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# ALL-STORY WEEKLY



*The Roaring Comedy*

## Beware of the Bride

*Written by* Edgar Franklin

*For* Eileen Percy *the Popular Fox Film Star*



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# ALL-STORY WEEKLY

VOLUME CXII

NUMBER 3



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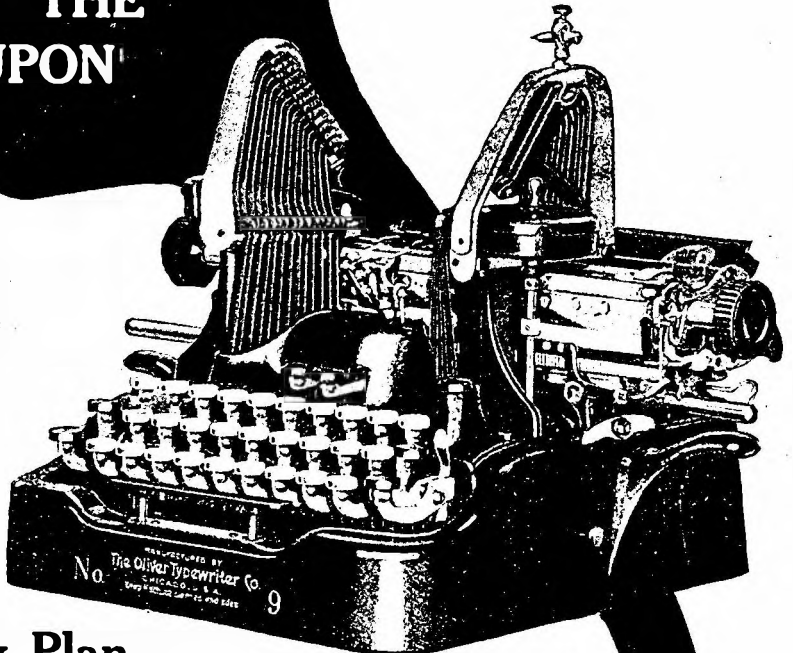
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# ALL-STORY WEEKLY

VOL. CXII

NUMBER 3



SATURDAY, JULY 17, 1920



## Beware of the Bride by Edgar Franklin

Author of "Don't Ever Marry," "His Word of Honor," "The Wicked Streak," etc.

IT did not take the producers of motion pictures long to discover in Edgar Franklin a humorist whose work lends itself especially well to the medium of the screen. Attractive characters, masterly plots, action that never even hesitates, side-splitting situations—all of his wares are as diverting in the silent drama as our readers have proclaimed them to be in fictional form in the ALL-STORY WEEKLY. So it happens that a new Franklin story is as eagerly welcomed by the makers and patrons of the "movies" as by the readers of our magazine.

The new story that starts on this page was written especially as a vehicle for Eileen Percy, the popular Fox Film star. After reading it you will be able to see it in your favorite motion-picture theater—and having read the story will add to your enjoyment of the picture. In publishing the work of Mr. Franklin in serial form we are carrying out the ALL-STORY WEEKLY policy of giving our readers the best—first.

### CHAPTER I.

YOUNG MRS. EMERSON.

VIEWING Chicago for the first time from the eleventh-story window of a first-class hotel, many of us might thrill just a little and quicken with interest. Mary neither thrilled nor quickened. Many of us might fall to speculating upon the endless activities of the teeming thousands below, upon the mighty lake beyond, upon any one of a dozen other kindred topics. Mary did not.

It is the simple fact that although Mary stared straight down upon Chicago, Chicago—for all the impression it conveyed to her just now—might as well have been Medicine Hat or Egg Harbor City, N. J. Mary, in fine, was deep, deep in thoughts of her own.

Taken as a general proposition, there is perhaps nothing in the world more futile than an attempt to follow the thoughts of a woman. Mary's is the exceptional case; as they shaped themselves in Mary's own clear-visioned fashion, the thoughts are to

be followed with the utmost ease. On this, the last day of its third month, Mary was reviewing her honeymoon.

She did not smile. Not that she was unhappy, in the strictest sense; but there was certainly nothing particularly tender and bride-like and radiant in Mary's expression just then, nor was she kissing one of Bill's gloves and holding it to her cheek, or anything of that sort. On the other hand, she did not frown—but it is beyond dispute that she sighed frequently as the meditations trod their orderly way.

There had been her wedding, back home in Braydon, good little city!—mother weeping frankly and dad pretending that he must have caught cold somewhere last night and everybody else laughing and bustling and racing about and throwing rice—merely Mary Lawson becoming Mrs. William Emerson, with at least a dozen Braydon mothers privately infuriated because their own daughters—oh, well. Mary sighed again and rested her bright head against the casing, to stare at the sky.

And after that the wonderful trip, straight to the Pacific Coast and Seattle and all the new scenes. And after that? Well, Mary's clearest memory of Seattle was the dinner with Mr. Carson and his wife, during which Mr. Carson and Billy talked business incessantly and Mrs. Carson, who was plump and self-satisfied, chatted entertainingly of her bridge game. Mary recalled that Billy had exulted half that night, because his share of the business done with Carson would amount to something over nine hundred dollars.

Oh, yes, and there had been that lovely automobile ride out of Seattle, too—eighty miles out and the same distance back, of not particularly good going, to see Mr. Wendell's new plant, while Billy sat on the front seat and talked business with Mr. Wendell as he drove and Mr. Wendell's private secretary, who used perfume and was deeply interested in amateur theatricals, leaned close to Mary in the back seat, ogled her and talked directly into her face.

She had not voiced a protest; it is a poor sort of wife who will intrude her likes and dislikes into the money-making operations of a rather cyclonic young husband;

and Billy had netted over five hundred dollars that afternoon. But, all the same, they hadn't been married three weeks then and—

"What?" said Mary, as she started and slipped suddenly to the floor, radiant at last. "Come in!"

She sped across the room, too. She also stopped short, half-way across, for a really proper young bride never embraces a bell-boy and this one was looking quite startled at her approach.

"Oh!" gasped Mary. "I thought it was—or—did you find him?"

"Yes, ma'am," said the boy. "Mr. Emerson's in the lobby with Mr. Downing, of New Orleans."

Mary ceased radiating.

"Did you give him my message?"

"Mr. Emerson said he'd be up just as soon as possible, ma'am."

"Er—very well."

"There is a Mr. Simmons waiting to see him, he said, and—"

"Very well. That is all, thank you," Mary said briefly.

The boy retired. Its former hush settled upon the big room. Mary Emerson returned to her window-sill and gazed out once more.

Things were different now, were they not? Six months ago, in Braydon, before the firm took Billy into partnership and proposed sending him all over the world on this beastly old trip, three words over the telephone would have caused Billy to drop business and fly to her side.

Now, when he had finished with Mr. Downing, and Mr. Simmons and with the Messrs. Smith and Jones and Brown, who would have accumulated in the intervals, Billy would come to learn what she wanted!

Oh, yes, things were very different now. Mary's lovely chin dropped to her equally lovely palm and she stared on, unseeingly.

Mr. French in San Francisco—Mr. Potts in Pasadena—Mr. Wells in Salt Lake City and Mr. Stevenson in Denver—Mr. Finch in Portland and both Mr. Tiddles in Omaha, not to mention Mr. Swanson in Minneapolis and Mr. Neft in St. Paul and Mr. Harrison in Kansas City—she had met them all and heard them all talk business

with Billy while she sat by and kept her perfunctory, mechanical, beautifully wife-like smile on view; and her bones had ached and her head had ached and she had wished several times that Congress might turn a little more eccentric and enact a law for bidding all business for a while.

Mary swallowed just once and blinked several times. She had had such a good time, back home in Braydon, all her life!

The minutes, unable to oblige even Mary by pausing, continued to pass. The shadows deepened and grew deeper still. Presently it would be Mary's part to powder her nose and dress her hair more enchantingly and get out the prettiest frock from the larger wardrobe trunk and summon the Cheshire Cat expression, and the go down and dine with Billy and Mr. — what were they doing back home, just now? Mother was glancing at the table and into the kitchen, where old black Maggie pottered over dinner; and dad, home from a comfortable day in his comfortable law office, was sitting down with his paper and the letter Mary had mailed yesterday and getting out his reading glasses. And next door elderly Mr. Nelson was rocking on the veranda, while the three Nelson boys came up the street and waved to him from the corner.

And—Mary did not swallow this time. She gulped quite frankly. She even felt for her handkerchief and—the door opened with a swish!

Aye, and the door closed and there was a brisk click as a finger pressed the button; and overhead twelve lights blazed out—and William Emerson had arrived at last!

## CHAPTER II.

### FORSAKING ALL OTHERS.

**H**E was a heavily-built, keen-eyed young man, this William, with a nose and a chin full of strong character. When he smiled, it was briefly; when he talked, it was swiftly and convincingly; swiftly, too, did William think and move.

Swiftly, just now, he stepped to the desk upon which he had insisted in every hotel room so far and laid down two brief-cases, four large envelopes and a sheaf of miscel-

laneous loose papers. He drew out the chair and sat down with a positive thud and a quick:

"Hello, Mary!"

"Hello—Billy," sighed Mary.

"I got him, kid!"

"Got—"

"Simmons," said William and shuffled papers in the fashion that was growing painfully familiar to Mary. "Never expected to see him here, y' know. Just accident. But I nailed him—Mary, will you get me the ink? Never mind, the ink's here. Now, lemme see—"

"What—kept you so long?"

"Business!" chuckled William.

"I had a boy page you, to—"

"That's right. I'd forgotten. The boy did say something. What did you want, Mary?"

"Nothing!" Mary sighed.

"That's what I thought," muttered William, and wrote rapidly. "Now, let's see just what I did do to this bird—Three thousand, four hundred and eighteen—hm! That's pretty good. Mary, get me the big pad of order blanks, will you?"

"No!"

"Eh?"

"I want to look at you, once in a while, Billy, when you're not doing business!" Mary said wistfully.

"Watch he when I'm asleep, kid!" chuckled the bridegroom, as he whizzed to the open grip, extracted his order blanks and whizzed back to the desk. "Now! Where was I?—Why, what do you know about that? How much real money do you suppose I made down there?"

"I don't know."

"A little better than three hundred dollars in forty-five minutes!" cried William, and finally sat back and grinned. "Mary—some trip!"

"Some trip!" Mary echoed sadly.

"Hey?" said William, and stared. "Aren't you enjoying it?"

"There seems to be a dreadful lot of business connected with this honeymoon, Billy!"

"Not to mention the handsome profits, this is probably the only self-supporting honeymoon in history, Mary!" William



laughed, quite boisterously. And then, since there really seemed to be something odd about Mary, he subsided suddenly. "Why, what's the matter, kid?"

Silently, Mary turned away. The pre-nuptial William never would have asked that question in just that astonished way; he would have known. This later William, with characteristic speed and decision embraced her.

"I guess you're just tired, Mary," he submitted. "Maybe we've been moving a little too fast for you. Well—er—forget it and think of all the fun ahead. Out of here to-morrow night and straight for New York!"

"And we can't even stop and see the City again!" Mary pouted.

"Because we have to hop aboard the little old steamer and hit the well-known continent of Europe, and then spend a whole year just jogging around and showing 'em what real American business means when it's served by a real American business man!" William pursued, with brisk blitheness. "You'll get a good rest on the steamer and then—Mary, did you see what became of that bunch of small carbon paper sheets?"

"No," said Mary, in a still, small voice which might have meant much to some husbands, but meant nothing to William just then.

"There they are!" cried the bridegroom. "Dearie, will you excuse me for a few minutes while I jot down this stuff?"

He was at the desk again. He wrote—and wrote—and still wrote, whistling the while.

"Billy, dear!" said Mary.

"Yes—three hundred and twenty-two gross—darling?"

"Let's stop over at Braydon for a couple of hours to-morrow. I want to say good-by to mother and dad again. We'll be gone such a long time."

"Can't kid," said William. "Too bad. No time."

"If we just—"

"Can't be done, sweetie," the bridegroom said firmly, if absently. "We have to make rotten connections as it is. We have to dig out in the middle of the night and

wait two hours, changing cars. At that, we won't have more than a couple of hours' leeway in making the steamer."

"But—"

"Nothing doing, Mary. I'm sorry. Will you just let me finish this?"

Once more he wrote, while Mary watched his unquestionably powerful shoulders and his unquestionably handsome head. He was quite absorbed—in business, not in Mary.

"Billy!" Mary said suddenly.

"Er—ah?"

"I want to go on alone and see the folks for a few hours."

"What?" said William, quite amazedly.

"Yes, I do! The train that gets to Braydon in the middle of the afternoon must leave here about six in the morning. I'll take that to-morrow and be at the Braydon station when you come through on the 10:22!"

It may be that there was an entirely new note in Mary's voice; certainly William seemed to find one. His smile vanished, as did also his consuming interest in business. William turned about and stared, hard and rather darkly.

"Just *what's* the idea?" he queried.

"I want to say good-by to mother and dad again!"

"So you said. But you've been away from them three months without thinking of it until this afternoon, Mary. Why this sudden desire to return to Braydon?"

"I've told you, Billy."

"Well, there's nothing doing on that scheme either, Mary," William said flatly. "Your place is here with me, your husband. I'm not going to have you racing off alone."

"But—"

And particularly not to Braydon. I don't like the idea!" William rapped out, and a dull flush came to his cheeks and to his eyes came really the oddest light Mary had ever seen.

There was a suspicious, wicked glint to those eyes! "You were too popular back there, Mary!"

"What do you mean?"

Precisely what I say. The young men of that town always took too much interest

in you, my dear. Nobody back there ever looked at you—in the last few years—without wanting to start a party or a picnic or a dance, with you for the central figure, you know. And, as a matter of fact, you smiled on them all pretty impartially."

"Billy, you—"

"I'm not unreasonable and I'm not at all mistaken!" young Mr. Emerson said, and his tone was dangerously steady. "Don't think that indignation has any effect on me, Mary. I know what I'm talking about!"

"There were some of them I didn't object to, so very much. Pete Noble, for example; there's no harm in that sober old bird and he's a friend of mine. But some of the others—why, Tom Henning was wild about you!"

"I never—"

"Just a minute, Mary. I know more about the inner workings of your mind than you fancy! I know just how that Henning type appeals to a girl—so handsome and so darned poor! I know—"

"You don't know anything of the kind!" Mary broke in hotly. "I've known Tommy Henning for twenty years, just as you have! And you dare to—"

"Hold on, Mary!" snapped Mary's husband, and this time a heavy hand settled on either of her arms and held her fast; and in the most incredible manner the wicked glint in Thomas's eye grew to a downright vicious, sizzling flame! "I—I'm as much astonished as you are, perhaps, that this topic has come up, but I think it's a pretty good time to thresh it right out to the finish and come to a definite understanding! *You're mine!*"

Mary merely stared.

"Nobody else in the world has any interest in you henceforth. Anybody who fancies that he has such an interest, is heading straight for the worst trouble of his whole life! Get me?"

"I'm not jealous. I'm not suspicious. I've never quizzed you about any past love affairs, or anything of that kind, and I never will. But there's one thing that I want you to get into that pretty little head and keep it there forever after."

He paused for breath, quite ignoring

Mary's parting lips and widening eyes. He smiled, too, quite terribly, and gazed straight at her.

"Mary, I'm the best-natured, most easy-going and devoted creature in the world," said William, his voice vibrating suppressed fury and his general expression indicating, as nearly as anything else, implacable hate. "But if *ever* I suspected that your affections were straying to someone else, I'd divorce you in one second! And I'd drop business and everything else and consecrate the rest of my days to making life a hell on earth for the party of the third part!"

"I'd hound him till he pleaded for death! I mean that! I mean every word of it!"

"But what—what do you mean *by* it?" Mary gasped. "What have I done to call forth all this?"

"You've suggested returning to Braydon alone!" William snapped. "I'm not asking your true reason; I'm probably happier for not knowing it. But you're not going!"

"D'ye hear, Mary! You're not going! And as for what I've just said to you, see that you keep it in mind when you think of Henning or anybody like him and—here! Crying isn't necessary!"

Mary, nevertheless, was crying. There on the bed, her lovely features buried in the pillow, Mary was sobbing as if her heart would break. And William stared at her—furiously, in the beginning, then somewhat blankly, and after a little with rather the expression of a man coming out of a bad dream.

What in the name of Heaven was the matter with him, anyway? Had he gone altogether insane, that his darkest and unfounded secret musings had thus suddenly burst into blistering words? William bit his lip and scowled at the desk for a minute or so, collecting himself and wondering.

For one thing, of course, he had been working at tremendous pressure these last weeks. Outwardly jubilant and brimming with healthy energy, it was nevertheless the fact that his nerves were taut as fiddle-strings and his whole being keyed up to concert pitch. In a business way, William was out to make good on a tremendously big proposition this next year, and he meant to make good or die.

But was that any reason for barking and snarling at Mary, for insulting the most adorable little bride in the world and—abruptly, William was on his knees beside the bed, his arms about Mary.

"Kid! Sweetheart!" he cried gustily. "I never meant a word of it. I'm crazy! I'm an ass! I'm the biggest blasted fool that ever lived! But I love you so that—"

"No you don't!" Mary choked. "Nobody with one bit of love in them could ever say the things you—"

"Mary!" William cried brokenly, and crushed her to him. "Just listen a minute and let me tell you how sorry I am!"

Fully ten of them had passed before the last tear was kissed away and Mary snuggled again in the arms of a sane, contrite husband—snuggled and said uncertainly:

"And all I—wanted was to see mother and dad again for a few minutes before—we go away for a whole year!"

William drew a deep breath.

"Girlie, that's really all you'll do?" he asked. "I mean, you won't try to hold any reunions, or let anyone else hold them for you, or go to any parties or on rides or anything else that might make you miss the train to-morrow night when I come through?"

"Billy, I think you're—"

"No, but this is awfully important, sweetheart," William purred. "Almost the whole of the next year is laid out on a schedule for me, you know, and if we missed that steamer it would raise the very dickens and maybe spoil the whole thing. And all our future depends on that next year, Mary; we can't afford to take one chance!"

"When I've made good, we'll go back and build the prettiest house in town and—Mary, dear, will you surely be down on the 10:22?"

"I will, if you let me go," murmured a submissive Mary.

Thrice William kissed her. Then he bounced to his feet.

"Gad! What a fool I am!" he snapped, as he jerked down the telephone. "Hello, I want you to get me the exact time of a train to-morrow morning and then get me a state-room through. Yes, I want the

whole state-room. My wife's traveling alone. All right. Hurry him up!"

Then he waited impatiently while they were connecting him with the particular person down-stairs who told one about trains and secured tickets and drawing-rooms; and Mary, very round-eyed and thoughtful, gazed at the back of his handsome head again and at his thick, powerful neck.

A very small chill ran through Mary. That was her own Billy, to be sure, but she had never known, had never even suspected, that her Billy could look as wicked as he had looked fifteen minutes ago.

### CHAPTER III.

#### THE FAVORED ONES.

ONE nice thing about Braydon, as a place in which to live one's life, is that all its movements are consistent and deliberate. Braydon has passed from a charming town to a charming city of thirty thousand without the usual series of jumps and jerks, real-estate booms and changes of local geography.

As from the beginning, lower Braydon Street is still the heart of the business district, with Bond Avenue running north through one splendid residential section and Evans Avenue running west through the other, equally splendid. No new business centers have cropped up to break the commercial scheme; no Magnolia Parks or Braydon Manors have been started on the outskirts, to start a rush away from the older homes.

The Traders' Bank Building, all white marble, stands just where the one-story frame Traders' Bank stood of yore; "Brisley's," giant department store, occupies the site of the almost forgotten "John Brisley, general store" establishment; even the great Bond-Grimshaw business-and-social feud—the feud which for more than twenty years has caused the North Side to pass the West Side with nose uptilted—has not altered one whit. Rather, perhaps, it had not altered until this very month, although that is a matter for a little later consideration.

Although at least one swift, startling



change, if of a minor character, had taken place in Braydon quite recently.

Two months ago, had one chanced to enter the rather forlorn little double office of Henning and Noble, at the top of the old four-story building at the foot of Braydon Street, one would have noted the spare, unornamental furniture—second-hand in the first place—the limited clerical force of one and the generally depressed air of the partners themselves. Inevitably, the most casual observer must have been struck by the unsmiling countenance of Peter Noble and Thomas Henning, by their drooping shoulders, by the abundance of worn and shiny spots upon their raiment.

Yet had the same observer elected to look up the firm this afternoon, he would have discovered the "These Offices For Rent" sign upon the dingy old door, and the chaste little card announcing that hereafter Henning and Noble would be found in Suite 19, Traders' Bank Building. And had he gone farther and eventually reached Suite 19, he would have discovered a spacious anteroom with a heavy green carpet and a dull mahogany desk and several comfortable chairs and a girl at the desk without one single hair out of place.

Beyond the partition to the left, he would have caught the clicking of busy typewriters. Beyond the one to the right, he would have caught nothing, because that was the big office used by Thomas Henning and Peter Noble in their new surroundings; both of them rather affected low, impressive, big-business voices.

They were in there now, as the day waned. They were smiling, both of them, as they smoked. For some little time they had been silent; now Tommy Henning picked up the recent trend of their joint thoughts once more with:

"Two months! Just two measly little months!"

Peter nodded rather soberly. He was a sober soul, anyway, with his long, grave countenance, and his slow movements and his deep, meditative eyes; one might, off-hand, have taken him for forty.

As a matter of fact, he was very little past twenty-five—the precise age of Tommy Henning, and Tommy Henning's an-

tithesis, because Thomas, with thick curly hair and blue eyes that snapped, was a distinctly vivacious and handsome young man, all full of the joy of living, and not at all bowed down by troubles more than an hour in the past.

"Two months have made a mighty fine change in our affairs," Peter mused.

Not for the first time, not for the thousandth time, the pure wonder of the whole thing overcame Tommy. His perfectly shod feet dropped from the desk; he leaned forward and grinned at his associate, as if challenging him to contradict as, even again, he burst into the old song:

"Pete! Just two months ago, we were at the last gasp!"

"We were."

"As a firm and individually, we were down and out, dead and buried. We had the factory so plastered with mortgages that you couldn't see a brick, and not a chance to pay off one dollar. Business was so good that we couldn't get an order out of a man at the point of a gun. We—why, dammit! I was even behind in my board bill."

Peter sighed.

"I know. If I hadn't been living home with Aunt Jennie; I'd have been in the same pickle. Why go over it again?"

"Because I love to talk about it," Tommy chuckled. "Going over the whole thing makes me feel like a man on a desert island who's just discovered a ham-sandwich mine."

"Think of it, Pete! It was just that Wednesday morning that we talked it over, you and I, and practically decided to go into voluntary bankruptcy."

"And then the letter came from the lawyer bird in Portland, Oregon—"

"Announcing that the poor old uncle I'd never seen in Alaska had left me within forty thousand dollars of an even million!" Tommy concluded triumphantly. "And from that second onward the luck's turned and—*isn't* it amazing, when you come to think of it, Pete?"

"It is all of that."

"We hadn't finished that letter—we hadn't even laid it on the desk—when that first big order was telegraphed in, Pete."

"And they've been coming in ever since,

and we've got contracts enough for the next two years, and we're making money hand over fist, and the factory's virtually paid for, and everything's lovely—and that's all," Peter smiled, with just a touch of impatience. "Now, what else have we to do this afternoon before we shut up shop here?"

"Nothing," Tommy said meditatively. "Although that isn't all, by any means."

"Eh?"

"You're married now, Pete. You've been married five full weeks to one of the most beautiful girls in the most exalted social circle of all our fair city—Sally, bless her!" Thomas grinned happily. "And two months back, if her father had ever known your true financial standing, that engagement would have been busted with such a crash that you wouldn't have finished counting the stars even at this very moment."

Peter's faint smile died.

"That's true enough," he conceded. "Tommy, I've been married so long that my wife's gone on her first visit alone—over to her dog-gone cousin's in Comp-ton."

"Ah?"

"She left yesterday—and it seems a year ago. She doesn't come back till to-morrow night—and that seems a century," Peter muttered. "Why does a girl, only five weeks married, have to do a thing like that?"

"I dunno," said Thomas, and it was plain that his concern in his friend's trouble was of the scantiest. "And I, Pete, I am engaged to Dolly Hayes! The fairest maiden in the whole world is going to marry me!"

"Yep," said Peter absently.

"Y'know, I can't get over it," Thomas mumbled. "I was all ready to enlist in the army or sign up on a whaler or something and disappear forever—and then poor old uncle went and did it and—no, I can't get over it."

His feet returned to the arm-rest of his desk. The senior partner selected from the silver box beside him a tastefully monogrammed cigarette, and for a minute or so he smoked in silence. Until:

"Going to the big masquerade to-night, Peter?"

"Eh? Me? No. Not without Sally," sighed Peter. "You?"

"I shall be there with the bells on," Tommy chuckled pleasantly.

"What are you going to wear?" Peter yawned perfunctorily.

"What? For a costume? I don't know. That's a matter I haven't had time to look after as yet, Pete. I'll stop at Kratz's on the way home, inspect his costumes and hire something tasty. You ought to go, Peter. This is the biggest affair of the kind that ever happened in this town."

Peter shook his head.

"Not without Sally," he sighed. "She didn't care enough about it to stay around; I don't think I'll bother with it."

"That isn't the point, Peter," Tommy said earnestly. "You're a representative business man now and you really ought to appear at this shindig. You know, this isn't any ordinary social affair of the Bond faction or the Grimshaw faction. This is the great big love-feast that marks the burying of the hatchet by the two penitent clans."

"I know that, of course."

"Well, you're a Bond, essentially, because you've married a Bond, and you ought to appear. You know, it took a lot of effort and sacrifice for this bunch of lunatics to get together and bury their differences, but they've done it, and after to-night every Bond Avenue lady will smile at every Evans Avenue lady, when they pass—and after to-night no business man will cut another's throat just because he happens to be married to the seventh cousin of a Bond or of a Grimshaw."

Peter nodded.

"Calling off that fool feud will be a mighty big thing for this town, Tom."

"You bet!" murmured Thomas. "Where did it ever start?"

"Oh—back some time just after the flood, I believe. I don't know. I do know that it has cost a pile of money, first and last."

"Why, they say that just that one stunt of old Jim Bond's—trying to run the Henry Grimshaw mill out of town—used up over

a million and a half of dollars, and all but wrecked this bank down-stairs. And all for nothing but spite."

## CHAPTER IV.

## NEWS.

**O**F the two, Thomas was decidedly the quicker thinker. Mentally, Thomas had left the absurd old feud behind ten seconds ago. He was roaming up another path now, and what he found there caused him to smile suddenly and softly. He tilted back and blew a long cloud of blue smoke toward the expensive indirect lighting-globe.

"Say, Pete," said he.

"Well?"

"Tell me something: What the dickens will a big dance in this town seem like, without Mary Lawson?"

Peter started slightly.

"What put that into your head?"

"I give it up. Maybe Mary's thinking about the old-home burg," Thomas grinned absently. "Do you realize that it's the first one in our time to be held without Mary? Mary always used to be the very middle of the excitement, Pete. She was the center, and every big show revolved around her."

"Oh, yes," Peter said guardedly.

Thomas sighed.

"Didn't she have lovely hair, Pete?"

"She probably has it still."

"And her eyes! My Lord! What eyes she did have! Just one slaughtering glance from those eyes and any well-regulated man would hand over his soul and—"

"Why the pause?" Peter inquired dryly.

"Did you just remember that you were engaged to Dolly Hayes?"

"Frankly, no. I happened to think about Bill Emerson just then. I'll never stop wondering why she married him."

"Doubtless, Tom, she loved him."

"Doubtless she did; but why the devil she did—how she ever could—is what possesses me. He'll make her life miserable."

"Bah!"

"Oh, yes he will, Pete. Wherever she is, Mary 'll always be popular—and Bill's

sort of a throwback to the Stone Age. He's jealous of the air she breathes. Before they were married, he'd start snorting if any one looked twice at Mary's coat hanging in a cloak-room. What he is now I hate to think. What tiny little feet she had!"

"Very," agreed Peter.

"And her hands, too!" Thomas muttered, smiling faintly. "I never saw such dear, funny little, soft, pink hands as Mary had."

And now Peter scowled his candid disapproval—opened his lips to speak, and did not speak—walked over to the filing-cabinet with his hands in his trousers pocket and considered, in deeply meditative fashion, the typewritten labels on the drawers. Eventually he shrugged his shoulders and even smiled; but the scowl came back abruptly as Thomas said:

"I never saw an ear just like Mary's ear, Pete. That shell stuff about ears, you know, always sounded like rot to me until one day, about two years ago, I happened to look at Mary's ear and—"

"And if you'd been able to look straight in and see what she was thinking, you'd very likely have learned what an ass she considered you for staring at her," Peter said sharply.

Thomas elevated his eyebrows.

"Do I deduce, with my characteristic keenness, that you, too, have examined that ear, and that you're sore at Bill for marrying her and—"

"You do not," Peter said harshly. "I have a wife of my own, and I wouldn't swap her for a million of Mary. Not to say that Mary isn't a pippin and the finest little girl going, but—"

"No, not to say anything like that, Pete," Thomas agreed curiously. "Well?"

"Well, I want you to listen to me for a minute, Tom."

"It is possible that I understand it all without listening."

"It's a darned sight more possible that you don't," Peter snapped. "Tommy, cut it out."

"Dreaming of fair women?"

"Dreaming of Mary. You're engaged."

"I knew it first, Pete. I love her!" Thomas said unsmilingly. "Believe me,



when I tell you that there isn't a traitorous thought in my head. But, just the same, Mary—"

"And Mary is married," Peter pursued. "And what's more to the point, she's married to a jealous man. A fool like you, mooning about her ears and her feet—"

"Well, what's still more to the point," Thomas interrupted in turn, "is that Mary's gone away, and she'll be away for another year at the very least. What are you talking about?"

"About the time when she'll come back here again to live," the more sober young man said gravely. "Cut it out! D'ye hear? *Cut it out*—all this Mary business!"

Thomas grinned at the end of his cigarette, shook his head and sighed.

"If I were you, Pete, I wouldn't worry so about things that do not exist. From the general look of affairs, about the time Mary gets back I may be pushing Thomas, Jr., around in his modest little fifty-dollar perambulator on sunny Sunday mornings."

"All right. But mind what I'm telling you, nevertheless. You'll have a bride of your own. No man ever got anything but trouble out of gazing raptly at other men's brides.

"Beware of 'em! Beware of that bride in particular. I'm telling you!"

"I'm hearing you," yawned Thomas. "You're crazy. Dry up!"

There was a letter on Peter's desk which he has meant to answer. It chanced to catch his eye, and he sat down suddenly and considered it again, the while, in turn Thomas considered his partner's profile, shrugged and grinned again—and finally whirled about to his own desk.

"I suppose I might better check up those weights to-night before I go," he reflected. "It's an hour's job, but it'll be that much less to do to-morrow."

Peter nodded. Thomas uncapped his fountain pen and lighted another cigarette—and just then, although Thomas was blissfully, utterly unaware of such a possibility, a new and startling era of his life was heralded by the simple tinkle of Peter's telephone bell.

"Lo!" said Peter.

"If that's Donovan, tell him to can the

telephone-stuff and come up here to-morrow morning and do his talking in person!" Thomas said sharply. "That bird's trying to put something over, and I want to look him in the eye while he tries it, and then tell him—"

"Hush!" said Peter, and addressed the telephone again: "*Who* is this?"

"Isn't it Donovan?"

"No, it's my cousin Alice!" snapped the junior partner. "Hello, Alice! Yes, I've got you now. What can we do for you?"

Immediately after this, the diaphragm squawked quite excitedly, and Peter opened his eyes suddenly—and after that, in turn, he smiled deprecatingly and drummed impatiently with his free hand.

"What? Oh, yes. Yes, of course. I'm always interested in the town gossip, Alice, but I'm pretty busy down here and—what? Well, thanks, anyway, although I don't know that you need have called up. Good-by."

"Next door neighbor to Alice bought a new hat?" Thomas queried, from his work.

"Mary's back!" said Peter.

"Hey?"

"Alone!"

"What do you mean—alone?" Thomas demanded warmly.

"That's what Alice said!" said Peter, with equal animation. "The Lawsons live two or three blocks beyond Alice, you know, and Mary always walked by the house on her way home, back in the old days.

"Alice says that Mary just went past, walking slowly and sort of—er—crushed-looking, Alice said, and—"

"Hell!" cried Thomas. "Have they separated?"

Briefly, they gazed hard at one another. Then Peter, with a slight effort, became Peter once more and faced his desk again and cleared his throat, as he picked up the letter.

"If they have, it's no concern of mine," he said, just a shade too elaborately.

"Eh? No. Of course not."

"And, by the same token, it's no concern of yours!"

"Only, if that brute's been beating her, or anything like that—"

Peter transfixed him with a hard stare, a steady stare.

"Even so, it's no concern of yours, Tom—*now*."

The stare persisted. Thomas, after five peculiar seconds, relaxed.

"No, of course not!" he grunted.

"Are you going to check those weights, or would you prefer to spend the rest of the afternoon discussing Mary?" Peter inquired.

"Weights!" said Thomas, who very evidently—almost too evidently—had dismissed Mary altogether from his mind.

Still minutes sped by, with the clock ticking and Peter muttering over his letter and Thomas shuffling papers and jotting down a figure here and there. Then:

"Can't be done!" he snapped suddenly, and rose with a jerk. "I'm going to fire this whole office force and get another. Half these weights aren't down, and the other half are wrong. I'll attend to them to-morrow."

"Going?"

"Yes."

"Where?"

"Home, of course. Where else?" Tommy demanded, and it was very plain that business cares had irritated him extremely. "I'll stop at Kratz's and get some kind of suit for to-night, on the way. Why?"

"Nothing," said Peter. "Er—nothing. Good night!"

"'Night, Pete," Thomas said briefly, and snatched down his hat.

When he had gone Peter still stared at his letter. Looking at him, one might almost have thought that some sort of struggle was going on inside Peter; at last, however, he seemed to reach a decision and pressed a button.

"Take a letter, Miss Brown," he said shortly to the girl who entered.

"Oh—yes. I'll get my book," murmured the maiden.

It was unusual for Peter to scowl at an employee or otherwise to manifest impatience, but he scowled for a second or so just now.

"When I ring once, will you please make it a rule to bring the book with you?" he requested. "Yes, all right, but please

hurry, Miss Brown. I want to dictate a letter and then get out of here. I have to leave—er—a little earlier to-day."

Although surely no more than thirty seconds elapsed before the young woman's return with her note-book, Peter's scowl had darkened, and his teeth were actually gritting before she reappeared. And though usually he dictated in a slow, low, considerate voice, his words this time came in a machine-gun series of barks that brought from the girl a frightened, amazed stare and an involuntary cry of:

"Oh, wait! Please—please wait, Mr. Noble!"

## CHAPTER V.

### THE OLD HOME TOWN.

**W**HEN, the term beginning in the cradle, one has spent more than twenty years in the same pretty city, three months is a long time to be away from home.

This, in an abstract way, of course, Mary had always known. She realized it much more keenly as the train roared by little Haverly station and the first scattered houses of Braydon appeared in the far distance; but not until her little feet met the Braydon platform did really full understanding come to Mary. This was home.

There was the pillar beside which, years and years ago, Uncle Arthur and she had stood when he brought her down to see her first train. There, far away and just visible from here, was the spire of the church where she had toddled to Sunday-school; and over there was the dingy lunch-room where the pretentious Elite Restaurant used to stand; and for a queer little minute Mary blinked rather moistly at the spot and remembered the funny two weeks when they had been forced to take meals there, after the kitchen burned.

There was the usual line of taxis, some of them engineered by men who were piloting hacks about Braydon before Mary had learned to walk—and one of them was beckoning her now, and Mary ceased blinking and smiled and shook her head.

She would walk. It was all too dear and

familiar to let even a solitary detail go unenjoyed; she wanted to look into every store window on Braydon Street and smile into every face and meet friends and tell them how happy she was with an adoring and prosperous husband and have them tell her how glad they were to see her again, if only for this fleeting moment.

So Mary walked, and the unfortunate thing is that in all the distance up Braydon Street she encountered not even one acquaintance. It was odd and it was rather depressing. That queer eruption of William's yesterday had left Mary rather emotional, and the corners of her mouth drooped before she had passed the business section.

Still, the immediate future held much for Mary. She brightened a little as she thought of the surprise ahead—just half a dozen blocks ahead now! It was rather late in the afternoon, and dad, who left his office early, would be home before this. And mother—oh, Mary would be so glad when they were back in Braydon for good and she was in daily touch with mother again!

She had written home at least every other day, but in all the mad racing around after business not half a dozen letters from her mother had overtaken Mary.

Strangely for the lips of a happy bride, Mary's lips took to quivering again, and she quickened her step. Home was right ahead there! Her eyes filled.

The last dozen yards she took at a literal run, coming breathless to the dear old veranda and—which was another odd thing since it was usually open on days like this—to the closed door.

It seemed to Mary that she had never really understood before this second how tremendously one can yearn for a mother's arms! She snatched at the knob of the door and turned briskly.

The door refused to open—and Mary's heart skipped a beat. Were they away? Why, they couldn't be away! She tried again, but the door remained as firmly locked as before.

Mary, then, lips parted, pressed the button and waited for the waddling approach of old black Maggie. And waited—and

still waited—glanced at the deserted Nelson veranda next door and waited again. But some one was coming in there, although it did not sound at all like Maggie's ponderous step. Some one approached and rattled the lock—and the door opened and Mary stood face to face with her Uncle Arthur.

Be it not said that Mary detested her Uncle Arthur. One never actually detests the brother of one's own father, even though he be the first of the brood and twenty years older than one's father, the youngest and best!

On the other hand, be it not denied that Uncle Arthur lacked many of those qualities which engender love at first sight. He had been crabbed from birth; he was no less so now, as he approached his seventieth bachelor year. He was given to noisy slumber whenever, if ever, one desired conversation with him.

He was a confirmed cynic and pessimist; he owned three teeth, and hair enough to equip a very young baby; as a child, Mary had fancied that the countless spots down the front of his vest were some sort of eccentric design painted there by the tailor.

However, regard him as one might, there stood Uncle Arthur, staring at Mary—squinting keenly from the veranda to the sidewalk now and rasping:

"Mary! Mary, by gad!"

"It's Mary," the bride confessed.

"Where's your husband?"

"He isn't with me."

"Huh?"

"I left him behind, Uncle Arthur. Where are—"

"Hah! Happened, did it?" her Uncle Arthur cackled astonishingly. "Really did happen, hey? No more than I said, was it? I said you were a fool to marry him.

"I said it wouldn't last six months. Hasn't lasted three! And now you're back home! Grass widow! Got to get rid of him somehow, hey? Well, there won't be much trouble about that, I'll venture to say, knowing him.

"Hah! I should say not. Good riddance at that! Another scandal in the family—pah! Where's your baggage,



Mary? Did you fix to have it carted up, or do I have to wrestle with that devilish telephone girl till—"

"Uncle!" cried Mary.

"Huh?" said her uncle, and cupped his ear.

"Billy and I haven't separated. We haven't had any trouble. Please don't shout like that for the benefit of the neighbors—please! We're sailing for Europe to-morrow, you know, and I just ran ahead to visit for a few hours. Where are mother and dad?"

Distinct disappointment came to Uncle Arthur's countenance.

"Your parents?" he snapped. "Gone!"

"Gone where?"

"French Lick, I believe. Some fool place where they tinker people that haven't sense enough to keep their health. Your Uncle Harry went to get his insides fixed and they decided to go along for—a vacation, I believe your mother called it."

"Yes, but how long will they be away?" Mary cried.

"Huh?" said her uncle. "Two weeks."

"And they went—when did they go?"

"Huh?" said her uncle. "Yesterday!"

He stepped back and jerked his head, indicating grudgingly that she might enter her own home if she chose. Rather limply, breathing somewhat jerkily, Mary stepped in and looked about.

She was not to see them after all! After all the excitement with Billy, after rising at dawn to-day and everything else, she was merely doomed to spend a few hours alone with Uncle Arthur and then to go on again.

Her uncle was studying her with sour satisfaction.

"You don't look none too cheerful for a bride!" he stated.

"I—what? Oh, but I am!" Mary said brightly. "I—I'm just a little disappointed. That's all."

"Well, it's nothing you couldn't have spared yourself if you'd taken the trouble to write on ahead and say you were coming," her uncle remarked cheerily; and since Mary seemed to have no further comment to make just then, he wound up the little chat after his own fashion. "I was

taking a nap when you rang the bell, Mary. Maggie's out buying food."

"Oh?"

"So, if you don't mind, I'll go finish my nap now. You do whatever you like, Mary, except play the piano. Probably you won't bother me. Maggie gets my dinner at the regular time. You tell her to set a place for you."

Then, sparkling, happy soul that he was, wholly out of control with Mary's father elsewhere, Uncle Arthur gripped his newspaper and shuffled back to the library. He composed himself upon the old leather couch after a long series of protesting creaks from the springs; and finally, with a last, highly expressive snort, he subsided, and Mary was essentially alone.

Not that she minded the solitude, In just these circumstances she preferred it infinitely to Uncle Arthur's society. Some minutes she stood motionless, gazing in the general direction taken by that exuberant, affectionate being; then, with a snarl that suggested the death-shriek of a strangling panther, Uncle Arthur snored his first snore of the series—and Mary turned quite suddenly and fled to the veranda. She had been enduring those snores since childhood's happy hour, but she could not endure them this afternoon!

## CHAPTER VI.

### PETER—TEMPTER.

**I**T was still and pleasantly drowsy out there, yet Mary settled in her chair with a heavy sigh. The hour lacked something of five o'clock. Dinner would be at seven and an agony.

After dinner she might come out here and sit again, if she chose, for unless there was a particularly gruesome offering at the movie house two blocks beyond, Uncle Arthur usually slept through the evenings.

Nor might she run around and visit. Silly as it seemed, her promise to Billy prevented anything of that kind. Some one might insist on her staying to dinner, and they might have in a few of Mary's old friends, and some one might start the dancing and—Mary smiled sadly.

She knew herself well. Once the dancing began in earnest, ten twenty-two might steal up unawares and—oh, no, that wasn't to be considered. It was the part of Mary, the bride, to sit right here and reflect.

Although, with all her friends, it seemed queer that nobody had happened past. Mary sighed again and looked down the pleasant street. She started slightly.

Somebody was on the very verge of happening past—somebody who had approached so lightly that not until this second had she been aware of his presence in the street!

"Why—why, Tommy!" called Mary.

There was real drama in Thomas Henning's start. With a jerk his progress ceased, his eyes opened incredulously; he frowned, as if quite unable to believe their evidence; and then Thomas opened the gate and sped up the little walk with a cry of:

"Why, Mary! Upon my word! Mary!"

Their hands clasped heartily; they smiled brilliantly, both of them. Quite breathless with the delightfully unexpected shock of the thing, Tommy tossed his hat to a chair and sat down beside Mary.

"Back for good?" he asked eagerly.

"Back till Billy comes for me to-night," Mary dimpled.

It is possible that the animation in Tommy's eye dwindled slightly; but his undisguised pleasure at seeing Mary again did not. He heard the details of her brief visit and settled down for a little stay; and for a time they chatted on in the rather silly fashion affected by persons of their respective ages, and Mary learned that Pete was really married to Sally Foster at last, and that the engagement of Dolly Hayes and Tommy really had been announced. And presently:

"Mary, you're going to look in on the big masquerade to-night, the big love feast?" Thomas inquired.

"Mother wrote me all about it last week," Mary sighed. "No, I'm not going, of course."

"You could go with Dolly and me and just stop for an hour or so?"

Mary gazed wistfully across the street.

"I wouldn't dare, Tom. Something might happen to make me miss the train. I—no, I'd never dare. I'd love to go."

"Yes, and I'd—that is, we'd—love to take you, Mary!"

With an effort the longing was forced out of Mary's eyes. Her chin set quiet determinedly.

"No, I can't! Really, I can't, even for a minute!" she said.

It is possible that the smallest hint of relief lurked in Thomas's sigh; he did not press the point. It was not the sort of point one presses when engaged to a Dolly Hayes. Like any other sane person, of course, Dolly would have been tickled to death to see Mary once more and to have her accompany them; at the same time, as Thomas was forced to confess to himself, on at least two occasions when Dolly had mentioned his lifelong friendship with Mary Lawson, there had been a certain tendency to acerbity on Dolly's part, a certain suggested—well, he was not going to take Mary, anyway.

He glanced rather nervously up and down the street. That girl passing the corner wore a hat almost exactly like Dolly's new one; and while she was not Dolly, she did suggest the possibility of Dolly's passing unexpectedly. Thomas arose with some reluctance.

"I must run along, Mary; I wish I could stay," he said. "Good-by, and come back to us soon."

"In a year!"

"And I wish you were going to the big show to-night, Mary."

"So do I, Tom," sighed the bride, as she watched him hurry down the path and through the gate.

Well, at least she had seen one cheery, familiar face. Mary's dimples were visible for a little, as she returned to her chair. She wished that Tommy might have stayed a little longer; there was no end of gossip that she yearned to hear, about their immediate circle and about the ball to-night.

Yes, particularly about the ball to-night! Some of Mary's dimples smoothed away. Frivolous as it might be for a married lady like herself, Mary surely doted upon big affairs like that impending masquerade,

just as she had always doted upon them! And this was to be such a mighty and jolly affair, even for Braydon.

This formal ending of their silly old feud meant so much to every one concerned that it was bound to be a perfect riot of gaiety—and if there was one thing that Mary's very soul adored it was a riot of gaiety.

Mary sighed again and sought to visualize Bill, at this moment, in the act of sending her a telepathic message, which urged her to stick to the spirit, not to the letter, of her promise—to use her own judgment and go to the ball early, if she liked, and to come away early.

It was useless, though. The only mental picture of Billy which consented to take shape was one wherein he talked frantic business to a man with a long nose and a shoe-brush mustache, glancing occasionally at his watch.

And still—

"Mary!" said the voice at the gate.

Mary jumped and stared, and then bounced to her feet, beaming, and beckoned. Because it was Peter Noble, standing there just as much amazed as Tommy Henning had been a little while ago, and she liked solemn old Peter very much.

Ah, he, too, was hurrying up the path—clasping Mary's little hand as he cried:

"Well, this is as pleasant a surprise as I've had in a long time, Mary! Where—is Bill?"

"Oh, Bill's somewhere between here and Chicago," Mary dimpled. "I'm going to meet the ten twenty-two to-night and go aboard with him. We sail to-morrow, you know."

"Ah!" said Peter, and relaxed. "Just back for a little visit?"

And so, again, Mary chatted with an old friend. And so, again, just as the sun vanished from the tops of the taller trees down the street, the topic of the ball came up in Peter's:

"You're going to slip-off for an hour at the ball to-night?"

"Oh, I can't, Pete!"

"Why not?"

"I'd miss the train, and Billy'd be perfectly furious."

Peter raised his brows.

"No reason why you should miss the train, Mary, if you want to go and dance for an hour. Everything 'll be in full swing there by half past eight. You could leave before ten and—you know how you love to dance, Mary."

Her nod was as sober as his smile.

"I know better than you do, Peter, but I can't. Not this time. I promised Billy I wouldn't do anything like that, that might make me late for the train. I—I haven't anything to wear, anyway."

Peter, having hummed for a moment, grinned suddenly.

"What's the matter with wearing one of those old party dresses of your great-grandmother's, like the one you lent my sister Nell, a couple of years ago. She said there were half a dozen of them."

Mary's lovely eyes all but popped.

"I could do that!" she cried. "And that one with the big green flowers has never been worn to a party here, either, and they're right in the attic and—no, I couldn't! Honestly, Pete, I'd love to, but I can't."

"What did you bring? Just a grip, Mary?" Peter inquired.

"What? Yes, just a grip. Why?"

"Because, if you *did* feel like going, I could take it down with me now, Mary and check it at the station. Old Harkness keeps the room open all night, now, you know, and it wouldn't take you a second to get it, when you got down to the station."

"Peter," said Mary, "are you trying to tempt me?"

Peter shook his head and smiled faintly.

"Far be it from a respectable old married man like me to go around tempting blushing brides, Mary," said he. "But all the same I hate like sixty to see you miss all of this affair. It's going to be some show! A lot of the costumes were sent on from New York."

"Yes. Go on!"

"That's where the band comes from, too, by the way."

He stared meditatively at Mary Emerson. Mary, as one drawing back from a seductive demon, straightened up resolutely and shook her head.

"Well, it's no use, Petey. I can't go. I haven't any one to go with or anything."

Peter considered her thoughtfully. Possibly for the first time, in so many words, Peter conceded mentally that there was something wrong with him this afternoon. It may have been Mary's surpassing beauty, it may have been Sally's absence which had rather piqued her husband, it may have been human nature's faintly stirring protest against what had so far been a rather monotonously virtuous lifetime. But something inside was a little bit askew.

He had rushed from the office, solely, as he now admitted, to see Mary and learn why she was back; that much accomplished, he had astonished himself slightly by urging her to attend a ball which, obviously, she rather feared to attend, and even by devising some helpful means! And now, by all that was remarkable and indiscreet, Peter gave himself a further jolt with:

"Would Bill have any objection to your going with *me*?"

Mary stared.

"I—I don't know," she breathed. "He might not. He likes you because you're—you're staid and sober and not like some of the others, you know. Sally might object, though."

"Rot!" said Peter, and leaned forward earnestly. "Sally's sensible. Anyway, she isn't in town to-night. There's no need of any one recognizing you, if that worries you. They're going to a lot of trouble in the way of disguises to-night, and everything will be pretty well mixed up."

"You might arrange your hair in some freak fashion and get a good-sized mask. You'll be gone before the unmasking."

"Even so, Peter, I—what are you going to wear?" Mary asked restlessly.

"Armor!" chuckled Mr. Noble, whose plans for the evening seemed to have shaped themselves wonderfully since his recent interview with his partner. "Kratz has a great little suit down in his shop. I'm going to turn into a knight."

Mary fell silent—very silent. Distantly, through the screen door, floated the savage note of Uncle Arthur's snore. Mary shuddered and smiled wanly.

"Oh, I do so want to see it all!" she said, quite piteously.

"Well, why not go ahead and see it, then?" Peter cried recklessly. "I don't want to urge you to do anything against your better judgment, Mary, but I don't want to see you miss the fun, either. See here, Mary! What does your uncle do after dinner? Would he try to keep you from going?"

"Sleeps or goes out," Mary said bitterly. "He would, indeed!"

"All right, then. Listen to this. You get your dress and stuff ready and drop them out of the window before dinner; then say good-by to uncle after dinner and come down to my flat to fix up for the ball!"

"Oh, don't stare like that! This is all perfectly proper!" the abandoned Peter said hastily. "I'll have my sister Nell there to help you dress. Then you can go across the street with her—the Cypria Apartments are right opposite the Thorn-dyke mansion, you know—and when you're ready to leave, give me the high sign and I'll take you down to the train!"

His eyes glowed, which was an unusual thing for Peter's eyes. Young Mrs. Emerson turned a shade paler, but her own eyes sparkled.

"Petey, if I—if I did all that, I'd never dare tell Billy!"

"There are probably not less than five hundred billion things in this world of which Billy is already ignorant!" Peter stated, with a quick, strange grin.

"Yes, but—Petey, will you *surely* get me down to that train on time?"

"Where's your grip, Mary?" Peter asked.

"In—there in the hall, where I dropped it," Mary faltered. "But—"

Peter, having slipped into the house, slipped out of it again with Mary's handsome little bag. If Mary, at this juncture, was somewhat scared, Peter was not. The spirit of adventure, after dallying around elsewhere for quarter of a century or so, had found its way into Peter's make-up, and if the simple truth must be told, Peter felt more pleased with himself than he had for a long, long time!

"I'll skip along, now, see about the armor, and get an extra mask for you, Mary," said he. "You get down to the flat about eight, if you can, and if I'm not around, don't bother waiting for me.

"Just go across with Nellie and get into the thick of the fun, and—oh, yes. You'll dress in Sally's little boudoir, I presume. I'll leave the check for your bag on her pincushion, where you can't miss it.

"Don't forget to slip it into your pocket or your pocketbook when you find it. Good-by, Mary—until this evening."

He bowed sedately and strode away.

Upon Mary Emerson descended sudden panic, coming like a flood of invisible ice-water and sending a terrific shudder through her. She must not go—not with Peter, not to an affair like that in a town like this, where people would recognize her and tell Billy later—not, particularly, when she had promised that same William to sit at home and avoid society!

"Oh! Oh, Peter!" Mary called weakly.

Peter did not hear. Nor, being outwardly at least a person of extreme decorum, did he think of turning to wave a final good-by to another man's bride. Head up, he turned the corner and vanished.

Indoors, Uncle Arthur gathered himself for the ten-thousandth attempt to loosen lath, plaster, and everything else with a new, terrible, blasting snore.

## CHAPTER VII.

### TOWARD EIGHT THIRTY.

FROM this point, for a little, it becomes necessary to trace the progress of three different persons along their several paths. Let the first be Peter.

Peter hummed as he turned the corner. He was, in truth, a very devil of a fellow; he was luring another man's wife to a masked ball! That was all, to be sure; but the fact that Peter, of all people, was doing it, was what made the thing exciting.

More than this, he had managed a tremendous joke upon his alert partner; approaching Mary's house, it chanced that Peter had seen Thomas Henning in the act of leaving, and if Peter's mental processes

were slow there was a deadly accuracy to them now and then no less than astounding. Hence Peter hummed.

There were two phases of the case which, on more prolonged thought, caused Peter to cease his humming and take to frowning for a while. The first was Bill. He dismissed Bill very quickly. If Bill did hear about the matter, as doubtless he would sooner or later, he would have had ample time to cool down before returning to Braydon.

The second phase was Sally, and her Peter did not dismiss with quite the same celerity.

He would tell Sally all about it, of course, as soon as she came home; that is, he assumed that he would tell Sally. And Sally would laugh—or he assumed that she would laugh. Or perchance he might not mention the matter.

Peter was wise beyond his years. It was, all of it, innocent to the last degree; yet women, and brides in particular, are likely to turn unreasonable and feel that they own a man, body, soul, thoughts, and everything else; and since Mary meant to leave long before the unmasking, there was a wonderfully fine chance that even a year hence not a soul in Braydon, save his sister and himself, would ever know that she had been present.

If he made the request in just the right way, Nell would say nothing. Yes, it might be better not to advertise Mary's attendance. Peter had settled this point when he turned into Bond Avenue and headed for the tall Cypria Apartments, his home since marriage.

It was a fine place for one so recently in dire financial straits; Peter grinned complacently every time he entered it, with its near-onyx foyer and its rugged floor and bronze elevator doors at the rear. He grinned in the fifth floor corridor, too, at his own door and at that other, across the hall, where Thomas Henning would live, two weeks hence, when he had married Dolly Hayes. Tommy, in fact, was spending his nights there, now, amid the countless new luxuries.

But it was lonely in Peter's actual flat! The rooms, cozy with Sally's brilliant pres-



ence in them, gaped and echoed without her. Some little time Peter looked about moodily before he abandoned his original idea of dining from the ice-box on cold roast beef, with warmed-over spaghetti and mince pie. It was too infernally still; even dressing for the ball, he fancied, would be a quick operation in this bereft habitation.

There was telephoning to be done, however. Peter sighed and settled by the little stand; and presently:

"Hello, sis!" said Peter.

"Oh, hello, Pete!" said his sister.

"Going to-night, of course?"

"Of course!" said Miss Noble.

Her brother cleared his throat.

"Oh, Nelly," said Peter. "Will you give us a hand this evening?"

"Us?" queried his sister. "Is Sally back?"

"No, but Mary Lawson is, for a few hours, and she wants to see the show to-night, incog. I offered to see her through and to the train—had to do it, you know.

"If you'll come down here when you're dressed, about eight, I'll leave the key with the superintendent down-stairs, and you can give Mary a hand. Eh?"

"She's coming to your flat, Peter?" his sister asked sharply.

"It's a respectable flat, Nell."

"I know, but—you're foolish, Peter. All you boys were crazy about Mary, and I don't blame you. But—er—don't you see that things are different, now? You're married and she's married.

"Yes, you're horribly foolish, Pete. No man ever got anything but trouble out of trotting around with another man's bride."

A slight chill ran through Peter. This, to be sure, was the sentiment he had hurled so sternly at Thomas Henning. Then he smiled, tartly and impatiently.

"I'm not luring her from her husband or eloping with her, or anything like that," he said. "I'm offering her Sally's room to dress in, and my company afterward as far as the station. Will you come down and lend a hand?"

"I'll have to come, of course. That's all right, Peter; I'm glad to do it, so far as the thing itself goes. You understand that. Only—yes, I'll be down."

"And will you bring an extra mask for Mary? A big one?"

"If I can find one."

"Fine!" said Peter, with a faint sigh of relief. "Get the key and go up when you come. Don't wait for me, by the way. There are three or four tickets here, and I'm going to have dinner out and get a costume from Kratz and several other things.

"It's just possible that I may dress down there. Good-by, and thank you, Nell."

"Oh, you're welcome enough. But—good-by, Peter."

Peter rang off. So that was settled—not quite as happily as possible, because Nelly might have spared the unpleasant comment, but settled nevertheless. Peter glanced at the clock and quickened.

He had been roaming around here longer than he had fancied; it was dark now, and the minutes were speeding. Rather hurriedly, he looked up the number of Kratz, the costumer.

"Kratz!" said Peter briskly. "Mr. Noble speaking. You've got a suit of armor down there. I want to hire it for this evening."

"It's hired already," said Kratz's sour voice, which seemed sourer than usual.

"The armor?" Peter cried, disappointed.

"The armor."

"Well—er—have you got something else good for me?"

"There's no finer line in the State than I'm carrying, Mr. Noble."

"Then—save me something good. Will you be sure to do that?"

"Sure," said the costumer, and rang off without further formalities.

And that, too, was settled, although not at all as Peter wished. That armor, standing in the window last week, had caught Peter's eye, and—oh, to the deuce with the armor! Anything else would do as well, of course. Peter ceased his frowning, considered for another five minutes, and finally picked up Mary Emerson's bag and departed.

He would dine down-town and check the bag afterward, and then to the Kratz establishment.

So Peter dined alone and rather gloomily, and it is pleasant to note that most of his thoughts were of Sally. This was his first full day without Sally since the night of their wedding. He sighed over his soup and considered his roast sadly; a full five minutes he gave to moody contemplation of his pudding before touching a spoon.

These things take time. With his check Peter awakened again to the need for a little speed, and walked quickly down Braydon Street to the station—into the station and to the little check-room, with its open shelves and its elderly custodian—and finally out of the station again, with the check for Mary's grip in his pocket, and the grip itself standing on the lower shelf in there. Now to see just what might be had in the way of a freak suit of clothes for the evening, and then—

"My—Lord! Mr. Noble!" cried a gasping voice, and two shaky hands clutched Peter's arms. "I've found you at last!"

In the center of the station platform, Peter stopped short, jerked back his arm to lay the maniac low with one trusty fist—and then relaxed again, because it was no maniac at all. This, to be sure, was merely Standing, the superintendent of their precious factory at Holbury, thirty miles down the line.

As a rule, immaculate was too mild a word to apply to Standing; at present, however, perspiration streamed down his dusty countenance, his necktie vibrated just beneath his right ear, and his hat was jammed crazily on the back of his head.

"Just—in time!" he contrived breathlessly. "I've been—hunting all over town for—you! The—down train goes in three minutes!"

"What of it, Standing?" Peter asked.

"Now, listen, boss! I came up here on the three five, to see if I couldn't stir up those empty cars and get 'em down to the works to-morrow. I called up Jim Royce at the works about half an hour ago and—he told me! The dam's gone out, up the river!"

"What?" shrieked Peter.

This story will be continued in next week's issue of the ARGOSY-ALLSTORY WEEKLY, the consolidated title under which both magazines will appear hereafter as one.

"Gone! Smashed to bits, just as I predicted! Royce says the factory 'll go before midnight, and—oh, you've got to come down with me, Mr. Noble! You've got to come back on this train with me; you're the only real engineer connected with the works, and you'll have to do what you can to help save the—"

Here he stopped for sheer lack of breath. Peter, dead white, clutched Standing's arms, much as Standing had clutched his own.

"Say, are you trying to tell me that there's a chance of the factory being washed out of existence, just when everything's running so beautifully?" he choked.

"Royce says she's bound to go, boss, unless we can turn the flood or find some other way of protecting the foundations. You know how that old shack's built. It's no place to load down with expensive machinery when—here's the train!"

"I know how she's built, Standing; but she's all the factory we could afford when we bought her!" Peter said bitterly. "Get aboard!"

"D'ye think—"

"I'll do my thinking when I get there!" stated Peter. "Get aboard!"

He pushed the superintendent up the steps of the day coach and swung after him. He dropped into the seat beside Standing.

This threatened structure, be it remembered, was the one building on earth which stood between newly married Peter and a wonderful chance of returning to that hideous genteel poverty and the joys of a completely fresh start in life.

And now there was every likelihood of the rotten old foundations being washed away, to send ton upon ton of fine machinery crashing down to wreckage—and while it may have been unflattering, considering the newness of Sally as a wife and the abundant charms of Mary Emerson, the certainty remains that long before the train had crossed the city line of Braydon, so far from remembering either them or the evening's ball, Peter had forgotten the very presence of woman in the world!

# Teach: Pirate De Luxe

by C.J. Cutcliffe Hyne



THE first of C. J. Cutcliffe Hyne's series of stories detailing the adventures of "Teach: Pirate De Luxe," was printed in the ALL-STORY WEEKLY, issue of May 22. One will appear in each of our issues throughout the summer months. While each story is complete in itself, all are concerned with the adventures of that likable blackguard, Captain Teach—descendent of the notorious pirate Blackbeard—and charming Mary Arncliffe.

## IX—THE ASSYRIAN CAME DOWN

**M**Y dear prospective father-in-law," wrote Teach to William Arncliffe.

"Please do not send table silver as a wedding present. Mary and I will have plenty, mostly Georgian. I have taken a good deal of trouble in collecting it. We have some really fine pieces.

"I am sorry you are burdened with the foreign secretary of the Irish Republic. He was very thoroughly embalmed when you took him over. But I gather he and his kind all live by suction only. Tie a label round his neck, addressed Dublin, and give him in charge of the guard. I understand that is his usual method of travel.

"Make the keeper take you on the Slieve Mohr beat, and you will get some birds. Refuse any cooked meats from Mrs. Keeper, except roast mutton, or you will regret it. Her treatment of baked grouse

merits the Chinese Heavy Death. Donald's Harris tweed smells to heaven when it is damp, and the peat fire in the drawing-room always smokes. But stick to the little gun room on the left (where I have smashed the window) and you will love Balnamurchan as much as I did.

"How do you like Sir Godfrey Kneller's portrait of my great grandfather now appearing in the picture papers? The black beard from which he takes his *nom de guerre* is rather a startler. How do you think I should look in one?

"Your affectionate prospective son-in-law

"E. TEACH,

"(Admiral I. R. N.)"

William Arncliffe grinned rather wryly as he read this epistle, and had half a mind to fling it on the peats that smoldered on the hearth. On second thought he folded it, and put it in his pocketbook. A letter in

the handwriting of Admiral Teach might have its value for future reference.

Then he, and his two burly friends and the disgusted police officers, went south by fast motor-car, and left the foreign secretary, much bemused by whisky, to do exactly as he pleased.

Teach had cleared out in some sort of an American motor-boat that the local policeman said did fifty knots (and was probably making at least a real forty), and a motor-boat's wake is a poor trail to follow.

"Gone to join his infernal pirate ship outside," was William Arncliffe's conclusion. And then he dropped his head in his hands and muttered to himself: "My poor Mary!"

Two days later he was in London, having journeyed to that metropolis for the purpose (as he expressed it) of gingering up the Admiralty. Teach, though William Arncliffe did not know it, was in London ahead of him.

Now Edward Teach might be the complete pirate, but he had all of an Englishman's objection to being robbed himself. From newspapers that came to his hand he discovered beyond doubt that Mr. Alfred Fraustenheim was appropriating fees that were rightly his, and, at considerable risk to himself—and to the neglect of important business—he proposed to make things hot for Alfred.

To this end he traveled up to London on an ordinary third-class ticket, nobody letting or hindering him, and put up at that well-known Bloomsbury hostelry, the Wivenhoe, which specializes on the six shilling bed and breakfast.

As the name of Mr. John Yockenthwaite might have leaked over into publicity, he registered as Beckermonds, James, British subject, Liverpool, and requested to be called at eight-thirty next morning. But as a point of fact, he did not need calling, as he was out all night on what one may call a reconnaissance.

I believe history records that the late Edmund Kean once mouthed Shakespeare on the stage that is now called Perry's, and "the house was illumined with wax" for the occasion. Perry's has carried many

names, and seen many vicissitudes. It has been a movie house. It has staged grand opera (for a season that lasted three days). It has even sheltered a circus. But it came to its own in '14 when Alfred (or, as he then was, Adolph) Fraustenheim, by means of financial methods that no chartered accountant could follow, eviscerated the whole interior, refurnished it, and hit an instantaneous winner in that sparkling revue "What Ho!"

"What Ho!" put on exhibition shapelier legs, and frocks with less top and less tail than any other revue running, and tired warriors after a flushed three-day leave from the front, assured other warriors in the muddy trenches of Flanders that "What Ho!" was completely it. "What Ho!" got talked about in *Pictures from the Front*, which is the high note of advertising.

Mr. Adolph—I beg his pardon, Alfred Fraustenheim bought diamond cuff-links, and improved the brand of office cigars from genuine British to Havana-banded Just-as-good-ados.

But Herr Fraustenheim, after the manner of his kind, took little thought for a play to follow on. "What Ho!" utter rot that it was, was a gold mine. Why gamble in futures? He had two hundred plays in M. S., awaiting consideration, somewhere in the dusty drawers of his office, and had never read one of them. As he wisely said, who could foresee the tastes of a fool public that would suck down "What Ho!"

Still, when Teach's M. S. reached him, it did not take any wizardry to spot a winner. "It's bound to be hobeless tosh," he said to his lady secretary, "but that doesn't madder a gondinental. Here's the bodanza I have been waiting for. We'll gif it them before they are sick with that fool revue. Read the play, mith, and try and knock it into some sort of shape. You are a smart girl, mith, and onnerstand the English right along.

"Do it correct, and it 'll mean a fifer to you. I'll tink out who to play. If there isn't a bathing scene, wride one in. We must haf leks. I'm under contract mit one of my backers to give Connie Chesney a chance with hers.

"Don't blush, mith. Connie's are tam

fine leks, and you know it as well as the box-office does."

Possibly Teach's play was "hobeless tosh," but, personally, having sat it out twice, I should class it as quite passable. Its construction was crude, but there were new ideas, it had a fresh outlook, and there was nothing anemic about it. It was good red-blooded stuff from start to finish.

Moreover, Fraustenheim had the sense to pick actors and actresses who fitted the parts naturally, and not mere persons with names who thought they could pretend to be otherwise than nature had made them. But of course the great pull was Teach's name, which just then, to the annoyance of the politicians, and the soap people, and all the other advertisers, was the most talked about in the known world.

Any play however bad, written by "the Pirate," would have had a tremendous reception. The welcome, therefore, that a reasonably good play got, reached the terrific. So naturally the first night at Perry's Theater went with a bang.

In a week Fraustenheim was running a second London company at the Splendid. In a month he had three provincial companies on the road playing to tremendous business. In the United States his brother, William J. Howard, had put Teach's play on at the Courtier and Finkelbaum's in New York, and was starting off touring companies as fast as he could find casts. Spain, Germany and Scandavia were buying up territorial rights. The South African diamond interests (who are always in at all the theatrical hot things) were kicking themselves at missing the chance, and cabling wildly over creation for an option on Teach play number two. France alone said the play was not art, and refused to touch it.

In the meanwhile, all profits were trickling into the pockets of Mr. Adolph Fraustenheim, and Captain Teach felt justifiably annoyed. The papers in the Wivenhoe's smoking-room were full of the play's boom when he arrived in London.

One could not get away from it. Nobody worried about the title of the thing. It was merely Teach's play. In fact, from the title, Teach would not have recognized

the thing at all. He, Teach, had christened it "Cromwell's Scoop." Fraustenheim had sent it forth on its career of conquest as "Putting Salt on His Tail."

Perry's theater is built, as all students of London know, on land that has been continuously occupied by buildings for fifteen hundred years, and the present edifice has been improved, and altered, and added to at frequent intervals, but has never been entirely pulled down. The well-known front of Perry's faces a reputable street. The back pushes its way into a warren of the worst dwellings in London.

Teach rummaged among the flats and cubby-holes at the back of Perry's, found a spot that attracted him, bought out the tenant for two pound notes down, secured a month's lease for another two, left a bag as token of possession, and went back to the Wivenhoe for breakfast. When he returned later the bag had been stolen.

Acting on this hint he laid on a carpenter who made additions to the outside door, and added a Yale lock said to be unpickable, except by lengthy siege. He then furnished the room with a packet of sandwiches, a crowbar and a portmanteau, and a copy of the *Week's Pictures*, and settled down as a householder.

That issue of *Week's Pictures* had given Sir Godfrey Kneller's "Blackbeard" as a whole-page, three-color block, with a fine screen and good machining. It was a very creditable specimen of the printer's art, but the great-grandson of the subject regarded it with critical eye.

As the possessor of Sir Godfrey's original painting, he strongly resented this reproduction from a very second-rate copy being labelled as "From the portrait hanging in the pirate's own room on the Littondale."

He pinned up the copy from *Week's Pictures* on his frowsy wall, and glared at it evilly. As a connoisseur of pictures, the incident rasped him in his tenderest place.

Then he took off his coat, rolled up his shirt sleeves, and handled the crowbar like a man who has a heavy job ahead of him and knows how to do it.

"My gee-willy-cums!" Mr. Fraustenheim was saying just then in his private

office in Perry's. "Did you run your eye over the boogings before you handed them across, mith?"

The lady secretary showed a gleam of the dentist's art. "The box-office sent up word they'd never done such magnificent business in the whole of their experience. They're sold out for two months. The Splendid phoned up just now they're full for five weeks. But of course that's a larger house."

"No blooming author's fees to pay, mith."

"Er—no—I suppose not." The secretary adjusted a rich mahogany corkscrew curl over her right ear. "Of course there's that agreement you had me send. But he could hardly come here to claim."

"Now, I ask you, mith, is that a risk worth underwriting?"

The secretary shrugged the diamonds in her ears. "It's all right to laugh. You're a man, and brave. But if it was me I should be awfully frightened of that man Teach."

"I seen his photo in *Week's Pictures*. I tell you, Mr. Fraustenheim, it quite give me a turn. But perhaps, that's because I'm a lady myself, and not so brave as some."

"I should never have guessed it of you, mith," said the manager handsomely. "Juth take dis letter, and put it into grammar as you go along."

The secretary corrected a manicurist's error on her left thumb, picked up notebook and well-gnawed pencil, and commenced the morning task of translating Mr. Fraustenheim's sentiments into commercial English as she is wrote in the highest theatrical circles.

Correspondence, however, flowed slowly. The germ of distrust which his decorative secretary had planted in Mr. Fraustenheim's mind refused to be dislodged, and time after time, to the detriment of continuity in the morning's work, he harked back to the black menace of Teach.

"You better docket all notes relating to the man as Admiral Teach, not captain," he observed once. "It 'll please him."

The secretary eliminated a nasal gleam with a deft powder dab.

"Now, that's real brainy of you, Mr.

F. Understating a man's title is enough to madden anybody."

"And I was wondering about the bills, mith. What about announcing the play as by 'Admiral Teach,' instead of calling the poor fellow 'Pirate'?"

The secretary admired eighteen inches of her silken legs.

"My idea is, that would have come in as a useful stunt to liven up the second edition when we are ready for one. But that's not yet. No signs of senile decay in Salt for the next two months, if I'm any judge."

"You are that, mith, besides being a very handsome lady. But I think I'll do it all the same. Calling the fellow admiral will embarrass the government, and I've got my knife into them good and hard for the way they're being unkind to dose poor ducks in Mittel Europa. What I thay is, we've licked 'em, unt now we should be good sporthman, unt get trade going with them again."

The secretary looked round the angle of her magnificent nose.

"M'yes," she said. "I'll do whatever you wish, Mr. F., and of course nothing you say to me ever goes outside the walls of this room."

"Eh? Oh—ah, yes. You're a good girl, mith, and a mighty able girl, and that green blouse you're wearing thuits you no end. Buy another like it, and enter it up to me."

Mr. Fraustenheim's waistcoat heaved with a sigh, and his magnificent watch-chain clanked gently.

"We'll hang up the 'admiral' stunt for the present, and let the present bills stand. But I'd have liked—it almost theems like failing in one's duty not to. Just take this letter to the electrician, mith. Well, you tell 'em in your own language and say that last lot of carbons they supplied for our arcs flare like tallow. Thay we know they were British made. Thay they ought to be getting the good Elberfeldt ones shipped again by now."

"I'll have all this lot typed for signing by lunch-time," said the secretary a little later. She prinked an opulent mahogany tress with a skilful pencil point. "I wonder, Mr. F., if you could do without me this evening?"



"Your best boy taking you out somewhere?" asked the manager with heavy archness.

"As a point of fact, he isn't. I thought I'd just have a cup of tea and some pastry at my digs, and go to bed early. I feel as though I'd a headache coming on."

Mr. Fraustenheim protruded a heavy forefinger, and wagged it slowly. He followed this with a sidewise hand wave, palm uppermost.

The secretary understood. "Well," she said, with a defiant throwing back of fine green shoulders, "you're a man, Mr. F., and made different. But I tell you straight the thought of that Teach and the way we're doing him, gets me where my dinner goes. And I've got a sort of feeling—"

"Yeth?"

"Something might happen mighty sudden and quick. I wish you'd pay up, Mr. F."

The manager heaved himself laboriously to his legs, and stamped a heavy patent-leathered foot:

"Mith, you leave me to my part of the busineth, and you attend to yours. You're a mighty clever girl in many ways and a mighty handthome one. You decorate any office you're in. But you don't onnerstand the high finance, and that's a fact.

"Besides, it's no use hunting trouble before it arrives. Now I ask you, has Teach ever put in a claim? You just show one side of your teeth, and mighty handsome teeth they are as all the photographers know. You know he hasn't. When we hear from Teach we'll handle him. Until then, subject dropped.

"Got that? Well, have those letters typed, and I'll bring along a box of candies if I think of it."

The manager lumbered out of the room, and shut the door noisily after him. The secretary repenciled her jetty eyebrows most carefully before the office mirror, and then sat before the typewriter and gave a full orchestral rendering of the Hailstone Chorus.

That night, beside the announcement of "house full" outside Perry's and the Splendid in London, the Sceptre in Manchester, McTaggart's in Glasgow, and the Crown in Bradford, was pinned a cablegram from

New York which reported that the Cour-tier, the Nightgarden, and Finkelbaum's of that city had been forced to turn away patrons. The Metropolitan in Cincinnati, the Home Topics Theater of New Orleans, and the Big House at San Francisco had also flown the "house full" on the previous night.

Teach read the cablegram in the rain outside Perry's Theater behind his big black pipe, and very much wished he could do his proposed turn at all these houses of amusement simultaneously. But not seeing his way to this, he slipped down narrow, wet by-streets to the squalid flat he had rented, and made preparations for a one-night performance that would be exclusive to Perry's.

He came on at the end of the second act and he brought with him Mr. Adolph Fraustenheim. To be precise, he was towing that eminent manager by his large and fleshy right ear.

Teach was an exact reproduction of Sir Godfrey Kneller's Blackbeard, barring, of course, the neat cartouche of the gallows, and the man swinging from it in the top right-hand corner. He had the same savage black eyes, the same long, clean-shaven upper lip, the same black spade-shaped chin beard and whiskers.

His heavily gold-braided blue coat, heavy hanger, blue and white striped seaman's petticoat, and heavy bucket-topped boots were exact to the Kneller picture. So was the scarlet handkerchief round his capable head. So was the broad leather belt with its big silver buckle.

In only one point did he deviate from the record of 1718. The Blackbeard of that date had carried flint-lock pistols in his belt, with heavy metal butt. His grandson of 1919 had replaced these by three grim, serviceable .45 automatics. He carried a fourth specimen of the same caliber in his spare hand.

"If all people in this theater," he announced, "remain seated exactly as they are, nobody will be hurt. If anybody moves out of his seat there will be casualties."

There was a rather startled murmur of acquiescence.

"I have come here, ladies and gentlemen, at considerable personal incon-

venience. In the first place I wish you to spread the news that the papers—*Weekly Pictures* in particular—have taken an unwarrantable liberty with my name.

"They say the portrait of my great-grandfather which they publish is by Sir Godfrey Kneller, and is reproduced from the one in my possession. It is nothing of the kind. The portrait I have, now hung in my cabin on the *Littondale*, is Kneller's original. It has never been photographed.

"Presumably a bad copy of Sir Godfrey's picture has come to light, and they have made their reproduction from this. If they had owned up to the details, I should have made no complaint. But when they let it be understood I am not connoisseur enough to know an original when I see one, well, there I kick, and I want you, ladies and gentlemen, to see that kick is registered in the proper quarters.

"Hi, you sir, at the back of the pit. Sit down. That's right. Don't try and do anything heroic a second time, or I will shoot you through the head without another warning.

"In the second place, my lords, ladies and gentlemen—didn't see you before, Raisghyll. Sorry—in the second place, this camouflaged Hun that I've got in tow has been swindling me. Or, to be more precise, he is swindling a charitable institution I am interested in.

"This play that I am breaking into at this moment is making pots of money all over this country and about ten other countries. The author's fees amount to thousands weekly. I can assure you I have not seen one penny of them. Isn't that so, Hun?"

Mr. Fraustenheim, with the ends of his dignity to maintain, for a moment said nothing. But Teach looked so indescribably menacing, and gave his ear such a savage wrench, that in reply to a second demand he interrupted with: "Ach! I am sorry. But I did not know your address."

Teach turned back to his audience. "You see? Now I personally am a rich man. I am Admiral commanding the navy of the Irish Republic and my service pays most liberally."

"Ha, ha!" said Lord Raisghyll from his

stall. "Good man, Teddy. Come along to Brown's after you're through, and I'll stand you a war supper. We've the chef back."

The pirate nodded to the invitation. "I'm afraid Brown's Club must do without me till the political situation is a bit clearer. As I say, I am a rich man, and these fees are of no special importance to me. But I have promised them to the Sailors' Mothers' Guild, and I do not intend to see these ladies defrauded. If any body of women on this earth need pity and help, it is sailors' mothers.

"They cannot prevent their sons going to sea nor becoming the brutes they often turn into. So the author's fees from this theater and the *Splendid*, and all the places in New York and elsewhere that run my play are to go to the Sailors' Mothers. Got that, Fraustenheim?"

"Hell! You are tearing my ear from my head. Ja, I get you!"

"And you will deliver the goods?"

"Ja."

"Then sign this declaration that you will do so. Good." Teach twisted the document into a ball and threw it to his friend in the stalls. "Raisghyll, you are the straight man, and you don't like aliens. I appoint you trustee in this matter. See you get all that's owing."

"Right-o," said Lord Raisghyll. "Sorry you won't come and sup. But if you think you're too busy, hadn't you better tear yourself away?"

One woman laughed. All the rest in the audience sat in frozen silence.

"There is no hurry," said Teach. "The British government, to which I suppose you are alluding, is not likely to interfere with me without due and ponderous consideration, and as they did not expect me here this evening, there is no possibility of their acting in the matter before this day week.

In the mean while I want to thank all you people, and the New Yorkers, and the rest of you for the splendid reception you have given to my play.

"A lady whose opinion I value, read the play and said it was bosh. You, by the way you have welcomed it, lead me to think it is the reverse."

With which final splash of vanity the pirate kicked the portly Fraustenheim into the orchestra, bowed to the audience, walked to the wings, and was lost to sight.

The interrupted play went on. It takes a lot to upset actors and actresses from their mechanical routine. But for the rest of that evening it went flatly. The theater attendants telephoned, and in due time police arrived.

Once there, they acted. They ringed London round with alarms, and searched every train, and boat, and motor-car that left the radius.

Teach traveled north in a clanking lorry laden with empty biscuit cannisters. He was driving himself, and he thanked a plain-clothes officer for warning him that some news was on hand that the notorious Teach in a motor-car was somewhere on the road behind him.

"I'll slue my old bus athwart the road if I hear him coming," said Teach.

It is worthy of record that those unerring sleuth hounds, the London police, found the Blackbeard kit and the private entrance to Perry's only two days later. Nothing ever escapes them.

U U U U

## SONNY

To J. S. W.

BY MARGERY GRAHAME WELLES

I LOVE him 'cause his face is never clean.

His finger-nails are always filled with grime.

He thinks that it's not boylike to be seen

Around the house, except at dinner-time.

He scoffs at girls and thinks they're just a bore.

He blushes tearfully when one's called a "Beau."

He lets me kiss his ear—just once—no more,

Then rushes off. But oh! I love him so.

The neighbors think his presence is a curse

And hope into a galley he'll be hurled.

I know that to all others he's uncouth;

To me he's like an oak-leaf yet unfurled.

When on a Sunday, dressed in suit of blue,

He struts off manfully to the church with dad,

He knows I watch him till he's lost to view,

So stumbles. Dear self-conscious little lad.

But when at night I tuck him into bed,

So sweet and clean, tired out from all his fun,

If no one's 'round he lets me stroke his head,

And I thank Heaven for such a perfect son.

# Moors End

by Jeannette I. Helm

Author of "The House of the Purple Stairs," etc.

## PRECEDING CHAPTERS BRIEFLY RETOLD

CARLOS BRENT received a letter from his great-uncle, Gregory Deane, who lived alone in a house called "Moors End," on the island of Seetucket, off the Massachusetts coast, asking him to spend two weeks there. The old man was about to make his will, and intended to leave his entire estate to either Carlos or his second cousin, Shirley Deane, who was to stay at Moors End later.

That afternoon Carlos left New York for Seetucket, on a Sound steamboat. Aboard he became acquainted with a pretty girl, and that night had a tussle with a hard-looking character, apparently an ex-prize-fighter, who had tried to break into her stateroom. On another boat, bound for Seetucket, he learned that the girl was Shirley Deane, his rival for their great-uncle's fortune. Carlos liked her, and perhaps would have withdrawn from the contest but for an invalid half-sister, who needed his help financially. He and Shirley agreed to be "good" enemies, but each was determined to get the fortune.

Gregory Deane lived alone—except for a man-servant—in a handsome house in a lonely part of the island. As he and Shirley approached the house Carlos thought that he saw the ex-pug hiding behind a tree, but could not be sure. The house was deserted; the front door unlocked. The man and the girl entered; found food; made themselves comfortable in comfortable rooms. Some time in the night Carlos heard some one descending the stairs; following, he saw a man attempting to force a safe in the lower hall. Carlos attacked the fellow. While they were struggling Shirley called to ask what was the matter. As he answered Carlos tripped and went down; something heavy crashed down on his head—darkness!

## CHAPTER IX.

### RECOVERY.

I OPENED my eyes to feel Shirley's hand patting cold water on my head, and heard Shirley's voice saying as if from a long distance: "Do you feel better? Please speak to me, Carlos!"

It was rather pleasant to lie there with my head on the soft, yet firm something that supported it; with Shirley's face, anxious and tender bending over me, and I was in no hurry to end it. Instead, I shut my eyes—and stupidly—for my head felt sore and dazed—tried to recall just how I had got there.

I was nearly off again in a pleasant dream, when two strong young arms began shaking me violently. This wasn't half so pleasant, so I opened my eyes and took my head off the firm thing, which I now realized to be Shirley's knee.

"I was getting happy and now you've

spoiled it," I said reproachfully. "I thought I liked you, but now I know I don't!"

"Oh, you are so provoking," cried Shirley half vexed and half relieved. "I found you lying here unconscious—and I've had the hardest time to bring you to. I thought you were killed and now—

"I've come alive to spoil it."

"Of course, I don't mean that," snapped Shirley. "Do you suppose I want to be left alone in this spooky house?"

"Well, it's something to be wanted even for that," I murmured, holding my now aching head. "Gee, he must have given me a good wallop, my skull feels cracked!"

"I'm sure it is," said Shirley drily. "Who hit you and where is he?"

"That's just what I'd like to know. If he's somewhere around I'd better hunt him out." I tried to get up, but my head beginning to swim, I sat down promptly.

"He's not anywhere around—if you

This story began in the All-Story Weekly for July 10.

mean the man," observed Shirley calmly. "The whole floor is empty."

"How do you know?"

"Because, after I came down and found you, I went all over it with a light."

"You?—Alone?"

She flushed at my uncomplimentary emphasis.

"There was no one else to do it. I'm not a coward—if that's what you mean."

"I should say you weren't. It would take all my nerve to investigate those rooms alone."

"Well, I didn't go through the parlors," she confessed. "But I locked the doors and took the keys, so if he is in there, we will find him to-morrow. The back door was wide open, so I'm sure he got in that way."

The big back door was, in fact, ajar; and, as I didn't remember having closed and locked it myself on my last trip downstairs, I decided that Shirley was probably right.

"If he is in there in the parlors, we'll let him stay until morning," I remarked. "I think it is most probable that he skipped out the door. I'll see he doesn't come back that way."

"Who was he, and where did he come from?" asked Shirley, as I got up still unsteadily and shut and bolted the door.

"Blest if I know. I heard some one creeping down-stairs, and followed to see him trying to open the safe in the library there. When I surprised him, he put up a fight, and I was just getting him down when my foot caught on the rug and we fell together. He managed to get on top and must have slugged me with something. That's all I know till I woke up on the floor there."

I purposely said nothing of her calls to me, which had momentarily diverted my attention, and so led to the man's escape. She had acted promptly and bravely, and it was in no possible way her fault.

"What did he look like?" asked Shirley with even more anxiety than she had shown over my bruised head.

"I don't know, I didn't see his face. He was tall and rather thin, a middle-aged man, I should judge."

Her anxious expression relaxed visibly, although she still looked puzzled.

"It couldn't have been—Uncle Gregory?"

"Uncle Gregory! What on earth would he be doing, trying to burglarize his own safe at dead of night? I'm prepared for anything happening in this house, but I draw the line at that."

"I suppose it would be a foolish idea, but I wish I knew where Uncle Gregory was."

She looked so wistful and pretty as she stood there in her loose pink kimono, her bare feet in some sort of moccasins, her coppery hair trying as usual to escape from the two long braids into which she had arranged it for the night, that I felt an absurd desire to put my arms around her and comfort her. But in spite of her youth and smallness, there was a strength and independence about her that made me carefully restrain myself to a cousinly pat on the shoulder.

"Don't worry any more about it to-night. I mean to go back to bed and sleep off this confounded headache."

The blow had indeed given me a racking headache, and I was almost willing to let a dozen robbers creep up and down-stairs, so long as they didn't disturb me. Shirley was instantly all sympathy.

"Does it hurt so badly? Come upstairs and I'll tie it up for you in a cold compress and a towel. I've got some headache tablets in my bag you can take."

I declined the latter, but accepted her offer of the cold towel.

"A good sleep will mend me up. I expect I won't be a pretty object for a day or two, but luckily the blow caught me in my hair, where it doesn't show much. Now go back and finish your own sleep. Nothing more is going to disturb us."

She smiled pluckily, although the anxious lines about her mouth did not relax. I heard her lock her door, and then went into my room and did likewise. Five minutes later I was in bed and asleep.

My predictions were correct. Nothing woke me up but the pale sunshine streaming in across my bed and the sound of a tapping on my door.

"Carlos," said Shirley's voice as I still lay gathering my wits together, "get up. It is nearly nine o'clock and I'm going down to find some breakfast."

"Wait ten minutes," I called, scrambling out of bed, "and I'll go down with you. Please don't go alone."

It was only seven minutes later, however, when I joined her in the big hall. In spite of the night's adventure, she looked fresh and rested, and I, too, was equal to anything, although my head felt sore and bruised. Shirley laughed as her eyes fell on the blue-black mark that ran down one temple and cheek.

"You look as if you hadn't been 'handled with care' on your way here. How do you feel?"

"Like eating the rest of that bacon I cooked last night. I'm terrible hungry."

"So am I. How different everything looks in the sunlight. It's almost cheerful."

Everything was indeed decidedly less forbidding than it had appeared by night. Although there was an uninhabited look about the house, it did not feel—deserted; and in spite of the heavy furniture and over much mahogany trimming, there was an air of cheerful commonplaceness that contrasted sharply with the sense of lurking mystery, that I still could not quite shake off. It was as if an ordinary cheerful person had suddenly put on a mask of tragedy, and was quite as much surprised by its effect on him as was the rest of the world.

I mentioned this to Shirley and she nodded.

"Yes, I feel it, too. It's just as though the house had been intended for a comfortable, middle-class happy family with lots of children tumbling about, and hadn't got over wondering why it had come to this. How on earth did such a house with all the air and trimmings of a town mansion ever happen to be built on this desolate end of the world. It belongs to an old New England street and not these wild moors."

We were in the kitchen now, getting breakfast at a great rate. We had still met no signs of life except the black cat which was divided between its distrust of us as

intruders, and its hungry longing for the milk with which Shirley was trying to tempt it.

"I think I heard that Uncle Gregory was once engaged to a very lovely young girl; and that he built this place for them to live in. She jilted him and he has lived here ever since with only his old servant, Peter. I wonder if he has still kept his wedding clothes and feast, as old Miss Habisham did in Dicken's story."

Shirley was looking thoughtfully down at the cat which had finally conquered its fears was drinking nervously, as though half starved.

"I think I know who the girl was."

"Who?"

"My grandmother."

I whistled. Here was a complication that might work in Shirley's favor. She evidently read my thought.

"I didn't think Uncle Gregory had ever forgiven my grandmother—and he hates my father. He is only considering me because I've got the family name."

"Is your father still alive?" I asked after a moment's hesitation.

"Yes, but I have nothing to do with him now."

Her curt tone gave warning that I had touched a guarded spot. Quite evidently there was no love lost between father and daughter. I remembered vaguely that he had been a promoter of shady enterprises, leaving always a bad record behind him; and I regretted having stupidly intruded on what must be a painful memory.

~Fortunately, the coffee boiled over at that moment, and the subject was dropped. After we had finished breakfast and after putting everything in order, we took counsel again.

"Do you suppose Uncle Gregory has really gone away and left us here?" asked Shirley. "It's the strangest thing I've ever heard of. He might at least have left some word for us. I've half a mind to go back on the boat, to-day."

"I would but for this—" I slapped my pocket, and Shirley laughed ruefully.

"I'm in the same case. It's provoking to be so helpless; we might just as well be on a desert island."



"Let's explore the extent of our domain, then. Perhaps we may find rescue outside."

## CHAPTER X.

### UNCLE GREGORY.

I PUSHED open the back door, as I spoke, and stepped out with a feeling of relief. A broad uncovered veranda ran along the back of the house, and steps led down from it into one of the prettiest gardens I have ever seen. It was laid out in the formal Italian style, with white marble seats and yew bordered walks, that all converged to a slender marble temple before which stood an old sun-dial.

The white flower beds, in which some of the hardier flowers still bloomed; the high white latticed wall that enclosed all; and the yellow tiled roof of a tall outbuilding in the back gave such a Florentine effect that one almost forgot the ever-present roar of the surf, and the gray dunes that reached almost to the height of the wall on every side like menacing waves. It was only when I faced about and looked at the house itself, that I got the same shock of incongruity that I had felt inside.

It was all, house and garden, like some hastily-painted scene, which, lacking the necessary actors, looked both cheap and unfinished. There was no attempt at a period; windows and balconies were stuck in, anyway; and the resulting jumble did not possess the usual charm of such growth, but gave a feeling of confusion like a person not sure of himself. To crown all, a big square cupola had been jammed on and seemed to weigh down the whole structure.

Everything was sadly in need of paint and varnish, and I reflected uncomfortably on what I had heard of Uncle Gregory's parsimony.

The pale sunshine, which had waked me, had been sucked into dark, puffy gray clouds, and a savage wind was tearing at the flower stalks and rattling the shutters. It was all rather depressing, and I turned to my companion to read the same thought in her eyes.

"There's a bad storm coming," I said.

"The sea sounds pretty high. I expect we shouldn't be able to leave in any case."

Shirley had just opened her mouth to answer when she stopped abruptly, her eyes staring beyond me. Surprised, I wheeled in the same direction and stopped, too.

A man was standing on the steps of the veranda smiling down at us. He would have been tall but for a slight stoop, and his face was lined with the wrinkles of old age. There was nothing old or senile, however, about his sharp black eyes which watched us with a steady alertness in which there was a disconcerting touch of amusement. Straggly, white hair and fiercely jutting eyebrows contrasted strangely with these eyes, and a large powerful nose was contradicted by a small thin-lipped mouth and obstinate chin.

Altogether it was a face of marked opposites in which promise had been annulled and threats restrained. Yet it was not negative—rather, positive with something I could not quite determine. A black skull-cap and a faded dressing-gown completed the costume of this singular person who could be no other than our redoubtable uncle. Although I had not seen him since I was a very small boy, I seemed to remember the formidable tufts of white hair, and alas, equally formidable, malicious humor I now saw glinting in his eyes.

As we remained stupidly dumb, he shot a quick glance at each of us in turn and said in a voice unexpectedly melodious:

"Well, nephew; well, niece, have you been making yourselves at home?"

It was typical of the effect he produced on us now as he had in our infancy (Shirley confessed the same to me later) that although Uncle Gregory had given us no welcome whatever; had even absented himself on the very day of our arrival, so that he might reasonably have been expected to offer some word of explanation, it was we, instead, who were made to feel guilty and hastened to offer an apology.

"Why," I stammered. "When did you get back?"

"Back?" he echoed. "To the best of my knowledge I've not been away from here all night!"

He seemed grimly amused, while I stared

dumfounded. So he had been in the house all the time!

A harrowing idea occurred to me. If he had heard all our conversation we had made a fine start in his disfavor. But if he had been in the house, why on earth hadn't he appeared during the fight with the burglar? We had made noise enough to wake the dead.

"I hope we didn't disturb you, uncle," said Shirley, coming to the rescue. "We tried to be as quiet as possible."

"Nothing could have disturbed me last night except what is said to have happened to the walls of Jericho," he returned coolly. "I had one of my bad neuralgic headaches and was obliged to retire early and take a dose of chloral to gain some ease. Once under the influence I knew nothing until this last hour."

"But, indeed," he added with a sudden old-time courtesy, as charming as it was unexpected, "I am sorry that I could not be present to welcome you and I trust you found everything you required. My old servant, Peter, was unfortunately called away by family illness, but I told him to provide amply for you both before he left, and to leave a note for you on the table to that effect. I cannot even see to write when I have one of my blinding headaches."

Remembering the beans and the small pot of rice, I smiled inwardly at Uncle Gregory's idea of ample; but at least he had given a very good and simple explanation of his absence, and had made us welcome after his fashion.

I only wished I could feel more at my ease and less like a shy schoolboy. In his uncannily intuitive way, he may have felt it, for he advanced down the steps, and, holding out a hand to each of us, said in a delightfully modulated voice that was a continual surprise to me: "Welcome, Carlos, welcome, Shirley; I am very glad you have come."

His glance lingered for a moment on Shirley, and I wondered if he was recalling in her the girl he had loved and lost. I was probably overtired, and the tension of the approaching storm was making me abnormally sensitive, but it seemed to me,

in spite of the words and the courteous warmth, that no real welcome showed in the steely black eyes that rested on us.

Shirley smiled prettily, however, and I hastened to assure him that we were both very glad to be there.

"We are due for a storm, I am afraid," he said as a gust tore the leaves from the trees and flung them about us. "They come up very suddenly here and are very severe. Perhaps we had better go in."

As we followed him into the house, the big black cat scuttled by us, paying no attention to my great-uncle's call.

"He is a wild beast," observed Uncle Gregory. "He will never make friends with me although I like cats. Peter is the only one he tolerates." He turned on me suddenly. "I hope you don't smoke. I thought I noticed an odor of tobacco when I came down-stairs. It is a filthy habit and I abominate it."

I groaned inwardly, for my pipe and I were old comrades, and I dreaded to lose its comfort. Yet I was here to win Uncle Gregory's good-will if possible, and what did a temporary deprivation mean, after all? I caught Shirley's eyes fixed on me, with a little mocking challenge in them, and it decided me.

"I have smoked, but I'm not very keen about it. Of course I won't smoke if you prefer not."

"I do prefer," he snapped, and his voice had changed from its modulated sonority to a cracked snarl. "Peter will insist upon having his pipe in the cellar, but I don't wish any vile tobacco in my house, do you understand?"

"I do," I returned stiffly. I could give up my smoking, hard although it might be, but I didn't enjoy being lectured like a school-boy. Uncle Gregory paid no attention to either my tone or my words; he turned and went swiftly up-stairs, leaving us in the hall below to stare at each other. Shirley giggled nervously.

"Pleasing Uncle Gregory is going to involve an exact treading of the narrow path," she observed with malicious emphasis.

"Yes, confound him," I growled. "And I'm dying for a smoke already. I expect

I'll have to bribe Peter to let me share the cellar with him."

"Poor Carlos," she laughed, "I see where you acquire a halo."

"Don't laugh too soon," I returned dryly. "Uncle Gregory doesn't seem running over with human kindness. He may make you give up candy."

"I won't, so there," she defied. "I'll go down in the cellar with Peter and eat them."

We both laughed, and felt better.

"Seriously, Uncle Gregory isn't my idea of an old dear," she said. "How does he impress you—smoking aside?"

"As a man who intends to have his own way and usually gets it. He would be a bad person to oppose. On the whole I think I prefer him when he snarls than when he so urbane."

She nodded.

"I feel the same way. Isn't it funny, though, how mysterious and gloomy every thing was last night?—I mean Uncle Gregory's strange absence, the deserted house and everything—and now it has all been explained so naturally—"

"Has it?"

"What do you mean?"

"We don't know yet who the man was that tried to open the safe last night."

"I'd completely forgotten him. Do you suppose you ought to tell Uncle Gregory about him?"

"I've just been wondering that myself. [It seems to me he ought to know; and yet one never can tell how he would take it. Who could it have been, anyway? There can't be many people around here who would dare to attempt open burglary on an island where everybody knows everyone else and it would be so hard to get away. Do you think Peter was having a go on his own?"

"You can never tell. I really think uncle should be warned."

"All right. I'll tell him when we meet again. Think I'll walk down to the town, would you like to come?"

"I'm afraid I'm too tired, for I didn't get much sleep last night. I think I'll take a book and curl up on my bed."

I left her selecting a book from the

surprisingly well-stocked and up-to-date shelves in the library, and putting on my heavy sweater let myself out of the house. It was already beginning to mist, and the high wind made it anything but an ideal day for walking, but I felt restless, and to tell the truth, longing for a pipe.

I had promised not to smoke in the house, but outside on the dunes no one would be the wiser. The house oppressed me, somehow, and I wanted to clear my brain and think out some problems. I struck off toward the bridge, and once out of shelter of the house, found walking in the heavy wind difficult for even a strong man. The wind hit one with a thud of a board and from where I stood I could see great yeasty waves tumbling landward.

The steady roar of the surf combined with the shrieking of the wind, gave one a sense of being at sea, and as I buffeted my way onward, I began to wonder if we were well provisioned for the voyage, in case our section of the island should take a fancy to cast adrift. Seriously, it would certainly not be possible for the delivery wagon to come out on a day like this, and it would be a hard job to carry back much stuff oneself over the sandy road from the village. I hadn't any money to buy anything with, but I decided to head for the town, partly from the desire for a little more human companionship than Uncle Gregory was likely to afford.

As I reached the edge of the island I stopped, however. Where the bridge had been the night before there was nothing. The crazy old structure had given way under the wind, and only a few jagged ends of board on either side showed its former place. Between me and the other side tossed white breakers, so high and so rough, that even a good swimmer would have found it dangerous to attempt them. The islet *had* cast off from the mainland after all, and although it was not likely to drift away, we were as completely marooned as though at sea.

I stood for some moments watching with fascination the waves crashing in through the opening from the sea, and rushing by to the other side. I was wondering, also, if the man I had nearly caught in the house,

had made his escape before the bridge went down; for if not, he would still be somewhere on our part of the island. The thought was not pleasant, so I decided that I would explore the islet before saying anything to Uncle Gregory, and set out, keeping close to the water's edge with the intention of beating the low scrub oaks and bushes of the interior when I had finished the outside.

The islet was not more than half a mile square, shaped somewhat like the end of an egg, and the house was set in a hollow at one side of it. In a little cove, which had a rough sandy beach, several bits of wood were floating, that looked as though they were the wreckage of some large power boat.

Even there the sea was dashing up in great combers, but I managed to salvage a piece and found it to be exactly what I had supposed; part of the gun-wale of one of the kind of large motor dories they call Hampton boats. The man had probably come in this boat, but if he left after I met him, his boat must have been wrecked by the high seas and he himself drowned.

That would dispose of his still being on the islet, unless his boat had been driven loose while he was in the house. This was possible, so I continued my search. It was not an easy matter to examine every probable bit of cover in the teeth of a howling wind, and although I did my best, when I was through I did not feel entirely sure that there was no one except ourselves on the islet.

I lit my pipe and getting in the lee of a rock, smoked and thought it over.

My uncle had contrived to ruffle me more in ten minutes than any one else had done in my whole life, and it did not promise well for the future. I wondered savagely whether his headache might not have been assumed to try us out, and if he had been spying on us and laughing at our plight all the time. It might be his idea of a good joke!

Only, in that case, he must have heard the racket made by the burglar, and it was beyond possibility that he would have remained quietly in his room during it. Besides, his eyes undoubtedly had had the

worn look of one who has recently suffered. Somewhat reluctantly, I gave up that theory. One thing was certain; I was not favorably impressed by my Uncle Gregory, and I was afraid lest my feeling might be returned.

Confound him and his money! If it were not for Ethel, he could keep it and be hanged!

## CHAPTER XI.

### FIRST BLOOD FOR CARLOS.

IT was getting on toward noon when I shook out my second pipeful of ashes and started for the house. I had no great desire to return to it, but there was small comfort in huddling behind the shelter of a rock on a raw windy day—even for the sake of a smoke.

Then, too, there was the question of dinner or lunch, for Peter was away, and I could not let Uncle Gregory get the meal for us. I might have spared myself any anxiety on that account, however, for, just as I entered the kitchen, I almost ran into him coming out with a tray.

"I always have my meals by myself," he observed in a melodious voice. "It is a little habit of mine which I fear I cannot break—even for guests. I also eat in my own room.

"There is a sufficiency of everything in the storehouse—you will find the key on the kitchen table—and whatever you and Shirley feel like preparing for yourself, you are at liberty to take. Make yourselves quite at home."

Judging from the well-laden tray he was carrying, he did not intend to starve himself; and as I remember the scanty supper he had left for us the night we came, I mentally added another mark to the score of my growing dislike. I kept my thoughts to myself, however, and having found the key where he said it was, proceeded to dig up the makings of a fairly satisfactory meal.

There was, indeed, a good supply of both fresh and canned food, and a quarter of lamb hung in a sort of large ice-box, together with several hams and flitches of bacon. There were plenty of eggs and

vegetables, and the only thing lacking was fresh milk. With condensed milk in plenty we could make shift to do without it; but our friend the black cat would probably have to suffer. We shouldn't starve, at all events, and I was glad, for these storms, as I knew, sometimes lasted several days.

When I had knocked together a fairly appetizing dinner, I went to call Shirley and met her coming down-stairs, still yawning.

"Oh, why didn't you call me before?" she exclaimed when I told her all was ready. "My watch had stopped, and I slept so hard I didn't know what time it was. Now, you've done all the work."

"Never mind, I'll let you help in the wash-up. I'm proud of my cooking—so mind you do it justice."

"I certainly will. That stew is as good as any I've ever tasted. Really, Carlos, you are wasted on reporting."

"A great chef lost to the world," I laughed. "Uncle Gregory is some little cooker himself. I met him staggering upstairs with a loaded tray just now. He has a fancy for feeding alone."

Shirley made a grimace.

"I'm glad of it."

"So you also find Uncle Gregory rather trying. Has he issued any edicts to you?"

"No, but I keep being afraid that he is going to. There's something about the way he looks at one that makes one feel—"

"Exactly. I know I'm going to have a hard time before I win his affections and the money."

"You certainly will," said Shirley calmly, "because I'm going to get both of them first."

"Just for that I won't tell you what I discovered this morning."

"Not the man?"

"No, but the way he must have come." Seeing her interested face, I relented, and told her of my morning's exploration and the remains of the boat I had found in the cove.

"What makes you think the man is still on the island? He has probably gone to the village."

"He can't, the bridge has been blown down."

Shirley stared.

"Then we can't get to the village either?"

"Not unless you are a better swimmer than I am; or the storm goes down."

"It has no intention of doing that for a while," observed Shirley. "Listen to that," as a thunderous gust shook the house. "What shall we do for food?"

"There's plenty, I looked to see."

"Why, we are regularly marooned. It's quite a lark! "But," she added with the same anxious look I had seen before on her face, "if the man didn't get off in his boat he must be somewhere on our part of the island."

"I don't think he is. Of course, I couldn't comb the entire place, but I looked pretty carefully. Don't bother about him, we sha'n't see him again."

Shirley wiped the dried dishes with an absent air and did not answer.

"What shall we do now?" I asked when everything was in order. "Do you feel like taking a stroll, or a blow, rather?"

"Yes, I'll be glad to get out of this house. It oppresses me, somehow, with it's air of forced cheerfulness. Don't you feel as though something—"

She caught herself up as if she regretted her words. I nodded.

"Yes, I do, but I think it's only the storm, and the general atmosphere of a recluse. The house isn't lived in, only occupied, and it feels it. A normal, happy family here would make a great difference."

"Come, get on your warmest things and take a walk with me. It will do you good."

She came back presently looking very picturesque in a dull yellow sweater, with a big green velveteen tam on her head. She was surprisingly strong, for though the increased wind buffeted her vigorously she kept on steadily beside me. I found walking with such a companion far pleasanter than when alone in the morning, and was indiscreet enough to tell her so. She flushed, but more with annoyance than embarrassment.

"I don't like compliments from you. It isn't playing the game."

"But why?" I protested rather hurt. "Even if we are here to fight for some

stupid money, we don't have to hate each other. And I really mean it."

"Do you?" she observed drily. "You have a suspicious gift for pretty speeches. They slip out too easily not to have been often practiced."

"I'll begin practicing the other kind if you like," I returned, nettled. "I only draw the line at putting poison in your food, or otherwise showing that I realize we are deadly rivals."

"Don't be absurd," she laughed. "I didn't mean that, either. Only if you are too—nice—I may forget my own evil intentions."

"Oh, if you put it that way I'll do my best to set my worst side forward. The trouble is I just naturally can't help being—nice—to you."

"You are absolutely hopeless. Come, show me the place where you saw the pieces of the boat."

"It's right around this corner. Better take my arm, the wind is strong here."

But she had already clutched it with a sudden exclamation.

"Look! there's the man there now."

A dark figure was indeed standing on the brow of the headland looking down with intent gaze at the tumbling water below. For a moment, I thought he was the man of the night before, and had already laid my plan of capture. Then he moved, and I realized that it was our uncle.

He could not see us without turning completely around, and as we came nearer, I was struck by the expression on his face: a fierce burning anger that seemed directed at some one or something on the beach below. He made a sudden gesture with his hand, whether of defiance or despair I couldn't tell, and wheeling abruptly, came toward us. As he saw us, his face swiftly resumed its usual watchful half-mocking expression.

"You are having a pleasant walk?" he asked in his suavest manner. "The view from here is quite fine."

As locomotion against such a wind could hardly be called pleasant, and the only view to be had was one of slate-colored breakers against an equally gray sky, I took it he meant to be sarcastic.

"I can't say either appeals to me to-day. We've come out to see if we can find any trace of the man who tried to open your safe last night."

"Open my safe?—Last night?—What do you mean?" he snapped, dropping his suave manner at once.

"Simply that some man tried to get your safe open, after we had all gone to bed. I tackled him, but he knocked me senseless and made off. He ought to be somewhere around still—if he didn't get away before the bridge went."

"Why didn't you tell me this at once—it is very important?" he snarled. "It seems to me, young man, as if you had some reason in not informing me."

"I don't know what you mean," I answered, keeping my temper with an effort. "You did not give me much time to tell you anything this morning—or much encouragement either. Shirley will tell you that we both intended to speak of it, and that we have been searching the island for the man."

"Ah, so you were in it, too! he observed turning from me to Shirley. "And did you see this man, also?"

"No, I only heard a scuffling, and came down to find Carlos lying senseless on the floor."

"Ah! (He had a highly unpleasant way of saying that little word.) "Then it seems that I must apologize to you, Carlos."

I nodded rather ungraciously. After putting the worse construction on my statement, it was not soothing to have him make amends on the strength of Shirley's corroboration.

It was quite evident that he did not love me, and by now I heartily reciprocated; but I could not well afford to show my feelings—so I didn't speak. Something in my angry silence seemed to please Uncle Gregory, for he smiled grimly.

"I don't think we need to worry over another night visitor. I always lock up carefully, and there are no valuables in the safe."

"Haven't you a dog?" asked Shirley. "They told us in the village to look out for it."

"Oh, he died long ago, poor old Jack."



I keep up the tradition—I find it useful. Really, this wind is getting a trifle unpleasant, I think I shall go in."

We followed him, for we, too, were getting more blown about than was comfortable. I expected he would go at once to his room, but he waited in the hall after we were all inside and the door shut.

"I should like to hear a little more about yourself, Carlos," he remarked suavely. "If you can spare me a few minutes' chat and Shirley will not mind my taking you off, we will go in my study and talk."

Of course I assented, and Shirley declared rather hastily that she was going upstairs to write a letter. As Uncle Gregory passed his arm quite pleasantly through mine and led me to the door of the library, I could not help giving Shirley a teasing look of triumph. She laughed and nodded, but there was a half uneasiness in her glance that nettled me.

Surely she could trust me to play fair with her? If she didn't—well, that was her loss.

## CHAPTER XII.

### A CRY IN THE NIGHT.

**I** FOLLOWED Uncle Gregory into the room and stood watching him light the fire, for he declined my services. The leaping flame made a great difference in the room, changing its austere gloom to something nearly approaching comfort.

Uncle Gregory drew a chair up before the blaze and motioned me to do the same. He did not speak for several minutes, but sat gazing into the fire while I watched him speculatively.

He must have been rather a handsome man in his youth, I thought; his features were good and the light of the fire brought out the strength of the nose and softened the rather mean mouth. Yet I felt instinctively it would be difficult to like him, or to win his liking. When he spoke, however, it was with unexpected interest.

"You know why I have asked you here?"

"Why, yes," I answered surprised. "You told me in your letter."

"Quite so, but I would like to hear from your own lips so as to make sure whether you understand."

"You asked me here to see for yourself whether I would make the right heir for your property," I returned bluntly.

"Exactly—and Shirley?"

"She is here for the same purpose," I answered half impatiently—surely there was no need of making me go over all this. He read my thoughts with instant perception, and held up a thin hand.

"Have patience. I have good reason for asking. Has it ever occurred to you that it is nearly twenty years since we have met, and although there is some slight family resemblance in you, it might be easily possible for you not to be my nephew, Carlos Brent, after all?"

"Now, don't get angry!" as I half rose from my chair with an exclamation. "I do believe you are what you say, but I put my questions in order to be sure. Living alone here as I do, I have grown cautious as to whom I entertain. You understand, don't you?"

His manner was so frank and unexpectedly charming that I felt my annoyance subsiding. After all, it was quite natural that he should be suspicious of newcomers; and I put it down to the eccentricity of his secluded life.

"Of course. Here are my credentials, anyway."

I handed him his own letter, and he glanced over it with a slight smile. He was so changed, somehow, and so friendly, that I felt emboldened to speak out.

"Uncle," I said, "You may have already decided that you prefer Shirley. In that case I may be wasting my breath. But in any event, I'm telling you frankly I don't like the idea of competing, as it were, with Shirley for your money. It's cold blooded enough as it is—"

I paused, half expecting that he would go off in one of his sudden angers, but he continued to smile at me in a friendly way.

"What would you suggest, may I ask?"

"Simply that if you really want to leave us your money, why not divide it equally between us? I should be perfectly contented, and so I know would Shirley."

"Have you asked *her*?"

"No, but I'm sure she would feel the same about it."

He smiled. Although it was still friendly, I did not like that smile. Anyway, I felt sure that I had already spilled the beans, by my frankness, and it didn't much matter.

"I don't know but that your idea is a good one," he observed, much to my surprise. "It is certainly very chivalrous. I'll think it over and speak to Shirley myself about it."

"For obvious reasons it will be better if you say nothing to her of our talk just now. I want to sound her delicately on the subject, and I wish her mind to be absolutely unbiased. You understand?"

I said I did, and promised not to mention the matter. He seemed much pleased and held out his hand.

"Your feeling in the affair does you much credit, Carlos, and it may be the best solution. I have always had a prejudice against dividing an estate, however; and I should have to feel very well satisfied with my future heirs before I could consent to splitting up the little I have."

"I am not a rich man, and what would be sufficient for one to live on would prove rather slim for two. You understand?"

He had a sudden way of saying this with a quick outshoot of his hand that was very disturbing. I said again that I understood, and he nodded as if satisfied.

"I must prepare my supper now," he said as he rose. "And then you and Shirley had better get yours. I trust you find sufficient food in the storeroom. Peter usually lays in a good supply, and it is as well, for we are practically shut off from the world until the storm stops."

"Tell me," he added suddenly, "Did you see this man who broke in last night? Well, what did he look like?" His eyes fixed on mine anxiously.

"No, I only caught glimpses of his figure as we struggled, but I thought he was a man of about forty, tall and thin with gray-brown hair. I couldn't see his face."

"Ah!" His anxious look deepened into a spasm of almost fear. "He must have come, after all—in that boat!"

"He? Who?"

His face swiftly resumed its usual sardonic repose.

"Visitors are not very welcome here—especially so at night. We must guard against another such attempt."

He turned and went up-stairs, leaving me to wonder at his words. It was evident he had some idea as to who his visitor was and that he feared him, I had no doubt.

I was sure our night visitor was not the ex-pug, but could not rid myself of the idea that he was somehow connected with it. It was a queer mess but promised some excitement. Decidedly we were not going to be as dull at Moors End as I had feared.

I determined not to tell Shirley this, at least she needn't be worried by any more fears. Going down-stairs I found her already in the kitchen. She was sitting by the table, peeling potatoes, and I stopped for a moment, unnoticed, to watch the picture she made; the light from the lamp overhead falling on her tawny hair and her spirited little face bent in entire absorption over the pan in her lap.

I liked girls that could do things, and do them with heart and soul, even if it was only potato paring. The black cat sat uneasily on the hearth watching her, ready to spring away at the first advance; but evidently longing with all his timid soul to climb up on her lap and be petted.

"Cinderella, hard at work?" I laughed, as she looked up and saw me.

"Oh, I like it. This is the only cozy room in the house. It seems honest, somehow; I'm sure Peter must be a good old soul."

"Not like our respected?"—I jerked my head in the direction of up-stairs.

"Well, I didn't mean that exactly. But don't you feel a certain—reserve—about Uncle Gregory that holds you at arm's length?"

"He would make a good diplomat; he doesn't say everything he thinks. What shall we have for supper? I saw an inviting ham outside."

"Just the thing, and bring in some eggs, will you? I'm going to make a custard, just to show that you're not the only cook."

She wouldn't allow me to do anything more than fetch the ingredients, and set the table; and went about the job of custard-making with an efficient little air that was vastly amusing. I sat on the settle and made advances toward the cat, which for some strange reason was more inclined to be friendly with me than with Shirley.

"He is evidently unaccustomed to women," said Shirley. "I suppose Peter is his only friend; he seems to dislike uncle, and he regards my skirts with deep suspicion."

"He suspects that the female of the species is more clever than the male. I expect he is right."

"She's too clever anyway, to be taken in by those worn-out theories, that you have in common with every man," retorted Shirley. "Just because I'm small you think I've got to be fed sugar-candy speeches, and teased about my accomplishments."

"That's a nasty one and unfair, besides. I think you are capable as well as plucky. I'm only trying my clumsy best to get you on my side. I remember the deadly efficiency with which you pulled my hair."

"Oh, you always escape," she laughed, "and I'm too grown up now to try hair-pulling. There now, if you don't say that is a nice custard I—well, I won't let you have any of it."

"It's a perfect creation. Hand it here."

We had a jolly supper and lingered over it. As Shirley had said, the kitchen was the only homelike place, and we found it's warmth and coziness very pleasant. I told her stories of my newspaper experiences, and the black cat was emboldened by our laughter to creep up on my lap, where he poised most uncomfortably with one paw caught in my coat and one leg hanging over to balance himself.

"I won't tell on you," said Shirley, as I drew out my pipe and shoved it back with a sigh. "This is near enough to the cellar to be proper."

"You're a good sport," I laughed and lit up thankfully. "I'm just needing a pipeful to top off this good supper. I'll chance Uncle Gregory."

"It would be a pity, though, to lose his favor just now when he is honoring you."

I shot a glance at her. Her tone was dry, and both it and the words were unlike her.

"You mean by giving me a private audience? I don't even think you would object to the subject matter of it."

I chuckled, and Shirley reddened.

"That wasn't fair of me, I'll admit. I'm sorry."

"But you don't have to be fair," I hastened to say. "You warned me you wouldn't be."

"Yes, but I didn't need to hint you weren't. I know *you'd* always be fair," Carlos.

The words were so unexpectedly flattering that I was taken by surprise and reddened like a fool. Shirley hadn't wasted any polite speeches on me before, and I didn't know how to take this one.

I was very glad she had said it, however, and gladder still that I had deserved it in my talk with Uncle Gregory. She caught my confusion, and also blushed furiously, with the result that we both stared helplessly like a couple of idiots.

"For them kind words, many thanks," said I, trying to make a clumsy joke. "But don't be too sure. I may steal down at night and burgle the safe yet. Seriously, I'm proud you feel you can trust me. I hope I shall always deserve it."

Something in my tone made her color still more until she was one glorious flame, head and face.

"Of course you will. And now don't you think we'd better go up-stairs? I haven't caught up on my sleep yet—and I mean to get ten hours to-night—if this wind will let me. How it blows!"

"I don't think anything will wake me to-night," I yawned, "but if you feel nervous, pound on your door and I'll be on hand."

She laughed and put out the lights and went up-stairs. It was blowing hard, and for some minutes after I had climbed into bed, I lay listening to the wind.

Now it would tear savagely at my windows and casement like some animal trying to force an entrance; and then it would go away sullenly to some distant side of the house to repeat its efforts there. Tired as

I was; I could not sleep at once; my brain was teeming with all the happenings of the day; and chiefly, I must confess, with Shirley's unexpected testimonial.

I reflected comfortably that she would have even a better opinion after Uncle Gregory had told her of my wish to be co-heir with her. It would simplify matters, and still leave us the friendship I so desired. I was just dropping off to these pleasant thoughts when I was startled wide awake.

Across the hall from me I could hear, in a sudden lull of the wind, a cry, first long drawn out, then quickly choked!

### CHAPTER XIII.

#### THE CHANGELING.

**I** THOUGHT at once of Shirley, and, springing out of bed, ran to her room.

"What is the matter?" I cried. "Are you hurt?"

"No," she answered through the door. "Who screamed?"

Then in a lull of the wind I heard another choking gasp, this time from my uncle's room. With a bound I was across the hall and turning the knob of the door. It did not yield, and I beat vigorously on the panels with my fists.

"It is I, Carlos," I called. "What is the matter?"

No one answered, but I could hear distinctly the sounds of a desperate struggle going on behind the locked door; shuffling feet and the thud of an overturned chair. In desperation I put my shoulder to the door, but it was very strong and resisted all my efforts.

Perhaps murder or violence was being done in there; I must get in somehow. Suddenly there flashed across my mind what a man had once told me; that a kick would often force the stoutest door where mere pressure would fail.

I was barefooted, so I ran back to my room and hastily put on my shoes. When I came out Shirley was standing at the entrance of her door, looking very pale.

"What is it? What are you going to do?" she cried.

I had no time to answer; I balanced myself on one leg before the door, and with the other delivered a smashing kick close to the lock. The door creaked, shook, and a second and even more vigorous kick drove it open, causing me to tumble in after it and land most undignifiedly on my hands and knees.

I picked myself up and looked around. By the light of a small candle flickering on the mantel I could see the signs of a fierce struggle, as evidenced by overturned chairs and a table swept bare; but apparently there was no one in the room. Then a faint gasp caught my ear, and I caught sight of my uncle leaning against the farthest corner of the room, his hand to his throat. I sprang to his side.

"Uncle, are you hurt? What has happened?"

He feebly waved aside my offered help.

"I am not injured; luckily you came in time, or he would have choked me to death."

"He? Who? Where is he?"

Uncle Gregory pointed toward the window which I now saw stood wide open.

"He escaped that way when he heard you coming."

"I'll go after him," I said, making toward the window; but my uncle stopped me.

"He has gone by now; you can never find him in this storm. It is only a short drop to the balcony below, and quite easy to gain the ground from there. That was how he came up and surprised me."

I stuck out my head, and could see enough to realize that his words were true; then I closed down the window, for the icy wind made me shiver, and returned to my uncle, who had sunk down into a chair.

"Who was the man that attacked you?" I repeated.

Uncle Gregory made a curiously helpless gesture.

"I do not know. I had no time to see him clearly. I was preparing to retire, and had just put out my light and lit the candle to place beside my bed and read for a while—I sometimes fall asleep while reading, and a candle is safer than a lamp—I had placed it on the mantel in order to see

better while I wound the clock, and had hardly begun before some one sprang on me from behind and caught me round the throat.

"I struggled desperately to twist around and free myself, but he had the advantage, and I only managed to utter one scream before he choked me. Then, fortunately, when you knocked, it seemed to frighten him, and he loosed his hold and made for the window.

"I grasped him around the waist, and tried to hold him until you came; but he turned and choked me again until I was obliged to relax my grip, then he made his escape; the rest you know."

"But surely you must have seen his face? What did he look like?"

"Could you see much of a man's face when he was behind you, choking you?" asked my uncle dryly. "Besides, he had a black silk handkerchief over the lower part. I only know he seemed about middle age and exceedingly strong and wiry."

"It's the very same one!" I exclaimed. "The man who was trying to open your safe last night. What fools we were not to remember to look in the parlors to-day!"

"Why the parlors?" asked Uncle Gregory quickly.

I told him of Shirley's having locked them the first night, and our forgetting to search there the next day.

"He must have been hidden there all the time," I exclaimed, "and waited until we were asleep before getting out. Of course, it was a simple thing for a man who can open safes to force a door."

"But why did he come in by the window, then?" asked Shirley, who had been standing in the doorway listening to us.

"My lock is, or was, a good one," answered Uncle Gregory dryly. "Carlos found a way to open it—but the burglar could hardly hope to get in that way."

"I'm afraid I have spoiled your door," said I, looking at it ruefully, "but when murder may be going on one has to get in the quickest way."

"It was well thought of, and I owe you my life, Carlos. I thank you."

He took my hand and shook it warmly. I didn't feel at all like a hero. I was be-

coming conscious just then that pajamas and shoes are a light costume for a winter night, and that, already, my teeth were chattering. Uncle Gregory saw this with his usual quickness.

"You are freezing, boy. Put on my coat and take a drink of this," handing me a flask of whisky which he took from a small cupboard.

I accepted both the drink and the coat gladly, and felt better.

"Now we had best all go to bed," continued our uncle. "I, for one, would be glad of some sleep."

I couldn't help admiring his coolness; he might only have been disturbed by a mouse instead of having been nearly strangled.

"Sleep!" cried Shirley. "I couldn't possibly close my eyes with the feeling that that man is wandering at large. He may creep back in the house again."

"I'll make sure he isn't there now," said I. "Have you such a thing as a flashlight? A pistol would come in handy, too."

"No; but I will go down with you and hold the light," offered Uncle Gregory. "That poker over there would make a good weapon."

He was evidently no coward, and I set this down to his credit. Together we explored the whole lower part of the house, and found all the locks as usual, even the bolts undrawn. All the fastenings were new and very strong, and I couldn't see how any one could easily have got in without assistance from inside. I said as much to my uncle.

"I have good reasons for wishing to feel secure," he replied briefly. "There are some people on this island, mostly foreigners, who have very few scruples about property rights."

He was evidently determined not to let me know that he suspected who his assailant had been, and I did not press the point. I drew my own conclusions, however. We reached the upper hall again, and found Shirley waiting for us there, a trifle pale but calm.

"No, we didn't find any sign of him," I said in response to her look of inquiry. "He can't possibly get in down below, and

I don't think he would try the upper floor again. Besides, your room has no windows on the balcony, if I remember rightly."

"I shall be careful to keep mine closed this time," said Uncle Gregory. "Then I think we shall get some sleep, after all."

Shirley looked doubtful, although she smiled cheerfully. I followed her to her door after saying good night to my uncle.

"Don't be nervous," I whispered. "I intend to camp out here on the sofa by your door. But I really don't think we shall be troubled any more to-night."

"Oh! you are such a comfort, Carlos. You mustn't do it, though—I shall be perfectly safe."

"I intend you shall be. Now, don't argue, for I am an obstinate person, as you ought to know by this time."

"Well, you can have your way to-night; this place gives me the horrors. Who do you suppose the man is?"

"I don't know," I yawned, "and I don't intend to worry about him to-night. He'll probably be blown off the island by to-morrow if this wind keeps up. The house rocks like a ship at sea."

But after I had seen Shirley's door close, and had established myself on the big horse-hair sofa in the upper hall, wrapped in as many covers as I could find, I could not dismiss the subject so lightly.

There was some one that Uncle Gregory feared, that was certain. The new fastenings; the anger I had seen in his face as he had looked at the wreck of the boat; his outburst at me when I told him of the man's visit the night before—all were connected together somehow, and the answer lay in the mysterious man, who, I was convinced now, Uncle Gregory knew.

Surely, after having been foiled in an attempted burglary the night before, it must be a strong motive indeed to lead a man to attempt murder the following night. He must be a desperate criminal, and the thought that he was shut in on the islet, like ourselves, until the storm subsided, was not a cheering one. And the storm showed no signs of subsiding; the wind hammered the house with heavy broadsides until it fairly rocked beneath them.

I decided that sleep was out of the question, anyway, but I was young and strong-nerved, so I knew nothing more until the opening of Shirley's door aroused me.

"Well, 'Faithful Slave at the Door,'" teased Shirley, "I think we can raise the siege now and get some breakfast."

"Did you sleep well?" I asked, sitting up.

"I did. How could I help it with such a protector watching over me?"

"I meant to have stayed awake all night, but I fell asleep, I must confess."

"Most sensible thing to have done. Now, hurry and get dressed; it is nearly ten o'clock. What hours we do keep!"

Gathering my coverings around me, I plunged into my room, where I spent little time in dressing. When I got down-stairs I found both Shirley and my uncle, the latter, much to my secret annoyance, having announced his intention of sharing the meal with us.

"I have been a recluse long enough," he observed genially. "It is time I mended my ways. I hope you both slept well after your night's adventure?"

"I did," I answered. "Unless the wind succeeded in blowing the house down I wouldn't have waked, I'm afraid."

"I think it is moderating somewhat this morning, although the sea is very high. We shall none of us be able to leave the island for a day or two more, though, I imagine."

"Leave the island?" echoed Shirley. "Why should we?"

"No, of course not," he returned rather hastily. "I meant that we should still be cut off from the rest of the island for a time."

"It doesn't matter then, so long as we have plenty of provisions."

"I should like some cream for my coffee," said Uncle Gregory, with a slight grimace. "However, I can stand picnicking for a few days, especially with such pleasant company."

I wanted to ask him if he included the burglar in his compliment, but restrained myself; he seemed bent upon being amiable, and there was no use in spoiling his good intentions. In fact, he exerted himself to be entertaining with such good results that we lingered over our breakfast.

I saw Shirley glance at him once or twice, as though half-puzzled; and I was somewhat surprised myself. Uncle Gregory seemed to be able to change at will from a suave man of the world to a grumpy old tyrant. In this new mood he was very charming, the more so as I caught in him faint glimpses of the mother I had adored and lost so early.

There was only one thing I objected to in this new sociability; I wanted to see more of Shirley, and he made that almost impossible. I did, however, find a chance to whisper to her to come out for a walk with me as soon as she finished making up her room.

"I'll meet you in the garden," I said, "at the little temple, in an hour."

She nodded and went up-stairs.

#### CHAPTER XIV.

CARLOS SPEAKS—IN ANGER.

**I** WANTED badly to smoke, but Uncle Gregory seemed bent upon my society.

At last, in despair, I suggested that we make another search for the man; but he shook his head.

"I don't think it would be safe to leave the house; he might slip in again, and Shirley is alone."

I began to understand now his desire for my society; he was probably afraid of being attacked again, and this seemed natural—although he did not impress me as being at all cowardly. Whatever it was, he had also effectually bound me to the house.

I determined to make a thorough search of the premises and lock up as many rooms as possible, so that in this way we should be at least sure of an uninterrupted night. I mentioned this to my uncle, and he approved of the idea.

"The upper floors you need not search," he said, "since no one in his senses would hide there. There are a great many places in the basement, however, where a man could remain concealed, so it would be wise to look there thoroughly."

Accordingly, I armed myself with a stout cane and proceeded on my search. The house being almost square, there were three

rooms besides the kitchen on that floor. The first of these was the storeroom I had found before, and unless the man could hide under piles of potatoes or in sacks of flour, there was no possible concealment; the second was an old lumber-room, very dusty and littered with all kinds of junk.

I disposed of these two quickly, and went on to the third. This proved to be a sort of bedroom, evidently Peter's, very stuffy and dirty, with a cot in one corner and a jumble of broken-down furniture, evidently passed on from above. I had poked into all the possible hiding-places, and was just turning gladly away, when my eye was caught by a round object lying in a corner half covered with some clothes which my cane had dragged partly off. I bent down and picked it up.

It was a dog's collar, quite large and studded with heavy spikes. Evidently it belonged to the dog of which my uncle had spoken; but what puzzled me was the fact that it was almost new and still pliable. A collar which has been worn close to any animal's neck becomes stiff and hard after it has been long disused, and Uncle Gregory had said that the dog had been dead for some time. I could have sworn that this had only been off a few days. I didn't give this much thought; however, it was quite possible that it had never been used.

I went up-stairs again and examined the parlor doors more carefully. They showed no signs whatsoever of having been tampered with; there were no scratches of any kind around the locks, and I felt sure that any theory of the man's having been locked in there by Shirley was altogether impossible. It seemed absurd, now I thought of it, that he should have taken the trouble to have gone outside and entered by the window when the simplest thing would have been to open the lock of my uncle's door, Uncle Gregory to the contrary. That is, supposing that he had been in the house at all; and that I now doubted.

Where was he now, and how best could we guard against another attempt? That was the problem, and it was a serious one, for I did not fancy any more than Shirley having the dangerous man at large. At all events, hunger must soon drive him into an



even more desperate act, for as long as he was shut out of the house he could not get anything to eat.

Uncle Gregory had scouted the idea of my looking through the top floor, but I determined to leave no possible loophole of escape. The top floor corresponded to the floor below, with the exception that the rooms, instead of being grouped around a square central hall, were on either side of a long, narrow one that ran the whole length of the house.

A spiral staircase led to the cupola, and from there one could get out on to the tin roof of the house. I braved the gale, which was making the windows of the cupola rattle like musketry, and edged my way along the roof until I was just above my uncle's balcony. The wind nearly bent me double, and at times I was forced to lie flat on the tin roof to regain my breath; but I managed, by hanging onto the brick chimney that came out by that corner, to satisfy myself that an agile man might let himself down by a rope to the balcony below.

I crawled back to the cupola and made my way down to the attic, resolved to search every room thoroughly. There were four rooms on each side; the first two of these held the usual rubbish that accumulates in most old houses—broken-down chairs, old trunks, and chipped china. There were several nice-looking bits that I should have liked to examine more carefully, and some old books that looked most interesting, but I resisted the temptation and went on.

The next two had evidently been servants' rooms, disused for a long time, to judge from the thick dust and moldy bedding; two of the rest were entirely empty except for several trunks, and the last two were locked. As these were directly over my uncle's room, they interested me very much.

I bent down and looked through the keyhole. I could dimly make out something that looked like a heap of rugs on the floor, and was straining my eyes to see more when I heard steps behind me. I whirled around to see my uncle regarding me with such a look of mingled fear and fury on his face that for a moment I could say nothing.

"What are you doing here?" he hissed.

"I—I—was looking around," I stammered. "I finished the basement, and I thought perhaps it would be best to search this floor."

My uncle still glared at me, but he controlled himself with an effort.

"These rooms contain my private property, and are no concern of yours. The rest of the rooms are empty, as you see. I believe I told you that any search for the man up here would be unnecessary."

His cold sarcasm stung me more than any rage could have done. His very words were skilfully chosen to put me in the position of having intruded where I was not wanted; and I resolved that, come what may, I would not lift a hand to prevent his being strangled again; even more—I should be half glad of it.

"I am very sorry," I said stiffly. "I thought I was doing you a service in making sure that no possible hiding-place remained for your man, but I won't offend again."

I was turning away when my uncle laid his hand on my shoulder quickly.

"Don't be offended, my boy. I appreciate your solicitude for me very much, but I do not want you to waste your time. Besides, these rooms contain souvenirs very precious to me, and the mere thought of any one spying on them made me angry. You will understand, I am sure."

Of course I said I did, but although the apology was satisfying enough, there was a look in my uncle's eyes that left me still uncomfortable. I was puzzled also by the angry fear there had been in his voice when he first discovered me. He might easily have been annoyed by my poking about, but there was no reason that I could see for fear.

One thing was certain to me now: my uncle knew more about this man than was evident on the surface. Either he was some former enemy of his, or some one who held some secret power over him. In any case, it was some one who knew my uncle's habits so well that I felt sure that the next attempt on his life or property would succeed.

This theory would fully explain my uncle's fear, and I was convinced that it was the right one. It fell to me then to be on

my guard every moment to protect my uncle and Shirley against this mysterious marauder.

All this passed rapidly through my mind as I followed Uncle Gregory down-stairs. He went at once into his room, and I went out into the garden to find Shirley. But there was no one in the wind-swept little temple, that still retained a mockery of summer in its withered vines and its white-marble seats; neither was she to be found among the box-edged walks or in the kitchen, and, annoyed at myself for a queer disappointment, I disregarded my uncle's request and plunged out of the house.

I was sick of all this mystery, and I wanted to walk and smoke. Just above the house was a sheltered spot with a fine view of the ocean, and I made my way there. The first thing I saw was Shirley, her back against the rock, looking out toward the creaming breakers. Her face was turned partly from me, but I could see a look on it of depression and loneliness that made me wonder if the events of the last few days were beginning to effect even her plucky spirits. A sudden wave of tenderness swept over me as I stepped forward and spoke.

"Well, Little Crusoe, here is your faithful Man Friday come to scold you for venturing so far from the house."

She turned her head quickly, and, on seeing me, all expression vanished from her face, leaving it white and rather cold.

"I'm not afraid. I wanted to walk and think—alone."

"Exactly my case; but the man would not be apt to trouble me, and he might you."

"Have you discovered any traces of him yet?" she asked, with an attempt at her usual tone.

"No; but I have made sure that he is not in the house, so far."

I went on to tell her of my search and my uncle's queer behavior about the rooms. She listened with an odd lack of interest, and with no expression whatsoever on her face, so that at last I stopped short.

"What do you make of it?" I asked abruptly.

"It's certainly very queer—the house

knows more than it tells. Oh! I wish we hadn't come here."

The distress in her voice troubled me. I put my hand involuntarily on her arm with a protective touch.

"It will be all right, Shirley. We'll solve the mystery and come back with our pockets full of money."

"I'm not afraid that *you* won't manage to fill your pockets, Carlos."

I dropped her hand quickly. "What do you mean?"

"It doesn't seem necessary to go into details. We both came here for the purpose—as you put it—of filling our pockets."

"I don't like your emphasis."

"You're too sensitive in some ways, and not enough in others."

I caught her by her arm, and my face was as hard as hers.

"See here, Shirley—you must speak plainly. I thought you were above Red Indian tactics—to be friendly one moment and knife one the next."

She wrenched her arm away furiously. "And I thought you were, too; but I find I am mistaken. You are afraid of me; you are content to play safe; to beg my uncle to give you half of his property at least. Well, I'm a better sport than you are—I'll play for all or none!"

In spite of my intense anger, I couldn't help admiring her as she stood there, her head thrown back, her eyes blazing defiance at me; but my own temper was red hot now. So, my uncle had told her, and this was the way she had chosen to read my generous offer! Well, let her think it if she liked—I was too proud to thrust my defense on some one who was so evidently ready to believe the worst.

"Very well; I'll play for any stakes you please. And I'll win this money—and you into the bargain."

I don't know what insane impulse made me add this last. Certainly I had no love for her at this moment; only a primitive longing to see her humbled and at my mercy—but the words fairly forced themselves out.

The shot took effect. She grew as red as she had been white before, and her hands

clenched vigorously; I knew that she was longing at that precise moment to bury them in my hair—and I didn't mind.

"You'll regret that speech," she said furiously.

For reply I only laughed tauntingly as I turned away—but I was beginning to regret it already.

## CHAPTER XV.

### SUSPICIONS.

I WALKED on at a blind pace, for I was furiously angry, as much with myself as with Shirley. The words she had said rankled bitterly, but what hurt me most was the fact that she could believe me capable of such a mean motive. It did not seem to me like what I knew of her, and that, perhaps, was what hurt me the worst of all.

I could not disguise from myself that I was growing much fonder of this little rebellious second cousin of mine than was wise; and I told myself sternly that my wisest course was to put her out of my mind as quickly as possible and devote myself to the business at hand—that of becoming my uncle's heir.

A review of all that I had accomplished to that end in the last few days, however, did not make an encouraging showing. There was an evident lack of sympathy between us, to begin with, and our encounter over the rooms had now increased it. I must do something to overcome this handicap, but what should it be?

I thought of one plan after another, but each seemed more fruitless than the others. I even got to the point of desperately considering the idea of pushing Uncle Gregory into the water in order to save his life afterward; but that seemed hardly the way to win his affection; the water was sure to be cold, and I was an indifferent swimmer besides. Fortunately, the thought of Uncle Gregory's face, if he knew I even meditated such a plot, made me laugh and broke up somewhat the strained condition of mind I was getting into.

I shook myself together sternly. What was there in the atmosphere of this house which made Shirley act so strangely, and

had reduced me to plotting like a veritable motion-picture villain? I must think more sanely, and, to do so, must put aside all these thoughts of Shirley that were only weakening my purpose. There was just one way in which I could be of use to my uncle; I could find this man that was threatening him, and at least drive him away.

With this thought fixed in my mind, I walked around the house, examining it carefully from every possible point. One thing immediately caught my attention—a long covered passageway that apparently led from the kitchen to the stables. I did not remember having seen any door in the lower part of the house that would lead to it, but then I had not been looking for any such door.

Full of this new idea, I hurried around to the house and ran full tilt into my uncle. I eagerly explained my discovery to him, and he listened with his odd little smile.

"That mysterious passage you speak of leads to the laundry and the wood-shed," he observed. "They have both been disused for a long time, as Peter prefers to do our small wash in the kitchen. You can look there if you like, but I'm afraid even the key has been lost."

His smiling manner nettled me; it seemed to say that I was a romantic boy and might as well be humored. Confound it! I was only trying to protect him against a dangerous, clever adversary; and here he was, either laughing at my efforts or scolding me for intruding on his sacred souvenirs.

"I'll take your word for it," I answered as carelessly as I could. "Shall you join us at lunch?"

"I shall give myself that pleasure. Where is Shirley?"

"I think she is out walking."

Uncle Gregory looked at me keenly. Evidently he caught the insincere note in my too careless reply.

"Have you talked with her?"

"Yes?"

"Ah, then I'm afraid she has told you herself how she feels in regard to your offer?"

"Yes; she left me in no doubt on the subject."

My uncle sighed. "I'm afraid she does

take a very different view of your generous offer than I had expected. She seems to think that you are actuated by mercenary motives and wish to—"

"To play safe," I interrupted hotly. "She told me that herself."

"Too bad, too bad. I had hoped that, in spite of the rather strained position, you would still be friends. I have tried to be impartial; in fairness to both of you, I must be. I have a trust to fulfil, and I must leave my money to that one of you who proves most worthy of it—no matter what my personal feelings may be. You understand how I am placed, Carlos?"

His manner was so dignified and sincere that I was impressed by it.

"Of course," I answered heartily. "I do, indeed; and I know that you will be fair in any case."

He took my hand, with unusual warmth, for him. "Thank you, Carlos. I may add that you are not likely to lose by your generosity toward Shirley."

He turned and went down to the kitchen, leaving me tingling with the idea his words had given me. It might be that, after all, I was nearer the prize than I expected, and Shirley would see that fairness was its own reward.

The second half of the task I had set myself might prove more difficult; and as I remembered Shirley's angry face it seemed now well-nigh impossible. Well, I would show her that I was as good a sport as she!

Uncle Gregory and I had lunch together, Shirley saying briefly that she did not feel like eating and would take a glass of milk to her room. She looked tired, and her face had a drawn look that gave color to her excuse of a headache.

Uncle Gregory seemed lost in deep thought, and as I myself felt in no mood for talking, we ate in silence. He also retired to his room directly we had finished; so I was left to myself. Tired of my fruitless thinking and annoyed to find how much I missed Shirley, I cast about for something to do, since smoking was forbidden and I felt too restless to read. As I strolled out into the garden, my eyes fell on the covered passageway that I had noticed before, and which my uncle had said

led to the laundry and wood-shed, unused for years. It was undoubtedly so, but I felt a strong desire to make sure, and with the coast clear I could easily satisfy myself.

I returned to the house, and went into the room on the right, which would be, I judged, on a line with the passageway. Sure enough, almost hidden behind a big clotheshorse, I discovered a door, which I shook and found that, as my uncle had predicted, it was locked.

There was no key, and I was turning away baffled, when I saw something that made me stoop quickly and examine the keyhole. On its rim were two little drops that looked to me very much like oil. I speedily made sure by touch and smell that it was in fact oil, and, what was more important still, had been recently applied. Here was a new puzzle!

If, as my uncle had said, the passageway had been disused for some time, who was it that had oiled the keyhole so lately and for what purpose? The more I thought of it, the queerer it seemed.

I could hardly doubt that my uncle had been speaking the truth about the door; but might it not have been oiled without his knowledge, since it would make a capital entrance for a burglar and be equally good for a getaway? I determined that, come what might, I would get through that door myself.

The lock was not a very strong one, and probably would not have been difficult to pick, if I had possessed the tools or the knowledge; lacking these, there remained the alternative of forcing it as I had done my uncle's door. I hesitated decidedly before doing that; it would both give the man a warning that his means of entrance had been discovered, and in the event of its turning out to be merely an innocent storehouse would make me distinctly unpopular with my uncle. Still, I must get in that door!

As I bent down again to examine the keyhole, a slight sound behind me made me whirl around suddenly, to see Shirley watching me. She was so far from my thoughts at that moment, and I was so prepared for some one else, that I stood

staring at her with what must have seemed a guilty surprise; at least, that was the only way I accounted for the suspicion that grew in her face.

"What are you doing?" she demanded briefly.

"Trying to get in the storeroom," I answered as briefly.

"What for?"

I shrugged my shoulders. "My dear second cousin, why does one want to open a door except to be on the other side?"

She kept her temper, although a quick color flamed in her face. "Do you expect to find any treasure there?" she asked.

"Are you afraid that I may?"

Her face was crimson now, but she answered still calmly: "I do, so I intend to come also."

"I don't know very well how I could prevent you, even if I wished to; but I don't think either of us will go anywhere if I can't get this door open."

"Surely you have the key," she said. "It will be an easy matter to open it."

"No, I haven't, and you know it as well as I do; but perhaps *you* know where it is."

I felt rather ashamed of my shot when I saw its effect. She grew very white, her lips trembled, and I had to remind myself that it was she who had made the first accusation. I expected her to go, but she still stood there watching me with an angry, suspicious look that was very different from her usual frank one.

I felt sorry for what I had said, but my pride kept me from apologizing. I turned my attention on the door; I must get in if only to carry off an unpleasant situation, but how on earth was it to be done? Suddenly I remembered that I had a bunch of old keys in my pocket; souvenirs of my many travels, which had long since lost their various partners. More from mere bravado, I pulled these out and began trying them perfunctorily.

The flat keys were, of course, no good, but there were three of the old-fashioned kind that looked as if they might be somewhat near the shape of the lock. The first two were no use, and I inserted the third more as a matter of form.

To my everlasting surprise, after some grating and twisting, the bolt shot back and the door swung open. If I was surprised, Shirley was not.

When I turned my head, it was to meet a look of triumph on her face.

"Why, it has opened it," I said foolishly enough.

"What a surprise!" she mocked. "And you had the key all the time in your pocket."

I fell into her trap, as she intended I should.

"I never saw the beastly door before," I blurted. "One of my keys just happened to fit it."

I was conscious that, while it was only a lucky coincidence, it certainly had a suspicious look.

Shirley smiled with a detestable serenity. "Of course. I hope we shall have equal luck in finding what we want inside."

## CHAPTER XVI.

### ANOTHER MYSTERY.

I DIDN'T answer, but pushed my way in rudely, leaving her to follow if she chose, as I was not going to be turned from my purpose by her taunts. She immediately came after me, and we found ourselves in a big room, a third longer than it was broad; and, from the two stationary tubs in the corner and a rusty stove with some equally rusty iron upon it, I knew it was the laundry of which my uncle had spoken. The windows were grimy and covered with cobwebs, and the evidences of disuse were visible on all sides.

Another door faced the one by which we had entered, and as this was not locked I jerked it open. It led into a smaller, dingier room, partly filled with wood, and a door led from this to the garden outside, but this was locked and my key would not open it.

So far, nothing had been gained by this exploration, and I felt rather foolish as I met Shirley's sarcastic look. There was a jog in the room, caused, I should imagine, by one of the eaves of the stable, and under this was a low closet about four feet

high. The door was padlocked, and I gave it an idle shake, bending down to do so with my head close to the door. A peculiar, moldy smell came up, so much like that of a cellar that I was surprised and not a little curious.

"Think I'll take a look inside," I observed to myself, rather than to Shirley. She chose to answer it, however.

"Have you, by chance, this key also in your pocket?" she asked sweetly.

I disdained to answer, but picked up a stick and a piece of stone, and using the first as a lever and the stone as a hammer, I quickly pried out the old and rusty staples. As I opened the door, such a wave of damp, moldy air rushed out to me that I drew back.

It was too dark to see the inside of the closet, but from the smell I imagined that it was a sort of coal-bin or extra woodshed. Why was it locked in that case?

"Are those steps?" exclaimed Shirley suddenly. She had been looking over my shoulder, and her eyes must have been sharper than mine, for I could distinguish nothing. I lit a match and held it in front of me and instantly out of the gloom sprang the three shelving sides of the closet, with something else, two stone-steps leading downwards.

Shirley uttered a cry, and I lit another match with a feeling of tingling anticipation. I had noticed a small piece of candle stuck in an empty bottle which stood in the corner, so I hastily transformed my match to the wick of this and, with it in my hand, again approached the door.

"Where do you suppose it leads? Are you going down?" asked Shirley breathlessly.

For answer, I cautiously went forward, and by bending nearly double managed to descend four or five steps, Shirley following close behind me. The steps led directly down for perhaps eight feet, and then I found myself in a passageway that went straight ahead and was sufficiently high for me to walk erect.

The air was damp and very cold, but not stale. The floors inside were earthen, but the roof was of boards, and from that, and the beams at intervals, I judged that

we were directly under the floor of the stable. I only hoped that it would be strong enough to prevent anything giving away and coming down on us.

Half-way, the passage turned abruptly at right angles, and for a moment I thought we had come to the end. At that precise instant, something black shot between my legs from behind almost upsetting me, and startling us both. I swore as I clutched my precious candle, and then laughed, for a parting hiss flung back at me showed that it was our old enemy, the black cat.

"He's evidently been mousing around," I said. "But where could he have gone to—the way ends here?"

"No, it can't, if the cat can get out we may be able to."

She was right; as I held up my candle I could see that the passage still continued, although it was much narrower and there were no beams overhead, and it was here we became aware of a peculiar sound that seemed partly like a drum beaten far off, and partly like a hollow murmuring.

The way was getting so narrow that we went along with great difficulty; but there seemed to be a light from somewhere, faint though it was. I could even make out a round gray hole almost above us, and as I brought up abruptly beneath it, my shin, at the same moment, struck against a sort of wooden ladder.

I climbed two or three steps and suddenly found that the round, gray hole was the sky, and that I had popped out of the passage much like a rabbit from its warren. I pulled Shirley out, and we stood there, both somewhat dazed and half blinded by our sudden transition from dark to light.

We were in a corner of the cliff, and so well and naturally was the exit to the passageway arranged, that looking back at it from only a few paces off, it was hard even for me to detect more than what seemed to be a hollow in the rock. Just beneath us was a little, partly sheltered cove, with a landing-place and a boat-house.

We scrambled down to the landing and stood looking around us. The boat-house was not locked, and on stepping inside I found two boats: one, a dory such as the fishermen used, and the other as nice a

little motor-boat as one could desire. It was not over thirteen feet long, and, as I could readily see, was prepared for instant use, from the well-filled tank to the extra can of gasoline.

"It looks as if somebody was prepared for a quick getaway," I observed to Shirley, forgetting our recent coyness. "There's even some grub in the locker."

Shirley seemed to have forgotten, too.

"I don't know what to make of it," she said frankly. "Of course there must be a landing for boats; but surely they don't reach it only through that rabbit-hole we came by."

I pointed behind the boat-house.

"There's the regular path; I saw it as I came down. Ours is only the emergency exit."

"For what emergency?"

We both looked at each other doubtfully.

"It's rather queer, but I fancy it had something to do with the old days when smuggling was in fashion, and every gentleman found it handy to have a back exit. This house, or the original frame of it, rather, belonged to some one else before Uncle Gregory bought and rebuilt it."

I could see her former suspicion creeping back in her eyes.

"How do you happen to know so much about it?"

"By reading an old copy of a history of Seetucket that I found in the bookcase yesterday."

"Oh, that was the reason you wanted to open the door?"

"Not at all, it was sheer guess work. Besides, I never let anything keep me from getting what I want."

"You're a dangerous person," she sneered, but there was an unwilling admiration in her eyes.

What I might have answered I do not know, for at that moment my eye caught something which made me whirl about seaward. A boat was coming around the bend, heading directly for our landing.

As I said before, the cliff jutted out on either side so as to make a natural little harbor about two hundred feet across. It was comparatively smooth inside, but just beyond the projecting cliffs the breakers

were hurling themselves against the rocks furiously. Although the northeaster had spent itself, the sky was still leaden gray and the waves high.

Handling even a dory like this, in such weather, was a task for a good rower, and this the occupant of the boat did not seem to be. The dory zigzagged from side to side and the oars thrashed clumsily about.

"If he doesn't hold the boat straight before the waves he will be spilled on the rocks," I remarked to Shirley. She was staring at the boat, and there was a look of dawning recognition on her face which puzzled me.

"Oh! he will be drowned," she cried. "Can't you help him?"

As she spoke a big wave caught the awkwardly steered boat and broached it. I yelled to the rower to keep it straight, but even if he heard, he could do nothing, for a second bigger wave had struck the boat, capsizing it and spilling its occupant out into the water.

Shirley shrieked, and I ran into the boat-house to get out the dory there. It took me several minutes to find the oars which were in an upper gallery, and all the time Shirley kept calling to me to hurry. I am a fairly good oarsman, but it takes some practise to manage the peculiar bucking motion of a dory, and I made a poor job of it at first.

Apparently the man could not swim, but, looking over my shoulder, I saw that he had managed to get hold of the boat and so keep himself up. The waves, however, were driving him in toward the rocks, and I set my back into reaching him as soon as possible. Even at the distance, he had seemed half familiar, and as I neared him and saw a great ugly face, with one misshapen ear rising out of the water, I recognized the man of the Sound boat.

I had little time, however, to speculate on his appearance here, for too much began to happen all at once. When I was only fifteen feet off, he let go his hold of the boat and started to swim toward me. He could barely keep afloat, and with his huge arms flailing the water in awkward strokes, he looked like some great sea-crab.



He might have made it, however, but for a wave, bigger than all the rest, which curled over him and drove him directly on the rocks. I held my breath, but he reappeared again, struggling feebly, although there was a big splash of blood on his forehead. Then his struggles ceased, and I reached him only just in time to grab his hair as he sank.

It was no easy job to get a half-unconscious man into a bobbing boat, and keep

off the rocks, too; and several times I thought we should be capsized; but I managed at last to haul him in and make a safe landing. All the time a wonder was growing in my mind as to why I was doing this, and what was his business here, anyway?

And why in the name of all common sense did Shirley receive us so gladly, and bend over this evident tough with such solicitude?

This story will be continued in next week's issue of the ARGOSY-ALLSTORY WEEKLY, the consolidated title under which both magazines will appear hereafter as one.



# Into His Work

by

Philip M. Fisher Jr.

## A "DIFFERENT" STORY

I DO not know exactly how this happened. And all the evidence that I have to offer in proof that it did occur lies in my own given word and the following simple facts:

My students saw me leave the room at a little after two. They met me at the door at five minutes to three, forty minutes later. During the interim no one in the building saw me—neither my students, nor neighboring teachers, nor even the patrols always watching in the hall outside my door, nor those on the floor below. These have been questioned. All are reliable. All are positive. I was not seen.

In college I was not brilliant in psychology. The study of the workings of the

human mind had never appealed to my work-a-day, practical sense of things. I liked matters to be concrete, tangible, capable of direct application to human affairs.

Theoretical analysis of thought was to me an utter waste of time. Kant, Freud, Mann, each was a superman only in that he was a supermaniac. When class discussions approached dual personality I would nod and mutter: "Yes, Stevenson wrote a good story in 'Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde'." When some one read a paper on the inseparability of mind and matter I would smile superciliously, and whisper in my neighbor's ear: "Yes, I admit it. When you're dead, you're dead." When the good professor raved of thought transference and

the undreamt-of half-occult powers of the mind, I would say: "Bosh! The mind is a tool. I *think* with mine." And forthwith would get up and leave the room.

Direct application of practical money-making studies became my hobby. I liked to see students grow in their work. I liked to see develop in them, day by day, a rising ability to earn a living wage. It was for this reason that of all the subjects I had at hand I chose to teach the one which my friends deemed most prosaic, most unintellectual, most evidential of my utter folly—typewriting.

Five years in a low-roofed, ill-lit, half-ventilated attic room of our school I worked with practical-minded boys and girls. For five years I transformed successive generations of awkward adolescents into young men and women, capable of earning an honest dollar.

Then came this experience.

Suffice it to say that I no longer use that attic room. Kant, James, and Mann are now my constant companions. In the philosophy building of the university my old professors sit down welcomed at my side and talk.

They like to study my case, they explain. I cannot say I blame them. It is curious enough.

The thing happened the Monday following the spring school convention.

For three days we had been gathered into the theater of the city auditorium to listen to the wafting breezes of the dozen or more selected lecturers as they presented their pet pedagogical propensities. Then finally on the last day arose a stately gentleman. Bewrinkled he was as to clothing, sparsely gray of hair. He was—I thought it even before his first sentence was complete—a real lover of his work. And, as he spoke, my impatience of the dimming afternoon wore off; my mind opened for his word, and I said to myself, "From this man I can learn."

Of one subject only he held forth—it was no new philosophy; no new mathematical formulation of students' monthly reports; no separation of the children in the years when they need each other most. It was plain, common horse sense—coming

from one who knew. It was a doctrine of humanity coming from one who, though a mere underpaid teacher of the city's future citizens, still retained his human understanding. This man received applause—from the heart.

In my case—from the very soul as well; for as are many of most practical turn of mind, so was I also, to the highest degree, impressionable.

Afterward a brother teacher and I walked up-town to get our car. For several blocks we spoke no word. Then suddenly Markle broke the silence in which thought bound us.

"He's right. The others were mad over technicalities. He alone had something to say. If we would be teachers, then we must teach."

I started, for the same thought was in my own mind.

"That closing sentence!" I exclaimed enthusiastically. "Throw yourself—"

But Markle, too, had the words on the tip of his tongue. He interrupted.

"Put yourself into your work—your heart, your mind, your soul, your body. If you would be teachers in the truest sense of the word, do this. I was impressed," Markle went on, "for the man was in earnest, and he knew."

I nodded.

"He knew," I answered. "And I have learned something. I thought I was teaching as best I could, before. But from this on, I'll do better."

"It wasn't my heart I had in my work. It was merely the practical side of my mind; and that, I see now, is not enough."

All Saturday, as I made out my next week's program, I pondered over those closing words: "Put your very self into your work." I began to see the great truth in them.

"This," said I to myself, "is sound and practical. Such advice is worthy of acceptance. Heretofore, even despite my real love of doing practical creative work, I have not labored with all the tools I had at hand. Despite my intense desire to do great work, I had neglected to make the fullest use of the powers that were in me."

"Let Monday come," I went on, "and

see the new impetus I will put into the work, the new enthusiasm instill into my classes, when I throw my every nerve and thought, and all my heart, into my chosen task. Ah! What wonders I will do for those hard-plugging students; what a mark I will set for my brothers in the profession."

These reflections excluded all others throughout the whole of Saturday. I found myself so obsessed with the new developments of this idea of putting myself into my work, that that night I could hardly sleep. And even when I did, it was but to dream of my golden age of teaching, to start the Monday following.

Long Sunday morning I lay abed with these thoughts still drumming in my head. I felt now almost a sense of guilt about my former labors. I knew that I had not loafed, that I had done the best I knew or thought of at the time, yet, nevertheless, this new sense of dereliction in my full duty as a teacher insistently prodded my conscience. When finally I arose to dress, I found I was unable to glance at myself in the dresser mirror without a twinge of shame.

At breakfast I had no appetite. I spent the day walking in the hills thinking, thinking, thinking of methods of extending my work. Devising new plans, enlarging old, balancing this, rejecting that, until my head fairly reeled.

At dinner my wife startled me with an exclamation.

"John!"

I almost dropped the spoon with which I was listlessly idling at my soup.

"Wh-what is it?" I stammered.

"John," she cried again. "Aren't you well?" She arose and placed her palm on my forehead. Then shook her head as if bewildered. "You have no fever. What is the matter?"

"I—I—" I shook my head, for the words refused to come. Then in sudden irritation I found my voice. "Why did you startle me so?"

"I?" she answered as she shrank back. "I? Startle *you*?" Her eyes widened in fright. "Why, what *you said* startled *me*!"

Now I knew I had said nothing. I had simply sat gently at my place, drawn the napkin from its ring, and taken spoon in hand. I started to deny her accusation when she interrupted.

"What *I* said!" exclaimed I. "Surely I said nothing. I was thinking, thinking—"

"John!" cried my wife again. "You did say something!"

I now began to feel somewhat uncertain about the matter myself. Had I been asked to swear as to whether or not I had really spoken, I would have had to acknowledge that I could not. My mind was in such a state, the tumult of new thought so chaotic, the obsession so complete, that I could not be sure of what unconsciously I might do or say. I turned unsteadily to my wife.

"Very well," I said gravely, "what did I say?"

My wife clasped her hands to her bosom.

"You said, 'Damn it all, I *will* find the way!'" She paused and looked at me with sorrow and perplexity in her eyes. "What is worrying you, John; dear? Why must you find a way? And for what?"

"Oh, can't I help in some way? I am so troubled. You are worrying yourself sick over something. Can't you tell me, dear?"

I sat there dazed. And, I confess, rather frightened for myself.

At this writing, after the experience I was then shortly to go through, and with my studies in philosophy and psychology now to aid me, I can see that this exclamation was merely a manifestation of my subconscious mind; a cry from that queer part of my mind, of any one's mind, in fact, that thinks even when consciously one knows it not; that stores up memories of sensation and incident even while I, or you, consciously am thinking of totally different things. In other words that unconscious exclamation was really a true expression of those thoughts which consciously I had been for two days before absolutely unable to express. They told truly enough of the real tumult in my mind; of how terribly strong, indeed, was this passion to throw my very soul into my work. I know that now.

But then, in my own dining-room, ac-

cused of Heaven knows what scandalous behavior by my bewildered and rather suspicious wife, I did not understand the significance of what I had said. But the words began now to vibrate consciously upon my ears, and deeper, deeper, pressing on my brain: "I will find a way! I will, I will, I wi—"

Through another night of teeming thought I tossed.

Half mad from lack of sleep, half dead from utter weariness, I arose early, splashed cold water on my body, dressed, and left the house. My school was some four miles away, in the work-a-day practical district I had chosen when appointed to my task. I had decided to walk, for in this exercise alone could I find solace.

I arrived in good time at the school, bodily and mentally refreshed. True, I still felt eager for my new experiments upon my class; still was determined to immerse myself deeper and deeper into my task, in order to bring out the best that was deep hidden in my students.

But my brain no longer seethed. The pressure was relieved. My thought was clear.

I met my friend Markle on the steps, and he grinned reminiscently as he greeted me.

"To-day is the day," I cried at once. "I'm starting in the new work at eight A. M. sharp."

"Well," he said, "go to it. Take the man's advice. Go up-stairs to your clattering attic, and throw yourself head and heels, body and soul, into your work. Hum," he added, with a touch of irony in his voice, "go ahead and do it—literally."

"All right," I called back. "Edison and Goethals, and J. P. Morgan did it—why not I? It's worth experiment."

Without a voluntary act of thinking, now, there came running through my mind again the words: "I will do it. I will—I will—I will—" I frowned. Were the last three days to be repeated on this?

As I thus stood, Markle slapped my shoulder and cried once more:

"Go to it!"

He waved as he disappeared down the

corridor, and I, forgetting the more foreboding thoughts, and eager for my new work, took the stairs three at a time, and plunged into my task.

The morning went smoothly. I found that certain ideas, developed since that last talk in the auditorium, showed their potency in immediate result. I felt a bit proud of myself because of this, and yet, paradoxical though it may seem, also somewhat mystified. I wondered why previous to this I had been so self-satisfied.

And then vaguely came a wondering doubt. Had I been right in my college days when I mocked the study of the mind? Was not this new notion of putting one's very heart into his work merely another way of emphasizing that fact that one must give all his *mind*, all his thought, over to it? And in order to do this must one not need to study the workings of the human mind for the two-fold reason of getting a better understanding of the student himself, and of developing better methods of transferring to that student what knowledge one has in his own mind?

In other words, would not the study of psychology aid me even in my practical teaching of this practical subject? My doubts grew apace. The tumult gripped my mind again. And yet, somehow, I drove myself on.

But in the afternoon a dead weariness seized upon me. The stress of three practically sleepless nights had drained my reserve strength. And despite the hearty luncheon I had eaten, despite my efforts to nerve myself to continue my new experiments, I felt the lethargy of complete exhaustion creeping upon me.

Once in my dictation work I jerked awake to find myself repeating words of which I had no thought, with the class staring wide-eyed at me. Once I felt a blackness irresistibly overcoming me.

The former I hastily amended with a joke. But of the latter I was frightened.

It would never do to fall fainting before my class. I resolved that I must leave at once and stumble to the rest-room for water and a snatch of sleep. With this in mind I wended my way through the desks toward the door, still swinging my ruler to the

rhythm of my words, still concentrating every nerve to keep alert and drive my dictation into the students at the machines.

At the door I turned a moment toward the class, and beheld with disappointment that they were not working even up to the former standard, that for some reason they seemed nervous, and uncomfortable. I felt this was due to my own exhausted state, and determined to overcome it.

With a violent effort of will I brought all my mental force to bear upon them. Every trick of the profession I threw into this last hand. And then, as I saw them catch up again, as I saw them, too, knit their brows in greater concentration, those closing words of the teachers' convention came rushing again.

I drew on all the power left within me, physical and mental, resolved to make one final, deep-seated impression which would last until I returned to the room. All my nerve, all my strength, all my will-power, I invoked. The impelling force of three days and nights incessant mental concentration welled irresistibly within me; in one final terrible moment, for I felt the coma of sleep closing in again, I summoned all these to my aid, compounded them into one terrible effort, put myself, even as the laughing Markle had suggested, heart, mind, body, and soul into my work, determined to make it go or drop there by the door.

And then in that one awful instant of bodily and mental struggle, even as I turned to step through the door into the hall—it happened.

For a moment I felt that I was falling to the floor dead asleep, and my spirit sank for I saw that I had failed in my purpose. No matter what had been the effect of that last effort, the shock and terror to my class of this misfortune would ruin all.

Even as the calm blackness enveloped me I felt that it meant disaster. Never again would I be able to control these students as I had. Never again could I get so much practical work out of them, nor do them so much practical good.

Then, even as these thoughts rushed through my mind, the darkness of complete oblivion fell.

My next sensation was that of a something irresistible within me that was striving to burst out. Its power grew, its outward pressure upon every part of my body rushed to a point where, even though I felt no pain, the sensation of imminent bodily disruption became intolerable.

Then in one blinding flash, with one second of exquisite agony and a terrible wrenching of my body, I found myself wide awake again.

I opened my eyes quickly with the idea of reassuring a frightened class of half-hysterical girls and boys. I closed them at once with a sensation of great dizziness. I opened my eyes again—closed them as quickly once more.

Thus I waited a moment until the terror which that one glance had thrilled through me quieted down. Then once more I dared to look.

The thing was true!

I was not viewing my students from the doorway—but from somewhere else, from some extraordinary place, in some remarkable way. And where this place was, what was that way, I could not quite make out.

But whatever it was, certainly something was utterly wrong. For a moment I reflected.

"This is a dream—a crazy dream. Steady yourself, and think!"

Then I looked again in sudden curiosity.

"If it is a dream, then why not see it calmly out?"

My fear rapidly gave way to this curiosity. With a calm mind I began a hasty examination.

"Funny," I remarked to myself, "if I were standing in the doorway now I could see only the side of the students toward me. That red-haired girl, for instance, whose profile was always so attractive from that angle—what is the matter with her? I can see the side toward me, her profile, yes.

"But more than that. I can see from both sides at once, and the full front view I had always deemed so homely as well. I can see her fingers playing on the keyboard of her typewriter, the movement of her eyes as they follow the writing she copies, and at the same time view with dis-

pleasure the fact that the ribbon at the back of her head is soiled.

"What on earth has gone wrong with my eyes? Have they suddenly received the power of seeing all sides of a solid object at one and the same time? Have they become periscopic?" I chuckled. "Was there ever dreamt such a foolish dream?"

Thus spoke I to myself. Yet vaguely now a certain apprehension again gained the upper hand. I began to feel that perhaps I was not dreaming after all. The fear that my words were merely the protest of a practical, work-a-day mind against something about me that had gone utterly wrong began slowly, relentlessly, to grip me.

I gazed in growing consternation now at that red-haired girl. Then found that I was looking not only at her, but in the same manner at the entire class. Concentrate my vision as I would I could not so focus it as to see but her alone.

Every student in the room was as clear to my sight as would be each member of a group in a photograph. Clearer—for the camera records but one side of that group. The camera records perspective, sees things from a single point of view—and objects may be hidden by some other body in the foreground. But here I saw all the students in my room, all at the same time, all from every point of view. In my vision now there was no perspective, no angle of vision, nothing was hidden.

In sudden dizziness again I hazarded that I was suspended in the air above my class, and was floated over the students' heads by some strange power—and was thus viewing them as an observer in an airplane sees the land beneath.

Then came the counter thought. The airman sees but the surface of the ground, and only the tops of people and houses thereon. I could see all sides, all places, all objects in my room.

Then a very curious and seemingly inconsistent thing struck me. There *was* one part which, after all, I could not see. The floor of the room was clear enough, and even the feet of the students; some prim upon the linoleum, others hooked about each other curiously, still others resting pigeon-toed one upon the other. There

were the neat rows of variegated feet, I say, and I chuckled at the sight.

But from the floor to the students' waists there was absolutely nothing!

I gasped. The sight cut short my chuckle, for it seemed as though the students, the desk tops, and the typewriters themselves, were floating waist high above the floor—resting stiffly on a sea of nothingness, suspended in empty air.

The weird humor of the thing took hold again. I found myself chuckling once more at the rows of paired feet upon the otherwise empty floor as they shifted occasionally, or tapped in time to their practising fingers, with such comical result in their absolute disattachment from their bodies above. And I laughed at the diligent students, floating steadily on naught but air, and unconcernedly plying their craft on machines secured to desk tops which themselves floated raftlike over nothingness.

"If those children could only see what I see now," I said to myself, "what would they think; what would they do?"

Then I noticed a young chap in one corner snatch a piece of paper from his machine with a rasp of whirling gears. Quickly he crumpled it into a ball, then sneaked a covert look toward the door, for his act in these days of conservation was forbidden.

Then he bent to the right, and I saw what I had not noticed before; that beside his right knee, and similarly next each student in the room, floated one of the drawers of the desk. This youngster, perhaps the only incorrigible of the class, pulled his floating drawer slowly toward him, dropped the wadded paper into it, pushed it back—then sneaked another glance to the rear.

I smiled, for I liked the rascal—he was so desperately a boy. But then the really queer part of the thing came home to me. Why had he pulled that drawer toward him when it lay there already open beneath the floating desk top, below the empty space where the upper drawer should be, and all he need do was to toss the paper in?

Why all this precaution against being seen, his silence, his covert, "There, I put something over on the old guy!" grin as he adjusted new paper in his typewriter?

Then in a flash I recalled myself. For, of course, while to me in my dream, or madness, whatever it was, he floated so weirdly above his awkward feet on the floor below; and the drawer at his side floated conveniently open too, nevertheless, to him things were as usual. To him that drawer was underneath a layer of heavy oak; to him the desk extended, solid wood, to the floor.

Then another very simple thing set me suddenly cold.

I reached down to tap the young fellow on the shoulder. To my surprise I could not tap him—I could not feel the touch.

I looked for the cause, and shuddered. My consternation quickly changed to actual fear.

I distinctly had felt the nerve impulse following the idea of touching the boy, but that was all. I repeat, I did not feel the touch. Nor did that youngster himself make sound or motion to show that he had felt it.

For a moment, even though I dimly held the hope that my whole situation was but illusion, even though I still believed, or tried to believe, that I was lying where I had fallen in a huddled heap just outside my classroom door, ridden by a weird and incomprehensible nightmare, I was carried away with fright. For the first time my thought really centered upon myself; upon not what I saw of other things—but of my own good body and the thing that was really *I*.

Here I could see everything, with certain uniform exceptions regarding each student, to be sure; and weird enough exceptions at that; and could see from every angle, and with the most inexplicable surprises in appearance and condition. And yet, though I could see and so had sensation still, when I tried to move my arm, I found I could not. And I could not for the simple reason that I *had* no arm.

In frightened experiment I tried to move other parts only to find that of them also had I none. I tried to glance down at myself only to find that I had no self that was seeable. I tried to move in my entirety, and discovered with growing terror that even though I was quite invisible I could

not move—for my body, my self, whatever I was now, was fixed, rigid, immovable.

I became all at once hysterical, and laughed harshly—then, as it dawned upon me that while I could hear what my students were doing and saying, yet I could not hear my own voice, I ended in a sob.

Yet even from this came a grain of comfort. Even though I had no sense of touch, could not make my own voice sound, still I could hear the clicking of the typewriters, the shuffling and occasional whispers of the students, even as I had heard the rasp of my young incorrigible's machine as he impatiently ripped the paper out. So I could at least hear—I could hear all sounds; could see, with exceptions mentioned, all things.

Then suddenly as I pondered, a certain indefinable part of me, a part quite without definite location, felt cold. A sudden odor of the chemical laboratory below my room followed this new sensation.

I did not have to turn now to see what this meant. I was already getting accustomed to my nightmarelike condition. The other door, the one opposite to that near which I felt my exhausted body lay, had been opened. A moment more and the department head stepped in, glanced expectantly about, then spoke to the nearest girl.

"He is not here?"

The girl looked up.

"No, sir. He just left."

"Went out the other door, I suppose?" said the man.

"Yes, sir—just a few minutes ago."

"Thank you," answered the head.

I expected then to see him go. But he did not. He stood quite still and looked about the room with a queerly pleased air of mystification.

Then he picked his way among the desks and about the room a moment and watched the students work. Then shrugged his shoulders, turned as if to go; but at the doorway hesitated. Then wheeled as if in sudden decision.

"Attention, please!"

The clatter of machines ceased at once. The students looked up in surprise, but were quiet, orderly, attentive. A thrill of



pride ran through me as I watched. Also a queer bit of the humor of the situation danced in again—what an opportunity this was to have a little joke on the man. But I desisted—for in my condition what could I do?

"All I want to do," said the head, "is to compliment you on your industry. This is indeed a practical, businesslike group. I never have seen a class, with the teacher out of the room, so well behaved, so attentive to its business, so earnestly hard at work, as this. I shall inform Mr. (naming me) of it. For the first day after vacation it is wonderful. Keep it up!"

He nodded, started to leave by the door through which he had entered, then turned as if in after thought, and stepped to the door whence I myself had gone.

My glow of pride, my appreciation of the humor of the situation, beat a hasty retreat. A chill tremor of impending trouble took their place.

Surely now, thought I, though then I did not see the inconsistency of it, surely, despite the excellence of my class, when the head discovers me lying half dead just outside that door, things for me will be all over. As one in a dream awaits a threatening peril, so did I wait tensely for him to lift my head and shake my senses back.

But he passed on; and in whatever condition I was I stayed. The man had not seen me. I wondered if he had been so keen on following down the hall that he had missed my sleep-drugged form where I felt it was huddled on the floor.

But wait! Another and horrifying thought rushed upon me. In the hall outside was stationed a student patrol. If the head had not seen me lying there, and if that patrol himself had not seen, then—then was I, after all, *there*?

And if I was not there, then again—where was I?

My next thought came as a blow in the dark. If my body, my good solid, substantial, concrete, body was *not* lying in the hall, and yet I, my real thinking self, was here in my room somewhere—all over it, perhaps, Heaven only knows—and yet could not reach forth to tap an erring student on the shoulder because I had not the

arm with which to do the act, then again not only where was I, but what?

I repeat I could see, with certain curious omissions, all things. I could hear, again with very definite exceptions, all sounds. I had distinctly felt the coldness from below when the department head opened the other door. I definitely recoiled from the odors of the chemical laboratory that came with it.

And yet with all these sensations my actual, concrete, physical body was not visibly, feelably, concretely, with me.

I could not move. I could not feel the touch of anything about. I felt not the movements of the very students whom otherwise I so intimately sensed. I had not felt the physical touch of the draft that had brought the coldness and the chemical odors from below when the department head passed through.

As I wondered, and, I must say it frankly, feared, another feature of my predicament presented itself.

I was I—if the thing may be so stated—and yet curiously at this point I began to feel as though a certain part of me were not altogether now a part of me.

I could hardly understand this then—I hope I can make it clear now. I do not mean that this missing part was like an amputated leg, or an extracted tooth. Neither the leg nor the tooth can feel of itself that it is detached from the central body. Neither can possibly sense that it is missing, because the brain centers are in the skull and not in the arm or leg or tooth.

Yet this indefinable missing part of my self knew *of itself* that it was not altogether still a part of me and *me only*. Very, very definitely I could now feel this, and it was queer enough, I will say, and gave such a feeling of uncertainty and awe.

I, as my whole self, began to understand that I was divided up into numerous parts—otherwise, how could I see all things at once? I began to understand now that these parts must be microscopically small—for only thus could I remain in my room and yet be unseen. I began to see also that these parts of me must be infinite in number, to be so scattered about my room and my machines and my students. I be-

gan to understand that, though I yet could sense certain things, and still could think, the body part of me was nothing more than air.

And yet again, was I really nothing more than air? I wondered. Then I at last comprehended that no part of me was actually missing, but the whole of me was disseminated broadcast throughout the room. It was as if I had literally been blown in tiny fragments, and each fragment had found a lodging-place in some part of the room.

I saw, I felt, that an equal proportion of these parts of me, of my body, and of my personality, were allotted to each student. I began to differentiate certain curious sensations which told me that parts of me were even in the very typewriters themselves, in these machines of iron and rubber and steel, even as the students worked upon them. I felt that part of me was in those students; keeping them quiet, working on their very minds, molding their very thought.

It was then that I began to see clear light.

These parts of me that were also part of my machines and part of my students were not upon the surface of the machines or of the girls and boys, but beneath it. These numberless fragments of me working so to make them learn, strove not from the outside as a teacher often does, but from the inside.

These parts had now become, through some awful and unbelievable catastrophe, part and parcel with their own bodies. As salt goes into solution in a glass of warm water, so had my own body, my own spirit, my own very self been dissolved into the working material in my room and the bodies of the students themselves and the air about them.

But why? How?

A little idea crept into my mind at these last thoughts. With fright I tried to keep it out. Then, as it grew, in terror I attempted to smother it, to keep it down. But it developed, insisted, pressed harder and harder, matured and rushed upon me in all its appalling awfulness.

And this is what it said:

"Be calm and logical, my friend. Put one and one together and examine then the sum. Think of all you now experience."

The voice paused, and I did think. And again shuddered, or felt the impulse to shudder, though in reality I could not. It was such a terrible sensation, such a ghostly paradox, this being something, and yet, though something, *nothing*. The voice went on.

"You have the sensation at this moment of being a part of your students, a part of the machines they use, even a part of that sign upon the board which says: 'Hooverize on paper!' You see the floor of this room. You see the feet of the students.

"You see their hands as *thus* they play the typewriters' keys. You see all of their bodies above the waist. But *nothing* more! Think! Are not these *the only* parts of the students and of the room which you observe in correcting them while at work?

"You see a single drawer, too, floating at the right of each. It is the second drawer from the top, and thus lies open to the view. Think—does not the second drawer belong to this afternoon's class now seated at the desks, and to *this class only*? Look again; do you see *anything*, or hear *anything*, which does not pertain to this one particular class and the particular work it does?

"Now think again, *think!*

"When you teach your work, what points do you particularly emphasize? Feet, bodies, hands. The typewriters, the desk tops, the special neatly kept drawers.

"Do you see any other drawers? Do you see the limbs of the students? The chairs they sit upon?

"My dear dull friend," the voice went on wearily, "why do you not see these things? Why? Think once more. Isn't it because these things are *not* a part of your work in teaching these students? And the objects you *do* see, the sounds you *do* hear, the sensations you *do* feel—these things *are* part of your work. Am I not right?

"Think! You yourself, in all your work, demand concentration on the task at hand. And to get that concentration you dictate

letters, words, phrases, even as you were doing at the moment when this dreadful thing occurred. And to get results from all, the school department of this city held a great convention of its teaching force. And of all the speakers whom you heard, the last impressed you most.

"And what were the latter's final words? What was the message he gave to you? What thought so affected you that for the past three days it drove all others from your mind? What was it you tried to do in that last final effort at the door? Great Heavens, man, can't you, *won't* you, understand what you have done? You have succeeded, as your friend Markle ironically hinted, in *putting yourself, body and soul, at last into your work!*"

The voice stopped. But it had left nothing undone, it had completed its task.

I gasped as the truth struck home. Then, as I realized the significance of the thing; that in that last terrible effort of concentration upon my work I had in the actual literal sense of the word "thrown myself into my work," a great panic seized me.

How, scattered infinitesimally about my room as I was, impregnating the very machines themselves, and every part of students and desks and equipment which I used in my work with this particular class as well, how was I to get back? How was I to sweep together all these invisible particles of my scattered body and mind, and compound them into my good old body again?

A great shiver went through me, a shiver that was half a sob. I felt as utterly lost as must a lonely child cast into the blackness of the night.

"How, how?" my impulse was to cry the words aloud in the vain hope that I might make myself heard, that some one might be able to give me help. "How can I get back?"

Immediately following my outburst there was a concerted rustling among my students, and I perceived them hunching their shoulders uncomfortably and looking about at each other almost in bewilderment. I saw at once how closely was my own self united and interwoven with theirs—that

my suddenly concentrated emotion should, to their wonder and surprise, stir them so.

Panic seized me again.

Suppose my parts were so tightly knitted in with the bodies and minds of these boys and girls as to be forever inseparable from them. Suppose that before I completed myself, if I ever did, that some of the students should leave the room. Could I ever regain that part of me which I had thrown into them in my desperate desire to put my whole self into my work? Must I wander on through life hereafter only as a miserable fraction of a man?

A warning bell sounded. I knew that but a single minute remained before the whole class would be scattered in a dozen different rooms of the school. I saw there was but one thing to do.

I had blown myself into these forty students by a violent and intense effort of mind. By the same method, therefore, must I bring myself together. I started to work. The strain was exhausting, for my mind as well as my body was spread to every part of the room, and fused in everything which at this time of day I used in my work.

I concentrated harder and harder. My students began to fidget about, nervously to look toward the door whither a short half hour before they had seen me go.

The second and final dismissing bell was due.

I worked with all my soul. My students began to arise and pick up papers and books ready for the signal. They seemed preoccupied, nervous, too, which was unusual with this class.

Desperation seized me lest some leave before the time was due, and part of me be perhaps forever lost. My situation was horrible. I strained every nerve—yet achieved no result.

Then the clamor of the last bell shrieked me final warning. The students rushed for the exit door in a surging, unusually nervous crowd, as though each one would be first out of the room.

I made one maddening effort while thus they closely bunched. Then suddenly found myself facing the group of them, and nodding rather uncertainly in dismissal as I stood again in my own good shape on the

selfsame spot beside the door whence I had blown myself apart so short a while before.

Dumbly I watched the students as they filed past. Then with a sigh of relief, for not one was missing, I turned back to my room.

It was good to see the bottoms of the chairs and the lower portions of the desks solid and substantial again. Yet, though I smiled in recollection of this part of it, the seriousness of the circumstances into which my obsession had thrown me were too grave, too near a matter yet, to give real joy of achievement.

I had put myself into my work; yes, in that I had succeeded. But the idea of a literal meaning to that phrase had never consciously occurred to me.

Clearly enough I now can see how that queerer part of my mind, the subconscious—the part that perhaps is more nearly our real selves than the mind we know, and think with, and by which we see, and feel, and hear, and so on—I now can see, I say, how this part of my mind had truly expressed the real determination of my whole soul and body when it forced out that unconscious exclamation that had so startled my dear wife:

"Damn it all! I *will* find a way!"

I *had* found a way. But I will never try that way again.

I shudder at what might have occurred had something suddenly disrupted my class while literally I was thus "a part of my work." I feel a haunting terror when I think of what might have happened had I not, before the class scattered in dismissal, come to full realization of the real situation and gathered myself together with that last violent effort of will.

I will never again put myself in a place where such a thing might reoccur. I dare not. I know my own mind too well. I would be carried away by my own enthusiasm.

I would concentrate every effort to make my students learn. I might once more overdo the thing and again literally, body and soul, "throw myself into my work."

Let it suffice to say that my resignation was in the hands of the surprised head that very afternoon, and my application for a studentship in the College of Psychology left for the university with the evening mail.

I saw with shame that I had been much of a fool when a student there before. I understood at last that there is more to the study of the human mind than mere idle thought. Yet even at that, let me add, I went at my new work with *easy-going*, thoughtful, almost apprehensive *care*.

I was resolved, and am still, that even in that wonderful study I will *take* no risks.

## THE TEST

BY DAVID FERRIS KIRBY

WHETHER you be rich  
Or poor,  
I neither know nor care.  
But,  
In the strife  
And turmoil of life  
When you are struck  
By the blows  
Of the Master Lance,  
If you  
Ring true,  
You are the man for me.

# In Dead Men's Pants

by Walter Clare Martin

## CHAPTER I.

### THE ARROGANCE OF YOUTH.

**E**VEN philosophy, the accustomed refuge of great minds, is not entirely impregnable to a siege of troubles, when such troubles come piling on in waves and heaps and drifts and splashes like a mixed Shakespearian metaphor, and no arms at hand to oppose them.

If philosophy were fool-proof and fear-proof, there would have been no worried shadows in the fixed, gray substance of Mrs. Snipkins's unexpressive eye as she heaved the slopping milk-pail from the naked board floor to the pine-slab table in the middle of the parlor—or kitchen, or court, or library, or dining-room—whatever you fancy—there being but one other compartment to the cabin, and it consecrated to the use of Morpheus, weaver of dreams, and of Minerva, weaver of socks and mittens.

For be the truth revealed uncensored, not even Buddha himself ever chewed the philosophical quid more calmly and consistently than do the natives of the interior folds of the Ozark Mountains in Missouri and Arkansas—the vanishing representatives of a moonshining, log-rolling, possum-skinning civilization that, even in these enlightened days of the universal mind which aches for the higher good and the international stomach which aches for lower food, holds undisturbed its thunder-breeding hoe-down all through the star-painted, wind-cleaned, leaf-scented autumn evenings that fall like Lethean lotus blossoms, one by one,

to hide the parched and pain-encrusted bones of summer past and dead.

A civilization that thrives in the spring on greens and expectation; wears out the midsummer with wild blackberries and wilder hopes; revels in squirrels and squirrel whiskey throughout the fall; and greases the tedious wheels of winter with sow-belly and friend corn pone!

This being the autumn season, any kind of mental perturbation seems more out of order than ever before or after; yet Mrs. Snipkins threw out of the corner canthus of her better eye a distrustful glance at the white and simmering face of a two-inch foam that stared innocently from the old granite pail. It looked so fresh and nourishing that in spite of her suspicions she reached to the nearest rafter for a siftin' rag and gave the fluid a more or less sanitary passage from the cheerful flecked granite into a couple of morose earthen jars.

With the siftin' rag dangling at her oblivious hand, dripping its blue-white drops on the patient boards in front of a much delighted brace of tortoise-shelled tomcats, Mrs. Snipkins gazed stoically at the lone suspender-strap which ran down the meridian of a hickory shirt, poked its snaky nose through a knife-slit in the rim of a pair of greasy jeans, looped itself over a rusty nail and effectually held together the upper and lower sections of the male object that sat in the privileged household rocker—armless and ribless and almost rockerless, but none the less privileged—and spat authoritatively into the fire.

"That muley cow with the sprig tail

what the white sow chawed up looks to be crippin' again," she commented in her accustomed drawl.

Her lord and master took the pipe from his mouth and thought the subject over.

"Crippin' again?" he asked eventually. "Whereabouts?"

"Looks to be lame in the hist."

"Lame in the hist, are she?" Mr. Snipkins relapsed into a judicial silence to thoroughly digest the matter. Though composed and unruffled at the first reception of the news, the longer he cogitated upon it the warmer rose the bile in his liver, the stiffer the configuration of his muscles in the armless rocking-chair. He leaned toward the unmortared stone fireplace and poked back the wandering ashes with a resentful thrust of a bent wagon-rod, muttering audibly:

"Bewitched—double witched—one time too many—a silver bullet—by the great horned devil, I'll do it!—I made a threatenin, and I'll fersartin do it!—Shoot her with a silver bullet!—Tan her black soul in brimstone, anyway!"

"Now, paw, what fer ye bemeanin' that pore sprigtailed cow, which all the same has underwent a right smart of hard luck and misfortune, too, by the way?"

"I ain't bemeanin' no sprigtailed cow. I'm bemeanin' that onery, Taw County, haw-eatin', valley-borned, squinch-eyed, toad-tamin' critter what plays fingers and toes with the old devil hisself fer the object of bewitchin' pore, honest animals."

"Now, paw, ye ain't got no fersartin evidence about that. Moreover, she's about the bestmost neighbor that ever toted a warm didy to a pore mite with the summer complains."

"No fersartin evidence! Go hang yer-self upside down on a blind bat's limb, ole woman, if ye're that slow at seemin' things—which all the same I reckon ye don't recollect the Sunday mornin' she was over to our house, sittin' right in this here identical rockin' chair, palaverin' about the pie supper, the one what never come to pass on account of Dick Poggiefoot's baby, Silvia Angelica, a dyin' with the infancy, and that very same evenin' the ole yaller leg-gern with the bald topknot, which none the-

less was the bestmost egg-layer ever scratched fire from gravel, jest up and took red-eye and limber neck and got so porely and no earthly use, we all had to eat her fer supper the follerin' Tuesday to keep her from downright pinin' away and perishin' afore our face and eyes. Hey, there, ye childern, quit that behavin'! Quit it, I say, or I'll frale ye like the devil a beatin' tan bark!"

"Why you shoutin' so, paw? Has the childern got a good time treed and tearin' the fur out?" Another voice introduced itself.

"What, Jack, ain't home again, are ye? Where mought been all this here afternoon? Where mought ye been, I say?"

"Waal, I mought of been to Europe, or to Noo York, or to the moon, but insofar as school is still holdin' down the ridge—"

"Skule, ye say! Since how long do they be keepin' *night* skule fer ambitious young men which lets their paw and-maw do all the chores and everything about the place whiles they goes sanchoin' around with witch women's dorters with red hair from Taw County? Ye been snoopin' home with Milly Dewberry, so ye been, or they ain't no readin' signs in the almanac or out, and don't ye dare deny it."

"I reckon so; and her maw ain't no witch woman, neither. My teacher has learned me not to believe none in witches, nor ghosts, nor devils; which the same I sure don't."

Jack stiffened up as if to receive an onslaught. This was the first time he had blown a big, clear note on the horn of defiance, and he rather liked the bold ring of it. Home politics must rush to a crisis sooner or later, and Jack felt himself ready, though not without that tremor of apprehension which tomentose youth always experiences upon crossing foils with full-bearded authority. Was it James Russell Lowell or some greater poet who long ago discovered that—

Once to every Ozark native  
Comes the moment to decide  
Whether he must lick his dad or  
Let the old man tan his hide.

Generally, when the crisis comes to a head, the old man manages to do most of the

licking; then, realizing that he could never repeat the victory, magnanimously bates his voice of authority from the imperialistic bass to the democratic alto, ruling thenceforth by clucking and counseling more than by a show of spurs and feathers.

Jack was limbed and muscled in the image of the mountains; made for bigness and awkwardness, for bashfulness, taciturnity and iron-hearted perseverance. You could have easier budged the hills than his ideas, once they were set. He was as handsome an eighteen-yearling, too, as ever klopped a wild filly over six shaggy "hog-backs" by starlight to woo a maiden in her father's secluded castle or carve his initials defiantly upon her father's tower. True, that ugly ogre, poverty, had changed the castle into a log-hut and the tower to a pigsty, but Jack's imagination, and Milly's, could rear it as fast in magnificence as the ogre could sink it in mud.

The time had come when he wanted to stretch out his arm and assert his position in the household, but was loath that the stretching should be of such a violent nature as to leave the black and blue record of insurrection on the features of constituted government.

The froth that had risen on this Dewberry kettle would have cooled and settled into a wholesome broth, if left to his cooking; but with Paw Snipkins blowing the fire from one side, and Paw Dewberry blowing just as fiercely from the other, the neighbors were all beginning to look eagerly for a spontaneous overboiling, and did not entirely refrain from confiding their hopes to one another whenever the subject was up for an airing.

Old man Snipkins, for his part, was right now, not so disturbed by the slipping of the reins of control as he was aroused by the audacious rejection of a self-evident truth, a truth that had been demonstrated and accepted from Copperhead Cave to Dog's Misery ever since Hec was a pup and chased kittens—the truth, namely, that animals—and folks, too—do get bewitched from time to time and somebody in the known region is responsible—not to mention any names, of course, except to a person's family and friends, and such visitors

as might possibly insist in fetching the subject up.

And to think that a man's own son, Jack, could be so blinded by an auburn light from Taw County that he could not discern the manifestations of the black art at its very blackest—in his own father's barnyard, his own mother's churn, his own sister's bed, and his own fatal infatuation.

## CHAPTER II.

### OLE SPRIGTAIL.

"DON'T believe none in witches," he reiterated. "Waal, now, that's extraordinary sensible in sich a young feller—me and his mother both havin' sich onusual weak minds. Facts? Shucks, what is facts to a genius? No more 'n a tick to a mad steer, rain-drop to a mallard, wart to a toad, or tight shoes to a proud woman. Facts be damned! What we want is *new thought* and lots of it. The more the better, I reckon, since it takes a heap of philosophy to fatten a hog."

"If ye got anything to specify, then specify." Jack had never relished the flavor of his father's sarcasm.

"Waal, F feels downright mortified to mention, fer example, the night when yore little tomater-head's broom-straddlin' maw goes to roost on our goose-feather company cot in the smoke-shed, and the very next night yore own sister, Lordine, which was cuddled up on the shakedown, wakes up all suddenlike and sees seven little imps as red as a spanked baby's bottom a dancin' stiff-legged on the foot of the kivver, and it scart her so teetotally orful she couldn't go to skule, nor rid up the table, nor sop the dishes, nor nothin' heavy thataway—jest set around or read stories or chased the pop-eyed calf around the house, and didn't feel vigorous atall."

"Waal—"

"Likewise I reckon ye don't recollect much about yer maw's churnin' which wouldn't scatter; or my buggun-juice fresh from the holler Moon Oak which wouldn't bead; or the ole yaller leggern which walked around here with her neck all catawumpus, like a county-seat dude which has jest



passed a purty hill girl on the public square; no, nor Bill Bones's Angora doe which comes blattin' home with one eye shet and couldn't open it no more 'n a rusty padlock until Bill ketched a wart toad under a witch-hazel and rubbed it on that doe's eye and says over out loud three times:

— 'Witch eye, witch eye, ope and see  
Wart toad fer the witch's tea,  
Ketched at seven, left at three  
Under a witch-hazel tree!!

and by the great ferever—if that doe didn't perk up and squinch at Bill almost afore he'd done incantin', and that toad went as blind as a grand-jury witness, and when Bill deposited him under the hazel that afternoon, why, the next mornin' he was all gone, but the skin and toes and nothin' more to be seen nowhere, as sure's the devil's a gentleman!"

"Waal, some wanderin' skunk or polecat mought of chanked him."

"*Mought! Mought!* To be sartin, to be sartin. That sprigtail cow *mought* of fell outen a pin-oak and sprained her hist leg on a acorn—hey, where ye headin'?"

Jack halted, wavering between two answers. His angered tongue was writhing in its eagerness to fling back some bomb of scorn at Milly's detractor. He hesitated on the very precipice of "Going to see Milly Dewberry, a young lady that has to endure bemeanin' remarks from the ignoramus of Skunk Holler." Still he hung back. A retort of this caliber meant war—war to the hoe-handle and the bootjack.

Jack had high confidence, high pride in his youth and his prowess. He believed that he could lick the old man good and plenty. The old man needed it, too, in Jack's opinion; he was incorrigible. Yet something—filial conscience, perhaps—pulled at his tightening muscles and controlled his tongue. He thought of the humiliation—the bruises, the accusations, the cool days of stubborn uncompromise that might follow. To-night, moreover, was the night of the dance at Calico Point. Would Milly like to go with a boy all scarred up with the evidence of a domestic eruption?

"Going to the dance," he stated with unnecessary positiveness, and slammed the door behind him.

The offended father squelched a glowing knot on the suffering backlog with unerring marksmanship, and soliloquized audibly:

"A purty out I've made of it; a right beautiful out, indeed. All the best years of my blood and perspiration spent in jerk-in' up this bunch of ungratitude, tryin' to make a man outen—only to diskivver in him that firm fortitude and noble upstand-in' character of a squash pie, which same has been drapped on the door-step. Don't believe none in witches; the idee on't. Hey, ole woman, what went with that last year popcawn which was fascinated and wouldn't pop and *wouldn't* pop and then all of a sudden jest jumped outen the skillet like somebody had said boo at 'em, and when Lordine and Christine picked 'em off the floor and went to chaw 'em they was tougher 'n a 'rithmetic problem in the back of the book?"

"Let me see. If I ain't mistaken, that cawn is in the ole rubber boot in the ole monkey-stove under them pokes of cawn-shucks which you was savin' fer hot termollies."

"Fetch 'em out."

"What fer?"

"Fer the reason of my goin' to show that alecky son of yourn which is which and what is what. If that cow are bewitched, she'll be onticed towards ary witch's thing like a bird to a blacksnake; willin' or unwillin', she's got to come, jest as if the devil was pullin' her by a unseen halter. Fetch 'em out."

Not altogether enthusiastically, Mrs. Snipkins disturbed the ancient, solitary reign of the twinless gum boot and haled to light a flawless peck of long sleeping beauties; three score of plump and pithy cobs, brocaded with yellow jewels.

"There ye be." She dropped the boot indifferently.

Mr. Snipkins rose to the occasion—it took something of an occasion to get him to rise—and lugged the boot authoritatively to the gate of the cow-lot and up-ended it with a wide and magnificent gesture not calculated to entirely miss the

attention of the white-faced lady of mixed Hereford ancestry who stood modestly at the opposite end of the rotten rail enclosure and sucked the last drop of tea out of a frayed sassafras-stub, which seemed, like the roots of anarchistic propaganda, to thrive on extermination.

Lady Sprigtail had never been acquainted with "feed" in any material sense. She knew the *theory* of it, because she had once talked with two stray Guernseys from up Springfield way who often alluded to feed as to the fond memory of a reality to which they were yearning to return. But in practise the only kind of provender upon her plate, since the blessed days of calfhood, was the kind that she herself had gone marketing for—in woods and pastures, in sloughs and brambles, and in the shock-fodder field whose fences, thanks to the snouty persistence of the irresistible razor-back, remained in a state of heavenly disrepair.

Nevertheless, the fascinating yellow gleam of the treasure pouring out from the dusty caverns of the old gum boot deflected her interest from the sassafras sprout and pulled her across the two-acre lot as if by an unseen halter. Faster and faster, in spite of her game hind-leg, she tripped to the enchanted feast.

Arriving at the yellow pile, some inner counsel, some feminine instinct, told her what to do to it; even though she had never before beheld a popcorn nubbin in the flesh, shuckles and defenseless in the naked ear, and the yellow pile began to dwindle as if by magic.

Paw Snipkins has always maintained that it really was by magic—no *if* about it—but his son disputes that point.

When the mulley sprigtail with the proud white forehead and the cadaverous flank had incorporated the last gullible kernel, and had waddled to the trough below the spring and thoroughly watered every share of her new grain stock, she appeared to be a different creature. The proud, white face was still there, to be sure—although a trifle sadder, it seemed, as if from a premonition of some great burden that would have to be borne—the mulley head-piece and the bipartite tail were present and as distinctive

as ever; but the cadaverous flank was no longer cadaverous; nay, the hyperbole of the very opposite; and therein lay the secret of the transfiguration, the inward and the outward change.

She now resembled, as much as anything, the calm bulbescence of a floating mine; and even little Hezekiah, whose restive toes had often prodded her in the protesting paunch, this time refrained, in awe of a vast explosion.

"Now, paw," the voice of Mrs. Snipkins drawled into the exultant consciousness of the triumphant scientist as he surveyed the site where the hoodooed corn had been piled, "I jest been thinkin' something."

"Thinkin'? How so?"

"I reckon that there holler cow would of et most ary kind of cawn, if somebody had of asked her right politely, or maybe of done the same without askin'."

"There ye be! There ye be! Jest like yer unreasonable, two-legged son—always *if* and *mought* and *maybe* with ye both, and all the time, in spite of the facts bein' as plain as the egg on yer apern. Hey, Hezzy, fetch me some of that new cawn outen the terbaccy-shed, which same we been feedin' to the ole fatten' hog. I'll jest naturally git this idee under yore scalp, ole woman, if ye ain't even got room fer a headache."

"Ye're a powerful smart man to of asked sich a ignorant woman to of been yer wife." Paw wasn't the only sarcastic person.

"I sure do be. Now, Hezzy, drap that cawn about as fur as ye mought heave a stick o' stove-wood, and see if the ole sprigtail will come prancin' up jest the same as heretofore. Haw! Haw! nothin' stirrin'. Tote it a little closter, Hezzy; still closter; right under her nose. There ye be, ole woman, there ye be. Haw! Haw! turnin' away from it. Now wouldn't that jar a frozen boot offen a drowned nigger. Lordine, jest lope to the house, on a nail in the bedroom, fetch me my corduroy pants."

As Lordine came sailing back, flaunting the helpless garment in her clutch, for all the world like a young hawk with a garter-snake, Mrs. Snipkins asked:

"What ye aimin' now?"

"I'm aimin'—Handle 'em here, Lordine. Don't feel like I got ary quawter. Here's a

nickel, and a penny. Aimin' to rid that pore female cow of the witch-leg, that's what—and a dime, and a horseshoe nail. Hezzy, skedaddle across Skunk Holler and ask Perrimore Poggelfoot if he's got a quawter, and give him this here nickel and dime, and tell him I'll fetch him two more nickels, or maybe a dime, next week or so; git a go on ye; punch right along and back over again afore it's too teetotally dark to shoot the witch out of ole Sprigtail—"

"Hello, Jawn Snipkins!"

"Why, hello yer own onery self! If it ain't Tawm Senessy from down by Angel-wing Gap! Jest light down, Tawm, and stop off by."

"Naw, I cain't, Jawn; I'm goin' to the hoedown at Calico P'int. You-all aimin' to go?"

"Nary one but Jack, and he's done went."

"Yep; flicked him outen the tail of my eye turnin' up to Dewberry's jest as I circulated the hogback."

"Turnin' up to Dewberry's?"

"Sure; leastwise I took it to of been him; straddle the strawberry roan."

"Yep, that was Jack. Think on't, ole woman—Dewberry's! Takin' that tomatertop from Taw County. Hey, Tawm!"

"Yep?"

"Didn't aim to detain ye, but if ye sets eyes on that two-legged son of mine at Calico P'int, be so congenial as to tell him I'm a comin' to that dance my own self, jest as soon as I can settle a little affair atween me and old Sprigtail; and when I git there I figger on raisin' some first-class hell."

"All right, Jawn, I'll sure tell him. And atween me and you, Jawn, I don't mind admittin' that nothin' on this sad earth can afford me more undiluted pleasure than bein' witness to a little hell in the raisin'."

### CHAPTER III.

#### THE POT AND THE KETTLE.

ALL hill histories tell us that when Jack "lit down" at the Dewberry castle the bearded knight—to wit: Milly's father—was not anywhere on guard. He

had gone to town. He has always contended, when probed on the subject, that he had been forced to go to town by the direst necessity, being stark out of tobacco—and Lord knows that such a particular man as *he* would rather go to town a dozen times over, even if it were farther than Nellie missed the answer, than to buy or borrow any of that foul, half-cured, stemmy stuff which that old rascally Snipkins grew last season on a patch of impoverished soil.

Others, including Milly, audaciously assert that Paw Dewberry had at least two plugs of chewin' and three hands of smokin' lying on top of the kitchen cupboard the very evening that he rode off to the store. Mrs. Dewberry, when cried at for a verdict, declines to incriminate herself or any one else; merely smiles a wide and appreciative smile and shakes her gray hairs lightly. Smiles, indeed, were her special, and it was one of them, a fine, flashing, welcoming one that made Jack Snipkins vow inwardly that evening, as he smiled back and said, "howdy," that if his old man should ever again scandalize her as a witch-woman, he, Jack, would proceed to mop up the kitchen and porch and a large portion of the out-of-doors with his venerable father's anatomy.

Whatever vengeance was coagulating in his brain, however, was instantaneously dissipated into the thinnest fancies of dead memory when he and Milly fared near enough to the clapboard schoolhouse at Calico Point to hear the magical clumpety-clump of the roaring hoedown—a sound that never has, and never will be, duplicated on this side of pandemonium's walls.

Caught by the dissonant spell, Milly dug an agitated heel into the moist nap that lined the trim abdomen of her spirited bay, and clicked him into a faster fox-trot with her tongue.

"Best preserve all yer energetics for dancin'," warned her perspiring companion. "Goin' to be hotter 'n a monkey-stove on Monday!"

But the threat of heat did not daunt Milly; not a little bit; it being a fact of some prominence that a mountain girl can dance from sundown to sunrise, kill every man on the floor, and feel as gay as a cuckoo-clock all the next day. The men

make such hard work of it, out so many caprioles, do so much high kicking and low clogging, that even the springiest of them begin to wilt and feel tuckered about two or three hours before dawn.

"Peter Burr — Doggett Brownley — Grumpy Everby — Jack Snipkins!" sang out the stentorian bookkeeper. Nice little thrills of anticipation rippled along Milly's spinal-cord. Her Jack had lost no time in buying his number.

"All jine hands and circulate all;  
Break in the middle and yer back to the wall—"

chanted Croaky Callison, the best caller in three counties. Milly's delight doubled; they were going to dance Nancy-up-and-down, her favorite.

Sashay up and honor Johnny,  
Sashay back and put on style,  
If yer legs git feelin' funny,  
Keep 'em prancin' all the while!

Croaky Callison infused his rhythmic enthusiasm into every heel and toe; the fiddlers sawed wilder and wilder; the dancers clumpety-clumped faster and faster, in spite of the enervating heat. Then a stately promenade: eyes up, heads thrown back, noses at the north star; and none so proud as Jack and Milly.

Yer right foot up and yer left foot down,  
Like a redbird walkin' on the frozen groun'!

Then a transition ode, a lively interlyric, prophesying a still more violent measure:

Chicken on the door tray, peck, peck, peck,  
Door tray fell and broke a chicken's neck;  
But the other little chickens hadn't orter of cried,  
'Cause he got a good dinner jest afore he died!

"Which all the same 'minds me"—Jack began to chuckle—" 'minds me of Ole Yaller with the bald topknot and the catawumpus neck which made her look south when she was thinkin' north, and retreat when she figgered she was advancin'."

"And I reckon yore paw laid *that* on my maw, like everything else." Milly bit at her tongue sharply, but the agile words had slipped through.

"And I reckon yore paw laid my paw on *me*, jest like everything else." Jack, too, was hot and easily irritated.

That was his whole offense, nothing worse. But sometimes one mistake is a blunder. A cool word in a warm situation is like a copperhead's egg, fraught with potential havoc.

Milly was mad at herself for tipping over the wagon in the first place, but doubly incensed at Jack for not straightening it up like a gallant diplomat, for not giving her a chance to get on firm ground again. She floundered, and went in deeper.

"Waal, I'll have you know my paw is growin' all-fired impatient at yore paw's bemeanin' of my maw, and he 'lowed to go over around up by there this very evenin' and leave him a piece of his mind."

"Waal, I kindly cal'late his mind will be mostly in pieces when my paw gits done with it."

Up leaped Milly's nose with a quick and angry gesture, as if it were striving to keep abreast of the rising tide in her cheek. "Gawd!" she muttered passionately, "I wisht this dance was ended!"

"Can be ended whenever you git good and ready," he grimly assured her.

"Then it's ended right now—this and the next and the next and all the rest which you was so sweet to ask me fer!" She jerked her waist free from his awkward clasp and flared out through the open door.

The caller paused; then the fiddlers; every one stared inquiringly at Jack for an interpretation of this strange event.

"Milly 'lowed it were right smart warm fer dancin'," he drawled his apology steadily, in spite of the mounting color of embarrassment, and escaped into the twilight of the yard.

The bookkeeper rounded up another couple, and Nancy-up-and-down continued merrily to the end. Not a mouth quirked, not an eye in the entire assembly flickered with a meaningful gesture. The mountain code demands a supreme indifference to every one else's tender spot so long as the owner of the spot is present, or his friends or relatives; but Jack knew that every shack from "hell to Haw River" would clack and buzz next day with the news of this social rupture. His hands worked open and shut, nervously, angrily; he felt as if he would like to take the whole world by

the nape of the neck and kick it into eternity.

He would doubtless have drawn even his dad's sympathy, if that worthy could have telepathed the actual situation. But Paw Snipkins was too busy dancing on his own coals right now to lend much concern to the burns on other people's feet. He might, indeed, be said to be not only peeved, but furious. For had not that bantam-legged husband of the witch-woman from Taw County ventured to call him a *bulldozin' muddauber*, a *doodle-bug*, and a *liar* right before his old woman and kids.

The first and last insults he could possibly have washed out by an acid retort in kind; but *doodle-bug*—by the eternal dog-fish, *doodle-bug*!—and that is how the fight was started.

He realized that old Dewberry had arrived on a matter of business the moment he hove the woodline. Business crackled from his stiff posture in the saddle; business in the taut and jerking bridle-reins; business in his inflexible eye. Snipkins decided to be as diplomatic as honor would allow.

"A feller can afford to be a little extra broad-minded with a long-standin' neighbor," he confided magnanimously to his wife. "I could give him doo warnin', howsomever, that my corns is packed plumb full of dynamite, and he better not try to tromp 'em—evenin', Berry."

"Good evenin', sir." There was business in that good evening; its tone was so non-committal.

"Been to town and back home already, I guess?"

"I reckon."

"Hearn anything?"

"Nope."

"Things kindly so-so around your diggin's this season?"

"Kindly."

"How's yer ole woman?"

"How's my ole woman! A fine specimen ye be, to be preposin' that question, after spendin' all yer days and half yer nights fer twenty-odd year' a blasphemin' the name and reputation of that good woman with all the sneakin', snivelin', skunky, fishy, lousy consinuations yer feeble brain could devise; howsomever, my ole woman

is not so perky, since ye seem so *interested*, Mr. Snipkins. Fell off the step and bunged her right leg on a stun, jest afore I fetched up home from town, and I'm goin' over to Pete Burr's this identical minute to borry a bottle of polecat liniment, my bottle bein' stark empty. Since ye kindly want to know, Mr. Snipkins."

"Bunged her right leg on a stun?" faltered Mr. Snipkins. "Whereabouts?"

"Right clost above the knee-j'int. 'Tain't no whoppin' big gouge, but makes her limp worse 'n a bootlegger."

Mrs. Snipkins gasped, and shot her hand to her mouth in amazement. Mr. Snipkins, too, seemed violently affected. Lordine, next day, told Jack that her paw's hair "stood out straighter 'n wagon-spokes," but Mr. Snipkins invited the child to the smoke-shed to verify her remark, and inasmuch as Lordine never again mentioned the phenomenon, we have to assume that she was mistaken.

Whatever the quality of Mr. Snipkins's inward disturbance, it soon found outward expression. He yelled, nay, fairly shrieked at Mr. Dewberry in excitement and exultation:

"Fell down steps! Fell down a pig's hind leg! Tell that to yer grandmother's ole deaf mare! Maybe she won't laugh if she don't hear ye. A most reemarkable accident! A right fearful and wonderful tale! I'll cite ye what's the trouble of yer ole Taw County witch. How about it, ole woman, didn't I shoot the witch outen ole Sprigtail with a silver bullet? Didn't I chuse her jest above the knee-j'int? And ain't she standin' out there in the moon-shine jest as calm and peaceable as a still-born babe? And ain't the ole witch crippin' around with a hurt place jest above the knee-j'int, pertendin' to of fell on a stun? How about it, ole woman? How about it Christine? There ye be, Hank Dewberry. That's what yer Taw County queen is limpin' about. And when ye go home again, if ye ever do, jest inform yer ole woman what's really the matter of her."

Poor Dewberry looked as if his controversial suspenders had burst. This unexpected avalanche of evidence had knocked the rigidity out of his posture, and the

determination out of his eye. Indignation at length rallied his tongue, however, and guided it back to speech.

"Silver bullet Silver fiddlesticks! Jest as if *that* had anything to do with it! Ye're the most bodacious liar atween here and sunup, anyway, Jawn Snipkins, and I fer one don't pay no notice to nothin' ye try to say. Moreon, ye never yet had enough silver in yer jeans to plug the ear of a half-growed muskeeter. Besides, I reckon I ort to know if my good woman is a witch or not, bein' as I've been the mate of her bosom fer nigh on—"

"Ye don't know nothin' about that woman, Hank Dewberry, bein' only her second husband. Why, I knowed that same individual when she was hitched up to Bush Tomley—twenty-two year' agone next berry-pickin'—and her and him taken up housekeepin' in the ole Tomley cabin, and it wasn't six months afore she's bewitched pore Tomley and he died of it taken the infernal revulsions, Doc Somers said, and his heart and liver and stummick 'peared to git all tangled up, and he flopped around in bed like a chicken with its head off and his eyes popped out like that green frog which the childern tied a rubber elastic around its belly, and the pore feller couldn't no more help jerkin' inside than little Christine there can at night help—"

"Jawn!" Mrs. Snipkins cut in sharply, "I've told ye afore I won't have no disrespecktable language used in the sight of these childern. I'm makin' a effort to jerk 'em up a little decenter as both you and me."

Dewberry saw his chance and made haste to take advantage.

"There's a specimen, Jawn Snipkins; even the wife of yer bosom cain't abide yer disrespecktable language; and as fer scandal and gossip, ye never found a pot o' scum in all yer life which ye didn't dip yer whiskers in and go drippin' all over the country. Ye're a bullyraggin', bulldozin' muddauber, that's what ye be, and a liar to boot! Ye're a snoopin', snivelin' doodle-bug, always a hidin' in a pile of dirt, waitin' to devour some nasty morsel—"

"Look out, Hank Dewberry, don't you dare call me no doodle-bug!"

"I reckon ye're done called, Jawn Snipkins!"

#### CHAPTER IV.

"ALL TO THE HICKORY."

AND that is how the fight began.

"Began" is the proper and only word to use under the circumstances of this particular fight; for it certainly had no middle and no finish. Mrs. Snipkins strode arbitrarily to the adjacent fence and wrenched loose a formidable rail. This mediator she thrust between her husband and the other contending party, swinging it back and forth with such a determined motion that both Hector and Ajax found it expedient to retreat hastily in opposite directions.

She explained this arbitrament of the rail by declaring that no rough stuff was going to be pulled off in the presence of Lordine, and Christine, and Hezekiah, and Baby Eglatine; moreover, if the contending parties attempted to resume hostilities, she would lay her pogamoggan across their brain-pans and stretch them side by side in the quiet moonlight to recover their spirits as best they might.

This act of intervention gave Dewberry an opportunity to "retreat with honor." He straddled the back of his languid mount and stippled her ribs with an angry rowel.

"I'll git ye alone some time," he vibrated, a Parthian fist at his wife's defamer, "when yer ole woman ain't there to pectect ye."

Snipkins denied the allegation and defied the allegator, shouting Jeremiads till his enemy was well out of range.

Forgetting all about the bottle of polecat liniment, Milly's father reined into the first bridle-path leading in the direction of Calico Point, vowing a fearful vow. He'd teach his alecky daughter to associate over the country with the offspring of that scandal-snouted old doodle-bug!

And Mr. Snipkins, not dreaming even faintly that his bosom enemy had veered in the direction of the hoedown, despatched little Hezekiah into the woods pasture to drive up the blazed-faced filly.

"I'll learn that alecky son of yourn to go

galavantin' in public with the tomat-headed babchick of that ole banty-legged haw-eater!" he announced emphatically to his wife.

Mrs. Snipkins did not protest; did not seek to question or argue. He was her lord and master, and she calmly acquiesced in his dictatorship—except in certain peculiar domestic emergencies, such as have already been more or less hinted.

One person, however, who had not licked the imperial boot for a year or more without making a bad mouth at the flavor of it, was now pacing rebelliously back and forth between the well and the woodpile in the playground of the Calico school. In his affliction he was approached by Tom Senessy, the light-hearted gentleman who dearly loved to watch hell in the raising.

"Do, Jack!"

"Do, Tawm!"

"Jest seed yer paw as I rid by the place, Jack. He informed me to tell ye he was pretty damned quick a comin' to this here dance on all ten toes with his tail feathers up and his gizzard plumb full o' hot gravel."

"Paw comin' here! What's the object?"

"Guess he don't fancy the idee of yer assistin' Milly to the hoedown."

"How'd he know I got Milly? Who told him?"

"Don't have no idee. Guess nobody told him. Liable he jest hearn it somewhere."

Jack straightened up. His muscles, filling with compressed emotion, bulged out like auto tires.

"By Gawd—"

The clumpety-clump in the schoolhouse ceased; then broke a yell and a handclapping.

"Let's go in and see," suggested Tom Senessy. "If somethin' are goin' to take place withouten me bein' there, I sure don't want to miss it."

They went in, and beheld two buxom girls tugging at the wrists of Miss Derricia Ladleby. All the dancers had yielded to the effects of the unusual autumn heat and had agreed to a few minutes respite. Some one had proposed that Derricia speak a

piece. Derricia shrank back modestly. No, indeed, she wouldn't speak. She had forgotten all her pieces—never could speak very well anyhow.

The two neighbor girls dragged the famous elocutionist perforce into the center of the room. She cast about as if seeking escape, but, observing all exits closed, spread her palms outward with a gesture of well, I suppose there's no way out of it, and inquired demurely:

"Waal, then, what shall I speak?"

"Boston Burglar!" cried her partner, Doggett Brownley.

"Hiram's Goat!" chimed Jack. He had never heard this piece, but dearly wanted to. Folks often mentioned the dramatic way in which Derricia handled it. Derricia smiled at Jack.

"All right," she consented, "I'll try it."

If she had glanced at Milly just after she smiled at Jack, she might not have been able to go forward with the recital; for Milly had blood in her eye. Derricia had not been blind to the rumpus between Jack and Milly, not by a jugful, and she had no scruples about baiting a wounded enemy. She smiled again, and proceeded:

"Old Hiram's goat was feelin' fine:  
Ate six red shirts right off the line.  
Sal took a club and broke his back,  
And stretched him on the railroad track.  
Pore Hiram's goat was doomed to die;  
The fearful train was drawin' nigh;  
He gave six shrieks in orful pain,  
Coughed up them shirts and *flagged* the train!"

A second of silence, an interval of open-mouthed awe; then a ripple of handclapping around the naive circle—a burst of admiration which might have been meant for the goat or for Derricia or for both.

As Derricia bowed she maneuvered a skilful sidewise glance at Jack Snipkins to see if he was applauding. He was not. She bit her lip and tried to swallow her tonsils, which had inopportunely jumped out of place and were threatening to close up her windpipe. She backed into the crowd of girls sitting or standing along the wall, and contrived a seemingly happy giggle as she indulged a mock collapse, and hoped that nobody had seen.

But somebody had seen; and the worst

of it was that somebody was Milly Dewberry. She noticed Jack's abstract indifference to Derricia's bow, and detected the engouled lump in Derricia's throat. If Jack had seized this radiant instant to apply for a reconciliation, he might have achieved it. Milly's revengeful heart was gloating; she could have hugged a post.

Jack, a democratic soul, had not offered the elocutionist an intentional snub. If not thinking of her, he was at least thinking of the hero of her recital, Old Hiram's goat; thinking deep and seriously. Jack's head, as already recorded, bore a certain definite resemblance to his native hills: slow to receive an impression, but once received neither storm nor sunshine could efface the effects of it, nor even the dim lapse of years.

"I sure cal'lated that goat was a goner," he murmured, "and him in a durn sight worse fix than me right now, though 'tain't sayin' I ain't experiencin' them same humorous sensations which a gent receives when he sets down on a flat-eared cactus. Where they's a will they's a way, I do declare. More ways of ketchin' meat fer dinner than jest lassoin' a frog with a shoe-string. I kindly anticipated to give paw a first-class, genuine, ole-fashioned wallop in', but—" He betook himself and the remainder of his thoughts to the big elm-tree that overshadowed the woodpile.

Milly, animated, perhaps, by similar broodings, wandered hither and yon about the schoolground, pausing eventually beneath the protective umbration of the very same elm that Jack had fled to, but on the other side of the double row of cordwood.

She heard a galloping horse jerked to a stop at one of the huge green posts that supported the front line fence, and a moment later the voice of her father, insistent, impassioned, demanding:

"Where's Milly?"

Her dander rose like a startled grizzly at the advent of this new mortification. Wasn't it bad enough to have a row with her steady, right on the floor of the hoe-down, and everybody suspecting it—wasn't it bad enough to have civil war in the bosom of the family over her love affairs, and the war public property, without hav-

ing the old man stalk into a community festival like an enraged steer, bellowing out, "Where's Milly?"

Some ill-wisher, Derricia Ladleby, maybe, indicated the general direction in which Milly had been seen to stroll. Descrying her father as he emerged from the school-house door into the moonlight, Milly snuggled close to the rows of cordwood and tried to look as much like the shadow of an elm-twig as possible.

A venturesome moonbeam tumbled through the treacherous roof of brown elm-leaves and lit in a broken heap on her expansive white muslin collar, outlined against the invisible background of her blue cambric dress. The roving patriarch caught the betraying gleam. He ambled unevenly across the rocky terrain and clutched her by the nearest wrist. "Trot right along with me, young lady!" he ordered fiercely. "I'll learn ye to disrespect yer legal paw and go sanchoin' around the timber with the first-borned insect of that gossip-eatin' ole doodle-bug!"

Quicker than any wildcat Milly extended her free hand and plucked a stick of stovewood from the cord.

"Let go my wrist!" she exclaimed threateningly.

He let go.

"That's it! That's it! Tryin' to kill yer own flesh and blood fer the sake of a insect! That's gratitude! That's what I git fer lettin' children go chummin' around with any kind of trash!"

"He ain't trash—and I ain't chummin' with him."

"Ain't chummin'! Don't ye lie to yer paw, Milly Dewberry! Don't ye try to throw me off the scent by pertendin' ye ain't thicker'n bread and butter!"

"I ain't no such of a thing!"

"There ye go again! Never seed sich a hypocrite since the devil wore specs! Jest as if ye didn't come with him—ain't been dancin' with him—ain't aimin' to go home with him!"

"Ain't dancin' with him. Ain't aimin' to go home with him."

"Quit yer lyn', Milly Dewberry!" The indignant father shook his fist excitedly, and might have laid authoritative hands



upon his unruly seventeen yearling, had it not been for the pacifying influence of the stick of stovewood gripped resolutely in Milly's muscular fingers.

"Ain't lyin'," she insisted.

"My Gawd! As stubborn as a pinch-back pine! Waal, I'm givin' ye doo warnin', young lady—and don't ever let me ketch ye associatin' with this insect any more!"

"I will if I want to—and he ain't no insect!"

"Ah, there's the hole in the dish-pan! Standin' up fer him, of course! Murder will out at last, folks say, if it has to out through the chimney! But mark my language, Miss Persnickety. If ye come ridin' along to-morry mornin' with that Snipkins feller, ye'll never darken my door again!"

"I'll ride home to-morry with that same Jack Snipkins, and I'll darken yer door and git breakfast whiles you snores and maw does the pailin', jest as we always has."

"Ye dasn't! I'll lock the door on ye!"

"Not if you values yer winder glass. A nice husband you'd be, indeed, to expect to leave maw with them seven youngins a draggin' on her dresstail to do all that work alone all by herself—and her not feelin' none too perky, nohow. No, siree, if you want to git shut of me fer the present, Paw Dewberry, you can jest go out and hunt up a nice, comfortable location in a holler stump and abide there till all the bile oozes out of yer liver!"

So saying, she walked away from the interview, circumnavigated the teeming schoolhouse, and settled into a woful heap in a far, dark corner of the playground.

"Consarn it!" she lamented, almost ready to seek relief in a feminine overflow, "this here's a worse darned mess than my first pie!"

Jack came shuffling along the fence—entirely by accident, no doubt—and noticed Milly—entirely by accident. He accosted her solicitously:

"'Fraid it's goin' to rain in a mighty few minutes. Moon's a playin' hide-and-seek among some powerful black clouds."

One advance drop, like a royal courier, kissed the back of Milly's listless hand.

"Waal," she replied with fine indifference, "I reckon I'd jest as lief be drownded as bored to death." To this insinuation Jack remained oblivious by a powerful effort of will.

"I was jest a goin' to ask you," he persisted gently, "fer a favor."

Curiosity burned at the roots of Milly's tongue, and she swallowed hard as she answered coolly:

"Did you need somebody to help you add up yer family's list o' virtues?"

"Now, Milly, I don't ask it because I thinks I deserves it, or anything like that; I'm simply dependin' on yer goodness of heart."

A little bird fluttered in Milly's breast. It was her natural sweet impulse, trying to get free once more. She pitied it, but kept it caged.

"Waal, maybe"—the latch was lifted a trifle—"but I won't promise."

"Waal, that there Hiram's goat has set me studyin'"—Jack detected a hostile curve creeping into the Cupid's bow of his sweetheart's mouth, and he struck in with a *coup d'etat*—"of course, I can't say much fer the way it was spoke, but I was ignorin' delivery and everything like that—jest thinkin' about that goat and the manner he figgered out a most desperate situation which all the same is something similar to what I finds starin' me in the face this identical minute."

"How so?" Milly's displeasure began to melt in the glow of her curiosity.

"Waal, there is paw—Tawm Senessy says—a comin' at me roarin' and puffin' like that same express train. And here is mē, honorbound to meet the misfortunate oncomin' jest like that same pore goat. Now, which ort I to undertake—to lay down pious and humble and git all run over and bulldozed and mangled—or act up kindly vi'lent and wreck the train—meanin' paw—or set my wits to workin' like that same smart goat and figger out some way of convincin' the train meanin' paw, of its foolish and destructive headlong course and make it stop short somewhere of its own free will and testament afore any damage is done?"

"Yes," said Milly, as soft as an execu-

tioner; "but you see that was a *smart* goat."

Jack winced, but the strings of control still held.

"Now, my proposition can be spoke as follers: if I can make good soap out of this evil-lookin' mess—can tie some kind o' knot in paw's shirt-tail so as to make him leave off bemeanin' yer good maw fer now and evermore—can calmify yer dad, satisfy yer maw, and git the two families both on the same agreeable and happy-speakin' terms as a couple of new-borned babes—then Milly, would—would you sweeten up and marry me all the same as heretofore?"

"Is *that* yer favor?"

"Yes, Milly, that's the favor. You understand it's no earthly use fer me to try to do this here thing, it bein' a mighty particular proposition and mayhaps can't be done at all—and bring the ole folks to drinkin' sociable outen the same trough—if, after all is said and done, you and me is still as fur apart as fangs and rattlers."

Milly's dark eyebrows gathered thoughtfully, and her mouth assumed the tantalizing pucker of perplexity, as she profoundly pondered the problem.

"No, Jack, I'm afeared this here corn on the family toe is growed too big fer you to trim successful, so I reckon we'll jest have to say *ouch* until we git used to the feel of it. You mought—I mean *might*, as teacher says—you might jest as well try to make a moonshiner and a government officer sleep peaceful in the same small bed and expect to find both of them alive and happy the next mornin' as try to avail on my paw and yore paw to sit down at the same meal o' victuals without testin' the soup fer pisen—"

"Where they's a will they's a way, Milly. Don't ye mind how that pore goat was trussed up tighter'n a burned boot, and no help nowheres in sight—"

"That's all very scrumptious in theery, Jack, but it takes a heap of philosophy to fatten a hog. A studious, deep-thinkin' man might figger it out, if he thunk hard enough, but you ain't no thinkin' man, Jack, and never will be. You're a big, stout feller, Jack, and not so orful homely, and folks do say you got a mighty good

mind in a way; but nobody never yet insulted you by callin' you a thinkin' man—not to my recollection."

Seeing his countenance turn cloudy with disappointment, Milly hastily continued:

"Of course, if you should accident'ly turn the trick—I'm simply sayin' *if*—"

Jack impetuously seized her hands, regardless of her gesture of protest.

"That's enough, Milly! That *if* is jest as satisfyin' to me as all the words in Webster's Unabridged—"

A clatter on the road interrupted him.

"By doggies! Sounds like the blaze-faced filly—paw must be tryin' to outrun a bad temper. Damn the luck, there comes the rain, and I've got to set out somewheres in the tall timber and git wetter'n the month of April!"

"What fer?"

"Fer two reasons. Fer the one reason of avoidin' the pleasure of lickin' the tar out of my deluded ancestor, and fer the other reason of bein' all alone whiles doin' a considerable spell of deep thinkin'."

"Then why don't you straddle yer ole Strawberry and cavort up the ridge to the ole Tomly cabin? Tain't more'n a long quawter. Place and everything in it is bewitched, of course, to hear yore paw and some of his friends tell it. But if you don't mind ghosts nor goblins nor devils nor sills nor springs nor imps nor fairies, why I reckon you're 'all to the hickory, because they's an ole cypress bucket to set on and a sound roof to keep the warter off yer brain whiles you're thinkin'."

"Jest the identical thing!" Jack sparkled with admiration. "I may not be a thinkin' man myself, Milly, but I got sense enough to hang around people that *does* have first-class idees once in a while. Good-by! I'll be back again afore the last dog's hung!"

## CHAPTER V.

SATAN D. BEELZEBUB.

**W**HEN Milly regained the school-room, and pried herself a place between the triple balustrades of human bodies that enclosed a central

square of floor in which a double set, eight girls and eight boys, danced and perspired and gulped for oxygen, she heard Dad Snipkins, as he wormed his way vigorously among the throng, inquiring the whereabouts of his son.

He spotted Milly, and blustered up to confront her. She took about ten degrees of the bluster out of his system with one of her mother's dissolving smiles.

"Where's Jack?" he demanded, much more moderately than he had intended. Milly replied in a voice as sweet as chlorine, and as deadly:

"I think you'll find Jack in—" She hesitated and began to watch the dancers absently. He recalled her with a nudge.

"Yes," he prompted her eagerly, "as ye was sayin', I would find Jack in?"

"In good health, Mr. Snipkins." And she resumed, more intently, her contemplation of the dance.

A suppressed grin communicated along the tier of stolid faces on that side of the room; and Mr. Snipkins, in spite of his aggravated wrath, perceived that he was totally done for. Any further performance on his part that evening, even the sacred business of disciplining his own son, would only serve to make him ridiculous. And if Jack should turn up, and should refuse to be disciplined, and hold his own—which was not even to be dreamed of—the on-lookers would rib one another with their elbows, shift their quids, and remark very solemnly: "Jack 'pears to be in unusual good health this evenin'."

Paw Snipkins could not endure this vision. Squeezing his way surreptitiously to the door, he dared the downpour, unhitched his filly and skedaddled home through the dark—which *may* have been exactly what Milly intended.

The negrescent clouds, like dusky servants, labored for an hour or more, washing the dusty sconces of the hills; then retired as quietly as they had arrived, while the matronly moon came out and smiled her approval. Full another hour, and Jack, emerging from his intellectual incubation, slyly reconnoitered.

"No more filly," he grinned, examining the tracks where his pursuer had

mounted. "I 'lowed paw would begin to feel kinder foolish huntin' fer a feller he couldn't no more locate than a pain in a infant." With manlike presumption he credited his father's discomfiture solely to his own cleverness, never imagining that a lady had salted the brew in his absence.

For purposes that he did not divulge, or even hint at, Jack begged Milly to quit the dance early—about two o'clock in the morning. With an air of great indifference—too great, possibly—Milly assented. She did not say that she wanted to show certain smart Alecks, who had been licking their chops in the surmise that she and Jack had been mixing things up, that they didn't know beans from potatoes. She didn't say so; but it is not beyond reason to conjecture that she had a motive of some sort. Motives were to Milly what futurism is to art—none but the originator can fathom it.

Mountain youths are seldom loquacious; but even that fact can hardly cover the causes of the blank and wordless interval, the conversational doldrum, that stretched all the way from the purlieus of Calico Point to the ramparts of the Dewberry castle.

As his lady alighted, Jack swallowed the accumulated lump of huskiness in his throat and said, very earnestly:

"You won't disremember yer promise, Milly?"

"I ain't give no promise."

"Waal, you know what I mean; I mean yer *if*."

"Oh, *that*? Waal, yes, of course I'll stick by that *if*." Then a light laugh.

"But I reckon it won't ever worry me none." She dumped the saddle and bridle on the floor of the lean-to, and pulled the latchstring on the door of the cabin.

The door was not locked.

Milly's action left her escort foot-loose and fancy-free. There were no *sub rosa* delays in the sweet name of dalliance, no elastic good-bys. When Jack wheeled his horse, the hour was just three o'clock in the morning. The Strawberry was a good traveler with a long and easy stride, and should have breasted the bars of the Snipkins gate by five o'clock, or before. All reports agree, however, that Jack did not

come jogging down the ridge spur until after six o'clock—more than three hours of travel. How this chronological discrepancy happened—where he had been or what he had been doing—he has never been heard to explain. Perhaps the Strawberry had sprung a shoe.

The family, all up and breakfasted, were plying their several morning professions. The baby, appareled in breech-clout and innocence, rolled contentedly in the dirt. Lordine and Christine soaped and sopped the fragmentary china. Mrs. Snipkins pailed Whitey and Notchy, while John hissed the dogs after an erring pig in the pumpkin patch, and little Hezekiah traipsed barefoot through the scintillating grass and buckbrush to hunt up the sprig-tailed cow—she with the silvery knee-joint.

This was by no means the first time that old Sprigtail had wandered away in the moonlight; she was by nature and practice a globe-trotter, and the lot fences were always more or less down. But little Hezzy, returning from the woods-pasture without finding hide, hair or corner, cursed the poor beast to the capacity of his young green vocabulary for grazing "so plague-taked fur."

In this interim, while Hezekiah's legs were recuperating and Hezekiah's dad was speculating as to "what went with her," Jack rode up to the rickety barrier and leaned over to drop the bars, whistling exuberantly.

The happy carelessness of this idle music galled Mr. Snipkin's eardrums like a note of taunting victory. He could not shut from his retina the intruding phantasma of the night before—the neighbors, the suppressed grins, the sweetly treacherous voice of Milly Dewberry.

"That's it! That's it!" he burst into ardent recrimination. "Come wabblin' in fer yer breakfast in the middle the forenoon when all the work is over! Why can't ye do nothin' to earn yer salt, once in a blue moon, instead of paradin' from hell to Haw River with spiteful female women from Taw County? That's what I'd be all-fired relieved to ever hear expounded!"

"Do nothin'?" Jack jerked up with astonishment. "Do nothin'? Didn't I

bow my humble back in laborious hard work at Seaville all summer long to provide that there coffee and them there molasses and whatsoever flour was used up in mixin' them ten or twelve biscuits you gulped down this mornin' fer breakfast—without you was feelin' a little mite peaked and only et seven or eight! Do nothin'—"

Realizing that he had cut his temper loose from its moorings, which was evidently not a part of his plans, Jack bit a remorseful lip and looked back along the ridgeway anxiously, as if half expecting Pan or Silvanus or some other wood god to appear and come to his rescue.

The old man's control flew into fractions, and he frantically began to shuck his blue jumper.

"That's enough, young feller, and more'n enough and a plenty! I've abided enough of yer resurrection and stood it too patient and then some! We'll see who's boss right now, I tell ye—or know the reason why! Climb down offen that hoss, Gawd blast ye! The bodacious nerve of ye—throwin' yer dirty biscuits in my face—"

"Paw! Paw! Lookie! Lookie!"

The thrilled and thrilling voice of little Hezekiah rose in a wild and mingled key of wonder and surprise. He danced up and down like a frantic jumping-jack and leveled an agitated finger at the edge of the black-oak timber from which Jack had so lately emerged.

Paw Snipkins' mouth which he had left tentatively open in order to resume his diatribe, now opened still wider and remained agape, as if propped in that position. His eyes, which had been narrowed by the contortions of anger, began to metamorphose into big, pale-blue bulbs, inflated with amazement.

At last his voice welled up from the abyss into which it had sunk, and with it a gasp that relieved the tension:

"My Gawd—bewitched again! Ten thousand times worse 'n ever!"

Like a lurid headline bringing verification of this hasty theory, the old mulley sprig-tail came hippity-hopping, stumbling, bellowing and cavorting along the embouldered ridgeway.

Her ribs and belly carried the marks of the wet sand and gravel into which she had been slumping from time to time in her frenzied attempts to make headway. Her stubby, forked tail stuck out behind like the arm of a prophet, imploring the gods to witness.

And on her humiliated forelegs, sweeping the rocks and flapping about her ankles, were a pair of raggedly, dun-colored trousers!

Although of the wrong sex to fully comprehend all the technicalities of masculine adornment, the misguided lady had evidently donned them with a great deal of skill and imagination. The front was in front, as it should be, and the dingy, elastic suspender which looped over her shoulders was buckled to the fore of the right leg and to the aft of the left leg, insuring but small chance of a slip-off.

She rolled her eyes so piteously, and moaned so loudly, as she stumbled across the lowered bars into the cowlot, that Jack unhooked the ever-present lariat from his saddle and flopped her to the ground. Paw Snipkins ran forward to sit on her head while Hezekiah worked excitedly to uncatch the suspender buckles; tug off the disgrace, and restore her to her pristine modesty.

Mrs. Snipkins, surprised, almost, out of her unfathomable calm, approached gingerly with an empty milk pail.

"By the great horned devil! Don't tetch that fascinated milk, woman! Don't ye recognize them pants? Don't ye mind how pore, bewitched Tomley perished with the infernal revulsions in that identical pair of britches—which all the same has been hangin' on a peg in the cabin fer nigh on twenty-two year, because nobody was willin' to steal 'em?" There certainly was no hypocrisy, this time, in Mr. Snipkins's alarm.

The children stood about in a timid but ever-narrowing semicircle, and allowed their curiosity to gorge.

"Paw," chirped Lordine, after fingering her mouth for half a minute in awful contemplation of the mysterious beast, "didn't ye cure ole Sprigtail of the witches yesterday, when ye chused her with a silver bullet?"

"Of course I cured her!" he responded indignantly; then went on to elaborate his theory as to what had occurred in the night-time—a theory that would have made a fair bedfellow to some of the marvelous hypotheses of the metropolitan police.

The witch—he explained—being lamed by the magical effects of the silver bullet, had flown into a horrible rage and retaliated by mixing the ingredients of another spell, ten times more potent than the limp in the hist, and had infused it into the brain and muscles of the unfortunate creature until she was no longer the mistress of her own behavior; the mere sport and bauble, as one might say, of unseen agencies.

Being thus bewitched, she was lured to every "witch's thing" like steel filings to a magnet. The breeches in the Tomley cabin were, of course, the most intensely fascinated, the most irresistibly sorcored article anywhere in the country, because it was in these same breeches that the hapless first husband of Mrs. Dewberry had spasmodically expired, after having been so internally bedeviled that his natural organs all seemed to jump loose from their beds and run amuck like people trapped in a burning building.

Madam Sprigtail could not satisfy her craving for the preternatural by devouring the jeans, as she had the popcorn, so she compromised by merely putting them on. Contact was several degrees short of assimilation, but it was the best that she could do.

"But paw, how in the hell did she manage them suspenders?" A flash of wonder from little Hezekiah.

The sire explained that the witches and their horde of imps and sprites had undoubtedly assisted in making the poor creature's toilet; had dressed her up and started her home in a ludicrous dementia by jabbing her in the rump with their pitchforks.

To further illustrate this probability Paw Snipkins picked up the renegade trousers—if his hand trembled, it was from coffee, not apprehension—and learnedly examined the buckles and the tabs of the waistband into which the rusty teeth were clinched with a bulldog tenacity—a Herculean style

of pants-coupling invented in the days when men had to hitch their horses to their suspenders to keep them from bolting into the great, forever at the whiff of a bear or a panther.

Hearing, or rather feeling, a crinkling motion under his fingers, he shoved his hand inquisitively into one of the pockets and exhumed a soiled but rather new and modern, piece of grayish brown paper, resembling in thickness and texture the paper sometimes used as a lining for tobacco cans. His interest intensified as he discovered one side of the paper covered with a ruby scroll, a deep red ink, about the color and transparency of pokeberry juice.

Mr. Snipkins blinked at the peculiar manuscript with puzzled eyes; then called his wife to help him figure it out. They went over it together, like a pair of first-reader children, using their index fingers as a finder while they laboriously spelled out the words.

"Friday—April 13

"To all the witches and wizerds—wiz—wiz—"

"What's that word, maw?"

"Don't reckon I ever seed it afore—w-i-z, wiz, e-r-d, erd, oh, sure—wizerd! Ye know what that be, paw—a he-witch."

"Why, sure, I knowed that; only I didn't have no specs and it's a little dim withouten—now let's see:

"To all the witches and wizerds of my re—re—"

"I wisht my specs wasn't busted by the calf stompin' on 'em—what do ye cal'late that one means?"

"Got me up a tree, paw—handle it to Jack; he's eddicated."

Jack accepted the responsibility and strove manfully to interpret the script. He did interpret it, eventually, very completely—marvelously completely, considering the number of times he stopped and skidded, reversed and backfired, explained and spelled and syllabled. Nevertheless, when he did finally construe it, after a great outlay of time and effort, not a single word remained unpronounced or undefined, and the entire contents of the document were crystal clear, even to Christine and Heze-

kiah. A magnificent illustration, to the children and mother, of Jack's superior intellectual powers.

A silence, deep, intense, overpowering—a silence such as will surely brood above the multitude about the throne of judgment when the eternal doom is read—drowned even the heart-beats and the suspended gasps of the creepy beings who stood with lips apart, eyes lit and ears agog, and listened to the revelations of the blood-red script:

"Friday—April 13

"To all the witches and wizerds of my retinew in Taw county and Crow county and Brush county as well as Nootling county in Arkansasaw I hereby command you to make all the trubble you know how in yore respectful counties from now on to the last of this year. One good way to make this trubble is to bewitch unsuspecting animals and fool the inhabittance by laying it on themselves and maybe cause much profain languidge back and to, or even better a fight or a murder. In Crow county you can lay it on old lady Dewberry by reason of some persons already thinking she is a witch which same she is not and never will be and especially mr. Snipkins thinks so. He is a extry broadminded man and if ever he learned that you had fooled him he would invite the Dewberrys to dinner and forget all the trubble you made and spoil all my plans which same I command you to prevent every way in yore power or otherwise. I am sending this command to be read out loud by a special messenger at the next meeting at the old Tomly cabin. It is wrote in the blood of a sinner which murdered his wife and was linched by the mob so dont none of you dare overlook what I am telling you.

"Yore lord and master,

"Satan D. Beelzebub."

When the hypnotic tension had relaxed a little, and nature had reasserted her vitality among Mrs. Snipkins's vocal cords, she cried out imperatively:

"Jack! Drap that thing this minute!"

Jack suddenly awoke to the horror of holding between his fingers the blood of a murderer, and dropped it instantly. Paw Snipkins cautiously picked it up by one corner. He scrutinized it importantly.

"Sure is blood," he agreed with the air of a man confirming a piece of tremendous information. "Observe how dark it shows up. Sinner's blood is always blacker 'n other folks', H-m-m-m—Satan D. Beelzebub—D stands fer Devil, I reckon. Fig-

gered he could fool me, did he? Always did have my doubts about her bein' a witch, spite of everybody sayin' so. I'll cite him! I'll learn him he can't keep a broad-minded feller from bein' on terms with his neighbors! H-m-m-m, next time he informs a imp to read his sinful dokkiments at the ole witches cabin he best pick one smart enough not to tuck his bloody papers away in a ole pair of fascinated britches which the same any bedeviled cow mought run off with." Here Paw Snipkins began to chuckle, as if at his cow's cleverness in outwitting the master criminal. The humor of the situation appealed likewise to the others, and a general illumination of the nature of a slowly lengthening grin lit up the entire family.

Jack pulled a match from his pocket.

"I 'low we best burn that bloody thing," he proposed in a matter-of-fact tone. "It mought have an evil influence."

## CHAPTER VI.

### AN ATTACK OF PSYCHOLOGY.

A THOUSAND times in after days Jack's father cursed his hindsight and stupidity in accepting this plausible suggestion. Some of the neighbors, especially Perrimore Poggelfoot, always looked as if they doubted parts of the story, lifting their eyebrows particularly at the genuineness of the signature. And to think that the red and irrefutable proof of this exalting experience had been burned to a wafer and blown to the seven corners of nowhere!

There was something of a stir in the Dewberry household Saturday afternoon, when a letter came to announce the double fact that a captive possum would be butchered at the Snipkins's cuisine next Sunday, and that the family thought maybe if the Dewberrys didn't have anything else to do, they might like to drive over around up by there and take pot luck with them and the school-teacher—she bein' so fond of Milly.

"The downright nerve and gall on 't!" Paw Dewberry exploded wrathfully, as soon as he had partially recovered. "Does that consinuat' ole doodle-bug imagine

fer a minute as how I'm full enough o' wet clover to poke my feet under his table and his knife in my mouth? Why, the ole cayote'd pisen me deader 'n a door nail."

"That's the hickory, paw—I knowed you wouldn't!" Milly endorsed him heartily.

"Ye knowed it? How so?" The voice of suspicion rearing its head.

"I knowed it because Jack Snipkins says to me as how you was a broadminded feller, and he 'lowed if his paw ever afforded to be friendly you would meet him half-way—and I says I knowed you wouldn't by reason of yer havin' a change of words with him the other evenin', and besides I wouldn't stand fer it myself."

"Ye wouldn't? Since when has Milly Dewberry growed to be cock of the walk on these here premises?"

"Waal, you can rant and rave all you want, but I ain't goin' to stand fer the Dewberrys traipsin' over to the Snipkins jest to testify they ain't got nothin' over us in bein' broadminded. I'm mad at Jack Snipkins now, good and plenty, and I don't propose to take any more eggs to his market—so there you be!"

"Listen at her rant! Waal, I can tell ye there 'll be a passel of other girls waitin' prompt to take him offen yer hands, and no questions asked; and fer my side I can't decipher what fer Jack would want with a person like yerself, anyway—seein' ye got a temper which every six months swells up and puffs over like a dumplin' in a kivered kittle."

"Waal, I insists on we stay at home."

"And I insists on we *don't* stay at home. If ye're personally honin' to set here all by yer lonesome and nuss yer spite, it's all right with me and yer maw; but the beft of the family is aimin' to pile out tomorry with our teeth all filed keen fer possum."

Milly ordered her pretty mouth into a sulky pout. She seemed strangely afraid of being left alone at the cabin.

"Of course," she admitted grudgingly, "I don't hanker after the idee of stayin' by myself all Sunday long, with two or three mad steers runnin' loose on Flat Creek, not more 'n seven miles away."

"Waal, then, give up yer bellyachin' an' expect to take yer place in the wagon to-

morry, jest like ye mought have a grain of sense."

"I suppose if I must, I must," Milly concluded resignedly.

"That's the way to talk. I figgered ye'd some day learn who's the plate-log of this here cabin—what's the matter, maw?"

Mrs. Dewberry was stealing from the room, apparently in great emotional stress, as if all the air wanted to burst out of her lungs, and couldn't. Her husband solicitously watched her retreat.

"Milly, it fears me yer maw is havin' another attack of her pod."

"No, paw, it ain't her pod. Maw is sufferin' a vil'ent attack of psychol'gy."

Not caring to be lured into waters so deep that his educated daughter could drown him, the old man mosied out to the lot to tinker with the lumber wagon, and crow internally over his victory—the subjugation of his insurgent daughter.

Milly gazed at the closing door of the smoke shed as it swallowed her mother's fleeing form, and heaved a mighty sigh of relief.

"Gee whillikins!" she breathed amazedly, "but maw is smart! Smarter 'n double-gear'd lightning!"

The success of that possum dinner can be measured by the fact that the whole countryside, from Skunk Holler to Dog's Misery, talked about it through autumn and winter, through winter and spring, even up to the close of school, as well as on the day after, the day that Jack and Milly—wait a minute! The cat almost got out of the bag!

"Lands sakes, but them two fellers must of been unusual broadminded," folks would repeat, almost incredulously, "insofar as afore that possum dinner there wasn't two men in the whole United States could of got further apart, without one of them backin' into the ocean!"

Be that as it may, when the Snipkins family issued from the threshold in skirmish line to welcome the Dewberry wagon in that airy fashion peculiar to the interior Ozarks, Milly had no difficulty in recognizing the other members of the family, but she couldn't see Jack for the tall grass. Her father's furtive eye digested this in-

hospitable conduct and he nodded mentally as he murmured:

"She sure is sittin' on her high hoss this time. Pity, too," he added sympathetically, as he noted the shadows in Jack's disappointed face.

Except for these twain, the neighborly tomahawk, nicked and blunted by many months of lusty impact against the Snipkins or the Dewberry cranium, seemed to be effectually buried. The head of the visiting tribe found no difficulty in breaking the ice:

"We mought of been here some earlier," he said apologetically, "except Milly insists on us waitin' at the mouth of Skunk Holler whiles she runs up the trail to the Poggle-foots to palaver with Perrimore about buyin' her Poland China pig, which same I never hearn of her wantin' to sell at any price afore to-day."

So the rapprochement proceeded beautifully. The young ones of both houses were not a bit backward about getting a good time treed and tearing the fur out. Paw and paw were soon lost in an elaborate prospectus of the coming turkey shoot, while maw and maw rehearsed the mysterious death of Dick Pogglefoot's baby girl which died with the infancy.

Milly allowed she would meander out to the persimmon patch, to see if the feeble frost, some nights ago, had made any impression on the crabbed disposition of the fruit.

Jack was not invited to help sample the persimmons, at least not ostensibly, but it didn't take him long to present himself. Milly spoke to him with a recognition that was neither warm nor cold, neither friendly nor hostile; polite, yet a little bit guarded. This done, she turned quite matter-of-factly and busied herself spying among the lower branches.

A vibrating twig jarred loose a mature persimmon, which lit on the ground in front of Milly with a ripe and cushiony thud. She stooped to capture it.

"Oh, there's one, I'll bet, that's lost its pucker!"

"Why don't you loose *yourn*, Milly?" demanded Jack.

Milly bent her eyes studiously over the



retrieved persimmon, as she carefully picked the gravels out of its receptive flesh.

"What do you mean?" she replied naively, hiding behind the skirts of dullness.

"Didn't you promise me to act different, if I brung the ole hawk and wildcat to sittin' together on the same limb without scratchin'?"

"No, not jest *bring* 'em together, but *keep* 'em together. Most anybody could bring 'em together, but I figger that afore this day is done the fur and feathers will be flyin' so thick in the air we can't hardly see the sun!"

Alarmed at this frightful augury, Jack hurried back to the house to have his part in guiding the conversation. "A word in time saves nine" he muttered whimsically.

## CHAPTER VII.

ENTER PERRIMORE POGGLEFOOT.

THIS aphorism was certainly all right as far as it went, but where Jack fell down was in failing to couple it with another, equally vital, concerning "eternal vigilance." He assumed, with a complete sensation of relief, that as peace had prevailed up to and including the call to dinner, his apprehensions could be laid aside. Surely, the vapory odors of that steaming possum were potent enough to asphixiate all the gods of war! And so, when the thundercloud did roll over his consciousness and threaten to burst, it nearly petrified him.

Dinner opened, as between Paw Snipkins and Paw Dewberry, with possum of the present mixed with reminiscences of 1896 in very wholesome proportions.

"Do ye mind how we used to sing:

"Mark Hanna and McKinley Bill can take the lower seat.

Perfection to the millionaire o' course is mighty sweet,

But we don't like to gnaw the bone and leave them all the meat.

Sixteen to one's our motter!"

chuckled Paw Dewberry, slapping Snipkins on the shoulder so vigorously that the startled gravy jumped out of its bowl. Paw

Snipkins certainly did remember, and volunteered the chorus with equivalent gusto:

"Hurrah, hurrah, fer William Bryan true!

Hurrah, hurrah, fer gold and silver, too!

They want us folks to be the goat—we're damned, sir, if we do!

Sixteen to one's our motter!"

Gratified by this safe and happy trend of the dialogue, Jack gave it no further heed, but surrendered his ears entirely to some shop talk between Milly and the schoolma'am, and later to a very entertaining yarn that Milly's mother was spinning over from her adventurous childhood days.

When the last thread was spun in this humorous narrative, and the laughter had drained itself out, Jack was horrified to discover that both Snipkins and Dewberry had raised their voices at least ninety degrees centigrade and the old sparkle was in their eyes. It was too late now to sidetrack them with an opportune suggestion. From the campaign song they had drifted into free silver, and from free silver into gold without silver, and from here into an invidious comparison of metals; Paw Dewberry, who had slid off the platform of 1896 after the election had made kindling-wood out of it, maintaining that gold was the only metal fit for coinage and circulation, because it was hard to get and couldn't be counterfeited and had, moreover, a lot of peculiar properties that silver did not possess.

Snipkins had disparaged this excellence, rationally at first, then with increasing heat and emphasis, arguing that one ounce of silver had more peculiar attributes than a whole mintful of gold. As Jack awoke out of his Damoclean bliss into this nightmare, his father was beginning to thump the table in the zeal of exasperation, as he pitched his cords a note higher:

"I'll cite ye I know what I'm talkin' about! Take the mysteries of incantin', fer instance; what good is gold fer incantin'? Not a bodacious thing! But silver—why, 'tain't been four days ago since I melten a silver quawter and moulden a bullet and shot—"

All the pillars of Atlas snapped in twain and the high vaults of heaven came collapsing about Jack's ears with a sickening

din, as he powerlessly awaited the ignition phrase that would set the fur and feathers flying thick enough, as Milly had prophesied, to obliterate the sun—

“—and moulder a bullet and shot—”.

“Hello, Jawn Snipkins!” the hearty bass voice of Perrimore Poggiefoot boomed in the doorway like the guns of a relief battalion, and so effectually interrupted the declamation that the bullet which Snipkins had just verbally fired never reached the cow, but remain suspended in mid-air somewhere between the gun and the target, like a bullet in a movie studio.

“Hello, yerself, Pogy! Come right in and poke yer feet under!”

“No, thankee; I done et extensively on rabbit and dumplin’ I jest drapped in to ask ye a little favor, if it’s all the same. Do ye happen to have that quawter, Jawn, I sent over fairly recent by little Hezzy?”

John Snipkins glowered. This was no fitting occasion to be making or receiving duns.

“No,” he retorted haughtily, “I ain’t got that quawter; but I’ll give ye yer dime to-morry, if ye’re so all-fired—”

“No, no, Jawn, I didn’t mean to dun ye. I know ye’re as good as gold about payin’ up some time or other. I simply intends if ye still had that quawter by accident, I’d be glad to give ye another quawter in place of it.”

“Swap quawters? What’s the big idee?”

“Waal, nothin’, except I jest learned I must of absented-minded like give ye my counterfeit pewter quawter, which same I always cal’lated to keep fer a lucky piece.”

The thundercloud that had been converging around Jack’s dizzy temples bolted suddenly the full length of the table and exploded with a terrific impact between Mr. Snipkins’s ears. He gripped the edge of the table to maintain his balance and groped randomly among a haze of ten thousand possible answers to find one that would take care of the situation. Not finding it, he responded weakly:

“Oh, I reckon ye’re mistaken, like as not. Liable jest lost it somewheres. What’s that?”—he shifted the subject abruptly—“sounds like them strange hosses is fightin’ our hosses in the barn. Guess

I best go out and circumspect a little, and maybe turn ’em out—”

Those champions of Mr. Snipkins who contend that he was not a bit shaken up by this incident, will do well to remember that Hezekiah had turned out the strange horses, meaning the Dewberry grays, before dinner; and they had been conspicuously visible about the premises for *more than half an hour*.

It was apparently a case of nerve-break-down, rather than nervous breakdown; for although Mr. Snipkins’s general health and appetite continued to function unimpaired, yet he was never again able to bring himself, voluntarily, to the point of introducing the subject of the silver bullet.

That is what happens when an ice-berg unexpectedly slides down a warm back!

Perrimore Poggiefoot, seemingly oblivious to the havoc he had wrought, strolled down to the spring, a few rods from the cabin, to wet his whistle perfunctorily in nature’s feeble distillate which did not come from the direction of the Hollow Moon Oak, and never would bead in a bottle. Milly, likewise, conceived a thirst in her system, and reinforced him at the spring.

Perrimore scooped a gourdful from the mossy basin and handed it to Milly with a gracious motion; then said in an undertone:

“If I’d of delayed to of swallowed jest one more dumplin’, I’d of been too late. Them two ole hedgehogs would of had the floor and the ceilin’ all mixed up together, and the table waltzin’ around with the cook-stove.”

Milly tossed out the superfluous contents of the gourd, dipped it again, served it to the gentleman, and answered quietly with what one might call ordinary, or less than ordinary, interest:

“I reckon that’s right, Mr. Poggiefoot. It’s probably a good thing you happened along.”

“Happened along!” he echoed, staring at her incredulously as she took the gourd from his slowly-yielding fingers to hang it on the accustomed nail. Then a suspicion, a light, an idea cast its faint reflection over his features, localizing, eventually, in the region of his mouth and evolving into a

grin what appeared to cover all the distance from China to Peru. He chuckled appreciatively, and brought his expansive palm against his hoisted thigh with a rebound thwack.

"By the great horned Devil!" he ejaculated admiringly, "if Jack didn't have no brains, it wouldn't make no difference as I can see. Fersartin he'll never need 'em!"

As for Jack, although his bin of happiness, for the four months succeeding the possum dinner, had seemed full and running over, it managed to hold the additional nubbin that Milly dropped into it the day after the wedding, when she made her most memorable remark of the year.

They were sitting together in the doorway of the old Tomly cabin—their cabin—their

eyes brooding in languid rapture over the long fallowed fields, with witch-haunted woods, the orchard choked up with brambles and worm-bitten trees, guarded by copperheads and tarantulas—the world that was theirs for the conquering. As Milly leaned over and crowned Jack's shoulder gloriously with her golden head, her right hand sceptered with the rolled-up marriage certificate and her left with her graduation diploma from the district school, she dreamed back with half-smiling, half speculative eyes through a long, delicious silence; then stirred ever so faintly as if afraid to break the spell, lifted her eyelids toward his reminiscent face and said with a happy sigh:

"Jack, boy, you sure have been one wonderful, deep-thinkin' man!"



## I HAVE MY DREAMS TO KEEP!

BY LYDIA M. D. O'NEIL

ALL day the weary inland winds are blown against my lips,  
 But all night long beneath the moon I dream of seas and ships;  
 I dream of brig and brigantine and barkentine and bark,  
 And sirens hooting huskily through low-hung fog and dark.  
 I dream of freighters lazying along the Queensland coast;  
 Of cruisers built like greyhounds, flinging out their battle-boast;  
 Of tankers and of colliers and of pilot-vessels too—  
 And all the flags of all the world clean-cut against the blue.

I dream of tides that climb the cliffs and surfs that comb the shore;  
 Of winds that send the foam-tipped waves fast-scurrying before;  
 Of lightnings leaping through the night and sky-lines long and red,  
 And of the flashing far-flung gleam from many a pharos sped.  
 Of broken moonbeams chaste and cold but fair as flowers may be;  
 Of meteors hissing through the sky to splash within the sea;  
 Of the engines' steady droning and the humming of the winch,  
 And of harbor-lights receding through the darkness inch by inch.

The old Pacific has my heart; I have my dreams to keep!  
 Though landsman in the daytime, I'm a sailor in my sleep!

# Land of the Shadow People

by Charles B. Stilson

(A Sequel to "A Man Named Jones")

## PRECEDING CHAPTERS BRIEFLY RETOLD.

**R**EADERS of "A Man Named Jones" will remember that Jones married Katherine Manning. At the opening of this story they were living in Detroit, with their five-year-old son, Bobby. One day he was kidnaped by a man of foreign appearance. Then Jones received a cable from the "Martian"—otherwise King Kelly, the ruler of the island of Bomavalu—warning him that Zalmon Grimshaw, who had been left marooned on a Pacific island, had escaped, and saying that he—the Martian—would come to Jones's aid. Later Grimshaw called upon Jones and offered to help him find Bobby—after Jones had taken him to an emerald mine in Peru; a mine of which Jones only had exact knowledge. Jones was confident that Bobby had been kidnaped by Grimshaw's orders, but all efforts to find the boy having failed, he accepted Grimshaw's offer. Meanwhile he had been joined by King Kelly and the latter's native follower, Nambe.

Accompanied by Katherine, his friend, Jim Arnold, Grimshaw, King Kelly, and Nambe, Jones went to Peru. There he engaged as guide Don Castro de Ulloa, one of the few men with knowledge of the interior country, to which he was anxious to return. Don Castro engaged natives to accompany them, including Tomás Porres.

One night Jim Arnold met a beautiful girl, who spoke a few words of English, and said that her name was Nee-Nah. After she was gone he found a large uncut emerald in his pocket. Jones said that this stone was much like one given him by Cooper, the discoverer of the mine, for which they were searching.

In a battle in an underground temple of the Inca's Enrique, one of the guides, was killed. While Jones was investigating, Katherine, waiting outside the ruin, saw Nee-Nah, and called to her, but the girl ran away, followed by what appeared to be six shadows.

When Jones told Don Castro that he wanted to penetrate the country as far as the Rio Ucayli the Peruvian became greatly excited and said that he too wanted to go there.

Determined to find Nee-Nah, Jim visited another ruined stronghold. He did find her, and told her that he loved her; but the girl misunderstood his intentions, and Jim was captured by her follower, Hualla, and four of his men, *all of them gifted with the power to at will change their coloring to conform with their surroundings.* Hualla was determined to take Jim to the lost land, Paititi, to mate with Nee-Nah, the priestess of the god, Pro-Tay-Us—a divinity always served by a white woman, sometimes a child stolen from its parents.

All efforts of the Jones party to find Jim failed, but by notes that he dropped they learned that he was well and being taken to the east. Don Castro said that he thought there was a lost city, inhabited by descendants of the Inca's, in the interior, and that Jim was being taken there. Jones decided to follow and rescue his friend. Grimshaw objected, but was overruled.

## CHAPTER XIX.

### CHAMELEON MEN.

**O**N the eastern slopes of the White Cordillera at an elevation of ten thousand feet above the level of the sea lies a region of silence.

Far above among the snow-caps, glaciers

thunder and grind the trembling rocks to chilly dust; mighty winds scream across the chasms and drive roaring through the passes.

Far below begins the realm of sentient life, where pumas and jaguars screech and monkeys and parrots gibber and chatter; where savage tribes, to whom no light of

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understanding has been borne, wage hideous battles in the jungle depths or by the banks of rushing rivers.

But in the interspace between the heights and the waters, below the mists and above the miasmas, abides an undisturbed calm.

Here the crashing of glaciers, the hurly-burly of the mountain storms, are never heard. Not so much as a faraway murmur of the rivers, clamorous with their rapids and their falls, penetrates this mute solitude. No flutter of bird or cry of beast or man troubles its dumb repose.

Here nature comes to slumber and dream of new creations, her rest unbroken by the fretting of her lesser children.

Its quiescence is comparable only to the deathlike stillness of the polar wastes at the ends of the world—only here all is green and warm and glowing. Everywhere is the soft, thick carpet of lush grass and mold; everywhere the dark green tangle of impenetrable shrubbery, gnarled and nameless trees, hoary with hanging mosses, deformed by their burdens of climbing vines; everywhere the slow, soundless seep and drip of water; everywhere the same inaudible life, dusk and dampness and decay.

This is the rim of the Montaña.

From the early Inca days, when Sinchi Roca led an army to the banks of the Rio Caya-Huaya, and there found gold, down to the present, the Montaña has been the mystery spot of South America, the Eldorado of the great southern continent.

Below the silent hillsides it stretches toward the Amazonian plain—a maze of jungle, marsh and river, where for hundreds, nay, thousands of miles, foot of civilized man has never trod. Its secrets are in the keeping of the centenarian patriarchs of its forests; its only denizens are the savage beasts and wandering tribes of still more savage men.

Down the cordilleran slopes and into this region of silence pushed two parties of men, traveling tirelessly and in haste, one fleeing, the other pursuing.

The pursued were soundless as the shadows under the mighty trees, and traveled on foot and at night. The pursuers rode noisy beasts by daylight, bringing clamor to a place where sound was sacrilege.

Never was there more than one day's journey between them; yet never could the hunters quite come up with their quarry. And so the race went on.

The semicivilized Cholo Indian of South America is not the keen master of woodcraft and trailer that is his cousin of the northern continent; and Jones and his party were tracking cunning men, who left few traces. Had it not been that Arnold, eluding the vigilance of his guards, occasionally let fall a message for his friends, the task would have been hopeless.

Sometimes it was a leaf from his notebook, fluttering from a bush, on which, lacking pen or pencil, he had scrawled a few words with a burnt match; sometimes it was a page plucked from nature's green library, and the lines were scratched with a bit of sharpened twig or the point of the prisoner's knife.

Many of these tokens never reached the eyes for which they were intended; but the followers found enough of them to keep them upon the trail.

In these fragmentary records of his progress, the buoyant, lovable nature of the man spoke often, heartening those who came after him, spurring them to new efforts, making them laugh.

"Still going east," read one of them. "Never appreciated the conveniences of a full beard before. It fools the flies." Jim carried no razor with him.

In another missive, referring to the perpetual dampness of the forest he remarked that his pipe was "down with a severe attack of pneumonia"; but he hoped that it would "pull through." Again he wrote: "Think I had rattlesnake steak for breakfast. Too hungry to inquire."

One message, which threw Don Castro into great excitement, ran: "Believe we're headed for the Garden of Eden. They call it Paititi."

"Look you, *señor*," said the little Peruvian, bringing the note to Jones, "all of the old tales are true. This proves it. We are turning back a page of the past."

Stimulated by an incentive greater than any of his companions guessed, De Ulloa had become like a man pressed by an unquenchable fire. He made prodigious ef-

forts. Scarcely sleeping at all, he forced his Indians through every hour of the day, and sometimes far into the night; and in consequence his party moved at a rate little short of miraculous through a jungle so dense that in many places it was necessary literally to hack the trail for the mules for mile after mile through a living wall of undergrowth and creepers.

Of his captors Jim wrote little, beyond the information that there were five of them, and they were white men. Doubtless he feared that his sanity would be questioned if he went into further details. Once, however, he did remark that he had "found something that old Herodotus overlooked," and that "these chaps could make a fortune with Ringling Brothers."

Had it not been for the handicap of Arnold, Hualla and his tireless men and the girl, who was almost as enduring as they, soon would have outstripped the other party, burdened as it was with baggage and the bulky mules; for the Paititians could slip through the tangled brakes with an ease that was little short of serpentine.

Jim purposely retarded their progress, often feigning a weariness which he did not feel, and forcing them to carry him, little as he relished that mode of transportation. He was uneasy in conscience because of the trouble to which he suspected he was putting his friends; for he was sure that they still were following on. He was partially consoled by the reflection that Jones's expedition would have traveled in the same direction anyway.

Some time before the Rio Ucayli was reached, he hoped that opportunity would offer to bring the two parties into contact; or, failing that, to make his escape with the girl; but the more he saw of the resourcefulness of Hualla, the feebler grew that hope.

If it had been merely a question of his own escape, Jim felt that he could have made a break for freedom with a fair chance of success. He still had his automatic. But its use would have entailed bloodshed. Hualla and his nephews would not have suffered their captive to depart without a struggle. He played too large a part in their plans for the future. In

their way, they had been kind to Arnold, too, and he had no desire to harm them.

Most cogent of all reasons against such a course was Nee-Nah herself. Jim had tested his sentiments toward the girl in the crucible of every-day acquaintance and observation. He loved her. He would not leave her.

He could only conjecture what the past of this beautiful mystery had been. Through the weeks of their companionship he had steadily enlarged the girl's vocabulary of English. He found the task surprisingly easy; for she was quick to learn, and her mind was retentive.

Frequently she astonished him by her proper use of a word, or phrase which he was sure she never had heard from him. At some period of her life—doubtless in her early childhood—she surely had heard and spoken English, and good English; but if any record of those days remained, it was slumbering, locked fast in the recesses of her memory, awaiting some magic touch to awaken it and set it free.

All that Nee-Nah could tell of her life related to Paititi—a marvelous city somewhere far to the east, built upon a great hill in the forest and surrounded by seven high walls of stone. In Paititi she had lived as long as her memory reached, the only one of her kind; for all the other inhabitants of the city, she said, were like Hualla and his nephews.

She was, she told Jim, priestess of the god Pro-Tay-Us, and her life in his shrine had been pleasant. There had been other priestesses before her, she had been told; but she had known none of them.

Once in the lifetime of each priestess, it was the law of the god that she should make a pilgrimage across the wilderness to offer prayers at the foot of mighty Mount Huascan, from whence the western sea could be seen. It was the belief of those who dwelt in Paititi that in the beginning their god had come up out of the sea and taken up his residence on the inaccessible summit of the giant peak. Huascan was thus the Olympus of Paititi religion.

Pro-Tay-Us had created the first man and woman of the world at Paititi, said Nee-Nah, whose ideas of the world that lay

beyond the seven walls of her city were very vague indeed.

It was while she was returning from her pilgrimage to Huascaran that she had fallen in with Arnold. Whether she was glad or sorry because of that event, Jim could not discover. It was certain that she was extremely curious. As she became more facile in conversation, she questioned him like an eager child.

For a few days following her rebuke of Hualla's presumptuous utterances, she treated Jim with marked reserve. He, of course, thought her coolness due entirely to his conduct on the tower hill, and he was in consequence properly contrite. Little by little her manner thawed, and the two became good friends and comrades.

Each day the glamor which she had cast over him became more powerful. He loved her quaint ways and quainter speech, her little *moues* of displeasure or perplexity, her flashing smile, even her angers.

But did Jim by words or manner attempt to convey to Nee-Nah that his feelings for her were more than those of a good comrade; she at once retired within herself, sometimes troubled profoundly, sometimes angered. Jim was not disheartened when appearances were against him.

To good judgment he joined the patience of the true lover. He realized that he was dealing with a young and inexperienced nature. Wisely he concluded that time and propinquity would be his best allies; and so he bided his time.

Meanwhile, the weeks slipped by; and at last, thorn-torn, fly-tortured, and almost exhausted, both pursued and pursuers in the long race tore through that terrible, lifeless belt upon the hillsides and emerged into the more open jungles of the true Montaña, below the cordillera.

This is the realm of the *cauchero* and the *shiringuero*, the intrepid gatherers of rubber, who enter their domains along the highways of the rivers in canoe or raft, taking with them their wives, their dogs and their guns, and for months collect the precious gray sap, which later on stirs the dust of a thousand roads, and even causes occasional flurries of the golden dust of Wall Street.

Many a tortuous detour did Hualla steer to avoid the camps of the *caucheros*. When he had passed beyond their range, he led his party into the unbroken jungle, the wilderness of barbarians and unguessed perils, beyond which, somewhere in the distant forest reaches, lay the great Paititi.

Arnold and Nee-Nah sat to rest one afternoon by the shore of a small, tree-rimmed lake, the surface of which reflected back the tropical sunlight like a mirror lined with gold. Above them swayed the leafy cone of a tree which was covered from roots to topmost branches by a gorgeously flowering vine—a species of begonia—the profusion of whose bloom had attracted hundreds of hummingbirds. Like brightly-colored insects, these tiny, musical workers darted from flower to flower, filling the air with their pulsating, many-toned melody. Every wandering zephyr from the jungle depths was heavy with a new perfume.

Farther back in the forest a troop of monkeys chattered excitedly, disputing the clustered nuts in a *sapucaya* tree. Gaudy parrots screeched and fluttered among the branches, and an occasional *arara*, or macaw, whirled overhead like a shrieking flame.

Among the scented bushes a few feet from the edge of the water, Musth kept watch while his uncle and brothers slept.

Jim bent to consider his face in the limpid water, and caught Nee-Nah peeping over his shoulder. Both of them laughed.

Arnold's untrimmed beard was now a noble growth, nearly an inch in length; and this, with the pinlike punctures which the vicious green jungle flies had left on every morsel of unprotected flesh, gave him a most ferocious appearance. Nee-Nah had by no means escaped the attentions of these pests; so they looked at each other and laughed merrily in sympathy.

"Nee-Nah, we look like bushwhackers," observed Arnold.

"Yes," agreed the girl. "What is a booshwaaker, Ah-meer-e-can?"

She still called him by the name which she had at first given him; and he, loving

the soft inflections of the word upon her lips, never had told her differently.

"Why, a bushwhacker is—is somebody who looks as we 'do," he explained inversely; "especially me, with all this spinach on my countenance." He fingered his beard.

"You call him spin-nage? I think you say beard?" queried Nee-Nah.

"So I did. I forget, Nee-Nah, that you haven't been initiated in Yankee slang."

When first they had begun to sprout, Jim's whiskers had been a source of great puzzlement to Nee-Nah. She had been used only to the hairless visages of the Paititians, and she thought this strange, black, prickly growth on Ah-meer-e-can's face must be some creeping sort of a disease.

She knew that it was prickly, because she had felt it surreptitiously one day while its wearer was asleep. Later he had explained it to her.

"Say, Nee-Nah, there's something I've been meaning to ask you," said Jim. "You remember the day, don't you, when we had the chicken dinner, and Rascal, Ikey and Mush jumped on me while I was snoozing?"

"What's that—snoozing?" interrupted Nee-Nah, puckering her brows.

"Oh, dum it! I forgot again. I meant when I was sleeping."

"I think know when you mean, yes. Day big noise and many men come in woods."

"Yes; you get me. Well, did you notice anything queer about Hualla that day—something that happened just as I waked up? Did you see what I saw; or didn't I see it?"

"What you mean—queer?" asked Nee-Nah, who had followed his words intently.

"Maybe I was seeing things, after that crack on the noggin that the old gentleman gave me in the tower," pursued Jim doubtfully; "and maybe he used paint; but I could swear that I caught one glimpse of him when he was as green as the hope of Ireland. Did you?"

Much of this query, like all of Jim's conversation, was Greek to the girl. She sat turning it over in her mind, and clinking the golden bands upon her arms.

"Green—you know—green color, like this," supplemented Jim, breaking a broad leaf from a near-by plant, "or this," and he touched with his finger the pendant stone of Nee-Nah's necklace of emeralds, which he had restored to her some time before.

Her face brightened with comprehension.

"Oh, yes—color—I know, Yes; Hualla, he green *that day*," she replied in a matter-of-course manner.

Jim sat back and gaped at her.

"The deuce you tell me! He was green *that day*, eh? Does that mean that he has a regular schedule for his color scheme—and what *does* it mean, anyway? How did he get green?"

Nee-Nah shook her head.

"Don' know. Hualla one of sons of changeful god—great god Pro-Tay-Us." She lowered her voice reverently when she pronounced the name of the Paititian deity. "All mans, womans, babies, in Paititi children of great Pro-Tay-Us. All can change skin color when want. I don' know how. I no can do."

Arnold took in and digested this astounding statement.

"Even the babies!" he gasped, feeling the need of saying something, even if it were idiotic. "Gee! what games of hide-and-seek they must have! Polychromatic heathen! Fadeaways! Camouflage to its nth power—and then some!"

"Now you making fun, Ah-meer-e-can," said Nee-Nah; and there was that in her tones which warned Jim that her hasty little temper was stirring.

"I didn't mean to—honest, I didn't!" he exclaimed contritely. "But this rather jars a chap's mental pegs, you know, Nee-Nah. Who ever heard of human chameleons before? Shades of Herodotus!"

Under the stimulus of his discovery—for it did not occur to him to doubt the girl's story, Jim straightway thumbnailed his impressions upon the surface of the agave leaf which he was holding, and tossed it over his shoulder. It was the last note which Jones received from him.

"Say, Nee-Nah," said Jim after a pause, during which his brain had been formulating conjectures with the rapidity of a picture-machine, "there's Mush sitting on his



thumb over yonder under a bush, with nothing particular to do. Call him out, and let's have a little private demonstration of his variegated phases. Let's see; suppose we have him do himself in pink with chocolate trimmings—a sort of Neapolitan ice-cream effect. What do you say?"

"What—"

Nee-Nah sprang to her feet, leaving the sentence unfinished, and gazed steadily in the direction of the forest. Jim read in her face that something had alarmed her.

"What's up?" he asked.

"Ssh!" she whispered, motioning for him to be quiet. "Something come. Monkeys all stop talk. Birds all quiet."

It was true. A strange hush had stolen over the jungle. The quarrelsome little apes in the *sapucaya* tree might have been a thousand miles away for all the noise they were making. Not a parrot screeched. Only the hummingbirds and the bees in the begonia vine droned on as before.

Musth had found a fragment of sandstone upon his last march, and was whetting the edge of his copper ax with it, and perhaps day-dreaming of some Paititian maid who would blush in seven different hues at his return. Occupied with these pursuits, he did not notice the sudden hush of the jungle world.

The girl's sharp hiss recalled him to the present, and brought him leaping from the shade of his bush, ax in hand. He, too, stood like a statue and peered toward the twilight arches of the trees. The same warning which had put him on the *qui vive*, aroused Hualla and the other Paititians from their *siesta*.

With eyes and ears, all of the party, Arnold included, interrogated the silent forest.

On the side of the lake where they had halted, between the bushes at the edge of the water and the towering trees of the deeper jungle, was a thirty-foot expanse of marsh-grass, dotted with clumps of flowering shrubbery.

Across this little glade lay like a bar the shadow of a gigantic massaranduba tree, whose widespreading branches overtopped its tallest neighbor by nearly one hundred feet. Along the edge of the shadow cast

by the bole of this colossus, and not far out from the wall of jungle undergrowth, was a thicket of bush aflame with crimson bloom.

Arnold's gaze strayed across the sunlit glade. He was wondering what danger could be apprehended in a scene which appeared so peaceful, when he saw this particular bush agitated violently, as if by a sudden twist of wind; and in its leafy depths he fancied that he caught a glimpse of a large, moving, yellow object.

His mouth was open to shout a warning, when a sight nearer to him held him speechless; with jaws agape. He had asked for a specimen demonstration of the Paititians' powers; here it was before him, one might say in bulk.

Musth had advanced a few paces into the open and stood knee-deep in the waving grass. His uncle Hualla and his three brothers were crouched in his wake against a background formed by the enormous purple leaves of the plants under which they had been sleeping. The attention of all five was centered upon the bushy clump which had arrested Jim's notice. All were gripping their copper axes.

But it was not the imminence of the peril which they were preparing to meet, nor their attitudes, striking as they were, and remindful of the figures on an antique vase, that caused the American to stand like a man rooted. It was the metamorphosis which was taking place in their naked bodies.

Not sudden, nor yet slow, was the change, nor did it appear in one spot more than another, as the bronzed skins faded and paled, to brighten again into new and unnatural hues.

"Well, I'll be—an orphan!" breathed Jim, winking hard to assure himself that he looked upon reality and not illusion.

Upright among the marsh grasses stood young Musth, his lithe body as green as their most verdant frond. Against the purple foliage of the shrubbery behind him, the glint of the sun's rays on the burnished copper of their axes was the only indication that Hualla and the others were still there. They seemed actually to have melted.

Only an instant was Jim allowed for wonderment. An appalling scream rent the

silence of the jungle. The branches of the crimson bush were torn aside, and through them bounded a great, tawny, animal form, and stood snarling in the arena where the Paititians awaited it.

"*Jauarité!*" shrieked Nee-Nah.

It was indeed the jaguar tiger, the lord of the South American forests.

At the sound of Nee-Nah's voice, the beast leaped its own height from the ground and crouched snarling, its fiery eyes fixed upon the man and girl, its sinuous tail lashing its golden sides.

Intent upon stalking the unsuspecting Musth, the jaguar had not seen these others. The strange alteration in the appearance of its nearer prey seemed also to puzzle it; for it was evident that it still could see the Paititian. Several times it made taut its powerful muscles, as though to spring upon him, and then relaxed again with a rumbling growl.

From his trance of amazement Jim awoke to action. His hand flew to the holster of his automatic. He was too late. *Jauarité* had made up his mind and was charging.

In his path Musth, fearless as he was unlucky, swung up the copper ax. The gilded terror dashed the weapon aside like a straw. One paw, terrible with its crescent claws, struck Musth upon the breast, and the ancient house of Hualla was less by one brave man.

Hualla and his nephews, hissing an enraged serpent's hiss, sprang to avenge their comrade.

But *Jauarité* had another aim in view. Ere ever an ax fell, he leaped again, high over the heads of Hualla and his axmen—straight toward Arnold and the girl!

Jim swung Nee-Nah behind him.

## CHAPTER XX.

### JUNGLE POLITICS.

**W**ITHIN a single day's march Jones's caravan passed from the lifeless, damp and gloomy tangle, through which for three weeks they had cut their way, into the life and comparative light of the more open Montaña.

First herald of their approach to it was a small *vizcacha*, or native squirrel, which appeared suddenly, bouncing up and down on the bole of a tree and cursing fluently at the intruders. It was greeted with yells of delight from the dispirited Cholos. Not long afterward birds were seen; a big tree serpent glided across the path; and in the distance a tribe of *guariba* monkeys made the forest arcades hideous with their howlings.

"If there is a valley of the shadow upon this earth, it is yonder, Robert," said the Martian, pointing back toward the region which they were leaving.

"Yes, Señor Kelly; and it is our fortune and the will of God that none of us remained there forever," commented De Ulloa. "I feared the fevers, but they did not strike."

Noticeable at once was a change in temperature. In the belt which the travelers had traversed, the moist atmosphere precludes uncomfortable warmth; and the nights especially are chill. But the flatter Montaña is as torrid as central Africa. Before their first day in it was ended, there was a general lightening of garments, in which one member of the party nearly went the limit.

Though he was inordinately proud of it, Nambe never was too comfortable in the garb of the white man. Here it was torture. At the first stopping-place, after determined burrowing among the Martian's luggage, the Savoan stepped aside into the bushes. When he emerged, his companions saw that he had shed his civilization altogether, and carried it in a parcel under his arm.

He wore a four-yard strip of brightly colored *tappa* cloth wrapped about his middle, and a band of white cowrie shells bound his fuzzy hair from his temples. That completed his costume proper.

For adornment, he had supplemented his ear and nose rings with a crescent-shaped pendant of pearl, suspended from his neck by a thong, and had donned armlets of fish teeth and thrust a scarlet plume in his head-band. His loin-cloth supported his indispensable *vele* pouch, in company with a bone-handled knife and an automatic.

This last was the only relic of effete civilization which the islander had retained. The same box which had contained his scanty wardrobe yielded also his South Sea war club and his powerful bow with its five-foot arrows.

Don Castro's Indians, themselves stripped down to the thinnest of cotton blouses and drawers, looked with envy upon Nambe.

With redoubled speed the Peruvian led his party on into the Montaña. Caucheros whom they encountered and questioned in the rubber forests, thought them men possessed, and looked at them strangely and prayed for them when they had gone on.

None had seen the fugitives they were following. Had it not been for Arnold's messages, they must have lost the trail altogether, and despaired of ever finding him.

Soon they left behind them the farthest outpost of these daring frontiersmen of commerce, and plunged into a wilderness whereof about all that is known to civilization has been gained from Indian traditions and travelers' wild tales.

In this region, on a small stream tributary to the Ucayli, Don Castro had, he said, a friend, one Icorro, a *curaca* or chief-tain of the Antipas tribe. He had been the former comrade of the little don in many hunts and battles, and had shared his captivity and the torture of the ants in a Huachipairi village.

This man, thought De Ulloa, might give them valuable aid, providing he were not dead, which was not unlikely, for he had been an inveterate maker of war. As the direction which Arnold's captors were taking led through Icorro's territory, it was decided to pay his tribe a visit.

Less than a week after leaving the last camp of *caucheros*, the caravan reached a lazy little river, flowing quietly under the arches of drooping trees. De Ulloa, after clambering to the crown of one of the tallest forest monarchs in the vicinity and getting his bearings by a survey of the now far-distant skyline of the sierras, declared it to be the stream on which Icorro and his people had their home.

The expedition had proceeded along its curving bank but a little distance, and the

Cholos were about to pitch camp for the midday meal, when a hollow, drumming sound echoed through the forest aisles ahead and arrested every hand.

"A *tunduy!*" exclaimed Don Castro, and ordered his Indians to look to their rifles. They obeyed him with alacrity, clustering together and gazing apprehensively down the jungle vistas as if they expected the advance of danger.

Though the timber of the resonant strokes varied so as to approximate a rude scale, they were irregular, as though struck at random. After a few seconds they ceased, but at once began again, either fainter or farther away, and receded rapidly into the distance.

"What is it, Señor de Ulloa?" asked Katherine; "some animal? It sounds like a giant partridge drumming."

"They are Indian signal drums, *señora*," answered the don. "We must be approaching a settlement. They are the wireless telegraphy of the wilderness. A scout or sentinel has observed our approach, and the news is being relayed from village to village."

"How far away are they?"

"The first one five miles, perhaps, *señora*; the others much farther. The drummer strikes with a hard and heavy stick on the dry and hollowed trunk of a large tree, and the sound carries far. I have known them to be heard for nearly ten miles."

"And the Indians actually are able to communicate with them?" queried Jones.

"Doubt it not, *señor*. Every village of the settlement below us knows now that white men are approaching, and how many. It is my advice, *patron*, that we delay our dinner and hasten on before they have time to prepare for mischief, if may be. Had we known of their presence, we might have made a detour and avoided them, but now it is they who have discovered us, and it will not do to show fear. These are not the people of Icorro, unless the tribe has moved many miles up-stream, which I doubt."

That advice seemed sound. The caravan moved at once, in battle array, Katherine riding in its center. Nambe, in full

war panoply, jammed his bare heels into his mule's ribs and took the lead, as befitted the grand vizier of a great nation and the traveling companion of a king. Nambe was not lacking in courage when material things were to be faced, however much he might shrink from encountering jumping skulls on gloomy stairways. None of the Cholos showed any desire to contest his precedence.

Unseen eyes marked their progress. So many details of the strangers' advance were "put on the wire," that the beating of the *tunduy*s became almost continuous, and resembled a crazy chorus played upon immense xylophones.

Both of De Ulloa's assumptions were proved correct. The settlement was not that of Icorro; and the upper of its five villages was distant at least four and three-quarters miles from the spot where the first *tunduy* stroke had been heard.

"Aguarunas, master—from the Rio Marañon," growled Tomás to Don Castro, after a glance into the clearing where stood the village—a collection of oval, palm-stem huts surrounding a compound, in the center of which was a tall war tower built of logs.

"And not a woman in sight," added De Ulloa, knitting his brows at this unwelcome sign. "Be ready with your weapons, señores. These are evil dogs, and treacherous; and there is little here or hereafter which they fear."

At least a hundred savage warriors were gathered before the gateway to their stockade, and others were hurrying in each moment along the forest paths, each clutching his bow and arrows, his lance and his head-breaker, a stone-tipped club. Lithe, brawny men they were, superbly muscled, and wearing only cotton waist-cloths.

As the caravan pushed boldly into the clearing, a warrior who was taller by a hand's width than any of his fellows, strode out to meet it. He proved to be the *curaca*, or ruler, of the five villages. He was under the impression that Nambe occupied a similar station among his companions; for he began a long harangue, addressing himself exclusively to the Savoan.

Perhaps Nambe, who was something of

a linguist among his native islands, expected to be able to hold converse with these tribesmen; and he might have been pardoned the thought. Except that their hair was straight and their lips thinner, the Aguaruna braves differed but little in appearance from the stalwart islanders of the Pacific.

Yet before the *curaca* had terminated his second period, Nambe gave it up.

"By dam, sar, Tamal Jones," he appealed; "Nambe talk-um five-four-sebben tongue; but not what this fella he say."

Tomás, who understood the Aguaruna language, interpreted.

The *curaca* welcomed the chieftain and his white servants ("Cuss his impudence!" muttered Kelly, referring to Nambe) assured them of full stomachs so long as they should remain in his domains; and expressed himself as particularly pleased to see them so well armed, as he did not doubt that they would be happy to accompany him on a little war expedition against certain undesirable neighbors farther down the river.

"*Cáspita!* ask him who are these neighbors," observed De Ulloa, when Tomás made known the *curaca's* hopes.

After he had recovered from the disgust occasioned by the discovery that he had not been talking to a chieftain, the *curaca* confirmed Don Castro's suspicions that the settlement which he harbored a desire to exterminate was none other than that of the don's old comrade Icorro and his Antipas, between whom and the Aguarunas there was a feud of long standing.

Asked why it was that the warlike Aguarunas had so long held their hands, the *curaca* replied honestly that it was because of the presence of still a third tribe, which had come from the south and settled on the river below Icorro's people. He, the speaker, had been unable to discover which side this tribe would take should he open the ball. Now that he had the white men and their death-dealing firesticks to depend upon, that was a matter of indifference; in fact, the more foes, the merrier, seemed to be his sentiments.

To this frank exposition of aboriginal politics De Ulloa answered diplomatically

that he and his friends were in great haste; that they were following a strange war party, and wished to overtake it before it could cross the Rio Ucayli; that having done so, as they did not doubt they would, they would return and appraise the strength of the *curaca's* enemies, and see what might be done.

Though they must have passed directly through his territory, the *curaca* professed ignorance of Arnold's captors. He was only indifferently pleased with Don Castro's decision, being a man who believed in striking while the spear was sharp. However, he offered no serious objections to the strangers continuing on their way; though in the sequel it showed that he had made mental reservations.

At the termination of the negotiations De Ulloa was considerably relieved to see the women of the tribe pour forth from the stockade to stare their full at the white men, more especially at the beautiful woman with golden hair, the like of which no Aguaruna belle ever had dreamed.

Throughout the conference the eyes of the *curaca*—and they were as cruel a pair of orbs as one could wish to avoid—continually strayed to Grimshaw. The fat man sat his mule in the shade of a tree, and had removed his palm-leaf hat to fan his pink face. It was apparent that his hairless dome was a subject of intense interest to the *curaca*. He could not keep his eyes off it. His business with De Ulloa terminated, he restrained his curiosity no longer; but approached Grimshaw and twice walked around him, inspecting the amazing cranium from all angles, and making many admiring comments, none of which were understood by its owner.

Zalmon, believing that the savage wished to become friendly with him, amiably offered a cigarette, which the *curaca* accepted with a peculiar grin.

Nambe, circulating fearlessly among the Indians, discovered their telegraph instrument. The *tundry* was a hollowed log the height of a tall man, suspended by cords to the branches of a tree in the stockade and tied below to a stone which was buried in the earth. Three holes and a vertical groove which had been burned in its side,

explained the variations of its resonant and not unmusical notes.

No sooner did he set eyes on the drum than Nambe caught up the club which lay beneath it and beat a lively tattoo. His performance was greeted at first by frowns; but when it was seen that the *curaca* had condescended to smile at the mad stranger, the village rocked with laughter and encouraged the islander to renewed efforts. What the listening Indians down the river thought of Nambe's attempt at "operating," is not upon record.

To cement their friendship with the *curaca*, Don Castro thought it advisable to dine with him. Camp was made near the compound, and the Cholo cooks began operations upon a plentiful supply of maize, bananas, yuccas, etc., from the extensive gardens which surrounded the town. The flesh of a *guariba* monkey, which one of the chief's huntsmen brought in, was roasted; and it proved excellent eating, despite the preconceived notions of the white folks.

Though the Aguarunas crowded about the camp with every sign of curiosity, they had their own ideas of politeness, and they did not overrun it, as might have been expected. But great was the craning of feminine necks and wagging of feminine tongues when Katherine took off her hat.

The *curaca* and one of his wives shared the meal. She was in her way a fine-looking young woman; but her costume, if such it might be called, allowed such a generous display of her charms that the Martian, who was notably sensitive about such matters, was quite put out of countenance.

It was interesting to watch the dignity with which these two untutored, but intelligent savages comported themselves in a situation which was so entirely new in their lives, each observing carefully the manners of their hosts, and then doing likewise.

In mid-afternoon the caravan preceded on its way, notwithstanding the earnest desire of the *curaca* that his visitors remain with him at least another day.

At parting, the glance of the native chieftain was bent regretfully upon Zalmon, to whom he had been markedly courteous and attentive; and he made a number of re-

marks to Tomás which caused the Aymara to smile uncomfortably.

Hardly was the expedition under way when the thudding clamor of the *tunduy* broke out behind it and echoed down the river, to be answered in turn from each of the four towns below. Whatever was the burden of the messages interchanged, the "conversation" was animated; and the drumming chorus accompanied the travelers for many miles.

Could they have known the exact import of that syncopated tapping, they would have been even less easy in their minds than they were.

"I would not wager the tip of a *cigarro* that the *curaca* has not at this moment his spies upon our trail, who will report to him our visit to Icorro," said Don Castro. "Fortunately we shall be indeed, *patron*, if we do not see fighting, and that before long."

Jones, who had passed the rubicon of hesitation some time before, and who saw little use in further worrying, merely shrugged his broad shoulders. If it came to fighting, he would fight, as he had before—only he wished that Katherine had not been quite so insistent upon coming into this.

But Katherine, looking up at the big, quiet, capable man she had married, and thinking of the wee, brave man that they had lost, was glad that she had come.

A short cut across two continuous bends of the river took the caravan past the other four Aguaruna villages at a distance. Perhaps the *curaca* had instructed their inhabitants not to show themselves. If he had, they obeyed the order implicitly; for the travelers saw not so much as a black hair of any of them.

"Tomás, the chief back yonder, appeared to be unusually taken up with me," remarked Grimshaw to the Aymara as the men sat smoking around their campfire that evening. "Why did he single me out for his intentions?"

"It is your head, *señor*," replied Tomás, unabashed. "The Aguarunas are hunters of heads. Each chief has much pride in the number and variety of the trophies which hang on the walls of his *malocca*.

"To me the *curaca* said that he had taken many heads, and fine ones, but that one like yours, Señor Grimshaw, he never had seen, and it would give him as much satisfaction as the winning of a battle could he add it to his collection."

Jones and Don Castro smiled grimly.

"Hm-m-m," was Zalmon's only comment, and he lighted a fresh cigarette.

## CHAPTER XXI.

### AFTER POLITICS—BATTLE.

NINE days' march through a flowering and scented jungle separated the colony of the Aguarunas from the settlement of Icorro.

Under the leadership of their wise old *curaca*, the Antipas had held their location for many years; and their main village with its stockade and war tower was a stronger place than that of their hated neighbors above-stream. But its defenders were fewer, else had Icorro long ago rid himself of a thorn that embittered his flesh.

Because of Icorro's *penchant* for trouble-finding, the women in his villages outnumbered the fighting-men by nearly two to one. *En revanche*, wives were plentiful; and the *curaca* nourished many bright-eyed little hopes for a future army.

For a number of days Jim Arnold's friends had found no sign of him, and they were pushing on blindly, but with fears that they might be off the trail altogether. On the fifth day out from the Aguaruna stronghold, one of the Cholos who was doing scout duty ahead of the caravan brought in a crumpled leaf from Jim's notebook, containing the three words, "Still going east."

Hours before they reached it, the throbbing beats of Antipa *tunduy*s warned the searchers of the proximity of Icorro's bailiwick.

When he learned from his sentinels that white men were advancing into his territory, the peppery old *curaca* mustered a hundred men and sallied forth to give the presumptuous strangers any kind of a reception which the occasion might seem to warrant.

Great was his astonishment and delight at beholding his ancient comrade Don Castro; and he literally ran and fell upon the little Peruvian's neck.

He was a ferocious looking old man, this famous curaca—squat, wide, stoop-shouldered, with a wizened face like a withered cocoanut, and beady black eyes under shaggy brows. What was strange for a *Chuncho*—the name impartially bestowed by Peruvians upon all dwellers in the *Montaña*—he had white hair.

Whether a few natives of the Amazonian jungles live long enough to attain the silver crown, or whether nature herself is kind to old men in those regions, it is sure that a white-headed *Chuncho* is an almost unheard of rarity. Icorro was the only one the travelers saw during their many weeks in the *Montaña*.

Icorro was clad in a sleeveless shirt and sash, all hung with a *cascabeles* or tails of rattlesnakes. As he clasped De Ulloa to his bosom, every tail of this remarkable equipment rattled in evidence of the emotion with which he welcomed his friend. Indeed, in his exuberance he would have extended the same greeting to every member of the don's party had they offered him the slightest encouragement.

With wild shoutings, the hubbub of gourd drums and the shrill screeching of cane flutes, the visitors were paraded in triumph to Icorro's chief village and ushered into the compound. As soon as they were seated at the foot of his three-story war tower, the old fire-eater made his speech of welcome so that all the tribe could hear, and broached the subject which lay nearest his heart.

"Oh, the good old fighting days that are gone! How they grow big in Icorro's mind at sight of his friend!" he exclaimed, his black eyes snapping and his aged back straightening as he addressed Don Castro. "Then Icorro was a man, and feared nothing. Now he gets to be a whimpering old woman, and must sit on top of his tower and tremble while a tribe of insolent Aguaruna dogs defile the river above him, and Huachipairis, who are less than dogs, crowd his hunters below!"

As the name of the Huachipairis struck

his ears, De Ulloa started. His eyes, too, began to take fire, and he twisted hard at his moustaches.

"Ah, friend, that is a reminder of the great days, indeed!" roared Icorro delightedly, taking note of the don's gesture. He thrust forth a withered brown arm, deeply scarred in parallel bands across its dusky skin. He rubbed the scars and laughed savagely.

"Icorro sees that his brother remembers; for he, too, is scarred, even as Icorro is scarred. He remembers the day when he stood with Icorro in the smoke of a Huachipairi fire, and laughed at the tormentors while the red *tocandeiras*, whose bite is more bitter than fire itself, ate the skin from his flesh.

"And later, when the young men of Icorro—many then, but few now—came like the rain through the jungles, and ate up the accursed Huachipairis, slew them by the scores, as Tamandua, the great ant-eater, licks up even the fiery *tocandeiras*. Aye, we destroyed that village and took its women; and the head of its *curaca* hangs even to-day on the wall of Icorro's *malocca*.

"Again the enemies of Icorro and of his brother are near. Do not my brother's scars turn hot and cry out for further vengeance at the hearing?"

"Ah, you have stout young men, my brother, and a plenty of the fire-sticks which slay at a distance far greater than the bows of Icorro. Icorro is glad. Tomorrow will we start on the trail; and we will leave only the big marks of our feet where these Huachipairis have dared to set up their stinking *maloccas*! Later we will swallow up the Aguarunas, too, and then there will be peace on Icorro's river—peace such as my brother knows Icorro has striven to maintain for many years, and at the cost of many warriors.

"Thirty sons has Icorro bred; and his women, children, and his grandchildren have been uncouthed. Now he is old and breeds no more sons. These are all that are left him." He pointed to where a row of nine stalwart men stood like statues behind him. "And of the sons of Icorro who are gone, only one there was who did not fall in battle. He was killed by the

bite of a *jararaca* snake while he was hastening through the forest to surprise a sleeping camp of Amahuachu hunters.

"Ah, glad is the heart of Icorro this day. The sight of his brother is to him like fresh meat to Jauarité. To-day and to-night we will feast and make merry. To-morrow let us go and make war!"

Icorro finished his speech amid a great shouting of appreciation from his sons and tribesmen, and Don Castro arose to reply.

That he was not in command of the party; that he was merely its guide; that it was bound on an urgent quest; and that the presence of the white woman prevented it from sharing in the *curaca's* "peace-making"—these things De Ulloa explained as carefully as he could, and as tactfully. He added—and it was true—that had he been in command of an unhampered party, nothing would have pleased him better than to have a brush with his old-time Huachipairi foes.

Tactful as was the reply, it was far from satisfying Icorro. The bloodthirsty old ruffian was immeasurably disappointed, and somewhat disgusted as well. Tears stood in his eyes.

"The blood begins to run chill in the veins of Icorro's brother," he reproached, throwing his immense head-breaker upon the ground and treading upon it by way of emphasis. "He grows old—older than Icorro, who, though his hair is like the pod of the cotton bush when it breaks, still feels a fire at his heart when he thinks of his foes.

"The white woman could remain safe at the village of Icorro. It would be so easy to creep upon this village, going softly down the river by night upon rafts. Then my brother's warriors could pour the thunder and death of their fire-sticks into the sleeping *maloccas*; and those of the Huachipairis who remained alive, Icorro's young men should spear as they ran.

"Only aid Icorro, my brother, to lick up these crawling Huachipairis," pleaded the old fellow, warming to the picture which he had painted, "and Icorro will gladly make affair with the Aguarunas afterward. Icorro has not dared attack the one, for the fear that the other would climb upon

his bare back and bite him behind while he was busy."

To his unspeakable chagrin, the *curaca's* pleading, impassioned as it truly was, and to his angle of vision, plausibility itself, failed to move Don Castro's decision.

"To-night we will remain the guests of Icorro and taste his hospitality, the fame of which has reached even to the *maloccas* of the white men beyond the great western hills," announced the Peruvian. "But the sun of to-morrow must see us upon our way eastward.

"Know, my brother, that my heart is with you; but we have a duty which may not be shirked. Afterward—*quien sabe?*—we may return and speak further of these matters."

Icorro was out of sorts—so much so that had it not been for the don's hint at hospitality, he might have opened his gates at once and bidden his guests go and be damned to them, or whatever is the Antipa equivalent for that forceful phrase. As it was, he sulked all the evening. But he fed them of his best, and cleared two big houses of their sleeping quarters.

At sunrise they took the trail again. One of the *curaca's* sons and an escort of ten bowmen marched with them, to accompany them for a way through the jungles.

Behind them a fierce-hearted old savage clambered to the summit of his war tower, and through tears of pure disappointment watched depart from his domains the makings of as sweet a scrimmage as ever he had dreamed of.

Anxious at all events to avoid the territory of the Huachipairis, who treated all strangers without mercy, Don Castro shaped his course to bear away from the river at an angle which would take his party to the southeast. This direction was followed for nearly a week, in which none of the dreaded enemies were seen; nor were any further signs of Arnold found. On the third day's march from the Antipa stronghold, the son of Icorro and his bowmen turned and went back to their village.

"It seems that we must go on, *patron*—across the Rio Ucayli," said Don Castro wistfully; "though we near the destination that is marked upon your map."



Jones long before had showed De Ulloa the map of Cooper, and told him something of its strange history, and of the reasons for his jungle quest.

Without the knowledge of the Americans, there was now between the bronzed little Peruvian and the big, quiet Jones and his beautiful wife a stronger bond of sympathy than ever. Don Castro knew it. In the strange silences of his heart he had hoped to spare both them and himself the uncertainties of this longer journey.

If only he might come up with Arnold—and those with him! Nightly he prayed for it.

So they went on as swiftly as might be, firing no guns, for fear of what ears might be listening in the forest.

Afternoon of the eighth day from the villages of Icorro found the caravan hacking its painful way through the thick of undergrowth and hanging *lianas* at the feet of tall, dark trees—a maze almost as dense as that which they had traversed to reach the *Montaña*.

Heated and tired, the toilers flung themselves to rest upon the grass in a small clearing, which had been made partly by their own efforts. Katherine did not dismount, but amused herself by focusing Jones's powerful field-glasses in an attempt to pierce one of the forest vistas which seemed deeper and more open than in any other direction.

Far down its reach the arched and gloomy aisle was cut across by a flaming blade of sunlight, and just beyond lay a great fallen log, half overgrown by plants and parasites. As Katherine brought the glasses to bear upon the spot, something disturbed the bushes.

A dark body leaped into the log, poised there for an instant and disappeared. Another followed, and another, and another. They were larger than monkeys.

Katherine twirled the button of the glasses, bringing them into sharper focus. Her instantly stifled cry of alarm brought Jones to his feet beside her.

"Savages, Bob! Yonder, where the big tree lies across the path!"

She handed him the instrument, now in perfect focus. As he directed it at the

indicated spot, a brown warrior sprang fantomlike from out of the shrubbery to the top of the log, stood outlined against a leafy background, and disappeared.

Five men Jones counted, snapping into view and vanishing as swiftly and soundlessly as though they had been painted men on slides of glass. Who were they?—the Huachipairis, whom he was trying to avoid? As if in answer to his mind's question, the sixth man flashed across his field of vision, and he recognized the splendid figure of the Aguaruna chieftain. Almost could the watcher see the gleam in those well-remembered cruel eyes, and read upon the lips their peculiar, mocking smile.

Still holding the glasses to his eyes, Jones called softly to Don Castro.

"A war party, *señor*," De Ulloa said after a glance through the glasses. He tugged thoughtfully at his moustache as he continued to gaze through the instrument.

"Aguarunas—I glimpsed the chief," informed Jones. "Think they're looking for us?"

"No, *patron*—not yet, else they would have found us. They are going north. I do not understand it. It is best that we continue our present course, *patron*—with great care."

While they talked, Don Castro counted. When the last of the war party had vanished, his tally added to that of Katherine and Jones, totaled one hundred and seventeen half-naked fighting-men of the Aguarunas who were slipping like ghosts through the forest on some dark, unguessed errand.

"Undoubtedly there were more, *señor*, whom we did not see. Let us—"

The don's words were cut short by the frightful, squalling roar of a jaguar, which echoed from the jungle some distance to the left. It was followed by the scream of a woman. The beast screeched again, with a new and appalling note of fury in its tones. Then came the crashing report of a heavy automatic pistol; and a silence so intense that the faraway murmur of a breeze among the countless leaves sounded like the breakers of a distant sea.

"Arnold!" shouted Jones, and leaped astride his mule.

"Nee-Nahl!" roared Don Castro, clam-

bering catlike upon his own beast and spurring it furiously toward the more open arcade ahead.

"Jauarité make his kill, or he never yell so," muttered Tomás, hewing his way through the break behind his master.

Before he had gone a hundred feet, De Ulloa pulled up his animal and turned in his saddle to watch the rest of the party straggling behind him.

"Pardon, *patron*," he said; "I had forgotten your *señora* for the instant. The Aguarunas are yonder." The Peruvian's face was ghastly, and his breast was heaving like a runner's.

"So is Jim Arnold. That was his gun. We must go to him," replied Jones firmly. "But let us keep together and be ready for trouble."

And trouble was waiting—many-faced, hideous trouble, with eyes that glared and lips that writhed, and obscene brains anticipatory of deeds to make the very trees shudder with loathing.

Together, and quietly, the members of the little party tore their way through the jungle, where, following that single pistol shot, had fallen a silence that was broken by only their own labored breathing and the swishing strokes of the heavy machetes as they severed the tangle of green cane and hanging *Wimars*.

Almost had they gained the more open going beyond, when shadowlike in their path rose the shape of a fiend, malevolent eyes glaring from a face made livid with a coating of ashes and oil; perforated lips, weighted by carven sticks and shells and bones, hanging pendulously upon its chin; and a naked body below, painted in hell's colors of scarlet and sable. Arrow on string, it arose, and sent a whistling death speeding through the heart of one of the Cholos.

"Huachipairis!" screamed rather than shouted De Ulloa, leveling his pistol. He was saved the bullet.

For the first time that dim old forest rang to the war cry of the far-off Pacific islands, and Nambé, springing over the body of the slain man, dashed the brains from the horrible apparition with a blow of his stone-headed war club.

A death scream echoed the war cry. A hundred throats challenged the victor in demoniac chorus. The jungle became alive with clamor and motion. Every thicket and bush vomited painted fighting-men.

"Now are the devils unchained! Hold we together, *señores*, and fight for the lovely *señorita*!" boomed Don Castro, his big voice never so commanding.

Down from his mule swung the Peruvian, and turned the animal broadside. The others followed his example. In the midst of turmoil and death, the don did not forget his courtesy. Hat in hand he appeared at Katherine's saddle-bow and offered her his arm to descend.

A barricade, a living rampart of determined men and devoted beasts was interposed between the white woman and the ravening foemen. Rifles and pistols took up death's work. Like a stormdrift flew the long arrows. Cholo David went down with his throat transfixed. Wounded mules reared, braying and kicking.

To those to whom it was given to remember, what followed then was recalled always as a grisly vision, a something either more or less than human—a dark and bloody page torn from a grim, pagan inferno.

Above the blatant symphony of *hades* sounded the wolflike ululation of a new war shout. From no fixed direction, but from all directions simultaneously, a new force entered the battle, a force that was ruthless—and friendly to neither of the participants already engaged.

Over fallen logs and through the thickets, leaping around the boles of the trees, and even from their branches, the wild tribesmen of the Aguarunas charged in upon their hated enemies. In an instant the spot where the travelers had made their stand became the vortex of a scene of singular hideousness.

So furious was the charge that the little barricade was overrun, inundated by twisting waves of brown bodies, interlocked, clawing, gashing, and rending. From the struggling mass arose a snarling more horrible than that of battling beasts.

As the rush started, Jones glanced around him.

Katherine, crouched behind the body of a fallen mule, was firing mechanically with David's rifle. De Ulloa, his magazines emptied, stood among his Cholos, swinging a machete against a half score of threatening lance points with the cool skill of a practiced swordsman. On the other side of the circle, Kelly and Nambe, with pistol and club, fought back to where a mule was down. A growing heap of Huachipairs before them attested that they had not fought in vain.

At Jones's elbow stood Grimshaw. The fat man's cheek had been gashed by a cast lance; but his arms were folded, and he was dispassionately watching the oncoming deluge of death with his old-time smile.

"Why aren't you fighting?" Jones shouted in his ear, much inclined to put a bullet through the smile.

"I have no lethal weapon, Mr. Jones," replied Zalmon. "I brought none."

It was incredible, but true. Jones plucked an extra automatic from his belt and shoved it into his hand. A box with spare clips lay at his feet. As he turned back into the fight, Jones heard the weapon going like a corn-popper.

On came the wave of battle, and broke and overwhelmed them with writhing bodies, blinded them with hot spurting blood, dizzied them with its horrors.

Within a yard of his own, Jones saw a cruel face of the Aguaruna chief. He flung up his pistol and pressed the trigger. But the weapon was empty, and the *curaca* laughed as he was swept away.

Two warriors fast locked in each other's arms hurtled through the air from a tree overhead and struck across Jones's broad shoulders, knocking his gun from his hand and upsetting him.

"God! They're raining on us!" he growled, and flung an arm around each; for, jarred apart by their fall, both savages had turned by common consent on the big white man. Under their armpits he gripped them, and put forth the great strength that was his.

Once before, in the shadows of Islais Street, years before, he had played at this game of breaking men's ribs with men. Spanish Luiz had launched against him,

and he had not thought to play it again. He grinned at the memory, and increased the pressure of his closing arms. The Indians clawed and screeched like tortured cats as the living girdles tightened.

Again the tide of revolting battle overflowed the barricade. When it was gone, Jones stood up, his arms empty.

One Aguaruna and one Huachipairi would never fight again. Their bodies looked at if the weight of a great wheel had passed over them.

Jones laughed, glancing around him uncertainly. He had been struck on the back of his skull by an Aguaruna head-breaker; but he did not know it. His vision was failing; but he could see how it was in the circle.

Don Castro was down at last, with Tomás fighting over him. The Martian was reeling. Nambe had disappeared. Katherine was either swooned or dead. Her white face and yellow, disheveled hair lay like a pale flower on the blood-sprayed grass.

In front of her, Zalmon, kneeling on one knee, was aiming and firing, and smiling as he fired, as cool as a dragoon on parade.

Strange memory! thought Jones, to carry with him whither he was going—for he felt now that he *was* going—fast.

He raised himself stiffly and tried to step forward. He saw the gold of sunlight upon open water, heard a roaring as of a great cascade in his ears, and under his patient mule he fell.

## CHAPTER XXII.

### NEE-NAH'S ULTIMATUM.

TIME had Arnold for neither thought nor aim as the jaguar, a tremendous bolt of living fury, launched itself through the air.

He saw the great, yellow, devil's face and the wide-flung forelegs, swollen with muscles, their crescent talons dripping with the blood of Musth, come driving at him through a broad bar of sunlight. He threw up the automatic and fired; and so close was Jauarité to the weapon's fire-spitting muzzle that his throat was scorched.

Like a mighty hammer, the huge golden head struck Jim on the chest and drove him backward and down.

He had a confused vision of treetops and brassy sky racing past him, in which swam Nee-Nah's lovely face, wide-eyed and filled with terror and with pain. Ah, God! then he had failed to save her! Groaning, he passed into darkness, the weight of all the world bearing down upon his soul and stifling it.

But he was only stunned. Presently his senses began to filter back to him. The crushing weight was gone. Near him he heard many voices speaking in an unknown tongue; and something farther away, a hellish clamor of shrieks and yells and shooting. He started up, but fell back; for his limbs were tightly bound.

Slowly, but with quickening perceptions, he looked about him. He lay where he had fallen; but instead of the figures which had grown familiar in the last weeks, he was surrounded by a group of savage warriors. Some of them were bleeding from wounds; all were breathing heavily, as from great exertions.

A few feet away was the carcass of the jaguar, which they had pulled off him. The heavy steel bullet of the automatic had done its business, tearing through the throat to the spinal column and shattering it. Three of the Indians with long knives were busily removing the tawny hide.

Of Nee-Nah and her companions he could see nothing. From where he lay he could see the spot where Musth had fallen. The body was not there.

Persistent in his hearing was that distant clamor of battle. What was it? Then he heard clearly the stentorian voice of De Ulloa bidding his Cholos stand firm. At that, the last of the fog cleared from Jim's brain. He sat up, wrenching at the *sipo* withes which bound him.

"Let me out of this!" he cried, not recking in which camp he might be, and forgetting that these Indians could not understand him.

With a ferocious grunt, the savage nearest him, who was nursing a wrist that a rifle ball had smashed, lifted his naked foot and struck the prisoner across the mouth

with its heel. Another menaced him with a knotted club. Jim subsided and lay still.

In a few moments the noise of the conflict in the forest grew fainter; the shots and the shouted orders of Don Castro ceased altogether; and the hideous yelling of the savages died away in the distance.

Who were victors? Who vanquished? Jim might wonder until his head ached; there was none to tell him.

Other Indians came hurriedly from the jungle. They were fresh from the struggle. Few were unwounded; and—what turned Arnold faint and sick—one of them bore over his shoulder a network bag of woven *sipos*, in which were half a score of newly-severed human heads!

With difficulty forcing his loathing gaze to its task, Jim assured himself that no white man or woman had contributed to that horrible cornucopia of victory. The heads were all of brown men.

Came finally a tall, cruel-eyed man, stately despite his torn plumage and gaping wounds—for the Aguaruna chief had led his tribesmen wherever the fighting was thickest. He walked to Jim and looked him over with interest, and gave an order to one of his followers.

The man departed swiftly and returned, leading a trembling mule. At sight of it, Jim groaned again. It was the one De Ulloa had ridden; and its Lima saddle was bespattered with blood.

Jim's legs were untied, and he was set astride the animal. The party, momentarily augmented by new arrivals, who came in in twos and threes, set off through the forest in a westerly direction, proceeding at a brisk trot. One savage led the mule, and another continually lashed it from behind with a length of tough *sipo*. Some of the blows fell upon Jim.

Behind them the din of battle broke out again, and an occasional arrow sang over head. The white man judged that his captors were fighting a stiff rearguard action.

When they had gone a short distance, the savages who were in the lead raised a cry of alarm. A number of them grouped themselves beside the path, dancing and gesticulating with rage.

Jim looked down. Half hidden in the long grass lay the body of a warrior, his knees drawn up rigidly and his head cloven nearly to the chin. His comrades, with many a grunt and suspicious glance into the jungle depths, picked the gruesome thing up and threw it across the mule's back in front of Arnold.

A little farther on, another corpse was found, its throat gashed and one arm hewn away; then another, and another, until Jim had counted no less than five of these grim milestones, left along the path by some mysterious agency. At each new discovery, the Aguarunas became more and more frightened, clustering together and discussing in whispers.

Then in a small clearing they came upon three dead warriors lying in a twisted heap, and near them the naked body of a white man, beside which lay a shining copper axe.

Jim shuddered at sight of that white flesh, and involuntarily turned his head away. The Aguarunas precipitated themselves upon it with howls of fury. When Arnold looked again, the body had been decapitated and another dread trophy added to the contents of the already bulging basket.

But Jim drew a sign of double relief. He had recognized the body. It was that of none of Jones's party. It was the corpse of Musth. Here Hualla and his nephews had passed and left sinister evidence of their passing. Perhaps Nee-Nah was still safe.

With fine foresight the Aguaruna *curaca* had concluded that the white men would not proceed very far before falling afoul of old Icorro and his Antipas or the Huachipairis. Trouble in either place would make the whites his allies; so the Aguaruna had sent out scouts, gathered his warriors hastily, and making a wide detour, had cut in ahead of the caravan.

Reports brought him of the reception of the strangers by Icorro had puzzled him; for of course he knew nothing of the old man's friendship for De Ulloa. But when he learned that a large Huachipairi war party was in ambush awaiting the white men, the Aguaruna leader was delighted. As has been seen, he attacked like a whirl-

wind, did all the damage he could to both parties, and withdrew with all speed.

Reason too dictated his last maneuver: Reinforcements were coming up from the Huachipairi villages; and he had captured in the mêlée what was valued to him as a province.

For ahead of Arnold plodded another mule, and on its back rode Grimshaw. Beside him, prodded on by lance-points, strode Tomás the Aymara.

And Grimshaw was the possessor of a head such as the Aguaruna *virtuoso* had dreamed of but never before had seen.

When Jim went down under the weight of the charging jaguar, he was thrown violently against Nee-Nah; and though she was not much hurt, the girl, too, fell like a stone. Hualla and the others, running in, found Ah-meer-e-can and their priestess both prone under Jauarité's great, yellow carcass. For, to their amazement—the Paititians did not understand firearms, and had cowered at the report of Jim's pistol—the jaguar needed none of their axe-strokes to keep him quiet. There was not a twitch left in him.

They dragged Nee-Nah out and set her on her feet, and were about to perform a like office for Jim, when they were interrupted.

In ridding himself of Jauarité, Jim, all unwittingly, had precipitated a battle. The sound of his pistol-shot sent his friends hurrying into the arms of the ambushed Huachipairis; and it hastened the advance of the Aguarunas, who had skirted the northern rim of the little lake.

Just as Hualla and his three nephews—who, by the way, had resumed their natural tints—laid hold of the jaguar's paws to heave, the din of war arose in the forest, and the van of the Aguaruna charge broke cover at the foot of the lake. Despite Nee-Nah's protest that Ah-meer-e-can should not be left behind, Hualla dragged her away; and the five of them fled swiftly westward, where seemed to be the only open way. Rasco and Isako caught up the body of Musth and carried it with them.

Swift as they were, they did not escape

the keen eyes of the Aguaruna chief. He supposed them a part of the white caravan which he had been trailing; though he wondered somewhat at their costume, or lack of it. He told off eight warriors and sent them to capture the fleeing five.

As the chase went on, some of the Aguarunas proving better runners than their fellows, they became strung out. Hualla had counted on this. With Jaqui, he hung behind his fleeing party, and one by one the two Paititian axemen cut the Indians down.

Brave men were those Aguaruna warriors. They did not turn back when they came to the bodies of their slain comrades, but held on, breathing revenge. When he had disposed of five of them in running fight, Hualla called to Isako and Rasco to lay down their brother's body, and the four turned on the three remaining Aguarunas and slew them.

Nee-Nah, unstrung and weary, fainted at sight of that fell struggle. Thinking that they heard more pursuers coming up, the Paititians then abandoned the body of Musth and carried the girl upon their shoulders, striking off toward the river.

Part of the way they traveled through the trees, so as to leave no trail. When they reached the side of the water, they made a small furtive camp.

Her consciousness returned, Nee-Nah proved difficult to handle. Never had Hualla seen her so—or any other woman for that matter, hysterics being unknown in the great Paititi. He had to restrain her by force, or she had certainly rushed back into the deadly jungles in search of Ah-meer-e-can. He had rescued her from the jaws of Jauarité, and she had abandoned him, she screamed. Furiously she accused Hualla of treachery and cowardice.

Though he was troubled by her unaccountable behavior, the old fellow took her accusations stoically.

"How knowest thou, daughter, that Fire-Maker was not himself slain by Jauarité?" he asked, when she paused for breath, and he could get a whisper in edgewise.

"I know—that he was not! He slew Jauarité with thunder and fire from this

thing!" She took from her bosom Jim's automatic, which she had snatched up and brought with her. "He did not die; I saw the fingers of his hand moving as ye four cowards turned to flee—and I think that thou sawest it also, Hualla."

This was true; but Hualla did not feel called upon to admit it. Instead, he took the pistol gingerly and sniffed at its muzzle.

"Fire has surely come from it," he declared wisely. "I can smell it. This Fire-Maker is a powerful magician. He can keep himself from harm, my daughter."

"How may that be, when he has lost his magic?" denied the girl, taking the weapon from him and hiding it again. "I say to you, Hualla, that if you desert Ah-meer-e-can, I, Nee-Nah, priestess of the great god Pro-Tay-Us, will not go back to Paititi! If you force me to do so, I will die!"

"Lovest thou then this stranger, my daughter?" questioned Hualla gravely.

"Nay, but I owe him the blood debt of life for life."

Hualla bent his head and considered for a time.

"Isako," he said at length, "of us all thou art the most swift of foot and the most enduring. Go thou on to Paititi at thy best speed. Say to Ito the high priest that Hualla has lost two of his house, and that men must be sent to—thou must lie to him, nephew—to rescue our priestess, who is held captive by the barbarians beyond the great river. I will meet them when they come, and lead them. Haste, Isako!"

Without a word Isako saluted his uncle and vanished into the jungle.

"Thou dost well, Hualla," said the girl thankfully. "We will wait."

But she was not content with waiting.

## CHAPTER XXIII.

### ONE SCORE WIPED OUT.

WHERE had been the fiercest center of the jungle battle—where the white men from beyond the mountains had made their grim stand against the dark foemen—for a time was silence.

In the forest depths to the westward and northward, Huachipairi and Aguaruna still waged desperate warfare and did ghastly murder under the giant trees that had looked calmly down upon so many scenes of darkness. But where the caravan of the white strangers had halted was peace and the stillness of death.

Yet all were not dead. The human machine that had crushed two strong fighting-men like toys was too powerful to be utterly wrecked, even by the blow of an Aguaruna war club. Groaning and panting, and so dizzy that sunlit glades and dim, leafy aisles swam in his vision like a turning wheel, Jones sat up.

The upright position sent an agony to his head. He clasped it in his hands and strove to compel his whirling senses to thought. What had happened?

Rebellious memory unkindly limned a vivid picture: his wife's pale face against a heap of dead men. As though a fiery arrow had stricken him, he leaped to his feet and stood swaying.

"Kate! Kate! Where are you, dear?"

No answer came in the accents of the best-loved voice. Only a macaw screamed harshly overhead.

Jones cleared the blood from his eyes and the vertigo from his brain and staggered forward. Here was the spot where she had lain. Here was Cholo David's rifle, which she had used; and here, ah here, was her little khaki handkerchief, all damp and stained with red. Jones snatched the relic from the grass and held it in a grip which might have bent an iron bar.

Katherine was gone.

Vainly the distracted man's eyes roved over the little battleground. Plenty of motionless figures were lying there—some of them horrible; for the savage headsmen had been busy—but his wife was not among them; and he knew not which outweighed the other: gladness that she was not among them, or anxiety as to what had befallen her.

Grimshaw too was missing, and the Martian, and Nambe. Were they all slain or gone but himself? Jones wondered as he noted the absent. No, not all. There, on

the rim of the broken barricade, nosing gently at a fallen man's upturned face, was the gaunt gray mule which he had ridden. He walked to the animal. At its feet he found Don Castro lying, very white and still.

Jones thought he saw the Peruvian's breast heave faintly. He stooped and felt of his heart. It was beating. Recalling the impression which had come to him as he fell of the light shimmering upon water, Jones stood on the carcass of a mule and looked around him. Through an opening in the branches he saw it again; but whether it was river, lake or pond, he could not tell.

Like an automaton he recovered and reloaded his pistol and one of the rifles. Then he lifted De Ulloa and laid him across the mule; and, strong man though he was, he was so shaken that the weight of the little don almost overtaxed him. Leading the mule, he set off toward the water. At each step he was confronted by some new and sickening evidence of the fierceness of the *Chuncho* battle.

As he neared the lake, a wounded Huachipairi writhed out from a thicket and struck weakly at the white man's legs with a broken lance. Like a furious, mutilated snake, the savage struck, glaring up at Jones out of venomous, snake-like eyes; and like a snake Jones trod him down, setting is heel on the evil face and grinding it into the earth.

Near the water's edge lay the skinned carcass of the jaguar. The mule snorted and shied at it; but Jones scarcely noticed it. He laid De Ulloa on the bank, threw water in his face and examined him for wounds.

He found a deep knife-gash in the don's right thigh and a hole in his upper left arm, where a war arrow had torn through. These he bandaged as well as he could with pieces of the wounded man's shirt.

Jones's injuries were limited to a trifling cut in his neck and a bruised lump nearly the size of his fist where the club had struck him on the back of the skull. He lay in the grass and drank from the lake, and the cooling water revived him like a tonic.

While he was washing the sticky red stains from his face and hands Don Castro stirred and sat up.

The Peruvian's first conscious movement would have been laughable had not the setting been so tragic; for one of his hands crept feebly up and tugged at his damp mustache.

"*Santos Dios! señor*, where are the others?" he asked. "Where is the *señora*?"

"Gone—perhaps dead," replied Jones, his voice breaking. "They are all gone."

Don Castro gazed deep into the Americans eyes, and then out at the lake. He saw its dancing waters through a mist. But Castilian blood that had fought with the Pizarros ran strong in his veins and vanquished despair. He sprang up, limped to Jones and wrung his hand.

"I do not think that your *señora* is dead, *patron*," he said earnestly; "the good God would not permit that. She is alive; and we will find her—you and I."

"Thank you for that hope, *Senor de Ulloa*. What is first to be done?"

De Ulloa thought for a moment. His eyes fell upon the mule. "Are there any more of the mules alive, *patron*?" he asked.

"I think so. Yes, I am sure I saw others."

"Then there is a thing to do, *patron*—the only thing. We must hasten back to Icorro. And by God's thunder!" he added, his voice deepening with excitement, "we will offer him a chance at such fighting as will satisfy even him!"

At that instant Jones's eyes were attracted by peculiar scratches on the surface of a broad green leaf which lay at his feet. He picked it up, and read Jim Arnold's last message.

"Arnold was here!" he exclaimed, showing the writing to Don Castro. "It was his shot we heard. Those devils must have bagged him, too," and he ground his teeth savagely.

"Perhaps, *patron*. Yonder is the game he brought down." De Ulloa pointed at the body of the jaguar. "Now come, *patron*, let us hasten and be gone. Whoever wins in the fighting will be passing this

way again before long, and they—" He checked himself awkwardly.

"They will be looking for our heads, you mean," Jones finished for him grimly. "You need not spare my feelings. They made quite a collection yonder where we were fighting."

De Ulloa looked at him pityingly, but found nothing to say.

"Poor Jim," continued Jones, "he writes of Herodotus and the circus as if things had not been going too seriously with him. I hope his luck holds now until we can find him—and Kate." He shook his head, and grasped the mule's bridle. "Yes, let us be going."

With the Peruvian limping beside him, he turned back toward the scene of the conflict.

Five more of the mules were found alive; though one of them was injured so badly that Jones in mercy cut the poor beast's throat. The others either had been killed or driven away by savages.

"Lighten their loads, *patron*, and haste," counseled De Ulloa. "Let the supplies go—all save the guns and ammunition. Those we shall need."

While Jones gathered the beasts and recovered the firearms, Don Castro took upon himself the unpleasant task of estimating the casualties. One by one, he found the bodies of his Indians, with the exception of Tomás only. He called the list to Jones.

"Counting the *Senor Arnold*, six of our party are missing," he announced. "The rest are slain—may God rest them! Besides your *señora*, *Señor Kelly* is gone, and his servant; and the *Señor Grimshaw* also is gone—and bad as he is, I am sorry, *patron*. I saw him fight. He is a brave man—a very brave man."

Two of the wretched Cholos had been dragged outside the barricade and mutilated by the headsman. Don Castro swore softly to himself, pulling hard at his mustache, as he looked with burning eyes at those poor corpses of faithful men. He swore again, in amazement, when he found the pair of warriors who had perished in Jones's deadly girdle.

"*Cáspita! Señor Jones*," he exclaimed, marveling at the almost superhuman



strength of arm of the big American, "if ever you hug Castro de Ulloa in such an embrace, let it be when he is dead. The ribs of these men are broken like rotten sticks!"

Jones, coming toward him with the mules, tightened his lips. Just then he was wishing that all the savages of the *Montaña* had but a single neck, and he had it between his hands. He aided De Ulloa to mount, and they spurred their mules into the trail by which they had come, Jones leading two of the pack animals, and the Peruvian the third.

Before they had gone three hundred yards, a voice from the air hailed Jones:

"Tamal Jones! Tamal Jones!"

Jones pulled up his mule and looked around in astonishment. The branches of a big tree over his head were agitated, and down, almost into his arms, came the long form of the Martian, bound with withes and dangling at the end of a long *sipo*. Above him among the leaves appeared the face of Nambe.

The Savoan, too, had proved his right that day to stand with the immortals. When Kelly had fallen, under the same war club which had smitten Jones, Nambe had gone to the grass with its wielder and slain him, after which he had deemed it the better part of valor to lie quietly beside his master until the atmosphere should clear. Later he had shouldered the Martian's senseless body and taken to the jungle, without concerning himself overmuch as to the fate of the others.

Such an act, where a woman was involved, would have been inexcusable in a white man; but for Nambe the sun rose and set in the red hair of his master; and Jones knew it, and did not reproach him.

"But why did you tie him, Nambe?—and gag him, too?" he asked, seeing that Kelly's jaws were bound with his handkerchief.

"By dam, Tamal Jones, sar, he got-um debbils in head. Fight-um Nambe, fight-um trees, fight-um eberyting, and yell-um like mad pig." Which was Nambe's way of explaining that the Martian had become delirious.

So the devoted islander had bound his

king and hauled him into a tree to wait for nightfall, intending no less an attempt than to carry him all the way back to civilization, if need be.

Jones and De Ulloa removed the gag, and despite his mad babblings and struggles, they dosed Kelly with quinine from Jones's medicine kit. He had a number of flesh wounds, and the fever had entered him through them. They tied him on a mule and went on, until darkness compeled a halt. By morning the fever had left the Martian; but he still was so weak that they had to tie him in his saddle.

By pressing their mules to the limit of their endurance, they reached the Antipa settlement on the fourth day; and right glad were all four men when they heard Icorro's *tundays* making thudding music in the distance.

The old pagan listened with a sort of religious joy to Don Castro's story. It became ecstasy when he learned that his powerful neighbors had been at each other's throats.

"They eat each other!" he exclaimed gleefully. "May Icorro turn into a louse when he dies, if he doesn't go eat what is left of them himself!"

East and west into the forest went swift Antipa scouts, to learn, if possible, the fate of Katherine Jones. For where the white woman was, there would the first attack be made.

Word was returned that she was held in the Huachipairis' main village; and that the fat man and another white man, whom the scouts had not seen before, were prisoners among the Aguarunas. To Jones this news was as the reprieve to a man condemned to die.

Icorro put himself at the head of his sons and a hundred and fifty warriors, and recklessly leaving his villages in charge of women and youths, took his array down the river on rafts. On a dark night the Huachipairis were attacked both by land and water.

Covered by the four deadly rifles of the white men and Nambe, the Antipa braves fired the stockades and put the panic-stricken villagers to the spear. It was fell work; but none of the white men made any

plea for mercy. There was that in their memories which had steeled them.

On the crest of the first wave of fighting-men which swept into the chief village went Bob Jones, in one hand a spitting automatic, in the other the war club of a savage. Men of Icorro still tell of the execution he did with it. From *malocca* to *malocca* he rushed, distancing his savage allies and running fearful risks, but his search was vain.

Katherine had disappeared!

Before he died an unpleasant death, the Huachipairi *curaca* told Icorro that the white woman had been there. He had intended her, he said, as his favorite wife; but an evil spirit of the river had entered his village three nights previous, slain four of his young men, and carried the white woman away.

For many days war parties of the Antipas aided their white allies to scour the forests; but they found no trace of Katherine. Icorro, thinking of the Aguarunas, became restive. It was decided to go back

This story will be concluded in next week's issue of the ARGOSY-ALLSTORY WEEKLY, the consolidated title under which both magazines will appear hereafter as one.

and remove that menace also, and then to continue the search for the lost white woman.

Hardly had they returned to the Antipa fortress when a new calamity struck. Don Castro fell ill. Jones found him tossing and moaning on his bed in the night.

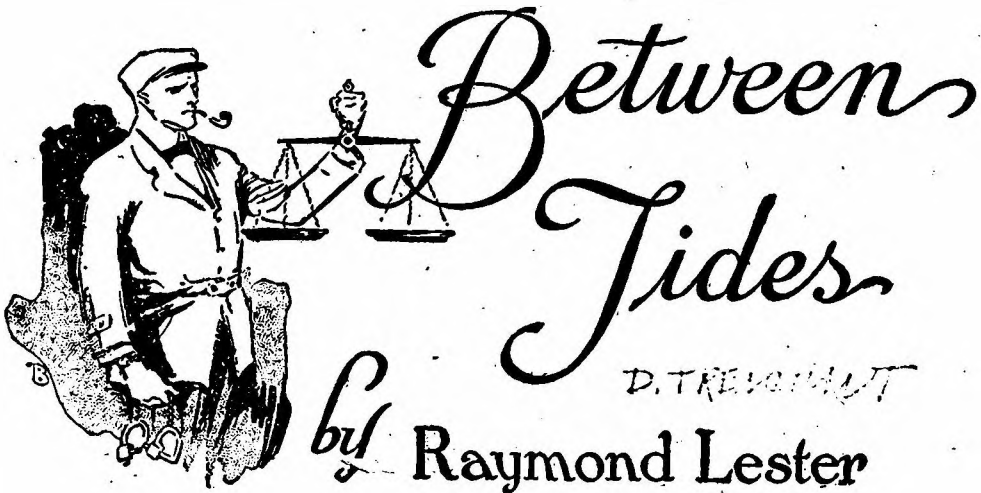
"It is the — *tercianias* — *patron*," he gasped, "the — jungle — fever. Fetch Icorro."

But before the old *curaca* reached his side, the Peruvian's mind was wandering.

This was a dire setback. Icorro would not move a step without De Ulloa. Indeed, with the little don wandering in the fever mists, Jones had no means of even talking with the *curaca*, who knew scarcely a dozen Spanish words, and of English none at all.

Day by day Jones and Kelly sat by turn beside a bed where lay a small, wan man, who repeated over and over, with every shade of inflection of which his voice was capable the word, "Nee-Nah!"

There was nothing to do but wait.



"I HAVEN'T seen Scotland Dan for months. I guess he's gone off hunting or fishing. Why?" asked Rankin.

"Because I want to meet him. I hear he's the grand mogul at the sleuth game. Maybe he'll give me a few pointers and—"

Rankin, a grizzled veteran and a member of Pilkington's world renowned private de-

TECTIVE agency, interrupted me with a chuckle.

"Huh!" he grunted. "Trying to get hold of experience without going through the mill, eh? Well, you'll find you'll have to pay your share of mistakes before you come, anywhere near being a humdinger de-TECTIVE. Take it from me, you can't

learn much from the other feller, however good he may be."

"Suppose you cut out the moralizing, Rankin, and come down to what is commonly called brass tacks," I put in, and gave him a cigar. Rankin carefully inspected it, wrinkled his bushy eyebrows, sniffed at it as a suspicious dog does a wayside bone, and finally snipped off the end with his strong white teeth. I handed him a lighted match. Volumes of smoke ascended to the ceiling of his little office. He leaned back with a sigh of content.

"Well, what about Scotland Dan, then?"

I spoke rather irritably. I had paid a quarter for that cigar, and I didn't see the fun of watching it burn to ashes without getting something for it.

"Didn't I tell you I ain't seen him for four weeks? There was a bit of a mystery over on Long Island. It was known as the Creek murder, but nothing could be proved and the woman got off scot free. The police couldn't make head nor tail of the affair. Scotland Dan was there at the time, but he wouldn't do a thing. Guess he was up to his old tricks again. He's a queer bird."

My mind fastened on those last words of Rankin. I had previously heard something of the kind in connection with Scotland Dangerfield, and vainly had I tried to get at the exact significance of these suggestive remarks. My inquiries had always met with evasive replies. I knew that Scotland Dan, as he was known in private and official detective circles, was a mighty good criminal investigator. A free agent who had the reputation of doing what he darned well pleased, and I also gathered here and there, from the dribs and drabs of conversation, the knowledge that he was sometimes a help and a blessing in the cause of the law; and sometimes a thorn and a hindrance.

No one had a bad word to say concerning his humanity, his honesty, or his good intentions; but there were many who dubbed him "queer," cranky and quixotic. For this and several other reasons, he seemed to me to be the man whose methods a beginner like myself ought to study. Hence my visit to Rankin and my reckless graft in the shape of that cigar which was

now fast becoming a mere stub. I determined to see if I couldn't strike some sparks of definite information from Rankin before my cigar became a thing of the past. I struck boldly.

"There's something wrong with him? Is he crooked?"

Rankin sat bolt upright. He glared at me. It was my turn to chuckle inwardly; for although he was foxy and seldom to be drawn, I had got his goat and he didn't know it.

"Scotland Dan a crook!" he spluttered. "Man, you're crazy. He's a dandy good feller, let me tell you. Keen as a lancet and all fired hot as red pepper when he's on a good trail. But—"

The old detective shot me a side-long glance under his heavy brows, and a curious hesitancy came into his speech. "But," he repeated, then added: "You can bet your sweet life Scotland Dan's a fine feller. He's a bit funny sometimes, but he's all right."

There it was again. The hint of something that did not quite fit, or assemble with the evident liking every one had for the man I was anxious to meet.

"How do you mean 'funny'?" I ventured to persist.

Rankin grunted, scratched his ear and regarded me doubtfully. "You are worse than a woman after a new hat," he muttered. "You've got my missus licked a mile for dog-gone stubborn hang-onto-a-argument. Don't I tell you he's on the level, and as straight as a gun-barrel? Only—well, here's the point, since you will have it, he's got a twist in his make-up that neither me nor the rest of the boys can make out. He's here to-day and gone to-morrow. One minute he's leading the way on the trail of some crook, and the next he's off on his own. Nothing can hold him. He's independent. Got plenty of money. Before you can say knife, he cuts loose and leaves the police, or his pals, as flat as frozen pancakes."

"And then?" I queried.

"Then," sniffed Rankin disgustedly. "Then—in nine cases out of ten there's a fizzle. Another unsolved mystery, and a howl from the press about the inefficiency

of the police. I tell you what, though," the old detective concluded in a rare burst of confidence, "I'd rather shake hands with Scotland Dan than a good many other men, but there are times when he makes me so mad that I can't see any other color but red."

"I wish I could meet him," I murmured. "If he's all you say, he's one of the few men that are worth while knowing, even if he won't talk."

"Now, you're saying something!" exclaimed Rankin dropping the cigar butt and crushing it to complete extinction with his heel. "I know darn well you'll be mighty glad to meet Scotland Dan for his own sake and not for what little bit of good he may be able to do you. I'll make a deal with you. If you'll promise to let me in on Scotland Dan's reason for dropping out of cases like he does, I'll locate him for you, and give you a line of intro."

The offer placed me in an awkward position. I badly wanted to meet this man, and yet it was hardly possible that I could pledge my word to betray his confidence.

"It's his say so," I protested. "I'll tell you if he's willing. That's the best I can—"

"Good enough. Bully for you," shouted Rankin. "That was only a bit of a test, that's all."

He brought his muscular hand down on my shoulder with a thump that nearly fractured my collar bone, and the next instant he was at the telephone. After all, the old fox had been pulling my leg and trying me out.

In less than sixty seconds, he replaced the receiver, turned smiling to me, and with a trace of pride scribbled on one of his cards:

To Mr. Scotland Dangerfield, introducing Mr. John Mortimer.

"Scotland Dan's a bigger friend of mine than I let on to most fellers," he explained. "Going?"

"On the first train to Long Island!" I exclaimed. "You have been as slow as a mud turtle, but I'll buy you a nickel cigar when I get back."

I was jubilant, for whatever may be said

in favor of paddling your own canoe, a chap who knows the channels and hidden snags of the underworld, can often save you from running on the rocks.

A Long Island village held Scotland Dan and he had the key to many mysteries. I was going to meet the former. What was to be my fate regarding the latter? Would I get a headful of real, inside stuff, or would he refuse to talk?

## II.

I MET Scotland Dan, and he proved to be all that Rankin had said and a great deal more, besides. He was massively built, with a pair of immense shoulders, and yet with all his physical, brute strength, it was evident that he was a refined, thoughtful man. A broad-minded thinker, and, rare combination, a man of action. His eyes and the corners of his mouth also showed that he was blessed with a sense of humor.

A perception of the ridiculous prevents many a clever man from being a prig, and countless fools from becoming utter idiots; but even had he been incapable of smiling at the weaknesses common to frail humanity, conceit and stupidity would not have been existent among Scotland Dan's qualities.

Scotland Dangerfield resembled one of those big, purring dynamos in the powerhouse of a city's lighting plant. He was a mass of quiet, reserve force. Restraint and self-control were as natural to him as breathing. He was entirely without "side" and talked to me as freely as if I had been an old hand.

"So," he commenced, when we were seated on the hotel veranda after dinner. "Rankin mentioned the Creed murder. You wouldn't believe that sordidness and crime could exist in such surroundings as these, would you?"

I followed the direction of his gesture and glanced over the rail of the balcony.

Far below, the foot of the tree-girdled cliff, shimmered the moonlit, placid water. Lights twinkled here and there on the yachts anchored in the harbor, and shone steadily from the opposite shore.

The spirit of peace and serenity brooded over the scene, and only a faint, reddish glow in the sky to my left, served to remind me that I was not more than twenty odd miles from busy, blazing New York City. I sighed involuntarily; for although I am no sentimentalist to be wooed to weeping by a harrowing tale of tragedy, it does seem to me a bit ironic and sad that beauty and rottenness so often mingle.

"Where is the creek?" I asked.

"Over there."

Scotland Dan nodded in the direction of a waterside village, and as the bowl of his short brier momentarily glowed to sullen crimson, I saw that his face was set in stern lines. There was an expression of hardness in his kindly eyes.

"You're thinking of the alleged crime," he asserted.

"I was wondering about that and what Rankin told me about you."

"About my refusal to lend a hand?"

"Something of that sort," I admitted.

"Well, Rankin is a good old scout; but he belongs to one school and I to another. He's a hunter and has to obey orders. I'm a detective and a student of human nature, and, as near as any man can be, my own boss. But, I'll tell you this: when I refuse to help the cause of justice, there's a good reason. I won't say legal, or even legitimate according to law, but consistent with my conception of common decency. The law is a machine that does not always grind up the right person, and although we are not quite so antiquated in our methods as they are in Europe, we still have some way to go, in administering justice to the evil-doer. The laws don't provide for the difference between the criminal by deliberate and malicious intent, and the wrongdoer by accident and combination of circumstances. The smooth and the cold-blooded crook is weighed in the same balance as the hot-headed fool.

"If you had come to me two days ago, I would have had nothing to offer you but my hospitality, and a few generalities about old and by-gone cases. As it is, the principal in the Creek murder went beyond the reach of detectives and the police forty-eight hours past. I'll tell you the inner

facts of the affair, and you will see there are occasions when a good detective does not detect and tell the public *all* he knows. First of all, allow me to ask you a question: Would you arrest and hand over to the police a person who had committed the crime of murder?"

This was a facer, I could tell by the gravity of Scotland's voice that his inquiry was not lightly put, and I knew that his views were unusual and freed from the bonds of convention.

"I think that circumstances would govern my decision," I answered. "Like yourself, I favor the cause of justice rather than the mechanical expression of the law."

I leaned forward as I spoke, and strove to read the expression of my companion's face, but a cloud had drifted over the moon. Scotland's pipe had burned out. His features were an indistinguishable smudge. Only the distant howling of a dog broke the long silence. Then, Scotland Dan's deep voice commenced:

"God knows! We atoms of humanity do our little best; but we are never infallible. Only the Big Boss of king and crook knows the origin and the future consequence of our actions. We think we know. Nine tenths of the time, we're guessing. Thirty-seven days ago to-night, I thought I was after an ordinary, common sneak thief, and I thought I would land him in jail. I would have wagered a thousand dollars to a penny that I would get him in a couple of hours or so. Yet—wait a bit, I'm running past myself. In the first place, I cannot say what led Fred White to this balcony at the precise moment when I was nodding with drowsiness. So, all I can do is to commence at my beginning.

"It was a sultry, misty night, and I came out here for a breath of air. I took my coat off and dropped it onto the seat of a chair just behind where I sat. I suppose I must have fallen off to sleep for a few minutes. Anyway, when I woke up, my coat was gone. In the outside pocket was a gold watch and chain, and in the breast pocket was a wallet containing close on three hundred dollars. The money didn't matter much, the watch was a horse

of another color. I valued it, for it had belonged to my father. The first thing I did was to get good and mad for being such a darn fool. The next thing was to get my pocket radiolite and prospect. Over there," Scotland pointed to a corner of the balcony that jutted over the cliff, "I found my trail. There was no need to waste time cross-examining the hotel servants. They do not wear rubber boots.

"I followed my man into the village and picked up his footmarks in the woods between there and the end of the creek. The ground was soft and it was easy work. I presently found my coat hidden in some bushes. What?"

"The streets of the village are paved," I ventured. "How—"

"Oh, I didn't bother, or try to follow him through the streets. I made a circle of the village and picked up his trail where he had left it. You don't have to dog every footstep of a man in order to get onto his track, especially in a small place like this. Besides, the thief could not be aware I was a detective. After I got my coat, I went after my watch and money, and traced the thief to the obvious place—a dirty roadhouse. He'd gone. Then I had a deuce of a job to pick up his trail again, for the mist had thickened to the consistency of a wet blanket, and it was nearly midnight when I came down off the hill-side onto the Creek road.

"Somewhere out by Sand's Point, the fog siren was roaring and booming, and I was chilled to the bone, and miserable. There was nothing exciting or interesting about the business. It was a simple case of sneak-thievery, and if it hadn't been for the fact that the beggar might hide my watch somewhere, I would have given the matter over to the local sheriff and gone back to bed.

"I followed the tracks across the road, right down to the edge of the water. It was high tide and it was clear to be seen from the state of the ground that my quarry had gone off in a boat. I listened intently but could hear no sound of oars. Nothing but the intermittent, throaty moan of the fog signal. Then, while I pondered whether I should borrow a boat that I

could see moored close by, and chance picking up my man, I heard the sudden sound of voices on the water. They reached me muffled by the fog, and I could not actually hear what was said. Then, as suddenly, the voices ceased. I heard a faint splash and then a scream; shrill wailing as the call of a banshee—then silence. I ran for the boat. As I pushed off, I heard the sound of running feet on the roadway. The mist was not so dense on land as over the water and I was able to distinguish the form of a woman. I found out afterwards that she was waiting there for the man I was after, and the pair of them had evidently been planning to go off together on the money he had stolen.

"It was ticklish work poking about in the fog on strange waters, and it was a good ten minutes before I found the only place whence those voices could have come. It loomed ghostly gray suddenly before me. It was a houseboat, a creek shanty. I remembered having seen it from the heights. The nose of my boat bumped into something soft and yielding as I came alongside. I leaned sideways and flashed my light into the water. *There was something wavering about beneath the shallow scow of the houseboat!* Before I could reach it, it disappeared; but I coupled what I had seen in that momentary glimpse with the fact that I had heard no sound from the water since the moment of the splash and scream, and sensed that my quest for a thief had developed complications.

"'Who's that? Who's there?'

"The words came in a gasping whisper from above me and I looked up into the gray, terror-stricken face of a woman. She was peering down at me from a small window that swung outward from the siding of the houseboat.

"I did not tell her who I was, but asked if I might enter. She gave a trembling consent, and while she fumbled with a dim, smoky lamp I looked about the place. In a corner, thrown carelessly aside, were the still wet and muddy boots of the man who had stolen my coat. The broken heel of the right foot tallied unmistakably with the mark in the trail I had followed from the hotel. Then I noticed something

else: The door by which I had entered was very lightly formed, and was broken. It had been forced *outward*.

"I looked at the woman. She returned my glance with eager, questioning gaze. She was badly frightened, but there was no sign of guilt on her face.

"My husband!" she gasped. "He—he fell. No. What's the use? He didn't fall—I pushed him. He was d—he had been drinking again—a little—and fell. I—oh! Have you seen him? Did he swim ashore?"

Scotland Dan broke off abruptly. His voice dropped to a lower key.

"Mortimer," he continued, "by that question I was placed in a quandary. I could tell the truth and serve no useful purpose, or I could lie and save the poor woman needless suffering. As clearly as if I had been an actual witness, I visualized the scene that had taken place on that houseboat: The drunken brute, and thief, advancing to strike. The desperate thrust of self-protection of the part of the defenseless woman. I think I told her that her husband must have got away. I decided that sometimes the better part of truth lay in its evasion. I had not said *how* he got away, but the woman broke down with gladness and wept tears of joy for the animal who had ground the zest of life from her existence, and brought her by starvation of heart and body to the brink of the grave. In her gladness, in the belief that her husband had got ashore, she talked. Like any child she babbled to me, a stranger, and I read between her words and was thankful of the impulse that had come to me to withhold the truth from her."

For a moment the detective sat silent and pondering. While I waited for him to continue, I could not help but congratulate myself that I had met him. My heart warmed to Scotland Dan. He knew what to do under exceptional circumstances.

### III.

"Has it ever occurred to you that you can read one person's character in the face of another?" asked Scotland Dan suddenly.

"Why, no," I ejaculated. "And yet—"

"I see you get the idea. Isn't it true that the moods of the character of an employer are reflected by his clerks? Why, even a dog is a mirror of his master. How much more so, then, is a wife plain-to-read testimony of her husband's goodness or badness. There's no magic about it. No great power of observation required. The cleanliness of that houseboat, the evidence of the woman's personal tidiness, despite the poorness of her own clothes, spoke volumes in her favor. The few bits of crockery, clean and shining on a shelf by the side of the polished stove, the sock she had been darning, showed me that she was doing her part as well as she was able. All else—the bruise on her forehead, the marks of brutal fingers on her thin wrists—were needless, excessive evidences that although she was a loving, she was, as often happens, a terribly abused wife.

"Eight years, she told me, they had been married. Eight years of slow agony and torture. The result was stamped in lines of pain and suffering around her once tender mouth. I tell you, Mortimer," Scotland's voice became harsh with the intensity of his feeling of truth, "I saw the grimy soul of that woman's clam-digger husband reflected in her eyes. There, apart from all else was the scroll of his character. He was a drunkard and a beast."

Scotland Dan sighed. "That's pretty nearly the end. I left her sobbing her heart out in that sordid, floating hell, for a worthless blackguard. I went ashore and waited until the tide went down, then I crept back through the mud to the houseboat, and quietly pulled out both the bungs and threw them into a thatched bed. The next day, when the tide came up, the neighbors rescued Laura White from the flooded houseboat, but her home did not rise with the tide. Somebody sent her away to a farm in California. The day before yesterday she died of a broken heart. Fretting for a faithless brute. He was—"

"You sent her away," I interrupted.

"Considering I scuttled and swamped her home, it was about the only thing I could do," returned Scotland Dan calmly. "The hull of the boat was all right, good

and solid. It's there still, for that matter, sunk right in the mud. About three tons of timber, but the superstructure, the house, was a flimsy affair and went to pieces. Of course, there was a hullabaloo when the woman whom White had planned to run off with informed the police that he had been murdered; but she had no evidence, and although they searched every foot of the creek, nobody thought of moving the sunken houseboat, or even digging round the edge to see *how* it foundered. It lays there between tides and is likely to stay there until it rots and falls to pieces. I, for one, shall not disturb it."

Then, Laura White, she—" I hesitated. "She committed—"

"Yes, she did. According to law she committed murder. She killed her husband. I judged, if she went for trial, she would die of remorse even if she were acquitted on the score of justifiable homicide. So I lied, pulled the bungs out and kept my mouth shut. The bones of Fred White, my few dollars and my father's watch lie moldering in the mud beneath the scow of that houseboat, but Laura White never knew the truth. She never guessed that the thrust that had sent her husband backward through the door had placed him where he could do no more evil. He came up all right, but under that flat-bottomed scow. I was sorry to lose my father's watch, but I know the old man wouldn't have wished me to get it back at the price of a woman's freedom. I reckoned she had suffered enough."

"So that is why you refused to help

when the woman he was running off with raised the rumor of murder. That is why you drop out of cases and leave Rankin and the rest of us up in the air," I murmured. "I'd like to shake hands with you. You're a man."

Scotland Dan Gave an embarrassed little laugh as our fingers met in a firm grip.

"What are you going to tell Rankin?" he asked as we entered the hotel sitting-room. "He is sure to ask if I said anything about the Creek murder."

"I know what I'll tell him," I answered. "Just this: You drop out of the hunt when it is a matter of giving some poor unfortunate devil a square deal."

Scotland Dan smiled. "I guess you're about right," he murmured. "It is what I aim to do, but say, go careful or I'll get into trouble. Judges and juries, you know, hate to be done out of a job. And for your own sake, I advise you not to be too magnanimous. In nine cases out of ten it is better to stifle your feelings and let justice take its course."

Next morning I went out of my way to take in the Creek road. The sight of that hulk lying in the mud put the seal of conviction on Scotland's words of the night before.

Further investigation would only have been an indulgence of needless curiosity. I knew the truth and I also knew that if I made a success as a detective, I had no need to develop a brutal disregard for the morally innocent. Whatever the law might be, Laura White was in no sense a deliberate murderess.

## SERVED HIM RIGHT

BY D. J. TINNES

**H**E knocks the lodges; the churches he flails;  
 The local news-sheet he reviles;  
 His village is dead, his neighbors ill-bred;  
 Yet his hostess still patiently smiles.  
 Our fathers were wiser than we, of yore,  
 For they nailed the knocker outside the door!



# Midnight of the Ranges

by George Gilbert

Author of "The Flame Orchid," "They Were Seven," etc.

## CHAPTER XXII.

"FOR ME, SPECIAL!"

AND now, terror-riven, the voice of Aguilar could be heard inside:  
"Merci, señors!"

Death fear had stripped him of his viper-like poise. He was crying for the mercy he never had shown to others.

Peters boomed: "Stand to th' rack, Mex, an' quit whinin', for them wolves outside don't know that kind o' talk."

But yet the more he pleaded:

"Merci, señors!"

"The Mexican, the greaser," the mob yelled.

"Peters, too," Barnquist roared, throwing off the mask at last.

"Yes, Peters, too," Pardee echoed, in faithful-retainer-wise.

"Peters, too—"

"Yip-y-ipppl!"

"You shot your wad that time," Maltrane yelled at Barney. "It's all a fake to kill Peters, eh? You might bump off a greaser, but not a son of a Native Son. Keep back! It's not yore gun-fighter, but th' fi'st dep'ty o' San Felicé that's a lookin' at you, Barnquist. Ah, would you—back!"

His guns swung in line with Barnquist.

Nearer came the yells of the old-timers and of Burlane. Events were now hardly quarter heartbeats apart.

"Merci, señors—this window—ah, the window, señors!" So the Mexican.

"Bang, bang!"

A shuddering wail, a bare quarter second of silence, then some one cried out:

"Weaver's plugged him, through th' window."

They drew back—a bare hesitancy—but it was enough, for Maltrane, like a cat, had reached behind him, even with one gun in the hand he so used and, fingering the door's key, that Gallagher had inserted before being felled by the flask, yes, fingering it over the trigger-guard of the gun, had the door unlocked before they could fix attention upon him—and then he was gone!

It had all taken place so quickly that Maltrane had locked the door inside before they could come to their senses.

"To th' window; part of you jaw in front with those old fools that are coming," Barnquist ordered. "We'll get Peters from there. While they hold 'em in front, we can side-wind on Lars f'om th' window."

At that word they swirled about the jail's corner, to find Weaver there, his gun smoking, his head below the window's sill, out of line of fire. He motioned them from the window, spluttering into his pipe's stem, the bowl dropping embers on to his shirt front as he did so.

"I got th' greaser, cold turkey," he cried, over the tumult the impact of Burlane and the old-timers made upon the screening party before the calaboose. The yells and demands of them came floating around the building's smoke-wreathed corner.

"And Peters?" Barney asked.

This story began in the All-Story Weekly for June 19.

"I can't see him."

"We'll make a jump for th' window, all together, put our guns in, an' let go," Pardee suggested.

"Into th' corners," Barney ordered.

Out in front the din increased. There were no shots—just cries and demands. The screening party was doing its part well.

"Now," Barney ordered.

They sprang, bodies low, hands stretched toward the window space. Their hands eagerly plunged over the sill, their guns spat. At first answering shots came; spurts of blood showed on stricken men. They shot and shot, by turns, and then all was still inside. The commotion out front increased. Pardee, turning from emptying his gun, bawled:

"C'm on, Barney; he's huddled in a heap in th' corner near th' door. My gun's empty. You shoot. You ain't shot yet—"

Clatter of hooves on the road! And a booming call:

"What's doing? In the name o' th' law—"

"Harvison—an' his posse, by hell's bells," Pardee said.

The screening party about the corner near the door gave way. Men edged back, the old-timers greeted the sheriff eagerly.

"Where's Lars, my dep'ty?" he demanded.

"In th' calaboose," some one called.

"Dead?"

"No one wasn't after him; we was after the Mexican hoss thief."

"Oh," with an expression of contempt. He swung down and shouldered past them. He shook the door, called:

"Lars, Maltrane!"

There was no reply. Then a groan, a choking groan.

"Break in that door, men," Harvison ordered.

Mighty shoulders came against it. The stout door strained, then burst inward, and they swirled in.

In a corner was Aguilar, crumpled, still. And in that corner most sheltered from the window was a huddled heap.

On top was Lars Maltrane, his body arched over that of Peters. A scalp wound had rendered Peters merely and mercifully

unconscious. But Maltrane, still breathing, clearly was in worse case.

"Carry me out—into th' air," he pleaded, as soon as his ears had caught Harvison's voice. "Take me out, sheriff—th' prisoner, th' one that counts, is safe—I turn him over to you—I did my duty 's f'ist dep'ty—"

They carried him forth into the air and laid him down on the trampled earth. Peters, staggering out, half recovered, fell into the arms of Berenice, who, white-lipped, came from the crowd's fringe at a run to receive him.

"Father, are you hurt much?" she asked.

"Not much, Berenice, not much."

"Is that you' girl a talkin', Peters?" Lars called, his head on Harvison's knee.

"Yes, Lars."

"I want to see her—a bit."

He coughed, spat blood, froth.

"Go to him," her father said, pushing her forward.

Berenice, as the crowd drew back, went quickly to the stricken man and bent over him. His eyes, not agatelike now, dwelt on her fresh young face.

"Harvison," he said hollowly, "you listen t' me. This lynchin' bee was all cooked up to get Peters, under cover o' gettin' th' Mexican. I made one fool play when I shot Barnum, for he might o' told what was in my gun, 'stead o' bullets, when old Barnquist was shot. It's queer business all th' way, old-timer!"

He paused for breath. Horses stamped, spurs jingled; saddle leather creaked.

"Seeing eye to eye with death, as I am, I think young Barney killed his father, under cover o' that shootin' in th' Thimble Belt, same 's he planned to scrag Peters under cover o' gettin' the Mexican."

"It's a lie," Barney yelled, starting forward. "I've not shot my gun once; been tryin' to keep my men in bounds. See; my gun's cold—clean."

"Ride easy, now, young cock," Harvison warned, his hand dropping to his gun's butt; "ride easy now. Put 'way you' fool gun—"

"He *all*-ways has a gun t' fit his alibi," Pardee snarled.

"I'm a goin' out now, folks," Maltrane

coughed. "Bend over, Miss Ber'nice. I got something to say to you."

The girl dropped to her knees and leaned over. He gazed up at her, his eyes dimming. His voice came faintly:

"They hit your dad in there. He dropped in th' corner, in plain sight o' th' window. I could have shot it clean out with them—killed some—but he'd been shot sure, then. I jumped in front o' him—took th' fire for him—I liked th' cake—special—for me—special for me—thanks!"

The agate eyes closed; the thin lids came over them wearily; the thin brows were in a straight hair line above them, and on the thin lips was the ghost of a smile—and so the man-killer died.

"I got a word to say, you Ox Bow men," Harvison jerked out, his eyes roaming up from the dead man's face to the faces of the living. "My first dep'ty's been slain here. Some o' you did it. I got to sift this thing. I can't jail you all. But your names are known, an' most of you 're not over-important. It's the leaders I want. Barnquist," whirling on Barney so suddenly as to take him off his guard, "it is fight, or give in?"

Barnquist swept his eyes over the faces of his followers. He saw there, now, no lust for battle. The realities were pressing home on them. Each man looked to his own safety. And to the old-timers were joined now their friends, and the decent element of Coppered Jack was ready to join with the posse. Gallagher, restored to consciousness, was ready to fight anew. Harvison spat. He glanced at Pardee inquiringly. Then at Burlane who, edging toward Barnquist, plainly had hostile intentions. The sheriff nodded to Ed.

"No jury 'll punish us much for bumpin' off a Mexican hoss thief," Pardee snarled.

"No," Harvison admitted. "I suppose not. But I got to hold some of you. There's Lars to account for yet. An' Peters was shot, cold turkey. He's on'y wounded, but 't was done while he was under protection o' th' law. But Lars's case is worst." He pointed to the stark form. Berenice had arisen to go to her father, leaving the useless clay by itself, the thin smile still on its lips.

"You'll find me out at Ox Bow, when wanted," Barney blustered.

"*In the calaboose, you mean,*" and a strong arm circled his neck, snapping his chin back. A gun stared him in the face—Burlane's. Ed had worked to Barney's side as the sheriff talked with him.

"If an Ox Bow moves, I'll shoot," he called, "or any one else."

Step by step, while they watched, he forced the daunted man to the portal, sent him spinning inside with a single heave of his big shoulder. Then he clanged the door to and faced the sheriff.

"You did that darned well, young-timer," Harvison approved. "Now you follow him, Pardee."

Pardee went to the door—and inside, too.

"Now Weaver," Harvison called.

Folk glanced about. Weaver was not to be seen. Some one remembered that at the first appearance of the posse he had edged to the outer fringe of the throng. Clearly he was gone.

A half dozen more Ox Bovians were enjailed speedily. The others, as less directly implicated, Harvison turned loose, bidding them go out to the ranch and take charge, pending developments. A party was told off to carry Lars Maltrane's body into the center of town, to the Thimble Belt.

"And now," said the sheriff, turning to Peters, "you can't go in there with them; you just nacherly can't do it. They'd do so'thin' to you. You come with me. I'll see what's to be done."

He clanked away toward the town's center. A few deputies of the posse took charge of the horses; others scattered to look for Weaver. Peters followed the sheriff.

Ed took Berenice's arm, and they trailed her father. All Coppered Jack was minded for homegoing, as well, and soon a living stream of people was flowing toward the town's center.

Before the saloon a breathless deputy rode up to inform Harvison that a boy in the wagon yard had informed him that Weaver but a few moments before had gone into the yard, taken his own horse, a good one, and Barney Barnquist's big roan and ridden, as he said, for Ox Bow.

"That roan is the best on these ranges," Harvison said with regret, "and if he's gone on him, he's gone, at least for a while, with this start. But we'll nip him later, p'r'aps when I get reward circulars out by mail."

"He'd be caught if I had my old Midnight," Ed thought with regret, as he turned away with Berenice, after Harvison had said to Peters:

"I'm going to go into th' Eagle Short Order for a bite, Peters, an' you got to come, too. I'm goin' to keep you with me til this is over, one way or 'nuther."

"You're welcome t' my company, if you can stand it, Harv," Peters answered with a laugh.

He waved a good-by to Berenice and Ed—a cheerful good-by. Then he followed Harvison into the Eagle.

They sat down inside. Harvison rapped on one of the rough tables. Came then the whisk of soft feet and a dark-haired, red-cheeked girl to serve.

"Why, bless my eyes, it's th' lil breed girl," Harvison greeted her.

"Yes, it's Ess-Way," timidly.

Her face, for all its wild beauty, showed lines of care. Her eyes she kept cast down.

"I thought you were out to Ox Bow—"

"No; Barnee, he drove mother and Ess-Way out—"

"So?" regarding her keenly.

"Yes, an' it was a plumb scandal, after all th' years Greasewood Kate served them out there," Peters said angrily. He had heard of the event through Berenice.

The girl took their order and went out. They heard short, sharp words out behind the cook's screen, mingled with the splutter of frying meat, the bubble of a boiling kettle. The girl spoke; then the woman—one pleading, the other insistent. Suddenly from behind the screen Greasewood Kate came, the girl's hand fast-gripped. She stormed up to Harvison.

"Shereef, you ask my girl what she feend in hole in dhee wall in dhat Barnee's room in Ox Bow."

She thrust the reluctant girl forward.

"What was it, Ess-Way?" Harvison encouraged kindly.

"I wouldn't tell, eef Barnee love me,"

she sobbed, breaking down; "but he keel my heart; he put my mother out—"

"Yes, what did you find?"

"Night beefore old boss is shot, I peek in Barnee's door. He often kiss me in dhee hall."

Her face flushed. Her mother shook her.

"Yes, hon; go on," Peters said eagerly.

"You tell dhee shereef," her mother urged. "Eef Barnee, he stuck by us, we'd never tell."

"I peek in door," Ess-Way continued. "Barnee, hee's workin' on ca'tridges. See," clutching her bosom and dragging forth a silken bag that she cast on to the table before them. "Look in dhere, shereef."

The two men clawed the bag open. Pellets rattled out; an empty .38 shell, balls for a .45, evidently pried from a lot of cartridges; some black, leadlike stuff that Harvison fingered.

"He put dhem in hole in wall back of hees stand in hees room," Ess-Way said. "I saw heem—I got dheem nex' day, w'en he rides away. I heard heem and hees father talk—they wanted to keel thees Peters old man, but ol' Barnquista, he was shoot, dhat taim."

Harvison started up, fingering that pellet of black stuff yet. His eyes blazed.

"I see it now," he flashed; "the dirty gun of Maltrane; filled with fake bullets; so that Peters would be left alive to take th' blame; Barney, he shot his dad down, but why?"

"Dhey all taim quarr'l 'bout money," Greasewood Kate informed. "A'm hearin' dheem, all taim. Barnee, he runs to Chaparral Cock—wants cash money."

"We're gettin' warm now. The right man is in the calaboose this time. Peters, you c'n go home, giving me your parole to remain inside San Felicé till wanted. I'm goin' out to double th' guard at th' jail. I don't want no fake rescues or lynchings or any more funny tricks."

Clutching the bag, in which he had replaced the bullets and the bits of leaded soap, Harvison swung outdoors, leaving Peters to go to Pap Wickson's to break the good news to both Berenice and Burlane.

Later still a deputy rode to bring Coroner Alberstone for the inquest which,

Harvison announced, would be held on the morrow, both on the death of the elder Barnquist and that of Lars Maltrane.

### CHAPTER XXIII.

#### WEAVER SPLUTTERS AGAIN.

**W**EAVER, who had lived a mere shade in a Barnquist's shadow for so many years, had about him a certain doglike loyalty, or rather wolflike adhesion, to the chief of his pack. As Maltrane had been the gun-arm of the elder Barnquist, Weaver had been the faithful messenger, the second man. He had fetched and carried, cleaned the guns of Barnquist, acted the humble squire to the border master of miles and men and thousands of horned cattle.

That a Barnquist should be in the calaboose was to Weaver a thing unheard of. The calaboose was for wastrels, town drunkards, not for free lords of thousands and thousands of acres! Weaver was not conscious of the growing force of law and order, of the turn of events toward a newer day. He was a survivor of the old days of pure gun law. It seemed to him that all that was needed to set the world right was to have Barney out, at the head of the Ox Bow clan again, that he might overawe Harvison and name some one, perchance Weaver, as first deputy of that part of San Felicé. He had seen old Barnquist bluff range sheriffs before with the threat of Ox Bow votes and guns—why not the new one?

It was with such ideas swirling in his narrow brain that he left the calaboose just before he had been called for. Making his way behind the line of buildings, he had emerged at the wagon yard, taken his own horse and the big roan and made off. He rode the roan and led the other, and as his own horse was a good one, on account of Weaver's need for speed in his many long rides about Ox Bow business, he made good time away from Coppered Jack.

He knew better than to go to Ox Bow then, or to any inhabited place. The ground was dry; he left little sign that

would not be cut by cattle. At times he struck into their well-beaten paths, zig-zagged in apparent aimlessness. Before dusk he had ridden far and seen no signs of pursuers. He snugged down atop a higher roll than common in the uneven country a bit southwest of the irrigation ditches. He was counting that the pursuit would be toward Vernon and to the south, Old Mexico. That he would remain close to Coppered Jack was hardly to be considered, and it was not, for the search that night did swerve wide of the man the deputies sought.

When the dark was fully come, Weaver, chewing his pipestem methodically, tethered the horses and stole off toward the main trail, which he struck out toward Twin Springs.

He was in quest of news, and the glow of a campfire told him of Soda Lake teamsters and possible opportunity to eavesdrop to advantage. The teamsters would be careless, fearing no danger. The Indian menace had ceased to worry, following the Comanche settlement; there were only hold-ups to be apprehended, and as teamsters were notoriously short of cash, road agents would not bother them. So teamsters set no watch and spent many hours in gossip.

Thus it was that Weaver had no difficulty in worming his way close to the fire, and as the teamsters were discussing events in Coppered Jack, he picked up the news that had followed his own departure. The seriousness of the case against Barney rather shook the old wolf's determination for a moment, but the announcement that the inquest had been set for one o'clock next day, if Alberstone arrived in time, and was to be in the Thimble Belt, the largest single room in Coppered Jack, consoled him, for it gave him a plan, especially as the teamsters' gossip represented Coppered Jack as quieted down for the night.

Long use and habit had given to Weaver a certain degree of courage. He had been through so many affrays that he had discounted danger as affecting himself and so was ready to take whatever chances were part of the scheme that sprang into being

in his mind as he crept away from the teamsters' fire.

He circled out and then back and struck the trail again. He kept to the side of it cautiously, avoiding the sleeping hutches of the Mexican laborers along the irrigation works.

The night had grown very dark before Weaver neared the Calaboose. He could hear the deputies on guard talking in low tones. The calaboose was familiar to Weaver, who often had acted as guard there, accompanying Maltrane while the gunman had been holding some culprit against the sheriff's coming. He expected to find the door, the window, well guarded, and they were, as his ears told him, judging by the talk of the guards. The back and one side had no openings that were known to the general run of Coppered Jack folk.

There was, however, a certain crack in the wall at the darkest corner of the big single room—a crack at which Weaver had practiced spitting to relieve the monotony of night vigils when he and Maltrane had sat up inside, playing cards while guarding some very dangerous prisoner. It was right near the head of the calaboose's single cot, and Weaver was sure that the Ox Bow men would yield the cot to Barney and bunk down on the earthen floor themselves for the night. In such case, if he could win to the calaboose wall, he might be able to get the ear of the Ox Bow heir and concert plans with him.

He listened for a long time, well back from the jail. The guards were whispering, story-telling. He heard one report that the prisoners were all asleep—except Barnquist—and that all seemed quiet. After that they were more and more lax. SnORES from the calaboose's interior told of tired men giving way to fatigue in real earnest.

Presently a San Felice *raconteur* launched into a long tale of how he and others, in their more hectic days, had shot up the faro bank at Tumencaro, and the guards drew in closer to listen. Weaver, under cover of a burst of subdued laughter, crept forward. Another point in the tale, laughter-punctuated, enabled him to edge

farther in and to note that the lone guard on the windowless side of the jail was leaning around the corner, intent, not upon duty, but upon the story that was going forward to a highly-spiced climax. Weaver wriggled to the place where he expected to find the crack, found it by feeling and glued his lips to it. He called:

"Barney—hist!"

The story was coming on and on, laughter rewarding the teller at each new chapter.

"Barney!" Weaver whispered through the crack.

The guard at the corner shifted, and Weaver thought for a moment he was turning back toward him, but he merely was leaning farther around, the better to hear.

"Barney!"

"What is it—where are you, Weav?" came back through the crack.

Weaver flattened himself to earth, inwardly rejoicing.

"I'm outside; feel for the crack just at the head o' th' cot."

"I got it. Are you alone?"

"Yes; I got th' big roan hid out an' my own pinto hoss. Want to make a break?"

"I'd not get far now, Weav, with all th' guards ready t' shoot."

"I, know, but to-morrow, say. Listen to my plan."

"All right, Weav."

The laughter heightened as the story came to a new point of cowboy humor. The leaning guard had all but edged around the corner, out of sight.

"They're goin' to hold th' inquest to-morrow, in th' Thimble Belt."

"Yes?"

"I figger, same's other times, that Harvison an' Alberstone will line up in th' back o' th' big room."

"Yes, like they always do."

"Yes, Barney an' you, as one o' th' pris'ners, 'll be right there wi' them, Savvy?"

"Yes."

"P'r'aps right by th' door to that back room and that opens on to th' alley."

"Yes," eagerly.

"They'll be late comin' to order, like. Ever' one an' his dawg will be there,

pushin' an' shovin' out in front. Th' back door 'll be locked, as usual, 'cause Harvison don't ever want no rescues or lynchin' parties from th' rear. Savvy?"

"I'm comin' to it."

"But I've got a key to that back door. It was ready for us t' use—you' dad an' I. Harvison 'll have a lone guard out there—to keep th' few town's kids off, like. I'll come into town, down th' back way, when ever' one's taken up wi' th' inquest. You know how 't will be—ever' inch before an' to th' sides o' th' Thimble Belt will be crowded, them inside passin' word to them outside—ever' one scrougin' for'ard—

"You be ready—in th' chair near th' backroom door, if so-be you c'n manage it, in th' shufflin' an' pushin' when you-all file in. I rides up th' back alley, leadin' th' big roan, casual-like. It 'll be sich a fool play no one'll be lookin' for it. It's got a chance in its favor, Barney. I'll whirl down on that guard at th' back door, an' at th' crack o' my gun, you jump f'r th' back room, slam its door behin' you, then to th' back door—I'll be to it, key in lock, an' swing it open. As you jump out, I'll shet th' door, lock it, an' while they batter at th' inside and folks jamboree in between th' buildin's, tryin' to find out what's broke loose, we'll go, hell-for-leather, up th' alley—it's a long chance—but onct you get out an' to Ox Bow, th' boys 'll rally to you. You're th' head, Barnquist, yit, by gripes, an' once in th' saddle you c'n ride it out wi' th' hull b'ilin' o' sheriffs an' sich."

His spluttering whisper trailed off. He waited.

Then came the answer:

"All right, Weaver; I'll make it out, just 's you say."

"Remember, at th' crack o' my gun—"

"O. K."

A loud guffaw from the listening deputies told of the end of the tale. The man at the corner edged back, with evident intent to take up the interrupted pacing of his beat back and forth along the dark side of his jail.

Weaver, fox-like, belly to earth, melted into the umbers of the nearer shadows—was gone.

Barnquist remained quiet after Weaver had gone, his mind busy on the events that had led up to his present condition.

He had no illusions. He knew the peril that he faced. He had heard from Harvison, with outward bravado but with inward raging, of the way in which the Indian girl had eavesdropped on him and revealed what she had seen and knew of in her rage against him for casting her off. That had battered his defense, he knew. Up to that moment there had been suspicion against him, perhaps. Lars Maltrane's dying denunciation was only based on belief. Barnum, who knew of the origin of the soapy, greasy dirt on the mirror, was gone, slain in artful fashion by Barney's malign plan, yet by the hand of Lars, openly shown—and in defense of a jailed prisoner. Maltrane, who might have told of the discrepancy between Barney's public weaponry and private, was gone as well. The plot to kill Peters, under cover of the lynching of the Mexican, had been a good one, but Lars had spoiled that. Once Peters had been disposed of, Barney, in his swelling egoism, had planned to marry Berenice in some rough border fashion, or else get her out of the way, that Twin Springs might escheat to the State and so be open to lease by such as had wide influence, like the owner of Ox Bow. And then a limitless horizon of pleasure would open up before him. But now—

The heavy breathing of the men about him told of the end of his career. They, his best men, were enjailed; his prestige was broken. A Barnquist had been tainted by the touch of the law's finger. Barnquist knew that the old wild days were passing; that to north, east and west the great ranges were being cut up; that the faro banks were being left vacant or closed; that the newer era was being ushered in. His father, in other days, might have gathered a small army of retainers about him and overset the law's machinery and mastered the situation; but he, falling upon softer times, could not.

"No, Weaver," he thought at the last, "I'll not go to Ox Bow, but south into Old Mexico. I'll go broken in pocket, but I've youth, health, and may be able to

make something of myself yet in Old Mexico."

The despair he had felt earlier in the night gave way to a burning, fierce anger against Peters, against Burlane, who had mastered him in the presence of the crowd and of Harvison, against all and sundry. He longed, with an avid, consuming longing, to injure some one, to destroy, to vent all the evil, wild impulses of his deep, forceful nature upon some one, some thing.

"If only I could hurt them; tear them," he raved inwardly. "If I could ride my big roan over them, trample them—ah—"

Tremors of rage shook him. He half started up—to fall back again, shuddering with anger, as he repressed his wilder reflexes at the call of that inner monitor that whispered:

"Be careful and to-morrow you may mount the big roan and go, to return some day and perhaps triumph over those who now have you down—"

"Ah—"

He relaxed, breathed deeply. His jailers, outside, were chatting freely again. And he was inside, a prisoner. If he paid the law's debt, distant relatives would own Ox Bow; strangers would sit in his seat, hardly yet after his father's death!

So his black soul, bereft of its usual stays and props of adulation and purchased praise, drank to the dregs the cup of humiliation.

## CHAPTER XXIV.

### HAPPINESS DEFERRED.

UP betimes, Harvison clattered to the jail, to find all well, in seeming. The prisoners were quiet; Barnquist apparently had accepted the situation. He affected not to hold a grudge against Harvison and to be able, in due time, to explain away all that seemed to be against him.

Harvison, not a little worried underneath at having been compelled, by force of circumstances, to hold the heir of Ox Bow, was glad that Barney was so minded. To administer his office fairly well, to hunt down the small offenders relentlessly, to

palter about the edges of big things, was Harvison's limit. When forced, he could act with promptitude, yet he always had in mind the day of reckoning—election day—and hoped to continue in office. There was no dodging the situation that was now on his hands, though, and he knew that he must face the outcome and play square with the public. Which took on added zest from the fact that by so doing he smashed Ox Bow's prestige and would be reelected.

At noon, Coroner Alberstone came racking in from San Felice on his comfortable cayuse and approved the plan for the inquest at one o'clock in the Thimble Belt. Together he and Harvison adjourned there to set the stage—place chairs, tables, and make things easy for the public to see and hear, to the extent of the saloon's accommodations. Harvison himself locked the rear door, according to custom, and placed on guard there, at a half after noon, a lone deputy who, assuming a bored expression, guaranteed to keep any one from venturing in by that way.

Alberstone, who went to see the prisoners, brought back word that Barnquist wished for no delays; that he looked upon the inquest as a preliminary only, and that he would have plenty of lawyers to defend him at the regular trial in Vernon.

This statement confirmed Harvison and Alberstone in the belief that the inquest was to be a mere formality, and that Barnquist was relying upon his money and the prestige of the Barnquist name to secure acquittal in the higher courts. That Barney should take this view Harvison set down to his lack of experience, for the sheriff, like all the others with whom the accused had come into contact, had entirely misjudged the depths of Barnquist's being, setting him down as a scatterbrained young fool, spoiled by possession of money and power. The attempt at lynching had confirmed this belief.

Learning early what the plans for the day were, Berenice asked her father to drive her out to Twin Springs for one of her usual inspections of the place. She would not be a witness at the inquest, Harvison had told her upon inquiry; and she



did not share the morbid curiosity of the generality in regard to such things.

"I got to stay close, Harvison says," her father told her; "mebbe Ed might drive you out."

Ed, sounded, proved willing, very willing. He got the buckboard ready and the sober Peters ponies hitched. They started, past the Thimble Belt, the Eagle Short Order, where Greasewood Kate waved a greeting to them; past wagon yard and finally past calaboose. From the window Barney saw them go, and he could barely repress a scowl at sight of them, chatting, laughing, as the ponies jogged.

Out on the trail the goodness of their first carefree day since they had met came to them like a balm. Harvison's manner pointed to the release of Peters from the charge, and the troubles of the Twin Springs folk seemed at an end now. The ponies shacked along, contented. A dun hawk wheeled above, a road runner raced ahead of the ponies. A stray wisp of the girl's warm hair, jostled loose by the buckboard's swaying, blew across Ed's face. She sighed happily.

"Miss Ber'nice," and his free hand stole over to rest on her two, crossed on her lap.

She started, glanced at him, smiled happily.

"Yes, Ed."

It was the first time she had used his first name with such eager warmth! The music of it sank into his heart's depths.

"Miss Ber'nice—now 't your dad's out o' trouble, like, an' ever'thin' seems O. K., I got something to say to you, especial—"

"Wait, Ed," she said, low, sweet, compelling; "wait. It's all so wonderful, so good—and I'm only a girl, yet—I know what it is, Ed, you want to say—I know what I'm going to answer—"

"Miss Ber'nice," his hand closed warmer and closer about hers clasped on the lap of her faded calico. His eyes swept in the purity of her, the inclusive charm of her and the cheap hat, the stubbed-out shoes; he'd deck her out like a queen—

"Don't, Ed, let's wait—till to-morrow. Just a girl's whim. I'd like to think about you all day long and dream about what may be—oh, let me wait—"

He pressed her hands together in a gentle love-grip, spoke to the ponies, then to her:

"Yes, lil girl, I'll wait—years, if you want. If I c'n get you—an' old Midnight—back some day— Say, Ber'nice, we're goin' to be happy, eh?"

Her eyes, swimming with love-lights, answered him.

They found all safe at Twin Springs. Berenice bustled about the house at small tasks. Ed, lolling in the open doorway, smoked and watched her over one shoulder at times; at others he looked away off into the dim and tranquil distance, his thoughts in a maze of 'gold-shot day dreams, in which she was the central figure.

They had an early meal, over which she had lingered in preparation, their first love-feast together. He made no reference to what was in both their minds, and she kept her sweet reserve, which was to him an added charm. To have her thus, within reach, to know she was his, yet to withhold his hand, was sweeter, then, than possession, he felt, for he had the fine-grained soul of the native Texan, the innate courtesy to womankind, the yearning for the decent, the clean things.

He left her at noon to drive in, the understanding being that he would return at dusk for her. There were many little things about the house that she wanted to do—such things as a woman prizes in the doing and that her heart told her should be done if she and Ed—

He kissed her hand—the veriest breath of a kiss—at parting, with mock deference that held in it the proof of the real. She laughed with a catch of joy akin to pain in her throat at the touch of his lips, and would have held him had he been less prompt in turning to leap into the seat of the buckboard. A crack of the whip—and he was gone, with a cheery farewell phrase. She turned and went indoors, her eyes swimming in happy tears.

With a light heart, a thankful spirit. Berenice went tripping about the place. There were a few veteran hens and a cock to be looked after; not that they needed food, for they practically ran wild, but there might be eggs, or varmints might have

poached on them. Bernice sought out all the nesting places, brought in an apronful of fresh eggs and placed them in a basket in the kitchen. She dusted, swept, laid wood for the supper fire.

Then, all tasks completed, she went for a ramble about the old place and, finding many of her flowers in bloom, made up an armful for her mother's grave.

She wanted to go to the grave, too, for another reason. She wanted there to commune with the spirit of the one who had been her guiding star and to tell over, in her heart, beside the green mound near the tinkling waters of the springs close to the willows, the words, the phrases that Burlane had used during their ride out that morning. The experience had been so sweet, so satisfying that she wanted to treasure it.

She found the wonted place and cleared the mound of weeds that enforced neglect had permitted to grow there. She made it all fresh and pure again, then placed her floral offerings at the shrine of mother's love. Then she sat down and, telling over, in tender summing up, the pleasures of the morning, fell into a day-dream, precious, heart-refreshing.

She did not reason about her new happiness; she simply accepted it thankfully, as a boon from above.

"Oh, mother," she said aloud; "I am so happy, so happy."

A mocker scolded at her, then, finding no harm, came to bathe in the margin of the runlet at the springs' brink. A gopher, fat-pouched, went shyly past to drink.

It was too early for Ed, but she suddenly heard the thrum of hooves, not those of the sedate ponies, but those of a great, a huge horse, man-ridden, her border-trained ears told her. "Who can it be?" she wondered. Then she got up and went through the screen of the willows, hoping it was Ed, for some reason coming on horseback.

Ed, homing to Wickson's, told Peters of Berenice's decision to remain at the Springs all day. It seemed safe enough! There was no one to do her harm there; she could take care of herself in ordinary circumstances.

Ed took off his guns, hung them up in

the Wickson kitchen, by the shelf over the sink, and went to the inquest, where all feet were tending in Coppered Jack. He left the guns because the sheriff would expect all arms to be out of sight, save those of himself and posse, while the orderly processes of the law were functioning during the inquest.

Ed delayed outside until he saw the prisoners coming. The deputies, on either hand, were chatting with the captives. Ox Bow men were not in evidence, Harvison having sent word over to the big ranch for them to stay away that day or shoot it out. The sheriff meant to have no attempts at rescue. Word had come back that none of them would come; in fact, many had left quietly during the night for Vernon, giving out that it was merely for a few days.

"I don't care if a few o' th' hirelin's do vamoose," Harvison smiled. "Th' fewer we have 'bout th' better, till this storm blows over."

A deputy sent back to visit the lone guard there reported that all was quiet in the alley, except that he had shooed a few youngsters away.

The prisoners filed into the big barroom, Harvison clanking at their head, Alberstone bringing up the rear. Barney, vigilant, alert, kept his face under perfect control.

Burlane, by dint of strong elbows and his height, soon reached a place, well back, though, where he could see what was toward. The few boxes and seats were for captives and officers; the others must stand.

Barnquist, in the confusion of the entrance, had no difficulty in working to a point at Harvison's side; in fact, the sheriff, by what he deemed an artful maneuver, edged Barney so that he ended his progress to the room's rear right by the side of the chair the sheriff had picked.

Barnquist slumped into the chair with a fine effectation of boredom. His hands were in his pockets; his hat was over his eyes. The buzz of conversation went up in intensity as the others, Pardee and the rest, took seats. Harvison rather pompously ruffled some papers on the table that had been dragged from the rear room for the purposes of the inquest. Barnquist, not-

ing that, rejoiced, for it meant that the room was clear for his plunge.

There came that moment of indecision that precedes all public events, when it seems that matters will drag. Harvison cleared his throat, Alberstone glanced over the folk now pressing more and more closely into the big room.

"I call f'r th' first witness," Alberstone began. "Mr. Peters. Is Mr. Peters within call?"

There was a stir in the crowd's center. Peters shouldered his stubby body forward.

Barnquist, his muscles tensed, his face outwardly calm, glanced up naturally, set his hat forward, then back, as one who fidgeted a bit, yawned.

Peters reached the table.

The rapt crowd, intent upon the scene before them, had not heard what Barnquist had, with his ears fixed upon something else outside.

"Mr. Peters," Alberstone began, "I call upon you—"

A little rattle of hooves out behind that no one heard in there, save one.

Barnquist leaned forward, as if to listen to Peters, really to be ready to kick the chair behind him and whip behind the partition into the back room.

"I call upon you to—"

*Crash of booming gun! Crash of over-set chair! Hurling of a man's body into the rear room! Babel of tongues! A rush for the door through which he had gone! A jam of men into door space! A surge of men to get out front! Slam of heavy door: rattle of booming hoofs. Yells of: "He's gone, on th' big roan—"*

The crowd bulged into the alley to see two men fleeing, the deputy shot—dead. The big roan was ahead, Barnquist on him.

Harvison flicked out his gun, passed his left wrist over his gun-hand to steady it for the long shot; his gun flamed; the rear-most rider toppled, his horse fleeing still, saddle vacant. Now came flash on flash, but still the big roan fled, his rider spurring, and then, in a moment, he had whisked about a shack up the line, plunged through the upper portion of the rambling cow-town street—and was gone.

"Hell's bells! Mount, men, ride him down."

So cried Harvison, struggling toward the front of the Thimble Belt. He dashed into the street, to find Burlane swinging up into a saddle.

"Get down; that's my hoss," the sheriff stormed.

"I know it," Ed flared at him; "but I c'n ride a hoss two miles to your one, Harvison. There's on'y one hoss c'n stop that roan, an' he's my old Midnight, an' he's gone. You got th' best hoss, an' I c'n out-ride you all. Let me go; you-all follow."

Harvison's hand dropped from the bridle.

"Go git him, young-timer," and he struck the good horse's flanks. "Go git him."

Ed touched the calico of the sheriff's horse with his heel; he had no spur, having left his spurs, with his guns, at the Wickson house. He did not think of guns then, or of spurs, but only of riding after Barnquist, for he had noted the direction of the man's flight—past empty calaboose, over the farthest rise—toward Twin Springs.

That Barnquist would pause there; that he would not go on and on, straightaway, as far as the roan would carry him, Ed did not believe. But there was the chance that he might see Berenice, and Ed's thoughts of her, so warm, so tender, abhorred that that fleeing man, with his swart passions, should let even his shadow fall on the soil where his beloved trod the happy ways of girlhood peace.

So Harvison's calico swirled off, and others and others, acting under Harvison's orders, followed after in pursuit. Harvison and Alberstone announced they would remain in town and direct matters from there.

Presently some one thought of Weaver, lying up there in the alley, and Harvison went to him with Alberstone. They found him prone, pipe still clutched in his teeth, his eyes staring wide at the sky.

Harvison bent over the wolf who had been faithful to the traditions of his pack. And felt of the man's shirt front.

The teeth champed on the pipe-stem once, twice, thrice, the bowl turned over; the last of the hot dottle sparkled on the

quiet chest; the pipe slithered out, sidewise, over the arch of the bosom to the soil.

Weaver had sputtered out!

## CHAPTER XXV.

"I CAN HURT HER."

THERE was a dull flame of rage in Barnquist's heart as he sat the great roan whose thunderous hoofs spurned the trail behind him out of Coppered Jack. Once he glanced over his shoulder, just as he left the town, and could see no pursuit. He had succeeded better than he had anticipated!

That Weaver had been shot down beside him occasioned him not a qualm. That the old dog-wolf had fallen so, aiding him, irked not the hate-ridden murderer. He even joyed to think that a halt to inspect Weaver's body would give him some added seconds of safety.

Past the Mexicans on the irrigation ditch without noticing their waved greetings to him, their supposed *patronne*, he urged the roan, who by now was getting into his stride. He swirled up the trail like the passing of a whirlwind, the dust pyramiding up behind him and then hanging over the trail like a tan fog.

He had no weapons. He had no spurs. But he sat his seat like a centaur, for he had been born to the saddle, and use had given him the mastery of the roan.

He had no set purpose—only to go, to go, to go, to double and twist, if need be, but to get away, to make into Old Mexico, to let the storm blow past, to come back some time, to be in position to vent his rage, when again in a place of power, upon them all. Yes, upon them all.

And, as he neared Twin Springs, came the thought that no one would expect him to turn aside there, for the inference would be plain that he had gone on the straight trail toward Soda and the thither desert. And if he were to strike across country later, southward, not northwestward, as the Soda trail led, he would need water for man and beast. There was no one at Twin Springs. He could make in there, get a canteen, water the roan against the all-

night ride to the old Quarles place, with its little spring and tumbledown ghost of a house. No one at Twin Springs. They'd all be at the inquest. He had seen Burlane, damn him, and Peters. The silly girl would be there, too.

"Yes, I'll do it thataway," he decided, twitching the roan's bridle.

He glanced back. There was no one on the trail following. It was safe.

He peered about, arrived before the house. Everything was quiet. The doors were shut, for Berenice had closed them that the fowls might not enter and run about, as they did when given the opportunity. He pressed the roan to the corral bars, where the trough was. He let him have a little drink, intending to give him a deeper one after a moment's breathing space. He got down, looked about in search of a canteen, when afar, toward the buttes, he caught the flash of a dress near the willows.

He remembered the place, where Berenice so often went, where he had tried to make love to her before Burlane had come.

"So, she's out there—alone, for th' day?" he thought.

He swung up, spurred the roan toward her. In a few mighty leaps the big horse had cleared the intervening space, for Berenice already had come part of the way back before he had seen her.

He reined in the horse, that was breathing hardly above normal after the keen push from the town to the Springs and glowered down at her. There was no passion for her in his heart, no love. There was hate, mean, searing hate, though, and it whispered:

"There she is; hurt her and, through her, all of them."

She glanced up at him bravely, if her face was white, for she could not but read what was darkling in the depths of his mind. She had no defense, for her little gun that she sometimes carried she had left in the house. But there was no quailing in her eyes or in her demeanor.

He said no word, but the hate in him spoke for him. She gave him glance for glance, proof that she was not daunted.

"Damn you!" he bellowed, his face

flushed with rage. "*I'll have it out on you, on you, no matter what comes.*"

He twitched the horse, tried to make him trample her down as she stood there swaying, nimble-witted, the sweet courage of the native Texans burning clear in the depths of her soul. She swerved aside and, indeed, the roan failed him in his purpose, for no horse, unless in blind rage, likes to trample living human flesh.

"Damn you," he roared, leaning in his saddle and striking at her with clenched fists as she flashed under the horse's flank by a scant inch of safety. "*I'll have it out on you, on you!*"

She started to run—swiftly, her shabby calico skirt swishing, her stubbed-out little shoes flicking back and forth.

He whirled the horse as if on a pivot and, fine horseman as he was, tooled him forward. He knew better than to seek to make the horse trample her again; his common sense told him the roan would not, for the dumb brute was kinder than his human-devil rider.

Berenice ran well, with courage, with hope, determined not to yield until the very last. The purpose, the hope of Barnquist she had read in his blazing eyes, sensed in his fists as it had swished past her ear.

But ran she never so well, the thrumming hoofs were upon her. She tried to swerve, to dodge—

Barnquist snapped the reins up between his teeth, leaving his hands free!

Then, letting himself down as a trick rider does in picking up a handkerchief, he had her. His mighty back muscles, the hate power in him, gave him the strength to do what seemed impossible even to him, for he swung her up, fighting against it. Then he had her across his saddle; his hands, free of reins, toyed with her, one under her shoulders, fast gripped into her clothing, the other seeking her throat. The big roan thundered on, mad now with excitement. He felt her go limp in his arms.

Of a sudden the excess of fury left him. He crushed her to his breast with one arm, and she was as a feather in his grasp. He seized the reins from his teeth with his other hand, snubbed the roan down, twitched him about and then turned him off toward the

springs, for the protection of the screen of the willows. For over his hatred a saving gleam of caution had returned, and he hoped to get behind the willows before any one came in sight along the main trail.

As Ed, on Harvison's horse, flew down the street, he realized that he was beginning a losing chase, for the first few bounds told him that the sheriff's calico, big as he was, was not fast enough to run down the big roan, and then Harvison, a heavy man, never had ridden at that nerve-racking pace that a range rider can attain to, so his calico was a bit soft.

Yet, for the first burst, he went beautifully, low-skimming, eager on the bit, willing. Ed nursed him along. He knew Barnquist would not leave the open trail in full view of the Mexican laborers and thus expose his point of departure and probable direction of flight. So he rode boldly until the irrigation gangs were passed. Once he called if Barnquist had passed, and a dark-skin answered:

"*Sí, señor poco pronto,*" and laughed.

So Ed pushed the calico with hope, not that he could ride down the roan, but that he could get some clue to Barnquist's going, to his probable destination, in order to pass it on to whichever of the posse might come along later, with perhaps a faster horse than he had, or a more enduring.

He kept watch of the trail and saw the marks of the big roan's hoofs. He swept past the Twin Spring's side fork, then missed the big hoof-prints in the trail of the teamsters' ruts. Fear chilled his heart, and he turned the calico aside sharply and they made off, across ways to the Twin Spring fork.

Fear sat perched like an evil bird on Ed's shoulder as the calico bore him into the little ranch-yard. He saw the dripping troughs, heard the hens cackling in alarm, as over some recent disturbance, glanced all about, then his gaze swept afar, drawn by a flutter of something just where the willow-screen about the springs was. He saw the great roan, the huge man atop him, the flicker of the faded calico he knew so well.

Then he smashed into the saddle firmly, fairly lifted the astounded calico forward

with his will urgent and dominant, and they made for the willows. He felt, as by instinct, for his guns, but of course found none. He doubted if Barnquist had a gun, and cared not if he had. He wanted but one boon of Providence—to come at the man, to be at grips with him.

The calico smashed through the willows—into the open space beyond—past the brimming springs so sparkling in the westering sunshine.

Out beyond was mocking laughter, the thrum of hoofs, the flutter of faded calico. Barnquist had taken to the open spaces, yet he was riding in line with the willows in such a way that for quite a distance he would be thoroughly screened from the main trail.

Burlane lifted the gallant calico again—again—again! The tireless, effortless ease of the big roan mocked him. Carrying Barnquist, the slight added burden of the girl but made up for the difference in weight between the hard-bitten if huge son, and the softer, but heavier, father, to whose weight the roan had been accustomed. So, seemingly without limit of power, the roan spurned the prairie sod behind him.

Again Burlane called on the calico; but the roan remained well ahead.

Suddenly Barnquist was seen by Ed to throw the roan to his haunches, and he slithered and slid to a stop. Burlane thought he was yielding or about to shoot, but he saw the man raise the girl, as if to dash her to the earth, and he reined in his horse as well.

"I got you where I want you, Burlane," Barnquist called, smiling to see Ed pause so. "I doubt if you've a gun, or you'd used it by now. You all had to turn in your weaponry before th' inquest opened."

"I'll break you, yet, Barnquist, break you in bits," Ed called back, reaching out his bare hands toward the other.

"When you get me, mebbe so, Burlane. I got you now. I can hurt you—through her. I'll do it; I'll tear her in bits before your eyes."

He laughed, crushed her to him, spoke to the roan and again they sped on.

The possibility that the man-devil would dash Berenice beneath the hoofs of his

horse tortured Ed; the fear that the calico would give out maddened him. Already the horse was suffering. Barnquist's, with the sip of pure water to go on, was fresh and keen. Ed's mount, taken thirsty from the town's warm center, already suffered from thirst. His tongue hung out; he breathed deeply.

They had left Twin Springs and the main trail behind the rolls of prairie. They were far off to one side of the traveled way, alone. The sun was westering fast.

Burlane lifted the calico again—again. He responded, then staggered. Ed pulled him upright. The roan was gaining more and more.

And now Barnquist swung south, toward the main trail again. Ed divined his purpose—to cut across it to make south. He lifted the calico again, called on him for all he was worth. The gallant steed put forth his reserves, almost gained on the roan for a final awful mile, then began to tire visibly. A cloud of dust off beyond the Twin Springs fork told that the posse had ridden right through toward Soda, overrunning the sign toward the Springs.

And still the huge roan, like a machine, put the distance behind him, easeful, strong.

To Burlane came the mocking laughter of the man who held against his great breast all that Ed held dear; he caught the flutter of the faded little calico skirt. They flashed across the trail, just at the end of the ditching. The Mexicans yelled wildly, yammering, frightened. There Ed felt he was definitely beaten on the calico horse—yet that on him alone depended the outcome, for the posse had gone wrong, toward Soda, and he only had the right track.

A mile beyond the main trail the dusk began to come down. The calico, no longer swift, was faltering, yet Ed held it up by sheer force of will. He lifted him at times, and then the roan seemed not to make such headway by way of contrast.

The weary miles passed, and still ahead went the roan. He seemed to tire not, to falter not; yet ever the calico was wearing down, inch by fatal inch.

With the last of the daylight Ed had the tireless roan still in sight—a mere speck

against the darkling skyline. And then the calico swerved badly, seemed about to pitch forward, but regained.

Ed called on him for a last effort. There was no will to yield in Burlane's mind; his will was all to keep going. He gripped the calico between his strong knees, pleaded with him, lifted him, nursed him. It seemed as if he, the indomitable rider, were the driving force, the horse but living and speeding because he bade him to. It was as if he, of his powers of will, were forcing the horse to live, to move, were carrying him between his knees—onward—forward. Ah!

The end came suddenly. Just as the light failed and the roan slipped from sight in the umber distance, the gallant calico collapsed, slithering down. Ed barely saved himself from being caught underneath and rolled free. And then, without a backward glance, determined, not willing to own defeat, his spirit straining forward toward the woman he loved, he ran like a grayhound, his long-heeled boots striking firmly into the earth, his elbows by his sides, his breath coming, going, in rhythm. He did not spare himself; he drove himself, he bounded forward, a man against a splendid horse, with no chance of victory so afoot, with only the driving force of his great love to hold him up—his love and the thought of what would happen if—

He had nothing to guide him. The roan had vanished in the darkness. Ed was trusting that Barnquist would keep on as he had started. He panted; his tongue clove to his mouth's roof; his lungs seemed about to burst; his heart had in it a dull, grinding pain, yet he ran—he ran—

He stumbled, he fell, arose, ran again; gasped, staggered forward, walked, fell. Yet, as he fell, he clutched at the grass and strove to pull himself forward toward her, if only an inch, in his agony of body, soul, heart, mind. Then nature, outraged, took her due; he collapsed. He had gone the limit—the end—and Berenice—

A great sob welled up inside him.

*"Oh, for Midnight, my Midnight!"*

So his soul's wish was breathed to the empty air. He gasped, his body quivered;

he relaxed with a long, shuddering sigh—futile, helpless—blackness enveloped him.

## CHAPTER XXVI.

"YOU'RE MINE NOW!"

**B**ACKWARD glances had told Barnquist of the distress of Burlane's horse long before dark. He had noted the collapse of the calico with the coming of dusk and knew that he had the game in his hands. The girl, after he had choked her at the Springs, had remained inert in his grasp, save when she aroused herself feebly and struggled against his chest. He eased her back and forth at times. His purpose in regard to her was not plain, even to himself, except for this.

He knew that by bearing her off he was blackening the lives of others and her own as well. To carry her away, to break her down, to soil her, would be to joy over them all in his own evil, mean fashion. And he meant to do it.

To Berenice the ride was a nightmare of stresses, ghostlike pains, wrenches, horrors of mind and body. His fingers on her throat had been an agony, his crushing hug scarcely less torturing. She was as a babe in his power.

After the dark came, Barnquist rode more steadily, ever south. He wanted to make that deserted Quarles homestead, where he knew there was water and shelter for a time, where he could get the roan under cover. He had seen the place when riding herd on the open range below Ox Bow, and he judged he could make it before midnight, or before dawn came.

Once, as he rode, a great black shape appeared from out of the dark, a neigh of greeting came, to which the roan did not reply. The big black horse, a wild one, he thought, kept pace a bit, then swerved onto the nearest roll of land.

Barnquist spurred on. Soon the hackberries of the deserted house loomed ahead; then he was there. He put his head to the ground, after dismounting and laying the girl down. No thrum of pursuit came to him, so if any one were on his trail they were yet a long, long way off. He tethered

the roan in the grove of hackberries, after watering him sparingly. Then he picked up the girl and carried her to the house. The door yawned. He went in, placed her on the floor and tied her ankles with his 'kerchief. He lighted a match, found a cold chimney, scraped some rubbish into it. Soon he had a crackling blaze going, and by its red, dancing light he looked at her, so crushed, so wan, so pale.

He had no food, but he cared not for that. He might have gotten some water for her. Indeed, he got a drink for himself; but he offered her none.

Presently she stirred and opened her eyes. She tried to get up wildly. He laughed as her bound ankles threw her prone.

She looked at him then, at the fire, but her pride kept her silent. She drew herself together, remained sitting.

"I don't know what you intend to do," she said, her voice brave yet, "but you shall not frighten me."

"I won't?" bending forward. "I will. I'll break you; I'll tear you to bits, Berenice Peters. You had your father drive me away w'en I was wo'th havin' an' now that I'm not wo'th it I'll have you, I'll have you—"

His fury shook him, he bent forward as if to strike her, then he laughed, held his arm back.

"No; there's a better way than that—when we're off down in Old Mexico, an' you're mine, mine! Now, I got to use all my wits to get away—with you—"

He sat, glowering at her, gnawing his finger-nails, muttering.

"You'll never break me," she answered bravely. "Never, never."

He spat malevolently, grinned. She struggled to get up—rolled toward the door. He was on her in a single leap; he yanked her upright, struck her once, leaving a cruel weal on her temple. Then he threw her into a corner, growling:

"I'll break you in bits—you're mine; nothin' matters now—but hurtin' them all—through you, you—"

Into the blackening swirl of his exhaustion and despair something thrust its way

into the inner portal of Burlane's consciousness. He was lying on his back. His face was being brushed by something. He thrust out and struck something soft. He felt the blackness closing in again.

Again something soft brushed his face. His ears drank in a sound that—

He struck out, open-palmed, at something that was pressed to his cheek. Again that sound, calling to his heart's depths. A whicker, deep-toned, full-chested. Something was nuzzling his cheek, under his chin, into his bosom—

He gasped—got hold of a mane—

"*Oh, Midnight; oh, Midnight!*"

He staggered upright, holding on to the mane of the horse that seemed to grow out of his delirium.

Again came the whicker.

"Ol' son-of-a-gun."

Ed's arms went about the stallion's neck. He swayed there, the horse calling deep love notes to him.

"Ol cuss. Oh, you beauty!"

And so, in the dark, they drank of each other's love for a moment or two. Then the recollection of how he had come there beat back into Ed's aching brain. He caught at the mane, swung himself up, barebacked. The horse, joying to feel the wonted weight on him, thinking it was a barebacked frolic, such as Ed often gave him, pranced in the dark. Ed swayed, all but fell, he was so weak.

"Steady, boy, now; steady, ol' son-of-a-gun!"

So he gentled him, and the brainy stallion steadied. Ed, feeling the heave of horseflesh under him, strove for a clear brain, got it. Then the hopelessness of the situation overwhelmed him. How was he to find Barnquist in that sea of land that rolled on all sides? He did not even know, now, in which direction he had last seen the ravisher. The clouds hung low; there were no stars to guide him, no wind.

"You play this hand, ol' cuss," Burlane said, lax in his unsaddled seat from weakness and pain. "I'm to my limit; I'll let you ramble away, an' with th' earliest light I'll look for signs."

Midnight, finding no direction was given him, drifted slowly, steadily. He had been



away from the spring at the hackberry grove all day. He wanted a drink. Now, if the man-god on him wanted one—

He began to walk, then to lope. Ed, by now recovered, feeling from the animal's going that he had a purpose, held on. And the ride nerved him, toned him.

After what seemed a long, long time, Ed felt that they were among trees. The night was black. Midnight had entered the hackberry grove on the side opposite the house. Ed heard the horse drink. He staggered down and drank also, washed his face, hands, neck, which revived him wonderfully.

Then he looked about. He saw the flicker of light beyond the trees, the outlines of windows. And then he remembered the deserted homestead there. He knew where he was now. He spoke to Midnight to follow, and the stallion, like an obedient dog, came after. Ed stepped into the open, a horse whickered. Midnight answered. Ed looked—and saw, between him and the flickering, shifting fire gleams from the empty window frames, the form of the great roan horse.

Ed laughed aloud and called:

"Barnquist, come out—"

There was a sound of a leaping body within. Ed plunged forward, into the open door. As he did so, the man scuttled for the back door. Ed saw the huddled heap covered with faded calico in the corner, and hurtled after the other—to find the all but useless door slammed in his face as Barnquist got through a hand's grasp ahead of him. The old door jammed in its frame; Ed tugged at it, wrestled with it blindly—fell into a panic at his error—wheeled back toward the front door, only to hear the thrum of hoofs again, as the roan, Barnquist riding, swept out of the deserted farmstead's yard.

Ed sped back. The girl had struggled upright and he saw the weal on her forehead where she had been struck by the brute in his anger. He was swept by fury; the beat of the roan's hoofs. He called

"Ho, Midnight!"

With a squeal of joy the great black stallion came, eager, sniffing. Ed leaped on his back. Out beyond he could hear

the beat of the roan's hoofs. He called on Midnight, his own strength mounting under the emergency's urge. The thin-thighed legs of him gripped the hard sides of the big steed; he felt the pulsing rhythm of his stride, and then they were away, under the now clearing sky, and, in the dim light of the fading moon, he could see the roan just topping the nearest prairie swell.

"Now, Midnight. You never failed me!"

The black, like a shot from a bow, unleashed the fury of his mighty muscles as he caught the direction of the chase. No tame cayuse he, no pampered son of city streets! He knew, as by instinct, that the other horse was the quarry his man-god sought, as he knew, when on the round-up, which steer was meant to be cut out. Though the dark closed in, he would follow by sound, by scent. Though the roan were an eagle, he would descry him in mid air.

"Oh, Midnight, *if you love me.*"

Love him! Now the mighty thews of the stallion flexed and reflexed. His belly fairly laid to the ground; his hoofs drummed a wild rataplan.

"Oh, if you love me!"

Love him! Do men ever know the love a good horse or faithful dog feels for its master! Love him!

Midnight burst into greater effort, and now, atop the next rise, the roan loomed against the skyline. And Ed patted the heaving flank of the gallant stallion.

Again he called on Midnight and as a reward could hear plainly the roar of the roan's hoof-beats. Ed, riding bareback, as he never had ridden before, was fired to the toe-tips with energy. He had but one mind, one purpose: to catch hold of the beast in front, to tear him from the back of his horse—to—

"Oh, Midnight, do you love me? Please, Midnight."

The dark earth, spurned behind, was like a sheet of brown. And now, just ahead, was the roan—strong, enduring, nearer, nearer, foot by foot.

The oaths of Barnquist came floating back to Ed. Neither could think of gopher

holes, of all the dangers of night riding on the plains.

Ed lifted on Midnight who, stung with the affront of it, leaped into a yet wilder stride. And at that mighty effort, he came, as by magic, head to wither beside the roan, and then, inch by inch, Ed crept along until side by side they raced together.

"If you love me, Midnight—"

A last mighty burst of that matchless speed, that glorious effort!

Gripping the black's heaving sides, with his knees, one hand wound in his mane, Ed reached.

He tore the great evil bulk from the saddle with one awful, resistless heave. The roan raced away, riderless. The bulk crashed to the soil. Ed, even while the black raced, swung down, flicking right leg over to left side, hands on mane, and landed upright, thanks to his high heels. So, when Barnquist flung himself upright, it was to find the big range rider towering over him.

Midnight, wheeling, as he knew he should, stood a few yards away munching unconcernedly.

Silence now, as eye sought for eye in the dark. Then came the crash of meeting bodies, tug of strong hands, gasps of breath from mighty lungs, a single wild, awful, straining upthrust. A form shot over the head of a man and came down—thrown clean, fair, a broken, wrecked mass—

"We'll leave him there, old Midnight." Ed, panting, leaned on Midnight's shoulder. "We'll leave him there. It would poison the earth to bury him."

Midnight turned, man-hate being incomprehensible to him, and nipped playfully at Ed's hand.

"Quit, darned nuisance," and Ed batted him with his palm.

Then he swung up and rode toward the deserted house. The distance it had taken perhaps half an hour to traverse at that awful speed it took an hour to recover. He lost his way for a time, by trying to find the route himself, then, remembering that Midnight had drifted there, finally let him go as he would.

Dawn was coming when he found the hackberry clump. He turned the horse loose and went toward the house. He feared to approach, much as he wanted to. Her condition? What would it be? He thought of the harm that might have been done, of the weal on her forehead, and blamed himself for the unreasoning hatred that had swept him out to slay when he should have remained to succor. He felt guilty, uneasy as he feared the condition in which he might find her.

Berenice was seated in the doorway, leaning wearily against the rotting jamb. He came quietly, and she did not hear him until he was almost upon her. She shrank at the first sound, then stood up and opened her arms with a happy little cry. He came forward, swept her inside his embrace.

"Are you safe? Did he hurt you bad, Bernie?" he asked eagerly.

"No and yes. But not as he intended; you came too soon, Ed, you saved me—from the—the worst—" nestling to him.

"Thank God!"

He drew her to him. He sought to kiss her. Something came between their faces: black, soft, velvety. Ed tried to push it aside, rubbed it; she laughed gleefully. Again it came, caressingly nuzzling in between them. They heard a deep-chested whicker.

"Darned old son-of-a-gun," Ed said fondly, dodging the interfering nuzzle; "you, Midnight, behave; can't I kiss my sweetheart even, but *you* must horn in?"

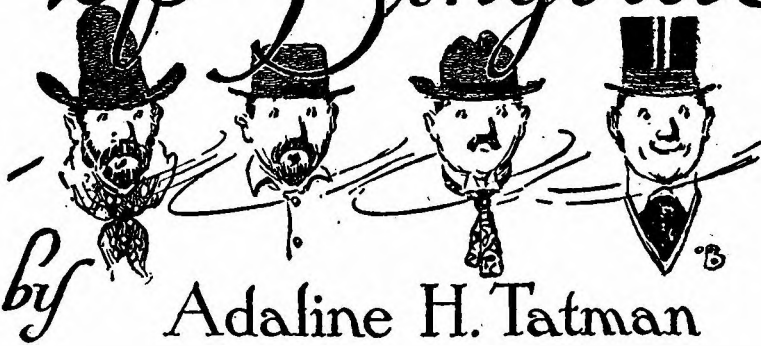
And Midnight? He just whickered and nuzzled.

The dawn-wind came, sweet, pure, clean. The light gained. The world was new for them as they three, so loving, loved, faced the new day; the sun rising in the rose-broidered east.

"Darned old son-of-a-gun!"

And Midnight? He whickered again, and with his rumbling love-call chimed the rippling laughter of Berenice, on her face and in her eyes the gleams that were reflected from the new-risen god of day who was smiling so kindly and encouragingly upon the newness of their surrender.

# The Evolution of Bingville



**I**T was Doc Martin's bathtub that started the boom in Bingville, Bill Brown has always maintained.

Bill was keeping our one livery-stable at the time of the arrival of the first bathtub in our town, and considering the circumstances, if he gives the credit of the boom to anything or any one except to his wife, Sally, no one else should object.

This is how we first heard of Doc's purchase.

Several of us had gone down to see the 4.20 freight pull in one evening when Bill, who was lounging against the station door watching the brakemen unloading some empty chicken-crates, suddenly exclaimed: "I, hockey, boys! What's that? A coffin?"

We looked in the direction he was pointing and saw two huskies shunting a long, heavy object onto the platform. We all crowded around to see what it was.

"It's a bathtub!" announced Larry McCall, who had been down to the city clerking in a store for a couple of months and who had thrown up his job because, he said, city water did not agree with his indigestion.

"A bathtub!" we exclaimed as one man.

"A bathtub!" snickered Bill Brown. "What does any one in this town need of a bathtub?"

"Why, to wash themselves in," explained Larry. "Down to the city everybody has bathtubs—"

"Humph! They might do for city folks," laughed Sam Larkin, "but how on earth does one of 'em happen to be shunted off here?"

Larry sidled around and peeped at the tag hanging to one end of the crating.

"It says 'Dr. J. M. Martin' on this tag, all right," he announced.

"Doc Martin," ejaculated Bill in amazement, "aw, come on, you're a jokin'. Doc Martin wouldn't buy nothin' like that. He ain't got no use for a bathtub no more 'n I have."

"I bet it is for him, too," put in Al Avery, stooping over to squint at the tag. "I hear he's buildin' all sorts o' jimcracks into his new house."

"Sure, it's for him," agreed Larry. "They ain't but one Doc Martin in this town."

At this Jim Johnson nearly had a spasm.

"Well, if Doc Martin can't wash himself in a washtub in the kitchen on Saturday nights like the rest of us has allers done. I'm a goin' to send for Doc Phillips," he choked.

"Me, too," spoke up Andy McFadden.

It seemed that he voiced the sentiments of most of us, for when Bill Brown realized

that the luxurious article was really intended for the personal comfort and convenience of Doc Martin and his family, he became indignant.

"I, hockey, boys! It's no wonder Doc Martin kin have sich jimcracks as bathtubs in his house! Him a chargin' *fifty cents* every time he comes to give a body a pill and then makin' 'em run to the drug-store to git the pill."

"It's blamed snobbery, that's what it is," piped little Bob Allen, who drove the Bingville bus from the depot to the National House, "and I won't stand for it. I ain't a goin' to uphold no man in any sich foolishness. I'll send for Doc Hays first."

That was a dire threat from Bob or any one else. We had three doctors in town, Doc Martin, Doc Phillips, and Doc Hays, of which the most popular by far was Doc Martin, "old reliable," we had always called him, but nobody but a newcomer, ever thought of sending for Doc Hays.

He might have been a pretty good doctor for all we knew, but he held some queer ideas. For instance, he believed absolutely in cremating people instead of burying them when they died, and that queered him with the citizens of Bingville. Also he had been heard to say that most folks weren't as sick as they thought they were, generally, and we didn't think a doctor could be very smart to stand in the way of his own business like that. Therefore, we realized the seriousness of Bob's threat.

"It's an outrage," wheezed Clem Davis excitedly, "and I'll smother to death before I'll hev Doc Martin or any other man around me that thinks he's better 'n I am."

Clem suffered from chronic asthma and was often in need of Doc's services.

"Well, but maybe it ain't Doc's bathtub," spoke up Amos Barker, who was generally the peacemaker in our small disputes, but the matter was settled at that moment beyond peradventure or doubt by the arrival of Ike Larkby and his Bingville Daily Express, Hauling, Drayage, and General Transportation Wagon.

"Yes, sir, it's Doc Martin's bathtub and he sent we down here after it; and I ain't a keerin' what he wants of it so I gits my fifteen cents for haulin' it up there," he re-

plied in answer to the unanimous inquiry if the tub really was Doc Martin's property.

The news that Doc Martin was going to have a bath-room in his new house spread through the town like wildfire. It was the one topic of conversation at Bingville supper-tables that evening, and the feeling among us was that in importing such a high-flown luxury to a town like ours, Doc Martin was setting a bad example in the community.

It not only would have a bad influence over some people, encouraging them in extravagant ideas, but we felt the money spent for it—bathtubs cost a power of money, we had heard—could have been put to a better use. Indeed, the elders of the M. E. Church called on Doc that very evening and asked him if he did not feel that he could have served the Lord much better by giving that amount of money to the church instead of putting it into a bathtub. Doc and his family belonged to the M. E.'s.

I don't know what Doc said to them, but in the post-office the next evening he apologized to a lot of us.

"It's this way, boys," he said. "It ain't just exactly that me or my family *needs* a bathtub, that I'm a puttin' one in, but since we're gettin' a new electric line in place of the little narrow gage there's likely to be a lot of city folks out this way to buy property and I'm a lookin' at the thing from a financial standpoint. City folks are used to bathtubs and I could sell my house for a lot more money by having a bath-room in it. I don't suppose we'll really use it much," he added conciliatorily, "but it is a good investment from a financial standpoint."

That apology did not lessen the excitement any. It only turned it into another channel, for word got out that Doc Martin was going to sell out and leave-town, which threw Granny McPherson into one of her "spells" for fear it was true, although it was only April.

Granny McPherson was subject to a "pain in her insides" in January, June, and July. It seemed that only the months that began with a "J" brought this affliction to Granny, and Doc Martin was the only doctor she'd ever had that could give

her any relief. Years ago she had exacted from him the promise that he would never under any circumstances leave town during these months; now the mere rumor that he was going to leave for good had brought the pain on Granny out of season.

Doc finally put a piece in the paper to the effect that "whoever had circulated the rumor that he was about to leave this fair village was a liar and the truth was not in him." (Signed) Yours resp'tfully, J. M. Martin, M. D.

That helped some, but Doc nearly had a fit a few days later when the *Daily Clarion* came out with an editorial saying:

Our genial Esculapius, Dr. J. M. Martin, has almost completed his new residence, which has all the modern improvements, and which reminds us that if it is all the same to them we'd like for some people to pay up their subscriptions which have long been overdue, as the apple-butter and side meat that Mrs. Silas Burgeson brought in last week are about gone.

Of course, we afterward found out that a drunken tramp-printer who left town the day the paper came out was responsible for this, but Doc Martin was furious and almost threshed the life out of Editor Mooney before the latter could explain the matter.

That editorial tickled Doc Phillips and Doc Hays nearly to death. They made capital out of it, in a sly way, and the rest of us enjoyed the joke, too.

In an effort to mollify us folks, and to show us she was not a bit set up over her fine home, Mrs. Doc Martin gave a dinner—noon—as soon as her house was completed and invited every woman in town except Mrs. Doc Phillips and Mrs. Doc Hays. She took them all over her house, but the center of interest, of course, was the bathroom. Everybody was crazy to see the bathtub in operation, so to speak. Not that most all of them had not at various times and on various occasions enjoyed that luxury, but this was the first house in town to boast such a convenience.

And that evening the husband of every one of those women was mad. Every woman came home demanding a bath-room forthwith. My wife was there and she came at me for one before we'd fairly begun to eat supper.

"I never saw anything so handy in my life," says she. "I don't see how I ever can stand it to bathe in the kitchen any more. It seems so—so—"

"Yeh," I said, "that's the way with women. Let some other woman get something and they'll all have a fit till they get it, too."

That shut her up for a while and she sat there eating away quiet, but directly she looks up at me funnylike and says: "Well, I wonder what would happen to this world if women weren't that way?"

"What way?" I asked. I'd forgotten my last remark.

"Wanting something like her neighbor's got or a little bit better."

"Well us men would have an easier time," I answered.

"You men wouldn't amount to a pinch of snuff," she retorted, "and this world would just stand still. There wouldn't be any such a thing as progress."

I laughed at her idea, but a few days later she handed me an envelope.

"Look inside," she said, and I pulled out a square of pasteboard, on which was written:

Mrs. L. C. Phillips  
presents compliments  
and requests the pleasure  
of your company at a  
reception at her home on  
Thursday afternoon from  
3 to 5 o'clock.

I chuckled as I gave it back to her.

"She's going to get even with Mrs. Doc Martin for having her 'bathtub' party," I said.

"Well, it's the first real reception we've ever had in this town and I'm going," she replied. "I've always thought we're just too behind the times socially for any use."

She went, and came home breathless with pleased excitement over it. It was the swellest affair, it seems, we ever had in our town. Mrs. Doc Phillips had invited everybody in town, of course, except Mrs. Doc Martin and Mrs. Doc Hays, which was to be expected since all the doctors were sworn enemies, except on the rare occasions when they were called in consultation on a difficult case.

Mrs. Phillips received her guests in her Sunday black silk which, until that afternoon was an unheard of thing on weekdays, but the crowning triumph of the occasion was the fact that instead of opening the door herself, she had little Jinny Keck dressed up in a white apron and *white cap* to do it for her.

That last touch, Jinny's cap, settled Mrs. Doc Phillip's social preeminence in Bingville forever. Mrs. Doc Martin couldn't lord it over Mrs. Doc Phillips, with her bathtub any longer. Things began to move in Bingville. Every woman in town vied with every other woman to see which could outdo the other in the matter of entertainment or the purchase of some improvement in her home.

Mrs. Cherrington Gibbs, the wife of our leading storekeeper, put in a door-bell and not only made every woman in town envious, but let themselves in for a series of sleepless nights until all the small boys in Bingville had tested to their own delighted satisfaction the effectiveness of the contraption.

I think Angie Burr expressed also the secret feeling of many of the feminine element when she naively remarked: "It gives me such a genteel feeling to call on Mrs. Gibbs. I just feel when I've rung her door-bell and stand waitin' for her to come to the door: 'Well, *this* is real society.'"

There was an epidemic of door-bells in town that year.

Then, that winter, Mrs. Emmaline Dillman, wife of our leading—and only—druggist, went to the city to visit her sister for a couple of weeks, and when she came home she got a lot of women together and formed what she called a Civic Club.

"It is aimed," she said, "to promote the general welfare of our citizens by beautifying the town, and regulating many existing evils."

What these evils were she didn't enumerate at the time, but the Ladies' Aids and Missionary Societies of our three churches were at first rather doubtful as to the advisability of women undertaking any work, as they put it, "other than that connected with the spiritual growth of the church and her affiliations," but Mrs. Dillman, who was

a bright woman and a good talker, won them over and a new era dawned for Bingville. A feverish period of building, remodeling, painting and general cleaning up of the town ensued. Here and there about town, at the homes of the "best" people, porch-awnings—a rare luxury and indubitable sign of personal affluence—were beginning to appear.

Flowers and trees were planted in front of the stores and the post-office and lawnmowers whirled in yards and allies hitherto innocent of even a scythe, thanks to the Civic Club.

The *Daily Clarion* announced in bold type:

### OUR TOWN IS BOOMING.

Come to Bingville, the most enterprising little town in the state.

### WATCH US GROW.

There came a time, but a little later, when those last three words were hung on a huge flag across our main street and that editorial was reprinted far and wide in every paper in the land.

Finally us men began to wake up. The town council, which heretofore had been rather a mythical organization, got together and voted to replace with cement the stone sidewalks they had sloshed up and down every rainy spell for twenty years. Of course, they had to weather quite a storm of objections from some of the property-holders—they were mortal sure that the assessments for the walks were going to bankrupt each and every man in town and openly asserted that they wouldn't pay a darned cent of 'em. Council went ahead and laid the walks and every man paid his assessment at the proper time, but the greatest trouble came when they voted to replace the oil lamps with electric lights.

The electric trolley had replaced the little narrow gage road the year before and we were beginning to feel rather citified, but some of our citizens objected more strenuously to the lights than they had to the cement walks and much more to the point.

Joe Kinkead had barely inserted his digger for the erection of a pole in front of old man Chatterton's residence when a voice from the doorway stopped him.

"Drop that digger, darn ye, or I'll put a hole through ye!"

Joe looked up and along the barrel of an unattractive-looking shotgun into Uncle Jake Chatterton's snapping black eyes. Knowing Uncle Jake as well as he did, Joe did as he was bidden.

"But Uncle Jake," protested Joe, "I gotta dig this hole. I kain't hold up the lights in this town thataway. And I've got a job with this here electric light company—"

"You touch that digger again an' I'll fill ye so full o' lead you'll look like a sieve, ding ye!"

Joe mopped his forehead.

"But Uncle Jake," persisted Joe, "I kain't understand what objection you've got to these here lights. I think they're fine—"

"Fine," sneered the old man, *fine!* A-keepin' ye awake nights year in and year out, and when ye want to set on the porch in yer sock-feet in the summer ye hev to be a jerkin' em out o' sight every time a woman's a-passin'. What rest is they in 'em, I say, fur a body, besides the gnats and skeeters buzzin' around 'em by the million. I never did like so much light and now I got to *hev* it, day and night, *all* the time. I'll be swunged if I don't see if a man ain't got *no* rights no more in this dinged town."

Joe became diplomatic.

"Well, you lower yer gun a leetle, Uncle Jake, and I'll go tell the company about it and see what they'll do."

Uncle Jake lowered his gun and watched Joe shamle down the street.

"You tell 'em," he called as Joe was about to turn a corner, "you tell 'em I'll put a hole in the first man that sticks another digger in the ground *anyways near* my house."

The matter was most unexpectedly settled, for Uncle Jake being upward of three-score and ten and long in indifferent health, suddenly departed two days later for a sphere where the lights were much brighter than any of ours could possibly be.

The next thing to set Bingville a quiver with excitement—and it seemed to us that we didn't get over one shock until something else happened—was the sight of Doc

Phillips whizzing through town in an *automobile*. Bingville went wild. People rushed to doors and windows and out into the streets. Small boys yelled, dogs barked and kids screamed. Not since the day Doc Martin's bathtub arrived on the station-platform had people been so excited over the advent of any new thing to the town. As before, public opinion was divided on the wisdom of Doc Phillips's purchase. Some said it was a wise purchase considering the high cost of feed at the time—corn was selling at the outrageous price of sixty cents per bushel—but others were indignant at Doc's extravagance.

Bill Brown, the livery-stable keeper, was furious. He had stabled and boarded Doc's horse for ten years, and as Doc lived in rented property on which there was no stable, Bill quite reasonably supposed he would continue to receive that little addition to his own income the rest of his life.

"I, hockey," he raged, "them automobiles air enough to skeer a man to death let alone a horse. And look at the danger our children's in. They're an invention of the devil," meaning, of course, the automobile, "Doc Phillips will kill more people with that darned contraption than he ever cured and I won't uphold *no* man in murder. I'm goin' to send for Doc Hays next time any of my children gits sick."

As Bill's family now numbered eleven and were passing through all the series of children's ailments, from mumps and measles to first love, and as Bill was fairly good pay considering his financial status, the transfer of his patronage was no small matter, but when a few months later Doc Hays sharing in the modest prosperity of our growing town also appeared on the street in a shiny, new, small car Bill's rage knew no bounds, for he saw his own business as livery-stable keeper beginning to dwindle.

"This world's going to the dogs," he snarled, "and this town is gittin' too darned fast for a pore man like me to live in. I'm goin' to sell out, and leave."

His threat, however, was not carried out until a few months later when, to his own amazement, Bill really did sell out, but he did not leave town.

The last person for the boom idea to strike was Mrs. Bill Brown, from the fact that she had been so busy attending to the wants of the numerous Browns, big and little, that she had neither time nor inclination to want to join in the general idea of progress. She had watched the people around her remodeling and repainting their homes, putting in electric lights, buying automobiles and porch-awnings, but not until her next-door neighborhood had put in a new pump did she frame a wish for any modern improvement for herself.

"I want a well," she calmly announced to Bill one evening as they sat at supper.

Bill's mouth fell open with amazement.

"A what?"

"A well," repeated Mrs. Bill calmly.

"What kind of a well?" questioned Bill after he had recovered enough to swallow.

"The only kind there is," said Mrs. Bill, "a well for water."

"I, hockey, woman are you crazy? You got a cistern and—"

"Yes, I got a cistern," stormed Mrs. Bill, who had dragged water with a tin pail from that same cistern for fifteen years, "and in summer it's so warm we can't drink it and in winter it's all froze over with ice."

"But," argued Bill, "you git nice, cool water from the station pump in summer and—"

Mrs. Bill looked up at her husband with snapping eyes.

"Yes, and every summer for fifteen years me or one of the children has toted water from that station pump to drink and now we are the only people in this town that does such a thing. Everybody else has wells with pumps in 'em. I'm so ashamed when I send Minnie to the station pump I can't see. No other girl has to—"

"I, hockey," raged Bill, jumping up, "what's this darned town comin' to, with its high-falutin' ways? You women's all gittin' too stuck up to—"

"Well, I'm a goin' to have a well," Mrs. Bill interrupted calmly, "and before long, too."

Bill went out, slamming the door after him, but inwardly uneasy as to what might be sprung upon himself in the matter, for patient and uncomplaining as Sally Brown

had been all her life, Bill never knew her to go back on an assertion made in that tone of voice.

However, the subject was not broached by Mrs. Bill again, and Bill supposed she had postponed the idea of a well for a time at least, until one day, returning from a trip into the country, he found a lot of men and apparatus working away busily in the back yard.

"What's them men a doin'?" he demanded of Mrs. Bill as he strode excitedly into the kitchen where Mrs. Bill was getting dinner.

Mrs. Bill deftly turned a piece of salt pork she was frying.

"They're diggin' me a well."

"Diggin' you a well!" sneered Bill.

"And I reckon you'll pay for it."

Mrs. Bill turned another piece of pork.

"Nobody has to pay for it if they don't strike water and if they do it 'll be the coolest water in this town. It 'll be one of them bored wells, and if you don't want to pay for it, I will. Ma left me fifty dollars when she died and I'd as lief put it in a well as anywheres."

Bill glared at his wife, started to speak, gulped, and finally stuttered.

"When—when's supper ready?"

"Right now," said Mrs. Bill, "set down."

The Browns lived on the extreme edge of Bingville on the flattest piece of land in that flat section. On three sides lay the open country, forty acres of which Bill had inherited from his father and which had yielded him an indifferent living. It was only by the strictest economy that he managed to make both ends meet with his growing family, and the livery business getting worse every year owing to the advent of the automobile, but by pasturing his horses and some of the town cows on his lots, he had managed to get along. Mrs. Bill was a good manager and mentally above her husband, but the poverty and the care of her large family had made a drudge of her. Only rarely did she assert herself, as in the matter of the well.

For two days she watched the men drilling, but they had struck a thick formation of rock, and had to work so slowly that one of the men remarked at noon of the



third day that if they did not strike water that day he'd quit.

Sally Brown's heart sank. It seemed to her that she would die if they stopped digging. Never in all her drudging life had she wanted anything so badly as she wanted that well. She prayed that they would go on; that they would not give up, but at three o'clock one of the men came and spoke to her.

"We're goin' to quit, Mrs. Brown. It's no use to go on. We've lost money now stayin' here so long."

Sally's face went white.

"Oh, just dig an hour longer," she begged, "just one hour and I'll pay you anything, anything you ask; anything."

It was an absurd promise seeing that fifty dollars was all the money she had or hoped to have to pay for the work, but she felt that she simply could not give up now.

Seeing her eagerness, the men grudgingly consented to work until six o'clock.

With beating heart and hungry eyes, Sally, with the youngest Brown on her lap, sat watching them. She forgot that supper should be cooked, that the evening chores should be looked after. She forgot everything in the world but that she wanted a well—a well of her very own.

Suddenly there was a shout from the men downed instantly by a terrible roar like the sound of many cannon and Sally Brown's horrified eyes saw the men fall upon the ground even as the drill with which they were working flew high in air. She ran out.

"What is the matter, what has happened?" she shrieked in a vain effort to be heard above the roar.

Half-dazed, the men scrambled to their feet. She seized one of them by the shoulder.

"What is it?" she shrieked in his ear.

"Gas," yelled the man into her own uncomprehending ears, "and lots of it."

And before she could really realize what had happened, the whole town, wild with excitement, was pouring into Sally Brown's back yard to see her well of gas.

You see, it was this way. A couple of men had gone through town the day before trying to interest people in the then new idea of bored wells, but no one but Sally

had wanted a well. They were quite content with the wells that they or their forefathers had dug. But Sally, long deprived of such a luxury, had resolved that when she had a well she would have a good one.

You can imagine what Bingville was like in the weeks that followed.

For years a queer character whom we had dubbed "Dippy Dave" had gone about the town talking about gas and oil and limestone arches, *et cetera*, underlying Bingville. He had tried to interest several of our leading citizens in a project to bore for oil, but thinking him crazy we had with our accustomed acuteness refused to listen to him. Now he came into the lime-light insisting that the flow of gas from "The Sally Brown Well" was only an indication of the proximity of oil.

In less than two months an Eastern oil company had bought, or leased, much of the land about Bingville at what we, with small-town ideas of business, thought a mighty good figure, but which we found out later to our sorrow was a comparatively moderate amount.

Dippy Dave prophesied that the Brown forty acres would be found to be the richest section of any in the production of oil.

This proved to be true. Although numerous wells were put down, the Sally Brown, which began from the start to produce hundreds of barrels of oil per day, rich in gasoline and lubricants has been the the most prolific of them all and the output is steady.

One year from the day that Sally Brown had contracted for the well of water, Bill sold his farm for a fabulous sum and retired from the livery-stable business for good.

Bingville has grown from a village to a small metropolis. That was four years ago.

I had been away from there for a year and when I got back Bill Brown met me at the depot in a shiny new roadster. I hardly knew either Bill or the town. I could not remember even the street I had formerly lived on, so great had been the change in the place in the short time I had been away.

Bill was all dolled up in good clothes and he handled his eight-cylinder roadster like a Barney Oldfield.

I remarked upon the change in Bingville since I had first known it; ten years ago.

"Yes," agreed Bill, "but I, hockey," he exclaimed confidentially as he took a corner at a rate that made me gasp and cast an eye about for a traffic cop, "this town has growed and Sally and her darned well had a lot to do with it, I must say, but do you know, I really believe that none of it would ever have happened if Doc Martin had not bought his little ol' bathtub. That tub is what set this town on its ear and started it to progressin'."

"It's this way," went on Bill, whom prosperity seemed to have made philosophical, "people begin to want things, better things, and when they begin to want things they progress. But do you know that when Doc brought that bathtub here they was some people that could 'a' mobbed him? They's some people 'll just stand right in the way of progress and stop it if they kin."

"But," he added as he brought his car smoothly to a halt in front of Bingville's new four-story hotel, "I'm for progress every time; yes, sir, ev-er-y time."

# By Proxy

by Charles Wesley Sanders



TAYLOR stopped, grinning, when he saw the squat, solid figure of Captain Percival. As he surveyed Percival, he realized that he had come just in time.

Percival was standing on the river-wharf, looking up at the load of lumber on the deck of his schooner. The schooner was headed toward Lake Michigan and Taylor knew that she was about ready to sail from Grand Haven, probably for Southport on the Wisconsin side.

Walking softly in his mocassins, he crossed the wharf and came up behind the captain. He stopped without Percival's having heard him. Taylor was a taller man than Percival but not so stocky, and he was younger by ten years.

Percival usually carried a cargo of

whisky in his stomach and the sun had boiled the whisky out of his blood into his skin till the skin was a brick red. Taylor knew of old that his eyes were watery and red-rimmed. The mark of the out-of-doors was on Taylor, too, but he drank no whisky, so that his naturally fair skin was merely darkened to an olive hue. His eyes were clear and dry.

Now he spoke to the captain in a low voice:

"How much for a ride across the lake, cap'n?"

Though Percival was a whiskey-drinker, he had his nerves under control. The start he gave was perceptible and no more. Taylor had expected he would wheel about with a look of amazement in his eyes, but he did not; he turned slowly and gave

Taylor a brief and casual glance in which there was no recognition.

"Dollar and a half," he answered:

Taylor took out a pouch and extracted a silver dollar and a silver fifty cent piece and handed them to Percival.

"When do you sail?" he asked.

"You ain't a sailor, are you?" Percival sneered.

Taylor did not answer. He knew that Percival knew that he was a sailor, so that no answer was necessary. He had to admire Percival for the cool courage which enabled him to put the query in that cold, sneering voice.

Well, he'd fix that a little later. Percival would be whining for mercy before the trip was done.

"We'll sail when the wind shifts to our back," Percival went on, "and that I'm thinkin' will be about sundown. You c'n go on board if you like."

Taylor clambered on board, just forward of the cabin, where there was a little space between the companionway and the deck-load of lumber. With the freedom that a passenger had in the early days of sailing ships on the Great Lakes, he went down into the cabin. He wanted to look about a bit.

This schooner differed little, doubtless, from the schooners which Taylor had sailed upon in the past, but he was not going to overlook anything. At the foot of the stairs he stood looking about for a moment. Then he felt in his pockets to make sure that his knife and his revolver were handy.

Two doors opened off the cabin on each side. Taylor opened three of these and glanced inside. He was about to open the fourth when the knob was turned from within and the door was drawn back. Taylor stopped, staring with lifted head.

A girl stood on the threshold. She returned Taylor's stare.

"Excuse me," Taylor said. "I didn't know you were here."

The girl seemed about to speak, but she refrained. After another moment of scrutiny of him she closed the door.

"Snubbed me," Taylor said. "I wonder what the devil she's doin' here."

He went on deck and walked forward,

to have a look at the crew. He wanted to see if they were foreigners or native-born. It would make a difference.

Down on the wharf Percival was leaning against a pile. He, too, was thinking of his crew and he realized that he was unfortunate in that the men with one exception were Americans.

The exception was a Cousin Jack, a Cornishman, who had forsaken the mills to sail. In a racket the captain supposed he would be about as independable as an American. Those Americans couldn't be bought to stick a knife in a man and heave him overboard, and Percival supposed the Cousin Jack couldn't be bought for that sort of job either.

"Damn Taylor, anyhow!" Percival said. "I suppose he thought I wouldn't recognize him after these last three years. I'd know him in a million. I wonder has he got guts enough to shove me off, or does he just think he can scare me into returnin' that money to him?"

"That money" was a little over eight hundred dollars which the captain had stolen from Taylor, who had come aboard his schooner one summer at Detroit. He hadn't known much about sailing, but the captain had been short-handed and had taken him on. He had sensed a difference in Taylor at once and he had kept an eye on him.

The result of his watch was that he had found Taylor in the forecabin with a pouch of money in his lap. Percival had been lucky in his crew that year and he had got Taylor's money and had hired the crew to see that Taylor recovered consciousness one morning in a blind alley, with little recollection of what had happened and a sore head.

Percival had kept that crew with him all through that season. He had fully expected Taylor to follow him and make a scene. He had been prepared with wittnesses to prove that he had had nothing to do with the theft.

He had been astonished when Taylor did not appear, and in that he had given evidence that he did not credit Taylor with the native shrewdness which Taylor had.

Taylor had known that he could not get

his money back. He had taken that trip merely to kill time till his brother came on to Michigan from the East. When the brother did come, they went into the interior and took up government land. Taylor told no one, not even his brother, about his experience with Percival, but he did not forget it.

He had made several trips each season in sailing ships but he had not run across Percival. If he had permitted his desire for revenge to become an obsession, he could have found Percival the first year; but he knew the danger that lies in obsession. He would continue his pursuit but he would not sacrifice himself to make it successful. He was quite sane.

By this autumn he and his brother had cleared a good deal of land and their crops were cared for early. Saying he was going into the woods to work through the winter, Taylor had set out. From Detroit he had traced Percival to Grand Haven. And now he had him under his thumb.

It was characteristic of Taylor that he did not think of danger to himself in thus embarking on Percival's ship. He might have had his revenge on Percival there on the wharf after making what he knew would be a futile demand for the return of his money, but he had waited three years and he could wait longer. There would be no fun in merely hurting Percival.

He judged the captain was a coward. He was going to play with him for a while.

His study of the crew satisfied him. There were six of them altogether. Three were middle-aged men, two were past thirty, and one was a lad of twenty. They wouldn't sell themselves to the captain as the crew of foreigners had done, not even the Cousin Jack. Of that, Taylor was sure. So then he and Percival stood man to man—and that was all Taylor wanted.

His thoughts reverted to the girl then. What was she doing here? Certainly she did not look as if she had been traveling on a hooker like this, as cook. There was an indefinable something about her which lifted her out of that class.

Well, he'd see.

Just before dark, he and the girl and Percival had supper together. Taylor and

Percival were at table when the girl came into the room.

Percival kept his seat, but Taylor rose and looked at the girl expectantly. She glanced at him fleetingly and sat down. Taylor looked at the captain with eyes darkened with anger, but Percival would not return the look.

"My name is Taylor, ma'am," Taylor said. "I'm a passenger aboard."

The girl lifted her eyes and nodded, but she did not give him her name as he had expected and hoped she would do. As he sat down, his eyes were again on Percival's face. That face was expressionless.

Percival acted as if he had not heard what Taylor had said. Because he had given his real name, Taylor knew that Percival had recognized him on the wharf. Well, that didn't make any difference. He had supposed the captain would recognize him. In fact, he had wanted him to do so.

They ate for ten minutes in silence. Then Percival lifted his head. Taylor saw him fix his red-rimmed eyes on the girl. Taylor let his own glance flash to her face.

"You're appetite ain't none too good, my dear," Percival said. "You must eat, you know. You don't want to be all pale an' trembly when you stand afore the parson over on the Wisconsin side."

Taylor saw the line of the girl's mouth harden, saw her pale, and saw the rich color flood to her cheeks to replace the pallor.

"I'm doing the best I can," she said.

Percival made a sound in his throat which was like a chuckle, and he gave Taylor a triumphant look. A strange rage seized Taylor. He had seen the girl only a little while before but it sickened him to have a man like Percival intimate that he was going to marry her.

The meal was finished in silence. Percival rose and walked around the table to the girl's side. He put a hand on her head and bent to her. With a shiver and a cry she sprang up and ran to the other side of the room and disappeared through the door which Taylor had opened a while ago.

Taylor's gaze followed her and he felt that Percival's own gaze was on him. He guessed that there was something here

which required careful thinking, and he beat back the anger which was making his blood boil. When he raised his eyes to Percival's face, those eyes were cool and steady.

"Goin' to marry the girl, are you, cap'n?" he asked.

"That's my intention," Percival answered. "Anything to say about it?"

"It don't interest me," Taylor said with a shrug of his shoulders.

"Well, what 're you doin' here?" Percival ground out. "Let's have a show-down."

Taylor put his elbows on the table and cupped his chin in his hands. Percival was getting a little anxious, was he? That was a good sign. Let him wait. Let him stew.

"Show down about what?" he asked.

The captain stared at him. Could it be possible that Taylor had come aboard by chance? Hadn't he recognized the man who had wronged him? Was he going over into Wisconsin on some legitimate errand?

It seemed incredible, but the captain had had experience with incredible things in the past. There was a remote possibility that he had overplayed his hand.

"It don't matter," he said. "I—I was fussed up a little by the way my girl acted."

"Oh," said Taylor.

He rose, filled his pipe, and went on deck. He was forward when the captain came up ten minutes later. The captain, whatever else he was, was a sailor to his marrow and he had caught the smell of a breeze. Without looking at Taylor he began speaking to the mate.

Taylor stood back against the rail to be out of the way. The breeze freshened, directly off the schooner's stern, and she was presently moving down the river and out into the lake.

Taylor waited to see if the captain would go below again, but he did not. He went up into the bow and stood there with his back to the deck, his arms folded, a squat, powerful figure silhouetted in the night.

Taylor was puzzled. He was sure that the captain was acting a part, but to save his soul he couldn't figure it out. He began to think about the girl again. He'd like to have a talk with her, to get at an

understanding of her relation to the captain.

With that thought in his mind, he turned and went aft. To do so, he had to climb over the deckload. As he came to the end of it, he was arrested by the sound of voices below him.

Looking down, he saw that the girl and youngest of the sailors was standing at the head of the companionway. The young fellow had the girl's hands in his and was crushing them up against his breast.

"I could stick a knife in him and throw him overboard and nobody would be the wiser," he said passionately.

"Oh, you mustn't," the girl cried. "You mustn't talk like that."

The tableau, Taylor knew, was not for his eyes, and he turned to retrace his steps. A pine board beneath his foot creaked and the man and the girl looked up. The girl disengaged herself and stood away from the man.

"Mr. Taylor," she said, "I want to speak to you. Tommy, go away, will you?"

As Taylor climbed down, the man climbed up and disappeared across the deckload. Taylor stood at the girl's side and looked down into her face. He felt a twinge of jealousy in his heart as he spoke:

"How's it happen that you're going to marry that swine Percival, when you got a lad like that?" he asked.

"Oh," she said, "that's my brother."

Not quite knowing why, Taylor felt a surge of relief go through him. The girl laid a timid hand on his arm.

"I'd like to speak to you in the cabin," she said.

Taylor nodded. She turned and went down the stairs and he followed her. She sat down and he took a seat opposite her. Before she spoke she brushed her fair hair back from her forehead and then drew her hand across her eyes. He saw that there was a glaze of fatigue over her eyes; she looked as if she had not slept for a long time.

"What is it?" he said gently.

His gentleness seemed to touch her. Her lips quivered and he thought her eyes

were about to fill with tears. But again, with a courage which filled him with admiration, she fought back her emotion.

"What have you come aboard the ship for?" she asked.

"Why do you want to know that?" he countered.

"It's important to me."

Taylor took his time. He liked to think things out. He would have to know just where he stood before he told the girl anything.

"Percival asked you to find out, didn't he?" he chanced a shot; and before she could answer he went on, "What a coward the man is. He ain't sure I recognized him and yet he is restless for fear I did. He can't be easy in his mind till he is sure he has made things snug an' safe for himself."

He could see her mouth harden as if she were keeping back something which she would have liked to confide in him.

"What's your brother ragin' against the captain about?" he asked.

"He isn't, that I know of."

"Well," said Taylor with a faint smile, "all I can say, then, is that I come aboard this schooner so's I could cross Lake Michigan."

He put his hands on the edge of the table and tilted back his chair. She looked at him anxiously. Certainly as he sat there like that, he didn't look like a man who could be led into a trap. She would have to be frank with him.

"The captain knows who you are," she said. "He knows that you think he once robbed you. He believes you have come on board to harm him. He says he wants no trouble with you, but if you try to harm him he will have to harm you."

"Oh, will he?" said Taylor hardily. "We'll see about that."

She leaned against her side of the table and extended her hands to him appealingly.

"Oh, please," she said, "don't try to do anything. Leave the captain alone. If you have any mercy in your heart, leave him alone."

"Mercy—who for?" he asked, his eyes half closed.

"I see I'll have to tell you everything," she said. "A half truth won't serve with

you. I—I am going to marry the captain and I don't want any harm to come to him. Won't you, for my sake, leave him alone?"

"You love the captain, do you?" he asked in a low voice.

She took her breath in a long, deep inspiration. Her face was as white as death as she made her avowal:

"Yes, I love the captain and I don't want any harm to come to him."

"And you want me just to mind my own business?"

"Yes, oh, yes. Please!"

Taylor cast down his eyes. He had to think deeply and clearly. Here was a snarl if ever there was one. Percival had shown how yellow he was by hiding behind this girl and having her voice his plea. Now, just what should he do?

The girl, watching him anxiously, saw his face grow hard and then saw it relax. A slow grin flickered across his lips. He put up his hand to hide it. She tried to fathom what was passing through his mind but could not. At last he lifted his eyes.

"I'll promise I won't lift a finger against the captain," he said. "You can tell him that. Tell him I came on board to beat the hide off'n him, but because you ask me to do it I won't bother him."

"Yes, oh, yes."

He pushed back from the table and stood up.

"I had the captain scared, hadn't I?" he asked.

"I don't know that he was scared exactly," she said, "but he—he didn't want any trouble just now. He said he hadn't the right kind of crew, for one thing. And he—he is looking forward to his wedding when we reach the Wisconsin side."

"And you?" he said. "You're lookin' forward to that wedding?"

"Of course," she said.

"You say that when you can't help but see the kind of man that skunk is?" he challenged. "Can't you see that he was in hard luck because he happened to have a gang of decent men on board his ship? If he had had his reg'lar run of bullies that could be bought for a bag of coppers, he'd have given me a fight."

"Now when we stand man to man he's afraid. I wish you joy, ma'am."

She said nothing. She just sat there, picking at a splinter in the table. He stood looking down at her with a half-pitying look in his eyes, and then he turned and went up on deck.

Going forward, he saw that Percival was still up there in the bow. He looked as if he had not moved since Taylor had gone below. Taylor went up behind him, as he had done on the wharf, his mocassined feet again making no sound.

"Your lady is waitin' for you below, cap'n," he said.

The captain turned swiftly, inquiringly. Taylor did not wait for him to put a question.

"Oh, it's all straightened out, Cap'n Percival," he said. "I told her you could go to hell and all for anything I'd do to you. I hope you'll quit stewin' now."

"I thought when I come on board that you an' me would have a reg'lar old-fashioned drag-down-and-knockout fight. But I guess you ain't got it in you. You're scared clean through to your liver."

"I've got a strange crew and I've got business ashore," Percival said.

"I see you haven't got your bullies with you," Taylor said. "You're no good without 'em. Well, I come aboard your ship when I didn't know what kind of a crew you had. I was willin' to take a chance with you and with them, too. I figured that a little quick action would put them where they belong."

"Now, I ain't to have a fight of any kind. I don't mind tellin' you that I'm disappointed. I been lookin' forward to this thing for three years. I'm one of these here damn fools that never forgets a wrong."

"Mebbe later on you an' me c'n get together," Percival said.

"I'll kill you if we do," Taylor retorted.

"We'll see," said Percival. "You know, you are a passenger on my ship and, as such, you are in my care. I got to remember that."

"You lyin' skunk," said Taylor, and turned away from him.

But his eyes were on Percival's thick body as Percival slipped over the end of the deckload a few minutes later. Taylor ran to the forecastle scuttle then, and went below. Three men were there, two in their bunks and a third, the girl's brother, sitting on the edge of his.

"Come on deck," Taylor said. "I want to talk to you. I want to see if you got as much spunk as that sister of yours."

"What's my sister to you—" the lad began.

Taylor seized his wrist in an iron grip. "I been savin' a scrap for three years," he said. "I can't have it with the man I'd pick. Shall I have it with you, or are you an' me goin' to work together? Looks to me like you needed a friend."

The lad studied his face for a moment, and then a glimmer of hope shone in his eyes.

"I'll go on deck with you," he said.

Twenty minutes after that Percival and the girl were sitting opposite each other in the cabin as they had been sitting since the captain had come below. The girl was white-faced, leaning back; the captain leaned to her across the table, leering at her. Every once in a while he put a mocking question to her, bringing the blood into her cheeks for just an instant.

There was a sound at the door and the lad and Taylor stood there. The captain came to his feet and stood staring at them, anger and suspicion fighting in his eyes.

"What's this mean?" he demanded. "What're you doin' here, Burnham?"

"Now, act quick," Taylor told the lad.

Burnham whipped a revolver from behind his back and pointed it at the captain. The captain retreated a step, fear thickening the blood in his face.

"Mutiny, by Gawd," he whispered. "A deckhand usin' a gun on his captain. You'll be in trouble, boy."

"Sit down," Taylor ordered.

The captain looked at him. Taylor was standing erect just within the door. His eyes gleamed with hate of the man who faced him. The captain sank into his chair.

"You promised the girl you would leave me be," he muttered.

"And so I shall," said Taylor. "See, I'm lockin' my hands behind my back. My words was that I wouldn't lift a finger against you and I sha'n't. But this boy has an account to settle with you."

"Oh, him," the captain said, in relief. "I'll put him in jail just as soon as we touch the Wisconsin shore."

"Will he?" Taylor asked with a lift of eyebrows in the boy's direction.

Burnham stepped forward, his revolver still held out. The clean rage of youth, held in check till now, was whipping through him. His eyes shone with a fine purpose.

"I'll kill you—" he began.

The girl got to her feet and held out her hands to him.

"Wait, Tommy," she pleaded. "You heard what he said. Do you want to go to jail?"

"I'm trusting this man, Stella," he said. "He's the first that has been kind to me since I got into trouble."

"Ma'am," Taylor interposed in a gentle voice, "you just wait a minute. I been puttin' two and two together in this thing and I've got the answer. I've been talkin' to your brother up on deck and I see how things stand. I needed only an outline of his story to get the whole of it. It is a good deal like my own story."

"This here Captain Percival is a skunk, ma'am, and don't you doubt it even if it's only me that's tellin' you. He's a criminal if ever one lived, but the trouble with him is that he has only one way of doing his criminal acts. He robbed me some time back, and he had me beat up ashore, and arranged matters so he would have the witnesses on his side."

"Now, your brother tells me that there was a warehouse robbery on shore a bit ago. The boy had his goods in that warehouse and as you know, he went down there to get them. He was seen coming outside and pretty soon, the alarm having been sounded by Percival's friends, the man in charge was found beat up, near to death."

"There was an immediate hullabaloo, raised by Percival, and the boy was accused. Percival got him aboard this ship and then he sent for you and told you and

the boy that he would send the boy to jail if you didn't agree to his little plan of takin' you for wife."

"Yes, you shiver. I marked that before. No wonder. The thought of tying yourself up to a thing like Percival would make you shiver."

"Now, the thing lies like this: I have promised you that I wouldn't lift a finger against the captain and I will keep my word to you. But the boy has made no promise and he is on his feet."

"You made a mistake in makin' him agree to the captain's plan. Why, he is a fine boy, ma'am. If it hadn't been for your tears and pleadin's, he would have taken his medicine from Percival, just as he should have done, rather than see you do what you aimed to do."

"He is so young," the girl murmured.

"Why, he's a man," Taylor cried. "You been a mother to him for a good many years, ever since his own mother died, he tells me, and you ain't noticed that he has growed up. He didn't need no coddling and you'll see he don't before he is through."

"I only ask you, ma'am, not to shed tears over him. It takes his nerve away. He will be a man before your eyes if you will let him. I found that out when I had been talkin' to him only a minute or two."

"But the captain had witnesses against him," the girl objected.

"Aye, I have witnesses," the captain broke in. "And I have a witness here, as good as gold, to what you two are doing now. You can be hanged for this, you two. Put the girl on the stand and she will tell the truth."

"She is the kind to tell the truth," Taylor said with a look into her eyes that brought the ready blood to her face again.

"She will say that you entered my cabin and menaced me with a revolver," the captain continued with a note of triumph in his voice.

"There is only one flaw in all that," Taylor said.

"And what's that?" Percival asked.

"You ain't going to have this boy arrested. You ain't going to prefer no charges against him and me. You're going to keep your mouth shut about this



whole matter. And you ain't going to bother this girl no more."

"Is that so?" the captain exploded. "Well, that's nonsense, I'll tell you. What makes you think I'm going to change front like that?"

Taylor leaned against the side of the table, his hands still clasped behind his back. There was a thin, ironic smile on his lips. His bright eyes mocked the captain.

"Because, Percival," he said, "you're a coward. No man would plan to do the thing you are planning to do to this girl unless he was a coward. You lose because you are a coward."

"If you don't sign a confession saying you was mistaken about this boy in the warehouse matter, he is going to kill you. And he is going to give you while I count ten to make up your mind."

Percival saw that he had nerved Burnham to make this play. The only loophole for the captain was as to whether Burnham had the nerve or not. He turned his eyes slowly to the lad's face.

What he saw in Burnham's eyes made his soul sick. He had looked to see whether there was determination in those eyes, an unwavering purpose which should urge the boy to pull the trigger of the revolver.

It was a flaming hate, born of resentment and loathing. The captain had seen that look in men's eyes before. The boy looked as if he *wanted* to kill him.

Taylor laughed softly.

"Well, sir, Captain Percival, this boy will kill you as sure as hell, if you cross him. I wouldn't want that look in the eyes of a man that was pointin' a gun in my direction. I bet you this boy would laugh when he saw your blood jump out after he pumped a bit of lead into your rotten body. And now you can do what you like."

The captain's hand went slowly up to his throat and he fingered round the inside of his collar. The flush in his face abated and his eyes seemed to protrude.

"Makes you feel kind of choky, don't it?" Taylor sneered. "Well, come! We're through talkin'."

The captain, his eyes still on Burnham's face, drew open a drawer in the rude table. From this he took writing materials.

"What is it you want wrote?" he asked huskily.

Taylor dictated to him and he scratched out the words in his clumsy hand.

"Give the paper to Miss Burnham," Taylor said, when he had finished.

The girl accepted it.

"Now, Captain Percival," Taylor said, "your course is set. No need for you to go on deck again to-night. The weather holds fair. You can retire while me an' the boy keep watch. If you raise a finger between now and the time we all leave your ship, Tommy 'll—well, we'll leave *that* to Tommy."

"And, oh, captain, what d'ye think of my revenge? Ain't this far superior to anything I could have planned; ain't it far sweeter to me? It's just as if everything you'd ever done had piled up an' toppled over on you, captain. Get out!"

The captain withdrew, cowed to silence.

The boy crossed to his sister and took her in his arms. She hid her face against his shoulder. Taylor went to the foot of the companion and turned his back.

Presently there was a light footfall behind him. The girl was standing at his shoulder.

"You didn't believe me when I said I—I was looking forward to that wedding?" she asked.

"Of course not."

"I was looking forward to it—with terror," she said. "But what made you guess that?"

"It was ridiculous," he said. "And I saw you shiver when he went near you. You don't conceal things very good."

"I didn't know Tommy had grown up," she said. "He has always seemed a boy to me. I—I'm grateful to you."

She put out her hand and he took it. They clasped for a moment. Then her fingers relaxed. His did not.

She looked questioningly into his eyes and seemed to find reassurance there. Her fingers tightened on his again. She was not concealing things very successfully just then.