've come straight up here off the road to tell you about

it and thank you for the strongest backin'-up in national advertisin' that a bunch o' salesmen ever had—that's all. We want to—"

"Boys," suddenly broke in Pennerton, "do you want to do me the biggest favor anybody could?"

"Just name it, man!" Ratty led the eager chorus.

"Bust Anderson!" obeyed Pennerton tensely. "Put Anderson's Rubber Heels clean off the business map. Concentrate on Anderson and forget the other competitors till he's smashed."

An astonished silence was broken by Schiefergold, the oldest of the roadmen.

"Why care who we take business away from," he puzzled, "just so we grab it for Wearlong?"

PENNERTON'S thin face crimsoned, but he looked determinedly into the questioning eyes of the little group.

"Boys, there's a girl," he confessed heroically. "Anderson's rushing her. If you've ever seen Anderson, you can picture how I stack up against him as a Romeo. Any money I may make or Anderson may lose wont mean anything—she isn't that kind of a girl. But Anderson once succeeded in making me look even more insignificant to her than I really am—if you can imagine it. Before I make a single move to try to get her to notice my existence once more, I must get Anderson's business smashed. It's a job of work I've laid out for myself to clean up first—understand? I've got to do it to show her and Anderson—and myself. See now, boys?"

They fell upon him.

"Oh, cut out the back-slapping, bunch, and get back to the business-as-usual idea," ordered Schiefergold. "Pennerton, Anderson's almost as good as smashed already," he went on, his jetty eyes gleaming with relish of the selling fight. "You'll realize it when you've had a chance to go over to the office and look over our sales-records for the past two weeks. You didn't need to tell us to put his heels out of the game—it's working out that way naturally.

"I've been talking with Corboy—An-

der-son's star city-man. His commissions have dropped to next to nothing. He and every other live salesman Anderson has come over to our office this afternoon, begging to be taken on our sales-force—on a straight commission or any old basis—and the boss put 'em on. They've broken the news to Anderson by this time. Get the authority from our office, then go over and make Anderson an offer for what's left of his business, and I bet he's panicky enough right now to take you up on it!"

Pennerton smiled ponderingly. "I'll have to get the 'authority' of only two thirds of the Wearlong powers that be, Schiefergold," he tranquilly answered. "You see, with what little capital I've saved out of a misspent life, a lot of nerve and the threat to quit writing their ads, I succeeded yesterday in making the revered Wearlong company give me a third interest in itself. Now, for heaven's sake, don't stop me while my nerve's good," he begged, heading off the renewed hubbub of congratulation. "I'm going over to Anderson and offer to buy him out right now. I'll talk to my partners later. Wait around for me—I wont be long."

PENNERTON wasn't "long." In less than half an hour, he came in, wearing a little-boyish attempt at a smile.

"Anderson's just told me to go to the devil, so I've come straight back to you," he chaffed ruefully. "That ninny wont have sense enough to get panicky till he reads a bankruptcy notice posted on his front door. You've got to help me put one there. And the day Anderson goes out of business, you're all going to get wired orders to come back here to attend a jubilee dinner, whether you have to come from South Chicago or from South America, to do it!"

"You're going to throw that party in about two months from now, Pennerton," volunteered Schiefergold quietly.

Nash and Pennerton idled about the office until long after quitting-time that evening.

"Let's go—you haven't done a lick of work since that bunch of salesmen left here, anyway, Pennerton," remarked Nash in mock shock.

"Can't—I'll have to stay to interview some copy-writers I asked the Advertising Association to send over."

"Ah, but why the dreaminess? Did you see *her* this afternoon on your flying visit to Anderson's office?" inquired Nash.

"I did not—for which I thank heaven. I don't want to see her until I've earned back my self-respect. According to that keen-looking Schiefergold person, that'll be in only about two months, now—"

NASH spun around to see what vision could possibly be causing the transformation that he suddenly saw in Pennerton's face.

One of the most eye-satisfying blonde girls that Nash's critical stare had ever rested upon, somehow had managed to walk inaudibly down half the length of the hard-floored ad-shop. She and Pennerton stood so long staring mutely at each other that Nash had time to note that the distance from her modishly hatted fair head to her trim, white-spatted, rubber-heeled shoes, was so short as to make Pennerton's dimensions look positively heroic by comparison; that her gray eyes had about them a look of clear-visioned experience, and that they were now fixed on Pennerton's twitching overwork-hollowed face with an expression that was positively maternal and something more. Finally she went to Pennerton's desk, and he let her shake his hand.

"Nat Mayer, of the Advertising Association, told me you needed some copy-men," she smiled, dimpling the maternal expression out of existence. "I want a new position. My brain's getting atrophied because my respected employer insisted on writing every word of his own copy for weeks; and besides, things over there look so shaky— Do you know your Wearlong campaign's almost put Monty Anderson out of business?" she accused severely.

"I confidently hope within the next two months to accomplish the object I once mentioned to you—that of putting the Anderson Rubber Heel Company into bankruptcy," glowered Pennerton.

"Oh, do leave poor 'Beauty' Anderson the remains of his business to play

with!" she begged in real solicitude. "Why, he simply isn't capable of making a living at anything else. You know the kind of a brain he has!"

Pennerton had gone shakily toward her.

"Amy, if you realize so well the mental capacity of that—how could you put up with so much of his society—dinners and all that!"

THE girl tittered engagingly.

"Out of about two hundred invitations with which Monty Anderson has honored me, I've accepted exactly three. Those were for luncheons, which I couldn't refuse, because he said he was making 'em for the purpose of talking business—and talk business he did—I saw to that. But do promise to let him live. Wearlong'll get rich enough, even if poor Monty does go on filling the few backwoods orders that'll keep coming in from the kind of people who form only one set of buying habits in a lifetime, you know. Please do—he's tried to be nice to me."

"I promise," replied Pennerton dizzily. "I'll call off the salesmen and tell them to let Anderson die a natural death. If you asked it, Amy, I'd even try to stop the sale of Wearlong heels forever."

"I was awfully glad for an excuse to come up here," interrupted Amy briskly. "I wanted to abuse you, but you look so pitiful, I haven't the heart. Been ill, or what in the world's the trouble?"

When Pennerton was not talking business, the expressions of his worn face were as transparent as those of a child's. Nash literally saw him prepare half a dozen perfunctory replies and reject them all in a mighty surge of yearning.

"The trouble's been just—you," he huskily confessed.

Nash bolted for his desk and grabbed his coat from a chair-back. "Given a ghost of a start, you certainly work fast, old man," he was chuckling under his breath. The girl's bonny face had become so frankly tender that he alarmingly saw she was going to "work" just as fast as Pennerton.

"But why didn't you ever try to see

me—why didn't you— Oh, what does it matter why, you poor, shy, sick, wonderful, sensitive thing!"

Before he had had time to go the length of the room, and before Pennerton had made a single movement, Nash saw the silk-sleeved, tender arms of that dainty little feminist go swiftly around Pennerton.

NASH found himself outside the copy-department door, grinning like a jack-o'-lantern. Gradually he became conscious that for a full minute there had been standing before him some sort of male human being who was demanding to see Mr. Pennerton.

From the copy-department, Nash heard a stifled laugh, and the door opened behind him.

"Right here, Anderson," said Pennerton. "What's on your large mind?"

"I want to talk to you—privately," answered the picturesque young man, glancing significantly down from his spectacular height upon Nash.

Nash promptly turned into the copy-department. As he pushed open the door, Miss Amy Dell reeled away from it.

"I was going to listen at the keyhole," she explained superfluously.

Nash disapprovingly regarded her.

"Pardon me for telling you this, Miss Dell, but you deserve it," he began. "You've needlessly caused old Pen a good deal of heartache. May I ask why you turned down the one and only dinner invitation he ever got up the courage to extend? You needn't tell me unless you want to, but I confess I'm curious."

"We-ll, you see, I *did* have an engagement," she answered demurely. "It was with Mother. Mr. Anderson drove me over in his car to meet her train. I was furious with Will Pennerton for sending me a fiddler's invitation like that after he'd completely neglected me for weeks. So I wrote him a frosty note—but you seem to have seen that note."

"Why, y-yes," stammered Nash, trying to pull out his imbedded foot. "There certainly was nothing in it you could possibly object to having Pen

show me—" He broke off, trying to recollect just what had been in that little note. Let's see, he thought, there was a line or two congratulating Pen on some ad he'd written—she'd said the ad had made her want to put Wearlong heels on her new shoes—blue shoes. Nash threw back his head and roared.

"Pennerton thinks," he chortled, "that the colored-heel idea came to him out of the blue sky. You see, he read that note of yours only once; it saddened him so that he tore it up without looking at it again."

"Sh-sh!" she warned, coming close to him. "Would you believe it? I loyally suggested that colored-heel idea to Monty Anderson, and when he failed to pay the slightest attention to it, I felt free to—"

PENNERTON breezed back, choking with laughter.

"The Anderson Rubber Heel Company is no more!" he announced. "It was absorbed five minutes ago by the Wearlong company!"

"Will Pennerton! After you promised!" cried Amy.

"But Anderson turned down your offer not four hours ago," gasped Nash.

"Anderson's going to be a movie star!" shouted Pennerton. "Some screen-girllie gave him the idea at tea an hour ago. They immediately communicated with her boss—Hapgood of the Effenkay—who's seen Monty's beauty, and offered him a job as an extra, till he's learned the ropes. Too slow for Monty. He's going to take the few thousand his outfit is worth to the Wearlong company, and set up as his own angel—star himself! He'll probably get rich—the beautiful doll! He's crazy with joy. Loathes business—I can't understand how he stood it this long. Why, would you believe it, when I tried to carry out my vow to put the fear of 'pencil-pushing' into his peacock's soul before he got away from me, I found he'd hardly even heard of my *colored-heel idea!*"

Amy Dell gave Nash a look that sealed their unspoken pact forever.

"It was a *wonderful* idea, Will, dear!" she marveled, shining-eyed.



Joan's Enemies

by J. J. Bell

CHAPTER I

IN A GIRL'S KEEPING

MISS MARCH, you are keeping something back."

"Mr. Cran, I have answered your questions as fully as I could."

"You have told me nothing at all—nothing I did not know."

They faced each other across the broad writing-table in the spacious, lofty, shaded room—a pale shrunken, aged little man in a black velvet dressing-gown and skullcap, and a fresh, straight, blonde, blue-eyed girl in a white linen frock. The time was late summer, the scene the library of an old mansion in Highgate.

The voice of Rufus Cran held neither anger nor reproach; it came quietly, evenly, as one simply stating a conviction. That of Joan March was not so calm, but it betrayed anxiety rather than alarm or resentment, and the girl's attitude was wholly dignified.

"As my secretary," he resumed at last, "don't you think it is your duty to tell me all you know?"

At that her color ebbed; yet her reply came clearly, steadily. "As my employer," she said respectfully, "you have the right to dismiss me I—I shall not insist on the month's notice."

The thin, pallid lips twitched almost imperceptibly; the sunken eyes left her face to rove idly round the apartment wherein the man had spent so much of his life. It was a handsomely decorated place, red predominating, and expensively and solidly furnished. Two of the walls were lined with books—books of all sizes and all ages; and practically every book had to do with one or an-

other, several or all, of the precious metals known to science. A large safe in the angle of the wall carrying the wide window and that holding the fireplace contained manuscripts on the same subject.

But Rufus Cran was no mere student. If he had the eyes of a dreamer, he had the mouth of a practical man. For near forty years, within his shabby-enough offices in Hatton Garden, he had been dealing in the precious metals themselves—certain of them worth their weight in gold over and over again. He had never married, never gone into society. Some said he was enormously wealthy, and a miser; others declared he spent all his profits on those rare and costly books.

JOAN MARCH, bracing herself, waited for him to speak. His keen gaze was upon her again before she was ready.

"Miss March, I offer you five thousand dollars for a straight answer to my last question. Where, at the present moment, is my nephew Douglas Grant?"

Sick at heart, the girl rose and said:

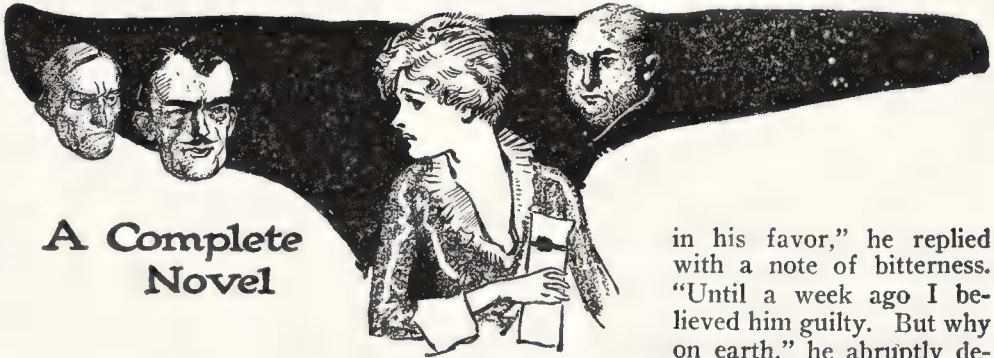
"I am sorry I cannot tell you, Mr. Cran; and now I must ask you to accept my resignation."

"And I beg to offer you, Miss March, my congratulations on your ability to keep a secret. Kindly shake hands and sit down again. I have much to say to you. I am going to trust you in a great matter."

She took the proffered hand, and sank upon her chair, shaken and mystified.

"You must not think of deserting me just yet," he said; and he added a little sadly: "You will be relieved of your duties here soon enough." He cleared his throat. "Meanwhile I ask you to trust me. The subject is still my nephew, but you need not speak unless

A Complete Novel



you wish. In the first place, you are of course aware of the reason why my nephew left my employment—and my friendship—so hastily two years ago?"

"I have heard a reason," she answered in a low voice. "I am sure it is not the true one."

"Ah! You knew my nephew well?"

"He was a frequent visitor to this house, Mr. Cran."

"You were friends?"

She drew herself up. "Friends—nothing more, I assure you."

"Pardon my curiosity; it is not idle. You have heard, no doubt, that a discrepancy came to light in certain accounts,—fifteen hundred dollars to be precise,—and that immediately thereafter my nephew went—disappeared."

"Yes, I have heard all that."

"And disbelieved it! Very well! Yesterday I received, by registered mail an envelope containing fifteen hundred dollars in bank-notes, along with a single line of writing, which said: 'Repaid by Douglas Grant.' . . . Now do you still disbelieve?"

An exclamation of distress escaped her.

"Well, Miss March?"

"No! I don't believe that he took the money."

"What faith!" said Rufus Cran gently. "But if he didn't take the money, why should he return it?"

She shook her head. "He did not take it; that is all I know."

He leaned toward her. "And that is all I know, Miss March, but I wish to God I had known it sooner!"

"Oh, you believe in him!" she cried.

"Thanks to lately discovered evidence

in his favor," he replied with a note of bitterness. "Until a week ago I believed him guilty. But why on earth," he abruptly demanded, "didn't the boy put

up some defense? Why did he run away? And of all absurd things, why has he sent me fifteen hundred dollars? Now you understand why I want to find him."

Joan wiped her eyes. "I'm so glad you have learned the truth. . . . Did the postmark give you no hint?"

"New York—the Bronx."

"Ah!" She considered a moment.

"Mr. Cran, I can tell you this much; I do not think he mailed it himself, for I'm sure he is not in New York. Oh, I wish I could tell you where he is!"

HE regarded her hopefully—then sighed. "I must respect your reason, whatever it is, for this odd silence. But could not you let him know that I have discovered the truth? I want him back—quickly. You could write."

"It would be my first letter to Mr. Grant," she answered a little stiffly. "Forgive me!" she went on, "but I must warn you not to count on his coming back. I—I know of only one thing which would insure his return."

"Tell me!"

"I cannot."

"Then send word I am dying."

"Mr. Cran!"

"It is the truth; I am very ill. But I have neither the desire nor the time to discuss that now." He looked at his watch. "Stormont and Lismore will be here directly. Miss March, I only ask that you will do what you can for an old man's peace of mind."

"Mr. Cran, you are not fit to see people and talk business to-day. They may not have started. Let me phone the office—"

"I must see Stormont and Lismore. Afterward I will rest. By the way, you and Lottie Lismore are as good friends as ever, I hope?"

"Oh, yes. Surely—"

"Continue to be Lottie's friend. I would not hurt—" He paused and opened a drawer in the table. "But I'm forgetting," he resumed with a sharp change of tone. "I want you to watch what I do now, Miss March, and to remember." He took forth a large sheet of handmade paper covered with his own large, clumsy writing, and picked up the scissors from the pen-tray.

"Pray observe!" he said then. "I divide this sheet into three strips, cutting from bottom to top. So! The two outer strips I put away in the drawer, but the middle strip I place in this linen envelope, which is already directed to my nephew. I seal the envelope. . . . Finally"—his voice had become impressive—"I commit the packet to your care. Take it, Miss March, and give it to Douglas immediately he returns. On no account is it to be forwarded to him. Should he not return within six months from to-day, which will mean that he refused to return for my sake,—and I depend on your letting him know of my state,—you must burn it unopened. . . . You will accept the trust, and give me your promise—will you not? For as surely as I am speaking to you now, I shall be gone long, long before the six months are expired."

"Oh, don't! . . . Of course I will do as you ask, and thank you for trusting me. Only if this"—she glanced down at the packet—"is in any way precious—"

"There are always risks," he remarked, "but I have preferred to leave it in your charge. Precious or otherwise, I believe it will be safe with you. But mention it to nobody." He sighed. "The boy might have had some thought for an old man. I admire him, but I can't wholly forgive him."

A SERVANT entered to announce that Mr. Stormont and Mr. Lismore were in the drawing-room.

"When I ring, show them in here," said Rufus Cran. He turned back to his secretary. "I shall not require you

while they are here. But," he went on, "I have still much to say to you. Dine with me to-night, and we will talk afterward. And in case I forget then, my thanks now, my dear, for the cheer you have brought into my poor life these last two years. Farewell."

Impulsively she held out her hand. "Oh, Mr. Cran, if I could only—"

With an old-fashioned air of homage he took her fingers to his lips; then he rose, conducted her to the door and bowed her out.

CHAPTER II

A PAIR OF SCOUNDRELS

A CAREFUL observer would have noted that neither of the two men, as they entered, was quite at his ease. Harold Lismore, big, ruddy, fair, was painfully solemn-looking; while Daniel Stormont, slight, dapper, dark, followed, smiling with what seemed unnecessary geniality.

These two men were middle-aged: Lismore was fifty, and in a clear light looked every year of it; Stormont was five years younger, and passed for forty at the most.

"Hot, isn't it?" the latter remarked with a nod of greeting, and appeared to search for a suitable seat.

Lismore thought he did better than his companion when he advanced to the writing-table, from which Mr. Cran had not risen, saying:

"Sorry you didn't feel equal to town to-day. I trust—"

"Thanks. Please be seated—but first kindly turn the key in the door and draw the curtain across it. . . . Mr. Stormont, I regret having to ask you not to smoke your cigarette in this room. I am not well."

"Beg pardon, I'm sure. Must be getting absent-minded," said Stormont, hastily pocketing his gold case.

There was a silence, not long but impressive. Then, without lifting his eyes from some papers on the table, Rufus Cran began to speak.

"What I have to say is better said here than in my office—which, by the way I shall never enter again. But of that more presently." A gesture re-

questing silence. "Pray allow me to proceed. In the first place, I have news of my nephew." He paused, his head still bowed, and one would have fancied he was listening. Perhaps he did hear the sharply drawn breath of Harold Lismore. Daniel Stormont altered his attitude very slightly and soundlessly.

"My nephew," he continued, "has sent me fifteen hundred dollars—nothing more. I am still in the dark as to his whereabouts and his occupation, but I have reason to believe that he is abroad, though the money was mailed in New York. . . . Well, gentlemen, what do you think about it?"

"It must have been a blow, Mr. Cran," said Stormont readily. "I confess I have always suspected you of indulging secret—and very natural—hopes of his clearing himself; but now, unhappily, he has condemned himself."

"Condemned himself," echoed Lismore in a mere whisper.

STORMONT shot him a warning glance while he added gravely: "At the same time, may we not also say that he has—to some extent, at least—redeemed himself?"

"Yes, yes!" said Lismore eagerly. "Redeemed himself—that's it!"

"It struck me as very odd," Rufus Cran remarked as if to himself, "that he should have sent me fifteen hundred dollars."

"Odd, Mr. Cran?" said Stormont softly. "I should call it—"

"When he does not owe me one penny!"

An inarticulate sound—it might have been a groan—came from Lismore.

"Come, come, Mr. Cran," Stormont interposed quickly, "you are forgetting. Lismore and I would be the last to remind you of that unfortunate event of two years ago—" He stopped short.

Rufus Cran had at last raised his eyes, and even in that doubtful light there was something deadly in their gaze. Yet his voice was cold and level.

"Stormont, Lismore, you know as well as I do—and you knew from the beginning, and left me in ignorance—that Douglas Grant never touched, unlawfully, a penny of mine!"

"My God!" muttered Lismore, looking ready to collapse.

But Stormont, though white, kept his wits and said with a fair semblance of haughtiness:

"Really, my dear sir, I must beg of you to weigh your words! You are flying in the face of facts. Permit me to ask you two questions: first, why did your nephew disappear; second, why has he sent you the fifteen hundred?"

"You have the better of me, and I may never know how to answer those questions. Yet sometimes I imagine I have guessed." Rufus Cran looked hard at Lismore.

"No, no!" cried the big man, writhing. His colleague snarled at him.

"Silence!" commanded Rufus Cran. "I have been making discoveries of late—strange but bitterly true discoveries, and the time has come to make an end. I accuse you both—"

Stormont sprang to his feet. "Be careful, Mr. Cran; I warn you to be careful! You love your business, and you know you cannot carry it on—"

"My business comes to an end at noon to-morrow! At that hour my lawyers will take charge, preparatory to winding up. They will pay you and Mr. Lismore the agreed three months' salaries."

"But this is insufferable! We have served you for twenty years!"

"Yes,—but be seated, Mr. Stormont,—you have both served me for twenty years, and for many of those years I have regarded you as my right and left hands, and trusted you as such. Also I have treated you, I think, generously."

"We are not complaining of that," Stormont said sullenly as he resumed his seat. "Only—"

"And now, but for one thing, and that no merit of yours, I would without mercy break you both!" He paused, his fingers playing lightly on the blotting-pad.

Stormont opened his mouth, but no word came forth; Lismore sat huddled, inert, his gaze on the floor.

RUFUS CRAN, still in that cold, level voice, continued:

"When you agreed to serve me, you

also agreed to have no speculative dealings on your own account. Both of you have been speculating, off and on, for years. You have lost more than you have made. To cover your losses, you have preyed on me and my business—"

"Proofs, proofs!" croaked Stormont.

"Better not insist on your damnation, Mr. Stormont! For years, also, you have accepted from foreign houses bribes and secret commissions. It took trouble, but I have unearthed the evidence. As for you, Mr. Lismore, there are entries in the books which—but why go into details? To me it is far worse than any bodily sickness, this late knowledge that you have cheated me all along. The money is nothing—less than nothing—to me. I could almost, being so near to death, have forgiven it. . . . But one discovery set me searching further, deeper, until I stumbled upon the truth—or a part of it—concerning my nephew. For that I do not forgive you. Because of that I pull my business to pieces rather than let you carry it on to your profit, and I leave you no penny of it to help to pay your wretched debts!"

"Lismore," said Stormont with forced composure, "let us get out of this. Old age—"

"Better stay," retorted Rufus, "to hear my final accusation, along with the one hope I can offer you of saving yourself from ruination. I accuse you both of conspiring to get rid of my nephew, though I cannot show precisely how you succeeded. Why you conspired is clear enough: you were afraid he would supersede you and have my fortune. Your fear was groundless, so far as the business was concerned: he would have had but a share, a partnership, which you also would have had. Stormont,"—the name came sharply,—"do you know where my nephew is at present?"

"I do not."

"Lismore?"

"I wish to heaven I did!"

"Oh, chuck it, Lismore," Stormont muttered harshly.

"I cannot judge," Rufus Cran remarked, "which of you is the more contemptible. But let it pass. Now I must ask your careful attention to what I am about to say. So far as my last

will and testament will show, I am only a moderately rich man. For a good many years, however, I had a fancy—craze, if you like—for putting my spare profits into platinum, and as platinum has more than doubled in value since I purchased, the proceeding has not been altogether a folly. I am possessed at the moment of forty thousand ounces of platinum; and as you know, the current price is about fifty dollars an ounce."

"Good Lord!" muttered Stormont, fairly astounded.

"Where is it, you naturally ask!" Rufus rose, holding out two strips of paper. "One for you, Mr. Stormont—the other for you, Mr. Lismore. Kindly come and take them." He sat down, rather wearily. They remained standing. "There is a third strip, which fits between these two. It will be delivered to my nephew, providing he returns within six months from this date. Otherwise it will be destroyed, and the platinum will belong to the chance discoverer—possibly a century hence."

He allowed the two nearly a minute to make what they could of their respective strips before he continued: "Now, were the three strips neatly re-joined, you would read that my nephew is entitled to three fourths of the platinum, while to you will be given the remaining fourth to divide between you. You would read, also, certain brief, plain directions for finding, and taking possession of the platinum." His voice was becoming hoarse. "You will at once perceive that in order to benefit you are bound to bring about, or at all events do nothing to prevent, my nephew's return. Moreover, you may some day admit that Rufus Cran, if he could not forgive, endeavored to rise above mere revenge." His finger sought the electric button. Sorrowfully his eyes regarded the men he had trusted in vain. "I have given you a second chance. I wish you no evil," he said. "Now leave me. I am tired."

For an instant Stormont hesitated. Then a servant opened the door, and in silence he followed the drooping Lismore from the room.

Rufus Cran sank back in his chair, a trembling hand over his eyes.

"Have I done foolishly?" he murmured. "Would it not have been better to have made Douglas my principal heir in the ordinary way? And yet. . . . No! I will reconsider it to-night. That young girl inspires confidence. Perhaps—"

His hand fell; he winced violently as though stabbed, and drew a breath with a hiss. After a moment he leaned forward painfully and lifted the receiver from the telephone. Presently:

"Is the doctor in? I'm Cran—Rufus Cran. Tell him to come at once—at once."

WHEN Joan March came in from her walk, in the course of which she had mailed a hastily written letter, a servant informed her that Mr. Cran had been taken ill and had been asking for her. She went upstairs in fear.

The doctor was still in the sick-room; he nodded in response to her look of inquiry. She went over to the bed.

Rufus gazed wistfully into her face, took her hand and patted it.

"I'm feeling better—only tired," he whispered. "We must have our talk to-morrow. There are some things—I'm not sure. . . . I trust you. . . . To-morrow," he repeated, and closed his eyes.

She turned away; her sight was blurred. She had not realized till now how fond she had grown of this lonely old man.

The doctor followed her from the room.

"Miss March," he said gently. "I think I ought to warn you that—there will be no to-morrow for your old friend."

Joan's hand went to her heart. Even at that moment she was conscious of feeling the packet hidden there.

CHAPTER III

JOAN'S INHERITANCE

BY a provision of Rufus Cran's will, which had been executed three days before his death, his secretary found herself mistress of Elm House and proprietress of a parcel of first-class securities yielding fully five

thousand dollars a year. With the exception of the books and manuscripts, which were bequeathed to the Metallurgical Society, the entire contents of the house were also hers. No conditions were attached to the splendid gift, but the wish was expressed that Joan should occupy Elm House for at least six months from the date of the giver's death. Joan did not hesitate to recognize the wish as a command.

One of the many questions which presented themselves at the onset concerned a companion. Her parents were dead; her two sisters were married and had their homes and children in distant States; her only brother was an engineer in the Argentine. So she thought her of an aunt whom she had not seen for years, but whom she knew to be a person of more wits than wealth. To this lady she wrote a letter of explanation and invitation, and received by return a postcard, which simply said: "Coming directly. —G. G."

Ten hours later arrived Miss Griselda Gosling, a small but wiry lady with a face like a ripe pippin, bright brown eyes and an unsentimental, imperturbable spirit, who greeted her niece with a brief, brisk handshake and a quick "How are you?" She installed herself without fuss, expressing approval of things in the curtest fashion, and asked not a single question.

THE first visitor to be received by Joan in her capacity of hostess was Lottie Lismore, who was a distant relation. Through Lottie's father, Harold Lismore, Joan had obtained the post of Rufus Cran's secretary. Joan, though grateful, never much liked Mr. Lismore, but she had an enduring affection for his daughter, whose excessive sentimentality was nevertheless often a trial to Joan's patience.

"What a lucky girl you are, Joan!" she was saying. "But I was always sure that poor dear Mr. Cran would do something generous for you. . . . How dreadfully sudden it was! I cried and cried when I heard of it! And to think of his leaving poor little me all of five thousand dollars!"

"What are you going to do with it, Lottie?"

"I shall give it to Father to invest for me. He and Mr. Stormont are going to start a new business at once. What a pity Mr. Cran did not leave them the old business!"

"You admire Mr. Stormont?" Joan's tone was casual, but her interest was caught.

Lottie's rather pale complexion became slightly pink.

"He's very clever, isn't he?" Lottie murmured.

"I shouldn't wonder."

"Don't you like Mr. Stormont?"

"He doesn't appeal to me. I don't care for sleek men, you know," Joan said lightly. Then, seriously: "Lottie dear, I am going to ask you a question, and you are not to imagine it is asked out of mere curiosity. Have you ever heard from Douglas Grant?"

"Oh, Joan, how unkind to remind me! No, of course, I have never heard. He wouldn't dare!"

"I didn't mean to vex you," Joan said gently. "Then you have no idea where he is?"

"Really, Joan! What business—"

"Patience, dear! It was yourself who told me, two years ago, that you and he were something more than friends—"

"I was very young; and we were never properly engaged—and I don't think Father would have permitted us to be, though if Douglas and his uncle had— But why do you remind me?" Lottie was rosy and reproachful. "You know he was a— a thief!"

"He was not! He had nothing to do with the missing money!"

Lottie stared. "Then why did he run away?"

"I don't know. But he was innocent."

"Who told you that?"

"Mr. Cran—a few hours before he died."

Lottie shook her head. "Poor Mr. Cran! I always thought he was not quite himself toward the end. So did Father."

"Mr. Cran told me he had lately discovered that his nephew was innocent, and I thought—I hoped—you would be glad to know."

"Of course I'd be glad—if I could be-

lieve it. Though Douglas killed my— my love, I've often cried and cried to think of him an outcast, perhaps begging his bread."

"I somehow think he would manage better than that," Joan said patiently. "Well, I have told you what Mr. Cran told me, and I can assure you that Mr. Cran was perfectly able to attend to his affairs until nearly the last hour of his life. The only odd thing he did," she added with a faint smile, "was to put me into his will."

"Don't be silly, Joan! And— Joan!"

"What?"

"If he thought Douglas was innocent, why did he leave him not a single penny? Answer me that!"

"No doubt he intended to leave his nephew many pennies," replied Joan bravely, for the question took her aback. The will, she knew, had been made after the discovery. Next moment she remembered the packet. For the first time she felt really curious as to its contents. "I'm sorry I can't convince you, Lottie," she said.

SHORTLY afterward Lottie took her departure, and when Joan returned from accompanying her down the garden, the spinster remarked dryly:

"So that's Harold Lismore's daughter!"

"Why! Didn't you like her, Aunt Griselda?" the niece exclaimed.

"I have nothing against her except that she is her father's daughter."

"Really, Aunt Griselda!" said Joan, half angry, half amused. "And what have you against her father? Lottie told me just now that he is coming to see me to-night."

"I haven't seen Harold Lismore, for twenty years," Miss Gosling interrupted, "but I can't hope that he has improved in the interval. What's he coming to see you about?"

"Lottie didn't say, and I have no idea. You once told me you had no curiosity."

"Don't get huffy, Joan. How many children has the man?"

"He has three sons—all abroad."

"Couldn't live in the same country as their father, I suppose! Lottie the only girl?"

"Yes. If you don't mind, Aunt Griselda, I'd rather not discuss—"

"I'm doing the discussing, and I'm not going to apologize for warning you against Harold Lismore—"

"Warning me—why on earth should you warn me?"

"Because you apparently need warning; and I imagined you had your share of woman's wit! Do you mean to tell me you regard Harold Lismore as trustworthy?"

"Good heavens! Why not?"

"My good Joan," the spinster quietly announced, "the man is as straight as a corkscrew, and not unlike that useful implement in his methods. Did he never try to draw you?"

"Draw me!"

"About Mr. Cran's private affairs, for instance."

"Ah!" cried Joan as at a flash of light.

"Just so!" observed her aunt pleasantly. "Now come off your high horse and speak to your poor but honest relative on the level. I've nothing to gain by saying what I have said."

"I see what you mean," Joan remarked after a moment or two. "But you must forgive my wondering why you are so—so bitter against Mr. Lismore."

"Bitter?" Miss Gosling's smile was bleak. "Bitter enough, you might think," she went on, "to be the woman he did not marry! No, no—that woman is to be eternally congratulated, Joan—but she isn't me. Some day I may tell you why I never have, and never can, believe in Harold Lismore."

Not another word on the subject could Joan extract from her then, or after Mr. Lismore's call in the evening.

CHAPTER IV

THE MADDENING DOCUMENT

ON leaving Elm House, shortly after ten o'clock, Mr. Lismore made for the city. He and Stormont had already taken an office, though the prospects of their being able to establish a business, however modest, on the lines of their late employer's, were doubtful. The trade in the rare metals

is in few—and strong—hands, and the good will of Rufus Cran's concern had been promptly acquired by one of his oldest rivals. Moreover they had been losing steadily for weeks on a copper speculation, and were now near to living by their wits.

Stormont, seated at his roll-top desk, with the draft of a circular letter shortly to be issued by the new firm before him, looked up with what an ill-natured acquaintance had once called his "dentifrice grin"—the smile that Lismore hated, possibly because he feared it.

"Well?"

Lismore let his large body drop into a huge easy-chair.

"No luck," he said. "Not a bit of good."

"I'm afraid you aren't," returned Stormont, the smile vanishing as though he had switched it off. "Do you mean to tell me you have found out nothing at all?"

"Not a thing. I never imagined she'd know anything about the platinum; and now I'm satisfied she doesn't."

"Well, perhaps that's something, after all. What about Douglas Grant? Had Cran mentioned him to her just before he died?"

"I didn't refer to Grant."

"Why not?"

"Stormont, you are well aware of my feelings regarding—"

"Hang your feelings! Sooner or later, you'll have to face him in the flesh. May as well get used to mentioning his name. Did she speak of him?"

"Not a word."

"Then I shouldn't wonder if she learned something from the old man," said Stormont, looking thoughtful. "In the ordinary course of things, Elm House would have gone to Grant. She must be wondering about him. But let that pass. Has she accepted your wife's kind invitation to spend a week or so at Cromer?"

"I'm sorry to say she refused—quite pleasantly, of course. Said she intended to follow out the old man's wishes to the letter."

Stormont gave a shrug of impatience. "You observed no signs of suspicion on her part?"

"Suspicion!" Lismore was startled. "What should she suspect?"

"Everything—if you were half as nervous then as you are now!"

"I did my best," said Lismore wearily.

Ignoring the remark, Stormont continued: "Lottie might find out, if properly directed, a good many things for us."

"She was at Elm House this afternoon."

"And you never—oh, well, never mind! But you had better have a chat with Lottie first thing in the morning. Only you must bear in mind that she is Miss March's friend—sincerely devoted, no doubt. Again, she was—and still may be—more or less attached to young Grant. So you will have to go warily."

FOR the first time during the interview Lismore's eyes rested on his partner. Until that unhappy last interview with Rufus Cran, Stormont had been paying apparent attentions to Lottie. Were these attentions at an end?

"I will do what I can," said Lismore. "Lottie will certainly never betray Joan March."

"Not willingly," was Stormont's cool qualification. "Well," he went on briskly, "we must get a move on, Lismore, in one direction or another. Nearly three weeks out of the six months gone, and nothing done. We can't last beyond six months unless we find a pot of money—can we?"

Lismore shuddered. "If we could only lay hands on that middle strip of paper!" he sighed.

"My dear fellow, don't babble! You may be sure the precious strip is in safe hands, and with it the instructions for its destruction on a certain date, failing Grant's return. And the more I think of it, the more I feel that our only hope lies in that event taking place. In fact, I'll begin to move in the matter tomorrow."

"No, no!"

"Look here, Lismore, you have a good enough reason for desiring the continued absence of Grant, but you have a still better for bringing him home. You are afraid of his going back on you—which I don't for one instant

believe he would. On the other hand, without your share of the platinum you are bound for bankruptcy—and a particularly unpleasant sort of bankruptcy it will be! However, if you can suggest how we may get at the platinum without the presence of Grant or that precious middle strip, I'm ready to follow your lead."

Lismore was mute.

"And we don't even know," Stormont went on, "that the hoard is within the walls of Elm House. We naturally think of it as there, because our late friend, since first we knew him, lived there and, so far as we are aware, owned no other place of residence. But how are we going to satisfy ourselves on the point? Since Miss March has refused the invitation to Atlantic City, the thing looks pretty hopeless. I have not the impudence, and you have certainly not the nerve, to ransack the place while she is in residence. . . . Now what have you to say?"

"If—if the house were to become uninhabitable," mumbled Lismore.

"Uninhabitable! How?"

"F-fire."

Stormont laughed. "Oh, Lord, man, don't be so crude!"

"I'm desperate, Stormont!"

"So am I. Only I draw the line at being idiotic. No, my friend, unless you can evolve a more brilliant scheme, you must let me be leader. It may not be such a difficult thing, after all, to trace young Grant. He must have at least one correspondent in New York—the person who forwarded the inexplicable fifteen hundred to Rufus. There is such a thing as discreet advertising, and there are private detectives who do really wonderful jobs, if well paid. However, I will give you three days more to produce another plan; but do try to invent something a little more subtle than arson!"

LISMORE winced at the mockery. And a moment later he said: "There's another thing—something that happened at Elm House to-night."

"What?"

"Oh, it concerns no one but myself," Lismore's manner became awkward. "Only I want to put you on your guard

should you be asked questions about me."

"Do come to the point!"

"Well, it turns out that the aunt whom Joan has chosen for her companion is a Miss Griselda Gosling."

"What a sublime name! An old flame, I presume!"

Lismore wriggled. "I knew her—slightly—a good many years ago. As a matter of fact, we have some distant kinship. I knew her mother better. . . . On one occasion Mrs. Gosling asked me to invest a sum of money for her."

"How much?"

"About thirty-five thousand, I—I think."

"Don't be too precise, Lismore!"

"Well—thirty-seven thousand. . . . The investment turned out a most unfortunate one, to my deep regret. The money was lost. A year later Mrs. Gosling died."

"And to-night you meet her presumably penurious daughter! Happy man!"

"It was a hideous encounter until I gathered that she knew nothing about the wretched business."

"But how on earth could she help knowing?"

"I presume her mother never told her, and—there were no documents. At the same time, should you meet Miss Gosling—"

"All right!" said Stormont curtly. Then he closed his desk with a crash, saying: "Aren't you going?"

"I think I'll wait and write a letter or two," Lismore replied.

PRESENTLY, with a curt "Good night," Stormont left the office. Even his crooked spirit was in revolt at his partner's poltroonery.

Lismore got up and opened his private safe. From a drawer he brought a sheet of paper. It was a copy of the two strips handed to himself and Stormont by Rufus Cran and was already shabby from frequent handling, while the blanks showed traces of pencil which had escaped the eraser. He opened his desk, seated himself not without eagerness, and once more fell to studying the maddening thing.

Dawn came before he desisted, haggard, shaky and as ignorant as ever.

This was the document:

In all p. . . . s my final word to you, m. . . . as Grant, and to you, my on. . . . nts, Harold Lismore and D. . . . It concerns the location a. . . . n of 40,000 ounces of Rus. . . . accumulated by me in the. . . . eclining years. Had Douglas. . . . ago, but considered my f. . . . sted me, he would have s. . . . istress, and he would surely h. . . . hole 40,000 ounces in du. . . . t is, I desire him to take. . . . ,000 ounces and pay remaining 10. . . . more and Daniel Stormont, 5,000 . . . being rewards of Honesty fro. . . . latinum, in bags of 100 o. . . . in a small, secret, special. . . . er unknown to anybody, b. . . . ry, to which entrance is on. . . . y raising—a lever required—. . . . hich is to be located just i. . . . all, and all but the same di. . . . all. That is all. Beware dead. . . . be lurking over the treasure in. . . . er, and use all means of ven. . . . making descent. And so farew. . . . o evil. R. Cran.

CHAPTER V

MR. LISMORE SOWS A SEED

"**L**OTTIE," said Lismore, to his daughter next morning, "what had Joan to say for herself yesterday? I could spare only a few moments at Elm House in the evening, and didn't get her news."

"I don't think she said very much," the girl answered, "except about—"

"About what?" he asked carelessly.

"About Douglas Grant. But perhaps she told you?"

"She certainly did not mention the unfortunate young man to me, and I must say I'm surprised she should have mentioned him to you." Mr. Lismore leisurely turned over the folded pages of his paper. "What had she to say about him?"

"She said that Mr. Cran, just before his death, declared him innocent."

"Really! You didn't happen to see Mr. Cran during the last three or four weeks of his life, did you, Lottie?"

"No, Father."

"Then you cannot imagine the change in the man—mentally, I mean."

"Mentally! Oh, yes, I remember you saying something to Mother."

"Just so. The innocence of young Grant was one of his hallucinations."

"I see! I told Joan I couldn't believe it. But she does."

"It would be disrespectful to the memory of her benefactor for her to do otherwise. Mr. Cran was also convinced that Mr. Stormont and I were his enemies!"

"Oh!"

"But"—suddenly Lismore dropped the paper and faced his daughter—"the most pitiful sign of madness was shown in his leaving the house and five thousand a year to his secretary."

"Joan! But she was always so good to him. She was far more than a mere secretary."

"Allow me, Lottie. I have nothing to say against the girl. I don't even suggest that she took advantage of his weakness at the last. But I am bound to tell you that had he died a week sooner, the house and a hundred thousand dollars would have come to you, while she would have received just five thousand." So saying, Mr. Lismore threw down the paper, with what might have been a gesture of Christian resignation, rose and left the room and, immediately after, the house.

He was by no means an astute man as to the workings of human nature, but he knew his daughter, and he felt that he had said just enough for the present. Lottie would not doubt his statement, which he had invented during his ride home that morning, but she would begin to wonder about Joan March.

And sure enough, it was not long before Lottie was asking herself all sorts of ugly questions concerning the girl, her friend, to whom her hundred thousand had gone.

ON the same morning, but some ninety minutes later, the new owner of Elm House was seated at the writing-table in the library. Joan had letters to answer, but none of them held her attention now. She was examining, by no means for the first time, a half-sheet of note-paper, once folded small, which had been slipped into her hand, hurriedly, without a word, at the door of

Elm House on an early autumn night two years ago. It was written in pencil, hastily yet clearly enough, and ran:

I think you are the only one I can trust to be both kind and secret. With you I leave an address at which a message will always find me—sooner or later. I ask you to use it for one reason only, and to destroy this rather than let it be seen by another person. If ever you should become convinced that my uncle really *needs* me, write, and I will come. But be certain of his need, I beg of you. You will hear soon enough a reason for my hasty departure. I have nothing to say, except that I am glad to think you are my uncle's good friend as well as his secretary. I am sorry to go; but there seems to be no other way. Good-by. All happiness.

D. G.

The address which followed named an obscure little town in Canada. Joan, whose training had made her methodical, had taken the trouble to learn that it promised to become a mining center of importance, silver and gold having been discovered in payable quantities in the district.

AT last, with a sigh, she folded the note and laid it in a trinket-box, which she would presently put away in the safe. For the first time she wished the writer had left her free to consult at least one person in emergency. She could have trusted Miss Gosling without hesitation.

The difficulty was this: The letter she had written and mailed on the afternoon of Mr. Cran's fatal seizure ought to have reached its destination—she had made inquiry of the post office—fully a week ago. It had asked for a telegraphed answer.

Of course, as the note in the trinket-box reminded her, a letter to the address given would reach him only "sooner or later." If he were engaged in mining work, which was the likeliest thing in the world, he might be far out of range of the post office. Also, a letter might get lost.

What ought she to do? Try the effect of a telegram which might possibly reach him where a letter would not, or simply let matters take their course?

Joan was not a young woman of indecision, but for once she was seriously

thinking of seeking a sign in the fall of a coin when she saw Miss Gosling coming up the garden walk; and going quickly to the open window, she requested her aunt to join her.

NO sooner had Aunt Griselda closed the door than she began: "I'm so glad you asked me in here at once, Joan. I hate having to bottle up news—so seldom I have any. Where do you think I've been this fine morning? You'd never guess, so I'll tell you. The city!" She flopped her small person upon the couch.

"The city!"

"Yes. And who—whom, if you like—do you think I saw in the city, arriving at his office?"

"Mr. Vanderbilt, perhaps."

"Mr. Harold Lismore."

Joan, her amusement gone, looked at her aunt.

"I had a notion of seeing him again, if I could manage it," said Miss Gosling, suddenly serious. "After our talk yesterday, I began to wonder whether I had been too hard on the man; but Harold Lismore is no better than I reckoned he was. Still, he and I had a nice chat, and parted on the best of terms. All the same, don't ask him to dinner on my account. I'm afraid I'm trying your patience, Joan."

"You are indeed! Is that all your news?"

"Not quite. Mrs. Lismore and her daughter are not going to Atlantic City this year, after all."

"Poor Lottie! That will be a big disappointment for her."

"Her father seemed disappointed too. Must have been a sudden change of plans. It was only last night that you were invited to join them. . . . Well, here's another item. Mr. Lismore did not actually say it, but he hinted that your late employer and benefactor was scarcely of sound mind the week before he died."

"Oh, the beast!" exclaimed the girl, her blue eyes dark with anger. "How dared he! Why should he hint at such a horrible thing?"

"I wonder! His personal feelings, of course—"

"Yes, and because of Douglas Grant

—the nephew I told you about." Joan was rather flushed.

Miss Gosling did not appear to notice it. "The poor boy under a cloud for so long! But Mr. Lismore did not seem to have heard of his innocence."

"Lottie has not told her father. Why?" thought Joan. Aloud she said: "Had Mr. Lismore anything to say about my getting the house and so much money?"

"He admitted that that was a thing in favor of Mr. Cran's sanity; only he could not help wondering how you would feel if the nephew turned up. What's the matter?"

"Good heavens!" cried the girl in sudden distress. "How awful! I never saw it in that light until this moment! But I don't care! I can easily give it up!"

"Give what up?"

"House and money. Of all things, the house ought to have been left to his nephew."

"Come, come," said Miss Gosling placidly. "Don't be absurd. I repeated Mr. Lismore's remark, not to annoy you but simply to confirm you in your opinion of him expressed a minute ago. He is a beast, Joan, and you will do well to remember it."

"I will remember it," said Joan.

A few minutes later, when the telephone rang, Miss Gosling left the room. Joan took up the receiver.

"Well? . . . Yes, I am Miss March. Who are you?"

"A friend of Douglas Grant,—Henley is my name,—the friend who recently sent fifteen hundred to the late Mr. Cran. As his secretary, you may know about the incident."

"Yes," she managed to say faintly, "I know. What can I do for you, Mr. Henley?"

"Douglas has sent me a question to be answered by return. It is this: can Miss March say whether Mr. Cran left any written message for his nephew?"

"Is that not a question you ought to ask Mr. Cran's lawyers?" asked Joan in reply after a pause.

"Douglas instructs me to ask you. Personally, I think he ought to have written to you direct."

Joan felt cornered. What could she

say, other than a downright untruth, that would not be a betrayal of her trust?

"Douglas," went on the courteous voice, "seems to hope that his uncle might have left a message in your keeping, Miss March."

"Oh, wait a moment," she said. It occurred to her that she too had a right to ask questions. "Mr. Henley," she went on then, steadily enough, "where is Mr. Grant at present?"

No answer.

"I am asking where Mr. Grant is at present. Are you there?"

Silence.

"They've cut me off," she thought crossly, and waited.

But it would appear that Mr. Henley, friend of Douglas Grant, had suddenly lost interest in his quest. At all events, his courteous tones came over the wire no more.

CHAPTER VI

STORMONT GETS TO WORK

"THANKS, Plyden; you did that very nicely," Stormont said with a complimentary smile as he and his clerk stepped from the stuffy telephone-box. "In fact, you read your part excellently."

Mr. Plyden, a tall, thin, very fair man of thirty or so, laughed with some complacency. "I happen to have had a little experience in reading parts and playing them—amateur, of course," he said. "Naturally I was handicapped just now by being in the dark as to the purport—"

"And you will kindly remain in the dark, Plyden," Stormont interrupted with the utmost suavity. "You are not of a curious disposition, I trust?"

The clerk became grave.

"You may rely on me, Mr. Stormont, to repeat nothing—"

"And you, Plyden, so long as you satisfy me, may rely on me to overlook the testimonials which you gave me last week, and which are now in my safe. Meanwhile," Stormont continued pleasantly, ignoring the other's semicollapse, "here is your fee for that excellent but immediately-to-be-forgotten performance."

Mechanically the younger man took the folded yellow-back. With a nod and a smile which a passer-by would have deemed most amiable, Stormont made for a taxi-stand.

A little later he stepped briskly into the private room at the office.

"Anything doing?" he called gayly to his partner.

"No," replied Lismore, who was again poring over the distracting document.

"Give it up," said Stormont, dropping into the easy-chair. "You'll never discover anything."

"Don't say that!" Lismore sat up stiffly. "There's another ghastly drop in copper this morning. Haven't you had prices?"

"Yes—pretty rotten, aren't they? I think I'll become a dramatist. This morning I wrote out a part, and this afternoon I witnessed it played with most gratifying effect."

"What nonsense are you talking now, Stormont?"

"Read that!" Stormont unfolded a sheet of paper and passed it to his partner. Upon it was neatly typed every word Joan had heard on the telephone twenty minutes earlier.

As he read, Lismore's scowl gave place to an expression of puzzled interest. "But what are you going to do with it?" he asked at last.

"The deed is already done. The invaluable Plyden repeated the lines to the phone—and very well he did it!—and yours truly stood beside him, caught his whispered reports of the lady's replies, her hesitations and pauses, instructed him when to go slow, and so on."

Lismore half rose and fell back. "Stormont, don't keep me in suspense! Did you discover anything?"

"My dear chap, I'm altogether convinced that the girl has handled a letter from the old man to his nephew, and all but certain that it is still in her possession. I should be prepared to bet three to one on its being in the library safe. Further, I would bet a hundred to one that she is ignorant of its contents, or their importance."

"Why are you so cocksure of that?"

"Partly because Rufus Cran was not such a fool as to risk making his trustee

a nervous wreck; partly because the telephone-stunt did not upset her sufficiently. No, she certainly hadn't forty thousand ounces of platinum on her mind!"

"Then, since she does not know the letter's value," said Lismore, pale and perspiring, "she might perhaps be induced to part with it."

"Don't be idiotic, my dear man! One blunder in that direction, and it's failure for good. Supposing she believes the letter to contain nothing but the old man's blessing, she would defend it at all costs to herself. And did it never occur to you that she might still be in love with young Grant?"

Lismore shrugged impatiently. "She must have been aware that young Grant was in love with Lottie," he said.

"Nothing of the kind!"

"What? Then why—"

"Lismore, you are hopelessly lacking in an understanding of your fellow-creatures. Your daughter may have imagined young Grant was in love with her, but I can assure you it was only chivalrous pity on his part, for which he has dearly paid. I rather admired Grant, you know."

"Pity! What the deuce—"

"Look here, Lismore, you are always asking for it—and this time I'm going to give you it! Grant pitied your daughter as he pitied your wife—and no wonder! And Grant, in a moment of greatness, which I've no doubt he has regretted long ago, took upon himself a theft of fifteen hundred dollars, not for your sake, but for theirs!"

"Damn you!" snarled Lismore. "You promised you'd never refer to that. Besides, he need not have run away. His uncle would have come round and—"

"Don't make yourself out a meaner hound than you can help, Lismore. The boy saved you. Don't grudge him his nobility. I don't, though I'm about to do my best to annex his fortune."

"You'll never touch it," said Lismore with a malignant glance.

"If I don't touch it pretty soon, you and I are done for." Stormont pointed a steady forefinger at the other. "Lismore," he said slowly, "in your sober senses, have you the slightest hope of an early recovery in copper?"

"No—no, I haven't."

"Then there's no good in our going on lying hopefully to each other and to ourselves. Listen! We have got to find that platinum within a month. How are we going to see the inside or learn the contents of that safe in Elm House? That is the urgent question."

"One moment! About that fellow Plyden—can he be trusted to hold his tongue concerning the phone affair? We know nothing about him?"

"He had excellent testimonials. They are still in the safe over there, if you'd like—"

"Testimonials are no guarantee—"

"Not the genuine sort, perhaps; but those are forged—and Plyden knows that I know. He's ours, all right. Leave him to me. Now what about the safe in Elm House?"

"Why ask me?" returned Lismore, sullen again.

"You've got to share the work as well as the plunder, my friend. Besides, in this case you have an advantage which I don't possess."

"You'll have to enlighten me."

"I've already given you the hint, but I'll repeat it. You have a daughter who is extremely friendly with the owner of Elm House." Stormont got up and took his hat. "Think it over for all you're worth, Lismore. It has got to be! I'm going to lunch."

He went out, leaving his partner in open-mouthed horror. Lismore had already intended that Lottie should help in a small way, but—oh—not that, not that!

THE episode of the telephone was bound to have a disconcerting effect on Joan March. Early in the afternoon she proceeded to ring up, in turn, all the Henleys mentioned in the directory, but each in turn, gave a more or less courteous "No" to her inquiry. She could not recollect having heard Douglas speak of a friend of that name, though he had spoken to her of not a few of his acquaintances.

Among her letters that day were two in the writings of Lottie Lismore and Stormont. She opened the latter's rather roughly. She had not seen Mr. Stormont since the day of the fune-

ral, but his notes had been of almost daily occurrence, and while courteous to a degree, had seemed to her unnecessary, unless the writer's memory were sadly failing.

"Bother the man!" she exclaimed to Miss Gosling, who rarely received a letter. "I suppose he wants to know whether I can recollect some absurdly petty business incident of eighteen months ago, which poor Mr. Cran—Good Heavens!"

"What's the matter?" inquired the spinster, pausing in the act of opening an egg.

"He's coming to call this afternoon—Mr. Stormont. What a nuisance! Listen! 'My dear Miss March, may I venture to call on you to-morrow, at four in the afternoon, concerning a matter of much importance to myself? I may say that it is due only to the recent melancholy event that I have not made this request before now. Your silence will give consent. Should to-morrow be unsuitable, however, may I beg you to let me know the earliest possible hour that you would be willing to receive me?—Yours sincerely.' But what on earth can the man want?"

MISS GOSLING resumed her attack on the egg, remarking: "Never having seen the gentleman, and never having encountered a similar epistle except in love-novels, I can only suggest that he wants to propose to you."

"Nonsense!" Joan laughed. "I'd sooner marry a monkey!" she said indignantly.

"That may be," Miss Gosling mildly replied, "but the gentleman may be looking higher, as the saying is."

Joan smiled. "All right. I'll let him come to-day, and get it over, whatever it is. Here's a line from Lottie." She read: 'Dearest Joan, I want you to do me a *tremendous* favor! May I come and tell you about it to-morrow evening, after dinner? *Please!* Ever yours, Lottie. P. S. Ring me up in the morning.' She had better come to dinner. I'm sure you'll get to like her when you know her better, Aunt Griselda."

"I should like to know her better," was the pleasant though, perhaps, somewhat equivocal response.

JOAN received Stormont—who arrived precisely at the hour appointed, looking his smartest—in the library, a room which she still regarded more or less as a place of business.

"It is kind of you to receive me to-day, Miss March," he said in his soft, musical voice. "I have been waiting none too patiently for the opportunity. I am afraid my numerous little letters during the last few weeks must have bored you."

Joan's smile was polite, like her words. "You were entitled to have any information I could give on the matters you inquired about, Mr. Stormont."

"Still, you thought my inquiries rather unnecessary?"

"It was not for me to judge."

"You are too courteous. Well, I am here to confess the truth, and I hope you will forgive me when I declare that I wrote those stupid little letters simply in order to keep in touch with you."

There was a moment's silence till she replied coldly: "That does not seem to me any more necessary than the letters."

"To me," he returned quietly, but with a slight flushing of his dark countenance, "it seemed, and seems, the most necessary thing in the world. I could not bear to think that the death of our mutual friend might mean the severing of our acquaintance, and I earnestly hope it is not going to do so."

"Our acquaintance," she said, feeling forced to say something, "has always been of the slightest, Mr. Stormont, and I'm afraid it—"

"No fault of mine if it has been so," he protested. "I always wanted your friendship. I want it now. I don't—I daren't—ask for more at present, but I beg you to give me what I do ask now."

Apparently he was all in earnest. Joan was puzzled, yet also moved. Immediately, however, she remembered Lottie, to whom Stormont had paid such marked attentions.

"Really, Mr. Stormont, I can't imagine why my friendship—which is a thing I certainly cannot give on a moment's notice—should be of importance to you. But I don't wish to discuss the point, and I am sure you did not come

here this afternoon on such a trifling errand. Will you please tell me what you wanted to see me about?"

He looked hurt and his voice was sad. "Miss March, in your heart you know that I came to ask you to marry me, and then hadn't the courage—"

"Oh!"

"But I do ask you to marry me—"

"Please stop! Oh, you must know I couldn't."

"Yes, yes," he said gently, "I know." After a brief pause he added with a melancholy, whimsical smile: "They say a woman always feels more kindly toward a man after she has refused him; is that true?"

Still remembering Lottie, she was mute. And yet Lottie, who had told her all she knew about Mr. Stormont's attentions, always exaggerated things so tremendously.

HE sighed. "Explanations are difficult, but I ask you to hear one. As a servant of Rufus Cran I never felt myself in a position to ask a woman to marry me, I confess I had absurdly extravagant ideas; but things are different with me to-day. I am telling you a secret now, Miss March. People are sorry for Lismore and myself at present, but their pity is quite undeserved. Rufus had his own reasons for the winding up of the old business, but he did not treat his two assistants so badly as is generally imagined, thanks to our not being mentioned in the will. Rufus, as you know, had his own methods of doing things, and though I am not at liberty to give you details now, I tell you in confidence that Lismore and I are on the fair way to becoming rich men. That is all—except that—no, that is all."

It was told so frankly that Joan felt ashamed of herself. At all events, Stormont was a much better sort of man than Lismore.

"I'm very glad indeed!" she exclaimed, and she meant it.

"Thank you," he said, and rose. "I always believed you were generous. I will go on hoping that some day we may be friends." From his vest pocket he brought a little oblong box of unpainted wood, such as a jeweler may

send with fragile articles through the mail. "Before I go, may I show you something?" He spoke more cheerfully, and opening the box, brought to light from amid the cotton a tiny glass tube, less than two inches in length, plugged with a miniature cork.

The tube was half full of silvery-gray metallic grains. He handed it to her, saying:

"Do you happen to know what that is, Miss March?"

"Why, of course!" was the instant answer; "it's platinum. Isn't it the mineral, about eighty per cent pure?"

"So you have seen it before." He was watching her face. "Stupid of me," he went on before she could express her astonishment at the remark. "Mr. Cran must have handled it often in your presence."

"I have handled it myself," she said, her eyes going back to the tiny tube. "At one time I was always weighing it for Mr. Cran. It fascinated me—by its preciousness, I mean. Worth its weight in gold, I suppose."

"It will soon be worth three times its weight in gold, Miss March. Mr. Cran evidently did not trouble you with market fluctuations," he remarked lightly. "During the past year the rise has been remarkable."

"I dare say it is nearly two years since I handled any." Joan was a bit nettled. "Since then I had had no occasion to watch the price."

"I'm sure Mr. Cran gave you quite enough to do in other directions," he said quickly. "But it's rather odd, isn't it, that we never met in the weighing-room in the office? It was in my department, you know."

"Not so odd," she returned, recovering her good humor, "because I don't think I ever handled platinum, or any of the other metals, in the office. It was here, in this room, that I became so familiar with platinum."

THERE was a glint in the man's dark eyes as he casually remarked: "Mr. Cran brought home samples, no doubt. Still, I had understood that he had not used the little laboratory, for years—that his books claimed all his attentions."

"Yes, the laboratory was dismantled before my time. Thank you," she said, handing back the tube; "it was nice to see the plain precious stuff again."

He began to repack the tube in its protective material. "If one hadn't known Rufus Cran as a generous man," he observed, "one might have suspected him of being a platinum-miser."

Joan, not deeply interested in the subject, was wishing her visitor would take his departure. "I never thought about it," she replied. "Mr. Cran never mentioned to me his purpose in bringing it home so frequently, and of course I didn't ask questions. I weighed and packed it according to instructions, and there my duty in the matter ended."

"Well, it's of no consequence to either of us," Stormont said cheerfully, though sorely tempted to inquire as to the manner of the packing. But he possessed that valuable and rather rare faculty which tells a man when to stop; so with an apology for having kept her standing so long, he held out his hand and bade her good-by.

"Oh dear!" murmured Joan, when he had gone. "What a mixture—a proposal and then a chat on platinum! Well, it was nice of him to change the subject so thoroughly."

She lifted her eyes to the window—then started to her feet. A boy in uniform was approaching the house. Mr. Stormont was making for the gate. The girl was too excited to observe that as he was about to pass the boy he hesitated for the fraction of a second, then strode onward with his shoulders squared stiffly. A moment later she was hurrying to the front door.

In a little while the boy was going the way he had come, and she was back in the library reading over and over again this message:

Thanks recovering accident start ten days hence, secret.

GRANT.

CHAPTER VII

LOTTIE STEALS THE LETTER

STORMONT went straight to his office after leaving Joan, and in a conference with Lismore related a part of his conversation with

Miss March—in particular her admission that Rufus Cran had frequently brought platinum home. Lismore was for burglarizing Elm House in order to search for the stuff, but Stormont overruled such crude methods. Lottie was to visit Joan; and they counted on the jealousy Lismore had stirred up in his daughter to spur her on to some successful prying.

After Lismore had gone, Stormont wrote something in a notebook, tore out the page and then pushed a button on his desk.

Plyden the clerk entered.

"Plyden, take this note to Ramage's," directed Stormont, "and bring back what he gives you. Have you any particular engagement this evening?"

"No sir—nothing of importance."

"Do you care to earn twenty-five dollars?"

"Rather!"

"Then you might dine with me and learn what the fee will be for. Do you happen to know whether there is a moon to-night?"

Plyden, who was prepared to be surprised at nothing, whipped out a little calendar-notebook.

"No sir—doesn't rise till four-two A. M."

"Thanks; you may go to Ramage's now. You can let the boy go."

DURING dinner, which had been delayed on Lottie's account, Joan felt very grateful to her aunt. She was experiencing a reaction from the excitement caused by Grant's message, and would have found the sustaining of conversation, even with a friend so familiar as Lottie, more than irksome.

They lingered over their coffee, and it was nine o'clock when they moved to the drawing-room, Lottie rejecting the suggestion from Miss Gosling that they might spend a few minutes in the garden.

"I don't like the darkness," said Lottie with a dainty shudder, "and I'm sure it's less sultry indoors than out, to-night. It was suffocating on the way here. I think you might play to us, Joan."

"Anything you like, dear," Joan replied, feeling that she was doing badly

as a hostess, and making an effort to rouse herself.

But she rose from the piano without having touched a note, and joined the others, saying:

"It seems too soon, doesn't it? It's not a month since he—" She paused.

"Perhaps it is," Miss Gosling said gently.

"Too soon?" cried Lottie. "Oh, I see what you mean. But aren't you a little absurd, Joan? It's not as if you had any special regard for him—when he was alive, at any rate."

"Lottie!" exclaimed Joan, her blue eyes wide.

"Oh, I beg your pardon," Lottie said in sudden contrition. "Forgive me. I didn't know what I was saying, Joan. It must be this ghastly weather."

"I'm sure you couldn't have meant it," Joan said after a moment. "Aunt Griselda, can you get your smelling-salts quickly?"

"No, no—I'm all right," protested Lottie, who had gone white. "I'm only fagged and—and worried," she added the moment Miss Gosling left the room.

"Worried, poor child! Can't I help you?"

"Yes, you can—only it must be a secret. I thought I gave you a hint in my note."

"So you did," said Joan, ashamed of having forgotten. "You were going to ask a favor. Forgive me. I didn't think of its being so urgent, and I—I've had rather a crowded day. We'll go to the library at once, and you'll tell me all about it."

"Not yet, not yet," Lottie murmured with a surreptitious glance at her bracelet-watch. "In a little while."

"When you please, dear," Joan said soothingly, as Miss Gosling, whose room was on the ground floor, returned with the salts.

The changeable Lottie was now all pretty thanks and smiling apologies. She took the green bottle and sniffed at it daintily. "I'll be all right in a minute. Perhaps I ought not to have come to-night. I'm sorry to be so silly."

Presently Miss Gosling remembered a letter that must be written. "I'll be

in my own room, if you want me, Joan," she said, and went out.

Arrived in her own room, however, she seemed to have forgotten about the letter. After turning the key in the door, she switched off the light and groped her way to the chair by the wide-open window. For many years she had lived in loneliness, and there had been many evenings which she had spent in darkness for economy's sake. Partly from force of habit and partly because she could think most clearly there, she sat in the darkness now, for there were several things which Miss Gosling wanted to think about.

IN the library Lottie was saying petulantly: "Oh, Joan, would you mind opening the windows wide and having only one light? My head aches."

When Joan had carried out her friend's wishes, she seated herself at the writing-table and said: "Now, Lottie, old girl, what is it? You know you can trust me to be secret, and to help if I possibly can."

Lottie was half sitting, half lying at the end of the couch, almost with her back to the other girl. She moistened her lips and fell to toying with her bracelet.

"There are two things," she began at last: "I'm sorry for what I said the other day about Douglas Grant, and I'm going to try to believe that he never took that money."

"You may believe it without trying, Lottie," Joan remarked a trifle coldly.

"Don't be hard on me. You heard Mr. Cran say it; I didn't. It makes all the difference, just how a thing is said—now, doesn't it, dear?"

"That's true. But you know very well, Lottie, that I've always begged you to believe the best."

"I know. But you see, I couldn't. You never offered the smallest proofs—"

"For one thing, he didn't require the money. For another—but we needn't go over it all again."

"I wonder where he is now," said Lottie suddenly, turning her head.

But Joan was not unready. "In some outlandish place, or he would have

heard of his uncle's death. The lawyers have had no word from him."

AFTER a little pause: "Joan, do you know what would make me believe? If only he were to write to some one of us. It's the silence that makes it difficult for me."

"Yes, I quite understand; and perhaps we may speak about it another time." Joan's voice was calm and kind. She was wondering whether unstable Lottie really cared for Stormont.

"You are so sympathetic," said Lottie sweetly, with anger in her heart. She had failed in her first task.

"There was something else, wasn't there?" Joan inquired.

"Yes—and it's rather horrid." Lottie got up and came over to the table. From the bosom of her pale pink dress she brought a packet covered with azure-tinted paper, sealed with azure wax, tied with azure ribbon—a packet suggestive of nothing in the world but love-letters. She laid it on the table. "I want you to keep this for me—keep it safe," she said.

"Yes?" Joan murmured quite doubtfully.

"It's the money I got from Mr. Cran. The lawyers paid it yesterday. It's in bank-notes—I asked for it that way—five thousand dollars. I've no place to hide it."

"But Lottie, you told me your father was going to invest it for you."

"I've changed my mind about that. I don't wish him to have it. But if you won't keep it for me, he's sure to get it."

"Oh, Lottie, do you really—"

"If I put it in a bank, he'd force me to take it out again. In your care, he can't touch it. In that great, strong safe of yours it will be all right. Please, Joan!"

To Joan the thing seemed too unpleasant for further discussion.

"Very well," said she. "Write your name, the address and date on it while I get the keys; then I'll give you a receipt for it."

"Nonsense! Don't be so horribly businesslike!"

"It's Mr. Cran's teaching; I sha'n't be a minute."

LEFT to herself, Lottie scribbled her name and the rest. Then, one after another, she tried the drawers in the table. Some were locked; the contents of the others did not attract her. She went back to the couch. She had never seen the big safe open; yet she knew what it was like inside. It was fitted with shelves, and halfway from the top were a couple of drawers side by side. And the drawers required different keys.

Joan came back, wrote on a sheet of note-paper, "*Received from Miss Lottie Lismore one sealed packet,*" and the date, signed her name and handed the document to her friend, saying: "When you want your property, you must bring along the receipt."

She went over to the safe, expecting to hear Lottie's laugh behind her, but Lottie made no sound at all. The moment was too critical. As the ponderous door swung open, she rose quickly and stood for a single second facing the windows, her arms thrown out like semaphores. In the next moment she joined her friend, who was fitting a key into the right-hand drawer.

"You may as well see where it is to go," Joan remarked as the drawer came open. "There are really no valuables, and very few papers in the safe. The lawyers and banker save me a lot of worry. Nothing here but my bank-book, check-book and a few papers and a little money. Your packet will be safe enough; it is so pretty no burglar would think of taking it." She laid it in the drawer, which she closed. "I'm only sorry, Lottie, that—"

There came a frantic ringing of the front doorbell.

"Good gracious!" exclaimed the mistress of Elm House. "I've never heard it ring like that. Who on earth can it be?" The thought of another telegram sent her across the room to the door.

"It surely can't be my taxi yet," said Lottie. "It was ordered for thirty."

Her friend did not seem to hear. Then there was a scurry outside the door, and the housemaid entered without knocking. She looked scared.

"Please, ma'am, Inspector Davis wants to see you at once."

"Who is Inspector Davis, and what is his business?" Joan asked with some asperity.

"A sort of policeman in plain clothes, and I think it's about burglars, ma'am."

"Nonsense! But I suppose I must see him. I sha'n't be a minute, Lottie."

"I'll come with you," said Lottie, but she followed only as far as the door. Pushing it to, she ran back to the safe. Her pretty face was white and set. Under her breath she was muttering: "I've got to try to find a letter with Douglas Grant's name on it; and if I do, I've got to drop it out of the window; and when I've done that, I've got to switch off the light and then go after Joan, and look as if nothing had happened, and explain that I switched off the light when I was trying to switch the others on." She continued talking to herself during the brief act that followed.

IN the drawer which Joan had closed but not locked her search was vain. Reclosing it carefully, she removed the key and found another on the bunch to fit the adjoining drawer. Without pausing, she drew it open; it contained but one item.

To Lottie's amazement rather than her delight, she read the name "Douglas Grant." It was written in Joan's firm hand on a fairly large yellowish envelope. On lifting the envelope, Lottie saw it was unsealed. She hesitated an instant and then drew out the contents, a smaller white envelope addressed in Rufus Cran's big writing to his nephew. Across the top were scrawled the words: "*If not delivered as directed within six months from date, to be burned unopened.*" A second date had been added in pencil by Joan. On the spur of the moment, Lottie decided to leave the outer envelope where she had found it; its presence might delay discovery.

But now her unnatural courage began to fail. She became conscious of voices sounding from the hall. Only the bitter stimulant of envy and jealousy upbore her. She closed the drawer and replaced the keys where the

owner had left them. Then she went to the window with the letter. For an instant a sort of hysterical bravado possessed her: holding the white thing out over the ledge, she gave it a little flutter before letting it drop. Somehow she had got it into her head that her father would be the recipient, that he was hidden somewhere in the darkness.

She shut down the window, darted across the room, switched off the light—and for an age, as it seemed, stood helplessly leaning against the door, sick with terror. Indistinctly she heard faint sounds outside the window.

BY the time Lottie joined her hostess and the servants in the hall, Inspector Davis, a tall, thin person with a thick straw-colored mustache, of awkward movements and speech not at all New Yorky, seemed to have said his say. Yet he continued to repeat himself, possibly for the newcomer's benefit.

"Well, Miss, it is our duty to warn you; and as I was saying, a house like this, in its own grounds, has special attractions for them blackguards. So as you happen to have shutters on the ground windows, I advise you to use them after dark, and keep a bright lookout generally. Suspicious characters, as I was saying, are about this district at present, and the public has a duty as well as the police."

Joan got rid of him at last. "I'd have offered him beer," she remarked, "only I fancied a great many people had done that already. However, he meant well, and we must take his advice—and goodness me, Lottie, we left the safe open—the window, too!"

DESPITE the long wait in the shrubbery, at a considerable distance from the house, Stormont enjoyed moments of genuine amusement. That had been really a humorous idea—to get Plyden, in a false mustache, to give warning of suspicious characters in order to have the coast clear for Lottie's bit of work at the safe. However, he became serious enough from the moment of the girl's first signal,

at which he dispatched Plyden to the house. It was now or never! He had no extravagant hopes of success; at the same time, the possibilities had been well worth testing.

He could not see the safe from his lurking-place, but he detected Joan leaving the room. A period of very acute anxiety followed. At last came relief in the flutter of the letter and its fall into the shadow. Next the window went black. He had no time to lose; yet he must proceed with the utmost caution. There was a broad lawn to cross and a steep bank to climb, and he must take a very roundabout course to escape the glare from the doorway. But all the way he kept smiling to himself. If the letter turned out to be the right one, that little girl was entitled to a decent reward. Why, he might even marry her, after all—no, not that!

At length he was there, right under the window, stooping over the narrow flower-bed whereon the letter had indubitably fallen. The air was as still as ever; the scent of flowers was sweet and heavy in his nostrils. A faint chuckle escaped him as his eager hands began to grope. . . . After a little while he brought out a small electric torch, and putting his handkerchief over the lens to reduce the brilliance, resumed the search.

But the light showed him nothing—nothing save the stunning fact that the letter was no longer there.

CHAPTER VIII

MISS GOSLING TAKES A HAND

WHAT a blessing trousers must be!" murmured Miss Gosling, surmounting the sill with anything but agility. Safe once more on the floor of her room, she heaved a sigh of relief. Then hurriedly but quietly she lifted in the slim chair which had served as a precarious step between the sill and the ground, closed the window and drew down the Venetian blind. She switched on a light, rubbed her eyes and picked from the carpet the letter which she had thrown in before making her entrance. Blinkingly she read the superscription.

"How very extraordinary!" she said under her breath. "Dear me, I shall have more than ever to think about now! What a life it is, to be sure!"

It seemed to her that much time must have elapsed since that violent ringing had roused her from her communion with the darkness and caused her to make for the door. As a matter of fact, the whole adventure had occupied barely four minutes. On hearing the scared housemaid's summons to Joan, she had felt that her presence might be acceptable to the girl. But as she was about to pass the library door, a sound from within—a slight jingle—brought her to a standstill, all on the alert. Soon a second sound came to her pricked-up ears. She recognized it, faint though it was. Since her arrival at Elm House she had heard it on quite a number of occasions. There is no other sound just the same as that produced by the opening of a safe drawer.

Her hand, which had gone forth involuntarily, came back without having touched the door. Softly she returned to her room, noiselessly locked herself in and almost silently proceeded to get herself out of the window. Then with her outstretched hand touching the wall she moved along the strip of grass bordering the bed, cautiously and hopefully.

BUT on reaching the corner of the house, she came face to face with disappointment. The blaze—it seemed a blaze to her—from the library window informed her that the blind was up. What madness, then, for her to attempt to play the spy in that direction! "H'm!" she muttered, recoiling, "what's to be done now?"

Indecision was not a failing of Griselda Gosling's, but for once she felt at a loss, standing there in the dark, peering furtively round the angle at that so-distant yet so-near glow of electric light.

Then a startling thing happened. Into the glow came a slender hand and wrist. The hand held a letter; the wrist bore a watch-bracelet which the spinster had admired earlier in the evening. The hand fluttered the letter,

let it go and disappeared. Almost immediately thereafter the light went out. And as swiftly the spinster's indecision gave place to determination. "I must have that letter!"

And now it was in her hand!

She had seen the late Mr. Cran's big, clumsy writing often enough lately to know it on this envelope. The green-penciled date also had a familiar look: it was March 3, and the unusual formation of the "3" suggested Joan at once. Moreover, there was at the present moment a green pencil in the pen-tray on the library writing-table. Therefore it was not to be doubted that Miss Lottie Lismore had abstracted the letter from her friend's safe. But why?

Questions began to pour into the lively mind of Miss Griselda Gosling as she stood in her room staring at that envelope. Minutes flew past. What was her immediate duty? Take the letter straightway to Joan and confound the girl's false friend? Yes; but would that be the best way of getting at the meaning of the theft? Quite the reverse, she decided at once.

MISS GOSLING'S sense of expediency began an argument with her sense of duty. It was fated to be brief, however. A slight jarring sound intruded on the silence. Wheeling about, she perceived that behind the blind the window was being raised from the outside. Swiftly she stepped backward to the door, but not before two of the laths were turned flat and between them protruded a shining object—unmistakably, even to a spinster's eyes, a revolver.

"Kindly throw me that letter," said a smooth voice.

Miss Gosling may have been afraid of the weapon, but the cool command had the odd effect of making her exceedingly angry. At the same time it flashed into her mind that of the thousand villains in her reading-experience, not one had actually fired at a woman.

"Certainly not!" she snapped.

"I will count three," said the voice, "and then I will shoot. Stop! Don't you try to open that door!"

"I wasn't," she retorted, letting fall

the key. "The door's locked," she added as with an awkward movement of her foot she pushed the key under it.

"The letter, quick!"

The letter, too, fell from Miss Gosling's fingers. Another awkward movement, and it had followed the key.

"Now shoot away!" she said faintly yet defiantly.

"Damn!" said the voice, no longer smooth. The revolver disappeared.

"Oh, for my smelling-salts!" she murmured after a minute had gone by without anything happening. "Thank heaven, he didn't fire—though I don't suppose he ever intended to. . . . I wonder whether I can get the key back."

WITH the help of her comb she was successful. She then opened the door and recovered the letter—scarcely a moment too soon. Her niece was coming from the hall and calling for her. Miss Gosling hid the letter in her dress, hoping she was not looking as pale as she felt.

"Have you had a visitor, Joan?" she managed to inquire.

Joan laughed. "Yes. I'm sorry you did not meet him—a police officer doing his best to make our flesh creep with stories of suspicious characters in the district. I'm afraid the maids will be giving notice. . . . Come in," she added, as she switched on the library lights. "I've only got to lock up the safe. Fancy leaving it open like this, and the window open too, with those dreadful suspicious characters in the district!"

"Hadn't you better take the warning seriously and see whether your valuables in there are all right?"

"What nonsense!"

Miss Gosling moved toward her niece. "I'm afraid I sha'n't sleep unless I know for certain that everything is all right."

"Oh, well, in that case—" Joan, much amused, unlocked and opened the right-hand drawer, ran through its contents and quickly counted some loose notes and gold. "Quite all right!" was her verdict. She transferred Lottie's

packet to the back of the drawer before closing it.

"That little jewel-case on the shelf," pursued the other, pointing.

"Don't keep jewels there."

"Have you no valuables in the other drawer?"

"Nothing that would appeal to a burglar."

"Better look, and then I'll perhaps sleep without having a nightmare."

"You are determined that I shall have a fearful night, at any rate," said the girl lightly. But she became graver while she removed the bunch from the right drawer and fitted a key in the left. She drew open the latter and shut and locked it again. "Yes, yes, all right there also," she murmured, proceeding to close the ponderous door.

Now though the left-hand drawer had remained open for but a bare instant, Miss Gosling's bright eyes had discerned a yellow envelope bearing the words: "*Letter for Douglas Grant.*" In order to conceal her excitement, she moved over to the window. For a moment she peered out; then she turned to retrace her steps. As she did so, her eye was caught by a tiny thing on the dark, polished flooring at her feet. She picked it up and appeared to drop it out of the window.

SHE strolled idly toward the fireplace, and a glance at the several glasses of flowers informed her that there was no yellow rose in the room. At the same time her faculty of observation reminded her that the only yellow roses in the garden grew almost under her bedroom window.

So, after all, somebody had entered the library by the window—somebody's shoe in all likelihood had conveyed the yellow petal now hidden in her hand from the place where it fell to the place where she found it. Surely it was her duty to tell Joan everything forthwith. Yes, but—well, she would "sleep on it" first.

A couple of maids came in to close the shutters.

"Let's go to the drawing-room," said Joan, after they had very willingly performed the office and retired. "Lottie's

taxi will be here presently. She has become quite nervous, poor girl. This heat is absurd so late in the year—not that it worries me."

"I've been feeling a bit upset myself to-night," the spinster remarked, still uneasy lest she should be looking ghastly.

"Then we'll have a room upstairs made ready for you at once. After that policeman's warning—"

"Please, no! I'd rather be stuffy than change my bed. I'm not in the least nervous."

"WELL?" demanded Lismore, wheeling upon his daughter as her taxi sped away.

She clutched his arm, whispering:

"I didn't find out anything about a telegram, though I did my best and all you told me, but I found a letter addressed to Douglas Grant—to be destroyed in six months; and I dropped it out of the window. And oh, I wish—"

"Thank God!" exclaimed Harold Lismore, and no doubt he meant it.

An hour later he dashed panting into the office.

"Congratulations, Stormont! You are a most wonderful fellow! I'll never doubt you again—never! But I've lived ten years this evening, so you'll forgive my impatience. I've no doubt you have the contents of the thing by heart by this time. For heaven's sake, let me have a sight of it!" Flushed and unsteady, he stood looking down on the slight, dapper figure in the easy-chair.

Stormont met his gaze with a cool, faint smile.

"I'm so sorry to disappoint you, Lismore," he said, "but as it happens, I haven't got the letter."

Lismore's foolish laugh was followed by a dead silence lasting for many seconds. Then the large face purpled, and in a bellow came the word:

"Liar!"

"Don't be silly," remarked Stormont. "I haven't so much as touched the letter. I have merely seen it in another's hand."

"Lottie told me she put it out of the window for you, and I—I believe my daughter."

"Quite right! Miss Lismore dropped from the window, but ill-luck intervened in the shape of a friend of yours. You had better take a seat."

LISMORE stumbled to the opposite chair, and Stormont told of Miss Gosling, her capture of the letter and his attempt to get it from her.

When he had ended, Lismore said heavily: "So we are discovered and ruined, thanks to your want of foresight. You ought to have arranged things so that—"

"Don't drivel. For myself, I don't feel that I have fallen under suspicion at all; and as for you, there may still be a way out. You have simply got to manage your daughter. She was acting blindly in the interests of a young man whom she believes to have been done out of his rights, and whose friend was waiting in the garden—"

"Sacrifice my daughter!"

"You have already done so."

"Damn you, Stormont!"

"I have already asked you to refrain from being silly. Let us understand each other. We still want that platinum, don't we?"

"The platinum! Stormont, it's out of reach now—now and forever!" groaned Lismore.

"Not at all! We have at least two chances left. First, we may yet secure the letter—"

"You've gone crazy. It is back in the safe by now, and do you imagine we or Lottie will ever get another opportunity there?"

"If it's back in the safe, I shouldn't wonder." From the side-pockets of his jacket Stormont drew forth two flat metal boxes.

"It was a huge risk, but immediately after the encounter with your friend Miss Gosling I managed to enter the library and obtained impressions—my hands were fairly steady, I assure you—of the keys."

"Good Lord!" muttered Lismore in grudging admiration. "And the other chance?"

"Douglas Grant's return."

"You mean we should at least get our shares of the platinum?"

Stormont, gazing at the boxes,

ignored the question. "Douglas Grant," he said slowly, "will be home within three weeks from now."

Lismore sprang to his feet. "How on earth can you know? What have you been doing behind my back?"

"Working for your good. Sit down. Don't gesticulate. You wouldn't earn ten dollars a week on the stage. In the safe was a little jewel-box. I piled on the risk by stopping thirty seconds longer to look into it. There was a telegram from Grant. I heard a door open near at hand, but I read it. He is in Canada. Been ill. But he leaves for New York soon."

CHAPTER IX

JOAN RECEIVES A SURPRISE

NEXT morning Miss Gosling, having slept—or rather laid awake—on it, decided what she would do. Shortly after eight o'clock she craved admittance to her niece's room, and received it readily.

"Sorry to bother you, Joan," she said easily, "but can you let me have fifty dollars in cash. I must get my little bank-account transferred to this part of the country." She carried a check in her hand.

"Of course! You shall have it immediately after breakfast."

"Well, it's such a lovely morning that I thought of going downtown at once. I've neglected some little things—still, I can wait."

"No, no," said Joan, to whom the pleasure of being able to oblige a fellow-creature was still somewhat of a novelty. "I've nothing like that in my purse, but—" She got up and stepped over to an old-fashioned bureau.

Shortly afterward Miss Gosling went downstairs with the keys of the safe and instructions to take what she required from the right-hand drawer. Her plan had worked admirably, and within a couple of minutes the mysterious letter was once more in the yellow envelope in the left-hand drawer.

TO Griselda's wonderment, a week passed without producing any occurrence of the most mildly thrilling

nature. Joan had a note from Lottie, sweetly apologetic for what the writer termed her silliness on that sultry evening; she and her mother were off to Atlantic City, after all. Mr. Stormont made two afternoon calls, but on both occasions the ladies were out. He left neatly worded notes written in the library, to which the housemaid, knowing him as a friend of her late master, admitted him readily. One of the notes begged Miss March's acceptance of the concert-tickets inclosed; the other asked for a donation toward a poor-children's Christmas treat.

Joan's refusal of the first request was as kindly as her granting of the second. She mentioned both to her aunt one morning at breakfast.

"He seems to be a nice man," remarked Miss Gosling thoughtfully. "I think I should like to meet him."

In the drawing-room some twelve hours later it became evident to the girl that her relative was nervous. On being pressed for a reason, the latter admitted that it was the "burglar business."

"I do wish," she added, "you would look again to see if the contents of your safe are all right, in spite of the shutters. I keep wondering in the night—"

Joan did not argue. "Come along," she cried good-naturedly. "I'll make the inspection at once."

They passed to the library. From a discreet distance Miss Gosling witnessed the counting of some money; she also saw her niece take out and put back the inclosure of the yellow envelope.

"You must have a room upstairs, Aunt Griselda," Joan said.

"I'm quite satisfied now, and shall sleep well where I am," said Miss Gosling, and changed the subject. She did have a good night—the last she was to enjoy for some time.

ON the next evening, which was the ninth following that of the first closing of the shutters, the two were finishing dinner when the maid brought Joan a card and the intimation that "the owner" awaited her convenience in the library.

Miss Gosling saw her niece start, flush, pale, and flush again.

"Impossible!" exclaimed the girl. A moment later she regained command of herself, if not of her color. "Very well, Kate," she said quietly. "I will see the gentleman presently."

"I hope," Miss Gosling ventured when the maid had retired, "it is nothing disagreeable, Joan. If you like, I'll see the gentleman and polish him off."

Joan smiled now. "Perhaps you may see him later, Aunt Griselda. I was taken by surprise, not horror. Will you excuse me?" She went quickly to the library.

By the table was standing a tall, bronzed and weather-beaten young man with darkish coloring and exceedingly fine gray eyes. His left hand was heavily bandaged.

For what seemed a long space of time, Joan, halting just inside the door, returned his gaze. Two years ago they had been friends—good friends. What had the long separation done to them that neither had ready a greeting for the other?

At last he came toward her, and she went to meet him.

"Joan," he said hoarsely, "how wonderful to see you again!"

"Oh, Douglas," she cried, "I don't understand, but I—I'm so glad—"

Their hands met, but at the contact their gazes wavered, for it was borne on both that the thing they had cherished silently for two long years was not friendship, but love.

CHAPTER X

THE SILVER SEAL

THEIR hands fell apart. The sweet, powerful emotion had spent itself, having shaken but not broken their self-control. They were not weaklings, these two; they could face facts, and the facts before them now were hard and urgent. Their hearts must wait; the man knew it, and the girl feared it. She was the first to speak.

"What have you done to your wrist?"

"Out prospecting, I was clumsy enough to get it crushed; it is not serious. I'm afraid I have interrupted you at dinner, and perhaps you have some engagement."

"No. Please sit down."

He took a chair a little way off, saying: "I fancy we have both a good many questions to ask, Joan; I am ready to answer yours. But perhaps I ought first to tell you that your letter reached me along with your telegram: they were brought to the camp, some forty miles from the place of their address. But for the telegram the letter might have lain there for another week or so."

"I see." She thought for a moment. "I will ask just one question now, for I am sure you would wish to hear about your uncle. Why did you telegraph you would start in ten days? You must have left almost at once."

He smiled a little grimly. "I could not count on the wire's being read by you only, and I wished, if possible, to avoid encountering one or two people who might be unduly interested in my visit to the old place. That may not sound a very satisfactory answer to your question—"

"I am perfectly satisfied," she said quickly if not altogether truthfully, adding rather unnecessarily: "Then you have just arrived."

"A few hours ago. You are the second person I have spoken to. The first was an old friend—the only one I have kept in touch with during the last two years."

"Mr. Henley!" she exclaimed before she was aware.

"Henley!" He looked at her curiously. "I don't know anyone of that name."

"I mean the man who forwarded the fifteen hundred to Mr. Cran." She stopped.

"It was Fairthorn, the man I have just left, who did that for me," said Douglas, his color deepening. "So my uncle told you! Your letter did not mention that. But who is Henley?"

JOAN wished she had held her tongue—for the time being, at any rate. "I will try to explain later," she

said uneasily. "Yes, Mr. Cran told me about the money. It—it puzzled him greatly, your sending it."

"It was quite simple."

"Yes, if you had—had owed him the money."

"Well, I did owe it, as you so kindly put it—didn't I?"

"No."

He smiled at the downright answer. "Your letter told me that Uncle Rufus had discovered some evidence of my honesty. But might he not have said so much out of—well, generosity?"

"No."

"You have given me your hand, Joan," he continued; "so I take it that you believe in me."

"I have always done so," she said quietly.

"Even the fifteen hundred's being returned did not give you doubts?"

"Only a little curiosity." She smiled faintly.

"I wonder what made you believe in me, Joan."

"Can one always give reasons for one's beliefs?"

For a moment or two he was silent, his gaze warm with gratitude. Then: "Yet it is really quite simple about that fifteen hundred. I had made a bit of money out there—two or three thousand merely—and believing that the old man deemed me guilty, I did what I could to make the best of a bad job. I was fond of him, Joan, though I hurt him as I did."

"If he had only known why," she said softly, her eyes averted.

"No one will ever know why," he replied, a sudden harshness in his voice. It was gone when he resumed: "By the way, I got a piece of very pleasant news this evening. Fairthorn told me that you had become mistress of this house."

"Oh," she exclaimed, flushing, "so you have heard! I've been wondering how I was going to tell you. You will believe me when I say that the thing was altogether unexpected, and that I have been rather unhappy about it. But you'll take it back, wont you?"

"Take what back, Joan?"

"The house and the—the money. There's a lot of money, you know."

NOW it was his turn to redden; then he laughed easily. "I'm afraid my uncle, if he knew, would be hurt by that; and I have my feelings too; so I hope you wont mention the matter again. All the same, it's what I should have expected of you."

"But it seems all wrong."

"It is very much all right, so far as I am concerned. When I got your wire, almost the first thing I wondered about was Elm House. I knew I was out of the question, but I hoped it would not go to—certain persons. Well, it's splendid to think of the old place being yours, though I don't suppose you will want to live in it always."

"He wished me to stay in it for six months, at least. I think he must have wanted me to stay till—till the books were taken away. The books, you know, are—"

"Yes; Fairthorn told me about the books."

She smiled for the first time. "I have not met Mr. Fairthorn," she said, "but he seems to know something of my affairs."

"Very little. He knows you by sight." Douglas hesitated before he added: "I've got to confess that during my absence he sent me occasional news of you—small news, of course, but better than nothing. For instance, you went to church on a Sunday last May in a grayish hat with touches of scarlet—"

"How absurd!"

"I'm sure it wasn't! And the previous December you were at the theater in a—"

"Oh, please!" She broke off with a laugh, then called herself a fool to have felt pleased, and said gravely: "I must tell you some things about your uncle, and after that I will give you a letter from him."

JOAN'S little tale was soon told, without interruption from the listener, and when she had made an end he was still silent.

"I think," she added, after a pause, "indeed I am sure, that he would have told me much more had he been spared a little longer. We were to

have had a talk that evening; he had asked me to dine with him. Well, I hope I have at least made it clear that he believed in you and longed for your return."

"You have, Joan," said Grant with a sigh. "Thank you for telling it so kindly. It will be a long regret to me."

"That you did not confide in him?" she said eagerly.

"That was impossible—in the circumstances. Don't misunderstand me, Joan. I regret nothing except that I should have caused the old man suffering. At the time—I hope you can believe this—I did not dream in my haste that he would be deeply affected by my action. Uncle Rufus was never anything but just; but I cannot remember his ever showing much feeling. Latterly his books—"

"He changed during the last two years of his life. But please, don't fancy that I have ever judged you, even in my thoughts. From the very first I have felt certain you were shielding another person."

Douglas made a slight gesture of distress.

"Later," she went on, rising and going to the safe, "I began to wonder whether I knew the person. I am quite sure Mr. Cran did know—or suspect—just before the end. . . . How stupid of me! I must go and fetch the keys."

DOUGLAS got up. "Whatever you have to give me can wait," he said. "Joan, I ask you as a friend not to waste another thought on the question of why I went away. Only a few people were, and are, interested, and it would serve no good purpose to go back on the matter. For me it is enough that you should have believed in me all along, and that my uncle believed before he died. Shall we let it rest there?"

"As you will," she answered. "If I have said too much, forgive me. Only, Douglas, the truth will come out in spite of you, and I will say that the person who took what you gave—no matter how readily you gave it—is too abominable for words! There! I've

said my say!" She ended, with a smile on her lips, and a moisture in her lovely eyes.

"Ah, Joan!" he sighed, downcast. If it meant uncovering the truth before he could hope to win her, what should he do? For another woman held his vow of concealment.

"Will you come and be introduced to Aunt Griselda before I deliver the precious letter?" she asked in a lighter tone. "I may tell you that she has been most assiduous in making me take that big safe seriously. One would almost imagine she knew of my terrible responsibility!"

"And does she not?"

"Neither she nor anybody alive. There were times, I must confess, when I felt burdened, and once I did get a scare. I have mentioned a Mr. Henley. Well, nearly a fortnight ago, Mr. Henley rang me up stating that you had instructed him to inquire whether Mr. Cran had left a packet for you in my charge."

"But, as I've told you, I know nobody called Henley, and I certainly would not have employed a third person to convey such a message to you!"

"However, I don't think Mr. Henley got much satisfaction. He seemed to take fright and—"

"Joan, I'm afraid this has been an unpleasant business for you. I'm sorry you had to undertake it. No doubt it was only some impertinent and curious person who wanted information. Think no more about it."

"Well, I don't take it so seriously now that you are here to relieve me of my trust," she said. "Now I'll go get Aunt Griselda."

PRESENTLY Joan came back with her relative.

"My niece tells me you have just arrived from Canada," said Griselda, seating herself. She chose a place whence she could have an uninterrupted view of his face. "Are you glad to be home?"

"I am glad to be here." He noticed Joan's slight frown and added quickly: "I put it that way, Miss Gosling, because, if ever I have a home, it is likely to be in Canada."

"Your work being there," she said with little apparent interest.

Joan, engaged in opening the safe, said over her shoulder: "Aunt Griselda, I have a letter to present to Mr. Grant; as a matter of form, you'd better witness its delivery."

"I am willing," said Miss Gosling, "but would not a written receipt be the proper thing?" She looked from one to the other in the perky manner of a bird.

"Quite right," said Grant. "I ought to have thought of that."

"Nonsense!" Joan exclaimed, shutting the drawer with a bang. "One can have too much formality." She came over with the yellow envelope, extracted the white one and presented it to Grant. "Here it is, Douglas, just as your uncle gave it to me, and I hope—" She stopped short.

Miss Gosling was on her feet, staring, nay, glaring, at the packet now in Grant's hand.

"What on earth is the matter, Aunt Griselda?"

"I'm afraid—I'm afraid you'll never forgive me. But I have got to tell you. Don't open it just yet, Mr. Grant. May I have it in my hand for a moment?"

"Why, certainly," said the puzzled young man, handing it over.

"But this is extraordinary—" the girl began.

TO Joan, from a keen inspection of the back of the envelope, Miss Gosling turned unhappy eyes.

"Joan, before I say more, I beg you to answer a few questions. Did Mr. Cran have more than one seal on his desk?"

"He had two, but—"

"Can you say with which seal he sealed this letter, and if so, can you produce the seal?"

"I remember most distinctly that he used his favorite silver one. It has not been used since. Both seals have exactly the same device—a raven. But you must explain—"

"Where is the silver seal?"

The young man softly interposed. "Get it, if you can, Joan. It seems that Miss Gosling has something important to show us."

The older woman gave him a grateful glance; the younger stepped over to the writing-table, opened a drawer and came back with the article desired. It was a beautiful little bit of workmanship, in the shape of a nymph posed above the die. None too graciously Joan offered it to her aunt. The latter gave a little groan, and muttered, "As I feared!"

"Mr. Grant," she went on, "I am afraid you will never forgive me. You are not going to be the first to open this letter. Joan, take the letter and see if that seal fits the impression."

With a creeping sense of dismay Joan did as requested—and went white. "Oh," she cried piteously, "the seal is too small!" Next moment she darted to the table and picked up a seal with a plain ebony handle. . . . "It fits!" And now her voice was faint. "What has happened?"

GRANT turned to Miss Gosling; he was stirred by the sight of Joan's distress; and his voice, though under control, was sharpened by resentment. "Are we to understand, Miss Gosling, that the letter originally sealed by my uncle has been opened and resealed by another person?"

Miss Gosling, the picture of humiliation, bowed her head.

"Forgive me, Joan," he said after a moment's pause. "Are you positive my uncle used the silver seal?"

"I can see him using it now! But the thing is impossible! The letter has never left the safe since I put it there, a few days after his death; and from the moment I received it until I put it there I carried it." Involuntarily her hand went to her breast.

"Suppose I open it and see what its contents are," the young man suggested. "After all, there may be—"

"Wait!" cried the girl. "Aunt Griselda, you must tell us at once how you come to know so much—how, indeed, you come to know anything at all—about this letter. When I trusted you with the keys—"

"Don't, oh, don't!" moaned Miss Gosling in a voice of such misery that her niece's wrath subsided. "Let us sit down, please," she went on, "and I will

tell you all I know. It's a horrid, horrid business, and I've been an awful fool, but I thought I was doing you a service, Joan, in keeping things to myself for the time being."

Miss Gosling's story was bitter hearing for Joan March. She had been tricked and confounded by a friend, that "sweet little thing" Lottie Lisimore and fooled by a man against whom she ought to have been on her guard, Mr. Stormont; and so, instead of having fulfilled her trust, she had, for anything she knew to the contrary caused the man of her heart grave injury. She was too heartsick to make any comment at the close of the dreary yet sensational recital.

Grant, however, did not appear at a loss. He got up and with an easy smile approached Miss Gosling. "You are an extremely plucky lady," he said, "and I should like to shake your hand."

Whereat two tears, the first shed in many years, as the spinster long afterward mentioned, rolled down her apple cheeks, and from that instant she was devoted to Douglas Grant.

The tears were too much for the generous Joan. In a moment her arms were round the little woman, and she was murmuring: "You poor dear, how awful it must have been for you!"

GRANT may have been apprehensive of more tears, for he said briskly: "Well, what about opening the letter now?"

He took out his knife.

Without a word Joan handed him his property.

"It isn't empty, anyway," he remarked, and slit the flap carefully.

At the sight of the strip of paper which he took out and unfolded, Joan's color came back. "That," she cried, "is just what I saw Mr. Cran put into the envelope. Perhaps, after all—" She stopped short at his puzzled look.

"I suppose this means something," he said at last, "but at first sight it is very like a joke—or a puzzle. It is evident that it is a cutting from a document—something to do with platinum, two gentlemen lately mentioned by Miss Gosling, and myself."

"Two gentleman!" echoed Miss Gosling.

"Platinum!" exclaimed Joan. "May I—" She held out her hand for the strip, but withdrew it quickly. "I beg your pardon. I had no business to—"

"Please examine it, Joan," he said, looking up from the once-familiar writing. "You may be able to throw some light on this queer fragment. To me it suggests something in the nature of buried treasure—which, of course, is absurd."

"Why absurd?" Miss Gosling inquired with a trace of her old asperity.

"Platinum," murmured Joan to herself, remembering her last interview with Stormont. Then aloud: "What do these mean—'*deep chamb,*' and '*laborat*'? Why, '*chamber*' and '*laboratory*,' of course! Oh, Douglas, perhaps, after all— And listen: '*A stone flag, . . . 1 foot from N. w . . . stance from E. w.*' These must be directions. Let us go at once to the laboratory!"

"It all sounds rather suggestive, but I seem to remember," said Grant, "that the laboratory had a cement floor—not stone."

"So it has," she admitted, crestfallen.

"We must presume," said Miss Gosling, "that the person who, thanks to my folly, managed to open your letter took a copy of that paper; and we may imagine that he took it in order to complete information he already possessed."

"Aunt Griselda," cried the girl, "you are clever!"

"I'm an old fool, but I sometimes see the likely side. When were you last in the laboratory, Joan?"

"Two years ago, for the first time. I doubt whether it has been opened since except by the valuator after Mr. Cran died. It is completely dismantled—nothing but benches, shelves, and bare walls."

"Are there windows?"

"Yes—barred," answered Grant. "I think we had better delay our visit until we can have daylight," he went on, guessing that his companions had undergone enough for the present. "If any treasure is there, it's safe enough.

With your permission, Joan, we shall make an inspection to-morrow or the next day. Now, I had better get back to town. I'm staying to-night with Fairthorn at his rooms. Please keep that paper for me."

Poor Joan! The only consent she could give was her silence. But an unexpected intervention left the paper in Grant's hand.

Miss Gosling had risen in an oddly stealthy fashion.

"Sh!" she whispered. "I feel that some one is eavesdropping! Keep back," she muttered to Grant, about to make for the door, and sped thither herself.

Smartly she drew it open.

CHAPTER XI

THE MIDDLE STRIP

JOAN and Douglas could not refrain from smiling at Miss Gosling's frank chagrin as she stood staring into the untenanted passage.

"I'm afraid we are letting it get on our nerves, Aunt Griselda," said Joan kindly.

Miss Gosling shut the door softly before she replied: "Some one was there within the last minute, and I could almost swear it was a woman."

"Bravo!" cried Grant lightly. "But how—"

"If your nose is half as keen as mine, you will be able to smell her perfume yet. I'm not up in scents, but it's none of yours, Joan. It's something like Russia leather."

"Impossible!" cried the girl. "She's at Atlantic— Oh, wait a moment." She darted across the room and rang the bell.

"I seem to have dropped into a nest of mysteries," Grant remarked. "Please tell me candidly which will be helpful—my going or my staying."

"I think you had better stay," said the spinster. "Hadn't he, Joan?"

"Yes—yes, of course. He doesn't want his presence known."

"As to that, I'm afraid there may be difficulties now," Miss Gosling observed, "—that is," she added, "unless that door is fairly sound-proof."

There was silence till the housemaid appeared.

"Has anyone called?" asked her mistress, calmly enough.

The reply, though not unexpected, was yet startling.

"Miss Lismore is in the drawing-room, ma'am. She arrived about twenty minutes ago."

After a moment Joan asked why she had not been informed.

"Miss Lismore would not have you disturbed, ma'am. I told her you had business in the library, and she said she preferred to wait. But she hoped you could put her up for the night, ma'am. She had a handbag with her."

"Very well," said Joan, suppressing her feelings with no small effort. "I will see Miss Lismore immediately." She had no fault to find with the maid: Elm House knew no guest more familiar than Lottie Lismore.

"Which room shall I prepare, ma'am?"

"I will let you know presently."

THE instant the door closed Miss Gosling exclaimed: "Go at once, Joan. Don't give her time to think, and you may learn whether or not she has overheard anything. Upon my word, I didn't imagine she had the nerve—"

"Pardon me," Grant interposed; "but Joan, I beg of you to deal gently with her."

The girl looked from the one to the other.

"Douglas," she said, "you ask almost too much of me. Yet one of the last things your uncle said was: 'Continue to be Lottie's friend.'"

"Then you will not do otherwise."

Miss Gosling fairly writhed.—"Mr. Grant, for goodness' sake, don't be too quixotic! Suppose that her action had robbed you of a fortune, what would you say?"

He answered steadily: "Miss Gosling, whatever has happened or may happen, I can take no means that might effect the ruin of Miss Lismore—or her parents."

The declaration was as a stab to Joan March, but she took it bravely. "If you will stay here, I will go and see her.

I cannot promise how I shall act. If she is still unaware of your return, Douglas, she shall remain so." Without another word she left the room.

MISS GOSLING turned to Grant. Impatience had ousted penitence for the time being. "Really, you are a very trying young man! Are you going to do nothing at all? If there is a treasure waiting for you,—and I'm convinced there is,—aren't you going to make any effort to secure it?"

His eyes looked worried, but his smile at her asperity was good-humored. "I will do everything I can, Miss Gosling," he said, "for I want the treasure, if it is there, pretty badly."

"Don't you feel sure it's there?"

"I should not be surprised, now that I come to think of it. I was never particularly curious about my uncle's affairs, but I heard from a friend, a few hours ago, how much he had left, one way and another, and I confess the total sum struck me as small. I just wish I could imagine a reason for my uncle's extraordinary method of informing me of my good fortune."

"We shall discover that in time! For the present, what are you going to do about those—those people who, undoubtedly, are after the treasure? They must be stopped!"

"Would it not be worth while to let them proceed a little further, just to see—"

"No, no!" she cried, with a rueful look. "You must think me a horribly interfering old woman, Mr. Grant, but I'd do anything, even to the point of offending you, to undo what I have done in this affair."

"Thank you," he said, touched by her earnestness. "And what, in your opinion, is the first thing to be done?"

"A serious study of that strip of paper, and then an examination of the laboratory."

"I can't ask Miss March to open up the old place to-night."

"She will do so, whether you ask her or not, and probably keep guard till she drops! Of course, Miss Lismore's arrival may complicate matters. If I were Joan, I would simply pack her out of—well, never mind. I don't

apologize, but I'm not going to make myself more unpleasant than I can help."

"If you imagine that my regard for—"

"No, no—not another word, please! Wont you utilize this precious time in studying your uncle's writing?"

"We might do it together," he said, glad enough to change the subject, and he placed a couple of chairs at the writing-table.

"It's too good of you," Miss Gosling said gratefully. "I don't deserve your confidence at all."

"You may be troubled with a good deal of it yet," he returned, unfolding the paper. "Now let us take the thing as seriously as ever you wish."

This was the manuscript he laid on the table:

... robability this i . . .
 ... y nephew, Dougl . . .
 ... e-time assista . . .
 ... aniel Stormont. . . .
 ... nd the divisio . . .
 ... sian platinum . . .
 ... course of my d . . .
 ... Grant, two years . . .
 ... eelings and tru . . .
 ... aved me much d . . .
 ... ave inherited the w . . .
 ... e season. As i . . .
 ... possession of 10 . . .
 ... ,000 to Harold Lis . . .
 ... ounces apiece, . . .
 ... m myself. The p . . .
 ... unces, is stored . . .
 ... ly excavated chamb . . .
 ... eneath my laborat . . .
 ... ly obtainable b . . .
 ... —a stone flag, w . . .
 ... l ft. from N. w . . .
 ... stance from E. w . . .
 ... ly gas that may . . .
 ... that deep chamb . . .
 ... tilation before . . .
 ... ell. I wish you n . . .

OPENING the drawing-room door, Joan first became conscious of a faint fragrance which she recognized as "*Cuir de Russe*," a perfume affected by Lottie Lismore—and then of a sound of subdued sobbing. At the latter her resentment cooled slightly. So, after all, Lottie had come to confess! The intuition was correct so far as it went. Lottie had indeed come to Elm House to confess—but twenty minutes had passed since her arrival.

As Joan softly closed the door, won-

dering how she ought to receive the confession, Lottie's hands fell from her face, disclosing beauty ravaged by a passion which was surely not that of penitence; she sprang to her feet, and her words came in a tempest that fairly took the other aback.

"Oh, oh, how could you be so deceitful! How could you be so underhand? You have pretended to be my friend, and all the time you have been working behind my back! You knew where he was all along, and you have been corresponding with him and telling him abominable things about me! And now he's home again, and you would have hidden it from me! Oh, oh, I never dreamed you could be so—"

"That will do," Joan interrupted in cold anger. "You are referring, I suppose, to Mr. Grant. May I ask how and when you became aware that he was home?"

"I got tired of waiting for you here, and I went along to the library, thinking you and Miss Gosling wouldn't mind my—"

"The library door is not transparent."

"I heard his voice,—oh, I don't mind admitting it,—though I couldn't make out what you were all saying. I don't care what you call it. If you can be mean, so can I."

"You are a little fool," said Joan scathingly, "and I'm not going to discuss Mr. Grant with you. What brings you here to-night?"

"But I'm going to discuss Douglas with you. You have been trying to steal him from me; yes, I will repeat it! You have—"

"If you do, I'll leave you. You must be crazy. Only a few days ago you refused to believe in his innocence."

"I don't care! I don't mind whether he is innocent or guilty. He cared for me till you came between—"

Joan went quickly to the door. With her fingers on the handle she turned and once more asked: "What brings you here to-night?"

Lottie's expression had become sullen. "I've quarreled with Father," she replied, "and I left Mother alone, to come and tell you something fearfully important. But I sha'n't tell it now—or ever!"

"Very well," said Joan. "It's too late for you to go to Kensington to-night, so I will tell Kate to prepare your room at once and take up some supper for you. Perhaps by the morning you will feel inclined to apologize. Good night."

WHEN she had instructed the housemaid, she went to her own room; she did not feel able to return to the library yet awhile. Certain words of Lottie's rankled horribly. She spent a bad ten minutes, and then her meditations were interrupted by the housemaid.

"Please, ma'am, Miss Lismore has gone. She said she had changed her mind about staying, and she would not let me call you."

It was an awkward moment, but Joan got over it fairly well. "That was too bad of Miss Lismore," she remarked, "but as her father is at home, she was not quite happy about staying. I hope you offered her something, Kate."

"Yes ma'am, but she wouldn't have even a cup of tea."

"Very well. Is there anything else, Kate?" The maid was lingering.

"Only that the inspector detective person was here again to-night. He wouldn't have you bothered, ma'am, but asked me to tell you that the police had got hold of the suspicious characters, so that there was no need to use the shutters now."

"Glad to hear it. Miss Gosling will be delighted."

The maid retired and Joan returned to the library.

GRANT rose, saying: "Miss Gosling and I have learned something. It appears that I am not the only person involved in my uncle's—"

"One moment," the girl interrupted, "I must tell you at once that Lottie has gone. I expected she would stay the night, but while I was upstairs—well, she ran away! She had found out that you were here, Mr. Grant. I can't tell you how ashamed I am."

"Don't say that! It will pan out all right." But his smile was a trifle rueful, and he was wondering why she had used the formal mode of address. "I

ought not to have come here to-night without warning you. I ought," he went on with an attempt at levity, "to have asked you to admit me by a back window, after midnight, and have arrived in a slouch hat and whiskers, muffled to the eyes."

Joan sadly shook her head, sick at heart. She had betrayed him as well as his interests. Oh, she must not allow him to take further risks!

"I wish you would come and inspect the laboratory now," she said abruptly.

"Right!" cried Miss Gosling.

"I'm ready," said Grant.

"Then I'll get the keys and some candles," Joan said. "The electrics were dismantled with the rest." She left the room.

CHAPTER XII

LOTTIE BRINGS NEWS

ON the previous night—the only one spent by him, thus far, at Atlantic City—Mr. Lismore had experienced the unprecedented, a scene with his daughter. Of course the rebellion had been speedily quashed, and Mr. Lismore had returned to town in the morning with a vaguely uneasy recollection of the episode, but nothing at all in the way of forebodings.

He and Stormont were seated now in the smoking-room of his house, to which the latter had come, a couple of hours ago, with certain great good news.

"No, I should never have thought of it, myself, Stormont," he was saying for perhaps the tenth time, shortly after eleven o'clock. And he took a sip of his whisky and soda with relish.

"You wouldn't," the other pleasantly replied. "It's a pity we can't bag the entire forty thousand ounces, but all the same, to have reduced Grant's share from thirty thousand to ten thousand, and raised our own shares from five thousand to fifteen thousand was not a bad day's work. Only I don't want such a job again. To convert a three into a one and so forth, without showing one's handiwork, is not easy. Only Rufus's heavy, sprawling handwriting made it not impossible."

"A masterpiece!" Lismore exclaimed.

"What did you feel when you were returning the strip to the safe at Elm House?"

"Nothing till after the deed was done. Then I felt a bit cheap—had to fall back on those beastly tabloids. I suppose I ought to see a doctor again, but—Hello, who's that ringing at this time of night? No need to turn ghastly, man! I'll go if you like."

"I'm all right," said Lismore, getting up. "Don't know why I got so scared. Some one come to the wrong house, I expect." He left the room, closing the door after him.

Lightly and swiftly Stormont crossed the floor and noiselessly opened the door an inch. Presently he heard a key turned harshly, and next moment Lismore's voice risen high with astonishment:

"Lottie! What's wrong? What brings you this time of night?"

Promptly, clearly, Lottie replied: "Father, I want my five thousand dollars."

"Confound it," thought the listener, "that girl may spoil everything! I shall have to play the lovelorn swain, after all!"

He heard Lismore hiss: "Hush, for heaven's sake! Stormont is here!"

"I don't care," was the retort. "Perhaps he'll make you give me my five thousand." And she stepped straight for the smoking-room. Her father shut the door and followed, seething but helpless. He was suddenly and seriously afraid of his daughter.

Stormont sprang from his seat as she entered; his smile suggested admiration, which was never unpleasing to the girl.

"What a happy surprise!" he exclaimed. "But you must be very tired, though you don't look it."

Lottie's sullen look, which had gone for a moment or two, came back. All the way from the Elm House she had kept commanding herself: "You must not give in; you must simply make him give up the money!"

"Wont you sit down, Lottie?" Stormont said solicitously. "Your father must forage for some supper. I'm afraid the servants have gone to bed. I hope you left Mrs. Lismore well."

Lismore would willingly have taken the hint to forage, but his daughter said quickly:

"No, I don't want anything—except my five thousand dollars. Mr. Stormont," she went on, "my father has the five thousand Mr. Cran left me. Please make him give it me."

Stormont regarded her sympathetically. "Surely," he said gently, "you don't doubt that it is safe with your father."

"Perhaps not; but I want it for myself."

"But you didn't expect him to produce five thousand dollars here and now, Lottie."

Lottie could not have told what she had expected, but she rejoined with that simple formula of creditors of all peoples and all ages: "I want my money."

The same words were familiar enough to the two men, who at this time could not have raised anything like five thousand between them.

Lismore cleared his throat. "It's too bad of you, Lottie. I explained to you last night that the money had been invested in our new business, and once more I promise you that you shall be well paid for the use of it—before long."

"You may rest assured of that," said Stormont blandly.

Lottie shook her pretty head and its pretty hat. Then paling, she said: "Father, I must have it, and if you wont give it to me, I shall go and tell Joan March everything!"

Stormont, perceiving a dreadful expression growing on his partner's countenance, said swiftly: "No, no, Lottie; you would never go so far as to do that. Besides—"

She wheeled upon him. "What do you know about it?" she faltered.

"Very little, I'm afraid, except that the letter you took from the safe—"

"Oh! Well, he made me take it."

"Did he? And where is the letter now, do you suppose?"

"He has it. He said it would compel Joan to give up Elm House and—"

"Possibly. But, you see, your father has not got the letter. It is at present in Miss March's safe."

"Nonsense! I don't believe it. How do you know?"

"I can only give you my word for it, Lottie."

"Does—does Joan know?"

"One must suppose that she does. Still—"

"Oh, oh, what will happen to me? Father, you wont allow—"

"Nothing at all is going to happen to you," said Stormont soothingly. "And don't fret any more about your own five thousand. If you want a few hundred to go on with, I dare say we can manage it—eh, Lismore?"

Lottie's determination was completely broken. Tears were not far away.

"I've just come from Elm House," she murmured. "I didn't mean to tell you unless I got my—but I will now. Douglas Grant is home. I heard him talking in the library. . . . What have I said?"

Her father had started and turned away, the old fear upon him, and the visitor had a hard, alert look in his eyes—which, however, gave place immediately to a gleam of gayety.

"That is splendid news," cried the latter. "Isn't it, Lismore? Thank you, Lottie!"

"Yes, yes, but—it took me by surprise. You had better get off to bed, Lottie. You shall have all your money, and much more, very soon."

CHAPTER XIII

THE LABORATORY

THE inspection of the laboratory proved to be a simple and placid business with no particularly illuminating results. As recollected by Grant, the floor was of cement, an unbroken expanse—not the faintest hint anywhere of a flagstone lurking underneath. The laboratory itself was a spacious high-roofed building with numerous tall, narrow windows of dullish but not altogether opaque glass, barred on the outside; it formed an offshoot from the back of the house and had been built to balance a much older extension containing the servants' quarters. A small courtyard lay between the two.

"If there is anything of value under

this," said Grant, tapping the cement with his heel, "it is as safe as in a safe-deposit vault. This is no job for a silence-loving burglar. I'm afraid we have been misled by the unsatisfactory document we have studied so hard, Miss Gosling."

"It is too soon to say that, Mr. Grant," she solemnly replied. "There may be—in fact, there are, till we have proved it otherwise—flagstones under this stuff. If I had a proper tool, I'd begin at once."

"But the cement has been there so long. If my uncle had had it laid recently, I would say no more, but join you in excavating."

"All the same," Joan put in, "it isn't three years since I handled heaps of platinum for Mr. Cran. Of course, it may not have been the platinum referred to in the writing; only I have often thought of it without once remembering that he ever took away anything heavy to the city, and I usually saw him off."

"At all events, Joan," said Grant, teasingly, "you must admit that he did not hide it under this cement."

"Looks as if I should have to do all the thinking," the spinster observed with something of her old asperity. "Suppose Mr. Cran had another entrance to his treasure-chamber; suppose he got at it from somewhere down below, and—and destroyed this entrance and all traces of it after he was done with it, leaving us—I mean you, Mr. Grant—to find and use the entrance mentioned on the paper. How's that?"

"Brilliant, Aunt Griselda!" cried Joan. "I should say he made a burrow from the garden every night and filled it up just before morning!"

Miss Gosling ignored the pleasantry. "What besides the treasure-chamber, which I imagine to be small, lies beneath us?"

"Ground," said Joan, so stolidly that Grant laughed.

With a fine dignity Miss Gosling turned and marched to the door, opened it and passed through. Then she wheeled and faced them. "What," she demanded, "lies beneath me now?"

"One of the old cellars, probably."

"Good! Let us go to it at once!"

At this Joan demurred. "I do think," she said, "we ought to avoid rousing not only the servants but their curiosity. You see, I might have to ask for keys and so on. In the morning I can easily make an excuse for an underground excursion. And I shall arrange that we have proper lights."

So it was finally agreed that further search be deferred till next day. Then Grant spoke: "I must go, Joan. What hour will suit you to-morrow, and may I bring my friend Fairthorn?"

Once more Miss Gosling put in her word. "Please make it after lunch. I've just remembered I must be out in the morning. Of course, if you'd rather go ahead without me—"

"Don't be silly," said her niece with weary good-humor. "Yes, Mr. Grant, we shall be pleased to see you to lunch at half-past one, and Mr. Fairthorn also."

"And a mariner's compass," added the irrepressible spinster, "in case we lose our way down below."

"I wish he weren't quite so secretive," Miss Gosling began when Joan returned from the hallway.

"I'm going to bed," Joan interrupted. "I'm dead tired." From the table she took the strip of paper and its envelope.

"Are you going to put it in the safe, Joan?"

"No," was the brief, decided answer. Joan had determined that the paper should never leave her person until the treasure was either in Douglas Grant's possession or proved to be a myth. Not again would she risk failing in her trust.

AN early train next day carried Lottie back to Atlantic City—richer by one hundred dollars, a little wiser in the ways of men, but certainly no happier, for her adventure. And she had allowed herself to be put off with a hundred dollars! It was disgusting!

Accordingly it was scarcely as a bringer of cheer that she reached the rooms wherein her mother had spent a lonely, anxious night and morning. Mrs. Lismore had been told only of the financial reason for her daughter's journey to New York; she had done her

best to dissuade the girl from an errand which, she foresaw, would have distressing results.

Lottie now kissed the fragile creature tenderly enough.

"Dear, tell me—" began Mrs. Lismore.

"He let me have a hundred."

"Oh, but that is very good news, Lottie! It was kind of him, for he is sorely pressed just now, poor man. The expense of this holiday lies heavy on my conscience."

To Lottie's credit let it be recorded that she suppressed a bitter rejoinder. She moved over to the window. A moment later her face cleared. A young man of pleasing appearance and, as she was aware, fair means, was passing. Catching sight of her, he bowed, smiling gladly. They had had something like a flirtation, three evenings ago. Perhaps they might meet again shortly. Her troubles slipped from her like a loosened ugly-cloak. She returned the salutation graciously.

"Any news, dear?" Mrs. Lismore was inquiring.

Over her shoulder the girl said casually: "Douglas Grant is home."

After a little while, the young man having passed from sight, she wondered why her mother, who had been very fond of Douglas, offered no comment. She turned round—and screamed.

Mrs. Lismore, for the first time in her daughter's experience, had fainted.

CHAPTER XIV

MISS GOSLING AGAIN INTERVENES

AT his desk, Harold Lismore raised a troubled countenance from one of the letters he had received that morning.

"Heimberg refuses to renew the loan, even for a month."

"Taken fright at the continued fall in copper, I suppose," Stormont remarked easily. "No wonder! Still, he's a mean skunk; he gave us to understand that there would be no difficulty about a renewal three months, if we wanted it."

"The note is due this day week. What am I to do about it?"

"Tell him to go to the devil, and look on the bright side. We are going to have fifteen thousand ounces of platinum apiece!"

"But when? You know, Stormont, sometimes I feel we shall never see that platinum. When?"

"Why, as soon as we can get into touch with Douglas Grant. From this afternoon our excellent sleuth Plyden is going to watch Elm House until he can pick up Grant's trail. By to-morrow, or next day, I trust you and I may have the pleasure of calling upon him and presenting our compliments and credentials in the shape of our own particular strips."

"I—I'll never be able to face him. He might turn nasty and—and—"

"Lismore, I'm getting sick of your beastly cowardice! You must take the risk—which I don't, as I've said before, believe exists. Think, my friend, how easy and safe it will be compared with our former plan. Think of that cemented floor and the risks in kidnapping Miss March and her aunt, not to mention managing the servants. Why, the game has been played into our hands!"

Stormont rose, glanced at himself in the mirror over the mantel and flicked a speck of dust from the lapel of his coat. "Well, I'm going out," he remarked. "Write to Heimberg that the note will be met on its due date. By-by!"

Shortly after this Lismore got up and opened his safe. He took out two papers; the strip given to him by Rufus Cran, and a clear copy in his own writing of the completed document with the figures as in the original. It was headed "*Rufus Cran's Instructions.*" He was about to carry those papers to his desk when a tap sounded on the door. He replaced them hastily, turning the key in the drawer.

The office-boy looked in. "The lady you were expecting, sir," he said. And in walked Miss Griselda Gosling.

WHEN the door had closed, she remarked: "Sorry I had to tell that boy a falsehood," and walked over to the easy-chair, in which she deliberately settled herself.

It was beyond Lismore to make any

sort of response. The man looked stupefied, helpless.

"You seem upset, Mr. Lismore," she said at length. "If you will sit down, I will state my business."

He seemed to grope his way to the chair at his desk, and sank upon it.

"You poor creature!" she murmured. "Have you no fight in you?"

Stung, he drew himself up. "I—I am not very well. Your sudden entrance gave me a shock. What is your business, Miss Gosling?"

"You shall have it in the fewest words possible. The first part is concerned with a matter of nearly twenty years ago. My mother, not long before her death, intrusted to you a large sum of money for investment. Neither to her nor to me have you ever accounted for it. Will you do so now?"

At her first words he had gasped and gone gray. Now, "I never—" he began.

"Don't take it that way," she interrupted swiftly. "You never gave my mother a receipt, but you wrote your name on the back of her checks—"

"That proves nothing! Your outrageous assertion is—"

"My mother was alone when she gave you the check, but there were two people in the house who heard you say as you left the room: 'I will double your money for you within three years, Mrs. Gosling!' These two people are still alive. Finally, before she died—poor, by the way,—my mother made an affidavit which I hold. . . . Mr. Lismore, you will have to account for that money, and speedily."

"All a delusion on your mother's part," he stammered at last. "You come to me after nearly twenty years—"

"For nearly twenty years I have spared you; I have pinched on four hundred a year—for the sake of your wife, who was once my dear and generous friend. All that time I prayed for your success for her sake as well as my own. I fancied that success might make you desire to redeem—"

"So it will, so it will!" he cried, clutching at the straw.

"No, I know you better now, Harold Lismore. Once more I request you to

account for the money, \$37,500, with interest, a fortune to a poor old maid!"

"The money was—lost."

"How?"

"The investments went—"

"Name them!"

"I—I'll make up a statement, but I must have time."

"You are at your desk. I can wait five minutes."

He turned to the desk, put out his hand as though for a pen, let it fall nervously. There was a dire silence until she said:

"I will give you a week—"

"God bless—"

"—on conditions! First, answer this question: why did you make your daughter take that letter from my niece's safe?"

His reply was slow in coming: "We—I had a certain right to the contents of the letter."

"Documentary rights?" Miss Gosling had rehearsed that phrase in the watches of the night.

"Y-yes."

"Part, or parts, of the letter, in fact?"

... . Answer please!"

"You seem to know—"

"Answer!"

"Yes."

"You have your own parts here—in this office?"

"No."

"Don't lie! I want to see them."

"I have only one part—a third part—my own."

"I want to see it." Her bright eyes fastened on the safe.

HE shook his head. "I daren't," he said weakly.

"Listen!" Miss Gosling glanced at her old-fashioned little watch and proceeded to tell another falsehood. "I left two men downstairs—not pleasant men for a wrongdoer to meet. They too are watching the time. In four minutes from now they will come up, unless—" She rose, leaving the sentence unfinished. "Is the document on your person?" she demanded.

Again he shook his head, past speech.

"I am going to look for it in your safe," she said. "If you attempt to in-

terfere—well, there are only three minutes now."

She felt that she was beginning to tremble a little and prayed that the remainder of her task might be brief.

Without delay she opened the drawer with the keys in it—and nearly screamed with satisfaction. There was a strip similar to the one she already knew, and—

"Ah," she said softly, "a copy, obviously, of the completed document!" She read rapidly, holding a hand to her head as if to steady her brain. And suddenly she stared violently.

Lismore, with his back to her, never moved.

At last she spoke: "I'm going now. You have till a week from to-day, at noon, to render an account of those investments, and to pay the money, with interest."

He heard the door close, seemingly at a great distance. After a while he got feebly to his feet and crept to the safe.

Thank heaven, she had not taken away his precious strip, sole proof of his right to a share of the platinum. She had merely taken—

He reeled and clung to the steel door. For he remembered that he had made the copy before forgery had been done on two of the originals—Grant's and Stormont's own.

And just then Stormont himself ran in.

"Lismore, what has happened? What did that woman want? Speak out!"

Lismore was incapable of speaking at all then, but his quivering hand pointed to the drawer, and the other understood.

"You unutterable fool!" For a moment Stormont's expression was murderous. Then he darted to the door and called sharply. "Plyden, come here at once!" While the clerk obeyed, he ran back to Lismore and dragged him over to the window. "Answer quickly! Is that the woman, crossing the street? I only got a glimpse of her and must be sure before I act. Answer!"

Lismore nodded.

"Plyden, see that little woman in

gray? Well, she has stolen a valuable paper from the safe—a large sheet of office-paper, with Mr. Lismore's writing. It may be in her bag now, but that's your affair. One hundred dollars if you bring it back to us before the other eyes have seen it."

Plyden, a sickly color, hesitated only an instant, and ran out.

CHAPTER XV
AT ELM HOUSE

HERE we have a transcription of the document carried away by Miss Gosling.

And as we know, Stormont's delicate task on the original strips had been to convert a 3 into a 1, a 1 into a 3, and to insert a 1 before 5000.

In the library of Elm House, the clock on the mantel chimed two.

"We cannot wait longer," Joan said. "I've no doubt she is all right—only she assured me she would not be later than one, and she is such a punctual person, as a rule."

"So many things may happen in New York to make a stranger late for lunch," Fairthorn remarked pleasantly. He was a tall, darkish man, some years older than his friend, well featured, with a pair of sleepy-looking eyes which, however, saw as much and as far as most.

The luncheon passed pleasantly enough, in spite of Joan's anxiety about Griselda. On the suggestion of the hostess, the men were about to light

cigarettes, when the housemaid entered with a tray on which reposed two telegrams.

"Two!" exclaimed Joan. "Did they arrive together? Oh, but one is for you, Douglas." She passed it to him.

"Yes ma'am," the maid answered. "The boy is waiting to see if there is any reply."

"Don't mind me," said Fairthorn. "You may have news of your aunt, Miss March."

"I hope it's nothing bad," she said, paling a little as she unfolded the message. Next moment an angry flush dyed her face.

Meanwhile Grant, frowning, made as

if to crush up the flimsy paper; then he refolded it and put it in his pocket. It was brief:

Surely you will not forget your promise.

SYLVIA LISMORE.

"No answer," he said to the maid.

Joan's color faded almost as quickly as it had bloomed. "I think you ought to read this," she said with a touch of haughtiness and handed the message to Grant.

It was his turn to redden as his eyes took in the words:

If Douglas Grant is at Elm House, please ask him to meet me on arrival of train seven-five. Most urgent. LOTTIE.

When a few moments had passed, Joan asked if he wished her to send a reply.

"Please, no," he said, and seemed about to say more, but checked himself.

Joan signed to the maid, who withdrew; then she turned to Fairthorn

In all probability this is my final word to you, my nephew, Douglas Grant, and to you my one-time assistants, Harold Lismore and Daniel Stormont. It concerns the location and the division of 40,000 ounces of Russian platinum accumulated by me in the course of my declining years. Had Douglas Grant, two years ago, but considered my feelings and trusted me, he would have saved me much distress, and he would surely have inherited the whole 40,000 ounces in due season. As it is, I desire him to take possession of 30,000 ounces and pay remaining 10,000 to Harold Lismore and Daniel Stormont, 5,000 ounces apiece, being rewards of honesty from myself. The platinum, in bags of 100 ounces, is stored in a small, secret, specially excavated chamber, unknown to anybody, beneath my laboratory, to which entrance is only obtainable by raising—a lever required—a stone flag which is to be located just 11 ft. from N. wall, and all but the same distance from E. wall. That is all. Beware deadly gas that may be lurking over the treasure in that deep chamber, and use all means of ventilation before making descent. And so farewell. I wish you no evil.

R. CRAN.

with an apology. "Nothing to do with Aunt Griselda, I'm thankful to say," she added, "—though I do wish it had been to tell me she was all right. But please smoke; and then, I suppose, we must get down to that old cellar. By the way, Mr. Fairthorn, in order to discourage curiosity, I mentioned to the maids this morning that an architect was coming to examine some of the foundations."

"Very bright of you!" he returned, wondering what trifle had come between this desirable girl and his friend. Within the minute, however, Joan's manner toward Douglas became so extremely amiable that Fairthorn, who was not a fool, perceived that the rift might be serious.

The cigarettes were barely half consumed when privacy was again broken. Joan was summoned to the telephone.

"Aunt Griselda at last," she remarked and left the room, taking with her Lottie's telegram, which Grant had returned and which, in apparent absence of mind, she had squeezed into a little ball.

JOAN'S lip quivered as she passed to the library. Nothing but shocks and disappointments, she thought bitterly. Could she still hope that Lottie had told a falsehood the previous night? Well, there was still another shock, another disappointment in store for her.

The voice that came to her over the wire was Daniel Stormont's. After a conventional greeting it proceeded:

"Miss March, I must see you this evening on a matter of the utmost importance."

"Impossible, Mr. Stormont," she returned. "What is the business?"

"I must see you. I will call at nine o'clock. Please be ready to receive me privately in the library."

"Really, Mr. Stormont!"

"The library is essential."

"Absurd! I cannot receive you there or elsewhere, to-night or at any other time. Is that clear?"

"You are angry. I am sorry." His voice was tender. "But you will grant my request when I tell you that your refusal would mean serious unpleasant-

ness for a third person—a friend of yours and I hope of mine. So I will depend on seeing you at nine. Good-by."

"Mr. Stormont! Listen!"

Silence.

The men had finished their second cigarettes before she felt equal to re-joining them.

"No," she replied to their questions; "it wasn't Aunt Griselda, after all. I'm afraid"—with a frail smile—"I'm becoming nervous about her."

"Let me ring up the police-stations," said Grant. "They are sure to have nothing to tell, but you'll feel better afterward,—Joan!" There was appeal in his eyes if not in his voice.

Her amiability had passed.

"If there is no word by four o'clock, I may do as you suggest," she replied. "Meanwhile, shall we go and see the cellar?"

ARMED with an electric lantern, a couple of torches and sundry tools, they were among the foundations of the old house. The cellarage accommodation was extensive, but only one or two of the apartments were now in use.

Without much delay Fairthorn gave his verdict as to which cellar lay nearest to the comparatively modern foundations of the laboratory. But on entering, the three could detect nothing at all in the way of encouragement.

"It's that blessed whitewash," remarked Fairthorn at last. "A happy thought from the hider's point of view, but a perfect nuisance from the seeker's! Well, let's see whether this hammer can find out anything."

With his ear close to the wall, and while his companions kept silence, he began to tap lightly, starting from the left corner. He had progressed but five paces when his sleepy eyes became alert. Next moment he exclaimed:

"Douglas, get busy with the tools. There's a thinness here."

"Oh, one moment, please!" cried Joan, holding up her hand. "I thought I heard some one calling. Yes!" She ran out.

Grant was stirred in spite of himself. Grasping a small crowbar, he joined

his friend. "Is it hollow?" he asked eagerly.

Fairthorn did some more tapping, high and low, left and right, before he replied: "Seems to have been an opening here at one time. Go ahead, and see if you can dislodge a—"

"Let's wait till Joan comes back."

As the words were spoken, she reappeared.

"A wire," she announced, and took it over to the lantern. . . . "Aunt Griselda at last!" Then she gave a little gasp. "Extraordinary! What on earth— Oh, listen; I'll read it." She read aloud:

"'Dangerous. Don't do any exploring till I return, probably to-night. Don't worry. Am all right.

—'Gosling.'

After a short pause Grant remarked: "It does seem a bit mean, beginning without her. I suppose she has been detained somewhere, and doesn't want us—"

"But she says 'dangerous,'" said the girl. "She doesn't say things like that without meaning them."

"May I ask," put in Fairthorn, "where the wire is sent from?"

"Why," answered Joan, staring at the message, "it was handed in at the Pennsylvania Station. What has taken her there? She has no friends—"

"She may have been going farther on, perhaps to Philadelphia or—or even Atlantic City."

The girl winced, caught a mere glimpse of Grant's frowning gaze and gave a small bitter laugh.

"Oh, it's all too absurd!" she exclaimed. "Let her go to Atlantic City, by all means! The only question now is: what are we going to do?"

"Nothing," said Grant dully. He was longing to get a word with her alone. "We can't go on in the face of Miss Gosling's request."

THEY went upstairs, and at the end of half an hour of somewhat strained conversation Grant rose to go, and his friend reluctantly did likewise. Before this, Fairthorn would fain have given the two an opportunity, which seemed to him so sadly needed, of a quiet word together, and now, as they

moved to the hall, he left his cigarette-case behind him.

The moment they were alone, Grant, his hand on the door, asked what he had done to offend.

"Nonsense!" she replied with a short laugh. "I'm not offended; but I've been worried about Aunt Griselda and—and I've got a headache."

Douglas was sorry but not satisfied. He expressed sympathy and the desire that she would forget about the platinum for the present.

"You shall hear from me as soon as Aunt Griselda returns," she said.

After a moment's pause he said: "Ought I to go to the station to-night? I can't imagine what she can want with me. Can you?"

"She may wish to make a confession." Miss March seemed to have lost interest in everything.

"I'd prefer to avoid such a thing. Please advise me, Joan. Ought I to go or not?"

"I'm afraid I can only advise you to decide for yourself. Can you refuse? The wire said 'Most urgent.'"

He would have sacrificed much then to have been free to show her the telegram received at lunch, and to have added a dozen words or so to its message.

"Joan—" he began appealingly, but she was already calling:

"Mr. Fairthorn, can't you find your case?"

Then Fairthorn, having done all that a friend could, appeared, and the chance of an understanding was over.

MISS GOSLING left Stormont's and Lismore's office in a condition of highly nervous elation. Well, now, she wondered, what was next to be done Straight home to Elm House or—ah that was it!—a cup of tea! She needed it; also, she deserved it! And she had plenty of time. Presently she was seated in a tea-shop.

To a casual spectator that cup of tea would seem to have had an odd effect upon Miss Gosling. Before it was consumed, her bright, alert expression had given place to one of brooding melancholy. Discomforting thoughts stole into her mind. She had confounded

her enemy, Harold Lismore, embezzler and forger (as she believed him to be); but what of the man's unhappy wife, dear friend of her girlhood days?

The spinster had terrified Lismore with an empty threat; for Sylvia's sake, she would never have invoked the law against him. But the document now in her bag complicated her position. She must be true to her niece and to Douglas Grant.

It took her just twenty minutes to decide on her course of action. She summoned the waitress.

"Can you tell me from which station the trains go to Atlantic City?"

The girl was not sure, and went and fetched a railway guide. A tall, thin man at a neighboring table looked for a moment as though about to proffer information, but seemingly changed his mind. He drank his coffee and went out.

Miss Gosling, having consulted the time-table, looked at the clock.

"Dear me! I believe I can just catch it."

A few seconds later she was on the busy pavement. She knew that the Pennsylvania was not far away, but being uncertain as to its direction, she signaled to a passing taxi.

"Pennsylvania Station," she said, and got in.

Just then a tall, thin man stepped forward and said something to the driver, who raised his eyebrows, and then nodded. The words which Miss Gosling did not catch were "Suspected shoplifting."

The next thing she realized was that the taxi was moving and that the tall, thin man was sitting opposite. Before she could speak, he was saying in a harsh voice:

"Is it to be the Pennsylvania, ma'am, or the police station?"

Miss Gosling fell back on the seat, gaping; there is no other word for it. But she understood.

"No use making a speech," he went on. "Give up the stolen paper, or I instruct the driver. He knows me."

"You are a detective," she said faintly. "I could tell you something—"

"Save it up for the captain—or the judge." He took up the speaking-tube.

"Let me think."

"Plenty of time for that in a cell."

Miss Gosling knew when she was beaten. She shuddered and opened her bag. At all events, she reflected, she could not be deprived of the information stored in her brain. She held out the document, saying with considerable spirit:

"Take it, you beast, and tell your employer—"

"You've had a narrow escape," he said, and was gone before the taxi had properly stopped.

Presently the driver looked in. "Did you say the Pennsylvania?" he asked not very respectfully.

"Yes! And be quick!" Now more than ever she was determined on the journey. If any influence remained to Sylvia Lismore, it must be used now.

CHAPTER XVI

SHEER MISCHANCE

PLYDEN did not take the most direct route back to the office. He followed Miss Gosling and saw her departure. Then in a shabby street he went into a gaudy café and had a conversation with one of the attendants, with whom he appeared to be on familiar terms. The two retired to a private room.

Nevertheless barely an hour had elapsed between his setting forth and his return to the office.

From the window Stormont sighted him crossing the street.

"Plyden comes—and from his walk I should say he has done his job."

Stormont seated himself at his desk, reflected for a moment, and then unlocked a drawer on the right and drew it a little way open.

Plyden entered, breathing rather quickly.

"You haven't been long," said Stormont pleasantly. "Just shut the door and turn the key—will you?" As the clerk obeyed: "Well, are you going to claim that hundred, Plyden?"

Plyden's smile on facing his employer could hardly have been termed frank, but he spoke glibly enough.

"Just got back from the Pennsy sta-

tion. The lady has gone to Atlantic City."

"Indeed!" commented Stormont. "But you are not standing there to tell me that the lady has taken the document with her."

"No sir. She gave it up without a struggle."

"Good! Let us have the story."

It must be allowed that Plyden's recital was worthy of a nobler deed, and not without its dramatic and humorous touches. At its close:

"Excellent!" said Stormont. "And now let us have the document."

THERE was a brief pause till Plyden answered: "You did not forbid me to look at the document, Mr. Stormont."

"Of course not! What did you think of it, Plyden?"

The clerk, less confident now, moistened his lips. "I thought it was worth more than a hundred dollars."

"Did you, indeed? To you or to me?"

"To either of us, sir."

Stormont took a sidelong glance at Lismore, who was bolt upright and glaring. Then he shook his head sadly. "Not to me, Plyden, not to me!"

"To me," said the other with an apparent effort, "it seems worth twenty-five thousand. Of course, I don't ask for the money right away. A written promise would satisfy me. A—"

"Hadn't you better go and have some lunch?" Stormont interrupted in the kindest manner.

"I'm not joking, sir." The speaker was becoming hoarse.

"I hardly think you would venture to joke with me, Plyden."

"I know what you mean—those beastly testimonials of mine in your safe. But I was going to suggest that you make a gift of them along with the twenty-five thousand dollars."

"Charming idea, of course, but not feasible, I'm afraid. Kindly produce the document you have so cleverly recovered for us."

Plyden took a step forward. "I'll risk the testimonials, but I—I must have the money. I can put two and

two together, and it's clear to me that you don't want the document to fall into certain hands. Besides, you are coming into a fortune shortly."

"Thank you so much! Will you please put the document on my desk?"

"I don't want to threaten." Plyden paused and brought out a half-sheet of notepaper. "I was afraid I might not be permitted to speak, so I wrote the important point down. If you will kindly look at this, Mr. Stormont."

Stormont's hand went to the open drawer—then upward. "And if you will kindly look at this, Mr. Plyden," he said in a fine mockery.

THE clerk went back against the door, white, sweating, staring at the shining revolver.

"You can't beat me, Plyden," said Stormont evenly. "Rather than pay you a penny more than I promised, I will kill you. To kill you would save me a hundred dollars, and there are several good enough reasons for your committing suicide. Now give up the document."

"Read this first," said the clerk in little more than a whisper.

Lismore had risen and was standing quaking in the background.

"The document!" repeated Stormont, unmoved. "I will count ten; and then—"

"For God's sake, wait—listen!"

"One—two—three—"

"I haven't got it."

"Four—five—six—"

"I say, I haven't—"

"Seven—eight—"

"Stormont, don't shoot!" shouted Lismore in a frenzy, and threw himself upon his partner.

There was a sharp report. Plyden writhed for a moment, an awful look of amazement on his countenance; his hands fluttered vaguely, and then he crumpled up, fell, straightened out and lay still upon his face.

Stormont flung the big man aside, crying: "Oh, you blundering fool, couldn't you see it was all pretense!" He ran to the stricken creature, knelt, turned him gently over on his back and shuddered, murmuring:

"God! he's gone!"

"Not dead?" wailed Lismore.

"Right in the heart."

In a perfect abandonment of despair, Lismore threw up his arms.

"Stop that!" commanded Stormont. "This is no time for us to quarrel," he went on, rising. "You and I have got to be more solid than ever. The man died through sheer mischance; his blood is not on our hands." Springing to the desk, he took from the open drawer a box of cartridges. "Quick! go and place that in Plyden's office coat. But first lock the outer door. Then ring up the police—the more excited you are the better. Say 'Suicide!' and ask them to send their doctor. Wait! Let me have one of those cartridges. There! Now go!"

STORMONT was very pale; yet his hand was fairly steady as he loosened the bullet from the cartridge-shell. Once more kneeling by the body, he shook a little of the powder round the bullet-hole in the clothing. Then with a match he ignited it. A small cloud of smoke, and an evidence for suicide was established. Next with his handkerchief he removed possible finger-marks from the revolver and placed it first in, and then within, reach of the dead hand. Tears came to his eyes. "You poor, weak devil!" he muttered. He disposed of case and bullet, for the time being, by dropping them into a large jar of ink. Finally he found a clean handkerchief and covered the still face.

Then he picked up the half-sheet of notepaper which had fluttered into a corner. He was about to examine it when there came a knocking at the outer door. Lismore appeared in a panic. Pushing him aside, Stormont went out and opened the door to a little crowd gathered from neighboring offices.

"Yes," he replied solemnly to their questions, "it was a shot you heard. Our clerk, poor fellow, has taken his life. We have sent for the police. Until they arrive we cannot, as you will understand, admit anybody." Softly he reclosed the door and turned the key.

In the outer office he read that which

Plyden so recently had begged him to look at. It was this:

\$25,000 payable within a month, also my testimonials. You have till 5 P. M. to make up your mind. I have left the document with a friend. It is sealed and directed to Miss March, Elm House. If I do not call for it by 5:30 P. M., my friend will then mail it.

At that moment Daniel Stormont all but admitted defeat.

CHAPTER XVII

AT THE PENNSYLVANIA STATION

WHEN Mrs. Lismore came out of her alarming swoon, her first clear word was her husband's name.

"Father is in New York," her daughter gently explained. "Would you like me to wire to him?"

Mrs. Lismore shook her head. "I had forgotten," she murmured, and lay silent for a space. Then: "But I must send a wire to Mr. Grant, at once. Do you know his address in New York?"

"No, Mother," Lottie answered.

"Then I will send it to Elm House. If he is not there, Joan will forward it. Get me a blank."

"Shall I write it for you?" the girl asked presently.

"No. Yes—I can't write yet. But you must promise to forget it as soon as it is sent; at least, you must never mention it again," the woman said wearily. She then uttered the message which was to reach Douglas during lunch. "Now take it, quickly, to the office."

"Mother," cried Lottie, "it's cruel to keep me in the dark! Does this mean something dreadful?"

"Hush, dear. In all probability the message is quite unnecessary; only I'm nervous."

After sending her mother's message, Lottie hurried back to their rooms and quickly prepared for the second journey of the day. She lunched, and finding her mother apparently asleep, confided a vague message to their landlady, and made her escape.

And as her train rolled out of the station, Miss Gosling's rolled in.

ON their way to town, Fairthorn, not without diffidence, put the question to Grant: "Something gone wrong, old man?"

"Yes," was the reply, "but you wont mind if I don't discuss it at present?"

In his heart Douglas Grant made no pretense of misunderstanding the change in Joan any more than he ignored the danger he was in of losing her friendship—he dared not use a warmer word. In her service to him she had been subjected to villainous treatment, and he had appeared to side with the offenders, her enemies and his. That in itself was surely enough to chill any special regard Joan might have felt for him, but his case was made worse if, as he was forced to take into account, Joan suspected a secret understanding between Lottie Lismore and himself.

On arriving in town, Fairthorn suggested an hour at his club. There he picked up an afternoon paper and shortly afterward, with an exclamation, passed it to his companion. A half-column was devoted to details of a tragic occurrence in a city office. It appeared that a highly respected clerk, distracted by secret gambling-debts, had entered the private room of his employers armed with a revolver, and after vainly threatening one of the gentlemen, suddenly turned the weapon upon himself, inflicting a wound immediately fatal. One of the two partners had been completely overcome by the shock, but the other had, with praiseworthy promptitude, done all that could be done in the painful circumstances.

"What a ghastly business!" murmured Grant. "Not the sort of experience one would wish even to one's worst enemies."

"Where shall we dine to-night?" Fairthorn asked presently.

"I'm sorry, old man, but I've got an engagement," said Grant.

"All right!" Though signs were lacking, Fairthorn had been hoping that his little ruse at Elm House might have done his friend service after all.

The other's next remark extinguished the hope. "I am going to ask a favor, Fairthorn—which is, that you will stay at your rooms this evening in

case a message should come from Miss March."

"Why, certainly, I sha'n't go out until you turn up."

"Thanks! I can't say just when that will be, though it ought not to be late. And I say, Fairthorn: I don't know that I'll ever be able to explain myself to you, but—"

"That's all right, also. Shall we get along to my rooms now?"

THE train came in late and crowded.

After those two years in the wilds Grant encountered difficulties on the busy platform, but he caught sight of Lottie at last. Apparently recognition had come first to her, for already her smile had dawned—a sweet, pathetic little smile.

He was within a few yards of her when he beheld her expression changed in truly startling fashion. Amazement, anger, fear were depicted on her face, gone suddenly white. With a fierce little gesture of the hand, she seemed to warn some one back. Following her gaze, Douglas Grant glanced to his right—and saw the last man he wanted to see in this world. He stopped short.

And then Lottie, darting forward, clutched his hand, whispering: "Take me away—quick! I wont speak to him!"

Next moment Mr. Lismore was beside them.

"Your mother wired me," he began. Then he recognized Grant, and drew in his breath as though he had been stricken with a lash.

As for Grant, his first thought was: "Harold Lismore! This old wreck of a man—impossible!"

Lottie pulled at his hand, her shoulder turned to the intruder.

"He's my father," she said, no longer in a whisper, "but I wont speak to him. I wont! Let us go—at once."

Lismore did not appear to hear; he was standing quite motionless, his head fallen forward.

"You—we cannot leave him like this," Grant said at last. "Mr. Lismore—"

"Don't speak to him! How can you? He has treated you so abominably—"

and me too. He has stolen five thousand of mine, and—"

"Good heavens, Lottie! Remember where we are! Can't you see he is ill? You have not heard, I fancy, but I happen to know that he had a great shock at the office to-day."

Lismore spoke. "Your mother wired me to meet you. Your mother wired me—"

Grant, crushing down his dislike, took the man's arm supportingly, saying: "We had better get a taxi."

At the clasp Lismore shuddered and slightly raised his head.

Grant gave his arm a gentle, reassuring shake. "Mr. Lismore, don't worry. We're going to drive you home now. You remember me surely,—Grant—Douglas Grant—"

Beside herself, Lottie struck in with: "Yes, Douglas Grant, the man you got blamed for your crime—"

Lismore seemed to waken up. "Oh, my God!" he sighed.

"Stop!" said Grant almost savagely. "Lottie, you are saying what is not true."

"Not true?"

"Your father had nothing to do with my taking the blame. I say it before him. You heard, Mr. Lismore?"

"Oh, I see," cried the girl, and suddenly she smiled like a courtesan. "At least, I think I see what you mean, Douglas," she added sweetly.

THEN came an interruption. A suave voice remarked: "Didn't intend to intrude, but I'm afraid you have your hands rather full, Grant. Glad to see you home again!" And Stormont, almost colorless, yet smiling gravely, was before them.

At that moment Grant could have forgiven the man much—all, indeed, except his treatment of Joan.

Without fuss Stormont took his partner's free arm and nodded to Grant.

"Come, Lottie," he said kindly. "We had a trying affair in the office to-day, and I've been rather anxious about your father. Hope you left your mother well. You must get your father to join her at once. He ought to have a real rest from business now."

Drooping and sullen, the girl walked half a pace behind him till they reached the taxi-stand.

"Now," Stormont said briskly, when they had got their dazed charge on board, "I have just time to see you both home, Lottie. Allow me—no, sit beside your father, like a dutiful daughter." He turned to Grant. "There is room," he said courteously. "No? Then may I hope for another and happier meeting very soon?"

He did not seem to expect a reply. "You have forgiven my curt welcome, I trust," he went on. "It was genuine. I have—and so has poor Lismore—a great deal to say to you—also something to explain. But this is not the time. Well, good night, Grant." He did not offer his hand. Then having given the driver directions, he stepped in and drew shut the door. The cab started. "Oh, by the way," he called from the window, "I'm due at Elm House at nine o'clock. Perhaps I may see you there!"

CHAPTER XVIII

STORMONT FORCES THE GAME

STORMONT left the taxi a little later, giving Lottie urgent instructions to look after her father carefully. Then, after a bite of supper, he left for Elm House. He had much to think about on the way. If on that crumpled half-sheet of notepaper his late clerk had told the truth precisely, the damning document—curse Lismore!—was now on its way to Elm House, and would be delivered there between eight-thirty and nine o'clock.

He reached his destination with minutes to spare. In the drizzling darkness he hung about the gates until he descried the special-delivery boy approaching. Then he entered and walked slowly toward the house, allowing the boy to overtake him. They arrived at the door almost abreast.

Presently the housemaid admitted him and received some letters from the boy. She replaced the tray on the table, and stood ready to take the visitor's raincoat and hat. Stormont seemed to hesitate.

"I'm a little before my time," he said. "Would you mind inquiring whether it suits Miss March to see me at once?"

"Miss March is in the library, sir. I'll ask. Will you step into the drawing-room?"

"Thanks—I know my way."

The girl went down the hall and disappeared. There were five envelopes on the tray: Three of them, containing odd circulars, had been mailed by Stormont himself. Of the two remaining, one was directed in Plyden's writing.

When the maid came back, the visitor was standing over the drawing-room fire. Miss March, she intimated, would see him in about ten minutes. And at the end of that interval the maid returned and beckoned to him.

JOAN, standing by the writing-table, as if to impress on him that she had granted him the interview on strictly business terms, received him with a slight inclination followed by a gesture in the direction of a chair a little way off. Seating herself, she appeared to wait for him to begin.

Stormont took the chair indicated, saying: "I wish, first of all, to thank you for consenting to receive me to-night."

"I am ready to hear what you have to say," she said; "but I would ask you to make it as brief as possible."

"I'm afraid it is rather a long story," he returned, "but I will do my best not to tax your patience. I dare say you remember, Miss March, that Lismore and I were with Mr. Cran, in this room, a very short time before the—the end. He had summoned us from the office."

"Yes, I remember."

"Yet, you have no idea, I think, of his reason for the summons."

"I may have a theory."

"Of recent conception?" he said quickly.

"Possibly. But I am here to listen, Mr. Stormont."

"I ask pardon. Mr. Cran's main object, as far as I have realized it, in summoning us to Elm House was a double one: first, to strike us a blow;

second, to confer upon us an enormous benefaction. His method in each case was so extraordinary that, with all respect to his memory, I am still convinced that his mind was failing."

THE girl gave her head a little shake, but held her peace.

"As you know," he continued, "Rufus Cran caused his valuable and prosperous business to be wound up there and then. All that meant to Lismore and myself, after twenty years' service, I need not inflict on you. But while with one hand he put ruin before us, with the other he held fortunes before our eyes! He declared that he was the owner of forty thousand ounces of platinum which he had gradually accumulated and hidden away; he also declared that the forty thousand ounces were to be divided among his nephew, Lismore and myself. He had written down instructions for the division and for finding the platinum, and as Lismore and I sat listening to his amazing story, he presented us each with a portion of the document, informing us that a third portion would go to his nephew, and that when the three portions were put together again, the platinum would be ours. Do I make it clear, Miss March?"

"Perfectly."

"But it is not all news to you? Well, never mind. I now ask you to consider, for a moment, the position of Lismore and myself. I may tell you that we had, unwisely, foolishly, if you like, contracted large liabilities outside of the business. We were threatened with destruction, extinction, so far as our business interests was concerned. As a lonely man, I dare say I felt it less than Lismore; yet—but that would not interest you. So there was destruction coming swiftly nearer, and there was salvation—our rightful shares in that hoard of platinum—where? Imagine the situation! Of Douglas Grant's whereabouts we were in sublime ignorance, and every hour brought the danger nearer!" Stormont's voice sank in its appeal. "Miss March, was it unpardonable that we two desperate men should make an effort to find sal-

vation without the assistance of the third interested person?"

Joan did not appear to hear him.

HE sighed. "I wonder how much you know," he said at last. "But for the intervention of the lady,—your aunt, I believe,—you would never have known anything, and you would be none the worse. Shall I confess everything?" he asked abruptly.

"Nothing, if you please," she replied coldly.

"I will ask you to believe one thing: when I asked you to marry me, I was sincere."

"Will you be good enough to tell me the one thing that is of any consequence to me? I have received you in my house to-night because you assured me that my refusal to do so would mean great distress to a friend. Who is the friend?"

"You are merciless. The friend is Mrs. Lismore."

"Mrs. Lismore!"

He gave no sign of having noticed her surprise.

"Go on!" she said after a moment. "She, of course, must not be allowed to suffer. What can I do?"

"I'm sorry to mention it to you, but a dreadful thing happened in our office to-day. A clerk shot himself—fatally—in our presence. Lismore, already wrecked by those financial worries, is going to pieces. I left him an hour ago in the care of his daughter and Grant. You would not have known him."

"Ah!" murmured the girl. Was that why Lottie had wanted Douglas to meet her?

"I'm afraid for Lismore."

"Of his—dying?" she said, and wondered at her own lack of feeling.

"By his own hand."

"Oh!" Now she was stirred. Her dislike of the man lifted for the moment and she asked: "Tell me now what I can do—for Mrs. Lismore."

"Help me to rouse Lismore." He met her glance unflinchingly. "Don't you understand? Good news—like medicine." There was no mistaking his meaning.

"Impossible!"

AT this he rose, taking from his pocket a long envelope. Advancing to the table, he laid two strips of paper on the blotting-paper.

"The originals," he said quietly. "Into no other hands would I trust them." He paused for a moment and continued: "Miss March, I believe I know exactly where the platinum is hidden. I take it that you have already read the middle portion of the Rufus Cran document: therefore if you will study these for a moment, you will know—everything."

She barely glanced at the strips. "These ought to be presented to Mr. Grant," she said. "Of course," she added, a faint hint of inquiry in her tone, "they are of no value as claims to the platinum without the third."

"Quite right—just as the third without these is mere paper and ink."

"You had better take care of them, Mr. Stormont," she said carelessly. And then: "I suppose what you're after is for me to give you freedom to secure your share of the platinum at once—"

"It will cost Grant nothing."

"And what about myself, Mr. Stormont?"

"And Mrs. Lismore?"

"Ah, yes. I am a selfish person. But—" A sound she had been longing for had reached her ears at last. "I must ask you to excuse me for a few minutes. I will think over what you have said, but I beg you to consider whether there may not be a better way."

As the door closed, Stormont picked up the two strips, put them away and returning to his seat, bowed his head in his hands. After a little while he looked at his watch! Still two hours at least before that woman could reach Elm House, were she returning from Atlantic City to-night.

It had, oddly enough, not occurred to so thorough a man as Stormont, that special excursion-trains might go without mention in the *time-table*.

IN the hall Miss Griselda Gosling, much exhausted, fell into the ready arms of her niece. She talked for five minutes, with scarce a breath. "And so," she finished, "I brought poor Sylvia

Lismore with me. She is at home by now."

"Oh!" cried Joan, anger giving way to distress. "I must tell you!" And she ended with "How I wish I could go to the poor woman!"

"I'll go!" cried Miss Gosling. "I'm not a bit tired. Give me your message, let Kate get me a cup of tea and order a taxi, and I'll just slip out quietly—that is, if you aren't afraid of the man."

"Afraid!" Joan's blue eyes were splendid then despite her weariness. "But I can't let you—"

"Say no more! I want to see Sylvia Lismore come out on top. I've stirred her up so far, and— Excuse my ringing for Kate. There's no time to lose. Are you going to kick—send him away soon?"

"Not exactly," said Joan gravely, and let her aunt do the rest of the talking.

SOON afterward Joan returned to the library.

Stormont rose like a prisoner bracing himself to hear the verdict.

"Well," she said, "have you thought of a better way?"

"I am sorry," he answered gently, "but there seems to be no other way."

There was a short silence till she asked rather abruptly: "Forty thousand ounces of platinum is a great weight."

"More than a ton."

"Really! Then even supposing your share, not to mention Mr. Lismore's, were available, you could not possibly remove it to-night."

"I could have it removed within an hour of touching it."

"You have made arrangements for its removal."

"Provisionally, of course, Miss March."

She regarded him with something like admiration.

"Did you really imagine I would permit you? Is a woman supposed to have no sense of honor?" she asked sternly.

"Grant would understand and appreciate anything you did for Mrs. Lismore's sake."

"Would he? Has he so great a re-

gard for her? Oh, Mr. Stormont, why can you not be honest?"

"Honest? I have offered to confess, but you would not hear me. Tell me, is such dishonesty in seeking one's own? I have begged you to read those two strips of paper so that you might learn what my own amounted to—in figures written thereon by Rufus Cran. Read them now!" He held them to her.

There was a strange set look on her face as she moved leisurely toward the hearth.

"See!" she cried, and unrolled a similar strip which she had been holding in her left hand.

"Ah!" he exclaimed, transfixed. "You really have it! So you will read them together, and then—" Triumph was in his voice.

Swiftly she stopped and thrust the strip into the heart of the fire! For an instant he remained as if petrified; then he sprang forward—too late! He grasped but ashes. It was, perhaps, characteristic of the man that his next action should be to flick the sooty fragments from his fingers.

Slowly he straightened up and looked her full in the face. He was paler than she; yet it was she who winced. His gaze was destined to be a memory to Joan March. Neither wrath nor hate lived in his eyes—simply reproach, a passionate, awful reproach.

Involuntarily she retreated a pace.

"Don't alarm yourself," he said quietly. "It almost looks as if I did really love you—does it not? For otherwise I must have killed you. You have had an unfair advantage all along."

"Mr. Stormont," she exclaimed, "why did I burn that paper?"

"My punishment, I suppose." He smiled faintly.

"For what, precisely?"

Had he but known it, she was offering him a chance to escape the worst thing of all. Had he then confessed to forgery, she would surely have followed in her determination to carry the affair to its bitter end. But though the impulse came to him, he rejected it; the forgery could never be proved.

"After all," he said, "have you not

punished me chiefly for the crime of seeking my own?" He saw her face harden, and added: "At the eleventh hour you tempt me to employ a little force. I know exactly where to look for the platinum; I left a bag of tools in the hall. . . . The police might interfere; on the other hand, they might not." He moved swiftly to a position between her and the door.

But Joan showed no special alarm. "Listen!" she said. "Before you came, I had made up my mind that the platinum business should be settled to-night. I phoned to Mr. Grant, and he and his friend Mr. Fairthorn will be here almost immediately—at ten-thirty. Mr. Grant will not object to your assistance. In fact, I have his permission for you to begin the search as soon as you like. If you will kindly let me pass, I will show you the way to the laboratory. Come with me, please."

Neither doubting nor believing, he followed.

The gloomy place was lighted up by oil lamps, and on a bench lay a collection of obviously new tools.

Then Stormont came to himself, but when he would have spoken, she was gone. Before long he was laboring as if for his life.

CHAPTER XIX

LATE CALLS

IT was Lottie who opened the door after Miss Gosling had rung three times.

"What do you want?" she stammered.

"I wish to see your mother. Even if she has gone to bed, you must tell her I am here."

"Mother went out about ten minutes ago; she is on her way to Elm House."

Miss Gosling sought the support of the doorpost.

"How long was Mrs. Lismore at home?" the visitor at last inquired.

"I couldn't say—about half an hour?"

"Suppose you let me come in for a few minutes," said Miss Gosling. "I have told the driver to wait."

"But you can't see Father," returned

the girl. "He's ill. He has had a powder, and now he's sleeping, thank goodness."

"It is you I wish to speak to."

Reluctantly Lottie drew back the door. She conducted the other to the drawing-room. A glare of electric lights showed neglect everywhere.

"Weren't you glad to see your mother to-night?" the spinster asked, seating herself.

"Of course! I didn't know what to do with Father."

"How could you leave her, as you did to-day, alone at Atlantic City?"

"How do you know of that?"

"It was I who brought her from there. It seemed to me she was needed here."

"What do you mean?"

"Miss Lismore, your father is on the brink of ruin."

"Oh! And he owes me nearly five thousand dollars—all I have in the world!"

"Indeed! What about your five thousand in my niece's safe?"

Lottie gasped. "What business—"

"Hush! I saw you drop the letter out of the library window. Don't make a fuss! You are safe so long as you do your duty to your mother. I want no promises. I simply advise you to be truer to your mother than you have been to your friend. And by the way, you had better reclaim that packet from my niece's charge. Do so by letter, for I should be sorry to think of your entering her house again." Then, Miss Gosling rose. Apparently she was without pity.

"I brought a letter for your mother," she said, "but frankly, I dare not leave it with you. I hope I may catch her at Elm House. But I leave you a message from myself for your father, in case he awakens before her return. It is this: for his wife's sake, he shall have mercy. That is all I have to say."

And with that, Miss Gosling departed.

AT Elm House Miss Gosling missed Mrs. Lismore a second time. That unhappy lady, on arriving at her home, had found her husband's state of mind

so dreadful that, with neither rest nor nourishment to sustain her, she had hurried off to beg from Joan March a word that might possibly soothe him.

When she rang the bell of Elm House, Joan was in the library with Grant and Fairthorn. While they talked, they heard the distant sound of hammering.

"That cement must be awful stuff," Grant was saying, not for the first time. "Isn't it a bit cruel to let the beggar do all the hard labor?"

It was then that Joan, the servants having retired, excused herself and went, wondering and not a little anxious, to the front door. The interview which followed in the drawing-room was painful but brief. Joan spared the woman all she could, telling her the trouble was already known to her, and how Miss Gosling had gone with a message of comfort.

"There is only one condition," said Joan, gently but by no means weakly. "The money must be settled on you; Mr. Lismore simply must submit to being dependent on you; and you must learn to manage the money yourself. And he must give up his speculation in town."

"Oh, I think he will be glad to hide himself far away from the city now! You know we were happy in the few years before we came to New York."

"Before he knew Mr. Stormont?"

"You blame him? Perhaps—I don't know. I never have had anything but consideration and respect from Mr. Stormont. Ah, well, Griselda says my chance has come. I pray I may be able to use it. But before I go I must tell you one thing! It's about Douglas Grant. I was very fond of Douglas,—you know, all my own boys went away,—but I did him a terribly injury. You remember how he abruptly disappeared, two years ago, even beyond my reach. He and my husband were in the same department of Mr. Cran's business. One afternoon my husband came home early, and I thought he was going to be very ill. And then I caught him just in time—*laudanum*, you know. And he confessed to me. Oh, I can't tell you all—but the thing would be discovered next day—and it was

either Harold or Douglas Grant who could have done it."

"What are you telling me?" said Joan in a harsh whisper.

Mrs. Lismore drooped, but went on: "Without delay I sent for Douglas. I knew his warm heart and generous disposition, and I told him everything. He was dreadfully shocked and very sorry for me. He declared he would do anything for me who had treated him like a son, but when I suggested the great sacrifice—"

"How could you?"

"—he hesitated. I pointed out that he was young, with the world before him, while my husband was getting old and the disgrace would kill him. Douglas offered me everything except his honor. I implored, I wept—in vain. And at last, Joan, I, who might have been his mother, went down on my knees before him. . . . He gave in!"

"Oh!" cried the girl. She got up. She was afraid of being brutal to the woman who had already suffered so much.

Mrs. Lismore rose also. "It was wicked of me," she said in a low voice. "You would not have done it, my dear; yet some day you will understand better why I did it. I had to tell you, because you and Douglas were—friends. I will go now."

Without further words Joan saw her to the door.

As she stood alone in the hall Grant came from the library, and said:

"We were wondering about you. The hammering has ceased."

CHAPTER XX

THE TREASURE AT LAST

BECAUSE of his desperate haste Stormont had made an error in his first measurements. Consequently he had been compelled to dispose of several square yards of cement, whereas one would have sufficed, before he laid bare the flagstone. When Joan and the two men entered, they found him greatly exhausted, covered with dust, his hands bleeding. Yet he nodded pleasantly to Grant, saying: "So we meet at Elm House after all!"

Grant briefly introduced him to Fairthorn. They bowed politely, and then Stormont directed attention to his handiwork.

"Well," he said, "shall we go ahead? I've cleared the dirt from around the stone, and here is a trusty lever!"

As Grant and Fairthorn went forward to assist, Joan moved into the background and leaned against a bench. When the stone was raised and Stormont's voice exclaimed "At last!" she did not move, but her hand went to her heart.

"Why," said Fairthorn, flashing an electric torch downward, "it's a steel room! Come and see, Miss March!"

"Thanks; I will wait," she cried faintly.

"Yes; better wait," Stormont agreed. "Keep back, gentlemen. There may be some gas." He struck a match, set fire to a piece of paper and tossed the burning mass into the pit. It floated down, flaming cheerfully.

"Certainly not carbonic. In fact, I think Rufus has given an unnecessary warning. I'm going down," added Stormont, now trembling slightly with eagerness. "I'll let you know at once what I find."

A silence ensued, broken only by occasional sounds from below—foot-falls and clangs as though Stormont were testing the walls. But those sounds came to an end.

After a little while Grant called: "I say, are you all right there?"

There was no response.

"I'd better go down," said Grant in concern, and he was on his knees when Fairthorn cried: "Wait—I think I hear him. Yes! And he's coming up!"

As Stormont's face rose from the pit, the two friends involuntarily recoiled. Despite the dust, its pallor was startlingly apparent.

"Didn't think it of Rufus, but he has fooled us—fooled us, fooled us! What? Platinum? Not a pennyweight! Nice steel room down there, riveted like a ship, but nothing in it. Didn't think it of Rufus, but he has fooled us!" He staggered. "Fooled us!"

Grant sprang to his aid, but Stormont recovered himself and made

unsteadily for the door. There he turned and drew himself up.

"Good night, gentlemen," he said, and gazed wistfully at Joan. "Good-by, Miss March," he said, and went out.

"Don't you wish to see the place for yourself, Grant?" asked Joan a moment later. "Mr. Stormont may have missed something."

He shook his head, but moved over to the hole.

The moment he disappeared, Joan fled from the laboratory.

GRANT found himself in a space ten feet by eight, by about twelve in height. Floor, walls and roof were lined with large steel plates closely riveted. He could discover neither crack nor crevice, though he conducted a most careful examination with his torch. And the chamber, as Stormont had stated, was absolutely void.

A sound behind him—the grate and clash of metal—caused him to wheel about. With a shuddering noise a steel plate swung outward; and next instant Joan, holding a lantern, stood in the opening.

"Come," she said, "and don't speak a word."

Amazed, he followed her through a short, narrow tunnel, over a litter of bricks, into a cellar which he recognized. Without pause the girl hurried from the cellar into the passage and turned to the left. A few paces more, and she halted before an ancient door. With a big key she opened it, and motioned him to enter.

It was a cellar like the first, but the floor was littered with small black sacks of stout drill, tied together in couples, and all bulging.

"Your platinum," she said. "Four hundred bags, each containing a hundred ounces." She leaned against the wall and set the lantern on a narrow ledge at her side.

"Joan! But how?"

"Oh, I felt that something might happen. I could endure no more risks. After you went this afternoon, I took the law into my own hands."

"You broke down the wall! But the danger—the gas!"

"I kept back till I thought the place had aired. Also"—with a small, weary laugh—"I wore gloves."

"But forty thousand ounces!"

"The bags are handy for carrying, and I had several hours. Please don't ask any more questions just now. But I must tell you this much. I burned your strip in Mr. Stormont's presence."

"Then I have no claim to the platinum, nor has anyone!" cried the young man excitedly. "Oh, splendid! So it belongs to you. Honestly, I'm glad."

"Don't be silly, Douglas. I burned it because those two men had altered the figures to their own advantage. Aunt Griselda knew, though she could not prove it. She will tell you about it herself."

"So that's why you let Stormont go on to the bitter end!"

"He deserved it—but I feel a brute." She drew herself erect. "Take this key, please, and let us go upstairs. Mr. Fairthorn—"

Grant's self-restraint gave way. He caught her hand and kissed it, while the key rang on the stone floor.

"Oh, Joan, Joan, if only I could hope all you have done meant something more than a duty to my uncle and your own honor!"

"You mustn't do that!" she cried. Smartly she drew away her hand, and with her elbow touched the lantern on its precarious refuge.

A crash—and darkness!

"Oh, dear!" she said helplessly.

"I have a torch in my pocket," said Grant, and in almost the same breath: "Joan, you know I love you dearly. Will you marry me?"

The rest of that conversation is really not our affair at all, though you will be glad to know it was wholly satisfactory to Douglas Grant.

ON an afternoon about a year later Joan and her aunt were seated in the drawing-room of Elm House, which had been in the latter's charge while the former and her husband were away "seeing the world." The pair had reached home on the previous day. They intended to settle down,—for a

time, at any rate,—and Miss Gosling, being a sensible creature, had already taken a small flat for her own use. She had been forced to accept a few sacks of the platinum.

"Yes," she was saying, "Sylvia Lismore's letter gave the impression that things were going pleasantly enough. I can imagine Harold Lismore, with money in his pocket and nothing to gamble it on, as quite a passable country gentleman. Sylvia says his liver—I hope she means his temper—is greatly improved."

"And Lottie?"

"Lottie, I gather, is, for the moment, sweet on a curate—heaven help him! She is thinking of becoming a nurse. Finds the country dull. But as she has also thought of becoming an artist, an author, a famous actress and so on, the nursing profession must not reckon too surely on being adorned."

"Poor Lottie!"

"Poor fiddlesticks!" In a kindlier tone the spinster said: "I wonder if you would go to see Mrs. Lismore, Joan, or allow her to come to see you."

"No."

"Well, well, that decides it. And yet you were going to give her all you had, if Douglas had not insisted on handing over a share of the platinum, for which act he had no real reason but my word. I did hate being honest then!"

Joan still shrank at the mention of Mrs. Lismore; perhaps the memory would always rankle. In silence she turned to the window, while the other continued:

"And never a trace of the Stormont person since he attended that inquest and got complimented on his evidence, and afterward went to his office and dismissed the boy with a gold-piece extra! Do you think he can be alive? Think of it! All his creditors paid, even the horrid revenue people, and two hundred thousand or so in the bank waiting for him! Well, it serves him right if he's in want somewhere!"

Joan sighed—then smiled. Douglas was coming up the garden.

THE END

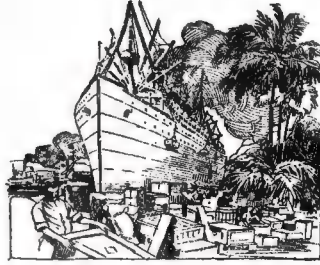
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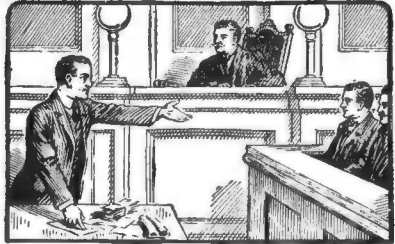
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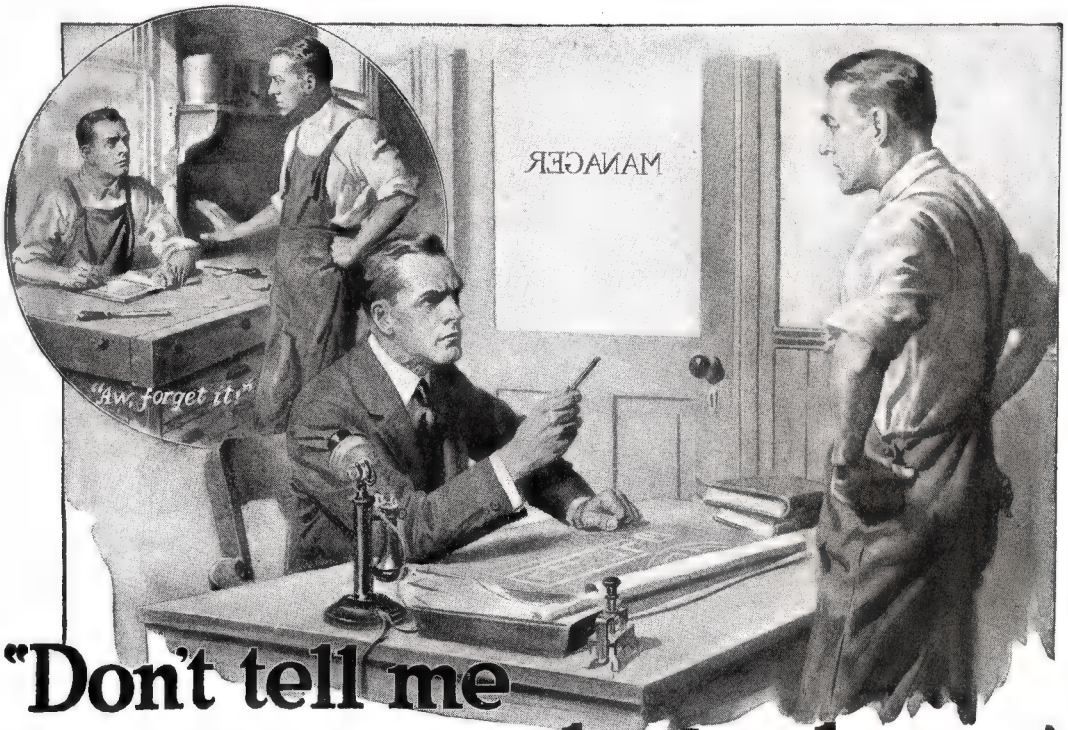


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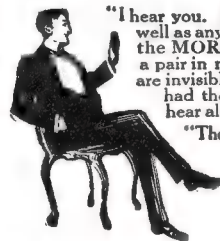
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What and Why Is the Internal Bath?

By WALTER WALGROVE



MUCH has been said and written about the present generation living unnatural lives and being, for that reason, only half as energetic, enthusiastic, ambitious or even healthy as it should be.

And this is so.

The confined lives that we live, the lack of constant exercise (for it must be constant to be effective), and the strenuous requirements of our business or social duties, directly bring on a condition, to which little attention has been paid in the past, though it does more to rob us of power, spirit and ambition than any other one thing known to medicine.

But Nature has provided, as in so many other cases, an immediate and perfectly natural relief for this condition, and over five hundred thousand Americans are already taking advantage of it.

When you are ill and a physician is called, the first step that he takes, no matter what is the matter with you, is to clean out the colon (large intestine).

There are two reasons for this:

One is that no medicine can possibly take effect while there is waste matter in the colon—

The other and most significant reason is that if the colon did not contain this waste, it is safe to say that you would not have been ill at all.

The penalty for the lives we live is agreed on by all physicians to be the clogging up of our colons with waste matter which the system does not voluntarily carry off—

This waste is extremely poisonous; the blood circulation comes in sufficiently close contact with this waste to take up these poisons by absorption and distribute them throughout the body—

The result is a gradual weakening of the blood forces; the liver becomes sluggish;

biliousness asserts itself; we become heavy, dull, and develop a more or less nervous fear of anything we undertake—the more this waste accumulates, the more we are affected, until at last we become really ill and incapacitated.

Now the Internal Bath is the one process, with the assistance of simple warm water, properly introduced in a new and natural way that will keep the colon as clean and sweet and pure as Nature demands it to be for perfect health.

It is rather remarkable to find, at what would seem so comparatively late a day, so great an improvement on the old methods of Internal Bathing as this new process, for in a crude way it has, of course, been practiced for years.

Enlightened physicians by thousands are prescribing this new method which is fully explained in "The What, The Why, The Way of Internal Bathing," by Chas. A. Tyrrell, M. D., 134 West 65th Street, New York City. This he will send, free, on request if you mention BLUE BOOK MAGAZINE.

It explains just why this method has proven superior to any other (including drugs), for removing this troublesome waste; it also contains many other interesting facts and statistics which cannot be touched on here.

It is surprising how little is known by the average person on this subject, which has so great an influence on the general health and spirits.

So if you are nearly well and want to get really up to "concert pitch"; if you want to feel consistently bright, confident, ambitious and enthusiastic—in fact, no matter what your condition, sick or well, the experience of other hundreds of thousands would prove it worth your while to at least send for the book, and look further into this method and its history.

The Lazy Muscles That Cause Constipation

By R. H. SINCLAIR

It is now agreed by all of the great authorities that constipation is not a disorder of the stomach or even of the small intestine, but of the large intestine or colon.

Under normal conditions, this large colon, which is about five feet long and shaped like a horse-shoe, extracts the liquids from the waste matter entrusted to its care and promptly passes the residue on.

But unfortunately, due to our sedentary lives, the colon has gradually become so lazy from lack of exercise, that it is unable to perform its functions.

If we were able to live outdoors and to exercise vigorously every day, our colons would handle their work properly; for exercise is the greatest and most satisfactory colon stimulant known.

To most of us, sufficient daily exercise, however, is not possible. We have neither the time nor the inclination. Instead, we dose ourselves with laxative drugs, mineral waters, and other nostrums, with the result that, while we get temporary relief, we not only aggravate the condition, but find that repetitions of the same dose later fail to produce results.

But relief, even when obtained, is not sufficient. To maintain health and efficiency, it is absolutely of paramount importance to create and maintain, day in and day out freedom from intestinal poisons; and this is impossible with laxatives.

There is a new way, however, to keep the colon sweet and clean—a way which has the same effect as vigorous exercise, yet without the inconvenience or time-consuming features of exercise. And the results are even better because the treatment is localized.

The principle upon which this new method is founded is the same as that used in massage. We all know that massage has

the same effect as exercise—it stimulates the nerves and strengthens the muscles. Colon massage as practiced by osteopaths has proved wonderfully effective.

This new method of massaging the colon involves the use of a device called the Kolon Motor—a mechanical masseur, the face of which is shaped to fit over the colon when placed against the abdomen. You merely put the Kolon Motor on a door or wall, lean up against it and turn the handle for a few moments. The face rotates with a scientific waving motion which immediately stimulates the colon and causes proper functioning. A couple of minutes in the morning each day is all that is required and unless your experience is different from the hundreds of other users you will feel like a new person after the very first application.

Before the Kolon Motor was offered to the public a number of well-known physicians were acquainted with its merits and used it in their practice. Without exception the results were most gratifying—in fact, every physician who has tested the Kolon Motor endorses it most highly.

Martin's Method, Incorporated, Dept. 439, 105 East 30th Street, New York has prepared a booklet called Colon Cleanliness, which they will be pleased to send gratis to all readers of this magazine. In this booklet the Kolon Motor is clearly illustrated and its application shown. It also contains a scientific discussion of auto-intoxication, and explains why and how the Kolon Motor produces such assured results. Letters from well-known physicians relating their experience with the Kolon Motor also form a part of the book.

There may be some who scoff at the idea of colon hygiene and its direct relation to health and efficiency, but the wiser ones will write for this free book and learn what this wonderful device is accomplishing for so many others.

Nuxated Iron to Make New Age of Beautiful Women and Vigorous Iron Men

Say Physicians—Quickly Puts Roses Into the Cheeks of Women and Most Astonishing Youthful Vitality Into the Veins of Men—It Often Increases the Strength and Endurance of Delicate, Nervous “Run Down” Folks 100 Per Cent. in Two Weeks’ Time.

Opinion of Dr. Schuyler C. Jaques, Visiting Surgeon of St. Elizabeth’s Hospital, New York City

SINCE the remarkable discovery of organic iron, Nuxated Iron or “Fer Nuxate,” as the French call it, has taken the country by storm. It is conservatively estimated that over three million people annually are taking it in this country alone. Most astonishing results are reported from its use by both physicians and laymen. So much so that doctors predict that we shall soon have a new age of far more beautiful, rosy-cheeked women and vigorous iron men.

Dr. Ferdinand King, a New York Physician and medical author, when interviewed on the subject, said: “There can be no vigorous iron men without iron. Pallor means anemia. Anemia means iron deficiency. The skin of anemic men and women is pale. The flesh flabby. The muscles lack tone; the brain fags and the memory fails, and often they become weak, nervous, irritable, despondent and melancholy. When the iron goes from the blood of women, the roses go from their cheeks.

“In the most common foods of America, the starches, sugars, table syrups, polished rice, white bread, soda crackers, biscuits, macaroni, spaghetti, tapioca, sago, farina, degerminated corn-meal, no longer is iron to be found. Refining processes have removed the iron of Mother Earth from these impoverished foods, and silly methods of home cooking, by throwing down the waste pipe the water in which our vegetables are cooked, are responsible for another grave iron loss.

“Therefore, if you wish to preserve your youthful vim and vigor to a ripe old age, you must supply the iron deficiency in your food by using some form of organic iron, just as you would use salt when your food has not enough salt.”

Dr. E. Sauer, a Boston Physician, who has studied both in this country and in great European Medical institutions, said: “As I have said a hundred times over, organic iron is the greatest of all strength builders. If people would only take Nuxated Iron when they feel weak or run down, instead of dosing themselves with habit-forming drugs, stimulants and alcoholic beverages I am convinced that in this way they could ward off disease, preventing it becoming organic in thousands of cases and thereby the lives of thousands might be saved who now die every year from pneumonia, grippe, kidney, liver, heart trouble and other dangerous maladies. The real and true cause which started their disease was nothing more nor less than a weakened condition brought on by a lack of iron in the blood.

“Not long ago a man came to me who was nearly half a century old and asked me to give him a preliminary examination for life insurance. I was astonished to find him with the blood pressure of a boy of twenty and as full of vigor, vim and vitality as a young man; in fact, a young man he really was, notwithstanding his age. The secret, he said, was taking iron—Nuxated Iron had filled him with renewed life. At thirty he was in bad health; at forty-six he was care worn and nearly all in. Now at fifty, after taking Nuxated Iron, a miracle of vitality and his face beaming with the buoyancy of youth. Iron is absolutely necessary to enable your blood to change food into living tissue. Without it, no matter how much or what you eat, your food merely passes through you without doing you any good. You don’t get the strength out of it, and as a consequence you become weak, pale and sickly looking, just like a plant trying to grow in a soil deficient in iron. If you are not strong or well, you owe it to yourself to make the following test: See how long you can work or how far you can walk without becoming tired. Next take two five-grain tablets of ordinary nuxated iron three times per day after meals for two weeks. Then test your strength again and see how much you have gained. I have seen dozens of nervous, run-down people who were ailing all the while double their strength and endurance and entirely rid themselves of all symptoms of dyspepsia, liver and other troubles in from ten to fourteen days’ time simply



by taking iron in the proper form. And this, after they had in some cases been doctoring for months without obtaining any benefit. But don’t take the old forms of reduced iron, iron acetate, or tincture of iron simply to save a few cents. The iron demanded by Mother Nature for the red coloring matter in the blood of her children is, alas! not that kind of iron. You must take iron in a form that can be easily absorbed and assimilated to do you any good, otherwise it may prove worse than useless. Many an athlete and prize-fighter has won the day simply because he knew the secret of great strength and endurance and filled his blood with iron before he went into the fray; while many another has gone down in inglorious defeat simply for the lack of iron.”

Dr. Schuyler C. Jaques, Visiting Surgeon of St. Elizabeth’s Hospital, New York City, said: “I have never before given out any medical information or advice for publication as I ordinarily do not believe in it. But in the case of Nuxated Iron I feel I would be remiss in my duty not to mention it. I have taken it myself and given it to my patients with most surprising and satisfactory results. And those who wish quickly to increase their strength, power and endurance will find it a most remarkable and wonderfully effective remedy.”

NOTE—Nuxated Iron, which is prescribed and recommended above by physicians in such a great variety of cases, is not a patent medicine nor secret remedy, but one which is well known to druggists and whose iron constituents are widely prescribed by eminent physicians both in Europe and America. Unlike the older inorganic iron products, it is easily assimilated, does not injure the teeth, make them black, nor upset the stomach; on the contrary, it is a most potent remedy in nearly all forms of indigestion as well as for nervous, run-down conditions. The manufacturers have such great confidence in nuxated iron, that they offer to forfeit \$100.00 to any charitable institution if they cannot take any man or woman under 60 who lacks iron, and increase their strength 100 per cent or over in four weeks’ time, provided they have no serious organic trouble. They also offer to refund your money if it does not at least double your strength and endurance in ten days’ time. It is dispensed by all good druggists.

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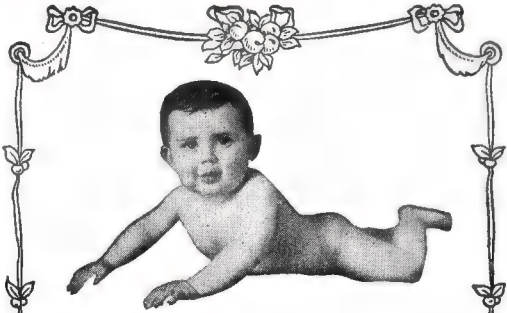


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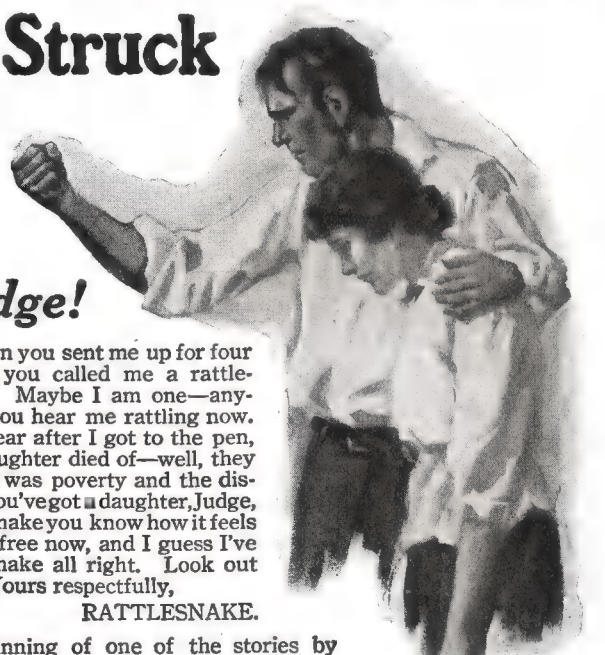
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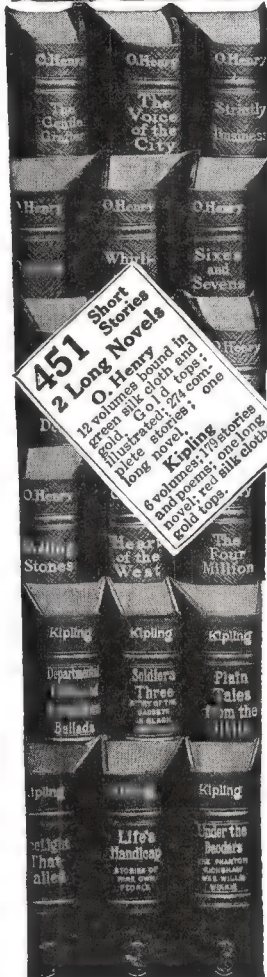
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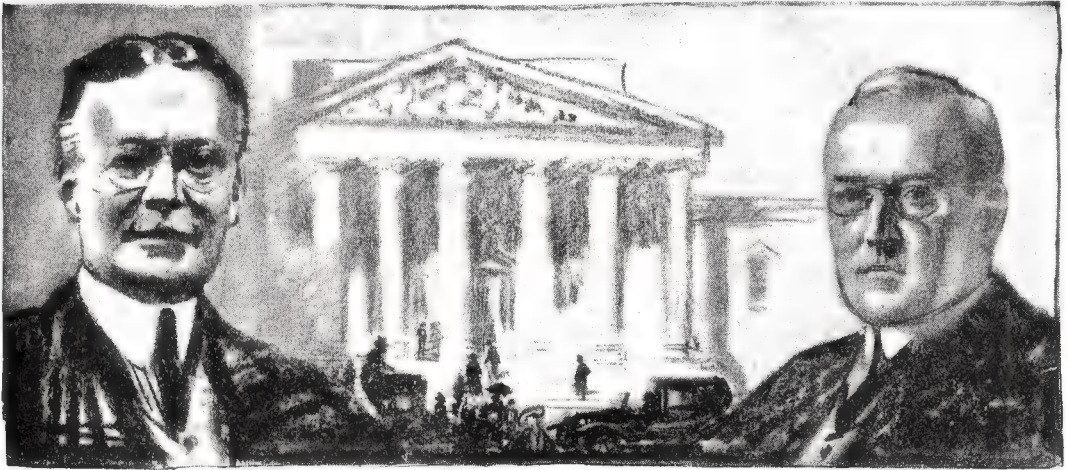
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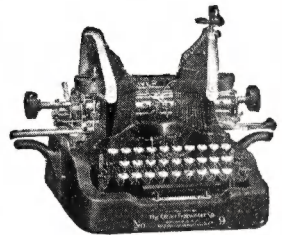
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